



LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

Report title

Airwave – Procurement of Direct Communications Server (DCS)

Report to

Corporate Services Board
Commissioner's Board
Deputy Mayor's Fire and Resilience Board
London Fire Commissioner

Date

17 August 2021
25 August 2021
7 September 2021

Report by

Chief Information Officer

Report number

LFC-0582y

Protective marking: **OFFICIAL - Sensitive**

Publication status: Published with redactions

If redacting, give reason: Commercial information

I agree the recommended decision below.

Andy Roe

London Fire Commissioner

Date **This decision was remotely signed
on 22 December 2021**

Executive Summary

All emergency services have been using the Airwave digital radio system for all its critical operational communications since its introduction as part of the national project in 2009. At LFB, Airwave is used as the primary communications bearer for all LFB fire appliances, officer radios and all centralised 999 equipment installed in the LFB control at the Merton (LOC) and at LFB fall-back facility in Stratford.

In December 2022, the interfaces that provide the communication between control rooms and Airwave will reach the end of their serviceable life and are scheduled to be withdrawn from service. Airwave have provisionally scheduled the provision of a replacement solution, known as Direct Communications Server (DCS) for February 2022 and therefore the new interface needs to be commissioned prior to this date.

This report seeks approval to commit expenditure to replace the current Capita Airwave interface with a new DCS interface.

Recommended decisions

For the London Fire Commissioner

That the London Fire Commissioner approves expenditure up to £ [REDACTED] to replace the Airwave interface to the DCS server.

The London Fire Commissioner delegates authority to Assistant Director Technical & Commercial to award a contract for the replacement equipment up to a value of [REDACTED]^{1 2}

Introduction and background

1. The Airwave Network provides a secure mobile communications system for the emergency services and other public safety organisations with whom they need to communicate. Airwave was established in 2000 specifically for the supply of a Professional Mobile Radio (PMR) communication service to the police and other 'blue light' services. It was introduced into the UK Fire Services in 2007 as part of the FireLink project. All the UK's emergency services and over 300 public safety organisations communicate using the Airwave Network. Airwave is used as the primary means of communications between LFB fire appliances, officers and all centralised 999 equipment installed in the LFB control at the Merton (LOC) and at LFB fall-back facility in Stratford. The Airwave Network forms part of the nation's Critical National Infrastructure. Designed to withstand major incidents and provide secure and speedy communications, Airwave is relied upon during routine operations as well as during the toughest situations our country's emergency responders face.
2. The original Airwave contract expired on 31 December 2016 with all ongoing hardware procurement and product support being transferred to local FRSs. In February 2016 Airwave was acquired by Motorola Solutions and continued access to the Airwave Network for the UK fire and rescue services was secured by the Home Office, through its Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme (ESMCP). The Home Office secured an extension of the original Network Access contract to support transition of UK emergency services across to the new Emergency Services Network (ESN) in due course.

Equipment replacement

3. The LFB has been relying upon Airwave components to ensure that critical communications activities can be maintained since the introduction of the Airwave digital main scheme radio service to LFB in 2009.
4. These critical components are installed in the London Operations Centre at Merton – referred to as a SAN H – and the Stratford (mobilising) fall-back site – referred to as a SAN G. These systems are provided to the LFB as part of the current contract that exists between the Home Office and Airwave.
5. The SAN H and SAN G systems will reach the end of their serviceable life in December 2022 and will need to be replaced to allow the LFB to continue to use the Airwave Network service. The replacement for the SAN H and SAN G is referred to as the Airwave Direct Communications Server (DCS).

¹ This sum includes a contingency of 10% - ² Redact

6. The SAN H and SAN G infrastructure is able to communicate to Airwave via a dedicated interface known as an Integrated Control and Communications System (ICCS). The ICCS is developed by Capita and will also require upgrading at both LFB sites to work with the new DCS.
7. Any new interfaces that are developed to integrate with the Airwave service need to be accredited to do so by the national Network Approval Testing Scheme (NATS). Capita have produced an interface for the current ICCS and DCS which has received accreditation following work undertaken with Lancashire Police Service.

Costs

8. The Home Office have stated that no funding for the DCS interface is available from the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) and no Emergency Service Network (ESN) infrastructure funding that has been allocated to each FRS can be used for this interface procurement.
9. The expectation is that each emergency service will be responsible for funding the DCS work, that will allow it to continue to interface with and use the national Airwave service. LFB have received a quotation for the implementation of the DCS solution from Capita of [REDACTED].

Budget Implications

10. Funding for the DCS project will be met from the existing Capital provision in the approved budget for 2021/22.

Alternative options considered and consultation

11. There are in effect no viable alternatives to replacing the SAN H and SAN G equipment and install the upgraded ICCS interface. This report has been produced in full consultation with the AC Operational Resilience and Control and senior control room management.
12. The LFB relies on the Airwave service for all critical operational voice communications, both within and outside of the LFB. If the DCS solution is not in operational service by December 2022 when the support for legacy equipment is withdrawn, then there would be significant risk to the continued operational use of critical voice for LFB control room, officer, and appliance communication.

Objectives and expected outcomes

13. The objective of this procurement is to ensure that the LFB is able to continue to use the national Airwave system after December 2022. By working with suppliers and other senior stakeholders throughout the LFB, ICT will ensure that the transition to the DCS is as seamless as possible. However, it is not yet possible to be specific as to any systems "downtime" that may be required.
14. The Chief Information Officer will ensure that all stakeholders are briefed, risks identified and where possible mitigated as part of this project.

Project approach and future timelines

15. A project will be established, and a project manager allocated from within ICT Department, and appropriate project management governance arrangements will be put in place. The project will be managed in line with the LFB's established project management guidelines and progress regularly reported at project board meetings to ensure any new service is delivered in line with LFB expectations and timescales.

16. The upgrade will need to have been completed in advance of December 2022 and so all governance, procurement and transition activities will need to have been completed in time for service transition.

Impacts

Equality impact

17. The London Fire Commissioner and decision takers are required to have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (s149 of the Equality Act 2010) when taking decisions.
18. It is important to note that consideration of the Public Sector Equality Duty is not a one-off task. The duty must be fulfilled before taking a decision, at the time of taking a decision, and after the decision has been taken.
19. The protected characteristics are: Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Pregnancy and maternity, Marriage and civil partnership (but only in respect of the requirements to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination), Race (ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality), Religion or belief (including lack of belief), Sex, Sexual orientation.
20. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the LFC, in the exercise of all his functions (i.e. everything the LFC does), to have due regard to the need to:
 - (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other prohibited conduct.
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
21. Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard to the need to:
 - (a) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic where those disadvantages are connected to that characteristic.
 - (b) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
 - (c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
22. The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.
23. Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard to the need to—
 - (a) tackle prejudice, and
 - (b) promote understanding.

24. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been completed for the upgrade of the Airwave equipment. The objective is to replace hardware / software that is end of life and is designed to ensure continuity of the Airwave service for the Brigade. As such the work undertaken will be transparent to LFB staff.

Procurement and sustainability

25. Advice has been sought from the General Counsel and agreement has been made that this service should be procured by way of a contract variation to the current contract that exists with Capita, for the provision of the Vision mobilising system, utilising Regulation 32(2)(b)(ii) of PCR 2015. This is due to the fact that competition is absent for technical reasons as Capita are the current supplier of the LFB's mobilising system and the solution will need to interface with this system, added to which Capita are currently the only accredited supplier for this solution.
26. This procurement by way of a contract variation does not introduce any new sustainability impacts.

Strategic Drivers

27. The replacement of the Airwave end of live infrastructure with modern hardware / software combination, will allow the Brigade to continue to use the national Airwave system and therefore service a critical requirement of the Brigade. In this respect it would contribute to the delivery of the strategic pillar "Delivering Excellence".
28. The procurement of upgrades hardware / software will allow the Brigade to continue to ensure that operational officers and staff are able to carry out their roles, to serve and protect the people of London.

Workforce impact

29. The procurement of the upgraded Airwave system will have no direct impact upon staff. Apart from potential downtime when the new equipment is transitioned to live, the process should be seamless to users.

Finance comments

30. This report is requesting the replacement of the Airwave infrastructure due to the current interface reaching the end of its serviceable life. The Capital Programme for 2021/22 has an overall budget for ICT in 2021/22 of £4.369m and includes funding of £200k which is sufficient to fund the £[REDACTED] required for the replacement of Airwave infrastructure.
31. The capital budget is funded through capital receipts and borrowing. The cost of borrowing is made up of minimum revenue provision and based on the asset life which would be £35,000 per year and interest on borrowing, assuming a rate of 2.5 per cent at £5,000 per year. The cost of borrowing to fund the capital programme is reflected in the revenue budget.

Legal comments

31. Under section 9 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, the London Fire Commissioner (the "Commissioner") is established as a corporation sole with the Mayor appointing the occupant of that office. Under section 327D of the GLA Act 1999, as amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, the Mayor may issue to the Commissioner specific or general directions as to the manner in which the holder of that office is to exercise his or her functions.

32. By direction dated 1 April 2018, the Mayor set out those matters, for which the Commissioner would require the prior approval of either the Mayor or the Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience (the "Deputy Mayor").
33. Paragraph (b) of Part 2 of the said direction requires the Commissioner to seek the prior approval of the Deputy Mayor before "[a] commitment to expenditure (capital or revenue) of £150,000 or above as identified in accordance with normal accounting practices...".
34. The Deputy Mayor's approval is accordingly required for the Commissioner to vary the Capita contract for the provision of Vision mobilising services, to replace the Airwave interface with the DCS server, at a cost of up to £ [REDACTED].
35. The statutory basis for the actions proposed in this report is provided by section 7 (2)(a) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, under which the Commissioner must secure the provision of personnel, services and equipment necessary to efficiently meet all normal requirements for firefighting.
36. The General Counsel also notes that the contract with Capita will be entered into by virtue of regulation 32(2)(b)(ii) of PCR 2015. This is due to the fact that competition is absent for technical reasons as Capita are the current supplier of the LFB mobilising system and new solution will need to interface with this system. Furthermore, Capita are currently the only accredited supplier for this solution.