

FireFighter

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

November/December 2011



Up in flames

Pensions changes will cost firefighters
and the public

See pages 4 and 10



Matt Wrack

Crucial phase in fight for our pensions



Pensions – the campaign continues

We are reaching a crucial stage of our battle to defend our pension rights. We are now involved in detailed discussion with government and their pension officials regarding the various proposals they have to attack our pension schemes.

We have prepared a whole range of detailed evidence to challenge their arguments.

This has included a general critique of the claims that public sector pension schemes are unaffordable; a challenge on operational and occupational health arguments to the idea of firefighters working to 60 and beyond; and detailed evidence from our actuaries challenging a whole range of claims from government.

This detailed evidence has now been presented to the Westminster fire minister as well as to the appropriate ministers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These discussions are part of the “scheme-specific” talks which are now taking place in every public sector scheme.

Colleagues in other schemes report that their talks are not seen as any form of genuine dialogue. That is the key reason why they are balloting for various forms of industrial action on 30 November. We will fully support them and I urge members to attend picket lines, lobbies, marches and demonstrations on that day.

However, *currently*, we

cannot say the same of the discussions we are involved in. CLG officials and the CLG fire minister have provided all the information requested and have agreed to consider in detail the various challenges we have made. In that sense, talks continue.

Having attended meetings around the country I am aware that members expect us to talk – and we are doing so. Whether progress will be made remains to be seen – i.e. will the government start to move on the key attacks we face? That is the issue we need to explore in the talks over coming weeks.

Cost ceilings

The most important development in assessing this has been the decision of the Treasury not to immediately set cost ceilings

for the old and new firefighters’ schemes (this does not include the Local Government Pension Scheme for control members). We urged the government not to set a cost ceiling until we had the opportunity to challenge the basis for any such ceiling being set. They have now complied with our request and we have already started work on this important aspect of the discussion.

Cost ceilings have been set in other schemes and that is another factor why other unions are balloting for action on 30 November. We cannot say what the outcome of our talks will be. We are aware that members have been consulted through branch meetings for the past few months and have voted overwhelmingly for strike action if that is what

is necessary.

Of course a strike in our service is an extremely serious matter and we only take such action when it is necessary to do so. We have made clear to ministers, employers and all others concerned that we shall take such action if necessary.

They are fully aware of the strength of feeling among FBU members.

Get organised – keep campaigning

There are lots of things that FBU members can do to keep mounting the pressure on the government.

1. We need to ensure that every branch is well organised and well informed. During such a difficult time, nothing can replace democratic debate through our workplace structures.
2. There are many opportunities for lobbying politicians. We are building support for our early day motion (EDM 2049) and local activists have reported that every opportunity to speak directly to MPs, MSPs, assembly members and others is having an effect. This is something everyone can do using the union’s website.
3. Support the 30 November day of action. Get out on picket lines and demonstrations.
4. Keep ready for a fight in the fire service if it comes. It may well be necessary to take action and if a ballot is called we need the biggest possible yes vote.

This fight is entering a crucial phase and we need to be well organised to see it through.



FBU members demonstrated outside the High Court in London in October on the first day of a judicial review hearing backed by six unions to challenge the switch to using the consumer price index instead of the usually higher retail price index for the annual increase in public sector pensions

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A delegation from the FBU's south west region lobbying Westminster on 11 October

LETTERS

Gold-plated pensions: the true story

As a fire brigade pensioner I am sick and tired of reading in the Tory press about how fortunate we public service pensioners are. I would be very grateful therefore, if you could publish the true story of how our pensions have failed to keep up with the rise in wages and the rise in the cost of living.

We keep reading how our so-called gold-plated pensions are paid for at the expense of the taxpayer.

What they don't say is that our pensions are taxed as earned income at exactly the same rate as everyone else. It's true you don't pay National Insurance, but if you want your full old-age pension you either have to carry on working, as I did, sign on as unemployed, or make your own arrangements to pay.

One other point; firefighting is a young person's job. Retire at 60. You're having a laugh. In truth you're probably getting past it at 40.

Paul Kleinman
OOT member
London

First woman brigade secretary

I wish to correct details in the October *Firefighter*. My colleague Marion Gaunt was first elected as brigade secretary of Lincolnshire in 1976. Working tirelessly during the strike and other difficult times, she remained in this post until she became the first woman to be elected to the executive council of the most splendid union.

G M Mallett
Lincolnshire



Firefighters meet MPs at Westminster to put the FBU's arguments on pensions

Government delays setting cost ceilings at FBU's request

Pensions

The Fire Brigades Union continues to negotiate over pensions after the government accepted the union's demand not to set cost ceilings for the firefighters' pension schemes last month.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "The most significant development was the decision of the Westminster government to comply with the FBU request not to set an immediate cost ceiling for firefighters' pension schemes.

"This clearly does not resolve the issue in any way. It does, however, offer us an opportunity to try to influence government before any such cost ceiling is set. Among TUC trade unions, this has put us in a unique position, since cost ceilings have now been set for the main public sector schemes."

The FBU argues that occupational

pension schemes must take account of the needs of the relevant occupation. The union believes there are a number of such specific factors for firefighters, in particular the physical demands of the profession and the very high contribution rates already paid.

The FBU opposed the introduction of cost ceilings for each scheme, arguing that these would set a financial straitjacket for discussions. The government's initial position that cost ceilings would be set

on 1 October was the trigger for the trade disputes the FBU registered in all parts of the UK on 14 September.

However, the Treasury confirmed on 7 October that a cost ceiling for the firefighters' schemes (excluding the local government scheme) would be delayed until later in the autumn.

This delay is a clear shift in position and is a direct result of the request made by the FBU and the issues we have raised – including the cost to firefighters and to the public of increasing contributions.

The FBU's executive council has said: "Should progress not be made in talks, the executive council will launch a ballot for strike action as agreed at annual conference 2011.

"The FBU supports the TUC day of action on 30 November and will urge members to join with other workers in protesting against the attacks on pensions."

PENSIONS COURT CASE

The FBU's court case on pensions began as *Firefighter* went to press. The union took legal action after the government imposed the consumer prices index (CPI) to uprate pensions for inflation, a move that would cost firefighters 15% of pension benefits.

Ben Sprung: We are told suppliers are unwilling to deliver parts without payment upfront



FiReControl mistakes are being made again

Control

An influential committee of MPs has vindicated FBU opposition to the FiReControl project, but the union has warned that the government is now repeating the same mistakes at local level.

The union welcomed the Public Accounts Committee report on the failure of the FiReControl project, but warned that key lessons are still to be learned.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "The fire and rescue service is repeating at local level the mistakes that the Communities and Local Government department made over FiReControl. The project failed because ministers failed to listen to the voice of control staff and their professional representatives. We argued that the project was not resilient and there was

insufficient scrutiny of costs and contracts.

"Now the present government is leaving it to local fire and rescue services to clear up the mess, making ad hoc arrangements without an overall view of national resilience. There needs to be proper oversight, not the closure and merger of control rooms. For the second time, we urge ministers to consult with professionals in the service and, in particular, the representatives of the control staff who work in it."

An example of government folly came in September when plans were announced to axe Buckinghamshire's fire control.

FBU regional secretary Ricky Matthews said staff had been told their work was to be outsourced to Cambridgeshire with the loss of 20 posts. "It is very unhelpful that this was communicated to many of them by letters delivered to their homes by taxi."

SOUNDING OFF

This is no way to run a fire and rescue service

Ben Sprung,
London region organiser

"Our latest performance figures show that London's fire engines continue to be maintained and available as normal." That's the London Fire Brigade's response to media reports about the state of appliances in the capital. London's firefighters tell a very different story. AssetCo's financial problems have meant that cupboards are bare at the workshop. Suppliers, we are told, are unwilling to deliver parts without payment upfront. The mechanics do the best they can – but a make-do-and-mend culture has developed.

A part taken from one machine is given to another. With so few spares, old Volvos are being brought back into service. Machines rejected for having a fault by a driver on arrival are often sent onto another station without being repaired.

I know of a case where a member recently attended a large tyre fire. It was a long way up a track and getting water was a problem. The Volvo suddenly died. He thanked his lucky stars that he wasn't deep into a building – the loss of water could have been fatal.

The recent national extrication challenge stretched things beyond breaking point. Shiny series 2 Mercedes were taken from stations to show the outside world and replaced by older machines for frontline rescue. Firefighters were rightly angry at the hours wasted with re-stow after re-stow, having been constantly lectured about "productive time".

A spare machine arrived at my station, only to break down. Luckily the mechanic fixed ours. The following day another re-stow was expected, but the machine apparently broke down on route. An appliance covering the political heart of the capital was ordered to the training centre, as there were no fire engines left for the trainees to train on.

This is no way to run a fire and rescue service.



Cumbria FBU members at Barrow-in-Furness town hall

Closure 'not thought out'

Cumbria

Cumbria firefighters have called for a rethink of moves to axe the county's fire control and farm out the work to Cheshire.

The FBU says the move, due to be completed in June 2012, has been overshadowed by plans for a north west regional control centre in Warrington, scheduled to go live in 2014–15.

FBU brigade secretary Ade Kevern said: "Our control members are at the

heart of Cumbria fire and rescue service's response, they are the frontline of the frontline. Cumbria's control operators and fire crews are intrinsically linked, working closely to ensure the best possible response is made to operational incidents.

"They are the first point of contact for those in distress and their value has been evident during a number of major multi-agency incidents, including the 2005 and 2009 floods and the Grayrigg rail crash.

Our control staff feel they have been betrayed.

"Cost savings are exaggerated if they exist at all. Cheshire wants to close its control to make savings although the 'savings' figures don't add up either.

"When the chips are down and the people of Cumbria need us, the control centre has never failed. This is ill-thought out, a bad deal for council tax payers and could increase the risk to the public and fire crews."



The FBU delegation with Palestinian firefighters at Nablus fire station, 12 October

FBU takes firefighting supplies to Palestine

Solidarity

FBU members took humanitarian aid to Palestinian firefighters last month in a long and eventful journey. All costs were met by money raised by FBU members and the firefighters delivering the equipment all took annual leave to enable them to do so.

FBU officials from Scotland and the north west of England delivered fire appliances, breathing apparatus, helmets,

boots and fire gauntlets to the Nablus fire department.

The equipment was driven through Europe, then by ferry to Israel before being driven to the occupied territories.

The FBU delegation met firefighters and the PGFTU Palestinian trade union federation. They also met Israeli firefighters and were assisted by the Histadrut, the Israeli trade union federation.

The delegation will produce a full report.

FBU Scotland welcomes single structure plans

Scotland

The FBU in Scotland has welcomed government plans to restructure Scotland's eight fire and rescue services into a single structure.

The union believes this gives clarity and focus to the service.

It said it hoped that all who had the best interest in the service would work together to make the project a success.

FBU Scotland regional secretary John Duffy said: "We look forward to shaping a new service. One that builds on the

commitment and sacrifice of previous generations, where we can remove the barriers to progress and where we can deliver a comprehensive, highly skilled and highly motivated rescue service, that will protect the communities of Scotland for years to come."

The FBU believes the priority should now be to focus on delivery of this emergency service. It suggested that a measure of success would be to complete the restructure without the public noticing anything other than positive changes.

The FBU also believes that the best people to develop the new service are those closest to it.

Roddy Robertson, FBU executive council member for Scotland, said: "The service must rise to the challenge. The FBU is ready, willing and able to make a positive contribution to the process.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "The FBU will monitor this process very closely. Our priorities will need to be defending jobs and quality of service as well as protecting all conditions of service for FBU members."

IN BRIEF

Essex calls for assistance

Essex FBU has called for third party assistance to try to break the deadlock in its long-running dispute over frontline cuts after Essex fire chiefs walked away from talks.

FBU Essex brigade secretary Mick Rogers said: "Once again, a few senior managers have shown a crude attitude to modern industrial relations.

"Just when it seems a settlement may be possible, they have broken away from talks and reverted back to slinging insults and megaphone diplomacy.

"We remain committed to finding a negotiated settlement, so we have written directly to the elected members of the fire authority seeking their agreement to call in the NJC joint secretaries to facilitate talks."

No to control privatisation

Ken Livingstone has called on Conservative London mayor Boris Johnson to drop plans to rush through the privatisation of the city's fire control centre.

Livingstone said: "London's mayor should be protecting our emergency services not privatising them. I cannot think of a more unjustifiable, foolish or dangerous policy under this mayor than privatising the control centre of the fire brigade. It is a new low.

"My commitment to Londoners is that I will campaign flat out against this plan, and from the outset of my administration.

"If I am elected, there will be a fresh approach at the fire brigade – and Boris Johnson's privatiser in chief, Brian Coleman, will be sacked as the chair of the fire authority."

In 2008 Boris Johnson appointed Conservative Brian Coleman to run the London Fire Authority (LFEPA). When asked "Are there any functions of LFEPA that you believe are inappropriate for take-over by private operators?" Brian Coleman replied: "No, in the right circumstances."

'Call challenge' review urged

East Sussex FBU has raised the alarm after management failed to carry out a review of a serious incident in which a member of the public suffered injuries as a result of a fire.

East Sussex fire and rescue management said it did not intend to make any changes to the service's "call challenge" procedures as a result of the incident.

The FBU has serious concerns about who is deemed a "responsible person" under the policy and is calling for an immediate review of the policy. The union fears it is putting firefighters and the public at risk.



The FBU's south west region delegation lobbying Westminster on 11 October

Get the message across

FBU national officer Dave Green reports on successful lobbying at Westminster

Whether we like it or not, if we are to convince anyone of our arguments regarding pensions or cuts, then we have to engage with politicians at Westminster, Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh. They can all influence the outcome – if they hear the right arguments.

Several FBU regions have organised such interventions in recent months, coordinated through head office. As a result MPs of all parties and from all over the UK have heard first-hand how the government's proposed changes to the pension schemes will affect each and every employee of the fire and rescue service.

On 11 October FBU representatives from three regions visited the House of Commons and spoke to MPs, not just about pensions but also pay and cuts to local services. With the help of the FBU's parliamentary group we were able to

arrange a room at the House of Commons, send letters to MPs from the regions inviting them to come and talk to us and then for representatives from brigades in the region to speak to MPs themselves.

Officials from the East Midlands, West Midlands and the South West all found the experience worthwhile. Although there were varying degrees of enthusiasm from MPs in the different areas (with predictable no-shows from MPs representing

the coalition government), officials and members were still able to lobby their individual MPs using the green card system that operates at the House of Commons.

In the near future we have lobbies organised by the London region, Yorkshire and Humberside and women members. Several regions and brigades have already seen their MPs. Slowly but surely we are working our way across the UK.

More action is vital

It is vital that we see as many politicians as possible – right across the regions and political spectrum. Ask your brigade officials how to get involved. If you have missed a lobby, then you can still write to your MP. If there is a lobby organised, then ask to be involved. You will be given a briefing pack to help explain our case, although MPs should be aware as they have already received a parliamentary briefing on our arguments.

It is never too late to get our message across – but now is ideal. We have presented our technical, legal and financial arguments. Now we need the human side of what their proposals mean. Over to you.

It is never too late to get our message across. We have presented our technical, legal and financial arguments. Now we need the human side. Over to you.



How did the service cope with widespread civil unrest?

The widespread civil disturbances in August raised questions over how stretched the fire service was and how it coped. The answer varies from brigade to brigade, but all conclude that further cuts to frontline personnel would cause major problems in the response to any future civil disturbances.

Kevin Brown, FBU north west regional

secretary, said: "It was a very tough and difficult time for Greater Manchester fire crews. They managed to cope in August but there are real concerns about whether that would be the case in the future.

"GMC have just announced it wants huge cuts to frontline crews. That has to raise issues about whether we could cope with

the same or worse in future."

The same views are echoed on Merseyside, which also faced civil disturbances. FBU brigade secretary Les Skarratts said: "Fire crews dealt with the disturbances with great courage and tact. We had firefighters injured and it was pretty tough.

VIEW
FROM THE
AERIAL LADDER
PLATFORM

*Firefighter in
Tottenham
during the
disturbances*

JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

"The coalition cuts have led to another 80 frontline posts placed under threat. That inevitably raises questions about how we could cope in future."

West Midlands regional secretary Chris Downes has similar concerns. "West Midlands crews coped with great courage and professionalism. We had the resources,

but we were incredibly busy. If the major cuts go ahead, it will leave communities with limited cover should such events occur again."

The issue is much clearer in London where the civil disturbances were widespread. London FBU criticised a report by the London Fire Brigade, which claimed that it

had enough resources to cope in August.

FBU regional secretary Joe MacVeigh said: "Publishing one-sided, self-congratulatory and disingenuous reports is neither in the interests of Londoners nor firefighters, who too often during the civil unrest were exposed to real dangers because of a lack of resources."

“Scuppering our retirement plans”

The FBU has done the maths on the government's pensions attack. The results are devastating. It wants firefighters to pay tens of thousands of pounds over their careers in extra contributions and then get tens of thousands less in retirement

Pay more

The government wants all firefighters to pay an extra £2,000 in extra pension contributions over the next three years. It then intends to introduce a new scheme that would make these extra contributions permanent.

The FBU asked independent financial consultants First Actuarial to work out what this would mean for firefighters over the length of their careers.

First Actuarial indicated that, if the government gets its way, a typical firefighter aged 40 in the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) would pay over £18,000 more over the course of their career.

A “high-flying” firefighter (who is rapidly promoted) in the FPS would end up paying additional contributions of £54,000 up to their retirement.

A young firefighter aged 20 in the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme (NFPS) would be expected to pay over £26,000 in extra contributions over their career if the government's proposals are implemented.

High-flyers in NFPS could expect to pay over £40,000 in additional contributions.

Get less

A member in the FPS, now aged 40, who had been through the typical career path and who retired at the age of 50 would currently expect to receive a pension of £21,885 a year. Under the proposed career average (CARE) scheme (assuming an accrual rate of 1/60th), this would fall to £13,313.

A member in the FPS, now aged 40, who is a high-flyer would currently expect to receive a pension of £33,761 a year if they retired at the age of 50. Under the CARE scheme (assuming an accrual rate of 1/60th), this would fall to £20,240.

A newly joined member in the NFPS, now aged 20, who retired at the age of 55 after following a typical career path would currently expect to receive a pension of £20,394 a year. Under the CARE scheme (assuming an accrual rate of 1/60th) this would fall to £16,370.

A newly joined member in the NFPS, now aged 20, who became a high-flyer and retired at the age of 55 without applying an early retirement factor would currently expect to receive a pension of £31,462 a year. Under the CARE scheme (assuming an accrual rate of 1/60th) this would fall to £20,400.



*John Drake:
Hit by
university fees
hike*



*Chris Downes:
Determined to
fight injustice
to the end*



The FBU asked firefighters and our officials what this would mean for our living standards

"I am due to retire soon and I am angry that this government has downgraded my pension and wants to rob me of my legitimate payment. I have never reneged on my pension contributions and I fully expect to be paid the correct amount that I agreed to receive when I signed my contract of employment. This makes me determined to fight this injustice to the end."

Chris Downes, FBU West Midlands regional secretary

"If the government gets its way then my lump sum would be reduced by over £40k! I would be tens of thousands of pounds worse off. Another victim of what I consider state-sponsored theft."

Adrian Clarke, FBU eastern region secretary

"The attacks on my pension will scupper my retirement plans in the blink of an eye. With the pay freeze, rampant inflation and threats to jobs, it means we haven't got the income to enjoy the fruits of our labour. We have cut right back on holidays, trips away and nights out. It can't be right that we have to pay for the greed of the City in this way."

Brent Thornley, Swindon FBU

"My daughter is planning on going to university next year, the first to be hit with up to £9k a year tuition fees. I was hoping to minimise her debt as much as possible, but the government's proposals drastically change that plan. It's really difficult telling her that I can't help her as much as I want to."

**John Drake,
FBU south west regional secretary**

"I can't help my daughter with her tuition fees"

"I'm not prepared to say adios to family holidays, bye-bye to family days out at the cinema or to sacrifice my family's future financial wellbeing to pay for others' mistakes and greed. We will fight them all the way to keep what we have earned and what we are due."

Paul Donnelly, Strathclyde FBU

"The government's proposals to increase our pension contributions and extend the retirement age are crazy. My husband and I are both firefighters. We already pay 11% contributions and to expect us to work until we are both 60 is simply signing our early death warrant. This has a huge effect on our family what with a zero pay rise for two years and then rising fuel and food bills."

Samantha Rye, Durham and Darlington FBU

"I'm not prepared to sacrifice my family's future financial wellbeing to pay for others' mistakes and greed"



Our right to retire with health and dignity

Why the FBU wants a decent normal pension age for all firefighters

Fast forward your career in the fire service. Do you think you could do your job at the age of 60 and beyond? The government thinks you can. The FBU disagrees, pointing to the lack of evidence that someone in their sixties could keep pace with the operational demands of firefighting.

And the union has struck a chord with politicians and the public. "It is plain daft to expect people of 60 and beyond to work as an operational firefighter," said general secretary Matt Wrack. "Even the very fittest will struggle to do that. It will not work in the real world."

"When we speak to politicians and the public, most accept the point we are making. Most of them see the common sense in our case for retirement at 55".

The union rejects the Hutton report's recommendation that the normal pensions age (NPA) for firefighters should increase from 55 to 60 from 2015. The FBU also believes the NPA for those who joined the New Firefighters' Pensions Scheme (NFPS) since 2006 should be reduced from 60 to 55.

The normal pension age in the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) is 55 – although FPS members may retire before that in certain circumstances. The government is proposing a new normal pensions age of 60 for all firefighters after 2015.

Evidence

When the NPA of 60 was imposed in 2006 in the NFPS, no evidence to support the change was ever presented.

And the change was never accepted by the FBU.

In 2006, the government claimed that firefighters who could no longer maintain operational fitness could be redeployed into alternative roles.

The FBU warned that this would simply lead to increasing pressures for firefighters to be dismissed under capability procedures.

This concern was vindicated by the subsequent case in London in which firefighters' pensions were removed despite their employer being unable to identify any alternative work. The case broadly confirmed the FBU view that an occupational pension scheme must be designed around the service and that redeployment opportunities must be real rather than hypothetical.

FBU national officer Sean Starbuck said: "We recently surveyed 41 fire authorities about their redeployment opportunities, only seven said they had any potential redeployment opportunities that met the required criteria. Even in these cases, the number of redeployment opportunities available is so low that they undermine the claims made by government in 2006."

Costs of increasing NPA

The FBU believes that any rise in the NPA will inevitably result in an increase in ill-health retirements. This would undermine the long process of reducing the cost of ill-health retirements.

Government knows this. Its own Government Actuaries Department (GAD) admitted in 2005 that "any increase in retirement ages will result in a corresponding increase in

SIMON FARR



Retirement at 55 Research backs the union's case

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has argued that the government's proposal to increase the normal pension age (NPA) for firefighters from 55 to 60 is "daft" and "plain wrong". The union's research shows that firefighters are not fit to work at 60 and beyond, and that the government's proposal would lead to a significant increase in ill-health retirements. The union's research also shows that the government's proposal would lead to a significant increase in the cost of ill-health retirements.

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No evidence was provided for a new premium age of 60

– see page 18

ill-health retirements". They also advised that "it would not be until after the first recruits of the NFPS have completed their careers that a determination could be made on whether GAD's assumptions are correct or incorrect".

Starbuck said: "It would be extremely risky to wait until ill-health retirements begin to increase in 35 years or so. If there is a rise in ill-health retirements, then there will be a knock-on effect on scheme costs. Instead of making savings as claimed, costs will go up."

The FBU recently asked First Actuarial consultants to provide an assessment of the potential impact of any rise in ill-health retirements on the pension schemes. The consultants found that an increase in ill-health retirement by only 10% to 15% will cancel out any savings that might be delivered by increasing the NPA from 55 to 60. An increase by 20% will actually make the proposal to increase the NPA from 55 to 60 more expensive than the current scheme arrangements.

Occupational health issues

Important occupational health issues are raised by the demand for firefighters to work beyond 55. The FBU asked the Institute of Occupational Medicine (IOM)

to conduct a review of the literature on aging and the demands of firefighting.

The IOM report confirms that a wide variety of health conditions have a clear association with age. While there is no hard data to show that osteoarthritis and diabetes are more common in firefighters than in older members of any population, the authors recognise that there is an added risk in professions such as firefighting, due to the nature of the work.

The report indicates that there is a lack of specific data on the impact of aging on firefighters, especially female firefighters.

The authors recognise that: "The entry requirements for UK firefighters are based, at least in part, on the assumption that these reflect an anticipated deterioration in performance up to a certain age. It must be assumed that, beyond that age, an increasing proportion of firefighters will find operational demands more challenging."

The independent evidence suggests that all firefighters should be able to retire at 55 – so the FBU wants this extended to NFPS members. The union also supports full protection for all existing rights – including the right for FPS members to retire earlier in certain circumstances.

A PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE?

NOTH

The government has published its White Paper on opening up public services to profiteers. The FBU has told it not to bother

Apparently the government believes that the fire and rescue service is “run from Whitehall” and has had “decades of top-down prescription and centralisation”. Ministers say the current arrangements are not value for money.

The government’s Open Public Services White Paper says public services are “broken”, with “poor standards” and “an outdated approach out of step with the way we live now”.

The FBU response is that the government does not know what it is talking about. National standards have been removed and each service has its own locally developed integrated risk management plan that is not subject to national oversight.

FBU national officer Dave Green says the government’s plan is not to improve public services, but to sell them off to private profiteers. “They are literally gambling with people’s lives if they think it’s OK to let private providers own and run the fire and rescue service. They need to understand why the fire and

rescue service must remain in the public sector.

“Private ownership and control of the fire and rescue service does not make any sense. Profits would be hard to make from those putting out fires in remote farmhouses rather than in large supermarkets. Social solidarity means that local people collectively contribute to defending themselves and others from the shared risk. In addition, equity and social justice require some parity of provision.”

Private wreckers

The experience of private finance initiative (PFI) deals like AssetCo and FiReControl show what happens when the private sector comes into the fire and rescue service.

AssetCo has become a by-word for mismanagement and greed that has ended in a trail of over £100m of debt and near insolvency for the company itself. In and out of court, replete with internal scandal, its share price suspended, AssetCo is a terrible advertisement for what can and does go wrong when private providers come into public services.

What is particularly

disturbing is that public authorities lack control over this private company and have been left as helpless spectators watching this catastrophe unfold. Apparently, the AssetCo fire engines and equipment are now owned by Lloyds Bank, in part as credit for loans made to the firm.

Wasted

Another example is the FiReControl project. Around half a billion pounds of taxpayers’ money was wasted on it, and most of that went on private sector providers and private sector consultants.

Sharon Riley, executive council member for control staff, said: “The taxpayer is

still paying £50,000 a day in rent for eight empty buildings, built under a private developer scheme that is even worse for the taxpayer than PFI schemes. FiReControl wasted nearly £70m on consultants. And, on top of that, the private company EADS failed to deliver the technology necessary. No wonder it was described by the Public Accounts Committee as ‘one of the worst cases of project failure’ they had seen in many years.”

Mutuals

The FBU is aware that at least a dozen fire and rescue services are exploring whether to establish “mutual” organisations.

FALCK – TOUTING FOR BUSINESS

The FBU is aware that Falck, the Denmark-based multinational service provider, has been touting for business in the UK. The union has learned that Falck has had no fewer than 23 meetings in six months with officers from Devon and Somerset fire and rescue service.

Tam McFarlane, executive council member for the south west, said: “There’s no transparency here. Falck has signed a memorandum of understanding, but they have refused to disclose the precise details of the agreement to local FBU officials. The FBU does not believe Denmark is a model for the UK fire and rescue service – its fire deaths per head are significantly worse than the UK’s.”

ANKS

The most high-profile has been Cleveland fire and rescue service. It has stated publicly that it has received the go-ahead to work up proposals for a mutual and created a “trading arm”.

Andy Noble, executive council member for the north east region, said: “The expansion of a relatively low-key ‘for profit’ trading arm into a full social enterprise company, and all that could come with it, is alarming.

Investigations are at an early stage, but the whole issue is management-driven from the top down, with no detailed consultation taking place, as yet, with firefighters.

“It’s not being done for the right reasons, but more out of desperation for funding. There’s no buzz for it among firefighters who have not been given any details. If there are ramifications for terms and conditions, we know firefighters will oppose it. We’re also confident that the public wants a publicly provided fire service.”

If the government really is genuinely listening to the representative stakeholders in the fire and rescue service, then it will scrap its privatisation plans.

The case for “opening up” the fire and rescue service to other providers has not been made.

The FBU believes the government is simply wrong to proceed in this direction.

WHAT DOES IT COST?

The AA and British Gas are NOT bidding to replace the fire service, but what does the private sector charge for its version of ‘emergency response’?

The AA

The AA, the ‘fourth emergency service’ – £398.76 a year gets you “home emergency response”, including central heating (exclusions apply), roadside assistance, a tow if you need it or help if your car won’t start at home.



AA = £398.76 PER YEAR



BRITISH GAS = £324 PER YEAR

British Gas Homecare

British Gas Homecare 400 cover – £324 a year to “safeguard your essential systems from emergency”, covers boiler, central heating, plumbing, drains and electrics.

Fire service

Fire service – cost £42 a year per person (according to CLG), instant response to fires, floods, RTAs, urban search and rescue – the list goes on ...



FRS = £42 PER YEAR

The FBU has written to chief fire and rescue adviser Ken Knight asking him to progress urgently vital work that is needed to ensure the safety of firefighters

An appeal for professional standards

Dear Ken,

I write to express a number of concerns relating to public and firefighter safety. These will need to be addressed if the government is to meet its commitment to deliver more accountable, effective and cost-efficient services and if it is not to repeat mistakes made in the past.

In 2008, the FBU published *In the Line of Duty*, a report on firefighters killed on duty. It found that firefighter deaths were consistently related to inadequate assessment of risk, poor fire and rescue policies and procedures and inadequate training and assessment of competence.

The report found that there was a notable absence of substantial guidance from government, particularly the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG).

It found that the publication of brief and general circulars was no substitute for detailed policy guidance. There was a policy vacuum with regard to firefighter safety and that this was reflected in the fatality figures in recent years.

The report concluded that these were failures of national leadership

and direction. Despite the rhetoric of “modernisation”, there were aspects of firefighter safety that had not improved.

It recommended that a common, consistent and comprehensive reporting system for fatalities and major injuries should be introduced across the UK.

It said government should publish figures for all firefighter fatalities, major and serious injuries and near-misses across the UK in an official annual publication together with analysis and evaluation.

Guidance

CLG accepted the need for central guidance to improve firefighter safety, to provide safe systems of work for the fire and rescue services and to promote interoperability and effective operational deployment. The chief fire and rescue adviser unit was asked to review and refresh all operational guidance.

Of the 14 projects commissioned so far, six are more than a year late. For no obvious reason, the revised guidance resulting from three of these projects has been delayed for over six months.

The operational guidance programme board has not met since March of this

year. Meetings for June and September were cancelled at the last minute.

This failure has further hampered the commissioning of new projects vital for firefighter and public safety.

Health and safety

In 2008, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) commissioned a series of inspections of fire and rescue services. It found that “little or no proactive inspection of the fire and rescue service has been carried out for a number of years; there have been a number of multiple fatalities during operational incidents and the incidence of fatal accidents appears to be higher than over the preceding period.”

In October 2010, HSE released a consolidated report based on the eight inspections carried out so far. This report confirmed, as far as the FBU is concerned, that firefighter safety has been compromised by the previous government’s “modernisation” agenda.

The coalition government has continued this agenda with a four-year programme of further budget cuts for fire and rescue services. It has also laid out its own “modernisation” agenda in



HSE: 'The incidence of fatal accidents appears to be higher than over the preceding period'

PHIL NOBLE/PA PHOTOS

its response to the Fire Futures project, which appears to have a blatant disregard for the concerns expressed by the FBU and the HSE.

National standards

The "modernisation" agenda has driven down the effectiveness of the fire and rescue service. In 2009, CLG published a report – *Review of Fire and Rescue Service Response Times* – that showed how average response times in England had increased between 1996 and 2006.

The authors predicted that increased response times may contribute to 13 additional fatalities in dwelling and other building fires each year and possibly 65 additional deaths in road traffic collisions.

Last year, the FBU published *It's About Time* on response times. The union did not accept that slower attendance was only because of traffic congestion, as response times at night are equally slower, despite the lack of traffic.

The FBU believes that the real reason for slower response times is the disastrous, Whitehall-inspired "modernisation".

The removal of national standards of fire cover, the shift of emphasis almost entirely towards prevention and community fire safety – at the expense of emergency intervention – and the grinding process of cutting firefighter jobs are the central causes of the problem.

The way forward

At the operational guidance project board meeting in March 2011, to address these issues, the FBU recommended that:

- An additional operational guidance project be commissioned to develop response planning based on worst-case planning scenarios. The software developed for the pathfinder trials and the national implementation pilot should be made available to the project and to all fire and rescue services.
- There is normally insufficient outcome data to be gathered in one fire and rescue service for response planning to be achieved at local level. It is therefore necessary for this work to be carried out at a pan-service level.
- In order for data to be shared across

services, the same data must be collected in a common way by all fire and rescue services that wish to deliver safe and effective systems of work.

- Nationally, response times have been recorded and measured from time of call to time of first attendance. This should be maintained so that evaluation is possible against past performance and for future planning. In June this year, at the behest of the board, the FBU submitted a project bid for this work entitled *Planning scenarios for emergency response*. The FBU requests an urgent meeting of the board to progress this vital piece of work.

I hope that you will treat our request with the utmost urgency and will meet us to discuss the serious concerns raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely

Andy Dark

FBU assistant general secretary

This is an edited version of the original letter. The full version is on the FBU's website www.fbu.org.uk

Retirement at 55

Research backs the union's case

**No evidence
was provided
for a normal
pension age
of 60**

The Fire Brigades Union believes that the normal pension age for all firefighters should be 55, with the possibility of earlier retirement in certain circumstances.

The normal pension age in the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) is 55, but in the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme (NFPS) it is 60.

The Hutton report states that the government should "consider" setting a new normal pension age of 60 for all firefighters from 2015.

When the NFPS was introduced, no evidence was provided for a normal pension age of 60.

Neither did Hutton produce any evidence for extending the requirement. In fact, previous research has suggested that 55 is the appropriate normal pension age.

Research

The most detailed evidence available on firefighters' retirement ages remains the report by Michael Haisman, *Age Limit for Serving Firefighters*, produced for the Home Office in 1996.

After a comprehensive survey of the available literature, covering many countries, the author recommended "that the existing limit of 55 years is retained".

Haisman specifically rejected raising the retirement age limit of 55 years, because this "would result in diminishing numbers being able to meet the [fitness] requirements". He concluded that

"there is, therefore, no case for raising the limit".

Fitness

Haisman argued that "the fitness demands of firefighting can be very severe; heavy work such as climbing stairs carrying heavy equipment is made more extreme by the need to use BA and wear heavy and restrictive protective clothing". There is "agreement that in order to meet these demands high levels of anaerobic power and strength are required together with corresponding high levels of aerobic fitness".

The report warned that "simple answers about retirement age are not possible because of the variability of fitness within each gender at any age". In addition to variability, "there are interactions with factors such as

training which aims to improve or maintain fitness, and also effects of excess body fat which will detract from aerobic fitness".

The risks

There is also wide variation in the risks of developing coronary heart disease (CHD), heat exhaustion, respiratory problems and musculoskeletal disorders because of a wide range of factors. These include smoking habits, physical fitness, body composition and habitual physical activity. However the report found that "generally the risks of CHD and heat exhaustion will increase from age 50 to 60, and lung function will continue to decline over this ten-year period".

After about age 30 years, "lean body mass decreases because of decreased muscle

and bone mass. The loss of muscle mass parallels the loss of strength described earlier. The loss of bone mass at age 65 can be 10% in men and 20% in women. These changes can be delayed to some extent by training".

The job

Firefighters' working environments are unique in many respects and have been described as "among the most extreme of the non-military vocational experiences". Firefighters cannot control the physical requirements of the work environment but "must respond to ever-changing emergency conditions. It is suggested that any firefighting activity should be regarded as 'unusually stressful'".

Haisman said that wearing BA "can produce a 20% reduction in maximal performance because of the weight of the equipment". The use of BA in hot environments presents particular problems. He reported that "Swedish authorities have recommended that firefighters over age 50 years are not exposed to such conditions requiring the use of BA, because of the risks to health".

The Haisman report concluded that: "It is clear that beyond 55 years an increasing number will be unable to undertake the full range of duties." He argued that "retaining the existing age of retirement at 55 years should be considered". This option has attractions, "most notably that it appears to work and is in line with the majority of comparable organisations in this country and some in Europe".

IAN MARLOW



Wearing BA can produce a 20% reduction in maximal performance

Legal Beagle

How to prepare for a pension hearing

**FBU
FREEPHONE
LEGAL ADVICE
LINE
0808
100 6061**

Q My pension appeal is coming up for hearing before the Board of Medical Referees. Is there anything I can do to prepare?

A You should speak to your FBU rep about this, but you can make sure that the board will have all your relevant medical records and any relevant paperwork from the brigade. These would include accident reports. It is also a good idea to speak to your brigade and to see if you can agree the correct question that the board will have to address.

Although, at the end of the day, it is the chair of the board's decision as to what question(s) the board addresses, if you agree a position with the brigade, it should help things go much more smoothly on the day of the appeal.

Also, spend a little time in advance of the hearing thinking about your usual daily routine, such as what exercise you take, what medication you take and how you sleep at night.

Q I was injured in an accident on the fire ground. I was working just as we are trained to do and my colleagues including the officer in charge did nothing wrong. Can I still bring a claim for compensation?

A Unless your accident was in some way due to the brigade's negligence then you



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

probably cannot bring a claim against it.

But if you were attending a fire that was started deliberately or negligently, you might well have a claim against a third party.

If, for instance, it was a house fire and the owner of the house left a cigarette burning and this caused the fire, you might well have a claim against the owner (or, in practice, their insurers).

If the fire was in a shop that had been set on fire in an arson attack, you might be able to put in a claim to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority.

In either case, it is worth taking legal advice through the FBU's legal scheme.

Q A loved one has suffered a very serious injury as a result of an accident and we have been told that we should try to get an interim payment. What is this for and how do we go about it?

A Serious or catastrophic injury is a very specialist area so it is important that you get legal advice from a solicitor who has specific experience in this field. Thompsons, the FBU's lawyers, have a specialist serious injury unit that can provide the advice and experience that you need. This includes experience in obtaining interim payments from the negligent party to pay for the cost of things like

specialist medical assistance and rehabilitation while the claim for compensation is proceeding.

Serious injuries for which it is possible to recover compensation include brain and spinal injuries, severe burns, loss of sight and amputations. It is important to get advice as soon as possible as there are strict time limits for taking legal action (normally three years from the date of the accident or when it was known that a serious injury had been caused through someone else's fault). Serious injury claims are also often very complex.

Your lawyer will probably want early specialist medical assessments to establish medical, rehabilitation and care needs in order to apply for the interim payment. This is made either voluntarily by the negligent party's insurer or by a court order.

Negligence has to be proved, irrespective of the level of injury caused. But in serious injury cases, because the potential level of damages is high, insurers will often deny liability or argue that the injured person in some way contributed to the accident and that damages should therefore be reduced. Negotiations as to the final amount of compensation to be paid can therefore take months or even years. It may also be some time before the full extent of the disability suffered by the injured person is established.

But it is vital treatment and specialist care is not delayed – hence the importance of interim payments.

“Have you seen our son?”

Kent firefighter Jim Green and wife Pauline search for their missing son

Missing

There has been no real “day off” for Kent firefighter Jim Green and his wife Pauline since the day their son Matthew left the family home in Sittingbourne more than 18 months ago.

Matt, then 26, said he was off to see a friend for a weekend in Mile End, east London. He took his passport, birth certificate, driving licence and £1,700 in cash. He has not been seen or heard of since – although there have been a few inconclusive “sightings”.

Matt’s disappearance is especially troubling as he suffered from acute mental health problems less than a year before he left. And the friend he said he was off to see in Mile End had moved out of the area months before.

“We just want to know he’s safe,” says Jim, who joined the Kent fire service 32 years ago. Jim is ex-navy and a seasoned fire and rescue professional. Witnessing distress, loss and trauma in the course of saving lives comes with the territory. But nothing could have prepared Jim for living life day-to-day and not knowing the whereabouts of his vulnerable youngest son or what has happened to him since he left home on 9 April 2010.

Press cuttings

“Matt was still quite withdrawn but seemed to be getting his life back on track,” Jim said when *Firefighter* visited the couple’s neat and welcoming home. “He was back working as a self-employed roofer and seemed more at ease with himself,” he adds, rifling through a heap of press cuttings.

“It’s the not knowing. We just want to hear his voice, know he’s safe. We have to do everything we can to try and find Matt. We can’t just give up.”

Nobody could possibly accuse Jim and Pauline of giving up. The couple – married for 35 years – have been extraordinarily resourceful since Matt disappeared, taking every opportunity to get his image in front of as many people as possible. The Greens have printed the latest version of their Have You Seen Matthew Green? poster, with a different shot of their son’s strong features. It is already up in Jim’s car – and ready to display and circulate.

Online presence

Red watch colleagues at Sittingbourne fire station have been very supportive, says Jim. “But it would be really helpful if FBU members around the country could show Matt’s picture in this article to friends and family. You never know, it might just jog someone’s memory. It has to be worth a try.”

Jim and Pauline have made sure their missing son has an online presence – and are happy to co-operate with journalists to keep his name and face in the news. One of Matt’s friends suggested a dedicated Facebook site, which has attracted over 5,500 visitors.

This site prompted a TV production company to make a 15-minute film screened on BBC 1 this May. The couple were interviewed and filmed walking the streets of Mile End, where their son said he was heading and where someone reported seeing him on a bus in the area. Making the film was distressing, but necessary for Jim

MIS

Have you seen



Matthew Green - 27, f

Last seen at home on

He told his family he was going away

End, London - he never arrived and d

He is white, has/had a shaved head, br

tattoos on his upper arms. They are ‘M

Squaw and a Chinese symbol on his ca

his welfare and need to know he is saf

If you have seen Matthew or have any i

please call: Police (Sittingbourne) on 0

0500 700 700 or email us directly at:

“It would be really helpful if FBU members round the country could show Matt’s picture in this

MISSING

Have you seen Matthew Green?



from Sittingbourne, Kent
Thursday 8th April 2010

for the weekend to visit friends in Mile End. He didn't return home after that weekend. He has brown eyes and is of slim build. He has a 'Matty', England Football emblem, Indian ink. We are increasingly concerned for his safety and well.

Information on his whereabouts,
01795 419164 or Missing People on
greensindoors@aol.com

article to friends and family. You never know, it might just jog someone's memory"



JIM GREEN

Jim Green, a Kent firefighter of 32 years' standing, and his wife Pauline are searching for their missing son

and Pauline in their determination to find Matt.

Mile End is not the only place the couple have visited in search of Matt. "We've been to Streatham and coastal towns," says Jim. "We 'people watch' and if someone looks like they could be Matt – the way they walk, the shape of the head, we approach them. But when we get nearer it's clear it's not him."

The couple speak of a witty happy-go-lucky football-loving son, who was outgoing and had many friends before becoming increasingly withdrawn and troubled with mental health problems.

False accusation

They believe a false accusation of rape years earlier may have helped trigger Matt's problems. CCTV cameras showed Matt was at a Leytonstone petrol station at the time a Sittingbourne teenager said she was being raped on wasteland in the town. Another teenager was subsequently prosecuted for perverting the course of justice and told to pay Matt £150 damages.

"We don't want to drag him home if

he doesn't want to come," says Pauline.

"We just want him to contact us, or let us know he is safe and well." As Matt is an adult, even homeless charities such as the Salvation Army cannot tell his parents if he is living in a hostel. To do so would breach the Data Protection Act.

"I even wish he'd get arrested – at least he'd come up on the police computer and we could pinpoint where he is," says Pauline.

Days after Matt went missing, police found the mobile his parents had been ringing repeatedly in Matt's bedroom. He hadn't taken it. The bedroom is now stacked with Matt's unopened birthday, Christmas and Easter presents.

If and when Matt returns to Sittingbourne there will be a lot of catching up to do. Let's hope vigilant FBU members can help Jim and Pauline make that longed-for breakthrough.

More information:

Pauline Green on Facebook:

<http://tinyurl.com/65te23k>

email: greensindoors@aol.com

Prize quiz

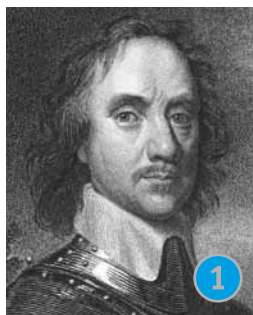


Win £150 of John Lewis vouchers

To win £150 of John Lewis vouchers please send your answers by 15 December 2011 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (Nov/Dec 2011), 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 Who banned Christmas festivities in England between 1647 and 1660?

- A. Henry VIII
- B. Charles I
- C. Pope Innocent X
- D. Oliver Cromwell



2 Which of the following was not one of the four ghosts in Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol?

- A. Christmas Past
- B. Christmas Present
- C. Jacob Farley
- D. Jacob Marley

4 Traditional in Germany at Christmas, what sort of food is stollen?

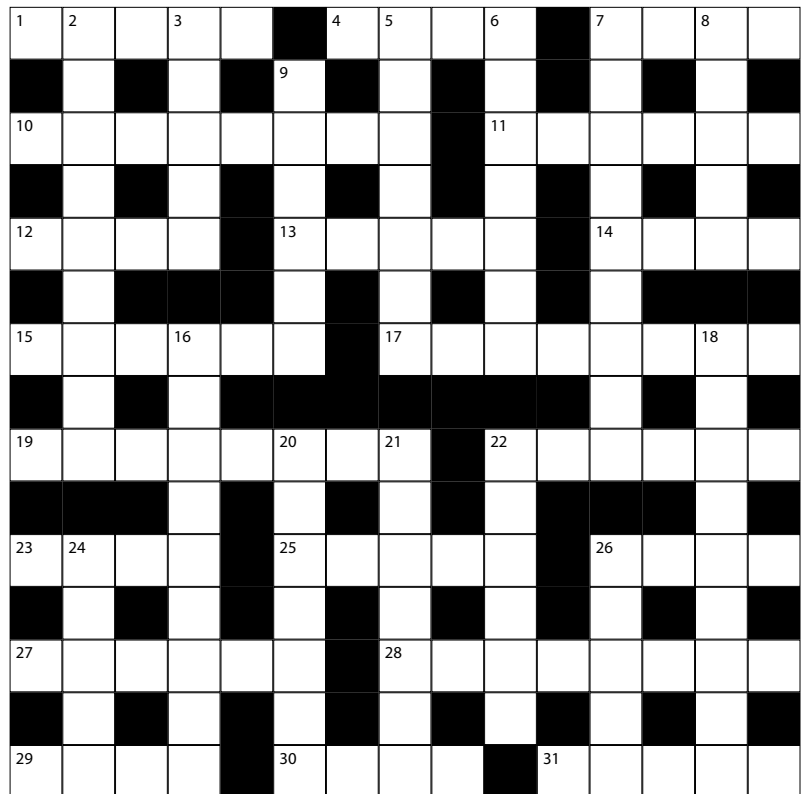
- A. Salt cod
- B. Roast pork
- C. Cake
- D. Smoked ham

3 What is the English title of the carol written in 1818 by Austrian priest Josef Mohr originally called Stille Nacht?

- A. Silent Night
- B. Moonlight
- C. Quiet Night
- D. Holy Night

5 How many gifts are given in total in the song The Twelve Days of Christmas?

- A. 365
- B. 364
- C. 12
- D. 78



CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1, 11, 17** What FBU and other public-sector unions have been telling the government (5,3,3,8)
- 4** Essential bit of our kit (4)
- 7** Made very cold – or covered in sugary layer (4)
- 10** Find way from A to B (8)
- 11** See 1
- 12** Lavish party – sphere (4)
- 13** Curry sauce (5)
- 14** Spindle for wheels (4)
- 15** Range of eight notes (6)
- 17** See 1
- 19** Unable to settle (8)
- 22** Rank, rotten (6)
- 23** Fish – complain (4)
- 25** Happening, occurrence (5)
- 26** Expired (4)
- 27** Vote – for industrial action? (6)
- 28** One who runs in short, fast bursts (8)
- 29** Organised tangle of rope; wading bird (4)
- 30** Call – circle (4)
- 31** Small group of trees (5)

DOWN

- 2** Snow slide (9)
- 3** Bore; tool; military practice (5)
- 5** Partly cover the same area as (7)
- 6** Wearing away of (7)
- 7** Pumping up – of prices (9)
- 8** The same as (5)
- 9** What speculators do (6)
- 16** 'George' – device that takes control of aircraft (9)
- 18** Silent (9)
- 20** One entitled to vote (7)
- 21** US hatmaker – the world's biggest (7)
- 22** Something we should be able to do with decent 17 (6)
- 24** Once more (5)
- 26** Dog-like Australian native (5)

Last month's answers and winners



Crossword solution October

October quiz answers

- 1. B. Tim Robbins
- 2. A. Tony Curtis
- 3. A. Quentin Tarantino
- 4. B. Rick Blaine
- 5. A. Kirk Douglas

Winner of the August/September quiz
Antony Brighthouse, West Yorkshire

Station Cat

Going Dutch puts the heat on firefighters

A clean sweep from the keyboard – see Don't lift a finger



Where's the fire?

🐾 Heard the one about the South Yorkshire fire crew who had to stop on their way to a job to put out the fire on their fire appliance? They were driving one of the new combined aerial rescue pumps (CARPs, or, as their crews call them, CRAPs) – the ones that are supposed to be at the cutting edge of new technology. But to put a fire out, they've got to get to it first and before they could get to this particular blaze, the crew had to stop and put out a fire in the machine's engine compartment. This is the third fire on one of these machines – on another occasion the CARP's mud flap was set on fire by its own exhaust pipe.

Weighty problem

🐾 That's not the only design problem with South Yorkshire's four CARPs. They were just within the maximum weight for their class of vehicle – but fire bosses, perhaps carried away with the idea that the machines were going to make them look thoroughly modern, forgot that the machines wouldn't work until you had some firefighters on them. And even if they summoned up the leanest firefighters they could find, these still pushed the weight over the maximum permitted. So over to Holland went the CARPs for expensive modifications. When they returned to Yorkshire other problems surfaced, including a serious rear wheel steering mechanism failure.



Now, they'll have to cross the water again to find a means of stopping them bursting into flames. The saving they are supposed to make in fire-fighters is starting to look a bit foolish.

Don't lift a finger

🐾 Here's our prime minister's encomium to the new folk hero of the Big Society: "Dan Thompson watched the riots unfold on television," Mr Cameron told the Conservative Party conference. "But he didn't sit there and say 'the council will clean it up'. He got on the internet. He sent out a call. And with others, he started a social movement. People picked up their brooms and reclaimed their streets." So of which deprived inner city area is Mr Thompson an ornament? Er, Worthing, actually, a sleepy south coast resort populated mostly by well-heeled retired folk, where a two-room flat will set you back £400,000 and there were no riots. So,

naturally, he rushed up to London to lead the sweepers of the streets in their Big Society revolution? Well, not exactly. He never left Worthing. He sat at home, on his computer, apparently putting people in touch with one another. That's how streets get swept in the Big Society when we've got rid of all the street cleaners. One day we'll wake up and find it is how fires get put out, too.

Divine guidance

🐾 On the Sunday the news of the first riot in London broke, a Conservative evangelical pastor from Tottenham, Revd George Hargreaves, was on television announcing that he knew for certain that Mark Duggan, the man killed by a police bullet, had been firing at the police. He added that Mr Duggan was no saint, but a "tearaway" and that there could be no possible criticism of the police. He muttered about all the things he could say about Mr Duggan, if only there wasn't an ongoing investigation. Within 24 hours we knew for

certain that Mr Duggan had not been firing at the police, but Revd Hargreaves continued to be wheeled on whenever expert comment from a local community leader was required.

Lest we forget

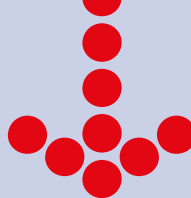
🐾 Revd Hargreaves was wheeled on because he fed the demand for a return to the fifties, when parents, police officers and especially teachers routinely hit children, all young men had to do a spell in the army, and not believing in God was seen as a moral lapse. So Revd Hargreaves found a slavering media ready to listen to him saying that the police were unable to respond vigorously because they have been cowed by criticism of their behaviour at the G20 and other places. If only they could be free of these niggling criticisms he implied, they could weigh into those thugs and stop the violence. So just let's remind ourselves what happened at the G20 demonstration. A police officer struck an unarmed middle aged man and has been charged with manslaughter.

Get the picture?

🐾 They get like that sometimes. Photographer David Hoffman put a picture of David Cameron in his window with the word "anker" written across it in large letters.

Half a dozen policemen pushed their way into his home, threw him against the wall and handcuffed him, saying it was an offence against the Public Order Act. You can find the story at <http://tinyurl.com/37nb6vn>

25-year badges



Keith Darlington (l), Hereford, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Stew Dewar



Gavin Pallister (r), Durham, receives his 25-year badge from officers rep Dane Rollo



Roger Baker (r), Stafford, receives his 25-year badge from general secretary Matt Wrack



Peter Simpson (l), blue watch, Tamworth, receives his 25-year badge from Staffordshire brigade chair Rich Williams. Looking on (l to r) Cliff Moore, Tim Grube, Duncan Cole and Sam Parker



Carl Murphy (r), white watch, Durham, receives his 25-year badge from brigade vice chair Jim Bittlestone with white watch looking on



Doug Shepperd (r), green watch, Garston, Herts, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Tony Smith



Gary Worman-Buckland (r), Longton, Staffordshire, receives his 25-year badge from general secretary Matt Wrack



Brad Malpass (r), Durham HQ, receives his 25-year badge from officers' rep Dane Rollo



Randy Mathison (centre r), red watch, Kensington, Liverpool, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Aimi Molloy accompanied by members of white watch.



Paul Robinson (r), Newcastle, Staffordshire, receives his 25-year badge from general secretary Matt Wrack



Andrew Pomfrey (r), white watch, Garston, Herts, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Tony Smith



Neville White (r), blue watch, Garston, Herts, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Tony Smith



Lol Dunne (l), white watch, Durham, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Tony Curry

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Leeds, LS26 0AG
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REGION 5 Greater Manchester, Lancs, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire

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REGION 6 Derbys, Notts, Lincs, Leics, Northants

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

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

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

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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 Membership
Secretary or 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
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contact your local FBU
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