

Cheshire FBU News

August 2007

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1. Corporate Bullying

A recent discipline case in GMC has resulted in a real anger amongst the members with a press release by the FBU calling the management's action in this case as corporate bullying.

The FBU receives a lot of complaints about members feeling bullied by management, especially over attendance at development days but most of this has not been communicated to management as the complainants fear they will be targeted or labelled as having a bad attitude. Some members are even fearful of filling in the Staff Attitude Survey, believing that management will be able to trace their answers back to them. What a sorry state of affairs the Service has got itself into when its most valued asset, its staff, feel they work in an atmosphere of fear.

There are several discipline investigations ongoing at Crewe, Wilmslow and Warrington that bear out that this fear of retribution for criticising the Service is not imaginary.

Are Senior Managers so scared that they will not tolerate any criticism to their policies or style of management?

The measure of a sound policy or management style is that it can withstand criticism.

Surly constructive criticism should be invited as it gives the service a chance to justify its actions and test its policies.

The service will never take its staff with it, if it surrounds itself with staff that do not speak up and voice an alternative point of view through fear of consequences real or imagined.

Is it any wonder the service lost the badge of Investors in People?

Do you think Cheshire Senior Officers are acting as corporate bullies?

2. Reclining Chairs

Stations will by now be using these items of real modernisation.

Seeing grown men and women squirming around in the early hours in a vain attempt to find a comfortable position is both demeaning and slightly embarrassing. Certain Station Managers have openly said to their staff that the rest period is not compulsory and if they cannot get comfortable they could always get on with station work! Whilst there is a rest period within the shift then the employer has a duty of care to provide facilities that are fit for purpose, it is evident within the first few weeks that these chairs do not fit into that category at all.

Members are encouraged to alert their line Manager at the earliest opportunity should they be encountering any problems whatsoever with being able to rest properly in the chairs.

Lumbar supports are available through OHU.

3. Freedom of Speech?

The Crewe seven have all been given a record of 'Informal Discussion' placed on the personal file. The solidarity between the majority of members at Crewe is evident in the outcome of this case that was nothing more than a blatant attempt by Management to silence staff that may have a different opinion to the *Orwellian mantra* being chanted by the majority of Managers. Do you think they would have been investigated if they had praised the IRMP4 to all Cheshire MP's?

The outcome here is a victory for common sense however it is important for members to realise that there are no cosy chats or 'toolbox' sessions with managers.

As Firefighters your voice is not being listened to in order for your comments to be taken on board, they (Senior Managers) are only using this as an exercise to root out individuals who are not towing the party line. If pressed it may be useful to inform the relevant manager that you wish to decline from entering into dialogue about the Service in case your views are misinterpreted and that they may then affect any CPD application you make.

If in doubt or you require further guidance please contact your local FBU official for assistance

4. Hardship Fund

At the Brigade Committee on the 11th July, it was decided to donate £500 into the CWU fund to assist fellow Union members during the postal dispute. The purpose of the fund is to assist Union colleagues during periods of industrial unrest. As the CWU were one of the first donors during the pay dispute it was felt only right that we make a donation to them. It is important that when asked for a collection on to support other disputes members put their hand in their pockets. Any donation however small adds up to provide financial support; you never know when we might be calling upon other FBU members or Unions to assist us if Cheshire FBU members decide they have been pushed to far.

5. Joint Sec's Meeting 20/07/07

By the time this edition hits the stations members should have seen the Green Bulletin joint statement on the restful watch, further information will follow in due course.

6. Response Times

The labour group of MP who campaign on behalf of the FBU in Parliament have been asking questions of the Fire Minister two of which relate to attendance times and fire deaths. We on the front line will know the answers to the questions of:-

1 Are attendance times going up, post 2003?

2 Are there more staff being killed at operational incidents, post 2003?

THE ANSWER TO BOTH QUESTIONS IS YES

Here are the facts to support what we already know

1 Attendance times

Question: _ to Angela Smith from Mr. Roger Williams *"what fire brigade response times to emergency calls were for each fire service in each year since 2000"*?

Answer: - *"The available information covers primary fires (those involving property, or casualties, or attended by five or more pumps) attended by the fire and rescue service. The figures are average response times in minutes, measured from the time that the call was received by fire control staff up to the time of arrival of the first appliance at the fire ground"*

Average attendance times in Cheshire since 2000 as follows

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
6.43	6.85	6.73	6.9	7.2	7.3

This is nearly a full minute increase from 2000 to 2005.

2 Operational Fire Deaths

A parliamentary answer to the question of the number of operational deaths since 1997 was given as follows:-

1997=0,

2003=1, Manchester

1998=0,

2004=2 London

1999=1, Manchester,

2005=2 Hertfordshire

2000=1, Hampshire,

2006=2 East Sussex

2001=0,

2002=1, Leicestershire

In the six years prior to modernisation there are 3 deaths, in the five years post modernisation there are 7 deaths. That represents a 233% increase! The percentage increase is worst (375%) if you count the sad loss of Watch Manager from Herts. What makes the post 2003 figures worst is they are based on falling calls to fires and the implementation of stricter command and control procedures designed to increase safety of crews. Further to this fire losses have increased dramatically. These statistics could be pointing out the job is getting more dangerous, we are less efficient in firefighting all since modernisation?

There needs to be a full discussion on whether modernisation is taking us forward or dragging us back in time. Get the discussions going on your station/section?

7. Stop Message

The last touches are currently being put to the Cheshire FBU website. A link will be placed on the Region 5 page of the national site but the site can also be accessed via the URL: www.cheshirefbu.org.