

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. As far as uniformed operational staff from firefighter to chief fire officer level are concerned they 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 continuing to progress, bringing focus again on two of the most contentious issues – further increase in the employee contribution rate and publication of the normal pension age review recommendations. Should the unions remain aggrieved the risk of potential industrial unrest could return.
3. 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

4. There are no national issues with short term industrial relations implications at the present time.
5. Work continues on the two reviews currently underway under the auspices of the NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services. Employers' Side members and advisers will meet again later this month to continue consideration of employer priorities in respect of the joint review on pay and terms and conditions. Negotiations are also continuing in respect of the separate review on car mileage rates.
6. At the time of writing it is expected that the final group of settlement offers in relation to the Employment Tribunal claimants/potential claimants' cases brought under the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations, will be issued shortly. This is in relation to the terms and conditions aspect of the claims/potential claims only.
7. At the most recent meeting of the FSMC members reviewed the current arrangements for stakeholder involvement in informing the work of the Employers' Sides of the NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services and NJC for Brigade Managers. FSMC members were content that the current approach should continue, which includes members of the Employers' Side taking political

soundings within their own stakeholder groups, the views of the National Employers' professional advisers, communication with CFOA on key issues, updates to FSMC and the Fire Commission, regular communications with authorities, surveys etc. Members of the FSMC recognised that all new members of the Employers' Sides receive a detailed half-day induction session with the Employers' Secretariat (provided by the LGA). It was recommended and agreed that periodic refresher training would be provided.

Local issues

8. Since the last meeting of the FSMC, there have been two formal Joint Secretaries conciliations, both of which assisted the local parties to identify positions they were content to recommend for acceptance to their respective stakeholders. We are currently dealing with two further requests for assistance in resolution of disputes at local level – one for conciliation and one to the NJC's Technical Advisory Panel (which deals with the introduction of new shift systems only).
9. There has also been a considerable amount of informal work with a number of fire and rescue services on industrial relations issues.
10. We have also assisted fire authorities by providing general advice and interpretation on the terms and conditions of employment of uniformed personnel.
11. The national Joint Secretariat recently visited a Fire and Rescue Service to provide a full day session with its key local management and union representatives to explore the current relationship and whether it could be improved. Feedback on the day has been very positive.