



**Minutes of the Bucks Branch N.A.R.F. Annual General Meeting
Held at BFRS Headquarters on 10th May 2008**

Present:

Jeff Goddard – Chairman and Branch President
John Coombs – Acting Branch Secretary
Terry Price – Assistant Branch Secretary
Ernie Shankster – Branch Treasurer
Roy Potton, Eric Frost, Bill Edwards, Malcolm Ash, Geoff Bowles, Rowland Goss, Jim Southcott, Bernie Hillyard, John Hudson, John Biggs, Frank Knowles – District Rep.,
Bob Pepler, Dave Richards, Ray Hedges, Jack Plumridge, Peter Robinson – National President, Pat Reynolds and Frank Hayle.

Welcome:

The Chairman, Jeff Goddard, welcomed everybody to the 2008 Annual General Meeting.

Apologies:

Apologies were received from – Pete Young, Mrs John Holdgate, Norman Raisey, Nick Raisey, Arthur Ellis, John Tubb, Brian Young, Dave Bonham, Dennis Deeprose, Mick Madigan, John Whitmore, Ray Tamlin, Tony Cairns and Chris Stevens.
The Acting Secretary, John Coombs, also reported the passing of George Bennett at a nursing home on the south coast.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 14th April 2007:

The Chairman ran through the minutes for accuracy. All was found to be correct and their adoption was proposed by Malcolm Ash, seconded by Dave Richards and unanimously agreed by all present.

Matters Arising From The Previous Minutes:

The Chairman informed the meeting that the trustees of the FSNBF had agreed to change its title to the Firefighters Charity.
Peter Robinson stated that it was his understanding that it was the members who had voted for the change of name not merely the trustees.
Jeff added that the charity was looking to become more professional and to do more for burns victims.

District Representatives Report:

Frank Knowles told the meeting that he had attended the National Meeting along with the Chairman and Peter Robinson the National President.
He stated that he would only point out the salient points from the minutes of that meeting. The AGM of the National Council lasted 1.5 days but was mostly procedural. However there was one very important item that was discussed, that being that the Government is on route to attack 'overpayments' of pensions. It would appear, he said, that firefighters who retire before time on ill health grounds 'CAN' have their concessionary payments withdrawn.
He then asked the Chairman to outline specific cases with which he had been involved.



Jeff advised the meeting that an 'Ill Health Award' is not a pension but an 'award' which can be withdrawn and that some counties had made these awards to members when they retired although not due to any injury sustained. He said that the government now pay the pensions but not these awards, which are now being checked by Local Authorities with the intention of adjusting the amount of apportionment.

He cited a specific case, in Surrey, where an ex Stn O had had his award dropped from 75% to 7.25%. Jeff had prepared an appeal, which he presented to an appeals panel, and had won the case, although not totally satisfactorily.

Jeff also gave details of another case where he advised the recipient not to appeal, as he did not think that he had a case.

He stated that NARF do not have the funds to continue fighting these cases and that it may have to set up a 'fighting fund' to cover the costs.

Frank stated that this is fast becoming a national issue as many hundreds of cases could be coming up.

Jeff had put up alternatives to the National Executive, namely:

- Do not get involved
- Set up a fighting fund
- Pensioner to pay costs – up to £8000

The National Treasurer stated that to provide a fighting fund would put up subscriptions by £3 per person per annum.

Peter stated that Jeff's expenses for fighting these cases was £200 - £300 per case and therefore a fighting fund is needed as this sort of money could not be taken from reserves.

Dave Richards asked that if a fighting fund were to be set up would NARF ensure that there were no frivolous appeals.

Jeff responded that after initial research there was little or no chance of success then the appellant would be advised to drop the case. He also added that if NARF did not help, who would.

John Hudson asked if these cases could be handled by a no win no fee firm of solicitors.

Peter said that the organisation already has an affiliation with one of these firms. He also added that the FBU have yet to come to a resolution on the 3 cases with which they are involved and he reminded the members that there was an agreement that there should be no increase in subs until 2010, but this is happening now.

Bernie Hillyard asked if there was any input from the union.

Jeff responded that they would not help if the appellant were a non-union member.

Geoff Bowles wanted assurance that the award that is being disputed is only that made for injury and Pat Reynolds stated that an injury could be the start of an ongoing problem.

Frank then asked if the branch was in support of this initiative and Jeff added that if we can claim a few victories in the early stages then the authorities might back off somewhat.

Terry Price asked if the branch should make provision for a fighting fund, to which Peter replied that we do need to make a quick provision.

Terry then proposed that 'Bucks Branch makes a £2 levy as a fighting fund and the amount raised is ring fenced for this one objective.'

The proposal was seconded by Peter Robinson and was agreed unanimously by all the members present.

Frank then reported about the 'Garden of Remembrance' where the old National Monument, a grotty drill tower, has now been replaced by a large block of granite with the FS badge carved on. This monument will be officially dedicated by the Princess Royal on Tuesday 20th May 2008.

Frank also informed the members that NARF goes to various pensioners' councils but with little voice in these organisations, who conversely have very little sway with the government. It has been suggested, he said, that Help the Aged and Age Concern will join together to have more say.

Jeff reminded the members that he sits on the National Pensioners Council and suggested that they run along the lines of a 1960's union meeting with the Chairman ruling most items 'out of order.'

This concluded the District Reps report.

Treasurers Report:

Ernie Shankster reported that the Branch funds are 'in pretty good nick' and gave out copies of the accounts. He said that according to the accounts 17 members were in arrears but of these 10 had since paid up leaving only 7.

He asked that members make subs payments annually by the end of February each year, and that the Direct Debit scheme was working well as cheque payers sometimes forgot the date of payment.

He then submitted the statement of accounts for acceptance, stating that membership was discontinued if someone failed to pay 3 years in a row.

Terry Price proposed that the accounts be accepted, seconded by Geoff Bowles.

This proposal was agreed unanimously by the members present.

Firefighters Charity Report:

Terry Ridgley, who attended the meeting, was asked to give a report in the absence of Jim Dunbar.

He stated that he, Terry, was one of 12 representatives looking at restructuring the fund at all levels. This will mean the radical alteration of the fund, with a change of name and a substantial raising of its profile to the public.

Within these change some are universally liked and some disliked.

A new eastern home will be established in 2-3 years time, somewhere in Cambridgeshire, and will be both a rehabilitation and recuperation centre.

The fund now helps 16000 beneficiaries a year, up from 11000, and therefore the funding streams need to be in place to be able to continue the work, and the charity is looking for a bigger 'giving base'.

He hopes to give a full presentation next year as to the changes that are complete and in hand.

Terry Price was assured that the fund still intends to include partners and that the lottery subscriptions were safe.

Election of Officers:

Before the election of officers took place Terry Price asked if he could say a few words. He thanked the members for their support throughout the year and stated that the newsletter was still awaiting 2 reports but that it would be published and circulated as soon as possible. He said that the website was growing and any information etc. from members for inclusion on the site would be most welcome.

Geoff Bowles asked if the web site could incorporate a discussion forum. Terry said that these are hard work and have to be carefully monitored.

Finally he gave prior information relating to the Autumn Luncheon. This will be at Court Gardens, Marlow on 15th November and as it is the 25th anniversary of the Branch he had the Lord Lieutenant of Bucks to attend and had receive a reply in the affirmative. The cost will be £20 per head and it is hoped that it will be the best ever.

Branch Chairman:

The Chairman then asked the Acting Secretary to chair the meeting for the election of the Branch Chairman.

Asked if he was prepared to stand again Jeff said that he was.

It was proposed by Dave Richards that Jeff Goddard be elected to the post of Branch Chairman for the succeeding year, seconded by John Hudson and agreed unanimously by all members present.

Jeff then resumed the Chair.

Branch Secretary:

Jeff asked if the posts of Branch Secretary and Assistant Secretary had worked through the previous year and on being told that it had he proposed that John Coombs be elected as Branch Secretary with Terry Price as Assistant, all present agreed.

Branch Treasurer:

Jeff enquired of Ernie if he would be willing to continue in this role as he has successfully kept the funds in 'good nick'. On Ernie's accidence he then proposed him and this was duly agreed by all present.

Branch Representative to District:

Again on the assurance that he was willing to continue Frank Knowles was duly elected by all members present. Frank however did ask if there was any one willing to shadow him with a view to representing the branch should he be unavailable.

Firefighters Charity Representative:

Jeff believed that Jim Dunbar had family problems that were leaving him short of time to represent the Branch in this role. It was agreed that we would co-opt someone to act in this role and Terry Ridgley agreed to keep the branch informed.

Any Other Business:

Peter Robinson stated that in the last edition of NARF News the telephone number for the no win no fee solicitors was incorrect and should read 0845 23486723.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1230 hrs and members and partners then enjoyed a splendid buffet prepared by Elsie the Aylesbury Fire Station cook at £2.50 per head.

John Coombs – Branch Secretary 16 May 2008