



# **Fire Brigades Union Region 1**

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ALL MEMBERS,  
REGION 1  
SCOTLAND

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015

## **Austerity, Cuts, 2015 Election & Resourced Based Crewing**

As Members may know the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service budget for 2015/16 was considered by the Fire Board at a special meeting on the 26th February. The budget has been cut again this year by £7 million as the Scottish Government continue to pass on the cuts to the Scottish block grant imposed by the UK Government as part of their destructive and politically motivated austerity agenda that seeks to reduce spending on public services to levels not seen since the 1930's, while also placing the running of many public services, including the Health Service in the hands of private companies, many of whom are large donors to the Tory party.

This further cut shall clearly have a detrimental impact on the Fire Service and it is no surprise that the Service wish to discuss changes they wish to implement to meet this. We have been asked to work jointly with the Service to assist in preventing or mitigating as far as possible any impact on the front line and Fire Service posts. This is clearly a very difficult process for FBU officials to become involved in, however, if we are to try to achieve the best outcome for our Members, I am sure you would agree that it is essential that we take the opportunity to constructively engage with the Service.

The dangers of rejecting this approach are all too evident. You will know that Essex along with many other FRS in England are currently imposing major cuts that shall remove a further 20% of front line posts. FBU Essex officials have produced alternative proposals that would have achieved the savings the Service want and mitigated the effect on front line posts, but these have been rejected by the Service, leading to the current intermittent strike action that has also seen our Members locked out. I would urge all members to please organise letters of support and make contributions to their hardship fund.

## Essex hardship fund account

Account name: Essex fire brigades union hardship fund

Branch number: 086001

Account number: 20292568

Of course, any proposals from the SFRS that result from constructive engagement shall be reported to Members via our branch and committee structure and All Members Circulars to ensure that Members have the opportunity to decide over any proposed changes. The Service have informed us that amongst the measure they wish to discuss are; the most appropriate future duty systems for the SFRS, a strategy for ensuring equitable access to height vehicles and arrangements for transferring Members to different locations/stations.

The Service clearly believe that there is the potential to make savings by changing some of the current legacy agreements and have informed us that this shall assist in protecting the front line service and jobs. It should also be noted that the TUPE protection provided by legacy policy and terms and conditions is not absolute and that the contractual arrangements can be changed by employers for justifiable reasons provided sufficient notice is given. FBU Officials shall always seek to protect our members as far as possible from any potentially unwanted changes and to mitigate the effects of these.

The most productive means of doing so is usually achieved through negotiation and by reaching consensus where this doesn't prove possible other options shall need to be considered.

### **2015 Election**

There is also a unique opportunity for FBU Officials and members to help protect and enhance the Fire Service budget by organising to challenge the candidates for the Westminster election in May to protect the SFRS budget. It is clear already from their own admissions that whichever of the traditional parties form the next UK Government, the austerity agenda is set to continue to a greater or lesser degree.

FBU branches and members also need to organise to support the FBU campaign to exempt the SFRS from VAT payments, an exemption that every other FRS in the UK enjoys. This would return many millions to the

SFRS budget provided we get a pledge prior to the election that a Labour dominated UK Government would permit this and that the Scottish Government (who face an election in 2016) would pledge not to claw any of this money back from the SFRS budget. This would at the very least provide a considerable cushion against further austerity cuts and may allow the SFRS to enhance the service in areas they have already identified need further provision such as specialist rescue and areas covered by our RDS members. Further advice and information to assist branches with this campaign to challenge candidates for the Westminster election can be provided. Please organise branch meetings and discuss how you can assist in supporting this campaign.

### **Resource Based Crewing**

You shall know that revised crewing arrangements are being implemented in each of the 3 service delivery areas currently, consistent with an agreed Resource Based Crewing (RBC) Model. The primary drivers for change were the inconsistent legacy service crewing arrangements and the imposed austerity related and ongoing reductions in the service budget

The RBC model was developed over the last 6 months and the fundamental principle the FBU have insisted on is to ensure a safe system of work can be implemented on the incident ground for all incident types as soon as practicably possible by adopting a standard response model throughout Scotland.

The first phase has concentrated on applying this to wholtime crewing arrangements and the FBU have insisted that any resources that may be freed up be re-invested in reorganising the current RDS model to provide the same assurance over implementing safe systems of work. This shall now be considered within the context of the ongoing review of the RDS and the availability of RDS resources that this delivers. Early indications appear to indicate it shall require increased resources to achieve this.

The service is also committed to ensuring any changes implemented due to RBC do not compromise the delivery of front line resources when required on the incident ground.

A number of further principles were also agreed to support safe working:

- All first pumps shall be crewed with a minimum of 5 riders
- All second pumps shall be crewed with a minimum of 4 riders
- All second pumps at dedicated water and line rescue stations to have a minimum crew of 5

All High Reach appliances shall have a dedicated crew

- Aerial Rescue Pumps to continue with legacy crewing arrangements
- An agreed ridership factor to be applied to take account of leave, sickness etc. based on the traditional reciprocal of 5.6 in the areas aligned to the 4 Watch duty system
- Resources deemed to be support vehicles shall not have a dedicated crew
- An agreed buffer to be applied in the areas aligned to the 5 Group duty system

In order to apply a consistent RBC model a range of station types were then identified based on the particular resources, specialist skills and specialist appliances that are available in each fire station. A number of agreed categories were then created to indicate the crewing requirements for each specific station type (e.g. 2 pump station, 2 pumps and swift water rescue capability etc.).

This generated indicative numbers of Firefighters required at each station and was then referred to Managers and FBU reps at service delivery areas to consider how this local implementation should be applied.

It became apparent that due primarily to support vehicles no longer being assigned a dedicated crew the outcome of applying the RBC model to station crewing resulted in some stations (almost exclusively in the East SDA) having surplus firefighters to their identified needs while others have too few. A voluntary transfer process is now underway to attempt to correct the imbalances in firefighters and other options such as a service wide mobility policy may be proposed to assist with this. Clearly this would be a more long term piece of work and the FBU shall be involved in any negotiations that take place and will consult members over any proposals that emerge.

We realise changes in station crewing arrangements are difficult for members who may be affected, however as the Resource based crewing

model is predicated on responding to the specific local risks and provided it is clear that safe systems of work can be achieved to support the safe firefighter concept that the service assure us that they are committed too, we have no viable means of challenging this. We do have some concerns over the way the reciprocal has been calculated and is being applied to a number of the agreed categories and are currently seeking a review of this with the service.

We know that the application of the RBC model at some single pump specialist skills stations is causing serious concerns. Local FBU Officials have been pursuing solutions with management and we would ask you to arrange branch meetings to discuss the current position.

It is clear that the service are seeking to contain the overtime bill by implementing RBC to assist with meeting their reduced budget, while we are focused on ensuring the front line is protected and balancing firefighter skills and crewing arrangements to align them with these objectives, is one key element of achieving this. All public services as you know are being subjected to often savage and politically motivated budget cuts by the austerity policies of the UK Government with mutualisation, outsourcing, and inevitably outright privatisation also being planned for many including the Fire and Rescue service. In this climate and with UK Government commissioned reports flagging up the decline in emergency incident mobilisations ,we need to consider how we may have to adapt to continue to protect the front line.

One means of doing so is to expand the number of specialist rescue stations. This is also a key aim of the Scottish Governments Reform programme and to consequently provide equitable access to specialist skills throughout Scotland. The Service has recently completed a specialist resources review to meet this aim and this shall alter, and it appears, increase the Specialist skills and resources profile of the service when this is approved and fully implemented.

We have asked the Service to take account of this review when considering the current RBC crewing arrangements but they believe the financial difficulties and the uncertainty of when any new arrangements may be implemented make this impossible for them to agree too. Once this review has been approved by the Fire Board (and where required a training programme in new skills completed), the RBC model will be applied to the revised station types by utilising the agreed categories.

This shall then positively change crewing arrangements at a number of stations where enhanced skills are required.

Please organise a branch meeting if you require any further clarification of RBC and invite a District and/or Regional Official to attend to discuss any concerns.

### **FBU Conference 12-15<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

Executive Council Policy Statements to Conference 2015.

- 1. *The Future of the Fire and Rescue Service***
- 2. *Canvassing and Conduct During Elections***
- 3. *Health and Safety – Internal Arrangements***
- 4. *Firefighters and Response to Medical Incidents***
- 5. *Membership, Recruitment and Organising***
  - 1. *All Different All Equal – Review***
  - 2. *Europe and International Solidarity***

The policy statements will be in Branches and on line shortly, committees have the opportunity to submit amendments to the Policy Statements, a Regional meeting will be held in good time to allow consideration of amendments.

Branches and Districts need to organise meetings in order to consider these very important EC policy statements.

All amendments must reach Head Office not later than **2.00 pm on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2015.**

Yours Fraternally



Roddy Robertson  
Executive Council member  
Region 1  
Scotland