

# FIREFIGHTER



THE MAGAZINE OF THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION | [WWW.FBU.ORG.UK](http://WWW.FBU.ORG.UK) | OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2020

## THE FIGHT FOR OUR SERVICE

UNPRECEDENTED TIMES,  
UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES

SEE P10

**FBU CAMPAIGNS WIN  
PUBLIC SUPPORT**

SEE P14

**BLACK LIVES  
MATTER**

SEE P5 & 16

**UNIVERSITIES WARNED  
OVER FIRE SAFETY**

SEE P7





# MATT WRACK

## COVID: WE WON'T WALK AWAY NOW

### COVID-19

When writing my editorial a couple of months ago, we were beginning to see Covid-19 infections increase. Today, there are thousands more cases each day and a second wave truly feels upon us.

For this reason our tripartite national agreement was temporarily extended to the end of October and can be extended further still, pending the successful implementation of Covid-19 risk assessments locally. So far, outbreaks of the disease in the fire and rescue service have been few and far between, and we must keep it this way.

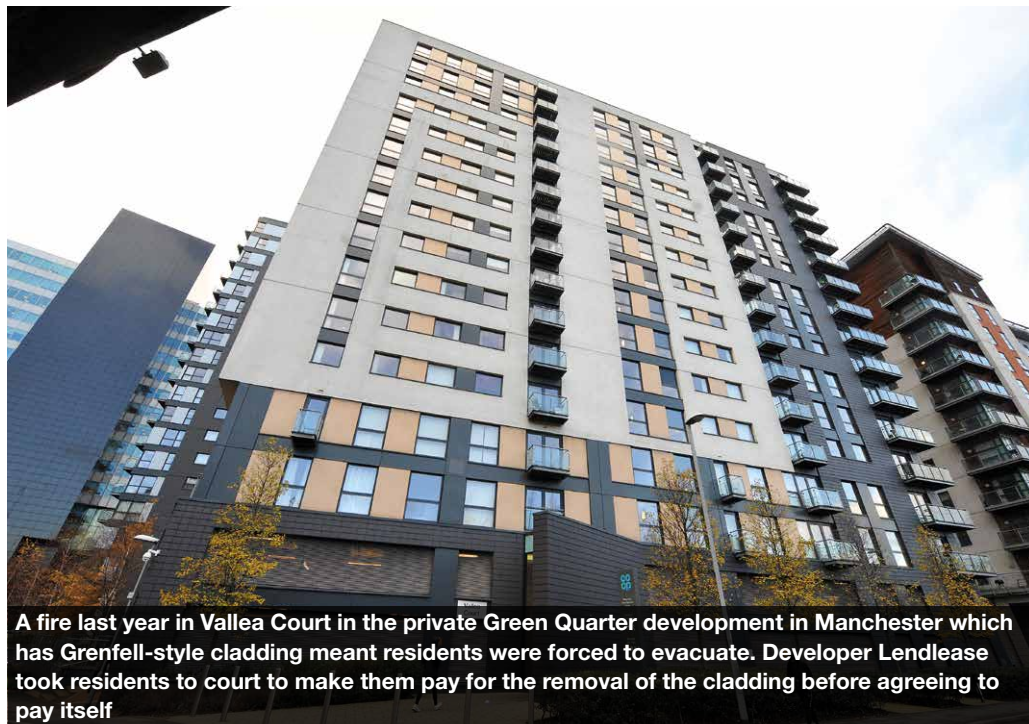
We have been there throughout this pandemic for our communities with fire and rescue services intervening more than 400,000 times to aid the covid-19 response – we know our members won't want to walk away now.

### BLACK HISTORY MONTH

October of course marks Black History Month, a time during which we not only celebrate the contribution of our black brothers and sisters but also resolve to challenge the racial injustices that still remain prevalent in society.

From the disproportionate effects that Covid-19 has had on the black and minority ethnic community to shocking examples of police discrimination at home and abroad this year, it is clear that there is so much more for us to do.

I would like to pay a special tribute to all our black and minority ethnic members who serve our profession with



A fire last year in Vallea Court in the private Green Quarter development in Manchester which has Grenfell-style cladding meant residents were forced to evacuate. Developer Lendlease took residents to court to make them pay for the removal of the cladding before agreeing to pay itself

such pride. But there is no doubt that more needs to be done to ensure the fire and rescue service better reflects the communities it serves.

I promise that the FBU will be at the forefront of that fight.

### CAMPAIGNS

The last two months have seen FBU members on the front foot campaigning to protect their service and the public.

In East Sussex, members have won a series of concessions, amongst them the protection of dozens of jobs and fire appliances that were set to go under council plans. And in Surrey, members successfully forced the council to hold an emergency public meeting over its devastating cuts.

The next scene of FBU campaigning is in London where members have launched a high-profile campaign aimed at preventing £25m of cuts to London Fire Brigade over two years.

We spoke to officials from these regions for a special feature on pages 14-15.

### THE BATTLES AHEAD

The next few weeks and months will be pivotal for our profession. Local government finances, which part fund our service, have taken a severe hit during the pandemic, and the Westminster government at least is already sounding off about plans to "balance the books".

It won't be easy, but together we must make the case for long-term investment

in our service. You can read more of my thoughts on this on pages 10-13.

### END OUR CLADDING SCANDAL

Alongside housing campaigners, charities, actors and politicians, we pledged our support for End Our Cladding Scandal, a campaign that calls on ministers to fully fund vital remediation work on private residential buildings with combustible cladding.

Thousands of people currently have no access to government support and face extortionate costs for their homes to be made safe. This is not only having a huge financial impact on residents, but also leaves them living in a home they know could kill them. The government must step in.



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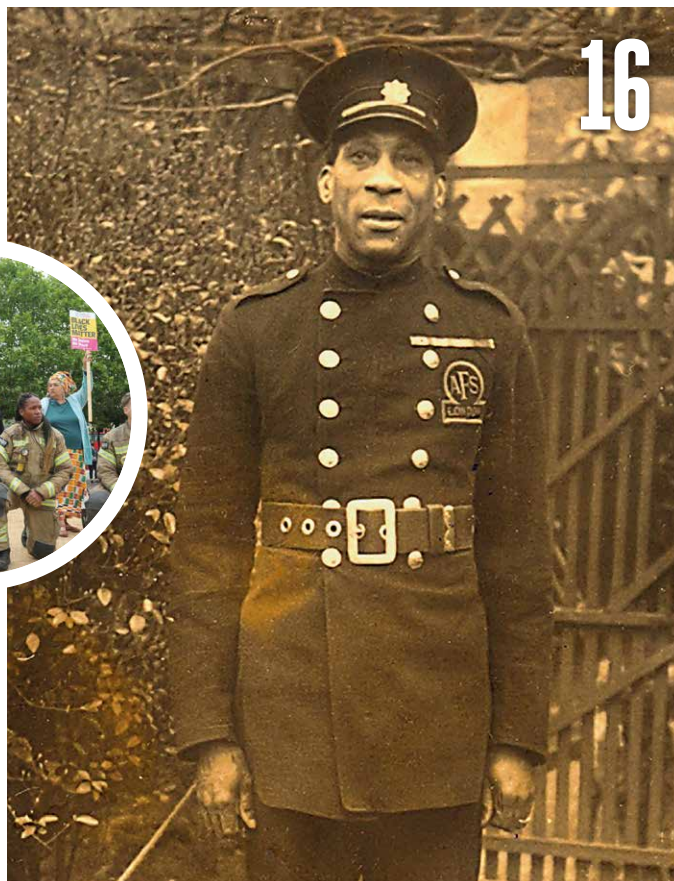
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## FIREFIGHTER

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# NEWS

## NON-FIRE INCIDENTS

Non-fire incidents outnumbered fires last year as flooding increased p6



## SAFETY WARNING

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VICTORIA JONES/PA IMAGES



London firefighter Dominic Pearce and paramedic Daniel Phillips of the London Ambulance Service (LAS) during training at LAS headquarters

# FIREFIGHTERS CONTINUE COVID WORK

## CORONAVIRUS

The agreement allowing firefighters to assist the NHS and social care sector during the coronavirus pandemic has been extended, as a second wave of infections spread across the UK.

The extension will last until 29 October, while risk assessments for the nationally agreed activities are implemented locally.

The agreement can then be extended further, if agreed by the three sides: the FBU, the National Fire Chiefs Council, and national employers.

The FBU has warned that proper risk assessments are crucial to prevent coronavirus outbreaks in fire and rescue services.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said: "The FBU has played a central role in forming the fire service's response to the pandemic, ensuring the safest possible conditions for firefighters."

"But brigades must not be complacent about the risk to firefighters and the public – implementing risk assessments locally is crucial to keep our heads above water."

Fire and rescue services have now

been asked to risk assess all coronavirus-response activities, including those that have not yet been requested by local resilience forums, so that brigades are ready for a second wave.

New data reveals that firefighters have intervened more than 400,000 times to aid the Covid response.

Eight in 10 fire and rescue services delivered more than 80,000 packages of food, medicines and other essentials to vulnerable people, while more than seven in 10 delivered PPE, mostly for the NHS and ambulance services.

44% of brigades assisted with face-fitting masks, providing 4,000 masks for NHS and care staff.

**'LIKE THEIR COLLEAGUES IN THE NHS, FIREFIGHTERS AND CONTROL STAFF HAVE HAD TO PICK UP THE PIECES FROM A GOVERNMENT THAT GUTTED THEIR SERVICE WITH AUSTERITY AND FAILED TO PREPARE FOR THE ENTIRELY FORESEEABLE RISK OF A PANDEMIC'**

Three quarters provided personnel to drive ambulances and assist ambulance services, while almost two-thirds assisted with the movement of bodies to mortuaries.

In late March more than three quarters of fire and rescue services reported having supply chain problems, including maintaining the supply of respiratory masks, hand sanitiser, wipes, cloths and coveralls.

Eight brigades reported problems securing essential cleaning products from breathing apparatus suppliers. Issues securing face mask cleaning products, respirator protective equipment and other items of PPE persisted into April.

"Much like their colleagues in the NHS, firefighters and control staff have had to pick up the pieces from a government that gutted their service with austerity and failed to prepare for the entirely foreseeable risk of a pandemic," said Matt Wrack.

"As death tolls soared earlier in the year, firefighters stepped in to aid their communities in their darkest hour. With a second wave of infections now arriving, our crews are staying on high alert."



East Sussex firefighters tackle a wildfire

# SUCCESS IN EAST SUSSEX

## EAST SUSSEX

Firefighters have cautiously welcomed new proposals by East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service after a campaign by FBU members forced a re-think of devastating cuts.

More than 31,000 people signed a petition and over 2,000 residents wrote to the chair of East Sussex fire authority opposing plans, which included cutting 90 frontline firefighter jobs, removing ten fire engines and slashing dedicated crews for a high-reaching aerial fire appliance at Hastings fire station.

The FBU also ran a high-profile social media campaign which highlighted the danger posed by the cuts.

Now, under the new plan, four fire engines have been saved and a number of stations will retain wholtime firefighters for day-time fire cover seven days a

week. The service has also been forced to change plans which would have seen huge numbers of firefighter posts cut.

The new plan was approved by the fire authority at a meeting which agreed to a further review should more funding be provided by central government.

Simon Herbert, FBU brigade secretary, said: "We're proud of all the FBU members who have actively campaigned to protect their fire service, and a huge thank you to everyone who's supported us.

"It is positive that the fire authority has listened to firefighters' and residents' concerns and revised their plans but now they must focus on lobbying central government for more funding.

"Our service has been devastated by a decade of austerity and it needs investment so that we can continue to keep East Sussex residents safe."

# TRADE UNIONS THANK FIREFIGHTERS FOR THEIR WORK IN THE PANDEMIC

## TUC

At this year's TUC, trade unions unanimously thanked firefighters for their work responding to the coronavirus pandemic.

Data compiled by the FBU shows that firefighters have intervened more than 400,000 times to aid the Covid-19 response, performing duties such as delivering PPE to frontline

healthcare workers, driving ambulances and moving bodies to mortuaries.

The TUC also backed a motion pledging to defend the right of firefighters and control staff to collectively negotiate pay and conditions, which came under attack in a report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services in January.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said: "We're pleased that the vital contribution that firefighters have made during the pandemic has been recognised.

"Our members will continue to help the public and trade unions will stand together to support the workers who are keeping the country going through this difficult time."

## SOUNDING OFF

*Joseph Mendy, FBU black and ethnic minority members' section national secretary, on a movement that matters*

## BLACK LIVES MATTER

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement raises awareness of the unacceptable treatment of black people. Born in response to US police brutality, it has won support across the globe.

The FBU's black and ethnic minority members' (B&EMM) section wants to explain why this movement is important to us – and there is no better time to do so than October, Black History Month.

BLM is about advocating for justice, fair treatment, equal opportunities and the value of black lives, as any other life.

This should not be misinterpreted to mean that "only black lives matter" but, instead, be seen as a message that advocates for a fairer society by addressing the systemic injustices faced by the black community.

Unfortunately, racism is common in the UK. It can be subtle or overt, and it can exist in public places as well as your workplace and in the justice system.

We know because we have experienced it.

A TUC report revealed that

70% of ethnic minority workers have experienced racial harassment at work and two thirds say they have been subjected to unfair treatment by employers. Outside of the workplace, people from the black community are disproportionately stopped and searched, die in police custody, and today are seven times more likely to be fined for breaching pandemic regulations than a white person.

We have a duty as trade unionists and human beings to dismantle racism wherever it exists. That means solidarity with brothers and sisters overseas, but also getting our own house in order.

This country prides itself in being a diverse country. Let's promote solidarity and fairness. Long live the one race, the human race.



ISABEL INFANTES/PA IMAGES

# UNION AND MPs CONDEMN LACK OF PROGRESS ON CLADDING REMOVAL

## GRENELL

The FBU accused ministers of doing the “bare minimum to fend off bad headlines” after MPs criticised government progress in tackling the safety crisis exposed by Grenfell.

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee said the government had “missed its target badly” to make thousands of homes with Grenfell-style cladding safe by June 2020.

It said that it is now “imperative” to meet a new deadline of the end of 2021 for work on remaining high-rise blocks to be completed.

But the committee warned that there is no convincing plan to meet the deadline. More than three years on from the disaster, 149 buildings are clad in the same or similar material as Grenfell.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said: “After Grenfell, people have a right to expect homes to be made safe. But this government has consistently failed to deliver, instead taunting residents and firefighters with endless delays and fake promises.

“At every stage, ministers have done the bare minimum to fend off bad headlines, but

their policies have come up short. There are potentially hundreds of thousands of people still trapped in dangerous homes. Without proper action, it’s another tragedy waiting to happen.”

The FBU again pointed the finger at ministers after the Grenfell Tower Inquiry heard how lax building regulations were exploited by companies in the deadly refurbishment of Grenfell.

Housing and construction industry salespeople knew that, without government intervention, high-rise buildings would continue to be constructed with flammable cladding.

In an email seen by the inquiry, a salesperson said that cladding manufacturer Arconic “won’t change their core until they are forced to due to changes in the fire regulations”.

Wrack said: “People in the industry knew that, until government stepped in, homes would continue to be wrapped in flammable cladding and constructed with other dangerous materials, but ministers showed no interest in tackling the problem.”

# BRIGADE TO CHALLENGE STRUCTURAL RACISM

## GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service has committed to “challenging and dismantling” structural racism in its service, after former personnel told the BBC that the brigade was institutionally racist.

The brigade has recognised that racism “clearly can have a huge impact” on the health and wellbeing of black, Asian and minority ethnic firefighters.

The FBU has represented a number of Gloucestershire firefighters facing racist discrimination historically and voiced concerns about racism in the service repeatedly over the last year.



EDDIE HOWLAND

# FIREFIGHTERS FLOODED WITH CLIMATE CHANGE CALLS

## NON-FIRE INCIDENTS

Firefighters responded to more non-fire incidents than fires from March 2019 to March 2020, according to new UK government data.

Non-fire incidents rose by 6% to 162,251 compared to the year before, up 12% over the last decade, driven by an

increase in the number of flooding incidents recorded.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said the “significant” increase in flooding incidents was “likely linked to the mass flooding emergencies across the country over winter”.

“Widespread flooding in the last year and recent

wildfires have shown that firefighters are battling the sharp end of climate change. Their work should be properly recognised with a statutory duty to respond to floods in England and the proper funding of their service.”

Nationally, non-fire incidents accounted for 31%

of call-outs, while fires made up 28%. 42% of incidents attended were false alarms.

“Firefighters have always taken on a range of non-fire work,” said Matt Wrack, “and can be proud of stepping up during the coronavirus pandemic, all while still responding to fires and other emergencies.”

# UNIVERSITIES WARNED AGAINST DANGEROUS BLOCKING OF FIRE EXITS

Cable ties  
block fire exit  
at halls of  
residence at  
Leeds Beckett  
University



Firefighters and education staff have warned universities that it is dangerous and illegal to block or lock fire exits, after pictures emerged of a locked fire exit in student accommodation in Leeds.

In a joint letter with the University and College Union (UCU), the FBU warned the vice chancellors and principals of all UK universities that obstructing fire exits “can, and has, cost lives in the past”, demanding that the safety of students and staff be “absolutely paramount”.

It comes after images circulated on social media showing cable ties sealing the fire exit in Marsden House, a student accommodation block at Leeds Beckett University run by private student housing supplier iQ Student Accommodation.

The issue hit the news after thousands of students were forced to lock down in their universities because of the pandemic.

iQ and Leeds Beckett said the cable ties had been removed after the uproar, but a video posted online later

that evening showed tables and chairs blocking the exit instead.

The unions have thanked West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service for investigating the incident and warned that “any attempts to take shortcuts with regard to people’s safety must be dealt with swiftly and uncompromisingly”.

In the letter, the FBU and UCU told universities that any action to fix shut a fire exit is a breach of the law in every part of the UK and that the “pandemic is no excuse, nor mitigating factor for this sort of action”, advising that it is

**‘IT’S ILLEGAL TO BLOCK,  
LOCK OR OBSTRUCT FIRE  
EXITS FOR ANY REASON  
– SEALED FIRE EXITS KILL  
PEOPLE WHEN A FIRE  
BREAKS OUT. END OF’**

incumbent on universities to ensure outsourced building management and security services understand.

Jo Grady, general secretary of the UCU ‘which represents 121,000 academic staff’, has said the incident is further evidence of just how “crass” comments from Westminster education secretary Gavin Williamson were when he claimed universities were “well prepared” for the coronavirus crisis developing on campuses.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said that “the very least” students being locked down in their accommodation should expect is that universities and private housing providers comply with fire safety regulations.

“The safety of students must be made paramount at universities – and not just safety from coronavirus.

“There is no excuse for dangerous breaches of fire safety legislation as we saw in Leeds. It’s illegal to block, lock or obstruct fire exits for any reason – sealed fire exits kill people when a fire breaks out. End of.”

## PERFECTLY CAPTURED – A HISTORIC MOMENT

Thursday 8pm clap for carers, Sidcup (South East London) fire station by James Atkins is the winner of this year's FBU photo competition.

Judges praised its technical quality, composition and the way it captures a historic moment.

See the runners-up and more of the judges' comments in Noticeboard on page 18.





# THE BATTLES

The FBU's campaign for fairer funding for the fire and rescue services



# SAH£AD

...e will be a challenge, says **Matt Wrack**



In fire stations and control rooms up and down the country there is a clear consensus – our service is in dire need of investment and our members are in need of a pay rise.

Each day, firefighters and control staff go to extraordinary lengths to keep their communities safe – and have gone further still during this pandemic.

But those efforts come at a cost. Firefighting is arduous work, requiring high levels of skill and fitness, and can be both physically and mentally hazardous.

These realities have often been ignored by governments of all parties. But over the last decade, under Tory and Lib Dem administrations, the cuts to our service and real-terms cuts to our pay have been unprecedented.

The latest 2% pay increase may have been above inflation but, after everything firefighters and control staff have undergone through austerity and the pandemic, it was an insult – and we said so.

Campaigning for investment and better pay during a pandemic will not be easy – and FBU members should enter the coming year with eyes wide open, in full knowledge of the challenges we face as a profession. And key to that will be understanding funding for the fire and rescue service.

## FINDING THE MONEY

Funding for the fire and rescue service comes from two sources – central government and local authorities.

Historically, the split has been fairly even. Most services are funded half centrally, half locally, while metropolitan brigades, with a larger population and therefore larger risk, have received a greater proportion of their funding from central government.

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the devolved administrations have varying levels of control over how much they can spend on fire and rescue services, with Holyrood and Stormont having complete control of how they spend their funding. But, fundamentally, the money comes from the same source: either locally-raised revenue (like council tax) or national funding from the Treasury's borrowing and tax receipts.

In England, central government has slashed funding for fire and rescue by around 30% since 2014. In the last four years alone, fire funding in England has fallen by £141.5m.

Similar cuts have been made to public

**After everything firefighters and control staff have undergone through austerity and the pandemic, the latest pay increase was an insult**

EDDIE HOWLAND

services across the board, pushing a greater burden onto councils struggling to maintain services under austerity.

Local authorities can make up some of this funding through council taxes, business rates and other local revenue streams like car parks and leisure centres. But local government finances have collapsed during the coronavirus pandemic and, despite pledging to protect councils, help from central government has barely scratched the surface.

The government is providing some additional funding to help pay for reductions in council tax bills for low-income households, but councils will still take a huge financial hit. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has warned that, without further funding, local authorities are already looking at a £3.1bn shortfall.

We already know that local authorities are now being forced to look at cuts to the fire and rescue service. Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, has said that, without government support, he will need to make £500m of cuts, including £25m to London Fire Brigade's budget.

Councils are forecasting that they will collect £12bn less in business rates this year which, after recouping some costs from government and businesses later on, is projected to cost local authorities £600m. Other council revenue streams look set to remain stagnant at best, with a winter of greater lockdown restrictions looming.

The drop in council tax payments alone has caused a £1.5bn fall in revenue, estimated to ultimately cost councils £700m.

But can local authorities raise council tax to pay for fire funding, or other services? The short answer is No.

David Cameron's Tory government brought in a 2% cap on council tax increases which, even before the pandemic, was not predicted to cover increased demand for local authority services.

If councillors want to raise rates by more than 2%, they must hold a referendum, which they are unlikely to win.

With local government finances a mess, councils are unlikely to provide additional funding for fire and rescue services. Even if they could, council taxes are relatively regressive and put a



disproportionate burden on those with the lowest incomes.

It has always been the FBU's priority to demand that central government provide proper funding for our service. That way, it can be funded through less regressive means, such as income tax, corporation tax, or capital expenditure.

## TREASURY TERROR

The austerity policies inflicted on public services were the government's response to a systemic collapse of the global financial sector in 2008, triggering one of the biggest economic crises in history.

At the height of that recession, UK GDP fell by 2.6%. In the second quarter of this year, UK GDP fell by 20.1%, the single biggest drop since records began.

The same politicians who told us that austerity was an "economic necessity" have borrowed more than £200bn to fund the coronavirus response, bringing UK public debt to above £2 trillion for the first time.

While the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, revelled in gushing headlines for spending public funds on half-price meals out through August, his declaration that "hard times are here" received less attention. Trade unionists know that when Tories talk about "hard times" they mean the burden will fall onto working people, and the Treasury is widely understood to be considering another damaging public sector pay freeze.

The 2010 freeze, brought in by Tory chancellor George Osborne, lasted



PA IMAGES/LAMY

two years and was followed by another five years of pay caps, restricting pay rises to below inflation, lasting until 2017. As inflation outstripped wages, particularly during the earliest years of pay restraint, firefighters and control staff have undergone a real-terms pay cut of around £4,000.

Of course, economic crises and high public debt do not necessitate public spending cuts. After the Second World War, the UK's debt was sky-high, but the government chose to invest in the economy, nationalising key industries, creating the NHS, and building the welfare state. In the final years of the war, it had established the National Fire Service, which moved to local authority control in 1947.

But that was a Labour government

**Firefighting can be both physically and mentally hazardous – a firefighter observes a minute's silence for colleagues who died in the line of duty**

## IT WILL TAKE A UNITED VOICE FROM FIREFIGHTERS TO PRESSURE THE GOVERNMENT INTO ACTION

– and not one of the Blairite New Labour variety that so viciously attacked firefighters and control staff. We are still facing a Tory government ideologically opposed to investing in working people and public safety. And we must be under no illusions about how they might intend to “balance the books”.

### THE OPTIONS BEFORE US

The 2% pay uplift this year was not enough to address our members' rapidly deteriorating living standards. But, in the government's mind, it has given firefighters an above-inflation pay rise.

After our health and social care colleagues pulled us through the first wave of this pandemic – and more than 600 of them paid with their lives – the government offered a 2.8% pay rise to doctors and dentists.

Nurses received no reward, as they were still in the middle of a three-year pay deal, while the government has refused to do anything to assist workers in a fragmented care sector, mismanaged by private sector profiteers.

The upcoming autumn spending review is an important opportunity to fight for the fire and rescue service. A better funding settlement than the disastrous one that has covered the last five years would mean there is more money for jobs, equipment and pay.

The FBU has sent a detailed submission to the Treasury outlining the case for greater funding, not least noting the significant expansion of firefighters' inspection work coming from the government's fire safety and building safety Bills.

But it will take a united voice from firefighters to pressure the government into action. And it will take pressure on chief fire officers who have done so little to defend our service. Now is the time for them to speak out.

The coming years will be difficult for firefighters and control staff, as they will be difficult for this country and much of the world.

But after a decade of austerity, the government must never again make our service pay for a crisis we did not cause, and instead must bring forward investment that improves services and delivers proper pay rises. We will rally together to demand better – but we must know that we have a mountain to climb.

# FIGHTING ON ALL FRONTS

The pandemic has not stopped the drive by politicians to cut the fire and rescue service – but firefighters and their communities are fighting back

## MEDIA CAMPAIGN WINS MASSIVE LOCAL SUPPORT

In May of this year, with the UK still under nationwide lockdown and daily Covid deaths well into the hundreds, many firefighters had taken on extensive new duties to respond to the coronavirus crisis. Some had even begun moving dead bodies, as mortuary services became overwhelmed.

People were rallying around key workers, applauding every Thursday night, and there was a momentary sense that, after more than a decade of austerity, the country might be reassessing its priorities.

And then, East Sussex fire authority launched a consultation on sweeping cuts to its fire and rescue service.

Ninety operational firefighters were set to be cut as the brigade considered slashing 10 fire engines and ending dedicated crewing for its high-reaching aerial appliance.

Simon Herbert, FBU East Sussex brigade secretary, lambasted members of the fire authority for launching dangerous cuts “from the safety of their living rooms”.

The FBU launched a high-profile local media and social media campaign to pressure local councillors. This mobilised 31,000 people to sign a petition against the cuts, while more than 2,000 residents wrote to the chair of the fire authority.

The campaign has so far saved four of the ten fire engines under threat, forced the service to scrap its planned job cuts, and keep seven-day wholetime day cover in a number of stations. The fire authority has agreed to lobby the government for more funding.

While the union continues to campaign to save

every job, it was a modest victory over potentially devastating cuts in difficult circumstances – something that members in neighbouring Surrey are hoping for too.



East Sussex fire appliance near a dam used to supply water to fight a serious fire in Ashdown Forest



JESS HURD

FBU members rally at Surrey county hall in Kingston upon Thames

## CELEBRITIES RALLY ROUND

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service was already in the midst of swingeing cuts. Firefighters had paused a six-month industrial action campaign, launched in December, to help their communities through the pandemic, but there was no reciprocal de-escalation from their employer.

The first phase of cuts removed four fire engines at night and the brigade, which had spent £900,000 on its “transformation” agenda, declined the FBU’s pleas to scrap the second round of cuts, which would see a further three appliances removed in October.

But a hot summer sparked a wave of incidents raising public consciousness about the danger of fire cuts in the county once again, with multiple high-profile fires where it took more than 20 minutes for a fire engine to arrive.

When a huge wildfire broke out in Chobham Common, it spread to what tabloids call “Britain’s Beverly Hills”. Crews were treated appallingly by senior managers, expected to work long hours in extreme heat without access to toilets, food, or additional water.

After firefighters saved an animal sanctuary run by Queen guitarist Brian May, they told him about the dire condition their service was in and the climate of fear and intimidation their employer had created.

“It’s opened my eyes completely,” May told the local BBC. “We’ve seen that the whole National Health Service had been run down before the pandemic ... and now it’s obvious that the fire brigade is chronically under-supported.”

Writer and *Celebrity MasterChef* winner Emma Kennedy launched a fresh petition against fire cuts, gaining the support of more than 6,000 residents, but despite being successful in forcing an emergency Surrey County Council meeting over the cuts, the petition was essentially dismissed.

A long-awaited report from Brunel University on the impact of the first wave of cuts looks set to be a whitewash, but with public safety on the line, firefighters and residents are not easing the pressure and will keep fighting.

## JOHNSON'S LEGACY

One of the many problems Surrey faces is over-reliance on resources from neighbouring brigades – particularly London Fire Brigade. But London could soon struggle to provide cover for its own residents, let alone its neighbours.

Faced with plummeting revenue from council tax and business rates as a result of Covid, combined with soaring demand for services, the Greater London Authority is facing a £500m budget shortfall unless central government steps in.

London mayor Sadiq Khan has pencilled in £25m of cuts to London Fire Brigade to make up savings. The mayor has pledged to protect frontline jobs, but the FBU is adamant that there is no way to make those savings without devastating emergency response capabilities.

In a city still reeling from the trauma of the Grenfell Tower fire, and a fire service still recovering from the £150m of cuts made while Boris Johnson was mayor, the brigade fell beneath its minimum crewing level on nearly 100 shifts last year and last year missed its target average response time in 156 wards.

With a Tory government unlikely to come to the aid of a Labour mayor up for re-election in May, the FBU is gearing up for a major campaign to mobilise residents into action.

DOMINIC LITINSKI/PA IMAGES



January 2013: London firefighters demonstrate against then mayor Boris Johnson’s station closures and job cuts

**CREWS WERE TREATED APPALLINGLY, EXPECTED TO WORK LONG HOURS IN EXTREME HEAT WITHOUT ACCESS TO TOILETS, FOOD, OR ADDITIONAL WATER**

October is Black History Month, a time in which people come together to celebrate the incredible contribution of people from the black community and to reflect on our shared history.

These extracts from the FBU history record the life of one notable black firefighter, George Arthur Roberts

# A FIGHTER OF WARS, FIRES AND PREJUDICE

George Arthur Roberts BEM, MSM (1891-1970), was called up to serve in the First World War in 1914. Originally from Trinidad, he was the first black man to join the Middlesex Regiment. Serving as a rifleman, he fought and was wounded, first at the Battle of Loos on the western front in France in 1915, and then in the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

He was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal, usually given to non-commissioned officers of the British armed forces for distinguished service or gallantry.

After being demobbed in 1919 he became heavily involved with the post-war welfare of soldiers and campaigned on behalf of The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers, going on to found a local branch of the British Legion. He led thousands of ex-servicemen in a march demanding improved rights and higher pensions.

After the war he settled in South London where he earned a living as an electrician, a trade he had learnt in Trinidad, but found himself up against the bigotry that he and other black people were subjected to in their day-to-day lives, war heroes or not.

In response, in 1931 he became one of the founder members of the League of Coloured Peoples, the era's most influential civil rights organisation and one of the first organisations to focus on the needs of Britain's black community.

Aged 50 at the start of WW2 and too old to re-enlist for combat, he joined the Auxiliary Fire Service and was stationed at New Cross fire station in South East London from 1939, where he served throughout

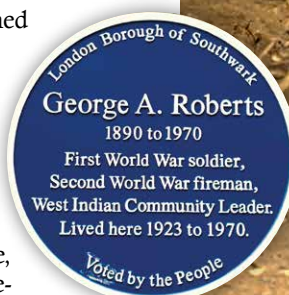
the Blitz and the rest of the war.

In 1943, George was made a section leader and in the King's 1944 Birthday Honours was awarded the British Empire Medal "for general duties at New Cross Fire Station" and for his part as a founder and pioneer of the Discussion and Education groups of the fire service, a government-inspired effort at consciousness-raising, during his time in the fire service.

The Regional Civil Defence commissioners informed George of the award of his British Empire Medal – "in recognition of your exemplary conduct".

After his death in 1970, he became a largely forgotten figure, until interest in the pre-Windrush generation of black migrants began to surface over a decade ago and he is featured in Stephen Bourne's book *Black Poppies – Britain's Black Community and the Great War*, the story of men of the "old British Empire" who regarded joining the war effort as a matter of honour.

On 11 September 2016, in a scheme led by the Southwark Heritage Association, a Blue Plaque was erected in his honour, as the first black man to serve in the army and fire brigade. The plaque is on the Lewis Trust Dwellings in Warner Road, Camberwell, in the London borough of Southwark, his home until he died in 1970.



**"IF WHAT I AM DOING CAN ASSIST IN SOME SMALL WAY TO BRING ABOUT A BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND A TRUE FELLOWSHIP AMONGST THE PEOPLES OF THE EARTH, I SHALL BE EXTREMELY HAPPY"**

GEORGE ROBERTS ON THE BBC'S *CALLING THE WEST INDIES* IN 1947

# RIGHTS AT WORK

## REDUNDANCY – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

At a time when members' partners or family members may be facing the issue of redundancy, employment rights specialist **Jo Seery** of Thompsons Solicitors advises on checking whether redundancies are genuine, what rights employees have to alternative employment and what compensation might be available

The pandemic has forced us all to adapt to a "new normal" which is challenging in itself and then, for some, there is the possible worry about whether a loved one faces redundancy.

In general, employees who are dismissed by reason of redundancy have a right to:

- a redundancy payment;
- be treated fairly in the redundancy process; and
- reasonable time off work to look for alternative employment.

### REDUNDANCY SITUATION

The law says a redundancy situation arises when:

- a business closes;
- a workplace closes; or
- there are fewer employees needed to do the work available.

If an employer closes their business and then reopens it as something completely different, that would also count as a redundancy.

If the actual workload has not decreased, but fewer employees are needed to do it, for example because of a reorganisation, this would also be a redundancy situation.

When employers are

consulting with staff over redundancies ("collective redundancies") the definition of redundancy is wider and covers "any dismissal for a reason not related to the individual concerned ...". This would cover, for example, dismissals because terms and conditions of employment are changing and a new contract is being imposed.

In each case, you need to work out whether there is a redundancy situation, and if there is, whether the dismissal was caused by that situation. You need to keep an eye out for "redundancies" that are in fact employers covering up a dismissal which would otherwise amount to

discrimination or victimisation – such as when union activists face redundancy.

### REDUNDANCY PAYMENT

Two years' continuous service entitles someone to a statutory redundancy payment.

The payment is calculated according to age, weekly pay (subject to a statutory cap, currently £538 per week) and the number of years of continuous employment. The formula followed is:

- one and a half weeks' pay for each complete year of service after reaching the age of 41;
- one week's pay for each complete year of service between the ages of 22 and 40 inclusive; or
- half a week's pay for each

complete year of service below the age of 22.

Some people may also have a contractual right to a redundancy payment that is better than the statutory minimum.

### FAIR REDUNDANCY

Redundancy is deemed to be a fair reason for dismissal. However, the employer must act reasonably and follow a fair procedure. A fair procedure requires the employer to:

- warn and consult;
- apply a fair selection procedure; and
- consider alternative employment.

A failure to follow a fair redundancy procedure will normally make the dismissal unfair.

An employer proposing to make 20 or more employees redundant in any 90-day period, must consult with trade union representatives or other elected employee representatives before any redundancies are made.

### SUITABLE ALTERNATIVE EMPLOYMENT

Before making anyone redundant, employers are required to look for suitable alternative employment for them.

Someone made redundant who refuses a suitable offer of alternative employment, can lose the right to a redundancy payment.

Whether an alternative job is suitable is ultimately decided by an employment tribunal. It will look at what the whole job entails, not just the tasks to be performed, the terms and conditions (especially hours and wages) and the responsibility and status involved. Location may also be relevant.

■ To find out more about Thompsons' work with the FBU, visit [thompsonstradeunion.law/fbu](http://thompsonstradeunion.law/fbu) or call 0808 100 6061



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**RUNNER-UP:** Grass fire near Clydebank, by Martin Cahill

## FBU PHOTO COMPETITION 2020

This year's FBU photo competition saw another large number of entries with many outstanding images.

Online judging was as intense as ever with many images vying for the three top spots – each with their supporters among the judges.

Some judges were impressed by the composition, technical quality and significance of several images that came close but did not make the final cut because they did not have firefighters as a major part of the image.

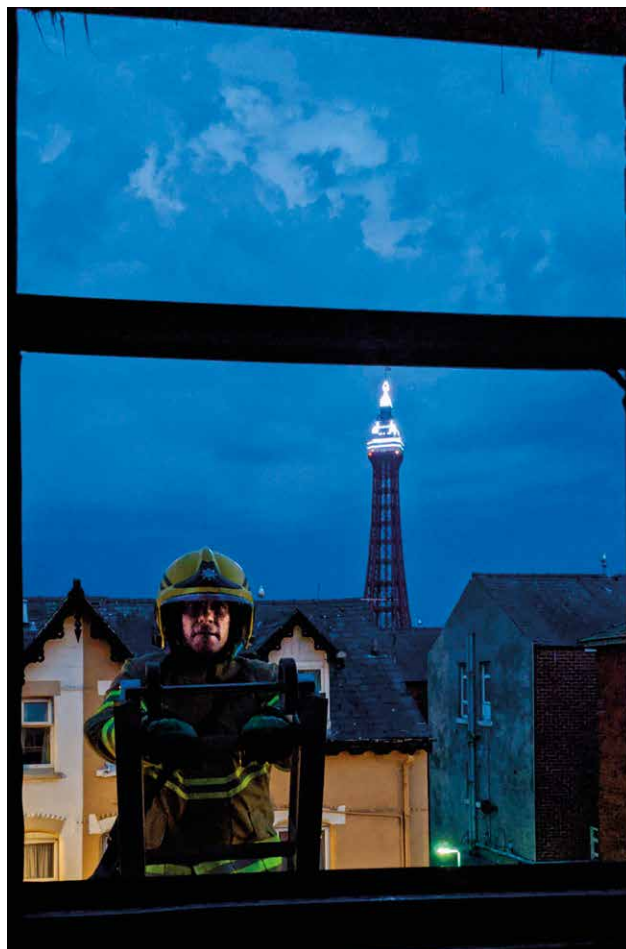
Other striking images failed to make the top places because, while excellent in most respects, they did

not tell a recognisable story or capture a single memorable moment.

The winner, James Atkins' image of firefighters lining up in front of their station for a lockdown Thursday night clap for NHS workers, was both technically excellent and captured one of the moments that will define the historic period we are living through.

The light is perfect and the composition excellent.

Martin Cahill's image of a firefighter and helicopter at a grass fire near Clydebank in the West of Scotland captured a moment in time and made it memorable through the planes and



**RUNNER-UP:** Access to a house in Blackpool via the third floor window following a severe fire in which the entire staircase had burned away, by Wayne Elcock

angles made by the various elements. Judges looked very closely at its rather low resolution before allowing it to qualify.

Wayne Elcock's striking image of a firefighter on a ladder at the upper window

of a house in Blackpool has, for non-firefighters a surreal air, but captures very well the "anytime, anywhere" nature of a firefighter's work.

A big thank you for all photo competition entries.



**WINNER:** Thursday 8pm clap for carers, Sidcup fire station, by James Atkins. See a larger version on page 8

The union is planning a 2021 calendar using the finalists' entries

# STATION CAT CLAIM AND BLAME

## PIFFLE DE PFEFFEL

You would think a vote to make Britain safer would have an easy passage through Parliament. Apparently not.

An amendment to the Fire Safety Bill designed to implement recommendations made by the first phase of the Grenfell Inquiry was voted down by 307 Conservative MPs.

The clause would have required owners of flats to share information with their local fire service about the design and materials of the external walls. It would also have required them to carry out regular inspections of lifts and flat entrance doors and share evacuation and fire safety instructions with residents.

MPs are, supposedly, elected to represent the majority of their constituents. Surely there cannot be that many private landlords out there?

Your Cat cannot help but think, if the Tories had shown the same scant regard for the nation's health and safety during the pandemic, we would have been in a right de Pfeffel by now! Oh, wait ...

## HAVE I GOT NEWS FOR YOU?

Newspaper editors can, on occasion, be creative with their headlines. They have to be, catchy headlines sell newspapers.

The editor of the *Whitchurch Herald* is no exception.

Following a recent incident when a dog, yes dog, got stuck up a tree, yes tree, in

Barking up the wrong tree – see Have I got news for you?



Having ridden a cannonball was one of the many boasts of the apparently world-beating but fictional Baron Munchausen. His present day rivals for far-fetched claims of amazing achievements are actually in charge of the UK government – see Safety without numbers

Shropshire, local firefighters slipped and pitched their way to a successful rescue.

And the headline in the local rag: 'Ca-nine' metre ladder used to rescue dog struck up tree by Wem firefighters'.

Your Cat is at her wits' end!

## CALIFORNIA SCREAMING

For the third year in a row California is being ravaged by wildfires.

And while many blame climate change for the fires, US President Donald

Trump criticised scientists as "prophets of doom" at the World Economic Forum and dismissed them as "alarmists" who wanted to "control every aspect of our lives".

So, if climate change isn't the cause, what is?

Just as in 2018 and in 2019, Mr Trump's response to the fires was predictable: blame the Democrat-run state and then threaten to punish it by withholding money. Simple.

## SAFETY WITHOUT NUMBERS

Last year Conservative controlled Surrey County Council voted to implement their Making Surrey Safer plan.

October will see 30 of Surrey's 380 full-time frontline firefighters transferred to roles in fire prevention as part of this plan. Let your Cat put this in some perspective: that's 8% of Surrey firefighters being removed from the frontline.

The resulting strain on SFRS personnel is starting to take its toll.

FBU brigade secretary Graham Whitfield said: "If this phase two goes ahead there will be another exodus in a few months' time and there'll be no firefighters left in Surrey.

"They cannot train people as quickly as they're leaving." This year, so far, 40 firefighters have left SFRS.

In the interest of balanced journalism your Cat wanted to put across the Surrey County Council point of view. Unbelievably, a spokesperson for Surrey said recruitment and retention are among its highest priorities.

Your Cat cannot help wondering how Conservatives think safety works, but it is certainly not by under-resourcing the emergency services, or by promising one thing and delivering another. Or not delivering at all.

Surrey's Conservatives could learn a few lessons from their big brothers and sisters at Whitehall.

Who can forget Boris Johnson's "world beating" track and trace app, or Matt Hancock-up's 100,000 tests? And what about the critical shortage of PPE for NHS workers at the beginning of the pandemic?

In the words of Boris: "Hands, face" ... knees and bumps a daisy!



# 25-YEAR BADGES



**Steve Hulme** (r), South Wales, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Dai Evans



**Dean Loader** (r), South Wales, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Dai Evans



**David Hepburn** (l), Tollcross and Liberton, Edinburgh, receives his 25-year badge from prevention and protection branch secretary Elliot Whitson



**Antony Green** (r), RDS, Aberdare, South Wales, receives his 25-year badge from David James



**Neil Teasdale** (l), red watch, Redditch, Hereford & Worcester, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Neil Bevan with colleagues (l-r) Michael Corsi and John Steel



**Paul Brown** (r), Morecambe, Lancashire, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Martin Sears with colleagues looking on



**Dave Coates** (r), Battersea green watch, London, receives his 25-year badge from Croydon borough rep Nigel Cox



**Steve Robinson** (r), green watch, Eltham, London, receives his 25-year badge from station commander Daniel Capon with colleagues looking on



**Gordon Mitchell** (r), red watch, Blackburn, Lancashire, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Mark Hoyle with colleagues (l-r) Mark Laws, Danny King, Neal Douglas, Chris Jowett, Simon Hatt and Becky Barr



**Richard Paice** (r), blue watch, Croydon, London, receives his 25-year badge from Croydon borough rep Nigel Cox



**Lee Byatt** (r), blue watch, Croydon, London, receives his 25-year badge from Croydon borough rep Nigel Cox



**Panyiotis Zouganelis** (l), green watch, Croydon, London, receives his 25-year badge from Croydon borough rep Nigel Cox



**John Relph** (r), green watch, Croydon London, receives his 25-year badge from Croydon borough rep Nigel Cox



**Marty Ward**, USAR training manager, Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Holly Ferguson at service headquarters



**Dave Thwaites** (r), Maidstone, Kent, receives his 25-year badge from health and safety rep Marcus Bell



**Scott Jones** (l), and **Alan Furlong** (r), Dagenham, London, receive their 25-year badges from former London regional secretary Joe MacVeigh (25 years after he signed them up to the FBU). Social distancing protocols were observed, hence no handshake!



**Richard Jukes** (l), white watch, Farnham, Surrey, receives his 25-year badge from former brigade secretary Lee Belsten with colleagues (l-r) Kym West, Mark Kelly, Alan Daly and Drew D'Auriel



**Lee Turner** (l), Southall, London, receives his 25-year badge from London EC member David Shek



**Tony Cooper** (r), blue watch, Bracknell, Berkshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser James Hunt with colleagues looking on

# 25-YEAR BADGES



**Mike Herbert** (l), Cardiff Central, receives his 25-year badge from Gareth Llewellyn with blue watch colleagues looking on



**Nathan Lapwood** (l), Exmouth, Devon & Somerset, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Greg Rowland



**Mark Westgarth** (r), Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from brigade chair Brian Harris



**Steve Foster** (r), Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from brigade chair Brian Harris



**Dave Taylor** (l), blue watch, Woodside, London, receives his 25-year badge from SW London area secretary Dave Young



**Lee Bell** (c), green watch, Byker Green, Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Holly Ferguson, with (l-r) Keith McKay, David Owen, Jack Peacock, Paul Salters, Michael Connolly, Daniel Nessfield and Jonathan Hammond



**Ian McPhail** (c), white watch, Christchurch, Dorset and Wiltshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser (South) Scott Blandford, with (l-r) watch members, Kelvyn Thompson, Dave Smith and Mark Craft



**Paul Blakely**, blue watch, Tynemouth, Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Holly Ferguson



**Mark Phelan**, blue watch, Tynemouth, Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Holly Ferguson



**Ken Wilkinson**, blue watch, Tynemouth, Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Holly Ferguson



**Rob Fouracres, St Austell, Cornwall,** receives his 25-year badge from branch rep **Matt Grubb** – following social distancing guidelines



**Troy Curry (l), Tyne & Wear,** receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser **Holly Ferguson** with (l-r) **Dave Cullen, Kev Sirey, Chris McCabe, Jade Markarski, Annabel Crowther** and **Lewis Johnson**, white watch **Farringdon, Sunderland**, looking on and **CFO Chris Lowther** as photographer



**Clinton Smith (r), Sidcup, London,** receives his 25-year badge from London regional secretary **Jon Lambe** with members of **Sidcup red watch** looking on



**Kev Williams, green watch, South Shields, Tyne and Wear,** receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser **Holly Ferguson**



**Dan Clarke (l), Woodside, Croydon, London,** receives his 25-year badge from SW area secretary **Dave Young**



**Paul Green (l), and Jimmy O'Neill (r),** receive their 25-year badges from former London regional secretary **Joe MacVeigh**, 25 years after he signed them up to the FBU



**Jon Dutton (c), blue watch, Hebburn Fire Station, Tyne & Wear,** receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser **Holly Ferguson**, with (l-r) **Davy Bell** and **Paul Grieve** looking on



**Simon Wood (r), Princes Street, Ipswich, Suffolk,** receives his 25-year badge from branch rep **Stephen Hayward**

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

For your image to look its best, we need the original, full-resolution image. One lifted from a website may not do justice to a unique occasion. We do our best with images that are low resolution, taken directly into a bright light or suffer from camera-shake, or have other problems, but cannot perform miracles. Please include details for each image – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where/when it was taken.

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### Region 2 N Ireland

14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn,  
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### Region 6 Derbyshire, Notts, Lincs,

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### Region 9 Herts, Beds, Cambs,

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

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