



SAVE OUR FIRE SERVICE



FBU FIGHT 'DANGEROUS CUTS' IN AVON

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in Avon has slammed plans to cut frontline cover which they say will compromise the safety of the public and fire crews.

The cuts include the downgrading of fire stations, vital high rise appliances and a rescue tender used in serious motorway accidents. They have been proposed by Avon Fire Authority as a result of a savage £5m government cut to the fire service budget.

The cuts, which are out for public consultation, will see 49 firefighter posts removed from frontline fire stations and the downgrading of Yate fire station at night where fulltime cover is being removed.

The plans also include cutting the immediate response of vital aerial appliances from Bath and Weston Super Mare fire stations that are used for rescues and firefighting in high rise buildings. The cuts will also mean the end of 24/7 availability of specially trained firefighters to crew a heavy rescue 19 tonne truck in Avonmouth.

As a result of the cuts the vehicle will not be able to be mobilised immediately to serious road

traffic collisions on the motorways surrounding Bristol; it's catchment area.

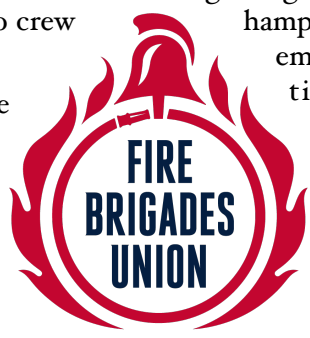
Avon firefighter and brigade FBU chair Gary Spindler said: "These are untenable, dangerous cuts to the frontline fire service in Avon. Here, firefighters have recently tackled large scale incidents that have stretched us to the limit, and we needed every firefighter we could muster.

'The role of aerial appliances at incidents such as the recent massive fire at St Michaels Hill or the high rise fire at student accommodation in Colston Street, Bristol, has been vital in helping us protect the public and deal with the incident.

"The cuts being proposed would have a severe impact on our ability to respond effectively and promptly to these incidents. Every firefighter knows the importance of getting to an incident quickly, and these cuts would hamper our ability to do so. Every second counts in an emergency - these cuts would mean that response times at night in Yate would increase to a dangerous level.

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Union launches fight back against 'unsafe and untenable' cuts to firefighter jobs, fire station, aerial appliances and heavy rescue tender!



Fighting for the Fire & Rescue Service

Protecting Firefighters & Control Staff

FBU fight 'dangerous cuts' in Avon cont from page 1

"We're asking the public in Bristol and across the Avon area to support their firefighters and say no to these cuts. They can do this by signing our online petition or by responding to the formal consultation."

South West regional FBU rep Tam McFarlane said: "The 21% cut to the budget being forced on Avon Fire Service by the government will mean a severe and dangerous cut to the frontline fire service. Every single day firefighters risk their lives to provide a 24 hour, all hazard emergency service."

"Last year firefighters rescued 40,000 people UK wide and 90% of these weren't from fires. Yet despite providing this incredible, life-saving service, firefighters are seeing their service and their safety compromised by politicians who put



Encouraging people to support the campaign, South West rep Tam McFarlane said "we're making the professional case against these dangerous cuts and we're not going to stop until politicians start listening. Even at this early stage its clear that the public



budget cuts ahead of public safety. Our service is at crisis point and we are asking the public to get behind their local firefighters and demand that these dangerous cuts are reversed."

FBU reps will be attending consultation events run by the Brigade to make sure that the public know of our opposition and are encouraged not to support the cuts. The Union has also launched an online petition which can be accessed at the '**38 Degrees**' website under the title '**No Dangerous Cuts to Avon Fire & Rescue Service**'. The petition has been an early success, with hundreds of signatures in the first few days of its launch.

Campaign days have been organised on the 10th and 17th of December where FBU members will take to the streets of Yate (on the 10th of Dec) and Bristol City Centre (on the 17th). We will be handing out leaflets, explaining our concerns and asking the public to support us in our fight against these cuts. We have had thousands of leaflets printed for this and will be handing these out on the day. In addition, a campaign video has been made, fronted by Avon rep Gary Spindler, which sets out the dangerous consequences of the cuts and urges people to show their opposition to the plans.



overwhelmingly support their firefighters and oppose these cuts.

"We'll be taking to the streets and campaigning throughout December, making the case for a properly funded, fully resourced Fire & Rescue Service. I would urge everyone reading this article to make sure they sign and share the petition and, if able, join us on our campaign days to take the case to the public."

"Times may be tough, but we're the only body fighting for firefighters and our service and we're not going to stop! Join with the Fire Brigades Union - lets fight for our profession together."

Fighting for Fire Control members



FBU win additional payment for Fire Control Staff

The Fire Brigades Union has won an additional payment of £500 for Fire Control staff in Dorset & Wiltshire FRS, Devon & Somerset FRS and Hampshire FRS.

The payment, a one off sum in the form of an 'honorarium,' was put forward by the Union as a recognition of additional workloads and pressure Fire Control members have been under since the installation of the 'Vision 4 DS' mobilising system.

This system, supplied by the private company 'Capita' was meant to underpin the '*Networked Fire Control Services Partnership*', a single command and control system covering the Fire and Rescue Services in Devon & Somerset, Dorset & Wiltshire and Hampshire.

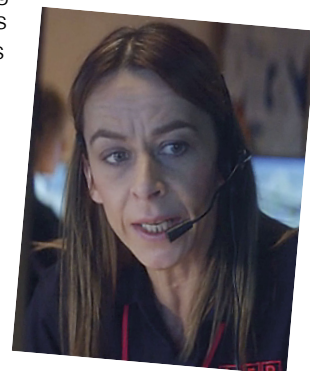
However, since its introduction there have been numerous system failures impacting on operational effectiveness. These have put Fire Control staff under enormous pressure. Throughout the summer, the FBU has been raising serious concerns with politicians and principal managers; even at one point writing

directly to every individual member of the Fire & Rescue Authorities involved. We have also had meetings and been in direct contact with Chief Fire Officers regarding the unreliability and instability of the system.

South West FBU rep Tam McFarlane, who witnessed first hand an operational failure of the system, said "the system supplied by Capita has been beset with serious problems since its inception. We have spent the summer months raising our professional concerns and demanding action. The situation our members have been working under is unsustainable and must be resolved".

"As a result of a number of high level meetings and sustained pressure, Capita have now finally started to make the system more workable, but we are firmly of the view that this company has seriously let down our Fire & Rescue Services. The FBU have left politicians in no doubt that this issue is not going to go away until its fully resolved. We will continue to keep a very close eye on the situation and keep up the pressure until the system is 100% reliable.

"In the interim, everyone should acknowledge the incredible work our Fire Control members have been doing in the most stressful of circumstances. In the face of serious system failures, our Fire Control staff used their skill and experience to keep our Service's running and the public as safe as possible. This is why we wanted a financial acknowledgment of their work and I'm pleased that the three Chief Fire Officers involved agreed. Everyone in the FBU is deeply appreciative of the superb work of our Control members and we will continue to fight for them and support them every step of the way."



'Professional duty systems for professional firefighters'

Several Brigades in our region are undertaking so called 'duty system reviews', so we thought it was a good time to hear the experiences of colleagues from other parts of the UK. At a recent meeting, we asked FBU Officials from East Anglia to give us their experiences of a "5 watch" duty system, introduced in Cambridgeshire FRS.

Much of what was said echoes our experiences, with management making promises of 'flexibility' and trying to cut out the Union by going direct to fire stations, telling firefighters that change is 'inevitable' and '*if you don't accept this then you will end up with an even worse system*'. But the main lesson we learned was: don't believe everything you're told! Cambridgeshire rep Cameron Matthews explained that one year after the controversial system was introduced, the FBU undertook a survey of firefighters, asking them if it had lived up to the promises they had been given. The message that came back loudly was a resounding **NO!**

The survey findings were shocking and serve as a clear warning to the perils of getting sucked into believing management warnings of "inevitable change" or promises of "flexibility". Talking to our meeting, Cameron said "this system is deeply unpopular with the majority of firefighters saying that they would not recommend this change to colleagues in other Brigades. Despite management claims to the contrary, the truth is that this is a very inflexible system and our members struggle to get proper time

with their families as well as working a potential 14 extra days a year for free. Four years later we still have unresolved issues between what was promised and what was delivered. The clear advice we would give to FBU members in other

Brigades is to stick with the Union and don't be hoodwinked by the promises or threats of management. Professional firefighters need and deserve professional duty systems and we will only get them by sticking together".

South West regional secretary Trevor French, who is overseeing negotiations in our Brigades, added "In the South West we have shown that we are ready and willing to negotiate on duty systems that meet the professional requirements of the Fire Service and have proper consideration to the working conditions and work/life balance of firefighters. But I want managers who are considering change to be clear - we won't be duped into a duty system that only works for management and which members look back on with regret. The lessons from our colleagues are clear: stick together and don't be dragged into a race to the bottom."



Cambridgeshire rep Cameron Matthews talks of duty system experiences

We are custodians of our profession.



One of the first things I was told when I joined the Fire Service was: “don’t think of this as your own personal job - you’re only looking after it for the next person.”

This was a sentiment that was repeated time after time in my first few months. First at training school when we joined as recruits, then at the Fire Station when I joined my first watch, then at my first Union meeting and so on..

It was a view so strongly felt within the Fire Service that it was expressed across our profession, by people of all ranks and in all areas. It represents a culture of pride in our occupation and the achievements of previous generations of firefighters who built it and made it so highly valued by society.

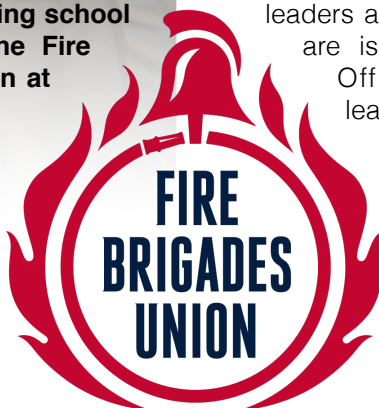
More importantly, it is also a commitment by us, the current generation of firefighters, that we value what was entrusted to us and will pass it on unscathed to the next generation. This commitment, built up by generation after generation of firefighters, is an integral part of our close knit industry and it is an ethos which now, more than ever, we need to reaffirm and unite around.

Because, although we serve proudly as firefighters, we have the misfortune to do so at a time of unprecedented attacks on our service and profession.

The cuts we face seem never-ending and have ripped across every part of our profession - cutting jobs, fire stations and appliances. They compromise public safety and the safety of firefighters who now face even greater risk at dangerous incidents by turning up in fewer numbers, with less back up and less resilience than ever before in modern times. Our conditions have also come under attack with pay freezes, pension cuts and absurd, unprofessional duty systems being threatened.

This is the time we are in, we can't change that, but what we can do is learn the lessons of the past and recommit to defending our industry and each other. And the one lesson that stands out more than any other is: ***the only people we can rely on to defend our profession is ourselves*** - by standing together as the Fire Brigades Union.

Yes, there are good politicians who offer us support - but they are currently too few in number and are overwhelmed by a Government who prioritise budget cuts above public safety. There are also some good leaders at the highest level of our Service - but they are isolated and undermined by a Chief Fire Officers Association that offers neither leadership nor defence of our service.



In this 'neoliberal' era, public services are being pushed into privatisation and trade unions are being marginalised. We won't let this happen to the Fire & Rescue Service or the Fire Brigades Union. Politics & Politicians are transient, they will pass. It is our duty to ensure that our exceptional profession remains intact.

So, just as it was in previous generations, it is up to us to stand up for each other and defend the Fire Service. I said earlier that ours is a close knit industry; as a consequence we are also a close knit Union and it is this that will get us through this current period of political attacks - by ***standing together, supporting each other and being determined & united.***

Tam McFarlane



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