



Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority

## Decision Report

<b>Report reference number:</b> 063-21	
<b>Government security classification:</b> Official	
<b>Title of report:</b> Renewal of ECFRS Firelink Contract	
<b>Area of county / stakeholders affected:</b> ECFRS Control and Operations	
<b>Report by:</b>	Paul Gardiner, Control Programme Manager
<b>Date of report:</b>	9 <sup>th</sup> November 2021
<b>Enquiries to:</b>	Neil Cross, Chief Financial Officer

### 1. Purpose of the report

The purpose of the report is to seek approval for the renewal of the Firelink Contract and payment of the Service Fees for the Financial Year 2021-22.

### 2. Recommendations

This report makes and provides supporting information for the following recommendations:

- That the purchase order for the renewal of the Firelink Contract and payment of the Service Fees for the Financial Year 2021-22, to the value of **£827,304** is approved by the PFCC.
- The PFCC provides authorisation for the Chief Financial Officer to raise this purchase order on their behalf.

### 3. Benefits of the proposal

The benefits of the proposal are that it will allow ECFRS to continue to discharge its statutory duties, by continuing to mobilise and support mission critical voice and data communications between Control, appliances, officers and all other emergency services over the current Airwave network.

### 4. Background and proposal

The Firelink Project Agreement - to provide a new digital emergency services communication network - was originally commissioned and approved by The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in 2006. The project implemented the Airwave Network and Service,

which was borne out of the need for all emergency services in Great Britain to have access to a secure and reliable communications network with unrivalled coverage across the length and breadth of the country.

The original contract ran until the end of December 2016. DCLG then approved a major extension of the Firelink Project Agreement for a further 36 months until the end of 2019, but this was further extended by the Home Office in 2018, due to the delays in Home Office led Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP), which was commissioned to replace the Airwave network with a new 4G LTE Emergency Services Network (ESN). As a result, the core Firelink contract between the Home Office and Airwave remained in place and unchanged, with a revised target date at that point for the national shutdown of the Airwave network of 31 December 2022.

The Full Business Case (FBC) for ESMCP was then reviewed and updated by the Home Office in 2020, at which point the best case for the Airwave network shutdown was estimated to be June 2023, although the expected (risk based) shutdown date was estimated to be as late as June 2025. On that basis, it is anticipated that ECFRS should be able to complete the transition to the new ESN sometime during 2024, so the proposal is that we continue to renew the Firelink contract until the point at which we have fully transitioned to the new ESN, and decommissioned all Airwave devices and connectivity to the Airwave network.

The costs of service are allocated to us by the Home Office.

## **5. Alternative options considered and rejected**

There are no alternative options to the Airwave network, until the full ESN mission critical voice and data capability has been delivered by ESMCP, which as stated above, ECFRS is unlikely to fully transition to until some point during 2024.

The only alternative open to the Commissioner is to withdraw from the Airwave service without their being a workable alternative. This would have significant negative operational implications and is not recommended.

## **6. Strategic priorities**

Renewal of the current Firelink contract will support the following aspects of the Fire and Rescue Plan: -

- **Prevention, protection and response**
  - Help all of our communities, both urban and rural, to stay safe
  - Ensure an effective, co-ordinated response to major emergencies and incidents
- **Improve safety on our roads**
  - Minimise the impact of road collisions by ensuring an efficient response to protect property and preserve life
- **Develop and broaden the roles and range of activities undertaken by the Service**
  - Improve performance by using technology better to coordinate our response with other emergency services
- **Collaborate with our partners**
  - Enable effective national and international mobilisation
- **Make best use of our resources**
  - Benchmark our performance with other fire and rescue services and leading public and private sector bodies to improve our own performance
  - Use new technology and business processes to improve service efficiency
- **National Fire and Rescue Priorities – Home Office**
  - Make appropriate provision for fire prevention and protection activities and response to fire and rescue related incidents

- Collaborate with emergency services and other local and national partners to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the service they provide

In terms of the ECFRS Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2020-2024, the project will specifically support our Response and Technology Strategies by continuing to support our core activities regarding how we mobilise crews and maintain effective communications between Control, appliances, officers and all other emergency services.

## 7. Operational implications

Renewal of the Firelink contract will have no operational implications.

## 8. Financial implications

The following table denotes the annual Firelink costs along with the annual S31 Grant Received since 2016-17. Both the costs and the annual S31 grant are budgeted for each financial year.

<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>Actual Firelink Costs</b>	<b>Annual S31 Firelink Grant</b>	<b>Net Cost to the Authority</b>
2016-17	£772,334	(£569,608)	£202,726
2017-18	£790,970	(£590,193)	£200,777
2018-19	£812,236	(£609,480)	£202,756
2019-20	£837,259	(£628,258)	£209,001
2020-21	£822,815	(£642,268)	£180,547
<b>2021-22</b>	<b>£827,304</b>	<b>(£567,920)</b>	<b>£259,384</b>

The current Firelink contract is subsidised by the Home Office for all FRSs, so on the assumption that this will continue to be the case until it's terminated, and there will be no significant change in ECFRS network usage, the costs for subsequent years are likely to be similar to those for the last six years.

The monthly cost of the Firelink Service from the Home Office is £68,942 and therefore an annual charge of £827,304 is expected.

These have been and will continue to be accounted for in the annual Revenue Budget for ICT.

It is of note, that on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021, a letter was received from the Home Office confirming that an overpayment of the S31 Annual Grant had been made for 2020-21 across all Fire and Rescue Authorities. This has resulted in the Home Office making a correction being made to the 2021-22 S31 grant, and we will receive £567,920 instead of an amount of £655,113 which was originally expected (See Appendix A).

## 9. Legal implications

Renewal of the Firelink contract will have no legal implications.

## 10. Staffing implications

Renewal of the Firelink contract will have no staffing implications.

## 11. Equality and Diversity implications

Renewal of the Firelink contract will have no Equality and Diversity implications.

We have considered whether individuals with protected characteristics will be disadvantaged as a consequence of the actions being taken. Due regard has also been given to whether there is impact on each of the following protected groups as defined within the Equality Act 2010:

Race	X	Religion or belief	X
Sex	X	Gender reassignment	X
Age	X	Pregnancy & maternity	X
Disability	X	Marriage and Civil Partnership	X
Sexual orientation	x		

**12. Risks**

There are no risks associated with the renewal of the Firelink contract.

**13. Governance Boards**

This proposal has not been discussed at any governance boards, the request came directly from the PFCC to the Chief Financial Officer.

**14. Background papers**

Appendix A Home Office Letter S31 Grant

**Decision Process (051-21)**

**Step 1A - Chief Fire Officer Comments**

(The Chief Fire Officer is asked in their capacity as the Head of Paid Service to comment on the proposal.)

I support this recommendation



Sign:

Date: 17/11/2021

**Step 1B – Consultation with representative bodies**

(The Chief Fire Officer is to set out the consultation that has been undertaken with the representative bodies)

Discussions will be held with all representative bodies, as part of the transition to and implementation of the new SEE.

**Step 2 - Statutory Officer Review**

The report will be reviewed by the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority's ("the Commissioner's") Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer prior to review and sign off by the Commissioner or their Deputy.

Monitoring Officer

Sign:



Print: Darren Horsman - Deputy MO

Date: 22.11.2021

Chief Finance Officer

Sign:



Print: Neil Cross

Date: 17/11/2021

**Step 3 - Publication**

Is the report for publication?      **YES**

If 'NO', please give reasons for non-publication (Where relevant, cite the security classification of the document(s). State 'none' if applicable)

If the report is not for publication, the Monitoring Officer will decide if and how the public can be informed of the decision.

**Step 4 - Redaction**

If the report is for publication, is redaction required:

- |   |                   |     |
|---|-------------------|-----|
| 1 | Of Decision Sheet | N/A |
| 2 | Of Appendix       | N/A |

If 'YES', please provide details of required redaction:

Date redaction carried out: .....

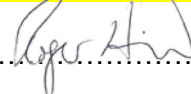
If redaction is required, the Chief Finance Officer or the Monitoring Officer are to sign off that redaction has been completed.

Sign: ..... Print: .....

Date signed: .....

**Step 5 - Decision by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner or Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner**

I agree the recommendations to this report:

Sign:  ..... (PFCC)

Print: Roger Hirst

Date signed: 1 December 2021