

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

IRMP 2

ACTION PLAN 2 2008-2009

Introduction

This document provides the Fire Brigades Union's response to consultation regarding the IRMP 2 action plan for the years 2008 to 2009.

The Fire Brigades Union recognises that this response is outside the 12 weeks consultation timeframe which is solely due to significant workloads. The FBU request the Authority to accept the document as part of the consultation process.

The FBU comments are offered as follows:

Foreword

The FBU note that Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MF&RS), along with Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KF&RS), are the only two English Fire and Rescue Services' that did not have to participate in the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery as a result of the CPA awards of excellent. The Operational Assessment of Service Delivery was a challenging assessment of amongst others, operational efficiency, and many F&RS's were criticised for staff levels being of a level that operational appliances were not available for front line emergency readiness on occasions. The FBU would have been surprised that the very same level of, or indeed a significantly higher level of criticism, would not have been levelled at MF&RS by the CPA process, as it appears to the FBU that levels of staff are more critical within MF&RS than other Fire and Rescue Services, especially within the NW Region.

Our Community Standards

Emergency Response standards

Fire

As the FBU have consistently stated throughout the life of the IRMP process, the achievement target for the response standards of only 85% is set too low, and significantly below the 100% expectation required by Government under the now repealed national standards of fire cover.

For a risk and safety critical emergency service such as the fire and rescue service a target that aspires to the critical intervention standard being met on only 85% of occasions, or not being met on 15% of occasions is unacceptable. For an F&RS that sets challenging targets across a wide range of Service functions, such as Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSC's) and absence and attendance levels for staff, this most important target is less than ambitious.

The IRMP states that the aim is to improve the attainment level of reaching the intervention standards to 90% by 2010, this concerns the FBU and effectively reverses decisions made by the fire authority in previous years.

In 2006 the elected members of the MF&RA agreed within the IRMP Year 3, covering the years 2006 and 2007, that

'From our current high standard of meeting the above attendance times on 85% of occasions, we propose to improve attendance year on year over the next three years to achieve the above attendance targets on 90% of occasions.'

There seems to be no evidence to indicate a year on year improvement. The consultative IRMP states that the performance achieved in 2006/07 is on course with Service predictions to achieve necessary an improvement to a 90% attainment level by 2010 it does not provide evidence to support that claim. It does refer to the industrial action in 2006, which could simply be removed from the average response standards for the rest of the period under scrutiny.

Further, the earlier IRMP that was agreed by the elected members of MF&RA for the years 2005/06 have set the standards of response to be met at 90%. The IRMP and action plan agreed by the fire authority for that year states that:

'As work continues on the development of the rapid approach, in particular to incorporate the risk profiling of Merseyside based on the FSEC model, the standard of intervention with respect to fire risk will be:

- *High Risk - First attack within 5 minutes with additional support within 8 minutes*
- *Medium Risk - First attack within 6 minutes with additional support within 9 minutes*
- *Low Risk - First attack within 7 minutes with additional support within 10 minutes*

These times to be achieved on 90% of occasion.'

Why this achievement standard now has been abandoned for a lesser standard is concerning but draws the conclusion that it cannot and has not been achieved with current staffing levels. It certainly stands contrary to the principles of Best value which requires year upon year improvement of service delivery.

Road Traffic Collision

This attendance standard was supposed to have been set before the end of 2007, and if it has the Union has not been informed or consulted with, as such the FBU reserve the right to comment further on this matter.

IRMP Medium Term Strategy 2007/2012

The FBU support the MF&RS vision to make Merseyside a safer and stronger community.

Objective 1:

The FBU support the action and target yet the FBU continue to urge for a zero fire deaths target.

Objective 2:

As aforementioned the FBU believe a 100% attainment level of standards of attendance should be met on all occasions. The 90% target to be achieved by 2010 stands contrary to previous IRMP's agreed by MF&RA and the FBU request clarification why that is the case.

Objective 3:

The FBU support the concept of improving risk reduction across Merseyside and look forward to working with the MF&RA and MF&RS to achieve that aim.

Objective 4:

Broadly support despite the objective appearing somewhat ethereal.

Objective 5:

The FBU support the development of the Liverpool City Region at this moment in time, but reserve the right to make further comments when the political realities are clearer.

Objective 6:

The FBU broadly support this objective.

Objective 7:

The FBU believe this target should be a minimum of 10% with immediate effect with a year upon year improvement. The objective however is too vague to provide more detailed comment upon.

Objective 8:

Again the FBU broadly support this objective but it is light on detail so cannot provide further comment at this time.

Objective 9:

The FBU support this objective.

Objective 10:

The FBU support and are actively involved in the implementation of this objective.

Objective 11:

The FBU believe that the level 5 of the Local Government Equality Standard should be met within 2008, the FBU do not support the targets set for under-represented sections of the community to be represented within the workforce as they are set at too low a level. The FBU recommend that this objective is re-visited with dialogue between the Service, the FBU and the MF&RA Equality Champions with a view to agreeing appropriate levels to meet this objective.

Objective 12:

The FBU support this objective.

Objective 13:

The FBU broadly support this objective but feel that the Service could provide more detail including action plans and training needs within this objective.

Objective 14:

The FBU cannot support this objective as we believe the regional concept for control rooms is ill founded and prohibitively expensive which will provide a lesser Service for Authorities, Firefighters (control), firefighters and community members.

Objective 15:

This objective concerns the FBU and brings into question the nature of local accountability and local strategic decision making of elected members.

Objective 16:

This objective is subjective, aspirational and vague, the FBU could not provide any further comment at this time.

Objective 17:

The FBU is extremely tense with regard to this objective and could potentially jeopardise the important aspect of firefighter neutrality within our communities. This could have a significant impact on attacks on firefighters with an increase of those attacks a real concern. The FBU strongly recommend extreme caution and significant consultation between the FBU and MF&RS, including elected members on each and every aspect of this issue.

Objective 18:

The FBU do not have enough detail to comment authoritatively on this issue, but would draw members to comments made within objective 17 above.

Objective 19:

Again this objective is vague and aspirational, the FBU reserve the right to comment further on this matter when more detail are available.

Objective 20:

The FBU broadly support this objective.

Elected members will see that the FBU support, or broadly support 17 out of the 20 objectives proposed by MF&RS which demonstrates that although some managers purport the FBU to be obstructive in each area of the fire and rescue service, that is not the case.

Framework of Affordability

This section again refers to the cost per head of the population of MF&RS and despite briefly flirting 12 months ago with the real indicator of cost per incident which places the Service very favourably with other F&RS's that indicator seems now to have slipped off the radar.

The comments regarding precept levels and political aspirations to place the precept levels at a particular level, should remain with the local politicians, and has no real place in a document intended to be a emergency risk management plan. More concerning are wide sweeping comments such as '*pay increases of any kind (including overtime) must be funded through improved efficiency ...*' and '*we aim to limit precept and thus Council Tax increases*', as stated previously that is a matter that must remain with the locally accountable elected members rather than an issue for Service managers.

ACTION PLAN 2008/2009

REDUCE RISK

Local Area IRMP's

The FBU view this as an interesting concept and look forward to further consultation on the matter.

Flood Response and Intervention.

The FBU fully support this proposal.

Intelligence Led Targeting of Home Fire Safety Checks

The FBU believe this proposal stems from a suggestion from the FBU and as such the Union looks forward to continuing dialogue on this matter.

Youth Prevention and Intervention Schemes in each District

The FBU broadly supports this proposal yet is concerned that with the financial situation that this proposal, and others, would be funded at the cost of operational resources.

Extend Commercial Fires Reduction Strategy

The FBU look forward to further and required consultation on this matter.

Regional Approach to Wheelie Bin Fires

The FBU have been urging the Service and Authority for a number of years to tackle the problem of wheelie bins and to respond to such incidents in an appropriate fashion and not with a response with the Small Fires Unit (SFU). We therefore support this proposal.

RESPOND

Operational Skills Maintenance

The maintenance of operational skills is of vital importance but the FBU feel that assessment of competence of firefighters remains with the watch manager, with the watch manager being assessed by his/her line manager. The current operational assurance system is seen by some as resource wasteful and undermines the watch management position.

Modernise the Procedures and Methods for dealing with Operational Incidents involving Acetylenes Cylinders.

The FBU have made considerable representations on this matter and looks forward to further consultation on this issue.

Flexible Response Vehicle

This concept causes the Union some concern but the proposal is light on detail, accordingly the FBU reserves the right to reserve comments until such time as the proposal becomes more detailed.

Wild land Response Vehicle

Again, and with previous proposals, the proposal is conceptual and lacks detail; the FBU looks forward to the required consultation on this matter.

Remote Controlled Aerial Drone

This concept is not unique and is used widely in various industries, the Union looks forward to further dialogue on this issue.

Incident and Risk Level Review and Implement Findings as Phase III of the LLAR System

This section greatly concerns the FBU and appears to reaffirm the aspiration for a cuts agenda. The FBU are also unaware of what is meant by phase III of LLAR, and what would then constitute phases I, II and subsequently IV of this system.

The Fire Brigades Union in Merseyside believe that to recognise the true potential of effective Integrated Risk Management Planning a fine balance must be achieved between preventative measures, detection and emergency intervention.

Proposals and recommendations to 'trade-off' emergency response capability to part-fund other preventative proposals demonstrates, at best, a lack of understanding of the IRMP process. This 'trade-off' in the name of efficiency savings is demonstrated in the proposal to implement phase III of the LLAR system and therefore cannot be endorsed by the FBU.

Systematic Approach to Shift Patterns and Staff Location

This section simply redresses statutory requirements on terms of flexible working as a Service proposal.

RESTORE

The FBU support this proposal.

ORGANISATION

A People Strategy

This proposal should have been considered as a priority from the start of the IRMP process. The FBU recall that in year one of IRMP the plan stated that the Service would be a great place to work within. Evidently, the findings of the JMU Staff Perceptions Survey have shown that is currently not the case. The FBU again call for urgent dialogue with the elected members to ensure that the findings of the survey are enacted upon as a matter of urgency.