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TO: ALL MEMBERS

Dear Brother/Sister

Report of National Joint Council meeting – 1 June 2017

On 1 June we met with the fire service employers in York for a scheduled meeting of the National Joint Council (NJC). In recent years this has been the meeting at which the employers have made their proposal on pay, which has complied with government policy since 2010.

Prior to this meeting, the union had submitted a letter to the employers setting out a position on pay and conditions. This, in turn was based on an emergency resolution agreed at our conference in Blackpool in May. The key points on pay raised in the letter are to be found in the NJC circular issued with All Members circular 2017HOC0279AD.

At the meeting, I set out to the employers the growing concerns and anger of FBU members regarding the levels of pay in our service. I made the following points:

- The pay freeze and pay cap since 2010 has left those working in the fire service worse off than before the financial crash of 2007/8 as a result of falling real wages.
- This has led to increased hardship for fire service employees and their families.
- Government in all parts of the UK (i.e. including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) have simply followed the lead of the Tories in Westminster and applied this squeeze to public sector pay.
- This growing level of financial hardship is demoralising the workforce.
- Despite this, we have never heard any criticism from the fire service employers about government pay policy. We have increasingly heard concerns expressed in other parts of the public sector from those responsible for pay – but in the fire service we have heard nothing.

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- During the period when FBU members have seen their pay squeezed to an unprecedented level, we have continued to see some chief fire officers and principal management teams be awarded pay rises considerably in excess of 1% - while the rest of the workforce is told to tighten their belts.
- For the first time in recent history we are seeing highly skilled firefighters leave the service to seek other (better paid) employment. We risk seeing a return to a low pay industry as existed before the 1977 national strike.
- Despite these unprecedented attacks on wages and despite record levels of job cuts, firefighters have continued to serve their communities in the best way possible. However, what was once known as a world leading fire service is being undermined by the policies of relentless cutbacks.

I addressed the recent joint work on the future of our service, focussed on the five NJC work-streams. This work had been generally constructive but the FBU had clearly set out major concerns on operational matters, safety and training – and on pay. I explained that:

- There is a serious danger that the employers' approach to pay will derail the work on the NJC about the future of the fire and rescue service.
- There are various areas of new work which are not contractual.
- The trials on Emergency Medical Response are trials – they are not a permanent agreement.
- The arrangements for EMR at local level are very different in different services, with some examples of good practice and lots of examples of very bad practice.
- There is no permanent contractual obligation on any firefighter to undertake Emergency Medical Response.
- In the absence of any agreement on pay and conditions (and on other areas of concern) the trials would obviously not continue.
- Local services or individual Chief Fire Officers should not fall into the trap of thinking that they can bypass the NJC or the FBU by seeking local agreements on such matters. Those who seek to sabotage the possibility of a national agreement will be held to account for it by the FBU locally and nationally.

Employers' side consultation

It is important to note that not all fire service employers are represented on the NJC. The NJC consists of 14 members on each side (employee and employer). The employers' side is representative of the employers' organisations in the different parts of the UK and of the different political parties.

The position of the union was set out extremely clearly to the employers' side. As a result of this dialogue the employers informed us that they intend to hold a series of three meetings at venues around the country in order to speak directly to individual employers. This is a departure from the normal practice in recent years. We understand that this will allow individual employers to hear directly the state of discussions and the position set out by the union at the NJC. However, these will be meetings attended only by employers' representatives.

The employers have informed us that they will respond to our letter before the end of June. All FBU members are therefore asked to follow closely developments over the next few weeks.

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Further information will be issued as necessary

Yours fraternally.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Wrack". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary

MW/sll