



FIRE BRIGADES UNION

CONFERENCE 2019

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

**Rebuilding Our Fire and Rescue Service:
What We Need From a Labour Government**

Conference is appalled that the Westminster government continues to impose austerity on the fire and rescue service, more than ten years after the economic crash and despite the approaching two year anniversary of the Grenfell Tower fire.

Conference notes that across the UK in recent years, the numbers of fire and non-fire incidents, rescues, casualties and fatalities have either plateaued or increased significantly. At the same time central government has continued to cut funding with the result that jobs and services have faced further significant reductions. Conference condemns the Westminster government for the one-in-five firefighter jobs (20%) that have been cut since 2010. This reduction is without precedent in the history of our service.

Conference deplores the slowing of response times in recent decades, which is linked to the scrapping of national standards of fire cover, the use of so-called IRMPs to reduce local standards, the closure of fire stations or other forms of reduction in emergency cover. Conference continues to oppose the takeover of fire authorities by police and crime commissioners, which have proceeded despite local and national efforts to oppose.

Conference condemns the continued fragmentation of our fire and rescue service, caused by the disbandment of sector-wide service delivery standards which allowed the development of a local free-for-all permitted by successive governments and by employers and facilitated by Chief Fire Officers. The operational guidance programme and successor process has value but has flaws and continues to struggle to catch-up the ground lost.

THE FBU AND THE LABOUR PARTY

The FBU has been the only consistent voice making the professional case for a modern fire and rescue service, able to address the changing and emerging risks facing our communities today. The FBU has long recognised the need for dialogue and engagement with politicians from all the main political parties.

The decision at recall conference in 2015 to re-affiliate to the Labour Party opened new areas for developing policies on the future of our service. Given the different political alignment in different parts of the UK, the FBU is not affiliated to the Scottish Labour Party or to the Labour Party in Northern Ireland.

Conference confirms that the election of a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government at Westminster represents the best possibility in a generation of putting workers' issues, including firefighters' issues, at the heart of politics.

Conference notes that since re-affiliation, the FBU has engaged with the Labour Party through various forums including the Fire Brigades Union Parliamentary Group, Labour Party conference, the Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation (TULO) and representation on the NEC of Labour Party. This influence led the Labour Party to make the first ever commitments to the fire and rescue service in the 2017 general election manifesto:

"Labour will halt cuts to the Fire Service. The Conservatives have cut 10,000 firefighters closed dozens of fire stations. As a result, response times have got slower and lives have been put at risk. Labour will recruit 3,000 new firefighters, review staffing levels, and consult on national minimum standards for the service. We will reinstate separate governance arrangements for Fire and Police Services. We will give the Fire and Rescue Services a statutory duty to coordinate and respond to floods."

Conference welcomes these positive Labour commitments and seeks to build upon them in forthcoming elections.

ASSESSING THE NEEDS IN EACH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

The executive council recommends that the union should conduct a comprehensive audit of local risks and local needs with each fire and rescue service in the UK. This should be conducted by local brigade committees and overseen by the regional committees and nationally by the executive council. It will require input from all of the union's sections. This exercise will allow us to begin to map out in detail the damage that needs to be addressed and the positive proposals the union will demand of national and local politicians to make our modern fire and rescue service fit for purpose. It should be part of the process of restoring the service we need and building for the future.

FBU DEMANDS ON A LABOUR GOVERNMENT

In addition, the FBU's demands on an incoming Labour government will include:

Plan for the risks facing our communities

1. UK-wide assessment of risks and resilience facing our communities, to ensure adequate resource planning and response and to guarantee standards are maintained and improved.
2. A review of the National Framework (or other equivalent documents) and the IRMP process (or equivalent). This must address the need to prioritise planning for existing, emerging and changing risk through a process in which communities and firefighters can have confidence, which is clearly not the case today.
3. UK-wide professional standards for the fire and rescue service for equipment, training, promotion and selection, procedures and planning.
4. UK-wide standards for response times from the time of call to arrival of the first and subsequent pumping appliances (including aerial and other special appliances). These should be based on up to date, safe and effective operational procedures for dealing with various types of risk.
5. UK-wide professional standards for a minimum of 5 riders on all pumping appliances, an end to jump-crewing and other attempts to cut corners with staffing.
6. A statutory duty for Fire and Rescue Services to respond to flooding in England, as already exists in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.
7. Increase the number of trained and specialist fire safety inspecting officers across the UK in order to deliver a new fire safety regime.

A new regime for fire safety and the fire and rescue service

8. The creation of a new statutory stakeholder standards body with guaranteed FBU representation at all levels. This must be adequately resourced by central government and, unlike the current failed structures, must have the confidence of those delivering the service on the frontline. As far as possible this should involve cooperation across the whole of the UK.
9. The reversal of the privatisation of BRE (formerly the Building Research Establishment). We need a national research organisation responsible for addressing the changing risks in homes and other buildings. Such a body must be publicly owned and accountable, must be independent of any corporate interests and not subject to corporate pressure. It must be democratically accountable and have the confidence of those working on the front line in the Fire and Rescue Service and of tenants, owner occupiers and all those using buildings for living, working or leisure.
10. High quality mandatory building standards and guidance, alongside clear rules for construction, refurbishment, renovation or change of the use of buildings underpinned by a system of fire inspection by fully trained FRS fire safety officers to ensure compliance with such standards.

A publicly owned and accountable service

11. An end to and reversal of all privatisation, outsourcing, mutualisation or not for profit social enterprise organisations in the fire and rescue service at local or national level and a clear commitment to a publicly owned and accountable fire and rescue service, including the reversal of the privatisation of the Fire Service College.
12. The reintroduction of democratic local fire authority control over fire and rescue services taken over by police and crime commissioners.

13. That all emergency fire control rooms are under, or returned to local fire authority control, including having the required safe levels of trained professionals staffing them

Modern and professional conditions for firefighters

14. An end to the dangerous and unlawful Close Proximity Crewing and related shift systems, which reduce fire cover and put firefighter safety at risk. All shift systems must adhere to the principles of The Grey Book.
15. An end to the cuts to fire and rescue services, with a planned programme of investment to renew the service at every level.
16. A full review into firefighters' pensions. We need a good quality occupational pension scheme based on the real demands and needs of the occupation.
17. The right to free cancer screening and treatment, and also exemption from sickness monitoring and capability procedures in relation to all cancers for firefighters.
18. National standards for work-related mental health issues.

Conference mandates brigade, sectional and regional committees to provide the executive council with their own specific demands within this framework, to enable the union to prepare a comprehensive plan to transform the fire and rescue service.