

Milly Southworth

From: Torpoint Town Council <admin@torpointtowncouncil.gov.uk>
Sent: 21 September 2022 09:37
To: 'Milly Southworth'
Subject: FW: Cornwall Fire Control could be lost!

Kind regards,

Danielle

Danielle Argrave

Torpoint Town Council Support Officer

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From: John Rickard <j-rickard@outlook.com>
Sent: 20 September 2022 12:39
To: admin@torpointtowncouncil.gov.uk
Subject: Cornwall Fire Control could be lost!

Mrs Milly Southworth
Cornwall Council

By email: admin@torpointtowncouncil.gov.uk

Tuesday, 20 September 2022

Dear Mrs Milly Southworth,

I am writing to you as one of the Critical Control Centre team from Cornwall Fire and Rescue, answering the public's emergency calls when they are at their most vulnerable.

Unfortunately, I write to you with a tear in my eye. At a time where recent proposals being tabled by the Fire Service Senior Management have caused huge upset and emotional strain. A proposal which I believe is likely to put lives at risk!

In July 2022 my manager was emailed to inform him of a review into efficiencies that had already started! Subsequently a 999-call taker vacancy would not be being filled, after an employee of 37 years had retired. This gap was already increasing stress and pressure on us, trying to cover rota.

The email said, "Due to delays in the national Emergency Services Network (ESN) project and rising infrastructure and operating costs, we [Cornwall Fire and Rescue] will need to review the most effective way to deliver an efficient Critical Control function for Cornwall".

On 14th September 2022, myself and 18 members of Critical Control were invited to a meeting, there was no published agenda, and the team went in blind. Senior Managers dropped the news that within the next few weeks a proposal will be submitted to Cornwall Council to close the Critical Control Centre. Closing within 6 months and moving the function outside of the County.

I was physically shocked, I sat beside my colleagues of many years shaking and on the verge of bursting into tears. Some of my friends/colleagues walked out of the room and couldn't return to work straight away. We handle life and death calls on a daily basis, resilience is something we pride ourselves on but this meeting crushed everyone

I have lived in Cornwall since birth, I am a Special Constable of 13 years having worked all over the county and I am passionate about supporting my community by being a local voice when someone calls 999. At the meeting we were told that money needed to be saved in the Critical Control budget, all other options had been looked at and closing the Control Room was the "only viable option". In a Cornwall Live article dated 15th September, Chief Fire Officer Billing was reported as saying, "one option the service is exploring". Which is not what was announced to us.

When you ring 999 and your house is on fire, or you're trapped in your car after a road traffic collision, would you rather not speak to someone who, through local knowledge and experience, can picture exactly where you are and send the best appropriate resource? Instead of someone hundreds of miles away, working only from a map and hoping they know where you are.

When Cornwall's population swells in the summer months, our questioning of callers with local knowledge to ask specific things, is often the only way to get an accurate location and get the quickest resource to that person in their time of crisis. Regularly we use our professional judgement to adapt the Fire Service response to incidents because we know there are tight lanes, or recent weather will result in the ground being softer. If I just send fire engines the computer tells me to, I have no doubt there would be delays in the people of Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly, parts of Devon and North Yorkshire getting appropriate help!

Between Sept 2021 and Aug 2022, we answered 59,173 phone calls. We answered 260 emergency calls for our partnership service in North Yorkshire. In the year 2020/2021, 97% of our emergency calls were answered within 10 seconds, with an average being 3.4 seconds. On average a resource was mobilised to an incident in under 1 minute 40 seconds. All of this whilst having to adapt to dealing with a global pandemic; including working distanced from each other, consuming multiple new policies to keep our crews and public safe and ultimately keeping us safe too.

The proposal to move the 999 functions outside of the County I feel is a dangerous one and it will put you and I at great risk!

The FiReControl Project to move 999 functions out of our Control Room failed not too many years ago. This proposal sounds very similar!

A report commissioned by the House of Commons on the failure of the FiReControl project remarks "The Department and Treasury committed to the project in 2004, but did so on the basis of very broad brush and unrealistic estimates of costs of £120 million and an anticipated overall net saving of £86 million. These estimates did not include the costs of meeting local and regional implementation, or the costs of installing equipment, and overestimated the savings that could be achieved locally. It was not until 2007 that the

Department carried out its first comprehensive assessment of costs and savings, which estimated the project would cost £340 million, and in fact involved additional expenditure of £50 million.”

The Critical Control Centre provides additional services to the public. We monitor 175 public realm CCTV cameras, create evidential packages of footage for the police and answer the Highways out-of-hours emergency line for Cornwall Council. When asked, at our meeting, if these could be extended or more income generating activities introduced, so we could keep our jobs, it was discounted immediately. None of the senior managers could provide facts and figures to support this, we have been told they will be provided but to date nothing has come forward. So, I feel this proposal will end in the same way as FiReControl and end up costing the tax paying community a lot of money.

The Fire Brigade Union published a paper in 2017 called Losing Control. It states “Ad hoc arrangements for stand-alone controls, joint and shared controls are not robust enough to tackle the problems facing control staff in the period ahead. Outsourcing/privatisation would be a disastrous development, putting the lives of the public and firefighters at risk.”

We have been told this proposal will be taken to the Cornwall Council Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 6th October 2022, giving less than 3 weeks for other ideas from us.

My colleagues and I welcome your support with our campaign to save Critical Control.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and I hope I have cemented in your mind, that the Cornwall Critical Control Centre is a function which cannot and should not be handled outside Cornwall.

Yours,

John Rickard
A worried Critical Control Centre Firefighter

<https://chnng.it/zRWmwPvv>