



# Fire Brigades Union - South West Region



Avon - Cornwall - Devon & Somerset - Gloucestershire - Dorset & Wiltshire

*The Premier Trade Union for Professional Firefighters and Emergency Fire Control Staff: July 2018*

## GRENFELL: ONE YEAR ON



**JUSTICE  
4 GRENFELL**

**FIREFIGHTERS UNITE IN SOLIDARITY WITH SURVIVORS, THE COMMUNITY & LONDON COLLEAGUES**

In June we saw the first anniversary of the shocking Grenfell tower fire which took the lives of 72 people and devastated an entire community. Over the past year FBU members in the Southwest have shown solidarity with the local community by sending delegations to the silent march, held on the 14th of every month in North Kensington.

On the first anniversary of the fire, a larger delegation from across the South West joined the estimated 12000 people who marched in silence across the borough of Kensington to remember those that were lost and stand in solidarity with the survivors in the quest for answers and justice.

Every single member who has attended this march has reported how powerful it is plus how close the relationship between the community and local firefighters is. Seeing this relationship has brought many members to tears. This relationship will prove vital in the coming months and years as certain sectors of the media are starting to attack our brave members who

We have also been supporting solidarity events across the Region. In Bristol there have been two events with Avon members attending a silent march in the City in May. They marched in silence through the city centre with the Regional Banner at the head before ending at the Malcolm X community centre.



FBU BANNER AT HEAD OF BRISTOL SOLIDARITY MARCH

A reflective event was then held on College Green on the first anniversary of the fire, attended by Avon members and National Officer Tam McFarlane. Tam was asked to speak for firefighters at the event and rounded on what he called "**an insidious campaign to attack the professionalism and commitment of firefighters that night**". He spoke for many when he slammed "**The**

**armchair critics who criticise our people are not fit to tie the boots of the firefighters who entered that tower that night**".

Gloucester members also attended the silent sister march that was held to mark the anniversary of the fire. They marched through the streets of Gloucester town centre as a mark of respect for everyone who was and still is effected by the events of that night.

The FBU will continue to fight for justice for

**Fighting for the Fire &  
Rescue Service**



**Protecting Firefighters &  
Control Staff**

## #IAmMichaelDowden

The FBU has been supporting and representing our members who attended the Grenfell Fire. This support has been more needed than ever after the shocking line of questioning to Watch Manager Mike Dowden who was in charge of the first appliances on the scene.

The line of questioning, which to many seemed aggressive and undermining, has created anger amongst the firefighter family and led to the Union fighting back and speaking up for our member. In addition, a social media campaign in solidarity with Mike saw tens of thousands of people use the #IAmMichaelDowden to show their support.

FBU General Secretary released a powerful statement of support for Mike and said "Watch Manager Mike Dowden has shown himself to be a very honest man. He has answered all questions to the best of his ability. He is a professional, brave and honourable person. We are proud to have him as a member of the Fire Brigades Union. There clearly are important and difficult questions to ask but they should not be directed at those who do not have the power or authority to have altered policies, operational procedures or training. The line of questioning toward Mike Dowden has been, at times, absurd.

"Mike Dowden is not in any way a 'Fire Chief' as has been reported in the media in recent days. In fire service structures, he is a junior officer. He is not a middle manager



Michael Dowden

and he is not a strategic or principal manager. On the night of the fire he was originally in charge of two fire engines at one fire station.

"Let's remember that Mike Dowden

did not apply flammable cladding to Grenfell Tower. Nor did he make the other alterations which destroyed the fire safety within the building. Nor did he start the fire. He was simply on duty when the worst fire since World War Two broke out. Like all firefighters that night, he was placed in an impossible situation. He did what they all did; he tried his utmost to save lives.

"The Grenfell Tower Inquiry is approaching issues back to front. It is self-evident that the disaster at Grenfell Tower was a result of the building having been altered. While there have been expert reports provided on these issues, the inquiry is looking at the events of the night rather than the decisions which led to it. Those who made the decisions have yet to been called to give evidence. If the 'Stay put' approach failed, it failed as soon as flammable cladding was installed on the building. The alterations to Grenfell Tower happened before the fire and before any firefighting took place. The order of the inquiry is chronologically and causally wrong."

## South West FBU at Conference 2018



South West Delegates at FBU Conference 2018

FBU Officials from every Fire & Rescue Service in the Region joined colleagues from across the UK at the 2018 FBU Annual Conference.

The Conference, held in Brighton, was a special event which recognised the centenary year of the Union as well as debating and deciding policy across all the important areas for members.

Delegates from the Region played an active role at the Conference with many of our Officials speaking up for members in debates. The vital issue of pay was discussed at length and delegates made clear the frustration that we all feel at years of unjust pay caps and freezes which have left our pay at crisis point.

In addition, action against cuts was demanded and the Union is making direct representations to the Home Office about the impact that frontline cuts are having on public and firefighter safety. Our Region's call for additional finance to provide for primary crewing of aerial appliances was backed by Conference and the General Secretary will now take this issue up with Governments across the UK.

Grenfell was also on the agenda with Thursday afternoons session dedicated to the fire. The session was one of the most powerful and moving that has taken place at conference for many years and was attended by members who fought the fire and residents from the community.

A number of guest speakers attended to give their solidarity & support to UK firefighters including the leaders of firefighter unions in the USA and Australia. Political support was also given by Labour Jeremy Corbyn who praised firefighters and gave a commitment for investment in the service if elected to Government.

It was also good to see our own Tam McFarlane taking to the role of National Officer and entertaining delegates in a way that only he can!



## FBU Legal Victory Rules 96 Hour Shifts Illegal

The FBU has won a fundamental legal case to protect firefighters from duty systems which the Union says belong to the 'Victorian Age'.

South West members will be familiar with south called 'Day Crew Plus' of "Close Proximity Crewing" systems as we have had to fight them off at a local level in previous years. These duty systems, which see massive job losses and firefighters working up to 96 hours a week, have now been the subject of a fundamental legal case which rules them totally unlawful and unacceptable.

The case was brought by the FBU in defence of members in South Yorkshire and was heard by the High Court.

The Judgement, by the honourable Mr Justice Kerr, was handed down at Manchester High Court and stated that 'CPC in the form used in South Yorkshire does not and cannot operate in accordance with (Working Time) regulations. He then concluded: "I do not see how CPC

system as it exists at the four fire stations in South Yorkshire, can operate lawfully in compliance with regulation."

Of South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority's action, the judgment states: "the illegality is continuing and

there is a concerted plan (by the respondent) to continue the unlawful conduct" plus it went on to state "I am troubled that the stance of the Authority and the Service offers an affront to rule of law."

On this ruling Brent Thorley, acting Regional Secretary, said "this is an important ruling and a tremendous success for the union. Firefighters often carry out long and arduous work under dangerous condition as we all saw at Grenfell. A shift lasting 96 hours is unacceptable."

'I just wish employers had listened to us, the professional voice of the fire service, when they were first proposing these Victorian duty system. It would have saved a lot of pain and stress for members - as well as a lot of tax payers money spent on unjustifiable legal action. I now hope that this ruling will be a catalyst for eradication this Victorian duty system nationally.'



Brent Thorley

## FBU Victory in West Midlands

After a highly successful industrial campaign, an interim agreement has been signed in the West Midlands.

The campaign resulted in an incredible ballot result of 860 members voting for strike action out of a return of 954 ballot papers. This smashed the limits set out in the Trade Union bill and also clearly registered the anger of FBU members in the way they had been treated by the Fire Authority.

The Fire Authority, which is Labour led, also came under intense political pressure from the Labour Shadow Government with Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell condemning their belligerence at the FBU Annual Conference.

The incredible fight back and will to take strike action from the overwhelming majority of Firefighters and Control Members clearly resulted in the Fire Authority backing down and the unacceptable contractual changes, which were at the heart of the dispute, have now been withdrawn.

To summarise the main points,

- **New contracts that included health activities (EMR) have been withdrawn and replaced.**
- **Control members will not be required to deal with Telecare or other health related calls.**
- **Cultural Review will take place**
- **West Midlands Fire Service/Authority has committed to collective bargaining**

Commenting on the victory, Trevor French said "I am sure all our members will join with me in congratulating FBU members and officials in the West Mids for their fight back that resulted in this tremendous victory."

'The strength and success of our Union is such that sometimes our members think that we can fight off change simply by writing a letter or registering a dispute, but the truth is that there are times when we need to organise and fight back in a far more aggressive way.'

'Clearly strike action is always a last resort, but there are times when we need to be willing to take it to get the change we need. I'm calling on all members to learn from the West Mids dispute. Make sure that you are organising at a local level, maximise your membership locally and never hide behind the 'easy option' of expecting senior officials to deliver what you know they can't. Sometimes you need to show your Chief that you are willing to fight, that is the real lesson from the West Mids victory.'



# The Backpage

## Frenchie's view on the Pay discussions:

This is the first time that I've written a 'back page' to you all in my new role as acting EC member and the first bulletin we've produced in the Region since our long standing EC member Tam McFarlane took up his new role as temporary National Officer.

I want to start it by giving a big shout out to Tam, I know he will carry his new role out in an exemplary manner and will continue to work tirelessly for members. I want to reassure you all that the South West team, including our new acting Regional Sec Brent Thorley, Regional Treasurer Val Hampshire, Vice Chair Gary Spindler and all the reps and members on the Regional Committee will be working hard and keeping up the standards Tam has set, ensuring no loss of membership service during his temporary absence.

The Union is tackling some massive issues the moment, however there is no doubt that we are coming to the crunch on the issue of pay for 2018.

It has been conference policy to look at broadening the role of a firefighter as part of our overall strategy on pay. The broadening of the role was undertaken under the umbrella of nationally agreed work streams. As a result, Emergency Medical Response (E.M.R) trials were undertaken in Cornwall, Dorset and Wiltshire and also Gloucestershire.

Alongside this work, independent reports were commissioned which show the value of this work within local communities. However, we cannot take on extra work without the necessary extra funding needed to properly implement it - and this includes in our pay.

We have been making this clear to our employers at the NJC and also to the Government. We have made joint submissions through the NJC to the Fire minister, Nick Hurd, which have included tabling three evidence based reports which clearly show the value of additional work and the need for proper funding.

The NJC leads will be meeting with the Minister to discuss these reports and seek the necessary funding needed in order to make progress. In addition the employers side of the NJC are currently meeting Chiefs and Chairs of Fire Authorities from across the UK to discuss pay.

I hope CFO's and Authority Chairs remember the level of reserves they have built up over the last 8 years when they are discussing our pay. They should also not forget these reserves have been



built up when they have been slashing their own Fire and Rescue Services.

In our Region, the amount of all reserves as of 1st April 2017 are:

- **Avon** £ 9,014,000.00
- **Devon and Somerset** £ 35,303,000.00
- **Dorset and Wiltshire** £ 27,601,000.00

It is a bit more complicated in Cornwall and Gloucestershire as they are part of the county council but the county council reserves levels as of 1st April 2017 are;

- **Cornwall** £ 233,381,000.00
- **Gloucestershire** £ 133,541,000.00

Again I hope CFO's and Chairs realise they can use these reserve to fund a pay rise irrelevant with what happens with the work streams.

I would also call on these reserve's to be invested in the front line rather than just sitting dormant in the Authorities accounts.

Also don't be fooled by the difference between 'earmarked' and 'general' reserves. Earmarked reserves can be changed to be spent on anything the F.A / CFO agrees.

Just a final thing to consider over the summer period: Harold Schaitberger, leader of the Union for firefighters in the USA, gave a speech at FBU Conference and reported that since firefighters undertook Emergency Medical Response in the USA not one firefighting post had been cut. That also has to been in our thinking when we consider the position of 'broadening of the role'.

Have a great summer break. Nice one!

**Trevor French**  
**Acting EC Member**