

FireFighter

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

May 2012

BASED ON RISK

Why planning needs to be
risk based, not cash based
See p10





Matt Wrack

At the forefront of the fight

Mick Shaw

I know all of us are saddened by the untimely death of Brother Mick Shaw, former FBU President. Mick's death was particularly tragic, coming so soon after his retirement and so young. A fuller obituary is carried on page 7, but I am sure you will all join me in sending condolences and best wishes to Mick's family and friends.

It will come as no surprise to many of you that in my last conversations with Mick he was still following closely the various developments in the FBU and the wider trade union and labour movement. Mick was always a careful and cautious thinker and perhaps one tribute we can make to him is to try to apply the same level of thought and analysis to the many challenges we will face in the future.

Pensions

In a discussion with a group of members a couple of weeks ago, one firefighter told me that one of his main wishes was that the whole pensions saga should come to a finish. The campaign has been long and hard but it is still far from over. We face two major challenges in the reviews of pension age and of contribution levels. There are no guarantees at all about where these reviews might go – but they are an opportunity to influence policy. Therefore they are absolutely essential.

We are putting a great deal of effort into preparing our work in these areas. We have

already done a lot of research on pension age, operational fitness and related matters. But we are now taking this further and looking at the issue again and in even more detail. Likewise, on contributions, we have already produced significant evidence on the danger of members leaving the pension schemes and the threat to their viability. We have now identified further questions which need to be looked at and further evidence to be obtained.

So there is still a long way to go and a lot of work to be done. At the same time we will need to continue our lobbying campaign. It has undoubtedly already had some effect but more is needed. And we will always need to keep in mind that if the attacks continue and there is no significant movement for our members to consider then we will need to return to the industrial

front and strike action may be necessary. It will continue to be a long and hard campaign.

Cuts and fragmentation

For the past year we have all been putting a great deal of effort into campaigning on pensions. However, that has not stopped the cuts which we are facing across the UK. All public services are under attack – and many have faced an even greater level of cuts than we have faced in the fire service. However, the scale of cuts and job losses in the fire service give the lie to David Cameron's claim that he would "protect frontline services".

The executive council discussed these challenges recently and identified that we will need to urgently step up our campaigning against cuts and job losses. There have been some excellent campaigns at local level but we need to ensure that a UK-wide message

is developed. If they keep cutting our service the safety of the public and of firefighters will be put increasingly at risk.

Recent discussions with others in the service demonstrate that the concerns we have raised for a long time are now being felt by others. The English metropolitan fire authorities recently lobbied government and MPs against the cuts, as has the FBU nationally and locally.

Growing concerns were raised at the recent fire conference of the Local Government Association. We need to build on this. Alongside the views of elected councillors, we need to add the professional concerns of those on the frontline. Over the next couple of months we will be setting out what you can do to support this campaign.

Alongside the cuts we are seeing increasing fragmentation of the fire service. Dressed up as "localism", this sees chief fire officers and local fire authorities increasingly going their own way.

It is not efficient, it is not effective and it is not professional. We have argued for some years now that we need core professional standards on training, equipment, procedures and emergency response. A key aspect of our battle to defend the service is this battle for standards.

Once again, it is the Fire Brigades Union at the forefront of that fight on behalf of all our members but also on behalf of our profession and the communities we serve.



Mick Shaw: FBU to the core

Contents

Privatisation and cuts threaten us all

Greece:
Financial
crisis,
human
tragedy

ICON/REUTERS



14

JANE MINGAY/AP/PA IMAGES



10

London after the 7/7 explosions of 2005 – FBU warns that national resilience is at stake in response to government national framework consultation

News

- 4** Perils of privatisation highlighted once again
- 5** FBU keeps up fight against cuts
- 6** Firefighters' health Union rights in Colombia Union challenges Johnson

Obituary

- 7 Mick Shaw**
Firefighter, campaigner, internationalist, FBU President

Features

- 10 National framework**
Fund for risk not for cuts, FBU tells government
- 14 Greece**
National officer Dave Green finds a financial crisis and a human tragedy
- 16 Who is in control?**
Concern mounts as fire control mergers and privatisation threaten resilience

Regulars

- 5 Sounding off**
Why Wiltshire firefighters are fighting budget cuts

8 Aerial ladder platform

The Fire Service College needs to be funded, not sold

18 Health

Cutting workplace regulation will damage health for many years to come

19 Legal Beagle

Pensions and paternity leave

20 Day off

Colin Devine and Operation Florian train firefighters in Zimbabwe

22 Puzzles

Win an eco patio heater

23 Station Cat

The news they don't want you to hear

FBU NATIONAL LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANS SCHOOL

19-21 October 2012

Wortley Hall, Sheffield

A great opportunity to get an update on all the issues concerning the LGBT community in the UK and overseas. But also an opportunity to find out what is going on in the Fire Brigades Union. An opportunity to get involved at a crucial time where the government's plans for public services will mean massive cuts to the frontline, a pay freeze, increases in our pension contributions and much more.

Application form available at www.fbu.org.uk and www.fbulgbt.org.uk

Regional control saga drags on as property company collapses

Fire control

The owner of five regional fire control centres, empty after the collapse of the FiReControl project, has gone into receivership. Jersey-based Control Centre General Partner Ltd has called in receivers Jones Lang LaSalle.

It means the FireControl saga is still not over, despite the project being abandoned with the loss of £500m in December 2010 after disastrous failures by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Throughout the project's life, frontline services were subjected to significant cuts. At a time of "austerity" cuts in the fire service, millions of pounds are still being wasted on rent for buildings

which stand empty but have around the clock security and are fully maintained.

Control Centre General stood to earn over £200m in rent over the period of the 20-year and 25-year leases signed by the last government. The buildings have never been used for the purpose for which they were designed.

The company owns RCCs in East Midlands, East of England, North East, West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside. Rents in excess of £4m a year have been paid for the North East, East Midlands and West Midlands RCCs since 2008 with an additional £2.5m a year paid for the Yorkshire and Humberside and East of England buildings since 2009.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "Millions of pounds which should have been going on the frontline has gone

into the pockets of an offshore property company. And even then the private sector could not get it right and ran into financial problems.

"A key risk of putting any critical national infrastructure into the hands of private companies is the uncertainty which it brings. As with AssetCo, the public sector is left on the sidelines waiting to see who the next owner might be.

"We hoped the problems had ended when FiReControl ended. What we now have are continuing costs, ongoing problems and some in the fire service still saying privatisation is a wonderful thing.

"It beggars belief that our disastrous experience with fire service privatisation has not yet sunk in with some of its advocates. Based on our experience, it has no place in the fire service."



Regional fire control centre in Wolverhampton Business Park – one of the five owned by the offshore company now in administration

Welcome for AssetCo contract termination

Lincolnshire

Lincolnshire FBU has welcomed the decision of the county's fire and rescue service to end its contract with AssetCo.

The financially troubled company still owns and maintains London's fire engines.

But Lincolnshire's vehicles and equipment will be owned by the service

once the values have been agreed and AssetCo Lincoln Ltd paid off. Plans for future maintenance are under way.

Chief officer Dave Ramsar said the decision was not taken lightly. "I firmly believe that it is in the best interest of our service and the people we serve to move forward into a new era with the maintenance and testing of our fleet and

operational equipment."

FBU brigade secretary Karl McKee said: "We welcome the fact the service will have direct ownership of its fleet and operational assets. We support the chief officer in his attempts to resolve the situation. We will be working with the service to ensure all interim and long-term arrangements are in place and working properly."



Cumbria branch secretary Ade Kevern and control branch chair Morven Anson with FBU protesters launch the petition in Carlisle in November

Council defies public

Cumbria

More than 21,500 people have signed an FBU petition opposing Cumbria county council's plan to close its fire control room in June and outsource emergency fire calls to Cheshire fire and rescue service, 150 miles away.

Tim Farron, MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale, presented an 18,247-signature petition to the Speaker of the House of Commons on behalf of the FBU and Cumbrian citizens on 17 April.

The union gave 3,298 signatures to Cumbria county council in February, triggering a full council debate. But councillors refused to budge.

An FBU delegation – control members Christine Wilson and Morven Anson, Ade

Kevern, Cumbria brigade secretary, and Kevin Brown, north west regional secretary, attended the Commons as part of the union's campaign to highlight the strength of local feeling against the planned cut.

Ade Kevern said the council had continued to ignore local people's strongly held desire for emergency fire calls to be answered locally. "The government is always banging on about localism, but over 21,500 people in Cumbria have made it clear they want fire calls in Cumbria answered in Cumbria. Yet the county council just ignores their views."

Morven Anson said: "The council's dismissive attitude was hugely disappointing. The FBU will continue to fight for the best possible service for the people of Cumbria."

Who's in control – p16

Union's message on the move

South Yorkshire

The FBU took to the streets of Barnsley in South Yorkshire with advertising vans (*below*) and used a local newspaper advert

to highlight its concerns over cuts.

Despite opposition from the public, MPs and local firefighters, the authority pressed ahead with plans to close four stations, cut

five appliances, lose 140 frontline posts and cut control staff.

South Yorkshire FBU brigade secretary John Gilliver said: "These cuts are too deep, too soon. We agree with the fire authority's own conclusion that the cuts are life threatening. We have a potential cash problem caused in London which we can solve in South Yorkshire. The budget gap can be filled by using part of the huge financial reserves."



SOUNDING OFF

Wiltshire firefighters want a first-class service

Wiltshire FBU brigade secretary Brent Thorley explains union opposition to plans for cuts

Wiltshire firefighters went to Westminster on 17 April to warn their MPs about plans to slash £1.8m from the fire authority budget. They include cuts to frontline fire-fighting, fewer appliances, removing all four emergency tenders and cutting rope and water rescue teams.

Firefighting professionals can see the risks. These cuts threaten to have a devastating impact on Wiltshire fire and rescue's ability to serve our communities.

The plans, which are out for consultation, include:

- cuts to retained duty firefighters that could see the loss of one in three full-time equivalent posts
- the loss of 30 wholetime firefighter posts – one in six frontline posts, leaving only 140 wholetime firefighters to provide around the clock cover 365 days a year
- cutting aerial appliances from two to one
- removal of all four emergency tenders
- 96-hour shifts.

Many retained crews are concerned that the changes to their contracts that are being demanded mean they are being asked to choose between their main employment, their families and their fire service work.

There would be much greater pressure on retained crews – who also face cuts – to fill gaps created by the loss of wholetime crews. Our retained crews get limited training time in their current roles, never mind having responsibilities added.

The proposed introduction of 96-hour shifts is a move back to Victorian days. Crews would away from their families for long periods and long shifts could be very demanding.

We want to see a first-class service for the people of Wiltshire. We do not think these proposals are the right way of delivering the service the public pays for, expects and demands.



Liliany Obando greets supporters as she is released

'International solidarity helped to set me free'

Union rights

A political prisoner whose fate was highlighted at the FBU national women's school has been freed by the Colombian authorities.

Trade unionist, human rights defender and academic Liliany Obando was greeted by a delegation from the UK trade union solidarity organisation Justice for Colombia (JFC).

She had been held since 2008 on false accusations of "rebellion" and "administration of resources related to terrorist purposes".

Speaking to supporters, including TUC deputy general secretary and JFC vice-president Frances O'Grady after her release, she said: "A piece of my heart will always remain behind those prison bars, and I will not stop the struggle to free our political prisoners and for peace in Colombia. I want to thank Justice for Colombia. International solidarity set me free."

But the news is not all good for Liliany Obando. She was jailed on trumped-up charges that have never come to trial and her release on bail was simply the result of evidence not being presented in time – the Colombian government has not accepted her innocence. Her security and that of her family is a huge issue after threats from right-wing death squads.

The British ambassador in the Colombian capital of Bogota invited Liliany to lunch and wrote to the Colombian government expressing concern for her safety.

In 2011 29 trade unionists were assassinated in Colombia. A further six have died this year. Over the past 20 years 3,000 trade unionists have been assassinated.

FBU EC member for women Denise Christie said: "We were highlighting support for political prisoners and campaigning for their release. The campaign for Liliany Obando was strengthened by support from the UK trade union movement."

● www.justiceforcolombia.org

Johnson challenged on cash raid

London

London FBU EC member Ian Leahair challenged London mayor Boris Johnson at a mayoral election debate over millions taken from fire service reserves and given to the Metropolitan Police.

"Under Johnson,

London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority reserves have been raided to the tune of £50m in just two years," he told *Firefighter*. "This was to create a short-term boost to police numbers, even though the Met had under-spent its own staffing budget by nearly £20m.

"We also demanded

a commitment to keep the fire service free from privatisation after our experience with AssetCo. Ken Livingstone is committed to that and Jenny Jones from the Green Party has said it is madness to privatise any part of the fire service."

Voting is on 3 May.

Call for regular monitoring of the health of firefighters

Health

The health of firefighters, including those who have retired, should be monitored regularly, says a report that surveys their working conditions across Europe.

Firefighters feeling the heat was produced by the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) and the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU). It says unions should be more involved in protecting their members' health.

Author Fabienne Scandella, who has a master's degree from Oxford university, said it was deplorable that firefighters can be portrayed as "heroes" while their working conditions are ignored until it is too late.

The report addresses known risks, including smoke and heat, and also looks at the impact of the organisation, structure and funding of fire services on firefighters' health and safety.

"Firefighting is a risky business and, while some of the risks cannot be properly assessed in advance, firefighters' life and health can be better protected," said EPSU general secretary Carola Fischbach-Pyttel.

"The complex relation between an effective response and protecting workers' health is itself a good reason for trade unions to be more involved," she said.

Laurent Vogel, director of the ETUI's working conditions, health and safety department, said: "Most of us give little thought to firefighters' working conditions. The life-and-death nature of their job can result in the risks being trivialised and prevention ignored."

The report is based on feedback from union representatives from various European Union countries at two conferences and other research. It includes recommendations on health and risk prevention and on rethinking monitoring health at work in the sector.



www.etui.org/Publications2/Guides/Firefighters-feeling-the-heat



STEFANO CANNONI



Mick Shaw greets members who rallied against plans for mass sackings of London firefighters in 2010

Mick Shaw 1958–2012

Mick Shaw, firefighter, campaigner, London regional official and former President of the Fire Brigades Union, has died of cancer at the age of 53, a little over a year after he retired. He will be remembered by his many friends and colleagues as a principled trade unionist, socialist and internationalist.

Mick joined the London Fire Brigade as a recruit in 1977. He was one of the generation of young FBU activists whose trade unionism was forged in the first ever national firefighters' strike that year.

Mick made a tremendous contribution to the FBU and the whole labour movement throughout his life. He was a tireless campaigner on wider political issues and numerous anti-cuts campaigns in the fire service.

He was FBU to the core and deeply committed to the union, to members and to the fire service. He was a campaigner against injustice in the fire service and beyond.

Mick was politically active from his very early years spent as a firefighter. After the National Front polled more than 100,000 votes in the London local elections of 1977, Mick became heavily involved in the Anti-Nazi League. With other firefighters, he set up Firemen against the Nazis (FAN) a national rank-and-file organisation supported by the national union.

He helped organise and support

demonstrations up and down the country opposing the National Front. Mick, having held numerous positions in London, was elected as executive council member in 1997, and in 2007 elected FBU President, serving until he retired in 2011.

His determination to make the case for socialism within the wider trade union movement was bolstered by active membership of the Labour Representation Committee, to which the FBU is affiliated. He was also very actively involved in the

Cuba Solidarity Campaign and made his first trip to Cuba in 2007, which led to a deep interest in Cuban politics and culture.

He learned to speak Spanish and how to dance salsa. He began studying at the University of the Orient in Santiago de Cuba, and published a blog on his experiences, *Tales of the Heroic City*.

Mick had become interested in politics as a schoolboy, influenced by his uncle Ron Leighton who was Labour MP for Newham North East (1979-94).

As an adult, he went on to study economics and history at Coleg Harlech in Wales, and later studied law at Birkbeck College, graduating with a 2:1 degree. He considered issues calmly, deeply and rigorously and this helped him in all his roles in the union, particularly as President.

As with all discussions of a political nature, injustice or the FBU, there are a wide variety of views. When Mick took a different view or disagreed he always remained a friend and colleague to those with whom he disagreed.

There will be a memorial event later this year for friends and colleagues. A condolence page (link below) has been set up on the London FBU website, where people may leave tribute messages. All messages will be passed to Mick's family.

Matt Wrack, General Secretary

● www.london.fbu.org.uk/?p=1528

TONY BARTHOLOMEW



Mick Shaw chairs FBU national conference in 2009



Time to think again about Fire Service College sell-off

JACK FORD Officers' EC member

The government says it wants to secure the future of the Fire Service College in Moreton-in-the-Marsh, Gloucestershire. It's going about it in a funny way – flogging it off to the private sector.

It's an old-school privatisation. You take a public asset and you sell it.

And any business will take a business-like attitude. It will want to pay as little as possible and, in the middle of one of the worst ever economic dips, that is likely to be well off the value at the top of the market.

So it could be bargain basement time. An asset sold cheaply and quickly to

webuyanything.com.

There appears to be a very naïve view of the benefits the private sector can bring. The government says that will be “innovation and investment”. It is as if the worst private sector-caused recession and the near worldwide collapse of private sector financial institutions had not happened.

In addition to the consequences of mass unrestrained greed the corporate private sector has brought us, there is also the sheer incompetence it has demonstrated. And the regular fines the banks are totting

up in relation to mis-selling of pensions, endowment mortgages and a host of other products. Does anyone feel they are getting a good deal from the privatised energy companies? Or banks or insurers?

At the large-scale corporate level the private sector has been shown to be run by too many snake-oil salesmen intent on taking us to the cleaners. And treating their clients – as one former senior Goldman Sachs executive claimed – like “muppets”.

So let's not be naïve about what the private sector can bring to the table.

VIEW
FROM THE
AERIAL LADDER
PLATFORM

Especially for the fire service, whose reputation with the public is far higher than anything the private sector can muster.

The facilities at the Fire Service College are world-renowned for being second to none. The college has been at the forefront of developing effective training for firefighters of all roles across all services – training that has consistently helped to protect and serve firefighters and the public for decades. It is an asset; but it's an asset for the fire and rescue service and the public it serves, not for the private sector.

We have members who work at the

college and members train there. The college is crucial to delivering standards, training and quality across the fire service.

The government has recognised neither the importance of the college nor what it really does for the fire service overall. It has measured the Fire Service College only in monetary terms, without understanding its overall importance for fire services across the country.

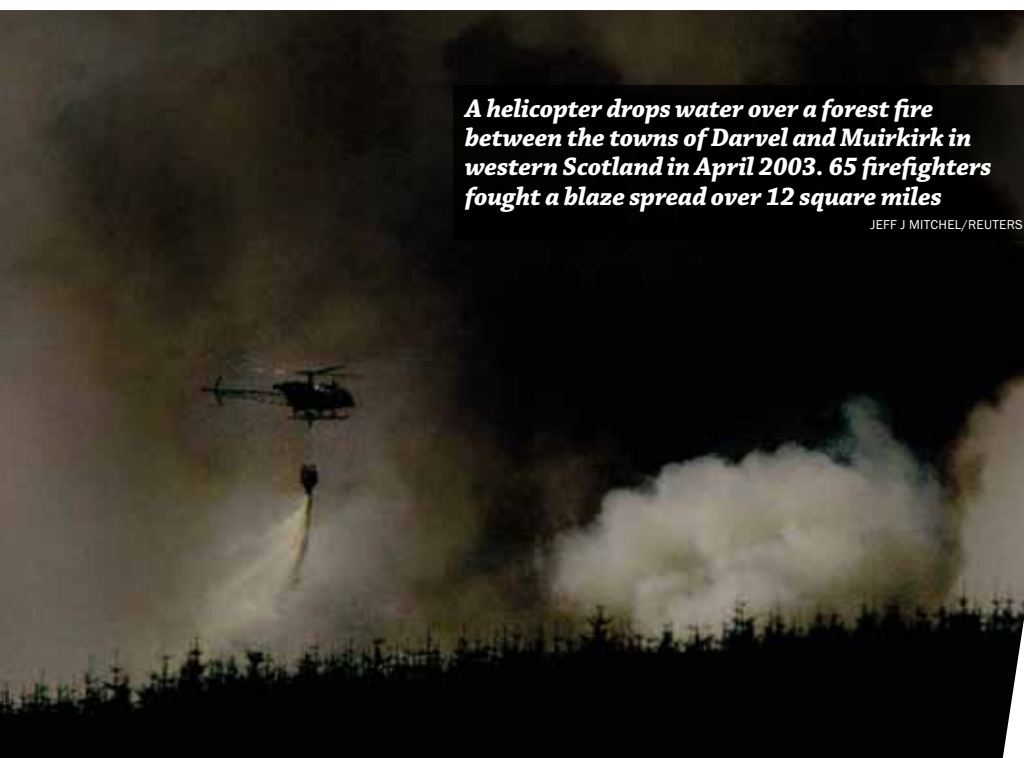
It is using privatisation to get rid of the college, not to develop it. In so doing it is, once again, showing that it knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Privatising the Fire Service College will not secure its future. If the recent financial collapse caused by the private sector has taught us anything, it is that nothing is secure in the private sector, which is why the fire service is in the public sector.

The Fire Service College is world-renowned with some fantastic facilities. And it does need investment, but selling it off to the private sector is not the answer.

The college is a centre of excellence. It's important to the fire service and all the work we do.

It's time to think again.



A helicopter drops water over a forest fire between the towns of Darvel and Muirkirk in western Scotland in April 2003. 65 firefighters fought a blaze spread over 12 square miles

JEFF J MITCHEL/REUTERS



A firefighter goes to rescue people from floods in Keswick in the Lake District in November 2009

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES

FIRE PLANNING RISK BASED NOT CASH BASED

Fire services must be funded according to the risks they need to address, not the dwindling amount of cash it makes available, the FBU tells the government in response to consultation on the national framework

The Westminster government's fire and rescue national framework document must take on board concerns with national resilience, firefighter safety and funding, the FBU has said in its response. The framework is intended to set out the government's expectations for fire and rescue authorities in England. Similar exercises are being carried out in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

FBU assistant general secretary Andy Dark said the Westminster government wanted the revised framework to "reset" the relationship between central government and fire and rescue authorities. "Our concern is that an unregulated lurch towards localism will mean public and firefighter safety will be undermined by a 'free-for-all' driven by budget cuts not risk," he said.

Localism

The framework document opens by saying: "The government has a responsibility to ensure that the public is adequately protected". But "adequate protection" is the bare minimum that the government is responsible for providing. The FBU believes it would be more appropriate if the government gave a clear statement of its desire to ensure that "the public receives a high level of protection".

The government points to integrated risk management plans (IRMPs). However fire and rescue authorities do not produce their IRMPs to conform to



Edgware Road tube station in London after the 7/7 bombings in 2005

JANE MINGAY/AP PHOTO/PA PHOTOS

any set standard. Government paints this as a “hands-off” approach, but it is more akin to government washing its hands of safe and sufficient planning and provision by the primary rescue and public safety service in England, said Dark.

He went on: “This disregard looks set to continue in the new framework as it did in the previous one. The purely localist approach has resulted in fragmentation.

“It has meant a free-for-all driven by cuts and not one driven by what is needed. Fire and rescue authorities should not simply be allowed to do what they like.”

Resilience

The FBU believes that national resilience requires national coordination, national uniformity and national availability. It is the ability to respond effectively to whatever man-made incidents or natural disasters are thrown at the fire service, such as Buncefield, major outdoor fires, terrorist incidents or widespread flooding.

National resilience means those responsible for the safety of the nation as a whole having the means and processes to verify for themselves that the arrangements are in place, that the arrangements will work and that the process is continuous.

Resilience can only be delivered effectively when interoperability is delivered. Interoperability is only possible when there is either common equipment, or

equipment that conforms to common specification, common guidance, common procedures, common training to implement those procedures, common competency assessment procedures and common command and control protocols.

These need to be delivered in a competent, legitimate, trusted and timely manner and with enough personnel to get the job done effectively and safely.

The introduction to the framework says that: “National resilience is best built on the basis of local professional expertise and understanding of risk.” The FBU believes that national resilience also needs to be built on wide-area cooperation and coordination between local professionals.

If local professionals do not have higher level forums to communicate beforehand and do not share common

working practices, they will never deliver the most successful outcomes when they are called upon to work together to provide mutual aid or to pool their resources.

Andy Dark said: “Resilience is about strategic and tactical pre-planning, and commonality of operational procedures. It is also about suitable and sufficient training to ensure that all the equipment and planning can be put into practice safely and effectively.

“To that end, resilience demands structures that ensure cooperation and coordination between local fire authorities and other partners.”

Firefighter safety

Resilience also means that the people who do the job – the firefighters – are central to the process. The FBU has always understood the nature of the fire service and has recognised that firefighting is a dangerous occupation. A dangerous occupation, however, does not have to be, and should not be, an unsafe occupation.

The union is therefore disappointed that there is no recognition in the draft framework of the extremely hazardous work that firefighters undertake and the duties of fire and rescue authorities to minimise the likelihood of firefighters being injured or killed whilst at work. The lessons are not being learned.

In 2008 the Fire Brigades Union published *In the Line of Duty*, a report on firefighter deaths in the UK since 1978. It made a number of

National resilience requires national coordination, national uniformity and national availability

recommendations to government and the fire and rescue services.

Civil servants and safety inspectors have long promised to rectify the shortcomings. So it is disappointing that the importance and centrality of health and safety for firefighters has not been placed at the core of the draft framework document as a key priority and objective for fire and rescue authorities.

Financial support

The fire and rescue service must have funding mechanisms that are aligned to risk. The FBU believes that the funding model in its simplest form is:

Risk defines the IRMP > the IRMP defines the configuration of the fire and rescue service > this defines the cost of fire and rescue service > this cost must be funded.

Experience has shown that both government and the fire and rescue authorities have been inverting the model. The wrong model has been used:

The fire and rescue authority assesses the cash it is told to spend > the fire and rescue service configures its structure and delivery plan accordingly > this is reflected in a document which is referred to as an "IRMP" > the fire and rescue authority agrees the document and says that it is risk-based.

This incorrect relationship between risk and cost has been reflected in the

draft framework. The fire and rescue authority is left with responsibility, insufficient funding and all the liability.

The FBU is unhappy with the idea that the funding of fire and rescue authorities should become more reliant upon business rates. This is highly inappropriate for fire and rescue authorities anywhere in a period of business closures, and especially so for those fire and rescue authorities that are in areas hit hardest by the recession.

Privatisation

Andy Dark said: "The FBU totally rejects any suggestion of fire authorities, in any guise, becoming the commissioning agent with fire services being delivered by another provider. It rejects totally

the privatisation of the fire and rescue service – and for good reason.

"The fire and rescue service is an emergency responder. There is no public demand for such a change, it is desired only by those commercial entities that wish to make a profit at public expense or those who wish to work in the interests of those commercial entities, whether directly or indirectly.

"AssetCo has been one significant example of this. AssetCo has been much-praised by the proponents of this model. As with the FiReControl experiment, the FBU stood alone in consistently warning of the foolhardiness of the experiment and the spending of public money. In both cases only the FBU stands vindicated in its stance."

The London Fire Brigade is highly dependent upon the financial viability of AssetCo and is vulnerable when the external provider is unstable. Its own report *PFI Vehicles and Equipment Contract* indicates that AssetCo's financial difficulties have resulted in a number of performance shortfalls in the service delivered by this firm under the contract.

The report says that "the uncertainties arising from the financial crises had also affected staff morale in AssetCo and a number of staff departed from the Company's employment". It states that financial uncertainty has resulted in

The FBU totally rejects fire authorities commissioning fire services delivered by another provider



Cumbria firefighters on flooded roads after the River Greta burst its banks in 2009

PETER BYRNE/PA IMAGES



“AssetCo under-performing in some areas of the contract including late provision of information, late equipment deliveries and a deteriorating trend of increased time taken to complete vehicle repairs”.

Lincolnshire fire service has now terminated its contract with AssetCo with immediate effect. Lincolnshire also complained about major contractual failings by AssetCo.

Mutuals

The Localism Act 2011 allows fire and rescue authorities to engage in new activities. This new development is as yet untested. It is difficult, therefore, to judge the outcome.

The FBU is aware that scarce resources are being expended by fire and rescue authorities on plans for mutuals and other activities. Yet very little, if anything other than costs, is being reaped by their fire and rescue services.

The government is not only endorsing mutualisation through its own legislation, but is also actively encouraging it within the fire and rescue service. This is of great concern to the FBU.

The removal from the public sector of a critical part of national resilience is a massive gamble. The union says that the stakes are too high even to contemplate such an idea, especially at a time when some in the fire and rescue service are seeking to distance themselves from any

Not to strengthen the fire service but to make it inefficient through duplication of work is a recipe for disaster

form of regulation.

In essence, market forces should not be allowed to dictate either the level or quality of local fire service provision. The very idea should be rejected by the vast majority of those who work in the fire service and the vast majority of the public.

New opportunities are not always a good thing. “Diversification” sounds positive until you realise that, without proper control mechanisms or guidance, it can lead to “mission creep”. There is nothing positive in a relatively small organisation that tries to overreach itself, and moves from a position where it delivers a restricted number of functions adequately, to one where it

performs a lot of activities poorly.

Andy Dark said: “The FBU believes the government needs to think again. The national framework should play a vital role in raising expectations and help the fire and rescue service continue to be a high quality public service.

“That means putting firefighters at the centre of local and national resilience. It means recognising that 57 varieties of fire service is not the best plan.

“Maintaining a high quality fire service needs a properly functioning operational assessment and inspection regime to underpin excellence.

“It cannot be right that education services, health services and social services have proactive professionally led inspection and assessment regimes while the fire service does not.

“At the moment we have a fire service where the government does not know what is going on and appears not to want to know what is going on.

“In the context of slash-and-burn cuts, the lack of inspection is an accident waiting to happen.

“For the government not to strengthen the fire service and, instead, to make it inefficient through duplication of work is a recipe for disaster and a missed opportunity.”

● **The FBU submission is at www.fbu.org.uk**

The remains of a London bus destroyed in the 7/7 bombings of 2005

DYLAN MARTINEZ / REUTERS



Fire rages after an explosion at the Buncefield fuel depot in Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire in December 2005

CHILTERN AIR SUPPORT UNIT/REUTERS



Greece's firefighters are being hammered along with the rest of the public sector. FBU national officer Dave Green, was part of a delegation to Greece to see at first hand the impact of austerity cuts. Ayse Ferliel reports from Athens

Financial crisis Human tragedy

European Union politicians and the International Monetary Fund have hailed the restructuring of Greece's debt as a success. But after more than two years of austerity an increasing number of Greeks – including firefighters – are having to live under horrendous conditions.

These have been imposed by the “Troika”, the three organisations currently running the Greek economy: the International Monetary Fund, the Central European Bank and the World Bank. Public and private sectors are cutting costs and jobs as well as reducing pay and pensions.

In March the stricken country secured an international bailout of €130bn (£108bn) – the second in less than two years. The government's private-sector creditors also agreed to turn in their government bonds for new ones worth

less than half the face value, wiping some €105bn (£87bn) off Greece's €356 (£296bn) debt.

FBU national officer Dave Green was part of a UK delegation which visited Greece to see what was happening first hand. He told *Firefighter*: “There is human tragedy behind the financial crisis. Those who caused the collapse of the banks and the debt crisis are not paying to clear up the mess.

“Instead, they see it as an opportunity to push on with cutting and privatising public services and squeezing those who work in them. Greece is currently the most extreme example of people being reduced to economic lab rats with devastating results.”

The austerity measures implemented to secure the rescue funds have taken a heavy toll of both the Greek economy – now in its fifth year of recession – and Greek society. Tens of thousands of

businesses have closed, unemployment is at a record high of 20.7% (with youth unemployment as high as 45%) and poverty and social exclusion are increasing.

One non-governmental organisation estimates the number of homeless people in Greece has risen by 25% since 2009, with up to 20,000 people living on the streets. Deputy health minister Markos Bolaris says that the so-called “new homeless” are citizens “who became unemployed and could not pay their bills, so they were evicted. This is a new profile for Greek society”.

According to health minister Andreas Loverdos, suicide rates in Greece rose 40% in the first five months of 2011 compared to the same period in 2010. In April a 70-year-old man shot himself in front of the Greek parliament. His suicide note blamed the recession for his hopelessness.



Dave Green (left) with the delegation of Andrew Burgin (Coalition of Resistance), Ben Soffa (TSSA), Kate Hudson (COR), Paul Mackney (former general secretary Universities and Colleges Union), Manuel Cortes (TSSA), translator Isidoros Diakides, Dot Gibson (National Pensioners Convention), Dave Rogers (Banner Theatre) and Mikis Theodorakis (seated), composer of Zorba's Theme for the film Zorba The Greek

A Greek firefighter at a wildfire

These social and economic changes are impacting on the lives of millions of Greeks, including firefighters, whose salaries, benefits and pensions have been cut significantly.

"Greek firefighters, as part of the Greek society, are also facing social exclusion and poverty," Anastasios Maniatis, an executive council member of the Greek firefighters' union EAPS told *Firefighter*.

"There are families who cannot pay their rent and cannot deal with their daily expenditure. Some don't have enough to survive."

According to Mr Maniatis, Greek firefighters' salaries have been cut between 25% and 40% since the beginning of austerity measures agreed in May 2010 as part of the first international bailout package of €110bn (£91.6bn).

He says they have already seen annual salaries (including benefits) fall from

€30,500 (£25,400) to €23,000 (£19,155) after the 2010 austerity measures, and they expect a further fall to €18,000 (£14,990) by June as part of continuing public sector pay cuts.

Firefighters with 35 years of service have seen their monthly main pension fall from €2,100 (£1,750) to €1,400 (£1,166) and their €300 (£250) supplementary pension drop to €200 (£167). This is a result of the Greek government's agreement with the IMF to cut main pensions of more than €1,300 a month by 12%.

Firefighters are also suffering from reductions in the state budget. Cuts to operating costs have resulted in lower levels of equipment and as higher depreciation of machinery and fire engines. "Our economic conditions and morale are disastrous, and on top of that, we are facing one of the greatest dangers: danger to our lives through the reduction

of resources," said Mr Maniatis.

According to data from EAPS, some 22% of fire engines in Greece are between 16 and 20 years old, while the number of fire engines that are under five years old are 17% of the total.

Wildfires caused by high temperatures and winds, drought or arson are common throughout the summer and Greece frequently relies on help from outside due to its limited number of "fireplanes" and helicopters.

Massive wildfires broke out across several areas of mainland Greece during the summer of 2009. Some spread to the suburbs of Athens. These were the worst since fires in 2007 killed over 70 people, including firefighters.

Another problem is that, just like in the UK, some of the firefighters who retire are not being replaced, leading to a reduction in the total number of permanent employees. According to data from EAPS, the number of permanent firefighter posts is meant to be 12,942 while the actual number of firefighters currently employed amounts to only 8,966.

As for the future, Greece's interim prime minister Lucas Papademos recently expressed confidence that the country's downward economic spiral would prove temporary. He heads a coalition government of "socialist" PASOK and conservative New Democracy parties formed last November.

"I am convinced that we are more than halfway along the path to economic recovery," he said recently. "Although the fiscal consolidation process will last longer."

Papademos, a former European Central Bank vice-president, added: "Positive growth rates should be achieved within less than two years."

That is jargon meaning that public sector cuts are in prospect for years to come, even if the economy starts to pick up – which is by no means a certainty.

Mr Papademos's words of optimism came despite continuing fears outside Greece that its economic situation makes exit from the euro a distinct possibility. There is increasing scepticism from Greek workers that the austerity measures are working.

Eighteen national strikes in as many months are testimony to the opposition to the coalition government. Greece is expected to go ahead with general elections on 6 May.

Leaders of PASOK and New Democracy have repeatedly stated that they will be committed to implementing the austerity measures even after the elections.

How that will go down with those doing the voting remains to be seen.

Concern is growing over the future of the fire service national co-ordinating centre following the decision of London Fire Brigade to privatise the control room in which the co-ordinating centre is to be based.

It appears that other fire authorities were not consulted about the decision's implications for the national co-ordinating role London is expected to take on.

The national co-ordinating centre (NCC) has been based in West Yorkshire's control and was used to co-ordinate the national response to large-scale incidents such as the 2005 Buncefield explosion, the Swinley Forest fire and major flooding.

The West Yorkshire base was meant to be a short-term one before a move to the new London control centre as part of the FiReControl project which collapsed.

London's new control in Merton, south London, is the only one of the FiReControl "regional" buildings that will be used as originally intended. But London's move to privatise its

control is a local decision with national implications.

The concerns it raises coincide with central government sitting back and watching the creation of a "patchwork quilt" of local controls, each with a different approach. The FBU has already asked how what is emerging can underpin national resilience.

Another issue is the owner of five of the empty regional control centres that are leased to central government. The Jersey-based property company, Control Centre General Partner Ltd, went into receivership in April in a crisis reminiscent of the one that afflicted AssetCo, which owns London's fire engines and had to be rescued to avert a financial collapse.

Sharon Riley, FBU executive member for control, said: "We are witnessing a fragmentation of control rooms with widely varying approaches. Central government takes the view these must all be correct because they are coming from local decision makers.

"The result is a patchwork quilt of

'Bizarre amalgamations and hybrid controls are springing up with no overview of what is emerging'

controls with many decisions being taken with little or no public consultation. There are geographically bizarre amalgamations and hybrid controls springing up, but no overview of what is emerging.

"The north west is trying to merge

Who is in control?

London Fire Brigade's decision to privatise its control centre has thrown a spanner into work on national resilience



into an empty regional control with an extra £1.2m for four fire authorities as a financial sweetener. Merseyside has opted out and looking for a shared building with other 999 services.

"Further south we have seen mergers on then off. Bucks now wants to merge its control with Cambridge and Suffolk although they share no common border and are not even in the same region.

"The privatisation of London's control throws a spanner in the works of national co-ordination and national resilience. Every fire authority in England relies on the national co-ordination function that until 1 April was provided by West Yorkshire and now lies with the London fire service.

"None of them appear to have been asked their views on the London privatisation and its impact on national co-ordination and resilience. It is a clear example of how a locally made decision can have knock-on effects across the fire service."

The government says it is tackling the legacy of the failed national FiReControl

project which collapsed after costing at least £500m. Fire minister Bob Neill has thanked fire authorities which responded with plans.

"The plans submitted by fire and rescue authorities have reinforced this approach and shown how a localist approach will build resilience on a national scale," he said.

"Our approach also seeks to take steps to tackle the legacy of the empty regional fire control buildings which we have inherited, and which as the National Audit Office has observed, were a consequence of the flawed procurement process of the FiReControl programme.

"Each bid has been considered carefully in line with the criteria I set out in July for value for money, efficiency and resilience. The resilience aspects of each bid were assessed by the chief fire and rescue adviser."

Approved bids include either mergers, stand-alone controls or joint co-operation and back up for:

● Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk

- Cornwall
- Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire
- Devon and Somerset, Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire
- Essex and Bedfordshire and Luton
- Gloucestershire
- Hereford and Worcester and Shropshire and Wrekin
- Hertfordshire, Humberside, Lincolnshire and Norfolk
- Kent
- Isle of Wight and Surrey
- Merseyside
- Northamptonshire and Warwickshire
- Oxfordshire and Berkshire
- South and West Yorkshire
- Staffordshire and West Midlands
- Tyne and Wear and Northumberland.

Bids approved earlier include those from a consortium of four north west fire and rescue authorities (Lancashire, Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Cumbria) which the FBU is campaigning against; Durham and Darlington fire and rescue authority; and East and West Sussex fire and rescue authorities.



The national co-ordinating centre played a key role in fighting the fire in the Swinley Forest near Crowthorne in Berkshire a year ago

STEVE PARSONS/PA IMAGES

Cancer

How much is caused at work?

Three-quarters of all cancers are caused by five carcinogens

A recent briefing from the TUC has outlined the official figures for occupational cancers in the UK – and the numbers will make shocking reading for firefighters.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that around 13,500 new cases of cancer are caused by work every year, with over 8,000 deaths.

But the TUC says that this underestimates the true number of cases. Giving a figure for what causes any kind of cancer can be very difficult as it cannot be said for certain what the cause of anyone's specific cancer is.

Sometimes the link between a specific cancer and a chemical or dust is only suspected and has not been proven yet. Therefore, any estimate of the number of occupational cancers is likely to be an underestimation, possibly by a considerable amount. The TUC has estimated that the true level is more likely to be well over 20,000 cases a year.

The HSE figures are based on estimates of exposure to definite and probable carcinogens defined by the International Agency for Research on Cancer and do not include suspected carcinogens. Neither do the figures include deaths from cancers caused by alcohol and tobacco among people who drink or smoke because of the stress of their work.

What causes occupational cancers?

Three-quarters of all cancers are caused by just five carcinogens. These are asbestos, shift

work, mineral oils, the sun and silica. Asbestos accounts for over 4,000 cases in the HSE figures and shift work for nearly 2,000.

Our lungs are the most vulnerable part of our body to cancer. Lung cancer and mesothelioma (a cancer of the lining of the lung) are responsible for just over half of all cancer diagnosis. They are, however,

responsible for over 80% of deaths. That is why controlling what dust and fumes we breathe in is so important.

Because men traditionally were more likely to work in engineering and construction more men get occupational cancer than women and, for all but two of the main occupational cancers, the rate amongst men is higher

than that for women. The two exceptions are breast and cervical cancer. Although men can get breast cancer it is very rare. Cervical cancer can only affect women.

In the future the difference between men and women is likely to narrow as we have less job segregation on the grounds of gender.

Future risks

The number of cancers may go up simply because people are living longer and the longer you live the more chance there is of you developing cancer. However we can cut the future cancer number considerably by acting now.

Researchers at Imperial College have developed a mathematical model to ascertain the effects of various actions on cancer numbers in the future. This includes better safety regulations and stronger enforcement of safety law.

What we do today will have a major impact, but it will not be seen for perhaps 20 or even 40 years. Cutting regulation and enforcement will not only cause fatalities from injuries to rise, it will also increase future deaths from cancer.

What you can do

■ There is a TUC guide to preventing occupational cancers at www.tuc.org.uk/extras/occupationalcancer.pdf

■ TUC Education and Macmillan Cancer Support have teamed up to produce guidance on how to support workers who have a diagnosis of cancer. It can be found at <http://bit.ly/HP3s9Q>



X-ray of the lungs of a patient with asbestosis, an incurable lung disease caused by the inhalation of asbestos fibres, affecting the membranes that line the chest cavity and lungs. The fibres cause scarring of the lung tissue (white speckles).

What we do today will have a major impact, but it will not be seen for perhaps 20 or even 40 years. Cutting regulation and enforcement will not only cause fatalities from injuries to rise, it will also increase future deaths from cancer.

Legal Beagle

If your pension is overpaid ...



Q I have been told that I must repay several thousand pounds because an injury pension I receive has been overpaid because state benefits I also receive were not offset against it. Is this right and must I repay the whole amount, even though the overpayment has allegedly gone on for more than 20 years?

A You have a duty under the scheme to apply for benefits and to inform the pension fund about any benefits received so that they may be offset against your pension where applicable. However, there can be a grey area as to whether the benefits and the pension cover the same disability and you may need to take advice from the FBU or legal advisers on that.

There may well be a time limit on the recovery of any overpayment. But whether any, or which, time limit will apply will depend on the circumstances of the case and the reason why the benefits were not offset against your pension. For instance, you may have failed to notify the pension fund or the fund may simply have made a mistake in its calculations.

Q My partner is due to give birth in a couple of months and I would like to take more time off than the statutory two weeks. How do I go about that?

A The Additional Paternity Leave (APL) Regulations



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

2010 give fathers (and adoptive partners) the right to up to six months' paternity leave, which can be taken once the mother (or other adopter) has returned to work. Some of this leave may be paid if taken during the maternity or adoption pay period. This means that an employee may be entitled to APL in respect of a baby born earlier than expected.

To qualify for APL, the father or partner of the child's mother must also be an employee. The eligibility criteria for APL to a large extent mirror those for Ordinary Paternity Leave.

You must:

- have been continuously employed for at least 26 weeks ending with the fifteenth week before the expected week of childbirth (EWC)
- remain in continuous employment with the same employer until the week before the first week of APL
- be the biological father of the child, or be married to, or be the partner or civil partner of, the child's mother
- have, or expect to have, main responsibility (apart from any responsibility of the mother) for the upbringing of the child
- be taking time off to care for the child – Reg 4(2) APL Regulations.

In addition, the child's mother must be entitled to maternity leave, statutory maternity pay (SMP) or maternity allowance (MA) and must have returned to work. For this reason, the right to APL is only open to employees whose wives or partners work. Spouses or partners of women who have decided not to return to work cannot benefit from the right.

To qualify for APL, an employee must give their employer written notice at least eight weeks before the start of the leave, giving the date that the baby was due, the actual date of birth, and the chosen start and end dates of APL.

Q Am I allowed to vary the dates of my planned paternity leave?

A Yes, but notice must be provided. If the variation is to provide for the leave to begin on the date of the child's birth, notice must be given at least 28 days before the first day of the expected week of birth (EWC).

If the variation is to provide for the leave to begin on a date that is a specified number of days after the date of birth, at least 28 days notice is required. So for example if you wanted to take paternity leave 14 days after the baby is born and the EWC is 17 August then you must notify your employer of the new date by 3 August (i.e. 28 days before 31 August which is 14 days after 17 August).

‘It makes a huge difference’

When Aberdeen firefighter Colin Devine takes time off you’ll find him in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, not the beach

Operation Florian

For the past two years, Grampian firefighter Colin Devine has taken time off work in early spring. But instead of basking on a beach he goes to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, to train firefighters in how to use equipment donated by fire and rescue services in the UK.

The project is run by Operation Florian, a global humanitarian fire and rescue charity, which aims to help impoverished communities keep safe. Its work in Zimbabwe has gone down so well that the next phase looks set to transform fire and rescue services not just in Bulawayo, but many other parts of the country.

There are plans to set up Zimbabwe’s first ever fire, medical and rescue college, with help from Operation Florian.

Things have moved fast. Three years ago, a fire officer from Manchester involved in Operation Florian met Shephard Ndlovu, the lead lecturer in fire engineering at the University of Central Lancashire. The lecturer used to fight fires in Bulawayo. “They got talking and Shephard said his city could certainly do with some help from the charity,” says Colin.

That was enough to set in train the

first Operation Florian trip to Bulawayo.

Colin, already a bit of an Operation Florian veteran – he had worked on projects in Macedonia a couple of times – was certainly up for more.

“We’d normally do a scoping visit for these projects. But Bulawayo was just too far, so four of us went out blind last year. Their autumn is the best time to go, as the hot summer spell is over,” says Colin. He first went to Africa with a colleague from Grampian and two retired firefighters from Manchester (project leader Tony Burscough and Bernie Lees).

Immediate rapport

There was an immediate rapport between the UK team and firefighters in Bulawayo. “We’ve got an absolutely fantastic relationship with the people we’re training. They are friendly, easy to get along with and very willing to learn.”

Training is linked to kit and appliances donated by UK fire services as well as community fire safety and school visits. This year and last, a 20-foot container laden with equipment donated by UK fire and rescue services arrived in Bulawayo. Donations included hydraulic equipment for use in road traffic accidents, breathing apparatus,



COLIN DEVINE

Volunteering for Operation Florian – a charity that helps poor communities with fire and rescue training and equipment – has taken Grampian firefighter Colin Devine to Zimbabwe and Macedonia





Colin (right)
with a colleague
in Bulawayo



boots, helmets and protective clothing.

"Some of it may be a bit past its sell-by date by UK standards, but it is all fully functional and in good order and makes a huge difference," says Colin. "Last year, one fire engine was donated – this year two." The project has an extra dimension. Aberdeen, where Colin works, is twinned with Bulawayo – but the link had lain dormant for years.

"This project has revived the link. Aberdeen city council donated £2,000 pounds towards equipment," says Colin. "It will make a real difference to the emergency response of the city and surrounding stations."

Economic crisis

Bulawayo is the only brigade in Zimbabwe to employ women firefighters. There are three operational at the moment. Colin says that because of the country's economic crisis, the area lost some male firefighters to Harare, Zimbabwe's capital city. They left in search of "better money and job security".

Evidence of hard times and austerity is all around in Zimbabwe – but things are getting better according to Colin. "Conditions when we first brokered the deal were really bad. With rampant inflation, it almost took a wage to buy a loaf of bread.

"This year we noticed a big difference, though times are still tough."

This time round, the Operation Florian team consisted of four firefighters from Grampian, six from other UK services

and four fire engineering students from UCLAN. Florian fundraisers – "quiz nights, car washes, poker nights" – helped raise cash for the trip.

Operation Florian has gone down a storm in Bulawayo and beyond. "We have more or less got all the fire services in the country interested in what Operation Florian has to offer," says Colin, who is already planning to return with colleagues next spring. "We had a conference when we were over there to show other cities how they could benefit from the project. There was a lot of interest and enthusiasm from other towns and cities for setting up a training centre for firefighters in Bulawayo, as part of a new fire, rescue and medical college for Zimbabwe."

Under the plan, UCLAN would play a key role in helping train staff members and help ensure courses met international standards.

Meanwhile Colin is back on duty in Aberdeen after three weeks off. He is keen to thank Grampian fire and rescue for supporting the members and projects of Operation Florian as without their support it would be difficult to achieve such outstanding results. And he's keen to encourage other FBU members to get involved.

"Operation Florian is always on the lookout for donations and new volunteers with firefighting skills. Anyone interested in donating or volunteering should look at the website for details. It can be very rewarding." And not just for the volunteers.

www.operationflorian.com





Win an Enders stainless steel eco patio heater

To win an Enders stainless steel eco patio heater send your answers by **31 May 2012** on a postcard to: **Prize Competition (May 2012), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE.** Please include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

1 How many bank holidays are there usually in England and Wales?

- A) 8
B) 9
C) 6
D) 10

2 The Bank Holidays Act of 1871 created the first four bank holidays in England. Which of these was not one of them?

- A) Easter Monday
B) Whit Monday
C) Christmas Day
D) Boxing Day

3 Which British band recorded a song called *Bank Holiday*?

- A) Stone Roses
B) Oasis
C) Take That
D) Blur



4 'Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but ...

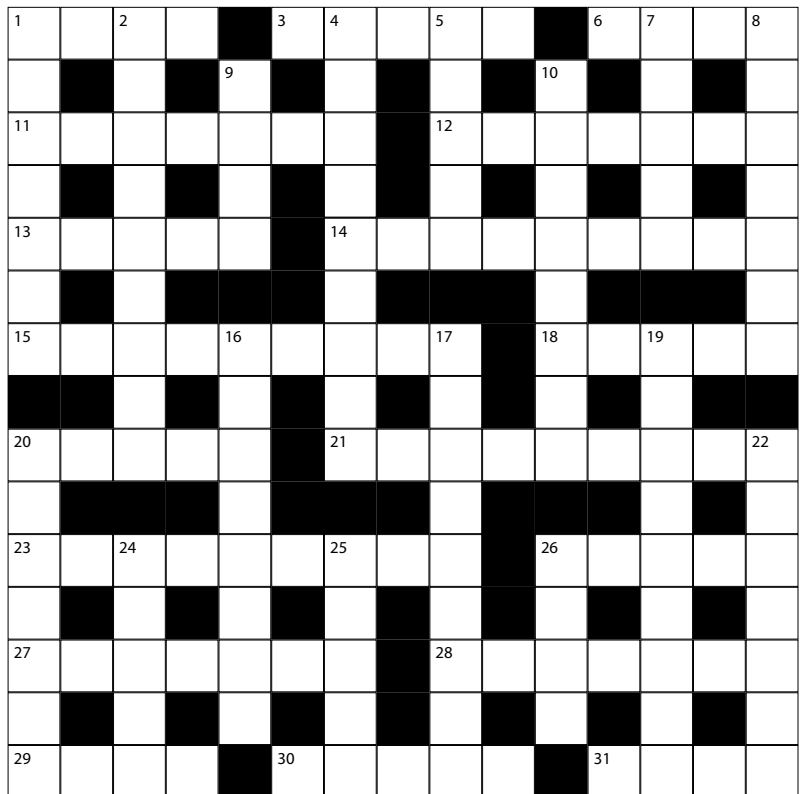
- A) ... your jobs'
B) ... your pensions'
C) ... your chains'
D) ... your reserved parking space'

5 May Day originated as a pagan festival the Ancient Britons called?

- A) Plantain
B) Maypole
C) Aquarius
D) Beltane

6 May Day became an official bank holiday in which year?

- A) 1881
B) 1981
C) 1978
D) 1781



CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1** Not barking (4)
3,6 The age we should retire (5-4)
11 Very old (7)
12 Green gemstone (7)
13 Angry (5)
14 Poke one's nose in (9)
15 Any of Clapton, Raitt, Santana, Kossoff, for example (9)
18 Arsenal's former Tony; second US president; Sinn Féin leader (5)
20 Napped leather made from underside of skin (5)
21 Ice-cool, calm and controlled - or cowardly! (9)
23 Building designer (9)
26 Seller can't exist without one (5)
27 Firefighter, French style (7)
28 Firefighter, Spanish style
29 Heavy, pliable metal - Pb (4)
30 Flat cap, French style (5)
31 Festival, feast, outdoor party (4)

DOWN

- 1** One shouldn't be doing this on thin ice (7)
2 Smooth-skinned peach (9)
4 Perception based on feeling rather than reason (9)
5 Make sound like a bird - in 140 characters? (5)
7 Picture - or reputation (5)
8 Without limit or conclusion (7)
9 Only a lake? (4)
10 Decline in number, become smaller (8)
16 Pre-meal drink (8)
17 Bit of kit for playing vinyl records - or with a ladder (9)
19 Unstable hydrocarbon gas used in welding (9)
20 Surgeon's knife (7)
22 Dickens character personifying meanness (7)
24 Punctuation mark, used here (5)
25 Spooky, chillingly strange (5)
26 Minor collision - (causing) protrusion on the skin (4)

Last month's answers and winners



Crossword solution April

April quiz answers

- 1.** B - Bruce Springsteen
2. D - Pasquale
3. A - Gene Kelly
4. D - Ed McBain
5. D - Chile

Winner of the March quiz
Ian Hunt, Durham

Station Cat

Fire service privatisers go for broke

Four-wheel drive means the only spin you get in a Range Rover comes from your PR man



Falling assets

 Privatisation is a wonderful thing for the fire service according to the Local Government Executive, and they quote Brian Coleman, chair of London's fire authority, in support. It's a stunning success, except when you are at the sharp end.

Within weeks of the privatisation call from Coleman, Lincolnshire fire service announced it had terminated its contract with AssetCo Lincoln Ltd. Chief officer Dave Ramscar said: "I would like to reassure you that the decision to terminate the contract with AssetCo Lincoln Ltd was not taken lightly and I firmly believe that it is in the best interest of our service and the people we serve to move forward into a new era with the maintenance and testing of our fleet and operational equipment."

And within days of that, the Jersey-based property company that owns five empty regional control centres went into administration. This company has been raking in the huge rents the last government signed up to pay for 20–25 years.

Do the math

 We all know the government wants the fire service to cut jobs, but South Yorkshire fire and rescue seems to have got carried away. They had a business plan that involved cutting three control posts. So they

EXPRESS & STAR



got rid of six people, at a cost of £325,757. Then, of course, they had to recruit three support staff to cover the vacancies.

So let's get this clear. South Yorkshire FRS set about saving money. To do this, they spent more than £300,000 on six redundancies. But they only saved three posts – they had to fill the other three.

Cheshire fat cats

 We're all in this together, chapter 97. Your Cat has just noticed that her litter basket is lined with shredded up copies of the minutes taken during a meeting of Cheshire fire authority brigade managers pay and performance committee. There is nothing we won't do for our readers – we spent hours putting them together, like a jigsaw puzzle. And we read that the two top people, Cheshire's chief fire officer and deputy chief fire officer, are getting a £3,000 a year boost to their earnings.

Yet these two prosperous gentlemen, Paul Hancock and his appropriately named deputy Mark Cashin, have been

running what they call "management

roadshows" in which they tour fire stations selling pay freezes and redundancies to the people on the front line. And they even use the prime minister's words. "We're all in this together," they say. We hear they're heard in frozen silence.

By the way, this isn't a pay rise, apparently. These two gentlemen got a one-off "honourarium" of £3,000 last year. This year it's quietly being incorporated into their basic salaries. It's being done, apparently, in grateful recognition of the fact that their management restructure got rid of two director-level posts.

Wheels spin

 Did we mention that Messrs Hancock and Cashin are also being given brand new four-wheel drive Range Rovers? Sorry, we might have forgotten that. We hear from the authority's top public relations man that: "This is part of a wider programme which involves the purchase of other 4 x 4 cars and a 4 x 4 midi fire engine to improve the service's resilience during bad weather."

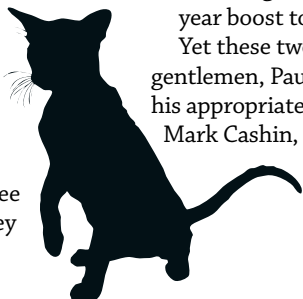
So Hancock and Cashin's splendid new cars are all in the interests of improving

the fire service? Well, not exactly – they're not rushing to put out fires in them. In fact, the two chief officers' cars have nothing at all to do with improving resilience.

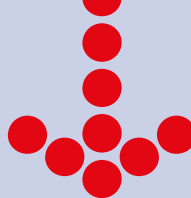
Do we know the PR man responsible for this bit of shameless spin? Actually, we do. It's the Cat's old friend Mr Tim Bevington. A few issues back we reported that Mr Bevington's car had been fitted with a blue light, and he'd been given training in emergency driving, so that he could get to fires quickly. And then, we assume, jump out of his car and elbow his way through the crowds, shouting "let me through, I'm a spin doctor".

Animal crackers

 The *Daily Mail* worked itself into a froth of indignation over the fact that firefighters stood beside a pond in south London, instead of wading in to rescue a trapped seabird. The bird was rescued by Adam Briddock from the nearby Riverside Animal Centre. The reader in a hurry might have been forgiven for reading the screaming headline ELF 'N' SAFETY BIRD BRAINS and the furious diatribe on page one, and missing the fire service comment inside, which said that firefighters are not permitted to risk their lives for a bird. And quite right too, you might think. Anyway, rescuing a bird was probably best left to someone from the Riverside Animal Centre. The more you examine the story, the more it looks like a cynical ramp to try to discredit the rules that protect us all.



25-year badges



Mark Evans (r) white watch, Cardiff Central, receives his 25-year badge from regional chair Cerith Griffiths



Chris Filipe (r) Newport, Isle of Wight, receives his 25-year badge from assistant general secretary Andy Dark



Alan Wilson (r) blue watch, Darlington, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Paul Dawson



Paul Burt (r) white watch, Methil, Fife, receives his 25-year badge from branch chair Rab Gough



Steve Cooper (r) Bridgend, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Neil Byrne



Jim Curry (c) blue watch, Grantham, receives his 25-year badge from membership secretary Mike Smith as blue watch look on



Rob Underhill (centre r) Bridgend, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Neil Byrne



Greenwich, London, borough secretary Ian Smith (l) presents 25-year badges to (l to r) **Andy Ferigan, Bob Ayerst and Neil Butcher**



Chris Jones (l) red watch, Knightsbridge, London, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Yusuf Timms



Darren Smith (l) Wombourne, Staffordshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade chair Rich Williams



Wyn Davies (l) Paignton, Devon and Somerset, receives his 25-year badge from brigade membership secretary Andy Gould



Kevin Hart (r) and Mark Taylor (l) blue watch, Darlington, receive their 25-year badges from branch rep Paul Dawson



Back row (l-r) **Matt Buiskool, Martin Payne, Paul Robinson, Guy Volpe**. Front row (l-r) **Bob Dagless, Paul Spender, Steve Pope, Mick Jahn**, Staffordshire, receive their 25-year badges



Steve Kavanagh (l) blue watch, Cardiff Central, receives his 25-year badge from crew manager Richie Smart with members of blue watch looking on

FBU regional offices

REGION 1 Scotland

52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow, Scotland G1 4AA
0141 221 2309, 01rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 2 Northern Ireland

14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn, Co Antrim, BT28 1XJ
02892 664622, 02rs@fbu.org

REGION 3 Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear

1 Carlton Court, 5th Avenue, Team Valley, Gateshead, NE11 0AZ
0191 487 4142, 03rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 4 Yorks and Humberside

9 Marsh Street, Rothwell, Leeds, LS26 0AG
0113 288 7000, 04rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 5 Greater Manchester, Lancs, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire

The Lighthouse, Lower Mersey St, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 2AL
0151 357 4400, 05rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 6 Derbys, Notts, Lincs, Leics, Northants

Little Dennis Street South (above Dawsons), Nottingham NG2 4EU
0115 947 2042, 06gen@fbu.org.uk

REGION 7 West Mids, Staffs, Warks, Hereford & Worcester, Salop

195/7 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill, West Midlands, B64 6HE
01384 413633, 07rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 8 Mid and West Wales, North Wales, South Wales

4 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed, Bridgend, CF35 5LJ
01656 867910, 08rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 9 Herts, Beds, Cambs, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk

28 Atlantic Square, Station Road, Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL
01376 521521, 09rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 10 London

John Horner Mews, Frome Street, Islington, London, N1 8PB
020 7359 3638, london@fbu.org.uk

REGION 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex

Unit 11, Hunns Mere Way, Woodingdean, Brighton, BN2 6AH
01273 309762, 11rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 12 Bucks, Berks, Hants, Oxon, Isle of Wight

FBU Regional Office, The Merlin Centre, Unit L, Gatehouse Close, Aylesbury HP19 8DP
01296 482297, 12rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 13 Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, Avon, Gloucs, Wilts, Dorset

158 Muller Road, Horfield, Bristol, BS7 9RE
0117 935 5132, 13rs@fbu.org.uk

Change of address or next of kin

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

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE 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.