

FireFighter

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

October 2013

**FBU
THWARTS
SAFETY
ATTACK**

See p14

**CUT PENSIONS
OUT JOBS**
PRIVATISATION



**Join the
firefighters'
march**

**WEDNESDAY
16 OCTOBER**





Matt Wrack

Stay together and strong in this period of intense activity

Members responded magnificently to our strike on pensions on 25 September – this magazine contains a selection of photos from the day.

I met a large number of resolute and determined members on picket lines. I know we had a good response from the public, whether it was people tooting their horns or receiving our leaflets.

Convincing people

Our members are very well informed about the pension situation and rightly so. A firefighter's pension is one of the vital reasons for persevering in the service throughout our often tough working lives. Our pensions are deferred pay – the return we are entitled to receive after a lifetime of public service.

It is an occupational pension – it should reflect the peculiarities of our job.

We undertake often gruelling and testing work, keeping ourselves physically fit and at the cutting edge of our profession. Firefighters retire earlier than others – but we already pay considerably more for the arrangement than other public sector (and private sector) workers for that reason.

The public understand our argument that it is ridiculous to expect most firefighters to work to 60. They do not want to have an ageing fire and rescue service, or firefighters turning out for the dire emergencies they may face who are not – for perfectly

understandable reasons due to human ageing – able to work safely.

They understand the connection between their own safety and the safety of firefighters. It is utterly wrong to send professionals into life-changing and life-threatening situations, knowing that they are not capable of meeting the physical demands of that situation. It is doubly wrong to force firefighters to work longer and then to sack us and slash our pensions just because we have become too old to work.

We have taken action and



Matt Wrack joined pickets in Brighton during the 25 September strike

we have shown the government we are serious about defending our pensions. We hope they see sense and negotiate a solution with the union. But we may need to take more action. We need members to stay active, attend FBU meetings and explain to the public and politicians the issues we face.

Cuts

Alongside our pension campaign, the FBU still has a titanic task to defend the fire and rescue service and our voice within it from government attack. That's why we are marching on London

on Wednesday 16 October. I urge every firefighter and their family and friends to attend – so politicians at Westminster hear our message.

We know the grind of cuts continues – though not without a counterblast from members.

At Westminster last month I spoke to MPs on behalf of the union on the subject of Ken Knight's report (see pages 10-11). We know the government asked Knight to come up with some cuts proposals after the last spending review. We know they published his review on the last

day of our conference and a week before announcing more cuts in 2015-16.

As a result of our work – together with supportive MPs and some chief fire officers – major damage has been done to Knight's report and reputation.

He was a fervent advocate of the failed FiReControl project. He is about the only person left in the service opposing a legal duty to respond to flooding.

And now his report has been found to be full of holes and false assumptions. One thing is clear: Knight's report is no basis for progress in the fire and rescue service.

FBU irreplaceable

There are examples throughout this issue of *Firefighter* of the irreplaceable role of your union.

It has been the determined campaigning of FBU members in Cleveland that has put those pushing privatisation plans on the back foot.

Some 97% of our members oppose the mutual they have tried to impose. With the help of friendly MPs and councillors, we want the proposal finished off.

If we can do that, it will be a tremendous victory for every firefighter in the country.

The FBU has also played an irreplaceable role in the courts.

Without a union, injured members and bereaved families would not get the compensation they are entitled to.

Without the union, the health and safety of every firefighter would be in jeopardy, as insurers and chief officers try to strip us of the safety protection we have won and which is enshrined in law.

FBU members attended Stephen Hunt's funeral last month.

We paid tribute to his life, but the union will also do everything in its power to ensure that lessons are learned and that there are no more tragedies like Stephen's death.

We have a great deal to do. But what we do makes a huge difference – both as a service and as a union.



Follow the general secretary on Twitter:
@MattWrack

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Britain's smallest fire engine pokes fun at fire chiefs' drive for ever-smaller appliances and raises money for the Fire Fighters Charity

GEOFF ROBINSON



ANDREW WARD



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MARCH

WEDNESDAY 16 OCTOBER LONDON

CUT PENSIONS
CUT JOBS
PRIVATISATION

Assemble
11.00am
Malet St
WC1E 7HY

SAVE OUR FIRE SERVICE
FIRE BRIGADES UNION • WWW.FBU.ORG.UK



Determined: Pickets at Temple station in Bristol

Pensions strike demonstrates anger and determination

National strike

Thousands of firefighters across England and Wales took part in a four-hour strike over the government's unworkable, unsafe and unfair proposals on pensions.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack, who visited picket lines in Brighton and London, said: "This was solidly supported strike action. It has demonstrated firefighters' anger and determination.

"This strike was a last resort after the government refused to negotiate – and a warning shot that firefighters are serious about keeping a fair, safe and workable pensions scheme.

"Firefighters across the country reported a fantastic response from the public, who seem to understand that the government's proposals on pensions are ludicrous. We haven't ruled out further industrial action, but let's hope common sense wins out, public safety is put first

and that the government comes back open to compromise."

Throughout the day messages of support flooded in from members of the public, politicians, trade unionists and firefighters around the world.

FBU members in Scotland, Northern Ireland and in control also expressed their support. MPs John McDonnell and Kate Hoey and TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady gave their backing. Australian and Czech firefighters' unions were among those sending solidarity messages.

Unity

In Cardiff, firefighters assembled at the Millennium Centre and marched to the National Assembly to present a show of unity against attacks on their pensions.

In Surrey, firefighters expressed "extreme concern" after the fire and rescue service decided to prevent striking FBU members from accessing fire stations for the duration of Wednesday's day

shift, meaning the county was unnecessarily without most of its fire and rescue workforce for a nine-hour period.

Buckinghamshire fire and rescue service had threatened similar behaviour, but backed down after pressure from the union.

Earlier, firefighters had demanded that fire minister Brandon Lewis stop claiming firefighters would receive £26,000 a year when they retired after the independent fact-checking organisation Full Fact "comprehensively discredited" his claim. (See <http://tinyurl.com/n5lkxyz>).

No major incidents were reported during the stoppage – the first FBU national walkout for a decade.

Firefighters in Scotland did not strike while union officials were discussing separate Scottish government proposals.

But a settlement in Scotland has not yet been found and the union's strike ballot could still result in industrial action in Scotland.

Billy Hayes: The CWU is standing up against this latest attack on our members, just as the FBU fights for firefighters

www.fbu.org.uk

Firefighters confront mayor over life-threatening cuts

London firefighters confronted the city's mayor, Boris Johnson, at a protest outside City Hall last month. They were campaigning against the closure of 10 fire stations, the slashing of 588 frontline firefighter jobs and the removal of 14 engines.

The FBU members joined a demonstration, before heading into the building to watch a session of Mayor's Question Time.

FBU London secretary Paul Embery said: "We went to City Hall to tell Boris Johnson that his cuts are reckless and wrong.

"There is widespread hostility to these cuts which would lead to an increase in response times for millions of Londoners.

"In a service where seconds really do

count, this would inevitably cost lives. The mayor should abandon his plans and keep his pre-election promise not to cut fire cover in London."

The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, the London Assembly and several local authorities – including Conservative-run councils – have voted against the cuts. 94% of respondents to a public consultation exercise said they did not want to see any frontline cuts.

● The FBU's campaign has won the support of actor Ross Kemp, who has voiced a powerful short film in which he accuses the mayor of lying to Londoners over the cuts. The film can be viewed at: <http://ow.ly/oBEO5>



London FBU members lobby members of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority outside City Hall

FBU helps member win £2.2m award after severe fire injuries

Injury compensation

A Bolton FBU member has been awarded £2.2m compensation after suffering severe burns in a house fire.

Steve Morris was injured while attending a domestic fire as part of a Bolton

Central station crew.

Two people died in the fire. Steve suffered burns to 50% of his body and was unable to return to work as a firefighter. The compensation was won after a battle that took years.

Steve told *Firefighter*: "I'm extremely grateful

to my family and friends as well as fire service colleagues for their support over the last five years.

"I'm especially grateful to the FBU and Thompsons, who have secured compensation money for me that will provide care for the rest of my life."

SOUNDING OFF

Why we are striking

Communications Workers Union general secretary Billy Hayes says his members are fighting 'poisonous privatisers', just like FBU members

As I write, the Communications Workers Union is preparing to ballot 125,000 Royal Mail workers for national strike action that could take place in mid-October.

The dispute is over the impact of privatisation on job security and terms and conditions. And pay of course. We do not want a race to the bottom in terms and conditions as we see in private mail companies like TNT, which employs people on zero-hour contracts and poverty pay.

Privatisation of Royal Mail would mean higher prices and worse services for customers. What company would be interested in the expensive universal service that delivers to our villages at the same price as our cities?

It would undermine the quality and security of jobs, as we have seen in countless cases.

Privatisation is not about improving the company or mail services; it's about lining the pockets of this government's City mates.

Royal Mail made £403m profit last year, hardly a basket case, but a private company would look to maximise payouts to shareholders – money which the public sector should benefit from.

The poisonous hand of privateers is penetrating our public services like never before. The CWU is standing up against this latest attack on our members, as the FBU fights for firefighters. We are stronger together.



Sign up for the FBU's e-bulletin **Rollcall**. Visit www.fbu.org.uk/?page_id=7341. If your smartphone or tablet has a QR code reader, point it at the box on the right



FBU message on cuts is 'loud and clear' at TUC

TUC

The FBU was well represented at the TUC Congress in Bournemouth last month, to ensure that the voice of the fire and rescue service was heard by delegates. Matt Wrack condemned firefighter job cuts and fire station closures as "a disgrace" and said the FBU's message was "loud and clear – these cuts put lives at risk".

FBU executive council member Ian Murray also spoke against fire cuts during the austerity debate, while Tam McFarlane, executive member for the south west, warned that whichever party or parties become the new government in 2015, it cannot impose further cuts on the service.

Wrack also spoke in the pensions debate to explain the FBU's dispute with the Westminster

government and to appeal for solidarity in the event of strike action. This was very well received by delegates.

David Pitt, FBU official in the West Midlands and a first-time delegate, spoke in the debate on young trade unionists. He said that unions should "give young members the tools to help renew this great movement of ours".

Wrack also moved the main international resolution, calling for solidarity with Greek workers facing austerity. The FBU co-hosted a fringe meeting with the Greece Solidarity Campaign, which was addressed by FBU national officer Dave Green and representatives from the Greek labour movement. Green also spoke at a fringe meeting on climate change, explaining the role of firefighters in responding to floods.

Firefighters rally round fundraiser

Sheffield

A Sheffield firefighter has raised hundreds of pounds for his local hospital – with help from his motorcycling friends.

FBU member Jason Jenkinson started the fund-raising drive to show his thanks for the care his family received at Sheffield Teaching Hospital.

His son Archie died in 2011 just 13 hours after being born prematurely. Earlier this year Jason's partner gave birth prematurely to their daughter, Poppy May, at the same hospital.

"As well as a collection, I started a book signed by Sheffield celebs and anyone who was passing through the city," Jason told *Firefighter*. "Jessica Ennis, Richard Hawley, Pete McKee, Robert Cray and Simple Minds have all signed!"

As reported in *Firefighter* Jason visited Chicago, USA, two years ago with 31 other UK firefighters to take part in a motorbike ride commemorating the 10th anniversary of 9/11 attacks in New York.

Friends from the American trip started adding to the collection themselves.

In September this year, firefighters Tony Smith, Tim Norris and Paula Jones rode to Sheffield in pouring rain to present a cheque to the hospital neo-natal unit.

Fire chief 'must choose'

Devon and Somerset

Devon and Somerset fire chief Lee Howell must choose between a full-time role in Devon and Somerset and a government position in Wales, firefighters have said. His position as part-time fire adviser to the Welsh government was revealed in the summer.

Devon and Somerset FBU brigade secretary Trevor French said: "The public and fire crews of Devon and Somerset deserve a full-time fire chief; especially when the service appears to be spiralling out of control."



PAUL HERMANN

Fellow firefighters mourn tragic death of Stephen Hunt

Manchester

The full ceremonial funeral of Manchester firefighter Stephen Hunt (above) took place on 3 September at Bury parish church.

Firefighters from Greater Manchester and across the UK attended to pay tribute.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack, who attended the service, said: "Stephen died a hero, and his willingness to put his own life at risk to save and help others deserves to be

remembered and honoured.

"This sense of courage and self-sacrifice can be found in firefighters across the country, and we are all indebted to the tireless and often unseen work they undertake to keep us safe.

"Stephen's death was a terrible tragedy, and firefighters and the union will continue to work with our communities, employers and government to make sure that safety is put first for both firefighters and the general public."

The FBU is encouraging

donations to the Stephen Hunt Memorial Fund, which will be used solely to support Stephen's dependants.

Name of Fund: Stephen Hunt Memorial Fund

Name of Bank: Unity Trust Bank

Sort Code: 08-60-01

Account No: 20314381

To donate by cheque, make the cheque out to "Stephen Hunt Memorial Fund" and send it to:

Steve Shelton, Regional Treasurer,
FBU Regional Office, The Lighthouse,
Lower Mersey Street, Ellesmere Port,
Cheshire, CH65 2AL



Official figures show even slower response times

The FBU has protested strongly after government figures showed that response times in England have slowed to record levels

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) figures published in August reveal that the average response time to fires in dwellings in 2012-13 was 7.4 minutes, nine seconds longer than in 2011-12. Over the decade from 2002-03 to 2012-13, response times to both dwelling and other building fires increased by one and a half minutes on average.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "These figures confirm the FBU's warnings of a slide in emergency response times in recent years, which we believe is related to cuts.

"They also show that a postcode lottery is developing, with wide variation of responses times across similar brigades, or those adjacent to one another.

"The public rightly want firefighters to respond swiftly when they need us. These figures show we need investment, not cuts to our service."

The figures, which only cover the arrival of the first appliance, show a clear split between brigades that are predominantly urban and those that are predominantly rural, with the latter some 50% slower (see table below).

DCLG argues scandalously that the worsening of response times is "greatly outweighed" by improvements in fire safety. But prevention and intervention should not be counterposed – the FBU wants both and it is possible to have

improvements across the board to provide an excellent service.

DCLG offers no new reasons for the worsening of response times. It simply refers to previous reports. A DCLG report, *Review of Fire and Rescue Service response times* (2009) concluded that increasing traffic levels were the main factor behind the slowing response times.

DCLG said last year that "traffic levels have decreased since 2008, yet response times continued to increase until 2010-11, albeit increasing more slowly".

Instead they blame control staff for asking more questions and safety policies such as "drive to arrive" and PPE wear for the slowing.

Wrack said: "The government is wrong to blame firefighters for slower turnouts.

The government is not providing the service with resources and the personnel to intervene swiftly. Firefighters demand the government funds the service properly, given the risks involved."

● *Fire Incidents Response Times: England, 2012-13:* <http://tinyurl.com/qjppfl>

AREA	MINUTES
Average urban response time	7.2
Average rural response time	10.3
Fastest average response time Tyne and Wear	5.7
Slowest average response time Cornwall	11.0



A risk we don't need to take

By Tony Bosworth, Friends of the Earth energy campaigner

Fracking, and all its attendant puns, was one of the words of the summer. Events in Balcombe, West Sussex, projected the issue into public consciousness and put shale gas high on the political agenda.

The government is riding roughshod over local communities and ignoring local environmental risks in a Dallas-style

dash for gas. Even energy secretary Ed Davey says that fracking is very unlikely to cut fuel bills, and it keeps us hooked on the very fossil fuels we need to reduce if we are to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

The local environmental risks – water contamination and increased air

pollution – are major concerns for local communities too.

Fracking uses toxic chemicals that could be harmful to human health if they leaked into the environment.

The US Environmental Protection Agency has found contamination of groundwater near a fracking site at

Protest against the fracking company Cuadrilla Resources as it was due to start drilling in Balcombe, West Sussex

PICTURE: JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Pavillion, Wyoming likely to be linked to the process.

The risks come not just from the fracking process itself, but also from associated activities such as transporting chemicals to the site and removing waste from it.

Fracking produces waste water

contaminated both with the chemicals used in the process and, often, with naturally occurring radioactive materials released by the fracking.

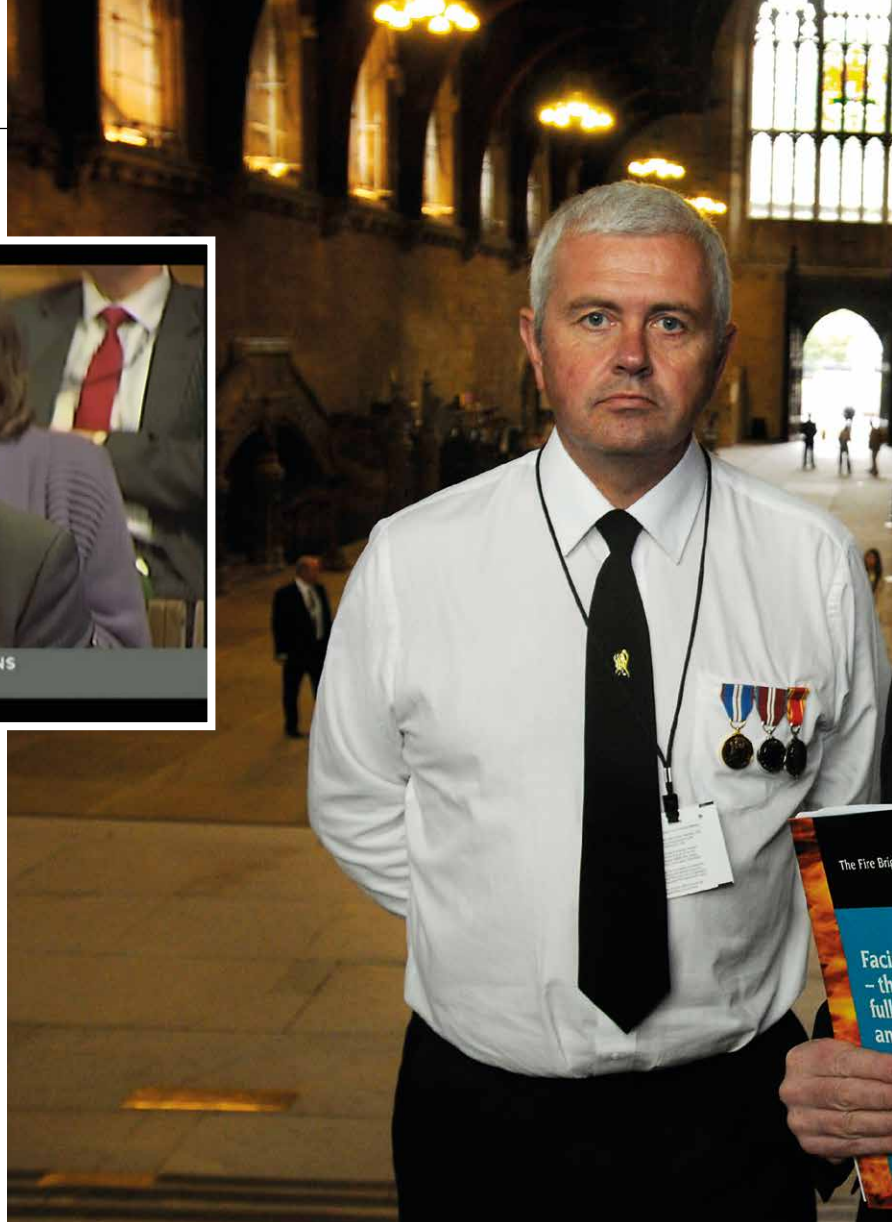
A US report lists more than 1,000 fracking-related spills of diesel, oil, chemicals and wastewater in Colorado alone in two years.

This poses real risks not just for local communities, but for those who would have to deal with any problems caused by the industry.

Given the UK's enormous renewable energy resources, fracking is not the answer to the UK's energy problems – and it's a risk we don't need to take.



MPs hear FBU warn of dire effects of proposed cuts on public and firefighters



Knight proposals

Sir Ken Knight's report into so-called efficiencies in the English fire and rescue service has been heavily criticised by the FBU, chief fire officers and MPs as a fig leaf to disguise cuts. Sir Ken was government chief fire and rescue adviser for England from 2007 to January 2013.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack and some chief fire officers were invited to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee at Westminster to discuss Knight's report on 9 September. Wrack told the MPs that the real reason for the report was to justify austerity.

"There are massive cuts being made in our fire and rescue service," he said. "You had a number of chief officers here last year and I think they equivocated on this issue. I want to be very clear: those cuts will put public safety at risk, those cuts will put firefighters' safety at risk, they will put lives at risk, they will mean that homes that could have been saved will be lost, and businesses that could have

Above: Matt Wrack and John Arnold, FBU executive council member for officers, at the Houses of Parliament before giving evidence to MPs

been saved will be lost. That is the point that Ken Knight has completely missed."

One MP asked witnesses for proposals to save significant amounts of money in the fire service. Wrack said: "One proposal that would have saved us all half a billion pounds was, under the last government, our opposition to the FiReControl project. We were the only voice within the fire and rescue service that consistently said: 'This plan is going wrong.'"

Making money

"There were huge numbers of very well paid consultants in buildings around this part of London, who were making a lot of money out of it, but Ken Knight, as the chief fire and rescue adviser, kept telling the government to carry on with that project."

Knight's big idea to save money is to substitute retained for wholtime firefighters. The FBU represents the majority of retained firefighters



STEFANO CAGNONI

When he appeared in July, Knight admitted that his report was not a risk assessment of national resilience. Asked by MPs about it, Wrack referred to the Smethwick fire earlier this year, where at the height of the incident, only one West Midlands fire appliance remained available.

Similarly, he pointed to major floods, including those in 2007, when firefighters were mobilised all over the UK, clearly testing national resilience.

MPs wanted to know about community fire safety work. Wrack said: "I would say very firmly that there is a unique aspect that operational firefighters bring to that work, because they know and understand fire and, to be honest, in terms of explaining a message, you cannot beat that."

Co-responding

Asked about Knight's proposal on co-responding, Wrack said: "The FBU's policy on co-responding is based on a discussion about 10 years ago on certain concerns around training, the effect on the fire and rescue service and various other issues that, at that point, we said 'therefore the union is opposed to it'.

"There is a clear contractual issue about what firefighters are required to do contractually and not. The most alarming thing about this debate is that I have been in post since 2005 and in that time the fire service employers and government have never approached us to have a discussion about co-responding. If people want to discuss that, at least have some joined up thinking and a dialogue."

One proposal Knight made that the FBU accepts is for an inspectorate. Wrack said it could improve public confidence in the fire and rescue service – as

are rubbished

and has long fought for equal pay, pensions and conditions for them. The union has pointed out the failure of fire and rescue services to recruit, train and develop retained firefighters.

Wrack told MPs that Knight really proposes to reduce wholetime firefighters by 10%, which would mean taking longer to get to incidents. Other witnesses concurred with this view. It is desirable to have more retained firefighters to ensure comprehensive fire cover; but not as a substitute for wholetime firefighters. MPs grilled Knight in July and made the same point.

'I want to be very clear: those cuts will put public safety at risk, those cuts will put firefighters' safety at risk, they will put lives at risk'

long as it went beyond financial matters and looked at operational ones as well.

Knight suggested that it is now safer to be a firefighter. Wrack said: "In terms of trips and minor injuries he may be correct, but in terms of serious injuries and death, in the last 10 years the number of firefighters killed at fires is double what it was in the previous 10 years. That is something the fire service should be shocked and alarmed about.

"There is evidence that fire services are not learning lessons from earlier tragedies and precisely the same point made in a previous coroner's inquest is now being made in a subsequent coroner's inquest.

"I think alarm bells should be ringing in the fire and rescue service about that matter."

❖ Quotes are from an uncorrected transcript of evidence (not an approved formal record) taken before the Communities and Local Government Committee on Monday 9 September 2013.



Ashfield, Nottinghamshire

UNITY IS STR

Pictures from the picketlines and during the FBU's strike for pensions

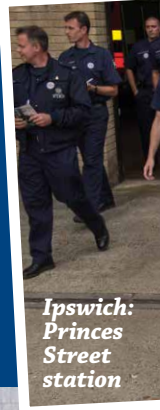


Walk out in Cambridge



OWEN HUMPHREYS/PA PHOTOS

Tynemouth station, North Shields



Ipswich: Princes Street station



Cardiff: left and above

SOLIDARITY



Orpington, London Fire Brigade

LENGTH

Protests around England and Wales
for justice on 25 September



JESS HURD / REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Clear message from FBU members at Poplar Fire Station in East London



PETER EVERARD SMITH



JOE GIDDENS/PA PHOTOS

West Bromwich



Kingston, Surrey: FBU president Alan McLean addresses strikers



TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady joins a Brighton picketline



Hackney pensioners at Kingsland, London



PETER EVERARD SMITH

Signing support in Ipswich



STEFANO CAGNON / REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Members of Camden Trades Council and other unions including the TSSA, RMT, Unison and the GMB join the picket at Euston, London



Acknowledging public support in Bridgwater, Somerset

MARLIE FARM FBU knocks back major attack on every firefighter

Union defends firefighters' safety and compensation for bereaved families



The FBU and its solicitors Thompsons are fighting to defend firefighter safety and compensation for bereaved families in the face of a sustained attack from East Sussex fire and rescue service and its insurers.

The union secured an important victory in July for the families of two firefighters killed at Marlle Farm, East Sussex. Brian Wembridge and Geoff Wicker were killed in 2006 after fireworks kept in an ISO container exploded with the force of a bomb.

The High Court ruled in July that East Sussex fire and rescue service was negligent and that compensation should be paid to the families of the firefighters killed. The owners of Marlle Farm were convicted in 2009 for the manslaughter of the two firefighters.

Systemic failure

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "The judge's ruling reflects the systemic and cultural failure of those responsible for East Sussex fire and rescue service.

"But the failings of East Sussex raised by the FBU were echoed in the criminal trial of the factory's owners, and it's clear that this case should not have been fought."

He added: "Every FBU member has contributed to this victory. Only a union, with the collective strength and resources of 40,000 members, is capable of carrying the legal and other costs of a prolonged battle like this."

The FBU was informed in September that East Sussex fire and rescue service

is seeking permission to appeal against the ruling.

Wrack said: "An appeal would prolong the pain for injured firefighters and the families of the bereaved. We believe the case has been very adequately heard and the result is not in doubt.

Waste of public money

"An appeal would also completely undermine any claim by East Sussex fire and rescue service that they care for the wellbeing of their employees. On top of this, an appeal will be a waste of public money and, if we are vindicated, those responsible for this decision should be held to account."

The High Court ruling has implications for every firefighter across the UK. This is because East Sussex fire and rescue service, backed by its insurers, used an outrageous argument to try to avoid their liability.

Had they succeeded, the health and safety of every UK firefighter would have been undermined.

East Sussex argued that the duty of care arising from the Health and Safety



Prolonging the pain: Heather Wicker (left) and Lesley Wembridge at the trial of Martin Winter, boss of Alpha Fireworks Ltd, and his son Nathan in November 2009



Aerial view of the devastation caused by the Marlie Farm explosion
GARETH FULLER / PA PHOTOS

at Work Act and the regulations that are based on it, dealing with hazardous and dangerous substances, workplace conditions and how safety is managed, do not apply to firefighters.

The judge in case, Justice Urwin, dismissed this argument emphatically. He identified a series of failures by East Sussex:

- Failure to train staff on the risks of explosives and the correct manner in which to approach explosives incidents
- Failure to carry out standard inspections and build the findings into their emergency response plans for an explosives incident, despite warnings about the site, evidence of poor water supplies and widespread, large-scale storage of fireworks in Sussex
- Failure to institute a safety cordon
- Failure to evacuate once the presence of large fireworks in the shipping container was strongly suspected
- Failure to execute the evacuation properly once it was belatedly ordered.

The judge also dismissed the scandalous claim that Brian Wembridge had contributed to his own death,

insisting that he had received no instruction to leave and no warning of the risks represented by the container.

Jim Parrot, FBU executive council member for the South-East, who attended the original incident, said: "Although the ruling cannot undo Geoff or Brian's tragic deaths, firefighters can be relieved that their employers cannot merely renounce their duty of care, as had been argued.

Absolutely clear

"The judgment is absolutely clear on the failures which sadly occurred that day.

"Two courts have identified major failures in East Sussex's delivery of its obligations to the public and firefighters. East Sussex does not accept these

'This appeal is a blight on the fire and rescue service'

failures and has not corrected them. Their appeal is a blight on the fire and rescue service."

The FBU has also written to fire minister Brandon Lewis after the death of FBU member Stephen Hunt about promises made under the last government that firefighter fatalities would be tackled. The union published the *In the Line of Duty* report in 2008 to get governments to act. Stephen Hunt was killed fighting a fire in a hairdressers in Manchester in July.

Lessons not learned

Wrack said: "Investigations into firefighter fatalities have found similar factors and causes to those identified in earlier incidents. If that is the case, then it would appear that lessons are not being learned from such tragedies.

"Our aim now is to examine whether this is the case and whether the factors we identified in 2008 have been addressed."

■ The FBU's executive council will publish a new report on firefighter fatalities next year.



CLEVELAND FIREFIGHTERS REJECT MUTUALISATION PROPOSALS

FBU members reject plans outright by an overwhelming vote in independent poll

Firefighters in Cleveland have overwhelmingly rejected fire authority plans to take the service out of the established structure to create a mutual organisation.

Almost 500 FBU members were surveyed by the independent YouGov polling organisation in August to seek their views on plans to turn Cleveland fire brigade into a mutual.

The union believes these plans would take the firefighters involved out of national pay, conditions and pensions agreements and allow private companies to tender for contracts, bringing in privatisation by the back door.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "Firefighters have given a clear verdict on these mutualisation plans and it is an outright rejection.

"This is a huge blow to government plans to privatise the fire and rescue service. Earlier this year, the government

was desperately trying to sneak through changes in the law, but were found out by MPs and the FBU. The government has thrown hundreds of thousands of pounds at Cleveland to try and get this through.

"This is another case where the FBU, working with local MPs and politicians, has managed to turn the tide. Our collective organisation makes the difference. We will now be campaigning to consign these mutual proposals to the scrapheap."

Thrown out

The chief fire officer's plans have been overwhelmingly thrown out by FBU members. Some 97% of members surveyed said that they are fully opposed to the proposals. The same proportion (97%) also said that they thought the fire and rescue service would change for the worse if it were to become a "for profit" mutual, while 92% said that such

Above: Firefighters lobby the Redcar and Cleveland council meeting in September

70%



a move would worsen the level of service available.

Nearly all members thought that they have not had the implications of mutualisation adequately explained to them and there is almost universal desire for more information regarding the possible effects on employment terms, job security, pensions, pay and role activity.

Over 90% were dissatisfied with the specific information provided by the fire authority. It is very clear firefighters have not been consulted. The proposals are certainly not "employee-led", but entirely principal officer-led. Some 96% were dissatisfied with the amount of information provided by the Cleveland fire authority.

Implications

Similarly, 97% of members said they had not had the implications of moving to a mutual adequately explained to them regarding:

- the impact on agreed rates of pay if not governed by the Grey Book
- general terms and conditions of employment if not governed by the Grey Book and
- the impact on job role if it were not within existing national occupational standards and role maps.

Andy Noble, FBU executive council member for the North East, said: "Our

'Firefighters have expressed their view clearly and without ambiguity'

members have overwhelmingly rejected the mutualisation proposals. I'm very proud that we've been able to provide a voice for firefighters' opposition.

"This survey was carried out by the independent YouGov organisation and the majority of our members took part. Firefighters have expressed their view clearly and without ambiguity.

"We don't want to see the service we provide to the public undermined by profiteers. We don't want our professional conditions undercut by the mutual. There are no benefits for the public or firefighters, and there would be many costs.

Future privatisation

"It's now time for Cleveland fire authority to put an end to these plans. The public don't want a mutual. Firefighters don't want a mutual. They don't want a hugely respected public

service fragmented and exposed to potential future privatisation.

"CFO Ian Hayton has been egged on by the government to do this. He has no local support for these proposals. He should recognise the strength of feeling among firefighters and call a halt. Cleveland fire authority must take cognisance of the views of firefighters and instruct him to stop."

COUNCILLORS REJECT MUTUAL PLAN

Redcar and Cleveland borough councillors overwhelmingly rejected the mutualisation plans after they were lobbied by around 80 firefighters last month.

Councillors were asked to call on the authority to fight government plans to enable the creation of a public service mutual at Cleveland Fire Brigade. The motion received cross-party support, with 35 members voting in favour of opposing the plans.

FBU Cleveland brigade chair Brian Gibson said: "I'm absolutely delighted to get the support of the council. The public service mutual will only lead to the privatisation of the fire service and the people don't want that."

CANCER

Conference explores risks and legislation

"There's no greater work that a union can do than look after the health and wellbeing of its members"

Firefighting and cancer

The Australian United Firefighters Union and the Canadian United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg and the Edmonton Fire Fighters Union co-hosted the Global Conference on Occupational Cancer and Firefighters earlier this year.

More than 190 people took part in the event in Melbourne, Australia, including firefighters from Australia, Canada, Finland, Norway, Denmark and New Zealand.

Internationally acclaimed epidemiologist and keynote speaker Dr Tee Guidotti told the conference that it was the responsibility of governments to "do what is right" over firefighter health.

Outer limits

"There really is no other occupation which forces people to work at the outer limits of what the human body can tolerate," Guidotti said.

His work was among the international research accepted by Canadian, US and Australian governments when they created what is known as "presumptive legislation".

The term refers to laws that presume that an illness or injury has been caused by a type of employment, meaning that victims can access compensation far more easily.

The burden is moved to employers or insurers to disprove the connection between the job and the illness, rather than the employee prove what caused the condition and

when it occurred.

Australia's Fair Protection for Firefighters Act was passed in 2011, and the conference began with a video message in which the then Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, thanked firefighters for their service, and for those working towards improving the safety of firefighters.

Plastics hazards

"Thank you for your endeavours to protect the men and women who do so much to protect us," Gillard said.

Guidotti also outlined his concerns about the increasing use of plastics, such as in 3D printers.

"Engineers don't think about the hazards when they produce these materials," he said. "They think about performance."

As with construction, designers and engineers and developers of new technology should be required to consider

the adverse health effects, Guidotti said.

Earlier, Melbourne Fire Brigade commander Brian Whittaker had set the scene using spotlights to point out the toxins and carcinogens that would combust into a toxic cocktail if the conference room itself was engulfed in flames.

Alex Forrest, president of the United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg, Canada, discussed the importance of trade unions campaigning for their members.

Forrest, who has 15 years' experience in educating communities and lobbying politicians on firefighter safety, said: "Australia is one of the most successful union lobby efforts I've seen anywhere in the world."

"There's no greater work that a union can do than look after the health and wellbeing of its members."

Forrest also pointed out

that residential and structure fires are increasingly sinister, as modern structures contain more plastics and glues than wood.

The Canadian province of Alberta recently legislated to designate post-traumatic stress disorder as a presumptive illness. Edmonton fire chief Ken Block said that firefighters of all ranks should support the campaign for presumptive legislation to recognise the occupational illnesses of firefighters.

Leukaemia

The conference outlined a study on firefighter health currently under way at Monash University in Melbourne. The study will focus on the link between firefighters and specific cancers; preventative measures; and other conditions.

Associate Professor Deb Glass also discussed her findings into the links between exposure to benzene and leukaemia.

A panel discussed lessons learnt during the ten-year campaign for presumptive legislation that has succeeded in nearly every province in Canada.

Presentations on contamination, wellness programmes and effective fire station design were enlightening for the firefighters and fire service managers.

Penny Wright, Green Party senator for South Australia, paid tribute to the "immaculate" campaign to win presumptive legislation. "I saw the benefit of pure doggedness, determination and hope," she said.



Kit demonstration at the conference

Legal Beagle

Compensation loophole for employers



Q The Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act ends more than a century of the principle of “strict liability” in health and safety cases. What does this mean for firefighters?

A “Strict liability” in health and safety cases meant that employers were automatically liable to pay compensation for workplace accidents that occurred because of a breach of regulations.

It was established as a legal principle in the 1898 case of *Groves v Lord Wimborne*. The Court of Appeal ruled that: “the defence of common employment is not applicable in a case where injury has been caused to a servant by the breach of an absolute duty imposed by statute upon his master for his protection.”

In April this year strict liability was ended following the Löfstedt review of health and safety commissioned by the government as part of its drive to reduce “red tape” for businesses.

Professor Löfstedt’s report said strict liability should be reviewed or qualified as it could be “unfair” to employers. He now says the government’s response to his review was more far-reaching than he had anticipated and has called for its impact to be “carefully monitored”.

The reality is that, without strict liability, unscrupulous employers will be tempted to ignore health and safety regulations because they will be less likely to have to pay compensation when accidents occur.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Q How exactly does the removal of strict liability affect claims?

A Removal of strict liability will mean that injured workers will have to prove that their employer was at fault, even if the employer had breached health and safety regulations that placed a clear obligation on employers.

This is best illustrated by a recent case Thompsons, the FBU’s solicitors, ran for a crane operator who had been installing portable buildings at a music festival.

The man suffered serious brain damage, a heart attack and organ damage when he was electrocuted by live power cables that did not appear on any plan. Little had been done by the festival organisers to ensure the site was safe. The man is now immobile, unable to speak or communicate and in need of constant care.

Under strict liability, his claim was bound to win because the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations had been breached. This meant there was less heartache for

the family from a dispute on liability and a potential trial. Thompsons were also able to obtain an interim payment to fund specialised care at home.

Without strict liability, a person injured in similar circumstances would have to produce evidence of employer negligence.

For an injured FBU member, this would mean having to prove “foreseeability” – that an employer knew, or ought to have known, that a piece of equipment or work area was unsafe – in every case, even if the employer was in clear breach of health and safety regulations.

Q What impact will this have?

A A recent report by the workers’ health journal *Hazards* showed that – despite all the tabloid hype about “compensation culture” – the number of people actually receiving awards for work-related injuries or diseases has fallen by 60 per cent over the last decade – down from 219,183 in 2000/01 to 87,655 in 2011/12.

Based on government figures, the report shows that for most occupational cancers the chance of winning compensation is below 1 in 50.

The ending of strict liability will undoubtedly make it even harder for injured people to win compensation battles.

Employers and insurers try every trick in the book to avoid paying out and the government has handed them a possible new escape route on a plate.

'Baby, baby, come push my button'

Five Norfolk firefighters take the stage as The Backdrafts

The Backdrafts

Music venues usually want to hear a demo tape before they book a new band. Ask any combo that's just starting out. Not so Norfolk-based band The Backdrafts who first got together in January. But this band is no run-of-the-mill newcomer to the pub and club circuit.

The Backdrafts have a unique selling point – all band members are in the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service. And they come on stage in full fire kit.

"It helped us get bookings without sending in a tape when we were just starting out," says Scott Field, The Backdrafts' drummer and one of three band members based at Dereham fire station.

"We take the helmets and the tunics off soon after we come on and play in Backdrafts teeshirts," he adds. "We often open the set with the Deep Purple classic *Smoke On The Water*."

Safety message

The Backdrafts were second on the bill at the Norfolk Firefighter Charity Ball, where the freshly composed *Smoke Detector Blues* was performed for the first time, in front of 150 smartly dressed guests.

It's a bluesy number with the safety message not so much smuggled in as blatantly plucking at the heartstrings, in a tongue-in-cheek sort of way. It tells the sad story of a love-lorn smoke alarm who is feeling kinda lonesome and neglected. It includes the line "Baby, baby come push my button".

You don't have to know about Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service's "Test it Tuesday" safety awareness campaign to enjoy the vibe. But you'll no doubt get the message it

makes sense to do so – especially when the blokes belting out the blues are wearing fire retardant trousers.

The band is happy to promote fire safety during their set – which includes a mix of self-penned numbers and covers from the Beatles to Oasis and the Buzzcocks.

Smoke Detector Blues was recorded at a professional studio, the band now have a publisher for their safety anthem and the hope is that interest will ripple beyond the band's Norfolk fan base.

There is even talk of an animated film linked to the tune to promote fire safety. All royalties and profits will go to The Fire Fighters Charity. The song is already available on iTunes and the band can be tracked down on YouTube and Facebook.

The Backdrafts are a five piece.

Lead guitarist James Little and Duncan Barrow, on keyboards, percussion and some vocals are based at Dereham with Scott. All three are on red watch at the station, which is retained and wholetime.

Scott, James and Duncan are trained to take part in the area's urban search and rescue operations.

Retained firefighter

Bassist and vocalist Dave Pleszko is a retained firefighter at Thetford and manages an electrical store. He also played in a band with Scott a few years back.

Singer and rhythm guitarist Andy Heginbotham, also known as "Higgy", completes the team. He is a group manager at Norfolk Fire and Rescue headquarters and was keen to harness the musical talents of fellow firefighters to help spread the safety





THE BACKDRAFTS

Norfolk firefighters' band The Backdrafts will be playing at the Lord Mayor's Show in London



The Backdrafts: Left, James Little; right, Duncan Barrow; centre, top to bottom, Andy Heginbotham, Dave Pleszko and Scott Field. With the band is James' son Aidan who sometimes sings with the band

message as part of a set which keeps the punters – and the band – entertained.

The band have performed at fetes as well as in pubs and clubs – and even on a blue light vehicle as part of the Lord Mayor's procession in Norwich – belting out six numbers in their fire kit on a human repeat loop.

Their next high-profile gig is in aid of the Lord Mayor's appeal – this time in the City of London. They have been booked to play in the Guildhall courtyard on October 13, after 4,000 motorcyclists complete a two and a half mile cavalcade. The Beat the Bounds event – which is big in motorcycle circles – will raise money for the Lord Mayor's appeal.

The booking came after Scott took part in the tunnel2towers 5k run in London this year in memory of US emergency workers who lost their lives in 9/11. It's all about networking, and Scott, who seized the moment, says: "We were offered a chance to perform – and of

course we grabbed it."

The band isn't in any way bankrolled by the fire authority and they play when they are off duty. But the firefighting spirit – camaraderie and being hard-wired to help save lives – informs their playing and songwriting.

Potential

"We enjoy playing and if there's potential to make a bit of money for the firefighters and their families through the safety anthem and get a safety message across that has to be good," says Scott.

As any firefighter knows, you don't want to be anywhere near a backdraft.

But maybe you should make an exception if you have the chance to catch up with this enterprising outfit – in full fire kit or just by clicking on the Catch The Safety anthem. Who knows, *Smoke Detector Blues* could even go viral.

● www.citybikers.co.uk/

● facebook.com/thebackdrafts

Prize quiz



A Nike+ Sportwatch GPS



HOW TO ENTER

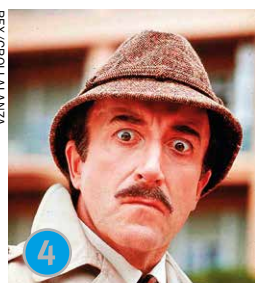
To win a Nike+ Sportwatch GPS powered by TomTom please send your answers by 31 October 2013 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (October 2013), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Please include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

1 'I don't believe it' was the catchphrase in which television programme?

- A – One Foot In The Grave
- B – Only Fools And Horses
- C – Last Of The Summer Wine
- D – The Vicar Of Dibley

2 Which silent movie actor created 'The Little Tramp' character?

- A – Buster Keaton
- B – Harold Lloyd
- C – Charlie Chaplin
- D – Rudolph Valentino



3 In which film does the line 'Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore' appear?

- A – THX 1138
- B – The Wizard of Oz
- C – Meet Me In St. Louis
- D – Superman

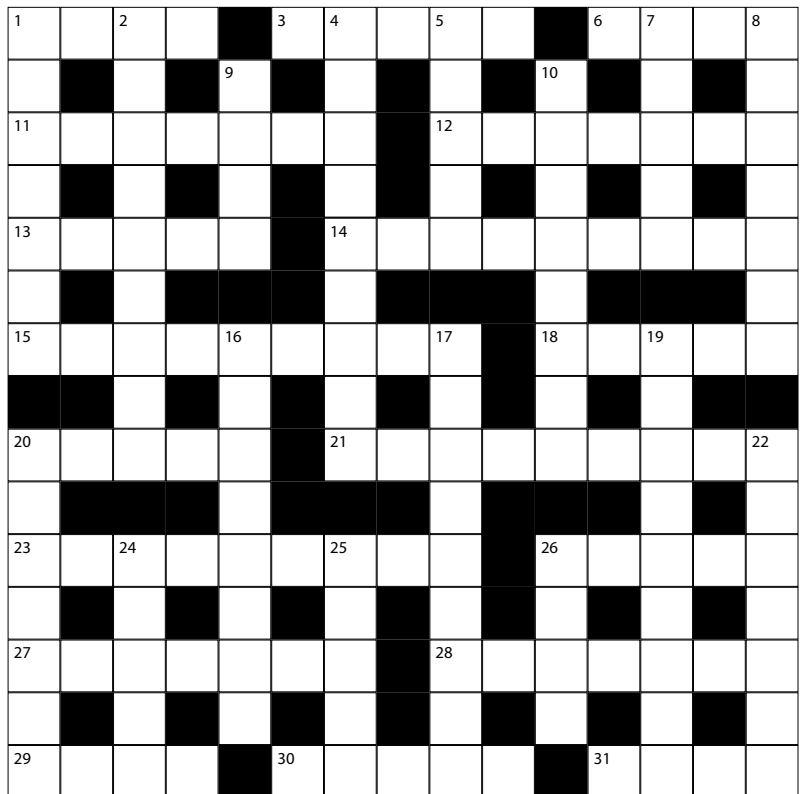


4 Name the central police character in the Pink Panther movies:

- A – Columbo
- B – Jack Regan
- C – Gene 'Fire Up The Quattro' Hunt
- D – Inspector Clouseau

5 Who played Maximus Decimus Meridius in Ridley Scott's film Gladiator?

- A – Joachim Phoenix
- B – Russell Crowe
- C – Oliver Reed
- D – Richard Harris



CROSSWORD

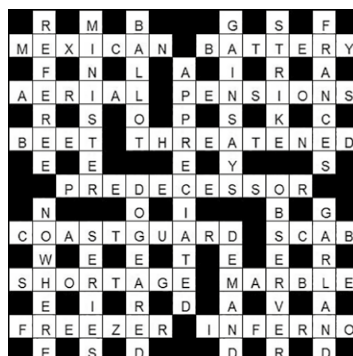
ACROSS

- 1** Overtake; ID card; mountain route (4)
- 3** Marriage? What every firefighter needs! (5)
- 6** Sea-going vessel (4)
- 11** Tending; breast-feeding; caring profession (7)
- 12** One of a number of things of the same type; British rapper (7)
- 13** Inactive; 'noble' gas; undynamic (5)
- 14** Target number in pontoon (6-3)
- 15** Bald peach? (9)
- 18** Greek island (5)
- 20** Get rid of; fight; unwanted stuff (5)
- 21** Moving staircase (9)
- 23** Now and then (9)
- 26** Begin; react to surprise (5)
- 27** Earth's hotline, equidistant from the poles (7)
- 28** Picture this Lennon song! (7)
- 29** Bolan's prehistoric band (1,3)
- 30** Rimless hat favoured by the French? (5)
- 31** Non-verbal mobile message (4)

DOWN

- 1** Small French hotel – every firefighter needs a decent one! (7)
- 2** Tram, across the pond (9)
- 4** After dark (5-4)
- 5** Fat (5)
- 7** Water-horse, in short (5)
- 8** Go before (7)
- 9** What one eats – when one eats less? (4)
- 10** Of the sea (8)
- 16** Cut off (8)
- 17** OTT (9)
- 19** Transport person for trial in another country (9)
- 20** One in the frame (7)
- 22** Cede ground, move back – to place of peace and quiet? (7)
- 24** Small rodent attached to computer (5)
- 25** Become as one (5)
- 26** Strike with open hand (4)

Last month's answers and winners



Crossword solution August/September

August/September quiz answers

- 1** D – 1
- 2** C – 2010
- 3** B – Ian Poulter
- 4** B – 347 runs
- 5** C – 1997

Winner of the July quiz

Paul Rudge, Birmingham

Station Cat

Chief fire officers look away now

Boris Johnson: 'It just popped out'

PICTURE: STEFANO CAGNONI



Four wheels good, three wheels better?

 You know these itty bitty teeny weeny fire engines? Like the London minis, now promoted from the Olympic park to the streets of the capital? Not much use if your home's on fire, but they make short work of a burning rubbish bin.

Well, John Ward of Spalding in Lincolnshire has gone one

it to raise money for the Fire Fighters Charity.

Don't tell your chief fire officer – he'll be ringing John to commission a fleet of them.

Struggling to finish

 Surrey's new £300,000 mobile incident command unit, bought two years ago and supposed to be operational in time for the Olympics, is nearly ready. Your Cat doesn't know if anyone's told Surrey County Council, which paid £75,000 for the unit and then spent an additional £225,000 upgrading it, that it won't make the opening ceremony.

And, even now, Surrey's FBU brigade chair Dave Herpe doubts if it's fit to use.

The shape of things to come

 We're told that the emergency services will be a lot better when everything's privatised, so how are privatised ambulances doing? Not too well, to judge by the performance of Medical Services Ltd in Hertfordshire.

Margaret Hencke needed an ambulance to take her from Watford General Hospital to Berkhamsted.

It took five hours to get there. The driver said he had only heard about the job half an hour before he arrived. Staff at the

hospital told her wearily that the company regularly leaves disabled people for four hours before it picks them up.

The Anglo-Danish company has a turnover of £29m, gross profits of £7m, and operating profits of £577,000. Managing director Joe Sheehan (salary £120,000 last year – a 20 per cent rise) apologised to Margaret for a "substandard service". Good thing his company doesn't put out fires. Yet.

Look before you leap

 G4S, on the other hand, is already trying to make a killing out of firefighting.

It's advertised for retained firefighters. Anyone thinking of applying might want to look at the Press Association's recent report that G4S is "selling shares and businesses in a bid to slash debt and stave off a ratings downgrade ... selling new shares worth around £350m at last night's prices, plus offloading businesses for a total £250m".

PA reports that G4S has "said it will also restructure under plans to reduce a debt mountain worth almost £2bn at the end of June".

Is Totteridge the end of the line?

 The independent councillor for Totteridge in Barnet must be getting near the end of the line.

Expelled from the Conservative Party after assaulting and insulting local residents who had the nerve to

disagree with him, he stayed on as an independent, and hopes to try to hold onto his seat at the next election. Latest news is that his appeal against being censored by the council was turned down.

"The Tories are scared witless of what I might do because I know where the bodies are buried," he told his local paper.

He seems to want to do as much damage to his old party as he can, presumably in the hope of hanging onto his Totteridge seat.

Who is this councillor? Why, none other than Brian Coleman, once Boris Johnson's chum and chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority. The one who used to sneer at firefighters.

So it's Brian Coleman against Boris Johnson's Tories. What a shame someone has to win.

A glimpse of the real Boris

 Talking of Boris Johnson, he's looking and sounding more like Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School every day. Labour's Andrew Dismore recently asked: "How can cutting fire stations, cutting firefighters be an improvement in fire cover?" Johnson replied: "Because we're improving fire cover." A few seconds later Dismore said: "You've lied to the people of London." Johnson replied: "Oh, get stuffed." Seconds later he apologised: "It just popped out."

Next week, Johnson steals Dismore's tuck and calls Labour members "rotters and cads".

GEORGE ROBINSON



better. The self-taught engineer was inspired to convert his Reliant Robin into the world's smallest fire engine by the fire chiefs' drive towards the smallest and cheapest.

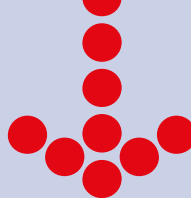
"With all these cuts to the fire service I wondered how small you could go and there isn't much smaller than a Reliant Robin, unless you go down to a bike," he said.

It took him four months and a few hundred pounds, but now the three-wheeler has six water cannons, an 18-foot ladder, a bell, red and blue lights, fire extinguishers and a 50-litre water tank. It can hurtle through the streets at fully 60mph.

John often takes the fire engine out for a spin and uses



25-year badges



John Hales (l), Marine station, Cleveland, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Peter Rodgers



Alan Woods (r), now retired, Grays, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from regional treasurer Del Godfrey-Shaw



Martin Aldred (c, l), Stockhill, Nottingham, receives his 25-year badge from region 6 EC member Dave Limer



Phil Collins (r), Grays, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from regional treasurer Del Godfrey-Shaw



Nick Mayes (r), Brentwood, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from general secretary Matt Wrack



Tony Brown (r), Grays, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from regional treasurer Del Godfrey-Shaw



Andy Stammers (l), Basildon, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from area rep Riccardo LaTorre



Ashley Drage (l), Grays, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Mick Weald



Bob Wright (r), Grays, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Richie Maddams



Gary Richards (l), blue watch, Carlton, Nottingham, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Dave Sheard



Colin Edwards (r), Grays, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Richie Maddams



Dave Hart (l) Paisley, Strathclyde, receives his 25-year badge from brigade vice chair Billy Coats



Chris Luckett (r), Plymstock, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Andy Gould



Jim Graham (r), Grays, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Richie Maddams

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Change of address or next of kin

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

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

(England, Wales and N. Ireland)

0800 089 1331

(Scotland)

The line provides advice for personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues. For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

T THOMPSONS
SOLICITORS

Please send prints or digital files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk. Please include full details for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.