



FIRE BRIGADES UNION

CONFERENCE 2019

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

FBU Organisation and Structure Review

Conference 2018 were informed that the executive council had agreed to commission an audit of the union's structures. It was agreed that this work would be conducted by an external consultant. The terms of reference for the work were as follows:

"To examine representative and organisational structures within the FBU in order to make recommendations on how the effectiveness of these can be enhanced. This includes but is not limited to branch, brigade, regional and national structures, trade and equality groups. There will also be an assessment of what steps might be taken to strengthen the union's diversity and equality so that its representatives more closely match the characteristics of the actual and potential membership, and succession planning can take place."

A programme of work was drawn up, with evidence gathering primarily by means of structured interviews with officials at all levels of the union. The executive council records it's thanks to all those officials who participated in the interview process.

The evidence gathering was quite extensive and the logistical problems such as meetings with participants resulted in the timeframes for the completion of the work becoming extended and an initial report could not be produced until January 2019.

The executive council were presented with the findings and tasked head office with addressing those areas that were seen as a priority.

The report identified a general consensus around the union's core strengths. These consist of:

- High membership levels and density;
- Tenacious;
- Assertive;
- Single industry;
- High profile and public recognition;
- Knowledge;
- History.

The biggest issues to be faced were described as:

- Austerity/cuts;
- Dilution of national standards, terms and conditions;
- Inability to do everything that we want to achieve;
- Membership levels;
- Pressures on FBU representatives.

In a challenging landscape there were encouraging examples of good practice. There was also some feeling of being overwhelmed by the scale of work.

The audit considered a number of key aspects of the union's operation and structures covering the following broad themes:

1. The age profile of officials;
2. There was a consensus that the union structures are good in theory but uneven in practice. The notion of workplace-based structures is viewed as a foundation for a strong and democratic organisation;
3. The need for support in/preparation for office;
4. The executive council should have clear and periodically agreed strategic objectives, and/or an annual plan;
5. Significant savings have been made in head office operations but there is a widespread view of a capacity problem there;
6. Conference occupies a central role in policy-making and accountability, a feeling of common purpose and collective strength. The union needs to address issues around training new delegates for conference and increasing participation levels;

7. The report felt that the timescales for conference were excessive (this is addressed later in this statement), as was the scale of work created by the number of resolutions submitted;
8. Engagement and proportionality was considered in the context of the importance of the sections to the FBU;
9. Capacity issues in regions and how best to use officials in an organising role to assist brigades;
10. A report to be commissioned on the merger which created the current region 11, to inform the union's view on the future regional structure;
11. Continue development of the brigade organiser role in order to build membership.

However, the report concluded that the union has a significant number of committed, articulate and politically shrewd representatives.

The report made recommendations that are currently being considered and as part of the process the executive council agreed to a meeting of brigade officials who were given a presentation of the audits conclusions.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONFERENCE

The executive council felt that the report highlighted an area of concern that was expressed in the 2018 conference resolution 'Arrangements and Organising for Conference'. The executive council established a small task and finish group to formulate proposals.

The task and finish group noted that arrangements for conference 2019 began in October 2018 and started in earnest on 7 January with the cut-off date for resolutions to be in. With conference starting on 15 May, this means there is around four months from head office receiving proposed resolutions for consideration by the standing orders committee to the start of conference.

The executive council consider there are powerful arguments for shortening our own timeframe, primarily:

- Motions to be submitted later and hence they are more likely to be current;
- It gives the union greater time to actually concentrate on dealing with business generated by conference, before being distracted by the next one.

Therefore, in order to address this, the executive council took reports on other union's arrangements for their own conference, as well as seeking the views of our standing orders committee. Following this consultation it is proposed that for a period of two conferences the standing orders of conference, dealing with timeframes only, are suspended, allowing a trial of new timescales.

This will allow resolutions to be submitted to the standing orders committee two months prior to conference (early March, as opposed to early January, with a May conference) and all other dates (for amendments and executive council policy statements) are similarly pushed back.

Conference should note that there will be a need for brigade/sectional committees to organise their meetings within tighter timeframes, as it will mean:

- There is a compression of timeframes between getting resolutions in and the standing orders committee sitting;
- The timeframe between the preliminary agenda going out and for amendments to be submitted is reduced down to three weeks;
- Sending out the preliminary agenda and executive council policy statements at the same time for consideration and amendment.

The executive council believe this proposal gives more certainty to brigade and sectional committees. They will know to organise two committee meetings to consider the following:

- Resolutions, standing orders changes, rule changes (when applicable) and delegate names;
- Amendments to the preliminary agenda, rules changes and executive council policy statements.

Therefore, conference instructs the executive council to put in place measures to carry out the above proposals as appropriate.

NATIONAL OFFICERS AND HEAD OFFICE

The report identified the need to address outstanding issues relating to the union's national officers. This followed the decision of conference 2017 to instruct head office to seek release for a temporary national officer so as to enable the union to assess the options for the future.

Bro. Tam McFarlane (executive council member for region 12) subsequently took up position as temporary national officer. Bro. McFarlane has carried out the national role flexibly with part of his working week based in head office and the remainder working remotely based in the south west office. His contribution has filled a number of gaps identified in the emergency resolution to conference 2017 and elsewhere. Head office officials and the executive council have assessed the impact of this additional support and the options which the union has in regard to the work demands at national level.

The union structure previously included posts for four national officers. These have been considered as part of various structure reviews over recent years.

In 2012 a special conference agreed to reduce the number of national officers required in the rule book to three and authorised the executive council to manage this reduction. A factor in this decision was a discussion regarding costs and financial liabilities associated with the full time officials as well as an assessment of various practical and managerial issues which had arisen in recent years. These issues remain important to any discussion on future arrangements. The various demands on the union and the demands on head office mean that the situation is complex.

The task and finish group has not yet completed its work but the intention is to do so in order to provide conference 2019 with recommendations.