

THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION OFFICERS' NATIONAL COMMITTEE

NEWSLETTER

November 2007

JUSTICE ON PENSIONS

IN THIS edition Dave Beverley, Officers National Committee Secretary, raises some of the issues facing officer members in light of the department of Communities and Local Government guidance on pensions.

As Assistant General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, I also ask you to consider:

■ With the revised CLG guidance the hazard remains the same but the risk has just increased. The risk of no job and no pension. Just how reasonable is it for you to be expected to ask someone to take a risk, the outcome of which may cost them their income, their job, their home, their family?

■ Just how reasonable is it for this fire and rescue authority [FRA] to expect of its personnel to do this?

■ Just how reasonable is it for the FRA to expect you as an officer to instruct personnel to expose themselves to that risk?



ANDREW WARD

Andy Dark: Just how reasonable is it for you to be expected to ask someone to take a risk, the outcome of which may cost them their income, their job, their home, their family?

I urge all officers to raise the questions posed within this bulletin with their principal management teams and demand answers.

More importantly you should expect your chief officer to state categorically that it is their recommendation to the fire authority that it votes to reject the 2006/7 CLG Guidance and writes to the minister demanding a return to the 2004 guidance.

As FBU officers you expect clear service-based leadership from each and every chief fire officer and they should take up the clear demand call from our General Secretary – a return to the 2004 position: where there is no job, a pension will be paid.

Andy Dark
Assistant General
Secretary

**THE OFFICERS' NATIONAL COMMITTEE:
PROVIDING THE PROFESSIONAL
FIRE OFFICERS' VOICE TO THE MMNB**



www.fbu.org.uk



YOU WILL be aware of the FBU Justice for Pensions campaign and hopefully will have been discussing and debating the implications for you as officers. This CLG guidance, introduced in September 2006, brings into focus our clear obligations as managers, officers or commanders of the UK fire and rescue service.

The incident command manual refers to the dynamic risk assessment (DRA) of incidents we attend. It clearly states that the principal consideration of incident commanders is the safety of their personnel. And never more so than now in light of the revised CLG guidance.

In particular, I ask you to consider the concept in the incident command manual that “firefighters will take some risk to save saveable lives”, it is explained that this has to be managed and led firmly, professionally and ethically. Perhaps you might want to read the last word again. And in case anyone missed it, it says ‘ethically.’

So just how ethical is it for you to ask someone to take a risk that under the current guidance on pensions may cost them their job, their home, their family. A risk that might result in them not receiving a pension and being sacked because they cannot be offered a non-existent post to undertake ‘any part of their role’. A risk that could result in them being deemed not capable of doing their job and sacked as a direct result of being exposed to that risk. A risk that you exposed them to. The answer is simple. It isn’t ethical.

But it does not just stop there. What about training? Remember the NIG report on training for hazardous occupations? How it tried to strike the balance between training and safety? Is it ethical to ask someone to undertake any kind of training that presents or poses any risk? Of course we all use a generic risk assessment or actually undertake one prior to every activity, don’t we? That only deals with reducing the risk to an acceptable level, it doesn’t ask the ethical question of what happens if ...? That’s the question it ignores. Perhaps there is no longer an acceptable level of risk. Who decides?

WHAT

Take time to consider a few ‘what ifs’. What if someone is injured? What if they are sacked because that injury means they cannot do their job? What if I am the one who has to sack them? What if it happens to me?

And, of course, we haven’t even begun to explore what happens if someone refuses to undertake an activity because there is a risk that they might be sacked because they get hurt doing as you tell them. Is that ethical? Is it even something that can be managed?

The FBU urges all officers to raise the question with their principal management teams and demand answers.

It is no longer an acceptable answer that it’s not their fault or that it is all subject to the judicial review outcome therefore it is inappropriate to make comment – as one chief fire officer stated in his reply to the General Secretary of the FBU!

What we, as FBU officers, must demand is



Firefighters and officers at the Buncefield fire two years ago: how current guidance on pensions may cost them their job, their home

HAPPENS IF...

clear. We must demand leadership, we must demand a return to the 2004 pensions guidance and we must demand justice for firefighter pensions.

We also know there's only one organisation fighting and campaigning for that justice.

The issue of ill-health pensions shows why the FBU always was and always will be the only trade union for firefighters – regardless of rank or role. No-one will stop us from winning justice for all members of the Firefighters Pension Scheme.

The FBU, the largest professional voice of the UK fire and rescue service, is the only representative body that has formally disputed this outrage.

The FBU is the only union campaigning for justice for firefighter pensions and the only union which is both willing and able to fund a legal challenge to CLG and any fire authority on your behalf.

Dave Beverley

Secretary, Officers' National Committee



ANDERSEN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

*ethical is it for you to ask someone to take a risk that under the
e, their family*

TAKE ONE MINUTE TO PROTECT YOURSELF

THE disgraceful attack on ill-health and injury pensions threatens every firefighter of all duty systems and every officer of all duty systems. It has already left several firefighters without a pension or a job.

The guidance on ill-health pensions issued by the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) effectively means the end of ill-health pensions in the fire and rescue service. If you suffer ill-health or injury and cannot be redeployed to another job you will be dismissed and any pension withheld until you reach 60.

The FBU has met with CLG officials and directly with ministers. At these meetings we have outlined our position and expressed the anger and disgust these proposals provoked among FBU members. The Union's parliamentary group also met recently with Fire Minister Parmjit Dhanda and raised our concerns.

John Healey MP, the Minister for Local Government, has written back to General Secretary Matt Wrack saying he has "asked for an examination to be made of the current arrangements, including the implications for firefighters and employers. This will, of course, take into account the points that the FBU have made".

We need to continue to press that this examination leads to the right conclusion – that your pension rights are restored.

Let your MP know just how angry you are about the sudden change in the guidance in September 2006. Let your MP know you want the 2006 guidance returned to the original guidance set out in 2004.

Take one minute of your time to protect yourself and your colleagues.

Go to the FBU website – www.fbu.org.uk – click on the Justice for Firefighters or Lobby Your MP links and email your MP. There is a standard letter you can use if you wish.

The letter on the FBU website asks your MP to make representations to John Healey and contains a briefing on the issue.

■ For further information on the justice for firefighter pensions campaign visit the FBU website.



AN OPEN MESSAGE TO THE FOA

Just who will be sitting at your side of the table? Will anyone actually turn up?

FBU MEMBERS will be aware of the campaign we mounted against the removal of nighttime fire cover in Falmouth and Camborne Fire Stations in Cornwall. The FBU was asked by local politicians why all Fire Service “unions” did not come together to campaign against the cuts.

In their submission to the Fire Authority, the Fire Officers’ Association (FOA) said that they “recognise and accept the need to harmonise aerial appliance crewing levels as well as the need for securing budgetary savings”.

They also accepted all the reasons (or rather excuses) for the fire authority’s cuts plans as spelled out in a “consultation fact sheet”. This fact sheet made claims that included “the potential

to save at least £1 million annually through changing the crewing arrangements for aerial appliances” that needed to be carried out because of a mere “expectation” of central government funding cuts.

FOA did, however, “have difficulty in supporting the proposed reduction in posts until a comprehensive IRMP is produced which identifies all the risks and associated resource requirements.” They stated that they “would like to address the fire authority at its meeting on 12 October to fully explain their view point.”

The original date for this meeting was 12 October. It was postponed until the 26 October. The FOA did not attend this meeting and thus nobody heard them “fully explain their viewpoint”.

So again we ask the question – or rather ask the question the FOA has been asking: “Who will be sitting at your side of the table?” And we would answer, the Fire Brigades Union. You can be sure we will turn up and your views will be represented!

RIP cigarettes

THE European Union’s General Product Safety Directive Committee is due to meet on 29-30 November to vote on whether there should be a European standard for the reduced ignition propensity (RIP) cigarettes. A positive vote from the committee, which is looking at this matter as a product safety issue, would enable the European Commission to send a mandate to its standardisation body CEN to begin work on a standard. The Fire Brigades Union has been actively involved in campaigning for the introduction of fire safer cigarettes as part of the NO2 Fire Deaths Campaign and as a way of reducing injuries to firefighters on your behalf since 2003.



PETER MAUTSCH