



FIRE BRIGADES UNION

PARLIAMENTARY BRIEF

March 2006 Regular Newsletter for all Members of the Scottish Parliament Issue 4



PENSIONS TALKS MAY AVERT NATIONAL STRIKE ACTION (Though Not Necessarily Scotland!)



Talks between the Fire Brigades Union and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has resulted in John Prescott amending the long standing proposals to alter the conditions of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

Delegates to the Union's Recalled Conference passed a Resolution which means that the amended

proposals will now be considered by Firefighters throughout the UK

The proposals represent a significant improvement on the previous position, however they still fall short of what Firefighters had previously considered acceptable.

The basis of the new proposals are that current serving Firefighters

will be afforded protection rights except for ill health retirement arrangements (see below). Firefighters who join the service after 1st April 2006, will not be allowed to join the current scheme.

The final decision on the current proposals will be made at a further Recalled Conference, due to be held on 16th March 2006.

Ill Health Retirement Levels in the Scottish Fire Services

Much has been said about the levels of ill health retirements in the UK Fire Service. The ODPM has stated that the levels were unacceptably high and have quoted that 5 years ago ill health retirements constituted **75%** of all retirements in the UK Fire Service.

Since then, the national figure has dramatically reduced to **25%**.

This is mainly due to the introduction of policies & procedures as a consequence of the 2000 HM Treasury document "Review of Ill Health Retirement in the Public Sector".

Future Reductions

On top of that, last year saw the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act, which puts the onus on employers to find alternative employment or reasonable adjustments for employees who are no longer deemed fit to carry out their current role.

Despite this, the ODPM has refused to recognise these significant reductions and has insisted on driving through detrimental changes to the current

Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS).

Arrangements for ill health retirements is the only aspect of the current FPS that is not being protected for current serving Firefighters.

Scottish Figures

In Scotland, the percentage of ill health retirements has been much lower than that nationally.

The table below illustrates the levels of retirements in the Scottish Brigades since 1999. As you will see, Scotland has been consistently lower than the rest of the UK.

Indeed, retirements due to ill health have reduced by over **58%** in the last 3 years to **19.7%**.

Consequently, there is an even stronger argument within Scotland to maintain the current arrangements for ill health retirements for current serving Firefighters.

Scottish Regulations

The Scottish Executive is required to produce a Regulation in order for any amendments to the FPS to be enacted in Scotland.

The Fire Brigades Union calls upon the Executive to utilise this process in order to maintain the current ill health retirement arrangements for Firefighters in Scotland.

Year	Service Retirement	Non Service Retirement	Total Ill Health Retirements	Compulsory Retirement (age)	Other
1999/00	3.8%	38.5%	42.3%	36.5%	21.2%
2000/01	5.7%	25.3%	31%	34.5%	34.5%
2001/02	0%	47.2%	47.2%	42.9%	9.9%
2002/03	6.4%	33.3%	39.7%	52.1%	8.2%
2003/04	2.1%	24.3%	26.4%	59.3%	14.3%
2004/05	7.3%	12.4%	19.7%	76.6%	3.6%

*Source: HMI Scotland Annual Reports

Latest Fire Statistics Show Huge Casualty Rates in Scotland

Figures Are Conclusive Proof That Quick Response Times Are Essential

Scotland has the highest number of casualties in fires per capita, in the UK.

According to the Scottish Executive Statistical Bulletin, which was published in February 2006, the figures in Scotland for 2004 show **19 Fatal Casualties per million population** and **360 Non-Fatal Casualties per million population**.

This equates to **99 Fatal Casualties** and **1,827 Non-Fatal Casualties**. Amazingly, this is during a period when the number of Fires has **REDUCED!** There were **20,665 Primary Fires** in 1999. This has reduced to **15,765** in 2004.

UK Figures

This compares extremely badly to other UK Countries.

Equivalent figures in England show **7 Fatal Casualties per million population**, with Wales & Northern Ireland showing **8**. English figures also show **222 non-fatal casualties**, with Wales & Northern Ireland showing **277 & 240** respectfully.

In Scotland, Highland & Islands, Strathclyde and Dumfries & Galloway show the highest levels, with **39, 26 & 20 Fatal Casualties per million population** respectfully.

Response Times

This is no coincidence, as these Fire & Rescue Services cover vast areas, which means longer response times to incidents.

Coupled with the fact that **1,827** people were rescued from Fires, **these figures show a direct correlation between response times and casualty rates.**

The LONGER the Response Times, the HIGHER the Casualty Rate.

Safety

Not only does longer response times compromise the safety of the Public, the safety of Firefighters is also compromised as they will

“These statistics show in the clearest of terms that the quickest possible response times are essential in ensuring that members of the public have the best possible chance of rescue from Fire with little or no injury”: Ken Ross, FBU Scottish Regional Secretary.

have to deal with more developed fires and subsequently, more complex incidents.

Performance Indicators

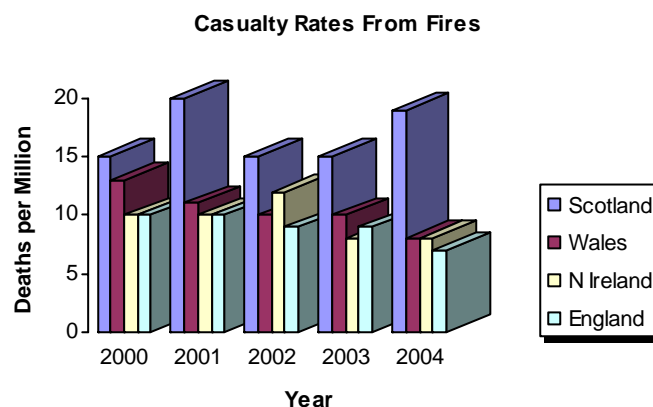
Last year, the Scottish Executive, on the advice of the HMI Chief Inspector of the Fire Service in Scotland, Jeff Ord, abolished Response Times as a Performance Indicator. He stated that they were *“no longer relevant”*.

The Fire Brigades Union finds this viewpoint to be not only totally erroneous, but offensive and morally corrupt.

The figures show the need to re-establish a national Response Times Indicator for all Fire Authorities in Scotland, in order to ensure a consistent & safe approach for ALL our Communities.

ZERO TOLERANCE

The graph below shows clearly that Scotland must re-establish a **RESPONSE TIMES** Indicator, incorporating a **ZERO TOLERANCE** Policy, in order to make true *“improvements to community safety”*



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