



Fire Brigades Union Region 1

Scottish Regional Office: 52, St Enoch Square, Glasgow. G1 4AA

☎ 0141-221-2309

☎ 0141-204-4575

Roddy Robertson: EC Member

E-Mail: roddy.robertson@fbu.org.uk

☎ 07801-047-601

All Members,
Region 1
Scotland

18th December 2013

Dear Comrades,

Update on Negotiations and SFRS Budget Reductions

2014/15 Budget

The Scottish Fire & Rescue Budget for 2014/15 is now being discussed and will be taken at a special board meeting on the 28th February 2014. We have been contacted and will be meeting with the service to determine how issues around the budget policy can be discussed and any concerns we may have can be taken account of and addressed using the working together principles, that were recently agreed by the service and the Board. We have been informed that the budget proposals are just that, initial proposals and that shall have to be discussed and agreed before they become the policy for the service or the board.

As outlined in the last newsletter in November, the Union shall be stepping up a political campaign challenging the Scottish Government over the finances/budget that has been allocated to the SFRS and the way the budget is controlled and restricted by the rules directed by the Scottish Government. For example the cuts to our budget appear to be disproportionate to the reductions to the Police budget that has been allocated to also deliver a single service that is designed to protect the front line while achieving economies of scale to meet the austerity cuts being imposed by the Westminster Government. The constraints on the SFRS revenue raising potential include an instruction that all additional revenue that may be earned by the service shall be deducted from the budget allocation and the SFRS have also no ability to carry over any reserves generated by revenue from providing external training etc. or from any under spend.

VAT

As previously outlined the service have lost the ability to reclaim VAT in comparison with the previous 8 services and Local Government who enjoy this VAT exemption., The unexpected withdrawal of the VAT exemption has resulted in a £9M annual shortfall that will inevitably lead to unnecessary and unacceptable cuts to the service. Our Union campaign includes focusing on this UK treasury and Government decision in order to restore the VAT exemption and support our emergency service

to fulfil the difficult job that is being asked of us by the public Imposing VAT charges is perverse and combining this with austerity cuts shall seriously ultimately affect service delivery and impact on the protection we can provide to the public .

Special appliance review

Some early discussion have been held with the SFRS concerning providing equitable access to specialist appliances and specialist services across Scotland. Previously each service had different arrangements for their special appliances; these resulted in dual crewing, alternate crewing and permanent crewing dependent on the choices made by the legacy service. The SFRS are considering the current locations and crewing arrangements of these appliances in relation to the overall risk and also to providing equitable access and the impact of removing the former service borders The FBU Regional committee has established a sub-committee to negotiate with the SFRS on this matter and when any proposals are made we shall begin a full consultation with members to determine our collective response.

Working together policy

The document was agreed at the last board meeting and is designed to ensure the FBU are fully involved in responding to any SFRS proposals (and we can also initiate proposals) at the earliest point possible and can propose alternatives that must also be fully considered without prejudice. This is intended to reduce the potential for conflict by considering all potential options before any definitive proposals are arrived at. This process complements the agreed negotiation policy, supports the joint aim of maintaining good industrial relations and is in addition to the agreed dispute resolution machinery in the Grey book that can still be invoked if necessary. It is expected that formal training for all parties on the working together principles will take place early in the New Year.

Future of Control rooms

The FBU has agreed to participate in a joint working group to consider the options for the future locations of control rooms and to develop this in accordance with the agreed partnership principles this was conditional on the SFRS recognising that the FBU may wish to propose an alternative option to the 3 recommended by the Board in response to the strategic intent document. I am sure members will agree that while we welcome the service proposals to consider redeployment and retraining or voluntary service/early retriial for any potentially displaced staff retaining an EFCR within a reasonable travel distance for existing staff remains the best option for our members the SFRS and the communities we serve. Any FBU proposals shall seek as far as possible to secure this.

We shall also be seeking the assistance of FBU Control reps and members to generate alternative proposals that shall aim to secure the retention of as many EFCR as possible together with the provision of the appropriate number of Control staff posts to ensure any new arrangements optimise the protection of our

communities and provide at least the same high standard of emergency response as is currently provided.

5GDS

The service appears to be considering the potential to introduce a 5 Group Duty System either on a service wide basis or where they may deem this appropriate, no discussions have taken place with the FBU on this issue as yet and members will be kept informed if and when they do through the normal branch structures.. Discussions as to the difficulties with adhering to the current agreement and delivering the key aims on the 5GDS in the former Strathclyde area are underway. Operation of the current system is being reviewed but it is apparent that the primary difficulty in delivering the stated aims is the historical and ongoing serious under establishment. It is evident that until the under establishment is rectified by recruiting more firefighters this duty system cannot be considered fit for purpose.

Action Short of Strike.

You will have seen the circulars from head office on the subject; the Regional Committee will be meeting on the 19th December to discuss the implications for the Overtime ban on the days that have been outlined from head office.

We appreciate that this Industrial action shall create difficulties in maintaining appliance availability and are aware of the concerns this causes members. However the proposals from the UK Government to force firefighters to work longer, pay more and receive less remain unaltered and the UK negotiations remain deadlocked.

Given the number of concerning issues as related above that are facing FBU Members it is more vital than ever that members attend branch meetings and discuss these matters to help to collectively decide the FBU response via our recognised structures. The FBU is the professional voice of the Fire Service as our members deliver the service to our communities at their times of greatest need. It is the knowledge and experience of Firefighters formed through the most challenging circumstances such as the magnificent response from our members to the recent Clutha bar incident that leaves us best placed to identify what the SFRS needs to continue to do to protect and enhance the service. A world class Fire Service cannot be maintained in a climate of continual and severe budget cuts. We must organise to protect our service and the communities we protect.

I thank all members for the contributions you continue to make to assist these aims and for your support for this campaign to challenge the budget cuts. I wish you all a very peaceful Christmas and a prosperous New Year

Yours Fraternally

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Robertson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Roddy Robertson
Executive Council member
Region 1
Scotland