

THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

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FIRE AUTHORITY SHOULD LOOK AT GENUINE EFFICIENCY SAVINGS AND NOT KNEEJERK ATTACKS ON FRONTLINE 999 RESPONSE SERVICE

The fire authority must look at where it can make genuine efficiency savings and not just axe lumps off the 999 emergency response service, Merseyside fire crews said as their 8-day strike started. Merseyside FBU said senior managers were so hell bent on confrontation and cuts they were not seriously considering alternative proposals put forward by the union.

The union highlighted its alternative proposals which would also deliver a better balanced budget but said genuine efficiency savings could add to that.

Les Skarratts, Merseyside FBU brigade secretary said: “Our financial experts have come up with a viable alternative which would re-balance the budget. These are serious alternatives to the kneejerk reaction of senior managers to make massive cuts to the 999 response service.

“The massive cuts they still plan would leave far fewer 999 response firefighters spread much more thinly. This would inevitably mean longer waits at 999 incidents before a full fire service response arrives and that puts us at risk and the public at risk.

“Our plans would deliver savings through genuine efficiency gains and by using the financial reserves the authority has built up to help them through precisely this type of problem. But other ideas have arisen during the dispute which could also see more efficiency gains by cutting back on the corporate structure and senior managers.

“Do they need so many people at corporate central office? If the heads of several departments can take time off to work as a firefighters, do these position have to be full-time in the future?

“Fire crews on picket lines watched the delivery of a brand new silver 3-litre BMW 5 series saloon car to the fire authority during the strike. Why do they demand such expensive gas-guzzling top of the range cars when they could make do with, say, a cheaper Mercedes Benz ‘C’ class or other alternatives?

“The service has been run during the dispute with almost no senior officers, who have been riding fire engines instead. Does this show we can run with a less top heavy organisation by making savings among managers?

“Cutting the 999 emergency response service must be the very last resort but for our managers it has been a first resort. They must think again about where genuine savings can be made and not go for kneejerk reactions.

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