



FIRE BRIGADES UNION

**THE WESTMINSTER GOVERNMENT AND THE
FORTHCOMING ATTACK ON FIREFIGHTERS'
RIGHTS, PAY AND CONDITIONS**

Conference notes that the Westminster Government has been preparing an unprecedented series of attacks on fire and rescue services governance arrangements, on firefighters' rights to collective bargaining, on our conditions of service, pay, jobs and our industry for some considerable time. These were first openly laid out by the Home Secretary of the day, Theresa May, in her speech to an event organised by *Reform* on 24 May 2016.

This coming attack directly applies to fire and rescue services in England but it will have significant implications for the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) across the UK. If the National Joint Council (NJC) is abolished or if its powers and structure are altered, this will impact on the rights, pay and conditions of FBU Members in all parts of the UK. This is therefore a battle for all FBU Members.

Conference notes the written statement made on 16 March 2021 by Home Secretary Priti Patel, announcing that the Home Office will be launching a White Paper on fire reform. The White Paper is likely to focus on:

- Professionalism: including minimum entry standards, promotion and leadership
- People: the role of firefighters
- Governance: mandating the takeover of fire and rescue authorities by Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) or mayors; and operational independence for chief fire officers.

Conference condemns the HMICFRS for its role as being the vehicle to provide ostensibly 'independent' reports to provide false legitimacy for these attacks. Conference condemns the reports published on 15 January 2020, 22 January 2021 and 17 March 2021, containing premeditated attacks on firefighters' pay and conditions under the pretext of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The conclusions and recommendations of these reports are not based on any genuine assessment of evidence; rather they represent a gross distortion of the facts and are a slur on the reputation and good work of firefighters. They were published by Thomas Winsor who has no expertise or experience in fire and rescue service matters who has previously carried out similar attacks as the Rail Regulator and when carrying out the government-commissioned review of the police service.

Conference condemns the HMICFRS for abusing the trust of fire and rescue service officers who volunteered to be seconded as the professional assessors for the inspection of local fire services.

Conference condemns Thomas Winsor, the chief fire inspector for England, for his destructive recommendations to downgrade firefighters' pay and conditions and to attack collective rights. His report makes the following recommendations:

- Determine the roles of: (a) fire and rescue services; and (b) those who work in them
- Consider the need for an independent pay review body and the future of the Grey Book
- Legislate to give chief fire officers operational independence
- Implement a Code of Ethics.

Conference condemns Winsor's demand to abolish the NJC and impose a pay review body, made up of Westminster-appointees, required to work to an agenda and within terms of reference set by government. This is a major attack on the right to collective bargaining and, in turn, is an attempt to drive down the pay of firefighters across the UK.

Conference rejects Winsor's demand to tear up the Grey Book. This is an attempt to give governments, fire and rescue authorities and chief fire officers the power to unilaterally downgrade duty systems and hours of duty, pay, leave, maternity, childcare and dependency provisions, health & safety and welfare, occupational health, grievances, conduct, capability and discipline, local consultation and negotiation.

Conference rejects Winsor's demand that chief fire officers be granted "operational independence". This would reduce the accountability of chief fire officers to local communities and politicians, while giving them a free hand to dictate what firefighters do day-to-day, how they would do it and to what degree the safety of FBU Members is accommodated in doing so. Recent experience of National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) initiatives do not bode well in this regard. Furthermore, it would worsen the post code lottery and further undermine any element of national standards.

Conference further condemns Winsor's remarks made in an interview with the *Daily Telegraph* (18 March 2021), suggesting firefighters' right to take industrial action should be reviewed by Westminster politicians.

Conference condemns the proposal to impose wider roles on firefighters without pay. The aim is to give chief fire officers wide latitude to impose new areas of work and new roles locally, without any overarching national constraints or any additional payment. Despite significant upskilling and additional risks, the risk is that these tasks could be imposed without any remuneration or without other concerns being addressed such as investment, training and resources. Winsor bases his conclusions on a distorted and dishonest account of the work of fire and rescue services during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Conference rejects the proposal to hand over the governance of every fire and rescue service in England to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC). Currently, just four out of forty-four fire and rescue services are governed by PCCs. Local communities, not ministers, should decide how their fire and rescue service is managed.

Conference therefore mandates the Executive Council (EC) to organise a multifaceted campaign in defence of:

- Fire and rescue services
- Firefighters' pay and conditions.

This campaign will consider all legal, political and industrial options. Conference calls on all FBU Members to unite in defence of:

- Fire and rescue services
- The dignity and professionalism of firefighters
- The reputation of the fire and rescue service, firefighters and the firefighters' trade union of choice – the Fire Brigades Union
- Our hard-won and well-deserved conditions of service
- The rights of firefighters to organise and bargain for our pay and conditions.