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Executive Council Policy Statement – Fire Brigades Union – Independent, United and Strong

Since 1918, the purpose of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has been to protect the interests of our members and the service we provide. FBU members have stood shoulder to shoulder in unity for over 100 years, earning a hard-earned reputation for discipline, loyalty and commitment to our aims.

Throughout our history, the FBU has had to adapt to governmental and societal changes. Generations of members and officials have met the challenges of the time and, almost uniquely in our movement, the FBU has continued as a proud, specialist, single industry trade union.

We now face further, significant challenges. The first quarter of the 21st century has brought unprecedented governmental, societal and, especially, technological changes which were previously unimaginable. The rapid pace of change must be faced head on, and our union adapted to ensure that we continue to maintain and build our strength and industrial leverage on behalf of members.

The period since January 2025 has brought a focus on the values and organisation of the FBU. The FBU must build on our strength in the workplace - encouraging and supporting members to unite as a union at a local level and fight to improve working conditions and oppose cuts.

To achieve this, the Executive Council (EC) over the last year has instigated a comprehensive review of our processes and practices, aimed at enhancing our effectiveness and responsiveness to member needs, and identifying critical areas for improvement.

The review was undertaken on a 'task and finish' basis. It involved the following six groups each of which examined specific mandates:

- a) improving communication
- b) enhancing transparency and accountability
- c) promoting democracy, accountability, and decision-making
- d) assessing regional structure
- e) reviewing sectional structure
- f) examining EC structure.

This process was undertaken over a period of nine months, involved staff and officials from across our structures, assessed FBU policies and took evidence from across the union and the movement.

The process culminated in a final report with 51 recommendations, including nine sub-reports, and three appendices. It is from this substantial, evidenced and collective piece of work that the future must be built.

Many of the recommendations in the report have already been implemented by the EC. Others have been the subject of further work and development.

All decisions in relation to this work will be made in accordance with the democratic structures of the FBU and reported in the same manner.

This work includes:

- i. **Modern systems** - The FBU has revamped the circulars system, replacing it with modern communication methods including email, SharePoint and Intranet. Technology has been introduced to add transparency to decision making bodies - making minutes, policies and documentation more easily accessible.
- ii. **Social media and comms** - The FBU has invested in social media, introducing specialist support and a new social media policy to encourage FBU committees to build campaigns, engage with members and highlight local work across appropriate platforms. The FBU will provide regions and sections with the ability to send specific emails direct to their members, highlighting local campaigns and encouraging engagement.
- iii. **IT** - The FBU will use technology to strengthen capacity and support the union's aims. This includes moving to new, cost-effective IT suppliers, with clearer policies and improved governance at national and regional levels. Cloud-based systems are enhancing security and support, alongside ongoing IT and GDPR training for officials. Dedicated Teams sites will enable regions and sections to organise and store documents securely.
- iv. **Democracy hub** - The FBU will establish an online democracy hub where election and conference information will be provided to officials and members in an easily accessible and understandable format.
- v. **Electronic balloting** - The FBU is introducing electronic balloting, including at the nomination stage, in all non-statutory elections at Brigade, Regional and National levels. This centrally managed system will modernise and widen participation, while reducing costs, and freeing officials from administrative tasks to focus on organising and representing members.
- vi. **Promote democracy** - The FBU will clarify our canvassing rules and introduce new methods to assist members to consider candidates. The union will review our rules on terms of office and consider if restrictions on standing for office are necessary.
- vii. **Financial focus** - The FBU will strengthen financial transparency through monthly reports to finance committees and the EC, alongside regular regional treasurer meetings to share best practice. Clear guidance on expenses and allowances has been introduced, together with travel booking systems to reduce card use. Financial implications will be mandatory in decision making. Expenditure will be reviewed at every level to ensure value for members.
- viii. **Training Department** - The FBU will introduce a new FBU training department, led and run by officials, with staff support. The union will introduce a clear policy requirement that elected officials must undertake the necessary training to match their role. This will be a cascading system of development to ensure that, at every level, our officials have the necessary skills to properly and professionally represent our members.
- ix. **Organising and recruitment** - The FBU will build on the successes of our 'Safer, Stronger, Together' strategy by introducing a targeted, rolling programme of release to brigade organisers with the purpose

of recruiting new members to our Union. The initial focus will be engaging firefighters working the retained duty system, many of whom have never been approached to join the FBU. The FBU will introduce specific support mechanisms to assist brigade organisers to build our Phoenix membership system and be ballot ready in accordance with our industrial focus.

- x. **Full time release (facilitated financially by the FBU)** - The FBU will increase capacity by giving additional responsibilities to officials on full-time release. This will provide additional development support across the union and set regional targets to enhance density and engagement.
- xi. **Enhance reporting** - The FBU has introduced a mandatory national reporting system to highlight urgent matters impacting on cuts to jobs, safety and/or Grey Book issues. This will enable us to act quickly and target resources where they are urgently needed.
- xii. **Local views on political donations** - The FBU has introduced a new system to make sure local views are at the heart of decisions on political donations. For the first time, no financial support will be given to any Labour Party politician without a recommendation being considered by brigade/regional committees.
- xiii. **Enhancing representation** - The FBU will enhance our democratic representation, beginning with the equality sections. This will provide for direct representation at the four annual business meetings of the EC and the provision of facilities to do so where necessary.
- xiv. **Embed sections within our structures** - The FBU's equality and trade sections are an integral part of our union structures. The union will establish a clear expectation that regions and sections must work together on issues specific to casework and policy. The FBU will clarify the rules around the elections and statistics of sectional representation and make clear that they are an integral part of the FBU.
- xv. **Equality is an FBU priority** - Equality is a trade union principle and an FBU priority. The FBU will enhance our unity by challenging discrimination in all its forms. The union will ensure our equality sections have a voice at the EC and campaign for their inclusion at appropriate policy forums across the fire and rescue service. The FBU will reinvigorate our engagement at the Trade Union Congress and wider movement, demanding fairness at work for all. The union will additionally implement a confidential reporting line, so members and officials can report concerns without fear.
- xvi. **Rules fit for purpose** - The FBU will undertake a root and branch review of the FBU rule book, bringing it up to date and making it fit for purpose. The union will introduce clearer, quicker and more open internal discipline processes and refocus our energy on member support.
- xvii. **Sharpen our structures** - The FBU will review our structures to ensure that they are member focussed, clear and transparent, efficient and effective. The union will move to a remit-based system for officials, ensuring they are clear what their role entails and what their primary responsibilities are.

Much of this work has been completed and the benefits are already clear. Other areas are the subject of ongoing work and require consideration in the context of rules. The EC are clear that this work must be completed.

The EC is clear that this programme of reform has one central purpose: to put the FBU firmly back into the workplace and back into the hands of members. Our strength has always come from organised firefighters

and firefighters' control, united at local level, shaping the direction of their union and prepared to act collectively in defence of their service and their livelihoods. That remains our foundation.

This change has not come without cost. It has required investment, difficult decisions and a willingness to challenge established ways of working. But that investment is for the future — to ensure that the FBU is equipped, resilient and battle-ready for the immediate and long-term challenges we face.

Pay and conditions remain under pressure. Health and safety protections, pensions and national sectoral collective bargaining must be defended. The fire and rescue service requires sustained investment, not further erosion. At the same time, the growth of the far right and divisive politics seeks to undermine the unity upon which trade unionism depends. In that environment, the FBU cannot be passive; we must be organised, confident and prepared to act.

Firefighters need their own independent, industry specific specialist trade union — an organisation of firefighters, for firefighters, and led by firefighters. Through this work, the EC is determined to ensure that the FBU remains independent, united and strong, and ready to meet whatever challenges lie ahead.

Executive Council