

Date: Tuesday, 02 November 2004

ALL MEMBERS

Co-responders Trade Dispute

Dear Brother/Sister,

I am aware of an email communication from CFO McGuirk that I presume has been sent to all MFB. Within that communication Mr McGuirk makes several comments that obviously require a response from the Union.

It is fact that management decided to stop negotiations early on this matter after only one negotiating meeting taking place on this matter and as such no agreement could be possible. In a letter received from ACO Evans dated 20th September 2004 the managements position on this matter is crystal clear and is as below:

'Your comments on these matters are noted and despite your thanks in respect of previous reassurances given by me (letter from FBU dated 10th September 2004), I believe that consultation is becoming less meaningful with each received piece of correspondence. Therefore, noting comments received from you in respect of co-responding and picking up on the FBU response in their (sic) Preliminary Observations to IRMP document (Point 40), I believe that further discussion on this issue will be pointless, unless that it is the case that the FBU have reversed their position on this matter and no longer oppose co-responding.

The Service will therefore enter into a co-responder pilot with MRAS, which is in line with our 2004/5 IRMP, and the pilot will be conducted by members of the SRT. You will note that all members of the team are volunteers and undertook to perform in all aspects of the role of team members, which included co-responding. Accordingly, I will conclude consultation on Friday 24th September 2004 and will implement a co-responder pilot within timescales agreed with MRAS.'

Despite the FBU stating in correspondence to the ACO, dated 22nd and 27th September 2004, that *'it is wholly inappropriate for either party to impose conditions on another party to enable negotiations to occur'* they decided to implement this proposal without agreement.

I note that Mr McGuirk in his email referred to 3 requests off the FBU within the trade dispute letter. It is interesting that Mr McGuirk failed to mention the fourth bullet point that states that the FBU requests:

'Agreement that the Authority will not impose prior conditions upon negotiations under the established procedures as to do so is in breach of the Grey Book.'

Mr McGuirk further records his disappointment that even though the Authority first proposed co-responding over 12 months ago, the FBU were unable to offer these demands until a few days ago.

The FBU in our preliminary response document to the Authority that was sent to the Chief Fire Officer and every elected member of the Fire Authority on the 4th May of this year clearly stated that the FBU have concerns

'On the issue of co-responders and that:

A national dispute relating to co-responding duties was registered at NJC level by the local FBU Brigade Committee in the Mid & West Wales Fire & Rescue Service in 2000. The Joint Secretaries were scheduled to go into the Mid & West Wales Brigade on the 17th July 2003 to assist in the resolution of the dispute, however it was subsequently agreed with both parties that local negotiation should commence with a view to establishing best practice with regard to co-responding arrangements. This best practice to include the issues of:

- **training requirements** (co-responding and fire and emergency duties)
- **availability of crews for fire or other emergency calls**
- **pension entitlement** (where injured whilst performing co-responding duties)
- **individual/personal liability insurance cover** (for civil claims against individual firefighters as a result of their co-responding actions)

It would therefore clearly be prudent to await the outcome of the negotiations between the local FBU and the brigade in Mid & West Wales Fire & Rescue Service (and to consider the implications of any best practice agreement) before progressing the proposals in the MF&CDA IRMP.'

As I say that was 6 months ago!

One of the more destructive elements of this debate is the emotive rhetoric that is preached by co-responder advocates, such as 'if one of us, or a member of our family collapses with a heart attack, what would we want our local firefighters to do?'

The FBU ask the question:

- If one of us, or a member of our family have chest pains
- If one of us, or a member of our family is unconscious, fitting or unresponsive
- If one of us, or a member of our family is having severe breathing problems
- If one of us, or a member of our family has suffered trauma with penetrating wounds to head or trunk such as a knife or shotgun wound
- If one of us, or a member of our family has anaphylactic shock
- If one of us, or a member of our family has severe obstetric bleeding in pregnancy
- If one of us, or a member of our family have children under the age of two who are in need of emergency paramedic assistance

would we want them to agree with conference policy for a fully funded, fully staffed paramedic service responding immediately or would we want well meaning firefighters with 5 days training to respond to medical emergencies to one of us, or a member of our family?

Paramedics are highly skilled professionals who undergo intensive training over a five to six month period to be able to diagnose, medically intervene and transport to hospital those in need under emergency conditions.

Quite simply put, the FBU has listened to members who disagree with Mr McGuirk and his principal management team on co-responders and the reason for the dispute. We disagree with denying us a grey book avenue for dispute resolution. They have decided that they do not wish to recognise the dispute and so that agreed avenue for resolution has been disregarded.

Accordingly there is no alternative whatsoever but for a trade dispute between members of the Union and the Authority to exist and consequently a special meeting of the Authority has been called for Thursday 4th November 2004, where the elected members will consider the trade dispute letter sent by the General Secretary. We await the outcome of that Authority meeting and members will be kept informed of developments.

Yours in unity

L Skarratts
Brigade Secretary