

Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
Palace of Westminster
Westminster
SW1A 0AA

15th May 2023

Dear Chair,

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme (ESMCP) with the Public Accounts Committee on 26th April. I hope that the session helped with your enquiry into the Programme.

On behalf of the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), I would like to provide the following written response in relation to Q27 reproduced below:

'Q27 Mr Pritchard, I was listening carefully to your remarks on transitional costs and totting it up, it seemed to be a chunky number. You talked about £150 million being spent. You talked about new data costs and multiplying that by the number of officers you have. I wonder whether you have added that up and whether you have a figure you share with us.'

In order to provide clarity around some of the figures mentioned and to highlight some of the complexities associated with quantifying figures accurately, I will utilise the three broad headings listed below:

1. Airwave Devices

We can estimate that we have spent approximately £125m on Airwave devices since 2018 and anticipate a further £25m being necessary before 2026. This gives a total estimate of £150m for Airwave devices purchased as a result of Programme delays, noting the original Programme date of end-2019 for the shutdown of Airwave.

2. Resources for Transition

Regional ESN teams were stood up in 2016 and, due to revised anticipated timelines, began to be stood down from late 2022 and early 2023. Due to local forces having approached this in a variety of ways, an exact figure for monies spent thus far is not possible to determine, however based on a sample from one broadly typical region we estimate that it has been in the order of £5m annually across the service.

We do not know yet what this resource picture may need to look like for future deployment, but there is no reason to suggest that it will be substantially different to that which has gone before. The future cost will run from the stand-up date of the teams, which is not likely to be before mid-2025, to the Airwave Shutdown Date. This



should allow for forces to properly and safely de-commission their Airwave assets and infrastructure, as well as deploy ESN.

Even though these teams have not been able to achieve that for which they were formed, we do not seek to make the case that this has all been nugatory effort, in fact it certainly has not been. It is also fair to say that these teams have, in some regions, performed other associated tasks not just ESN-related duties. However, even with all that properly stated, there can be little doubt that this has placed a burden on forces that has not necessarily realised all the benefits that it should. To date, those costs have been borne by forces and we do hope that some assistance may be forthcoming with our anticipated future costs.

3. Commercial Mobile Contracts (Data)

At its inception, ESN was to deliver what forces required so far as mobile data was concerned. As we know, with the delays that have been experienced, things have moved on and forces have developed their own solutions to fill this gap. It would be a stretch to suggest that all of the cost, time, effort and other resource devoted to this matter arises only as a result of Programme delays and we do not seek to suggest that. However, it is certainly the case that had ESN delivered what it promised, on time, that effort and resource would have been reduced, perhaps substantially.

Generally, forces are in an agreeable place with the various solutions they have developed and procured. Work is still going on to further enhance these operational benefits. In relation to the full costs of these deployed solutions, it is not feasible to extrapolate a total figure for all forces. Different forces have different approaches and these are supported by a range of different suppliers and different commercial models.


For forces to transition from these arrangements to an ESN data service, it would have to demonstrate better terms. Figures taken from the 2016 Business Case suggested an ESN cost of £8 per connection per month with all data being an additional cost at £1 per GB. Those figures were updated in the last Business Case and came more in line with what forces had negotiated for themselves but the commercial basis for that change was not fully explained. These new costs came in the form of an assumption, rather than a set cost, setting out a fee of £3 per connection per month. We hope that in the new Business Case we can see that any ESN data solution will provide a comparable, if not better, commercial proposition than the solutions currently in use.

Overall, it would be fair to say that Programme delays have cost the service a substantial amount of money, which cannot be accurately quantified in all cases. This has had a challenging financial impact on force budgets, given the immediate priorities they have had to contend with. The Programme has provided some funding and grants to assist with a number of these challenges. This includes the DNSP funding for both installation and revenue costs up until one month before transition, Assurance Partners and coverage testing. This has been helpful to us and indicates a Home Office recognition of the need for additional support. That said, it still leaves substantial costs remaining with forces.

We believe that the case for further financial assistance is a strong one, especially in light of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) findings and the forecasted savings from the proposed price capping. Forces will need to pay for Airwave devices from which they will not benefit from a full life span and will need to buy ESN

devices. It is proposed that the dual running costs and transition costs should be catered for in the new FBC, to avoid users facing unaffordable transition costs which could threaten whole scale service migration. We very much hope that the Government will use this as an opportunity to ensure there is funding available to assist with the cost of transition which will be significant and in any case greater than if the Programme had achieved its original time frame.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kier Pritchard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kier Pritchard
Chief Constable
NPCC lead for ESMCP