



GRENFELL: SUPPORT & SOLIDARITY



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South West firefighters support London colleagues in aftermath of Grenfell

FBU reps from across the South West have been volunteering their services to support London colleagues in the aftermath of the Grenfell tower fire.

All the firefighters and control staff involved with the incident, including those from control rooms outside of London, face being interviewed by the Metropolitan Police. The FBU are making sure they have the support and advice of Union representatives inside these interviews.

With many hundreds of interviews planned, this is a massive challenge but the Union has committed to the task and reps from as far away as Cornwall and Devon have answered the call for support.

Our Region has supplied trained officials to travel to London, often in their own time, where they receive a detailed briefing before supporting London colleagues over many hours of police led interviews. This support has proved invaluable to members as they relive their experiences in a formal process. In addition, the Union is undertaking a vast amount of detailed work to give firefighters a full and active voice in the formal Grenfell inquiry, in which the FBU has been granted 'core participant' status.

The FBU is also supporting the Grenfell community, which has been devastated by the tragedy. Through our 'Firefighters 100 Lottery' we have helped rebuild

a much loved community boxing club which was destroyed in the fire, and helped in several other projects, including donating £20,000 to Grenfell community causes from the Lottery.

Also, on the 14th of every month FBU members join with residents in a moving 'silent march' to pay respect to those who are no longer with us. This is part of the 'Justice4Grenfell' campaign, which we are fully behind.

FBU stand "shoulder to shoulder" with colleagues & community

South West rep Tam McFarlane, who attended one of the first 'silent marches' said:

"Firefighters can be justly proud of the support being given by their Union in the aftermath of this tragedy. We have rallied from across the country to support our London colleagues, who performed so heroically at the incident, and as a Union we

have stood shoulder to shoulder with the wider community, offering practical and moral help.

"Having marched with residents in the shadow of Grenfell tower I know the value they place on our support and I urge all FBU members to get behind the campaign. The efforts of our London colleagues on the night of the fire were incredible and genuinely heroic. Now we all need to play our part to make sure such a tragedy is never repeated and that the Grenfell community achieves the justice they so rightly deserve."



Fighting for the Fire & Rescue Service

Protecting Firefighters & Control Staff

The Firefighters Story - 100 yrs of the FBU



Tam McFarlane introduces the first screening of 'The Firefighters Story'

The South West FBU hosted the very first screening of a new documentary style film, *'The Firefighters' Story'*, commissioned by the FBU as part of our centenary.

The hour long film traces the history of the Fire Brigades Union since its inception at the end of the First World War, and the contribution the union has made over ten decades to improve public and firefighter safety through its campaigning work.

The film, produced by In Focus Productions for the FBU to mark its centenary this year, uses archive footage throughout, including the Blitz which shows the incredible bravery of the firefighters Churchill called 'Heroes with Dirty Faces'. The film examines the appalling conditions early firefighters worked under, and the role of the Union in building the modern Fire & Rescue Service.

The screening was attended by FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack who took part in a Q&A after the film, answering the questions of members and officials on a wide range of subjects. The screening took place in Bristol on 4th of February, a date which has a special place in the hearts of everyone in the South West FBU as it was the date in 1996 when Avon Firefighter Fleur Lombard QGM lost her life whilst fighting a blaze in Bristol.

Speaking at the event, Matt Wrack said: "As we reach the end of our first hundred years as a trade union and start our second, we wanted to mark it in a memorable way. This film is something for current and future generations to learn from, not just about the value of firefighters to communities over the last century, but the significant contribution FBU members have made to public safety, and of course the safety of its members.

"We are extremely proud to have made such an impact on safety through our long history of campaigning and lobbying. And now, 100 years after we began, we have the Grenfell Tower atrocity to address.

We will do our utmost to ensure that policies around social housing, building regulations and fire safety will be extensively improved so that people living in tower blocks are safe."



Matt Wrack answers questions

Firefighters remember Fleur Lombard

On Sunday 4 February, 1996, fire crews were called to a fire at the Leos supermarket in Staple Hill, Bristol. Firefighter Fleur Lombard, who was serving at Speedwell Fire Station at the time, was inside the building when she lost her life while tackling the inferno.

Fleur was posthumously awarded the Queen's Gallantry Medal and Chief Fire Officer's Commendation in recognition of her bravery. Two of her colleagues who were with her that day were also awarded the George Medal and the Queen's Commendation for Bravery.

The memories of Fleur remain close to the hearts of those in Avon and a memorial stands to commemorate her life near the site of the fire in Staple Hill. Each year, on the anniversary of Fleur's death, colleagues from Avon Fire & Rescue Service and the Fire Brigades Union gather at the memorial to remember her.

This year, the Chief Fire Officer of Avon, Mick Crennell, laid a wreath followed by Gary Spindler from Avon FBU. Vicky Dicks then laid a wreath on behalf of women members in



the Fire & Rescue Service followed by station personnel from Kingswood Fire Station (Speedwell Fire Station was closed by Avon Fire Authority in 2015). A minutes silence was held in memory of Fleur by all present, which included members of the public and firefighters from across the Region.

Avon FBU rep Gary Spindler, who worked at Speedwell Fire Station in 1996, said 'It is always an emotional and moving occasion as we gather to remember Fleur and it is especially heartening to see members of the public and colleagues from across the region join with us in Avon to do so.

"Fleur is recognised as an outstanding Firefighter whose loss is as keenly felt today as it was on that terrible day 22yrs ago. She made the ultimate sacrifice whilst protecting the citizens of Bristol and her courage is an example to us all, which we will never forget".

FBU slam 'flawed and misleading' IRMP

The Fire Brigades Union has lambasted the Integrated Risk Management Plan' (IRMP) and its consultation in Devon & Somerset FRS, calling it 'flawed and misleading' at a fire authority meeting on 16 February.

James Leslie, secretary of the FBU in Devon and Somerset, said: "This plan does not spell out to the public what will happen in the event of a dwelling fire, road traffic collision, flooding or any other type of incident we attend. The public have a right to know how Devon and Somerset plan to deal with these incidents, how many firefighters will attend and how quickly they will mobilise fire crews, arrive at an incident and respond.



James Leslie FBU

"The plan falsely claims, with no evidence to back it up, that 70% of DSFRS incidents can be dealt with by only two firefighters. The FBU believes this 'claim' is being made to justify fire engines attending incidents with less than the current safe crew minimum of five firefighters.

"The backdrop to these worrying measures is one of continuing government cuts which, by 2022, will have cut central funding to



the fire and rescue service by 50% from 2010, the most savage cuts in the history of the modern fire service. The plan also proposes to expand firefighters' role in emergency medical work without any extra funding for this."

Scott Young, chair for the FBU in Devon and Somerset, said: "There is not a single mention in the plan of the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower last June, which has to be a wake-up call for building and fire safety regulation in this country. Any effective IRMP has to be based on

what are called 'worst case planning scenarios'. This plan needs to be more focused on fire protection measures.

"Issues raised by Grenfell and through large fires in Devon and Somerset over the last few years have not been adequately addressed. We do not believe that this plan is fit for purpose. The DSFRS management need to consult properly with the FBU. They need to work with us to come up with a better plan, which is clear and factually correct."



Scott Young FBU

Plymouth MP raises 'disgraceful' firefighter cuts in Parliament

Plymouth MP Luke Pollard demanded answers from the Home Secretary in Parliament over what he has called 'disgraceful' cuts to the number of firefighters in the City.

The intervention follows a series of discussions between the MP and the local FBU which raised serious concerns about the impact cuts to fire cover in the city have had on public safety. Since 2004 Plymouth has suffered massive cuts to frontline cover which has seriously downgraded the ability of firefighters to respond to incidents. The comparison between 2004 and 2018 highlights the dangerous situation with the following figures driving home the impact:

In 2004: there were a maximum of 50 wholtime firefighters based across 5 fire stations in Plymouth, permanently available 24/7 .

Fast forward to 2018 and the situation has dramatically changed due to a series of devastating cuts imposed by politicians. Two of the City's fire stations have had wholtime cover removed completely and other stations have also had firefighter and appliances cut. This means that:

In 2018: there are now only a maximum of 28 wholtime firefighters based at 3 fire stations in Plymouth. However, due to shortages on watches, the total crewing figure regularly drops as low as 17 - a disgrace in a City with the population size and risk of Plymouth.



Plymouth MP Luke Pollard

Luke said 'I challenged the Home Secretary over the adequacy of fire cover in Plymouth, pointing out that there are far fewer firefighters today than there were previously. But the risk has not decreased, combustible cladding is still on the tower blocks in Mount Wise and Devonport. In the wake of the tragedy of Grenfell Tower, it should be a priority for the government to ensure that there are no further reductions in the number of firefighters and funding for the fire and rescue services.'

FBU rep Tam McFarlane said 'The cuts to fire cover in Plymouth are on the worst scale of any I have seen anywhere in the UK. Firefighters in the City have been badly let down for years by politicians and chief officers who have compromised safety through a series of devastating and dangerous cuts to the frontline service. We need people to understand the potential consequences of these cutbacks and I urge everyone connected to the City to join with us and lobby for change.

'It's great to see a local MP stand up and be counted on public safety and I want to thank Luke Pollard for his intervention and support to local crews and the FBU. It means a lot to get this issue raised in Parliament and see the Home Secretary challenged directly about dangerous cuts to the Fire & Rescue Service. We are going to continue to work with Luke to get public safety prioritised and a reinstatement of fire cover in Plymouth which has been so dangerously cut.'



In October 1918 a small group of Firefighters, disillusioned with poor treatment at the hands of those who oversaw their service, set up the 'Firemen's Trade Union'. The founding aim was "a means to reorganise the conditions of their labours and thus bring more happiness into the lives of its members."

Soon renamed the "Fire Brigades Union", the Union built its membership throughout the United Kingdom and has forged 100 years of supporting & protecting firefighters through an ethos defined in our motto 'Unity is Strength'.

In this, our centenary year, we will be campaigning to give people outside our industry an understanding of the incredible achievements of previous generations of FBU members, who fought so hard and with such commitment to build our remarkable profession and make it so highly valued by society.

As Firefighters we know our history. We understand that everything in our Service had to be fought for and hard won through the endeavours of FBU members.

In the 1920's, when Salford Firefighters were described by the *Manchester Courier* as 'municipal slaves', imprisoned for fourteen days at a time by a 'continuous duty system', it was the fledgling FBU who began a decades long battle for fair working hours.

When the blitz arrived **in the 1940's** and eight London Firefighters, killed while fighting fires in air raids, were delivered to their widows in canvas sacks on a council lorry, It was the FBU who shamed the Home Office into paying a funeral allowance. Prior to this their colleagues had a whip round to prevent them being buried in paupers graves.

In the late 1950's when two Firefighters died a lonely death in the smoke filled tunnels

below Smithfield Market, the oxygen in their breathing apparatus exhausted, It was the FBU who instigated a change in Breathing Apparatus procedures that has saved countless lives since.

In the 1970's, when the pay of Firefighters had fallen far below that of even the most basic council rate, It was FBU members who stood shoulder to shoulder for nine weeks on freezing picket lines to win a set of pay & conditions that are still enjoyed by those serving today.

And so it goes on.

Many of these aspects are covered in the new film, 'The Firefighter's Story', which we screened for the first time in Bristol. Following the success of this first showing, we intend to hold more screenings across the Region and I would encourage all members to join us for a fascinating insight into the history of our industry and Union.

The date of the Bristol screening, 4th February, has a special place in the hearts of everyone in the South West FBU as it was the date in 1996 when Avon Firefighter Fleur Lombard QGM lost her life whilst fighting a blaze.

Each year, the FBU join with Avon FRS to lay a wreath for Fleur at her memorial in Staple Hill, remembering the incredible courage of this young Firefighter who died whilst protecting her community. It stands as a poignant reminder that, no matter the emergency, there are a group of people just a 999 phone call away, ready and willing to risk their own lives in order to save others.

The story of our remarkable profession is one of courage, service and, in too many cases, sacrifice in the line of duty. But, in this year of all years, we will be reminding people that our heritage is also one of unity, comradeship & progress through our Union.

It is all too easy to imagine the disaster our Fire Service could have been if it had been left to politicians and managers to build. Thankfully it was not.

Instead, through the collective efforts of previous generations of frontline firefighters from 1918 onwards, a legacy of professionalism and commitment to the highest standards was fought for and created. A legacy which made us the envy of firefighters the world over.

Now however, in 2018, this legacy is at threat as we face some of the most dangerous cuts in living memory. Once again, it is up to rank and file firefighters to defend their Service and we, the current generation of FBU members have to create our own legacy by standing together to protect our profession for the next generation. In doing so, we can take confidence from the lessons of the past.

The Fire Brigades Union is more than a Trade Union. For many of us, it is the lifeblood of our chosen profession. Let's stick together, protect our lifesaving Service and build our own legacy of progress.

**Unity is Strength,
Tam McFarlane**

