



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Justice Committee

Kirsty Darwent
Chair
Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

All correspondence c/o:
Justice Committee Clerks
Room T2.60
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

By e-mail

Tel: 0131 348 5195
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
justicecommittee@parliament.scot

1 June 2020

Dear Ms Darwent,

Removal of trade union facility time for Fire Brigades Union officials

Thank you for your letter of 19 May 2020.

In your letter you indicate that the decision of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) to reduce the number of full-time trade union officials is based on the need to maintain effective service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has informed the Committee that there have been, to date, no issues with maintaining service delivery.

Would you please confirm whether the SFRS's decision was in response to service delivery issues arising which impacted on the ability to maintain an operational response, or whether this decision was taken as a precautionary measure? If it is a precautionary measure, would you please confirm whether data collected during the pandemic confirms this step is necessary. For example, the levels of appliance availability and staffing levels in operational fire control rooms and fire stations.

The FBU has also informed the Committee that some fire and rescue services in the rest of the UK have increased trade union facility time for FBU officials. This is in acknowledgement of the extra work that they are required to undertake during the coronavirus pandemic and to support an appropriate work/life balance.

Would you please confirm whether the facility time provided to FBU officials in other parts of the UK is being considered as part of the best practice and benchmarking work that you refer to in your letter, to ensure that the Service's approach is in accordance with other comparable organisations.

Would you please provide details of any assessment or ongoing review being undertaken by the SFRS to understand the impact of this decision on trade union representatives and their members?

Finally, in your letter you refer to funding a full-time Health and Safety representative during this period. The FBU indicate that the SFRS had removed facility time for the health and safety official, along with other senior FBU officials, and reinstated that official after representation over many weeks by the FBU.

This is concerning. Ensuring the health and safety of firefighters is vitally important at all times, but even more so, during the current pandemic. Would you please confirm whether this is the case and, if so, explain the rationale for these decisions?

The FBU believe that removing 65% of facility time from senior trade union officials is removing their ability to function effectively as a trade union at the worst possible time.

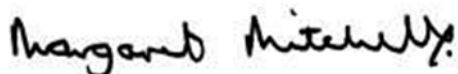
The Committee is concerned that this decision does not meet the fair work requirements during the Covid-19 crisis, which were agreed by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Trades Union Congress, which state that:

Government, unions and business organisations must work together to reach, collectively, the right decisions for protecting workers and public safety, and to help businesses to stay open, where permitted under latest guidance, and keep people in employment.

The Committee reiterates its request that the SFRS reconsider this decision, as a matter of urgency.

This letter has been copied to the Minister for Community Safety and the Chief Officer of the SFRS for information.

Many thanks

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Mitchell". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Margaret Mitchell MSP
Convener, Justice Committee

cc: Ash Denham, Minister for Community Safety
Martin Blunden, Chief Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service