

## **Emergency Service Mobile Communication Programme (ESMCP)**

Currently all of Great Britain's emergency service and up to 300 public safety organisations communicate using the Airwave network. The Airwave network forms part of the nation's critical national infrastructure and is designed to withstand major incidents whilst providing secure and speedy communications. The network is relied upon during routine operations as well as during the toughest situations our country's emergency responders face.

In 2014 the government launched the Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme (ESMCP) which is a Home Office led, cross-government programme delivering a new critical communication system for Great Britain's emergency responders; the Emergency Services Network (ESN). This will replace the current Airwave service used by the emergency services in Great Britain.

ESN will transmit fast, safe and secure voice, video and data across the 4G EE network and give first responders immediate access to life-saving data, images and information in live situations and emergencies. Customers for the ESN include the Police, Fire and Rescue and Ambulance services.

The original timescales for ESN would have seen the South West region (which GFRS is a part of) transition away from Airwave and onto ESN in 2019. However due to the complexity of the programme timescales have been compromised and new challenges have arisen for the programme to consider. To meet these, delivery of ESN has been pushed back with a new go live date to be released shortly from the National programme.

Although Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) have been engaging with the programme since the outset, a full time dedicated member of staff was not in place until November 2021. The member of staff is currently seconded into this role from the Fire control room, covers the role of Project Manager, Coverage Lead, and Control room lead. This role is part funded by the programme through a 'Local Transition Resource grant' from the Home Office with the shortfall being met by GFRS.

An Infrastructure grant has been received to cover additional costs to ensure GFRS equipment is 'ESN ready'. However, the funding has recently been affected by a new list of activities the Home Office programme deem to be out of scope from the ESN project. For instance, a required upgrade to the Airwave network, which has been required due to the delays of ESN, has not been funded by the programme or government. This part of the programme is likely to cost in the region of £120,000 before any staffing costs, and is obligatory to ensure GFRS have access to the Airwave Critical Communication Network.

Since the new member of staff has been in post a delivery plan was put into place to ensure GFRS were in a place to transition to the new Network. A strategic board has been created and meet on a 6 weekly basis, this includes a member of the National Fire Chiefs Council ESMCP team. A GFRS ESN delivery team which has been created and will begin to meet as the project moves forward and workloads increase. We are working with fleet to future proof any new appliances that are currently on order. Risks are highlighted and control measures put

in place to manage the risk and highlighted using the GFRS Risk register, Corporate Risk Register, and through the programme as required.

Although nationally the delivery plan has been affected by the programme delays and re-procurement of one of the contracts, GFRS are continuing to work towards transition. Currently the work is based around coverage of the network, and surveys have now been carried out at all GFRS Fire Stations. We are currently working collaboratively with Gloucestershire police and South West Ambulance, looking at all Critical Operational Locations in the County and ensuring the network is available to enable to transition to ESN. Testing of coverage on the Road Network in the County has been taking place over the last 3 years using devices fitted to operational vehicles. Nationally these devices have collected over 3.5 billion pieces of data. GFRS are also working with Severn Area Rescue Association and the Forestry Commission to undertake testing on the River and Forestry Tracks.

With the programme activity reduced due to the current national re-procurement taking place, GFRS will continue to work on the coverage the new network provides and highlight any 'Areas of Concern' to the programme. As the programme develops we feel currently GFRS will be in a position to ensure a successful transition to ESN in line with the National Programme.