

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

TUESDAY 26 MAY

ESSEX FIRE CREWS GIVEN APPROVAL FOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION BALLOT OVER FIRE CUTS

Essex fire crews have been given approval to ballot for industrial action following cuts to their fire service proposed by the Fire Authority. Formal approval to ballot has been given by the national executive of the Fire Brigades Union after a request from the Essex FBU membership.

The move is a clear signal of the significant opposition of firefighters and fire officers at all ranks to the cuts put forward by the Fire Authority. The ballot and potential action could be just weeks away following the necessary legal steps and timeframes set down by statute.

The timeframe provides an important opportunity for the fire authority to modify their plans, give necessary assurances and avoid an industrial dispute.

Essex Fire and Rescue Service is set to implement a rolling programme of frontline cuts in staff and provisions to respond to 999 calls. The result will be that fewer firefighters will be spread more thinly across Essex leaving too few firefighters on duty to crew all the fire engines.

The first round of cuts include axing 44 frontline wholetime Firefighter posts, one in ten of the firefighters at fire stations ready to respond immediately to 999 calls in Essex. The posts will be lost by changing how specialist high-reach and specialist rescue vehicles are crewed leaving only enough firefighters on duty to crew one of the two specialist fire engines at a time.

Mick Rogers, Essex FBU Membership Secretary and Firefighter at Colchester: "The fire authority claims this is about having the right people in the right place at the right time but these plans simply don't add up. Firefighters can't be in two places at the same time.

"The authority needs to see through its own spin. Firefighters can't crew two fire engines at the same time and we can't respond to two 999 emergencies at the same time."

Paul Adams, Essex FBU Acting Brigade Secretary and Firefighter at Grays: "It's a recipe for disaster. Despite the recession, Essex is continuing to expand, the population is rising, housing increasing and the range and complexity of specialist risks and emergencies for the Essex Firefighters to respond to is ever-growing.

"Whether its fires, road traffic accidents, terrorist incidents or floods - when the people of Essex find themselves in trouble they rely as much on their 999 fire service today as they ever have. The fact is that cuts compromise the safety of Firefighters and the public alike and the Fire Authority needs to realise there is strong and growing opposition to the cuts they are planning."

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