

# UNION RENEWS CALL TO STOP THE CUTS



**Following the fire in Newquay over the weekend, the Union has once again highlighted the dangers of cutting back on specialist equipment such as aerial appliances and on staffing, as well as reductions in night-time cover**

In the wake of the fire which destroyed a hotel in Newquay, Cornwall on Saturday, the Union has renewed calls for fire and rescue authorities to stop cuts to fire cover, crews and equipment. FBU general secretary Matt Wrack, said:

"We have to offer our condolences to those who have been injured or have lost a friend or relative in the Newquay hotel fire. And we must congratulate the

firefighters. They behaved in the committed and professional way which we expect of them. We also have to learn lessons for the future.

"We know that the only two aerial appliances in Cornwall were out of action, and an appliance had to come 50 miles from Devon. The Fire Brigades Union has heard reports for three years that the numbers of aerial appliances were being cut back across the UK because of cost. There must be no more cutbacks on aerial appliances.

Cover must be adequate in holiday season too

The general secretary added:

"We have been concerned this summer about cuts in staffing in Cornwall. It's just over two

months since Cornish fire crews came to Truro for a protest march against the cuts. In the height of the holiday season in particular, we must have sufficient firefighters."

The population of the popular resort grows from about 20,000 to 100,000 over the three-month period.

#### Cuts to fire cover at night-time

Matt Wrack added:

"We have also been concerned at cuts in nighttime cover. The first call to the Penhallow Hotel came at 12.30. There were not enough crews in the area to staff the second pump. It is dangerous not to have sufficient nighttime cover."

The Mayor of Newquay, Patrick Lambshead, has called for 24-hour fire cover from stations in the town during the summer months, according to the BBC.

#### Hotelier: cuts cost lives

Christine Findon, who runs the Tregella hotel next door to the burnt hotel, told the Mirror: "Lives were lost because there wasn't sufficient equipment."

There are concerns that the hotel was in charge of its own fire safety precautions after fire certificates were scrapped last year [under the Regulatory Reform Order], reported the Sunday Mail.

A second set of human remains has been found in the ruins of the burned-out Penhallow Hotel in Newquay, police told local media Wednesday.

Physics teacher Peter Hughes died after attempting to rescue his 86-year-old mother from the blaze and two other people were missing after the blaze.

#### **Falmouth and Camborne fire stations downgrading must stop, say Cornwall crews**

The Union has condemned as "disgraceful" proposals by Cornwall County Council to downgrade Falmouth and Camborne fire stations.

On 21 August it asked the county council to drop the proposals, but councillors refused, saying instead that they wished to await the outcome of a detailed investigation into events at Newquay. The proposals are to be considered by the full council on October 9.

#### Meetings with crews and councillors

The FBU held two meetings on Monday. The first involved fire crews union representatives from stations from around Cornwall, the second was with Councillor David Whalley and Councillor Ken Yeo.

Chief fire officer Matt Littmoden also attended. At the meeting FBU officials insisted that public safety demanded that Cllrs Whalley and Yeo withdraw the

proposals unconditionally. They declined to do so.

### Establishment shortfall

The FBU also requested that the shortfall in wholetime firefighters - currently 17 - be addressed as a matter of utmost urgency by recruiting more firefighters. This shortfall equates to almost 1 in 10 of the wholetime establishment in Cornwall. This is, in effect, "cuts by stealth". This was refused by Cllrs Whalley and Yeo.

The FBU then went on to request that retained firefighter numbers in Cornwall are increased in line with a review that has been gathering dust on a council shelf for 3 years. This too was refused.

### "Disgraceful" proposals

FBU Regional Secretary John Drake said:

"Councillors Whalley and Yeo had an opportunity this afternoon to consign the disgraceful proposals to downgrade Falmouth and Camborne fire stations to the bin.

"It would be seen as the only decision to make in light of recent events in Cornwall.

"They have, however, not only shattered any trust the public in Cornwall have left in these two politicians but also refused to back the men and women serving in Cornwall Fire Brigade by continuing to wring their hands,

plead poverty and await the outcome of a review. The review into Retained Duty system firefighters has not been actioned for almost three years."

Cornwall FBU Secretary Terry Nottle said:

"After the tragic events of the weekend firefighters and control staff from all over Cornwall have been contacting the FBU to state that it would be totally unfeasible for the council to continue with its proposals, and surely the County Council will see sense. Remarkably the two leaders didn't share this view.

"As leader of the County Council, David Whalley has totally lost the confidence of firefighters in his ability to provide a service which the public in Cornwall deserve. Councillor Yeo has also shown a complete lack of leadership and firefighters are rightly angry that these proposals are still on the table."

**Cuts in fire cover provision have been taking place all over the country. The FBU is the only organisation which has steadfastly campaigned to oppose these threats to public safety. Below are details of some of the current campaigns.**

## **Newquay fire points up dangers for Lincolnshire**

Delays in getting vital equipment and sufficient firefighters to the Newquay fire could be repeated in Lincolnshire, if current proposals to cut the numbers of operational firefighting posts goes ahead, the Union has said.

"These proposed new cuts are on top of changes to operational safety cover already made on April 4 of this year," said Lincolnshire FBU brigade secretary Chris Hides.

"These further losses of operational firefighting posts will damage Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service's ability to respond to incidents.

### Serious concerns over the availability of aerial appliances.

"We are especially concerned about the availability of the hydraulic platforms based at Lincoln, Skegness and Boston. With these cuts, there may be no firefighters available to crew these platforms at key times.

"A recent incident in Skegness highlighted the importance and need for these aerial fire engines for tackling fires, and the need for them to be available 24/7."

## **Union to present proposals to keep Windsor 24-hour**

The Union will present proposals to maintain 24 hour cover at Windsor fire station at no extra cost when it meets senior managers from Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFERS) on 3 September.

The fire authority decided against strong opposition from the local community and politicians that crews from Windsor fire station will no longer be available to respond to fires and other emergencies during the night time hours when most serious incidents occur.

The decision, taken on 24 July under the authority's integrated risk management plan (IRMP), means an emergency response between 20.00 and 08.00 hours will now be provided from Slough, if crews there are available.

The Union put forward proposals to maintain a 24-hour emergency response from Windsor to the Fire Authority in July, but councillors dismissed the proposals.

### Union demands improvements to public and firefighter safety

Eddie Cardoso, FBU brigade secretary in Berkshire said: "The FBU has closely worked with RBFERS in designing the five year IRMP plan. However, we have maintained throughout that we will oppose changes that fail to lead to improvements in public and firefighter safety".

"The fire authority says it aims to make our community safer by doing more with the same resources. The decision of the fire authority means we will have less fire engines and less firefighters."

### Two appliances to be cut

"We will lose two major appliances in the East of the County during the night hours when most serious incidents occur."

Mick Rowley, Windsor FBU Representative said:

"The FBU on behalf of all its members offer our condolences to those who have been injured or have lost a friend or relative in the Newquay hotel fire.

"This tragic event in Newquay clearly demonstrates the need to have the appropriate resources in Windsor at night time."

### Cuts cost lives

"The Union has always maintained that cuts cost lives, and should these proposals go ahead, Windsor's residents and visitors will have to wait longer for appliances to arrive.

"The extra 3-5 minutes it will take an appliance to arrive with the correct number of firefighters can literally mean the difference between life and death."

## **Warning of more flooding**

The UK is facing further flooding in the coming months, with soils left saturated by heavy summer downpours unable to absorb extra rainwater. The Environment Agency has given "enhanced flood warnings" across England and Wales because massive amounts of water stored underground following the recent deluges could overflow if further heavy rain hits the country.


If this week's calmer weather foments sustained sunshine, water-logged ground could dry out. But with the approaching winter months, the danger of more flooding could persist through to next year, according to Terry Marsh, of the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology at Wallingford in Oxfordshire.

### "Enhanced flood risk" this autumn and winter

He said: "If we have a very dry autumn, soils could dry out, but typically, with average rainfall, we can expect an enhanced flood risk all throughout autumn and winter.

"Soils have been the wettest since records began in 1961. The rainfall that flooded Tewkesbury was exceptional - you would expect to see that sort of thing maybe once every thousand years."

With no monsoon and little seasonal variation in rainfall, summer rainfall levels in the UK are comparable to winter.



The Environment Agency said it was "worried" about land in the North, Wales, the Midlands and South West, after rain in July and August filled aquifers across the regions, and normally drier summer water levels were already high in the run-up to autumn.

Spokesman Simon Hughes warned that there was little that authorities could do to absorb the effects and would be unable to pinpoint water developments more than several hours beforehand, leaving them at the mercy of natural processes.

Meteogroup, the weather division of the Press Association, said a crisis looked unlikely in the shorter term, with relatively mild weather expected over the next week.

### **Floodings: Union investigation**

The warning of more flooding came as the Union continued its investigation into how the emergency services coped with June and July's floods. The investigation will lead to recommendations on what improvements need to be made.

Brigade officials are collating centrally reports relating to health and safety concerns, including personal protective equipment, training, planning and co-ordination (including the operation of Gold Command), welfare arrangements, among other issues.

FBU members who have particular experiences of note or concerns arising from the recent responses to the floods are reminded that they should contact a local FBU official who will be able to ensure all information is passed on to the appropriate official within the FBU.

### **Regional controls: Government needs to learn lessons of floods, says Lib Dem leader**

The Liberal Democrat leader, Sir Menzies Campbell, has come out against the Regionalisation of Control centres. That the matter has been brought again to prominence is not unhelpful.

However, the FBU has been consistently and vigorously arguing against this project for a number of years and continues to do so. It is unfortunate that fire authorities under the control of political parties which stand in opposition to the Labour government have been equally consistent in NOT opposing the regionalisation of control centres.

Below is an example of the coverage that has been given in the press to the Liberal Democrat leader's comments:

Liberal Democrat leader Sir Menzies Campbell has said that the Government has failed to learn the lessons of this summer's devastating floods.

Sir Menzies made the statement while visiting a closure-

threatened fire and rescue control centre which was at the heart of efforts to tackle the flooding in Gloucestershire.

He said the Government is going "full speed ahead on moves which may lead to increased risk of devastation" by seeking to reduce the number of fire control centres and by allowing building on flood plains. The fire and rescue service faces being moved out of the TriService unit near Gloucester as part of plans to introduce regional control centres.

"Government is compromising safety"

Sir Menzies said: "The Government is compromising safety and could be putting lives at risk by introducing regional fire and rescue control centres.

"Closing down locally-based centres will severely undermine a community's ability to cope with emergency situations such as flooding, while regional centres will lack crucial local knowledge.

"Criticism of this move has come from all sides, including the Fire Brigade Union and Parliamentary select committee reports, but the Government is not listening."

In relation to building on flood plains, he said: "Only a few days ago, 5,000 residents in Tewkesbury marched in protest against building on flood plains.

"The Government must put the minds of these residents and the British public at rest by giving responsibility for flood defences to one agency who will ensure defences are adequate before any building takes place."

Under its Firecontrol project, the Government plans to replace the control rooms of England's 46 fire brigades with nine remote regional centres.

Source: The Independent

*For more information on the FBU's campaign against the regionalisation of control centres please click the link below:*

[www.fbu.org.uk/campaigns/outofcontrol/index.php](http://www.fbu.org.uk/campaigns/outofcontrol/index.php)

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