Coastguard Modernisation

Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative) Click here to see Sarah Live

Twenty-five staff are employed at the Brixham maritime co-ordination rescue centre. I pay tribute to their dedication. Can the Secretary of State reassure those staff that they will be treated fairly when applying for jobs either at Falmouth or at the maritime operations centre? That is a real concern and will be essential to retaining local knowledge. I am concerned at the suggestion that those staff will not have an opportunity to contribute to the further consultation, because neither I nor anyone else in south Devon can understand how safety can be preserved with the closure of that maritime operations centre.

Philip Hammond (Secretary of State, Transport; Runnymede and Weybridge, Conservative)

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the measured way in which she makes her point. First, her constituents, like anybody else, will of course be able to respond to the consultation, but the consultation itself is limited to the issues that represent changes from the previous consultation. The coastguards employed at Brixham are civil servants. They will be entitled to be considered for deployment elsewhere in the civil service. Wherever possible—a€"and where they are willing—a€"we will look specifically to secure their knowledge and experience by redeploying them to other stations that will remain open. This process will take place over a number of years; it is not going to happen overnight. If at the end of that process there are people remaining who cannot be accommodated elsewhere in the service, they will be offered voluntary redundancy terms. We hope that it will not be necessary to make compulsory redundancies, and any that are made will be made only as a last resort.

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