

Fire control developments

The challenges presented by the ongoing threats of terrorism and climate change have led to a review of Fire and Rescue Service functionality and capabilities, writes **Dennis Davis**



IN THE LATE 1990S, THE UK Government began to renew its emergency planning process across all government and local authority sectors to reflect the changes that had happened at an international level.

However, the 9/11 attacks in New York galvanised ongoing work that was designed to improve both the functionality and capacity of the emergency response capability. The terms 'resilience' and 'critical national infrastructure' emerged in this period and both are now being translated in practical ways into the provision of UK Fire and Rescue Services (FRS).

The fire resilience programme brings together the FRS contribution to help ensure that the country remains ready to respond to incidents, particularly large scale events, including natural disasters, industrial accidents and terrorist attacks.

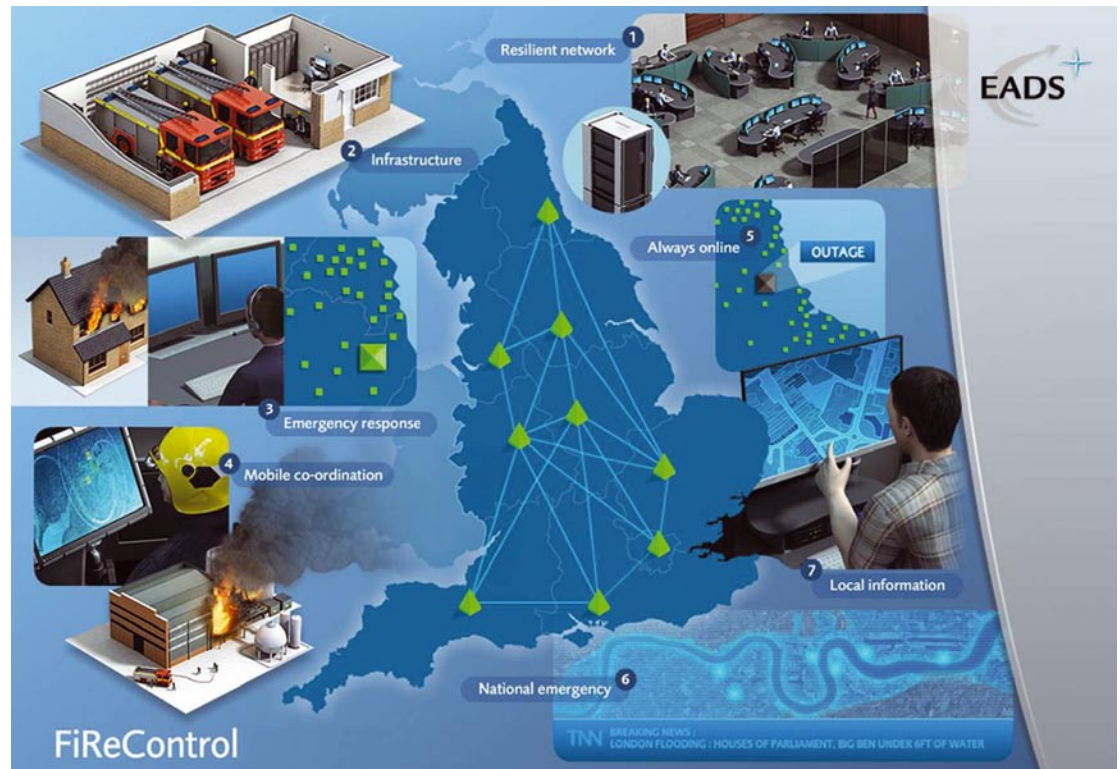
PROGRAMME

The programme utilises equipment, technology and people in three broad ways. Firstly, to improve inter emergency service communication, a data radio system, Airwave for the Police, and FireLink for the FRS, has been installed in police forces and is underway in the FRS.

Secondly, a wide range of equipment that improves USAR, high volume pumping and mass decontamination capabilities, known as the New Dimension Programme, has been rolled out within the FRS. Thirdly, the interlinking of FRS control room functionalities, known as the FiReControl project, has begun.

FiReControl brings together the activities currently conducted in 46 separate FRS control rooms in England. It represents an investment of over £350 million (€490 million; US\$718 million) to provide robust resilience in supporting the FRS and the public it serves. The project involves new purpose-designed buildings equipped with the most modern technologies, so that by 2011 the FRS in England will have a fully integrated national network of nine Regional Control Centres (RCCs).

Each of the RCCs will be capable of receiving emergency calls from anywhere in the English operational areas and then, using a fully dynamic mobilising system that includes



automatic vehicle location and integrated geographical mapping, be able to direct the nearest appropriate FRS asset, determined by travel time. Every RCC and mobile asset will be integrated with the new digital radio system being delivered by FireLink.

"The solution to be provided by EADS will use the very best of proven technologies, avoiding developmental changes while increasing reliability; the technologies being installed are cutting edge, but not experimental," says Philippe Meleard of EADS.

Some FRS do already have access to some of these capabilities. Around half of England's FRS use some type of mobile data terminal in appliance cabs, although very few have automatic vehicle location and even fewer have fully automated caller identification on receipt of a telephone call that is interlinked to a geographic mapping system.

FiReControl will enable every FRS across England to have access to the best available emergency call and mobilisation technology. The new data capabilities will offer firefighters the very best information available to help decision-making, whether on buildings,

hazards, water supplies, routes or risks.

At the FRS level the essential information required to plan risk reduction strategies and tailor response will be available and responsibility will remain with each FRS for how it meets its community needs. The RCCs will play the central role in mobilising the emergency response and providing incident management.

The network, using FireLink, is designed with processes that ensure that when the priority exists any individual RCCs are able to call on any of the available resources. Likewise, when exceptionally busy periods of call demand occur, these can be dissipated throughout the RCC network, so eliminating unplanned call stacking and delays for callers. Ultimately, in the event of total loss of an RCC, the EADS network integration solution allows overall FRS emergency response functions to be retained without serious degradation.

The FiReControl project brings to the FRS the extensive benefits of enhanced communication and information. It is undoubtedly an improvement in capability that few individual FRS would have been able to achieve or afford. **CRJ**

AUTHOR



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