



**Response to the Call for
Written Evidence from
the Scottish Parliament
Justice Committee
inquiry into Fire and
Rescue reform**

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to outline some of the difficulties and challenges being faced by UNISON members in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service at this time.

The setting up of the national fire and rescue service has meant both a great deal of change for UNISON members in the service but also confusion and uncertainty. This has been exacerbated by poor communication with staff on the part of Fire and Rescue Service management. One of our principal concerns in this process is that a single standard for dealing with all staff during this process is established and maintained.

The no compulsory redundancy guarantee is of course welcome. But the existence of this policy does not detract from the fact that UNISON members are bearing many costs in regard to the reorganisation of the service. Workload is increasing for many members as staff leave under voluntary Severance / Retirement and are not replaced. This is compounded by having to deal with legacy issues arising from the merger. We have recorded instances of members who in addition to their own workload are having to cover for unfilled vacancies and at times expected to pick up the work of their former managers.

Members complain of poor communication and lack of direction from the top. This means they have difficulty in coming to decisions in their own roles. One example given is that despite promises of regular communication some members are having to wait for the publication of board minutes to find out what is happening in regard to their role. Depending on the Board meeting schedule this can mean up to a two month delay before knowing what decisions have been taken.

The Job Matching process is moving very slowly. To date only around half of the 900 support staff have been matched into new posts. The situation is exacerbated by most staff having been given only the vaguest information as to how this process is meant to be carried out. As such uncertainty is rife and this contributes significantly to lowering morale. The situation is not helped by the practice of advertising jobs without specifying either salary or location - no one can make an informed decision about their future in these conditions.

Sections of the staff fear that as a cost cutting exercise areas of support services will be privatised. The poor level of communication and slow pace of Job Matching and Job Evaluation have given considerable weight to these concerns.

The Job Evaluation programme is vital for staff members. Yet this programme has been under resourced. We cannot see how this project can be completed before the target date of March 2015. Members are also developing concerns as to the thoroughness of this process. The Job Evaluation process is crucial to ensuring equal pay and conditions across the new service - the lack of progress in this regard means many members are not confident that they are being paid appropriately. Given that in some locations staff doing similar jobs are working with four separate sets of terms and conditions this is all too likely.

The Board approved the Strategic Intent Document in September 2013. This will see the closure of a number of sites across Scotland. Whilst we appreciate the policy of no compulsory redundancies remains in place - we cannot ignore the fact that travel costs for many staff will increase massively as a result of these changes. We would point out that the facility at Newbridge has no direct access to public transport making travel to the site near impossible for those without a car.

This process has been indicative of the poor communication that has been a hallmark of the new service. Some staff were notified of their moving arrangements via an email pinned up on a notice board. This is an entirely unacceptable way of communicating such important information to staff.

Conclusion

Morale amongst support staff is very low. Changes so far have been largely detrimental. Uncertainty about the future has been compounded by the failure of management to involve and inform staff. Regardless of the motivation behind the setting up the fire and rescue service many support staff are of the view that management priorities are cutting costs with the needs of the fire and rescue service second and consideration of the staff a long way behind that. The notion that Staff are the greatest asset the fire and rescue service has is not one

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