

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE		
DATE:	20 JANUARY 2026	REPORT NO:	CFO/35/2526
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, NICK SEARLE		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	AREA MANAGER, PAUL MURPHY	REPORT AUTHOR:	AREA MANAGER, PAUL MURPHY, DAN CARTWRIGHT
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	HEAD OF PROCUREMENT, HYWYN PRITCHARD, CHRIS NOAKES		
TITLE OF REPORT:	PROCUREMENT OF NEXT GENERATION SUITS		

APPENDICES:	NONE
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Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members of the proposed procurement to procure Next Generation (NextGen) suits as part of the National Resilience DIM Uplift Programme.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that Members;
 - a) note the contents of the report; and
 - b) approve the award of a contract to the West Midlands Police Crime & Commissioner for £450,725.40 to procure NextGen suits from the Multi-Agency Strategic Reserve.

Introduction and Background

3. The next phase of the DIM Uplift Programme focuses on the deployment and operationalisation of NextGen protective suits. The timely delivery of training and the issue of NextGen suits across host Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) is now a critical programme priority.
4. This phase is fully aligned with JESIP principles and strengthens interoperability across all three blue-light services. The introduction of NextGen suits enhances collective capability, supports integrated CBRN response arrangements, and ensures consistency of operational practice in line with NR requirements.

Equality and Diversity Implications

5. There are no identified equality or diversity implications related to the procurement of NextGen. The NextGen suits are individually sized specialised protective equipment designed to ensure safe operation in CBRN environments, prioritising safety across all personnel roles regardless of background or identity.

Staff Implications

6. There are no staff implications as the proposed contract would provide service continuity.

Legal Implications

7. The route to market would be for the Authority to contract with the West Midlands Police Crime & Commissioner, for the NextGen suits as manufactured by Blucher.
8. Schedule 2 (Exempted Contracts) of the Procurement Act 2023 allows for such contracts under paragraph 3 (Horizontal Arrangements) within Part 1 Counterparty Exempted Contracts.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

9. In January 2025, the Authority received dedicated funding from the HSG, including £450,725.40 ring-fenced for NextGen suits. This funding must be applied in line with the phased NextGen acquisition schedule to ensure programme continuity and uninterrupted operational capability.

Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications

10. Any delay in procurement poses a risk of creating a critical gap in CBRN response capabilities.
11. Without NextGen continuity, the FRS may face heightened risks to interoperability, as NextGen is the standard for multi-agency response coordination with NHS and Police.
12. Departing from this standard could undermine both health and safety standards and reduce the efficacy of multi-agency CBRN responses, especially in the event of large-scale or catastrophic incidents.

Environmental Implications

13. The procurement of NextGen from a Multi-agency Strategic Reserve aligns with sustainability goals by maintaining existing equipment specifications, thereby reducing the environmental impact associated with introducing new PPE.
14. Aligning with the Police and NHS using the current NextGen suits avoids additional manufacturing demands, minimises waste from discontinued

equipment, and promotes responsible environmental practices within the procurement process.

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.*

15. The NextGen Replacement Strategy supports the Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service's vision as the Lead Authority for National Resilience of being the best in the UK by:
 1. Ensuring Readiness: Securing reliable, compliant NextGen equipment enables swift, effective responses to CBRN incidents, directly enhancing public safety.
 2. Prioritising Safety: Continuity with standardised NextGen minimises health and safety risks for both personnel and the public.
 3. Fostering Collaboration: Maintaining interoperability with the NHS and Police supports a unified, large-scale emergency response, showcasing leadership in national resilience.
 4. Demonstrating Accountability: Direct procurement minimises unnecessary costs, ensuring resource efficiency and reinforcing public trust in the Service's commitment to protection and fiscal responsibility.
16. This approach embodies the Service's commitment to serve, protect, and keep the community safe.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NONE

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CBRN Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear

NCBRNC National Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear Centre

FRS Fire and Rescue Service

HSG Homeland Security Group

MFRA Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

MFRS Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service

SI Service Instruction