

DSFA WORKING TIME PROPOSALS

Thank you for your email in which you raise your concerns over the Devon and Somerset Fire Authority's (DSFA) proposals to implement 96 hour shifts.

In 2003, the European Parliament passed the 'Working Time Directive' (2003/88/EC). Excessive and prolonged working hours can be a major cause of stress, depression and illness, and the purpose of the Directive is ultimately to protect people's health and safety.

A link to the Directive can be found at:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32003L0088:EN:HTML>.

The Directive mentions that employees have the right to work a maximum of 48 hours per seven day period. However, the directive has an opt-out clause, which has been adopted by the UK Government, so there is currently no legislation that prevents employees from working longer shifts.

The proposal that you mention, known as the day crewed plus scheme, comes as a result of the 25% Government budget cuts the DSFA faces over the next four years. The scheme proposes to implement a crewing system whereby operational fire fighters are permanently located at the fire station during normal daytime hours, and then remain on call throughout the night to attend any emergencies. This is where the 96 hour shift would come from. However, being on call means that fire fighters will also have the chance to rest in between call outs. As a result, there is no conflict between the proposed scheme and the Directive.

The scheme is currently in use in stations across the UK and throughout Europe. As it is a voluntary scheme, it does not breach the Working Time Directive, and fire fighters have the choice whether or not to accept the offer of working longer hours and a pay rise or whether to decide to continue working under the current scheme.

I hope that I have been able to address your concerns, however if you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Giles Chichester MEP