

THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION (LONDON REGION)



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TO ALL LONDON FBU MEMBERS

Dear Brothers and Sisters

PROPOSED MEETING ON SHIFT CHANGES

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) today attended a meeting at the request of London Fire Brigade managers, to discuss proposed changes to shifts. It will come as no surprise that what was conveyed to us was the need to change in line with authority decisions.

Senior managers have again reiterated their intention to use 12-hour shifts to introduce a flexible workforce who can be made to serve where and whenever they want you to.

The usual justifications were again given to meet both their aims and objectives. But we know why 12-hour shifts are so attractive to them: reduced fire cover at night, reductions in establishment levels, an end to night-time stand-down, a divided workforce, and an end to the watch structure. All of these are things to come if they get their way.

Whilst they dress up changes as “modernisation”, the truth is that modernisation can take place whilst retaining the current shift system – a fact that senior managers and politicians refuse to accept.

Modernisation should mean providing both the workforce and the communities we serve with a better service – but proposals such as 12-hour shifts will only lead to a worse service with cuts year on year.

Yes, if we agreed to 12-hour shifts (which we won't), we might get written into any agreement a commitment not to make cuts for one or even two years, but then what?

The current shift system is a legacy from retired firefighters who fought long and hard to secure it. The current shifts still tick all the right boxes for being family- and welfare-friendly, including meeting the requirement to attract and retain a diverse workforce.

Senior managers claim to want increases in productivity and think that 12-hour shifts will deliver them. Yet the FBU has time and time again shown how increases in productivity can be achieved within the current system; indeed, we are more than prepared to negotiate to allow the delivery of such increases, which could restore the low morale on stations.

What the brigade is proposing is a recipe for disaster, with lower morale and a worse service. They can dress up 12-hour shifts as delivering benefits, but when it comes down to it, we all know that 12-hour shifts will not benefit members, unless they consider the following as benefits: longer working hours, fewer breaks, even more domestic chaos for childcare and a social life that is almost non-existent.

Twelve-hour shifts will greatly affect our ability to retain diversity in the workforce, which should reflect the communities we serve.

The FBU's women's action committee has always maintained that shifts should not be changed in their name – a statement that management continues to ignore.

We urge all members to now stand strong on shifts. When the proposals were originally announced, a massive 98.5% of members voted '**NO**' to change, and now is the time to show senior managers and politicians that if they want to make change just for change's sake, we will not lie down and accept it.

The Fire Brigades Union is the only union fighting these changes, and we can win if we stand united amid threats of imposition which would require the employers to effectively sack everyone and issue new contracts. If such a step was taken, it would no longer remain a local issue. Firefighters up and down the country support our efforts to defend our current conditions – so too would the public we serve.

It is now down to us all to stand together if we want to stop change for change's sake. We need to focus the minds and decisions of our employers on the real issues: draconian policies which attack things such as leave, low morale and continual attacks on conditions of service.

Yours fraternally

Ian Leahair

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Fire Brigades Union