

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

August/September 2008

“...I need to advise you that our current perception is that it is highly unlikely that our client fire authorities will agree to move their operations into the RCC voluntarily...”

DEAR FIRE MINISTER... YOUR PROJECT'S GONE TO THE DOGS

Support for regional controls crumbles among fire authorities – and chief fire officers too **See pages 2 and 10**



'Dad's Army'

Privateers Group 4 could be brought in to strike break under Government plans **page 10**



Pitt reports on flooding

Give us the equipment, training and funding and we'll get on with the job **Page 14**



Day Off

Me and my sailing **Page 20**



Westminster must abandon regional controls



The Fire Control project is in deep crisis.

South west England fire authorities have said they are highly unlikely to agree to shut their existing control rooms and sign up to regional controls. The chief fire officer of Essex, reflecting the private views of many of his colleagues, has questioned the key Government justifications for FireControl and warned any further delays may force him to recommend withdrawing from it.

These developments come after the Government finally admitted that FireControl will deliver no savings at all, let alone the 30% off the running costs of existing controls as they had promised and which fire authorities had been expecting to be available to plough back into frontline services.

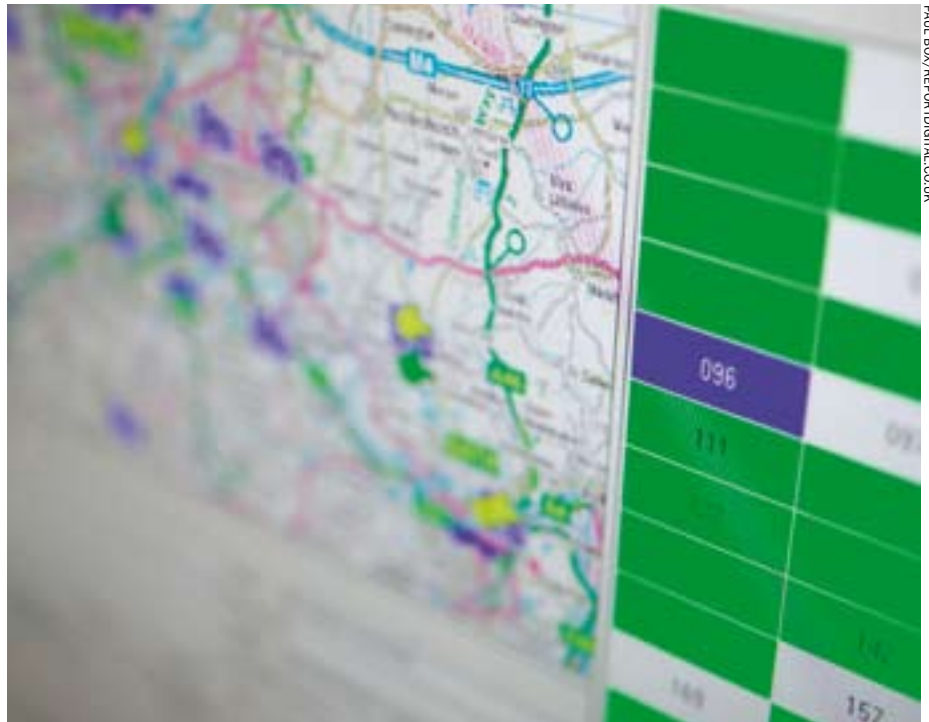
Frustration about escalating costs is compounded by constant delays. The Government still has not produced a proper business case: the "latest" was expected in February, then in June and we are still waiting. Having been originally scheduled to come on line in 2006 and 2007, regional controls are now timed to start coming on stream from October 2009 through to November 2011.

FireControl is now very late, massively over-budget and still has not been tested to establish whether it actually works. There are no benefits which justify the risks this project represents for firefighter and public safety. Regional controls should be abandoned now.

Following the briefing of MPs in Westminster on July 16, the Union is taking that message to fire authority chairs through the summer until fire authority meetings are held in September and October. I urge you to keep an eye out for local initiatives aimed at targeted lobbying of your fire authority chair and councillors.

Pitt and the floods

The Pitt Review has reported and the Union has welcomed many of its findings.



PAUL BOX/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

The review, commissioned by the Government after last summer's flooding emergency, has called for action to address the deficiencies in personal protective equipment and training for fire crews responding to flooding emergencies.

It has also called for a fully funded national capability for flood rescue in which fire and rescue authorities would play a lead role, including a strong recommendation to consider a statutory duty as the mechanism to embed this role.

Significantly, in all the 400-plus pages of the report, there was not one mention of any role for regional controls, despite the review team being strongly invited to by Government in its submission. Indeed, Pitt saw regional structures as spreading confusion.

The key issues and demands identified by Pitt are the same as those in the FBU's recently published report on the fire and rescue service response to the floods. Government must now act quickly and decisively on all the Pitt Review's recommendations relating to the fire and rescue service.

Privatised strike-breaking

Project Fireguard, managed by the Chief Fire Officers Association, aims to provide arrangements for "business continuity" in the fire service during strikes now the Government has decided the army cannot. It is a plan for organised – and privatised – strikebreaking within the service.

Instead of wasting public money on a scheme which may never be needed and would not work even if it was, senior fire service managers should focus on helping to improve relations and staff morale. It is the endless drive for change for the sake of change and penny-pinching attacks on conditions of service that has produced conflict in our Service. Yet £100 million plus – over 10 years – can be found for this ridiculous project.

In line to pick up the contract is Group4 Security Services (UK) plc, a multinational corporation whose only interest in our service is to make a bit more profit at the expense of UK tax and council tax payers. Members may remember the company's role in a number of prisoner escapes in the UK. This is by no means the only episode for which Group4 has come under scrutiny. All stakeholders should be deeply concerned about them having any role in the Fire Service.

Terry Fields

You will see over the page the obituary for Terry Fields. Terry was a fine socialist and trades unionist – a man who stuck by his principles. He was also a man of great humour. As well as his speeches and his politics I will always remember him (in Bridlington Labour Club) singing and expertly playing a tin tray with a two pence piece. Farewell Comrade.

Matt Wrack

STEVE GARDNER



Terry Fields addressing an FBU rally in London in 1989

Terry Fields

Terry Fields, a Merseyside firefighter, FBU official and Labour MP, was a man of honour, honesty and humour.

An unwavering champion of working class and progressive causes, Terry Fields' consistent record of matching words with actions was most famously marked by his imprisonment for 60 days in 1991 for refusing to pay the poll tax.

Born in Bootle in 1937, he was the son of a former dock worker. In 1957 he became a firefighter in Merseyside. As an FBU activist he was elected Executive Council member for the Merseyside and Cheshire region (now part of Region 5).

In 1983, after 26 years in the fire service, he was elected Labour MP for Liverpool, Broadgreen. One of his election slogans was, "A workers' MP on a workers' wage". Again, Terry put his words into action, taking the wage of a firefighter and putting the rest of his MP's salary into a fund for trade union and progressive causes. It was this type of commitment that ensured the seat was won against the national trend and then ensured that in the June 1987 general election he almost doubled his majority. His determination to put principle above career ensured that he won the support and respect of many ordinary people increasingly cynical about most politicians.

As an MP, Terry Fields

opposed cuts in benefits to the dependants of striking miners and, to Neil Kinnock's anger, joined a protest over the miners that culminated in the suspension of the Commons. He led a march of schoolchildren through Cardiff in protest at social security cuts affecting students, opposed a Bill to lower the time limit on abortions and urged non-payment of the poll tax. He was eventually jailed for refusing to pay. He was also an internationalist – sponsoring a parliamentary motion condemning the murder of Chileans by General Pinochet's secret police.

Terry was suspended from the Labour Party in September 1991 and then expelled for his Militant support. In April 1992 he stood as an independent Labour candidate but lost to the official Labour candidate. Asked if he would continue in politics he replied: "I've never been in politics in the accepted sense. All I've been is the representative of ordinary people in my area."

In 2002 Terry, ever the firefighter, rescued a woman from a house fire while on his way home from his social club.

Terry Fields was a great socialist, trade unionist and a leader of the left. He was an inspiration to many. He will be sadly missed.

■ Terry Fields, MP and trade unionist, was born on March 8, 1937. He died of lung cancer on June 28, 2008, aged 71.

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Government must act on the Pitt Review of last year's floods



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Correction

The article "Making the service a better place to work" (page 12, Firefighter June 2008), contained an error. The target percentage for new women entrants in operational roles should read 15%, not 12%. This percentage was determined by the CLG following a three-month period of consultation with all stakeholders including the Union.

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Win this month's quiz, and win an iPod Touch

WIN
an iPod
Touch
see p22



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Appeal to go ahead – new guidance imminent

ILL-HEALTH PENSIONS

The Union has been granted an appeal against the decision in a Judicial Review of the treatment of three retired London members who had their ill-health pensions removed. The appeal will be heard on January 13–14.

At the High Court on May 15 the judge ruled that government guidance issued in 2004 which said a disabled or badly injured firefighter may be given an ill-health pension unless they could be redeployed to a job within their role was wrong. Instead, it backed new guidance, issued in 2006, that a firefighter capable of doing any part of their job, even answering the phone, would not get an ill-health pension regardless of whether or not they were able to be redeployed to such restricted duties.

The news of the appeal came as the Union awaited the formal issuing of ill-health pensions guidance by Communities and Local Government. This is dependent on two further guidance documents from the Local Government Association and the Association of Local Authorities Medical Advisors.

These organisations give further advice to fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) when dealing with ill health issues.

The Union raised concerns that there are still outstanding cases of ill-health to deal with and that some FBU members may still be in a situation of uncertainty.

Following this the Union has welcomed confirmation that the two agreed draft documents are available on the CLG website and any FRA or individual requesting information on which guidance to use is being directed towards them.





Workforce development gets boost with new code

INTEGRATED PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

A new code of practice to encourage fire authorities to be more consistent in the application of the fire service Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) has been published.

The Union has been involved in the IPDS process since 2001. The IPDS project board, which includes fire service stakeholders including the FBU, met for the last time in December 2007 and agreed the code of practice document.

The document outlines how IPDS should be applied in every fire and rescue authority (FRA) and covers many aspects including vocational qualifications, national occupational standards and rolemaps.

It identifies which parts of the IPDS system are mandatory and advisory and

makes it clear that any amendments to rolemaps must be sanctioned by the NJC.

"We welcome the IPDS code of practice document," said National Officer Sean Starbuck. "IPDS is about identifying, attracting, assessing and developing an individual to fulfil their current and future roles.

"This new code of practice should help ensure clarity, consistency and fairness for FBU members in the application of IPDS. We will now be working hard to ensure fire authorities adhere to it in full."

The Union is planning to issue guidance for officials to enable them to encourage their FRA to adopt the code of practice in its entirety, giving a consistent approach to IPDS.

➔ More info: www.fbu.org.uk

Top award for Firefighter

The *Firefighter* article on the four firefighters who lost their lives in the fire in Warwickshire in November 2007 won the Best Feature award at the TUC Communications Awards in July. Judges described the article as "A moving account of a terrible tragedy" and praised its "great use of pictures". One judge described it as "in a class of its own".

In the One-off Publication category, the *Firefighter* supplement *The Road to Iraq*, telling how two appliances were driven by FBU members to Iraq, was highly commended and described as "conceptually strong and a

delight to read".

The Union's cuts campaign in Cornwall and FBU-Tube both won commendations. The former, said judges, was "a good example of low budget, local campaigning that worked, using a creative and strategic approach." They thought FBU-Tube was "a great idea" that gets members' voices in the public domain.

In comments on the Best Publication category, the judges said *Firefighter* had a good campaigning focus, reflecting a busy, dynamic union, adding: "The content was strong and design attractive."



Sounding off!

MICK SHAW

President

US War on Terror?

While in Cuba for May Day this year (more on this in a forthcoming issue), I attended an international trade union solidarity meeting in Havana, where I met families of five Cubans who have been imprisoned in the USA for almost ten years.

Their crime? They were sent undercover by Cuba to Miami to gather advance information on terrorist plots. For nearly 50 years Miami-based terrorists opposed to the Cuban government have targeted Cuba. Nearly 3,500 people have died in terrorist attacks, including the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner which killed 73 people, and bomb attacks aimed at the island's economy and tourism industry.

The five Cuban anti-terrorists succeeded in uncovering details of the terrorists' plans and Havana passed this information to the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation. But



Mick Shaw (centre) at a rally in Cuba to support the Miami 5

the FBI took no action against those planning further attacks on Havana. Instead, it arrested the five Cubans and convicted them of a range of charges, including being foreign agents and conspiracy to commit murder.

For fighting terrorism, the five Cubans were sentenced to between 15 years and life. Meanwhile in the same US state, Luis Posada Carriles, who has publicly admitted his role in the bombing of the 1976 airliner bombing, is allowed to walk free. To add insult to injury, the wives of two of the five – Adriana, wife of Gerardo Hernández, and René González's wife Olga – are denied visas to enter the United States to visit their husbands. In 2006, Amnesty International wrote an open letter to the US State Department deploring the treatment of the prisoners and their families.

On 7 October the Cuba Solidarity Campaign will be organising a vigil at the US Embassy in London's Grosvenor Square, part of a worldwide campaign to free the five Cubans. I will be attending the vigil and would urge all FBU members who are able to do so to do likewise.

➔ More information, www.freethethefive.org

Talks on RDS equal treatment to start

JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



EQUALITY

Three meetings between the Union and national fire service employers are planned over the summer to try to reach a negotiated settlement following the successful outcome of the Union's eight-year legal battle for equal treatment for retained duty system firefighters.

The aim, following the third meeting on 5 September, is to present an agreed outcome to the NJC on 30 September 2008. Discussions will take place between NJC Secretaries and the FBU negotiating team led by the General Secretary, advised by executive council member for retained Tam Mitchell and others from the National Retained Committee.

■ Want the FBU to visit your station? Email: stationvisit@fbu.org.uk

In brief



◆ FBU regional reps met National Officer Sean Starbuck and TUC Academy Organiser Dan Giblin (above) on 17 June to discuss how best to push forward the organising agenda in the coming months. The focus continues to be on retained duty system firefighters.



ANDREW BARRETT

◆ A team of FBU officials is looking at all the resolutions on workforce development that were carried at annual conference in May as well as those that were remitted. These resolutions include issues around retained duty system to wholtime transferability, problems with assessment and development centres and vocational qualifications as well as concerns about rolemap amendments. All progress will be reported via circulars and the website.

◆ The department for Communities and Local Government has offered support to the Union in promoting best practice in the fire service on maternity, paternity and adoption rights upon receipt of the union's new negotiating guide on this issue. In a letter to the Union, Minister Parmjit Dhandra wrote that the fact that there are fire services in England that have yet to develop appropriate policies on these "important" matters was "disappointing". More info: www.fbu.org.uk/workplace/fairnesswork/index.php

Bucks crews welcome family-friendly decision

DUTY SYSTEMS

Buckinghamshire fire crews have welcomed the decision of councillors not to rubber stamp plans to change their shifts. The plans will not now be recommended to a fire authority meeting in September.

More than 120 firefighters, officers and emergency fire control staff and their families

protested on 26 June outside the meeting in Stoke Mandeville at the plans that would damage family life.

The proposals would have seen day shifts extended from nine hours to 12 hours alongside an earlier start time of 7.30am and a later finish time of 7.30pm.

Fire crews say those changes would have caused havoc with childcare, undermined their

family life and made a mockery of management claims of being a family friendly employer.

Ricky Matthews, Buckinghamshire FBU brigade secretary said: "All we want to do is to continue to work to keep the people of this county safe at all hours and every day of the year.

"That can be achieved within a sensible shift system that works for us and the public we serve."



Problems in perspective

PALESTINE

We have problems of our own in the UK fire and rescue service, but Palestinian firefighters have it worse. On a trade union delegation to Palestine in June FBU officials John McGhee, Kevin Brown and Dave Chappell met firefighters in the Palestinian town of Nablus (left), and heard of their problems as a result of the Israeli occupation: prevented from attending emergencies, delayed for an hour or more at check-points, and even killed by Israeli soldiers when undertaking their duties. More details will feature in a future issue of *Firefighter* magazine.

FBU steps up its anti-fascist campaign

STOP THE BNP

Running in tandem with campaigning in London and elsewhere, FBU members and officials have been active in opposing the BNP in the East Midlands where a demonstration and picket against the BNP's second Red White and Blue Festival on August 16 was planned. The festival is to be held once again on the land of a BNP supporter at Codnor, Derbyshire.

The planned mobilisation follows a successful picket of the licensing application meeting for the event. The BNP had applied to Amber Valley Borough Council licensing panel for an entertainment and drinks licence but, because of the adverse publicity and, the Union believes, the picket of the meeting, the BNP withdrew its application. But it is understood that the BNP is pushing ahead with the event, calling it a 'private party'.

Dave Green, Executive Council member for the East Midlands said: "Last year's festival reportedly saw stalls selling Nazi merchandise and memorabilia and there was German marching music, an iconic part of Nazi Germany, blasted out across the countryside into the small hours.

"The BNP call any opposition to their festival anti-democratic. But opposition against the event is particularly strong amongst local residents. What the people from Codnor saw and heard horrified them and they have supported the coalition of opposition against the festival – even the local vicar has taken up the cause and is assisting the anti-fascist groups."

"It is imperative that we build on this and as many people as possible attend and voice their opposition.

"The fact that the BNP are portraying themselves as a legitimate political party in the media and during election time is hugely contradicted by what happens when they are out of the spotlight and feel they can be more themselves."

The 'Stop the BNP Festival' campaign took off in autumn last year. There was little publicity surrounding the first BNP 'Red, White and Blue' festival and it passed without any real opposition. However, trade unionists and activists from Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire became



FBU members and officials joined thousands from across the UK on the streets of London in June to show a united opposition to racism and fascist organisations like the British National Party

aware that the event was, in the eyes of the BNP, a success and that they planned a bigger event for 2008.

As a result a group was set up in Nottinghamshire called 'Notts Stop the BNP' and this group joined forces with Unite Against Fascism (UAF) groupings across the East Midlands (notably in Derby)

'It is imperative that we build on this and as many people as possible attend and voice their opposition'

to form a co-ordinated opposition to the festival.

Initial planning meetings were held in Nottingham to co-ordinate opposition to the event and the main inaugural meeting in January was attended by over 100 activists,

including six FBU members and among them, members of the FBU's Black and Ethnic Minority Section, who travelled from across the country. FBU East Midlands region was an active part of the campaign from the start.

As part of the campaign, a joint statement by FBU and Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service was sent to all employees of the brigade and a motion to Midlands TUC Regional Council was passed unanimously.

Support for the demonstration and picket on August 16 has been pledged by the RMT, PCS, Unison and the FBU.

→ www.nobnpfestival.wordpress.com

■ The Union joined other TUC-affiliated unions in pulling out of the July London Rise Festival following the new Conservative Mayor's decision to remove anti-racism from the theme.

2009 – a key year in Parliament

JOHN MCDONNELL MP, SECRETARY, FBU PARLIAMENTARY GROUP



The central campaign of the FBU Parliamentary Group in 2007/08 has been the regionalisation of fire control centres. But pensions, floods, firefighter deaths and a whole range of other issues have also featured high on our agenda.

Almost from the very beginning of the group being established three years ago, we have been highlighting severe concerns about the FireControl project to regionalise fire control rooms. Whether it is the escalating budget, insufficient call handling capacity, loss of jobs, expertise, or local knowledge – the FBU Parliamentary Group has made the arguments and has won support from hundreds of MPs.

At the end of last year, we also won the argument in Scotland when the Scottish Executive abandoned plans for regionalisation.

Earlier in 2007, the group became aware of reports of firefighters retired on ill-health grounds being re-assessed and having their pensions stopped.

We immediately sought a meeting with Parmjit Dhanda, the parliamentary under-secretary in the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) with responsibility for the fire and rescue service. We also intervened in adjournment debates to pressure the minister for assurances that there would be a moratorium on any further 'reassessments'. Although nothing is yet concrete, we look to have secured a deal so that no more retired firefighters are left without a job and a pension.

On housing, the group supported amendments to the Housing and Regeneration Bill. These would have given back greater control over local housing

policy to councils and allowed them to build a new generation of council housing, which would bring a clear benefit to FBU members and their families. These amendments were tabled by fellow group MP Austin Mitchell, and supported by the Defend Council Housing campaign. The group has also fought to defend the 24-week time limit for abortion in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill – in line with FBU policy.

Through the debate on the Employment Bill, after the House of Commons' summer recess ending October 6, the Group will be fighting to secure stronger trade union rights – including elements of the Trade Union Freedom Bill.

Over the coming year, we will continue to fight the regionalisation agenda to ensure that there is no attack on jobs, no cuts in terms and conditions, and no attempts at derecognition of the FBU.

A fire in Hackney Wick, London on November 12 last year inside the boundaries of the site where demolition and construction work is taking place for the London 2012 Olympics

PHOTO: RHYS WILLIAMS/
SCOOP/GETTY IMAGES

This fight is starting immediately, with redundancy notices already issued in the south west region – and the East Midlands the next region to move to a regional control. That's why we didn't wait until after the summer recess, but set about hosting a briefing meeting for MPs on July 17, in the last full week of Parliament.

Likewise, following the publication in late June 2008 of the Pitt Review on floods we secured an urgent meeting with floods recovery minister John Healey. Over the coming months, as new legislation is drafted for the next parliamentary session, the group and the Union will be campaigning to ensure that the voice of firefighters is not only heard, but shapes the National Flood Emergency Framework consultation.

No doubt, as in previous years, we will have to defend local services against cuts

wherever they are occurring in the country, and support local brigades in their battles to maintain a decent service for their local communities. In the next year, we hope to open up a debate about how we can ensure local integrated risk management plans take proper account of both local fire brigades and clear national guidance.

We will also continue to monitor closely the review of guidance to fire authorities which the CLG is carrying out.

With the Government's planned roll-out of fire control regionalisation, and new legislation affecting how the fire and rescue service deals with floods, 2008/09 will be a key year for our group in parliament. If we are to be successful, it will require all of us to engage in a co-ordinated campaign uniting FBU members, MPs and our wider communities.



IN NUMBERS

In the last year, the FBU Parliamentary Group has:

- Held six regular Group meetings
- Circulated ten written briefing papers to MPs on specific campaigns
- Tabled over 100 written parliamentary questions
- Tabled or supported eight Early Day Motions
- Met with Ministers on two occasions, with a third meeting in the offing
- Written eight letters to Ministers, local fire authority chiefs, and others
- Spoken in two adjournment debates on fire service issues
- 42 MPs as members

PRIVATE 'DAD'S ARMY' WOULD BREAK STRIKES

At a time of cuts over budgets, fire services are considering handing millions to privateers Group 4 to ensure 'business continuity' during industrial action

Fire service managers have hatched plans to create a private strike-breaking force for fire services in England and Wales that will cost £100m over 10 years.

The Union has dubbed the project, to be managed by the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), a "privatised Dad's Army". It said the move was "provocative" and the focus should be on improving public relations and staff morale instead.

According to documents obtained by the Observer and Sunday Mirror newspapers, the private firm Group 4S Security Services (G4S) will provide personnel "in scenarios such as pandemic flu, industrial action, or as a result of a catastrophic incident or natural disaster."

Group 4, which made over £300 million profit last year, is the preferred bidder for a 10-year contract providing a one-off payment of just under £10 million and then a further £9 million a year just to cover running costs – even if no strike action occurs.

Group 4 has made headlines for its handling of the

Yarl's Wood fire, losing prisoners, a mistaken deportation to Zimbabwe and failing to properly monitor offenders – including alleged murderers, sex offenders and suspected terrorists – under an electronic tagging scheme it was running for the Government. The global security firm is also under fire for human and trade union rights abuses from the USA to Indonesia.

Project Fireguard – to provide "business continuity" cover – has been launched because the army can no longer offer cover, said Barry Dixon, chief fire officer for Greater Manchester. The Union is raising the matter with the Government. FBU and local officials will be taking it up with chief fire officers and councillors. Fire authorities are being consulted on the plans over the summer.

Advertisements for jobs have already been published and the Union is strongly advising out-of-trade FBU members and other organisations of retired firefighters not to participate in what it has described as a "ridiculous farce".

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "It's a privatised Dad's Army training for the battle that never comes."

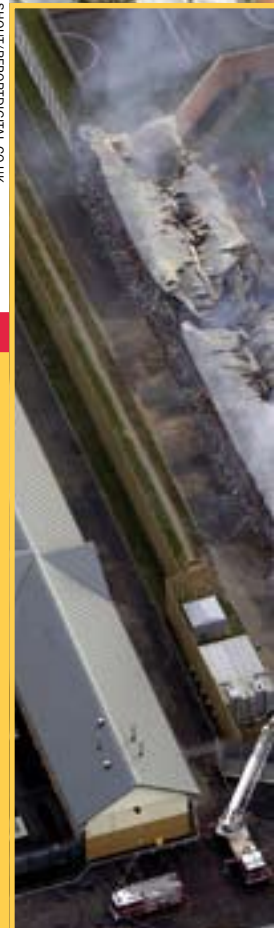
"This is proposed in a service where we are constantly being told that cuts are unavoidable due to financial pressure. The investment of this money at local level could actually avoid some of the problems which we have faced over recent years in individual fire services."

"Instead of planning for privatised strikebreaking, politicians and chief officers in our service would be better used trying to improve industrial relations and avoiding conflict in the first place."

JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



SHOBY/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



GROUP 4'S CATALOGUE OF FAILURES AND LABOUR RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

■ In February 2002, Group4-run Yarl's Wood detention centre in Bedfordshire was burnt down following a protest by the detainees reportedly triggered by a 55-year-old woman being physically restrained by staff. At the trial in 2003 of the 11 asylum seekers charged in connection with the fire, a former Group 4 officer was reported to have said he was ordered to "lock detainees in the burning building", although Group 4 denied this. A Prisons and Probation Ombudsman report could not substantiate this claim, nor did it find evidence to justify the allegation that Group 4 improperly denied access to the emergency services to enter Yarl's Wood. However, there were other gaffes, including a failure to train staff

in fire safety matters which meant that they could not offer detainees effective assistance during the fire. Furthermore, no sprinkler system was fitted in the centre, despite being recommended by Bedfordshire Fire Authority. Group 4 were themselves suspects as a company and were investigated for the offence of corporate manslaughter until it was concluded nobody had died in the fire. Calls for a public inquiry were ignored. The Union had warned that Yarl's Wood was a fire waiting to happen..

■ Poor management and faulty electronic tagging equipment at G4S's operation in the East

Midlands led to offenders not being monitored – sometimes for months at a time – and some staff lying to hit Government targets, according to a 2007 BBC documentary. Two men described as sex offenders and one as a murderer went unmonitored for days at a time. Someone whom members of staff described as a suspected terrorist connected to the 7/7 London tube bombings was left unmonitored, once for more than 24 hours. One G4S staff member quoted said: "You think this company is doing good? It's crap."

■ In September 2006, just weeks after major hand luggage restrictions were imposed on passengers at





Group 4 staff at Yarl's Wood detention centre watch an anti-deportation demonstration. Left: fire crews tackle the blaze at the centre.



Britain's airports following a terrorist threat at Heathrow Airport, a traveller carried three scalpels through G4S airport security and onto a plane at Doncaster's Robin Hood Airport. Although the blades triggered an alarm, G4S security officers failed to find them. When the passenger suggested that they might be a tin of mints, the G4S security officer looked at the mints and waved her through. In 2003, 41 people who lost family members in the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 sued Argenbright, then a G4S subsidiary, over its screening practices.

■ In November 2006 an asylum seeker escaped from Dungavel Detention Centre in Scotland in a laundry van less than six weeks after G4S took over the centre.

This is not a first – when Group 4 became the first company to take on private prison escort duties in the UK, they were the laughing stock of the nation after managing to lose seven prisoners in one week in 1994.

■ In July 2006 G4S mistakenly deported a woman to Zimbabwe, according to the BBC. The deportation had been cancelled following a High Court review. The Home Office had faxed G4S to cancel the deportation, but the temporary member of G4S staff who received the fax did not realise its importance.

■ Violations of workers rights have been documented in nine countries. In Indonesia in 2006 over 200 union

members participating in legal strike action at Securicor/Group 4 Falck were dismissed on false claims that they had resigned. In 2007 the US National Labor Relations Board ruled against G4S' American subsidiary Wackenhut in a case involving security workers who sought to organise a union at the headquarters of the IMF in Washington DC.

■ Before Group 4 merged with Falck in 2000, the ultimate holding company was based in the Dutch Antilles, a tax haven. Group 4 Falck then merged with Securicor in July 2004 to become Group 4 Securicor PLC, which is UK-based.

Sources: BBC, The Guardian, Daily Record (Glasgow), Home Office, Unison, Service Employees International Union/Focus on G4S, Independent Race and Refugee News Network.

Dear Fire Minister project has gone

Fire authorities in the south west of England are 'highly unlikely' to agree to shut down their local control rooms and embrace FireControl. Support among CFOs is crumbling too.

Fire authorities in the south west of England have warned fire minister Parmjit Dhanda that they are "highly unlikely" to agree to shut down their local fire control centres and move to a regional centre in Taunton. The message was given in a letter from the local government company set up to run the control centre and signed by Jerry Willmott, chair of Wiltshire fire authority on its behalf.

The news came amid growing concern about the project in other English regions following the admission by Government that the massive 30% savings it promised will not emerge.

The full and detailed costs of the project for England that were promised for February and then for the end of June, had still not materialised as *Firefighter* went to press.

The project costs, first estimated at £100 million, have risen to nearly £1.5 billion as they grew to include extra items such as rent for new buildings.

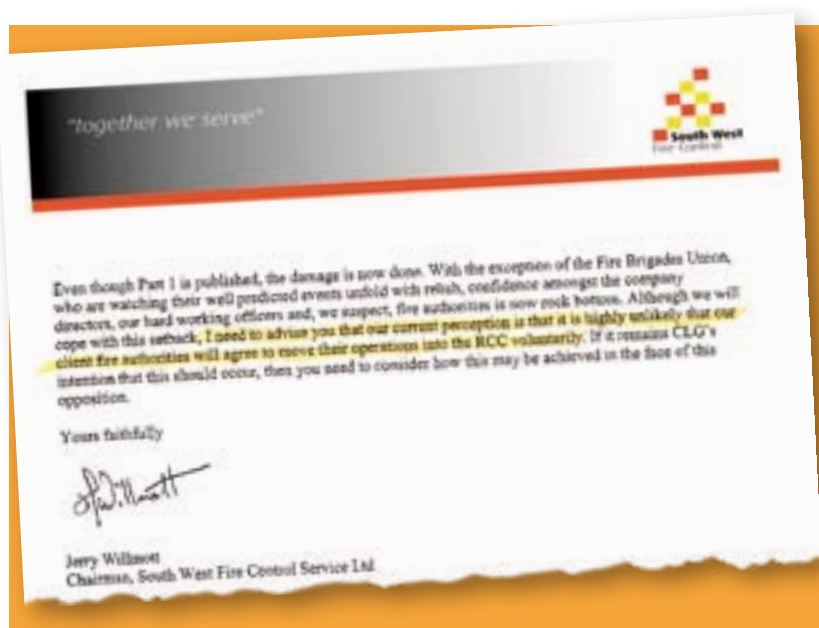
But even this excludes a huge amount of extra work currently carried out in fire service controls. Fire authorities will either have to pay for this work to be contracted out or pay the new regional controls extra money for doing the work.

In a letter to fire minister Parmjit Dhanda, Jerry Willmott, chair of South West Fire Control Service Ltd (the company set up by the fire authorities to run the controls) wrote on 8 July: "In essence, the message that I have been asked to convey is one of immense frustration, profound disappointment and

an overall feeling of being let down once again by CLG failing to honour the promises that they make. We feel that our personal credibility is being compromised and that is absolutely unacceptable.

"With the exception of the Fire Brigades Union, who are watching their well-predicted events unfold with relish, confidence amongst the company directors, our hard-working officers and, we suspect, fire authorities is now rock bottom. Although we will cope with this setback, I need to advise you that our current perception is that it is highly unlikely that our client fire authorities will agree to move their operations into the RCC voluntarily. If it remains CLG's intention that this should occur, then you need to consider how this may be achieved in the face of this opposition."

Chief Officers are also increasingly and openly raising concerns. Essex chief fire officer David Johnson told local media: "The business case contains an awful lot of assumptions and statements that we have asked repeatedly for further information on and that information has



not been forthcoming."

"We have a very effective control room that mobilises resources quickly and effectively to emergencies when we receive calls.

According to Mr Johnson the functions of all the systems which Essex is said to be missing are replicated by other systems which do similar jobs. He said: "What I am keen to point out is that whilst technically we do not do these things we do many of them, but in a different way than the Regional Control Centre is going to do them."

"I am a little bit disappointed – I would say the [CLG] report is disingenuous ... To turn around and say we need to have (centralised) fire control because we do not have these things is not portraying the full picture.

"The control room [east of England] is due to go live in summer 2011 – if there is any further slippage taking into Olympic year [2012] my concern is whether I will be professionally comfortable with agreeing to move knowing it will have this impact before the world's largest sporting event."

‘Once again the CLG has failed to honour the promises that it makes’

ster, your ne to the dogs

PROMISES, PROMISES

“In addition to greater resilience the new system will deliver running cost savings over the present system.”

Parmjit Dhanda MP Parliamentary Under Secretary of State CLG, January 2008

“The current estimate in the FBC (Full Business Case) is that FRAs (Fire and Rescue Authorities) will make efficiency savings of around £115m in the six years from FY 2012-13 until FY 2017-18 and they are expected to continue to make savings directly as a result of FireControl for two more years before they replace the systems.”



Letter from Parmjit Dhanda, 6 November 2007 to Matt Wrack General Secretary FBU re FiReControl Full Business Case

“There is however, a strong business case for regional controls, showing that there are significant efficiency savings to be made ... RCCs will achieve, on average, a saving of some 30% over existing arrangements. In the case of smaller fire and rescue services with lower call volumes, savings will be significantly higher than this. These savings will enable us to invest more money in frontline fire prevention.”

Letter to the FBU from former Fire Minister Nick Raynsford, 10 December 2004



WHAT YOU CAN DO

The Union is stepping up the campaign at this crucial time.

It co-ordinated a “drop-in” for MPs at the House of Commons in Westminster on July 16 where control staff and firefighters across the country were available to speak to MPs from their respective areas.

Throughout the summer, the FBU will be intensively targeting English fire authority councillors up to the point when they make decisions in their September-October fire authority meetings



DEFEND CONTROL JOBS
AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

about future participation in the FireControl project.

Listen out for and participate in local initiatives aimed at highlighting concerns directly with your fire authority. Local FBU officials may be requesting permission to present the Union's views on the closure of your local regional control rooms.

The south west England control room building under construction



PAT BAX/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

'Give us the equipment, training and funding and we'll get on with the job'

Government must act on the Pitt Review recommendations for a fully funded, FRS-led national capability for flood rescue and adequate PPE and training

The Union is urging Government to act quickly on the Pitt Review recommendations to ensure a better and safer rescue response to floods by the fire and rescue service. It has said it was unacceptable for fire crews to continue to be put at risk by a lack of equipment and training. The Union challenged Government to commit itself to acting quickly and decisively on all of the recommendations in the report relating to the fire and rescue service.

The review by Sir Michael Pitt was launched in the wake of the flooding emergency that took place in June and July 2007, when over 30,000 million cubic metres of rain fell on north and south west England as well as other parts of the country. In an unparalleled effort in post-war history, the fire service rescued over 3,000 people and ensured that vital services were protected.

In one of a number of findings welcomed by the Union, the review concluded that the public and rescuers were put at unnecessary risk by the current lack of clarity over who was responsible for the emergency response to flooding.

Furthermore, it stated: "It appears that in the event of another wide-area flooding emergency, those responding would still not necessarily have the right resources or training to respond safely" (Paragraph 11.60).

The report recommended that the Government urgently put in place a "fully funded national capability" for flood rescue in which fire and rescue authorities would play a lead role, "underpinned, as necessary, by a statutory duty" (Recommendation 39).

Climate change

Climate change, it said, was likely to lead to floods becoming both more frequent and more severe in the future. "The response capability for major floods, including coordination arrangements and resources needs to be enhanced to reflect this."

It stated that the existing boats, personal protective equipment (PPE) and training were predominantly for local rescue – not for the "greater scale of response required for multiple rescues in wide-area flooding events" (Paragraph 11.58).

The report cited firsthand evidence that

fire crews were working in normal firefighting PPE and how they had rapidly become "wet, cold and risked contamination" by flood water (Paragraph 11.59). This evidence was mirrored by that of the chief fire and rescue adviser, Sir Ken Knight.

This recounted how crews worked in difficult conditions, frequently using personal protective equipment designed for routine firefighting duties, or for infrequent, short-duration incidents in rivers, lakes and canals rather than an interoperable response.

Regarding other essential equipment, the review quoted government estimates that showed that the number of boats in England and Wales suitable for flood rescue currently held by various local responders, including the fire and rescue services, was less than half the number required.

It found that there were approximately 70 boats but said that a further 80 boats and, crucially, associated personnel and equipment would be needed to respond to future wide-area floods, based on a 'worst case' scenario, and called on the Government to invest in these additional resources "at the earliest



Toll Bar near Doncaster was one of the areas worst hit by the June 2007 floods and firefighters were back in the town in January this year evacuating homes and businesses as heavy rain brought renewed flooding



JOHN GILES/PA PHOTOS

possible opportunity” (Paragraph 11.66). In a marked contrast to Sir Ken Knight’s report – the Government’s submission – there was, however, not a word in the 400-plus pages of Sir Michael Pitt’s review on a role for regional controls in improving resilience in the face of widescale flooding.

Pitt’s focus was on national and local level responses. Regional structures such as the Regional Civil Contingencies Committees (RCCCs) activated in the South West region on 23 and 24 July 2008 – the first RCCCs activated since the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 came into force – caused “uncertainty” and the reasons for creating them “were not widely

appreciated” (Paragraphs 13.41/13.42).

FBU South West Regional Secretary John Drake said: “We’re proud of the work of firefighters across the south west during the floods despite the absence of even basic equipment. This is a ‘can do’ service and they got on with the job of assisting thousands in their communities as best they could.

Crews frustrated

“But fire crews are increasingly frustrated that central government always seems to expect us to respond without enough personnel and with little or no basic protective clothing or training. Government needs to act on the Pitt recommendations and give us the personnel, equipment and training we need to do the work safely and professionally.

“We’re also angered at the threats to close every single brigade’s control centre in the south west. Local emergency controls were at the heart of organising and managing our magnificent response and plans to axe them will damage our response and that is not acceptable. This was recognised by the Pitt Review which had not a word to say about

regional controls.”

Ian Murray, regional chair of FBU Yorkshire and Humberside, said: “In Yorkshire and Humberside if we faced the same spate weather conditions tomorrow firefighters wearing just fire kit would once again be chest-deep in contaminated water for unacceptably long periods of time.

“A number of fire and rescue services are attempting to implement training and suitable PPE to deal with flooding incidents but more investment is urgently needed. The government must act on the Pitt recommendations and move swiftly to put in place a fully-funded national capability for flood rescue that is led by fire and rescue services.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: “Government must give us the equipment, training and funding and we will get on with the job. This must be done as a matter of urgency. We challenge ministers to make clear Government will act quickly and decisively on these key issues.”

➔ The union’s own report and submission to the review is available at www.fbu.org.uk

Faced with the same spate conditions tomorrow, firefighters wearing just fire kit would once again be chest-deep in contaminated water

WHAT DOES A GROUP

When his cousin told him about life as a firefighter in Nottingham, Kam Basi started applying to brigades. Now, 22 years later, he heads up technical services.

Kam Basi is a group manager and head of technical services for Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service. He is about to take up a post as temporary area manager in the south of the county – where he began his fire service career 22 years ago.

Firefighting was not Kam's first job – he started out as an apprentice electrician, qualified and went to work for British Rail at Derby. But when his cousin told him about life as a firefighter in Nottingham, Kam was inspired to change direction and started applying to brigades. He was taken on by Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service and has since worked his way up through the ranks.

Kam is still very much in the frontline – he was out at a six-pump incident shortly before he spoke to Firefighter. As part of the group manager's job spec he has to "lead, monitor and support people in operational incidents" as well as "plan and implement activities to meet service delivery needs".

He has also got to keep on top of the

'Better equipped firefighters do their job more effectively so the right decision benefits the whole community'

latest legislation, take a strategic overview, stick to budgets and remain in touch with how things are going down with crews on the ground.

His brief as head of technical services means he has to ensure crews and their wagons have the right kit for the job. If a piece of kit is failing to deliver he has to find out why. Is it an individual instance, or part of a trend? Then there is placing orders for new equipment. "I get to see what is available and the benefits new products could bring to our firefighters. Better equipped firefighters can do their job more effectively so the right decision benefits the



PICTURES: JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

whole community." The selection process can involve trial tests of products from manufacturers, getting crucial feedback from frontline crews.

There are, for instance, plans to trial a new two-handed 15-kilo metal door breaker to help Derbyshire crews smash into buildings speedily. These days, says Kam,

with multi-lock systems and thick doors made from tough new materials, "we can't assume a firefighter's size 10 boot, or even a sledgehammer, will do the job. With this piece of equipment, all the force is concentrated at the end, and it can open the door very quickly." Frontline crews will give their verdict before an order is placed.

MANAGER DO?



Kam has also drafted a report making the case for electronic personal dosimeters (EPDs) to gauge radiation levels and replace old-style quartz fibre ones. The cost for these could be cut if Derbyshire links up in a consortium with neighbouring brigades and they place a bulk order. Though it's early days yet.

But one large piece of new kit has just been agreed – a major new rescue unit to help ensure the local brigade can

cope with the first ninety minutes of search and rescue in a major incident, before help arrives from fellow brigades under plans for regional resilience. “We spotted a gap in our provision and took advantage of powers under recent legislation. We have to ensure our firefighters have the best available equipment, while ensuring money is used efficiently. We’ve got to try and strike a balance.”

Kam has relished the challenge of the jobs he’s had in the service so far – including firefighter, watch manager, crew manager, station manager and head of technical services. He has always had an interest in

workforce development and at one point spent two years working to this brief. He believes the service as a whole has benefited from bringing in national occupational standards, and that personal development plans and reviews help firefighters focus “and see how they can progress within the service.” Career progression can, he says, be “horizontal as well as vertical” broadening knowledge, and leading to new opportunities.

“I think nationally we struggle to sell the service and the progression that’s possible, both within uniform and support. Everybody sees the response side – the fire engine rushing to a scene – but there are many key support roles and mechanisms behind the scenes.” He admits he wasn’t aware of the varied opportunities a career in the fire and rescue service could offer when he first signed up. “I didn’t really have much knowledge about progression, I just knew I wanted to be a firefighter. It’s only when I got inside the service that the opportunities opened up. The thing about the service is it really doesn’t matter about your ethnic or educational background. Everybody has an equal chance of progression. You just need to perform.”

But, of course, you can’t perform unless you’re recruited in the first place – which is why Kam thinks it is important that fire and rescue services are making more of an effort to attract people who may not think the service is for them, including women and people from minority ethnic communities. Government policy, outlined in its strategy for diversity and equality, sets targets for new recruits.

“Getting into the fire service is extremely competitive,” says Kam “there are 40 applicants for every single job. Like any employer, we are

going to employ the best for the job. Which is why we need to get the most diverse group of individuals we can to apply in the first place.”

In his own area, there are 16 women firefighters and nine from minority ethnic groups – “a drop in the ocean,” says Kam, when set alongside the 800 people on the payroll. In his role as acting area manager for South Derbyshire, he hopes to carry on selling the service to under-represented groups, drawing, in part, on his own community contacts. “Having a target can help galvanise the organisation, but it’s a target not a quota. It is something to strive for.”

‘Having a target can help galvanise the organisation, but it’s a target not a quota. It is something to strive for’

Working For You

JOE McVEIGH

Regional Secretary

London

London members will be balloted for industrial action unless senior management produce satisfactory proposals on pay protection arrangements for 380 watch managers by 22 August.

The dispute comes against the backdrop of a national agreement that was reached on 13 March between the FBU and fire service employers on pay protection for watch managers and group managers at the National Joint Council.

This agreement – part of the pay protection arrangements linked to the move from rank to role under the 2003 pay and conditions agreement – allowed for improvements to be made at a local level. But the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) has been refusing to make any serious offers of a local enhancement.

The March 2008 pay protection agreement sees a watch manager “B” (protected pay point L) receive a lower level of pay rise than other members for the years 2008-2010.

Those remaining in this protected post on 1 July 2011 will receive a non-pensionable

Should LFEPA not exercise its right to improve on the minimum agreement, the effect on 380 watch managers is an eventual pay cut of nearly £2,500

lump sum of £1,050. At this time, those affected will be assimilated fully into the pay scale of watch manager B. There are similar arrangements for some members in control rooms around the country – bar London.

Should LFEPA not exercise its right under the national agreement to improve on the minimum agreement, the effect on 380 London watch managers is an eventual pay cut of nearly £2,500. Hence the importance of the freedom granted through the NJC to the FBU and management locally to agree enhancements.

London employers’ treatment of our members is shabby in the extreme. This is a loyal and dedicated group of people who deserve much better. They are the people the authority relies on most to ensure that its programme is carried through at stations.

A resolution calling for industrial action, up to and including strike action, was supported unanimously at a recent mass meeting of over 100 angry London watch managers. London Regional Committee has backed the ballot and the FBU Executive Council has given permission for it to be held.

Negotiations with employers set for Friday July 11 were called off after the Union called a lobby of the talks, but they were then reinstated. We await a just proposal.

Injecting sense into immunisation

PCV, Hib, MMR ... which, when, what for?

VACCINES

Ensuring your children are properly immunised is a struggle for many parents and carers who already have enough on their plates with the kids. Below is a recommended timetable for getting those essential injections.

At two months old:

- ◆ Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio and Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) (DTaP/IPV/Hib) – one injection
- ◆ Pneumococcal infection – pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) – one injection

At three months old:

- ◆ Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio and Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) (DTaP/IPV/Hib) – one injection
- ◆ Meningitis C (meningococcal group C) (MenC) – one injection

At four months old:

- ◆ Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio and Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) (DTaP/IPV/Hib) – one injection
- ◆ Meningitis C (meningococcal group C) (MenC) – one injection
- ◆ Pneumococcal infection – pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) – one injection

At around 12 months old:

- ◆ Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) and meningitis C (Hib/MenC) – booster dose in one injection

At around 13 months old:

- ◆ Measles, mumps and rubella (German measles) (MMR) – one injection
- ◆ Pneumococcal infection – pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) – one injection

Three years, four months to five years old (pre-school):

- ◆ Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough) and polio (dTaP/IPV or DTaP/IPV) – one injection
- ◆ Measles, mumps and rubella (German measles) (MMR) – one injection

13 to 18 years old:

- ◆ Diphtheria, tetanus and polio (Td/IPV) – one injection



Immunisation appointment

Your GP's surgery, local health centre, or baby clinic will send you an appointment when your baby's immunisation is due. It is important that your baby has their immunisations as near to two, three and four months of age as possible, to keep the risk of them catching these diseases as low as possible. Premature babies should also be immunised from two months after birth, regardless of how premature they were.

Gap between vaccinations

It is recommended that there is at least a month's gap between each vaccination to allow your child's body to build up an adequate immune response. If the gap is less than a month, an adequate immune response cannot be guaranteed and the immunisation may have to be repeated.

If the gap between immunisations is longer than a month, you should continue the course where you left off, although it is advised that your baby has immunisations at regular monthly intervals if possible. If you miss an appointment, contact your doctor's surgery as soon as possible to rearrange immunisations.

Changes to vaccination schedule

The child vaccination schedule was changed in September 2006 to include a vaccine to protect against pneumococcal infection – the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV).

As part of the changes, children under two who have missed the new scheduled vaccinations will be offered a single dose of PCV as part of a catch-up programme. Children over two years of age will not be part of the catch-up programme because the risk for children who are over two becoming ill with pneumococcal infection is considerably less than for those under two years of age.

A vaccination catch-up programme for haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) started on 10 September 2007 and will run until 3 March 2009. The programme provides a booster vaccination for young children who have not previously received one, so that they are protected in line with older and younger children.

→ Parents/carers should contact their GP's surgery or NHS Direct on 0845 4647 if they have any questions or concerns about the child vaccination schedule. Also, see www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

CHILD HEALTH RECORD BOOK

- ◆ This is the only complete record of childhood immunisations.
- ◆ Vaccinations given at health clinic/school are not necessarily added to a GP's notes, so keep the book in a safe place.
- ◆ Details of childhood illnesses and immunisations are often needed later in life: Without them, booster vaccinations may be required if the level of immunity is unknown.

My mother has to go into care

Q My elderly mother has to go into care. Can I get any financial assistance for this?

A Medical nursing care is provided free of charge. Services other than nursing are always means-tested, including help with bathing, dressing, eating and going to the toilet. Where the primary need is a health need, funding should be the obligation of the NHS.

Most of a resident's income will be put towards the fees for means-tested services.

The main exceptions are:

- The first £21.15 per week (tax year 2008/2009), commonly referred to as 'pocket money' (in Wales, £21.38).
- Where the resident pays half their pension to their spouse, this half is ignored
- Where the resident has responsibility for a child who does not live in the home, their child benefit is ignored.

The capital limits for care home fees in England are: the upper capital limit is £22,250 and the lower capital limit is £13,500 (in Wales, the upper capital limit is £22,000 and the lower capital limit is £19,000). At £13,500 and below the resident's capital is ignored, and only income is taken into account. (It is £19,000 in Wales).

The home is considered to be capital and is therefore included, but it can be ignored under certain exceptions:

- the first 12 weeks after permanent admission to residential accommodation; or
- a husband, wife or partner of the opposite sex lives there; and/or
- a relative who is over 60, or under 16, or disabled, lives in the house.
- if you were being looked after by a carer, who lives in the



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

There are no time limits for someone can be regarded as having deprived themselves of capital. If capital is given away less than six months before entering a home, or while in a home, then section 21 of the Health, Social Services and Social Security Adjudication Act 1983 allows the local authority to claim the cost of care from the person it was given to.

The longer the time lapse between transferring assets and then going into a care home, the less likely the local authority will be able to prove the assets were transferred to deliberately deprive themselves of the capital.

It may be advisable to seek the advice of a trusts lawyer and a tax specialist for ways in which the assets may be protected.

A local authority must not charge for accommodation or personal care provided as after-care services to people leaving hospital after being detained under the Mental Health Act 1983. The NHS will continue to fund any nursing care needs, which means that these residents will continue to pay nothing. This is known as section 117 funding.

Q My mother has money in joint names. What about the assets of her partner?

A Any capital in joint names, apart from the home, is assumed equal ownership and therefore only the person's half share is included in the calculations. The capital of their partner is not assessed.

→ Write in with your legal problem to legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

house, it may be ignored.

The local authority will usually wait until the property is sold before collecting the fees and sometimes it may wait until after death.

An application for a deferred payment agreement can be made by the local authority. This involves a loan secured against the property and is at the discretion of the local authority

The value of the former home is counted as capital, after any outstanding mortgage has been deducted. There is an allowance of 10 per cent of the value to account for the sale costs,

therefore only 90 per cent is actually taken into account.

Q Is there any way I can avoid paying the exorbitant prices care homes charge?

A To give away assets, whether savings or home, in order to qualify for any benefit, is termed "deliberate deprivation". If the local authority believes that this has happened, it can still treat the property as though the person who gave it away still owned it. This is called 'notional capital'.

‘It can be very raw but it’s also really exhilarating’

It’s not only the rich who can enjoy the delights of sailing, as Hendon firefighter Debbie Young was to find out ...

Four years ago, Debbie Young hadn’t really thought about taking up sailing – it seemed a sport for the affluent, conjuring up pictures of private

yachts moored off the French Riviera. Football was Debbie’s main sport, and she was picked to represent her country in the 2004 World Firefighter Games in Sheffield. But while there, she met up with other UK firefighters whose love of sailing proved infectious – and nailed the myth that only the rich can enjoy the delights of sailing.

“I met a couple of guys who run the London Fire Brigade sailing club,” Debbie explains. “They told me about an event for firefighters, racing yachts in the Solent off the Isle of Wight, asked if I’d be interested, and that’s

how I first got involved.” That event was the UK Firefighters Sailing Challenge. The three-day event was held for the fifth year running this year, ending on May Day. It attracted crews from around the country – and even, this year, a few “visitors” from other “blue-light” services – police and ambulance crews.

It was the third year running that Debbie, a firefighter for six and a half years, had taken part. “The weather was pretty awful, but it didn’t really matter,” she says. “Our London boat came 10th out of 23 entrants – West Sussex usually wins, but Hampshire did this time. There are some very experienced and capable crews from both areas.” In fact, the two fire and rescue services co-host the event.



Debbie with the LFB sailing club crew





Racing off Cowes

Each eight-strong team competing in the series of races crews a 370-foot yacht hired for the occasion – no team is allowed to bring its own vessel to get an unfair advantage. Once the race starts, it's all hands on deck – the kind of teamwork firefighters are used to at work. "I love the fact that there are eight of us, each person has a job to do and if that job's not done, it all falls apart – you're not going to go where you're meant to be going." It goes hand in hand with how fire crews operate.

There are races to be won

Debbie regards herself as a bit of a novice, compared to many of the more seasoned hands in the team, but is keen to learn and alongside more experienced team mates happy to share their expertise. After all, there are races to be won.

So what's the appeal? "It's all very tactical, all to do with reading the elements as well as the opposition's tactics. When you're racing you can't just take a direct route to where you want to go – there are winds and tides out there. It can be very raw – especially when the weather's rough. But it's really exhilarating when you're out there. Then there are the evenings in Cowes West Marina, relaxing, taking stock and comparing notes.

Yacht crews are flexible. "We all switch about a bit on board," says Debbie. "But for the last couple of times I've been on the spinaker, which is the huge sail at the front of the boat. When it's up you need someone to stand up there and "fly" it. There are a couple of lines attached to it, and once it fills with air, you have to let it out, and when there's not enough air, you have to try and catch

some. It's all about keeping the boat going as fast as possible."

Debbie also enjoys sailing a lot closer to home. The London Fire Brigade Sailing Club is even in her station's home territory – or at least half of it is. The Club is based on the Welsh Harp reservoir, just off the far from glamorous North Circular, bisected by the boundary between the grounds of Hendon and Willesden fire services. Wagons from Hendon have been called out on occasion when someone's driven a car into the water.

On the reservoir dinghies not yachts are out in force – particularly when the club hosts the Fire Brigades National Dinghy Sailing Championships, which attract crews from all around the country. Once you've proved yourself proficient in taking out a dinghy, you can even take it out yourself, though Debbie usually prefers to go with a colleague.

She still plays a lot of competitive football – but she now twintracks it with sailing. "I only got into it through being in the brigade and there are lots of opportunities out there. You don't have to be rich; it's a lot of fun and all about teamwork."

Tough and demanding

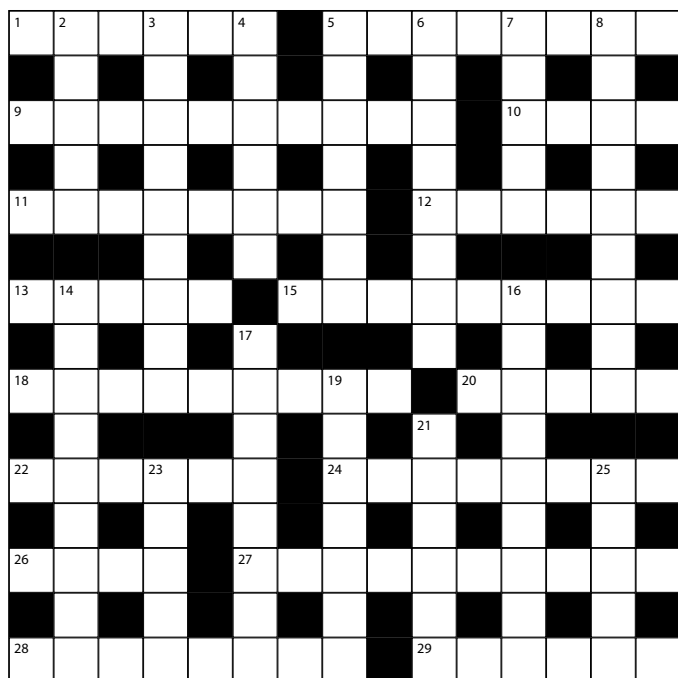
It can be a tough and demanding sport that can have you battling against the elements and trying to outwit rival boats. But it's also a very inclusive sport in the firefighting world. The UKFSC even encourages skippers to enter crews of mixed ability so newcomers to sailing can have a "safe but exhilarating" introduction to the sport. It certainly worked for Debbie.

→ www.ukfsc.org.uk

DEBBIE YOUNG

Debbie Young is a firefighter in Hendon, north London – which is handy for sailing on the nearby Welsh Harp reservoir – when she's not playing football

Quick Crossword

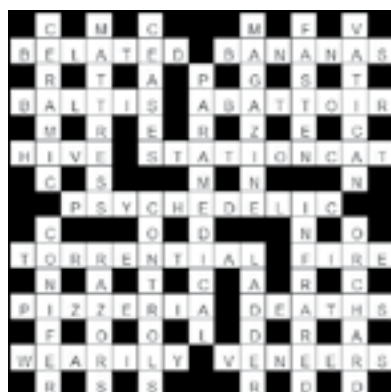


ACROSS

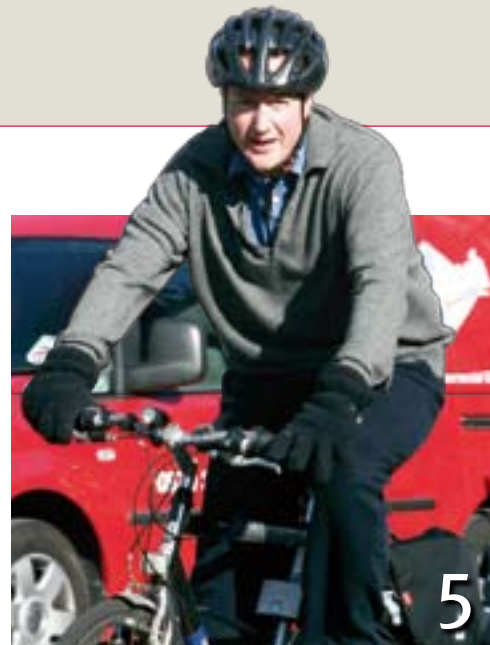
- 1 Clutch at these when you're feeling helpless (6)
- 5 Eyes, nose, ears, mouth etc (8)
- 9 Us, as seen by Martians, perhaps (10)
- 10 Scratch it! (4)
- 11 Choose once more (8)
- 12 One who stands guard (6)
- 13 Ease, end or make less strong (5)
- 15 MP John, FBU's parliamentary secretary (9)
- 18 Convert to energy derived from charged particles – or make hair stand on end? (9)
- 20 Raw, unrefined – like oil or humour! (5)
- 22 Ran away to marry (6)
- 24 Information, facts supporting a case (8)
- 26 See 2 (4)
- 27 Kidnappings (10)
- 28 Wakeful but mind-wandering fantasy (8)
- 29 Long-tailed primate (6)

DOWN

- 2, 7, 19, 26 across Parliamentary attempt to restore workers' rights – backed by 15 (5, 5, 7, 4)
- 3 Real (9)
- 4 Answered – like this clue! (6)
- 5 (Over-)zealous follower (7)
- 6 One who estimates monetary value or judges performance (8)
- 7 See 2 (5)
- 8 Surrounded (9)
- 14 Triangular stringed instrument from eastern Europe (9)
- 16 Native of north European country (9)
- 17 Complete degree course – or one who has (8)
- 19 See 2 (7)
- 21 Popular format for humorous TV shows (6)
- 23 Heaped (5)
- 25 Narrow boat paddled by one or two people (5)



Solution to the July crossword



Prize Quiz

Win an iPod Touch

Just answer the questions below.
The theme this issue is politics.

- 1 Who is the longest serving Labour Prime Minister for a single stretch?
- 2 Which US President said the following: "I think anybody who doesn't think I'm smart enough to handle this job is misestimating".
- 3 Which FBU Executive Council member and Labour MP was jailed for 60 days in 1991 for refusing to pay the poll tax?
- 4 The press from which country gave Margaret Thatcher the nickname 'the Iron Lady'?
- 5 Which senior politician received criticism for travelling to work on six wheels in 2006?
- 6 To which politician did Jeremy Paxman ask the same question 12 times during a Newsnight interview?



MICHAEL STEPHENS/PA PHOTOS

Answers to July quiz
1. Amerigo Vespucci
2. Simon Bolivar
3. Falkland Islands
4. Darwin
5. Yorkshire
6. Mount Everest

Winner of the June quiz was Steven Viner of Northants

HOW TO ENTER

To win the iPod Touch please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 30 September 2008 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (September 2008) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.



StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

Planet DCLOG engaged



Ministers and civil servants at Planet DCLOG have been terribly keen for "stakeholders" to "engage" with Government and the various forums it sponsors on FireControl.

Given the Government's admission – in contrast to promises of a substantial financial bonus from no less than five fire ministers – that there will not now be any savings at all, interested parties are currently very much focused on the regional project. Although perhaps not in the manner those in the ministry would have hoped.

Fire authority councillors in the south west have delivered a message to fire minister Parmjit Dhanda that, with still no Business Case in sight, they are not at all minded to shut down their control rooms and embrace regional controls.

CFOA has twice revised its "policy statement" on FireControl in the space of a month, with fire chiefs starting to publicly voice concerns about never-ending project delays and continuing lack of evidence to justify claims that regional controls will deliver service improvements.

So, never a better time, you would have thought, for all to engage on the issue.

Imagine then the surprise and disappointment, just days after the minister had written to the Union urging continued engagement, to be told a high level ministerial meeting has been cancelled along with a raft of other meetings over the summer, including the Fire Control Sounding Board.

The inhabitants of Planet DCLOG are now unavailable and have more pressing engagements, we are told. Given their exemplary track record of generating bad news for the suffering Brown administration, dusting down those CVs may be one of them.

Cheshire values



Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's "core values" statement, contained in the brigade's integrated risk management plan states: "We value all our employees by practising and promoting: fairness and respect; recognising and rewarding performance; honesty,

integrity and mutual trust; personal development; co-operative and inclusive working."

This is a very positive commitment and one all would support.

So it was with some surprise and not a little upset that managers across the organisation greeted a new seminar that included details of how to categorise staff. Apparently, there are four types of firefighter in Cheshire: players, who can and will do as they are told, supporters, who can but won't, terrorists (yes that's correct!), who can do their job better but won't, and corpses, who can't do their job and won't.

Following complaints by managers about the tone and language of the seminar, a slide of the presentation has been removed from the FRS' intranet.

But for many this is the straw that broke the camels back. A recent survey of staff attitudes showed that just a quarter of staff felt valued by the organisation and were happy with their jobs, with a major factor being bullying and harassment, particularly among crew and watch managers, by more senior managers.

Super soaraway consultants.



Talking of FireControl, the latest figures revealed in answers to parliamentary questions, show that the cost of consultants for the project hit £38.5 million as of June. And the estimates are that the total will rise by a further £16.9 million.

Total departmental staff costs (civil servants, secondees and agency staff) meanwhile, have now hit £22.5 million

That excludes of course the £92 million paid to fire authorities, under New Burdens principles, so that they can prepare the groundwork for England's regional controls.

Now the original cost of the project was only going to be £100 million – with a massive £115m savings (according to the consultants, that was).

It's getting near the point when the first estimates of the project costs will be outstripped by consultant and DCLG project costs alone.

Planet DCLOG bias

The Fire and Rescue Conference is upon us again and this year fire service



JESS HIRD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

"stakeholders" will have the pleasure of the company of Hazel Blears (above), Secretary of State in planet DCLOG.

As it happens Ms Blears is also lead Cabinet Minister for race and faith issues. And so it's a fair guess that given the recent launch of the Service's equality and diversity strategy that she'll make a least a mention of the issue.

Ms Blears will no doubt reiterate the commitment of the department to promote efforts to reach out to all sectors of the community, notwithstanding her decision to boycott IslamExpo, a celebration of the diversity of Muslim art and culture which attracted 50,000 people in over a weekend in July.

Apparently the basis of the decision was that some of the organisers had alleged links with Hamas or the Muslim Brotherhood. The most offensive thing about the event according to one attendee who contacted me was the size of the queues for the bouncy castle, Laser Quest and double glazing (special offers).



✂ if you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into email: stationcat@fbu.org.uk

25-year badges



Andy Harrison (l) White Watch receives his 25-year badge from Adam Course Weston-super-Mare FBU Branch Secretary



John Bennett (l) White Watch, receives his 25-year badge from Adam Course, Weston-super-Mare FBU Branch Secretary



Roy Kennedy (l) Green Watch receives his 25-year badge from Adam Course, Weston-super-Mare FBU Branch Secretary



Steve Bagg (l) (Red Watch) receives his 25-year badge from Adam Course, Weston-super-Mare FBU Branch Secretary



Tom Monday (l) Green Watch receives his 25-year badge from Adam Course Weston-super-Mare FBU Branch Secretary



Adrian Bell (r) Community Safety Department, Malpas Fire Station, South Wales Fire Service receives his 25-year badge from Simon Fleming, Welsh H&S rep



Graham Owen (r), London Fire Brigade TRIO team receives his 25-year badge from Eastern Command Officers' Branch Secretary Steve White



Aidan Fortune (r) Lancashire, receives his 25-year badge from Officers' Branch Chair Paul Haydock



Peter Moss (r) Lancashire Officers' Branch Secretary, receives his 25-year badge from Officers' Branch Chair Paul Haydock

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

Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – 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 and when it was taken.



John Lund (r) Lancashire receives his 25-year badge from Officers' Branch Chair, Paul Haydock

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

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.

T THOMPSONS SOLICITORS