

The background of the page features a large, faded circular logo for the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). The logo contains the letters 'FBU' in a stylized font, with a fire helmet and a fire axe positioned behind the text.

**FIRE BRIGADES UNIONS  
COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS  
TO  
MF&CDA  
IRMP - YEAR 2  
2007/08.**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Again, the FBU make the point that if consultation is to be truly meaningful, then the response from those involved in the consultation exercise has to be taken seriously. The FBU to date has fully played its part in the consultation phase of the MF&CDA IRMP, however it is disappointing to note that the FBU's recommendations to that consultation has not been included in any IRMP to date.

The FBU again offer those recommendations from previous consultation responses and invite the Authority to consider them as part of this round of consultation, required by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

### **FBU Recommendation 1:**

*The Fire Authority should adopt a target of zero fire deaths and work together with the Fire Brigades Union in formulating policy and strategies in order to work towards achieving this.*

### **FBU Recommendation 2:**

*The effectiveness of current Community Fire Safety initiatives should be thoroughly assessed in order to properly calculate their contribution to bringing down incidences of fire.*

### **FBU Recommendation 3:**

*That MF&CDA ensure that advocates should augment uniformed personnel not replace firefighters.*

### **FBU Recommendation 4:**

*That a full and extensive consultation programme is undertaken with the FBU on any proposed revision of standards of fire cover with agreed outcomes based on qualitative and quantitative data and evidence. These agreed outcomes to be trialled to ensure a safer and more effective Fire Service is available to those who work in, and require assistance from.*

### **FBU Recommendation 5:**

*The FBU strongly urge that the formulation of action point 43 (response standards to life threatening non-fire emergencies) has the full involvement of the FBU, and that both MF&RS and the FBU to formally discuss and agree outcomes through the employee relations machinery and Health and Safety Committee currently in place.*

**FBU Recommendation 5:**

***That MF&RS and the FBU enter into a full and extensive consultation programme on the methodology and ethos of rescue and support appliances in the light of identified and known risks both appliances are mobilised to. It is important to remember that on occasion due to availability of appliances it may be necessary to mobilise 3 support appliances to effect a rescue.***

**FOREWORD**

The foreword makes mention of a number of key strategies, strategies that the FBU support.

We support the improvement of the response standards to which the FBU has been advocating since the implementation of IRMP's. Recommendation 6 above indicates that the FBU have maintained that response standards should be set at 100% which we believe is a target that is achievable. We again make that recommendation to the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority.

However, the risks we face today as workers within the Fire and Rescue Service have not been greatly reduced as stated within the foreword, they have increased and indeed there remains much work to do. Terrorist threat remains a significant risk to which the government requires operational readiness from Fire and Rescue Services. Climate change is resulting in more and more extreme weather conditions that stretch the Fire and Rescue Service from control to fire appliance and its crews, along with command and control structures.

We have seen a massive and welcome infrastructure investment, particularly but not exclusively in the Liverpool City Centre. We have already had to deal with a number of testing incidents within that infrastructure work.

Naturally, in a period of change within the Fire and Rescue Service there requires a great deal of leadership and managers whom have extensive people skills to bring the workforce along with the implementation, including the speed of that change, managers whom respect and listen to a workforce who have a valuable contribution to make; managers who are able to assess and input that contribution to evolve and consequently improve the issues of change. Change for changes sake is the one great mistake a fire and rescue service can make and requires careful monitoring to eradicate that impetus.

The longest period of local industrial action involving any Fire and Rescue Service is a clear indicator that somewhere within this process and within Merseyside F&RS mistakes have been made, mistakes that can no longer be ignored. A greater investment in employee relations is clearly required to restore the morale and improve the motivation of the workforce.

The one key element in providing an efficient and effective F&RS are the firefighters and firefighters (control) themselves, to place them any where except at the top of all agendas is a folly that will manifest itself time and time again.

Members are aware of the ongoing work of the industrial relations review committee and trust that the support and confidence that the elected members have shown to date for that team and the process remains throughout in order to assist that improvement of relations.

The FBU provide the comments within this document to assist the process and to be fully involved in the consultation exercise. The FBU accordingly expects that the comments are considered as part of the process and the FBU Officials remain available to meet with elected members and management alike to discuss any and all comments.

## OUR SUCCESSES

### IRMP ACTION PLANS 2004 - 2007.

This section of the IRMP 2 states that the previous years in the IRMP process analysed the risks to which our communities were exposed at that time and devised courses of action to reduce the risk, creating a safer community and a safer workforce. The FBU regrettably challenge that statement with regard to the safer workforce.

Evidently, due to staffing shortages the FBU analyse to be chronic; there have been a significant amount of occasions that frontline emergency fire appliances have had to be removed from availability due to a lack of staff. The Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority has set its response resources within previous IRMP's and has strategically located the required amount of rescue and support pumps at key locations across Merseyside to protect the community and to provide safe staffing levels for the fire crews. For any fire appliance to be removed from fire cover through staffing shortages is dangerous in itself, to allow the level of fire appliances to be removed from the Merseyside communities as experienced in recent months, requires urgent investigation and intervention.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**The FBU urge the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority to launch an urgent and thorough investigation and audit in the frequency and depth of the removal of frontline emergency fire cover due to staffing deficiencies and to assist the local joint secretaries in developing an action plan to remedy the problem.**

**The removal of frontline fire cover and as such breach the determined level of fire cover set in previous IRMP's will increase the risk to fire crews covering for those shortfalls.**

### ACHIEVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

While there is a lot to admire in the work the Merseyside fire crews have carried out in the previous years to reduce fire deaths and accidental dwelling fires, the use of statistics is something the FBU have always been cautious and vigilant about. This section of the IRMP declares a decrease in accidental fires within the home of 8.77% whilst the DCLG figures provide a decrease of only 7% change over the previous 12 months.

Clearly there remains some ambiguity over figures which the FBU have highlighted previously. The FBU are concerned about the source of figures used within this document as they appear to differ from the figures that the Government appear to provide and circulate.

This section refers to the valuable work the advocates provide to get to the hard to reach sections of our community. The FBU acknowledge the work the advocates undertake and remind the elected members of the FBU recommendation 3 which states:

**FBU Recommendation 3:**

***That MF&CDA ensure that advocates should augment uniformed personnel not replace firefighters.***

**OUR COMMUNITY STANDARDS**

**EMERGENCY RESPONSE STANDARDS**

If any elected member asked a firefighter or firefighter (control) what is the most important issue in successfully reducing fire deaths by being able to successfully effect rescues from those trapped in fire, the exclusive answer would be - speed and weight of attack. That is the view of the professionals who continually risk their lives to protect the communities we serve.

It is the view of many current fire service managers that the most important life saving technique is community fire safety, prevent rather than intervene, and whilst all acknowledge the importance of community fire safety, intervention will always remain the core service of a modern fire and rescue service.

***Speed: the time taken for emergency fire crews to arrive on scene of an emergency incident, the less the time the more people we will save.***

***Weight of attack: the necessary and appropriate levels of firefighters at the incident.***

The FBU has provided the Merseyside F&RA with a suite of risk and task analysis called the Critical Attendance Standard (CAST) scenarios.

**Critical Attendance Standards.**

Fire Cover Standards have been the subject of intense recent review within the Emergency Fire Cover Review commonly regarded to as the Pathfinder review and conducted as the Pathfinder trials.

This review focused on the methodology of moving to a risk based approach to emergency cover and determined the resources actually needed at differing types of incidents.

To achieve this determination, emergency incidents attended by the Fire Service were categorised under four broad headings:

**Critical Attendance Standard**

- Dwellings
- Other Buildings
- Special Services

- Major incidents

Pathfinder intended to categorise the types of emergency incidents a Fire Service could reasonably be expected to attend, and to determine the resources required to be deployed at the incident. Those resources determined to be deployed are required to undertake Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's), to minimize the risks posed to firefighters and to increase the likelihood of the incident being brought to a successful conclusion.

The process of planning Intervention Control Measures was based on actual operational experiences, and was classified as the Worst Case Planning Scenario (WCPS).

WCPS has now evolved into what is referred to as the Critical Attendance Standard (CAST).

The Critical Attendance Standards, in compliance with Service SOP's, will only be effective if the resources attend an emergency incident quickly and together. The requirement of 9 firefighters to attend a two storey house fire can only be satisfied if those resources arrive simultaneously.

Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence authority has attempted to foresee this methodology by adopting above the 1985 standards of fire cover, and to mobilize two appliances as a minimum to all house fires, a policy to be applauded and goes some way to safeguard the health and safety of firefighters and community members alike.

Until there is quantitative and qualitative evidence to the contrary, and prior to the adoption of a Critical Attendance Standard methodology to plan the correct levels of emergency response for all emergency incidents, then;

- To ensure that members of the public have the best possible chance of surviving fires and other incidents; *and*
- To ensure as far as possible the firefighter safety is not further compromised through an ability to instigate current Standard Operating Procedures at emergency incidents,

The only acceptable level of crewing for 'Rescue' or 'Support' appliances is FIVE RIDERS in order to carry out existing standard operating procedures safely and effectively.

The Critical Attendance Standard is a standard the MF&CDA must factor into the IRMP, and to ignore that standard is to potentially place firefighters at risk.

The IRMP has identified that the previous response standards have been met on 95.2% of occasions, yet only wish to raise these most crucial of all standards, from 85% to 90% in the year 2010. That is a remarkably low aspiration of an emergency service and a level disallowed under previous national standards of fire cover which was set at 100%.

The FBU urge the Merseyside F&RA to set, as a matter of urgency, standards of emergency response to be achieved on 100% of occasions, excluding second and subsequent calls that requires a separate risk based strategy, with a report generated by the Service to the Authority if the standards are not met on any occasion.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT**

The Service makes a number of worrying assumptions within this section such as research has identified that people die as a result of fire in the home rather than in offices, shops, hotels and cinemas. Whilst that is undoubtedly true at present, that is not an accident of timing, geography or any other such factor, it is solely due to successive and successful pieces of legislation that has forced fire safety improvements upon industries and the business sectors.

Such legislation was implemented only after tragedies such as the Henderson's fire, Bradford fire and other tragedies. It is crucial, and indeed a Government requirement, not to jeopardise the advances we have made in these areas as a fire and rescue service and in fact it is even more important that now the many areas of fire safety legislation has been pulled together within the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 legislation (initially laid in front of parliament as a bill sponsored by the FBU) that Fire and Rescue Authorities do not relax in these key areas.

It is even more important when the change in the social make up of Merseyside is considered. While Merseyside continues its move away from an industrial manufacturer of goods to a more service providing community and whilst there is a massive increase in the number of bars, hotels and restaurants, along with the presence of the largest student population in the UK, a strategy that doesn't fully acknowledge those challenges to the fire and rescue service puts fire crews and community members at risk.

The IRMP points to the use of a commercial risk management consultancy to assist in risk management strategies. Documents provided by such consultants within Merseyside recently have proven to be at best a human resource strategy rather than any proper risk based strategy. At worst some of the documents provided have simply been incompetent.

A simulation model using 5 years of incident data is useful only as a historical tool and cannot assess new or existing risk if those risks have not been unfortunate enough to have an emergency incident in those last 5 years. An example could be the John Lennon Airport (this is not an evidence based example and is only used as an illustrative tool) if the John Lennon Airport was incident free for the previous 5 years, then it becomes invisible to the consultancy firm relying on that data. Clearly an international airport is a significant risk to the fire and rescue service and requires strategically based fire cover, it cannot be deemed as low risk due to it having a decent safety record.

## **FRAMEWORK OF AFFORDABILITY**

This section causes some concern for the FBU as it indicates that Service managers, compiling a risk assessment led risk management plan, has factored in wholly political components. The IRMP again refers to the fact that MF&RS is a relatively high cost per head of population but declines to comment on why there is very good reason for that. The FBU have always maintained that we are a relatively cheap Authority per incident attended, a fact confirmed by the Authority Treasurer at the recent budget setting seminar combining staff and incident data.

A number of political statements are made in this section that can only remain a decision for locally accountable, locally elected representatives of the fire authority. Pay increases remain a national issue and it is concerning to learn that the Treasurer is to recommend

estimating annual pay increases down from 3% to 2%. A hostage to fortune strategy that seems at odds with the recent more prudent strategies adopted by the fire authority.

Equally concerning is the statement that overtime will be funded through improved efficiency, usually management vernacular for job losses. Hypothetically then, management could make a decision to increase overtime and reduce the numbers of the workforce to pay for it. These issues rightly remain political issues that lay only with the politicians.

The main source of concern is a concern we have laid out in previous IRMP response documents and that concerns the level of the precept. Whilst the level of Government Settlement Grants remain disappointingly low especially for the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority it is also disappointing again to observe political leanings contained within documents such as this. The level of the precept is rightly a political decision and whilst Service managers have a right to comment upon the level it should remain within a lobbying arena rather than a risk management plan.

***As part of that lobbying process however, the FBU again urge the elected members to set a precept that takes into account the low level of settlement grant of 2.7% and to take the opportunity to raise the maximum amount of revenue by setting the precept level at the 5% allowed by the Government of the day.***

It seems absurd to the FBU that the Authority are prepared to capitalise on firefighters pensions to the tune of £6.1M but hesitate at taking available funds through the setting of precept levels at the level that other public services will undoubtedly set.

### **WHAT WILL WE DO IN 2007/08.**

#### **REDUCE RISK**

##### **COMMERCIAL FIRES REDUCTION TEAM.**

The FBU support this concept and view the loss of commercial premises as not just a risk to firefighters having to tackle the blaze, but a risk also to those who would inevitably lose their job and livelihood through the effect of fire.

##### **DERELICT PROPERTY STRATEGY**

The FBU provide qualified support for this proposal with the qualification being only the lack of detail on the proposal at present.

##### **WATCH COMMUNITY PLANNING**

The FBU provide qualified support for this proposal with the qualification being only the lack of detail on the proposal at present.

##### **INTELLIGENCE LED TARGETING OF HOME FIRE SAFETY CHECKS AND SMOKE DETECTOR INSTALLATION**

The FBU again provide qualified support but is concerned at the growing trend toward cold calling within MF&RS which the FBU view as unnecessary and divisive. The inclusion of local

staff to allow development of local strategies has proven invaluable in this area and should be allowed to develop free from restraint.

For clarification the FBU oppose cold calling and view it as unnecessary and a risk to the very people we intend to protect.

### **CROSS BORDER RISK**

The FBU recognise that there are already statutory procedures in place to accommodate this section. The FBU cannot comment until further detail is provided.

### **HATE CRIMES**

The FBU have already offered support to this initiative through the Services Equality and Diversity Committee.

**The FBU urge that the Equality Champions attend the Equality and Diversity Committee meetings to demonstrate equal commitment.**

## **RESPOND**

### **PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

The FBU have previously urged a performance standard of 100% be adopted in this and prior IRMP response documents, we again reiterate that position.

With national government statistics showing MF&RS injuries rising by 118% over the last three years and with the reduction in immediate frontline emergency fire appliance availability with the subsequent reduction in firefighter posts in Merseyside continuing, we would expect standards are aimed to be improved and that the IRMP ensures that there is always a rescue appliance available within each station area 24/7, in line with previous IRMP's.

### **ATTENDANCE STANDARDS FOR ROAD TRAFFIC COLLISIONS**

The FBU urge the highest standards be set for this type of emergency incident on 100% of occasions.

### **LOW LEVEL OF ACTIVITY AND RISK STATIONS**

The recent industrial action and subsequent collective agreements provides comment on this issue. It is welcome that elected members will be a part of that review.

### **MEDIUM LEVEL OF ACTIVITY AND RISK STATIONS**

The FBU cannot provide comment on this issue as there is no detail available to comment upon. It is concerning however that conceptual issue's such as this is presented in IRMP documents with no detail as this is a consultative document which must provide that detail if it is to carry the credibility it requires.

For clarification, the FBU cannot provide comment on this issue and urges the elected members to instruct Service managers to include issues that are detailed and complete so as not only the trade unions can provide comment but also the communities of Merseyside.

The FBU view this tactic as an abrogation of consultation responsibilities.

### **RESCUE CONCEPT**

Again this issue concerns the FBU as it is presented in a consultative format for the stakeholders to comment upon, yet is already implemented. It is not a fait accompli as it is evidently passed that point.

### **IMPROVED HAZARDOUS MATERIALS INCIDENT RESPONSE**

Again, in part this has been the subject of industrial action which has resulted in a number of collective agreements already adopted as policy by the MF&RA. We look forward to constructive negotiations on the implementation of this issue.

### **ROVING FIRE APPLIANCES**

Again, the FBU cannot provide comment on this issue as there is no detail available to comment upon. It is concerning however that conceptual issue's such as this is presented in IRMP documents with no detail as this is a consultative document which must provide that detail if it is to carry the credibility it requires.

For clarification, the FBU cannot provide comment on this issue and urges the elected members to instruct Service managers to include issues that are detailed and complete so as not only the trade unions can provide comment but the communities of Merseyside. The FBU view this tactic as an abrogation of consultation responsibilities.

### **SMALLER FIRE APPLIANCES**

The FBU could provide support for this proposal and has called for a smaller dimension fire appliance in key locations for a number of years. The FBU do have concern with this proposal simply through lack of detail. The FBU also have concern on the savings aspiration of the proposal as it states that there is an over provision of resources at incidents which is clearly not the case.

### **PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER FIRE SERVICES**

The FBU are concerned that this proposal may lead to a reduction of frontline emergency fire cover in certain areas with MF&RS looking to supplement fire cover to the communities of Merseyside by the utilisation of the other fire service resources.

Until further details are provided the FBU cannot comment further.

### **MAJOR RISK STRATEGY**

The FBU is surprised that such a strategy is not already in place and urges the strategy to be completed in the shortest time possible. The FBU await further consultation on this matter.

## **MOTORBIKE WITH FIREFIGHTING CAPABILITY**

The FBU oppose this proposal as dangerous and absurd. The FBU reserves further comment until required consultation on the details of the proposal commences.

## **COOL VAN**

The FBU offer support for this proposal and views it as one that will increase the benefits and decrease the risks to firefighters.

## **GOOD SAMARITANS RESPONSE UNIT**

The FBU urge that an equality impact assessment is undertaken on this issue and at the very least the title of the unit is revisited for obvious reasons. The FBU urge caution when the use of religious based terminology is used in a multi cultural secular society such as Merseyside.

## **ORGANISATION**

### **PRIVATE FINANCE INITIATIVE**

Again, this is a hugely political issue that must be debated in full by the elected members. The FBU oppose the principal of PFI and view it as being short termist, though it saddles the public authority with long term debt. PFI is inefficient and profit driven by the PFI contractor. The FBU urge extreme caution on this issue to which should be fully and openly debated.

### **POST RETIREMENT POLICY**

The FBU is not surprised that a more for less proposal such as this is within the IRMP, but urges extreme caution on this issue.

Although the FBU cannot and will not support this proposal, it may be the case that the Authority is again to adopt a 'hostage to fortune' situation and has not taken fully into account, the recent changes to the Firefighters Pension Scheme (FPS) and the introduction of the New Firefighters Pension Scheme (NFPS).

### **INDIVIDUAL VALUES**

This section crosses into the work being carried out by the joint industrial relations review committee.

It is welcome however, that the Service recognises that there is a level of lack of enthusiasm by some employees for their role but the FBU suggests that is misguided. There is no lack of enthusiasm for the role of firefighter and beyond within MF&RS, simply a lack of morale and feeling of worth. That work must be accelerated with the support of the employers, the elected members.

## **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

The issue of equality impact assessments (EIA) is a subject of some concern for the FBU as to date there is little evidence of this important piece of equality legislation being enacted despite FBU representations on the matter.

Again, this issue should be a standing item on the Services Equality and Diversity Committee in attendance with the Authorities Equality Champions.

## **RECRUITMENT STRATEGY**

This item was the subject of the return to work agreement. The FBU welcome that the elected members will be a part of the discussions.