

FireFighter

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

May 2007



Meet the Public Servant of the Year



Harrow Court inquest

Never again



Regional controls

It's not too late to stop
Government plans



Lifelong learning

FBU ULF
goes
national



What's going on?



Many of you may be asking the question posed by Marvin Gaye in 1971 in relation to developments in the fire service in 2007. What's happening about pay? What's going on about CPD?

Like all others in the public sector, we face a difficult time on the question of pay. The Chancellor's 2% guideline is an approach to pay which we have not seen for some time and is extremely unhelpful.

We have stated time after time in recent months that the service could do with a period of stability and the way to achieve this on pay would be for the employers to agree to meet the pay formula agreed under the 2003 settlement.

Our conference in May will need to discuss this issue and all branches should be discussing the issue of pay so that decisions made at the conference or by the Executive Council are well informed by the views of members.

I am sure that you are as frustrated as I am on the issue of CPD. The negotiations on this issue took more than a year. We engaged in a lengthy consultation exercise with FBU members and we eventually reached a provisional agreement with our employers. The implementation of this has been delayed for some time at government level.

If this matter is not resolved by the time conference takes place then I am sure that delegates will be extremely

angry and will be ensuring that the issue is raised and discussed. I urge those involved at the CLG to ensure that the issue of pensionability is settled as a matter of urgency.

Modernisation

The fire and rescue service has been through an enormous period of change in the past three or four years. Almost every aspect of the service has undergone some change and this has affected the working lives of those who work on fire stations, in control rooms or in other departments.

The FBU has never been scared of, or opposed to, genuine modernisation. Indeed the union has a proud history of leading the way in professionalising our service and the work of those within it. In the past the union has led campaigns on fire safety and to ensure that professional firefighters are involved in fire safety policy and enforcement. The union campaigned for proper standards of training, for modern equipment and for the resources we need. All these were about the modernisation of the service. The FBU played a key role in the building of the UK fire service in the years after the second world war and have been central ever since.

In recent years we have heard a lot about modernisation and all too often this word has been used to force through policies which are simply another form of cuts or which are designed to sideline the workforce and their views. This has led to a number of local conflicts during 2005 and 2006.



In response to these changes the Executive Council has begun a discussion about the challenges posed and opportunities created by the 'modernisation' agenda. This will involve looking in detail at various aspects of the modern service and examining what is driving the changes. What is the real agenda of those

forcing through change and how can the union best adapt to protect our members and the service we work in?

This work is already underway and in coming months you will see more about it as local officials and rank and file members are involved in these discussions. We are

YOUR LETTERS

Let's hope that money still talks

There is another angle regarding insurance and the effects fire cover has on business (Claims up in flames, April) that we have discovered during our fight in Cornwall to oppose the downgrading of Falmouth and Camborne Fire Stations from shift- to day-crewed due only to financial pressure upon the county council.

Falmouth Fire Station covers an area that includes the dockyard area of the town. The dockyard provides employment for a significant number of local people. The area – one of the most economically depressed in the UK – relies on securing contracts for the refitting of vessels for this employment.

If Falmouth Fire Station is downgraded this will affect the insurance rating of the dockyard by raising the risk. This, in turn, raises the insurance premium and these costs are passed on to the owners of ships who are seeking the best possible rates for the refurbishment of their vessels.

Clearly any rise in costs would make the dockyard less 'competitive'. We have anecdotal evidence that this would have a negative effect not only on the dockyard and its owners and employees, but also on the entire local economy due to the knock-on effect on the many businesses in the area that support the dockyards.

A fire authority's IRMP should not only improve safety but also fit in with any local, county or regional economic strategy.

We have not yet saved these two stations but we hope that in this case 'money talks'!

Mike Tremellen
Cornwall Brigade Chair

Firefighters at work – the Union has begun a discussion on the fire service modernisation agenda

committed to listening to your views and this may involve the use of surveys and local forums and I urge all members to participate. Out of this process we will ensure that the union emerges strengthened, in touch and ready to respond to the challenges of the 21st century.
Matt Wrack

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WIN
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PUZZLES

Win this month's quiz, and you'll be the owner of a pair of CES30 premium plus wireless speakers



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PROSPECT



Civil servants at the MOD striking over pay in February: public service unions have pledged to support each other's pay campaigns

FBU in talks with employers

PAY 2007

Meetings between the FBU and employers have been taking place on the issue of the pay rise due July 1. The Union has told employers that it believes a continuation of the pay formula established as part of the 2003 pay and conditions agreement would help bring much-needed stability in the UK fire and rescue service.

The Union's Executive Council discussed

the issue at a meeting on March 28, and FBU regional and sectional reps met 16 April to discuss progress on the pay talks. A report went to the Executive Council on April 19 and will also be made to delegates during the FBU's annual conference May 9-11.

The Union's talks with employers came as Chancellor Gordon Brown repeated his insistence on driving down public sector pay by capping it to below inflation. Setting a limit of 2% for public sector pay rises means a pay cut as the retail price index is currently

running at 4.6%, with average earnings rises not far behind. Pay experts Income Data Services say the Treasury is taking its "toughest stance for many years on public sector pay in 2007."

The FBU and other public sector unions, like PCS and Prospect which have launched industrial action, are committed to helping each other in their pay campaigns. General Secretary Matt Wrack will be meeting with them in the TUC's Public Services Liaison group in May to discuss progress on this.



CORBIS

Still independent: The Isle of Wight's Needles rocks

Merger of two fire authorities rejected

ISLE OF WIGHT

Islle of Wight council has voted unanimously to retain control of the island's fire service, marking a successful end to a joint FBU-Unison campaign against a merger with Hampshire that won strong public support.

The majority of the councillors who spoke in the debate that preceded the vote on 21 March congratulated the FBU on its work and the positive image it now has among management and employers, said Paul Fletcher, FBU Isle of Wight brigade secretary. He added: "The process has enhanced industrial relations and is a starting block to build on for future negotiations and discussions.

"The vote follows an excellent campaign that has been fully supported by the public on the island. We managed to get the option for the Isle of Wight to remain independent reintroduced into the consultation, after it

had initially been withdrawn, and eventually that option won unopposed in the council chamber. The whole membership feels proud of what has been achieved. But we know we can't rest on our laurels. We have got to carry on, pushing for further improvements and to maintain them."

The campaign kicked off in November 2006 when the Isle of Wight and Hampshire started a three-month period of public consultation following a report into the possibility of merging the two brigades.

Strong links

FBU officials on the island forged strong links with local Unison officials whose members would have been the most affected initially if any merger had taken place.

Local officials were supported by the FBU at all levels, including the commissioning of a report by the Institute of Public Finance that was sent to all councillors and fire service staff on the island.

Bargaining tool gets face lift

FBU REPS

The fire service local agreement database established in 2004 by the FBU and the Labour Research Department has been revamped with new features and functions that will make it easier to use for FBU brigade officials.

Designed as a tool for FBU brigade officials negotiating with fire and rescue authorities, the database

now contains the full text of over 400 local agreements and service orders and synopses of many of these agreements which are searchable with an easy-to-use engine.

Accessible via the FBU's website, the database provides details of existing local agreements on a range of issues from duty systems and overtime to disciplinary procedures, parental leave, flexible working, as well as

bullying and harassment policies and union facilities.

In addition to the search functions, information can be accessed under subject areas such as conditions, working time and leave, health and equality.

Information on the database has been provided by local FBU officials, who are encouraged to send any new and existing agreements, service orders and so on to pay@lrd.org.uk

Sounding off!

TAM MITCHELL

Executive Council Member, Retained

RDS establishment levels

When the FBU embarked on the pay campaign in 2002, establishments at retained stations across the country were at crisis levels. Five years later, has anything changed?

Sadly not. Almost every UK brigade has either failed to recognise, or failed to act and address the issue of under establishment. Many retained duty system (RDS) watch and station managers are left attempting to provide whatever availability they can with minimal and under-resourced crewing levels.

In 2002 there was already a shortfall of 3,000-4,000 from the official RDS establishment levels, set at around 18,000. This resulted in more and more stations failing to provide availability of their appliances for increasing amounts of time – and they still are. Many are off the run for days at a time.

Some brigades have had as many as 50% of RDS stations off the run at the same time for many periods during the week. The shortfall remains at around the 3,000 mark.

But a critical issue stemming from the June 2003 pay agreement was the change to 120 hour cover for 100% retaining fees, down from previous 168 hour availability. Yes, RDS crews were to get two day's off out of seven.

This change effectively meant that in order for brigades to maintain the establishment levels at the time they would need to recruit an additional 29% RDS firefighters just to stand still.

Another overlooked area was the introduction of paid annual leave for RDS firefighters in 1999. Two day's off a week, and paid holiday too! This also led to a significant reduction in available cover on RDS stations by up to five weeks a year.

The limited efforts to address establishment deficiencies has almost always been based on the original establishment levels prior to the changes in 2003. Any deficit resulting from the move to 120 hours a week has not been addressed.

The FBU has been campaigning to get RDS establishment levels up to the correct levels with varying degrees of success. In many cases cost is the excuse for failing to act.

But the majority of FRS budgets in recent years have been operating with surplus RDS budgets. This money is often being used to offset other budget deficiencies. Enough excuses – its time to act!



Northern Ireland fire cover threat suspended

CUTS FIGHTBACK

The FBU-led campaign to save fire services in 12 Northern Ireland towns has been given a lifeline after proposals to halve cover were put on hold.

The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service Board has agreed that a review of services in Ballycastle, Ballyclare, Ballymoney, Castlederg, Clogher, Holywood, Kilkeel, Lisnaskea, Maghera, Newtownhamilton, Portstewart and Rathfriland will continue until February next year.

It had been feared that the fire stations would see one pump removed, leaving them with just one fire engine each.

Public outcry

The plans sparked a huge public outcry and when consultation on the integrated risk management plan (IRMP) opened last November, 900 written responses were submitted opposing them.

Jim Barbour, Executive Council member for FBU Northern Ireland, described the move as a "victory for common sense".

He said: "What we have seen is a massive climbdown by the Fire and Rescue Service Board.

"They have wilted in the face of public and political pressure and have backtracked on their proposal to cut by 50% fire



Stormont voted unanimously to oppose the proposed cuts in the Northern Ireland fire service

services in some towns."

Prior to the fire authority's decision, following sustained lobbying by the FBU, the "Transitional" Northern Ireland

Assembly in Stormont voted unanimously, on a Sinn Féin motion amended by the DUP, to support the Union's position in opposition to the proposed cuts.

New employment rights resource

TOOLS FOR REPS

The Institute of Employment Rights has launched a new website – www.ier.org.uk – with many new features.

It enables visitors to purchase publications on line; join the growing list of Trade Union Freedom Bill sponsors; sign up for seminars; contact the Liverpool or Brighton Office directly; and receive alerts when the website is updated.

IER hopes to introduce new features for subscribers such as providing access to electronic versions of its publications, seminar papers and discussion forums, as well as new features in the wider public domain.

IER welcomes feedback on the site and suggestions on how to improve its content.

→ Contact Carolyn Jones at cad@ier.org.uk or call 0151 702 6925

In brief

◆ An FBU crew manager for Red Watch at Easterhouse fire station in Glasgow is planning to jump out of a plane at 10,000 feet – and has managed to convince another five on his watch to do the same. Paul Tyrrell, who will also be joined by his wife, will be doing the jump with a tandem parachute team called "Boobybirds" which is seeking to raise funds for Scottish breast cancer charities. For more info: visit www.boobybirds.co.uk. Paul is on 07876540499.

◆ Moaaid Hamid, vice president of the General Federation of Iraqi Workers of Nineveh province, and his wife were killed on April 9 following clashes between the Iraqi army and terrorist elements. Mr Hamid, who met the Unison/FBU delegation that visited Iraqi Kurdistan in March 2005, played a key role in building a democratic trade union movement in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein.



◆ A coalition including Scottish author Iain Banks, Welsh actor Rhys Ifans (above), Ken Livingstone, trade unionists, faith groups and students has spoken out against the threat of the fascist British National Party at the May Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and local council elections. The coalition, co-ordinated by Unite Against Fascism, was responding to the announcement by the BNP that was standing a record number of candidates for the Scottish Parliament in May.

◆ Trade unions across Europe are ramping up efforts to get signatures on a European TUC petition in support of high-quality public services. Just over 50,000 people around Europe have signed the petition – and only 1,000 of them are in the UK. Organisers hope to reach the 1 million mark by 20 May. To sign the petition, visit www.petitionpublicservice.eu

SANDRO VANNINI/CORBIS



The Tay Bridge stands astride the largest river in the UK

FIFTH COLUMN

An anonymous take on events in a brigade near you

A firefighter in Tayside will at one time or another attend an incident at, or near to water. Tayside is dominated by the longest river in the UK, the River Tay. The Perthshire flood plain has the largest water catchment area in the UK.

Yet Tayside Fire and Rescue Service has failed to provide adequate training and equipment to carry out rescues at flooding and other water related emergencies. In 1991 the worst flooding in 75 years caused an estimated £50 million damage to property in the Tayside area and there were scores of rescues from properties. The FBU sought a change in management attitude to water incidents. But it took 14 years, repeated major flooding and numerous rescue incidents to convince management to take the matter seriously.

In January 2005, 12 Tayside FBU members were sent on a water rescue training course in Wales. But afterwards, instead of forming a water rescue team, they were sent back to their watches and departments and the new kit was placed in a 'safe place'. Management has prevaricated on the issue since that enlightened decision and it has taken heroic action by a firefighter to force policy change.

Tam Brown, 42, is on Green Watch in Perth and has been a firefighter for 15 years. On the evening of March 6, Green Watch were sent to an incident at Queens Bridge, Perth. A young woman was in the River Tay. The police had thrown her a line which she was struggling to hold on to. She was fighting for her life. With the approval of his watch manager, Tam entered the water with a harness and an additional line. He quickly reached the casualty and proceeded to bring her close to steps that would assist in her removal from the freezing water. At this point the line supporting Tam and the casualty snapped. Tam managed to retain his nerve and had the strength to reach the steps. On their

TAYSIDE

After water rescue training, they were sent back to their watches

removal from the river, Tam and the woman were taken to A&E, suffering from hypothermia.

The FBU called for immediate dialogue with the management of Tayside Fire and Rescue. At the first meeting we asked for assurances that management would recognise the heroic actions of Tam and his colleagues. This was not forthcoming. But it was stated that the brigade-led top set H&S investigation would take notice of the fact that Tam and his watch

manager had breached safe systems of work (SSOW) covering water incidents. This was taken as a threat to discipline both of them.

At an emergency branch meeting at Perth Fire Station on 12 March attended by brigade and regional officials, a unanimous vote of no confidence was passed in the management of Tayside Fire and Rescue from the station manager up to and including CFO Stephen Hunter.

The local press took up the story, leading local politicians to condemn the CFO for his actions. Eventually the story hit the nationals. Management sent out peace proposals and ran up the white flag. Training on water awareness started on 27 March, with management insisting that never at any time did Tam face discipline over his courageous actions.

Tam has fully recovered and has returned to full operational duties. He received a visit from the DCFO on Monday 25 March, almost three weeks after the events of 6 March. During his visit the DCFO indicated that he felt that the FBU had been mischief-making and that the branch officials had been naive. After another PR disaster for TF&R management you might think that they would start to understand: it is due to the outstanding work of FBU members, who, in representing the interests of all the people of Tayside, that there was a change in policy that will result in even more lives being saved.

No to Trident

KATE HUDSON, CHAIR OF CND

“ The scale of the parliamentary rebellion against Trident replacement on 14 March shows that we are winning the argument against nuclear weapons.

Forced to rely on Conservative support to get the vote through, the government faced the largest backbench rebellion on a domestic issue since Labour came to power in 1997. Indeed, the size was of historic significance; it was also the biggest rebellion on defence policy since Labour first entered government in 1924.

Even better news is that this parliamentary opposition is just the tip of a massive iceberg which represents greater opposition to nuclear weapons than ever before. The size of that iceberg was revealed, by an opinion poll in early March, to be 72% of the population opposed to proceeding with Trident replacement now. And we know from our work over recent months that the iceberg is made up of people from all walks of life – from trade unions and faith communities, from across all political parties, from people who oppose Trident replacement on numerous grounds: moral, legal, costs, security – and in every case the best arguments have been ours.

Nuclear weapons do not meet our current threats, the chief of which is terrorism. Our arsenal did not prevent the tragedy of 7/7. Nor do we currently face any nuclear superpower threat. So what possible purpose do nuclear weapons serve?

The government argues that we need them 'just in case', because we do not know what future threats we may face. However, what is absolutely certain is that if Britain and other nuclear weapon states assert that they need nuclear weapons for their security, then other countries will come to the same conclusion.

If we decide now to rearm, when we face no threats, this will encourage other nuclear weapons states to do the same, and will lead to a new nuclear arms race. By our actions we will bring about the increase in nuclear threats and dangers that we most wish to avoid.

Using the government's own figures, CND has calculated that Britain will likely spend over £100 billion on its nuclear weapons programme over the next 47 years. This is an astonishing sum of money to spend on Cold War weapons which cannot protect us from the threats that Britain faces today, whether terrorism or climate change. The government would serve the British people better by abandoning its old dogmas

and spending the money on combating 21st century threats.

What else could the government spend this money on? It could fund new equipment and facilities for our vital public services, such as the NHS and emergency services. It could scrap student top-up fees or protect hundreds of millions of acres of rainforest. The list goes on and on. Our world is inundated with weapons of mass destruction yet we lack genuine security. The government must spend this money addressing the real needs of the British people.

The recent report of the Defence Select Committee raises serious questions about the future of employment in UK submarine production but makes clear that the employment issue should not be the deciding factor in any decision to replace the current Vanguard submarines – the launch platform for the Trident nuclear weapons system.

CND has historically worked with national trade unions and local workplace organisations to discuss viable alternative employment strategies. CND will shortly be publishing a new study by Dr Steven Schofield, sponsored by UNISON. The study reveals the reality of employment in the nuclear weapons sector, and explores the many options for future arms conversion possibilities were the government not to replace Trident.

We need government policies to actively remove the nuclear threat, not increase it. We need to reverse the decision to replace Trident, together with genuine initiatives from the government towards multilateral disarmament – supporting a Nuclear Weapons Convention to ban nuclear weapons would be a good start. A draft Convention is already lodged with the United Nations, and a recent YouGov poll shows that 64% want the government to support a convention banning all nuclear weapons.

Many MPs have shifted their positions to oppose nuclear weapons and many more will do so in the months and years to come as they realise the extent of the majority public opposition to new nuclear weapons.

CND will continue to campaign tirelessly against Trident replacement and for initiatives which will eliminate nuclear weapons from Britain and the entire world. Your continued support is vital to encourage our government to adopt policies of peace and true security.

”

→ For more information visit: www.cnduk.org



HMS Victorious, one of the Royal Navy's four current strategic missile submarines departs her home port at Faslane in Scotland

PICTURE: TAM McDONALD/ROYAL NAVY/AP/PA PHOTOS

REGIONAL CONTROLS

It is not too late to stop
Government plans to
regionalise fire controls,
so it's ...

TIME TO STAND UP AND BE COUNTED

It may seem strange to state that the FBU campaign against the regionalisation of fire service control rooms is one of the most successful campaigns that the Union has ever run. But look at the facts:

- we have won the argument with the public and have their support;
- we have won the argument with the local media which is reflected in television and newspaper coverage;
- we have won the argument with substantial numbers of local politicians who do not accept the basis of the project;
- we have won the argument with substantial numbers of national politicians who have backed the Union in Parliament through the signing of early day motions and so on.

We have also succeeded in:

- exposing as false many Government claims regarding the potential operational abilities of a regional control;
- exposing the extraordinary and ever-escalating costs of the project;
- exposing as false the potential savings that the Government initially claimed;
- exposing the lack of planning for the project;
- exposing the Government timescales as naive and unachievable;
- exposing the ideology which the Government claimed to be driving the project as flawed, unsound and inconsistent
- getting a Parliamentary select committee to challenge the basis of the project.

This, briefly, is what the FBU has achieved in the last few years. But there has been much more that the Union has succeeded with regard to this campaign and, when put together, the local and national work put in by FBU members and officials has been both extraordinary and successful.

So why, given everything that we have achieved, can we not claim victory and just sit back and congratulate ourselves? Well, despite all our achievements we have not won – yet!

Despite the protestations of every worth-

while body that knows anything about the fire and rescue service, despite the enormous local and national political objections, despite the enormous and escalating costs, massively increasing timescales and the crumbling of the reasoning behind the project the Government still insists that it is pressing ahead.

This nonsense can still be stopped and this is a critical time to ensure that it is.

There are two key events that are happening now and in the near future which will have a major impact on whether this project continues to go ahead or not.

LACCs

The first is the setting up of Local Authority Controlled Companies (LACCs). These will consist of a politician from each of the fire and rescue services involved in the region concerned. So, for instance, the South West LACC will consist of a member each from Avon, Cornwall, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Devon and Somerset and Wiltshire. These six people will constitute the employer for any future regional control centre and will be responsible for the services it provides and the pay and conditions of service of the staff it employs.

The Government has indicated that each FRS should agree to participate in the LACC and discussions on this are happening now in many areas of the country. However, if each FRS is being asked to agree, it must also be true that they are an option not to agree!

The majority of fire authorities have (at the very least) shown a reluctance to accept the Government's plans and have often hidden behind their lack of ability to alter the course of the project.

But now is the time for them to stand up and be counted.

We should all be putting pressure on our local FRS to show leadership in this respect and to tell the Government that it will not "sign up" to a LACC until it is convinced that a regional control will actually improve the service that the FRS is charged to deliver.

For many of us this may seem unlikely given the lack of courage and responsibility that many fire authorities have shown of late.

**We should all be
putting pressure
on our local FRS to
show leadership**

But it can happen! In the South West one fire authority – Avon, led by the Labour Chair of the fire authority, Terry Walker – has had the courage and responsibility to stand up to the Government and refuse to "sign up" to a LACC because the authority is not convinced that it will protect the public they represent as effectively as the system currently in place.

Terry Walker is to be applauded as a man who takes his position seriously and has the courage to defend the service for which he is responsible despite considerable outside pressure.

But what of the others? Several in the South West, although not able to find the courage that Avon has shown, have also expressed doubts and this has meant that the regional management board has only advocated the establishment of an LACC subject to the



PAUL BOX

The proposed south west regional copntrol would be housed in thiuis building in Taunton

following caveats:

- That final commitment to the project will not be made until the full business case is published and the legal obligations of best value have been satisfied;
- That each authority reserves the right to withdraw from the company at any time;
- That authorities will not agreed to finance long-term financial or contractual obligations entered into by the LACC, for instance the lease of the regional control centre, until they are satisfied that the proposal to deliver a service through the LACC is justified.

When they discussed this matter, the regional management board members indicated that they wanted a written assurance from Government that – as had previously been indicated – it would meet all costs associated with the FiReControl project up to the date of actual cut over of services from individual fire and rescue authorities to the new regional control centre.

Final business case

You will note that one of the caveats concerns a “final business case”. This is the second key consideration that will have a major impact on whether or not this project continues to go ahead.

The project relies on the Government showing, in this business case, that all the serious concerns regarding the financial and service implications of the project are answered fully and openly. However the track record of the Government so far does not inspire confidence in it producing such a full and transparent assessment.

So we need to do everything that we can to force the Government to do so. The Union

has the full support of the FBU Parliamentary Group which has tabled an Early Day Motion (EDM) in Parliament requesting “an urgent full and independent assessment of the DCLG’s final business case for the FireControl Project before any major decisions are made.” To date 118 MPs have signed EDM 805.

But the question is: has yours? Write to your MP now and request that they sign – and if they don’t make sure to ask them why not! When you get the response give it to your

This is a very simple thing to do but its importance cannot be stressed enough

FBU brigade official who can pass it up to head office.

This is a very simple thing to do but its importance cannot be stressed enough. If the Government’s plans for regional control centres go ahead then the entire fire and rescue service will be affected for the worse. Jobs will be lost and response times will increase, so fires will tend to be larger, and firefighter safety will be compromised.

This has been a long and hard campaign, but it is far from over. The stakes are too high not to get involved and now is a crucial time to do so. We must all play our part, no matter which part of the service we work in. By taking five minutes of your time to write a letter or send an email you can influence this campaign positively.

Go on, do it now!



‘The plan is wholly unconvincing’

Terry Walker, Chair of Avon Fire Authority

Avon Fire and Rescue Service is a progressive modern-day fire and rescue service, leading the way in many areas of ‘preventing, protecting and responding’ to both fires and other potentially life-threatening events and incidents.

We take our responsibilities very seriously and have studied the Government’s plans for a regional control centre very carefully. Quite frankly, the plan is wholly unconvincing with no firm evidence as to how it would improve the service we give to the public in Avon.

We are firmly of the view that our current fire control centre remains the best facility for delivering our service and the staff within it are second to none.

As the Chair of Avon Fire Authority I am committed to delivering the best service in Avon and as such I refuse to sign up to the Government’s plans which I believe would compromise our fire and rescue service. I have made my position clear at all levels of both local and national Government.



PA PHOTOS

LOBBY YOUR MP NOW!

Write to your MP at:

**The House of Commons,
London, SW1A 0AA**

requesting that they sign Early Day Motion 805. Make sure to include your postcode and address so they know that you are their constituent (otherwise they may not respond at all).

You can also use the FBU website:

log on to www.fbu.org.uk

follow the “Lobby Your MP” link and you will be guided through an easy step-by-step process. This takes less than five minutes.



FBU ULF courses cover a very wide range of topics. Suffolk members recently took part in a deaf awareness course at the county fire service headquarters in Ipswich.

Left, firefighter Kevin Canham and watch manager Wayne Crabb discuss the course.

Right, firefighter Kat Ellis tries to lipread while wearing a headset that excludes all sound.

Next page, left, tutors Yvonne Brook and Lorraine Thurkettle demonstrate communication equipment for people with hearing difficulties.

Right, firefighter Paul Trenter attempts to lipread.



PICTURES: MALCOLM WATSON

When the Union launched its first course at the FBU Learning Centre in Northumberland in the winter of 2002, Trevor Shanahan was not to know just how far the culture of lifelong learning would spread across the UK fire and rescue service.

But from modest beginnings in the north-east, the FBU's Union Learning Fund has grown rapidly. Through a series of successful bids it has extended to all parts of England, Northern Ireland and Scotland opportunities for FBU members to enhance their career prospects.

Now Trevor, ULF national project manager, has seen the last piece of the national ULF jigsaw put into place. The Union received news in March that it had been successful in seeking £95,000 to run a range of courses over a two-year period in Wales.

"It's fantastic news," says Trevor. "The FBU, in partnership with fire authorities, is now able to offer opportunities for our members to boost their careers, family and social lives wherever they may be in the UK."

As elsewhere in the country FBU members in the three Welsh brigades will be able to get to grips with ICT, brush up on numeracy and literacy skills, learn foreign languages and develop awareness of other issues that will help them in their jobs, such as deafness and dyslexia.

They will also be supported if they want to gain qualifications such as an S/NVQ and go on to further or higher education, so boosting their opportunities in the fire service and in the wider job market. The Union has secured an agreement for a 10% discount with the Open University.

The first courses in Wales will kick in from February next year after the ground for the

FBU ULF GOES NATIONAL

Following a successful bid to extend the Union Learning Fund to Wales, the Union now offers lifelong learning opportunities to members across the whole of the UK. And some 5,000 have already taken up the challenge.



project has been laid – including the appointment of a project manager, the training of some 50 local ULF reps, the assessment of specific learning needs in Wales and the purchase of computer equipment.

The figures tell an impressive story for the FBU's ULF.

Around 5,000 uniformed fire service personnel have attended at least one course;

there have been 'dissemination' events across the fire and rescue service meeting around 12,000 staff; 6,000 courses covering ICT, deaf awareness and language skills; 500 'skills for life' courses covering numeracy and literacy; support for 900 learners undertaking higher or further education; 2,000 staff undertaking an S/NVQ; support to over 2,000 staff on workforce development programmes.



Languages

Some 60 Cheshire firefighters are among those who have recently benefited from the ULF with a taster in Polish language and culture at Crewe Fire Station.

Says Garry Harney, Cheshire FBU Brigade lifelong learning coordinator: "Crewe has recently had a large increase in its population after an influx of over 5,000 Polish migrant workers. I thought the course would be helpful to our members, not just for work but for social skills, to learn some Polish and try to understand a bit about their culture.

"With the help of Milke, a translator from Krakow, Ron Evans, a learning rep from the Communication Workers Union and Ged Bretherton, from the TUC's unionlearn, I ran the course on an informal basis, one night a week over three weeks.

"We invited about 10 members of the Polish community to join us. It was very successful, with around 60 Cheshire firefighters turning up on the first day."

Deaf awareness

In Suffolk, firefighters have just completed a course on 'deaf awareness', organised by FBU

brigade lifelong learning coordinator Adrian Mayhew at the fire service's headquarters in Ipswich. "The course was really useful," says Adrian. "There will be situations in the job where understanding people who are hard of hearing or totally deaf will be critical, and could save lives."

ICT

In the South West of England, members of Red Watch at Bath Fire Station – all working the retained duty system – recently took part in computer training thanks to a successful bid for ULF funding by Bill Hendy, the FBU Regional ULF co-ordinator.

"Within the group there was a wide range of abilities, from those who had no knowledge of computers, to those who were more IT literate," says Bath firefighter and FBU branch secretary Alastair Dunlop.

"There are many areas where database and spreadsheet work are required such as analysing data and providing statistics and, over time, our use of IT is only going to increase. It is important that everyone is brought up to speed and feels confident in using the technology.

"Those who took part in the training have definitely progressed and have been able to use their new-found skills in other areas – such as helping their children with homework."

Members of Red Watch are now working towards information technology qualifications (ITQ) and all members will soon be able to work toward achieving the ITQ qualification.

FBU members in Scotland and Northern Ireland, meanwhile, have not only been improving their skills for life and IT skills under the Union's Scotland and Northern Ireland ULF projects, but they have also been brushing up on areas as diverse as customer

'Those who took part in the training have definitely progressed and have been able to use their new-found skills in other areas – such as helping their children with homework'

services and management techniques to drug awareness courses. These have been made available under 'ethos blended learning', five different 12-week courses on a range of subjects, even map reading.

"The introduction of S/NVQs and the integrated personal development system (IPDS) in the fire service will require employees to meet new levels of competence," says Says Trevor Shanahan.

"The Union's ULF project and lifelong learning agenda will ensure that all employees have equality of access to learning opportunities to meet these requirements. But the benefits don't end there. The acquisition skills in areas such as ICT will also improve the quality of life of FBU members' families.

"Wherever you work in the UK fire service, whatever your role, your personal circumstances, or expectations for the future, chances are there will be something out there for you under the FBU's ULF project.

"There's never been a better time to seize the opportunity for lifelong learning. I urge all members to consider getting a piece of the action."

➔ More info: <http://ulf.fbu.org.uk>

'Wherever you work, whatever your role, your personal circumstances, or expectations for the future, chances are there will be something out there for you under the FBU's ULF project'



PA PHOTOS

Firefighters Jeff Wornham (left) and Michael Miller

NEVER AGAIN

‘Sitting here giving evidence is very painful, but we are willing to go through that pain to make sure it does not happen again’

Blue Watch firefighter Jim Dudley

In the early hours of 2nd February 2005 Stevenage blue watch were on duty in the Hertfordshire town. At approximately 02.59 Herts emergency fire control room received the initial call to a ‘person’s reported’ fire on the upper floors of Harrow Court, a high rise block in the town.

The station’s two pumps, with a total of nine crew, were quickly on their way. Harrow Court was only a few minutes drive time from the station.

The original call from a member of the public reported that the fire was on the 15th floor of the 17 storey block of flats. As they raced to the scene, crews described seeing thick black smoke pouring from windows on the upper floors of the building.

The crew on the first pump to arrive, which

included Mike Miller and Jeff Wornham, were told the fire was in fact on the 14th floor. In the following fifteen minutes Hertfordshire was to suffer one of the biggest losses it had known in a single fire. They were to lose a resident, Natalie Close, and firefighters Mike Miller and Jeff Wornham.

Mike and Jeff saved the life of Nick Savage, Natalie’s partner. They died trying to save Natalie. Evidence given at the nine-day Coroner’s inquest suggests the Hertfordshire fire service were fortunate not to lose more firefighters, as crews battled to help their colleagues.

The inquest heard that a tealight-style candle had been placed on top of a television in a bedroom in Natalie Close’s 14th floor flat. As the candle had not been placed within a

holder – which would absorb some of the heat – the bottom of the candle became very hot and it burnt through the top of the television and started the blaze.

Stevenage Borough Council, which owned the flats, had fitted a hard-wired smoke alarm in each flat which had a battery as back up. But this flat ran on a pre-paid type electricity meter and the occupants had run out of cash credits. There was no electricity to power the smoke alarm and no back up battery.

The inquest was to centre on how two firefighters died having gone into a burning flat without water, without effective BA entry control and before a bridgehead was established. A significant contribution, the inquest would hear, was that there were only nine firefighters sent in the initial response,

compounded by concerns about practical training in high rise procedures, incident command, crew command, breathing apparatus and refresher training.

With a total of 167 recommendations being made to the Coroner (94 of those from Herts FRS and 73 from the FBU, some covering common ground) there is no question that significant lessons could be learned by the entire fire service.

Tony Smith, FBU brigade secretary said: "Everything to do with this incident has been traumatic from the night itself to the end of the inquest. It is never the job of an inquest to attach blame to individuals and neither the union nor the families sought to do that.

"The important, and at times difficult thing, is to get to as much of the truth as we can. It is important for the families to know that all the lessons which need to be learned have been learned so that no other firefighters are injured or killed in similar circumstances."

Blue watch firefighter Jim Dudley, now retired, said during his evidence: "Sitting here is very painful but we are willing to go through that pain to make sure it does not happen again."

The inquest was to centre on how the two firefighters arrived at the door of flat 85 on the 14th floor of Harrow Court with branch and hose but with no water supply. In fact Mike Miller and Jeff Wornham were never in a position to get water onto the fire.

The dry riser had been secured with a chain after it had been vandalised. A memo to stations from Herts FRS notified crews that this course of action had been agreed between the service and Stevenage Borough Council.

A delay in getting the boltcroppers to the 14th floor – they were being used on the ground floor – caused the delay in the water supply to Michael and Jeff who were at the door of the flat ready to enter in response to shouts from inside.

The firefighter carrying out BA entry control was prevented from doing so because he was tasked to look after the first casualty, Nick Savage, rescued by Mike and Jeff. Their BA tallies were later found in the debris.

The inquest heard that the two firefighters went into the flat and had pulled Nick Savage to safety. It is believed they then re-entered the flat without water (which was still not available) and a rapid fire development occurred which killed Mike Miller instantly and injured Jeff Wornham.

Jeff Wornham's body was found in the lobby outside of the front door of the flat with melted plastic cable – some of which was wrapped around his BA set – on top of him. The second BA crew of Jim Dudley and Simon Dredge were making their way to the flat following the uncharged length of hose, then called for water which quickly arrived. Simon Dredge said the visibility at that stage was "zero". They had applied pulsed water but it just came back as steam.

"It was," he told the inquest "like a blow torch coming towards us, it was incredibly hot". At one point firefighter Simon Dredge lifted Jim Dudley and dragged him out of the inferno. It was an action, the Coroner later said, which almost certainly saved Jim Dudley's life.

Forced back, they went down to the floor directly below, crossed the landing and went up the other stairwell towards the flat. But the length of hose they had was too short.

Through a glass partition they could see the shape of a body lying on the floor. Not knowing if it was someone dead or badly injured, they opened the door, realised it was either Jeff or Mike and tried to pull him out. Despite pulling him with all their might, neither of them could move him "even a centimetre".

The low-air warning whistles were ignored as they tried to get Jeff Wornham out. Jim Dudley told the inquest: "I kept going until I ran out of air. I couldn't breathe."

Crews from Baldock and Hitchin arrived and also tried to pull Jeff Wornham out. They were eventually successful in cutting him free from the cables and passed him to the care of the paramedics.

Following the verdict of the inquest jury, Howard Miller, the father of Mike Miller thanked all of Mike and Jeff's colleagues who tried in vain to save them. "They did everything professional firefighters could have done in the circumstances they found themselves in. No individual or collective blame can be attached to them.

"I don't believe that the tragedy had anything to do with individual errors but was directly because Herts fire and rescue service

'Herts FRS had not been giving their fire crews sufficient hands-on practical training'

Howard Miller, father of Michael Miller

– like so many others across the UK – have not been giving their fire crews the hands-on practical training and preparation needed to deal safely with the dangerous incidents they are sent to and to the standards that we as a society expect from them.

"I do not want other mothers and fathers of the young men and women serving in the fire service to ever have to bury their children. It's a parent's worst nightmare."

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "There were extraordinary acts of courage and bravery shown by everyone at this incident and they all did the very best they possibly could with the resources, training and equipment available to them.

"Selfless and courageous people act in selfless and courageous ways to save life. It is

PA PHOTOS



A Hertfordshire fire service firefighter stands alone deep in thought, at Harrow Court

essential for fire and rescue authorities to avoid placing firefighters in situations where they face the moral dilemma between attempting rescues in a way which seriously compromises their own safety or not attempting a rescue and risking the public.

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

The Coroner, Mr Edward Thomas, made an explicit call for the Herts Fire and Rescue Service to work with the FBU to help ensure that all lessons are learned. FBU Regional Secretary Graham Noakes and Herts FBU Health and Safety co-ordinator Paul Stanbridge have already started joint working with Herts FRS to implement the recommendations.

The Coroner has written to a number of Government Departments, and other interested parties, including the recommendations made by both organisations.

→ The executive summary of the FBU's health and safety investigation is available at www.fbu.org.uk

WHAT DOES THE PUBLIC SERVANT OF THE YEAR DO?

Avon firefighter Allan Middleton has won two national awards for his 'outstanding work' with young offenders

Winning one prestigious national award for "outstanding" work with young offenders is pretty impressive – but Avon firefighter Allan Middleton has won two. Allan, a community liaison officer, was named Public Servant of the Year by the Guardian newspaper for launching a fire cadets scheme in Ashfield prison and also won a Butler Trust Development Award to help spread innovative ways to keep youngsters from re-offending.

The scheme has been running inside HMP Ashfield – a privately managed prison for 15-18 year-olds – for two and a half years now, thanks to Allan Middleton with support from the prison governor. The structure and discipline of learning new skills is helping to boost self-esteem, transform young lives and cut the risk of re-offending.

Cadets turn out in association time on Thursday evenings at sessions Allan runs inside the prison, wearing fire kit, running out hoses and learning the basics of firefighting. There are also sessions on the reality of road

traffic accidents, fatal crashes involving joyriders and on how hoax calls waste time and can cost lives.

It seems to strike home. There is a waiting list for the fire cadet scheme and attendance has to be earned by good behaviour inside. It is proving a powerful tool for rehabilitation. First names are used and there is a culture of mutual respect. "The lads know where the line is and are very responsive to what's on offer. Fire cadets gives them some structure in their lives. They usually haven't had much," says Allan.

Once the scheme was up and running, Allan made the case for young people who had proved they could be focussed and disciplined in cadet sessions to be allowed day release to train in the kitchens or workshops at the fire station and with other employers in the Bristol area.

Strict rules

There are strict rules around day release under ROTL – release on temporary licence – but the prospect of getting a placement can help motivate young people to turn their lives around. Before they can be considered for ROTL, they have to successfully complete a five-day fire skills course at the local fire station.

The fire skills course provides "lots of skills and discipline and gives us a chance to see how these lads will respond under pressure. As long as they can cope, they can go to their work placement."

There are impressive success stories. One former Ashfield inmate is now employed by Avon Fire and Rescue as a youth advocate and is thriving in the job. He was on ROTL working on maintenance with the service for the last 18 months of his five-year sentence. Others have had day release placements while serving time with employers in the Bristol area.

A few Ashfield inmates have been out promoting community fire safety on the fire service trailer – spreading the word about smoke detectors and also working with young

people at risk of offending on some of the area's roughest estates.

"There are lots of activities and the lads from Ashfield can really get the message across that it's no fun being locked up," says Allan. "Quite often, they'll finish a session looking youngsters in the eye and saying 'what are you doing tonight? Going out with friends, cinema? Youth club? Well I'm going back in the prison van and will be locked up in my cell 'til morning'. And it really hits home to them."

Impressed by results

Allan was already experienced in community outreach before launching the fire cadet scheme inside Ashfield. He has run fire skills courses for disaffected youngsters at risk of exclusion from school. But it was a conversation with a prison officer about what could be done to help young people in jail sort their lives out rather than spiral into a life of crime that made him determined to get the scheme up and running. Ashfield governor Vickie O'Dea has been impressed by the results – she nominated Allan for the Guardian award.

After Easter, Allan started a six-month





Allan Middleton
with cadets at
HMP Ashfield,
Pucklechurch, near
Bristol

PICTURES:
PAUL BOX

secondment to work at Ashfield. He is now a qualified teacher – but remains very much a firefighter at heart with a passion to help young people discover their own potential and turn their backs on crime.

There has been a lot of interest from other prisons in the success of the fire cadet scheme at Ashfield and all it can lead to, and Allan would like to see it spread to other prisons. He is also keen to help get in place a national network of fire service mentors to support young ex-offenders adopt a crime-free life on release. The alternative is bad for them and

bad for us – becoming yet another statistic in the “revolving door” syndrome, where a spell outside is followed by more offences, more convictions and more time in Britain’s full-to-bursting jails.

And it’s certainly getting results. Or, as Allan puts it: “When we first started this scheme we faced a lot of opposition and people saying these lads were a lost cause and not to waste our time. We’ve proved them wrong. We shouldn’t ever give up on young people and with the right support they can turn their lives round.”

Working For You

ANDY PRICE

Brigade Chair

Cheshire

As part of its integrated risk management plan (IRMP) for 2007/8, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service intends to pilot the use of two targeted response vehicles (TRVs) between Runcorn and Widnes Fire Stations in the borough of Halton.

These TRVs are to be “on the run” from 3.00pm until 10.00pm every day. TRVs are ‘midi’-sized fire appliances, but with only a basic firefighting capability.

The Union has grave concerns about their deployment. This includes the fact that:

- ❖ TRVs are fitted with a small amount of equipment, limiting their fire-fighting capacity;
- ❖ TRVs will only be deployed to small fires, bin and rubbish fires, for instance;
- ❖ TRVs do not carry rescue ladders, whereas fully equipped structural appliances (SAs) carry two;
- ❖ TRVs carry only 600 litres of water, SAs carry 1800 ;
- ❖ TRVs are staffed with a crew of only three, reducing firefighting capabilities;
- ❖ TRVs do not allow for full breathing apparatus control procedures;
- ❖ TRVs will not respond to property fires or road collisions.

We fear TRVs will replace fully equipped fully staffed appliances

During the time that the two TRVs are staffed, at either Runcorn or Widnes fire stations, Halton will lose one SA and gain two TRVs.

Their deployment has been presented as an extra resource. The reality is that, with the introduction of the TRVs, Halton’s level of fire and rescue cover lowered by 25%. If, as stated, these TRVs are to be an extra resource, to release the SA for property fires they would have to be staffed with extra firefighters.

There is a real danger that the TRVs will be mobilised to incidents they do not have the capacity of dealing with safely, leaving crews morally obliged to respond even though this may risk their health and safety.

The Union is calling on local councillors to ensure fire cover is maintained for the community of Halton by keeping a life-saving, frontline fire appliance ‘on the run’ for 24 hours a day. But this is not just about Halton. We fear that these limited vehicles will replace fully equipped fully staffed appliances, thus reducing fire cover in Halton now, and in the rest of Cheshire in the future.

→ Cheshire’s IRMP4 is available on the CFRS web site: www.cheshirefire.co.uk

Kept under wraps

Misconceptions mean people are reluctant to talk about the condition

EPILEPSY

Epilepsy is the second most common neurological condition in the UK. Only migraines affect more people, yet most of us know very little about the condition. Many people – either in the public eye or passing you on the street – are reluctant to tell people that they have epilepsy because misconceptions surrounding the condition make people embarrassed about – and the more people know about epilepsy the less they will fear it.

Epilepsy facts

Roughly one in 131 people in the UK lives with epilepsy, that's approximately 456,000 of us. It is a very complex condition that can affect anyone from any walk of life. Some people develop epilepsy as a result of some kind of brain trauma (although sometimes it can take years to develop), whereas sometimes there seems to be no cause at all. Sometimes people can develop epilepsy late in their lives, whereas others are born with it and may even grow out of it.

Epilepsy is described as a tendency to have recurring seizures. A seizure occurs when the electrical signals in the brain go wrong – sometimes firing off all at once and becoming mixed up. There are around 40 different types of seizures that can be recognised in different ways and one person can have more than one seizure type (see box).

MAIN TYPES OF EPILEPSY

- ◆ **Partial seizures.** A person's level of consciousness will not be affected by a simple partial seizure. They will often experience changes in sensation, such as strange tastes or smells, or a feeling of déjà vu. A person experiencing a complex partial seizure will find their consciousness is impaired, often appearing very confused.
- ◆ **Absence seizures.** This type involves losing awareness for several seconds and can happen several times every day. These seizures are sometimes accompanied by smacking lips or fluttering eyelids, although often there can be no outward sign that a person is having them.
- ◆ **Tonic-clonic seizures.** These seizures are the type that most people would recognise. A person having a tonic-clonic seizure will suddenly go stiff, falling to the floor. This is followed by contraction of the muscles, resulting in the body jerking. A tonic-clonic seizure will usually be over quickly, although an ambulance should be called if a seizure lasts longer than five minutes.

What to do

Tonic-clonic seizures may be the most dangerous type. This is partly because if a person falls they may be injured. Seizures can

also reach status epilepticus. This is when the seizure lasts longer than 30 minutes, does not stop on its own and may require medical intervention. Tonic-clonic seizures that lead to status epilepticus are particularly dangerous and will mean a medical emergency.

If you encounter someone having a tonic-clonic seizure (see left), follow these guidelines:

Do

- ◆ protect the person from injury – remove harmful objects from nearby
- ◆ cushion their head
- ◆ look for an epilepsy identity card or identity jewellery
- ◆ Aid breathing by gently placing them in the recovery position once the seizure has finished
- ◆ be calmly reassuring
- ◆ stay with the person until recovery is complete.

Don't

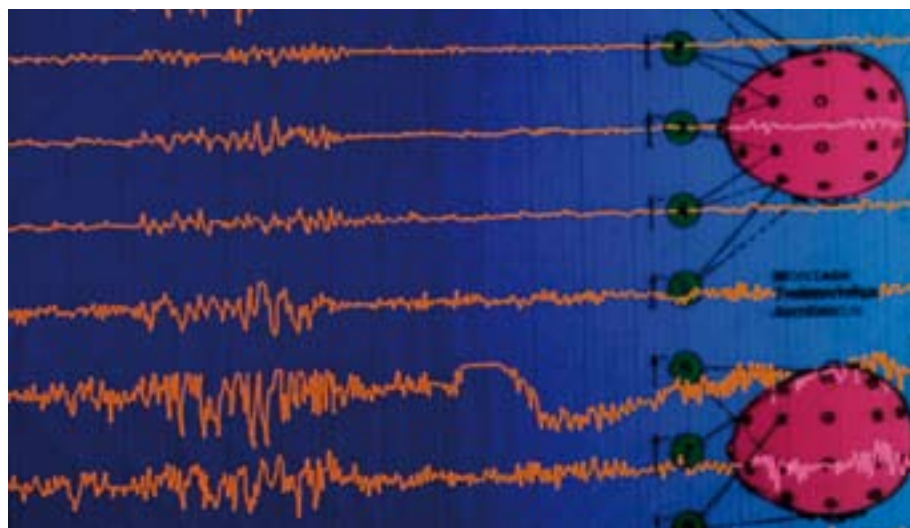
- ◆ restrain the person
- ◆ put anything in the person's mouth
- ◆ try to move the person unless they are in danger
- ◆ give the person anything to eat or drink until they are fully recovered
- ◆ attempt to bring them round.

Call an ambulance if

- ◆ you know it is the person's first seizure
- ◆ the seizure continues for more than five minutes
- ◆ one tonic-clonic seizure follows another without the person regaining consciousness between seizures
- ◆ the person is injured during the seizure
- ◆ you believe the person needs urgent medical attention.

→ Epilepsy Action is a member-based charity that provides information and support to people with epilepsy, along with their friends, family members, carers and health professionals. It produces a range of booklets and factsheets. Several are available in different languages including Braille. The organisation runs an Epilepsy Helpline, offering free, confidential advice and information. The helpline can be accessed by emailing helpline@epilepsy.org.uk or by calling freephone 0808 800 5050.

Visit the organisation's website for more information on epilepsy and a broad range of related services at www.epilepsy.org.uk



Coloured electroencephalogram of an epileptic seizure. The orange traces show electrical activity in the brain. The sudden onset of the attack is shown here by the abrupt increase in activity on the traces.

Acting up and pay

Q After I had been in a temporary post (higher role) for over two years, I was told that I would be 'reverted' to the original role with a substantial reduction in pay. Is there anything that can be done to take into account to the length of time that I have been in the role and become accustomed to the higher rate of pay?

A You can claim an ongoing entitlement to the higher rate of pay after you have returned to your original role only if that was agreed with your employer.

The presumption will be that temporary means what it says: that the pay will be that of the higher role only whilst the temporary promotion or acting up continues in accordance with paragraph 4.B.19 of the Grey Book. In the absence of a clear written agreement to the contrary it would take substantial evidence to mount an argument based on an implied (ie unwritten) agreement that a member would receive continued pay at the higher role after reverting to the original role.

Members still on lengthy periods of acting up/temporary promotion may be well advised to seek to negotiate agreements providing for periods of notice before reverting to the original role and/or continued pay at the higher rate for a period after the temporary arrangements end.

A member who is dissatisfied about a pay reduction on reverting to the original role could make a formal complaint under the grievance procedure. If the matter remains unresolved, legal assistance can be requested to take the case further by making a claim in the employment tribunal or the civil courts. The time limit will be three months from the date when the pay was reduced in tribunal cases and six years in the courts.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

a firefighter as defined by the pension scheme. Members in this position should make it clear that they require either a job within their role map or retirement on the grounds of ill-health. The employers should be pressed to obtain a medical report from an independent qualified medical practitioner (IQMP) under the pension scheme confirming whether or not the member is permanently incapacitated for duty, ie. firefighting duties and/or any other duties within the role map allocated to the member concerned.

A member who wishes to take up the job offered but to retain his/her pension rights should make it clear that the appropriate course of action for the fire authority is ill-health retirement under the pension scheme followed by the offer of re-engagement in the non-firefighting role.

Where the employers refuse to proceed in this way, members should seek assistance from the Union and legal assistance may also be required.

Members are reminded that, in cases where a medical report is obtained from an IQMP, a letter will be sent giving details of the outcome. If a copy of the report is enclosed, members have only 14 days to appeal against the medical opinion. If a copy is not enclosed, members have only 14 days to request a copy of the opinion and, on receipt of it, a further 14 days to appeal against the medical opinion. These time limits are easily missed as many employers routinely fail to inform members about them and then refuse to accept late appeals. We condemn this sharp practice by some employers but, regretfully, it is not uncommon for employers to act in this way.

→ 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.

Legal Beagle

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

Redeployment

Q I have developed a medical condition that prevents me from carrying out firefighting duties but I can do other duties (ie be redeployed). I have been offered a part-time job but not within the role of a firefighter and this would mean a loss of pension rights and reduced pay. If I refuse the job can my employer then terminate my employment on grounds of medical capability?

A Some fire authorities think they can do this but we do not agree. The Firefighters' Pension Scheme requires that fire authorities pay an ill-health

pension to members who are permanently incapacitated for duty. It had been established in the courts that "duty" meant operational duties so that members unfit for operational duties had to be retired with an ill-health pension. This was changed in 2004 when the pension scheme was amended.

But the amendment was designed only to allow fire authorities to keep on members who could be allocated other duties within their role maps, rather than paying them an ill-health pension. A job that is not within the role of a firefighter is a wholly different job and would not be the job of

‘There is nothing quite like the amazing quiet of the mountains’

Whether with work colleagues or family, Pete Goddard is passionate about skiing and climbing

It was the scenery and the mountains that first attracted Pete Goddard to the Pyrenees. But he now also relishes the pleasures of skiing when visiting the holiday apartment he and his wife bought a few years ago in an historic French village near to the Spanish border.

Pete has been inviting groups of fire station colleagues along for a spot of skiing ever since they bought the apartment. It's not a works outing though, but purely for pleasure – no drilling, no paperwork, no orders and, of course, strictly no rank pulling. “Everyone skis to their own level and some choose to go snowboarding” says Pete, a keen mountaineer since schooldays. Then there's always good local food and a shared bottle or two of the local red to look forward to in the evening.

Barèges, the village Pete and his fire-

fighter friends visit, was made famous when Napoleon reckoned his battle-weary troops made a speedier recovery after relaxing in the thermal springs there. It is one of two villages in the vast, majestic ski domain of Tourmalet.

The apartment the West Brom firefighters stay in is part of a converted hotel, built before the first world war by the Rothchilds for wealthy Parisian tourists. The second Winter Olympics was held in the area in 1926.

He got the skiing bug

Pete relishes both alpine and mountain skiing and sometimes skis with a guide off piste with suitably skilled friends. He first tried skiing a while back, but really got the bug a few years ago after years of climbing and mountaineering in the UK, the Alps and more recently the Pyrenees.

Scottish firefighter Heather Laurie's article in the *Firefighter*, “Me and My Mountain”, last year certainly struck a chord with Pete when it celebrated the satisfactions of climbing.

He's still keen on mountaineering but has very much taken to skiing too, enjoying “the speed and the challenging runs over difficult terrain” amid breathtaking scenery. Pete aims to combine the two in time, by taking up ski touring and ski mountaineering – “going up the mountain with skis and descending off piste”.

There is nothing, he says, quite like the amazing quiet of being up there in the mountains on routes far from the most popular slopes. But however much you like the quiet, it is never a good idea to ski alone, and going with a ski guide can be a good idea on harder untried routes, he adds.



Ski mountaineering: Going up the mountain with skis and descending off piste



PETE GODDARD

Pete Goddard, Blue Watch manager at West Bromwich fire station, has developed a taste for off-piste skiing in the Pyrenees. But he doesn't always get a break from work colleagues when he takes to the slopes; fellow watch members and their wives sometimes come along too.



Off piste and far from the popular slopes of the Pyrenees on the roof of a snowed-up building

Pete says though he and his wife Sue first took to the ski slopes some years ago. They couldn't really afford to take it up when the children were young. Now grown-ups themselves, their son and daughter come to Barèges to enjoy the skiing and the scenery – but not when the apartment is full up with firefighters.

Camaraderie on the watch

Pete has been on West Bromwich's Blue Watch since 2001 and has notched up 26 years with the fire service. The fact that he invites work colleagues to stay must surely say something about camaraderie on the watch.

The après-ski could well be a shared bottle or two of Madiran, the local red wine, which apparently goes down quite well after all the exertions on the slopes.

Given that there are fires to fight and people to be rescued the world over, it is hardly surprising that Pete and friends have met up with some local firefighters in the Pyrenees.

"We just bumped into them in the village one day, got talking and found we had a lot in common" he says. They were wearing firefighter uniforms, which made it quite hard to miss them. The two groups of firefighters may have very different workloads, but, says Pete, they got on just fine and had a lot in common.

➔ More info:

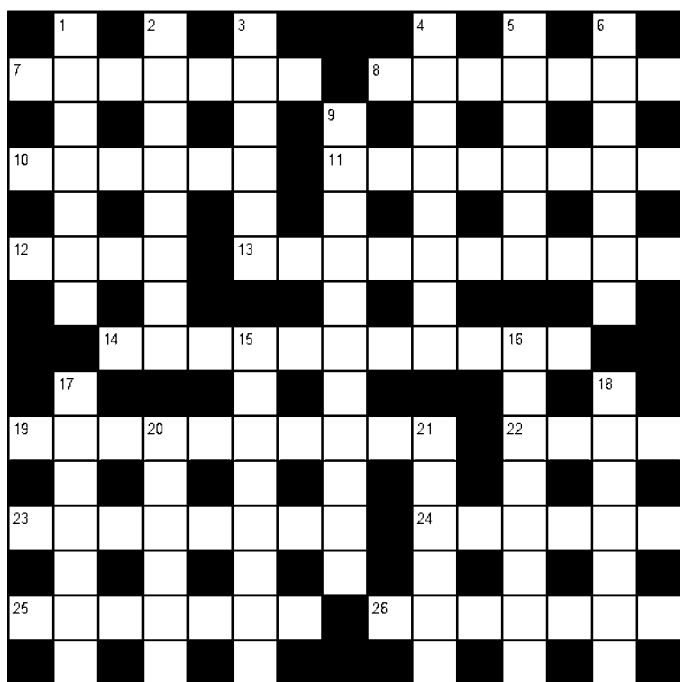
www.tourmalet.fr/
www.borderlinehols.com/
www.mountainbug.com/
www.lessorbiers.co.uk/
www.pyrenees.co.uk/



Pete (left) has been inviting groups of fire station colleagues along for a spot of skiing ever since he bought his apartment

Pete Goddard caught the skiing bug after years of mountaineering

Quick Crossword



ACROSS

- 7 East London setting of major print-industry dispute (7)
- 8 Now rarely seen passenger-carrier attached to motorcycle (7)
- 10 Liquid secreted to help chewing and swallowing (6)
- 11 The first (and best, as they say) (8)
- 12,22 New president (4, 4)
- 13 Former general secretary (3,7)
- 14 Bulletins sent out (11)
- 19 Negotiation should be (but all too often aren't!) (10)
- 22 See 12 across (4)
- 23 Squid (8)
- 24 Molluscs in shells (6)
- 25 Crops, eaten for breakfast? (7)
- 26 Duelling with swords, or selling bent gear (7)

DOWN

- 1 Disease carried by mosquitoes (7)
- 2 What sprinklers should do! (8)
- 3 Take out, from suitcase, perhaps (6)
- 4 One prepared to fight (8)
- 5 Formula for producing dish (6)
- 6 Umbrella, but not for rain! (7)
- 9 Forged (banknote, say) (11)
- 15 The Titanic certainly was! (8)
- 16 Systematic study (8)
- 17 At ease: how you should be when off duty! (7)
- 18 Judy, Lisa Minnelli's mum (7)
- 20 Closer (6)
- 21 Tied, whipped, or just plain drunk! (6)



Solution
to April
crossword



Prize Quiz

Win wireless speakers

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

- 1 Name the group of British workers who between 1811 and 1816 destroyed textile machinery they believed was replacing them in the workplace.
- 2 Name the assassinated American civil rights activist who made a famous speech that began 'I have a dream ...'
- 3 Name the gladiator slave who led an uprising against the roman republic in around 70BC and about whom a film was made starring Kirk Douglas.
- 4 This year is the bicentenary of the abolition of what trade?
- 5 What is the name of the July 14 French national holiday celebrating the beginning of the French Revolution.
- 6 What is the name given to 6 June 1944 when the largest amphibious assault in history was launched against the Normandy coast to establish an allied foothold in Nazi-occupied France.



HOW TO ENTER

To win a pair of CES30 Premium Plus wireless speakers that work indoors and outdoors with MP3 players and audio systems send your answers to the prize quiz by 31 May on a postcard to: Prize Competition (May 2007) FBU, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston, Surrey KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

Answers to
April's quiz

1. Telephone
2. The ball point pen/biro
3. The battery
4. The Penny Farthing Bicycle
5. Coca-Cola
6. Penicillin

Winner of the
March quiz was
Anthony Hey of
Cleveland



StationCat

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

Gongs and medals



The cat flap has been busy since I mentioned that Strathclyde accountant Eileen Baird has been awarded the Queen's Fire Service Medal, normally given for exceptional achievement over a lifetime of service or an act of selfless bravery. The QFSM is not usually given for being a fire service accountant for nine years or being Deputy Chief Fire Officer for 18 months.

Strathclyde's website said Ms Baird's award was for "overseeing the funding" of various and typical fire service projects. My many correspondents say that, on this basis, everyone paying the council tax in Strathclyde should be eligible for the QFSM as they are providing the funding.

Then we could add anyone who worked in the bank that processed the cheque and anyone who works for the Scottish Executive or was involved in the papermaking process that created the cheques. **If they want to give medals to accountants then they should be more appropriate: the Order of the Audit; the Queen's Medal for Excel Spreadsheet Service.**

The service needs to get a grip or fire service accountants will be putting on uniforms and appearing on the fire ground next. I have dismissed rumours that Ms Baird has been doing this as entirely scurrilous and without foundation. She's too intelligent for such behaviour.

McGuirkyside BLT bis



Have I said anything that might have offended Beloved Leader Tony McGuirk? Station Cat has been banned from all fire stations and all fire service premises across McGuirkyside.

Was it something I said about his 15% pay increase and a financial package that runs not a million miles away from £198k a year? Banning Station Cat means he will miss out on important news.

I can tell him that news of his pay rise did not go down well in Whitehall. **Gordon Brown – who doesn't yet earn as much as the Beloved McGuirkyside Leader – wants to cap public sector pay rises at 2%.**

Tony needs to be reminded that it was Gordon Brown who led the mid-90s campaign against the fat cat pay of the bosses of former public utilities. One famous campaign stunt attacking British Gas bosses involved the GMB union using Cedric the Pig – a real live pig borrowed from a farm – with his nose in a trough outside a shareholders' meeting.

And who was behind this famous union stunt against fat cat pay rises? None other than DCLOG minister Phil Woolas who overseas the fire service.

Oh dear, Tony. I'm sure my McGuirkyside contacts would not borrow the idea for future meetings of the fire authority? It would be too unfair.

Planet DCLOG



On Planet DCLOG the FireControl Project is pressing on without a hitch despite the relentless scaremongering of the FBU. On Planet Real Life chief officers have taken to phoning up the Union to find out what is really happening.

Some blew a gasket when they found out the bill for the rent of the buildings would be in excess of £400 million. Others went into meltdown when they saw the figures for the call-handling capability of the centres.

The Union's comments, far from being scaremongering, "would have been justified if they had been much, much stronger," one CFO told us.

When DCLOG announced the FireControl technology contract winner – EADS – it promised the regional controls would go "live" in 2008 (the original date was November 2006). A week later it was 2009. Two weeks after that, 2010. Now there is no timetable, simply "timescales" which can be pushed back as reality bites ever deeper.

The full and final business case (FBC) was due last summer, then in December 2006, January 2007, then March, then April. It has now become just the "latest version" and is a "living document". Translated into plain English: they are making it up as they go along. And the progress and costs of FireLink? Don't!



25 year badges



Bruce Chapman (l) receiving his 25-year badge from Gavin Watson, branch chair Hyndburn, Lancashire



Mark Harris (l) Green Watch, Rushmoor receives his 25-year badge from Lud Ramsey, Brigade Chair, Hampshire



Nick Isherwood (l) receives his 25-year badge from Officers Branch chair Paul Haydock, Lancashire



Andrew Clark (l), Gilbert Gallie and Gareth Edwards (r) receive their 25 year badges from Billy Sanderson (second left), Officers Rep, Highlands and Islands



Simon Woodhouse (l) Watch Manager, Lowedges Road, Green Watch receives his 25 year badge from Darren Smith, Divisional Secretary, South Yorks



Peter Stanley (r), Kent Fire and Rescue Training Centre, Maidstone, receiving his 25 year badge from Steve Finlay, branch secretary



Julian Hall (r), Kent Fire and Rescue Training Centre, Maidstone, receives his 25-year badge from Steve Finlay, branch secretary



J. Wayne Dilworth (l), Buxton Red Watch, Derbyshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Dom McGlynn



Paul Haydock, Officers Branch chair (l) receives his 25-year badge from Officers branch secretary Peter Moss, Lancs

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk (Please note that inkjet prints from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.



Watch manager James Hawthorn (right) receives his 25-year badge from Brigade chair Colin Irving, surrounded by fellow watch members at Whithorn Fire Station, Dumfries and Galloway Fire and Rescue Service

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11rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight**
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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.



THOMPSONS
SOLICITORS



Malc Barlow (l) Watch Manager, Lowedges Road, White watch, receives his badge from **Darren Smith**, Divisional Secretary, S Yorks



Crew Manager David Gwalchmai (r) Llanfair Ceireinion fire station, receives his 25-year badge from **Grant Mayos**, Regional Secretary



Fred Brown (l), Fire Safety - Buxton Fire Station, Derbyshire receives his 25 year badge from branch chair **Neil Sheppard**



Andrew English (l) with colleagues from Buxton Red Watch, Derbyshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary **Dom McGlynn**



Geoff Matthews (c) receives his 25-year badge from Regional Official **Kevn Herniman (l)**, with them is Brigade Chair **Scott Turner**



Peter Reading (l), Green Watch Kentish Town Fire Station, London, receives his 25-year badge from FBU President **Mick Shaw**