

FBU RAISES FIRE SAFETY ISSUES IN PARLIAMENT



Union moves to shape the fire and rescue service agenda with IRMP Seminar

The health and safety of FBU members and the public was brought to the attention of MPs yesterday at a seminar in the House of Commons that provoked a lively debate around the Union's IRMP strategy and fire safety policy.

The "Local Standards - National Issue" seminar was sponsored by the All-Party Parliamentary Fire Safety Group, the joint chair of which is Labour MP Michael Clapham.

Presentations by a variety of stakeholders, including the FBU, within Government, insurers and business, took place in the morning.

This was followed by a lively debate in the afternoon led by FBU General Secretary Andy Gilchrist and Ken Knight, Commissioner for London's fire authority. Mick Clapham chaired the debate.

A wide range of MPs, as well as representatives Scottish and Welsh and local government politicians, members of fire authorities, businesses, insurers and other stakeholders attended.

Some of the key points were:

Chris Hanks, General Manager, Allianz Cornhill Commercial:

- "It is not the time to withdraw fire coverage."
- "Insurers fear that as budgets are squeezed that cuts are made."
- "IRMPs are good, 58 different versions are bad."
- "Make changes and we become extremely concerned."
- "We need good fire protection and response to big risks."
- "You may find fire [insurance] cover at today's

competitive and attractive premiums withdrawn"

Denis O'Brien, Fire Safety Advisor to the Confederation of British Industry:

- On the Government's bid to make millions in savings through the modernization process: "Before we start looking for savings, let's make sure we get it right.
- "It is important for government to listen to the fire service and those who work in it.
- "The Government needs to let the fire service make the decisions.
- "The fire service does offer a high quality service, it is authoritative and it is successful."

Sir Graham Meldrum CBE, HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services:

On the BDAG research report, which exposed that assumptions about what is 'humanly possible' and upon which current Standard Operating Procedures and emergency response (SOPs)_planning are based are wrong, he said:

- The importance of research is that "you cannot put it back in the bottle."
- "It [the BDAG report] simply cannot gather dust.

Martin Seaward:

- "Massive responsibilities have been delegated to fire and rescue authorities."
- "[In the past] the ODPM had a supervisory role helped by the fully staffed HMI and access to the CFBAC. The fire inspectorate has been reduced in size and the CFBAC has been abolished. By and large elected councillors who take decisions don't have the benefit of that [expert] knowledge."
- Hence a real concern about a "significantly reduced level of experience [of fire service issues] at a local level
- "Financial savings drive decisions at local level
- "Statistics and targets are disguising a drop in standards
- "Changes to fire cover without sufficient evidence
- "With the safety blanket of the national standards removed, legal challenges [to Fire Authorities and their leaders] could be round the corner if somebody dies or property damaged [following cuts under an IRMP].

*John Cronin, Arthur D Little,
(risk management experts):*

- Under the new IRMP process, "it is essential to avoid situations which could motivate or pressurise firefighters to act unsafely in the interests of saving life.
- "These situations can be avoided by ensuring that arrival times of fire engines are considered as part of the response planning process - and that the arrival time includes the relative arrival time of different appliances
- "Research has found that there is a statistically robust relationship between fire and rescue service attendance times at dwelling fires and fatality rates at those fires.
- Experience of other industries using risk management, such as rail and offshore, suggests fire and rescue service may move back to national standards.

Andy Gilchrist, FBU General Secretary:

- The ODPM has promoted the new risk-based system but it is a system that is today in far too many places around the country geared towards cuts, turning one of the UK's finest public services into a fire and rescue

service by post code lottery.

- "The new targets introduced by the Government exclude fire deaths where the fire is judged to have been started deliberately at a time when we see a significant rise in the numbers of fires which have been started deliberately, and rising deaths from these fires. The real danger is that as a result of these narrow targets, response planning will not take place in any meaningful way.
- "While we work with other agencies to reinforce the principles of citizenship in the UK, we must also ensure that we are able to deal effectively with the fallout of anti-social behaviour and deliberate fire-setting.
- "The time it takes the fire & rescue service to get to these incidents will always be the first critical factor in our ability to limit the destructiveness of fire - and the number of firefighters sent is the other critical factor.
- "The way forward for the 21st century fire & rescue service in the UK is risk-based response planning which supports risk-based preventative and protective activity - against a nationally agreed standard."

Members will receive a fuller report of the event in due course.

FBU & Raynsford - agreeing for once!

This was Nick Raynsford's answer to parliamentary question last month:

Nigel Waterson (Con, Eastbourne; Opposition spokesperson on Economic Affairs): To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the implications for tackling domestic fires if regional control centres are established; and if he will make a statement.

Nick Raynsford: The technology to be used in the regional control centres for the Fire and Rescue Service will automatically locate callers from the telephone network, detect the appliance with the appropriate skills and equipment which can be most quickly mobilised to the incident and direct it along the most effective route to the incident. This will help the fire and rescue service to reach all incidents, including domestic fires, quicker and so save more lives.

Yes that's right - the Fire Minister acknowledged, quite correctly, that reaching any emergency incident quicker, and not just fires in people's houses, will save more lives!

Pensions:Lobby Your MP Now!

New letters are now available for members to send to MPs to ensure they keep the issue of OUR pensions in the forefront of their minds as they seek votes from us and our families in the General Election.

Click on the "Lobby Your MP" link from the home page of the FBU website (www.fbu.org.uk), enter your post code and your MP will pop up. Then enter your name, address and email, and "send". It takes just 3 clicks and less than 3 minutes. It's simple - really.

A number of members and officials have used this facility but many haven't.

If you fit into that later category do it - NOW!

The election - mostly probably May 5 - is just round the corner.

Received a response from your MP? Let us know

Members are asked to forward copies of any responses from MPs to John McGhee, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston Upon Thames, KT2 7AE or by email to pensions@fbu.org.uk.

Those who met their MPs during constituency week last month - or in November - please also let us know what your MP said by mailing/emailing us at the above postal/email addresses.

Widened parliamentary group to hold inaugural meeting

The widened FBU parliamentary group is holding its inaugural meeting March 21. General Secretary Andy Gilchrist will be attending, along with John McGhee, National Officer responsible for the Union's political work.

Andrew Dismore will chair the group, Michael Clapham will be vice-chair and John McDonnell is expected to be Secretary.

Brigade Officials Seminar

Pensions, control and rank to role will be on the agenda at a brigade officials' seminar to be held in London on March 7.

General Secretary Andy Gilchrist will be leading the briefing and discussions on how to push forward the Union's strategy.

National Officials John McGhee (Political lobbying work, IPDS-Rank to Role), Paul Woolstenholmes (Pensions), Geoff Ellis (Control CARE campaign) will also be making contributions to the debate/available to answer questions.

Brigade officials are urged to attend and confirm their attendance with Jo Huggins at Head Office.

Control CARE campaign

Send a letter to your MP calling for their support in our campaign to stop the madcap plans to regionalise emergency fire controls.

Click on the "Lobby Your MP" link from the home page of the FBU website (www.fbu.org.uk) or the www.controlcare.org.uk, enter your post code and your MP will pop up.

Then enter your name, address and email, and "send". It takes just 3 clicks and less than 3 minutes.

Please forward copies of any replies you receive from MPs to National Officer Geoff Ellis at Head Office or email them to CARE@fbu.org.uk.

To receive the e-bulletin and other FBU campaign news/information by email go to www.fbu.org.uk and subscribe.

On the Move?

Members are reminded to advise their brigade membership secretary of any change of address. Head Office should be advised of any changes of next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU's Confidential Freephone
Stress and Support Line

0800 783 4778

**Don't be bullied, don't
be stressed,
get help from the
Union!**

Ring the number above and get
free advice from the FBU.