

FireFighter

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

January/February 2008

YES

TO LOCAL CONTROLS!

New pressure on England's regional control project as Scotland rejects similar closure plans Page 10



Ill-health pensions

The fight goes on as Union wins important legal victory Page 12

RDS pensions

Equality battle continues in the courts Page 14



Cuts fightback

The latest moves to axe local fire services Page 6



Four funerals



I write this shortly after returning from Warwickshire, where I attended the funerals of our four members killed

in the incident at Atherstone-on-Stour. This was the saddest week in the UK fire service for many, many years.

Of course, it is the families who have suffered the most. We can only hope that the many firefighters who attended the funerals helped to provide some comfort at such a difficult time.

I know that local people were remarkably impressed that firefighters from all over the UK attended the funerals. Indeed the solidarity between firefighters was commented upon during the services.

Once again, I would like to thank our local officials in Warwickshire and the West Midlands region who have been working non-stop in dealing with various aspects of this tragedy.

We have been able to provide support and assistance to all of our members who have been interviewed as part of the investigation. This is likely to be a long and difficult process for all concerned.

The aim of the FBU in these circumstances is to ensure that lessons are learned so that the safety of others can be improved. That is just one of the tributes we can pay to Ian, John, Ashley and Darren.

Pension campaign continues

Elsewhere, the union's campaign for pensions justice continues. You will all have received a

bulletin on this issue before Christmas. Our campaign is progressing well.

We have won our first legal battle without having to go to court! We have also managed to win the vast majority of the fire and rescue service in support of our campaign.

It is difficult to find anyone who is willing to even attempt to justify the stance taken by the pension officials at the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Indeed, it is increasingly apparent that the only people who agree with the CLG stance are the CLG pension officials themselves.

Over the Christmas period we shall be continuing to lobby ministers to give a favourable response to our demands. All we want, after all, is justice.

Once again, I would urge everyone to take a couple of minutes to send a letter or email to their MP to outline our case and urge them to support us.

We have made it very easy to do this and provided the materials through the Union's website (www.fbu.org.uk) where we have a pension' campaign page.

I can assure you that this political lobbying is having an effect. It has already prompted the launch of a parliamentary Early Day Motion (EDM) which will help to raise the profile of our cause. Whatever you can do to help is of value and everyone can play a part.

In early 2008 we shall be starting the next round of this campaign. We shall be arranging meetings for members across the UK and I would urge you to try to attend one in your locality.



The Last Post is played at the funeral service for Ian Reid at St Gregory's Church, Stratford on Avon

New Year, New Start, New Challenges

Finally, may I take this opportunity to wish all FBU members and their families a happy New Year. We continue to face challenging times in the fire and rescue service on issues such as cuts, jobs, pay and pensions. Those who oppose the Fire Brigades Union are those

who want to be able to trample on the rights and conditions won over many years. Despite many attempts, they have not yet managed to shut us up or stop us from fighting for the rights of firefighters – in all roles and on all duty systems. We get knocked down but we get up again!

Happy New Year.

Matt Wrack

Justice for firefighter pensions

The recent issue of *Firefighter* magazine (October 2007) on ill-health pensions should make people think. I hope some in power manage to get hold of a copy. I found it – and a recent circular on the matter from the General Secretary – very interesting but still cannot understand why the Government should treat firefighters so. I'm 75 and remember when the service was respected for the work it did.

I wish you every success in your fight for justice and the rights gained many years ago.
Maurice Scott
OOT member and former FBU area secretary, Leeds

Immoral proposals beggar belief

It was with some dismay, if not disbelief, that I read the circular from the General Secretary regarding the proposed abuse of the Fireman's Pension Scheme.

I served for 30 years in the London Fire Brigade, and I know that every person I served with was well aware of the risks entailed in the job.

However, we all felt secure in the knowledge we were in 'caring' employ, and in the event of sickness, injury or even death, we would have the full financial support of a good employer. This applied also to our families.

To suggest now that firefighters, who through no fault of their own, and who can no longer continue with their profession, would be discharged with neither pension or job is unacceptable and I trust that the Union will make that clear in no uncertain terms! To step back from this challenge would leave the door wide open to whatever threat any unscrupulous

employer proposed in the future.

To suggest also that these immoral proposals could be made retrospective beggars belief! We must remember also, it comes within weeks of the tragedy in Warwickshire, where four firefighters gave their lives.

W J Langworth
OOT member
Kent

Fire investigation dogs' pivotal role

I am saddened that the anonymous author (Fifth Column, *Firefighter* Nov/Dec 2007), could not have highlighted their concerns in such a manner that focused purely on those issues and not to the detriment of the work that fire investigation dogs do.

Fire investigation dogs play a pivotal role in assisting fire investigators to determine the origin and cause of even the most severe of fires in the form of illegal fire setting.

With low morale, uncertainty and so many people in the fire service feeling generally undervalued, it's good to have something, such as a fire investigation dog, to be proud of, which will undoubtedly do some good.

Nikki Harvey
Fire investigation dog handler
Hertfordshire

CORRECTIONS: Two mistakes crept into our coverage of the Warwickshire tragedy (*Firefighter*, November/December 2007) The article referred to the death of Paul Mallaghan of Stevenage Blue watch and said he died in March 2007. In fact, Paul died in the line of duty in June 2007. In addition, a quote attributed to an FBU official referred to "the first time any firefighter has died on duty in this brigade in the living memory of staff at Warwickshire". It should have read "the first multiple death in this brigade".

This month



16

Meet Bob Smith,
Head of Fire Control
for Avon

Regulars

4 NEWS

Deaths touch colleagues at home and abroad,
Still no action on firework 'bombs'

5 SOUNDING OFF

Seizing the opportunities offered by devolution

6 CUTS FIGHTBACK

A *Firefighter* round-up of how FBU members in England and Northern Ireland are combatting cuts

16 WHAT DOES

A Head of Fire Control do?

18 YOUR WELFARE

New Year, new start

19 LEGAL BEAGLE

Contracts of employment, injury at work, asbestos

20 DAY OFF

Meet keen – and good – golfer Kenny Hankinson

22 PUZZLES

Last year's news is this issues prize quiz theme

23 STATION CAT

Brings you the news they don't want you to hear

24 25-YEAR BADGES

Features

8 GOOD PRACTICE

How supportive are employers to RDS firefighters on their payrolls?

10 YES TO LOCAL CONTROLS

Scotland's decision should make government think again, says Union

12 PENSIONS FIGHT GOES ON

First round to the FBU with an important legal victory

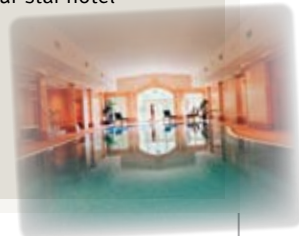
14 BATTLING FOR EQUALITY

Seven years and counting in the campaign for equal pensions treatment for RDS firefighters

PUZZLES

Win this month's quiz, and you'll get enjoy a romantic getaway in a luxury four-star hotel

WIN
a romantic
getaway
see p22



Published by the Fire Brigades Union, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston Upon Thames, KT2 7AE.
www.fbu.org.uk

Tel: 020 8541 1765. Fax: 020 8546 5187
Design by Edition Periodicals 241-251 Ferndale Road London SW9 8BJ. www.editionperiodicals.co.uk.
Printed by Southernprint Ltd, 17-21 Factory Road, Upton Industrial Estate, Poole, Dorset BH16 5SN.



Deaths touch colleagues at home and abroad

WARWICKSHIRE FIRE

FBU officials joined the families, friends and colleagues at the funerals of the four Warwickshire firefighters who died in the line of duty at the Atherstone-on-Stour fire on November 2 2007. At the four services held between November 30 and December 7 tribute was paid to Darren Yates-Badley, John Averis, Ian Reid and Ashley Stephens.

In a statement issued as the service and the community prepared for the funeral of Darren Yates-Badley on 7 December, FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "The deaths of John, Ian, Ashley and Darren in the line of duty has been a terrible blow to their families and colleagues. They are a great loss also to the communities which they served with pride and conviction.

"Their deaths have touched our colleagues in other fire services. Messages of support have come from serving firefighters and their unions from every continent. Those firefighters may express their grief and sadness in different languages and with different gestures. What unites us is knowledge of the risks and dangers inherent in firefighting.

"These are the risks and dangers faced by all firefighters in all communities and all countries. Because of this, the deaths in Warwickshire have resonated in fire stations across the world.

"The families of John, Ian, Ashley and Darren are united in their grief and sadness. In the fire service we also think of ourselves as a family and we are also united in that grief and sadness."

An inquest into the deaths opened in Stratford November 20. After Warwickshire coroner Michael Coker read statements from all four families, paying tribute to their loved ones, it was adjourned pending further investigation. Mr Coker told the families that they should be proud of their "gallant" loved ones and said: "Firefighting in an ordinary fire is a dangerous task and bravery is required to go into the circumstances that happen day by day. Every one of you can be proud, as I know you are, of the young men who are prepared to undertake that for the people of Warwickshire."

→ Donations to: Warwickshire Firefighters Families Fund; Bank: Lloyds Bank; Sort Code: 30-00-02; A/C No.: 00581408

JOHN HARRIS/REPORT DIGITAL.CO.UK

Still no action on firework 'bombs'

MARLIE FARM

The FBU renewed calls for an overhaul of the regulations that cover the import, manufacture, transport and storage of fireworks in the UK on the first anniversary of the deaths of two fire service personnel in an explosion at Marlie Farm in East Sussex on 3 December 2006.

The Union says the investigation into the Marlie Farm explosion uncovered a number of other incidents involving fireworks where lives had been lost and many people injured.

The Union warns that emergency services and the public are being put in needless danger because of confused regulation, lack of monitoring and the poor labelling of imported fireworks.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "In fires containers packed with fireworks can cause the same devastation as some military bombs and artillery shells.

"Despite the dangers

already identified there has been no action from government, the Health and Safety Executive or the other regulatory agencies.

"At present there is no effective regulation of fireworks standards, labelling, transportation or storage. Government and its agencies have done nothing to properly address what we have already learned about firework-linked explosions at incidents in the UK and other countries.

"Emergency services

and the public are being put needlessly at risk by this inaction. The current regime is too complex and isn't working.

"We need one agency in overall control. The regulating agencies need to have a comprehensive programme of inspection and enforcement to achieve an acceptable level of risk."

→ For more on Marlie Farm and other health and safety matters, visit www.fbu.org.uk/workplace/healthsafety



Fire rages after the explosion at Marlie Farm on December 3, 2006

Sounding off!

TONY MAGUIRE

Regional Secretary Northern Ireland

Seizing the opportunities of devolution

If we are to pursue objectives on behalf of our members, FBU activists must campaign, lobby and negotiate in the environment beyond the CFO's office. It is not the CFO driving the agenda on closing controls or stopping ill-health pensions. So we must focus energies where they will have the most impact. To do this, we must develop an understanding and knowledge of contemporary political organisation, political and social change – and, where appropriate, the consequences of devolution and the opportunities it presents.

With this objective, in November 2006 Northern Ireland and Scotland FBU officials attended the Stormont Assembly as part of an "Engaging With Politics" course. The training, delivered by Trevor Cave, Park Lane College, aims to help FBU officials consider the relevance of trade union engagement with local, regional, national and European politics.

The Stormont event created a perfect opportunity for FBU activists to engage with a range of political representatives from Scotland and Northern Ireland, and to outline our concerns and vision for the future of the fire and rescue services in both

Our activists left confident and better equipped to deal with the issues facing the FBU

administrations. As a direct result of that event, the FBU succeeded in a campaign against the cuts proposals in Northern Ireland's IRMP.

Next stop on the course, in November 2007, was Edinburgh, where Trevor drove a challenging schedule: the same officials working in small groups reviewed progress and developments since the Stormont event and considered how to exploit opportunities for moving the FBU agenda forward.

Course activities culminated in a visit to the Scottish Parliament during First Minister's Question Time. The event rounded off with an entertaining but challenging Question Time style debate with a panel comprised of members of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly, Jeffrey Donaldson, (DUP), Carmel Hanna, (SDLP) and Daithi McKay, (SF), and members of the Scottish Parliament, Pauline McNeill, (Lab), Nigel Don (SNP) and Margaret Smyth (Lib Dem).

FBU activists asked a variety of questions and commented on issues from the proposed closures of controls in Scotland to whether Scotland could beat Italy. It was an intense and exhausting few days, skilfully steered by Trevor Cave and efficiently organised by FBU education officers Lynda Rowan-O'Neill, John Duffy and Stephen Boyd. Our activists left Edinburgh confident and better equipped to deal with the issues facing the FBU.

Save on your insurance needs

MEMBER BENEFITS

UIA Insurance, a specialist insurer that has been offering low cost insurance for trade union members and their families for over 100 years, is now offering FBU members access to a range of insurance products that "deliver peace of mind and assured protection". Special rates on these comprehensive policies are:

- **Home:** Up to £50,000 to cover your contents and up to £500,000 for re-building costs. Interest free instalments.
- **Motor:** Immediate cover available. Low cost breakdown cover option.



- **Travel:** Single trip or annual cover available.

To find out how much you can save, call UIA on 0845 842 8421† (please quote ref FF1) (Lines are open 8.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Or buy online at www.fbuinsurance.co.uk

† For quality and protection your call will be recorded. We exchange information with other insurance companies and the police to prevent fraud. The FBU is an Introducer Appointed Representative of UIA (Insurance Services) Ltd and UIA (Insurance) Ltd. Travel insurance is underwritten by Fortis Insurance Ltd. Motor Insurance is administered by Fortis Limited. All these companies are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority.

CUTS FIGHTBACK

Services under threat in England and Northern Ireland

Cuts are threatening frontline fire services in rural and metropolitan brigades across England, while services also face the axe in Northern Ireland.

Firefighter details below some of the proposals that will risk firefighter and public safety in the name of budget savings.



CORNWALL

Cornwall fire crews have welcomed a decision by the county's executive to recommend that Camborne Fire Station should remain crewed 24 hours a day. But they remain deeply concerned at the lack of detailed information given to them and have demanded that councillors meet them to discuss details of the proposals.

Terry Nottle, Cornwall FBU brigade secretary said: "We welcome the news about Camborne, but there is no reason why the threat should remain over Falmouth. They have relieved Camborne without the promised detailed risk assessment, so why not do the same for Falmouth? We came into this campaign determined to save 24-hour immediate response cover at both stations. That resolve remains."

DEVON AND SOMERSET

Devon and Somerset FBU is warning that a new and more severe cuts package will test the limits of safe working for fire crews. As many as 66 frontline firefighter posts could be lost. The authority put the proposals out to consultation for an eight-week period straddling Christmas and New Year.

Trevor French, Devon and



ROB BRENNER

Somerset FBU Secretary said: "These cuts will clearly impact on our work and compromise our safety and public safety. We could lose nearly twice as many frontline firefighter posts as under the old proposals. Those were overwhelmingly rejected by the public and then by the fire authority."

"This is not just showing utter contempt for public opinion. It is throwing it on the ground and kicking it in the teeth. The repeated promises from managers and councillors that there would be no cuts after Devon and Somerset merged have been ripped to shreds."

DORSET

In Dorset, chief fire officer Darran Gunter has warned of budget cuts that will directly and adversely affect the service.

"The options for these cuts may include the number of fire engines or possibly closing stations throughout Dorset."

Dorset brigade secretary Karen Adams said: "The FBU in Dorset will vigorously campaign

against any frontline cuts and would urge the fire authority, rather than wield the axe, to challenge government spending on regional controls at a time when money should be better invested."

AVON

In Avon, fire authority chief councillor Terry Walker has warned of budget cuts with "devastating effects on our communities."

Tam McFarlane, FBU Executive Council member for the South West said: "It is very clear that such cuts will have a devastating effect on the service, and we cannot stand by and let that happen. We will look at all options including industrial action."

EAST SUSSEX

In East Sussex, the brigade is considering a change in shift patterns that would see 36 firefighters removed from the frontline or fewer pumps available for call out, among a number of options.

Brigade secretary Steve Huggins said the FBU was concerned about the options of variable crewing and annualised hours "which will reduce frontline crews and consequently the service we provide and the safety of the public".



EMILY WHITFIELD-WICKS

The current system had delivered a high class service for the past 30 years, he said. "The FBU has seen no evidence that any of these proposals will maintain that service. FBU members have been making this clear in the consultation process and oppose any changes that are detrimental."

HERTFORDSHIRE

Hertfordshire fire crews are up in arms over a shortage of firefighters despite the county council agreeing in July 2006 that this problem would be resolved.

While engines fail to mobilise and crews attend incidents short of personnel, the council has begun to take more firefighters off frontline duties – something that politicians agreed not to do following industrial action last year.

Local firefighter's concerns are also growing over the shortage of experienced personnel available on fire engines as disillusioned staff have left.



ANDREW PARSONS/PA PHOTOS

Brigade secretary Tony Smith said crews were willing to risk their lives every day to save others, "but feel they are being let down by senior managers and the council. Firefighters across the county are extremely angry that our employers have reneged on their agreement that saw an end to our industrial action in 2006. We are angry that our safety is being jeopardised."

KENT

Kent FBU has expressed concerns over the impact on firefighter and public safety of fire service plans to provide height vehicle cover to anywhere in Kent in a 30-minute benchmark standard.

It said the content of the plan was misleading to members of the public who were expected to respond by 18 January.

Harry Sawyer, FBU Secretary for Kent, said: "We agree that a height vehicle should be available to any part of Kent for any purpose – whether that is for rescues or any other reason – within a maximum of 30 minutes.

"But under these misleading plans the proposal would be unachievable unless the height vehicles are crewed 24/7. KFRS has understated the usage and importance of these frontline



ROB BRENNER

vehicles."

HAMPSHIRE

In Hampshire, the FBU continues to campaign against the closure of Copnor fire station in Portsmouth, which, among other cuts, would leave central Portsmouth without any fire appliance. The proposals would also see the moving of an appliance from Redbridge to St Mary in Southampton; the relocation of Winchester Fire Station and the redevelopment of Cosham Fire Station in Portsmouth.

The IRMP was out for consultation until 31 December 2007 and Hampshire fire and rescue authority was due to make a decision on 13 February.

GREATER MANCHESTER

In Greater Manchester, the FBU has slammed a new policy that will limit the fire service response to automatic fire alarms. The GMC's own figures show that at least 60 genuine fires on commercial and business premises – more than

one a week – will get a reduced response.

The FBU has warned that the public and firefighters will be put at risk by delays of even a few minutes which would allow small fires to develop into much larger ones.

Peter Taylor, FBU GMC brigade secretary, said: "The key is reducing the number of false alarms, not opting for a much reduced response to all automatic alarms.

"Under the new policy automatic alarms will be checked out by non-fire-service personnel and some of these are likely to be based many, many miles from the site, meaning a very long delay before they can get to the premises.

"It is only at that stage – after a long delay – that the Greater Manchester Fire Service says it will respond. All it will take is the loss of one medium-sized building and the savings of £2 million to the fire service will have gone up in smoke."

CHESHIRE

In Cheshire, firefighters are angry at plans to replace their full-size 999 vehicle with two cheaper, mini-fire engines that carry fewer firefighters, half the water of a normal fire engine and shorter ladders.

The brigade originally bought the targeted response vehicles (TRVs) to deal with small rubbish fires, but now their role is expanding.

A particular concern is the planned use of TRVs to deal with property fires. Dave Williams, chair of Cheshire FBU, said the smaller tanks on the TRVs meant there could be insufficient water to cool down a significant blaze.

He suspected the long-term intention was to use the TRVs to cover urban areas like Chester, Ellesmere Port and Runcorn where most small fires occur.

A sustained FBU campaign forced the service to take all its TRVs off the run for a time, including the Chester-based TRV, although one has now begun working out of Nantwich.

NORTHERN IRELAND

SHORTFALL IN INVESTMENT WILL HIT STANDARDS

Twenty-six Northern Ireland fire stations are no longer fit for purpose and badly needed investment in them and the emergency fire control room is now threatened thanks to a shortfall in funding, said the brigade.

About £45 million is needed over the next three years to maintain standards, but it is only scheduled to get £12m. Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) has written to Northern Ireland assembly members over its concerns about money allocation in the executive's draft budget.

Bill Gillespie, chairman of the NIFRS board, said the allocation would "barely replace our fire appliances and equipment, never mind look towards investment in fire stations and our 999 command and control system. Undoubtedly, very difficult decisions will have to be made in relation to the provision of emergency cover for the people of Northern Ireland."

The service may have to consider removing some wholetime firefighters from Ballymena, Lisburn, Lurgan, Bangor and Newry, he said.

Jim Barbour, FBU Executive Council member, Northern Ireland, said this was an "extremely grave" situation. "Up to 26 fire stations are being jeopardised. Lives will be put at risk. Our existing control centre will only cost £2.5 million to upgrade, a drop in the ocean compared to the money that is being thrown away on Westminster's totally flawed project for regional controls.

"Scottish politicians have had the good sense to reject regional controls and have chosen instead to invest £50 million in improving the resilience of their emergency fire controls.

"It is unacceptable that the people of Northern Ireland should see the high standards of public safety currently provided by the fire service undermined because of these budget-driven cuts."

How do full-time employers approach RDS firefighters on their payroll?
Alerter reports

Supportive: Gwyn Williams, RDS firefighter at his workplace at Hotpoint/Indesit, with Will Pritchard, a Health and Safety Officer, who was his line manager for a long time



GOOD PRA

There are many challenges for retained firefighters but one of the hardest is undoubtedly the constant tension between the day job and the other job of being a firefighter. In the same way that the families of RDS firefighters are alternately proud and understanding – while sometimes feeling neglected – employers, too, can be hesitant about employing someone who can be whisked away at a moment's notice with no fixed time of return.

It's a growing concern for retained firefighters as society changes and employers become less local and more global in their priorities.

Pete Preston, Secretary of the FBU National Retained Committee, says employers often think that when a retained firefighter goes on a shout he or she will be gone for hours.

"Overall there's a general reluctance to release employees who are retained to respond

to calls. The perception is that they will be away all day. The reality is that it will be only an hour or so and often will be less. A lot of the resistance is down to the ignorance of employers of the benefits of having firefighters on their staff."

Yet there are exceptions. 54-year-old Gwyn Williams, from Colwyn Bay station, is a driver. His day job is making metal drums for washing machines. He says his employer, the multinational company Hotpoint/Indesit, has been brilliant with him.

Everyone was quite receptive

"I came to the service late," he says. "I was 46 when I joined and I've been working for Hotpoint for over 22 years now. I talked to them before I started the training and I think that, because they knew me well, they were fine with it. I went to my immediate boss and everyone was quite receptive to the idea.

"There's quite a few times I've been out all night and seen fatalities and we come back to the station and we talk about it and I haven't gone into work and my boss understands.

"One of the managers has a son who's a retained firefighter at another station and he's been very good with me. Recently the company have been after me to join their own fire crew, which makes sure everyone is out of the building if the fire alarm goes off."

Will Pritchard, a Health and Safety Officer for Hotpoint/Indesit, who for a long time was Gwyn's line manager, could not be more supportive. "We understand we have a responsibility to the community. You never know when you're going to need the fire service, so we give the retained firefighters great respect. It's about team working. We respect what Gwyn does and I got more out of him at work."

Gwyn, too, acknowledges that being a fire-



COLIN McPHERSON

production store supervisor at Morgan, says: "We don't mind about the time – one day it could be you needing help. It's a community thing. Morgan don't have to do it, but they do. Everyone appreciates that one day they may have to call on the fire service."

But not everyone is quite so lucky. Geoff Lennon, a facilities officer for an outdoor education centre run by Conwy County Borough Council in Wales, is allowed to go on shouts, but with a totally different *modus operandi*.

Constant and difficult balance

He's been a retained firefighter for over 20 years and worked for the same employer all that time. His experience is slightly different. "It's a constant and difficult balance, juggling two jobs and a family and my line manager is pretty tolerant."

"The council releases employees for fire calls, however it never comes up in conversation. I just get on with it. My line manager trusts me to be sensible, as long as it doesn't interfere with the running of the centre."

Geoff is obviously highly trusted. But within the council there is little or no discussion of his role, as he fears others may become resentful of the time he has away from his job. He says everything is fine – but no one talks about what he does. "Some of my colleagues take an interest in what I do but it's a very delicate balance and my role outside my job goes almost unregistered in many ways." Consequently, he asked *Firefighter* not to talk to his line manager.

Yet, in spite of some positive stories of aware and considerate employers, Pete Preston says the last 30 years have seen a marked decline in the number of employers willing to release firefighters to help their community. But he says that if the positive benefits can be explained, employers might be more receptive.

"Employers don't appreciate the advantages of having firefighters on the staff, so we need to communicate with them. Shropshire fire service are putting up statistics on their website revealing the amount of time, on average, a retained firefighter is away from their job. This is good as it is exploding myths."

Engage with employers

"We need to engage with local employers, particularly those with variable shift patterns. Centralisation of labour and its inevitable insensitivity to local issues and people, is a feature of our age and presents very real challenges for retained firefighters, the fire service and the FBU."

"A national campaign – like the Territorial Army had – to highlight the vital role of the RDS firefighter would help raise the public awareness and educate potentially supportive full-time employers."

CTICE

fighter has developed him as human being: "I feel more confident now I'm a firefighter. It's developed me as a person. My family have noticed the difference."

Equally harmonious

Nick Robinson, 36, based at Malvern station in Worcestershire has had an equally harmonious relationship with his employer, Morgan, the family-owned iconic UK car manufacturer.

"It was a factor when I took the job six years

ago," he says. "I told them at the interview and asked if it was a problem and they said no. It was a major factor for me. I wouldn't have moved to Morgan without that attitude."

"They asked questions about how long I'd be out on a shout and about the number of brush fires we have in the summer here. But they've got no problems with it. Lots of guys at my station get docked time but I don't. I'm one of the fortunate ones."

Nick's immediate boss, Stuart Webb, the

GOOD PRACTICE POINTS

- ◆ Good communication is key to getting a good employer
- ◆ Flexibility on both sides is the key to building a good relationship
- ◆ Work colleagues can provide valuable support in getting the message across
- ◆ Myths about the number of hours spent on shouts should be demystified
- ◆ Retained firefighters bring unseen benefits to any organisation
- ◆ Employers need to be made aware of their role in the community
- ◆ Fire stations' work in the community can help explain the role of the RDS firefighter

Local controls: Scotland says YES!

The Union has called for Whitehall to urgently re-think plans to close all 46 emergency fire controls in England and move to one control for each region, following an announcement that plans to reduce the number of emergency fire controls in Scotland have been halted

Scotland will now get all the benefits of an enhanced digital radio system, interoperability between emergency fire controls and other emergency services, modern data terminals in fire appliances and real time updates of the exact position of vehicles much cheaper and much faster than England. In England the regional control project – FireControl – is now running years late, costs are ten times the original estimate of £100 million and it is placing enormous burdens on the fire service.

The decision in Scotland comes close to three and a half years after the Scottish Executive published in July 2004 the Mott MacDonald report on the review of fire service control rooms in Scotland. This recommended closing eight local emergency fire control rooms and replacing them with as few as one regional control.

In announcing the decision in December, Scotland's Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill said: "The view of a substantial majority of those who actually run the control rooms – Councillors, Chief Fire Officers and other staff – is that we should stick with the status quo. This view is also shared by the Fire Brigades Union. Cabinet has therefore agreed with my conclusion that we will not be taking any action centrally to reduce the number of emergency fire control rooms."

"However events in recent years – including the Glasgow Airport incident, the flooding in the Borders and England over the summer, and the warnings by the new Chief Constable of Strathclyde about the terrorist threat – have highlighted the requirement for enhanced emergency fire control room resilience. This is an issue which national and local government and the FBU and other staff representatives need to consider together."

Minister MacAskill announced that the Scottish

'The view of a substantial majority of those who actually run the control rooms – Councillors, Chief Fire Officers and other staff – is that we should stick with the status quo. This view is also shared by the Fire Brigades Union.'
Scotland's Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill

'Good government is also about listening and trusting those closest to the frontline.'
Minister for Community Safety Fergus Ewing

'The Scottish Government's decision to invest rather than close is a welcome one.'
Keith Brown, an MSP for Stirling (Ochil)

Government was to publish for consultation with stakeholders in the New Year what it regards as a minimum standard of resilience for emergency control rooms. "We will want to discuss this with stakeholders and reach a consensus on what needs to be done across Scotland to ensure that this standard is reached," he said.

The Scottish Executive is to invest over £50 million in the next three years to equip fire and rescue services with a "state of the art" digital incident communications system. This programme would ensure Scotland has the resilience and flexibility at both a national and a local level to cope with everything from a terror attack or a Stockline, to localised flooding and fire prevention visits, added Minister for Community Safety Fergus Ewing.

"Good government is about preparing the country as best we can for the range of threats we face – from climate change to terrorism. But good government is also about listening and trusting those closest to the frontline – and also about making decisions. This issue has been clouded in uncertainty for too long," he said.

In additional comments to the local press, Mr Ewing, who represents Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber, expressed "particular concern" that the lengthy decision process caused control staff to "fear for their jobs", adding: "The staff are extremely skilled in what they do. There is also a strong argument about local knowledge, not just of small places and Gaelic names but also an in-depth knowledge of city streets. The argument that there was a substantial saving to be made from reducing the number of control rooms is not clear."

Keith Brown, an MSP for Stirling (Ochil), in welcoming the rejection of regional control plans in Scotland, described the plans in England as a "false economy", adding:

"It is now possible for fire boards and control rooms





PAUL BOX

to move forward and ensure they are delivering the best possible service to people locally. The Scottish Government's decision to invest rather than close is a welcome one and I hope it will win support across the board."

The news was welcomed by emergency fire control staff in Scotland. Said Susan Bruce, from Tayside control: "We are all extremely pleased with the news. By keeping our control local we can provide the best fire and rescue service to the community in Tayside."

Tayside colleague Libby Logan, who is also control staff rep for Scotland, said: "We have succeeded in stopping the closure of our existing control rooms. This was a long and arduous campaign. I'd like to thank the public, FBU officials and firefighter and control staff members for their tremendous support. This is the best solution for resilience in Scotland. With our future secure, we can now go forward and build on our success."

FBU Scotland regional secretary Ken Ross, described the Scottish Executive's decision as a "victory for common sense and public safety", adding: "Local communities need local emergency fire control rooms staffed by professionals who have experience, technical expertise and local knowledge."

The decision in Scotland came as it was revealed that there was even greater confusion over what the Government knows about the spiralling costs of England's FireControl Project. Answering a parliamentary question on 11 December, fire minister Parmjit Dhanda said fire authorities had not produced "meaningful estimates" of what are called "convergence costs".

This is the technical name for some of the critical work involved in paving the way to regional controls and which is not included in the business case. "Meaningful" or not, many fire authorities have told *Firefighter* that they have provided

'By keeping our control local we can provide the best service to the community'
Susan Bruce,
Tayside control

'This was a long an arduous campaign. Thanks to the public, FBU officials and members for their tremendous support.'
Libby Logan,
Scotland Control Rep

'This decision is a victory for common sense and public safety.'
Kenny Ross,
Regional Secretary,
FBU Scotland

'Scotland has looked into the abyss and quite rightly stepped back.'
Matt Wrack,
General Secretary

these figures to CLG and the cost is likely to be in the region of another £80 million to £100 million nationally.

In addition there are also more delays – although not yet announced – because of problems synchronising the FireLink and FireControl projects. The Government is now paying rent on some of the RCC buildings that have now been completed and handed over and more delay means paying rent on these on top of the cost of existing controls.

At this stage, even on the Government's dodgy figures, there is no chance of FireControl making any savings at all against the money being spent on it. The talk among those involved in the highest levels of the FireLink and FireControl Project is of yet more costs and "reality adjustments", the latest projectspeak for delays.

FBU General secretary Matt Wrack said: "Scotland has looked into the abyss and quite rightly stepped back. They will now get a better and more resilient system which is much cheaper and quicker than that planned for England. It makes a real difference when Government takes the time to engage with frontline staff and the fire service before key decisions are made. Whitehall made poor decisions in the face of overwhelming opposition within the fire service at the time." The General Secretary blamed Whitehall's "obsession" with a regionalised structure in England for "bleeding the fire service dry of money and personnel" and said FireControl was an example of public money being wasted on another IT project of "dubious benefit" and "which diverts money from frontline services."

He added: "Scotland has understood those issues, Whitehall has not. It is not technology and buildings which gives us the resilience to deal with major incidents. It is professional fire crews and emergency control staff which give us that strength and we have never failed the public."

The fight goes on

The Union has won an important legal victory in its battle for justice for firefighter pensions, but continues to campaign on its key demand for the Government to change its highly detrimental guidance on ill-health pensions



Firefighters – here at a recent warehouse fire – may be forced to question the risks they take because of the change in ill-health pensions guidance

In an important victory in the campaign for Justice for Firefighter Pensions, an FBU-backed judicial review of the move to terminate the ill-health pension of three London firefighters has resulted in a decision that should see their pensions restored. The legal case, launched in the autumn, was based broadly around three issues: That the three had not been told in advance that their appeal hearings would include an issue that could result in their pensions being stopped and that therefore



the process breached natural justice; that the Board of Referees exceeded their powers in considering an issue which was not submitted to them; that the guidance from CLG in relation to ill-health pensions does not reflect

the requirements of the pension scheme.

The lawyers for the CLG and the Board of Referees conceded the FBU's case on the first point, fully vindicating the stance taken by the three members and the FBU on this issue and showing that the stance taken on this issue by the CLG, the Board of Referees and LFEPA was incorrect. "But," warns FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack, "this does not end the case. Even the three members concerned may still face the same issue again depending upon other decisions. Most importantly, the

guidance issued by CLG remains in place and this is the fundamental problem.”

And nobody knows this better than Mark Padgett, a retained duty system (RDS) firefighter at Edwinstowe fire station, North Nottinghamshire. Mark was assaulted at an incident by a member of the public that resulted in him losing his main employment, and that now looks set to lose him his fire service job and ill-health pension.

Nottinghamshire fire and rescue service has indicated to Mark that he is likely to be sacked from the Service after a medical said he was too disabled to continue working as a firefighter and because it couldn't find him another role to perform. Mark, who suffered a serious shoulder injury, was also told that he would not receive the pension to which he was entitled because in September 2006, the Government suddenly issued new guidance.

Says Mark:

“After ten years service, and after being injured because I was attacked on duty, the brigade is going to sack me. What kind of message does that send to other RDS firefighters? We do a good job and we are the fire service in many areas. Employers are struggling to find enough RDS firefighters already.

“Then they say if you get injured on duty because of an accident or deliberate acts of violence against us – and we all know attacks on fire crews are now a sad fact of life – you will lose your job. Who's going to join the Service as a RDS firefighter if that's the treatment you're going to get.”

“As a result of the injury sustained while on duty, I'm already on light duties, earning the station average – a pay cut. The injury also meant I lost my full-time employment down the pit. And then the brigade tell me they're going to leave me without a penny.

“I and many of my colleagues say we don't do it for the money. We love the job, protecting our local community. But of course at the end of the day, the money we earn as retained firefighters does help pay our bills.

“I have a wife and an 8-year old son. I have a mortgage. The loss of my income will be a massive blow. Sometimes I can't see the light at the end of the tunnel. It's not right.”

Mark says the whole station has been in a state of shock since the brigade informed him he'd be left without a job or a pension.

“My watch manager still can't believe it. He is devastated. He feels he's lied to me and all of us on the station. He told us that even if we didn't pay into a pension, we were covered if we were injured. We'd be looked after. Of course he's not to blame. He told us that in good faith. That was the situation until the Government changed its guidance on ill-health pensions.”

The chief fire officer visited Mark's fire station and said if he could do something about it, he would. “He said he couldn't find alternative jobs for people injured on duty

and that if you are injured on duty, and if there wasn't work for you to do, then you should get a pension. But the decision wasn't his any more. He said his hands were tied because of the new Government guidance on ill-health pensions.”

Says General Secretary Matt Wrack: “Our message is clear: those who work in the fire service are expected to attend incidents other workers would consider a hazard. It defies belief that fire crews will be ordered into a fire with the knowledge that if they are badly injured in doing so they will be sacked.”

“RDS firefighters also face the loss of their primary employment if injured at fire service incidents. They would also lose out on their entitlement to be paid illness and injury awards in line with wholtime firefighters. It is unacceptable to treat any FBU member in this way irrespective of duty system, rank or role.”

The Union has written to and met with CLG officials and directly with Ministers. At these meetings the FBU has outlined our position and expressed the anger and disgust that the effective end of ill-health pensions in the Service has provoked among FBU members. The Union's Parliamentary Group also met with Fire Minister Parmjit Dhandra and raised our concerns.

Minister John Healey MP has written back to General Secretary Matt Wrack saying he has

TAKE A MINUTE TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Let your MP know just how angry you are about the sudden change in the guidance in September 2006. Let your MP know you want the 2006 guidance returned to the original guidance set out in 2004. Go to the FBU website – www.fbu.org.uk – click on the Justice for Firefighters or Lobby Your MP links and email your MP. There is a standard letter that you can use if you wish that asks your MP to make representations to John Healey. It contains a briefing on the issue. For further information visit the FBU website.

It is unacceptable to treat any FBU member in this way irrespective of duty system, rank or role

“asked for an examination to be made of the current arrangements, including the implications for Firefighters and employers. This will, of course, take into account the points that the FBU have made”.

The Union is urging all FBU members to ensure that this examination reaches the right conclusion by writing to their MPs to put pressure on the Government to amend its guidance on ill-health pensions (see above).

Since the launch of this campaign, the Union has written to every CFO seeking

support and a number have written back expressing concern at the CLG guidance and broad support for the stance taken by the Union. Likewise, a number of fire and rescue service politicians have raised their concerns with CLG and with the Minister, John Healey.

In parallel with the political campaign, branches have been meeting across the country to consider other forms of pressure that can be brought to bear and there is a growing sense among FBU members that national strike action may be necessary.

In Hertfordshire, for example, firefighters say that they will take industrial action should any Herts firefighter have their ill-health pension benefits removed. And this amid shortages of frontline staff that they believe will mean they are more likely to get injured.

Herts FBU Secretary Tony Smith says: “We are angry that if we get injured our employers will force us to leave the Service without a pension. This job is becoming increasingly dangerous and the number of serious incidents we attend is on the increase. Last year, our employers said they would work with us to improve the Service but their words are ringing hollow. Instead they continue to erode the frontline emergency response service we can offer to the public and now it seems that they will not look after us if we get injured in the line of duty.”

In Norfolk, meanwhile, the FBU has said FBU members in the brigade may be forced to question the risks they take in light of the new Government guidance on ill-health pensions. Norfolk FBU chair Peter Graves, said:

“It is highly regarded that firefighters will push themselves to the limits to save a life whether it is at a fire or at a road traffic collision. Unfortunately we are now being forced to question our actions before committing ourselves into what could be a harmful or dangerous environment.”

FBU Norfolk has already met with chief fire officer Richard Elliott to raise its concerns, but believes his hands are tied by the government guidelines.

Officers are also considering the implications of the Government guidance on ill-health pensions. Says FBU Assistant General Secretary Andy Dark:

“With the revised CLG guidance the hazard remains the same, but the risk has just increased. The risk now is of no job and no pension.

“Just how reasonable is it for officers to be expected to ask someone to take a risk, the outcome of which may cost them their income, their job, their home, their family? Just how reasonable is it for a fire and rescue authority to expect its personnel to do this?

“And just how reasonable is it for the fire and rescue authority to expect officers to instruct personnel to expose themselves to that risk?”

Equality battle cont

The FBU-backed case for equal treatment returned to the Employment Tribunal as the employers continued to bankroll the legal argument that supports RDS firefighters' second-class status

The FBU's seven-year battle in the courts to end discrimination against firefighters working the retained duty system (RDS) continues after an Employment Tribunal hearing took place in Croydon, South London, in November.

The move follows a landmark legal judgment by the House of Lords on 1 March 2006 in favour of the Union.

The tribunal originally considered 12 test cases from a total of 12,000 in 2000 on behalf of RDS firefighters across the UK. Any judgment applies to all 12,000 FBU RDS members in all fire brigades in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England.

The tribunal's purpose was to determine whether RDS firefighters do the same or broadly similar work as their whole-time colleagues and whether the employers and the Secretary of State are able to justify the difference in treatment of RDS firefighters in relation to the exclusion from access to the FPS, additional pay for additional responsibilities and sick pay.

The Union, represented by Robin Allen QC and Martin Seaward at the tribunal, and by Thompsons, has been battling this case against the employers and the Government for seven years.

The national fire service employers are financing the legal defence by Royal Berkshire and Kent fire brigades, and backing their argument that RDS firefighters don't do the same or broadly similar work to their wholetime work colleagues, supporting the continued discrimination between RDS and wholetime. As co-defendant in the case, the department for Communities and Local Government is also opposing equal treatment of RDS firefighters.

Over four days, the Union's legal team presented further evidence to demand equal treatment for RDS firefighters on pensions and sick pay. Evidence was called from the four

station commanders at the test case stations, Ashford, Marden, Bracknell and Wokingham. Evidence was also presented by FBU officials Mr Lincoln Ball and Mr Harry Sawyer and also by individual RDS and wholetime firefighters.

In their submission to the tribunal, the CLG and employers didn't dispute that regardless of duty system firefighters do "essentially the same work on the fire ground" and that this activity was "very important". But, pointing to community fire safety work, argued that "the differences in the work the retained and whole-time fire-fighters

**'It is hypocritical
for employers
to complain of a
shortage of RDS
firefighters while
denying them
employment rights that
would help tackle this'**

were actually engaged in [was] of such importance to prevent their work being regarded overall as the same or broadly similar."

Says Richard Arthur, from Thompsons Solicitors:

"The central issue is whether, as at December 2000 when the Tribunal claims were lodged, the work of retained and wholetime firefighters was the same or broadly similar.

"Nobody is denying the importance of community fire safety and fire prevention work. But the fact of the matter is that, in the test brigades and nationwide, CFS was in its infancy in 2000, and did not form a major part of the working time of whole-time or retained fire-fighters. Fire Certificate and inspection work, certainly in the



issues in the courts



test brigades, was done by specialist officers and fire safety teams, not by regular wholetime firefighters.

"Any difference between the work of wholetime and retained firefighters was not of sufficient significance to undermine the inevitable conclusion that their work was the same or broadly similar."

Secretary to the National Retained Committee, Pete Preston, who attended the Employment Tribunal in November, said:

"All those who gave evidence – from frontline firefighters to senior managers – did extremely well in what is a highly complex legal case. They faced tough cross-examination. But they were meticulously prepared and the quality of evidence provided was very high."

"Professional RDS firefighters are the backbone of the fire and rescue service in many parts of the country. Yet employers continue to support their second class status. This legal case is about changing that."

Sean Starbuck, national officer responsible for RDS firefighters, said:

"Whatever employers say in public, they are bankrolling old-fashioned discrimination against RDS firefighters

in the courts.

"It is frankly hypocritical for employers to complain of a shortage of retained firefighters when they are denying them the very employment rights that would help tackle this short-fall."

"The FBU is the only organisation that has been working for equal treatment for RDS firefighters. We have been fighting this case for seven years and we will continue to fight for as long as it takes to achieve justice for RDS firefighters."

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack added: "It is absolutely disgraceful that still today thousands of RDS firefighters should be facing discrimination."

"This has no place in the modern fire service and the FBU intends to bring it to an end. The FBU is confident we have a strong legal case and we are determined to win."

There was insufficient time before the Employment Tribunal for closing submissions to be heard and so detailed witness submissions are now being produced by the union's legal team and the Tribunal will hear those final submissions in January.

A decision from the Employment Tribunal is expected in the Spring.

TIMELINE

December 2000 Claims launched in the wake of the introduction of the Part Time Workers Regulations that calls for equal treatment for part-time workers.

November 2001 Employment Tribunal (ET) hears over nine days FBU-backed test case for equal pension and sick pay rights for firefighters working the retained duty system.

July 2002 ET dismisses this claim; FBU decides to appeal.

July 2004 Court of Appeal accepts the employers' arguments that RDS firefighters did not do the same or broadly similar work and rejected the appeal. It found that wholetime firefighters had "measurable additional job functions" including education and preventative work. FBU decides to appeal to the highest national legal authority – the House of Lords.

March 2006 Law Lords uphold the appeal brought by the FBU. The Law Lords said that retained and wholetime firefighters are employed on the same "type of contract". They ruled that the Employment Tribunal (ET) which originally rejected the FBU's case had focussed too much on differences rather than similarities between wholetime and RDS duty contracts. Case sent back to ET.

November 2007 ET five day hearing takes into account the House of Lords ruling and, following concerns from the claimants about the accuracy of some key evidence heard by original ET (principally around the extent of RDS firefighters' involvement on Community Fire Safety), considers this fresh evidence and decides whether to make additional or different findings from that original ET. Further evidence to be submitted and considered in the following months.

Spring 2008 ET ruling expected.

WHAT DOES A HEAD OF FIRE CONTROL DO?

Bob Smith, Avon's Head of Fire Control, runs a control room with 30 staff working four shifts who help people who can be distressed and panicking. So his views on government plans to replace 46 local centres with nine regional ones are well worth listening to

Bob Smith has been in the fire service for 36 years – the last 20 as Head of Fire Control at Avon Fire and Rescue. It's a role he combines with heading up communications at Avon. So he was an obvious choice for *Firefighter* to interview to spread a few insights about the crucial role control plays in serving the public and minimising loss of life and property.

He is also well placed to take a strategic view, as he is Avon's co-ordinator for two national systems – Firelink radio and the Government's controversial plans for regional control centres. He's also been an FBU member since he joined the service.

As head of control, Bob is in charge of the day-to-day running of a control room where 30 staff members, spread over four shifts, provide the first contact to members of the public who ring for help.

It's a job he did himself in the past – so he

knows first-hand the stresses and satisfactions it can bring. Control staff may be on the end of the phone rather than out on an appliance dousing down flames, but in many ways, they are very much in the frontline. They are dealing with people who may well be panicky and distressed. The job is to "extract crucial information from the caller in the shortest possible time,"

Bob says. And, when every second can count, offering callers reassurance, support and calm professionalism. "Control staff have to make sure they get the correct address and send out the right appliances when people ring in with emergencies. Sometimes they can be very

Control staff taking emergency calls have to be calm and reassuring

distressed.

"Obviously it's important that we not only listen, but also lead the caller to get down to the essentials – what's on fire, where it is and making sure we don't miss important information such as that there is someone in a wheelchair on the first floor.



"People can be understandably distressed, so control staff taking emergency calls have to be calm and reassuring. We need to pinpoint exactly where the fire is."

Then there are the "misrouted" calls which can come from as far away as Manchester or Liverpool. "We always take the call. The public just wants to get through and we don't want them to put the phone down if they are not talking to their local station. People sometimes think they are ringing their local fire station.

"The thing is to get the information, not reply: 'No, it's control,' if they ask if it's the fire station, or tell them they are hundreds of miles away. It's a case of just getting the details as quickly and accurately as possible and passing them on."

At Avon, as in most other fire and rescue services, control shifts are matched to frontline firefighter shifts, which, says Bob, helps build rapport. "We are another station to the people on the ground. We don't just take the emergency calls and turn out appliances. We receive messages, get help from other services – whatever is needed at the incident ground.

"Firefighters know there's a face and a name to colleagues in control, which is what we've tried to achieve over the years at Avon.





PICTURES: PAUL BOX

Bob Smith in the Avon control room

It works well."

Avon is not plagued by recruitment and retention problems – there's a recruit school on at the moment, but only because long-standing staff have retired.

Courses for fire control recruits run alongside firefighter courses, and where possible, recruits attend courses which encompass both control and firefighter disciplines.

For instance, control operators have an hour or so on the role of the pump operator during training "so they can hear how noisy it can get when we are trying to communicate with firefighters in the midst of dealing with an incident."

The plan to replace 46 local centres with nine regional ones will mean calls currently dealt with by Avon will be dealt with at the newly built RCC in Taunton, earmarked to serve the whole of the South West. Calls taken by Avon staff are scheduled to transfer there from May 2010 – though many believe this timetable will slip.

The planned shift has, says, Bob, had an impact on morale. "The staff have been tremendous. They've had this hanging over

their heads for four years now. They know what's planned and it has to be business as usual. It has helped that our fire authority chair Terry Walker and chief fire officer Kevin Pearson have told control staff that if they don't want to move they will be redeployed within the fire authority."

While there is always room for improvement, when major incidents have hit Avon and neighbouring brigade control centres coped very well. For example, when floods hit Gloucestershire in July, Avon control doubled the number of staff on duty to take calls from stricken areas and "passed them back" to Gloucestershire fire and rescue authority.

As an experienced and committed professional, Bob Smith says people join the fire service to protect the public and save lives. Whether nine RCCs will be more "resilient" than the 46 local centres now serving the public, as the government maintains, is a moot point, he says. "But whatever the future brings," Bob adds, "it should always be to improve the fire and rescue service for the public." The question is, will RCCs achieve this?

The planned shift has had an effect on morale. The staff have been tremendous

Working For You



STEVE HARMAN

Brigade Secretary

Lancashire

Attacks on crewing levels, attacks on TB 1/97 BA safe operating procedures, attacks on mobilising control jobs, attacks on officer cover, proposals to remove RDS front line appliances, increased response times for special appliances, loss of STC trainer posts, attempts to undermine the 'Grey Book' overtime rate: these are just some of the issues brigade officials have faced since the so-called modernisation process began. It did not take long to realise that the IRMP was budget-driven to implement cuts.

We realised early on that on occasion, in order to achieve its objectives, Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) regarded the consultation process as a game of chess.

This year's IRMP has been no exception. In one section of a consultation questionnaire entitled "Matching emergency cover to varying risk" it stated: "From long experience, LFRS knows that the risk of fires occurring and the number of emergency calls we receive varies substantially at different times of the day and night. Nonetheless, despite risk levels and demand varying, we have historically provided the same number of fire engines over each 24-hour period. We are now considering changing how we match our resources, i.e. fire engines, more closely to these varying risk and demand levels."

Then it asked: "Taking into account the paragraph above, do you agree or disagree that LFRS should more effectively match the resources (fire appliances) we provide to varying levels of risk and demand?"

In other words: "Because we have based the risk at night solely on the probability and have not considered the severity, would you agree to the removal of fire engines at night when the majority of people are asleep in their beds?" Surreally, LFRS has stated that they have made no such proposal.

As you would expect, this has been vigorously opposed by the FBU and at this time, the fire authority has stated it will only consider this issue as part of its 2009 Fire Cover Review. It's worth noting that – as happened in 2006 when ten RDS appliances were under threat – there has been no response from the RFU.

New year, new start

Ten ways to get that feel good factor

NO PAIN, JUST GAIN

1 Do something new: take up a new hobby or sport or dedicate some time to learning a language perhaps (see no. 7). This is good for relaxing and beating stress.

2 Make a conscious decision to eat healthier: have some breakfast; you should always try and eat something within an hour of waking up to kick start your metabolism. Eat a little less of the things you know aren't so good for you and eat a little more of the things you know are beneficial to your health. You'll feel more energetic for it and maybe lose a couple of pounds too – and with no silly diet fads or calculating calorie intake. No pain!

3 Spend 10 minutes a day doing some kind of relaxing activity even if it is only deep breathing to lower stress levels and help you unwind. Try a 'hatha' yoga deep breathing technique – particularly beneficial after a hard day's (or night's) work to relax the mind and body and help you get off to sleep (it also helps tone the stomach muscles).

Alternatively you could try meditation: new research proves that meditation reduces stress, blood pressure, heart disease, anxiety and increases mental abilities, focus, concentration and longevity. There are many different

ways to meditate – choose one that suits you. There is no equipment necessary. All you need to do is find a bit of free time and a reasonably comfortable place to sit.

4 Do something on a regular basis that you really enjoy – give yourself something to look forward to – a game of golf, going out to see a film or play. It might just be getting round the table once a week for a relaxed meal with your family or friends.

5 Socialise – stop making excuses and free up a bit of time in the week to get in contact with friends. There's nothing like a chat and you may even get round to making that date to meet up! Socialising is not only good for your health; it can even make you live longer, according to some studies.

6 Do a bit of brain training every day, it can reduce the risk of Alzheimer's. Try crossword puzzles (the one in Firefighter magazine is only for real aficionados!) or a su doku puzzle? There are plenty of electronic games that keep your grey matter agile, with some even giving you a 'brain age', depending on your results (it can be quite satisfying to see it getting younger).

7 Try singing. It is not only aerobic – working the lungs and heart, it clears

sinuses, tones the stomach and back muscles and encourages the body to produce the feel-good hormones – endorphins – as well as reducing stress. You might want to sound-proof your bathroom walls first though.

8 If you have a few spare hours a week, how about doing some 'volunteering'. It can, according to American research, boost your immune system, help you sleep better and make you less likely to become depressed and anxious. There are endless ways to donate some free time – check the websites of organisations, charity bodies etc in your area.

9 Give yourself a few 'dry' days a week – making weekends and Wednesdays your allocated drinking days. You'll never be more than a couple of days away from a chilled glass of sauvignon blanc or a bottle of your favourite brew and it will probably taste all the nicer for it.

10 Lastly, de-clutter. There is nothing quite like starting the New Year having given the shed, loft, spare room, wardrobe, desk – whatever – a good clear out. You might find 'that' long lost whatever or something worth selling on eBay. And if not, the best thing is you will have freed up space and feel so much better for having made the effort.



Fauja Singh celebrated his 93rd birthday as he ran the London Marathon for the fifth time in 2004. He put his success down to a diet of ginger, curries and regular meditation

FIONA HANSON/PA PHOTOS

Management dictat

Q When our management wants to introduce new policies they first get approval from the fire authority so that when our FBU officials speak to the brigade they are told: "It's now policy and can't be changed". I believe that our contracts of employment may have been changed like this, without agreement. Is this legal?

A It is important to understand the distinction between contractual and non-contractual matters. There will be occasions when policies are introduced by management relating to issues, such as health and safety, which the fire authority may have statutory authority to implement without the agreement of members.

In these cases, the scope for negotiation by FBU officials would be more limited although under the Grey Book there would still be a requirement to consult members. It would not be acceptable for the fire authority to change such policies without consultation.

The position with issues such as members' pay and hours is different. Policies relating to such issues are probably contractual and, therefore, would require the member's agreement to implement.

On duty injury

Q I was injured at an operational incident where I was not at fault. Am I entitled to any financial compensation?

A If you are injured as a result of someone else's negligence then you may be entitled to compensation. It is important that you seek legal advice as soon as possible through the FBU's free legal assistance scheme. Our lawyers will assess your claim. If it is considered to be valid they will start the process of claiming damages on your behalf. The sooner that they can do this the better as "evidence" can quickly go cold.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Legal Beagle

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

They will need to obtain medical reports and to contact any witnesses to the accident. There is in any case a three-year time limit, from the date of your accident, for claiming.

Asbestos at work

Q Despite being highlighted in a number of health and safety inspections there is still a large amount of asbestos in my workplace. My employer's solution is to simply ban access to these areas (which includes the pole drops). Is this a suitable response or should the asbestos be completely removed?

A The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002

place a duty on anyone with responsibility for the repair and maintenance of non-domestic premises to manage any asbestos in the building.

Regulation 4 deals with workplaces. It places on employers a duty to monitor asbestos and to keep records.

It is not negligent to have asbestos in a building. Many work places, homes and public places still contain asbestos. As long as it is in good condition so that fibres will not be released into the atmosphere, it should not present a hazard.

Damaged asbestos, or asbestos sited somewhere that it is in danger of being damaged, by maintenance work or vandalism for example, is a risk.

The Health and Safety Executive advises that asbestos in good condition should be left where it is and be regularly monitored. The area should be clearly marked and anyone likely to go near it should be warned.

So if the asbestos at the station is not damaged, then the response of the employer may not be inappropriate. If, however, it is damaged, it is not enough to ban people from the area.

The FBU safety rep should discuss with management what the inspections have said about the condition of the asbestos and whether the response has been appropriate and complies with the regulations.

Because increasing numbers of firefighters and former firefighters are developing asbestos-related conditions, the FBU advises any member or retired member who thinks they have been exposed to asbestos to join the FBU asbestos register, whether or not they have been diagnosed with any condition.

This is a register of details of where and when individuals believe they were exposed. It can be of invaluable assistance when pursuing compensation claims on behalf of those who have developed asbestos related conditions.

To enter your details on the register, call 0808 100 6061 and ask for a form. Alternatively visit the FBU website (www.fbu.org.uk) and go to the 'Workplace' section (Officials forms) to fill one in on-line or to get hold of a form to print and send to our solicitors Thompsons.

→ Write in with your legal problem to 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.

‘There’s a great sense of camaraderie on the course’

Kenny Hankinson is one of the many keen golfers in Scotland’s fire brigades – thanks to the game’s team ethos, not to mention a keen competitive spirit

Golf is big in the Scotland’s fire and rescue services, and nowhere more so than Strathclyde brigade. Kenny, 41, caught the golfing bug at 11 and has been an active member of the golf section for the past seven years.

Members enjoy playing at many highly rated golf courses and the season is studded with competitions – from the Scottish singles, to the Four Nations and the prestigious Sheriff’s Cup.

In this event, after qualifying rounds across the UK, golfing firefighters from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland compete over two days in teams of four. There’s a day of doubles followed by individual rounds.

“Every score counts,” says Kenny, who knows firsthand how this can really matter when you’re out there on the fairway. “The Sheriff’s rotates between fire and rescue sections. In 2007, Strathclyde hosted the contest at Cawder golf course – and won it for the first time since 1983.”

Then, of course, there’s the fiercely contested annual Scotland versus England international, which Kenny has played in a good few times.

£150 a round

The shift system is excellent for golfers, says Kenny, who has been known to have the odd round with station colleagues. “During the summer, golf courses tend to be quieter midweek and it’s far easier to get tee-off times.” His local club – Troon Welbeck – is just down the road from exclusive Royal Troon, where a round can cost £150 for those who can get to play. But Kenny can play two rounds on the championship course for £18 in an annual tournament for local amateurs who play off a handicap of less than five.

So what is it about golf and firefighters? It obviously pays to be a team player in contests that don’t just focus on individual scores, which, says Kenny fits in with how firefighters approach the job. “We are obviously used to sticking together at work. In Strathclyde section, we try and get out to higher-rated golf courses around and

beyond the region, which has encouraged more people to join.

“Meeting firefighters from all over the country and other parts of the UK gives a different perspective. There’s a social side – a few rounds and a few beers are a good way of unwinding.

“Being able to discuss things with colleagues from Devon to Norfolk or wherever gives you a chance to get to know what’s happening in different fire and rescue services.

“There’s a great sense of camaraderie on the course and afterwards. People are very welcoming. And it’s a great way to relax.”

But alongside the relaxation, the adrenalin rush can also be very much part of the game. Take last summer’s Sheriff’s Cup – with the added edge, for Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Section, of playing on home turf. Kenny was in the winning team – and admits to

feeling rather pressured as he played in the last round of the contest.

“I knew we were leading and I had to put in a half decent performance to win. Golf is normally about

‘Being able to discuss things with colleagues from Devon to Norfolk or wherever gives you a chance to get to know what’s happening in different fire and rescue services’



individual performance, but the Sheriff's Cup and the Four Nations are more like the fire service where you work as a team. So when you're representing Strathclyde or Scotland, you want to do well for your colleagues, specially if it's looking good and you're the last to play."

We ended up winning

Kenny was the last of his team to play that day – and his three colleagues had already put in good scores. The adrenalin was pumping and he knew the cup was within the team's grasp. "I played the first nine holes quite well, then got it into my head that I had to be really careful, got quite defensive and my game started to go downhill. Fortunately, I managed to turn it round and we ended up winning by six shots."

Kenny enjoys team events. "When you're representing Strathclyde or Scotland you kind of want to do well for your colleagues – especially if they've played well. You don't want to let them down. In competitions, all teams are trying their utmost to win. There's a good bit of banter out there, and it really matters – especially when we're trying to beat the auld enemy. I'm sure the English team feel the same about beating us." But it's all very civilised, of course.

Kenny could be poised to take over as secre-

KENNY HANKINSON

Kenny Hankinson is station commander at Barrhead fire station on the outskirts of Glasgow. He plays off a handicap of two, would like to get down to scratch and is a keen member of the flourishing Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Golf Section.



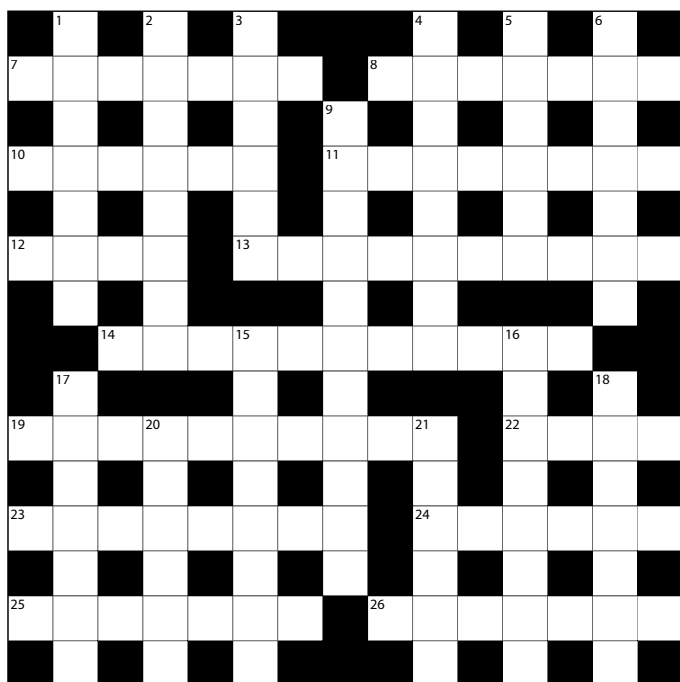
PICTURES: ALAN WYLLIE

Kenny practising at Troon Welbeck

tary of the Strathclyde golf section now longstanding secretary Willy Hotchkiss, who has done much to build up the club, has retired from the service. Retired and retained members are keen section members. There are no women members – but Kenny says they would be "most welcome".

"It would be good to have a European championship and if we could expand the four nations contest to include the Republic of Ireland. There are some great golf courses over there ..."

Quick Crossword

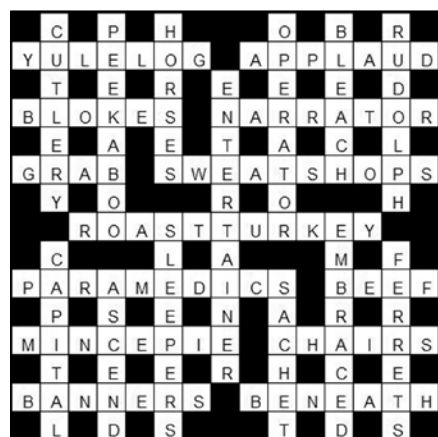


ACROSS

- 7, 10** 24 of TUC (7, 6)
8 24 of RMT (3, 4)
10 See 7
11 Approaching from opposite direction (8)
12 Type of food shop, in short (4)
13 Late US singer-songwriter of Only The Lonely etc (3, 7)
14 Privileged class of 'nobility' (11)
19 Electrical conductors used to make contact, used in medicine, plating, torture etc (10)
22 Bird - on a chess board? (4)
23 Male voice between bass and tenor (8)
24 The one at the front (6)
25 Find unpleasant (7)
26 Dave, 24 of Unison (7)

DOWN

- 1** Big wave; crusher of cars (7)
2 Even more stuck-up! (8)
3 More just, or lighter-haired (6)
4 Weaver of spells - with an apprentice? (8)
5 Shrimps, cooked in breadcrumbs (6)
6 US fast-food favourite: sausage, cooked in batter, served on a stick (4, 3)
9 Joint 24 of Unite (4, 7)
15 Mark, 24 of PCS (8)
16 Material covering windows (8)
17 Shabby, grubby public building, especially cinema (4, 3)
18 Former kingdom now in Czech Republic, synonymous with unconventional lifestyle (7)
20 Not warm (6)
21 Wage, usually paid monthly (6)



Solution to November/December crossword



Prize Quiz

Win a 'Romantic Getaway' in a luxury 4* hotel

Enter our prize quiz and it could be yours
 This issue the theme is 'last year's news'



NICK POTTS/PA PHOTOS

1. What over-budget stadium which recently hosted the embarrassing departure of England from the European Champions League was completed and opened in March 2007?

2. In June 2007 what long anticipated hand-over took place at 10 Downing St?

3. Name the Welsh boxer who won the WBO/WBA/WBC super-middleweight title bout at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff in November 2007?

4. Name the rich, famous musician whose acrimonious divorce proceedings filled the tabloids for much of 2007?

5. In November 2007 in a landslide victory what country has gone from a long term right wing government to a Labour government?

6. What British thespian won best leading actress in the 2007 Bafta awards for her role in 'The Queen'?



STARMAX/EMPICS ENTERTAINMENT/PA PHOTOS



AP/PA PHOTOS

Answers to November/December quiz

- Billy Bob Thornton
- A partridge in a pear tree
- Palestine
- 24
- Winter Solstice
- The Queen

Winner of the October 2007 quiz was Martin Tuckey of Poole

HOW TO ENTER

To win the 'Romantic Getaway' please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 29 February 2008 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (January/February 2008), 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.

StationCat

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

Station Chimp



Hope you didn't miss the clever chimps on TV counting up randomly placed numbers in their proper order. In fact they can finish the test much faster than humans.

So I have now recruited Station Chimp to assist the civil servants in Communities and Local Government (CLOG) with their counting up. Station Chimp has been looking at the figures for FireControl.

He says the claimed £20 million 'savings' on annual operating costs won't start to happen – if they ever do – until 2015 at the earliest. The chimp says this is called "steady state operating conditions".

But as the leases for the regional control buildings run out any time between 2026 and 2031 the savings can only be achieved for 11-16 years.. DCLOG are also massaging the 'savings' so they don't have to deduct the annual losses in the years before 2015.

Even on the savings figures most favourable to CLOG, the £1 billion-plus FireControl Project cannot possibly pay for itself until at least 2065.

That is 34 years after the last lease runs out. If the Station Chimp can spot that is impossible for the project to make savings on the money invested, why can't the department?

The clever chimp has also spotted that the longer the delays the more money the consultants make. Won't that be a surprise.

Ministry of mayhem



Which government department is "not up to the job" of managing the £670 million Thames Gateway Development, according to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC)? Which department was condemned for its "woeful handling of this critical project" by Lib Dem MP Tom Brake?

Any idea? How about this from Tom Brake again: "Ministers have broken all the basic project management rules: they do not know how much it will cost, whether it represents value for money or who is responsible for what."

And this truly dreadful department is treated with near contempt in Whitehall and goes ignored says Mr Brake: "Crucial to the success of the enterprise will be a full

and coordinated contribution by Whitehall departments but, like a small child clamouring for the attention of its bigger classmates, the department does not have the influence to make this happen."

You've guessed it, it's CLOG. And what did they have to say in response. Along the lines of **everyone else is wrong and they are right.**

They found the comments "baffling" and said: "We simply do not recognise many of the suggestions in the report." Sure. All's well on the Magic Planet of CLOG, pass the happy pills and let me see the FireControl project.

Delays abolished



And back on the Magic Planet of CLOG they have abolished delays in the FireLink and FireControl Projects. The great plans are doing splendidly well with no more delays on either of these linked projects (pass more happy pills, the effect is fading).

Not meeting deadlines and having to build in further delays are now being called "realism adjustments", according to several people close to the projects. You may think I'm kidding, but sadly, no.

Realism adjustments – delays – are trying to inject some realism into both projects without admitting that some dates are slipping back even further. It's what happens when you launch projects without a heavy dose of realism in timing and costs at the very start.

The Station Cat, along with others, knew all along that both projects on their own are very, very ambitious. Tie the two projects together – and demand detailed synchronisation – and greater risk is added to both of them in terms of delays and extra costs.

When the department gets back from its trip to the Magic Planet expect the announcement of more delays. Sorry, "realism adjustments".

McGuirkieside



In McGuirkieside the cycle of councillors backing huge pay rises for top managers and then top managers tabling papers backing massive increases in allowances for councillors gathers apace.

Memories of the £6 million funding gap have faded away, and another claimed £2

million shortfall was set aside as councillors were tempted by proposals for allowance rises that would cost £247,000.

The last recommendation was to increase councillors' allowances by 140%. The chair of the fire authority's allowance would go up from £15,186 to £33,066 and massive rises all round for councillors with "special responsibility", although firefighting isn't one of them.

Allowance rises in Merseyside used to be tied to the general pay rise within the fire service. Is it only in McGuirkieside that such proposals for 140% rises would see the light of day? They have been binned for the time being. The next move will be proposals for even more cuts in fire cover in McGuirkieside.

Swindler



I've no time for showboating arrogant swindlers who steal millions of pounds of other people's money. Conrad Black's Sunday Telegraph was obsessed with attacking the Union throughout the pay dispute.

There is a difference between any group of workers having a legitimate and legal pay claim and stealing £3 million.

That's what the Sunday Telegraph's crooked, swindling owner – who still clings to the title of Lord Black has been convicted of.

He joins the ranks of other arrogant showboating media swindlers like Bob Maxwell who robbed the company pension fund and jumped off his yacht.

Black will do six and a half years. The crooked hypocrite deserves more.



✂ if you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into email: stationcat@fbu.org.uk

25-year badges



Rik Davies (r) Upton Blue Watch receives his 25-year badge from Mark Rowe, Brigade Rep, Merseyside



Norrie Henderson (r) Dunfermline Branch receives his 25-year badge from Scott McCabe, Brigade Secretary Fife



Pete Flynn (l) Blue Watch North Lincoln, Lincolnshire receives his 25-year badge from Tim Fryer, Branch Rep



SC John Hamill, Enniskillen District NI, receives his 25-year badge from Tony Maguire, Regional Secretary



Graeme Joss (l) Watch Manager receives his 25-year badge from Watch Manager Bob Thomson, Lothian and Borders



Kevin Parrington (r) Upton Green Watch receives his 25-year badge from Mark Rowe, Brigade Rep, Merseyside



Elaine Smith (l) Derbyshire Control receives her 25-year badge from Phil Poole, Derbyshire Brigade Chair



Pete Dann (r) Upton White Watch receives his 25-year badge from Mark Rowe, Brigade Rep, Merseyside



Keith Jones (r) Farnham Green watch receives his 25-year badge from Mick Smith, Surrey Fire and Rescue West Division Rep



Lindsay Bell (l) and **Kevin Murphy (r)** Lochgelly branch receive their 25-year badges from Graeme Birtley, Brigade Chair, Fife



Arthur Brown (r) receives his 25-year badge from Mark Rowe, Brigade Rep, Merseyside

FBU REGIONAL OFFICES

→ **Region 1 Scotland**
52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow,
Scotland G1 4AA
0141 221 2309
o1rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 2 N. Ireland**
14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn,
Co Antrim, BT28 1XJ
02892 664622
o2rs@fbu.org

→ **Region 3 Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear**
1 Carlton Court, 5th Avenue, Team Valley,
Gateshead, NE11 0AZ
0191 487 4142
o3rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 4 Yorkshire and Humberside**
9 Marsh Street, Rothwell,
Leeds, LS26 0AG
0113 288 7000
o4rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 5 Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire**
The Lighthouse, Lower Mersey St,
Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 2AL
0151 357 4400
o5rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 6 Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire**
Little Dennis Street South (above Dawsons)
Nottingham NG2 4EU
0115 947 2042
o6gen@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 7 West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, Salop**
195/7 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill,
West Midlands, B64 6HE
01384 413633
o7rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 8 Mid and West Wales, North Wales, South Wales**
4 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed,
Bridgend, CF35 5UJ
01656 867910
o8rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 9 Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk**
28 Atlantic Square, Station Road,
Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL
01376 521521
o9rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 10 London**
John Horner Mews, Frome Street,
Islington, London, N1 8PB
020 7359 3638
london@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex**
Fire Station, Coldharbour Road,
Northfleet, Kent, DA11 8NT
01474 320473
11rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight**
The Fire Station, St Mary Street, High
Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 2HE
01494 513034
12rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 13 Cornwall, Somerset, Devon, Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset**
158 Muller Road, Horfield,
Bristol, BS7 9RE
0117 935 5132
13rs@fbu.org.uk

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.

T THOMPSONS SOLICITORS

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.