

# SOMERSET CFO: GOVERNMENT POSITION MORALLY REPREHENSIBLE



**Kemp accuses Government of being 'slow' on tackling issue of lack of New Dimension insurance cover, saying it 'should have been sorted out 18 months ago.'**

Clive Kemp, Chief Fire Officer at Somerset Fire and Rescue Service has claimed to be "completely mystified" as to why FBU members have voted to take industrial action short of strikes over the lack of insurance cover in case of injury or death as a result of attending terrorist incidents.

However, he expressed "sympathy with the issue that the Somerset Fire Brigade are putting forward" and said "this is an issue which does not just affect Somerset."


Describing the Government's position as "morally reprehensible," he added: "The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

are dealing with it, although very slowly. This is an issue which should have been sorted out 18 months ago."

Kemp's comments came as Somerset fire crews agreed to hold back the start of industrial action to allow 12 clear days for talks to resolve their dispute over lack of insurance cover. FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack will attend the talks.

Industrial action short of a strike will start from August 4 if those talks fail. Fire crews will then refuse to train on specialist equipment designed for use in major terrorist incidents - such as high volume pumping equipment and incident response units.

The move follows a near nine to one vote in favour of taking industrial action short of a strike in an individual postal ballot.



Adrian Woollaston, Somerset FBU secretary said: "We have not sought this dispute and would like to resolve it through talks. Somerset fire crews want a sensible solution that addresses our very real concerns.

"We want to know that our families will be properly protected if anything happens to any of us while responding to such an incident. Our employers can take steps to do that. They have chosen not to but have said they will order us to go anyway.

"This is limited action, it is not strike action. When people dial 999 they will still get a fire engine as fast as ever."

Some insurance policies - such as mortgage protection policies and life insurance - will not pay up if a firefighter is killed or injured while responding to a terrorist incident.

## **FBU members from southern region lobby parliament**

More than 50 emergency fire control staff and firefighters from Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (Region 12) on Wednesday took to parliament their campaign against plans to close local emergency fire control rooms and to create one single regional centre for the region to parliament.

Members pointed out to MPs that the expensive, high-risk project would lead to a poorer service, putting lives at risk.

Almost all managed to see their MPs, having chosen a Wednesday when most MPs would be in the House for Prime Minister's Questions, and came away with the support of all these MPs.

MPs pledged continued assistance and practical help for the Union's campaign. The FBU members also met Lord Montague of Beaulieu who agreed to support the Union.

Members and officials made an impact with the media, giving interviews to several local newspapers across the region and to the BBC, Meridian, BBC South, Central TV, the Morning Star and 15 radio stations.


The lobby took place just days after the Government delayed the announcement on the sites for the new regional fire control centres, citing the London bomb attacks as a reason. The announcement was originally scheduled earlier for this week.

The South East regional centre would cover the south coast from Kent to Hampshire - and as far north as Oxfordshire.

Says Sharon Eames, Control Staff National Committee member for Region 12:

"What was apparent was the absolute professionalism with which control staff and firefighters conducted themselves. It was obvious that the best people to tell it like it is are the people on the ground!

"The delay in announcing any locations means we have to continue to use this time to keep the



pressure up. The deliberate stalling tactics of the ODPM are designed to take the steam out of our campaign. But we will use this to our advantage.

"MPs now have their summer recess. During this time we must continue to campaign and build more public support and get more signatures on our petitions.

Adds Dean Mills, Executive Council member for FBU Southern Region:

"This is the third time we have lobbied as a region and the lobbying process continues in addition to other union initiatives.

"All in all, this was yet another very successful lobby and the failure to force through these dangerous plans can only be seen as a major success by the FBU.

"I congratulate every member in the Southern Region for their workplace campaigning and their refusal to accept the massively expensive, high-risk regional control project as a done deal."

## **Matt Wrack gives lifelong learning a boost**

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack has confirmed his commitment to the learning agenda by signing up as a skills for life advocate with the TUC.

The new advocates project will bolster the profile of learning at work and provide union learning representatives with extra support.

Key players in the trade union movement are being asked to sign up as advocates and pledge their support to learning in the workplace.

The TUC has led the way with Deputy General Secretary Frances O'Grady signing up as the first advocate last year. Since then all the TUC Regional Secretaries have thrown their weight behind the project and signed up.

There are now 10,000 union learning representatives in workplaces across the country finding courses to meet the needs of their colleagues and over 80,000 union members have already benefited from their help.

Says Matt Wrack:

"The hard work being done by union learning representatives across the country is transforming the lives of thousands of workers and I'm keen to do as much as I can to help raise their profile and the profile of learning. Our members understand the value of education and know that a little knowledge can go a very long way."

*Want to become an FBU learning fund rep or boost your own skills? Visit [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk) and look for Lifelong Learning under the Member Services section.*

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