



SOUTH WEST REGION

Avon - Cornwall - Devon & Somerset - Dorset & Wiltshire - Gloucestershire

To: Chief Fire Officers

Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service

Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service

11th Oct 2017

Dear CFO,

CREWING LEVELS: NETWORKED FIRE CONTROL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP

I am writing to you following serious concerns which have been raised with the Fire Brigades Union in regard to crewing levels within the Networked Fire Control Services Partnership (NFCSP).

As you know, the stated purpose of the NFCSP includes "*helping to enhance service levels while improving public and firefighter safety*", however since its inception staff have raised a series of serious concerns, including system failures which have undermined operational effectiveness and caused serious stress to staff tasked with operating the system.

These issues have been the subject of previous correspondence between the FBU and the Service, including to members of the Fire and Rescue Authority.

One of the key issues raised by the FBU over this period has been the provision of sufficient staff numbers to ensure the maintenance of proper crewing levels within individual Emergency Fire Control Centres and the partnership as a whole. This is necessary in order to provide proper operational effectiveness on a day to day basis and ensure resilience when faced with a major incident.

In addition and just as importantly, proper crewing levels are necessary to counter what I have described in previous correspondence as the 'intolerable level of stress' which system failures has imposed upon our Emergency Fire Control staff.

The NFCSP consists of only three Emergency Fire Controls which cover a very wide and diverse area. The three Controls cover 195 Fire Stations stretching from the border of Cornwall to the border with Surrey and includes the Isle of Wight. The current minimum crewing within the NFCSP is meant to be set at thirteen staff consisting of a minimum of four in Hampshire FRS, four in Dorset and Wiltshire FRS and five in Devon and Somerset FRS.

The FBU has previously stated our view that this number is set too low. We have submitted a business case to Dorset and Wiltshire FRS outlining the necessity of increasing the minimum number of on-duty Emergency Fire Control staff from the current number of four to a revised number of five, with associated increases in overall staff numbers as a consequence.

Low crewing levels in our Emergency Fire Controls appear to be prevalent across the wider partnership and on several occasions have resulted in the partnership failing to provide even the absolute minimum crewing figure of thirteen staff on duty across the entire partnership.

Specifically, the Fire Brigades Union is raising our serious concerns regarding reports of severe shortfalls in crewing which have come to light for the August 2017 period. It is our understanding that during this period there have been numerous occasions when crewing levels across the NFCSP fell below the minimum number of thirteen.

In addition, we have received concerns that there have been occasions when crewing levels have been brought up to the minimum number only through the use of day duty watch and station managers who have been removed from their normal duties in order to make up for shortfalls.

Against this background, I must urge immediate action to resolve these issues which the FBU regard as unsafe, unacceptable and unfair on the Emergency Fire Control staff who are at the sharp end of failures to provide enough staff and I seek urgent assurances regarding measures in place to prevent this situation reoccurring.

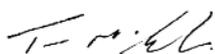
In addition, the FBU are aware that work is currently being undertaken in regard to an 'NFSP Review'. Having had sight of the 'review scope' I must state my concerns at the apparent lack of focus or understanding on the real problems faced by Emergency Fire Control staff across the partnership.

As opposed to a structured, solution led focus to achieve proper and safe crewing levels across the partnership, the 'review scope' instead indicates an intention for a lengthy and unnecessary review across a set of wide ranging areas - including conditions of service - which can only delay a proper solution and bring further unease and discontent to staff who have, frankly, already suffered enough.

I have to state at the outset that the Fire Brigades Union believe that, whilst we commit to proper and professional engagement with the Service on all the issues involved within the NFCSP, the only proper response to this current situation is an immediate commitment to increase crewing levels across the partnership with associated increases in overall staff numbers as a consequence.

I am of course available to discuss this matter further should you wish.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. McFarlane'.

Tam McFarlane
Executive Council Member
Fire Brigades Union - South West Region