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Circular: 2025HOC0140SW

Date: **24/04/2025**
To: **All Members**

Dear Brother/Sister,

Employers' pay offer 2025

Today the national fire service employers' have written to the FBU with an offer on pay, with effect from 1 July 2025. The employers' letter is attached to this circular.

The Offer

The National Employers have made the following offer:

- A 3.2% increase on all basic pay rates and Continual Professional Development payments with effect from 1 July 2025
- To address the issue of Trainee rates of pay, by removing that rate from all NJC pay scales from 1 July 2025
- A very clear commitment to an ongoing negotiation around Grey Book pay reform, including pay progression
- To improve the Grey Book provision around notice periods.

Assessment and recommendation

The Executive Council has carefully assessed the offer and asks members to consider the following points:

- On current and projected rates of inflation, the pay offer would mark a real increase in pay. The latest inflation figure for March 2025 was 2.6%, measured by the Consumer Prices Index (CPI)
- The offer is greater than the rate the Westminster government budgeted for in other sectors such as education and health
- The offer addresses a significant problem for our lowest paid members, who would now start their career on development rates of pay
- The offer includes a commitment from the employers to negotiate with the FBU on pay progression and other important matters raised by members.

Full time officials have held intensive negotiations with the employers over pay for many months and this has increased in frequency in recent weeks. One key aim of the FBU has been to seek an offer for this year which could be implemented in time for the settlement date in July. The timing of this offer allows this to be achieved. The offer does not redress years of attacks on our pay and conditions and we must continue to campaign for long term improvements.

Having assessed the offer, **the Executive Council has agreed to recommend that members should vote to accept the offer.**

The Executive Council has agreed to conduct a ballot of members to seek agreement for the pay offer. This will be conducted in hybrid form - by post and online.

Further information will follow on details of the ballot.

The Executive Council recommends that members vote – ACCEPT

Yours in unity,

Steve Wright

General Secretary

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FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES
National Employers

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23 April 2025

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Steve,

The National Employers are now able to set out in full, the position in relation to pay negotiations for 2025.

Our negotiations have been challenging this year, with a large number of factors making for a very difficult dialogue between us.

Since your election as General Secretary of the FBU, you have been consistently clear about your ambition on behalf of your members, and your expectations with regards to the pay discussion for 2025. The challenge for the NJC is to seek to find the balance between the impact of the external economy on the wages of your members, against the financial challenge facing services.

The National Employers are very conscious that when government grants for local government and Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) in England were set in September 2024 CPI was at its lowest level for some time at 1.7%. CPI has increased but the amount of funding received from government has not. However, it was clear from our negotiations that settlement at this level would be unacceptable to you and your members.

It should not be forgotten that employer National Insurance contributions increased from 13.5% to 15% on 6th April, with the government grant to public sector employers (including Fire and Rescue Services) only funding approximately 50% of this increase, adding an additional cost pressure to services.

It is clear then, the financial health of many services provides a very challenging backdrop against which our negotiations have taken place. Any agreement this year will most certainly push some services to the limit of their financial extremities. Indeed, there are a number of services for which this will be beyond that limit. If there are challenges ahead, where efficiencies require difficult conversations and local negotiations, it is our expectation that these are met constructively, jointly, and in line with the NJCs Industrial Relations protocols.

As such, this offer is made in good faith, demonstrating the commitment the National Employers have for finding the basis for a settlement on pay for 2025, which we are now able to set out in full.

Pay

The National Employers have agreed to make the following offer:

- A 3.20 per cent increase on all basic pay rates and Continual Professional Development payments with effect from 1 July 2025
- To address the issue of Trainee rates of pay, by removing that rate from all NJC pay scales from 1 July 2025
- A very clear commitment to an on-going dialogue around Grey Book pay reform
- To improve the Grey Book provision around “notice periods”

Trainee rates of pay

The National Employers have reflected on the points made in your claim letter regarding Trainee rates of pay. While we remain of the view that careers and roles in the Fire Service do remain attractive to new entrants, the National Employers shared the concerns you have expressed about the close proximity of the national living wage, and in particular the risk of the national living wage overtaking the trainee rate of pay for firefighters (control).

To that end, the National Employers propose removing the “Trainee” rate of pay for both wholetime and RDS employees as part of this pay agreement. This will enable all FRSs to recruit directly onto the Development rate of pay from 1 July 2025. It should be noted that in doing so, the National Employers see a clear link between this step, and our ambition to reform the Grey Book pay structure, as set out below.

Grey book pay reform

The FBU claim letter sets out the ambition of the union to resolve longstanding issues around the role of the fire and rescue service, and the role of firefighters. It makes the point about control staff pay and underlines the union’s commitment to negotiating a new pay progression system through the NJC.

The National Employers welcome this commitment to further talks and are keen to pick up this work under the auspices of the NJC as soon as possible, building on previous discussions that have taken place in this space.

The NJC has done good work already, establishing a shared understanding of the issues and agreeing high level principles about what a modern pay structure within the Grey Book could look like. The Joint Working Group that reported to the NJC in 2024 agreed the following broad principles which remain a good starting point for further discussion and development:

- Structuring around a principle of upskilling and developing in role
- That development should be demonstratable over time
- Progression should be realistic and achievable
- The system should be easy to understand and operate
- Delivering potential expansions to the role of a firefighter
- Applied across all services in the same way.

The working group also said that any new pay structure should:

- Be part of a package driving rewarding, fulfilling careers to firefighters (and all roles in the Grey Book)
- Underpin a nationally agreed and consistent system across all FRSs – that is transparent and justifiable.

Our vision, aim and commitment

The National Employers remain clear that the national pay and grading structure should reflect the demand and role of Fire and Rescue Services in 2025, that the Grey Book pay and grading structure should underscore firefighting as a highly skilled occupation, rewarding skills and knowledge (not simply time served in role), driving professionalised leadership and management at all levels.

The culture of Fire and Rescue services needs to sit at the centre of any discussions around reform, ensuring there can be no doubt about the sort of attitudes and behaviours that our sector expects in 2025 and beyond.

There are varying views on all sides of these discussions and long held ambitions about reform on which delivery by the NJC is overdue. Issues like MTA and EMR continue to be subject to debate. Any consensus on a national basis will no doubt require a collaborative approach and the National Employers understand this will require working with key partners across the sector. In doing so, we would build on the good work and broader relationships being established via the Ministerial Advisory Group, on which both our organisations are represented.

There is obviously a role for Government here, not just around the conversation on financial investment, on which the National Employers invite the Employee side of the NJC to make a joint case, but in understanding the role of the Fire Service, and supporting the NJC to ensure that the Grey Book pay structure reflects a modern Fire Service, fit for the future.

Should this letter form the basis by which we can settle pay negotiations for 2025, work should promptly commence to develop these discussions, making the case within all four governments, whilst aiming to implement change within this pay round.

Notice Periods

The existing provision is contained within Section 7 of the Grey Book: Miscellaneous Conditions. The existing wording reads as follows:

“Notice of termination of employment
An employee shall be subject to a minimum period of notice in respect of his or her employment and shall give a minimum period of notice of termination of his or her employment in accordance with the provisions of the Employment Rights Act 1996.”
Under the Employment Rights Act (ERA), after one month at work, an employee must give one week of notice if they wish to leave the employer.

The Employer responsibility matches the employee responsibility up until 2 years of employment (one week) but then grows adding one week per year of service - up to 12 years. This means that only after an employee has 4 years’ service are they entitled to four weeks’ notice from their employer.

The National Employers believe one week of notice is inadequate for both employee protection in those initial years of employment, and for workforce planning among services. We therefore propose amending this to ensure that the existing basic Grey Book provision remains ‘as is’ for the first 3 months of employment but then moves to 4 weeks for both sides.

After four years of employment, the Employer’s responsibility would continue to grow in line with the ERA statutory responsibilities.

This amendment to the Grey Book is not intended to replace locally agreed amendments to notice periods, which we know already exist across FRSs, but simply tidies up the Grey Book provision for those who are following that basic line as it currently exists.

In conclusion

The National Employers have put together a comprehensive offer on pay this year, identifying a settlement that aims to balance the significant financial challenges of services while seeking to find an increase to wages that feels fair. We are proposing removal of the NJC trainee rate of pay which will result in an immediate uplift for the lowest paid staff, and commit to detailed discussions around pay reform, having underlined the vision of the National Employers in relation to this. Finally, we are seeking to improve the shared responsibility around notice periods in the Grey Book.

It is our strong belief that we achieve more working together than we do when working in opposition, acknowledging that ultimately both sides of the NJC want the same thing, which is a fire and rescue service fit for the future, invested in and valued by government, with the right resources and capability to provide the best service to local communities. We look forward to working with you in your new role, to deliver this shared ambition.

The National Employers hope this letter can form the basis of an agreement between the two sides.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Ward
Employers' Secretary