



THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

A SERVICE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2009

A SERVICE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

2009 will mark the fifth anniversary of the new legislative framework for the Fire and Rescue Service in the UK. During this period, rushed and ill-thought out changes have adversely affected the functioning and efficiency of our Service. The abolition of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC) and of the Scottish CFBAC eliminated a key element in the development of professional standards within the Fire and Rescue Service.

Professional standards are crucial to the ability of firefighters to perform their job efficiently, effectively and safely. Standards should provide an objective measure of quality by which both firefighters and the public can measure the effectiveness and efficiency of each Fire and Rescue Service. They are integral to a coherent risk reduction and risk management strategy. Professional standards should apply to all key areas of the work of the Fire and Rescue Service including:

- Training;
- Equipment;
- Operational Procedures;
- Standards of emergency response;
- Appointment and promotion systems;
- Planning systems at local, regional and national levels.

Regrettably, since 2004 there has been no robust system for the development of such standards. This has led to the increasing fragmentation of the Service across the UK. While Government calls for greater resilience, the systems which developed this in the past have been abolished and not replaced.

The Fire Brigades Union is the largest professional body within the Service, representing the overwhelming majority of firefighters. The FBU has a central role to play in developing the professional standards to which our members are required to work.

In the past two years the FBU has highlighted a vacuum in the development of policy within our Service. This has been done in FBU reports on; Attacks on Firefighters; FRS response to floods; Firefighter fatalities. The same issues have been highlighted by FBU officials at a local and national level. Our 2008 report on fatalities (*In the Line of Duty*) drew attention to the crucial nature of this debate and its potential impact on the safety of members.

It is therefore welcome that as a result of campaigning by the Union, new arrangements are being developed to address the issue of the development of operational guidance and that research is to be undertaken on issues around operational training. These developments are welcome *but are not sufficient* to resolve the whole range of concerns of firefighters about the future of their profession.

Therefore the Union will continue to pursue the genuine modernisation of our Service and our profession and will address the issues which have been missed or deliberately ignored by Government. In particular we will highlight the need for:

- Professional Standards

Professional standards are key to a modern and efficient service. In recent debates about the NHS, there has been widespread public hostility to the idea of a 'postcode lottery' in relation to levels of service. Likewise, the public has a right to know that firefighters attending an emergency incident have received training to the highest possible standards and that this does not vary according to locality. The same principle should apply to the provision of equipment and to planning for emergency response.

Firefighters have the right to know that they have the best possible equipment, training and procedures. To achieve these aims requires the creation of structures and committees where such issues can be thoroughly and professionally addressed. Most importantly, firefighters must have confidence in such structures. That means that their professional views must play a central part in the development of standards. The Fire Brigades Union must play a central role in all such processes if such processes are to have any credibility within the profession.

- Preparation

Fire and Rescue Services are primarily organised around three key areas of activity; Protection, Prevention; and Intervention. To ensure that each of these is properly integrated requires adequate preparation. It is the view of the Fire Brigades Union that this aspect has been lacking in recent years as the Service has attempted to cope with an ever wider range of incident type and with new roles and responsibilities placed on the Service by Central Government. Adequate preparation requires an integrated approach including:

- The assessment of risk within communities;
- Planning for the response to risk at the local level;
- Training;
- Communication between different strands of the Service;
- Planning at a regional and national level;

The FBU has criticised current standards of planning within the Fire and Rescue Service. All too often IRMPs are about cost-cutting rather than risk management. The public have the right to know that their Service is planning professionally for the various risks faced by the community. Firefighters have the right to know that the Service is planning adequately for incidents rather than deliberately under-resourcing them. Likewise, when firefighters are sent to attend major incidents in other parts of the country, they have the right to know that a robust plan has been developed and tested so as to ensure the safety and welfare of those concerned.

- Public Engagement.

The Fire Brigades Union is the voice of the firefighters of the UK. In campaign after campaign we have also become the voice of the community in seeking to defend the best provision of services to the community. In many cases, local communities have complained about bogus 'consultation' processes which subsequently ignore the views of the very people they seek to consult. The Fire Brigades Union seeks genuine public engagement. We are confident that when Fire and Rescue Service issues are properly explained the public can and will understand the need to defend and improve their Service rather than see it cut back further and further. To this end, we will seek engagement across the UK and within each locality with tenants and resident groups, community groups, local businesses and local trade unions so as to build an alliance to defend and improve our Service for the benefit of all.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to develop the work already undertaken around these issues and outlined above so as to develop further a strategy for a Service fit for the challenges of the 21st Century. This campaign should build on the success of our rally and lobby of November 2008 with further lobbying and campaigning events designed to draw the attention of politicians, the press and the public to the concerns of the Union outlined above and elsewhere.