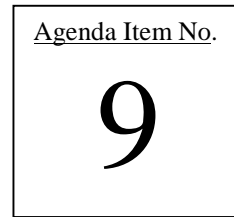


HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CABINET
MONDAY 19 MARCH 2001 AT 10.00 A.M.



BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CONTROL AND COMMUNICATIONS

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1. Purpose of Report

The report summarises the outcome and recommendations of the Best Value Review of Communications and Control.

2. Summary

The Home Office has placed specific requirements to carry out Best Value Reviews of defined activities in the first three years of their Best Value Programme. In the first year this related to the Communications and Control function to be completed by 31 March 2001 (although in February the Home Office recently announced that this would be relaxed to 31 March 2002).

The six fire authorities in the Eastern Region agreed to conduct a joint review under the auspices of the East of England Forum (a regular meeting of the six Chairmen or Executive Members and Chief Fire Officers. Those authorities jointly resourced a Best Value Review Unit based at Bishops Stortford on a pro rata basis.

A Best Value Members Panel was established in Hertfordshire to receive reports on the work of the unit and to oversee the management and outcome of the review.

This report is designed to provide an overview of the considerations and recommendations of the Best Value Review and the work of the Members Review Panel. A copy of the full report is available on request and a copy has been placed in the Members Room at County Hall.

The Cabinet need to consider whether to ask the Executive Committee to adopt the recommendations of the Review.

3. SUMMARY OF OPTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS:

Option 1: Retain the existing Control and Communications facilities with a commitment to introducing measures for improving efficiency and effectiveness.

Conclusion: It is **recommended** that this option be pursued. The adoption of the CACFOA Output Specification and consideration of practices from other control rooms will provide opportunities for enhanced productivity, efficiency and effectiveness.

Option 2: Amalgamate the control rooms of Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service.

Option 3: Amalgamation with the control rooms of all of the other brigades in the East of England Region.

Option 4: Amalgamation with the control rooms of one or more of the other brigades in the East of England Region amenable to such an approach.

Conclusion to Options 2, 3 and 4: It is **not recommended** that these options be pursued. Whilst amalgamation with Bedfordshire and Luton may provide savings it is contingent on the willingness from both authorities to enter into the arrangement. It would also meet with considerable opposition from staff and their representative bodies. Additionally options 3 and 4 will also require significant investment in order for savings to be achieved.

Option 5: Share control room facilities with either or both of Hertfordshire Constabulary and Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Ambulance and Paramedic Service.

Once again the arguments outlined in Option 2 apply. Although full scale amalgamation is **not recommended** at this time, the other main emergency services in the county will be replacing their wide area communications facilities within the same broad timeframe as that of the brigade. In the wider interests of inter service incident communication it is recommended that the brigade establishes a formal dialogue with appropriate personnel in the Police and Ambulance services to secure compatibility of the replacement systems.

Option 6: One main control room for the region supplemented by satellite controls in each brigade area.

Conclusion: The cost benefit analysis has demonstrated that this is not a cost effective solution for the authority and it is **not recommended** as a feasible option.

Option 7: Privatisation of the Control Function.

Conclusion: This option is **not recommended** for the following reasons:

Indications from the private sector are that the relatively small call volumes and incidents handled are unlikely to prove commercially viable;

The core functions of the control centre are mission critical and in the event that a private sector organisation did not provide satisfactory performance, transfer of ownership to another organisation or back to the brigade is fraught with difficulty;

The public survey demonstrated that 77% of those who responded were against privatisation.

Option 8: Share System Hardware and Software

Conclusion: It is **recommended** that this option be pursued. Whilst investment is required it can be a rolling programme of replacement and therefore phased. Development of this proposal provides long term opportunities for further savings linked to the replacement radio schemes. It also provides greater resilience.

Option 9: Share Communications Infrastructure across all six brigades in the East of England Region.

Conclusion: It is **recommended** that this option be pursued. The benefits of collaboration include both reduced procurement and on going costs. A collaborative venture may also help to ensure central funding support reducing the costs still further.

Option 10: Income Generation Opportunities

Conclusion: It is **not recommended** that this option be pursued at the present time. However, scope for more income generation could be considered once other proposals have been implemented.

1. Introduction

The Home Office has placed specific requirements to carry out Best Value Reviews of defined activities in the first three years of their Best Value Programme. In the first year this related to the Communications and Control function to be completed by 31 March 2001 (although in February the Home Office announced that this would be relaxed to 31 March 2002).

The six fire authorities in the Eastern Region agreed to conduct a joint review under the auspices of the East of England Forum (a regular meeting of the six Chairmen or Executive Members and Chief Fire Officers. Those authorities jointly resourced a Best Value Review Unit based at Bishops Stortford on a pro rata basis.

A Best Value Members Panel was established in Hertfordshire to receive reports on the work of the unit and to oversee the management and outcome of the review.

The function is currently provided from the Longfield site at Stevenage with a secondary back up control at Welwyn Garden City Fire Station in the event of a failure at Stevenage. The following is a breakdown of the operational statistics and costs at the Control Room.

Operational Fire Stations served	32
Number of emergency calls 1999/2000	29,369
No of incidents attended 1999/2000	14,633
Total number of Control Staff	25
Cost per incident attended	£ 62
Expenditure per 1,000 population	£ 859

Costs:

Salaries		
Control Room Operators	Basic	£662,500
	Overtime	£ 22,500
Other staff		£ 28,000
Communications:		
Command and Control Systems		£ 43,145
Communications		£137,000
Overall Total		£893,145

2. Review Process

The review process applied the framework for carrying out Best Value Reviews as defined in Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999, utilising the four C's: Challenge, Compare, Consult and Compete.

2.1 Challenge

The Fire Services Act 1947 imposes a legal obligation on the Fire Authority to make provision for fire-fighting purposes and, in respect of Control, Section 1(1)(c) requires the authority to secure:

“... efficient arrangements for dealing with calls for assistance of the fire brigades and for summoning members of the fire brigade”.

This may appear to address the fundamental challenge as to the need for this function. It is, however, necessary to consider whether there are alternative arrangements for its delivery. The various options explore the full range of those alternatives.

A Home Office commissioned report entitled *“The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications in England and Wales”* was published by the consultants Mott McDonald in early 2000. One of the main recommendations was that:

“Fire Authorities must work together to eliminate control rooms that handle less than 20,000 incidents per year. In choosing the boundaries for brigade groupings, it would be preferable not to intersect the boundaries of NHS ambulance trusts and, if possible, police forces. (This is desirable on the grounds of interworking and to allow future developments towards shared control rooms).”

The report sets out two main recommendations:

Fire-fire control amalgamations, either on a sub-regional or regional basis
Joint/shared emergency service control rooms.

Currently the Control Centre within Hertfordshire handles approximately 15,000 calls per annum. However, the CACFOA Control Output Specification recommends a 30% additional capacity be provided for spate and extreme climatic conditions which would create a total close to the recommended viability threshold.

2.2 Comparison

The consistent approach to data collection across all six brigades clearly facilitated comparison across a number of areas. The Benchmarking Study conducted by

Staffordshire Fire Service on behalf of CACFOA provided useful statistics for comparing performance with other brigades in the family group.

The external visits to West Midlands Fire Service, the Welsh Brigades and the RAC Control Room also provided comparative opportunities. Visits to Hertfordshire Constabulary and the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Ambulance and Paramedic Service provided opportunities to compare working practices, priorities and standards.

2.3 Consultation

Consultation was considered to be a key part of the review process. Initially a one day workshop was held in each of the six brigades to discuss the review and to assist in developing an internal consultation questionnaire designed to gather information from staff across the organisation. During the review members of the review team visited control on a number of occasions to meet with staff. These visits were supplemented by visits to operational stations, including wholetime, day crewing and retained. A copy of the questionnaire and responses is included at Appendix F of the main report.

Public consultation was undertaken on behalf of the six authorities by ORS (Opinion Research Services). The decision to use a third party was taken in the interests of objectivity, impartiality and professionalism. The method used ensures truly random sampling and has the effect of including in the survey some of those who may be considered to be in the hard to reach groups. A copy of the questionnaire and analysis of the responses is included at Appendix C of the main report.

A number of other public, private and voluntary sector organisations were also consulted, a file of all consultees is outlined in Appendix M of the main report.

During the course of the review the representative bodies were kept apprised of progress and met and discussed the review with the Members Review Group.

2.4 Competitiveness

The Best Value legislation requires the use of fair and open competition wherever practicable as a means of securing efficient and effective services.

The review team found it difficult to engage private sector organisations in any detailed discussions as early indications are that due to the relatively low call volume and 24 hour requirement for the service it was not considered as commercially viable.

3. Appraisal of Options

The Fire Authority is legally obliged by the Fire Services Act 1947 Section 1(1)(c), to ensure that there are satisfactory arrangements in place to handle emergency calls for assistance. The legislation therefore requires the authority to secure the provision of the service – it does not follow that the authority itself has to provide the service, although it may well choose to do so.

The review team, in challenging existing arrangements and considering the need to demonstrate competitiveness, has examined a range of options for the provision of the control and communications function, including retention of the existing facility.

3.1 Option 1: Retain the existing Control & Communications Facilities with a commitment to introducing measures for improving efficiency and effectiveness

3.1.1 In support of the proposal:

The control function within Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service performs consistently well and the dedication and professionalism of the control staff is not in question.

Control operators handle many more calls than those which relate to the initial call for emergency assistance. The proliferation of mobile phones has resulted in an increase in the number of duplicate calls to incidents. Operators must treat all such calls as relating to a new incident until it is established that the call relates to an incident already logged. Some duplicate calls can take longer to handle than the initial call.

In addition to this, control staff deal with a substantial number of ‘admin’ or non emergency calls from within and without the brigade (see Appendix S of main report).

As part of the consultation exercise, ORS(Opinion Research Services) were retained by the brigade to conduct a survey of public opinion in Hertfordshire on relevant control and communication issues. Of the three main emergency services, this brigade achieved the highest satisfaction level (92.3%) for responses received by emergency callers. A copy of the questionnaire and analysis of the responses received is given at Appendix C of the main report.

The service operates a policy of continuous development within the control centre and this is particularly true of the technologies which are updated year on year to maintain their currency and to expand the capabilities of the system.

Retention of the existing facility is the option preferred by existing staff and their representative organisations.

However there is always scope for improvement within the current arrangements, and the following proposals, gleaned from the unit's research, are worthy of further consideration;

- a) Consider the potential for collaboration with others on issues of mutual interest such as training and qualifications, recruitment, and secondary or backup controls.
- b) Consider a range of measures for improving the productivity, efficiency and effectiveness of the facility.
- c) Examine the potential for generating income from the facilities.

A comprehensive report on the findings of the review team with suggested actions is given at Appendix N of main report.

The authority may wish to give serious consideration to the Control Room Output Specification (see Appendix O of main report), which contains a wealth of performance measurement recommendations. If implemented, these measures will provide a means of setting targets for improving year on year performance.

3.1.2 Against the proposal:

Although it is unlikely that this option on its own will secure best value for the authority, there is nothing inherent in the proposal that would mitigate against its uptake.

Specifically, the Mott MacDonald report recommends action to eliminate controls which handle less than 20,000 incidents per annum, as they are not seen as being cost effective. The control room in Hertfordshire currently handles approximately 15,000 incidents per annum.

It should be noted however, that the CACFOA Control Room Output Specification recommends an allowance of 30% for spate conditions. This is in recognition of the fact that the control room may occasionally experience a considerable upsurge in emergency calls because of, for example, adverse weather conditions. A sustained spell of dry sunny weather may give rise to a substantial number of grass fires, or, as more recently, extended spells of rainfall can cause extensive flooding with a consequent impact on the brigade. A 30% increase applied to 15,000 incidents gives 19,500 incidents, which is very close to the recommended viability threshold level.

3.1.3 Conclusion

It is **recommended** that this option be pursued. The adoption of the CACFOA Output Specification and consideration of practices from other control rooms will provide opportunities for enhanced productivity, efficiency and effectiveness.

Fire-Fire Amalgamations (Options 2,3 and 4)

3.2 Option 2: Amalgamate the control rooms of Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Bedfordshire & Luton Fire and Rescue Service

This recommendation is based on the premise that control rooms handling less than 20,000 incidents per annum should be considered non-viable and their elimination would result in financial savings to the public purse.

Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service currently handles around 15,000 incidents per annum. Bedfordshire and Luton currently handles around 8,000 incidents per annum. The combined incident total of these two brigades is therefore approximately 23,000 incidents per annum which is above the Home Office recommended viability threshold.

This is likely to result in a reduction in the current levels of staff, from 42 across both control rooms to around 30 staff for the combined control room. There is an accepted Home Office formula for determining control room staffing levels and in the event that the Authority decided to pursue this option, the staffing levels would need to be calculated using the formula. However, the Review Team believe that the staff numbers given are indicative of appropriate staffing levels.

Using the number of calls handled by each of the brigades as a pro-rata measure of staff savings, this would provide a 20% saving on staff costs for Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, with an overall saving of 10% or approximately £93k on current costs. Subject to the retention of the current mobilising system, there would be limited investment required in Hertfordshire.

The area served by the combined control room would be co-terminus with the borders of the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Ambulance & Paramedic Service and the joint borders of Hertfordshire Constabulary and Bedfordshire Police. This proposal therefore retains the option of further amalgamation with either or both of these services at some point in the future.

3.3 Option 3: Amalgamation with the control rooms of all of the other brigades in the East of England Region.

This option would result in a single control room covering all of the six brigades in the region, i.e. Bedfordshire & Luton, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk.

Based on current statistics, the combined control room would handle approximately 79,000 incidents per annum. This option is supported by the 'Possible arrangement for regional fire control rooms' set out in the Mott MacDonald report (Appendix A – Page A2).

This is likely to result in a reduction in the current levels of staff, from 156.5 across all six control rooms to around 101 staff .

Using the number of calls handled by each of the brigades as a pro-rata measure of staff savings, this would provide savings on staff costs of approximately £129,000 for Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. There are, however, significant set up costs in the region of £1.4m associated with this option.

The area served by the combined control room would be co-terminus with the borders of the police and ambulance services in the region. This proposal therefore retains the option of further amalgamation with either or both of these services at some point in the future.

3.4 Option 4: Amalgamation with the control rooms of one or more of the other brigades in the East of England Region amenable to such an approach.

In investigating the full range of possibilities, the review team consider that there may be brigades in the region which are open to collaboration on joint arrangements for the control room function, outside the arrangements already proposed at options 2 and 3.

Ability to implement this option is enhanced by the inherent agreement of the collaborating authorities.

Amalgamation of the Hertfordshire control room with any of the other control rooms in the East of England Region would result in an increase in the incidents handled per annum to above the 20,000 incident viability threshold set out in the Mott MacDonald report.

The potential savings which accrue from the amalgamation are likely to range between £100,000 - £150,000 on current costs depending on which brigades subscribe to the amalgamation. Investment of approximately £1.1m may also be required.

3.4.1 In Support of Options 2, 3 and 4:

Amalgamated control rooms would only require one set of central site computer and communications hardware and software and attendant maintenance arrangements. Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service currently spends around £50,000 a year on maintenance of the various system components. Depending on the arrangements, a significant amount of this money could be saved.

The joint funding of a single control room presents opportunities for the implementation of more advanced technology than may otherwise be affordable by the brigades acting separately.

There are arrangements in place for each of the brigades to provide mutual support in what is commonly known as ‘over the border’ incidents. This tends to cause communications problems for each of the controls, which would be removed by the amalgamation of the controls.

A larger control facility is likely to present opportunities for enhanced career development and increased job satisfaction. During one of the consultation exercises with brigade control staff the lack of promotion opportunities was cited as giving rise to some frustration (see Appendix F of main report). It is understood that control operators derive most satisfaction from the core functions of call handling, mobilising, and incident support. A combined control room will result in a larger volume of emergency calls and therefore staff are likely to be more involved with the core functions than at present.

The greater staff numbers of the combined control room are likely to bring about improved flexibility of the control function, therefore making it more robust.

A significant collaboration such as proposed by these options, is likely to be a catalyst for further collaborative ventures between the participating organisations.

3.4.2 Against Options 2, 3, and 4:

Consultation with existing control staff has established that they are substantially opposed to any form of amalgamation. These are principally, but not exclusively, the reasons given;

- × Local knowledge would be reduced
- × Differing computer systems of other brigades
- × Differing mobilising policies and procedures
- × Loss of identity with their existing brigade
- × Lowering of morale

Operational station staff were also consulted and they too expressed some opposition to amalgamation of control rooms. The Fire Brigades’ Union has

expressed opposition to the amalgamation of control rooms, to the extent of pursuing a course of industrial action should amalgamation proceed.

Amalgamation of the control rooms may lead to the loss of experienced staff for a number of reasons:

- ✘ Extended journeys to/from work (location dependent)
- ✘ Possible need to re-locate
- ✘ No desire to work under the new arrangements
- ✘ Heightened feelings of job insecurity
- ✘ Lack of ownership of facility (winners & losers)

Concern was expressed by a number of staff regarding the management arrangements of an amalgamated control. Management by two or more brigades seeking to impose differing policies and procedures, and with different management styles, could lead to conflict and tension for control staff.

There was a perception by some staff that the loss of the brigade's control room could result in loss of public confidence. As a measure of public confidence, 77% of those who responded to the Hertfordshire public survey questionnaire indicated that they would consider it *'fairly unsatisfactory'* or *'very unsatisfactory'* if they were served by a control room which was not located in Hertfordshire.

Depending on the arrangements, the non-core functions carried out by control staff would not necessarily be transferable to a combined control room facility. Provision would have to be made for servicing those non-core functions which would remain with the brigade.

3.4.3 Considerations

Amalgamation of the control rooms is clearly contingent upon the agreement of the relevant Fire Authorities with the co-operation of the Chief Fire Officers and their staff.

It is clear that there are some savings to be made from the amalgamation of the control rooms. This is enhanced by the potential to improve the technologies, reduce the 'over the border' incident communications problems, and improve job satisfaction and career development.

Fire-fire control room amalgamations have taken place in Wales. However, the circumstances of the amalgamation are somewhat different in that the brigades amalgamated two years prior to the amalgamation of the controls, thus the amalgamated control serves a single organisation.

The principal obstacles to implementation are as follows:

- ◆ The resistance of a significant number of staff to amalgamation proposals and the stated intention of the Fire Brigades Union to seek industrial action in the event of amalgamation proceeding.
- ◆ Public confidence may suffer if the control room is not located in Hertfordshire
- ◆ Investment in the existing facilities is not yet fully amortised in Hertfordshire.
- ◆ Currently there appears to be a lack of political will from potential partners.

3.4.4 Conclusion

It is **not recommended** that these options (2,3 & 4) be pursued. Whilst amalgamation with Bedfordshire and Luton may provide savings it is contingent on the willingness from both authorities to enter into the arrangement. It would also meet with considerable opposition from staff and their representative bodies. Additionally options 3 and 4 will also require significant investment in order for savings to be achieved.

3.5 Option 5: Share control room facilities with either or both of Hertfordshire Constabulary and Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Ambulance & Paramedic Service.

This option proposes that either two, or all three services share a common facility, whilst retaining their individual identity. Each service would continue to operate as currently, however the building, computer and communication systems would be shared.

Consequently there would be no reduction in staff, however the cost of the facilities would be shared on a basis to be decided. This is the second of the two main options set out in the Mott MacDonald report commissioned by the Home Office, commonly referred to as vertical amalgamation.

Although the boundaries of Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service and Hertfordshire Constabulary are co-terminus, the ambulance service covers the counties of Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. Consideration of this option should therefore perhaps include Bedfordshire and Luton Fire & Rescue Service and Bedfordshire Police.

This model of amalgamation is currently being implemented in Cleveland, Wiltshire (see Appendix R of main report), and Gloucestershire as 'Invest to Save' projects (see Mott MacDonald report pp 53-62). In these projects each service retains its existing staffing levels but shares infrastructure and building costs. It is anticipated that such a project in Hertfordshire would require £1.2m investment with additional annual running costs of £46k.

3.5.1 In Support of the Proposal:

Advantages attaching to this option include shared hardware and software systems as well as a shared location. Future collaboration between the services may also be enhanced by adopting this proposal.

In particular, the replacement of radio systems as a result of withdrawal of the existing frequencies at the end of 2005 (see Option 9) will impact the Police and Ambulance services as well as the brigade. The process of procuring replacement systems within the same timescales presents a unique opportunity to ensure compatibility of equipment and operation as a means of enhancing at-incident communications between the services.

3.5.2 Against the Proposal:

Amalgamation of controls is likely to be difficult to achieve because of the differing cultures, priorities, working practices, and performance standards of the organisations concerned (see Appendices K and L of main report).

The volume of incidents handled by the Ambulance and Police in this scenario are considerably in excess of the volumes handled by the Fire Service, which may limit the ability of the Fire Service to influence any future development within the shared facility.

It may also have the effect of inhibiting future collaboration with other fire services within the region.

This would mean that the controls of Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service and Bedfordshire and Luton Fire & Rescue Service should be merged before any consideration of a joint control room with either or both of the ambulance and police. In the case of the police, this would necessarily involve both Hertfordshire Constabulary and Bedfordshire Police.

3.5.3 Conclusion

Once again the arguments outlined in Option 2 apply. This model of amalgamation is being applied in the Invest to Save Budget pilots in Cleveland, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. The authority may wish to await the full implementation of these amalgamations in order to benefit from the experiences gained before any further consideration of this option.

Although full scale amalgamation is **not recommended** at this time, the other main emergency services in the county will be replacing their wide area communications facilities within the same broad timeframe as that of the brigade. In the wider interests of inter service incident communication it **is recommended** that the brigade establishes a formal dialogue with appropriate personnel in the Police and

Ambulance services to secure compatibility of the replacement systems.

3.6 Option 6: One main control room for the region supplemented by satellite controls in each brigade area

This option proposes that a specified control room within the region becomes the main control room for the region operating around the clock. The remaining brigades would retain existing control rooms, however these would operate from 08.00 until 00.00. This is based on the assumption that 80% of incidents occur during the hours specified (Based on the call profile of London Fire Brigade – see Mott MacDonald report p129).

This option is a variation of fire-fire control room amalgamation. The review team considered the possibility of having one main control centre covering the whole of the region around the clock. This would be located in one of the brigade areas to be determined, and supplemented by satellite controls in each of the other brigade areas operating for 16 hours per day.

3.6.1 In Support of the Proposal:

This has the advantage of maintaining a control presence in each of the brigade areas whilst keeping all options open for future consideration.

This option develops a more flexible approach to the provision of control room facilities and provides a closer correlation between supply and demand.

3.6.2 Against the Proposal:

As this option is a variation on a fire-fire control room amalgamation it will be viewed as such by the staff and representative bodies who will therefore oppose its introduction.

The cost of establishing the main control would be in the region of £685,000, with the annual running costs in the region of £675,000. Depending on the local staffing levels and maintenance costs this option may not provide savings.

3.6.3 Conclusion

The cost benefit analysis has demonstrated that this is not a cost effective solution for the authority and it is **not recommended** as a feasible option

3.7 Option 7: Privatisation of the Control Function

The possibility of outsourcing the control facility was considered by the review team.

This option is **not recommended** for the following reasons;

Indications from the private sector are that the relatively small call volumes and incidents handled are unlikely to prove commercially viable.

The core functions of the control centre are mission critical and in the event that a private sector organisation did not provide satisfactory performance, transfer of ownership to another organisation or back to the brigade is fraught with difficulty.

The public survey demonstrated that 77% of those who responded were Against privatisation.

3.8 Option 8: Share System Hardware and Software

Currently, Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service operates its own control room with attendant hardware, software, and communications systems.

As an alternative to amalgamating control rooms, the authority may wish to consider entering into an arrangement with one or more of the brigades within the region to share the systems hardware and software.

3.8.1 In Support of the Proposal:

This would have the effect of reducing the costs of maintenance and upgrades to the authority, currently running at £43,000 per annum. Depending on the number of brigades participating in the project, up to 50% of the costs could be saved.

Aggregation of funding for the project may result in access to enhanced technologies which may not be affordable by the brigade on its own.

This also has the advantage of being less threatening to the existing control room arrangements whilst retaining all future options.

3.8.2 Against the Proposal:

Adopting a common system for several brigades will require compromise on hardware and application enhancement. Each of the constituent brigades will wish to influence the ongoing development of the system. Consequently there will be some loss of control over the system.

Arrangements for managing the system and its continuing development will need to be carefully determined to ensure equality of influence for the subscribing brigades.

3.8.3 Conclusion

It is **recommended** that this option be pursued. Whilst investment is required it can be a rolling programme of replacement and therefore phased. Development of this proposal provides long term opportunities for further savings linked to the replacement radio schemes. It would also provide greater resilience and flexibility in times of extreme weather conditions or the failure of individual control rooms.

3.9 Option 9: Share Communications Infrastructure across all six brigades in The East of England Region

The authority will be aware that the radio frequencies, which the brigade uses for wide area communications to mobile resources, will be withdrawn in 2005. This applies equally to all emergency services in the UK.

Regardless, therefore, of which of the other options the authority may wish to pursue, replacement of the radio system must proceed.

The indication of the cost of procuring or maintaining the system have been provided, however, from previous guidance the authority has identified £1.5m of capital provision in future years.

3.9.1 In Support of the Proposal:

The communications officers from each of the six brigades in the East of England region have established the feasibility of a collaborative procurement of replacement communications facilities. Each of the brigades is now actively involved in producing a composite specification of requirements, for approval by the East of England Forum as a pre-cursor to a competitive tender exercise, also subject to approval by the Forum.

In seeking to secure best value for the authority, a collaborative procurement will provide the most cost effective and cost efficient way of procuring future communications facilities. This has recently been reinforced by the Home Office Minister who indicated that financial support would be dependent on collaborative arrangements.

It will also ensure technical compatibility between the subscribing brigades and lead to enhanced inter-working of control and operational personnel.

The Airwave service (PSRCS) will be taken up by all of the police services in the region, however this solution may not be adopted by fire brigades. It is not clear at this stage, what solution the ambulance trusts within the region will implement. A

common, shared infrastructure across brigades will facilitate inter-communication with other emergency services, irrespective of the solution chosen. (See Option 8 above)

Collaborating with one or more of the other brigades in the region in the procurement of the replacement system will result in economies of scale, sharing of workloads and expertise, and will ensure access to assistance which otherwise will not be available to the brigade operating alone.

3.9.2 Against the Proposal:

Wide area communication within the brigade is a mission critical activity and replacement is a major project by any standard. There are risks inherent in any major project, heightened in this case by the nature of the project.

Collaborating with others will inevitably add complexity to the project, however this tempered to a large extent by virtue of the greater pool of expertise and knowledge which will be available.

3.9.3 Conclusion

It is **recommended** that this option be pursued. The benefits of collaboration include both reduced procurement and on going costs. A collaborative venture may also help to ensure central funding support reducing the costs still further.

3.10 Option 10: Income Generation Opportunities

The computer facilities available at the existing Control Centre are currently capable of handling around 50,000 incidents per annum which is 62.5% of the total of incidents currently handled by all of the fire service control rooms in the East of England Region. Alternatively it could be utilised to handle calls for other organisations.

There are currently five operator positions with an additional two positions which are currently used for backup and training. The system is capable of enhancement to handle a greater number of incidents at relatively little additional cost and the space available within the control room could be reconfigured to take up to ten operator positions.

3.10.1 In support of the Proposal:

This presents an opportunity to the authority to provide control facilities to other emergency services, including fire brigades for payment.

There does not appear to be anything in the Fire Services Act, 1947, to prevent this, although it clearly depends on finding willing partners to the venture.

3.10.2 Against the Proposal:

Some system re-development may be necessary to accommodate the requirements of the client organisation(s).

Further studies will be needed to determine the feasibility of this option, potential clients, and the cost of provision against achievable revenue.

As stated previously there will be staff resistance to this proposal.

3.10.3 Conclusion

It is **not recommended** that this option be pursued at the present time. However, scope for more income generation could be considered once other proposals have been implemented.

4. Financial Implications

The broad financial implications are outlined in the description of each option. Full cost benefit analysis can be found in Appendix D of the main report.

5. Costs of the Review

A major benefit deriving from a collaborative approach to the Best Value Review of Control and Communications lies with the economies of scale in relation to the cost of conducting the review. The following table details these costs:

Initial Workshops	546 hrs @ £13 per hr	£7,098
POLG Meetings	187 hrs @ £25 per hr	£4,675
COLG Meetings	225 hrs @ £13 per hr	£2,925
COG Meetings	120 hrs @ £13 per hr	£1,560
Visits (Wales, RAC, etc)	150 hrs @ £13 per hr	£1,950
Total		£18,208
Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service – 20%		£3,641
HFRS contribution to overall BVRU costs for year (est.)		£50,000
	Overall Total	£53,641

Background Information used by the author in compiling this report:

*Home Office Report “The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications in England and Wales (Mott McDonald)
The Best Value Review of Control and Communications*