

# UNION SLAMS REGIONAL CONTROLS PLAN



## **ODPM summons fire authorities to London**

The Union has condemned Government plans to close all emergency fire control rooms in England as "another expensive IT disaster waiting to happen" as English fire authorities respond to an ODPM summons to attend a meeting in London to get more news of the moves.

The meeting took place in the Lecture Theatre, Royal Horticultural Society, Vincent Square, London SW1 from 10am to 2pm today.

General Secretary Andy Gilchrist said: "Central Government needs to rethink these plans and scrap them. They have a track record of huge cost overruns, delays and appalling failures in major IT projects.

"This is another expensive IT disaster waiting to happen. The difference is that this time they are toying with a rapid response

999 service where IT failures will cost lives.

"These regional follies will sap the resources of local fire services to pay for them. And not one single life will be saved.

"I condemn Nick Raynsford's suggestions that the current system is failing. I challenge him to tell us at what incidents he means including major terrorist incidents.

"The fire service does not fail the public. We did not fail at the Brighton bombing, the Manchester bombing or the many major incidents in London or at Lockerbie.

"Our local emergency control room in Northern Ireland did not fail in dealing with sustained incidents for 40 years.

"We did not fail at other major incidents such as the factory collapse in Glasgow or the flooding at Boscastle. I resent a minister running down this service to

justify change for the sake of change.

"He says the new centres will mean we will be sent to the correct address. It's been happening for years.

"He says there will be direct communications with the crews attending the incidents who will be alerted of potential hazards. It's been happening for years.

"And that control operators will be trained in how to deal with anxious and panicking members of the public. It's been happening for years.

"That we will have to deal with new roles such as dealing with floods and other environmental disasters. We've been doing that for years as well.

"He claims savings of 30% when his own documents show no more than 5%. And never mentions warnings from his Department that the project might lose large sums of money.

"On Wednesday he suggested the idea for regional controls came from the Bain Review. Which page minister? It doesn't.

"The minister paints a picture of the fire service and this project which defies reality. Central Government must see sense and listen to those who run and work in an excellent community based public service."

## **Lobby Your MP - Controls**

Send a letter to your MP calling for their support in our campaign to stop the madcap plans to regionalise emergency fire controls. Follow the "Lobby Your MP" link as described above.

Please forward copies of any replies you receive from MPs to National Officer Geoff Ellis at Head Office or email them to [CARe@fbu.org.uk](mailto:CARe@fbu.org.uk).

## **London cuts go ahead**


Manchester Square fire station is to close and 10 fire engines will be moved to the outskirts of the capital under plans approved by the Fire Authority. Around 128 firefighters' jobs will be lost through natural wastage out of a total of 180 posts being axed, the authority said.

The Union says the changes will make London less safe.

FBU General Secretary Andy Gilchrist said: "This is extremely bad news for Londoners. It beggars belief that in the current climate anyone should want to make cuts in a service that would be in the front line of responding to any terrorist attack."

FBU members took part in a rally outside City Hall ahead of the Fire Authority meeting on Thursday.

An objection letter from Westminster City Council, the Royal



Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Islington Council has described the plan as "irresponsible" and "potentially dangerous".

## **Overtime Dispute in London**

London members started an overtime ban at 18.00 today in protest at local management's attempts to impose a new local overtime agreement. The overtime ban follows a 73%-27% ballot in favour of the action.

Brigade management are trying to use overtime as a method of managing sickness absence by excluding firefighters from working overtime if their sickness absence was over a certain number of days. This is despite the fact that sickness levels in the brigade have been reduced substantially in recent years.

The job cuts now approved in the London IRMP were in part proposed because fewer firefighters were needed to cover for sickness absence because sickness levels had been cut. The London Region FBU want pre-arranged overtime to be offered to all members irrespective of what sick leave they have had to take.

The ballot vote follows several months of discussions around the introduction of a policy on pre-arranged voluntary overtime which formed part of the June 2003 Pay and Conditions Agreement. Local FBU officials had been seeking to end the link to sickness, arguing that it formed no part of the national agreement and that the London FBU was unaware of any other brigade

where such a policy was being introduced.

Despite this, local management said they did not need the agreement of the FBU and would implement the new policy anyway. They also dismissed FBU claims for an increase in the overtime rates for weekend working.

## **Compulsory overtime complication**

This dispute is complicated by a compulsory overtime agreement in the London Fire Brigade which dates from the 1970s. This results in members being ordered to remain on duty at the end of a shift if there are shortages of personnel. The London Region registered a dispute on this matter in March 2003.

London FBU says this compulsory overtime agreement is a clear breach of the new national conditions contained in the June Agreement. The FBU are seeking the implementation of the Grey Book agreement that overtime is voluntary and is not undertaken to cover for staff shortages.

London Regional Secretary Matt Wrack said:

"We want to resolve this through discussion with management. Unfortunately they have cancelled recent talks scheduled to try to resolve the issue. We always remain ready to talk and would urge LFEP and LFB management to reconsider and to sit down and start talking seriously. London firefighters are not a bunch of militants. All they want is to be treated fairly"

## **W.Mids FA scales back cuts plan after Union pressure**

Following a campaign by FBU members and the general public, the proposed cuts to the number of fire engines in the West Midlands between midnight and 8.00 am has been scaled back.

Instead of a cut of 15 fire engines 13 will be cut. The 2 stations that will remain unaffected are West Bromwich and Foleshill. It is claimed that this is based on their location and specialist skills.

The final decision will be made by the Fire Authority on Monday the 21st of March, and the decision not to cut the 2 fire engines will be subject to a 12 month review.

Andy Dennis, acting chair of FBU West Midlands said: "As far as we and I'm sure the public are concerned this is a token gesture to all of our concerns, and we will be vigorously opposing any cuts to the service we provide to the public.

"So far this year we have seen the time it takes fire engines to arrive shoot through the roof, ranging from 10 to 15 minutes in at least a dozen cases, well in excess of the Brigades average times. We have always said that that's the danger with using average times- it gives no guarantees, and these cuts can only make things worse.

"A review will be carried out in September not in 12 months as claimed by the Brigade, even so it could well be too late by then"

## **Pensions:Lobby Your MP Now!**

Let's keep the issue of OUR pensions in the forefront of their minds as they seek votes from us and our families in the General Election.

Click on the "Lobby Your MP" link from the home page of the FBU website ([www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)), enter your post code, your MP will pop up. Then enter your name, address and email, and "send". It takes 2 minutes.

### **Received a response from your MP over pensions?**

Members are asked to forward copies of any responses from MPs to John McGhee, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston Upon Thames, KT2 7AE or by email to [pensions@fbu.org.uk](mailto:pensions@fbu.org.uk). Those who met their MPs during constituency week in February - or in November - please also let us know what your MP said by mailing/emailing us at the above postal/email addresses.

### **Fire Service news**

Visit the FBU website - [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk) - and get the latest news in the UK fire and rescue service from a wide range of national and regional press sources. The news feed is updated daily during weekdays.

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