

SUFFOLK MEMBERS MAKE STAND AGAINST CUTS



Ballot for industrial action to be launched as fire authority seeks to axe 12 wholetime posts

Suffolk members are to hold an industrial action ballot over plans to cut 12 frontline emergency response firefighter posts. If the move goes ahead specialist rescue equipment - an aerial ladder - will not be available at all times.

Although some non-emergency posts will remain, there will still be fewer firefighters to carry out community safety work. The Union will send out ballot papers on 4 July to all its Suffolk members, a result is expected on 25 July. The earliest date for industrial action is 1 August.

Suffolk FBU Brigade Chair Vince Jell said:

"We are already understaffed and only have around 45 frontline emergency response firefighters on duty at any one time to cover a population of 675,000. We are also 67 retained firefighters short.

Community fire safety will suffer, turntable ladders will not be available at all times

"In future the specialist rescue equipment - a turntable ladder - will not be available at all times. Community safety work will also suffer because these 12 firefighters had a dual role.

"Suffolk has one of the largest areas at risk from fires in England but we spend less on the fire service than all other fire authorities. This is a significant cut for a small fire service which is already run on a shoestring.

"It will make our work less safe and the people of Suffolk less safe. We do not want to take

industrial action; we do want the new councillors to think again.”

According to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Annual Fire Statistics of the 22 Combined Fire Authorities and county fire brigades in England with populations of less than 900,000, Suffolk is BOTTOM of the table in terms of fire service spending per head of population.

Vote Yes!

The officials and activists in Suffolk and the rest of Region 9 are now focusing efforts on securing and getting a large YES vote in the ballot.

Messages/resolutions of support for Suffolk members can be emailed to Suffolk brigade chair, Vince Jell (vinceatthejells@hotmail.com). They will be forwarded to Suffolk FBU branches.

Regional controls costs leap nearly 32% to £988 million

The costs of controversial plans for emergency fire control rooms have leapt by nearly 32% in 7 months the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has let slip.

In January of this year the FBU leaked the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's confidential outline business case which revealed the project to close all of England's 46 emergency fire controls and opening 9 remote regional centres would cost £754 million. The business case stunningly revealed the project had

a “high risk” of “total project failure” because of the Government's poor track record on major technology projects.

It went on to warn there was a “high risk” spiraling costs could lead to cuts in frontline fire services and push up council tax. But the ODPM let slip last week that the estimated costs had now spiraled to £988 million - a hike of 31.74% in a matter of only 7 months.

The new figure of £988 million emerged from the ODPM press office as it tried to justify plans to spend £31.3million on consultants over the cost of the project. As the ODPM routinely deny their figures and statements we include it at the end of this press release.

The ODPM say they hope to announce the sites of the remote regional centres by 21 July. 144 cross-party MPs have now signed Early Day Motion 229, or its amendment, raising concerns about the controversial project.

More Labour MPs (60) have signed this EDM than the one relating to ID cards another project where the Government cost estimates are being challenged.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: “Costs are spiraling out of control. You wouldn't run a jumble sale like this.

“Government didn't have a clue what this project would cost when they signed up to it 2 years ago and the new figure is mind-boggling.

Estimated costs have leapt nearly 32% in the space of only 7 months.

"This represents two-thirds of the annual spending on the fire service. It's three times as much as Government is spending on new equipment to deal with major terrorist incidents.

"This is an expensive and very risky project which won't save a single life. They should invest the money directly in frontline fire services instead of chasing another technology rainbow hoping there's a pot of savings at the end of it."

Lobby of parliament : controls regionalisation

As part of the ongoing campaign against the regionalisation of controls, a lobby of MPs will take place on the 6th July 2005.

A pre-lobby meeting will be held at Westminster on the 6th July in Committee Room 5, and will commence at 13.00hrs.

Members and officials should arrange to meet their MPs after 14.00hrs. This can be done by writing to your MP prior to this date or by attending Westminster and completing a 'Green Card' on the day.

The General Secretary will address the pre-lobby meeting at 13.00hrs and it is envisaged that MPs will also attend this meeting.

Brigade secretaries should contact the office of John McGhee with information on those attending in

order that we can co-ordinate and monitor numbers. Brigade Secretaries should co-ordinate the lobby from their brigade.

144 MPs have signed Early Day Motion 229, EDM 229: Risks Associated with Regional Emergency Fire Control, which calls for a full independent assessment of the final business case before this project proceeds, and an amendment calling for the project to be scrapped.

Pay Formula

The Union will be meeting with the Employers Secretariat on Wednesday 29 June on the issue of the new Pay Formula, which is due to kick in from July 1st. The Executive Council will receive a report back from that meeting on Thursday 30 June.

Pay Protection

An arbitration meeting took place Tuesday 21 June on the issue of pay protection for the substantive move to rank to role. Professor Linda Dickens, the ACAS-appointed arbitrator, is expected to make the award shortly. The award will be binding on both the employers and the Union.

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