



The Premier Trade Union for Professional Firefighters and Emergency Fire Control Staff: May 2012

TUC SLAMS “UNSUSTAINABLE” CUTS TO FIRE SERVICE!



The Fire Brigades Union has praised the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in the south west after the TUC took the unprecedented step of writing to Fire Authorities demanding reassurances that cuts would not mean Firefighters being subjected to “archaic” working practices.

This important development follows the recent annual TUC conference in the South West where a delegation from the regional FBU gave a report outlining planned cuts to the front line of the Service as a result of slashed budgets. The reports focussed primarily on cuts being planned in Wiltshire FRS which include plans for a so called “Day Crew Plus” duty system.

The “Day Crew Plus” system has previously been proposed in other South West Fire Services under the banner of “flexible staffing”. This “system” usually involves plans to remove half the workforce at a Fire Station and expecting the remainder to provide cover by living and working on the Station for up to 4 full days at a time.

The FBU has fought hard against this system which would take the Fire Service back to the Victorian period. TUC Delegates were shocked to hear that Firefighters could be asked to work such an outdated system which is so backward it even includes “visiting rights” for families. The delegates were unanimous in their

condemnation of these plans which are clearly about reducing establishment levels and achieving massive job cuts in front line Firefighter posts.

Delegates at the TUC, who represent Union Members from many different industries across the public and private sector, were so appalled at this situation that they asked the TUC Regional Secretary (Nigel Costley) to write to the six Fire Services in the South West raising their concerns and seeking assurances that such a system will not be implemented in the Region.

The letter from the TUC was sent to the Chairs of the Fire Authorities in Avon, Cornwall, Devon & Somerset, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire on the 18th of May. In the letter the TUC condemn such working practices as “*archaic, unsustainable, and not in the interests of the fire & rescue service, firefighters or the public.*” The TUC goes on to seek reassurances that such systems will not be considered or progressed in the South West. The full letter is available on our website: www.southwestfbu.com

FBU Regional Chair Phil Jordan, who attended the Conference, said “this is a powerful message from the TUC and politicians need to listen. Delegates at the Conference, who come from many different industries and sectors in the region, were appalled at the cuts being proposed to the front line of the Fire Service. They were outraged that Firefighters could possibly be subjected to a working system that is so outdated it has its origins in the victorian period.”

“The support received from the South West TUC shows that ordinary working people do not support cuts at the expense of front line cover and our political leaders need to realise this and act on it.”

Fighting for the Fire & Rescue Service



Protecting Firefighters & Control Staff

WILTSHIRE FIRE CREWS CONDEMN CUTS PROPOSALS!

Wiltshire Fire crews say they are deeply concerned over the impact of £1.8 million of cuts on the local fire service, which they say would do irreparable damage. The cuts have been put out to public consultation before being considered by the fire authority.



The Fire Brigades Union is warning the cuts would mean a reduction in frontline firefighters and appliances being spread more thinly across the county. The cuts are across the service and affect all duty systems.

The key concerns are over:

- Cuts to 'on call' retained firefighters which could see the loss of one in three full time equivalent posts. Many are also concerned the contractual changes being demanded mean they are being asked to choose between their main employment, their families and their 'on call' fire service work for their communities;
- Plans to cut 30 wholetime firefighter posts, one in six frontline posts;
- Cutting the number of aerial appliances (for use in buildings over 3 floors where fire engine ladders can't reach) from two to one would mean longer journey times before the only appliance could reach an incident. This would compromise public and firefighter safety;
- Removal of four emergency tenders used at road traffic incidents and building collapses and which carry enhanced medical equipment for use in specialist rescues where a member of the public may be suffering spinal injury;
- Halving the rope and water rescue team from 10 firefighters to 5 firefighters. The rope rescue team is

used at buildings with difficult access, high rise cranes, on slopes outdoors or for rescues of people trapped where access is difficult such as a well or a hole. The water rescue team is used for water rescues or during flooding. This would affect the crew's ability to carry out rescues and achieve their objectives;

- The creation of 96-hour shifts for firefighters, when they will be based at their fire station and unable to leave, except for emergencies. They will be granted visiting rights for families. This is based on a system used in the Victorian age.

Brent Thorley, FBU brigade secretary said: "There is anger and concern amongst the firefighters in Wiltshire about the cuts proposed by senior managers. The cuts would see the loss of one in six wholetime station based firefighters in Wiltshire leaving us with only 140 to provide around the clock emergency response.

"We're a small and efficient fire service and these cuts would leave us spread too thinly to guarantee an immediate response to emergencies. Our concern is the loss of frontline crews to the communities we serve, with fire service personnel and appliances thinly spread across the county.

"There would be much greater pressure on retained crews, who are also facing cuts, to fill the gaps. Our retained crews are aware they get limited training time in their current roles never mind having more responsibilities added.

"We rely very heavily on our retained fire crews who are now being asked to sign new contracts which make more demands on their availability. They feel they are being asked to decide between their main employment and the fire service they provide in their communities. Under these plans they will also be paid an hourly rate well below that of wholetime firefighters.

"The loss of an aerial platform will leave us with only one for the whole county. This will inevitably mean it will take longer to get to incidents where it can be crucial for firefighter

and public safety.

"We see no case for the removal of all four emergency tenders and halving our water and rope rescue team. These are all used at a range of emergencies and we fear losing specialist equipment, skills and personnel.

"The introduction of 96-hour shifts is a move back to Victorian days. It would confine those crews to being away from their family for long periods of time and the long shifts could be very demanding. It would devastate the wholetime service and would have a detrimental effect on their family lives.

"We want to see a first class service for the people of Wiltshire. We do not think these proposals are the right way of delivering the service the public pays for, expects and demands.

"We have written to the Chief and urged him to withdraw these proposals, also informing him of the anger and concern amongst the fire crews". The Union will shortly be publishing a full written submission to the consultation. Regular meetings are taking place with members to discuss a campaign of opposition to the cuts.

Fire Authority to meet!

A meeting of Wiltshire Fire Authority has been called for the 30th of May in Devizes. The FBU will be making a formal address to all of the politicians present at the meeting. The Union will be putting on record the concerns and opposition of FBU members in Wiltshire to the proposed cuts

FBU members will attend the meeting and lobby the Fire Authority councillors before the meeting commences. A report on this crucial meeting will follow.

DORSET FIRE CREWS HIT OUT AT FIRE AUTHORITY OVER “SLASH AND BURN APPROACH”

Dorset fire crews have hit out at the fire authority for ditching plans to raise 4.2p a week in council tax for the local fire service. The fire authority voted down the plans by 7 votes to 5 making cuts to frontline services a real possibility.

The seven councillors voted against the proposal to increase council tax by £2.16 a year – 4.2p a week for band D households which was backed by the budget group, the community risk group, the chief officer and the chair of the fire authority. Instead they backed a council tax freeze for the fire service which will no longer ensure that frontline services are protected.

Karen Adams, FBU Dorset brigade secretary said: “We’re angry that these seven councillors went against all the professional advice they were being given. It beggars belief that they think the public would trade 4.2p a week for every household for cuts which will increase risk to life across the county. There are no more efficiencies to make, this is a slash and burn approach these councillors have taken. The chief officer now says



Karen Adams

he may be left with no alternative other than to look to make savings from frontline cuts which the service was previously trying to avoid at all costs.

“The local fire crews have made sacrifices and we’re facing the third year of a pay freeze with another 2 years of potentially no more than 1% a year. With what we’re going through to protect local fire services this feels like a kick in the teeth.

“This could create plans for real cuts and you don’t get more frontline than the 999 emergency service. The pre-election promises about protecting vital frontline services are now in the gutter. It could also create real conflict as the FBU in Dorset aren't going to put up with cuts to frontline services for political reasons.

“Keeping a first class fire service for the people of Dorset was in the gift of the fire authority. Instead they have decided that the price of a life is not worth 4.2 pence per week.”

DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE CREWS DEMAND POLITICIANS “SORT THEMSELVES OUT” OVER 25% ALLOWANCE RISE

Devon and Somerset Fire Brigades Union has called on local politicians to "sort themselves out and start putting the interests of the fire service first". The union's call comes amid a row about a 25% rise in allowances for Fire Authority councillors which was voted through at a fire authority meeting.

Following this increase - pushed through on the casting vote of the Fire Authority Chairman - the chairman and his deputy may lose their positions after they were criticised by the leaders of Devon and Somerset county councils for backing the rise in allowances. The FBU says local fire crews have “no sympathy” with the councillors.

Trevor French, FBU Brigade Secretary of Devon & Somerset said: "We condemned the councillors' decision to vote through a 25% rise in allowances at the time. It was plainly wrong then and it remains so.



Trevor French

“It comes at a time when firefighters are facing the third year of a pay freeze, massive pension cuts and when the fire service is facing massive budget cuts. Senior local political leaders need to deal with this issue swiftly and decisively, sort themselves out and put the interests of the fire and rescue service first”.

Phil Jordan, FBU Regional Chair said: "The politicians who now may lose their positions on the fire authority will get no sympathy from firefighters. They are accountable and are reaping what they sowed through their previous, outrageous decisions.

“Local fire crews are trying to do their job against a background of very public political infighting and uncertainty. The senior politicians need to deal with this issue quickly and get back to dealing with how we deliver the fire and rescue service to the public.”



FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK:

Follow us on our own dedicated facebook page: Go to **South West Region of the Fire Brigades Union** and hit the “like” button to receive updates on how we are fighting for you locally. Also follow us on our dedicated website at: www.southwestfbu.com

NO TO FRONTLINE CUTS



South West EC Member Tam McFarlane

These are crucial, and worrying times for all of us in the Fire & Rescue Service. Politically motivated cuts to public spending have seen front line Firefighter posts being lost and fire cover reduced in some areas of the South West. These cuts expose as a lie previous promises by senior politicians to “protect front line services”.

The initial set of financial cuts by Government have been made even worse by some individual Fire Authorities who have chosen to reduce or even freeze their council tax. This has resulted in some Fire Authorities making plans for cuts on a staggering scale.

There is only one true voice of opposition against these cuts to our Service and it comes from the Fire Brigades Union. In recent months the Union has been campaigning vigorously within the Region against plans to cut our service. Regional Officials have been working closely with local FBU Officials and Members in Wiltshire as we organise and campaign against a set of planned cuts to the Service which are so fundamental that they are, in the view of the FBU, unfit for purpose.

Many of the cuts being put forward in Wiltshire have been seen before in other areas of the Region and this shows the very real need for the Union to co-ordinate and plan effectively at a Regional

level. By sharing our resources, ideas and experiences we have been able to react quickly and effectively to expose these cuts and the dangers that, in our professional view, they will bring.

All Members can be assured, and senior managers need to be clear, that the FBU will fight against any cuts that reduce fire cover and put public or Firefighter safety at risk and we will use all the resources at our disposal to do so.

The situation nationally is also crucial with as yet, no response from our employers on the vital issue of pay. As living costs and pension contributions both rise the detrimental effects of pay freezes are hitting all of us in the Fire Service hard and we need to make sure that our employers know our anger at this untenable situation.

The situation regarding pensions is still developing and remains very serious. The reviews into normal pension age and opt outs for Fire Service Pensions are due to report at the end of the year and we all need to monitor these developments carefully. The FBU Executive will be immediately reconvened in the event of any significant developments ahead of the reviews and Members should keep up to date via the FBU website and branch meetings. You should ensure that your views are known and your voice is heard, through our democratic structures.

We have recently seen a substantial number of serving Firefighters join the FBU for the first time in the South West. In some cases, crews from entire Fire Stations are applying for membership. This is in recognition of the strength of the Union and the protection that it gives. Our strength remains in our unity and I urge every FBU member to resist any tactic designed to split us. Proposals to cut our Services will impact on us all: Wholetime, Retained, Officer & Control and we must send the message that we are all united in defence of our service.

***Unity is Strength
Tam McFarlane***

JOIN THE PROFESSIONALS!

The FBU in the South West has recently received numerous enquiries from Fire Service staff asking for information on joining the Union. Remember, all the information on the many benefits of being an FBU member is available on our website at www.southwestfbu.com. You can also get specific information on the FBU in your own Brigade by contacting your local Official using the details in the box opposite.

The FBU is the voice of Firefighters and the Fire Service nationally. Our members cover the roles of Firefighter to Area Manager, including Emergency Fire Control Staff and Firefighters working the Retained Duty system. Join the professionals today!

Contact Your Rep:

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FBU SOUTH WEST

The Fire Brigades Union is the premier Trade Union for professional Firefighters and Control Staff across the UK. The South West Region is the largest Region in England and we cover Avon, Cornwall, Dorset, Devon & Somerset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire FRS's.

We represent over 85% of uniformed staff across the UK. Our members cover every role from Firefighter to Area Manager, including the retained duty system. We are committed to protecting our Members, their interests at work and to ensuring that the public receive an excellent and professional Fire & Rescue Service. Join the professionals, contact us at:

www.southwestfbu.com

