

Date: Wednesday, 27 October 2004

ALL MEMBERS CIRCULAR **FBU DISPUTE – CO-RESPONDERS POLICY**

Dear Brother/Sister,

As you will now be aware the Fire Brigades Union in Merseyside have been informed by principal management of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service that negotiations regarding the proposed policy on Co-responders have concluded early by their unilateral decision and without agreement being able to be reached.

This unusual step has been taken by management, outside of agreed negotiation procedures, and after only one meeting with management had taken place on this matter.

As no agreement could be reached with management because of that decision not to negotiate any further, the FBU informed management and the Clerk to the Authority that a failure to agree on this matter clearly existed, that dispute was accordingly registered Friday 15th October 2004 and the Union expected status quo be adhered to whilst resolution to this dispute is sought and as stipulated in the Grey Book (Section 6.C.18). Simply put, that meant that the proposal on co-responders be suspended pending that resolution of the dispute.

It is disappointing then, that the Union received correspondence from the Clerk to the Authority, which states that it is his belief that no dispute exists and that any outside assistance on this matter, which could include the NJC Joint Secretaries, is unnecessary.

Astonishingly it was officials of the Ambulance Service Union (ASU) and not MF&RS that informed FBU officials that the co-responder policy will be implemented on the 1st November 2004 and members of the Special Rescue Team will be expected to respond as co-responders to 'Category A – Life Threatening Calls.' This information was included on a Mersey Regional Ambulance Service (MRAS) Information Bulletin dated 20th October 2004, 5 days after the Union registered a dispute on this matter.

For clarification, this means more than our members responding to members of the community who may have suffered a heart complaint, Category A life threatening calls also include calls to members of the community who may be:

- Unconscious, fitting or unresponsive.
- Have severe breathing problems.
- Have trauma with penetrating injuries to head and trunk.
- Anaphylactic shock.
- Women with severe obstetric haemorrhage.
- Children under the age of 2.

It is clear that the dispute registered by the FBU has been all but disregarded and we are currently in contact with the General Secretary, Andy Gilchrist, and our legal advisors with whom we believe there is only one route left available for the FBU.

FBU Annual Conference Policy on the matter of co-responders is clear and supported by Merseyside FBU. It is FBU Policy to oppose any proposal on co-responder schemes as the Union believe that participation in co-responder schemes:

- Will leave firefighters and the fire service liable for facing legal claims without adequate protection,
- Will compound the under-provision of training for firefighters,
- Will inevitably lead to delayed turnouts to fire calls, will be used under 'Best Value' legislation to reduce emergency fire cover.
- Is already used to argue for emergency service mergers.

I attach for your information a letter received from Ray Garrick, Assistant General Secretary of the ASU, who voices on behalf of the emergency ambulance workers within the ASU, strong opposition to the use of co-responders within Merseyside and offers support for the FBU in opposing this scheme.

Evidently, the 'key stakeholders' expected to participate in this scheme, firefighters and paramedics, strongly oppose such initiatives and the voice of those trained and skilled emergency workers should not be ignored.

To that end, the Merseyside FBU Brigade Committee believe that the only route left available is to ballot our members on this issue and accordingly we have requested permission of the Executive Council for a trade dispute to exist between the FBU and the MF&CDA and that a ballot of all members in Merseyside for action short of strike action to take place in opposition to this co-responder policy. The result of that ballot would inform management that we will not be prepared to participate in this initiative.

It is our absolute belief that a fully funded, fully staffed and trained Ambulance Service is the only emergency service equipped to provide the statutory medical assistance at time of need for the members of our community which includes our families, friends and of course ourselves.

You will receive further information as soon as it becomes available and I hope you support the decision made by the Merseyside FBU to protect the Fire Service and the Ambulance Service from a policy that will undoubtedly result in a lesser Service of both if not defended against.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact your branch officials or the Brigade Officials.

Yours in unity

L Skarratts
Brigade Secretary

P Micallef
EC Member

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