

Industrial Relations

Purpose of the report

To update the Fire Commission on matters in relation to fire service industrial relations.

Summary

This paper is for information and briefly describes the main industrial relations issues at present.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the issues set out in the paper.

Action

This report is for information.

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Background

1. Uniformed operational staff from firefighter to chief fire officer level are in the main represented by one of four unions specific to the fire service – the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), the Fire Officers Association (FOA) the Retained Firefighters Union (RFU) and the Association Principal Fire Officers (APFO).

Pension scheme reform

2. The Government's pension reform proposals are now moving into the next formal stage. The spotlight will therefore shortly return to two of the most contentious issues – further increase in the employee contribution rate and the normal pension age review.
3. We understand that a Government consultation on the matter of employee contribution rates is imminent. The Chair of the review which is looking at issues around an appropriate normal pension age is due to issue his report in December.
4. Should the unions remain aggrieved the risk of potential industrial unrest could return.
5. As far as industrial relations are concerned, Members will recall that the LGA worked closely with all parties on the first stage of this work, which moved forward without recourse to industrial unrest. We shall endeavour to do so again.

National issues

6. There are no national issues with short term industrial relations implications at the present time.
7. Members will however recall that agreement was reached in September to progress two reviews through the NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services.
8. Work is jointly underway in respect of the shorter term review, which is looking at an appropriate mileage rate for employees covered by the NJC's scheme of conditions of service.

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9. Members of the Employers' Side and its advisers have commenced work on the medium term review, which is looking at pay and terms and conditions. This work is building upon previous work undertaken by the Employers' Side together with its advisers and a wider group of HR professionals drawn from all types of fire authorities and is in preparation for the joint review work that will follow.

Local issues

10. Since the last meeting of the Fire Commission in October, there has been one formal Joint Secretaries conciliation to assist that particular fire and rescue service in identifying a resolution to its local level dispute. Another referral has just been received from another fire and rescue service.
11. In addition, there has been a considerable amount of informal industrial relations relationship work with a number of fire and rescue services.