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To: All Members (Home Addresses)

Dear «MemSalutation»,

Getting prepared: the imminent attack on our service, our rights, our pay, and our conditions

FBU members were rightly angered by the recent criticisms made of our service and our profession by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). These criticisms, set out in three reports issued by HMICFRS, are part of the preparation of a serious attack on our service and how it is delivered. This coming attack also targets the pay, conditions and collective rights of firefighters. HMICFRS is the inspecting body for fire and rescue services in England but the implications of their recommendations are UK wide; ***this is an attack on every single FBU member***.

Background – responding to Covid-19

FBU members can be justifiably proud of their work over the course of the pandemic. Firefighters, including emergency fire control staff, have ensured the delivery of our service in the face of a deadly virus. FBU members have been required - as 'key workers' - to carry on attending the workplace while millions of other workers were asked to stay at home. In itself, this placed FBU members and other key workers in the private and public sector at greater risk than others. It has been the efforts of such workers – including FBU members – which have seen our communities through the pandemic. All deserve thanks, recognition, and reward for doing so; or at the very least an end to government imposed pay cuts.

In addition to delivering core fire and rescue service functions, many FBU members have also taken on – on a voluntary basis – additional work directly related to the Covid-19 response. Among other things, these activities included driving ambulances, training ambulance drivers, training other agencies in the use of PPE and moving the bodies of the deceased. These activities were introduced following discussion between the FBU, the fire service employers and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). The resulting agreement ensured appropriate attention to risk assessment, training and PPE. This agreement, and its successor with the NJC, enabled our members to deliver core functions as well as playing an important role in the Covid-19 response.

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HMICFRS criticism and recommendations

Considering the work our members have done over the past year, it is extremely alarming that rather than acknowledging and praising this effort, HMICFRS has chosen to attack the fire and rescue service, firefighters and the FBU. Their report on Covid (22 January 2021) and the two reports on ***The state of fire and rescue*** (January 2020 and January 2021) are documents which are designed to enable a major political attack of the FBU and on the collective bargaining rights of firefighters in order to set up further attacks on pay and conditions.

HMICFRS recommends so called 'operational independence' for Chief Fire Officers in order to increase their political powers and reduce their accountability to local communities. This recommendation aims to increase the ability of Chief Fire Officers to:

- force through cuts to our service without suitable accountability to local communities
- unilaterally force through changes to our conditions of service without normal negotiating requirements
- create a system of overarching managerial control and a workforce which is expected to simply obey orders from above without question
- create a system where our jobs and roles can be unilaterally altered from above without negotiation – and without appropriate payment.

To support these changes, HMICFRS also recommends fundamental change to our right to collective bargaining i.e. how we negotiate with our employers on pay, hours, leave, health and safety and all other conditions of service. We face a threat to our rights to negotiations and collective bargaining through the National Joint Council (NJC). The Westminster government is now preparing a White Paper to develop these attacks. In interviews with the press, the Chief Inspector, Thomas Winsor, has even floated the idea that the right of firefighters to take industrial action might be removed.

These attacks are imminent. The Executive Council is currently preparing our campaigning plan to confront them. In the coming weeks you will receive further information and reports on:

- The outstanding contribution made by firefighters during the Covid pandemic
- The flawed reports issued by HMICFRS and why their recommendations are not based on evidence
- The threat to the NJC and collective bargaining rights
- Why more power should not be given to Chief Fire Officers and the NFCC
- The threat from the coming White Paper and how we can challenge it.

There will be briefings for FBU officials and larger meetings for all FBU members. Please ensure you follow the FBU website, circulars and bulletins closely. ***This is an imminent attack on every FBU member – every one of us will need to stand together to resist it.***

Yours in Unity



Matt Wrack
General Secretary