

THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

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REACTION: SOUTH YORKSHIRE FIRE CREWS REJECT THREAT OF FORCED SHIFT CHANGES

South Yorkshire fire crews have rejected the threats of imposed changes to their shifts. They say the changes would cause havoc with childcare and undermine their family life.

The proposed changes, which managers are threatening to impose on 4 May, would see their day shifts extended from 9 hours to 12 hours. Start and finish times have now been put forward to start work at 08.00 and finish work at 20.00 hours.

Ian Murray of the FBU said: "This threat to impose difficult and worrying change has gone down very badly with those who are trying their best to bring up children. As any parent knows, arranging reliable childcare is one of the most stressful things you have to deal with.

"Extending our already long working day by 3 hours will cause havoc with childcare. Having to start at 08.00 in the morning and finishing at 20.00 hours will mean firefighters will have to make child care arrangements for possibly 13 hours plus a day, when you add the travel times to get to and from work onto the 12 hours they will have to be on duty at the station. What effect will this have on the children being in childcare for such long periods?

"Firefighters are even more worried that they won't find childcare facilities that cater for the imposed long day shift as well as weekend working. Firefighters are on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year and they fear they'll end up having to rely on informal arrangements that can so easily break down. All of this is causing enormous stress and anxiety plus the inconvenience to other family members, as well as the worry of finding the extra costs for childcare.

"Those with older children will also have the problem of what they do in the school holidays. It will cause particular problems for women when we are trying to recruit and keep females in the fire service.

"The chief officer is wrong about shift changes in other authorities. No fire authority has ever imposed 12 hours shifts on its firefighters.

"This threat is dangling over the heads of working parents and their children and has been rejected by 98% of firefighters in South Yorkshire. We will consult South Yorkshire fire crews and we are ruling nothing out and nothing in at this moment."

Those fire crews who work shifts do so in 48 hour blocks of two 9 hour day shifts (9am to 6pm) followed by two 15 hour night shifts (6pm to 9am). The proposals would introduce 12 hours day working and 12 hours night working and would not mean an increase in hours worked but how they are worked.

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