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To: All Members

Dear Brother/Sister

Initial response to HMICFRS report: Values and culture in fire and rescue services

You will have seen that His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) has produced a report entitled 'Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services'.

The report notes widespread discrimination, harassment and bullying across Fire and Rescue Services in England. It received widespread coverage in the media.

The values and principles of our service, our profession and our union are built on teamwork, keeping people safe and saving lives. That also means that unity and equality must be at the heart of what we stand for as a union. The incidents noted in this report will be extremely alarming to most and are completely unacceptable.

Firefighters have the right to work without fear of being mistreated because of their gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, or neurodiversity - or bullied or abused while doing their job.

Just as much as fire contaminants and unsafe working practices, this kind of behaviour is also a matter of workplace health and safety. We believe the problem goes right to the top of the fire service and that Chief Fire Officers have often failed to act. Every year, the Fire Brigades Union brings legal claims against employers on behalf of our members on these very serious matters. Often these result in significant compensation for FBU members. It is not credible for those at the top to simply claim ignorance.

It is welcome that the inspectorate is beginning to highlight these issues, finally acknowledging the scale of the problem. Our equalities sections have also raised concerns about these issues for many years.

Addressing these extremely serious issues cannot be left to the National Fire Chiefs Council alone. Over the years, they have demanded more and more power and have overseen our service throughout the time covered by the report. Indeed, some principal managers are part of the problem; they have systematically failed to address reports or allegations of discrimination, harassment and bullying in their services.

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This report corroborates experiences raised by FBU members, including members of our equality sections. It details how allegations of racism, homophobia, sexual harassment and misogyny are often ignored, or how such behaviour is even instigated by people at the very top of our services. Firefighters should not be made to feel scared to speak out or find themselves subjected to disciplinary action for doing so.

The coalition government in 2010 scrapped equality standards across the fire service. It was clear to the Fire Brigades Union then, as it is now, that these political decisions undermined steps to promote or assist in building a more inclusive fire service.

The National Joint Council has previously established a sector wide approach to seeking to improve equality, inclusion and diversity in our services. It did this by forming the Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) which invited all key fire service organisations to participate. It is disappointing that some services ignored the strategies which the IFSG produced. The HMICFRS declined to engage with the IFSG improvement strategies.

As the only democratic and representative body for firefighters and emergency control staff, the Fire Brigades Union will take a leading role in transforming the situation in the Fire and Rescue Service, putting Women, LGBT+ and Black and Ethnic Minority firefighters in the driving seat of our campaign.

The Executive Council's Anti-Sexual Harassment and Cultural Review Working Groups will discuss the findings of this report and our Conference in May will decide what our response and next steps shall be.

The Fire Brigades Union is clear, there is no place anywhere in the fire service for bullying, harassment, victimisation or discrimination. We will continue to challenge such behaviour on behalf of all our members.

Yours in unity

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary

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