

THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

24 June 2008

BUCKS FIRE CREWS TO PROTEST AT FIRE AUTHORITY MEETING OVER PROPOSED CHANGES TO SHIFTS THEY SAY WILL DAMAGE FAMILY LIFE

Fire crews from across Bucks will be joined by their families to protest against proposed shift changes they say will damage family life. Fire crews will be joined by partners, children and other family members at the fire authority's ruling executive meeting on 26th June.

Under the proposed changes fire crews would see their day shifts extended from 9 hours to 12 hours alongside an earlier start time of 7.30am and a later finish time of 7.30pm. Fire crews and their families say these changes will cause havoc with childcare, undermine their family life and make a mockery of management claims of being a family friendly employer.

Ricky Matthews, Buckinghamshire FBU brigade secretary said: "Extending our already long working day by 3 hours, and changing start and finish times will cause havoc with childcare. These proposals have no regard to the impact on families and have created an enormous amount of concern among fire crews across the county.

"These start and finish times would mean waking our children up at 6am and relying on informal ways of ensuring they are looked after until school starts. They would then need to be picked up at the end of the working day, most likely after 8pm, relying on a mix of childcare arrangements.

"It will not only extend our working day but it will extend the day for our children, cause inconvenience and stress to other family members and extra costs for childcare. Bringing up a family is difficult enough without the fire service making it intolerable.

"Anyone who has ever relied on those sorts of childcare arrangements knows it is a recipe for family stress, anxiety and low morale. It will cause particular problems for women we are trying to recruit and keep in the fire service.

"It is not a responsible way for a modern employer to act and councillors need to know the strength of feeling on the issue before they rubber-stamp these proposals. Fire crews and their families will be making their views loud and clear directly to councillors."

Those fire crews who work shifts do so in 48 hour blocks of two 9 hour day shifts (9am to 6pm) followed by two 15 hour night shifts (6pm to 9am). The proposals would introduce 12 hours day working and 12 hours night working and would not mean an increase in hours worked but how they are worked.

Unlike other workers there is no "off station" time to do shopping or carry out other activities.

The Fire Authority Executive meeting takes place on 26th June starting at 10am at Bucks county council sports and social club, Stoke Mandeville, HP21 9DR . Local fire crews and their families will be available for interview.

Contact: Ricky Matthews (FBU brigade secretary and a firefighter at Great Holm Fire station) on 07917 065863. Makyla Greaves (FBU rep and a Fire Control officer in Aylesbury) on 07973523370. Gordon Richardson (FBU rep and a crew manager at High Wycombe Fire Station). Ben Ogle, FBU rep and firefighter at Buckingham fire station) on 07912 348485.