

Firefighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union



POLITICAL FUND BALLOT 2024 VOTE YES

Return your ballot to ensure
a voice for firefighters

See p8



PLUS UNION LAUNCHES PLAN TO
TACKLE SEXUAL HARASSMENT
See p4

February/March 2024



www.fbu.org.uk

POLITICAL FUND – VOTE YES

You may not be interested in politics, but politics is interested in you.

Since 2010, the Westminster government has pursued a ruthless attack on workers and the services they rely on. NHS waiting lists have tripled in a decade. Local councils have been hammered by cuts.

In the fire service, one in five firefighter jobs has been lost, stations have been closed and appliances taken off the run. Progress on equalities has stalled, and democratic accountability undermined.

Ministers prioritised the profits of developers over building safety; the result was the Grenfell Tower fire. Now they are going to try to ban strike action in the fire service. The daily life of firefighters and control room staff is shaped by the decisions of politicians.

This issue of *Firefighter* magazine is largely dedicated to the political fund ballot, which we are obliged to run every 10 years if we want to undertake lobbying and political campaigning. Ballots will land at your home address in time for the voting to take place in April.

Please make sure you vote yes, and encourage your colleagues to do the same.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

On 7 February, we published an independent report into sexual harassment in the FBU. Its headline finding is sobering: three in 10 women in the FBU have experienced sexual harassment in a union context.

The FBU stands on the side of the victims of this behaviour, as we stand on the side of everyone facing discrimination and oppression.

We commissioned the independent report because we were determined to find the unvarnished truth, and now we must root the problem out.



Matt Wrack

Politics
affects us all

Did you know ...?



... That in 6AD the Roman emperor Augustus formed the Vigiles – a force of 7,000 men freed from slavery – to act as ancient Rome's permanent firefighting service



The executive council has approved an “initial action plan” on the subject, and a full action plan is expected by the summer. We report in detail on the matter on page 4.

ATTEMPTED STRIKE BAN

A few days before we went to print, the Westminster government announced the regulations for the fire and rescue service under the Minimum Service Levels Act.

As expected, they amount to an attempted strike ban for firefighters and control staff in England.

But there is plenty of room for resistance and repeal. Employers can be pressured not to issue work notices, and Labour has pledged to get rid of the new law. Read page 7 for more details.

PAY

The two-year pay deal negotiated as part of our Fair Pay or Fire Strike campaign will expire in July this year. We have taken steps to move forward urgently with negotiations and wrote to employers in December. It is early days, but we anticipate that discussions will begin

soon, and members will be updated as soon as there is news.

We also hope to be able to report soon on the outcome of NJC working groups on CPD, retained and control pay.

MINERS' STRIKE

6 March 2024 will mark 40 years since the start of the 1984 miners' strike – one of the most heroic and important struggles in the history of the labour movement. We commemorate it in this issue on page 14.



PAW RISNA/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



JESS HARRIS



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Firefighter

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

Firefighter production team:
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Lisa Irving and Alan Slingsby

Cover images: Stefano Cagnoni, Craig Maclean, Mark Pinder, Andrew Wiard
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

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FBU members organise humanitarian visits to refugee camp

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STRIKE BAN

Government announces 'minimum service levels' for fire service

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FBU launches wide-ranging plan to tackle sexual harassment

The FBU's executive council has announced a wide-ranging plan to tackle sexual harassment, following the publication of an independent report into the issue.

In recent years, scandals involving sexual misconduct and misogyny have rocked other unions, most notably the GMB, TSSA and Royal College of Nursing (RCN). Investigations into the fire and rescue service – including the London Fire Brigade's independent cultural review, a report by the Inspectorate – and a raft of media reports have also highlighted discrimination, bullying and harassment in the sector.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said that it would not be immune. We took the step of commissioning an independent report because we wanted to uncover the unvarnished truth, and because we are determined to combat sexual harassment in all its forms."

The authors of the FBU report, which was published on 7 February, surveyed all women members and all black and ethnic minority members, alongside a random selection of others – 9,675 people in total. Of



these, 1,128 answered enough questions to be included in analysis.

They found that:

- 30% of women members reported experiencing sexual harassment in an FBU context
- In 93% of cases, the perpetrator was a man
- Just 10% of women reported harassment to the union
- Social events were the most common venue for sexual harassment.

Robyn Richardson, secretary of the FBU's national women's committee said that "while the findings of today's independent report are not surprising, they are sobering." The FBU has now

launched an "initial action plan", which includes:

- Compulsory training for all brigade-level officials and above
- An annual equalities audit
- A statement to be noted at the beginning of all FBU events
- More prominent advertising of reporting processes and support available to victims.

Matt Wrack said that the announcement was "a key moment in our campaign to

root any sexual harassment out of the FBU and the fire and rescue service more widely," and that the FBU "stands with the victims of this behaviour".

Robyn Richardson said: "It is positive that we have as a union taken a proactive approach to uncovering sexual harassment, and now it is time to root it out. It is the duty of every firefighter to speak up and call out sexual harassment where they see it."

A full action plan will now be drawn up by the executive council's equalities subcommittee no later than the summer, and the issue will be a priority for discussion at FBU annual conference in May.

In a members' circular, Wrack wrote that "while we must act quickly and decisively to root out sexual harassment, changing behaviours in the union and the wider fire and rescue service will take time, determination and resources."

'We took the step of commissioning an independent report because we wanted to uncover the unvarnished truth, and because we are determined to combat sexual harassment in all its forms'

'Positive outcome' as control strike off after improved offer

Merseyside fire control members voted to accept an improved offer following last minute negotiations in late December before they were due to go on strike.

FBU control room members had voted 100% to strike on a turnout of 92% and were set to strike for eight consecutive days from 27 December.

However, fire service management came forward with a revised offer during negotiations, which was accepted by members.

This agreement will improve the work-life balance of control room staff, as well as introducing an agreed duty shift system with a pay uplift of £6,880

per year. Staff will also be compensated if they agree to change shifts at short notice.

"This is a positive outcome for both fire control staff and the wider public in Merseyside, and demonstrates clearly the benefits of collective bargaining" said FBU general secretary Matt Wrack, congratulating local members and officials. "By sitting down with our employers, we were able to hammer out an agreement which was acceptable to all parties."

Negotiations are still under way to resolve a wider dispute in Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service.

Sounding off



Doctors' strikes

Dr Emma Runswick, deputy chair of the council of the British Medical Association and a doctor in psychiatry, says stick together and win together

Doctors across the UK are campaigning for full pay restoration. We deserve to be paid the same in real terms as doctors earned in 2008.

Across the grades, we have lost 21-35% in real terms. Our compulsory costs have risen with inflation – not just housing, food and fuel, but childcare for 24-hour rota patterns, mandatory General Medical Council and Royal College fees and exam fees. Many of us carry over £100k of student debt.

Pay cuts have driven many thousands of doctors to leave the UK: to Australia, New Zealand, the Middle East and even Ireland, where wages are double those here.

We have smashed ballots for "junior" doctors in all four nations, consultants and speciality and specialist doctors (SAS) in England and Wales, with Northern Ireland soon to follow.

In Scotland, doctors won 17.5% and a commitment to above-inflation pay awards for three years. In England, we have taken 42 days of strike action. We have shifted the government position from 0% and no talks, to 3%, 5%, 6% + one-off £1,500, and most recently to approximately 12%. We will push all UK governments further, to offer doctors a route to pay restoration.

Firefighters can help by visiting pickets (see strikeamap.org), donating to the strike fund (bmastrikefund.raisely.com) and fighting your own disputes.

Workers in safety-critical professions can stick together, strike together and win together. Solidarity.

NORTH WALES



FBU campaign defeats night closures plan

A campaign to save North Wales Fire and Rescue Service from cuts resulted in a victory for firefighters and public safety.

Following months of FBU members campaigning, rallying, organising and lobbying, North Wales fire authority voted to scrap the last of three austerity proposals.

Rhyl and Deeside fire stations both faced being closed at night. FBU

members and officials had warned that this would impact firefighters' ability to keep people and homes safe in two of the region's busiest areas, as well as decreasing capacity across North Wales at night.

Firefighters and members of the public joined forces in opposing the plans, staging protests at the stations under threat. The fire authority subsequently voted to reject all proposals to

downgrade fire cover in the region.

Duncan Stewart-Ball, FBU regional secretary for Wales, said that "the incredible solidarity we have seen during this campaign has shown just how valued the work of our firefighters is by the people they protect."

The service has now introduced a "task and finish group" looking at options to address difficulties with rural fire cover.

CARE4CALAIS



FBU volunteers witness spirit and resilience of Calais refugees

FBU members and officials organised monthly humanitarian trips this winter from the North West of England to the refugee camp at Calais in France.

Firefighters from across Cumbria, Lancashire and Manchester got organised into delegations; putting a resolution to support Care4Calais, passed at FBU conference 2023, into action.

Care4Calais is dedicated to providing support and assistance to refugees and migrants in the Calais region, particularly those facing challenging circumstances due to displacement and conflict.

Volunteers collected and delivered vital winter supplies to the refugee camp, including sleeping bags and tents, and spent the week distributing food and supplies and assisting with the running

of essential services.

Lancashire member Rob Lewis said: "I would strongly recommend that anyone who can volunteer to go and work with Care4Calais does so. It is one thing seeing the situation on television or online, but it's very different seeing it for yourself and speaking to people".

Fellow delegation member Paul Farman emphasised the impact of volunteering. "Visiting the sites throughout the week I bore witness to the incredible spirit and resilience of some of the world's most vulnerable people. I was struck by the value placed on the services offered by Care4Calais volunteers."

For support in organising an FBU delegation from your region, contact regional officials.

In brief

Fire service pay

The FBU wrote to fire service employers on 6 December to commence discussions on pay as quickly as possible to ensure a pay settlement can be delivered for 1 July. The NJC last year adopted agreed working groups on pay progression, CPD, retained pay and conditions and control job evaluation. The outcome from these working groups is now due and, as *Firefighter* went to press, they were expected to report to the NJC in February. The FBU said there is an urgent need to address the issue of falling real wages for firefighters as part of this year's pay settlement. Members will be informed as discussions develop.

FBU retained firefighters AGM

With representation from all regions with retained duty system members (RDS), the FBU national retained committee (NRC) AGM in November discussed the concerns of retained firefighters across the UK. They included risks posed by reduced crewing, and how the removal of RDS fire appliances has compromised emergency response capabilities. It was noted some brigades and regions still lack RDS representation. The NRC welcomes members interested in taking up roles as RDS representatives. Those interested, should contact their brigade or regional representative:

■ fbu.org.uk/sections/retained

FBU LGBT+ school

This year's LGBT+ school was held in Glasgow on 7-9 February. FBU general secretary Matt Wrack opened the school via an online link. Issues covered included organising and building power within the LGBT+ section and LGBT+ mental health.

GRENFELL

Grenfell firefighters settle for £20m in High Court

Firefighters who attended the Grenfell Tower fire have settled claims for £20m in the High Court.

The 114 affected firefighters were given legal support through the FBU and its law firm Thompsons. They suffered personal injury and loss caused by alleged negligence and breach of statutory duty. Some were left unable to work again due to severe trauma.

The defendants in the claim included Arconic Architectural Products, Celotex

and Rydon Maintenance Limited: the companies that made the combustible cladding and designed and built the refurbishment to the exterior of the building. Other defendants included the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the London fire commissioner.

This year will mark the seventh anniversary since 72 people were killed and many residents were left injured and homeless. The public inquiry into the

circumstances around and leading up to the fire is expected to provide its final report in the coming months.

The settlement for the firefighters follows a High Court settlement earlier this year for nearly 900 cases on behalf of the bereaved, survivors and residents affected by the tragedy.

The FBU continues to support survivors and the bereaved in calls for justice and accountability, and with leaseholders campaigning for safe homes.



Trade unionists demonstrate in Cheltenham to mark 40 years since one major battle to protect workers' rights and the start of a new one

The Westminster government has announced new authoritarian “minimum service levels” for the fire and rescue service. This legislation amounts to an attempt to ban firefighters, control staff and other workers from taking strike action.

These new regulations will only apply in England, with the other parts of the UK left out.

Under them, fire service employers will be able to issue “work notices” during any period of strike action so that 73% of fire appliances are crewed and that services “attend all emergencies as usual”. Fire control rooms will be expected to run as if a strike was not happening.

Named workers who refuse to comply could face dismissal.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack described this as “an attack on the pay and conditions of firefighters and other workers. The Fire Brigades Union will resist this dictatorial legislation in every way possible.”

Each fire and rescue service employer will have



News Focus

'An attempted strike ban'

the power not to issue “work notices”, and local pressure will be key to making this happen.

Scotland’s first minister Humza Yousaf has vowed that “the Scottish government will never issue or enforce a single work notice”, and the Welsh government has also voiced opposition to the legislation.

Rail bosses recently failed to impose minimum service levels on LNER workers, withdrawing the threat after ASLEF escalated planned strike action.

Alongside fire and rescue, the laws threaten the right to

strike in services including rail, ambulance, education and more.

The wider trade union movement continues to mobilise against these attacks, with the Trades Union Congress (TUC) committed to a campaign of resistance, up to and including non-compliance and non-cooperation.

TUC general secretary Paul Nowak said: “We will

fight these draconian laws all the way – working with the FBU and every other union affected. And we won’t rest until these laws are off the statute book.”

FBU members joined thousands of workers protesting the anti-strike laws this January in Cheltenham, at a demonstration supported by the TUC.

Organised by PCS civil service union, the march marked 40 years since the Thatcher government’s attempt to ban GCHQ workers from trade union membership. This ban was overturned by the Labour government in 1997, following a long campaign of defiance by GCHQ workers.

The Labour party has pledged to repeal the Minimum Service Levels Act, as well as the 2016 Trade Union Act, within the first 100 days of taking office.

Services must attend all emergencies as usual and fire control rooms will be expected to run as if a strike was not happening

POLITICAL FUND BALLOT 2024 VOTE YES



The law dictates that trade unions cannot spend money on political objectives unless this has been approved by a ballot of members. The FBU's political fund is used for political campaigning and to lobby politicians on behalf of our members at Westminster and in the devolved governments, no matter who is in power.

The FBU's political fund enables the FBU to:

- Lobby on laws that affect the interests of firefighters
- Campaign on issues that matter to firefighters
- Advocate improvements for firefighters and the fire and rescue service
- Raise awareness with the public and politicians of FBU policies.

The Westminster government does not want firefighters campaigning for our rights. Under the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, trade unions cannot spend money on political objectives unless approved by a ballot every 10 years. To meet this rule, the FBU will ask members again this spring to vote to renew our political fund.

The FBU is asking members to answer with a resounding 'Yes', just as we have done before. Here are 10 reasons why the political fund is crucial to the union's ability to stand up for our members and for the fire and rescue service. >>

**The
ballot is
expected to
take place
in April**

FBU members outside
the Westminster
Parliament ready
to lobby MPs over pay



10

REASONS WHY FIREFIGHTERS NEED THE FBU'S POLITICAL FUND

1

LOBBIES OF POLITICIANS

FBU members assembled in Westminster last November to launch our Firefighters' Manifesto. The year before we rallied at Westminster as part of our pay campaign. FBU members have done the same lobbying with devolved governments and politicians in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. FBU delegations regularly meet politicians to make our demands. The FBU organises a parliamentary group of sympathetic MPs to support our case and raise our issues in Westminster.

The political fund pays for this work.

Protest in Westminster
against attacks on
the right to strike

MARK THOMAS



2

FIGHTING FOR PAY AND PENSIONS

When the Westminster government capped firefighters' pay and attacked our pensions, the FBU organised concerted campaigns to defend members. Without those campaigns, firefighters' basic conditions would now be far worse.

Adequate opposition to
dangerous ideas like
crews of three requires
a political fund



3

OPPOSING CUTS AND PRIVATISATION

Westminster cuts have slashed nearly 12,000 firefighter jobs since 2010. Wholetime, retained and control have all suffered. Ministers have tried to privatise parts of the fire and rescue service. The FBU has organised local and national protests, including demonstrations, letters and stunts to get our message across. The political fund helps us campaign for investment.

4

SAFETY FIRST

Firefighters rightly prioritise health and safety. It's an arduous job and we expect protection. All of our safety campaigns depend on the political fund. The DECON campaign involves making a political case to governments for the necessary investment. Mental health support needs funding. Our BA safety campaign means engaging with the Health and Safety Executive, including making challenges through the political structures. That's what the political fund is for.

5

CAMPAIGNING WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The Westminster government is imposing minimum service levels, designed to attack firefighters' right to strike. The FBU works with other unions and organisations to campaign for trade union freedom, oppose all anti-union laws and defend collective bargaining over pay and conditions. The political fund pays for much of this work.

6

SOLIDARITY WITH FIREFIGHTERS GLOBALLY

Firefighters in the UK share an affinity with our sisters and brothers abroad who do the job. The FBU works with other firefighter unions internationally, to learn from their campaigns and to build our own. The FBU has a proud record of solidarity with people suffering across the globe.

7

EQUALITY MATTERS

Firefighters want a profession and a world free from discrimination, bullying and harassment. This requires campaigning within the service and wider world. It means fighting for 52 weeks paid maternity leave, tackling sexual harassment, opposing racism and homophobia. It means working with other organisations with similar objectives. The political fund pays for this work.

FBU members take part in a Stand Up To Racism rally

MARK THOMAS



8

TRADE SECTIONS

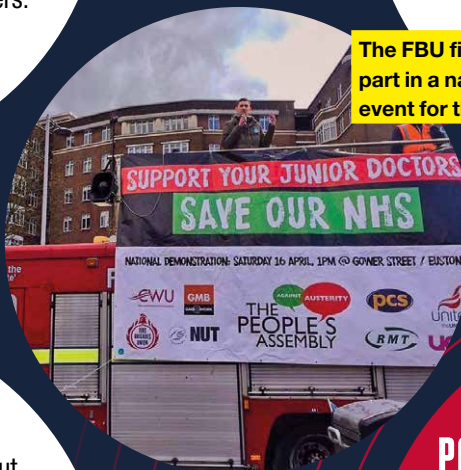
Our members in officer, control and retained sections of the service face problems that politicians can fix. The FBU campaigns against the unfair taxes on our officer members who use their own vehicles for work. The FBU fought off regional controls because it would have devastated our industry – it was a political campaign. The FBU fights for working time, pensions and other equal rights for retained firefighters. We need a political fund to do this.

9

COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The political fund pays for many of the tools the FBU produces to communicate with politicians and the public. Our reports, submissions, briefings, social media and much else helps the FBU to get our message to a wider audience.

The FBU fire engine takes part in a national campaign event for the NHS in London



10

GENERAL ELECTION

Firefighters will have the chance to put **all** politicians to the test later this year in a general election. The FBU provides members with an organised political voice, to hold politicians to account and to commitments to fund public services. The NHS, the welfare state and our fire and rescue service depend on our willingness to campaign. To give firefighters a voice, we need a political fund.

POLITICAL FUND BALLOT 2024
VOTE YES



Pay and pensions, fighting cuts, safety and DECON – it is all political

Political decisions shape our working lives. Every day, politicians at national and local levels make decisions that affect us all – in the fire and rescue service and beyond. Core workplace issues such as health and safety, fairness and equality, pensions, compensation for death or injury, and protections at work are all political.

Workers' rights, the NHS, housing, and the state of our public services are key political issues that every member has a stake in.

The FBU therefore needs to engage with politics and politicians on every level.

Without a political fund, trade unions have their hands tied. The campaigns we have fought and won, and the improvements we have achieved together, have all been facilitated by members voting for and contributing to the political fund.

The law dictates that trade unions cannot spend money on political objectives unless they have a political fund that has been approved by a ballot of members. This is separate to our general fund which finances most of our activities.

WHY IS THE POLITICAL FUND IMPORTANT?

Throughout the history of our union, politics has been at the very heart of everything the FBU does. For over a century, the FBU has proudly stood up for our members interests and the rights of working people more widely.

Everything about the fire and rescue service is political. Politicians decide on cuts, resources, pensions and pay.

Across the UK, our service faces brutal austerity. This follows more than a decade of the worst cuts in our history. Our campaigns against cuts to firefighter jobs, stations, and appliances, for safe crewing levels, and in defence of conditions of service are more important than ever.

A strong "Yes" vote in the political fund ballot will make sure we can continue our fight for the future of our service.

October 2023 - Rally
against cuts in the
Scottish Fire
and Rescue Service



WHY IS THE VOTE HAPPENING NOW?

Since Thatcher waged war on trade unions, successive governments have passed increasingly restrictive legislation to limit members' ability to fight back.

Under the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, trade unions cannot spend money on political objectives unless they have been approved by a ballot of our members.

All unions are legally required to hold a vote every 10 years, asking members whether their "political fund" can continue. As the last vote was in 2014, it is now time for us to vote again.

Trade unionists mark the 40th anniversary earlier this year of the Conservative government's ban on trade unions at the GCHQ intelligence centre in Cheltenham

JESS HURD



POLITICAL FUND BALLOT 2024
VOTE YES



IS IT ALL ABOUT THE LABOUR PARTY?

At our annual conference, members decided that affiliation to the Labour Party would be in the interest of members. No political fund money from Scotland or Northern Ireland is used for that affiliation.

However, the political fund is vital for lobbying politicians of all parties.

It gives us a presence in the corridors of power by helping us organise the FBU parliamentary group – MPs who make our case in the House of Commons. These MPs work with us to make sure we have an impact on government policy, challenging ministers and raising our concerns in parliament.

We need it to campaign in the interests of firefighters: organising rallies and demonstrations; putting pressure on local councils, devolved governments and Westminster; getting the public on our side through leaflets, posters, petitions, and online tools; producing hard-hitting reports to set out our arguments.

HOW MUCH DO MEMBERS CONTRIBUTE TO THE FUND?

Just 20p per week of your union subs goes towards the political fund through what is known as the "political levy".

New members decide whether to "opt in" to pay into the political fund. Members paying into the fund can opt out at any time. By voting yes in this ballot, you are voting for all members to be given this choice.

The government doesn't want you to vote yes to having a political fund, or to opt into it. They want you to lose your political voice, to make it easier for them to strip away your rights and attack your working conditions.

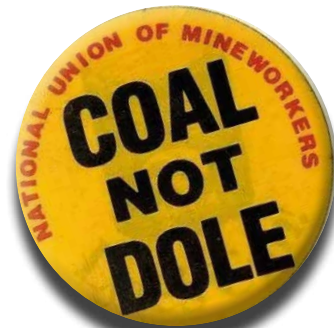
HOW DO I VOTE IN THE BALLOT?

You will receive a ballot paper to your home address. Restrictive legislation requires the ballot to be delivered by postal vote only. So please make sure you vote yes and return your completed ballot paper in the Freepost envelope provided.

The ballot is expected to take place in April



CRAIG MACLEAN



'IF WE DON'T FIGHT, WE'RE DEAD'

The FBU brought together activists to assess and learn from a struggle the government would rather ignore, **Barrie Clement** reports



March this year is the fortieth anniversary of one of the most bitter political and industrial conflicts in British history. The year-long miners' strike of 1984–85, which started at Cortonwood Colliery near Rotherham, saw parts of the country under the virtually totalitarian control of the Thatcher government and the police.

Its impact on the union movement – and, by implication, on workers' terms and conditions – was without parallel and is still felt today. The fact that many full-time workers are unable to feed their

families, is a direct consequence of its impact on the union movement, says former miner and an organiser of the Durham miners' gala, Dave Temple.

Despite its seismic importance, the strike is barely mentioned in our schools, if at all.

NEVER FORGOTTEN

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack is seeking to ensure that it is never forgotten and recently brought together a small group of activists to offer their reflections on the 40th anniversary of the start of the year-long dispute and to assess the extent to which it has lessons for trade unionists today.

The proposed closure of Cortonwood

– probably a deliberate provocation says Dave – proved to be the catalyst which led to walkouts all over the British coalfield. In the Midlands however, most miners continued to work in pits which were not threatened with closure and which attracted the attentions of thousands of flying pickets as a consequence.

Dave believes prime minister Thatcher set out, not just to close pits, but to “humiliate” miners. At the beginning of the conflict, he was asked by fellow miners if they were going to win. “I said ‘you can never tell, but if we don’t fight we’re dead’.”

Heather Wood, whose father died from emphysema caused by working >>

Police pursue a picket at Woolley Colliery near Barnsley in South Yorkshire in October 1984
RAY RISING/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Despite its seismic importance, the strike is barely mentioned in our schools, if at all



A trade union convoy with supplies for striking miners and their families leaves London's County Hall, then the headquarters of the Greater London Council, in September 1984
STEFANO CAGNONI

underground and whose grandfather was killed in a pit accident, played a key role in the Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC) group. She said it was ironic that so much effort was devoted in her home town of Easington, County Durham, to protect a pit where, on 29 May 1951, an explosion had killed 83 miners. "They were fighting to keep something open that killed men."

But it was not just a strike to keep jobs, it was fight for the whole community. "Welfare halls, parks came from the pit. In a way mining gave us the NHS. It was the nearest thing to socialism, living in a mining community." The annual Durham miners' gala is a celebration of that community: "It's saying we are here and we're not going anywhere."

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT

The cohesion of the community was an essential ingredient of the miners' armoury.

Tony Curry former miner and now FBU executive member for the north east, has a vivid memory of the local comprehensive school in Wingate, near Hartlepool, opening up its kitchen in the summer of '84 to provide meals for the benefit of the strikers' families.

"Everybody helped. Small communities like mine came together." The community provided a "life-support machine" for young and old, said Dave. "We have to replicate that again." Unions should be among the

organisations setting up food banks for instance. "There should be a trade union café in every village."

Women were the backbone of mining communities and were at the very heart of the strike, said Heather. "Unless we got the women together, the strike would fail. If they'd said go back to work, they would have."

At the beginning of the dispute women at Easington colliery would inform the NUM of their plans to carry out a certain course of action so they wouldn't replicate it, but gradually they would just tell them what their intentions were.

Women saw what Thatcher was trying to do to communities, said Heather who, with other women of Save Easington Area Mines (SEAM), ran 14 cafes where anyone in the community could get a free meal.

Dave, who worked at nearby Murton Colliery, said he was astonished at the speed with which women got involved in what was seen to be a male-dominated industry. "Within a week, meetings were

full of women." Many refused simply to go back to their role as housewives. "A whole generation of women got involved in politics."

Many villages had their own police station and those officers tried to keep out of the conflict. But they brought in police from other areas, said Tony. "Everywhere we went there was a police presence."

Heather argues that the large-scale invasion of officers from other areas helped cement the determination of communities to stick together.

On one occasion police ransacked a house in the village, having entered without a warrant. They told the woman who lived there that things would be worse for her if she insisted on proper documentation. "The house was left a mess and nobody was ever taken to court for it."

Not all local police officers kept their heads down; one sergeant in Easington was "a right bastard" who shopped one of his own mates. And it should be remembered that "our police were

While the industrial action did not halt pit closures, it did ensure there were no compulsory redundancies and severance pay of up to £30,000 was on offer



Striking miners' wives and their families and Women Against Pit Closures demonstrated in London in August 1984 over the distorted and sometimes dishonest way national media was reporting the strike

JOHN HARRIS /REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

doing it in other areas. I came to hate the police."

Penniless striking miners used to dig for coal at the side of railway tracks. "You would see police chasing them away, just for trying to heat their houses and warm their kids. These were desperate times." In the coal strikes of 1972 and '74, the National Coal Board allowed the strikers a bit of leeway. "In this strike, if you were caught, you were sacked," said Dave.

After the Battle of Orgreave at a coking plant in Rotherham in June 1984 in which massed ranks of police attacked pickets, Dave was asked by "shell-shocked" colleagues why it was happening. He replied: "It's the capitalist state and it's organised against us and this is what they do." It was one of the most violent episodes in British industrial history.

Some unions withheld their support for the National Union of Mineworkers on the grounds it had failed to hold a national ballot, but many trade unions, individual union leaders and groups

of trade unionists, especially those on the left, did what they could to help protect mining jobs.

Matt retold the famous incident when the then FBU general secretary Ken Cameron, who handled finances for the strike when NUM accounts were frozen, asked a bank manager for £100,000 from union funds. The money was for miners' welfare but on receiving the cash, Ken, a man with a well-developed sense of humour, asked the bank manager for directions to the nearest bookie.

Dave told of a number of occasions when haversacks full of money were used to get cash to where it was needed.

SUPPORT FROM GRASSROOTS

There was also support from grassroots trade unionists. Matt told how as a young firefighter in London, he went out every week raising money for striking miners and urging colleagues in his workplace to back them, "sometimes in challenging circumstances".

Miners who crossed picket lines in areas where the strike was strong got a hard time of it.

Tony was 15 years old when the strike started. He told how his small community of Wingate, seven miles north west of Hartlepool, came together

during the dispute and shunned the "one or two" colliers in the village who continued to work. On one man's garden fence, the word "scab" was writ large.

Tony became a trainee in a nearby pit in 1987 – two years after the strike ended. On his second day, he was warned not to talk or associate with a "scab" on the shift. Other miners wouldn't get in the cage with him. "They felt he had betrayed them. He was always on his own. Nobody would change or shower next to him," says Tony.

Most accounts of the conflict argue that the miners suffered complete defeat, but Dave pointed out that while the industrial action did not succeed in its main aim of halting pit closures, it did ensure there were no compulsory redundancies.

And severance pay of up to £30,000 was on offer, which proved to be a "life-changing" sum for him when he was finally made redundant in 1993.

"If we'd knuckled under we would have got a minimum of compensation," he said.

So what should we learn from the strike? We need to "organise", said Heather. "Wages and conditions are the most important things, but we also need to act as advocates for the general public. It's the only way we're going to get anywhere near a socialist society." At a time when right-wing racist groups are increasingly voluble, "we need to be getting out there".

FIRE AND ICE

Two firefighters from Wales, Rebecca Openshaw-Rowe and Georgina Gilbert, pulled well over their own body weight on an untried 750-mile plus route to the South Pole. They spoke to **Steve Morgan**



Bex (right) and George celebrate a challenge accomplished

"52 days, 10 hours and 30 minutes – in the freezer". It doesn't get any further removed from the firefighting day job than ploughing close on 1,227 kilometres – 762 miles – through the stark, often stormy wastes of West Antarctica to the South Pole – where temperatures routinely bottom out to -51.

Add in the challenge of lugging well over your own body weight in supplies at a breath-catching altitude – this as a relative novice on skis – across a hostile snowscape with no liquid water and no wildlife.

"I've done a lot of things in my life sport-wise," reflects Rebecca Openshaw-Rowe, "but this is the toughest challenge."

Openshaw-Rowe, "Bex" to her Mid and West Wales Fire Service mates – veteran of a rugby World Cup and former Great Britain rower – certainly earned her stripes completing the remarkable challenge alongside Georgina – "George" – Gilbert.

Currently with South Wales Fire and Rescue, George is in her 26th year fighting fires and – as an ambassador for gender equality – stereotypes.

Inspired by their attendance at a training and development event in 2019, the Antarctic Fire Angels (AFA) project was born. Tucked away on a website brimming with can-do advice and testimonials is the motto "you can't be what you can't see".

"Our key message is about women supporting women and inspiring the next generation – and every generation – to have a go at something," George says.

"Something" is quite an understatement. "The preparation doesn't quite ready you for the longevity of it," she adds. This was a huge undertaking four years in the plotting.

LEARN TO SURVIVE

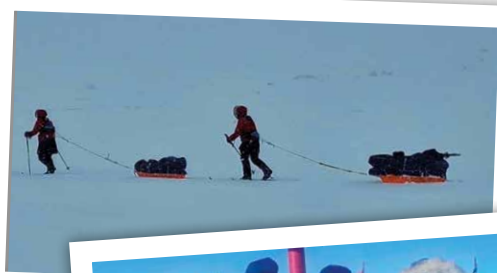
The spectre of Covid threw a huge spanner in the training works not long after the would-be explorers – strangers beforehand – signed up. "You need to learn to survive in the cold and live on the ice and we couldn't go anywhere where there was any snow or ice," says Bex. "So we skied on beaches, on sand, we pulled tyres around the country. We must have looked very strange."

Having prepped the best they could, with tough taster treks to Norway and

Sweden, it was time to depart for real in November 2023. By that time the initial party, tackling a new, as-yet-untried route from Union Glacier via Constellation Inlet to the South Pole had, for various reasons, been pared down to Bex and George. Though they did not travel, the remainder of the Angels – Nikki Upton, Emily Butler and Elissa Pedone – were hugely active on the support front, with Bex's wife, Kirsty Openshaw-Rowe, who is also a firefighter, updating social media during the expedition.

It is testament to George and Bex's rounded, team-centric characters that they seem as keen to talk about their back-up as themselves. George is also quick to pay tribute to the fire service. "Nothing but supportive," she says. "Amazing, all the way up from our watches to leadership team."

The hardest yards on the altitude-busting 25-kilometres per day schlep



At the South Pole

– one of the tougher days brought an 800-metre incline – were eased by checking the constant stream of goodwill messages from friends, workmates – and expedition patrons Dany Cotton, former

'Our key message is about women supporting women and inspiring the next generation'



London fire commissioner, and TV presenter Lorraine Kelly Smith.

A tracking app allowed the intrepid duo's progress to be followed via the website, with audio clips and check-ins, at least when wi-fi was available.

"There were hundreds and hundreds of these amazing, inspiring motivational comments from people, just spurring us on, really. It really helped," says Bex. "Many of the people we didn't even know."

"It wasn't just family and friends; it was complete strangers who'd really taken to our expedition."

PEOPLE WERE OBSESSED

"It gives you validation – to be so far away, yet to have that kind of connection with people back home and know there was so much support. It helped massively. People were obsessed with it – when we'd finished, we had so many people say: 'I don't know what I'm going to do now!'"

For Bex and George, it is back to work – changed in part by the experience, reflective and certainly more appreciative of life's simple things: trips to the loo without fear of frostbite, hot showers, and food that isn't freeze-dried.

Critically, they hope to have sown a seed of self-discovery for others. "We'd learned how to do absolutely everything from scratch four years ago. It's about believing in yourself," says George. "And the fact that you can teach an old dog new tricks as well – neither of us are particularly young."

"We don't go out of our way to prove ourselves – you shouldn't have to – but believing in yourself, is without a shadow of doubt, where to start in life."

You couldn't really wish for a better set of role models – the perfect combination of fire and ice.

Equality Matters campaign rolls on

The next phase of the Equality Matters campaign was launched in February, with new materials and resources to equip members to stand against discrimination in the workplace

Delegates at FBU conference 2023 voted for a UK-wide campaign to fight for equality in the fire and rescue service, after investigations highlighted widespread discrimination, harassment, bullying and inequality in the sector.

This work started with the Fight for 52 campaign, pushing for 52 weeks' full-pay maternity leave.

Now, Equality Matters is preparing members to have difficult conversations and take a stand against misogyny, racism, transphobia, homophobia and ableism.

As part of this next stage, FBU activists from across the equalities sections came together to film a video sharing experiences and how we can work together to

create an inclusive service.

New posters will now be up on fire station and control room noticeboards everywhere, and an online hub with information, updates and resources is available at fbu.org.uk

As the only democratic and representative body for firefighters and control room staff, the FBU will take a leading role in transforming our service.

LFB independent culture review

The FBU executive council has approved the union's official response to the London Fire Brigade (LFB) independent culture review. The review was published in November 2022 and was carried out in response to



NATIONAL NEURODIVERSITY EVENT

The FBU is proud to announce a national neurodiversity event. This is an important step in fighting for a fire service that is inclusive of neurodivergence.

WHEN: Wednesday 20 March

PLACE: Leeds



To register your interest, please email phoebe.wilson@fbu.org.uk

the tragic death of black firefighter Jaden Matthew Francois-Esprit in August of that year.

Its author, Nazir Afzal, concluded that the brigade was "institutionally racist and misogynist".

The FBU broadly accepts that the findings of the review reflect the lived experiences of members. It also broadly accepts the vast majority of the review's 23 recommendations, with important caveats around body-worn cameras and the ambiguity of the term "zero tolerance".

However, there are gaps. The voice of LGBT+ and neurodivergent LFB

employees is limited, and it is important that we explore this. The union also believes that the Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) is an important mechanism to bring about change; it is omitted from the report.

Equalities cannot be left to chief fire officers and principal managers. The FBU and its members must be part of the solution.

We will continue to fight for a better, more inclusive culture. Jaden Francois-Esprit will always be remembered, and we pay tribute to his family for their unwavering determination to see similar circumstances never repeated.



Meet the rep

Dan McNulty
North Wales brigade vice-chair

1. What made you want to become a rep?

There was a vacancy on station, and a colleague asked would I be interested. I've always been up for a new challenge so thought I'd give it a go. That was nearly six years ago. I've since moved from station to brigade level and now I'm working on a national level on new projects.

2. What is your proudest achievement as a rep?

Standing up in conference and seeing my resolution being passed. I wanted to make a positive change to help those no matter where they are based. Since being diagnosed as neurodiverse, it's been a huge rollercoaster, but I quickly saw that others have been and may be on a similar journey. I saw there were gaps where help could be provided and knew that was my calling.

3. Who are your ultimate heroes?

My watch members, past and present. They have stuck by me through my highest and lowest times. They listen to my endless "good ideas" no matter what time of night. My partner Lois for putting up with me and my ever-changing schedule, phone calls at all times of the day and being my partner in crime to cry, vent and laugh with.

4. Describe yourself in three words.

Determined, enthusiastic and passionate.

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

With my watch manager Neil, who is always the voice of reason. Running any idea past him, he will always be supportive and enthusiastic, but will always show me the other side of the story and the bigger picture, no matter how stubborn I can be about it.

6. Which TV show could you not live without – and – What's your favourite band/musician?

The US Office, because we all know a real-life Michael Scott. As for music, anything that originated in the 80s.

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

I'd have loved to have been a pilot. Unfortunately, I don't have a spare £150,000 for the training. But I knew from day one I wanted to follow my dad as a firefighter, and I was lucky enough to join full time at 18.

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

I'd have loved to have lived through the 70s and 80s. It has always appealed to me for some reason. Maybe I've watched too much Life on Mars.



What's New?

Our new column looking at developments in the jobs of firefighters

Fighting fire with fire

Though once relatively rare in the UK, the strength and number of wildfires in recent years has increased dramatically, rising to nearly 24,000 in 2022, double the number of the previous year.

Due to the large spike in grass and wildfires, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) sent their wildfire burns suppression team (otherwise known as the burns team) to Catalonia for intensive specialist training with the Catalan Fire and Rescue Service (Bombers de la Generalitat) GRAF team.

The GRAF team is made up of wildfire specialists and world experts, and use fire as a tool to manage vegetation – called prescribed burning – and conduct tactical burns to create fire breaks, essentially "fighting fire with fire".

The burn team underwent highly physical training, using trench tools to cut through strong vegetation.

GMFRS have since agreed to buy some of the tools used in training.



Members of the GRAF team at work

■ We want to hear from you. Are you working with new technology or firefighting techniques? Is there new equipment or training in your brigade or specialism – breathing apparatus, water rescue training, or more health-conscious ways to work? Is it working? What do you think of it?

■ Write to us at firefighter@fbu.org.uk

FBU SHOP



ENGRAVED FBU WHISKY DECANTER AND TWO GLASSES SET £120

A stunning three-piece whisky set consisting of a decanter and two glasses – the set comes complete with a satin-lined box. It would make a beautiful present or retirement gift.

All FBU profits go to the Firefighters 100 Lottery fund – to support seriously injured firefighters and their families.

Sadly there will be no FBU shop at this year's conference in Blackpool. If there is any shop merchandise you would like to order for delegates, please send orders directly to Kym – by early May: kym.napier@fbu.org.uk

FIREFIGHTERS 100 LOTTERY



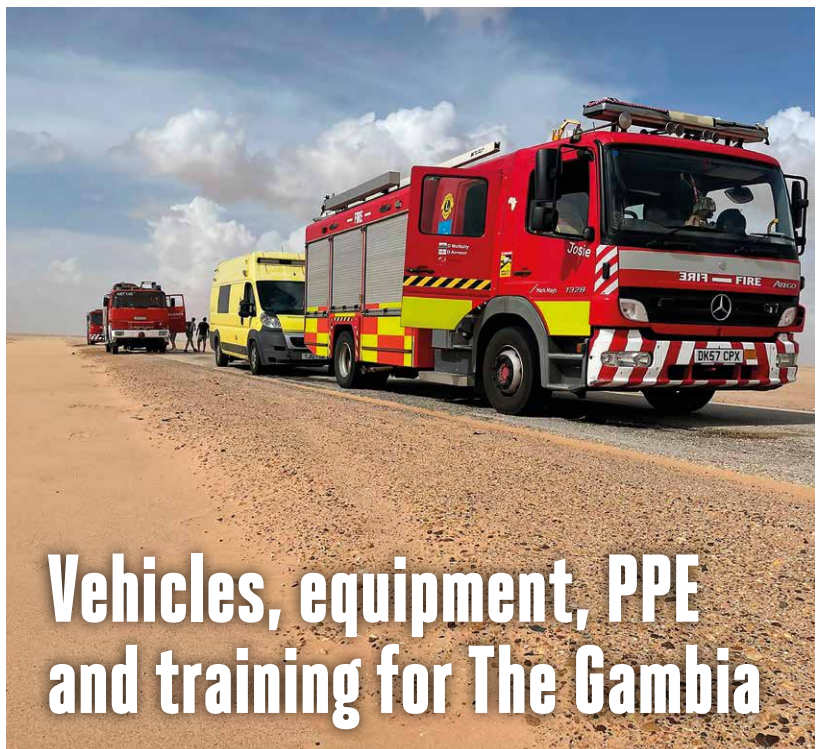
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Buy your tickets at
firefighters100lottery.co.uk**



OPERATION ZEPHYR 2024



Vehicles, equipment, PPE and training for The Gambia

Dan McNulty, FBU North Wales brigade vice chair and a volunteer with the Emergency Services Aid Charity, explains the work of its Operation Zephyr aid mission which sends medical, firefighting, policing and rescue equipment to the small West African state of The Gambia.

After a very challenging 4,000-mile journey across France, Spain, Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania and Senegal, Operation Zephyr 2022 delivered 18 emergency vehicles, equipment and PPE to The Gambia's emergency services.

Operation Zephyr 2024 is heading to The Gambia again this September, delivering much needed vehicles, equipment, PPE and training.

We have been incredibly lucky to have three fire appliances donated so far through Fire Aid and North Wales Fire and Rescue Service, but we still have some way to go to reach our target.

If you would like to make a contribution to our work, please email us at: firelead@emergencyservicesaidcharity.com

All of your support goes to saving lives.

■ opzephyr.square.site

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Wrack on the Road

■ 13 January – National March for Palestine in London which attracted thousands of supporters



JESS HILD

■ 27 January – TUC rally in Cheltenham against Minimum Service Levels Bill

■ 7-9 February – FBU LGBT+ school opening

■ 15 February – Free our unions online meeting as a speaker on anti-union laws

■ 19 February – Rally at Avon fire authority against cuts

COMING UP:



■ 24 February – War on Want event in London



■ 2 March – National Women Against Pit Closures (NWAPC) 40th miners' strike anniversary event in Durham

Where's the firefighter?

Station Cat gets into a tangle

Rather like Conservative cabinet ministers, the Conservative police, fire and crime commissioner (PFCC) for Northamptonshire has friends who require well paid jobs at public expense. Which may help explain why Stephen Mold is about to appoint the county's fourth chief fire officer in 12 months, and two of them have no experience at all of firefighting.

In July he appointed Nicci Marzec, who up to then had worked as monitoring officer in Mold's office. Mold and Marzec are, Mold says, "long-standing work colleagues and personal friends" but he rebuts rumours of an affair.

The FBU pointed out that experienced firefighters might feel insulted by the appointment, and after 10 days Marzec resigned. The appointment was "an error of judgement" said Mold, and Simon Tuhill, who was due to take up the role as deputy chief fire officer, became instead the interim chief.

Tuhill is still the interim CFO, and applied to take the job permanently, perhaps hoping that his long career in the fire service would count in his favour. If so, he was to be disappointed.

Mold now wants the job for Nikki Watson, the recently retired deputy chief constable in Avon and Somerset.

Watson has a 36-year career in the police but has never worked in the fire service. She is, however, acquainted with Mold, who is a board member of the College of Policing, of which Watson's husband Andy Marsh is the CEO.

Marsh, as it happens, is also a former chief constable of Avon and Somerset police, where Watson became deputy

chief constable. It all starts to feel a little incestuous.

Mold has put Watson forward as his preferred candidate, and the other members of the fire authority can only accept her or reject her.

So can Mold safely ignore the county's firefighters, who still prefer to take their orders from someone who knows a bit about what they do?

Perhaps not. There seems to be a hitch. The fire authority has been called together twice, in December and then in February, to confirm Watson's appointment, and both times she has been unable to turn up for "personal reasons".

As we write, a third meeting has been called. Her reluctance to appear is presumably unrelated to the fact that her record at Avon and Somerset is being questioned.

There is an investigation into her "attendance at a policing conference in 2023 and whether proper policies and procedures were followed".

A separate issue concerns Watson's husband, Marsh, who in 2016 found out that one of his undercover officers had a long relationship with a woman using his false identity, and fathered a child with her.

The force was accused of failing to tell the woman concerned promptly. The *Guardian* newspaper reported last September that the woman's family questioned "whether it was appropriate for Marsh's wife, Nikki Watson, currently the deputy chief constable at Avon and Somerset, to take the leading role in the force's handling of the highly sensitive case."



25-year badges



Wayne Keenan (r), ORI team, Barnstaple, Devon and Somerset, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Dave Lock



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



Rob Mears (l), Derbyshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Graham Cooper, with colleagues (l-r), Paul Markham, Adam Mears, Nick Crisp, Tom Longden, Dan Allen, Dan Lewin and Phil Austin



Martin Stebbings (l), red watch, Leatherhead, Surrey, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Daryl Jeff



Matty Stather (r), receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Davy Howe with colleagues from Cleveland brigade HQ looking on



Rob Phelps (r), blue watch, Springbourne, Dorset and Wiltshire, and West Moors training centre, receives his 25-year badge from Dorset brigade organiser Scott Blandford, with (l-r) Chris Mitchell, Paul Milton, Lewis Rodwell and Faris Mani



David Barkley (l), white watch, Stockton, Cleveland, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Davy Howe accompanied by watch colleagues



Mark Kuczaj (r), green watch, Stalybridge, Manchester, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Matt Fryer



Kev McKay (l), red watch, Perth, Scotland, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Richard Collingwood



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



Andy Cox (r), long serving branch rep at Shepton Mallet, Devon and Somerset, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Dave Lock with colleagues looking on



Price Gething (l), white watch, Hartlepool, Cleveland, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Davy Howe with watch colleagues looking on



Darran Harrety (r), blue watch, Hartlepool, Cleveland, receives his 25-year badge from brigade chair Karl Wager with colleagues looking on



Mark Haslam (r), green watch, Bolton North, Greater Manchester, receives his 25-year badge from officers' branch member Ady Taylor with colleagues looking on



Wayne Pennells (centre), white watch, Southern, Leicester, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Harry Brant with watch colleagues



Stuart Anderson (l), white watch, Billingham, Cleveland, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Davy Howe with colleagues looking on



Darran Harrety (r), blue watch, Hartlepool, Cleveland, receives his 25-year badge from brigade chair Karl Wager with colleagues looking on



Phil Davies (r), training department, Telford, Shropshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Rob Cartwright



Paul Lawday (r), Newbury, Berkshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Martyn Ainsworth



Michael Cahill (l), national operational guidance, West Midlands, receives his 25-year badge from HQ rep Tom Marchant



Shaun Langley (l), white watch, Orsett, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Matt Edwards with watch colleagues looking on



Matt Warren (r), green watch, Torquay, Devon and Somerset, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Chris Balcombe with colleagues looking on



Simon Richardson (r), red watch, Grangetown, Cleveland, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Davy Howe with colleagues looking on



Simon Carey (centre), Devon and Somerset, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Dave Lock, with (l-r), brigade chair Dan Gillard, EC member Val Hampshire and brigade secretary James Leslie



Luke Morgan (r), red watch Stopsley, Bedfordshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Craig Carter with colleagues looking on



Ram Karavadra (r), green watch, Stopsley, Bedfordshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Craig Carter with colleagues looking on



Andrew Howe (r), blue watch, Redbridge, Hampshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Vytas Jakimavicius



Steve Joliffe (r), Gosport, Hampshire and Isle of Wight, receives his 25-year badge from brigade health and safety rep Rob Dellow with Gosport RDS crew looking on

40-year badge



Dave Bithell (r), Wrexham, North Wales, receives his 40-year badge from brigade vice chair Dan McNulty with colleagues from Wrexham retained duty system looking on



Richard Champ, Gloucestershire brigade chair, receives his 25-year badge from executive council member Val Hampshire with the regional committee



Bob Mortimer (r), green watch, Croydon, London, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Ivan King

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

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THOMPSONS
SOLICITORS



EQUALITY STARTS WITH BEING DECENT TO EACH OTHER



LEADING THE FIGHT FOR
A FAIRER FIRE SERVICE

EQUALITY

MATTERS

ALL DIFFERENT ALL EQUAL
FAIRNESS AT WORK POLICY

