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Circular: 2021HOC0047MW

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To: All Members

Dear Brother/Sister

Covid related activities – update

On 15 January we reported (Circular 2021HOC0022MW) that the fire service employers had unilaterally terminated the previous agreement reached through the NJC on additional activities related to the response to Covid. We have been clear since then that the FBU seeks to restore the agreement and to ensure that firefighters are safe in the workplace and that those who choose to volunteer for additional Covid related work can undertake those activities safely.

In view of this position, we met leading representatives of the employers on 25 January and expressed our desire to meet further as quickly as possible to resolve any differences. This was set out subsequently in writing. Regrettably, the employers have informed us that before they can meet and discuss with the FBU they will need a full meeting of the employers' side of the NJC. That meeting has still not taken place. We wrote again on 29 January urging the employers to meet urgently. Our offer has still not been accepted. This is alarming considering the continuing threat to public safety arising from the Covid pandemic. It is also shocking in view of the public criticism which has been levelled at the union in parts of the media in relation to the Covid response. To be clear, we have offered to meet the employers at any time to resolve differences. That offer was made in a meeting on 25 January and subsequently repeated twice in writing. Despite this the employers have not taken up our offer. This is disgraceful.

The Executive Council met this week to discuss the situation and resolved that despite the delays created by the fire service employers, the FBU will seek to restore the national agreement through the NJC. We will seek to discuss the obstacles with fire service employers at a local and national level to seek to achieve this. At the same time the union will seek to ensure that work can be safely undertaken at local level by an agreement applying stringent safety measures based on those which were previously agreed and which have been in place in many services throughout recent months. Local FBU officials will be asked to liaise with their regional officials to seek to make progress on this and with a view to assisting in restoring a national agreement, which would provide the clearest position and therefore the best safeguards based on common and agreed standards.

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In relation to testing the FBU continues to seek to follow the best available scientific advice. This may be subject to change but currently means that the best standard of test available to protect the safety of FRS workplaces in relation to the return of staff from higher risk Covid activity is a PCR test. This test requires an appropriate time period prior to testing and prior to subsequent return to FRS workplace pending a negative result. This is the measure which has been in place in many FRSs for several months and which provides the best safeguards based on current and available testing technology.

Best wishes.

Yours in Unity

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack', written in a cursive style.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary

MW/sll