

WEST MIDS STRIKE CONTINUES



Dispute over compensation for working anti-social hours and for additional travel costs following introduction of new shift system drags on as brigade management fail to deliver

West Midlands members held a solid three hour strike on Monday 14 November 2005 and are set to strike again on Thursday 17, Monday 21 November and Wednesday 23 November (the latter date was announced today).

The strikes come after a series of talks, including some earlier today, at which the management failed to offer a way out of the dispute over compensation for working anti-social hours and for additional travel costs following the introduction of a new shift system.

In particular, it failed to satisfy the recommendations of the Independent Chair of the Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) in June. They were:

- Application of leave in line with the national agreement

- Compensation for travelling to stations whilst working on early and late shifts
- Compensation for a midnight finish whilst working the late shift

Pete Gallagher, West Midlands Brigade Secretary said: "We don't want to take strike action but local managers are refusing any attempts at compromise. They are ignoring the recommendations of an independent expert called in to help resolve the dispute.

Shift changes have major impact on family and working life

"Managers want major changes to shifts that force us to finish work much later and work more days in the year. These clearly have a major impact on family life as well as working life.

"At the weekend they made cosmetic changes to their offer so they could dress it up as a compromise. But they knew it fell well short of the expectations of local fire crews.

"We're ready for more talks to help resolve a dispute which we have never sought. But our next 3-hour strike is due to take place on Thursday from 07.00 to 10.00 if there is no resolution."

New shift system causes 'no end of problems'

Adds Regional Secretary Tony Nutting:

"Since management brought in a new shift system it has caused no end of problems. Now it's collapsing around their ears.

"There have been several occasions when we have had 20 or more pumps off the roads because of staffing. Firefighters are often in the 'wrong' place because they're having to cover shifts at other stations."

Safety of public and crews comprised

He added: "It's not right that engines from Warwickshire and Staffordshire brigades should be helping us cover incidents but that's exactly what's happening. This isn't just compromising public safety, it's compromising the safety of our crews."

Some sixty plus firefighters have rejoined the Union since the FBU held the ballot for strike action.

Support from public

A member of the public, a district nurse at Stechford health centre, in Birmingham, has emailed the Union saying:

"I fully support you all in your recent campaign, just as I have previously. Don't give in, the government are attacking your pensions and working conditions, just like they are trying to do us.

"Stick with it you deserve better treatment you do an extremely dangerous job and I for one admire and respect you all. "

Another member of the public wrote:

"Heard about the industrial action by the firefighters in the Midlands. Just wanted to say I'm right behind you."

Opposition to Herts fire service cuts grows

The campaign against cuts to the fire and rescue service in Hertfordshire is building up steam.

At a meeting with fire chiefs on November 11, 200 residents turned up to save Bovingdon Fire Station from the axe. The station, which is home to 10 retained firefighters, is set to close next April alongside retained station Radlett, while Watford will have a reduced service at night.

Jane Hogg, ward councillor for Bovington, Chipperfield and Flaunden, said at the meeting that the proposed closure of Bovington Fire Station was a 'risk' and urged a rethink on the situation. "I feel it is very important that Bovington fire station is retained for reasons of safety. With a very strong public response they [fire chiefs] must listen and hopefully reconsider," she added.

Village Vicar urges fire chiefs to stop cuts 'madness'

The vicar at St Lawrence Church in the village, told chief fire officer Roy Wilsher and county councillor responsible for fire and rescue, David Lloyd, that closure would 'cut out the very heart of this community' and leave us "less safe in our homes and in times when accidents and emergencies come" and urged fire chiefs to 'turn away from this madness and leave our fire station to do the crucial work which we value enormously'.

The cuts are designed to make savings of £500,000 countywide. MPs Mike Penning and David Gauke as well as borough councillors, have spoken out against the plans and have asked county council chiefs to reconsider.

In early October, 100 firefighters, residents' groups, local councillors and Mayor Dorothy Thornhill, protested against the cuts to night time cover in Watford with a march through the town centre.

The Union has accused Caroline Tapster, Chief Executive of Herts

County Council, of "demonstrating a lack of understanding at the highest level over Hertfordshire's proposed Safety Plan".

A three-month long public consultation into the proposed cuts began November 1.


London FBU to take legal action over imposition of new contract

FBU London region has accused London fire brigade bosses of flouting contract law by unilaterally imposing new contracts on employees. Every FBU member in London recently received through the post a copy of a new contract of employment from LFEPFA. However, the union has refused to recognise the new contracts, as there are, in parts, significant differences from existing contracts that have not been agreed.

Under contract law, employers are obliged to negotiate and seek agreement on any proposed changes to contracts before their implementation. The union says that no such negotiations have taken place and is seeking a declaration in the High Court.

FBU executive council member for London, Mick Shaw, said, "Once more, the London fire brigade has ignored its obligation to negotiate with the FBU and has unilaterally imposed changes on our members. I think the time is fast approaching when they will realise that they have pushed our members too far."

London members reject shift changes



In an FBU consultative ballot, 3,217 London members, representing 98.5% of the vote, rejected brigade management plans to introduce new 12-hour shifts, saying they wanted to continue working under the current five-on three-off arrangements. The union says the shift changes will lead to reduced night-time cover and job cuts.

Public must have more time, have more balanced information on Northumberland closures

The Northumberland public need more time and more balanced information about the proposed closures of four full time fire stations at Ashington, Blyth, Cramlington and Morpeth in south east Northumberland. The Union has called for the public consultation period to be extended beyond the 18 November deadline and said it would not do deals behind closed doors.

The move follows admissions by the county council at a series of public meetings that the plans are meant to deliver cuts and not the improvements they originally claimed.

Northumberland FBU Chair, Colin James said: "The public need a clear and balanced view of the options and honesty about what is behind these proposals. So far Mr Hesler, the chief fire officer, has tried to pull the wool over their eyes and given them biased and one-sided information.

"Mr Hesler admits he is biased towards his own proposals for two privately funded fire stations

which would burden the county council with £10 million in debt. At the same time the council is discussing plans to close care homes for the sake of a few hundred thousand pounds.

"More than two years' work and hundreds of thousands of pounds in wages and other costs have been spent putting together plans which the public don't want and firefighters on the frontline say we don't need.

"The public have a right to open and honest consultation and the county council needs to give more time to ensure this happens. The chief fire officer wants to meet us urgently now to discuss further his proposals but local firefighters are not going to do a deal behind the public's back."

Unions unite to oppose Northumberland cuts

The FBU has joined forces with Unison and the GMB unions to mount a united campaign against fire service, education and care-homes cuts.

In addition to four fire stations closures, a number of care homes and 44 Northumberland schools are threatened with closure.

Kenny Bell, Deputy Regional Convenor for Unison, said: "We all know there is greater strength in unity and we should use that. We need to assemble the greatest protest against service cuts ever in this County, bringing together the schools, fire service and care homes issues. Parents, school

teachers, employees and relatives have to come on board and make the biggest rallying call Northumberland has ever seen."

Steve Brown, of the GMB at Lynemouth's Alcan Smelter and the Wansbeck TUC, added: "We need to get everyone campaigning against service cuts in this County to come under one umbrella."

Cuts 'affect most vulnerable people in our society'

Kieran Brennan, FBU brigade secretary, agreed that a cross-issue campaign was important.

"We are fighting cuts which would affect the most vulnerable people in our society - children, the elderly and people in need of the emergency services," he said.

"Everything in our power must be done to stop the cuts. It always seems to be the vulnerable people in Northumberland who suffer. People in this County deserve to be treated with dignity and respect and a wholesale campaign to fight closures is the best way to ensure that happens."

Union welcomes LFB call for more resources

The Union has welcomed the call by London Fire Brigade management for six extra fire rescue units and commitment for a new command station in Havering. In calling on London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority to make the extra resources available, London Fire Commissioner Ken Knight said they would make the city safer. More

than 200 firefighters were called to central London on July 7.

Says Mick Shaw, FBU executive council member for London:

"The incidents of 7th July showed how the London Fire Brigade's resources were stretched to the limit in dealing with a coordinated terrorist attack. As difficult as those incidents were, they could have been much worse.

"They underlined the need for an increase in the brigade's capacity to deal with such circumstances and we welcome the proposed increase in firefighter numbers."

Solidarity with Notts members fighting co-responding

Notts members are paying a minimum voluntary levy of £5 per week into a Hardship Fund to assist the 34 members at Retford. Send your donation to:

Details of the fund are:

BANK DETAILS: NAT WEST BANK PLC
ACCOUNT NAME: NOTTS HARDSHIP FUND
ACCOUNT NO: 68013868
SORT CODE: 55 - 61 - 17

Cornwall's cuts proposals threaten safety, says FBU

Cornwall Fire Brigade has announced that it is to axe 15 operational posts if funding is not secured for 2006/07.

The 15 posts, equal to 14% of the brigade's operational staff, are being proposed to cover the deficit in next years budget for Cornwall Fire Brigade. The cuts are detailed

in the Brigade Integrated Risk Management Plan, IRMP, for 2006/07.

Terry Nottle, FBU Brigade Secretary said, 'These cuts will impact heavily on the effectiveness of Cornwall Fire Brigade. The public expects Community safety to be a central theme of Local Government but in Cornwall it will not extend to the Provision of an effective Fire Service should these cuts go ahead.'

'These proposed cuts come at a time when Cornwall Fire Brigade is already understaffed and struggling to cope with the demands of providing a modern Fire Service to the public. Any cuts in community safety and prevention schemes will inevitably result in an increase in the number of fire related deaths and injuries in the county.

Community deserves properly funded effective service

'The people of Cornwall expect and deserve a properly funded, effective Fire Brigade. Instead of this vision of a modern, effective Fire Service what is proposed are cuts which will do nothing but damage to the effectiveness of an already underfunded emergency service.

These proposed cuts fly directly in the face of the County Councils vision of making Cornwall the safest place to live, work or visit. Cornwall FBU are not prepared to accept these life threatening cuts and will vigorously oppose them. These cuts are so serious that we cannot rule out industrial action in order to

protect the service and the public within Cornwall.

Hillsborough memorial

At FBU Annual Conference 2005 Merseyside FBU hosted a fringe meeting for The Hillsborough Justice Campaign. At the meeting Anne Williams told of her battle for justice over the death of her son, Kevin. Anne's solicitors have been preparing a "memorial" (a legal document) to the Attorney General to hold a new inquest into Kevin's death, who died at the age of 15.

The document is to be presented to the Attorney General, in London, on Monday 21 November. At 1200 there is a Mass arranged at St Georges Cathedral. Following the Mass Anne will leave to submit her document and there will be "A WALK OF TRUTH" from the Cathedral, straight over the bridge to the Attorney General.

The HJC will provide transport from Liverpool. For those in and around London: The Cathedral is situated at the junction of Westminster Bridge Road, Lambeth Road, St George's Road, and London Road, SE1, and is a short walk from Westminster Bridge. Lambeth North tube station (Bakerloo Line) is approximately 3 minutes walk away, and Waterloo, Southwark, and Elephant & Castle stations are around seven minutes walk away. Numerous buses serve the area.

For further info email

lee.andrews2@btopenworld.com or try www.contrast.org/hillsborough

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