

# FIRE BRIGADES UNION

## SOUTH YORKSHIRE FIRE CREWS TO BALLOT FOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION SHORT OF A STRIKE IN PROTEST AT IMPOSED SHIFT CHANGES

South Yorkshire fire crews are to hold a ballot for industrial action over plans to impose changes to shift and start and finish times. Firefighters say the changes would damage family life and cause problems with childcare.

The proposed changes, which managers are threatening to impose on 4 May, would see day shifts extended from 9 hours to 12 hours. Work would start at 08.00 and finish at 20.00 hours.

Cutting the night shift from 15 hours to 12 hours, would have no corresponding benefits for family life or child care. Fire crews would still have the longest working days in the public sector.

The formal notice of the intention to hold a ballot has been given by the national union to the clerk of the fire authority, which is what is required under law. The fire authority had been given 14 days notice to withdraw the plans, but they declined.

There are very tight legal rules involving notification to the employer and detailed and drawn out timescales before any industrial action can take place. The earliest date any action could take place is early May.

Jerry Pagan South Yorkshire FBU said: "Firefighters don't want to take any form of industrial action and want a negotiated agreement. The threat of imposition means a ballot for industrial action short of a strike has been forced on our members.

"These plans have gone down very badly with firefighters and genuine concerns have, we feel, been dismissed. Arranging reliable childcare is one of the most stressful things parents have to deal with and these plans make matters worse.

"Being forced to start at 08.00 in the morning and finish at 20.00 hours will mean making child care arrangements for possibly 13 hours plus a day, when you add travel to work time. It will increase the time spent in childcare by our children and disrupts arrangements we currently have in place.

"South Yorkshire's own Equality Impact Assessment on the proposals state that single parent firefighters with young children may be forced to leave them with relatives two days a week so as not to disturb their regular sleep patterns

"Those with older children will also have the problem of what they do after school and in the school holidays. And there is very little childcare available at weekends.

“It will cause particular problems for women when we are trying to recruit and keep women in the fire service. Over 98 % of firefighters have repeatedly said they are opposed to the plans and their concerns have been dismissed.

“No fire authority has ever imposed 12 hours shifts on its firefighters. We will continue to seek a negotiated agreement but fire crews will not accept imposition.”

Those fire crews who work shifts do so in 48 hour blocks of two 9 hour day shifts (9am to 6pm) followed by two 15 hour night shifts (6pm to 9am). The proposals would introduce 12 hours day working and 12 hours night working and would not mean an increase in hours worked but how they are worked.

#### Media contacts

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