

PENSIONS : BUILDING THE CAMPAIGN



EC calls for unity with fellow trade unionists

The FBU Executive Council this week called on members and officials to work closely with their fellow trade unionists in the pensions campaign, and has not ruled out strike action to protect FBU members' future financial security.

At a meeting two day meeting, the EC discussed the Union's strategy in response to the Government's proposed changes to the Firefighters Pensions Scheme (FPS) and the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), and developments with sister unions in the public sector involved the broad TUC-co-ordinated pensions campaign.

It agreed to:

- Build on any positive outcome to today's (Friday February 18) day of action,
- Reiterate the importance of lobbying and writing to MPs

(standard letters are available to email direct from the FBU website).

- Build for March 23, the date when some unions may take industrial action around the issue of the LGPS and promote participation and solidarity activities across brigades.
- Work towards our own timetable, to best advantage FBU members, building towards a yes vote for strike action if required.
- Increase work with other trade unions to achieve common goals, where possible, both locally and nationally.

In the meanwhile the EC also called for the Union to build awareness of these issues around the proposals to change the FPS and LGPS, including to:

- Continue to seek meetings with ministers, and organise parliamentary briefings.

- Provide information for members and officials, including Out Of Trade and pensioners lobby.
- Expand on the FBU campaign by highlighting opposition to detrimental changes to the FPS, and call for improvements and inclusion of emergency fire control members and firefighter members working the retained duty system into the FPS as positive changes.
- Beef up our press strategy and publicity campaign, including the production of effective campaign materials
- Draft a paper to submit to the EC, identifying an effective industrial strategy, including the opportunity to take industrial action if necessary prior to conference.
- Confirm the FBU's 2001 national fire & co-responding policy - and continue to expel members who voluntarily undertake co-responding duties for acting in contravention of policy;
- Re-define the 2001 national first & responding policy - to state that although the FBU does not actively support first and co-responding, FBU members will not be expelled for undertaking these duties. Such members will not be eligible for AIF benefits or entitled to apply for FBU representation or legal aid in respect of co-responding issues. In essence this is similar position to that adopted for issues connected with proceeding through red traffic lights en-route to an emergency incident.
- Revise the 2001 national fire & co-responding policy - and support fire and rescue service co-responding with the necessary safeguards (or 'control' measures) identified in the Arthur D Little report.


For more on the pensions campaign, visit the FBU website.

Co-responding consultation

The issue of co-responding was debated by the EC and a specially commissioned risk-based study on co-responding produced by consultants Arthur D Little was considered. The EC decided to consult the membership on determining the Union's future policy on co-responding and will write to members in the coming days, sending them the study, which outlines three key options:

AGS Election

London Regional Secretary Matt Wrack has been elected Assistant General Secretary. Matt Wrack, who was elected as London Regional Secretary in September 2004, will start his new job in September 2005, replacing Mike Fordham.



The EC has agreed to ask the TUC to conduct an independent enquiry into the allegations of canvassing received by the Union during the AGS election.

Union forces Merseyside bosses on backfoot

Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority has been forced on the backfoot over planned staffing cuts after a robust response from the Union at a local and national level.

Under its Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), the Authority and the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) proposed to set a crewing level of four firefighters for all one-pump stations and 4 and 4 at two pump stations in a move that would have entailed an immediate operational 100 job losses from Stations and a serious risk to the public.

The Authority failed to produce any risk assessments or risk and task analysis justifying this proposal, making a mockery of the consultation process.

Working together with the Union's national IRMP department, the Union rejected the proposals, backing up its point of view with a convincing and compelling case in line with the FBU's National IRMP Strategy and in particular the principles of the Critical Attendance Standard (CAST) planning scenarios.

The Authority has now suspended these proposals pending the submission of "detailed analysis

research and the risk assessment process that supports attendance by a crew of eight firefighters as an initial response to property fires" from the CFO.

"The FBU IRMP team has been very helpful," says Les Skarratts, Merseyside Brigade Secretary. "The CAST scenario was vital. The question we keep putting to the Service and the elected members is: 'Which of the nine firefighters that we believe is the minimum amount for a safe system of work, can they consider they can do without?' They have failed to answer the question."

"The Authority has not backed down entirely and continues to pursue its cuts agenda. It is supporting a pilot which will provide a response to property fires by eight firefighters at two-pump stations. So the fight continues!"

For more information on the Union's IRMP Strategy and its National IRMP department, visit www.fbu.org.uk.

Merseyside: new duty system

The Union has agreed a new "flexi-time" duty system with Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority. The Employers proposed a new duty system last year but that was rejected by the Union, leading to the TAP hearing to resolve the dispute.

Brigade Secretary Les Skarratts said:

"This was the first TAP hearing under the new procedures and we managed to secure agreement on a duty system that was acceptable to the Fire Brigades Union. The new system allows for leave taken as flexi time along with an increase in the time owing rate that allows for further leave for our members.

"The new duty system agreement includes the right to take 2 days leave, or 4 half days leave, off in a one month period, on the day of the members choosing, similar to the 9 day fortnight but with the added flexibility of taking leave when our members want it rather than when the Service allows it."

Copies of the duty system will soon be available on the LRD Grey Book Pay and Conditions Database, which is accessible to Brigade Officials from the FBU website.

Employers renege on agreement - again

The FBU Executive Council meeting today heard a full report on a new attempt by employers to renege on an agreement, this time on the new constitution of the National Joint Council (NJC). The move is part of an attempt to weaken the FBU's position in the national pay and conditions bargaining machinery of the UK fire and rescue service by bolstering the flagging RFU and creating a 'stand-alone' NJC for middle managers. Once again the National Employers are seeking to break an agreement reached.

In January 2004, Rita Donaghy, Chair of ACAS, made a report, and recommended revisions to the NJC

Constitution. This report was circulated to all members and formed a part of the Union's consultative ballot. The EC subsequently endorsed the recommendations of the report, and informed the National Employers of the Union's decision.

At that time, the National Employers informed the Union that while they agreed the report in principle, they had concerns in respect of the working arrangements for the proposed Middle Managers Negotiating Body. Subsequently (15 March 2004), Rita Donaghy wrote to the Joint Secretaries clarifying as to how she thought the Middle Managers Negotiating Body would operate. A copy of her initial report and letter to the Joint Secretaries is available on the FBU website.

New demands on NJC Constitution

At a recent meeting with the Employers' Secretariat of the NJC, the Union was informed that there were now three areas of recommendations in Rita Donaghy's report that the Employers would not be prepared to endorse:

- They wished the number of seats on both sides of the NJC to be increased from 12 to 14. This would lower the threshold on which both F.O.A. and R.F.U. could gain a seat. The threshold would be lowered from 8.34% to 7.14%.
- They now wish the proposed Middle Managers Negotiating

Body to be a "stand alone" NJC for middle managers.

- They wish to end the current provision in the Constitution for either side of the NJC to refer a matter to ACAS for arbitration.

The National Employers' position represents a clear breaking of an agreement we reached with them under the Chairmanship of the Chair of ACAS in June 2004. The Employers' representatives on the Joint Working Party consisted of the lead members of the Employers' side, who verbally accepted the recommendations made by Rita Donaghy.

The National Employers' action is a repeat of their behaviour on 2 August 2004 when they reneged on an agreement reached under the chairmanship of Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the TUC, on "stand down" arrangements.

Bid to prop up RFU

Their demand for additional seats clearly demonstrates that the RFU do not have in excess of 8.34% membership among employees of the UK fire and rescue service covered by the Grey Book, as their proposal to lower this figure is solely designed to give the RFU representation. This is in line with the promises made by some members of the National Employers during the pay dispute.

Their demand to end the current provision in the Constitution for either side of the NJC to refer a matter to ACAS for arbitration

was at no time raised by the Employers during the Joint Working Party.

While the Union was aware it was on their agenda, we did not feel it incumbent upon us to actually assist them in doing their job professionally.

Union committed to position backed by members


The Union has responded to this latest attempt by the Employers to renege on an agreement by informing them that we remain committed to the position agreed by our membership through ballot, and as outlined in the report by Rita Donaghy.

The National Employers has now agreed to recognise the RFU and FOA at a national level for consultation purposes (although not on any issues covered by the Grey Book), and have reiterated their commitment to securing representation for both the RFU and FOA within the national consultative bargaining machinery. A copy of a letter sent to the RFU is available on the FBU website. The Union believes a similar letter has probably been sent to FOA.

The Union will continue to keep members and officials informed of developments.

SW control row escalates

Leaders of the three political groups on Avon Fire Authority have requested an urgent meeting with Nick Raynsford MP, the Minister



with responsibility for the Fire Service in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. This request follows heated exchanges over the future of Fire Control facilities in the South West.

Avon Fire Authority recently wrote to the Minister stating that it was not prepared to move 'voluntarily' from its existing control facility at Lansdown, Bath. It claimed such a move would be 'unnecessarily disruptive and costly' to local taxpayers, labelling the proposed procurement of a new building as 'a disgrace' and the evaluation process 'a farce'.

Nick Raynsford has replied to Avon Fire Authority stating that there is no chance of Lansdown being reconsidered, nor of the procurement process being stopped. He has pointed out that legislation is in place for the Government to enforce changes in the Fire and Rescue Service.

Chair of Avon Fire Authority, Councillor Terry Walker, said "Unfortunately, despite all our reasonable requests, the Minister and the Government seem determined to hide behind feeble excuses to justify their current position. The fact remains that the Lansdown facilities are perfectly capable of meeting the Regions' requirements and they have not been properly considered. The costs involved of providing new buildings and infrastructure are simply not necessary."

Chief Fire Officer Kevin Pearson added: "It is difficult to see what options exist for Avon Fire

Authority under current circumstances. The Authority has been reasonable throughout the whole process. It has invited officials and Ministers to Lansdown to see the existing facilities for themselves. The Authority has pleaded for a proper evaluation. In failing to get this, it has asked for an independent review of the process and the Minister to intervene and stop the procurement of a new building. All requests have been refused.

"The Authority has consistently stated that it fully supports the modernisation of the Fire and Rescue Service, and recognise that the regionalisation of Fire Control Centres is a part of that agenda. However it cannot understand why the Government is refusing to look at an existing control centre as an alternative to a new building."

Terry Walker explained the current position; "It seems that the Government has stopped listening. We have asked for an urgent meeting with the Minister, in a bid to once again put our case forward. We have made this request to avoid the potential for Government intervention. All we have ever sought is a proper evaluation of our existing Control Centre, and a fair deal for the local taxpayers who have elected us onto this Authority. That is what we want to make clear to the Minister."

Source: www.avonfire.gov.uk