

**Safest People, Safest Places**

County Durham and Darlington  
**Fire and Rescue Authority**



## **COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY**

**09 FEBRUARY 2017**

### **EMERGENCY SERVICES MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMME (ESMCP) UPDATE**

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#### **REPORT OF DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

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##### **Purpose of report**

1. This report provides members with an update on the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP).

##### **Background**

3. Members have received previous reports explaining how the ESMCP will replace the existing communication service delivered by Airwave with a new national mobile communication service for the three emergency services and the other organisations that currently use Airwave.
4. The new system will be called the Emergency Services Network (ESN) and it will take advantage of the latest mobile technologies to provide national critical voice and broadband data services. It is a cross-government programme hosted by the Home Office.
5. In July 2016 a paper was presented to members detailing the financial support that the Service would receive to fund the necessary control room and information technology (IT) upgrades required; the purchase of new handheld and vehicle mounted communication devices and local transition support to cover the costs of Service staff involved in the project.
6. The first instalment of the funding was received in June 2016 with further instalments planned for 2017/18 and 2018/19 to coincide with the Service's planned transition onto the ESN in 2018.

##### **The Current Situation**

7. This Service along with many other Services has raised concerns that the implementation plans produced by the central project team have been unrealistic when taking into account that in a number of key areas the technical capability necessary to operate the ESN has yet to be fully developed and tested. As a result of the feedback from the emergency services and the three companies who are contracted to deliver the ESN; Kellogg Brown & Root (KBR), Motorola and EE, the central government programme team issued a revised programme plan in late December 2016.

8. The new plan indicates that the first Services will transition onto the ESN commencing in July 2018, a ten month delay from the previous plan with the aim being that all Services will have transitioned by the end of 2019. Factoring in the delay; if the order in which fire and rescue service (FRS) regions transition onto ESN was to remain the same as previously reported, the north east would commence transition in October 2018 instead of January 2018. These timescales still cause concern for the FRS as many of the key project milestone dates remain ambitious. Members should also note that the order for transition has changed several times due to the complex nature of the project and it is likely that it will change again; therefore it is not possible to say at this time when the north east region will commence transition.

### **Implications of the delay**

9. Nationally the most significant risk is the fact that the contract with Airwave, the current provider of the emergency services mobile communication network, is due to end in December 2019 which does not provide contingency for any further delays. If the contract is to be extended negotiations must be completed by December 2018 with the cost of any contract extension estimated to be £475m per year. If this were to occur it is expected that Services would continue to pay for Airwave at their current rate with any additional costs met by the government.
10. The delay; however, should provide more time for the 200+ additional mobile network masts to be built. There is a risk that the timescales for this may not be met as land will need to be purchased and planning permission acquired first and as many of these masts will be in sensitive areas such as national parks this will not be an easy process. To ensure key leaders in the affected communities are fully aware of the programme and its importance to national resilience Brandon Lewis, the Minister with lead responsibility for ESN has briefed the 42 MPs whose constituencies require an additional mast(s) to be built. Within our area Helen Goodman MP was provided with a briefing.
11. As stated earlier in the report transition funding for Services has been planned over a three year period up to 2018/19; however, it is possible that some Services will not commence transition until 2019/20 and this has been raised as a risk with the Home Office. It is hoped that clarification on transition funding will be received by the end of February 2017.
12. Within County Durham and Darlington FRS the risk of a delay with the project, because of the issues mentioned above, has been logged as a corporate risk and our specific concerns over the project plan have been fed back to the central project team.

### **Recommendations**

13. Members are requested to **note** the contents of the report.