

THE FIREFIGHTERS' MANIFESTO

OUR SERVICE. OUR FUTURE.



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CREDIT: MARK THOMAS

FIREFIGHTERS' DEMANDS

Firefighters and emergency control staff employed by fire and rescue services provide an irreplaceable emergency service.¹ The fire and rescue service is responsible for a wide range of emergencies now and in the future. It exists to make our communities safe and resilient. This includes tackling fire and other risks in homes, businesses and other places, facing the impact of climate change and extreme weather, helping vulnerable people and protecting critical national infrastructure.

1. The fire and rescue service has suffered unprecedented central and local funding cuts for more than a decade. The Westminster government and devolved administrations must commit to **investment, not cuts** to the fire and rescue service.
2. The reduction of firefighter and emergency control staff jobs is putting the safety of the public and of firefighters at risk. The Westminster government and devolved administrations must fund the immediate **initial employment of an extra 5,000 firefighters** to complement the existing professional workforce, with a review to examine the reversal of the cuts and the need for long term expansion.
3. Fire station closures and fewer fire engines damage the service to the public. The Westminster and devolved governments must ensure **a minimum safe crewing of five firefighters** on every pumping appliance and no reduction in the number of fire stations.
4. Firefighters have the right to expect **high standards of pay and professional conditions of service**. The FBU wants a pay rise that reflects the real contribution firefighters make to community safety, an end to the pay cuts and remedy for its impact on our members' living standards. Firefighters expect employers and governments to engage constructively with our elected representatives at local and national level and through agreed collective bargaining arrangements – the National Joint Council (NJC).
5. The equality agenda in the fire and rescue service has stalled. The Westminster and other governments must instigate and implement **a new equality and diversity strategy**, based on the NJC's Inclusive Fire Service Group standards and best practice. This includes levelling up maternity, paternity and caring leave.
6. The chief fire officers' body NFCC and its predecessors have had a monopoly on advising ministers and are culpable for the failures in fire and rescue policy in recent years. The Westminster government must create a **new statutory advisory body** to oversee standards and best practice in fire and rescue services across the UK, which includes the FBU at every level, along with other key fire experts.
7. Every government should implement **a statutory duty on the fire and rescue service to respond to major flooding and other extreme weather**, providing the necessary powers and resources to carry out this work safely and professionally. Ministers must be held to account for adequate and appropriate funding, guidance and UK-wide standards.

¹ We refer to wholetime, retained and control firefighters generically as 'firefighters' in this report for brevity. This also refers to all ranks and roles, from trainees to senior officers.

8. The Westminster and devolved governments should increase UK-wide planning and cooperation, devise **UK-wide response standards** in consultation with fire sector stakeholders. These should include:
 - a maximum response time standard of five minutes from the time of call to arrival of the first pumping appliance
 - a maximum response time standard for the second pumping appliance
 - a minimum of five riders on all pumping appliances
 - permanently crewed aerial ladder appliances.
9. There should be research undertaken to assess the response time to optimise the key aims of reducing deaths and injuries, reducing fire-spread and damage to property. There should be a general requirement on all fire and rescue services to continually improve emergency response times, measured from time of call.
10. The Grenfell Tower fire exposed the building safety crisis in the UK and the consequences of deregulation for fire safety. The Westminster government and devolved administrations must urgently remove flammable cladding from all tower blocks and public buildings.
11. The Westminster and devolved governments must ensure sprinklers are retrofitted to high-risk buildings, including buildings over 11 metres, houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) and schools, wherever a risk assessment deems them necessary. Tenants' rights should be strengthened and democratically-elected groups given genuine influence in decision making.
12. The Westminster and devolved governments should reintroduce mandatory fire certificates for designated premises, particularly HMOs and places where people sleep or congregate in significant numbers, such as hospitals and shopping malls. Such premises would be subject to independent inspections by professional fire and rescue service inspectors, with statutory powers of entry to individual homes where necessary. Fire inspectors should get the resources needed to enforce fire safety legislation.
13. The Westminster and devolved governments must ensure **fire inspectors** are involved in all stages of new high-risk buildings, from design to sign off before occupancy. Fire inspectors should have a statutory role at each gateway in the development of high-risk premises.
14. The Westminster and other governments must urgently research the resources needed so firefighters can intervene safely at all incidents, from houses to high rise residential buildings, warehouses to other businesses, with all key fire stakeholders involved. Governments must scrap private 'approved' inspectors, with all such work brought in house with properly-funded local authority building control.
15. The Building Research Establishment (BRE) should be brought back into public ownership, to provide central government with a publicly owned, publicly funded and publicly accountable research establishment and testing house. All governments must provide statutory underpinning for all fire risk assessors to meet stringent professional occupational standards before they can be accredited as "competent" to carry out fire risk assessments for the owners/managers of buildings. Fire risk assessment should be carried out by trained firefighters.
16. The FBU wants a **publicly owned, democratically run** fire and rescue service. The union wants fire and rescue authorities to be directly elected and directly accountable to their electorate for decisions made on local services.

17. The Westminster government and devolved governments must rule out **privatisation** of the fire and rescue service, end efforts to outsource and mutualise local fire and rescue services and return the Fire Service College to public ownership and control.
18. The Westminster government and devolved administrations should prevent Police and Crime Commissioners from taking over the governance of local fire and rescue services. Fire and rescue authorities should run fire and rescue services: PFCCs should return fire responsibility to local democratic control.
19. The fire and rescue section of the new inspectorate HMICFRS should be separated from the police inspectorate and be renamed accordingly.
20. The FBU is willing to **discuss serious proposals** for reorganising the fire and rescue service, as long as they will improve public and firefighter safety and protect democratic accountability.
21. The Westminster and devolved governments must ensure any development of the role and responsibility of the fire and rescue service is properly funded. Any changes must be negotiated between fire employers and the FBU at the NJC.
22. The FBU will campaign to defend existing national negotiating structures on pay and conditions, and in defence of our officials' right to facility time, time off for trade union duties and other workplace rights.
23. Firefighters have the right to expect that their **health, safety and welfare** is paramount when decisions are made by employers and governments. The FBU wants to ensure firefighters' mental and physical health is suitably risk assessed, so that prevention and control measures are implemented through safe systems, health monitoring and suitable personal protective equipment. The Westminster government should investigate presumptive legislation, along similar lines to laws passed in Canada, the USA and Australia, which compensates firefighters for occupational diseases.
24. Firefighters have the right to decent quality occupational **pensions**, which properly reflect the nature of the work we do. Governments must scrap the firefighters' pension scheme changes imposed in 2015, so that all firefighters (including control firefighters) can obtain an occupational pension equivalent to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme 1992.
25. Firefighters must have the right to organise, assemble and take industrial action. Repeal all the anti-union laws, including the Minimum Service Levels Act and Trade Union Act 2016, and institute positive legal rights for trade unions.

1 INTRODUCTION – FIRE AND RESCUE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

The fire and rescue service is an essential public service and a national strategic asset. Firefighters tackle every kind of emergency, **24 hours a day, 365 days a year**. Firefighters receive the first call people make when it matters most and are the first line of defence when things go wrong. The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is proud to represent the vast majority of firefighters across the UK.

The UK fire and rescue service can mobilise ten thousand firefighters in a matter of minutes to tackle almost every emergency imaginable. Specially-trained firefighters are on duty at all times, ready for deployment to incidents, large and small. The arrival of professional firefighters, swiftly and with appropriate numbers and adequate resources, is of tremendous value, both to those immediate victims who need our help and politicians who are accountable when things go wrong.



*Matt Wrack,
FBU general secretary*

RISKS

Firefighters tackle a wide range of hazards in the service of our communities. Whether it is fires, road traffic incidents, floods, terrorist incidents or animal rescue, firefighters are there to prevent, protect and intervene. There are still a very large number of those incidents – the Grenfell Tower fire was a terrible reminder of those existing risks. But we know that climate change, the changing population and housing are **current and growing risks**. Firefighters will be central to managing these.

INVESTMENT

Despite saving lives and reducing fire damage, one-in-five (20%) frontline firefighter jobs have been cut over the last decade. Governments and local fire authorities impose malevolent austerity. This is a disgrace and cannot continue. To meet the risks of today and tomorrow, central government and fire authorities must put **sustainable investment** into the fire and rescue service.

STATUTORY ADVISORY BODY

Successive governments and ministers have overseen decades of damage to the fire and rescue service. This has been dressed up as modernisation, with retrogression on standards dressed up as reform. Deregulation has weakened resilience. This regime has been imposed by politicians and implemented by chief fire officers. The FBU has been excluded from advisory bodies, guidance and policy – despite warning repeatedly before every calamity. The Westminster government and the devolved administrations must establish **a statutory advisory body**, with the FBU involved at every level, to oversee fire and rescue research, policy, guidance and planning.

RESILIENCE

The FBU is determined to ensure the UK fire and rescue service is fit for purpose. Firefighters want **UK-wide resilience**, safe and professional standards applied nationally that provide the public with the fire and rescue service they deserve. Firefighters want investment in our service and a voice at every level of decision making. The FBU believes that fire safety law and the whole safety regime needs overhauling. We publish this report so politicians hear the views of the professionals.



CREDIT: EDDIE HOWLAND

2 THE RISKS TACKLED BY FIREFIGHTERS

Firefighters tackle a wide range of risks to protect the public: fires, floods, road traffic collisions, rail and air incidents, wildfire, storms and heatwaves, as well as terrorist attacks. The risk profile is increasing, with climate change, an ageing population and housing crises generating further challenges for UK-wide resilience.

2.1 THE NATIONAL RISK REGISTER

The Westminster government's National Risk Register assesses the risks facing the UK and preparations to tackle them. The most recent edition was published in August 2023. Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, firefighters are category 1 responders to a wide range of threats:

- terrorist attacks
- chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) attacks
- environmental hazards, such as flooding, heatwaves, droughts and wildfires
- human and animal health, including pandemics and infectious disease outbreaks
- major accidents, such as transport accidents, industrial accidents and major fires.

The National Risk Register assumes the fire and rescue service can respond robustly.¹ National resilience – the capability of the UK as a whole to tackle one or more of these emergencies – depends on firefighters and emergency control staff. Yet successive governments over two decades have cut funding to local fire authorities, undermining resilience.

PANDEMICS: A RISK IDENTIFIED SINCE 2008

The first National Risk Register (2008) warned of the high probability of an influenza pandemic and the risks from new diseases. The UK would likely face “wider social and economic disruption, significant threats to the continuity of essential services, lower production levels, shortages and distribution difficulties”. These warnings were repeated subsequently. However ministers, employers and chief fire officers did little to prepare for a pandemic like Covid-19. This was a deadly failure with more than 200,000 people dying from Covid-19 in the UK.

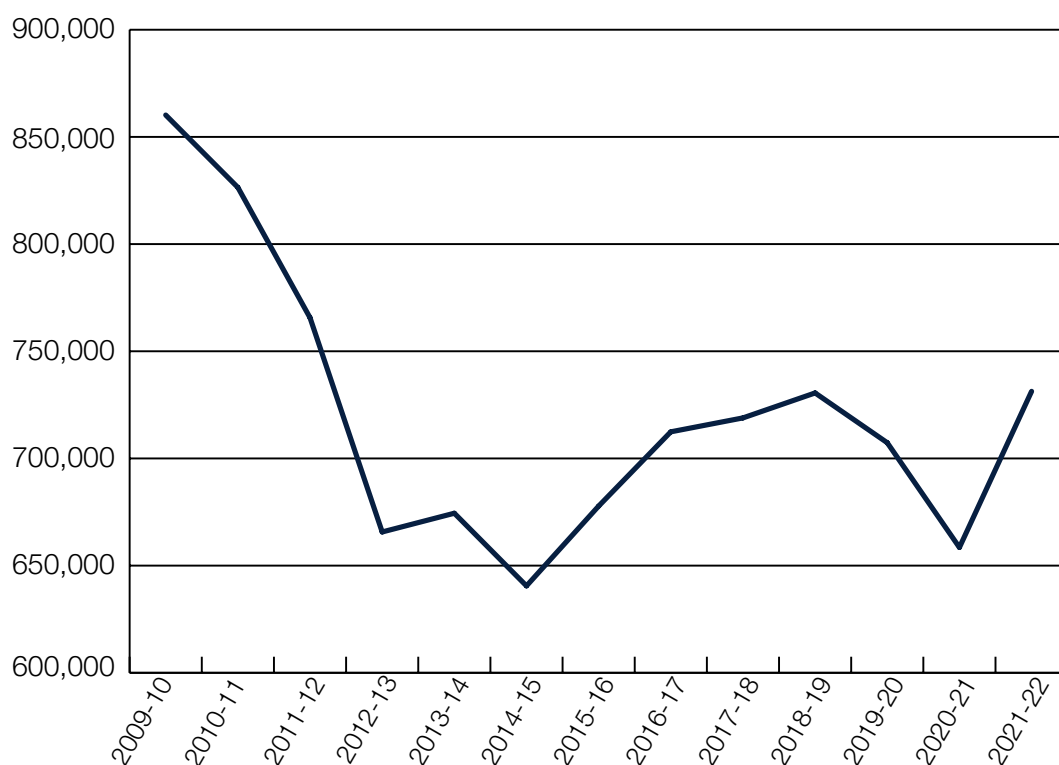
During the Covid-19 pandemic, firefighters maintained 24/7, 365 emergency cover right across the UK. Firefighters also agreed, via a UK-wide collective agreement negotiated by the FBU with fire employers and chief fire officers, a range of additional activities to assist the public.

2.2 FIRES, NON-FIRE INCIDENTS, FIRE AND OTHER DEATHS

Some politicians, civil servants and think tanks claim that fewer fires somehow justify cuts to the fire and rescue service. But even officially published data shows that there are still high risks of fires and fire deaths. It also shows that firefighters respond to an ever-growing range of emergencies to assist the public. There is no justification for cutting firefighters numbers.

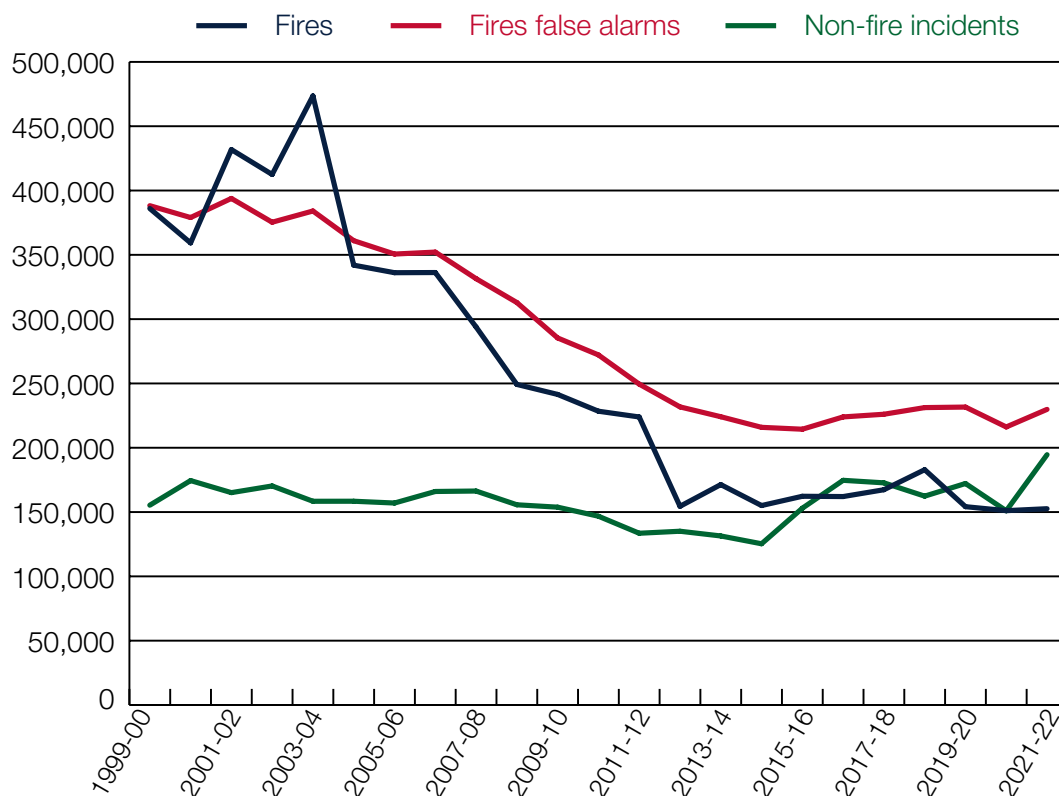
At the turn of the century, firefighters responded to more than a million incidents a year. There was a downward trend in total incidents until 2012, when total incidents plateaued at around 700,000 a year. Incidents have risen since, apart from the Covid-19 pandemic years (see Figure 2.1).²

FIGURE 2.1: TOTAL INCIDENTS ATTENDED BY UK FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES, 2009-10 TO 2021-22



The fire and rescue service attends fires, false alarms and non-fire incidents. Since the turn of the century, there were significant reductions in the number of fires and false alarms attended. (Many fire and rescue services choose not to attend fire alarm actuations, which they would previously have attended). The number of non-fire incidents attended has risen (see Figure 2.2).³

FIGURE 2.2: FIRES, FALSE ALARMS, NON-FIRE INCIDENTS ATTENDED IN ENGLAND, 1999-2000 TO 2021-22



The downward trend in the number of fires attended by fire and rescue services was driven by changes in fire safety, technology and smoking habits, as well as fire regulation, education and prevention work by firefighters. Over the last decade, the number of fires attended levelled off at around 200,000 each year.

In recent years, firefighters have tackled new and emerging risks from fire:

- at a vape factory in Blackburn
- at a lithium-ion storage plant in Merseyside
- in homes and outside caused by e-scooters
- high rise residential buildings
- wildfires.

Non-fire incidents attended by firefighters have also increased, reaching almost 200,000 in recent years. These include:

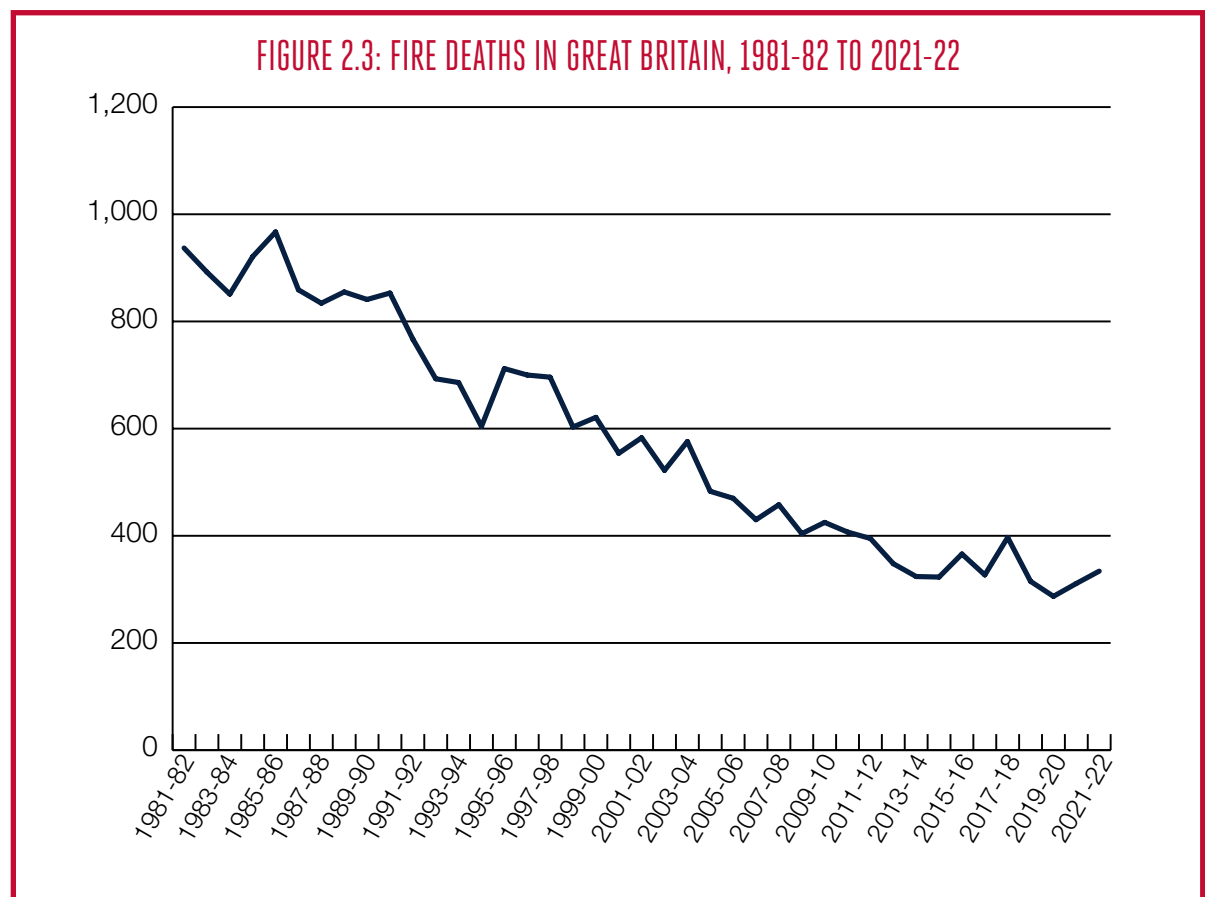
- road traffic collisions (RTCs)
- medical incidents
- flooding
- effecting entry and exit
- animal assistance incidents
- hazardous materials incidents
- suicides and attempts
- assisting other agencies.

Official statistics do at least indicate the range of irreplaceable activities carried out by firefighters serving their communities. But they don't capture the whole picture. The flooding of an entire village could be counted as one incident, equivalent to a basement flood at a single property. How responses to terrorist attacks are recorded is not clear.

Annually, more than 40,000 people are rescued by firefighters across the UK. This equates to more than 100 rescues every day. Around 4,000 rescues take place at fires. But there were around ten times more rescues at non-fire incidents.⁴

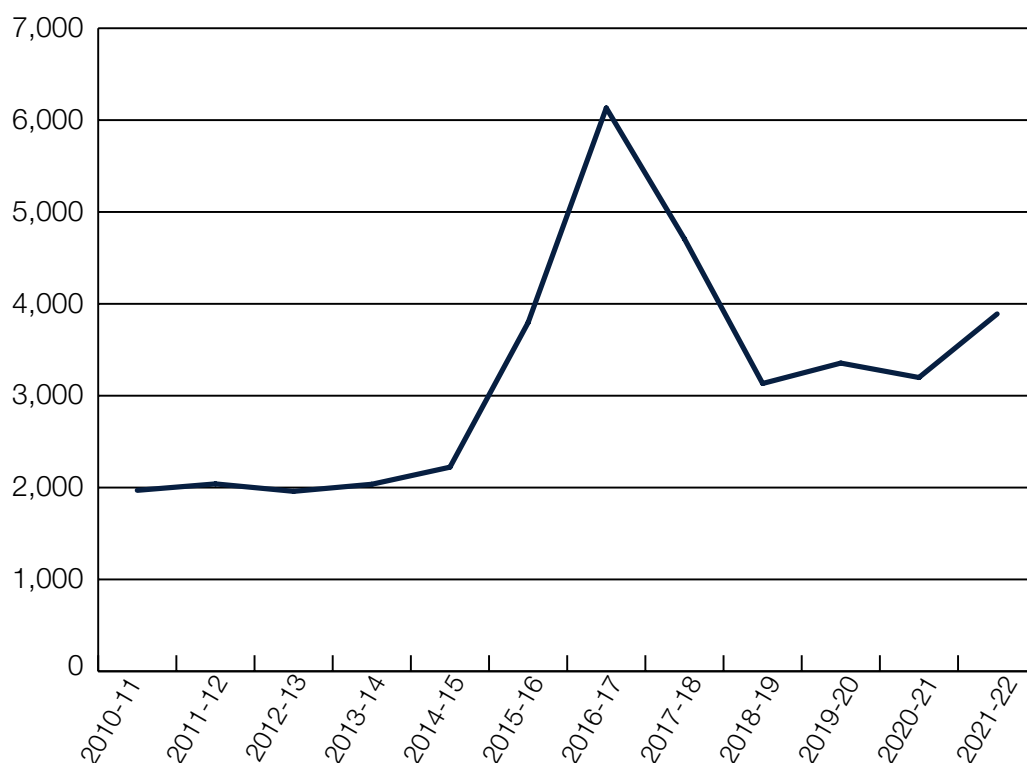
FATALITIES

The risk of death and injury from fire at home, work and the wider community tragically still exists. Around three-quarters of fire deaths occur in dwellings. Fire deaths have fallen from around 600 a year at the turn of the century. Since then, around 400 people die in fires annually across Great Britain. The Grenfell Tower fire was a reminder of the terrible consequences of complacency over fire safety.



Fires are not the only emergencies attended by firefighters where people die. The number of deaths firefighters deal with every year at non-fire incidents, including road traffic collisions, floods and suicides has doubled over the last decade. With the emergency medical response trials, this leapt to more than 6,000 deaths during 2016-17 (see Figure 2.4).⁵

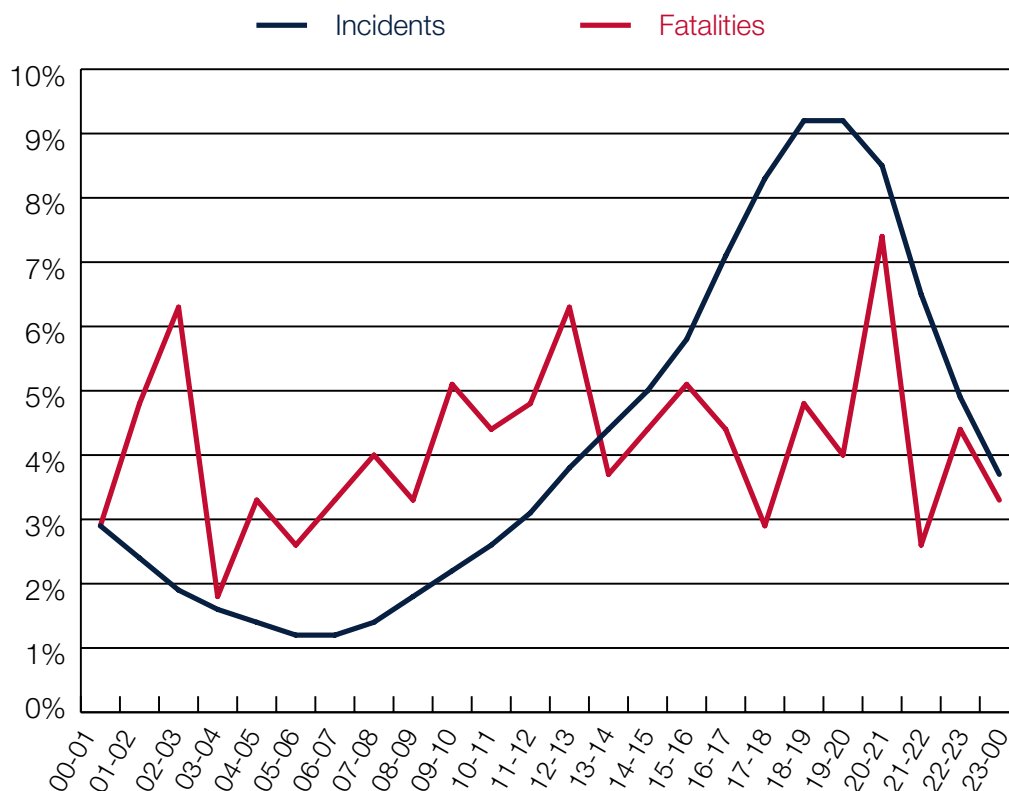
FIGURE 2.4: FATAL CASUALTIES FROM NON-FIRE INCIDENTS IN GREAT BRITAIN, 2010-11 TO 2021-22



NIGHT COVER

Peak times for both fires and fire deaths occur during night shifts, indicating the importance of firefighters on duty during these periods.⁶

FIGURE 2.5: FIRES AND FIRE DEATHS BY HOUR, ENGLAND



2.3 CLIMATE CHANGE

The climate is changing. The Met Office confirmed 2022 was the UK's hottest year on record. The top ten highest annual temperatures have occurred in the last two decades.⁷

All areas of the UK are projected to become warmer. Hot summers like 2022 could become even more common by mid-century. In the future, with further high emissions, the frequency of hot spells increases. So does the intensity of heavy summer rainfall events.⁸

The Westminster government's first Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) in 2012 recognised that "There would be added burdens on our emergency services in responding to more frequent flooding, heatwaves and wildfires."⁹ The latest CCRA 2022 lists floods and wildfires in a number of risks assessed as "more action needed" at a UK-wide level.¹⁰

The Westminster government's second National Adaptation Programme (2018) demanded: "Emergency services and local resilience capability take account of and are resilient to, a changing climate."¹¹ This has not translated into funding the fire and rescue service sufficiently to meet these challenges.

WILDFIRES

Recently, the UK has experienced significant wildfire incidents, bringing an increased risk to homes, infrastructure and agriculture. These wildfires increasingly occur at the "rural-urban interface", where countryside meets settlements.

On 19 July 2022, fifteen fire and rescue services declared major incidents due to wildfire. The London Fire Brigade (LFB) took 2,500 calls and tackled a thousand incidents – probably its busiest day since World War II. Yet on the day, 39 appliances were out of action – there were not enough firefighters to crew these fire engines.¹²

FLOODS

Similarly, firefighters have also had to intervene in a wide range of flood incidents in recent years, notably in summer 2007, 2012 and in the winters of 2013-14, 2015-16 and 2019-20.¹³

The Climate Change Risk Assessment 2022 estimates that just under 1.9 million people across all areas of the UK, are exposed to frequent flooding.¹⁴ Annual damages from flooding for non-residential properties across the UK is expected to increase by 27% by 2050 and 40% by 2080.¹⁵

The FBU has campaigned for a legal duty to be placed on all fire and rescue authorities across the UK to tackle major flooding and wants the resources to match it from central funding. There is currently a legal duty for fire and rescue services to respond to major floods in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales – but not in England.

2.4 A CHANGING POPULATION

The UK population is now 67 million, an increase of 3.7 million (6%) from a decade ago.¹⁶ There were more than 28 million households in the UK in 2022, an increase of 6% (1.6 million) in a decade. More than eight million people live alone, 30% of all households.¹⁷

The number of households in England is projected to increase from 23 million to almost 25 million in 2028 and to 27 million in 2043. The number of people aged 75 years and over living on their own is projected to increase by 461,000 in the coming decade. Similar trends in one-person households are expected in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.¹⁸

The number of people of pensionable age across the UK, currently 12 million, will grow to more than 15 million. The number of people aged 85 years and over will almost double to three million by 2045.¹⁹ More than three million people aged 65 years and over were living alone in England and Wales, 30% of the older population.²⁰

A Health Foundation report published in July 2023 found that 9.1 million people in England are projected to be living with major illness by 2040, an increase of 2.5 million people. Nearly one-in-five of the adult population will be living with major disease by 2040, with significant implications for public services.²¹

The risk of fire-related fatality increases with age, with those aged 80 and over at the greatest risk of dying in a fire. Around half of all fire-related fatalities in England were 65 years old and over. The fatality rate for people over 65 is at least double the rate for the general population; for people aged 80 years and over it is quadruple the general rate.²²

Health-related incidents attended by the fire and rescue service are likely to increase in the future. This requires planning, training and remuneration for firefighters and emergency control staff to ensure a professional response.

2.5 THE HOUSING CRISIS

Living arrangements have changed significantly over the last half century. Home ownership and private rentals have increased, while fewer people live in council housing.²³

Housing standards vary enormously. In England, 23% of private rented sector dwellings and 13% of local authority dwellings do not meet decent homes standards. Similarly, 6% of private rented dwellings and 8% of social housing are overcrowded.²⁴

A house in multiple occupation (HMO) has at least three tenants living there, forming more than one household, sharing toilet, bathroom or kitchen facilities with other tenants. Landlords of HMOs are subject to licencing arrangements across the four administrations, in part due to the increased risks associated with these properties. More than half a million HMOs are licenced.²⁵

Around three-quarters of all annual fire deaths take place in dwelling fires. A similar proportion of non-fatal casualties were also in dwelling fires. Around a quarter of dwelling fire casualties take place in purpose built flats or maisonettes.²⁶

A safe home is a fundamental human right. A properly-resourced fire and rescue service is necessary to ensure fire safety standards are maintained and improved.

3 HOW AUSTERITY DAMAGED THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Austerity cuts to fire and rescue services have damaged the service to the public and hurt the workforce. Sustained investment from Westminster and other governments is an urgent necessity.

3.1 CUTS TO CENTRAL AND LOCAL FUNDING

The fire and rescue service across the UK has been massively underfunded over the last decade. In money terms, the fire and rescue service across the UK spends about £3bn each year (see Figure 3.1). This is around the same level it was in 2010. Therefore, taking inflation into account, spending on fire has fallen significantly.

FIGURE 3.1: NET CURRENT EXPENDITURE ON UK FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES, 2022-23

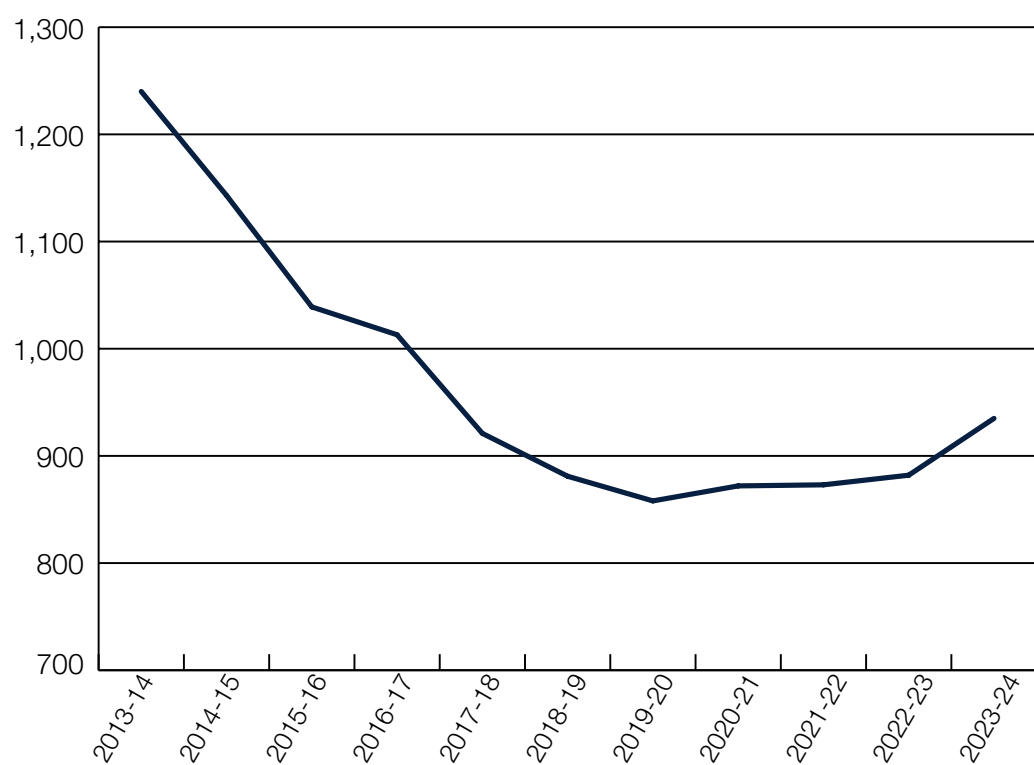
England	£2,421 million
Scotland	£294 million
Wales	£164 million
Northern Ireland	£90 million
UK	£3 billion

CENTRAL FUNDING

Funding for the fire and rescue service is made up of central funding from Westminster and locally raised revenue from councils. In England, central funding between 2013 and 2020 was reduced by more than 30% in cash terms alone, and with small increases in cash terms since (see Figure 3.2).²⁷

In 2010, fire funding was split roughly 50:50 for England as a whole, with varying proportions in different brigades. Today, central funding accounts for less than 40% of fire and rescue income, fuelling local cuts.

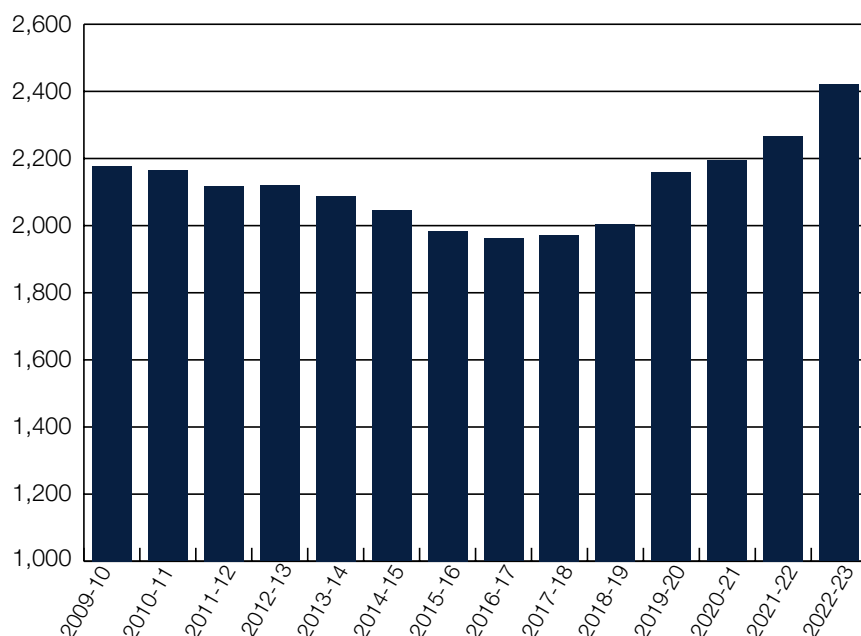
FIGURE 3.2: CENTRAL FUNDING FOR FIRE AND RESCUE IN ENGLAND, CASH TERMS (£M)



ENGLAND

In England, actual spending on fire and rescue has not risen much in cash terms over the last decade (see Figure 3.3).

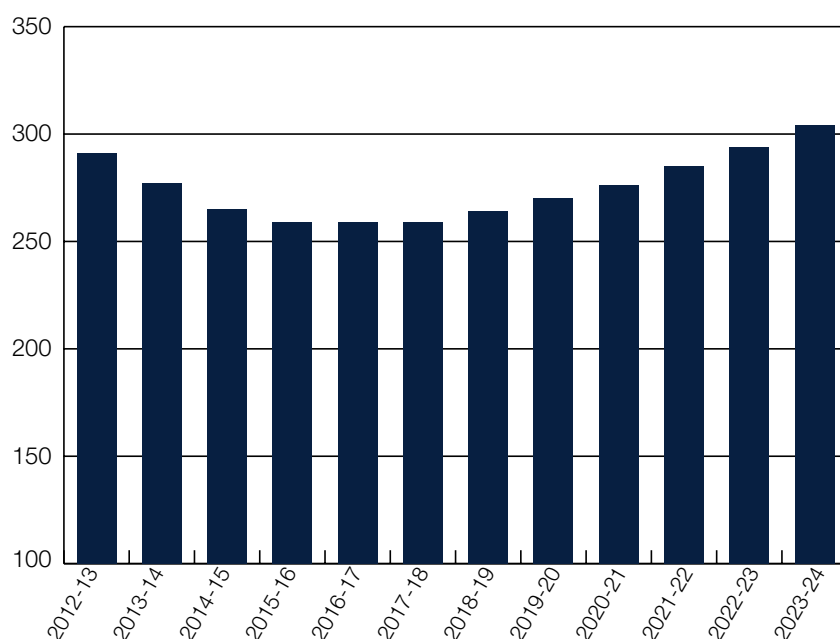
FIGURE 3.3: OVERALL EXPENDITURE ON FIRE AND RESCUE IN ENGLAND, CASH TERMS (£M)



SCOTLAND

On 1 April 2013, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) replaced the eight previous brigades. Overall funding in cash terms fell steeply in the first five years, before some increases recently (see Figure 3.4).²⁸

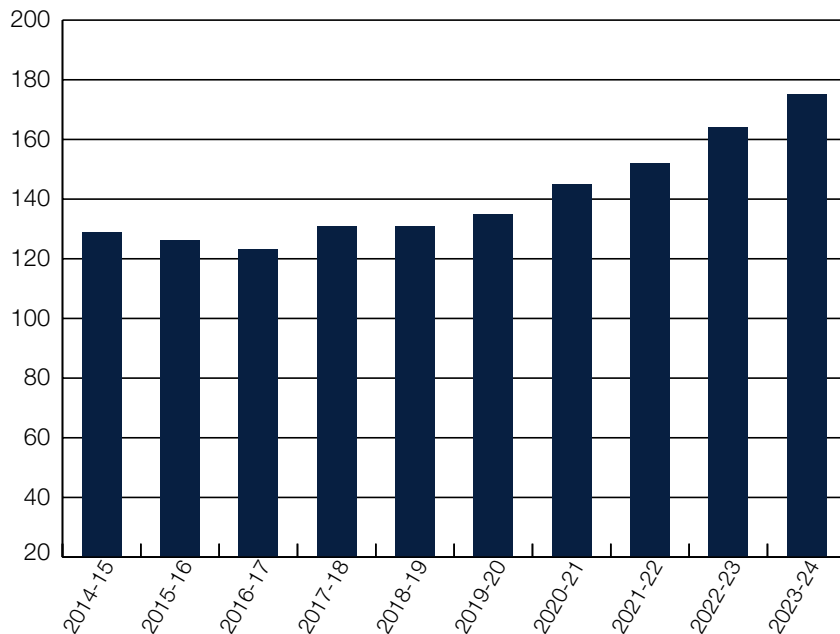
FIGURE 3.4: FUNDING FOR FIRE AND RESCUE IN SCOTLAND, CASH TERMS (£M)



WALES

Funding for the three fire and rescue services in Wales was also cut, but has increased since 2016-17 (see Figure 3.5).²⁹

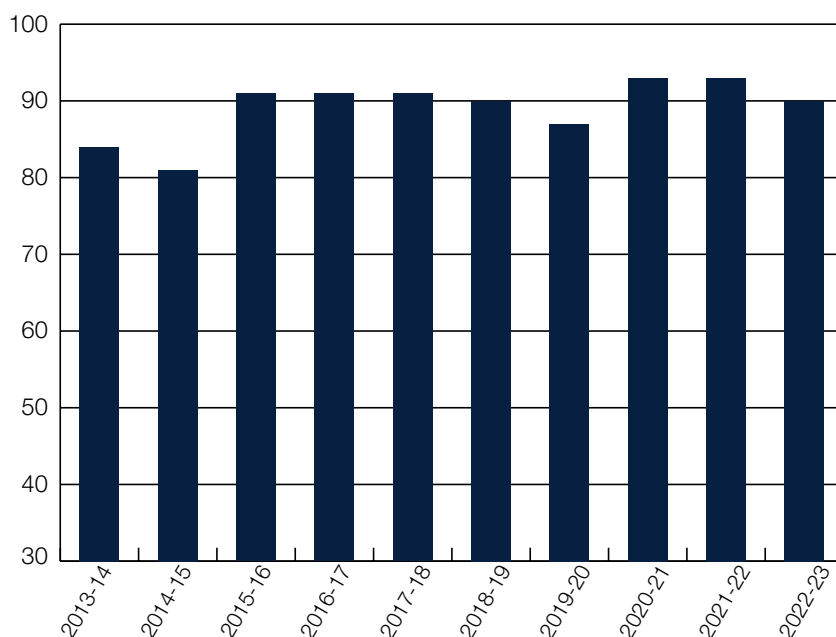
FIGURE 3.5: FUNDING FOR FIRE AND RESCUE IN WALES, CASH TERMS (£M)



NORTHERN IRELAND

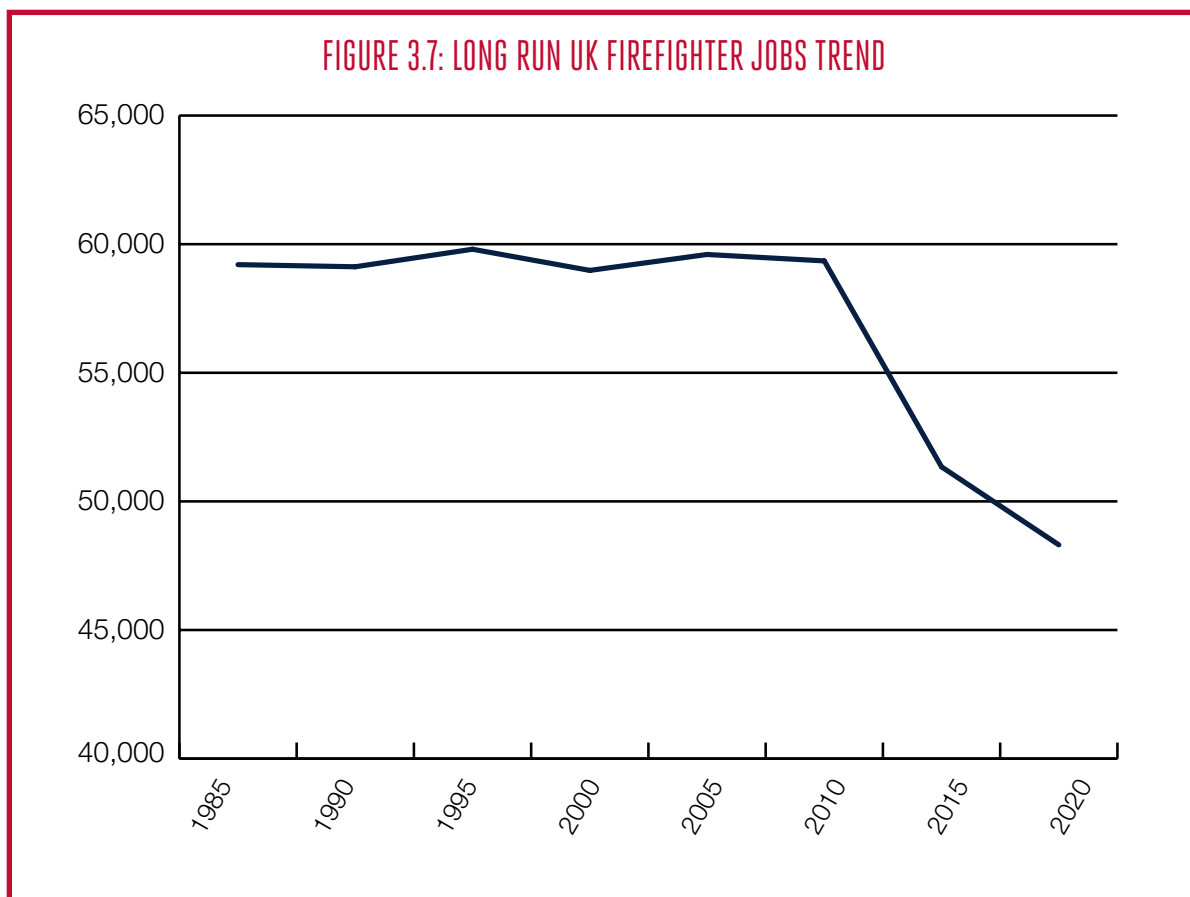
The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) did not face the same drastic austerity as other parts of the UK, although budgets have been tighter in some years (see Figure 3.6).³⁰

FIGURE 3.6: FUNDING FOR FIRE AND RESCUE IN NORTHERN IRELAND, CASH TERMS (£M)



3.2 FIREFIGHTER JOBS CUT

Fire and rescue services are labour-intensive – firefighters are irreplaceable on the fire ground. Three-quarters of fire budgets is spent on firefighters. Therefore any cuts to funding inevitably impact on the number of firefighters employed (see Figure 3.7).³¹



Since 2010, almost **12,000 firefighter jobs** have been cut across the UK – one-in-five (20%) of the total number of jobs.

The bulk of those job losses were wholetime (full-time) firefighters, with more than 8,000 jobs lost. Almost 3,000 retained (part-time, on call) firefighter jobs were lost, while more than 500 control jobs were cut.³²

FIGURE 3.8: FIREFIGHTER JOB CUTS 2010-22

	Wholetime	Retained	Control	Total	%
England	-7,099	-2,248	-434	-9,781	-21%
Scotland	-822	-314	-60	-1,196	-16%
Wales	-184	-321	-29	-534	-14%
Northern Ireland	-121	-104	2	-223	-11%
UK	-8,226	-2,987	-521	-11,734	-20%

3.3 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY – NOT GOOD ENOUGH

The fire and rescue service has a major problem with discrimination, harassment, bullying and other unacceptable behaviour. Significant sections of the workforce are mistreated.

In November 2022, the Independent Culture Review report found the London Fire Brigade was “institutionally misogynist and racist”, with evidence of homophobia and disability discrimination. It confirmed what FBU representatives – especially our equality reps – have reported for many years in every service across the UK. The FBU is determined to create a working environment free of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination, promoting dignity and respect for all.

The Westminster government and its ministers carry heavy responsibility for failures on equalities. The 2010 Cameron government scrapped equality targets. It also cut central funding, hampering new recruitment. Successive governments gave no priority to equalities within public services, provided no new legislation or guidance.

Fire employers and chief fire officers also bear responsibility for these failures. They have implemented the agenda of governments, failing to fight for the policies needed to tackle inequality. The NFCC has done very little in the realm of equalities.

HMICFRS, the fire inspectorate in England since 2017, has also failed. Although it has carried out local inspections examining equality, diversity and inclusion, it has mostly given individual fire and rescue services and chief fire officers a clean bill of health. In some cases, this has happened just before a major equality scandal emerged.

The proportion of women wholetime and retained firefighters in the UK has risen from around 4% in 2010 to around 8% in 2022. Some of the improvement in the proportion of women is due to the retirement of older male firefighters, together with a shrinking workforce. In emergency fire control rooms, where three-quarters of the workforce are women, more than a quarter of control jobs have been cut.³³

The proportion of black and ethnic minority firefighters has increased, from around 4% in 2010 to 6% in 2022 for wholetime firefighters. However only around 2% of retained firefighters come from more diverse backgrounds. The official figures leave the identity of significant numbers of personnel unstated, making comparisons unreliable. Not all services even provide a breakdown by ethnicity.³⁴

The numbers of lesbian, gay and bisexual firefighters is recorded at 3-4% in England over the last few years. However there is significant under-reporting and no figures for the numbers of transgender firefighters. Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales do not currently report the proportion of LGBT+ firefighters.³⁵

In 2015, the NJC established the Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG). It includes the FBU, fire service employers and chief fire officers. The IFSG has gathered evidence, published comprehensive reports and set standards. In 2017, the FBU and fire service employers signed a Memorandum of Understanding committing the fire service to take action to create a more inclusive workforce and culture. The IFSG delivered the only sector wide developed equality, diversity and inclusion recommendations. However these have been largely ignored by chief fire officers and the inspectorate in England.

3.4 FIRE STATION AND CONTROL ROOM CLOSURES, FEWER APPLIANCES

Across the UK, 82 fire stations have closed since 2010, about 4% of the total. Some 17 fire controls have closed in the UK since 2010.³⁶

FIGURE 3.9: FIRE STATION CLOSURES, 2010-22

	2010	2022	Change	%
England	1,439	1,390	-49	-3%
Scotland	382	357	-25	-7%
Wales	157	149	-8	-5%
Northern Ireland	68	68	0	0%
UK	2,046	1,964	-82	-4%

There are now fewer pumping appliances and aerial ladders. In England, more than 200 pumping appliances have been removed since 2010. In Scotland, there are 45 fewer pumping appliances. Some fire authorities have introduced vans, which carry fewer firefighters and less specialist equipment.³⁷

Even HMICFRS has recognised that “in some services there are too few firefighters available to crew fire engines on a regular basis than the service says it needs to meet its foreseeable risk”.³⁸

Cuts to the numbers of firefighters, stations and appliances have a huge impact on the service to the public. Some brigades impose three firefighters on a fire engine, instead of the required five. This means fewer firefighters on the fire ground at the early stages of any incident. Incidents deteriorate exponentially. Slower attendances and fewer firefighters mean more harm to our communities and more risk to firefighters.

3.5 THE VALUE OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

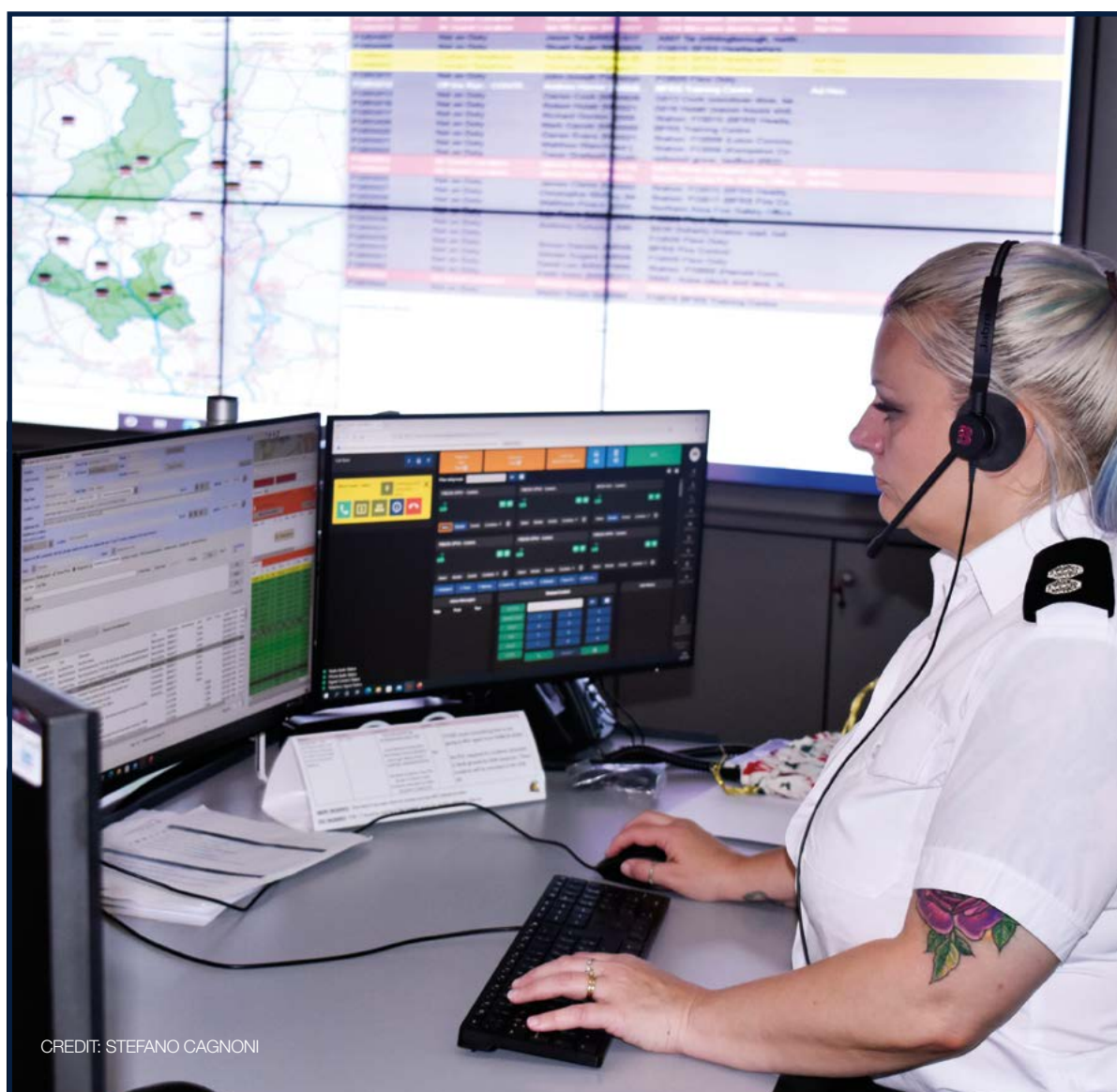
The cost of the fire and rescue service is still only around £3 billion. This equates to less than £50 for every man, woman and child in the UK per year – extraordinary value for money considering the wide range of activities undertaken. It compares very favourably with private sector providers of insurance for boilers or vehicle breakdowns.

In 2022, the NFCC published a report, *The Economic and Social Value of UK Fire and Rescue Services*. This was based on England-only data before the pandemic. Its conservative estimate put the value of the fire and rescue service at £13bn. This included:

- economic value of fire (property) = £4.45bn
- economic value of fire (lives) = £ 5.35bn
- economic value of non-fire = £3.2bn
- economic value of protection = £0.11bn.

Spending on fire and rescue in England at the time was £2.1 billion. Therefore the report concluded that the value of the fire and rescue service was six times its cost.³⁹

There are significant flaws with the report, including its disgraceful flirtation with the potential role of private companies and the failure of the NFCC to prevent cuts to the fire and rescue service. However it does illustrate the continued importance of the fire and rescue service and underlines the foolhardy austerity policies that have marked recent Westminster government policy.



4 HOW CENTRAL GOVERNMENT DEGRADED THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

UK-wide standards, central government oversight and stakeholder involvement were hastily removed from the fire and rescue service at the beginning of the 21st century. A more fragmented structure with a postcode lottery has weakened resilience and accountability. Politicians need to listen to the professionals – the FBU.

4.1 THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES ACT

The post-war fire sector established a world-class system:

- national standards of fire cover, setting the required number of fire engines for different fires and making requirements for crewing levels on fire engines
- minimum staffing levels for fire brigades – known as “establishments”
- the **Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC)**, the statutory advisory body for ministers.

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 in England and Wales, with similar legislation in Northern Ireland and Scotland, scrapped these arrangements. This fragmented fire and rescue services, creating a postcode lottery of provision. The FBU warned politicians about the risks.⁴⁰

The weaknesses are:

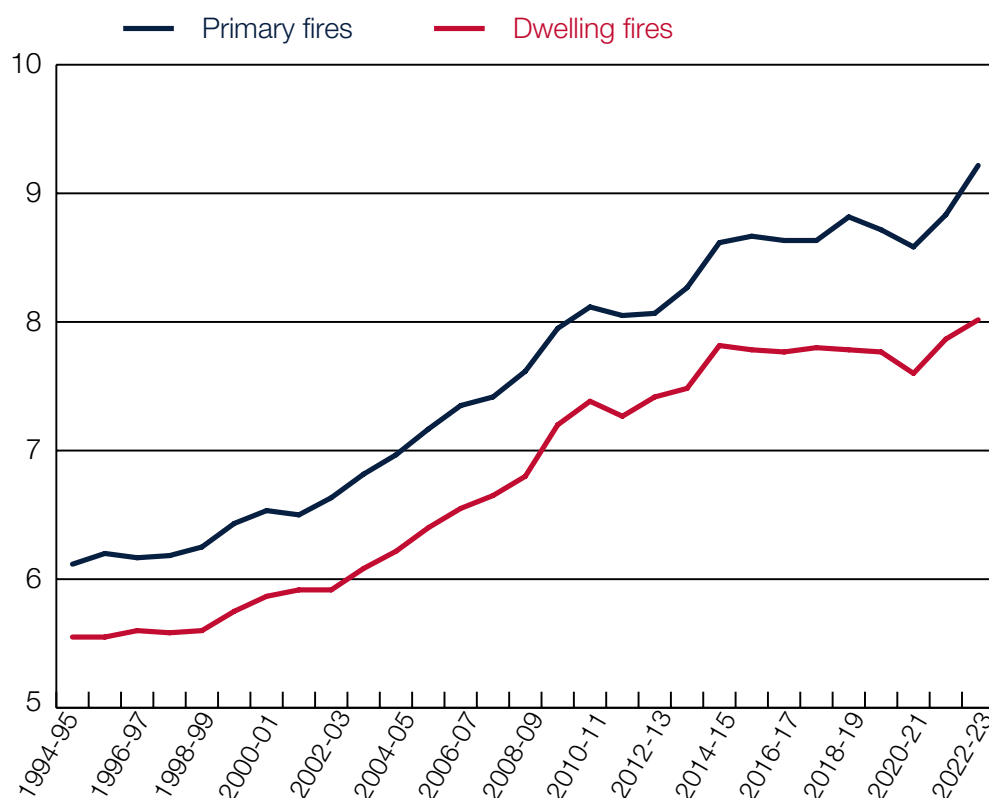
- removing establishment provisions, which facilitated cuts to firefighter numbers and station closures
- scrapping national emergency response standards and norms, leading to fragmented standards and slower response times
- setting a weak National Framework for England with only limited oversight at Westminster
- allowing local integrated risk management plans (IRMPs) to become effectively “resource management” plans for implementing cuts
- scrapping the CFBAC and excluding the voice of firefighters – the FBU
- scrapping the inspectorate in England, giving chief officers a free hand to reduce standards
- failure to institute a statutory duty on flooding in England
- fragmented governance, including police and crime commissioner takeover of fire authorities.

4.2 FIRE COVER – RESPONSE TIMES

The ‘modernisation’ reforms abolished national standards of fire cover. Instead, local fire and rescue services are allowed to set their own standards. Almost everywhere this has led to slower response times.

In England, response times for all primary fires (potentially more serious fires that harm people or cause damage to property) slowed by **three minutes**, from 6.11 minutes in 1994-95 to 9.13 minutes in 2022-23. Response times to dwelling fires have slowed from 5.33 minutes to 8.01 minutes over the same period. Response times to other building fires, including workplaces and businesses have also deteriorated substantially.⁴¹

FIGURE 4.1: FIRST APPLIANCE RESPONSE TIMES IN ENGLAND, 1994-95 TO 2022-23



The FBU believes that **cuts are the central reason** for the slowdown in response times. Fewer firefighters, fire stations and appliances have led to a worsening of the speed and weight of emergency response.

Official figures only cover the attendance times for the first fire appliance, despite the fact that many emergency incidents require a larger attendance and this is built into planning. Ministers and chief fire officers know some incidents require more than one fire engine and related crews, but do not measure when these additional essential resources arrive.

Some incidents are excluded. Some fire and rescue authorities count the response from smaller vans, which might arrive swiftly but cannot deal with bigger incidents. Others do not include the emergency fire control call handling times in their response standards. This means the real response times even for first appliances is probably even slower.

The current system does not record the arrival of **second or other appliances**. There is now a postcode lottery of attendance standards, meaning a slower response to emergencies than our communities are entitled to expect and firefighters want to deliver.

Even HMICFRS has recognised that this has led to a **two-tier service**, with towns getting a quicker response than rural locations. HMICFRS found that standards “vary considerably across England, so what you can expect in one service differs from what another would provide a few miles away across a border”.⁴²

4.3 THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Westminster government sets statutory strategic priorities for fire and rescue authorities in England. This is the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, with similar frameworks replicated in Wales and Scotland. The most recent National Framework for England, last revised in 2018, has a significant contradiction at its heart:

“Fire and rescue authorities must manage their budgets and spend money properly and appropriately and ensure the efficient and effective use of their resources, pursuing all feasible opportunities to keep costs down while discharging their core duties effectively.”⁴³

The implication is to cut fire budgets and reduce resources as much as possible. This is only qualified by the reference to risk. Central government has not funded the fire and rescue service sufficiently, despite a wide range of escalating risks.

Westminster oversight is weak. Ministers are meant to provide the Westminster parliament with a biennial report on how well fire and rescue authorities are meeting their statutory responsibilities. Ministers submit a tawdry “Section 25” report, consisting of scarcely a few pages. The most recent reports were published a year late.⁴⁴

4.4 THE FAILURE OF IRMPs

Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) were a central plank of the Westminster government’s ‘modernisation’ programme. However UK-wide resilience has been diminished.

IRMPs allow individual fire authorities to make their own local plans based on resources available, not risk – and then reduce the service to the public. IRMPs vary widely in content, size, style and even name. Guidance is inadequate or absent.

Even HMICFRS recognised that “people living in very similar communities up and down the country can receive quite different levels of service from their fire and rescue services”. It argued that “45 different ways of defining and doing things is not helpful in some situations. There should be more consistency, for example, in how fire and rescue services define risk and calculate and communicate response standards to the public”.⁴⁵

4.5 SCRAPPING THE STATUTORY ADVISORY BODY

For 50 years, the CFBAC was responsible for almost every major improvement in the professionalisation of the fire and rescue service. As a statutory body it had real weight at Westminster and throughout the sector. As a representative body it gave a voice to wide sectors of the industry and a table at which all the main interested parties could contribute. It drew in expert researchers and managed the implementation of changes. The CFBAC pioneered fire prevention, the introduction of more efficient appliances and personal protective equipment. It oversaw appointments and promotion, firefighters’ health and safety, as well undertaking work on particular incidents, so lessons could be learned. It was a sounding board for legislation and a powerful vehicle to get buy-in for improvements.

The Westminster government scrapped the CFBAC. The non-statutory Practitioners Forum, which replaced some of the functions of the CFBAC, staggered on for a few years, before it was scrapped by the coalition government after 2010. There was no central stakeholder body to learn the lessons from tragedies such as fires, flooding or firefighter deaths.

Instead the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) was entrusted by the Westminster government with providing ministerial advice. These same chief officers were asleep at the wheel during the entire experience of IRMPs, implementing flawed resource management plans and then justifying each other's decisions through "peer review". Rebranded as the NFCC, they have continued with business as usual, despite the failings exposed by the Grenfell Tower fire.

The FBU believes that the Westminster government cannot continue to leave it to chief fire officers to set their own exam questions and then mark their own homework. The voice of professional firefighters – principally the FBU – needs to be heard through statutory advisory bodies.

4.6 GOVERNANCE OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Since 2017, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) have had the legal power to take over the governance of fire and rescue services, and become police, fire and crime commissioners (PFCCs). The FBU argues this adversely affects the service firefighters provide to the public, damages the functioning and reputation of the fire and rescue service, diminishes local democracy and worsens firefighters' working conditions.

The roles of firefighters and police are completely different. The firefighters' role is to save lives. Firefighters respond to render humanitarian service. Firefighters provide safety advice to thousands of vulnerable and hard-to-reach people in communities. There is a clear understanding that they are not there for law enforcement, nor to pass judgement on lifestyles and choices.

PFCC management undermines firefighters' community engagement. For decades, firefighters have cherished their impartial and independent role as "helpers and savers". PFCC governance is part of a cost-cutting agenda and about opening up more of our public services to private profiteers.

PFCCs do not bring any skills or expertise to the fire and rescue service. PFCCs undermine democratic accountability and oversight of local services. PFCCs only have weak scrutiny panels, often composed of cronies or appointed bureaucrats. This is worse than committees of elected councillors.

PFCC control over fire and rescue service represents a significant threat to firefighters' safety and working conditions. It damages the careers of all firefighters, hitting women and black and ethnic minority firefighters particularly hard. The involvement of PFCCs disrupts and worsens industrial relations within the fire and rescue service.

Since the new law was introduced, five services – Essex, Staffordshire, North Yorkshire, Northamptonshire and Cumbria transferred governance to PFCCs. A number of PCCs have withdrawn from the takeover process or ruled out the option owing to a lack of public support. The failures of this model were illustrated recently in Northamptonshire.

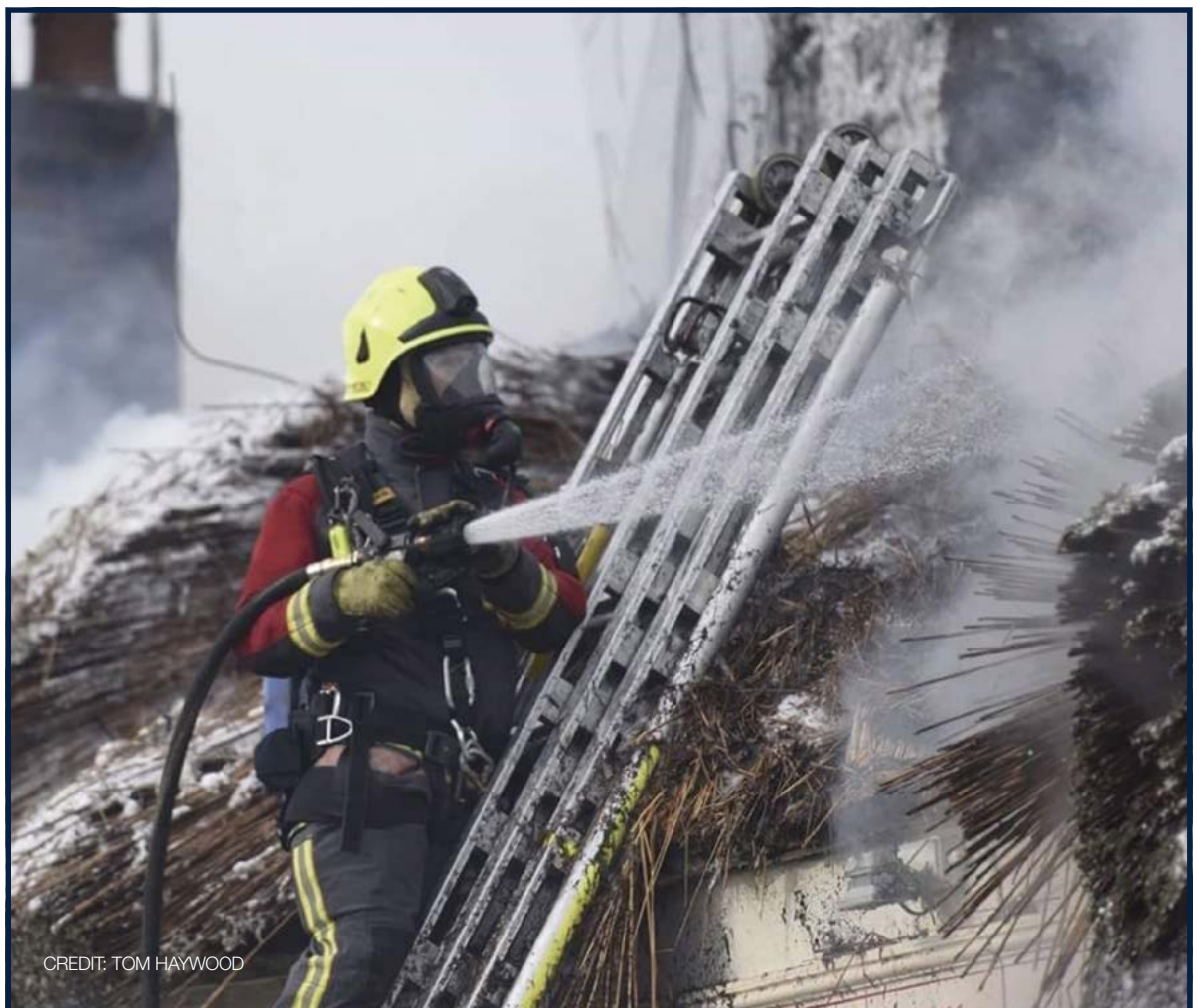
The FBU also has serious concerns with the governance and scrutiny arrangements of the SFRS. The union believes there is insufficient knowledge or experience of operational matters by members of the Board. As a consequence the Board is wholly reliant upon the advice and guidance provided by SFRS principal managers, whose plans the Board scrutinises. This is unsatisfactory. The union wants a forum of elected stakeholders.⁴⁶

4.7 ROLE OF THE INSPECTORATE

In the early years of the 21st century, there was no inspectorate in England. The FBU was the only voice advocating such a body. The FBU supported the re-establishment of the inspectorate in England in 2017.

Thomas Winsor, the first HMICFRS chief inspector for England, was a destructive figure who promoted an anti-union agenda. His *State of Fire and Rescue* reports for 2019, 2020 and 2021, recommending attacks on firefighters' collective bargaining arrangements, while ignoring the problems of austerity and deregulation within fire and rescue. HMICFRS was an inspectorate in crisis under Winsor. It failed to drive up standards, while attacking the pay and conditions of respected public servants.

HMICFRS has failed. The fire inspectorate for England should be separated from the police inspectorate. It should be a professional, independent body, focused on public fire safety and holding fire and rescue authorities/boards and principal managers to account.



5 HOW DEREGULATION DOWNGRADED FIRE SAFETY

Successive waves of deregulation have damaged public fire safety. This has included efforts to privatise parts of the fire and rescue service, along with other building safety bodies, contracting out of public services to private providers and watering down legislation designed to protect people. Deregulation was the crucial factor that created the conditions for the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017. The building safety crisis continues with revelations about Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC).

5.1 THE GRENFELL TOWER FIRE

The Grenfell Tower fire resulted in the deaths of 72 people and the devastation of a whole community. It was the worst fire in living memory in the UK and one of the worst high rise residential building fires ever seen across the globe. The bereaved, survivors and residents are right to describe the deaths as an atrocity. The FBU stands in solidarity with those fighting for justice at Grenfell.

Firefighters went into Grenfell Tower at considerable risks to themselves with the sole aim of trying to save lives. Many firefighters and emergency control staff rescued people or helped them evacuate from the building. Every firefighter regrets the tragic loss of life.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry (GTI), established by the Westminster government, has identified multiple failures with the building:

- rainscreen cladding system covering the outside of the building
- lining materials around the windows
- compromised fire resistance of flat fire doors
- fire doors that did not self-close
- lack of provision for persons who required assistance
- a lower standard of stair doors
- a single stairway of 1.04 metres
- lifts not working
- dry fire main instead of a wet riser for water supplies
- failure of the lobby smoke control system.⁴⁷

Last year, the GTI completed its hearings. Many participants argued that **deregulation** had undermined building safety and fire safety. The FBU argued from the beginning of the inquiry that deregulation was the crucial driver. The GTI has not yet published its final report. But deregulation has to be reversed for the sake of public safety.

5.2 DEREGULATION – A DISASTROUS HISTORY

Deregulation was a high priority of the Thatcher governments from 1979 to 1990. In 1985, its White Paper, ***Lifting the Burden***, defined deregulation as:

“First, freeing markets and increasing the opportunities for competition. Second, lifting administrative and legislative burdens which take time, energy and resources from fundamental business activity.”⁴⁸

The Thatcher government formed an Enterprise and Deregulation Unit and set about “cutting red tape”. John Major’s governments continued the deregulation drive with their **Deregulation and Contracting Out Act**, designed to scrap “burdensome legislation”.⁴⁹

After 1997, Tony Blair’s government continued deregulation under the rubric of “better” regulation.⁵⁰ They introduced the Regulatory Reform Act 2001, attacking “unnecessary, overlapping, over-complex and over-burdensome legislation.”⁵¹

In 2005, the Better Regulation Task Force published a report, **Less is More**, which proposed the “one in, one out” approach to new regulation, which “forces departments to prioritise between new regulations and to simplify and remove existing regulations”.⁵²

After 2010, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government accelerated deregulation. Its programme for government promised to cut red tape, introduce a one-in, one-out rule and impose sunset clauses.⁵³ In 2012, they made it the “one-in, two-out” rule and just before Grenfell, “one in, three out”.

In 2011, David Cameron launched the Red Tape Challenge. The Open Public Services White Paper extended the process of selling off and contracting out public services to private providers, including the use of mutual and community interest companies. The administration introduced an Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act and the Deregulation Act to further reduce “burdens” and “red tape”.

5.3 BUILDING SAFETY DEREGULATION

The Thatcher government immediately applied deregulation to building safety. The administration pushed through the Building Regulations 1985, which cut regulations from more than 300 pages to 25 and introduced the “Approved Documents” of voluntary guidance instead.⁵⁴ They part-privatised local authority building control, permitting private approved inspectors.⁵⁵ The Building Research Establishment (BRE), the government’s main testing and research facility, was threatened with privatisation, turned into a commercial enterprise and had its workforce cut in half. The Major administration extended these deregulatory policies. Ministers expanded the number of approved inspectors and privatised BRE.

After 1997, Westminster governments failed to strengthen building regulations, guidance, building control, research and testing. Ministers continued to support private approved inspectors and extend their reach. They did not reverse the privatisation of BRE. Approved Document B on fire safety was further weakened, allowing for flammable cladding to be installed on high rise buildings.

The Cameron coalition government accelerated deregulation of building safety. The building regulations, guidance, building control, research and testing were all weakened. Ministers published lists of “unnecessary regulations, ridiculous micromanagement or outdated laws” that they intended to revoke or simplify. This was explicitly linked to the one-in, one-out rule and sunset clauses. This included the Building Regulations and Approved Inspector Regulations. They planned to “reduce 18 separate pieces of building regulations into two”.⁵⁶

In 2012, ministers announced the repeal of “unnecessary fire provisions in 23 local Acts”. These changes repealed the London Building Acts, Section 20, which dealt with fire safety in tall buildings.⁵⁷

Theresa May's government continued to procrastinate over changes to the Building Regulations after the Lakanal House fire and inquest. In 2016, ministers admitted they had not reviewed the Building Regulations and denied further legislation was necessary.⁵⁸

5.4 THE DEREGULATION OF FIRE SAFETY

The Thatcher and Major governments launched several attacks on fire safety, but were thwarted by FBU campaigning.

The New Labour government's Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order took up the language of deregulation.⁵⁹ The FBU warned about the weak enforcement regime and the loss of fire certificates for high-risk premises.⁶⁰

During the seven years before the Grenfell Tower fire, successive Conservative-led administrations wrought huge damage to the fabric of the fire and rescue service across the UK. These governments accelerated efforts to privatise, deregulate and contract out fire and rescue:

- the *Open Public Services White Paper* (2011-12) suggested the fire and rescue service should no longer be free at the point of use and advocated "mutualisation" of the service
- in 2013, fire minister Brandon Lewis tried to sneak through the Regulatory Reform Committee at Westminster new laws to "enable fire and rescue authorities in England to contract out their full range of services to a suitable provider"
- in 2013, the Fire Service College was sold to Capita.

Some fire authorities and chief fire officers brought in the private sector, contracting firms such as AssetCo and Falck or establishing community interest companies. Cleveland Fire Brigade tried and failed to set up a "mutual". LFB almost privatised its control room. It did contract out training to Babcock.

In 2015, a National Audit Office report found serious reductions in prevention and protection services. The numbers of audits/inspection, hours spent on fire safety checks by fire service and hours on campaigns were all reduced by around 30% since the coalition government came to power.⁶¹ This background of deregulation, fragmentation and cuts created the conditions for the Grenfell Tower fire.

5.5 DEREGULATION HAS CONTINUED SINCE THE GRENFELL TOWER FIRE

Deregulation has not ceased. Sadly, it has continued under all administrations. In England, there are currently fewer than a thousand **fire safety inspectors** competent to carry out audits and to serve enforcement notices, fewer than the year after the Grenfell Tower fire.⁶²

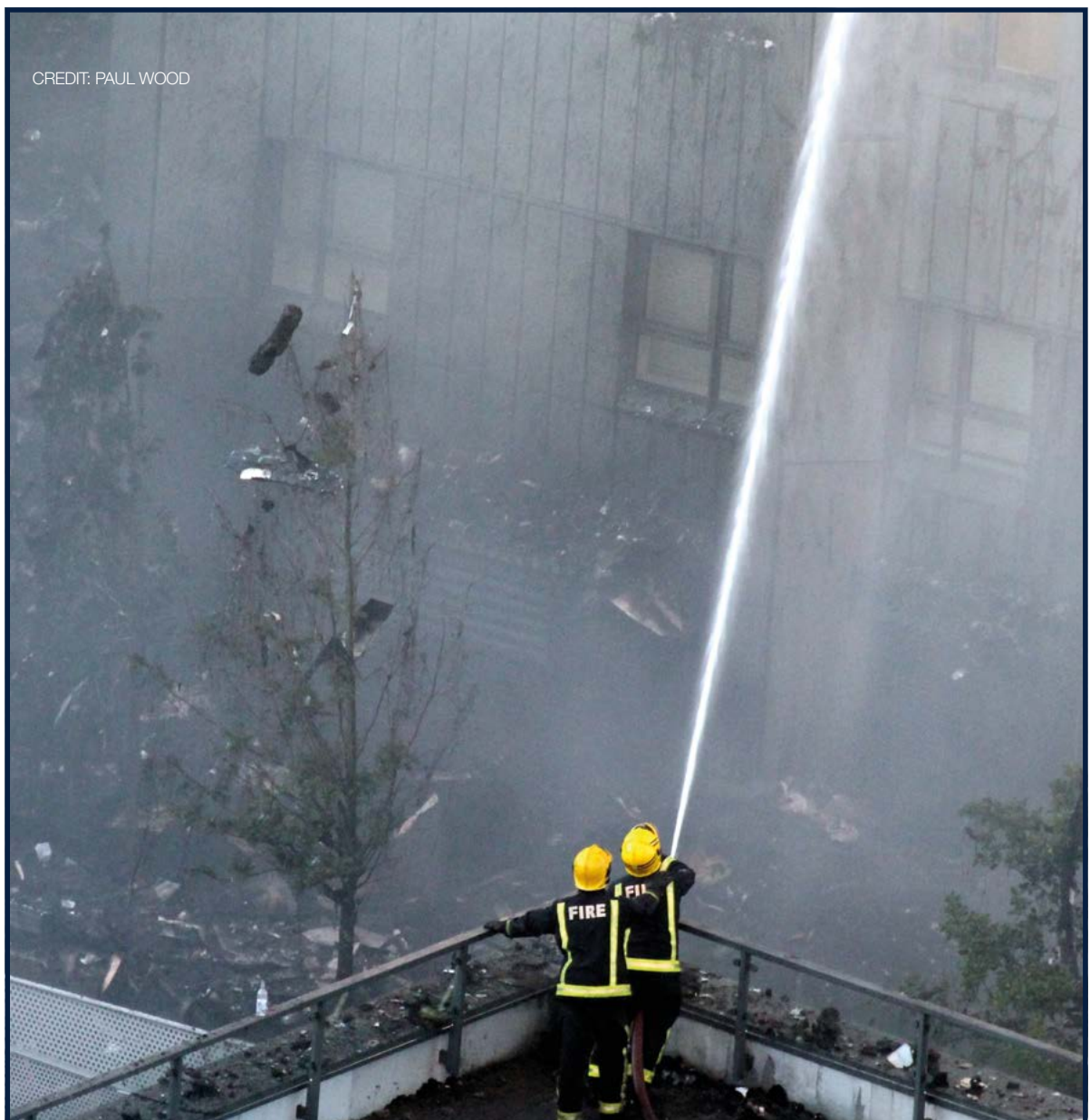
The GTI made 46 recommendations in its Phase 1 report, mostly aimed at building owners and LFB. Sadly, the Westminster government refused to introduce Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) for vulnerable people living in high rise buildings. This leaves disabled and other residents in a dreadful position, worried every night about safety in their homes, in order to save wealthy building owners the expense of providing facilities to guarantee safety.

Similarly, ministers failed to develop national guidelines for carrying out partial or total evacuations of high-rise residential buildings. This is a difficult task, but little progress has been made.

Ministers made a last-minute amendment to the Building Safety Act, so owners no longer have to appoint a building safety manager to oversee safety. Residents will still struggle to get a prompt and comprehensive response from building owners, because there is no guaranteed point of contact to deal with these matters. Profits (and rents) are put above safety.

The Building Safety Act created a new regulatory regime for 'higher-risk' buildings. It defined these as buildings that are 18 or more metres in height or have seven or more storeys and contain at least two residential units. The FBU called for an **11-metre** threshold. The Act renamed private approved inspectors as '**building control approvers**' who will have to register. This will not address the countless complaints about how this part-privatised system has undermined local authority building control. Ministers failed to ban all combustible materials on external walls.

In 1999, the FBU warned the House of Commons Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs of the dangers of cladding. The FBU repeatedly warned that their deregulated, free market system of building safety would result in death and destruction.



6 THE WORKFORCE – PROFESSIONAL FIREFIGHTERS

Firefighters are widely respected in their communities and often lauded in times of emergency. Yet firefighters' pay and conditions have come under sustained assault in recent years, with government caprice and senior management coercion combining to fuel frequently toxic industrial relations.

6.1 COLLECTIVE BARGAINING: THE NJC

The FBU negotiates on firefighters' pay and conditions through the National Joint Council (NJC) and Middle Managers Negotiating Body (MMNB). The union strongly supports UK-wide collective bargaining and the 'Grey Book' as the best means to achieve improvements for all firefighters. The value of the NJC for industrial relations is recognised by fire employers and its independent chair.⁶³

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the FBU, fire employers and NFCC negotiated a tripartite agreement so that firefighters could provide emergency intervention while also assisting the NHS and vulnerable people during the crisis. Nick Chard, Conservative councillor and vice chair of the NJC, publicly praised this contribution.⁶⁴

The NJC was pivotal to resolving the 2022-23 pay dispute. After the FBU balloted its members, fire employers made an improved pay offer. FBU members voted by 96% to accept the pay offer, on a turnout of 84%. This underlined the importance of collective bargaining.

The NJC has developed significant workstreams to examine the development of the firefighters' role. These are environmental challenges, emergency medical response, multi-agency emergency response, youth and other social engagement work, and inspections and enforcement. This is currently stalled because the Westminster government has refused so far to provide any necessary funding.

National bargaining provides stability, is cost-effective, strategic and efficient, providing both the competence and capacity that cannot be reproduced locally. There is no appetite for cumbersome, duplicative and bureaucratic local or regional systems of pay. The NJC's achievements could not be replicated by a pay review body. The NJC remains the best model for fire and rescue.

6.2 PAY, APPOINTMENTS AND PROMOTION

Firefighting is a profession – skilled work that requires planning, training and best practice to be safe and effective. Firefighters deserve to be paid according to the skills, risk and other capacities required to do the job. Yet between 2010 and 2017, firefighters and other public sector workers had their pay capped, mostly at 1%. This led to real terms pay cuts. The union believes a decent pay rise for firefighters should be an absolute priority for the Westminster government.

All firefighters have been hit, but some in different ways. Retained firefighters are angered by getting paid a pittance in exchange for their time to be "on call". The small amount they get from the 'retaining fee' is not enough, resulting in the continual loss of staff. Similarly, emergency fire control staff have seen a massive increase in the range and responsibility of their work in recent years, without receiving the requisite compensation in pay.

The union believes the commitment to professionalism starts with the appointment of firefighters. The public must be confident that when a person is trained to be a firefighter, they have the right skills and knowledge to do the job properly. Firefighters are given huge responsibilities by their communities. Conferring the power of entry into someone's home or workplace cannot just be awarded to anyone. Similarly, the ability to save lives and rescue people requires character, expertise and constant training.

This matters all the way up to principal manager level. The FBU opposes parachuting individuals without any experience of actually doing the job of a firefighter into senior managerial roles in the fire and rescue service.

The fragmentation of the Integrated Personal Development Scheme (IPDS) has eroded the professional standards by which firefighters' competence and professionalism is measured. IPDS disregarded swathes of established practice to measure and select progression through the fire and rescue service, particularly practical assessment of firefighting and incident command.

Lack of investment and coordination in IPDS has resulted in the whole system stalling, leaving fire and rescue services to make their own policies and rules for assessing competence and progression within their service. A funded framework is required to re-establish professional practices in learning and development.

6.3 CULTURE IN THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

The FBU has longstanding concerns about culture in the fire and rescue service. Almost 25 years ago, HM Fire Service Inspectorate's landmark thematic review was scathing about inequalities within the fire service, but praised the FBU's contribution.⁶⁵

Sadly, there is damning evidence of unacceptable behaviour in every fire and rescue service across the UK. In March 2023, HMICFRS published its report on values and culture in fire and rescue services in England. It found 17% of staff had experienced discrimination in the past 12 months. HMICFRS admitted that:

"These reports came from FRS staff at all levels but were most often about alleged cases of senior staff bullying more junior staff (75% of 1,478 reports of bullying and 85% of discrimination reports in the staff survey). This was also reflected in the information we received relating to misconduct allegations."

Throughout all 44 services, HMICFRS issued 17 services with "requires improvement" or "inadequate", along with five "causes of concern" grades in relation to values and culture. HMICFRS also issued "requires improvement" or "inadequate" grades to over half (26) and "causes of concern" to five in relation to fairness and diversity.

It is clear that much of the problem lies at senior management level. Almost all staff who responded to the survey said they were aware of their service's statement of values, but only 27% agreed that senior leaders consistently model and maintain service values.⁶⁶

The FBU is therefore astonished that the majority of HMICFRS recommendations looked to chief fire officers to solve the problems, with the NFCC name-checked in almost a quarter of them. Chief fire officers have presided for years over the regime that led to this appalling situation. It is obtuse to allow those who were in charge when these behaviours took place to oversee solutions.

The FBU has pursued the equalities agenda vigorously – for example through the Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG), set up by the NJC. FBU equality reps should be part of the solution.

6.4 INDUSTRIAL MATTERS: CONTROL, OFFICERS AND RETAINED

Around half of those employed by fire and rescue services work in an operational capacity and on a wholetime basis as competent firefighters or crew managers. However there are particular industrial matters affecting firefighters in certain roles or working certain duty systems – notably in emergency fire controls, as officers and as retained firefighters. The FBU wants to ensure that all firefighters are well looked after, professionally trained and remunerated at levels commensurate with their contribution.

EMERGENCY FIRE CONTROL

Control staff have been subjected to years of failed government policy, beginning with the disastrous FiReControl project. This left many control rooms at breaking point.

Continued, austerity-driven under-investment in the fire and rescue service inevitably damages the resilience of control rooms, puts control staff under greater pressure and increases the risk of a major failure on a daily basis and during spate conditions. Reduced numbers of control staff, mergers, poor technology, enforced shift changes and management pressure are adversely affecting the health of staff in emergency fire controls.

Widespread technological failure, both from outdated old systems and from badly-developed, untested new systems, have damaged control room resilience. Technology providers have not delivered on their grandiose promises in the day-to-day functioning of control rooms across the UK.

OFFICERS

Fire and rescue service officers face highly variable interpretations of the flexible duty system, with many working additional hours they never agreed to. Officers are frequently expected to take on additional duties. Issues such as Hazmat, fire investigation and tactical advisors. Excessive workload is routine. Officers have been penalised by benefit-in-kind rules, paying tax on their own vehicles in order to attend work incidents.

A key concern among officers is the excessive use of temporary promotions. In the worst cases, staff were promoted temporarily for a decade. Staff in temporary promotions feel vulnerable, fearful for the security of their role, unable to challenge or make difficult decisions for fear of losing their promotion.

Promotion and selection processes in many fire and rescue services are often unfair, or not clear and open. Several fire and rescue services don't consistently follow due process or comply with their own procedures. Selection criteria was often inconsistent or unclear, processes were run locally with little or no independent scrutiny, and procedures years out of date and not always followed.

RETAINED FIREFIGHTERS

Retained firefighters do an outstanding job in providing fire cover for many communities throughout the UK. However, the service provided by retained firefighters is in crisis. There is a significant problem with recruitment and retention of retained firefighters. This means that there are currently shortages of retained personnel and many retained appliances are off the run across the country. Fire engines that should be available under local plans are regularly unavailable. This is a problem in all fire and rescue services relying on retained firefighters. The recruitment and retention problem has been significantly exacerbated over the past thirteen years by falling real wages. This is further worsened for retained firefighters by a reduction in calls, which has further reduced earnings.

Retained firefighters face many difficulties:

- many retained firefighters don't work (in their primary employment) in the same communities where they live and so aren't able to commit to the retained as they were in the past
- many **primary employers** are reluctant to release employees to undertake retained duties
- prospects for **self-employment** are limited when firefighting work and number of call-outs is high.

Some fire and rescue services have over 100 vacancies for retained firefighter posts. Recruitment problems may result from geographical or labour market factors beyond the control of the fire and rescue service concerned. The majority of retained firefighters travel many miles to their primary employment, making it impossible for them to be on-call from their place of work. Clearly the pay and conditions offered to retained firefighters matter too.

6.5 HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE

Firefighters may risk their health or even their lives at emergency incidents. The FBU wants risk assessments, safety control measures and standard operating procedures that are fit for purpose and properly consulted on.

Firefighters expect governments and employers to take care of their long term health, including exposure to contaminants, which have been linked to a range of cancers. The evidence of these links has been growing in recent years, including studies in the UK.⁶⁷ The FBU's DECON campaign has demanded actions from governments and employers to tackle occupational exposure to contaminants – including regular health monitoring.

The UK is now dangerously out of step with the World Health Organization (WHO) and fire and rescue services in some other parts of the world on the matter of cancer and disease causing occupational exposures. As well as the appropriate preventative measures, the FBU wants presumptive legislation, like the laws passed in Canada, USA and Australia, which compensates firefighters for occupational diseases. The FBU also demands that government funded research be carried out on the scope of, and dangers presented by, the presence PFAS in firefighting foam and PPE.

The FBU wants employers to take their responsibilities seriously and tackle mental health issues. This requires engagement with the union and UK-wide structures such as the NJC.

6.6 PENSIONS

The FBU opposed the 2015 firefighters' scheme, which imposed new pension arrangements making firefighters pay more, work longer and still get less. The union fought a tenacious campaign of industrial action, political lobbying of all four governments and legal action through the courts. The FBU submitted substantial evidence to demonstrate that the occupation of firefighting is arduous and cannot be effectively carried out by personnel approaching the age of 60.

The FBU has won a series of victories, which have demonstrated how the implementation of the 2015 arrangements discriminate against firefighters in a number of ways. The union argued that the imposed changes were unfair and unworkable. The FBU believes that the Westminster government and the devolved administrations should acknowledge that the 2015 schemes were flawed and that all firefighters (including control) should be included in a pension scheme consistent with the provisions of the 1992 firefighters' pension scheme.

6.7 THE RECORD OF CHIEF FIRE OFFICERS

The current crop of chief fire officers have presided over the longest and deepest period of cuts to the fire and rescue service in its history. A fifth of the workforce has been cut. Chief fire officers have implemented these cuts, sometimes with relish, while enriching themselves.

Chief fire officers presided over the failed fire safety regime that was so cruelly exposed by the Grenfell Tower fire. They failed to warn of the dangers of cladding and other failures of compartmentation despite growing evidence from the UK and across the world. They failed to act on the lessons from numerous coroners' inquests and serious accident investigations into fatalities in tower blocks, including the deaths of firefighters. They failed to warn of the dangers of deregulation, fragmentation and lack of oversight, instead choosing to provide cover for ministers, for example with "waking watches".

In 2018, the Westminster government was forced to amend the Fire and Rescue National Framework in England to discourage the practice of chief fire officers retiring, collecting a large pension and then returning to their senior role with a cosmetic change of title and a large salary on top.

Chief fire officers have managed to secure huge six-figure salaries and gold-plated pensions for themselves, so that most now earn more than the prime minister. Salaries of £200,000 a year, five or six times the average pay of firefighters, is a gross insult. In many cases, chief fire officers have used public money to commission reports making the case for increases to their own pay. This is a cynical abuse of power which both the NFCC and the Home Office have completely failed to address.

Some chief fire officers have made venal decisions about their own financial position, including awarding themselves bonuses, perks, vehicles and various other financial gains with public money. Some went to work after retirement with the same private firms they had contracted while employed. Such behaviour is shameful.

Some chief officers have made disastrous procurement decisions, wasting millions of public money on equipment that either did not work or was not suitable, such as combined aerial rescue platforms (CARPs).

The NFCC is a committee of CFA, formed in 2017. The NFCC is run by chief fire officers through CFA, a registered charity and a company. Although it has fewer than 500 members, some of them retired, it now boasts an income of £12 million. Unlike real representative bodies, which get their income from membership subscriptions, the NFCC receives millions of pounds every year from central government, with more millions from fire and rescue service budgets.

The NFCC has been given funding and support by the Home Office for technical expertise. However the NFCC's record has been disastrous:

- it is the NFCC that authored the heinous “temporary waking watch” procedure after the Grenfell Tower fire, which has cost tenants thousands of pounds while allowing untrained contractors to provide the fig-leaf of cover for wealthy building owners
- it was the NFCC that actively set out to undermine and destroy the national agreement reached between the FBU and fire employers during the Covid-19 pandemic
- it is the NFCC that has promoted the dangerous and unsafe procedure of allowing firefighters to go beyond the bridgehead and entry control point in a high rise building fire without starting up their breathing apparatus sets, exposing firefighters and the public to a greater risk of death and injury
- it is the NFCC that has encouraged fire authorities to avoid their legal liabilities for firefighters’ pensions, won in the courts by the FBU, denying retired firefighters the money owed to them after a lifetime of service to the public.

Ministers cannot rely on the NFCC alone for strategic advice. A statutory advisory body composed of key organisations in the fire sector, including the FBU, is the best and obvious alternative.



7 HOW TO TRANSFORM THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

INVESTMENT IN FIREFIGHTERS

1. Investment, not cuts to the fire and rescue service.
2. An immediate increase of 5,000 firefighters, with a review to examine further expansion.
3. A new equality and diversity strategy, including levelling up maternity, paternity and caring arrangements.
4. No more fire station closures.

NEW PUBLIC SERVICE STANDARDS

5. A new statutory advisory body to oversee standards and best practice.
6. An end to privatisation, deregulation and contracting out of fire and rescue. For public ownership and democratic control.
7. Resilience and adaptation to climate change. A statutory duty on fire and rescue services to respond to major flooding and other extreme weather.
8. UK-wide response standards, including:
 - a maximum response time standard of five minutes from the time of call to arrival of the first pumping appliance
 - a maximum response time standard for the second pumping appliance
 - a minimum of five riders on all pumping appliances
 - permanently crewed aerial ladder appliances.
9. Research to reduce deaths and injuries, as well as fire-spread and damage to property.
10. A general requirement on all fire and rescue services to:
 - regularly and continually improve emergency response times
 - improve the time taken to safely implement intervention at incidents
 - evidence these improvements.

SAFE HOMES FOR ALL

11. Justice for Grenfell and decent homes for all.
12. Remove flammable cladding and ensure all homes are safe. Tenants and leaseholders must not pay the price for the failures of others.
13. Sprinklers retrofitted to high risk buildings (including buildings over 11 metres, houses of multiple occupation and schools), wherever a risk assessment deems them necessary.
14. Give tenants a real voice in running their buildings.

15. Mandatory fire certificates for designated premises, particularly homes of multiple occupancy and places where people sleep. Independent inspections by professional fire and rescue service inspectors.
16. Ensure fire inspectors are involved in all stages of new buildings, from design to sign off before occupancy.
17. Government-funded research into the resources needed so firefighters can intervene safely at all incidents, from houses to high rise residential buildings, from warehouses to other businesses.
18. Scrap private 'approved' inspectors, with all such work brought in house with properly-funded local building control.
19. Bring BRE into public ownership, to create a publicly owned, publicly funded and publicly accountable research and testing house.
20. Statutory underpinning for all fire risk assessors to meet stringent professional occupational standards.

GOVERNANCE AND INSPECTION

21. A fully publicly owned, democratically run fire and rescue service. Fire and rescue authorities directly elected and accountable to their electorate for decisions made on local services.
22. Stop Police and Crime Commissioners taking over the governance of local fire and rescue services. Fire and rescue authorities should run fire and rescue services.
23. The fire and rescue inspectorate in England – HMICFRS – must be separated from the police inspectorate and be renamed accordingly.
24. Serious negotiations between the FBU and fire employers at the NJC on developing the role of firefighters, with guaranteed funding from governments.

PROFESSIONAL FIREFIGHTERS

25. Support for existing collective bargaining arrangements (the NJC), and FBU officials' facility time, time off for trade union duties and other workplace rights.
26. Decent, sustained pay rises for firefighters and good conditions of work. Negotiation and consultation with FBU reps.
27. Guaranteed safe systems of work, health monitoring and suitable personal protective equipment. Presumptive legislation to compensate firefighters for occupational diseases.
28. A decent, high quality occupational pension scheme for all firefighters (which includes emergency control staff), reflecting the nature of the work we do.
29. The right to organise, assemble and take industrial action.

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