



Dear GMB Members,

We write to you this week, following the introduction of the new 'Emergency Change to End of Shift Arrangements and Meal Breaks in Response to the significant and sustained demand within the Southwest' SOP. (Just saying the title is enough to fill you up!)

As you should be aware from the previous update, recently GMB Organisers and your Branch Secretary, Graeme Ayrton met with senior management of SWAST to discuss several issues, along with several communications had with the Director Operations and Director of People and Culture. One of those issues is - and it's one that has caused significant detriments to members over recent weeks and months - the meal breaks and end of shift protections.

In the discussions and communications, GMB highlighted the concerns of our membership and where we saw the problems, giving ideas and recommendations of what we thought GMB members saw as reasonable solutions, based on the recent survey. You will also have seen the messages put out on the Facebook group, and in particular, the idea of a significant and easy payment to staff if they were to have an off-station meal break. Well, as you would have now seen, between the Trust and the recognised union Unison, they have run with many of the ideas GMB members presented and, in some cases, unfortunately ruined them!

During our discussions it was suggested the issues members were having were threefold:

1. ARP/poor triage by the inadequate systems, are causing crews to travel significant distances to attend calls that, in many cases, did not warrant an ambulance or conveying resource in the first place.
2. Due to the distances crews were travelling, crews were out of area for their meal breaks, meaning staff were forced to take a break at a different station.
3. When crews were getting breaks at different stations it was leading to being pushed further away from their areas, and this was resulting in late finishes.

GMB requested that the trust consider that staff be given primary breaks on station in order that they can be certain of having at least one meal during their shift, which can be kept cool in a fridge if required. We further asked for staff to be returned to their local areas to reduce overruns, along with requesting that staff on two 30-minute breaks be given the opportunity to forgo their second break if the crew wished, therefore giving them the opportunity to plan their own end of shift protections. Most importantly, we have asked for the trust to develop better communication with the staff in order that staff are not left miles from their base station if, or when the Strategic Commander decides to change the SOP on a whim!

Now, I am sure none of this will come as a surprise to you, seeing as these are the points members have been making across the GMB social media. It is clear from the proposals that SWAST and

Unison liked our ideas so much that they decided to use them and label them as their own! If anyone has seen the recent issues with Aldi & M&S in relation to caterpillar cakes, then GMB now know how M&S feel.

So, what are you to expect from the likely changes?

Many of the ideas have been carried forward yes, but there have been some subtle changes which GMB feel might actually lead to more pressure on the crews, the trust and harm to the patients.

A single 60-minute meal break on day shifts. Many staff have told us that they do not want a single long break on their shift, though we would of course appreciate that some do. Our concern is, many day crews begin their shifts between 0600-0800, this would mean that a number of crews will be on a meal break at the same time, for 60 minutes each.

So, what happens to the 999/111 calls that are coming in during this period?

For instance, will they sit in the stack waiting?

Would that not just make the stack even bigger, causing more stress to our hardworking hub/dispatch staff, and meaning of course that the calls are still out there for when you finish your breaks?

The enhanced end of shift protection, in the last 60 minutes of the shift, no Cat 3 or 4 calls will be answered, and in the last 30 minutes no Cat 2 calls will be answered. This is potentially good news for the crews finishing their shifts, but it does cause similar issues to the 60-minute meal break, if the dispatchers have a growing stack with nothing to send, so the oncoming crews will be starting their shift with a reduced opportunity for any downtime.

GMB believe that this may well cause issues to the road staff at night especially, with only one 30-minute break guaranteed and the current position of second meal breaks, that many staff either aren't getting one or, if so that the second meal break is a significant distance from their base station.

Of course, this might appear hypocritical, asking for two 30-minute breaks on one hand, then complaining about them on the other. They do have their place, but with the likely increase in the call stack in the scenarios given, they are potentially more likely to be detrimental.

You might be aware that as GMB Branch Secretary Graeme, had asked the CEO and Directors for GMB members to be given the opportunity to see the plans ahead of time, and to be able to feedback their thoughts and suggestions on it.

As in previous meetings the GMB and Branch Officials have told the Trust Executive team that by engaging and seeking the input of our members, it would potentially smooth the way before the implementation of any policy change. Unfortunately, as you can probably guess, the response was a firm NO, as the trust to be honest has not yet decided on how they want to deal with GMB and would prefer to only deal with Unison at this time, until they have had further discussions with Unison and ACAS about potential recognition.

But GMB need to get on with the job of protecting and representing its members whilst others decide if they want us working in partnership or independently. Now of course we hope that we are proved to be wrong with our concerns, and that the road crews and the hub staff will see a significant benefit under the new proposals, we guess only time will tell.

But GMB will as promised, seek your views and ratification or not through our GMB consultative ballot, (*see link to ballot below*) And simply we ask, do you *accept the new SOP or not?*

PLEASE VOTE NOW at <https://www.gmb-southern.org.uk/swast-end-of-shift-meal-break-ballot>

Please read the Emergency Change to End of Shift Arrangements and Meal Breaks in Response to the significant and sustained demand within the Southwest' SOP (at) if you haven't already, and then take the time to vote on whether you accept the New SOP as presented by the Trust and Unison. **It's you** that will be working to this SOP, and **it's you** that could be affected in doing so, so GMB ask **that you** take the time and responsibility to vote on things that effect **you**.

The ballot which will close on *12.30 am Fri 30th July* at which time GMB will update both you as members, and the trust of the outcome of that vote, and any next steps.

In Fraternity,

Asia Allison, GMB Regional Organiser

Gary Palmer, GMB Organiser

Graeme Ayrton, GMB G40 Branch Secretary