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## Strike warning at Northern after 'relations break down'

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NORTHERN RAIL staff are being balloted for industrial action, after a claim by their union the RMT that there has been a 'breakdown in industrial relations'.

The call for a ballot, which could be followed by strikes, has been triggered by the use of freelance agency staff to carry out 'core railway work', which the RMT says should be restricted to its members.

In an internal union communication seen by Railnews, RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: "Northern Rail management continue to use agency and sub-contract labour for core railway work. Agency staff and other companies are carrying out roles which should be carried out by our members employed within the company. This situation is completely unacceptable to the RMT and the company's response is completely unsatisfactory. Northern Rail is refusing to bring these workers in-house in line with union policy."

However, Northern Rail said that out of seven issues which had been in dispute six had been resolved by discussion, leaving only a disagreement about the use of contractors' staff to carry out revenue protection duties.

The operator said it had been contracting the work to two organisations, one of which had been undertaking these duties for 13 years – since before the present Northern franchise began. The other was introduced on a trial basis in 2012 with a commitment to review progress with the RMT in May this year.

Although Northern has not identified the organisations it uses, the RMT has named them as Trainpeople.co.uk and G4S Security.

Northern HR director Adrian Thompson said: "The RMT has demanded that Northern either sacks or employs the 260 people employed on these contracts. The RMT is claiming that Northern is gradually replacing employees with 'agency staff' a claim that is completely unfounded and untrue.

"We do not want to put these people out of work. These contracts carry out a vital role, ensuring that passengers have valid tickets and those fares are fully captured to reinvest into building a better railway. The changes the RMT is demanding we make would also potentially breach the rules governing the last 12 months of our franchise agreement."

The ballot opens next Tuesday (7 May) and closes on 20 May. If there is a vote in favour Northern said the earliest possible date for a strike would be 27 May.

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