



Fire Brigades Union - South West Region

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

BRIEFING FOR WILTSHIRE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT REGARDING PROPOSED CUTS TO WILTSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE.



Firefighters and Emergency Fire Control Staff from across Wiltshire have made the long journey to London to make the case against cuts to our Fire & Rescue Service. We are asking our Members of Parliament to listen to our case and support us in having the threat of front line cuts removed.

Senior managers in Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service (WFRS) have announced proposals for the biggest series of changes to our service in a generation. The proposals are contained within 2 documents which are entitled "***Draft Consultation Document***," and "***Our Plans to Improve Your Fire & Rescue Service***". The purpose of these proposals is clearly outlined within the foreword to the documents and elsewhere on the website: "**the Service needs to save £1.8 million over the next four years.**"

The Wiltshire Fire Brigades Union (FBU) believe that these proposals represent the biggest attack on the fabric of Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service in living memory and if implemented, we believe would

detrimentally change our Service for a generation to come.

It is the view of the Fire Brigades Union and our Members within Wiltshire that, if implemented, these proposals will make wholesale cuts to the front line of the Service which will dramatically reduce the operational effectiveness of Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service. On this basis we believe they are wholly unacceptable.

In your position as a Member of Parliament the FBU wish to draw your attention to the political context of this situation. Time and again the general public has been promised by political leaders that frontline public services would be protected from spending cuts. Despite these promises Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service has now produced plans which we believe would create massive job cuts in frontline Firefighter posts and remove life saving frontline Fire & Rescue Appliances. They have done this, by their own admission, to achieve a £1.8 million spending cut.

In addition to the above, frontline operational personnel in Wiltshire would also be expected to bear the brunt of further cuts through a massive increase in working hours, and what the FBU sees as the tearing up and casualisation of current pay & other contractual arrangements which will also impact dramatically on the families of our Members.

We have called for these proposals to be withdrawn on the basis that, in our professional view, they are unfit for purpose. We ask that you, as a Member of Parliament within Wiltshire support us in that call.

WILTSHIRE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

Fighting for the Fire & Rescue Service



Protecting Firefighters & Control Staff



Shift Changes and Frontline Job Cuts

The proposals and why Wiltshire Fire Brigades Union oppose them

emergencies. They would be granted visiting rights for families. This is based on a system used in the Victorian age.

These plans are called “Day Crewed Plus”. It means reducing the normal 4 watches at a wholetime shift Fire Station to only 2 and the remaining Firefighters would be expected to live & work on the Fire Station for 4 days at a time. We believe this system of work is archaic, unsustainable, and not in the interests of the Fire and Rescue Service, Firefighters, or the public.

The FBU concludes that it would mean;

- Firefighters required to be at work for days at a time
- Large levels of Wholetime Firefighter job loses
- A potentially detrimental impact on Family life

The proposals include what the Union sees as massive cuts in the number of frontline Firefighter posts. Under the plans there would be a cut of around 30 wholetime Firefighter posts which equates to one in six frontline posts in Wiltshire being lost. Firefighter posts in the Retained Duty System (or “on call” firefighters as they are also called) would also be reduced, which could see the loss of around one in three full time equivalent posts.

The frontline staff that are left would then, in the view of the Union be expected to bear the brunt of further cuts through a massive increase in working hours, the tearing up and casualisation of current pay & other contractual arrangements which we believe will impact dramatically on our families.

Front line Firefighter posts would be cut through the introduction of 96 hour shifts for firefighters, when they will be based at their fire station and unable to leave, except for

The FBU sees this system as a fundamental break with Firefighters’ national conditions of service and the Wiltshire FBU Brigade Committee has declared total opposition to its introduction. We also believe that the system is outside at least the spirit of legislation which is in place to protect workers such as doctors and lorry drivers etc from being made to work too long when by doing so the public is put at risk.

The FBU does not accept that duty systems designed for the Victorian age have any place in the 21st century Fire & Rescue Service

Removing Special Appliances and Reducing the number of Aerial Appliances to only One.

The proposals include plans to remove special appliances called Emergency Tenders and also cut the number of aerial appliances to only one, which would then have to cover the entire county by itself. The FBU believe that if these cuts to the front line of the Service are allowed to proceed they will dramatically reduce the operational effectiveness of Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service.

Currently our four emergency tenders are used at road traffic incidents and building collapses and they carry enhanced medical equipment for use in specialist rescues where a member of the public may be suffering spinal injury. We see no case for the removal of all four emergency tenders. These are used at a range of emergencies and we fear losing specialist equipment, skills and personnel will have an inevitable impact on public safety.

Currently we have two aerial platforms, one is based at Salisbury and the other at Swindon. 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. 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. We believe this would compromise public and firefighter safety. These appliances are vital to saving lives and fighting fires at height. Their use is unique and they cannot be replaced by another piece of equipment. Should the plans go ahead, the

Service will place the one remaining appliance at Devizes. We have undertaken trials to see how response times would be affected to some major high rise fire risks within Wiltshire and these are a snapshot of our very worrying results:



Current:

Aerial appliance to Salisbury Cathedral = 7 minutes;
Under new proposal = 58 minutes.

Current:

Aerial appliance to Swindon High Rise = 8 minutes;
Under new proposal = 55 minutes.

Response times of this order could massively increase fire growth in high rise buildings. This could then significantly increase fire damage with a resultant increase in financial cost through insurance etc and societal cost through rehousing etc. It is, in short a false economy and, in the view of the FBU, also a very dangerous one. Many buildings in Wiltshire have national heritage importance, such as Salisbury Cathedral, Longleat house etc and the current two aerial appliances have a significant role in keeping buildings such as these safe from fire.



The proposals and why Wiltshire Fire Brigades Union oppose them

Fundamental Changes to the Retained Duty System

The FBU believe that proposals for the retained duty system would, if implemented, be the largest single change to the Service in Wiltshire for a generation.

The service suggest that by offering a fixed salary, recruitment and retention will be more easily attained than at present, even being as bold as to suggest that 100% availability of all appliances should be attainable under the new scheme.

The FBU believe that this assertion, which appears based on mere hope and not fact, is just plain wrong. The FBU acknowledges the recent downward trend in retention of retained fire fighters, but offers alternative reasoning for this trend.

Lack of Retention

WFRS try to link the reduction in retention to a reduction in fire calls (largely due to the services alterations of policies such as response to Automatic Fire Alarm's) and therefore a reduction in income to the retained fire fighter.

Retained members themselves give an alternative view; that the pressure from endless auditing and testing, combined with frustrations of not riding the appliance due to policy changes, as the main factors which lead to their colleagues leaving the service. Whilst it is the case that retained fire fighters have seen a drop in their income, the majority still state that that they "don't do it for the money" and that finance is not the main reason for lack of retention.

The Fire Brigades Union has many concerns regarding the proposed salary scheme. This is based on the views of Retained Firefighters themselves following extensive meetings and consultation with the Union.

Lack of Flexibility

One of the fundamental aspects of being a Retained Firefighter is that they have separate and "main" employment outside of the Fire Service. In order to balance their main employment with answering fire calls in the community, together with the need for fire service training in the evenings and also meet the needs of their family, an individual requires, above all: **flexibility**.

When external life pressures arise, be they from an employer, a customer of a self-employed RDS fire fighter, a family emergency, or from a husband or wife who simply asks that they be put ahead of the alerter for an afternoon, the RDS fire fighter can, at present and on most occasions, accommodate this. This flexibility creates a manageable situation for the RDS fire fighter whilst enabling them to fulfill their contractual obligations of what is perhaps the most arduous of roles and duty systems.

Feedback has told us that the removal of this flexibility, as is planned under the proposals, will lead to many staff questioning if they will be able to fulfill the services expectations of them whilst balancing their business and family lives.

Contrary to the services reasoning that fire fighters will receive higher remuneration, a large proportion of RDS are suggesting that, due to the removal of flexibility, they will be forced to offer less cover than they do presently, which may lead to less pay.

Arising from the removal of flexibility, a high number of RDS fire fighters have told us that they would not be able to offer any cover during weekend days, largely due to the fact that very few are willing to offer such a commitment to cover every weekend, week in, week out. Unsurprisingly this is more the case in the smaller towns and villages where there are few opportunities to

'do something' and generally get out and about with the family following a busy week at their full time employment.

This was particularly the case at one retained station where just one person said they would be willing to do weekends. Incidentally, being available for every weekend from 0900-1700 Saturday and Sunday will give the retained fire fighter £22.44 or £11.22 per day.

We believe this is a derisory figure to offer anybody for sacrificing both their own and their families' weekends every week of the year. In this context it is plain to see, and therefore understand, why a retained fire fighter would be reluctant to place this extra stress upon their home lives.

Job Losses

The project leaders documents state that: "a reduction from 303 FTE (full time equivalents) to 185 FTE, will enable the project to remain cost neutral"

In other words: **frontline job cuts**.

From the beginning of this process the service has maintained that the project will be cost neutral, and yet also claimed that the RDS fire fighters in its employ will be paid more. What is clear to the FBU is that to do this they intend to get rid of a large proportion of the workforce and make the remainder work longer for less.

The service states that the RDS budget is currently year on year £600k under spent, and that this is where the additional finances will come from. After discussing this issue with its members, the FBU is disappointed that use of these monies to perhaps enhance current retainer fees to aid in the retention and recruitment of RDS fire fighters which would inevitably lead to better contract adherence and therefore improved fire cover, were never even considered.

The proposals and why Wiltshire Fire Brigades Union oppose them

Reduction in Specialist Rope Rescue Capability

The Union are opposed to the Services proposal to halve 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 for water rescues or for use during flooding incidents.

The FBU believe that this reduction would affect the crew's ability to carry out rescues and achieve their objectives. We see no case for this reduction which would halve our water and rope rescue team. These are all used at a wide range of emergencies and we fear losing specialist equipment, skills and personnel.

The devastating floods in neighbouring Gloucestershire are still fresh in the memories of Firefighters and the public alike. The Fire & Rescue Service is the primary rescue service which deals with these emergencies and we believe that as opposed to cuts, there should actually be **more** investment in our capability to do so.



Wiltshire Fire Brigades Union: Comments from the local Officials

The FBU in Wiltshire believe that these proposals, if implemented, would see the resources of the Service being spread too thinly. This would, in our view, seriously affect our ability to provide a first class service to the public of Wiltshire. We also believe that these plans could increase the risk to Fire and Rescue Service personnel. We believe these proposals could lead to delays in turn outs as well as potentially significant delays to the use of specialist equipment with specially trained crews. We believe the reduction in resources would also impact on our ability to respond to incidents in neighbouring Brigades. The most disappointing aspect for our members is that during the 12 - 18 months that these proposals were being put together by the project leaders they did not speak to the skilled professionals within their own organisation, particularly those that lead in specialist skills or provide training. These are the people who really know what it takes to deliver a first class service and safe working practices for operational crews.

Brent Thorley, Wiltshire FBU Secretary

PLEASE CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION OR WITH YOUR COMMENTS:

If you would like more information from the Wiltshire Fire Brigades Union on this issue or you would like to add your comments please get in touch with one of local Officials opposite. We can also arrange meetings with Firefighters within your constituency in order to discuss this situation directly with them

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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**](http://www.southwestfbu.com)

