

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE
DATE OF MEETING	19 JULY 2021
SUBJECT	ESMCP UPDATE
LEAD OFFICER	TONY VINCENT
LEAD MEMBER	N/A
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	FOR NOTE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This briefing note seeks to update Authority Members regarding the background and progress of the Programme to date and the plan to deliver.
- 1.2 The Chair of the South Central Regional Board, which represents Thames Valley FRSs at Fire Customer Group and into the programme, has been taken up by ACFO Jo Bowcock of Oxon CC, following the retirement of DCFO Steve Foye of RBFRS. The vice-chair position vacated by ACFO Bowcock has been taken up by Tony Vincent, Head of Business Information and Systems at RBFRS.
- 1.3 The Full Business Case (FBC) has been reviewed by Thames Valley FRSs via ESMCP user groups as part of a wider User Organisation (UO) consultation. The FBC has been accepted (with caveats) as being able to meet service operational requirements. The FBC is expected to receive government signoff in July 2021.
- 1.4 The FBC, as well as early cost modelling tools, has indicated that although the overall programme is cheaper than the current Airwave service, individual FRSs may find local costs are higher. RBFRS projections indicate a potentially significant increase against current Airwave costs. Details are evolving using national programme modelling, and is being discussed centrally through the NFCC and Fire Finance Network. The Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for the National Programme has committed to work with the treasury and other agencies to ensure that no FRS is worse off as a result of ESN adoption, but this remains a risk at this time. RBFRS has updated the corporate risk that covers ESMCP to ensure the situation is tracked and mitigated as far as is possible.

- 1.5 Concerns remain regarding several elements of the programme, namely coverage, device lifecycles and costs, in-service/dual running and long term ESN service costs, and service acceptance criteria. RBFRS continues to work with our Thames Valley partners within the South Central Regional Board to press the programme via the Fire Customer Group (FCG) for greater clarity and feedback on areas of concern where they exist.
- 1.6 The overall national programme timeline continues to slip after a comprehensive re-planning exercise. Current Airwave switch off is projected for the end of 2026, following a 27 month transition period for all services. RBFRS continues to work with the other Thames Valley FRSs to manage local planning against programme milestones effectively.
- 1.7 Constant shifting of timescales and uncertainty regarding local funding positions means that confidence in the programme remains low for the time being.
- 1.8 The regional programme manager role formerly filled via an external contract with Mott Macdonald is under recruitment following a resourcing review by the South Central Regional Board. B&MKFRS are running the recruitment process which is hoped to conclude successfully in the autumn of 2021. RPM duties are being shared by current FRS Project Managers in the interim period.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Members are invited to **NOTE** this report.

3. REPORT

- 3.1 Due to the retirement of DCFO Steve Foye, the South Central Regional Board for the ESMCP programme is now chaired by ACFO Jo Bowcock of Oxfordshire County Council. Previously vice-chair of the board, Jo has a wealth of experience to bring to the Chair. The vacated vice-chair position has been taken up by Tony Vincent, Head of Business Information and Systems at RBFRS, who has worked closely with both DCFO Foye and ACFO Bowcock within the SCR Board for a number of years.
- 3.2 Two versions of the revised draft Full Business Case (FBC) were released for consultation amongst User Organisations during April 2021. These have been reviewed by the fire and rescue services, led by the ESMCP team in the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), and the strategic governance body for the fire sector (the Fire Customer Group) accepted, with caveats, that the Full Business Case would meet the sectors operational requirements. It is intended that the latest version will receive government sign-off in July 2021 by the Major Projects Review Group.
- 3.3 Initial feedback on the latest FBC highlighted several areas of concerns for the Fire Sector:

- Local Affordability both concerning dual running and long term sustainability, including the funding models to ensure that individuals FRSs are not financially disadvantaged through adoption of ESN.
- Coverage and Resilience – concerning the timescales and mechanisms employed to fill any gaps in contracted coverage, and overall resilience of the technical solution. The question of cost attribution for supplemental coverage, especially for inside key premises is still unclear.
- Devices – including acquisition costs and expected lifetime. The programme base assumption that a device will last at least 5 years in the field may not be realistic.
- The scope and service acceptance of ESN v1 – will this meet operational requirements, and what will the governance around acceptance of service performance look like.

The Thames Valley FRS continues to monitor and in many cases shape the overall South Central Regional response to managing the risks posed by updated information coming from the national programme, through representation at Fire Customer Group, working closely with the NFCC, and participation in many technical working groups. This approach will over time mitigate specific risks to FRS' and minimise adverse impact of the national programme implementation.

- 3.4 A fire service cost modelling tool has been developed to assist FRS' in determining and planning for changes in local costs. This modelling tool is evolving but early indications suggest a potentially significant increase in local costs. Concerns have been raised with the national programme about the longer term affordability of ESN for individual FRS. As details evolve and discussions continue centrally, members will be kept informed via regular updates. For context, current planning assumptions indicate that any ongoing cost increases are unlikely to manifest prior to 2024/25, leaving significant time to plan for impact.
- 3.5 The NFCC and National programme SRO are lobbying the treasury for funding to ensure that no local FRS is worse off as a result of ESN implementation given that the FBC is predicated on an overall saving to UK PLC. The outcome of these discussions will remain unclear for a period of time and as a result, the Thames Valley FRSs are working in close collaboration to understand, plan for and mitigate as far as possible the financial risk this poses.
- 3.6 Projected Delivery Timescales have again been shifted back after significant re-planning effort within the national programme, which is intended to build confidence in the programme's ability to deliver and now includes multiple 6 month "firebreaks" or contingency.
- 3.7 The current projected milestones from the programme's perspective* are:
- ESN Beta availability – Q1 2022
 - ESN V1 availability – Q2 2023
 - Control Upgrades – 27 months starting Q4 2022 ending Q4 2024
 - National Service Acceptance – Q2 2024
 - Service Transition – 27 months starting Q2 2024 ending 2026
 - Airwave shutdown – End 2026/beginning 2027

*Please note all dates should be considered provisional

- 3.8 Despite the efforts of the National Programme to reset planning assumptions, finalise the full business case, and build contingency into the programme, confidence in current timelines continues to be low. The Thames valley FRS project managers continue to work collaboratively to keep abreast of current programme progress to minimise impact to FRS and other interconnected infrastructure planning activities associated with TVFCS.
- 3.9 In January 2021 the contract to provide a regional programme manager, which has been fulfilled by Mott MacDonald to date, ended. B&MKFRS are seeking to recruit a full time replacement at similar cost to the Mott McDonald Contract with agreement from both OFRS and RBFRS. It is expected that this recruitment process will conclude successfully in the Autumn of 2021. The FRS project Managers have jointly assumed the specific RPM responsibilities during the intervening period and will continue until the recruitment process concludes.

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 Financial impact of any increased costs will be monitored within the frameworks and horizons of the normal medium term financial planning cycle as they evolve.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No legal implications identified

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 No Equality and Diversity Implications identified.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 An additional treatment and slight re-wording of the existing Corporate risk monitored by SLT has been added to ensure that increased costs associated with ESN are managed and mitigated as far as is possible.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

- 9.1 The South Central Regional Programme Board is a collaborative construct with senior representation from all three Thames Valley FRSs

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

- 10.1 Chief Fire Officer, RBFRS
10.2 Head of Finance, RBFRS
10.3 Assistant Chief Fire Officer OFRS and Chair, SC Regional Programme board

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 None indicated

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 None indicated

13. CONTACT DETAILS

- 13.1 Tony Vincent, Head of Business Information and Systems,
vincentt@rbfrs.co.uk, 07787 263320