



THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

CONFERENCE 2013

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

**THE FUTURE OF THE
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

The Fire and Rescue Service represents exceptional value for money as a public service. Annually, at a cost of still less than £3bn (on average less than £50 per adult per year in the UK), firefighters across the UK provide a 24 hour/365 day comprehensive service dealing with a wide range of emergencies.

Despite taking on a number of additional activities such as responding to major flooding and dealing with terrorist incidents, the Fire and Rescue Service has faced cuts for over a decade from Central Government.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century up to 2010, the total number of firefighters was reduced by around 2,000 for the whole of the UK.

The advent of the Coalition Government in 2010 saw an acceleration of cuts to the funding of the Fire and Rescue Service.

The Government's own figures for England show the annual cuts in revenue spending power (which is a combination of central funding plus the local council tax revenue).

Revenue Spending Power

Year	% cut
2011-12	-2.2
2012-13	-0.5
2013-14	-4.7
2014-15	-3.3

Their own figures show that they have cut every year of this Government and that the cuts have been backloaded, so the next two years will be worse than the last two.

Figures for the central grant show that the bulk of the cuts have come from reductions in central funding.

Central Formula Grant

Year	% cut
2011-12	-6.7%
2012-13	-1.0%
2013-14	-8.7%

If the final year of cuts is as bad as next year, they will have reduced central funding by 25%, as they promised to do in 2010.

It is important to recognise that central edicts have also restricted local funding. The Coalition Government has offered financial incentives to Local Councils to freeze council tax at the same time as reducing central grants. This has given local Fire Authorities less room to deal with the central cuts.

These cuts have had a devastating impact on the number of firefighters. In 2011-12, the first year of the cuts, over 1,500 frontline firefighter jobs were lost. These job cuts have affected all parts of the Service. This will also adversely affect the equality work that has been ongoing in the Fire and Rescue Service in the past twenty years.

The Government has not yet published figures for the second year. However when they made their plans to cut the Fire and Rescue Service in 2010, the FBU estimated that 6,000 jobs were under threat. Unless the cuts can be reversed over the next two years, that figure is likely to be confirmed.

The FBU has been the highest profile organisation within the Fire and Rescue Service campaigning against these cuts. While politicians and senior managers accused the Union of scaremongering, they are now admitting we were accurate with our warnings.

In 2012 the Association of Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authorities and The Chief Fire Officers Association both published briefings warning of cuts to firefighter jobs, fire station closures and the loss of appliances. In March 2013 the Local Government Association (LGA) also warned of a £600m shortfall in Fire Service funding.

Politicians at Westminster have argued that the historical fall in fires and fire deaths is an excuse to make cuts. They have ignored the wide range of other work that firefighters undertake that is not counted in these figures, including the fire prevention work that lies at the heart of these trends. This work is also threatened by cuts to the Service.

The argument is also wrong because even if a station has experienced a reduction in calls, for those affected by the incident the rapid response of the Fire and Rescue Service is just as important as it ever was. Even if it is one household or business that has to call, the speed and weight of the Fire and Rescue Service response is still absolutely critical.

The FBU has exposed the slowing of response times by over two minutes, so that many of the targets set by individual brigades fall well below the national standards that were in place a decade ago. Slower response times have increased the risk to the public and firefighters. Every second counts in a fire or other emergency, so we cannot accept their argument for fewer firefighters, fewer appliances and fewer fire stations.

CAMPAIGNING FOR OUR SERVICE

In order to defend our Service and develop it for the future we need to address

1. Campaigning against cuts and for adequate funding
2. The changed and changing role of our Service
3. The roles, responsibilities, pay and conditions of service of firefighters arising from such changes.

1. The cuts in our Service have been so severe that other voices have increasingly been heard expressing concern alongside that of the FBU. This has included some of the Fire and Rescue Service Employers and some Chief Fire Officers. Where appropriate the FBU is willing to work together with others in the Service to make the case for adequate funding and investment.

Unfortunately however, the FBU is often left as the sole organised voice standing up for our Service. The Executive Council has agreed to allocate additional resources to this campaign over the next two years as we face a further spending review and as we approach the general election in 2015. This campaigning will require lobbying and public activity at national and local levels.

2. The debate about funding has highlighted that Central Government has not adequately acknowledged the changed role of and demands upon the Fire and Rescue Service. This stands out most sharply in relation to issues of national resilience. For example, large scale flooding incidents are an increasingly important area of work but this is not recognised properly by Westminster, nor is it adequately funded. There are many other areas of work now undertaken by firefighters which are not properly recognised by Central Government, or by the Employers.

The Union is involved in a project with others in the wider fire sector to develop models which assess the cost of fire to the economy. The Union will also undertake additional research on this and on the value of our Service to our communities at local and national level. This will need to address the expanded roles and activity already undertaken by our Members.

3. The Fire and Rescue Service has changed and developed throughout its history and the FBU has often been at the forefront of this, for example our role in fire safety inspections or at road traffic accidents. Firefighters have been willing to take on such roles but expect that such developments should include:
 - Full and adequate planning and training
 - The best available equipment and resources
 - Negotiations on roles, responsibilities and payments
 - The necessary funding to provide all of the above

It is unacceptable to change the role of firefighters and of our Service by stealth and by refusing to negotiate. It is also unacceptable to allow the continued fragmentation

of our Service through an endless drift to ill thought out 'localism'. To be effective our Service needs to be both a national and local Fire and Rescue Service; a national Service delivered locally.

As part of this process the Executive Council will undertake a review of all the additional roles and responsibilities and all additional work already taken on, or proposed, at local level. Brigade Officials are asked to fully cooperate with this. The Executive Council will discuss the issues of new challenges, roles and responsibilities (including those already taken on) with Employers and with Governments but expects recognition of the need to address such developments through full discussions and negotiations at national level. This is the best way to ensure professional, interoperable standards and fair rewards. This also allows our Members to determine what is and is not acceptable, the roles we may undertake now and in the future and the pay and conditions which we expect in return.