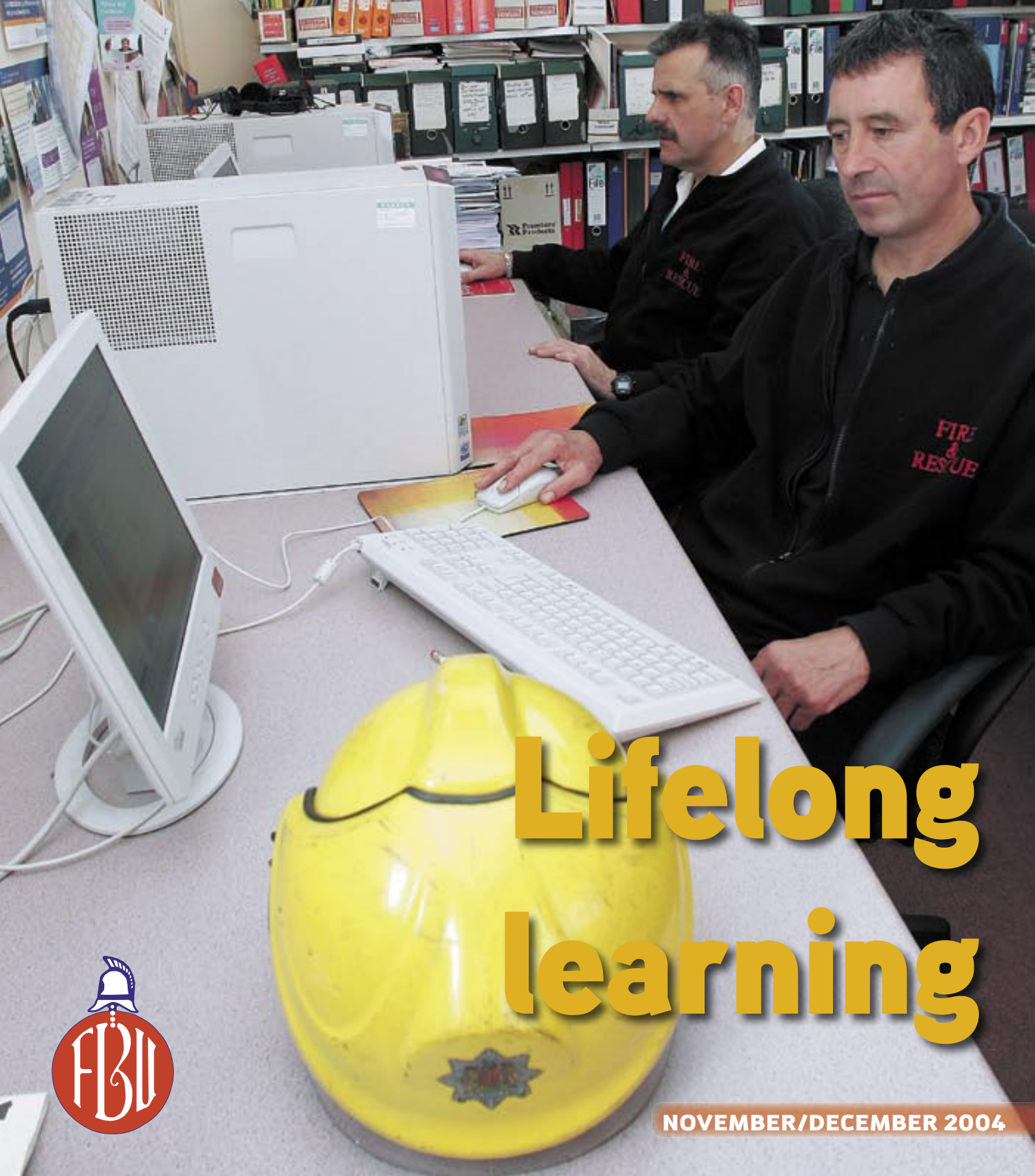


FIRE FIGHTER



Lifelong learning



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2004

Delivering to you

Most of you should have pay rises of at least 16% backdated and in your bank accounts by now. For some of you it will be more. These pay rises were hard fought. Not the 40% we all thought we deserved but compared to most settlements in the public or private sector, a significant increase nevertheless.

The union has also achieved the other three strands of its pay claim – pay parity for retained firefighters, an improvement in the pay relationship between control staff and firefighters and a pay formula that recognises the professional nature of FBU members' jobs.

And if there have been some backward steps, we have also made improvements in conditions of service, enshrined in the new Grey Book, in some important areas.

But most importantly, after an onslaught from the British state not seen since the miners' strike of 1984, your, our union remains strong and united.

Of course, there are tough times ahead.

Far too many fire authorities are seeking to push through cuts under the new integrated risk management plans (IRMPs), and no longer have to go through the Section 19 process to change local fire cover. But let's not kid ourselves about how useful Section 19 was to us, and let's be clear that the response needed remains the same as it always was.

Once again, we have the threat of the regionalisation of control rooms, and, as we have seen in the South West, the Government have hired privateering contractors to do the job.

And building on the June 2003 Pay and Conditions Agreement, we still have the battles to obtain equality for firefighters working the retained duty system, and we have to address the recruitment crisis. Crucial to the success in these campaigns is ensuring we build membership.

We also face the Government's threat to undermine our pensions – the Firemans Pension Scheme and Local Government Pension Scheme. The Executive Council in December will be considering the Government's proposals, submitting our response under the consultation process



The Government's
so-called
modernisation
agenda presents
both a challenge and
and an opportunity,
says Andy Gilchrist

and plotting a way forward to ensure pension justice for all members.

I've heard some say all these changes were brought on by our dispute.

The fact is what we are facing today is part of sweeping changes across the public sector, especially in local government. The fire service was never going to be an island.

The writing was on the wall from the late 1990s, spelled out in detail the Home Office's draft White Paper on the fire service that minister Mike O'Brien shared with the union in 2000.

When we launched the pay dispute, the only question for us was: did we accept the writing on the wall or did we seek a significant pay rise, pay equality for control, pay parity for retained and a new pay formula tied to rises in the pay of professional workers?

That was the basis on which your representatives at the FBU annual conference in May 2002 unanimously backed all the strands – not simply the across-the-board pay rise – on which we campaigned and on which we fought.

No-one spoke against that strategy. No-one voiced an alternative strategy. You all will have your own views – and as they say, history will ultimately be the judge.

But let's remember, we are living in a world where the rest of local government was recently offered a 7% staged pay deal tied to radical change. In a world where civil service workers, after having a below-inflation pay rise imposed on them earlier this year, now face 100,000 job cuts and a range of other attacks on their benefits, including their pensions.

So much for Government's talk of social justice! But we must not forget that now their fight is our fight because many of the issues facing them are also those facing us.

The real challenge and opportunity for the union, as with the national pay campaign, is to turn this modernisation agenda to our advantage, turning around the penny-pinching, private-is-best, cuts agenda and so defend the jobs and conditions of firefighters and emergency fire control staff and the safety of the public.

A whole new world has opened for the union. Bad employers will no longer be able to hide behind the National Standards

If the last two and more years in the Fire and Rescue Service have been dominated by the Union's national pay campaign, more of what we do in the future will be done locally. Under the new Grey Book, brigade officials now need to be involved locally on issues such as duty systems, hours of work and fire cover.

The Union is pressing on with strengthening our capacity to deliver to members directly.

For example, our national IRMP department is working with regional and local officials and reps, training them and providing expertise that is helping the union argue your case with fire authorities and the public.

A whole new world has opened for the union. Bad employers will no longer be able to hide behind the National Standards – the national safety net – that has been abolished. Your union will be holding them to account for their decisions, and if necessary through the courts.

We have no illusions about who we are dealing with. The way many local councillors and Government ministers continue to conduct themselves, following the resolution of the pay dispute, is a disgrace.

But you the members, this union, are more than up to the challenge of defending the UK's best performing public service – and ensuring the safety of the public.




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The union is at the heart of a £1.2 million project to deliver lifelong learning for FBU members and soon, we hope, your families

Toxic exposure 16

A new union initiative aims to end the scandal of firefighters being routinely exposed to poisons



A stand for jobs 14

Mark Serwotka, General Secretary of the Public and Commercial and Services Union explains why his members are striking for jobs and pay – and why we should support them

Control campaign 12

With the cost of the regional control project running out of control the campaign started by the FBU is spreading



Chronicle of a death foretold 8



Firefighter Paul Metcalf died in a bid to save a teenager from drowning. His death exposed the failure of Fire and Rescue authorities to draw up risk assessments properly and competently

IN THE NEWS



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7 Members and their families promoted No2 Fire Deaths at the Respect anti-racism festival



18 Government drops plans to scrap regulations brought in after the Kings Cross fire

FBU BANS 'UNION WITHIN A UNION'

THE union has banned the organisation "Grassroots FBU" after an inquiry found it was contrary to the policies and interests of the union. The move follows a 6-month investigation headed by Assistant General Secretary Mike Fordham after complaints from a number of regions.

In a circular to branches, General Secretary Andy Gilchrist said that no union or any other organisation in the UK would tolerate such an organisation working within it but outside its democratic structures. The organisation, the inquiry found, went way beyond simply being a loose grouping of activists.

The investigation found that Grassroots FBU is an organisation whose supporters have discussed breaking away from the Fire Brigades Union. The inquiry found that Grassroots FBU describes itself as an organisation with its own application form, officers, bank account, treasurer and potential to become an alternative union.

Supporters are asked to complete an application form containing the statement "I have read the draft aims of Grassroots FBU, and broadly agree with those aims. I wish to join the Grassroots FBU, a group

of FBU members and officials who network and meet at open meetings in order to try to realise the Aims of Grassroots".

The organisation has at least two "officers". Andy Dark describes himself as "convenor of meetings of Grassroots FBU". Paul Embery describes himself as "Grassroots FBU treasurer". There are also numerous editors of Grassroots FBU bulletins.

Grassroots has at least one committee and organises structured meetings. It has its own finance, website, e-mail address system and merchandise. The extent of organisation is such that it has been seriously considering whether to establish a new union and seek negotiating rights on the newly formed National Joint Council alongside the FBU.

The inquiry concluded that Grassroots FBU is an unauthorised organisation operating within the FBU and this was contrary to rule. The inquiry concluded there was sufficient evidence of significant involvement in respect of four members:

- Paul Embery (London Region) – Treasurer of Grassroots FBU
- Andy Dark (London Region) – Convenor of Meetings of Grassroots FBU
- Gordon Fielden (London Region)

– Registrant of Grassroots FBU website

● Matt Wrack (London Region) – Recruiting and Organising support for Grassroots FBU

Up to now the union has been blocked from hearing disciplinary proceedings against these four named London members because starting such proceedings does not have the backing of the London Executive Council member, as is required by rule. These proceedings would have considered whether the four had any case to answer and could have resulted in a range of disciplinary action.

A number of rule changes have also been recommended. The full inquiry report can be found at www.fbu.org.uk under "circulars".

Grassroots FBU

For a democratic and fighting union

"I have not yet begun to fight" John Paul Jones (1747-1792)
Bulletin 12 ... No Consensus conference June 2004
FORCE THE EMPLOYERS TO PAY UP!

APPENDIX 5



COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY
CONCERNING COMPLAINTS OF
POTENTIALLY SERIOUS
MISCONDUCT WITHIN THE UNION

THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

11 October 2004

Union backs teachers' schools sprinkler call

THE Union is backing calls from the National Union of Teachers to install sprinklers in new school buildings in a bid to improve the safety of children and firefighters at work. Damage to schools from fires has exceeded £170 million in the last two years.

The FBU has pressed for the installation of sprinklers in schools for many years. FBU General Secretary Andy Gilchrist has written to the Chairs of every Fire Authority in England and Wales asking them to back a legal requirement to install sprinkler

systems in new schools and during refurbishments.

Andy said: "Firefighters see first hand that school fires devastate communities and disrupt education. Sprinkler systems slow down the spread of the fire and will stop an enormous amount of damage. "Some kids think its fun to start fires. What they don't see are the many firefighters injured in the last ten years dealing with the consequences."

£25M FOR SMOKE ALARMS

THE Fire Brigades Union has welcomed the £25 million Government money to fund the fitting of more smoke alarms in poorer areas. President Ruth Winters told Firefighter: "We are glad the Government has listened to us on this issue. Up to now we have had a smoke alarm policy with no money to back it up.

"This will help save lives. People will either have an early warning to escape or give us more time to carry out a rescue."

Putting members first

IN a move to put "members first," the union is introducing a package of measures designed to strengthen local reps ability to deliver on key workplace issues arising from local fire cover and regional controls to pensions and additional responsibility payments.

Under the new Grey Book, brigade officials will need to bargain locally on more issues, some of them new opportunities which did not exist under the old Grey Book. This will mean a big "shift of resources to the front line."

"An increased set of skills, such as bargaining, negotiating, campaigning, lobbying and media and communication skills will be required if officials are going to be able to carry out these new responsibilities to the high standards that members need and deserve," says National Officer John McGhee. Officials are to be asked what they need in terms



of training through a union-wide survey.

Immediate action will then be taken to ensure that the current training programme fits with those needs and adjustments made to plug the gaps. The union will also be introducing better systems to share experience and best practice around the country.

It will include a monthly officials' bulletin which will carry information and updates on local bargaining issues such as shift patterns, leave agreements and overtime agreements, and to which officials will be encouraged to contribute.

"Employers exchange notes on worse practice in order to chip away at our conditions. We must share information and work together to spread best practice. That's how we'll keep ahead of the game," says John.

The union is also working towards ensuring members are given the opportunity to take up non-work-related opportunities to learn.

"Negotiating paid time off for lifelong learning opportunities must become integral to the union's future bargaining agenda and the union centrally will lead a vigorous campaign to win learning opportunities for everyone," says John.

GRIEVANCE AND DISCIPLINE

The union's training programme on the new grievance and discipline procedures that are coming in under the new Grey Book has kicked off.

Three seminars designed for brigade officials are being organised in November and December in Bristol, Glasgow, Manchester, following a successful pilot in September.

"The programme will ensure brigade officials can work effectively under the new grievance and discipline procedures so they can provide a first class service representing and defending members in fire stations and emergency fire control rooms," says National Officer John McGhee.

The new procedures came out of the negotiations that produced a new Grey Book, the national conditions of service scheme for the UK fire and rescue service that was revised as part of the June 2003 Pay and Conditions Agreement.

The new discipline procedures, replacing the discipline regulations which were abolished by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, will commence 1 January 2005 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland they take effect early next year.

Your disability rights

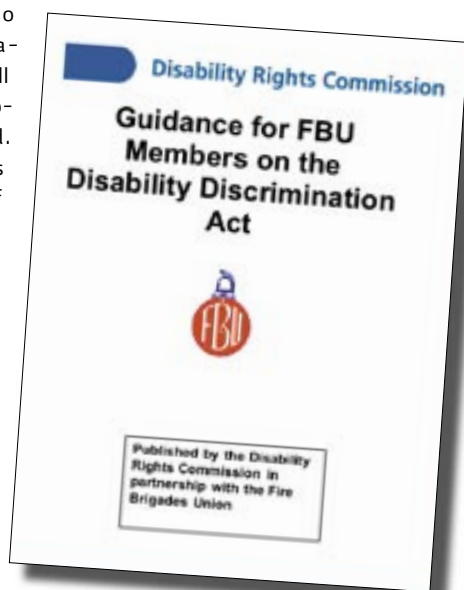
DISABILITY will no longer be a legal bar to becoming a firefighter, following the application of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 to firefighters from 1st October. It means that employers will not be able to discriminate on the grounds of disability: in the recruitment process; in their terms and conditions of employment; in chances for promotion, transfer, training or other benefits; by dismissing them unfairly; by treating them less fairly than other workers; or by subjecting them to harassment or victimisation.

Under the Act, disabled people can range from those who are deaf to those with learning difficulties, dyslexia or epilepsy. Members who develop a disability will have legal protection under the Act for the first time.

Coupled to changes in the Firefighters Pension Scheme that come into effect in September,

a firefighter who becomes permanently disabled will no longer be automatically retired. However, employers must take note of members wishes should they become permanently disabled and wish to retire.

Under the Act, FBU representatives and members should be consulted by employers about what they wish to do, rather than the employer assuming that there is only one course of action. The union has published, in conjunction with the Disability Rights Commission, "Guidance for FBU members On the Disability Discrimination Act", which provides



information and guidance to FBU reps on members' rights under the Act.

■ For more information contact your local rep. The guide will shortly be available on the FBU website, www.fbu.org.uk.



FBU official Simon Jenkins (left) and TUC general secretary Brendan Barber at the FBU stand. Simon briefed visitors on our NO2 Fire Deaths Campaign and managed to shift large quantities of NO2 clothing, collecting some £1,200 pounds in donations for RAFT.

FBU builds influence at the TUC

THE Union has consolidated its position at the TUC, with General Secretary Andy Gilchrist topping the poll in the General Council elections for unions with fewer than 100,000 members. It is the first time the FBU has topped the poll in what is often a volatile election grouping – technically called General Council Group 'C'.

It is these elections which have seen general secretaries from numerous unions "bumped off" the General Council. Infamously – some felt disgracefully – former FBU General Secretary Ken Cameron lost his seat on the General Council in these elections just as he was about to become General Council President.

Andy Gilchrist was appointed to the 26-member TUC Executive Council which meets monthly to develop TUC policy and deal with urgent business. The 52-member General Council, which is still the ruling body, now meets eight times a year.

The vote took place during

this year's TUC Congress where the FBU joined other unions in rallying around demands for Government action on employment rights, public services, pensions and manufacturing. The union also highlighted other ongoing campaigns, including NO2 Fire Deaths, Regional Controls and equal rights for Retained Firefighters.

The FBU obtained the support of other unions for a resolution that called for a "new and greatly improved funding formula for the UK fire and rescue service... urgently needed to ensure that new local risk-assessed management plans are adequately financed to meet the objective of zero fire deaths in the UK; and [to] maintain a network of emergency

fire control centres based in local communities and managed by elected fire authorities."

Speaking in support this resolution, Andy Gilchrist warned of the dangers of integrated risk management plans without a national safety net and ambitious national targets. He also condemned the attacks on emergency fire controls. Calling on the Government to "radically rethink its approach," Andy said: "No life is expendable and no life should be written off. But this is effectively what is being done today." He also slammed the plans to regionalise controls. "Public money will be wasted and it will be a massive financial drain on fire services, threatening frontline services."

ELECTED IN GENERAL COUNCIL SECTION C:

Andy Gilchrist (FBU)	585,000
Judy McKnight (NAP0)	554,000
Jeremy Dear (NUJ)	553,000
Paul Mackney (NATFHE)	552,000
Brian Orrell (NUMAST)	495,000
Jonathan Baume (FDA)	492,000
Brian Caton (POA)	486,000
Bob Crow (RMT)	430,000
Gerry Doherty (TSSA)	428,000
Michael Leahy (Community)	409,000
Ged Nichols (Accord)	382,000

NOT ELECTED

Doug Nicholls (CYWU)	323,000
Joe Marino (BFAWU)	264,000
Ian Lavery (NUM)	220,000
Robert Monks (URTU)	59,000

Employment Rights

UNIONS also demanded better employment rights for all workers. They backed the FBU's call for the repeal of the sections of the Fire Services Act 2003 and those in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 which give the Government powers to impose pay and conditions.

"These draconian powers

remain on the statute books as a threat to free collective bargaining in the public sector and contravene international and European labour standards. These powers, in any country that claims to be democratic, should be removed," National Officer John McGhee told Congress.

US firefighters say thanks

THE US International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) leader Harold Schaitberger, a guest speaker at the TUC praised the FBU. Harold, some of whose 267,000 members were in the frontline in the September 11 terrorist attacks, said he was "eternally grateful" to FBU members who went to work

at Ground Zero to help in the recovery efforts and "for their generous contribution to our relief fund...for the families of the 343 firefighters...my members we lost that day." And he added: "To my brother Andy Gilchrist, and the FBU, thank you again for your help and support in that time of need. We will never forget."

'Stinking hypocrisy' on our pensions

THE Union has condemned a Minister's comments on the Firefighters Pension Scheme (FPS) as "stinking hypocrisy".

Launching a consultation exercise on the scheme, Fire Minister Phil Hope attacked the current scheme saying it was "clearly not fair to expect the taxpayer to continue to fund packages that are so much more generous than those on offer in their own workplace."

Hitting back, General Secretary Andy Gilchrist said: "MPs pay far less in contributions and have a gold-plated copper bottomed scheme."

"His comments are stinking hypocrisy when politicians get a public sector pension after seven years and a full final salary pension after only 20 years."

"Firefighters who have been paying 11% of their pay for over 30 years will be appalled at the

comments. It isn't a generous scheme, you get out what you put in and we put in a lot more than MPs and get less benefits from our scheme."

He said that the FPS is facing problems because Government inaction has allowed employers to spend the contributions FBU members have paid.

"They have been spending our contributions as fast as they have been taking them off us."

"We are not going to sit back and let them pickpocket our pensions because they have spent all the money."

The Government has launched a string of consultations on the FPS and other public sector schemes (an exception is their own).

The Union will be responding in detail to the proposals and backing a TUC-organised public sector pensions lobby of Parliament on 16 November.

Government FPS pension proposals concentrate changes on a new scheme for future entrants to the service with some changes to the existing scheme from 2013. Key proposals are:

- The introduction of a new pension scheme for firefighters available to new entrants joining no later than 1 April 2006
- The new scheme would be "defined benefit" linked either to final salary or final salary combined with earnings in earlier periods, compared to two third's final salary basis with option to turn some of it into lump-sum
- Employees joining the new scheme would have to work 40 years to get the full pension, compared to 30 under the FPS
- Membership of the scheme would be open to firefighters working the wholetime and retained duty system although there is little detail at this stage
- Extension of availability of survivor benefits – to unmarried partners – and improvements to death grant
- Partners get the pension whether or not they (re-)marry
- Cost of new scheme to 'average' firefighter would be between £1,600-£2,000 compared with £2,750 under current arrangements with contributions at around 7-8.5%, the Government claims.
- The "normal" pension age for existing firefighters would rise from 50 to 55 years from April 2006, although those who retire on or before April 2013 aged 50+ with 25 years or more service due would be unaffected
- Ill-health retirement: enhanced pension only for those who are permanently disabled from taking regular employment elsewhere

ANDREW WARD



FBU members and their families spread the message of our NO2 Fire Deaths campaign – and raised a sizable amount of money for the burns charity RAFT – at the anti-racist Respect festival in London's Victoria Park.



On the stall (l to r): Colin Jarrett, Warren Simpson, Ben Gallagher, Pete Gallagher, Billy, Samantha Samuels

Scotland moves to protect firefighters

The FBU and the STUC are working with the Scottish Executive to promote an attitude of zero tolerance of violence and abuse against firefighters and other emergency workers.

FBU official Linda Shanahan has been seconded to the Scottish Executive to work directly on this project.

The move comes as the Scottish Parliament examines the Emergency Workers Bill that would give firefighters similar statutory protection from violence and abuse as the police.

The Bill, which will have its second reading in December, would make it a specific offence

to assault, obstruct or hinder an emergency worker or anyone helping an emergency worker in an emergency situation. The maximum penalty under the Bill would be nine months imprisonment, a fine of £5,000 or both.

The Lord Advocate, the chief law officer of the crown in Scotland with ultimate responsibility for criminal prosecutions, has issued guidance to ensure that the courts deal with assaults on workers effectively: the fact that a worker is assaulted whilst providing a service to the public is treated as an aggravating factor to be taken into account in deciding whether to prosecute.

5 FEBRUARY 1994: A firefighter writes a memo pointing out that water rescues were being carried out without adequate equipment. Requests buoyancy aids. No action taken. This memo was the basis of the prosecution of the authority, it being the date when they must have known a problem existed

29 JANUARY 1997: Memo from a Divisional Commander raises concerns about "Body recovery from water";

11 FEBRUARY 1997: Operational Officers meeting asks for general outline for water rescue to be presented at the next meeting;

28 FEBRUARY 1997: A Divisional Officer sends memo regarding "rescues from water" and suggests buoyancy aids as "a minimum". Also says: "If it is accepted that personnel will attempt rescues from water, then training issue may arise".

28 APRIL 1997: Management memo confirms "activities on or near water" is being considered;

16 MAY 1997: A memo from an ADO lists equipment needed including life preservers, throw line, buoyancy aids, safety line and harness.

JUNE 1997: Equipment costed.

15 SEPTEMBER 1997: A memo from a DO highlights the fact that "firecrews will be called to rescue persons that had either jumped, fallen or in some cases been pushed into" water. Points out the only existing piece of equipment that can be used is a rope tied around personnel which "must raise the issue as to whether a safe system of work exists" and ask for buoyancy aids.

11 NOVEMBER 1997: Operational officers meeting drops trial of equipment until a full water strategy is in place.

19 JANUARY 1998: Meeting starts process for examining and evaluating buoyancy aids.

6 FEBRUARY 1998: Operational Officers meeting hears "waistcoat" style life jacket would be best suited to fire service needs.

APRIL 1998: Project plan commenced (including risk assessments) for water rescues

JUNE 1998: Risk assessment ranked as "moderate" priority because of "low" frequency of water rescues. Development of operational procedure planned to start September 1998.

25 MAY 1999: Memo details water incident involving the rescue of a child.

JULY 1999: Request made for operational procedure for water rescues.

1 SEPTEMBER 1999: Meeting to discuss formation of a water operational policy follows discussions which had taken place in August.

5 SEPTEMBER 1999: Sub-officer Paul Metcalf drowns at Simon's Lodge.

CHRONICLE OF A



BY ALL accounts it was a warm Sunday afternoon on 5 September 1999. Several teenage boys were messing about in the water at Simon's Lodge, a small and isolated lake near Bury, north of Manchester.

But the day was to end in tragedy with 15-year-old schoolboy Reyaz Ali drowned. Despite Reyaz being under the water for at least 30 minutes, and none of the attempted rescuers ever seeing him, firefighters attempted a search and rescue.

They had no training in water rescues, no risk assessment into water incidents had been carried out, no dangers highlighted and the first rescuers on the scene had no proper equipment. Any risk assessment would have warned that hypothermia sets in very quickly and risks the life of the rescuer and that any person under the water for more than 10 minutes will not survive.

Retained sub-officer Paul Metcalf was ordered into the cold waters of the small lake with nothing but a heavy rope tied around his waist thinking he was rescuing a young boy. Any training would have told him that before he took the first steps into the lake Reyaz Ali had been dead for some time and the incident was a body recovery.

Frantic and at times chaotic efforts to locate Reyaz ended with Paul Metcalf succumbing to the cold waters of the Lodge. Two of his fellow firefighters had somehow dragged Paul to the surface on three occasions only to see him disappear under the water each time. Both also got into difficulties in attempts to save him.

The efforts to rescue Paul ended with his body being dragged from the small lake feet first, the rope still entangled around the tree on which it was snagged. Reyaz Ali's body was recovered later.

Five years later the whole tragedy was played out again at Bolton Crown Court. Greater Manchester Fire Authority faced charges of breach of section 2 of the

Above: Simon's Lodge, Hawkshaw near Bury where Paul Metcalf from Ramsbottom drowned in a vain attempt to rescue a teenager who had fallen into the lake



Central to the prosecution was that the fire authority had not carried out a risk assessment in five years. The authority's defence included being too busy to carry out a risk assessment for water incidents

DEATH FORETOLD

Health and Safety at Work Act. But Manchester and other fire authorities have moved on, although it took Paul Metcalf's death to prompt them into faster action.

"Before Paul's death we had no risk assessment, no training and no equipment and it was the same in a lot of other brigades" said FBU Health and Safety rep Alan Anderson. "Within six months of the death we had a water policy, a risk assessment, training, buoyancy aids, floating ropes, throw ropes and inflatable hoses.

"The judge said the equipment cost 'next to nothing' and if we'd had it on 5 September 1999 then Paul Metcalf would not have died. Paul's death has led to every other firefighter in this country being safer in these situations. That is his legacy, it should not be forgotten, but he should not have had to die for that to happen."

Years of investigation turned into the first ever prosecution of a fire authority under health and safety laws and the case was followed closely by fire authorities across the UK. The case ended in acquittal, but Greater Manchester Fire Authority had come close to being the first with a criminal conviction for breach of the Health and Safety at Work Act.

In the prosecution's opening statement Tim Horlock QC, for the Health and Safety Executive, told Bolton Crown Court that Paul Metcalf had displayed the "selflessness and courage you would expect of a firefighter and lost his life as a result of trying to save another". He accused GMC of a "catalogue of failures which had contributed to Paul Metcalf's death."

Mr Horlock said there was "clear and overwhelming evidence" that GMC had failed "over a lengthy period of time" to take "even the simplest of steps to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its workforce" in regard to operations in or near water.

He said it must have been "abundantly clear" that fire service activities included rescues at or near water.



Paul Metcalf: only equipment was a heavy rope tied round his waist

He said it was "inevitable that the first crews to arrive would attempt a rescue."

Despite, he said, knowing for years that such activities were undertaken, GMC "did nothing or next to nothing". He said it was "obvious" that activities near or close to water could result in death or serious injury yet "no, or no adequate steps had been taken".

He told the court there was a lack of training or advice on the dangers of water rescues or operational procedures prior to Paul Metcalf's death. He said fire crews had no access to floating rescue ropes, quick release harnesses or even a knife to cut through a rope if it became entangled.

Central to the prosecution was that the fire authority had not carried out a risk assessment in five years. The authority's defence included being too busy to carry out a risk assessment for water incidents.

They admitted they had carried out no risk assessment and had no policy on water rescues but claimed other fire authorities hadn't done them either and produced evidence to support this. It was custom and practice at the time, said the defence, for fire authorities not to carry out risk assessments for water rescues although this was a legal obligation.

The QC for the Health and Safety Executive told the court in that case other fire authorities were also open to prosecution. Part of the defence was placing the blame elsewhere including, at one point, the Health and Safety Commission and even an attempt to blame the FBU.

A key defence point was that the failures had to be seen in the light of the "environment" in which the fire service worked. That health and safety should either not apply to the fire service or not be applied so rigorously.

Chief Fire Officer Barry Dixon was very forthright in

CONTINUED OVER PAGE

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

the Manchester Evening News the day after the acquittal, saying the prosecution was a waste of public money. He told the MEN: "I don't think the HSE understands the specific problems which are faced by the emergency services of Great Britain.

"They seem to see the fire service as no different from someone that runs the corner shop. Yet we have situations where we have to respond to an emergency at 3am and our young men and women have to make life or death decisions.

"The HSE have to be realigned with the real world. A rule book as the HSE want, or a highly-trained, skilled and experienced firefighter, used to making swift decisions in unpredictable, emergency situations.

"The HSE expect specific and detailed procedures in place for every conceivable emergency. With the ever-increasing threats we face, particularly from terrorism, this is impossible."

The union and Paul Metcalf's family supported the prosecution and took a very different view. Kevin Brown, FBU Greater Manchester Brigade Secretary said: "The fire authority admitted a catalogue of systematic failings but laid the blame elsewhere. The fire authority admitted an appalling approach to health and safety.

"Part of the defence was that for five years the authority was too busy to deal with health and safety issues surrounding water rescues. Health and safety was not given the priority it needed and that contributed to Paul Metcalf's death.

"There was a catalogue of systematic failures over many years. The verdict is that these failings did not add up to a breach of criminal law but it does not free them from the responsibilities which they bear.

"We are seeking an urgent meeting with our fire authority to establish their views of the importance of health and safety. Their defence sent us signals of complacency which are deeply worrying."



A fellow firefighter prepares to carry Paul Metcalf's coffin into Bury parish church, Greater Manchester

THIS story is not just about Greater Manchester Fire Authority and its chief officer Barry Dixon and Paul Metcalf. The haphazard approach to risk assessments and health and safety shown by Manchester was mirrored at the time by fire authorities across the UK.

What happened in this water incident could have been almost any fire authority, any chief officer and any firefighter. It was a death that was waiting to happen somewhere, sometime to someone because health and safety was not a priority.

Firefighters across the country have a debt to pay to Paul Metcalf. But he

should never have needed to lose his life to ensure that others can go about their work at water incidents.

The Health and Safety Executive presented a professional and comprehensive case and they were right to prosecute. Fire authorities think they are above the law and they are not.

Barry Dixon's statement are complacent but not shocking. Many chief fire officers think the same: the fire service is different and health and safety laws should not apply or not apply as rigorously.

Complaints against the Health and Safety Executive are remarkable. The Coroner's jury, for the first time ever had returned an "open" verdict at an inquest into the death of a firefighter. This flagged up a view that the death was not "accidental" and suggests a degree of responsibility lay with the authority.

The Crown Prosecution Service followed with an investigation with a view to bringing criminal charges, but did not proceed. There was also a fire service investigation carried out by Ken Knight, the London Chief Officer although that placed no blame.

Fire authorities are not corner shops. The managers of corner shops don't send people into potentially dangerous situations as a matter of routine.

Greater Manchester Fire Authority, the second largest in the UK, should have the resources and health and safety expertise to have carried out risk assessments. Fire authorities must be far better than corner shops, not be treated as if they have fewer resources.

Yes, highly-trained and experienced firefighters can make quick decisions in fast-moving emergencies as Barry Dixon suggests. But in this case the first crews were not highly trained – they had no training of any kind – no risk assessment and no proper equipment on the pumps.

The views expressed are by no means unusual in the higher reaches of the fire service. But they are wrong. The greater the potential dangers the more important health and safety becomes, it is not of lesser importance.

Risk assessments are also the key to integrated risk management planning. And if they are not carried out properly and competently then the whole process is undermined and fire authorities open themselves up to all sorts of legal action including criminal prosecutions.

It is never acceptable to say that having proper training and equipment in place and operating procedures in place to deal with what we have to face is "impossible". It is a legal obligation.

There is no question there was a case to answer. No question the HSE should have taken the prosecution.

We are not expendable and fire authorities are not above the law. The quicker they all learn that the better.

Andy Gilchrist, General Secretary

YOUR RIGHTS AT WORK



Each year, the FBU handles thousands of work problems on behalf of members. Here are just two issues that cropped up.

What should I do if I am bullied, harassed or intimidated at work and don't feel I can complain?

If you are being bullied or harassed the only way of resolving the issue is by raising it. By doing nothing, the problem is unlikely to go away.

As a first step, you should use the informal approach. Talk to an FBU representative or one of the FBU's sectional representatives, who may have a better understanding of the issue and how to deal with it. Discuss the options with them.

Alternatively ring the FBU's Confidential Stress and Support Freephone Line – 0800 783 4778.

The FBU rep/sectional rep can advise you how to deal with the issue, including whether there is a bullying or harassment policy in place in the Brigade which might set out a procedure to follow when making a complaint of bullying or harassment. Such a policy may be found in the standing operating procedure, brigade or routine order.

Keep a diary, recording dates and times of incidents when you feel you are being harassed, and an outline of what happened. Note down the names of any witnesses and keep copies of any relevant written material.

Then, the best way forward is to inform your employers so that they can assist in resolving the situation. At the end of the day, if one of their employees is behaving in a bullying way this is their problem not yours. The FBU rep can assist you with raising the issue with your line manager, or if they are the person who is bullying you then with their manager.

Remember that if you contact a representative of the FBU first, it will be treated with confidentiality.

If you feel that you cannot raise the matter yourself with anyone, then the FBU can deal with the matter on your behalf. Either way, if either you or your FBU rep do not raise it with management then it is likely that nothing will change.

There are no specific legal rights that outlaw bullying or harassment (except on discrimination grounds eg sex, race, disability etc), so the only way of resolving the problem is by discussion with management.

My colleague has been diagnosed with the asbestos-related condition pleural plaques. He has been told that the condition is a direct result of exposure to asbestos at work. How are firefighters exposed to asbestos?

TRAGICALLY the FBU is seeing a number of cases of asbestos-related disease among members and retired members. Not all of these are killers, but they can take decades to develop. That means that while asbestos is now a banned material, those exposed to it in the past may not yet show signs of illness.

That is not to say that everyone exposed to asbestos, even in large quantities, will become ill.

Asbestos-related diseases range from pleural plaques. These are calcified areas of tissue and normally symptomless, though they can often cause a shortness of breath, to mesothelioma, the asbestos cancer which is always fatal.

There are a number of ways in which firefighters have been exposed to asbestos. The most common is at fire scene locations where asbestos was used in the structure of the building.

Although asbestos is fire resistant the bonding agents holding the asbestos fibres together is often destroyed in the intense heat, resulting in significant amounts of asbestos dust being released into the atmosphere. Making these buildings safe would see firefighters sweeping and shovelling the dust – something for which breathing apparatus was not always used.

Asbestos was also used in fire blankets, pipe lagging and, ironically, in the very equipment provided to firefighters to protect them, such as anti-flash hoods and asbestos gloves.

As with all occupational diseases it is necessary to establish that an asbestos-related condition has been caused by the sufferer's work and is due to fault by the employer. There are also strict time limits for starting legal proceedings.

If any FBU member has been diagnosed with an asbestos-related illness they should call the FBU Freephone Legal Helpline on 0808 100 6061 or use the online form available on the FBU website (www.fbu.org.uk).

With the cost of the regional control project running out of control the campaign started by the FBU is spreading

SCOTLAND has joined what has now become a growing and open revolt against Government plans to close down every emergency fire service control room outside of Northern Ireland and London and replace them with as few as 10 remote regional centres. The south west of England also has formidable opposition and there is strengthening opposition in the south east and east of England.

A political storm has broken in Scotland with news that central Government is planning to override the wishes of the Parliament and impose three controls and possibly a single control for the whole of Scotland. Chief Inspector for the Fire Service in Scotland, Jeff Ord has said the decision to reduce the number of emergency fire control rooms in Scotland is likely to be made by Westminster before Christmas.

During a routine visit to Tayside Fire Brigade yesterday on 2 November he told fire service personnel that Kathy Jamieson, Minister for Justice is "likely to avoid having to make the very unpopular decision to recommend to the Scottish Parliament a reduction in the number of control rooms". The matter will be referred to Westminster on "National Resilience" grounds which is outside the powers of the Scottish Parliament.

Such a controversial move, – fire policy is now a matter for the Scottish Parliament – means Scots politicians would be by-passed and would not have a say in the future of fire control rooms in Scotland.

Recently Scottish local authorities, fire service

pressure from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to toe the Whitehall line. The Welsh Assembly is having its arm twisted behind the scenes to accept one control room for Wales.

The ODPM has threatened to withdraw £10 million of central funding if they do not carry out the central dictat. To date such moves have been strongly resisted.

The ODPM has also been unable to convince local councillors in England that the move will improve the service or save money. Although claims are made about savings no details have ever been given or been subject to any independent scrutiny.

Many are suspicious that, like almost every other Government project involving technology, the original budget is little more than spreadsheet fantasy. The real costs spiral out of control with Government locked into the original decision based on false figures.

News of local disquiet on a number of issues started to break in the summer with a leaked letter relating to the South East control exchanged between chief fire officers. The letter exposed what it calls "significant flaws" in the



Control revolt spreads

employers and the Fire Brigades Union made clear they want to see the 8 Emergency Fire Control Rooms in Scotland to remain. Mr Ord has said that Cathy Jamieson is now under "severe political pressure to get the decision made" to by-pass the Parliament and have a decision taken in Whitehall.

Such a move would undermine the Justice Committee of the Scottish Parliament currently taking evidence on the issue, Scotland's own Fire Services Bill process, the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament. It may well spark a constitutional crisis in the run in to a general election.

Ken Ross, FBU Scottish Secretary said "Mr Ord's comments are extremely alarming. If what he says is true, then it makes a mockery of the consultation and Parliamentary processes in Scotland. It indicates clearly that Scottish Ministers are merely dancing to the tune of Westminster, and not listening to the fire service professionals and the people of Scotland"

"We want the Minister for Justice to give the people of Scotland a cast iron assurance that any decision will be made by the elected representatives in the Scottish Parliament."

But the controversial move is entirely in line with what is happening elsewhere in the UK with enormous

regional control plans.

The letter from East Sussex Chief Fire Officer Desmond Pritchard to West Sussex Chief Fire Officer M Burrell dated 7 June showed growing disquiet among fire and rescue service professionals and local councillors.

In it Desmond Pritchard says the regional control plans:

"Potentially brings into conflict the ability for a Fire Authority to manage its own resources and deliver its own Integrated Risk Management Plan....to allow the current proposals to go forward will undermine and inhibit the ability of an individual Fire Authority to separately manage its own resources...."

"I believe we are allowing civil servants and other stakeholders, including I must say some Fire and Rescue Service professionals, to take us down a path which is politically unacceptable to politicians in the South East...."

The letter warns the project "will lead to a loss of local accountability, democracy and responsibility for delivering their Fire and Rescue Service and improving local community well-being." South East councillors are now in public revolt over the plans.

But it was the South West of England where the flaws

The real costs of remote regional centres will drain fire authority finances for years

were spotted earlier and public opposition appeared much earlier, thanks to a strong campaign started by FBU members to highlight the issue. South West authorities were stunned when the ODPM recently announced that all public sector bids to design and build the regional control had been turned down. Only three private sector bids – each involving a range of companies – are in the running and no one outside the ODPM knows who they are.

The campaign in the South West is being spearheaded by the FBU's John Drake who is also playing a key role in the national campaign team opposing the moves. He told Firefighter: "The public in the south west are being used as guinea pigs but there is very strong local opposition. The private sector involvement lets the Government to hide behind commercial confidentiality and not give details of the true costs.

"The real costs of these remote regional centres are being concealed from the public and councillors. They will be a drain fire authority finances for years to come.

"It'll be a worse service and it will cost more. Scrapping efficient fire control centres will rip the heart out of local fire brigades.

"This will be a major issue in the run in to the General Election. We will target Labour MPs in south west seats and pressure them to back local interests and not Whitehall interests."

There is growing political pressure with the Lib Dems and Tories joining the campaign to oppose the moves. The Lib Dem's Jeremy Hilton, Gloucestershire County Council's cabinet member for the Fire and Rescue service said Nick Raynsford's savings claims are a figment of his imagination.

"Time and time again I have asked the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to prove that there will be cost savings on moving over to a regional control centre and each time I am told that the finance group are still looking into it. How on earth can Mr Raynsford make such a statement when he cannot back it up with any evidence?"

And like everyone else who has asked for costs details Mr Hilton has hit a brick wall. "I have asked to see their business plan for this region but I am told it is commercially sensitive and therefore confidential" he said.

The Regional Management Board in the south west is considering calling for a review of the financial case for change. FBU President Ruth Winters said: "They have no financial case for change. The figures they have rigged in private to show savings – the foundation of the plans – will not stand up to independent public scrutiny.

"The business case which is meant to underpin the plan is a basket case and everyone knows it. We will be left with regional white elephants draining fire service budgets for years to come."

The national campaign team is drawing up fresh plans to oppose the moves. You can do your bit by using the campaign website: www.controlcare.co.uk and using the materials to lobby your MP, councillors and fire authorities.

■ The updated campaign document Out of Control is also available on the control campaign website and the main FBU website: www.fbu.org.uk

OUT OF CONTROL

THE union has produced a hard hitting report – Out of Control – in response to the Government moves in which it comprehensively demolishes the case for regional fire control rooms. It also attacks Government secrecy in seeking private sector bids to build the control rooms which will not be open to local scrutiny or be assessed by local fire service experts.

It warns that local council taxpayers will be lumbered with picking up the tab for the on-going costs of regional control rooms for years to come. The Government has consistently over-estimated savings and under-estimated costs based on a makeshift business case on poor quality – and sometimes wrong – information.

THE REPORT WARNS:

- no proper and rigorous costings were done in advance of the decision being made;
- the current business case rests on inadequate information which exaggerates savings and under-estimates costs to create a false picture;
- the assessment of the work done in control rooms is based on only a fraction of the work which is actually carried out, inflating savings from job losses;
- the Government case rests on only counting the number of incidents rather than the number of actual 999 calls which are significantly higher;
- fewer and bigger controls make them an easier targets for terrorist attacks including cyber-terrorism and viruses;
- relying on technology is dangerous as recent catastrophic failures in the national coastguard and air traffic control computers clearly demonstrate;
- there will be a loss of local knowledge including details of local fire and rescue plans, local dialects, place names and the specialist technical skills of individuals fire officers;
- the entire project is driven by national government riding roughshod over local wishes;
- the number and variety of controls builds in strength and resilience which will be lost with fewer and bigger controls;
- neither the police with 99 controls nor ambulance with 44 controls are making such moves because they know they are wrong.

Val Salmon, Executive Council member for control staff said: "The Government make claims for savings where none are proven. Costs are underestimated to create a false picture.

"The Government claim regional controls will be better when they will be worse. They claim they will be more resilient to terrorist attack when the opposite is true.

"Emergency fire control rooms are cost-effective, and those who work in them save lives and are highly professional. This is an exercise in the centrally dictated destruction of a system which has been proven to work time and time again."



Mark Serwotka,
General Secretary
of the Public and
Commercial and

Services Union, says if you
want decent public services,
then you need the people to
deliver them – not cuts of more
than 100,000 public servants

THE Government recently announced 104,000 job cuts in the civil and public service – cuts on a scale not seen since the attack on the miners.

The main political parties have been engaging in the obscene sport of who can cut the most, oblivious to the disastrous impact such cuts will have, somebody has to stand up and defend public services.

A misguided notion has been promoted that civil servants are bowler-hatted bureaucrats with nothing better to do other than to push pens all day.

The truth is we are talking about thousands of hard-working people who deliver vital public services that touch us all from cradle to the grave.

The truth is if you want decent public services then you need the people to deliver them.

The course on which the government are embarking will damage the very services they have sought to improve, impacting on some of Gordon Brown's very own initiatives such as Sure Start, the New Deal and Tax Credits, initiatives aimed at helping some of the most vulnerable in society.

Civil servants all work as a team on the front and back line delivering initiatives such as Sure Start and delivering the things we take for granted, such as your driving licence or child benefit, and protecting our shores against the influx of drugs.

So for the government to think it can cut a fifth of the civil service arguing that it won't have a detrimental affect on services because it will be the back room staff who get chopped is both insulting and naive.

As was the manner in which they were announced – the first tranche out of the blue in the Budget with the grand total announced in a rather self-congratulatory tone by Gordon Brown in his Spending Review.

It is therefore unsurprising that PCS members are angry. Angry at being left in limbo with still no real detail

PAUL MATTSON/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Why we're taking

These are
real people
delivering
real
services to
real people
affecting
our
everyday
lives

of where the axe will fall, fearful for their futures and unable to plan. Angry at being dismissed as just a bunch of faceless bureaucrats and angry at the damage such cuts will inflict on the very services they take pride in delivering.

These are real people delivering real services to real people affecting our everyday lives. So you are left scratching your head when the government employs the rob Peter to pay Paul argument as a basis to slash jobs, saying it will mean more for areas such as health, education and crime.

You are left wondering about what value key parts of the public service such as pension credit and winter fuel payments are held in. The government are essentially creating a false divide and saying one part of the public sector is more important than another. The result – poorer services delivered further away from the very people they are meant to serve.

Which is why as a union we are taking a stand. A stand that says if you want decent accessible public services you need civil servants to deliver them. A stand which says that are no false divides in public service delivery and the work that civil and public servants do across the country is integral to every section of our society's lives.

It is a stand in which we as a trade union movement and as members of society need to stand shoulder to shoulder, saying no to the cuts.



Mark Serwotka (centre) with PCS members in the Department of Work and Pensions at Stratford social security offices, East London, taking part in a national two-day pay strike this summer. In January PCS members had voted strongly in favour of industrial action in five government departments as a result of the imposition of pay settlements that were below the level of inflation. Low pay is endemic in the civil service, where 25% of civil servants earn less than £13,750, and 41% earn less than £15,700. Tens of thousands of PCS members took industrial action in January and February. Now, faced with job cuts of up to 100,000, they have been forced to go out on strike again.

**We as
a trade
union
movement
and as
members
of society
need to
stand
shoulder
to shoulder,
saying no
to the cuts**

a stand for our jobs



Firefighters and other public sector workers stand shoulder-to-shoulder with civil servants

Management neglect means members across the UK are being routinely exposed to poisons. A new union initiative aims to end this scandal.

YOUR eyes are streaming, your lungs irritated, you are coughing and your personal protective equipment (PPE) is turning black. "Damping down" after a fire without Breathing Apparatus (BA) is common practice. But just because smoke has 'cleared', is it really safe for Firefighters to knock off their BA? The answer is that most Firefighters simply don't know.

After all, burning embers are still 'gassing off' unknown products of combustion. And no thorough risk assessments are being made of the current working environment.

A recent suggestion is that employers may use genetic testing of a workforce for resistance to chemical sensitivity. Yet it is chemical and heavy metal exposures during operational duties that may bring about genetic changes or trigger genes to behave abnormally. This in turn can and does make Firefighters ill.

Firefighters work in questionable untested atmospheres every day. We fight barn fires. We deal with chemical incidents. And who knows what type of incident the new roles being assigned to Firefighters under New Dimensions will expose FBU members to.

We attend incidents, but we do not make continued use of our BA throughout. And while our PPE might be good enough, it is not used to its full advantage.

Yet it is perfectly possible that accumulative or indeed a single exposure at a whole variety of incidents may trigger worsening sensitivities to atmospheres previously well tolerated.

Firefighters are continually contaminated by a toxic cocktail of chemicals and heavy metals. Exposure to dangerous man-made substances leave us carrying in our bodies chemicals and heavy metals such as mercury, lead and cadmium, plastics, polychlorinated biphenols (or PCBs, which used to insulate electrical transformers) and their combustion products.

Studies link exposure to chemicals and heavy metals to cancer, infertility, immune system disorders and neurological problems.

A 1989 US study of 14 Firefighters by Kaye Kilbun of the University of Southern California School of Medicine, examined their exposure to PCBs. It found significant impairment of memory, cognitive function and perceptual motor speed compared to unexposed Firefighters from the same department.

Two to three months after the fire, all 14 of those exposed noted symptoms such as extreme fatigue, headaches, muscle weakness, joint aches, memory loss and impaired concentration. The UK should not ignore the US findings.



TOXIC

SMOKING ANALOGY

The British medical profession has finally turned its attention to smoking and won the argument that both passive and active smoking are detrimental to health, but it has been slow to pay similar attention to other areas of chemical exposure. The fact is at incidents there is 'passive smoking' of toxic fumes and chemicals, which Firefighters inhale, ingest and absorb through their lungs and their skin.

In both cases there are powerful vested interests at stake. Just like the tobacco giants who denied the fact that smoking was a health hazard – long after they knew the truth – multinational chemical and petrochemical corporations will strongly deny any link between low

A 1989 US study on 14 Firefighters examined their exposure to PCBs. It found significant impairment of memory, cognitive function and perceptual motor speed



cause of ill health followed five stages of recognition and may be reproduced in the battle to end the routine toxic exposure of Firefighters:

- 1) You are mad.
- 2) You are scaremongering
- 3) I suppose there might be something in it.
- 4) There could be something in it but where is the proof?
- 5) Well of course, we knew all along.

FBU members may experience the onset of ill-health after high, prolonged or repeated exposures to chemical and heavy metals. But subsequently symptoms such as headaches, depression, fatigue, infertility and arthritic conditions, can be provoked by exposure to very low concentrations.

In the same cynical manner that conditions such as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Gulf War Syndrome and so-called psychiatric conditions have been constantly sniped at as having a purely psychological basis, we will no doubt hear that the illnesses Firefighters suffer from are unrelated to the real cause.

Yet ill health caused by toxic exposures is one of the greatest crimes against humanity still left unchecked. And in the UK Fire and Rescue Service it is management's failure to implement proper risk assessment processes that lie at the heart of the problem.

This scandal will only grow with New Dimensions, where Firefighters face exposure to new contaminants that will remain unidentified until after an incident has occurred. What is clear is that there is an urgent need for investigating the effects of chemical and heavy metal toxicity in Firefighters.

So what are we doing about it? The Union is sponsoring the testing of 15 Firefighters at London's respected Biolab Medical Unit, which specialises in Environmental

EXPOSURE

dose exposures to chemicals and ill-health for fear that it will dent their profits.

Asbestos is a work-related example. Years of denials and lies led to the long-term exposure of millions of people at their work (in the UK alone).

The result is that more people are now dying from asbestos related diseases than die on the roads. The Department of Health estimates that by 2020 there will be around 10,000 deaths a year directly linked to asbestos exposure, almost all of that exposure work-related.

Yet the way to deal with chronic and recurrent health issues is to recognise and deal with the cause. The model for cigarette smoking – and indeed asbestos – as a major

Medicine. The test results will form the basis of a report that will be presented to our next Annual Conference.

Most importantly, the findings should act as a tool for Brigade Officials to demand that management sit up and listen.

It is a scandal that in the 21st Century in one of the richest countries on the planet, essential public service workers are being exposed to poisons every day. This initiative should allow us to bring it to an end.

■ **Pete Goulden is Regional Health & Safety Rep for Region 7. Pete was Staffordshire Brigade Health and Safety Rep at the time of the 1999 fire at the Royal Ordnance Specialty Metals factory at Featherstone, Wolverhampton, that left 200 Firefighters at risk from exposure to depleted uranium.**

London proposed cuts slammed

THE Union has slammed plans by London Fire Brigade to make cuts to fire cover in central London.

General Secretary Andy Gilchrist said the proposals are a "step backwards", highlighting the failure of fire authorities to take into account the terrorist threat in their local Integrated Risk Management Plans.

Andy told the London Evening Standard that the "Government and the intelligence services tell us the terrorist threat to this country is current and real...Our key concern is that fire authorities, like London, are not properly building this new terrorist threat into their local safety plans. Instead, the basis of Ken Knight's plan is to reverse previous cuts in the fire service in the suburbs by stripping away personnel and equipment in central London."

"If there is an identified need for more resources to deal with fire risk in the suburbs, then that must be addressed – but not by stripping resources away from central London which has a clear fire risk and a clear terrorist risk.

"London has more firefighters to staff the new equipment to deal with terrorist incidents; but the response to any incident would be from the entire brigade, not simply those personnel crewing the new equipment."

Andy pointed out that any major incident will result in "gridlock" and firefighters and appliances will not be able to be moved like "chess pieces" from the suburbs to central London.

"We are better prepared than we were. But we are not as best prepared as we could be and this latest plan is a step backwards when we should be moving forwards."



Firefighters get ready to tackle the 1987 fire at London's King's Cross Underground station which killed 31 people

GOVERNMENT IN UNDERGROUND FIRE SAFETY U-TURN

The Government has dropped plans to scrap sub-surface station fire-safety regulations brought in as a direct result of the 1987 Kings Cross fire.

"Tube and rail workers and passengers alike will be enormously relieved that the government has accepted the need to keep these regulations in place," said Bob Crow, general secretary of RMT union, which worked with Aslef and the FBU to oppose the plans. "We argued that scrapping minimum standards, allowing management to conduct their own risk assessments and effectively leaving fire precautions to their discretion would be a recipe for cost-driven corner-cutting. It would have led to a weakening of fire precautions, fewer station staff and more risk to our members and the public."

OBITUARY

Joe 'Jock' Hall

IT was with profound sadness that we learned of the death of our friend and esteemed former Regional Chair, Joe Hall.

Joe Hall, originally from Scotland, served during wartime with the Royal Air Force. Like many servicemen who found themselves in Northern Ireland, Joe met his wife Ella and entered into lifelong partnership. They remained devoted to one and other for the rest of their lives.

Joe Hall settled in Northern Ireland and joined the Belfast Fire Brigade in 1947. In the best traditions of the Brigade, he was given a suitable nickname, and forever after was known to his firefighting comrades as Jock.

The post war years in Northern Ireland were difficult for trade unionists in general and for firefighters in particular. Working on the 72hour week duty system at Albert Bridge Rd Fire Station, Jock Hall railed against the Dickensian work practices and conditions.

His abilities and talents ensured his rapid progres-

sion to Regional Chair where played a central role with the FBU Executive in Region 2, seizing the opportunity of local government reform at that time to organise and establish the FBU firmly in the consciousness of the Belfast Corporation employers.

Jock Hall and his comrades were responsible for bringing a new insight and approach to the industrial relations of the time. He would have been much too modest to accept his share of the credit for establishing this union in Northern Ireland and would have preferred that recognition went to his contemporaries and colleagues. However Jock Hall's essential contribution cannot be overlooked.

Amongst Jock's many attributes were his maturity, wisdom and dependability. It has been said many times that Jock Hall possessed an uncanny ability for accurately weighing up a person's character.

Such instinct and strength ensured that Jock was highly successful at recruiting new members.

Joe 'Jock' Hall is survived by his loving children Pauline, Heather and Stephen.

His legacy remains with FBU members and activists in Northern Ireland to this day.

Don't attack firefighters, union urges youngsters

THE union has issued a plea to youngsters to stop attacking firefighters, a problem that tends to peak around November 5 – or October 31 in the case of Northern Ireland.

The union will be talking to Government and fire authorities to make sure attacks on firefighters by members of the public become part of firework safety campaigns in the future.

The FBU has long campaigned to raise awareness in communities of the dangers of fireworks and bonfires.

Now it has identified another major problem: the rise in attacks in the run up to November 5 has been highlighted at the early stages of an FBU research project looking at the rising number of attacks on firefighters.

Youngsters who start their own bonfires are attacking firefighters responding to 999 calls to put them out.

The union said: "Youngsters think we're killjoys when we turn up to put out unofficial bonfires. They attack us because they think we are spoiling their fun. We get bricks, stones and bottles thrown at us. Fireworks, like



PAPPHOTOS.COM

rockets, have been used to attack us.

"Youngsters throw gas canisters onto bonfires without realising that can be deadly. This has to stop before it gets completely out of control and a youngster or a firefighter is killed."

The union also reminded youngsters not to start bonfires without proper supervision and permission, because they are "unaware of the dangers they running for themselves, their friends and their communities."

The union issued a plea to youngsters that "they don't play with fire and don't attack firefighters who are there to help you and your families. Don't make our job any more dangerous than it already is or your communities any less safe."

And it added for parents: "Tell your kids of the dangers of unofficial bonfires. Tell them we are guardians of public safety and not killjoys putting their bonfires out."

NOVEMBER

FIREFIGHTERS in Gwent were attacked with fireworks while dealing with an emergency call. A service spokesman said crews will be forced to withdraw from non-life threatening incidents in the future if attacks continue.

A group of youths fired fireworks at firefighters tackling a vehicle fire in Pontypool. The crews had to withdraw while they waited for police. Two weeks earlier a fire crew was pelted with stones answering a minor call in Pontnewynydd.

Firefighter Craig Russell said: "We were called to a van fire in Trevethin and about three or four youths starting verbally abusing us. We carried on trying to put the fire out but about six more youths appeared and started lobbing fireworks at us.

"I rang control and asked for them to ring the police but it got to the point where we couldn't put the van fire out because it was too dangerous. Even when we were pulling off, a few bangers were thrown on top of the fire engine."

Community fire safety liaison officer Bruce Kilshaw said: "These people are using fireworks as lethal weapons – and they are firing them at our crews." He said all non-life threatening incidents would be risk assessed, with the result that officers who came under attack while dealing with routine calls would in future withdraw if necessary.

www.thisisgwent.co.uk (3 November 2004)

...AND OCTOBER

A fire crew in Northern Ireland was attacked with fireworks near the border with the Irish Republic.

This was one of a series of attacks on firefighters across Northern Ireland as crowds lit bonfires and set off fireworks to celebrate Halloween on Sunday October 31 this year.

A rocket was fired at an engine in Jonesborough, South Armagh. In Belfast, a fire engine from Cadogan station on the Lisburn Road was off the road for a number of hours for repairs after a window was broken.

Over six hours, firefighters responded to 370 calls.

Divisional Fire Officer John Smyth said most calls were to bonfires and other mostly secondary fires. "There were several incidents where crews were attacked, which is a cause for major concern. We had been working with local communities to try and reduce the number of secondary fires and arson attacks as well as attacks on our crews.

"It is of major concern to us that our appliances are still being attacked when they arrive to tackle fires. It was just luck that no-one was injured. He said people must realise these attacks not only put firefighters at risk, but they put the public at risk.

"If a fire appliance is forced off the road, that could be critical on a busy night like last night."

www.bbc.co.uk (1 November 2004)

Want to get on? The union is at the heart of a £1.2 million project to deliver lifelong learning for you (and looking to extend it to your family as well)

GONE are the days when Firefighters' training could all be done with a ladder and hose in the Station yard. And gone are the days when education ended when you left full-time education, most of us as teenagers.

Nowadays, most jobs in the fire service – not only those in Administration and the Control Rooms – involve computer work. A new system of training and development is being introduced based on national standards and a skills framework. Called the Integrated Personal Development Scheme, it includes literacy, numeracy and Information Communications Technology (ICT) skills targets.

naire, the learning reps arranged a series of promotional visits to every Watch at every station to raise awareness about the centre. This helped produce a much better response to a second questionnaire.

The only trouble was that the union wasn't fully prepared for the overwhelming demand among its members. Nor the volume of support the new learners would need once they were enrolled on their LearnDirect courses.

"At the beginning we signed on as many people as we could, but we had to step back after six months as we couldn't support the learners," explains project director John Arnold.

LIFELONG LEARNING

"The old-fashioned view of training was walking into the drill yard, putting up a ladder and running out hose and wearing breathing apparatus," explains Adrian Slassor, Union Learning Representative at Morpeth in Northumberland.

"Most managers recognise that nowadays you might need to work a computer, so if the manager feels that learning about using a computer is necessary, then it's included in the employee's learning plan."

The problem was finding the money to cover the costs of staff training and development – until the Northumberland FBU invited local managers to join a partnership bid to the Government's Union Learning Fund project. The project went national in April of this year and there is no shortage of takers.

Northumberland FBU are proud of the fact they helped get the ball rolling. "We approached Brian Hessler, then Deputy Chief Fire Officer, about the Union Learning Fund money available if the Brigade joined a partnership with the Union. He took a momentous leap of faith and said he would support us 100 per cent," Adrian recalls.

The union's initial idea was to put together a project to train a team of Union Learning Reps who could organise Skills for Life and ICT training, signpost colleagues to learning in general, and negotiate time off for study. But TUC Learning Services development worker Barney McGill suggested the bid should be more ambitious, and include opening a learning centre onsite at the Morpeth Fire Station.

Management supplied the premises, connectivity, maintenance and renewal of the computers, while the ULF money covered a project worker and six computers (further bids have funded a project manager, learning support worker and part-funded an ICT tutor).

After a poor response to their first learning question-



"We were hitting the financial targets but not the support ones, so we stopped signing anyone up for six weeks and trained the ULRs on how to support the members. If it wasn't for the help of TUC Learning Services we would have struggled with that."

They've comprehensively turned the situation around since those difficult early days though. "This centre is providing outstanding opportunities for union members which will also benefit the organisation," says FBU National Officer John McGhee who has responsibility for education.

Morpeth is Matrix-accredited – a national quality standard award for learning centres – for offering learners high quality information, advice and guidance. It is also an accredited European Computer Driving Licence testing centre – useful since the County Council actively encourages all its staff to obtain the qualification.

The centre also offers some Skills for Life support in literacy and numeracy to assist people on the learning ladder, is active in the business and management portfolio and is looking to offer language courses, too.

Today most jobs in the Fire and Rescue Service involve computer work



THE LEARNER:

● Susan Stone, who works in Northumberland Fire Control, said: "I am thrilled to have gained the ECDL qualification and without any doubt would not have achieved it without the help of the FBU learning centre."

THE PROJECT WORKER:

● Claire Wealleans, Project Worker in the North-East FBU Learning Centre said: "I really enjoy working with the FBU and Fire Service staff in the learning centre and helping them gain qualifications they may otherwise not have achieved."

THE UNION LEARNING REP:

● Scott McCabe, FBU Learning Rep in Fife said: "The five day ULRs course was really interesting and the member's reaction back on Station has been very supportive. As well as helping staff access ICT I have been involved in producing a basic skills DATCD, sensory awareness courses and Spanish course that was delivered in Kirkcaldy Fire Station."

THE FBU ULF NATIONAL PROJECT MANAGER

● Trevor Shanahan, FBU ULF National Project Manager said: "Over the last seven years ULRs have been making a difference in workplaces throughout the country. Over 35,000 workers have been helped to gain qualifications they probably thought were out of their reach. Now is the time for the FBU to take up the Lifelong Learning agenda and working in partnership help our members attain similar achievements."

THE FBU NATIONAL OFFICER

● John McGhee said of the Union Learning Fund project "The Union Learning Fund project will help many of our members back in to Lifelong Learning and also give them support as IPDS and S/NVQs are rolled out in the Fire Service. It is another benefit and reason to be in the FBU and I am sure our members will reap the rewards in and out of the workplace."

The union encourages members who have not previously been active in the union to become learning representatives, to make sure they don't have too many competing demands on their time.

Many ULRs have supervisory roles such as Watch Managers, which means they understand management as well as union perspectives. One of the lead ULRs, John Arnold, is employed on the Integrated Personal Development Scheme – a real bonus.

All the ULRs and centre staff provide information and advice to learners, some provide online tutoring, some enrol learners and John also chairs the FBU regional project management board in the north-east and is helping promote good practice.

The ULRs also enjoy a

**The Morpeth learning centre
is providing outstanding
opportunities for union
members**

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT YOUR REGIONAL ULF CO-ORDINATOR

Members in England who wish to take advantage of the Union Learning Fund should contact the following regional learning co-ordinators:

Region 3 – Pamela Walton (FBU learning centre manager) ULF03@fbu.org.uk

Region 4 – Mike Kirby ULF04@fbu.org.uk

Region 5 – Ian Foulkes at ULF05@fbu.org.uk

Region 6 – Andy Bricksles at ULF06@fbu.org.uk

Region 7 – Maxine Laugher at ULF07@fbu.org.uk

Region 9 – Graham Tranquada at ULF09@fbu.org.uk

Region 11 – Bob Fitz-Gerald at ULF11@fbu.org.uk

Region 12 – Harry Williams at ULF12@fbu.org.uk

Region 13 – Bill Hendy at ULF13@fbu.org.uk

Region 10 is currently in the process of advertising the post of regional learning co-ordinator, but members from London region can email this address: ULF10@fbu.org.uk or Trevor Shanahan at 01reo@fbu.org.uk

Members in Scotland (Region 1) should contact Kenny Munro at ULF01@fbu.org.uk. FBU Northern Ireland (Region 2) and Wales (Region 8) are currently bidding for ULFs. For information members in these regions should contact Steve Boyd at 02rt@fbu.org.uk and Nigel Williamson at nigel.williamson@fbu.org.uk, respectively.

If you do not have access to e-mail you can contact your regional office (ideally in writing or their phone lines will jam up) for further details. A list of regional offices is on page 24. If you would like to be a Union Learning Rep you can also contact your regional office.

productive partnership with the Fire and Rescue Service ICT tutor Amanda Tee, who is jointly funded by management and the ULF project. She is able to refer staff to the centre or identify alternative providers, deliver ICT tutoring at different Stations during work time and help broker new provision for the centre.

Much of the Northumberland activity is underpinned by a learning agreement – currently informal – between the FBU and the fire service, which includes many elements from the TUC model agreement.

At its heart is the commitment to establish a joint union-employer Learning Partnership Committee which aims to build a partnership culture around learning.

The FBU has also reached a very similar agreement with the Cleveland Brigade, and aims to draw up a regional learning agreement in preparation for a potential regional merger if voters agree to set up a North-east regional assembly, a vote currently under way.

Building on the success of the Northumberland project, the FBU has extended its learning programme through two further ULF bids anticipating the possibility of a regional Fire Service in the north east. Morpeth is already supporting a centre at South Shields Fire Station in Tyne and Wear and Middlesbrough in Cleveland.

A two-year national project has been underway since April 2004, modelled on the regional work, which aims to create a network of learning centres within the Trade Union Hub which can offer learning opportunities to all present and retired FBU members and their families.

25 YEAR BADGES



Mark Skelton (L) of Hamilton Fire Station, Strathclyde receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Membership Secretary Alan Kane



Steve Johncock (R) from Exmouth Fire Station in Devon receives his 25 year badge from Branch Secretary Mike Graham



Neil Davies (R) of Red Watch, Cwmbran, South Wales Fire Service, receiving his 25 year badge from Sub Officer Idris Alford



Paul Furler (R) from Exmouth Fire Station in Devon receives his 25 year badge from Branch Secretary Mike Graham



Andy Wilkinson (R) receiving his 25 year pin from Branch Secretary Kevin Deacon, both of Preston station in Lancashire



Gary Clement (R) from Exmouth Fire Station in Devon receives his 25 year badge from Branch Secretary Mike Graham.



Pat Eccles (L) of Springfield NI Branch receives his 25 year badge from Dermot Rooney, Regional Official, Region 2.



John Orley (R) receives his 25 year badge from Billingham Branch Secretary Paul Ferguson



Tony Devlin (L) of Springfield Branch NI receives his 25 year badge from Regional Official Dermot Rooney



Mick Tyrell (R) receives his 25 year badge from Chris Irvine, Branch Sec, Crosby, Merseyside



Henry Brown (R) receives his 25yr Badge from John McDonald, EC Rep for Scotland, with Red Watch Polmadie looking on



Richard Bond (R), Wandsworth, receiving his 25 year badge from Branch Chair Graeme Lester



John Geddes (R) receives his 25 year badge from Chris Irvine, Branch Sec, Crosby, Merseyside



Jeff Marwood (L) receives his 25 year badge from Billingham Branch Secretary Paul Ferguson



Cliff Briggs (R) receives his 25 year badge from Billingham Branch Secretary Paul Ferguson



Fred Warrick (R) receives his 25 year badge from Billingham Branch Secretary Paul Ferguson



Mick English (R) receives his 25 year badge from Billingham Branch Secretary Paul Ferguson



Michael Spence (R) receives his 25 year badge from Billingham Branch Secretary Paul Ferguson



Dave Stevenson (R) receives his 25 year badge from Chris Irvine, Branch Sec, Crosby, Merseyside



Tom Stanthorpe (R) receives his 25 year badge from Billingham Branch Secretary Paul Ferguson



Joe Coomer (R) receives his 25 year badge from Billingham Branch Secretary Paul Ferguson



Mark Royden (R) receives his 25 year badge from Chris Irvine, Branch Sec, Crosby, Merseyside



Neil Heath (R) receives his 25 year badge from Billingham Branch Secretary Paul Ferguson



Paul Chevalier (L), Brigade Training Centre, Cleveland, receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Secretary Steve Watson

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 print from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it, where they are (e.g. :left to right ...), their union posts/branch if relevant and where and when it was taken.

0808 100 6061 FBU

freephone legal advice line



THOMPSONS
SOLICITORS



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

Regional Office	Address	Telephone No.	Email address
Region 1 Scotland	52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow, Scotland, G1 4AA	0141 221 2309	01rs@fbu.org.uk
Region 2 N. Ireland	14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn, Co Antrim, BT7	02892 664622	02rs@fbu.org
Region 3 Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	1 Carlton Court, 5th Avenue, Team Valley, Gateshead, NE11 0AZ	0191 487 4142	03rs@fbu.org.uk
Region 4 Yorkshire and Humberside	9 Marsh Street, Rothwell, Leeds, LS26 0AG	0113 288 7000	04rs@fbu.org.uk
Region 5 Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire	The Lighthouse, Lower Mersey St, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 2AL	0151 357 4400	05rs@fbu.org.uk
Region 6 Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire	Mill 3, Unit H3B, Pleasley Vale Business Park, Off Outgang Lane, Pleasley, Nr Mansfield, Nottingham, NG19 8RL	01623 812290	06gen@fbu.org.uk
Region 7 West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, Salop	195/7 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill, West Midlands, B64 6HE	01384 413633	07rs@fbu.org.uk
Region 8 Gwynedd, Clwyd, Dyfed, Powys, Glamorgan, Gwent	Units 38 – 40, Port Talbot Bus. Units, Addison Road, Port Talbot, SA12 6HZ	01639 871013	08rs@fbu.org.uk
Region 9 Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk	28 Atlantic Square, Station Road, Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL	01376 521521	10ra@fbu.org.uk 09rs@fbu.org.uk
Region 10 London	John Horner Mews, Frome Street, Islington, London, N1 8PB	020 7359 3638	london@fbu.org.uk
Region 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex	Fire Station, Coldharbour Road, Northfleet, Kent, DA11 8NT	01474 320473	11rs@fbu.org.uk
Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Dorset, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight	The Fire Station, St Mary Street, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 2HE	01494 513034	12rs@fbu.org.uk
Region 13 Cornwall, Somerset, Devon, Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire	158 Muller Road, Horfield, Bristol, BS7 9RE	0117 935 5132	13rs@fbu.org.uk

on the move?

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