

Date: Friday, 18 August 2006

## **ALL MEMBERS**

### **FIRE COVER IN TIME OF STRIKE ACTION.**

Dear Brother/Sister,

You may have seen reports circulated by the Service on alternative fire cover in time of any strike action undertaken by FBU members.

The report declares that an optimum of 123 staff may be available in time of strike, but not all can be available because of 'annual leave, childcare commitments etc.' Out of the 123 *possible* staff, it is stated that 38 of those are firefighters, the rest being 50 middle managers and 35 supervisory managers. That would entail, the Service somewhat dubiously states that in the region of **20** fire appliances *may* be staffed.

With no disrespect to our officer members intended, it was ironic when a BBC presenter asked me 'how long does it take to train a senior officer up to firefighter standards.'

You will recall in the 2001 action that alternative cover was provided by fire service staff who worked through the strike and the armed forces. I attach 2 press reports from July 2001 which covered the alternative fire cover.

The first press report states that **500** military personnel would be available in addition to those that worked through that strike action. The second press report states that a fleet of **35** green goddesses were deployed, in addition to those fire service staff who worked through the action. Clearly the Service has nowhere near the cover they had in 2001 and it is even more important now that the councillors meet with the FBU to resolve this dispute through negotiations.

The FBU are expecting a dirty tricks campaign to commence and there is a possibility that a small group of members may return to work at a time of management choosing. We are aware of the intention and preparatory work for this stunt which would be intended to attack the morale of our members who are determined to stand up and defend our fire service, our conditions and our jobs, naturally we hope that doesn't happen, but if it does we are more than ready for it.

Yours in unity

L Skarratts  
Brigade Secretary

## Last-ditch bid to avoid strike

Jul 10 2001

by Richard Elias, Daily Post

PREPARATIONS are well under way for the armed forces to take over firefighting duties on Merseyside at the end of the week but attempts to avoid the strike are continuing.

Around 500 military personnel from the army, navy and air force are currently being trained in firefighting techniques while more than two dozen Green Goddesses are being prepared for use.

Today, members of the Merseyside Fire Authority will meet with Fire Brigade Union members to try and find a last-minute solution to the crisis.

It follows a plan by the brigade's chief fire officer, Malcolm Saunders to introduce non-uniformed staff to senior officer positions.

More meetings are to take place in London involving the National Joint Council which is the fire service's employer-employee forum.

Last night, Les Skarratts, secretary of the Merseyside branch of the FBU said: "We requested tomorrow's meeting. We want to resolve the dispute and I hope these talks will achieve that.

"There are on-going talks at a national level on the recruitment issue. But our argument is that Merseyside should wait for a national strategy to be developed.

"However, if the authority does not resolve the dispute the action will go ahead on Friday."

He continued: "We have sought a resolution through arbitration and it found in our favour."

Mr Saunders has said the FBU should use the arbitration service, ACAS or the National Disputes Committee of the National Joint Council but the FBU claims they have already attempted this move.

Chairman of the Merseyside Fire Authority, Peter Dowd said: "The committee came to a resolution that we should not appoint non-uniformed staff to operational posts during national discussions.

"We have agreed to that but the union is saying we should not even consider anyone for the posts when they become vacant in two or three years time.

"Our view is that we have fulfilled the climate of the committee meeting and it is a question of interpretation.

"We are saying to the FBU that if they do not think we have carried that out fully then go to arbitration.

"The strike can be avoided if the union agrees to go to arbitration. That is where the

resolution lies."

The armed forces' training is being carried out at the Altcar army base on north Merseyside and will last right up until the dispute is due to be staged at 9am on Friday and last eight days.

A spokesman for the Army said all serious incidents and those involving firefighting inside premises would be handled by professional fire crews from either the Royal Navy or Royal Air Force.

He added: "The Green Goddesses, staffed by people from all three services, will be able to respond to a wide range of incidents.

"A fire service officer or a Defence fire service officer will be present at all incidents to advise the crews.

"A joint control centre is being set up at Merseyside Police headquarters at Canning Place in Liverpool.

"The Green Goddesses, supplied by the Department of Transport and Local Government will be deployed throughout the county.'

## **Army ready to roll**

Jul 11 2001

by Rob Brady, Liverpool Echo

A FLEET of Army green goddesses was ready to roll on Merseyside today, as talks aimed at averting Friday's fire strike collapsed.

Union bosses walked out of peace negotiations with the Merseyside Fire Authority after just half an hour.

Now the only hope of calling off the eight-day strike depends on national talks today at the National Joint Council in London - the fire service's employer-employee forum.

But neither side was holding out much hope as they appeared to be more divided than ever over fire chief Malcolm Saunders controversial plans to offer senior posts to non-uniformed staff.

Today a fleet of 35 green goddesses was unveiled at the Altcar army base near Formby. They will provide cover while Merseyside's 42 frontline fire tenders stand idle at 26 stations.

From Friday emergency calls will be answered by a special Merseyside police command centre which will mobilise the Army vehicles to incidents around the county.

Yesterday's negotiations between Merseyside Fire Authority and the Merseyside branch of

the Fire Brigade Union ended in deadlock.

Neil Thompson, FBU regional chairman, said: "It looks like the strike will go ahead. The authority is not prepared to give guarantees on the points we put to them.

"The ball is in the fire authority's court.

"We have tried everything through the NJC's disputes committee to avoid this. Now it looks like we have no choice but to withdraw our labour.

"It is not a decision that we have taken lightly."

Peter Dowd, chairman of Merseyside Fire Authority, said: "I'm disappointed we have been unable to reach a way forward. The tone of the dialogue leads me to believe the union is determined to hold a strike.

"We continue to urge the FBU to go to arbitration with us to avoid a strike which will endanger the public and damage the image of Merseyside."

*Merseyside MPs pleaded for the dispute to be resolved before lives are put at risk.*

Riverside MP Louise Ellman said: "This is a very important issue and even at this late stage I would ask everyone involved to do their utmost to find a negotiated solution.

"I hope all efforts will be put into these talks today to avert the strike, which would inevitably cause fear and concern on Merseyside."

Bootle MP Joe Benton said: "Even at this very late stage I appeal to both sides to come back from the brink. The breakdown in communication between the union and management has gone on too long and nothing should be allowed to put at risk the safety of my constituents."

Liverpool West Derby's Bob Wareing repeated his call for an intervention by Home Secretary David Blunkett.

He said: "There is no doubt that this dispute can and must be settled."