



National Audit Office

Department for Communities and Local Government

The failure of the FiReControl project

Detailed Methodology

JULY 2011

Detailed Methodology

1 This document outlines the methods used in our examination.

Scope

2 This National Audit Office report assesses why the Department for Communities and Local Government (the Department) failed to deliver the FiReControl project and the consequences of the failure.

Methodology

3 The methods used were:

- survey of Fire and Rescue Services;
- interviews with current and former Departmental staff, the contractor for the computer system – European Aeronautic Defence Systems (EADS), PA Consulting and senior officers within a number of Fire and Rescue Services;
- review of key documents;
- stakeholder consultation and telephone interviews;
- analysis of Departmental financial data; and
- benchmarking against best practice.

4 These methods were used to provide appropriate evidence against an audit framework established at the outset of the study. The main elements of our fieldwork took place between March and May 2011.

Survey of Fire and Rescue Services

5 We conducted an internet-based survey of all 46 Fire and Rescue Services, of which 27 (59 per cent) responded. Responses were received from all types of services (county, metropolitan and combined) in all regions except London, where there is only one service. Thus non-responders were geographically dispersed, reducing the risk of bias in the results. The questionnaire results gave;

- the level of satisfaction with the Department's engagement with Fire and Rescue Services during project planning, design and delivery;

- the operational and financial impact of the decision to cancel the project upon the Fire and Rescue Services; and
- the intention amongst Fire and Rescue Services to use assets delivered by the project.

Interviews with current and former Departmental staff, EADS, PA Consulting and Fire and Rescue Services

6 Semi-structured face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with Departmental staff and representatives from EADS, PA Consulting, and the Fire and Rescue Services involved in the planning and delivery of the project, the decision to terminate and those involved in efforts to wind down the project. Most face-to-face interviews were conducted through group meetings at the Department's premises during April 2011. Interviews presented an opportunity to hear the Department's accounts of the planning, delivery and termination of FiReControl.

Review of key documents

7 Our review included Departmental corporate documents, initiation, design and delivery documents (e.g. Business Case documents, procurement documents, the IT contract), policy papers and submissions to Ministers and senior officials, reviews of project progress and feasibility, legal advice to the Department, and correspondence. We also reviewed records of parliamentary inquiries and papers from other sources including: The Department for Communities and Local Government Select Committee, the Major Projects Review Group and the Office of Government Commerce. Independent and technical reviews undertaken throughout the course of the study were also reviewed. This review informed our analysis of the Department's initiation and design, delivery and termination of the project.

Benchmarking against best practice

8 We assessed the Department's performance in procuring and managing FiReControl against a framework of best practice based on published guidance by the National Audit Office and the Office of Government Commerce. We used the guidance to identify the areas upon which to collect information when reviewing the documents and when undertaking the interviews.

Stakeholder consultation and telephone interviews

9 We invited submissions from the following key stakeholders involved in FiReControl:

- The Local Government Association – submission received.
- The Office of Government Commerce – telephone interview held.
- The Chief Fire Officers' Association – telephone interview held.
- The Retained Firefighters Union – submission received and telephone interview held.
- The Fire Brigade Union – no response received.

10 Respondents and interviewees provided additional background on their involvement in the design and delivery of the project and material on the effectiveness of the Department's management of the project.

Analysis of Departmental financial data

11 We audited financial data supplied by the Department. We calculated the total costs of the project by area of spend, the costs of delays to the IT system, and the costs incurred in closing down the project. We estimated the future cost to the Department of maintaining the Regional Control Centres by multiplying the remaining number of months in the lease for each centre by the agreed monthly rental for the lease period.