

Firefighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union

STOP THE CUTS

The national fightback begins

See p8

A TOXIC PFAS
SCANDAL
See p12

A YEAR IN
RED PLAQUES
See p14

ORGANISING YOUR
WORKPLACE
See p18

February-March 2026



www.fbu.org.uk

On 11 February, FBU officials from all over the UK gathered in Oxford, with two purposes. First, to show their solidarity with firefighters and FBU members in Oxfordshire, who are getting ready for industrial action over the loss of 42 firefighter posts, three stations and six appliances.

Second, to launch in earnest our nationwide anti-cuts campaign, Cuts Kill. Over the past decade and more, the fire and rescue service has lost one in five firefighter jobs, 17 control rooms and dozens of fire stations. That damage has not been repaired. Last summer, modelling by the NFCC showed a budget shortfall of more than £100m over the next three years — the equivalent of 2,300 firefighter posts. Our service remains underfunded, overstretched and under real threat.

In the coming months, the FBU will be gearing up and fighting back. That could very well mean strike action, well beyond Oxfordshire. This isn't a spectator sport: now is the time to organise on your station, and on page 18 we set out how.

Read page 4 for coverage of 11 February, and pages



Steve Wright

Cuts Kill

8–11 for testimony from FBU members.

PAY

We are now in the final run-up to next year's pay round, and we will look to get the best possible outcome for members. Even more importantly, the union has spent a significant amount of energy pushing employers to deliver a system of pay progression for firefighters – increased pay for length of service and skills – as well as to address various aspects of pay inequality.

In the coming months, the FBU will be gearing up and fighting back

As we report on page 6, the assistant general secretary and president have been touring the UK to brief officials on the progress made on our push for pay progression. This means that your brigade officials should now know more detail which they can discuss with you.

FLEUR LOMBARD

In this issue, we commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Fleur Lombard, the first woman firefighter to die in the line of duty in peacetime. She was just 21 years old when she was caught in a flashover at a fire in a supermarket in the Staple Hill area of Bristol.

We remember her, and all those who have lost their lives protecting the public. Read page 7, and pages 14 and 15, for more.

PFAS

If per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) don't make you angry, they should. On pages 12 and 13, Pippa Neill tells us the story of Angus Fire, whose factory has had an untold impact on the environment of Bentham in North Yorkshire. This is a national scandal waiting to break.

Anna Stec and her team at the University of Central Lancashire are expecting to release new research on PFAS and firefighter health in the coming months – watch this space.

JIM QUINN

Finally, we say an emotional goodbye to Jim Quinn, who is retiring just as this magazine goes to print.

Jim has served as the executive council member for Northern Ireland for 12 years, and has served as the FBU's national treasurer for almost a decade. He joined Northern Ireland Fire Brigade in January 1986. We thank him for his many years of service.



JESS HURD

Steve speaking at the Oxfordshire rally against cuts (see pages 4 and 8)



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Firefighter

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NEWS

PAY REFORM

Talks continue on fixing fire service pay



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30 YEARS ON

Fleur Lombard and the Blaina tragedy



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OXFORDSHIRE



Marching through Oxford city centre

JESS HURD

Standing against job losses in Oxfordshire

Fire Brigades Union officials travelled from across the UK to attend a meeting in Oxford this February, in a stand against proposed cuts to the service.

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service plans to close three fire stations, remove six fire engines, and cut at least 42 firefighter posts. Under these proposals, only five fire engines will be available at night to cover the whole of the county.

Oxfordshire members are moving towards industrial action in response to the threat to their jobs, launching a consultative ballot in February (see page 8).

Addressing the meeting, Steve Wright explained that “an injury to one is an injury

THE NATIONAL PICTURE

Over the past 14 years, the service has been hit by devastating cuts:

- Nearly 12,000 frontline firefighter roles have been lost
- 82 fire stations and 17 control rooms have closed
- More than 200 fire engines have been removed from the frontline in England
- Central government funding has been cut by 20% since 2010.

to all in the fire and rescue service. Cuts in Oxfordshire would not stop at the county boundary: they would damage national resilience, undermine cross-border

The latest three-year financial settlement has failed to increase the amount of central government funding available for the fire and rescue service.

In response, the union is launching “Cuts Kill”, a national campaign demanding that the government provide investment to prevent cuts and rebuild the service after the years of austerity.

arrangements, and set a dangerous precedent.

“This is a local battle here in Oxfordshire — but it is also part of a national fight. Across the UK, our members

are facing the same story... this is about getting on an industrial footing.”

Continuing, he committed the union to fighting cuts wherever they are threatened.

CITY CENTRE MARCH

“The FBU will not accept any further erosion of our fire and rescue service — not for our members, and not for the public we protect.”

The meeting was followed by a march through the centre of the city to the Oxfordshire County Council building, finishing at one of the impacted fire stations, Rewley Road.

FBU members are also organising against cuts in Dorset and Wiltshire, Buckinghamshire and Scotland (see pages 5 and 6).

Alarm in Scotland over £6m funding gap

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) has warned that inadequate funding from the Scottish government may lead to 500 firefighter posts being cut over the next three years.

The service says it is facing a £6 million funding gap in the next financial year and could receive flat cash settlements until 2029 under Scottish government spending proposals in the January 2026 Scottish Spending Review.

The Fire Brigades Union has responded to the Scottish government's latest budget, calling for urgent investment to rebuild following over a decade of cuts.

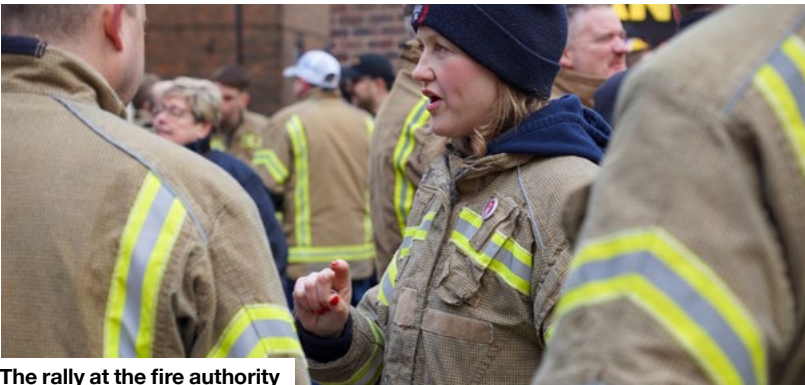
The SFRS has confirmed that final decisions on proposed changes to

more than 30 fire stations across Scotland will be made after the Scottish Parliament election.

John McKenzie, regional secretary for FBU Scotland said: "This budget is a wasted opportunity for both Scotland's firefighters and the communities they keep safe, as for the fourth year in a row the Scottish Government has failed to find the investment required to expand the role of the fire and rescue service in Scotland."

While FBU Scotland broadly welcomed an increase to the resource budget, it still fell £11 million short of what the service has stated is required to recruit new firefighters over the next three years.

DORSET



The rally at the fire authority

Fight to stop eight fire station closures

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service is threatening to close eight fire stations, which would see 96 firefighter posts lost to cuts. The eight under attack are: Bradford-on-Avon, Charmouth, Cranborne, Hamworthy, Maiden Newton, Mere, Ramsbury, and Wilton.

Eight fire engines and six specialist appliances would also be lost.

The FBU says that closing fire stations will leave communities across Dorset and Wiltshire without adequate protection from fires, flooding and other life-threatening emergencies.

Dorset and Wiltshire is already nearly 2 minutes slower than the national average in arriving to life-

and property-threatening fires, and rural residents will be hit hardest with firefighters having to travel greater distances to incidents.

Firefighters held a rally outside a meeting of the fire authority on 10 February, but the service has decided to push ahead with a thirteen week consultation.

Barney Hedgecock, a Dorset and Wiltshire FBU rep said: "The raging Holt Health wildfire this summer should have been a stark warning that Dorset and Wiltshire needs urgent investment to face increasing extreme weather events."

"The FBU demands that the fire authority reject these disastrous proposals. The council and fire service leaders must put public safety first and stop these cuts."



Sounding Off

Clean up our water

Only public ownership can clean up our water, writes We Own It campaigner Sophie Conquest

The year is still young and we've already seen a litany of water disasters: severe flooding in London; thousands unable to flush their toilets or shower in the South East of England; yet another increase in water bills. The average household in England will now pay £639 a year for a collapsing service.

We are being fleeced. Since privatisation in 1989, shareholders have taken over £85 billion out of the water sector. By taking money straight from billpayers to fill their own pockets, shareholders deprive the water sector of the investment it desperately needs.

These disasters, including the sewage crisis choking our rivers and seas, are the inevitable outcome of a system that puts profit before people and the environment. And as firefighters know all too well, polluted water is a health hazard.

90% of water in the world is publicly owned. Welsh Water is a not for profit, while water is publicly owned in Northern Ireland and Scotland. But polluted water knows no borders, and waterways across the UK are impacted by England's failed privatisation experiment.

Public ownership is fair and rational: money currently spent on shareholder payouts would instead be used to cut bills and invest in infrastructure.

That's why we're honing in on the debt-ridden Thames Water. Right now, the company's creditors are asking the water regulator to allow them to maximise profits by polluting outside of legal limits.

Ofwat and Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds must say no to this outrageous deal and take Thames Water into public ownership. If they do, this could be the beginning of the end for privatised water – and the first step to cleaning up our waterways everywhere.

■ Find out more at weownit.org.uk

Talks continue on fixing fire service pay



Assistant general secretary Ben Selby gives a regional briefing on pay talks

FBU negotiations on pay reform continue with the Labour government, National Fire Chiefs Council and local government employers around the table.

FBU assistant general secretary Ben Selby and FBU president Ian Murray travelled to all thirteen FBU regions across the UK over ten days in January, briefing regional officials on the pay talks.

The ongoing discussions are focused around demands for: fair pay

progression; an end to the Continued Professional Development postcode lottery; pay equality for retained firefighters and control staff; and investment in the fire and rescue service to make it happen.

In the 2025 pay settlement, employers committed to working with the FBU to fix the pay structure. The goal is to deliver pay reform by 1 July 2026.

■ See President's Dispatch on p22

VICTORIES

Campaign wins in Avon and Leicestershire

FBU members in two fire services – Avon and Leicestershire – have fought off cuts to services following a determined campaign.

Firefighters in Avon have been campaigning against cuts since the autumn, when Avon Fire and Rescue announced that it had a £2 million deficit for the 2026–27 financial year, which would have resulted in the loss of between 32 and 72 firefighter posts.

FBU members rallied, lobbied and warned that they would be willing to strike. Now, Avon's Chief Fire Officer has written to fire service employees to inform them that, as a result of lobbying and campaigning, the service has received an additional £3.5m in central government funding.

Meanwhile, firefighters in Leicestershire have won an additional £2 million of funding this year following an anti-cuts campaign and changes to their central funding calculation, allowing them to avert cuts.

Harry Brandt, FBU Leicestershire brigade secretary, said that "This fresh money from central government is a huge relief to firefighters in Leicestershire, who are already stretched to breaking point because of cuts implemented over the past decade or so. We are proud of the campaign we have run.

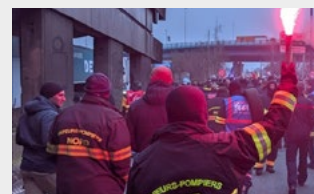
"We will stand in solidarity with residents and firefighters across the country as they prepare to fight a fresh round of austerity in the fire service."

In brief

BUCKS PETITION GROWS

A petition protesting plans to cut the fire and rescue service in Buckinghamshire has gained over 500 signatures.

Launched by the Fire Brigades Union, the petition calls for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to stop plans to remove 7 fire engines and close 2 fire stations in the county.



FIERY PROTEST IN FRANCE

Over 600 firefighters protested poor working conditions and lack of staff in Lille, France on 29 January, clashing with police as they stormed the service headquarters.

According to unions, firefighters are overworked and crewing levels are dangerously low.

LONDON CONTAMINANTS REPORT CRITICISED

The London Assembly fire committee released a report into fire contaminants in London this February, recognising the need for urgent action on firefighters' exposure to toxic fire contaminants.

However, these included recommendations for firefighters to make "positive lifestyle changes, including smoking cessation, physical fitness, diet, sleep hygiene, and alcohol awareness", which the FBU has criticised as offensive.



Relatives of Fleur Lombard attending her memorial

Wednesday 4 February marked thirty years since the tragic death of firefighter Fleur Lombard.

Fleur Lombard was aged 21 and worked for Avon Fire and Rescue Service when she was killed in a flashover while searching for persons reported at a fire in Leo's Supermarket, Bristol.

A Red Plaque unveiling ceremony was held marking the thirtieth year since her death, situated near the site of the fire in Staple Hill, with wreath laying and a minute's silence.

When Fleur joined the service in 1993, she was one of only eight women employed by her brigade, and was awarded the silver axe award as an outstanding recruit.

Hers was the first death of a female firefighter in peacetime Britain and prompted a number of changes in fire safety and firefighter PPE.

Campaigning led by the FBU National Women's Committee led to the



News Focus

Fleur Lombard and the Blaina tragedy, 30 years on

introduction of SOPHIE, the female test manikin, meaning that PPE could be properly tested for women.

The FBU demanded and secured women-fit PPE across all services.

However, the union has received reports that some

services no longer supply this, putting women at risk. The FBU has now written to all services demanding reassurances that proper PPE is issued to all firefighters.

KEVIN LANE AND STEPHEN GRIFFIN

On 1 February 1996, two firefighters lost their lives at a house fire in Blaina, South Wales. Thirty years on, the lessons learned are as important as ever.

On a Thursday morning at 6:03am the first of eight emergency calls were received at fire control, reporting a house fire in

Blaina. Firefighters Kevin Lane and Stephen Griffin entered and were able to successfully rescue five year old Daniel Harford from the blaze.

The two firefighters then re-entered the property, mistakenly believing another child was inside. They were caught in a deadly backdraught that engulfed the house in flames, and tragically both died as a result.

Findings from an FBU investigation into the tragedy have shaped training and procedures to this day.

An extensive research project, which also referenced government sponsored trials, concluded that a minimum of nine firefighters are needed to carry out operations safely at a fire like Blaina.

It was also found that breathing apparatus procedures were not followed during the incident. The union argued that "it is essential to avoid situations which could motivate or pressurise firefighters to act unsafely in the interests of saving life".

Thirty years on, the lessons learned are as important as ever

FIGHTING CUTS

Igniting the fight

A dispute in Oxfordshire is kicking off a national campaign against cuts. **FBU members** explain what's going on from a rally outside Oxfordshire County Council



Officials from FBU brigades across the UK travelled to Oxford, with firefighters moving towards industrial action to prevent cuts



back



SAVE LIVES



As members in Oxfordshire gear up for potential industrial action, services across the UK are at risk of – or are facing – similar cuts. But the FBU is mounting a determined fightback.

On February 11, FBU officials from every region travelled to Oxford to hear about the campaign and bring the demand for investment back to every region of the UK.

Chris Wycherley, executive council member for the Southern region:

■ “Five fire stations, six fire engines, at least 42 forced redundancies, unagreed dangerous 12-hour shifts. Only five guaranteed whole-time appliances at night. These are the cuts that Oxfordshire County Council and senior managers in Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service are trying to force through.

“Fire service managers and council leaders have their heads in the sand. FBU members are absolutely furious with these cuts, and they are willing to go down the route of industrial action.”

Mark Chapman, regional secretary for the Southern region:

■ “These proposals are going to hit the morale of Oxfordshire firefighters, which is already at rock bottom right now. The frontline has been side-lined for too long.

“If these cuts are imposed, we’re looking at changes to duty system, changes to homes, changes to the number of fire stations. It could force firefighters out of the service, and we refuse to accept that.”

Chris, firefighter at Rewley Road station:

■ “The plan to cut Rewley Road station and merge it with Kidlington fire station will impact on call firefighters.

Colleagues at my station and at Kidlington face losing their jobs.

“The merge will lead to only one fire engine available on a night shift, covering two station grounds in some of our busiest areas.”



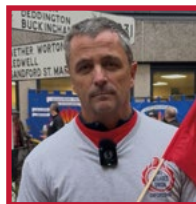
covering two station grounds in some of our busiest areas.”

Nick, watch manager Woodstock fire station:

■ “I’ve been in the brigade for 21

years now. I’m massively passionate about this job – I care deeply and I go the extra mile. If Woodstock Fire Station was to close, colleagues would lose their jobs.

“Years and years of training would just go out the window, and that would be a huge loss, not only for Woodstock, but for the surrounding areas, and the entirety of Oxford Fire and Rescue Service.”



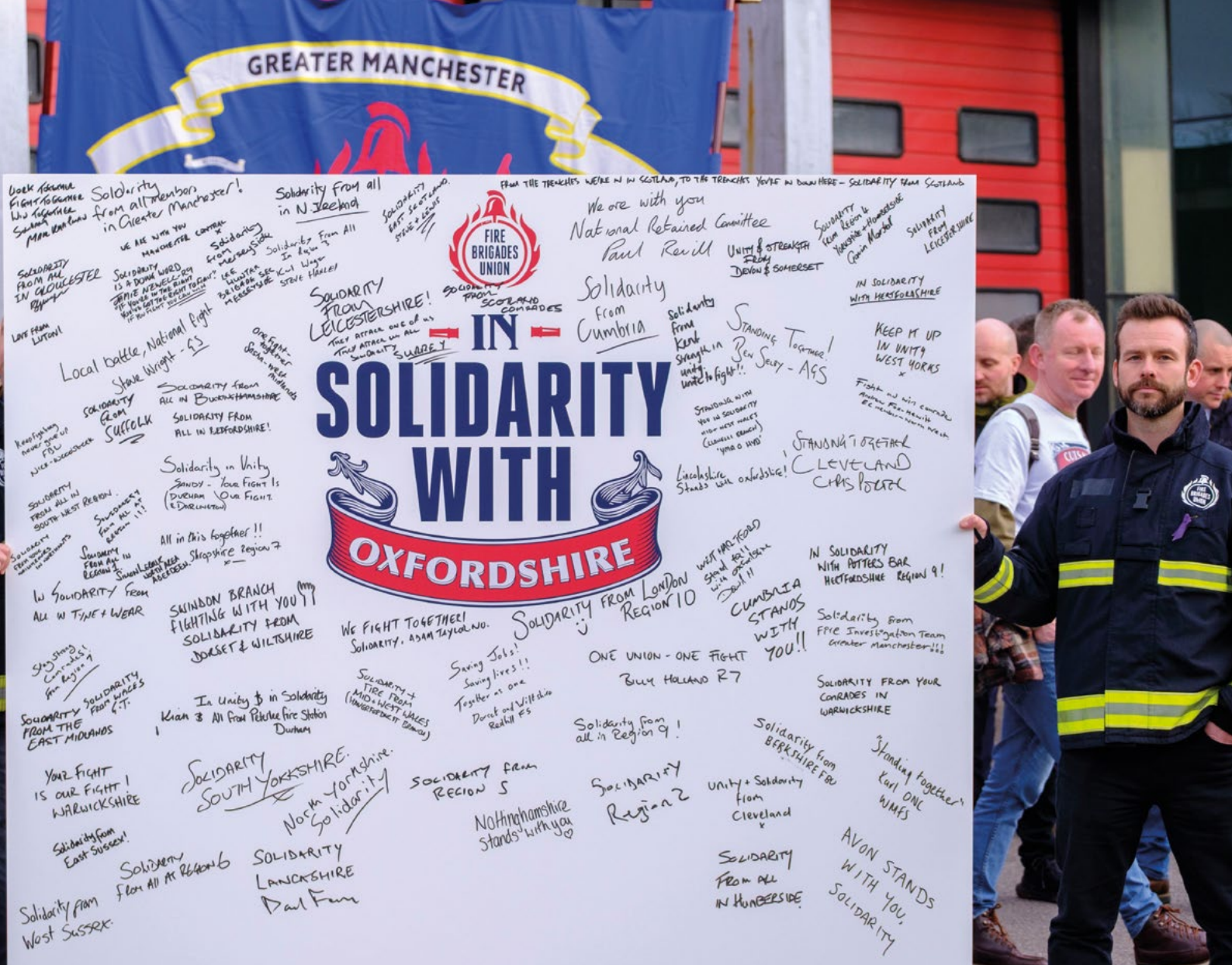
Barney, firefighter at Kidlington fire station:

■ “I got into this job about ten years ago. It was a dream job for me and I’m extremely proud to do it.

“But these plans make me question

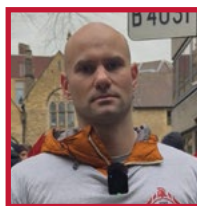


Reps gathered to hear plans to fight cuts nationwide



my future with the fire service, despite it being a job I love. These cuts will threaten our safety and public safety. But it's also the way we've been treated by management over these years. They make us feel undervalued and worthless.

"I don't want to be in an environment – which I care so much about – where there's such little respect for staff. They won't even talk to us about plans for the future and how they affect us."



Steve Wright, FBU general secretary:

■ "Response times in Oxfordshire are two minutes longer than the national average. Oxfordshire itself has lost over 100 firefighters over the last decade. It's dangerous levels that we're working at now."

"The message is clear: firefighters will oppose these cuts and are talking about industrial action. Oxfordshire members have the full support of the union behind them."

"These cuts don't end in Oxfordshire. We are seeing devastating cuts across regions, and every service is severely underfunded. We need to lobby all fire authority budget meetings across the UK. We must be there — with banners, placards and armed with the arguments."

"We are putting ministers, employers and fire authorities on notice. What we do now will shape the future of the fire and rescue service. And if we stand together – organised, determined and unafraid – we can win."

After 14 years of cuts to UK fire and rescue services, it's time to draw a line in the sand.

Join the fight by calling for investment and lobbying your local decision makers.



TAKE ACTION

Join the campaign and write to your MP



Firefighting foams containing PFAS chemicals have been used over decades in training and operations



A TOXIC SCAN

Pippa Neill, environmental journalist and news editor at ENDS Report, on her investigation into the Angus Fire Factory in Bentham, North Yorkshire

In 2024, in carrying out an investigation published in both the *ENDS Report*, a publication for UK environmental professionals, and the *Guardian*, I discovered that the small rural town of Bentham in North Yorkshire was polluted with what experts said was the highest level of PFAS pollution ever known to be recorded in the UK.

The town is home to Angus Fire, a factory that has historically produced PFAS-containing firefighting foam.

I found that Angus Fire had repeatedly breached its environmental permits, with the firm warned by the Environment Agency in 2023 that its permit could be suspended after the regulator found unpermitted discharges of PFAS to the environment.

DARK REVELATIONS

Angus Fire stopped testing and producing PFAS foams in Bentham back in 2022, and says it never made foams containing PFOS and only ever used trace amounts of PFOA. However, both chemicals have been found in extremely high quantities on

the site, and trying to find out why, and what impact this may be having on those living nearby and working at the site, has become the biggest job of my working life.

On the back of this investigation, Bentham Town Council requested that Angus Fire test for PFAS at various offsite locations in the town. This included some communal gardens that were owned by the factory and leased to local residents. The testing revealed that the soil in these gardens

was contaminated with elevated levels of PFAS, and as a result, residents were advised to thoroughly wash and peel any home-grown produce, clean their homes regularly of dust, and remove their shoes before entering their homes.

Angus Fire has since bought several homes on this street, citing “potential environmental concerns”.

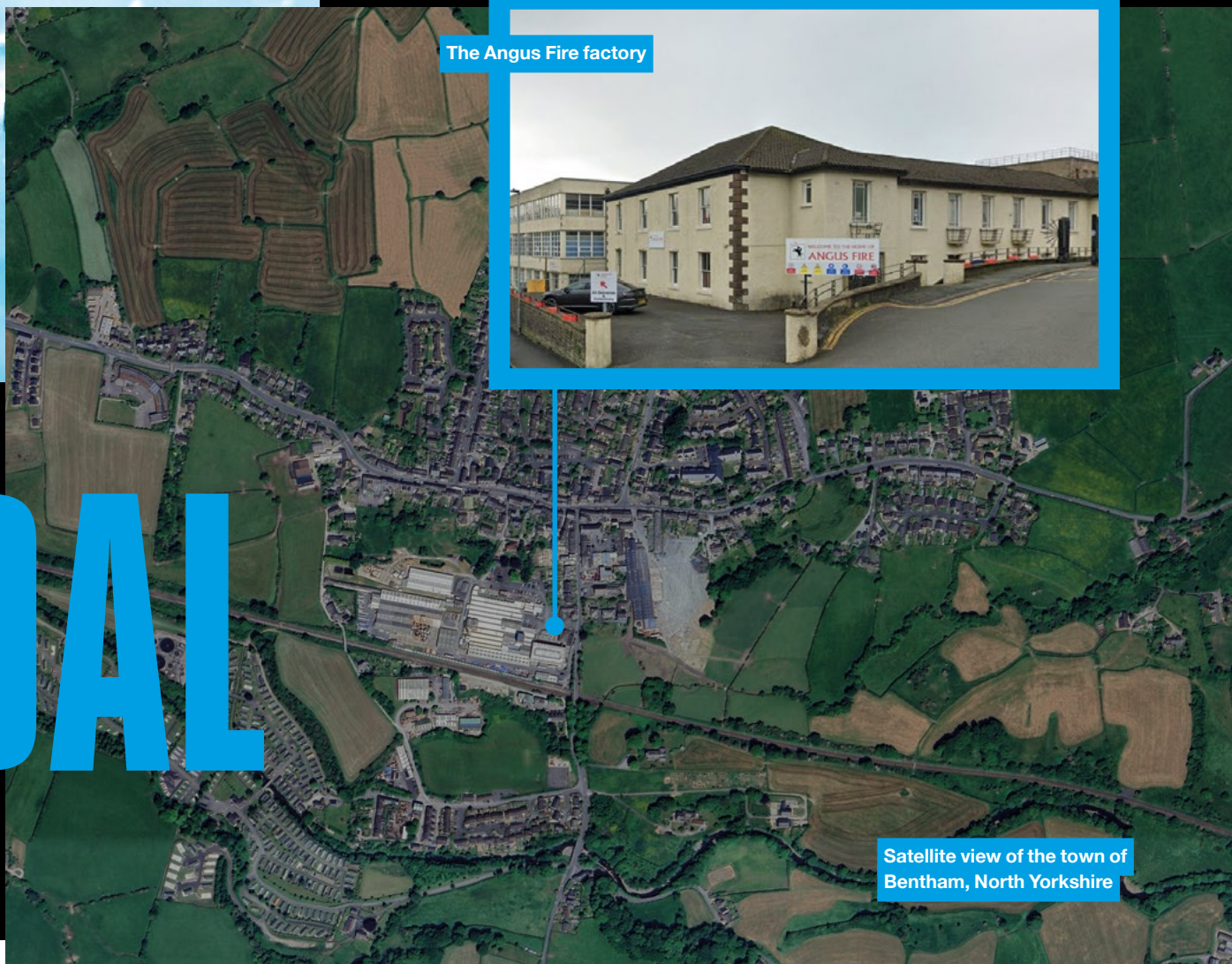
WHISTLE BLOWERS

One household, which described feeling trapped by this pollution, instructed law firm Leigh Day to investigate a potential legal claim in relation to the pollution. This was touted as the first-ever PFAS related legal claim in the UK. The challenge was subsequently settled out of court and no admission of liability was made by Angus Fire, nor any of its affiliates, in relation to this matter.

My reporting on industrial pollution like this has relied on people coming forward and blowing the whistle on something that doesn't feel right to them, or people who are worried about their health and looking for answers. This has included firefighters, who

WHAT ARE PFAS?

PFAS, short for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances and commonly described as ‘forever chemicals’ because of their persistence in the environment, are a subject of growing concern. Exposure is linked to a range of different health impacts, with two of this family of over 10,000 chemicals in particular, PFOA and PFOS, known and suspected carcinogens respectively.



have bravely shared their stories with me, revealing how they used firefighting foam without any warnings of the potential harm and without any protection.

While PFAS litigation remains relatively novel in the UK, the picture in the United States is starkly different. There, legal action linked to PFAS contamination has resulted in settlements running into the billions of dollars.

UNKNOWN DEPTHS

Through my investigation, I discovered that Angus Fire's US sister company, National Foam, is a defendant in an ongoing class-action lawsuit in the US related to the harms caused by exposure to PFAS firefighting foam.

A spokesperson for Angus Fire said at the time that "industry and scientific knowledge about the potential impacts of PFAS chemicals has developed over time". They added that "Angus was a user of those chemicals, rather than a supplier" and that "its own

"The small rural town of Bentham is polluted with the highest level of PFAS ever recorded in the UK"

understanding of these chemicals evolved at the same rate as those of other customers and the regulators. We depended principally on the assurances of our suppliers."

Back in Bentham, legal action may yet return to the fore. Residents have formed a grassroots campaign group called Cleaner Bentham, which has instructed law firm Mishcon de Reya to explore potential litigation. Cleaner Bentham is currently seeking funding to enable it to undertake independent blood testing and to source legal assistance.

A LONG SHADOW

The full extent of the contamination in Bentham remains unresolved, with the local council still investigating any potential health impacts and the Environment Agency still examining

"possible permit breaches". Angus Fire has said in a previous statement that it is working alongside independent environmental consultants and in cooperation with the Environment Agency to fully understand the extent of any PFAS contamination, which would "assist in determining the remediation required".

Regulators are slowly responding as the UK moves towards phasing out PFAS-containing firefighting foams, with a proposed ban expected in 2027.

For communities like Bentham, living with the consequences of decades of unregulated chemical use, the damage is already done. Until remediation and long-term health monitoring are firmly in place, the legacy of PFAS pollution will continue to cast a dark shadow, long after the foam itself has disappeared.

A year in Red Plaques

The Red Plaque project commemorates firefighters who lost their lives in the line of duty, placing plaques at the centre of the communities they served. In 2025, the FBU unveiled ten new plaques across the UK



**FIREFIGHTERS 100
LOTTERY**

FIRE BRIGADES UNION | SERVING FIREFIGHTERS SINCE 1939

Each unique event brings together firefighters, friends, relatives, and local communities to ensure that fallen firefighters are remembered as part of our history. The project is made possible due to money raised by the Firefighters 100 lottery.

James Potter Schofield

Firefighter James Potter Schofield is synonymous with one of Leeds's most significant historical fires. When a large fire broke out in the "Dark Arches" beneath the iconic train station on 13 January 1892, flames rose high into the air and attracted large crowds.

Intensive industrialisation in Leeds increased the risk of fires, in an era that preceded the fire and rescue service. The Dark Arches fire was found to be caused by a soap manufacturer storing 16,000 tons of highly combustible materials beneath the railway tracks.

James, known as Jim, was fighting the fire on one of the station platforms when it collapsed. 133 years later, his Red Plaque was unveiled at the site of the fire beneath Leeds station. The event included a youth theatre performance in partnership with Leeds based community group Brave World, and with the support of historians Shane Ewen and Chris Smith.

"It helps keep his legacy going while also involving the youth of Leeds in helping to shape the city's cultural heritage."

Hector MacDonald Graham

Hector MacDonald Graham's daughter, Jean Glenn, contacted the FBU when she heard about the Red Plaque project. Eighty-five years after his death, she helped unveil a plaque in his honour at the Liverpool docks, where her father lost his life fighting a warehouse fire during the Blitz on 1 October 1940.

"I had just celebrated my seventh birthday when my dad was killed. I was sent away for several weeks, and was just told that my daddy was killed in a fire and I wouldn't see him again," she said.

"I have scraps of memories of him: helping him in the greenhouse; pedalling my three-wheeler bike to the tram stop to meet him from work... so I made various attempts to try and find some more information, to get to know him. Sadly, often the reply was 'all our records were destroyed in the Blitz'. My chance discovery of the Red Plaque scheme has helped complete the task I set myself."

Dudley Hamish Grant

Dudley Hamish Grant, known as Hamish, was just 36 years old when the fire engine he was riding hit a tree en route to an emergency call from a farmhouse in Aberdeenshire. The engine overturned and Hamish tragically lost his life in the crash. Four other members of the crew were injured.

"We are really pleased to have the Fire Brigades Union Red Plaque in memory of our Dad put in place at

Aboyne Fire Station," said his daughter Charlotte Paterson, at the Red Plaque event in his honour.

"This will ensure that Dad's sacrifice 60 years ago is not forgotten in history and will be a permanent reminder of his dedication to the fire service and to his local community."

David Wilson and John Sydney Farrow

John Sydney Farrow and David Wilson lost their lives when a bomb hit a school that was being used as an auxiliary fire station during the second world war.

Eighty four years to the day, their plaque was unveiled at the West School in Paisley. 150 people attended the event, with school pupils contributing artwork as part of a "Forged by Fire" history project.

Relatives of both firefighters were in attendance. David Wilson's grandson, Calum Ross described the ceremony as an "emotional moment" for the family, inspiring them to continue researching.

"Through the awarding of the Red Plaque and this journey of discovery, the knowledge of this part of David's life will be kept alive for many, many more years to come."

Mick Bird

Mick Bird's plaque is located at Shepshead fire station, Loughborough, where Mick served as a retained firefighter for 21 years. He died as a result of a medical emergency while in a fire engine responding to an incident on nineteen years ago.

Kev Henshaw, a colleague of Mick's who was riding on the fire engine on the night of his passing, now FBU representative for Loughborough branch, said:

"Mick was the life and soul of Shepshead Fire Station, always upbeat with a smile on his face. He was an excellent firefighter with great blue light response driving skills. He is still often talked about and remembered."

RED PLAQUES UNVEILED IN 2025

James Potter Schofield
Hector MacDonald Graham
Daniel O'Donovan
Dudley Hamish Grant
David Wilson and John Sydney Farrow
Frank Mallinson
Mick Bird
Alan Sherratt
Christopher William Betts
Eight firefighters killed during the Blitz in Sheffield



Christopher Bett's father unveils a red plaque in his memory in Hainford, Norfolk



A plaque for Daniel 'Mick' Michael O'Donovan, who lost his life during a lift rescue, was unveiled in Camden



Wreaths laid for Frank Maillinson at the site of the Little Mermaid Café fire in Sheffield



Eight firefighters who died in Sheffield during the first day of the Blitz were honoured



Alan Sherratt's plaque was unveiled in Swansea



Stepping into the ring

Firefighters are bringing their communities together in the boxing gym.
Taj Ali met FBU member Charlie Beatt to find out how

'Welcome to my manor,' says Charlie Beatt, grinning as he greets me outside East Croydon station.

At 45, Charlie is a firefighter, boxing coach and Croydon through and through. As we drive through the streets of his childhood, he speaks with pride about the diverse, working-class community he grew up in. 'I used to walk past the fire station on the way to school,' he says. When he left, he simply knocked on the door and asked how to join.

Charlie has fond memories of school and friendships that endure to this day, but he's clear that for many young

people in the area, life hasn't been easy. Croydon faces high levels of poverty and deprivation, and the challenges of youth violence and criminal exploitation.

It's against this backdrop that Charlie has spent the past 15 years coaching boxing through the London Fire Brigade's boxing club, using the sport to support and guide young people. His work earned him the 2024 Merton Partnership Civic Pride Volunteer Award.

GRAFTING EVERYONE TOGETHER

'Boxing has always been a working-class sport,' he says as we sit in Croydon fire station with a cup of tea. 'It grafts everyone together, regardless

of background.'

Aware of his passion for boxing, the London Fire Brigade approached Charlie as part of its efforts to strengthen community engagement with young people from deprived areas. For him, the work is a natural extension of being a firefighter.

'We're a rescue service,' he says. 'Through community engagement, we can rescue young people too. We can give them a community, channel their aggression, help them be healthier and make better decisions.'

LIFE LESSONS

The impact can be life changing. Charlie describes helping one young man onto an employability programme.



Charlie Beatt training the next generation at a community boxing session



to some of the most disadvantaged young people across the UK, aiming to reduce gang violence and knife crime through sport and opportunity.

MAKING THE DAYS COUNT

He teaches the jab by asking a bigger question: what's your purpose?

'The purpose of the jab is to keep your opponent away,' he explains. 'But we all need a purpose in life.'

He often uses Muhammad Ali as an example. 'For me, he's the greatest sportsman to ever live,' he says. 'I talk about his impact outside the ring too. He stood against racism and fought for his people with dignity.'

Charlie encourages the young people to research Ali, to think about doing good. 'I try to sneak in a little life lesson at the end of each session.'

ON STATION

He already runs weekly Friday sessions where local firefighters train alongside

young boxers, and has ambitions to bring boxing directly into the fire station. He shows me a half-empty storage room where a ring already stands. He hopes to transform this into a boxing gym.

'Most firefighters are like me — working-class people from the local area,' he says. 'They can be positive role models.'

Later, we head to Croydon Amateur Boxing Club in Thornton Heath, where Charlie runs a free weekly session for young people in partnership with Be Inspired CIC. The aim is to introduce boxing basics before linking promising participants with trusted local clubs.

DEEP ROOTS

Another coach Charlie once trained finishes with the under-9s before Charlie runs his session with the older kids. Before and after training, Charlie chats with parents and guardians.

One father, noticing his fire brigade shirt, asks what it's like to be a firefighter. A young mum from Sutton Council says hello, explaining she works with young people the early-intervention mental health team connected Charlie with for a boxing session.

Watching him coach, it's clear that Charlie's authority is matched by genuine care. Deeply rooted in his community, he's a firefighter saving lives in more ways than one.

'Last Friday he got his CSCS card for the construction industry, and he's got a job interview this week. That's massive for us.' Many of the young people he works with come from care homes or highly vulnerable backgrounds. 'They're coming from estates where crime on the streets is serious.'

Part of his mission is to widen horizons. Through boxing competitions, Charlie hopes some young people will represent the fire brigade and begin to see it as a possible future. And in the gym, boxing becomes a vehicle for life lessons.

Beyond the fire service, Charlie helped write the syllabus for the BoxWise Foundation, a charity delivering 10-week boxing programmes

'We're a rescue service. Through this, we can rescue young people too'



DONATE

Support boxing youth clubs by donating to Be Inspired

Organising your w

CUTS KILL STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

To win the battle against cuts, we need to get fighting fit in every single fire station and control room. Whether you are already active in a strong FBU branch, or are at the start of your journey to organise your workplace, here's a step by step guide to prepare for action.

1 Plug in

Not sure where to start, or want to hold your first branch meeting on cuts? Your brigade and regional FBU officials are there to support you.

Shape the Cuts Kill campaign by making sure your branch is represented at area and brigade meetings.

■ **Find your local contacts and reach out:**
fbu.org.uk/regions-nations.

2 Who's with you?

Ask your FBU brigade or area organiser for support in getting workplace data up to date. This is especially important in the lead up to any potential industrial action.

■ **Speak to your colleagues about the union, ask whether they've joined, and explain why and how they can get active as an FBU member.**

TOP TIP

Noticeboard

Your workplace should have an FBU noticeboard, used by members and officials to keep everyone up to date about union matters.

The Red Notice newsletter is a great resource to print and put up regularly.

■ **How's yours looking? Bring some vibrancy by pinning up the latest campaigning materials from the FBU website, FBU flags, placards – or even better, make your own.**

3 Get visible...

Make sure your workplace looks and feels like a union workplace, ready to fight for members.

■ **Get members together for a branch meeting held in your workplace.** If you're facing cuts, loop in with the rest of your region and bring an action plan.

■ **Ask an FBU health and safety rep to do a site assessment of your workplace.**

■ **Wear your opposition to cuts loud and proud – bag the latest FBU t-shirt at a rally or from the online shop.**



orkplace



A packed-out meeting builds a strong branch

4 Build the team

Every member can get involved in fighting cuts. Key to driving this is having a trained-up team of reps, elected by members to represent your views to the employers, and to coordinate union activities.

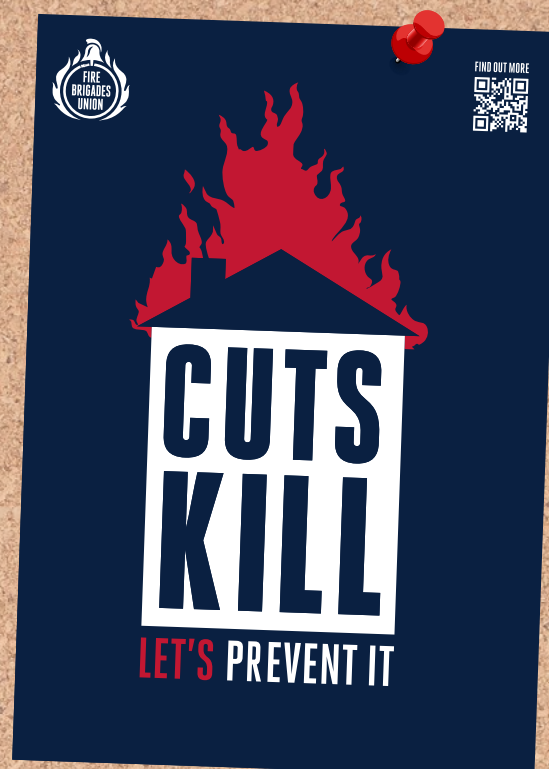
The FBU sections also have roles for women's reps, LGBT+ reps, and Black and ethnic minority members' reps.

■ If you're elected to a branch role, claim your entitlement to time in work hours for union education. The FBU education programme runs courses throughout the year: speak to your regional education and learning organiser and find out more at fbu.org.uk/education

5 Small wins lead to big changes

Start small. Speak to members about what bothers them around your station or control room and agree a position or demand as a collective to take to management.

■ Every time you raise an issue as a group and win, you will grow in confidence and capability as a branch.



Everyone can do their bit

TOP TIP

Ask fellow members to help with the vital everyday tasks that will build your branch brick by brick.

- Putting up Cuts Kill posters
 - Talking to colleagues about cuts, where and why they're happening
 - Researching your fire authority
 - Getting the snacks in for a branch meeting!
- Getting everyone active – with big or small responsibilities – lays the groundwork for any winning campaign.

6 Show solidarity

FBU brigades around the country are fighting against cuts in their services, and the national campaign will be ramping up throughout the year.

■ Send messages of solidarity or organise a group from your branch to attend a rally in another brigade – details of local campaigns can be found on the website and on FBU social media.



Make it loud and clear that you're an FBU workplace

"Make sure your workplace looks and feels like a union workplace, ready to fight for members"

Step forward, organise and defend our right to be seen

Kayley Bridges, LGBT+ rep for the South West, on resisting attacks and building something better

As we enter 2026, the landscape for LGBT+ rights remains deeply uncertain. With shifting political narratives, proposed changes to the Equality and Human Rights Commission's guidance, and an emboldened wave of anti-LGBT+ rhetoric across public life, the year ahead will test our movement in ways we have not faced for some time.

Our trans siblings continue to bear the brunt of this hostility, and this climate inevitably impacts our workplaces, our members, and our collective bargaining environment.

In a year where rights feel precarious and inclusion is questioned, we need solidarity: active, visible and unapologetic.

As Pride season approaches, our participation cannot be taken for granted. We must ensure that employers continue to support attendance at Pride events, remain publicly visible, and do not retreat under political pressure or manufactured controversy.

FLAGS NOT OPTIONAL

Our flags are not an optional accessory. They are a show of who we are as a section and who we stand with. In every brigade where attendance is challenged or visibility reduced, we need members willing to step forward, organise, and defend our right to be seen.

LGBT+ History Month reminds us that progress in the workplace has never been given freely. It has been fought for through representation, collective bargaining, and the solidarity of our members. It reinforces the truth that inclusion isn't simply a value; it is a trade union issue.

Fairness, dignity and respect are fundamental to safe working environments, and to the professional



MARK THOMAS

standards the public expects of our service.

Growing up in South Africa, I was bullied. But being targeted and feeling alone made me appreciate the importance of welcoming spaces.

Then, after moving to the UK and working in the prison service, I faced retaliation at work for reporting misconduct. I've always wanted to do what's right, and so moved to the fire and rescue service.

While I have met many amazing people and love my job as a firefighter, I have also encountered homophobia and struggled with moments of deep self-doubt.

Coming out to my watch, and then to my fire service, Avon, helped me grow in confidence. This was the starting point for getting more involved in the union: organising Pride events, attending my first LGBT+ school, and starting to support others to speak up and be themselves at work in my region.

I'm proud to have now been elected to the national FBU LGBT+ section committee. I know that my journey mirrors our collective one: difficult moments, persistent challenges, and a commitment to building something better.

The pressures of 2026 are real, but so is our determination.



Meet the rep

Amanda Mills, acting regional chair
for the FBU South West

What made you want to become a rep?

Seeing bosses treat workers unfairly made me want to challenge them. I realised early on that the union was the place to fight back with support, instead of on your own. Firefighters protect the public and I wanted to do something to support firefighters in return.

What's happening in your region?

We've faced a series of attacks, some of which we've won and others we're still fighting. Gloucestershire had the threat of 12-hour shifts being imposed on them, which they successfully fought against.

My brigade, Avon, was facing a £4 million shortfall and the axing of up to 72 firefighter posts. Thanks to combined efforts of our brigade committee and members working together, we rallied hard for extra funding – and it's been secured, meaning that no firefighter roles are being cut this year.

Now we're fighting the closure of eight fire stations in Dorset and Wiltshire.

What have you learned during your most recent campaign?

Never underestimate how much impact each individual member can have when

they are motivated enough and work together for a common cause.

What's been your proudest moment during the campaign?

Seeing the Avon brigade committee sat round a table together, talking about how a local strike could have a ripple effect across the rest of the country. Then I realised that even if a movement starts small, it can have a much bigger impact than you anticipated.

Who are your trade union heroes?

Matt Senior, brigade chair for Avon. He's a relentless political animal.

What piece of advice would you give to a new rep?

Don't be overwhelmed by how much there is to learn. Every rep started somewhere, and we didn't all start with great political or legal knowledge. Don't ever be held back because you think you might not be good enough.

If you had the aux cord at a rally, what song would you play?

The End of All We Know, by Bleed from Within



What's new?

Body-worn cameras

Several fire and rescue services are now using, or considering, body-worn cameras for the frontline, often citing their use in streaming incidents into control rooms.

But recording and storing of hundreds of hours of footage raises questions about surveillance.

The National Fire Chiefs Council advocates the use of cameras as a deterrent against attacks on firefighters. Meanwhile, FBU conference delegates have argued that if firefighters are seen as gathering evidence against communities, they'll be associated with law enforcement, making it harder to access incidents in places where people have lost trust – and even leading to an increase in attacks.

And would cameras help to stamp out unacceptable behaviour at work? The independent culture review into the London Fire Brigade recommended firefighters wear them during home safety visits.

The FBU raised concerns that this could create a hostile atmosphere, cause significant GDPR issues, and address the symptoms instead of the roots of problems.

The union called for “wholesale change, not just increased surveillance of problems”, arguing that services must create a workplace where bullying and harassment is unacceptable in all situations, not just when there is a camera present.



ALAMY



President's dispatch

Let's pay attention to pay reform, says FBU president **Ian Murray**

This month, I travelled to every FBU region with assistant general secretary Ben Selby, updating officials on the potential for pay reform.

Whilst we will ensure 2026 pay is dealt with accordingly, separate ongoing negotiations could result in the biggest changes to firefighters' pay structures that we have seen in a generation.

The 2004 pay settlement resulted in the fragmentation of the fire and rescue service. We have seen workers in the same fire service roles carrying out differing activities, with differing pay levels introduced, across the length and breadth of the UK.

The FBU's aim is to bring back some consistency and standardisation of the roles including training, the activities undertaken and importantly, the reward for carrying them out.

This is the first time in decades I have seen all four key stakeholders involved in pay reform talks: the union, the national employers, fire chiefs, and the government all desiring the similar outcomes.

But we continue to make it clear to ministers that this cannot involve reshuffling budgets – investment is required.

You can attend your branch meetings for the latest information. If these discussions result in a proposal, it will be decided on by FBU members.

EDUCATION COURSES



FBU education courses open for applications

Grievance & Fairness at Work

25–27 March

Coventry

This three-day course will accredit branch and brigade officials to represent members in formal procedures in work, including both grievance and discipline.

Introductory Branch Officials

10–12 June, Cambridge

17–19 June, North West England

You will be trained in the essential tasks associated with branch officials' roles, learn where to get help and advice, and ensure you have the resources you need to support members in your branch and build a strong union group.

Disability & Neurodiversity in the Workplace

30 June–2 July

Coventry

This course has been designed to give reps the skills, knowledge, and confidence to represent and advocate for disabled and neurodivergent members, so that physical or neurological difference is never a barrier to a long, successful, and safe career.

■ To apply to attend an FBU education course, contact your Regional Education and Learning Organiser (RELO): fbu.org.uk/education-contacts



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EVERYTHING FBU IN ONE PLACE





Wright on the Road

■ **14 Jan** – hosted a parliamentary event in Westminster with Buckinghamshire MPs to raise issue of local cuts

■ **17 Jan** – spoke on cuts at an Oxford and Banbury Labour group meeting

■ **30 Jan** – spoke at the Birmingham bin strikers' megapicket

■ **10 Feb** – attended a members rally against cuts in Dorset and Wiltshire

■ **11 Feb** – held a meeting for all officials on fighting cuts

■ **24 Feb** – political launch of the Cuts Kill campaign in Westminster



At the bin strike megapicket

COMING UP

■ **3 Mar** – opening the FBU's first Control members' school

■ **14 Mar** – speaking at the National Union of Mineworkers memorial lecture

Objections welcome... but not in public

Station Cat on a fire chief's approach to criticism

Firefighters in Dorset and Wiltshire are free to criticise proposals to axe eight fire stations, apparently. Chief Fire Officer Andy Cole has told them: "Staff are entitled to object to the proposals." They can tell Mr Cole himself, in the "consultation process".

Trouble is, they can't tell anyone else. They are banned from campaigning, "including by setting up websites, social media accounts or organising public meetings."

And Mr Cole has matched actions to words. He ordered an FBU open letter to be taken down, threatening its signatories with disciplinary action.

He claims this is to protect the integrity of the consultation process and the reputation of the fire service. But the letter was full of praise for Charmouth, one of the stations Mr Cole wants to close down. "Our team at Charmouth is dedicated, hardworking, and proud of our service to the community," it says.

It quotes resident Martin Nutkins saying: "Without the incredible efforts of the crew at Charmouth fire station, I probably wouldn't have any



parents who are still living, and they most certainly wouldn't have a house.... [The firefighters'] courage, decisiveness, local knowledge and sheer professionalism

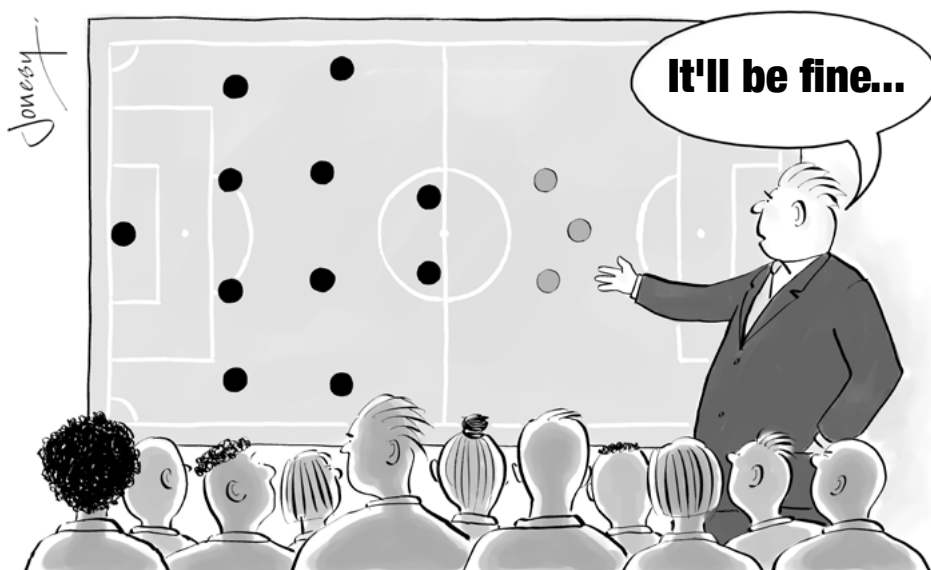
saved the day."

But it questioned the data on which the decision is being made. The letter points out that the plans overlook the number of tourists visiting every summer; the increase to local housing being built; and the number of cross-border incidents crews respond to.

Criticism of his data isn't the sort of thing Mr Cole tolerates. On a flying visit, your Station Cat was told by a local source that "he doesn't like things not being done his way".

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Darren Langdown told Station Cat: "We know that this is a highly emotive and difficult time... Whilst we are mindful of how difficult this is, there is still a need for all our staff and leaders to act professionally and respectfully..."

However, the firefighters he commands think that alerting the public to dangerous proposals is both professional and respectful.



IMAGINE IF FOOTBALL TEAMS WERE RUN LIKE FIRE SERVICES

25-year badges



Kevin Montgomery (l), Swalwell branch, receives his 25-year badge from Chris Burton (r)



William McCartney (r), white watch, Kilmarnock, Scotland receives his 25-year badge from FBU branch rep Craig Clark



Johnny Earl (l), West Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from FBU brigade secretary for West Yorkshire Martyn Bairstow (r)



Iain Franks (r) receiving his 25-year badge from branch rep Thomas Atkins (l) with Forest Row crew



Gavin Carter (l), Banbury, Oxfordshire, receives his 25-year badge from FBU general secretary Steve Wright (r)



Simon Robinson (l), Rainton Bridge, Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from FBU organiser Chris Swift-Hunter (r) with Courtine Mills, Steven Balback and Sean Collard (l-r)



Keith Miller (r), Cookstown & Glengormley Districts, Northern Ireland, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Sean O'Neill (l)



Damien Peaker (r), Lichfield fire station, receives his 25 year badge from FBU Staffordshire brigade organiser Craig Elson (l), with watch colleagues looking on



Stuart Dobson (r), receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Chris Swift-Hunter with Stephen MacDougall, Dan Walton, Charlie Davidson, Mark Stewart, Rob Sanders, Stephen Gardner, Graham Cartwright (l-r)



Seona Hart (r), FBU Scotland regional treasurer, receives her 25-year badge from FBU assistant general secretary Ben Selby



Andy Luinen (r), Sandyford fire station, Stoke-on-Trent receives his 25-year badge from FBU Staffordshire brigade secretary Martin Starkey (l), with watch colleagues looking on



Gerard McCloskey (l) and **Geoff Booth** (r) receive their 25-year badges from FBU station Rep Sean O'Neill and Graham Bittle (l-r), pictured during their drill night at Magherafelt Fire Station



Stuart Ledgerwood (l), Richmond, London, receives his 25-year badge from FBU London south west area secretary Dave Young with colleagues looking on



Matt Lewis (r), Penkridge fire station, receives his 25-year badge from FBU Staffordshire brigade organiser Craig Elson (l)



Nick Fife (r), Penkridge fire station, receives his 25-year badge from FBU Staffordshire brigade organiser Craig Elson (l)



Ben Shiels (r), Bispham, Lancashire, receives his 25-year badge from branch chair Mick Dawson (l)



Richard Pallister (r) green watch, Darlington fire station, County Durham, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Alex Sosnowska (l) with Daniel Farnell, Arran Dixon, Jess Tucker, Holly Haggerty, Nick Meek, Dave Ratcliffe and Paul Kingdom



Simon Watanangura (l), Livingston fire station, receives his 25-year badge from Brendan Stutt (r) with colleagues looking on



Stuart Standing (r), red watch, Blackburn, Lancashire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Kev Wilkie, with Simon Hatt and Jonny Ashton looking on



Tom Clark (r), Nottinghamshire Officers Section, receives his 25 year award from Tom Farr, Nottinghamshire Officer Rep with colleagues from command groups 2 and 6



Ian Fitzhenry (r) red watch, Wigan, Greater Manchester, receives his 25-year badge from brigade vice chair Kieran Roberts alongside watch colleagues



Richard Thompson (r), red watch, Wigan, Greater Manchester, receives his 25-year badge from brigade vice chair Kieran Roberts alongside watch colleagues



Geoff Young (centre) service training centre, Witham, Essex receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Matt Edwards (l) and branch rep Scott Fretton (r), with service training colleagues looking on



Alan Nixon (r), red watch, Darlington fire station, County Durham, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Alex Sosnowska (l) with Michael Thompson, Harry Allen, Stephen Fletcher, Jon-Paul Chilvers, Alex Kinney, Lee Robson and Dominic Ball



Jane Thompson (centre) and **Matt Prunty** (l), Newhaven, East Sussex, receive their 25-year badges from brigade organiser Jake Kaye



Steven McAughey (r), Burntisland fire station receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Lee Mahady (l)



Ben Emerson (l), green watch, Ardrossan fire station receives his 25-year badge from FBU Scotland West Area rep Chris Smart



Dave Davis (r), Deptford, London, receives his 25-year badge from FBU London South East organiser Andy Wilks (l)



Darron Buckley (r) receives his 25-year badge from Wolverhampton branch secretary Morgan Taylor (l), surrounded by members of Wolverhampton white watch, West Midlands



Lee Howland (r), red watch, Lewisham, London receives his 25-year badge from FBU London south east organiser Andy Wilks (l)



John Broadfield (l), Lee Green and Eltham fire stations, London, receives his 25-year badge from FBU London south east organiser Andy Wilks (r)

40-year badge



Michael Wilson (centre), Larne fire station, receives his 40-year badge from branch reps **Paul Henderson** (l) and **Wayne Moore** (r)



Liam Devine (r), Dalkeith fire station, Scotland receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary **Alistair Campbell**



Gordon Aitchison (r), white watch, Dalkeith receives his 25-year badge from Dalkeith branch secretary **Alistair Campbell** (l)



Cliff Webb (r), white watch, St Albans, Hertfordshire, receives his 25-year badge from Eastern Region B&EMM rep **Dwight Williams** (l)



Grant Morrow (r), Maltby fire station, South Yorkshire, receiving his 25 year award from FBU South Yorkshire brigade chair **Stu Smith**

Please send high resolution digital files or prints to: firefighter@fbu.org.uk or Firefighter, FBU, Ken Cameron House, 171-173 Gray's Inn Road, London, WC1X 8UE

For your image to look its best, we need the original, full-resolution image. One lifted from a website may not do justice to a unique occasion. We do our best with images that are low resolution, taken directly into a bright light or suffer from camera-shake, or have other problems, but cannot perform miracles. Please include details for each image – 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/when it was taken.

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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

England, Wales and N Ireland

0800 100 6061

Scotland 0800 089 1331

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.



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MARCH

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AGAINST THE FAR RIGHT.

**On 28 March we will march
together in hope and unity.**

We're in trouble. As our economic problems have grown, working people are struggling to get by. And some politicians are using this crisis to pit us against one another to build their power.

While the challenges we face are real, we won't solve them by giving into racism, hate and division.

That's why we're marching together in hope and unity.

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28 MARCH LONDON

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