

## **Calls mount for STFC changes : Research Fortnight : Feb 18.**

MPs are calling for the Science and Technology Facilities Council to restructure its decision-making procedures and even to replace senior staff members due to its handling of the 2007 comprehensive spending review settlement.

Peter Soulsby, the Labour MP for Leicester South, was planning to table an early day motion in the House of Commons on 18 February calling for change to the “structure and leadership of the STFC”. His constituency is home to the University of Leicester’s physics department, considered to be under significant threat from the cuts.

Soulsby is concerned that the research community has lost confidence in the council’s management after it failed to consult physicists before making dramatic budget cuts. He claims to have wide support for his motion in the House of Commons after the issue was debated in Westminster Hall on 15 January.

“I think that, in the short term, the only thing that will restore the community’s confidence is a change both in the attitudes of the STFC and to the people who are heading it up.”

The Royal Astronomical Society suggested on 15 February that the council should install a consultative body below the level of the Particle Physics, Astronomy and Nuclear Physics Science Committee, the body which advises the STFC council on its priorities. Soulsby told Research Day that he thought this was an advisable option.

“It’s a very sensible suggestion,” he said. “It may be what’s needed to engage the community in the sort of open dialogue that is necessary.” However, Soulsby insists that he does not presume to suggest which figures should be removed from within the council, stating only that a reshuffle is needed among those who “head up” the organisation.

Members of the Particle Physicists Action Group, set up in response to the settlement, are also putting pressure on STFC leaders. They sent a letter to Keith Mason, the council’s chief executive, Peter Warry, its chairman, and Peter Knight, chair of the STFC science board. In the letter, they call on the three to work with the government and in open communication with scientists to resolve the situation.

“A positive response from STFC is required to restore confidence in the processes involved in the public funding of fundamental science in the UK and to begin to repair the damage that has undoubtedly been done to our international reputation,” the letter reads.