

## Airwave Sharers List Process

### Background

The purpose of this note is to give guidance to potential applicants on the process for joining the Airwave Sharers List.

The Airwave service is provided using spectrum that is allocated for emergency service applications and, as such, is only made available to particular types of users (e.g. it is not a publicly available service). Before it can enter into a contract with Airwave an organisation needs to first:

- be approved as a sharer organisation by Ofcom (approval takes the form of a specific organisation, or named part of an organisation, being added to the sharers list recorded on the Ofcom website); and
- obtain security clearance from the Airwave Accreditation Secretariat (within the Home Office HO ) for a TEA2 sub-licence (TETRA Encryption Algorithm 2) - (application process not covered in this note).

The purpose of the sharers list concept is to limit the availability of the service to organisations involved in public safety related activities that have a need to communicate with the blue light services in emergency situations.

Organisations need to apply to Ofcom to join the sharers list and do so by filling in an application form. The purpose of the application form is to allow Ofcom to assess whether the intended use of the service by the applicant is in line with the intended purpose of the Airwave service.

### The criteria

The sharers list was set up to describe specific individual user groups who are eligible to join the Airwave service.

The sharers list provides for amendments, including additions and deletions, to be made to the list of sharers.

This means that there should be no confusion about whether or not a particular user group is on the list (and therefore able to use the Airwave service). In order to assist respondents in considering whether a particular user is eligible to join the list, the following criteria must be met.

The organisation must: -

1. Respond to emergencies;
2. Be involved in emergency situations reasonably frequently;
3. Be civilian, or required to respond to civilian emergencies: and

4. Require interaction with those who respond to emergencies (the purpose of being on the Airwave service is interaction by way of instant direct communication with the emergency services on the ground).

### When and how to apply

Ofcom will accept applications to be added to the sharers list from 1 September until 31 October annually.

There are two separate relevant application forms: a generic application and a full application, both of which can be downloaded from the Ofcom website. Which form the applicant completes depends on whether the organisation is a generic organisation type (named part of an organisation, for example a local authority emergency planning department) or not. If the applicant is a generic organisation type, the shorter application form can be used. All other organisations must use the Full application form.

### **A list of generic organisations can be found on the Ofcom website.**

For the avoidance of doubt with respect to generic organisations, each organisation needs to become added to the sharers list in its own right; the fact that a generic organisation type (such as local authority emergency planning department) is included on the list does not in itself constitute approval.

In order to validate your organisations or user groups requirement, you are required to have your application supported by an emergency service or sponsor Government Department. The aim of the support is to validate the applicant's requirement for instant and direct communications, to facilitate interoperability with the emergency services in emergency and public safety situations. Support at Senior Officer level provides the suitable clarity of the operational purpose and working relationship with the applicant from within a particular emergency service e.g. Police Force/Fire Brigade. Support must be provided at Police Force/Brigade/Trust wide level and submitted by an officer who has authority to act on behalf (e.g. Chief Constable, Chief Fire Officer) of one of the following:

- National Police Force
- British Transport Police
- Ministry of Defence Police
- Ambulance Trust
- Fire and Rescue Service

In view of this, and in order to shorten the time taken to complete the assessment of your application, the last section of the application form(s) must be completed in full by the relevant emergency service ideally before the application form is submitted to Ofcom. However, Ofcom is content to accept applications without the emergency service section completed, in order for applicants to comply with the two month application window deadline (1 September 31 October annually) providing that a copy of the application form with emergency service support section fully completed is received by Ofcom no later than one

month after the closure of the application window i.e. 30 November. If assistance is required in obtaining a supporting signature please contact [MAAUG@airwavesolutions.co.uk](mailto:MAAUG@airwavesolutions.co.uk)

Once completed, please submit your application form by email to [Emergency.Services@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:Emergency.Services@ofcom.org.uk).

In exceptional circumstances Ofcom will consider processing urgent applications in advance of the annual application process, but only if the applicant can **demonstrate an urgent requirement. This may require the applicant to submit a robust business case to justify the application. Any business case submitted must clearly define details of the requirement and timescales to justify urgent assessment, by Ofcom, outside of the annual application window.**

### **Description of how Ofcom assesses applications to join Airwave Sharers List**

Following closure of the annual application window, Ofcom will conduct a full assessment of all applications received. In assessing whether an organisation should be allowed to join the list, Ofcom is seeking to understand through the answers to the application form:

- who the defined user group will be within the applying organisation (it will sometimes be the case that the valid user group will be a subset of the applying organisation); and
- what types of communication the user group will use the Airwave service for (in addition to communications within and between sharer organisations at times of emergency).

Ofcom may be required to follow up the response to the application form to seek additional clarification.

In assessing the appropriate user group Ofcom will only approve users who need to be part of the communication chain that links to blue-light services in emergency situations.

Ofcom may also seek advice and guidance from the Emergency Services Sharers Advisory Group (ESSAG) in relation to the above requirement. ESSAG comprises of representatives from Police, Fire and Ambulance Services. This group plays two roles in relation to the Airwave Sharers process.

They provide Ofcom and any potential sharer organisation (where requested) with guidance and advice in connection with the requirement for sharer organisations to have interoperability with the blue-light services. As part of this they maintain a liaison with Ofcom, Airwave Accreditation Secretariat, the Emergency Services and Airwave throughout the sharers application process. Ofcom will specifically request advice from the ESSAG where there is a query over the support provided by the relevant Emergency Services or sponsoring Government Department.

The group also considers and provides support for sharer applications that have a national interoperability requirement.

The group plays a vital role in determining the sharing and coordination of the appropriate emergency services talk groups with successfully approved sharer organisations that have a requirement for localised, regional or national interoperability.

It is therefore important that potential sharer applicants discuss their intentions to become a sharer organisation with their local emergency service(s).

Once a user group is identified in line with the above requirement, Ofcom will also consider the broader nature of use that this defined user group is expecting to make of the service. In so doing, Ofcom is seeking to understand whether the usage will be restricted to emergency and other related public safety activities (including routine operations associated with these activities). Where the primary role of the user group is concerned with emergencies and other related public safety activities, Ofcom will expect to approve the addition of the user group to the sharers list, providing proportionality criteria are met (e.g. relating to the numbers of terminals expecting to be used).

In cases where the user group will need to communicate on emergency or related public safety matters on an infrequent basis only (eg. only in the case of disaster response) then Ofcom will want to understand how the system will be used outside of these situations before adding the user group to the sharers list. Users will clearly need to be familiar with the system and take part in related planning exercises etc.

### Sharer approval in relation to use of contractors

When assessing applications, Ofcom considers the applicant to be the official body (i.e. local Council/Authority) involved in public safety related activities, requiring communications with blue light service and where applicable, is ultimately responsible in an emergency situation.

If the public safety related activity is carried out by a contractor on behalf of the organisation applying, Ofcom policy dictates that sharer status be awarded, if successful, to the applicant (i.e. local Council/Authority) rather than the contracting company who performs that role on their behalf. This will also facilitate the official body having Sharer status and the right to access Airwave equipment and the network should contractors change.

It is important to note that contractors to a sharer organisation will also be required to obtain a suitable TEA2 licence to handle Airwave terminals. Please refer to section below on 'Next Steps and TEA2 licence'.

### MoD, Blue Light Service and Sponsor Government Department Sharer inclusions (applicable all year round).

Ofcom, in consultation with the Airwave Accreditation Secretariat and ESSAG, have agreed that organisations within this sector are not required to submit individual application forms to join the Airwave Sharers list due to and where the following points are adhered to:

- are a recognised Blue-light service e.g., Air Ambulances
- The sponsor department provides Ofcom with a list of Blue-light organisations to be included on the list

Ofcom will then formally notify the Airwave Accreditation Secretariat that the organisations have been approved so that TEA2 authorisation can be progressed. Ofcom will still decide if

a list of such organisations from sponsor departments falls within the intended scope of this exemption from making individual applications.

Organisations which perform a blue light function on behalf of the emergency service (e.g. an Airport Fire Brigade) may be added directly if the emergency service or Government Department writes to Ofcom requesting the inclusion. The request need not be supported by an application form. Following receipt of the request Ofcom will either approve the organisation or request that an application is completed following the standard application process.

### Notification procedure to applicants following completion of the assessment process

Ofcom will contact all applicants at the same time, by letter, confirming whether their application to join the Airwave sharers list has been approved or rejected. Ofcom is unable to publish a date by which this exercise will be concluded each year as completion of the assessment process is very much dependent on the amount of applications received. Where there is a need for Ofcom to follow up the response to the application form, to seek additional clarification, this could result in delays to the notification procedure. Ofcom's aim, however, is to conclude the process and contact all applicants by the end of February.

Ofcom will update the list of approved sharers on the Ofcom website and also provide the Airwave Accreditation Secretariat with a list of all successful applicants.

Applicants should note that inclusion on the sharers list does not mean that an organisation has an automatic right to use the Airwave network. The effect of inclusion only means that Airwave may make the network service available to such sharer organisations. It is then up to the parties to agree the contract terms.

**Please note: application forms of successful applicants will be shared with Airwave and HO . This is to assist the process of facilitating network access and determination of talk groups.**

### Next steps for successful applicants applying for a TEA2 Sub-Licence (TETRA Encryption Algorithm 2)

Before your organisation and / or user group can handle or use any Airwave radio terminals, you need to be in possession of a valid TEA2 user sub-licence. (TEA2 stands for TETRA Encryption Algorithm 2 and forms part of the security mechanism within the radio terminals. Its use is strictly controlled, through licensing, under the terms of an international arrangement.) The licensing authority within the UK is the Airwave Accreditation Secretariat. TEA2 licensing information can be obtained by email at:[airwave.accreditation@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:airwave.accreditation@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk)

### Variations to sharer approvals

It is a requirement of the applicant to include the number of terminals an organisation intends to use as part of their application. As such, sharer approval, if granted, is based on the information submitted by the applicant. If an approved sharer wishes to increase their number of terminals, thereby varying their current approval, then a formal request and

justification must be submitted to Ofcom for consideration. This is applicable all year round. This falls outside the formal application process to become a sharer.

### Queries on the process

Email: [Emergency.Services@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:Emergency.Services@ofcom.org.uk)