



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority

EMERGENCY SERVICES NETWORK UPDATE

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 26 February 2021

Purpose of Report:

To provide an update on the progress of the Emergency Services Network programme by Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Recommendations:

That Members note the contents of this report and agree to receive further updates as the project develops.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) is intended to provide the next generation communication system for the three emergency services (3ES) and other public safety users. This system will be called the Emergency Services Network (ESN) and provides integrated critical voice and broadband data services for the emergency services. ESN will replace the existing Airwave contract which is scheduled to expire in December 2022.
- 1.2 The programme has three key objectives it aims to achieve:
 - Better - integrated service, functionality and coverage;
 - Smarter – more flexible and pay only for what is used;
 - Cheaper – address budget pressures and leverage market forces.
- 1.3 The ESN programme will deliver:
 - Secure and resilient mission critical communications the emergency services can trust to keep them safe;
 - A modern voice and data platform which will enable the emergency services to improve front-line operations and work more closely together;
 - Value for money by replacing legacy technology, improving commercial terms and providing a common platform for innovation and data sharing.
- 1.4 In March 2016, the Fire Authority received a financial information and sign-off pack which provided information about participation in the ESMCP, and that the lead government department was committed to provide all reasonable transition funding, this agreement was signed and returned to Department of Communities and Local Government, committing the Fire Authority to the Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme.
- 1.5 East Midlands fire services have an established regional programme board with representatives from all Services and Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service's Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) is the lead officer on behalf of East Midlands FRS. An Area Manager is seconded from Lincolnshire as the Regional Fire Programme Manager (RPM), with a major day-to-day role on behalf of the East Midlands and works closely with the DCFO.
- 1.6 The Head of Digital Transformation leads on behalf of Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) project structure, co-ordinating key roles across the organisation and along with the NFRS ESN Project Manager works closely with East Midlands colleagues to seek opportunities for mutual support to deliver the ESN.
- 1.7 The DCFO attends regular Fire Customer Group (FCG) meetings; this forum is the sounding board for the fire sector strategic leads to feed into the national programme team within the Home Office.

2. REPORT

ESN Full Business Case

- 2.1 The ESN full business case (FBC) is currently being refreshed and a draft was released in September 2020 with the ambition that this will proceed through governance and be signed off in early 2021.
- 2.2 The current draft of the FBC concludes that whilst Airwave shut down between June 2023 to February 2024 is the preferred option based on a full financial assessment, the feasibility of delivering ESN at such an accelerated timetable needs to be confirmed through detailed planning with the User Organisations (UOs). The plans underpinning this FBC have not yet been presented in the detail that is required to assure the overall deliverability.

Timescales for Transition

- 2.3 Deployment planning is ongoing within the programme and engagement with UOs and suppliers is taking place, work is currently being undertaken on a national interoperability matrix to be used for transition scheduling. The Tri-Service partners have stated that our preference would be for transition of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire at the same time or reasonably close and Leicestershire either just before or just after.
- 2.4 The transition plan for the Tri-Service is being pushed for the end of 2022, however this is with the caveat that Systel is yet to provide their Delivery Support Plan and the adoption of their ESN compliant system will mean a significant change in the current solution architecture; therefore, it is currently unclear what impact this will mean to ESN transition.

Ongoing Issues for Core and Non-Core Costs

- 2.5 Costs for ESN fall into two main areas:
 - **Core Costs** – representing those costs necessary to create, maintain and manage the network that will be managed centrally for UK UOs;
 - **Non-Core Costs** – representing the costs of connecting to and using the network, including device purchases, connection, data and call charges.
- 2.6 For English fire and rescue services there is a policy that non-core costs associated with transitioning from Airwave and onto ESN will be paid by the Home Office Fire Directorate, currently by means of Section 31 grant. Therefore, non-core costs for FRSs can be split into two categories:
 - **Transition Costs** – representing those costs incurred by OUs to enable transition onto ESN;
 - **BAU Costs** – representing the UOs costs associated with in life and business as usual activities incurred by utilising Airwave/ESN.

- 2.7 The Authority continues to receive transition funding from Government for preparation and implementation of ESN. However, no further funding is expected until 2021/2022.
- 2.8 NFRS continuously reviews costs and is yet to receive clarity on what the local costs of implementing ESN are likely to be. Furthermore, it is worth noting that unlike the Airwave/Firelink agreement, ESN will not offer a fully managed service to FRSs. Therefore, NFRS will need to find additional resources and funding to facilitate the administration, support and maintenance of our local ESN solution and devices after ESN transition.
- 2.9 There has been some concern from the NFCC and UOs regarding the movement of some of these non-core costs through progressive iterations of the FBC. To allay these concerns, the NFCC has committed to produce a model and tool to enable financial predications and planning down to an FRS level. The production of this tool should be considered a prerequisite for any progress of the FBC through FRS / NFCC governance, especially as there are concerns that ESN may well cost more than Airwave at a local level.

ESN Resilience

- 2.10 ESN resilience has been a matter of debate for several years, especially as the current Airwave system provides a high level of resilience. The ESCMP believes that the current resilience levels will be unaffordable, or the cost will be disproportionately high to deliver. The estimated costs to reach an operationally acceptable level of resilience in ESN ranges from £35m to £340m, depending upon the extent of resilience required. Throughout the lifespan of ESMCP, Government has provided assurances to the UK FRSs and user communities that ESN will be at least as good as Airwave in every respect. There are concerns that the costed options for ESN resilience may not provide a level of equivalence to those currently provided by the Airwave system, and that will have implications for Fire Authorities and FRSs.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 An earmarked reserve of £200k was originally established for the supporting work required to prepare for ESN compliance, significant spend against it has been used in conjunction with government transition funding to address remediation plans. This has focused upon assuring the infrastructure of NFRS is ESN ready, increased timescales will clearly protract the financial implications for the Authority.
- 3.2 The ESN programme has always set a clear expectation that government will only fund the like for like replacement of the current Airwave.
- 3.3 The Authority will continue to receive transition funding from government for preparation and implementation. However, no further funding is expected until 2021/2022.

- 3.4 The programme of work has increased demands upon the Service, these will only be partially funded from government and this continues to be closely monitored.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The ESN programme has requirements for staff training and these will be addressed as part of the implementation phase across the East Midlands and offers potential opportunities for wider collaboration.
- 4.2 ESN continues to place increasing demands upon support departments, specifically across the Procurement, Response and ICT functions. These have all been delivered within the Service's existing policy framework, but it is anticipated that capacity will need to increase further in the build up to transition to ESN transition.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

An equality impact assessment has not been undertaken because this report does not amend existing policy or service provision.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The ESN programme presents a high-risk potential for the Authority solely dependent on external factors beyond its day-to-day control, the main issue being slippage at a national level.
- 8.2 Tri-Service implementation issues have a direct implication for NFRS and its Tri-Service partners to be able to connect to ESN, this will continue to place a protracted demand upon the organisation.
- 8.3 The Service is engaged with ESN regionally and has previously reviewed the East Midlands ESN risk register, it is further included within the Corporate Risk Register, which has been reviewed and informed Service department leads to ensure risks are communicated and work is planned to manage and or mitigate risk.

- 8.4 Regular project meetings are led by the Head of Digital Transformation and these monitor changes in any areas of risk and update both the Service project and inform the regional lead to monitor progress made by Nottinghamshire.
- 8.5 Members should be aware that the ESN places a demand upon the organisation and 'programme governance' is a key risk highlighted within the Corporate Risk Register, officers are obliged to monitor the capacity of the Service to ensure they deliver upon its commitments. As the project delays continue and financial pressures impact upon the Service this risk will require scrutiny.
- 8.6 With the now significant delay in transition timelines and funding, it is recommended that the risk of ESN to NFRS is maintained at an increased level and the DCFO will look to ensure that this is reflected in the Services governance arrangements. The Chief Fire Officer will also receive information directly through the NFCC and these will inform the Service's position in future.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Following discussion and workshops with East Midlands Police and Fire strategic leads, five collaborative areas had been developed: training, procurement, devices, installation and coverage assurance.
- 9.2 A joint East Midlands Police and Fire strategic programme board with terms of reference is in place.
- 9.3 Collaboration between Fire and Police is complex, not least given that this spans ten separate organisations and ESN incremental delivery.
- 9.4 Extensive East Midlands Police, Ambulance and Fire collaboration is taking place for coverage and coverage assurance activities, with a joint strategy and deployment plan in place for coverage assurance testing.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the contents of this report and agree to receive further updates as the project develops.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None.

John Buckley
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER