# FIRE BRIGADES UNION

# CONFERENCE 2023

# EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

## FIREFIGHTER PAY: BUILDING ON OUR CAMPAIGN: BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Since Conference in May 2022, the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has conducted a vigorous and sustained pay campaign. The campaign has made significant progress, but much remains to be accomplished. This Executive Council (EC) statement summarises the campaign and sets out the tasks ahead.

The Executive Council congratulates FBU members for the determination and unity shown throughout the past year during our campaigning on pay. It is notable that the Fire Brigades Union is the **only** organisation which has conducted a consistent and determined campaign for improvements in fire service pay.

**<u>Key steps in the pay campaign</u>**

The key dates and events of the pay campaign were:

- On 31 May 2022, the FBU wrote to the national employers in the National Joint Council (NJC) submitting the union's pay claim. On 1 June, FBU officials put the union's pay claim directly to the employers' representatives at the NJC and the Middle Managers Negotiating Board (MMNB) meetings. We informed the employers that firefighters and firefighters (Control) are vital emergency service workers who served on the frontline throughout the entire Covid period. During this period, our members provided additional services to communities and undertook additional areas of work, with the agreement of the union, to help the country through one of the worst crises in living memory

- Despite this, on 27 June, fire service employers wrote to the FBU with a firefighters' pay offer of 2% on basic pay rates and Continual Professional Development (CPD). The FBU described this offer as an 'insult'. During July, the union held extensive consultation with members on the offer. On 19 July, after receiving report backs of the consultation, the Executive Council rejected the 2% offer and argued for the need to prepare for strike action

- On 2 August the NJC employers' side chair sent letters to the Home Secretary and other relevant ministers in other parts of the UK, arguing for funding on pay

- Throughout August and September 2022, the FBU ran a substantial campaign of membership engagement, branch meetings and mass meetings. Entitled 'Fair Pay or Fire Strike' the campaign publicly displayed the anger of FBU members at the 2% pay insult and the determination to move to strike action in the fight for fair pay

- On 2 September, with no further offers from the employers, the EC accelerated preparations to ballot members for strike action. The FBU held a programme of in person and online briefing meetings over the following month, engaging thousands of members and achieving an unprecedented uptake in membership email registration and updated details

- On 4 October, fire employers made a revised pay offer of a 5% increase on all basic pay rates including CPD. On 6 October, the EC recommended rejection of the revised offer and organised a further round of in person and online briefing meetings

- On 31 October, the FBU launched a consultative ballot of members on the employers' proposal for a 5% increase. On 16 November, the FBU published the consultative ballot results – the offer was rejected by 79% on a 78% turn out

- On 5 December, the FBU commenced a national ballot for strike action, with additional briefings, membership communications and resources. On 6 December, the FBU held a successful pay rally and lobby of the Westminster parliament. On 23 December, the FBU negotiated a major incidents agreement with the employers in the event of strike action

- On 12 January 2023, the London Fire Commissioner wrote to London members with a separate pay offer. This was for a 2022-23 increase of 6% on basic pay, backdated to 1 July 2022 and a 2023-24 additional increase of 5% on basic pay from 1 July 2023. On 13 January, the Executive Council insisted that all pay offers should be made through the NJC and apply to all members. The Executive Council gave the employers a 10 day window after the strike ballot closed to make another offer

- On 30 January, the FBU announced the strike ballot results:
  - England, Scotland and Wales, 88% voted YES on a 73% turnout
  - Northern Ireland, 94% voted in favour of action on a 68% turnout
  - In North West Fire Control, 80% voted YES on a 64% turnout.

- On 9 February, after intensive discussions at the NJC, fire employers made a revised pay proposal (detailed below) the EC agreed to hold a consultation with members on the offer

- On 10 February, after extensive discussions and liaison with brigade, regional and sectional committees, the EC made its assessment of the offer and recommended that members accept it. This was followed by further online and in person meetings to hear members' views

- On 20 February, the revised pay offer was put to members in a consultative ballot. On 6 March the consultative ballot results were announced.

**February 2023 pay offer**

On 8 February 2023, fire employers made the following offer through the NJC.

Following the joint discussions earlier today, the National Employers have agreed to make the following offer:
- A 7% increase on all basic pay rates and Continual Professional Development payments with effect from 1 July 2022
- A 5% increase on all basic pay rates and Continual Professional Development payments with effect from 1 July 2023.

In addition, the employers' side of the NJC is committed to explore the additional points which were raised in your pay claim. Given the complexity of the issues, the following approaches are proposed:

- Retained Duty System firefighters: Firefighters employed on the retained duty system are an important part of the workforce. It is proposed that both parties commit to a joint working group to include review of the retained duty system pay and rewards package. Membership of the group and a schedule of dates should be agreed as soon as possible once the current pay award negotiations are concluded with the intention of the joint working group concluding its work within 8 months

- Firefighters (Control): The employers' side of the NJC recognises the important contribution of emergency fire and rescue control employees. To inform NJC consideration on the matter of the pay differential it is proposed that a joint job evaluation process be undertaken as soon as possible once the current pay award negotiations are concluded

- Pay progression: The employers' side of the NJC is content to continue discussions around pay structure and progression. It is proposed that both parties commit to a joint working party commencing as soon as possible once the current pay award negotiations are concluded with the intention of the joint working party concluding its work within 8 months

- New roles: The employers' side of the NJC also remains committed to developing the work of the fire and rescue service and to do so by agreement. It also recognises the need for this to be supported by appropriate investment as well as employee reward

- Continual Professional Development: The employers' side notes the issues raised in the claim and is open to exploring further. Given the overlap with the pay progression point, it is proposed that consideration be incorporated into that proposed working party

- Progress reports would be made on each point above to the June meeting of the NJC

- During our lengthy discussions throughout this process, we have explained that this offer reaches the very limit of what we can do, and it is made with the hope that it forms the basis of an agreement between the two sides.

**Next steps in the pay campaign**

Conference endorses the strategy and tactics deployed by the Executive Council and commits to continuing the pay campaign in the immediate period ahead. The decision of members for 2022 and 2023 does not conclude our campaign on pay. There remains much to do to deliver professional pay in the fire and rescue service and to restore ground lost during the years of austerity.

Conference mandates the Executive Council to continue the pay campaign through:

1. A review of the campaign undertaken to identify where the campaign brought about successes, but also where the union can learn and improve.

2. EC working groups, including support from the relevant sectional committees, progressing the additional pay issues, including control, retained, CPD, pay progression and the future role of, and demands on, the fire and rescue service.

3. A new and updated analysis of all aspects of firefighters' pay, including different measures of inflation and relative to other sectors.

4. A major campaign for investment in UK fire and rescue services, to improve the service to the public and secure long term improvements in pay for firefighters.

5. Campaigning to defend UK wide collective bargaining and the National Joint Council and opposition to the imposition of a pay review body.

6. Immediately beginning preparations for our claims on pay for 2024.