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31 October 2024

AMS04/24

To: All Retained Members Scotland

Dear Comrades,

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) proposal to standardise Retained Duty System (RDS) terms and conditions of service

The purpose of this circular is to update FBU members working on the RDS, and Volunteer Duty Systems (VDS) in Scotland on the following:

- The recent progress of RDS terms and conditions standardisation negotiations between the FBU and SFRS
- The decision of the FBU Scottish Regional Committee to ballot members on the new SFRS proposal on these terms with the recommendation that they should be accepted
- To provide details of both the ballot process, and member engagement sessions, to support that process

Background

On the creation of SFRS on 1 April 2013, uniformed employees of the eight legacy Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) were matched into the new Service under their existing terms and conditions.

These terms and conditions had been developed through either local interpretation of the National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Authority FRS Scheme of Conditions of Service (the Grey Book) or through local agreements with the FBU.

As these agreements were designed to meet and facilitate the needs of the individual legacy FRS, and the FBU members of those legacy FRS, some terms and conditions within each individual Service differed from those of others. This has resulted in the current position, where FBU members working the RDS across Scotland are subject to differing terms and conditions.

Since late 2017 representatives of both the SFRS and the FBU have been in negotiations in an effort to reach agreement to standardise these terms and conditions. Some elements were resolved in 2018 following a ballot of all impacted FBU members on a standardisation package for terms which predominantly affected wholetime duty system (WDS) members, which reached collective agreement on a number of terms which also affected RDS members (see section 2.4 of attached proposal).

The remaining outstanding elements were specific to RDS terms and conditions, and following receipt of the Service's first formal written proposal on these terms in January 2019, negotiations have continued with the ultimate intention of reaching a collective agreement.

Recent negotiations and proposal

The lengthy period of time which has elapsed since the initial formal offer was received is reflective of the complexity of negotiations, and in regard to some specific terms, the significant differences which exist between the eight sets of legacy terms and conditions. Nevertheless, it is not lost on the FBU lead negotiators, and officials of all levels, that RDS members have displayed considerable patience and unity in order for a negotiated settlement to be reached. No parties involved in the negotiations believe that it has been acceptable for this process to take over a decade to achieve.

Despite this, the NJC pay settlement for 2024, and specifically the changes to retaining fees and reflective contractual hours of availability as detailed within NJC circular NJC/3/24, allowed negotiations to recommence in July of this year, following a period of pause whilst the NJC working group regarding RDS pay and rewards completed its work. FBU members will rightly recall that the formation of this working group, and therefore the associated outcomes of the 2024 pay settlement, were as a direct result of the FBU pay campaign of 2022 and 2023, resulting in an overwhelming ballot for strike action based upon an 88% vote for that action. It is on the basis of that campaign, and the unity and resolution shown by FBU members in that ballot result, which has allowed for the current position to be reached. A further testament to the unity and strength of FBU members of all duty systems.

These most recent discussions have seen an intense period of negotiations take place over the last four months, which resulted in the FBU negotiators being able to take the proposal back to the Scottish Regional Committee with a recommendation that the proposal be put to members via ballot.

Scottish Regional Committee recommendation

The Scottish Regional Committee subsequently met earlier this month to give detailed consideration of both the proposal and the current legacy terms and conditions in place, as well as carrying out detailed questioning of the FBU lead negotiators. The negotiators reported back that the negotiations had taken place in good faith, with a genuine shared intent to reach a negotiated agreement to resolve the matter. Following that feedback and process the Scottish Regional Committee came to the unanimous decision that FBU members working the retained and volunteer duty systems in Scotland should be balloted on the proposal, with a recommendation that it is accepted.

Member engagement sessions and ballot

FBU members working the retained and volunteer duty systems in Scotland will now be balloted through a consultative ballot to seek agreement on the offer. This will be conducted in hybrid form, both via post and online, where all affected FBU members in Scotland will have a vote. Additionally, member engagement sessions will be held so that FBU RDS members across Scotland can engage with the lead negotiators and have their questions on the proposal answered.

The ballot will run for a period of three weeks, commencing at noon on Thursday 7 November and closing at noon on Thursday 28 November.

Members must not vote online and via post. If members vote twice their vote will not count.

Any members who have not received a ballot paper by Thursday 14 November should email membershipservices@fbu.org.uk with the following information:

- Full name
- FBU membership number (if you have it)
- Home/personal address email (**Not SFRS email address**)
- Home address

Eight online member engagement sessions will be held, with one designated for each of the legacy FRS areas. It is important that you attend the correct meeting, as some of the legacy FRS areas terms and conditions differ significantly from each other, therefore, to receive accurate information specific to your current terms and conditions, please attend the correct meeting as listed below using the hyperlink provided to register. Each session will last around 90 minutes:

- Monday 11 November 18.00hrs – [Legacy Grampian](#)
- Monday 11 November 20.00hrs – [Legacy Highlands & Islands](#)
- Tuesday 12 November 18.00hrs – [Legacy Dumfries & Galloway](#)
- Tuesday 12 November 20.00hrs – [Legacy Tayside](#)
- Wednesday 13 November 18.00hrs – [Legacy Fife](#)
- Wednesday 13 November 20.00hrs – [Legacy Strathclyde](#)
- Thursday 14 November 18.00hrs – [Legacy Central Scotland](#)
- Thursday 14 November 20.00hrs – [Legacy Lothian & Borders](#)

Members can submit questions in advance of the meeting by email to gus.sproul@fbu.org.uk and stating the legacy FRS area they work in, or will be able to send in written questions during the course of the meeting.

This is your union and it is important that you have your say. Please ensure that you read the proposal carefully, attend the online member engagement session for your legacy FRS area, return your completed ballot and encourage your fellow members at your branch to do the same.

In unity

Ben Selby
Assistant General Secretary
Fire Brigades Union