



“FURY” AS CUTS FORCED THROUGH!

Public “misled” as Tory & Lib Dem Councillors gang together to cut Gloucestershire Fire Service!



Firefighters tackle huge blaze at Gloucester docks - only days after cuts to frontline are announced!

Vital frontline fire and rescue services are to be axed across Gloucestershire despite warnings it will take firefighters much longer to get to emergencies.

Cabinet members of Gloucestershire County Council met on the 3 February and, despite huge public opposition, voted unanimously to close Painswick fire station and cut all full time firefighters at Cirencester fire station.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has warned that it is likely that attendance times to emergencies will increase as a result.

Scott Turner, secretary of the FBU in Gloucestershire, said: “In an emergency every minute counts. It can be the difference between a successful rescue or a person losing their life. This decision means firefighters will arrive a lot later to emergency incidents, seriously hampering our ability to perform rescue

operations.

“The public are dead set against the cuts to their Fire and Rescue Service. Thousands have signed petitions demanding the county council drop the plans, but they have been ignored.

“This is a dark day for firefighters in Gloucestershire.”

Barry Kirby, the shadow Labour spokesperson for fire planning and infrastructure in Gloucestershire, said: “I am very disappointed with the decision the cabinet have made. It is an insult to our community and the brave firefighters who serve it.

“We want to see fire engines making it to the scene of emergencies as soon as possible, ideally within eight minutes, so they can save lives and keep us protected.

The cuts will mean response times will increase. The council’s handling of the situation has been pitiful.”



Fighting for the Fire & Rescue Service

Protecting Firefighters & Control Staff

A coalition of Conservative and Liberal Democrat Councillors dealt the death blow to hopes that dangerous cuts in Gloucestershire Fire Service would not take place. The cabinet of Gloucestershire County Council had made a decision to remove all wholetime Fire Cover at Cirencester and close Painswick Fire Station, but this decision was then challenged by the Labour group in the Council. Labour challenged the decision by using a process called 'call-in' which is occasionally employed when it is felt a decision may have been wrongly reached.

The "call-in", argued that the Council used misleading figures around the amount of call outs that Painswick fire station attended, and that the consultation used leading questions to get the answers they wanted. FBU Regional Secretary Trevor French said "The consultation was totally misleading, and the figures relating to incident turn outs were just plain wrong. There were two separate questions rolled into one question, and the service dismissed alternatives to



Labour Councillor Barry Kirby, who backed Firefighters and the FBU

the station closure with no explanation whatsoever.

"In contrast, the FBU asked the public a straightforward question, **'Do you think Painswick Fire station should close?'** and the response was a resounding **no!** Over 1800 people signed our petition demanding that the cuts be stopped - but they were ignored by a Council which used underhand means to make dangerous cuts."

Councillor Barry Kirby, Labour spokesman for the Fire Service in Glos, said "petty politics has got in the way of keeping vital and much needed fire cover in Painswick and Cirencester. I have been overwhelmed by the support that residents and fire officers from across the County have shown by our move to scrutinise the Council's decision.

FBU make case for Fire Service in local elections

The FBU has been meeting with politicians and candidates to make the case for the Fire Service in the run up to the May elections.

Especially important are the City Council and Mayoral elections in Bristol, which could impact on Avon Fire Authority and the running of the Fire Service. Former Firefighters Chris Jackson and Jeff Lovell are up for re-election and the FBU are backing them to the hilt, as real champions of working people.

We have also met with Bristol Mayoral hopeful Marvin Rees, who has pledged to support Firefighters



FBU lobby Gloucestershire County Council

"Ultimately though the Conservatives came into this meeting with a closed mind and pre-prepared speeches. They were not prepared to listen to the views of residents and to reasoned arguments of fact. I took to the panel of Councillors reasoned and evidenced arguments based on fact, not politics. Unfortunately some members of the panel put their political ambitions above residents. It was especially telling that Tory Councillors presented political arguments and didn't engage with the evidence." The Leader of the Lib Dems in Shire Hall expressed his intention for his group to vote down Labour's call-in before the arguments had even been heard.

Speaking after a mass meeting of Gloucestershire FBU members, EC member Tam McFarlane said "Gloucestershire County Council should hang its head in shame. They stand accused by Firefighters of cutting vital emergency cover through a process of political stitch up and public misinformation. I want to thank the Labour group for standing up for Firefighters and trying to force the Council to be accountable. "The "call in" process has been highly controversial in political circles but it should stand as a warning to politicians everywhere: if you try and cut the Fire Service the FBU and our political allies will leave no stone unturned in our fight back".



FBU Officials Tam McFarlane & Chris Taylor with Bristol Councillor Chris Jackson and Mayoral candidate Marvin Rees

and the FBU if elected in May. Speaking after the meetings, FBU rep Tam McFarlane said, "its our job to get Firefighters the most effective political voice that we can, and we are working hard to put Fire Service issues centre stage in local elections.

"The elections in Bristol could have a big impact on our Service and Chris Jackson and Jeff Lovell are 2 tireless champions of Firefighters and working people everywhere. With legislative changes possible we also want a Bristol Mayor who understands and supports the Fire Service. Having met with Marvin Rees, there is no doubt that he fits that bill."

The Union will be putting out more information in the run up to the May elections.

20 years on, Fire Service unites in tribute to Fleur



Fleur Lombard QGM 1974 -1996



gives the opportunity to apply for a scholarship to fund study into firefighting and learning from other services across the world.

Remembering Fleur, Avon Chief Fire Officer Kevin Pearson said "Every year since

On Sunday 4 February 1996, Fire Crews from Avon Fire Brigade, as the Service was known at the time, were called to reports of a serious fire at Leos supermarket in the Staple Hill area of Bristol. Tragically, Firefighter Fleur Lombard, who was serving at Speedwell Fire Station, was inside the building when she lost her life 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.

One of only eight women employed by Avon Fire Brigade at the time, Fleur was awarded the Silver Axe for being the most outstanding recruit on her graduation from training and the memories of Fleur remain close to the hearts of those in Avon. A memorial to commemorate her life stands near the site of the fire in Staple Hill and every year Firefighters from Avon mark the anniversary of her death.

This year, in recognition of the 20th anniversary of Fleur's death, a moving ceremony took place at her memorial where Firefighters and staff from across Avon Fire & Rescue Service were joined by FBU representatives, Fire Authority members, local politicians and other members of the emergency services to remember Fleur. Members of the public and the business community of Staple Hill also attended the ceremony.

Wreaths were laid and a minutes silence held to remember the inspirational courage of this young Firefighter who died whilst protecting her community. The FBU were fully involved in this ceremony and laid 3 wreaths: one on behalf of the National Union, one on behalf of the FBU National Women's Committee, and one on behalf of the Avon Brigade Committee.

After Fleur's tragic death a trust fund was set up as a fitting tribute to her bravery, courage, dedication and professionalism. The Fleur Lombard Bursary aims to keep Fleur's values alive, helping others progress their careers in the fire and rescue service. The bursary, which is open to all fire and rescue service staff across the UK,

Fleur's death our staff mark the anniversary and there is no doubt in my mind that she will ever be forgotten. The ceremony to mark the 20th anniversary of her death was a fitting tribute to her memory and I went to thank the FBU and everyone involved in today's event, which was a credit to our service and carried out with tremendous respect for Fleur."



The ceremony to remember Fleur

South West EC member Tam McFarlane, who laid a wreath on behalf of the National FBU, added "the moving ceremony of remembrance to Avon Firefighter Fleur Lombard serves as a reminder as to what is really important in this sometimes mad world. This courageous young Firefighter died in the line of duty 20yrs ago, whilst protecting the community she served. The ceremony showed that the loss of Fleur is as keenly felt today as it was on that terrible day in 1996. Staple Hill in Bristol fell silent as members of the public stood shoulder to shoulder with their Firefighters in memory of Fleur - a show of solidarity that moved many people present. The thoughts of everyone in our remarkable profession are with the family, friends and colleagues of this inspirational young woman."

For more details of the Fleur Lombard Bursary - including how to apply - please go to www.avonfire.gov.uk

Don't let them silence you!



South West EC member Tam McFarlane

There is no better testament to the effectiveness of Trade Unions in protecting members and defending services, than when our enemies attack us. It may be a perverse form of flattery, but the truth is that the strength of the attack unleashed on Trade Unions by the current Government reflects our ability to frustrate and fight back against the cuts that they have planned for our jobs and our services.

As individual members, we pay our FBU subs for a wide variety of reasons, but first and foremost we are all in the Union for one primary reason: **protection**. Protection from exploitation, from bullying bosses, from cuts to conditions and so on; whether this protection comes on an individual basis - for instance by getting the FBU to support and represent you at a discipline; Or whether it comes on a collective basis - by standing together to protect jobs and conditions, we are all in the Union because we are always stronger together than we are alone.

But now the latest attack by Government means that this protection is at serious threat unless you act quickly and decisively. Like almost every other FBU member in the Region, my union subs come straight out of my wages. This is done by the Fire Service pay department and is a process called "check off". Its quick, easy and suits the employer (because they know where all the FBU members are) and the Union (because we can contact one administrator for all the members in each Brigade)

Importantly, this process also suits individual FBU members because its quick, easy and we can see our subs in our wage slip). **But now the Government is banning this process!**

The "Trade Union Bill" is currently going through parliament and one of its measures will be to abolish the right of workers, including Firefighters, to pay our union fees direct from our salary. This means that we will all have to switch over to paying our fees via direct debit.

The reason the Government is doing this is as obvious as it is disgraceful. They are banking on the idea that a significant number of FBU members will either forget, mislay the forms or simply not bother to switch their union fees onto check off. If this does happen, then under law, these members will formally cease being members of the FBU and will not be able to access any Union services, protection or take part in campaigns or action.

In other words, the reason the Government is doing this is to weaken the ability of trade unions to support public sector workers and oppose cuts to jobs and services. Its no secret that the Government is planning drastic cuts of around 40% to all public services and intend to uphold public sector pay freezes. They know that trade unions, especially the FBU, wont stand for this, so they are trying to neuter our opposition by hoping that members won't switch over to direct debit.

We have to prove them wrong.

You should have received a letter through the post from the Union explaining this process and asking you to fill in a direct debit form. Please do

it. I know its a hassle, and everybody hates filling in forms, especially Firefighters, but this is a deliberate attempt by politicians to undermine

Firefighters, the FBU and the Fire Service - and we have to show them that we won't fall for it.

Please fill in the form and switch over to direct debit. If you don't, the Union can't protect you as an individual and we can't protect each other as a collective. Don't be silenced - make the switch. Show politicians that Firefighters stand together.

Tam McFarlane

