

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

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ESSEX FIRE CREWS PRESS FOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION BALLOT

Essex fire crews and officers from stations and workplaces across the county have backed moves to ballot for industrial action following plans to cut fire services.

Meetings of fire officers and firefighters across the county have revealed:

- substantial and growing opposition to the cuts from all ranks of firefighters and fire officers;
- a vote of no confidence in the Essex chief fire officer;
- a call for a joint review with the Fire Authority to examine a more appropriate balance of resources deployed on the frontline and in the back office.

Official notice of a move towards a dispute and ballot could only be a matter of days away.

Any ballot and potential action would follow detailed legal timescales. The timescales mean there is a window of opportunity for the fire authority to modify their plans, give necessary assurances and avoid any industrial dispute. The union warned the authority not to wake up too late to the real concerns of firefighters and officers.

Essex Fire and Rescue Service is set to implement a rolling programme of frontline cuts to the 999 emergency response service. The result will be fewer firefighters spread more thinly across Essex leaving too few firefighters on duty to crew all the fire engines.

The first round of cuts include axing 44 frontline wholetime Firefighter posts, one in ten of the firefighters at fire stations ready to respond immediately to 999 calls in Essex. The posts will be lost by changing how specialist high-reach and specialist rescue vehicles are crewed leaving only enough firefighters on duty to crew one of the two specialist fire engines at a time.

Paul Adams, Essex FBU Brigade Secretary and firefighter at Grays said: "Essex fire crews and officers have given a massive thumbs down to the cuts being proposed.

We need real engagement between the fire authority and professional firefighters and officers to address those concerns. Firefighters can't crew two fire engines at the same time and we can't respond to two 999 emergencies at the same time.

"The cuts being proposed can compromise the safety of Firefighters and the public alike. There is a real danger that frontline crews will be spread far too thinly across the County.

"Those who claim there is little or no opposition to the cuts are dangerously out of touch. We urge fire authority councillors to realize there is strong and growing opposition to these cuts and to start discussions with us as a matter of urgency.

"We understand their concern about making efficiency savings. But the frontline 999 emergency response service must not be compromised by the drive to make savings."

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