

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item No 5

MEETING: 21st July 2014

**SUBJECT: EMERGENCY SERVICES MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS
PROGRAMME (ESMCP)**

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the current progress of the national ESMCP and to highlight the long term risks of its implementation on Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS).

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The ESMCP is a national programme aimed at sourcing a replacement for the current communications system which is used by all emergency services and other supporting agencies in order to manage operational incidents.
- 2.2 The current emergency services radio scheme is provided by Airwave Solutions Ltd (ASL), this being a private network working within a dedicated radio spectrum (bandwidth). Although the current system offers high availability for voice communications for users, it is considered to be not only expensive, but limited in the context of providing the scope required for future developments within ICT and Data messaging in line with projected Emergency Services demands.
- 2.3 The Firelink contract between the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and ASL was signed in 2006 for a period of 10 years and is due for renewal at the end of 2016, with the last ASL / Police contracts ending in 2020. The intention is to replace the current Airwave system with a new, modern and efficient emergency services communications system, which will offer both voice and data services in a more cost effective and efficient format including scope for further development.
- 2.4 The new service will be called the Emergency Services Network (ESN). ESN will deliver the future mobile communications required by the three emergency services by taking advantage of the latest mobile technologies fourth generation (4G) and Long Term Evolution (LTE) to deliver the functionality, coverage, security and availability required for critical voice and broadband data services needed by the U.K.'s emergency services.

- 2.5 The Home Office is obligated to retender the current first responder communication services contract once the Airwave contracts expire, the first in 2016 and the last in 2020. It is envisaged that the new ESN will be fully functional by 2020 when the final Airwave contract expires. The annual cost of providing the current Airwave service is approximately £350 million, plus an additional £80 – £100 million spent by users for non-Airwave communication services (data).

3 ESMCP IMPLICATIONS ON FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

- 3.1 It is not clear if the Government are willing to give a commitment to continue supporting Airwave beyond the current contractual obligations, therefore should DCLG not extend the Airwave contracts, it may be left to individual FRS to negotiate separate contracts with Airwave or source alternative solutions.
- 3.2 The Airwave service under the Firelink contract for FRS's is a managed service but potentially the ESN will not be, therefore FRS need to ensure that they have the resources in place to manage these services themselves. There may be scope for the ESN to be managed as a national service, either by CFOA or by the formation of a dedicated central team; however this is still under discussion.
- 3.3 The Airwave network currently has 97.8% geographical coverage of mainland UK, mobile networks currently provide 95% coverage of the population which means large rural areas do not have any coverage at all. This means that there will be reception / response implications for Emergency Services that cover scarcely populated areas. It may not be commercially viable for network coverage in remote areas and alternative technology may need to be developed. It is not yet clear who will bear the additional cost of this in areas where demand for the service will be very low.
- 3.4 Consideration must be given to the possibility of installing ESN equipment prior to changeover which would mean placing new equipment next to existing equipment in appliances, server rooms, etc. This would need consideration as it is not yet known what this equipment will be in terms of size or logistics.
- 3.5 The exact financial costs are unknown at this stage as clarification needs to be sought from DCLG on who will stand any transition costs resulting from purchasing and installing additional equipment alongside our existing equipment and any building works required to make this happen.
- 3.6 In addition to the transition costs there is currently no indication of any potential funding models for Fire & Rescue Services to consider. This needs to be a factor in any decisions made on future provision of the ESN.

3.7 The Airwave contract is due to terminate for all FRSs at 23.59hrs on 31/12/16. It is the intention of the ESMCP to enter into negotiations with ASL to extend these contracts to align with the regional rollout groups, with Tyne and Wear and Yorkshire regions being in the 4th rollout group, with an anticipated transition date of late 2017 / early 2018.

3.8 Following approval of the Outline Business Case in April 2014, a full Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) Procurement process commenced. The Invitation To Tender (ITT) is due to be issued during the summer of 2014 with Contract Award programmed for Spring 2015. Service Commencement is expected late 2016.

3.9 It is expected that Mobilising Control rooms will connect to the ESN via a Public Service Network (PSN) connection, therefore user organisations are required to prepare for this. DCLG has made £300,000 available to establish a baseline of all Fire and Rescue Services in relation to PSN. Confirmation if any new burden funding is to be made available to comply with PSN requirements is being sought.

4 RISK MANAGEMENT

4.1 A small, cross department team from TWFRS is currently monitoring the programme with relevant risks being highlighted to ACO Community Safety as they arise.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 It is not possible to forecast the financial implications of the ESMCP at this time.

6 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no equality and fairness implications in respect of this report.

7 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 Members are requested to note the contents of the above report and receive further updates in the future.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A at this stage.