

The Fire Brigades Union



# **Dorset Fire Brigades Union**

**Response to Dorset Fire Authority consultation  
"Strengthening our Fire and Rescue Service"  
2014**





# Introduction

This document has been researched, developed and written by the local Fire Brigades Union and its Officials within Dorset Fire and Rescue Service. They have done this by attending meetings at local Fire Stations and seeking the views of the firefighters that work within the service. This document therefore represents the real voice of the professionals within the service, and the views contained within it must not only be listened to within that context, but also acted upon.

It is the firefighters and emergency fire control Staff in Dorset that make up the front line of our service. They serve the public of Dorset by responding to every type of emergency imaginable and display a level of commitment and professionalism that is recognised and relied upon by every community across the County.

It is firefighters and emergency fire control staff that the public turn to in times of desperate need. It is our emergency fire control staff that take the calls from people in life threatening situations and give them support, guidance and often life saving advice; all while mobilising and organising fire appliances and fire crews to the incident.

It is firefighters who crawl through the smoke, heat and flames to rescue people trapped in fires or who deal with the carnage of road collisions, chemical incidents or any of the other myriad of incidents that today's Fire and Rescue Service is required to attend. This runs in parallel with significant amount of risk reduction work carried out by our firefighters on a daily basis. In short, it is firefighters and fire control staff that **are** Dorset Fire and Rescue Service and they should be treated with respect.

However, the operational commitment and dedication of firefighters is in stark contrast to the political leadership of the Fire and Rescue Service who, in recent times have imposed unprecedented cuts to central and local funding. These political cuts have placed financial savings ahead of service delivery, operational effectiveness and safety.

It is a shocking, and disgraceful, truth that the purpose of this consultation is not based on enhancing emergency cover or improving community safety – rather it is about the survival of the Fire and Rescue Service itself.

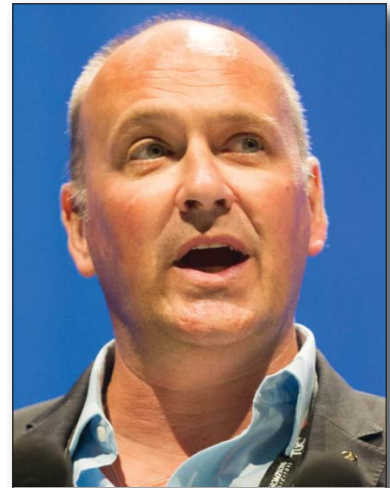
Dangerous cuts to central funding by Government have been compounded locally by council tax freezes, which further reduce local revenue, with resultant cuts impacting on frontline services. Such cuts have included the disgraceful decision to remove the dedicated Emergency Fire Control in Dorset – a decision which shows a complete disregard to the vital role of emergency fire control staff and which undermines the operational effectiveness of the service.

Funding cuts have now pushed the service to the brink of survival, with senior officers briefing that if a merger does not go through, the service is in threat of "**going bust**" – an indictment that should bring shame on politicians who have, for political reasons, deliberately starved a vital frontline emergency service of the basic funding necessary for its function.


This exposes a fundamental fault line that has run throughout the consultation process – how can a consultation be meaningful when the only alternative to the suggested proposal is openly described as "insolvency" or "going bust"?

Trying to achieve a pre determined outcome by holding a financial gun to the heads of those you are asking does not make for a meaningful consultation.

Against this background, the view of the FBU and our members is clear: We demand investment, not cuts to the service going forward. We will not allow the safety of the public, or our members, to be compromised in order to make cuts.



**Tam McFarlane**  
*Executive Council Member, South West FBU*



The cuts suffered by Dorset firefighters in recent years have already affected our service and created a huge reliance on the goodwill of firefighters. Our members are increasingly expected to work in their own time, and on low pay rates, in order to keep fire engines on the run and support community safety events. But enough is enough: no matter the outcome of the "consultation" – we demand a long term strategy aimed at protecting and enhancing emergency cover and community safety: all within a properly financed, locally accountable Fire and Rescue Service – no matter which name it bears.

The firefighters and crews of Dorset Fire Brigades Union have spoken. Their views are made plain within this document and, if consultation is genuine and meaningful, their professional viewpoint will be treated with the respect it demands.

**Tam McFarlane**  
**Executive Council Member**  
**South West FBU**

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# Dorset Brigade Committee

This document has been developed and written by the Fire Brigades Union in Dorset and represents our response to Dorset Fire and Rescue Service's consultation document entitled "**Strengthening our Fire and Rescue Service**" which opened on 21 July 2014.

The primary concerns of the FBU are;

- **The safety of the people of Dorset and surrounding areas;**
- **Ensuring the service delivers a swift, effective and professional emergency response whenever called upon;**
- **Ensuring the service develops and delivers an effective and professional community safety strategy;**
- **To provide a safe and competent workforce who are well trained, well equipped and provided with the proper pay and conditions appropriate to their role and employment.**

The purpose of the FBU is clear, to represent collectively the best interests of our members and ensure that the public is served and protected by a highly effective Fire and Rescue Service.

These are desperate times for Dorset Fire and Rescue Service. Politically driven cuts have created a financial crisis in our service so dangerous that the most senior officers in the service are warning of "**insolvency**".

The reaction to this situation has been for the service to wed itself to a proposal to merge our Brigade with Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service. The consultation process has been so weighted towards this proposal, openly touted as the "**only option**" by senior managers delivering the consultation, that the FBU regard the entire consultation process to be fundamentally flawed.

The only thing in its favour is that those who espouse a merger are at least trying to secure the short term viability of the Fire Service – in stark contrast to the politicians who are putting our entire future at threat.

However the FBU is putting a marker down: Politicians are responsible for introducing these cuts and they can also reverse them. We will not pay for their cuts with our jobs, our service and the safety of firefighters and the public; either now or in the future.

Within this document, the FBU in Dorset sets out the current situation faced by firefighters in our service and demands a real commitment towards a better future for all. Against a background of cuts and political intransigence it is only the goodwill and commitment of our firefighters that keeps Dorset Fire and Rescue Service running. Despite years of being let down and undervalued we have always gone the extra mile to deliver a Service to the public – But we will not be taken for granted.

It is time for Politicians to lay down a proper, safe and secure future for the Fire and Rescue Service. The professional firefighters that make up and deliver our service now demand reassurances for the future of our service: and it is time for the Politicians to deliver.

## Dorset FBU Brigade Committee



Karen Adams





David Gale



Scott Blandford

# Executive Summary

- 1) The options within this consultation are being proposed entirely as a result of the failure of politicians, at all levels, to finance Dorset Fire and Rescue Service to a level where it can function as an effective, safe and locally accountable emergency service.
- 2) The funding crisis has now resulted in a consultation which is clearly designed to achieve only one outcome: a combination of Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Services.
- 3) Recent polls and consultation forums have shown that the public do not support cuts in the frontline service and would support an increase in the level of fire precept in order to protect frontline service delivery.
- 4) There is no option being put forward to provide for the proper funding needed for the ongoing provision of Dorset Fire and Rescue Service. On this basis it is a flawed consultation.
- 5) The loss of meaningful democratic accountability is one of the central risks of a potential merger and it must be addressed properly, fully and effectively.
- 6) The public and firefighters of Dorset require assurances that any combination will not adversely affect emergency cover. Should the Fire Authority decide to pursue this option, assurances must be given that there will be no reduction in the number of fire stations, fire appliances or uniformed station based posts arising out of any proposed combination.
- 7) Staff require assurances that they will not be made to pay with their jobs and conditions for political failure. On that basis they require assurances that:
  - Terms and conditions of staff (Grey Book) including pension arrangements will be protected;
  - There will be no compulsory redundancies as a result of combination.
- 8) There is a lack of adequate staffing in Dorset Fire and Rescue Service due to funding cuts. There are significant establishment shortfalls in both the Wholetime and Retained Duty Systems.
- 9) There is an unnecessary reliance on firefighters within the Retained Duty System (RDS) to fill gaps created by significant staff shortfalls in the Wholetime Duty System.
- 10) Current policies have created a situation where staff sent to cover gaps in one Fire Station can have the knock on effect of taking fire appliances off the run at their home Fire Station.
- 11) An unacceptably high number of front line Fire Appliances are off the run on a regular basis. Between 1st January 2014 to 28th September 2014 the combined total of hours where appliances were off the run was **30,745**. If averaged across the Retained Duty System appliances, this equates to 40 days that each fire appliance is not available to serve their community in a 9 month period.
- 12) The delivery of proper, safe and resilient crewing arrangements for fire cover must be a priority no matter the outcome of the consultation. This will require investment and proper, ongoing funding for the future.
- 13) There is an over reliance on the goodwill of firefighters to fill gaps created by staff shortfalls by working longer hours and using their own time to provide cover for operational and community services.
- 14) Goodwill is increasingly becoming a one way street and there is a growing trend within the service to offer flat rate payment to firefighters who voluntarily give up their own time to provide additional services. This is outside of the nationally agreed Grey Book conditions
- 15) The lack of recruitment has created an ageing workforce which has been identified as a risk to the organisation. The majority of our workforce is aged between 40-54 and there are no wholetime firefighters between the ages of 17-24 and only 11 between 25-29.
- 16) Staff levels in Emergency Fire Control are dangerously low and are leaving the control severely under crewed. The levels of overtime required to maintain crewing are excessively high and are impacting on staff health and safety.

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- 17) Contrary to the press release from the Chief Fire Officer on 7th October 2014 the introduction of 5 apprentices will not address our ageing workforce concerns. The apprentices are supernumerary to the establishment and have no guarantee of a job on successful completion of the 2 year programme.
  - 18) The decision to close the Emergency Fire Control Room in Dorset and set up a Joint Command and Control Centre (JCCC) in Wiltshire has the potential to compromise operational effectiveness and the safety of the public and firefighters.
  - 19) The decision to close the Emergency Fire Control Room in Dorset has left staff in Fire Control feeling undervalued, under-appreciated and sold out by the service.
  - 20) Should a merger be agreed the FBU and the public will demand to be assured that lessons have been learned from previous mistakes in other areas and that proper, meaningful assurances are given for the future. Not least, we will expect employers and managers to engage properly and constructively with our elected representatives at local level and through agreed collective bargaining arrangements.
  - 21) Funding cuts are threatening not only emergency response, but also prevention and community safety work. The FBU believes cuts cost lives and ruin communities. The union wants long-term, strategic investment in the service, not cuts – and a fairer funding formula that better reflects the wider contribution made by the fire and rescue service to society.



# 1) The Financial Background – A Failure of Funding

The options within this consultation are being proposed entirely as a result of the failure of politicians, at all levels, to finance Dorset Fire and Rescue Service to a level where it can function as an effective, safe and locally accountable emergency service.

Our service has suffered unprecedented and dangerous cuts to central funding in the last decade.

Nationally, central funding to the Fire and Rescue Service has been cut by more than a fifth during this parliament and further cuts of 7.5% are planned for 2015-16, an unprecedented reduction. These cuts will ultimately cost lives, destroy homes and businesses, drive up insurance premiums and damage the environment.

However, central cuts are only one part of the story. Locally driven cuts to funding, compounded by council tax freezes, have further reduced local revenue and exacerbated the decisions of central Government.

Although the majority of the funding cuts have been driven by central Government, the Fire Authority must also take responsibility for the role they have played locally in this funding crisis. They must take responsibility for the decisions they have made, such as the decision in 2012 to reject an increase in Council Tax, which had been recommended by their professional advisors and supported by the Union, and instead accept a "freeze grant" from central Government. They made this decision despite being informed that the acceptance of the "freeze grant" would create a larger funding gap and deficit in future years.

Warnings regarding the unsustainable nature of council tax freeze grants have been made time and time again, on a cross party basis. The freeze grant is an offer made by Government to authorities who freeze their council tax and in 2012 was only available for a single year.

It was therefore not an appropriate mechanism to protect the long term financial position; a point made to the Authority in the build up to their decision and at the time of the meeting itself. At the 2012 budget meeting this point was made clear and in writing: ***"members were informed that the use of the freeze grant would create a larger funding gap in future years"*** (minutes of Dorset Fire Authority meeting 14 Feb 2012).



Despite this clear and unequivocal warning, and despite recommendations to the contrary, the Fire Authority chose this unsustainable route.

By making this decision the Fire Authority went against the advice of their own budget working group and the professional advice of the Chief Fire Officer and Fire Brigades Union.

The professional advice was explicit and clear: The Chief Fire Officer informed the Fire Authority, prior to their decision in 2012, that **"future savings would affect front line service provision and that this would likely affect wholetime stations with a consequential reduction in response standards and performance"** (minutes of Dorset Fire Authority meeting 14 Feb 2012).

The Fire Authority ignored this clear advice and instead, for purely political reasons, voted for a decision which would deliver **"cuts to services and not efficiency savings"** (minutes of Dorset Fire Authority meeting 14 Feb 2012).

The Authority **knew** their decision would impact on front line services, a reduction that would **"ultimately affect people's lives"**, (minutes of Dorset Fire Authority meeting 14 Feb 2012).

Such decisions clearly illustrate that the current lack of adequate funding to our service, and the frontline cuts which result, are not due to external forces outside of anybody's control: They are a deliberate consequence of decisions taken by politicians who put political ideology ahead of professional advice and cuts ahead of life saving emergency cover.

Dorset Fire and Rescue Service is a life saving emergency service which requires a budget sufficient to ensure we can provide effective and safe fire and emergency cover, as well as providing and building on our vital community safety work. This purpose has been forgotten in the drive for financial cuts year after year.

Instead of developing our service and community safety, principle managers have been expected to focus on budget cuts. In the words of our Chief Fire Officer – **"Every day I am going in and counting beans and then counting them in a different way. My focus should be on the frontline not the bottom line."** (Interview with Bournemouth Echo 2012).

This is not just a damning indictment on the failure of politicians to discharge their responsibilities; it is also unacceptable and dangerous.





## 2) Public Opinion and Perceptions of the Fire and Rescue Service

Firefighters rightly receive plaudits for the invaluable work we do. The public expects firefighters to respond in an emergency and deliver unparalleled assistance in the most dreadful circumstances imaginable. Public support for firefighters is exceptionally high. A YouGov survey commissioned by the FBU in 2010 found that more than nine out of ten believed the fire and rescue service was providing a good service, with only 1% describing it as "fairly bad". Two out of three thought the service was very good – a glowing tribute to the work firefighters do on a daily basis. Four out of five members of the public were satisfied with their local fire and rescue service, while only 2% were dissatisfied.

There was no mandate for cutting the service in 2010. Some 95% said they favoured maintaining the current level of staffing across the UK, with a third demanding more firefighters. Some 85% said they opposed plans to cut funding to the Fire and Rescue Service as a whole, with the same percentage opposed to local cuts in funding. Nine out of ten people said the Fire and Rescue Service was good value for money. An overwhelming majority of people (95%) said that rapid response to an emergency call is a priority for them as householders and for local businesses. The same percentage believe that attendance times should be a high priority for Fire and Rescue Services – exploding the myth that response times don't matter. A swift response with adequate resources remains crucial to providing a first-class service.

No politician can claim there is a mandate to put cuts ahead of frontline emergency services – there is not.

The results of this national pole are replicated in public consultation forums undertaken on behalf of the Authority within Dorset. During one of these when the public was asked if they would support an increase in precept levels to protect the frontline they answered **yes**:

***"The Authority has conducted a series of public consultation forums with local residents across Dorset. The outcome of these forums shows that there is substantial support for increasing the level of fire precept in order to protect frontline service delivery".*** (Dorset Fire Authority budget paper February 2013).

This same question is a glaring omission from the current consultation which, if it had been asked, would have given local politicians the ability to press the case for proper and adequate funding of Dorset Fire and Rescue Service without the need for a merger even arising. It is telling that it has not been included.

Funding cuts are threatening not only emergency response, but also prevention and enforcement work, and overall national resilience to a wide range of emergencies. The FBU believes cuts cost lives and ruin communities. The union wants long-term, strategic investment in the service, not cuts – and a fairer funding formula that better reflects the wider contribution made by the Fire and Rescue Service to society.

### 3) Ongoing Impact of the Financial Crisis on DFRS

Funding cuts are having a severe and ongoing impact on the services of Dorset Fire and Rescue Service and the working arrangements of the staff within it. The service is running dangerously low on establishment levels with an expectation, and over reliance, on the goodwill of firefighters to fill gaps created by deliberate under staffing. Firefighters are working longer hours and using their own time, on a voluntary basis, to provide cover for operational and community services.

The service has introduced new and different forms of working arrangements and altered policies and practices in an attempt to maintain services. The FBU has entered into negotiations locally and reached agreements regarding new ways of working in many different areas, but no amount of "flexibility" can fill a financial hole that keeps expanding.

There is an unnecessary reliance on firefighters within the Retained Duty System (RDS) to fill gaps created by significant staff shortfalls in the Wholetime Duty System. Current policies do not have adequate safeguards and have created a situation where staff who are being used to "plug gaps" in wholetime Fire Stations, are having the knock on effect of potentially taking fire appliances off the run at their home retained Fire Stations.

Dangerous situations such as this have at their root cause a single factor: a lack of adequate staffing caused by funding cuts.

#### Establishment Shortfalls

The last wholetime recruitment process within Dorset Fire and Rescue Service was in 2007.

Our current wholetime establishment is **274** however the reality is that we currently have **256**, thus carrying a shortfall of **18 vacancies**.

Our retained establishment is **334** full cover equivalents, excluding Dorchester which is a salary scheme. We have an establishment of **22** full time equivalents at Dorchester and currently carrying **3** vacancies. Excluding Dorchester we are currently carrying **57 full cover equivalent vacancies** including **7 Watch Manager vacancies**.

Overall the retained establishment reported to the Fire Authority Audit and Scrutiny was a shortfall of 57 full time equivalent firefighters out of an overall establishment figure of 365. A considerable amount of time and money has been invested into numerous recruitment campaigns including the employment of a part time RDS recruitment and engagement officer. Due to the demands of the job the role is no longer appealing to many and the expectation and commitment is off putting.

Our ageing workforce has been identified as a risk to the organisation. The majority of our workforce is aged between 40-54 and there are no wholetime firefighters between the ages of 17-24 and only 11 between 25-29.

In June 2013 members of the Fire Authority were advised that in the period 2012-17, 34 of the 47 wholetime duty system (WDS) staff eligible to retire held a role above firefighter. Such significant 'managerial' turnover will impact on DFRS leadership capability and has resulted in workforce planning being escalated to corporate risk status. A report presented to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee in November 2013 set out the age profile of our workforce. The profiles demonstrated that DFRS have an aging workforce with an increasing under-representation of staff aged under 30. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that we have not carried out any external recruitment since 2007. At the Fire Authority meeting in June 2014 the Fire Authority were advised that an aging workforce could result in high levels of sickness and injury. Workforce and succession planning has identified a further impact of an ageing workforce means a reduced talent pool to develop and nurture future leaders.

## The impact of "Mixed crewing" on Fire Cover

"Mixed crewing" is a form of work open to wholetime and retained firefighters and paid at an overtime rate of 1.5 for less than 24 hours notice and 1.3 for more than 24 hours notice. The latter is a rate of pay below the minimum level set out within the Grey Book national conditions of service.

Following the implementation of this policy, a lack of adequate safeguards has been identified which have created a dangerous impact on Fire Cover at Retained Fire Stations.

Currently RDS firefighters are volunteering to crew wholetime appliances at overtime rates of pay. However, by doing so this is depleting cover at their home Station. In some cases this is causing the retained appliance to go off the run. The business rules clearly state that overtime can only be worked on the proviso that reducing their cover does not result in their "home" retained appliance being taken off the run. However, the gartan system (which is the system used within DFRS in regard to the provision of RDS cover) works in 15 minute segments and is a "live" system.

This creates a flawed situation where individuals check the system for that moment in time, agree to work overtime based on adequate cover being in place at their "home" station and then, during the period when they are covering a wholetime shift, cover at the "home" station reduces for normal reasons, and the pump is then **taken off the run**.

The person who is covering the wholetime shift is committed to overtime and so the pressure is then put on others to maintain fire cover. The only safe solution to this dangerous anomaly is to ensure that wholetime shortfalls are filled using off duty wholetime firefighters and there would be no reduction in any fire cover and no subsequent additional cost implications.

## Cover at Retained Stations

RDS firefighters have local arrangements in place whereby they provide cover at another retained station for any given period of time. These duties are paid at a flat rate.

As illustrated below we regularly have an unacceptably high number of front line Fire Appliances off the run (i.e. unavailable to respond to emergency calls).

From 1st January 2014 to 28th September we had the following appliances off the run:

- Lyme Regis – 58 instances – 168 hours
- Charmouth – 176 instances – 319 hours 15 minutes
- Bridport 1st pump – 153 instances – 490 hours
- Bridport 2nd pump – 3 instances – 6 hours
- Beaminster – 190 instances – 310 hours 15 minutes
- Maiden Newton – 254 instances – 1598 hours 30 minutes
- Portland 1st pump – 19 instances – 53 hours
- Portland 2nd pump – 363 instances – 2040 hours 15 minutes
- Weymouth – 286 instances – 3391 hours 30 minutes
- Dorchester 1st pump – 19 instances 56 hours 30 minutes
- Dorchester 2nd pump – 11 instances 19 hours
- Sherborne 2nd pump – 150 instances 220 hours 45 minutes
- Sturminster Newton 1st pump – 23 instances 45 hours 30 minutes
- Sturminster Newton 2nd pump – 413 instances 3282 hours 15 minutes



- Gillingham – 35 instances – 111 hours 45 minutes
- Shaftesbury 1st pump – 494 instances – 3398 hours
- Shaftesbury 2nd pump – 47 instances – 135 hours 15 minutes
- Blandford 1st pump – 288 instances- 545 hours 30 minutes
- Blandford 2nd pump – 1 instance – 45 minutes
- Bere Regis – 312 instances – 1022 hours 15 minutes
- Wareham 1st pump – 52 instances – 135 hours
- Wareham 2nd pump – 448 instances – 5398 hours 15 minutes
- Swanage 1st pump – 303 instances – 1172 hours 30 minutes
- Swanage 2nd pump – 1 instance – 30 minutes
- Hamworthy – 250 instances – 1112 hours
- Poole – 340 instances – 801 hours 15 minutes
- Wimborne 1st pump – 11 instances – 14 hours 30 minutes
- Wimborne 2nd pump – 492 instances – 2200 hours 30 minutes
- Cranborne – 307 instances – 1420 hours 15 minutes
- Ferndown – 197 instances – 744 hours 45 minutes
- Verwood – 262 instances – 522 hours 30 minutes
- Christchurch – 7 instances – 9 hours

**Total = 30,745 hours 15 minutes**

*Figures supplied by Dorset Fire and Rescue Service*

This represents an unacceptable and dangerous situation which increases response times, undermines resilience, removes cover from other areas and puts intolerable pressure on other crews. It also creates a false sense of security and reality within communities – the big red doors remain steadfastly visible in the towns and villages of Dorset, but there are not enough firefighters available to crew the appliances behind the facade.

Delivering proper, safe and resilient crewing arrangements for fire cover must be a priority no matter the outcome of the consultation. This will require investment and proper, ongoing funding for the future.



## 4) Local Examples of Goodwill and Voluntary Working

Firefighters are proud of our jobs and the services we provide to our communities. We want to see a highly effective and efficient Fire and Rescue Service. This commitment often sees firefighters going the extra mile and giving up their own time to provide the public with effective and proper services.

However there is now real concern that the goodwill of firefighters is being abused in order to cover up gaps caused by a lack of funding. There is a growing trend within the service to only offer flat rate payment to firefighters who voluntarily give up their own time to provide additional services. This is outside of the nationally agreed Grey Book conditions and is an abuse of the goodwill of firefighters who are committed to making the service all that it can be. We require the Fire Authority to address the issue and adhere to their side of the contractual agreement.

There are numerous examples of events and activities which rely on the goodwill of firefighters to deliver and we list some below:

**Prevention activities** – A high proportion of prevention activities are crewed by firefighters volunteering whilst on duty as part of their normal shift pattern or off duty for payment at a flat rate of pay for the first 42 hours and then overtime for any additional hours.

**"SPARC"** – "Safer People and Responsible Communities" (SPARC), is a programme which uses the skills of Dorset Fire and Rescue Service staff and partners to support and motivate young people. These individuals are at risk of getting involved in anti-social behaviour, or experiencing difficulties in engaging with school or their peers because of bullying, truancy, or low self confidence. SPARC is an intensive five day programme within a disciplined and focused team environment.

**"SPARC plus"** is based on the SPARC model and aims to increase the skills and confidence of people who are new to the jobs market or currently out of work.

In addition to "SPARC and SPARC plus", we are also about to run a pilot for **"SPARC Families"**

There are two ways that firefighters staff these courses: The first is as part of their day job, where they will work a 42 hour week **plus** an additional 10 hours overtime per week. The additional hours are necessary as the course duration is normally 52 hours.

The second method is on a voluntary basis whilst they are off duty. This is done by both wholetime and retained firefighters who are paid at a flat rate for 42 hours and then overtime for any additional hours for SPARC and **flat rate** overtime for SPARC plus.

Since April 2014 we have run two SPARC courses at Redhill Park and Weymouth involving 5 wholetime instructors.

Since April 2014 we have run two SPARC "plus" courses at Weymouth and Springbourne involving 2 wholetime instructors and 3 retained duty system instructors.

In addition, and in a similar vein, the goodwill of firefighters also provides for the following:

**Firesetters** – a firesetter is a child or young person who is habitually setting fires, playing with fire or showing an unhealthy interest in fire. It is critical that firesetter behaviour is addressed as early as possible and the "Firesetters" programme is an initiative designed to do this. The firesetter intervention scheme is aimed at reducing the risk to the child and other members of the household by reducing the amount of times firesetter behaviour occurs and achieving a "fire safe" person and environment. We currently have 33 advisors, who are specially trained to run these courses, 25 of which are active and are a mix of Green and Grey book staff. Training is a four day course run by an external company plus one day local familiarisation training and two days safeguarding training with the local authority. In addition, one day per year CPD training is carried out jointly by Fire and Rescue Services in the South West. All advisors are paid at a firefighter flat rate of pay. Each advisor will take 2 cases per year to maintain competency. During 2013-2014 DFRS had 46 firesetter cases totalling 93 visits and each one attended by two advisors.

**Cadets** – The Fire Cadets Programme aims to support the development of young people both personally and socially while promoting self-discipline, team work and citizenship. In 2014 we have run one course in Wareham consisting of 1 night for 20 weeks involving 5 instructors who are paid at a flat rate of pay.

**Fire Bikes Heath Patrol** – The fire bikes heath patrol is part of our joint partnership working with operational heathland protecting heathland in times of greatest risk. We are part of a collaborative approach sharing responsibility in times of financial hardship. During the summer season firefighters patrol the heath on fire bikes. This is paid at an overtime rate. Only 34 hours were worked in May and June due to our current industrial action overtime ban.

**Community Station Open days** – Retained and wholtime stations organise open days for their communities on a voluntary basis. This is paid at an overtime rate of pay.

## Miscellaneous

**Overtime** – A compromise agreement was negotiated with the Union for mixed crewing to pay a rate of 1.5 with less than 24 hours notice and 1.3 with more than 24 hours notice.

**Role play for command assessments** – Green and Grey book staff volunteer to role play for command assessments for all levels of command. This is paid at a flat rate of pay.

**Station Management meetings** – Every wholtime station has a quarterly station management team meeting which is paid at an overtime rate of pay for all off duty staff.

**Technical rescue supervisors** – all supervisors are required to attend one day a year update training which is paid at an overtime rate of pay.

All of the examples above illustrate the extraordinary amount of voluntary goodwill given by firefighters in the delivery of the service. However, all of this is being carried out against a background of funding cuts and an increasing over reliance, even expectation, that firefighters will continue to be willing and able to give of their own time in order to deliver services and provide cover.

There is increasing concern amongst firefighters that goodwill is a one way street which is not being reciprocated by the Authority.

Firefighters are proud of the job we do but we will not be used as a tool to deliver cuts or cover up their impact. We have the right to expect high standards of pay and good conditions which reflect the nature of the work we do. We have the right to expect our employers and managers to engage properly and constructively with our elected representatives at local level and through agreed collective bargaining arrangements.

Firefighters and the Fire Brigades Union require that these points are addressed properly and as a matter of urgency.



## 5) Emergency Fire Control

Emergency fire control staff are highly trained, skilled members of the Fire and Rescue Service who perform a vital task in ensuring the safety of the public and operational firefighters before, during and after emergency incidents. In addition they perform an enormous variety of other tasks linked to community safety, administration and the day to day work of the service which is vital to the success of Dorset Fire and Rescue Service.

In recent years the fiasco that was the regional fire control project seemed to put down a marker that the role of an Emergency Fire Control operator was expendable and since that point our members undertaking this role have apparently been seen as an "easy option" for cuts.

At present time, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Services maintain an Emergency Fire Control Room each. However, at the Dorset Fire and Rescue Authority meeting of 5th December 2013 the Chief Fire Officer presented a paper entitled "Fire Control" with a recommendation to close Dorset Fire Control and set up a Joint Command and Control Centre (JCCC) in Wiltshire.



Despite this being a subject of the utmost importance for the working lives of the Fire Control Members in Dorset and a vital area of operational response for all firefighters within the service, the paper was subjected to a process of confidentiality which deprived the people of Dorset and the staff of Dorset Fire and Rescue Service the ability to have any informed input into the decision making process of either the service or the Fire Authority.

The FBU has spoken at length to our members and consulted with our Officials and representatives of all the staff directly affected by this proposal. It is a near universally held view that the staff in Fire Control feel undervalued, under-appreciated and now sold out by the service. Our Fire Control operators are a vital part of the Dorset Fire and Rescue team that has served the people of Dorset year in and year out, serving them 24/7 and ensuring that they are provided with an effective, life saving emergency service.

It is the view of the FBU that the paper was not written with a view to exploring options in order to assist in informed decision making. It was written with the clear purpose of bringing about the closure of Dorset Fire Control with the subsequent risk to the jobs of everyone serving within it.

The paper fails to mention the fact that Dorset has a control room that is perfectly adequate to deliver the required JCCC crewing model; it skates over the fact that we currently have a larger substantive establishment of fire control staff who are already competent and experienced with a mobilising system largely similar to that which is going to be employed by the Network Fire Control Services Project (NFCSP); it does not recognise that Dorset consistently out performs all other partners of the NFCSP in our key performance indicators for call answering and mobilising; it does not recognise the risk associated with not being able to crew a JCCC in Wiltshire due to the severe disadvantage the staff in Dorset face regarding a relocation of facility; there is no consideration given to the potential future location of any combined FRS headquarters and the subsequent isolation that may face the facility.

On the face of it, and if a JCCC was to actually go ahead, all of the facts seem to indicate that Poundbury would be a suitable, if not a better location for the JCCC.

It is the view of the FBU in Dorset that our Fire Control operators are being made to pay for a political objective with their jobs and the public of Dorset are being forced to see the closure of their emergency fire control facility in the name of austerity.

## **Merged Control Crewing**

The Fire Brigades Union believe it is imperative that the crewing for the merged Emergency Fire Control, is based on the various risk and service requirement analysis within each service, and should be a reflection of the full current crewing of both Dorset and Wiltshire Controls.

## **Retention – Redeployment – Relocation Options**

Against the background of the planned closure of the Emergency Fire Control in Dorset the FBU and Fire Authority have begun negotiations regarding retention, redeployment and relocation options for affected staff. We look for a swift, positive and agreed outcome to this process.



## 6) Local Accountability and Democracy

Dorset Fire and Rescue Service should be publicly-owned and democratically accountable to local communities.

The public value their Fire and Rescue Service and they have the right to demand genuine local accountability of the politicians charged with running it.

At present, Dorset Fire Authority is comprised of 15 councillors from Dorset County Council, Bournemouth Borough Council and the Borough of Poole who combined in April 1997 to form the Dorset Fire Authority. These members have been assigned by their respective parties in proportion to the overall political composition of the Fire Authority. This is an indirect democratic form of governance, but it does allow for some local accountability.

It is of great concern that, if a combination with Wiltshire FRS goes ahead, the size and spread of the new Fire Authority would be on such a scale as to render elective democracy too big for any meaningful, organic link to exist between the electors and the elected.

The loss of effective local democratic accountability between the Fire Service and the communities it serves is one of the central risks of a potential merger and it must be addressed properly, fully and effectively.

The FBU has experience regarding the democratic deficit and loss of local accountability which can result as a consequence of merger.

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Services combined in April 2007 creating a Fire Authority of 25 councillors covering the largest non-metropolitan Fire and Rescue Service in the UK.

In July 2013 a package of proposed cuts including job losses and downgrading of local Fire Stations was put to public consultation by the Authority.

The consultation process engaged the public in local communities with overwhelming opposition to the cuts being made via representations to local councillors and local councils etc.

At the subsequent decision making meeting of the Fire Authority, the democratic deficit created by the size and spread of the Authority became the defining impression for members of the public and the firefighters present.

This was demonstrated throughout a meeting where councillors representing one area, for example Plymouth, spoke and voted against cuts to their local Fire Cover whilst councillors in, not just another area but also **another County**, voted for those cuts. The process was then reversed with councillors representing areas such as Taunton in Somerset seeing cuts voted through against their wishes by councillors in Devon. Such conduct carried on throughout the meeting with cuts in each area being voted through by narrow majorities carried by councillors totally distanced from these areas.

The impact on the public and firefighters attending the meeting was profound, which was represented in the subsequent reporting of an "undemocratic" and "shambolic" process by sections of the media.

If a merger is to go ahead between Dorset and Wiltshire safeguards must be implemented to avoid a similar fiasco.

Any Fire Authority which oversees the strategic running of a potential Fire Service covering Dorset and Wiltshire must also ensure that powers are devolved to representatives, within the Authority, representing local areas. These powers must be "real" in order to reassure communities that the service remains democratically accountable and that consultation is meaningful.

## 7) Combination: A False Economy? – Lessons from other Areas

Those who advocate a combination of Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Services do so on the basis that it would achieve financial savings by merging certain services and that these savings could then be used to protect front-line services.

However the FBU has experienced a previous combination between two Fire and Rescue Services that, although had the same aim, actually had what the Union believes to be the opposite outcome.

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (DSFRS) is a result of the combination of the two separate Fire Services (in Devon and Somerset) which took place in April 2007.

This particular combined service has 84 Fire Stations consisting of 121 Fire Appliances, which are crewed by Wholetime, Retained Duty System and Volunteer Fire-fighters.

DSFRS also has an Urban Search and Rescue Service (U.S.A.R) station and a single Emergency Fire Control Room, both of which are based at the Head Quarters. The single Control Room has been operating since 1st April 2012 following the combination of the previous Devon and Somerset control rooms.

The rationale for combination in Devon and Somerset was identical to that which is proposed for Dorset and Wiltshire, i.e. to achieve financial savings by merging certain services in order to protect the front-line service. However, since the combination there have been a series of cuts to the operational frontline of the service. These cuts include a total, so far, of around 200 frontline, full-time Firefighter posts.

The cuts in operational frontline posts since combination are in stark contrast to an increase in the non operational establishment (to date of over 67 posts).

In addition, during a study last year the FBU found that the cost of the service had increased to the public, whilst at the same time seeing a decrease in standards of fire cover.



In a consultation response to a 2013 draft plan (**Devon & Somerset FBU Response to Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Draft Plan for 2013/14 to 2014/15**), the Devon & Somerset FBU were able to show that since combination there had been increased spending on the following areas, whilst at the same time massive cuts to the frontline operational service were being proposed:

**Increased spending since combination:**

- Non Uniform: £4,023,000
- Equipment and furniture by £1,080,000
- Communications by £756,000
- Travel and Subsistence by £683,000
- External Consultants/Partners by £432,000

**Whilst, during the same period there had been decreased spending on;**

- Wholetime firefighters by £611,000
- Control Operators by £305,000

This clearly shows a contradiction to the stated aims of the combination within Devon and Somerset. The public and staff saw a continual series of cuts to the front-line of the service and the combination of two Emergency Fire Control centres into a single centre with less Emergency Control Operators available.

In the consultation response, the local FBU stated that, for frontline firefighters, it was hard to come to any other conclusion that, since combination, the "new" DSFRS has had a clear strategy to cut the operational frontline Fire and Rescue Service and has increased and built the non operational side of the service in order to achieve this. This is a clear contradiction to the "Combination Business Case", which stated combination would "provide an opportunity to rationalise Support Services". This has not happened in any meaningful way. Instead the public and the staff has seen a continual series of cuts to the frontline of the service and the "combination" of the previous two Emergency Fire Control rooms into a single centre with less Emergency Fire Control Operators available.

Further lessons can also be learned from the combination of Devon and Somerset. A common theme running throughout the substantial series of meetings we have held with our FBU colleagues in the Brigade is the deep discontent amongst staff that combination has simply led to a "**race to the bottom**" in regard to conditions of service, policies, watch strengths, payments, crewing arrangements etc.

Local Officials and members have time and again raised their concern that detrimental change to their working arrangements is simply imposed from the distant centre under the threat of discipline. It is clear that staff feel that this combination has simply been a cost cutting and casualisation exercise at the expense, primarily, of the operational front line.

This should serve as a stark and sobering warning to everyone involved in this process of consultation within Dorset and Wiltshire. Combination is not a panacea or "quick fix". To the contrary, without proper controls, direction and engagement, it can simply result in centralised empire building, loss of identity and leave staff and the public feeling disenfranchised from the service. This can then lead to the opposite impact than was intended – namely cuts to the frontline of the service proposed from a distant centre.

If the Authority do propose to move forward with a combination the FBU and the public will demand to be assured that lessons have been learned from previous mistakes in other areas and that proper, meaningful assurances are given for the future. Not least, we will expect employers and managers to engage properly and constructively with our elected representatives at local level and through agreed collective bargaining arrangements.



## 8) Our Vision for Dorset Fire and Rescue Service

The FBU has a powerful, positive vision for the Fire and Rescue Service. Firefighters are proud of our jobs and the services we provide to our communities. We want to see a highly effective and efficient Fire and Rescue Service.

The FBU wants a Fire and Rescue Service that:

- Professionally assesses the full range of risks facing communities and plans to address these by integrating the various measures of prevention, protection and intervention
- Rapidly responds to a wide range of emergencies facing communities
- Provides a first-class service to the communities we serve
- Is publicly-owned
- Is democratically-controlled, democratically-run and accountable to communities
- Receives sustained investment, not cuts
- Is resourced to manage a wide range of risks, rescues and interventions
- Has consistent, universal and professional standards at its core
- Trains and prepares a highly skilled and professional workforce.

The public have the right to know that their Fire and Rescue Service is planning professionally for the various risks faced by the community. Firefighters have the right to know that the service is planning adequately for incidents rather than deliberately under-resourcing them.

Firefighters are trusted professionals, enthusiastic advocates for our Fire and Rescue service and absolutely committed to serving our communities. Firefighters are confident we have the skills and experience to revitalise our service. Give us the tools and let us get on with doing the job.



## 9) FBU Position Statement

Central Government grant cuts combined with locally decided council tax freezes have created a politically driven budget crisis within Dorset Fire and Rescue Service. This crisis has now resulted in a consultation which is clearly designed to achieve only one outcome: a combination of Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Services.

There is no option being put forward to provide for the proper funding needed for the ongoing provision of Dorset Fire and Rescue Service. On this basis it is a flawed consultation.

What the public and the firefighters of Dorset want is a properly funded, effective and safe Fire and Rescue Service, which is locally accountable. If the combination is to go ahead it must be on this basis.

The public and firefighters of Dorset require assurances that the combination will not adversely affect fire cover, i.e:

- ***There will be no reduction in the number of fire stations, fire appliances or uniformed station based posts arising out of any proposed combination;***

In addition, staff require assurances that they are not being made to pay with their jobs and conditions for political failure. On that basis they require assurances that:

- ***Terms and conditions of staff (Grey Book) including pension arrangements would be protected;***
- ***There will be no compulsory redundancies as a result of combination.***

The current funding crisis in Dorset Fire and Rescue Service has put enormous pressure on staff who have to cover shortfalls which cannot be safely left uncovered. If politicians now expect firefighters to support a combination on the basis of "more of the same" then they can think again.

Should a merger be agreed the FBU and the public will demand to be assured that lessons have been learned from previous mistakes in other areas and that proper, meaningful assurances are given for the future. Not least, ***we will expect employers and managers to engage properly and constructively with our elected representatives at local level and through agreed collective bargaining arrangements.***

Whatever the decision of the Fire Authority, Dorset firefighters demand an appropriate, consistent and long term mechanism of funding our service which provides effective and safe fire and emergency cover, as well as providing and building on our vital community safety work

On behalf of our members, the firefighters and control staff of Dorset, **we will not pay for cuts with our jobs, our service and the safety of firefighters and the public.**





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