



Matt Wrack General Secretary
Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road,
Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE
fbu.org.uk | @fbunational
020 8541 1765 | office@fbu.org.uk

Circular: 2020HOC0526MW

Date: 1 October 2020

To: All Members

Dear Brother/Sister

Covid-19: Update on FBU Organisational Measures – Branch Meetings

The executive council met last week to consider the current position on branches meeting during the current crisis. All Members circular 2020HOC0186MW was sent out to branches on 25th March 2020 and said that all meetings organised by the FBU will be avoided, with alternative video conferencing arrangements put in place for meetings of regional/sectional committees and the executive council.

These systems are now well embedded in the FBU and have been successful in allowing the union to function in these extremely challenging times. In light of this the executive council discussed the position of branch meetings during the current crisis.

The rule book is clear that the democracy of the union lies in the workplace and in order for the FBU to operate under these difficult circumstances, the executive council is of the view that the FBU now needs to temporarily introduce a new way of doing things in order to ensure the democratic functioning of structures at local level.

Brigade, regional and sectional committees, as well as the executive council, have continued to meet using various video conferencing platforms and this has ensured the democratic functioning of the union under difficult circumstances at brigade, regional and sectional level.

After six months of restrictions related to Covid-19 it is clear that the situation is not going to be resolved in the near future. The executive council has concluded that variations relating to the branch structure shall be introduced. This means members will be able to attend democratically accountable branch meetings.

The executive council have considered three options that are available to the FBU and have agreed that a 'properly convened branch meeting' (as defined by the rule book) can be called and decisions made using one of the following methods:

1. Physical meeting

If circumstances allow it and government guidance and rules are strictly adhered to, then a physical branch meeting can be held. The executive council urge extreme caution in this respect and if there is any question about members or officials safety being compromised then such meetings should be avoided. Heed should be taken of government advice at the time and the numbers who could potentially attend should not exceed the maximum permitted. This option will not generally apply at branches in a workplace operating a shift system. It is likely that this option will only be possible at branches with a small number of members (primarily at RDS branches).

Contd/2....

2. Online/virtual meeting

That branches meet via zoom/teams/other conferencing platform. This is a preferable option to option 1 and would allow all branch members access to a properly convened branch meeting, albeit virtually. However, branch secretaries must ensure that all branch members are able to participate if such a process is to be used.

3. Consultation and limited physical meeting

The final method is that the branch officials call the branch meeting for a specific date. This meeting would be in the workplace. Prior to this meeting the branch officials will be required to discuss with those members of the branch who would not be on duty when the branch meeting was called and receive their feedback and their decisions on issues to be voted on. At the branch meeting the decisions of the other branch members would be conveyed to the on-duty personnel present and a collective decision then taken. It is expected that the members physically present at the meeting will take full account of the views and votes of those members not present. The position of the branch and the outcome is then decided and reported in the normal way, depending upon the matter voted on.

In all cases, it is essential that all decisions are recorded and all members of the branch are informed, using the branch notice board, verbal reports and other methods.

The executive council believes this process gives branches the maximum flexibility to allow their members to have their voices heard in the decision making process of the FBU. Branch officials will need to consider which one of the three options outlined above most suits their members and, crucially, is preferred by the majority of those branch members.

This situation creates new challenges for FBU officials and members. Officials at brigade and regional level will have experience of on-line meetings and can assist with this process. Brigade and regional officials are also required to ensure that the rules of the union and the guidance issued is followed and to provide assistance as necessary.

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack'.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary

MW/sll