

# FireFighter

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

April 2007

## CO-RESPONDING APPEAL COURT DELIVERS VERDICT



### Insurers' fears mount

Commercial  
property losses  
force rethink on insurance cover

### Retained to wholetime

Transferring is a  
haphazard process

### John for leader

Why Labour Party  
leadership battle  
is an FBU issue



# Pay formula would provide stability



As I have reported previously the Union has raised at the National Joint Council the issue of pay

2007. We have made clear to the employers that a period of stability would be of benefit to everyone working in the fire and rescue service and also of benefit to the employers. The simplest way to provide that stability is by an early settlement in relation to our pay. The continuation of the formula agreed in 2003 offers the most straightforward way to achieve this.

We are currently awaiting a response from the employers and you will be informed of developments as soon as possible. If no progress is made then the Union's conference will consider the issue as a matter of urgency.

## In the courts – again!

The Union returned to court recently over the issue of co-responding. You will recall that last year we were taken to the High Court by two fire and rescue authorities. They had argued that co-responding was effectively a contractual obligation and that they could therefore force employees to undertake this duty without agreement. They lost the case in the High Court.

Following the original judgement we wrote to all Chief Fire Officers and the Chair of every Fire and Rescue Authority stating that legal action is not the best way to resolve differences. We offered to consider any suggestions or proposals which

they may have. The Union has always considered any such proposals from our employers.

Regrettably, that suggestion was rejected. Instead we were taken back to court – this time to the Court of Appeal. In front of three senior judges, including the Master of the Rolls, the two authorities attempted to overturn the previous judgment. Again they lost. The union's legal arguments have been upheld and two fire authorities have seen their appeal dismissed. All this has been at great cost to the public.

The question has to be asked. Why do our employers seek to impose measures on our members instead of negotiating? Unfortunately it appears that there are far too many among the employers who seek to defeat the Fire Brigades Union rather than attempting to talk to us. Yet again they have been shown to be misguided. Unfortunately it is the council tax payer who picks up the bill.

## Harrow Court – another inquest

I recently attended the inquest into the deaths at Harrow Court, Stevenage in February 2005. Two firefighters, Michael Miller and Jeff Wornham were killed, as was a resident, Natalie Close. It was a sad, deeply moving time for all concerned; for those from the fire service who had to relive the terrible experience and most of all for the families of the dead.

It is important for all of us to remember the families of Michael, Jeff and Natalie among all the publicity and debate surrounding the inquest. This is



A period of stability would benefit everyone working in the fire service

an extremely difficult process to go through, but it is important to remember that someone has to ask the questions which the families cannot ask – that is the role of the legal team.

The families of Michael and Jeff made very clear to me that they wanted one thing to come out of their terrible loss. They want to ensure that lessons are learned and that everything



## YOUR LETTERS

# Adoption is an option

I was interested in the article 'Difficult to conceive' (Your Welfare: Health, March 2007).

My wife and I are in that very predicament where I am the person with fertility problems. I have had various tests and operations to correct the problem but to no avail.

We then made the decision to adopt and are now proud parents to a wonderful 11 year old boy who we adopted at the age of ten months.

As the article outlined the issues involved can be very stressful. However, there are other options like adoption and fostering. I myself was fostered and can appreciate the benefits of both adoption and fostering.

**Alan Swift**  
West Midlands

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possible is done to prevent such a tragedy in the future. That would be a lasting tribute to Michael and Jeff and I hope we can all work to achieve it.  
**Matt Wrack**

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**WIN**  
A Nintendo Wii  
see p22

## PUZZLES

Win this month's  
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owner of a Nintendo Wii



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**APRIL 2007**

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PHILIP WOLMUTH/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

## Lessons of two deaths must be learned

### HARROW COURT INQUEST

**T**he Union has criticised Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service following a two-week long coroner's inquest into the deaths of Hertfordshire firefighters Jeff Wornham and Michael Miller and member of the public Natalie Close at the Harrow Court blaze in Stevenage on February 2, 2005. The union said the deaths of the firefighters could have been prevented.

Matt Wrack, FBU General Secretary, said: "We have heard of the extraordinary acts of courage and bravery shown by everyone at this tragic fire in Stevenage. In particular the bravery and courage shown by Mike Miller and Jeff Wornham who rescued one person but died trying to save the life of Natalie Close.

"Everyone at this incident did the very best they possibly could with the resources, training and equipment available to them. But initially there were not enough firefighters to tackle this fire safely and none of them had specific and practical training in fighting fires in high rise blocks.

"The FBU investigation concluded that Hertfordshire fire authority failed to put in place proper procedures, did not have adequate training and did not send enough firefighters in the initial response to tackle this fire safely. But this tragic loss of life could have happened in any number of fire authorities across the UK, it was only by misfortune that it happened in Stevenage.

### End pressure for cuts

"The entire fire service and Government need to learn the lessons of what happened in Stevenage. There must be an end to the constant pressure to cut frontline fire crews and cut corners with training and other safety critical activities.

"Cuts cost lives and we do not intend to lose any more people in this way. We look forward to reviewing the Coroner's Rule 43 report on the incident which he has promised to send to the relevant bodies in the fire service and Government."

The coroner passed a verdict of accidental death in the case of Natalie Close. For Jeff Wornham and Michael Miller the coroner passed a narrative verdict after the jury unanimously agreed on their answers to 20 questions given to them by the coroner.

→ For more on the FBU's health and safety investigation visit [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk). A fuller report on the issue will be published in a future issue of *Firefighter*.



A Hertfordshire firefighter walks with flowers to be placed near to Harrow Court (background) where Jeff Wornham, Michael Miller and Natalie Close died

JOHN STILLWELL/PA/EMPICS



PATRICK WARD/CORBIS

Harrogate shopping district – many business and commercial buildings in North Yorkshire would see a delayed and reduced response

# Alarm over AFA curbs

## AUTOMATIC FIRE ALARMS

**N**orth Yorkshire fire crews have raised concerns about the introduction of a policy that would limit the fire service response to automatic fire alarms (AFAs). The biggest proposed reduction is to AFAs in business and commercial premises.

Many of AFAs would be checked by non-fire service personnel designated the “responsible person” for particular premises but based many miles away. They can be sent to inspect premises in the middle of the night having been woken from sleep. Such individuals would be asked to enter and inspect the premises where an AFA has been triggered. This is contrary to longstanding advice to “get out, stay out and call the fire service out”.

For many business and commercial

buildings there would also be a delayed and reduced response from the fire service. Fire crews are concerned that there has not been proper consultation with business or insurers over the move to take effect from 1 April.

Ian Watkins, North Yorkshire FBU brigade secretary said: “It is irresponsible to put pressure on anyone to enter premises with an activated fire alarm on their own, at night and quite possibly with limited communications. A visual inspection of a premises is not going to tell anyone if there is a fire unless it is obvious. The fire service on the other hand has specialised equipment to detect fires including those which are difficult to find.

“A delayed and reduced fire service response where there is a fire will cause more damage.”

# Night cover campaign continues

## CORNWALL

**F**BU members and officials in Cornwall are continuing their campaign to retain the only 24 hour crewed stations in the brigade, focusing now on responding to the fire authority’s IRMP. Cornwall County Council have a budget crisis on their hands and expect the fire service to cut over £700,000 from the budget. This means the downgrading of Camborne and Falmouth fire stations from 24-hour shift stations to day crewed.

The brigade has in six weeks received more comments than in all previous consultations thanks to the efforts of FBU reps meeting parish and town councils, explaining



ADAM WOOLFITT/CORBIS

Will the public be safe in Cornwall when night falls?

the consequences of these cuts to councillors and the public, and working with community groups and sister trade unions. The FBU has also been collecting a petition already into the thousands of signatories.

Says Cornwall brigade secretary Terry Nottle: “A full response to all the proposals is being worked

on by local and regional officials and will be comprehensive in its criticism of the brigade managers and councillors. We have serious safety concerns about these ill-conceived and dangerous plans.”

The local economy will be another casualty of the end to 24-hour fire cover in Falmouth, he says.

“Currently the Falmouth ship refit facility is economically viable due to reduced insurance premiums thanks to 24-hour fire cover. If this is reduced then there is a real danger that this extremely important business may not be able to attract the work it needs. One can only guess at the financial impact on not only Falmouth but also the whole of Cornwall.”

## Sounding off!

### DEAN MILLS

FBU National Officer

## Labour Party Election

Tony Blair has begun his road show of meetings to divert the obituary of his leadership focusing on Iraq, lost morality and diminished conscience. The Iraq war was far from popular, and among public sector workers the attacks on us have been just as unpopular and unsupported. However, wholehearted support has been found in one quarter for war, attacks on the fire service and misdirected public funding. Gordon Brown has supported and assisted in drawing up many of Blair’s policies and practices.

Brown has been widely touted as the leader in waiting simply because Blair has promised him the job. We have long insisted within the FBU on open, fair and transparent elections. It is totally unacceptable that a leader who heads a party embroiled in the cash for honours fiasco can also dictate his successor. An election for the leader of the party will allow for a democratic debate on the future of Labour.

Following consultation with FBU members through brigade, regional and sectional committees the union has decided to endorse the campaign of John McDonnell for the Labour Party leadership. We join the RMT and the PCS as well as the affiliated union ASLEF in supporting John for leader. Some may question why as a disaffiliated union we are supporting John McDonnell and debating Labour’s future direction. The truth is that had the leader and policies been different, we may have never disaffiliated from the Labour Party.

We maintain an active political presence and engage in political activities. We fight against the privatisation of the public services. We don’t believe our fire kit, fire stations, and fire appliances should be owned by private business. Disaffiliation from Blair’s Labour Party has not suddenly made us mute. Indeed, it was the majority voice of members who spoke out against Blair’s Labour following its attacks on us which required us to cease our affiliation.

We do have a political voice in Parliament and beyond through our Parliamentary Group of MPs, the Secretary of which is John. He supported us throughout our disputes, both national and local, and has spoken up for firefighters and control staff when others in Blair’s Labour condemned us and called us criminals.

Our aim is to win for our members the best possible conditions and pay inside the fire service and secure the best social support system outside it. We have far more chance to achieve this with John McDonnell as leader.





ANDREW WARD

## In brief

◆ Trade unions can expel members of the far right BNP, the European Court of Human Rights has ruled. The decision marks the end of a long fight that began for train drivers union ASLEF in September 2004 when an Employment Appeal Tribunal found in favour of Mr J Lee, a BNP member and a local council candidate who had been expelled. ASLEF believed that the EAT judgement raised important general issues under Article 11 of the European Convention of Human Rights on the freedom of trade unions to determine their own rule books, and to choose with whom they wish to associate.

◆ The raid by US soldiers on the General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW) office in Baghdad and the arrest of one of their two security guards on February 23 has provoked protests from trade unions globally. The soldiers entered with force, leaving broken furniture and equipment in their wake and confiscating the GFIW's computers and fax machines. This raid followed a similar reported attack on the Baghdad offices of the Iraqi Journalist Syndicate on February 19.

◆ Public authorities will have a positive duty to promote gender equality and to eliminate sex discrimination from April 6. The Equal Opportunities Commission, and unions such as PCS and Unison, believe the legislation, implemented in England, Scotland and Wales by the Equality Act 2006, has the potential to tackle issues such as income inequality, discrimination when pregnant and women missing out on pensions. The EOC is responsible for enforcement until the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights comes into force in October and takes over its functions.

## Preferred bidder is revealed

### REGIONAL CONTROLS

**F**ire Minister Angela Smith has announced that the preferred bidder to supply and run the IT system for the proposed regional controls is EADS Defence and Security Systems. The contract is worth £200 million over eight years.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) said the project "is being procured so as to allow for it to be phased-in and to avoid a single 'big bang' handover day" and will 'go live' from 2008.

Almost everyone outside of Whitehall believes the date of 2008 for the controls to become fully "live" is optimistic by several years. There is still no final business case nor any detail on the proposed handover from existing controls to regional controls.

■ Visit the FBU site and follow the "Lobby Your MP" link to email your MP to encourage them to sign Early Day Motion 805 calling for "an urgent full and independent assessment" of DCLG's final business case "before any major decisions are made."

Local residents demonstrate to save Bovingdon station in Hertfordshire

## Union demands an independent review of closure plans

### HERTFORDSHIRE

**T**he FBU has written to the chief executive of Hertfordshire County Council calling for an independent review of the closures of Bovingdon and Radlett fire stations.

The move comes as a scrutiny meeting held by Hertsmere Borough Council, expected in the near future, is likely to support the case presented by local action groups for re-opening their local fire stations.

### Attendance times

Tony Smith, FBU Herts vice-chair, said: "The local action groups have consistently highlighted the failings in the business cases to close the stations, not least the discrepancy in the recording of attendance times.

"The original plan stated that the time started when a 999 call was received. Subsequently Hertfordshire chief fire officer Roy Wilsher changed his mind and is now starting the clock

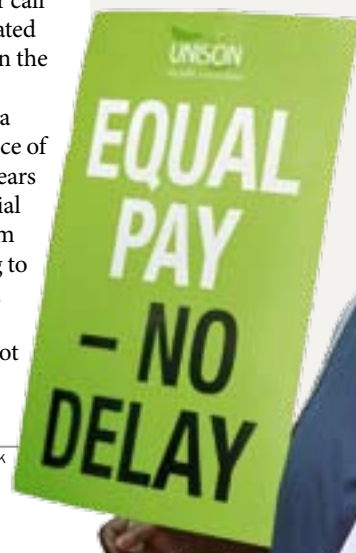
when the bells go down at the station. Those cynics among us believe this is because Herts cannot make its targets without this 'adjustment'.

"Quite rightly, the action group members believe that any attendance time should be recorded from the time a call for help is made and Government advice on recording and reporting supports this.

"It is quite incredible that a fire and rescue authority is able to gloss over this issue and present a false picture to the press.

"For Hertfordshire to continually ignore all other call data that is not directly related to property fires is hardly in the spirit of IRMP.

"The closures have had a major effect on the resilience of the brigade and it also appears that the removal of the aerial ladder platform (ALP) from St Albans is also beginning to have an adverse effect with Luton's ALP needed at a house fire in Radlett, but not arriving in time to make a difference."





Fire destroys a school.  
Delayed response can cost  
millions – and lives

## FIFTH COLUMN

An anonymous take on events in a brigade near you

**S**ince January 2006, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMCFRS) has been operating a “Drive to Arrive” policy. All turn-outs, regardless of the origin of the call/incident, place strong relevance on ‘sleeping risk’, not ‘life risk’. Pumps within GMC do not turn out on blues and twos to schools, hospitals, airports, and (in some areas) domestics ... unless we are provided with specific information stating that persons or property of value are involved, or if there is a likelihood that persons may be asleep within the premises.

If it is deemed that an emergency response is required, a driver or officer in charge has to make a risk assessment based on limited information while located on a fire station some distance away from the incident. Watches and officers are forced to guess how they should respond. How are crews to know if a factory has shift workers sleeping on site for example? We know who will carry the can.

Since this policy was introduced, firefighters in GMC are aware of a large number of incidents that could have been handled differently and would have had significantly better outcomes, had the initial response been on blues and twos.

Here are but a few examples:

**September 2006** (Sunday, Salford.) A small fire in the open within a lorry yard/warehouse complex. One pump, normal road speed attendance, as per policy. Ended up as 15 pumps. Seven to eight HGVs were

### GREATER MANCHESTER

**Under the Drive to  
Arrive policy pumps do  
not turn out on blues  
and twos to schools,  
hospitals, airports,  
domestics**

destroyed, along with two buildings.

**May 2006** (weekend, Offerton) Automatic fire alarm (AFA) at a primary school. One pump, normal road speed attendance, as per policy. School destroyed.

**Christmas Eve 2006** (Sunday morning, Astley) Food packaging company. AFA. One pump, normal road speed attendance, as per policy. Ended up as four pumps and two aerials. Business destroyed.

And that’s not the only result of the policy. Imagine the reaction of the occupants of the many hotels within Manchester who are made to wait in all weathers, up to 45 minutes for an attendance to

an AFA.

Millions of pounds worth of goods and services, along with many jobs have already literally gone up in smoke. And very soon someone, or indeed firefighters, will die as a result of this policy.

An article on the attempted cutbacks by Central Scotland Fire Board to attendances at schools published in *Firefighter* (January/February 2007, page 6), highlighted some striking parallels with the scheme in GMCFRS these past 16 months.

But in Scotland the fire board took the right decision, one that the Union shares: changes to cover must take into account “life risk” and a “blanket policy of downgrading is not acceptable.”

It’s about time councillors in GMC – and indeed, other brigades such as North Yorkshire – woke up to the dangers of the ‘Drive to Arrive’ policy and did the same.



New York commemoration of  
Maafa – an African word for  
the trans-Atlantic slave trade

PICTURE: SHANNON STAPLETON/REUTERS

# Why remember the fight against slavery?

**MATT WRACK, GENERAL SECRETARY, FIRE BRIGADES UNION**

“2007 marks the bicentenary of the British abolition of the slave trade. This is being commemorated by a host of events and initiatives throughout this year. But why should this be relevant to the FBU and FBU members?

We can only understand our present if we attempt to understand our past and the simple truth is that slavery is a part of that past. Slavery played a huge part in creating modern Britain. The profits of slavery helped to fund British industrialisation and to turn Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into the “workshop of the world”. The effects of slavery continue to influence our world today, leaving a legacy of racism and international inequality. The history of slavery also includes the history of the struggle against slavery, primarily by the slaves themselves but also by progressive people in Britain and elsewhere. Although much emphasis is placed in official histories on the role of reformers like William Wilberforce, a key role in the campaign in Britain was played by tens of thousands of working people

It was in the ‘New World’ of the Americas, including Britain’s colonies in the West Indies, that slavery was developed on an unprecedented scale between 1500 and 1870. The horrors of the New World slave system cannot be expressed in figures but the sheer scale of these is staggering. The slave population of the Americas reached 33,000 in 1700, nearly three million in 1800 and peaked at over six million in 1850. During this period a million and a half died during the passage to the New World, large numbers died beforehand and between a tenth and a fifth died within a year of landing.

This trade in people was put to profitable investment by the British merchants who established it. The products of Britain’s new industries, metal goods, textiles, alcohol and other manufactures were shipped to west Africa and used for the purchase of slaves. Slaves were shipped to work on plantations in the West Indies. In turn sugar from the West Indian plantations was shipped to Britain. This ‘triangular trade’ was lucrative and the profits played a key role in funding Britain’s industrial revolution and thus in creating modern Britain.

In the traditional British account of slavery and the slave trade the key role in abolition falls to enlightened campaigners such as William Wilberforce. This version ignores the key role of the resistance by the slaves themselves and the opposition of working people in Britain.

In the Caribbean, throughout the slave period, resistance in various forms was the norm, not the exception. Between 1638 and 1837 there were 75 slave rebellions in the British Caribbean – one every two and a half years. Twenty two of these were large scale campaigns involving thousands of slaves. On a number of occasions the British forces were unable to defeat the insurgents and were forced to sign treaties which granted freedom to those involved

and effectively created liberated zones outside of the British control. It is highly misleading and insulting to suggest that freedom was eventually granted simply because of the campaign of a few well meaning men in the British parliament. As Eric Williams – who before becoming Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago wrote a pioneering work on the economic impact of the slave trade – commented, the old official versions of the story were written “almost as if Britain had introduced Negro slavery solely for the satisfaction of abolishing it.”

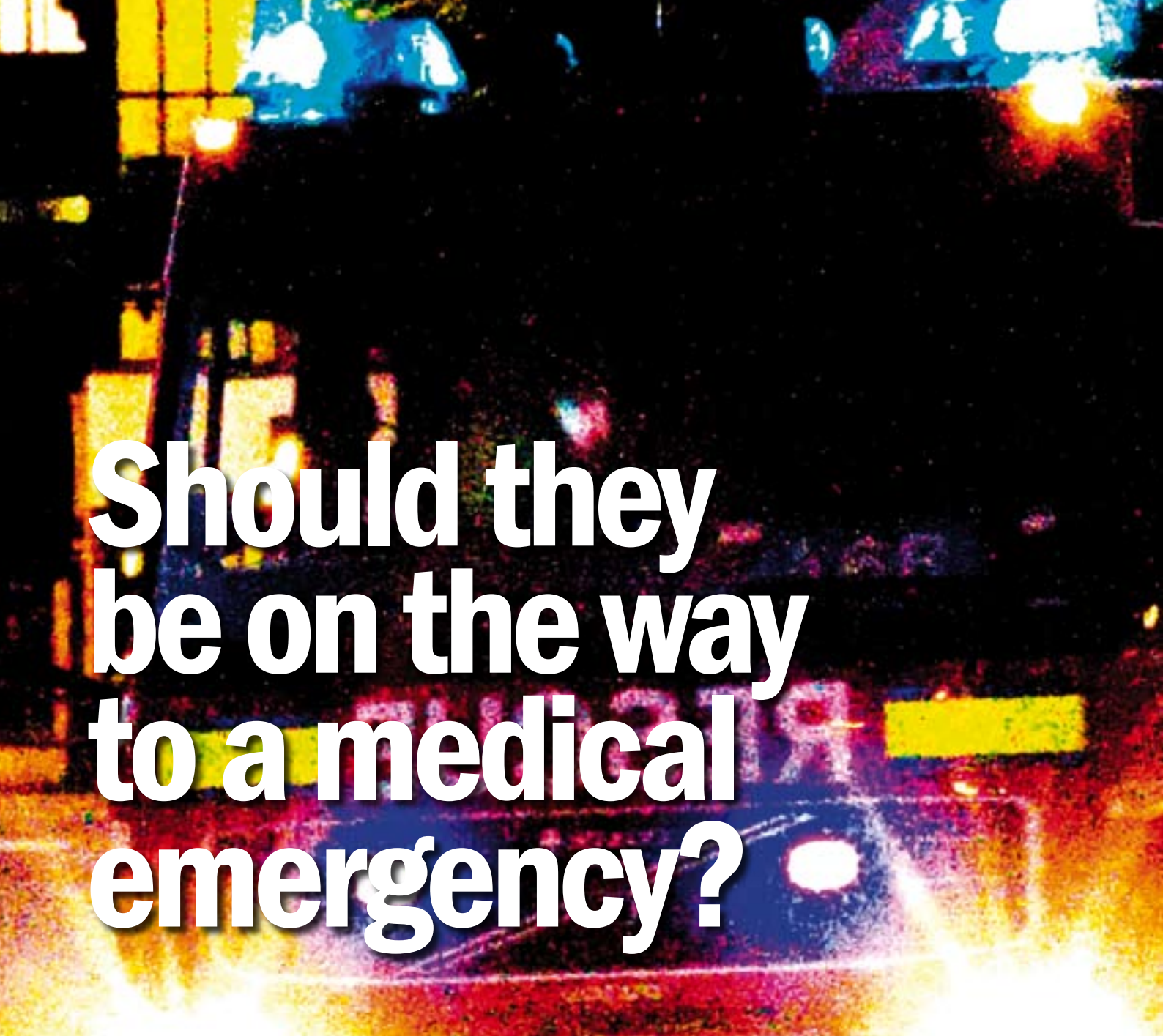
Also written out of history were the many working people in Britain who campaigned against slavery. The process of industrialisation created many horrors for the workers in the new factories. People began to draw attention to the fact that the factory owners who exploited workers in Britain were the same people who justified and defended slavery in the West Indies. In fact the treatment of ‘free’ workers in Britain often differed little from the treatment of slaves in the colonies. For example, if poor people sought assistance from the parish workhouse, their children were taken away from them and compulsorily bound as apprentices to manufacturers. John Locke, the political philosopher, argued that the children of the poor should commence work at the age of three.

So many working people opposed slavery and saw a direct link between their own conditions of life and those of the slaves on the colonial plantations. This thinking laid the basis for a huge political campaign. Mass petitions are common today but their first use on a mass scale was in the campaign against slavery. In 1788 there were over 100 petitions to Parliament, demanding the abolition of the slave trade. A 1792 petition from Manchester received the support of 20,000 people out of a population of only 75,000. The working class activists also went much further than Wilberforce in their demands. While the parliamentary campaign initially focussed only on the slave trade, the radicals outside of Parliament were already demanding the abolition of slavery itself.

The story of slavery in the new world colonies is a truly horrific one which cannot be forgotten or neglected. But it is also a story of struggle and resistance which can provide lessons and inspiration for today in the continuing fight against exploitation and for a decent society. Today, millions of people around the world continue to suffer under forms of slavery, bonded labour and people trafficking. The struggle is not complete.

→ Want to know more? Email [firefighter@fbu.org.uk](mailto:firefighter@fbu.org.uk) (including your name and address) by April 30 and we will pick out of the hat the winners of the following books relating to the anniversary:

- Capitalism and Slavery (Eric Williams)
- Staying Power (Peter Fryer)
- Black People in the British Empire: an introduction (Peter Fryer)
- Bury the Chains (Adam Hochschild)



# Should they be on the way to a medical emergency?

The appeal by two fire authorities seeking to force firefighters to co-respond has been dismissed by the Court of Appeal

**A**n appeal brought by two fire authorities seeking to force firefighters to answer 999 medical emergencies on behalf of the ambulance service has been dismissed by the Court of Appeal in London. The Union welcomed the decision and was awarded its legal costs.

The legal case focused on whether firefighters could be required under their contracts of employment to participate in co-responding. It follows the attempted introduction of co-responder schemes at Retford Fire Station in Nottinghamshire and Grantham Fire Station in Lincolnshire.

Fire crews at Retford had 10% of their pay cut for over a year by local managers trying to force them to attend very serious medical

#### MANAGEMENT DICTAT

The issue in the Court of Appeal was one of co-responding. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the (former) Chief Fire Officer of Nottinghamshire was absolutely clear in his original evidence that it was about control of the workforce: that we have to expect to do exactly as told by our employers and that resistance to that position will result in some form of sanction.

emergencies on behalf of the ambulance service. Local managers had never tried to reach an agreement on the changes.

In both areas fire crews are sent to the highest category of medical emergencies on behalf of the local ambulance service. The arrival of fire crews 'stops the clock' and counts in the official NHS ambulance response statistics as if a proper ambulance paramedic has arrived.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "We welcome the ruling but are dismayed that senior fire service managers have thrown council tax money away on legal fees and court costs. These two fire authorities tried to impose these schemes without agreement, with no

## Not the same job...

JOHN GALLAGHER/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

### FIREFIGHTER

Rescues people and property from all types of accident and disaster, as well as promoting fire safety and enforce fire safety standards in public and commercial premises. Large numbers of firefighters do not even have their basic first aid certificates up to date, know nothing of diagnosis, medical protocols or how to ensure there is no cross-infection with bugs such as MRSA. Enthusiastic firefighters with basic first aid skills are not the sort of response the public expect when they dial 999 and ask for an emergency ambulance. "In co-responding, the Fire and Rescue Services are not acting as firefighters at all. There is no incident calling for their special skills and qualities." (High Court Judgement, October 2006)



PAUL BOY/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

### PARAMEDIC

Assesses the patient and initiates any specialist pre-hospital medical treatment and care. Besides administering life-saving procedures, such as giving electric shocks to the heart (defibrillation) in cases of cardiac arrest, paramedics are qualified to use 'invasive' clinical techniques, including intravenous injections; administering other drug treatments; inserting a tube into the throat (intubation) to keep the patient's airways open. "Providing treatment to casualties in general, and in particular to medical emergencies, is something that is and ought to be carried out by the ambulance service." (High Court Judgement, 23 October 2006)



SHOUT/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

national discussions, with no proper procedures and with no UK-wide standards. Our repeated calls for dialogue and discussion at national level have been constantly ignored.

"Fire crews are not going to give away their employment rights. And they're not going to let anyone take them away either.

"Against a background of cuts and increased responsibilities fire and rescue

services are struggling to provide time and resources to maintain our members' fire service skills, never mind being forced into providing an ambulance service.

"NHS targets for ambulance arrival times allow the very basic first aid provided under these schemes to count as if an ambulance paramedic has arrived. There is no target for the ambulance to arrive which can mean a worse service is covered up by misleading response statistics suggesting the opposite."

Dave Green, Executive Council member for the East Midlands (Region 6), said: "The Court of Appeal has completely vindicated the position taken by the FBU and its members. We had consistently told management at both a local and national level that co-responding does not form part of our contract of employment and they had consistently refused to accept that position.

"We must now move on, secure in the knowledge that we have the right to negotia-

tion on any changes to our job descriptions outside of role maps. This right, that the employers challenged, was won through a High Court ruling.

"Many thanks from all the members in Region 6, but particularly at Retford and Grantham, for the support we have received over the past 18 months. It has been superb and you can all be proud."

### GREY BOOK RULES

The employers' side believed that the IRMP, National Framework documents and changes in legislation took precedence over your negotiated contract of employment, the Grey Book. The judgement has dismissed that proposition. It is the Grey Book that determines what duties can be required. The employers have to negotiate if they wish to introduce new duties under our contracts of employment.

### ROLE MAPS

All members need to look at their role maps and understand what is contained within them, what exactly you are paid to do and not deviate from those roles assigned to them. If you take on extra responsibility then you are entitled to extra pay. The stance taken by members at Retford, the Court case and resulting victory has meant that we have to be treated as workers, with the rights that brings – and not as slaves.

# CLAIMS UP IN FLAMES



The fire service's reluctance to pour resources into commercial property blazes means insurers are being forced to re-think their insurance cover decisions\*

**T**he tragic deaths of service staff at the fireworks warehouse blaze in East Sussex brought home the risks fire brigade staff face when commercial property goes up in flames. And it was these concerns that led to the brigades' decision to give less priority to commercial fires.

This is forcing insurers to re-think their fire cover and the risk management actions they will insist upon if they are to maintain cover at competitive rates.

A key tenet of the employers' – and government's – argument during the Fire Brigades' Union dispute three years ago was to change the emphasis of the 50 or so different fire and rescue services around the country.

Saving lives, rather than property, was to become the priority – something established by the Bain review that took place just after, combined with a heavy influence from the Treasury.

National service standards based on property (from the 1947 act) were scrapped in favour of local Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) based on saving lives.

Many of these resulted in brigades sending smaller appliances or, in the first instance, just an observer, to commercial fires where no lives were at immediate risk.

Some also claim as many as 90% of automated fire alarm calls are false alarms so

reduce their response as a result.

Brigades had suffered a series of maimed and killed fire fighters and their own health and safety obligations persuaded them that containing fires to stop them spreading, while allowing buildings to burn to the ground should replace plans to aggressively combat fires to minimise financial losses.

"You can understand why they won't commit men inside if there are no lives at risk," says Tony Hutchins, Allianz Cornhill Commercial's property manager. The deaths at the weekend will emphasise that.

But insurers are concerned that they are starting to see more large losses and more total losses than they used to. "In some cases, such as for shopping centres and hospitals, the situation has improved but industrial estates overnight are less well served. We are sensing – and this is a market thing – that more fires now result in total losses," says Hutchins.

**The fear is that some businesses will not view fire safety the way they did when they knew a fire officer would be round with the clipboard every now and then**

Allister Smith, property risk manager at Norwich Union agrees. "We are certainly seeing larger fire losses in terms of the exposure and impact. We are trying to establish what factors had an impact on these larger losses," he says.

Insurers are flagging up that the economic loss to the local community of a major employer being out of business does not feature in most local brigade risk management plans.

"Life safety is the first priority, both in terms of occupants and of the fire service, but the economic and social costs must also be a driver of fire brigades' plans," says Smith. He flags up a National Audit Office report that confirmed 80% of firms affected by a major fire were out of business completely within five years. "A total loss of a large employer will have a detrimental effect on a local community."

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has been mapping fire brigades' response times and through InFiReS [Insurers' Fire Research Strategy Funding Scheme], its collaboration with the insurance industry, it can allow insurers to find out response times by postcode.

But there is also an issue of response size. Some insurers also suspect that costs are driving the response size, rather than risk management plans. In areas where the service is predominantly run by retained firefighters



**Commercial property fire  
– insurers are concerned they  
are starting to see more large  
losses and more total losses**

SEAN WATCHER

– those with other jobs who drop everything to become firefighters when the alarm goes off – there are question marks over whether the lack of response is to save paying the retained crews. All of this information is now being collated to paint a clearer picture.

But Jonathan O'Neill, NFPA managing director, is also concerned that when it comes to the new fire prevention role of brigades, emphasis is concentrating on domestic, rather than business fire prevention. And things are set to get worse. Fire inspections by the local brigade will be replaced by companies nominating their own 'competent' individual to inspect themselves. "The fear is that some businesses will not view fire safety the way they did when they knew a fire officer would be round with the clipboard every now and then," he says.

There have already been cases where businesses fitting fire alarms have run cables through what were secure firebreaks, effectively negating those breaks through the drilling.

Nick Black, corporate major impact team adjuster with Crawford's, says that while fire losses may be rising because of the reduced responses, where insurers have secured better building design, fire safety measures and risk management planning from their commercial property clients, reduction in losses can be huge.

That is something the industry is tackling

**We are certainly seeing  
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on these larger losses**

through InFiReS. It is lobbying hard for better constructed buildings for secure fire walls within them and other physical fire protection standards. It has had some success, and expects its design guide to be included in the new government produced Approved Document B on fire safety. There have also been a series of meetings with the chief fire officers' association and suggested improvements to each individual brigade's risk management plan.

Insurers will also have to make more demands on their insurees. "Alarms only alert the fire service, and if they are not going to come to an alarm then we might have to demand sprinkler systems and other fire suppression systems for smaller risks," says Allianz Cornhill's Hutchins. "It might be that some risks get priced higher."

Norwich Union's Smith says regional price variations are a real possibility. "You could

have differential pricing for different parts of the country because we are concerned about the variations we sense in some of the IRMP planning."

Insurers set up the first fire brigades as an innovative solution to rising commercial property fires. Now that the fire brigades are taking the self-same fires less seriously, the innovation that led to those first historic fire-marks being nailed outside insured buildings is being called upon again to solve the current crisis of exploding fire losses. And last week-end's disaster will continue to shine a spotlight on the situation.

\* Insurance Times, 7 December 2006

## Have your say

This article was originally published in *Insurance Times*. The magazine kindly gave *Firefighter* permission to use it. The views expressed are entirely independent and raise a number of issues.

Please e-mail [firefighter@fbu.org.uk](mailto:firefighter@fbu.org.uk) telling us what you think of the views expressed in this article. If you want us to leave out your name, brigade or anything else which may identify you then please indicate this and we will do so.

We will endeavour to publish a range of views on our website and in a future edition of *Firefighter* magazine.

# A firefighter is

**A** firefighter is a firefighter, is a firefighter. That's a phrase you'll often hear when discussion turns to the different duty systems in the fire service. Since the pay dispute this maxim has had a greater ring of authenticity than ever. Yet given the progress that has been made by retained firefighters – backed by the FBU – in establishing their rights to parity with the wholetime service, why is transferability from retained to wholetime still such a haphazard process?

If you ring round the country's brigades you will find an unprecedented and heartfelt desire to make it easier for retained firefighters to make the transition to wholetime. But ask: "How is it being done?" and you'll get as many different answers as there are brigades.

Peter Preston, FBU National Retained Committee Secretary, says every brigade is pursuing its own ad hoc system: "There is no national procedure to go from being retained to wholetime. Historically, when the retained transfer to be wholetime they had to start the recruitment system from scratch and apply as if they'd never been in the service before.

"There were no allowances for the training they'd already had – breathing and even driving training had to be done again. It still happens in most brigades. It's farcical and a total waste of money."

If you are a conspiracy theorist, the fact that the fire service historically has not made it easy for retained firefighters to become wholetime would be a no-brainer. There's a chronic shortage of retained firefighters – 18,500 jobs, with only 13,000 being filled. Yet as soon as a wholetime job is advertised, stand back and watch the stampede. As Peter Preston says: "I recall one particular recruitment campaign in

**Why is transferability from retained to wholetime still such a haphazard process?**

my own brigade in North Wales where they had advertised for 11 jobs and there were over 1,100 applicants.

"People from all walks of life want to be wholetime firefighters. Yet brigades have a massive problem finding people to give retained daytime cover."

However the desire – if not the system – to make transfers easier, seems to be there. Norfolk fire service, for example, appears to

**Each brigade pursues its own ad hoc system when recruiting retained duty firefighters to wholetime. It's high time for a national procedure**

be ahead of the game and seems to have it all mapped out.

But there's a catch. Neil Day, FBU Brigade Secretary in Norfolk, says the union and the brigade spent three months defining a clear and proper transfer procedure.

"We ran a few test cases and concluded that there were only a few elements missing from the skills already acquired by the retained. We figured it would only take ten days training, as opposed to the 11-16 weeks wholetime course. We recognised there was a degree of difference between the wholetime and the retained, but not much."

And the catch? "Unfortunately, Norfolk brigade doesn't have the resources to implement it. They need to find and pay qualified instructors to teach the course. So, anyone

making the transfer in our brigade still has to do the full 16-week wholetime course.

"We even had a case where five retained firefighters were promised this new modular course but there was so much procrastination, with nothing in the end happening, that it would have been quicker if they'd just done the 16-week course!"

Peter Preston applauds the new mindset, if not the execution. "We see this as a very positive step. I've seen a significant number come off retained watches to become wholetime, with some of these guys getting credit for their retained training, thus reducing their wholetime training. However, the fire service still made them go through the initial selection process, as if they'd walked in off the street, and we're not happy with that at all."

**We know there's an invisible barrier within the fire service between retained and wholetime and we aim to break it down**

Peter gets to the heart of what is required: "If vacancies occur in the brigade it should be simple and straightforward and retained firefighters should get full allowance for their skills. We want training modularised, so it's broken down into component parts, bite-size chunks. The union – and retained firefighters – want the service to have a fully recognised national system.

"The retained are fed up with being treated as second class citizens. They want access to the same promotion prospects. It's a bizarre anomaly of the fire service. Other organisations allow internal applications."

Peter points out some fire services are more progressive than others. "Leicester are very proactive in taking internal applicants. If a wholetime job comes up, anyone in the organisation can apply. Control staff and everyone."

So what of the experiences of those who have successfully negotiated the transfer? Lee Howl made the transfer from retained firefighter to wholetime with West Midlands fire service. The service decided he would follow the procedure as if he was a wholetime firefighter coming in from another brigade. So they interviewed him accordingly – and failed him.

Three weeks later, they called back and said



Mark Jones, also pictured above with colleagues at Windsor fire station in Berkshire, says he "had to apply as if I was a member of the public" but "my retained skills got me the job"

# a firefighter ...



PICTURES: SIMON GREEN

on reflection they thought they'd been a bit tough on him, considering he was retained, and so awarded him the transfer.

"I was really pleased to get the job," he says. "However, I still had to do the full 16-week training course, even though I'd been a retained firefighter for four years. I have to

**I had to apply as if I was a member of the public and go through all the usual assessment days, interviews and aptitude tests**

say, I thought it was a waste of the fire service's money. Yet West Midlands encourage transfers. There were nine last year and two more coming in February 2007," says Lee.

In the case of Royal Berkshire's Mark Jones, localised and unsystematic recruitment procedures probably worked to his advantage. As a retained watch manager at Pangbourne station, but also a wholetime firefighter at Tilehurst, Mark decided he was going to use

his retained watch manager experience to apply for the same rank in wholetime. "In lots of ways it was an unusual step, as I got the job, and managed to jump a rank in the wholetime structure – going from firefighter to watch manager. In this instance, my retained skills got me the job."

Yet when he originally made the transfer from retained to wholetime, Mark had to go the same route as a new applicant to the service. "I had to apply as if I was a member of the public and go through all the usual assessment days, interviews and aptitude tests. Obviously I had a distinct advantage over the other applicants."

Tam Mitchell, FBU Executive Council member for retained firefighters, a retained firefighter for 19 years and a crew manager at Carlisle station in Strathclyde, acknowledges that there is, in some circumstances, a skills gap between the retained and the wholetime.

But he says it is often station-specific – differing risk profiles and appliances – and does not require a full initial 13- or 16-week training course and it certainly shouldn't be a barrier.

"We need a national procedure where the level of competency can be determined and measured," he says. "There are only integrated personal development systems in 25 per cent of brigades. This would give credence to the view that the retained satisfy the criteria for competence."

**The retained are fed up with being treated as second class citizens. They want access to the same promotion prospects**

"Brigades handle transfers in their own unique ways. Some have a methodology but the majority have no procedure. We know there's an invisible barrier within the fire service between retained and wholetime and we aim to break it down."

"Retained firefighters are not given enough credit for their skills. When you get to an incident, you're all firefighters. There's no such thing as a retained house fire."

# WHAT DOES THE FBU PRESIDENT SAY?

Mick Shaw, elected unopposed in February, has every confidence that the Union can consolidate its current position and begin to move forward again

**“** I am honoured to have been elected as FBU President and would like to thank all those members who supported me. I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the achievements of my predecessor, Ruth Winters\*. Ruth held that crucial position during probably the most difficult period that this union has faced. She did so with determination and dignity and I hope that all members will join with me in wishing her well for the future.

I joined the union on my first day at training school in 1977. Within four weeks of being posted to a station I was on strike for nine weeks – not a happy time, but an invaluable lesson for me in trade unionism. I first became an FBU official – the branch chair at Shoreditch Fire Station in East London – in 1979. Since then I have held office at every

**Ruth Winters held that crucial position during probably the most difficult period that this union has faced and did so with determination and dignity**

level in the Union. Most of that time has not been easy for the FBU, but due to the leadership of its officials and the loyalty of its membership, the Union is just as strong now as it was back then.

Most of the challenges that we face now are not really new. During 18 years of Tory government we faced relentless pressure for cuts in services, which we were successful in resisting in some areas and less successful in others. We only maintained a pay formula because of our determination to defend it. Strike-breaking organisations attempted to poach our members, but we were successful in resisting them, maintaining and increasing our membership figures.

I have every confidence that we can consolidate our current position and begin to move forward again. We still have the support of the overwhelming majority of employees in fire stations, control rooms, training centres and brigade headquarters throughout the UK. Despite the best efforts of our opponents to drive retained duty members and officers into the hands of strike-breaking organisations, almost all have remained with the only organisation that has the strength and the determination to consistently fight for their interests: the FBU. Where our



## KEY POINTS

- ◆ The Union is just as strong now as it was in 1977
- ◆ Time to end introspection and navel-gazing
- ◆ FBU must play lead role on firefighter/public safety, equality, professional standards, in wider labour movement and world



STEFANO GAGNONI

Mick Shaw outside  
Union headquarters

members have faced attacks on their jobs or their shifts – such as in West Midlands, Suffolk, Hertfordshire, Merseyside and Cleveland – our members have shown that they are prepared to fight to defend them.

Instead of continued conflict and confrontation, however, I would like to see our employers adopt a true “modernisation” agenda: one that involves proper representation in the workforce of women and other under-represented groups; one where members on the retained duty system are given proper recognition and training and are no longer treated as second-class firefighters; where members working in control rooms are assured of their future employment and disastrous proposals for regionalisation are dropped; where all our members are provided with the best training and equipment to enable them to do their job professionally; with a proper focus on imaginative community safety measures, but not at the expense of essential operational

## Where our members have faced attacks on their jobs or their shifts they have shown that they are prepared to fight to defend them

training; where our members are properly recognised as highly motivated, skilled professionals whose dedication and expertise is essential to the proper delivery of a first class service to the public. With such an agenda, the FBU could work in partnership with employers and Government. The main beneficiaries of such an approach would be the public, whose interests should always be foremost for the whole fire and rescue service.

I look forward to presiding over our annual conference in May. It is where representatives from every brigade in the UK get the chance to decide union policy and to receive reports from their national officials on the union's work. Since the pay dispute of 2002–2003, members have taken a keen interest in the workings of the union, as they did after the last national strike of 1977–1978. However, I feel that introspection and navel-gazing is not what we should now be concentrating on. We should instead be looking outside of our own structures: to the UK Fire Service, where we should be playing our traditional leadership role on firefighter and public safety, equality and professional standards; to the wider labour

## Most of the challenges that we face now are not really new. During eighteen years of Tory Government we faced relentless pressure for cuts in services

movement, where we should be continuing to play a full part, as we have since our inception; and to the wider world where, in an increasingly globalised economy and society, events elsewhere will shape our future.

At a time when many unions are merging to form ever-larger organisations, the FBU – organising in a single industry – is increasingly untypical. However, despite our relatively small size, we are well organised, influential; and have a fine tradition of all that is best in trade unionism. I am proud to have been elected as President. I look forward to a period of office in which our union, its members and the wider fire and rescue service can re-assert their position as organisations to whom other workers, politicians, opinion-formers and society as a whole give their wholehearted respect and support. I am confident that we will do that and look forward to working with members and officials throughout the union in doing so.



\* Ruth Winters served as President from September 2002 until February 2007

## Working For You

### PAUL FLETCHER

Brigade secretary

### Isle of Wight



The Isle of Wight and Hampshire launched a three-month period of public consultation at the start of November 2006, following a ‘scoping study’ that looked into the possibility of merging our two brigades.

The island's FBU officials started a campaign opposing any merger, forging strong links with local Unison officials whose members would initially be the most affected by any merger. As well as attending branch meetings, they also provided financial assistance towards the campaign.

The strength of feeling of island residents and the organised approach of the FBU was underestimated by the council and within the first few weeks it backed down. The consultation included new options to stay as we are, which allowed the public a real choice, and to stay as an independent brigade while working with any provider that benefited the island service.

During the public consultation we collected over 4,000 letters of objection and sent them to the council's chief executive. Family and friends asked people in their local areas to support our campaign, there were newspaper ads and firefighters canvassed local towns.

The local FBU committee has received tremendous support and guidance from all levels within the FBU, including the General Secretary. The Union financed all aspects of our campaign, including the commissioning of the independent report by IPF consultants that we have sent to all councillors and fire service staff on the island.

Our Executive Council member Pete Miller has been instrumental in raising awareness of our campaign off the island, attending a number of meetings from the start to the final council vote due as Firefighter went to press on 21 March, and his input into the IPF report was crucial.

All this has helped ensure an effective, professional campaign, boosting membership (more membership forms have gone out to some retained stations following requests by them) and underlining to all in our brigade what the FBU can achieve on behalf of its members, locally and nationally.

➔ More info: [www.fireservicemerger.com](http://www.fireservicemerger.com)

# Getting a fix

There were over 1,400 drug-related deaths in the UK last year

## DRUGS

Last year, there were over 1,400 drug related deaths in the UK – with the average age of death being just 35. If these deaths occurred through war, or disease, there would be national outcry. Although having a drug or alcohol problem is very different to being a soldier or suffering from a fatal illness, does it not still deserve our attention and our compassion?

What comes to mind when you envisage these 1,400 people, or the estimated 360,000 adult problematic drug users in the UK? Do you imagine them as pale, shivering wrecks, ruthlessly abusing their bodies and destroying their lives, committing crimes to 'get their fix'?

While the stereotype of the 'addict' may well be true in some cases, it is not 'the norm'. There is no norm, and no typical user, and it is essential to understand this. It is difficult to concede that many people with drug and alcohol problems actually hold down jobs, have partners, children and responsibilities. It is all too easy to pigeonhole drug users or addicts; to believe that they are so far removed from yourself that you need not make a comparison.

The typecast 'user' becomes somehow totally unconnected to someone who partakes in recreational drug use; and this misconception is dangerous.

Often, what begins as 'a bit of fun' or

### DRUG FACTS:

- ◆ 34% of adults have used drugs
- ◆ 1,400 drug-related deaths in 2006
- ◆ Average age of drug-related death: 35
- ◆ 123,000 injecting users in the UK

a 'weekend treat' can soon escalate and become more difficult to cover up. It can result in 'sick' days from work, rendering the emergency services' compulsory drug testing pointless. The damaging consequences of drug and alcohol abuse for individuals, and its impact on families and society, is enormous. The hard costs of crime, homelessness, unemployment, health, and loss of workdays are estimated at £11-20 billion a year for drugs, and £22 billion for alcohol abuse.

The prevalence of drug-taking – and drinking – amongst under 16s in the UK is the highest reported in Europe. Cocaine use in the UK has become more socially acceptable and the culture of drug use is spilling into the workplace with often-disastrous consequences. Society's stereotype of those suffering from addiction is often very different from the reality. These widely held assumptions are largely due to inadequate information or mis-education. After the drugs education of your school years ceases, there is very little on-going, everyday education about the constantly

evolving drugs culture. Yet it is as important for parents to be aware of this part of our society as their children. How can parents, mentors and carers be equipped to support their charges if they themselves are ill informed?

Whether you are in contact with people who need help through your job, as a parent or carer looking after young people who may be vulnerably exposed to the world of drugs, FBU members need to be aware of the support that is available.

Whether you think you should refer a young person to Drugline to ask the questions he or she is too embarrassed to ask their peers or family, or you wish to express concern for a colleague or friend, or if you are worried about your own drug or alcohol use, just call.

There can be no real measure of the devastating impacts on an individual or family's health and emotional wellbeing when drugs are involved, and there is no shame in asking for help, guidance and support from an impartial source.

The Drugline crisis line is staffed by a dedicated, trained team of volunteers who will answer any questions you may have and when necessary, refer you to someone who could help you further.

→ If you want to talk...

- ◆ Call Drugline on 0808 1 606 606 for free, confidential, independent advice
- ◆ Visit [www.drugline.org](http://www.drugline.org) to find out more



TMM SONNENSCHEN/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

## Flexible Working

### **Q** What are my rights to apply to work flexibly?

**A** Employees with children under six or disabled children under 18 have the right to ask their employer to consider a request for flexible working. The Work and Families Act also introduces a new right for carers of adults to request to work flexibly, from 6 April 2007.

Flexible working can include part-time work, using flexitime, varying the hours you start and finish work, your patterns and place of work and job sharing. You should first get advice from your FBU rep, as your contract of employment or locally negotiated agreement may provide for different arrangements to those laid down in law.

Your employer has a statutory duty to give serious consideration to any request to work flexibly and can only refuse it if there are clear and permissible business grounds for doing so. However, the remedies available to you if they refuse your request are limited.

### **Q** What is the process for applying to work flexibly?

**A** Any request to work flexibly must be put in writing, stating that it is being made under the statutory right to apply for flexible working. You must confirm your relationship to the child and set out your proposed change to your working patterns. You must have 26 weeks continuous service.

Importantly, you must explain what effect you think this change will have on your employer (ie would they have to find other staff to cover for you) and how you think they might deal with this.

You must also state if you have made a previous application and, if so, when.

Your employer must either respond with an agreement within 28 days of receiving your application or must request a meeting with you to discuss it.

They must then notify you in writing within 14 days of



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

## Legal Beagle

### Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

the meeting of their decision. This will either be acceptance of the request, agreement to any alternative arrangement that will have been discussed with you at the meeting, or a refusal.

### **Q** What can I do if the employer refuses?

**A** If the employer refuses your request they must set out the clear business reasons as to why, and they must inform you of the appeals process.

If you decide to appeal, you must inform your employer and they must hear your appeal within 14 days. They must then write to you either upholding the appeal, specifying any agreed variation to your request, or dismissing the appeal and stating the grounds for doing so.

If your appeal is turned down, you must seek legal advice through the FBU as soon as possible as you have just three months from the date of

notification of rejection to apply to the employment tribunal.

Your grounds for complaint to an employment tribunal are fairly limited, and depend primarily on whether your employer complied with the procedures, based their decision on correct facts or rejected your application on a business ground that they cannot justify or is not permitted. The ET can either make you a monetary award, limited to eight weeks' pay (capped at £310 a week) or order your employer to reconsider.

It may also be possible to pursue a sex discrimination claim, but again, legal advice through the FBU should be sought first.

## Me and my DNA

**Q** Can I be ordered (by the police or by my brigade) to give a DNA sample for elimination purposes following my attendance at an incident and what rights do I have to

refuse? And if I give a sample what will happen to it following my elimination – will my DNA end up on the national database?

**A** DNA profiling methods are very sensitive and it is now possible to detect very low levels of DNA. Because of this high sensitivity, there is an increased chance of detecting DNA from more than one individual in samples. Some may be material left by those attending the scene legitimately after an incident has been reported. This is known as contamination.

Because of the ease with which DNA contamination can occur, a record of the identity and actions of those who have visited the scene is maintained. It may become necessary to obtain elimination samples from those visitors afterwards. Neither police nor brigade have any power to obtain a DNA sample from a firefighter without written consent from that individual. However, refusal to provide consent may result in unnecessary and expensive enquiries being made and could increase the chances of a perpetrator escaping justice. DNA samples provided by consent will be destroyed once the enquiry has been concluded.

The police maintain a national DNA database. The database is searched speculatively to match profiles from DNA researched during the investigations of crimes. Firefighters who provide a DNA sample can also volunteer to have their DNA profile stored on the national DNA database but a separate written consent must be provided by each individual.

If written consent is obtained to the DNA profile being stored on the National DNA database the consent cannot be withdrawn and therefore the DNA profile will permanently remain on the national DNA database.

→ Write in with your legal problem to [legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk](mailto:legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk) and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

# 'The buzz of fighting, pitting your wits against an opponent, is intense'

Ben Vickers certainly knows how to box clever, keeping himself fit and helping others to follow suit by using his military training

**F**or a mild-mannered, personable sort of bloke, Ben Vickers certainly gets into a lot of fights these days – but never, of course, on duty or in public houses. For Ben, 26, has just competed in the World Police and Firefighter Olympics in Adelaide, Australia, where he boxed his way to the final, coming second with a silver medal after losing to an 'absolutely brilliant' Kazakh opponent.

He is a keen boxer but also enjoys martial arts, and even takes colleagues for a spot of circuit training in the station gym or round the bay from time to time. He has also encouraged a younger work colleague, keen on boxing, to take up the sport and has watched his first fight since helping to put him through his paces.

Ben first got the taste for boxing when he joined the army at 16, signing up for five years with the Princess of Wales Royal Regiment, serving in Northern Ireland and Bosnia during his five years as a soldier.

He had a dozen boxing "bouts" in the army, and was runner-up in the regimental boxing tournament. "It was a big thing in the army. If there was a boxing match on, everyone on camp who was not on essential duties would turn up to watch," says Ben.

Though colleagues at the fire station take an interest in his sporting life, things are a bit different now: Ben, a self-confessed "thrill-seeker", has also developed a taste for martial arts in the past couple of years. This includes judo, jujitsu, kick boxing and wrestling, which, he says, is very good for getting the adrenaline pumping.

He trains six days a week to keep himself match-fit and more. "When I'm in training for a fight, I don't drink and try and eat healthily. My social life disappears, but in the aftermath of a fight I usually let my hair down a bit," he confides. But not as much as he did in his first job on leaving the army – a working holiday in sun-kissed Lloret de Mar on the Costa Brava.

## 'Fighting's a primal instinct'

"It was fun for a season, but I certainly wasn't going to make a career of being a drunken bum," says Ben, who also demonstrated "bungee jumping into the Mediterranean" in Cyprus before looking for a job in the fire service. "That was quite an experience, but I find the buzz of fighting, pitting your wits against an opponent, more intense than even that. I think fighting's a primal instinct and with boxing there are strict rules."

To box successfully in contests, punches must be landed and taken, but some people take up the sport to get fit without fighting. "Instructors will never force anyone to punch, and some people like to dance around to get fit. But if you are competing, you'd probably get booed off stage and you'd certainly lose if you didn't. People watching would think you had picked the wrong sport," says Ben, before he left for Australia.

Firefighting seems to suit him. In earlier non-uniformed jobs, he had missed the close camaraderie of life in the army, and only found the kind of team working

PICTURES: STEFANO CAGNONI





### BEN VICKERS

Ben Vickers, 26 a firefighter on Red Watch at Islington station in London, has just competed in the World Police and Firefighter Olympics in Adelaide, Australia, as a boxer. Ben first got the taste for boxing when he joined the army at 16.

**‘Instructors will never force anyone to punch, and some people like to dance around to get fit. But if you are competing, you’d probably get booed off stage and you’d certainly lose if you didn’t. People watching would think you had picked the wrong sport’**

and mutual trust he was after rekindling when he joined the brigade. “You don’t get that bond if you do a job where there’s no danger involved,” he says.

When away from firefighting duties, Ben also draws on his army experience as a fitness trainer with British Military Fitness, a specialist company which recruits former soldiers and other military personnel to help people from civvy street get and keep fit.

You could well have seen trainers from the company, dressed in combats, probably wearing rucksacks, shouting at and encouraging groups of people in parks to run, stretch and generally engage in rigorous workouts.

#### **Punches must be landed and taken**

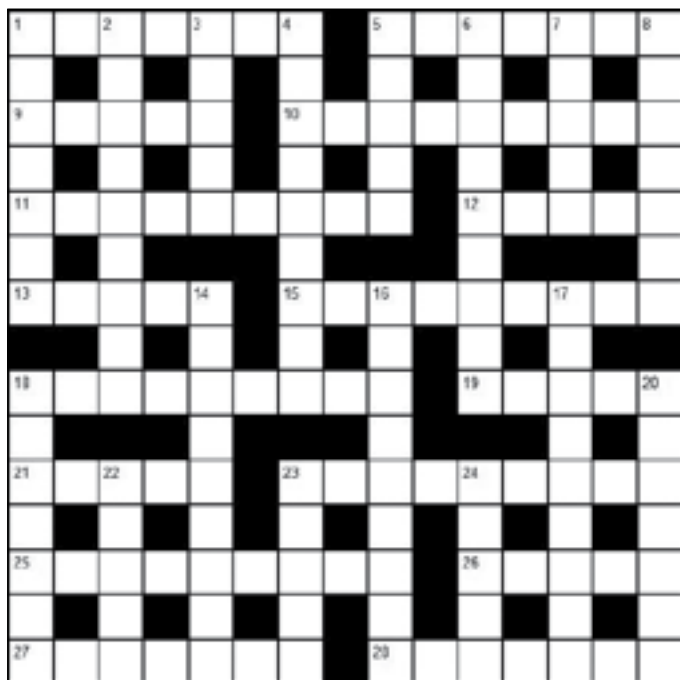
Unlike gym membership, few tend to drop out once they get the taste for army-style training tailored to civilian needs. People from all walks of life join up for courses, says Ben, from executives, to City types and people in sedentary day-jobs. The oldest punter on the books is a fit and sprightly 75.

Earnings from Ben’s work as a fitness trainer have helped bankroll his trip to Adelaide to compete against other policemen and firefighters in the boxing ring. When working as a trainer, there may be a bit of shouting, but no one gets punched. “We understand people are paying for the service. We shout because it’s our way of motivating people but we never get personal or insulting. People don’t join to be abused, but to get fit. And being ex-army we have a sense of humour and can have a laugh.”

But it’s certainly not for slackers, or faint hearts, or those who like a leisurely chat on the exercise bikes.

“We are out in parks whatever the weather – rain, sleet snow, cold, whatever” Which, come to think of it, sounds very much like life as a frontline firefighter.

## Quick Crossword

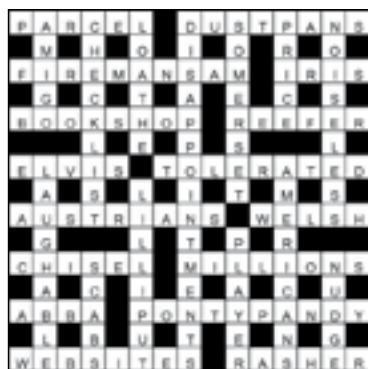


### ACROSS

- 1 Fine-toothed cutting tool (7)
- 5 Informer, indicter (7)
- 9 One who abuses strength or power (5)
- 10 Unbending, rigid (9)
- 11 The 18 across 28 were transported there (9)
- 12 One of the senses (5)
- 13 Windmills and boats have them (5)
- 15 They pretend to be those they are not (9)
- 18 Dorset village important to trade-union history (9)
- 19 Count on them to get a good night's sleep! (5)
- 21 Demonstration month? (5)
- 23 It'll tell you how far you've walked (9)
- 25 Islander in south of 11 (9)
- 26 Two times (5)
- 27 Hates (7)
- 28 They give life or freedom for a principle (7)

### DOWN

- 1 Wheels have them (7)
- 2 Heavenly (9)
- 3 Leo, who was a One-Man Band (5)
- 4 Vortex, hurricane (9)
- 5 Theatre of sport (5)
- 6 Reformers of the mid 19th century (9)
- 7 Places chosen for building (5)
- 8 Fireworks or spacecraft (7)
- 14 Boxers who lead with the right (9)
- 16 False or other name (9)
- 17 Excite, energise, charge, thrill (9)
- 18 Enticed, especially to do something 'sinful' (7)
- 20 Packets (7)
- 22 Put (broken bone) back in place; re-boot (5)
- 23 Sets of two (5)
- 24 Engine (5)



Solution to March crossword



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## Prize Quiz

### Win a Nintendo Wii Console

Enter our prize quiz and it could be yours. This issue the quiz is on scientific inventions and discoveries. Answer the following questions to win.

1. In 1876 Alexander Graham Bell was one of two people to invent (and the first to patent) what instrument of communication?

2. In 1938 the Hungarian journalist Ladislo Biro got fed up with leaking fountain pens and invented what type of writing tool?

3. In 1880 Alessandro Volta invented a type of energy that powers torches, remote controls and much more importantly, smoke alarms – what was it?

4. Name James Starley's invention of a two-wheeled mode of transport.

5. What is the name of the soft drink that was invented in 1886 by Dr John Pemberton and which is today drunk worldwide but which originally

contained traces of cocaine and was first sold as a tonic from a pharmacy in Atlanta, Georgia?

6. What is the name of the earliest antibiotic agent discovered by Sir Alexander

Fleming while working at St Mary's hospital in London in 1928?

### HOW TO ENTER

To win the Nintendo Wii console send your answers to the prize quiz by 30 April on a postcard to: Prize Competition (April 2007) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

March quiz  
- answers

1. .... trousers
2. The Jam
3. Freebird
4. Live Forever
5. Mika
6. Prince

Winner of the  
January/February  
quiz was  
Stuart McQueen  
of Motherwell



CORBIS



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# StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

## Garden leave



It's spring time and my thoughts turn to gardening or, more specifically, "garden leave", and its lucky recipient Notts (now ex) CFO Paul Woods. Mr Woods suddenly has time to gather lilacs in the spring as he takes his "garden leave" while awaiting the start of his new job for that charitable organisation known as CFOA.

It follows a "crisis" in Human Resources (HR) headed up by that fragrant, delicate flower, Gina Woods. They are – by chance – related by marriage which must have been interesting when Mrs Woods was suspended after the review which uncovered the "crisis" also found the HR department was failing in six out of eight key areas.

Consultants PriceWaterhouseCoopers were paid £25,000 to come to the conclusion that 81 grievance hearings and 41 disciplinaries in 18 months contributed to the "crisis" in the department. **Any Station Cat could have told them that for a bowl of milk and some Whiskas, but never get between a consultant and their next pay cheque.**

Mrs Woods is suspended on full pay while hubby Paul tends the flower beds. The return to work offer to her includes working under a temporary head of HR while trying to attain training and development goals. Will this work or will the curse of Station Cat claim another victim? Watch this space.

## McGuirkieside BLT



And in McGuirkieside, Beloved Leader Tony still appears to be avoiding the pruning shears. Better still, everything is coming up roses for our Tony as he battles it out for the title of highest-paid chief officer in the universe.

As his local councillors flagged up to the local media that with another financial crisis looming, they took time off from the real world to award Beloved Leader Tony a whopping 15% pay rise.

This includes an annual payment which amounts to a loyalty bonus just for staying in his job.

**The entire top management team in McGuirkieside are now all quids in. So good is their financial package that they have had to withdraw from the NJC "Gold" book conditions (and yes, Gold is appropriate).**

What convinced the Labour councillors to team up with the Tories to force this through? An apparent belief that Tony could be poached by other brigades desperate to recruit the greatest fire chief in the world, ever.

Yes, I know. Some people, I fear, are either born gullible or believe every rumour they hear about who is going to be the next head of Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate.

Sorry, I mean the new national entirely independent professional advisory unit (I must have a nap, having got bored with the

very long official preamble to whatever the new unit will be called).

## Gongs and medals



I've never been a Cat for gongs and medals. But having seen the actions of Gus Campbell confronting an alleged suicide bomber on the tube I get a sense of what they are meant to celebrate.

The Queen's Fire Service Medal is, according to the official honours website, for exceptional achievement, exceptional service or for "recognition of specific acts by individuals who risk their own lives in a selfless way in order to save, or attempt to save, the life of one of The Queen's subjects." So far, so simple even the Station Cat can understand.

Not so simple to understand then is the award of the medal to Eileen Baird, an accountant who was head of finance for nine years before also becoming Deputy Chief Fire Officer of Strathclyde 18 months ago.

Her achievements in gaining the medal include, according to Strathclyde's website "overseeing the funding" for fire station refurbishment, new safety equipment and an aerial rescue pump. **Overseeing funding is what accountants do, so what is exceptional or brave about doing it for ten years?** Answers to my usual e-mail address please.



# 25 year badges



(left to right) Andy Jobson, Neil Turnbull and John Pringle West Denton Branch, Tyne & Wear, have received their 25-year badges



Bob Taylor (left) and Jeff Sabiston (right) North Div HQ, West Denton, Tyne & Wear, receiving their 25-year badges



Tony Devenish (left) Chelmsford Red Watch receives his 25-year badge from Chelmsford Branch Chair Martin Ketley



Watch Manager Martin Cutler (left) Walton Fire Station, Surrey, receives his 25-year badge from branch chair John Toes



Crew Manager Steve Milner (left) White Watch, Maidstone, Kent, receives his 25-year badge from Watch Manager John Hogben, branch secretary, Maidstone



Watch manager John Toes (Left) Walton Fire Station, Surrey, receives his 25-year badge from station rep Martin Cutler



Martin Donnelly (left) receives his 25-year badge from officers' branch chair Paul Haydock, Lancs



George Martin (left) receives his 25-year badge from officers' branch chair Paul Haydock



Don Cross (left) receives his 25-year badge from officers' branch chair Paul Haydock, Lancs

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk (Please note that inkjet prints from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – 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 and when it was taken.



Steve Docherty (centre, right) Station Manager, Buxton, Derbyshire receives his 25-year badge from Branch Secretary Dom McGlynn

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## Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

## FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

**0808 100 6061**

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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