

CFO McGuirk  
Merseyside Fire Service  
Service Headquarters  
Bridle Road  
Bootle  
Merseyside  
L30 4YD

Date: Monday, 11 August 2008

Dear Mr. McGuirk,

Thank you for your letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> August 2008, regarding an All Members Circular issued by the Fire Brigades Union on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2008. You state that a number of rumours are circulating as a result of which you wish reassurance are unfounded and untrue. You go on to detail those rumours but do not divulge where the rumours emanate from or who are perpetuating them.

Nonetheless the rumours, as you detail them, are untrue and unfounded.

The fact of the matter is that my Brigade Committee is meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 2008 to discuss registering a trade dispute on the issue of the so called Small Fires Units (SFU) which you are aware are transit vans undertaking a form of firefighting activities with less than safe numbers of firefighters and to which you have mentioned may replace support appliances in various locations within MF&RS. That Brigade Committee process is a matter of record and previous Joint Secretary discussion, I am sure you would be aware of that information, including details of the concerns of the Union, as you would have naturally discussed them with the Employers Joint Secretary, ACO Evans. As such the Union has complied with the requirements of the National Joint Protocol on Industrial Relations (NJC/08/07) you refer to. For avoidance of doubt, I can confirm that the Joint Secretaries have discussed this issue and the process and are searching for resolution to the matter, .

You will also be aware of the details of the Unions concerns, as along with being briefed by your Joint Secretary, you will be aware of the detail of the Brigade Committee resolution, which was circulated by the Union on the 16<sup>th</sup> July 2008 and placed on the FBU website on the World Wide Web. You have previously corresponded with the Union in matters relating to All Members Circulars, I note you have attached the latest of our Circulars to your correspondence.

Along with the publically available Circular, the FBU have discussed this issue with the Employers Joint Secretary, including giving ACO Evans a full update on the progress of the resolution, with that update given verbally on at the London RAP like meeting of the 15<sup>th</sup> July 2008. You will note from the chronology of events, it could be said that the Officials updated

the Employers Joint Secretary prior to informing our wider membership via the Circular. I enclose a copy of that Circular for your information.

The issue was discussed again in detail at the latest Joint Secretaries meeting of the 7<sup>th</sup> August 2008, where again the Union expressed in detail our concerns on the issue. To move the issue along and to search for resolution on the matter, I subsequently wrote to the Employers Joint Secretary on the 8<sup>th</sup> August 2008, correspondence that was copied to you and the Chair of the Authority, Cllr Newman, requesting an urgent meeting with you and Cllr Newman. I sent an electronic copy of the letter to you, ACO Evans and the Chair at 11.01 hours on the same day; I note your letter was widely circulated to all staff, and presumably the elected members at 14.22 hours later on in the same day. It appears then that you wrote your correspondence in the knowledge that we have already requested a meeting with you on this issue as such it appears reasonable to assume your letter was always intended to be for other purposes rather than a genuine dispute resolution search, I would be grateful if you could confirm that is not the case.

In giving the reassurances you seek it is clear to the Union that some of your advisers are intent in creating an atmosphere of tension built on untruths and innuendo, I respectfully request that you remedy that issue as a matter of some urgency and that any and all references to issues of industrial matters remain within the Joint Secretaries.

You refer to a ballot and the firefighter games, the minutia of the rumour in this regard are complex and comprehensive, yet wrong. Again the source of your information is the issue here and your reliance on that source rather than the accepted industrial relations forum, the Joint Secretaries, appears to indicate a level of distraction that is becoming obstructive if not destructive. The firefighter games is an issue for the Authority and the Service and it is confusing when you firstly believe the Union is intent on disruption of the games by some issue formulated by rumour yet the Service states that *'it would be accurate to say that hardly a single person in our 1500 strong organisation is not involved in some capacity, whether that's as an organiser, volunteer or competitor.'* The games is an issue the Union has no formal position on, and that will remain the case.

If you ask whether our members are interested in the games then I would honestly answer that the answer would probably be no for a number of reasons, one of those being the dispute we are currently attempting to resolve.

You go on to state that you will be raising this issue with me and my colleagues when we meet next week to discuss the FBU Lifelong Learning Project and that I should ensure that my FBU colleagues are aware it will be raised; this despite my request to meet with you and the Chair to discuss this matter in a mature attempt to resolve the issue. I can say with certainty, that whether you bring the matter up or not is for you, whether I respond given the manner in which you wish to initiate such discussion is another. The FBU remain committed to resolving this issue in an agreed rather than unilateral manner.

On a final note, you will also be aware that the dispute on LLAR working is not resolved, with the FBU progressing the issue to ACAS in line with your recent letter to the National Employers, copied to the Union. It has transpired that one of your managers has informed our members at Belle Vale that once the games are concluded then the station will convert to LLAR working regardless of the nature or progress of the dispute; in the same vein as your correspondence I seek your assurance that your manager was wrong in that assumption and

that the Service will abide by the very same agreed procedures you require similar assurances from the Union.

I look forward to our meeting and if you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

L Skarratts  
Brigade Secretary

cc    General Secretary  
      Assistant General Secretary  
      EC Member  
      Branch Secretaries  
      Chair  
      Elected Members  
      ACO

Attach

ACO Evans  
Employers Joint Secretary  
Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service  
Service Headquarters  
Bridle Road  
Bootle  
Merseyside  
L30 4YD

Date: Friday, 08 August 2008

Dear Mr. Evans,

Further to our discussion at the Joint Secretaries meeting yesterdays date, I write to request an urgent meeting with you, the Chief Fire Officer and the Chair of the Authority.

As you are aware following those discussions, there is a great deal of industrial tension within the workforce at present, a large proportion of that concern stems from a perceived staffing deficiency which results in frontline fire appliances being rendered unavailable. It seems at odds with all strategic planning for a primary function, that being the core frontline firefighting crews and appliances, becoming affected when supernumerary and as such secondary functions remain unaffected.

I recall that you stated that you are aware of my brigade committee meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 2008 and that one of the items to be discussed is a resolution to ballot members for industrial action, I feel this meeting, held as a matter of urgency could provide a means to resolve that potential dispute.

I believe that the meeting, if held in a similar manner that previous Joint Secretary single status meetings have been, could prove beneficial to all parties.

I look forward to your response and if you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

L Skarratts  
Brigade Secretary  
cc Chair  
CFO

Date: 16<sup>th</sup> July 2008

## **ALL MEMBERS**

### **Merseyside Brigade Committee Resolution**

Dear Brother/Sister,

All Merseyside FBU members and officials will be aware that the following resolution was passed at the Brigade Committee of April 17<sup>th</sup> 2008.

***“This Brigade Committee condemns the Merseyside Fire Authority Budget resolution and its intention to replace emergency fire appliances with Small Fires Units across Merseyside.***

***Therefore, to protect against fire appliance downgrading, firefighting with a crew of three and the loss of firefighter jobs in Merseyside, this branch asks permission from the FBU Executive Council to ballot Merseyside FBU members to support a complete ban on any working on, or volunteering for, Small Fires Units in Merseyside”***

Since that meeting this resolution has been unanimously supported by the FBU Regional Committee and the Executive Council of the FBU who have also given permission for every Merseyside FBU member to be balloted on the single issue contained within the resolution.

The Emergency Brigade Committee Meeting of Monday July 14<sup>th</sup> 2008 has unanimously agreed that this resolution should be taken to all branch/sectional and departmental meetings of Merseyside FBU members for discussion and for officials from those meetings to report back to the Brigade Committee within four weeks.

Watch, Branch, Sectional and Divisional FBU officials have asked for all the relevant information with regards to this resolution for our members across Merseyside. Members are once again reminded that [www.merseysidefbu.co.uk](http://www.merseysidefbu.co.uk) is available and accessible for all FBU members and that much of the information requested is contained within those circulars, in particular in the “**Latest news**” link, the **All Members dated 28<sup>th</sup> Feb 2008**.

This All members circular is also aimed at addressing other issues and relevant points raised by our members at this current round of branch meetings with the following information for our members and officials:

- There has never been an agreement on the imposition TRV's or SFU's between MF&RS and the FBU in Merseyside
- The FBU Brigade Officials and Brigade Committee have held the consistent belief that these transit vans would replace fire appliances and cut firefighter jobs in the long term since their imposition in 2004
- To justify the downgrading of fire appliances and job cuts on LLAR stations and proposed LLAR stations, management are using SFU's within those stn areas
- Merseyside FBU have always viewed these transit vans as a political tool which is why there has always been premium rate overtime offered to volunteer for them, unlike other contracts and extra hours working which were paid at "flat rate" or less
- FBU members will also be aware that despite the use of pre-arranged overtime, fire appliances across Merseyside stations are still regularly off the run due to "overtime budgets" being spent but it obvious that more finances could be made available by simply not using the SFU at all and keeping more firefighters and fire appliances on the run for full shifts
- It is no coincidence that Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service have already replaced front line fire appliance with TRV's or that MFA now wish to do the same
- The FBU in Merseyside have always believed that the tens of thousands of tax payers pounds spent on TRV'S/SFU's could and should be spent on operational firefighters and appliances, not political tools and expensive gimmicks
- The ballot is for members to not work on or volunteer for TRV's or SFU's in Merseyside, the ballot for Merseyside members does not involve any other issue other than voting on whether they wish to work on SFU's or not
- The Brigade officials have recommended that all FBU members attend their Branch meetings and listen to the information and debate and the reasons for a ballot of our members to make a decision on SFU's
- The FBU believe that there is a breach of Tech Bulletin 1/97 and firefighting with a crew of three and that these genuine H&S concerns have been ignored by MF&RS management yet they now wish to consult with us for SFU's to respond under blue lights and horns, a further indication why certain one and two pump stations should view with concern the replacing of fire appliances with SFU's
- FBU members are once again reminded that this ballot is for our members to express their support for, or otherwise, a complete ban on staffing or working on SFU's, the democratic decision and support of the FBU members in Merseyside will inform the Brigade Officials and Brigade Committee accordingly

Any members or branches requiring any further information should contact your FBU reps or the FBU office by phone or e-mail.

Yours in Unity

Mark Dunne  
Brigade Chair