

FIREFIGHTERS



FIRE BRIGADES UNION CENTENARY 1918-2018

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Fire Brigades Union

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TO: All Members

Dear Brother/Sister

Grenfell Tower Inquiry: suggestion of institutional racism

The public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire – Grenfell Tower Inquiry (GTI) - is now under way. Within the inquiry there are various Core Participants, a status which gives certain rights within the inquiry process. The FBU is a Core Participant at the GTI. Other Core Participants include various public bodies (such as the London Fire Brigade), the bereaved, survivors and residents or commercial interests (such as cladding manufacturers).

We have alerted FBU members to the fact that the inquiry will be a long and difficult process. We have said very clearly that we want to get to the truth of what happened and why. That means that the various parties are perfectly entitled to ask questions, including difficult questions; that is in the nature of the process.

Nevertheless, the FBU has expressed our serious concern and anger at the suggestion from one legal representative at the inquiry that 'institutional racism' within the London Fire Brigade and among London firefighters, may have played a part in what happened that night. This was immediately challenged at the GTI by Martin Seaward, counsel for the FBU who said: "that suggestion is offensive, it is wrong and it is unconstructive".

There is no evidence that firefighters attending the fire did anything other than their utmost to try to save lives and tackle a fire which should never have happened. The suggestion that during this emergency response, they were giving any consideration to the race, religion or background of the victims is a disgraceful slur. Firefighters at Grenfell clearly placed their own safety at risk in order to save the lives of others – a point we have made from the start.

Our engagement with the community

Having spent a considerable amount of time over the past year in the local community, I want to assure FBU members that I do not believe that such a suggestion of racism reflects the views of the local community. For a year, the union has worked closely with local people to provide what support we can and to support the campaign for justice for the survivors, the bereaved and other residents. This work is known and appreciated by people within the local area.

This activity has included:

- In advance of the public inquiry, calling for the local community to be central to the inquiry process
- Regularly attending the monthly silent walks
- Supporting, through our **Firefighters 100 Lottery**, various local charities and initiatives aimed at supporting and re-building the community, particularly with children and young people
- Working very closely with the campaign group **Justice 4 Grenfell**, including *jointly* organising the demonstration on Saturday 16 June
- Representatives of **Justice 4 Grenfell** addressing our recent conference in Brighton
- Working as closely as possible in the GTI with the legal representatives of the bereaved, survivors and residents
- Attending various local public meetings and other events to bring support as well as to explain the role of firefighters on the night and of the fire service more generally
- A recent showing of our centenary film in a local social club which was followed by a detailed, but very constructive, discussion about the role of the fire service and of firefighters.

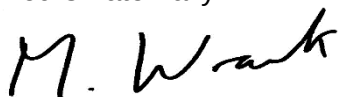
FBU members from across the country have attended the monthly silent walk. Particular mention should go to our members at North Kensington fire station who regularly turn out and stand along the route in a mark of respect. This monthly act by local FBU members has attracted huge sympathy and support for those attending and is well known in the local community.

As a result of this engagement work and as a result of our strong support for the local community we have been able at several recent events to address and answer the suggestions of possible racism mentioned above. It is therefore my firm assessment that the claims or suggestions mentioned above do **not** reflect the views of the community and that the vast majority of local people are extremely supportive of firefighters.

We see no differences between the interests of FBU members and those of the community around Grenfell. We will continue to support them in the period ahead. We will also intervene whenever necessary to protect the interests and reputation of FBU members.

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally



Matt Wrack
General Secretary