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## **Merseyside Fire Brigades Union**

**Response to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority  
Integrated Risk Management Plan 2017 - 2020**

## **Forward**

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) welcomes and fully supports the principle of a risk based approach to Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) and indeed have previously endorsed this approach into FBU Conference Policy.

The FBU can support the majority of the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2017-2020 and seek to support Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) as it comes to terms with the continued devastating cuts applied to MFRA.

The dedication and professionalism of all employees of MF&RS is beyond question and it is the employees who, throughout continued cuts to services and pay, have consistently delivered for the people of Merseyside.

The Fire Brigades Union represent the overwhelming majority of uniformed employees of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service. We offer this document as part of the required consultation process. This document has been compiled utilising the vast wealth of expertise, knowledge and experience of those personnel who provide the emergency response and other vital services to the people of Merseyside.

The key principle of a risk based approach to Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) is the introduction of the **Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)** which all Fire and Rescue Authorities are required to undertake.

The stated aims of this approach, as laid out by Government, is to produce IRMP's that improve public safety and consequently improve Fire and Rescue Services by reducing deaths, injuries and other consequences of fire and other emergencies such as Road Traffic Collisions (RTC's). This was set out originally in the Governments Guidance Note 1 to IRMP's at paragraph 1.2, in that:

***'The government thinks that a modern and effective fire and rescue service should serve all sections of our society fairly and equitably by;***

- ***reducing the number of fires and other emergency incidents occurring;***
- ***reducing loss of life in fires and other emergency incidents;***
- ***reducing the number and severity of injuries occurring in fires and other emergencies;***
- ***reduce the commercial, economic and social impact of fires and other emergency incidents;***
- ***safeguarding the environment and heritage (both built and natural); and providing communities with value for money.'***

IRMP's are plans for determining future Fire and Rescue Service activity aimed at keeping people safe from fire using a 'risk-based' approach which is built on the pillars of Intervention (Emergency Cover), Prevention (Community Fire Safety) and Protection (Legislative Fire Safety) activity as follows:

- **Prevention:** Stop fires before they start (education) and give early warning of fires if they do (e.g. smoke detectors), coupled with fire escape plans (what to do if a fire starts in your home to maximise your chances of escape/rescue). Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service offer this to each resident through the practice of operational firefighters and designated community fire safety officers undertaking Home Fire Safety Check (HFSC's).
- **Protection** - (in buildings covered by Fire Safety Legislation) stop fires before they start, give early warning of fire through automatic fire detection (AFD) equipment and limit fire spread through building design and building management so that people can get out safely if a fire does start.

- Intervention - have sufficient emergency resources (firefighters/ emergency fire control operators / fire engines etc.) available to deal with fires (and other emergencies) when they do occur.

The provision to some Merseyside residents of free smoke detectors and to others of the fitting of smoke detectors provides all Merseyside community members the real opportunity for early detection and escape from death and injury in the event of fire.

***With early detection must come swift and sufficient intervention, and consequently with earlier detection must come swifter intervention. A real potential to save more lives.***

Kevin Hughes  
Brigade Secretary (Acting)

Ian Hibbert  
Brigade Chair (Acting)

For and on behalf of Merseyside FBU Brigade Committee

## Executive Summary

Merseyside Fire Brigades Union have found much to agree with in the Fire and Rescue Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan for 2017 - 2020.

The FBU submitted an extensive response to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authorities IRMP 2013/16 in 2013 and to the IRMP Supplement 2015-2017. The majority of the FBU previous submissions is still relevant and current as it deals with the years 2017 - 2020.

This Union has always been at the forefront in campaigning for improvements to the Service which over the years have saved many lives both of the public and firefighters alike. **However the Fire Brigades Union continue to wholly reject the concept of cost as the main driver for change.** IRMP's should be a 'risk' based plan not a financial plan.

The FBU warns the reader that nationally fire deaths are at their highest since 2001/02 and have risen to alarming levels locally. This is unacceptable and steps must be taken to ensure the causes of those deaths be addressed with immediate effect.

The FBU believes that the consequences of the fiercest attacks against the Fire and Rescue Service by a Government intent on hacking away at public services, and the Fire and Rescue Service in particular by reducing budget provisions to an unprecedented dangerously low level, places firefighters and community members at peril and that cannot be allowed to continue.

It is alarming that after many years of reductions in injuries and fatalities caused by accidental dwelling fires that injuries and fatalities have now increased. The question has to be asked:

**'Is the increase in injuries and fatalities caused by accidental dwelling fires as a result of increased attendance times and the reduction in appliance numbers and Fire Station closures?'**

The FBU have consistently warned that a reduction in front line fire cover will result in an increase in Fire deaths. Tragically those fears have now been realised as Fire Deaths in Merseyside more than trebled in 2015/16.

The FBU also supports Chief Fire Officer Dan Stephens's previous comments when he stated that:

***'The grant cut will lead to more fires, fire deaths and injuries on Merseyside. Reductions in stations, appliances and firefighters will have a significant impact on our frontline emergency response and prevention work'***

Sadly both the Fire Brigades Union and CFO Stephen's warning's remain unheeded.

Fewer fires locally and nationally do not justify these relentless cuts. New FBU research shows a consistently high level of rescues carried out by firefighters every day, reinforcing the vital role of emergency intervention. Around 40,000 people were rescued from all incidents by firefighters in the UK in 2013-14 - over one hundred rescues a day.

Firefighters still make a significant intervention at fires - over 4,000 people are rescued annually at fires by firefighters - similar to levels a decade ago. The distinction should be made that we are a Fire and Rescue service and it is not just fires that we attend, in Merseyside alone there is **one rescue every 15 hours** according to the Services' own data.

The FBU would also point out that it is only through the dedication hard work and commitment of the Authority's employees that the last ten years of swingeing cuts have not had a larger detrimental effect on the communities that we serve. FBU Firefighters and Control staff continue to work over and above their normal hours at reduced rates of nationally agreed pay but continue to demonstrate their loyalty and dedication and adopt more skills despite continually being asked to do more for less. They should be proud of their contribution and the Authority should rightly be proud of all of its staff.

## **FBU Response to IRMP 2017-2020**

Merseyside FBU Officials meet daily with Service managers across Merseyside. Our Health and Safety Representatives continue their essential collaborative work with Service managers to ensure that our firefighters and their work places are the safest they can possibly be. A large portion of FBU Officials' time and resource is committed to the consultation and negotiation processes to deliver an operational response that safeguards public and firefighter safety.

This collaborative approach has seen the best possible operational response delivered in the face of the worst cuts that Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service has ever had to endure, cuts that are set to continue. Whilst the FBU have individual concerns which we will pursue through the agreed mechanisms we make the following comments in relation to:

### **Who we are - On the Horizon**

Merseyside FBU recognises the challenges for the Authority to the possible changes to the way the fire and rescue service is governed over the coming years. Whilst the FBU hold deep suspicions as to the Policing and Crime Bill and the role of Police Crime Commissioners (PCC) in the Fire Service we look forward to and are committed to working with the Service to ensure the best possible outcomes for our members, the Service and the communities we serve.

Likewise, for the Liverpool City Region Devolution Agreement and The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 which states that a Mayor may take on the functions of the PCC and Fire and Rescue Authority which the FBU hopes may see our financial situation improve in the long term.

Merseyside FBU Officials meet regularly with local politicians to discuss PPC's and Devolution to make sure that Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (and consequentially our members) receive the best outcomes and funding possible in the changing political landscape. We will continue to do so as Devolution progresses to make sure our members voices are heard at the highest levels possible.

### **Who we are - Our People**

#### **Firefighters**

Merseyside FBU wholeheartedly agree with the Authority statement that *our greatest resource is our people as they drive the service and deliver world class services to our communities.*

It is only through the dedication hard work and commitment of the Authority's employees that the last ten years of swingeing cuts have not had a larger detrimental effect on the communities that we serve. FBU Firefighters and Control staff continue to work over and above their normal hours at reduced rates of nationally agreed pay but continue to demonstrate their loyalty and dedication and adopt more skills despite continually being asked to do more for less. They should be proud of their contribution and the Authority should rightly be proud of all of its staff.

We also continue to support the belief that wholetime firefighters offer a better service to the public of Merseyside. A wholetime (full-time) firefighter undertakes 20 hours or more of training and practice per week and also spends many hours within their communities to better understand and reduce risk to the public through the delivery of prevention and protection work.

However whilst we tolerate the use of Day Crewing shift systems and recognise the Authority's reasoning we cannot support a non-agreed (not Grey Book) shift system and especially one that further reduces immediate night time response in those areas.

## **Support Staff**

Merseyside FBU recognises that all support functions are an essential key to keeping firefighters safe and in maintaining frontline services. We also recognise that the threat of redundancy in support services is a very real one due to ongoing government cuts. For that reason Merseyside FBU strongly oppose the use of resilience payments to staff for providing cover during periods of Industrial Action.

Industrial Relations on Merseyside has improved considerably over the years due to the hard work and determination of the FBU Officials and Service management alike. Industrial Action can only be considered as a remote risk in our opinion and the possible savings from removing those payments could possibly save several jobs and more importantly save several people from compulsive redundancy. The FBU believe the potential savings from the removal of resilience contracts to be a substantial year on year saving.

## **Training and Capability**

The FBU do not believe the list of skills provided to firefighters by the instructors at the Training & Development Academy does justice to either the firefighters receiving the training or the instructors who deliver this first class training.

A more defining list would possibly be;

- Command and Control; an essential core skill for all managers which enables the Service to maintain high levels of safety for all personnel whilst attending incidents.
- Breathing Apparatus; including fire behaviour training which enables firefighters to recognise and react to the ever changing of a fire environment.
- Hazardous Materials; including preparing for CRBN(E) incidents and mass decontamination.
- Casualty Care; operational personnel are highly trained in advanced trauma care.
- RTC Rescue and Extrication
- Water Rescue and Water Safety; including swift water rescue training and flood response training.
- Driving; including Emergency Fire Appliance Driving (EFAD) and Blue Light Emergency Response driving.

These are more comprehensive examples of the high level training that firefighters receive and we believe can only be achieved with a wholtime fire service.

## **Your Service Your Voice**

The FBU are fully supportive of the actions being taken to address the results of the 'Employee Engagement Surveys' namely through the engagement commitments to ensure that consideration of people (both staff and communities) is at the heart of everything the service do in day-to-day management. The FBU have, and are, currently undertaking meetings with Service managers and FBU members to best address all the issues raised as a result of the most recent survey. The MF&RS 2015 Employee Engagement Survey shows an improvement in employee/employer relations but we cannot be complacent. This improvement has only been achieved by MF&RS manager's commitment to meet regularly with FBU Officials in an open and honest forum, this commitment must continue.

## **Our Finances**

The FBU reiterates its opinion that the Government cuts to the Authority's budget is nothing more than a political ideological attack and has little to do with 'Best Value' or 'Austerity', both of which serve nothing more than emphasising our point.

The FBU does however recognise the challenges that the Authority faces in dealing with the cuts and although we disagree with the Chairs opening comments that we "*accept the service must change*" we will continue to support the service and to attempt to give the public the best Fire and Rescue service that we can in the face of these unnecessary cuts.

The FBU Nationally and locally have continued to Lobby the government and MP's to warn about the dangers in making these cuts and to continually request more funding, funding that recognises the service that we deliver, We give our commitment to redouble that political lobbying.

## **What We Do - Response to Incidents**

The FBU believe that this section of the IRMP is possibly misleading. The IRMP states;

*"The only noticeable increase in incidents in recent years is in relation to road traffic collisions."*

The statement calls on the notion that there is little to worry about apart from an upward trend in RTC's and yet makes no mention of the fact that fire deaths have risen dramatically. Authority report CFO/079/16 16th October 2016 reported that since 2012/13 fatalities as a result of accidental dwelling fires had increased year on year leading to a high of 16 in 2016. The FBU believe that this may possibly be a direct correlation to year on year cuts that have impacted on the Service and again ask the question;

**'Is the increase in injuries and fatalities caused by accidental dwelling fires as a result of increased attendance times and the reduction in appliance numbers and Fire Station closures?'**

We believe that this section further misleads the reader when comparing the figures for Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA's) and the FBU have continued to oppose the Authority Policy for 'Unwanted Fire Signals'.

The FBU submitted a detailed report on this matter in its response to the 'IRMP Supplement 2015' and we again include that submission as part of this response as it is the belief of the FBU that it is as relevant today as it was for 2015.

*"The Authority has now fully embedded the Risk Based Strategy for responding to Unwanted Fire Signals resulting in a reduction of over 70% in the actuations of fire alarms that we class as unwanted"*

**FBU response:** The previous IRMP 2013-2016 stated that in 2011/12 crews responded to 5573 calls to AFA's and that on 89.7% of those occasions they were false alarms. If we take the statistics as valid for these purposes, the IRMP identifies that out of the 5573 incident figure quoted, 574 of them were incidents requiring MF&RS intervention.

In 2014 the Chief Fire Officers Association published a document titled: 'Guidance for the Reduction of False Alarms & Unwanted Fire Signals'.

The following are direct quotes from that document:

Background (page 5)

*"The clear benefits that AFA systems can offer is not disputed. The early warning of fire is essential to protect both life and property and research has proved that AFA-detected fires tend to be smaller than person detected fires and generally require less effort to extinguish when the FRS response arrives. This also assists with protecting business assets, business continuity and community resilience".*

Introduction (page 6)

*"The guidance outlined in this document has been widely consulted and developed with stakeholders representing the fire alarm industry and FRS in order to reduce the occurrence of false alarms from automatic fire detection and fire alarm systems and to manage the appropriate FRSs response to UwFS."*

*“It is essential that FRS operate within a framework to reduce UwFS. This can be achieved through the widespread adoption and implementation of this guidance.*

*Co-operation and understanding cannot be expected from companies operating across various regions in the UK when each FRS operates a local policy which details the resource response to AFA systems.”*

*“Widespread implementation will encourage our fire industry partners to work with us in the development and review of the Fire Alarm Monitoring Organisations (FAMOs) elements of guidance. This guidance provides a clear and structured strategy that will, where adopted, lead to sustained reductions in false alarms and UwFS and provides a framework for all FRS, and Fire Industry and Business in which to operate”.*

**FBU comment:** Clearly the aims of this guidance issued by CFOA is to promote best practices that should be adopted by all Fire and Rescue Services.

Summary of Guidance Processes Required for Effective UwFS Reduction (page 9)

*“NB: Where FRS employ a nil response to groups of premises by type as opposed to targeting of specific system poor performance, they must recognise that it will not be possible to appreciate the full benefits of the holistic approach. FRS that engage with Responsible Persons (RPs) through responding to UwFS will be able to influence these key processes.....this will be supported by the uniform adoption of this Guidance by FRS”.*

**FBU comment:** The fact that within this paragraph CFOA again mention a ‘uniform adoption of this guidance by FRS’ shows that CFOA believe an operational response to AFA’s is necessary.

The next quote from the guidance is unequivocal in defining an ‘appropriate response’ by FRS to AFAs.

Guidance Operation - A Tool Kit Approach (page 12)

“The FRS has a number of options which it can consider in deciding how AFA calls will be handled.

*“A call challenge or filtering process - Use of this system will allow the FRS to gain additional information about the cause of the alarm, following which a decision is made about what, if any, response is made. Development of such a process will be determined by the specific FRS in line with an assessment in their Integrated Risk Management Plan.”*

This call challenge procedure is explained further on page 13 which states:

*“FRS must be careful not to recommend the investigation of an alarm during an emergency call. If investigation was possible it should have already have been carried out as part of their existing procedures before the emergency call was made. An unplanned investigation at this stage may jeopardise the safety of the investigator”*.

The consideration of what is an appropriate response continues stating:

*“Reduced attendance - The FRS may select to send a reduced attendance to any call resulting from an AFA system actuation where there is no confirmation of a fire or signs of a fire. In line with adoption of this approach, the ‘responsible person’ for any site will need to consider what arrangements they will put in place to provide this confirmation.*

*Full attendance - The FRS may select to send a full attendance to any report of an AFA sounding. Whilst this is likely to mean no change to the service’s existing control measures, the implications should be considered in the wider context of the service’s Integrated Risk Management Plan.”*

**FBU comment:** Note that no attendance is not an option in the CFOA policy document.



CFOA add further clarity to response levels to AFAs:

FRS Attendance Levels (page 10)

*“In order to protect resources, FRS response policies may alter the response to premises where calls are based on unreliable AFA systems. This may include anything from the reconsideration of any ‘enhanced response’ options through to not sending any attendance in the case of persistent false alarms”.*

Definition of what would constitute a ‘persistent false alarm’ is given within the footnote on page 14 which states:

*“FRSs considering applying a reduced response (or charge) option should ensure UwFS can be considered ‘persistent’. This would include a recent history of multiple calls to false alarms and a failure to adopt reasonable practises recommended by the FRS to assist them in reducing UwFS.”*

The ‘Aims of this Guidance’ continue on page 14:

*“It is recommended that any reduction in response is applied to premises on an individual assessment basis and that suitable notification is provided in advance of any change.”*

*“If adjusting FRS standard response attendance to premises the process must be applied in accordance with this section and section 11 where applicable.”*

The final paragraph of section 11 referred to above states:

*“FRS employing a reduced response option will consider the individual circumstances of the premises management and alarm performance in order to determine the level of response appropriate to the level of UwFS being produced.”*

CFOA then detail what they consider to be the three principal response options to AFAs:

*“**Attendance Level One** is an immediate emergency response, resulting in an initial attendance based on a risk assessment of the firefighting requirements that will be not less than one appliance.*

***Attendance Level Two** in the absence of a confirmation call via the 999 system; the FRS will make an attendance based on a risk assessment of the firefighting requirements. The attendance may be made under non-emergency conditions, thereby maintaining the availability of the resources for confirmed emergencies and protecting the public from the risk that arises from fire appliances responding under emergency conditions.*

***Attendance Level Three** no emergency response, until a confirmation of fire is received from the premises via the 999 system or from some other acceptable source. Such confirmation will result in a full or enhanced emergency response, dependent on the information received.”*

The above ‘response options’ MUST be taken in context to the final paragraph of the chapter which again gives very clear guidance:

*“It is recommended that these response options should only be applied if there is experience of persistent false alarms from specific premises. It should not be the case that it is applied generically e.g. to all premises of a certain type.”*

Action under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO) is discussed on page 19 of the document. This section deals with reducing attendance for persistent offenders and unacceptable premises performance in relation to UwFS. In essence the CFOA guidance within this chapter informs that once a FRS determines that an unacceptable rate of UwFS has occurred at an individual premises, and a reduced attendance of FRS resources has been instigated, then the FRS will need to determine how long the reduced attendance will last, when it will be reviewed to see if performance has improved, and how normal attendance is reinstated and notified to the premises

**FBU comment:** Government (CLG) has also investigated this issue extensively and produced a report in 2008. The report was entitled ‘Costs and Benefits of Alternative Responses to Automatic Fire Alarms - Fire Research Series 2/2008.’

This document reports that the average number of actual fires per year attended in England ‘other buildings’ (hospitals, schools, shops, factories etc.) over a nine year period is approximately 26,600 of which nearly 6,600 fires were detected by AFA systems. The CLG report also states that ‘*It is important to note, however, that AFA systems can be shown to offer clear benefits in terms of providing early warning of fire*’ the FBU agree with this statement.

CLG looked at a number of options in reducing unwanted fire signals and concluded that a strategy of only responding to an AFA if a confirmation call is received, such as the MF&RS policy, is the only strategy, amongst many looked at, that will result in a significant cost to the community and business because of high property damage associated with attending AFA calls only following the receipt of a confirmation call.

CLG go further and concluded that:

*“Strategies which involve delays in a response being sent to a call (eg call challenging and responding only if a confirmation of a fire was received) were the least favoured strategies as the increases in property damage caused by fires due to the delay outweighed those benefits accrued in the reduced response and those arising out of the reallocation of resources to fire prevention work. This conclusion would also apply to circumstances where a response was sent only after confirmation of a genuine fire following attendance of a fire service motorcycle.”*

The FBU stress that this is a Government conclusion that mirrors exactly the historical position of the Fire Brigades Union on such matters.”

CLG go on to state that:

*“A potential downside of strategies involving reduced initial attendance may be that a real fire cannot be tackled as effectively and quickly. These tradeoffs need to be made on the basis of sound risk assessment and analysis, but very often the data is not necessarily available at a local level to make these decisions based upon qualitative evidence.”*

This again reinforces the FBU’s opposition to blanket policies A view on blanket policies in relation to AFAs that appears to be mirrored by the Chief Fire Officers Association and also effectively supports our concerns that the MF&RS AFA strategy increases risk to firefighters as we now attend fires that are potentially more developed as a result of non-attendance. Which along with diminishing resources and our concerns in relation to LAG, (the time take for second and subsequent appliances to provide sufficient resources in terms of firefighter number for safe systems of work to be properly implemented) significantly increases risk to firefighters.

It remains the belief of the FBU that MF&RSs policy in relation to AFAs will lead to increased property damage and increased loss of life due to the delay in dispatching the initial response to the initial call for assistance through the AFA system.

**The Fire Brigades Union urges MF&RS to reconsider this policy and to reverse the strategy as a matter of urgency to better protect firefighters and communities.**

## **What We Plan to Do - Response Proposals**

### **National Resilience**

Previously we have stated that with the public of Merseyside bearing the brunt of Government cuts to their Fire and Rescue Service that the FBU call for a full review of the national and international response capability provided by MF&RS.

With limited resource and finance it is time for other Authorities less affected by the cuts to 'pick up the slack' whilst MF&RS focus on utilising its limited resources to provide the best fire cover possible in these difficult times. The FBU recognises that we are now the lead Authority for National Resilience and we hope that this important function and recognition will hold us in some good stead as we explore more ways to obtain additional funding to protect the overall service that the Authority can deliver.

## **What We Plan to Do - Response Proposals**

Whilst there is much in this section that FBU can agree with and support the FBU have individual concerns which we will pursue through the agreed mechanisms, however we make the following comments in relation to:

### **Emergency Medical response**

EMR was introduced as a trial at three stations in February 2016. Merseyside FBU officials and members have worked with Service managers and NWS managers and staff to ensure that the introduction of EMR trials in Merseyside were given the best chance of success with the best possible outcomes for the public of Merseyside. FBU officials, MF&RS and NWS staff jointly agreed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) as a way of working that is being considered for adoption by the FBU and NWS as the best practice MoU in the UK.

The EMR trials are also taking place in 33 other FRS's and are part of the National Joint Council (NJC) Workstreams.

Those trials are set to be completed at the end of February and as of the date of this IRMP response it is unclear as to whether the trials will continue or end at that time therefore the FBU cannot at this time support the Service proposal to adopt EMR at the successful conclusion of the trial period. The FBU will continue dialogue with MF&RS to carry out EMR if there is National FBU NJC agreement and guidance.

## **What We Plan to Do - Response Proposals**

### **Safe and Well Visits**

The FBU have had early discussions with Service managers regarding Safe and Well Visits and have been sighted on the ongoing work and reports to the Authority. We support the position of asking the Clinical Commissioning Group to commission the Service to deliver Safe and Well and provide valuable additional funding. Whilst the FBU can see the considerable benefits to the public in offering Safe and Well Visits we also consider that without the additional funding the introduction of this scheme would place unnecessary strains on our ability to meet our response standards, maintain our overall operational response and commit to the daily training routines.

## What We Plan to Do - Equality & Diversity

It is a fact that the Austerity agenda being pursued by Government is disproportionately impacting on the most vulnerable individuals and groups within our societies. It is also a fact that Merseyside has some of the highest areas of social deprivation. It is these individuals and groups who will consequentially suffer the most at the hands of this Government. Areas of social deprivation are recognised as having the highest risk due to fire and therefore these areas require immediate and adequate intervention from emergency services, more so than affluent areas. When Governments increase social deprivation and decrease the funding for Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, forcing the Authority into drastically removing fire appliances and closing community fire stations, then this is a recipe for disaster for our communities.

It is essential therefore that equality objectives feature at the forefront of our thinking in identifying and subsequently reaching the most vulnerable within our communities. Merseyside FBU fully support MF&RS in identifying the priorities that should feature as our equality objectives.

However, whilst MF&RS have placed Equality objectives high on its agenda the FBU believe that nationally the equality agenda in the fire and rescue service has stalled badly since 2010. The FBU calls on government to instigate and implement a new equality and diversity strategy, developed in consultation with key stakeholders.

The abolition of the equality and diversity strategy for England early in the previous parliament, along with cuts to firefighter jobs (including recruitment freezes in most brigades), has made the battle for a more diverse and representative workforce increasingly difficult. Equality and diversity has been largely ignored at Westminster, by senior civil servants and others within the fire and rescue service. While progress has been made, the presence of sexist, racist and homophobic bullying and discrimination has not been totally eradicated. This needs to be addressed across the UK.

### Equality Objectives 2017-2020

The FBU welcome the Authority's commitment to delivering services and employing staff in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and offer our support and assistance in achieving that objective. We further support the objective *to ensure that staff are better equipped to deliver their roles whilst showing due regard to the need to "eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't."*

We also broadly support the Action Plan for that objective in the *'Development of equality and diversity training including: e-learning, equality and diversity related workshops, inductions for new staff.'* However, the FBU believe that whilst 'e-learning' has a place to play in the education and training of all staff it is not an appropriate tool for equality and diversity and that direct learning through tutorage and workshops are far better methods and achieve far better results and should be made available for all staff.

- Command & Control/Command Competence Training

The FBU agree with MF&RS that Command and Control competencies should be an absolute priority and that the delivery and training of such competencies should be constantly reviewed and improved upon. To deliver a process that provides the necessary skill sets and also deliver a consistent and uniform criteria for training and development purposes, the FBU make the following comment.

The FBU believe that a fair, open and transparent promotion system is essential to building the confidence of managers in all aspects of their work. Historically an independent examiner from a neighbouring FRS was utilised to oversee the process. This proved popular with candidates who had put themselves forward for promotion and as such is something that the FBU believe should be considered. A written assessment/examination, before a practical assessment, to give under pinning knowledge before promotion should also be considered. The FBU have highly competent Watch

Managers who are trained assessors who would be willing to observe the process to give back the confidence to the process that appears to be lacking amongst FBU members.

## Conclusion

There is a great deal that the Fire Brigades Union can, and do support within the IRMP 2017-2020. However, the FBU can never support the loss of fire cover for the people of Merseyside. Although we do recognise that it is the previous Conservative led coalition and now this Government that has put Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority in this disgraceful position.

In conclusion, we reiterate our point that the Fire Brigades Union believes that MF&RS was an extremely cost effective service providing the people of Merseyside with an excellent and quality value for money FRS before the previous years of cuts, despite what CLG Ministers, Sir Ken Knight and Adrian Thomas say.

The FBU encourages the Authority and the Service to redouble our joint efforts in making the case for a return of the reduced fire cover lost through the devastating attack on our Fire and Rescue Service and that together we can ensure that we can return the Fire and Rescue Service in Merseyside to the position it once was before the continuing budget cuts to a public service whose objective is to save life.

The FBU continue to lobby all Cllrs, MP's and anybody who will listen, we also regularly undertake press and media interviews to further explain the 'MF&RS position'. This is a continuous and ongoing body of work for Merseyside FBU Officials who attempt to ensure that politicians of all parties and the general public understand what firefighters and the public of Merseyside deserve, which is/are:

- Fire and rescue services needs investment, not cuts
- Firefighters provide an irreplaceable service. More firefighters are needed to meet the range of threats, risks and emergencies now more than ever and also going forward
- The FBU seeks that firefighters wider contributions to society such as dealing with flooding and terrorism is recognised, resourced and rewarded accordingly
- Consistent national standards backed by a national inspectorate are the best way to improve the fire and rescue service, level up performance and deploy resources efficiently

To these ends the FBU are continuing to call for a National moratorium on reduced crewing levels on pumping appliances, reduction of fire appliances and fire station closures.

The absence of central guidance and oversight of integrated risk management planning has led to the fragmentation of the fire and rescue service. Local Resilience Forums are not functioning as they should. The FBU calls for risks and resilience to be assessed nationally as well as locally, to guarantee standards are maintained and improved.

MF&RS might have to attend less numbers of incidents today than it did 10 years ago but with a consequential drop in firefighter numbers we remain a Fire and Rescue Service with more workload per community member, more workload per firefighter and a more efficient Fire & Rescue Service than almost anywhere else in the country.

