MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	**POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**		
DATE:	**23 MARCH 2023**	**REPORT NO:**	**CFO/68/22**
PRESENTING OFFICER	**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER PHIL GARRIGAN**		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	**AM GED SHERIDAN**	**REPORT AUTHOR:**	**GED SHERIDAN PAUL TERRY MIKE PILKINGTON**
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TEAM**		
TITLE OF REPORT:	**PURCHASE OF LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**		

APPENDICES:	**APPENDIX A:**	**EIA**

Purpose of Report

1. To request that Members approve the recommendations of this reporting relating to the purchase of an organisational wide Learning Management System (LMS).

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that Members:

    a) approve the purchase of an organisational Learning Management System (LMS), and a four-year G-Cloud 13 contract with SQEPtech Ltd.

    b) note the justification for requiring a new organisational wide Learning Management System (LMS).

    c) note the extensive market research carried out to determine the most appropriate solution for Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service ('MFRS').

    d) note the expected improvements in efficiency and effectiveness for training delivery and reduced risk to the organisation.

    e) approve the drawdown of £87,565 from the capital reserve to fund year one costs.

    f) note the positive financial implications and reduced costs if the contract is agreed by 31st March 2023.

Introduction and Background

3. The existing systems and processes used within MFRS for the recording and reporting of training, learning, appraisals, and coaching have evolved over recent years as processes have changed. The current methods rely on several different software applications, manual processes, and people resources to ensure consistency and reliability of the data for performance reporting.

4. This approach can be time consuming and disparate, and at times has resulted in avoidable errors such as staff due to attend risk critical training not being identified; duplication of training records; inconsistent methods of recording training; and increased costs associated with internal and external training providers.

5. In 2018/19 HMICFRS commented on this in their report. *"The service needs to assure itself that all staff are appropriately trained for their role. It needs to ensure all staff keep their skills up to date and have a consistent method of recording when they have received training."*

6. In response to this MFRS made significant improvements in how records could be accessed and reported, this was acknowledged in the follow up inspection during 2021/22. We recognised some of these improvements relied upon manual processes and we have since identified that further enhancements would only be possible through a new platform, due to limitations of existing systems.

7. As a result, a project was initiated to consider the best options now available to enable the Authority to continue to meet its staff training obligations in the most effective manner.

8. The main objective of the LMS project was to identify and purchase a solution that brings together the ability to record and report on all learning activities in a consistent and intuitive manner resulting in improved efficiency and effectiveness.

9. Initial timescales assumed completion of the project and a move to a new approach in late 2023 / early 2024 with the appropriate report being submitted to Authority and considered as part of the budget setting process in February 2024. This times scale coincided with the predicted end of life of the existing OPS application which was developed internally by MFRA and went live in 2011.

10. Following recent discussions with the proposed supplier, officers have identified that by bringing forward the proposed start date to before 1st April 2023 a significant saving of £62K (19.5% reduction) over the 4-year contract period could be realised.

Recommended Solution

11. The project has identified that the introduction of the 'Cornerstone LMS' with 'eSQEP Skills Matrix' fulfils MFRS requirements of having a system for the administration, automation, and delivery of educational courses, training programs, learning and development of e-learning courses, and appraisals.

12. Cornerstone and Skills Matrix (eSQEP) together provide an all-in-one solution, Cornerstone being the LMS i.e., containing and hosting our courses, learning records, profiles and learning resources. Whereas the Skills Matrix provided by SQEPtech is a tool that enables the fluid reporting of learning across the organisation allowing for a holistic and person-centred view of training records for all operational staff. This system, although separate is integrated seamlessly.

13. The two systems together become a powerful tool for Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service and is a high-quality product comprising all learning and reporting aspects and ensuring easy access of data.

14. This solution is being recommended after an extensive market benchmarking exercise were the project board and team sampled many solutions and matched each system to our high-level requirements.

15. The integrated solution of Cornerstone's LMS and SQEPtech's Skills Matrix will provide Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service with significant benefits not just in system and processes and will better support effectiveness and efficiency of administrative and support staff as detailed below:

    - Seamless Integration - Seamless, real-time data transferred from Cornerstone LMS and SQEPtech Skills Matrix.
    - Improved Administration - the ability to create training courses and events without the reliance of Systems Support. Seamlessly adding staff to training events based on their status/competency. Up to date information of operational staff skills and competencies in real-time.
    - User Progress - Users can view their own progress status against required skills and launch courses directly from the Skills Matrix.
    - Team Overview - Managers can view their own individual progress and all their team members achieved status against required competency.
    - Course Status - Users can access and launch uncompleted courses directly from the Skill Matrix dashboard providing a simple and consistent user experience.
    - Reports - Reporting of competencies and skills by organisation unit, role requirement, curricula, by organisation level or line management hierarchy.

Alternatives Analysis

16. Alternative options have been considered to address the business problem. Further to a review it was determined continuing to record training in multiple applications across the organisation is not the most effective process and efficiencies of current applications and processes have been exhausted and the

Authority does not have sufficient resource for internal development of a new Learning Management System.

17. Therefore a number potential providers were invited to demonstrate their solution to an officers' panel.

18. The approved supplier's solution was the most suitable for the Authority

Equality and Diversity Implications

19. A full EIA has been completed and can be found in Appendix A. It has demonstrated that a change in system will positively impact those learners with additional needs and better accommodate various learning styles.

Staff Implications

20. Staff from all directorates have been involved in extensive engagement, with a number of workshops and reality testing with system providers since March 2022. This involved an in-depth review of all five products to ensure the chosen solution was not only value for money but met the requirements of MFRS together with expected improvements in efficiency and effectiveness.

21. All groups and departments within MFRS will be impacted by the new LMS, as it will be used by all operational and non-operational staff for learning/training. The change in system will help in the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting and delivery of electronic educational technology (eLearning).

22. Training for staff will be coordinated through the project implementation team and the selected system partner.

Legal Implications

23. The Manchester Arena Inquiry report volume 2 outlines a number of recommendations that involve training and recording systems. The report suggests improvements should be made in how organisations maintain and store their records.

24. That report also recommends the introduction of electronic training records in a standard form and the introduction of centrally held electronic training records for all staff. The report further recommends using a system whereby each staff member is required to view their record each year and identify any errors or omissions within it.

25. The purchase of the LMS system will address these recommendations reducing organisational risk and improve our current ability to respond to legal scrutiny if required.

26. The route to market followed the G Cloud framework agreement.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

27. The integrated solution provided by SQEPtech and Cornerstone will cost £273,460.00 over a four year period. The year one costs is£87,565, followed by year two to four costs of £61,965 p.a. The termination of the current e-learning application will deliver an annual saving of £20,000 from the second year. The year one costs, £87,565 will be funded from the Capital Reserve. For the year two to four annual funding shortfall (£21,965 in 2024/25 and £41,965 thereafter) officers will look to release other current revenue budgets, however, if this is not achievable the shorftall will be built into the 2024/2025 budget setting process.

28. Successful negotiations have taken place with the supplier to reach the costs outlined above. These preferential costs are time sensitive and failing to sign contracts by 31st March 2023 will result in the quote expiring and costs reverting to £335,477, an increase of £62,017.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

29. The implementation of a robust LMS will help ensure MFRS can record training accurately and efficiently. This will ensure compliance with legislation including the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974.

30. The introduction of a LMS will reduce organisational risk by offering thorough training needs analysis (including driver training and all aspects or core risk critical training). This will ensure all training is completed in a timely and effective manner.

31. The LMS will remove the need for the current paper-based processes. It will also allow the service to deliver a more blended approach to training delivery, through eLearning and other alternative solutions other than face to face delivery.

Contribution to Our Vision:	*To be the best Fire & Rescue Service in the UK.*
Our Purpose:	*Here to serve, Here to protect, Here to keep you safe.*

32. A robust LMS will allow the Service to efficiently and effectively train our staff. This will improve the safety of staff and the community by ensuring they are able to prepare and respond to all foreseeable risks.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

CFO/111/11   If this report follows on from another, list the previous report(s)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

MFRA   **M**erseyside **F**ire and **R**escue **A**uthority is the physical and legal entity. When writing reports MFRA is the "object".

MFRS	**M**erseyside **F**ire and **R**escue **S**ervice is the service provided by MFRA. When writing reports MFRS is the "action"
LMS	**L**earning **M**anagement **S**ystem