



Staffordshire
Fire and Rescue Service
preventing • protecting • responding

RETIRED STAFF WELFARE NETWORK NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 26 | SEPTEMBER 2024



INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to be able to present the 26th issue of the Retired Staff Newsletter. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the merging of Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent and Burton on Trent Fire Brigades and consequently this edition largely features items related to this event and the previous 50 years. In preparing for the celebration event at HQ a large catalogue of around 400 photographs were collated. It is not possible to include such a number in the newsletter but I have been showing some to the Living Well Groups where they elicit much discussion and memories. I will try to include some in the next few newsletters.

It is still important for me to increase the numbers of email contacts in order to reduce the burden of posting out hard copy versions as much as possible. If you receive this newsletter by post and have an email address, please let me have your details. You will also receive updates and news on a variety of matters

of interest e.g. walking groups, charity and social events, service updates etc.

Please note that all details are held securely on a Service database and are not shared with anyone. All emails are sent out without showing any individual addresses.

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Don't forget if you need any help from the Fire Fighters Charity the helpline No is: **0800 389 88210**

helpline@firefighterscharity.org.uk

INTRODUCTION FROM CFO ROB BARBER

This year is very important for Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service as we reach our 50th anniversary of the Service in its current form. We will be celebrating throughout the year and remembering our history. It is crucial that we remember where we have come from and those that helped us develop the Service to where it is today. There have been significant changes over the last 50 years and it is a good time for us all to reflect on the improvements that we have made.

We held a celebration event at HQ in April where former colleagues were invited to

share stories and experiences of their time in the Service and to see some of our progress over this time. There are plenty of photographs from this event in this issue of the Retired Network Newsletter.

I am also keen to raise £50,000 for the Fire Fighters Charity this year as the charity has supported so many of our current and former colleagues over the years. The charity is there for all of us and does some amazing work on our behalf. You never know when you or your family may need their support and without the fundraising efforts it could not provide these vital services.



THE FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY



To give some idea of the work carried out by the Fire Fighters Charity here is a picture giving some statistics from last year.

Don't forget that as Fire Service veterans, as long as you have completed five years' service you, your partner and any

dependants are beneficiaries of the charity and are eligible for help and support.

The support line number is
0800 389 8820

More information can be seen on
firefighterscharity.org.uk

The year in numbers

A statistical look at the year in regard to some of the ways we supported our fire family.



In total we supported

10,367
beneficiaries

3,719

beneficiaries attended one of our centres

15

Hope programmes were attended by a total of **757** beneficiaries

6,248

digital consultations delivered across our physical and psychological services teams

10,451

copies of our children's book, *The Wolf Was Not Sleeping*, were sent free of charge to beneficiaries

20

the total number of Living Well Groups meeting regularly by the end of the year

7

the number of child and family weeks held at Harcombe House

222

wellness workshops delivered across **17** different fire and rescue services, to a total of **1,753** attendees

858

beneficiaries attended a mental health workshop with our partners Lifelines Scotland

FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY PATRON

In May of this year the Fire Fighters Charity made the following statement:

“We are thrilled to announce that His Majesty the King has accepted the Patronage of The Fire Fighters Charity.

His Majesty’s appointment, succeeding his mother, the late Queen Elizabeth II, marks the continuation of a longstanding

relationship between the Royal Family and The Fire Fighters Charity.

We welcome His Majesty the King as our new Patron, and we extend our deep gratitude to Him for his support and dedication to our work to ensure all those in the fire and rescue services community live healthy and happy lives”.





Here are some of the photographs from the celebration event at HQ in April. Around 120 veterans attended and had a chance to catch up with former colleagues, in some cases, after many years. They all enjoyed the experience and many memories and stories were shared.





KELVIN KNAPPER

A LOOK BACK OVER 50 YEARS



Fire Safety Manager Kelvin Knapper is approaching his 50th anniversary of working for the Service. He has shared his reflections from when he joined in 1974.

In February 1974, aged 17, I went to the then Stoke-on-Trent HQ at Hanley handed in my application to join the Service and was accepted. The recruits course started in the August, by which time the Service had changed following the amalgamation of Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire and Burton on Trent Fire Brigades. I started at 9am on my first day ready for my first 48 hour

week and was told to get my hair cut or don't come back in the afternoon, a lovely start! Stoke and Staffordshire had different makes of breathing apparatus sets - the ones used by Staffordshire only lasted for 21 minutes, and in general there was different ways of working.

In 1974 asbestos wasn't considered dangerous, we had asbestos gloves which were kept in a box and asbestos blankets that when wet were dried in the open and shaken out. The Health and Safety at Work Act came out that year and activities became somewhat safer after that. Fire Safety (Protect) was the Fire Precautions Act and factories, offices, shops and hotels had fire certificates and plans drawn up. 18 officers carried out this work from Hanley Station.

The summer of 1976 was a particularly challenging one - there was a drought and Staffordshire burnt. Every crew was out day and night tackling

grass, forest and heathland fires all summer. The nine week strike of 1977/78 also comes to mind. The strike ended with Green Watch being formed and a 42 hour system. 11th February 1980 Permaflex LPG factory in Burslem (now Wayne Walkers) saw one of the largest fires in Staffordshire.

Between 1974 and 1980, chimney fires and chip pan fires were high on the list of causes and during this time, the country was only just beginning to see smoke detectors. We started to call on houses to give safety advice... the origin of Safe and Well was born.

We had no computers or tablets, and everything was paper based - it could take days for a message to arrive. For road traffic collision (RTC) rescues, we had a hacksaw and a porta power wedge to use.

We used to drill at Stoke City and Port Vale grounds... well really to flood them with water to help them win games... One game in particular was when Stoke beat Liverpool under Bill Shankly, the pitch was a mud bath! Our appliances back then were large petrol engines (Merlin Spitfire engine) and they were very fast but had no power

brakes or steering, making them "interesting" to drive. Our PPE involved yellow plastic leggings, double breasted wool tunics and cork helmets... Gloves, well they were plastic and could be found in a box wet and smelly.

Some of us were still paid in cash, on-call received two shillings and sixpence a turn out. The Station Officer used to put a 'two bob' bit and a 6d in front of the firefighters and expect the 6d to be put in the Ben Fund (now The Fire Fighters Charity) box.

The old Longton Fire Station was another memory - opposite was the old nightclub Jollees and the stars who would appear used to park on the station and come in after their show. They used to autograph the station wall Tommy Cooper, Bruce, Tom Jones to name a few.

I have now worked under eight Chief Fire Officers; Blacktop, Burn, Reid, Dale, Doig, Dartford, Bryant and now Rob Barber... whose mother asked me at a school years ago about how her young son could possibly join the fire service!

FIRE CONTROL

A LOOK BACK WITH JACKIE THOMAS

My name is Jackie Thomas, I am the Watch Manager in charge of Green Watch in Fire Control.

I started with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue in November 2004 on a temporary contract during the project to establish nine regional control rooms. I came from a background of sales and marketing and had previously secured a place in the police control room but had to turn it down due to family commitments.

During my time in Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, I experienced a variety of calls and incidents as both an operator and a temporary Crew Manager. I have been involved in spate fires and flooding, as well as larger more protracted incidents including Million Wood which went on for days. The largest incident I experienced in Staffs was probably a make pumps 10.

When the regional control project was scrapped, and a

decision was made to merge with West Midlands, very quickly prior to the merge we had to learn and integrate a new Command and Control system - Vision 3. Whilst many people chose a different path, I made the decision to move to the new Shared Control mainly because I loved my job and wasn't ready to give it up. To prepare, I had six training/ induction days at West Midlands and learnt about a variety of topics including pipelines, marauding terrorists and new procedures for make ups and I worked tirelessly to learn all the new call signs. On 31st March 2014 I was on duty as a temporary Crew Manager when we went live with the new shared control. I can honestly say initially I felt like a cat caught in headlights, I'd well and truly taken my slippers off.

Since then, I've regularly experienced to name but a few 15/20/25 pump incidents, been exposed to incidents involving

stabblings, cannabis factories, spate fires and flooding like I'd never experienced before. I was officer in charge in control for the 'Smiler' incident at Alton Towers and the tragic incident at Babbs Mill which saw four young boys lose their lives.

In the last 10 years we have:

- moved from Vision 3 to Vision 4
- seen the introduction of 999 eye and What3Words to support decision making to ensure that we mobilise the most appropriate/effective response
- established an interagency talk group channel EISCTRL to pass critical information quickly and effectively
- established a National Control Room Talkgroup to provide additional call handling support to other Fire and Rescue Control rooms dealing with a large-scale incident
- set up dedicated talk groups to support Fire Survival Calls during Tall Buildings incidents.

So, after nearly 20 years am I ready to hang up my headset? Absolutely not, I am committed to developing my team to ensure that we deal with each and every incident effectively to support West Midlands with keeping their community Safer, Stronger and Healthier and Staffordshire the safest place to be.



A TIMELINE | 50 YEARS

This is a shortened version of a time line prepared for the anniversary of the amalgamation of the three Fire Brigades. It gives a snapshot of some of the significant events of the last 50 years.

1st April 1974: Merging of Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent and Burton on Trent Fire Brigades. CFO D Blacktop.

1st September 1974: Tom Burn (former CFO of Stoke on Trent FB) became CFO.

1976: Long hot summer led to extreme demands on the Service necessitating support from the military. Major incidents included Cannock Chase and Hopwas Woods. 4,000 calls were received in August alone. The Brigade managed to get hold of an additional 21 appliances – mainly Green Goddesses.

1977: Introduction of the first two Water Carriers as a result of the demands of the previous year.

Nov 1977 – Jan 1978: First national strike that lasted continuously for nine weeks.

Jan 1979: The start of Green Watch formed due to the change of shift pattern and reduction in working hours from 48 to 42 per week.

July 1981: Peter Reid joined Staffordshire as the new CFO.

1982: It was decided by the Fire Authority (SCC) that HQ would remain at Pirehill. The first stage of the planned redevelopment programme would be the construction of a new Control Room which would commence in 1983.

1st Jan 1986: The Brigade changed name to become Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

1986: Major Incident – Rescue of a child from a disused mine shaft on Cannock Chase made national headlines and resulted in two members of the Service and a mines rescue officer being awarded the Queens Gallantry Medal.

July 1987: The new Command and Control Centre was officially opened by HRH Duke of Kent.

1995: Another long hot summer creating major demands on the Service which was now better prepared than in 1976. E.g. Water carriers, 4 x 4 vehicles, Liaison with other agencies.

1997: Change of governance from Staffs County Council (Fire and Public Protection Committee) to Combined Fire Authority.

2001: The attack on the Twin Towers in USA led to the establishment of the New Dimensions Programme Staffordshire received Incident Response Units for mass decontamination, High Volume Pumps and New Radio Communications.

2002: Publication of the Bain Report – The Future of the Fire Service: Reducing Risk, Saving Lives. This looked at how FRSs were operated and managed as well as working conditions of firefighters. It led to a White Paper and subsequently a change in primary legislation for the operation of FRS.

2004: Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 see above.

2009 – 2012: PFI 1 New Community Fire Stations at Hanley, Sandyford, Tamworth (Belgrave), Cannock, Newcastle, Uttoxeter, Kids Grove, Rising Brook Stafford, Burslem and Tamworth (Mercia). PFI 2 Burton-upon-Trent, Kinver, Lichfield, Longton, Leek, Stone, Chase Terrace, Rugeley, Codsall, Penkridge and Loggerheads (replacing Ashley).

2014: Fire Control moved from HQ to a shared facility with the WMFS.

2017: Inspection regime changed with inspection of Fire Services coming under the remit of the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services.

August 2018: Change in Governance from the Combined Fire Authority to the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner.

August 2019: Collaboration with Staffordshire Police. A number of departments merged with Staffs Police becoming the employer with a service being provided for both organisations.

2020/2021: The Service played a part in the fight against Covid – 19 supporting with the delivery of food parcels, hosting vaccination clinics and delivering medication. A number of retired personnel took part in some of these activities.

2024: The present day. The journey continues – Preventing, protecting and responding.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

In this edition we will take a brief look at a few of the major incidents that occurred during the last 50 years.

Turnpike Hotel Fire 23rd March 1976

The fire broke out just before 5.00am on the top floor. The third and fourth floor and roof were badly damaged by fire. Other parts suffered smoke and water damage.

One man jumped from his bedroom window suffering serious injuries. Another man escaped by tying curtains together and lowering himself to the floor below. One lady was rescued by a firefighter from her bedroom. (he subsequently received a commendation for his

actions) and another man was rescued by the Fire Service using a Hydraulic Platform.

One of the problems faced by firefighters arriving just before 5am was compacted straw partitions used on walls and ceilings for sound and heat for insulation.

Forty firefighters dealt with the incident under the command of Deputy Chief Fire Officer Ralph Ford.



Chase Terrace High School 14th August 2002 - 'When Kinver met Longnor'

On Wednesday 14th August 2002 a fire broke out at approximately 9.15pm at Chase Terrace High School, Burntwood.

Appliances from across the county were mobilised leading to the unusual situation where the southernmost and northernmost

stations attended the same incident.

At its height some 150 firefighters were at the scene. Crews had to withdraw from the building due to danger of collapse and continued to fight the fire from outside including the use of a hydraulic platform and using water from the school swimming pool. No one was hurt but the

1300 pupils would have to work in temporary buildings for the next two years whilst the school was rebuilt at a cost of nearly £9 million.



Permaflex Fire, Trubshaw Cross, Stoke on Trent 11th February 1980

On Monday 11th February 1980, a fire and a series of explosions occurred at a warehouse in a factory at Trubshaw Cross, Longport, Stoke-on-Trent. The warehouse contained some 49 tonnes of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) in cartridges and aerosol containers as well as about one tonne of petroleum mixtures in small containers, raw materials, and packaging materials.

It is almost certain that the source of ignition was the electrical system of a battery-operated forklift truck.

The fire spread rapidly through the warehouse destroying it and damaging other buildings on the site. Minor damage to the roofs, guttering, windows, and paintwork of nearby industrial, commercial and domestic premises was also caused. By 7.20pm the upper storey, roof, and part of the south wall had collapsed.

At approximately 9.00pm, two

major explosions occurred almost simultaneously at the western end of the building where the fire had originated. Rising, spreading columns of flames about 30 - 40 metres in height and containing what appeared to be burning metal particles were seen.

A substantial proportion of the damage to an adjacent property was caused by these explosions. A subsequent and apparently similar explosion occurred at approximately midnight in the same area of the building.

The fire continued burning, though with decreasing intensity for some 60 hours. The fire brigade maintained a presence on site to counter any subsequent outbreak until 6 pm on Wednesday 20th February.



LIVING WELL GROUPS

The FFC Living Well Group meetings are still being held Leek, Lichfield and Newcastle and will soon be holding a meeting at Sandyford Fire Station. It is through the Living Well Groups that the Health Checks which are open to all retired staff, have been organised. (see the article elsewhere in this newsletter). Following a recent very well attended meeting at Leek where the guest speakers informed the group about the Abdominal Aortic Aneurism screening programme the possibility of

running clinics for retired staff who may not have been called for screening is being considered and will be communicated to the network if goes ahead.

The Living Well Group meetings are held for all retired beneficiaries of the Fire Fighters Charity which means anyone who has worked for the Fire Service for at least 5 years in any capacity and their partners. Details of meetings are circulated by email and through social media. If anyone would like any more information, please get in touch.

TREE PLANTING

On 26th May 2024 the Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire, Mr. Ian Dudson and the Chief Fire Officer, Rob Barber planted a tree in the memorial garden at Service HQ to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the amalgamation of Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent and Burton on Trent Fire Brigades.



SELF-CARE

The advice given below on Self Care has been provided by Occupational Health and while, in parts, it relates to being at work the main thrust of the message is equally important in retirement.

Self-Care Day is a reminder to prioritise one's wellbeing and engage in activities that promote self-care. Self-care refers to intentional actions taken to nurture and care for oneself physically, mentally, and emotionally. Finding time for self-care can be challenging in our busy lives, but it is essential to carve out moments for ourselves. This can involve setting boundaries, delegating tasks and scheduling dedicated time for self-care activities. Examples of self-care include practising mindfulness or meditation, engaging in physical exercise, pursuing hobbies or interests, spending time in nature, getting enough sleep, and nurturing social connections. Self-care is vital for maintaining overall well-being and health. It helps reduce stress, enhances resilience, improves mood, boosts productivity, and prevents burnout. Incorporating self-care at work is crucial for maintaining a healthy work/life balance. It can involve taking regular breaks,

setting realistic goals, practising stress management techniques, and seeking support from colleagues or supervisors when needed. Prioritising self-care at work enhances job satisfaction, productivity, and overall job performance. Self-care practices, such as regular exercise, adequate sleep, balanced nutrition, and mindfulness activities, help improve physical health by enhancing energy levels, supporting the immune system, reducing the risk of chronic diseases, and promoting overall bodily function and resilience.

Taking care of your mental wellness can be as simple as connecting with others, indulging in self-care activities, or even catching a few extra minutes of sleep each day. Surrounding yourself with nature's greenery and soaking up some sun can also work wonders. Engaging in artistic endeavours can help you tap into your emotions, while breaking a sweat not only boosts your physical appearance but also uplifts your mental state. Time with pets has been scientifically proven to enhance mental health as does practising meditation for emotional regulation. And don't forget about the power of nutrition - eating more fruit and vegetables can revitalise your body and nourish your mind.

FREE HEALTH CHECKS

In April of this year, through the Living Well Groups, a free NHS health check day was arranged at Newcastle Fire Station for retired staff. It was a successful day and all those who went through the health check process found it very useful and worthwhile. A further event has since been held at Lichfield and further days will be arranged in coming months.

The Service has been holding these clinics for serving Fire and Police staff for some time and has now provided the opportunity for fire veterans to attend these clinics too. Dates have already been circulated by email and details of future events will be sent out to the network as they arise. If you are not on the email circulation and would be interested in receiving a free health check please get in touch using the contact details on the front page.

The clinics are provided following engagement with Everyone Health to provide NHS approved Health Checks for those aged between 40 and 74, and Mini MOT's for those under who fall outside of the criteria which also includes; Living in Staffordshire, not had a Health check or

cholesterol test in the last 5 years, not on statins or blood pressure meds and not already got a long-term condition such as diabetes or heart disease.

The Health check will take approximately 30-minutes, during the appointment the practitioners will conduct a thorough assessment, if any potential issues are identified you may be advised to attend your GP for further assessment. They will also provide guidance in relation to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. your results will be sent directly to your GP,

The Mini MOT takes approximately 20 minutes.



Get a free local Health Check

NHS



Staffordshire residents*

If you're aged 40-74, even though you might be feeling great, you may be at risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, diabetes or dementia.

A free NHS Health Check can help you reduce these risks and make sure you stay healthy.

What do I do now?

Visit: staffordshire.everyonehealth.co.uk

Email: eh.staffs@nhs.net

Text: **HEART** to **60777**

Tel: **0333 005 0095**



*Excluding Stoke on Trent.

**It's
FREE!**

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 **Staffordshire**
County Council

 **everyonehealth**
because everyone matters

WALKING GROUP

The walking group continues to attract new participants and is well supported. Walks are arranged to be about 5/6 miles in length together with an option for those who prefer to have a shorter walk. After the walk we have lunch (usually in a nearby pub). Walking and walking in groups has many health benefits including reducing blood pressure, body fat, total cholesterol and risk of depression. These walks provide an opportunity for former colleagues to get together and reminisce, take some exercise and enjoy the fresh air. The

most important aspect however, is having a social event share stories, maintain contact with former colleagues and just to have an enjoyable few hours together.

Details of walks are sent out by email and circulated on social media. If anyone wants to take part who isn't on the email contact they can contact me using the details on the front page.

"Walking is man's (and woman's) best medicine" - **Hippocrates**



RUGBY SEVENS

A Rugby sevens tournament was held recently in aid of the Fire Fighters Charity at Stafford Rugby Club and organised by serving member Andy Topham and the Combined Services Barbarians. It was a full day of sevens matches being played on three pitches with and open and veterans competition attracting teams from a number of clubs and organisations. The eventual winners of the open competition were an impressive team called The Fijian Knights. The Brigade

Rugby Sevens team won the prestigious National Rugby Sevens Competition after hosting the event for the previous 13 years.

This event evoked memories of the Fire Service National Rugby Sevens tournament which was hosted by Staffordshire for many years and which a team from the Service won the competition for the first time in 1984. Pictured below are the victorious team with the trophy being held by the then CFO Peter Reid.



DIARY DATES

4th September

The Fire Fighters Charity Living Well at Sandyford Fire Station
10:30 – 12:30

7th September

Newcastle Fire Station Open Day

24th October

The Fire Fighters Charity Living Well at Lichfield Fire Station

5th December

NARF/Retired Staff Xmas Lunch at Service Headquarters. Open to ALL retired staff. The cost will be £15.00 per head. Booking is essential. Please let me know if you wish to attend.

There will be other dates to add to the diary such as Living Well Groups, Wreath laying and walk at the National Memorial Arboretum in November, further veterans walks and additional days for the free Health Check.

Details of these and other events will be sent out by email so if you are not on the email circulation and wish to be added please let me know.



The Fire Fighters Charity is making a life-changing difference every day by offering wellbeing support to the whole UK fire services community.

Could you help it continue to be there for more fire service personnel and their families?

To join the charity's valued support community, Scan the QR code or visit:



www.firefighterscharity.org.uk/donate

Registered office: The Fire Fighters Charity, Level 6, Belvedere,
Basing View, Basingstoke, Hampshire, RG21 4HG. Charity registered
in England & Wales (1093387) and Scotland (SC040096).
Tel 01256 366 566 or email customer care@firefighterscharity.org.uk



**The
Fire Fighters
Charity**

IN MEMORY OF FORMER COLLEAGUES

I have been asked to include a list of names of former colleagues who are no longer with us. Detailed below are the names of those who have passed away since the last newsletter was issued and that I have received notification of.

Alan Paulinski

Colin Davies

Ray Holton

Douglas Welsh

Roy Solomon

James Walker

George (Lindsay) Bell

Dennis Malbon

Jeff Bailey

Our thoughts are with their families and friends as they come to terms with their loss.

RETIRED STAFF WELFARE NETWORK NEWSLETTER



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