



**NFCC**  
National Fire  
Chiefs Council

The professional voice of the  
UK Fire & Rescue Service

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Sir Philip Rutnam  
Permanent Secretary  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
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21 August 2018

Dear Sir Philip,

Thank you for facilitating the meeting between National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) delegates and the Home Office in June which provided an opportunity to discuss the NFCC's concerns with the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP), particularly those outlined in my letter of 30 November 2017. We jointly agreed at the meeting to continue to work with the Home Office to resolve the financial challenges that delays to ESMCP will create, not just for transition onto the new Emergency Services Network (ESN), but also to sustain and remain to use Airwave.

Subsequent to this meeting, the NFCC has briefed the Local Government Association's Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) on this work. The FSMC expressed frustration that after seven years we were now faced with the choice of incremental introduction or stopping the programme altogether. Members want to see certainty around the timing and cost of the programme.

Whilst we recognise that many of the assurances we seek won't be provided until the revised full business case (FBC) is signed off, we are writing to you jointly, on behalf of both the Fire and Rescue Service and Fire and Rescue Authorities, to express our concerns and reiterate the issues that we feel need urgent attention. In particular, the future of the Section 31 Airwave grant after December 2019, which will become increasingly pressing through the autumn as Fire and Rescue Authorities seek to agree balanced budgets for the 2019/20 financial year and beyond.

Both the FSMC and the NFCC can see the benefits that technology can bring the Fire and Rescue Service. The NFCC have previously stated that the ESN will be a cornerstone of our strategy in delivering our digital vision and that any loss or delay to ESN will hamper the sector's ability to progress digitally and may indeed lead to a postcode lottery between those technologically-enabled fire and rescue services with good, commercial 4G coverage and those without.

In the deliberations over the future of ESMCP the NFCC, which had previously supported plan A, sees the incremental approach to delivery, or so-called option B, as both a viable and sensible approach subject to this being financially and technically viable. However, without access to the finalised detail of the FBC our commitment to option B must be in principle at this

stage. The FSMC is similarly concerned to see the FBC before we can commit to supporting option B. Going forward we would welcome sight of the FBC as soon as possible so that fire and rescue services can be assured of the viability, affordability and benefits realisation of ESN.

With the delay to ESN and the indicative FBC costs predicted to rise significantly the NFCC and the LGA are keen to seek assurance that the current Home Office transition funding policy, whereby ESN transition costs for fire and rescue services are met centrally, is maintained.

The cessation of Sec.31 Airwave grant funding for Fire and Rescue Authorities associated with the transition from Airwave to ESN is causing concerns regarding the affordability of ESN at a local level. There is a perception that ESN may subsequently cost the Fire and Rescue Service more than the current Airwave provision. We would welcome continued dialogue with the Home Office to ensure that ESN remains affordable and cost effective to Fire and Rescue Authorities without putting pressure on already stretched budgets.

Throughout the life of ESMCP, the Fire and Rescue Service has enjoyed a fruitful and equitable relationship with the teams within the other emergency services and with programme colleagues alike. We remain committed to working collaboratively through the many challenges that collectively we will all face, and we welcome your assurance that this will be on an equitable basis and not focus on the perceived majority stakeholder. The LGA would welcome further engagement in the programme at a strategic level to represent the political views of the sector.

I trust that the NFCC's and the LGA's formal position is clear, however if you need any further information please do not hesitate to contact either Roy directly, Darryl Keen the NFCC ESMCP lead, or Ian Taylor the NFCC Business Change Lead for ESMCP. The contact at the LGA is Mark Norris ([mark.norris@local.gov.uk](mailto:mark.norris@local.gov.uk))

Yours sincerely,



**Roy Wilsher OBE, QFSM**  
Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council



**Councillor Ian Stephens**  
Chair, LGA Fire Services Management Committee

Cc: CFO Phil Loach QFSM  
CFO Huw Jakeway QFSM  
CFO Darryl Keen  
Bryan Clarke, Project Director  
Steven Adams