

Official Sensitive

Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA) Request

Decision Required

This paper seeks your approval to request military aid to assist our response to the impact of COVID-19. Military aid is requested via the Secretary State for Wales and the Secretary State for Defence.

Introduction

1. The Welsh Government is able to call on the UK military in times of exceptional challenge, for help and assistance. It is known as military aid to the civil authorities (MACA).

Background

2. WAST has been in its highest level of escalation since August 2021 because of a mismatch between demand and capacity. 999 call rates are at the highest levels recorded and WAST capacity has been impacted through increasingly higher abstractions rates due to long-term sickness and Covid related reasons. There have been further impacts on capacity due to delays in discharge from hospital of medically fit patients, some of which are due to reduced health and social care provision, bed blocking and impeding flow. This translates to extended hospital handover delays.
3. On 17th September 2021 WAST escalated back to a Response Phase due to increased community and hospital COVID cases, unknown impact of seasonal flu and other viruses and increased pressure across urgent and emergency care; having been in the COVID Recovery Phase since June 2021. The overall call demand into the service is increasing with over 2000 calls taken on 5 September, a 30-40% increase above the 'seasonal norm'.
4. WAST has previously received MACA Support for Ambulance Drivers to support its COVID specific response. WAST has increased its staffing however current reasonable worst case scenario data indicates that WAST should increase its emergency ambulance capacity to 150% in order to meet predicted demand. Predicted demand does not include that from seasonal flu. The Welsh Government have committed to continue with elective surgery over the winter period to meet the backlog from the impact of COVID-19.
5. WAST is currently facing significant levels of demand likely due to the combination of exacerbation of chronic conditions due to the impacts of health service change during the pandemic and rising Covid cases. Forecasts suggest

that the winter period, likely to be exacerbated by other seasonal conditions, shows that demand is likely to increase even further.

6. WAST moved back into a specific call coding matrix for COVID-19 (Pandemic flu protocol 36) on the 17th September 2021. Initial use is showing that 16-18% of its demand may be connected to the pandemic, with a further 16% of calls for breathing problems and chest pain. These are levels equivalent to that of December 2020 during the peak of the second wave and increases operational risk to WAST to unacceptable levels.
7. Fire and Rescue Service have previously provided mutual aid. FRS continue to provide residual support through the MOU, however numbers of FRS service staff previously made available to WAST were low and have not provided any significant impact. This is a result of demand on their own services.
8. Consideration has also been given to support from Health Boards. Health Boards are currently facing significant staffing issues to manage the flow of patients in and out of the hospital system.
9. Commercial alternatives have also been explored, including increasing its employment of the current workforce - 136 additional frontline staff have been employed by WAST since April 2020; with the aim of a further 127 before March 2022. WAST are seeking to secure funding to privately train at least 18 Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) to be deployable from March 2022.
10. WAST has fully re-engaged its community responder cadre and re-mobilised the Mid and West Wales Fire & Rescue Service co-response and maximised the support from St John Ambulance Cymru to the end of financial year. The WAST Non- Emergency Patient Care Service (NEPT's) is seeking additional support from commercial providers within funding made available via its commissioner. It has also implemented several enhancement schemes to improve staffing levels, and this has reached its peak effect.
11. WAST is also currently in the process of securing additional ambulance fleet from St John and also to utilise its staff in areas where vehicles may not be required, such as Cycle Response Units (CRU) and Mobile Response Teams (MRT) in city centres or where there are large centres of population.

Military Assistance Required

12. Military support is required to enable WAST to meet current demands as well as those forecast this coming winter.
13. The request is for:

- The provision of 251 Cat C1 drivers to drive WAST ambulances from 15 October to 31 March 2022. An equivalent of an additional 42 emergency ambulance crews across the week. This will be reviewed monthly.
- The provision of defence estate for delivery of WAST training to Service personnel for a total of 10 days (5 x 2-day packages. Date and locations to be confirmed.
- The provision of a C2/RLS team. Supporting Cat B drivers are to be confirmed.

Advice

14. You are advised to formally ask for the provision of military assistance through a Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA) request to the Secretary State for Wales for:

- Cat C1 drivers to provide WAST ambulance driving support.

15. This advice is based on the following considerations:

- There is a definite need to act and the tasks the Armed Forces are being asked to perform are clear and defined.
- It is necessary to take this action to reduce patient harm and suffering as a direct consequence of delayed attendance to in-community cases/calls for emergency response creating significant risk to life.
- WAST is currently facing significant levels of demand likely due to the combination of exacerbation of chronic conditions due to the impacts of health service change during the pandemic and rising Covid cases. Forecasts suggest that the winter period, likely to be exacerbated by other seasonal conditions, shows that demand is likely to increase even further.
- The Welsh Government and wider public services lack the necessary capability and capacity to fulfill the tasks. Other options, such as commercial alternatives, have been explored.
- If action is not taken quickly there is a significant risk to life.

16. Estimated costs are currently unknown and will be confirmed in due course.

17. Dr Andrew Goodall is supportive of this request.