

Advisor

... Warren Simpson
on 'Lift and Climb'

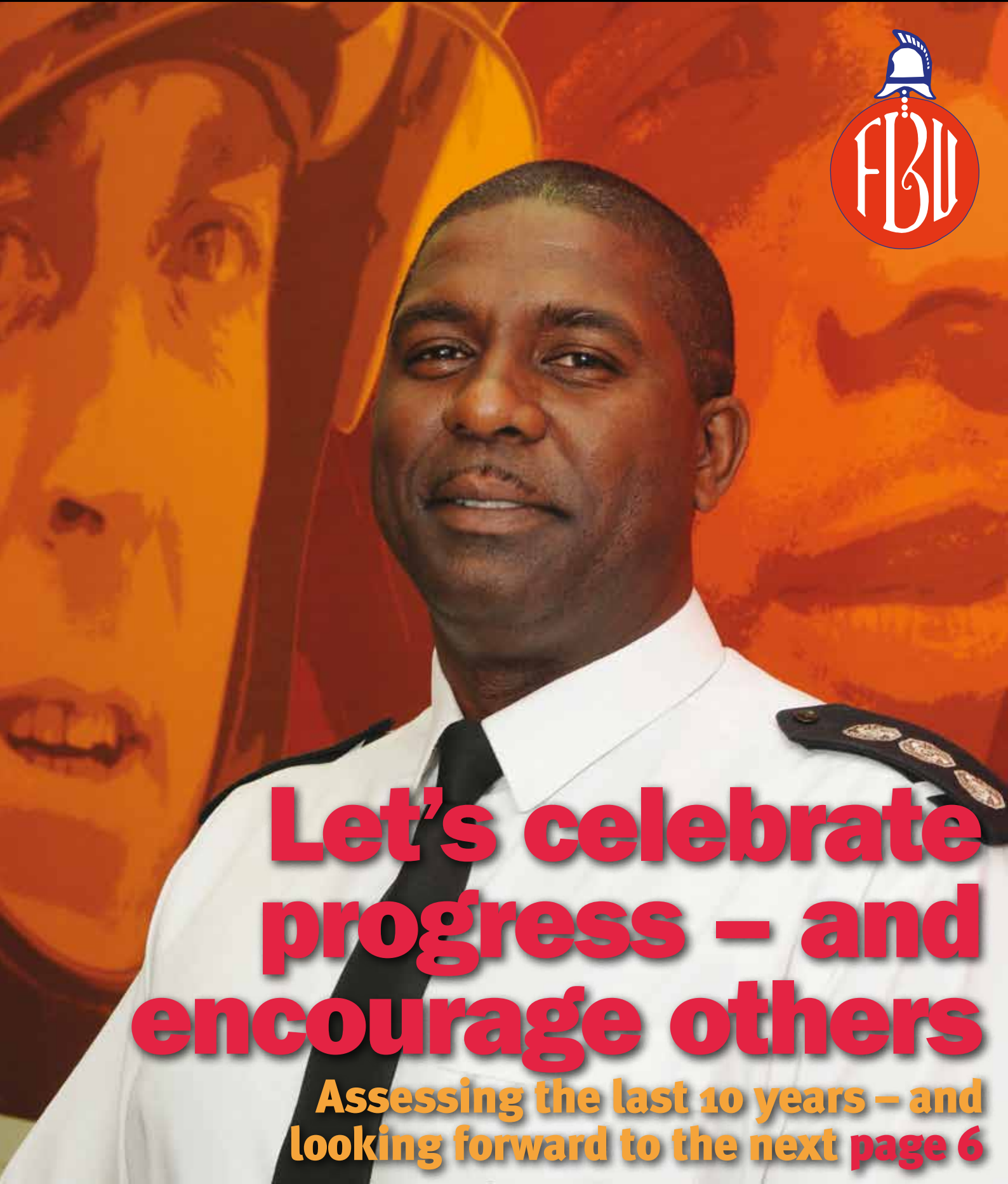
page 8

... Andre Fernandez
on the Nazi menace

page 2

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union Black and Ethnic Minority Members ... www.fbu.org.uk

Autumn 2009



**Let's celebrate
progress – and
encourage others**

**Assessing the last 10 years – and
looking forward to the next page 6**

Foreword

Greetings to you all.

I hope this season's *Advisor* finds you well. The theme of this edition is looking at our progression and development.

As black and ethnic minority employees of the British Fire Service we should never underestimate what we have achieved within our respective brigades and the opportunities that are now more available to us all.

This edition's main feature talks to some of those who have influenced change.

It reflects on where we were and where we want to be.

We also look at the impact of the far right, following the European elections and our next steps to diminish the threats, including those threats within the service and our union, an issue that B&EMM raised at FBU Annual Conference.

We also say goodbye to Wayne McColin, one of the original steering group members who has now formally retired. Throughout Wayne's career he has always sought to engage and assist the progression of B&EMM within the

We should never underestimate what we have achieved in our brigades

British fire service. He will be sorely missed. We wish him well in his retirement.

The school is nearly upon us. By the time this goes to press your application forms should have

been received and processed. The school theme will be continuing along the lines of development, be it personal or professional. We have an engaging and thought provoking agenda lined up, which will include inspirational guest speakers. Panel debates and evening entertainment, as usual, will not disappoint.

Finally, yet again we find ourselves in the terrible situation of losing another member of the FBU, Ewan Williamson from Toll Cross in Edinburgh. The thoughts of the B&EMM committee are with his family and colleagues at this very difficult time.

Peace and prosperity to you all.

Brian Amos



Fighting the Nazi menace

Stop the BNP





Love Music Hate Racism festival, Stoke-on-Trent, 30 May 2009
Below: Beverley Knight singing at the event

PICTURES: SIMON GREEN

The BNP's breakthrough in the European elections should be a wake-up call to all of us. Nick Griffin and Andrew Brons won seats in the North West and Yorkshire & Humberside respectively. The party polled 943,598 votes, securing them £250,000 worth of EU funding, which will undoubtedly be used to spread hate here in Britain.

Against the background of the collapse of financial capitalism, the implosion of New Labour and the MPs' expenses scandal, Nick Griffin (BNP leader) described the pre-election atmosphere as the 'Perfect Storm' for the BNP. During the election campaign and since the result there has been an escalation of racist violence, particularly towards the Muslim community and other non-whites in Britain.

The BNP spend enormous amounts of time, money and effort denying that they are a Nazi organisation in order to appear respectable in the political spotlight. But their racist, sexist homophobic and holocaust-denying past is not so easy to escape. Therefore it is important that one of the ways we fight back is to expose the BNP as the Nazi party from which they desperately seek to distance themselves.

We must organise the biggest possible movement against them in the form of the trade union movement, socialists and the groups in society singled out by the BNP for abuse. The fascist BNP must be hounded at every turn. Where they attempt to organise, we must be there to break up and disrupt their events.

The root causes behind the BNP's success must be challenged too – housing, education, unemployment.

The dual fight between the BNP's racism, sexism, homophobia, islamophobia, anti-semitism; and the social problems facing the ordinary working people of Britain must be tackled simultaneously.

The slogan 'British jobs for British workers' (first coined by Mosley and his BUF in the 1940s, then by the NF in the 70s, then by Gordon Brown at the 2007 New Labour conference and adopted by the BNP in 2009), must be rejected out of hand, including Gordon Brown's latest racist translation of 'local houses for local people'.

The 'British jobs for British workers' slogan and subsequent spin-offs from it have no solutions to the economic crisis and undermine any workers struggle for better pay and conditions as they pit worker against worker instead of worker against boss.

The terrifying breakthrough of the Nazi BNP and their continuing trend of success must now be a call to arms for all trade unionists.

→ For more details on the election results and what action you can take now visit: www.hopenothate.org or www.uaf.org.uk

Andre Fernandez, B&EMM Rep Region 12

Contents



4 Campaign news

Annual Conference
TUC Black Workers Conference



5 I'm a rep

Meet Colin Jarrett,
B&EMM rep, West Midlands

6 Ten years on



Sabrina Cohen-Hatton and others talk to *Advisor* about the big advances and the many challenges that remain

8 Advancement

Meet Warren Simpson, group manager, West Midlands

Cover picture Stefano Cagnoni

Published by the Fire Brigades Union, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE .
Tel: 020 8541 1765, fax: 020 8546 5187

Design by Edition Periodicals, 241 Ferndale Road, London SW9 8BJ.
www.editionperiodicals.co.uk

Printed by Blackmore Ltd, Longmead, Shaftesbury Dorset SP7 8PX

CAMPAIGN NEWS

In brief

◆ The Equality and Human Rights Commission has issued court proceedings against the BNP over its “whites only” membership rules. Welcoming the news, Unite Against Fascism said: “No other party bans black and Asian people from joining it. No other party is led by people with criminal convictions for racism. No other party burns golliwogs at its events – as the BNP did in disgusting scenes filmed by the News of the World at its recent rally in Derbyshire. Far from being democratic, it stands for an apartheid system where black people have fewer or no rights compared to those the party deems ‘white’. Despite this, the BNP receives public funds paid for by everyone, including black and Asian people.”

◆ The FBU’s annual conference unanimously supported B&EMM’s demand for action over brigades’ requests for disclosure of spent convictions during the recruitment process in apparent contravention of the law (resolution on the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Resolution 56). With an Executive Council qualification about the facts of the situation and ensuring UK-wide relevance, Conference called on the Union to obtain the correct legal position on exemptions from the legislation, to raise this issue at the first Practitioners Forum after conference and to issue a circular to brigade officials requesting information as to how many brigades are asking for spent convictions disclosure as part of their application process.



◆ According to the Commons Home Affairs Committee, racist discrimination still exists in the UK police 10 years after the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. Black people remain more likely to be stopped and searched, and a disproportionate number of black and Asian people also have their profiles held on the national DNA database. For more, visit: <http://tinyurl.com/l6r6xr>

Innocent BME people must be removed from DNA database

TUC BLACK WORKERS CONFERENCE

There is a disproportionate number of innocent black and ethnic minority people on the national DNA database and their DNA must be removed, the FBU told fellow delegates at the TUC Black Workers’ Conference, which swung unanimously behind the Union’s resolution on the matter.

Calling for the labour movement to join campaigners on the issue and to raise it with Justice Minister Jack Straw, the resolution stated that the problem was part of a wider issue of gross over-representation of BME people within the criminal justice system in the UK, whose “unfairness and injustice and its consequences continue to have a negative impact on BME communities”.

Garrett Brooks, who moved the resolution, was one of an eight-strong delegation to attend the conference, held on 24 to 26 April in Scarborough. Highlights of the conference included addresses by Dr Richard Stone, a member of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and Simon Woolley from

ROD LEON



The FBU delegation

Operation Black Vote. Other keynote speakers were TUC General Secretary, Brendan Barber and the TUC President, Sheila Bearcroft.

In all 20 resolutions and three emergency resolutions were moved and supported, with just one remitted. Resolution 2 – Agenda for Economic Recovery – was voted as the motion to take to Liverpool in September for the TUC Congress 2009.

The conference was attended by 232 delegates from 33 unions. The FBU delegation spoke in support of 11 resolutions and seconded two resolutions – one calling for the TUC Race Relations Committee to carry out a study of BME in leadership positions in trade unions which would identify any best practice initiatives (Black

Representation in Trade Union Structures, Resolution 5), the other calling for the committee to encourage trade union support for a research project on bullying and harassment experienced by black workers (Institutionalised Workplace Bullying and Harassment of Black Workers, resolution 13).

B&EMM EC member, Michael Nicholas, was elected for the seventh time onto the TUC Race Relations Committee. FBU member Richard Reid was also at the conference as a member of the National Role Model project REACH. It was Richard’s attendance as a delegate at the 2008 Black Workers’ conference that motivated him to get involved in this project.

→ For a full report visit: <http://tinyurl.com/mabafj>

Delegates rally behind B&EMM call for action on racist abuse

FBU ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Union is to instruct all of its members not to continue with home fire safety visits in residences where members are abused and to report any incidents through their incident recording mechanisms as well as informing the appropriate authorities, the FBU’s Annual Conference in May unanimously agreed.

The B&EMM resolution (Racial Abuse Whilst Carrying Out Duties Resolution 57) followed cases of FBU members who have suffered racist

abuse while carrying out routine home safety visits. The police have taken no action against perpetrators as the law says it is not a criminal offence under the Public Order Act to verbally abuse anyone in your own dwelling.

Delegates agreed that this form of abuse should be classified as a hate crime and should be prosecuted as such. The Union is to kick start a campaign for an amendment in the law so that perpetrators can be prosecuted, as well as raising the matter within the fire service, for example, at the Practitioners Forum, conference agreed.



The B&EMM delegation

Call for clarity on FBU's BNP policy

FBU ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Conference rallied behind B&EMM's call for clarification on its policy on what action will be taken if any FBU member is found to be a member of a far-right or extremist organisation whose policies are in direct opposition to the policies and rules of the FBU (Resolution 55 – British National Party Membership).

The resolution called for "all relevant Rule Changes to Annual Conference 2010 allowing for the expulsion from the FBU of any member who is also a member of the BNP and other similar fascist organisations" and demanded that the FBU "lobby the Government to ensure that the fire and rescue service can have the same rights as the police and prison services to dismiss members of extremist organisations from their employment."

The Executive Council qualified its support in terms of legal restrictions on trade unions' rights to set their own rules and rights to organise which would affect any rule changes.

Speaking for the EC, General Secretary Matt Wrack said that the Union needed to call on this and any future Government for the law to be changed to give trade unions the freedom to decide "who is not welcome in our trade union."

Referring to the leaking of the BNP membership list in November 2008 which exposed a minority of fire service employees who are members of that organisation, the resolution reiterated conference's "abhorrence" of that organisation's ideology and backed the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 and the general statutory duty placed on Fire and Rescue Authorities to promote good race relations.

The motion also called on the Union to "ensure that all FBU educational processes discuss the far right and the real threat they pose to democracy in the UK and Europe."

FBUTUBE
www.youtube.com/fbutube

See Dave Bazir and Samantha Samuels on the issues the section brought to the FBU's annual conference



COLIN JARRETT

B&EMM rep, West Midlands

Forward together

Colin Jarrett is based at Perry Barr station and is an active member of both B&EMM and the mainstream FBU. And it certainly makes for a busy schedule.

Representing all B&EMM members in a region is quite a responsibility. But Colin wears many other union hats. He is B&EMM National Committee vice-chair, fairness at work rep for both B&EMM and the brigade health and safety rep.

And, as a union borough rep in the West Midlands Fire Service, he's the first point of contact for firefighters at six stations who need help from the union. He has, for instance, offered support to Stage 2 trainees who found themselves facing a disciplinary hearing, fresh out of training school.

Colin, now acting white watch manager at Perry Barr, joined the WMFS in 1988 – a decade before B&EMM was recognised as an FBU section. He's been active within B&EMM for over nine years and says his involvement with B&EMM led him to get more involved in the FBU and take up other union posts. In addition to his B&EMM commitments, he is happy to support union members regardless of their race and gender.

He says all firefighters deserve fair treatment and believes passionately in equality – a take on life nurtured by his B&EMM activism. The "lift as we climb" message put across at last year's B&EMM conference chimes very much with Colin's worldview. "It's about making a stand, making a difference and those who do achieve things taking others with them," he says.

i'm a rep

Let's celebrate progress – and encourage others

A decade on from the Thematic Review, there have been big advances but many challenges remain, *Advisor* finds

Ten years ago, a shocking report landed on the desks of fire chiefs and ministers. But its findings didn't come as much of a surprise to black and ethnic minority staff, or women or gay and lesbian members. The Thematic Review into Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service put it bluntly: major change was needed to "eradicate an outmoded culture and embrace a real commitment to equality and fairness."

The statistics made grim reading. Just 513 uniformed staff out of over 50,000 were recorded as being from black and minority ethnic groups. Interviews with staff conjured a far from progressive work environment.

The Macpherson inquiry into Stephen Lawrence's death, published earlier in 1999, had put institutional racism on the map. And the FBU proved itself ahead of the equality agenda in the sector by that year officially recognising self-organised 'sections' for its black and ethnic minority, women and LGBT members.

A decade later, B&EMM members at annual school this October will be discussing development and progression against a changed backdrop. The FRS Equality and Diversity strategy – agreed by the Government, Employers and the Union – was launched last year and the Department for Communities and Local Government has announced tough targets aimed at making brigades reflect the communities they serve. By 2013, the percentage of ethnic minority staff should mirror the local population. Some fire authorities will "stretch" this target further, aiming to recruit between 2 and 5 per cent more ethnic minority staff than there are in the local population.

Sam Samuels, B&EMM secretary, welcomes "stretch targets". But once recruited, BME staff shouldn't be left



Sabrina Cohen-Hatton: rebrand the role of the firefighter

to languish. "People are achieving and progressing through the service and that should be celebrated. It's important for others to see that it's possible. Committees have been talking about the need for recruitment, retention and promotion for a long time, but the emphasis always seems to be on recruitment." Promotion, though important, isn't everything, Samatha argues. "We have members who are councillors, magistrates or very involved in the trade union, some as both branch and fairness at work reps. Let's celebrate those who are progressing at work, in the community and in the trade union movement. They have a lot to offer and can encourage others".

Les Bowman is now manager at Kingsland fire station in Hackney and

is well known to B&EMM activists for encouraging others. Earlier this summer to his "complete surprise", he was awarded the Queen's Fire Service Medal in recognition of his service to Londoners. "Though it's obviously good to get the numbers in, it would be a wasted opportunity if we don't develop ourselves and move on to make effective changes as middle and senior managers," says Les.

He reckons that though there is still a way to go, the situation for London firefighters has come on "leaps and bounds" over the past decade. But many other FRSs have done very little, with B&EMM members "often having to remind Chief Officers and HR managers of their responsibilities" in promoting equality and diversity.

At first sight today's national figure for minority ethnic staff looks high – over five per cent of FRS staff are said to be from minority ethnic groups, with ethnic minorities making up 19 per cent of the English population. This will mark the baseline from which future progress can be charted. There has been a change in definition of minority ethnic to include "Other White" to reflect the arrival of people from Eastern Europe. When this category is stripped out, minority ethnic representation is 3.4 per cent and the total minority population 13.5 per cent. In Scotland BME staff stand at 0.6 per cent and in Wales 0.8 per cent. In all four nations, firefighters can choose not to disclose their ethnicity, so official figures are likely to underestimate BME levels.

South London firefighter Richard Reid is among a group of 20 black men helping to raise aspirations and attainment among young black men. Twenty men from a range of careers were selected to act as role models as part of the government's REACH programme. Richard, now on secondment, has already visited more than 25 schools, as well as prisons and young



London B&EMM firefighter Richard Reid (centre) is one of 20 people selected from 200 applicants to a new national role model programme (REACH) for black boys and young black men. He met then Communities Secretary Hazel Blears last December.



Les Bowman: Queen's Fire Service Medal



offending units. He's happy to "give something back" and passionate about brigades reflecting the communities they serve.

Michael Nicholas has represented B&EMM on the FBU executive since the section was formally recognised. He is also a Labour Councillor in Newham, South London, and encourages B&EMM members to get involved as branch or fairness at work

reps. "It's good to get involved rather than sitting back and whingeing." But he realises it can be harder for people in rural areas or outside big cities. "If you're the only black person on the station you can tend to keep your head down and get on with it – it can be quite a brave thing to put yourself forward as branch rep."

When it comes to getting involved, Mick doesn't just talk the talk – he helped organise a conference of black professionals in the London Fire Service to celebrate Barack Obama's election and learn lessons from his "Yes We Can" campaign.

Sabrina Cohen-Hatton is temporary station manager in community safety at South Wales headquarters and about to start a PhD in neuroscience part-time. Wales, where only 0.8 per cent of staff are recorded as BME, is low on role models. So, Sabrina suggests a "national rebranding of the role of the fire-fighter" to make the FRS more accessible to under-represented groups.

In London, it's been recognised that help is needed to redress imbalances in the workforce hierarchy. Targeted development programmes, aimed at getting more BME staff and women into management roles should help. As Pat Oakley, head of equalities at the London Fire Brigade put it: "We can't just wait for this to happen organically".

OUR CHALLENGE

What Shahid Malik, the Fire Minister says:

“Progress since the critical thematic review has been disappointingly slow and the Government and the service recognises this. However, the publication of the equality and diversity strategy last year, signalled the commitment of government and the service to increase the pace of change. That commitment was demonstrated by many authorities responding positively to the Government's challenge to set stretching targets for the recruitment of people from ethnic minorities.

The service offers a rewarding career and we need talented people from across our diverse communities to hear that message and feel that they can apply, as the service can only benefit from the skills they would bring to the job. Communities and Local Government is supporting the authorities in their efforts by developing a national campaign to change perceptions about the service as a career of choice for minority ethnic groups.

I have no doubt that the service has a strong desire and commitment to make real progress on these issues. Our challenge is to translate this desire and commitment in a way that gives confidence to people in our communities that we are serious about change.



WARREN SIMPSON GROUP MANAGER, WEST MIDLANDS

Warren Simpson will be well known to anyone who has ever attended B&EMM School – or taken an interest in learning and development. He was B&EMM lead on this during his time on the section's national committee. Last summer, he stepped down after seven years representing members in the West Midlands region (Region 7).

Warren is the highest ranking FBU member of Afro-British descent in the West Midlands, as a group manager. And as *Advisor* went to press, Warren was temporary Group Manager over two stations. But, for him, progression is not simply about rising through the ranks. He believes BME firefighters can achieve in many ways to enrich both their own lives and those of others.

Warren left school at 17 – in the midst of the last major recession in the early eighties, and applied to the fire service after a stint on government training schemes. He didn't get in first time around. "They said I was too small," says Warren, who stands six foot one inch tall. "I didn't have the right chest expansion, apparently". Undeterred, he applied again, got accepted and joined Fallings Park fire station, Wolverhampton, in 1985.

He stayed there for four years and qualified as a firefighter working alongside colleagues in a multi-racial team before moving to Walsall station. Both his station officers were supportive when he took a part time law degree at University while working shifts and completing his

statutory fire service exams. Then he hit a brick wall. "One year, my divisional commander said I couldn't get a temporary promotion without an assessment. And then he told me the following year that I couldn't get an assessment without a temporary promotion. It was a vicious circle. I became active within the Union and got that changed."

Warren's first real engagement with the FBU was through his colleague Stephen Martell, who was Region 7's first B&EMM rep. "Joining B&EMM was very important to my personal development. Second generation migrants, now British Citizens weren't really progressing within the organisation, and when they do it's important to encourage others to realise their own potential. This really came home to me when I went to the International Association of Black Professional Firefighters conference in Barbados in 2000, after the Thematic Review (see feature). The brigade and the union both sponsored a number of places, which was quite controversial".

What Warren learned in Barbados has influenced his world view. "It made me realise that the aspirations of many BME members can be too low, and that development doesn't have to be about progression within the uniformed side or the union – though it will be for some. "Those of us who can ... must" – and "Lifting as We Climb" are important ideas I took away from the conference, and tried and put into practice."

Personal

PROMOTIONS

- Pardeep Raw (West Mids) – Watch Manager
- Warren Simpson (West Mids) – Group Manager

CONGRATULATIONS

- Les Bowman (London) – QFSM
- FF Makeda Haines (London) – May 2009 nuptials
- Andrew Thomas on being selected to become a Justice of the Peace
- Michael Nicholas and partner Anna on the birth of son Luke Ezra

GET WELL SOON

- Emiel Aiken and Vinton Robinson (London)

CONDOLENCES

- Carole and Alan Brown (Kent) – sad passing of daughter Charlotte
- Leroy Phillpotts on the passing of his dear sister Sharon Grant
- Our dear friend Dawne Stephenson on the passing of her niece

If members have news of congrats and promotions don't be shy about it – please get in touch. Your progress is an inspiration to us all.

Contact B&EMM Executive Council member Michael Nicholas:
mickn@fbu.org.uk

DIARY DATES 2009

- 9–11 October
B&EMM School
- 21 October
FBU rally and lobby of Westminster parliament
- 1–6 Nov 2009
FBU National School

STRESSED AT HOME STRESSED AT WORK?

Ring the FBU free
confidential
stress and support
hotline

0800 783 4778

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

**T THOMPSONS
SOLICITORS**