

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

ESSEX FIRE TALKS RESUME TODAY (Wednesday 19 AUGUST)

Talks aimed at settling the Essex fire dispute are due to be resumed this afternoon. Essex fire crews are to start an overtime ban and action short of a strike a week today (26 August) in a dispute over cuts and other changes.

FBU Brigade chair Keith Flynn said: “We hope the fire authority take these talks a lot more seriously than they have taken the others. They ended one set of talks inside 6 minutes and the last talks ended after 45 minutes.

“We’ve been told the budget crisis is so bad that frontline services must be cut to save £3 million. Then we find out managers want to buy a helicopter and spend an **extra** £5 million on computer systems.

“Essex fire crews believe that any available money should be used to protect frontline fire services. There is money available but it is being spent in the wrong areas.

“We are more than happy to sit down and look at where genuine savings can be made. There are alternatives to targeting cuts at frontline fire crews.

“The union has asked to work jointly with the fire authority to identify where genuine savings can be made. We remain willing to do that.”

Essex Fire and Rescue Service are 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.

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