

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

21 MARCH 2016

1. **EMERGENCY SERVICES MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMME**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer.

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT the Authority notes the expiry of Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) current contract with Airwave emergency services mobile communications.
- 1.2 THAT the Authority notes the cross-government Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) to replace existing mobile communication services for the emergency services.
- 1.3 THAT the Authority approves the sign up of West Midlands Fire Service to the ESMCP.
- 1.4 THAT the Authority notes the indicative financial implications associated with the ESMCP.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 2.1 This report is submitted to update the Authority on the replacement of Airwave mobile communications with the ESMCP which will deliver a new Emergency Services Network (ESN).
- 2.2 This paper is submitted to seek approval from the Authority to sign up to the ESMCP and note the indicative financial implications associated with the programme.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 ESMCP is a cross-government programme to replace the existing mobile communications service for the emergency

services (Firelink for the FRS) with a new commercial system based on 4G.

3.2 The overall objectives of ESMCP are to be:

- Better with integrated broadband data services; public service functionality; national coverage and high availability.
- More flexible, to evolve and improve over time and pay only for those features required by users.
- Cheaper; to help address budget pressures, with flexibility to be re-competed regularly to leverage market forces.

3.3 There are three strategic drivers that are influencing the scope and timing of ESMCP's development. These are that:

- Current contracts for the emergency services (provided by Airwave) expire between 2016 and 2020 and cannot readily be extended. As such there will be no Airwave Firelink service from 2020 meaning that now is a good time to procure an alternative system.
- The current Airwave Firelink service is already significantly more expensive than similar public safety systems in Europe and price trends for publically available mobile telephony.
- Users within the emergency services are increasingly requiring broadband data (not just voice communications) to support operational transformation. This cannot be met by current Airwave technologies.

3.4 The intended scope of ESMCP will include 44 police forces, 50 fire and rescue services (including those in Scotland and Wales) and 13 Ambulance Trusts. A range of other civil contingency user organisations will also join ESMCP as second tier users. Overall this means that the system is likely to have approximately 300,000 users.

3.5 Fire and rescue service (FRS) transition onto the new ESN

is due to begin with the mobilisation phase in 2016 and will be complete by January 2020 by which time all FRSs will be in a steady state. The steady state will last until the end of the financial year 2032 by which point a retendering of the contracts will have taken place.

- 3.6 DCLG recognises that fire communications systems continue to be the responsibility of each individual FRA. However, central government has a strong interest in ensuring that the country is fully prepared to deal with civil contingency issues. As such the Government believes that it is important to have in place a communications system that enables interrelated working across boundaries and between the emergency services. Furthermore the Government believes it is important to ensure that emergency services communications are robust and resilient, using the latest technology to aid the delivery of a more effective service.
- 3.7 As such, whilst DCLG is currently not mandating take up of ESMCP, it is strongly recommending that FRAs sign up to the system, both from an operational perspective and also a financial perspective (the fire service as a whole stands to make significant savings of approximately £80m over the twelve year life of the contract).
- 3.8 Not providing a mobile communications service at the end of the existing Airwave contract would prevent the WMFS being able to communicate with other Fire and Rescue Services and blue light services when dealing with emergency incidents both regionally and nationally.
- 3.9 WMFS has been working collaboratively with other FRSs across the West Midlands Region for the proposed introduction of the ESMCP. To support the implementation phase of the programme an officer from Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service has been appointed to support the transition process from April 2016. This post has been funded by DCLG and FRSs in the region and the officer will be located at WMFS Headquarters.
- 3.10 The delivery and realisation of the new Emergency Services Network via ESMCP will take place in two major stages of mobilisation and transition. The mobilisation stage consisted

of planning, design, build and testing; the transition stage is where FRSs prepare for and undertake the switch to ESN, and the steady state stage where FRSs fully utilise the ESN.

- 3.11 The ESMCP will incur transition costs such as equipment requirements and control room upgrades as Fire Services move from one communications system to another. To help achieve a smooth and effective transition, DCLG has made a commitment to support FRAs in the cost of transition. Whilst DCLG are not yet in a position to confirm funding on an individual basis, a total of £50m will be made available to FRAs to fund transition.
- 3.12 Details regarding the individual costs of transition will be provided over the first two quarters of 2016. However as DCLG requires a commitment from FRAs prior to providing transition funding, it was deemed prudent provide the indicative costs at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.13 During transition FRAs will continue to pay the costs of Firelink until the point at which the transition is completed and the Airwave connection is no longer required.

4. **STEADY STATE STAGE**

- 4.1 Overall the Programme estimates that ESN will produce at least an £80m saving to English Fire and Rescue Authorities nationally between 2020 and 2032. This indicates a strong value for money case for ESN. The vast majority of FRAs including WMFRA will make a saving on the costs they are currently paying for the existing Airwave radio system.
- 4.2 Government has analysed a range of options for updating emergency service communications as a consequence of the forthcoming expiry of the existing Airwave contracts.
- 4.3 The result of this options analysis was that ESMCP (an enhanced commercial Long-Term Evolution network) provided a compelling case going forward. ESMCP will provide a system that is:
- Robust, interoperable and contains data capabilities
 - Smart in that it only charges only for what is used
 - Cheaper overall than the existing system

- Contains scope for future efficiencies as it is linked to a commercial system.

4.4 DCLG believes that ESMCP offers the best communications system going forward. As such DCLG will only contribute to transition costs for FRAs moving onto ESMCP as a Tier 1 user. It will not provide any support to FRAs wishing to choose alternative methods of communications.

5. **FRA REQUIRED RESPONSE TO DCLG**

- 5.1 DCLG requires a formal response from each FRA's Chief Fire Officer regarding whether or not they intend to migrate onto the new Emergency Services Network as part of the ESMCP no later than Friday 25th March 2016. This will allow DCLG to have the assurance it needs to be able to distribute the required funding for transition in line with the Programme timescales.
- 5.2 Following FRA sign up to ESMCP, DCLG will make the appropriate funding payments via a Section 31 grant (subject to legal/financial approvals), in time for the transition arrangements.

6. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out and a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

7. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Under the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 Part 2, sections 7, 8 and 9 a Fire and Rescue Authority must make provision for the purposes of dealing with fires and road traffic collisions and other emergencies deferred by the Secretary of State
- 7.2 An order under by the Secretary of State may require functions conferred on a fire and rescue authority for dealing with other emergencies to be discharged outside the authority's area.
- 7.3 In particular the fire and rescue authority must secure the

provision of the personnel, services and equipment necessary efficiently to meet all normal requirements and make arrangements for dealing with calls for help and for summoning personnel.

8. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 As stated in paragraph 3.11, transition costs would be incurred when moving from the current Airwave system, which expires by 2020 at the latest, to any alternative communications system. It is not clear at this stage what the actual costs of transition would be for this Authority although as part of the overall ESMCP project arrangements, CLG has committed to 'provide all reasonable transition funding for FRA's moving onto the Emergency Services Network'.
- 8.2 The estimated annual costs for the Emergency Services Network will depend on a number of variables such as; configuration of data and connections and device refresh. However, CLG have produced indicative figures which indicate annual savings for this Authority in the region of £150k from 2019/20 onwards.

9. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

None identified

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Not applicable

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