

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

ESSEX FIRE CREWS TO START INDUSTRIAL ACTION NEXT WEEK

Essex fire crews start industrial action next week against plans to cut one in ten frontline firefighters based at stations. The action, short of a strike, will include an overtime ban, not acting up to fill absences in more senior ranks and officers not working on day's off.

Keith Flynn, Essex FBU brigade chair said: "Essex fire crews don't want to take any action but we have little option. We'd hoped to resolve the dispute by now but the fire authority keep finding excuses to avoid negotiating and have thus far refused our offer of a joint review that might reach an agreement.

"We've given as long as the law allows before we have to give notice of the start of action. This action is taken reluctantly but with great determination to stop cuts to frontline fire services.

"The fire authority appears to have no shortage of money to spend on the wrong priorities. Savings can be made, but cuts in Essex are only being targeted at the frontline 999 emergency response.

"If the money can be found to fund a multi-million pound increase in the IT budget then it must be found to pay for the 999 service. If they can also afford to think about buying a helicopter they can afford to fund the frontline services the public and businesses need.

"Our action will only highlight where there are already shortages or where the fire authority relies on the goodwill of their fire crews to provide a service. But refusing to negotiate or reach agreement shows they hold their fire crews in contempt and yet they still expect goodwill in return.

"We strongly oppose plans to cut one in ten frontline station-based firefighters and impose other changes. Several recent incidents in the south of Essex highlighted the need for more fire crews and equipment, not less.

"Any action we take will be short term and only until our dispute is resolved. The real damage to the service is the long-term effect of the cuts our action is intended to prevent."

By law, notice of action must be given within 3 weeks of the ballot result and that deadline is now. Essex fire crews voted 4 to one in favour of industrial action on 31st July. Action will start at 09.00.Wednesday 26 August, following the 7 day's notice required by law.

Essex Fire and Rescue Service is set to implement a rolling programme of cuts to the frontline 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.

ENDS

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