

Thursday July 28 2005 No.61

SUFFOLK DISPUTE: NATIONAL SOLIDARITY DEMO 11 AUGUST



National demonstration in support of Suffolk FBU members is to take place 11 August 2005, 1400 - 1600 Ipswich, Suffolk

Suffolk Brigade Committee has called for a national demonstration on 11 August 2005 in support of strike action planned by Suffolk members for 2 and 5 August 2005. It will take place at 1400-1600 in Ipswich, Suffolk.

Due to the imminent first strike date, there is a planned fire Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) to be held that day. This will be an ideal opportunity to show the elected members of the Fire Authority the depth of support for our fellow members taking a stand against totally avoidable cuts in frontline firefighter posts at a

time when resources are already badly overstretched.

Members who wish to attend are urged to contact their local official for travel arrangements.

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

Union prepares for action

Yesterday, at an FBU Suffolk regional committee meeting, discussions and preparations for action were made, including setting up pickets lines across the brigade for next Tuesday, the establishment of a hardship fund and building support within the union, from other unions and the local community.

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

Somerset dispute

General Secretary Matt Wrack will join an FBU negotiating team - consisting of officials John Drake, Phil Jordon, Leigh Redman and Adrian Woollaston - in talks with Somerset fire authority senior management on August 2 in a bid to resolve the dispute over the lack of insurance cover for members attending New Dimension incidents.

If those talks are unsuccessful Somerset members will take industrial action, starting August 4. This will involve no participation in training for New Dimension equipment, IRUs and HVPs.

In a ballot, Somerset FBU members voted 85.5% in favour of industrial action short of strike action.

FBU slams national Audit Commission report

The Union has criticised an Audit Commission report rating the performance of the 45 English fire authorities for "completely missing the real point" about the role of fire and rescue services. The FBU has also criticised the Audit Commission for releasing the reports to the media and local managers two days before they were available to the workforce.

The report only gave two fire authorities "excellent ratings" under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and said there was room for improvement among half of fire authorities who failed to secure a "good" grade.

The Audit Commission, which described the CPA scores as "an encouraging start", admitted that "they do not make judgement on how well fire authorities respond to emergencies or other incidents."

Emergency response not measured!

The CPA assesses fire authorities "corporately", judging them on "how well they are run and their capacity to improve."

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said:

"It's a great shame that the Audit Commission did not see fit to share their reports with fire service professionals working at the sharp end before they shared them with the media. This is a poor attitude to dedicated emergency service professionals who are working in very difficult circumstances.

"Local fire and rescue services are seen by the public as providing an excellent public service and this report could send them entirely the wrong message. The public judge us by how well we respond to fire and rescue emergencies and other incidents where they really value our professionalism and dedication.

"They judge us by how quickly we respond to their calls for assistance, how well we deal with

those calls, how many lives we save from fires, the rescues we carry out and the assistance we provide at other major emergencies from chemical spills to flooding or the aftermath of bombings. That is what the public see as important but this report deals with none of those crucial issues.

"It is annoying that the Audit Commission seems only interested in the process of Comprehensive Performance Assessment and not the outcomes of it.

"The Audit Commission appears to have completely missed the real point of what the fire and rescue services are here to do. We hope they can put that fundamental omission right in the future."

Damning conclusions

The national statement from the Audit Commission gave little hint of some damning conclusions contained in the reports on individual fire authorities.

The individual brigade reports said there are "fundamental management issues" at Lincolnshire fire authority and a "confrontational style of management displayed by some senior officers that has prevented some important groups of staff from being engaged in the development of the service" at Essex fire authority.

The Isle of Wight was criticised for the weakness of its planning process and the lack of councillor involvement.

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