

# REGIONAL CONTROLS: ANGER OVER SPIRALLING COSTS



## Consultants' fees topped £11.7 million in the last year amid frontline firefighter job cuts

The FBU has attacked the "spiralling" amount of money the Government was spending on new fire control centres after figures showed that consultants' fees topped £11.7 million in the last year. The "staggering" amount of money was being paid at the same time as frontline firefighters' posts were being cut.

Figures given to Labour MP John McDonnell showed that money spent on consultants to the FireControl project rose from £1.5 million in 2003/4 to £9 million in 2004/5 and £11.7 million in the last financial year. The latest figures showed £32,000 a day was being spent on project consultants, considerably more than an entire year's pay for a firefighter. (CONTINUED OVERLEAF)

### Members' consultation on CPD.

Branches are currently meeting to discuss the employers' proposals on Continuous Professional Development payments. Full details of the issue are available from the front page of the FBU website [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk) and from a special edition of "Firefighter" which is on its way to home addresses.

Officials have attended meetings around the country to report on the negotiations and the proposals. The General Secretary recently attended meetings in Region 5 (North West) and the Assistant General Secretary has spoken in Region 8 (Wales) and Region 1 (Scotland).

All regions have been given the opportunity to invite the GS or AGS to speak about the issues around CPD. Make sure you attend your branch meeting to hear a report and please make your views known.

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General Secretary Matt Wrack said:

"At the same time as these huge fees were going to consultants over 500 frontline posts were cut. It looks as though the money is going from paying for frontline services seamlessly into the pockets of consultants. The Government is paying through the nose for this work.

"It is a staggering amount of money which is now spiralling. These figures show the amount of money being wasted on a project that no-one wants."

Under the project, nine new centres will replace 46 control rooms in England in a plan costing £1 billion.

#### Expensive, flawed

Shadow local government secretary Caroline Spelman said: "The regionalisation of the fire control rooms is yet another expensive and flawed project left over from John Prescott's ill-fated tenure.

"Just as the scrapping of local police forces would have wasted millions of pounds and made policing more distant and less responsive, so the planned regionalisation of the fire control services is risky and badly thought out.

"If the Government wants to improve civil resilience, it should ensure there is greater coordination and collaboration between the three emergency services, rather than

creating expensive and ineffective tiers of regional bureaucracy."

#### Norfolk

The news provoked an angry reaction from FBU officials around the country. Neil Day, Norfolk FBU brigade secretary, said:

"The basic principle should be if it isn't broken, why fix it? Our system works really well and it has never failed us.


"This is an awful lot of money which is being spent on something that nobody wants and we can think of a 101 better uses for the money which is going to consultants.

"We are still totally opposed to this move. From the firefighters' point of view the control staff are not just telephone operators. They are a vital support and back up to us. They know the job inside out and their local knowledge is invaluable.

"We are extremely concerned about the health and safety implications from the move to Cambridge."

#### Herts

Hertfordshire firefighters and control room staff added their voices to the storm of protest. At the moment all emergency fire calls in Hertfordshire are handled by the emergency fire control room in Stevenage. But if the plan goes ahead the work will be transferred to a single control covering the whole of the East Of England based on a waterside business park in Cambridgeshire.



Fire crews expressed anger at the spend on consultants at a time when frontline posts have been axed, fire stations closed and while Hertfordshire County Council are publicly lobbying for better financial support from government.

If it isn't broken, why fix it?

Tony Smith, Herts FBU Brigade Secretary, said:

"Our system has never failed us. This was proved beyond any doubt during the Buncefield incident where our control room handled yet another major incident in the County, together with hundreds of other emergency calls".

Northamptonshire

In Northamptonshire FBU officials condemned "extortionate" Government spending on consultants for the project.

Gary Mitchell, secretary of Northamptonshire FBU said: "We are opposed to regional control rooms in the first place and now they are going to cost even more money than first envisaged.

"These costs are not at all justified. It is an extortionate amount for the Government to pay to find out what we have already told them."

The East Midlands Regional Control Centre (RCC) would be based at Willow Farm Business Park in Castle Donington, Leicestershire.

**Y&H RMB: RCC costs "very far from satisfactory"**

The Regional Management Board of the Yorkshire and Humberside Fire Authorities met on January 11 over the move to a regional control centre in Wakefield.

West Yorkshire's Acting Chief Fire Officer, Simon Pilling told the Yorkshire Post the situation is "very far from satisfactory" but that plans were too advanced to be substantially altered or abandoned completely.

The proposed new regional base is expected to bring in total savings of about £1.8m each year, based on central Government figures. But the rent on the Wakefield site is predicted to cost £1.2m each year. This would leave £600,000 to finance ongoing redeployment, IT, power and water bills as well as pensions, maintenance, training and administration.

Mike Price, treasurer of the regional management board, stressed to the Yorkshire Post that no direct comparison was available between the cost of running the region's existing control rooms, as the new regional centre would be incorporated into a national emergency response strategy.

He added that financial figures could change as the Government continues to finalise its proposals.

Clive Betts, the Labour MP for Sheffield Attercliffe and who is a member of the select committee

which was critical of the project told the Yorkshire Post:

"I would want assurances from Ministers that there will be no additional costs incurred to the taxpayer and no reduction in services as a result of the introduction of regional control centres.

"You do not invest millions of pounds without establishing exactly what is going to happen in the future."

Sean Cahill, Yorkshire and Humberside regional secretary for the FBU, said: "The taxpayer is going to have to meet the cost of running these regional control centres, and we believe that the service is not going to get any better.

"It is not going to make anyone feel any safer when they call 999, and it is certainly not going to make the job any easier for firefighters."

## **RCC delays continue**

Local FBU members campaigning to save Cumbria's fire control room believe moves to from the county's fire and rescue service headquarters in Cockermouth to a regional centre in Warrington may not be pushed through until 2010 or 2011.

Judith Tauber, chair of Save Our Control Room and an operator in the Cockermouth fire control room, said: "We think the government still plans to go ahead with it but

it's about three years behind schedule.

"Initially we understood that we would be going in the early part of 2008, now they are talking about 2010 or 2011. There is a huge slippage of the project and it is very difficult to keep the whole thing going when you have got that projected time-scale."

### Lack of information

Mrs Tauber said: "We know very little more than at the start of the project.

"It has been very, very difficult to get any meaningful information from anyone and in all fairness to our managers here I don't think they know what is happening either.

"When information is forthcoming and we hear about things like terms and conditions we will be continuing our fight."

### More information

*An Institute of Public Finance (IPF) report says more work is needed on key areas of the draft plan to close all 46 local emergency fire control rooms in England and open 9 regional controls. This includes "revisiting" whether regional controls are the best option.*

*Links to this and other background documents and more information on the FBU 'Out of Control' campaign can be found at:*

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

## **In the news**

### Night-time closure threat

The future of night-time cover by Falmouth firefighters is under threat after the Lib Dem led county council proposed to close the town's station at night.

It will mean there will be no staffed stations in the county after 6pm and all fire and rescue emergency cover will be provided by staff responding from their homes. The FBU says this will add a minimum of five minutes to appliances being mobilised to emergencies. Firefighters at Falmouth said they are opposed to any form of reduction in cover for Falmouth and Penryn and that they are very unhappy about the proposals.

Falmouth mayor Roger Bonney also said he was totally opposed to the proposal which would put lives at risk.

### False economy

"It is a false economy as far as I can see. They are putting the whole county at risk. We are a national port and the gateway to England. This port is a vital service to the whole of Cornwall. We have the potential of a ship coming in on fire, or a terrorist attack, and if we have a hotel fire there is no way the service will meet the demands of that. There will be a serious loss of life.

"Penryn used to have its own fire station 12 to 13 years ago but it was closed after the town council

was promised that 24 hour cover would continue to be provided from Falmouth."

Penryn town council is writing to county hall opposing the cutbacks.

The Liberal Democrat's own MP for Falmouth and Camborne, Julia Goldsworthy, says she is very concerned about the proposals and is requesting an urgent meeting with fire chief Ken Yeo. "Public safety must remain the prime consideration," she said.

*Tuesday 9th January 2007, Helston Packet*

### **Campaigners slam "tainted" Colombian minister**

Justice for Colombia has slammed Government ministers as the Colombian Foreign Secretary, Maria Consuelo Araujo, visited the UK last week amid a paramilitary scandal. Araujo met with Foreign Minister, Lord Triesman.

The meeting comes as the Foreign Secretary's brother, Alvaro Araujo, a Senator and leader of one of Colombia's Governing parties, faces a criminal investigation for his links with Colombia's extreme right wing paramilitary death squads. The investigation came after his name was found in documents recovered from the computer of paramilitary leader "Jorge 40". The main opposition parties have called for the Foreign Secretary's resignation in view of the scandal. In total seven pro-Government parliamentarians are under investigation.

## Human rights record

The Colombian Government has one of the worst human rights records in Latin America. More murders of trade unionists happen in Colombia than anywhere else in the world and the United Nations have documented regular collusion between the armed forces and paramilitaries.

A communiqué from the paramilitary group AUC called President Uribe "our candidate" prior to last year's elections.

The FBU is affiliated to Justice for Colombia and has long campaigned on the issue of trade union and human rights in the country. For information about the Union's international work, visit: [www.fbu.org.uk/campaigns/international/index.php](http://www.fbu.org.uk/campaigns/international/index.php)

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