



FIRE BRIGADES UNION

Scotland *Newsletter*

THE PROFESSIONAL VOICE OF YOUR FIREFIGHTERS

August 2022

Welcome to the Summer edition of the FBU Scotland newsletter for 2022, introducing our newly elected Regional Secretary and covering our campaign work on the Scottish Governments draft spending review, the NJC pay offer and next steps, the ongoing push to raise awareness of the FBU DECON campaign that has helped inform the World Health Organisations decision to recognise firefighting as a cancer-causing profession and Red Plaque events in Scotland. There's also information on our victories, winning for our RDS members on CPD, and our successful challenge to the initial refusal by SFRS to adhere to annual leave arrangements in the Grey Book for members testing positive for COVID 19. There is also information on the importance of ensuring your details are up to date on the new FBU Phoenix membership system, a matter of heightened importance given members rejection of the NJC Employers insulting pay offer, and where that may lead.

As your EC member I've been ensuring that Scottish Firefighters voices continue to be heard not just at Scottish Government level but at a UK level. Since the first quarter newsletter I've led a delegation attending the STUC annual congress where we moved resolutions on pensions immediate detriment, a demand, backed by a threat of industrial action, for SFRS to agree a mechanism to return to the agreed safe crewing model and had speakers in debates on solidarity with Palestine and public sector pay. Our delegation to FBU National Conference in May were noted for their informed and passionate contributions when delivering our resolutions and representing Scottish members during other debates.

The importance of backing from the STUC cannot be understated, by having our resolutions passed we

now have around half a million Scottish Trade Unionists in our corner to back us in our efforts to deliver pension justice and maintain our safe crewing model. Our National Conference is our parliament, it is the decision-making body of the FBU where resolutions brought through our structures by members on branches are debated and voted on to become FBU policy.

Following a two-year pause brought about by the global COVID 19 pandemic, tentative talks, facilitated through the NJC Joint Secretaries, have recommenced between the FBU and SFRS continuing to explore role map expansion for increased remuneration for Scottish Firefighters.

Both sides have remained committed to the principles of reaching agreement throughout the last two years and initial talks are being conducted in a positive, open manner with all parties keen to progress. There are obvious and significant challenges that didn't exist in 2019, brought about by the financial impacts on global, UK and subsequently Scottish Government budgets caused by the pandemic, war in Ukraine and Brexit. If a principal agreement can be reached then it will be vital for both the Service and FBU members to lobby and make the case to the Scottish Government to provide funding beyond the current SFRS budget and beyond the figures contained in the draft spending review. Plans are already being put in place for a mass member mobilisation and demonstration ahead of the Scottish

Government budget announcement in December, which is covered in the Regional Secretaries update later in this newsletter.

I, along with the Regional Secretary and Regional Treasurer met with the Minister for Community Safety, Ash Regan, on 28 June. We made the case for increased funding for the



SFRS for role expansion if agreement is reached, highlighted that the UK Home Office White Paper – Reforming the Fire and Rescue Service (England) will have significant and detrimental impacts on Scottish Firefighters and our ability to collectively bargain and imposing further regressive restrictions on the FBU and our members whilst giving carte blanche to Chief Officers to dictate what activities our members are involved in. The paper also proposes pushing through the failed governance model of Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners across England. The Minister was clear that the Scottish Government view industrial relations very differently to the UK Home Office.

During this meeting we drew attention to the significant research and work

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carried out by the FBU into carcinogenic fire contaminants and our DECON campaign. This was an opportunity for us to again highlight to the Minister the need for urgent and significant investment into the SFRS to be able to realise the aims of DECON and keep Firefighters safe in their workplaces. The existing SFRS estate is mixed from new builds to those which are 80+ years old, some stations have no running water, many have no dignified washing or changing facilities. Without investment the condition of the estate, our workplaces, is only going to fall into further disrepair.

Against the backdrop of improved industrial relations in Scotland there is the insulting 2% offer from the Employers side of the NJC. Whilst they make the case that Fire and Rescue Service budgets across the UK cannot provide anything more, their Firefighters, our members, face increasing hardship as the cost-of-living emergency escalates.

At the time of writing the UK Home secretary gave the following response to the Police pay review body *"The Home Office will provide forces with additional funding for pay over the Spending Review period of at least £70m in 2022/23, £140m in 2023/24 and £140m in 2024/25. This will mean funding allocations to policing this year of £17 billion, a strong and sustained investment to allow policing to deliver."*

In response to the rejection of the 2% NJC offer by our members the Employers side of the NJC have

written to the Home Office making the case for increased funding to support an improved offer. This is clearly a welcome development but does not change our course. Until a significantly improved offer is received, we continue to organise and plan for a UK wide ballot on industrial action, including strike action.

Such ballots take time to organise to ensure the ballot and the outcome complies with UK anti Trade Union Law. It is vital that members immediately update their details on the FBU membership system: Name, Primary (Fire Service) work location and role/rank must be up to date in order to produce a legally compliant matrix in line with the legislation. Branches and Sections must

continue to organise, agitate and most importantly ensure they have structures in place to ensure rapid communication direct with members can be achieved.

This is an incredibly busy and important time for FBU Officials and members, we may call meetings that some find highly unorthodox but organising in the modern world has changed. We are a country covering over 30,000 square miles with members working on Islands and in remote rural communities. Online meetings for engagement on big issues will be a vital tool going forward, the ability to submit questions ahead of meetings allows answers to be sought and provided in meetings which in turn allows more time for debate and additional questions.

We are facing the reality that for the first time in 20 years, Firefighters across the whole of the UK will take coordinated industrial action. Now is the time for our membership to be united, we would never look for debate and differing views to be silenced, this is the fundamental principle of a functioning and democratic Trade Union. However, we all have to recognise that to take on and challenge a fundamentally right-wing UK Government, more intent on protecting the wealth of the rich than protecting workers, we have to pull together in a singular direction. Unity is Strength

Colin Brown
Executive Council member



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Regional Secretary update

Members will be aware of the Scottish Government's resource spending review announcement at the end of May and the subsequent FBU all members Scotland circular that was circulated to your branch in early June. The announcement detailed the Scottish Government's indicative plans to freeze the budget for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for the next five years, a plan which would mean a real terms budget cut of tens of millions of pounds.

The implications of this cannot be overstated. If the indicative resource spending review becomes a reality the consequences for members will be severe. Over 80% of that budget is used to fund wages of SFRS employees, such a real terms cut will threaten further reductions in firefighter numbers, changes to shift systems, reduction in crewing models and station closures. None of these outcomes can be acceptable to FBU members.

Such a freeze would inevitably also impact on members pay. Annual NJC pay increases are funded from the SFRS resource budget, as would any proposal reached between the FBU and SFRS in continuing to explore role map expansion for increased remuneration for Scottish Firefighters.

The Scottish Government will publish the 2023-24 Scottish budget in December of this year. To protect jobs, shift systems and crewing levels as well as improving members pay to combat the long-term erosion of our wages and mitigate the spiralling cost of living crisis, it is absolutely imperative that the budget is substantially increased and the threat of a budget freeze is removed.

Regional and Area officials have been lobbying Ministers and MSPs to argue this case, however a huge response from members over the autumn will be pivotal in winning this argument. Over the coming weeks and months your local Area, Sectional and branch officials will be provided with information on how you can all play a role in helping our union win this fight.

The key event in this campaign will be a mass member lobby of the Scottish Parliament building in Edinburgh on Thursday 27 October this year.



I make no apologies in stressing how absolutely critical it will be that every single FBU member in Scotland who can possibly attend this demonstration does so, and urge every one of you to start making the necessary personal arrangements to ensure you are able to attend on the 27th. Officials can make all the arguments we like with politicians in regard to the issues members face, both operationally and in regard to their pay, however nothing makes this point clearer to those in power than five hundred FBU members standing outside their workplace and lobbying for their support.

Information on times, speakers, travel arrangements, etc for the day will be communicated out to your branch officials over the coming weeks. To this end it is also critical that your branch has active reps in place so that all members are aware of this information when it is sent out.

As a minimum every FBU branch should have a branch Secretary, Chair, Health and Safety rep and Union Learning rep (ULR) in place, and on stations every watch should have a watch rep in place as well. The reality is that whilst many of our branches have these structures in place, not all do – and that is counterproductive for ensuring that all our members are represented and that our union is as democratic as possible. If your branch has vacancies in officials, I would urge you to work collectively

to resolve this, and consider taking on a role as a leader in your workplace.

In finishing I want to record my thanks to the branches who nominated me in my recent election as Regional Secretary. It is humbling for members to put their faith in me and I will work with

my fellow officials at all levels of the union to fight for the best interests of FBU members in Scotland. To that end I would encourage members at all branches where I am yet to visit to invite both myself, or any one of the other Regional officials, to come to your workplace and speak to your members at branch meetings. Whilst the very size of our region with close to four hundred workplaces creates huge logistical challenges, it is imperative that members are given the opportunity to have engagement with the officials who are ultimately representing them.

There are fights ahead for this union where our unity will be tested. It is that unity that will see us win those fights.

John McKenzie
Scottish Regional Secretary

Covid Absence Annual Leave

Last summer the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) released a communication to all staff, to advise that from 20 July 2021 the Service would be changing the way in which they managed Covid related absence. The rationale given for this was to attempt to avoid detrimental impacts in relation to sick pay and attendance management triggers.

This change meant that if an individual confirmed positive for COVID-19, SFRS would not reallocate any annual leave lost during the first ten days of absence. Thereafter a fit note would be required and normal sickness absence procedures would be applied from the eleventh day. Regional officials raised concerns that this change was detrimental to our members and went against the Scottish Government Fair Work Statement that 'Any absence relating to COVID-19 should not affect future sick pay entitlement or other entitlements like holiday or accrued time'.



Having sought legal advice Regional officials also raised contractual concerns that this alteration could result in our members not receiving their full contractual annual leave entitlement. Collective grievances were submitted by FBU members and subsequent meetings with the FBU and the

Service took place. During these meetings the Service agreed to review this process, and subsequently accepted that the position inadvertently prevented individuals who were absent, following a positive COVID-19 test, from being able to reallocate pre-booked annual leave that they would otherwise have been able to do.

Following our union raising these concerns with the Service, an agreement was reached to recompense individuals affected. A significant result from FBU fighting for our members to receive what they were due!

FBU Scotland RDS CPD win

Earlier this year Regional officials became aware that some RDS members were not being paid the full level of CPD payment that they were entitled to. Following discussions with SFRS management it became clear that this was not an intentional decision by the employer, rather it was the result of an administrative error.

In brief the issue was that RDS members who work on average more than ten and a half hours per week over the course of a year should have their CPD payment increased to reflect this, however in error this has not been actioned since the current SFRS CPD policy was negotiated in October 2018. Letters have now been sent out to all affected members from the employer to cover backdated payments over the last three years.

Once again it is our union which has fought for the pay that retained firefighters are due. Action not words!



THE GOOD CAUSES

The Firefighters 100 Lottery Fund shall be administered appropriately by the Fire Brigades Union for the future benefit of all firefighters and their bereaved families in accordance with the following good cause criteria:

<https://www.firefighters100lottery.co.uk/support/firefighters/buytickets>



Networking in Brussels

The FBU Scotland Regional Health & Safety official, Barry Johnstone, recently attended the EPSU (European Public Service Union) firefighter networking meeting in Brussels, on behalf of members.

This was a high-profile event with the purpose of the visit to highlight the issues facing firefighters across Europe, specifically in regard to cancer-causing contaminants, and the research and work carried out with the FBU led DECON project, which is crucial to firefighters' health and wellbeing.

The event was attended by firefighters from across Europe, including the UK, Sweden, Poland, France, and Italy. Over the course of two days the delegation visited the European Parliament buildings to lobby MEPs from across Europe, highlighting these issues and raising better awareness around the critical work that has been carried out. This included evidence that firefighters are at greater risk from cancer-causing contaminants within the workplace environment, and measures must now be taken to prevent risk and protect members. The delegation also attended debates within the parliament, which included matters on asbestos and how the EU are seeking to address this threat to workers across Europe.

The delegation was joined on the second day by Professor Anna Stec who presented the work carried out by her team at the UCLan university, and how these studies have helped to shape the FBU DECON project. The commitment and dedication from the team was clear to see and the findings from the studies carried out are vital in assisting the FBU in the quest to



create safer working environments for firefighters and acknowledgement from the employers that firefighters face a higher risk from cancer, and need protection not just from contaminants, but also from the distressing impact of a cancer diagnosis.

This was an excellent opportunity for the delegation to meet with Professor Stec, which has subsequently led to Barry working with Regional Officials in putting plans in place for Professor Stec to visit Scotland in November. This visit will include meetings with FBU officials, SFRS senior management and the SFRS contaminants group and hopefully also a wider meeting with FBU members, to discuss the DECON project, and the latest studies Anna and her team have carried out.

The FBU are also in the process of arranging a meeting with the Scottish Government, during Professor Stec's

stay, to raise the issues in relation to cancer causing contamination of firefighters and in light of the International Agency for Research of Cancer (IARC) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) classification of cancer division reclassified firefighting as a Group 1 carcinogenic profession.

The FBU will continue to keep members fully updated on the progress of the DECON project and would encourage all members to continue to play the firefighter 100 lottery, which funds the DECON project. Link below.

<https://www.firefighters100lottery.co.uk>

We would also encourage all members to view the full DECON report which can be found by following the link below along with DECON videos from the campaign:

<https://www.fbu.org.uk/campaigns/decon-fire-contaminants>

Don't forget that a comprehensive list of legal services are available to members and their families.

Information leaflets are available and details can be found on the legal services website



Contact the FBU Legal Service on

0808 100 6061

www.thompsonstradeunion.law/fbu

50 year anniversary Red Plaque unveiling Kilbirnie Street Fire

On 25 August 1972, seven members of the Glasgow Fire Service sadly lost their lives in the line of duty, fighting a warehouse fire at 70-72 Kilbirnie Street, Glasgow.

What started as a routine industrial premises fire resulted in one of the highest losses of life for UK Fire Service's at a single incident in peacetime.

In honour of their memory, and the sacrifice they gave, their tragic deaths will be marked by the unveiling of a Red Plaque, funded by The Fire Brigades Union 100 Lottery. In line with the locations of other FBU commemorative Red Plaque locations across the UK, this will be sited and unveiled at the scene of the fire at Kilbirnie Street, on the warehouse building where the fire took place.

The unveiling ceremony will be held on Sunday 28 August 2022, on the 50 year anniversary of the fire, with an open invitation to all FBU members, families and friends wishing to attend to show their respects.



The ceremony will commence at 13:30hrs and will include speeches from FBU senior officials, SFRS Chief Officer and the Lord Provost, with SFRS Heritage vehicles also in attendance.

The ceremony is scheduled to conclude at 14:15hrs with the laying of wreaths, and all attendees are then welcome for light refreshments at Pollok Fire Station, the only remaining operational fire station that any of the seven fallen firefighters served at.

The FBU would welcome all who wish to attend to join us in commemorating our fallen comrades and the ultimate sacrifice they gave.

FBU Political Fund Contributions

In December 2015 the FBU affiliated to the Labour Party, a decision taken by our national Conference. However, delegates to Conference were clear that such an affiliation would exclude contributions made by our members who work in Scotland and Northern Ireland, taking into account the different political positions within these parts of the UK.

The law states that unions must have a separate Political Fund to pay for certain types of political campaigning. The amount currently paid into the FBU political fund from member's overall monthly contributions is 78p.

Contributing to the political fund allows us to engage with politics and politicians on every level. The fund is used to support lobbies of the Scottish government to demand budget investment in the SFRS, to finance online campaign activity, produce reports, organise rallies and demonstrations and pay for leaflets, posters and petitions.

If the FBU were to lose its Political Fund, much of the work the Union does could be seriously hampered. Campaigns such as DECON, NO2

Fire Deaths, the defence of Emergency Fire Control members and our risk management framework strategy would be put in jeopardy. Indeed, any number of bread and butter workplace campaigns to improve your health and safety would be undermined. Ensuring that politicians understand the implications of their decisions for Firefighters and Firefighters Control working at the sharp-end of service delivery is central to the FBU's work.

As the law defines much of the Union's work as potentially 'political', this is why we need to keep the Political Fund to pay for our current and future campaigns. FBU members recognise that in the current climate, our political fund is more important than ever to our efforts to stand up for firefighters and the communities we serve.

Politics is at the very heart of everything the FBU does, with firefighters currently facing two of the most significant challenges we have ever faced: government attacks on pensions and the worst cuts in the history of the fire and rescue service.

Keeping the Political Fund is vital to defend the rights the FBU has already won, to ensure that the Union can continue to campaign for new rights and improvements for members and continue to take workplace campaigns into the political arena - influence political decisions and have a say on changes in the law.

KEEP UP TO DATE

With the latest news on the
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New FBU Phoenix Membership System

The FBU have introduced a new membership system which will include, in the future, the addition of a Mobile App for members to update personal details, access national and regional information and keep up to date with the latest FBU news.

Due to ongoing work on the system, members presently cannot update personal information online however, the Area Organisers within the region can update any changes to details meantime on behalf of members.

It is crucial your membership details are up to date on the new FBU Phoenix membership system, as a matter of heightened

importance, given member's rejection of the NJC Employers insulting pay offer, and where that may lead.

Please see below organiser contacts for FBU Scotland:

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WEST AREA ORGANISER
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Direct Debit

The Fire Brigades Union paid out nearly £150,000 nationally on administration fees to Fire and Rescue Services to process FBU Contributions on behalf of members! Switch your membership to Direct Debit now to avoid these unnecessary costs

www.fbu.org.uk/form/direct-debit-form

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REGIONAL EDUCATION/LEARNING REP

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REGIONAL LGBT REP

Vacant

25 Year Membership Presentations



Alan McGregor, FF city of Edinburgh CAT team receiving 25 year recognition from Crewe Toll branch Secretary Ronnie Silverston.



SC Falkirk and West Lothian Andy Rae (R) receiving 25 year recognition from Regional Chair Gus Sproul



FF Ali Hosie Dalkeith Green watch (L) receiving 25 year recognition from Regional Chair Gus Sproul



Dalkeith Green watch WC Bob Hunter (R) receiving 25 year recognition from Regional Chair Gus Sproul



CC Gary Stewart, Glenrothes Amber watch (L) receiving 25 year recognition from Glenrothes branch Sec Stevie Wann.



CC Dougie Morrison TSA receiving 25 year recognition from Stirling Branch Sec Rachel Rogers

Firefighters Memorial Day



EC Member Colin Brown, Regional Treasurer Seona Hart & crews from Cowcaddens laying wreaths on Firefighters Memorial Day



Perth Fire Station Firefighters Memorial Day

International Workers Memorial Day



Regional Fairness at Work Rep, Melanie Gibb, speaking at International Workers Memorial Day on behalf of FBUI Members

