

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 11 September 2009

ESSEX FIRE DISPUTE –ANGER AND FRUSTRATION AT SURPRISE MOVE TO PRESS AHEAD WITH CUTS

Essex fire crews are angry at a surprise move by the fire authority to press ahead with cuts on 1 October. They say the move is provocative and have asked for the decision to be suspended while talks to resolve the dispute continue.

Specialist crews on high reach and other specialist emergency vehicles at Colchester, Harlow and Chelmsford will be hit by the move . This will leave too few firefighters on duty to crew all the vehicles, even if they were needed in a 999 emergency and so will put the safety of firefighters and the public at increased risk.

The union warns the management's decision will inevitably inflame the dispute and they are facing calls to escalate the industrial action in response.

Adrian Clarke, FBU regional secretary said: “This is a highly provocative move and we will face pressure from Essex fire crews to escalate the industrial action. We have asked for the decision to be suspended while talks continue and to defuse some of the real anger this move has provoked.

“The surprise move typifies the approach to the talks which have taken place with senior managers consistently refusing to moderate their plans despite widespread opposition throughout the service. They appear determined only to consult and impose, and that is no way to treat the professionals who deliver the fire service to the public.

“We hope the talks can continue to resolve the dispute by negotiation and reach an agreement acceptable to both sides. But this move looks to us like an effort to derail that process.”

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 not being 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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