



Phil Coates
Executive Council Member, Region 6
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27th June 2017

Dear Sir/Madam

I write to you regarding the proposed takeover of the Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service by the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Proposals have been sent out for public consultation with a six week consultation period. This seems to be getting rushed through and should be put on hold, whilst serious questions are being asked about Fire and Rescue services funding following the serious incidents in recent weeks.

Firefighters provide a humanitarian service, they are not agents of the state nor are they law enforcers. Firefighters play a neutral role in our communities.

PCCs are unlikely to have any experience in management of the fire and rescue service. They were elected with the lowest turnout in British peacetime history, an average of 15.1%.

It represents a threat to the terms and conditions of firefighters. It could potentially take them out of agreed rates of pay and conditions of service and open the door to privatisation of the service.

The FBU completely oppose these plans. There are more democratic and devolved models of governance on the table.

Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue are currently in negotiation with local union officials regarding shift change that is doomed to failure due to a lack of firefighters in the system that they are proposing.

The system that is being proposed will mean Fire appliances in Northamptonshire will be crewed for almost all of the year with only four firefighters. This is wholly inadequate and will leave members of the public and firefighters at greater risk of injury and death.

Following the Grenfell Tower incident it is imperative that Firefighters are properly resourced and the FBU do not believe that will be the case through a PCC.

Firefighters enjoy the highest levels of public trust, satisfaction and confidence in the UK with the skills and expertise communities know they can rely on. Their role as independent and impartial life-savers enables them to reach all communities, in difficult political and social circumstances.

The public's view of the police, and reception to them, is often quite different. Association with the police through shared governance or service mergers could damage the reputation firefighters have built up in neighbourhoods over decades, which they rely upon in order to have access to people's homes for vital fire prevention and rescue work.

PCCs have not proven to be particularly efficient to date with 40% of PCCs spending more than the police authorities they replaced.

Bringing PCCs into fire and rescue services is a smokescreen for the government's cost-cutting agenda that will lead to further outsourcing and privatisation within our emergency services. **PCC lack the expertise to govern fire services**

PCCs do not bring any skills or expertise to the fire and rescue service. Some PCCs already have an unfortunate record for ill-judged interference in operational matters as highlighted by the Police Federation and Lord Stevens, the former head of the Metropolitan Police Service.

Police officers and firefighters are subject to separate procedures for safe systems of work and different arrangements for pay and conditions. The involvement of PCCs will disrupt industrial relations. The existing employment relations are fit for purpose; they can be improved through negotiations.

The different remits of the police and fire service have also presented practical challenges to integrating back office support functions. In Derbyshire, the joint Police and Fire HQ venture has encountered serious problems sharing IT infrastructure due to the security level requirements of the police service which do not apply to the fire and rescue service. Derbyshire PCC, Alan Charles, notes that this restricted how far IT systems can be shared and thus the potential for back office savings. This is also happening in Lincolnshire. This is why many fire authorities favour collaboration with local government bodies with whom there is greater compatibility and scope for efficiency savings to be made.

I urge you to examine the consultation and ask questions for the people of Northamptonshire on this poorly thought out plan.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phil Coates', with a stylized, cursive script.

Phil Coates

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