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Circular: **2023HOC005MW**

6 January 2023

To: **All Members**

Dear Brother / Sister

RDS Firefighters – Vote Yes for Fair Pay

Retained Duty System members, alongside wholetime members of the FBU, recently took part in a consultative ballot on whether to reject or accept the employers revised 5% pay offer for 2022.

The Executive Council was clear that, although an improvement on the previous 2% pay insult, after more than a decade of real terms cuts, 5% doesn't even begin to address the attacks RDS firefighters have faced on their pay. FBU members agreed and voted by 79% to reject the offer.

The national ballot for strike action of Grey Book FBU members and North West Fire Control FBU members has now commenced and opened on 5 December 2022 and will conclude at 2pm on 30 January 2023.

Ballot papers should have arrived or be arriving at the address held for you on the FBU membership database.

<https://www.fbu.org.uk/news/2022/12/05/fbu-strike-ballot-opens>

The circular included with your ballot paper explains in detail why the Executive Council has agreed an extended ballot period.

Due to the restrictive Government legislation that covers ballots for industrial action, the union is unable to offer the option to vote online. Therefore, a postal ballot is the only option available.

RDS Members - Vote Yes for Fair Pay

In addition to the wider cost of living crisis, soaring energy bills and rising mortgage costs or rents and food prices, there are widespread and increasing difficulties in relation to the recruitment and retention of RDS firefighters.

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This has created, among other things, increasing problems regarding the availability of appliances crewed by those working retained duties in many FRSs. This severely affects our RDS members' safety in addition to their pay.

RDS Jobs 2010 - 2022

	2010	2022	Change	Change %
England	14,427	12,179	-2,248	-16%
Scotland	3,125	2,811	-314	-10%
Wales	1,963	1,642	-321	-16%
Northern Ireland	1,018	914	-104	-10%
UK	20,533	17,546	-2,987	-15%

Home Office, Scottish FRS, Welsh Government, NIFRS – headcount 31 March

The UK has almost 3,000 fewer retained firefighters now compared with 2010. This is a 15% reduction over that time. According to Home Office figures, two thirds of the reduction in RDS staffing numbers last year were due to resignations. This highlights the crisis facing RDS firefighters.

The earnings of RDS members have been hit twice over. The low pay increases of the past twelve years have hit all FBU members. But RDS members have also been severely affected by the reduction in calls - this has often been a deliberate strategy of FRS employers. It has had the effects of severely cutting the earnings of RDS firefighters.

This is why the union set out clearly in our 2022 pay claim sent to the National Employers in May of last year, that this matter should be addressed by the employers, proposing significant improvements in the pay and rewards package for RDS firefighters, **which should include a substantial increase in the annual retaining fee.**

To have accepted the 5% offer would have closed the door on further negotiations on all points of our pay claim in relation to settlement for last year.

RDS firefighters provide a service of huge value to our communities, and often at great personal sacrifice. This was demonstrated even more so by the additional voluntary activities taken on by large numbers of RDS members throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic. **We make no apologies for demanding that our RDS members receive fair and proper pay and reward in return for the commitment they give.**

In addition to this:

- At a time of such high inflation, the Executive Council does not believe that the previous offer from employers represents fair pay for the fire service. When inflation is taken into account, the 5% offer still represented a further significant **cut in real wages** and follows years of austerity, pay stagnation and falling real wages.

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- Firefighters and firefighters control have already lost pay worth 12% in real terms over the last decade and, taking account of the contribution on the frontline throughout the Covid crisis, the Executive Council firmly believes that now is the time for our employers to deliver fair pay.
- When we were initially presented with the 2% insult, we were told it was a final offer and the employers had no more to offer. We were then told that 5% was final, and the employers have no more to offer. The change in their position is a direct result of the determination already shown by FBU members. That determination is needed again to demand improvements.
- Government and employers have been telling us for over a decade that we either have to accept low pay or cuts – but then they try to force through both. **Enough is enough.** Our aim is to achieve fair pay for all FBU members.

The current situation cannot continue and only through standing and fighting together can we possibly hope to achieve a desperately needed pay rise.

Yours in Unity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack'.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary

MW/RLT/jh