

Cheshire FBU News

April 2007

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1. Capability

Over the last few months many members have been going to their medical case conferences clutching a letter effectively saying get well or get out. For some of these members the illness/condition is one that will not improve enough to let them come back operationally. The Service say they have no jobs to redeploy them, and so it is with a heavy heart the Brigade have to sack them on the grounds of capability. These members having done nothing wrong then have to attend a stage 3-Discipline Hearing with the forgone conclusion of the sack. If the Service continues to interpret the Pension Regulations in this way it will mean that the provisions on ill health retirements will be null and void. The FBU does not agree that the Service has only one course of action, that of the sack. It believes that if Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service cannot redeploy our members who are unfit for operational duty but fit for redeployment on Grey book jobs then they should be medically retired with an ill health pension.

The FBU has instructed its solicitors to take up member's cases who are sacked on capability grounds; it may take a legal case to get Management to take a different view on these cases. However until this is sorted these members may need the collective protection of the wider Cheshire membership.

2. Halton Campaign

Considering that England were playing, or was that the reason, the turn out of members from Runcorn and Widnes branches was good? The members met in a local venue to discuss the proposed pilot to remove a structural appliance and replace it with two TRVs as detailed in the IRMP.

After a good discussion on the pros and cons the members decided it was time to defend the level of service and a political campaign is to be mounted to reverse the cut of one appliance from 1500-2200hours each day. The meeting decided to take the aims and objectives decided at the meeting back to the respective branches for endorsement, set up a campaign group and start the work.

3. Optimum Crewing

At long last the saga of what is or what is not short term sick leave has been resolved. It is the first eight days of sickness. The FBU will further discuss the question of 'due to service' injuries not being included as short term sick, but for now the wholetime staff have, through the most difficult period of leave allocation, returned on average a short term sick statistic of 4 days lost per FF /year.

It took hours of work and discussion with Management to get them to accept that our figures were correct and theirs were not. The reason for the figures being in dispute for so long was that the recording methods were just not good enough and both sides had to resort to the old fashion method of counting the number of days sick from the rota books. Modernisation is not all about improvement as sometimes the old methods are the best, or did you know that already?

The FBU has tabled a suggestion which management seem to agree with that Station/Admin Managers in partnership with the FBU Rep should count the short term sickness on a monthly basis.

IF the Service doesn't report the gain of a scale 'A' leave day soon to staff it will make it difficult to get the leave programmed. Keep your eye on the green.

4. Staffing Levels

With the numbers of new FFs arriving on station faster than current staff can make their escape this should push the staffing levels up too and maybe above the level of 76 per watch on the wholetime system, at least for a period of time. The FBU has requested that the leave screen should show the rise in staff numbers and therefore reflect movement of the buffer numbers so that staff should move out into a confirmed leave slot as numbers go up. This needs to happen quickly, so that staff know when leave is guaranteed and can therefore plan their day off. The speed at which these improvements seem to be taking place should remind readers of a character in the magic roundabout.

5. Retained Payment Issues.

At a recent JCC, the first for many years, (this is a committee made up of CFA Councillor's to hear disputes between the Rep Bodies and Brigade Managers) the FBU wanted the correct rate of pay for riding the TRVs and being a part time advocate. To solve the dispute on part time advocates the FBU offered a compromise on behalf of the retained members as follows:-

When carrying out HFSA and also making them selves available for calls they should attract their standard rate of pay, this in the unions view would help to increase the number of available staff thus making the appliance more available in the day, giving the communities greater fire cover and achieving extra CRR work at the same time.

This unfortunately was rejected after clarification by Brigade Managers.

6. Northwich/Winsford Second Appliances.

The IRMP states that these two retained pumps will be replaced by two TRVs. It is not clear as yet how this is going to affect our retained members. If the retained are going to crew this vehicle then it will only need three staff if Management persists with the current crewing arrangements for TRV's, so some members will see a loss of turn out fees. The question is:

Does the local community want to lose the firefighting capability of its appliance to a vehicle that at present only has the ability to put out small fires?

The Brigade officials will be meeting with both retained branches to gauge the mood and reaction to what will be a downgrading of the retained role and the level of service to risk critical calls with the introduction of the TRV.

7. Joint Consultation Panels

The formal procedure for raising issues at the station level (see TU Protocol) has arrived and the first meetings should have taken place. This is a good opportunity for FBU reps to put forward member's concerns direct to local managers. This should be the first port of call for all issues before they go to Brigade level. If the issue is not resolved at this level the Brigade officials can be contacted and the matter will be raised at Brigade level.

What are the Reps rights under the TU Protocol?

- 1 Right to meaningful consultation on local issues 21 days is the recognised norm.
- 2 Right to call emergency meeting.
- 3 Right to register a failure to agree with a status quo until the issues has been resolved at brigade level.
- 4 All issues can still be raised directly with your brigade official.

8. FBU Reps Training

It is vitally important that members who put themselves up for nomination as officials at any level are prepared to undergo training. Effective officials are a must for a functional Union and with more and more consultation and negotiation taking place at workplace level together with the need to ensure the correct and proper representation for members then formal training is a must.

Please look out for circulars from Garry Harney Cheshire FBU Education Rep and Union Learning Coordinator for Cheshire offering courses for existing or prospective officials.

9. Stop Message

The fight to maintain a cooker at wholetime stations has resulted in an announcement in the accommodation alert that the Service have taken on board your reasoned proposals for a domestic cooker. Well done to all those members and branches that took the trouble to let Management know their feelings on this issue. The combination of members at branch level and Brigade officials pulling in the same direction does yield results.

**To contribute to further issues of Cheshire FBU News contact your
Branch rep or email: cheshirefbunews@googlemail.com**