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Emergency Services Network

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Question for Home Office

UIN 9008, tabled on 10 January 2024

Question



Alan Brown

Scottish National Party

Kilmarnock and Loudoun

 Commons



To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what was the original completion date for the Emergency Services Network critical communications system; what his planned timetable is for the completion of that project; and what is the (a) original and (b) current cost estimate for that project.

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Answer



Chris Philp

Conservative

Croydon South

 Commons



Answered on

17 January 2024

The Emergency Services Network (ESN) will replace the Airwave communications service currently used by Britain’s emergency services and transform the way they operate.

The Programme’s 2021 revised Full Business Case set out the expectation that the transition to ESN would start in 2024 with Airwave shut down by the end of 2026. In 2021 the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) launched an investigation into Motorola’s profits on Airwave and as a result Motorola left the Programme in December 2022. Motorola’s withdrawal from the Programme means this timeline cannot now be achieved. The CMA’s final report in 2023 ruled that Motorola had enjoyed ‘supernormal’ profits and recommended Charge Controls on the Airwave service. This ruling was upheld by the Competition Appeal Tribunal in December 2023.

The Home Office is in the process of procuring a new supplier for mobile radio and data services and intends to release a revised Business Case in 2024, which will set out a new timetable and costs, taking into account the impact of procurement activity and the proposed CMA Charge Control. Recent NAO and PAC reports have indicated that Airwave Shutdown by December 2026 is now unlikely to be achieved, but new timescales cannot be confirmed until the procurement is complete. ESN must be ready prior to Airwave shut down and time has been set aside to allow a safe and orderly transition of users.

The 2021 Full Business Case estimated the cost of the programme to deliver ESN at £1.6bn, compared with the original estimate of £1.2bn. When combined with the Airwave and Legacy contracts, and the ongoing costs of the replacement ESN service, the total cost of providing critical emergency services communications between 2015/16 and 2036/37 in the July 2021 FBC was estimated at £11.3bn. This assumed Airwave and legacy system costs of approximately £450m annually compared with ESN at around £250m per annum. The Charge Control imposed by the CMA will save the taxpayer in the region of £200m a year for the period 2023 to 202.

The Home Office’s priority is to deliver the ESN as swifty and safely as possible and **Airwave will only be shut down when it is safe to do so.**

Answered by

Home Office