

FIREFIGHTER

NOVEMBER 2005

**How many
firefighters
does it take ...**



Cuts and job losses are

Suffolk

You will have seen that the dispute in Suffolk has now been settled. Our Suffolk members met at branch meetings and ended their dispute over the cuts proposed in the Suffolk integrated risk management plan.

The short-term strike action was undertaken on 22 separate days. And they achieved a result which they found to be satisfactory.

On behalf of the whole union I would like to congratulate members in Suffolk for the stand that they took. They opposed cuts to an appliance and the axing of 12 frontline firefighter posts.

The lesson which needs to be learnt on all sides is that cuts and job losses are not an inevitability. All too often chief fire officers and fire authorities believe that their plans will be accepted without any opposition, or that once cuts are pushed through in an IRMP that the job is done.

The message from Suffolk has been that they need to take notice of the views of the people on the ground who do the job as expressed through their union.

Controls and pensions

Our campaign to defend emergency fire controls has continued over the past couple of months. We recently held two successful campaign meetings at the Trade Union Congress and the Labour Party Conference, both



The message from Suffolk is that chief fire officers and fire authorities need to take notice of the views of the people on the ground who do the job as expressed through their union

held in Brighton.

There have also been public meetings held on the issue in various parts of the country. This side of the campaign will continue over the next period. This is not a done deal and we will do all we can to ensure our voice is listened to.

The Executive Council also discussed recently the campaign to defend our Pensions. It is important that all members are fully informed about the proposals for the existing scheme and that proposed for new entrants to the Service.

A series of bulletins have already been produced on pensions and I hope that branches are ensuring that this issue is discussed.

There will be a series of meetings around the UK covering both the issue of regionalisation of controls and the threat to our pensions. All regions are currently organising these meetings and I hope that as many members as possible will turn up to hear our case and raise any questions that they wish.

LSI/CPD pay

You will be aware that long service pay will be removed from fire service pay as a result of the June 2003 agreement. It was agreed that long service pay would be replaced by a payment for continuous professional development (CPD). The Executive Council has set up a sub-

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Dick Pearson, the FBU's national IRMP advisor, on a question many brigades would rather not see answered

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Easing suffering

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A terrible accident while not on duty changed the life of Nigel Pugh, a firefighter working the retained duty system. Compensation won by FBU solicitors Thompsons helped ease concerns about the financial security of his family

not inevitable

I don't think editorials always have to be too heavy, so I hope to make room each month for a lighter touch. I enjoyed this quote in response to Northumberland's Chief Fire Officer Brian Hesler's proposed fire service cuts.

"I attended that public debate in New Hartley, and the chief fire officer lost hands-down. If I was not convinced before I went to the meeting I was when I left, because the FBU made a good case. Northumberland county council is making a grave mistake. I urge Hesler to go back to where he came from — Noddyland, where he produced his Noddy policy."

Ronnie Campbell MP, Hansard, 12 October

committee to negotiate on this. We will keep members informed as these negotiations progress.

Barry Foster

On 26 September I attended the funeral of Barry Foster. Barry was our brigade secretary in Lincolnshire and died tragically young through illness.

He was a very strong and effective campaigner on the issues he held dear. It was a great honour to be in attendance at the funeral and to see the obvious respect in which Barry had been held by so many people.

New assistant general secretary

On a final note I would like to congratulate Bro. Andy Dark on his election as assistant general secretary. I look forward to working with Andy and the rest of the team at head office to ensure

I hope that as many members as possible will turn up to hear our case and raise any questions that they wish

that the interests of all members are protected. There is a great deal of work to be done and I am sure Andy will play a full part in this.

I would like to commend both Andy and the other candidate, Bro. Geoff Ellis, for the way they conducted themselves during the election. Elections can be conducted in a dignified and comradely manner and I hope that that will continue to be the case in the future.

Members back action over co-responding

NOTTINGHAM fire brigade management is seeking permission from the fire authority to deduct 10% of employees' salaries for 'refusal to deliver co-responding to the community', AKA partial performance.

This follows a successful ballot for industrial action short of strike over the co-responding scheme at the wholetime/retained Retford fire station. Members ceased co-responding on 4 October. Management has since been noting at every shift change who is on duty and if they are willing to co-respond. The move comes against the background of

said: "The members at Retford are determined that they will not be bullied by the management and will resist the imposition of a co-responding scheme - and hence a unilateral change to their contract of employment.

If the brigade is backed by the (Labour) fire authority then 34 of our members will have their pay docked by 10% for every shift they refuse to undertake co-responding duties. Pay will also be docked from members who are attached to that station for one shift to cover for crewing shortfalls.

Nottinghamshire brigade committee has set up a hardship fund and regular donations will be made by all Notts FBU members not affected by the stoppage. Details of the fund are at www.fburegion6.com. Messages of support to: Retford Fire Station, Wharf Road, Retford, Notts DN22 6EN.

Nottinghamshire FBU brigade secretary Ian Young said: "Fire crews and the public would be at risk if there is a delay in attending incidents because we are being used as an ambulance service. This scheme is not about saving lives it is designed solely to fiddle figures for ambulance response times."

a recent proposal to change to a three-shift system and management's refusal to engage in even the most basic form of negotiation on the matter.

Dave Green, FBU Executive Council member for Region 6,



Andy Dark is new FBU assistant general secretary

ANDY DARK has been elected assistant general secretary of the FBU in a secret postal ballot conducted by Electoral Reform Balloting services.

He fills the post vacated by FBU assistant general secretary Mike Fordham who retired on 1 September after serving as a

full-time national official of the FBU for 26 years.

THE RESULT:

Votes cast: 11,527

Spoilt: 245

Valid: 11,282

Andy Dark: 6,921

Geoff Ellis: 4,361

Andy Dark, 42, is a London fire-

Barry 'Spike' Foster

IT WAS with very great sadness that the union heard that Lincolnshire brigade secretary Barry Foster died on 18 September.

Barry, who was 37, joined Lincolnshire Fire Brigade as a firefighter in December 1987. Following initial training he was posted to Lincoln in April 1988 where he made an immediate impact and later in the same year he was posted to A2 Gainsborough. Between October 1996 and February 1997 he was temporarily promoted to leading firefighter in the community fire safety department based in Lincoln.

During this period Barry used his creative talents to drive forward the schools project that ultimately was delivered to the vast majority of school children within Lincolnshire. Barry returned to Gainsborough where he served until June 1998 when he was substantively promoted to Leading Firefighter at A1 Lincoln. In August 2000, at his own request, he returned to Gainsborough as a firefighter where he served until the time of his death.

Barry was an active member and official of the FBU from being a branch secretary at A2, then assistant brigade secretary.

When Sam Mason retired Barry took over the role as brigade secretary which he carried out with enthusiasm and profession-



alism. He worked tirelessly for the fire service and union members in Lincolnshire and represented them in the wider regional and national arena.

He is leaving a tremendous void in the lives of his family, his friends and colleagues both in the fire service and in the union. He was an absolutely sincere, talented and true individual and loyal FBU official. It has been a difficult time for all that were close to Barry as he made such an impact on their lives and work that it will take a good while longer before they come to terms with him not being here.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack says: "I will remember Barry as a hard working, good natured and humorous person. I am sure the whole union will join me in sending our condolences to Barry's family and friends."



Andy Dark: looking forward to representing all of the members of the union

fighter and the acting FBU London regional secretary.

He said: "I am very proud to be elected and am looking forward to representing all of the members of this union.

"I will work hard with all officials at all levels within the union to address the many challenges we now face to protect this fire service and those that work within it."

Geoff Ellis said: "I congratulate the winning candidate and welcome him to the team at national office. We will all work together in the best interests of the members."

West Mids members may be balloted over shifts

WEST Midlands fire crews have told bosses they will ballot for strike action if they refuse to withdraw the new duty and shift system until agreement has been reached on crucial outstanding issues.

The union says West Midlands Fire Authority has paid lip service to a deal brokered by independent arbitrators over a new shift and duty system.

Recommendations on a new duty and shift system were set out by the fire service national technical advisory panel. West Midlands fire service managers initially accepted all the recommendations of the panel, but have delayed and failed properly to negotiate on some of the key parts.

Peter Gallagher FBU West

Midlands Brigade Secretary said: "There were clear recommendations set out to help resolve this dispute. Our managers initially accepted them all but since then have dragged their feet and shown little interest in reaching agreement on some of them.

"Managers want to cherry pick the ones they like and ditch the ones they don't like. We thought we could resolve issues through talks only to see those hopes dashed by managers.

"Instead of trying to reach agreement based on the independent recommendations as they promised, they have done everything they can to prevent agreement. This has left our members and their families feeling angry and financially worse off.

"If we had behaved like this we

would have been heavily criticised. If this is not resolved we will ballot for strike action."

The move came after West Midlands firefighters raised their concerns about risks to public safety following the implementation on September 9 of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority's integrated risk management plan (IRMP), which led to the axing of 13 fire appliances between midnight and 08.00.

Their fears were increased when at 23.51 on the 21 September two appliances from Ward End and one from Central Fire Station were sent to a house fire with persons reported trapped in Alum Drive, Bordesley Green.

The appliance from Central Fire Station was due to become

unavailable at midnight and was turned back after being mobile to the incident for two minutes and was replaced by another appliance from Central Fire Station, all this resulted in a severe delay in attending the incident.

FBU West Midlands chair Andy Dennis said: "We have been calling upon the fire authority to review their IRMP as we have clear evidence that attendance times are being compromised throughout the whole of the West Midlands. The problem is that they now use average attendance times instead of maximums."

"We now ask the public to ask questions as to what is happening to the future of their service. If standards continue to slip like this who knows what the future will hold – I hate to think".



FBU members at Blyth Fire Station, one of three in Northumberland faced with closure

Council planners in blow to closures plan

PLANS by Northumberland county council for a new fire station at Pegswood have been deemed 'premature' by planning officials from the borough of Castle Morpeth where the station would be built.

The bid forms part of sweeping £10m changes to Northumberland's rescue services, which would see stations at Morpeth, Blyth, Ashington and Cramlington closed.

The existing stations would be replaced by two new stations

at Pegswood and East Sleekburn under the county council's integrated risk management plan.

The proposal is to create a new centre on 3.90 acres of agricultural land south of Pegswood Welfare Park and next to the proposed Pegswood bypass.

Castle Morpeth's planning committee was asked to comment on the move and said the move should be put on hold until the specifics of the Pegswood bypass plan are confirmed.

Its chairman, Councillor Frank Harrington, said: "It's felt that the proposal is premature when funding for the Pegswood bypass isn't in place yet."

After the meeting, a spokesman for Castle Morpeth Council said: Members are asking to be consulted on the fire station plans again once this is in place."

The union said that the IRMP would lead to a 20% cut in wholetime firefighter posts and undermine emergency response times, risking lives.



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AFTER 22 short, discontinuous strikes over an eight-week period, a negotiated settlement has successfully brought the lawful Suffolk trade dispute to an end. At the heart of the dispute was the Suffolk FBU's willingness to welcome real improvements in community safety provisions, but not at the expense of emergency response capability.

The fire authority's original IRMP sought to cut 12 wholetime emergency response firefighters that provided the 24/7 crewing of one of the county's two turntable ladders (TTL) and accepted that alternative crewing arrangements would mean, at best, significantly delayed response times and, at worst, no emergency response at all by the TTL or the frontline pump from which the crews would "jump".

Despite all efforts at resolving these issues with management, FBU members in Suffolk felt they had no alternative but to take strike action to press home their concerns.

A ballot produced a 2:1 vote for strike action that kicked off on August 2. A negotiated settlement reached on October 3 focused on six key areas:

- Reduction of the wholetime establishment from 256 to 253 rather than the cut of 12 wholetime posts;
- The purchase of a multi-role appliance (combining frontline pumping and aerial capabilities) that will remain primary crewed to replace the existing TTL and pump;
- The redeployment of nine wholetime establishment posts from crewing the TTL into sustainable

Unity in action brings success

**National Solidarity
Demonstration
August 11, Ipswich**

The Union has emerged with a successful outcome to its first strike since the national pay campaign. Agreement has been reached between the FBU and employers in Suffolk with significant improvement on original IRMP, emergency response capability and community fire safety

community fire safety (CFS) roles with a dual commitment to improving frontline, emergency response crewing levels. All nine posts will be contracted to NJC conditions of service, requiring the agreed NJC firefighter role map and maintaining emergency response competency;

- A commitment to achieve and maintain the agreed wholetime establishment and to recruit to the full retained establishment on stations;
- A commitment to the key objective of five riders on all frontline pumps;
- A commitment to fully involve the FBU in future IRMP processes and the use of evidence-based methodologies including CAST (see article on page 14).

"As with most negotiated settlements, the deal is not a 100% victory", said EC member for East Anglia Keith

Our solidarity can and will lead to a truly modernised fire and rescue service and not the watered down, bargain bucket service central government are striving to achieve

Handscorn. "However, it does represent a significant improvement on the original IRMP and, importantly, the Suffolk membership believes that it means an overall improvement in emergency response capability and an improvement in community safety provisions. The Suffolk members would like to share the lesson they have learnt: If we do nothing IRMPs will cut us down, but if we fight, we can change them."

Steve Collins, FBU branch secretary, Bury St. Edmunds, added: "The concern for the members of Bury St. Edmunds was the loss of a primary crewed aerial appliance at the station. The negotiated settlement provides a primary crewed aerial capability in Bury St. Edmunds in the form of a multi-role appliance, this type of vehicle could give the crews more versatility as well as maintaining the aerial capability."

"The settlement ensures the Suffolk Fire Authority commits to achieving and maintaining the wholetime and retained establishments, and providing standard crewing on all appliances, that's a commitment that we haven't had from the fire authority for a long time in Suffolk."

Firefighter Pete Taylor from Bury St. Edmunds said: "This settlement should demonstrate to members nationally that our solidarity can and will lead to a truly modern-

Suffolk members on the picket line

EAST ANGLIAN DAILY TIMES



ised fire and rescue service and not the watered down, bargain bucket service central government are striving to achieve. In Suffolk we settled this dispute to our satisfaction."

Bury St. Edmunds colleague, firefighter Dave Mackie, said: "I'm glad to see a negotiated settlement to the dispute. There will be changes at Bury St. Edmunds, but I hope the FBU and management can now work together to implement the changes as smoothly as possible."

The Suffolk FBU brigade committee has sent its thanks to all officials and members who showed their support both morally and financially and was particularly grateful to those who arranged workplace donations and regular contact from members on the ground.

Said Vince Jell, FBU Suffolk brigade chair: "Your support helped sustain us. Suffolk would like to be able to reciprocate your support in anyway we can, be it speakers, financial support, messages of support or just being there when you want us. Do not hesitate to ask. Your fight is our fight. Unity is our strength."

General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "Suffolk members and officials must be congratulated for their unity and determination. They have shown what can be achieved if you stand up and fight."

"The Suffolk strike was the first since the end of the national pay dispute and underlines the fact that the FBU remains strong and able to defend members and local communities. It shows that the union can succeed against employers seeking to make cuts that endanger the health and safety of firefighters and the lives of the public they serve."



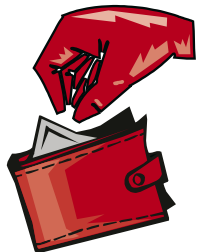
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The Union is continuing to press home the demand for pensions justice for FBU members as formal negotiations with the Government over proposed reforms to the Firefighters Pension Scheme commence and is encouraging a wide-ranging debate within the Union on how best to take the campaign forward.

Fighting for justice in retirement



HANDS OFF OUR PENSIONS!



THE UNION has commenced formal negotiations with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister over the proposed reforms to the Firefighters Pension Scheme. General secretary Matt Wrack and national officer Paul Woolstenholmes, supported by FBU pensions advisors Thompsons, met ODPM civil servants and local government employers on 12 October. They discussed some of the main proposals, setting out our opposition to key areas such as the raising of the retirement age, detrimental changes to ill-health benefits and a two-tier scheme. This was the first of what will be monthly meetings through to April next year. At every occasion the FBU will be using these opportunities to argue its case and seek a negotiated solution of benefit to FBU members.

The national-level discussions over the FPS came as unions representing workers in the Local Government Pension Scheme – including FBU control staff – met to discuss their strategy after local government employers presented them with proposals that Unison, the largest public sector union, said were worse than those tabled

Members need to take ownership of the campaign and are urged to attend 'open forums' which are being held in the regions

last year. Despite a commitment from the government to ditch dictat and seek genuine negotiations in March this year, there is little evidence so far that it is listening to what public service workers and their unions have been saying.

The anger of millions of UK public and private sector workers about the broad assault on their pension rights was highlighted in September at the TUC Congress. Unions called on the government to take action to force the private sector to properly fund collapsing occupational schemes and reiterated the demand for a fairer state pension linked to earnings. Public sector unions, meanwhile, decided to deepen efforts at co-ordination and displayed their determination not to allow the government to divide-and-rule the labour movement and to take industrial action if necessary.

The FBU, for its part, is moving to encourage the widest possible debate in the union about the government's plans and how the FBU best responds to them. "Open forums" have kicked off in the regions to which officials and members have been invited to discuss the issues and how the Union should take forward its campaign. Contact your local FBU official for details.

"Members need to take ownership of the campaign," said Paul Woolstenholmes. "The open forums we have commenced in the regions are an opportunity for firefighters, officers and control staff to get up to speed with the facts, find out where the campaign is and express their views on how best to collectively take the battle forward to protect their retirement income."

Says Matt Wrack: "Initial meetings with Government officials suggest that negotiations with the Government over the coming months will be tough. This is no surprise. The ODPM ignored the objections we raised in our submission to the consultation process and they continue to insist that FBU members pay for apparent problems in

ALL RIGHT FOR SOME: MPS

THE people who must deal with the pensions problem – the politicians – have the least to gain from a change. MPs get a pension entitlement after seven years. A backbench MP is paid £59,000 a year and gains a maximum two-thirds pension of just under £39,000 after 26 years of contributions. Actuaries calculate it would cost more than £1 million to buy an annuity today producing the same income for a 65-year-old man in the private sector. A private sector employee making the same contributions to a personal pension as an MP would have a pension at retirement of less than a quarter of that enjoyed by the MP.

SOURCES: Reuters, Daily Telegraph

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

THE government and much of the media claim there is no alternative to raising the retirement age for public sector workers and that these workers cannot expect to retain their full pension entitlements when so many private sector pension schemes have been closed.

The size of the problem may appear huge, but it will be spread over many years. Thus, for example, a couple of years ago the combined pensions deficit of FTSE 100 companies was estimated to be £70 billion, yet experts predicted that if long term investment trends were restored this deficit could disappear within only 10 years.

Similarly, earlier this year the pension deficit for local authority workers in England and Wales was estimated to be around £30 billion. Since then the FTSE100 has grown by well over 10 per cent that may already have reduced this deficit by a third. Similarly with increases in life expectancy. In 1972 a male civil servant retiring at 60 could expect to look forward to a retirement of around 20 years. Today he can look forward to living for 27 years – 35% longer. This sounds huge, but the actual annual increase was well below 1% and so should be affordable.

In addition, potential increases in national income and public sector efficiency over the next 50 years seem to be ignored. Over the last 50 years the average increased in GDP in the UK has been around 2.3% a year. Diverting a small proportion of future increases in GDP to the provision of adequate pensions sounds sensible.

Estimates of future pension costs depend on many variables, including changes in life expectancy, economic growth and activity. As the Government Actuary's Department said recently: "The one certainty of making population projections is that, due to inherent unpredictability of demographic behaviour, they will turn out to be wrong."

In this situation, there is a huge range of policy options. Given that the UK state's spending on pensions as a proportion of national income is only half as much as in other EU countries, then long-term increases in state spending on pensions could be considered in a similar way to the government's undertaking to match average European spending on the health service.

**Andy Wynne, Head of Public Sector Technical Issues
at the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants).**
LGIU Briefing for Trade Unionists, September 2005

financing pensions caused by local authority's reckless raiding of our contributions in the past.

"We need to be ready as a Union to consider all legal means to pursue our demands for pensions justice. In this battle we are not alone. At the TUC in September, unions representing 1.5 million public sector workers agreed to continue pursuing a common strategy that could include, if necessary, industrial action.

"I encourage all members to get active in the campaign, discuss the issues within the Union and build ties with fellow trade unionists elsewhere in the public sector to ensure we fight the best possible campaign to protect our pensions."

TUC CONGRESS BACKS JOINT CAMPAIGN

CONGRESS congratulates the public service unions on their campaign to defend public sector pension schemes, and recognises the key role played in this by the threat of co-ordinated industrial action and welcomes the support and co-ordination provided by the TUC to constituent unions to oppose proposed increases in the normal pensions age in public sector schemes.

Congress.. reiterates its opposition to any compulsory increase in pension ages... [recognises] that pensions are deferred pay and must be maintained on a final salary basis thus enabling an employee to clearly calculate the amount of pension they will receive.

Congress welcomes the Government's subsequent acceptance that all aspects of the proposals will be open to genuine negotiation... However, Congress believes that the Government will continue to argue strongly for the pension age to increase

Congress believes that to defend our members' interests it will be necessary to maintain and enhance the public sector campaign alliance and to organise together for maximum pressure should further united industrial action prove necessary...

Congress therefore calls on the TUC to continue its high profile campaign on public sector pensions. To that end, Congress calls on the General Council and Executive Committee to:

- I) support and co-ordinate public service unions in their efforts to defend and improve the public sector schemes, including through further industrial action if necessary;
- II) campaign against any imposed change to pension schemes, specifically increased pension ages;
- III) coordinate the scheme specific sectoral negotiations, including the circulation of reports from each set of talks;
- IV) propose to unions that they fully consult with each other before reaching agreement in order to counter any 'divide and rule' tactics from the Government;
- V) set up regional and local multi-union campaign groups in alliance with trades councils, the National Pensions Convention and other relevant organisations;
- VI) produce and distribute to public sector unions for their use, common campaign materials (leaflets, petitions);
- VII) produce publicity to counter the prevailing myth that decent public sector pensions are unaffordable and the myth of the 'crisis' in pension provision;
- VIII) oppose any Government attempts to limit the use of the new Inland Revenue flexibilities by public sector pension schemes;
- IX) campaign for employers to be compelled to contribute into a pension for their employees at a level of at least 10 per cent of pay;
- X) campaign for a fairer state pension system, so that no pensioner need depend on means-tested benefits;
- XI) organise a national pensions demonstration; and
- XII) assist unions taking industrial action and support the coordination of that action.

SOURCE: EXTRACTS from Composite 8 Public service pensions, TUC Congress 2005

Fire authorities have delivered a damning verdict on Government plans to close all emergency fire control rooms in England and create nine remote regional centres

REGIONAL MANAGEMENT Boards and fire authorities have bluntly told civil servants and ministers to rip up plans to regionalise emergency fire control rooms and start again. They disputed the government's claims of savings, doubted the plans were practical and warned lives could be at risk.

Even the most supportive regional management boards (RMB) had some concerns while others were openly sceptical at whether the plans made sense at all. But as the controversial plans were being given the big thumbs down, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was boasting of having fire service support.

All of the RMBs pointed out concerns about the costs and the lack of detail in the plans set out in the outline business case (OBC). Most could not support the plans on those grounds alone.

The private outline business case – leaked in full by the FBU – revealed the project would cost at least £754 million (now £1 billion), had a high risk of total failure and could result in higher council tax and cuts in frontline services. The private feedback to ODPM from regions and individual fire authorities agreed with that assessment.

South East RMB said: "there are grave concerns that key elements of the real costs have been missed out". A number also warned that some of the FireControl project cost was being loaded into the costs of FireLink, the national radio project.

The effect – as the union has warned – would help conceal the true cost of FireControl in order to claim bogus savings. Some fire authorities said the boundaries between the two projects are being blurred and redrawn with clear suspicions this was to enable ODPM to move costs 'off the books' of FireControl.

The plans were savaged by fire authorities. Avon called for the project to be stopped and Cornwall could not accept the case presented to them.

Yorkshire and Humberside RMB said the OBC was not "achievable financially

'Rip it up and start again'

or practically" and called for it to be withdrawn, rethought and then put back out to consultation.

A running theme was that while the plans may be able to work in theory there were serious practical difficulties. Dorset fire authority was "not satisfied that deliverability, affordability or value for money have been demonstrated."

Some warned that the costs of the project were already beginning to bite financially and operationally. While ODPM was putting up some money for the extra costs, it didn't cover all of the cost burdens being placed on fire authorities.

One burden not being placed on fire authorities is the need to carry out Best Value reviews of controls which ODPM insisted must now stop. The proposed new regional controls will not be subject to Best Value reviews to test whether they offer value for money.

There were serious concerns expressed about the risks of the project. West Midlands RMB said: "this is clearly a high risk project" which meant proper checks and procedures needed to be followed.

In a chilling warning it went on to say: "the impact of project failure or even of the transitional period includes a very high likelihood of endangering lives" which heightened the need for all procedures, checks and reviews to be followed.

However there were serious questions about

Stop the closure of your local 999 rescue co-ordination control centre

Why dedicated fire service professionals working to protect you in your local community oppose the Government's plan to establish a regional control centre:

- Worse service to the public
- Higher council tax bills
- Cuts to frontline fire services
- High costs with a risk of failure

Fire Won't Wait Why Should You? 

whether this was happening, with the project by-passing a critical internal review. A claim that all the procedures were being followed to reduce the risk of project failure was said by the South East RMB to be “misleading to the point of being factually incorrect”.

National officer Geoff Ellis said: “This is a damning verdict on a dangerous and daft plan. The approach of ODPM is both arrogant and ignorant.

“It is clear that almost the entire fire service doubts that the ODPM knows what it is doing. If it gets this wrong – and their track record suggests it may go badly wrong – it will endanger our lives and the lives of fire-fighters.

“The union will continue to press for a full independent review. If the government really was so confident of its plans it would not be opposing this but welcoming it.”

The union stepped up its campaign for such a review to be carried out. Campaign meetings were organised at both the TUC and Labour conferences.

The campaign was stepped up as parliament returned from its long summer holiday. The future of fire controls formed a key part of a parliamentary debate on the proposed merger or regionalisation of all 999 services.

Government plans for wholesale merger of police and ambulance services, as well as the creation of regional controls, came under close scrutiny. In a debate called for by the Conservatives, MPs from across the political spectrum raised major concerns about regionalisation of emergency fire controls.

It came the day after ODPM announced the location of the proposed South East control would be in Fareham, Hampshire. The single centre will serve nine brigades in one of the most densely populated areas of the country.

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MPs from across the parties raised the concerns contained in the ODPM’s own outline business case and those expressed by fire authorities and the FBU. These centred on the costs and risks associated with the project and whether the proposals would work at all.

Many took the opportunity to question the latest ODPM claim for the project: quicker response times. A series of MPs pointed to proposed cuts in Northumberland, West Midlands and Hertfordshire as evidence of slower response times.

John McDonnell MP, FBU parliamentary group secretary played a key role in the debate. He said the Government had failed to convince many within the fire service.

“Does the project command the confidence of the professionals themselves?” he asked the House of Commons.

“Front-line firefighters are deeply sceptical about whether the scheme will work, about the cost savings and, as my hon. friend the member for Blyth Valley (Ronnie Campbell) has said, about whether it will lead to privatisation.

“No matter what assurances the government make, we must accept the firefighters’ concerns. The business case makes it clear that neither the frontline firefighters nor the regional management boards, who must deliver the project, were convinced by the argument.

“I worry that if they were not convinced, then the proposals will not be successful, and that the lack of confidence in the deliverability of the project will undermine our assurance to our constituents that the government are providing the necessary services to protect their safety and the lives of their families.”

NEVER AGAIN!

Join the national demonstration to defend fire-safety rules Assemble Kings Cross Station, London Saturday 26 November 11.30am

Following the 1987 Kings Cross fire that claimed 31 lives, fire-safety rules were put in place laying out minimum safety standards for sub-surface stations. The government has already tried to scrap these crucial safety rules but RMT and its parliamentary group successfully prevented this through swift action. However, the threat to staffing levels and safety standards covered by these regulations still exist. So make your voice heard on November 26 in London and ask your MP to sign early day motion 549 set out below.

EDM 549

FIRE PRECAUTIONS REGULATIONS - John McDonnell MP

“That this House condemns the terrorist attacks on London’s public transport network and commends the bravery and professionalism of the emergency services, London Underground, national rail network and London bus service workers who were on hand to provide assistance and support in the immediate aftermath of the attacks; notes that the Government is set to review the Fire Precautions (Sub-surface Railway Stations) Regulations 1989, introduced following the Fennell Report into the 1987 King’s Cross Fire disaster; further notes that the Regulations set out minimum standards for fire precautions in sub-surface railway stations including means of escape, means of fighting fire, minimum staffing levels and staff instruction and training; believes that these minimum standards are even more essential in light of the recent terrorist attacks; and calls on the Government to retain in full the 1989 Regulations”

In 2003 a total of 3,868 people were rescued alive from fires in the home in England by the fire service. Of these: 2,441 had suffered injuries and 1,427 were rescued unharmed giving a total of 3,868 rescues. According to ODPM annual fire statistics, there were a further 345 fatal casualties in dwelling fires in England.

The total of 4,213 persons who needed to be rescued from fires (those rescued alive plus those who died) in the home is made up of those 3,868 who were successfully rescued alive PLUS the 345 who died. In this 'at risk' group in need of fire service rescue, the survival rate is 91.8%.

This puts in context the highly misleading use of statistics by ODPM and some chief officers to imply that 80% of people are dead before the fire service is called. If this were the case the number of fire deaths would be 3,370, that is 80% of the 4,213

Rescue: the facts, figures and lives

BEHIND THE technical jargon of FSEC, IRMP and CAST are people who need the help and assistance of the fire service. What is clear is that the 'fire' service has quietly evolved over the years into an all-round rescue service.

A quick trawl of the news clippings shows rescues from fires, water, mud, sand, machinery, lifts, road traffic accidents, train crashes and plane crashes. The rescue arm of the service does not suit certain types in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and some chief officers.

They would rather claim their 'focus' is on prevention measures, rather than accept that intervention is a critical part of the role. Not that prevention is a particular focus given the significant cuts in fire prevention inspections in recent years.

The number of rescues has not been published for several years and the union presumed the figures were no longer available. It took a series of parliamentary questions to dig the figures for England alone out of the ODPM. And yes they do keep the figures; they just don't make them public.

These show that 42% more people rescued from home fires up from 2,716 in 1994 to 3,868 in 2003. The figures do not include those escaping without the aid of the fire service or those rescued by neighbours or passers-by. Nor do they include the numbers not at immediate risk who are evacuated.

The number of incidents which involved people being rescued from road traffic accidents is up 13%, from 8,556 in 1994 to 9,673 in 2003. These are the number of incidents only, the number of people involved would be significantly more as there is at least one person rescued at each incident. In 2003 this included the rescue of John Prescott's son, a television journalist, who was trapped when the car he was driving left the road.

Every watch on every station has its stories. We tracked down a few, and despite the usual initial reluctance we managed to get a few to talk.

SHIPLEY red watch got a call at 04.37 on 15 August and responded as one of three pumps to a persons reported. Shipley was on the scene in two minutes, Idle followed

**They do
keep the
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they just
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make them
public**



Sonia Chadwick and her sons Scott, six, and Dominic, four, visited Shipley Fire Station to express their gratitude for their rescue by the station's red watch. Sonia's partner James Tomlin died in the fire. Sonia said: "I felt a great need to come here today and personally thank the firefighters who rescued

us. They saved my two little boys' lives and they saved my life and we will be forever in their debt." Andrew Moore, crew manager for the Red Watch, said: "We usually just get a letter of thanks rather than a visit, so it has been tremendous to see them."

BRADFORD TELEGRAPH & ARGUS

within four minutes and Bradford within nine minutes.

Mick Goodwin was the driver of the Shipley pump. He told *Firefighter*: "It was a night time fire and we got the call shortly after 04.30. As it was a persons reported, control mobilised three pumps: one from Shipley, one from Idle and one from Bradford.

"The control operator used her fire survival guidance training to keep the family going. It was two parents and two young boys.

"The landline connection had been lost. The mum was on a mobile phone. En route the control operator told us the mother and two kids were in the upstairs front bedroom. There is no doubt the control operator kept that mother and two kids alive while they waited for us to arrive.

"The Shipley pump arrived within two minutes, Idle within four minutes and Bradford within nine minutes. The BA crew went in through the front bedroom window and got the mother and two kids, the father was a fatality.

"If we had been much longer – and every second mattered – the mother and kids would not have lasted. There is no doubt the control operator kept that mother and two kids alive until we got there."

The fire is being treated as suspicious and inquiries are ongoing. If the fire is confirmed as suspicious then the father who died will not count in the statistics as an 'accidental' fire death.

BLYTH station in Northumberland is under threat of closure. On 19 February Blyth white watch was called to a persons reported at the docks in Blyth.

**'If we had
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rather than
one'**

Two fishermen had gone overboard from a trawler tied up in the harbour in near freezing conditions. One man had fallen between the trawler and the quayside and a colleague had got into difficulties trying to assist him and was also in the water.

Crews were at the scene within two minutes.

Peter Johnson of Blyth White watch told *Firefighter*: "It was cold and snowing and the danger of hypothermia was obvious. We went down the steps of the quay, managed to get a line around them and hauled them in all within a matter of minutes.

"We started resuscitation but we could not revive one of the men. We had one fatality and one rescue.

"The paramedics were very clear that our speed of response was critical in saving one of the men. They told us that if we had been even another 60 seconds we would have been dealing with two fatalities rather than one."

A matter of weeks later there was another rescue by crews at Blyth, this time a house fire on 3 April where smoke alarms were fitted and operated. Like Shipley, it was another night time fire.

"It was 03.58 and we were called to a house fire" recalls Peter. "Smoke alarms were fitted and worked but the two people inside the first floor flat had their means of escape blocked by the fire.

"It was another situation which needed a fast response. They had no chance of getting out without the fire service.

"Blyth station is under threat of closure with the proposed new station being further away. In both these instances the speed of response was absolutely critical to saving lives."

How many firefighters does it take...?



NO ... IT'S not the joke about changing a light bulb. It's the question that has occupied the minds of Government, fire service employers, brigade managers and particularly the FBU since the early part of the 20th century. And it's highly contentious. More firefighters mean higher costs; fewer firefighters mean greater risks.

To arrive at any kind of definitive answer (and, let's face it, it's an answer the service needs) we have first to look at the factors which have made this question more urgent now than at any time since 1936 when the Riverdale Committee recommended the first national standards of fire cover for the UK.

Before you switch off, or look for an article with a bit more entertainment value (after all, we've all had more than enough history lessons about the fire service over the last few years), the FBU does have an answer. The FBU can tell you "how many firefighters it takes ...". And our answer is a lot more precise and evidence-based than the "in my personal experience ..." answer that is trotted out by those in the service who would rather the question wasn't asked in the first place.

But if you want to skip straight to the answer, and find out the actual number, turn over a couple of pages now. It will be a bit like reading the last few pages of a book first to find out 'whodunnit'. You'll know the answer sooner, but you probably won't understand why.

IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Before we are overcome by a wave of nostalgia we need to accept the shortcomings of the 1985 National standards of fire cover. These shortcomings have been well documented. The opening section of almost every

Dick Pearson, the FBU's national IRMP advisor, on a question many brigades would rather not see answered

brigade's year-one IRMP included the obligatory 'shot across the bows' of the former standards. The lists (or, in some cases, the diatribes) included the fact that they were property-based, that they did not (directly) address the risk to life and that they were inflexible.

Very few year-one IRMPs went on to say that the former standards took little account of firefighter safety; took little account of standard operating procedures; took little account of what was actually needed to get the job done. Indeed when you analysed all the year-one IRMPs, it was blindingly obvious which brigades had read and understood the full report of the group which recommended the 1985 standards, and which brigades were simply quoting sound-bites.

The abolition of the 1985 national standards of fire cover to pave the way for the current version of integrated risk management planning in the UK simply intensified the debate. For all their failings (they were far from perfect) the 1985 standards at least attempted to address the question.

**The FBU
does have
an answer**

adjustment in the fire service pay formula to take account of slippage and to reflect the increasingly skilled nature of the job. In 2001 the conference had committed itself to research into the correct basic rate of pay for the job, and to a means for maintaining this pay level (a new pay formula). In May 2002 the FBU annual conference agreed a policy that formally committed the union to a pay campaign which would have implications for central government funding of the fire service. By late 2002 the Government had become so entangled in the dispute that even political commentators were having difficulty in establishing who was really negotiating on behalf of the employers.

Bird 3

The unfunded fire service pension scheme had shifted from a scheme that was funded exclusively by employee contributions to a scheme where a higher and higher proportion of the cost was having to be met from existing fire service budgets.

In summary, the government desperately needed to distance itself from the Pathfinder research results and to find an alternative (and hopefully cost neutral) option to the review of standards of emergency cover; it needed to find (as far as possible) a self-funding solution to the pay dispute, and it needed to reduce the pension burden.

THE LOGICAL SOLUTION

And thus was born the idea of integrated risk management planning in its current form. It meant no national standard of emergency response – which in itself would support reductions in resources to offset any costs associated with a pay settlement – and reductions in resources had the potential to streamline the service and (in the long term and other proposals aside) to reduce pension liabilities.

Strategically it was a superb solution for the ODPM; a solution that ticked all three boxes. The ODPM had been aware since 2000 that Pathfinder was likely to deliver massive increased funding requirements on central government. With or without the pay campaign, a solution had to be found which sidelined this potential national response standard.

With issues at a head in late 2002, a strategy was constructed by the ODPM to make the necessary legislative changes required to sideline any national standards of fire cover and, by default, to guarantee a tick in at least one of the remaining two boxes.

WE ARE WHERE WE ARE WHERE WE ARE!

So said Pollyanna. However a pivotal and defining point in the whole process was the evidence quoted by Nick Raynsford MP (lately departed from the cabinet) to support the shift to integrated risk management planning.

With Sir George Bain's report providing the platform (if not the killer blow as hoped), the civil servants advising Raynsford had been desperately searching for the key piece of evidence on which to hang the whole case for removing resources from emergency response under an

KILLING TWO (OR EVEN THREE) BIRDS WITH ONE STONE

It would be naïve to believe that integrated risk management in its current form was a purely 'objective' solution to the issue of standards of emergency response for the fire and rescue service. This was not the case. Integrated risk management planning was a response; a reaction; a solution to two (possibly even three) enormous fire service problems which together carried huge financial implications for the Government ... and these problems came to a head in late 2002.

Bird 1

The first problem was initially identified by the Audit Commission in its 1995 report *In the Line of Fire*. This criticised existing standards of fire cover for being property-based and not life-based. As a result research was funded by the government to devise a system of planning fire and rescue service emergency responses to replace the 1985 standards of fire cover. The new national standard was to have as its cornerstone the saving of lives rather than property. The research project became known as Pathfinder. When the results (and financial implications) of this research project became apparent, the Government initially moved to prevent publication of the report. The full report was eventually published (under duress) by the Government in late 2002, the time that the second big problem was coming to a head.

Bird 2

The government was aware that since the mid-1990s there had been calls at FBU annual conference for an

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integrated risk management planning process.

They found it in a study that was published in 1997 into the effect of fire service attendance times on fire fatalities. The study found that close to 50% of fatalities occur in fires estimated to have been discovered over 30 minutes after ignition.

Raynsford continually quoted this as evidence of the relative ineffectiveness of emergency response in saving more lives. He also consistently avoided quoting the next part of the same paragraph that stated that there appeared to be only "a minority of fires where attendance in response to a call will not avert the death however fast the attendance is".

Clearly this part of the study indicated that a national standard could be derived from the attendance time/fatality rate relationship. And the methodology for this standard was exactly what Pathfinder had been developing. Of course, these sums didn't add up for the government. A faster response would mean more fire-fighters, which would mean more money. This solution simply didn't fit with its strategy.

In fairness, by the end of October 2003 Raynsford had begun to qualify his earlier position, notably by stating more accurately (or is it more obviously?) that "... preventing fires is the only way to cut the numbers of those who die [in fires] before firefighters arrive on the scene."

Unfortunately, and with the year-one IRMP consultation process in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in full swing by that point, the damage had already been done. Brigades were reproducing Raynsford's initial statements almost verbatim in their IRMPs. Still, thanks for clearing that one up Nick!

The ODPM still had a nasty surprise up its sleeve for fire and rescue authorities, however now was not quite the time (read on!).

DON'T AIM FOR THE STARS

Having laid the ground, it was critical to the ODPM strategy that its integrated risk management planning system could be proved to be a success. And that involved target setting against which brigades would be measured.

The trick here was to ensure that the targets were 'loaded' in favour of preventive activity; to ensure that they marginalised the effectiveness of emergency response; to ensure that when the success of the IRMP system in its current form was judged it would only be against a reduction in accidental fire related deaths that occurred in the home. If a fire in the home was judged not to have started accidentally, or if the cause was not established as accidental, the fire death simply wouldn't count.

Closer scrutiny reveals that these so-called accidental fire deaths are those that are considered preventable through education alone (fire deaths that occur as a result of 'accidental' fires). Prevent the accident (the fire) and you prevent the death.

Abolishing national fire service response standards, and then setting this type of 'outcome-based' target potentially allowed fire and rescue authorities to reduce resources committed to providing emergency responses almost irrespective of the effect this had on wider community safety. In effect it is actually possible to meet



Perhaps the service should be more concerned at the steady and continuing rise in non-accidental fire deaths recorded in the ODPM's quarterly fire statistics

**The ODPM
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the government target even if MORE people are dying in fires than at the start of the target period. Not a particularly integrated approach!

Still, big picture strategy can be constrained by too much detail, so it's not surprising that this point was missed by the ODPM. But perhaps the service should be more concerned at the steady and continuing rise in non-accidental fire deaths recorded in the ODPM's quarterly fire statistics.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH STANDARDS?

The problem with a standard is just that – it's a standard! You either measure up to it or you don't; or at least you would think that would be the case. But there is another way that maintains the illusion of a standard while dropping the bar. Adopting a more creative approach to measurement can all but guarantee getting everyone over the bar, no matter how badly they perform.

So set a standard (or a target) and award marks for effort rather than using a simple pass/fail criteria. And if you are setting a standard for a public service (the fire and rescue service) that is measured against a target (a specified reduction in certain fire deaths), and you desperately need brigades to reach the standard to prove that your new system (IRMPs) works, well ... you have to make sure that success can be (almost) guaranteed.

It would be a public relations disaster for the government and supporters of the IRMP system in its current form if in the year 2010, when the reduction in fire deaths is measured, brigades had not reached the required standard.

The safe bet is to first set the standard, and then, once the uproar about the standard itself (too challenging, not challenging enough, too narrow, too broad) has hopefully died down, introduce a guaranteed pass for everyone. Impossible? – not so. The ODPM proposes a system of measurement for brigades against the ODPM's own 2010 fire deaths reduction target that allows brigades (and by default the ODPM itself) to claim success even if the target is not reached.

It works like this: if more people die in fires than are supposed to under the target – well, that's not necessarily a fail – it's a target that has been 'partially met'. It's 'top-draw' spin, a real PR coup, strategic level civil servants doing what they do best; and with only the slightest chance that the public will be distracted by the actual number of people in boxes who would still have been walking around if the target had actually been met.

There's probably a sample press release filed away somewhere with a big red "USE IN 2010" stamp on it which talks about how [brigade] will do better in the future but how it's important for the public to realise that [brigade] has met the ODPM's target of partially meeting the target!

AVOIDING THE 'HOW MANY?' QUESTION

It's disappointing (if not somewhat predictable) to see the reactions from some senior fire and rescue service managers to fire deaths. Gone are the days of wringing hands and exuding sympathy when there is a fire fatality. These reactions have been replaced by good, upright and straightforward re-classification, supported (implicitly) by the ODPM's fire deaths reduction target.

The ODPM's target focuses on fire deaths in the home, where the fire is judged to have started accidentally. There is no reference in the ODPM's target to 'preventable fire deaths'. Indeed the word 'preventable' does not appear anywhere in their text. So why is there a growing trend amongst senior managers to replace the word 'accidental' with the word 'preventable' when brigades write IRMPs, release statements or give interviews about fire deaths?

Some brigades have gone so far as to suggest that a fire death is only preventable if the fire starts accidentally in the home and there is a working smoke detector installed in the dwelling. Others have postulated that the fire (even an accidental fire which starts in the home where there is a working smoke detector) has to be the direct cause of death for that death to be counted against their fire death reduction target.

If you jump out of the window to escape the fire, break your neck and die ... well, that's not a fire death is it? The smoke and the flames didn't kill you; you chose to jump out of the window. Taking this position to the 'nth' degree it could be argued that there aren't actually any fire deaths at all, as the 'medical' cause of all deaths is the heart stopping. That argument of course ignores the key question 'what caused the heart to stop in the first place?'

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SO WHAT'S ACTUALLY GOING ON?

The truth is it's a natural human reaction to attempt to avoid any question about who is to blame. If you can replace the word 'accidental' with 'preventable', and couple this with a bit of re-classification, then the number, planning and disposition of fire service appliances and employees for which you have responsibility is unlikely to be questioned. By default you should not be blamed for any fire death.

It really is quite sad.

COINCIDENCE OR ... COINCIDENCE?

Of course the real threat to the government strategy would arise if the effectiveness of emergency response could be quantified in absolute terms; if the number of rescues carried out by firefighters across the UK was recorded nationally.

Local statistics were/are compiled in so many different ways that it would be unlikely that a clear picture would emerge from a trawl of individual brigades, and that pre-supposes that all brigades even hold the figures locally.

But the Achilles heel would be a request (at national level, perhaps in the House of Commons) for statistics on the number of rescues carried out by firefighters; figures compiled against standard and national guidance. Brigades were (and are still) compiling this information in their FDR1 returns, and dutifully sending the information to the ODPM. And every year this information has been published in Table No.22 (casualties and rescues by brigade area and location group) of the UK Fire Statistics.

Or at least this information used to be published in Table No.22. The UK Fire Statistics report for the year 2000 (which wasn't published until 20 February 2002) bucked the trend.

Table No.22 no longer contained information on 'casualties and rescues by brigade area and location group'. The information on the number of rescues carried out by firefighters was not published. It has not been published since. Table No.22 now just contains information on casualties.

The official reason for this information being omitted was that it is difficult to differentiate between full blown 'over-the-shoulder' rescues, and rescues where the incident commander decided that members of the public were in imminent danger and needed to be rescued (although this issue was never seen as a problem in the past).

And please note we are not talking about 'evacuations' here, which are not, indeed never have been recorded in Table No.22.

It's interesting that just at the time when the preliminary findings of Pathfinder (and its likely costs) were becoming more widely known at the beginning of 2002, UK Fire Statistics stopped publishing information on the number of rescues from fires carried out by firefighters; information which could have really upset the IRMP appletart.

But hey ... that's coincidences for you. Nothing for ages and then a couple come along at the same time!

IMPRESSIVE READING

FBU members (at least) will by now be aware of the true scale of the continuing success of emergency intervention in saving lives. Although not publishing the information any more the ODPM is still collating it, and must be well aware of the massive contribution that emergency intervention makes to public safety.

Last month's *Firefighter* contained information supplied by the ODPM in response to a question tabled in the House of Commons on the number of rescues from fires carried out by firefighters.

The figures supplied by the ODPM only relate to England. But the Parliamentary answer showed that there had been a 42% increase in rescues carried out by firefighters over the ten years between 1994 and 2003, with nine out of ten people who required rescue being rescued alive by firefighters. The figures supplied by the ODPM do not include those escaping without the aid of the fire and rescue service nor those rescued by neighbours or passers-by. Nor do they include the numbers not at immediate risk who are evacuated.

These figures put into context many of the wild claims made by Raynsford and Co. in the transition period to integrated risk management planning. A more honest approach aimed at developing a truly integrated approach to community safety would have seen the following type of comparison:

- There were 3,868 people rescued alive by firefighters from dwelling fires in England in 2003:
- 446 people died in dwelling fires in England and Wales in the same period:
- 392 people died in accidental dwelling fires in England and Wales in the same period:
- Even if preventive activity saved every one of those 446 lives, emergency intervention would still be over 8.5 times more effective than preventive activity.

And let's not forget that the Westminster government's target for 2010 (to prove the effectiveness of its integrated risk management planning system in its current form) is to reduce accidental dwelling fire deaths by only 20%. If only 79 lives (20% of 392) were saved by preventive activity then emergency response would be nearly 50 times more effective.

Yes there are variables in the projections (almost all of which under play the effectiveness of emergency response) but you should at least get the thrust of the argument. Unfortunately the contribution of these rescues to public safety has been largely sidelined by the focus of current IRMP strategy. Strange? Probably an oversight!

House of Commons Written Answer:

House of Commons Fire [1632] 16 June 2005

Andrew Dismore: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people were rescued alive by the fire service (a) from fires, (b) from fires in dwellings and (c) having been trapped or injured by industrial machinery in each of the last ten years for which figures are available.

Jim Fitzpatrick: The number of people rescued alive from fires by fire and rescue service personnel in England are shown for each year 1994 to 2003 in the following table. The number of people rescued having been trapped or injured by industrial machinery is not available centrally.

	RESCUED CASUALTIES ⁹		RESCUED UNHARMED ¹⁰		ALL PEOPLE RESCUED ALIVE	
	All fires	Dwelling fires	All fires	Dwelling fires	All fires	Dwelling fires
1994	2,072	1,815	1,150	901	3,222	2,716
1995	2,317	2,034	1,155	918	3,472	2,952
1996	2,442	2,138	1,022	864	3,464	3,002
1997	2,684	2,347	889	701	3,573	3,048
1998	2,545	2,300	959	811	3,504	3,111
1999	2,511	2,252	1,413	1,043	3,924	3,295
2000	2,728	2,641	2,155	1,627	4,883	4,268
2001	2,671	2,412	1,409	1,176	4,080	3,588
2002 ¹¹	2,829	2,580	1,763	1,589	4,592	4,169
2003 ¹¹	2,735	2,441	1,606	1,427	4,341	3,868

(9) Based on all primary fires attended. Casualties include people who were injured or required a precautionary check-up.

(10) Based on a grossed up 20 per cent. sample of primary fires attended.

(11) Data include estimates for incidents not recorded during periods of national industrial action in 2002 and 2003.

Source: Fire and Rescue Service FDR1 returns to ODPM

THE HOSPITAL PASS

Having convinced enough people of the merits of the government's version of integrated risk management planning, with the year-one IRMP consultation round all but over, and with IRMPs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland due to go live on 1 April 2004, it was time for the ODPM to complete a little 'tidying-up' exercise.

After all, we were at this stage effectively beyond the point of no return. Almost without exception the year-one IRMPs produced by brigades had dutifully reproduced the key arguments that underpinned the abolition of National standards of fire cover.

In February 2004 the ODPM posted a document on a 'password-protected' website (all brigades had access) which contained 'guidance' on the process brigades would have to follow to satisfy the emergency response planning element of integrated risk management planning. Strangely this information had not appeared in any of the IRMP guidance notes which the ODPM had issued during 2003.

In a section entitled 'Response planning' The document stated:

A fundamental part of planning fire service emergency cover is the determination of what response is required to incidents.

Planning an appropriate response involves:

Defining the planning scenario (PS) that each risk in an area attracts;

Deciding what resources are required in that scenario;

Deciding how to 'phase' those resources i.e. in what order and what intervals they should arrive.

Fire and rescue services will need to provide evidence that the planned response is safe and appropriate. This is likely to involve carrying out detailed risk and task analyses of the planning scenarios.

Responsibility for the safety and effectiveness of the planned responses will lie with the fire authority and as such they should be approved at the highest level.

The process advocated by the ODPM was essentially the same process that was followed by the review of standards of emergency cover (Pathfinder). But of course, now that fire and rescue authorities had responsibility for integrated risk management planning, they (and not the ODPM) would be responsible for ensuring that

their emergency response planning measured up to the Pathfinder process. A process that had been unceremoniously dumped by the ODPM in 2002 on cost grounds.

In relationship terms, this is known as the 'clean-break'. No messy loose ends, everyone (finally) clear on their responsibilities, and most importantly, no audit trail back to central government. And if things do go wrong, if firefighters are injured or killed, or property losses rocket as a result of failures in response planning, well ... It's not the Government's fault!

After all, the ODPM could now prove that it had discharged both its legal and moral responsibilities by issuing guidance to fire and rescue authorities (albeit rather belatedly) on the process they should follow to ensure appropriate and safe response planning.

From the ODPM's perspective the strategy was now complete; all that was left was to wait for 2010. There could be no legitimate demands made by fire and rescue authorities for extra funding from central government for response planning. After all, the majority of fire and rescue authorities and senior brigade managers had queued up to pledge support to Raynsford's vision of IRMP. "Surely these elected representatives and the service professionals who advise them must have known that response planning arrangements would not be ad hoc under IRMP, with decisions supported by little more than anecdotal (... in my professional opinion) evidence". You can almost hear civil servants trotting out these lines now.

That's the problem with a clean-break. It never is. No matter how civilised a manner it is conducted in, someone always ends up with a bitter taste in their mouth.

And there's little point in fire and rescue authorities looking to the Health and Safety Executive for support. In a recent exchange of letters with the FBU on the issue of response planning they stated: "HSE is concerned to ensure that safe systems of work are adopted at incidents and that where a specific number of personnel are necessary to implement procedures they are available. This should be determined through risk assessment."

The phrase 'No port in a storm' comes to mind. Suddenly the idea of a national standard seems a whole lot more appealing doesn't it?

BACK TO THE NUMBERS GAME

So how many firefighters do you need? (we're almost there now). The simple answer is 'work it out using the Pathfinder – sorry, the ODPM process'. You would expect brigades to have done that by now, wouldn't you?

In September 2004 (around the time that brigades were issuing their year-two IRMPs for consultation) the FBU wrote to all chief fire officers asking them why the response planning risk assessments, and the detailed risk and task analysis which underpinned these risk assessments, appeared to be missing from their IRMP consultation documents (as you would expect, the FBU had managed to get hold of the ODPM's 'password-protected' document too).

The FBU's national IRMP document (published in May 2004) contained the resolution from the FBU annual conference showing that the FBU had signed up to proper integrated risk management planning (including risk-based response planning) in 2002. The document also contained the results of a series of CAST (that's Critical

Attendance Standard) planning scenarios, which showed the bare minimum number of firefighters and equipment needed for the more basic type of incident that the service routinely attends. And the results of the CAST planning scenarios had been derived (yes, you guessed it) from detailed risk and task analysis.

Before we go any further, it's probably best to clear up what detailed risk and task analysis actually is. In simple terms it's about matching firefighters and equipment to standard operating procedures (SOPs). The process allows you to work out how many firefighters you will need to employ SOPs at, for instance, a two-storey house fire, or a high-rise flat fire.

And SOPs are things like *Technical Bulletin 1/97* (BA procedures), or the procedure for pitching a 135 ladder (try doing that with two firefighters!). If you can't employ the SOP (because you haven't got enough firefighters), but you still try to accomplish the task (a rescue in BA for instance), well we've all been there thanks to the 1985 standards.

Back to the letters to brigades asking for their risk assessments. The answers the FBU got from brigades, with very, very few exceptions, were disappointing to say the least. They tended to fall into one of three categories:

Answer One

No answer – i.e. pretend the question wasn't even asked.

Answer Two

Ask if there is anything specific the FBU has to say about what is actually in the IRMP – i.e. please don't ask questions about what isn't in the IRMP.

Answer Three

Explain that the IRMP is the risk assessment – i.e. pretend that you've already done it (for clarification an IRMP is a risk management plan which should be constructed using a series of risk assessments, but hey ... let's not get bogged down by minor technicalities like that).

Don't be surprised at the answers from brigades – the FBU wasn't. FBU officials had already been briefed on the likely answers they could expect to receive to their requests. If you remember, the important thing here for brigades was to avoid answering the question. In the perfect world the question would never have been asked. Well done again Nick for not telling brigades that you would be issuing the response planning guidance until after CFOs and fire and rescue authorities had signed up to your version of the IRMP process in 2003!

A LITTLE BIT MORE HONESTY PLEASE

Of course, the public are only interested in how long they have to wait for a fire engine. Perhaps it would be possible for brigades to sideline (indefinitely?) The FBU /ODPM requirement to undertake risk assessments for response planning. If brigades simply focus on how long the public would have to wait for the first fire engine, and not on how many firefighters are on that fire engine, or what the firefighters on that fire engine could actually achieve when they got there ...

Unfortunately not. Remember the recent exchange of letters on response planning requirements between the FBU and the Health and Safety Executive? After stating that "HSE is concerned to ensure that safe systems of

**The HSE
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'Where the
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trained for'**

work are adopted at incidents and that where a specific number of personnel are necessary to implement procedures they are available." The HSE went on to say "Where the numbers (of firefighters) are limited, then a different procedure may need to be established and trained for."

So if four firefighters on a front line fire engine isn't enough to implement the procedures (SOPs to you and me) to undertake a rescue at a house fire, brigades will have to introduce (and introduce training for) a different SOP, which reflects what they can achieve in line with SOPs. We're not simply talking about dynamic risk assessment (DRA) here. If you know that four firefighters cannot employ the standard operating procedures necessary to effect a rescue at a two-storey house fire, or that nine firefighters are not enough to effect a rescue at a multi-story flat fire, all the dynamic risk assessment training in the world isn't going to change that.

If a brigade routinely crews the first fire engine with four firefighters then the public should be told that those firefighters have been 'ordered' to conduct defensive firefighting only. They are simply following procedures laid down by the fire and rescue authority. Don't expect a rescue.

Brigades aren't allowed to ignore the question any more. The ODPM has stated that (sorry to repeat things) "Fire and rescue services will need to provide evidence that the planned response is safe and appropriate. This is likely to involve carrying out detailed risk and task analyses of the planning scenarios. No mention of dynamic risk assessment there! Things have to be planned in advance – that's why it's called integrated risk management planning.

Ah ... for the heady days of the national standards. At least in those days brigades could argue that they were simply complying with national minimum requirements if things went wrong.

Bizarrely, that's the argument that some brigades have started using now (with the exception of having five firefighters on fire engines of course), even though the standard has been abolished. I guess you have to keep at least one eye on any impending court case.

BUT I THOUGHT YOU SAID ...

Yes. This argument is a little rich after the statements that were made in brigades' year-one IRMPs about how the 1985 national standards of fire cover were inappropriate, out-dated, inflexible etc. but, then again, it's the only argument they've got left if they want to avoid complying with the ODPM/FBU risk-based response planning requirements.

The cuts we are seeing to frontline fire engines, or cuts in the staffing levels of those fire engines, will impact on the number of rescues that firefighters can carry out. The emergency intervention success story that is currently demonstrated by the rescue statistics is in real danger of being sacrificed as a result of cuts to staffing, cuts to fire engines, and/or blind pursuit of the Westminster government's 2010 'prevention-based' fire death targets.

Once again it will be firefighters in the frontline who are left carrying the real risks. Make a rescue by ignoring SOPs because you haven't got enough firefighters on the fire engine – fine. Get injured or killed trying to make

a rescue whilst ignoring SOPs because you haven't got enough firefighters to employ SOPs – it's not the brigade's fault – your dynamic risk assessment was flawed (weren't you listening in the DRA lecture we gave you?).

SO – HOW MANY FIRE-FIGHTERS DOES IT TAKE?

Finally the answer. Having pretty much failed to get brigades to answer the question it had asked them in September 2004, the FBU submitted its answer to brigades in the late summer/early autumn of 2005. We felt that we had been pretty patient, given that the ODPM had made brigades aware of the requirement to undertake risk-based response planning way back in February 2004 (remember the document on the 'password-protected' website?).

However given the 'attitude' most brigades had displayed to FBU questions, suggestions, indeed to FBU involvement in the IRMP process to date, we decided to invoke our rights under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations 1977 – and to formally table the answer at brigade safety committee level in the form of an appointed safety representative's report. Here's how it works:

Regulation 4a of the Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations 1977 requires the employer to consult with appointed safety representatives; Regulation 9 of the 1977 regulations covers safety committees (the guidance notes show that the functions of a safety committee include consideration of reports which safety reps may wish to submit); and regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 covers the duty to undertake risk assessments, and the duty to review these risk assessments where there is a reason to suspect they are no longer valid or where there has been a significant change in the matters to which they relate.

The FBU contends that the information in the CAST planning scenarios and accompanying task timelines constitutes 'new' information; a reason to suspect that the existing risk assessments on which current response planning is based are no longer valid. In terms of new information, well ... brigades certainly did not seem to have this information when we asked for it in September 2004. And this new information necessitates a review of the risk assessments underpinning response planning to fires in dwellings.

We have little doubt that most brigades will attempt argue the opposite position. They will attempt to dismiss the FBU reports as irrelevant. They will say that their existing response planning procedures are fine (even though they haven't carried out a detailed risk and task analysis).

AN EXAMPLE OF JUST HOW WRONG YOU CAN BE

Well if that is the case; if a brigade's existing response planning procedures are indeed correct, then check out your brigade's high-rise dwelling fire procedure (just for starters).

When the FBU undertook a detailed risk and task analysis and matched it against the vast majority of brigades' high-rise dwelling fire procedures, we found

Once again

it will be

firefighters

in the

frontline

who

are left

carrying

the real

risks



that these local procedures were not simply naïve, they were dangerous. If your local high-rise procedure says that the first crew to arrive investigates the fire by proceeding to the fire floor (or the floor below) to set up a bridgehead, then you've got problems!

You're likely to be at the fire floor, in BA, faced with a fire compartment, potentially with persons inside who are relying on you for rescue – and you won't have any water. How will you carry out your fire compartment door entry procedure (remember when hot fire training was the in-thing)?

Detailed risk and task analysis shows this flaw in procedures clearly – by plotting average timings for the most commonly occurring tasks we carry out on the incident ground against the number of firefighters needed to undertake those procedures.

Too much detail? ABSOLUTELY NOT. Ignore this detail, stick with outdated procedures that are no more than a hang-over from the 1985 standards, and sooner or later you're likely to kill firefighters at a high-rise dwelling fire.

And what about your brigade's procedures for medium-rise multi-occupancy dwelling fires; single occupancy dwelling fires; dwelling fires in basements; in underground complexes? Dynamic risk assessment is great – but it presupposes that the organisation has complied with its responsibilities, including the responsibility to undertake risk-based response planning before the event.

With risk-based response planning, the question

Rescuing men trapped in Thames mud: The FBU contends that the information in CAST planning scenarios and accompanying task timelines constitutes 'new' information.

isn't "Does the incident commander think it's safe to enter a fire compartment without water?" The question is "Does the chief fire officer/fire and rescue authority think it's safe to enter a fire compartment without water; without enough personnel to have a dedicated pump operator; without a dedicated BA entry control officer; without enough personnel to charge the dry-riser; to supplement the tank supply; without enough personnel to check the landing valves; to maintain control of the firefighting lift; with a BA team consisting of fewer than two firefighters?"

These are all safety-critical tasks. Have brigades ever done the sums to work out how many firefighters are needed – and as importantly when they are needed? There is little point in sending nine firefighters if they arrive so far apart that the SOPs are bound to have been compromised before the second crew arrives!

THE TECHNICAL BIT

The charts on the next two pages show what detailed risk and task analysis looks like when plotted against a task timeline for a multi-occupancy high-rise dwelling fire. The large chart shows the minimum number of firefighters needed in the initial response, the tasks that have to be completed to comply with SOPs, and how long each task (on average) takes. The smaller bar chart shows what the incident looks like when there is a three-minute delay (or LAG) between the arrival of the first and subsequent fire engines required as part of the initial planned response.

Which job is not important to maintain (as far as reasonably possible) firefighter safety at this incident? Which firefighters could turn up later? What will the firefighters already there do while they're waiting for them? What do your existing procedures for high-rise dwelling fires say?

Your local FBU officials have initially tabled 13 of these CAST planning scenarios (with detailed risk and task analysis for each) with your brigade. The scenarios all relate to firefighting/rescue from different types of routinely occurring dwelling fires.

The real question now is just how far will brigades go to avoid acknowledging the existence of the information tabled by the FBU; to avoid consideration of it when they are updating their IRMPs; to avoid having to act on the information?

The ODPM has told them they have to do it; the FBU has told them they have to do it; the HSE has told them they have to do it. Perhaps brigades will hang on until the courts tell them they have to do it too. The only problem with that strategy (for you anyway) is that they will have to seriously injure or kill a firefighter before the courts are likely to get involved.

The only (very small) consolation is that they will not be able to plead ignorance in any defence – we've tabled the facts with them already!

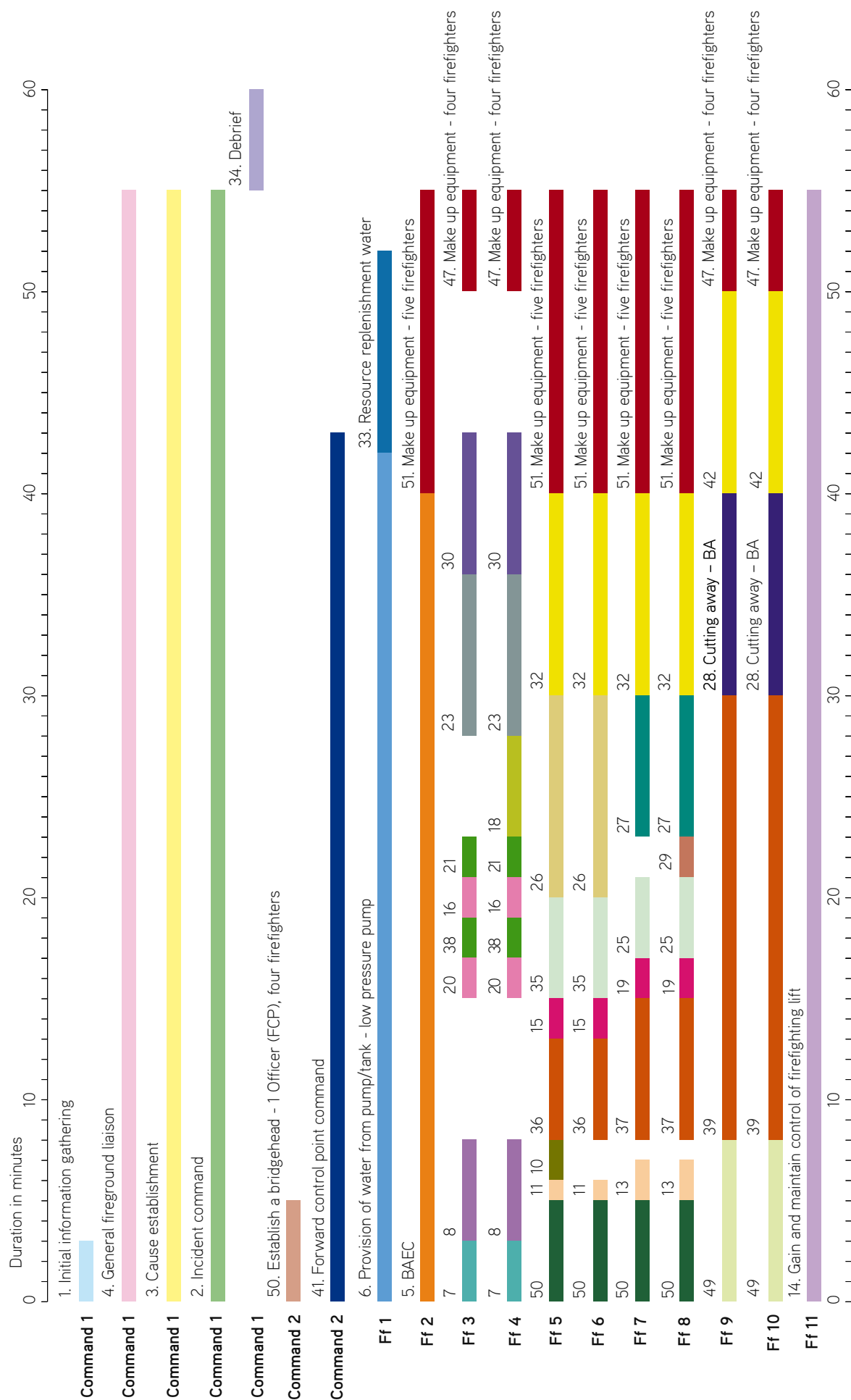
Oh ... and the answer for a fire in a high-rise multi-occupancy dwelling is that an absolute bare minimum of 13 firefighters (plus the listed equipment) must be sent as part of the initial planned response.

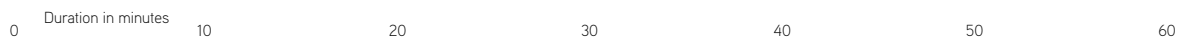
And those 13 firefighters have to arrive within three minutes of each other to avoid standard operating procedures being compromised by lack of available resources. If that's not possible please refer to the HSE advice above!

CAST 1 – Dwelling fire: multiple occupancy high rise

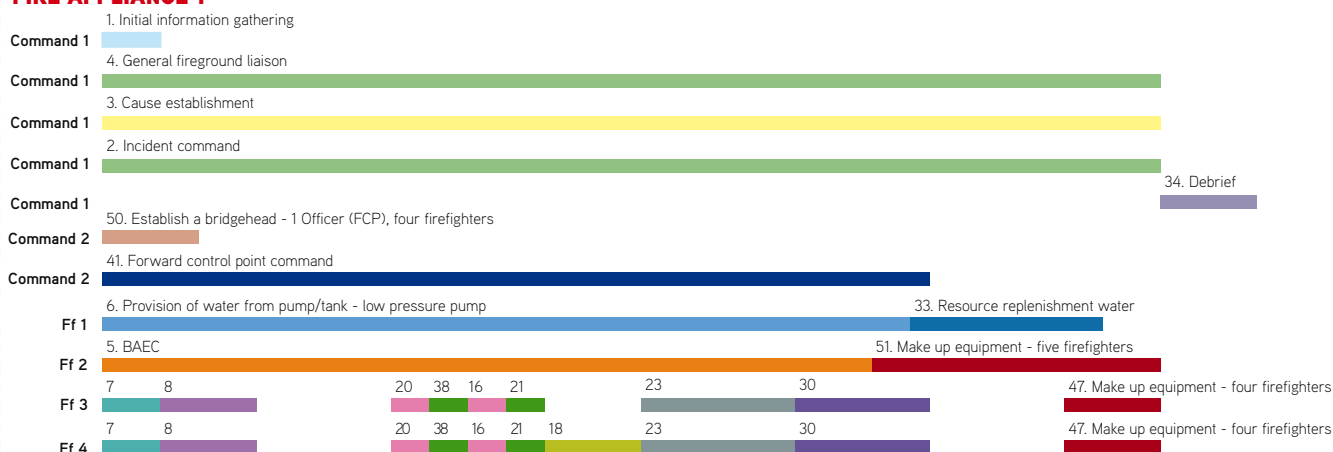
Two to four casualties involved rescue via internal staircase

A single flat with one room involved, needing a bridgehead set up. Two to four casualties needing rescue.

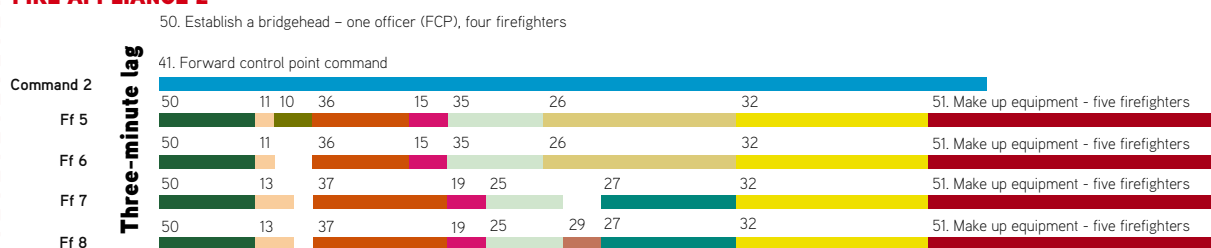




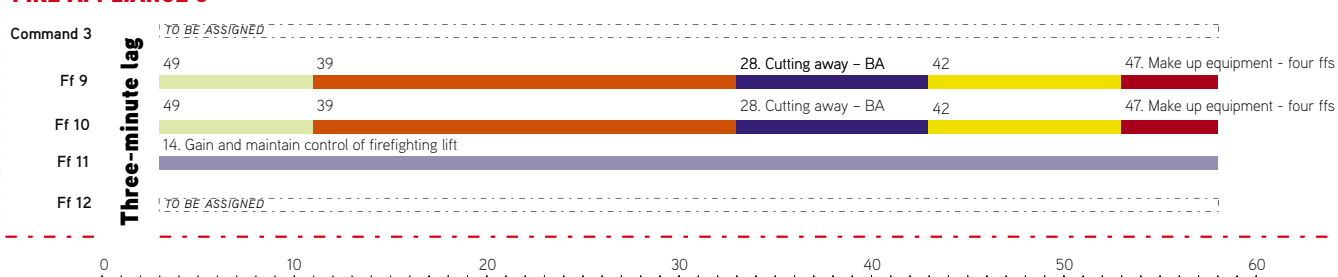
FIRE APPLIANCE 1



FIRE APPLIANCE 2



FIRE APPLIANCE 3



TASK	DESCRIPTION
1	Initial information gathering
2	Incident command
3	Cause establishment
4	General fireground liaison
5	BAEC
6	Provision of water from pump/tank - low-pressure pump
7	Provision of water to dry rising main, twinned supply
8	Provision of water from hydrant to pump/tank - two firefighters - double standpipe
10	Gaining entry to premises with breaking-in gear - firefighter
11	Provision of 45 mm jet
13	Provision of 45 mm jet
14	Gain and maintain control of firefighting lift
15	Remove casualty to external opening - BA
16	Remove casualty to place of safety
18	Liaison with ambulance - Firefighter
19	Remove casualty to external opening - BA
20	Remove casualty to place of safety
21	Casualty treatment
23	Salvage - two firefighters
25	Ventilation of other areas - 2 x BA

TASK	DESCRIPTION
26	Damping down - 45 mm jet - BA
27	Turning over - 2 x BA - thermal imager
28	Cutting away - 2 x BA
29	Isolation of services
30	Debris/water removal - with salvage equipment
32	Fireground servicing - 4 BA
33	Resource replenishment water
34	Debrief
35	Ventilation of premises - fire compartment - BA
36	Firefighting/Rescue two firefighters BA - 45 mm jet
37	Firefighting/Rescue two firefighters BA - 45 mm jet
38	Casualty treatment
39	Firefighting/rescue two firefighters BA as emergency team for BAEC
41	Forward control point command
42	Fireground servicing - two BA
47	Make up equipment - four firefighters
49	Check landing valves
50	Establish a bridgehead - 1 Officer (FCP), four firefighters
51	Make up equipment - five firefighters

Detailed Risk and Task Analysis is the process of **firstly** assessing the risk from the incident as a whole, and from specific firefighting/ rescue actions (or tasks), **secondly** matching the tasks to standard operating procedures (which are designed to minimise risk), **thirdly** determining the length of time each task will take to complete, and **fourthly** determining which tasks can be carried out simultaneously and which tasks can only be carried out after an earlier task has been completed. A **Task Key** and **Task Timeline** can then be constructed from which the minimum number of personnel for the planning scenario is derived.



This month the second phase of the UK fire and rescue service's mass decontamination capability will start rolling out across the country. The union has been involved in the process from the start, working to promote the health and safety of FBU members who will be operating the new specialist equipment. Paul Matthewman and Peter Goulden report .

THE NEW Dimension programme (ND) is the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's (ODPM) contribution to the Government's civil contingencies capabilities programme. Its aim is to make the country more prepared for and resilient to attack by improving the capability of the fire and rescue service to respond to 'level four' major emergencies, the highest level of emergency potentially drawing on resources from anywhere in the country.

The mass decontamination (MD) capability – one of six on the ND programme – spans England and Wales and liaises with equivalent programmes in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Members will recall the introduction of phase 1 of the MD programme in brigades in late 2003 with the roll out of incident response units (IRUs). The aim was to provide equipment and training to fulfil the requirements of the Home Office planning assumptions of two incidents occurring simultaneously, leading to the contamination of 20,000 people and involving their subsequent decontamination within eight hours.

Appropriate training procedures for the UK fire and rescue service were developed and phase 1 culminated in the deployment of 72 operationally available IRUs across the country.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE LEVELS

LEVEL 1
brigade
LEVEL 2
inter-brigade
LEVEL 3
inter-regional
LEVEL 4
national

Phase 2 is designed to meet the following requirements:

- Deploy effective detection, identification and monitoring equipment (DIM) for a range of contaminants in attendance within 30 minutes of initial call/declaration of chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) incidents in areas of highest risk and population in England and Wales
- Deploy the first IRU in attendance within 45 minutes – a phase 1 objective – with subsequent deployment of a further three IRUs, culminating in the fourth arriving within 180 minutes – a phase 2 objective – in areas of highest risk and population in England and Wales.
- Provide disrobe packs for 4,600 contaminated casualties within two hours
- Provide adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) resilience to enable decontamination of 4,600 people within six hours
- Decontaminate 4,600 casualties within a chemical (overt biological) or radiological environment within six hours
- Provide re-robe packs for the 4,600 decontaminated casualties.
- Ensure safe systems of work for fire and rescue service responders



NEW DIMENSION CAPABILITIES

1. Mass decontamination
2. USAR
3. Command and control
4. Water (high volume pumping)
5. Operation logistics
6. Long term capability management

WHAT IS DIM?

With the roll-out of the IRUs, the UK fire and rescue service (FRS) received a basic capability to detect radiation. The FRS still lack a capability to detect, identify and monitor chemical and biological contaminants. Early this year trials of the DIM equipment were carried out in several brigades. During 2005/06 it is expected that 18 locations/brigades will receive the DIM capability prioritised to population areas larger than 300,000 or target-rich environments, such as areas with nuclear power stations. It is anticipated that a further 13 brigades, may receive the DIM capability in 2006/07.

The DIM equipment consists of several pieces of high-spec kit including: infra-red spectroscope, radiation survey meters, multi-gas detectors, chemical vapour identification and isotope identification.

All this equipment will be transported in a van with blue lights and will be equipped with a work position which will enable the relevant special CBRN advisor – from the Home Office, ODPM or even abroad from among a pool of international experts – to plan operations and conduct sample analysis with communication and information system support.

DECONTAMINATION

MASS DECONTAMINATION REROBE UNITS (MDRs)

MDR containers will ensure the replenishment of the main consumables, such as detergents, as well as gas tight suits, rorobe packs and so on. MDR attendance is required around three hours after the declaration of an incident.

In order to attend within the currently planned timescales, the following total number of capabilities is required in England and Wales:

- DIM – 31 Units (18 to be rolled out in 2005/06)
- MD Disrobe Units – 36 Units (to be rolled out in 2005/06)
- MD Rerober Units – 14 Units (to be rolled

out in 2005/06)

LOCATIONS OF UNITS

DISROBE UNITS

NOV 05, 15

UNITS: Tyne and Wear, Hampshire, Humberside, Devon, Kent, GMC, Dorset, Avon, Surrey, London x 2, Staffordshire, Mid and West Wales, South Wales x 2.

DEC 05, NINE UNITS:

South Yorkshire, West Midlands, Merseyside, Kent, London, Surrey x 2, Hampshire x 2.

JAN 06, FOUR

UNITS: Cheshire, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, Tyne and Wear.

APR 06, NINE UNITS:

Suffolk x 2, Kent, Cornwall, Surrey,

West Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire, Cleveland, Wiltshire.

REROBE UNITS

NOV 05, SEVEN

UNITS: Tyne and Wear, West Midlands, Nottinghamshire, Lancashire, Mid and West Wales, London x 2

DEC 05, two units: Somerset, Dorset.

FEB 06, FIVE

UNITS: Shropshire, Cleveland, Wiltshire, Bedfordshire, Suffolk.

A further two units are to be designed and built for Isle of Man and Isle of Wight brigades. These will be bespoke units to include mass decontamination and firefighter decontamination.

FIREFIGHTER'S ROLE

The task of decontamination of the public involves the construction of a showering system, known as mass decontamination structures (MDS), that allows removal of potential contaminants using warm water and detergent. Response to an incident is managed in terms of three zones.

- Hot zone. Where gross contamination from the source is present;
- Warm zone. Where cross contamination can occur (this zone is extended to the MDS inside the cold zone)
- Cold zone. Clean area where entrants have been decontaminated.

One team of firefighters establishes the MDS within the Cold zone whilst another team of firefighters carries out the other necessary tasks in the warm zone. In the warm zone firefighters carry out the following tasks:

- Organise the disrobe procedure;
- Issue disrobe packs;
- Direct the public to the showers;
- Manage the flow of public through the showers;
- Monitor the progress through the showers;
- Check for collapse of any members of the public whilst going through the process and
- Clear discarded disrobe packs from people who have entered the shower system.

FBU REGIONAL health and safety co-ordinators Paul Matthewman and Peter Goulden have been representing the union in the New Dimension process. From high volume pumping (see Firefighter, July 2005) to mass decontamination, they have been involved in the design, manufacture, risk assessments, roll-out and ongoing training required for the new equipment. For more information contact Paul or Pete on email: hsc04@fbu.org.uk

Easing the suffering

A terrible accident changed the life of Nigel Pugh, a firefighter working the retained duty system. While money can never put him back in the position he was before the accident, compensation won by FBU solicitors Thompsons did help ease his concerns about his future financial security and that of his family.

YOU NEVER know what each day may bring. 38-year-old retained firefighter Nigel Pugh of Abercynon Fire Station, South Wales, was a healthy, happy man living with his long-term partner and their four children when, in April 2000, he was involved in an accident that was to completely change his life.

Nigel, an FBU member for the last 13 years, was out driving for British Bakeries as usual when a male car driver, intent on taking his own life, deliberately drove at speed directly into the front of Nigel's lorry on the Heads of the Valleys road not far from Nigel's home.

Nigel described the moments leading up to the accident. "I saw the car coming towards me. I couldn't understand what was happening. The car was clearly driving directly into my path and as I moved to the side to avoid a collision, the car moved across the same way too. I moved again and so did he. I slammed on my brakes and started skidding. I knew a collision was inevitable and I thought I was going to die."

The impact was at high speed. The car had hit the front of Nigel's cab with such force that the cab had been lifted up and onto the car crushing it. Nigel recalls "flying into the windscreen hitting his head and knee and being thrown back violently as steam and smoke began to appear."

As Nigel fell from the cab to escape, injured and in shock, he was met with an horrific sight. The car driver was clearly dead and strewn on the road in front of him

'As a firefighter working the retained duty system, I hadn't appreciated the support, benefits and specialist services that the FBU provided'



were two children's car seats.

"I thought I'd killed two babies," Nigel said. "I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I was in total shock." He subsequently learnt that the driver had been the only occupant of the car and that the accident had been deliberate. Sadly, the young male driver had been determined to take his own life.

How do you come to terms with an event like that?

The accident broke Nigel. He had suffered serious multiple injuries which required complex and risky surgery. Five years on he still suffers from back and knee pain on a daily basis which is expected to be permanent.

It was though, the psychological consequences of that event that changed Nigel's life.

He went from being a happy and caring family man who had successfully held down two jobs and been able to cope with the traumatic events that being a retained firefighter necessarily involves, to, in his own words an "aggressive and unpredictable person making life very difficult for the people around him". He was struggling to cope with everyday life. His relationship broke down spreading the devastating effects of the accident to his partner and children. The family unit basically collapsed.

This is where the FBU stepped in to help Nigel and his family. He was immediately referred to the union's

lawyers, Thompsons, and Joanna Stevens, his solicitor at Thompsons Cardiff described what happened:

"I was horrified listening to Nigel's account of the accident and its effects. The FBU and Thompsons were determined that he should have every possible support. Legally, my concern was that the driver's insurer's would try to void their policy and refuse to pay compensation on the basis that the collision was a deliberate act and not an accident. We had to move quickly. Within a week of meeting Nigel we had a claim under way, an agreement on liability and an interim compensation payment so that Nigel could at least pay his bills."

"Because his injuries were serious and diverse, we didn't know if he would ever be able to return to fire fighting or driving. We knew he'd require surgery and that his recuperation and recovery from both the physical and the psychological injuries would take a long time. We organised ongoing specialist psychotherapy and payment from the insurers of regular interim compensation to cover the medical treatment costs and Nigel's everyday living expenses. He was desperate to get back to work and thoroughly depressed by the prospect that his career in the Fire Service was over."

The years following the accident were a time that Nigel would rather forget if he could. He feels he missed out on key moments of his young children's lives and remains very concerned about the toll that the accident took on them and on his parents who have been, he says, "wonderful".

Nigel's case was due for a final hearing at Cardiff County Court this month, for a judge to decide the final amount of compensation. Whilst money can never put Nigel back in the position he was before the accident, his future financial security and that of his family, was paramount. Solicitors for the insurance company made proposals but they were too low. Eventually, after a day of negotiations between both sides, Nigel accepted a final payout of £236,000 that included compensation for his injuries, past and future losses and expenses. The final payout also included a specific sum of money in recognition of the unique sense of loss brought about by the end of his career in the fire and rescue service.

Nigel is now a full-time stay-at-home Dad to his three daughters Jade, Abbie and Lowri who all go to their local school. He is making up for lost time with them and preparing himself for a return to work, hopefully in the not too distant future.

"I don't know what I would have done without the union," Nigel said. "As a fire fighter working the retained duty system, I hadn't appreciated the support, benefits and specialist services that the FBU provided. The accident didn't happen when I was firefighting but the union looked after me and my family, made sure I had the best possible legal advice and I will always be very grateful for what they have done for me. I wouldn't be here without them."

■ See back page for contact details for Thompsons

**Five years after the
incident Nigel still
suffers from back and
knee pain on a daily basis
which is expected to
be permanent**

COMPENSATION: ASBESTOS

THE fire service paid a member £170,000 compensation for asbestos exposure, just days after his death from the asbestos cancer mesothelioma. John Allingham was stationed at Maidenhead and Reading fire stations between 1978 and 1983. He regularly attended premises in which asbestos was used as a construction material, and, ironically, the protective equipment he was required to wear, including fire blankets and gloves, contained asbestos.

John first noticed a cough and a pain in his chest in 2001. After various investigations and treatment he was diagnosed with mesothelioma.

FBU lawyers Thompsons lodged a claim for compensation against the Royal Berkshire Fire Brigade. The brigade failed to respond and court proceedings were started. The brigade denied liability throughout the claim, but finally offered to settle before the trial in September.

John's lawyer Richard Grayson said: "While this award does give John's family some security, it is a tragedy that he did not live to see it made. Had the brigade not stubbornly refused to admit liability, in the face of overwhelming evidence, then this settlement could have been reached in time for John to actually enjoy some of it before he died, and certainly in time for him to be assured that his long-term partner would be looked after financially, after his death."

COMPENSATION: BACK INJURY

A MEMBER forced to retire from the fire service after injuring his back when an office chair gave way under him has received £55,000 compensation from the London Fire Brigade.

Keith Rhodes was just 44 when he was medically retired last year, three years after the accident at G21 Harrow Road station. The chair gave way suddenly as he leant back. He pulled himself forward as a reflex to avoid falling and became aware of pain in his back.

An hour later, whilst out on an emergency call, the pain became so severe that he was unable to complete his shift or even to drive home. He slept overnight at the

station. His condition was diagnosed as purely muscular by physiotherapists provided by the fire service's occupational health department, and it was recommended that he return to work. He was not given an MRI scan at that time, even though he was still in discomfort. But the pain did not ease and he was forced to take further time off. Eventually, following an MRI scan, he was diagnosed with a disc bulge.

Other than exercise and painkillers, there was little that could be done to improve his condition and Keith was medically retired in October last year.

FBU lawyers Thompsons obtained

expert medical opinion that the cause of his injury had been the chair. But the Brigade disputed liability so his claim for compensation was listed for trial. The Brigade finally made an offer to settle the claim before the hearing.

Adrian Clark, Keith's lawyer, said that while the settlement did not make up for a career cut short, it did represent some compensation for the pain and distress the accident had caused.

Keith Rhodes said: "I am very grateful to the FBU and its lawyers Thompsons for their support for me during this difficult time. Without the union's legal service I may well have ended up with nothing."



BEN CURTIS/PA/EMPICS

January 2003: Striking firefighters outside the Maryhill fire station in Glasgow wave to motorists tooting their horns in support

Campaign builds for



The TUC in
September
overwhelmingly
called for the
repeal of anti-
trade-union

laws and the introduction of a
Trade Union Freedom Bill. Two
weeks later the Labour Party
conference passed a similar motion
– supported not only by trade
unions but also by a substantial
proportion of the constituency
parties. So what's it all about?
Carolyn Jones, director, of Institute
of Employment Rights explains

SO WHAT'S the Trade Union Freedom Bill all about? Before we look at the detail of the proposal, let's just clarify what the Bill is *not* about.

Despite how the media portray it, this Bill is not about going back to the 1970s. It's not about flying pickets. And it's not about unions holding the country to ransom.

This Bill is a very small step in the direction of introducing a balance of power in the workplace, giving workers the tools to resist exploitative employers and giving unions the freedoms enshrined in international law. It's about giving UK workers the freedoms enjoyed by workers throughout Europe.

WHY NOW?

The call for the repeal of anti-union laws has been on the trade union agenda since Thatcher began her onslaught in 1980. The fact that every one of the Tory laws remains on the statute book highlights just how patient trade unions have been.

But as employers like those at Gate Gourmet adopt increasingly aggressive cost-cutting tactics to win subcontracted work from profitable transnational companies (BA reported profits of £220 million in November 2004) – then patience begins to wear thin.

And Gate Gourmet is only the latest case. There have been many examples since Labour came to power of employers cutting pay, slashing pensions and announcing mass redundancies. Under existing legislation, unions feel powerless to officially protect workers' interests.

But there is a second reason why the time is right to call for a Trade Union Freedom Bill. 2006 will be the one hundredth anniversary of the introduction of the Trade Disputes Act of 1906. That Act protected unions against sequestration of funds and imprisonment. It was intro-



August 2005: Gate Gourmet workers at Heathrow demand reinstatement after they were sacked from catering jobs

union freedom law

duced following public outcry at the way unions were being attacked simply for protecting the interests of their members.

The 1906 Act reversed many of the worst judge-made laws. It effectively allowed workers to strike and to support others on strike. As we approach the centenary of the Act, the argument is that trade unions once again expect parliamentary intervention to protect them against abusive employers and anti-union judges.

PRINCIPLES OF THE BILL

So what would the Bill contain? John Hendy, QC has been working with the Institute of Employment Rights and the Campaign for the Repeal of Anti Trade Union Laws on the general principles to be covered. As it stands, the measures proposed are modest. They redress only the gravest limitations on trade union freedom. However, some of the more oppressive aspects of the current legislation will be removed. We will have moved policy discussion away from individual rights and on to trade union freedoms.

Below is a summary of the basic aspects of the Bill:

Abolition of restrictive balloting procedures

Current balloting rules are complex, almost impossible to follow and all too often end in unions being brought before the courts on minor technical challenges. According to the ILO, the very complexity of UK balloting laws is inconsistent with the right to strike guaranteed in ILO Convention 87. One suggestion is that the Certification Officer should decide if a union's rules on balloting are sufficient – not the courts and not

employers. And if a member wants to complain that the union is not following its own rules they should complain to the CO for a remedy.

The abolition of restrictive industrial action notice procedures

As with balloting rules, the notice requirements are far too restrictive and open to legal challenge. The four stages currently required (over a period of two weeks) and the detailed description of who and how many are to be balloted should be removed. We believe a simple notification with at least seven days notice is enough.

The freedom to take solidarity action for workers who are in dispute

The Conservatives removed all rights of workers to take solidarity action in support of others, a blanket ban repeatedly condemned by the ILO as a breach of Convention 87. At Gate Gourmet we saw one group of TGWU members (caterers) supported by another group of TGWU members (baggage handlers). But the baggage handlers' action was unlawful and the union was forced to repudiate to avoid costly fines. How can that be right when such solidarity is an essential element of freedom of association as enshrined in international law? The Trade Union Freedom Bill will provide the freedom to take solidarity action for workers in dispute.

Restrict the use of injunctions against industrial action

Interim injunctions to stop industrial action are granted all too easily to employers and the decision is weighted

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against the union as employers only have to show that there is a serious issue to be tried rather than proving they have a winnable case. This imbalance can be redressed by requiring that an injunction should not be granted unless the employer can show that it is more likely to succeed at trial than the union.

The right to automatic reinstatement for taking lawful industrial action

In the UK workers have no legal right to strike. Any strike action constitutes a breach of contract, entitling the employer to dismiss, discipline or sue the worker and leaves the union liable for inducing breach of contract. True, the Labour government introduced an eight-week period of protection against unfair dismissal for strikers – recently increased to 12 weeks. But what if a strike lasts longer than 12 weeks? And even if you win a claim for unfair dismissal, employers can ignore court orders to reinstate sacked workers as seen recently in the case of Jerry Hicks at Rolls Royce. This Bill proposes that strike action should not be seen as a breach of contract.

Sectoral forums to establish minimum terms and conditions

In 1979, about 78% of workers were covered by a collective agreement. By 2004 that had dropped to 35%. This was in no small way a result of Tory laws which removed the long-respected duty of the state to promote collective bargaining at work. To correct this situation it is proposed that Sectoral Forums be introduced in industries where there is no national collective bargaining machinery. Such Forums would include union and employer representatives, would set minimum terms and conditions for the industry and would take precedence over any contractual terms which are less beneficial to the workers involved. This would go some way to preventing bad employers undercutting good employers, a practice leading to a downward spiral of terms and conditions.

Allow action against subcontractors who refuse to recognise unions

Another way of promoting collective bargaining is to allow large employers – particularly the State – to insist that subcontractors recognise and negotiate with unions.

Extend the right to be accompanied by a union officer

The 1999 Employment Relations Act allows a trade union member to be accompanied by a union official at an employer's disciplinary or grievance hearing. We believe the Bill should go further and should allow unions the freedom to carry out their fundamental purpose, defined in law as "the regulation of relations between workers and employers". The proposal is therefore to allow an official to accompany a member on any matter under discussion between the employer and the worker.

THE NEXT STEP

As can be seen, the proposed Trade Union Freedom Bill is not revolutionary. It will not even restore the UK to

THE LAW AND FIRE SERVICE DISPUTES

THE Fire Service national pay dispute with the employers brought the limitations on trade union freedom contained in current law into sharp relief.

The restrictive balloting and industrial action notice procedures, introduced by the Trade Union Act 1984, had been reduced but not abolished by the Labour government's Employment Relations Act 1999.

Although it had been clarified that a union did not have to provide the names of individuals who will be balloted for industrial action, unions did have to provide "such information in the union's possession as would help the employer to make plans and bring information to the attention of those" employees to be balloted. This information included the number, category and workplace of members to be balloted.

There have been a few other minor improvements, which became law on 3 October this year, including that the need to give such detailed information doesn't now apply where there is 100%

union membership check off in a workplace. But this was obviously not in time for the pay dispute. The union was forced to attempt to conduct a national dispute but with 58 local fire authority employers.

The union and its legal team, which included a QC expert in balloting law, were forced to effectively set up identical disputes against every fire authority. There had to be separate balloting information for each authority, with every one provided with the matrix of information about the number, locations and grades of members to be balloted.

Providing 58 fire authorities each with a separate ballot notice, each containing its specific matrix of information and all on the same day in order to comply with the law on notice periods, risked the national nature of the dispute collapsing with just one mis-dialed digit on a fax machine.

A particular difficulty in framing a national trade dispute in these circumstances was that the FBU's pay claim demanded specific treatment

for specific grades of firefighter. The union was asking for a specified amount for wholetime fire fighters, equality for firefighters (control) and the equivalent for firefighters working their retained duty system. But because not all fire authorities employed the latter two categories, or because the union did not have them in membership at some authorities, it was impossible to frame that demand on the ballot paper. To do so would have risked employers objecting that the ballot was invalid in their authority.

Yet to ask members to vote for or against industrial action in support of the whole time claim risked alienating, or at the very least confusing, those who expected more detail in the proposition.

As it turned out of course, members voted 9 to 1 in favour of strike action. But only after an immensely bureaucratic, expensive and risky process which highlights why the FBU supports the campaign to repeal anti-trade union law and backs the Trade Union Freedom Bill.

compliance with our international obligations. It will, however, clear away the primary obstacles and create a minimum legal space for unions to protect the interests of their members. Between now and December 2006, the details will have to be discussed, the principles popularised and the arguments promoted. We hope the FBU, its members and its MPs will assist us in these tasks.

25-YEAR BADGES



Officer Charlie Mc Auley (l) receives his badge from Davie Currie Region 2 ONC Rep



Gordon Latimer (l) receives his badge from Davie Currie Region 2 ONC Rep



Paul Johnston (r), Larne Branch, receiving his 25 year badge from Harry Cotter



Sub Officer Torbitt (r), Larne Branch, receiving his 25 year badge from Harry Cotter, NRC chair Northern Ireland



George Ramsey, Eastern Area Safety Dept (l), receives his badge from Jim Barbour



Les Caddoo, Knock Fire Station (l) receives his badge from Jim Barbour



William Swann (r), Larne Branch, receiving his 25 year badge from Harry Cotter

Please send your 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/watch etc; where they are in the picture (e.g.: left to right ...); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.



Gerry Ward (l) receives his badge from Jim Barbour, Executive Council member Northern Ireland (Region 2)



Officer Kenny Leathem (l) receives his badge from Davie Currie, Region 2 ONC Rep



Tony Maguire (l), Regional Sec, receives his badge from Jim Barbour



Trevor Redmond, Brighthouse Fire Station, receives his 25 year badge from Branch Chair David Manning

HAVE YOUR SAY Firefighter magazine welcomes letters from members. Letters should relate to articles in the magazine. Please include full postal address, telephone number and reference to relevant article. We may edit letters. Please send them to: firefighter@fbu.org.uk or Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE

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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.

For further help and advice on union services contact your regional office

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