

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

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FIRE BRIGADES UNION “PUZZLED AND DISAPPOINTED” AS MANAGERS END MEETING IN SIX MINUTES

Essex Fire Brigades Union says it is “puzzled and disappointed” that fire service managers ended negotiations after only six minutes this morning. The talks started at 8am with the FBU intending it to be the start of a series of meetings they hoped would resolve their lawful trade dispute.

At six minutes past eight senior managers said that the meeting was over and asked the union representatives to leave. It appears that senior managers intend only to impose change.

Keith Flynn, Essex FBU Chair said: “The meeting started with the chief officer setting out the view of the fire authority, which is all perfectly normal. We set out our views and when it was clear that those views differed the meeting was brought to a halt by the fire authority, represented by the Chief Fire Officer, and we were asked to leave.

“We are concerned that the Essex Fire Authority does not appear to recognise that we have a legitimate and lawful trade dispute and that the only way of resolving it is to engage in meaningful discussions at meetings. The whole point of this morning’s meeting was to start turning a disagreement into an agreement.

“We are genuinely puzzled as to what they are trying to achieve by prematurely ending the meeting and I am sure that our members and the public will be disappointed by their actions.

“Essex members want their elected officials to start negotiations as soon as possible, we have never rejected positive change and we are urgently seeking for the talks to continue. We stand by our proposal for a joint review to look at changes across all areas of the service – made by agreement, not simply imposed.

“We are happy to sit down and work jointly with the Essex Fire Authority and look at where genuine savings can be made that protect the frontline service as the priority. There are plenty of alternatives to the current approach of targeting cuts at frontline fire crews.”

Essex Fire Authority are set to implement a rolling programme of cuts to the frontline 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 Fire Authority proposes to cut the number of firefighters by “managed vacancies” from 954 firefighters in December 2008, to an average of 940 during 2008/9, to 920 during 2009/10, to 905 in March 2010.

Forty four of those jobs – one in ten of the frontline fire station based crews -would go by changing the way higher reach aerial ladder platforms and rescue tenders are crewed. The impact would be there would not be enough firefighters to crew all appliances, even if they were needed in a 999 emergency.

The union has also objected to a number of other changes which it says local managers are trying to impose rather than negotiate.

Individual ballot papers were posted out on 8 July to firefighters’ home addresses. The secret ballot is being overseen by Popularis.

Media contacts:

Mick Rogers 07967 023709

Keith Flynn 07956 459111

Paul Adams 07967 720363

Adrian Clarke 07917 017713