

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE		
DATE:	11 DECEMBER 2025	REPORT NO:	CFO/32/2526
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, NICK SEARLE		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	AREA MANAGER, DAVID WATSON	REPORT AUTHOR:	STATION MANAGER, PETER JONES
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	HEAD OF PROCUREMENT, HYWYN PRITCHARD, GROUP MANAGER, PAUL HITCHEN, USAR CAPABILITY TEAM, STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TEAM (SLT)		
TITLE OF REPORT:	ND2 PROCUREMENT: USAR K9 VEHICLES		

APPENDICES:	NONE
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Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members of the outcome of the procurement exercise and to seek authorisation to procure 17 x Search Dog Vehicles (K9 Vehicles), as part of the New Dimensions 2 (ND2) Programme that supports National Resilience.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that Members;
 - a) note the contents of the report; and
 - b) approve the award of the contract to the Ford Motor Company, for 17 x K9 vehicles at a total purchase cost of approximately £1,100,000.

Introduction and Background

3. ND2 is a national capability uplift programme that supports National Resilience (NR). The programme is authorised and funded by UK Government via the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), and Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority (MFRA) are the Lead Authority for NR. Part of the national capability provides assets for Urban Search & Rescue (USAR).
4. The original New Dimension programme identified and delivered national assets which enhanced the Fire & Rescue response to a range of catastrophic incidents, including natural and deliberate events, and specifically included response to large scale structural collapse and serious transport incidents. It established various 'Capabilities' to respond to these events.
5. The USAR Capability currently has a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) set to one USAR Search Dog per USAR Team. Currently there are no national K9 vehicles,

with each USAR hosting Fire & Rescue Service funding and providing their own vehicles.

6. The K9 Vehicles will be used to transport USAR Search Dogs and Search Dog Handlers to operational incidents. Under Response Option 2 in the USAR Concept of Operations, Search Dogs can be requested as a standalone, specific asset. The K9 vehicles will also be classed as a mobile kennel and welfare facility for both dog and handler, ensuring their needs are met at protracted incidents and training events.
7. Through analysis of the capability, and review of projected requirements to address risk, it has been identified that a provided K9 Vehicle to the USAR Capability is a modernised and standardised enhancement (example):



8. The procurement of the 17 x K9 Vehicles, forms part of a range of solutions in the wider project of ND2 and will enhance the USAR response capability. The particular vehicle identified has a diesel power train.
9. Several factors have been considered in the selection of the K9 vehicle. These include but are not limited to the detailed specification in the National Fire Chief Council (NFCC) USAR Search Dog Vehicle Specification Guidance, and Dog's Trust, RSPCA, DEFRA and the overarching animal welfare act publications. The vehicle will be utilised as a mobile kennel for days at a time.
10. An option to procure a Plug in Hybrid Electric Vehicle (PHEV) was considered; however, it didn't meet the base specification requirements, that being the vehicle having All Wheel Drive (AWD).
11. A PHEV option that provided AWD was not available, and this was a key criterion. The nature of USAR incidents, such as major transport accidents, are often in remote and hard to reach locations. USAR incidents such as those involving large scale structural collapse, also present issues with difficult terrain. This is particularly relevant for the USAR K9 capability who will require welfare for both handler and dog near to incidents. K9 welfare limits search time and requires regular rest periods in between searches, making a K9 vehicle in close proximity to an incident essential.

12. The type of vehicle required is available as a standard conversion and is directly available from manufacturers. As such it was decided that a vehicle similar to that in service with Merseyside FRS, Norfolk FRS and Kent FRS was to be procured. A suitable framework agreement was Crown Commercial Services (CCS)' Purchase of Standard and Specialist Vehicles.
13. Following a meeting with CCS's Framework Agreement Manager to confirm the approach, quotes were secured for a similar vehicle to the one in service.
14. After careful consideration, the operational conclusion is that the procurement of the All-Wheel Drive diesel Ford Motor Company vehicles are recommended to transport the USAR search dogs as part of their deployment.

Equality and Diversity Implications

15. There are no identified equality or diversity implications related to the procurement. The K9 Vehicle specification ensures it would meet the criteria for Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Search Dog Vehicle Guidance, as well as the Dog's Trust, RSPCA, DEFRA and the overarching animal welfare act publications.
16. This design and selection ensure safe operation in USAR environments, prioritising safety across all personnel roles regardless of background, identity or physical characteristics.

Staff Implications

17. All K9 Handlers will be required to complete a vehicle familiarisation in the operational use. This training will include safety checks, operations and ancillary equipment.

Legal Implications

18. Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service Procurement Department have identified the route to market as Lot 2 of framework agreement RM6244 to the Ford Motor Company. This ensures a fair and transparent route to market.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

19. Funding for the 17 x K9 Vehicles is provided by MHCLG as part of the ND2 USAR project, and is approximately £1,100,000.

Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications

20. Risk management for the procurement and implementation is monitored and addressed by the ND2 Programme. Standard operating procedures will be developed and assured along with training, and risk assessments completed, prior to mobilisation and operational deployment. The procurement of 17 x K9 Vehicles will ensure standardisation throughout the fleet.

Environmental Implications

21. Whilst the vehicle chosen has greater carbon production than some alternative vehicles, a modern diesel vehicle can offer environmental benefits in high-mileage and longer engine life, helping to reduce overall fuel use and lifecycle emissions compared to many traditional models.

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.*

22. The recommendation supports the Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service's vision and purpose by allowing its USAR crews to respond faster, more effectively, and contribute to the saving of lives. It ensures responder and public safety during complex rescues thereby reducing the risk of injury or fatality and improves resilience and readiness for major incidents.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

MFRA	M erseyside F ire and R escue A uthority
MFRS	M erseyside F ire and R escue S ervice
MHCLG	M inistry of H ousing, C ommunities and L ocal G overnment
ND2	N ew D imensions 2 Programme
NR	N ational R esilience
USAR	U rbain S earch A nd R escue
KPI	K ey P erformance I ndicator