



Merseyside Fire Brigades Union
Response to Merseyside Fire and Rescue
Authority Integrated Risk Management 2017-20
2017 Update

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 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 is set out 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 intervention, and consequently with earlier detection must come swifter intervention. A real potential to save more lives.

Kevin Hughes
Brigade Secretary

Ian Hibbert
Brigade Chair

For and on behalf of Merseyside FBU Brigade Committee

Executive Summary

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) submitted a comprehensive response to the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2017 - 2020 and much of that response remains relevant.

However we now seek to make further comment in relation to the IRMP 2017 Update and in particular to some elements of the 2017-20 plan that remain in place which the FBU can no longer tolerate.

The FBU has always been at the forefront of campaigning for improvements to the Service, improvements which over the years have undoubtedly saved the lives of both members 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 major incidents that we have seen in the last year, namely the tragic events of Grenfell Tower and the more recent and closer to home major incident at the Echo Arena Car Park fire in Liverpool City centre highlight our concerns that Merseyside no longer has a Fire & Rescue Service fit for purpose.

If an incident the size of Grenfell were to occur in Merseyside the FBU does not believe that MF&RS have the resources to cope and the effects of that could be catastrophic.

The major incident at the Echo Arena confirms our concerns and it must be noted that we didn't have the necessary resources to deal with what was in reality an incident on a much smaller scale than Grenfell Tower.

In our response to the IRMP 2017-2020 we again raised concerns regarding the policy of not attending Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA's) and set out our argument that by delaying our response to AFA's that incidents could be more developed when crews do finally attend. The Authority published data to support the implementation of the policy at that time and within it stated that 89.7% of AFA's were recorded as false alarms. That means that 10.3% of AFA actuations required the intervention of fire crews.

Using the figures provided at the time indicates fire crews could be attending well developed and more dangerous fire situations on more than 570 occasions. We continue to labour the point that this policy puts the public and firefighters at greater risk of serious injury or death from fire.

The FBU recognises that the Authority are attempting to provide the best service possible in the face of stringent Government cuts however we also recognise that the best of the worst case scenario's that the IRMP seeks to deliver are not the same as a fully resourced and effective Fire and Rescue Service. It is our belief that the reason death and serious injury from fire are not at higher levels has more to do with luck than prevention or intervention. The latest national statistics show a marked rise in fire deaths in the UK from the previous year.

The FBU can no longer tolerate any further cuts or loss of fire cover in the Merseyside area. Indeed we believe that in light of the recent incidents previously described the last round of fire cover reduction, namely the removal of immediate fire cover during the night in the Crosby and Eccleston areas are already a step too far. We are deeply concerned about the impact that will have, particularly in relation to Eccleston where there now remains only one fire appliance covering the areas of Eccleston, St Helens and Newton le Willows during the hours of 22:00 - 08:30.

The FBU would again 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. Merseyside FBU members continue to work over and above their contractual hours for less than nationally agreed pay rates 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 its entire staff.

IRMP 2017 Update: FBU Comment

- *Introduction*

The IRMP 2017 Update includes the following statement contained within its introduction that the FBU believes is misleading and disingenuous;

“The Fire Brigades Union nationally have instructed their members not to take part in certain activities that were being widely piloted and rolled out across the fire and rescue service. This includes work in relation to emergency medical response and terrorist attacks.”

It should be noted that the pilot schemes referred to were in direct relation to 'Pay and Workstream' trials. Trials that were initiated by the FBU in an attempt to convince the Government to provide additional funding to FRS's in order to raise the level of basic pay for firefighters.

The comment above leads the reader to believe that MF&RS and in particular FBU members will not respond to terrorist attacks. It is important to note that MF&RS have a dedicated MTFa response team and that **FBU members have not been instructed to not attend terrorist attacks.**

- *Operational Response*

The FBU believe that the number of available appliances contained within the Operational Response section is incorrect. Within the section it is stated that 'Overnight (2030-0830)' the Authority will provide 19 immediately available fire engines including the additional Kirkdale pump and a further 8 available on a 30 minute delay.

The FBU contend that during the night the IRMP will mean that the Authority will only be able to provide the following response;

20:30 - 22:00 = 19 immediately available fire appliances

22:00 - 08:30 = 15 immediately available fire appliances + 4 appliances on reduced turn out (LLAR)

20:30 - 08:30 = 6 available fire appliances on a 30 minute delay.

- *Recruitment*

The FBU welcomes the Authority's continued commitment to recruitment to ensure that numbers and competence are maintained and welcome the comment contained within the update regarding the next round of recruitment. The FBU would clearly have an aspiration for more firefighter recruitment but we note the difficulty for the Authority in that matter.

- *EMR and MTFA*

It is with deep regret that we note that the Authority has imposed a contractual change to recruit firefighter's contracts that explicitly refers to EMR and MTFA response. An imposed change that was implemented without any negotiation or consultation with the FBU and in direct contravention of the Good Industrial relations Protocol contained within the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services Scheme of Conditions of Service Sixth edition (Updated 2009). The 'Grey Book'.

The FBU have been left with no other option than to register a trade dispute with the Authority and that was done on 21st December 2017. It is with further regret that the Authority has now refused to seek the intervention of the NJC Joint secretariat in attempting to resolve the dispute.

The issue of EMR and MTFA are part of a national pay claim and it is deeply disappointing that the Authority by its actions have undermined that legitimate claim.

- *Finance*

It should be noted that the FBU locally, regionally and nationally recently rejected a 1% increased pay offer on the basis that any increase in pay without additional funding would mean further cuts in the Service. Merseyside FBU will continue to reject any pay offer that would effectively be paid for with jobs, whether that is front line or support staff. The FBU does not therefore support the assumption of a 1% pay increase for all staff for 2016/17 - 2019/20.

IRMP 2017 Update

Conclusion:

As we have previously stated within this document 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.

Merseyside FBU members continue to work over and above their contractual hours for less than nationally agreed rates of pay and continue to demonstrate their loyalty and dedication by adopting more skills despite continually being asked to do more for less.

Whilst recognising the serious financial constraints placed on the Authority the FBU can no longer tolerate any further reduction in fire cover. The IRMP 2017 - 2020 outlines proposals for revised duty systems at a further two stations, Wallasey and City Centre. The revised duty system will mean that the between the overnight period of 20:30 - 08:30 the appliances will be only be available on a 30 minute delay.

For the reasons we have stated earlier the FBU believe these proposals are a step too far and will leave the public of Merseyside at much greater risk of serious injury or death from fire and we call upon the Authority to re-evaluate its plans.

The FBU will continue to jointly lobby the Government for additional funding in an effort to not only sustain the current levels of fire cover but also to reverse the stringent cuts that have been made in recent years. We will also continue to work with Service managers in an effort to find financial savings.

However, the Authority's continued use of resilience contracts is a major concern to FBU members, particularly when we are being informed that the cost of any future pay increases for frontline firefighters or support staff must be paid for with job losses.

For the period of 2006 - 2015/16 a total of over **£750, 000** was paid for resilience contracts. These payments were being made prior to the Authority becoming the lead for National Resilience responsibility.

For the last period that the FBU has available data (2015/16) 130 contracts at £500 p/a cost the Authority **£64,916.66**. Since then the cost of each contract has increased to £1000.

The FBU therefore estimate that the cost to the Authority in this financial year will amount to over **£130,000** and the total amount paid to date will be over **£1 million**.

It is with deep regret that we also note the Authority's position to reverse its decision to reduce its own numbers to deliver budget savings. FBU members find that decision incredulous and are currently reviewing their decision to undertake additional work for reduced rates of pay.