

Date: Friday 21st July 2006.

ALL MEMBERS

MERSEYSIDE FBU MEMBERS TO BALLOT FOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION

Dear Brother/Sister,

You will now no doubt be aware that representatives of Merseyside Fire Brigades Union members today have voted unanimously to lodge a trade dispute with Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority and as such have now commenced the process for a ballot of our members for discontinuous strike action.

I am sure every single member within Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is more than aware of the issues that have created a situation in which the Fire Brigades Union members have now decided there is no alternative whatsoever but to take action to defend ourselves against a Chief Fire Officer and Fire Authority intent on massive job losses, shift systems that we believe are immoral and illegal and overtime paid in breach of the national agreement ironically after the FBU agreed to the national employers request for us to lift our ban on overtime.

You will also no doubt shortly hear senior managers from Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service say that the issues are all part of modernising the Fire Service and that no firefighters will be made redundant, clearly that is a smokescreen as in excess of 120 posts are to be slashed as a result of the recent proposals.

We have requested that management withdraw the proposals to remove 4 pumps from 4 of the busiest fire stations in the service at night time when most fire fatalities occur, that request has been rejected.

We have requested that management withdraw, and in fact now cease, the policy of the LLAR duty shift system which has resulted in Merseyside firefighters working 96 hours straight through on a fire station, a system of work that is unlawful and breaches the terms of the recent Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) hearing, that request has been rejected.

The Fire Brigades Union negotiated away with government the continuous duty system in the fire service back in the 1940's, 66 years on and a continuous 96 hour duty system is back in Merseyside in the guise of modernisation. No modern fire service should require our members to work a 96 hour week.

We have requested that management withdraw the disgraceful attack on Merseyside firefighter (control) members which would result in variable staffing in our control room, with dangerously low staffing levels, and a proposal that has been justified by Merseyside stating that the current

night shift of 15 hours is considered by management as excessive and may prove a barrier to women with young children, that despite recent independent research proving that 96.9% of women firefighters prefer the current 2/2/4 shift system. Management in a recent meeting went further and indicated that the shift change could be imposed on our members by management, I am sure you will agree that is simply unacceptable.

We have continually demanded that secondary contracts for overtime working at rates of pay not only below nationally agreed Grey Book overtime rates but lower even than the basic rate of pay, be withdrawn and overtime properly worked in accordance with our local agreement as well as the national agreement. That demand has not been met by management.

Those policies and proposals result in excess of 120 frontline firefighter and firefighter (control) posts lost, more than 10% of the operational workforce at a time when fire appliances are removed from operational availability on a daily/shift basis through a chronic lack of staff. Clearly this will increase the risk to you as a professional firefighter/firefighter (control) and to the communities we strive to serve and protect.

This is not modernisation; this is old fashioned cuts to our fire service.

You also will undoubtedly hear from management and councillors that these proposals have been necessary due to a huge budget deficit, the largest the Union believe, in the country. How the Audit Commission delivered to MF&RS an 'excellent' rating, the highest in the country, at a time when there is such a massive budget deficit, is astonishing. The Fire Brigades Union on your behalf have identified a significant budget reserve in excess of £2.5 million; we have identified that money with the assistance of our expert financial advisors and that money can and must be used to resolve this issue.

The Brigade Officials will be meeting with the lead councillors of the fire authority, including the Chair, Councillor Newman, on Wednesday 26th July 2006, where we will attempt to resolve the dispute. There is a real window of opportunity for this matter to be resolved but it requires real political will.

You can be absolutely assured that your Brigade Officials will do everything and anything possible to resolve this dispute; it may be that a huge yes vote may be required to focus the attention of our political leaders. It is absolutely vital then that every single member records their vote in the ballot and that every single member supports your Union in the defence of our jobs.

Please vote yes in the ballot.

Yours in unity

L Skarratts
Brigade Secretary