

FRESH TALKS OFFERED AT PENSIONS SUMMIT



Andy Gilchrist offers to break the ice

General Secretary Andy Gilchrist offered to break the ice in talks to Fire Minister Phil Hope at the high level Pensions Summit on 31 March. A formal letter offering talks with the FBU is being sent to the minister.

The Summit was opened by Pensions Secretary Alan Johnson who said the initiative was genuine, would be across the public services and was not a cynical pre-election ploy. He accepted the Government had handled the issue poorly but said it was the beginning of a process of genuine negotiation and not imposition.

But he added that the Government could not ignore the demographic changes taking place which would see a huge increase in the number of pensioners in 50 years time.

Cabinet Minister Ian McArtney also said that could not be ignored and that a long-term solution had to be

reached. He said the talks were not window dressing but a reaction to the backlash from across the public sector.

Andy Gilchrist said the FBU welcomed the change of process. But the Government had, he said, been too slow to understand the depth and strength of feeling.

The Government was ignoring the physical nature of the role of firefighters and the dangerous nature of the job. They had also "quietly divorced the fire service pension scheme from the police pension scheme" a point carefully noted by both Cabinet Ministers.

He told Fire Minister Phil Hope that if the ODPM wanted a fresh start the process should kick off with a meeting with the FBU. Alan Johnson and Ian McArtney both indicated such a move would be welcome.

Andy Gilchrist, part of the TUC team which was instrumental in securing the talks, said afterwards: "The Cabinet Ministers

clearly signalled that the process has changed from one of diktat to dialogue and negotiation. I look forward to starting talks with Phil Hope and the ODPM so they can understand our very strong case and our genuine concerns.

"These will be critical talks about the future of our pensions and they will be my key priority as they are yours. A lot of members and officials have greatly assisted by lobbying their MPs and that work will have to continue and if necessary be stepped up."

London overtime ban on hold as talks start

London members have put their overtime ban on hold after agreement was reached to open talks with brigade management over a new overtime policy. Both sides have agreed to involve ACAS if the talks fail.

FBU London Region have made clear that if there is no deal which members can agree to that the industrial action will be put back on. The talks move followed the start of an overtime ban which saw between 40 and over 60 pumps going off the run in London.

Management responded by threatening to dock the pay of members implementing the ban, claiming it breached their contracts of employment. The issue is complicated in London because of brigade order 91 which is based on an overtime agreement reached over 30 years ago.

This allows management to order members to remain at work for up to one hour after the end of shift, amounting to compulsory overtime. London members want any new overtime agreement to be in line with the June 2003 Agreement: voluntary and not used to make up any planned shortfall in staff.

They also want the end of a link between individual sickness levels and the ability to perform pre-arranged overtime. Currently management want to bar any members from undertaking pre-arranged overtime if they have had a written warning for sickness or who have had 21 or more duty days sick in a rolling 3 year period.

The union is also seeking to negotiate double time payments for overtime at weekends.

Farce as Dixon tries to dock beds

Barry Dixon, chief fire officer at GMC, launched a one man media campaign at Easter to rid Manchester fire stations of beds claiming they "had no place in the modern fire service". The "no beds" move came as a surprise to GMC members and sparked a series of rumours about shift changes.

Mr Dixon now accepts that he had never in fact shared his proposals with the FBU.

He then followed it up by assurances that he understood the need for rest breaks during the 15-hour night shift. And that any

routine would be in line with the Grey Book.

For a brigade which told the Metcalf trial that it was too busy to deal with health and safety that would have saved Paul Metcalf's life they have found time to deal with changes to furniture. Because while Barry doesn't like beds, he is ushering in a new phase of modernisation by suggesting they should be replaced with reclining chairs.

And although he wants to remove four frontline pumps after budget cuts it appears he has £250,000 to pay for the "modernised" sleeping arrangements.

One GMC official told us: "If he has time to spare he should address health and safety concerns rather than waste time over choice of furniture. We've had a series of attacks on firefighters which the brigade is trying to cover up."

The latest incident was in Salford when a crew was fired on by youths with air guns.

The windscreen of one appliance was shattered.

The police are treating it as a crime scene while GMC frantically deny all knowledge.

Obviously too busy with the IKEA catalogues.

Fire Service news

Visit www.fbu.org.uk - and get the latest news in the UK fire and

rescue service from a wide range of national and regional press sources. The news feed is updated daily during weekdays.

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.

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.

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