

MERSEYSIDE STRIKE ACTION SOLID



Merseyside members walk out in strike over massive planned cuts to the local fire service

Merseyside fire crews walked out on strike at 10am Thursday morning in a massive show of opposition to the planned cuts to the local fire service.

Morale on the picket lines was high as off-duty members and officials from across the country - from the Highlands in Scotland to Cornwall in the South West of England, including the FBU's national leadership - visited, showing their solidarity with Merseyside members.

At an FBU meeting in Merseyside 40 had been expected, but 500 turned up and the venue had to be changed to accommodate the additional numbers.

Local fire crews are set to strike for four days until Monday 4 September, 10.00am, and will then be striking for a further

four days from 1200 midday 4 September.

The Union on Thursday repeatedly asked for talks with senior management, including twice on Radio Merseyside. But the fire authority said it was "too busy" to attend talks, although some informal talks have been pencilled in for the weekend.

As the first strike day kicked in, chief fire officer McGuirk admitted using staff from the fire authority's personnel and finance department to provide emergency fire cover - saying that this was an acceptable move because they didn't need to be "fully trained".

Further cuts to firefighter post

Enflaming the dispute, fire crews have learned that the fire authority agreed two days before the strike started - but not informed the Union - of a cut of a further 18 wholetime firefighter posts at Croxteth fire stations.

In a letter to McGuirk, FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said the chief fire officer appeared to have "embarked on a confrontational strategy" which has "given major cause for concern."

The Union has called for independent inquiry into significant industrial relation problems which have dogged Merseyside fire service for several years.

Members in the brigade voted 3:1 in favour of strike action over cuts they say will compromise firefighter and public safety.

The strike is in protest at plans to cut 120 emergency response firefighter posts - one in ten of the workforce - 15 emergency fire control operator posts and axe four fire engines at night time. There will be fewer rescue appliances, fewer firefighters on fire engines and a longer wait for crews to arrive to all 999 emergencies.

Cuts will damage operational capability

The loss of one in ten fulltime firefighter posts - in addition to the 68 posts lost last year - will inevitably damage the overall operational capability of the Merseyside fire and rescue service.

Fire crews say this will clearly compromise their safety and the safety of the public.

Solidarity

Members and officials are urged to show solidarity with Merseyside members by sending messages of support, visiting picket lines while off-duty and contributing to the strike fund.

Merseyside Hardship Fund
HSBC Bank
Sort code: 40-29-28
Account number: 91320165

Below are the addresses of all Merseyside fire stations:

- **Kirkdale Fire Station**
Studholme Street, Liverpool, L20 8EQ

- **Bootle & Netherton Fire Station**
Buckley Hill Lane, Liverpool, L29 1YB

- **Aintree Fire Station**
Longmoor Lane, Liverpool, L9 0EN

- **Croxteth Fire Station**
Storrington Av., Liverpool, L11 9AP

- **Crosby Fire Station**
Crosby Road North, Waterloo, L22 0LA

- **Formby Fire Station**
Church Road, Formby, L37 3NH

- **Southport Fire Station**
Manchester Road, Southport, PR9 0LH

- **Kirkby Fire Station**
Webster Drive, Kirkby, L32 8SJ

- **City Centre Fire Station**
Canning Place, Liverpool, L1 8EN

- **Low Hill Fire Station**
West Derby Road, Liverpool, L6 2AE

- **Toxteth Fire Station**
High Park Street, Toxteth, L8 8DX
- **Birkenhead Fire Station**
Exmouth Street, Birkenhead, CH41 4AX
- **Upton Fire Station**
Arrowe Park Road, Upton, CH49 0UF
- **Bromborough Fire Station**
Dock Road South, Bebington, CH62 4SQ
- **Heswall Fire Station**
Telegraph Road, Heswall, CH60 0AF
- **West Kirby Fire Station**
The Concourse, Grange Road, West Kirby, CH48 4HX
- **Wallasey Fire Station**
Mill Lane, Wallasey, CH44 5UE
- **Allerton Fire Station**
Mather Avenue, Liverpool, L18 6HE
- **Speke/Garston Fire Station**
Cartwrights Farm Road, Liverpool L24 1UY
- **Old Swan Fire Station**
628 Queens Drive, Liverpool, L13 5UD
- **Belle Vale Fire Station**
Childwall Valley Road, Liverpool, L25 2PY
- **St. Helens Fire Station**
Parr Stocks Road, St. Helens, WA9 1NU
- **Newton-Le-Willows Fire Station**
Boron Road, Newton-Le-Willows, WA12 0EL
- **Huyton Fire Station**
Huyton Lane, Liverpool, L36 7XG

- **Whiston Fire Station**
Fire Station Road, Whiston, L35 7JH
- **Eccleston Fire Station**
Millfields, St. Helens, WA10 5NB

You can contact the Merseyside FBU Brigade office on: 0151 709 3995.

Industrial Relations In Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack has issued the following "All Members" circular:

You will be aware of the current dispute in Merseyside and the strike action planned. Unfortunately it is becoming increasingly obvious that the current dispute fits into a wider pattern of poor industrial relations within the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority. The FBU Brigade Secretary, Les Skarratts has raised concerns about the state of industrial relations in the Merseyside F&RA and has called for both sides to support an independent inquiry as a way to try to resolve various difficulties.

Confrontational strategy

It has now become increasingly clear that the current difficulties in Merseyside are very much part of a wider picture and it appears that the CFO, Mr McGuirk, has embarked on a confrontational strategy in relation to the Fire Brigades Union. The evidence for this grows day by day. The Union has

been informed of comments made by Mr McGuirk to members of the Fire Service in New Zealand last year and these appear to support our concerns.

In October 2005 Mr McGuirk attended an Australasian Fire Service conference in New Zealand. Two National Officials of the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU) were invited to meet Mr McGuirk as a part of his visit. A meeting subsequently took place between Mr McGuirk and Derek Best and Mike McEnaney from the NZPFU.

The comments made by Mr McGuirk give major cause for concern and serve to confirm that Mr McGuirk has developed a long-term strategy to build for a confrontation with the Fire Brigades Union in Merseyside.

Disparaging about the FBU

Derek Best has reported that Mr McGuirk spoke disparagingly about FBU officials in Merseyside. Mr McGuirk went on to describe how he had already successfully enticed a number of Firefighters away from the FBU by introducing new teams involved in Emergency Medical Response.

He went on to describe the FBU policy on Co-Responding and that this had led to disciplinary action by the Union against the individual Firefighters.

Fire authority funding legal costs to fight FBU actions

"Mr McGuirk then stated that he was assisting those persons to fight the FBU's actions in the courts. Mr McGuirk further stated that this assistance went to the extent of funding those persons' legal costs.

It was quite clear that Mr McGuirk was making this statement as the CFO of Merseyside Fire Brigade. The cost was being met by the Merseyside Fire Brigade, not personally by Mr McGuirk."

The comments made by Mr McGuirk to members of the Fire Service in New Zealand are obviously a cause for great concern. It appears that Mr McGuirk has a political hostility to the Fire Brigades Union. This cannot be conducive to good industrial relations. I am sure you will also appreciate that there will be public concern that the senior manager of the Merseyside FRA may have used public money to support a politically motivated legal challenge.

On the basis of the information above, I have today written to the Chair of the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority asking for a response to the issues raised and again calling for an independent inquiry into industrial relation in the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service

Source: Circular 2006HOC0513MW

North West fire crews & Merseyside strike action

North West fire crews from the brigades which directly border Merseyside have been given assurances by their Chief Fire Officers that fire crews and equipment from those brigades will not be deployed into Merseyside during periods of strike action. The exceptions are 'border' areas with long-standing mutual assistance agreements which already provide for a joint response and in the event of a catastrophic incident such as a terrorist attack.

Crews from Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cheshire say equipment and personnel paid for by their local council tax-payers should not be used to cover additional areas which are the responsibility of Merseyside fire authority. Any such use would have reduced fire service availability within their own brigades and upset detailed safety and support arrangements.

FBU regional secretary Kevin Brown said: "We all work closely with each other at emergency incidents on and around our operational borders. The areas currently jointly covered will remain covered but there is no extension to additional areas beyond these, with the exception of a catastrophic incident such as a terrorist attack.

"Fire crews throughout the North West, including Cumbria which does not directly border Merseyside, have made it clear

that we fully support our colleagues in Merseyside in their lawful strike action in the fight against the cuts. Our concern was to ensure that firefighters and the public in the bordering brigades were not endangered by any ill thought out plans during the dispute in Merseyside.

"We have been given suitable assurances by our chief officers who understand our concern that existing agreements will be maintained with no extension of cover into other areas of Merseyside. Northwest fire crews will be fully supporting the strike, including providing financial assistance."

Long Service Increment - Continual Professional Development update

Ongoing discussions with the Employers concerning Continual Professional Development (CPD) have been under discussion at recent meetings of the FBU's national Executive Council (EC).

At the EC meeting last week following another update, the EC agreed a recommended timetable in order to ensure that informed membership discussion and consultation can take place.

On 6 September there is a meeting of the Joint Working Party - involving the Union and employers - which is considering the principles of and mechanism for CPD payments. The EC has agreed that it shall meet on 7 September to discuss the outcomes of this Working Party meeting.

Membership consultation

This will be followed by a meeting of representatives of all Brigades and representatives from the Regions and Sections in order to commence membership-consultation. This will be taking place on 8th September 2006.

"The negotiators and Executive Council are fully aware of the worry and distress that uncertainty over this issue is causing members of the Union and the de-motivating effect that it is having on the Fire Service as a whole," says Andy Dark, Assistant General Secretary.

"We understand fully the importance of trying to ensure that we achieve a satisfactory settlement on the issue of CPD."

Members should ensure that they be vigilant for notices of branch meetings which may be called at short notice as part of this consultation process.

Diary Dates

The following **sectional Annual General Meetings** will be held at Wortley Hall, Sheffield:

Retained AGM	- 19 November
Control AGM	- 20 November
B&EMM AGM	- 20 November
Women's AGM	- 21 November
Officers' AGM	- 21 November

And at Head Office, Kingston:

G&L AGM	- 22 November
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B&EMM School will be held on 27-29 October 2006 at Wortley Hall.

National School will take place 30 October- 4th November 2006 at Wortley Hall

FBU freephone legal advice line

0808 100 6061

For advice on personal injury, family law, wills conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.

FBU's Confidential Freephone Stress and Support Line

0800 783 4778

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