

Report of Assistant Chief Fire Officer: Director of Protection and Assets

Overview of the Fire Control Project

Purpose of report

1. To provide Members the opportunity to scrutinise the Fire Control Project overview and progress to date.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the Fire Control Project Overview, including the eleven referenced background papers, and decisions that have been made by the Fire Authority to date: noting the contract sign-off date of 14 December 2024, and project progress to date.

Introduction and Background

2. On 12 September 2018, Members of both Shropshire and Hereford & Worcester FRAs approved the creation of a Strategic Fire Alliance. The scoping of future requirements to ensure a resilient Fire Control function was identified as a priority and Officers were authorised to begin preparing options appraisals. The Strategic Fire Alliance Board and Programme Delivery Board were established to oversee progress. [Creating a Strategic Alliance 12 September 2018](#)
3. Through 2019 Stakeholder engagement and risk reviews were conducted alongside market engagement to explore available Fire Control mobilising systems. In October 2019 Members approved the adoption of a formal Fire Alliance and agreed the project priority for Fire Control was to scope the future requirements to ensure a resilient Command and Control function. [Strategic Alliance Update 15 October 2019](#)
4. In February 2020 Officers were tasked with conducting an in-depth analysis of the technical capability and longevity of existing control rooms, and to complete a gap analysis against recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 report. A draft options appraisal report was presented to Chief Fire Officers. [Strategic Fire Alliance - Projects update 12 February 2020](#)
5. In May 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19, key resources were redirected to operational duties and the Fire Control project was deferred. In September 2020, a new Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) was appointed to lead the project and was tasked with reviewing progress and proposing recommendations for moving the project forward. This was reported to

Members at the Fire Authority meeting in October 2020. [Strategic Fire Alliance Projects Update 14 October 2020](#)

6. Work continued to finalise a strategic options appraisal of the opportunities for Fire Control provision, with a shortlist and preferred option to be presented to the Fire Alliance Board. A full business case was scheduled for completion and presentation by April 2021. [Strategic Fire Alliance Report 16 December 2020](#)
7. For many fire services, including those who have previously established joint fire control systems, the major issue that is either a barrier to progress or a significant disadvantage in a joint Fire Control model is the loss of the Control function within each FRS. This not only removes the local knowledge and expertise held in each Fire Control in each FRS but also means the Fire Authority and Chief Fire Officer must cede responsibility and ownership for the crucial role of taking 999 calls, and mobilising assets to another Fire Service. This is often seen as presenting elements of legal and political risk.
8. These issues outlined above formed the basis for the lack of progress until 2021 when the Chief Fire Officer, alongside the Chair and Vice-Chair agreed with their Shropshire counterparts to explore a single system hosted remotely but retaining each FRS's own Control rooms and staff. This relies on close and continued collaboration and trust in the development, implementation and legacy arrangements to ensure a single system of working and methodology is agreed and maintained. It is hoped that the benefits of resilience, efficiency and improved operational delivery, whilst keeping operational independence and maintaining the internal staffing and Control function in each FRS will prove to be the newest and most effective solution in the UK, something already emerging from feedback from other FRSs and the National Chiefs Fire Council (NFCC).
9. During 2021, the emphasis moved from the strategic options appraisal to developing a joint specification for a new Command and Control system. It was agreed that HWFRS would produce a specification that would allow both Services to procure the same system but at different times. The Fire Alliance Board would review and approve the business case including the specification, resource plan, project plan and formally initiate the project. [Strategic Fire Alliance Board Update 13 October 2021](#)
10. In December 2021 the full business case was approved by the Strategic Management Board and Members approved the use of funding from the Fire Control reserve. [Replacement Mobilising System Reserve Budget 15 February 2022](#)
11. In April 2022 Shropshire FRS opted for procurement at the same time as HWFRS. In October 2022 the joint specification and procurement documents for a system which would allow the deployment of operational resources from either control room were nearing readiness for formal tender. A Project Manager was appointed and resource and project plans agreed with SFRS. Recognised as a multi-million pound complex project central to the response

function of both services, this project became a key focus of the Fire Alliance Board. [Strategic Fire Alliance Update 12 October 2022](#)

12. Just as the tender documents were being finalised for publication, HWFRS were approached by Cleveland Fire Brigade (CFB) and County Durham & Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS), who expressed an interest in being part of the procurement. As this had the potential to enhance resilience and reduce the cost of the system, it was agreed to adjust the tender and specification accordingly. In January 2023 the invitation to tender was published, and following rigorous evaluation from all four services, the contract was awarded to Motorola Solutions in June 2023, following approval by Fire Authority Chairs. [Fire Alliance Fire Control Update 18 October 2023](#)
13. There then followed a period of contract negotiations which resulted in the finalisation of a 7-year contract and a collaboration agreement between the four Services, known as the Integrated Fire Control Collaboration (IFCC), which was signed on 14 December 2023. The formal project start-up meeting took place on 25 January 2024. [Fire Alliance Update 13 February 2024](#)
14. The estimated cost saving to HWFRS through this joint procurement is estimated to be around £3.5 million over 7 years, plus an additional £0.5 million in the procurements of replacement Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) software. [Fire Alliance Update 16 October 2024](#)

The Business Case - Why are we doing this?

15. The main principle behind HWFRS's Response Strategy is to mobilise the most appropriate resources to an incident considering the incident type and the potential risks that may be known or suspected, and to arrive as promptly and safely as possible. The most appropriate initial resource, often known as the Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA), is normally mobilised by Fire Control Operators based on the information available to them at the time of the emergency call; however, they also use their skills, experience and professional judgement to ensure the right assets are deployed at the right time.
16. To support them in this, Fire Control Operators rely on Command and Control systems that are designed to enhance their efficiency in carrying out their role, by presenting them with a current view of where resources are, enabling them to process critical information and make informed decisions to mobilise resources within seconds, maximise interoperability between agencies and maintain situational awareness as incidents escalate.
17. The Command and Control system currently in use went live in September 2012. Although it is adequate as a means of mobilising resources, due to the number of manual interventions it is not at all efficient. It has not flexed when software that it uses becomes obsolete, nor kept pace with advances in technology or new working practices such as those introduced to meet the recommendations of the Grenfell and Manchester Arena inquiries.

18. Currently, HWFRS and SFRS can receive calls and mobilise resources for each other via a direct link between their respective mobilising systems. However, this arrangement is operationally inefficient, as Fire Control Operators must be logged into one system, or the other, and cannot function across both simultaneously. This limitation effectively reduces the number of available operators for each Service, often necessitating the deployment of additional staff in covering the control room to maintain adequate support levels.
19. Furthermore, although both Services utilise the same mobilising platform, differences in configuration; such as the methods used to search for risk premises, require additional training and reduce interoperability. The current setup also lacks full resilience; if one FRS's system experiences an outage, it becomes inaccessible to the other Service, preventing mutual assistance and further compromising operational capacity. To address these challenges, it was essential to identify a technical solution that would allow each control room to operate independently while also enabling seamless, simultaneous mobilisation across both Services.
20. While recognising the need to align certain control room practices, it was equally important to preserve each Service's autonomy in operational procedures and resource deployment, ensuring that decisions, such as Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) policies remain tailored to their respective geographical risk profiles. To better support Fire Control room operations and reduce risks to the public and the organisation, a more reliable, flexible, and resilient mobilising solution is required.
21. The new system is cloud-hosted which offers key advantages, including enhanced resilience through geographically distributed data centres, improved security via continuous updates and monitoring, and remote access for staff during emergencies or business continuity events. It also reduces the physical footprint within the estate and lowers the workload on FRS ICT teams by shifting infrastructure, maintenance and upgrades to the system provider.
22. The inclusion of CFB and CDDFRS in the procurement brings further benefits in cost savings, resilience, and control staff flexibility. The wider geographical separation between SFRS / HWFRS and CFB / CDDFRS reduces the likelihood of all control rooms experiencing peak demand simultaneously, for example during widespread flooding. The new cloud-hosted solution will enhance this capability by enabling operators in any control room to log into one, multiple, or all service areas at once, ensuring a rapid and co-ordinated response

The new Command and Control System - Why the Motorola system?

23. Following a full open competitive tender process, bidders were invited to spend a day with HWFRS and representatives from the other Services to demonstrate their systems to enable us to clarify our understanding of their bid and assess the system functionality offered. The bids were rigorously evaluated by all four Services for quality, cost, functionality, technical resilience and security. As a result of this thorough evaluation, the contract was awarded to Motorola

Solutions. Their proposal offered the best value for a robust, cloud-hosted mobilising system that met the collective needs of all four Services.

24. Motorola have already delivered this system into individual Fire Services such as Bedfordshire and Essex, but the very real collaboration between the four Fire and Rescue Services, being led by HWFRS, will be the first of its kind, which not only brings greater resilience but also affordability, allowing the communities of HWFRS to benefit from the improvements that can be achieved through access to the latest technology. The system has a proven track record of ongoing development and innovation to meet the needs of the fire sector.
25. It not only allows the Service to provide the benefits of the most up to date technology to better support our communities, but it will also improve our ability to scale up operations to deal with multiple calls and major incidents when required. This aligns with the expected outcomes and recommendations from recent high profile national incidents.
26. It offers several improvements over our current system such as the integration of WHAT3WORDS, Officer and Crewing Availability systems, the ability to transfer incident details electronically between control rooms, and other agencies, and the ability to accurately pinpoint the location of callers who are using mobile phones.
27. Instead of Fire Control staff contacting Officers to respond to incidents by telephone, Officers will be mobilised using a mobile phone App, this will provide them with all of the incident details, which fire appliances have been mobilised, how many crew, their real-time location and will also provide instant access to all risk information available at the address or surrounding premises.
28. Fire appliances are currently mobilised through a tablet mounted in the cab, but the new software will provide enhanced facilities such as satellite navigation, the ability to see and track other resources that have been mobilised to the incident, and the ability to pass messages to Control via an advanced data messaging system. This will be more efficient and cost effective than fire crews dictating messages by radio for Fire Control staff to type onto the incident log.
29. Enhanced Incident Command functionality which allows for an overview of resources, risk assessments and operations on the incident ground, will be available both via a web interface for use when Senior Officers need oversight of major incidents, and also on the incident ground in the command support unit, as well as on every fire appliance.
30. Through this incident command functionality, a fire survival module allows real time flow of information between the fire ground and fire control. For incidents where people are trapped in fire, particularly multiple people such as during the Grenfell Tower fire, this will create an up to the minute picture of where people are still trapped, and from where they have already been evacuated.

31. An example of Motorola's commitment to innovation is a trial of the use of artificial intelligence to give Fire Control staff an estimate as to the truthfulness of a caller, allowing for a more robust challenge from Fire Control staff, potentially reducing the number of hoax calls attended by the Service.

Benefits of Collaboration – Why are we doing this in partnership?

32. Motorola are providing a single system for all four control rooms which will be hosted in their secure resilient data centres and accessed from each Fire Control through a secure and diverse internet link.
33. On a day-to-day basis, each control room will manage calls and mobilise resources within its own Service area. However, the new system provides the flexibility for staff in any of the four Services to instantly and simultaneously expand their operational view to include one, several, or all Service areas. This means operators can support other control rooms in real time, enhancing resilience and ensuring a co-ordinated response during periods of high demand, local site failures, or temporary staff shortages.
34. Each control room typically operates with three staff, but the shared system effectively expands the available pool to twelve operators, allowing flexible and immediate assistance across Services. In the event of local site failures or temporary crewing shortages, any control room can take full responsibility for call handling, mobilising resources and managing incidents across all Service areas for as long as necessary, ensuring continuity and resilience.
35. Sharing the Command and Control system across four Fire Services has led to a considerable reduction in the set up and running costs for the system itself. Early estimates are that the Fire Authority has made savings of close to £3.5 million over 7 years on the system, based on the joint collaboration, rather than procuring a single system and this is replicated for each of the other three Authorities too.
36. In addition to the significant cost savings, the shared system also enables valuable joint training opportunities. Enabling shared training across all four Services, allows staff to access consistent, high-quality training regardless of which control room they are based in. This not only improves system familiarity and operational confidence but also fosters collaboration and standardisation of control room practices and will ensure that operators are well-prepared to support any Service area when needed.
37. By pooling resources in this way, the four Services benefit from shared training costs which also enables access to high-quality, consistent CPD opportunities for all of their control room staff.

38. Further cost savings have been achieved on the procurement of Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) software, which has realised further savings of close to £0.5 million over 7 years. As the project progresses, we are continuing to look for opportunities for further cost savings that might be made through the collaboration.
39. The new Command and Control System is scheduled to be live in all four Services during 2026.

Summary

40. Following contract sign-off, which was a significant milestone for the Service after many years of work, the project to deliver the new Command and Control System commenced in January 2024.
41. It will deliver a resilient Fire Control system, while maintaining control room teams in each Service, and also allowing them to support each other if there is a need to scale up operations or in the event of equipment failures in one of the control rooms.
42. The way in which the Motorola system can be configured allows each Service to maintain autonomy to mobilise according to their own risk profiles. It demonstrates our commitment to provide a high-quality new mobilising system, alongside three partner Fire Services, and being the first of its kind in the UK represents a new way of collaborating.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues).	Budget implications already agreed and approved by the Fire Authority, included within the MTFP.
Strategic Policy Links & Core Code of Ethics (Identify how proposals link with current priorities & policy framework and align to the Core Code of Ethics).	Links to delivery of the CRMP and Core strategies, specifically the Response Strategy.
Productivity & Efficiency (Identify how proposal improves productivity or efficiency).	Cost avoidance identified via collaboration with the three other Services, and system efficiencies concerning ways of working by Fire Control staff.
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	Risk Register is maintained as part of Prince2 project management principles, and reviewed regularly at IFCC Board meetings, chaired by HWFRS Assistant Chief Fire Officer.

Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter).	Wide consultation has been carried out with all stakeholders and continues throughout the project.
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?).	The system has been designed in accordance with WCAG 2.2 AA government standard for software accessibility, and an updated EIA will be reviewed prior to the system go-live.
Data Protection Impact Assessment (where personal data is processed a DPIA must be completed to ensure compliant handling).	DPIAs are all aligned to current standards and Codes of Compliance for the current system and will be refreshed when the data transfer happens against the project timeline.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 - Fire Control Project Timeline

Background Papers

Note: other previous papers / reports are provided via links within this paper as listed below for reference.

1. Creating a Strategic Alliance, 12 September 2018
2. Strategic Alliance Update, 15 October 2019
3. Strategic Fire Alliance Update, 12 February 2020
4. Strategic Fire Alliance Update Paper, 14 October 2020
5. Strategic Fire Alliance Report, 16 December 2020
6. Strategic Fire Alliance Board Update, 13 October 2021
7. Replacement Mobilising System Reserve Budget, 15 February 2022
8. Strategic Fire Alliance Update, 12 October 2022
9. Fire Alliance Fire Control Project Update, 18 October 2023
10. Fire Alliance Update, 13 February 2024
11. Fire Alliance Update, 16 October 2024

Fire Control Project Timeline

2018

- 12 September: Strategic Fire Alliance approved by Shropshire and Hereford & Worcester FRAs. Fire Control identified as a priority.

2019

- Throughout 2019: Stakeholder engagement, risk reviews, and market engagement conducted.
- 15 October: Formal Fire Alliance adopted; Fire Control project prioritised.

2020

- February: Technical and gap analysis initiated; draft options appraisal presented.
- May: Project deferred due to COVID-19.
- September: New Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) appointed.
- October: Progress reviewed and recommendations proposed.

2021

- April (planned): Full business case scheduled for completion.
- 13 October: Joint specification for new Command and Control system developed.

2022

- December: Full business case approved; funding from Fire Control reserve authorised.

2023

- January: Invitation to tender published.
- July: Contract awarded to Motorola Solutions.
- 14 December: 7-year contract and collaboration agreement signed.

2024

- 25 January: Formal project start-up meeting held.
- 16 October: Estimated savings of £3.5 million over 7 years reported, plus £0.5 million in MDT software procurement.

2025

- March: Factory Acceptance Tests Complete