

A year in resilient telecoms

Robert Wyatt, Resilient Telecommunications Programme Team, Civil Contingencies Secretariat, reports on progress made during 2009.

2009 has been a year of steady progress in the four work strands that constitute the Resilient Telecommunications Strategy and for the Resilient Telecommunications Programme Team at the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) which is charged with taking the Strategy forward. The strands, which are more fully explained on the telecommunications pages of UK Resilience (see link), are:

Strand 1 – working with providers and responders to enhance the resilience of every-day commercially available telecommunications;

Strand 2 – improving the management, take up and resilience of privileged telecommunications schemes that are only accessible to emergency responders;

Strand 3 – delivering a high integrity telecommunications infrastructure providing connectivity and services between the main multi-agency coordination centres at the national, regional and local level; and

Strand 4 – developing a means for securely sharing information between all local, regional and national responders both in preparing for and in response to an emergency.

Working to enhance what we have today – this is the essence of Strand 1. In this, the Programme has continued to support the Telecommunications Sub-Groups (TSG) which began to be established in each Local Resilience Forum back in 2007, and which lie at the heart of local activity to prepare for challenges to communications in the event of an emergency. Guidance to assist the Groups in their work was published in the summer, and a further workshop bringing together practitioners from the TSGs and industry with the principal aim of stimulating useful discussion and advice on planning was held in Birmingham in September.

A key element of our responsibility to aid local stakeholders is updating and delivering the sound base of knowledge and training needed for their local planning activity. We turn to the Emergency Planning College (EPC) in York for this. The College has built a reputation for

expertise which it has continued to impart this year through its two regularly-run courses covering telecommunications in the context of emergency planning and response. Further details of the EPC courses are at the end of this review.

Strand 2 of the Strategy incorporates projects concerned with reserved responder access. One of these is the Mobile Telecommunications Privileged Access Scheme (MTPAS) which has taken its final developmental steps and been fully established during the course of 2009. A management framework document went out for consultation early in 2009 and was signed off by senior officials in June. Earlier that month, in fact on its first day, the launch of Phase 1 of the Scheme took place with a wealth of records related to the forerunner of MTPAS, the ACCOLC Scheme being released to enable a national audit to begin. The records went out to all organisations who had agreed to act as sponsoring agencies and coordinators of the Scheme, chief among these was the Telecommunications Sub-Groups. Exactly three months later on 1 September, MTPAS went live. During its first month, over 400 responder organisations were authorised to take part in the Scheme operating under its new management processes.

Transition from the old scheme to MTPAS has been a task as huge as it is vital, and operational perfection cannot be expected overnight. The first MTPAS annual audit – to run over the final quarter of 2010 – will offer a picture of the Scheme that can be analysed for any improvements that can be made.

The sister project of MTPAS, the Fixed Telecommunications Privileged Access Scheme (FTPAS), has not undergone any substantial development in 2009 as a result of delays in the telecoms industry's continuing work to overhaul the existing networks and bring about the transition to 'next generation networks' (NGN). That said, CCS has kept up its engagement with industry partners in order to progress such matters as the needs of the civil protection community in the fixed-line communications of the future, and the details of migration from the current Government Telephone Preference Service (GTPS) to FTPAS.

The High Integrity Telecommunications System or HITS (strand 3) is designed to provide a resilient communications backbone between crisis management centres across the UK, with resilience provided through a hybrid of terrestrial and military-grade satellite equipment. HITS began the year with its project team in final negotiations with the supplier, and in February moved to award the contract to provide the system to Paradigm Secure Communications. This was followed in June by a successful Critical Design Review. The project is on course to deliver the pilot group of sites by the end of the year, and, looking a little further ahead, the first phase

For further details of the Resilient Telecoms Strategy and Programme, visit:

*http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience/preparedness/resilient_telecommunications.aspx
Details of telecoms courses at the Emergency Planning College can be found at:
www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/epcollege/training/courses/resil_telecoms.aspx*

The High Integrity Telecommunications System (or HITS) is designed to provide a resilient communications backbone between crisis management centres across the UK, with resilience provided through a hybrid of terrestrial and military-grade satellite equipment.



following the pilot, and involving ten sites, is due to be delivered by the end of March 2010, with installation at the next group of sites beginning in April 2010.

Making up Strand 4 is the eagerly-awaited National Resilience Extranet (NRE). The NRE began 2009 with a successful design review of the Collaborate software and in the succeeding months completed its disaster recovery facility tests. A series of briefing roadshows across the UK in July was enthusiastically received by the local and regional civil protection community. The events were a considerable success with over 600 delegates attending. Unfortunately, autumn saw the emergence of a small number of system development issues which led to the delivery date being put back by two months. Nevertheless, the NRE is progressing towards a national roll-out in early January 2010, with pre-identified 'early users' able to

begin accessing the system from 11 December. There has been new work too, joining the on-going projects and work-streams detailed above. In July, CCS agreed with the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) to bring into the Resilient Telecoms Programme some of the work around ensuring multi-agency communications interoperability – a must-have for any successful emergency response and which is currently being delivered by the Airwave radio system – and to step-up its contribution to the management of those organisations entitled to use Airwave – the 'Sharers', as they are known.

Now, in the final quarter of 2009, we look towards 2010 with confidence that our essential work is pushing forward strongly and that 2010 will be another good year for the growth in resilience of the country's telecommunications.

Building a firm foundation

Ian Readhead reflects on the positive advances BAPCO has achieved over the last year.

Last year, I had the pleasure and privilege of being the President of the British Association for Public Communication Officers. It is normal to be asked to provide a President's Address and now I have been asked to reflect upon what has happened since that time. I think that there are some really positive advancements which have occurred over the last year.

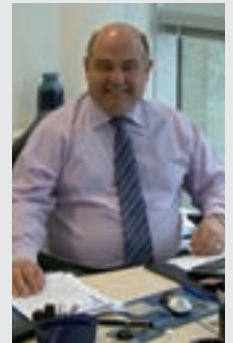
With regard to BAPCO itself, we have built upon the provision of road shows for our members. I sense that these have become an excellent way to provide an opportunity for national and local companies to present their solutions to those individuals actively involved in delivering blue light services. The presentations that take place have provided a foundation upon which future strategies are being evolved across a wide range of business activities including communication networks, mobile functionality, resilience, civil contingency planning and spectrum allocation. Road shows are taking place at the moment covering the North, Central and South of the Country and will, I am sure, compliment understanding, networking and business development.

We have been particularly interested in the work taking place in Europe where BAPCO continues to make its mark as a user driven organisation. I focus upon the "user driven" because the essence of our association is that it draws together individuals from a whole range of civil contingency activities who have common minded goals in developing solutions that compliment the process of making communities safer and ensuring that we manage incidents with the highest professional expertise. My view is, that society expects and deserves public services to share information, create interoperable solutions, reduce risk but to have the capacity and determination to respond effectively to the most serious of challenges. I believe that the current work which is being done concerning areas such as spectrum allocation indicates clearly how the blue light services believe that they have an exceptional case with regard to securing communication requirements

without having to participate in a bidding process against the private sector. This is not special treatment but a recognition that the critical nature of our work is a responsibility of Government which does not sit comfortably in a free market environment.

There has been much success enjoyed by our respective organisations. The mobilisation of emergency services is beginning to revolutionise the capability of frontline staff to deliver genuine enhanced actions. Police officers now have access to national and local applications which enable them to check individuals criminal records, search intelligence databases or take biometric readings and analyse them against national fingerprint records. Ambulance and medical personnel can obtain immediate advice on what treatments to offer at the scene of accidents whilst colleagues from the Fire and Rescue Service are able to quickly assess the contents of chemical spills and their resulting impact. In the Police Service alone, the National Policing Improvement Agency have successfully implemented in liaison with forces the role out of over 28,000 PDAs in the last two years. Of course, some solutions are better than others and in an environment of reduced expenditure on public services, the challenge will be insuring that we implement technical advances which deliver the maximum benefits.

Finally, BAPCO has adjusted its Senior Governance. We were delighted to make Ken Mott our Life President enabling Ray Trotter to assume the role of Chief Executive. It is right that I record the huge appreciation that we have for Ken and the work he has done in developing BAPCO. The change will give us an opportunity to build upon our resilience and to also manage what is the inevitable fact that we are an organic organisation and the contribution which colleagues make requires them to commit a significant amount of their free time. We still have much to do in some regions where BAPCO activity could be best described as "mediocre" but I know that we are up for the challenge!



Ian Readhead, Past President of BAPCO – he believes the organisation is up for the challenge.