

The Fighting Nine Times



"Members of the Eastern Region have suffered some of the most hardline, right wing Tories to have occupied parliament for 14 years. Today is a better day, but the outcome of the general election does not mark the end of the journey, rather the start of a new chapter to rebuild our fire and rescue services. That work starts now."

Jamie Newell, Executive Council Member

Landslide win for Labour

During conference 2024, an announcement that a General Election had been called was met with a cheer erupting from the floor. Before polling day, Labour committed to the creation of a new structure for setting national standards where our voices will be heard and used to drive those changes. Our region has now gone from 6 to 26 Labour MP's. Regional Secretary Rebecca Lewington wasted no time in writing to all of them, reminding them of their pledges during campaigning and has started to meet with them in person before the summer recess. "I know many members will find it hard to trust a Labour government and there have been repeated calls to disaffiliate as a union. Promises to repeal anti trade union laws within 100 days of taking office have been made; the clock is ticking and we are watching".

Pay Settlement 2024

In May, members were balloted over this years pay offer- 4% increase in pay and CPD, an increase in maternity provisions with 26 weeks full pay as a minimum, and a new system for the retainer for RDS firefighters from January 2025. The result of the ballot was 73% yes and pay will take effect from 1st July 2024

4%

HEADLINE PAY OFFER 2024



Equality Matters

The Fire Brigades Union stands for equality – for an inclusive fire and rescue service, open to everyone, which reflects the communities it serves.

Discrimination, harassment and bullying have no place in our service. But recent investigations have underlined how widespread these issues are.

As FBU reps and equalities sections know first-hand, the failings go right to the top. Fire service leaders have often been part of the problem.

As the only democratic and representative body for firefighters and control room staff, we will take a leading role in transforming our service.

It's our service, our union and our duty to make it happen.

Equality Matters.



Control Pay Review

Over the last 7 years, Control staff in our region have seen their role within the UK FRS change dramatically. Additional responsibilities are placed on them with MTA and major incidents being just 2 areas affected. Crew shortages and unreliable technology has an impact on the wellbeing of Control staff nationally and the current 5% difference in pay between Control and Firefighters is unjust. So it was disappointing that this years pay settlement, following a review of the role of Control, did not yield a narrowing of that gap. However we wont give up on our Control members and the CSNC continues to work with Head Office Officials to progress this important piece of work.

Pensions Update

An online meeting was held on 2nd July with Brigade Officials in attendance, for an update on where the Injury to Feelings litigation cases are. Claims are split into 4 waves depending on individual circumstances and whether you completed the 2015 or 2020 survey. Members with queries should contact their Brigade FBU pensions rep and if needed, they will escalate to the Regional Pensions Official for more assistance..

Retirement Uncertainty

Regional Officials have been made aware of a number of members due to retire not being given the correctly adjusted pensions projections, incorporating the McCloud remedy. This has caused those members to delay their retirement as without that projection, they can not properly plan for their financial future. We will continue to provide support to Brigade pension reps through the Internal Dispute Resolution Process (IDRP). Anyone with queries can get in touch with the Regional Pensions Official Andy Knowles andy.knowles@fbu.org.uk

Supreme Court Appeal

The FBU is seeking permission to appeal to the Supreme Court in relation to the costs control mechanism imposed on public sector pension schemes by HM Treasury. The FBU was successful in challenging the government's public sector pension reforms introduced in 2015 as age discriminatory. That legal success led to the government having to reinstate previous pension arrangements and pay compensation to affected public sector workers (the McCloud remedy) – not just in the fire service. The public sector pension reforms also included a costs control mechanism which mean that certain specific member-related costs could be attributed to the costs of the scheme, and paid for out of lowering benefits or increasing contributions for workers. The FBU argues that the costs control mechanism cannot be used for a purpose for which it was never intended, and also

that its use in this way discriminates against younger members of the schemes who have no opportunity to take advantage of the McCloud remedy.

The FBU's challenge has been rejected by the Court of Appeal but with the support of PCS, POA, RCN and Unite, the FBU now seeks permission to appeal to the Supreme Court.

Rebecca Lewington, Eastern FBU Regional Secretary said

"14 years ago, the Coalition Government began their brutal Austerity project that saw our pay stagnate, our public services decimated, 11,000 firefighter jobs cut and our pensions robbed. They told us we were all in this together but after 14 years, they only succeeded in making the poor poorer and the rich richer.

Having won our pensions dispute through the courts in 2015, to now tell our members that they will have to pay to rectify their disgraceful treatment of them only serves as a further kick in the teeth and to prove why the Conservatives are not fit to hold office. "

We will continue to update members as this case progresses.



Mental Health Working Group

Annual Conference, for the past 3 years, has had more of an emphasis on mental health and wellbeing. Last year, Norfolk delegate and Officers Section rep Al Jaye spoke movingly in tribute to 3 of our comrades lost. The FBU since then has commissioned the academics at University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) to conduct a survey into the mental wellbeing of UK fire services and the provisions available for us. The working group is assisting in this progress and Rebecca Lewington, Regional Secretary, is one of the group members. The first phase of the survey is complete with all CFO's/CEO's in the region agreeing to take part. The second phase will be a survey of all members.- details will follow via your Brigade Officials . Once this piece of work is complete, the working group will continue as an advisory group to wider union policy.

Fight for 52 Campaign

In May 2023, lead by the National Women's Committee, the Fight for 52 Campaign was launched. The previous year at conference, delegates debated on the postcode lottery of parental provisions within UK fire and rescues. 1 delegate noted that she would have been better off financially had she broken her leg and been off sick for 6 months. Correct maternity provisions for firefighters is not just about money; it is also a matter of health and safety. During pregnancy, a hormone called Relaxin is produced with softens joint and ligaments. It can still be present in the body for up to a year after giving birth! The recent pay settlement has seen an uplift in grey book maternity provisions to 26 weeks but the fight for 52 continues- we will not stop until every brigade in the country agrees to provide the same!

Eastern Region Round Up!

AGM -Your region needs you!

Our next AGM will be held in September at the regional office in Witham, Essex. We have a number of vacant positions in our trade and equality sections. The roles are important for shaping the union- YOUR union. We need those who are members of the sections to advise the region on issues members are facing. See below for the vacancies.

Dwight Williams- Regional BEMM Official

We are pleased to introduce the Regions newest official , Dwight Williams. Dwight has been appointed as the new Black and Ethnic Minority Member Section official for the region. Dwight is also the BEMM rep for Hertfordshire FBU where they have been working hard to get every equality and trade section organised and represented.

Dwight will be getting in touch with all the brigade officials in the region to help make sure our BEMM members are well organised and represented. members can get in touch with Dwight via dwight.williams@fbu.org.uk

Trade Sections

The Control Staff National Committee, Officers National Committee and National Retained Committee advise the unions Executive Council on matters affecting the terms and conditions of employment and related negotiations of their members. We are looking for members to take on all 3 trade roles

Equality Sections

Equality is a trade union principle and an FBU policy

The LGBT+ Section was set up over 20 years ago and Bedfordshire's Pat Carberry is the National Secretary. The section has been vital in ensuring LGBT+ members are supported and not left out in equality issues at brigade, regional and national level.

The National Women's Committee is a dedicated body of elected women fighting specifically for the interests of female firefighters and control staff. We are looking for members to take up these roles within region.

If you are interested in taking on any of the vacant equality or trade roles, please email rebecca.lewington@fbu.org.uk

Cambridgeshire and Suffolk

Combined Control

For over a decade, The control function for both Cambridgeshire and Suffolk has been located at Cambridgeshire's headquarters in Huntingdon. It came as a shock for all, but especially the Control Firefighters themselves, when Suffolk announced last year that they would be bringing back the Control function into Suffolk and leaving this arrangement. While the FBU has always believed that local control rooms are the preferred option, we are also mindful that this announcement will have caused ongoing stress and worry to the Control staff based in Cambridgeshire and local officials are supporting them. Suffolk's control building is near completion and the workforce has been recruited in stages ahead of go-live. Meanwhile the replacement mobilising system project that has been in the works for some years now, is still to go ahead with September as the expected time to switch over.

Essex HMI Report

In March, HMICFRS told ECFRS it must do more to improve the availability of its fire engines.. The report said availability had been "deteriorating", with more engines becoming unavailable for call outs.. It also stated the service was "heavily reliant" on overtime to keep its crews operational. In May the BBC reported that in 2023, £350,000 had been spent covering crew shortages on over 2500 occasions. Deploying crews from other stations to cover strategic areas had left firefighters exhausted and smaller communities unprotected.

Following the publishing of the HMI report, Eastern FBU EC member, Jamie Newell was interviewed by BBC Essex around key findings from the HMI on attendance times slipping and the practice of Phase 1 RDS Firefighters being used as core crew while unqualified for BA. The report, which no doubt is a reflection of many services around the country, highlighted the urgent need for investment and proper funding of our services at a time when, 2 years on from the 2022 summer fires, services are still struggling to maintain appliance availability without employing wild crewing practices.

We can not run our services on a wish and a prayer!

Norfolk Decon Zoning

With the Decon campaign now in its 5th year and following the announcement in 2022 that the World Health Organisation now classes firefighting as a cancer causing occupation, we are now starting to see our services take note and make the changes needed to protect our firefighters and prevent them from being harmed by their job. Norfolk FBU have collaborated with their service to introduce Red, Amber and Green zones on their stations, preventing contaminated kit from crossing over into sterile areas and ensuring correct PPE is worn when in a red zone.. Our fire stations are not only staffed by operational crews and where we open our stations up to the public, this becomes more than just protecting ourselves. There is much work to do still in all services and the FBU continues to campaign for annual health screening, better training, and legislation to ensure proper compensation and protection for affected firefighters.



Cambridgeshire RDS Crewing Trial

Local Officials in Cambridgeshire have been collaborating with their service to negotiate a trial RDS crewing systems which allows greater flexibility in availability and booking annual leave that aims to ultimately improve the overall availability of appliances. The system is being trialled at 5 stations and key features are a different method of calculating the retainer rate paid, enhanced rate for covering during key time periods and a 4 week rota pattern with flexibility around booking off call. Retained rates are due to change in January 2025 as a result of this years pay settlement and these will be factored into the trial from that point. Given the difficulty in recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters, across the country, officials across the region are very interested to see how trial goes.

Day Crewing Plus in Hertfordshire

Having ignored the union for years, burying their heads in the sand when other services have had the same issues, Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service have now commenced plans to remove the Day Crewing Plus (DCP) shift system from the 3 stations that have worked it for 12 years. The system was never formally agreed by the FBU, not just because it was against conference policy but also because it was deemed to be unlawful.

Indeed the HSE confirmed this with all services in writing in 2019 but only now have HFRS accepted this and are taking steps to change the crewing. The FBU has always warned that DCP encourages Victorian style working practices and is effectively a way to cut crewing. This is proven by the need to recruit more firefighters now in order to restore 2 stations to a standard grey book compliant wholetime shift but their plans to leave Rickmansworth as day cover station and use short notice crewing movements to cover at night time have resulted in anger amongst the members in Hertfordshire at what can only be described as a reduction in fire cover.

DCP attracted an allowance for those working the shift, allowed some crews to live further away from Hertfordshire in order to ease the cost of living burden and for some members, they were assigned those stations straight from training, with no prior knowledge of it being unlawful. Members are frustrated at being sold a system that should never have been allowed in the first place and they are the ones who will suffer financially when it ceases.

Regional Officials met with members and their Brigade Secretary recently to hear their concerns and will continue to support and advise them during the transition.

Solidarity Medal

The solidarity medal is the highest award given by the Fire Brigades Union. The medal is awarded, at Annual Conference, on behalf of all members of the Fire Brigades Union to recognise or dispense solidarity, or specific acts of exceptional merit.

This year, 1 of the 2 medals given out was presented to LGBT+ National Secretary and Bedfordshire member Brother Pat Carberry. Pat has been a pioneer for equality and fairness, joining the LGBT+ National Committee when it was first set up. He is a local councillor in his home town and has a 100% success rate when representing members at tribunal.

Pat retires this year and the union will miss his wise counsel and experience. When accepting his award he talked of passing on the baton to others now and made a special request of us all that we "don't f*** it up!"

We can never thank you enough Pat.



Upcoming Education Courses

There are a number of courses in the next 6 months with details found at <https://www.fbu.org.uk/education>. Course below are open for applications. You will need to apply for trade union leave from your service to attend.

Introductory Branch Officials – Bedfordshire - 9 –11 October 2024, Closing date 14th August
Pensions – Ill Health Retirement Course– Southampton – 8 – 10 October 2024, Closing date 16th August

National School – Wortley Hall – 12 – 15 November 2024, Closing date 20th September
Organisers School – Wortley Hall – 16 – 18 October 2024, Closing date 9th August
Black and Ethnic Minority Members (BEMM) School - Wortley Hall - 27-29 September - closing date 16th August

Contact your local officials for application forms to attend

Firefighters 100 Lottery

The weekly lottery was set up in 2018, the FBU Centenary year, to help commemorate the bravery and sacrifice of firefighters killed and injured in the line of duty and to establish a fund for the future benefit of firefighters, their bereaved families and the firefighting profession. It funds important research work like Decon and supports humanitarian initiatives and appeals, including internationally, which are aimed at assisting those affected by fire or disaster. For more information and to sign up go to <https://www.firefighters100lottery.co.uk/>

National Red Plaque Fire Service Memorial

In 2023, Essex officials were approached by a Retired and Out of Trade (ROOT) member, Ronnie Patterson, for some assistance with a very special memorial project being organised. Ronnie's father was also a firefighter but sadly passed away from cancer and, unlike other memorials for firefighters lost in the line of duty, there was no such place to commemorate him. Ronnie and Mark Moughton, members of the Red Knights Motorcycle Club - an international motorcycling club for firefighters- began an ambitious project at White House Farm, Rettendon, where there is already a living memorial to fallen British armed forces personnel, to create a site for our profession. The design was for a wall with individual plaques with the names of firefighters and control staff who are no longer with us, for a statue to be commissioned, as well as buildings that house donated memorabilia.

Ronnie approached the FBU for some funding and in early 2024, £20,000 was donated., generated by the FBU Firefighter 100 lottery scheme. In addition to this, the FBU Red Plaque scheme approved a plaque to be placed in honour of all firefighters and control staff- the first plaque to honour control.

The Grand Opening of the memorial took place on 4th May, Firefighter Memorial Day, and was attended by officials from around the Region with National Officer Riccardo la Torre addressing the crowd before officially opening the site. Ronnie and Mark have created a memorial not just to those lost in the line of duty but for all firefighters and control staff who have served their communities and deserve recognition. Thanks to the work of the Decon project, we now have irrefutable proof that our profession has and can cause cancer and with the increase in members being lost to mental health, they too should never be forgotten.

The memorial is open all year round and names can be added at any time by getting in touch with the red knights club via RCMKEng4News@gmail.com



EC member Jamie Newell and Regional Secretary Rebecca Lewington laid wreaths at the memorial.



Riccardo la Torre, National Officer

