

WALES FIRE COVER THREAT LIFTED



Welsh Assembly intervenes

The threat hanging over full-time cover at Pontardawe fire station has been lifted - for the time being. It follows intervention from the Welsh Assembly, which wants to maintain full-time cover at Pontardawe. Despite a huge wave of protest in the Swansea and Amman valleys, Mid and West Wales Fire Authority agreed some months ago that full-time cover at Pontardawe would finish at 6pm and that night-time cover would be provided by firefighters working the retained duty system.

The proposed downgrading of the fire station was considered to be in line with a UK Integrated Risk Management Plan.

However, responsibility for the fire service has since passed to the Assembly, which is drawing up its own risk management guidance. Gower Labour Assembly Member (AM) Edwina Hart, the minister responsible for fire service matters, said the fire authority had agreed to defer implementing the Pontardawe proposal - at least

until the Assembly's own guidance had been published.

Huge concern over downgrading

Labour AM Gwenda Thomas, whose Neath constituency takes in Pontardawe, has fought tooth and nail to retain the status quo. She said it was her understanding that the Assembly framework would rule out the downgrading of Pontardawe fire station. South Wales West AM Peter Black said he welcomed the fire authority's decision not to proceed with the downgrading at this stage. "There is a huge amount of concern in the area about the downgrading," he said.

Carmarthen East and Dinefwr AM Rhodri Glyn Thomas spoke of the concern in the Amman Valley, which is also served from Pontardawe. He said:

"I hope the fire authority looks at this again and takes into account the views of the firefighters themselves and the local community.

Derbyshire dispute concludes with success

Derbyshire have successfully concluded their trade dispute with the Brigade after many weeks of negotiation.

The dispute centred on what now seems a common theme: the Brigade suddenly not recognising that the FBU still had a right to proper consultation and negotiation.

The problems began when the Brigade insisted that everything that was to be discussed locally would be through a consultation procedure only. This was to include changes to working patterns. Several policies were forced through without any proper negotiation and local agreements were torn up in the process.

Big majority for industrial action

The Derbyshire membership fully supported the concerns of their brigade and regional officials and voted by a huge majority for industrial action.

The Brigade agreed to meet FBU Officials following the ballot result to see if a way forward could be found. A series of meetings followed with the Brigade agreeing to a request to extend the period of time whereby the FBU could issue dates for industrial action.

The dispute was finally settled last week when the Brigade Committee accepted a 'Consultation and Negotiation Policy' (which had

been negotiated!), as well as a commitment to revisit any specific problems the FBU had with policies that have recently been introduced. Any proposed changes to shift patterns have been postponed until at least September 2005, with a commitment to proper discussions with the FBU.

Brigade and regional officials are to be congratulated for their hard work in securing a satisfactory conclusion to the dispute. They will not be resting on their laurels though!

FBU supports Adult Learning at Work Week

This week is Learning at Work week and similar to other trade unions the FBU is encouraging its members to sharpen their minds and get involved. A number of events are taking place throughout the Fire Service supported by the FBU ULF project co-ordinators, ULRs, officials, Further Education providers and brigade management.

Region 1: there are bite size and taster courses in Thai cooking (sorry!), sign language and basic numeracy & literacy in a number of brigades. For further info contact Kenny Munro at ulf01@fbu.org.uk

Region 3: a BBC learning bus will be in Sunderland at South Division HQ on Wednesday and in Cleveland on Thursday (venue being arranged) along their and try a bit of bite size learning (the kids will love it to). For further info contact Adrian Slassor aslassor@northumberland.gov.uk

Region 4: in Grimsby, Peaks Lane fire station is hosting a learning at work day for Humberside on the 26th May in collaboration with BBC Learning. For further info contact ulf04@fbu.org.uk

Region 7: Hereford & Worcester will be running ICT, sign language and Skills for Life session during Tuesday 24th in the conference room at their brigade HQ and again on Thursday 26th at the Brigades Training & Development centre in Droitwich. A Computer bus will also be there between 1500 - 1900 so take the time and drop in. For further info contact Maxine Laugher ulf07@fbu.org.uk

Region 9: learning events are taking place at Suffolk HQ, Colchester Rd between 1100 - 2000, and Dogsthorpe Fire Station in Peterborough between 1000 - 1600, Dunstable Fire Station Bedfordshire between 1600 - 2000 and in the Herts Trade Union Learning centre in Watford. Subjects vary at venues but include TU learning links, Skills for Life and Football fun (Colchester only). For further info contact Graham Tranquada ulf09@fbu.org.uk

Region 13: at Temple Fire Station Bristol the brigade is hosting a learning seminar and learning day including access to Information Advice & Guidance, Skills for Life checks and online 'Learndirect' course advice. Book tokens are available to members taking the skills check in numeracy & literacy so give it a bash. For further info contact Bill Hendy ulf13@fbu.org.uk

Nationally, the e-learning pilot project run between the FBU and the Scottish Fire Services College Virtual College for retained firefighters is taking off.

Retained members at Braemar Fire station in Grampian and Rothbury Fire station in Northumberland will be accessing the Command & Control module on the SFSC Virtual College site. For further info contact Trevor Shanahan 0lreo@fbu.org.uk

Learning is for life and who knows where it may lead to.....go on give it a crack you may just enjoy the learning experience!

Lucky iPod winners

The winners of the five Apple mini iPods under the prize draw in the April's Firefighter are:

Andrew Leyland, Lancashire
B H Bills, Bolton
Jo Winrow-Jones, Merseyside
Nick Bick, Gloucester
Tom Webster, Stockport

The mini iPods were supplied courtesy of the Union's solicitors, Thompsons. The prize draw helped ensure nearly 20% of the total membership completed and returned the membership questionnaire. The Union thanks all those members who took did so.

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