

Friday 6 August

## LGA FIRE TALKS: CRISIS MEETING CALLED AMID “STITCH UP” AND “POLITICAL SPITE” CLAIMS

The Local Government Association is in crisis today as it deals with a growing and open revolt from fire authorities. Over 20 fire authorities in England – more enough to force a meeting - have called for crisis meeting of the LGA’s Fire Forum in the aftermath of the wrecking of Monday’s talks.

The Fire Forum is made up of the chairs of fire authorities and chief fire officers. It shows the revolt which started in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and among Lib Dem councillors has spread rapidly.

In a separate move senior Lib Dem councillor Peter Monk – one of the key negotiators - described Monday’s meeting as a “stitch up” driven by “political spite”. He joins other non-London councillors Pat Watters (COSLA) and Bill Gillespie (Northern Ireland) along with Lib Dem and other independent councillors who backed the deal and are angry at Monday’s outcome.

FBU Assistant General Secretary Mike Fordham said: “The latest moves show a growing revolt within the LGA on the back of Monday’s meeting. The employers’ side was suddenly enlarged from 16 to 23 turning a 10-6 vote in favour of a deal to a 13-10 vote against.

“The LGA has confirmed in writing that only one of the English councillors was a substitute. The others were additions. That directly contradicts what was claimed on the World at One today.

“Nine out of the thirteen councillors who voted against the deal were unknown to many of the fire service negotiators. Several of them had been drafted in from London, most of them Labour.

“The LGA is reaping the whirlwind of the decision to block the deal and the methods used. There is clearly a growing backlash.

“Their claims that this is all a union smokescreen are growing more ridiculous by the day. They now have a crisis of their own making.

“Fire authorities and councillors across the UK are as angry as our members are at what happened and that is saying something. There is growing pressure on them to settle this dispute in the terms we agreed at the TUC.”

SO IT’S ALL A SMOKESCREEN SANDY?

Sandy Bruce Lockhart claims its all a union smokescreen. He’d better read this then.

**From East Anglia Daily Times 4 August**

**A COUNCILLOR who is one of the negotiators trying to reach agreement with firefighters on their pay has accused the Government of "stitching up" the union.**

**Peter Monk, the Liberal Democrat deputy leader of Suffolk County Council, said he was "disgusted" at the manner in which the negotiations were brought to an end.**

**"Tory and Labour councillors who have no detailed knowledge of the dispute were brought in to pack the meeting and scupper the deal," claimed Mr Monk.**

**"The Fire Brigades Union has a fair gripe. They were stitched up.**

**"The Lib Dems present on the negotiating body voted in favour of the deal, but all our hard work in trying to reach an agreement has come to an end through political spite."**

### **Western Daily Press 5 August**

The chairman of Avon Fire Authority yesterday revealed that he is considering paying fire fighters the extra cash they want, in direct opposition to the Government, to avoid troops being sent to tackle blazes. Talks between the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) and employers to avoid a return to protests across the country broke down on Monday....

But the Western Daily Press has learned that Terry Walker, chairman of Avon Fire Authority, has written to the employers to warn that it will be forced to honour the pay deal locally, unless the two sides get back to the negotiating table.

**The remarks, by the former Kingswood MP, are a direct appeal to the employers to sort the problem out.**

**"We have written to the employers to tell them that we are going to have to consider making an offer to the firefighters of Avon in line with the settlement," he said. We have the money in our bank and we do not see why firefighters should be deprived because they have a different agenda in London.**

**"They have to get back to the negotiating table and unless they do we will be forced to make them an offer. Our main concern must be the welfare of people of Avon."**

Mr Walker said he had also written to chairmen of the 12 other fire authorities in the country to arrange a meeting. The proposal will be one of the items on the agenda.

"We shall be saying what we intend to do. If some of them take the same action then all the better," he added.

**Pat Watters (COSLA) on Newsnight Scotland Monday 3 August:**

**Interviewer:** Were you expecting when you went to the meeting today that this was just a done deal?

**PW:** Yes I had an expectation that work that had been done last week and the week before with the TUC...was something that would be acceptable to our side today.

I was down in London two days last week and we thought we had worked out a resolution to the difficulties we had and there's been work done since then and I had no idea that it was going to be refused by a majority of the employers today.

It was a shock to me....we were so close to signing a deal, the trade union was ready to sign the deal....I'm extremely angry at the whole situation.....They brought in additional people to vote....I questioned where these people came from, I questioned when they were appointed and it was apparently done at a meeting on Friday at the LGA.

**Interviewer:** You can see what it looks from where [the FBU] are sitting. You turn up at a meeting, these people you don't know and who hadn't been involved in previous negotiations in a situation where you think everything is smoothed out and it's just a matter of turning up and signing on the dotted line, they turn up and vote against. It's pretty suspicious isn't it?

**PW:** Certainly it was not a pleasant experience for me I can assure you.

**Belfast Newsletter 3 August 2004**

“Ulster Fire Authority chairman Bill Gillespie said: "We have been working for over a year, and have overcome obstacle after obstacle. I felt we had reached the end of the road and we should sign up. I'm extremely disappointed now.

**"To be fair to the FBU they have played their part and met us half way." He added: "I'm particularly annoyed that nine out of the 13 people who voted against the deal I had never seen before at negotiations. It seems they were drafted in at the last minute."”**

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