

# IRMP CUTS RAISED IN PARLIAMENT



## Station closures in Northumberland and Hertfordshire highlighted

Ronnie Campbell, Labour MP for Tynemouth, expressed deep concern about the closure of fire stations in Northumberland under the local fire authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan and cast doubt on claims of cost savings building two new stations under Private Finance Initiative (PFI) during last week's parliamentary debate - Emergency Services (Regionalisation).

Said Mr Campbell: "The chief fire officer, Mr. Hesler, says that he will build two state-of-the-art fire stations by the private finance initiative. We need to do our sums on PFI to see whether we save money or not. What we have come up with is that we will not save money and that the scheme will cost the council tax payers big time.

### Helser told to take Noddy policy back to Noddyland

Ronnie Campbell added: "Response times will increase. Perhaps the chief fire officer is going to put two jet-propelled rockets on the side of the fire engines to get

them to emergencies in Blyth quicker. We are losing out.

"I attended that public debate in New Hartley, and the chief fire officer lost hands-down. If I was not convinced before I went to the meeting I was when I left, because the FBU made a good case. Northumberland county council is making a grave mistake, and I urge Hesler to go back to where he came from—Noddyland, where he produced his Noddy policy."

### Hertfordshire cuts slammed

Mike Penning, Conservative MP for Hemel Hempstead, said:

"...Bovingdon and Radlett fire stations are being closed. At least one pump is being removed from Watford, and four full-time firefighters from Hemel Hempstead.

"When we asked the chief fire officer why that had happened, his reply was that he must save £500,000 so that he can finance the fire prevention measures...that are

not being funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

"We are therefore having cuts...The largest town in Hertfordshire is Hemel Hempstead...and it has two pumps. The most accident-prone part of the M1 in southern England, junction 8...is covered by the pump at Bovington, and Bovington station is being closed...

"The other week, I attended Dacorum borough council's scrutiny committee and listened to the commander of Bovington fire station, who has served as a community firefighter for 30 years and who was almost in tears because he knows that the closure of that station will cost lives.

### Longer attendance times

"One of the reasons that that is possible is that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has changed the rules and allowed a longer time of up to 10 minutes for the appliances to arrive at residences after a call is initiated.

"It was suggested earlier that most people are dead before the call is made, but many are not. The quicker that we can get the appliances to them, the quicker we can get them out, and those of us who have served know how important that is. If it is the case that most people are dead before the fire engine is called, we might as well turn the blue lights off and just drive.

"Closing Bovington station will save £90,000. When I asked the assistant chief constable who did the presentation what the reasons

were behind it, he said, "Sir, you have to ask the local politicians about that." I did, and the answer was that Hertfordshire must save £500,000 from the fire budget; otherwise it will not meet the criteria set by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

### **Local community joins FBU in march against Herts cuts**

About 100 firefighters and their supporters last week marched through Watford Town centre to highlight the proposed cuts to the fire and rescue service throughout Hertfordshire.

Amongst the plans, which go before Hertfordshire County Council on the 17 October, are proposals that Radlett and Bovington retained stations will close and Watford will have a reduced service at night.

Campaigners were trying to raise awareness of the proposed cuts and encourage the public to take part in the 12-week consultation period following the upcoming council meeting.

After marching up Watford High Street, campaigners gathered outside the Town Hall where they listened to a number of speakers including those from the FBU, residents' groups, local councillors and Mayor Dorothy Thornhill, all of whom talked about how the cuts would jeopardise the safety of Hertfordshire.

[www.bbc.co.uk/threecounties](http://www.bbc.co.uk/threecounties)

## **It's official! Night is the new day**

At a recent visit to Watford Fire Station, Hertfordshire chief fire officer Roy Wilshire stunned angry Fire Staff when shown a picture of one of his Fire Support vans, displaying the fact that half of all house fires happen at night.

When asked how he could justify cutting night time cover in Watford he replied "yes that statistic on the van is right, however there are more house fires in the day."

### No wonder his sums never add up!

When reminded by firefighters that there are more fire deaths at night he challenged that by adding "No. There are more deaths during the day."

The ODPM tells a different story: "...the chances of dying in a fire are higher at night than in the day" (Section 3.17, Our Fire and Rescue Service: White Paper).

The only explanation for the chief fire officers interpretation can be that under the proposed new Safety Plan, night will be the new day!

## **Notts co-responding dispute**

Nottingham fire brigade management are seeking permission from the fire authority to deduct 10% of employees salary for 'refusal to deliver co-responding to the community', AKA partial performance.

This follows the successful ballot for industrial action short of strike over the co-responding scheme at the wholetime/retained Retford fire station.

Members ceased co-responding on 4 October, 6pm.

Management have since been taking names at every shift change of who's on duty and whether they are willing to co-respond.

The brigade management's move comes against the background of a recent proposal to change to a three shift system and their refusal to engage in even the most basic form of negotiation on the matter.

Says Dave Green, FBU Executive Council member for Region 6:

"The membership at Retford, are determined that they will not be bullied by the management and will resist the imposition of a co-responding scheme - and hence the unilateral change to their contract of employment.

If the Brigade are backed by the (Labour) Fire Authority then 34 of our members will have their pay docked by 10% for every shift they refuse to undertake co-responding duties. Pay will also be docked from members who are attached to that station for one shift to cover for crewing shortfalls.

Notts Brigade Committee have set up a hardship fund and regular donations will be made by all Notts FBU members not affected by the stoppage. Details of the fund are at [www.fburegion6.com](http://www.fburegion6.com)

Messages of support can be sent to:

Retford Fire Station  
Wharf Road  
Retford  
Notts DN22 6EN

### **West Mids members in ballot over new shift system**

West Midlands fire crews have told bosses they will ballot for strike action if they refuse to withdraw the new duty and shift system until agreement has been reached on crucial outstanding issues.

The union says West Midlands Fire Authority has paid lip service to a deal brokered by independent arbitrators over a new shift and duty system.

Recommendations on a new duty and shift system were set out by the fire service national Technical Advisory Panel. West Midlands fire service managers initially accepted all the recommendations of the panel, but have delayed and failed properly to negotiate on some of the key parts.

Peter Gallagher FBU West Midlands Brigade Secretary said:

"There were clear recommendations set out to help resolve this dispute. Our managers initially accepted them all but since then have dragged their feet and shown little interest in reaching agreement on some of them.

### Senior brigade managers dash hopes of agreement

"Managers want to cherry pick the ones they like and ditch the ones they don't like. We thought we could resolve issues through talks only to see those hopes dashed by managers.

"Instead of trying to reach agreement based on the independent recommendations as they promised, they have done everything they can to prevent agreement. This has left our members and their families feeling angry, bitter and financially worse off.

"If we had behaved like this we would have been heavily criticised. If this is not resolved we will ballot for strike action."

[www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)

### **Pensions - case for public sector retirement age rise "irrefutable" says minister**

The biggest national stoppage since the general strike of 1926 moved a step closer yesterday when Alan Johnson, the trade and industry secretary, said the case for raising the pension age for public sector workers from 60 to 65 was "irrefutable".

Mr Johnson, who is in charge of negotiations with the unions over the issue, said it was "impossible" to stick with the current arrangements when workers in the private sector were faced with working longer and saving more. He is due to meet the public sector unions on Tuesday at the

joint government-union forum to discuss the issue.

[www.ft.com](http://www.ft.com)

## **Pensions & Control - join the FBU campaigns**

The FBU is moving to encourage the widest possible debate in the Union about the Government's plans for pensions and regional controls and how the FBU best responds to them. The first of a series of regional "open forums" kicked off on Friday October 14 in East Anglia (FBU region 9) in Whitham.

Officials and members from across the region discussed the issues and how the Union should take forward its campaign including General Secretary Matt Wrack, National Officer Paul Woolstenholmes, and Ivan Walker, FBU pensions advisor from solicitors Thompsons.

Attendees found the meeting informative and expressed a determination to fight the proposals on controls and pensions, although they recognised that these battles would not be easy.

The next meeting is to be held Wednesday 19 October in Yorkshire & Humberside (Region 4). It will take place in Wakefield at the Holiday Inn, M1 Junction 40, starting 10.30am.

The following meetings are also scheduled:

Region 2	11 Nov
Region 3	30 Nov
Region 5	24/25 Nov
Region 6	22 Nov

Region 7	28 Nov
Region 8	9 Nov
(North Wales	15 Nov)
Region 10	5 Dec
Region 11	24 Nov
Region 13	28 Nov

Region 12 and Region 1 dates are yet to be confirmed.

The meetings will be attended either by the General Secretary or President Ruth Winters.


Contact FBU brigade officials for more details.

## **Pensions - conference on state and occupational scheme**

The Greater London Pensioners' Association (GLPA) annual conference for working trade unionists and for pensioners will take place at the Somers Town Community Centre in Ossulston Street, NW1, off Euston Road, on Saturday 12 November, 10am-3pm.

The conference aims to promote understanding of the problems faced by working class people in the pensions field, both state provided and occupational, and to stimulate campaigning by trade unions and pensioners organisations.

The conference will be chaired by Joy Moss Vice President GLPA and speakers are: Martin Gould Chair SERTUC, Frank Cooper President of the National Pensioners Convention and Eddie Richardson, President GLPA. *All trade unionists are welcome to attend as individuals or delegates.*



£2 in advance to the GLPA,  
Interchange Studios, Hampstead Town  
Hall Centre 213 Haverstock Hill,  
London NW3 4QP, or at the door. Fee  
includes a buffet lunch.

## **Join fire safety demo!**

Join the national demonstration to  
defend fire-safety rules. Assemble  
Kings Cross Station, London  
Saturday 26 November 11.30am.

Following the 1987 Kings Cross fire  
that claimed 31 lives, fire-safety  
rules were put in place laying out  
minimum safety standards for sub-  
surface stations. The government  
has already tried to scrap these  
crucial safety rules but transport  
union RMT, with support from the  
FBU, successfully prevented this.

However, the threat to staffing  
levels and safety standards covered  
by these regulations still exist.  
So make your voice heard on  
November 26 in London and ask  
your MP to sign early day motion  
549: *Follow 'Lobby your MP' link on  
FBU website to email your MP.*

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