



Circular

Title: Airwave Update

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Further Information or Discussion: Darryl Keen, Strategic Lead for Operational Communications or Ian Taylor, NFCC ESMCP Business Change Lead

Issued by: Darryl Keen, Strategic Lead for Operational Communications

Approved by: Chris Lowther, NFCC Operations Committee Chair

Background

Colleagues will be aware on 21 September the Home Secretary announced to Parliament that the review into the Emergency Service Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) had concluded and that the best approach was to continue with the Emergency Services Network (ESN). He also said that the Programme would move to an incremental approach to deliver new capabilities sooner and extend the Airwave network until transition is complete to ensure the emergency services have unbroken access to a continuous critical communications network.

Government has continued to reiterate that under the new plan, once all the emergency services are using every ESN product or service needed, and no longer want or wish to pay for Airwave, then shutdown of the old service can take place. Government continue to be very clear that no risks will be taken with public safety and Airwave will continue until all the emergency services transition onto ESN.

Heads of Terms and Airwave extension

Heads of Terms (HoT) for the extension of core ESN contracts were signed in September. Allied to this was the signature of a joint letter of agreement between the Home Office and Motorola extending the Airwave Service for 3 years to a new target date for national shutdown of 31 Dec 2022. This will be formalised with the signing of an Umbrella Change Control Notice (UCCN) for the Firelink and other Airwave contracts, which is anticipated to be completed before the end of December 2018. Behind this sits detailed work to inform Change Authorisation Notices (CAN), which represent a formalisation of the HoTs, with an ambition that these are completed by the end of March 2019.

As a result of the above, the core Firelink contract between the Home office and Motorola will continue as is. This means the managed service currently enjoyed by FRSs should remain unchanged and includes repair or replacement of terminals etc. Implications for locally held contracts or call off items are discussed later.

Along with Home Office Airwave and Commercial colleagues, we are exploring the feasibility as to whether there is a way of introducing some flexibility or scalability in FRS Airwave device numbers. If successful, this could provide a mechanism of reducing the number of devices paid for by FRSs by way of taking back unused or redundant terminals for a corresponding rebate – this has been requested by a number of Services.

Sustainability of the core Airwave network

To provide assurance over the continued use of the Airwave network an engineering review has taken place and experts from the Home Office are in regular dialogue with Airwave to ensure that their plans to maintain the network will continue to deliver the required service. A number of elements within the core network will require upgrading due to obsolescence, but the impact of this should not affect users. On behalf of the emergency services the Emergency Services Airwave Strategic Group (ESASG), consisting of the Airwave SIRO's for each of the 3ES along with the Devolved Administrations and currently chaired by the FRS SIRO, CFO Darryl Keen, will continue to monitor and work with the Home Office and Airwave to ensure it remains fit for purpose until it is no longer required

Locally held FRS Airwave contracts

A number of FRSs hold contracts directly with Airwave which are separate to the core contract, these cover items procured directly from the Airwave catalogue or items from a call off or other contract. Items within this scope include extra terminals obtained after Firelink was implemented, SAN-H, MDT's, higher level SLA's with Airwave etc. Given the extension to the core Airwave [Firelink] contract those FRSs with direct Airwave contracts may need to consider their options with these contracts, factoring likely end dates alongside ESN adoption and retirement or refreshment of other associated technology. For example, if an FRS has a SAN-H some of these contracts expire at the end of 2019 and Airwave may well stipulate a notice period for renewal or cancellation. FRS will need to consider all of those contracts that they hold outside of the core Airwave contract.

Cetracomm, Vortex and DCS

Airwave have notified FRSs, via a formal notice, that their Centracom and Vortex products (SAN-H and SAN-G) will be obsolete from the end of 2022. Airwave's replacement for this system, Dispatch Communications Server (DCS), is currently progressing through development and accreditation for use on the Airwave network. To assist FRSs, consider their options and make any plans in this arena 3 DCS practitioner workshops took place in late Nov / early Dec and FRS should now have sufficient information to start considering their options.

GPS Rollover

Airwave notified FRSs in September that most terminals will need a minor reprogramming change to cope with a GPS week numbering roll over that happens every 1024 weeks. Airwave have now issued further guidance identifying the options for resetting the week number and allow terminals and devices to continue to use GPS functionality. This work can either be performed by FRS's for which Airwave will provide recompense to the value of £20 per affected terminal, or Airwave will undertake the work for FRS either themselves or through contractors.

Whilst it will be for individual FRSs to determine if they wish to update their terminals to continue to have the capability to provide GPS and location information, it is advised that is done across all FRS Airwave fleets so that there is consistency in the national fleet. This may have pertinence in future to allow greater interoperability between FRSs and systems.

Sec.31 Firelink grant funding post December 19

Engagement by NFCC representatives with National Resilience and Fire Programmes Division of the Home Office has emphasised the need for information on the Sec. 31 Airwave grant funding after December 2019. This has identified the need for clarity in 2 distinct areas; for Q1 2020 to enable services and authorities to be informed as part of the process of setting balanced budgets for the 19/20 financial year, and for the period after that until the Airwave national shutdown. Although not confirmed the first aspect for Q1 2020 is looking favourable, and there is an expectation that FRSs will be contacted in writing to inform them of this within the next month. Given that Airwave shutdown is currently forecast at the end of 2022 it may be prudent for FRSs to factor this into any medium term financial planning

NFCC representatives continue to work with ESMCP and the Home Office on behalf of FRSs to ensure that the Airwave service remains viable and operationally fit for purpose until ESMCP is fully delivered and Airwave is no longer needed.