

THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

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FIRE CREWS GIVE MASSIVE THUMBS DOWN TO GOVERNMENT 999 EMERGENCY FIRE CONTROL CLOSURE PLANS

Frontline fire crews say they have little confidence in the Government's ability to create a new 999 call system which works well and say the plans should be halted. They say the £1 billion the Government is spending on the system would be better spent on more frontline personnel, training and equipment.

Government plans to close all 46 emergency fire control rooms in England and replace with just 8 regional centres outside of London which will retain its brigade control room. There are similar plans in Scotland with proposals to shift from 8 brigade controls down to either 3 or one centre for the whole country.

The cost of the Project, known as FireControl is put at £1 billion by Government, although the Fire Brigades Union has always believed that is a serious under-estimate.

Emergency fire control rooms are the command and control centres at the heart of fire brigades. They handle all 999 calls from the public, send appliances to every type of emergency incident, assist crews at incidents and manage each fire brigade's emergency response resources.

In a nation-wide poll of FBU members conducted by YouGov, 95% of firefighters polled said the proposed regional centre would damage the service's ability to respond to incidents. 90% said it would also hit the safety of firefighters.

In 'marks out of ten' for the level of confidence they had in the Government's ability to build a new region-wide system that would work well, fire crews polled gave them an average score of 0.74 (less than one) out of ten. 69% of those polled gave them a mark of zero out of ten.

96% of those polled say the project should not go ahead.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "Fire crews have almost no confidence in the Government's ability to deliver this new system and think it should be scrapped. This project is being forced down the throat of local fire services by a central government which thinks it knows what's best for local services.

"We see the mess Government is making of other major IT projects like tax credits and the NHS system and we don't want to see that happening in the fire service. These plans are already chaotic, years behind schedule and running over-budget.

"Frontline crews want to see the £1 billion being wasted on this project being invested in more frontline fire services, better equipment and training. We fear the spiralling costs of this project will lead to cuts in frontline services and a worse service to the public.

"There must be a proper independent assessment of this entire project before it goes any further. The government must listen and think again."

YouGov interviewed 1,876 FBU members online across the UK between 22nd March and 3rd April 2007. Data are unweighted.

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