



Matt Wrack General Secretary
Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road,
Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE
fbu.org.uk | @fbunational
020 8541 1765 | office@fbu.org.uk

Our Ref: MW/sll

22 May 2020

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
Westminster
London
SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister

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

I seek 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. 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.

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 an unprecedented level of cuts over the last 15 years especially since the start of declared austerity in 2010. The most recent local government settlement figures released in February 2020 showed that central funding for fire in England had decreased by 30% since 2013-14 (when the report changed). The National Audit Office found cuts of similar magnitude for the period 2011-15. Official figures show that 10,000 frontline firefighter jobs were cut in England over the last decade. Those cuts continue.

The FBU underlines the importance of central funding in sustaining the fire and rescue service. Central funding has historically made up half of all fire funding. In some brigades, particularly those with higher levels of social deprivation, this funding has reached two-thirds of local fire service income. The union is of course aware that central government has made additional payments to local fire services during this Covid-19 crisis. Such funding is necessary, but it does not undo years of cuts.

Contd/2...

Similarly, the FBU is aware that some local fire authorities can hold reserves. The union has long argued that some of these funds should be used to pay for frontline services. However local revenues from business rates have collapsed during this pandemic and local authorities will have greater demands than before on their reserves. The use of reserves to protect frontline fire cover is important but in the longer-term, running down reserves is not a strategy for sustained investment in our service.

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 has been less than sufficient since 2008, in the fire service and in other parts of the public sector. It is illogical to introduce reductions in fire service cover before any non-pressurised assessment of the gaps in capability is undertaken.

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: The Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP - Minister of State