EXECUTIVE NOTE

THE GRAMPIAN JOINT FIRE AND RESCUE BOARD (SPECIFIED EQUIPMENT) (SCOTLAND) ORDER 2010

S.S.I. 2010/252

The above instrument was made in exercise of the powers conferred by section **46** of the **Fire (Scotland) Act 2005.** The instrument is subject to negative resolution procedure.

Policy Objectives

The purpose of the instrument is to give Scottish Ministers the power to require Grampian Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) to install Firelink equipment in officers cars for the purposes of enhancing public safety at a local, regional and national level during emergency incidents. This will enable Grampian Fire and Rescue Authority (GFRA) to join in with all other Scottish fire and rescue services in using Firelink as part of their method of mobilising officers to emergency incidents and as a resilient means of communication with officers en route to incidents.

The Scottish Government is investing some £40m over the current spending review period in a new communications system for Scottish Fire and Rescue Services known as Firelink. The system was commissioned at a UK level in response to requests from the fire and rescue service for a resilient communication system offering interoperability with the police and ambulance blue light services[1] so as to respond to the lessons identified following the terrorist attacks in New York on September 2001 and UK attacks in London (2005) and Glasgow Airport (2007) .

During 2009, towards the final stages of the Firelink programme roll-out, GFRS indicated that, while Firelink would be fitted to all its operational fire appliances and selected fleet vehicles, it would not be installed in officers' cars. The principal reason given for this decision was that there was an "overwhelming safety case" against installation. In light of the public safety implications of this decision the Minister for Community Safety invoked powers assigned to him under section 44 of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 and instructed the Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Authorities (CIFRA) to carry out an independent inquiry into the matter.

In February 2010, the CIFRA report was sent to Grampian Joint Fire and Rescue Board, published on the Scottish Government Web site[2], and, and lodged in the Scottish Parliament library[3].

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1 Blue light interoperability Agreement (April 2002): "Statement on Interoperability and Resilience for Voice communication Systems of the Emergency Services As Agreed by the Chief Officers' Associations"

2 CIFRA 2010, "A Report to The Scottish Ministers on the Decision by Grampian Fire and Rescue Service not to Install Firelink In Officers' Cars", Edinburgh

3 Bib no: 50382

The key findings of the report were as follows:-

- There is no overwhelming safety case against the installation of Firelink in officers' cars and Firelink will provide additional benefits for officers.

- The decision by GFRS compromises its position as a full partner in multi-agency incidents, including terrorism. It also compromises the service's role in national mutual aid arrangements, both as a provider and beneficiary.

- The inquiry team could not identify any geographical or organisational issue unique to GFRA, which would justify their decision.

The report recommended that a mechanism be found, preferably by discussion and through partnership with national bodies, for GFRS to support its role in multi agency incidents with the other Scottish fire and rescue services and install Firelink in its officers' cars in a form that was acceptable to the Scottish Government. It was further recommended that, if these discussions fail, the Minister should examine powers contained within the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 to achieve this end.

Following publication of the report, the Minister has written to Grampian Joint Fire and Rescue Board on 4 occasions and has met with its Convenor to encourage the Board to consider and respond to the findings of the CIFRA report. At the Minister's request, the Chief Inspector's report was presented to Board members at its meeting on 23 April 2010. The Board subsequently instructed the Chief Officer of GFRS to re-enter discussions with the Scottish Government, regarding the installation of Firelink in officers' cars. However, despite this and the plea for quick resolution, no progress was made. Instead the service has again submitted an earlier proposal to install Firelink in pool cars. This same proposal was considered in the CIFRA report[4] where it was subject to a number of concerns. Despite this and repeated requests to respond to these points, the proposal remains insufficiently developed to allow full consideration.

Following the successful roll out of the Firelink programme, GFRS remains the only service in Scotland who have not installed Firelink in officers cars. Its continued stance means that the service, and the public it serves is not benefiting from the additional functionality offered by the new system, specifically sought by the fire and rescue service to address their operational requirements for resilient communications. As such, GFRS own resilience is diminished and their position as a full partner in any multi-agency incidents compromised, including a terrorism event, for no proven reason. In light of this and GFRS's unwillingness to consider the compelling technical evidence and clear recommendation of CIFRA's independent report, the Minister has reluctantly decided to resolve this matter through the exercise of the powers conferred by section 46 of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005.

[4] CIFRA 2010, Paragraphs 71 and 72

Consultation

Grampian Joint Fire and Rescue Board are fully aware of the Scottish Government's request that Firelink be installed in its officers' cars - in the same way as all other fire and rescue services in Scotland. The issue has been the subject of discussion with the service for most of 2009, it has also been the focus of an independent inquiry involving GFRS which was presented to their Board on 23 April 2010 and it has been raised in numerous correspondence from the Minister to the Board in the course of 2010.

Financial Effects

The Scottish Government has invested £40m in the delivery of a new communication platform for the fire and rescue services in Scotland. It is also funding the annual revenue costs, estimated to be around £6m, while FRS are no longer having to fund the maintenance of their legacy radio systems. Thus the instrument places no additional financial cost on the Scottish Government and no net financial burden on GFRS.

Scottish Government
Scottish Resilience
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