

Wide Area Network Upgrade

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1. Purpose of Report

This report sets out proposals and revenue consequences to upgrade the Service's existing wide area communications network (WAN).

2. Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

- a) Approve the proposed upgrade to the existing WAN;
- b) Approve £12,000 for installation costs met by the General Fund, and £36,000 for annual running costs met from savings in the Communications Budget; and
- c) Approve the proposed exemption to Fire Authority's Standing Order 9, subject to the approval of the Chair and Treasurer.

3. Background

The Service currently connects its 23 fire stations to Headquarters (HQ) via a WAN that is supported via a 1 Megabyte (Mb) link, operating between HQ and Telford Central Fire Station. This arrangement enables limited communications and data transmission between sites with fallback facilities sited at Telford Central. With the increasing demands upon data usage and a need for enhanced resilience the current WAN arrangements offer insufficient bandwidth capacity and, more critically, are vulnerable to a single point of failure.

To address these shortcomings and moreover support full disaster recovery arrangements it has now become necessary to upgrade the WAN to the industry standard bandwidth of 10 Mb (albeit greater bandwidths exist).

Perhaps most critically, the WAN upgrade will enable the Service to enhance the fall-back Fire Control facilities that currently exist at Telford Central. These offer only limited functionality and are intended for short-term duration use only in the event of unforeseen failures at HQ. With the refurbishment programme due to take place at HQ/Shrewsbury Fire Station the risk of failure/disruption to the existing Fire Control Room will significantly increase as building works commence. The proposed WAN upgrade, undertaken by the existing WAN provider, will aid resilience and secure business continuity arrangements at Telford Central, enabling Fire Control Room functions to continue for extended periods, should the need arise.

4. Financial Implications

The proposed WAN upgrade will incur a one-off set-up installation investment of £12k (see report 11a) with ongoing revenue implications of £46k per annum, including £35k for fixed line, and £8k for Exchange Hosting network. This can be offset by a £10k saving per annum through termination of the existing WAN arrangements (resulting in actual revenue costs of £36k per annum). The revenue costs can be met through ongoing efficiency savings secured from the Service's communications budget.

The upgrade charges have been set by the Service's existing WAN provider. Officers have market tested these charges against other leading providers and conclude that the proposal is competitively priced (the lowest quotation) and, as such, represents value for money.

Member approval to proceed with the proposals set out in this report would require an exemption from the Fire Authority's Standing Orders¹. Standing Orders require a tender exercise where the contract value is likely to exceed £10k. The Orders permit an exemption² subject to consultation with the Chair and Treasurer.

5. Legal Comment

The Fire Authority's Standing Orders Relating to Contracts, Section J2, states that for contracts estimated to cost £25,000 or more, "not less than 4 contractors shall be invited to tender, unless fewer than 4 contractors have applied and are considered suitable, when all shall be invited to tender". Section D, Special Exemptions, states that an exemption may be obtained where there are special circumstances justifying such exemption, or in cases of urgency. As the upgrade to the WAN is considered crucial to the business continuity arrangements an exemption is being sought. Under Section D1, the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer, after consultation with the Chair of the Authority, may grant an exemption from the Standing Orders. When considering an exemption it must be capable of demonstrating to a third party that such a course of action is justified and in the best interests of the Authority."

¹ SWFA Standing Order 9: Standing Orders relating to Contracts (February 2009)

² *Ibid*: Section G5

6. Equality Impact Assessment

Officers have considered the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) and have determined that there are no discriminatory practices or differential impacts upon specific groups arising from either this paper or the Commission's report. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed.

7. Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

8. Background Reports

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority 3 July 2009 Report 11a Statement of Accounts 2008/09

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk); the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning	*	Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	*
Financial	*	Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link	*	Strategic Planning	
Information Communications and Technology	*	West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*