

# FBU STEPS UP CONTROL CAMPAIGN AS PROJECT COSTS SOAR



## **Members urged to attend their branch meetings to discuss how to take the campaign forward**

The Executive Council (EC) has agreed to step up the industrial campaign against the Government's plans to regionalise emergency fire controls and will be meeting in September to discuss the issue of industrial action to support our emergency fire control staff members if the Government does not see sense.

The EC is recommending that officials arrange for an emergency fire control staff member to attend branch meetings up and down the country in order for the issue to be discussed in detail.

The views of FBU branches will be communicated to FBU brigade and regional committees, so that the EC can make informed decisions.


Members are urged to attend their branch meeting to make sure their views are taken into account.

The decision by the EC follows the announcement on 10 August of the site locations of seven English regional control rooms and the invitation on 11 August to 3 companies to bid for the infrastructure - BT, EADS (European Aeronautical Defence Systems) and Thales.

It also comes after news that the costs of the FiReControl project have soared yet again.

## **Controls regionalisation costs soar up to £2 billion**

The costs of the Government's controversial plans to close all 46 emergency fire control rooms in England have spiralled to £1 billion and could hit £2 billion according to fire minister Jim Fitzpatrick. The figures were originally published in the



Winsford Chronicle in Cheshire - quoting Jim Fitzpatrick - and subsequently confirmed by him at a meeting with FBU members in Cambridgeshire when challenged about the newspaper's report.

The FBU points to warnings in the Government's own business case for regional controls that there was a "high risk" that spiralling costs will lead to pressure to cut frontline services and could push up council tax. The business case also said the plan had a "high risk" of "total project failure" because of the Government's appalling track record in technology projects.

FBU General secretary Matt Wrack said: "It was incompetent of Government to sign up to plans before they knew the horrendous costs involved. It is irresponsible of them to fail to accept they made a mistake and think again.

"£2 billion is more than the £1.7 billion annual budget of the entire fire service. A vast amount of money desperately needed for frontline services will be diverted to a technology project which won't save a single life.

"We now face the very real risk of cuts to frontline fire services to pay for the rising costs of this project. We need an independent assessment of these plans before they are allowed to proceed any further."

## **Control campaign stepping up in regions**

In Kent angry members are stepping up their campaigning against the

Government's proposals to close local emergency fire control rooms as they await to hear an announcement on the site location of the South East regional control.

The South East regional fire control room site location was not revealed on August 10, but this is "being finalised", according to the ODPM.

FBU members in the region have written to their MPs and local councillors. And they've been going to town centres setting up stalls, handing out leaflets and petitioning.

In July they descended on Maidstone and got 600 signatures in a couple of hours. They informed the public who were unaware of the critical role control staff play in Kent fire and rescue service or what the Government has planned - and received plenty of positive good feedback.

In September, as people return from their summer holidays and schools open again, more campaigning is planned in the Kent area - including hitting Bluewater shopping centre.

Both control and firefighter members have been strongly active in the campaign. Petition forms have been sent to fire stations and on open days FBU members have been gathering a lot of signatures. Members working the retained duty system have been taking petitions to their workplaces.

In addition, at a number of campaigning days there has been a pump in attendance.

Visit [www.controlcare.org.uk](http://www.controlcare.org.uk) for news and information about the Union's Campaign Against Regional Fire Controls. The website includes campaign materials such as model letters to chief fire officers and fire authorities.

Also, follow the Lobby Your MP link on the website and email your MP, highlighting the dangerous push forward on the FiReControl project and the outrageous timing during the summer parliamentary recess of the announcements of the site locations of seven regional fire control rooms in England.

## **Suffolk dispute**

The campaign by Suffolk FBU members against cuts in fire cover and against job losses continues.

The first of seven planned stoppages over the next fortnight took place today.

FBU Head Office has donated £5,000 to the hardship fund and money is coming in from around the country. Members elsewhere in the UK are urged to do all they can to support our brothers and sisters in Suffolk.

Details of the Suffolk Hardship Fund are:

Lloyds Bank  
Sort code 30-94-55  
Account Number 4418949

Cheques should be made payable to The Suffolk Hardship Fund, and sent to our Hardship Fund co-ordinator:

Kevin Block, 17 Kirby Street,  
Ipswich, Suffolk, IP4 4PZ

Officials are encouraged to do the collections, but cheques from individuals are also welcome.

Suffolk officials have been attending FBU meetings elsewhere in the country, informing members of their campaign for jobs, the Suffolk fire service and the public they serve and protect.

Messages/resolutions of support for Suffolk members can be emailed to Suffolk brigade chair, [Vince Jell](mailto:vinceatthejells@hotmail.com), (vinceatthejells@hotmail.com).

Suffolk fire crews voted late July two to one in favour of strike action in a ballot over plans to cut 12 frontline emergency response firefighter posts.

The cuts by the fire authority will endanger firefighters and the public for years to come.

## **MP demands answers after Coventry left without cover**

A Coventry city MP has demanded answers after Coventry had to cope with no fire engines for an hour on August 23.

The city was left with no cover for an hour overnight as busy fire crews attended blazes elsewhere in the city and in Birmingham.

Crews went from a fire at nine-storey Hillfields House, in Yardley Street, Coventry, to an arson attack at 16-storey Longfield House in Courthouse Green, which led to one man being taken to hospital.

A number of other incidents were also happening throughout the area.

Overstretched firefighters criticised the shortage, claiming lives were at risk, and that the problem would worsen once night-time cover is cut by one fire engine next month.

Fire chiefs have denied the claims.

Coventry North-west MP Geoffrey Robinson today stepped into the argument, demanding bosses produce a report into yesterday's shortage and the actual risk the public was in.

In a letter to chief fire officer Frank Sheehan at his Birmingham HQ, Mr Robinson said: "I understand the need for effective use of the fire brigade's resources but there has to be adequate cover at all times."

Mr Robinson and Coventry South MP Jim Cunningham have requested an urgent meeting with fire authority bosses.

Both politicians were assured during a previous meeting that plans to cut an engine were safe and there would be adequate cover.

In total, 11 incidents had to be dealt with during the night of Tuesday, which involved engines having to move from one station to another to provide cover.

Coventry firefighter Kevin Brewerton, spokesman for the FBU, said just one more incident yesterday morning would have crippled the service and worried emergency callers would have had to wait for crews from Leamington or Solihull.

Coventry has seven engines covering the city at night - two in the city centre, at Radford Road; two in Binley, two in Foleshill and one in Canley.

From September 9, there will be only six engines

[www.icccoventry.co.uk](http://www.icccoventry.co.uk)

### **Subscribe to the e-bulletin**

Get the e-bulletin, other FBU campaign news and information on Union services by email. Go to [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk), type in your email address on the bottom left hand side of the home page and hit the "Sign Up" button.

### **FBU's Confidential Freephone Stress and Support Line**

**0800 783 4778**

Stressed?

Bullied?

Get help from the Union!