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To: **All Members**

Dear Brother/Sister,

Labour Party general election manifesto on collective bargaining

On 13 June, the Labour Party published its manifesto, titled Change, for the general election on Thursday 4 July. This is an important moment for firefighters and the FBU. Our members have the right to vote for their MP and to directly influence who sits in the House of Commons and who forms the next Westminster government.

Labour's Plan to Make Work Pay states:

"Labour will ensure there is sufficient facilities time for all trade union reps so that they have capacity to represent and defend workers, negotiate with employers and train."

"Labour will create new rights and protections for trade unions reps to undertake their work, strengthening protections for trade union representatives against unfair dismissal and union members from intimidation, harassment, threats and blacklisting. Labour will introduce statutory rights for trade union equality reps in order to strengthen equality at work for all."

"Labour will ensure our plans do not undermine existing collective bargaining arrangements that are supported by unions."

The FBU is affiliated to the Labour Party in England and Wales. FBU officials have contributed to the Labour Party's internal democratic discussions over the last nine years, such as its annual conference, the National Policy Forum (NPF) and the Trade Union Liaison Organisation (TULO), in order to fight for FBU policies.

The last 14 years

These pledges are in stark contrast to the policies of Conservative-led governments at Westminster over the last 14 years. From beginning to end ministers and their advisers have

tried to diminish or do away with the National Joint Council (NJC) and the Grey Book, which sets the overall framework for the pay and conditions of firefighters and emergency control staff.

- In 2011, after the Fire Futures Reports, ministers proposed “Change in the current National Joint Council mechanism”.
- In 2016, the Westminster-commissioned Adrian Thomas, review of conditions of service for fire and rescue staff proposed a review of the NJC.”
- In 2020, the HMICFRS chief inspector Thomas Winsor demanded the Home Office, fire employers, the National Fire Chiefs Council and trade unions should replace the NJC with a pay review body and tear up the Grey Book.
- In 2022, the Westminster government’s White Paper on Fire Reform proposed HMICFRS’ proposals for the NJC and the Grey Book, promising a review. Ministers reiterated that threat in their response to the White Paper consultation in December 2023. Only last month, HMICFRS’ State of Fire and Rescue report welcomed “plans to review the outdated structure for negotiating pay and terms and conditions.”

National Joint Council

The National Joint Council has been the mechanism to determine pay and conditions through collective bargaining. Without common rates of pay and conditions, employers and chief fire officers would pay whatever they want and make firefighters do whatever work their political masters required.

In the last three years, the FBU has negotiated pay rises for firefighters through the NJC. These have been won thanks to the willingness of FBU members to take strike action if necessary. But thanks to collective bargaining, no strike action has been necessary; pay was resolved through negotiation.

The NJC still has much to do. There are many issues facing control staff, officers and retained firefighters that need to be addressed. There are huge disparities on CPD and questions over pay progression. There are important matters such as parental leave and related time off from work.

The FBU and fire employers can and will negotiate on those matters and much more. FBU members get a direct voice in those negotiations through collective bargaining. A pledge to protect collective bargaining from and incoming government would be an important gain for firefighters.

Yours in unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack', with a stylized, cursive script.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary