

26 September 2013

Business Continuity Management (BCM) – potential for industrial action

Report by the Chief Officer

Contact: Area Manager Mick Crennell Telephone: 07918 887509

1 Summary

- 1.1 The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has recently conducted a ballot of its members for industrial action as a result of a trade dispute over the Government's pension reforms.
- 1.2 The ballot (18 July 2013 to 29 August 2013) result has returned a 'yes' vote (78%) in support of strike action.
- 1.3 The strike pattern is, as yet, unknown but we are making appropriate preparations to ensure that Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS) satisfies the Fire Authority's requirement to provide business continuity arrangements during any period of industrial action. The position is likely to have developed by the time of the meeting and further updates will be provided at the meeting and during the Members' Awareness update on 26 September 2013.
- 1.4 The Government has confirmed that no military personnel will be made available to support individual fire and rescue services during industrial action, although some military personnel will be made available for national emergencies. At the request of the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor (CFRA), HFRS has loaned a fire appliance and 16 breathing apparatus sets to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) for this purpose.
- 1.5 To satisfy the Authority's statutory duty HFRS has an established suite of business continuity management plans including one for mass staff absence due to industrial action. We instigated our plan when the intention to ballot was announced
- 1.6 In accordance with our plans an Emergency Management Group (EMG) has been established to manage our preparations for strike action
- 1.7 Our plans have been reviewed recently by the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor and Government and we are satisfied that there is suitable and sufficient resilience in our current workforce to be able to provide adequate emergency fire cover for the communities of Hampshire during any periods of strike action.

2 Recommendation

2.1 To note the preparations and resilience arrangements of the Service in anticipation of industrial action.

3 Introduction and background

3.1 The FBU recently balloted its members regarding strike action over a registered trade dispute in relation to the Government's public sector pensions reform.

3.2 The FBU has stated that its concerns are as follows:

- Public and firefighter safety from a fitness perspective as operational fire-fighters will be expected to work until age 60, with significant benefit reductions for earlier retirement.
- Potential for sackings if fitness standards are not maintained.
- Further increases in employee contributions.
- Cost increases and benefit reductions will significantly deter new members from the scheme.

3.3 Our Fire Control staff were not included in the ballot for strike action as they are within a different pension scheme (the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS)).

3.4 The ballot paper asked the following question: "Are you prepared to take part in industrial action consisting of a strike – Yes or No."

3.5 The ballot result was confirmed on 29 August 2013 as 78% of FBU members voting 'yes' for industrial action with a turnout of 60%.

3.6 Currently no dates for industrial action have been announced by the FBU.

3.7 HFRS has always worked hard to ensure good industrial relations with all staff groups and trade unions and, naturally, we would always try to resolve any issue through open dialogue and by being as inclusive as possible. Our intent would always be to avoid any form of industrial action. However given the nature of this issue it is outside the control of local employer and remains a matter managed by Central government. Nevertheless we are working hard to maintain open communications channels and good working relationships with local FBU officials and staff.

3.8 The Fire and Rescue Services Act (Framework Document) and the Civil Contingencies Act place statutory duties on Fire Authorities to provide business continuity arrangements during periods of industrial action.

3.9 Consequently HFRS has business continuity management arrangements in place to deal with disruptions to 'business as normal' including during periods of mass absence of staff and for ensuring that it delivers on its statutory duties and core business functions. Our BCM arrangements and degradation plans have been rigorously tested through simulations and real-life events recently, such as adverse

weather, swine flu and the Shirley Towers incident.

- 3.10 The Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor (CFRA) has recently reviewed the BCM plans of each fire and rescue service and we have previously provided details relating to our plans within detailed questionnaires from CFRA and the Audit Commission who reported that they were suitable and sufficient.
- 3.11 The Service is therefore satisfied that its plans are 'fit for purpose' and enable us to continue to provide critical service delivery to the public of Hampshire, albeit at a reduced level.

4 Our preparations

- 4.1 HFRS have been preparing for the potential of industrial action since the decision to ballot for strike action was announced by the FBU in July.
- 4.2 Accordingly we instigated the Emergency Management Group (EMG) to oversee our planning and preparations by enacting our established plan for industrial action.
- 4.3 Since the ballot result was announced we have established a dedicated team to support and enhance the detail of our preparations.
- 4.4 Our principal planning assumption is that we aim to provide a 20 minute response to critical (life-threatening) incidents anywhere in the county. Depending on the number of staff available we may need to adapt our response plans to provide a flexible approach to other (non-critical) incident types and we may decide to not attend certain incident types.
- 4.5 HFRS recognise that we may also need to postpone, cancel and/or prioritise non-critical Service activities according to need. As such we will obviously need to reorder and prioritise the work of the Service given the focus on industrial action and preservation of our core functions.
- 4.6 Public safety remains our primary focus and we clearly recognise the importance of our Prevention and Business Fire Safety work in order to reduce the risk of serious incidents during industrial action. History has shown that incident rates generally reduce during strike periods as people tend to take more care and call for assistance less. We will ensure that effective safety messages and prevention activity are increased during the build-up and during industrial action. We will utilise the national 'FireKills' campaign and the Firepro Toolkit which will ensure that we are consistent with national safety messages.

5 National resilience

- 5.1 The Government has confirmed that no military personnel will be made available to support individual fire and rescue services during periods of industrial action, although some military and MOD personnel will be made available to provide for national resilience and major incidents that require New Dimensions assets to be deployed.

- 5.2 At the request of the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor (CFRA) HFRS has provided assistance to this process by the loan of a fire appliance and 16 breathing apparatus sets to the MOD for this purpose.

6 Communications and consultation

- 6.1 We have a good working relationship with local FBU officials as well as other representative bodies such as the Retained Firefighters Union and the Fire Officers' Association. As such we have been meeting regularly to ensure that we have open communication channels and a good understanding of expectations.
- 6.2 We have been keeping all stakeholders (all staff groups and internal and external stakeholders) informed of progress and will continue to do so via established channels.
- 6.3 As part of our preventative work mentioned above our communications plan includes the provision of safety messages to members of the public and business via various mechanisms in the build-up and during periods of industrial action.
- 6.4 We are also working closely with our Local Resilience Forum (LRF) colleagues and utilising the network to ensure that partner agencies are fully briefed and aware of our planning arrangements and the protocols that will be established.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 HFRS have been preparing for the potential of industrial action since the decision to ballot for strike action was announced by the FBU.
- 7.2 Suitable, sufficient and practiced BCM arrangements exist for dealing with periods of industrial action and HFRS' preparations are well progressed.
- 7.3 HFRS has sufficient resilience within its current workforce (wholtime and retained firefighters and officers who will not be striking) to provide an adequate but reduced level of operational cover and our degradation plan will enable a 20 minute response time to critical incidents.
- 7.4 Therefore provision of services to our communities will continue but it will not be 'business as usual' and our normal response times (and hence our organisational performance levels) will be temporarily reduced.

8 Background papers

- 8.1 The following documents disclose the facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and has been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of the report:

HFRS Business Continuity Management Industrial Action Plan

Note: The list excludes: (1) published works; and (2) documents that disclose exempt or confidential information defined in the Act.