

**Fire Brigades Unions Position Statement in relation to Proposed Shift Changes  
Regarding the Marine Rescue Unit.**

*'The MF&RS 'Marine Rescue Unit' (MRU) maintains a continuous 24-hour a day, 365 days a year service is maintained, providing a rapid and effective rescue service for all river users. MF & RS Marine Rescue Unit has a scope of operation that includes 60 miles of coastline.*

*In 2006 Merseyside Fire Authority agreed to invest in a new and improved rescue craft that would better equip rescue crews for the demands placed upon them in the unique environment of the Mersey Estuary and provide a much improved level of protection for the community. They appointed Liverpool Boat Manufacturers 'Marine Specialised Technology' (MST) to construct a boat that was fit for purpose.*

*The Boat, the 'MST Rescue 1000' was brought into Service in 2008. Capable of speeds in excess of 40 knots, the boat is 10.5 metres in length and is powered by twin 370 hp diesel engines. The Boat is kept permanently on the water and is continually crewed.*

*This provision combined with the boats exceptional capabilities means that most casualties are recovered from the water within 3 minutes of the Rescue Launch being called out. It is this rapid and skilled response that invariably makes a life or death difference.*

*Since its first year of operation in 1984 the Service has attended over 4,500 incidents and has assisted nearly 3,500 people. Additionally, the Service has gone to the assistance of more than 2,000 vessels found to be in difficulty or distress. Many of the crew are in receipt of multiple Resuscitation Awards from the Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Society.*

*As part of its commitment to make the River Mersey a safer place, MF&RS is at the front line in terms of developing new rescue techniques and equipment. This philosophy has in recent years seen the introduction of equipment like the 'Pathfinder Rescue Sled' and also the 'Slide Raft' a 60 person, tow-able rescue raft. The MRU became was the first Rescue Service in the world to use the raft on fast flowing tidal waters.*

*Boat Crew's are trained as Rescue Swimmers and are able to utilise a range of rescue equipment including rope systems.*

*The Mersey Estuary is an area of water penetrating 50 kilometres into a densely populated area of NW England. Three rivers form the Mersey: the River Etherow, the River Goyt and the River Tame. It broadens into an estuary at Ellesmere Port and proceeds via Liverpool and Birkenhead to the Irish Sea.*

*The River Mersey has contributed more to the development of Liverpool than any other feature. Even today the Mersey is still busy with container and tanker ships moving in and out, along with ferries and numerous pleasure craft.*

*Approximately 2 million people live within 5 miles of its shores. It has been an important artery for seaborne traffic for many centuries. Its banks are heavily industrialised but, despite this, the estuary is of international importance for its wildlife.*

*The River Mersey is an extremely dangerous river presenting many different types of hazard. The Mersey has the third fastest tidal run in Europe, with the speed of the water exceeding 10 knots in places.' (Source MF&RS Website)*

It is our understanding through communication with a Member of Parliament that the Service, having purchased a hovercraft, has decided that it is to be located at the Marine Rescue Station and crewed by members of the MRU. This had not been disclosed to the Fire Brigades Union throughout this negotiation process which is disappointing as clearly this would impact on resources and may indeed lead to an increased, not decreased, staffing level in the MRU.

Progress on moving negotiations forward on this issue has been difficult and outstanding requests for information remain in place at the time of writing. Similar concerns exist for the Fire Brigades Union as exist for other proposals seeking significant savings and relate in particular to a staffing level that is too low to meet the statutory and contractual requirements for leave and training particularly now it has been made known to the Union that the Hovercraft vessel will be crewed by members of the MRU, the FBU fully support the vessel being crewed by the MRU as it makes perfect sense to use the skills of those trained and experienced in river rescues in all weather conditions.

Further concerns relate to work as defined by the Working Time Regulations and the FBU are concerned that the Service has proposed a shift system that utilises a system that is entitled 'sleeping in' to be worked by crew members. 'Sleeping in' is a system used by local government workers such as care workers, who have to reside in their place of work, but may not be called to provide care for those they support. An example would be a person supporting a member of the community with learning difficulties and would have to 'sleep in' at the person's house. The FBU understands that such a system has never been used within an emergency service and view it as not fit for purpose.

The members of the MRU are employed under Green Book rather than the Grey Book national conditions of service of other operational uniformed members of MF&RS, despite the FBU formally proposing that the MRU members be moved to Grey Book conditions of service a number of years ago. However, the Green Book requires that any working arrangements proposed by the employer must:

- I. Seek to meet employee's work-life balance needs and agree new arrangements that reflect joint guidance;
- II. Conduct an Equality Impact Assessment consistent with the NJC model;
- III. Ensure that part time workers receive equal treatment in line with the provisions laid out in the Green Book;
- IV. Ensure that arrangements are consistent with Equal Pay legislation.

Further the Green Book requires that working time arrangements should avoid:

- I. Short notice changes to rostered or expected patterns of work;
- II. Excessive hours in any particular week;
- III. Unnecessarily long roster periods.

The Union fear that doubling the working week from 42 hours to 84 hours is excessive and potentially unlawful, and does not meet equality standards or the worklife balance needs of the Authorities employees.

The FBU also do not believe the Equality Impact Assessment to be appropriate, suitable or sufficient in its present format.

The Union await the Services belief as to the definition of 'sleeping in' and would look to determine if it would fall foul of the Working Time Regulations, simply put we fear the proposal may be unlawful as it stands.

Further meetings are required to resolve these outstanding issues and the Union await confirmation of meeting dates and outstanding requested information vital to ensure the required progress of those negotiations.

L Skarratts  
Brigade Secretary