

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE MATTERS

A PARLIAMENTARY BULLETIN FOR MPS FROM THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION | OCTOBER 2021

FIREFIGHTER NUMBERS CUT IN THE MIDDLE OF A PANDEMIC



There are too few firefighters to guarantee resilience after the COVID pandemic and more than a decade of austerity according to new figures obtained by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU).

One-in-five firefighter jobs (20%) across the UK have been cut since 2010. This has had a huge impact on the resilience of the fire and rescue service. Fewer firefighters mean slower response times, fewer home visits, fewer inspections – all hitting our communities.

On top of this, firefighters were integral in aiding our response to the pandemic in the past year; through a collective agreement firefighters took on additional duties extra to their statutory responsibilities, by driving ambulances, delivering PPE and moving the deceased. Despite this extra effort by firefighters, 200 firefighter posts have been cut in the last year alone.

MORE THAN A DECADE OF AUSTERITY HAS AN IMPACT

Since 2010, more than 8,000 wholetime firefighters have been cut, while 3,000 retained firefighter posts have gone. Moreover, one in four control staff, who take the emergency calls and mobilise fire crews, have been lost.

Every part of the UK has felt the effects of austerity – metropolitan, combined and county services – in all parts of the UK and under all devolved administrations, though not to the same degree. England was the worst impacted of the four administrations, with almost 10,000 jobs cut, worst hit brigades being Buckinghamshire, Staffordshire and West Yorkshire.

DOUBLE COUNTING ON THE RISE

The FBU figures also reveal once again the scale of “wholetime-retained” contracts across the fire and rescue service. More than 4,000 firefighters have a wholetime (full-time) contract and then another retained (part-time) contract – either with the same brigade or with another service. This is an increase of nearly 10% on the previous year.

While “wholetime-retained” contracts have helped firefighters deal with devastating pay cuts over the last decade, for the service as a whole it means they may be counted as two jobs. This double counting means that the numbers actually employed and available at any one time are significantly less than official figures might suggest.

CUTS IN THE LAST YEAR

Last year, there was a decrease of more than 50 frontline firefighter jobs, despite fire and rescue services aiding the pandemic response. In Wales, a similar picture, with a 1% decline in firefighter posts. Furthermore, in Scotland more than 100 firefighter jobs have been lost compared to the previous year. While in Northern Ireland 12 wholetime jobs were cut despite a small increase in frontline jobs overall.

Some brigades’ wholetime numbers have been particularly hit hard in the last year, with 63 posts lost overall with fire and rescue services such as Berkshire, Cleveland, Cornwall, Dorset and Wiltshire and North Yorkshire being proportionally hardest hit.

Retained firefighters bore the brunt of cuts in the last year – almost 1% decline – levels fell in a number of brigades, notably Berkshire, Essex, Isle of Wight and Northumberland. Control jobs rose slightly, after many years of harsh cuts.

THESE FIGURES

These figures come from Freedom of Information requests made by the FBU, April-September 2021. These are provisional headcount figures on 31 March of each year. Despite multiple efforts to obtain the 2021 figures, Northamptonshire once again refused to provide figures as they declined to provide them in the previous year also.

Note: Northamptonshire have not provided 2021 figures and hence their 2020 figures have been held constant.

Firefighter jobs by brigade 2010-21 and 2020-21

Fire and rescue service	2010-21	2010-21 (%)	2020-21	2020-21 (%)	Wholetime-retained 2021
Scotland	-1,018	-13%	-101	-1%	465
Northern Ireland	-212	11%	9	1%	116
Mid and West Wales	-85	-7%	-38	-3%	81
North Wales	-168	-19%	-20	-3%	-
South Wales	-211	-13%	16	1%	195
Cleveland	-213	-34%	-16	-4%	28
Durham	-51	-9%	6	1%	57
Northumberland	-147	-34%	-17	-6%	26
Tyne and Wear	-309	-33%	-18	-3%	6
Humberside	-322	-31%	-13	-2%	84
North Yorkshire	-104	-13%	-7	-1%	74
South Yorkshire	-259	-28%	33	5%	51
West Yorkshire	-615	-36%	-8	-1%	76
Cheshire	-33	-4%	23	3%	98
Cumbria	-122	-17%	34	6%	51
Greater Manchester	-631	-32%	4	0%	6
Lancashire	-269	-20%	5	0%	113
Merseyside	-253	-21%	66	7%	281
North West Fire Control	58	N/A	5	9%	-
Derbyshire	-34	-4%	43	6%	59
Leicestershire	-220	-28%	-7	-1%	92
Lincolnshire	-100	-13%	33	5%	34
Northamptonshire	-95	-17%	-	0%	Not provided
Nottinghamshire	-292	-30%	4	1%	84
Hereford and Worcester	-75	-10%	19	3%	65
Shropshire	-50	-9%	3	1%	24
Staffordshire	-465	-50%	-1	0%	97
Warwickshire	-22	-5%	9	2%	47
West Midlands	-470	-24%	-6	0%	57
Bedfordshire	-41	-8%	-4	-1%	49
Cambridgeshire	-149	-21%	22	4%	67
Essex	-336	-24%	-114	-10%	100
Hertfordshire	-110	-13%	-9	-1%	83
Norfolk	-67	-8%	44	6%	124
Suffolk	-178	-23%	8	1%	78
London	-1,112	-18%	17	0%	217
Berkshire	-109	-19%	-30	-6%	24
Buckinghamshire	-268	-43%	1	0%	43
East Sussex	-112	-15%	-12	-2%	93
Hampshire	-280	-17%	-70	-5%	230
Isle of Wight	-61	-28%	-14	-8%	21
Kent	-443	-27%	-23	-2%	119
Oxfordshire	-61	-9%	17	3%	57
Surrey	-127	-17%	16	3%	42
West Sussex	-185	-22%	24	4%	103
Avon	-281	-29%	-4	-1%	45
Cornwall	-25	-4%	-37	-6%	57
Devon and Somerset	-551	-27%	-49	-3%	200
Dorset and Wiltshire	-287	-22%	-39	-4%	58
Gloucestershire	-110	-21%	11	3%	29
UK total	-11,680	-20%	-185	-0.4%	4,206