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To: All Members Scotland

Comrades,

Cuts Leave Scars update – consultation close and next steps

Members will be aware of the ongoing FBU [Cuts Leave Scars](#) campaign against further frontline cuts which are proposed as part of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) ongoing Service Delivery Review (SDR).

The [public consultation](#) on proposed changes to the Service, including station closures, changes to duty systems and reductions to emergency cover across the country, closed on 16 September. Over the summer FBU branches across the country ran visible and highly effective campaigns clearly setting out how dangerous further cuts to firefighter numbers and front-line resources would be.

Significant political and public awareness of the cuts were achieved with FBU members leafleting local communities, hosting public engagement meetings, holding rallies and attending local community events in order to spell out the impact further cuts would have on both community and firefighter safety. The campaigning attracted significant local and national media attention over the summer, a credit to the work FBU members across Scotland have undertaken.

The opposition to further cuts to the fire and rescue service in Scotland has been universal from the public, clearly setting out how highly local communities value having 24/7 fire cover, and how opposed they are to the continued increases in response times. FBU members know these proposals are deeply unpopular with communities the branches at risk of these proposed cuts protect.

With the public consultation now closed, the SFRS has indicated that a final decision will be made by the [SFRS Board](#) in December of this year. The Cuts Leave Scars campaign continues, with the focus now firmly on MSPs, who are collectively responsible for funding Scotland's fire and rescue service, and the SFRS Board, who will decide how that funding is spent.

Political lobbying

FBU members know that the root cause of cuts to the fire and rescue service across the UK over the last decade have been as a direct result of budget cuts from both the Westminster, and devolved governments. As we have seen in Scotland, the pattern is clear. As budgets are cut, firefighter numbers fall and response times to incidents increase. Some politicians may seek to hide from their shared responsibility on spiraling response times and cuts to firefighter numbers, however it is their decisions which have led to these declines.

The FBU has demanded that the Scottish Government end over a decade of real terms budget cuts to our service which has already seen almost 1250 firefighter jobs lost across all duty systems since 2012/13.

These cuts have been as a direct result of sustained underinvestment from the Scottish Government in Scotland's firefighters, which has seen over £58 million of real terms funding per annum cut from the SFRS resource budget from the first year of the single service in 2013/14 to the budget settlement for the 2025/26 financial year. This sustained underinvestment has had devastating impacts on the front line, with jobs cut, appliances left uncrewed and response times spiraling.

Political lobbying is critical to both raise awareness of the issues firefighters face, the impact these have on the public, and the accountability politicians have in addressing these issues.

To further highlight these points, the FBU held an MSP briefing session at the Scottish Parliament on 9 September, where branch officials from across Scotland attended to spell out the impact of cuts to MSPs of all parties, the decade of underinvestment in the fire and rescue service in Scotland and the risk of appliance removals, cuts to firefighter numbers, station closures and changes to duty systems reducing fire cover during the night and at weekends.

MSP debate – Protecting Scotland's Fire Service

This lobbying helped lead to a dedicated debate in the Scottish Parliament on 2 October, titled Protecting Scotland's Fire Service. The wording of the original motion clearly laid out the link between budget cuts, the loss of firefighter jobs and increasing response times, and also the FBU Cuts Leave Scars campaign. The wording of the original motion can be read by members at the bottom of the page linked here and titled [original motion text](#).

The debate lasted for over an hour and can be viewed on YouTube through the link [Protecting Scotland's Fire Service](#). Many MSPs spoke as part of the debate, with cross part opposition support against cuts a clear theme throughout.

Of particular interest was the Minister with responsibility for Scotland's fire and rescue service, Siobhain Brown, contributions which sought to blame increasing response times on firefighters health and safety, increased traffic and road works. Even more misguidedly, the Minister sought to undermine the importance of response times, and deny that funding has been cut to SFRS over the last 12 years.

The motion was ultimately defeated, with the Minister tabling a wrecking amendment which removed the entire wording of the original motion, and replaced it with wording seeking to justify the last decade of cuts, and the proposed future cuts to come. The wording of the wrecking amendment can be read at the top of the page linked here and titled as [motions as amended](#). Additionally, the same link also shows how every MSP chose to vote to either support, or oppose the wrecking amendment. One SNP MSP rebelled to vote against it, with Labour, Green, Liberal Democrat and even Conservative MSPs also opposing the amendment to support the original motion. With the original motion only defeated by three votes, FBU members will doubtlessly be interested to view how their own local MSPs chose to cast their vote.

It is clear that, despite years of the FBU clearly spelling out the links between budget cuts, firefighter job cuts and increasing response times, many elected politicians are determined to bury their heads in the sand. The pressure is mounting though, and the EC member and Regional officials will be attending SNP conference this weekend to meet with MSPs and dispel some of the myths that continue to be used to avoid the impact budget cuts have had on firefighter and public safety.

A face to face meeting with the Minister is also in place for the first week in November. The issues below will be specifically addressed at that meeting.

The myth of funding and response times

It has become apparent that two myths are regularly used by politicians to avoid their responsibility on the cuts Scotland's firefighters have had to endure, and continue to face. They are both used to absolve politicians of their own responsibilities, and justify an agenda of cuts, conscious or otherwise, to our profession.

The first is that funding to the SFRS has increased over the past twelve years. It is, at best, purposely misleading, and at worse a conscious lie, because it ignores inflation completely. If inflation was accounted for, the SFRS resource budget has been cut by over £58 million this year alone, from 2013. That is over 17% of the current budget. Cuts to firefighter numbers are a direct result of these cuts. Firefighters' jobs have been lost, and their safety compromised, because of those cuts.

The second is that response times are not a reliable measure for how the fire and rescue service is performing. Given that response times have increased by an average of almost 18% (89 seconds) in ten years, it is hardly surprising that those responsible wish to diminish how important they are. Any member of the public who has been trapped in a house fire, involved in an RTC, or urgently needed firefighters for any other reason will understand the life and death implications of such increases. Every firefighter knows what such increases can mean.

For politicians, or anyone else, to dismiss the importance of these figures, or diminish their relevance in regard to public and firefighter safety, is shameful. The Minister did both during her speeches in the parliamentary debate last week. She has been in her role for over two years, and in that time has received numerous briefings and had a number of meetings with FBU officials who have made both points on a number of occasions. She is fully aware how purposefully misleading her contribution was, and yet made it anyway.

Scotland Demands Better march – Saturday 25 October

FBU members across Scotland have been campaigning to fight cuts to the frontline and restore the pay erosion which has been imposed on them since the banking crisis in 2008, for many years now. This summers campaigning is just the last step in this action.

We have all seen how firefighters can win when they are united and stand together. The pay dispute of 2022 was a timely reminder of that, and the mass member demonstrations in Edinburgh (twice) and also Glasgow in recent years has further underlined that strength.

The current proposals of appliance removals, cuts to firefighter numbers, station closures and changes to duty systems reducing fire cover during the night and at weekends is not in isolation. All cuts are driven by underinvestment, and more will follow in future years unless politicians start to repair the collective damage they have inflicted on our profession through underfunding.

Watching the parliamentary debate it is clear how much pressure both the Government, and many MSPs are feeling on this issue. We all need to continue to drive home this message.

Therefore, the FBU is calling on all FBU members across Scotland to attend the [Scotland Demands Better march](#) which will take place in Edinburgh on Saturday 25 October.

Scotland Demands Better is a grassroots trade union and civic movement, which demands social, economic and class justice across Scotland. It is rooted in ensuring that working class people and communities are no longer overlooked, and instead have the power to demand a better life for themselves, their families, their neighbors and their communities.

The three key demands of the campaign are:

1. Decent jobs that pay a genuine living wage and provide true job security
2. A social security system that guarantees no one is left without life's essentials
3. Properly funded public services

The FBU appliance will form part of the march, and an FBU official will also be speaking at the event. Buses will also be organised from locations across Scotland, including areas covered by the branches currently under threat of cuts. Contact your local [Area officials](#) for further information and to confirm places as soon as possible.

Full details including start time, route and other details can be found through the following [Scotland Demands Better](#) link. FBU members are encouraged to assemble outside the front of the Scottish Parliament building from 10.30hrs.

Together we can win the fight for investment in our Service, protect jobs and improve public and firefighter safety. I look forward to seeing you in Edinburgh on 25 October to do so.

In unity

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John McKenzie', followed by a long horizontal line.

John McKenzie
Scottish Regional Secretary
Fire Brigades Union