

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	3 SEPTEMBER 2026	REPORT NO:	CFO/10/2627
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, NICK SEARLE		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	AREA MANAGER, DAVID WATSON	REPORT AUTHOR:	STATION MANAGER, PETER MARNICK
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	HEAD OF PROCUREMENT, HYWYN PRITCHARD, GROUP MANAGER, PAUL HITCHEN, GROUP MANAGER, MARK BALDWIN, USAR CAPABILITY OFFICERS STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TEAM (SLT)		
TITLE OF REPORT:	ND2 PROCUREMENT: PARATECH EQUIPMENT		

APPENDICES:	NONE
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Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members of the outcome of the procurement review and to seek authorisation to procure additional Paratech rescue systems to complete the transition of the National Resilience Urban Search and Rescue capability to a fully integrated and nationally standardised rescue and structural stabilisation platform, as part of the New Dimensions 2 (ND2) Programme.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that Members:
 - a) note the contents of the report; and
 - b) approve the award of a contract to VimpeX Ltd. for the supply of Paratech rescue systems, structural stabilisation equipment, heavy vehicle rescue kits, compatible airbag systems and associated training at an estimated value of approximately £5,358,440, plus freight and associated delivery costs.

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 NR USAR capability currently operates a significant inventory of Paratech rescue equipment across all teams. This equipment forms the foundation of the national structural collapse response capability and represents an investment in excess of £24 million.
5. Recent NR investment has introduced Paratech Absolute Raker systems, Flying Rakers, High Strength Structural Kits, Rescue Guardian monitoring technology and heavy vehicle rescue kits. These capabilities have demonstrated significant operational advantages over traditional timber shoring methods through increased speed of deployment, improved safety margins, enhanced operational assurance and reduced logistical burden.



6. Further procurement is required to complete the conversion of existing operational modules to a fully integrated Paratech rescue and structural stabilisation platform and to replace airbag rescue systems that have reached the end of their service life.
7. Completion of the programme will establish a nationally standardised approach to shoring, stabilisation, heavy vehicle rescue and structural monitoring, ensuring consistency of equipment, training, maintenance and deployment arrangements across all USAR teams.
8. The proposed procurement will further enhance responder safety through wider use of engineered shoring systems and structural monitoring technology, while reducing reliance on traditional timber-based methods and improving operational interoperability during large-scale and multi-team incidents.
9. The required equipment must be fully compatible with existing Paratech rescue struts, LongShore systems, controllers, monitoring equipment and associated training programmes already in service across the national capability.
10. A direct award to Vimpex Limited is therefore considered the most appropriate procurement route as it protects the Authority's existing investment, maintains national interoperability, avoids unnecessary duplication of equipment, training and maintenance arrangements, and ensures delivery of a fully integrated operational capability within the required programme timescales.

Equality and Diversity Implications

11. There are no identified equality or diversity implications related to the procurement. The equipment specifications ensure compliance with safety regulations. The design and selection of this equipment ensure safe operation in USAR environments, prioritising safety across all personnel roles regardless of background, identity, or physical characteristics.

Staff Implications

12. There are no adverse staffing implications. Standardising the equipment platform will simplify training, maintenance and deployment procedures, while improving responder safety and operational efficiency.

Legal Implications

13. The proposed route relies on the provisions within the procurement regulations and the Authority's Contract Standing Orders relating to direct awards or single tender actions. This route is considered appropriate given the requirement for technical compatibility and interoperability with existing specialist equipment, together with the need to maintain national USAR operational standards.
14. The award of contract under the Procurement Act 2023 will require all officers involved in the decision making process to complete and sign conflict of interest declarations prior to the publication of the Contract Award Notice (UK6), which commences the mandatory standstill period, subject to the Authority's approval.
15. On successful completion of the standstill period, a Contract Details Notice will be published. Given the value of the contract, the Authority is also required to publish three Key Performance Indicators together with a redacted version of the contract in accordance with the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

16. Funding for the equipment is being provided by MHCLG as part of the ND2 USAR project. The estimated value of the procurement is approximately £5,358,440, plus freight and associated delivery costs.
17. The proposal represents strong value for money as it avoids duplication of training, maintenance, testing, storage and support arrangements that would arise from introducing an alternative system. It also reduces the ongoing requirement for timber procurement, transportation, storage and disposal.
18. The long-term benefit is the provision of a sustainable and reusable shoring capability that improves operational efficiency, extends the useful life of existing assets and supports a consistent national approach across all USAR teams.

Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications

19. Completing the transition to a fully integrated Paratech stabilisation platform will materially improve risk management during structural collapse and heavy rescue incidents. Engineered systems provide greater load predictability, improved deployment speed, reduced manual handling and stronger operational assurance.
20. The inclusion of Rescue Guardian monitoring technology further strengthens responder safety by providing real-time information on structural movement, vibration, inclination and load. This enables commanders and rescue teams to identify deterioration earlier and reduce exposure to hazardous environments.
21. Maintaining a single common platform also reduces the risk of operator error during large-scale or multi-team incidents. Crews will be trained, equipped and deployed using common procedures, which is essential to safe and effective national interoperability.

Environmental Implications

22. The procurement supports the Authority's environmental objectives by reducing reliance on timber-based shoring systems. The Paratech Absolute Raker and associated rescue systems are reusable engineered solutions designed for repeated deployment throughout their service life.
23. Reducing timber consumption, transport requirements and waste disposal will improve sustainability outcomes and reduce the environmental impact of structural collapse operations. The proposal also maximises the use of existing assets and supports responsible procurement practice.

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.*

24. This procurement supports the Authority's vision by delivering a fully standardised national USAR capability that improves operational readiness, responder safety, interoperability and value for money. It protects previous investment in specialist rescue equipment, supports sustainable operational practices through the use of reusable engineered systems and ensures the NR USAR community can continue to deliver safe, effective and coordinated responses to major structural collapse and heavy rescue incidents.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

MFRA	Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority
MFRS	Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
ND2	New Dimensions 2 Programme
NR	National Resilience
USAR	Urban Search And Rescue