

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

REVIEW OF THE EMERGENCY SERVICES DIGITAL MOBILE RADIO PROJECT



September 2023

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Abbreviations

ExCo	Executive Council
RFIP	Royal Falkland Islands Police
DES	Director of Emergency Services
DESIS	Department of Emergency Services and Island Security
FIG	Falkland Islands Government

Executive Summary

- 1.1 In 2015, Executive Council approved funds for the Royal Falkland Islands Police (RFIP) to purchase a Digital Mobile Radio (DMR) System to replace the Police and Emergency Services' ailing VHF communications system. The system was intended to provide secure communications and ensure interoperability among emergency services.
- 1.2 RFIP put out a tender for the system, which received a single response. After some negotiation, terms were agreed with Sure South Atlantic Limited (SSA). The contract covered both supply of the system and training to be provided to RFIP by SSA. The intention was that RFIP would in turn cascade that training internally to other departments.
- 1.3 Prior to the contract being signed, a decision was taken within Falkland Islands Government to cut the number of repeater sites that the system was to use from six to three. This was to have a considerable impact on the system's coverage area, and consequently, its usability. The decision does not appear to have been known by, or made clear to, some members of the Emergency Services and RFIP itself. The PAC was not able to find any concrete evidence of why and by whom this decision was taken. Accounts regarding the decision from individuals directly or tangentially involved in the project are either inconclusive or contradictory or both.
- 1.4 The PAC found that the system's poor area coverage was the single biggest deciding factor in hindering its usability and, ultimately, value for money. Moreover, SSA had effectively warned FIG that this would be the case prior to the contract being signed. That warning does not seem to have elicited any reassessment or reconsideration of the chosen option.
- 1.5 Other issues with usability arose during the system's rollout, some of which were technical and addressed by SSA; others related to the difference between the DMR system and the VHF system to which the Emergency Services were accustomed. There are numerous suggestions within the examined evidence that the internal training delivered by RFIP was insufficient. This was likely compounded by the suspension of the project leader during the system's rollout and a high turnover of staff within RFIP more generally.
- 1.6 The issues with coverage and usability meant that emergency services either gradually or entirely switched back to the VHF system, particularly as the island-wide repeater network for that system was renewed. In the case of one emergency service, the system was not used a single time as the system did not meet the basic needs of that service. The system has since become obsolete due to the manufacturer being bought out by another company, and the emergency services are seeking to replace it with a 4G-based push to talk system. The PAC thus concluded that, in its five years of limited use, the DMR system did not offer value for money.

- 1.7 Although the logic given for the chosen system appears solid, the PAC found some evidence that it was overly complex for the needs of the emergency services at the time, and in some cases, so complex that it completely failed to meet basic needs. The PAC has not been able to see the advice purportedly provided to RIFP by the Devon & Cornwall police, and which appears to have been central in the decision to opt for the chosen system.
- 1.8 The PAC nonetheless also found that the state of disrepair of the previous VHF system likely placed excessive pressure on officers to replace the system. This, in turn, may have affected critical assessment of the chosen system at all levels. Considerations regarding to oil-preparedness and new port sites are likely to have added to this pressure.
- 1.9 The PAC found there to be extremely poor communication between RFIP and other emergency services on what the system was likely to be able to deliver on the ground.
- 1.10 The PAC found that documentation relating to this project was piecemeal and incomplete, and fragmented across two departments (Emergency Services and Central Services).
- 1.11 The PAC also stresses the importance of structured and ongoing training for new equipment and technology, noting the paucity of training records relating to this system within RFIP.

About the Public Accounts Committee

2.1 The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) was established by section 81 of the Constitution¹ and it is regulated by the Public Accounts Committee Ordinance 2009.²

The PAC's membership

2.2 The PAC has five members:

- After consulting Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), the Governor appoints the PAC Chair and two other PAC members.

(None of these can be MLAs. Nor can the Financial Secretary, described in the Constitution as Director of Finance, be a member of the PAC.)

- The Legislative Assembly elects 2 MLAs to be the other two PAC members.

(An MLA cannot serve on the PAC at the same time as being a member of Executive Council nor at the same time as being the Chair or Deputy Chair of the Standing Finance Committee - see section 81(1) of the Constitution and section 5 of the Ordinance.)

2.3 The current members of the PAC are:

- Andrew Newman (Chair)
- Sacha Cleminson (Deputy Chair)
- Nadia Knight (Lay Member)
- MLA Teslyn Barkman
- MLA Peter Biggs

2.4 The work of the PAC is supported by a full time Clerk, Nancy Locke, and it can also engage other people to assist in its work.³

The PAC's role

2.5 The functions of the PAC⁴ can be summarised as follows:

- to examine and report on public accounts and audit reports, including those of FIG itself, as well as statutory bodies, bodies that receive public money and bodies in which FIG or a statutory body is a shareholder;⁵
- to advise on external audit arrangements and to examine and report on all reports produced by FIG's Internal Audit Department;
- to consider and report on the effectiveness of the regulation of bodies that have been granted franchises to provide services of a public nature;
- to consider and report on any other matter that the Governor may refer to the PAC.

1 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2008/2846/schedule/paragraph/81/made>

2 <https://legislation.gov.fk/view/whole/inforce/2021-04-11/fiord-2009-11>

3 See section 81(4) of the Constitution and sections 9 and 9A of the Ordinance.

4 See section 81(5) of the Constitution and section 11(1) of the Ordinance.

5 The bodies covered by this include Falklands Conservation, FLH, FIDC, FIMCo, the Museum and National Trust, the Media Trust, SAAS, SAERI and Stanley Services.

- 2.6 When carrying out its functions, the PAC has to look at the value for money derived from the public money that has been spent. It can also look at the arrangements made to manage financial risk.⁶
- 2.7 The Ordinance uses the terms “economy, efficiency and effectiveness”,⁷ which are widely used in relation to PAC activities worldwide. Economy, efficiency and effectiveness can be described as “spending less, spending well, and spending wisely”.⁸
- 2.8 One way⁹ of measuring these involves looking at:
- Inputs, such as staff and buildings vs costs in monetary terms (economy)
 - Outputs of a particular good or service vs inputs (efficiency)
 - Outcomes in terms of the impact on society vs outputs (effectiveness)
- Value for money is the overall relationship between costs and outcomes.
- 2.9 The role of the PAC does not include considering matters of policy: the PAC’s job is not to look at why money has been spent, but how.¹⁰
- 2.10 However, although the Ordinance provides that the PAC’s functions do not include considering matters of policy,¹¹ it does not define what are matters of policy and there is a clear potential for overlap between policy and delivery, particularly when looking at effectiveness.
- 2.11 A common sense approach is being taken in this review to determine what are matters of policy and what are matters of delivery.

6 See section 11(3) of the Ordinance

7 Section 11(3)(a)

8 Joachim Werner, “Best Practices of Public Accounts Committees” (22 November 2002), p8

The paper, originally contributed for the Handbook for Public Accounts Committees commissioned by the Association of Public Accounts Committees (APAC) in South Africa, is published online by the International Budget Partnership at

<https://www.internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/Best-Practices-of-Public-Accounts-Committees.pdf>

9 “Measures of Achievement” to Kristensen, Groszyk and Bühle, “Outcome-focused Management and Budgeting”, OECD Journal on Budgeting Volume 1 Number 4 (2002), pp32-33

The article, cited by Werner in his paper, is available online at <https://www.oecd.org/gov/budgeting/44526575.pdf>

10 See section 11(2) of the Ordinance.

11 Section 11(2)(a)

The Emergency Services Digital Mobile Radio Project

Note: Throughout this report, three different Directors of Emergency Services are referred to:

DES 1: In post at the time the system was being sought, also the Chief Police Officer at the time.

DES 2: In post at the time the contract was signed.

DES 3: Current Director of Emergency Services

References to the Chief of Police refer solely to the individual that led the project, and who was in post until his suspension in 2016.

References to the Chief Police Officer refer solely to the individual representing the police at Radio Users group meetings after the Chief of Police's suspension.

- 3.1 On 8 April 2015 the Director of Emergency Services (DES 1) submitted a paper (39/15) to Executive Council (ExCo) requesting approval to purchase a new Digital Mobile Radio (DMR) system. The proposed system would provide the Royal Falkland Islands Police (RFIP) with encrypted communications, and provide interoperability among other emergency services, namely: the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), Customs and Immigration (C&I), and the King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH)
- 3.2 The paper was the second to be submitted to ExCo on the matter, the first being 57/14. Paper 57/14 had requested £300,000 of capital funds and an annual operating cost of £21,900 to be allocated to the project. That figure came from an exercise to obtain expressions of interest for such a contract carried out in 2014. While ExCo did not approve this in its entirety, it did request Budget Select Committee to retain £72,400¹² in the capital programme "subject to DES confirming interoperability between all services and managers and DES briefing MLAs further".

¹² This figure was the lowest of all the options put forward in paper 57/14, with the highest being £1,240,000. The £300,000 figure requested in paper 57/14 was the "midrange option." Although this was the figure that went forward as the base price, ExCo paper 39/15 reads that "later analysis by the DES revealed that the £72,400 option did not address the requirements of the project", and therefore was discounted. It is not clear when this "later" analysis was, and whether it came before or after ExCo requested that Budget Select Committee retain that figure in the capital budget.

- 3.3 The decision caused some frustration, as the Chief of Police wrote to the Chief Fire Officer at the time:

“As you know I consulted you as the fire service and the medical department and the proposal is to provide the equipment to both these services so that its interoperability was optimised. [...] I am unsure as to why Members asked the question they did as the information was clearly in my paper.”¹³

The then Director of Emergency Services (DES 1) went on to meet with potential users of an interoperable radio system on 28 July 2014. Advice regarding “technical and contractual requirements” was sought from Devon and Cornwall Police. The PAC has not been able to establish the precise content of this advice, nor was any correspondence on this matter available. Officers in post at the time approached by the PAC either did not respond to PAC enquiries or had not been made privy to that advice. However, it is noteworthy that in assessing the durability and reliability of the equipment, ExCo paper 39/15 reads: “the equipment being proposed is tier III Sepura Equipment, which is covered by warranty and is used by numerous emergency organisations including Devon and Cornwall Police.”¹⁴

- 3.4 A tender board was established and an invitation to tender released on October 15. According to ExCo paper 39/15, only one bid was received by the deadline of December 1, from Sure South Atlantic Ltd (SSA). However, in his response to PAC questions, the then Chief of Police, who was leading on the project, said,

“The three tenders for the [digital mobile radio system] were subject to scrutiny by the Tender Board and the decision to award the contract to [SSA] done so on it being considered the best proposal for meeting the technical and non-technical specification and value for money”¹⁵

When asked about the discrepancy with the ExCo paper, he further added:

“My apologies but I am unable to recall why the paper contained the sentence referring to one tender, it would have been submitted by the then Director of Emergency Services (DES 2). I do know that there was some interaction between the DES and tendering companies and as previously stated the figure provided by the UK company during the first phase of the project was considerable. I do not know why the paper stated that no other company had

¹³ Email from Chief of Police to Chief Fire Officer, 2 July 2014

¹⁴ ExCo paper 39/15

¹⁵ Letter from the Chief of Police at the time to the Public Accounts Committee, 23 February 2023

submitted a bid within the deadline or sought permission to extend it. I do not know why the paper stated that no other company had submitted a bid within the deadline or sought permission to extend it.”¹⁶

It is likely that the discrepancy is simply down to poor recollection, given that eight years have passed since the events. It is also possible that the original expression of interest exercise is being confused with the invitation to tender proper. In any event, although the matter is largely inconsequential, it is regrettable that no tender board minutes or documentation are available for the PAC to corroborate this either way.

- 3.5 The one tender referred to in paper 39/15 proposed two options: one for an RFIP-only system, costing £78,360 in capital costs and operating costs of £31,060; and a second, interoperable system costing £147,250 in capital costs and £59,770 in operating costs.
- 3.6 However, according to that paper, “initial evaluation of the tender indicated that it did not satisfy a considerable number of the specification requirements and also some of the language used in the tender was open to interpretation.” The Tender Board therefore agreed that DES should negotiate with the single tenderer to “obtain a satisfactory offer suitable for acceptance by FIG (in line with Financial Instructions).”¹⁷ The final figure sought was £170,280 on top of the £72,280 that had already been set aside by Budget Select Committee.
- 3.7 The paper put to ExCo also detailed the system and user specifications. These included training plans to be delivered to the department (with a view to the training being internally cascaded), durability and reliability, and area coverage.
- 3.8 ExCo accepted the recommended option (the RFIP + interoperable system), noting that the two channels would be simultaneously monitored by RFIP and aimed to allow “FIG Emergency Services to deal with major incidents and emergencies.” The matter was forwarded to Standing Finance Committee, which approved £170,280 of additional funds on top of the £72,400 that had already been set aside by Budget Select Committee.
- 3.9 With regards the area coverage specification, the ExCo paper reads: “the submission covers the initial coverage requirements as detailed in the Invitation to Tender, and is capable of expansion and extension without the need to remodel or re-equip.” As the PAC has not been able to see the Invitation to Tender, it is not clear what that Area Coverage specification was. The final contract, signed on 26 February 2016, includes a reference to three repeater stations to be placed on existing SSA installations: at Cortley Hill, Sapper Hill, and Pleasant Peak. Although no coverage map is included with the contract, the Initial Coverage Requirement was listed as:

¹⁶ Letter from the Chief of Police at the time to the Public Accounts Committee, 23 February 2023

¹⁷ ExCo paper 39/15

Stanley (including Stanley Airport, Cape Pembroke, & Stanley Common); Port William & the New Port Area¹⁸, all roads system associated with the above; Berkley Sound; Stanley – Darwin Road; and MPC & Mare Harbour.

3.10 The contract further read:

The system must be capable of expansion and extension without the need to remodel or re-equip to any great extent, the infrastructure installed to obtain the Initial Coverage Requirement. Such expansion and extension may include: Road from Goose Green to New Haven Ferry Terminal; Pipeline assembly area/site which may be well away from Stanley Area (Oil Industry); Helicopter refuelling sites which may be well away from Stanley area (Oil industry); Emergency accommodation site; location unknown at present (Oil Industry); Temporary Accommodation site for new port and associated infrastructure build; accommodation site for pipeline assembly area/site; Oil industry local incident control room; Military emergency services (JSPSU (Police), Fire & Rescue, Medical/Ambulance)

Additionally, the contract referred to a Secondary Phased Expansion and Extension:

“It is envisaged that a gradual expansion and extension of the network could be made to make the system accessible over the entire Public Highway System on both East and West Falkland. This will be a phased expansion or extension possibly over several years if supported by elected members.”

3.11 The contract is therefore worded somewhat confusingly, in that it refers to areas of expansion under the “initial coverage requirement”, but which were not part of the contractual initial coverage requirement that was actually going to be delivered. In other words, there was expansion of the coverage planned that was not part of the initial coverage requirement, but which was not listed under the Secondary Phased Expansion, either.

3.12 Area Coverage was to be a concern during the finalisation of that contract. Prior to a final draft being decided upon, FIG’s legal services team had expressed concerns that the contract excluded SSA liability for indirect and consequential losses, and SSA responded saying that they were “unable to commit to commercial contracts that do not exclude indirect and consequential losses.” There were several reasons for this, one of which was related to the area coverage:

¹⁸ At the time, options to place a new deep-water port in the Port William area were being considered.

“The scale of investment by the FIG in the radio network limits the availability in fault conditions. At this stage you have only purchased 3 sites with very limited overlap of service coverage. For comparison, [SSA] have 8 mobile sites covering a similar geographical area.”¹⁹

- 3.13 The Chief of Police forwarded the letter to the Director of Emergency Services (DES 2) and Crown Counsel, arguing that “the contract is in serious risk of folding before it is signed”:

“Are we able to remove the offending clause from the contract? It appears that FIG is carrying this risk at present and has done so for all my 30 years in the RFIP; to continue to rely on the present radio system due to it being ineffective and not fit for purpose, is not acceptable. We must get this contract signed and the new DMR installed and commissioned without any further delay.”²⁰

Despite forwarding the letter, the Chief of Police does not make any reference to SSA’s warning regarding service coverage in the body of his email.

- 3.14 The contract was signed, and the system rolled out in late 2016. In early 2017, the chief of police, who had led the project, was suspended on an unrelated matter. By late 2017, there were ongoing issues with the system, and the Chief Executive of SSA met with FIG officers from the emergency services, the Chief Police Officer,²¹ the acting Director of Central Services, the Financial Secretary, and the Telecoms Regulator. The meeting minutes show that its purpose was to “discuss the poor radio coverage across areas outside Stanley and try to identify possible solutions.”
- 3.15 At the meeting, the Chief Executive of SSA explained that some voice quality issues had been identified, and that some faulty handsets had been replaced. With regards to the coverage, the minutes show him to have said:

“...a minimum of 6 repeater mast sites are required to provide good radio coverage over East Falkland and a further 6 sites are required on West Falkland to provide good Island-wide coverage. FIG were aware of this prior to any contract being agreed and FIG initially requested masts at 6 sites on East Falkland. However, prior to the contract being agreed FIG halved this order to 3 sites on East Falklands to cut costs. Consequently, radios have only been

¹⁹ Letter From SSA to Chief of Police, 14 December 2015

²⁰ Email from Chief of Police to DES and Crown Counsel, 14 December 2015

²¹ This was a different role and individual from the Chief of Police, who had led the project prior to February 2017, when he was suspended.

installed at 3 sites on East Falklands and this is the reason for poor coverage.”²²

- 3.16 A map was shown at the meeting showing the coverage of the 3 repeater sites. The PAC has not been able to see to this map. The minutes further state:

“The FIG members of the group all confirmed they were not aware of this cost cutting decision.”²³

Although the minutes show that an action was assigned to the Financial Secretary to investigate the matter further, the PAC has not seen any correspondence in this matter.

- 3.17 Attendants to that meeting included the Chief Police Officer and Chief Fire Officer. Both had been included in the first weekly update from the Chief of Police in October 2016, during the installation of the system. That update included the line:

“Of the three repeater sites (Sapper Hill, Mount Pleasant and Cortney Hill) all have had the antennae and cabling installed to masts.”²⁴

- 3.18 The wording appears to make it clear that only three repeater sites were going to be installed, though it is possible that it could have been construed as meaning “the first three of six”, particularly if six repeaters were what was expected. However, the Chief Police Officer present at that meeting had been copied in when the Chief of Police forwarded the letter from SSA referred to in 3.12, which raised concerns about only investing in three repeaters, to the Crown Counsel and Director of Emergency services. Thus, the documentation reviewed is inconsistent, and it is not possible to disentangle who knew what and when. However, taken at face value, the minutes of the radio users group suggest that, at the very minimum, there had been very poor internal communication regarding the project.

- 3.19 Perhaps more surprisingly, when asked by the PAC, the Chief of Police at the time had no recollection of such a letter:

“I do not recall this letter at all and it may simply be that my memory fails me. If it was on the RFIP file then it should contain any response that I may have made. I notice that the scanned letter does not show a RFIP date stamp nor my initials and date received, as was the usual process for mail received [...] Perhaps the letter was redirected to the DES because of their involvement in it.”²⁵

²² Minutes of Radio Users Group Meeting 2 November 2017

²³ Minutes of Radio Users Group Meeting 2 November 2017

²⁴ Email from Chief of Police to RFIP and other Emergency Services, 10 October 2016

²⁵ Letter from the Chief of Police at the time to the Public Accounts Committee, 23 February 2023

3.20 Again, this appears inconsistent with the documents seen by the PAC. As shown above, documents seen by the PAC clearly show that having received the letter by email, the then Chief of Police forwarded it to the Director of Emergency Services and Crown Counsel and directly referring to the letter in his email. In any event, the then Chief of Police reiterated to the PAC that he does not recall a decision to cut the number of repeaters:

*"I of course accept this as a matter of record, however I can only reiterate that I have no recollection of by whom and why the decision was made. Surely the same record would show by whom and the decision was made, particularly as it was a change to the original proposal against which [SSA] had been awarded the contract."*²⁶

While that expectation seems a reasonable one, unfortunately, nowhere does the documentation provided to the PAC clarify who took that decision and why, or indeed, who was aware of it being taken.

3.21 Other problems with the system were expressed at the meeting, including the timeout function, which meant that if one of the people communicating with the system didn't "hang up", the channel would be unusable for 60 seconds. Discussing the matter, the SSA Chief Executive noted that poor training had had an impact:

*"[SSA Chief Executive] shared his opinion that there are problems with people and training as well as poor coverage. He suggested that a detailed communications training plan should be in place to help overcome poor radio procedure and increase the competence of all radio users."*²⁷

3.22 The emergency services continued to use the system, but they relied heavily on mobile phones and the VHF network outside Stanley. The Customs & Immigration department ceased to use it altogether, as the Collector of Customs told the PAC:

*"As these sets did not satisfy our needs, we therefore continued using a standard cheap (£30) duty mobile phone and a Marine VHF handheld radio."*²⁸

3.23 At this time, FIG was also pursuing a renewal of the VHF/ 2-metre repeater system that would guarantee 100% coverage over the Falkland Islands road network. As this came online, the Fire Service too stopped using the system. In March 2020 the Chief Fire officer informed RFIP:

²⁶ Letter from the Chief of Police at the time to the Public Accounts Committee, 23 February 2023

²⁷ Minutes of Radio Users Group Meeting 2 November 2017

²⁸ Email from Collector of Customs to current DES in response to PAC questions, 23 November 2022

“Please be advised as of 16:30 today 4th March the Falkland Islands Fire & Rescue Service will be reverting to our 2mtr sets as main communications. [...] “We will however use mobile phones and the Sepura system as required as backups.”²⁹

- 3.24 The Chief Fire Officer has confirmed to the PAC that the VHF/ 2 Metre system remains their main source of communication. Meanwhile, the Chief of Police confirmed to the PAC that the Sepura system is only used by RFIP within Stanley. Sepura has now been taken over another company, and the period during which they bound to honour the contract has expired, and the system will become obsolete. The current DES has therefore confirmed to the PAC that it is now pursuing a new 4G-based Push-to-Talk communications system with VHF interoperability at a cost of £135,372. As that system works on the 4G-network, it comes under the telecommunications exclusive licence, and will be awarded directly to the licence holder.

²⁹ Email from Chief Fire Officer to RFIP and Fire & Rescue Service, 04 March 2020

How the review was carried out

4.1 The PAC requested the following documents on the matter from the Department of Central Services and the Department of Emergency Services:

- Public ExCo papers relating to the project, including but not limited to: 39/15. Please provide the public ExCo papers together with a list of ExCo papers which are not public or have redacted sections in order that the PAC can apply for them through Legislative Assembly/HE The Governor.

- Any agenda papers or minutes (in both cases, including both open and exempt versions) relating to discussions in relation to the project at meetings including the Police Committee or internal Emergency Services meetings, Tender Boards etc.

- Any Letter of Instruction for the project including the contract with the supplier.

- Any variation orders or instructions relating to the project where the project differed from the original tender and the reasons for the variation.

- Any planning documentation for the project before the system was purchased.

- Information about how the project was monitored during its course, including documentation relevant to the monitoring process

- Information about changes made to the project during its course, including documentation relevant to decisions taken to make these changes (and also about decisions taken not to make other changes). This includes any emails or correspondence relating to the purchase of the system, the use of the system or, if applicable, the decision not to use the system.

- Information about the acceptance process followed at the end of the project, including documentation relevant to the acceptance process

- A breakdown of the total cost of the project and variances from the original and amended budgets for the project, together with an explanation of any variances

- Information about the current use and running costs of the replacement Radio system (Supera).

- Information about any financial savings or other benefits achieved because of the project, including documentation relevant to any assessment of these .

The documents that were received were reviewed in the first instance.

- 4.2 Following initial review of the documentation, a request for closed papers and minutes was made to Gilbert House.
- 4.3 Supplementary questions were sent to the current Director of Emergency Services and two heads of Emergency Services, who were in post at the time, as well as the Chief Executive of Sure South Atlantic Ltd. Responses were received from the Chief Executive of Sure South Atlantic, the Director of Emergency services, and the heads of the Fire and Rescue Service and Customs and Immigration Service.
- 4.4 Supplementary questions were also sent to staff involved with the project at the time, and an interview was carried out with the Director of Emergency Services at the time the contract was signed. Other individuals approached include: the then Chief of Police, who was the project leader; the individual within the police thought to be in charge of training at the time; the Director of Central Services at the time (who signed the contract); and the Projects and Contracts Officer in post at the time. Responses were received from the then Chief of Police, whose answers are incorporated here, and the Director of Central Services and Projects and Contracts officer, neither of whom had detailed recollection of the project to answer questions. MLAs in office at the time were asked about the decision to cut the six repeaters to three.

Key Findings

- 5.1 The PAC has found that, although the system sought to ensure interoperability across emergency services, services outside RFIP were poorly informed of what the system entailed or what it could practically deliver. Although there appears to have been extensive consultation with other emergency services to determine their needs at a wide-scale level before the equipment was purchased, other emergency services had very little practical experience or knowledge of the day-to-day use of such systems. This led to issues with its usability, which were likely compounded by inadequate training by RFIP.
- 5.2 This would appear to be backed up by comments made to the PAC by the Director of Emergency Services in place in 2017 (DES 2), and who had not been involved in the purchase of the equipment or in its rollout:

"I would be asking the question, where's the training records? Because I know [from] other officers telling me confidentially that when they went to pick up the radio [they were told] 'here you go, use this, press this, press that to talk' and that's it, there was no proper training associated with it and to my mind it should have come with a proper training package off [SSA] anyway and with that one, there wasn't a proper internal one."³⁰

Although DES 2 questions the training package delivered by SSA, it is worth noting that when the subject of training came up at a later meeting to discuss issues with the system, none of the present Emergency Services are minuted as questioning the training delivered by SSA. It is also worth noting however, that SSA staff themselves were to be trained by the equipment manufacturer, and therefore SSA staff were not inherently familiar with the equipment. The PAC requested training records from both RFIP and SSA but none were available.

- 5.3 Problems with the rollout and implementation of internal training are likely to have been worsened by the suspension of the project leader and general change-over of staff within RFIP. Some years later, in 2019, a response from RFIP to a query from the Treasury suggests that there was some disarray surrounding the way in which the system had been implemented:

"The handsets and base station(s) are not on the Police asset list or any asset list of Emergency Services. Customs, Fire & FIDF have signed out some handsets (From RFIP?) & RFIP have some handsets too. (RFIP has had a massive staff

³⁰ Personal Communication between DES 2 and PAC secretary, 21 June 2019

change-over since the purchase of these radios & original people involved in the project have now all left).”³¹

- 5.4 Perhaps the most striking piece of information that appears not to have been made clear to other emergency services is the decision to cut the number of repeater sites from six to three. There is conflicting information regarding the extent to which other heads of Emergency Services and senior RFIP ranks knew about or had been made aware of the decision. A fuller record of correspondence and meeting minutes might have clarified the matter, but as it is, the matter is left open to conjecture. At the very minimum, and regardless of the departments and individuals involved, the episode demonstrates woefully inadequate communication for what was a quarter of a million pound project.
- 5.5 In trying to determine who made the decision and why, the PAC approached the chief executive of SSA, the Director of Central Services in post at the time, the Project and Contracts Officer in post at the time (who oversaw government tenders), Members of Legislative Assembly in office at the time, and the Chief of Police. Those who recalled the decision (most didn't), provided responses that contradicted each other. In the absence of consistent recollections, or evidence to corroborate one version over another, the PAC has not been able to confidently determine who took the decision. There is, however, sufficient agreement between the various recollections to confidently conclude that the decision sought to cut costs.
- 5.6 Cutting the number of repeater sites to three severely curtailed the functionality of the system outside Stanley. This effectively rendered it useless for the intended purpose of ensuring interoperability during major incidents outside Stanley. In this sense, the system would not ever deliver value for money until the coverage area was expanded. Of particular concern is the fact that the contractor had effectively warned FIG of the limitations of only having three repeater sites during contract negotiations, and yet it was decided to continue. The impact of the decision is succinctly and glumly summed up by RFIP themselves in a capital programme bid to replace the Sepura system in 2021:

“The current system suffers from gaps in coverage due to a lack of base stations. The initial proposal was for six base stations, but this was cut down to three. Consequently, the functionality of the current system has been compromised. This has had a detrimental effect on the usefulness of the whole system and meant that full operability across all of the islands was never achieved.”

- 5.7 The PAC found that the state of disrepair of the existing emergency services communications system at the time was very likely a factor that placed excessive pressure on officers to replace the system. Such pressure is

³¹ Email from PA to Director of Emergency Services to Senior Accounting Assistant, 29 July 2019

evident in the Chief of Police's email to Crown Counsel and the Director of Emergency Services:

"To continue to rely on the present radio system due to it being ineffective and not fit for purpose, is not acceptable. We must get this contract signed and the new DMR installed and commissioned without any further delay."

That this email included with it a letter from SSA making clear the limitations of the system with only three repeaters, and does not appear to have been met with much resistance, only further illustrates the pressure and urgency with which the decision had been made. The level of disrepair and unserviceability that the emergency services were allowed to reach is in itself a cause for concern.

- 5.8 References to a new port site and oil preparedness, and the ongoing planning for oil development going on across FIG at the time, suggest that it is likely that there was additional pressure to future-proof the system for a greater capability than was required at the time.
- 5.9 The PAC has found some evidence that the Sepura DMR system was excessive for the requirements of some if not all the emergency services. The requirements for interoperability and encryption were reasonable ones, but could have also been delivered by simpler, more familiar technology. As the Chief Fire Officer told the PAC:

"I had no input to this particular system. I was expecting an encrypted 2 metre radio system via several repeaters."³²

- 5.10 In fact, according to the Collector of Customs, not only was the technology excessive, it also didn't meet the needs of the Customs & Immigration service:

"When procurement of the Sepura system was being completed we were assured that once installed the set up would meet the DESIS secure communications requirements and also the C&I Service needs as well. At the time our requirement was for some multi-function handhelds which had the capability for marine VHF and access to the mobile phone service (including text-messaging facility.)

"We were provided with four hand-held sets but whilst they had been programmed for marine VHF and the mobile phone service they were not text messaging capable. When I asked about this shortcoming I was verbally advised by the Chief of Police that although text messaging capability had been sought, funding therefore had not been approved as it

³² Email from Chief Fire Officer to Director of Emergency Services in reply to enquiries from PAC, 23 November 2022

would have involved an additional five figure sum to have such included in the package. As these sets did not satisfy our needs, we therefore continued using a standard cheap (£30) duty mobile phone and a Marine VHF hand held radio.

“For the above reason we have never used operationally any of the four Sepura sets. When I enquired if any of our peer services could make use of the additional sets the response was ‘no thanks’. These sets are therefore sitting here in our office unused.”³³

- 5.11 In fact, representatives from SSA had already told RFIP that the ability to send text messages from the DMR system to a conventional mobile phone was not technically possible:

“This option is not technically possible, there is no common protocol between DMR and GSM systems to enable this functionality.”³⁴

The comment was made in response to one of the maintenance and service standards set out in the draft contract. However, despite the comment, the relevant service standard, which required for a text message to be successfully sent from the DMR system to a mobile phone, was left in the final version of the contract. It is unclear (and, to a certain extent, moot) why the service standard was left in. What is perhaps of more concern is that prior to signing to the contract, it was known that the system would not meet the requirements of the Customs & Immigration department, and this does not appear to have been communicated to the Collector of Customs until after the system was in place.

- 5.12 The system was a complex one. It represented a considerable technological step change from the previous system used by RFIP and the Emergency Services. In his response to PAC questions, the then Chief of Police argued the system was appropriate and that there was sufficient familiarity with it within the Emergency Services at the time:

“The Emergency Services radio system in the Falklands had reached a state of collapse. Following several disasters in the UK, especially the London Bombings where enquiries had identified inter-emergency service radio communications as being a major failure, it was considered appropriate to radically overhaul the system in the Falkland Islands. I was set the task of developing and pushing the project forward by [...] the then Chief Police Officer and Director of Emergency Services. I used the structure of the Islands Disaster Management Plan to identify all departments that would need

³³ Email from Collector of Customs to Director of Emergency Services in response to queries from PAC, 23 November 2022

³⁴ Comment from SSA on draft contract, undated

access to a fully inter service DMR system. Familiarity with such a system and that it be digital as opposed to analogue to improve clarity and security was an identified requirement. A requirement for person to person, group call ability and telephone access was identified as desirable. All departments were sent a general outline of the proposed system and were invited to return their requirement for both base stations and personal/handheld radios. These returns were used to build a bill of quantities and location for installation of base stations. The system would allow each department to operate within itself during normal daily business but, in the case of an emergency being declared, all departments would switch to a designated channel providing all informing interservice communications.

“The type of system employed by the Home Office Police Services in the United Kingdom (UK) was used as a model for our requirements and the eventual contracted supplier was involved in service provision in the UK. Most of the police officers, including [the then Chief Police Officer and DES] serving with the RFIP at that time were from the United Kingdom. They were all very familiar with the type of system that was eventually chosen, one of the officers was also a system trained control desk operator. I believe that some of the Fire Service staff, who had attended training in the UK, had also used the radio system. I had used the system and been involved in area control room attachments during my Senior Police Management Training Course period in the UK. Part of the contract with the system supplier was that all staff would be fully trained in its use and operation, which would include those who had no previous experience of it. In this case [a SSA staff-member] was trained by the system suppliers to carry out forward training of the end users in the Falklands. Examples of the personal radios and associated equipment that would be supplied were reviewed online and officers who were familiar with the equipment spoken to. [DES] was also able to access internal feedback from forces in the UK and his own personal experience of course.”³⁵

- 5.13 A determination on whether the system was proportionate to the needs of the Emergency Services is one that is difficult to make. Such a determination is almost certain be tinted by hindsight bias, given that the system was never fully adopted or used to the full extent of its technological capability. A question also remains over whether a system suitable for a rural UK police force would have offered the Falklands emergency services – and in particular the part-time and retained³⁶ staff – sufficient

³⁵ Letter from the Chief of Police at the time to the Public Accounts Committee, 23 February 2023

³⁶ Retained staff in this context refers to firefighters who are not full time, but are paid for training and attending incidents

operational opportunity and intensity to fully familiarise themselves with the system in real world scenarios. Nevertheless, the relative ease with which two of the emergency services reverted to previous communication systems is striking. Of note here, perhaps, is the comment made to the PAC by DES 2:

"[the system] was damned expensive and I think it was just, in my particular opinion, it was over the top for what we actually got..."³⁷

- 5.14 The above comments notwithstanding, DES 2 was in post as Director of Emergency Services in post (albeit newly so) when the contract was signed. He too had been made aware of the limitations of the system with only three repeaters, as can be seen in relevant email chains. The contract was signed by the director of Central Services in post at the time, as per Financial Instructions. The PAC has heard varying accounts of the then Director of Central Services' involvement in this contract, none of which can be corroborated by documentation. When approached by the PAC, the then Director of Central Services said he had no recollection of events surrounding this tender. There are two possible conclusions that can be inferred from the available evidence: **1** – The Director of Central Services was aware of, or involved in, the decision to cut the repeaters to three and the implications, in which case two members of the Government's Corporate Management Team effectively signed off on a £250,000+ system that was unlikely to achieve its goals, or; **2** – The Director of Central Services was not aware of the practical applications of the contract he was signing. Either conclusion is concerning in its own way, but both suggest an undue urgency to sign the contract, a prioritisation of cost-efficiency over technological understanding, and fragmented decision-making and communication across Government.
- 5.15 Thus the PAC finds that the project did not deliver value for money. The effectiveness of the system was hindered at a fundamental level by the very limited initial coverage. This meant that, effectively, the system added little more than was already available through the mobile phone and VHF radio system (although the latter was in a poor state of repair). Furthermore, the conservative approach taken towards investment in repeater sites was not mirrored when choosing a system, and the DMR system was likely gold-plated for the needs of some of the emergency services and, albeit to a lesser extent, RFIP too. There is some proof of this in the relative ease with which two of the emergency services reverted to previous communications systems. Furthermore, with such a step-change in technology there needed to be a comprehensive and structured internal training plan, and the PAC has seen no evidence of that. This had a further impact on the system's usability, thereby reducing its value even more.

³⁷ Personal Communication between DES 2 and PAC secretary, 21 June 2019

5.16 The PAC found there to be a staggering dearth of documentation relating to this project. Of note is the absence of swathes of meeting notes and correspondence, both of which are likely to have shed light on some of the decision-making involved. Although close to eight years have passed since the project was started, the PAC is at a loss to understand why the documentation provided appears to be present in some areas and completely lacking in others.

Recommendations

- 6.1 The PAC may wish to recommend that capital projects that involve new technology and equipment be accompanied by detailed training plans, and that these are written into contracts where it is the responsibility of the service/ technology provider to deliver such training. Training plans may include such information as: training format; officer responsible for delivering or arranging training; officers who are to undergo the training; training deliverables; relevant timelines; and ongoing arrangements to deliver refresher and new staff training.
- 6.2 The PAC may further wish to recommend that roles and responsibilities with regards to new equipment be made clear, written down, and kept. Such roles may include responsibility for training, maintenance, service standard reviews, and contractor management. Such documents are likely to address some of the issues that arise from high staff turnover.
- 6.3 The PAC may further wish to highlight the importance of training records being kept, particularly in situations where use of equipment is relied upon to save and preserve life.
- 6.4 The PAC may wish to stress the importance of ensuring that equipment and technology purchased by Government departments is appropriate to the needs and particular nature of operating that equipment in the Falklands. This should include an assessment of whether ongoing knowledge of and familiarity with the equipment is likely to suffer in high-churn departments. While it is reasonable to ensure that any technology is future-proofed, the infrastructure and communications challenges of the Falklands make it even more important to ensure that it is also present-proofed. Furthermore, it is vital that all users of any system understand how that system is going to work on the ground, and cross-department capital projects should involve all relevant departments throughout the process.
- 6.5 In light of the state of emergency services communications prior to the DMR system being bought, the PAC may also wish to stress the importance of ensuring that maintenance contracts are renewed accordingly, and, where technology is set to become obsolete or reach the end of its usable life, that a replacement plan is acted upon well before the equipment becomes unserviceable.
- 6.6 The PAC may wish to recommend that FIG adopt a basic standard and procedure for the archival of electronic communications, so as to ensure that these are filed according to subject matter and not deleted upon the departure of officers. In particular, and noting the Corporate Record Retention & Destruction Policy approved in ExCo paper 25/23, and given the PAC's constitutional governance role, the PAC may further wish to recommend that all documents relating to tender bids be considered as "statutory/legal" as per the Corporate Record Retention & Destruction

Policy classification outlined in page 10 of the report, and retained for 10 years as a matter of course. The PAC may also wish to request that specific record keeping guidelines be added to Financial Instructions setting out what records should be kept for tender bids and that such records are kept in a single, consolidated master-file. This is even more important for tender bids that are managed by external contractors and sub-contractors.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – List of Evidence

- Email from Chief of Police to Chief Fire Officer (2 July 2014)
- Letter From SSA to Chief of Police, 14 December 2015
- Email from Chief of Police to DES and Crown Counsel, 14 December 2015
- Minutes of Radio Users Group Meeting 2 November 2017
- Email from Chief of Police to RFIP and other Emergency Services, 10 October 2016
- Personal Communication between previous DES and PAC secretary, 21 June 2019 (interview recording)
- Email from Chief Fire Officer to current DES in response to PAC questions, 23 November 2022
- Email from Collector of Customs to current DES in response to PAC questions, 23 November 2022
- Email from Chief Fire Officer to RFIP and Fire & Rescue Service, 04 March 2020
- Email from PA to Director of Emergency Services to Senior Accounting Assistant, 29 July 2019
- Annotated draft contract
- Copy of final, signed contract
- Capital bid for 4G push-to-talk system, 2020
- Other correspondence not relevant or used as evidence base

Confidential Appendices

ExCo Paper 39 of 2015