



FIRE BRIGADES UNION

CONFERENCE 2024

**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY
STATEMENT**

**THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION AND
THE COMING GENERAL ELECTION**

Fire Brigades Union (FBU) Conference 2023, agreed the Statement: Preparing for a General Election. As a general election approaches, this statement supplements what was agreed in 2023.

For many months, opinion polls have estimated that the likely result of the general election is the defeat of the Conservative Party and the election of a majority Labour government. This should be a watershed moment in modern history.

Since 2010, the various Conservative and Conservative-led governments have engaged in brutal austerity policies, which have attacked public services, workers' rights and working class living standards. In the fire and rescue service, 12,000 jobs have been lost, hundreds of fire engines have been axed and unprecedented numbers of fire stations closed.

Firefighters, along with millions of other workers, have seen attacks on our pensions and an unprecedented attack on our wages and conditions. The defeat of this Conservative government is clearly in the interests of FBU members, of the trade union movement and of the working class as a whole.

The FBU is affiliated to the Labour Party, although no political fund money is used for this purpose from members in Scotland or Northern Ireland. As an affiliate, the FBU has argued and campaigned for policies within the democratic channels of the Labour Party, in line with FBU conference policies and the policies of the wider trade union movement. The FBU has also defended Labour Party democracy and opposed attacks on the rights of party members and on individual MPs, such as Jeremy Corbyn, Diane Abbott and Andy McDonald.

Under the current leadership, the Labour Party has retreated from many of the policies that the FBU supported since re-affiliation in 2015. Recently, these disagreements have been sharply exposed during the Israeli government's war on Gaza. The Executive Council (EC) has clearly set out a different position to the course adopted by the Labour leadership. The FBU has expressed support for those Labour MPs who have broken the whip in order to vote for a ceasefire.

As the election approaches, the FBU must set out an assessment of the issues we face, within the context we've faced over the last two decades. As the fire and rescue service's union, we need to make an assessment of the challenges facing our own sector as well as the wider political situation facing workers.

The election and the future of our service

The abolition of all national structures and standards between 2002 and 2004 opened the door to the fragmentation of the fire and rescue service. This absence of national standards and the drive towards so-called 'localism' opened the door to the savage austerity cuts that our service has suffered since 2010. The FBU should never forget that the abolition of national standards and structures by a Labour government created the mechanism for the subsequent cuts imposed by the Conservatives.

Despite this, it remains the assessment of the EC that it is in the best interests of FBU members and of our service that the Conservatives are defeated and replaced with a Labour government.

In this situation, it is incumbent upon the union to advocate for the necessary reform and changes that we need to see for the benefit and safety of our members, our service and for all workers. In line with this approach, the FBU launched the Firefighters' Manifesto in November 2023 at our national rally at Westminster. Since then, members across the UK have engaged in campaigning and lobbying activity to support the manifesto.

The union has also identified key areas of the manifesto to raise and discuss with politicians who may hold ministerial positions in a future government.

These have focused in particular on:

- The case for ending fragmentation through a new statutory advisory body to develop and advise on all areas of fire and fire safety policy
- The case for a new initiative to develop and rebuild resilience, including the unique role the fire and rescue service could play tackling emerging risks, such as extreme weather events linked to climate change
- The case for improved workers' rights and the repeal of anti-union laws.

Any such approach requires long term investment and the creation of thousands of new jobs in fire and rescue.

In this campaign, as in every other, there can be no guarantees of success. Nevertheless, it is the job of the union to make our case and to provide the evidence to support it – even in challenging circumstances.

Conference agrees that the FBU must use every possible leverage, including its status as a Labour affiliate, to set out the case for a major change of direction for our service. The FBU wants to see a service genuinely fit for the future, with the investment necessary to face the emerging and changing risks confronting our communities.

Prepare for struggle under a Labour government

There are already growing pressures on the Starmer leadership to roll back on any radical pledges.

Big business interests will oppose any relaxation of the anti-union laws or extension of other workers' rights. There will also be huge pressure to maintain policies of austerity and privatisation.

The task facing the FBU and the whole trade union movement is to prepare to resist such pressures and to fight for policies which benefit the working class.

In addition, our movement cannot merely rely on developments at Westminster and the devolved governments but must build and rely upon our own strength and that of other trade unions to campaign to improve trade union rights and our members' pay and living conditions.

Accordingly, Conference agrees:

1. The positions set out in this EC statement.
2. That the EC will continue to campaign inside and outside Parliament for FBU policy to be adopted and implemented by the Labour Party in government and for a new approach to fire and rescue policy.
3. That the EC will provide resources and information to assist FBU members and officials at all levels in the role that we can all play in this campaign.