

Fire Brigades Union
Scotland



Submission to
The SFRS Fire Board
January 2014

The Future of Emergency Fire Control Rooms In Scotland

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INTRODUCTION

The Fire and Rescue Service has been the best performing and the best value for money public service in the UK for many years. All 8 Scottish Emergency Fire Control Rooms have played an integral and vital part in that success. Current arrangements in Scotland for Emergency Fire Control Rooms have served the Service and the people of Scotland well over many years. The FBU recognise that there may be a case for considering how these arrangements can be improved upon, to provide a more modern and professional Fire & Rescue Service for Scotland. However, it is also clear that we currently have, tried and tested highly successful, high performing Emergency Fire Control Rooms with flexible arrangements with well trained and highly skilled staff.

The proposals to reduce the numbers and costs of Emergency Fire Command and Control Rooms in Scotland at a time of budget reductions, apparently relevant technological advances and with the introduction of a single Scottish Fire and Rescue Service may be attractive to the Board. It is however important that any proposals decided upon are a proportionate and legitimate response that considers the issue in the widest context possible and particularly on the impact on the communities we serve and the staff who provide this vital function.

Whilst it is important to review and assess inherited arrangements, and propose changes, any change must be valid, evidence based and proven to be an improvement in achieving the key aims of improved Firefighter and Community safety and improved Service Delivery and to meet the Scottish Governments stated objectives.

Changes to such a vital, core, front line function that is the key to initiating an effective, time critical emergency response must also be considered on their own merits and not with pre-determined priorities for utilising existing property assets, or indeed to generate financial gain or only to achieve “efficiency savings”.

2. REALIGNMENT OF SERVICE PROVISION

The Board decision to agree the phased closure of Emergency Fire Control Rooms at Dumfries and Galloway, Maddiston and Thornton, in order to ultimately reduce their number to a total of 3; albeit considerably larger control rooms caused great anxiety to FBU Control members.

Our members were disappointed that this decision was apparently reached as part of a wider SFRS strategic intent strategy that appeared to consider and

prioritise this within the context of the plans for retention and disposal of existing SFRS property assets.

We are also concerned that whatever the Board decides over the ultimate locations of future control rooms in relation to the 4 remaining options for potential sites in Inverness, Aberdeen, Dundee and Edinburgh that a large part of Scotland's geographical landmass and associated risks may not be governed by an Emergency Fire Control Room within any part of that locality.

The example of Johnstone's history of previous emergency fire control room mergers is referred to in the control outline business case as a key reason why further rationalisation can be readily accomplished considering the number of emergency calls it responds to and the geographical area it covers.

It appears that little recognition is given to the fact that there has been a long and gradual evolution required to achieve this. Johnstone has gone through a number of staged mergers utilising various mobilising technologies, IT systems and upgrades and due to the staged manner, long timescales and migration of staff from previous controls they were successful in retaining sufficient local knowledge from legacy control rooms to maintain the standard of service. Despite this they have had to deal with many ongoing difficulties. The Johnstone staff/members confirm this has been a very challenging and unsettling process and also that to achieve the highly performing control room they have today has taken approximately 25years.

3. FUTURE LOCATIONS

The SFRS strategic outline business case limited the opportunity of the Board to decide on the retention of any more than 3 Control rooms in the future. This means that the Board has up to now, not been unable to consider other options which may provide a better solution. We believe that the retention of an upgraded and enlarged Emergency Fire Control Room for the East Service Delivery Area is essential and that given the Board's previous decision this would leave the existing control room in Edinburgh as the only viable option. We also believe that the retention of an upgraded Emergency Fire Control Room for the West Service Delivery Area given the planned closure of Dumfries and Galloway is also essential and note that the Board has previously decided this shall be sited at the existing control room in Johnstone.

The North Service Delivery Area has a number of unique challenges that may require a different solution and options to the proposed enlarged control rooms to be sited in the central belt.

- Greater impact as a result of a loss of local knowledge
- Less requirement for enlarged controls
- Greater reliance on Retained duty system response
- Need to adapt Policies /procedures to meet local requirements
- Maintaining SFRS footprint across Scotland
- Limited opportunities for displaced staff
- retention of skilled jobs in remote and socio–economically disadvantaged areas

Wildfires for example are significant in the H & I and Grampian areas. Clearly the Forestry industry is a vital part of the Scottish economy that supports many jobs in rural areas and which requires a strategic risk assessment.

Initially, identifying the location of wildfire incidents is the first problem, as these do not have an address or postcode, so emergency fire control staff have to question the caller to determine their location. Quite often the callers themselves are not local so control has to interrogate them to find the correct location.

Working with retained crews also has different implications from working with whole time crews. The distances involved between stations can be vast, so Control staff must be aware that a second pump could be some distance away and often on minor or single track roads. (eg Acharacle to Mallaig – approx 44 minutes under blue light conditions).

Depending on the type of incident and in consideration of the often great distances and travel times involved, Inverness or Grampian control staff may increase the Pre Determined number of Fire appliances normally sent to an incident type (e.g. a house fire would require a minimum of 2 pumps). This would be in consideration of the information they have carefully interrogated callers to secure and Control staff may then mobilise extra pumps to respond to provide additional resources if required rather than having to wait what would often be a considerable time to receive this from the fire ground. If an incident escalates and more pumps are required, standby moves to maintain fire cover also have to be considered. It is not possible to standby at every station that is left empty as there are not enough pumps to do this so it is important that control knows which stations can be left empty and which ones can't. This type of local knowledge is essential and is not computer generated but is learned and maintained by local operators.

However, this cannot be determined in advance as standbys arrangements are dependent on how many stations have a crew available or are not available due to crew shortages or operational activity.

Often, pre-emptive mobilising has to be carried out, where a wildfire unit shall be moved to an area that is expected to be busy with wildfires. These units can drive over a hundred miles before getting to the standby station and then may be expected to fight fires once they get there. (eg Cromarty to Fort William 71miles – Cromarty to Thurso 111 miles).

Control staff has to be alert to crews having been out for long periods of time because they may not be under any Senior Officer's jurisdiction – they may have been sent to standby at a station, then moved to standby at another station before actually being sent to an incident. If a wildfire goes on overnight, control staff has to identify relief crews for the watching brief overnight and then organise fresh crews to the incident ground to begin firefighting at first light. Control staff have to be alert to the length of times that each crew have been working in often hostile conditions and intense heat to allow them to get an adequate rest period before mobilising them back to the same incident

Technology can assist with the initial call and will recommend to an operator where the nearest available appliance is. It cannot recognise tired crews or the impact on fire cover in the local area and potential increased risk that may be created by removing the nearest appliance from its local area. Operators are currently familiar with the call signs of appliances within their areas and will recognise if the mobilising system is suggesting the correct/nearest appliance. The Call Vision system in use occasionally has a glitch and does throw up wrong appliances in the histogram. Often this involves islands because Call Vision is designed to work by recognising the road network so just ignores large bodies of water in between.

Plans and procedures are only ever used as a best practice guide because Control staff in the North cannot legislate for every eventuality. Isolated locations often involve crews and/or appliances travelling on ferries. If a ferry is not available, (weather, technical problems) Control may have to make alternative arrangements. If coastguard or helicopters are involved then we will need authorisation from a Tier 3 Officer. Under the new Incident Command arrangements, it is very likely that the Tier 3 Officer will have only limited knowledge of the huge North service delivery area and may have to be guided by the control staff.

Control staff at Inverness for example have the authority to make decisions regarding mobilising and often initiate this. This is due again to the size and geography of the area involved; Officers are not always fully familiar with all of the relevant information to determine the appropriate response and often rely on and defer to the local knowledge and experience of the Control staff to do so.

Inverness control is also one of only two in Scotland that currently manages call handling, mobilising and incident support for island communities, some where Gaelic is the prevalent language and staff have a recognition of the Gaelic place names which they can quickly translate to retrieve a match on the system.

Control staff at Aberdeen also have to deal with a number of complex and unique high risks many of which they are specifically trained to initiate a response too.

High Risk Area

- Aberdeen Airport
- St Fergus gas terminal
- Scotlands New Super Prison, primarily for Sex Offenders
- Balmoral Castle
- Main North East Harbour both Supply and Ferry Terminal
- numerous Distilleries (COMAH sites)
- RAF Lossiemouth
- Kinloss Barracks
- Donald Trump Golf Course (Attracts a high tourist count)
- UK's largest Heliport
- Also Aberdeen being the 3rd largest city in the country and the oil capital has a large industrial support structure and the life risk is significant due to the Hotels constantly being at full capacity.

The specific and additional training for Control staff also requires them to be fully conversant with safety critical procedures for specific high risk incidents and undertake a range of vital additional tasks.

- First Responders and their unique mobilising arrangements to assist Scottish ambulance service
- Safe a Working at Height procedures
- USAR Team
- Mass Decontamination etc
- Aberdeen control also has an extremely high proportion of RDS stations with whom they have developed a very close professional working relationship with.
- Emergency Fire Control Rooms are not some remote call centre who just take the calls and turn out appliances they are a source of guidance and support and heavily relied on by Fire crews and Senior Officers.
- UK International Search and Rescue Team which is mobilised through co-operation with West Midlands and Hampshire Controls and Aberdeen Control

4. FBU PROPOSALS

We would contend that to provide the best solution for the North Service Delivery area it requires the retention of a Control room in both the North East and North West of Scotland to recognise and ensure a robust response to the unique risks and challenges presented by these large areas. This would also assist with considerably reducing the numbers of displaced staff (and associated costs), particularly if Inverness was to be retained as a future control with a similar staff profile and footprint as now in addition to retaining a proportionately enlarged future control at Aberdeen or Dundee using existing control rooms to largely cover the footprint of the former Tayside and Grampian Fire and Rescue Services.

It is apparent that the retention of as many control staff as possible that have the local knowledge and types of key skills required, within a future control room, is vital to the success of the control project this proposal also greatly assists with this.

This could also be contained within existing control project cost budgets for IT and property upgrades as there is evidently suitable capacity for extending the control rooms at Mc Alpine Road in Dundee or at Mounthooly in Aberdeen for a proportionately larger control room in addition to retaining Inverness.

This would also negate the need to consider Blackness Road in Dundee with its extensive capital spend requirements of £2.1 million pounds and represent best use of existing assets. Even given that there may be some requirement to upgrade Inverness Control also to meet the requirements of the Control project and the planned development of the site as an Asset Resource Centre this shall still be considerably less than the most expensive potential scenario. It is apparent that the site that consists of 9,580 sq. metres (of which the Control room accounts for 300 sq. metres) has considerable room for expansion and also for the development of other SFRS functions if required.

Emergency Fire Control staff carries out a wide range of additional tasks other than responding to emergency calls, mobilising appliances and dealing with incidents. We would also propose that a future Control room in Inverness is utilised for these purposes as widely as possible. There may also be a case for extending the current footprint of Inverness control south to help alleviate the additional burden that shall be placed on Johnstone following the planned closure of Dumfries and Galloway control room.

We also believe that Inverness could be utilised as the co-ordinating centre for the mobilisation and maintenance of specialist rescue resources both for the SFRS (including Scottish Control Co-ordination Database) and for other providers as recommended in the HMI report following the fatalities at Loch Awe in 2009. This would also assist with a key aim of Reform in establishing the SFRS as the champion of specialist rescue.

In reviewing the utilisation of current resources, staff and experience it is also we believe worth considering and further investigating the future use of the current Inverness Control Room as a permanent Control Training facility in addition to the three proposed Controls currently planned by the Fire Board. This we propose should be considered as an additional and flexible resource that could be used as and when courses are required.

To introduce a designated Scottish Emergency Fire Control Staff Training location would not only be a first for Scotland but to our knowledge would also be a first for the UK.

Providing an additional control room in the North to the 3 proposed would considerably assist in diminishing our concerns over the reduction of control rooms and over reliance on technology rather than the local knowledge, skills and experience of trained control staff. The ability of the control project to deliver the key aims would also be enhanced: to improve community and firefighter safety, maintain business as usual throughout the project and enhance resilience. The members feel that it is indisputably an enhanced and superior solution than the proposed 3 control rooms.

Particularly as:

- It can be provided at little or potentially less additional cost,
- Retains additional experienced Emergency Fire Control Staff in their current careers,
- Enhances Service delivery and supports business continuity
- Retains additional experienced staff in their current locations,
- Flexible option of utilising a smaller control in addition to the 3 larger controls,
- Provides enhanced resilience to the service as a whole,
- Retains safety critical local knowledge in an area where specific geographical and rural issues occur and this is required
- Provides the service with an option to investigate an additional use as a ground breaking stand alone peripatetic Emergency Fire Control Training facility.

5. SINGLE MOBILISING SYSTEM

It is apparent that the procurement of a new single mobilising system is designed to further enhance the inter-operability of future control rooms and assist with the simplification of implementing procedures and policies. Over reliance simply on new technology would however be undesirable as this cannot replace experienced and professional staff.

The technology does not exist that can substitute the split second decisions which Emergency Fire Control Operators have to make on a regular basis.

The speedy and essential intervention of the Fire & Rescue Service at emergency incidents begins when an Emergency Fire Control Operator answers the first call for help.

Ascertaining the cogent facts from members of the public, who in many cases may be extremely distressed, is a skill that computer software cannot assist with. This vital initial information gathering requires the correct number of experienced, competent & professional staff, with a comprehensive knowledge of local resources.

It is of considerable concern to FBU members that technological solutions and equipment may be perceived as some kind of panacea to all potential difficulties and a primary reason to rationalise and reduce a highly successful control service. Technology should be regarded as a valuable tool to assist in the professional provision of effective Fire Service emergency mobilising. It is a common misconception that technology is always right, however, no one should place an over reliance on its effectiveness.

One of the key lessons we have learned in the many years of working with enhanced technology is that we are now even more reliant on the knowledge of Emergency Fire Control staff to recognise when the mobilising system is actually wrong. For example a common fault which already occurs is when the mobilising system itself is routing the wrong appliances (therefore not the nearest appliances) to an incident. The only effective solution to this is reliant on the skills and experience of the Emergency Fire Control staff and their local knowledge of the area they cover to recognize this and rectify the error by overriding the system using their skills and by doing so can help avoid potential catastrophes

The procurement of the single mobilising system must also learn the lessons of previous Government led public sector IT failures such as FireControl, and the glaring criticism in that project of the failure to involve end users in the process and listen to them. The Fire Brigades Union represents the vast majority of end users involved in this current project and it is their view that we are reflecting.

Their serious concerns are not only about jobs, displacement of staff and future locations. The fundamental concerns they express and that we seek to articulate and detail are in their professional capacity as those who deliver the service, who know the importance of their roles and the difficulties as well as the virtues of technologies better than anyone else in the process and who are also ultimately end users of the service.

6. FIRELINK

The introduction of airwave technology since 2009 has enhanced the reliability of Fire Service communications and has now we are informed been adapted to provide if required a degree of inter-operability between the 8 current Control rooms. The UK Firelink contract with O2 is up for renewal in 2016 around the same time as the control project is due to reach its conclusion.

Early indications are that Fire & Rescue Services in England may not be keen to renew this contract due to the costs.

This may place the SFRS in a very difficult position as the costs of providing this system for Scotland alone may increase markedly as well as compromising joint communications with Fire & Rescue Services in England. If the Firelink contract was not renewed in Scotland also this would have a significant impact on achieving the aims of the control project unless a similar reliable system that is no more costly could be identified, procured and implemented. This is a clear additional risk that must be considered and planned for.

It is also unclear at this stage the level of resilience that may be required of any future radio system to meet the needs of the planned SFRS Control Project. For example currently the former Dumfries and Galloway and Lothian and Borders are both on the North East of England Firelink network airwave radio switch, all other former Scottish Fire services are on the Scottish switch. In the recent past there was a also a failure of the Scottish radio system where 6 out of the 8 Control rooms experienced a major failure. When this failure occurred it was thought that all potential scenarios had been explored to prevent this. This only serves to highlight that no system is entirely full proof. Therefore a robust risk assessment must be developed to mitigate against or prevent any similar occurrence.

7. NATIONAL RESILIENCE

It has been suggested in the control outline business case that reducing the present 8 Emergency Fire Control Rooms to 3 shall improve national resilience in the event of a terrorist attack or loss of that facility for some other reason such as a critical power failure, computer worm or virus. In actual fact this may have to opposite effect – fewer Emergency Fire Control Rooms dealing with larger amounts of Fire Service resources and responses are in effect fewer but more important targets, which would cause more disruption and have a much more serious impact on service delivery .

If an Emergency Fire Control Room is covering a larger area, then that would be a larger area without an Emergency Fire Control Room in the event of an attack or loss of function. A contingency plan shall undoubtedly arrange for calls in the effected Emergency Fire Control Room to be diverted to one of the remaining two. This would lead to control staff having to respond to calls from further, large geographic areas that they are largely unfamiliar with adding more risk to the call taking and also inevitably to a heavier reliance on technology that we know to be fallible. We do not believe such arrangements represent an improvement to the current arrangements.

If only 3 Emergency Fire Control Rooms were to be confirmed as the future solution, if one were to suffer a catastrophic failure for any reason, there would be only 2 left with, according to the proposals in the strategic outline business case, a considerably reduced number of staff in total than is currently available. This reduced number would then have to deal with the greatly increased workload across Scotland. Even given that future controls are intended to be enlarged controls; their capacity to cope, particularly if Johnstone which is according to the strategic outline business case planned to be twice the size of the other proposed controls is unavailable and a large scale incident has occurred such as the recent incident at the Clutha bar or the Glasgow Airport incident or if major flooding or extreme weather events occur, is a cause for concern. We do not believe such arrangements represent an improvement.

The initiation of a recall to duty for control staff where this may be required to deal with such circumstances is also of great concern.

Due to the current provision and locations of Control rooms this in terms of travel time for staff returning is relatively straightforward, however, the fewer Emergency Fire Control Rooms planned in future are almost certain to have a far wider geographical spread of displaced staff that have chosen to remain in a future control room.

This shall make achieving an effective response to any recall extremely challenging and in some circumstances this may prove ineffective if not impossible.

The SFRS has a statutory responsibility under the civil contingencies act for planning for all foreseeable contingencies and ensuring business continuity in all circumstances.

Therefore the SFRS doesn't just plan for the most common and lower risk scenarios, they rightly plan for worse case scenarios in the safest and most reliant way. For example when considering Torness, Hunterston or Dounreay Nuclear Power stations SFRS levels of response are tailored to the various different types of emergencies which may occur, statistically the SFRS may be unlikely to and hopefully never will have to attend the highest level of incident, however our members train, plan and have the resources to deal with this should it occur.

Worst case scenarios do happen such as the previous large scale terrorist incidents we have had to deal with that include the Lockerbie disaster and the Glasgow Airport attack and are now more likely due to the increased National and International threats from various terrorist groups. The SFRS and other responders are on constant alert in terms of preventing and reacting to any further occurrences. It is apparent that Emergency Fire Control Rooms must be prepared for these eventualities and retains sufficient staff and resources to initiate an immediate and capable response. The SFRS must plan for these eventualities and retain, train and prepare the appropriate numbers of highly skilled control staff to respond to the worst case scenario.

Technology and its capabilities may have advanced considerably in recent years however their functioning has also become much more complex and although they are an improved tool that assists with service provision, they are also more problematic to remedy if a fault occurs due to this complexity. A fault or removal of a computer virus or worm may take some days to repair. There are many potential factors that must be taken fully into account when planning such a major change to the provision of Control rooms and their future functioning to ensure sufficient resilience and the maintenance of business as usual throughout the transition. Technological failure; cyber terrorism; staffing issues such as avian flu and viable arrangements for recall to duty; the impact of a number of simultaneous large incidents and/or spate conditions; retention of the local knowledge, skills and experience of sufficient numbers of control staff all have to be fully planned for and robustly addressed.

8.Strategic Intent – Criteria of Fire Board

Operational

It is the member's views that there is not adequate robust evidence that the current proposals to reduce the number of Emergency Fire Control Rooms in Scotland shall enhance or maintain the Operational effectiveness of the current service. This perception has been created in consideration of the impacts of reducing staff numbers as proposed with members working in fewer albeit larger controls, covering larger areas, utilising more complex technology and their concerns over the consequences of any faults and failures that may occur. Considerable and ongoing financial savings are being demanded of the SFRS currently therefore there is also a perception that the ultimate driver that shall govern the control changes is simply down to the need to provide a solution to meet ongoing budget cuts.

A harmonisation of policies and procedures in the new single service will assist enhancing service delivery and safety. However, it is not a prerequisite of this that there needs to be a reduction in controls as currently proposed. Harmonising and improving policies and procedures is a separate matter that shall be delivered regardless of the numbers of future controls.

The FBU proposals would not result in any duplication in the service and would, in our opinion, provide a better outcome for the future of such an important high level front line service, that would further enhance public and Firefighter safety.

Integration

The potential benefits of a successful integration are apparent to the FBU and our members. For instance we can see the benefits of an integrated, safe, tested and fit for purpose mobilising system. However, once again an integrated mobilising system, and or radio system does not require the closure of Emergency Fire Control rooms to be successful or deliver the benefits identified. The choice to reduce control rooms as proposed is not a consequence of integration but a political and financial choice.

Integration of the service as a whole is a huge challenge which our members in all 8 control rooms are experiencing now, and responding too regardless of their size, staff numbers and mobilising technologies. The danger of losing staff currently in post due to low morale, feeling overwhelmed by change and lack of confidence in the future service arrangements is a real one. The perceptions of staff that are subject to this change is that their operational end user views are not being sufficiently taken account of and acted upon.

Successfully managing the stresses that result from such a substantial organisational change is reliant upon retaining experienced staff who feel valued and listened to and this requirement must be a high priority and appropriately weighted when making any final decision on the future of Emergency Fire Control Rooms.

The Scottish Government is also contractually committed to the Firelink Communications Project at a cost of £100M over 10 years. The future of this system is uncertain and provides additional risk to the control project.

Emergency Fire Control Rooms can currently communicate with each other and can assist each other during major incidents or spate conditions. Firelink software enhances this ability and a single mobilising system may improve this further. Technology can't however replace the knowledge of professional and experienced Emergency Fire Control Operators

Efficiency

Scottish Government National Outcomes state that our public services should be high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local peoples needs. The proposed changes are opposed by local communities, staff, local and national politicians and Trade Unions and our members as there is uncertainty that the changes will lead to better outcomes.

The FBU and its members have not seen a final fully costed final business case produced for the reduction in Control rooms and the planned transition. It must be fiscally undesirable to proceed with such a project unless the accurate cost implications & benefits analysis is calculated for both the short & long term.

Indicative savings need to be measured accurately to determine all additional work Emergency Fire Controls undertake and if this shall continue within or out with the Control Room. A profile of the in scope work of future controls needs to be provided to identify this.

Rationale

Any decision to reduce must be in the best interest of the Service and the Communities we serve. It must be evidence based and it must be proven to improve Service Delivery and Community Safety. So far, our members feel that not enough robust evidence has been provided. Examples of other similar projects and the lessons to be learned from their experiences such as Emergency Fire Control and the rationalisation of Ambulance Controls do not appear to have been fully considered.

Infrastructure

In the event of a terrorist attack or system failure less Control rooms would mean less targets, with the risk of the Service control infrastructure being unable to cope with the increased workloads that would result. This may crucially compromise the security and integrity of the infrastructure of the Service. Robust arrangements to mitigate this must be identified. Providing an additional Control room as proposed would assist greatly with this.

Emergency Fire Control Rooms can currently communicate with each other and can assist each other during major incidents or spate conditions. Firelink software enhances this ability and a single mobilising system may improve this further. Technology can't however replace the knowledge of professional and experienced Emergency Fire Control Staff.

Our People

Less staff in fewer, larger Emergency Fire Control Rooms would inevitably result in an increase in workloads, and the risk of increased levels of stress, sickness, and potentially operational errors and this may also ultimately lead to deterioration in quality of Service

There are over 230 Emergency Fire Control Room Operators in Scotland. The overwhelming majority are female. If the Emergency Fire Control Rooms staff numbers were to be reduced as proposed, this could potentially result in many of those Emergency Fire Control Room Operators leaving under voluntary redundancy arrangements or resigning because their local control room is closing.

Losing predominantly female members of uniformed staff, should be deemed undesirable, particularly as the Fire service Cultural Audit of 2007 demanded Fire and

Rescue service's improved the profile and volume of uniformed female personnel in the Service.

The proposals to provide any displaced staff with alternative employment while welcome may in practice prove highly challenging. The service has been reassuring our members verbally that they shall remain in the SFRS if displaced, however a number of issues remain unresolved including identifying viable opportunities, pay protection arrangements, career progression, retention of staff for business continuity etc.

Closing control rooms in relatively remote locations may mean there are fewer other suitable Fire service posts likely to become available during the transition that is due to begin with the closure of Dumfries later this year. This has to be addressed as a priority also.

An HMI Thematic Report in 1999 heavily criticised the UK Fire Service for its failure to achieve a diverse workforce and lack of policies within Fire Authorities to attract and retain female & ethnic minority members of society into the Fire Service.

Since then, Fire Authorities have been obligated to enact policies to increase the number of women & ethnic minorities in the Service.

To assist with our concerns over the impact on diversity we urge the Board and the SFRS to agree that all displaced staff should retain the option of remaining as uniformed members of the SFRS.

A Robust Equality Impact assessment of all planned control room closures must also be provided and fully taken account of.

9. Summary

- The primary objective must be to maintain and enhance firefighter and community safety.
- The SFRS must demonstrate that they have sufficient arrangements in place to achieve this prior to the reduction of control rooms and throughout the introduction of any new arrangements. Options for overcoming any potential failings also need to be considered, developed and implemented where necessary
- All Key project risks need to be identified the chances of them occurring mitigated and plans to overcome any that arise put in place.
- End user Staff involvement in establishing the requirements of a new mobilising system needs to be agreed and actioned.
- Arrangements for successfully retaining the skills knowledge and experience of current control staff are critical to success.
- The capacity for staff to train in a new mobilising system while simultaneously being expected to answer emergency calls across a far wider area needs to be considered and arrangements to address this agreed.
- The lessons and failings of similar large scale public sector IT projects such as the Regional Control Centres project in England need to be fully considered, evaluated and mitigated against.
- The original difficulties experienced at Johnstone following the migration of controls needs to be considered and relevant lessons learned taken account of.
- Concerns over resilience being compromised by all future control rooms adopting a single mobilising system need to be addressed as part of any tendering process.
- A concern over the success of the control project being dependent on an over reliance on technological solutions needs to be addressed.
- The financial considerations over projected cost savings should be secondary and the project must be driven by a focus on delivering service improvement, and maintaining and enhancing resilience.
- The number of Duties & Responsibilities placed upon Control Operators that do not involve call handling & mobilisation are considerable and shall need to continue to be carried out either within or outwith control rooms. This appears to be an additional cost that has not been taken account of in the outline business case.
- The potential of losing a large number of predominantly female members of uniformed staff, should be undesirable particularly given the Fire service Cultural Audit of 2007 which demanded Fire and Rescue service's improved the profile and volume of uniformed female personnel in the Service.

To put it succinctly:

To reduce the number of Emergency Fire Control Rooms as planned and also the number of Emergency Fire Control Operators would result in less staff dealing with more Calls over larger geographical areas . This coupled with the potential loss of local knowledge may result in calls taking longer to process and errors more likely to be made, This may also result in increased response times, and inevitably Firefighters having to deal with more developed fires and incidents

We believe this would not represent best value for the people of Scotland

Any Board decision should be based on sufficient robust evidence that the planned changes can deliver the projected improvements.

The FBU believe that a final business case should be produced to demonstrate this and to take account of and respond to the many concerns we have outlined on behalf of our members. Any changes must also be flexible enough to be adapted if business continuity is not being robustly maintained and the planned improvements in service delivery are not being realised.

We urge the Board to maintain 2 Control rooms in the North Service Delivery Area in addition to 1 in the East Service Delivery Area and 1 in the West Service Delivery Area with appropriate numbers of trained Emergency Fire Control staff to allay the most serious concerns we and many concerned citizens and politicians have outlined .

APPENDIX A

Examples of Duties of Emergency Fire Control Operators Other Than Processing Emergency Calls

Role: Firefighter (Control)

- Maintain emergency cover depending on risks by organising standby arrangements and Overseeing Strategic Reserve;
- Organise relief duties for crews at incidents as and when required;
- Respond to all requests from an incident on everything from requirements for additional and/or specialist resources/equipment and crew welfare arrangements
- Organise officer cover, including specialist officers, on a daily basis;
- Inform / mobilise officers as per incident command procedures;
- Answer all media enquiries as first point of contact;
- Answer all administration calls;
- Process and complete injury reports for stations / departments and advise relevant managers
- Check and complete weekly attribute checklist for every emergency appliance;
- Collate notification from local authorities / Scottish Water (and others) regarding any restrictions to roads and/or water supplies, and to process information accordingly;
- Add notes to the Pre Determined Attendance of appliances to incidents response (PDAs) on request from managers – ie: appliances attacked, vulnerable persons, alarm codes, key holders of premises, etc
- Input required data into mobilisation system;
- Update Community Alarms Centres on results of calls they have passed through to Emergency Fire Control;

- Maintain constant contact with Police & Ambulance Services during incidents;
- Maintain mobilisation equipment as well as back up equipment on a daily basis;
- Keep the incident support room in state of readiness;
- Receive continuous and ongoing training on policies & procedures;
- Give presentations to Community/Youth groups, as required (ie: Firereach);
- Deliver training presentations to colleagues. This may include visiting fire stations and other service departments;
- Familiarisation visits to fire stations and outside agencies;
- Continuous Personal development;
- Continuous Professional Development;
- Assist in the training and monitoring of trainee Control Operators;
- The Emergency Fire Control Room is generally the first point of contact to Fire & Rescue Services. All enquiries must be answered or directed accordingly.
- Building Security – Cameras, gates, etc;
- Test Building Fire Alarm;
- Dealing with complaints
- Recording Calls for Police;
- Navigating internet for information related to role (ie: Ferry times);
- Circulate any weather warnings
- Maintain & Update contact details (Officers, Appliances, etc);
- Maintain & Update Emergency Plans;

- Ascertain, Maintain & Update information on road network alterations / closures and pass to relevant individuals / department(s)
- Inform and pass information to such organisations as Gas Company, Electricity Company, Local Authorities, SEPA, Scotrail, etc – when requested and when required
- Assist in accommodating visitations from other service employees and outside agencies;
- ❖ The full & comprehensive list of duties, responsibilities and competencies of Emergency Fire Control Operators are contained within the National Joint Council Fire Service Role Maps. These run to over 100 pages and can be found at www.fbuonline.org.uk

Fire Brigades Union Scotland

APPENDIX B

Some UK Government IT Failures

FireControl England (EADS) IT System for networking 9 Regional Control Centres using a national computer system to handle calls, mobilise equipment and manage incidents: estimated cost **£120m** due to be complete in 2009. Abandoned in 2011 with new Regional Control Centre buildings lying empty and CLG paying monthly rents. The likely remaining total cost of the centres to the Department is estimated to be a minimum of **£247 million**, and up to **£431 million**, until the final lease has expired in 2035.
Cost **£500m**

NHS IT System (Accenture) estimated cost **£2.3 Billion** in 2002 abandoned in 2011 still not working 5 years after it should be
Cost **£12 Billion**

Universal Credit IT System: Government written off Costs of **£40.1 Million** in 2013 project already delayed by 2 years

Army Recruitment IT System (Capita): Government written off costs of **£15.5 Million** system delayed project delayed by 2 years further estimated costs of **£50 million** to complete

Swanwick air traffic control system (Lockheed):
£150M cost overruns.

Individual Learning Accounts (Capita):
Went **£50M** over budget, then scrapped.

NIRS2 (Accenture):
Failures in national insurance computerisation cost at least **£150M** compensation & extra staff time.

Child Support Agency (EDS):
System arrived late and **£50M** over budget.
£85M contract cancelled in 2004.

Pathway, the Post Office benefits 'Smart Card', designed to end fraud by confirming identity (ICL Fujitsu): Abandoned in 1999 with **£1bn** losses. Over **£577M** to Post Office;
Over **£127M** to the DSS.