

## report

meeting	<b>NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE &amp; RESCUE AUTHORITY</b>	
date	<b>24 March 2006</b>	agenda item number

### REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

#### NATIONAL FIRELINK RADIO CONTRACT AWARD

##### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform Members that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) have awarded the National Firelink radio project contract to O<sub>2</sub> Airwave. This report also outlines some of the consequences of this decision upon Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service.

##### 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service currently operates a three site quasi AM band radio system installed in 1986. In order to maintain this system, the Service employs a number of technical specialists, whose job it is to maintain this system.
- 2.2 The Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC) was discussing the need for a replacement radio system for the Service in 1996. In 1998 the CFBAC adopted a replacement radio strategy based on local procurement with a national inter working standard. The Home Office notified the Service in Fire Service Circular 7/2001 that they intended to withdraw the low band spectrum for the Fire Service and that local procurement of new systems should occur based on a national output specification. Services throughout England and Wales generally started a regional procurement process to purchase this new system to get best value for money from collaborative working.
- 2.3 Following the events of 11 September 2001, it became necessary for the Fire and Rescue Service and other emergency services to prepare to respond to catastrophic incidents, including terrorist attacks. In May 2002, Ministers announced a new competition for the procurement of a national wide area radio system, for the Fire and Rescue Services in England and Wales, with significant central funding from the Government, to replace the previous regional procurement strategy. This project was known as Firelink.
- 2.4 The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2005/6, Paragraphs 4.21 to 4.23 cover the Firelink project and states that :

“ODPM is funding the procurement of a new national radio system for Fire and Rescue Authorities in order to increase resilience and provide interoperability within the Service and with other emergency services. It will

replace the radio systems currently owned and managed by Authorities. Fire and Rescue Authorities, in line with Fire Service Circular 7/2002, will contribute to the revenue costs of the new radio system from 2006/07. We will discuss with Fire and Rescue Authorities the scale of their contribution upon contract award”

- 2.5 The objective of this contract is to provide the Service with a modern digital radio system that has full interoperability, not only with other fire services, but also with other emergency services attending incidents. The Police and Ambulance Services have already awarded contracts to O<sub>2</sub> Airwave.
- 2.6 Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service has been in regular contact with the national procurement team throughout the procurement process.

### **3. REPORT**

- 3.1 Formal letters of contract award were exchanged with O<sub>2</sub> Airwave on 24 February 2006 and the ODPM's central commercial procurement team is drafting the final details of the contract.
- 3.2 O<sub>2</sub> Airwave's solution is a digital solution that is owned by that company, it has strict access requirements and a revenue payment for the use of the system will be required.
- 3.3 The Firelink project will now move from a procurement phase to an implementation phase. The first stage of this process, which is infrastructure enhancement, will last approximately a year and will involve the installation of equipment within fire control and at other Fire Authority premises. Once the infrastructure is nearing completion, the end user equipment will be installed in fire appliances and at this time training for all staff will be conducted. The whole process is due to be completed during 2008.
- 3.4 The Firelink radio system is a prerequisite for the Regional Control Centre (RCC) becoming operational. The intention is to install voice system functionality within the existing control room, with full data functionality, via the new radio bearer, being turned on when the RCC goes live.
- 3.5 The Service's current radio system infrastructure will be removed when the new system is operational.

### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are a number of areas where the Authority will probably be committed to expenditure. These areas involve future running costs, training costs and logistics issues of engaging with the contractor to implement the system. The specific details are unclear at this time, as the Service has not seen the contract or been able to engage with the supplier in detailed discussions.
- 4.2 In the preparation of the budget approved at the last meeting of the Fire Authority on 24 February 2006, a provision was made for this area of work and so the Authority does have resources available to meet the initial cost of starting the work.

## **5. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

There are personnel implications relating to this contract, as the Authority employs radio technicians whose job is to maintain the current radio system. The employees and their representative bodies are being kept up to date on the current situation, as there are potential TUPE implications associated with this new arrangement.

## **6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

An equalities impact assessment has not been carried out as this report is notification of a decision taken by a national procurement body that affects the Service.

## **7. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct risk management implications from this report, however there are associated risks from project failure and to additional risk reduction work that the Authority would like to undertake, if resources have to be diverted in order to implement the system. Officers will be engaging with O<sub>2</sub> Airwave's project team as soon as possible so as to assess the risks to the organisation.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Members note the contents of this report and receive additional risk, personnel, financial and progress reports as the project moves forward.

## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION**

- Fire Service Circular 7/2001 ;
- The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2005/06.

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