



THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

SPECIAL CONFERENCE 2012

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

PAY AND THE NATIONAL JOINT COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

Like all workers in the Public Sector, firefighters have suffered severe attacks on living standards as a result of the pay freeze imposed by Fire Service employers following the General Election in 2010. In the context of high levels of inflation, living standards for millions of working people are being squeezed as part of the Westminster coalition Government's austerity drive.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has not at any point accepted the logic of freezing pay and as a result, no agreement has been reached at the National Joint Council for 2010 or 2011. Discussions on pay for 2012 are still under way although the Executive Council notes with concern the decision of local authority employers to refuse to increase the pay of "Green Book" staff in 2012, which for many will mean there has been no pay increase on basic rates for a third year running.

The role of the Fire and Rescue Service has changed considerably over the past decade. New roles and responsibilities have been taken on. This reflects the history of the Fire and Rescue Service which has always evolved to take account of the changing risks to our communities. Contrary to the propaganda of some employers, firefighters have embraced change throughout the history of the modern Fire Service. In turn, we have simply sought dialogue on the necessity for change, appropriate training and equipment, professional standards and procedures and appropriate recompense for the additional skills and responsibilities that have been taken on.

The Executive Council has received reports that increasing amounts of prearranged overtime are being worked in the Service. The Executive Council is concerned that this clearly indicates that national agreements regarding pre-arranged overtime are being disregarded. In the longer term an increased reliance on prearranged overtime would threaten both jobs, rates of pay and the ability to negotiate effective rates of basic pay in the Fire and Rescue Service. The Executive Council will survey and monitor this issue with a view to developing policy to address it.

It is clear that anger on the issue of pay is growing as increasing numbers of FBU members struggle to pay their bills and look after their families and dependants. It is clear that dangers faced by FBU members and the commitment to the safety of the public are dismissed by our Employers as a matter of course. Against this background, the Executive Council recommends that a campaign is developed on the issue of pay. This must address both short term and longer term aims. In the short term, we seek to make progress against the pay freeze.

In the longer term we seek a sustainable solution to the problem of pay in our service. Traditionally, there was a consensus that Fire Service pay and stability in the Fire Service was best secured through the operation of a reasonable Pay Formula. It is regrettable that the Fire Service employers have rejected such an approach in recent years.

REGIONAL PAY

The idea of Regional Pay has been proposed for public services by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. In the Fire Service, such an idea ignores the fact that firefighters can and do work outside the area of their own Service and alongside firefighters from all parts of the UK. It further ignores the fact that the Fire and Rescue Service benefits from the transfer of personnel between Fire and Rescue Services which is made viable by UK wide pay rates. The FBU supports national rates of pay and despite any weaknesses in the current arrangements the Union continues to support national bargaining through the UK wide National Joint Council (NJC) with the benefits and efficiencies it brings to the Employees and to the service.

Our campaign must involve:

Further research:

- On the impact of the pay freeze on our members
- On the cost and economic contribution of the Fire Service
- On the value of and contribution made by the Fire Service workforce.

Systematic and comprehensive lobbying:

- Of Fire Service employers at local and national level
- Of other politicians at Westminster and in Parliament and assemblies in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Campaigning with our members

- To ensure members are well briefed and fully involved
- To ensure that members are engaged in the political lobbying which is necessary
- To ensure that members are ready to support any call for industrial action should it become necessary.

We shall also mount an awareness campaign within the labour movement and with the public.

The Executive Council recommends to Conference that we seek to resolve pay for the short term and for the longer term through discussions with the employers at the NJC. The FBU remains committed to seeking agreement through dialogue and negotiation. However, should such an approach not achieve an acceptable pay rise by 1 July 2012 then as part of our strategy the Union will commence a membership campaign preparing for national strike action at the appropriate time.