



**AGENDA ITEM: 10**

**NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY  
EXECUTIVE PANEL**

**1<sup>st</sup> February 2010**

**PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT**

**Report by Gareth Griffiths, Senior Operations Manager**

**Purpose of Report**

- 1 To inform Members about the All Wales procurement project for new personal protective equipment (PPE).

**Background**

- 2 The current personal protective equipment (PPE) provided to firefighters in North Wales Fire and Rescue Service meets the relevant European standards and is fit for purpose; it is however based on specifications developed over 15 years ago. North Wales underwent a technical refresh of its fire fighting PPE in 2001 with the procurement and management contract awarded to Bristol Uniforms under a Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation (YPO) Framework arrangement.
- 3 There are 850 personnel within the Service who need to be provided with fire fighting PPE specifically for their role.
- 4 NWFRS has arrangements in place to ensure regulatory compliance in relation to the specification and maintenance of structural fire fighting PPE. However, an upgrade is now required to enhance the welfare and safety of operational personnel.

**Collaboration**

- 5 Both Mid and West and South Wales Fire and Rescue Services are also in a position of requiring an upgrade of their current fire fighting PPE. The 3 FRSs in Wales also recognise the financial

benefits of collaborative procurement and understand the importance of one corporate image for all three Services. It was agreed to progress the replacement of the fire fighting PPE on a collaborative basis.

- 6 An All Wales Project Team was established, made up of representatives from all 3 FRSs in order to drive the project forward on an all Wales basis. The 3 FRSs in Wales are currently working closely together to implement this project.

### **Wearer Trials**

- 7 During 2009 wearer trials took place across the 3 FRSs in Wales. In North Wales these took place at Dolgellau and Rhyl. The aims of the trials were to satisfy ourselves that any new PPE was fit for purpose, promote staff confidence in the new technologies and showcase the PPE to staff.
- 8 The exposure of the new PPE to the working conditions that staff are currently experiencing were replicated at the trials in order to ensure that the PPE was providing an improvement in terms of thermal protection, ergonomic considerations and wearer comfort/moisture management.
- 9 Many of NWFRS staff contributed significantly during the process and their opinions have informed the final agreed specification.

### **All Wales PPE Specification**

- 10 Lion Apparel Systems Ltd (LAS) are to be the new supplier of PPE in the form of Fire Coats and Trousers to the 3 Fire and Rescue Services in Wales.
- 11 Lion Apparel Pro-Tek Max suit performed exceptionally well in all areas of the evaluations. It finished top in five out of the six criteria evaluated against. It scored at least 17% higher than its nearest rival in the most important score of thermal protection.
- 12 All the kit is made from top quality materials and surpasses all the relevant European and other standards. The combination of the highest quality materials and design means that staff will be provided with PPE that offers excellent protection against extremes of heat and flame.

## **Cost Implications**

- 13 The outright purchase of PPE through one capital payment is the preferred procurement route as it results in lower revenue repayments over the term of the 7 year contract. Additionally, outright purchase immediately places the ownership of the asset with the Fire and Rescue Authority. This effectively minimises the risk if the manufacturer's business resilience suffers in the current financial climate.

## **Laundering and Managed Care**

- 14 Whilst the Authority will own the PPE, Lion will be providing the laundering, repairs and inspections throughout its life on a fixed price contract. Every item is tracked via a bar-code system so that its life history is recorded.
- 15 Lion Apparel offers a fixed annual fee for their managed care. This includes delivery and collection from 7 locations across North Wales on a weekly basis.
- 16 Fit for purpose inspections will ensure that all repairs which are necessary are carried out and recorded. Full tracking and tracing is available via the customer service support as part of the contract.
- 17 The managed care system will ensure that the kit is "fit for purpose" whenever it is worn.
- 18 Currently the cost of laundering and maintenance/repair with the current supplier is not fixed and stands at £84,000 per annum. This cost is based on the increased need for repairs and maintenance as the items get older.
- 19 The cost of the fixed price contract with Lion is approximately 50% less than the current maintenance cost.
- 20 The main benefit of a fixed annual fee is that it provides a constant revenue expense each year. A fixed fee managed care service also removes much of the administrative burden and associated costs from the Service.

## **All Wales Contract**

- 21 The project team has produced a draft contract for the procurement of the PPE and the provision of managed care. The production of the draft contract has drawn heavily on the expertise of the procurement staff from each of the three Services.
- 22 The draft contract for all three services is to be examined by SWFRS' legal advisors as they can provide a quick response and have no potential conflict of interest. Furthermore, a single legal opinion will expedite contract signing.

## **Summary**

- 23 There are numerous benefits to having a single specification across Wales, such as the reduced stock holding requirement across the three Services and successfully achieving a single corporate image for all Welsh firefighters.
- 24 The successful collaboration between the three Services and Lion Apparel is enabling delivery of the project aims quickly and efficiently. By the end of January the sizing and fitting of operational personnel across Wales will be nearing completion. It is envisaged that the roll out of the new all Wales PPE will be in April 2010.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- 25 Members are asked to note the information provided.