

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



COMMITTEE	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	3 NOVEMBER 2020
SUBJECT	URGENT ITEM NFCC LETTER TO EMERGENCY SERVICES MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMME (ESMCP) RE FULL BUSINESS CASE
LEAD OFFICER	STEVE FOYE, DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
LEAD MEMBER	N/A
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	FOR NOTE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is brought as an urgent item by virtue of section 100B (4) (b) of Local Government Act 1972. The urgent item is seeking the Audit and Governance Committee to receive and note a letter (Dated 20 October 2020), sent from the National Fire Chief Council (NFCC) Strategic Lead for Operational Communications (CFO Daryl Keen) to the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) (Stephen Webb) for the Home Office Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP). This letter pertains to the current review by the National Programme of the Draft Full Business Case (FBC) for the Emergency Services Programme.
- 1.2 A brief explanation of the FBC review process, options within the Draft FBC and the key points from NFCC letter is provided through the report. The report also reminds Members of the prudent actions already taken by the Committee and Fire Authority in writing to and meeting with programme representatives to register their concerns.
- 1.3 The NFCC letter of the 20 October 2020 provides a clear outline of the Fire and Rescue Sectors collective concerns. Given the number of years that the programme still has to run and that the Draft FBC is likely to be subject to further review by Ministers, additional comment by the Committee or Fire Authority is considered unnecessary at this time.

- 1.4 Officers will continue to provide periodic updates to the Audit and Governance Committee regarding any decisions by Ministers in relation to the Draft FBC and on-going progress and development of the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Audit and Governance Committee:

- 2.1 **NOTE** this report and the NFCC letter to the ESMCP dated 20 October 2020 (see appendix A).

3. REPORT

- 3.1 This report is brought as an urgent item so the Audit and Governance committee can receive and note a letter (found in appendix A), from CFO Daryl Keen who is the NFCC Strategic Lead for Operational Communications, to the SRO for the Home Office ESMCP, Stephen Webb.
- 3.2 This letter provides feedback on the latest draft of the ESMCP FBC - version No. 0.08d dated 18/09/20. The Draft FBC is currently going through a process of review and approval within the Home Office and is expected to go to Ministers in February 2021. Whilst recent information indicates a new delay in programme delivery of the Prime product, currently, there is no indication that this will impact the timeline for review of the Draft FBC.
- 3.3 Sign off for the FBC for English Fire and Rescue is undertaken by the Home Office as the funding sponsor body for the programme and overseeing Government Department for the sector. NFCC assists with key inputs into these decisions by providing assurance of the FBC in terms of its Technical viability, Operational viability and overall deliverability. Approval of the FBC is a matter for Ministers from across Government Departments.
- 3.4 As currently presented, the Draft FBC presents four options for the future of ESMCP, known as options 1,2, 3a and 3b. To assist the Committee, The Draft FBC puts less emphasis on options 1 and 2, with both leading to the on-going maintenance of the current Airwave provision and limiting the technological change achieved through the Emergency Services Network (ESN) that the ESMCP is intended to deliver. Equally the on-going cost of Airwave is considered to be prohibitive when compared to future on-going cost of the ESN.
- 3.5 In simple terms, if an ESN option (3a or 3b) is supported, there is an overall economic benefit of achieving the earliest possible transition from Airwave to ESN as ESN should be cheaper than Airwave in its totality of cost. In addition, maintaining both systems concurrently creates additional cost, so, if ESN is

the preferred option, the programme want to complete transition to ESN and shut down Airwave in the shortest safest timeframe possible.

- 3.6 Option 3b indicates incremental delivery of ESN leading to an expected Airwave shut down date between June 2023 and February 2024 whilst Option 3a indicates incremental delivery of the ESN with an Airwave shut down date between November 2024 and June 2025. Given the recently announced delay in the development of the Prime product, option 3a may be a more realistic option at this time.
- 3.7 NFCC supports ESN as providing the best strategic fit for the future of emergency services communications. However, without the detailed plans, assumptions and other information that sit behind either option 3a and 3b, the NFCC is not able offer a firm view or any assurance around either option.
- 3.8 At the start of the FBC revision process, in the summer of 2020, the NFCC believed that the delivery of plans (either 3a or 3b) were already under considerable pressure in terms of meeting relevant milestones with; an over optimism on delivery within the programme; zero contingency in plans and; limited assurance of ESN being successfully and safely delivered within current cost and time.
- 3.9 These issues and others, such as sector expectations regarding ESN resilience and coverage, are addressed through the NFCC letter, with the matters articulated drawn from input and concerns raised from across the Fire and Rescue sector and drawn together by the NFCC Team. By example, DCFO Foye currently chairs the South Central ESMCP Board (comprised of representatives from across the three Thames Valley FRS's) and regularly attends the National Fire Customer Group, which is chaired by CFO Keen and is just one route where input is offered and concerns raised for consideration.
- 3.10 The NFCC letter provides a clear narrative to the Home Office Programme that NFCC does not yet feel sufficiently informed to assure the FBC on grounds of technical and operational viability, nor its overall deliverability.
- 3.11 NFCC have been clear that Fire Authorities will want high levels of assurance on the financial elements, in particular the non-core and in full life costs that would fall to these Fire Authorities. Of growing concern is that ESN will cost Fire and Rescue Authorities more at a local level than they currently pay for Airwave capabilities. Essentially, whilst the total cost for the ESN may be cheaper than Airwave, elements of cost distributed to user organisations remain unknown thus creating uncertainty for Services and Fire Authorities. This is clearly articulated in the letter to the programme.
- 3.12 A revised draft of the FBC has been indicated and, whilst it remains to be seen, it may address some of the matters raised by user organisations thus far. Officers will consider the NFCC response to the Draft FBC and at the South Central ESMCP Board of the 04 November 2020. Any feedback from

officers will be provided through the Fire Customer Group on the 03 December 2020 though RBFRS officers are content to support the matters raised in the NFCC letter of 20 October 2020.

- 3.13 The NFCC do highlight in their letter that a number of Fire Authorities have expressed their desire to provide feedback into the programme. The NFCC team are working with the Local Government Association to identify how the LGA can provide this single voice into the programme. Audit and Governance Committee and the Fire Authority have shown prudence and foresight by previously registering their concerns with the National Programme.
- 3.14 A letter of 24 September 2018 was sent from the Chairman of the Fire Authority and the Chairman of Audit and Governance to the Home Office Permanent Secretary, recording the concerns of the Fire Authority. Following a reply from the Permanent Secretary, representatives from the Programme were invited to meet with Fire Authority Members. This meeting took place on the 04 July 2019 and Members were able to directly ask questions and register their concerns through this meeting.
- 3.15 Further to this, following an update report to the Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) Joint Committee, a joint letter, dated 22 October 2019 and signed by Members from all three Fire and Rescue Authorities that make up the TVFCS Joint Committee was sent to the Permanent Secretary for the Home Office, to register their joint concerns. A response was received from the Permanent Secretary to the Home Office on the 12 November 2019.
- 3.16 Given, the measured feedback the Fire Authority has previously reflected to the National Programme, the ongoing and the clear concerns of the sector being fully articulated in NFCC's letter in appendix A and the current work of the NFCC team to engage the LGA to provide a single voice for Fire Authorities, the Audit and Governance Committee can be assured that their concerns are known and continue to be articulated to the Programme. With the number of years that the programme still has to run, the Draft FBC will likely be subject to further review by Ministers, as assumptions are addressed and confidence levels improve. Consequently, further comment from the Fire Authority is considered unnecessary at this time.
- 3.17 Officers will continue to regularly update the Audit and Governance Committee and Fire Authority in regard to on-going progress and development of the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme including any decisions pertaining to the Draft FBC.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 Commitment 2 – We will ensure a swift and appropriate response when called to emergencies.

4.2 Commitment 5 – We will ensure that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service provides good value for money.

4.3 Commitment 6 – We will work with Central Government and key stakeholders in the interests of the people of Royal Berkshire.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 A risk is recorded on the RBFRS Corporate Risk Register concerning ESMCP to take account of implications for RBFRS and TVFCS. These risks and their associated treatments are monitored and updated by identified officers and reviewed regularly through by Senior Leadership Team.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

9.1 We work in partnership with FRS colleagues across the Thames Valley through South Central ESMCP board and maintain ongoing relationships with emergency services in our own region and across the wider South East and South West ESMCP regions.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

10.1 The Monitoring Officer and Senior Leadership Team has been consulted.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None

12. APPENDICES

12.1 None.

13. CONTACT DETAILS

13.1 Steve Foye
Deputy Chief Fire Officer
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