# Update on the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme

## Purpose of report

For information.

## Summary

This report provides an update on the Emergency Service Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP), including its reset and progress towards a revised full business case. It highlights some areas of concern around potential in life cost of the product of ESMCP, as well as some of the early uptake of ESMCP products by Fire and Rescue Services.

**Recommendation**

That the FSMC note the content of the report.

**Actions**

That FSMC seek a further update at an appropriate juncture.

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# Update on the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme

## Background

1. As FSMC members will be aware, the Emergency Service Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) will provide the next generation of communications for the emergency services in Great Britain. This will in part replace the current Firelink [Airwave] provision, as well as providing secure and resilient mobile broadband capability with near universal coverage across the country. ESMCP is a cross Government Programme involving the Home Office, Department for Health and Social Care, Scottish Government and Welsh Government, but run by the Home Office as the lead Government Department.

2. The product of ESMCP, the Emergency Services Network (ESN), uses in the main the EE mobile network, along with other provision in areas where there is no EE coverage. Motorola provide the application that users will interface with, along with the data centres that process the information. Samsung have currently been selected to provide rugged handheld devices and two suppliers, Handsfree Group and TST Consortium, have recently been appointed for vehicle devices.

3. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has a full time ESMCP Business Change Lead / Senior User leading a team of 11 people working full time at the centre on ESN on behalf of the Fire sector. Separate, but complimentary, arrangements exist for Wales and Scotland. Each English FRS region has a Regional Programme Manager working solely on ESMCP, providing coordination between FRSs in regions and the NFCC's ESN central team, as well as reporting into a regional lead, who is an FRS senior officer. These regional leads, along with representation from Wales and Scotland, in the main form the NFCC's ESMCP Fire Customer Group (FCG) chaired by the NFCC's lead for Operational Communications, Chief Fire Officer Darryl Keen from Hertfordshire. FCG is the Fire Sector's strategic body singularly focussed on ESN and provides the link into wider NFCC governance through the FCG Chair and NFCC Operations coordination committee.

4. Locally, arrangements are in place for ESMCP governance that vary according to circumstance and need, but include leadership within FRSs by means of a sponsor or senior responsible owner (SRO). LGA Officers are regularly appraised on ESMCP matters, but there is no specific forum. A vacancy exists on the Fire Customer Group (FCG) for an LGA member. The LGA has been lobbying for a place on the Programme Board rather than the Customer Group, however, this has not proved possible. The individual appointed to the Customer Group would therefore provide an ESMCP governance link into the LGA as well as providing an LGA perspective into relevant FCG decision making.

5. Since the last ESMCP update on the to FSMC in June 2018 there has been good progress. The new Programme Director, Bryan Clark, appointed in March 2018 initiated a reset of the Programme identifying ways to deliver ESN incrementally as technology and capability became available, as well as improving the working relationships with suppliers.

6. A key element of the reset was the production a revised Full Business Case (FBC) incorporating the cost associated with delay to the Programme. The extant FBC, agreed in 2015, has a value over a 15 year life of ESN of £5.1 Billion. The FBC work continues and a revised FBC is due for consultation in spring 2020. Clearly with some areas that are not fully known or yet delivered the revised FBC will be based on a significant number of assumptions, for which there has been considerable analysis of risk and modelling. Previously the fire sector through the NFCC's Fire Customer Group, has only been asked to provide technical and operational assurance of the FBC, with sign off being a matter for Government Department. It is not anticipated that this will change.

7. Planning around the Programme reset is ongoing and has involved suppliers as well as the Programme and the Emergency Services. From this the Programme are anticipating undertaking operational evaluation of the whole ESN solution in late 2021, with mainstream roll out of ESN across all emergency services between 2022 and 2024, with a 50 per cent level of confidence.

8. The delivery of ESN components in an incremental fashion has enabled individual FRSs to consider taking some of these at an early juncture. It is pleasing to report that County Durham and Darlington FRS (CDDFRS) became the first user of an ESN service using the ESN Connect data only capability on a number of front-line fire appliances, going live in July 2019. The learning that has come from this initial roll out has proved invaluable and has already shaped thinking in a number of key areas of the Programme. The debt of gratitude owed to CDDFRS for their endeavours by the wider Fire Sector is considerable. CDDFRS will be speaking at the conference on their work in more detail during a workshop on the first day.

9. Other FRSs have shown interest in taking early capability, with 3 at advanced stages of implementation. All have identified different use cases for their roll outs, identifying that the FRSs are content to explore the opportunities that ESN can produce and also assist to collectively realise many of its benefits. Merseyside FRS are towards the end of implementing one of the early voice products, ESN Direct 2, to assist the Programme with testing and validation as well as providing learning on behalf of the sector. West Yorkshire FRS will also be taking this product with a clear case for using it in non-risk critical situations.

10. Other emergency services and Government Departments are also taking early ESN products, but currently at a lower rate than the FRS. Immigration Enforcement have

taken the voice capability ESN Direct 1 into a limited trial. The ambulance Radio Programme is at an advanced stage with its early implementation of the ESN Connect data product.

11. Assurance around coverage for ESN is a high priority as this is a matter that most people are sensitive to as users of mobile phone technology. ESMCP's ESN Assure 1.1 product will shortly be rolled out in a mainstream way to provide the three emergency services (3ES) with tools to scientifically assess coverage in their areas.

12. With a contracted availability greater than 99.75 per cent, ESMCP and ESN has significant potential to deliver benefit for all FRSs, in particular in providing a secure, resilient and nigh on guaranteed platform and bearer with which to base mission critical and elements of any digital ambition. The potential for greater intra and inter-operability between FRSs, 3ES and other agencies provided by ESN may assist in improving interagency communications and meeting some of the challenges highlighted by reports and enquiries over a number of years.

13. FRSs have been proactive in planning their own organisation's implementation of ESN. Whilst the planning for technical delivery of ESN components and the system is reaching a mature stage, the planning for transition and deployment of ESN is proving somewhat more challenging. At a high level it is anticipated that each FRS will take 9 – 12 months to transition onto ESN and off Airwave, with the aggregate across the FRS sector being around 33 months (mainstream transition).

14. Work is ongoing on deployment planning, but there remain a number of areas where greater certainty or clarity is required to provide individual, sector and 3ES implementations plans of higher confidence. The further challenge is one of being able to piece together individual plans for circa 150 organisations such that it provides an ordered sequence of transition without imposing additional operational risk. This must be considered against a backdrop of other needs and matters affecting local FRSs such as major events (e.g. Commonwealth Games), other technology programmes, and organisational developments such that it meets all the expectations of stakeholders.

15. At the very outset of the ESMCP journey the sector through Fire Customer Group agreed a set of funding principles with Government Department, the then DCLG, to ensure that Fire Authorities would not be disadvantaged in the transition from Airwave to the new ESN technology. With the change of Government Department to the Home Office the policy towards these has not changed, and the principles are:

15.1. Funding will be available for equipment to be replaced on a like for like basis [Airwave equivalency]

15.2. No additional costs to be borne by FRSs for dual running (on a like for like basis)

15.3. Reasonable costs for transition will be provided by Government Department

16. Recently the sector and the Home Office's Fire Directorate have agreed a new model for Local Transition Resource (LTR) funding, in line with the above principles, to enable staffing for transition to ESN and any necessary preparation. The previous LTR model, agreed in 2015, provided £15.3 million of funding up to the end of 2019 by means of Section 31 grant, but became obsolete due to continuing Programme delays. This new model provides for £21.6 million of people resource at local and regional level up to and including the 2024/25 financial year and reflects new likely timescales and an increased workload to assure, plan for, and implement ESN.

17. As part of the new approach to LTR funding the Home Office require greater levels of assurance over the appropriateness and efficacy of LTR spend. Going forward this will require sign off by Section 151 Officers on returns to the Home Office and may well come to greater prominence in Fire Authority business. It is envisaged that this will prove a more efficient method than models implemented as interim processes.

18. Since 2015 ESMCP has appeared in front of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on 8 occasions and been the subject of 2 National Audit Office (NAO) reports. Internally ESMCP is regularly reviewed by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, which reports into Cabinet Office and HM Treasury, as well as internal investment committees and the Programme's own Independent Advisory Panel. From the most recent PAC enquiry in July 2019 the following six conclusions and recommendations were made:

18.1. Despite extending the Emergency Services Network (ESN) by 3 years and increasing its budget by £3.1 billion, the Department has still not got a grip on whether it can deliver the programme.
**Recommendation**: The Department should set out, by October 2019 a detailed, achievable, integrated programme plan including a realistic date for turning off Airwave and the cost of any extension of Airwave that may be needed and update the Committee when this plan is ready.

18.2. An unhealthy, 'good news' culture in the Department meant it failed to heed warning signs that the programme was undeliverable.
**Recommendation**: The Department should write to the Committee by October 2019 setting out the steps that it has taken to: improve senior oversight of the programme; ensure assumptions are subject to appropriate challenge; and to make sure the findings of independent assurance reviews are widely shared and taken seriously.

18.3. The Department's mismanagement of the programme means the emergency services do not yet have confidence that ESN will provide a service that will meet their needs.
**Recommendation**: The Department should, without delay, agree with users a set of specific and detailed criteria that will be used to determine when ESN is ready to replace Airwave, and who will ultimately decide when those criteria are met.

18.4. We are not convinced that the Department has the plans or the skills needed to integrate the different elements of ESN into a coherent service.
**Recommendation**: Before contracting with a new delivery partner, the Department should analyse the skills and tasks needed to integrate ESN, how any skills gaps will be filled, and how lessons from the failure of the KBR contract will be applied to the new delivery partner contract.

18.5. Based on past failures to manage its contractors, we are concerned about the Department's ability to manage the significant commercial risks facing the programme, including those presented by Motorola's position as supplier to ESN and owner of Airwave.
**Recommendation**: The Department should write to the Committee by October 2019 setting out how it will manage the risks presented by Motorola's position and the possible need to extend Airwave until it can be replaced by ESN.

18.6. Delays to the Department's revised business case for ESN and the prospect of further increases in cost raises doubts over the value for money case for ESN.
**Recommendation**: The Department should ensure it delivers a revised and approved business case, which both the emergency services and the other funders of ESN support, by the end of 2019 at the latest. The business case should include an appraisal of when continuing to spend money on ESN ceases to be value for money and should set out a 'plan B' for what would happen if that point was reached

19. ESMCP will be appearing in front of PAC in the near future. At time of writing this is anticipated towards the end of March.

20. Further information on the PAC and NAO reports can be found at:
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/inquiry27/
https://www.nao.org.uk/report/progress-delivering-the-emergency-services-network/

**Issues**

21. Any delay to ESMCP involves a continued reliance on the current Airwave system. Through ESMCP, the Home Office has instigated an Airwave sustainability board that

includes NFCC representation to ensure that the service continues to be fit for purpose until no longer needed by the 3ES. This is a position confirmed previously by the Home Office Permanent Secretary. NFCC representatives work to ensure the continuity of the Section 31 Airwave grant.

22. At a high level the usage and associated costs of ESN are approximately 50 per cent of those of Airwave, which on the face of it represents a considerable saving. This must be considered in the context that for English Fire Authorities on average approximately 60 per cent of the Fire link [Airwave] costs are met by Central Government by means of Section 31 grant under the new burdens principle. The exact proportion for each Fire Authority varies between 0 per cent and 95 per cent.

23. The current Firelink [Airwave] contract provides a fully managed service, something that won't exist in ESN and therefore FRSs will have to stand up, expand or procure some capabilities to manage the service. Device management, device replacement and fixing of device faults are some such areas that come into this category. It is likely that hand held devices will require replacement every 3 years and vehicle devices 5 yearly. Currently most FRSs are still using the devices they were originally issued.

24. At present there is no intent to provide any form of grant for in life costs of ESN as with Airwave. Thus, with marginally higher usage costs in the absence of grant, the need for new capability to manage ESN and equipment, along with the costs associated with more regular device refreshes, there is a likelihood that on average ESN will cost Fire Authorities more than they currently pay for Airwave. The NFCC team are working to provide some quantification of this. It is therefore imperative that the opportunity is grasped to realise the business benefits of ESN to recognise the investment that will be made into it at local level.

25. Whilst confidence in ESN is slowly growing within FRSs it is recognised that this is coming from a very low base. To assist in focussing effort the Programme has instigated a confidence measuring and assessment exercise across the user communities which from its first iteration has following four areas as the priorities for improvement:

    25.1    Integrated Plan

    25.2    Programme Business Case

    25.3    Coverage

    25.4    Programme Processes

26. One of the universal expectations of ESN is that it will be at least as good as Airwave which includes its resilience. Due to the very different technologies involved the cost of

providing 7-day power resilience is orders of magnitude greater than it was for Airwave, costs that were largely borne by the Fire sector. Discussions are ongoing with the Programme about how resilience can be cost effectively provided along with options should equivalency of resilience be deemed unaffordable by Government.

27. A vacancy exists on the Fire Customer Group (FCG) for an LGA member, which has remained unfilled for some time. This individual provides an ESMCP governance link into the LGA as well as providing an LGA perspective into relevant FCG decision making.

**Implications for Wales**

28. Fire is a devolved function for the Welsh Assembly. There is direct representation into ESMCP through the Welsh Senior ESMCP User working through the Welsh Joint Emergency Services Group (JESG), and who works closely with counterpart Senior Users from all user communities. Notable difference in approach from the respective Government Departments, particularly around funding, are highlighted in the paper.

**Financial Implications**

29. Financial implications have been discussed in detail in previous sections, however it should be noted that a new Local Transition resource Model (LTR) for English Fire and Rescue Services has been recently agreed with the Home Office Fire Directorate. This represents an increase on previous models. On behalf of Fire and Rescue Services, the NFCC is seeking assurances on the timing, amounts and methods of provision of this future funding.

30. The new model will require greater accountability to the Home Office via Section 151 Officers and FSMC members should be aware that this may raise the prominence of ESMCP funding through Fire Authority and FRS governance.

31. A broad concern exists that in the absence of grant support going forward the ESN may cost Fire Authorities more than they currently spend on Airwave.

**Next steps**

32. NFCC ESMCP representatives will continue to work with the Programme and Government to ensure that the ESN meets the needs and requirements of Fire and Rescue Services.

33. NFCC ESMCP representatives will work to refine some of the financial assumptions and present more detail to a future FSMC.

34. FSMC to consider LGA representation of the NFCC's ESMCP Fire Customer Group.