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Our Ref: MW/sll

22 May 2020

Nicola Sturgeon MSP
First Minister of Scotland
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Dear First Minister

Re: Investment in the fire and rescue service – a moratorium

I write seeking your support for a moratorium on funding cuts and to call for increased investment in the fire and rescue service, an increased investment which is crucial to the service provided by firefighters.

Firefighters have continued to carry out emergency intervention throughout the lockdown and will do so as restrictions are lifted. Significant fires and other incidents including rescues have been tackled over the past six weeks. These have included serious wild fires and an increase in fire fatalities since the current crisis began.

As the economy slowly begins to open up again, firefighters will need to resume the protection, prevention and enforcement work that is necessary to keep our communities safe. In addition to this, there are the additional workloads arising post-Grenfell coupled with the backlog of work resulting from the lockdown. Specifically relevant to Scotland, the full consequences of recent major fires is still being assessed, particularly the Glasgow School of Art. As we await the findings of that investigation, we know from experience that there is likely to be an impact on the SFRS.

Across the UK, 12 additional areas of work are being undertaken by firefighters to assist the NHS with key priorities and to provide further support for the public during the pandemic. This was the result of the national collective agreement between the FBU, National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the fire and rescue service employers. This work has already delivered important results for the health service and the public, and may be needed in case of further waves or future outbreaks.

The fire and rescue service has been subjected to unprecedented cuts during the period of austerity. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service came into existence on 1 April 2013. However overall funding in cash terms fell steeply by 11% in its first five years, before some increases in recent years. Overall funding was still 7% lower in 2019-20 in money terms, compared 2012-13. Official figures show that there have been 990 firefighter job losses in Scotland since 2013.

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Sadly, in too many fire and rescue services the FBU has had to continue to resist local cuts in order to try to protect both prevention and intervention capabilities during this crisis, while our members have continued to serve the public to deliver core services and an extraordinary range of additional services.

The union is seeking from all fire and rescue authorities/employers a moratorium, so there are no more cuts to the fire and rescue service. Firefighters have played our part in this current phase of the health crisis but we take very seriously government warnings that this pandemic is not over and that further waves are highly likely.

In addition, there is near-universal acknowledgement (formal or informal) that preparedness for pandemic human disease, and other risks identified on the national risk register, since 2008 in the fire service and in other parts of the public sector has been less than sufficient. It is illogical to introduce reductions in fire service cover before any non-pressurised assessment of the gaps in capability are undertaken. It is crucial therefore that we both plan and resource accordingly for the longer-term challenges that still lie ahead.

Therefore, we seek assurances from all governments across the UK that not only guarantee sustainable levels of funding but also develop a programme of investment to ensure our fire and rescue service is resilient going forward. That means investment in firefighters, fire stations and appliances.

We are of course always happy to discuss these matters with you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary

cc: Ash Denham MSP - Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs