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Dear Brother/Sister

Pay and Conditions consultative ballot:

Vote YES to reject employers' proposal

Vote YES to support FBU demands for professional pay in a professional service

The Executive Council has agreed to hold a consultative ballot of all FBU members in response to proposals from the fire service employers on pay and conditions. The letter from the employers can be found on the FBU website: <https://www.fbu.org.uk/publication/employers-letter-pay-proposal>

The full proposal can also be found: <https://www.fbu.org.uk/publication/employers-pay-proposal>

Please note that despite the title of the employers' document, this is not a document from the National Joint Council (NJC) since any such document must be agreed by both sides of the NJC (employer and employee). Rather, it is simply an employers' document; a proposal from the fire service employers.

The Executive Council is very clear that the proposal from the employers is completely unacceptable for a variety of reasons. We are asking members to support the Union's position and send a strong message to our employers and government that this proposal is not acceptable and to get back to the negotiating table to develop a serious, professional and sustainable pay proposal for FBU members.

To support the Union's position you are recommended to vote **YES** to both questions.

Your ballot will arrive in the next few days. There will also be a secure system which enables you to vote online if you prefer.

Background

FBU members, alongside other public sector workers, have suffered as a result of years of austerity. The pay freeze imposed by central government has cut the real wages of FBU members while cuts to funding have resulted in the loss of thousands of fire service jobs.

Taking account of these issues and assessing the changing risks facing our communities, FBU Conference has agreed and reaffirmed that the union should engage in discussion with our

employers about the future of our service, including the potential to further broaden the role of our service and the work undertaken by firefighters. The aim has been to make a strong case for investment in our service now and for the future – including addressing the issue of pay. The FBU has been clear throughout that any such change to our service needs to address concerns about:

- Operational procedures
- Training and equipment
- Mobilising
- Health, Safety and Welfare
- Pay and compensation

These discussions have taken place through the National Joint Council (NJC) by means of five work-streams looking at various areas of current or potential work:

1. Environmental challenges
2. Emergency Medical Response
3. Multi Agency working (e.g. terrorist incidents)
4. Youth and social engagement
5. Inspection and enforcement

It is important to note that while some of the work-stream discussions considered new areas of potential activity, others addressed work already in place nationally or locally in individual fire & rescue services. In some cases, FBU members are being paid for activities in some services which are unpaid elsewhere. The approach taken by the union seeks to address this fragmented local approach which is creating a race to the bottom in our service.

Vote YES – to reject the employers’ Free-For-All flexible contracts

The FBU has also been clear throughout discussions with the employers that any future changes to the roles and work of FBU members would need to be clearly defined and limited to those specific issues agreed.

Despite this, the employers’ proposal completely fails to take account of this point. The employers have instead provided lists of various (non agreed) activities with the comment that the lists are “Non Exhaustive.”

The Executive Council is clear that this approach would mean the introduction of an entirely open-ended contract for FBU members. Local employers would be able to simply add additional areas of work activity unilaterally and at will.

The Executive Council was **unanimous** in opposing such an approach and recommending that it should be rejected.

We are therefore urging you to vote YES to reject flexible contracts.

Other concerns

The issue of proposed flexible contracts is clearly very important and a huge risk to FBU members. But there are other concerns with the employers’ proposal.

- The employers’ proposal is **NOT** a pay offer. The employers state that three of the proposed pay rises are conditional on additional government funding. The FBU agrees that additional funding is required and we have been lobbying and campaigning to achieve this. But currently no such funding has been made available so the employers’ figures are purely hypothetical at this stage.
- Years of a public sector pay freeze have reduced real wages. The aim of the union is to start to address this through these discussions and through our wider campaigning. The proposal from the employers would not resolve this.

- The lists of activities set out by the employers are their lists. They are **NOT** agreed by both sides of the NJC. We are aware that some of the activities listed are already in place in some fire & rescue services. But any additional activities considered at a national level would need to be clearly defined and within the context of an offer which addressed the concerns and needs of FBU members – including on pay.

Vote YES to tell the employers their offer is simply not good enough.

Stop the rot - No more fragmentation of national agreements

It is clear that some Chief Fire Officers and local employers are seeking to impose change at local level as a means of bypassing national agreements. This is the sort of attack which our members in West Midlands FRS recently fought off. We now need to do the same nationally.

The FBU recently surveyed our officials in all FRSs in the UK. It is clear that some FBU members are receiving **no additional payment** for work activities which are being **paid for** in other services. In addition, in every service in the UK there is work being undertaken which has never been agreed nationally and which therefore is **going unpaid**. Chief Fire Officers and local employers are exploiting this situation to create a race to the bottom.

The FBU approach agreed by our Conference aims to allow FBU members to take control of any future development of our roles and our service. Too many changes have already been forced onto firefighters at local level and we need to stop the piecemeal erosion of our professional standards, our safety and our living standards.

Through our democratic structures, we need to be at the heart of any changes to protect members and this needs to be done at a national level. Any change needs to be achieved by negotiation and through nationally agreed structures. That is the only way to stop the fragmentation of our service and the race to the bottom which many employers are already pushing.

Vote **YES** – to ensure any change is delivered through collective bargaining via nationally agreed procedures.

Vote **YES** – to stop the race to the bottom.

There are two questions on the consultative ballot paper. In both of these, we are asking members to vote **YES** and support the Union's position. We all need to send a strong message to our employers and government that this proposal is not acceptable and to get back to the negotiating table to develop a serious, professional and sustainable pay proposal for FBU members.

Please attend your local meeting. Please follow updates in the FBU website.

Yours in Unity



Matt Wrack
General Secretary