

11. Transfer of Ownership of New Dimension Assets

Purpose of report

1. To seek FRA sign-up to the final Transfer of Ownership Agreement.
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Recommendation

The Chief Fire Officer recommends that:

- i) The Fire Authority sign-up to the agreement that will see the Authority accepting the transfer of ownership of New Dimensions Assets currently held.***

Background

2. The New Dimension project has been a collaboration between Communities and Local Government (CLG), the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), and has enhanced the ability of the FRS to respond to major disruptive events involving Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear materials, collapsed or unstable structures, and the displacement of large volumes of water.
3. Its origins were a result of the tragic events of the 2001 attack on the Twin Towers building in New York. Following this, both the Government and the FRS had to adapt to new levels of threat to the population and, at the same time, to the unpredictability of disasters arising from extremes of weather. The aim of the New Dimension project has been to ensure that FRSs throughout the country are resourced and equipped to provide a fully co-ordinated, coherent and unified national response to the widest possible range of potential national emergency incidents.
4. Hereford & Worcester is currently a National leader within New Dimensions and National Resilience supplying both the Chair of Government's Assurance Body (The National Resilience Board) and the National High Volume Pumping (HVP) lead.
5. The assets currently held by the Service referred to within this paper include the following vehicles and associated equipment:
 - 2 x Mass Decontamination Vehicles (Incident Response Units at Droitwich and Hereford))
 - 1 x Enhanced Briefing Facility (at Droitwich)
 - 4 x Urban Search and Rescue Modules (crewed by the USAR team at Droitwich)
 - 1 x Canine Search team (dog and handler)
 - Associated USAR training equipment and consumables
 - 2 x High Volume Pumps (crewed by firefighters at Kidderminster)
 - 1 x Enhanced Command Unit (awaiting delivery – based at Leominster)

New Dimension

6. New Dimension has been a successful project. It has accomplished what it set out to do – to provide the FRS with new capabilities to respond to terrorism and natural disasters. The new equipment is high quality and has been well-received. The roll-out of these new specialist resilience assets and training of Firefighters to use them is nearly complete. The capabilities have already been used effectively in several major events including the December 2005 fire at Buncefield and the widespread flooding in 2007. New Dimension equipment is also being used routinely within Hereford & Worcester to improve or build upon the response to events at the local level and currently features in the Authority's aspirations for future IRMP initiatives around technical rescue.
7. As the delivery of the project has drawn to an end, CLG has been increasingly focussed on the long-term management plans for New Dimension, to ensure the new capabilities are fully integrated into FRS core business and that standards are maintained to guarantee national interoperability over the life of the equipment. Long term arrangements have focussed on four areas:
 - Physical maintenance of the vehicles and kit;
 - Assurance that the capabilities continue fit for purpose;
 - Funding for the above; and the focus for this recommendation;
 - The transfer of the assets from CLG to Fire and Rescue Authorities.
8. The first three of these are in place. A **long term national maintenance contract** for the assets has been in place since October 2008, managed by Firebuy on behalf of the Department and the FRS customers, and is working well. Fixed costs under the contract – some £100m over 16 years to cover routine maintenance and servicing – are being paid for by the Department, and once assets are transferred to the Fire Authorities, the Department will provide this funding via the FRAs. It is a condition of transfer of ownership that FRAs sign up to the maintenance contract. Maintenance costs due to unfair wear and tear arising from the use of New Dimension assets for FRA purposes, currently being borne by CLG, will be payable by the FRAs in future, regardless of ownership. FRAs have been provided with access to the documentation surrounding the maintenance contract, which was drafted with FRS, Assurance Body and CFOA input.
9. **Future assurance** on a national basis is provided by the CFOA-led Assurance Body (the National Resilience Board). It is led by the Chair, CFO Terry Standing from Gloucestershire FRS, and Vice-Chair Jon Hall, of Hereford & Worcester FRS.
10. It provides operational assurance that the New Dimension capabilities remain fit for purpose and can be deployed consistently across national and regional boundaries, including managing and monitoring operational practices, procedures and technical advice on the capabilities, and the associated operational IT, communications and training, asset refresh and any siting or re-siting of assets. The body reports to the LGA Fire Services Management Board through Cllr Jeremy Hilton as Lead Member.

11. Funding for this CSR period of around £80m was announced by Ministers in July 2008 to enable FRAs to continue to deliver New Dimension capabilities. The Assurance Body funding of over £5m per annum covers running of the body itself and the national team, annual refresh of equipment, and centralised training. The Department remains fully committed to providing new burdens funding for the net additional costs to FRAs that arise from New Dimension.

Conclusion/Summary

12. All that remains now is the transfer of ownership of the New Dimension assets from CLG to the FRAs which host them. Following two consultations with FRSs and discussions with representative bodies over the last few years on the details surrounding the transfer, negotiations are now complete; sign-up is therefore sought to the final Transfer of Ownership Agreement.
13. Advice has been received from the Authority's own legal advisors as well as the Fire Lawyers Network and, whilst not all aspects have received complete answers from CLG, there is broad acceptance through both the LGA and CFOA that sufficient information is available to support the recommendation.
14. A Business Impact Analysis form is attached at Appendix 1 to measure and address the proposals contained in this report. The form contains information on the potential resource implications, legal issues, strategic policy links, equality/ethical issues and risk management implications.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Business Impact Assessment Form

Background papers –

- (i) Agreement for the transfer of the New Dimension assets and functions (CLG)
- (ii) Consultation response to the New Dimension Transfer of Ownership Agreement (CLG)

Contact Officer

Jon Hall, Assistant Chief Fire Officer
(01905 368206)
Email: jhall@hwfire.org.uk