

Date: Tuesday, 15 August 2006

ALL MEMBERS

OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE ASSESSMENT

Dear Brother/Sister,

All Fire and Rescue Services are to begin an assessment process, this time to assess operational performance. The process is additional to the existing Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). It is primarily focusing on service delivery or how quick and effective we can respond to incidents and that it is with the right staffing resources.

You will recall that MF&RS received an excellent score rating in the previous CPA that examined the bureaucratic set up of the fire and rescue service with only Kent F&RS receiving the same excellent rating. MF&RS have maintained that due to the excellent rating they should be exempted from the operational audit. As a consequence the operational assurance assessment for MF&RS will now be undertaken as a peer assessment with Kent F&RS assessing Merseyside F&RS and vice versa.

The FBU has always maintained the true mark of a fire and rescue service is how efficiently we operate as an emergency service not how excellent the book keeping and financial records are, it is also ironic that MF&RS received an excellent rating then declared a record £8.5M budget deficit.

Through the current trade dispute it concerned the officials that there appeared to the Union that a stalling strategy was being adopted by the Service, with September being the obvious date the Service had in mind. The Union believe that the impending operational assurance assessment may now have played a key part in that strategy.

Every firefighter and firefighter (control) within MF&RS is aware of the amount of occasions that frontline fire appliances have been removed from operational availability due to chronic understaffing. There seems to the Union a link between the disputed LLAR system being quickly implemented and the imminent assessment. It also appears to the FBU a desperate attempt to then be able to 'free' up 12 firefighters at each LLAR location who can then be transferred to fire stations who continually have difficulties maintaining fire appliance operational availability.

You will also be aware that MF&CDA gave approval to remove 2 fire appliances at N1 and N3 for reported training for managers prepared to work through any potential strike action, despite there being ample training appliances available to perform that role. Managers may say that they need those appliances to train on as they are the appliances that they will be staffing in time of any strike action, if that is the case why did they not put the training appliances back at N1 and N3 for us to staff and keep fire appliance numbers, and consequently fire cover, as it should be, instead of removing those appliances with agreement of the councillors and permanently transferring firefighters to locations which have vacancies.

Again, the question must be asked if the almost frantic transferring of personnel into vacant firefighter positions has anything to do with the operational assurance assessment. Whilst the trade dispute and the likelihood of industrial action grows nearer so does the assessment and isn't it ironic that a vast amount of firefighters are being transferred into vacant station positions just when an operational audit is to take place. It seems a bit like the queen visiting places and only smelling fresh paint.

One of the key aspects to an informative operational assurance assessment is not just how the fire and rescue service is being run now but how it has been run recently and if there is a reason for a difference between the two. The FBU will attempt to play a full part in the assessment process as is required in the fuller national process.

The FBU will keep you fully informed of any developments.

Yours in unity

L Skarratts
Brigade Secretary