



FIRE BRIGADES UNION

# PARLIAMENTARY BRIEF

December 2005 Regular Newsletter for all Members of the Scottish Parliament Issue 2

## Domestic Fire Deaths in Scotland Increase by over 27%.

The recently published Annual Report of HMI for the Fire Service in Scotland confirms that Fire Deaths in Domestic premises has hugely increased by over 27%.

The figures for 2004-5 rose from 58 the previous year to 74. HMI Chief Inspector, Jeff Ord, states that many of these deaths were "potentially avoidable if smoke alarms had been fitted" as half of the premises in which these fatalities occurred did not have smoke alarms.

### Intervention

This means that half of the premises **DID** have smoke alarms, yet people still died. The Fire Brigades Union supports any campaign that encourages the use of domestic smoke detectors, but what this Report shows is that even with this smoke detection, the people of Scotland still need the adequate number of Firefighters to attend fires as quickly as possible in order to reduce injuries and save lives.

### Rescues

Unfortunately, the HMI Report does not take any account of the number of casualties & rescues by Fire Service Personnel.

Scottish Executive Statistics state that in Scotland in 2003 there were 80 fire deaths and 1,880 Casualties. Year on year approximately 60% of casualties are rescued by the Fire Service. This amounts to approximately 1,100 people rescued. In some Fire Authorities, the ratio of people rescued compared to deaths is as high as 40 to 1.

These statistics result in Scotland

having the highest number of fatalities (16 per million) AND the highest number of non-fatal casualties (364 per million) in the UK.



Jeff Ord advocates the reduction of front line Firefighters & Appliances **NOW**, based on perceived future reductions in Fires & other incidents due to Fire Safety Initiatives - Initiatives that have yet to be undertaken and outcomes that have yet to be realised & proven!

The HMI Report is definitive proof that not only is there still a need for present levels of intervention & speed of response to be maintained, but arguably a need to increase those intervention levels & reduce response times!

**FEWER Firefighters taking LONGER to respond to Fires & other incidents WILL result in increases in Injuries & Deaths!**

### Proven Initiatives

It is clear that Fire Cover arrangements must not be worsened until Fire Safety Initiatives are **PROVEN** to have made a positive impact. This will not happen just because a Act of Parliament says so, nor will it happen overnight.

In order to ensure that IRMPs "improve community safety" a **Common Standard** across Scotland, based on **ACTUAL**

response levels/times **MUST** be established in order to ensure that all of the people of Scotland are assured of, at the very least, the same Fire Cover as before.

## Announcement on Future of Fire Control Rooms - Imminent?

Emergency Fire Control Operators are still waiting on the further consultation on the Future of Fire Control Rooms in Scotland, promised by Hugh Henry, Deputy Minister for Justice.

Unfortunately, it is unclear what Mr Henry's intentions are. In a Parliamentary debate he promised "further consultation with all stakeholders"; he then stated in correspondence that he would be "consulting key stakeholders"; then he stated in an answer to a Parliamentary question that he would further consult "if necessary".

He says that he is still considering responses to the consultation exercise that took place...in August 2004 - **16 months ago!!**

Meanwhile hundreds of Emergency Fire Control Operators' futures hang in the balance.



Is this the man who is determining the future of the Scottish Fire Service?

**NO<sub>2</sub>**  
Fire Deaths

## Stornoway Firefighters Win Appeal to Minister for Justice against sacking by Highlands & Islands Fire Authority

The Minister for Justice has overturned a decision made by Highlands & Islands Fire Authority to sack 7 Firefighters.

The Firefighters were disciplined by H&I management for not responding to a fire call in September 2004. They were subsequently sacked by the Chief Officer. They appealed his decision to the H&I Fire Authority who supported the Chief Officer's decision

They subsequently appealed the Fire Authority's decision to the Minister, who found in their favour.

What makes this case significant, is that it was determined using the previous Fire Service (Discipline) (Scotland) Regulations, which have now been revoked.

New arrangements do not allow for any appeal to the Minister, leaving the final decision with either the Fire Authority, or in

some cases the Chief Officer.

If the Stornoway Firefighters were disciplined using the new arrangements, they would have had no right of appeal and the injustice forced upon them would not have been corrected.

Their only other recourse would have been an Employment Tribunal, the outcome of which can be ignored by the Fire Authority.

The very powers that the Minister used to rectify this injustice is the very powers that the Executive insisted was no longer required.

It is clear that a proper and robust appeals process, all the way to the Minister, must be in place in order to afford all employees access to a fair and independent hearing.

If Fire Authorities are happy to leave it with the Chief Officer, they better get their cheque books ready for the multitude of resulting Employment Tribunals over the horizon!

Still no  
Fire Service  
Advisory Body to  
Advise Minister

Over the past 2 years, legislation governing the Fire Service in Scotland has been radically overhauled for the first time in almost 60 years.

The Scottish Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council was a body made up of Fire Service Stakeholders who advised the Minister on matters pertaining to the Service - A body that would be extremely important, you would think, during such an important and seminal legal period for the Service. Well, not according to the Minister.

This body **never** met throughout the legislative process and was eventually abolished. A replacement body has still not been established. This means that there has been no formal body for **over 2½ years!**

The question therefore arises: **Who has been advising the Minister during the most important legal time in the history of the Fire Service in Scotland?**

## Future of Firefighters' Pension Scheme still to be Determined

The Deputy Prime Minister is determined to push through detrimental changes to the existing Firefighters' Pension Scheme and also introduce a new Scheme with extended pension age and less benefits.

The Firefighters' and Police Schemes have always been almost identical in that they recognise the limited length of time that an individual can undertake the duties of these professions and are tailor made accordingly. Due to the shorter length of career, Police Officers & Firefighters pay an

**11%** contribution from their salary, the highest, by some margin, in the public sector

The Home Office has already agreed that the Police Scheme will remain in tact for existing members. The official reason why Prescott is not doing the same for Firefighters is because the Police have a more dangerous job.

Well, actually, according to Government Statistics, Firefighters are higher up the list of dangerous professions than Police Officers are.

So what's Prescott up to?

Yet again we see Firefighters being praised as they show their professionalism & dedication live on TV at the Buncefield Oil Depot Fire.

Unfortunately, that praise doesn't transcend into affording that dedicated workforce with the Pensions Scheme that they deserve and value so dearly.

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