

Members and Union faces up to challenge in West Midlands

THE Union is tackling head-on a whole range of issues across the region with members mobilising in defence of jobs, conditions and the fire service.

Some of the biggest challenges are in the West Midlands. The latest draft IRMP proposes cuts in appliances at night between the hours of midnight and 0800 hours.

The proposal will see a reduction from 62 in the daytime to 49 at night – effectively a 20% reduction during these hours.

The Union has mounted a major campaign to counter the proposals, including a meeting at Westminster with Midland MPs, which resulted in a parliamentary adjournment debate being held.

The public are keeping up the

pressure too. A large petition and thousands of letters are being handed in to the Fire Authority.

The Fire Authority meeting was due to be held on 21 March to discuss and decide on the IRMP. As this newsletter went to press, the Union was moving to organise a major lobby on the day.

The Union is also working hard in West Midlands to defend members against detrimental proposals on shift patterns.

The Brigade is proposing to introduce new shift patterns to support the IRMP as from 8th September. Their proposals – put forward on 4 January – were based on 8-hour shifts and a ‘composite’ shift system which includes 12-hour shifts and 8-hour shifts which would start and finish at 12.00 midnight.

At a series of well-attended meetings members unanimously rejected the brigade proposals. The Brigade Committee has made it clear that the changes will have to be negotiated in line with the Conditions of Service Agreement 2003 and that we are not prepared to discuss anything until after the IRMP has been decided.

The brigade has also moved on overtime policy in line with the pay agreement. However, they are attempting to get rid of long standing allowances in respect of washing up time on return from incidents at the end of shift at the same time.

We have registered a failure to

agree in respect of the policy and are awaiting a meeting with the Fire Authority Appeals Panel.

LSI/Promotion has also become an issue with the fire authority determining at appeal that the LSI payment should be stopped for personnel on Temporary Promotion in post prior to Nov 7th 2003.

This is outside of the National Agreement, which states that those personnel in temporary posts should continue to receive it until they return to their substantive rank.

Assistant General Secretary Mike Fordham has raised this with the Employers Secretary and we are awaiting further instructions from him.

MEDICAL REDEPLOYMENT

In another attack, the brigade has tried to redeploy operational personnel who are medically unfit to other posts within the Brigade.

They attempted to get individuals to sign new contracts, which gave our members 12 months pay protection. Through the Union lawyers’ Thompsons we threatened legal action and registered a failure to agree.

Following advice from Martin Hill of the ODPM and after a long delay the Brigade have agreed to maintain the status quo. But they have made it clear that they are looking towards dismissing people on ‘capability’

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grounds for those personnel who fall outside of the DDA protection.

Cold calling, IRMP attendance times, a brigade restructure and a survey of HMO's within Birmingham City Centre are also issues of concern to members that we are addressing in the Brigade.

Over in Staffordshire the Union has mounted a major campaign involving the public and local press against cuts proposals under the IRMP.

The Fire Authority is seeking to remove five retained pumps from multi pump stations and announced at the recent budget meeting that there would be 16 uniformed job cuts. An aerial appliance also faces the chop. The FBU members and officials in Staffordshire have collected some 8,000 signatures in a petition – and the Union hopes to soon gain as many as 20,000.

The Union is also working hard to tackle a number of challenges in the following brigades:

ELSEWHERE

Hereford & Worcester: Local agreements being ignored by manage-

ment; problems with new Discipline & Grievance procedures; proposal for new duty system.

Shropshire: Staffing levels on aerial appliances, masses of temporary ranks – over 50% of Stn O and above ranks are temporary at present.

Warwickshire: Possible problems with budget; Day Crewing – management want to introduce more flexibility

USE YOUR VOTE!

As you will be aware the election for General Secretary is at the nomination stage. The current General Secretary, Bro. Andy Gilchrist, has declared his intention to stand for re-election and there may be other nominees. Should this election go to a ballot stage then members are urged to participate and return their completed voting papers. This Government are watching the turn outs of union elections with interest and the low turn out in the recent AGS election only gives them encouragement to consider even more radical proposals for the Fire Service. It's your vote – USE IT.

DAVE WHATTON
EC member

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