

FireFighter

The magazine of

the Fire Brigades Union

www.fbu.org.uk

October 2006

United we stand

Union-busting in Merseyside



Regional controls

They wouldn't have coped under spate conditions



Me and my triathlons

Jacqui Slack hits the ground running...



CAN YOU AFFORD THIS?

Firefighters and their housing woes



Merseyside dispute



As I predicted last month, our members in Merseyside have regrettably had to take to the picket lines again.

Merseyside FBU members returned a magnificent Yes vote in their ballot. They have demonstrated again the determination to defend the service their working conditions.

I hope that by the time this magazine reaches you the dispute will be settled and we will have moved on. It is always sad to see industrial action in our service. I am sure that every single one of us wishes that it could be avoided – that issues could be resolved by discussion and negotiation.

The truth is that eventually disputes do have to be settled by discussion and negotiation. So it is extremely unfortunate that the Merseyside fire and rescue authority could not have ensured that serious talks took place so as to avoid this conflict. It seems that this has been part of a pattern in industrial relations in Merseyside in recent months.

We have published evidence which clearly suggests that the chief fire officer has followed a union-bashing agenda. It is all too often true that certain individuals in the fire and rescue service see sidelining the FBU as a way of ensuring that their wider agenda is delivered – and that wider agenda usually means cuts!

Union bashing

The CFO, Mr McGuirk, has

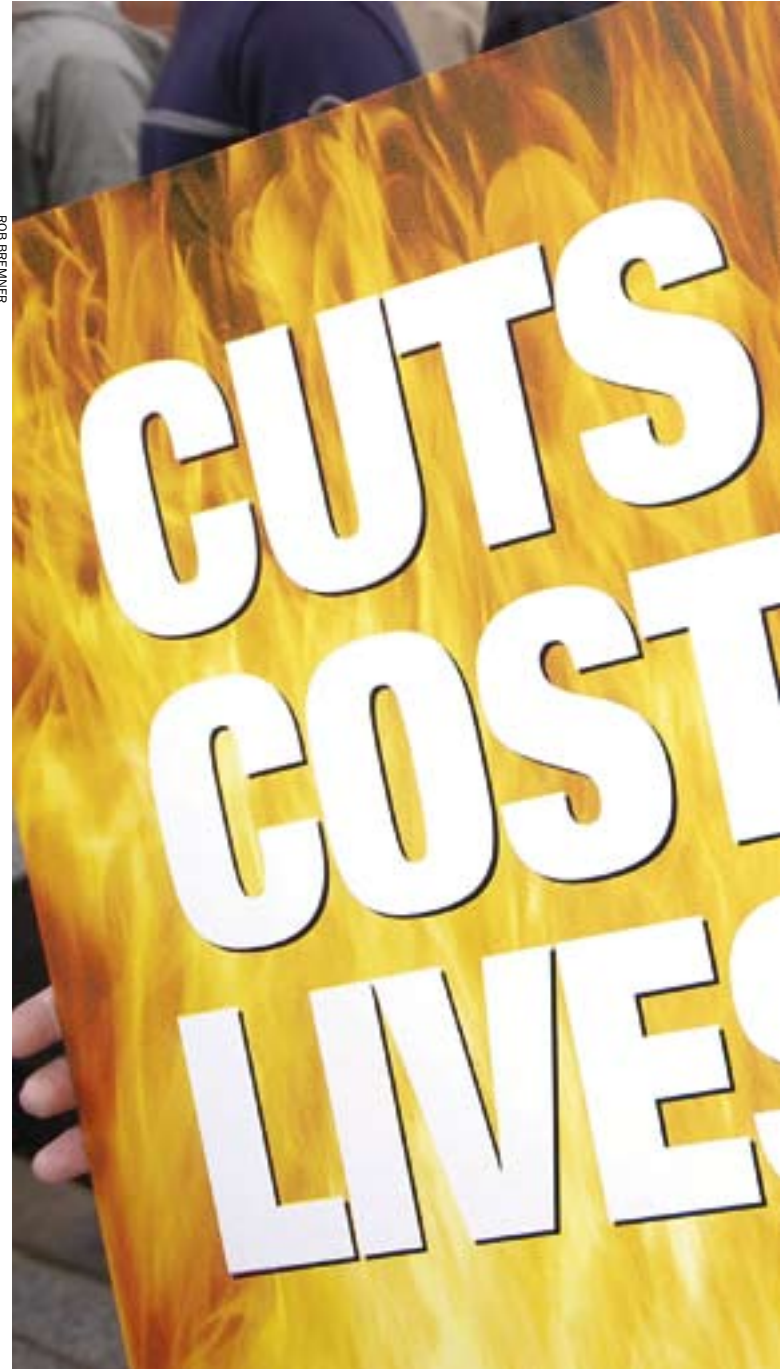
denied that he is anti-union or that he has a union-busting agenda. Yet the evidence is clearly against him. Our arrangement for collecting union subs ended by the local employer – without even formally notifying us. Union noticeboards have been removed from fire stations. We have seen a marked reluctance to allow in the National Joint Secretaries to give assistance in resolving the dispute, although, as I write, finally discussions with the National Joint Secretaries have started.

This – like all other disputes – needs resolving. The FBU at national level is willing to do whatever is necessary to assist in this. But equally we will not stand by and see our members on Merseyside defeated. That is why I urge all members to ensure that financial and moral support is given. A collection of just a few pounds a week from all members can ensure that members are not starved back to work.

More importantly such solidarity will send a message that we are all facing the same fight. We are all determined to defend our service and we will not allow members in individual brigades to be picked off and isolated.

I have been extremely pleased to see members from across the UK attending picket lines in Merseyside to bring support. This gives a huge boost to morale and sends a clear message to our opponents.

This dispute will be settled at some point. Our Merseyside members will then be able to look back with pride. They have made a determined stand



ROB BRENNER

to defend our service and our working conditions. They deserve the thanks of all of us.

National Standards

As we argued at TUC Congress in Brighton on 11-13 September, Merseyside and other disputes over jobs and fire cover underline the need for the reintroduction of national standards of emergency response. They should help prevent fire authorities under the deeply flawed Integrated Risk Management Planning process from pursuing short term financial advantage – or anti-union agendas – at the cost

of safety of firefighters and the public.

Regional Controls

This summer's surge in emergency fire calls once again reminded us of the massive dangers of the Government's regional controls project. Under such spate conditions, there would be a very high likelihood of emergency calls from the public not getting through. Following the criticisms in the report by the House of Commons Select Committee, the Chief Fire Officer's Association has talked of "huge challenges" facing FireControl – diplomatic-speak



JOHN GILES / PA / EMPICS

for major problems. The Union is pressing for an urgent meeting with ministers on the matter and members will be kept informed of progress on that front.

CPD/LSI

The status of negotiations on Continual Professional Development payments are no doubt at the forefront of many members' minds. We have been working hard to get a result that was satisfactory to FBU members. But by early September there was still much that hadn't been agreed and it became clear that the deadline of September 30 for LSI to start phasing out and

CPD to kick in – extended from the original July 1 deadline – was going to have to be pushed back beyond October 1.

National employers refused to agree this at the time of writing. Brigade officials met in London on September 8 and discussed the issue and in line with an Executive Council decision, officials are now consulting the membership to seek authority to conduct a ballot for industrial action up to and including strike action. Information is to be circulated. Please attend your branch meeting and make sure you have your say in the consultation.
Matt Wrack

This month

10

Fire and flood would have brought chaos to regional controls

Regulars

4 NEWS

CPD: Ballot consultation
Cleveland members agree changes

5 SOUNDING OFF!

Equality, diversity and the select committee

7 FIFTH COLUMN

He's a celebrity CFO
Get him out of here

8 AERIAL LADDER PLATFORM

Hands of our council homes

16 WHAT DOES ... DO?

Trainee firefighter Emma Pass talks to *Firefighter*

18 HEALTH

Arthritis is the UK's single greatest source of physical disability

19 LEGAL BEAGLE

Compensation for mesothelioma

20 DAY OFF

Jacqui Slack has got the triathlon bug

22 PUZZLES

23 STATION CAT

Brings you news they don't want you to hear

Features

10 CHAOS LOOMS?

Regional control rooms would have collapsed during the recent sharp increase in 999 calls

12 CAN YOU AFFORD A HOME?

Firefighters are among the key workers hit by soaring house prices

14 UNITED WE STAND

Union bashing in Merseyside

PUZZLES

WIN
A Nintendo DS Lite
see p22

Take part in our prize quiz and win a Nintendo DS Lite. It has 3D graphics and ultra-bright screens and enables you to connect wirelessly to Nintendo's Wi-Fi Connection and challenge players around the world. The Nintendo DS Lite's dual screens and touch-screen technology allow you to interact with games like never before. The lower screen offers touch-screen capability so you can navigate menus or access inventory items by touching the screen with a stylus or fingertip.



COVER PICTURES:
PAUL BOX/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK
SHOUT/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Published by the Fire Brigades Union, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston Upon Thames, KT2 7AE.
www.fbu.org.uk
Tel: 020 8541 1765. Fax: 020 8546 5187
Design by Edition Periodicals 241-251 Ferndale Road London SW9 8BJ. www.edition.co.uk.
Printed by Southernprint Ltd, 17-21 Factory Road, Upton Industrial Estate, Poole, Dorset BH 16 5SN.



OCTOBER 2006

→ Latest news

→ Sounding off

→ In brief



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Firefighters remove their chemical protection suits after finishing an exercise simulating a chemical agent terrorist attack on Bank Underground station in London. The Union says CPD needs to recognise the new demands placed upon employees



Union consults over action

LSI-CPD

FBU officials were consulting members on a ballot for industrial action over continual professional development payments, as *Firefighter* went to press. This follows the failure of the employers' side of the CPD working party – which has been considering the principles of and mechanism for CPD payments – to agree to recommend that the payment of LSI be extended beyond October 1.

The Executive Council agreed in early September that in the event of there being no agreement on CPD and no extension of the payment of LSI beyond October 1, consultation would commence among members over authorising the EC to conduct the ballot for industrial action up to and including strike action.

The FBU has been demanding that LSI payments continue until agreement with employers is reached over the introduction of CPD, in line with the national pay agreement which states that LSI will not be stopped until CPD payments have been made.

The key areas that remain unresolved include:

- Removeability
- National or local rate
- Payment of CPD in relation to disciplinary sanctions
- Method of payment (annual/monthly/hourly rate etc.)
- Pensionability
- Indications of commitment
- When personnel can apply for CPD
- Transitional arrangements
- Additional Responsibility Payments

- Eligibility being from competence in rank at joining

The Union negotiators have pointed out to employers that it was agreed from the outset that the methods of attracting CPD should be distinct from additional responsibility payments. These are payments for skills and activities required by the employer that are not contained within the agreed role-maps.

CPD must be made available to all NJC staff subject to agreement on qualifying periods/exclusions and so on.

At the most fundamental level, the Union has argued, CPD payments must reward personnel for their experience and loyalty, and address the issue of motivation.

Members are urged to attend branch meetings to take part in the consultation.

■ For more information visit:
www.fbu.org.uk

Members agree new authority proposals

CLEVELAND DISPUTE

Cleveland members have agreed proposals on changes to the local fire and rescue service after the fire authority put forward significant safeguards to protect firefighters and the public.

The decision came after council-lors amended their original proposals. Five firefighters will now crew the first fire appliance attending life-threatening emergencies from all fire stations in the county, including from Billingham fire station, where crewing levels had previously been cut. Furthermore, emergency response targets will now see the first appliance arriving in five minutes, the second appliance in eight minutes and the third appliance (with persons reported) in 10 minutes.

Steve Watson, Cleveland FBU brigade secretary said: "Fire crews were determined to ensure that any changes to the local fire service would not compromise the safety of the Cleveland community or frontline firefighters attending emergency incidents. They were ready to take strike action if necessary.

"Negotiations following the 3:1 vote in favour of strike action produced revised proposals for change to the local fire service

that the FBU recommended to its members. Cleveland fire crews have carefully considered them and have agreed them.

"The proposals significantly amend the fire authority's original Safety Improvement Plan and satisfied many of our concerns contained within the trade dispute. We still have concerns about the fire safety implications of the de-staffing of a fire appliance stationed at Hartlepool. And we will be monitoring the implementation of the changes to the fire service to make sure that they do not adversely affect the emergency response capacity. We will continue to work with senior managers to tackle the issue of improving public protection.

"Cleveland members should be congratulated. Their magnificent 74% backing for strike action enabled FBU brigade officials to reach a negotiated settlement."

John McGhee, FBU National Officer responsible for health and safety who advised local officials during the dispute, said: "The agreement reached is a significant step in the Union's overall IRMP strategy of achieving attendance of the appropriate number of firefighters to incidents, thus ensuring their safety in carrying out their duties to protect the public. It will have an important impact when officials elsewhere in the country are arguing over crewing levels."

Delegates back FBU call for new national standards

TUC

Delegates to the Trade Union Congress in September agreed to call on the Government to "urgently address" the FBU's demands for new national standards of emergency response. Supporting the FBU motion, delegates also agreed to demand that Government "ensure sufficient investment is made available to individual fire and rescue services to ensure that they are able to plan, control, manage and deliver the appropriate emergency response to all incidents on all occasions."

The motion also noted "with concern that the 'modernisation' agenda within the fire and rescue service appears to be focused on cost-cutting and reducing levels of emergency cover rather than on genuine improvement."



FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack, speaking at this year's TUC, was elected to the General Council

Sounding off!

KERRY BAIGENT (NWC)

CARL ST PAUL (B&EMM)

PETE GALLAGHER (NGLC)

Select Committee – equality and diversity

The 1999 Thematic Review provided a central stage to the otherwise underrated and unpopular subject matter of Equality and Diversity (E&D). The service was forced to look at its failings and weaknesses in this area and was made to focus and utilise resources to achieve this aim. A further thematic review set to take place in 2003, failed to materialise and we believe that this has contributed to the slowing down of progress and lack of commitment shown by some principle managers and Government. Ultimately it is FBU members who have suffered from this and despite a few interested parties continually asserting pressure; this pressure has largely been ignored.

The Select Committees conclusions are sadly echoed by B&EMM, the NWC and the NGLC. We too have been very disappointed by the lack of progress made by the UK Fire Service on E&D. Our members have become increasingly aware that this issue is no longer a priority and despite being well organised and representative, the FBU equality groups have been mainly ignored by Government and Principle management.

We conclude:

◆ In line with the select committee we endorse the utilisation of support groups for the Diversity Happens Forum; however we would urge the use of the existing support groups in the Fire Brigades Union who have accumulated years of experience, knowledge and empathy.

◆ We believe that the findings of the select committee regarding the Comprehensive Performance Assessment is a massive a step in the right direction, however; a rating of "failure" should be introduced for those authorities who have consistently failed to progress or show commitment to E&D.

◆ We would also support the reintroduction of a Diversity Champion as long as the individual is endorsed by all relevant stake holders. Added to this we would further suggest that a team of diversity champions may be a positive step forward.

◆ We fully support the recommendation of Government to conduct a thorough review of E&D policies and initiatives and further suggest that the scope is broadened to review the impact caused by these.

◆ We believe that it is essential to share examples of E&D best practice across the service and a mechanism to encourage and accommodate this must be produced by Government.

Legal help has never been closer to hand

LEGAL SERVICES

New arrangements for accessing the FBU's legal services, aimed at making the process even simpler for all members, have been introduced.

The service can now be accessed in three ways:

- direct freephone 0808 100 6061
- via the website www.fbu.org.uk/member/legal/index.php
- by filling in a legal assistance form, available from your branch secretary, which has been amended to cover personal injury claims.

Paul Woolstenholmes, FBU National Officer responsible for legal services, said: "It seems that in many cases members are not aware of the full extent of the union's personal injury legal service.

"Too often members and their families have fallen into the trap of replying to the advertising of privateer claims companies who push 'no win-no fee' schemes whilst hiding the details in the small print.

"Many claims firms have taken advantage of injury victims in their push for profit.

"They claim to pay 100% compensation, but hidden charges may include high interest rates on loans to pay insurance premiums which claimants are made to take out in case their claim fails."

"The difference between a claims firm and the FBU's legal services is that the union's services are absolutely free to members, and their families. They will not deduct a penny from your compensation.

FBU lawyers Thompsons are the UK's leading personal injury law firm, expert in winning justice for people injured due to the negligence of employers and others.



At its height 100 firefighters and 20 appliances tackled this chemical fire at the Biolab plant near Cheltenham in September. "The building was totally ablaze and uncontrollable within just a few minutes," a witness said.

FBU urges authority to reverse downgrade

AFA's

The Union is calling on Gloucestershire's chief fire officer and the fire authority to overturn its decision to restrict and downgrade its traditional response to emergency calls generated by automatic fire alarm systems (AFAs).

This follows the recent huge chemical fire in Andoversford.

The fire service has previously been warned by the FBU that the move to a policy restricting firefighters from attending calls following the activation of an AFA would be putting the public, firefighters and the environment at an unacceptable risk.

On the recommendation of the Chief Fire Officer, elected members of the County Council have voted through measures that means the fire service

reduces its initial attendances to incidents like the one at Andoversford.

Not only did the industrial unit in Andoversford get a reduced initial attendance (before the change in policy two fire appliances would have been dispatched) but the first appliance that did attend was ordered to do so under normal road conditions. That resulted in a much longer time before the appliance arrived and vital minutes were lost.

Local FBU official Phil Jordan said: "We will be writing to the Chief Fire Officer and urging him to withdraw, immediately, this dangerous and unacceptable policy of ordering fire appliances to respond to emergencies under normal road conditions and also to withdraw his policy of reducing the initial amount of appliances he sends to certain incidents.

In brief

◆ The Commission for Racial Equality is awaiting responses from five fire and rescue authorities after it wrote to them over their Race Equality Schemes. Two of these fire authorities were sent letters informing them that the CRE was 'minded' to enforce compliance with their race equality duties under the Race Relations Amendment Act. The CRE took these steps after receiving evidence gathered by the FBU's B&EMM committee.

◆ The FBU joined a trade union delegation to Colombia where it heard testimonies from trade unionists of murder and intimidation and of the collusion of the military and paramilitary death squads. The delegation will now be writing to ministers calling on the UK Government to halt to military aid to Colombia and to exert pressure on the Colombian government to stop gross violations of human and trade union rights. The visit was organised by Justice for Colombia: www.justiceforcolombia.org



Colombian soldiers mount a security check

◆ The first FBU National School in two years will take place at Wortley Hall, 30 October–4 November 2006. The tutor for the residential school is once again Mary Davis from London Metropolitan University. For more information contact National Officer Dean Mills at FBU Head Office in Kingston.

◆ FBU members and supporters of the Scottish Cuba Solidarity Campaign (SCSC) were shocked and saddened to learn of Katy Campbell's sudden death on July 4. Katy worked closely with the FBU and helped to establish the SCSC office within the Scottish Regional offices, dedicating herself to strengthening the Cuban Solidarity movement in Scotland. She will be missed by all who had the privilege to know her but she will live on in the minds, hearts and actions of all her comrades, brothers, sisters and friends. We send our deepest sympathy to all of Katy's family.

Members of the public outside the Big Brother house at Elstree Studios



FIFTH COLUMN

An anonymous take on events in a brigade near you

The funny season of Big Brother, Celebrity Love Island and Celebrity Only Fools on Horses is over. Enter the funny season of chief fire officers – scrutinising their IRMPs to see if they can win some kind of reality prize by demonstrating to the Department of Communities and Local Government how stupid and outrageous they can be by cutting the fire service to the bone, risking local people's lives and putting firefighters in danger.

The chief fire officer in Staffordshire is no exception. Alan Doig is downgrading three retained stations in rural areas leaving support back up to the throw-of-a-dice strategy: if someone is available we will turn up, if not then tough! He is downgrading the busiest fire engine in the county from the busiest wholetime station to retained status. He is downgrading two wholetime stations to retained but building one new one, putting in just one fire engine. He's also mulling the removal of four wholetime fire engines at Hanley, Stafford, Burton and Newcastle fire stations.

Forgive us for being cynical but if the public could phone in on this reality game I'm sure Alan Doig would be voted out in the first instant – even with his senior officers constantly ringing in and texting, hoping to get the next promotion.

How can senior officers who have come through the system stand idly by while they can see what damage it is having on morale? They

STAFFORDSHIRE

**I'm a celebrity
chief fire officer,
get me out of here!**

should know better. But they only see one thing. Yes, you guessed it. It is their future they care about, not the public's.

So let's play a game. Let's run a public campaign to oust councillors who turn up for their allowances, believe every word the chief officers tell them, don't offer any opposition, but love the public office of sitting on the fire authority (well it looks good on election material doesn't it!)

The chief has issued a press release stating we are being disingenuous. Well, that takes the biscuit. It's like them being disingenuous about the new shift review. It was stated that no decision was being taken on what we are to do with the dormitories – only to find out at Burton on Trent fire station architects' drawings of a new design for the fire station and lo and behold where there used to be a dormitory there is now an office. Talk about the cart before the horse. Is it any wonder we are sceptical of anything these so called professionals tell us?

I'm sure Channel 4 could make a reality programme about the fire service. Or more appropriately, a comedy programme, with the chief fire officer in the lead role.

It's time to reverse the trend. Let those who care about the fire service win for a change. We are fed up of the bad guys winning. Let's start now. Let's start a campaign: I'm a celebrity chief fire officer, get me out of here!



City centre council flats in Bristol
PICTURE: Paul Box/reportdigital.co.uk

Hands off our homes

ALAN WALTER, CHAIR OF DEFEND COUNCIL HOUSING

“ Council tenants are being mugged. Behind all the fine words of ‘choice’, ‘inclusion’ and ‘empowerment’, government is trying to take away our security, lower rents and democratic tenure.

They don’t like it when we see through their spin and join up the dots. Who hasn’t heard their mock outrage when we name stock transfer, PFI and Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) as privatisation? They claim disbelief when we point out that Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) are increasingly remote and unaccountable multi million pound national businesses generating huge surpluses and that the ALMO formula was designed as a staging post to take council housing out of the public sector – but each week’s housing news confirms it.

Systematic disinvestment from council housing has created acute poverty on many estates. Council housing has been deliberately stigmatised, to brand all of us who won’t or can’t climb the home ownership ladder as failures.

The attack on council housing is part of a broader drive to privatise public services and the moves to undermine the role of democratically elected local councils and replace them with private sector dominated quangos and ‘partnerships’.

We all share the hope of our parents and grandparents that our children should enjoy a better life. But as we enter a new century we watch dismayed as the major gains secured by past generations are being rolled back.

Our campaign for direct investment in council housing addresses the needs of 3 million existing council tenants and their families across the UK and the 1.5 million on housing waiting lists (plus those who are discouraged from registering).

It also offers hope – and a secure job with decent conditions – to council workers who want to provide a public service and to local councillors who believe that the provision of public services by an elected public authority

is worth defending. Like tenants they also suffer sustained bullying to accept privatisation from senior managers who stand to gain big pay rises.

The fact is communities are ‘sustainable’ with adequate support and resources. Watching new posh neighbours drive in to their gated home across the road or young professionals buying up ex council homes as the first step on the home ownership ladder doesn’t lead to wealth rubbing off – it increases resentment and fragments communities at the expense of those with least money.

Precisely because the private market always fails to meet social need there is a massive demand for council housing today. Give us the extra investment to improve our homes and estates and to build new council homes to address the demand, and council tenants and council estates would be proud once again. Investment would also overcome the desperation that fuels racism in places like the London borough of Dagenham and Barking and Dagenham, where 12 BNP councillors were elected in May.

A once strong and independent tenants movement has been systematically undermined. Those of us opposed to privatisation have to volunteer our own time - in between families and jobs - while councils promote privatisation using our rents to pay senior managers, consultants and PR companies to run a professional marketing campaign against us.

All the polls show that a big majority oppose privatisation of public services. Nowhere are tenants lobbying for a change of landlord. No stock transfer, PFI scheme or ALMO would have got through without tenants being subjected to a campaign of bullying and blackmail, threatening no improvements unless tenants comply. This is not ‘choice’. The process discredits local and national government and their commitment to meaningful consultation or democracy.

The privatisation of council housing has proved much harder than its supporters expected. 100 councils in

England and the majority in Wales and Scotland have opted for retention – despite the government pressure.

This isn’t just a fight for 3 million existing council tenants. We’re also fighting for everyone who would benefit from a first class public housing service as an alternative to the private market. We need the support of trade unionists to counter the glossy one-sided pro privatisation campaigns waged by local authorities. Find out what’s happening in your area and make sure FBU branches offer support to tenants to help stop privatisation and win the ‘fourth option’ of direct investment.

Every additional No vote adds to the pressure on ministers. However arrogant and confident they seem, they have to contend with a political dynamic that demands change.

We’ve made the financial case and clearly identified that decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing is financially viable. Our homes and estates can be improved if government ring fences all the money that belongs to council housing. We are not prepared to trade our secure tenancies, lower rents and democratic landlord for new kitchens and bathrooms and neither will we allow politicians to use the promise of building new homes as an excuse to walk away from their obligation to existing council tenants and estates.

The government was elected on a clear manifesto commitment: “By 2010 we will ensure that all social tenants benefit from a decent, warm home with modern facilities.” We expect them to keep it in spirit and in word.

→ Local campaigns needing help fighting privatisation include: Brighton, Chester le Street, Crawley, Fenland, Gravesend, Gedling, Highlands, Lambeth, Liverpool, Manchester, Monmouthshire, Oswestry, Plymouth, Southwark, South Kesteven, Swansea, Salisbury, Stirling, Renfrewshire, Rhonda Cynon Taff, Taunton, Tower Hamlets, Torfaen, Watford.

www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk

Chaos looms?

The Government's proposed regional fire control rooms would have collapsed under the strain of the recent sharp increase in 999 calls to emergency incidents, the FBU has warned

If regional controls had been up and running, the Union says, the fire service would have faced chaos dealing with the huge numbers of major fire and flooding incidents which have happened across the country over the summer months.

The Union says it was only the very close working between local controls and their local fire brigades which enabled the service to deal coherently which incredibly busy conditions. The regional control system – which would see calls “bounced” at busy periods to any regional control in England able to take the call – would break the existing link between emergency fire controls and the brigade handling the incident.

The summer months of July and August were a very busy period with local controls in every region dealing with “spate” conditions. That would mean every regional control would have been running at peak capacity, with no spare capacity to take overflow calls from other regions, even if that system could work.

Staff cuts

The staffing levels being proposed for the regional controls would have meant the collapse would have been even more rapid. There would be a very high likelihood of emergency calls from the public not getting through.

The proposed staffing cuts are between

JOHN GILES/PA/EMPIOS



Ilkley Moor,
August 2006

CFOA: FIRECONTROL FACES 'HUGE CHALLENGES'

The Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) has responded to the House of Commons Select Committee Report on the Fire and Rescue Service by saying that the FireControl project faces “huge challenges”. In its most sceptical remarks yet on the Government's regional controls plans, it said:

“The specific comments of the Select Committee relating to the FiReControl project reflect the broad concerns of both the FRS and were in fact those expressed by CFOA presented in both the written and oral evidence to the Committee. CFOA has been and continues to be supportive of the project but continues to seek reassurance and information around a number of aspects of funding, the business case and the governance and legal issues. The Association urges the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), to ensure that the FRS community is provided with more detailed information relating to a robust business case, consistent with commercial considerations. That said, CFOA recognises the huge challenges facing the FiReControl programme and continues to work closely with DCLG, providing a number of seconded staff to ensure that project deliverables are aligned with end user requirements.”

22% in the North East (from the current 109 total in existing local controls, to 82 being proposed in the regional control) to a 48% cut in the South West (from 168 currently employed in existing local controls to 86 being proposed in the regional control).

Reports over the summer from FBU control reps from just two regions gave a flavour of just how disastrous regional controls would be.

In Lancashire, which is already short of three posts – a shortfall soon to double – the control centre was busier than the same time last year thanks to a surge in grass and gorse fires. One night, they had to deal with a ten-pump moorland fire, and by 10pm had already



SPATE CONDITIONS?

A total of 124,600 fires were attended in the UK in the third quarter of 2005 (July to September), 14% more than in the corresponding third quarter of 2004. The number of primary fires fell (down by 6% to 42,600) compared to the same quarter in 2004.

However, the number of secondary fires increased by 28% (to 81,300) compared to the corresponding third quarter of 2004, mainly due to an 80% increase in grassland fires (to 29,600).” *Source: Fire Statistics Monitor 20 July 2006 comparing the third quarter of 2004 and the third quarter 2005 i.e like for like quarters.*

“The number of grassland and heathland fires is very dependent on weather conditions. In 2004, there were 61,400 such fires recorded, 60% less than the previous year. This was due to a return to more seasonally average weather conditions after a dry 2003 saw 152,700 grassland fires”. *Source: Fire Statistics 2004, page 55.*

In three out of the last four years we have faced huge numbers of incidents caused by changing weather patterns. In 2003 we had 152,700 grassland fires which was a near record and officially attributed to warm weather. A year’s respite in 2004 was followed by an 80% increase in grassland fires in the third quarter of 2005 compared to the same period in 2004. Reports from across the UK suggest that 2006 is even worse.

taken more than 200 calls.

In Cheshire – also currently under-staffed, although new recruits will soon make up the numbers – they were busier by about 1,000 calls a year, thanks to grass fires. On one day they took 309 calls, instead of a daily average of 70.

In Greater Manchester, they were also suffering spate conditions with staff heading into work in on their days off to provide cover.

In Wales, meanwhile, emergency fire control rooms in all three brigades were dealing with as many as three times as many incidents. There were large numbers of time-consuming duplicate calls. There were two instances of recall to duty in North Wales and

staff were having less breaks, which are shorter with workload constant.

Local controls resilient

Said FBU President Ruth Winters: “Over the summer local emergency fire controls have demonstrated how resilient they are and how fragile any the regional controls system would be. It was only the very close working between the local emergency fire controls and the local brigades they serve which kept the fire and rescue service going.

“Everyone in the fire service now knows the planned regional controls would have been too remote to ensure a coherent fire and rescue service response. The proposed

staffing levels on their own would have seen the regional controls collapse.

“Regional controls would have caused chaos across the fire service and put lives at risk with large numbers of 999 calls from the public not getting through. People would have been held in a queue listening to Vivaldi’s Four Seasons while the room filled with smoke.

“The Government needs to start listening to fire service concerns over these plans. It needs to listen to the recent Select Committee report which confirmed the project had a ‘high risk of total project failure.’”

➔ More info: www.fbu.org.uk/campaigns/outofcontrol/

A street in Bristol: on a firefighter's wage there's no chance of buying a decent-sized family home near the city centre

The housing boom may have benefited some homeowners, but for many firefighters it is a growing problem

CAN YOU AFFORD THIS?

House prices have doubled in the past five years and firefighters are among key public sector workers now finding it increasingly hard to get onto the property ladder, according to a survey from the Halifax, issued in late summer. Just two months later, as *Firefighter* went to press, both the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* chose to lead on new government figures which pointed to houses doubling in price in four years – with first time buyers borrowing an average of 3.21 times their salary.

Official confirmation that the problem has spread way beyond London and the South East will come as little surprise to those who have recently joined the service in many areas of the country.

Along with teachers, nurses, ambulance staff and police officers, many are resorting to renting for longer and find the cost of meeting the mortgage payments for an average property is way beyond their means, even if they can stump up a deposit.

The Halifax chose to focus on how these key public sector workers are getting frozen out of the housing market way beyond the M25. It found the average house was now unaffordable by these groups in 339 of 519 towns surveyed, compared to 124 five years ago. Increasingly, commuting is becoming a fact of life for more firefighters as town and city prices soar.

The South West is identified as a property hotspot, as Chris Jackson Avon branch stalwart and a Labour councillor in Bristol is well aware. He is based at Bedminster station, in a rundown area a mile and a half from the city centre. "It would cost around £120,000 to get a house that's almost derelict," says Chris. "If you want to buy a couple of miles up the road, it will cost around £220,000. With our wages, there is no chance of buying a decent-sized family property near the city centre now. Even renting a small studio would cost up to £190 a week and it's the same in Bath. It's a bit of a nightmare for new recruits." Chris says that five of his colleagues at Bedminster now commute at least 40 miles each way to work.

Anna James joined the service in Avon two and a half years ago. After years of working for herself, she was determined, at 30, to start buying her own place. But she couldn't even think about buying near Bedminster station, looking instead outside Weston Super Mare, where prices are not as steep. "I was lucky. I had some money saved up for a deposit. I bought a one-bedroomed flat on an interest-only mortgage, but, even then, my mother had to act as guarantor because the ratio of earnings to borrowings wasn't quite enough. I've got the bare minimum of housing possible and it has gone up £10,000 in two years, so I wouldn't be able to afford it if I was trying to buy now." She is converting to a repayment mortgage now she is on full pay.

In Edinburgh, the problem is also starting to bite. Andy Fulton, FBU brigade secretary for Lothian and Borders says prices have "gone through the roof", and the effect is rippling out beyond the city to outlying

areas where crews now have to look for a place they can afford. Back in 1991, all but two out of 17 Green watch members lived in the city. Now, only four do. Brian Banks is one of those who has moved out. He lived in a "one up one down" in Leith with his wife and young baby, but needed more space when their second child was on the way. "We needed a bigger house and that meant

more travelling. We moved out to Linlithgow, but couldn't afford to buy there now."

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, has flagged up how firefighters are being forced to live further and further away from stations because of the dramatic surge in prices in parts of the country. The lack of affordable rented housing, the sell-off of public housing stock and the ruinous ratios of earnings to mortgages are increasingly being discussed at work, especially if a new recruit is finding it hard to buy or rent locally, or a crew member moves up from the south east with news of allowances. When crew members move out, they have to foot the bill for travel costs. The problem may not be huge yet, but as new firefighters are needed to staff up stations in property hotspots, debate on what could be done is likely to hot up.

'In 1991, all but two out of 17 green watch members lived in the city. Now, only four do'

KEY WORKER LIVING PROGRAMME

Government help for firefighters is restricted to London, the South East and the East of England. The Keyworker Living Programme, for which firefighters and other uniformed staff below principal level in the fire and rescue service are among the "priority" groups, comprises:

■ **Open Market HomeBuy** – 'Equity loans' to help key workers buy a home on the open market. Key workers are typically expected to raise a mortgage of around 75% of the property's value.

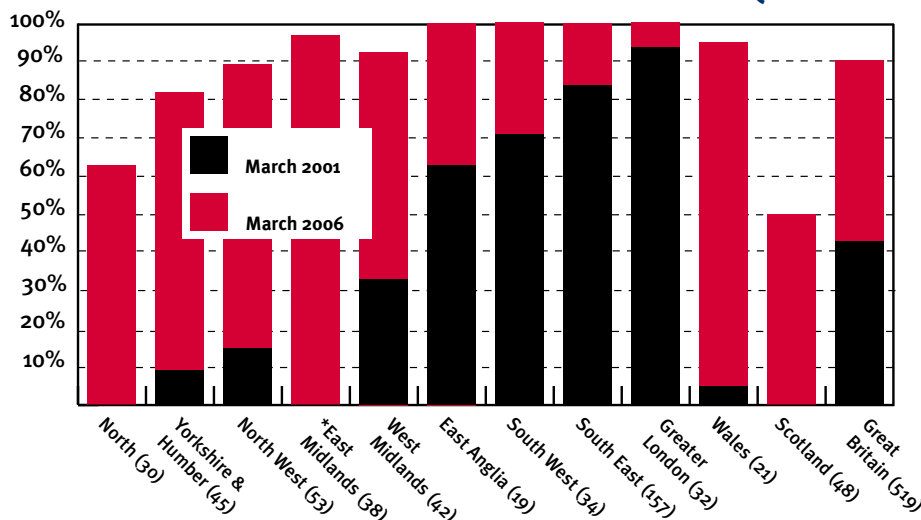
■ **New Build HomeBuy** – shared-ownership of newly built properties. You buy at least 25% of the home and pay a reduced rent on the remaining share.

■ **'Intermediate renting'** where the rent is set at a level between that charged by social and private landlords and the accommodation is provided by a registered social landlord.

Just eight firefighters – all from Hertfordshire – have purchased under the 'open market homebuy scheme' and a further five – in Milton Keynes, Hillingdon, Ashford, Surrey and Hampshire – have purchased with 'shared ownership schemes' between 2004/2006, according to Housing Corp, which manages the programme on behalf of the Government. This compares to over 400 police officers housed for the 'open market' scheme alone.

■ More info: www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1151221

Unaffordable towns for fire service workers (all houses)

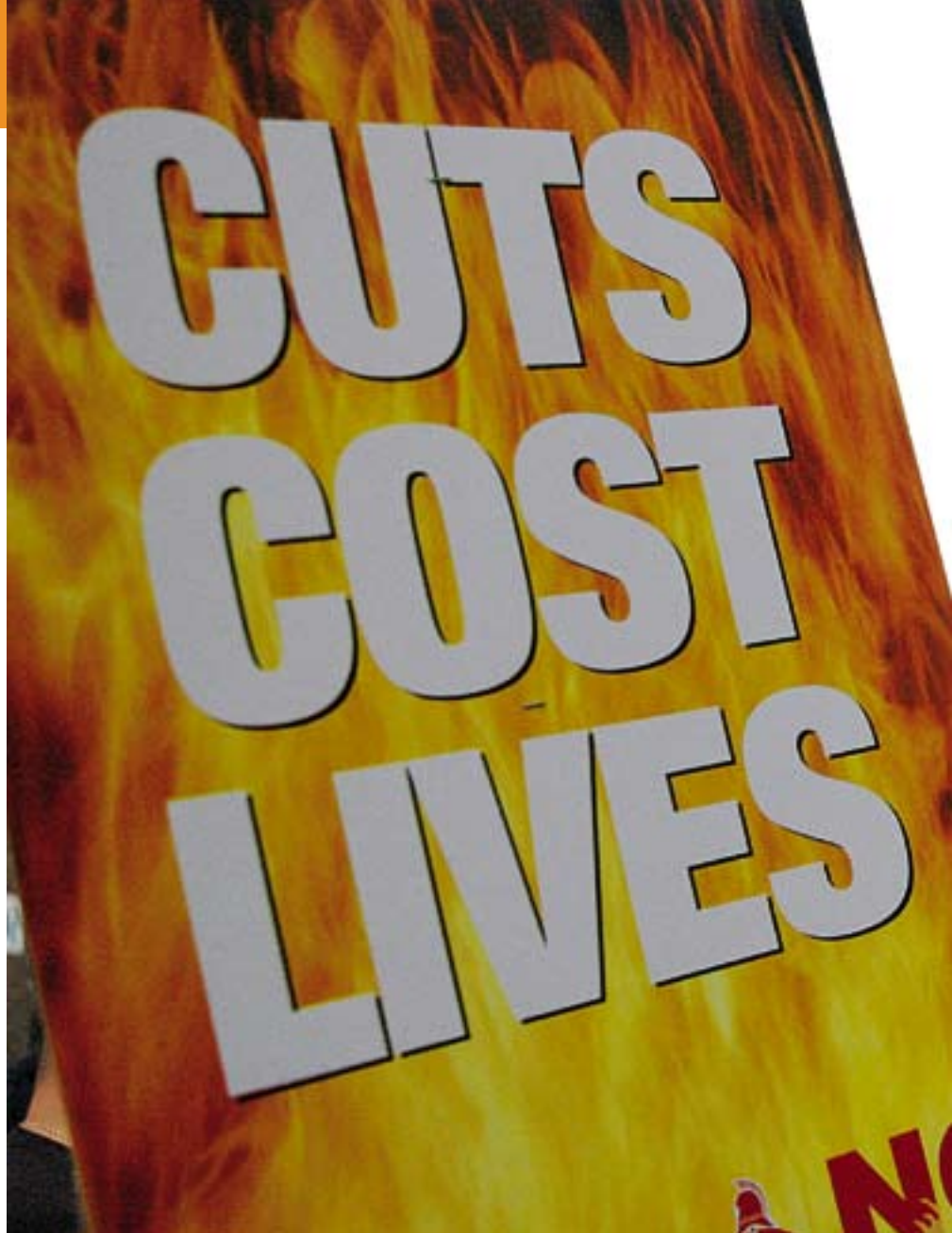


Number of towns surveyed in brackets. *Data for 2001 not available. Source: Halifax

A union-busting agenda is behind Merseyside fire authority's bid to cut over 100 jobs and its reluctance to negotiate

In its July 2005 comprehensive performance assessment, the Audit Commission gave Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority an "excellent" rating, partly on the back of its financial position. "Financial management is sound and is supported by effective plans," said the Audit Commission, "including a five-year medium-term financial strategy. This allows the authority to plan ahead, anticipating the implications of future income and expenditure. There is a well-developed financial risk management process and rigorous monitoring.

"The authority has strengthened its finan-



UNITED WE

cial position in recent years ... Members are fully involved in key financial decisions and are kept informed by comprehensive quarterly budget monitoring reports."

Exactly how Merseyside got from there to a £6.5 million budget deficit a matter of months later has never been fully explained.

It was this budget deficit that was to be used as the battering ram for major cuts across a fire service which had faced serious cuts the year before.

The authority, on the advice of chief fire officer Tony McGuirk, pressed for the loss of 120 firefighter posts – one in ten of the workforce – on top of the 68 posts cut the previous year. For good measure, they later added an extra 18 job losses from Croxteth station.

They also wanted the loss of 15 emergency fire control operator posts – one in four of those working in control. Four pumps were to be axed at night from city centre stations. And, in the words of the fire authority, firefighters were to be allowed to work more flexibly and earn more money.

This turned out to be coded language for the 96-hour working week (yes, you are reading that correctly) the authority wanted to introduce in up to six out of Merseyside's 26 fire stations.

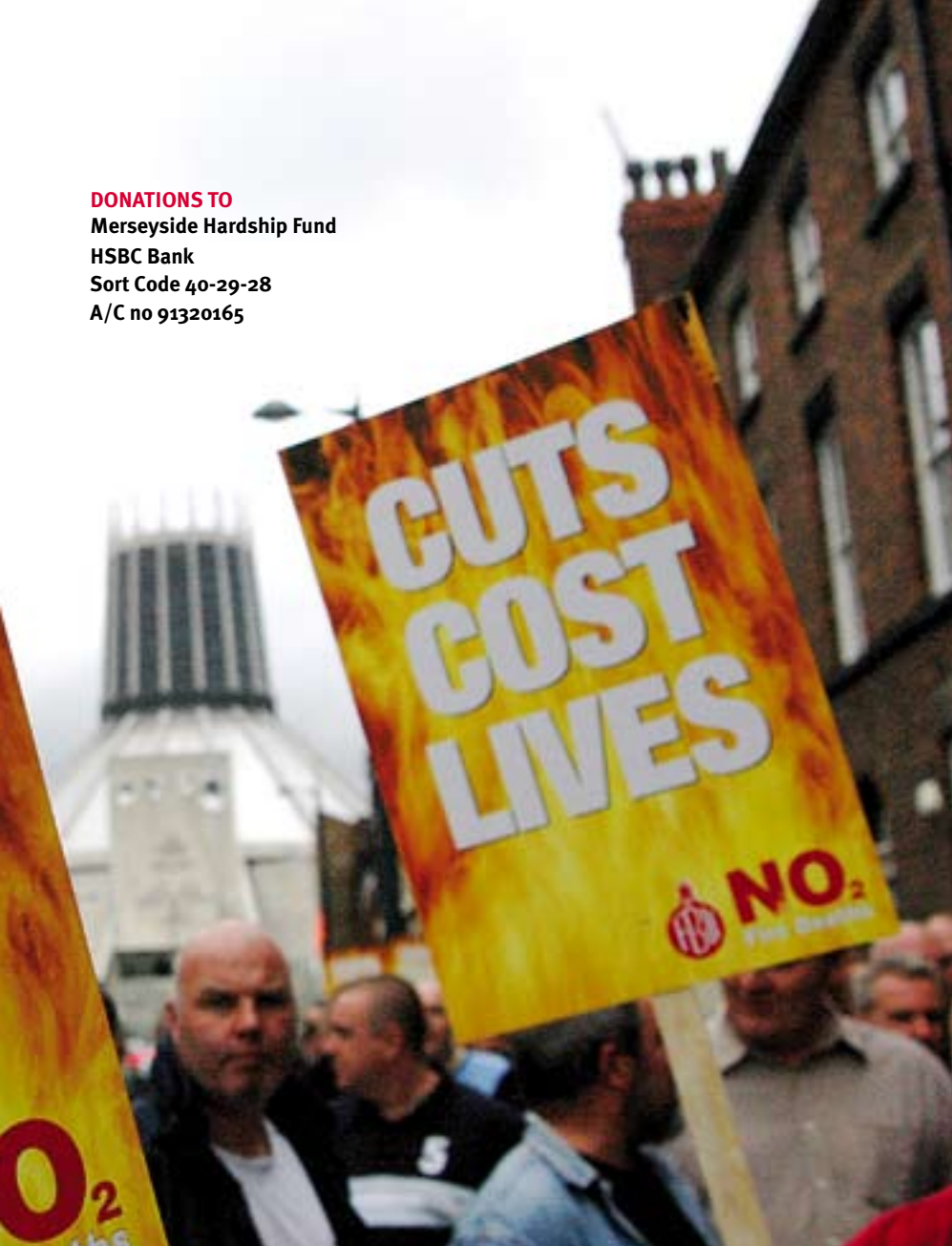
The fire authority showed great reluctance to negotiate from the word go, but did not know the union had been tipped off that there might be more to the dispute and cuts than first met the eye.

New Zealand firefighters' leaders had met chief officer Tony McGuirk in Wellington, New Zealand in October 2005. They were so concerned by the content of the meeting they telephoned General Secretary Matt Wrack and relayed it to the FBU.

In a formal signed statement given to the union's lawyers Thompsons, New Zealand firefighters' leader Derek Best detailed Tony McGuirk's agenda for the Merseyside fire service.

At the hour-long meeting he outlined the 'radical changes' he wanted to introduce, some of which are already in place. Much of this agenda was driven by a desire to drive a wedge between the FBU and its members and, according to Derek Best, Mr McGuirk said he

DONATIONS TO
Merseyside Hardship Fund
HSBC Bank
Sort Code 40-29-28
A/C no 91320165



our members. We also have kept up constant pressure for talks before, during and after strike action but the fire authority has been reluctant to get into talks at all.

"They've told us they are too busy or they are thinking about them and they won't agree dates for further talks for days. The national joint secretaries were finally allowed in on 14 September – after five written requests from the union – after the fire authority dropped its opposition to their involvement.

"We have dragged them kicking and screaming into almost every set of talks. In the early discussions, before the involvement of the joint secretaries, we'd think we were heading in the right direction then they would go into reverse at the next meeting and harden their position."

Merseyside FBU chair Mark Dunne said: "The members are absolutely determined to maintain momentum and keep up pressure on the fire authority. Morale is high our determination is unwavering.

"The public support has been tremendous. FBU members from across the UK have been sending us supporting messages and money for the hardship fund. Messages of support have come in from across the world. It has been astonishing."

While the union was building support, the fire authority seemed determined to move in the opposite direction, with fire authority

STAND

WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

Merseyside members are on strike to defend jobs, conditions and fire cover

- 120 job losses (one in 10 operational posts)
- Four of the busiest fire engines removed at night
- 96-hour working shift for less than minimum wage

'anticipated even further opposition from the Fire Brigades Union to many of the changes.'

The changes were "simply part of his overplan to marginalise the FBU and to attack and undermine the authority of the FBU and its local officials."

General secretary Matt Wrack described it as a "union-busting" agenda. The fire authority issued a formal denial on Mr McGuirk's behalf.

Matt Wrack said: "It has all the hallmarks of a union busting agenda tied into a cuts agenda. We're backing our members on Merseyside all the way and we're getting terrific support, not just from FBU members across the UK as we would expect, but from our colleagues in fire services across the world.

"The determination of our members on Merseyside to fight these cuts is enormous. The support they are getting is a real morale booster which I don't think they'll forget."

As *Firefighter* went to press there had already been two sets of four-day strikes followed by an eight-day strike. Two more sets of four-day strikes had also been announced up to 28 September.

The first strike started on 31 August with cover being provided by senior officers and some non-FBU members. Also providing cover were former operational firefighters and office staff given minimal training (see Station Cat, p23).

Les Skarratts, FBU brigade secretary said: "The dispute has been solidly supported by

councillors and the chief fire officer becoming increasingly gaffe-prone.

They managed to publicly rebuff offers to assist from two of the most senior councillors in the north west.

Warren Bradley, the Lib Dem leader of Liverpool City Council, and an FBU member based in Toxteth, was effectively told to mind his own business one day with Liverpool Labour leader Joe Anderson getting the same treatment the following day. Fire authority member councillor Dave Hanratty got more of the same.

As we went to press discussions with the national joint secretaries were set to start. As full a report as possible will be included in the next *Firefighter*.

WHAT DOES A **TRAINEE** **FIREFIGHTER** DO?



Emma Pass: A career in the fire service provides the perfect work /life balance

NEW NATIONAL SELECTION PROCESS

To secure her place on the training course, Emma had to complete successfully the new national firefighter selection process. This consists of an application form, paper-based tests, physical tests and an interview. Staffordshire was one of the first fire services to use the new tests that may soon be coming to a fire service near you. While it is designed to ensure that successful candidates do have the potential to carry out the role of a firefighter, it is not for the faint-hearted. In this particular campaign, Staffordshire selected approximately 30 candidates from the successful group at the end of the process, having had hundreds apply.

When you join a watch on your first station, you're a firefighter from day one, says trainee firefighter Emma Pass

Emma Pass is a 26-year-old sports science graduate from Loughborough University. She has just started out as a firefighter with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service and recently completed an eight-week induction course at the service's headquarters. Firefighting is a highly sought after career choice: it seems harder to get taken on as a crew member these days than to get into an Oxbridge college.

When Emma finished her induction course, she reported for duty as a member of blue watch at Tamworth station and was welcomed as a new crew member. She was ready for the challenge – determined to swim not sink whatever calls came in. “When you join a watch on your first station, you are actually a firefighter from day one,” she reflects. “You are one of the crew, part of the team and have to be ready to get stuck in and do what's needed.”

Emma feels the intensive induction course gave her a solid grounding in core skills, but is quick to add that she continues to learn on the job, working alongside highly experienced colleagues. “Colleagues on the watch are very supportive. It sounds a bit corny, but they're a really good bunch. I've been assigned a mentor and the crew commander is happy to go over any procedures I'm not quite sure about, when there's a quiet moment. When you get on station you know enough to be safe and should pick things up quite quickly as you get more experienced. It's sink or swim. You don't have a choice.”

The induction course focussed on common physical tasks a firefighter would be expected to carry out using personal protection equipment, including climbing and lifting ladders, crawling and walking wearing a face mask with vision obscured and awareness of hazardous substances. There were also sessions on rescuing people from road accidents, including cutting up cars to release

those trapped inside. The final part of the course was on equality and diversity. Emma was a bit sceptical about this at first, but says it made good sense to be aware of different cultural sensibilities and avoiding causing needless offence if possible – it was a view shared by others on the course.

Emma also plays basketball for Great Britain, one of a surprising number of elite sportswomen and men who combine their talents with a career fighting fires (although this isn't a requirement for the job!).

“I certainly see the fire service as a worthwhile and rewarding career. Basketball is very important to me, and I've always been very open about it. For me, a career in the fire service provides the perfect work /life balance, enabling me to train and compete as well as pursue my career in the fire service. I'm convinced I've made the right choice. There are lots of opportunities to progress, and I hope to take them in the future. I've always been a great believer in learning through life.”

Confidence, agility and stamina

Six months after starting work at Tamworth, Emma will begin working towards an NVQ level 111 in emergency operations, where her competences will be assessed by her watch manager, based on practical and written evidence she provides of the skills needed for the job. This is now standard for new trainees.

Those starting out in the fire service soon learn that they will need confidence, agility and stamina while on duty, not to mention the ability to crawl through a smoke-filled walkway using breathing apparatus, vision obscured, unable to hear or talk.

But perhaps above all, they will have to grasp the importance of being a team player – something that is already second nature to Emma as an elite sportswoman. After a stint on the watch, it should soon become second nature to all new trainees.



Emma has been assigned a mentor and the crew commander is happy to go over any procedures she is not sure about

PICTURES: JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Working For You

JOHN PURSER

Brigade secretary

North Wales



John Purser is both the NVQ Coordinator for North Wales Fire and Rescue Service and FBU brigade secretary for the area. Along with colleagues, he has helped to build up union membership through an outreach programme. The team tries to ensure it has regular contact with retained duty system firefighters, who work out of the many small stations peppered throughout the patch, which stretches from the Cheshire border to the Dovey estuary in the south.

The outreach strategy, which includes turning up at drill nights, seems to have paid off. Since the national pay dispute, union membership has risen by 25 per cent. “Most of the increase came in the two or three weeks before the strike,” says John, who spent 26 years on the appliances as firefighter and crew manager.

With other union officials in North Wales, John is keen to ensure that all members receive support when needed. “We are certainly not just a wholetime union. Members working the retained duty system (RDS) can feel isolated, so it's very important we keep in contact and ensure we are working on their behalf. It's very much a team effort here”. There have been recent successes, including the re-instatement through negotiation of extra statutory holidays for RDS personnel, which was lost after the pay dispute. The union is regularly consulted by management on a range of issues including the RDS review.

Though never an RDS firefighter himself, John has had family members who were and understands the pressures the system exerts on members. RDS firefighters make up the bulk of union members in North Wales. “We have around 800 members, two thirds of whom are RDS firefighters. Thirty six of our 44 stations are run solely by RDS personnel, and the rest have a RDS complement.”

John is now co-ordinating NVQ's for all staff, and is keen to ensure RDS personnel don't miss out on professional development and training. RDS personnel are already signing up for a pilot scheme, aimed at making NVQ's more accessible to all.

Them bones, them bones ...

This condition is the UK's single greatest cause of physical disability

ARTHRITIS

October 12 is World Arthritis Day. Over nine million people in the UK have arthritis, making it the country's single greatest cause of physical disability. So what is it, who gets it, and what can you do about it?

Arthritis means inflammation of the joints. There are some 200 variations, from gout and RSI to psoriasis and lupus, each causing pain and loss of mobility. Arthritis strikes people of all ages, including children. Its cause is unknown, and there is currently no cure.

People severely affected by arthritis may qualify as disabled under the Disability Discrimination Act, whose protection now extends to firefighters. This means FBU members with arthritis can request reasonable workplace adaptations to help them perform their job.

Osteoarthritis

The most common arthritis is osteoarthritis (OA), a degenerative form which damages cartilage, the smooth 'elastic' designed to help bones glide over each other. The major weight-bearing joints – spine, hips, and knees – are particularly affected, ruining the body's 'shock absorbers'. OA is frequently triggered by injury, so sports players are highly susceptible. Without injury, it is unusual to develop OA before the age of 40, and unusual not to have it after 50.

Getting a diagnosis

Immediately consult your GP if you have painful joints. Where OA is diagnosed, maintaining mobility is vital. Analgesics and non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) are often prescribed for pain, and a physiotherapist may offer muscle strengthening and mobility exercises to combat stiffening. If degeneration is advanced, you may be referred to an orthopaedic surgeon for joint surgery.

Rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is also common. An inflammatory disease in which the immune system attacks the body instead of

SYMPTOMS OF OSTEOARTHRITIS	SYMPTOMS OF RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS
- Swollen, creaking joints - Bony swellings in fingers - Pain and stiffness - Restricted movement	- Red, inflamed joints, warm to touch. - Often starts in wrists, hands, or feet - Pain and early-morning stiffness

defending it, RA inflames joint linings and tendon sheaths. RA can affect anyone but generally strikes women aged 30-50.

Early diagnosis is crucial because disease-modifying drugs can slow RA down, and control its flare-ups. If blood tests indicate RA, your GP will probably refer you to a rheumatologist for ongoing care.

Managing Arthritis

Obtaining medical treatment, like injections, drug therapy, or joint surgery is important, but so is helping yourself – and it's never too early or too late to start.

Arthritis is long-term so quality of life for people affected depends on their ability to 'self-manage' the condition in partnership with healthcare professionals. While the doctor's job is to relieve your pain, it is your job to stay healthy and active.

Eat properly, maximising vitamin and mineral intake. A varied diet including oily fish and plentiful fruit and vegetables may support joint mobility and help reduce weight.

Keep moving, even when you are in pain. Your physiotherapist will devise a safe exercise programme: low-impact, aerobic exercise like walking, swimming and cycling is usually recommended, whereas jogging or contact sports may strain damaged joints.

Shed extra pounds, so you do not overburden damaged weight-bearing joints. Excess body fat also increases inflammation, making joints more painful.

Challenge pain and the fatigue and depression that it may cause. As well as prescription drugs, try hot or cold packs, acupuncture, massage, yoga, pilates, and homeopathic treatments to see what works for you. Discuss any changes with your doctor.

Mobilise! Why not join Arthritis Care, the largest voluntary organisation working with and for people with arthritis in the UK. It provides information, support and self-help courses, and campaigns for better treatment and services.

→ Visit the website www.arthritiscare.org.uk for free downloadable resources, details of courses, or join the online discussion zone to share experiences with others living with arthritis. If you have any questions about arthritis, contact the Arthritis Care helpline on 0808 800 4050 (weekdays 10am-4pm). Calls are free and confidential and the lines are staffed by trained counsellors.



Coloured X-ray of the right hand of a patient with rheumatoid arthritis

Mesothelioma – claiming compensation

Q I have mesothelioma, the fatal lung cancer related to asbestos. I have a claim against the Brigade but also against my previous employers who were a small lagging company which went bust years ago. I've heard that I can now only claim a proportion of my damages against the Brigade – is that right?

A It did look like that was going to be the case after the House of Lords decided in *Barker v Corus* that mesothelioma claims should be apportioned between defendants. That would have meant that victims would be under-compensated when one or more of the companies who exposed them had gone bust and their insurers could not be traced.

However, after successful lobbying by the unions and their lawyers, the government amended the Compensation Act that has recently been passed so that the pre-Barker position has been restored.

Although all reasonable inquiries still have to be made into other employers, so long as a claim can be established against one defendant, you should recover 100% of your damages.

Ill-health retirement

Q I applied for ill-health early retirement under the Firefighter's Pension Scheme but was refused, even though I have been off sick for a year, because the doctors decided that I was not permanently



However, if the reason why you have been told that your condition is not yet likely to be permanent is that you have not yet explored all possible treatment options, you should seek to use your rights under the Grey Book, section 5, to try to ensure that your employers provide you with the best possible treatment, even if that is on a private basis, to give you the best available opportunity to return to work.

If that treatment is unsuccessful and you remain unfit for work, you will be able to return to your employers for a revised decision on your entitlement to an ill-health pension.

Pregnancy and sick leave

Q I am pregnant. Can I take sick leave?

A Yes, you should follow your employer's normal sickness reporting policy. You are entitled to any sick pay that your employer normally gives.

Your employer should record any pregnancy-related sick leave separately from other sick leave and it should not count towards your total sickness absence for disciplinary or redundancy purposes.

It is against the law for your employer to dismiss you or treat you less favourably because of your pregnancy or for having taken sick leave during your pregnancy.

Your employer can only 'trigger' your maternity leave if you are off sick for a pregnancy-related reason in the four weeks before your baby is due.

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

Legal Beagle

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

unfit. Is there anything I can do about this?

A If the decision to which you are thinking of appealing is the initial decision made by the Brigade Medical Adviser, then there will be a further appeal possible to the Board of Medical Referees. You should ask

your union representative for assistance with that appeal.

Where you have already followed that route and have been refused a pension again, it is likely that application for judicial review is the only way forward. You need to seek legal advice through your union on that.

‘I got the triathlon bug and knew it was something I wanted to keep on doing’

Stafford firefighter Jacqui Slack relaxes after a full day's work by training for up to 20 hours a week to take part – very successfully – in one of the most gruelling athletic endeavours she can find

Jacqui Slack, a probationary firefighter based at Stafford station, is extremely keen on swimming, cycling and running – and it all adds up to more than just a hobby. Last month the 23-year-old competed in the Triathlon World Championships in Lausanne, Switzerland. Coming ninth in the swim and ninth on the bike, she finished in 15th place overall in her age group and was the third Brit home.

Back on White Watch in Stafford, Jacqui enjoys station life – from drills to putting newly acquired skills into practice when the crew is called out on emergencies. But, of course, she also puts in rigorous bouts of training when not on duty, working on her performance as an endurance athlete. Every week, Jacqui spends between eight and 20 hours training in a bid to achieve even faster completion times in her chosen sporting discipline.

She started out as a serious swimmer when she was just nine and in her early teens was competing in galas all over the country, representing both Staffordshire and the North Midlands in team and individual events.

Appetite whetted

She took three years out from competitive sport at 16, but carried on going to the gym to keep herself on top form. Then, at 19, she bought herself a bike and entered her first triathlon, at Much Wenlock. She came in as “second overall female” and her appetite for competing in triathlons was well and truly whetted.

“That’s when it all started. I’d got the triathlon bug and knew it was something I wanted to keep on doing,” says Jacqui. And she hasn’t looked back. In July this year, she came in as the “first overall lady” at a race in Ironbridge and was the overall female winner in a triathlon held in Trentham Gardens in Nottinghamshire last year.

Jacqui relishes the challenge of competing in Olympic-style triathlons, which involve a 1,500 metre swim, followed by a 40,000 metre cycle ride and end with a 10,000 metre run. On average, it takes her just two hours and 16 minutes to complete all three and she can complete the run in 40 minutes.

Jacqui also plans to start competing in even longer distance events, such as the gruelling-sounding “half ironman” where a 2,000 metre swim is followed by an 85,000 metre bike race and a 20,000 metre run. She was due to enter her first half ironman a week after the Triathlon World Championships in early September.

She is finding life as a firefighter fits well

with her ambitions as an athlete. “I’m really enjoying the job, which involves helping the community and advising on safety as well as going out on emergency calls. It’s really satisfying work and the shift patterns allow me to train when not on duty.”

Determination and stamina

Though determination and stamina are certainly needed, support and encouragement during training for races can play an important role in helping endurance athletes achieve the results they are after. Endurance sports seem to be all about pushing yourself as far as you can, and it must help to have strong encouragement from highly focused sporting professionals. Jacqui currently trains with Subsixty Coaching, under the supervision of head coach Gavin Rogers who founded the Didsbury Triathlon Club in Greater Manchester.

The two first met after Jacqui came third in a local Triathlon two years ago. “I joined the club’s training scheme with eight triathlons under my belt and Gavin has given me the confidence and support to compete among the world’s best in my age range. Jacqui competes in her age category, against female athletes who are aged between 20–24 years old. Elite athletes form the next tier up, and Jacqui is

‘It’s really satisfying work and the shift patterns allow me to train when not on duty’



JACQUI SLACK

Jacqui Slack, a probationary firefighter at Stafford station, is extremely keen on swimming, cycling and running. So keen that last month the 23-year-old competed in the Triathlon World Championships in Lausanne, Switzerland



DOMINIC FAVRE/ARC/REUTERS

Contestants at Lausanne swam 1,500 metres, cycled 40 kilometres and ran 10 kilometres

DOMINIC FAVRE/ARC/REUTERS



Jacqui Slack taking part in the Lausanne triathlon last month

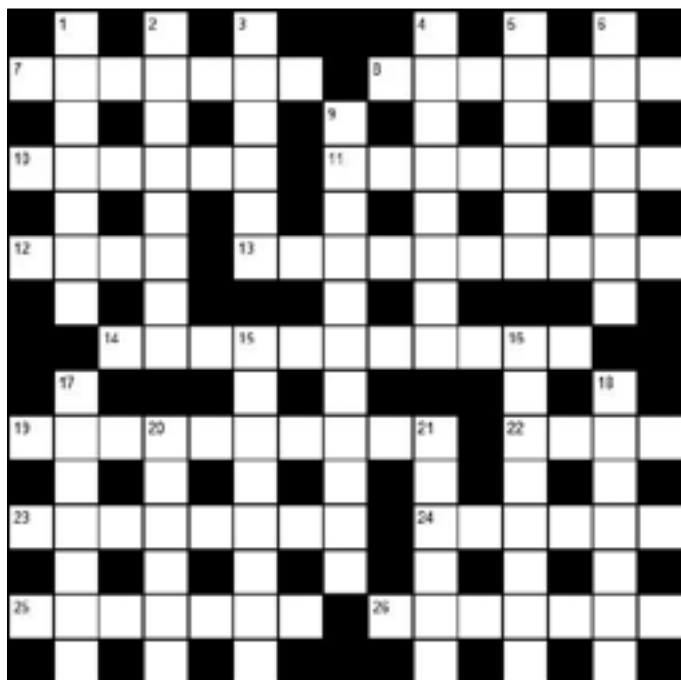
keen to raise her game.

She joined Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service earlier this year, after a six year career in leisure management, working her way up from life-guard to gym manager duty manager, and acquiring an NVQ Level 111 on the way.

"I decided I needed a change, and fire-fighting appealed to me. I think it helps to be focussed and willing to have a go and see things through." So far, she is more than happy with her new career choice and would like to progress within the service, maybe aspiring to team manager or watch manager as her career advances. The fire service has its own triathlon team, and there's the national firefighter games. Jacqui is interested in taking part. Watch this space.

➔ www.subsixty.com

Quick Crossword

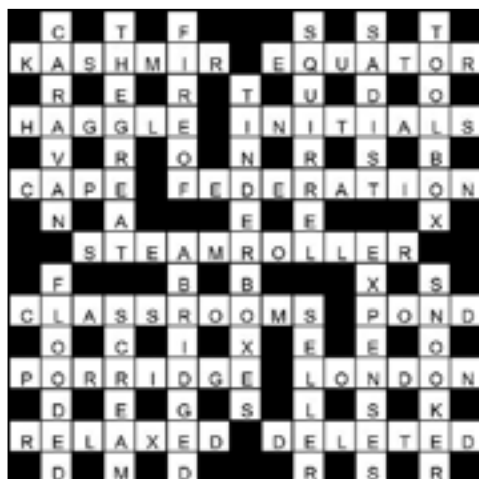


ACROSS

- 7 Mobile holiday home or convoy (of camels?) (7)
- 8 Corpse, especially in USA! (7)
- 10 Film house (6)
- 11 Lift, especially in USA! (8)
- 12 Give temporary possession to another (4)
- 13 No cuts wanted here – or anywhere else, for that matter (10)
- 14 One who transmits on TV or radio (11)
- 19 Not nice for mice (10)
- 22 Liquid measure – 20 fluid ounces (4)
- 23 Stir, for breakfast! (8)
- 24 Novice, greenhorn (6)
- 25 Let air out of (7)
- 26 sports adjudicator (7)

DOWN

- 1 Seafarer (7)
- 2 Table of dates (8)
- 3 Inflamable material infamously used as weapon in Vietnam (6)
- 4 Such behaviour causes fires (8)
- 5 Waterways (6)
- 6 They tick away... (7)
- 9 Fell in value (11)
- 15 Taken to counter effect of poison (8)
- 16 Wants to get as much out of you for as little as possible (8)
- 17 Military rank (7)
- 18 Motors (7)
- 20 Slow, easy walk (6)
- 21 Found in 10 (6)



Solution to
September
crossword

PAUL CONNORS/AP/EMPICS



Prize Quiz

Win a Nintendo DS Lite

Enter our prize quiz and it could be yours. This month fire and heat 'in food'. Just name the food associated with the following clues.

1 Originally served by the Aztecs to the invading Spanish in the 16th century, this well known Mexican dish cooked wrapped in a corn husk is hot.

2 Originating in Germany but adopted and loved by Americans this take away food can be livened up with onions, mustard, chilli sauce or cheese.

3 A Hungarian national dish, this thick meat and potato soup is spiced up with paprika.



4 Eaten predominantly in India and Thailand, this food can be prepared in numerous ways and can go from mild to 'blow your socks off' fiery.

5 Not so much a food as a style of cooking, warm weather will normally bring it on, needs a watchful eye as there is a thin line between char-grilled and plain old burnt!

6 Traditionally a spicy minced beef or pork pie with a yellowish coloured dough whose name reflects its origins in the caribbean.

HOW TO ENTER

Send your answers to the prize quiz by 31 October on a postcard to: Prize Competition (October 2006) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.



ALASTAIR GRANT/AP/EMPICS



Answers to
September quiz
1. frying pan
2. baptism
3. master
4. napalm
5. burned

The winner of the
Pure digital Oasis
radio in our July/
August quiz was
Robbie Taylor of
Cornwall

StationCat

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

Fantasy firefighters ...



We could not have a Station Cat column during a dispute in Merseyside without a mention.

Let's start with a Dave Wright, head of legal services for the authority who put out his first ever fire in Orrell on the first day of the dispute.

Dave was pictured on the front page of the Liverpool Daily Post in full colour, in his best 'firefighter holding branch' pose. He wasn't the only member of Merseyside fire authority staff given minimal training, given the kit and sent on the run putting out fires.

Pictured under the headline: "Lives 'being put at risk by fantasy firefighters,'" Mr Wright said: "I didn't realise there was so much to it at first. I thought it was just point and squirt ..." while denying he or anyone else was at risk.

The article ends with an unfortunate and purely coincidental quote from CFOA President Phil Toase backing the fire authority in its drive for modernisation which "inevitably means some changes to working practices". And no I can't find a single chief officer – other than Tony McGuirk – who thinks sending minimally trained office staff as firefighters is either safe, desirable or an acceptable working practice.

Mr Toase will no doubt be mortified

that his quote making a general point was included at the end of an article under such a headline and such a subject.

Perhaps solicitor Dave – along with other chief officers tempted to follow suit – need to refresh their memory on the law on gross negligence manslaughter and numerous health and safety laws. But what do I know, I'm just the Station Cat.

... and in the real world



I have previously pointed out (July *Firefighter*) that the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLoG) advertising campaign to recruit more women into the fire service was suffering from some worrying decisions regarding the location of adverts. Both Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead sports centres, for example, have the large poster adverts.

I can now report that DCLoG have made it a hat-trick with a third Sports Centre – Chesham – boasting poster adverts and leaflets. The leaflets also extol the virtues (and quite right too) of recruiting women to the retained duty system.

It reads: "Those of us working on the retained duty system live or work mainly in rural areas, near the fire station, and work on an 'on call' basis."

The inclusion of Chesham means all three

sports centres closest to Bovingdon retained station have these recruitment adverts.

Proving once again that Whitehall does not really know what is happening out in the real world. Bovingdon closed on 31 July.

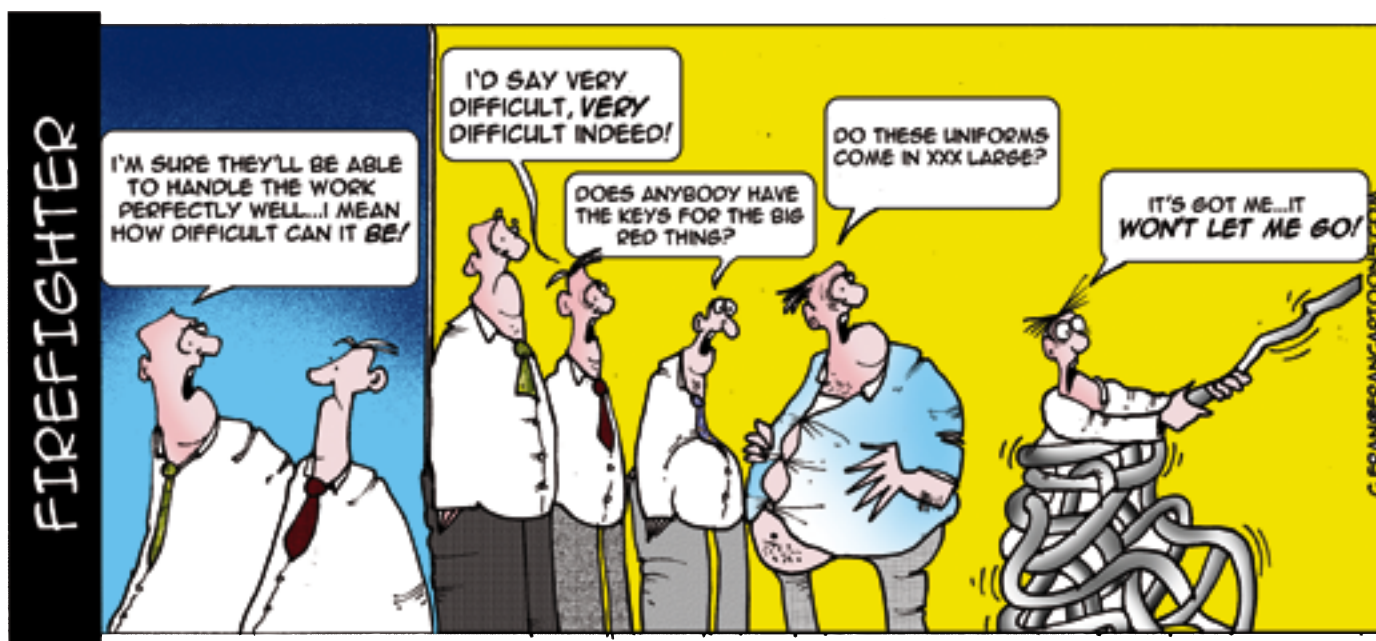
And possibly the most inappropriate location yet found for these recruitment ads? Top of the list so far has to be Torquay's Riviera Centre. The large ads to help recruit more women into the fire service are up on the walls of one of the changing rooms. That's the men's changing room. A female feline assures me there are none in the female changing room.

Poor dears



And, a suggestion from one chief officer that Government isn't really that interested in recruiting more women reaches my ears. Some of the poor dears (the white, male, middle aged chiefs, that is) think it will all blow over and it will be back to business as usual when it does.

Let me assist them. Look at the ministerial team of the Department which has responsibility for the fire service: Ruth Kelly, Yvette Cooper, Angela Smith, Meg Munn, Baroness Andrews ... and Phil Woolas, who helps ensure men have at least some representation. The penny will drop at CFOA some time.



25 year badges



Dorset firefighters Stuart Rowland, John Claxton, Jeff Shuttleworth, John Gaunt, Graham Beevers, Martin Reed, Pete King, Russell Lockwood (left to right) receive their 25 year badges from John Drake, Regional Official (far left) and Karen Adams, Brigade Secretary (far right)



Crew Manager Gordon Harvey (right) receiving his 25 year badge from Station Rep Watch Manager Martin Cutler, Walton-on-Thames Fire Station, Surrey



Dave Moore, Red Watch Orsett fire station, Essex, (right) receiving his 25 year badge from Branch Rep/Chair Tony Benham



Graham Richardson, Community Fire Safety, T&BCC, Essex (right) receiving his 25 year badge from Branch Rep/Chair Tony Benham



Watch Manager Alan Vincent (right) receiving his 25 year badge from Station Rep Watch Manager Martin Cutler Walton-on-Thames Fire Station, Surrey



Martin Brown, Blue Watch Orsett fire station (right), receiving his 25 year badge from Branch Rep/Chair Tony Benham



David Trotter-King (left) of Co3 Clarkston receiving his 25 year badge from Paul Wilson (right)

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



Sub Officer Dave James and his brother Graham James, Tenbury Wells fire station, Hereford and Worcester, receiving their 25 year badges from Ray Price, Vice Chair National Retained Committee

FBU REGIONAL OFFICES

→ **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, BT28 1XJ
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**
6 Bridgford Road, West Bridgford,
Nottingham, NG2 6AB
0115 982 7202
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 Mid and West Wales, North Wales, South Wales**
4 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed,
Bridgend, CF35 5UJ
01656 867910
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, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight**
The Fire Station, St Mary Street, High
Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 2HE
01494 513034
12rs@fbu.org.uk

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

Change of address or next of kin

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

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

T
THOMPSONS
SOLICITORS