



PCC'S COULD BE "FORCED" ON FIRE SERVICE!



Government slammed as Fire Minister admits it could force Fire Service to give up control to Police!

Government plans to force fire and rescue services to come under the control of police and crime commissioners (PCC), against the wishes of the public, have been condemned by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in Gloucestershire.

Under questioning during a parliamentary debate Tory fire minister Mike Penning pointedly refused to rule out a forced PCC takeover in an answer to a question from Cotswold MP Geoffrey Clifton-Brown. An extract of the exchange is below:

Clifton-Brown: "In Gloucestershire, we do not at the moment want the fire and rescue service to be put under the control of the PCC, so will he give us an assurance that it will not be forced to do so against its wishes?"

Penning: "I cannot do so because that is not part of the Bill."

Firefighters said the plans showed a contempt for local democracy. Tam McFarlane, the executive council member for the FBU in the South West, commented: "The fire minister has been forced to admit that they are willing to impose these controversial plans and effectively

allow a hostile takeover of a fire service even when local people, politicians and firefighters are united against it.

"This admission exposes the incredible arrogance of the Tory government who have point-blank refused to listen to the serious professional concerns of the firefighters who deliver this vital service. These plans would fundamentally compromise the independence of our service and would undermine our ability to provide effective life-saving community support."

Barry Kirby, a Labour Councillor in Gloucestershire said "the police and fire service in Gloucestershire are essential parts of our county's infrastructure. However, I believe very strongly that they perform very different roles and, while they should work closely together, they must not be joined together under the police and crime commissioner role",

"It is outrageous that the government has shown contempt for the views of local people and has refused to rule out the imposition of these plans even where there is serious local opposition".

Fighting for the Fire & Rescue Service



Protecting Firefighters & Control Staff

FBU members elect representatives in new combined service

As of 1st of April we have a new Fire & Rescue Service in the Region following the combination of Wiltshire and Dorset FRSs' into a single service. The imaginatively titled "Dorset and Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service" came into being following warnings of the previous Services "going bust" and has led to a re-organisation of those at the top. The new Chief Fire Officer of the combined service is Darran Gunter (former CFO of Dorset FRS), and the new Chair of the combined Fire Authority is Rebecca Knox (former Chair of Dorset FRA).

The FBU has been working hard in the build up to the combination, organising and representing members as the cutover approached. Now that the new Service is a reality we have amended our structures to reflect the new organisation and make sure we can continue to effectively represent Firefighters & Emergency Control Staff.



Karen Adams - newly elected FBU secretary in Dorset & Wiltshire

New Brigade Officials have been elected by members across the new Service. They are: Hamish Daya (formerly of Wiltshire FRS), who has been elected as the new FBU Brigade Chair, and Karen Adams (formerly of Dorset FRS), who is elected into the post of FBU Brigade Secretary. Karen set out the work being undertaken by the Union, saying "since being

elected, Hamish and I have been working closely together organising the new Brigade Committee and setting out the priorities of FBU members in meetings with management. Since combination we have definitely had to hit the ground running and the Union has been very active in serious negotiations to protect our members interests."

Hamish added "we are under no illusions of the challenges that this combination will bring. Trying to bring together the policies, terms and operating procedures of 2 Brigades into a single service is a significant task, especially against a background of budget cuts. For example, the Service has stated its intention to alter duty systems to make cuts of £1.5 million which means front line services would likely suffer, but we are very clear that we will not accept a race to the bottom of our members conditions of service. The FBU is united and we are working hard, with the support of our members, to organise, support and protect our members."

The contact details of Karen, Hamish and other Officials within the new Service will be available at www.southwestfbu.com



Hamish Daya - newly elected FBU chair in Dorset & Wiltshire

FBU fight for Emergency Fire Control "lifesavers"

Following recent serious failures involving the "Networked Fire Control Services Partnership (NFCSP)," the Region held an open meeting of Emergency Fire Control Operators from across all our Brigades, also inviting colleagues from Hampshire.

"NFCSP" is a single command and control system covering the Fire and Rescue Services in Devon & Somerset, Dorset & Wiltshire and Hampshire.

The system is underpinned by Capita's Vision DS "communications and control technology" which serves a single system networked to serve local control rooms in Exeter (covering Devon & Somerset), Potterne (covering Dorset & Wiltshire) and Eastleigh (covering Hampshire).

The purpose of this system is to allow the three FRSs to work closely together, "sharing

resources during busy periods or a major incident, and helping to enhance service levels while improving public and firefighter safety"- according to a recent press release from the three FRS's.

However, since the introduction of the new system the Control Room in Potterne has experienced a number of serious problems, which has placed our Control members under enormous pressure. Despite upgrades & repairs, the problems continue, including a major breakdown of the system which took place as recently as this month.

FBU Regional Official Val Hampshire said "the Vision system has been blighted with serious failures which include control screens freezing, gazetteers not functioning properly and appliances being wrongly "locked out" - which means they cannot be immediately mobilised to

incidents". **Cont Page 3**

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"There have even been instances when the nearest appliance to an incident has not been on the response plan, therefore control staff were unable to mobilise them. The system offered appliances from further away and Control staff have no option but to mobilise them, which has resulted in appliances actually driving past the nearest fire station to get to the incident".

These issues, and more, were discussed at the FBU meeting and the Union was able to update Control Staff members on the work we are doing to support them in this outrageous situation. We have raised this issue directly with the Chief Fire Officers involved and we have also informed the Union nationally. We are also liaising closely with London FBU - who

FBU meet Paramedic reps as NJC agrees Emergency Medical Response trials

The FBU has been meeting with paramedic and ambulance unions to discuss best practise and areas of joint working. The initiative follows a National Joint Council agreement to allow a series of controlled trials into Firefighter involvement in Emergency Medical Response (EMR).

There are currently 31 Fire Services undertaking EMR trials, including some within our region, and the FBU wanted to meet with our paramedic colleagues to share info, discuss best practice and embed a clear understanding regarding the collaborative nature of the trials. Regional Officials Tam McFarlane, Trevor French and Chris Taylor met with UNISON Paramedic Branch colleagues Jo Fowles and Chris Nelson in the FBU office in Bristol.

The Fire Service NJC trials were discussed in great detail at the meeting, especially the parameters set within them and the collaborative nature of their development. Our UNISON colleagues were supportive of this work and gave us some very useful information and advice regarding their development. Importantly, we discussed the necessity of maintaining essential emergency cover across both services and ensuring that public/patient safety is always put first - we must never allow joint working initiatives to be exploited or used as a cover for cutbacks locally.

However, our Paramedic colleagues expressed concerns being raised by serving Paramedics and Ambulance staff regarding recent press reports which stated that the Fire Service wanted to "take over" a whole variety of Ambulance Service work. These reports, which quoted senior Fire Officers, suggested that the Fire Service wanted to takeover duties such as patient transfers to hospitals and responding to non-urgent "green" calls. This has understandably created considerable concern

have the same system and are also having the same problems! We invited key members of Fire Authorities to the meeting and it was really powerful to have local politicians, who are ultimately responsible for the Fire & Rescue Service, to hear first hand the work our members do and the issues they face.

The Union has set up an open, and confidential, channel of communication with our members in Fire Control and we hope that this will enable faster and more direct reporting of problems as they are encountered. This will greatly assist the Union in taking issues forward quickly and demanding that they be resolved. We also intend to request time at every Fire Authority meeting to show the Bafta award winning short film "Operator", which was sponsored by the FBU, as part of our campaign to get Emergency Fire Control members the respect and proper working conditions that they all deserve.

amongst serving Ambulance staff who question the motivation of some Fire Service managers wanting to take over non emergency work which would undermine jobs, cover & conditions.

Responding to these concerns, FBU Regional Secretary Trevor French said "we reassured our Ambulance Service colleagues that the FBU would only agree EMR work which meets the agreed NJC protocol.



FBU Officials Tam McFarlane & Trevor French with UNISON Ambulance & Paramedic reps Jo Fowles and Chris Nelson

"Recent press reports have suggested areas of work that are clearly outside the jointly agreed terms and conditions of the NJC trials. Such reports undermine the trials and create unnecessary friction between our services. The people behind these reports need to understand the damage they are doing and start acting responsibly and professionally.

"The NJC trials, which have been jointly agreed, are about the future of our professions. No-one should be working to undermine them".

The meeting also discussed the concern that some FBU members have raised regarding the availability of ambulances at incidents such as RTC's. This follows a number of incidents where ambulances were either unavailable or severely delayed in responding to incidents and getting patients from the incident ground to hospital. Our UNISON colleagues explained that increased workloads are not being matched by the appropriate level of increased funding within SWASFT - something which all of us recognise within the FRS - and that they are working with the service to achieve more effective deployment of resources. We agreed this is an area where we can join together to campaign around proper funding for all our emergency services.

We have now set up good working links with these colleagues and we have a great deal of detailed knowledge at our disposal to assist us in future. We agreed to maintain these close links and work together to ensure that essential emergency cover is delivered across both our services with public safety and patient interest always coming first. Unity IS Strength!

A lifesaving part of the team!



South West EC member Tam McFarlane

Like most of you reading this, I have attended fires and other emergency incidents which would have resulted in fatalities had it not been for the life saving skills and professionalism of our emergency fire control staff.

All firefighters will recognise the scenario where information relayed by control guides BA crews to the exact room in a burning house where people are trapped, thereby saving vital, and often life saving, minutes. We also know of the life saving advice that our control staff give to people trapped in fires and other emergency situations, providing them with reassurance and professional guidance whilst they await the arrival of fire crews.

We know of the terror that people experience when they believe they may die and we can therefore appreciate the expertise of control staff as they work to keep callers calm, give reassurance and help - all whilst mobilising appliances to the scene of the incident and fielding multiple other calls. We also recognise the toll this work can take on control staff as they try to cut through the screams and terror on the other end of the line, knowing that on some occasions they are the last person the caller will ever speak to.

We, as firefighters and fellow professionals deeply appreciate the work of our emergency control staff and recognise them as a vital and indispensable part of the Fire & Rescue team.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for some politicians and managers who are failing to provide the support and equipment our colleagues need to do their jobs properly and effectively.

The recent meeting of south west control staff, held in the FBU office in Bristol, gave our control members the opportunity to relay and discuss their recent experiences - including with some invited Fire Authority members - and much of what was said shocked those present.

The meeting heard of the severe difficulties, pressures and apparent lack of support our members face in their day to day work. This included the dramatic, and scandalous, failings of the "new" VisionDS mobilising system, supplied by the private company Capita, which has put an intolerable burden on our control members. Having witnessed the failings of this system myself, I know first-hand the pressure and stress our members work under whilst dealing with the problems this system has created. That these failings continue, despite continuous warnings and demands for improvement by the Union, is nothing short of scandalous

Added to this is a continued and chronic lack of staffing which often leaves our Controls understaffed and creates pressure on individuals to make up shortfalls by working large amounts of extra hours. There is also the inevitable attack on duty systems, (a managerial obsession in today's Fire & Rescue Service), as senior managers propose changes which could see control staff work longer and more unsociable hours, impacting on their family lives and responsibilities. Our members have also been made to take on "additional work", such as, incredibly, monitoring town centre CCTV under the guise of being "more productive" - a gross insult to the life saving value emergency fire control staff give to our service.

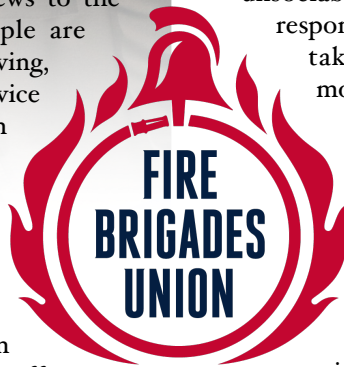
It is time that politicians and managers understood that emergency fire control staff are a vital part of the frontline Fire & Rescue Service. Every time they face cutbacks or are given equipment that is not fit for purpose there is a direct and dangerous impact on operational response.

It has become apparent that some people who want to cut our service regard our control members as "easy targets".

Our job, as firefighters, colleagues and

Union members, is to prove them wrong. We must stand shoulder to shoulder with our control members, be vocal in our support for them and, where necessary, fight to protect them and the skills they give us. The FBU is currently bringing people together from across the country in order to expose the scandalous attacks and lack of investment in our Controls. This is a positive step but it will also require us all to unite and send a clear message to belligerent politicians - an attack on one is an attack on all. Support our controls, support the FBU.

Tam McFarlane



An advertisement for switching to Direct Debit. It features a close-up photograph of a person's face wearing a fire helmet. Overlaid on the image is a dark grey box with the text "Don't let them silence you" in white. Below that is a white box with the text "Switch your membership to Direct Debit today" in black.