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Circular: 2025HOC0071SW

Date: 14th February 2025

To: All Members

Dear Brother/Sister,

INDEPENDENT CULTURE REVIEWS INTO MID AND WEST WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Last week historic homophobic and derogatory tweets surfaced that were reported to be from the then Deputy Chief of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS), an official with responsibility for equality, diversity and inclusion.

I want to extend a personal message of solidarity to any FBU member who might have been affected by those comments.

Our rulebook is clear – any form of prejudice or discrimination is unacceptable. That includes all forms of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, misogyny, and racism – past, present or otherwise.

The resurfacing of these comments was followed by the publication of further shocking, although not surprising, independent reports into the prevalence of unacceptable behaviour in the fire and rescue service. Following on from similar investigations into culture in London, Dorset and Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and South Wales, the Crest Reviews into NWFRS and MWWFRS found that:

- Bullying and harassment is widespread, with managers most often the perpetrators.
- Types of bullying or harassment include abuse of power, intimidation, sexual harassment, discrimination and inappropriate use of social media.
- A lack of transparency around diversity initiatives in recruitment have fed sexist and misogynistic beliefs that question the competence of women firefighters.
- Most firefighters (60%) are not reporting any or all the prejudicial and unacceptable behaviour they witness. Seventy-three percent of those that did report were dissatisfied with the outcome.
- Victimisation is also prevalent - almost half (49%) of those who made formal reports of unacceptable behaviour believe it had a negative impact on their career.
- Staff also reported being denied or discouraged from having union representation when they tried to speak up.
- Data on racism and LGBT+ hate was mostly absent from the Crest Reviews– but that does not mean members are not also enduring these types of unacceptable behaviour.

Multiple investigations have uncovered these issues across the fire and rescue service, yet no real progress has been made. Our union must and will continue to raise these issues and challenge poor leadership and unacceptable behaviour at every turn.

The FBU is committed to equality and to helping shape an inclusive fire and rescue service, open to everyone, which reflects the communities it serves. It is also committed to stamping out unacceptable behaviour in our own union.

Positive action is a lawful practice which ensures a diverse workforce. And a diverse workforce brings a wider range of perspectives and experiences to the problems firefighters must solve together on each shift. Let us be clear - our women, Black or minoritised and LGBT+ members are excellent firefighters. All fire and rescue services need to clearly communicate their positive action policies to avoid misunderstanding – there is no place for sexism or misogyny in our union or in the fire and rescue service.

In response to last week's events, FBU officials on the ground in Wales are organising and they have our full solidarity and support. I have also written to the Welsh Minister requesting a meeting to ensure that the union is involved in any conversations about how to rebuild fairness, equality and trust in Welsh fire and rescue services. I believe the Wales Social Partnership Forum for Fire and Rescue Services should make the issues raised by these and other cultural reviews an urgent priority.

Insufficient approaches to culture change will not lead to a change in toxic cultures. The Fire Authority must ensure that proper leadership and governance structures are in place, unacceptable behaviour is not tolerated, trade union rights are respected and FBU officials are empowered.

Like many of you, as more cultural reviews are published, I am angered by the statistics. But I am also heartened by the opportunity. Our union stands ready to be part of the profound change needed to improve the working lives of our members. A review is the first step, but change will only happen if it is followed by actions that reflect a true commitment to equality, equity, inclusivity, and respect.

Yours in solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Wright', with a stylized, flowing script.

Steve Wright
General Secretary