Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY **Item No. 7**

MEETING: FIRE AUTHORITY 28 OCTOBER 2024

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (CRMP) 2024-2027 UPDATE: OPERATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE (THE CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY) THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, ESTATES AND FACILITIES

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Members will recall that at the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 11th March 2024, Members approved the awarding of a contract for the replacement of the Service's Control Room Mobilising and Resource Management System to Motorola Solutions UK Ltd.

1.2 At the same meeting Members also approved the inclusion of the Operational Communications Project as part of the Authority's Community Risk Management Plan 2024-2027.

1.3 The purpose of this paper is therefore to provide Members with a six-monthly update on the progress of the Operational Communications Project.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 As part of the Authority's CRMP and our vision to 'Create the Safest Community', the Authority is committed to providing an efficient and effective response to the whole of Tyne and Wear.

2.2 The Service has benefitted from our existing fire control room mobilising system for over ten years and the system has served us well in terms of minimal down time. However, as part of the Authority's commitment to driving continuous improvement and our focus on investment in firefighter and community safety, a new mobilising system further enables us to ensure we continue to meet the modern threats, challenges and risks that our communities and firefighters face, as we strive to fulfil our statutory duties.

2.3 The Operational Communications Programme of work contains a number of separate projects which support the life cycle of a '999' call being received through to the incident being closed and the incident report being completed.

These are listed below:

- Replacement 999 telephone line connection
- Control Room Mobilising Solution
- Fire Station, Station End Equipment.
- Appliance Mobile Data Terminals
- Fire Control Room upgrade

3 REPLACEMENT 999 TELEPHONE LINE CONNECTION

3.1 Members may have seen in news reports that British Telecom who provide the 999 telephone lines have embarked on a significant program to update and move away from copper wires for the transmission of telephone calls to a digital service. Over the past twelve months and in preparation for the switch off of the Public Service Telephone Network (PSTN) in 2027 (originally December 2025), the Service was one of the first fire and rescue services in the Country to have migrated to the new digital system ahead of the deadline to ensure that we are prepared ahead of time and that this critical feature remains resilient.

3.2 The Service also used the opportunity to install a feature known as ‘Smart Numbers’ whereby incoming 999 calls can be diverted seamlessly to another number in the unlikely event that our control room had to be evacuated for any planned or unplanned outage; ensuring business continuity is maintained and improving our resilience arrangements.

4 CONTROL ROOM MOBILISING SOLUTION

4.1 Following approval to award the contract for the replacement Control Room Mobilising and Resource Management System, officers of the Authority worked with Sunderland Council Legal Services to finalise the terms and conditions. This was achieved ahead of schedule on 26 June 2024 whereby the Chief Fire Officer signed the contract agreement with Motorola.

4.2 The procurement of the replacement system which was led by this Authority was undertaken in such a way so as to allow for another fire and rescue service to benefit from the procurement should they wish. This in turn, would, if the other FRS accessed the procurement have an ongoing revenue cost reduction to the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority.

4.3 It is pleasing to report to Members that within three months of the contract agreement being signed, Motorola have produced and delivered the control room elements of the system in a basic form to allow for local configuration to take place over the coming months.

4.4 The programme and replacement Control Room Mobilising System will be operational in the Autumn of 2025 to coincide with the end of the contract agreement with the current provider.

4.5 When the system goes live, this Authority will be one of the first in the Country to go live on a wholly ‘cloud hosted’ Control Room Mobilising System. By utilising a ‘cloud hosted’ system we anticipate benefits in terms of cyber resilience and business continuity but also in terms of making a positive contribution to reducing our energy consumption.

4.6 The system itself is tried and tested in several other fire and rescue services and is state of the art. In addition to the current features that the community benefit from to maintain our speed of response, such as ‘pre-alerting’, the Service will have the ability to offer new ways for the community to interact with the Fire and Rescue Service when dialling ‘999’. Our Control Room will be able send a text message with an internet link contained within that will allow the caller to set up a video call with the Control Room. This will help our professional control room staff get a better understanding of both the caller’s location and the nature of the emergency.

5 FIRE STATION, STATION END EQUIPMENT

5.1 When 999 calls are received and as soon as the location of the caller is established, the responding fire station is alerted that they are about to be mobilised by a process known as pre alerting. Pre alerting has been proven to reduce the response time for firefighters mobilising to incidents and is one of the reasons the Service remains the fastest responding fire and rescue services to dwelling fires.

5.2 To enhance this Authority’s response to incidents, we are seeking to make further improvements through the investment in new Station End Equipment used to alert the fire station. Moving away from a standard audible tone, Firefighters will be alerted by a tone accompanied by a verbal message using text to speech technology. This will allow the firefighters to prepare for the type of incident they are to be tasked to deal with be that a fire, road traffic collision or other type of emergency. Other improvements will include the provision of an information screen with incident details to further enhance their situational awareness.

5.3 All equipment has now been procured, delivered and the installation of the equipment will take place over the coming months ahead of the Control Room system go live.

6 APPLIANCE MOBILE DATA TERMINALS

6.1 Through previous investment in technology by the Authority, Firefighters have benefitted from Mobile Data Terminals (MDT) within the cab of the Fire Appliances for a number of years. Over the next 12 months, the provision of Mobile Data Terminals will be enhanced to provide a state of the art ruggedised MDT for the Officer in Charge of the appliance to utilise and communicate with the control room.

6.2 In addition, a second smaller demountable device connected to the 4G/5G network will be installed in the rear cab of the fire appliance. The purpose of this device is to assist with our digital transformation work to provide internet connectivity whilst in the community dealing with the public and also to transform some of the existing administrative business processes on the fire station. Their use will be developed over time to include Microsoft 365 applications and features whilst also supporting video calling and live streaming from the incident ground.

6.3 The evaluation of the replacement MDTs has been completed and it is anticipated that the procurement will be completed imminently.

7 FIRE CONTROL ROOM UPGRADE

7.1 Our Fire Control Room has been occupied 24 hours a day, 7 days a week since 2013 apart from business continuity exercises where we have decanted to a secondary location. The installation of a new Control Room Mobilising System provides an opportunity to refresh and upgrade the working environment for those that work in the Control Room to ensure it is equipped with the latest in technology whilst also providing a modern-day ergonomic environment. Plans are presently being considered by Officers of the Authority for the upgrade works and it is anticipated this will be concluded in Autumn 2025.

8 COLLABORATION

8.1 TWFRA are actively seeking to work with other fire and rescue services of a similar profile and lead a ‘hub’ based concept in which other Fire and Rescue Services could join and adopt our configuration. Should other fire and rescue services join the hub, it will have a positive effect to the cost of the ongoing maintenance and support costs over the term of the contract.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 A comprehensive risk log is regularly reviewed and updated and is maintained within the project documentation aligned to the TWFRS Programme Office.

10 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The financial implications of this report are contained within the Authority’s agreed Capital Programme and will continue to be reported to Members.

11 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

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

12 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The provision of an up to date and state of the art mobilising system will assist the Authority in improving Firefighter safety whilst ensuring that we meet our statutory responsibilities under both the Health and Safety act 1974 and the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

12.2 Additional work to review and update the fixtures and fittings within the control room, also aims to ensure an enhanced ergonomically designed working environment.

13 RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 The Authority is recommended to:

a) Endorse the contents of this report

b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A