

Friday August 17 2007 No.111

CPD/LSI: EXECUTIVE COUNCIL RECOMMENDS PENSION- ABILITY PROPOSALS



Members are being consulted on proposals to make Continual Professional Development (CPD) payments pensionable by means of an Additional Pensions Benefit (APB) that would be accumulated for all the time a member receives CPD. There would also be an APB for members who have been in receipt of LSI. Members are urged to attend branch meetings and make their opinions heard!

Following a series of meetings between the Union, employers and Government officials, proposals have been presented that would see Continual Professional Development (CPD) payments made

pensionable by means of an Additional Pensions Benefit (APB). The APB would accumulate for all the time that a member receives CPD and would be reported on the Annual Pension Statement which all members of the schemes receive. A full explanation of the APB proposal will be issued in due course. The proposals come after a provisional agreement with employers on CPD in February and the subsequent decision by ministers to make CPD pensionable.

LSI pensionability

The Union, which lobbied hard on behalf of FBU members ahead of these proposals, also raised concerns with civil servants and Ministers about those members who

have paid pension contributions on LSI but may not benefit from these additional contributions because of the ending of LSI, arguing that this is extremely unfair. Officials from the department for Communities and Local Government have now also presented a proposal to introduce a further APB for members who have been in receipt of LSI. This would be based on the number of years that the employee had received LSI and would also include double accrual for years over 20 (as exists in the FPS). Again, full details will be issued soon.

The Executive Council has recommended that these proposals be accepted as they represent the best that can be achieved on this issue and has agreed that they should go to members for consultation. Reports from this consultation will be considered by the Executive Council on 18th September. If the issue is concluded at that time, the Union shall then press Employers to make rapid payment of CPD.

Members are urged to attend branch meetings and make their opinions heard!

Regional controls: "Listen to Gloucester's CFO and change course" Union tells Fire Minister

This week, new Fire Minister Parmjit Dhanda has the best chance he will ever have to rethink the Government's proposal introduce regional controls, the Union has said.

"Mr Dhanda, who is also the MP for Gloucester, should listen this week to the fire chief in his own constituency," FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said.

Gloucester chief fire officer Terry Standing said this week that his brigade's response to recent flooding would have been hampered if the proposed new regional control system in Taunton had been in place.

Under the government's Firecontrol project, the fire control centre in Gloucester, covering Gloucestershire, will be replaced by a regional control centre in Taunton covering seven counties.

"This is a window of opportunity for Mr Dhanda," Mr Wrack said.

"He has the evidence of the professionals involved that the new system will make the fire service less effective. He is a new fire minister who can take a fresh look. And we have a new Prime Minister who has shown himself able and willing to show leadership and revisit positions previously held by the administration.

"This is the best chance we will ever have for a rethink and a more rational policy. I urge Parmjit Dhanda not to throw it away. I urge him to listen to the people in his own constituency. He should listen to his own chief fire officer, Terry Standing. He should listen to the firefighters under Mr Standing's command."

Mr Standing's comments reflected what the FBU has been saying. He told the Gloucestershire Citizen this week: "We won vital battles because we were able to put the right resources in place at the right time. We used our professional judgement. My concern is when we get a regional control, that ability is somewhat removed from us. It's that ability to work locally and know your patch and people."

The influential local paper, the Gloucestershire Citizen, continues to run a vigorous campaign to keep Gloucester's own regional control room, a campaign which has the overwhelming support of its readers.

The £1 billion scheme will reduce the fire service's 46 control centres to just nine. It involves making 571 staff redundant - nearly a third of the total.

Technology no substitute for people

"In firefighting, technology is no substitute for people," said Mr Wrack. "In the end, an emergency call has to be dealt with by a human being. Every person in our control centres has been fully stretched during this crisis. If the current proposal had been implemented at the time of the crisis calls would have gone unanswered.

"And part of the reason they have been able to deal with calls quickly and efficiently is their local knowledge, which would be

lost in the proposed new regional centres."

Can our emergency services cope with national emergencies? Union surveys members' views

FBU members throughout the UK are being asked to report on how the emergency services coped with June and July's floods. Their replies will form the basis of a report, to be produced by the Union, on how emergency services coped, and what improvements need to be made.

The move came as the Union wrote to Environment Secretary, Hilary Benn seeking assurances that the views of firefighters will be considered by the review into the floodings which was announced by the government recently.

Key issues

The report will address three key issues:

- First, what were the problems posed to the Fire Service in the last few weeks?
- Second, are there enough people and resources? We know that since 2003, the Fire Service has been cutting the numbers of people, appliances and stations it has available
- Third, does the record of recent weeks, alongside the analyses of the experiences in the Service since 2003,

suggest that Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) - set up by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2003 - is working? Were we properly prepared for the floods? What changes are needed before the next emergency? Are the priorities of the government, set out in its framework document, sufficient or appropriate to address all the needs of the fire and rescue service, including severe weather and terrorist attack?

Regional controls and major emergencies

The Union will also be seeking information from FBU members that will indicate whether the proposed regional control system is up to the special demands created by an emergency such as freak weather conditions or a terrorist attack, after anecdotal evidence from the floods, and comments from senior fire service personnel, provided strong indications it would not.

FBU members who have particular experiences of note or concerns arising from the recent responses to the floods should, in the first instance, contact a local FBU official who will be able to ensure all information is passed on to the appropriate official within the FBU.

Brigade officials have already been charged with collating centrally reports relating to health and safety concerns, including personal protective

equipment, training, planning and co-ordination (including the operation of Gold Command), welfare arrangements, among other issues.

Conditions of service issues

With the floods meaning members often working away from home for days at a time, and this in many cases with little or no prior discussions or planning, the Union will be looking at issues such as overtime payments and arrangements for working in other fire authority areas.

In addition to raising concerns with Government, which is carrying out a review of the response and preparedness for major flooding incidents, the Union has been in contact with the TUC, suggesting that the views of all Unions with members involved be submitted to this FBU review.

Separately, the DLG is carrying out a review of the fire and rescue service response to the flood and the Union intends to make the views of FBU members heard in this process too.

Time for proper equipment!

What is already quite clear to the Union and our members involved in responding to the floods is that the supply of proper equipment to firefighters should be an integral part of proper planning for future floods.

Already this summer, one firefighter was taken ill, probably as a result of working in floods. During the June floods in Hull and Sheffield, a firefighter rescued a member of the public from a flooded ditch and went down with a virus, thought to have been contracted from the water. He was in hospital for six days and off work for two weeks.

Health warning

The Health Protection Agency's Thames Valley Health Protection Unit has said that hundreds of bacteria could be contained within flood water, including salmonella, campylobacter and cryptosporidium - with symptoms including diarrhoea, headaches, vomiting and stomach cramps. Flood water tends to become mixed up with the contents of sewers. Experts say it can get into small skin wounds and make you seriously ill.

While the public was warned not to go into floodwater unprotected, firefighters attending the floods were wading up to their waist into contaminated flood water, without appropriate protective clothing.

Toxins - the hidden killer

Earlier this year the Union conducted a pilot study into the levels of toxins contained within the body fat of members who have been exposed to smoke and other elements generated from fires. This study, although small (19 members tested), has shown a consistently raised level of

organochlorines and fire retardants. These substances are very toxic and can lead to major health problems including cancer.

The Union will be carrying out further work in this area to determine any methods available to protect you.

Although most toxins will be inhaled, a substantial amount may be absorbed through the skin. These toxins can continue to affect you from the residue on clothing. You are urged to do everything possible to reduce these risks and are advised to do the following:

- always insist on wearing BA where hazards are known or are likely to remain;
- always shower after fires and exposure to any other chemical/toxic atmospheres;
- ensure all personal protective equipment (PPE) used is properly cleaned (Do not forget gloves and helmets.);
- always change underclothes (Working Rig) after fires etc and have the contaminated ones properly cleaned (Normal laundry is usually sufficient). If unsure, ask your Brigade Safety Officer for advice;
- finally, members should make sure that exposure is recorded as a safety event / injury report.

Advice from Doctor Myhill, who carried out this work, is that detoxification can take place. Toxins contained within body fat can and should be sweated out.

Working together, we can improve the health and safety of all members.

For further information, please contact your brigade health & safety rep.

Firefighters 'involved in the use of unauthorised rest facilities' see punishments cut on appeal

Manchester firefighters disciplined for resting on the floor instead of on £400 reclining chairs have had their punishments cut on appeal. Dave Adamson and Keith Hadley of Bury fire station, were accused by the brigade of 'involvement in the use of unauthorised rest facilities'. Green Watch commander Steve Wilcock was also accused as he was in charge.

Senior brigade managers said they defied orders to use reclining chairs installed as a replacement for beds in Greater Manchester's 41 fire stations last year. The pair used gym mats and sleeping bags during a 15-hour night shift.

The Union described the case 'bureaucracy gone barmy' after the three were punished following disciplinary hearings in June. Mr Wilcock received a final written warning - a punishment one down

from a dismissal. Both Mr Adamson and Mr Hadley received written warnings.

But now their punishments have been reduced after all three attended individual hearings in front of county fire officer Barry Dixon.

The active period of Mr Hadley's warning has been reduced from six months to three months, Mr Adamson's punishment was expunged and Mr Wilcock's final written warning was reduced to a written warning, now lasting three months.

Senior managers admitted there were 'issues regarding the implementation and enforcement' of the controversial policy and a need for 'clarity'. New internal guidance will be issued.

More guidance needed

Mr Dixon said: "Having heard the appeals of those involved, I am satisfied they all understood the guidance issued and their individual responsibilities in relation to bringing in unauthorised rest facilities. I do however recognise that there are issues regarding the implementation and enforcement of the policy that not only affect these individuals but employees across the service. As a result I have lessened the disciplinary awards that were originally given. Recognising that clarity may be needed in some areas, comprehensive internal guidance will be issued shortly."

The brigade replaced all beds in its fire stations with the reclining chairs at a cost of £130,000 under a 'modernisation' programme. Firefighters were not allowed to use them until they had been given special health and safety training on how to sit on them.

An internal memo, issued last year, also gave new guidelines on how to rest at fire stations and warned of 'random inspections' and threatened anyone caught out with disciplinary action. The probe at Bury was launched after a 'performance review team' carried out a spot check at around 6.30am.

Source: Manchester Evening News

Get the e-bulletin and other FBU campaign news by email. Visit www.fbu.org.uk, type in your email address in the bottom left hand side of the homepage and "Sign Up". It takes less than 2 minutes

**FBU Confidential
Freephone Stress and
Support Line**

0800 783 4778

Stressed?
Bullied?
Get help from the Union

**FBU Freephone Legal
Advice Line**

0808 100 6061

For advice on personal injury, family law, wills conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.
For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU rep