



FIRE BRIGADES UNION

PARLIAMENTARY BRIEF

November 2005 Regular Newsletter for all Members of the Scottish Parliament Issue 1



HMI Chief Inspector for the Fire Service in Scotland demands scathing cuts in Fire Cover & Front Line Firefighter Posts.

Jeff Ord, HMICI, in an open letter to Brian Alloway, Chief Fire Officer of Lothian & Borders Fire & Rescue Service, heavily criticised Mr Alloway's proposed Improvement Plan, describing further cuts as "opportunities".

Improve Community Safety?

Mr Ord's own guidance on Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) to Fire Authorities states that any change in Fire Cover must "*improve community safety*". If Mr Ord had his way, this would mean **over 100 jobs lost** in Lothian & Borders alone - **10% of the operational staff!** If this is carried across Scotland, approximately 700 jobs would be in jeopardy. It is unclear as to how will this "*improve*" the safety of our communities?

Professional Judgement

Even more concerning is that Mr Ord's comments regarding L&B's Improvement Plan, in many aspects, is factually incorrect. This is astonishing, however, the worse aspect of Mr Ord's letter is that it clearly infers to question the professional judgement of the Chief Fire Officer. This is unprecedented.

Whilst the Fire Brigades Union will have disagreements with management on various issues, we would never find it appropriate to question their professionalism. For Mr Ord to do this, in his capacity as the most senior figure in the Scottish Fire Service, is staggering.

Cat Out The Bag?

Tailoring Fire Cover arrangements to the actual life risk is absolutely appropriate and is what the Fire Brigades Union has been arguing for years. However, Community Fire Safety Initiatives need to show real results BEFORE any reduction in intervention is contemplated. Is Mr Ord simply putting the cart before the horse or is he just so determined to reduce the number of firefighter jobs in Scotland NOW that he hasn't the patience to wait until there is proven statistical evidence to show that this MAY be appropriate?

Projected effects of Fire Safety Initiatives mean nothing in real terms. Actual proven improvements is the only data that can be referred to.

Don't let your Fire Service be decimated, and your lives put at risk, in the name of *Best Value*.

LATEST NEWS

West Lothian Council has formally rejected the L&B Improvement Plan. Borders Council looks like following suit, with the other 3 Councils unclear. The question is: Are Fire Authorities going to be left to formalise their own arrangements or is the Executive going to dictate from the centre? So much for local autonomy!

Still No Insurance Cover for Firefighters who attend Terrorist Incidents

With the Fire (Scotland) Act being enacted, Fire Authorities are now obligated to prepare for & attend terrorist incidents. The Executive has purchased equipment and Firefighters have been undertaking specialist training. Indeed, in London in July, we saw Firefighters on the front line of a terrorist incident on the Underground & Bus system. All well & good, however, a very important factor has been ignored.

Cover

Firefighters who attend these incidents are being told that their personal life insurance will be affected should they be killed or seriously injured at such incidents. This would leave their loved ones financially destitute. The ODPM has told the FBU in England & Wales that it is the responsibility of each individual Firefighter to arrange appropriate cover. Unfortunately, the Scottish Executive recently took the same view.

Executive's Duty

The Fire Brigades Union is clear: **If a Firefighter is being told that it is his/her duty to attend terrorist incidents in the course of their employment, it is incumbent on Fire Service employers to ensure that adequate insurance cover is afforded.**

The Fire Brigades Union calls on the Scottish Executive to underwrite the required cover for all Firefighters in Scotland who may attend terrorist incidents.

NO₂
Fire Deaths

Future of Emergency Fire Control Rooms in Scotland Still in Doubt

8 into
3, 2 or 1
doesn't go!

In August, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) announced their decision to close the 46 Emergency Fire Control Rooms in England & Wales and replace them with 9 Regional Control Centres.

Scotland

In Scotland, the Executive commissioned a Report by Mott McDonald Consultants, to look at Control Rooms in Scotland. Their Report concluded that the existing 8 Control Rooms should be reduced to either 3, 2 or 1. Their proposals have been widely condemned by all sections of the Fire Service, as being ill thought & dangerous. The Fire Brigades Union supports the retention of the present 8 Control Rooms, as do the Chief Fire Officers Association (Scotland), COSLA and the vast majority of Local Authorities.

This means that Fire Service Employers, Managers & Employees all support the retention of all 8 Control Rooms.

The Deputy Minister for Justice gave an assurance to the Parliament that further consultation with Key Fire Service Stakeholders would take place. A year later, we are still waiting.



In the meantime, over one hundred predominantly female Fire Control Operators' lives are on hold. Their future is uncertain.

Has the Decision Been Made?

In March this year, an Executive Technical Note was published. This Note stated that when the decision was made that the "*savings will begin to flow*". It goes on to say that the "*planned savings shown...are the minimum*

savings". Disturbingly the Minister is then quoted as saying that "*Consensus with FRAs remains the preferred way forward but there are Ministerial powers contained in the Fire (Scotland) Bill*". This appears to confirm that irrespective of the views of Fire Service Stakeholders, that the Minister intends to decide the future of Control Rooms unilaterally.

Reduce to Improve?

The Executive's own guidance states that any change in the Fire Service must prove to "*improve community safety*". **To reduce the number of Emergency Fire Control Rooms would result in Less Staff dealing with More Calls. This coupled with the loss of local knowledge resulting in calls taking longer to process will mean Increased Response Times, and inevitably Increased Number of Injuries & Deaths.**

How does this constitute an improvement to your safety?

Fire & Rescue Service (Framework) (Scotland) Order 2005

The Fire & Rescue (Framework) (Scotland) Order 2005 was passed through a negative instrument in October. The Framework is designed to afford guidance to Fire Authorities regarding a plethora of issues pertaining to the Fire Service. Unfortunately, the Fire Brigades Union takes the view that it represents a massive failure on behalf of the Executive.

Shortfalls

Due to the clear shortfalls of the Framework Order, we do not

consider that it meets the needs of the Scottish Fire Service as it fails to properly address such issues as:

- **Common Standards: Speed of Intervention Response & Levels of Intervention Response;**
- **Fire Cover;**
- **Fire Deaths Targets;**
- **National Resilience;**
- **Co-responder Schemes;**
- **Funding;**
- **Diversity; and**
- **Fire Control Rooms**

We urge the Executive to **plug the gaps** through a succession of Fire Service Circulars.

There will be a fuller Report on the Framework Order in the next issue.

Next Issue

- **Fire Service Pensions**
- **Framework Order**
- **Firefighting at Sea**
- **Co-Responding with Ambulance Service**

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