

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

DON'T CUT FRONTLINE FIREFIGHTERS IN ESSEX

Yesterday Essex Fire and Rescue Service confirmed, in negotiations with the FBU, that they will continue to make changes to save money, even though it will mean a worse 999-service and make the people and fire crews of Essex less safe. So industrial action short of a strike will continue.

Essex FBU brigade chair Keith Flynn said today: "They told us yesterday they are still determined to cut at least 44 firefighters' jobs by 2010 – down from 954 to 905 - which will mean fewer firefighters spread more thinly across Essex, leaving too few firefighters on duty to crew all the fire engines when they are needed in a 999 emergency. They also insisted they will be introducing smaller fire vehicles to fire stations in the county. These hold fewer firefighters to deal with emergencies.

"Of course they did not put any of that in the statement they issued this morning, in which they pretended not to understand what the problem is. They understand it perfectly well, and so do the fire crews and fire officers on the front line. The fire service's press statement this morning is at best economic with the truth and at worst dishonest. The only truthful sentence in it is: 'The service is not immune from the effects of the current economic downturn.' Everyone knows that but the economic downturn must not be an excuse for making everyone in the county less safe. Cuts to the frontline 999 service should be the last resort and there are alternatives.

"We remain committed to finding a negotiated settlement, and we had hoped yesterday's talks would be the start of real dialogue, because we had the impression yesterday that the fire service was at last willing to talk seriously with us. We hope that their statement this morning, with its crude swipe at the FBU negotiators, indicates only momentary irritation, rather than a deliberate strategy. If that is the case, we are happy to overlook it, and approach the next meeting in a spirit of constructive dialogue."

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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