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Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme paper

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

The report outlines the scope and progress of the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP).

Recommendation

The Fire Services Management Committee members are asked to note the update.

Action

Officers to note members' comments and views, and take action accordingly.

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Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme paper

Background

1. The Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) is a programme to deliver a replacement to the existing FiRelink communications system which is provided by Airwave across Great Britain. The Programme is centrally funded by the sponsoring government departments and is run by the Home Office as the lead department and Home Secretary as its sponsoring Minister. ESMCP is one of the key programmes within the Government's programme portfolio and has been running for six years, although it may have only attained more prominence in more recent times.
2. Although FiRelink (and Airwave) has served Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) well, its technology is rapidly approaching 20 years old and some of its components and equipment will be declared obsolete and unsupported within a few years. Allied to this the growth in Emergency Services communications has seen a need for the transmission of mobile broadband data rather than simply voice services, mirroring a shift in the consumer mobile telephony market place. As the current Airwave service can only meet a small aspect of the future requirements the gap has largely been plugged with commercial 3G or 4G providers, but these don't necessarily come with the resilience of service or coverage required for Emergency Service operations.
3. The eventual product of ESMCP, the Emergency Services Network (ESN), in comparison to Airwave is intended to be more cost effective than the current provision.

The Programme

4. Going forward ESN will essentially be split into two parts: a provider of the network, and a provider of the user services – essentially the array of secure network applications that allow the devices to communicate effectively. The philosophy behind this approach enables the individual parts to be re-tendered and re-competed more frequently avoiding the 'winner takes all scenario' of the current provider and to deliver a capability that keeps step with advances in technology.
5. The Programme itself is split into three main lots:
 - 5.1. Lot 1 – a delivery partner to assist with implementation and programme management awarded to Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR) in September 2015.
 - 5.2. Lot 2 – user services: the array of secure network applications awarded to Motorola in December 2015.
 - 5.3. Lot 3 – a network provider awarded to EE in December 2015.
6. Underpinning the three main lots are a number of supporting projects, some of which are centrally run by the programme, others are intended for local procurement by User Organisations including:

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- 6.1. 999 Control Room component upgrades
 - 6.2. Device procurement
 - 6.3. Vehicle installation
 - 6.4. Local Project Management
 - 6.5. Extended area services (coverage in more rural areas)
7. The Full Business Case (FBC) demonstrated a sound economic case for ESMCP with financial savings of approximately £3 billion anticipated over a 15-year period. The challenge is the spending 'hump' during the dual running period as Airwave continues operating and ESN is being built, tested and rolled out. This amounts to around £930 million over the Spending Review period. Overall ESN should be approximately half the cost of Airwave.
8. The four sponsor bodies of ESMCP – the Home Office, Department of Health, Welsh and Scottish governments – approved the business case in the autumn of 2015, and final Chief Secretary of the Treasury approval was secured on 1 November 2015.
9. In December 2015, Chief Fire Officers in England were written to and asked for indicative commitment to ESMCP. To provide information to assist individualised predictive costs those in the FBC were calculated based upon FiRelink usage and provided to each FRA. Every Chief Fire Officer responded on behalf of their authorities affirming a commitment in principle to ESMCP at that stage, subject to confirmation of the full terms and conditions.

Funding

10. When Fire and Rescue services in England were under the auspices of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAS) were provided with an assurance that all reasonable costs of transitioning from Airwave to the Emergency Services Network (ESN) would be met by DCLG. This was encapsulated in two principles; that equipment replacement would be funded on a like for like basis and FRA's would not pay both costs where they were operating Airwave and ESN simultaneously (dual running). With the move of Government department to the Home Office the policy towards these funding principles has not changed.
11. Within the Spending Review and Autumn Statement in 2015 the Chancellor at the time announced that £1 billion would be allocated to the Home Office to be spent on 4G communications for police forces and other emergency services, and that DCLG would provide at least £74 million of funding for the ESMCP, to ensure fire and rescue services can benefit from the latest mobile digital technology.
12. Of the £74 million assigned by the Treasury to DCLG approximately £50 million of this was identified for payment to English FRA's for transitional purposes and the remainder towards core Programme costs.
13. Through continued dialogue with the Home Office and the Programme some funding has been identified and earmarked for ESMCP transition purposes with the intent to be

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paid by means of Section 31 grants in this financial year. At time of writing a Section 31 grant submission is making its way through the channels of approval, which if successful will see in the region of £20 million issued to FRA's by Section 31 grant in the near future, including an additional £10 million which was not previously assigned for FRA ESMCP purposes.

14. Within the current and previous financial years some grant funding has been paid to FRA's for ESMCP purposes, which on top of intended funding, provides for a likelihood that English FRA's may see overall funding for ESMCP transition in excess of the £50 million originally envisaged.

Transition

15. With an ambition to use the cutting edge of technology combined with multiple lot winners the Programme is naturally complex, especially given that the Authority (Programme) is acting as the technology integrator unlike the current Airwave model.
16. Presently the background technology, including additional network coverage and resilience should be delivered by spring 2018. There will follow a period of operational trials and pilots before transition to ESN can commence.
17. For coverage in areas outside of EE's normal network the extended area services project within the programme will deliver 230 additional mast sites in predominantly more remote rural locations. Given the location of these sites some level of objection from local communities is anticipated, however the spin off local benefit will be increased availability of mobile broadband in these areas through the 4G network.
18. To enable transition to commence in local services a number of enabling works will need to have been completed in each organisation. These may include upgrading control system components to accept ESN, potentially improving the security of corporate IT networks to a standard tending towards that used in the Public Services Network (PSN), contracting with vehicle installers and training of staff. The decision to start transition will be a local one, which will be taken once all transition commencement criteria have been met to the satisfaction of the emergency services.
19. To maintain seamless emergency services communications through transition all of the emergency services Airwave contracts, including FiRelink, have been extended until 31 December 2019 under existing terms and conditions. This was agreed en bloc as part of the negotiations during the recent acquisition of Airwave by Motorola.

Governance

20. Day to day the Programme is run by the Home Office who provide the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO). The Programme board includes representation from Department of Health, Devolved Administrations, Fire Policy from within the Home Office and sector leads from each emergency service. Above that level a Ministerial Board operates when necessary consisting of Ministers from the Home Office, Health, Cabinet Office and the Treasury.

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21. Within the Fire and Rescue sector a Fire Customer Group (FCG) was established in 2013 under the chair of the CFOA Operational Communications Board and consists of senior FRS representatives from each English transition region along with representation from the Devolved Administrations, Home Office and specialist areas e.g. finance, ICT. The LGA has a seat on this group and is represented by Councillor Philip Howson. FCG performs the function of a reference group of senior stakeholders to provide sector specific guidance and direction into the heart of the Programme. Underpinning FCG are a series of boards and teams at regional and local level that feed into the national structure.

Independent Oversight

22. In September 2016 the National Audit Office (NAO) released a report into ESMCP entitled '*Upgrading emergency service communications: the Emergency Services Network*'. This identified a number of key areas of concern including an inherently high risk with new technology, compressed timescales impinging upon the time available for User Organisations to complete their transition and concerns over management of the service and redress once operational. The research for the report included involvement with FRS staff and accurately reflects the concerns of staff and their organisations, including a lack of user engagement and information coming from the Programme. Overall the report concluded that ESN was the correct direction of travel strategically for emergency services communications.
23. Following publication of the NAO report the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) enacted an enquiry, including testimony from Mark Sedwill, the Permanent Secretary for the Home Office, who acknowledged that ESN must be fit for purpose for transition to commence and that User Organisations would not be forced to transition until they were ready.
24. The outcome was published in January 2017 in a PAC report '*Upgrading emergency service communications*'. The main recommendations focussed around funding provision and contingency for any potential delay, the need for testing and assurance to provide confidence in ESN and contracting and commercial aspects to ensure an equitable playing field.
25. As a consequence of new technical information coming to light the PAC recalled the Permanent Secretary and SRO in February 2017. This predominantly centred on the withdrawal of support to a component part of the Airwave network in early 2020 due to obsolescence, for which work on analysis and mitigations has already been initiated.

Sector specific support

26. Representatives from the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) have been working with the Programme and Services since the early days of the Programme to provide independent sector specific advice and support. This has included producing a set of requirements to ensure future provision meets the needs of FRSs.

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27. This team currently consists of seven full members and operates between Services, the Programme and the Government Department (Fire Policy) and ensures representation at all levels up to and including Programme Board. Working within the ESMCP arena the CFOA team has a purview of English FRAs for the majority of aspects for example funding, transition etc., however it works with counterparts from the Devolved Administrations in leading on sector specific elements that span the borders, for example interoperability, operational doctrine etc.
28. One of the key roles of the CFOA team is to ensure appropriate risks maintained within local risk registers are escalated to the Programme and assessed and incorporated as necessary.

Implications for Wales

29. The Welsh Government has adopted a different funding model compared to the one described above. Any funding issues for Welsh Authorities should in the first instance be channelled through the ESMCP Business Change Lead for Wales.

Financial Implications

30. The high level financial implications have been outlined in the report above.

Next steps

31. Given that much of the work is already in train and the Fire Services Management Committee has representation within the Programme, it is recommended that the LGA maintain a watching brief of ESMCP and receives updates at appropriate junctures.