

SUFFOLK MEMBERS VOTE 2:1 FOR STRIKE ACTION



Move is response to plans to cut 12 firefighter posts which will endanger lives of firefighters and public for years to come

Suffolk fire crews have voted two to one in favour of strike action over plans to cut 12 frontline emergency response firefighter posts. The Union says the move will endanger firefighters and the public for years to come.

The FBU has given the fire authority notice of two periods of strike action: 07.00 hours on 2 August until 10.00 hours on 2 August (3 hours) and 17.00 hours 5 August until 19.00 hours 5 August (2 hours).

The short term action will minimise the impact on the public. Fire crews will be available for normal working immediately before and after the periods of action.

The FBU says the cuts are based on a fundamentally flawed plan for fire safety in Suffolk. The local Integrated Risk Management Plan is meant to be based on risks and assessments of what firefighting resources are needed to respond safely to the range of dangerous incidents the fire and rescue service deals with.

The fire authority has repeatedly refused to give the Union the detailed assessments this local fire safety plan is meant to be based on.

The cuts would mean specialist rescue equipment - an aerial ladder - would not be available at all times. There would also be fewer firefighters to carry out community safety work.

Suffolk FBU Brigade Chair Vince Jell said: "Every professional in the Suffolk fire service knows this is deeply flawed and

dangerous. The cuts have nothing to do with safety and everything to do with budget cuts.

"Suffolk has one of the largest areas at risk from fires in England but spends less on the fire service than all other fire authorities. We only have 45 frontline emergency response firefighters on duty at any time and we are short of 67 retained firefighters.

"The fire authority has slashed its community safety budget by two-thirds in the last few years. They have cut behind the scenes and now they want to cut the frontline emergency response role.

"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 have a dual role.

"It will make our work less safe and the people of Suffolk less safe. We do not want to take strike action but these are significant cuts based on a deeply flawed safety plan."

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.

FBU slams fall in Scottish fire safety inspections

Scottish fire brigades have been accused of "gambling with public safety" as new figures showed the number of safety inspections has plummeted by nearly three-quarters in four years.

The number of inspections carried out by Strathclyde Fire Brigade dropped from 17,937 in 2001 to 6,068 in 2004. Lothian and Borders Brigade's number of inspections dropped from 11,340 in 2002 to 3,315 in 2004. And inspections by Grampian Brigade fell from 7,673 in 2001 to 1,315 in 2004.

Kenny Ross, FBU Scottish secretary, described the fall as "shocking and deeply worrying".

"The inspection regime is one of the cornerstones of public fire safety and came about in the aftermath of major loss of life.


"There is no explanation how this can happen during a time when prevention is meant to have much more emphasis, not less.

"Firefighters, who see the day to day reality of fires, demand an explanation from the Scottish Executive."

www.scotsman.com

Union calls for rethink on London cuts

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack is to lobby Ken Livingstone to stop



cuts to London's fire services, which the Union believes may have led to delays in attending the scene of the London bombings earlier this month.

The General Secretary told The Guardian newspaper that the union had received anecdotal reports from local firefighting teams that the London fire service was forced to turn down requests for additional fire engines because of efficiency savings and cuts imposed earlier this year.

"We have asked for reports on how things went on the day to see whether there were any problems," Mr Wrack said.

"We think there will have been delays in getting people to the incidents."

Matt Wrack signalled his determination to be heard by government over reforms that his members fear will damage the fire service.

"I hope we can work with politicians in the fire authorities and at the government level but they need to start taking note of what the service is actually saying," Mr Wrack said.

Mr Wrack echoed concerns aired last week by the union's London region, which claimed staff were "seriously stretched" by last week's bomb attacks in the heart of the capital.

More than 60 fire engines were called out to respond to the blasts across London [of 7/7], with 12

sent to both Aldgate East and Edgware Road sites alone.

Firefighters faced "breaking point" on July 7 because some engines had already been removed from central fire stations.

Matt Wrack said he planned to lobby the London mayor, MPs and the London Emergency Fire Planning Authority (LFPEA), to urge a review of the decision to redistribute critical resources out of London.

Last March the LFPEA decided to redeploy a number of fire engines out to the greater London suburbs as well as close a central fire station and cut 182 jobs across London.

The plans now being implemented entail sending further afield fire engines based in stations across Euston, Westminster and Islington - close to the bomb sites.

More vehicles are expected to be redeployed from two central stations this September following the LFPEA decision, raising fears that firefighters will be hampered by the lack of equipment necessary to play their emergency role in full.

The LFPEA has also decided to close a fire station in Marylebone, close to where the Edgware Road bomb exploded.

The LFPEA was unavailable for comment due to another series of explosions in London.

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Northern Ireland government acts on firefighter attacks

THUGS who attack firefighters in Northern Ireland face up to two years in jail under tough new plans, the Northern Ireland Government has warned.

Public Safety Minister Shaun Woodward announced a zero-tolerance approach to gangs ambushing crew members on a near daily basis.

He pledged: "I am not prepared to tolerate such attacks and intend to punish those people who think it is acceptable to endanger the lives of firefighters.

"Those who continue to carry out these mindless attacks will now face the threat of going to court and a possible prison sentence."

The Government revealed last month there had been more than 2,500 attacks on the emergency services over the past 12 months, including 301 on Fire Service members.

Under the Draft Fire and Rescue Services legislation it will be an offence to assault crews as they carry out duties.

The draft plans, which will go out to consultation, also requires the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to provide assistance at road crash scenes.

But it was the heavy punishments for vandals that drew the greatest response.

The most serious offenders could be jailed for up to two years and face unlimited fines, while penalties for the less severe would be six months imprisonment and/or a £5,000 fine.

"Firefighters work to protect us, I want to ensure that they are also given every protection while they work," added Mr Woodward.

The move was praised by Jim Barbour, FBU Executive Council member for Northern Ireland.

Mr Barbour, who met the Minister to express concern at the attacks, said: "This is a daily problem. Only last night [21/07] we had another attack on firefighters in north Belfast, and at the weekend in the sleepy village of Killyleagh there were three separate attacks.

"The FBU raised this issue with the Minister at Stormont and we are pleased to see he has listened to us. It's a step forward and seems robust, but legislation was already long overdue."

www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk

The FBU is campaigning for an end to the scandal of 40 attacks daily on firefighters across the UK. Visit www.fbu.org.uk for more information about the campaign.

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