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To: All Members

Dear Brother/Sister

Coronavirus: Additional shifts, variations to working patterns and additional work activities

In the face of the current crisis around Covid-19, FBU members will want to see the fire and rescue service playing a full part in trying to keep communities as safe as possible. Any measures introduced as a result must also ensure the health, safety and welfare of our members and the protection of core functions. Any such measures must not be used to undermine the terms and conditions of FBU members. Please read this circular alongside circular **2020HOC0176MW, Coronavirus: Background to the crisis.**

Fire & Rescue Services have been making approaches to local officials and in some cases directly to their workforce (FBU members) regarding:

- additional work activities, roles and functions
- additional hours of work, variations to duty systems or working patterns.

Important: these matters are currently subject to a dialogue between the national fire service employers', the FBU and the NFCC. These discussions continue and the outcome will be notified to members as soon as possible and once the Executive Council has been able to consider the issue.

The position adopted by the Executive Council

As we have set out, the latest situation has starkly highlighted the crisis in our service, an issue which we have been warning about for a considerable time. Any discussions about tackling the current crisis must take place within this context; of a service suffering from long-term underfunding, under-resourcing and understaffing.

FBU members will want to play a full part in protecting our communities through the current health crisis. The FBU will therefore continue to discuss all such matters at **central level**.

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The approach will be to agree reasonable, deliverable adjustments to work activity and hours of work taking into account that members have contracts of employment which must be protected. We will not be agreeing to any imposed additional hours of work on any members; the performance of additional hours will be voluntary.

These central level discussions will be with:

- the fire service employers' side of the National Joint Council (NJC)
- the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC)
- government departments or ministers

Such an approach will avoid the fragmented and localised arrangements which are already such a widespread problem in our service. It will enable us to argue for the best possible standards and it will avoid individual CFOs or employers playing one part of our membership against another or encouraging a further race to the bottom.

Individual rights of members

It is imperative in this period that individual members should not be persuaded to relinquish or imperil any individual rights without seeking advice from union officials. An example of this is grievance hearings. Some grievances, if not resolved by the employer can be taken to an employment tribunal. However, amongst the criteria that a case must meet to be eligible to be heard by an employment tribunal, is that it is within time. In most cases this is three months of the act giving rise to the grievance.

Conclusion

FBU members will be wanting to assist as much as possible during this crisis. This additional contribution and co-operation does not need to be provided at the expense of your safety, of your health, of our collective longer-term interest and the principle of collective bargaining. It is with these factors foremost that we will approach discussions about how our service and our members can provide additional assistance to our communities at this most challenging time.

Further information will follow as soon as it is available.

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally



Matt Wrack
General Secretary

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