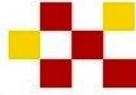


Fire and Rescue Service

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Disappointed by Control Collaboration End

15/06/2023

Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service and its Fire Authority councillors have been left surprised and concerned after being given notice that Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is withdrawing from its highly successful Combined Control collaboration at the end of 2024.

The Combined Control operates from Cambridgeshire's headquarters in Huntingdon and was the first merger of fire control centres in the country. With 12 years of successful joint working, it has saved the public purse £12million over that time and delivered an effective and efficient service to communities in both counties, managing 999 calls and mobilising fire engines, specialist vehicles and officers to incidents.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority Chair, Councillor Edna Murphy said: "We were informed last Friday by Suffolk's chief fire officer that they were withdrawing from our successful and nationally recognised partnership, which has helped keep people safe and also saved taxpayers £12million since 2011.

"We had no notice of Suffolk's intentions and would have preferred to discuss the way forward together. However, they have made their decision and now we must look to secure the best possible outcome for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough residents. We will continue with the implementation of our new control system and will try to minimise the impact of the extra costs on service provision. I hope we may yet succeed in restoring what has been an effective partnership and so we remain open to further cooperation."

Chief Fire officer for Cambridgeshire Chris Strickland was surprised by the announcement. He added: "There had been no talk of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service pulling out of the collaboration until last Friday, so it has all come as a complete surprise. There have been some delays implementing the new control system, mainly due to the Covid pandemic, current economic climate and some internal structure changes within the supplier's organisation, however things are now progressing well and we hope to have the system live in early 2024. We met with Suffolk's chief fire officer and others from their leadership team three weeks ago and agreed our position, deciding that we would meet again in July to review progress. So the news last Friday came out of the blue."

Chris also spoke of the concerns he has about the additional cost the Service will now face. He said: "The Control collaboration saves us at least £500k a year. We are a lean and efficient organisation and this is not an insignificant amount of money that will now need to be found year on year. It is too early to say how we will find this additional money, but we will review our financial business continuity plans and see how this can be funded."

He concluded: "The communities of Cambridgeshire and Suffolk remain our highest priority and so we will continue to work towards implementing the best possible mobilising system for both authorities as soon as we can. I have received the personal assurance of Suffolk's chief fire officer that he shares the same aim and so I am confident that people in both counties will continue to receive an effective and professional service when they need to ring 999 in an emergency."

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