

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 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 progress in the implementation the early ESMCP products by Fire and Rescue Services.

Recommendations

That the FSMC note the content of the report.

FSMC to consider a joint LGA and NFCC response to the Home Office on the Full Business Case.

Actions

That FSMC seek a further update on ESMCP in the future.

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Background

1. The Emergency Service Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) will provide the next generation of mission critical 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. Contracts for EE and Motorola were awarded in 2015 with subsequent contracts for supporting components such as handheld and vehicle devices, connections to control rooms etc. awarded since.
3. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has a full time ESMCP Business Change Lead (BCL) / Senior User leading a small team of Fire Service secondees 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. The LGA is represented on FCG by Cllr David Norman, from Gloucestershire, who joined recently, with a further vacancy on FCG for a second LGA member. 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). A regular liaison with LGA officers is in place to ensure that they are regularly appraised on ESMCP matters. The LGA has been lobbying for a place on the ESMCP Programme Board, however this has not been fulfilled, increasing the gap in equitability especially when considering Policing representation on Programme Board.

Programme Leadership

5. Since the last ESMCP update to the FSMC in March 2020, there have been some significant changes in Programme leadership. The previous Programme Director left the Programme in March 2020 and his successor, John Black, was appointed in August 2020. Stephen Webb, the Home Office Senior Responsible Owner (SRO), who had overseen the Programme from its inception in 2011 stood down in October 2020. Following a recruitment and selection process, Simon Parr has recently been appointed as the new full time SRO is due to take up post in early to mid-March. Simon was formerly Chief Constable of Cambridgeshire Constabulary between 2010 and 2015 and has been involved with Policing technology Programmes at a national level since.
6. In addition to the direct leadership changes, ESMCP changed its reporting line in the autumn of 2020 and now comes under the purview of the Crime, Police and Fire Group of the Home Office. This move is designed to better enable closer working and engagement between the Programme, Home Office and a larger number of key stakeholders within the user communities.

Programme Reviews

7. As part of internal Government scrutiny and control of major programmes, ESMCP was the subject of a Project Assurance Review (PAR) and a review by the Major Projects Review Group (MPRG) in October 2020. Both reviews made a number of similar recommendations, which included appointing a full time SRO as ESN takes greater prominence and revising the Full Business Case (FBC) to provide better clarity in a number of areas.

Full Business Case Revision

8. In 2018 a full reset of the Programme was initiated to address a number of areas including delivery. A key component of this was the production of a revised Full Business Case (FBC) incorporating the cost associated with delay to the Programme. The FBC agreed in 2015 had a value of £5.1 Billion over a 15-year life of ESN. Work to revise the FBC has continued, including the need to factor significant changes in technical delivery.
9. At time of writing, a very early draft of the revised FBC has been shared with Senior Users and Funding Sponsor Bodies (FSB). This initial draft is recognised as work in progress and has yet to be furnished with dates or financial information. These should be incorporated in a more complete iteration for consultation due week commencing 8 March 2021. The narrative within this draft FBC shows promise at this stage as it portrays greater realism and pragmatism towards the overall achievement of ESN than has previously been witnessed, and it is hoped that this reduces or eliminates the over

optimism which has caused challenges for the FBC and the Programme throughout its life.

10. For ESMCP, the overriding challenge for Fire Authorities and Services at this juncture is having sight of realistic and credible delivery dates for ESN and clear financial information with which to plan and budget against. Senior Users have held workshops and maintained a constant dialogue with Programme leaders providing relevant information on user led activities, risks and finance which all have a bearing on the overall plan and FBC. The NFCC ESMCP team have been working with Programme finance colleagues to aid in the production of a tool with which individual organisations can better estimate and predict ESN costs over its lifetime covering both implementation and in life costs. This tool is reliant upon financial information from the FBC, which has impacted upon its completion to date. It has been impressed upon the Programme that the release of such a tool alongside each iteration of the FBC is an imperative for the Fire sector and will influence the progress of the FBC through governance channels.
11. As may be anticipated on a Programme of this magnitude, there will be some areas that are not fully known or yet delivered. Therefore, the FBC will be based on a significant number of assumptions, for which there has been analysis of risk and modelling. In some cases, Senior Users and the Programme have jointly worked through some of the assumptions, parameters and risks to better understand them and to inform the FBC.
12. The Programme's ambition is that the FBC will proceed through the various streams of governance within the three emergency services (3ES), Devolved Administrations and Funding Sponsor Bodies (FSB) by the end of May. From here the FBC should go formally into the Government's approval processes in June. Previously, the fire sector, through the NFCC's Fire Customer Group, has provided technical and operational assurance of the FBC, with formal sign off being a matter for Government Departments. It is not anticipated that this will substantially change, however as we edge closer to ESN delivery, the aspect of cost and finance as it impacts at local level will take greater prominence and the LGA may wish to consider a position.
13. Unfortunately, the timeline for FBC governance and approval does not appear to permit bringing this back to FSMC before the FBC goes into the Government approval cycle in June. It is therefore proposed that a joint LGA and NFCC response to the FBC be provided to the Home Office once a final draft is issued.
14. Despite the challenges for ESMCP, many of which are being overcome, the NFCC is still firmly of the view that ESN represents the right technology and direction of travel for next generation and future emergency services communications, and that it is achievable.

Progress with ESMCP

15. Work continues apace to develop and deliver ESN, and steady progress is being made with early products and versions of ESN along with supporting components. As previously reported, County Durham and Darlington FRS (CDDFRS) became the first user of an ESN service using the ESN Connect, a data only product, on front-line appliances in 2019. Dorset and Wiltshire FRS also implemented this product in 2020 but used differently, in this instance as a method of fallback mobilising for fire stations, helping to prove the versatility of the product. A number of other FRSs are currently on the journey to taking the ESN Connect product and are undertaking much of the work in the background to onboard onto ESN.
16. Merseyside and West Yorkshire FRS's have formally become Assurance Partners of the Programme to assist with the development, testing and assurance of ESN products ahead of mainstream roll out. In both instances they are the only emergency services organisations that have so far implemented ESN Direct 2, an early iteration of the product that will deliver mission critical voice communications [radio]. Some Police and Ambulance Services have also committed to being Assurance Partners and will implement ESN products in the future. This technical implementation has entailed considerable effort on behalf of the two services involved along with the Programme and suppliers. West Yorkshire FRS will shortly be rolling this out to operational Watch Managers, which will provide invaluable feedback on its use in incident-based situations but maintaining Airwave provisions as a back-up.

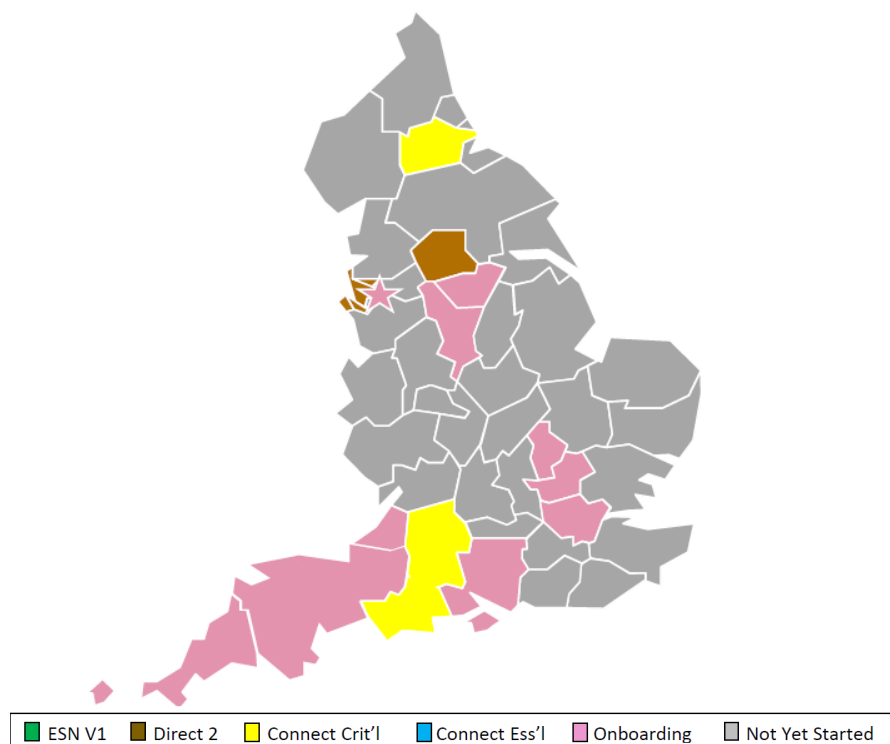


Fig 1 ESN Product Uptake in English FRSs

17. The adoption of early ESN products by FRS assists learning and aids the Programme develop products and support packages. In doing so it demonstrates that the Fire sector is well engaged and willing to take ESN products once they are fit for purpose, and consequently the fire sector is considered to be more than pulling its weight. The gratitude owed to these services for their efforts and pioneering endeavours by the wider Fire Sector is considerable, as is the onus on the Programme to ensure lessons are truly learned and applied ahead of mainstream transition.
18. Whilst dates have not yet been included within the FBC, it is unlikely that transition onto the new ESN will commence in earnest until 2023 at the earliest. This is as a consequence of a number of challenges and delays within the technical delivery arena. It must be borne in mind that this is cutting edge technology and the first of its kind in the world with other countries now following suit and many others actively watching.
19. Assurance around coverage for ESN is a high priority for users as most people are inherently aware of coverage from their own experiences as users of mobile phone technology. A product to aid coverage assurance, ESN Assure 1.1, was rolled out in 2020 and is now being used by the 3ES to assess coverage.

Funding

20. The English and Welsh Fire Sector's core costs for ESMCP, which represent current spend for upfront and development costs, are being paid by the Home Office and Welsh Government according to an apportionment agreed some time ago. The core costs for other emergency services and Devolved Administration are funded differently.
21. At the very outset of the ESMCP journey the English FRSs, 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 in 2016 the policy towards these has not changed, and the principles are:
- Funding will be available for equipment to be replaced on a like for like basis [Airwave equivalency]
 - No additional costs to be borne by FRSs for dual running (on a like for like basis)
 - Reasonable costs for transition will be provided by Government Department
22. A model for English Local Transition Resource (LTR) has been agreed with the Home Office for some time to enable staffing for transition to ESN and any necessary preparation funding in line with the above principles. This was revised in early 2020 to provide for £21.6 million for resourcing at local and regional level up to and including the 2024/25 financial year. Funding previously issued by Government for ESMCP work has been by means of Sec. 31 grant. From April 2021, the Home Office will introduce

changes to the finance monitoring returns and have asked that future LTR grant monitoring returns are sent directly by Section 151 Officers of each individual Fire and Rescue Authority instead of from the Regional Programme Managers.

23. The transition funding approach for Welsh FRSs is different and specific advice can be provided through the ESMCP Senior User for Wales

Issues

24. A delay to ESMCP involves a continued reliance on the current Airwave system. Airwave sustainability is managed by a dedicated board that includes NFCC representation to ensure that the service continues to be fit for purpose until no longer needed by the 3ES, a position confirmed previously by the Home Office Permanent Secretary.
25. As a consequence of the delay to ESN, a majority of FRS Control systems will require an interface upgrade to continue to effectively use the Airwave network. Although Airwave is responsible for support of equipment inside the network, replacement of obsolete components of the system has a knock-on effect into control rooms where an expensive upgrade to be completed by the end of 2022 is incumbent upon user organisations. This upgrade, known as Dispatch Communications Server (DCS), has an estimated cost in the region of £2M across English FRS. Due to a previous Programme assertion that ESN transition would be complete by mid-2023, Fire Authorities have not made provision for this within budgets and discussions between the NFCC and the Home Office are ongoing as to the potential for Government funding. At this juncture it cannot be guaranteed that other such matters won't emerge, although with a managed service from Airwave under the Firelink contract, the risk is somewhat reduced as items such as devices remain Airwave's responsibility.
26. NFCC representatives continue to work with the Programme to ensure that ESN will be fit for purpose. Whilst a detailed set of requirements was issued by the 3ES at the outset, and the Home Office has committed to the principle that ESN will be at least as good as Airwave, there are some emerging areas of concern. Due to the very different technologies involved in ESN, the cost of providing sufficient power resilience is considerably greater than it was for Airwave, costs that were largely borne by the Fire sector at the time. Discussions are ongoing about how resilience can be cost effectively provided, along with options for resolution should equivalency of resilience be deemed unaffordable by Government. In these instances, it is not unreasonable to expect that the Programme will pay due regard to the Government's National Risk Register in providing mitigations to reasonably foreseeable risks highlighted in the assessment, and particularly to the risks posed by significant regional or national power outage.
27. As previously highlighted, there is currently no tool or mechanism available with which Authorities can plan or budget for an ESN environment. Allied to the discontinuance of

Sec. 31 Firelink grant with cessation of Airwave, distinct concerns exist that ESN may cost more at local level than Authorities currently pay for Airwave.

28. The delays to ESMCP may well have consequential impacts on other key projects or programmes of work within FRS's which may in some way interdependent on ESN, for example the replacement or upgrade of Control Room Systems, many of which may be due for replacement during the likely deployment window for ESN.
29. Currently there is an exercise to assess the feasibility of accelerating FRS transition onto ESN. This work will also include an estimate of cost, or additional cost to achieve this, with a view that it would be provided on a pump-prime basis. The broader benefit is to work towards a collective 3ES goal of moving off Airwave at the earliest possible and safe point, and by doing so achieve significant savings for the public purse. The likelihood of all 3ES migrating off Airwave at the same time is low. Therefore, in working towards a safe and timely cessation of Airwave contracts, the Fire Sector will require some clear assurances that it won't be disadvantaged, especially financially, as individual Services and sectors migrate off Airwave.

Implications for Wales

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

Financial Implications

31. Financial implications have been discussed in detail in previous sections, however it should be noted that the Local Transition Resource (LTR) 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.
32. As highlighted, a broad concern exists that, in the absence of grant support going forward, ESN may cost Fire Authorities more than they currently pay for Airwave.

Next steps

33. Subject to approval, LGA and NFCC representatives will work to produce a joint response to the ESMCP FBC once in its finalised state
34. NFCC ESMCP representatives will work to refine the financial and allied assumptions with the intent to present more detail on the FBC and the progress of ESMCP to a future FSMC.