

The Officer Issue

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union officer members www.fbu.org.uk

Spring 2011



**Pensions: Pay more
and still receive less**





Foreword

United and focused

Hello and a very warm welcome to the third edition of the new *Officer Issue*. Since our last issue the FBU's Officers' National

Committee (ONC) has said goodbye to several members, and it is important that we acknowledge their contribution in this issue. Firstly we saw the retirement of Dave Beverley, closely followed by that of Russell Troth, and finally the standing down of Mick Coakley.

Farewells

As our secretary, Dave's knowledge and input will be a great loss, as will Russell and Mick's experience in fire engineering and health and safety respectively. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all for their professionalism, help and friendship and wish them well in their retirement and other ventures.

With these retirements it was important for the ONC to react positively and quickly and with this in mind I was delighted to be proposed by the committee as the new acting secretary. I can assure you that I will be doing all I can to continue the excellent work of Dave Beverley, and to ensure that officers throughout the UK are represented efficiently and professionally. We were

also very lucky to find excellent replacements for Russell and Mick in the shape of Rob Sherwood and Gary Platts. Both bring with them a desire and drive to ensure the ONC continues to be THE voice for officers and we welcome them to our committee with open arms.

Strong and resolute

Sadly, it would appear that

this is a tough time to become more involved in a trade union. We are seeing some of the most savage cuts across the whole of the public sector, and fire and rescue services are in no way exempt. As a group and as a wider union we must remain strong and resolute and do all we can to oppose cuts that will endanger our members and significantly reduce the capabilities of the service we provide to our communities.

I am confident that united and focused we can make great strides to prevent the destruction of a service that we are all very proud of.

One thing that is certain though is that we will continue to put pressure on our employers over a whole raft of issues at the Middle Managers' Negotiating Body (MMNB).

Unlike some other representative bodies, we will not be looking to sell, erode or pay for conditions that we currently have and we most certainly will not be using our officers as a bargaining tool to split and divide our union.

Voice of officers

So the message from the ONC is loud and clear, we are THE only true voice for officers both locally, nationally and with our employers at the highest level. We will not be divided or bought for short term gain, and we will make these points most vociferously at every opportunity.

Martin Pottinger
Acting ONC secretary

The ONC message is loud and clear, we are the only true voice for officers both locally, nationally and with our employers at the highest level



Fire and rescue services are in no way exempt from savage cuts

This issue

Make your contribution count



Jack Ford: ONC will bring officers' expertise to the fore



Officer members in brigades contribute significantly by bringing their expertise to the fore

Editor's letter

Jack Ford

Executive council member for officers

I hope you enjoy and maybe take some inspiration from the content of this issue. We try to make it interesting and pertinent to officer members and those that aspire to the role.

You will see that the focus of the union is not only on conditions of service matters, but also on influencing the legislative and technical arena nationally and politically.

Officers National Committee (ONC) members and supporting officer members in brigades contribute significantly by bringing their expertise in those areas to the fore.

The FBU campaigns and lobbies on key issues affecting our members and the public at large. We are working to protect and improve the fire and rescue service, improve safety in the workplace and end discrimination and harassment at work.

We are most successful when we are united and strong, and we still are strong despite continued attempts to undermine us by some employers and brigade managers who

endeavour to divide us from each other, and from those in the wider movement. Being organised is the key, both in terms of having your voice heard and in attracting the support that members will need.

If the officers' section/branch in your brigade/region is well organised, then continue to support it and make your contribution count. If it needs some work, and we recognise that you are busy people often under considerable pressure, then consider who benefits from it and what their motives are.

Yes, it might take some individual and collective resolve but you'll feel much better for it and, by the way, you'll be so much better protected.

Although many employers would probably prefer not to have a trade union around, good employers recognise their benefit and will respect your right to be a member of a trade union. Those that stand in your way should be exposed.

Contact your local representative(s) and ask what you can do to help.

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Leading professionals

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Occupational standards – often misunderstood

John Arnold, region 3 ONC rep explains the confusion surrounding different officers' responsibilities

Many services are reducing flexible duty system (FDS) posts as part of cuts. The attending officer is often critical within the incident command system (ICS), but some fire and rescue services are looking for cheaper alternatives. Taking watch managers (WMs) off the watch and having them respond separately for ICS is one suggestion. Other reasons quoted are such as 'attending meetings without having to take the crew', or supporting retained duty system stations. Many services are offering pay enhancements for WMs accepting these roles. Clearly this can be attractive for a WM, but equally it reduces future promotion opportunities as well as impacting on existing FDS post holders, some of whom have been threatened with reduction in role. Some are calling the additional WM

payment a form of FDS, though the Grey Book is specific that FDS is only applicable to station manager and above.

Challenges

These changes present us with a number of challenges, from loss of FDS posts to the demand from members keen to take on the replacement jobs. What has yet to be tackled is the National Occupational Standards (NOS), the very basis of the role maps. Often misunderstood, they are the foundation of our job descriptions and what we are paid for. They also protect us from being required to carry out tasks that we are not being paid to do. So where do the NOS and role maps fit here? To explain their importance to this issue we need to examine what the WM will be asked to do. The roving WM will therefore not be part of the appliance crews when they get a call to respond to an incident. They respond (though how emergency response driving relates to their role is for another discussion!) and will be anticipated to arrive after the first attendance. On arrival they will assess

the existing incident command plan and decide on changes needed, taking charge as appropriate.

National Occupational Standards

Now to the NOS. The WM's unit for ICS is WM 7, whose first element's description starts: "This element concerns your ability to prepare clear, realistic and appropriate plans for initial response to operational incidents." Now compare this to the middle managers ICS NOS, EFSM 2 and its first element's description: "This includes your initial review of the incident type, status and progress, the collection of relevant information ..." So which element applies to an officer whose job is to arrive after the initial attendance and review the initial IC's plan?

I contend that the person whose role on arrival is to check on the initial IC's decisions is working to EFSM 2.

We must challenge these changes, whether proposed, or already imposed. Not to do so risks further reduction of middle manager posts and additional demands upon WMs. Lastly it must be remembered that the NOS and role maps are intrinsic to the health and safety of our members.



The IPDS is dead! Long live the IPDS!

Staff development

Last July, fire minister Bob Neill gave a speech to the Fire and Rescue conference, in which he said: "Should we be telling you how to recruit and develop your staff? You are the employers and you should know best your workforce requirements."

Many, especially senior management, jumped upon this as the announcement of the demise of the Integrated

Personal Development System (IPDS).

Actually what he said changed nothing. No two services have ever developed their staff in the same way and only a very small number ever used identical recruitment.

A largely urban fire and rescue service will, due to organisational risk, have different development needs than a rural one.

Do the London Fire Brigade have to train in wildfire,

or Highland and Islands in underground railways? High rise, shipping and aircraft – the list goes on. The IPDS accommodates these differences and should be linked to the IRMP.

Furthermore the IPDS came about due to the deaths and injuries of firefighters in the 1990s. Yes, it has been haphazardly applied, but it is fully supported by the FBU and we must defend it against cost cutting. We

should be campaigning for it to be correctly implemented and supporting those who are trying to do so.

As managers we play a crucial role in ensuring the safety of our staff. We cannot allow ignorance, or anecdotal evidence to dissuade us. Instead we must insist that training and development is delivered within the framework of our health and safety approved code of practice – the IPDS.



A site better than it was

FBU fire advisor Dave Sibert explains how the FBU has improved HSE guidance

Health and safety

At the end of 2009, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) issued for consultation an update of their guidance on fire safety on construction sites – HSG 168.

The FBU was sent a copy of the consultation draft by the head of the fire safety policy team at Communities and Local Government. In less than a month, we had to read the 30,000 word document and decide whether or not we had any observations to make.

HSG 168 takes a risk assessed approach to managing fire safety on construction sites. However as we read through the consultation draft, it became clear quite quickly that, even though it generally met the high standards that we have come to expect from the HSE, the authors had not fully appreciated the role of the fire and rescue service.

In January 2010, we wrote to the HSE saying that: “Clearly the purpose of this document is primarily to protect the health and safety of construction workers employed on building sites. However the FBU represents workers who are employed to enter building sites once they catch fire (rather than evacuate from them). We have therefore looked at the draft document from this perspective.”

Unsurprisingly, the HSE draft already fully addressed issues of fire prevention and the safety of construction site workers. However we commented on five paragraphs where we thought

that additional guidance was required either to protect the health and safety of firefighters, or to improve the effectiveness of firefighting operations.

The key request we made was that in the description of the risk assessment process, firefighters should be specifically considered as “people at risk”.

In October 2010, the second edition of HSG 168 was published. We are pleased to say that every single one of the FBU’s comments were incorporated into the final document – most of them word for word.

If you take a look at the second edition of HSG 168, the FBU is responsible for:

Paragraph 36: Firefighters are added to the list of people at risk.

Paragraph 265, bullet point 9: Site safety information for firefighters.

Paragraph 270, bullet points 9, 10 and 11: Liaison with the fire service.

Paragraphs 318 and 319: Firefighting in multi-storey buildings under development.

It is worth remembering that it is only thanks to the combined weight of membership numbers that the FBU has the resources and the influence to get the HSE to re-draft their publications to make firefighting safer and more effective. Officers who are members of the FBU can rightly claim that they are responsible for a small piece of HSE guidance. Officers outside the FBU have made no contribution.



It is only thanks to the combined weight of membership numbers that the FBU has the resources and influence to get the HSE to re-draft its publications

Pensions: pay **more** — and still get **less**

**ONC chair
Peter Moss and
FBU national
officer Sean
Starbuck
explain
government
plans to make
firefighters pay
more for their
pensions, but
still receive
less**

At the last Firefighters' Pension Committee (FPC) meeting held in January 2011, wide-ranging proposals were made to drastically worsen firefighters' pensions, with officers likely to be worst hit.

The FBU was presented with a paper that outlined how the Treasury expects to make savings of £33–37 million from the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) and the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme (NFPS) by 2014/15. (These planned savings would be from English pension schemes only).

Increased contributions

The paper outlined that ministers expect schemes to deliver greater savings in the first and second year and that the previous proposed employee contributions paper from the last meeting had been amended to reflect this.

This front-loading proposal would now mean the FPS would see a 1.2% contribution rise in years one and two, followed by a 0.6% rise in the third year. This would mean that by 2014 members of the FPS would see their employee contributions raised to 14%.

In addition to this, amendments were made to the earlier proposal for the NFPS which would result in a 1% employee contribution rise to be imposed in years one and two and a 0.5% rise in the third year. This would mean that by 2014

members of the NFPS would be paying 11% employee contributions.

The paper proposed that tiered contributions would be introduced to both schemes from year one. This would see an increase to 16.2% for station and group managers by 2014 and, over the same period, brigade managers would see FPS contributions rise to 17.2%.

Other changes to FPS

A separate paper announced a consultation exercise on amendments to the 1992 FPS. These include:

- Proposals for dealing with pensionable pay in the future.
- Amendments concerning age discrimination issues around individuals who joined the FPS aged 18–20. (This included a proposal that chief fire officers should not be able to retire before 55).
- Removing rule A14 of the FPS and amending rule B7. This would allow fire authorities or boards to encourage firefighters to retire voluntarily before the age of 55 with less than 30 years' service, employers would have the discretion to remove the limits of 2.25 times the amount of pension lump sum in certain circumstances, which would allow them to pay a quarter of an individual's pension in a commuted lump sum. In these situations, the additional expense would be the responsibility of the fire and rescue service in question.



CPI/RPI

The FBU is considering options available regarding the imposition of the consumer price index (CPI) in place of the retail price index (RPI) for uprating pensions for inflation. This measure was passed by parliament last month, with only a handful of MPs (including the FBU's supporters) voting against. This will reduce pensions by around 10% over 20 years – and more for officers.

Indexation

The FBU submitted a paper outlining concerns around the changes to indexation. The paper outlined that there was no requirement to apply indexation changes on additional pension benefits and also outlined examples of where the retail price index (RPI) had been used to calculate added years and transferred benefits, which should be recalculated if

the consumer price index (CPI) is to be used as the government proposes.

The department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) responded to a question about possibly reviewing commutation factors. They informed the committee that until discussions had concluded around pension discount rates and future indexation had been considered, there would be no decision on whether or not commutation factors would be adjusted.

Many of the issues contained within the papers presented to the FPC represent further attacks on fire service pensions and such proposals are particularly detrimental to officers.

The government says it will outline its full pension plans in June, so there is still much for the union to do.

FOA – the so-called “independent voice” of officers – continues to roll over when confronted with difficult and complicated issues. It is only the true

Annual allowances

The FBU has received an update on the restriction of tax relief situation and clarification that any individual who had exceeded the annual allowance (AA) in the current year would be able to use any unused AA from the three years prior to the pension input period. This meant that a four-year period could be considered in total. The Treasury has just completed a consultation exercise looking at payment options available to individuals who are affected by this change and are considering the submissions.

professional body that represent officers, the Fire Brigades Union, that continues to provide the platform for us to resist such attacks on our pensions now and in the future.

Announcements

Rank to role-over

Martin Pottinger acting ONC secretary

About seven years ago, the wonderful new world of rank to role was adopted by the UK fire and rescue service.

Some were cautious and tried to find safe and well-thought out solutions, whilst others charged headlong into the unknown without a care in the world.

The more cautious approach appeared to bear fruit with reasonable solutions, but the "bull in a china shop" model produced a postcode lottery of results, leaving many demoted and despondent.

With most brigades now "converted" we might have thought that this was the end, that there may now be some time to take a deep breath and reflect. But no. Not a word of it. The postcode lottery is played every week and the next few weeks/months/years will be



a rollover.

Let's now reward our hard working professional officers with a new game. This one's called job re-evaluation, and even if you don't want a ticket, it's coming to a brigade near you! It goes something like this –

"We know how hard you work and greatly value what you do, but we feel now that your GMB role really aligns to SMA." HR can call this what they like, but I call it a despicable betrayal of professionals who have done nothing but assist and lead through the most difficult of times. Without officer input at all levels, many brigades would have folded like a pack of cards. It is time for us all, officers, officials and the ONC to say "Consult and discuss" yes, "Dictate" no!

We are "THE" professional voice for officers in the UK fire and rescue service and together we can shape our future. Anyone for a ticket?

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Fire Brigades Union



OFFICERS' SEMINAR

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