

Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme Update

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

The report provides an update on the progress of the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP).

Recommendation

Members 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 Update

Background

1. Members may recall the Update that was given on the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) in the [November 2017 FSMC Update paper](#). This is a programme to deliver a modern communications system for the emergency services and in part is a replacement to the existing FireLink communications system which has been provided by Airwave across Great Britain for over 12 years. It will also deliver a secure and resilient mobile broadband capability for emergency services' use. The Programme is centrally funded by the sponsoring Government Departments and is run by the Home Office as the lead department, and the Minister for Police and the Fire Service as its sponsoring Minister. The resultant system will be called the Emergency Services Network (ESN).
2. Since that briefing to FSMC the ESMCP is embarking upon a considerable reset in undertaking a comprehensive re-planning exercise with suppliers and users, a revision to figures in the original full business case (FBC) and an organisational restructure. A new Programme Director, Bryan Clark, was appointed in March 2018 bringing with him an extensive background in delivering change and digital programmes for Government and also in the private sector. Consequently, under new leadership ESMCP is moving to a more product based and customer focussed philosophy. It is also now being recognised that ESMCP is more of a transformational change programme with a technological element rather than a technology programme per se.
3. Options for the future direction of ESMCP are being considered as part of the reset activities. One observation to date is that it will be incredibly difficult to deliver all of the required technology for ESN simultaneously. Normally technology programmes deliver in phases or increments as component parts become available. Thus the preferred, and possibly only, option to deliver ESN is incrementally, which for the Fire and Rescue sector would mean the opportunity to take up data elements early before the full solution, including mission critical voice communications, is delivered, potentially bringing forward some of the benefits. Despite the potential for an incremental delivery, the likely dates for adoption of ESN will be much later than previously anticipated.
4. The other option being considered is some form of stop or pause to ESMCP. This may provide an opportunity for technology to mature before reconvening the Programme, but will come with many associated risks. Both options are currently being investigated in more detail, and a decision on the likely direction of ESMCP is due in the summer of 2018. The Emergency Services and suppliers are being consulted to help inform this decision.

5. In either scenario the need to maintain the current FireLink (Airwave) communications system past the current end date of December 2019 is of paramount importance. Previously Ministers have provided assurances that Airwave will continue to be available until ESN is ready and discussions are currently in train with relevant suppliers.
6. The NFCC Chair wrote to the Home Office Permanent Secretary in late 2017 outlining sector wide ESMCP concerns, centring mainly around financial and funding uncertainties due to delays. In early June an NFCC delegation met with the Permanent Secretary and other Home Office representatives to discuss these concerns. At this meeting the NFCC highlighted that assurances were sought over future Section 31 grant funding for Airwave, along with the need to consider additional funding for transition to ESMCP due to delay. The challenge of maintaining Fire and Rescue Airwave equipment was discussed with a view that the sector and Government will work together to maximise the life of equipment currently in use, but that couldn't be sustained indefinitely. It is unlikely that any answers to funding questions, or assurances are likely to be provided until the FBC has been signed off, which is anticipated in late 2018, should the incremental delivery approach to ESN be approved.
7. The sector's commitment to ESMCP was reinforced at the meeting confirming that ESMCP provides the most appropriate direction of travel for the future of emergency services communications. Those present defined many examples and cases for ESMCP allied to the potential benefits it brings, not just for Fire and Rescue Authorities, but equally importantly for the communities served. It was reiterated that ESMCP forms a cornerstone of the NFCC digital strategy for delivering digital and technological transformation.
8. LGA representatives supported by NFCC officers working on ESMCP have been lobbying for involvement of the LGA within the governance of ESMCP. Previously the NFCC's ESMCP Fire Customer Group had LGA member representation, however as ESMCP has progressed it was considered that this group may be more operationally focussed and that member representation would be better placed within broader governance. A recent communication from ESMCP's Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) has indicated his intention to undertake a review of governance and that he would be content for the LGA to be involved within the review. No further detail is currently available.

Implications for Wales

9. Much of the paper will have relevance for Welsh FRA's, however it must be recognised that the Welsh Government have adopted a different ESMCP funding model compared to the one for English FRA's and any funding issues for Welsh Authorities should in the first instance be channelled through the ESMCP Business Change Lead for Wales.

Financial Implications

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