

Firefighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union

**GENERAL
SECRETARY
ELECTION**

See Noticeboard p22

OUR SAFETY AT WORK

How FBU fights for life-saving
changes with DECON campaign

**PAY: FBU DEMANDS
'SIGNIFICANT' RISE**

See p4

**FIRE SERVICE MENTAL
HEALTH EMERGENCY**

See p16

**NEURODIVERGENT AND
DISABLED MEMBERS' FORUM**

See p18

December 2024/
January 2025



www.fbu.org.uk

MAKING HISTORY

A few days before *Firefighter* went to print, I attended a historic meeting. For the first time in more than 20 years, the FBU has been invited to advise ministers directly on fire service policy.

For years, we have warned of a postcode lottery on fire cover, caused by fragmentation and underfunding. And, because of the FBU's campaigning, Labour agreed in its election manifesto to re-introduce national standards in the fire service.

There will also be a ministerial advisory group on fire service reform. It met for the first time in early December, and includes the FBU as the representative voice of firefighters and fire control staff.

We will argue that this committee should be statutory, and that national standards should be established on training, equipment, response times, crewing levels, equalities, and health and safety.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

This edition of the magazine is themed around a topic which we will be looking to raise regularly with ministers, as well as with employers: health and safety.

The FBU's DECON campaign has changed the way that our sector talks about fire contaminants. You'll find our posters in stations across the UK, and we have made serious inroads into the debate around cancer and other occupational diseases.

Despite this work, the UK remains decades behind other countries in recognising the health impacts of firefighting. It is a disgrace that it has been left to firefighters themselves to fund this work.

In an extended feature (see pages 8 to 13) I set out what we are demanding: prevention, health monitoring, and



Matt Wrack

FBU campaigning means
firefighters' voice is heard once again

Did you know ...?



9/11

Illnesses linked to the 9/11 World Trade Center terrorist attack in 2011 have now killed more members of the New York City fire department than died on 9/11 itself. Some 343 NY firefighters were killed on the day the Twin Towers fell. Since then, more than 360 have died of incident-related illnesses.



FBU general secretary Matt Wrack with FBU national officer Riccardo la Torre in the UCLan lab where DECON research is based

proper recognition and compensation for firefighters who fall ill.

We also bring you news of a new initiative on mental health.

Next year, the FBU will begin in earnest to conduct research into the mental health crisis in the fire service.

We need a minimum of 10,000 current or retired firefighters to take part in the survey – please be one of them.

EQUALITIES

Health and safety overlaps significantly with equalities, with another feature focussing on the FBU's upcoming disabled and neurodivergent members' forum.

RED PLAQUES

And, finally, *Firefighter* takes a look at this year's Red Plaques, commemorating firefighters who have tragically died in the line of duty.

PAY

I have now written to fire service employers, requesting immediate talks on pay. We are determined to ensure that the new Labour government begins to undo the damage of austerity, and this must include a substantial above-inflation pay increase.

We must be prepared to fight for a pay rise – and, once again, it will be down to firefighters on the ground to lead that campaign. Read more on page 4.



IAN MARLOW



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Firefighter

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NEWS

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CLADDING SCANDAL

Government must speed up remediation of unsafe buildings, says FBU

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PAY



FBU national rally and lobby in Westminster, August 2024

FBU demands 'significant' above-inflation pay rise

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack wrote to fire service employers on 6 December to ask for immediate talks on pay for firefighters and fire control staff.

The next pay round is due to take effect on 1 July 2025, and the union is keen that a deal is reached in time for any increase to be paid immediately.

In his letter to Sarah Ward, secretary of the employers' side of the National Joint Council (NJC), Wrack said that he wanted to "build on progress made for 2022, 2023 and 2024", which were "the result of intense negotiation at the NJC".

Last year's pay increase was for 4%. It came alongside a significant increase to the retainer paid to RDS firefighters, as well as a minimum of 26 weeks' paid maternity leave across the UK (the FBU is campaigning for 52 weeks).

In 2022 and 2023, the threat of strike action forced pay rises of 7% and 5%.

However, the FBU leadership is determined to push the new Labour government to rebuild the fire and rescue service after more than a decade of austerity which hit real-terms pay and scrapped one in five firefighter jobs.

In his letter to employers, Wrack raised specific concerns about three areas. He argued that, as the minimum wage rises, firefighter apprentices and trainees must see their wages increase for the job to remain attractive. The letter also raised the need for further discussions on the role of firefighters, and for a proper system of pay progression.

Commenting on the letter, Matt Wrack said: "Firefighters put themselves

at risk around the clock to keep people safe. They protect communities from fires, floods, storms and extreme weather events.

"Under the Tories, the fire service was subjected to massive cuts. We now look to Labour to rebuild our fire service.

"Restoring pay is a vital part of this, alongside national standards and investment in training and equipment.

"The new government must make the money available for a substantial above-inflation pay increase to begin the work of making up for lost ground."

In an interview with the *Mirror*, Wrack said: "I do not want to see strikes in the fire service, but we do have that right and we have to be prepared to do so if we can't resolve things."

FBU in fresh calls for statutory England flood response duty

Firefighters responded to widespread flooding across the UK caused by Storm Bert this November, performing rescues and evacuations in extreme conditions.

In the aftermath, the FBU wrote to home secretary Yvette Cooper calling on the government to make the whole of the UK more resilient to flooding by giving the fire and rescue service a statutory duty to respond to floods in England, to introduce national standards, and

to deliver long-term investment to increase resilience.

Devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have already implemented a duty for fire services to respond to flooding. This duty is needed to clarify responsibilities, and to obligate the government to provide investment for sufficient numbers of firefighters, training and suitable equipment to be deployed in response to flooding emergencies.



Sounding off

Support our fight for jobs and climate justice

When a multinational corporation threatened to close a factory in Italy, workers fought back with a plan for a green transition solution. Their rank-and-file collective explains why their vision matters to workers everywhere.

In October a UK trade union delegation visited our former GKN auto components factory near Florence.

The plant was owned by GKN, a British multinational automotive company. In 2018, the UK-based investment firm Melrose purchased GKN and closed the plant in 2021.

The struggle of the factory's workers is at a crucial stage. We have occupied the site for three years and have developed to convert the factory to produce solar panels and cargo bikes instead of luxury car parts.

We formed a cooperative, receiving donations of over €1 million from social movements in Italy and beyond, and gaining investors for €6 million.

The owners have no plan. They have kept the factory unproductive. For a year they have kept us without a salary, waiting for us to quit.

The only people with a plan are the workers. Local institutions are taking timid steps towards a positive resolution. National government is totally absent. We must confront those in power with their responsibilities.

Do they want to leave an environmental disaster, and the loss of 500 jobs, at a time when so many sectors are in crisis? Or will they provide a positive example by allowing the green conversion of the factory?

Our fight is in danger. We recently discovered that the plant was secretly sold in March – with the threat of it becoming a mere real-estate speculation.

■ Read more and find out how you can support on the FBU blog: bit.ly/GKNsolidarity



24 November, Pontypridd – Flooding after the River Taff burst its banks following heavy rain from storm Bert

EQUALITY REVIEWS

Reports find racism and misogyny

Gloucestershire fire and rescue service has published findings of an independent review into allegations of racism and bullying in the service between 1991 and 2018.

After speaking to current and previous staff members and analysing more than 4,500 documents, the review found the service had been institutionally racist, detailing cases of racist harassment, discrimination, and bullying.

The report made 14 recommendations and concluded that there is more work to be done. Chief fire officer Mark Preece issued an apology on behalf of the service.

In the same month, the

inspectorate concluded that Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service has not made enough progress on equality, diversity and inclusion, and that firefighters lack confidence in complaints processes.

Despite commissioning an independent review into its culture, the service has failed to progress any of its recommendations.

Andrew Scattergood, FBU executive council member for the West Midlands, called for the fire authority to step in, saying that “those at the very top of the service are responsible for perpetuating and failing to tackle misogyny; as part of the problem, they cannot be the solution”.



FBU hosts European firefighters' network

Firefighters from across Europe met in London for the annual European Federation of Public Services Union (EPSU) Firefighters' Network on 2 and 3 December.

The event took place in TUC Congress house. Delegates discussed issues affecting their fire services and agreed a working plan for the network

for the coming year.

Delegates heard updates on research into occupational cancer and asbestos in the UK.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack and FBU national officer Riccardo la Torre presented on the Grenfell inquiry and the campaign for national standards in the UK.

Matt Wrack said: 'We are proud to be a part of the firefighters' network and to have hosted this year's meeting.'

'The struggles we face in the UK fire and rescue service are experienced by firefighters internationally.

'By learning from each other and working together, we can make firefighting safer everywhere.'

DORSET AND WILTSHIRE

'Week of chaos' follows cuts

In the week following the removal of one of the 24-hour crewed fire engines at Poole in Dorset, retained firefighters at the station were called out to 15 incidents – five times the number predicted by the service.

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service removed Poole's second wholtime appliance in November, with just over one week's notice, as part of a programme of cuts to eight fire stations. Poole fire station provides cover across the south of the region and is the busiest in the county.

Incidents attended in the first week following the cut included a house fire; water rescue; an attempted suicide; a road traffic collision; and a fire alarm in a high-rise tower. FBU officials described it as a "week of chaos", calling for the service to reverse the cuts.

In brief

Gloucestershire

Firefighters are calling for Gloucestershire county council to reverse a decision to change crews' shift patterns to 11-hour days and 13 hour nights; raising the alarm that this could result in firefighters being forced out of the service due to increased childcare costs and mental health issues.

Scottish retained vote

Retained firefighters in Scotland have voted to accept new terms and conditions, with 72% voting in favour on a 48% turnout. The improved proposal standardises terms and conditions for retained firefighters in the eight legacy services that merged to form the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in 2013.



Palestine fire engine appeal

Firefighters (above) delivered a letter signed by the FBU executive council to the Israeli embassy in London in November calling for the release a fire engine donated to Palestinian firefighters. The fire engine sourced by Scottish firefighters and stocked with life-saving equipment has been impounded since August.



JESS HARRIS

Aftermath of a tower block cladding fire at the Spectrum Building in Dagenham, East London, in August 2024

A new report into the cladding crisis has confirmed worst fears about the number of buildings which still have unsafe cladding seven years on from the Grenfell Tower fire.

An investigation by the National Audit Office found an estimated total of 9,000-12,000 buildings of 11 metres or higher with dangerous cladding still require remediation. By August 2024, only 4,771 of these had been identified for remediation, and only 1,392 completed works.

Of 514 buildings with the same or similar aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding as used on the Grenfell Tower, 471 have had it removed.

The investigation report highlights the thousands of residents who are living in fear of a fire, many of whom are also facing costly remediation bills without support. It also reveals that



News Focus

'Utter disgrace' of cladding remediation delays

the government does not know how many buildings below 11 metres have dangerous cladding. It is estimated that up to 60% of unsafe buildings have yet to be identified.

It concludes that the pace of remediation has been much slower than the previous government had expected it to be, and that putting the onus on developers to pay should help protect taxpayers' money. However, there needs to be

more enforcement to ensure that the industry does not stall in disputes around costs.

End Our Cladding Scandal, a campaign led by impacted residents, called for the government to stop the "merry-go-round of buck passing".

As MPs debated Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry in December, the Labour party published its remediation acceleration plan (RAP), as promised in its election manifesto.

Under the plan, all buildings of 18 metres and above must have been remediated by 2029. There is no target for buildings of 11 metres and higher, except that the government aims to publish a plan for these in 2029.

"We are still examining Labour's plan to resolve the cladding crisis, and they have only been in power for five months.

"But it is an utter disgrace that many millions of people are on course to be left living in unsafe buildings for 12 years after the Grenfell Tower fire," said FBU general secretary Matt Wrack. "We urge the government to speed this process up.

"The building safety crisis must be addressed urgently, with accelerated action on cladding, investment in local government and the fire and rescue service, and an end to the privatisation of building control."

DECON

THE WAY FORWARD

FBU general secretary **Matt Wrack** reflects on the DECON campaign so far and the fight ahead

From the FBU DECON poster Watch Out for Wear and Tear



JAN MARLOW

When it comes to the hidden dangers of toxic contaminants in fire, it is firefighters leading the way to safety. While politicians and bosses have buried their heads in the sand, the Fire Brigades Union has spearheaded the DECON campaign.

When the government told us that there was not enough data to act, we commissioned independent research. When they refused to provide funding, we set up the Firefighters 100 lottery to raise the money.

And when fire service employers failed to communicate the risk of exposure to toxic fire effluents, we created our own decontamination guidance and training. We have fought for changes to policy, procedures, PPE and equipment at every level: generating a wave of change across fire and rescue services.

Working with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), our union has funded and commissioned several momentous projects pioneered by Professor Anna Stec, a world-leading expert in fire chemistry and toxicology.

We are now expecting the latest research in early 2025, building on the case we have been making for the past few years.

As we prepare to launch the next stage of our campaign, now is the time to reflect on the progress we have made – and the way there is left to go.

THE BIG PICTURE

In 2022, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a World Health Organisation body, classified occupational exposure as a firefighter as carcinogenic: a preventable cause of cancer.

The US, Canada, Australia, and Poland, among others, all have laws in

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Firefighter safety is about much more than just getting out of a burning building

place which recognise that firefighters are at risk of occupational diseases. The UK is trailing decades behind.

Our demands are clear. Prevent exposure through decontamination and PPE; protect firefighters' health with regular health monitoring, catching diseases early; properly recognise and compensate firefighters who receive an occupational diagnosis.

But in the UK, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council still does not recognise that these diseases are occupational.

We need to pressure government bodies to ensure that they listen to the evidence and review their position – which is out of step with the rest of the world – by passing new laws to protect firefighters.

BREAKING NEW GROUND

The first of the reports we commissioned from UCLan was published in 2020.

It examined how contaminants can be inhaled, ingested, or absorbed through the skin. It found that contaminated kit such as dirty gloves and helmets put firefighters at risk after an incident, and recommended steps to avoid cross-contamination through cleaning kit, clothes and spaces.

In 2023, UCLan published five more research papers that provided the missing data. They found that firefighters are developing cancer at higher rates and at younger ages compared to the general population. Looking at Scottish firefighters' death certificates, the

scientists identified that firefighters have a higher mortality rate from cancers.

Exposure to contaminants is also impacting mental health, with firefighters more likely to report depression and anxiety.

And this was shown to be preventable. Firefighters in the study were twice as likely to develop cancer if they noticed soot in their nose or throat, or remained in PPE for more than four hours.

This data was not a surprise, but it has made waves. "Cancer Incidence Amongst UK Firefighters" was one of the leading science magazine Nature's most downloaded cancer papers of 2023. As the first studies of their kind for the UK, this research has put paid to the excuse that there is not enough evidence to act.



Understanding the issue is crucial, but we cannot wait around for the bosses to come up with the next steps.

Over the past two years, the FBU has worked with UCLan to test a record number of UK firefighters.

A team of scientists travelled far and wide for the project, collecting blood and urine samples from hundreds of firefighters in each location and analysing them in the UCLan lab.

WE DID NOT STOP

Though some fire and rescue services declined to support the research by allowing us to use facilities or providing funding, this has not stopped us.

In the West Midlands, FBU members staged a fundraising football match

1,000 firefighters have participated in nine regions across the UK

– joined by former England footballers Tony Morley and Geoff Thomas. They managed to secure a local football stadium as a site to test 100 firefighters, thanks to the support of Boldmere St Michael's FC.

One thousand firefighters have participated in nine regions across the UK.

When I visited the UCLan laboratory this November, I saw for myself the scale of the tasks undertaken. The Firefighters 100 lottery has contributed to state-of-the-art technology, helping fund and secure essential equipment to enable the research. We met technicians and saw testing in action. This busy lab will soon produce the next round of results, adding to our growing bank of evidence.

These samples are being analysed for markers of PFAS (perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances) otherwise known as forever chemicals, as well as detecting a number of biomarkers for cancers and other diseases, and levels of toxic chemicals.

Once the numbers have been crunched, we hope to gain a fuller picture of the level of risk to firefighters' health. This research will provide a scientific basis for health monitoring, showing which tests firefighters need regularly.

FALLOUT FROM A DISASTER

In parallel to the testing programme, UCLan has also been piecing together a ground-breaking study examining the health impact of the exposure firefighters faced at the Grenfell Tower fire.

There are lessons to learn from this



Left: A scientist at work in the UCLan lab
Below: Firefighters' donated samples are tested in the lab



MARK THOMAS



MARK THOMAS



MARK THOMAS

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack, Professor Anna Stec, and FBU national officer Riccardo la Torre in the UCLan lab

horrific and unprecedented fire that will shape our profession in the years to come.

Following the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001, a life-long health monitoring programme was established for emergency responders and the local community, enabling early treatment of cancers.

Our thoughts are always with the 72 people who lost their lives at Grenfell Tower that night. And though no firefighter was killed, we know that a tragedy of that scale takes a serious physical and mental toll on first responders.

It is vital that everyone who responded to the incident is offered support, monitoring and treatment.

Firefighter safety is about much more than just getting out of a burning building. We need the government and fire and rescue services to act now to protect the health of the frontline.

REMOVING A LIFELINE

Progress has not always been smooth. In recent years, while firefighters have been advancing the cause of firefighter health, the National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC) has concocted a new policy that would commit firefighters to being deployed beyond a bridgehead at a fire in a high-rise building without activated breathing apparatus.

Not only does this put lives in danger at an incident, where being "under air" is crucial to preventing injury or death due to smoke inhalation; it also puts firefighters' health at risk in the long run.

The FBU successfully challenged the London Fire Brigade when plans to introduce this dangerous policy were announced, and a panel of experts ruled it to be a deliberate breach of health and safety laws.

We have now taken the case to the Health and Safety Executive, which has so far failed to conduct a meaningful investigation into the safety concerns.

After having to apologise for failing to act on the complaint for a year, the regulator published a review relying on assumptions instead of competent assessment of the threat the policy poses.

The FBU continues to challenge the outcome of this flawed and insulting investigation, raising it at all levels.

FROM FIRE STATIONS TO PARLIAMENT

When we embarked on the DECON project, 75% of fire stations displayed no information about contaminants. Most firefighters had not heard about the risks

of bringing soot and smoke back to the fire station or home.

Now, thousands of firefighters have watched our training videos. Posters outlining simple steps to decontaminate – so firefighters can take precautions to protect themselves, their co-workers and families – are plastered across fire stations everywhere.

The campaign has been debated at Holyrood in Edinburgh, and in the Senedd in Cardiff.

The FBU pushed for Labour to commit to setting up a statutory advisory body, which would be able to raise the issue of health monitoring and set DECON standards.

Angela Rayner, now deputy prime minister, spoke in support of the campaign at FBU conference in 2023. And in the first few months of the new Labour government, we have sat down with ministers to raise the issue of firefighter cancer.

But we have a way to go. Across the UK, fire stations are still lacking in facilities, PPE and cleaning contracts. And we will keep piling on the pressure until all firefighters in the UK are protected, monitored, and compensated for occupational diseases caused by exposure to contaminants.

We must make sure that central government takes action – and soon.

We fight in memory of every firefighter who has tragically lost their life to these occupational diseases. But we are also fighting for the future, to ensure that our generation and future generations of firefighters are protected at work.

The Grenfell Tower fire
– It is vital that everyone who responded to that incident is offered support, monitoring and treatment

TOMMY LON DONALAMY







DECON
TO PREVENT & PROTECT

SHOWER WITHIN AN HOUR

Always shower within an hour of returning to station after attending any fire. This helps you to get rid of dangerous contaminants.

SOAP AND SCRUB YOUR SKIN
WASH AND DRY YOUR HAIR

Learn daily habits that can save lives after the fire is out

Scan for training:



or visit: fbu.org.uk/decon



We can't wait around for the bosses to come up with the next steps

When the FBU embarked on the DECON project, 75% of fire stations displayed no information about contaminants



DECON
TO PREVENT & PROTECT

PREVENT THE RISK AFTER THE FIRE

Any fire can release toxic contaminants that spread in the air and on skin, kit and surfaces. By taking steps to prevent this risk every day, you can help to prevent cancer and other diseases.

DECON to protect yourself, your co-workers and your family.

Scan for training:



or visit: fbu.org.uk/decon



REMEMBER THE DEAD FIGHT FOR THE LIVING

Helen Hague reports on the past year of the FBU's Red Plaque scheme



**FIREFIGHTERS 100
LOTTERY**

FIVE BRIGADES UNION | SERVING FIREFIGHTERS SINCE 1939

When a huge blaze spread through a warehouse in Langley Street, in London's Covent Garden on May 11 1954, Clerkenwell fire crews were among the first at the scene. They could not have known that three of their number would never return.

Firefighter Arthur Batt-Rawden and station officer Frederick Hawkins were killed by falling debris as the building collapsed. Fellow Clerkenwell firefighter Charles Gadd later died from injuries sustained.

It was a bleak day for London – one of the largest fires in the city since World War II. But as families and firefighters continued to grieve, investigations into the fatal fire exposed failures and shortfalls in procedures.

There were no agreed evacuation signals to warn firefighters to get out of the building if collapse looked imminent – and no-one was even monitoring whether crew members were wearing potentially life-saving breathing apparatus.

As so often, it took needless deaths to prompt changes to help keep frontline firefighters safer. But change did follow – including the tightening of BA procedures.

An FBU Red Plaque, funded by the Firefighters 100 Lottery, was unveiled in their honour at Clerkenwell fire station on May 11 this year – 70 years after the fatal fire.

LEARNING FROM THE PAST

Trying to ensure the health and safety of frontline firefighters needs constant vigilance from the union's members and officials – backed up with persistent campaigning to secure change when lapses and shortfalls are tragically exposed.

Take the deaths of Whitechapel firefighters Adam Meere and Billy Faust, who died fighting an intense fire in Bethnal Green in July 2004 after rescuing another man.

They were among 50 firefighters called to a blaze in a three-story building. When they entered the basement, there was an explosion which triggered a collapse and cut off their water supply.

Their untimely deaths – Adam was just 27, Billy 36 – prompted widespread grief and their inquest triggered key improvements to equipment, communications and safety procedures. And in December 2017 they became the first firefighters who lost their lives in the line of duty to be commemorated with an FBU Red Plaque. Twenty years after their deaths, a mural was unveiled on the side of Whitechapel fire station in their honour.

ACTS OF HEROISM

In Tayside, Roderick “Big Nic” Nicolson died after he volunteered to try to save two trapped workers from a 40-foot-high silo in Perth in December 1995. He became submerged in five tonnes of sodium carbonate ash – likened to quicksilver – and died from his injuries. The workers survived.

A Red Plaque was unveiled in his honour in May 2024.

Since December 2017, Red Plaques have been unveiled at fire stations and other locations across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland honouring firefighters who lost their lives in the line of duty. And since 2020, the union's DECON campaign has been working to save the lives of today's frontline firefighters through reducing exposure to cancer-causing toxic contaminants.

HERE AND NOW

Edinburgh firefighter Barry Martin died after helping tackle a huge fire that ripped through Jenners department store in Edinburgh in January 2023, where four other firefighters were injured. A Red Plaque honouring Barry's service was unveiled at McDonald Road fire station in January 2024 – a year after his death.

“The FBU's Red Plaques provide places for us to remember fellow firefighters who have tragically lost their lives,” said Ben Selby, FBU assistant general secretary. “They become a place of reflection and sit at the heart of the local communities in which the firefighters served.”

“No firefighter knows what they might face during any one shift. But as our history clearly shows, we must stand together and demand protections at work – from improved breathing apparatus to decontamination procedures.

“Every person signed up to play the Firefighters100 lottery helps to honour those who have lost their lives and to fight for future generations of firefighters. These donations are what power our DECON campaign for protections against firefighter cancer: saving lives while ensuring no one we have lost is forgotten.”

■ redplaque.org.uk



RED PLAQUES UNVEILED IN 2024

Barry Martin

Ian Cameron

Red Knights Firefighters Memorial

**Frederick Hawkins,
Arthur Batt-Rawden, Charles Gadd**

Roderick MacLeod

Roderick Nicolson

Bob Smith and Paul Parkin

**Robert A Crampin and
Keith David Marshall**

Henry ‘Harry’ Stafford Colebourne

Wesley Orr



ORRIS MACLEOD

Plaque for Roderick "Big Nic" Nicolson, who died after volunteering to try to save two trapped workers from a 40-foot-high silo in Perth in December 1995



LUCY RAY

Friends, family and former colleagues of firefighter Ian Cameron, who died in a fire appliance collision in 1980, gathered for a plaque unveiling in Hull



An order of service for the ceremony in honour of Henry 'Harry' Stafford Colebourn who lost his life during hose testing in Chester, 1972



A historic fire appliance at the Red Plaque unveiling for Roderick MacLeod in Inverness, who died fighting a hotel fire in 1981



FBU general secretary Matt Wrack joined the unveiling of a plaque for Robert Crampin and Keith Marshall in Kidderminster



STEFANO CAGNONI

At the unveiling of a plaque for Arthur Batt-Rawden, Frederick Hawkins and Charles Gadd at Clerkenwell fire station in London

So far this year, £105,392 raised by the Firefighters 100 Lottery has been spent on DECON research and more than £30,000 on Red Plaques and events. The fund has also provided direct support for the family of a fallen firefighter and to an injured firefighter

More than £1 million has been raised since the lottery started in 2016

Mental health emergency

It is time to talk about mental health in the fire service. **Riccardo la Torre** introduces the union's latest mental health project

We are facing a mental health crisis in the fire and rescue service. Many studies have shown that mental health issues are far more common for UK firefighters than the general population.

More than half – 57% – of firefighters have thought about quitting the job due to struggles with their mental health.

85% of fire and rescue workers reported experiencing stress or poor mental health in response to a survey by Mind, the mental health charity.

Despite evidence that vast numbers of firefighters are grappling with their mental health, there has been little drive from leaders to investigate and address the full scale and causes of the problem.

That is why the FBU has commissioned the University of Central Lancashire to undertake one of the biggest research projects of its kind into mental health in the UK fire and

rescue service.

The project is led by Dr Carolina Campodonico, who specialises in clinical psychology and has first-hand experience of the impact of working in the emergency services on mental health through her work as a paramedic in Italy.

We want to better understand the type of support available to fire service employees, the scale and severity of the mental health crisis, and its underlying causes. With this knowledge that we can advocate for better mental health provision and tackle the issues causing this crisis head-on.

INCONSISTENT

In the first stages of the project, trade union reps and fire and rescue services have been surveyed on the policies and procedures in place to support employees with their mental health.

Early findings have indicated that while there is support available, it is inconsistent across the UK.

Funding for and the quality of mental health provision varies from fire service

to fire service. Some employers signpost firefighters and fire control staff to their occupational health departments, which do not have mental health specialists.

This leaves firefighters facing a postcode lottery in the support available to them when they are at their most vulnerable.

In comparison, countries like the USA, Canada and Australia are putting policies in place to support the mental health of first responders. The Australian government recently allocated \$4.5m

'Trying to make us resilient to mental health hazards isn't enough. We need to remove the hazards'



Dr Carolina Campodonico is leading the latest research into mental health in the fire and rescue service

(£2.25m) to create a national framework to reduce suicide and improve mental health.

We need national standards across the board to ensure every fire and rescue service employee gets the support they need when they are struggling.

WANING RESILIENCE

Attending traumatic incidents is an unavoidable part of the job for firefighters. But while chief fire officers are keen to talk about the impact of trauma, they are less willing to acknowledge the avoidable stressors that could be contributing to the mental health crisis.

Fourteen years of austerity overseen by fire service leaders has left the fire service, and its workers, less resilient.

Cuts to frontline jobs and resources means firefighters are over-stretched and over-worked, worrying about being able to do their job and save lives.

This, coupled with years of stagnant pay leaving firefighters struggling to pay the bills and taking on second jobs to

make ends meet, is likely contributing to stress and burnout.

Firefighters are also contending with fears that their job is making them ill. Our research findings released in January 2023 show that exposure to toxic contaminants is also contributing to higher rates of anxiety and depression among firefighters.

Proper funding, pay, and protection from contaminants are part of the solution – but we need proper data so we can demand action on these issues. Simply trying to make firefighters resilient to these hazards is not enough. We need to work to remove them as we would any other hazard in the workplace.

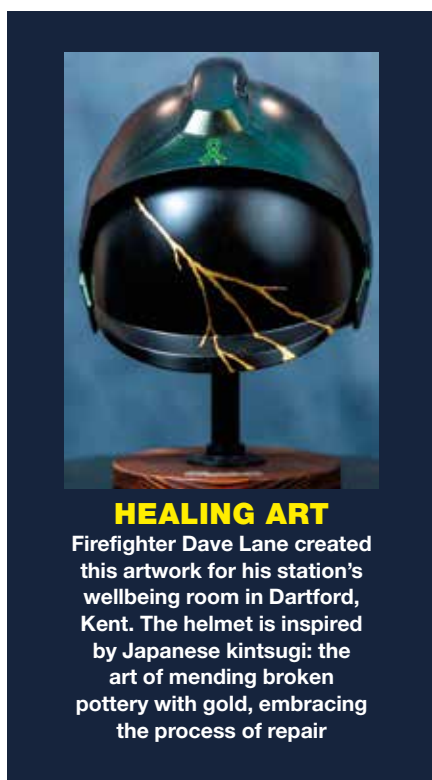
NEXT STEPS

In January, we will release a survey to gather information on firefighters' experiences and the key causes of mental health problems in the fire service.

This is a crucial step in the project to understand the real causes leading to poor mental health in our occupation, and to advocate for a change of direction alongside standardised, best-practice mental health provision.

We need a minimum of 10,000 serving, retired and out of trade firefighters to complete the survey to give an overall picture of the state of mental health in the UK fire and rescue service.

You can do your part to improve mental health in the fire service. Look out for the survey, complete it when it goes live, and tell your colleagues to fill it out too.



HEALING ART

Firefighter Dave Lane created this artwork for his station's wellbeing room in Dartford, Kent. The helmet is inspired by Japanese kintsugi: the art of mending broken pottery with gold, embracing the process of repair



Levelling the playing field

Ahead of the union's second disabled and neurodivergent members' forum this January, **Andrea Oates** speaks to firefighters about organising for improvements in the workplace

Dan Ascough is a station officer in London and an FBU neurodiversity and disability rep. In 2022, the brigade was found to be failing to provide adequate support for neurodivergent firefighters in the workplace: a situation mirrored across the UK.

Dan has lived experience of neurodiversity, and has been organising on the frontline to make improvements to firefighter training, resources and support.

TRAINING

Achievements in his brigade include the introduction of an online, video-based neurodiversity awareness package. Alongside the FBU dyslexia and dyspraxia diagnostic tool, these initiatives are now helping staff recognise that they may benefit from adjustments at work.

Reps can play a crucial role in reviewing specific areas of training and recommending improvements. Tactical ventilation training, for example, is currently being reviewed in London with



Launching the 'Neurodiversity in the workplace' guidance (l-r) Dan McNulty, Ben Selby, Hollie Codling, Charlie Batchelor, Janine Booth, James Collier, Karl Wager, Dan Ascough

the view that adding an extra day would reduce an overload of information being given in a short period.

"We need to make sure staff are trained to the best of their abilities," Dan explains. "If you're only training your staff up to 70% because you're not putting it in a format they can process, then it becomes a health and safety issue as well as an issue of inclusion."

WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Dan and colleagues have pushed for neurodivergent staff to be able to request

'Together we can tear down barriers, build on local progress and win improvements across the UK'

Ben Selby, assistant general secretary



At the first FBU disabled and neurodivergent members' forum

fixed desks, rather than hot-desking, as a reasonable adjustment.

A design board was put together so that neurodivergent firefighters were able to feed in to plans for a new headquarters, which is now set to include quiet spaces and individual working pods. And he has been working with the communications team to ensure that information is dyslexia friendly.

While there have inevitably been some challenges, he says, "It all comes down to education and making sure we get to all corners of the fire service."

He is now working on a two-day, face-to-face training package for junior managers and above in all areas – operational, control and green book – focusing on "understanding the different ways we process information". And an ongoing review aims to ensure the promotion process is neurodiversity friendly.

"It's not about giving anyone an advantage, but levelling the playing field," Dan says.

"A perfect example is not giving people questions on the spot. That can be hard for someone with ADHD, where your mind flies off in 10 different directions.

"We're looking at changing the process so that if your interview is at 10am, you are given questions an hour in advance so you can consider your answer.

"That's the same for all candidates so no one gets an advantage – it's in everyone's interest, including workers who may face obstacles but have not been diagnosed."

CREATING NETWORKS

Dan McNulty, Rhyl fire station temporary crew manager and FBU disability and neurodiversity rep for

Wales, has been driving improvements in the North Wales fire service.

When he was diagnosed with autism, dyslexia and dyspraxia three years ago, he found support from the service "basically non-existent" and set about creating a neurodiversity staff support network which now has around 50 members across North Wales.

The network is making changes in the fire service to "benefit everyone". For example, it has secured "Read&Write" software for every employee in North Wales, whether they are neurodivergent or not. This includes text readout, dictation functions, advanced spell check and colour filters.

"Everyone – and their families – have access to this and they can use it at home as well as work," says Dan. "That's probably our biggest win so far."

He is now pushing for neurodiversity passports to provide a portable record of needs and agreed adjustments to share with managers, HR and colleagues.

BUILDING A MOVEMENT

Both reps want to see the union's work in this area grow and are encouraging FBU members to get involved.

After the FBU annual conference passed a resolution to kickstart the union's work in this area, members and officials developed neurodiversity in the workplace guidance. This was launched at the first disabled and neurodivergent members' forum in March 2024, when members came together from across the country to share challenges and start organising.

"We know the fire service has a higher proportion of neurodiverse people within its ranks than a lot of other sectors," says Dan McNulty. "So while you may think it's not affecting you, the chances are it's affecting someone on your team or within your group."

■ The next FBU disabled and neurodivergent members' forum will take place on January 29–30 in Leeds. Apply before 20 December: bit.ly/fbu-DND-forum

KEY TERMS

Neurodiversity

The existence of people with different brain structures within a population, including people with autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, ADHD and Tourette's syndrome and more

Neurodivergent

Describes an individual whose brain functions in a way that differs from the dominant norm

It starts with **men**

Lewis Clark, Scotland east area chair, on why White Ribbon Day should inspire men to take action

White Ribbon Day, observed annually on 25 November, is a global movement dedicated to raising awareness about violence against women and girls (VAWG) and advocating for positive social change. It is a reminder of the importance of creating a culture of respect, equality and safety – not only in the communities we serve but also in our own workplaces.

This is not a women's issue. This is men's issue and men should take the lead to fix it. When the vast majority of

violence against women and girls comes from men, it is our duty as men to call it out.

By making a video for FBU socials on White Ribbon Day, Scotland had a fantastic opportunity to address this directly and, hopefully, change attitudes.

I initially thought about this purely from a fire and rescue service perspective, but I can see where this has been present throughout my life.

The “cheeky” comments, so-called “banter”, clear discrimination, and

physical violence. This is why it is important for us to challenge this and not just in our fire stations. This has to change, and it starts with we men.

This is not a national women's committee issue to fix, it's not a female firefighters' issue to fix, it's not your mum's, sister's, female cousin's or friends' issue to fix. It's a men's issue to fix.

If you are not actively saying no to violence against women you are not doing enough. It starts with us. It starts with men.



Maternity pay, harassment and more on the agenda

Katie Holloway, national women's committee chair, reports on a successful annual general meeting

The FBU national women's committee (NWC) held its AGM on 4 December in Cardiff, with delegates and observers attending from all over the UK.

We discussed key areas of ongoing work including:

- The Fight for 52 campaign for fair maternity pay
- Results of the Diana Holland report on internal union discipline, All Different

All Equal, and processes for complaints of discrimination

- The sexual harassment campaign and action plan from the report on sexual harassment
- Review of minimum workplace facilities
- Policy on domestic violence, including powerful testimony from a member and survivor
- Our upcoming NWC

school, 11–13 April 2025.

Guest speakers included Rosa from the Decrim Now sex workers' rights campaign. Nina Reece, new FBU equalities officer, provided counter arguments supporting the Nordic model. This is an approach to sex work adopted in Swedish and Norwegian law that includes criminalising buying, but not selling, sex.

In light of ASLEF's 2017 TUC congress motion, it is important for us all to be informed on the positions in this debate. The unsuccessful motion called for the decriminalisation of sex work.

We also voted on resolutions for the 2025 FBU conference. Our meeting was essential to steer NWC work for the coming year.



Meet the rep

Matthew Black
LGBT+ rep, North West region

1. What made you want to become a rep?

Coming to terms with being gay in my early teens set me on a path of standing up against injustices – dealing with discrimination, challenging discriminatory legislation, and supporting the fight for equal marriage. So stepping up as a union rep felt natural. It's a way to carry on that fight, making sure everyone at work has a voice and is treated with respect and dignity.

2. What is your proudest moment as a rep?

I'm incredibly proud of supporting LGBT+ members. It means the world to know I've made a real difference in someone's life by standing up for them, supporting them, or helping resolve a difficult situation.

3. Who are your ultimate heroes?

I'll focus on LGBT+ heroes for this. There's Harvey Milk, who inspired generations as the first openly gay elected official in California. Marsha P. Johnson, a trans activist and key figure at Stonewall, who co-founded the Gay Liberation Front and fought for homeless youth. And of course, RuPaul Charles – a trailblazer for drag culture and queer representation in mainstream media.

4. Describe yourself in three words.

Determined, empathic, committed

5. What was the last conversation you had that made you think differently about something?

I recently talked with a colleague about how children are being failed by a lack of mental health support. The pandemic took a big toll, and teachers need to be given the right resources to make a difference.

6. Which TV show could you not live without?

It's not a TV show, but I'm a big supporter of Liverpool FC. I'm lucky enough to catch a few matches in person each year, though tickets are as rare as hen's teeth!

7. If you weren't a firefighter, what would you be?

A musician! I have a degree in music and still play in bands. If I ever won the lottery, I'd spend my time travelling the world, playing and listening to live music.

8. If you could travel back or forward in time, where and when would you travel to and why?

I'd go back to the 60s, to watch The Beatles at the Cavern Club. It would be amazing to see them perform up close before they became a global phenomenon.



Legal Beagle

Employers' duty to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace

The Worker Protection Act came into force in October 2024. It amends the Equality Act 2010 by introducing a new duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment in the course of employment. It is designed to ensure employers take action to change workplace behaviours and eradicate sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment is defined as unwanted sexual conduct that violates a worker's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

The duty requires all employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.

Examples of risks given include staff working alone at night, and workforces which lack diversity and where there are power imbalances. Employers are expected to develop anti-harassment policies, engage staff and have effective reporting procedures.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission can take action if an employer fails to comply. And it can now increase the amount of compensation awarded to an employee by up to 25%.

Union reps can use the guidance to ensure employers are complying with their duty and request they consult with them on these preventive measures.

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[thompsonstradeunion.law/
trade-unions/fbu](https://thompsonstradeunion.law/trade-unions/fbu)



FBU GENERAL SECRETARY ELECTION

The FBU is currently holding an election for the position of General Secretary. The union is required both by its Rule Book and by law to hold this election every five years.

All FBU members have an equal, individual say.

**Voting OPENED on
Tuesday 10 December**

**Voting will CLOSE on
Tuesday 14 January**

Please note that, by law, this election must be held by postal ballot and that online voting is not possible.

In order to arrive in time, your ballot should be in the post by Wednesday 8 January ideally, and no later than Thursday 9 January.



Applications for officers' section school

The FBU's Officers' Section invites all members, watch commander/manager and above, to apply for their upcoming education event.

The school will cover key areas for officers:

- Understanding the flexible duty system
- Officer workloads and welfare
- DECON best practice guidance

The programme will also include a range of speakers and discussion sessions, and will be an opportunity to learn more about the work of the Officers' National Committee (ONC). Officers will share experiences, build networks, and develop the vital role officer organisation plays in the FBU.

It will take place from 12 to 14 March in Wortley Hall, South Yorkshire. All interested should speak to their RELO or email education@fbu.org.uk.



Wrack on the Road



MARK THOMAS

- 8 November – visited UCLan to see DECON and mental health research
- 10 November – paid respect to 997 firefighters killed during the Blitz at the Durham Remembrance Sunday event
- 12 November – met FBU reps from across the country at national school
- 21 November – spoke at the Manchester Law Centre about the warnings the union gave before the Grenfell Tower fire



ROSS HURD

- 2 December – updated firefighters from across Europe on the Grenfell inquiry when hosting the EPSU firefighters' network
- 4 December – first fire and rescue ministerial group meeting, representing firefighters in top level discussions of the sector
- 5-6 December – reps training in Northern Ireland
- 13 December – attending the 50th anniversary of the Worsley Hotel fire
- 16 December – speaking on LBC Cross Questions with Iain Dale

The feudal spirit

Station Cat pokes her nose into royal finances

The fire station in Poundbury has few friends. The *Architectural Review* called it “a ludicrous blend of suburban garage and clodhopping classicism”. FBU regional secretary Dave Roberts described it on television as “very imposing, built in a grand neo-classical style” and pointed out that its splendid mock balcony resembles the balcony in Buckingham Palace from which the King sometimes waves to his subjects.

In the late 1980s, West Dorset district council perceived a need for more housing near Dorchester, and the only suitable land was 400 acres belonging to the Duchy of Cornwall, which has been owned by the King or the Prince of Wales ever since Edward III gave it to his son the Black Prince.

So Charles was able to dictate what went up there, and he commissioned his favourite architect, Luxembourg's Leon Krier, to design a modern village in a classical style. Most of the buildings are designed by Krier or another professional architect, but the then Prince designed the fire station (pictured) himself.

If it was a gift from a monarch to his grateful people, we'd probably say “Thank you, sir” and turn a blind eye to the fact that it was huge and pompous

and probably the most expensive fire station in Britain. But it isn't a gift. The fire station isn't just balm for the King's ego. It's also a nice little earner. A Channel 4 *Dispatches* investigation reveals that he leased the land to the local fire service for £612,000.

The Duchies of Cornwall and Lancaster charge commercial rents, but, unlike other commercial companies, they pay neither corporation nor capital gains tax.

Among other ways in which His Majesty supplements his £132m income are: charging Poundbury church rent; charging the RNLI for the use of land on which its lifeboats rest when they are not at sea; and using the Duchy of Lancaster's feudal right to charge for cables crossing the foreshore to wring money out of windfarms.

The revelation that has caused most anger is that the King is earning £830,000 a year from renting a warehouse to Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust in London.

Your Cat learns that Pat McFadden, the government minister responsible for the relationship with the Royal Family, is being petitioned to stop this scandal. The petition is at bit.ly/NHS-KC



... then there's the absence of a fire alarm or sprinkler system, untreated timber and dry straw exposed to a naked flame ...

25-year badges



Ant Bholah (r), Dorset and Wiltshire, receives his 25-year badge from officers' rep Jason Moncrieff



Dan Perrett (l), Dorset and Wiltshire, receives his 25-year badge from officers' rep Jason Moncrieff



Jason Moncrieff (l), officers' rep Dorset and Wiltshire, receives his 25-year-badge from brigade secretary Andy Corben



Steven Gregory (r), white watch, Burnley, Lancashire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Kev Wilkie with Nicola Fletcher, Mick Pettigrew, Ashley Rothwell, Dominic Hindle, Jack Watkinson, Rob Snedden, and Shaun Rigg



Jason Browne (r), blue watch, Redhill Park, Dorset and Wiltshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Janine McCumiskey with colleagues (l-r) Lee Thomas, Simon Hart, Nathan Cotton and Phil King



Matt Jackson, (r). Kensington, London, receives his 25-year badge from SW London area secretary Dave Young



Mark Ware (r), green watch, Poole, Dorset & Wiltshire, receives his 25-year badge from membership organiser Scott Blandford with colleagues (l-r) Mark Greenham, Pete Stone, Mark Wilkinson, Nathan Davis, Craig Beavers, and Jason Thorne



Lee Horner (r), red watch, Bishop Auckland, County Durham and Darlington, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Guy Lawes



Alex Marland (l), Adwick, South Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade chair Stu Smith with branch members



Jason Lister (r), Northamptonshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade chair Jed Goodfellow with training department colleagues



Michael Chong (l), green watch, Corby, Northamptonshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Chris Lane



Oli Prior (l), Charing, Kent, receives his 25-year badge from station rep Nigel Collins



Sam Blackburn (l), Bingley, West Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from division rep Jim Davies



Mark Spinks (l), blue watch, Bexley, London, receives his 25-year badge from borough rep Tommy Lewis



Mike Rolph (r), Reigate, Surrey, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Simon Harris



Chris Burke (r), Bradford, West Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep George Rostron with colleagues from red and white watch looking on



Dave German (r), blue watch, Livingston, West Lothian, Scotland, receives his 25-year badge from fellow branch rep Brendan Stutt with colleagues looking on



Iain McGarry (r), Glenrothes, Fife, Scotland, receives his 25-year badge from health and safety rep Ian Stewart



John Senior (l), Bingley, West Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from division rep Jim Davies



Julian Barron (l), blue watch, Bromley, London, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Scott Pinkney

»



Ian Finlay (r), receives his 25-year badge from then executive council member for Wales Cerith Griffiths at a demonstration at Rhyl fire station



Pete Smith (l), West Midlands, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Philippa Smith, with members of the training department (l-r) Sean Yeardeley, Sonia Stoney, Simon Gilbert, and Rebecca Allsopp



John Hedley (r), white watch, Peaks Lane, Humberside, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Sam Horton



Brett McMahon (r), blue watch, Bathgate, West Lothian, Scotland, receives 25-year badge from Lewis Clark (l) Scotland East area chair



Andrew Webster (l), green watch, Dumfries, Scotland, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Duncan Gracie



Carol Nowell (l), white watch, control, Edinburgh, receives her 25-year badge from branch secretary Paul Leonard



Roy Tait (r), Norfolk, receives his 25-year badge from regional treasurer Harry Powell



Dean Lawson (r), white watch, Homerton, London, receives his 25-year badge from regional organiser Gareth Cook



Andrew Howard (l), green watch, Wolverhampton, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Morgan Taylor with (l-r) Karl Ruston, Jack Leavesley, Daniel Rogers, Daron Thompson, James Murphy



Karl Droy (r), blue watch, Mereway, Northamptonshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade chair Jed Goodfellow with colleagues looking on



Andy Wilkins (r), white watch, Solihull, West Midlands, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Andy Potts with (l-r) Daniel Elliot, Peter Beadsworth, Jack Baker and Elizabeth Kirk



Dave Smith (r), Christchurch, Dorset and Wiltshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Andy Corben with Christchurch on-call section

40-year badge



David Webb (l), West Bromwich, West Midlands, receives his 40-year badge from branch health and safety rep **Chris Ryan** with members of green and white watches



Stevie Johnstone (r), Lockerbie, Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland, receives his 25-year badge from RDS organiser **Kerry McCrone**



Craig Huxley (l) South Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary **Matt Nicholls**



Scott Hill (l), green watch, Dumfries, Scotland, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary **Duncan Gracie**



Laura Marr (l), community action team, Stirling, Clackmannanshire and Fife, Scotland, receives her 25-year badge from rep **Stuart Taylor**

Please send high resolution digital files or prints to: firefighter@fbu.org.uk or Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE

For your image to look its best, we need the original, full-resolution image. One lifted from a website may not do justice to a unique occasion. We do our best with images that are low resolution, taken directly into a bright light or suffer from camera-shake, or have other problems, but cannot perform miracles. Please include details for each image – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where/when it was taken.

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your brigade organiser of any change of address and head office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

England, Wales and N Ireland

0800 100 6061

Scotland 0800 089 1331

The line provides advice for personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues. For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.



THOMPSONS
SOLICITORS



**NO ONE SHOULD
HAVE TO HIDE WHO
THEY ARE AT WORK**



LEADING THE FIGHT FOR
A FAIRER FIRE SERVICE

**EQUALITY
MATTERS**

ALL DIFFERENT ALL EQUAL
FAIRNESS AT WORK POLICY

