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To: **All Members**

Dear Brother/Sister,

General election issue: fire service national standards

On 13 June, the Labour Party published its manifesto, titled Change, for the general election on Thursday 4 July. This is an important moment for firefighters and the FBU. Our members have the right to vote for their MP and to directly influence who sits in the Houses of Parliament and who forms the next Westminster government.

The Labour manifesto states:

“Labour will improve resilience and preparation across central government, local authorities, local communities, and emergency services. This includes formally working with all stakeholders in the Fire and Rescue services to inform policy and establish national standards.”

It adds:

“Labour will also take decisive action to improve building safety, including through regulation, to ensure we never again see a repeat of the Grenfell fire.”

The last 14 years

Labour’s promises are in stark contrast to the policies of Conservative-led governments at Westminster over the last 14 years.

In 2010, the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition government imposed a two-year pay freeze, so firefighters received no pay increase despite inflation. In 2012, they imposed a 1% pay cap, which lasted until 2017. The coalition government launched an attack on public sector pensions,

making firefighters pay more, work longer and get less. Since 2010, austerity policies have cut 12,000 firefighters – one-in-five (20%) of the workforce.

Over the last 14 years, successive Conservative-led governments have waged war on health and safety. All along they have promoted deregulation, through the ‘one-in, one-out’ rule, the Red Tape Challenge and the Open Public Services White Paper. In 2012-13, ministers tried to privatise the fire and rescue service, through mutualisation. All these attacks have fragmented the fire and rescue service. They have slowed response times through their cuts and weakened enforcement of fire safety law. Ministers bear responsibility for the Grenfell Tower fire.

National standards

For two decades, successive Westminster governments have scrapped national standards in the fire and rescue service. This has affected the service provided to the public as well as the conditions of firefighters. Chief fire officers were given a free hand to impose their own local projects, ignore new and emerging risks, as well as making devastating cuts.

The FBU fought to defend national standards where they have existed in the fire and rescue service. The FBU is the only organisation that has fought for national standards since they were scrapped. Higher standards mean better protection for the public and consistent, professional standards for all firefighters, wherever we work.

The FBU believes that national standards are a central mechanism to defend and improve our industry. The union has long demanded a statutory advisory body, involving the FBU and other stakeholders, to produce, implement and monitor national standards. Therefore the FBU welcomes the opportunity to engage with the process of establishing national standards and the new structures designed to put them into practice.

Yours in unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack', with a stylized, cursive script.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary