

PRESS RELEASE

Keep Andrew Turner for the Island **Andrew Turner - Conservative Candidate for the Isle of Wight**

20th April 2005

Save the Island's Fire Service

Andrew Turner, currently seeking re-election as the Island's MP, has pledged that Conservatives will protect the local Fire Control Room and save the Island's Fire & Rescue service from abolition. Under plans from John Prescott, fire authorities will be restructured to provide a regional call centre, and local fire control rooms will be shut down. Under these proposals telephone calls would be answered by operators hundreds of miles away who have no knowledge of the Island. The Government has admitted that restructuring would cost £72 million – taking away resources from frontline protection. The Island's Fire Service is particularly at risk after a series of damaging reports which showed that it was the worst in the country at modernizing the service.

Andrew Turner said

“John Prescott wants to move ahead with expensive plans to restructure fire authorities at a regional level. This will mean the local Fire Control Room in Newport will be shut down. Decisions on staffing and local fire stations would be made at a regional level, allowing unaccountable bureaucrats to shut down Island fire stations, without a clear understanding of the unique challenges that our fire service faces.

“The Fire Brigades Union have warned that a regional structure will put lives at risk, since 999 operators in the South East region would cover over 8 million people and nearly 7,500 square miles. Public safety could also be compromised by placing ‘all the eggs in one basket’. If the regional call centre is forced offline by a disaster or attack, the whole emergency response would go down across a massive geographical area.

“It is official Conservative policy to halt the regionalization of fire services, and to ensure that fire and rescue authorities remain accountable to local people, not an unelected regional quango. We believe it should be up to local fire and rescue authorities to decide how best to protect the public. In many cases, including on the Island, it will make sense for emergency services to work together to improve operational efficiency – this is entirely different from forcing them to adopt a regional structure.

“Labour and the Liberal Democrats support the regionalization agenda – so the only way to be sure that we keep the Island’s fire service is to vote for a Conservative government on May 6th.”

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