

# CALLS GROW FOR CORNWALL COUNCIL BOSSES TO GO



Local community, politicians, mayor and media rally behind Union's campaign against fire cover cuts in the brigade.

The calls for the resignation of Cornwall County Council leader David Whalley and fellow councillor Ken Yeo, executive member for public protection, are growing ever louder as the campaign to stop the cuts to fire cover in the county gathers pace.

The Mayor of Newquay, Councillor Patrick Lamshead, has called for both to resign. He told the Western Morning News: "These two men have the power and responsibility for public protection. They are not doing their jobs properly and should therefore go. We want 24-hour cover for Newquay."

He added:

"We have long been arguing for 24-hour cover at Newquay fire station all year round, that's what we really want.

"The fact is, during the holiday season the roads in and around Newquay become clogged up with extra traffic. We should have extra firefighters at Newquay in situ so that we don't have to rely on crews from other Cornish stations battling their way through busy roads."

"It's an absolute tragedy that it took three people losing their lives before the flaws in Cornwall's fire cover system were highlighted. We must fight for our fire service."

The mayor's comments came as Cornish fire crews made it clear they had lost

confidence in the fire authority after it failed to reverse proposals to downgrade Falmouth and Camborne fire stations in the wake of the fire at the Penhallow Hotel in Newquay in which three people lost their lives. The fire broke out at around midnight on Friday, August 10.

Mr Whalley and Mr Yeo have refused to resign, with the former repeating claims that he was making "difficult decisions...in the best interests of the majority of the people of Cornwall."

## Budget cuts

The council wants to slice £1 million a year off the fire service budget. It faces an overall £15 million shortfall.

The Union has denounced the fact that there were not enough firefighters to staff a second pump to tackle the Penhallow Hotel blaze. The fire service in Cornwall is under review since the tragedy.

Terry Nottle, brigade secretary of FBU Cornwall, said: "The county council need to go back, they need to identify the funding to support the service and they need to get that in now. At the moment the fire service is in limbo."

The Union together with regional paper, The Western Morning News, is running a petition against the cuts and all members are encouraged to sign:

Click on the below link:

<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/firecuts/index.html>

## **Cornwall county council – money (£20m) to burn**

Cornish fire crews are challenging the county council to explain why they are paying £20 million a year to burn rubbish, while setting aside only £17 million a year on the fire and rescue service. The £20 million figure has been given to the FBU as this year's cost for a PFI contract for a new incinerator to burn rubbish.

But the county council says it is so strapped for cash it has to push through major cuts to the fire and rescue service which would see the loss of 35 Wholetime firefighter posts – one in six of the Wholetime workforce strength of 206. The proposed cuts would see night time cover slashed at Camborne and Falmouth fire stations and mean a longer wait at night time for the fire service to get to 999 incidents.

FBU regional secretary John Drake said: "We were staggered when we were told the county council is spending £20 million this year to burn rubbish. Councillors are always going on about spending priorities and this seems like a lot of money to burn.

"£20 million is more than the county council spends on the fire service in a year. It would be perverse if they were spending more money starting fires than putting them out."

## **Cornwall's PFI hydrants useless during hotel fire**

Firefighters battling the Penhallow Hotel blaze were faced with clogged-up fire hydrants that could not be used, the Western Morning News has reported.

When crews arrived at the burning building in Newquay, hydrants nearby had silted-up with debris and were "useless" in quelling the flames, the newspaper said.

The brigade has admitted that "a number" of the underground fire hydrants had silted up with mud, sand and debris and that crews had to run around until they found one that worked.

The contract for checking the fire hydrants, owned by South West Water, was given to WS Atkins engineers under a PFI scheme in 2001 – up until then the fire service had been responsible.

A spokesman for Cornwall Fire Service told reporters: "The fire hydrants were checked earlier this year in January by WS Atkins. However, on the night of the Penhallow Hotel fire a number of hydrants were found to be covered in silt and couldn't be used.

"As there was no time to clear the hydrants out firefighters had to keep going until they found one. Unfortunately a driver had parked his or her car over one fire hydrant. Fire crews had to move the vehicle in order to reach the water supply."

The spokesman added: "Cornwall County Fire Service follows national guidelines which state that water hydrants are subject to visual examination only. The hydrants are all part of the ongoing investigation."

### **"Ridiculous" system**

The Union has slammed the visual examination guideline as "ridiculous."

Terry Nottle, FBU Cornwall brigade secretary, said: "We have long argued against this style of inspection. Sadly, it takes a tragedy like the Penhallow fire to highlight the ridiculous system that operates.

"Let's face it – if a contractor can get away with a quick five-minute look then he's going to do it because it saves time and money for the company.

"Wet testing the fire hydrant would take around half an hour."

## Fire service must check hydrants regularly

Terry Nottle said the FBU in Cornwall was fighting to take back around 1,000 high risk fire hydrants across the county to wet test them themselves.

He said: "The only way the system will work properly is if firefighters on the ground are continually checking the hydrants as part of their normal duties and not just every two years.

"Grass roots fire crews know what needs to be done to protect the public and we should be allowed to get on and do it. We've had these sort of problems before. Unfortunately the Penhallow was not an isolated incident."

In a town the size of Newquay fire hydrants are placed about 90 metres from each other.

Dan Rogerson, Lib-Dem MP for North Cornwall said: "I'm staggered that it is deemed alright that a visual examination of a fire hydrant is acceptable. We are seeing more and more revelations about what happened that night.

## FBU campaign supported

"These worrying matters will have to be dealt with by Cornwall County Council when it publishes its report into what happened. I would certainly back the FBU's fight to reclaim the fire hydrants."

A fire service source, quoted in a local newspaper, said: "The main problem firefighters faced when they got to the scene was that the hydrants in the immediate vicinity were all seized up. This led to a delay while the crew found alternative hydrants in the town.

"It also lowered the pressure because the water was coming from a greater distance away."

Under the terms of the contract, every two years WS Atkins are obliged to carry out checks to make sure that silt has not built up.

The source at the fire service told local media: "A similar problem happened in St Ives last year. The inspections do not take into account the fact that some hydrants in Cornwall are exposed to sea air and are much more likely to corrode."

WS Atkins refused to comment citing "client confidentiality."

## **Newquay memorial service**

Hundreds of people in the evening of 2 September filed into church to pay their respects to three holidaymakers who perished in the hotel fire in Newquay.

At the service of thanksgiving, grieving families and friends of the victims gathered at St Michael the Archangel, Newquay, with about 450 members of the public and emergency services.

Peter Hughes, 43, a physics teacher from Cheslyn Hay, Staffordshire, died after falling from a third-floor window. His mother Monica, aged 86, also died.

The third victim was a woman from the North of England referred to in the service only as Joan, from the north of England. Neither of the two women's bodies have yet been formerly identified as forensic tests continue.

The Rev Ralph Barber, assistant curate at the church, told local reporters: "The night of the Penhallow Hotel fire was a long and terrible night. Everyone here will have their own memory of that night."

He paid tribute to the role of the emergency services, many of whom attended the service.

Referring to the victims, he said: "They came to Newquay for a holiday, and would never have imagined what was to happen. Having spoken to their families, I could tell how loved they all were and how much they will be missed.

Members of the emergency services lit candles in remembrance of the three victims.

## Cornish lessons for Devon and Somerset...

The Newquay hotel fire should be a lesson to fire authority chiefs proposing cuts to front line services, a public meeting was told last week.

Firefighters in Torbay held the meeting to discuss proposals by the chief fire officer of Devon and Somerset Fire Authority, Paul Young, to save £1 million.

Members of the FBU, members of the public, local MPs and councillors were among a crowd of 70 supporting the call not to go ahead with the plans, reported the Western Morning News.

The fire authority is part way through a 12-week consultation into plans to dual crew aerial hydraulic platforms (ALPs), one of which is based at Torquay fire station.

Darren Peters, watch manager at Torquay, who gave the main presentation, said this effectively meant that crews would have to leave a front-line vehicle during a fire to jump across and operate the Bronto.

### Cut in frontline services

“At any one time we could only use two of our three front line engines,” he said. “If we then needed a Bronto [ALP] we would have to call Exeter or Plymouth to get one or send a crew back to Torquay to get it. By any reckoning that is a cut in front line services.”

Torbay councillor Roger Kerslake, was greeted with loud applause when it was revealed he was the only member of the fire authority to attend the meeting.

But he told the crowd: “I haven’t made my mind up yet, I’m here to listen and see what people are saying.”

At which point one member of the public shouted: “The fire in Newquay should have made your mind up.”

The meeting followed a major petitioning effort by firefighters in Plymouth on 25 August. The FBU members were urging people to sign letters of opposition to proposed cuts.

A campaign has been running since May to protect Devon’s fire service from losing personnel to staff cuts.

There will not be enough staff to operate full-time ALPs in Plymouth. Crews will only be able to use the equipment if there are enough firefighters to staff it.

Currently, there are always enough staff to crew the platforms.

If the changes go ahead, it will be a lottery whether or not the ALPs can be used.

## And for East Sussex...

Cuts to East Sussex fire and rescue service’s ALPs could leave properties and the public in the county vulnerable, according to the BBC.

They used to have four ALPs, with one in reserve, but two years ago it was decided to cut them down to three.

“If we have to facilitate a rescue from above the fourth floor we could have a problem,” said East Sussex FBU brigade secretary Steve Huggins.

The fire service said neighbouring counties offered backup if necessary.

Steve Huggins said the FBU was concerned because of the similarities between Newquay, in Cornwall, where the Penhallow Hotel caught fire last month, and the East Sussex coastal areas.

Seaside towns such as Hastings have many multi-storey buildings similar to the Penhallow Hotel.

“That kind of blaze could easily happen in East Sussex,” said Steve Huggins.

One night last week, the aerial ladder in Hastings broke down, and the only appliance in the county was stationed in Brighton.

“If there was a blaze in Hastings, it would have to be covered from Tunbridge Wells or Worthing which is 30 to 45 minutes away,” said Steve Huggins.

In the Newquay fire, Cornwall’s two aerial ladders were out of action, meaning a replacement had to travel 50 miles from Plymouth, Devon.

## **Windsor fire station cuts campaign continues**

The Union has presented its zero cost proposals to maintain 24 hour cover at Windsor fire station.

Eddie Cardoso, FBU brigade secretary in Berkshire said:

“Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service senior managers listened to what we had to say and were positive in their response to our proposals.

“We will now take our proposals to the Fire Authority Executive on 24 September where we hope that our proposals will be endorsed by the Executive and taken to the full Fire Authority meeting in Maidenhead on 10 October for full approval.

### Pragmatic approach

“We must emphasize, that if our proposals are accepted it does not mean that Windsor’s 24 hour cover status is secured in the long run.

“Our proposals are a pragmatic approach to the situation and will allow the Service to achieve day cover at Wokingham fire station without reducing Windsor’s 24 hour cover in the second year of their plans.

“The FBU continue to support the principle of having the right fire engines in the right place and believe that ultimately this is what the Fire Authority want to achieve.

“Our proposals do not alter the outcomes of the Fire Authority decision in the long term and we have a lot of hard work to do if we are to convince the Fire Authority of our belief that Windsor can remain a 24 hour cover station with little or no extra investment at the end of the fifth year of their plans.”

Mick Rowley, Windsor FBU rep said: “If approved by the Fire Authority, the firefighters in Windsor and the whole of Berkshire welcome this positive development, however, the FBU will continue to campaign to maintain a 24 hour fire cover in Windsor in the long term.”

Windsor firefighters have launched a website - [www.windsorfirestation.co.uk](http://www.windsorfirestation.co.uk) - and are encouraging members of the local

community to visit the forum and contribute their thoughts.

## **FRS tops poll on floods response**

The fire and rescue service topped a recent poll from the Times newspaper on the response to the floods by a range of services, public bodies and agencies, as well as politicians.

The FRS scored 8.72 out of 10, followed by 7.82 for the armed forces and 6.14 for local authorities in the affected areas. The Government as a whole lagged at 4.89 while Tory leader David Cameron was bottom, with just 3.75.

The Populus poll from the Times 29 July 2007 interviewed a random sample of 1511 adults aged 18+ by telephone between 27th July 2007 and 29th July 2007. Interviews were conducted across England and the results have been weighted to be representative of all English adults.

## **Public sector pay watch**

Rank and file police officers have demanded that their right to strike be reinstated as relations with the government fell to a 30-year low over a decision to stop their annual pay formula.

The Police Federation, with 140,000 members, is angered over a below-inflation pay offer, The Guardian reported. The Association of Chief Police Officers and the Police Superintendents’ Association are also angry at the decision to stop using a 30-year-old formula that governed annual pay settlements until last year.

The government is offering a rise of 2.3 per cent. Officers have put in a counterclaim for 3.94 per cent, in line with the private sector. Both sides will go to arbitration in October, but the government insists that public sector restraint is vital to keep inflation in check.

Police officers are banned from taking strike action or even discussing it. However, this year the rank and file voted overwhelmingly to look at the option of

lobbying for full industrial rights if their claims were not met.

The move highlights mounting anger in the public sector over pay.

### POA strike

Last week the Prison Officers' Association (POA) members staged unofficial strike action over pay and conditions.

'The public needs to be aware of how public sector workers who put their lives at risk are being treated,' Brian Caton, general secretary of the POA, told reporters. 'We will talk about the prospect of taking further industrial action.'

The POA, to whom the FBU has pledged its support, has said that the moral of wardens was at "rock bottom" with "prisons bursting at the seams".

POA members are furious that a recommendation by an independent review board to award officers a 2.5% pay rise in April was turned down by the government.

"The morale of staff throughout England and Wales is at rock bottom," said Colin Moses, national chairman of the POA.

"The level of assaults against staff has risen to more than eight a day and in turn the prisoner to staff ratio has also risen."

He said prisons had become more dangerous places to work and urged the government to take action to restore the members' confidence in their employer.

### Below-inflation pay rise

This is the second successive year in which prison officers received a below-inflation pay rise. Last year, wardens were awarded a 1.4% increase.

The POA has criticised year on year cuts by the government in the budget for prisons.

Under its contract with government, the union is currently legally obliged not to undertake any industrial action that would disrupt the HM Prison Service.

However, the POA gave notice to withdraw from that contract allowing them the potential to strike.

The Police Federation, for its part, said over the weekend that its members wanted the right to take industrial action unless the Home Office agreed to a more favourable pay deal.

The federation said it was dismayed that the Home Office had abandoned the pay formula when police were being asked to tackle the increasing threat of terrorism, a rise in antisocial behaviour and events such as the recent floods and the foot and mouth outbreak. 'The government keep telling us how much we are valued and at the same time are making arrangements that would result in police taking a pay cut,' the federation said. 'The mood among our members is one of anger.'

The Police Superintendents' Association, which has some 1,600 members across England and Wales, has stopped short of endorsing the federation's position, but warned that ministers had to come up with a suitable pay formula.

## **Pay high on TUC Congress agenda**

Gordon Brown stance on public sector pay increases is set to face an angry challenge at next week's TUC conference in Brighton. Delegates will be asked to condemn the prime minister's 2% ceiling on public sector pay rises and to back calls for coordinated industrial action, The Guardian reported.

Health service workers at Unison are being balloted on pay, while the union is discussing the terms of an offer to its members in local government.

The Public and Commercial Services Union has called on its members at the Department for Work and Pensions to reject their latest pay offer. PCS, which called two one-day stoppages this year – is consulting members about how they want to advance the campaign on jobs and pay. A full scale ballot may take place later this year.



## **Petition: UK military aid to Colombia – sign now!**

Justice for Colombia has placed a petition on the 10 Downing Street website calling on the Government to suspend military aid to Colombia. They want to get as many signatures as possible on it before Labour Party conference on 23-27 September.

Members and officials are urged to sign it now by clicking on the below link or pasting/typing it into your web browser:

<http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/Colombia/>

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Get the e-bulletin and other FBU campaign news by email. Visit [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk), type in your email address in the bottom left hand side of the homepage and Sign Up". It takes less than 2 minutes.