



The Premier Trade Union for Professional Firefighters and Emergency Fire Control Staff: April 2015

SO MUCH FOR “ALL IN IT TOGETHER!”

FBU slams “hypocrisy” as Chief gets pay rise - and Firefighter jobs are cut!



Firefighter = Real terms pay cut, pension slashed, job losses



Chief Fire Officer - £12,000 pay rise linked to rises for “top” management team

The Fire Brigades Union in Avon has slammed politicians on their fire authority after they agreed to increase the pay of the Chief Fire Officer and the “Service Management Board” by an incredible 10% despite recent austerity cuts which have seen 86 frontline firefighter posts cut in the last few years.

The pay increases, which equates to around £70,000 added to the wage bill, was agreed at the fire authority meeting on 27 March. The increase was opposed by the Labour members on the authority but the vote was carried after Tory and Lib Dem members joined forces to push it through. The decision has seen Chief Fire Officer Kevin Pearson's salary rise from £130,000 to £142,000.

This compares with a Firefighter who earns just £29,054 after a pathetic 1% pay rise last year.

Speaking after the debate Chris Taylor, secretary of the FBU in Avon, said: “Firefighters in Avon will be furious at this decision. At a time when budgets are being slashed and frontline posts are getting cut, it simply beggars belief that the authority would take this decision.

“In Avon we have lost 86 frontline firefighter posts since the start of austerity and firefighters have seen their pay plummet in real terms during the same period.

“It is worse than insulting to firefighters that the fire authority, against this background, now sees fit to increase the pay of the top earners in the organisation. It is **sheer hypocrisy**.”

***Fighting for the Fire &
Rescue Service***



***Protecting Firefighters
& Control Staff***

Pensions: The 2015 scheme is imposed but the campaign continues!

Update from FBU General Secretary

On 1 April the 2015 firefighter's pension scheme was imposed without agreement and with many of our key concerns unaddressed. The Executive Council position remains that the new scheme is still unworkable, most noticeably in England. Therefore our campaign continues.

In simple terms the new imposed schemes do not reflect the physical role undertaken by firefighters. In Wales, Ireland and Scotland the firefighters pension scheme proposals have been improved and some of the concerns have been addressed. We are still discussing specific issues with each Government and we continue to seek further improvements. ***It is important to note that these discussions continue.***

Lack of information from employers/Government

The union has attempted to put out as much information about the new scheme/s and how members could be affected by it. This includes a significant number of circulars, bulletins, magazine features, short films and PowerPoint presentations. We have also shared a huge amount of correspondence between the FBU and DCLG, Ministers, MPs, National Employers and individual Fire and Rescue Authorities.

One of our key aims was to ensure members did not take any knee jerk decision in relation to opting-out or not joining the 2015 scheme. We have consistently advised members that we support occupational pension schemes and have recently reiterated the pitfalls of opting-out or not joining the 2015 scheme in a short film by the General Secretary and a voiced over PowerPoint presentation.

It is clear that both Government and the employers have shirked their responsibility to fully inform pension scheme members of all their options. They seem so intent on exaggerating the cost of the current schemes; making claims about how generously firefighters are being treated; and criticising the action taken by FBU member that they have failed to give clear and concise information on the options available to pension scheme members. Scheme members have been left to make important decisions with very little or very vague information from the people who are imposing and managing the schemes. This lack of information has been totally unacceptable.

Legislation and guarantees but no regulation

DCLG have simply ignored our concerns and our requests to meet after laying regulations to impose the 2015 scheme. These regulations were only discussed in Parliament as a result of a superb effort by FBU members who lobbied their MP to 'pray' against the legislation. The debate and vote that followed was heavily influenced by the DCLG Fire Minister's clear guarantee that firefighters would not be sacked if they failed fitness tests as a result of aging. Instead she confirmed that in this situation firefighters aged 55 would be redeployed or would get an unreduced pension

This guarantee has been shown to be empty. This has been confirmed in writing by individual Fire Authorities and by the National Employers. We have consistently said that the only way of providing this guarantee was to include it in the scheme regulations, which has been done in Scotland. Unfortunately the Westminster Government don't seem to care that they misled firefighters, Parliament and the public in this way.

Options have been ignored by DCLG

We have also continued to highlight that the proposed actuarial reductions at age 55 in England are too punitive. We have suggested a fairer method for applying actuarial reductions but DCLG have so far refused to use this while Scottish and Welsh Governments have agreed to use this method. We continue to press on this issue.

General Election approaches: Political work continues

We continue to raise our pension concerns with MPs and Employers in all parts of the UK and have received some very supportive messages in response to this. We have also been discussing our key concerns with the senior Labour Party MPs in advance of the General Election. On 24 March we met with the Shadow Secretary of State, Hilary Benn and Shadow Fire Minister Lyn Brown, to discuss how they would deal with the firefighters' pension scheme dispute if they formed a Government after the forthcoming General Election.

The Shadow Fire Minister has written to the DCLG Fire Minister reiterating the worthlessness of the guarantee. She has also written a positive letter to the FBU suggesting how a Labour led Government would deal with some of our concerns differently. These are currently being discussed and a copy of both these letters will be issued to members very shortly.

Parliament has been dissolved pending the General Election and we are now preparing to continue the campaign with the incoming Government. If it is Labour led we have a strategy to ensure they revisit and address our key concerns. If it is a Tory led Government we can expect more of the same treatment and will have to react accordingly.

Next steps

The scheme has been imposed but we are not going away. We have still got key concerns about the future of our pension scheme and we aim to keep pressing these issues until something is done to rectify this. Over the next few weeks a series of meetings are being arranged around the UK where members and officials will be given a briefing on the most recent developments and the ongoing work. This will also provide you with an opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns with the campaign and what it means to you.

Best wishes,
Matt Wrack FBU General Secretary



Essex Control on the picket line



The South West FBU invited Essex FBU Official Alan Chinn-Shaw, to give us a full briefing on the ongoing strike action taking place in Essex FRS. Alan came to the Region and our reps were appalled to hear of the disgraceful treatment being suffered by our colleagues in Essex Fire Control at the hands of their Fire Authority. The Control

Solidarity with Essex!

Staff, most of whom are women, have had a draconian shift system imposed upon them which has meant that many have had to consider giving up their job or move to part time work because of the detrimental impact on those with caring responsibilities. They are fighting back by undertaking a nine day strike which ended on 19th March.

Financial donations to the Essex FBU hardship fund were made by the South West Region, Avon FBU Brigade Committee and Wiltshire FBU Brigade Committee. In addition, the Region also had a special batch of "FBU member with backbone" T-shirts made up for our Sisters on the Essex picket line and asked Alan to take them, together with our full support & solidarity to the members fighting for a fair future!

Support Essex FBU - Fighting for a Fair Deal!

The parliamentary order to combine

FBU steps up joint working as merger plans agreed

Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Services has been agreed, which means that the combined Fire Authority, imaginatively titled "Dorset and Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Authority" will become operational from 1st April 2016.

In anticipation of the combination the FBU has been ensuring that our Brigade Committees and Officials



in Dorset & Wiltshire are working closely together in order to work on a common

agenda for our members in the new service.

We have had several meetings together and have received specialist legal and other advice, in areas such as workforce development and IRMP development. We will be working hard in the future to ensure that the new Service puts the needs of Firefighters and the front line first!

Over 20 new reps take part in South West FBU training

Over 20 new reps attended a South West FBU training course held in Torquay.

The 3 day course is specially designed to give new FBU Officials and members the skills they need to organise in Fire Stations and Control Rooms, and to represent members in grievances and disciplines. Upon completion of the course the reps will receive a qualification from the TUC and will be equipped to be the Union Officials of the future.

Opening the school, South West FBU Official Tam McFarlane told the 20 plus delegates "the FBU has been fighting for Firefighters and organising in the Fire Service since 1918. The FBU is the Fire Service and your attendance at this event shows that we are building a new generation of Officials to take us

forward into the future". South West FBU =



New reps learning the skills they need.

giving new reps the skills they need!



South West EC Member Tam McFarlane

I want to start by once again paying tribute to the magnificent unity and solidarity of FBU members, fighting so determinedly for pension justice in our profession.

The demonstration held in February produced extraordinary scenes as Firefighters from across the South West travelled to London and joined thousands of colleagues from across the UK taking strike action and demonstrating against unfair and unjust pension cuts.

There were unprecedented scenes as Firefighters in their thousands shut down Westminster and even Parliament for a time! Disgracefully, and you would have to say deliberately, the mainstream media refused to report this incredible demonstration but our message is clear - We will not go away!

Following this demonstration we received many messages of support from across the Trade Union and Political spectrum, all expressing their admiration for the unity and determination of Firefighters and their Union - the FBU.

In our profession unity comes naturally - we call it teamwork. The reliance on one another to work together in the most dangerous of circumstances breeds a sense of unity and commitment within our profession which is very hard for others to understand, but it

means that we stick together at all times - good and bad.

Since 1918 our Union has been fighting for the frontline - for the Firefighters and Emergency Control Staff who deliver a life saving emergency service.

The history of our Union befits a profession that requires courage and determination. From day one the FBU fought to end privatisation and ensure that everyone could call us in time of need, rich or poor; those with insurance and those without.

We fought through the blitz to achieve death benefits for those who lost their lives and for survivors benefits for the families left behind. We fought through the 50s and 60s to professionalise our service and end the "spit & polish" regimes which denied us the proper training we needed.

We fought throughout the 70s and 80s to achieve proper working hours, proper pensions, proper shifts and a proper pay formula. We have been the only body fighting to demand that lessons be learned following every death in the line of duty and have fought to get proper compensation for those who have been seriously injured.

"Since 1918 our Union has been fighting for the frontline"

However, every day since we have been fighting against those who want to take us back in time, attack the legacy of our predecessors and remove the gains that previous generations have achieved.

Against that background, this generation of Firefighters can be proudly judged on their record of defending their colleagues, their profession and fighting for a fair future. We have fought, and will continue to fight, every step of the way against those who want to casualise our service, destroy our jobs, undermine the cover we provide and attack our pensions.

Since 1918 the fabric of the Fire Service and the fabric of the FBU has been one and the same thing; the Firefighters that make up our service. The FBU is the Fire Service and, as our profession continues to face an uncertain future, we can say one thing for sure: the FBU will always be fighting for the frontline!

Tam McFarlane
South West FBU

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FBU SOUTH WEST

The Fire Brigades Union is the premier Trade Union for professional Firefighters and Control Staff across the UK. The South West Region is the largest Region in England and we cover Avon, Cornwall, Dorset, Devon & Somerset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire FRS's.

We represent over 85% of uniformed staff across the UK. Our members cover every role from Firefighter to Area Manager, including the retained duty system. We are committed to protecting our Members, their interests at work and to ensuring that the public receive an excellent and professional Fire & Rescue Service. Join the professionals, contact us at:

www.southwestfbu.com



Follow us on our own Facebook page: Go to **South West Region of the Fire Brigades Union** and hit the "like" button. You will receive updates on our work and links to how we are fighting for you locally.



Follow us on Twitter at @southwestfbu