

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE MATTERS

A PARLIAMENTARY BULLETIN FOR MPS FROM THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION | SEPTEMBER 2020

FBU SAYS MORE FIREFIGHTERS NEEDED FOR RESILIENCE



There are too few firefighters to guarantee resilience after a decade of austerity, according to new figures obtained by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU).

One-in-five firefighter jobs (20%) across the UK have been cut since 2010. This has had a huge impact on the resilience of the fire and rescue service. Fewer firefighters mean slower response times, fewer home visits, fewer inspections – all hitting our communities.

Firefighters are responsible for rapid deployment to fires, floods, terrorist incidents, civil disturbances, industrial explosions, train accidents and other emergencies across the UK. They have also provided significant aid during the Covid-19 pandemic.

AUSTERITY BITES

More than 8,000 of these cuts are to wholetime firefighters, while 3,000 retained firefighters have also been cut. A quarter of control staff, who take the emergency calls and mobilise fire crews, have been lost.

Every brigade has suffered – metropolitan, combined and county services – in all parts of the UK and under all devolved administrations, though not to the same degree. England was the worst hit of the four administrations, with almost 10,000 jobs cut. Worst hit brigades were Buckinghamshire, Staffordshire, Tyne and Wear, Cambridgeshire and West Yorkshire.

DOUBLE COUNTING

The FBU figures also reveal the scale of “wholetime-retained” contracts across the fire and rescue service. More than 3,000 firefighters have a wholetime (full-time) contract and then another retained (part-time) contract – either with the same brigade or with another service. The data showed that nearly one in ten frontline firefighters in England and Wales are on “wholetime-retained” contracts, with Northern Ireland having 5%.

While “wholetime-retained” contracts have helped firefighters deal with devastating pay cuts over the last decade, for the service as a whole it means they may be counted as two jobs. This double counting means that the numbers actually employed and available at any one time are significantly less than official figures might suggest.

LAST YEAR

Last year, there was a small increase of 150 frontline firefighter jobs created, less than 1% of the profession. Fire and rescue services have continued to face cuts and almost half actually making cuts last year.

More than 100 wholetime (full-time) firefighter posts were cut last year, with fire and rescue services such as Humberside, Isle of Wight and South Yorkshire being proportionally hardest hit. Retained firefighter numbers despite an overall increase, levels fell in a number of brigades, notably Staffordshire, Surrey and Mid and West Wales. Control jobs rose slightly, after many years of drastic cuts.

THESE FIGURES

These figures come from Freedom of Information requests made by the FBU, April-August 2020. These are provisional headcount figures on 31 March of each year. Despite multiple efforts to obtain the 2020 figures, neither Scotland nor Northamptonshire provided these figures. Some fire and rescue services did not provide data on “wholetime-retained” contracts. The FBU believes this information should be published annually by all fire and rescue services.

Note: Scotland and Northamptonshire have not provided 2020 figures and hence their 2019 figures have been held constant.

Firefighter jobs by brigade 2010-20 and 2019-20

Fire and rescue service	2010-20	2010-20 (%)	2019-20	2019-20 (%)	Wholetime-retained 2020
Scotland	-915	-12%	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided
Northern Ireland	-196	-10%	8	0%	93
Mid and West Wales	-77	-6%	-75	-6%	79
North Wales	-148	-17%	-4	-1%	0
South Wales	-421	-25%	112	10%	209
Cleveland	-197	-31%	-2	0%	32
Durham	-56	-10%	24	5%	51
Northumberland	-131	-30%	-6	-2%	25
Tyne and Wear	-325	-35%	16	3%	8
Humberside	-307	-29%	-28	-4%	84
North Yorkshire	-83	-11%	16	2%	69
South Yorkshire	-293	-31%	-38	-6%	37
West Yorkshire	-609	-35%	-22	-2%	73
Cheshire	-56	-8%	18	3%	86
Cumbria	-156	-21%	0	0%	47
Greater Manchester	-629	-32%	-5	0%	6
Lancashire	-274	-21%	-11	-1%	99
Merseyside	-317	-26%	50	6%	228
North West Fire Control	N/A	N/A	4	7%	0
Derbyshire	-70	-9%	5	1%	43
Leicestershire	-213	-27%	6	1%	97
Lincolnshire	-103	-14%	30	5%	25
Northamptonshire	-116	-20%	Not provided	Not provided	54
Nottinghamshire	-296	-30%	-64	-9%	62
Hereford and Worcester	-101	-14%	-2	0%	38
Shropshire	-53	-9%	-7	-1%	27
Staffordshire	-332	-36%	-92	-13%	64
Warwickshire	-39	-9%	20	5%	44
West Midlands	-466	-24%	-1	0%	62
Bedfordshire	-37	-7%	9	2%	39
Cambridgeshire	-244	-35%	-7	-2%	64
Essex	-222	-16%	28	2%	87
Hertfordshire	-102	-12%	29	4%	82
Norfolk	-111	-13%	-3	0%	112
Suffolk	-195	-25%	-4	-1%	70
London	-1,128	-19%	-17	0%	0
Berkshire	-79	-14%	9	2%	27
Buckinghamshire	-266	-43%	0	0%	38
East Sussex	-89	-12%	10	2%	81
Hampshire	-208	-13%	13	1%	237
Isle of Wight	-53	-24%	-3	-2%	23
Kent	-420	-25%	62	5%	103
Oxfordshire	-88	-13%	-11	-2%	51
Surrey	-144	-19%	-9	-1%	48
West Sussex	-209	-25%	15	2%	75
Avon	-277	-29%	10	1%	49
Cornwall	12	2%	49	8%	64
Devon and Somerset	-502	-24%	11	1%	230
Dorset and Wiltshire	-248	-19%	10	1%	53
Gloucestershire	-94	-18%	-6	-1%	21
UK total	-11,622	-20%	142	0%	3,296

NB. 61 jobs at NWFC (2020) are included in respective totals