UPDATE ON REPLACING THE UK'S ELECTRONIC WARFARE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Background

Project Shepherd is a complex Information Technology project that was set up to develop a replacement Electronic Warfare information system to help protect UK Armed Forces on the battlefield and enable interoperability with allies, including our 'five eyes' partners. The main requirement was for a system with the technical ability to keep pace with both evolving threats and the new equipment coming into use by the UK Armed Forces and their allies, as well as the ability to share information with allies. Project Shepherd would ultimately replace the existing Electronic Warfare information system, which was reaching the limit of its capabilities to handle increasingly complex and technically advanced data.

Progress

The Department continues to use the existing system. However, some limited capability of the new system has been available to users since 2016. Project Shepherd will continue to be developed until the early-2020s when use of the current system is planned to cease. This is much slower than the timescales in the original business case, due to technical challenges and a changing threat environment. These challenges have led to a revised technical solution being implemented that ensures interoperability with allies. The current Electronic Warfare information system has continued in full operational service, with appropriate mitigations, to provide support to the UK's Armed Forces. Project Shepherd has spent £35.3m of its estimated £96.5m whole life costs.

Defence Equipment Plan 2013

In the 2013 Defence Equipment Plan, the Ministry of Defence reported Project Shepherd's achievement of its in-service date (paragraph 38). The in-service date is used as a project milestone in the management of Ministry of Defence procurement projects. Against the definition and accountabilities in place at the time, it could be said that Project Shepherd had met the in-service date. However, a reader of the Plan could assume that it had delivered a functioning Electronic Warfare information system capability that was being used by the UK Armed Forces. This was not the case. It was not appropriate to convey that Project Shepherd was delivering the Defence Electronic Warfare capability, as suggested by the 2013 Equipment Plan comments.

In this respect the 2013 report fell short of the standards of clarity that Parliament should expect from the Ministry of Defence.

This update supersedes the information provided on Project Shepherd in the 2013 Equipment Plan Report.