

Fire Matters

Bulletin for UNISON fire and rescue staff members in Scotland



UNISON
Scotland

Fire Reform Bill in Parliament

March 2012

UNISON argues the Police and Fire Reform Bill is the wrong approach in [evidence](#) to parliamentary committees scrutinising the Bill. There are three main areas of concern:

- This is a centralising reorganisation contrary to the principles of public service reform set out by the Christie Commission - undermining local democratic accountability. The arrangements for local accountability are unclear and local plans unfunded. The powers of the Chief Officer and Minister to direct services also conflicts with local accountability.
- The financial provisions are unrealistic, based on savings targets rather than service need. The VAT requirement adds a further financial burden that could be resolved by a national joint board.
- The fire staff transfer provisions are inadequate. The transfer order is outdated and doesn't cover all the current staffing provisions. There are separate and as yet ill defined provisions for local authority staff that support fire and rescue services. The arrangements for pensions are contradictory. The explanatory memorandum says staff stay in LGPS, but the Bill has provisions for the establishment of a new pension scheme.

Discussions with officials have confirmed that the new service will not be a Non-Departmental Public Body. This means it won't be covered by Scottish Government pay policy. Members will transfer on their existing terms and conditions and any harmonisation will have to be subject to negotiation with UNISON.

UNISON Fire & Rescue

UNISON members providing fire and rescue services have been advised of new organisational arrangements to ensure members are properly represented as we move towards a single service. There is a new lead Regional Organiser, Sarah Duncan who is involved in discussions over a range of staffing issues with the transition team. The following meetings have been organised for members:

- Inverness Fire & Rescue HQ, 16 Harbour Road, Inverness Monday 26 March 1230pm
- Dundee Fire & Rescue HQ, Blackness Road, Dundee, Thursday 5 April 1230pm
- Lothian Fire & Rescue HQ, 76-78 Lauriston Place, Edinburgh. Tuesday 10 April 1230pm
- Lothian Fire & Rescue Operations Support Centre, Tuesday 10 April 4.30pm
- Goodwille Room, Strathclyde Fire & Rescue HQ, Hamilton Wed 4 April 1230pm
- Cowcaddens Training Centre, Strathclyde Fire & Rescue, Glasgow Wed 11 April 1230pm

Sarah is keen to establish a network of contacts across all the divisions and would be delighted to hear from any member who is willing to act as a contact for their workplace.

An Industrial Relations Consultative Forum has been set up so that union reps and the Leads for the 4 workstreams have a mechanism to discuss issues. The first meeting is on 3 April where we will agree terms of reference and membership and also get an update on the four workstreams. The two most relevant to support staff are Business Support and Workforce and UNISON will be represented on those, However, we will get involved in the Response & Resilience and Prevention and Protection workstreams as necessary.

Treasury confirm VAT bill

UNISON Scotland has received confirmation from the Treasury that if the single fire service is established, as proposed by the Scottish Government, they will lose the current VAT exemption (known as s33 status). This means Scottish taxpayers will have to foot an additional bill of around £4 to £10m for fire and rescue services with a consequent impact of fire and rescue jobs. The Treasury letter makes it clear that the Scottish Government knew at the outset that VAT would be payable if they centralised the service.

Shared services

One of the financial assumptions that underpin the optimistic savings targets for the single fire and rescue services is based on sharing support services. A new report prepared by APSE and UNISON Scotland argues that 'efficiency savings' which are often expected from organisational change like the fire and rescue service are rarely achieved. In fact, the vast majority of front line staff - around 90% - who have faced cuts to so-called 'back office' admin jobs believe this has been at the expense of their primary tasks.

['The front line starts here'](#) document outlines the case for full service redesign to be explored as an option when developing shared front and back office service proposals.

The need for a different approach was highlighted earlier this month when the UK National Audit Office reported that Whitehall departments have spent a staggering £1.4 billion over the past seven years - but saved just £159 million by ill advised schemes to share 'back office' functions such as personnel and procurement.

The report includes results from a UNISON survey of public facing members, which shows that cutbacks in admin functions have damaging effects on vital public services, and are rarely effective or efficient.

Useful UNISON Scotland fire and rescue staff links

- [UNISON Scotland fire and rescue web page](#)
- [Briefing on Police and Fire Reform Bill](#)
- [UNISON press release on VAT issue](#)

UNISON Scotland's key campaigns

- [Public Works](#)
- [Protect Our Pensions](#)
- [UNISON Scotland website](#)

For more information contact Bargaining and Campaigns team on 0141 342 2811, or email [Dave Watson](#) Scottish Organiser, or [Sarah Duncan](#) Regional Organiser.



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