

Date: Thursday, 11 June 2009

ALL MEMBERS

IMPORTANT UPDATE – MASSIVE JOBS CUTS WITHIN MF&RS AGAIN!!

Dear Brother/Sister,

It is with deep anger and frustration that I write to you to report significant developments in relation to a number of consultation/negotiation issues that are being conducted between the FBU and MF&RS at this moment in time, it is unlikely that any other organisation will take part in defending against these latest attacks.

The cumulative effect of the cuts in all four of the issues amounts to the loss of 92 firefighter and crew manager jobs within MF&RS, another round of swingeing job cuts.

Despite consultation/negotiation commencing some time ago, it has again been incredibly difficult to gain enough information from management to enable proper and meaningful consultation/negotiation to take place. Once we had the information we could decipher the details and reveal the true extent of the cuts.

The four issues and the details of the proposals are as follows.

1 Review of Firefighter Posts within the Resource and Resilience Team (RRT).

A fire authority report proposing the above matter was agreed by the authority, the report advised members of the outcomes of a review into Firefighter posts allocated within the staffing model to the RRT undertaken in order to meet the budget agreed by the fire authority in February 2009. Since that report was passed by the authority we have been trying to get a copy of the review mentioned and despite everything in the fire and rescue service being done with the requirement of paperwork for audit purposes, management have now informed us that there was no written version of the review, incredibly no member of the fire authority asked for a copy of the review when it considered the substantive report.

Notwithstanding that point, the FBU have now met with management and have gained important information, some of which was contained within the authority report but which we thought was so absurd and nonsensical we required confirmation.

Management have confirmed that they wish to rationalise (cut) firefighter posts within the RRT from 57 to 20, we asked management how many firefighters were currently in the RRT (*naturally we knew the answer before we asked the question but we needed to hear them say it*) to be informed that there were no firefighters in the RRT!

It transpires that management believe (or now adopt the position) that although the firefighters were on station they really considered them to be part of the RRT. If that is the case then no-one in the organisation told us, including elected members.

We informed management if they continue to hold that position then firefighters have been denied the 10% pensionable increase in pay, as RRT members enjoy, since 2005, at best that is disingenuous at worst it is simply a snide and contemptuous move.

What is clear is that management have proposed this next step of the cuts agenda by confirming that they can only do it by formally adopting a default crewing level of 4 and 4, a level we have consistently maintained as being dangerous. The FBU put to management that this proposal should be suspended at present as management themselves have registered a dispute on the 4 and 4 issue, a perfectly reasonable position we thought, management refused and confirmed that they wish to plow on regardless.

One important issue we feel, is that currently the in place 'Temporary Agreement' between the FBU and MF&RS ensures that the most amount of appliance availability is maintained, through the use of '*pre-arranged overtime*' if necessary. It is clear that overtime is used to staff appliances up to 4 and 4 only, despite our aspiration to maintain 5 and 4 at all times, overtime will only be utilised when all appliances are down to 4 and 4, as a consequence overtime is used extensively. So that is the case then, overtime is extensively used now to staff at 4 and 4 even with the 37 jobs still in the system.

It is not a difficult sum to do to realise that if you take another 37 jobs out of the system, as proposed, then it will be impossible to run the Service in a proper and efficient manner. This proposal is dangerous, ill thought out and premature, it disregards important agreements reached with the Agreement of Principles ensuring a crewing level of 5 and 4 within MF&RS on 75% of occasions with a year on year improvement on that figure, what part of that agreement that management cannot understand is difficult to comprehend.

2 Review of Supervisory Manager Posts within the RRT.

This proposal again came after a review, a review that wasn't a written review but some other form of review; as such we obviously couldn't get a copy and spent a lot of time trying to get enough information for meaningful consultation to take place.

The proposal results in the loss of 11 Crew Manager jobs from the RRT with a revised Crew Manager establishment from 15 down to 4. However you dress it up it is still news to us as to our knowledge there are no Crew Managers in the RRT. It is entirely the case that there should have been and we now expect management to ensure that is the case.

To be frank the authority report does point out that *'the current staffing level in the RRT is 24 Watch Manager B posts and 15 Crew Manager posts. At present the Crew Manager posts are not filled as the existing RRT members work additional shifts as required to cover shortfalls.'* The FBU have asked for details of the extent of the additional shifts referred to and the remuneration those RRT members are receiving in relation to the additional shifts as evidently if they are additional to the contractually required 42 hours per week they should be receiving premium rate of pay, there is no reason whatsoever that should not occur and we await managements response on that point.

If it is the case that overtime is being used then that is a further admission of failure by the Service that they are not providing an efficient fire and rescue service, properly staffed with adequate resources. Again we make the point that the Grey Book is clear in that pre-arranged overtime cannot be used to cover for planned shortfalls and we expect the fire authority to ensure that is the case as they continually state they will abide by the national conditions of service.

3 Grey to Green Book Staffing Review.

This proposal refers to the intent to convert a number of Grey Book posts to Green Book posts. The proposal states that it has identified 52 posts that can be converted but will rely upon 36 of the 52 posts to be converted and wish to consult with the Union on that point.

The problem is that despite a number of meetings taken place to discuss this issue, management still will not tell us which 36 posts they wish to convert.

Worse, management have stated that they believe that not to undertake this intent will leave them open to sex discrimination claims as they believe a gender based claim could be launched on an equal pay for equal work basis from a non-operational employee. The FBU find this a ridiculous notion as a Grey Book worker has an operational commitment which can be utilised at any time the Service chooses mindful of the individual maintaining operational competencies, it also means that every other fire and rescue service in the land must be wrong and presumably acting in a manner that could constitute sexism as all other fire and rescue services are not proposing similar processes to stave off impending judicial doom. It is an awful thing to use discrimination for your own ends and despite us asking for the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) which should identify issues of potential discrimination they havent provided one as yet, with this proposal it really should have been the first thing they gave us.

If this proposal is successful you can virtually forget any notion of promotion within MF&RS as the bottle neck this proposal will create will be ruinous for the Service and aspiring managers.

4 Review of Staffing for Special Appliances at the Operational Resource Centres.

This proposal will result in all special appliances mobilised using the pod system being driver only. All the current skills profiles accrued through training and experience of those that staff the prime movers that mobilise such pods as the BA Support Unit etc, essential for the smooth running of incidents and vital for crews that may have not used the equipment or processes contained on the special appliances, will as a consequence be lost in the name of saving money. The proposal will result in 8 jobs lost.

The Service has used the example of the Special Rescue Unit as riding with driver only for over 2 years, in their minds perfectly safely, a fact we were unaware of as we were under the impression that it was still driver and OIC (although the OIC was usually a firefighter). We have requested details of the consultation process regarding reducing the staffing provisions on the SRU to be able to comment further.

I am sure you will agree that the above items constitute an appalling state of affairs with such massive job losses proposed at the expense, we believe, of firefighter safety, and the extensive use of pre-arranged overtime in a manner which we view as a breach of the Grey Book provisions on such matters..

Overtime cannot and should not be used to cover for staffing shortfalls in the manner described above.

Management will continue to blame the financial necessity of the situation, please recall previous circulars which identifies that MF&RS have in the last 4 year achieved more than £23.125 million of cumulative, cashable and annual efficiency savings, we have requested that some of that money now be vired back into the front line provision rendering these cuts unnecessary.

Members are urged to discuss this circular at your branch meetings and if you require a brigade official to attend please contact your branch official or the FBU Office.

Yours in unity

L Skarratts
Brigade Secretary