

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

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ESSEX FIRE CREWS TELL FIRE AUTHORITY: SUSPEND PLANS FOR FIREFIGHTER CUTS OR BALLOT STARTS 25 JUNE

Essex fire crews and officers have given the fire authority a further 10 days to shelve plans to cut firefighters or they will ballot for industrial action. The Fire Brigades Union has accused the fire authority of targeting frontline fire crews for cuts rather than looking at genuine efficiency savings.

The union has called for a joint review of the balance between office based activities and the 999 emergency response with a view to redeploying resources to fire stations. It says there also needs to be a better balance between prevention activities and the need for a proper and safe emergency response.

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

The Fire Authority proposes to cut the number of firefighters by “managed vacancies” from 954 firefighters in December 2008, to an average of 940 during 2008/9, to 920 during 2009/10, to 905 in March 2010.

Forty four of those jobs – one in ten of the frontline fire station based crews -would go by changing the way higher reach aerial ladder platforms and rescue tenders are crewed. The impact would be there would not be enough firefighters to crew all appliances, even if they were needed in a 999 emergency.

The union has also objected to a number of other changes which it says local managers are trying to impose rather than negotiate. The details were set out in the formal legal letter from the union to the Clerk of the Fire Authority, as required by law.

Paul Adams, Essex FBU Brigade Secretary and firefighter at Grays said: “We know the need to look at making efficiency savings. But the frontline 999 emergency response is being cut back while head quarters managers and bureaucrats have been growing.

“There is a real danger that frontline crews will be spread far too thinly across the County. The fire authority needs to look at making genuine efficiency savings rather than targeting frontline fire crews for cuts.

“The frontline service must not be compromised by the drive to make savings. Firefighters can’t crew two fire engines at the same time and we can’t respond to two 999 emergencies at the same time.

“The fire authority is forcing these plans through without honest consultation with frontline fire crews and officers and without agreement. That is a recipe for a ballot for industrial action.

“We are happy to talk and negotiate a mutually acceptable agreement. Essex fire crews and officers want a joint approach, working together to review the problems and where necessary reaching agreement.”

ENDS

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