

# Alert

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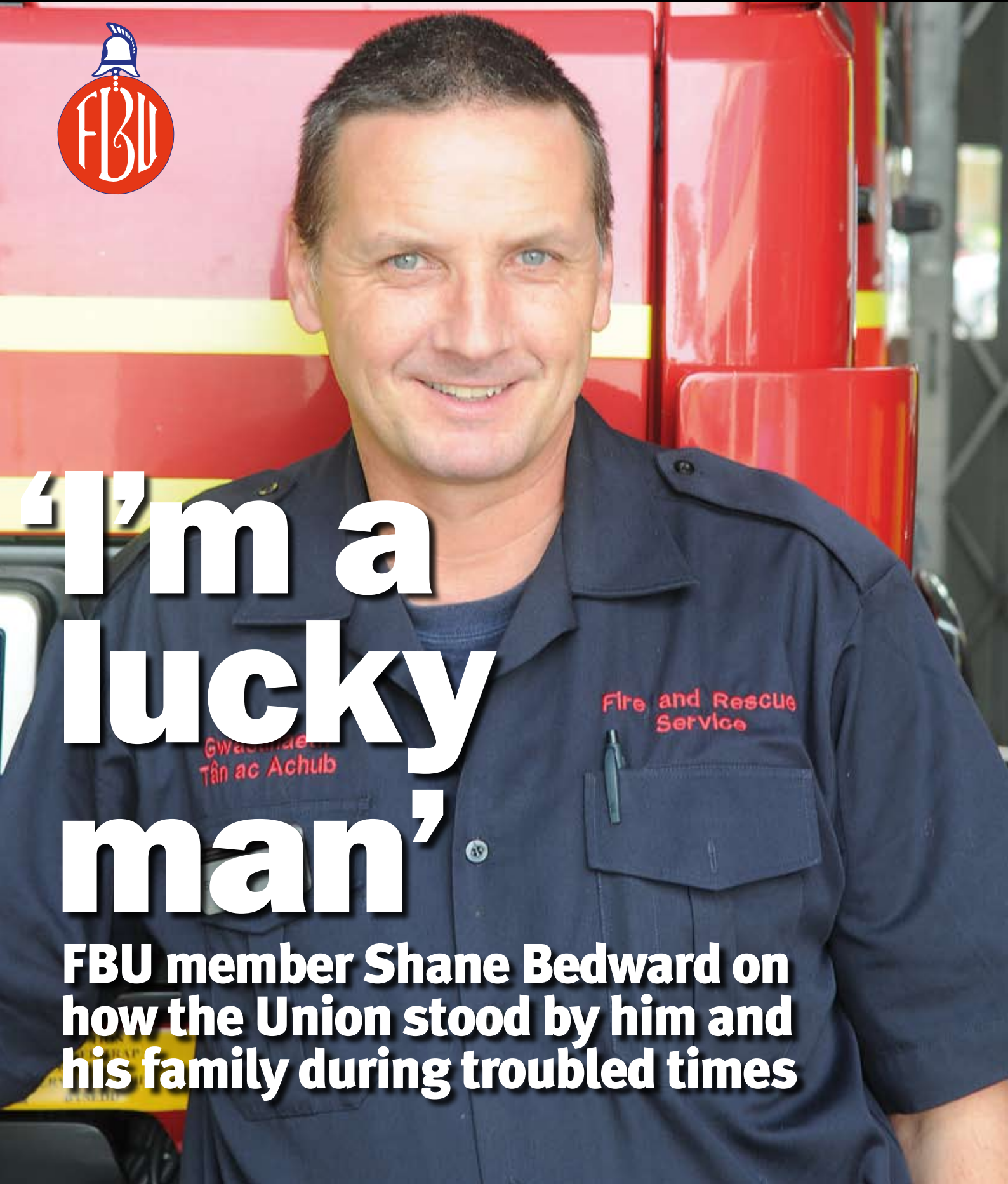
The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union Retained Members ❖ [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)

Autumn 2008



**'I'm a lucky man'**

**FBU member Shane Bedward on how the Union stood by him and his family during troubled times**



## Editorial



In March this year firefighters working the retained duty system (RDS) were finally accepted as being part-time workers. Over the next few months work will be ongoing to find a remedy to the issue of RDS firefighters being treated less favourably in relation to pension access and sick pay than our wholetime colleagues.

The part-time worker status will also require an evaluation of RDS conditions of service within the Grey Book and locally within brigades to ensure RDS firefighters are not being treated differently. If you want any further information on this subject you can contact your regional retained rep listed on the back of this magazine.

The number of FBU retained members is on the increase and this has opened up an opportunity for new officials in RDS branches within brigades, it is encouraging that other members can now see the benefits and strengths of being organised. It is vitally important that the communication link is maintained within the structure of the Union. This allows issues to be addressed at the appropriate level from the branch all the way to the Executive Council. As members, we all have a part to play and participation is beneficial and rewarding. If you want to be involved contacts are at the back of this magazine.

On our station visits around the country we were surprised to see that some brigades are using local interpretation on some elements of RDS pay.

- ◆ Are you aware of what your brigade is paying you, are you entitled to pay protection?
- ◆ Do you know how much CPD you are due?
- ◆ Is your retaining fee calculated as per Grey Book conditions?

If you need any information on how your pay should be calculated then we can help. All too often because of the complexities of RDS pay it can be difficult to understand exactly what should be in your pay packet.

On a final note, the National Retained Committee is angered at West Midlands fire authority for its abrupt and brutal treatment of the crew at Sedgley fire station.

After settling the unjust disciplinary against our members at the brigade's lone RDS station, senior managers made pledges to recruit additional RDS firefighters to bring numbers up to establishment. Instead, they have unveiled plans that will see all RDS jobs at the station go.

The committee will assist in whatever way it can in the campaign to maintain the emergency response at the station and, as part of this commitment, attended a meeting at the end of August of local officials, campaigners from the local community and the local MP.

**Tam Mitchell, Executive Council Member, Retained.**

# You and the FBU



## Meet the new members

Outwell fire station in Norfolk is now 100 per cent FBU after a number of firefighters working the retained duty system recently decided to join the Union.

Outwell, with ten RDS firefighters, is in the traditional heartland of the RFU, but in recent times more and more of their members in Norfolk and those who are not a member of any organisation have been choosing the FBU.

The Union now has health and safety reps in every one of the 33 retained stations in the brigade and members in



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more than 90 per cent of stations.

Watch manager Kenny Bright, an RFU member for 30 years, is one of the new recruits into the Union. He says: "The RFU today is not so strong. It had a chance to take a seat at the National Joint Council and didn't take it. It's no good having a dog that doesn't bark. I used to recommend to all new recruits to join the RFU – now I believe the best thing they can do is join the FBU."

In North Wales Abersoch fire station is also now 100 per cent FBU, following a recent visit by brigade officials. The station consists of a crew of 12 and had five FBU members before the visit.

Taking part in the visit were Chris Burns, brigade secretary-elect, Arwel Roberts, John Purser, and Pete Preston, National Retained Committee secretary. Questions on many issues, both local and national, were put by RDS firefighters at the station.

The benefits of member services such as those from Thompsons and the Accident and Injury Fund were highlighted and FBU new member packs were issued.

In recent years, North Wales has consistently increased its FBU membership especially among RDS members where all 44 stations have RDS watches and 36 of these are stand-alone RDS stations.

100 per cent – the  
Abersoch crew



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# CAMPAIGN NEWS



Protesters at Waltham fire station

## Two Humberside RDS stations saved

### CUTS FIGHTBACK

**V**ictory for the union on Humberside has seen over 40 jobs and two RDS stations saved. Huge support from the Humberside general public and total support from all the MPs in the area, including the veteran Labour MP for Grimsby Austin Mitchell and Shona McIsaac, Labour MP for Cleethorpes, forced Humberside Fire Authority to back down on its closure plans.

Region 4 Chair Ian Murray was delighted: "It's a victory for a hugely successful campaign," he said. "Everyone was behind us. We had eight petitions containing 17,213 signatures and an additional 23,132 letters of opposition and all the local

MPs were against the fire chief and lobbied the local councillors to save the stations."

The threatened stations were Waltham, Kirton in Lindsey, Hull's city centre fire station and the Sledmere station. Now, Waltham and Kirton will remain open, saving over 40 jobs and Hull's city centre station will remain open while research into its viability is carried out with the probable outcome a move to a new site. Sledmere, with four RDS members, two of which have been reassigned, will close.

Region 4 retained rep Rick Arrand praised the work of the local members: "The time and effort put in by members, attending council meetings and such like, was unbelievable," he



said. "They worked morning to night. We had a well-reasoned argument for the need for the stations and the fire authority agreed with us."

Humberside fire chief, Frank Duffield, put a brave face on the authority's rejection of his closure proposals, which had taken three and a half years to formulate. he said: "while i realise this has been a difficult period, the fire authority decision to support some of the proposals will enable the service to improve in a number of key areas."

The FBU won massive public support for its stance against closures

## Union warns against using electronic

### AVAILABILITY SYSTEMS

**F**ire services across the country that try to use the latest electronic availability systems such as Rappel to calculate RDS pay entitlement have been warned to expect strong opposition from the Union if they attempt to use these tools for monitoring an individual's availability.

The computer systems which record what cover firefighters are providing for the week ahead and then determine what resources can be

turned out are being seen by some fire services as a short cut to calculating eligibility to retaining fee payments.

Pete Preston, Secretary to the FBU's National Retained Committee, said the Union did not have a problem with the system itself when it was used for its intended purpose.

"Some fire services are intending to use the information to calculate part or full entitlement to retained fees. But this is no way to do it."

This is recognised, for example, by Norfolk Fire Service. The brigade's

human resources manager conceded in discussions with Pete Preston that the Rappel system could only provide them with a picture of what resources were available and could not be used to calculate eligibility to retaining fees.

Rappel is a system for mobilising appliances. Such systems – some of which are now being piloted – collate and manage the availability of RDS personnel as well as allowing

| Your Fire Station |      | 00 | 01 | 02 | 03 | 04 | 05 | 06 | 07 | 08 | 09 | WE |
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| Saturday          | DVR  | 06 | 06 | 06 | 06 | 06 | 06 | 06 | 06 | 06 | 06 | 04 |
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| Monday            | DVR  | 06 | 06 | 06 | 06 | 06 | 06 | 06 | 06 | 06 | 06 | 04 |
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# Participation is the key

## RETAINED AGMs

**R**etained firefighters up and down the country were gearing up to attend FBU regional annual general meetings (AGMs) to debate and pass resolutions on issues relating to their pay and working conditions, as Alerter went to press.

Every branch of RDS firefighters can elect a delegate to go to its regional AGM to raise matters of importance to them.

The regional AGM then selects three resolutions agreed by attending branch delegates to send to a national retained AGM in November, along with a delegate.

The national AGM in turn selects three resolutions that, subject to them complying with the Union's rules, are debated and put to the vote at the FBU's national annual conference.

A regional AGM is a "perfect forum for bringing us all together as a group," says Noel Jordan, retained rep for Northern Ireland (FBU Region 2).

"It gets the regional officials together and enables us to discuss the issues that are key to retained firefighters. It crystallises ideas that are important to the retained, as we get as many branches together in one room as possible to share information."

Northern Ireland retained members' AGM last year, held in August in Cookstown, saw an excellent turn out, with all five regional officials present plus Noel's



Some issues raised by retained firefighters at regional AGMs find their way to Annual Conference

colleagues on the National Retained Committee – Pete Preston (Secretary) and Rick Arrand (rep for Yorkshire & Humberside, FBU Region 4) – as well as Tam Mitchell, Executive Committee Member for retained firefighters.

The expectation is that a high turn out will be repeated at this year's Northern Ireland Retained AGM in October. Says Noel: "Participation is key. The decisions and direction of the Union are shaped and influenced by the acts and omissions of the membership."

## Briefing



**BILL LIGGINS**

Hertfordshire retained rep

### Best practice

I am quite often told in meetings with management that "It is being used in ..." "So and so brigade do it like that ...". But do they and is it successful. It seems strange in this day and age that we don't share more information with each other. If some method, procedure, piece of equipment, or technique is working well in another brigade we should all be able to find out about it. But more importantly to prevent wasting time and money we need to know about the failures.

A revised procedure for achieving competency in the retained duty system using the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) was proposed recently. It was suggested that this method was in use in Suffolk. But, on investigation, it was found that Suffolk had abandoned it as unworkable in the time scale of drill nights and there was no money to provide extra paid time.

Why had this not been publicised so that we did not waste our time considering it? Is it that we promote our successes and keep quiet about our failures?

I am trying to put together a spreadsheet of current practice out of which I hope, together with other FBU colleagues, to develop a template for good practice and then the promotion of that good practice throughout the brigades.

- ◆ **How long is a drill night?**
- ◆ **What duties are carried out on a drill night?**
- ◆ **Who measures availability? How?**
- ◆ **What is the definition of full rate?**

I can't tell you yet but I hope to be able to soon.

→ Email me at [Billyliggs@aol.com](mailto:Billyliggs@aol.com) with answers to these questions, including your name, station, brigade and membership no./address

## monitoring for pay

| WEEKLY AVAILABILITY |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
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| 07                  | 06 | 06 | 04 | 04 | 05 | 06 | 05 | 04 | 05 | 05 | 05 | 05 | 05 | 05 | 05 | 05 | 05 | 05 | 05 | 05 | 05 | 05 | 05 |
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RDS personnel to remotely log their own availability within the system.

As Pete Preston says: "Some stations just operate the alerters and hope people turn up. These systems take the doubt out of that situation. It can even mobilise the next-nearest pump."

Pete Preston is calling on fire services to allow the RDS to manage their own station availability – the current practice in many fire and rescue services.

"The benefits of the RDS managing their own availability means the brigade can save money and the RDS get some time off. So there are winners on both sides.

"It's not reasonable to expect someone to do 120 hours every week, especially if there is sufficient crew to allow people to take some time off-call if they wish to do so. Focussing on these systems as the answer to station availability will distract fire services from the real problem, which is usually staff shortages."



# 'I'm a lucky man'

Retained member Shane Bedward suffered a horrific accident while working as an LGV delivery driver. He tells *Alerter* just how crucial his FBU membership was

**R**etained firefighter Shane Bedward counts himself a lucky man. Despite having his neck broken when three quarters of a ton of sawdust was dumped on his head, the firefighter from Colwyn Bay has won compensation, with the help of the Union, to start his dream life in New Zealand.

While working as an LGV delivery driver, Shane suffered an accident that would have killed many of us. "I was delivering bales of sawdust to a farm in Wrexham. It was a cold, rainy October day. I remember shivering from the cold. The farmer unloaded the first two pallets, using a fork-lift tractor and then his son took over. One minute I was guiding him into a pallet, the next the contents of the pallet just dropped on my head," said Shane.

According to the driver's mate, the tractor jolted and jerked, throwing the load off the pallet and onto Shane. Eighteen tightly packed bales threw Shane to the ground and buried him.

"I was pushed back too quickly to brace myself and my head smacked against the road, putting a huge gash in it. The rest of the load then landed on my legs. I was screaming 'get the load off me'.

"There was a bit of panic. No one knew what to do. The driver's mate put something on my bleeding head and applied pressure. Luckily the ambulance was there in about six or seven minutes.

"They put me on a spinal board. It was terribly uncomfortable. Now when I put people on them I empathise with them and apologise. You start getting pressure points all over

your body that just add to the pain you're feeling anyway."

Forty-six year old Shane, who's married to Pam, 41, and has three kids, Joshua, 10, Kiri, 11 and step-son Shane, 22, had two very difficult years off work. Two years that saw him spiral into depression and ultimately get hooked on the morphine-based painkillers.

"I was on 16 tablets a day. At one point I got an infection and had to come off them. I was on a different planet. The wife couldn't leave me. It was terrible."

After the hospital put him back together it still took three more visits to diagnose the broken back. All the time Shane was in agony. Although he had some insurance and his mortgage was paid for a year, Pam had to give up some of her child-minding work to look after him.

Shane decided to use one of the so-called 'ambulance chasing' firms of solicitors to seek compensation against the farmer's son.

"I didn't realise I could use the union's legal representatives for something that didn't happen while on the job. Pete Preston (a firefighter at Colwyn Bay and National Retained Committee Secretary) told me the union could help. It was a huge relief as the accident solicitors were not much use.

"A lot of people don't realise you can still get union help even if the accident is outside the fire service. It was a massive relief," said Shane.

The union introduced Shane to Lisa Gormley at Thompsons, the FBU's solicitors. "From the start she was very good," says Shane. "She kept me informed at all stages. They said they could get me loss of earnings in both jobs.

**I didn't realise I could use the union's legal representatives for something that didn't happen while on the job**



New Zealand: Shane and his family have decided to make a new life there



The previous solicitors hadn't been very good and they had to sort out the work that had been done before.

"When Lisa started, the farmer's son was not accepting entire responsibility but she changed that."

Lisa, who is based in Thompsons' Liverpool office said it was clear there was liability, as Shane was buried under a ton of sawdust as a result of someone's negligence.

"The medical evidence was in a mess," she says. "So we got further medical evidence from a neurologist and an orthopaedic surgeon. We threatened court proceedings and they admitted 100 per cent liability and settled out of court."

"We don't give up and the FBU don't allow us to give up, while others would. We're delighted to have helped Shane. This case proves yet again the value of the FBU in seeking justice for its members."

Pete Preston said Shane's case illustrates just how much help and protection the union can provide for its members, even in situations that seem to be outside its remit.

"The benefits of being a member of the FBU can't be overstated," he says. "The legal support provided to Shane by our solicitors Thompsons was second to none. And his membership of the accident and injury fund allowed him to look after his family while he was incapacitated and couldn't work, even though it was a non-duty injury."

Shane also went on two weeks rehabilitation in the Lake District courtesy of the Fire Service National Benevolent Fund. "It's a rehab centre for fire service personnel where

**You never know what's going to happen in the future. People don't realise what the union can do for them in times of trouble**

you can get help for all sorts of things. It was very useful. The people up there were brilliant. They had physios, therapeutic pools and all sorts."

Shane returned to active duty two years to the day from the accident: "It was a great feeling. A lot of people in the brigade didn't think I'd be back. But I was determined to get back. Because I had the union and Thompsons behind me I felt that I could do it and I did. I never heard one word nor saw the farmer's son from the day of the accident."

Now, due to receiving compensation, Shane and his family have been able to take a family holiday in New Zealand, where he grew up. They have decided to make a new life in New Zealand, where his parents still live.

"I'm a lucky man," he says. "We've now got money behind us to go to New Zealand. I've always believed trade unions are a good thing. Joining up was one of the first things I did when I became a firefighter. You never know what's going to happen in the future. People don't realise what the union can do for them in times of trouble."



**THOMPSONS**  
S O L I C I T O R S

➡ If you are an RDS FBU member and have had an off-duty accident, call the FBU/Thompsons legal helpline on 0808 100 6061.



Sedgley  
firefighters  
training

## SEDGLEY, WEST MIDLANDS

### West Midlands region RDS rep Paul Brownhill says plans to close a retained station are despicable

The Union was battling to stop the permanent closure of Sedgley fire station as *Alerter* went to press. Only eight months after the FBU won the reinstatement of seven sacked members, the fire authority proposed removing the station's only appliance.

It is a disgraceful move. Promises to recruit additional RDS firefighters in order to bring numbers up to establishment – made after settling the unjust disciplinary against our members – have been broken and plans have been unveiled that will result in the loss of all existing firefighter jobs at the brigade's only retained station.

The Union says the proposals, announced mid-July, could put lives at risk and promised to pull out all the stops during the consultation period, which was due to end in mid-September.

Local MPs and councillors from the boroughs of Dudley, Tipton and

**It's madness to shut Sedgley. We fear FBU members at other stations and local people and businesses will pay the price**

Wolverhampton have swung behind the Union's campaign.

Paul Brownhill, West Midlands region retained rep and a retained firefighter at nearby Dudley station said the fire authority's treatment of FBU members at Sedgley was despicable.

"After the Union successfully fought off the unjust disciplinary action, the brigade pledged to boost numbers at Sedgley. Instead they are planning to sack everyone and effectively shut the

station down. But we will all fight tooth and nail to protect the local community's fire station. It is madness to shut the station down. Claims that we can maintain the same level of protection for local people are false.

"We believe that removing Sedgley's only fire engine will harm West Midlands Fire Service's ability to respond to all the emergency incidents we now attend. It will mean another has to be sent from Wolverhampton, Dudley, Tipton or Bilston – but only if enough fire engines are available from any of these stations.

"If they are busy in their own area – or assisting elsewhere – other fire engines will have to be sent from even further afield. Dudley, for example, only has one fire engine available at night time, when the most dangerous fires occur.

"Our members in stations neighbouring Sedgley could be left in the impossible position at 999 incidents of either waiting until a safe number of firefighters arrives and risking the public, or ignoring basic safety procedures and risking ourselves. We fear FBU members and local people and businesses will pay the price.

"Local council tax and business tax payers are paying more to West Midlands county council in local taxes. But they are going to get a much reduced fire service."

"We are calling on the support of the public to help us stop these plans."

The Union gave the fire authority a detailed submission of opposition to the proposals in August. An online petition – [www.savesedgleyfireservice.co.uk](http://www.savesedgleyfireservice.co.uk) – was established and local residents were being leafleted as *Alerter* went to press. The signatures were to be sent to the fire authority.

## FBU Contacts

### Executive Council Member

Tam Mitchell  
[thomas.mitchell@fbu.org.uk](mailto:thomas.mitchell@fbu.org.uk)  
07715 994200

### Secretary

Pete Preston  
[peter.preston@fbu.org.uk](mailto:peter.preston@fbu.org.uk)  
07971 086990

### Chair

Harry Cotter  
[nrcc@fbu.org.uk](mailto:nrcc@fbu.org.uk)  
07718 637251

### Region 1 Scotland

Contact Tam Mitchell

### Region 2 Northern Ireland

Noel Jordan  
[noel.jordan@fbu.org.uk](mailto:noel.jordan@fbu.org.uk)  
07775 633391

### Region 3 Cleveland, Durham and Northumberland, Tyne & Wear

Mick Jones  
[mick.jones@fbu.org.uk](mailto:mick.jones@fbu.org.uk)  
07734 871049

### Region 4 Yorkshire & Humberside

Rick Arrand  
[rick.arrand@fbu.org.uk](mailto:rick.arrand@fbu.org.uk)  
07970 010275

### Region 5 Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Isle of Man, Lancashire, Merseyside

Miles Parkinson  
[miles.parkinson@fbu.org.uk](mailto:miles.parkinson@fbu.org.uk)  
07834 465107

### Region 6 Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire

Contact Harry Cotter/Pete Preston

### Region 7 Hereford & Worcester, Shropshire Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands

Paul Brownhill  
[paul.brownhill@fbu.org.uk](mailto:paul.brownhill@fbu.org.uk)  
07824 491620

### Region 8 Wales

Lyndon Jones  
[lyndon.jones@fbu.org.uk](mailto:lyndon.jones@fbu.org.uk)  
07952 451983

### Region 9 Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk

Contact Pete Preston

### Region 11 Kent, Surrey, East & West Sussex

John Haizelden  
[john.haizelden@fbu.org.uk](mailto:john.haizelden@fbu.org.uk)  
07717 571726

### Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Oxfordshire

Bob Dewis  
[robert.dewis@fbu.org.uk](mailto:robert.dewis@fbu.org.uk)  
07966 754522

### Region 13 Avon, Cornwall, Devon & Somerset, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire

Leigh Redman  
[leigh.redman@fbu.org.uk](mailto:leigh.redman@fbu.org.uk)  
07971 484039