

Firefighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union

NATIONAL TIME TO DELIVER RALLY

PROMISES TO POLICIES

08.10.2024
WESTMINSTER
LONDON

August/September 2024



www.fbu.org.uk

This is the first issue of *Firefighter* magazine to be published under a Labour government in more than 14 years.

No one working in, or paying attention to, the fire and rescue service will be oblivious to the damage done by Tory rule.

As we report, only this month freedom of information requests by the FBU have uncovered the scale of job losses since 2010. Britain has lost 12,295 firefighter jobs – amounting to 21% of the total.

Now is the time to fight for positive change.

Ahead of the election, the FBU fought successfully for a series of commitments from Labour: to roll back the authoritarian anti-union laws of recent years, to safeguard collective bargaining for our pay and conditions, and to reintroduce national standards in the fire and rescue service.

The Firefighters Manifesto, which we published last year, was a good start. Now, it is down to firefighters to push Labour to deliver on its promises.

Recent years have demonstrated how much we can achieve when we stand together. We must roll back the legacy of underfunding and fragmentation of recent decades and win a fire and rescue service that is fit for the future.

On Tuesday 8 October, the FBU is calling a national rally and lobby of Westminster to take our case into the heart of the UK government.

We need hundreds of firefighters, fire control staff and other FBU members to come from all corners of the country. Please email your brigade secretary if you can make it.

FAR-RIGHT RIOTS

As we report on page 4, this August has seen some of the worst far-right violence in modern British history. Mosques, migrant



Matt Wrack

Now we must push this government to deliver



Matt Wrack greets firefighters at the Grenfell silent march, Friday 14 June 2024

accommodation, lawyers' offices, advice centres, homes and businesses have been targeted. People of colour have been attacked in the streets.

The FBU stands in solidarity with all those facing racist, anti-migrant and Islamophobic attacks and intimidation.

Austerity, cutting pay and trashing public services were choices made by right-wing politicians in the interests of big business – not by migrants.

Politicians have a duty to offer an alternative, and to

directly take on racism and anti-migrant rhetoric.

GRENFELL

More than seven years on from the Grenfell Tower fire, we expect the public inquiry to release its final report on 4 September.

Grenfell was a tragedy, but it was also a crime caused by deregulation and by political decisions at the heart of government. Time and time again, profit was put ahead of human life.

We will stand shoulder to shoulder with the community to demand justice for the 72

Did you know ...?



Unprecedented wildfires last year in Canada, in which eight firefighters lost their lives, were at least three times more likely due to climate change, according to the first annual *State of Wildfires* report co-led by the University of East Anglia, the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, the UK Met Office and the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts

lives that were lost.

FBU members should attend a briefing at 6.30pm on 5 September. Details have been emailed to members.

HEALTH AND SAFETY LAW

This summer marks 50 years since the introduction of the Health and Safety at Work Act, a landmark achievement for the trade union movement. While unscrupulous bosses cut corners, health and safety reps keep workers protected.

On breathing apparatus, fire contaminants and basic safety measures, changes to the law are vital – but trade unionism and collective strength are the ultimate guarantors of our rights at work. We must organise like our lives depend on it – because they do.

FAREWELL

In recent weeks, the FBU has been saying goodbye to a number of valued staff who are not coming with the union as we prepare to move Head Office to central London.

It would be wrong not to give a special thanks to Anna Zych, whose work behind the scenes has been a crucial part of the success of *Firefighter* magazine for many years. She will be greatly missed.



In this issue

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2024

NEWS

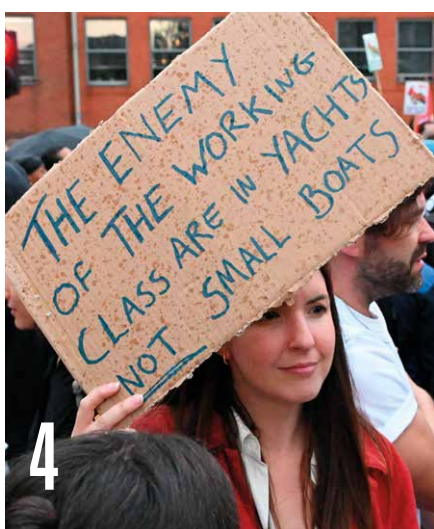
- 4 FBU calls for unity as the far right riots
- 5 Union research reveals impact of austerity
- 6 FBU pledges support for bullying victims

FEATURES

- 10 **October rally**
Matt Wrack explains why now is the time to fight for change
- 14 **A rogues' gallery**
Our guide to 14 years of Tory misrule
- 16 **'We made history'**
A group of 1974 trainees look back over the years and the 1977 national strike
- 18 **Humanitarian aid for Palestine**
Scottish firefighters' assistance impounded by Israeli military

REGULARS

- 5 **Sounding off**
Bus fires
- 7 **News focus**
Covid preparedness report
- 8 **The Big Picture**
Grenfell report
- 20 **Equalities**
FBU at the TUC LGBT+ conference
- 21 **Meet the rep**
Barry Johnstone Region 1, Scotland, Health & Safety Rep
- 21 **Legal Beagle**
Water rescue
- 22 **Noticeboard**
Win a luxury holiday
- 23 **Station cat**
Planning law failure
- 24 **Long service badges**



Firefighter

Published by the Fire Brigades Union
Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road
Kingston upon Thames KT2 7AE
www.fbu.org.uk

Firefighter production team:
Michael Chessum, Alice Dann, Lisa Irving,
Gabiella Matkin and Alan Slingsby
Cover image: Jess Hurd

Print: Walstead Roche, Victoria Business Park,
Roche, Victoria, Saint Austell PL26 8LX

Firefighter is mailed in a 100% compostable wrapper. Please do not recycle the wrapper but dispose of it in your home compost heap, your garden waste or food waste bin.



NEWS

CREWING

Fire authority delays crew of three plans as FBU protests

p6



COVID REPORT

Austerity and underfunding highlighted

p7



FAR RIGHT

FBU calls for unity as the far right riots



SEE LIFECAPITAL/ALAMY

Firefighters have joined thousands of anti-racist protesters in taking to the streets in opposition to far-right rioting this August. After three young children were killed in a horrific stabbing attack on 29 July in Southport, far-right networks used the tragic deaths to launch a series of racist attacks.

Places of worship, hotels housing migrants, and support centres for asylum seekers were targeted. People of colour were attacked on the street, mosques vandalised, and the businesses and homes of ethnic minorities and migrants have been vandalised.

On Wednesday 8 August, local communities mobilised against far-right plans to target immigration support centres across the UK.

Anti-racist demonstrators gathered in towns and cities including Belfast, Birmingham, Cardiff, Liverpool, Southend and Glasgow. 10,000 anti-racists filled the streets outside Walthamstow station in London. Far-right activists abandoned their plans or were overwhelmingly outnumbered.

Trade unionists have joined forces

with anti-racism campaigners, civil society organisations and local community networks.

Stand Up to Racism called a national day of protest on Saturday 10 August, with tens of thousands turning out. 5,000 people massed outside one of Reform UK's offices, to protest Nigel Farage's divisive rhetoric in recent weeks.

Firefighters were on the frontline of responding to the rioting. In Liverpool, a fire appliance had a window smashed, and far-right arsonists burning down a library and food bank attempted to block firefighters.

In Tamworth and Rotherham, rioters set fire to hotels housing asylum seekers, trapping people inside by blocking exits, and daubed the walls with racist graffiti.

The FBU leadership wrote to union

'The organised far right has used these tragic events to mount a deliberate campaign of racist violence and intimidation'

brigade secretaries asking them to reach out to local mosques, migrant groups and civil society organisations to offer support and build links.

The FBU issued a statement condemning the violence. Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said: "Firefighters were among the first to respond to the appalling stabbings in Southport last week. The FBU sends its thoughts and condolences to all those affected."

"It is clear that the organised far right has used these tragic events to mount a deliberate campaign of racist violence and intimidation. This situation has been decades in the making. Mainstream politicians and media outlets have stoked anti-migrant hate and Islamophobia while driving down the living standards of most people."

"The FBU stands in solidarity with those facing racism, violence and intimidation, and we stand for the unity of all workers against a cynical divide-and-rule agenda."

"The trade union movement has a proud history of mobilising against the far right, and it must continue to do so."

Union research reveals the impact of 14 years of cuts

After 14 years of austerity there are too few firefighters to guarantee resilience and public safety, according to new figures obtained by the FBU.

Freedom of information requests reveal that, since 2010, more than 8,000 wholetime firefighter jobs have been cut, while one in five retained firefighter posts have gone. Almost one in three control staff have been axed. The total is 12,000.

England is the worst hit of the four UK administrations, with 10,000 (or 22.5%) jobs cut. In Scotland, there was a decrease of 1,400 (or 18%) in firefighters. Some 500 posts (or 13%) have been cut in Wales, while Northern Ireland has lost

230 (or 12%) of its firefighters.

The figures also expose the scale of “wholetime-retained” contracts.

There are 4,000 firefighters with a wholetime (full-time) contract as well as a retained (on call) contract – either with the same brigade or with another service.

These “wholetime-retained” contracts mean that one firefighter is counted as doing two jobs. This double counting means that the numbers actually employed and available are significantly less than official figures suggest.

The FBU is urging the Labour government to invest in the fire service as a matter of urgency.

BETHNAL GREEN FIRE



Mural honours two who died in line of duty

A mural honouring firefighters Billy Faust and Adam Meere, who lost their lives responding to a fire in Bethnal Green, East London, 20 years ago has been unveiled.

Local artist David Speed was commissioned to paint a tribute on the side of Whitechapel fire station, where the two worked.

On 20 July 2004, firefighters responded to a fire at a three-storey building. Billy and Adam were rescued by colleagues following

an explosion in the basement, but died shortly after arriving in hospital.

Adam Meere, who was 27, had qualified as a firefighter three months earlier. Billy Faust, 36, had served at Whitechapel for seven years.

Firefighter Fred Hulbert, who helped carry the injured firefighters from the burning building, went on to lead a campaign to improve equipment, communications, and

training. Firefighters lobbied parliament in 2008, leading to key improvements to safety procedures.

The unveiling was attended by the bereaved families, retired and serving staff, alongside the London fire commissioner, London Fire Brigade and FBU officials, including general secretary Matt Wrack.

A Red Plaque commemorating the firefighters' sacrifice is in Bethnal Green museum gardens.

Sounding off



STEVE EASON

Bus fires

Mick Lynch, general secretary of the RMT transport union

Bus fires are a serious concern and they are occurring far too frequently. RMT has been at the forefront of highlighting this issue.

A study by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) recognised the importance of timely reporting and comprehensive maintenance in preventing bus fires and provided practical insights for the coach and bus industry.

Maintenance issues are the heart of many incidents. A significant number of buses on the road suffer from inadequate upkeep, with essential repairs and routine servicing delayed or overlooked. This leads to mechanical failures that can ignite fires, making regular and thorough inspections imperative.

Stringent safety protocols and frequent safety audits by qualified professionals can significantly lower the risk of fire incidents.

Stricter regulatory oversight is crucial, including more rigorous safety inspections, mandatory use of high quality replacement parts, and regular maintenance.

Bus operators are responsible for this and, if nothing changes, we could be sleepwalking into a serious incident threatening the lives of drivers and passengers.

There is a tendency to blame drivers, instead of focusing on the root causes or understanding the pressure from some employers on them to continue driving even if fire warning systems show a problem.

Bus companies must ensure their fleets are safe to drive and for passengers to travel.

RMT will continue to push for the changes that are needed and not shirk our responsibility to protect members' health and safety.

MISCONDUCT

FBU pledges support for victims of bullying

An investigation into misconduct in the fire and rescue by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) has highlighted the need for reforms to build processes firefighters can trust.

Potential whistle-blowers fear marginalisation or victimisation, while nearly one in three firefighters surveyed had experienced or witnessed an abuse of power in the last year, the investigators' report says.

It concludes that staff do not have

confidence in the misconduct process, and makes 15 recommendations to chief fire officers, fire and rescue authorities and others.

These include the need for each service to have a professional standards function to support fair and transparent misconduct investigations, and the introduction of the right training and support for all staff investigating misconduct.

"Firefighters must be able to go to work without fear of bullying,

harassment and discrimination," said FBU general secretary Matt Wrack, responding to the report.

"Just as much as fire contaminants and other dangers, this is a matter of health and safety and basic rights at work.

"The FBU stands unequivocally on the side of the victims of such behaviour.

"Chief fire officers have a duty to ensure senior managers are held to account, and to build processes that the workforce can trust."



MERSEYSIDE

Crew of three plans deferred after FBU protest outside fire authority meeting

Firefighters staged a rally (above) outside a meeting of the Merseyside fire authority to oppose a dangerous reduction to crew sizes, resulting in a vote on the policy being delayed.

The fire authority's community risk management plan (CRMP) includes proposals to send firefighters to "non-life" risk incidents with a crew of three on a fire engine.

A minimum number of five firefighters is needed to respond to incidents safely

and professionally. A fire engine with three firefighters on board cannot deploy breathing apparatus and must wait for back-up to arrive.

Merseyside firefighters mobilised with short notice, with around 50 protestors chanting and holding placards and banners.

FBU officials spoke out against the plans, and condemned additional proposals to remove watch managers from fire engines and reintroduce downgraded "small fires units".

Following the deferral, Merseyside FBU brigade secretary Ian Hibbert said: "If the fire authority brings this to a vote again, we will mobilise in even greater numbers to ensure this policy does not pass."

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "The Labour Party has committed to national professional standards across the UK, and the Fire Brigades Union will fight to ensure that no fire service faces this threat again."

In brief

Durham Miners' Gala

Thousands gathered for this year's Durham Miners' Gala, braving rain to mark the 40th anniversary of the miners' strike.

Fire service pay rise

A 4% pay rise came into effect on 1 July, following FBU members voting to accept a 2024 pay deal, with changes to the RDS fee structure to be implemented from January. The Grey Book has been updated to extend maternity provision to 26 weeks' full pay. The FBU continues to seek to improve headline pay, maternity pay and the retaining fee.

Tolpuddle martyrs

Trade unionists marked an important date in the labour movement calendar, travelling to the village of Tolpuddle in Dorset for the annual festival honouring six farmworkers who were deported to Australia nearly 200 years ago for organising against a pay cut. They were pardoned after a massive nationwide campaign to free them.



Firefighters applaud carers during the first wave of the Covid pandemic

The first report by the UK Covid-19 inquiry, published in July, confirmed the impact of austerity on pandemic preparedness.

The inquiry is examining the state of the UK's structures and procedures to plan for and respond to a pandemic.

Inquiry chair Baroness Hallett concluded that: "The UK entered the pandemic with its public services depleted, health improvement stalled, health inequalities increased, and health among the poorest people in a state of decline."

The report highlights the lack of resilience in public services caused by underfunding, with staff shortages and crumbling infrastructure.

The Trades Union Congress is a core participant of the inquiry.

Hallett stated that "money spent on systems for our

protection is vital and will be vastly outweighed by the cost of not doing so."

Since 2008, the Cabinet Office has published the National Risk Register, which sets out the range of risks that may affect the UK.

In 2008, out of the 12 main risks assessed, an influenza pandemic was assessed as having the largest relative impact and fifth greatest likelihood.

Despite this, the FBU is not aware of any publication by ministers

or chief fire officers on pandemics published in the decade before the Covid-19 pandemic.

There was no advisory body where emergency preparedness could be discussed with representatives of the workforce.

Firefighters assisted with the pandemic response, delivering PPE and medicine, driving ambulances, and even helping move the bodies of the deceased.

In March 2020, the FBU negotiated an agreement

to ensure firefighters could volunteer with safety protocols in place. The National Fire Chiefs Council and employers later walked away from this agreement.

The union has raised serious concerns about lack of resilience, raising the alarm in a letter to the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee inquiry on emergency preparedness in April 2020.

The UK government and devolved governments have been urged to implement promptly the 10 recommendations of the report, including a fundamental reform of the UK government and devolved nations' preparedness for civil emergencies.

The FBU has argued that the failure to prepare and the first year of the pandemic underline the need for a statutory body to advise ministers in Westminster.



News Focus

Covid preparedness

Grenfell report

Over seven years on from the fire, the final report of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry will be released on Wednesday 4 September. This long-awaited document summarises the findings of the second phase of the

inquiry, which investigated the causes of the fire, and the role of developers and the government. The FBU is holding an online briefing for members at 6.30pm on Thursday 5 September. ■ [Contact press@fbu.org.uk](mailto:contact.press@fbu.org.uk)





FBU members and officials
at the Grenfell silent
march on 14 June 2024



TIME TO DELIVER: JOIN US ON 8 OCTOBER

On Tuesday 8 October, firefighters from every corner of the UK will descend on Westminster to demand that the new government delivers a fire and rescue service that is fit for the future. FBU general secretary **Matt Wrack** explains why



JESS HURD

FBU National
Rally, Westminster,
November 2023

The result of the general election was a crushing blow for the Conservative party. It had its worst result – in terms of vote share and number of seats – since the foundation of the party in 1834. Liz Truss, Grant Shapps, Jacob Rees-Mogg and Therese Coffey all lost their seats.

Firefighters who took strike action against the robbery of their pensions will be pleased to hear that Penny Mordaunt was also defeated in Portsmouth North, on a swing of 18%.

They deserved it. For 14 years, the Tories have trashed the UK. The Trussell Trust handed out 60,000 food parcels in 2010. In 2022-23, it distributed about 3m. Over the same period, the number of people sleeping rough more than doubled. NHS waiting lists are at record highs. Meanwhile, the richest 350 families in the UK have a collective wealth of £795 billion, equivalent to the GDP of Turkey or the Netherlands.

The end of Tory rule gives firefighters, and all workers, a huge opportunity

In the fire and rescue service, we lost one in five firefighter jobs between 2010 and 2024. Eighty-two fire stations and 17 emergency fire control rooms were closed. Progress on equalities and other important issues stalled, lacking resources and support. Pay and pensions were relentlessly attacked by millionaire Tory ministers.

FBU members should be proud of what we managed to achieve under unfavourable circumstances. We defended our right to negotiate pay and conditions directly with our employers. Attempts to privatise parts of the fire service and further fragment it have been defeated.

And on pay and pensions we won important concessions. The pay rises of 7% in 2022, 5% in 2023 and 4% in 2024 are significantly higher than in other areas of the public sector.

The end of Tory rule gives firefighters, and all workers, a huge opportunity. But to make the most of it, we must hold

>>

10 DEMANDS

The FBU demands the following from the new Westminster government:

- 1 Resilience – rebuild our fire and rescue service with sustained investment to meet current and future risks
- 2 National fire and rescue standards – keep our communities and our firefighters safe
- 3 A fire and rescue statutory advisory body, including the FBU
- 4 Justice for Grenfell – end deregulation, safe homes for all
- 5 Scrap the Tory white paper on fire reform
- 6 Scrap the anti-union laws, including the Minimum Service Level Act, implement the New Deal for Working People in full.
- 7 Hands off the NJC, deliver on the pledge to safeguard collective bargaining
- 8 Make firefighting an equal, inclusive profession, open to everyone and reflective of our communities
- 9 Recognise firefighter cancer and other long-term health risks from contaminants. Deliver regular health monitoring
- 10 Pensions justice for firefighters

>> Labour to its promises and push it to deliver more.

That is why the FBU has called for a national rally and lobby of parliament on Tuesday 8 October. If you can, please come – contact your regional secretary for details.

WORKERS' RIGHTS

The FBU is affiliated to Labour in England and Wales, and we advocated for a Labour vote. We have many criticisms of Keir Starmer, and we have been robust where we have disagreed – on issues such as support for striking workers, taxing the rich, and investment in public services.

But Labour was founded to give workers a voice in politics, and as an affiliated trade union we could influence Labour's manifesto through the party's democratic structures. In advance of the election, we passed motions at Labour Party conference, pushed through Labour's national policy forum, and met several times with Keir Starmer and senior shadow cabinet members.

Because of this work, and the work of other affiliated unions, Labour has been elected on a promise to defend collective bargaining in our sector, as well as addressing the need for better regulation of building safety.

The new government has also pledged to introduce a "New Deal for Working People". Among other measures, this includes giving day-one rights on sick leave, parental leave and unfair dismissal; ban zero-hours contracts; and address fire and rehire.

Crucially for firefighters and fire control staff, the government also plans to scrap the Minimum Service Levels Act and other recent anti-union laws, overturning the de facto ban on strikes in the fire and rescue service in England.

STANDARDS

At present, the fire and rescue service is hugely fragmented. It is devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in England there are 46 different services.

The average response time for a first appliance is now nine minutes and 13 seconds, a full three minutes slower than in 1995. But how long it takes is a postcode lottery.

When the appliance arrives, there are no agreed national standards on how many firefighters will be on board, how they were recruited, what training they have, or what equipment they use.

It was not always this way. Until 2003, the Central Fire Brigades Advisory

Council (CFBAC) existed. It was a committee, outlined in legislation, which brought together the FBU, fire chiefs and others to advise on national standards.

At this election, Labour promised to reintroduce national standards in the fire and rescue service, and to create a new body to develop them.

Labour held an official election campaign event in Dewsbury, where dozens of firefighters gathered to hear Yvette Cooper, now home secretary, outline the plans.

In the past, national standards safeguarded the fire and rescue service and those that worked in it. Now, they could be a way to make serious progress on training, recruitment, equalities, fire contaminants and more.

At our national rally and lobby of Westminster in October, we will be reminding Labour MPs of this commitment. We will urge them to move ahead with the plans promptly, and to put the new body on a statutory footing, like the old CFBAC.

INVESTMENT

Climate change and an ageing population mean that the fire and rescue service will be in higher and higher

NEL TERRY



We must push, cajole and encourage Labour to deliver for workers and the fire service

demand in the coming years. The UK will face increasing risk from fires, floods and extreme weather events.

But, just as the risks are increasing, austerity has pushed our service into crisis. Since 2010, central government funding for the fire and rescue service has fallen by around a third in cash terms.

To meet the challenges faced by the fire service, and to make serious progress on pay and other issues, we need to fight for investment.

The new government has been reluctant to commit to additional spending. But the UK is a wealthy country. It needs and deserves good quality, well-funded public services. We will be making that case powerfully at our October lobby.

COLLECTIVE STRENGTH

There are two mistakes that we must avoid following the general election result. One is to set our sights too low, or to think that all politicians are the same. The other mistake is to think that just because we have a Labour government at Westminster, we can rest easy, the truth is very different.

We know from bitter experience that governments of all stripes can do

real damage. The Tories have left our service in crisis, but it was the New Labour government in 2002–3 that abolished national standards in the first place and removed establishment regulations, paving the way for cuts to firefighter numbers.

This Labour government can and should be different. Firefighters now have the best opportunity we have had in decades to shape the future of our service and win real advances.

But we can only do this through struggle – by demonstrating our collective strength and making our voices heard.

Billionaires and corporations will be lobbying Labour to break its promises. So we must push, cajole and encourage Labour to deliver for workers and the fire service.

■ Join us in London on Tuesday 8 October.

Yvette Cooper, now home secretary, with Labour candidate Heather Iqbal, FBU general secretary Matt Wrack and other union officials and members in the Yorkshire constituency Dewsbury and Batley during the general election campaign. Cooper set out Labour's plan to develop a national structure to inform policy and establish national standards in the fire and rescue service



A rogues' gallery

Your cut-out-and-keep guide to Tory fire ministers

Throughout the 14 years that the Conservative Party occupied 10 Downing Street, the FBU was led by one general secretary: Matt Wrack.

The Tories, on the other hand, had no fewer than 11 fire ministers. All of them were part-time, and dealt with fire alongside (at different times) building safety, the Olympics,

Thames Gateway, housing, planning, policing and counter-terrorism.

With most ministers serving less than a year, it would be easy to forget who ran the fire and rescue service into the ground for the past decade-and-a-half. But fear not – with Firefighter magazine's 'cut out and keep' guide, you now have a collectable set of souvenirs.



1


BOB NEILL

Official title Parliamentary under secretary of state at the department for communities and local government

In post 14 May 2010 – 4 September 2012

Days in office 844

Best known for Cutting thousands of firefighter jobs

Now Did not stand

2


BRANDON LEWIS

Official title Parliamentary Under secretary of state at the department for communities and local government

In post 4 September 2012 – 15 July 2014

Days in office 679

Best known for Trying to privatise the fire service

Now Did not stand

3


PENNY MORDAUNT

Official title Parliamentary under-secretary of state for decentralisation

In post 15 July 2014 – 20 May 2015

Days in office 309

Best known for Lying about pensions and holding swords

Now Lost her seat

4


MARK FRANCOIS

Official title Minister of state for communities and resilience

In post 20 May 2015 – 5 January 2016

Days in office 230

Best known for Writing an excruciating self-published memoir about Brexit

Now Still an MP

5


MIKE PENNING

Official title Minister of state for policing

In post 5 January 2016 – 16 July 2016

Days in office 193

Best known for Once having been, in his own words, "a fireman"

Now Did not stand

6


BRANDON LEWIS (AGAIN)

Official title Minister of state for policing and the fire service government

In post 16 July 2016 – 11 June 2017

Days in office 361

Best known for Taking a £250,000 job for an investment group part-owned by Russian oligarchs

Now Did not stand

7



NICK HURD

Official title Minister of state for policing and the fire service

In post 12 June 2017 – 25 July 2019

Days in office 773

Best known for Being so bored by the fire service that he almost fell asleep in meetings

Now Left parliament in 2019

8



KIT MALTHOUSE

Official title Minister of state for policing and the fire service

In post 25 July 2019 – 13 February 2020

Days in office 203

Best known for Saying that life was “too comfortable” for homeless people

Now Still an MP

9



LORD STEVEN GREENHALGH

Official title Baron Greenhalgh of Fulham, minister of state for building safety and fire

In post 18 March 2020 – 8 July 2022

Days in office 842

Best known for Being a bombastic aristocrat in the mould of Lord Flashheart

Now A baron for life

10



JEREMY QUIN

Official title Minister of state for crime, policing and fire

In post 7 September 2022 – 25 October 2022

Days in office 48

Best known for Being outlasted by a lettuce

Now Lost his seat

11



CHRIS PHILP

Official title Minister of state for crime, policing and fire

In post 26 October 2022 – 5 July 2024

Days in office 618

Best known for Trying to deny firefighters a pay rise

Now Still an MP

BONUS



THE LETTUCE

Official title Just an ordinary iceberg lettuce

Shelf life Variable

Best known for Outlasting Liz Truss's premiership

Now Aiming to beat the Tories into third place in 2029

BONUS



ERIC PICKLES

Official title Secretary of state for communities and local government

In post 12 May 2010 – 11 May 2015

Days in office 1,825

Best known for Telling the Grenfell inquiry not to waste his time, then apologising after he got the number of victims wrong

Now In the House of Lords

BONUS



PRITI PATEL

Official title Home secretary

In post 24 July 2019 – 6 September 2022

Days in office 1,140

Best known for Trying (and failing) to push through her fire service white paper

Now Running for Tory leader

BONUS



SUELLA BRAVERMAN

Official title Home secretary

In post

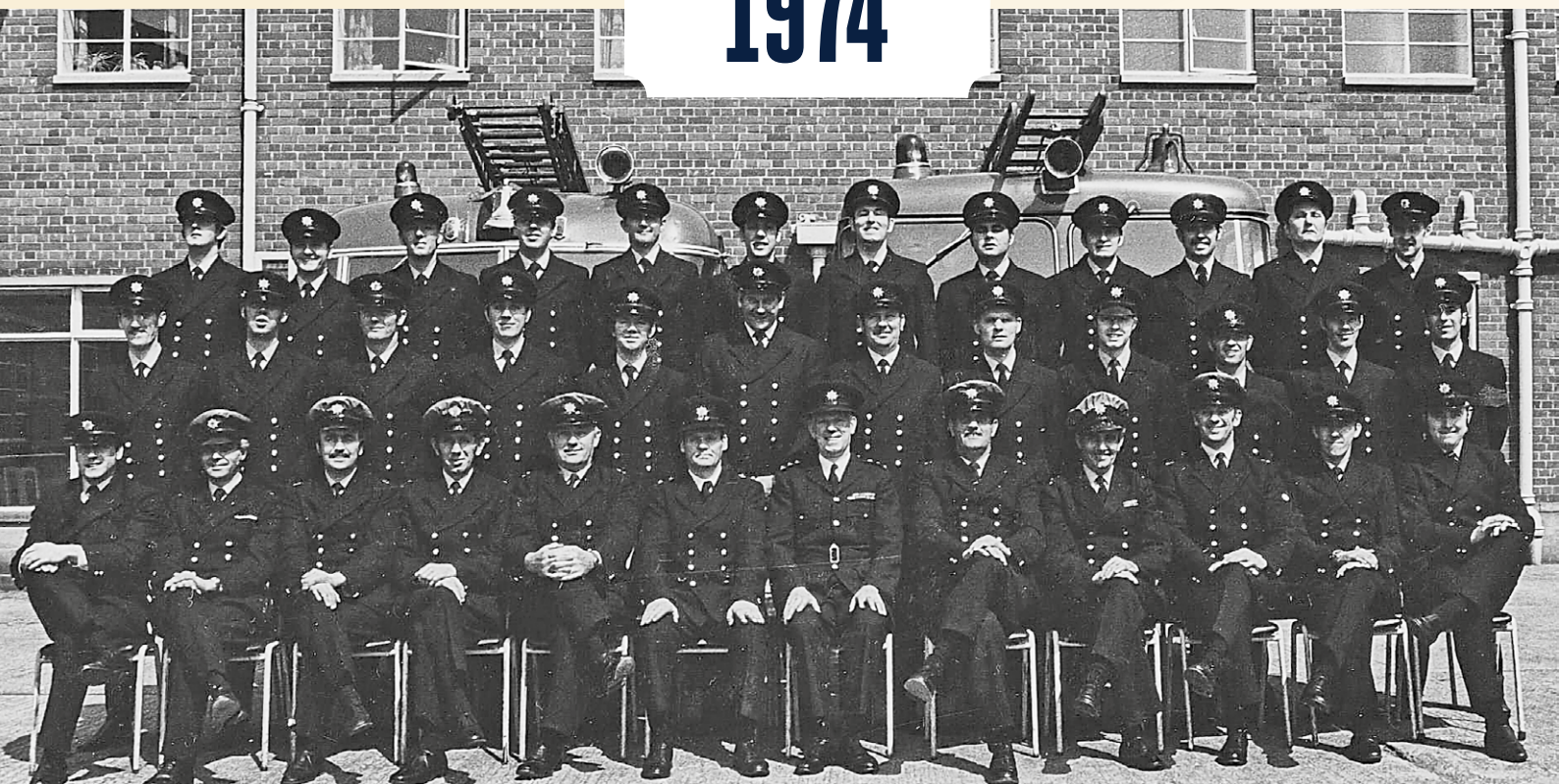
6 September 2022 – 19 October 2022
25 October 2022 – 13 November 2023

Days in office 43 and 384

Best known for Banning firefighters from striking and imprisoning refugees on a floating prison

Now Still an MP

1974



'We made history'

Firefighters reunited after 50 years share memories of the ground-breaking 1977 strike

Back in 1974, 30 young men gathered at Durham County Brigade to be trained as firefighters. They slept in an old appliance room, the windows boarded up for privacy, with makeshift beds and no ventilation.

"Health and safety would have a fit these days," says Ian Ferguson, who was 18 at the time. "But we bonded and had a great time."

Today, 50 years on, Ian is a 69-year-old retired firefighter. He's a busy man – the editor of the National Association of Retired Firefighters magazine and a warden in a nature reserve, he has a wife and grown-up daughter, a part-time job, a vintage van to keep on the road, and a saxophone which he plays with enthusiasm.

As if that wasn't enough, this year he gave himself a project: to track down all the men (and they were all men) on the

course, and get them to a reunion.

It was not easy. Four have died – the course included not just very young men like Ian, but also ex-servicemen in their thirties. There was one he could not trace. A few could not come because of illness and prearranged holidays.

But 20 retired firefighters assembled one bright Spring day in the same pub where they held their end-of-course celebration 50 years ago – the Queens Head in Framwellgate Moor, Durham, where the manager welcomed them with open arms and told them: "It's an honour to have you here".

ORIGINAL INSTRUCTORS

They included two of the original instructors, John Short, now aged 90 (with the beard in the picture) and Tom Nattrass, 80.

Among the memories they exchanged, the great firefighters' strike of 1977-8

figured prominently. Ian says: "Without what we did then, the FBU would not have been where it is today. We made history when we took on and beat the government of the day to get a fair pay and conditions deal. It was ground-breaking, and maintained stability in the fire service for many years."

By 1977, firefighters' wages had been reduced to about three quarters of average male earnings.

Ian recalls the abysmal pay of those pre-strike days: "I delivered bread for £44 a week, then I joined the fire service for £33."

He goes on: "We tried work to rule. It didn't have any effect, so we went for strike action. It caused a national emergency."

The strike resulted in a pay formula for the future, which tied firefighters' pay to the top quarter of male manual workers' earnings, guaranteed against

2024



Together again:
Trainees in 1974 (left)
and retirees in 2024

any future government incomes policy. The working week would come down to 42 hours by 1 April 1979.

The pay formula was the big gain from the 1977 strike, and it served firefighters well for more than two decades.

“What won that strike,” says Ian, “was solidarity. We were out for nine weeks, which is a long time with nothing in your pocket. I was 21 and my parents looked after me, but it was hard for men with families.” He only knew one person who broke the strike. “He disappeared afterwards, he wasn’t accepted any more.”

Most of them had stayed in the local fire service, like Ian himself, who worked in the Durham brigade for 34 years on the pumps, ending as a watch manager on a two-pump station, and retiring in 2008 aged 52.

“It was a great life. I could not imagine doing anything else. The job was always different every day, the camaraderie in the fire service is second to none, there’s a bond between us all. Look, 50 years on, 20 of them came back for a reunion.”

At the end of the course, they all worked in the Durham area, and most of those at the reunion stayed in the fire service, with one, Peter Williams, proud of having become an FBU official.

OVER THE MOON

One was forced to leave the service after an accident permanently damaged his leg, and took up driving heavy plant like bulldozers. “I was over the moon that he came to the reunion though he’d been 47 years out of the fire service” says Ian.

Another, Bill Roberts, rose to be a divisional officer. When he left, he

decided to do something far less senior and far less stressful – he became a porter in a university, and he told his old colleagues that he’s loving it.

They remembered the fun, the jokes, the camaraderie, the triumph they felt in 1977 when they changed the direction of travel of the fire service – but also the bad moments that were part of their lives. “I lost two colleagues in an accident – a fire appliance overturned” says Ian. “It’s burned on my brain. It’s like losing two brothers.

“I’ve been at fires where children have died. That’s terrible, but if you don’t know them you can put a buffer there. You can’t do that when it’s the guys you work with.

“There was no counselling in those days. We just sat round the mess room table and talked about it. We basically counselled ourselves.”



Scenes from the
great firefighters’
strike of 1977/8

From Dundee to Nablus

Vital humanitarian aid is stuck in customs while Palestinian firefighters face injury through lack of PPE. **Helen Hague** reports

A fully equipped fire appliance, laden with fire kit and medicine, left Scotland bound for the Israeli-occupied West Bank earlier this summer. It was the latest donation from Scottish firefighters to Palestinian colleagues, striving to save lives amid increasingly harrowing conditions in the world's longest running military occupation.

The appliance was driven from Dundee to Southampton by UK firefighters, then loaded onto a cargo ship – arriving in the Israeli port of Ashdod, correct paperwork in place, on 21 July.

It should have been heading for the city of Nablus to help chronically under-equipped fire crews fight fires. But, as *Firefighter* went to press, instead of saving lives it was still stuck in the port, impounded by Israeli military customs officials.

Scottish north area secretary Simon Leroux (centre) and representatives of the International Fire and Rescue Association with the donated fire appliance in Fife, before its journey to Palestine



Retired Dundee firefighter Jim Malone has championed the cause of Palestinian firefighters for decades and has visited the West Bank seven times.

He found the immediate fate of the fire appliance “shocking but not surprising”. The Israeli military has form, he says. When Scottish firefighters donated the first fire engine to Nablus firefighters back in 2011, it was detained in the Israeli port of Haifa for nearly three months. Jim should know – he helped deliver it.

SOLIDARITY

The FBU has called for solidarity with the people of Palestine for decades. Ken Cameron, former FBU general secretary, introduced the first pro-Palestinian motion at the 1982 Trades Union Congress.

In Scotland, the links forged by Jim Malone and Dundee firefighters have

been at the forefront of delivering the FBU’s constructive, practical support.

Roots run deep – and long. Dundee has been “twinned” with Nablus since 1980.

The appliance bound for Nablus was rammed full of fire kit, boots, breathing apparatus – alongside vital medical kit gathered from the city’s Ninewells hospital – and football kits from Dundee’s East Craigie FC for Nablus EBAL football club – the two clubs are twinned. There are also fire helmets – donated at the last minute by a firefighter from Kent.

Over 100 Palestinian firefighters have now learned new firefighting skills in Scotland.

Since October, there has been a demonstration in Dundee every week, calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and an end to violence and occupation.

One of Jim’s visits, in 2015, features in *Firefighters Under Occupation*, an award-winning FBU supported documentary made by south Wales firefighter Ciaran Gibbons.

COMPELLING TESTIMONY

Jim sees the appliance he helped deliver serving the people of Nablus and hears compelling testimony from Palestinian firefighters. Rabe’e Antar tells how he was shot in the shoulder by Israeli soldiers when his fire crew were delivering much needed water to a hospital.

The film also shows how a chronic shortage of personal protective equipment can leave Palestinian firefighters needlessly exposed to injury – their PPE can often consist of little more than layered overalls.

Watch manager Firas Mosmar suffered severe burns to his arms, hands and head when caught in a

backdraft tackling a fire in a storage unit.

Much has happened since 7 October, when Hamas killed 1,189 Israelis and kidnapped 251. The Israeli government responded with another brutal military offensive in Gaza, which has killed tens of thousands and displaced much of the population..

Life for Palestinian firefighters on the West Bank has become even more challenging. Jim Malone is in frequent contact with many – including friends he has known over decades. They tell him that life feels even more dangerous and unsettling since 7 October. “It’s becoming much more oppressive – some are saying they feel under siege”.

Firefighters, he says, are used to getting stopped at military checkpoints – and sometimes even having to strip to their underwear when searched. Stops and searches are getting more frequent – and can be particularly frustrating when the crew is on its

way to fight a fire and can see the flames.

Pressure has ramped up hugely, the firefighters he speaks to report. Israeli soldiers are more aggressive and confrontational – and Israeli settlers more conspicuously armed.

The situation is most acute in Hebron – which is also receiving much needed fire kit from the FBU.

As the appliance headed to Ashdod, Stephen Gethins, Scottish National Party MP for Arbroath and Broughty Ferry – Jim Malone’s MP – was putting down an early day motion in the UK parliament. It now looks quite prescient. It called for a “safe passage” for the appliance bringing lifesaving equipment to assist firefighters in Nablus.

When the vehicle was impounded, Gethins was seeking an urgent meeting with the Israeli ambassador to get the much-needed humanitarian donation to the Nablus fire station.

Meanwhile the FBU and individual firefighters were urging MPs and MSPs to press for the appliance’s immediate release.

CRUCIAL ROLE

Jim Malone is keen to stress many firefighters across the UK have played a crucial role in supporting Palestinian firefighters.

All those motions to annual conference – and the TUC – since Ken Cameron first took to the rostrum many years back – have helped raise awareness of the Palestinians’ plight.

Jim says firefighters are hardwired to save lives regardless of ethnicity or religion. Expect more from Jim – and others – as events unfurl in an increasingly uncertain world over coming months.

**Over 100 Palestinian
firefighters have
learned new skills
in Scotland**



Nablus firefighters Hasan, Montaser, Jawad, Firas and Amr with former Scottish regional secretary Denise Christie, chief of Nablus municipality fire department Sultan Menawi, and FBU ROOT member and Palestine solidarity coordinator Jim Malone (left to right)



Matt Wrack with FBU delegation members (l-r) Maria Buck, Gemma Betts, Pat Carberry, and Shelley Morgan

FBU at TUC LGBT+ conference

The FBU sent a delegation of four to this year's TUC LGBT+ conference in London in June.

A motion from the FBU LGBT+ section focused on challenging the Conservatives' plans to deport immigrants and failed asylum seekers to Rwanda.

The FBU LGBT+ committee considered this to be an important issue for our community as the then home secretary had made statements that she believed LGBT+ identity was not grounds for asylum.

Previous attempts to commence deportations to Rwanda had been stopped by the courts which ruled that

Rwanda could not be viewed as a safe place to receive deportees.

The Conservatives, using their parliamentary majority, forced through laws to declare Rwanda safe.

Rwanda, while not having specific anti-LGBT+ legislation, is not considered a safe place for people to be LGBT+.

Its neighbour Uganda introduced new legislation last year allowing the death penalty for what was described as "aggravated homosexuality".

The FBU motion called for a wider campaign to stop any deportations to Rwanda. At the time of its submission in February, there was a strong push by

the government to get the deportation scheme up and running.

By the time conference took place, a general election had been called and was scheduled to take place in the following week.

It was fairly clear that Labour would take power and the party had committed to ditching the Rwanda deportation plans. It was still important to move the motion in order to have policy in place should these commitments not be honoured.

The FBU motion was the first to be heard on the opening of conference and was passed unanimously. Following Labour's election success, one of the new government's first actions was to affirm its commitment to no deportations to Rwanda.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack addressed conference in his capacity as this year's TUC president. The union's delegation was given the honour of moving the vote of thanks to close conference.

■ The FBU delegation also attended the London Fire Brigade (LFB) Pride Breakfast at Soho fire station. Following the reception, we joined our union and fire service contingent for the London Pride parade (*left*) with an appliance from LFB and the FBU's campaign fire appliance. For the first time, this year a joint t-shirt was produced recognising both the FBU and LFB parading in celebration of the LGBT+ community.





Meet the rep

Barry Johnstone
Region 1, Scotland, Health & Safety Rep

1. What made you want to become a rep?

John McKenzie and Gus Sproul cornered me! Jokes aside, I was at a local branch meeting and raised a few issues that we were on my mind relating to H&S within the station. A lot of things were happening that should have been picked up on. We did not have an H&S rep on station for some time and so I took on the role. I did not realise at the time where that would lead me, but I then went on to carry out an area H&S role before moving to the Region 1 post.

2. What is your proudest moment as a rep?

I was part of a group of FBU reps from across the country who, along with comrades from across Europe, went to Brussels to lobby the European parliament. Along with Prof Anna Stec, we spoke to MEPs directly about the research carried out. This led to the FBU's DECON campaign. DECON continues and it's great to see reps helping to raise awareness and firefighters fully getting involved.

3. Who are your ultimate heroes?

My parents are my heroes. I have been very fortunate in my upbringing and that's testament to them and the rest of my family. I try to pass on to my two boys what I have learned from my parents.

4. Describe yourself in three words

Honest, loyal, caring.

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

I think I have these conversations regularly within the role I carry out. Often I will find myself going into something with a strong opinion but thinking differently after hearing other points of view or getting a bit more context.

6. Which TV show could you not live without? (What's your favourite band or musician?)

I would not say I have any particular show, but I love getting into a good series that I find myself glued to. I watch football and rugby also. Music-wise I have a very broad taste, I guess if I had to choose it would be a rock band.

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

That's a hard one, but probably working for myself.

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

I think I would like to go back and meet previous generations of my family. It would be amazing to see where we all came from.



Legal Beagle

Water rescue

Water rescue training is vital for firefighters, but comes with risks, particularly from waterborne illnesses and dry suit issues. Exposure to pathogens in rivers or lakes can cause serious diseases:

LEPTOSPIROSIS: Found in water contaminated by animal urine, can lead to severe complications including liver damage.

GASTROINTESTINAL INFECTIONS: Pathogens like E. coli and norovirus can cause severe stomach cramps, diarrhoea, and vomiting.

SKIN INFECTIONS: Cuts can become infected by waterborne bacteria, leading to serious conditions such as cellulitis.

Dry suits are crucial for warmth and dryness but require proper maintenance and usage:

FIT AND COMFORT: Ensure the dry suit fits well—not too tight or too loose. Do not train without a proper fit.

REGULAR INSPECTIONS: Check for leaks, tears, and seal integrity before each use.

PROPER TRAINING: Learn donning and doffing techniques to avoid accidents.

Employers must recognise inherent dangers and implement stringent safety measures during training. Discuss any concerns with your union representative.

■ Your FBU legal package offers access to independent legal advice from personal injury specialists for you and your family for any accident or disease claim.

In any work accident the union's lawyers work with FBU reps to maximise the chances of success and, unlike with any non-union law firm, whatever the claim you and your family keep 100% of your compensation.

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In Scotland: 0800 089 1331

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

CHARITY WALK

100 MILES IN BA AND INTENSE HEAT FOR CHARITY WALK

A group of retained firefighters from Devon walked 105 miles, the equivalent of four marathons – from Bristol children's hospital to Okehampton Fire Station – over three days wearing fire kit and breathing apparatus, to raise money for charity this August.

They called at nine other fire stations on their walk during days of intense heat.

Nine-year-old Callum



Wooldridge underwent successful open-heart surgery at the hospital last year.

On the walk wearing BA were his father Ricky and firefighter colleagues Tim and Dan. His mother Sam and grandad Kev, also a retained firefighter, took part in regular clothing.

They were joined for some of the way by Ellie from Thompsons solicitors.

The walk has so far raised more than £10,000 for the Fire Fighters Charity and other good causes which supported the family while Callum was in hospital.

FIREFIGHTERS 100 LOTTERY

WIN A LUXURY HOLIDAY

Enter the Firefighters 100 Lottery super draw this August for your chance to win a luxury holiday.

Get your tickets before Saturday 31 August to be eligible to win £2,000 to spend on your dream holiday or take the cash.



FIREFIGHTERS 100 LOTTERY

FIRE BRIGADES UNION | SERVING FIREFIGHTERS SINCE 1910



Lottery tickets cost £1, with weekly prize draws.

Proceeds go towards the running of the Red Plaque scheme, supporting injured firefighters and bereaved families.

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ETHICALLY SOURCED STYLE, QUALITY, AND VALUE FROM OUR SHOP

Join the national rally in FBU style this autumn – head to the official FBU online shop to browse the full range of union merchandise, from t-shirts and hats to bags, badges and more.

The FBU works with Kymera Embroidery to deliver high quality, ethically sourced and value for money clothing and merchandise.

All profits from items sold go towards the Firefighters 100 Lottery.

■ Visit shop.fbu.org.uk



PHOTO COMPETITION

The FBU photo competition 2024 has now closed for entries. Thank you to everyone who sent images. Winners and runners-up will be announced later this year.



Wrack on the Road



■ 1 July – election campaign event with Yvette Cooper, now home secretary

■ 13 July – speaking at the Durham Miners' Gala and fringe event



■ 20 July – attended Anniversary of the Bethnal Green Road Fire

■ 21 July – Speaking at the Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival



■ 23 July – attended a summit of trade union leaders in Downing Street

UPCOMING

■ 9 September – chairing TUC Congress as President

■ 22 September – Labour party conference

NEL TERRY

TAVAN SALCI

MARK THOMAS

Structural failures

Station Cat on long, sad and tall storeys

Firefighters in breathing apparatus risking their lives in a new block of flats in Kettering on 26 July may have wondered why the thing was still standing.

No one is living there, unless you count the property developer who is camping out in it. The council have ordered it to be pulled down.

So what's it doing, taking up precious resources? It's a long, sad story.

Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service advised against giving it planning permission – access in an emergency was not good enough, they said and, given its position, the building was too high.

Kettering's Civic Society didn't want the thing, either – the plans show no "sensitive consideration of the surrounding buildings and their important history" they said.

So the local council turned it down. But central government has the power to reverse local decisions, and if there's

money to be made, it usually does.

So the Michigan Construction Company – sole director 42-year-old Marcus Fielding, now the building's only resident – got to build a four-storey building.

Then Mr Fielding started to add extra storeys, for which he had no permission.

He was told to demolish the extra storeys. But he carried on building them, claiming that he did not have enough money to demolish them. The council sent a structural engineer round – and he advised that the whole building was unsafe. The whole thing needed to come down, before it started killing people.

But the council has no powers to force Mr Fielding to take it down. It has not even got enough power to demolish the thing itself, since Mr Fielding will not let council officers in.

Memo to new environment minister Steve Reed: take a look at our planning laws.

When discretion is the better part of Farage

Ever wondered why Reform party leader Nigel Farage is so uncharacteristically cautious in the words he chooses to condemn far right thugs?

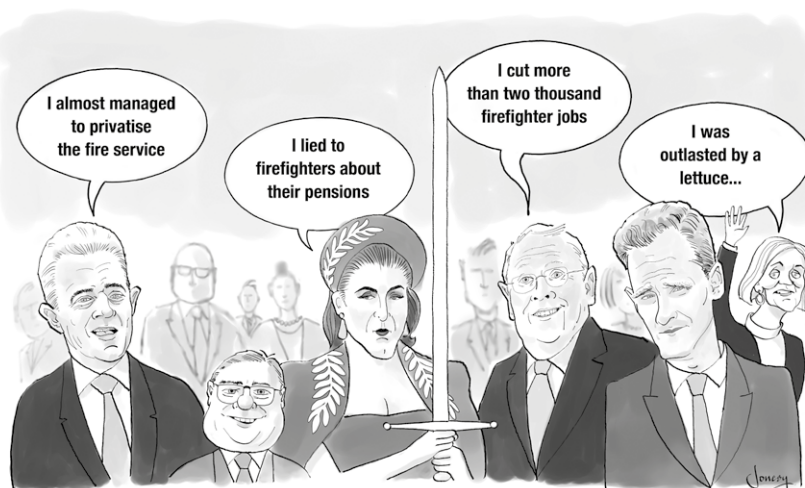
The clue might be in the Twitter feeds of a couple of far right activists. "Westy", who reposts tweets from Tommy Robinson, wrote to Kenny Smith of The Homeland Party, which believes "that the legitimacy of a state is derived from the ethnic, ancestral, and cultural unity of those it governs", and whose slogan is

"Family, Community, Homeland."

"Can't you unite with Reform?" asked "Westy." "Unite the clans."

#ReformUK." Kenny Smith replied: "They have already advised some of their people to stop working with us. Thankfully many of them are continuing to do so discreetly."

Could it be that Mr Farage knows his members are working with the likes of Kenny Smith – and he's being careful to make sure he doesn't upset them?



GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN...

25-year badges



Julian Short (l), Droitwich, Hereford and Worcester, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Neil Bevan at Malvern fire station



Scott Macaskill (l), amber watch, Altens, Aberdeen, receives his 25-year badge from Simon Leroux, North area secretary, Scotland



Mike McNab (l), Portlethen training centre, Aberdeen, receives his 25-year badge from Iain Ballantyne, North area vice chair, Scotland



Jonathan Mackey (r), Solihull, West Midlands, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Andrew Potts, surrounded by blue watch colleagues



Jon Walker (l), green watch, Newquay, Cornwall, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Adam Whitehead with colleagues Grant Patterson, Rob Carhart, Rob Goodman and Ali Trigg looking on



Denis Martin, red watch, Lee Green, London, receives his 25-year badge from Toby Walsh, London SE area mental health rep



Seamus Brennan (l), blue watch, Carlisle East, Cumbria, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Oliver Burrow



David Gilmore, red watch, Preston, Lancashire, receives his 25-year badge with watch colleagues looking on



Tracy Kinsley (r), of Shipley, West Yorkshire, receives her 25-year badge from Adi Gill, with Andy Hounslow and Harry Wales looking on



Tom Robinson (l), white watch, Blackpool, Lancashire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Kev Wilkie, with colleagues looking on



Gareth Davey (r), green watch, Truro, Cornwall, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Adam Whitehead



Sam Pick (r), Thetford, Norfolk, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Harry Powell with colleagues looking on



Andrew Stevenson (r), Handsworth, West Midlands, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Mick Mulcahy with branch members looking on



David Roach (r), Bury, Greater Manchester, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary James Hartley alongside Martin Kay, brigade chair Ross Strother and Jon Hamilton



Steve Crine (r), blue watch, Cheadle, Greater Manchester, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Matt Fryer, with Rae Ingram, Paul McCourt, Ross Birch, Ross Williamson, Mike Brocklehurst and Shane Barry



Colin Payne (r), Polruan, Cornwall, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Adam Whitehead



Frank McNeill (l), and Glyn Kelly (r), Rothwell, West Yorkshire, receive their 25-year badges from Dave Williams



Stuart Hinds (l), Aldridge, West Midlands, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Neil Kinsey, with (l-r) Carl Hilton, Robin Hendon, Ryan Donaldson and Neil Goodwin



Steve Osbourne (l), Essex HQ, receives his 25-year badge from officers' national committee rep Richie Green



Gary McArthur (l), Portlethen training centre, Aberdeen, receives his 25-year badge from Simon Leroux, North area secretary, Scotland



Steve Stroud (r), Polruan, Cornwall, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Adam Whitehead



Chris Lammy (r), Polruan, Cornwall, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Adam Whitehead



Kevin McGibbon (r), Cupar, Fife, receives his 25-year badge from Cupar branch chair Gordon Nimmo



Jim Ramsden (c), red watch, Acomb, North Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Andy Savor



Gary Stones (l), red watch Agecroft, Greater Manchester, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Lee McNab, with (l-r) Rob Lafferty, Chris Mobey and Chris Clark



Ian Anderson (r), Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from brigade chair Christopher Cook



Antony Richmond (l), fire safety, London, receives his 25-year badge from David Shek, executive council member for London



Neil Roberts (l), blue watch, Wimbledon, London, receives his 25-year badge from colleague Craig Colwill

40-year badge



Terance Jayes (l), red watch, Ilford, London, receives his 40-year badge from branch secretary Owen Gunn and general secretary Matt Wrack



Sasha Hitchins (r), West Midlands brigade secretary, receives her 25-year badge from brigade organiser Philippa Smith, surrounded by members of the brigade committee



Tom Devine (l), Rothwell, West Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from Dave Williams, with Mod 3 water rescue technicians looking on

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

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your brigade organiser of any
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changes to next of kin or nominations
for benefits.

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In recent years, we have seen how much we can achieve when we stand together. With a new government in power, we need to make sure promises become policies. **This is our chance to rebuild and shape our fire service for the future.**

**NOW IS OUR TIME TO TAKE ACTION.
NOW IS LABOUR'S TIME TO DELIVER.**

Together, we need to call on MPs
to support our demands to –

- ☐ REBUILD OUR SERVICE
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- ☐ PROTECT WORKERS' RIGHTS
- ☐ SAFEGUARD COLLECTIVE BARGAINING
- ☐ ENSURE EQUALITY AND INCLUSION
- ☐ DELIVER FOR DECON
- ☐ ACHIEVE PENSIONS JUSTICE

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