

Alert

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

Summer 2009



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Welcome to the summer 2009 edition of *Alerter*. This has been a busy time for the National Retained Committee and its officials, who are working on your behalf to progress issues nationally. The discussions in Europe between the European Commission and the European Parliament on the Working Time Directive have now concluded (See page 5). These talks, conducted through the Conciliation Committee (made up of representatives of both the Commission and the Parliament), resulted in no agreement on changes being reached. The current directive therefore remains in force and there will be no changes to current arrangements.

Discussions are ongoing around the part-time workers claim and a number of meetings have taken place to try and find a solution to the complex issue of access to the Firefighters Pension Scheme and sick pay. This work involves the Treasury and the National Joint Council. The Employment Tribunal agreed an extension to allow

The FBU recruitment and organising campaign is continuing to attract new members

both sides more time to conclude negotiations on these issues.

The FBU recruitment and organising campaign is continuing to attract new members and is looking to encourage members to be involved in the Union's structures which will allow

the opportunity to have your voice heard at all levels from branches right through to national level. It is important that members participate and the contact numbers for your regional RDS reps are on the back page of *Alerter*.

The FBU Annual Conference in Scarborough on May 13-15 saw a number of resolutions put forward in relation to retained issues including equal access to training, retaining fees, 120 hours availability and transferability.

This allows the membership through Conference to debate the resolutions and decide if they become FBU policy. I am pleased to inform you that all three National Retained Committee resolutions were agreed at conference this year, along with two strong resolutions from North Wales that focused on the retained membership.

Our thanks to all delegates and officials who supported them. In particular thanks to FBU North Wales for bringing its resolutions forward on retained issues and Chris Burns, brigade secretary, for speaking on them so well as well as to FBU Northern Ireland (Region 2) for all its support.

Tam Mitchell
Executive Council member, Retained

Meet the members

PICTURES: JOHN HARERIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Members matter





RDS members at Risca station in South Wales are among the 100 new FBU members in the brigade



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NEW RDS MEETING DATES!

FBU EAST ANGLIA (Region 9) is holding its Annual General Meeting (AGM) for retained members at 19.00 on 16-19 June at its office in Witham (28 Atlantic Square, Station Road, Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL). If you work the retained duty system in Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Essex, Norfolk or Suffolk please try to attend.

FBU EAST MIDLANDS (Region 6) is holding its AGM in 24 June 2009, 6.00 pm. If you are an RDS firefighter working for Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire or Northamptonshire brigades and wish to attend, contact regional secretary Dave Limer at dave.limer@fbu.org.uk

FBU WEST MIDLANDS (Region 7) is holding a quarterly meeting for retained members on July 4. Location to be confirmed. If you work for in Shropshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands, Hereford & Worcester or Staffordshire brigades please try to attend. Contact Region 7 Retained Rep Paul Brownhill for details.

→ Expenses for FBU meetings are covered by the Union. For more details contact your local FBU rep.

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The FBU proved its worth and its effectiveness by winning back thousands owed to RDS firefighters that their FRS did not want to pay

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CAMPAIGN NEWS

FBU ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Delegates call for substantial increase in retaining fees

FBU delegates gathered in the Yorkshire seaside town of Scarborough backed a motion presented by the National Retained Committee that called on the Executive Council to “use all necessary resources to negotiate and agree a substantial increase to the Annual Retaining Fee paid to Retained Duty System (RDS) employees.”

They agreed that “the current and inadequate Annual Retaining Fee can no longer be deemed acceptable as it fails to recognise the commitment of RDS firefighters, the disruption to their family life and the adverse effect on their primary employment, together with the increasingly high expectations from fire and rescue employers.”

Said Paul Brownhill from Hereford and Worcester: “We are told that establishment and retention levels of retained firefighters are hard to maintain. Well I don’t think you have to look too hard to see reasons why. Pay the firefighters appropriately and treat them as a valued member of the workforce and they will find that a happy workforce is a good workforce.”



National Retained Committee (Left to Right: Pete Preston, Secretary; Tam Mitchell, EC Member; Harry Cotter, Chair; James Dykes, East Anglia (Region 9) and first time at conference; Rick Arrand, Yorkshire and Humberside (Region 4) Paul Brownhill, West Midlands region (Region 7) Bob Dewis, Southern (Region 12)



‘UNITY WAS THE THING THAT IMPRESSED ME MOST’

James Dykes, an Essex firefighter and retained rep for FBU Eastern Region (9), was one of many new faces at FBU Annual Conference and was left impressed with the experience.

He said: “It was my first conference and I found it really interesting. It was good to see what other brigades have been doing for the last year and what they find important in their areas. It was also great to meet loads of other trade unionists. It was a good experience and I got a lot out of it.

The thing that impressed me most was the unity. It shows the employers that the Union isn’t dead, that we’re alive and kicking and strong, and going from strength to strength by having our members’ best interests at heart.”



Demand for equality on training and transfers

FBU conference supported a National Retained Committee motion demanding that “all personnel working the Retained Duty System (RDS) have equality of access to all assessment and development opportunities relevant to their role”.

The Executive Council is now committed to “develop and agree national guidance to facilitate local negotiations whereby RDS personnel have the same opportunities to apply for a transfer to internal vacancies that arise for their role, regardless of the type of duty system.”

Paul Brownhill from Hereford and Worcester told delegates: “We are all the same and employers should be treating us all the same. All retained firefighters should have the same access to the same training and same assessments as our wholetime colleagues.”

Union campaign will put RDS service in public eye

The Union is to launch a national campaign to highlight the value and contribution made by RDS firefighters and to raise the public profile and awareness of this essential element of many UK fire and rescue services, conference agreed.

The first step demanded by the resolution put by the National Retained Committee will be a survey of the day-to-day commitment given to the FRS by RDS members that includes “the sacrifices made by their families and primary employers”.

Presenting the motion, Rick Arrand from Humberside said: “We all remember the missed, re-heated and lonely meals, when the family has had to go on without us. Our social lives and outside interests all have to be sacrificed to give the commitment necessary to fulfil our contracts within the service. We want an in-depth professional campaign, which shows us for what we are.”

Unanimous backing to stamp out hours fiddle

Chris Burns, Brigade Secretary, North Wales, told delegates that some RDS members were working what was effectively fully retained cover for a fee that equated to less than the pay of a retained firefighter before the 2002 pay dispute.

This was because brigades employed them for slightly less than the 120 hours that would mean they had to pay the full fee, paying just 75 per cent of it instead.

“This practice must be stamped out,” he said. Delegates agreed unanimously and instructed the Union to negotiate removal from the Grey Book of the facility for fire and rescue authorities to reduce the retaining fee by up to 25%.

Working time directive talks fail leaving status quo

WORKING TIME DIRECTIVE

Discussions between the European Commission and the European Parliament over the Working Time Directive resulted in no agreement on proposed changes so the current directive remains in force and there will be no changes to existing arrangements.

There has been much propaganda peddled throughout the fire service, in Westminster and other devolved parliaments and in the media on the impact of amendments to the Working Time Directive agreed by the European Parliament last December.

Some organisations that operate on the fringe of the fire and rescue service have been lining up with an unlikely mixture of political bed-fellows – fire and rescue authorities; Westminster government departments, ministers and opposition MPs on the issue.

Many of those fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) are among the most hostile to firefighters of all roles and duty systems and many of these FRAs have made cuts. The ministers and Government departments have been responsible for insisting on cuts and holding back progressive measures in the fire and rescue service.

Conservative MPs have said that if their party forms the next Government they will insist on deeper cuts in public expenditure (which will include the Fire and Rescue Service) and push through savage attacks on public sector pension schemes

Assistant General Secretary Andy Dark said: “Rather than line up with these politicians or engage in scaremongering, the FBU has been working without ceremony through recognised structures, working with our lawyers and speaking to key players in the UK and Europe to ensure the interests of firefighters of all roles (ranks) and duty systems and the fire and rescue service itself.”

In short



◆ Neil Stafford, an RDS Member from Buckingham fire station received his 25-year badge from general secretary Matt Wrack at FBU annual conference in Scarborough. Neil has been a steward at conference for the past two years and has been appointed as deputy chief steward. Neil has been attending annual conference as an observer for many years and attends the annual meetings of the Retained Section of the FBU as well.

◆ The recent South Yorkshire and Humberside disputes centred primarily issues relating to wholetime firefighters. RDS members should remember, however, that an injury to one is an injury to all. Furthermore, given that so many RDS members have aspirations to transfer, clearly any loss of wholetime posts means fewer job opportunities for all. In light of significant work that, in particular, Humberside members and the brigade committee did to protect both wholetime and retained jobs the National Retained Committee has urged all RDS members to fully support their wholetime FBU colleagues at this time.

◆ The National Retained Committee is looking in a future issue to cover training Assessment and Development Centres (ADCs) and transferring across duty systems. We would welcome a quick email from any member who has gone through or attempted to go through this process and has either encountered obstacles or been blocked from doing so. Email: peter.preston@fbu.org.uk

MEET THE MEMBERS



Encouraging membership and activism in the FBU among retained firefighters has been a key priority of the Union and its National Retained Committee for the best part of two years. And thanks to the extra energy and resources put into this initiative more and more RDS firefighters are seeing the benefits of being part of the Union. They are also becoming more involved – attending branch meetings, joining in local FBU campaigns and stepping forward as reps.

It makes sense. No other organisation in the fire and rescue service in recent years has consistently fought for the interests of RDS firefighters over jobs, pensions and pay. No other organisation negotiates at a national level on pay and conditions. No other organisation has the human and financial resources to back up industrial, legal and public campaigns around the bread-and-butter issues that matter most to RDS firefighters. And the FBU has shown the willingness to put its money where its mouth is.

But this message was not getting across to all those who could benefit from membership. To assist in spreading the word, the union hired Dan Giblin, a graduate of the TUC's Organising

Academy and former activist in the PCS civil service union. In the past 18 months, Dan, together with local FBU officials, has visited stations in 17 brigades, from Northern Ireland and the far north of Scotland to England's South West.

In 95% of the brigades visited membership has increased. More than 25 have joined in Cornwall, many of them previously members of the Retained Firefighters Union. More than 50 new members were signed up after a single meeting in Highlands and Islands. And many



Sian Bell: 'I decided to join the FBU there and then'

members have stepped forward to be reps for the first time. One of the regions where Dan, working with local officials, has been busiest is East Anglia (FBU Region 9). The results are plain: over 80 new members recruited and several activists and new officials identified.

One of them is Adam Cornthwaite, retained rep for Cambridgeshire, who is celebrating after four retained branches in the brigade came over to the FBU last year. "I was a retained firefighter, but when I went to full-time, I joined the FBU," he says. "I soon found out all the benefits of membership. As well as the injury fund, *Firefighter* magazine, the website and the Union Learning Fund, FBU members have access to well-trained reps and officers to help them.

"Once I started talking about this to the retained members, they saw I was right and in one evening, 12 of them changed from the RFU to the FBU. It wasn't difficult to persuade them because, as it happens, many of them were thinking of changing anyway but no-one talked about it, so no-one wanted to be the first to break ranks.

"Once I mentioned it, it was easy to for

The FBU's new focus on organising uniformed personnel in the fire and rescue service is paying dividends with more and more retained firefighters seeing the benefits of membership



FBUTUBE
www.youtube.com/fbutube

For more on the campaign

Steve Clarke: 'If I was not an FBU member I would not have got the help and support I needed'



them to take the step because they could see the difference between joining the FBU where you got services for your money, and the RFU when you didn't."

Major successes

The Union has notched up some other recent major recruitment successes elsewhere.

Over the past year, membership among RDS firefighters in Wales has increased by 180, with 100 in the South Wales brigade alone, 50 in Mid and West and 30 in the North. Lyndon Jones, an RDS firefighter and FBU Wales regional retained rep, played an important role in this, catching up with trainees on the initial firefighter course.

Sian Bell works at Risca fire station in South Wales. She says that before meeting Lyndon on her initial firefighter course she had heard about the Union from firefighters at her station. "I was told that the Union had been a great support when help had been needed. When I heard Lyndon's presentation it cemented my decision and I decided to join the FBU there and then."

Risca colleague Steve Clarke is also a new to

the service and the Union. He says: "In a short space of time I have asked for help and advice. My FBU rep Lyndon supported me through both cases and gave me all the help I could ask for. I believe if I was not an FBU member I would not have got the help and support I needed. I believe retained firefighters cannot thank Lyndon enough."

Says Lyndon: "Our membership drive has worked extremely well over the last year. Our retained membership figures have risen by around 180 in Wales. This goes to show how important it is looking after RDS members, giving the support and fighting for what is right."

As part of the organising strategy, officials put aside one week of their diary between March and April 2009 to focus solely on recruiting and organising.

→ If you would like Dan or another representative of the FBU to visit your station or if you are not a member but would like to join, contact an FBU official for your fire and rescue service.

You can also make a request via the FBU website at www.fbu.org.uk, or email stationvisit@fbu.org.uk, or by using the contact details on the back page.

ACTIVIST ACADEMY

As well as encourage uniformed personnel to join the FBU and existing members to get more active in the Union and its campaigns, Dan Giblin (below) is also building the capacity of the Union to organise through pioneering training courses for activists, the first of which was piloted in Humberside.

The five-day TUC Activist Academy course, funded by the TUC and run in conjunction with East Riding College's Trade Union Studies Centre, was "very successful", says Dan. "It is the first ever for any union. Following the course, the Union has now launched an organising strategy for Humberside. Another first for the FBU."

One rep who attended was Rick Arrand, National Retained Committee member for Yorkshire and Humberside. "This course has made us realise how a well organised union can provide us with better communications, better educated officials, and better informed members," he says.

"When I had the activist academy course explained to me I immediately saw the benefits that it would bring in organising and recruiting members and activists, especially for RDS firefighters, and was only too happy to get involved".

General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "The Activist Academy has allowed us to provide new skills and additional support and resources to our reps; this obviously helped them, but also increases our capacity to address the union's organising challenges."



WARWICKSHIRE

FBU secures substantial payments for members

The Union has won an important victory for members in Warwickshire, securing a commitment from the brigade to stump up between £100,000 and £200,000 owed to retained firefighters.

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service discovered after an independent audit last year that it had been paying RDS employees less than their due for annual leave over a period of up to five years. In October 2008, the service wrote to retained firefighters saying it would pay back only one year. It said legal reasons prevented it from making full repayment.

An FBU team of local brigade officials Graham Beck, Mark Rattray and Marcus Giles, supported by regional officials Paul Brownhill and Chris Downes, immediately challenged this. In January, the Union assisted 100 FBU members to put in individual grievances. It also submitted a collective grievance. Both followed the brigade's procedures.

The brigade refused to budge so the FBU took advice from its lawyers, Thompsons, who said the brigade's stated position about legal constraints on payments was not correct.

With the help of Thompsons and the Union, 100 FBU members submitted employment tribunal forms. The brigade was now faced with the choice of paying up or risking a court appearance.

In May the brigade said it would now be paying the full amount owed on annual leave – five years, plus the one year it had already said it would pay. The individual payments, some as much as £1,000, should be made later this year to the 200 or so retained firefighters in the brigade.

"This was our money and we had every right to it," said Paul McMinn, an FBU member at Coleshill station. "The Union pulled its finger out and has succeeded in righting a wrong. I am very grateful to the FBU for progressing this issue on behalf of the retained firefighters."

Graham Beck, FBU retained rep for the county, said: "This is great news for retained firefighters in Warwickshire. This was money our members earned protecting their local communities. Even when senior



Paul McMinn from the day-crewed Coleshill station has been a member since joining the service in 2000: 'The Union has succeeded in righting a wrong. I am very grateful to the FBU for progressing this issue on behalf of retained firefighters.'

managers had discovered that they had failed to pay our members what was theirs by right, they offered them a paltry sum. We were determined to get all our members' money back and I am very pleased with the result."

Paul Brownhill, retained rep for the West Midlands region, said: "We followed all the proper procedures, but the brigade refused to see sense. Thank goodness we had access to Thompsons' unrivalled legal support and such a capable team of dedicated reps determined to see that justice was done."

"If there was any doubt, this case shows that the FBU is the only organisation in the fire service with the right know-how, resources and determination to deal with important issues such as pay and conditions."

Pete Preston, National Retained Secretary, said: "Warwickshire employers appeared set on defending the indefensible. The FBU team in the region, backed by our solicitors Thompsons, pulled out all the stops to counter such an outrageous attack on our members."

"They held employers to account and showed retained firefighters once again that they can count on the FBU's West Midlands region when the going gets tough. I would urge anybody who isn't yet a member of the FBU to join in order to ensure they get that same protection and support."

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