

FBU RDS MEMBERSHIP GOES FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH



The FBU's membership among retained duty system (RDS) firefighters continues to grow as the organisation that claims it is the "first choice for firefighters on the retained duty system" is being deserted in droves in some parts of the country.

Whole stations are quitting the RFU for the FBU as RDS firefighters realise which organisation represents their real interests.

Major inroads are being made in Yorkshire and Humberside with as many as 60 new RDS members – with one whole station now 100% FBU - in North Yorkshire, a development that followed a road show by membership secretary Bryan Barrett that is only half way through.

In Strathclyde, the FBU is recruiting large numbers of RDS firefighters and now some 70% are FBU, with fire stations in Oban and Campbeltown in Argyll & Bute, now 100% FBU.

Membership growth among RDS firefighters is meanwhile expected to accelerate in the East Midlands (FBU region 6) as the Union carries out a tour of retained stations in Lincolnshire to explain the benefits of FBU membership.

Even in the RFU's heartland of Norfolk, RDS firefighters have been ripping up their membership cards – some 50 odd – and they are heading for the FBU.

At Attleborough, site of what the RFU describe as their head office and the fire station from where the current and former RFU leaders hale, there are now FBU members for the first time, with four RDS firefighters signing up to the Union in the past six months.

Says FBU Norfolk brigade chair, Pete Greeves: "The RFU don't hold branch meetings that anybody has heard of, so how do they know what their members really want? They can't negotiate anything on behalf of their members.

"RDS firefighters know that if they want a voice in a union that represents *all* firefighters in the Service and if they want proper support when they are in times of need, there is only one organisation and that's the FBU."

"That's why we are signing up members almost every week, many of whom are deserting an organisation that time and again has failed to deliver to RDS firefighters."

RF who?

With the RFU haemorrhaging members all over, questions are being asked about just where the remaining membership of the RFU is. And these questions have only got louder since the RFU's refusal last month to allow an independent audit of its membership, a step required to allow it to take up the offer of a seat on the National Joint Council.

The RFU appears to be labouring under the illusion that that seat is still being kept vacant for it at the National Joint Council, a seat it had campaigned so hard for with employers and the Government.

The fact is the new NJC Constitution has been agreed - and it doesn't include anybody from the RFU on the employees side. There isn't any empty seat waiting for them – not one. All 14 seats on the employees side are now held by FBU representatives.

The reality is that the RFU has been talking itself up – but it has no substance in membership terms.

Red-faces must abound in Government and among senior civil servants. In a bid to attack the FBU they championed the RFU – and they ended up falling for their own spin.

Seven RDS firefighters reinstated thanks to FBU representation

Seven sacked firefighters at West Midlands' only retained fire station have been reinstated following representation by the FBU. The firefighters at Sedgley fire station faced charges of gross misconduct.

Senior managers had tried to close Sedgley fire station a number of years ago, but shelved plans after the FBU conducted a major public campaign. Had the decision to sack the firefighters been upheld then the fire station would have closed.

The main and only charge against the RDS firefighters was that they were 'complicit' in operating a system for turn outs - the so-called washer system, which the brigade alleged delayed the appliance in turning out.

Local FBU officials challenged the brigade's use of the word 'complicit' as none of the RDS firefighters were authors of the system and didn't know anything different from the time of joining. And then they succeeded in showing that the system did not delay the appliance at all.

One who was reinstated was reduced in role and further FBU member at Sedgley who remains dismissed will receive the full support of the FBU legal services.

The Sedgley fire crew were represented by Dave Whatton, Executive Council member for

Region 7 (West Midlands), Tony Larose, regional official for Region 7 and West Midlands brigade membership secretary Chris Downes, with assistance from regional official Tony Nutting. Pete Preston and Harry Cotter from the National Retained Committee and Retained Executive Council member Tam Mitchell also helped with advice.

Says Dave Whatton:

“Sedgley may be the only retained fire station in the West Midlands. But retained firefighters in Sedgley are entitled to the same protection and access to the same resources of the Fire Brigades Union as firefighters in any other fire station in the brigade.

“As a Union we represent all uniformed staff in the UK fire service and we are committed to supporting and defending all firefighters regardless of duty system.”

Devon cuts campaign

As Devon councillors meet again this Friday 26 October to discuss the axing of primary (full-time) crewing on aerial appliances in Exeter, Barnstaple, Torquay and Plymouth, the FBU has slammed the proposals as flawed and short-sighted and blasted the public consultation exercise used to justify the proposals as an example of 'spin' at its worst, and an insult to the public.

Speaking in advance of the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority (DSFRA) meeting FBU Chair Bob Walker said:

“Ever since this issue was first raised in May, senior managers have encouraged elected fire authority councillors to see the proposal as a 'soft-option' for savings instead of what it really is - a significant cut in firefighting posts and capabilities.”

“Service management have also resorted to spin to try and justify their proposals. They claim their consultation process showed members of the public support the proposal when explained to them.”

However, the Union pointed out that only 70 invited members of the public attended these six 'focus groups' from across Devon and Somerset and the FBU was refused

permission to put its case against the proposals. Those present therefore only heard only one side of the argument.

The FBU submitted nearly 10,500 signed letters of opposition from the public, which were collected at street stalls during August, but these have effectively been dismissed by the management report going to the fire authority, because the FBU's leafleting activity "canvassed and reported only those opposed to the proposal."

Added Bob Walker: "Rejecting almost 10,500 signatures of opposition is an insult to members of the public, and even more bare-faced given the refusal to allow the FBU to put an alternative view to the public focus groups."

Though the Penhallow hotel fire in Newquay took place during the 12 week public consultation period on the proposals there is only one reference to this in the report. And that is the Cornwall CFO's public statement that the delayed response of an aerial appliance had no bearing on the outcome of that fire.

The claim by Cornwall's CFO "must be treated with significant reservation," says Bob Walker. "Delayed aerial appliance attendance was one of several problems associated with that tragic incident. It is a fact that two aerial appliances from Devon attended that incident and were used to help bring the fire under control, because both Cornwall's aerial appliances (including one at Newquay itself) could not be mobilised.

"The FBU supports an appeal to the Government for more realistic funding arrangements, but little if anything appears to have been done to consider other options to this cuts proposal. We believe there are better alternatives available which would not impact on front-line fire and rescue activities."

Hampshire cuts campaign

The FBU have launched a campaign to save Copnor fire station in Portsmouth, Hampshire from closure. The proposals would leave central Portsmouth without any fire appliance, among other cuts.

The fire authority decided to back plans to shut the station down after the chair gave his

casting vote to back the proposals within the brigade's integrated risk management plan. The IRMP (Year 3) is out for consultation until 31 December 2007 and Hampshire fire and rescue authority will make a decision on 13 February 2008.

In addition to the closure of Copnor Fire Station (Portsmouth), the proposals will see: the moving of an appliance from Redbridge (Southampton) to St Mary (Southampton); the relocation of Winchester Fire Station and the redevelopment of Cosham Fire Station (Portsmouth).

Hampshire FBU branch officials and members will be attending a public meeting on 29 October in Copnor as part of their campaign to convince local residents, Portsmouth City councillors, fire authority members and Portsmouth MPs to reject the proposals.

FBU National School

The FBU's National School kicks off on Sunday at Wortley Hall near Sheffield with speakers from veteran left-wing campaigner Tony Benn to Fire Minister Parmjit Dhanda and councillor Les Byrom from the National Employers.

Modernisation and how the FBU should respond to it will be one central theme. And there will be sessions on organising the Union, engaging with politics, pensions, migrant workers, lifelong learning and equality.


Some 40 odd students from eight regions are expected to attend the week-long school. Evening entertainment includes Banner Theatre.

The General Secretary Matt Wrack will be speaking, President Mick Shaw will be chairing and Executive Council members will be in attendance.

FBU-TUBE TV

FBU-TUBE TV has been launched on website YouTube with a video of the march from Falmouth to Camborne stations that took place on 29 September as part of the FBU's campaign against cuts in Cornwall.

Also featuring on the site is the General Secretary Matt Wrack talking to FBU



members at the scene of the floods in the north of England this summer.

Matt Wrack can also be seen giving his speech to TUC Congress in September proposing the FBU's motion on fires in high-rise buildings while comedians Mark Thomas and Mark Steele are interviewed exclusively at Glastonbury in July.

The Union will add short video "programmes" to FBU-TUBE TV in the coming weeks and months, with a particular focus on local campaigns.

Visit www.fbu.org.uk and click on the link. Alternatively visit: www.youtube.com/fbutube

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