

The Officer Issue

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

Spring 2010

Ken Knight

The chief fire and rescue adviser attends FBU officers seminar

See p5





Foreword

Welcome to The Officer Issue

The assistant general secretary has for many years been the head office official with responsibility for liaising between the Officers National Committee (ONC) and the general secretary.

My predecessor Mike Fordham, in conjunction with the executive council member for officers and the ONC, was pivotal in putting in place procedures and processes which ensured that FBU officer members were provided with first-class representation by the union

and that the officer members' voice is heard. This is a role which I hope I have maintained and if possible can improve on in the future.

Officer information

This magazine is an important step in that process. *The Officer Issue* also provides the means to provide information directly to officer members on the key issues. Our officer members (and the employers and government), recognise that there is little or no difference between the demands or needs of officers (managers) and the firefighter.

Being the first, this edition is introductory in nature, however, there are some key articles contained within it.

The current "initiative" by Communities and Local Government (CLG) to make members of the firefighters' pension scheme pay extra towards the costs

of the scheme (or suffer reduced benefits) is not simply an attack on our pockets. It is unwarranted. The methodology used in assessing whether there is a problem at all is flawed. It is of no surprise that CLG is trying to burden the workforce, or indeed that it has decided to turn on fire service managers in particular.

FBU's role

While we await the decision by ministers in this government

or the next, one thing is clear – it is only the Fire Brigades Union that will meaningfully challenge any attack on the scheme or the firefighters (of all 'ranks').

As the article "Stealth attack on the flexible duty system" indicates, this assault on managers' (officers') conditions is not confined to pensions. Having tried for some little while to create an illusion that employees in managerial roles would be respected, an increasing

number of fire and rescue authorities have shown that no group is exempt from feeling the effects of their intention to slash away at hard-won conditions of service.

I hope you enjoy this edition. The executive council and Officers National Committee would welcome any feedback that you would like to make.

Andy Dark
Assistant General Secretary



John Denvir, ONC rep in Northern Ireland challenges Ken Knight

"Fire and rescue authorities have shown that no group is exempt from efforts to slash away at hard-won conditions of service"

This issue FBU officer members set the agenda



*Dave Sibert questions
building control, page 6*



Delegates from the FBU officers' section seminar

Editor's letter

As editor of *The Officer Issue*, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the new FBU officer magazine. We as the Officers National Committee (ONC) hope to use this magazine to keep you in touch with what's happening across the UK in relation to those matters which either affect or impact on your role within the fire and rescue service. That also means, of course, that you now have the opportunity to use this magazine to raise issues or ask specific questions which you feel may be of interest to other FBU officer members and we would welcome any such contributions, including articles on matters either affecting you or involving you as an FBU officer member.

A list of your ONC representatives is

published on page 8 of the magazine. Please use these details to keep in touch and communicate with your national committee.

On another note I would just like to take this opportunity to wish Allan Guest, the previous chair of the ONC, a long and happy retirement and hope that his wife Jean finally gets to enjoy a long-planned extended touring caravan holiday across Europe. Peter Moss has been elected as the new ONC chair and his biography is included on page 8. I am sure you will all send Pete your best wishes and fully support him in his new role as the ONC chair.

Please forward any articles or letters for publication to Dave.Beverley@fbu.org.uk

Dave Beverley
Secretary, ONC

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ONC chair Peter Moss
Firefighters pension scheme



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Fire spread in enclosed car parks

Fire hazards

The FBU has joined a steering group project managing research into car fires, after a spate of such fires in Europe led to firefighter fatalities in 2006.

The Department for Community and Local Government's (CLG) sustainable buildings division on fires within enclosed or underground car parks has commissioned the research. The Building Research Establishment (BRE) based at Watford has led and coordinated the project, arranging large scale fire tests and professionally recording a huge amount of data, which has subsequently been assessed and discussed.

The existing guidance for fire safety in car parks in England and Wales is contained within Approved Document B (Fire Safety) to the Building Regulations in England and Wales (AD B).

The basis for this guidance on fire strategies in car parks is based on fire initiation and fire growth involving cars whose designs are decades old. There has been increasing concern about the consequences of fires involving cars of modern design (such as plastic fuel tanks) including 4x4s, people carriers and cars built mainly of plastics or carbon fibre type materials. An additional concern is the introduction of vehicles using

alternative fuels such as LPG.

The views and concerns of firefighters were represented by the FBU as well as other bodies. It is encouraging to note that the very real dangers associated with fighting fires in these potentially challenging environments were acknowledged by all professionals on the steering group. There is a genuine commitment by the CLG to find an appropriate balance between the cost in providing appropriate passive fire protection within buildings whilst at the same time recognising the very real difficulties faced by firefighters when presented with a rapidly developing car park fire.

A final report produced by the BRE provides valuable and accurate information for fire safety officers involved in the approval process for car park schemes and it may be appropriate to challenge designers on the data or guidance used within their proposals.



Car parks are challenging environments

IN BRIEF

Industrial relations – Kent FBU officers take the lead

Kent FBU officer reps have proposed a joint training seminar with Kent fire and rescue service, looking at current issues at local and national level.

Russell Troth, Kent FBU officer rep, said: "We approached Kent fire and rescue service following the success of the FBU ONC seminars, recognising that such a seminar could have a positive impact on not just the technical competences of officers but could also pave the way for similar joint solutions to issues in the future."

Ann Millington, deputy chief executive agreed: "In Kent we have a long history of close working relationships between the FBU and management."

"The members and officers recognise the role of the union in sponsoring new ideas, championing issues for staff and constructive consultation and debate which leads to better solutions for all concerned."

"We have the common interests of doing the best for KMFRA and recognise that leads to robust challenge and dialogue but the skills of all the people concerned ensure that we stay positive and focused on the issues and not game playing."

For further info please contact Russell.Troth@fbu.org.uk

Station Cat

Overheard at the last Middle Managers Negotiating Body Meeting: "You might be able to take COSLA to Newcastle, but we're not taking a coalman to Edinburgh."

Stealth attack on flexible duty system

Exigencies

The Officers National Committee (ONC) has identified an emerging issue across several newly proposed flexible duty system rotas. The issue lies in the reduction of on-duty staff as a norm to the absolute minimum. This then

precludes the taking of PH, LS and compensatory leave. All of these types of leave are identified as being able to be taken by choice by the individual and not allocated by the fire and rescue service. The Grey Book offers a caveat to the taking of leave, in that it should "be subject to the

exigencies of the service".

However the ONC believes that reducing officer cover to the absolute minimum during specific periods creates the position that there will never be a time when leave can be taken on specific days, not because of exigencies, but because of a rota system

designed to introduce exigencies as a matter of norm.

We believe this to be a direct misapplication of leave allowance and have requested that the matter be discussed by the FBU executive council with a view to referring the matter to the NJC as it deems appropriate.

FBU the 'professional voice of the fire service'

Peter Moss reports on the FBU officers' section seminar on 19 and 20 October

Education

Gregor Gall, Professor of Industrial Relations at the University of Hertfordshire, began the seminar with an extremely helpful insight into employers' potential "amended" pay proposals and the "culture" desired in trying to establish these methods of pay. Gall left the delegates in no doubt of the dangers for middle managers in following such a route to pay agreements.

Trevor Cave, FBU education officer, gave practical help and advice in the "knowing your Grey Book" session. Ivan Walker from Thompsons solicitors completed the first day by explaining the

threats to the various pension schemes operating in the service. Questions were only curtailed by the chef at Wortley Hall, who demanded that dinner be served at the allotted time!

There was an earlier start the next morning, as FBU officers and Officers National Committee (ONC) members

"The FBU represents all levels of the service"

visited picket lines in Barnsley, Doncaster and Sheffield to support our colleagues on strike in South Yorkshire.

Jim Parrott, executive council member for Region 11, gave a presentation on the potential challenges to IRMPs under health and safety legislation. Dave Sibert, FBU fire safety advisor, introduced a comprehensive FBU document to guide officials challenging the validity of local IRMPs. Region 9 ONC member Mick Osborne from Essex then gave a very informative presentation on the Buncefield incident.

Ken Knight, the chief fire and rescue adviser (CFRA) gave a candid and thought-provoking presentation on the work of his unit. He expressed his hopes for strengthening the involvement of CFRA in the development of policy and operational assurance. He underlined his support for the FBU with his early request for the involvement of the union in the Lakanal House high-rise investigation.

THE professional voice

During questions from the floor no subject was considered off limits, which was refreshing from a senior figure within the service. Sir Ken promised greater CFRA involvement in the regional control project and we hope that his wealth of experience will add to the growing evidence against this damaging and costly farce. Sir Ken left the seminar acknowledging that officer members of the FBU want to see a strong and successful service throughout the country, and that the FBU is THE professional voice of the industry, the only one capable of and representing all levels of the service.



Trevor Cave led off on 'Knowing your Grey book'

Building problems for the future

Dave Sibert, FBU fire advisor, explains how the union is asking difficult questions about building control failures

There is currently a great deal of disquiet amongst many involved in the fire safety industry about new building materials and techniques. The “green agenda” is driving more combustible materials into buildings, while there are doubts about the suitability of existing standards, codes and regulations to fully quantify the fire performance of modern materials and techniques. There are deteriorating standards of workmanship, especially in “hidden areas” of buildings such as fire stopping of walls and cavity barriers. Buildings that do not comply with prescriptive standards are not being re-designed. Instead they are being “fire engineered”.

Fire risk assessment

Once buildings are completed and occupied, they should be subject

to a fire risk assessment. While there are many publications providing guidance on the process, the quality of many fire risk assessments remains poor. Even the assessment of a simple building that relies on fire resisting construction and compartmentation should be carried out by someone who knows what a compartment wall is, how it might be breached and where they should look for such breaches. Too often those assessments are carried out by people who lack appropriate knowledge and who don't lift ceiling tiles.

Regulators

Overseeing this rapidly changing world are the regulators. In the case of new buildings, this means local authority building control officers (BCOs) and approved inspectors (AIs) and in the case of occupied buildings, it means fire and rescue service fire safety inspectors.

In theory at least, the regulators should identify

*Dave Sibert advises
FBU officers*



and rectify problems with building quality and should pick up areas where fire risk assessments are not suitable or sufficient. But the regulators themselves are suffering problems of their own.

AIs are in direct commercial competition with BCOs. Commercial competition drives down costs and encourages suppliers to deliver exactly what their customers want. This means training budgets are cut and a minimum (or lower) number of site visits are carried out. Many “customers” want the cheapest possible building, so they want their building control provider to deliver the minimum (or lower) standards of fire safety.

Fire safety inspectors

In fire and rescue services, a few experienced fire safety inspectors are still out there encouraging higher standards in new building quality, picking up faults

missed by the building control process and spotting weaknesses in fire risk assessments. But their numbers are falling year on year.

One county that had 30 fire safety inspectors six years ago has 20 posts today, 10 of which are vacant. A county town that had eight fire safety inspectors six years ago has one today. And that one inspector has been employed from outside the fire service and so has no real fire experience to contribute to their role.

Career progression in technical fire safety has all but disappeared. Vacancies are being filled by the re-employment of retired fire safety officers. These staff will eventually put away their red pens for good and, with no succession planning by the service, their experience will be lost forever.

Typical training of fire safety officers used to be many weeks at the Fire Service College studying legislation and standards. Today, it is not unusual for “auditors” to be working after a one-week fire risk assessment course.

The FBU

Last year the FBU intervened in a round table meeting held at the House of Lords, arranged by the Federation of British Fire Organisations (FOBFO). The

“The FBU wants a well-staffed enforcement agency”

union questioned Brian Martin, who is responsible for Approved Document B (Fire Safety) within CLG.

FBU officers described the deteriorating standards accepted by AIs and BCOs. Martin said he wanted to see the union’s evidence so that it could contribute to a review. We are confident that a review will take place and if enough evidence can be collected, we will see a positive outcome.

Mike Larking, responsible at CLG for enforcement of the Fire Safety Order, also took questions. FBU speakers described the deterioration in technical fire safety departments and argued that the risks created by cuts in technical fire safety would materialise eventually. Larking said it was a matter for chief fire officers. This was deeply disappointing.

The FBU has written to FOBFO to point out that, without the threat of discovery by a robust, well-staffed and knowledgeable enforcement agency, third party certification, retrofitting of sprinklers and the selection of appropriate passive fire safety materials by the building industry, progress will only be piecemeal at best.

Short-term success is obviously important, but those fire and rescue services that achieve it by risking the long-term fire safety of the built environment need to be exposed and those who achieve it while taking steps to secure long-term fire safety need to be publicly congratulated.

The thrust of the FBU’s work will be to raise awareness of this rapidly growing problem.

We will encourage as many people as we can to join us in taking a critical look at technical fire safety enforcement provision and in applying pressure to fire and rescue services to take a long-term view of the risks they are creating.

Request for information



The FBU’s fire safety advisor and members of the ONC fire safety sub-committee are involved in addressing these issues. Previous requests for examples failures of the building control process have been used to good effect.

Send anonymised examples to david.sibert@fbu.org.uk



Announcements

Have your say

Peter Moss **Chair of the Officers** **National Committee**

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the officer members for electing me to the position of chair of the ONC and I will strive to ensure that the voice of officer members is constantly and consistently heard within the union, by employers and by individual fire and rescue services. I would also like to thank the



outgoing chair, Allan Guest, for his commitment and support and hope I can continue the work Allan has undertaken on behalf of officer members.

Peter has been a member of the FBU for 27 years and is currently station manager at Blackpool fire station. He is married to Anne and has two children and in his own words, for those of you who really know your football, he supports the only truly named Invincibles, Preston North End.

Officers National Committee meeting dates

14/15 April **Officers AGM** 1300 hrs, Wortley Hall
15 June **MMNB** Edinburgh, Venue to be confirmed
16 June **ONC Business Meeting** Edinburgh, Venue to be confirmed
29 Sept **ONC Business Meeting** 1000 hrs, Friends Meeting House Euston
30 Sept **MMNB** Venue to be confirmed
Nov TBC **ONC Sub Committee** 1300 hrs, Wortley Hall
14 Dec **ONC Business Meeting** 1000 hrs, Friends Meeting House Euston
15 Dec **MMNB** Venue to be confirmed



Ken Knight will be speaking at the officers' AGM

And finally...

Of course it's your fault

Apparently whichever way you look at it the firefighters' pension scheme faces some financial difficulties. Or does it? Is it the scheme that has a problem or those that administer the scheme that have a problem? And when I say those who administer the scheme, I mean the organisations that administer the scheme and have administered or perhaps more correctly mis-administered the scheme from its inception.

All the suggestions put forward by them so far to solve their problem will actually fall upon us, the members of the scheme, yet why should we pay more to receive the same or even less? Of course you will be told it's a joint problem, we should find a joint solution, which is HR-speak for 'our' joint solution meaning that WE will have to pay.

Well I have a solution, sell off all the assets that were funded by the scheme when it made money for the misadministrators. Don't ask me to pay for their mistakes!

Dave Beverley, ONC Secretary

Ivan Walker, the FBU pensions adviser will be discussing pensions at the ONC seminar at Wortley Hall, 14/15 April 2010

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Leading professionals

