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Circular: 2016HOC0376MW

To: All Members

Date: 22 July 2016

Dear Brother/Sister

Brother Stephen Hunt: inquest outcome and next steps

You will be aware that the inquest into the death of Brother Stephen Hunt has concluded. The coroner's report raises a range of concerns which will require attention and action by the Home Secretary and then by fire and rescue services. A copy of the coroner's report can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.fbu.org.uk/publication/stephen-hunt-report-prevent-future-deaths>

Stephen died at a fire at Oldham Street on 13 July 2013. The FBU was proud to count Stephen as a member and three years on his loss is still felt.

Throughout the inquest and the process leading up to it, FBU members and Stephen's family were represented and supported by the FBU legal team and by officials of the union. Regrettably the FBU and our legal team have built up unique experience in dealing with such terrible cases.

During the inquest it was also confirmed that the Fire Brigades Union would be dealt with as an 'interested party' and as such took an active part in the proceedings. So the role at the inquest was both to provide legal representation and professional advice for the family but also to address issues of concern to all members and to the entire fire and rescue service. It was very important that this status (interested party) was recognised since it provided the union with the opportunity to fully engage in the inquest and the discussion which will need to take place afterwards.

The FBU as an interested party and as the representative of those on the frontline of delivering our service, have now written to the Home Secretary setting out an assessment of the issues covered in the coroner's report. Our letter details key concerns relating to this incident and identifies where similar or identical matters have been raised previously in relation to other fatalities.

These concerns are fundamental to the role of firefighters and include issues around incident command; duration of wears of breathing apparatus; recognition and understanding of the effects of heat on firefighters; and recognition of when firefighters should be withdrawn from incidents.

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The coroner acknowledged the role of the FBU in ensuring that these concerns are addressed and suggested that they are jointly considered at the Health and Safety Representative Committees. The coroner also recognised that these concerns will need to be considered by **all** fire and rescue services, not just GMC. This is yet another reason that every FBU brigade committee ensures that the FBU plays its part in a functioning joint Health and Safety Committee at local level.

The union has accumulated considerable experience and expertise regarding firefighter fatalities, injuries and near-misses. Our letter to the Home Secretary offers assistance while aiming to ensure the lessons from Stephen's death are learned - and applied - and that the mistakes made are never repeated.

In the near future the FBU will be providing detailed briefings to officials in relation to the recommendations contained in the coroner's report and the FBU assessment of these against previous experience. We will be following up on the concerns raised in our letter to the Home Secretary and look forward to an important dialogue with the Home Office on this issue. We shall issue a more detailed report relating to our submission as soon as possible.

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack', written in a cursive style.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary

MW/sll