FIRE BRIGADES UNION

CONFERENCE 2025

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

FUND OUR FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE (FRS)

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) main priorities, large and small, depend on sustained investment in the fire and rescue service.

Investment impacts upon;

- the numbers of firefighters and emergency control staff employed by FRSs
- the pay and pensions our members receive
- health and safety provision
- equality and diversity representation
- crewing levels
- appliance availability.

These and many other matters all depend on sustained funding for our profession.

Fourteen Years of Hurt

Since 2010, successive Conservative-led governments at Westminster have attacked the FRS and the FBU. Their record will never be forgotten by the Union;

- politically driven austerity meant 20% of the workforce was cut
- the pay freezes imposed in 2010 were followed by a 1% pay cap between 2012 and 2017
- firefighters' and local government pension schemes were attacked, making us pay more, work longer and still get less
- there were efforts to privatise parts of the FRS, including the Cleveland mutual scheme, the role of AssetCo and Babcock within the FRS, and the sell off of the Fire Service College
- ministers tried to impose the policing model through the Home Office, police and crime commissioners and the 2022 White Paper
- the revived inspectorate HMICFRS in England was used as a political tool to attack the FBU
- chief fire officers were supported in creating the NFCC, a private company funded by central government and local FRSs.

These efforts were designed to ratchet up the pressure on firefighters to make our members do more for less. They were all designed to weaken the FBU, deny our members' rights to organise, speak out, and take action.

New Times, New struggles

During 2024, there were significant changes at Westminster and in some of the devolved governments. There is a different political landscape at government level which, to progress matters raised by our members, the FBU has to adapt to. There are new opportunities to advance the FBU's agenda, both to improve our service to the public and to improve the conditions of FBU members.

The new Labour government at Westminster was elected on a manifesto with some specific pledges for the FRS. The Labour manifesto stated:

"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.

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.

Labour will stop the chaos and turn the page to create a partnership between business and trade unions, by implementing 'Labour's Plan to Make Work Pay: Delivering a New Deal for Working People' in full…"

Within weeks of taking power at Westminster, the new government wrote to employers putting an end to minimum service levels. The Employment Rights Bill (ERB) is currently working its way through parliament and will soon become law. The FBU has been heavily involved in the Westminster dialogue relating to the ERB.

At the Home Office, the fire minister initiated a Ministerial Advisory Group, with the FBU given a seat at the table. The FBU wants this body to become a statutory advisory body, with responsibility for UK-wide standards to improve public safety and our profession.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry published its report with 58 recommendations. The government has responded to this with responsibility for the FRSs in England transferring to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

However, the new government has not provided the level of investment necessary to renew the FRS. Central funding for English fire services announced for 2025-26 was only 1.4% which is lower than the current rate of inflation. Although FRS employers have been given more latitude to secure funding, long term improvements require investment from Westminster and the devolved governments.

The Westminster government is holding a Spending Review in the summer of 2025. Central funding that delivers consequential Barnett funding to the devolved governments is the key for UK-wide resilience. The risks from climate change, the building safety crisis, terrorism and an ageing population all need sustained investment. The new National Risk Register spells out the range of potential threats facing the UK now and for the foreseeable future.

The FRS has never been more important. Firefighters and emergency control staff will need to stand up for ourselves and for the public through the FBU and through political and industrial campaigning.

The FBU must seize this opportunity to transform our FRS.

Conference resolves to;

- lobby the Westminster government and devolved governments for sustained investment
- lobby FRS employers, boards, mayors on fire budgets
- organise an autumn programme of meetings and lobbies both nationally and locally
- make the case for sustained investment in the FRS to all politicians
- produce campaign materials to assist officials with political meetings.