

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS 2025

96th CONFERENCE
20 – 23 MAY 2025



CREDIT: STUART STENHOUSE



Established 1 October 1918

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

96th CONFERENCE 2025

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A full list of all resolutions, policy statements and conference decisions has been made available to all officials and members in the booklet 'Record of Decisions 2025'

This is also available on the fbu website www.fbu.org.uk



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96th CONFERENCE 2025

BLACKPOOL

20-23 MAY 2025

MORNING SESSION

THE PRESIDENT:

Morning conference.

Conference. Welcome to Blackpool for the FBU'S 96th Annual Conference. And sadly, as we are all aware, we meet this week after a terrible tragedy last Thursday. At the incident, two of our firefighting family, sister Jenny Logan and brother Martin Sadler, tragically lost their lives, as did a member of the public, David Chester.

We also had two of our members suffer severe life-threatening injuries, and we wish them a speedy recovery. This tragedy brings home to every one of us how delicate life is, and it can be taken away at the blink of an eye. Our thoughts and condolences are with all of the families, friends, and colleagues of those impacted by this tragedy.

We know firefighting is inherently dangerous. We run towards danger when others are running in the opposite direction. But even so, when these tragedies do occur, it's equally as devastating for everyone involved.

The general secretary and the vice-president attended the incident on the night, along with EC member Chris Wycherley and local officials, and they, along with head office officials are dealing with all that needs to be dealt with. An investigation team has been brought together and that work has already begun, as has the welfare side of things, which has also been taken care of.

We also have been passed an email from the Oxfordshire brigade secretary, who has asked to pass on thanks to conference and for all the messages of support from officials and members around the UK offering their support and also wants to pass on thanks to those that are assisting them directly in dealing with the tragedy. It's greatly appreciated. *Applause*

In a moment after the chair of standing orders committee, Phil Millar, gives his first report, we move on to section N of the annual report, Obituaries, as we always do. This is where we remember all of the members who have sadly died in the last 12 months. So I think also remembering Jenny and Martin within that minute's silence will make it even more poignant and relevant than it always is.

Conference, I also want to update you on plans for Thursday. We have been liaising with Oxfordshire fire and rescue service and the NFCC with a view to holding a minute's silence at night, 18.39 on Thursday evening. The hope is that every fire and rescue service across the whole of the UK will take part in holding a minute's silence to honour Jenny and Martin exactly one week after the tragedy occurred.

We plan to do the same here on Thursday at the usual close of business. I intend, with your agreement, to suspend conference standing order 16 and give you an hour or so's break and then we'll reconvene around 18.30 so that we can also observe the minute's silence while conference is in session. Conference, is that agreed? *Agreed.*

Thank you. I now call brother Phil Millar, chair of the standing orders committee to give the standing orders committee report. Phil.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Thank you, president. Conference, good morning. The standing orders committee welcomes you to conference 2025, albeit under a cloud. As this is an FBU meeting, I will now read our equality statement.

The Fire Brigades Union stands for equality in the wider world, in the fire and rescue service and in our union. Undermining equality means undermining the unity, which makes us strong. We aim to make the FBU's events inclusive, respectful, and effective. Everyone here is responsible for making that happen.

The union is run by and for everyone, regardless of age, disability, sex, race, religion, or beliefs, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, marriage or civil partnership status, socioeconomic status and educational experience. Sexual harassment is incompatible with this and we do not tolerate it.

Sexual harassment is defined by law as any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. Please be aware that while you may have friends in this room, you're at a union event and are expected to behave with respect and empathy.

Please be aware of the language you're using and that what might seem like a joke to you could be humiliating, or degrading to someone else. You should be aware that everyone here is accountable for their words and actions. Social events and online forums, including social media, are subject to the same policy.

If you experience or witness any behaviour that you think is out of order, please report it to your regional secretary. If you feel uncomfortable reporting it to your regional secretary, you can also approach the national women's committee or the assistant general secretary.

Conference, can anyone attending conference who has a vehicle parked in the grounds of the Imperial, please ensure that you have it registered on the data terminal at reception. You will not be charged for parking. However, if you do not register your vehicle, you may subsequently receive a letter after conference from the hotel asking for payment. Should this occur, please email the standing orders secretary, Mark Rowe, to inform him and he will advise the hotel accordingly.

Also, to avoid any potential interruption to conference business on Friday, can you ensure that your vehicle is booked in until Saturday 24 May, even if you have elected not to stay on Friday night.

On that note, an email was sent from standing orders secretary, Mark Rowe, on 9 May, asking for names of delegates or attendees wishing to avail of the offer to stay on Friday night to be returned by 16 May. However, should anyone's circumstances have changed and they now wish to stay, please inform myself or Mark Rowe no later than 6pm on Thursday.

Conference, as we did last year, standing orders have issued documentation to each delegation as opposed to each delegate in order to reduce our paper usage, with the exception of a couple of the larger delegations that will have some extra copies. This includes all of the resolutions, rule changes or amendments to standing orders that have been ruled out this year by the standing orders committee, which we are obliged to provide in the event of a challenge.

Conference, even with our attempts to drive down the use of paper, it was painfully apparent last year when conference closed the amount of paper and other rubbish that remained in the conference hall when delegates had left. I hope conference agrees that this is not the kind of impression our union wishes to make upon the workers who have to come in after we have gone and have to pick up our rubbish. So to that end, when conference finishes on Friday, large bins will be provided and placed at the back of the hall, and I would ask that delegates dispose of any materials you do not intend to take with you before leaving the conference floor.

There are a few last-minute changes to the delegates list, so can delegates that have documentation in front of them please remove the delegate list and record the following:

Region 4 Northumberland, remove David Habberjam and replace with Heather Marshall.

Region 9 Norfolk. Remove Ruth Tolbart and remove Alan Jaye. There are no replacements.

Region 10 London, remove Gareth Cook and replace with Jon Lambe. Again, London. Remove Andy Warren and replace with Corneil Power.

Region 12. Buckinghamshire, remove Kieron Thomas and replace with Michael Jinks.

Still region 12. Oxfordshire, remove Heather Rowan-Robinson and replace with Matt Drinkwater. And also Oxfordshire remove Lee Newport and replace with Dave Hunt.

And finally, LGBT+, remove Gemma Betts and replace with Maria Buck.

With regard to credentials, each delegate has now received the credentials in the programme of business in accordance with standing order number 11. Regarding a change of delegate, the standing orders committee ask

that these are kept to a minimum. However, these will only be facilitated when both parties in the exchange come to standing orders to explain the reason for the change of delegate. And in all circumstances, both parties need to be from the same brigade or section.

To be clear, conference, a valid reason to change a delegate is not an observer just wanting to have a go at speaking at the rostrum. Only delegates and one regional national sectional official are allowed on the conference floor, and credentials must be worn and displayed at all times.

Delegates with business for standing orders committee should inform the steward of the nature of their business and you will either be called by standing orders or advised when to come back if they are in session. Please note, conference, that once a delegate change has taken place, the new delegate must, as a minimum, remain as part of the delegation for the entire morning or afternoon session, as there will be no delegate changes accepted by standing orders during comfort breaks.

The standing orders committee would like to stress the importance of delegates stating their name and brigade or section when addressing conference at the rostrum, as this will assist both the president and the verbatim report. The standing orders committee would also like to remind conference that the whole of the Imperial Hotel is a no smoking/vaping building, and trust this will be adhered to. May I also now request that all delegates, officials, stewards, visitors, and observers double check that they have switched off mobile phones, tablets, and any other portable devices whilst in conference. That applies to me too.

In line with standing order 16, conference will be in session from 9.30am to 5.15pm every day. Standing order 16 also clearly states assembly, adjournment, comfort break times. However, as the president mentioned, to facilitate the smooth running of conference business, he may at times ask you to agree a temporary suspension of standing order 16 to either extend or reduce conference session times.

Regarding the provision of meals and breaks, tea and coffee for all is to be served in the hotel reception lobby during comfort breaks. Breakfast for those staying in the Imperial will be from 7am to 9am in the Palm Court, which is situated directly opposite this room in the corridor behind you. Breakfast for those in the Grand will have been explained in your hotel welcome packs.

Lunch for all is at 12.45pm. Evening meal for all is 6pm until 9pm. All lunches and evening meals are served here in the Imperial regardless of where you're staying, and are served in the Washington Suite, which is located through the doors behind you, past reception, follow the corridor and to the left clearly marked Washington Suite. On Friday, lunch would normally be provided in the form of packed launch. However, this year it will be served in the Washington Suite.

The list of scrutineers and tellers has been compiled and rather than use another 200 pages of paper with just four names on it: they are Kerry McCrone, who is also chief scrutineer, Dan Bartley, Matt Senior, and Lewis Clark.

The list for the final appeals committee has been printed, one for each delegation, and both of these are now before conference for endorsement by agreeing the standard orders report.

Stall facilities. The standing orders committee have agreed stall facilities for the following organisations at conference: Bookmarks, Care for Calais, Institute for Employment Rights, Stand Up To Racism, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Justice for Columbia, Heat Strike and Hope not Hate. All of the stalls will be situated in the Derby room, which is just off the main hotel foyer. And I would ask you please to make an effort to visit all of the stalls to show your support. The FBU shop is not present at conference this year as attendance was cancelled at short notice due to unforeseen circumstances.

FBU media and research department are in attendance and whilst conference is in session they are at the back of the room. When conference is not in session they are located through the doors behind you, turn left, carry along the corridor through reception area and through the last door on the right, which is clearly marked, if you wish to see them for any business you have.

Fringe meetings have been agreed for today for the following: 1pm Equality Priorities, and please conference note the Equalities Report is on the desk in front of you. And at 6pm this evening, Power Mapping: An Essential Organising Tool. All fringe meetings will be held in Imperial room 3, which is downstairs and can be located through the doors behind you, turn left and take the first left.

A number of meeting rooms have been set aside for delegations that wish to use them as breakout rooms, and these are Imperial rooms 1 and 2, again they are downstairs, and the Boston and Concord Suites located just past reception.

So conference, for information, a number of resolutions have been remitted, some with the right to speak and some not, prior to the opening of conference. For information, conference, a resolution that has been remitted with the right to speak means that the proposer will speak on the resolution, but there will be no debate.

Can you please turn to your programme of business? So page 2, proposed alteration to Rule B2(2)(iii) by Derbyshire has been withdrawn and therefore the amendment by Scotland also falls. On page 3, alteration to Rule F3(3) should actually read and amend as F2(3).

And then alteration to Rule G1(1)(viii) remove Greater Manchester and replace with Mid and West Wales.

Proposed alteration to Rule G1(vi) from Scotland should read as Rule G1(2)(vi).

And then page 4, resolution 84 has been remitted. Then move to page 5. Resolution 78 has been remitted, resolution 74 has been remitted and resolution 70 has been remitted with the right to speak.

And then if you could move to page 6, resolution 27 has been withdrawn to second resolution 26. And resolution 30 has been withdrawn. And then page 7 resolution 2 has been remitted with the right to speak and resolution 13 has been withdrawn.

Moving on to page 8, resolution 17 has been withdrawn, resolution 39 has been withdrawn. On resolution 20, the amendment from Scotland has been withdrawn. The resolution is still on the programme of business. Resolution 21 has been remitted and also again on resolution 22, the amendment from Scotland has been withdrawn.

Page 9, resolution 25 has been withdrawn and therefore the amendment from the NWC falls and resolution 69 has been withdrawn. If you could move to page 11, resolution 65, the amendment from Hereford and Worcester has been withdrawn and resolution 67 has been remitted with the right to speak.

On page 12, resolution 55 has been remitted with the right to speak. And then page 14, resolution 79 has been withdrawn. Page 15, resolution 40 has been withdrawn, resolution 41 has been remitted and resolution 33 has been remitted with the right to speak. On page 16, resolution 43 has been remitted, resolution 32 has been withdrawn, which means that the three amendments, again from NWC, fall and Resolution 90 has been remitted with the right to speak.

And finally, on page 17, resolution 97 has been remitted. Resolution 101 has been remitted with the right to speak, resolution 88 has been remitted with the right to speak, resolution 92 has been remitted and resolution 94 has been remitted with the right to speak.

Conference, there have also been some emergency resolutions that have been received and two emergency rule changes that have been considered by standing orders and are on your desks. Can I ask any delegation that submitted an emergency resolution and it is not on the conference floor, can you please come to standing orders at a time that suits you to discuss your resolution?

Speaker's times. Executive council policy statement, Fund our Fire and Rescue Service, general secretary 20 minutes. Opposing the Threat of the Far Right. General secretary, 20 minutes. A Safety First Fire Brigades Union, assistant general secretary, 20 minutes. And executive council policy statement, Unity and Strength in the

Workplace, general secretary, 20 minutes. As per standing order, 22 the mover of a resolution shall be allowed seven minutes to speak, the seconder five minutes, and any or each subsequent speaker, three minutes. No person shall speak more than once on a question except the mover of the original resolution who alone shall have the right to reply.

Conference, standing order 20 states: *“After the opening of conference, the Executive Council shall present their report for the past year, which shall be laid on the table for discussion. The items of the report shall be discussed, seriatim and not as a whole. Delegates may move or reference back of the whole or any part thereof, each speaker limited to five minutes.”*

Conference, this standing order relates to delegates having five minutes to get on to the rostrum and speak on any paragraph in the annual report. And it is in large part because there were so many speakers, the reason that last year conference finished at 10 past 5 on the Friday, Furthermore, the number of speakers on paragraphs last year was also the reason that as chair of standing orders, I had to ask conference to agree to reduce speaker times for moving and seconding resolutions, and even though it was agreed there was considerable anger in the room. Conference, I have personal experience of having to take a hatchet to cut a carefully prepared speech to move a resolution that has been timed just right because speaker times have been reduced, and it is not a pleasant experience. To that end, conference, I wish to give you an assurance that as the chair of your standing orders committee, I will not at any time during this conference ask you to agree to reduce speaker times contained within standard order 22 even if it means we are here until 10 o'clock on Friday night.

However, to help ensure we are not here until 10 o'clock on Friday night, I would ask conference by agreeing the standing orders report to agree restricting the speaker's time in standing order 20 to a maximum of three minutes to speak on a para, which is also the subject of an amendment to standing orders submitted by region 1.

However, even if that is agreed this morning, it would not be effective until our next conference. Furthermore, the standing orders committee would like to remind you that any delegate speaking on a para from the annual report, the content of what they are saying should be relevant to the content of the paragraph they have chosen to speak on. It should not, for clarity, be seen as an opportunity to get up and read an emergency resolution that has been ruled out by the standing orders committee. You know who you are.

With regards to voting on a challenge to the chair of conference. I would draw your attention to standing order 15. The number of delegates to conference this year is 125. Therefore, the number of delegates voting to carry a challenge is 83. Please note that NRC delegates, ONC, CSNC, NWC, B&EMM and LGBT+ delegates are all entitled to vote on procedural motions and challenges only.

Regional officials on the conference floor who are not delegates have been issued with different credentials and they are not permitted to vote at all. So, conference, in 2023 I made it clear in the opening standing orders report that the standing orders committee were uncomfortable with the direction of travel in relation to the interventions that the committee were having to make in order for resolutions to be deemed competent.

It was becoming normal practice that in addition to identifying to committees the reason that the resolution had been ruled out, the standing orders committee, when sending them back under the 24 hour rule, would also supply the suggested wording that would fix them. I also stated in 2023 that, going forward, when standing orders have their first meeting of the year, to look at all of the resolutions submitted for any that were ruled out: we would just tell you why it had been ruled out and leave it up to you to fix it.

Conference, this year, the standing orders committee adopted the same approach as last year regarding returning resolutions under the 24 hour rule, and we received in total 108 resolutions, three of which were immediately ruled out completely as they could not be corrected under the parameters of standing order 4. In 2023 from 93 resolutions submitted that year, 78 were returned under the 24 hour rule to be corrected, and all 78 were returned fixed due to the alternate wording provided by standing orders. In 2024 last year from 87 resolutions submitted 30 were returned to be corrected under the 24 hour rule without any wording provided by standing orders, and 11 came back fixed.

This year, conference, of the 105 resolutions considered by standing orders, just 15 were sent back under the 24 hour rule and 12 came back fixed. So, conference, that means that 97% of all of this year's submitted resolutions are included in your final agenda with no assistance from standing orders, which is quite frankly an unbelievable turnaround in the space of two years, and one which you and your brigade committees should be enormously proud of. *Applause.*

So you'll be glad to hear, finally, conference, there is to be another election this year to the standing orders committee. Brother Gareth Beeton is up for re-election and is willing to stand. Nomination forms will be distributed this afternoon. And can you please place your nominations in the ballot box that will be at the rear of the hall during tomorrow morning's comfort break.

President, if that report is agreed, that concludes the standing orders report. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Phil. Any speakers? No. Is that report agreed. *Agreed.* Thank you. We now move on to section N of the annual report, the obituary section. In a moment, I'll ask you to stand for a minute's silence in memory of those members who have died over the last 12 months, and of course, Jenny and Martin. I'll now call the piper in to play the lament while we do the roll call.

Conference, if I can now ask you all to stand, if you are able for a minute's silence.

Conference stood in memory of those who had died.

Thank you, conference. Thank you conference, and thank you Dell the piper.

THE VICE-PRESIDENT:

Conference, come to order. I now call our president Ian Murray to give his presidential address.

THE PRESIDENT:

Might do if I can find it! All right, going to technology. Ah, I've got it. So conference, after the statement that I have just opened with, it's going to be a tough week, but together we will get through it and do what we do best, representing our members' best interests when determining the union's policies and priorities for the coming year. However, before looking forward, I'm going to look back at the last year, 2024-25.

It's been a year of change for the FBU. We have a new general secretary at the helm leading the union into what undoubtedly will be fairer battles, defending our members' terms and conditions, and of course, fighting to bring our members' pay to the level that we all believe it should be at. I'm sure you all join me in wishing Steve every success as he embarks on that journey, in which I have every confidence that he will smash. *Applause*

Conference, at this juncture, I believe it is only right to put on record the thanks of conference and the union to the former general secretary Matt Wrack, who led the union for 20 years, under which we had many significant victories that not only FBU members benefited from, but the wider trade union movement. Our pensions victory has allowed thousands of members, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of working people across the UK, to be able to retire at a time they signed up to with their pension schemes.

And I'll give you an example of this. For those who don't know, I had a hip replacement a couple of years ago and the anaesthetist who come to see me before the operation saw my occupation down as a firefighter and he asked me if I had anything to do with that brilliant union that represents him. I told him I was the union's national president, and he couldn't thank me enough because it was down to our pensions victory that he'd returned back to his original retirement date and we'd saved him working an additional five years and getting less at the end of it.

So the next stop, the pre-op room just before they knocked me out. The surgeon came through the door, and just before the anaesthetist was about to put me to sleep he actually said to the surgeon, this is him, this is the one that we have to do a good job on, he saved our pensions, so I don't mind that. So anyway, the surgeon come over and thanked us 'cause we'd saved him four years of extra work.

So thanks to the union, I got a good job done on my hip replacement. If we'd lost it, I'd have probably ended up with one leg six inches shorter than the other. But anyway, it's experiences like that that you realise the wider impact that the Fire Brigades Union and the battles that we take on have on people's lives and still we're fighting.

Thousands of our members are now seeing the injury to feelings claims coming through and being paid. And let's not forget that was the icing on the cake. The main victory was the pensions victory itself. But through the tenacity of the union and national officer Mark Rowe, we got affected members something extra.

Yes, it's been a long haul getting there and it's still going on, but we are coming to the end of the injury to feelings chapter. Conference, it's also great to see national officer Tam McFarlane back after missing last year's conference after falling seriously ill. It was that serious. I wasn't sure if I'd ever see Tam again, never mind back at work for the union. But he is, he is a battler, so I'm sure you'll join me in welcoming Tam back. *Applause*

Also within the year of change, it included finally getting rid of the Tories after 14 long years of their misery imposed on the country. And we've now got a Labour government, and let's face it, some of their decisions have left us wondering if we're any better off. However, all those bad policy decisions aside, because let's not forget, if the Tories had got back into power, they would've gone even further and harder on austerity and our future would have been a lot more bleak.

But what we do have now is opportunities. Opportunities afforded to us by having a Labour government and opportunities that must be grasped. For us as a union we are now, at least in the room, we meet with ministers regularly, we have a seat on the newly formed Ministerial Advisory Group for the fire sector.

Okay, it's not got the statutory footing we had wanted, but we'll continue to campaign for that. But what it does mean is that we have a seat at the table with all of the other key stakeholders and decision makers on the fire service matters. So we can have our say and get our points fed into the debates directly.

It gives the union the opportunity to influence and shape the fire service of the future as opposed to reacting to decisions that have been made without our involvement. We can now access the fire minister directly, something that for 14 years has been virtually unachievable. Yes, we could arrange meetings with Tory ministers and we might be given a 30-minute slot some weeks or months in the future.

However, the current fire minister, Alex Norris, who will be addressing conference this week, is just a phone call away. It's a long, long time, conference, since we've had an actual Westminster government fire minister addressing our conference. We've also got a seat on the Labour Party's NEC that I take up on behalf of the union where we can raise our fire service issues direct with the prime minister Keir Starmer face to face, none of which was open to us when the Tories were in government.

Nor would we have had these levels of access if we weren't affiliated to the Labour Party. Our devolved members, they've had their access to their respective governments and ministers, and they've utilised their political influence brilliantly, and I mean brilliantly. Unfortunately for us in England over the last 14 years, we've not had that access to the Westminster government. Not until a Labour government come into power.

I was pleased to see there was no disaffiliation resolution put forward by committees in this year's final agenda, although I may have spoken too soon, because I think we'd be letting our members down if we didn't grasp the opportunity to be part of the discussions on reshaping the fire and rescue service under the new government. We'd be letting our members down if we walked away from that opportunity, we'd be letting our members down because we would never know if we could have made a difference for a better fire and rescue service. Yes, we don't agree with all of Labour's policies or decisions they make, but some of them we do. The Employment Rights Bill coming into law, the biggest set of improvements to workers' rights we've seen in a generation, reversing years of attacks by the Tories. So personally, and as someone who vowed back in 2004, I would never, ever vote Labour again. Here I am now a Labour Party member urging you as delegates to at least give them a chance and give them the opportunity to work with us to shape the fire and rescue service.

We have an EC policy statement on tackling the far right to be taken later this week. We know some of our members will have voted Reform in the last elections, but it's vitally important we send the message to our members: look deeper, look at their policies, if you can find them, look at what their leadership thinks of workers' rights, look at what their leadership think of the NHS and how that should be run or funded.

We need to stand up to this threat and win the arguments of why we don't see Reform or other far-right organisations as the answer to their growing disillusionment with the two main political parties in general.

Looking at some of the resolutions, we can see we have got plenty of work to do across the UK. Mental health and cancers as expected, quite rightly, are here this week. But I just want to highlight one point that came to my mind when I saw them. Conference, you are the parliament of our union and the decisions you make set the policies and our priorities. But if there's one thing I would urge you to do this week, it's when you consider voting, listen to the debate and listen to the reasons the EC may seek you remit resolutions before you vote.

And I'll give you an example of this. Some of them are totally uncoded, and from past experiences and lessons learned when a decision was taken quite a few years ago, where a previous decision of conference made the AIF become untenable. As such, we had to bring the decision back to conference to reverse it. So listen carefully to all the arguments within the debate.

I would also ask conference if you think your contribution, whether moving the motion or just speaking on one, may trigger some emotional stresses on delegates, please try to give us a trigger warning beforehand. And I also want to echo the chair of standing orders report in which he praises the standard of resolutions that are now coming to conference. Two or three years ago out of the 97 or so resolutions, I think it was 75 that got returned by the standing orders committee. This year out of 102 resolutions that made it onto the final agenda, only 15 needed returning for correction. So a massive well done to all of you on that point on upping your game.

However, conference we do have a whole raft of business to get through this week and I'm putting you on notice. We will be strict on timings and we will be strict on speaking on paragraphs. If you want to speak on a paragraph, it would help us if you let the standing orders committee know in advance because they can put it into my timetable and I will then look out for you before just swiftly moving on. But I will say this, make sure your contribution is relevant to the paragraph you've risen to speak on, because if it isn't, I will stop you mid speech. We had some people really take the mickey last year and that won't be happening this year.

So going forward, at last year's conference, there were some occasions where I and others felt the tension and differing views in the room had the potential to erupt and completely overshadow and undermine the purpose of what we're actually here for. Thankfully, it never got to that stage, but what I will say to you all is leave your personal differences outside the doors of this conference hall. Come in here, truly represent your members' views. We can disagree in a comradely manner. We can disagree with speakers, but we do it with respect. We can be passionate about issues without being disrespectful.

Conference, we're all on the same side in here, or we're supposed to be so above all, let's be nice to each other and no matter what result the debates end up with, respect it, respect our democracy. Let's leave here with a united voice to tackle the battles ahead we know we will face. Okay, conference, that's enough from me. Have a good week. Thank you. *Applause*

Conference, we now move on to the substantive business of conference. You've all been given a programme of business and as I have previously stated to conference, we try to work resolutions and policy statements into the relevant paragraphs of the annual report. That isn't always possible because resolutions can fall in different sections of the annual report, and sometimes they stand in opposition to each other, and as such, they have to be taken in the same debate.

We've also listened to conference after last year's concerns were raised about the equality section business being traditionally taken on the last day where it sits in the annual report. So we'll be taking section H this afternoon and looking to alternate sections so that the same ones don't get the Friday afternoon slot, where depending on timings, sometimes we may reduce speakers' times.

Times, by the way, is the intention to do that this year. So please be disciplined. If someone else has said what you are going to say in a debate, then don't get up just for the sake of it unless you've got something important to add. Okay, let's crack on. I now call Section M financial accounts para M1, para M2.

I now call the national treasurer to move the financial statement. Brother Jim Quinn. Thank you, Jim.

NATIONAL TREASURER (Jim Quinn):

Thanks, president, conference, the interesting stuff first, as usual. A lot of detailed work has been carried out on the FBU accounts over the past year. This has been done by our head office finance team and the head of finance sitting beside me here, Ana Carvalho. I want to thank her and her colleague, Sabeel Khalid, for all the work they've done, and of course, the inimitable Tam McFarlane as well, who's the national officer with responsibility for finance. I can't thank them enough for their assistance in the preparation of this year's accounts, for presentation to our auditors who are present here today. I welcome Tom Brain, who's at the back there from HaysMac, who are our auditors. As usual, the process wasn't without its usual challenges. Additionally, our finance team, as you may know, have only been in place for a small number of months, and have performed magnificently to get these accounts in front of you today.

I'd also like to thank the regional treasurers for the work they have done over the past year and for their patience with the changes that have taken place. Conference will be well aware that over the last number of years we've reformatted the way we present the accounts to conference and by extension to the members.

So we have tried to maintain that type of formatting. We've maintained the formatting for a number of reasons, but mainly because traditional spreadsheets can be difficult for most to fully comprehend, even for those who spend far too much time looking at them. It's not just how much we're saving or spending, it's about what we're spending it on, what proportion of income it is, and are we spending more or less on particular budget headings than in previous years?

That's the real story, and that's why when you're operating in an extremely tight financial environment, such as we are, you need to focus attention. It's not solely presentational mind you. We're trying to enable a greater degree of understanding, and through that, ensure a greater degree of transparency and accountability with your money.

Of course, there would be no point in making these changes, presentation or otherwise, unless there was a benefit for doing so for us. The main benefit is that the more transparent and accountable we are, the better our forecasting for the future will be. And the reality is the tougher the financial environment you're operating in, the better your preparation needs to be.

I'll now move on to the accounts themselves present, and give a quick review of the finances in 2024 as it's already laid out in some detailing annual report in front of you. So some figures: 2024 our annual income was £12.75 million compared to £11.93 in 2023. Our total expenditure in 2024 was £12.79 compared to £13.21 in 2023.

This gives a total surplus of £1.09 compared to £27K in 2023. It should be noted - it's very important - this includes surpluses and investments revaluation and before actuarial pension adjustments. The surplus after actuarial pension adjustments was £2.67. For 2023 that was £2.01 and our general fund surplus has increased to £11.43 and it was point £8.48 in 2023.

Positive pension actuarial adjustments of £1.59 million, which in 2023 is £1.99 million has further contributed to the surplus for the year. However, it should be noted, as pointed out previously, but these actuarial adjustments are well outside of our control. They are due to external factors, which means they can vary enormously from year to year.

The pie chart in the report shows a breakdown of our 2024 expenditure that clearly shows that we spent money in three main areas, staffing, running costs protecting our members' interests and member benefits. Overall, our expenditure decreased by £414,000 primarily due to reduction in legal fees and office expenses.

In concluding, president, our budget for 2025 was followed in a similar vein of a prudent approach, the same as last year, taking into account other issues such as the move of head office to central London. As some of you may be

aware, we're also reviewing our use of credit and debit cards. Not a popular thing, but something that needs to be done, and we'll be introducing a comprehensive set of guidance documents on this and other expenses protocols in the very near future.

I know people have had difficulty in the past. We haven't had guidance for many a year, and it's as much our fault as anybody else's when the forms don't come back correctly, so we need to do something about that. To assist in better planning and access to travel and accommodation needs for officials undertaking FBU business, we are in the final stages of introducing a centralised booking system.

This will make it easier to book and make arrangements and will enable us to better analyse the need and usage of cards also. This means that members will be able to use either a website or a telephone call, to the company who can book your rooms, your flights, your trains, whatever way it needs to get somewhere, can be done, immediately can be done out of hours. So all sorts of benefits. Plus, we'll be able to monitor and understand where our spend is and what we're doing with it. We have, and we'll continue to provide members with the same first class service and benefits. This doesn't mean that we can rest on our laurels and not continue to explore all the ways of reducing unnecessary expenditure.

In fact, not only is it likely that more work will have to be done as in previous years, but we may have to take some very tough and difficult decisions this year coming. On that happy note, president, I move the accounts.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Jim. Any speakers? Is that financial statement agreed. *Agreed*. Thank you. Conference. We now come to the proposed alterations of the Fire Brigades Union's Rule Book. Conference, for clarity, there is no right of reply on these procedural issues, rule changes, or proposed changes to the standing orders. The right of reply is just applicable to resolutions. Just for clarity, conference, we will not be taking the emergency resolution that has been handed out this morning.

So I now call alteration B2(1)(ii) moved by Derbyshire, the EC are opposing. Derbyshire.

CHRIS TAPP (Derbyshire):

Morning, president, conference, I am moving rule change B2(1)(ii). The rule change arises out of debates that we've already had over a number of years around the inclusive language that we use, avoiding misgendering people which can be harmful. That was made very clear to us last year.

The rule change has been submitted following debates for a couple of years and changes that were made at last year's conference. And I just want to draw conference's attention to the comments of the then general secretary who said: *"I've been approached by activists within the LGBT+ section about whether there were better ways of doing that. And I acknowledge that the debate is not concluded. So we are not saying this is the end of the matter and we keep the matter open for discussion."*

We believe that this amendment to the rules - and just to point out, conference, that if you were to agree this, then there would be consequential changes throughout the Rule Book using the same or similar terminology. Where the pronouns can be removed and the use of more inclusive language can be adopted as required.

Conference, no one wants to misgender anybody, offend or upset anyone. So let's avoid doing that and just use a language that is inclusive for everyone that we can use and be proud to be referred to as an FBU member or an individual within a united group of people known throughout the world as the Fire Brigades Union.

I want to thank Maria from the LGBT+ section for her support and advice in putting the rule change together. And I have also received assurances from the assistant general secretary. Thank you for the conversation today that this work will be looked at in conjunction with the equality sections to ensure that I hope to give the opportunity to get the best outcome for everybody. So on that basis, uh, I will withdraw the rule change proposal. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you for that, Chris. I now call alteration to Rule B2(1)(viii) moved by the executive council, AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Conference, welcome again to Blackpool. Our last year, I've heard. Conference, this is a rule change that was debated at the executive council in 2021. However, for once the executive council made an error in not bringing it to conference in a rule change previously. Somebody, a delegate last year, identified that we'd missed making this rule change. So we're bringing it here again today. In effect, this is about ensuring that there is, a period when somebody joins the fire service, joins the Fire Brigades Union, that they're not paying subscriptions during their trainee firefighter period. It's already been discussed at conference. This is just moving formally the rule change.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. Does that have a seconder? Have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. Now open for debate. Anybody? No. I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule B2(1)(viii) to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call alteration to Rule B2(2)(i) moved by the executive council. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Again, thank you president. This rule is really seeking to provide a measure, a point where we would normally move to ROOT membership. The measure is that we will consider whether that member is currently under investigation, at either ADAE, or IUD. So it's just ensuring that where there are ongoing investigations, that that's not an immediate transition into ROOT membership.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you. Does that have a seconder? Secunder. *Formally* Thank you. Open for debate. Anybody? No. I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book B2(2)(i) to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call alteration to Rule C3(2) moved by the executive council, AGS. C3(2).

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you again, president. This is lifting the numbers from seven to eight in terms of the quoracy on the executive council. This follows the decision of conference to increase the number of regions in the union from 12 to 13. So, a follow up rule change in relation to that.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Ben. Does that have a seconder. *Formally*

Open for debate. Anybody. I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule C3(2) to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call alteration to Rule C3(5) moved by London. The EC are opposing. London.

JON LAMBE (London):

Conference, president, general secretary, this alteration to Rule C3(5) is about regions having a say. All this rule does is ensure that your region at all times has a say at the executive council. The management of the union shall be vested in the executive council. When your EC member is unavailable, your region has no say.

Your region will not get a say and your region will miss out. All this rule does is allow you as a committee to send one of your regional officials as a substitute. And I will say this, conference, if you're not going to vote for this, do you not trust your regional officials to put your region's position across when your EC member's not available?

And I'd ask the executive council why you're opposing it. I mean, what's so scary about having a regional official attend with full voting rights if the EC member is unavailable? I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Jon. Does that have a seconder? Seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's open for debate. Anybody?

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, whilst I understand the intent of this rule change, I think we need to look at the wording of it. "Where our EC member is not available" through to "reasonable excuses", somebody can go in their place. This rule change allows the EC member simply to not turn up and send someone in their place, and I don't think that should be acceptable. So that is why I am asking you not to support this rule change. Sorry, London. Thank you. *Applause*.

THE PRESIDENT:

Anybody else? Matt.

MATT NICHOLLS (South Yorkshire):

Conference. I wasn't intending to speak on this, but having just heard that – as a region, it's for us to hold our EC member to account. So if that was to happen in region 4, we would hold that person to account. Have your voices heard. Support the motion. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Anybody else? AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you. Yes. As you set out, president, the executive council is opposing the motion and I think Lee actually touches on some of the points that we've got to raise in relation to this. The Rule Book currently does allow, as Lee set out, that substitutes can be put in place where there is, say, prolonged sickness, reasonable absence.

And the executive council has recently, in London and in other regions, ensured that substitutes are permitted into executive council members' meetings with full voting rights. So the rule already exists, conference. But as Lee says, we have concerns about how regularly this may be used, how the continuity of understanding in EC debates moving from meeting to meeting would be lost across the officials.

We understand there are some issues in some places in relation to this and we've committed to understanding all issues that different regions have and sections have in the Rule Book review that is currently being undertaken. But conference, there are four business meetings of the executive council a year.

It is an expectation of your executive council members to book leave around those meetings and we expect EC members to be at them. Otherwise, where there is prolonged absence through sickness and other reasons, a substitute will be applied as in rule already. The EC oppose.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book Rule C3(5) to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That falls*.

I now call alteration to Rule C(6)(i) moved by South Yorkshire. The EC oppose.

STU SMITH (South Yorkshire):

Conference, president, moving Rule C6(3)(i). Conference, today I propose a simple but significant change, one that will strengthen our union at the grassroots level, improve our ability to represent members effectively and bring consistency to the way we elect our officials.

Right now our general secretary, our AGS, national officers, all serve a five-year term; our executive council members, regional officials, four-year terms. Yet our local brigade officials, those on the front line of member representation serve just two years. So I ask you, does this make sense? Should the people who deal with management every day, fight for members at local level and handle the issues that affect members most be given the least amount of time to do their job effectively?

That's why I'm proposing that we bring your local officials in line with EC members and regional officials by extending their term to four years. Conference, we all know the reality of being a union official. It takes time to settle into the role, build relationships with management, gain the confidence of your members, and develop the skills to be an effective rep.

By the time a newly elected local official has learned the job they're already halfway through their term, and then just as they start making real progress, they're either stepping down or forced into another election. This system is inefficient. It disrupts our ability to fight for members, and it weakens local representation.

How can we expect to win long-term battles when we keep changing our frontline reps every two years? Extending the term to four years would bring real benefits, stronger representation, local officials would have the time to properly learn the role, build experience and fight for members more effectively.

It would bring consistency. It would bring local officials in line with regional and EC officials, ensuring the union works cohesively at all levels. There would be less disruption. Fewer elections means fewer interruptions and more time to focus on representing members, better relationships with management, negotiations over terms, conditions, health and safety, staffing. Some of this can take years. A longer term means officials can see those through and more members will stand for office. Right now, the short two-year term puts people off standing. A four-year term would encourage more stability and participation.

Now, I know some may worry that a longer term means less accountability, but let's be clear. Accountability is not defined by how often we hold elections. It's defined by how well we engage our members. If your local official isn't doing their job, members will still have ways to challenge that. I'll refer to Rule C9, motion of no confidence.

If an official steps down midterm, elections can still be held when necessary. The fact is this works. This is why our EC members and regional officials already have four-year terms. This is about giving our local officials the same stability, the same opportunity, and the ability to deliver for our members. Conference, the strength of our union lies in our ability to fight for our members - on the picket lines, in negotiations, and in every fire station and workplace across the country. Our local officials are on the front line of that fight, but we are holding them back with the two-year term that limits their ability to deliver real and lasting change.

This rule change is about consistency, stability, and fairness. So I ask you all, let's give our local officials the time and the opportunity they need to do their job properly. Let's bring them in line with regional officials, and EC members. Let's pass this rule and make our union stronger. I urge you to support this conference. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Stu. Does that have a seconder? Have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. AGS to give the opposition. Oh, are you going to speak. Sorry. Yep.

REBEKAH UDEN (North Wales):

President, conference.

THE PRESIDENT:

Just turn your mic on, Rebekah, it's there.

REBEKAH UDEN (North Wales):

Can you hear me now? President, conference, until this rule change comes hand in hand with a full-time secondment we would firmly oppose. Thanks. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Rebekah. Anybody else in the debate? AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you. And look, thanks to South Yorkshire and Stuart for bringing it. It's created clearly a good debate and you did a good job of moving it. We are not sure as the executive council that this does at all strengthen our

union, our workplaces and our reps in workplaces and in brigades who are at the coalface of issues members face day in, day out.

And it's our view that our democracy at that level needs to be closer to the workplace more often. What our democracy does when we have elections is it engages our members, and it ensures and ensues good solid debate at the grassroots level of our union. And just a point of correction for the record, the president is elected for four years and not five.

There are different levels in terms of election periods throughout our union, but for this purpose, it's our view here that it's important that our workplaces have the opportunity to have debates in terms of their direct representation more often than less often. Thank you, conference.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Ben. I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule C6(3)(i) to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That falls.*

I now call alteration to Rule C7(6), moved by the executive council. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

This rule change really is just to set out that our branch officials' handbook is available online. It's a live document that's updated regularly and therefore, rather than providing a hard copy, we found it is easier, in terms of our green credentials as well, to make sure that resource is available online rather than provided as a hard copy.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. Now, open for debate? Anybody? No, I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule C7(6) to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call alteration to Rule C8(4) moved by the national women's committee, the EC are opposing.

KERRY McCRONE (NWC):

President, conference, moving rule change C8(4). Conference, the EC have published a policy statement on unity strength that refers to a well organised and a powerful union. That states, "*the future of the FBU will be built on capacity to mobilise, organise, and lead our members*", and declares "*we prioritise organising in our workplaces.*"

Organising and organisers are so integral to the FBU that there is now a dedicated organiser school and a national organiser. We all know how hard organisers work in the FBU. This rule change is simply changing to include an organiser in each of the sections. At brigade level, we have a secretary, a chair, and an organiser. So why not on a national level in our sections? Organising our sections - whether equality or trade - will enable us to reach members we might otherwise miss, it will enable us to future engage with activists who might otherwise have remained silent, and it will enable sections to aid EC policy declaration that a well organised union is a powerful union.

Let's make our sections powerful. Let's make our union powerful. Conference. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kerry. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's open for debate. Anybody?

PHILIPPA SMITH (West Midlands):

President, conference, speaking to second the proposed alteration to Rule C8(4) by the national women's committee. Every brigade, rightly so, has an organiser and whilst there are organisers dealing with less than 300 members and some with more than 1200, the role is not more or less worthy in any brigade.

Yet sections who can have thousands of members have their organising left up to the secretary, chair, and willing volunteers of the committees. Rather than leaving it to yet another postcode lottery, we can help our regional

officials by providing a strategy to assist them. Rather than putting more work on to their shoulders, we can increase the number of seats on our sectional committees and embed organising into the heart of them. To demonstrate the FBU is truly committed to equality, that it's truly committed to its organising strategy, that it's truly committed to change, organising should be given the resources it deserves and requires, and a section organiser rule change should pass. Conference, we second the rule change. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Philippa. Anybody else? AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, Kerry. Thanks, Philippa, for contributing in this debate. The executive council have concerns that at least at present, this is uncoded and have concerns in relation to the impact on the union's finances. But – and what the ask is – and we still do ask that the NWC consider withdrawing this rule change, because when our new general secretary took office, he set up a series of task and finish groups, very serious groups that are looking into, for example, assessing our regional structures, reviewing our sectional structures, and examining the executive council structure.

So you're going to hear, I think, this week, reference to those task and finish groups that include executive council members, head office officials, sectional officials, and regional officials, as well as our brilliant staffing team. They will contribute to have a look at this in the round, make sure that anything we do is fully coded and affordable to our trade union, but to also ensure that as a union we're ready to respond to our organising promises we've given here at conference previously, and we'll give here again this week. So we are asking again for the NWC to withdraw the motion. We can give you the assurance it will be part of the structural review of the sections and the executive council and the regions. And therefore the debates could be had in those rooms. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay. NWC. No pressure there. We talk to the wall. Pardon? If you're not withdrawing now, I'm going to put it to the vote. Put it to the vote? Are you withdrawing? Withdrawn. Do you want to just come up and then formally withdraw it. Thanks.

KERRY McCRONE (NWC):

President, conference, given the assurances from the AGS, the national women's committee will withdraw this rule change. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Kerry. I now call alteration to Rule D4(4) by Hereford and Worcester, the EC are supporting.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, moving the amendment to paragraph Rule D4(4). Conference, at the moment it is the responsibility of the general secretary to make sure that minutes are taken of EC meetings. All this amendment does is ask that those minutes are made readily available for us all to read. Conference, please support the motion. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Neil. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* That's open for debate. Anybody? AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

The executive council are very happy to support this motion, Neil, because we consider it already policy. Minutes are available to all members upon request. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks. I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule D4(4) to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call alteration to Rule D5 moved by Durham and Darlington, EC are supporting.

ANDY MURRAY (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, this is quite simple. In 2022, conference took the decision that we'd have four national officers. This just ratifies it in the rules. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. Now open for debate. Anybody? No. I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule D5 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call alteration to Rule E3(2)(iii), moved by Merseyside. The EC are opposing.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, I'm really interested to know why the EC are opposing this one. As has just been mentioned, we agreed at a past conference that we would have four national officers. Now maths isn't my strong point, but I can only count three up there at present.

And the whole point of this is when one national officer is no longer available, we should make it our absolute priority to get one in place as soon as possible. Six months is too long. We're not asking for people to be thrown out of their jobs. When the position becomes vacant, we should move as quickly as possible to make sure that Tam and Mark and Riccardo have somebody there with them or whoever replaces them, has someone there with them. The national officer's position takes a lot of work. I can see the toll it takes on them. We need to make sure there's someone in position as quickly as possible to take that strain off them. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lee. Does that have a seconder. *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, Lee. I think your maths are a little bit out. I can only spot, well, there's two now up here. Get your point now, comrade. Look, the executive council consider this rather unworkable in practice and that is because our Rule Book sets out that we have to agree a schedule of elections and some elections cannot run concurrently with others.

For example, you cannot run a general secretary election at the same time as a national officer's election. One has to start at the conclusion of the other. That's why we believe the six months is something we can attain to already, but, however, sometimes even that is delayed, Lee. When there are issues like suspensions where people would've stood in elections and have indicated they would have stood in those elections, those elections have to be delayed within the rule of the union.

So we are asking that you withdraw it, Merseyside, but if not, we're asking conference to oppose it.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay. Thanks, Ben. Lee, you want to think about it? No? Okay. I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule E3(2)(iii) to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That falls.*

I now call alteration to Rule F2(3) moved by Greater Manchester. The EC are opposing. Conference, Dave's going to move both alterations together, but the votes will be taken separately.

DAVE PIKE (Greater Manchester):

Thank you, president. President, conference. Conference, in 2023 Greater Manchester moved the resolution, instructing the executive council to establish a national standard on annual firefighter health monitoring for all fire and rescue services in England and the UK.

This resolution was passed and primarily based on the FBU DECON project, alongside UCLan and, in particular, Professor Anna Stec. Conference, it's important to repeat what we already know. The World Health Organisation has officially declared firefighting as a cancer-causing profession. That said, Manchester are content to withdraw these

rule changes, but would ask the executive council that data is provided before the next rule change conference on the impact having this change would have. This would enable conference to take a more informed decision in 2028 to fully understand the financial impact this would have on the AIF should this rule change return. We would also ask that the members are kept up to speed on the progress of presumptive legislation and request that it's made a priority issue with the employers' side of the NJC and through the Ministerial Advisory Group Conference, Manchester withdraws these rule changes. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks for that Dave. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks for withdrawing, Dave. We can give you those assurances. It was already in what we were going to say if we were going to have to move to oppose, and just for an update really, the Ministry Advisory Group, I think, at the next meeting is talking about holding a discussion on the work of cancer in firefighters. So we'll be making sure we raise it thoroughly in terms of our position at those meetings. But thank you very much, Manchester.

THE PRESIDENT:

Right, conference, seeing as I am such a generous chair, I'm going to knock you off early for tea break. So back in the room at quarter past 11. Thank you.

Break for tea

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, conference. After the VP excelled in bell ringing, he wanted to go with the gavel. So I now call the chair of standing orders committee Phil Millar to give a report.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Thank you, president. Conference, can you turn your programme of business, please? Go to page 7, resolution 9 has been withdrawn in support of 8. Page 10 resolution 66 has been remitted with the right to speak. Page 17, resolution 102 has been remitted.

And then, conference, on your delegate list, just a correction. Region 4, Northumberland. I think I called out Heather Marshall and it should have been Hannah Marshall and she did correct me in standing orders as well. So that one's on me. Thank you, president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Phil. Is that report agreed? *Agreed.*

Thank you. I now call alteration to Rule G1(1)(viii) moved by Mid and West Wales. The EC are opposing. Bear with us, conference, we are coming to the end of the rule changes.

DAN BARTLEY (Mid and West Wales):

President, conference, moving rule change, the union recognises that racism and fascism are fundamentally incompatible with our views and our values of equality, solidarity, and justice. We therefore reaffirm that any activity, whether direct campaigning or indirect promotion on behalf of racist or fascist groups, shall not be tolerated and should be subject to disciplinary action.

As a region, we've experienced the challenge around the current wording of this rule (sorry guys), during an internal union discipline investigation and support this rule change. The rule change is to ensure that all members will understand that any sharing or publicly promoting any material, in support of or on behalf of any racist or fascist political party or organisation, will not be tolerated. And simply not being a member of any such party or not directly campaigning for them does not make it acceptable. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Danny. Does that have a seconder? We've got a seconder.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, I'll be very quick. We absolutely support this rule change. Why would we not? I think everybody in here has the duty to each and every one of our members to tell them what they should be doing. Anybody who posts anything that makes one of our members feel less than what they should be, has to be challenged. Please support this rule change. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lee. That's open for debate. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

I'm given all the good jobs, president. Look, I think first of all thanks Wales for bringing this, and executive council do note the matter in Wales and how it's been handled in Wales. And frankly, you've been an example to everybody. You've shown that the Fire Brigades Union doesn't stand for racism and fascism, and you've done the right thing. You've made sure that those members are no longer part of our union. So I think we all applaud you for that. *Applause*

And whilst there is the sympathy and empathy and support in relation to those elements, our concern is that the rule as proposed is slightly too wide and overreaching, because some may define, and this is the issue with it, where the bar is in relation to it. Some may define the conservative party, a fascist and racist party and promoting their material could seem to be in breach of this rule. And we do know, comrades, and it's an issue we've got to address with our members, that we will have had members voting for Reform in the most recent elections. Some of those have shared support for Reform on social media, and I think there's no doubt in terms of the leader of Reform that he is both a fascist and a racist.

Conference, I think we are asking this still to be withdrawn. We will commit to looking at it and making sure the rule is slightly more robust in response to the issues faced by the Welsh region. But again, we applaud their work on this and ask conference just to oppose. We are opposing this motion: we ask conference to oppose it just on the basis that we will consider making amendments in the future.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you. Mid and West, any movement? No. I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule G1(1)(viii). All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That falls.*

Card vote's been called.

Conference, as you'll see, the stewards are distributing the voting cards now. As soon as they are all distributed, the chair of the standing orders committee will go through the process, but it should be done in a couple of minutes, hopefully. Now you can chat quietly amongst yourselves.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Conference, can the people that were elected as tellers and scrutineers, please come up to the front just prior to the vote here.

THE PRESIDENT:

Right conference, we're about to start the card vote, although we have just noticed that one of the scrutineers has just moved the resolution that we're voting on. Sounds well dodgy that one, doesn't it? Okay. Chair of standing orders, Phil.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Conference, can anyone who does not have a voting card for their delegation please make themselves known to the stewards by raising your hand? Excellent.

Conference, I'm now going to ask those delegations that are in favour for to come up and place their voting card in the appropriate box at the front of conference. Thank you.

Conference, can I now ask those that are against to come up and place their voting card in the appropriate box?

Thank you, conference. We'll return shortly with the outcome of the vote.

THE PRESIDENT:

Conference, thank you for that. While we're waiting for that result to come back, we will proceed with business. So we are now moving on to alteration to Rule G1(2)(ii)(a), moved by Hereford and Worcester. EC are opposing.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, moving the amendment to Rule G1(2)(ii)(a). Conference, simply, this is about putting a timescale on union internal disciplinary. If anyone's been subject of an IUD, I sympathise with you. I was the subject of an IUD and it lasted about 12 months. I would hope that everyone in this room would agree that is an unreasonable timescale.

Now, ACAS don't put timescales on disciplinary, but they do talk about the process being fair and reasonable. I think those two words wouldn't apply in my case. And I would hope that for those who do go through internal union disciplinary, it would be resolved as soon as possible.

And all the amendment is asking for, is to put a reasonable timescale on internal union disciplinary. Please support the motion, conference. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Neil. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* That's now open for debate? AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you, president. And look, thanks Neil Hereford and Worcester for bringing this to conference. The executive council do consider this to be unworkable and therefore are opposing it because there are matters which can sit around an IUD investigation that could cause them to be prolonged beyond three months.

However, we do accept, and if your motion was calling for as soon as possible, the position may have been different, but it's not. It's calling for a fixed three-month period. For instance, if a member's sick during investigation, we will not continue the investigation till they're back. If there are complexities in the case, for instance, multiple victims or multiple complainants, that investigation may need to be longer than that.

But also what we have found, and it was reported in the sexual harassment report, actually Hereford and Worcester, is that often when complaints are made in and around matters of discrimination, there are often counter-complaints and those matters need to be resolved before bringing a report in those senses. So there's a lot of considerations that our investigators, often single people in individual regions, are trying to have to tackle. We ask that they're continued to be given the grace by which the time is not so restricted as this motion or this rule change is proposing.

So the executive council is asking Hereford and Worcester to withdraw. If they don't, we're asking conference to oppose it. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Ben. Hereford and Worcester, any movement? Can't see you, Neil.

No change. No. Okay, I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule G1(2)(ii)(a) to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That falls*. I now call alteration to Rule G1(2)(vi) by Scotland, EC are supporting. Scotland.

GUS SPROUL (Scotland):

President, conference, moving our amendment on Rule G1(2)(vi). This is just to include the other significant sanctions into rule including standing for election, debarment from standing for union or expulsion. So just to add that into the rule to firm that up a bit. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Gus. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's open for debate, anybody? No. I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book G1(2)(vi) to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call alteration to Rule G1(5)(i) moved by the executive council. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

President. This is seeking to tidy up our Rule Book after previous decisions here at conference. This is in relation to the rules on the process around internal union discipline and not on the time, therefore for the defendants to be able to prepare reasonable cases in response to complaints laid against them.

This is to ensure there's no undue delay in our processes. For example, where a regional committee have debarred or expelled or recommended the expulsion of a member, this would cut down the timing by which it would be heard by the executive council and by the Representation Appeals Committee.

So it's just to tidy up the rules and remove all unnecessary delays in our processes.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Ben. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. It's open for debate. Anybody? No. I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule G1(5)(i) to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call alteration to Rule G1(6)(i) moved by the executive council. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

President. I'm not going to repeat everything I said in the last, I should have asked for these to be taken together, but it's the same rule change, just the knock on.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay. Conference, does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. Now open for debate. I now put proposed alterations to Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule G1(6)(i) to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call alteration G2(2)(iv) moved by Scotland, the EC are opposing. Scotland.

COLIN EDGELY (Scotland):

President, conference, moving rule changes G2(2)(iv) and G3(iv). Conference understands and appreciates the right to a fair hearing and the assumption of being innocent until proven guilty. This is not up for debate in our proposed rule change. What is up for debate though, is how efficiently we go about our business as a union.

It is incumbent upon us to ensure that our union operates efficiently for our members, as well as protecting the outward image we present to those who would use examples of poor or delayed governance as a weapon against us. Conference should be aware that there are internal union discipline cases that are over a year old with no date set for them to be heard.

We wouldn't accept this from an employer, and we shouldn't accept it from within our own union. Conference understands the workload placed upon our EC members and the excellent job that they do, but more must be done to ensure discipline cases are dealt with much quicker and ensure that the operation of the union does not experience undue detriment because of lengthy delays.

Our rule change proposal mainly seeks to put an upper limit on the length of time it takes for a case to be heard of six months. This is far from being unreasonable in my eyes and would be beneficial to the accused, any accusers, and also present the image of an efficient organisation able to govern itself properly and in a timely manner.

Specifically though, the rule change seeks to remove the flaw, which prevents any election taking place in which any suspended official may wish to seek nominations for. The rule, as it stands, has the unintentional consequence of holding up potentially several posts from being filled, because one official has to wait over a year for a hearing. By amending the rule to have a limit of six months' hold on any election for which a suspended official may wish to seek nomination, we would be empowering our EC to prioritise those cases which are relevant to this scenario, and eliminate the anomaly, which makes our union look unorganised and overly bureaucratic. Conference I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you for that Colin. Conference, even though Colin moved both of those proposed alterations to the rules together, for process, I will be taking them separate for obviously getting a seconder. So the first one is Rule G2(2)(iv). Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate.

Nobody. Jon.

JON LAMBE (London):

Conference, President, general secretary, speaking in opposition. I've just listened to the speech. I do not agree. I think what this rule does, it doesn't empower the EC to get disciplines done quickly. If we need disciplines done quickly, let's get them done. What this will enable is elections to be run while people are suspended. So how it is written is someone is suspended, and if they haven't been dealt with in six months, we can run their election, at which point, even if it's the position they hold, they cannot attend a branch meeting, they cannot ask to stand, they cannot do anything. This isn't going to empower to deal with elections. It'll enable people to not be able to stand in elections. It would be a mistake for us to support this, speak in opposition to it. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Jon. Anybody else? AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, Colin. Thanks, Scotland, for bringing this and for Jon's comments there too, which I'm going to echo here slightly. And that is that, as we just discussed in relation to a previous proposal that you voted against in opposition to, that actually setting timescales like this are sometimes unworkable. For instance, we have a policy and we have a rule within our union that we don't run elections whilst there is a suspension. That could be a suspension that turns out not to be found, and therefore we think there's an issue with fairness in running elections for those that may not have been found to be guilty or being breach of rule. Therefore, we think it's fairer to those individuals that they're therefore allowed to stand in the elections for office they're standing in.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, thanks Ben. I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule G2(2)(iv) to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That falls.*

So now we're moving on to the alteration to the Rule G3(1)(v) that Scotland have already moved. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody? AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

As per my previous comments, conference.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Ben. I now put proposed alterations to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule G3(1)(v) to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That falls.*

Conference, that concludes the Rule Book amendments apart from the one card vote that we're waiting on. So we're now moving on to the proposed alterations to conference standing orders. Oh, we have movement. Perfect timing.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Conference, we have a result. Just for your information, the only delegation that did not vote is Norfolk. Norfolk informed us this morning, as I read out in standing orders, both their delegates went home, so there was no one from the Norfolk delegation to submit their voting card. So over to Kerry.

KERRY McCRONE (Chief Scrutineer):

The results of the card vote are those for: 16,085; against: 17,239. Therefore, this falls.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Kerry. That was a bit close. You make it a little bit. Right. We're now moving on to the proposed alterations to conference standing orders. I now call proposed alteration to Conference Standing Order 20. Moved by Scotland, the EC is supporting.

GUS SPROUL (Scotland):

President, conference, moving our amendment to standing order 20. As moved by the standing orders committee, it was just to reduce the speakers' times on paras to, to three minutes to enable conference to move along and to hopefully prevent us having to suspend those standing orders in order carry our business out. So I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Gus. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody? No. I now put the proposed alterations conference standing order 20 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against, please show. *That carries.*

I now call proposed alterations to conference standing order 22 moved by the B&EMM committee, the EC are supporting.

ROB LEWIS (B&EMM):

President, conference, moving proposed alterations to conference standing order 22. In order for us to generally diversify and change the narrative of discussions at a conference, we need the speakers to be of a diverse background with the ability to inject lived experience and further bolster conversations.

Yet, while we need to do the work to increase diversity of our delegations amongst regions, the end result is still a long way off, delaying our voices being heard. We propose that this, as an interim measure, we should allow the secretary and chair to speak in order to change the narrative.

The FBU has approximately 33,000 members with roughly 1600 of those being from Black and ethnic minority background. This represents just under 5% of the membership, thus limiting the pool of representation at trade union events such as conference. Any measure to increase diversity in voice and visibility should be looked upon favourably. This will assist our sections greatly as the key issues our people care most about will have more of a chance of being heard. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Rob. Does that have a seconder? Bit louder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody? No, I now put the proposed alteration to conference standing order number 22 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show.

I now call proposed alteration to conference standing order 24, move by West Midlands. Oh, sorry, I'm just testing you. *That carried.* Sorry, Rob.

SASHA HITCHINS (West Midlands):

President, conference, moving the proposed alteration to standing orders point 24. Last year's conference was difficult to be part of at times, as the president has already alluded to. Some may not have felt it, but those of us that did felt powerless to raise a point of order under the current provision.

To raise a point of order, you must first find an order that is being breached and then challenge it on that basis. Currently point 24 relies on the president alone being the only one to recognise and challenge inappropriate language and behaviour. This amendment allows any delegate to raise a concern directly to the president.

We are free to be passionate and expressive. That is why we are here, but we must remember to use language and demonstrate behaviour that is appropriate in order to represent our members professionally and competently. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Sasha. The EC are supporting. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody? No. I now put the proposed alteration to conference standing order number 24 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Conference, I'm now calling the two proposed alterations to conference order number 27 to be taken in the same debate. One moved by the B&EMM committee and one moved by Scotland. The two amendments stand in opposition to each other, so if the alteration to standing order 27 moved by the B&EMM committee carries, alteration to standing order 27 moved by Scotland will fall. I now call the proposed alteration to conference standing order 27 moved by B&EMM committee. The EC are supporting and they are opposing the Scotland. So B&EMM.

ROB LEWIS (B&EMM):

President, conference, this is the same as the standing order for 22. Therefore, our points and arguments will be the same. However, it falls within two areas of standing orders, hence the two proposed changes. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Rob. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. I now call proposed alteration to conference standing order 27 moved by Scotland. Gus.

GUS SPROUL (Scotland):

President, conference, in the light of what you've put forward we will withdraw our amendment. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Excellent. Thank you, Gus. Okay, I now put proposed alteration to conference standing order number 27 from the B&EMM committee to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Conference, we're tearing through it now, so we will be moving on to Section K, organising and membership para K1. Conference, I am now going to call brother Tam McFarlane to give you an update on the launch of the new organising strategy. Tam, over to you.

TAM McFARLANE (National Officer):

Thanks very much. Conference, President, and hello conference. It's great to be back. And actually just quickly in that note, if I can, president, I just want you to say a big thanks for all the cards, letters, visits, and indeed videos that you sent me while I was detached into Musgrove Park Hospital. It was certainly the power of the written word. Never underestimate the power of the written word. It kept me going. And actually, on that note, president, if I may, I'm going to put on record my thanks, heartfelt thanks actually, to all the staff at Musgrove Park Hospital who made sure I was here and just to record that the overwhelming majority of those staff members, even in Somerset, were not born in the UK. Medics from Portugal, nurses from Nigeria, doctors from India, Filipino healthcare assistants, Nepalese nurses that helped me, that looked after me, that nurtured me, that build our communities, that support our public services. I say on the back of that immigration, I say reject what Farage says, reject what Badenoch says and shame on Starmer. *Applause*

Immigration builds our communities, it builds our country, and it saved my life. So thank God for immigration. *Applause*

Now let's look what we've done this year. I just want to give you an update on the tons of work that's been going on in the organising for the Fire Brigades Union, and what a lot of work we've done. Just a few quick updates if I may, conference.

First of all, one of the major ones, we've got a national organiser, Matt 'the Crocodile' Partridge, at the back. Stand up, Matt. Let's see you there. He's a giant of a man. We call him the crocodile 'cause he went to Australia for a period of time. Australia was a right-wing wasteland when Matt went there. When he came back, it's now a left-wing utopia and he's doing the same for us. Doing great work, Matt. We've also been undertaking a whole host of other work based mostly on conference resolutions and the work we've been doing in the past, keeping it going.

So for instance, with ROOT membership we're changing now the way that ROOT membership is paid, it was previously £2 a month. We're now making that £24 pounds a year, saving ourselves an awful lot of money in direct debit contributions from the bank, subscriptions from the bank, and reinvesting that in membership services.

The branch officials' handbook, the much-vaunted branch officials' handbook. As Ben said, we're now putting it online. We have done a new draft of it. We put it out to regional secretaries. Big thank you for your help, regional secretaries. They come back with a whole host of amendments. We put them together and it's now actually with Matt developing the branch officials' handbook and that will go online as an organising resource.

The recruitment presentation. I tell you what, I can't praise this recruitment presentation enough. One of the initial blocks of Safer, Stronger Together, a high-definition video-based presentation that's also got off the shelf speaker notes that have just recently been updated and also an online joining portal that connects with it.

And I've got a say, conference, what a difference that has made, a huge ongoing success used by the organisers in the way that they've done. We've gone from previously, just a few years ago from a paper-based system, 70% of the forms that were sent out to the membership departments didn't contain the information necessary to become a member of the FBU.

So they were returned. Of those that were returned, 70% of those we never got back. So the worst-case scenario of one where we aren't getting members in the FBU. And even worse, some people thought they were members that weren't. So we've been making a huge difference. And if you don't believe me, I've just got some figures here for you, conference.

Let me go from the big ones. The last big campaign, we had rejoiners. We had 2,422 new wholetime joiners. We had 453 rejoin us from the wholetime. 2,875 wholetime joiners and the RDS 1,476, joiners 88 rejoiners, 1,564 total. All in all 4,631 new members in that period. This year alone in just a few months, 445 new wholetime, 331 new RDS, 54 wholetime rejoiners, 22 rejoiners from the RDS, total of 852, just in this period. So it is making a huge difference, building our density. And just to show you how good it is, let's do a little comparator with the other, dare I say, competitors in the fire and rescue service. They're not union; they're associations.

Always watch out for a group that calls themselves an association. They associate with each other. We unionise. Let's compare it with the FRSA. The FRSA have recorded numbers: 1,653 members they have, but between 2010 and 2023, their membership decreased by 46%. Compare it with the Fire Brigades Union. We've got 6,546 RDS members, four times more than the FRSA.

Four times more. I tell you what, we've now got initiative on them. We've got the tools. We will drive them out of our industry. Let's also compare that with another association. The Fire Officers Association. He's behind you! Total numbers recorded in 2023, 841. Since 2014, membership has decreased by 33%. Comrades, the Fire Brigades Union has 6,806 watch managers plus members, eight times more than four. I don't know how they've got a nerve turned up at the National Joint Council on the MMNB. We've got the initiative on them, let's drive them out of our industry, as I said.

But now moving on to the biggie, as the president said, launching the new national organising strategy. I have to say, this is a big deal for us. It's something we're going to put primarily online so we can keep it constantly updated. But because we're good eggs, we printed off a few, we put them in your packs for you to read through.

I just want to touch on the background to it. It came from a resolution at conference. We then built an initial draft. That went to the brigade organiser membership group that we had going. It was then further developed at a seminar that we had with organisers. And then we gave it to Matt to actually put together and he put it together. Nina's also had input on the equality side of that as well.

So as I said, it takes the form of an online document which sets out the sort of purpose, direction, and principles of that, of organising. And there's a whole host of appendices that attach to it. I just want to touch on the principles, because it's the principles that matter to us, surely. Principle number one: we believe the fire and rescue service workplace is the building block of the Fire Brigades Union.

It has to be, because the workplace, the fire stations, the control rooms where our members are based, that's where they suffer the injustices. The injustices from the bosses who discipline them, who put unsafe working practices into place, who take away their kit and don't give them adequate PPE. It's the workplace where our members suffer the injustice. So it's the workplace that has to be the building block for the Fire Brigades Union. Number two, we believe that every branch must be prepared and ready to deliver collective action. Comrades, there is no point having membership of the FBU in the workplace if we're not ready to stand together and start fighting back.

So we need to get ourselves organised. We need to be ballot-ready at all times. Our members need to be ballot-ready at all times, and we use that building block within each branch to do that. Number three, and surely this should go without saying, we believe that the interests of our employers are different and opposed to the interests of our members. Comrades, the bosses want more work for less pay. We want safer work and fair pay. It's totally the different agenda that we work to. I have to say, it's always consultation with them, isn't it? Never proper negotiation. They always want their own way. They talk about partnership then stick the knife in. Partnership working.

Yeah. And whose interest is it in? Whose interest has partnership working been for the last 10 years when they've been cutting our jobs, cutting our appliances, making unsafe working practices? What we get, we take. Surely the Fair Pay Fire Strike campaign showed us that. Never forget at the start of that campaign, they offered us 2%. It was only when we stood together, stood up for ourselves and said it's not enough and we're willing to fight back on that, that we started to make big successes.

Yeah. Partnership working. Good grief almighty. The chiefs always want it, don't they? But I don't know if you've ever been to a NFCC meeting, I've actually been to one. There were several shivers running around the room looking for a spine to go up. But that's the NFCC for you. Number four, we believe equality is a trade union issue and an FBU priority. Why is that? Because we have to reject division. Whatever divides us works for the bosses.

Our superpower is solidarity. Our superpower is unity. So we reject all division and that means we stand in equality for equality in all its forms. It's not enough, comrades, not to be a racist, not to be a misogynist, not to be a homophobe. You have to be anti-racist, anti-misogyny, anti-homophobia. And that means letting people know where you stand. *Applause*

Now that's uncomfortable at times, and we've all experienced it, whether it's in the pub, even at home, or especially around the mess table. But you have to let people know where you stand. You have to challenge what is getting said if it's not in line with these principles. What we don't condemn, we condone, and we are the Fire Brigades Union.

We are the leaders of equality in this industry, and we have to make sure that reaches down to every single branch. We're strong when we're democratic and inclusive. Members are strongest when they empower themselves. We can't just put ideas, put documents, then put demands on our members. We have to build our members in the workplace and make sure the power of the union comes from below.

Do you know why? I want to just tell you a little thing. I was in the ICU. This is a true story. A lot of things happened to me when I was in the ICU. I was in the ICU and across on the far wall was a television and on the television, all of a sudden, Amanda Mills brigade secretary of Avon, appeared on the television.

I was absolutely off my head on drugs. And I seen her there and behind them there was all these FBU members in tunics with FBU banners and I thought it was a strike. And the machines in the ICU were going crazy, they were beeping like mad. I was going absolutely crazy. The ICU team came in, they thought I was in trouble.

They came to do something for me, and I was pointing at the telly, shouting the F-B-U, F-B-U. They had to sedate me. But that, surely that, is the best thing any of us can see. Our members and our officials organising and fighting back against the bosses. Well done, Amanda. And here's another few good examples where Gloucestershire, Kate Yhnell, engaging the entire community, organised our members and took the fight against shift changes direct into the council chamber. Mid and West Wales, Tom was wow. Organising, fighting back against shift changes and attacks on the RDS and day crewing. The West Midlands brigade organiser Philippa Smith and treasurer Sasha Hitchins, establishing regional women's workshops to Fight for 52. Rebekah Uden, that's my personal favourite, the brigade sec from North Wales, travelled right across her brigade to every station, engaging members, and in the process, recruited six new station reps. Comrades, it's the face-to-face engagement that works. Put down your WhatsApp and get that done.

So I'm just going to finish on this. This is just a tool. This is just a resource. If we are going to build a strong fighting union at local level, if we are going to go build branches and shift power down to ordinary members, ordinary members, by the way, who the bosses always think they can walk over, then we need to get our act together.

We need to put down our laptops. We need to shut down that WhatsApp and we need to get out onto branches. We need to make sure that our members know that they're the ones with the power. They've got the power when they get together, when they unite, when they fight back, and our mission is to harness that.

Our mission is to make sure that 34,000 members of the Fire Brigades Union know that they're safer and stronger when they stand together. Support this. Thank you very much. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Welcome back, Tam. Things have certainly got a lot noisier. Bad jokes are back in head office and singing. But we missed him. Conference, I'm now going to call the EC policy statement, Unity and Strength in the Workplace. There is an amendment from Scotland. However, because of the way that the amendment was submitted, it's an accept all or a reject all, unfortunately, on that one. So the EC are opposing the amendment from Scotland. General secretary, I now call you to move the executive council policy statement, Unity and Strength in the Workplace, prioritising our future together with the amendment from Scotland. Steve.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you, president, and good afternoon conference and welcome back, Tam. He certainly has made a splash, and he is here with us and it's great to have him back, and echo the thoughts around the NHS and saving Tam's life. Welcome back, Tam. *Applause*

So look, Steve Wright, general secretary, first time speaking as a general secretary. *Applause, cheers*

Just before I start, and move this important EC policy statement, I want to place on record my thanks to the head office officials, to the executive council, to the reps and officials of our union, to the staff that have welcomed me from 14 January when I took office and have supported me every step of the way.

So thank you to each and every one of you. And a thank you to Ben for moving the important rule changes so that my first speech wasn't made on a rule change and that I can make it an important speech on unity and strength in our union. So thank you everyone for the welcome you've given me since 14 January.

In moving this policy statement, I want to first acknowledge the election process that has delivered me into the role of general secretary. Elections are the lifeblood of our democracy, and are therefore an extremely important part of defining us as a membership-based trade union. They make sure that the voices and the choices of our members are front and centre in everything that we do, and the centre of how we organise. They provide the mandate for all elected officials, for all of us to stand toe to toe with the bosses, and that we can fight on behalf of our members in

any arena - politically, industrially, or even legally. So elections are important. They are healthy, and they're part of who we are. However, we must recognise that, by their very nature, they are polarising.

After all, a choice needs to be made. And there are winners and there are losers. But, conference, what they cannot ever be used for is to create division. The democratic decisions of our members must always be paramount and respected. And it is in that spirit that I pay tribute to my predecessor, Matt Wrack, who served as general secretary of our union for such a long period of time and delivered so much for our union. So I'm sure that I speak on behalf of everyone and all of us within our union, when I thank him for his service and wish him well for the future. *Applause*

But, conference, now on to the policy statement itself. And I want to say that I am aware that there has been some criticism of its content, and some people have approached me to say that it's too concept-based. It doesn't provide an easy answer to the challenges that we face. Conference, of course it doesn't.

There are no easy answers to the challenges that we face. And beware of anyone who tries to kid you that there are. The cuts to our service, to our jobs, to our pay, to our pensions, to our terms and conditions, and yes, even to our safety, were decades in the making and driven at the highest level by deep political ideology. Government after government since 2010, ruthlessly pursued by Rishi Sunak and others in that period of time. It could not and cannot be overturned or defeated by a petition, a lobby or a document drafted and sent through head office. We mustn't kid ourselves that there is some way that we can magically turn back the clock and return the jobs, the pay, the conditions that have been stolen from us through austerity, by simply voting for Labour.

Look, we hope that they can deliver for us, but, unfortunately, we don't know if that's the case at the moment, a fact that has been made clear by some of the decisions they have taken of late. However, conference, those of us in this room, we know that it can be done. In fact, it must be done. We must deliver for our members.

But the only people that are going to achieve that are us in this room, our members on every fire station. And it'll be achieved by a united, a strong, engaged and organised Fire Brigades Union at every level of our organisation. So, conference, we can turn the tide not only by stopping the rot of austerity, but we need to reverse it.

And we need to begin once again to build our service, our jobs, into the world class service that it once was. But to achieve this, we need every member to recognise the power that they themselves have when we unite as a collective. So at the core of this policy statement, agreed by the 13 executive council members from across the UK, is an understanding that we must build our branches and put the Fire Brigades Union firmly back in every fire and rescue service workplace because, as Tam has said, the workplace is where our members suffer. They suffer the injustices daily in their working lives, and it must therefore be the overwhelming focus of our organising.

Yes, the bosses contain and possess formidable power. They control our jobs. They can recruit us. They have the authority to dismiss us. They dictate the fate of our fire stations. They take vital resources off the run, day in, day out, and they impose disciplinary actions on our members. They can transfer us. They can modify our roles, burden us with increased workloads.

Conference, their intention is absolutely clear. They want to destroy our morale and extract every ounce of energy from us. But look, comrades, we recognise that and we recognise that power is not absolute. It can be challenged and it can be overturned, and it can be overturned by the power of us in this room.

But look, it can only be achieved by putting power back into the branches, back at the grassroots of our union, back into the hands of our members at local level. So in other words, we the Fire Brigades Union, us collectively, we need to shift our focus from the current top down approach within our union, and instead shift our focus and also our resources overwhelmingly towards organising, empowering, and engaging with all members to start and increase our fight back against the bosses and against the petty humiliations that our members face.

It is Fire Brigades Union reps and officials that are standing up for members on a day-to-day basis. So we need that strong, organised branch structure in every corner of the UK fire and rescue service. After all, rank and file activism in the workplace isn't just our foundation; it is our very lifeblood.

And that's what we all need to take home from this conference this week. But it won't happen by itself. We must build it. We must encourage it, and we must support it. And that is your role as officials and reps of our union. It's why I welcome the organising strategy that Tam's just talked about, recently agreed by the executive council. Executive council members bringing their thoughts and ideas from Scotland, Cornwall, the West Midlands, all across the UK, of how we can better organise our members. And Tam's given some great examples of what organising we have done so well this year in Wales and Gloucester.

So look, the next stage of our much vaunted, safer, stronger together plans must give our members the understanding that through FBU membership, by being a member of the FBU, by carrying their FBU membership card, they possess the ability to resist and when added together as a collective, that such resistance will achieve change. And we must all empower that, enforce that here today.

We need to put the excesses that the bosses have got and put the bosses back in their box where they belong. And that's the Fire Brigades Union that can do that. It's not the NFCC, it's not the FRSA, it's not FOA; it's the Fire Brigades Union.

So look, conference, the very existence of trade unions stems from the struggles within workplaces. It's there where essentially conflict occurs. It's where management gives those orders and workers comply. That dynamic is woven into the fabric of our system for all workers, not just us in the fire service and this conflict is not something that we can simply wish away. It will continue to emerge as long as the employers maintain control, while workers lack the confidence to challenge it.

But we as the Fire Brigades Union and those that work in the fire and rescue service, we have a core collective power and we have a core collective strength. And it comes from our shared industry, our watches on fire stations and in control rooms, our shift patterns, our natural teamworking that binds us all together.

We depend on one another on the incident ground, on the station after an incident, during an incident for that support. But most critically, for our own safety and this natural workplace bond, the bond of solidarity, as I've said, is the lifeblood of the Fire Brigades Union, and we must build on it. And our collective strength arises from the expertise that we have in the jobs that we do in firefighting, and our shared commitment to do it professionally and to do it safely. Our detailed shared knowledge of our own industry is a formidable source of power, and we must exploit it, comrades. But we are the ones that perform the work, day in, day out. Therefore, we hold the power, we hold the power in our workplaces to challenge or even halt unsafe practices, unsafe operations.

But we must give our members the confidence to do that, and give them the confidence through the Fire Brigades Union to do it, because we understand, as those that work in the fire and rescue service, that firefighting is not merely a job. It is an essential public service. Every call that we attend, every incident we go to, every community visit, and every inspection that our members do, connects us with the people that we serve in our communities, the people that rely on us.

So we therefore understand the struggles of our communities. So that means we understand the struggles of our class, the working class. So we therefore understand, as a former general secretary once said, Ken Cameron, that the war does not stop at the fire station door. So we have no compunction as firefighters and trade unionists to say that we will engage politically, internationally, and any other way that we see fit in order to fight back against the attacks on our class and offer solidarity to those who need it.

And that's solidarity to the bin workers of Birmingham, to the Palestinian people in Gaza. Look, we will stand by them, we'll stand up for them and we'll make sure that our voices are heard against the injustices being rained down on them. *Applause*

We will therefore build our branches. Not to be inward looking, but instead to engage at a grassroots level with other unions, with trade councils, with solidarity groups, with affiliated organisations. We do this because we believe in solidarity and the power it can do and can be to achieve a progressive and more equal society.

So we need to transform every fire station, every fire control room, every training centre, every headquarters, every fire and rescue service workplace across the UK into a bastion of the Fire Brigades Union. But we must also recognise that this will not happen overnight, and we've got to put the effort and the work in day in, day out, and it will require a refocus of our resources.

It'll require new policies to do this. And we also need to recognise that every official at every level must be part of such a plan to support this and get behind it to succeed. To the executive council, but we call upon every official, at every level, to recognise that if we want to reinvigorate the Fire Brigades Union, we must start from the ground up.

We need dedicated organisers in every workplace across the fire and rescue service. We need every organiser, every rep, to be reading our plan for the future. We need those dedicated officials in every single workplace. So that means recruiting new officials. It means retaining members. It means having the highest density, so that we're battle-ready when we need to be.

We will, head office officials, executive council, we will provide the resources to do that as Tam and the organising team are already doing so well. But we need local officials to start making this a priority. Comrades, it means training FBU reps at every station, every workplace, as I've said. And we will provide the schools, we'll provide the courses, because we all know we have got a fantastic education department. We've got one of the best education strategies in the trade union movement, and we need to exploit that and make sure we've got the leaders of tomorrow going through our education courses to represent our members.

So we need to begin the fight back, the fight back against the dangerous plans. We will face more cuts, we will face more policy imposition, but we need to expect that, but we need to be battle-ready to deal with it. And again, we'll provide the support to do that, to organise against that.

But look, comrades, it's time for change. I've said it before and I'll say it here again today, that the last decade and a half, we have seen far too many cuts to our service. Cuts that have got too deep and too dangerous for our members. Too many jobs lost, and too many practices imposed upon us. And when I mentioned the bosses earlier that this has got their tails up. They think they're in the ascendancy. And it is only the Fire Brigades Union that can put them firmly back in their box.

Yes, it will be difficult. Yes, there will be huge challenges, but they will not stop chasing us until we stop running and we need to stop running today. So the executive council policy statement outlines our ambitions, it outlines our commitments for the future - a bold, a strong and confident future.

Conference, I urge you to support and get behind this EC policy statement in its entirety. Together, let's build our union into a force for change, a symbol of solidarity, and a beacon of hope for all our members and the communities we serve.

And I'll just make some comments on the amendments from Scotland and the President has covered part of this. If you accept, as we would have liked, the executive council would have liked to accept some of those amendments. You will need to accept them all as a whole. And we can't do that. And we can't accept the amendments as much as we would have liked to have accepted some of them.

And I'll cover a few of these. It adds the word socialism in three places. It says, the future of our movement depends on socialist workplace activity. It states the Fire Brigades Union will be built on socialist foundations. It says our union is a beacon of socialism and you will all know, comrades, that the FBU Rule Book has a foreword stating that the union as part of an international and national labour movement, has at its ultimate aim the bringing about of a socialist system of society. I agree with that goal. I am a socialist, and many of the officials of this union would call themselves a socialist of one kind or another as well.

But the union, our union, is open to all, whatever party or none, and however you vote in elections, it is not a condition of joining the Fire Brigades Union that you have to be a socialist. We want 100% membership within our union. We want that density so we can win for our members, which means though, conference, that members

and officials can have a range of views. This union is not a beacon of socialism, nor will it ever be. That is a job of a political party, not the part or the job of a trade union. There are small groups, there are newspapers, there are organisations who play a vital part in the labour movement, and anyone is free to join them.

But what Scotland's amendments are doing is conflating the issues. This is about grassroots organising, about bringing strength and unity at every level, building our density across every part of the UK fire and rescue service. We want every worker in our industry to be part of the Fire Brigades Union. We want as a high density as we possibly can because it gives us greater leverage, the leverage against the bosses. So I ask Scotland to get behind the statement, empower this executive council statement of unity and strength. I ask them to withdraw their amendment, or conference I urge you to oppose. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Manchester to second.

PATRICK BRENNAN (Greater Manchester):

Conference, president, we wholeheartedly welcome this pragmatic and determined approach from the FBU towards activism and engagement, because let's be clear about where we are as a union and as a movement. We need to do better. We must be honest with ourselves. We have to engage our members more effectively. We need to meet them where they are, not just in terms of organising experience, but in their understanding of what a union is and what it can achieve. And most importantly, that it's only the members who can make that happen.

This policy talks about transparency, and again, conference, we are all aware that this has to be improved. If we can't trust members to have the conversations to make their own decisions on fundamental issues such as pay, then how do we expect to engage them in anything else? In a time when political parties are offering more problems than solutions, it's up to us as working people to create our own answers, to shape our own ideas about what an equal society should look like.

And we can, we've just been told for so long that we can't. Working age generations have come to believe that it's impossible. We're not alone in this struggle. Across the labour movement, the signs are the same. Declining engagement, growing cynicism, but that cannot be an excuse for complacency. The working class has been systematically persuaded that politics and especially economics are not for them. That it's a distant abstract, someone else's responsibility. That the problems we face are caused by others. Minorities, migrants, people who don't look or sound like us, but we know that is the lie. And even if that's where many are right now, it is our job as trade unionists to confront that lie and change the story.

The external issues we face as a class on poverty, inequality and division are inseparable from what happens internally within our union and at our fire stations. Because our members, our workplaces and our struggles exist within that hostile landscape. We can't shy away from difficult conversations.

We can't dismiss views that feel foreign or uncomfortable because engagement isn't about shutting people down. It's about opening conversations up.

Recent visits by the general secretary have provided the interaction with members in Manchester that is much needed for this policy to be effective because it's about face-to-face debate. It's about building trust, about restoring agency, believing in ourselves and in each other.

That's how we build power. That's how we build solidarity. We must educate. We must agitate, and we must organise. Because this neoliberal agenda is not the only path forward. It's not inevitable. We as a collective can do better and we will. Support this policy. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Patrick. Conference, I'm going to ask for your indulgence and agree to suspend standing order 16 so I can finish this debate. Is that agreed? *Agreed*. Thank you. I now call Scotland to move their amendment. EC position is oppose. Scotland.

GUS SPROUL (Scotland):

President, conference, moving our amendment on the EC policy statement, Unity and Strength in the Workplace. Conference, I don't really want to be doing this. In a way we agree with everything the GS has just said, except the bit about stop and running. I don't think we've run away from any fight, and I disagree that we shouldn't be trying to be a beacon of socialism, and I think the comrade from Manchester actually set that out in his speech.

But we brought this amendment after being a bit disappointed with the tone of the content of the policy statement, which seems to be mainly a statement of what we should be doing right now with a couple of additions. It seems to paint a picture of a disunited union that we don't recognise when looking at Scotland.

That point was made to the general secretary by our regional committee when he came to visit us and address us during the election. The policy statement says that the time for unity and action is now. It's always been the time for unity and action, and the picture painted of a disunited union over the last period seems to be concentrated at the EC level or not at the grassroots, as the GS has actually recognised in the speech that we just heard.

It also states that the education needs to be rooted in the workplace. It already is, and it always has been. We already run fantastic courses through the FBU and we put 200 reps through education in the last two-three years in Scotland. And that is all firmly rooted in the workplace.

The statement almost disregards the hard work of union. When we look over the last three years, we returned an overwhelming ballot for industrial action as Tam talked about, the regions across the country that have run campaigns in Gloucestershire, Avon, West Mids, Wales against cuts and changes to shifts, and they should be applauded for that.

We took a hundred members to London launching the I. We took 60 for the lobby of NJC. We've put about 700 or 800 firefighters outside the Scottish Parliament. We've got a full engaged delegation, and we've got a waiting list for observers. We're in the best place we've ever been in Scotland and in general, we even like each other.

And so in keeping this sentiment of the president's address, and for the sake of unity, we will withdraw our amendment. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you for that, Gus, and all them points will be taken on board. Oh no, that's open for debate.

BRIAN FLANAGAN (London):

President, conference, speaking in support of the EC policy statement. This is going to be very short and sweet. Some would say unlike me. Our region welcomes all the commitments proposed by the EC and the new general secretary and we feel the proposed amendments are unnecessary. Thank you, Scotland, for withdrawing. Conference, please support the policy statement and support the general secretary as a way of moving forward in unity as the statement proposes. We support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Brian. Lee.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, again, I'm speaking in support of the policy statement. Merseyside put an amendment into this, and I accept fully the reasons why it wasn't carried because I'm an idiot. What we would like to hear from the EC, and Steve did mention it there, is the absolute reaffirmation of our support for movements outside the fire service: the fact that I can wear a keffiyeh, the fact that I can wear a t-shirt with Nelson Mandela, speaks to exactly what the Fire Brigades Union did. We were the first UK trade union to support anti-apartheid movements in South Africa. We have spoken time and time again on what's happened in Gaza and the FBU, as Ken Cameron said, it does not stop at the fire station door. We need to make sure we are doing what we are doing to support the millions of people around the world that we have supported already. And I know that the EC are doing it. I've seen Steve's work with Stand Up to Racism, which I absolutely applaud.

This policy statement, we need to support, but we also need that affirmation that we are going to work outside the fire service again. Please support the policy statement. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Lee. Anybody else in the debate? Nope. Steve, just to give the response to Lee.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Lee, look, of course, that's what our trade union does. It's always done that and that will not change. I'm committed to that, the executive council and I hope all of you are committed to that as well. Thanks.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Steve. I now put executive council policy statement, Unity and Strength in the Workplace, prioritising our future together to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Thank you for that, conference. We are now just about to break for lunch. There is a fringe meeting, an equalities fringe event, in Imperial 3 at 1pm where you can find out more about the findings of the All Different, All Equal review and hear from Professor Nicola Rollock on the up and coming report into racial justice at the FBU. That is downstairs in Imperial 3. Right, conference. If we can have you back in here, sharpish at two o'clock. Conference, enjoy your lunch. Thank you.

Break for lunch

AFTERNOON SESSION

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you. Conference, I now call the chair of standing orders committee, Phil Millar, to give a report.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Thank you, president. Conference, can you turn to your programme of business page 4 and at the bottom of the page, resolution 75 has been withdrawn. Thanks, president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Phil. Is that report agreed? *Agreed* Thank you. Conference, we're now continuing with Section K. I now call resolution 83. Sharing of information in the Fire Brigades Union, FBU Structures moved by B&EMM. The EC give qualified support.

Resolution 83 SHARING OF INFORMATION IN THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION (FBU) STRUCTURES
Conference agrees the FBU is front and centre in helping all members whenever called upon and needed.

Conference recognises the importance of the FBU being able to contact all members to update them on all matters of significance and relevance.

Conference demands that members have the option to allow their relevant trade or equality section to contact them with sectional information.

Conference notes the General Data Protection Regulation in relation to information privacy and accepts that any information shared must be in accordance with this regulation on the processing and sharing of personal data.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to ensure that;

- *all members of their relevant trade or equality section be given the option to allow their FBU held membership contact information data to be shared with the Secretaries and Chairs of the sections that they are part of, unless they state otherwise via a tick box 'opt out' option when signing up to be a member of the FBU*
- *an email is sent to existing members providing them an option for their data to be shared with the section(s) that they are part of, so that they can be informed of FBU sectional matters and provided information that would be relevant to them (unless they explicitly ask to opt out of their information being shared).*

Conference instructs that this work commences at the close of Conference 2025 with regular updates to be provided to Equality and Trade Section sub committee meetings until the demands are delivered.

B&EMM

DWIGHT WILLIAMS (B&EMM):

Conference, President, first conference, first time speaker. *Applause*

21 years ago, I joined Hertfordshire Fire and rescue Service as a young, enthusiastic Black firefighter. I remember walking through the doors, uniform crisp, mind full of purpose, and a gap where my locker should have been. I also remember feeling very much alone. There was no one that looked like me, no one that understood my cultural reference points, no conversations that matched my lived experience, and at times that isolation was deafening.

Fast forward to today, I have grown. I have risen through the ranks. I've earned respect, and I now stand with the responsibility of representing others who may feel as I once did. But here's the thing, there are still too many members from the B&EMM section and marginalised backgrounds who remain isolated.

They may not know their sections, they may not know they have a rep. They may be facing challenges, silence, unseen, unheard and unsupported. I'll be honest with you, conference, I've experienced this firsthand in my own region. In my region I believe there are 80 B&EMM members. I know they are there, but I'm unable to get in touch with them, and it's been a struggle.

I don't know who they are, where they are, or even if they know the section exists. That is why this resolution is important. It's about communication. It's about connection, and above all, it's about inclusion. This isn't about breaching trust or pushing boundaries. It's about giving our members a choice and a voice.

We recognise the importance of GDPR, and that's why this resolution proposes a clear and lawful opt-in system, respecting privacy while empowering individuals. We're asking that that information only be accessed by chairs and secretaries. Let's be clear, if we can't contact our members, we can't support them. If we can't reach our members, we can't represent them. And if we can't hear our members, how can we hope to uplift them?

This resolution is about bringing the union closer to its members, especially those who have felt furthest away. It's about making sure as a B&EMM firefighter with no rep, that they do not feel forgotten, that they know the union sees them, hears them, and values them.

We want to keep our members informed on union matters that affect them, invite them to events that will help them feel seen and celebrated, such as the B&EMM school. And we want to be able to offer them solidarity and not silence. This resolution isn't just admin, it's action. It's how we move from intent to impact.

When I joined the fire service, I couldn't see myself in it. Now, as a watch commander, as a rep, I am someone who refuses to let the next generation of firefighters feel that same isolation.

Conference, I'm asking you to join me. Not everyone in this room has a B&EMM rep in their service, but every single one of us has the power today to ensure that no member is left disconnected from the very union that is here to serve them. Let's not let another member go unheard. Let's be the voice that reaches them. Thank you. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Well done. The EC are giving qualified support. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Secunder, thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody? Yep.

MATTHEW BLACK (LGBT+):

President, conference, speaking in favour of motion 83. Sharing of information in the FBU. Conference, at the heart of this motion is something simple: communication. The FBU is a lifeline for our members, whether it's things like pay, conditions, pensions, safety, or equality.

When our members need us, we are there. But to be truly effective, to be proactive, to organise, we must be able to communicate clearly and directly with those who we represent. This motion recognises that our trade and equality sections are only as effective as our ability to reach the members who belong to them.

Whether it's DND forum, control, retained, LGBT+, Women, B&EMM, officers, they all need to hear from the members, to engage with the members and to shape the work of the membership. Right now, we're limited. The flow of information is restricted by outdated practices and valid concerns about data privacy.

But resolution 83 offers a solution that respects both the rights of members under GDPR and the operational needs of our union. It calls for an opt-out model where members joining the FBU are, by default, enabling communication from the relevant trade or equality section unless they choose otherwise. It's clear and transparent and it's consent-based, a simple tick box, giving members control over how they are kept informed. It also depends on existing members being given this choice too, by email, so nobody's left behind. And importantly, this work can begin as soon as conference ends. Conference, this just isn't about information; it's about empowerment. It's about strengthening our structures, deepening our engagement, and ensuring every member hears from the people who fight their corner. Let's build a more connected union. Let's organise, let's support motion 83. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Matt. Anybody else? No. Tam, McFarlane, you are giving the qualification.

TAM McFARLANE (National Officer):

And thanks for bringing this, actually. Thanks for all the work that you're doing and an excellent contribution, comrade. The qualification is really quite simple. First of all, we do now gather the information through the online joining system. We gather information regarding members' race, should they wish to give it to us, sex, et cetera, as part of that as well. And we're also harnessing and encouraging members to submit us their email addresses. And I have to say, again, with a lot of success, we've currently got 29,991 members who have given us their email addresses.

And in terms of the opt-in, yes, we also have that as well. You might have noticed when you get an email from the FBU, there is a box down near the bottom that says, if you don't wish to blah, blah, blah. No, by the way, nobody's done it. People love our information, which is quite right as well. So it is part of that system.

I suppose the real qualification is around the review, because actually a lot of the issues that you've identified are the issues we do need to consider, which is about the flooding of information to members. And we need to make sure we do that in a joined-up way through the comms department. We do run a very careful comms grid and make sure that the information we send to members is appropriately done and is spaced out so that members don't get overwhelmed by information. So that's the only caveat comrades, that we've got this review on ongoing. This will be a big part of it, but listen, in the interim, should B&EMM wish to make contact to the member, we've got that information currently. The information we have currently, I'm more than open for you to give us an email, a correspondence you wish to send. We'll coordinate with the comms team and see if we can get that out. But yeah, that's the qualification. Again, thanks for bringing this.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Tam. I now put resolution 83 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 87. Review of Negotiation Rights For Green Book Members moved by South Yorkshire, EC are opposing.

Conference. It's just been brought to my attention. Somebody might be filming, don't do any filming with mobile phones. Thank you.

Resolution 87 REVIEW OF NEGOTIATION RIGHTS FOR GREEN BOOK MEMBERS

Conference reaffirms that the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is the only true voice of Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs), providing the highest quality representation for our members.

Conference acknowledges that despite our commitment to all members, we continue to fall short in fully representing our green book members due to the lack of formal negotiation rights.

Conference believes that without the ability to negotiate on their behalf, green book members do not receive the full weight of FBU representation that all members deserve. This undermines our position as a union that fights for all within FRSs.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to conduct a full review into the ability to claim negotiation rights for green book members. This review must also include a recommendation on whether the union should continue accepting green book members if negotiation rights cannot be secured. The findings of this review must be completed and presented no later than December 2025.

SOUTH YORKSHIRE

STU SMITH (South Yorkshire):

President, conference, moving resolution number 87. Comrades, this resolution speaks to the very core of who we are as a union: united, strong and determined to represent all our members. We proudly state that the Fire Brigades Union is the only true voice of the fire and rescue service. We say that we provide the highest quality representation

for our members. But we must ask ourselves, are we truly delivering that promise for every member? Right now, our Green Book members are being left without the full strength of FBU representation simply because we do not have formal negotiating rights on their behalf.

Let's be clear, these members are part of our union. They stand with us, they pay their subs, and yet when it comes to fighting for pay, conditions, job security, we are limited. Not because we lack the will, but because we lack the formal right to negotiate. Conference, that is unacceptable. It weakens us as a union. It undermines our principles. It leaves these members vulnerable. And it allows employers to divide us. We cannot allow this to continue.

This resolution does not commit us to a single course of action today. It commits us to have a review, a serious investigation into how we can right this wrong. It ensures that our executive council will explore what it would take for us to secure local negotiating rights and make an informed recommendation on the best way forward. This is not just sensible. It is essential. Comrades, we have a proud history of fighting for fairness and standing up for every worker in the fire and rescue service.

Today, I ask you to reaffirm that commitment, vote in favour of this resolution, stand up for all FBU members, show that our union fights for everyone, not just in words but in action. I urge you, support this resolution. Let's make our union the true voice for every member of the fire and rescue service. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Stuart. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody?

ANDY MURRAY (Scotland):

President, conference, I get the intention that this resolution brings, but we've got to think about it in the terms of would we want other unions affecting our terms and conditions, going out there and negotiating for us? We can't open that door, which I believe that this would do. So we do not support this.

ANDY SAVORY (North Yorkshire):

President, conference, fourth time conference, first time speaker. *Applause* Conference, we're under the strapline of safer, stronger, together. I don't think we're all out together, personally. We have our own issues in North Yorkshire with regard to Green Book staff. They're under a bigger organisation. Some of them I know really well, and I'm sorry if I'm getting a bit emotional, but I don't relish the thought of looking them in the eyes and telling them: I can't help you. These are the very people who, without us, we wouldn't turn out the doors. The mechanics, the admin staff, the pay, the nurses, they all play a role. We're supposed to be a team together. They pay union subscriptions. It's only right and proper that they get support. Conference, I ask you to support South Yorkshire, support this motion. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Andy. Chris.

CHRIS TAPP (Derbyshire):

President, conference, speaking in opposition to this resolution. I've stood up here before conference and said we need to put proper structures in place, support in place. We've got brigade secretaries, chairs, working right across their brigades and regions. It's great having this Green Book drive that we've had in the past and conference has agreed it, rightly or wrongly, but we are here now. For me, I said before, we don't have the capacity to resource this. I don't not want to support Green Book members, but I simply don't have the capacity to do so and I'm always looking for Green Book members to come forward and be those representatives and support that.

So for me, I understand the intent. I absolutely do and as the comrade before me has just said, I don't want to say to people: I'm sorry I can't help you, and I don't say that. I do go and support them, but this resolution just increases that even more. We're asking for bargaining rights. Do we actually fully understand? Can people in here that are going to vote for this say, "yeah, I'm happy to negotiate on behalf of Green Book members; I understand their terms and conditions? No bother. I've got it boxed off." I can't do that with my hand on my heart, in good faith, and say, I can fully support those members.

I'll do it on the case-by-case basis, and I'll do the best job I can. But we cannot commit to this at this point. I asked the executive council and others to ensure we do the resourcing work first, get a structure in place, however far up the union it goes. If it goes all the way to the executive council, then so be it.

But sort that plan out first, then we can think about saying, look, we've got it all in place, let's have the bargaining rights now. But right now, we're not in that position. And in good faith I can't vote for this. Sorry for those that have brought it. I understand your intent, but Derbyshire will be opposing it, and I urge conference to do the same. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Chris. Anybody else? Tam McFarlane.

TAM McFARLANE (National Officer):

Thanks, president, and thanks conference as well. Look, just to be clear, no one doubts the value of our Green Book members. They are all working class people within our profession. And of course we support the job they do. But this is about who represents them. And just to draw your attention back, which is a starting point to annual conference policy in 2015 when we started to look at this issue and indeed activated the membership in that way, and it was very specific. And just to be absolutely clear about this, listen. Regional and brigade committees must not launch campaigns or recruit new non-Grey Book groups of workers into membership without discussing the issue with head office and receiving the prior approval of the executive council.

That position still stands and there should be no regional brigade committee launching campaigns or trying to recruit non-Grey Book members into membership without the prior agreement of the executive council. And the issue for that is pretty clear as well, because this was brought in for specific reason. It was brought in because it was swathes of our industry where our members, Grey Book members, FBU members, their jobs were effectively getting privatised and our members wanted to stay in the Fire Brigades Union, despite them getting taken out of the Grey Book. So we had ongoing privatisation in the training and fire safety departments across the UK. Private provision in the North West Fire Control, privatisation of the then Fire Service College at Moreton-in-Marsh.

These was posts that were filled by uniformed FBU members in Grey Book positions that, because of those specific situations, were then faced with getting taken off the Grey Book, but wanted to maintain their FBU membership. So that was the reasons behind the Green Book as it were opening up. But certainly we are not out trying to recruit members from other unions.

And I have to say, comrades, why launch a review when you know the answer? Of course, we haven't got the density required to actually start negotiating formally on behalf of these people. You be honest with them about that. We have had a few unfortunate contacts come into head office saying, "I was asked to sign up to your union. I've just found out you can't negotiate on pay for me." Frankly, that should be made clear to them from the very start about that. We organise Grey Book members primarily because that's who we negotiate on behalf. We have got some Green Book members matched in those specific circumstances. So yeah, there is that.

And look, Andy talked about opening the doors. Speaking candidly, we don't want to get into conflict with trade unions that represent Green Book members, sister trade unions. The Fire Brigades Union has always had a very proud history of being a single trade union. Other trade unions have respected that.

And when you've seen some of the conflicts that go on at the TUC regarding poaching members, believe me, comrades, that is not a situation this union wants to be part of. So I understand the sort of reasons behind this, but would urge conference to understand the reasons why we are opposing it and to oppose it on that basis.

But again, just to be absolutely clear, this is not about the value of these workers concerned who are highly valued. It's about who negotiates with them. Thanks, president. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Tam. South Yorkshire right of reply.

STU SMITH (South Yorkshire):

Thanks, president. It's got to be clear; we do not actively go out recruiting Green Book members. We're not poaching, for want of a better word. We're not doing that. These as we heard before lunch, the general secretary and Tam, the rallying cry and what a fantastic union and the great work that we do.

These people in our brigade can see that. They can see it. They want to come and join us. They want to be part of that. Now, if we can't fully represent them, is it right that we should be taking their money?

Think about that. And all I'm asking, or should I say all we are asking for, is a review. Is a review. We're not asking for a decision today to take a look. If there's any chance that we could perhaps have local negotiating rights to fully represent these members, and if not, if the review comes out saying, no, it's a non-starter, then I don't believe we should be taking their money. Thanks. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Stu. I now put resolution 87 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against, please show. *That falls.*

I now call resolution 85. Improved Engagement With Potential New Members, moved by the national retained committee, the EC are giving qualified support.

Resolution 85 IMPROVED ENGAGEMENT WITH POTENTIAL NEW MEMBERS

Conference recognises that there is strength in unity. We are stronger together, forming a united front consisting of all Fire and Rescue Service employees, whether Grey or Green Book, Wholetime, Retained, Fire Control or support staff. Without a united front, we will see our pay and conditions decline. As a union, we are relatively good at recruiting new members into the union from the Wholetime workforce, but we could do better in the other areas.

Conference is aware that there are thousands of potential members out there, that could boost the membership and provide extra financial income. However, many of these potential members are in remote locations and their workplaces are currently not engaged with the functional structure of our union. None more so, than those working the Retained Duty System in rural locations. The consequence of not engaging with large areas of the workforce, is often the imposition of practices that are detrimental to the whole workforce, such as reduced crewing, unsanctioned Emergency Medical Response trials, Officer in Charge / Driver, Marauding Terrorist Attack and much more.

Conference believes that the current recruitment literature and presentation material would greatly benefit from being more role specific, and from the inclusion of role specific case studies and examples of the successful outcomes that have been achieved for members of each work group as a direct result of being members of our union.

Conference is also aware of the difficulties in reaching out to these potential new members, especially with the large workloads of our current active officials, and believes that brigade organisers would benefit from national assistance in the form of dedicated recruiters, who can help with targeting areas of low membership, and provide guidance on effective methods of signing up new members. There may also be other recruitment methods that are being successful in other unions that could benefit us, such as gift vouchers for recruiting a colleague into the union.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to explore ways of increasing engagement with potential future members, coupled with improved support for officials, and to implement a new national recruitment strategy.

NATIONAL RETAINED COMMITTEE

OLLIE BALDAM (NRC):

President, conference, moving resolution 85. Improved engagement with potential new members. I rise today to speak on a matter that is fundamental to our strength, our solidarity, and our future: the urgent need to improve engagement with potential new members. I would like to thank Tam for his work with the new National Organising Strategy. This is a great step forward in improving that engagement. Conference recognises, as we all do, that there is strength in unity. When we stand together, regardless of role, contract, or location, we are a force to be reckoned with whether Grey or Green Book, wholetime, retained, fire control or support staff.

We are stronger when we are united. But unity doesn't happen by accident. It takes action, it takes effort, and it takes strategy that includes everyone, especially those who right now are standing outside the structures of our union. We know that recruitment from the wholetime workforce is relatively strong, and that is a credit to our organisers and our activists.

But other areas, particularly among the retained duty staff and those working in rural and remote communities, are falling short. These colleagues are part of our service and they face the same pressures, the same risks, and often even greater challenges, and yet many remain unengaged, unorganised, and unprotected.

When we don't reach these potential members, we weaken our collective voice. We make it easier for derailment practices to creep in, such as reduced crewing, unsanctioned emergency medical response trials, and officer driver arrangements to name a few. These are imposed more readily when our union is absent or underrepresented.

So what is the solution? Conference, we must change how we think about recruitment. It's not just about signing people up, it's about connecting with them. It's about making the case for union membership through real relatable stories of success. We need recruitment material that speaks to people's experiences, and it shows the value of being part of a strong and unified union.

We also have to be realistic. Our current officials are already carrying heavy workloads, and that is why we call for support from national assistance, including dedicated recruiters who can focus on low membership areas and guidance on modern and effective methods for bringing people in.

Let's also look at what other unions are working, whether that is incentives, like gift vouchers for peers for recruitment, or coordinated digital outreach. We need to be open to new ideas, and this is about empowering our brigade organisers with the tools and supports to do the right job. Colleagues, this isn't just a campaign; this is a necessity. A stronger, broader, and better supported membership will give us all the power we need to protect our pay, improve conditions, and stop damaging the so-called reforms in their tracks.

So today, let's bring this call from the national retained committee, let's instruct the executive council to explore and implement a new national recruitment strategy, one that reflects the realities on the ground and lifts up every part of our service, because when we grow, we win; when we unite, we protect; and when we engage, we empower. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Well done, Ollie. Does that have a seconder? Yep.

GUY LAWES (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, seconding, resolution 85, Improved Engagement with Potential Members. I know it's already been mentioned by my comrade there, but we also wanted to place on record thanks to Tam and the backroom staff for the new system that we have in place with regards to bringing in new joiners and rejoiners.

There's no doubt that the new strategies and structures that are in place have made the joining process easier, more fluid for control, wholetime and RDS alike. Conference, a huge percentage of our membership are RDS firefighters. I recently took up the role of the RDS rep for region 3, which allows me to see via the national retained committee the huge challenges faced by officials in all areas of the union.

I work as a wholetime firefighter and as an RDS firefighter, and for me, being an RDS firefighter is harder than being a wholetime firefighter; the toll on family life and the community responsibility being large reasons as to why. Yet within the confines of union membership in the RDS I see the most degradation of spirit. RDS members feeling ignored, RDS members feeling forgotten, RDS members feeling undervalued creates a pathway to their disillusionment. So beyond the obvious, why does that matter?

In Durham, we've had some issues over the last couple of years. The bosses came with co-responding and we fought them off. Then they came with MTA and we fought them again. And then they came with crew-deficient mobilisation, and again, we fought them and then they came to try and push all of those things on the RDS. Thankfully, and I would say probably down to the work ethic of our secretary, we managed to fight them off there as well. But that's easy in Durham. Durham's particularly small, and as officials, we know every member by name, so organising locally can be done quite simply, and it's quite easy to be effective.

Resolution 85 calls for role-specific literature and materials, which is absolutely necessary to assist officials in reaching out to RDS firefighters in sometimes extremely rural locations and with huge member numbers. It also calls for a strategy for recruitment.

But it must be noted with regards to the creation of that strategy that, in many places, bosses will use the willingness of RDS staff and their sense of community responsibility to implement working practices which are unsafe and not in the role. And it must therefore be remembered that if we fail to address this issue with passion and sincerity, we open the door for these activities to become commonplace, filtering across into wholetime and anywhere else that we operate. It'll then go on to make the fight for everyone else far more difficult. Conference, please support your RDS, please support the resolution. We second. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Guy. Any more in the debate? Yes. No.

CARI McINTYRE (Scotland):

President, conference, first time delegate. First time speaker. *Applause*

We are speaking in support of the national retained committee resolution on engaging new members. Like many of you, my union membership started in the first state training school, and it wasn't exactly portrayed as optional, so I signed the form and smiled as I cried on the inside as another little piece of my training wage was eaten up after three months, of course. Fast-forward three and a half years, and I was a fully qualified firefighter and had just discovered that I was pregnant. Add in a very uncooperative station manager regarding my working arrangements, and it was a recipe for disaster. I reached out to my regional women's rep for support navigating this situation. Long story short, my station manager wars continued on my return to work after maternity leave, and I again needed the support of our wonderful women's section reps.

I was so grateful to them for their time, knowledge, and wisdom. I began to think how I could become more involved in the women's section to at some point be in the position to support someone else. I attended the STUC women's conference in Scotland and it gave me the final push to get involved, hearing so many women from different working sectors speak up on issues that affected all of us and witnessing their strength and resilience when sharing their experience truly inspired me shortly after, I was voted in on Scotland's women's committee.

I jumped in with both feet and decided to also become a station rep, in addition to the work I did with the women's section. Through meetings and courses I attended as part of the FBU education pathway, I met so many individuals who want to make a positive change. That feeling of support and unity is something I do not want any potential member to miss out on.

And in turn, we as a union do not want to miss out on their skills and active participation. I can think of nothing better than having the effective tools to go meet new recruits, be it in person or online, and not simply have them sign up out of pressure, but to enlighten them to the many benefits of what our union offers.

The organising strategy that Tam so enthusiastically delivered will go a long way to achieve this. Conference, we support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, anybody else? No. Tam to give the qualification.

TAM McFARLANE (National Officer):

Thank you, conference, and thank you for the praise for Safer Stronger Together, but we're a huge team, can I just say, and all of you are now on the team. Your union needs you, comrade. Come and join us. No. Listen, this is quite a heavy qualification, because although the wording in the last section for us is absolutely fine, and the part there about resources, it's actually the section before which frankly, comrades, if you read the organising strategy, that's not our strategy. Yeah. And we want to be clear about that.

Look, we want to build a strong member-led union and we can't outsource workplace responsibility in regard to that. Dedicated recruiters, we've seen it across other unions. It's a tried and, dare I say, failed tactic by other unions, because real organising has recruitment as a tactic, yes. But we do it through transformation, not transaction. With the greatest respect, I don't believe members join unions for gift vouchers, or at least if they do join for that, they're pretty easily going to leave. Members join unions when unions stand up and fight for them.

We've seen that across other sectors and, by God, we've seen it in the Fire Brigades Union. When this union decided we'd had enough of poor pay in the fire and rescue service, we stood up and we organised. We got our members to stand together, and we took on the bosses and we demanded fair pay. And through doing that, four and a half thousand members came to us.

That's how you recruit members: by being a strong, dedicated fighting union. Not through transactions like this. But I take the point about being relatively good at recruiting new members. Relatively. 97% Ollie, but okay, that's fine. How do we get the rest?

But there is a point here. I talked previously about good practice. It was only a couple of years ago, I was telling conference about Scott Blandford, an organiser in Dorset and Wiltshire. He just took it upon himself to go out and visit retained stations. He went out and visited them. He talked to them about what the union was doing locally for RDS members. He signed up two entire fire stations.

The main reason for that, by the way, was those members had never been spoken to by an official before. They welcomed him in. They're now thriving stations down there. Such good practice. We even put it in a section in *Firefighter*. I also talked previously about Amanda in Avon who did exactly the same thing: went out and actually, believe it or not, talked to retained firefighters and they joined the union. And of course we talked about Rebekah in North Wales. Again, the thing there, there's a common theme there: it's not done by WhatsApp, it's not done by email, it's not done by asking somebody else to do it.

It's done by us as officials getting on to branches, inspiring members, supporting them, encouraging them to be their own reps, to be the change that they want to be, as B&EMM says. So that's our job, comrades. We believe that real organising, as I said, has recruitment as a tactic, yes, but it's transformation we need. We need to transform our branches into organised branches, and we're not going to do it frankly by offering them small gifts. We do it by offering them hope, hope that if they stand united, they can make effective change. So it is support, heavy qualification. But again, Ollie, come and see us afterwards. Thanks, comrades. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Tam. I'll put resolution 85 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 86, Retired and Out of Trade (ROOT) membership involvement moved by Cleveland, the EC are giving qualified support. That varied. There's been a conversation with the brigade, and Tam got the EC to change their position to qualified support. Nick? Thank you.

Resolution 86 RETIRED OUT OF TRADE (ROOT) MEMBERSHIP INVOLVEMENT

Conference notes the value of the experience and expertise of ROOT members, especially ex representatives and officials, of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU).

Conference believes that this is a relatively untapped resource that current representatives and officials could utilise to the betterment of the FBU.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to support and encourage, via a social media campaign and guidance issued to all brigade secretaries, information on the value of ROOT member involvement at brigade and regional level and how their experience and knowledge can be used to make the FBU stronger.

CLEVELAND

NICK CAIN (Cleveland):

President, conference, we in Cleveland are extremely lucky. We have a string of ex-officials who, even after leaving, still engage fully and want to play an active part in making our union stronger and better.

There are times when we ask them for advice on matters that we are dealing with, and their knowledge is absolutely vital in guiding us to get the ultimate aim, which is improvements and wins for our members. Our ROOT members are still the most active and vociferous in the lobbying of MPs in their constituencies, and we heavily rely on them when we do the same in parliament.

Their help and guidance to members on the first visit there is absolutely priceless to us. We find them invaluable and can't understand why any FBU official wouldn't pick the brains of someone that has the knowledge and experience that they have. You see times where experienced officials retire and inexperienced reps are thrust into brigade official positions with hardly any experience themselves, very unfairly. And through no fault of they all are pretty much lambs to the slaughter.

Conference, let me be absolutely clear. We aren't asking for ROOTs to have a position on the committees and definitely not have a vote or a say in the committee's business. All we're asking for, conference, is to instruct the executive council to support and encourage the value of ROOT members to regional and brigade officials through guidance and via social media campaign as to the benefits of ROOT experience and knowledge, so we can use the betterment of the FBU to make it much better and stronger. And to the EC, we're happy to leave it in your capable hands as to the content of the social media campaign and guidance. Go as far or as short as you wish. This, as the general secretary said earlier, is just about organising. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Nick. Does that have a seconder? Have a seconder. *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody?

Maria, thanks for tearing yourself away from that little feast you're having down there and having a party down here, the LGBT+.

MARIA BUCK (LGBT+):

You're welcome to share. Thank you, president, conference, our section opposed this resolution not out of disrespect for the experience of long serving firefighters, but because we must be honest about what our union needs to thrive in the future.

This resolution, whilst well-intentioned, risks reinforcing a cycle that keeps our union committees looking the same, thinking the same, and coming from the same backgrounds. And from an LGBT+ perspective, and indeed from the perspective of anyone who values inclusion and progress, it's a serious concern.

Let's be clear. We absolutely value the knowledge and the skill that ROOT members bring. Their contribution, having shaped our service and our union. But relying on the ROOT members without addressing the lack of diversity in our

union committees is not a solution. It's a step backwards. We are in a moment where we have the opportunity and the responsibility to build a union that reflects the diversity of our membership and the communities we serve.

That means involving people from different walks of life, people with different lived experiences, people who bring new perspectives, new energy, and new ideas. We need union committees that are more diverse and more representative, not in terms of age, but in terms of race, gender, sexuality, disability, and class.

We need people who haven't always seen themselves in these roles to know that they are welcome here and that they belong. Relying on the same pool of ROOT members, no matter how skilled, doesn't get us there. We talk a lot about diversity of thought, but we can't achieve that if we keep drawing on the same pool.

We need to cast the net wider. We need to remove the barriers that have kept so many talented people out of the positions and within the committees. And let's not forget our younger people. Today, they are passionate, they are driven, they are ready to serve, but they also want to work in environments that reflect their values, places that are inclusive, forward thinking and open to change if you want to attract the next generation.

Forward planning committees, education will not leave the reps alone. This resolution, as it stands, sends the wrong message. It says, we're more comfortable with what we know than what we need. It says, we are willing to delay progress in the name of familiarity.

We can honour experience without clinging to it. We can respect the past and build a better future.

And that future must be done where LGBT+ people, our B&EMM, women, disabled people, and working class comrades, see union leadership as a role for them.

So conference, let's be bold. Let's invest in the future, let's build committees that are not just experienced, but dynamic, inclusive, and ready for the challenges ahead. Let's not go back. Let's move forward. We oppose. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Maria. Kerry.

KERRY McCRONE (NWC):

Conference, president, speaking on Resolution 86 Retired and Out of Trade Membership Involvement, conference. The NWC opposes this resolution. We believe it would be wrong to give those no longer working in the service a say in decisions that affect the working lives of current members.

ROOT members are approximately 96% males. By increasing their involvement in the running of brigade and regional committees, the gender balance of decision makers would become even more heavily weighted towards male members. Attitudes, including those towards women in the fire and rescue service, have thankfully shifted since some of these members have retired.

Giving retired members a say in the running of brigade and regional committees may allow some attitudes that are no longer as prevalent in the service to once again become influential in the day-to-day activity of brigade and regional committees. The NWC believes that we should be looking forward and focusing on recruiting a more diverse workforce, who in turn will have a say in the running of FBU committees and bring in currently underrepresented voices.

It is this that will make our union and our workforce a more diverse and inclusive space. Policies and procedures may have changed since these members have left. This would leave our current members possibly receiving potentially damaging information and guidance that is out of date and no longer relevant. Conference, we are urge you to oppose. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kerry. Lee.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, I am speaking in support of this resolution. We are a shrinking workforce. We have less and less members as years go by. ROOT members in Merseyside have been unequivocally supportive of all the work we've done. If it wasn't for ROOT members, then some of our lobbies would've contained maybe 15 people. Instead, we have had 50, 60, 100 there, made up in the main by ROOT members. I understand what the LGBT+ section and what the women's section say. However, we also have retired LGBT+ members, we have retired women members who come and help us with our fights. We should recognise that, we should use them more. Please support this resolution. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lee. Any more? No. Tam to give the qualification.

TAM McFARLANE (National Officer):

Thanks, president. And again, another heavy qualification. Because frankly, conference, the executive council had exactly the same concerns that have been set out by Maria and Kerry. But of course, words matter and importantly, the resolution, as has been pointed out to us on numerous occasions by Cleveland, doesn't actually say committees. I think you've just heard from Lee the importance of getting this balance right. We have got ROOT membership. We do encourage that, but we encourage it for specific reasons. Let's be absolutely frank, conference. The first rule of the revolution is replace yourself. We need to have effective succession planning in the Fire Brigades Union, and we don't do that if we've got ROOT members coming through our committees, getting involved in our structures formula at that.

However, clearly ROOT members do have a role to play in other areas. And again, it's difficult because across the executive council they relate the experiences of different brigades and regions, some of which are entirely different to others. Some brigades in some regions have got good experience of ROOT engagement and are doing it a certain way. Others have very poor experience.

So we are caught between a rock and a hard place with this one. But we believe on balance that we should be supporting ROOT membership engagement through campaigning, as we've said, and again in other ways that we do it.

But we have to be absolutely clear, our committees are for elected officials. The link between negotiating the conditions and you working in the role that is linked to those conditions is sacrosanct to us in the trade union movement, and that can never be broken. So yeah, to make it absolutely clear, when we've got ROOT members, we want them active, we want them involved in the union and our campaigns and our lobbies, etc. But in terms of how we run the committees, how we run our structures in the FBU, that is for us as elected officials.

And again, succession planning is a very important part of the work that we do. So with that pretty heavy caveat then, we would give qualified support. And the president has pointed out, look, the Rule Book is absolutely clear in this, out of trade members cannot hold office in the union. And I know some committees have stretched that a bit, but, let's be absolutely clear from here, from this conference, ROOT members cannot hold office in the Fire Brigades Union. So again, as I say, with that very heavy qualification we'd offer qualified support. Thanks. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Tam. Cleveland, right of reply.

NICK CAIN (Cleveland):

Thanks, president, with the greatest respect that I don't see how it's going to stop progression. We're not asking them to sit on committees. I don't know - all this has got cross-contaminated into this debate. It's just that, like a social media campaign, to use their experience, use their knowledge.

Like I say, we go down to London. They're absolutely vital to us. I don't know what other people in the room think, but we probably couldn't go down to London with the strengths that we do without our ROOT members. I just urge you to support, support debate please. The motion. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Nick. I now put resolution 86 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call paragraph K2, paragraph K3. Yep. Lee. K3 or K2? K2.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, we understand that there were no disputes run in 2024. However, the Merseyside disputes that were run the year before did run into that year. And what we would just like to do is place on record our thanks for your support. Everybody in here gave us wonderful support. And congratulations to all brigade officials who carry on going out there doing the work. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lee. K3, para K4, para K5. ONC.

GARETH JIANIKOS (ONC):

President, conference, speaking on section K5 of the EC report. This year, 2025 is the 40th anniversary of the Grey Book flexible duty system. The FBU were pivotal, sorry, in the creation of the FDS. Before 1985, officers were working in excess of 96-hour weeks. Any allowances they were accruing were non-pensionable. The FBU changed this. As the ONC, we will be celebrating the 40th anniversary at our officer school at the start of October this year.

Conference, we're looking for your support as regions to ensure that each brigade is in attendance at our school. We will be using this opportunity to launch the FBU Guide to the Flexible Duty System, and this will be a simple interpretation of the Grey Book and the best practice. This is to support our officers and our officials.

It will be a resource to stop brigades who are riding roughshod, ignoring, and even more sinfully, misinterpreting our terms and conditions to their own benefit time and time again. The combination of the school and the guide will provide a valuable recruitment resource tool. Conference, again, we are here to urge you to make sure each brigade is represented. President, conference, thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Gareth. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Just thanking the ONC for coming in on this section, actually. And they've got a great banner here advertising their school in October. So maybe we should put that somewhere where more people would see. You might need to ask standing orders for that first, actually. I just want to touch on something that the ONC have been discussing, and it's come up in a few brigades quite recently.

And that is seemingly the NFCC's understanding of how the flexi duty system works. Our understanding, and the national employers', because recently we've come together to issue a joint statement to one of our fire services, is that the 20% supplement is for being on call, for being on call only. At the point at which their alerter or their mobile rings, they switch on to positive or managerial hours in the context of the Grey Book.

And, therefore, that time then should be recompensed as soon as possible the next day. So I just want to be clear on that. That is not just the position of the Fire Brigades Union. That is the position also of the national employers, the NJC, and we'll disseminate that across the UK fire and rescue service in the near future. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks for that, Ben. And yeah, I'll definitely echo Gareth. It's incumbent on all of us to ensure that the sectional schools and AGMs are well attended and we get as many people as we can there. I've attended quite a few and they are fantastic.

Okay, thank you. Para K6, para K7. I now call section H, Equality and Fairness at Work, para H1.

I will now ask the AGS to give an update on the equalities work that's been undertaken since conference 2024.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Conference, let me start by saying it's a great honour to be able to present you the equalities report for 2025. You'll find this report on your tables in front of you, and I ask you to certainly look through the report, but focus in on the commitment for the work ahead.

The commitments the executive council are giving you, are giving our brigades, our regions, and our members, the commitments that will design our equalities work over the next few years. And before I get into the meat of this, I want to give a massive congratulations to our equality sections, the national women's committee, the LGBT+ committee, the Black and ethnic minority members committee, and now also our relatively new disabled neurodivergent members' forum.

The work they are doing is absolutely tremendous. It's driven by the sections and it's running for the people within the sections and often those reps leading those sections and those forums put in a great amount of work, of graft, often for free, and they're getting fantastic results for our members in the workplace. We all applaud you for your work. *Applause*

I also want to thank you, conference, for making a decision last year that meant that this year we've recruited the first ever equalities officer for the Fire Brigades Union, Nina Reece, who is at the back and we thank Nina for the work she's already doing for the union. *Applause*

So, conference, I think we know the backdrop to the Equality Matters campaign, which we launched at this conference here in Blackpool two years ago. The media had been full of reports of the worst kind of behaviours: bullying, harassment, and discrimination. Almost every report published by the inspectorate reinforces that message.

There is a crisis in the fire and rescue service, and it's wrecking lives and careers of our members. These reports have come as no surprise to many FBU members, especially women, Black and LGBT+ firefighters. And it will have come as no surprise to many of our fantastic reps in this room and across the union who work every day to represent people on the receiving end of abuse and discrimination.

We know that while the public discussion on the issue focuses on the individual cases, time and time again, our experience is that these failings drive right to the top of our organisations. They are about abuse of power and often systemic discrimination, decades of failure, cuts and deregulation by government and managers.

But before I talk about what our plan is on that, I think it's important that we zoom out, because you can't understand what's going on in the fire service without looking at what's going on in our world. We are living through a moment where progress looks like we're going into reverse. We have a far right president in the United States.

There are now seven EU countries where far right are in power. And the official opposition in France and Germany are also of the far right. Here in the UK we have Reform leading disappointingly in the polls. We've had 14 years of Tory rule, which has made prejudice and scapegoating mainstream. And we see figures like Andrew Tate gaining traction amongst young men.

Public attitudes towards trans rights have gone backwards, especially recently, and our media is full of hatred and racist violence, and that's the result. But why? I think we all know and think it's obvious, but it's not said enough. The Tories and the billionaire-owned press aren't interested in this as a hobby.

Prejudice and oppression are a tool for them, a tool to distract us, the working class people to turn against one another, a way to bring down our wages, boost their own profits, and blame migrants for the consequences, divide and rule. And as a union and as conference, we say no.

So when a woman firefighter is abused in the job, we say no. When a Black member is made to feel like they don't belong in our fire service, we say no. When a trans firefighter can't go to the bathroom without fear of being challenged, we say no. That is an attack on all of us. And what we're doing on equalities isn't a nice extra; it's basic self-defence defending our members, and it's linked to the bigger picture.

As Steve said earlier, the world does not begin and end at the fire station door. Keir Starmer last week said, we're becoming an island of strangers. There's no strangers in our movement, conference. There's no strangers in our society. The strangers exist in Westminster.

An injury to one is an injury to all. That's been the motto of our movement for more than a century. The fight for equality is a political struggle. It's a collective struggle, and it's a heavy responsibility we all have to take head on. There's lots of talk of equalities within the fire sector right now.

But, conference, let's not kid ourselves. The people in charge of our sector are the ones who have presided over this crisis. We have to push and we have to fight, and we have to educate for improvements on maternity pay, recruitment and funding. And in many cases, it is senior managers who have exhibited the worst types of behaviours and created the boys' clubs.

We aren't going to defeat racism with NFCC toolkits or DBS checks. We aren't going to beat misogyny by trusting the work of the bosses. And while it's right that inclusive language is important, we aren't going to defeat structural oppression by using just different words. There is only one force that we can really use to transform the fire and rescue service, and that's the force represented here in this room.

The Fire Brigades Union is the democratic voice of firefighters and the fire and rescue service, and we should make sure they all know that. And we will fight and we will win on equalities in our sections from the ground up, with reps and activists at every level of our union in every workplace across our union.

But if we're going to do this work, conference, which we've committed to doing, haven't we, we have to be honest with ourselves. The overwhelming majority of the victims of bullying, of harassment, of victimisation, discrimination are our members and, therefore, so are the perpetrators. When we talk about the problems in our service, by definition, we're talking often about problems within our union.

The report you've got on your tables goes into some detail about the work we're doing around All Different, All Equal. And I won't go into that in the greatest amount of detail because it's ongoing, but it's absolutely right as a union that we say clearly, whose side are we on? And that principle needs to extend in every aspect of our work.

Last year we released the report into sexual harassment. 30% of women who responded said they'd experienced sexual harassment in an FBU context, 30%. We know for a fact that some of that harassment has taken place right here in this building at conference, and it's easy, I suppose, for me to say that's unacceptable.

What's harder is for us to change it. We know we can't solve these problems with top down instructions and a few nice brandings. We know we have to educate people, bring people with us and change their minds. But that doesn't mean we don't challenge people. It doesn't mean we don't call out racism. It doesn't mean we don't call out misogyny. It doesn't mean we don't call out homophobia and transphobia. We must.

Some people worry that campaigning on this issue is perceived as lecturing or shaming? We should be ashamed that one third of women have experienced sexual harassment in the FBU, but I'm proud of the fact that we chose as a union to undertake that by having a look at sexual harassment and understanding the impact it's having on our women members.

And I'm proud that we've now commissioned (and we've got Professor Rollock here at the back) a report into racism within our union and its structures. We need it. We need to work with Professor Rollock and then we will need to do work to enact the recommendations she brings to us.

And that's not all we should be proud of. The work our equalities sections have done over the last year has been fantastic. The Fight for 52 campaign is a campaign we can all learn from. It started less than two years ago, and in that time it pushed services right across the country to move to 12 months on full pay. The UK minimum now, the Grey Book minimum, is now six months.

The B&EMM section is leading the way in fighting racism within the sector and on mental health of Black firefighters, and we commend their work too. The disabled and neurodivergent members forum is already thriving with tens of members turning up to the forum meetings and fighting for the rights of DND members. Our LGBT+ section is at the centre of the fight for trans liberation and we applaud you for that.

And we're working on a new campaign on parental leave. Conference, can I just say how proud I was that after the Supreme Court ruling over a few weeks ago now our union stepped up working with our equalities sections, signed off by the executive council to ensure that a statement was robust and brought in by everybody.

If you're a trans person and you are feeling scared and alone, you have a home in the Fire Brigades Union and we have your back. But our equalities work and our equalities sections are so much more than what I can say here. If you can, please go meet them, have conversations with them, see what campaigns they're leading and support them both locally and nationally.

And, conference, president, I won't take too much of your time, but I will say this in closing and I said it earlier. Equalities, it's not an optional nice-to-have extra. It must be at the heart of everything we do as a trade union. It's the responsibility of every member in this room, every official across the union, every member in every workplace.

We're going to have to win that fight together. We won't win it on our own. Equality matters. No barriers, no exceptions. Solidarity, conference. I move the report. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Ben. I now call resolution 71. Media Reporting Standards moved by B&EMM. The EC give qualified support.

Resolution 71 MEDIA REPORTING STANDARDS

Conference acknowledges that the media is used to share political, topical and human interest news across the world.

Conference believes those who report the news have a moral obligation to share news, that amongst other things, is factual and ethical in both context and content.

Conference understands the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) regulates the content of news publications. It regulates more than 1,500 print titles and more than 1,100 online titles, including most of the UK's national newspapers. Members of the IPSO agree to follow the Editors Code of Practice, which is the framework used to uphold the highest professional standards. Within the framework there are sixteen clauses, one of which is discrimination. This clause sets out to protect individuals from discriminatory coverage.

Conference is aware that the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) have over 30,000 members, representing just over 27% of UK and Ireland journalists. The NUJ code of conduct sets out rules to ensure journalists do not produce material likely to lead to hatred or discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, race, colour, creed, legal status, disability, marital status or sexual orientation. The code states that content should also be accurate and fair.

Conference understands that it has long been recognised that the media plays a part in fuelling racial hatred by using negative terms, racist narratives and provocative depictions of Black and brown people within their reporting all of which cause mental, financial and physical harm to Black, brown and minoritised individuals and communities.

Conference instructs the Executive Council (EC) to;

- ***work with the NUJ to ensure that the Code of Conduct in relation to discriminatory reporting standards is adhered to by its members***
- ***consult with NUJ Black members council to explore ways to bolster the effectiveness of clause 12 within the Editors Code of Practice***

- **report to IPSO to investigate all material considered to have content of a racial discriminatory nature either seen personally or brought to the attention of the Black members council**
- **support relevant ongoing research conducted by the Runnymede Trust challenging structural racism, noting their most recent report entitled ‘A hostile environment: language, race, politics and the media.’**

Conference further instructs the EC to research and challenge as necessary the mechanism in place to support IPSO rulings, basing challenge on data specifically related to the percentage of clause 12 (Discrimination), breaches deemed as ‘No breach – after investigation’.

Conference instructs the EC, upon conclusion of research to lobby IPSO to further update as necessary the Editors Code of Practice to prevent, whilst being mindful of freedom of speech, racial inflammatory and prejudicial material.

Conference demands the EC provide regular updates to all officials in relation to this important work.

B&EMM

DWIGHT WILLIAMS (B&EMM):

Conference, president, moving resolution 71 Media Reporting Standards. Let me cast your mind back to April 2015. Journalist Katie Hopkins referred to migrants as cockroaches in an article written in *The Sun*, and suggested that gunships blasting the boats out the water are used to stop them crossing.

Despite independent press standards organisation, IPSO, receiving complaints under clause 12, discrimination of the editor's code of conduct. The clause was not engaged as she was not referring to an individual, but rather referring to a group of people, which is not currently in breach of the code of conduct.

The code of conduct allows journalists the ability to discriminate against a group of people. In 2018, *The Sun* newspaper accused of ethical failings over a front page story regarding footballer Raheem Sterling's gun tattoo. Journalists are expected to source both sides of the story, particularly around controversial or contentious issues. Yet *The Sun's* treatment was noticeable for failing to represent Raheem's side of the story, but also showing no indication that they even tried to. Their actions are an attempt to falsely criminalise him and curtail his illustrious career. In 2023, Black athletes, Bianca Williams and Ricardo Dos Santos were falsely stopped and handcuffed for alleged offences.

The press chose to focus on the blackened windows of their vehicle, the innocent pair were driving at the time of the police stop, noting that cars with black windows are similar to those that drug dealers drive. This narrative falsely fuelling speculation and doubt in the minds of its readers, and once again, dehumanising the victims, not taking into account the trauma they both suffered and that of their young child who was seated in the back of the vehicle at the time of the stop.

In 2024, Daniel Anjorin, a Black 14-year-old public schoolboy, slashed to death by a random attacker as he innocently walked to school, referred to in the press as Sword Boy. Why? Because of the nature of his killing, the press, choosing not to refer to him by his name, thus dehumanising the innocent victim and showing very little compassion and respect to his grieving family.

These are only four examples of the actions of some journalists who use their pen as their weapon of choice to dehumanise Black and brown people, incite hatred and deliberately cause harm disguised as news. The list is endless.

IPSO annual reports and independent reports consistently show complaints of breach of conduct not being upheld. For example, 14,173 complaints were received in 2022 with only 0.56% being upheld. The time has come for us to work with the unions, those already looking at ways to update and bolster the code of conduct used to ensure journalists uphold the highest standards of journalism across all platforms. We all witnessed what happened when Lucy Connolly falsely reported that the killings of Bebe, Elsie and Alice in Southport were at the hands of a Muslim asylum seeker who had entered the country on a boat.

Her actions inciting racial and religious hatred and righteous actions, for which she was rightly imprisoned. This is not a direct example of press-incited hatred. However, it is relevant as it shows the damage that the media lies can cause. It is not okay for journalists to add to the already imposed negative trope language and behaviours that Black and brown people are subjected to on a daily basis, making everyday life a battle to remain untouched by published racial hatred subtly disguised as news. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Dwight. Does that have a seconder?

STEVE TUCKER (Nottinghamshire):

President, conference, seconding resolution 71, move by B&EMM. We live in a world where the media has enormous power, not just to inform, but to influence, shape public discourse, and all too often reinforce harmful stereotypes. This resolution rightly highlights the media's responsibility to report ethically and accurately, especially when it comes to race and identity.

The Editors' Code of Practice and the NUJ's Code of Conduct set clear expectations, but standards mean nothing without accountability. We've seen time and time again how biased and discriminatory reporting can cause real harm, both mentally and physically to Black, brown and minoritised communities.

That harm must not go unchecked. By calling on our executive council to work with the NUJ, consult with their Black Members' Council, and challenge where needed, this resolution sends a clear message. We will not stand by while injustice is dressed up as journalism. I urge conference to support this motion. It's not just about words on paper. It's about standing up for fairness, dignity, and the truth. Conference, Nottinghamshire seconds. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Steve. That's open for debate. Nobody. The EC are giving qualified support. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Dwight, I'm certainly not going to speak for long because I couldn't match your eloquence on this subject at all, but what I will say is that the qualification is very minor in the fact that we believe we need to do this work across the entire TUC rather than just with one trade union, and that's what we intend to do. So thank you very much for bringing the motion.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, thanks, Ben. I now put resolution 71 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call on resolution 76. Strengthening diversity, equality, and inclusion commitments moved by the LGBT+ committee. The EC are supporting.

Resolution 76 STRENGTHENING DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION COMMITMENTS

Conference acknowledges that within days of entering the White House, President Trump directed the undoing of Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts within the federal government, terminating DEI in the federal workforce and in federal contracting and spending. His Executive Order also directs all departments and agencies to take strong action to end workplace DEI initiatives and encourage the private sector to take similar action.

Conference believes that the global uncertainty surrounding DEI has been exacerbated by large corporations like Amazon and Meta in the United States, which have started to scale back their DEI initiatives. This trend should prompt UK Fire and Rescue Services (UKFRSs) to scrutinise their procurement policies. It is crucial to prioritise DEI by avoiding business with companies that have diminished their commitment to these values or removed DEI statements from their websites. Ensuring that procurement practices align with DEI principles will reinforce the importance of promoting an inclusive and equitable environment.

Conference further believes that employers should seize this uncertainty as an opportunity to create intentional and meaningful improvements to their DEI measures, signaling their commitment to creating workplaces where everyone can thrive.

Conference recognises the need to remind employers that discrimination and prejudice is overt and not covert, and that they should combat any form of injustice such as discrimination.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to demand that all UKFRSs require businesses to demonstrate a commitment to DEI measures when procuring goods and services by reviewing their policies and demonstrate a tangible commitment to DEI ensuring public funds support ethical and inclusive practices.

LGBT+

MATTHEW BLACK (LGBT+):

President, conference, moving resolution 76. Strengthening Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Commitments. Conference. I'm a gay man in the fire and rescue service. I'm a gay man in every town, not necessarily the fire service, not just for work. *(Laughter, applause)* Thank you. I know firsthand how powerful it is simply to be seen, to be recognised and represented. For so long in my life, I was told or felt I had to stay quiet, to hide who I was or to accept that I never quite belonged. But I'm standing here as someone who refuses to be invisible because visibility matters. And that's why this motion matters because every time a company dismantles its DEI commitments or ignores the need for diverse voices at the table, it sends a message: you don't belong here. Well, I do, and we all do.

As trade unionists, we are committed to justice, fairness, and respect. Our own Rule Book, which we've democratically voted on, puts the commitment front and centre.

Rule A2 says the union seeks representatives of diversity in regards to our society and “*oppose all forms of discrimination whether on the grounds of race, creed, sex, sexual orientation or otherwise.*” You are here today in the shadow of a global rollback against DEI: diversity, equality, and inclusion.

Conference, we cannot ignore the warning signs. Just days into his presidency, Donald Trump signed an executive order to dismantle DEI across the entire federal government. Not by mistake, not after months of consultation, but as a first move. And that tells you everything. Why so fast? Because political dismantling, DEI wasn't a footnote; it was the strategy. It signals to his base, to those who feel threatened by social progress. It played on the false belief that if someone else is invited to the table, you lose your seat. That's rooted in what's called a scarcity mindset. The idea that opportunity, respect or recognition is a finite resource, but that's not how inclusion works.

Making space for others doesn't mean you lose your voice; it means we all gain a stronger workforce. It's a deliberate cultural strategy. From the beginning, Trump weaponised cultural divisions for political gain, targeting DEI fit neatly into his broader campaign to paint that global institutions and corporations have been overwhelmed by liberal elites and stirs backlash against movements like Black Lives Matter, the LGBT+ community and gender equality, and it mobilised conservative media and voltage around fear of cultural change.

It's about obstructing accountability. DEI programmes are bringing attention to racial disparities, discrimination and institutional bias. Trump's administration was repeatedly criticised for its records on these issues. And dismantling DEI initiatives removed one mechanism for accountability and shifted the focus away from systematic reform. By ending DEI in government, Trump set the tone for private corporations to follow suit, many of whom feared backlash from Trump if they didn't, or in fact they felt emboldened to quietly withdraw from DEI commitments once the federal example set the tone: you can step back too; we won't hold you accountable. And many followed: Amazon, Meta and others in the USA have scaled back their DEI work, webpages wiped, training budgets slashed, teams disbanded and the commitments are gone. And it's no accident.

Conference, this isn't just happening over there in America. But when one of the largest economies retreat from DEI, the ripple effect is real. And that's what we need to act on. The recent political gains by Reform UK have brought an openly hostile stance on DEI into mainstream local government. In the local elections, Reform took control of ten councils, and secured hundreds of council seats.

They moved quickly to roll back on DEI programmes, refusing to participate in diversity training and dismantling DEI roles as unnecessary. Nigel Farage even advises workers in diversity or climate roles to seek alternative careers very quickly. Reform UK frames DEI as divisive or wasteful, using the language of treating everyone equally to justify dismantling support for minorities.

This is a regression in protections for these groups, a chilling effect on progress, and the erosion of structures that hold these institutions accountable. This motion demands that the UK fire and rescue services scrutinise their procurement policies and refuse to do business with companies who have abandoned or diluted their DEI principles, companies and religions like the Plymouth Brethren.

Because public monies will never support prejudice, it must support progress. It also causes employers to use the global uncertainty as an opportunity not to withdraw, but to lead, to strengthen their own DEI practices and create workplaces where everyone can thrive. So let's remind them. Discrimination isn't covert; it's overt, it's real, and our members feel it. Attacks on diversity, inclusion are nothing but a smoke screen, a cover for the same old bigotry.

It's not against DEI because it's ineffective. They're against it because it challenges racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny. It's a narrow vision of what belongs in the workplace. Conference, our own Rule Book is clear. The commitment to oppose all forms of discrimination and to ensure our union reflects the diversity of the communities we serve.

This motion strengthens that commitment and puts pressure on our employers to do the same. Let's show what it means to be a union that doesn't just talk about fairness, but takes actions to defend it. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Well done, Matthew. Does that have a seconder? Yep. Come forward EC support.

HANNAH MARSHALL (Northumberland):

President, conference. First time conference. First time speaker. *Applause*

I second this resolution because this is about more than a policy. It's about principle. It's about who we are as an FBU, a movement and what we stand for in the face of growing global facility to equality and inclusion. As Matt mentioned, within days of returning to office, Trump signed an executive order aimed at dismantling diversity, equality and inclusion across the US Federal government. He didn't just pause these efforts, he ordered their removal, instructed departments to eliminate training, silence conversations about systemic inequality, and discourage private companies from continuing their own DEI work. We're now seeing major corporations follow suit. Equality, diversity, inclusion teams disbanded, inclusion statements disappearing from websites. The message is clear: equality is no longer a priority.

Conference, this is not just an American problem. This is a warning, a signal against the backlash. A signal that the backlash against inclusion is global and it's gaining ground. Within our own region, new Reform councillors have stated in their opening speeches about cancelling Pride and banning flying Pride flags on council buildings within their first opening statements.

That's why this resolution matters because it says not here and not in our workplaces. It calls on us to take a stand, not just in words, but in action, to use our procurement power to say, if you want to do business with us, you have to share our values. You must demonstrate a real, tangible commitment to diversity, equality, and inclusion.

And let's be honest, some of the companies currently benefiting from public contracts do not meet those standards. For example, the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church, a group whose affiliated businesses have received millions in government contracts, despite their deeply exclusionary practices. Their views on LGBT+ people are not just outdated, but harmful. Speaking firsthand on when you see groups linked to the Plymouth Brethren Church as an LGBT+ member on a fire station, you know the impact that has on members is huge.

They promote segregation, restrict women's roles, and reject the idea of inclusion. And these are not our values of the FBU. They have no place on our fire stations, at our incidents, and they should absolutely not be funded

by public money. We must look at companies involved in the arms trade, especially those supplying regimes that criminalise LGBT+ people, suppress women's rights or violate human rights.

If we are serious about equality, we can't turn a blind eye to where our money goes. We can't fight for justice at home whilst funding oppression abroad. This resolution is about aligning our values with our actions and making sure that our commitment to equality isn't just something we say, but it's something we do in every station, in every decision that we make.

And this isn't just about LGBT+ people, it's about all of us: race, gender, disability, faith, and class. And it's about building the fire and rescue service that reflects the communities we serve and one that leads by example.

We support this resolution to remind employers that discrimination is not always subtle and it's becoming less and less subtle. It's not hidden, and sometimes it's overt and it's in the policies, sometimes it's in the silence, and we must be prepared to call it out, whether it's in hiring, procurement, or in the boardroom. We also know this moment of uncertainty can be an opportunity and a chance for our employers to step up, to go beyond the tick box, to embed DEI into the heart of their organisations, not because they're told to, but because they truly believe in it.

And we want to see transparency. We want to know who we're doing business with, and we want to know what they stand for to make sure that our contracts, partnerships and public spending reflect our values. Because when we say we believe in equality, it has to mean something.

So let's support this resolution, not just for the LGBT+ community, but for every worker who's ever been told that they don't belong. And for every person who's been excluded, overlooked or silenced. Please support. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Hannah. Conference, do you agree to suspend standing order 16 to finish this debate? *Agreed* Thank you. That's open for debate now. And you move quick. Rebekah?

REBEKAH UDEN (North Wales):

Yeah. I'll move quick.

THE PRESIDENT:

No, I didn't mean move it quick. I mean you move quick.

REBEKAH UDEN (North Wales):

I try. President, conference, in North Wales we recently received a damning cultural review, which highlighted widespread bullying, sexual harassment, misogyny, and protectionism to name just a few. Across the border in Mid and West Wales the same day their damning report described similar behaviours and also described their senior management team as a boys' club. With similar themes of bullying and harassment being recorded and reported across the UK over the past few years, sadly, it seems to be a widespread issue.

A few days before the release of our report in North Wales, a historic homophobic social media post from our former deputy chief fire officer was leaked to myself and the brigade chair. This individual was also our DEI lead in the service. To say our trust in our employers is damaged is a complete understatement.

A message from members in North Wales: we do not accept that equality, diversity, and inclusivity is just a tick-box exercise. It should not just feature once a quarter in a working group. We wholeheartedly support this resolution. This would be an easy step in the right direction for our employers to show their complete disassociation and cease affiliation to anyone that does not uphold the highest standards of equality, diversity, and inclusivity. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Rebekah.

GUY LAWES (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, as Hannah, so eloquently put it, we are obviously seeing a difference in political attitude starting to filter into this country. In Durham, we are one of the unlucky areas that now have a majority Reform council. Farage made his warnings on the day that they got their victories about the future of DEI.

He gave his warnings about the future of certain groups of workers, and we have rumours that in the Durham County Council building, the removal of LGBT flags has already started. These people are stepping foot in that office this week as we're away. It's a couple of weeks' worth of them getting in. And although our service have made strides over the last several years to improve equality and to work with the FBU's equality sections, they also have a track record of obeying their masters.

So we'll see how that goes. We are very aware that we will be one of the case studies over the next year. We are fully prepared to fight daily for each other. We will need your help. And resolutions like this are exactly the help that we need. Durham supports the resolution. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Guy. Any more? No. I now put resolution 76 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Right conference, we are now going to go into tea break and if I could have you back in here by 1550. Thank you.

Break for tea

THE PRESIDENT:

Conference, come to order. I hope you're all suitably refreshed. We are carrying on with section H and now call para H2, para H3, para H4, para H5 NWC.

KIRSTY WRIGHT (NWC):

President, conference, speaking on the national section reports 2024. So for the first time in many years, a regional women's committee rep or point of contact in every region of the UK enabling us to support, represent, and organise our women members. On 1 July 2024, we saw the maternity pay increase for all women to 26 weeks at full pay.

As a result of our Fight for 52 campaign, national women's school was hugely successful and oversubscribed once again. Laura Bates was a guest speaker at school speaking on everyday sexism. Her book, *Fix the System, not the Women*, is a fantastic read. A read that should be read by men. Conference, we urge you to read this book.

Congratulations to Kerry McCrone, Seona Hart and Rachel Rogers who won the STUC Equality Award. *Applause*

We continue to support women on several issues, including sexual harassment. We saw the result of our own in-house research project. However, we are disappointed that not all of the recommendations have been completed over a year later, putting women at continued risk. In 2024, the three equality sections have been meeting regularly, working together to better support marginalised groups. Conference, we thank you for all the continued support of our women members. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kirsty. I now call para H6. Kerry. Yep. Simon, come on.

KERRY McCRONE (NWC):

President, conference, we applaud the union for their continued work with the disabled and neurodivergent forums, but one of the largest parts of the FBU as we know is conference. For neurodivergent attendees to conference the programme of business is difficult to navigate.

As 2026 welcomes a new venue for conference, we ask that consideration be taken to improve the running order of business to better assist our DND members. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kerry. Simon.

SIMON LEROUX (Scotland):

President, conference, speaking on paragraph H6. Conference, it would be remiss of us not to recognise the work that has been undertaken to deliver on the repeated calls from our members through our conference to deliver for our disabled and neurodivergent members. Report back from members who have attended the disabled and neurodivergent forum, and the response to the workplace guidance document has been excellent. We recognise and commend the work of our neurodivergent members alongside the EC to deliver on past resolutions and deliver for members living with neurodivergence and disability. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Simon.

PHILIPPA SMITH (West Midlands):

President, conference, speaking on para H6. I attended the disabled and neurodivergent forum earlier this year and found an understanding of the way I think, and I want to highlight the work going into this area as enlightening on both personal and union level. Following the forum and subsequent video, a neurodivergent member contacted me to ask how they could get involved with the FBU and its activities. That person is now meeting with us to discuss what their role could look like, and how we can support and engage other neurodivergent members.

Our brigade chair and I have met with the brigade's neurodivergent lead and as a committee, we're planning how best we can progress in this area. I urge you all to utilise the Neurodiversity in the Workplace guidance document on the FBU website and to raise awareness of the union's work in the area. I'm proud to be part of a union that not only recognises neurodiversity, but celebrates it. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Anybody else? AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Again, not going to speak too long, but just in relation to the points Kerry raised there, I'm sure it's not news to everybody here, but it may be to some. The union is currently undertaking an independent audit of our structures in relation to its inclusivity for DND members. But I just want to make this point to all delegates here.

We are learning on this subject together and we're making those implementations once we have done learning together. And I think if you look at conference over the last few years, certainly under Mark and Phil's stewardship, you've seen that standing orders have reflected on the concerns raised and made great strides in improving conference to becoming a more inclusive space. I'm not saying there's not more work to be done, but we are on that journey, and we are committed to making sure it is inclusive space. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. I now call resolution 3, Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled and Neurodivergent, moved by Avon, the EC are giving qualified support Avon.

Left or right. Which way are you going to go? I always go left.

Resolution 3 REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS FOR DISABLED AND NEURODIVERGENT

Conference believes that UK Fire and Rescue Services must invest more into workplace inclusion and reasonable adjustments for disabled and neurodivergent people.

Members currently face a postcode lottery for access to reasonable adjustments. While a member in one service is paid to provide qualified coaching to neurodivergent members, in the service next door a member may be refused, because of cost, the provision of simple reading software that is commonplace in many industries.

Reasonable adjustments are not the price of employing disabled and neurodivergent people. They are common sense and moral investments in wellbeing and productivity.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to seek agreement through the National Joint Council that fire service employers commit to appropriate and consistent budgeting for accessibility and reasonable adjustment provisions.

AVON

MATT SENIOR (Avon):

Thank you. President, conference, moving resolution 3. Although quickly, before I start, to the people who spoke on paragraph H6 and everyone that's made the DND forum impossible, thank you. Really. I noted qualified support, great. Qualified support's fantastic. It's qualified and that kind of reminds me a little bit of the Equality Act itself. It's support, but it's very qualified. But at least when the executive council tell you what their qualification is, they give you a reason. They say, maybe we can't do it, maybe we can't afford it, maybe it'll have unintended consequences.

Employers don't do that. They'll celebrate our differences. They'll tell us we're welcome. They'll tell us they want to help until it costs money. And then they don't tell you they can't afford it. They tell you, you don't need it. They tell you you're not trying hard enough. They tell you it's not required for your role.

And the reason we started putting this resolution together is because of a member in Avon who approached the service trying to return to work, who is severely dyslexic to the point where it does cause them day-to-day difficulties. But they are an excellent firefighter. They asked for a laptop for lots of really good reasons I won't get into, but it was really reasonable and a simple adjustment. They ended up resigning because of what happened next.

In a capability hearing, I had to listen to a diversity inclusion manager ask this member if they thought they were too dyslexic to be a firefighter. Last year, this is. That meeting got adjourned and it didn't restart, by the way. That was shut down quick. But it rumbled on, and eventually the member decided they had had enough and they quit. And I'm sorry to this day that I couldn't help them more, gave it everything. But we were just banging our head against the brick wall over a laptop. They lose laptops. Surely it wasn't about the money, but they never really said what it was about. They just said that he didn't need it.

The issue with this is quite simple. The Equality Act gives us support. But it gives the employer so many ways to wriggle out of it. Cost being one of the main ones. This doesn't ask for a lot. This is about asking through the NJC, that in fire service budgets, potentially there can be a line where they say, we are committing some money to investment in inclusivity because it's an investment in productivity. It will make the fire service more efficient. The demands on neurodivergent people in their day-to-day work are going to get greater. We have more written output, we have to read more. We have more appointments to juggle through prevention and protection work that falls on fire crews across the country, I'm sure. It's getting harder. The adjustments are now more necessary than they were already. So by negotiating with the employer, get them to nail down: "yes, we will put money in and we'll show you the money, we'll show you where it's going." We won't have people quitting the job because the services they work for won't give them the support they need. And there'll be no more excuses and no more barriers. But we need to do the work. It'll have a big impact. And I think it's only asking for a small thing from the employer.

Yeah, so in terms of the qualification, I think it is achievable. And I hope it's carried through. Conference, I move. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Matt. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody.

CHRIS COOK (Tyne and Wear):

Conference, president, general secretary. It's just a very quick comment. So on this, it's not just about the employers, but we need to be looking within our union as well. There's officials, there's reps, and there's members out there that need reasonable adjustments within our movement.

It is great to see that everyone was given that needed it. Yellow filters. Last year, Tyne and Wear, we moved a resolution looking at text-based neuro inclusive communication, which was jargon-free. Have we seen some of the pension circulars that come out? And I get that it's legal, but there must be a better way. So it's just to say we're chasing our employers, let's just be mindful within our movement. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Chris. Anybody else? No. AGS

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you, Matt, and great jumper from the forum. It's good to see it here at conference. The qualification is rather simple, really, and I don't think it detracts at all from the motion. It's that we believe this needs some time to work on developing this work. And that means we need to develop it with the DND members in the DND forum rather than just without them.

And that's what we intend to do in response to the resolution. But I just want to make a point on the Equality Act 2010 as well, because it's the view certainly of the executive council that the reasonable adjustments legislation is relatively strong in this area. And look, what I think what we need to also consider in this space is the NFCC produced a guidance document and I don't know if you've read it; it doesn't take long on this subject actually, when you compare it to ours, but it lacks a great amount of detail and is only guidance to employers. We produced quite an extensive booklet last year to give guidance to officials and to members in each individual workplace that was quite comprehensive, and I think sets out the union's position in this space quite considerably.

And I want to stress that reasonable adjustments are legal requirements of the Equality Act 2010, and a failure to implement them could bring about its own kind of disability discrimination. And therefore, if those reasonable adjustments are being refused, then it's important that they're challenged both locally and possibly through to employment tribunals.

Just again in response to Chris's additional point there. Yes, that's why we're doing the DND audit of our own structures, having a look at whether we are inclusive in all that we do. That includes, as I said, the structures of the union like conference, but also how we communicate directly with our members.

So rest assured, comrade, that will be covered as well. But the executive council support this with those very minor qualifications. President.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay. Thanks, Ben. I now put resolution 3 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call Para H7. I now call resolution 77 Equalities network resolution, moved by the LGBT+ section, the EC are giving qualified support.

Resolution 77 EQUALITIES NETWORK RESOLUTION

Conference recognises the value and importance of specific equality sections and notes the hard work undertaken by them alongside Fairness at Work Officers, the Disabled and Neurodivergent Members' Forum, and allies from across the Fire Brigades Union to address the challenges and concerns facing members on issues of equity, diversity and inclusion.

Conference believes that we could better connect this work if we create space for collaboration to discuss issues, consider intersectional approaches, share good practice or knowledge and build allyship.

Conference therefore instructs the Executive Council to establish an Equalities Network to support and connect members and officials undertaking this work and build towards holding an annual forum for the Equalities Network to collectively educate, empower and build unity, and that the first Equalities Network Forum must take place before Conference 2027.

LGBT+

MATTHEW BLACK (LBGT+):

President, conference, general secretary, moving resolution 77 Equalities Network Resolution. Conference, we are a union. We believe in unity, the strength that comes from standing shoulder to shoulder regardless of role, region or background.

But for those of us doing equalities work in this union, it can often feel like we're operating independently with people working hard on similar issues without the support or opportunities to connect. We have dedicated equality sections all doing vital work. We have fairness at work officers, working hard in their brigades and areas, but too often this work happens in isolation. People facing similar challenges without the time, space, or structures to collaborate, share ideas, or learn from each other.

That's what this resolution seeks to change. We are calling on the executive council to establish an equalities network, a structure that supports and connects the people already doing this work across our union, a network that recognises that issues of equality, diversity, and inclusion don't exist in separate boxes. They intersect, they overlap. And so too must our response. Conference, if you want to see the power of that connection, look no further than our equality section schools. For me, the LBGT+ school is genuinely the highlight of my FBU calendar, the education, the shared experiences, the support put together by the brilliant work of our education team, from Nina, our equalities officer, and from our section is inspiring. And I'm not part of the other equality sections, but I hear the exact same from their members. Imagine if we could bring the same spirit, that same collaboration into equalities network, where we connect across sections, share best practices, and bring more officials into the spaces to listen, learn, and engage directly.

This isn't about reinventing the wheel, it's about making the most of what we already have and giving it the space to grow stronger. This conference sets out a simple but powerful goal to build a network that can share good practice, explore intersectional approaches, and strengthen allyship, and to bring that network together at an annual equalities network forum, a space to educate, empower and unify. Conference, we have seen how powerful our union can be when we organise together. This equalities network will ensure that no equality rep stands alone, that no good idea stays hidden, and that no issue affecting our members goes unheard simply because it didn't fit neatly into one section.

We are stronger when we act together, and this resolution is about making that our standard. I urge you, support resolution 77. Let's build the equalities network and move forward together. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Matthew. Does that have a seconder? Yep.

ROB LEWIS (B&EMM):

President, conference, the B&EMM section second this resolution on behalf of the LBGT+ section because this is about building something that will strengthen our union, not just for today but for the future. Across our union, we've seen incredible work being done by the equality sections, LBGT+, Black and ethnic minority members, women, disabled and neurodivergent members, and our fairness at work officers.

These groups have worked tirelessly, often with limited resources to challenge discrimination, support members and push for a more inclusive fire and rescue service. We're tackling similar issues: harassment, underrepresentation, lack of inclusive policies, but we're doing this separately.

We're missing opportunities to collaborate, to learn from each other and to build a stronger, more unified equality movement within our union. This resolution proposes a solution, the creation of the equalities network, a space where all equality sections can come together to share knowledge, build allyship, to take an intersectional approach to the challenges we face and strengthen the collective voice of equality within the Fire Brigades Union. This is not just talking shop; this is about creating a structure that connects our work, amplifies our voices, and ensures that no one is left behind.

Because the truth is our struggles are not separate, they're interconnected. A Black lesbian firefighter may face racism, sexism, and homophobia all at once. A neurodivergent trans member may face barriers that are invisible to

others. If we want to tackle the inequality effectively, we need to understand how these experiences overlap, and we need to work together to address them.

An equalities network would allow us to educate and upskill our reps and members on intersectionality and inclusive practice, share strategies that work. Whether it's how to support neurodivergent members in the workplace, or how to challenge anti-LGBT+ rhetoric on station, build solidarity across equality strands so that no one is left to fight alone and ultimately strengthen our union. Because a union that reflects and represents all its members is a union that wins. Now, I know that some may ask, what about the cost? Let me be clear. The cost of not doing this is far greater. The cost is burnout. The cost is missed opportunities. The cost is members who feel isolated, unsupported, or invisible.

The cost is a union that doesn't live up to its values. We invest in training, we invest in campaigns, we invest in equipment. Why? Because we know this investment pays off. This is no different. Investing in equality is investing in the future of our union, and we're not asking for a blank cheque. We're asking to work with the executive council to make this practical, to explore how we can build this network in a way that is sustainable, accessible, and impactful to ensure that the first equalities network forum takes place before conference 2027, and it becomes a cornerstone of our equality work going forward.

This is about creating a space where LGBT+ members can learn from Black and ethnic minority members, where disabled members can share strategies with women members, where neurodivergent members can be heard and understood, where we don't just talk about inclusion, we live it because when we come together, we are stronger. When we share our struggles, we find common ground, and when we build unity across difference, we build a union that is truly for all of us.

This resolution is about more than logistics. It's about leadership. It's about saying that equality is not an add-on. It's central to who we are. It's recognising the work of our equality sections is not peripheral; it's foundational.

So, conference, let's take the step. Let's build the equalities network. Let's create a space where our equality work can grow, connect, and lead. Let's show our members, especially those who felt marginalised or unheard, that this union sees them, values them, and is ready to fight for them. Please support this resolution. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Rob. That's now open for debate. Anybody? No. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, president. Rob, thank you very much. Qualified support from the executive council. I do note the point you make in terms of the costs associated with this and the wider cost potentially of not moving forward with this work. But it is important that we do consider costs of new kinds of ideas in this sense. But the executive council do support the premise of having an equalities network, certainly. We just think that work needs to also be developed with the equality subcommittee, which has already been established, which sectional reps all sit around the table to discuss these things.

And we need to do that with the support of our head office team: Lindsey, Charlie, and Nina too. So we make sure that this lasts for the long term and isn't just a kind of one-off event. One of the concerns the executive council has is that there are already a series of schools and forums within the union, and we don't want people to have fatigue in attending an extra forum.

We want to make sure our schools and our DND forum are vibrant and the safe space that they are today. And not to have that diminished in this sense, but I'm not sure it will be. I'm sure it'll be a raving success. And the executive council support the premise of the resolution just with those minor qualifications.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay. Thanks, Ben. I now put resolution 77 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call para H8, para H9, H8. Oh, sorry, NWC.

KERRY McCRONE (NWC):

President, conference, speaking on paragraph H8. The NWC would like to highlight that although our Fight for 52 campaign has been successful in shifting the Grey Book minimum from six weeks to 26 weeks, this is still a long way off from this campaign's asks: 52 weeks' full maternity pay.

All officials, all members must keep up this campaign and keep it at the forefront and continue to lobby fire and rescue services across the UK to end the postcode lottery and implement 52 weeks' full pay.

The hard work of our reps and what they've done across the country has not gone unnoticed, and we would like to thank you for that. There are now several brigades that have implemented 52 weeks: Greater Manchester, West Midlands, Kent, Berkshire. Devon and Somerset and South Wales. This is a testament to the fantastic work and campaigning of our officials, and we know many more local campaigns are ongoing.

For some women, they will receive over £16,000 less than others when it comes to maternity pay. This is shocking and we must end this postcode lottery. The Fight for 52 campaign is not only about maternity leave, but also touches on broader issues of recruitment, retention, and inclusion within the fire and rescue service. By advocating for fair maternity provisions, we aim to make our profession more inclusive and supportive for women, ensuring that we are not disadvantaged due to inadequate maternity policies.

For those who have not yet achieved 52 weeks' full pay, the fight is far from over. We will continue to campaign to ensure that every woman firefighter is treated fairly and receives 52 weeks' full pay maternity. Next year, I hope to be standing here reporting that all women will be receiving just that.

We need every member and official to help make sure that happens and for the EC to continue to include this as part of the pay claim. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kerry. Yep.

CARI McINTYRE (Scotland):

President, conference, in January this year, following formal communication from our regional officials, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service refused to increase the maternity from the bare minimum to 52 weeks' full pay. This was completely unacceptable to our members and kicked off our Fight for 52 campaign in Scotland on International Women's Day in March.

A maternity survey was created and sent out to our Scottish women members. The findings and the report were published this month, and the results were harrowing, but unsurprising to a lot of our female members. We have since taken that campaign to STUC Congress, held a Fight for 52 drop-in session with MSPs at Scottish Parliament, and met with the Minister for Communities and Victims.

We have taken the fight through the first formal process of resolution with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. If they do not come back and implement the 52 weeks, we will take it to the next stage. This is a fight we must win to end the outrageous postcode lottery across the UK.

We applaud the brigades that have won 52 weeks, and it is our sincere hope that Scotland will soon join them. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you. I now call para H9, para H10. Yep.

ELLIE HATHAWAY (South Wales):

All right. President, conference, first time delegate. First time speaker. *Applause* Thank you.

Speaking on paragraph H10 Senedd inquiry into culture in South Wales and other Welsh fire brigades in region 8. South Wales particularly, and the other brigades, thank our last EC and the former GS for their testimonies at the

Senedd when they took place. Since then, at that point in March last year, all three of our fire and rescue services in Wales have experienced or been through cultural reviews, which have been published, the results of which have had variable effects and destabilising impact on our members in our region and our brigades. It is evident that the managers of our services are not particularly keen to engage with some of the findings of those reports and are using them as excuses to attack the terms and conditions of our members in South Wales. This is not an acceptable way to deal with culture.

It does not embrace any of the things that we promote as FBU officials. And it is not an excuse to attack shift changes and other things like ridership levels. We are imploring that conference agrees that these fire and rescue services do not use these as an excuse, and actually follow through with the recommendations in those cultural reviews.

Sorry, I only literally threw this together two seconds ago. We need commitment for the work to be done to work on the Crest reports that were done on Mid and West Wales Fire Service and in North Wales. Without culture improvements, our members cannot fully be expected to further sacrifice their current working conditions.

We would not wish to further impact our members at this difficult time and insist that any further work done on emergency cover reviews is now seen as ongoing progress with little impact on members and on ridership numbers, please. We recommend quarterly reviews of working groups and data gathering, availability monitoring, and financial and budget transparency in order to monitor any improved availability and potential reduction of spending. Shift changes should not be the primary focus of these problems. Shift changes are not the problem in our fire and rescue services in their response to culture. Thank you, conference. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Ellie. I now call para H11. I now call resolution 70. All Different, All Equal legal representation moved by London. They've agreed to remit with the right to speak.

Resolution 70 ALL DIFFERENT ALL EQUAL (ADAE) LEGAL REPRESENTATION

Conference notes recent experiences have shown that the processes set out in the ADAE policy are highly problematic when requests for representation are made in connection with a defence against legal proceedings (which invariably are lodged with an employment tribunal). In such instances it requires one or both of the parties (Claimant and/or Respondent) having to reveal their legal arguments and/or legal advice.

Ultimately, where a complaint has been lodged with an employment tribunal the test of whether an act of discrimination or victimisation has been perpetrated will have been placed before the tribunal to make the determination

Conference therefore instructs the Executive Council (EC) to conduct a review of the ADAE policy to determine whether an alternative or modified process or test should be applied in such circumstances.

Conference requires that the outcomes of that review are reported by way of an EC statement and if required, any proposed rule changes brought for consideration to Conference 2026.

LONDON

JON LAMBE (London):

Conference, President, general secretary, this is something that we feel needs to be looked at. We've had the assurances from the EC that it's going to be covered under the ongoing ADAE review as well as the assurances during that review they'll be getting better engagement with our equality sections and the regional secretaries. So we remit. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

OK. Thank you for that, Jon. I now call resolution 72. Protecting the dignity of those who support All Different, All Equal ADAE process. Moved by Berkshire. The EC are seeking Berkshire remit or they will oppose.

Resolution 72 PROTECTING THE DIGNITY OF THOSE WHO SUPPORT OUR ALL DIFFERENT ALL EQUAL (ADAE) PROCESS

Conference notes the importance of our ADAE policy and the importance of the transparency of the process to our members.

Conference also notes that it is vitally important our Union protects the dignity of those who come forward and share their experiences of discrimination, bullying or harassment.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to amend the ADAE policy to ensure the complainants and witnesses only receive information that pertains to their involvement in the case through redaction of the final report.

BERKSHIRE

JAMES HUNT (Berkshire):

President, conference, moving resolution 72. Conference, this motion isn't abstract. It comes from a real case in our brigade that has exposed serious failing in how we handle complex complaints that involve multiple complainants. Last year, not only a member of Berkshire, but someone who is part of our movement, was found to have committed numerous behaviours that clearly breached our All Different, All Equal policy and values, behaviours that harmed a large number of our members and ultimately led to summary dismissal, which was then upheld at appeal. Eventually after these had already taken place and our union had already represented this member, their representation was even removed on the basis that no arguable defence could be found for their actions.

Convincing those affected to speak out wasn't easy. Many of them weren't even our members. It took time, reassurance, and no small amount of courage for the individuals involved. But eventually they came forward and spoke to our trained investigators, trusting the process, trusting our union. But when that final report was issued, that trust was shattered. Each and every complainant received a copy of the full investigation report, inside which was the deeply personal, in many cases traumatic, stories of every victim involved in this case, unredacted without warning. Victims very few people knew about, who had wished to remain as anonymous as possible through this were outed.

Conference, this policy meant we sent a father of one of the complainants every last detail of his daughter's substantial harassment alongside the counterclaims of the applicant. This was a story that no parent should have had to read. Within half an hour of the report landing in inboxes, multiple complainants were calling the reps and even senior management in tears. People who had already gone through so much were re-traumatised by having their stories shared to others unnecessarily by a process that was meant to protect them. This has caused great distress, and it saddens me to say that there are those who will not trust our union again in a similar situation. We want to be clear here that this did not happen through error of the diligent and tireless investigators who undertook this investigation. This was a difficult case for all involved, and we want to put on record our thanks to those from head office for their efforts and support in this case.

This happened because it's our policy and it could happen again. What we're asking for is the very confidentiality of the All Different, All Equal policy, that the All Different, All Equal policy promises: sensible, balanced guidance to ensure that complainants in a shared case are kept informed, but not exposed.

This resolution simply calls for the final report of a case which involves multiple complainants to be redacted, so that each complainant is only privy to their involvement within a case. Their deeply personal story won't be shared with others, and they won't see the trauma of others in return. If the All Different, All Equal policy is going to work, if we're serious about making our union a safe and inclusive place, then our processes must not cause further trauma to those it seeks to protect.

We need a process that our members can trust. One that protects their confidentiality and their wellbeing. We're aware the EC has asked us to remit this resolution because of what we're told: it's too much work to redact the final reports. We're also assured there is an ongoing review in the policy, but in Berkshire, conference, we have seen the harm this has caused firsthand. In our view, this change must be included and this resolution will ensure that. If it is

a recommendation as part of the review that will then be accepted, then there's no reason to oppose it. And it's an easy win. Happy days. If not, we in Berkshire cannot in good conscience leave it to be swept aside on the basis of it being too much work, or chance that's in the review that's coming up. Conference, please support this resolution for the members and the non-members who spoke up last year, and for any that still need to in the future. Thank you. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, James. Does that have a seconder?

KIRSTY WRIGHT (NWC):

President, conference, speaking to second resolution 72, Protecting the Dignity of Those who Support our ADAE Process. We know that challenging discrimination, bullying, or harassment takes immense courage. Often it comes with personal and professional risk. It is unacceptable that those who come forward, whether as complainants or witnesses, could be left feeling exposed or unsupported by the very process designed to protect them and our fellow members.

This motion is more about than just redaction of information. It's about reaffirming our union's commitment to dignity and safety. If we ask our members to trust the ADAE process, we must earn that trust by safeguarding their identities and limiting the exposure of personal information. This is particularly important for women and marginalised groups who already faced disproportionate barriers to break barriers to speaking up.

We cannot allow fear of retaliation or of being publicly identified to silence people who are trying to make our workplace fairer and safer. Conference, protecting dignity, it's not optional, it's a duty. Let's make it clear that our union stands firmly with those who challenge injustice and that we will shield them from further harm wherever possible.

Conference, the national women's committee second this motion. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kirsty. That's open for debate. Yep.

DAN BARTLEY (Mid and West Wales):

President, conference, in 2023 three members came forward in our service and called out the inexcusable behaviour of an individual who was allowed to preside over his watch in a reign of terror. It was allowed to carry on by multiple senior members of the organisation and even resulted in the crew and former crew members being addressed and threatened by senior officers to stop complaining about this individual. Following the investigation, the individual was provided with clearly identifiable information, which has resulted in consistent vexatious complaints, destroying many people's personal and professional lives. We support resolution 72. This cannot happen again. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Dan. Yep.

RICHARD BEEBY (Suffolk):

Conference, president, as a rep, I recently took on the ADAE course becoming an ADAE investigator. It was something I believe in, I still believe in, and whilst it's often not a process I enjoy doing, I welcome the chance to partake in it.

As an ADAE investigator, I would not say it's too much work at all for us to need to redact the final reports to safeguard those who have put themselves in vulnerable positions to reveal information that can cause distress to them. So on that, we welcome this resolution and support. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you any more? AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you, president and conference. This is why we took the decision to hold a fringe meeting today prior to this debate so we could have a discussion about the ongoing work this document sets out in terms of our work around ADAE. And I've said it before when I moved the section that the ADAE policy is very powerful.

It sets out why we don't automatically represent members who have harmed one of our own. And we stand by it. It's a strong, very clear policy, and that's why we're seeking the remittance, or if not, we will oppose it. Because during the review that we set out downstairs during the fringe meeting at lunchtime that was attended pretty well, the review that was set out for the delegates that attended that could see that they could accept the flaws that exist within the current policy and that the work that has been done as part of that review is being done in conjunction with our equality sections and our regions, our brigades, our fairness at work and our sectional reps are feeding in to that review. That review is ongoing. As James said, and I have reviewed the case in the brigade in question here, and I confirm that the process and the conduct of the vice-president that undertook the review and undertook the investigation was carried out in accordance with policy and within rule.

The review that we are committed to doing and we are doing is a wide-ranging review of All Different, All Equal policy. The intent of the resolution is welcome. The messages here at conference about there being an issue in terms of it being too hard to redact are not the opposition the executive council have. And I'm unsure of how that's being communicated to delegates that have raised it because actually I don't think that has ever been a discussion at the executive council. I think we understand the need for certain redaction in policy. But we have set up, you have asked us to set up, and we are delivering on last year's resolution to review ADAE policies, working with all, working with our equality sections and not moving without them.

This resolution, in effect, moves us without the full support of all our equality sections, and that's what we want to avoid. So we're asking that it is remitted. I can give the assurances that we'll look at it, not just look at it. I think we realise there is a problem with redaction and we're willing to move in support of that issue. But we'll do it in conjunction with our equality sections, not without them. And that's why we're asking it's done within the review. So please, conference, we ask that this is remitted, and if it's not, we ask that you oppose it based on the work we need to do alongside our equality sections. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. Berkshire, right of, reply. I'm not going to have any shouting out from the floor. Respect the speakers. Thank you.

JAMES HUNT (Berkshire):

President, conference, thank you for the comments from the GS, but our members don't need a review. They went through it. Our reps, myself, we answered phone calls from those members, so in good conscience, we can't remit it. We've got our equality sections here, so we move. Please support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, James. I now put resolution 72 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 73. Right to Appeal and Right to Representation moved by Berkshire. EC are seeking remit, or they will oppose. I've got a déjà vu feeling.

Resolution 73 RIGHT TO APPEAL & RIGHT TO REPRESENTATION

Conference notes the importance of the "All Different All Equal" (ADAE) policy to facilitate a fair investigation into allegations of bullying, harassment or discrimination.

Conference also recognises the distress that can be caused to victims where officials or representatives of our Union provide representation to those who are perceived, by Regional Committee (RC) or the Representation Appeals Committee (RAC) (in the case of Fire Brigades Union (FBU) Officials), to have no arguable defence for the bullying, harassment or discrimination that they are alleged to have committed.

The ADAE policy permits the continued representation of an applicant, who is found to have no arguable defence as soon as the applicant has submitted an appeal against this outcome, as decided by the RC or the RAC (in the case of FBU officials).

Conference recognises the responsibility placed upon the RC and RAC but it equally acknowledges their skills, experience and consideration when assessing the cogency, consistency and eligibility of all evidence before determining whether or not there is an arguable defence.

Conference notes that the ADAE policy time period for an applicant to submit an appeal is seven working days.

Conference also notes that the ADAE policy states an appeal must be heard within 10 working days of receiving an appeal and expects this to be adhered to.

Conference therefore instructs the Executive Council to amend the ADAE policy and uphold the initial decision of the RC or RAC to withdraw representation until such time that an appeal successfully overturns any decision to withdraw representation.

BERKSHIRE

JAMES HUNT (Berkshire):

Part two. Are we on? Yeah. Cool. President, conference, speaking to move resolution 73. Conference, as you've heard last year it came to light a large group of our members and non-members alike were subjected to conduct that fell drastically short of our union's values by someone who was not only one of our members, but someone who knew our Rule Book intimately.

It is thanks to these complainants' bravery in coming forward to trust our union and assist our All Different, All Equal process that ultimately it was decided that this member who had caused so much harm had no arguable defence, and our union would no longer support them.

But here's the issue. Our union did stand by them, not only for their initial discipline hearing where they were dismissed, but then we stood by them in their appeal hearing to appeal that dismissal. This was a complex case, and it took a lot of investigation by the service and by our own investigators. We accept that despite best efforts from our own investigators for the All Different, All Equal process, hindered in part by an applicant who knew our procedures very well, so knew how to frustrate them, that we could not come to an outcome to remove their representation before the applicant's first hearing.

So we stood by them in their discipline hearing, we couldn't get it done in time. What we cannot accept, however, is that despite this member, after that initial hearing being found to have no arguable defence for the numerous complaints against them, and the member having both been dismissed following their initial hearing, that we stood by them. The member was then represented by that first hearing. The reason why we stood by them at their appeal as well as their initial hearing was that the decision to withdraw representation made after a thorough and sensitive process was automatically reversed the moment it was appealed.

So, despite the gravity of the case, despite the member having already been found to have failed to uphold our values, union representation was reinstated throughout their appeal process, as if this decision to take it away in the first place hadn't been made at all. This puts the union in a contradictory position.

On one hand we say we stand with victims of discrimination and not with those who perpetrate it. On the other hand, our own process allows someone who has been found to have no arguable defence for their breach of our policies to retain representation until their appeal is concluded. Even though in most legal employment processes, a decision stands unless the appeal actually overturns it. You don't appeal a prison sentence and then not go to jail until the appeals are heard; you go to jail first. Same with dismissals.

So let's be clear, withdrawal of representation is not done lightly. The All Different, All Equal policy outlines a methodical, serious investigation process. It requires full evidence gathering, consideration of defences and an assessment of whether representation would conflict with our union's values. It is deliberately robust, and removal

of representation only follows after two trained experienced All Different, All Equal representatives complete a thorough investigation, which is then presented to a panel of likewise experienced brigade representatives who must then agree on this decision. Once that process has been completed, why should the outcome be suspended just because an appeal has been lodged? We don't see that in criminal justice as I mentioned, we don't see it in employment law. Why do we see it here? Worse yet, any member who loses representation and realises their hearing is next week and then takes the time to read our All Different, All Equal policy may realise if they lodge an appeal, they'll gain representation just long enough to cover them, and that could be long enough which, thanks to the skills of our representatives, to keep them in their job.

How's that going to look to our members when they've been discriminated against, bullied, or harassed by someone we then protected and saved their job? The policy gives seven days for applicants to appeal and another 10 days for the appeal to then be heard within our structures. That's 17 days of continued representation if the appeal is heard on time.

In Berkshire's case, that appeal hearing took months, not days, and our union stood by this member the entire time. We have also heard of other cases where this happened as well. What message did this send to those harmed by the behaviours our union abhors?

This resolution simply calls for a fairer balance that the union's initial decision made only after the careful deliberation I've listed remains in place, until the appeal is successful, if it is successful. This will protect our values, our credibility, and most importantly, it protects our members from further trauma, knowing their own union is defending someone that caused them harm. Conference, as we raised before, if this is already a recommendation in the ongoing All Different, All Equal review, then this is an easy win for the EC with no need to oppose it. If it isn't, and we want to ensure that our All Different, All Equal policy does more good than harm, and that we only stand by those who uphold our values, this resolution must pass. Please support this resolution. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, James. Does that have a seconder? Definitely déjà vu.

KIRSTY WRIGHT (NWC):

President, conference, I second resolution 73, Right to Appeal and Right to Representation, on behalf of the national women's committee. Also, from the perspective of somebody who has felt firsthand what happens when our systems are exploited and the safeguards we rely on fall short.

This resolution speaks to something many of us in the room know too well. The devastating impact when individuals with no arguable defence are allowed to continue using union representation to protect themselves rather than to seek accountability. I have stood by while somebody who caused harm continued to be supported, not because there was a defence, but because they knew how to work the process.

The result wasn't justice, it was silence, self-doubt, and deep frustration for those of us who expected better from within our own structures. Even when representation was eventually withdrawn, follow-up actions such as internal union discipline simply didn't happen. Policies that should have protected us weren't followed, and we have been left questioning who does this process really serve?

This resolution is not about removing the right to representation. It's about restoring fairness and integrity, and ensuring that when our regional and appeals committees take the difficult step to withdraw representation, that decision is practised until an appeal process proves otherwise.

It is about respect. It is about justice, and it is about protecting the values of what our union is supposed to stand for. Please support this resolution, not just for policy but for people. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kirsty. That's now open for debate.

MO AHMED (London):

Conference, president and Steve Wright, the awesome new general secretary, I'm probably going to be in a lot of trouble with my group here who have a different view of this whole thing than myself. I think the ADAE whole process is something that is abused time and time again for me.

I agree with my comrade from Berkshire at that first bit that where there's no arguable defence if it's something that serious and bad to be able to game the system and then prolong it so you can get representation for cases and stuff for me is completely unacceptable and I just do not agree with it.

I get some of the reservations from the people that I'm with. For the last couple of years within the Fire Brigades Union, we've had so much problems in London with certain people, certainly the previous general secretary and that kind of stuff. And people are worried that this can be abused. Someone might be the first ADAE, they look into it and they're found guilty or there's no arguable defence.

And then representation's taken away almost in a malicious way. I get that. But we need to move on from that, especially with the new general secretary and hopefully a new time. But for me, if you've got something, especially on racism, homophobia, sexism, and the first time it's been done robustly and there's no arguable defence, I can't with any conscience, regardless of my people, support something that gives you representation. Thank you. *Applause*

ROB LEWIS (B&EMM):

President, conference, we as a section cannot, and we as a union should not, stand by and witness the further victimisation of victims we support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Rob. Any more? AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

I know what you're thinking. It would be perverse of any of you to support the last one and not this one actually, especially considering the assurances from the executive council are the same. I will make one point though in relation to some of Mo's comments there. Actually, I think the executive council understand why this is being moved and I think broadly support the intent of what's being moved here.

But, however, as I set out in the last one, there is a robust review of ADAE being undertaken that includes all people from across the union. And we believe it's the right and proper place that, after you commissioned that place to have this discussion, it be allowed to bring about its policy changes to next year's conference, which will be a whole scale review of ADAE and not necessarily just isolated to this.

There were victims of discrimination discussed in the debate here. And I just want to say we stand in solidarity and support with all victims of abuse and discrimination. And that goes without saying again, I'm sure. Okay. Thank you, comrades. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. Berkshire, right of reply.

JAMES HUNT (Berkshire):

President, conference, AGS, thank you for your statements. But again, we in Berkshire have seen the harm this has caused. If the review doesn't find this, it needs to, so this resolution will ensure it. Again, we've got our equality sections here. So, I move still. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks for that, James. I now put resolution 73 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Right, conference. We're now moving on to section B, Pensions. I call para B1. I now call resolution 26, Normal Pension Age of 55, moved by London with an amendment from Merseyside. The EC are giving qualified support.

Resolution 26 NORMAL PENSION AGE OF 55

Conference recognises the victories the Fire Brigades Union has achieved regarding pensions.

Conference notes that a normal pensionable age of 60 in England, Scotland and Wales is unacceptable.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to immediately start a campaign to ensure that all UK firefighters have a normal pensionable age of 55.

LONDON

AMENDMENT

3rd paragraph, insert 2nd sentence 'That campaign should also include the review of accrual rates, to ensure that there is no financial detriment to members because of the earlier retirement age.'

MERSEYSIDE

JON LAMBE (London):

Conference, president, general secretary, firstly, we need to applaud the work done by officials and the national officers regarding the fight against age discrimination and our wins in court regarding the pensions. So firstly, I'd like to thank everyone up there and all our officials for the work they've done on that.

That being said, we all know the current retirement age of 60 is unacceptable and unsafe. We should have spent the last 19 years campaigning for a fit for purpose retirement age for all firefighters. We need to start a campaign now. We all understand what it means to be a firefighter. The risks and the stresses it puts on your body. When you enter a house fire, even what we describe as a bread-and-butter job, you are entering the most inhospitable environment on the planet.

The human body is not supposed to be able to survive in that environment. Our members, day in, day out, enter these hostile and dangerous environments to save life. The politicians don't understand the dangers or the stresses on the body that our members have to go through to perform their duties. They have never done it. They will never have to do it.

Let's be clear, no government, including this Labour government, is going to change the retirement age for our members off their own bat. We need to make them do it. We need to make them do the right thing. We need to fight for our members, and we need to fight for a normal pension age of 55. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Jon. Merseyside to second. Are you going to move the amendment at the same time? Thank you.

GRAEME JONES (Merseyside):

President, conference. Speaking to second resolution 26. Comrades, like London, we also welcome and recognise the hard work undertaken by FBU national officials in their fight on pensions and subsequent injury to feelings pay awards. We also recognise the impactful work undertaken by UCLan around contaminants and carcinogens within firefighting.

As I'm sure most of you are more than aware, firefighting takes its toll on your body, your mind, and on your families. We've seen the inclusion of resolutions to address issues around decontamination, to address whether or not fitness standards are applicable for a lifelong career in firefighting and to address mental health issues for firefighters.

This resolution works to protect us against all of those things in the time of our lives when we are at our most vulnerable. Dr Nicola Vanacore from the Italian National Institute for Health found that, in the 2010 study, firefighters are two times as likely to develop and die with motor neurone disease than the general population with the average

age of onset for sporadic motor neurone disease being between the ages of 58 and 63. Comrades, our current retirement age sits smack bang in the middle of that.

In a study by Dr Richard Graveling titled, *Scoping Study, Review of Aging and the Demands of Firefighting* shared by this very union, Dr Graveling cited the 1991 study which showed firefighters are two and a half to three times more likely than the general population to be hospitalised with knee and hip osteoarthritis, the median age for onset, 55.

In the years 2017 to 2018, according to the government's own figures in fire, 1,112 firefighters were dismissed on their inability to maintain fitness levels whilst just 91 took early retirement. Last year, 2023 to 2024, 29 firefighters took resignation due to ill health. 225 took early retirement making around one fifth of all retirements in the fire service, and 46 were dismissed on grounds of poor performance, which included an inability to maintain fitness levels.

The very real struggle that firefighters face maintaining the ability to function to high levels required and to maintain fitness, maintain mental health into the final years of their careers has been made worse by the cruel and unjust extension to 60. As well as the fear of not being able to reach retirement age, firefighters are left with the prospect of having impaired life functions when they do retire. We shouldn't be serving our communities in a lifelong career only to enjoy a few short years of having good mobility, of not being struck down with ill health and diseases that kill us quicker and worse in the years we have left.

We welcome this call for a campaign. And we support and second the resolution from our comrades in London. Conference, I urge you to support it. Conference, I second.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you for that, Graeme. Does the amendment from Merseyside have a seconder? The EC are supporting that. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate.

KIRSTY WRIGHT (NWC):

President, conference, speaking in support of resolution 26. Normal pension age of 55. The national women's committee speak in support of this resolution. A normal pensionable age of 60 in the UK has never been acceptable and it never will be. We recognise the battles fought and won by our union. Time and again, the FBU have stood against governments that have undervalued our work, our sacrifice, and the risks we take to protect our communities.

We have fought and we have won, but the fight is far from over. For women in the fire service, this issue is especially urgent. The physical demands of firefighting do not lessen with age. They intensify. The realities of aging, combined with the distinct physical challenges faced by female firefighters, mean that asking us to push our bodies to the limits into our sixties is not just unreasonable, it is unjust, and it is unacceptable. This is about fairness. This is about dignity. This is about protecting those who spend their lives protecting others. Raising the normal pension age forces firefighters into an impossible decision, forcing them to either sacrifice their health or retire without security. We will not accept that.

We're not asking for favours. We are demanding what is right. Moving the pension age to 55 would ensure that firefighters, men and women alike, can retire with their health intact, their dignity upheld, and their service honoured. To see it reasonable for us to carry on beyond that age is not just unfair, it is dangerous.

The national women's committee stand here today, united, unwavering and unrelenting. We will not stop until every firefighter in this country has the pension age they deserve, the pension age that their families deserve. Conference, we support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kirsty. I now call Mark Rowe to give the qualification.

MARK ROWE (National Officer):

Thanks, president, conference. Yes, in moving the qualification, there's a sort of a common thread that'll run through several of the pensions resos here. So you'll be relieved that I'm not going to get up on every single one. So where

the EC supports, I'm not going to get up, as clearly we support. And on the qualified supports coming up, I'll cover it in this one because the qualifications are going to be broadly the same.

So firstly, before we go into the pension stuff, I just want to put on record thanks to yourselves as officials, really, because there's no other generation of FBU officials, or I believe, any official in any trade union that's had to deal with the amount of pensions issues that you do. You've had to read, understand, and advise on a huge volume of issues in the one profession. I'll just briefly whistle through some, so the FPS 92, the NFPS 2006, the LGPS, the modified scheme, RDS pensions issues, including first options exercise, second options exercise, aggregation, consequential loss, various RDS tax issues, pre 7 April 2000 transfers, claimants who have passed away before and after retirement, eligible estates, injuries to appeal, remediable service statements, CETV issues, cost cap mechanism, remedy legislation, pension sharing orders, and ill health pension retirements. And that's a few of them. So for you to have grasped that and been able to advise members so importantly when they are bringing them to you is - I can't thank you enough because you are not coming to me personally now for this information. You're regional officials and you are dealing with this.

So I think certainly, president, a round of applause for yourselves for that, because that's a phenomenal amount of work that you do on just one issue. That's just one issue of your daily work. So thank you for the work that you're doing on that.

Just briefly I will go into the qualification. On the pension circulars themselves. Yes, they are heavy, they are legislation-heavy a lot of the time. We are looking at that as the AGS says in the review of all the communications we put out. But quite often they are provided to you as reference documents. So you can just send them on to members or just cut and paste for them. They are legally very heavy sometimes because we have to put the legal position to you as well, so that you can provide our members with that as well. There is an obligation on us to provide that.

So on the resolution itself, the qualification is it is the union's position that 55 is the NPA, it is the NPA in Northern Ireland, as you know. We just need to be realistic on the chances we need for any work that we undertake, and we will undertake this work. It needs to be heavily evidence-based. What we don't want to do is enter into something where we inadvertently get the government to say, oh we've looked at all the mortality rates now, and it's actually, we think there's a case that it should go up to 62 or 63. So we just need to really consider how we're going to craft this.

We also want to point out that on these resolutions, control as well is an issue. So we will be looking at control retirement age and the LGPS, and we are raising at the SAP meetings every time we attend Scheme Advisory Boards that we do not accept the pension age of 60. I updated national women's committee on recent conversations I'd had with Home Office, when it was Home Office just before 1 April, on a ten-year review and looking at all that. Fortunately, they were quite positive in that. As you know, we've got the fire minister here this week. And the general secretary and I have taken the opportunity to carve out some time to sit down with the fire minister solely on pensions issues. So this will be one of them. We want a single point of contact. We want to sit down and progress them.

So on a rather lengthy qualification, President, but you have my assurance, that it's not going to be on them all, as I've covered most of it there. We do provide qualified support. Thanks, president. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, thanks Mark. I'll just re-clarify this. I will now put the amendment from Merseyside that the EC is supporting to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put resolution 26 as amended to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 28. 2015 Firefighters' Pension Scheme Actuarial Reductions in England moved by West Midlands. The EC are supporting.

Resolution 28 2015 FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION SCHEME ACTUARIAL REDUCTIONS IN ENGLAND
Conference notes the disparity in actuarial reductions applied to members of the 2015 Firefighters' Pension Scheme in England compared to colleagues in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland remains unresolved with members in England faced with a reduction which is significantly higher than in the devolved nations.

Conference recognises that this remains an unfair situation where firefighters in England may have to consider not retiring due to the financial impact. Reaching the minimum retirement age is already a major concern for many of our members due to the physical demands of the job.

Conference in 2015 agreed;

'The FBU message to the new Westminster Government and to other governments is that we are not going away, and we will continue to fight for pensions for firefighters which properly reflect the challenges of their occupation. And that 'Conference reaffirms that the FBU's pensions dispute is not resolved, and our campaign will continue.'

Conference in 2018 instructed the Executive Council (EC) to;

'...raise with the Westminster Government, as a matter of urgency, the inequity in actuarial reductions across the different schemes.'

Conference instructs the EC to take all reasonable steps, including engagement with government, and legal avenues if necessary, to seek a fair resolution to this issue.

WEST MIDLANDS

CARL GOODE (West Midlands):

President, conference, moving resolution 28 titled 2015 Firefighters' Pension Scheme Actuarial Reductions in England. This resolution reaffirms a campaign that this union has stood behind for over a decade, which is the fight for fairness in our pensions, a fight in which the FBU has achieved groundbreaking successes, as the president mentioned this morning, not just for firefighters, but for the entire public sector. And we should applaud the efforts of everyone involved in these successes. However, back in 2018, Essex carried a resolution at conference that made it perfectly clear that the reductions being imposed on members of the 2015 pension scheme in England were fundamentally unfair. That resolution called on the executive council to raise this issue directly with government in Westminster as a matter of urgency.

And yet, seven years later, this issue still remains. Firefighters in England continue to face significantly higher reductions or penalties through early retirement than our colleagues in Scotland, Wales, and in particular Northern Ireland. This is real substantial sums of money out of our members' pensions and out of their pockets.

It has and it will create situations where members are forced to question whether they can afford to retire. It has and it will lead to members working beyond their physical capability, despite the demands of our job. It's been spoken about on a number of occasions in this very room, the challenges we all now face, just reaching that minimum retirement age, and it's no coincidence that other regions are bringing similar resolutions to conference this year.

Pension security remains a genuine concern for members across the UK. Conference, this is a question of both fairness and dignity. The same work, the same risk, the same sacrifice, yet pension benefits based purely on where you work. This needs to be challenged. We said it in 2015, and we said it again in 2018, that we, the FBU, are not going away. And now in 2025, we are handed a new opportunity, a new government in Westminster. This is a chance to reignite this issue and take the necessary steps to bring about fairer reductions for members in England and to our comrades in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, you have shown what can be achieved. You've gone out and secured better pension terms for your members, and I applaud you. That's not just your victory. It's living proof and a benchmark for what's possible for the rest of us. And today I'm asking for your solidarity on this issue. So, conference, let's honour the Essex resolution from 2018. Let us send a clear message to Westminster that our pension dispute is not over, and we will not stop until every firefighter's pension is treated with fairness, respect, and dignity. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Carl. Does that have a seconder? Have a seconder. *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate.

SIMON LEROUX (Scotland):

President, conference, speaking in support of resolution 28. Conference, in Scotland we have watched with growing concern as our comrades in England continue to suffer from an unjust and punitive system of actuarial reductions that stand in stark contrast to the arrangements we've secured in Scotland and those received by our comrades in Wales and Northern Ireland.

This isn't just a technical pensions issue. This is about fairness, dignity, and respect for firefighters who put their lives on the line every day. From our perspective in Scotland, the disparity is glaring and indefensible. When a firefighter in Gretna faces significantly lower actuarial reductions than a firefighter just a few miles down the road in Carlisle, something is fundamentally wrong.

Our profession doesn't change when we cross the border. The dangers, the physical demands, the tolls on our bodies remain the same. Yet the financial penalties applied to our English colleagues who choose to retire at the minimum retirement age are dramatically different. As this resolution correctly points out, our position has been clear and consistent since 2015. At our conference, we declared to governments across these isles that we are not going away and we'll continue to fight for pensions for firefighters, which properly reflect the challenges of their occupation. In Scotland, the government have recognised to a point these challenges, but I'm deeply troubled that after nearly a decade, the Westminster government continues to ignore the inequality faced by English comrades.

This isn't just about the money, although that is significant. It's about the respect for the profession and the acknowledgement of its unique demands. Some might ask why Scottish firefighters should care about pension arrangements in England. The answer is simple. Injury to one, is an injury to all.

Today, it's actuarial reductions in England. Tomorrow, it could be another attack on Scottish firefighters' terms and conditions. Our strength has always been in our unity and solidarity. This resolution instructs the executive council to take all reasonable steps, including engagement with governments and legal avenues if necessary, to seek a fair resolution.

This is the right approach. We must exhaust every channel, explore every avenue, and apply every pressure point available to us. Conference, I urge you to support this resolution. Let us send a clear message that firefighters across these islands stand united against this injustice. Let's reaffirm our commitment to fighting for pensions that truly reflect the challenges of our profession, regardless of which side of the border we serve on. In solidarity, we support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks for that, Simon. Anybody else in the debate? Nope. I now put resolution 28 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Right conference, on that note, we are four minutes away from the close of business. So I'm just going to read out tonight we've got a fringe event in Imperial 3 at 6pm focused on building the practical organising skills we need to develop a strong workplace that we've all committed to. Tonight is about mapping and there will be further sessions on Wednesday and Thursday lunchtimes.

We have then got at 8.30 tonight in the main dining room, we're excited to have comedian and activist Mark Thomas for a live standup act to raise funds for medical aid for Palestine. Tickets are available on the door, so please do whatever you can to get to these events.

We are going to stop you now early, so I'm knocking you off four minutes' early, so I'm still a good chair again. Thank you. See you in the morning. Conference is closed for today.

Conference adjourned

MORNING SESSION

THE PRESIDENT:

Morning, conference, morning. The VP wanted another go at just practising. Right, I now call the chair of standing orders, Phil Millar, to give his first report of the day. Phil.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Thank you, president. Morning, conference. So conference, the stewards have asked me to pass on to you: can you please ensure that you're wearing your delegates credentials when you're on the conference floor and don't leave them on your desk when you go for comfort breaks or lunch. Make sure you're wearing them when you're at the rostrum as well.

Can you please turn to your delegates list. Region 1 Scotland remove Iain Ballantyne and replace with Andrew Southward. Region 10 remove Dave Young and replace with Andy Warren. Region 11 Kent remove Tim Green and replace with Rob Parkin. And on CSNC, remove Lyndsey Burton and replace with Sherry Kitson.

And can you now please turn to your programme of business? So if you go to page 6, after resolution 28, which was carried at the end of business yesterday, insert the two emergency rule changes from the executive council and then, for your information, we will then be finishing section B and then moving on to section A, Pay. So on page 7, section A, insert after A1 Introduction, the EC emergency resolution 10 entitled Pay. Then staying on page 7. Further down, resolution 7 has been remitted, resolution 10 has been withdrawn to second the EC emergency resolution on pay.

Now if you can turn to page 8 on resolution 18 the amendment from Merseyside has been withdrawn.

Then if you can turn to page 12 resolution 52 has been withdrawn. Resolution 54 has been remitted with the right to speak. Resolution 57 has been remitted also, with the right to speak. And if you can then turn to page 13, resolution 59 has been remitted.

So finally, conference a bracelet was found on the conference floor and has been handed in to standing orders. So if you think it's yours, come and get it. Thank you, president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Phil. Is that report Agreed. *Agreed.*

Thank you. Conference, as Phil has just stated, I will be taking the two proposed emergency rule changes that was handed out yesterday as the first business.

Then we're going to move on to the two outstanding resolutions that was in section B, Pensions and then other pensions paras. And then after that we will be moving on to the pay debate section A. I'm going to ask the national officer to move both emergency resolution changes together, but I will take them separately in the vote for the records.

I now call Mark Rowe to move the proposed emergency alteration to Rule G2(5) and Rule G3(4) from the executive council. Mark.

MARK ROWE (National Officer):

Thank you, president. Conference, yesterday morning in the president's opening address he reminded conference that you are here to take some very serious decisions this week. We start the second day of conference with two such decisions. So I would ask that you consider very carefully what is about to be put to you.

Yesterday during the equalities debates, delegations raised repeatedly the confidentiality and protection for those raising complaints must be paramount at all times. We all agree with that. The union has had raised with it concerns and these have not been raised with the union directly from a complainant in a case. We've had concerns raised

relating to the current Rule Book appeals to conference. As the legal officer, on having a look at those concerns, I believed that those concerns were valid. I believed that the issues raised were valid, and that we needed some clear legal advice and direction on the current Rule Book position on appeals to conference.

Conference, the concerns were raised that having the details of the case laid out at a conference in front of what would be, or what would feel like, the entire union would obviously cause great distress to a victim, survivor of harassment of any kind, it would risk traumatising them or indeed retraumatising them. There are obvious confidentiality issues, again, conference, with our process. This could lead to further harassment or victimisation of complainants when or if those confidentiality issues were breached. There is a high reputational risk to the union and ethically it's difficult to say publicly the FBU stands with the victims of this behaviour, and we say that on our website where behaviour means sexual or any type of harassment, and then at a union event or a conference, have the details of a harassment case made public and debated in front of the person to whom the behaviour was directed. This could open us up to a whole array of criticism in the press and online.

Further to this, if a member experienced harassment of any form in the line of duty in their role as a rep, and then the harm from this harassment was compounded at a union event, a conference, the union itself may be vulnerable to legal action. As I say, I considered those points raised to be entirely valid and I did seek legal opinion on this.

When asking legal in relation to this, I asked them to consider issues under GDPR. I asked them to consider, does an appeal to conference make the union vulnerable to legal challenge? Would an appeal heard by the final appeals committee be a suitable alternative? And how should the union proceed with any appeals to conference, which are already in process?

I'll read some excerpts from the legal advice that the union received, and this was put to the executive council. We received this advice on 7 May 2025. And as this is a rule change conference, that is why it is of an emergency nature.

The executive council considered this at the meeting of 13 May, which is why the proposed rule changes have been brought to you today. The legal advice itself is clear and unequivocal. That legal view is that the current process of appeals to conference places the union at multiple types of risk.

This is a direct lift from the advice. The FBU has around 34,000 members, but not all are created equal under the Rule Book. For most, an appeal for an internal union discipline decision by the executive council lies to the final appeals committee, a body of 19, who sit in private and hear the appeal.

However, for a group of members, their appeal lies to conference. In cases where the sanction is expulsion, suspension from office or dismissal, the final appeals committee route is denied to them in those circumstances. They, as we know under the rule, are regional officials and of the officials of the six national committees of the union, also executive council members, presidents, full-time officials, national sectional officials.

The process for those appeals involves a loss of privacy since the process involves the whole disciplinary paperwork being distributed to the delegates ahead of conference, which this year amounts to about 190 people. The delegation number is obviously smaller, but when you take into account the executive council and the regional officials attending conference who would see that discipline bundle, that takes the number up to 190. That loss of privacy applies not just to the individual appellant, but to anybody else who acted as original complainant or as a witness during the investigation.

So in addressing the points that we raised with legal, the legal opinion was that there are several areas of concern with this process, which immediately come to mind. They represent a mix of legal and non-legal issues, including reputational. Privacy. As mentioned above, privacy and confidentiality are lost. The implications of this are widespread and raise issues about the article 8 right to respect for private and family life. Chilling effect. The public nature of the process may act as a disincentive to lodging an appeal at all, thereby effectively denying a right of appeal.

Furthermore, if an original complainant or their witnesses know that their details and revelations may be made public, it may prevent them from raising legitimate issues of concern or even cooperating in the process. Similarly, an appellant could use the public nature of the process as a way to victimise an original complainant.

Adequacy of appeal. There has to be at least a non-negligible risk that the delegates approach their task in a manner more akin to a popularity contest than as an impartial review body. Contractual issues. For appellants who are employees, there must be some doubt as to whether such a provision is consistent with the implied contractual duty of mutual trust and confidence.

Equality issues. The Equality Act 2010 has direct application to the union employees and indirect application to its members by virtue of Section 57. One can easily imagine scenarios where the appeal to conference process is seen as creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment for complainants, particularly in cases which involve sensitive complaints such as sexual harassment, and which might exasperate existing discrimination complaints to the extent of attracting aggravated damages and enhanced injury to feelings awards.

Conference, in summarising, for me the standout comment, which I ask you to consider in the legal advice is this, the appeals to conference process appears to present multiple risks to the union. And to be significantly out of step with modern views about appropriate appeals and complaints handling processes.

Conference, we simply must be consistent. Please support the proposed changes brought to you to protect complainants. I move on behalf of the executive council. Thank you, president. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Mark. Now on proposed emergency alteration to Rule G2(5) does that have a seconder? Seconder? *Formally* Thank you. And now on to proposed emergency alteration to Rule G3(4). Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate.

JON LAMBE (London):

Conference, president, general secretary speaking in opposition. Conference, whether you're an executive council member, regional secretary member, you are elected by an electorate of thousands of people. We, for getting on for a hundred years, have had that rule. I think it's only actually happened twice that we've had to bring an appeal to conference.

But the point is when you're elected by that amount of people, it'll be the EC that will have debarred or expelled you. They are the highest committee in this union. They're higher than the final appeals committee, apart from conference.

Conference, we are the highest decision-makers and I think it's perfectly right that if we have debarred or expelled someone who is elected by 5,000 of our members, the 143 people is it here today, should be brought back to hear that appeal. Not 19 people in a room. I move. *Applause*

NICOLE MARVIN (Leicestershire):

President, conference, I take on board what London is saying around that only happening once or twice, but actually it only takes once for it to be hugely damaging to an individual, to our members. Our union is one that is committed to dignity, justice, and the safety of our members.

Therefore, I welcome this rule change as I hope you do too. We must be mindful of the sensitivity of some of the cases that are called to conference, albeit very rarely. We must handle sensitive cases of abuse, trauma, and misconduct with care and without care, the harm is twofold. Bringing such cases back to conference poses a real risk of retraumatising victims and survivors, forcing them to relive painful experiences publicly in front of their peers and colleagues.

Regardless of outcome, reputational damage would remain to individuals and cannot be undone. And, actually to our union. Safeguarding, survivor welfare and fairness shouldn't be optional. They should stand. This rule change is about protecting our members, potentially the minority of members, especially those who have already endured harm. Again, our union is rooted in our values: safety, fairness, and solidarity. I support this rule change. *Applause*

MARIA BUCK (LGBT+):

President, conference, likewise with Nicole, we understand your position, London. However, we have to look at safety for all of our members, especially for those who have the courage to speak up when something's wrong. On the face of it, the provision ensures transparency and accountability, but we need to ask ourselves the difficult question: at what cost?

The process as it currently stands, as Nicole has said, really runs the real risk of not only retraumatising victims, but silencing us. If someone comes forward after experiencing harassment, abuse, or discrimination, they may find that most personal, painful details of that experience, debated in public forum in front of hundreds of people. For my section, especially in the cases involving issues of identity, for example, where a complainant's sexual orientation or gender identity has not been publicly disclosed, this process could inadvertently out them. Their privacy, their dignity, their very sense of safety could be put at risk simply because they had the courage to come forward.

We all know that the union movement is strongest when people feel safe to speak the truth, but if our own structures could cause harm, we should be protecting them. People who stand up and challenge wrongdoing need protecting, not punishing. If our rules don't protect them, our rules then do need to change. I support. *Applause*

ANDY MURRAY (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, we respect and understand London's concerns, but we must take on board the sound legal advice that's been given. Times change and we must change also. We support the rule and we urge you to support the rule. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Andy. Any more? No. Conference, obviously the president has to sit and preside over various discipline hearings and I think I must clarify to conference there are cases currently under the Rule Book that go from an IUD at the executive council, then go to the final appeals committee. And I get the points that London have raised.

However, the final appeals committee are your representative, conference. You elect them every year. So they are your final appeals committee. And I certainly don't consider the EC to be a higher body than the final appeals committee when carrying out that role. So I just wanted to make that clear.

When the final appeals committee meet, they meet without any interference or whatever from the executive council, being a higher body and everything else, who've already made a decision. They go there and they listen to that appeal on what's in front of them. Okay, thank you.

Conference I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule G3(4) to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put proposed alteration to the Fire Brigades Union Rule Book, Rule G2(5) to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Conference, we are now moving on to section B pensions to finish that off from yesterday. I now call resolution 29, Fit for Purpose Occupational Pension, moved by Cambridge, the EC give qualified support.

Resolution 29 FIT FOR PURPOSE OCCUPATIONAL PENSION

Conference is aware that the Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2015 (FPS 2015) has been running for 10 years and is due for a review.

Conference believes that it has been public knowledge for many years now that the Government's own review of the scheme has identified up to 92% of firefighters will not be able to maintain the required standard of fitness levels until the age of 60. This is wholly unacceptable.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to explore all avenues, including consideration of industrial action and do everything within its power to fight for an occupational pension that is fit for purpose.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

MARK HARRIS (Cambridgeshire):

President, conference, speaking to move resolution 29 Fit for Purpose Occupational Pension. Conference, we bring this resolution with urgency and with a very simple truth at its heart: the firefighters' pension scheme 2015 is not fit for purpose. It has now been in place for a decade, and what we've known for years is now public record.

Even the previous government's own review admits that up to 92% of firefighters will not be able to maintain the required fitness standards through to the age of 60, 92%. Conference, this isn't just a statistic. This is an admission that the scheme is broken, that it's unrealistic, that it's unfair.

We were told that the scheme was sustainable. We were told it was designed for the job. We now know that was never true. What does it say about a so-called occupational pension when the vast majority of people in the occupation can't physically do the job until retirement age? It says the scheme is not just flawed. It's dangerous. It's dangerous because it puts members in a position where they face either Ill Health, Capability Dismissal or Financial Ruin.

Conference, this resolution instructs the executive council to explore every avenue, including industrial action, to fight for a pension that reflects the realities of our jobs. We must now make a stand and say we do not accept working until we break. We do not accept being thrown on the scrap heap for failing standards, that the system itself makes unachievable, and we do not accept being told to wait and see what another decade goes by.

Conference, firefighters need and deserve a pension that respects the demands of our work, the risks we take and the sacrifices we make. It is clear the 2015 scheme must be challenged. Support this resolution. I move.
Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Mark. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. No, Mark Rowe to give the qualification.

MARK ROWE (National Officer):

Thanks, president. And Mark, thanks for bringing. This isn't much of a qualification to be honest. It's something that I was saying yesterday. This has been discussed at a recent Scheme Advisory Board in England. We are asking them for all the retirement figures from the pensions providers. One of the big issues that we've raised with them as well is that what I'm seeing, and I've got a lot of friends who are retiring early or leaving the fire and rescue services as women members aged 45 to 50 who are watch managers in particular. And the reason they're doing that is because they seem to be forced to go because they think: I'm not going to be able to stay operational. I've got quite a good transferable skill set as a watch manager. I'm going to have to get out now because I know I'm not going to be able to get to 60. And that's shocking that we are in this position. We agree with that.

We need to get all the facts and figures together. Mark, and conference, we need to be really careful where we're going with this. I did say yesterday that if we enter into it, they'll come back and say let's review it. Let's have a look at the 60. We need to get all our evidence in place before we do this. What we don't want to do is sleepwalk into a position where they'll come back and say "mortality rates have increased. Actually, we think you can all go to 61 now." So yes, we'll do this, Mark, guarantees on that. We just need to be careful on how we approach it. As I said, support and a very small qualification on that, really. Thanks, president. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Mark and Mark. I now put resolution 29 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 31, Dr Williams Discrimination moved by Cumbria, the EC are giving qualified support.

Resolution 31 DR WILLIAMS DISCRIMINATION

Conference is appalled to learn of the recent comments made by Dr A N Williams who stated that; “the simple facts are that the fitness standard for fighting is set at VO2 Max 42 mlO2/kgmin and this is gender neutral. Male and female fire fighters have to achieve the same standard. Men are naturally fitter than women, and while the majority of men aged 55-60 are able to meet this standard, at age 50 only 10% of women can meet the standard, by age 55 only 5% can meet the standard, and by aged 60 only 1% can meet the standard. Female firefighters therefore have to maintain a very high standard of fitness to remain fit for operational firefighting.”

Dr Williams further noted;

“There is a natural difference in maximal fitness levels between men and women, these levels decline naturally with age, particularly after age 40, and it is particularly difficult for women to continue to meet the required standards unless they keep their weight down and continue to exercise regularly.”

Conference notes that Dr Williams was the principal author of the guidelines for recruitment and retention in the Fire and Rescue Service in 2004 and again in 2012.

Conference further notes Dr Williams chaired the Government review into the Normal Pension Age for firefighters in 2012 which led to the attacks on firefighters pensions and ultimately the introduction of the 2015 scheme along with the imposed new normal pension age of 60 for firefighters.

Conference believes that the above comments are now evidence that the pension scheme changes are potentially unlawful on the grounds of sex discrimination.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to obtain legal advice in order to assess the merits of taking legal action against the 2015 pension scheme.

CUMBRIA

STEVE MATTINSON (Cumbria):

Good afternoon. Morning. Sorry. Ha. Brutal. It's one of those days already. We've only been here an hour. President, conference, you'll be well aware of the detrimental pension changes forced through by the Tory government. I'm proud that our union, our members, fought such a vigorous campaign in its response.

One of the many arguments we raised at the time was the completely disproportionate impact the changes would have on our female firefighters with the 2006 and 2015 scheme pension age of 60, especially when combined with the fitness requirements in the service and the difficulty members would have maintaining this to the age of 60.

Recently, in Cumbria, we had a female member suffer an injury at work involving a horse which prompted an IQMP referral. When our member received the IQMP, a decision refusing the ill health application, we were stunned to learn that it was none other than Dr Tony Williams who was the principal author of the recruitment and retention of the Fire and rescue Service whose report underpinned the attack on our pensions.

We were more disgusted to read that Dr. Williams' comments in the report stated that at 55, only 5% of women will meet the standard. At 60, only 1% can meet the standard. And women will tend to put on weight at the age of 50, which took our female member by a bit of surprise, to be fair. If these stats are evidenced, fine and then surely the scheme is flawed and unlawfully discriminates against the female firefighters.

In light of this, we've asked that the EC seek updated legal advice on the grounds of an unlawful discrimination with the 2015 pension scheme. Now, before I finish, I would like to put on record that I would like to thank our executive council member Andy Fox-Hewitt, who managed to overturn the refusal of Dr Anthony Williams by the Medical Board of Referees and got our member a pension award for ill health, which again, just absolutely stunned us because obviously Dr Williams is the be-all-and-end-all, apparently. So we'd like you to challenge these opinions now and do that for us. So conference, I move. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Steve. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody? Nope, Mark to give the qualification.

MARK ROWE (National Officer):

Thanks, president. Yes. The qualification is a couple of points really in relation to that, Cumbria, so thanks for raising this and bringing it. So look, we were never consulted.

Dr Williams was appointed by government to do the review, and we never agreed in large part elements of his advice. Some of it was useful. There's a couple of paras and lines in there that were useful. And I absolutely assure you our campaign isn't over. As long as 2013 we issued circulars stating that.

Just a couple of minor points. The resolution says that the introduction of the 2000 scheme along with the imposed new normal pension age of 60. That wasn't the case. It was imposed in the NFPS.

And the issue with legal advice as well is that yes, we'll certainly have a look at that. Andrew Short is still about, those of you with long enough memories, have been around the conference long enough, will recall that Andrew Short was the KC who actually undertook the challenges and the legal advice for the union in 2013 to 15. So Andrew is still around, so we can certainly get Andrew's view on that.

But what I will say, conference, is that we've got to be honest with ourselves in relation to this and the previous resolution. Legal advice isn't going to shift them. They'll just challenge that and we'll enter into legal advice, challenge on legal advice, appeals, counter appeals, etc, which will last years. The only thing that's going to shift them is a coordinated, concerted, determined campaign that involves industrial action.

Yes, happy to look at this. Executive council happy to support, but we need to be clear that we don't think legal advice on its own is going to shift them.

Start doing the work, start talking to the members out there, and then we'll get on with the tasks that you, conference, have set us. Thanks, president. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Mark. I now put resolution 31 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against, please show. *That carries.*

Right, conference, we're now moving onto the paras on pension. I called B1 yesterday, so it's B2. Yep.

COLIN EDGELY (Scotland):

President, conference, I'll be brief. Region 1 just wanted to put on record thanks to the national officer, Mark Rowe, for the work that he's done on pensions. I think everybody will probably agree firefighters can be pretty moany and one of the most common things that they like to moan about is pensions.

I think it's important. I always tell them that we are not the pension provider, we just fought for the pension. So it can be really complicated and we're only able to do the work that Mark thanked us for the other day because of the information that he gives us. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Colin. Any more on B2, B3 Hereford and Worcester.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, speaking under paragraph B3. Conference, I just wanted to put on record our thanks to the NFPS 2006 members who were pivotal in the industrial campaign and subsequent victory. Those members were treated horrendously and forced on to the 2015 pension scheme, as were we all. The union should therefore seek compensation for those members just like us 92 scheme members. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Mark.

MARK ROWE (National Officer):

Thanks, president. I can respond to that, Neil. But you'll have to bear with me, conference, because it's a little bit more complex than simply we should represent and get compensation for those members. And we have had – funnily enough, I just mentioned Andrew Short, the KC and also we've Ivan Walker who was involved in all of that time. Ivan Walker, you'll recall his contribution to the pensions challenges and successes. He received the solidarity medal from the FBU two years ago, I believe it was. The executive council were acting on very clear legal advice in relation to NFPS 2006 claimants. They have all been written to.

So if you were NFPS 2006 claimants, they have all been written to, to explain in detail why their injury to feelings claims would not be successful and I can whistle through it and I will be brief because it is pensions and people do tend to glaze over sometimes, particularly when we start talking about the real detail, except me; I absolutely love it.

So the reasons why the 2015 scheme is usually better than the NFPS scheme, which is why the advice was that if you pursue the claims, you will lose them, is that for firefighters, particularly in England the amount of pension that a member of the 2015 scheme builds up each year, the accrual rate is better in the 2015 scheme than in the NFPS 2006. NFPS is also a final salary scheme, which means that the one 60th accrual rate applies to the member's pensionable pay in their final year or the two preceding years if it's higher. So in the NFPS, the accrual rate is one 60th of the member's final -

Sorry. So for instance, if a member serves for 40 years, their pension is 40/60ths of their final salary. On the other hand, the 2015 scheme is a career average scheme. Each member of a pension scheme in the 2006 builds up a block of pension equal to the accrual rate multiplied by the pensionable pay ending that year. There's a number, I've got the letter here that went out to NFPS members. But what we did say and what is really important, conference, is that if you feel particularly aggrieved. If you are not happy with the legal advice and you wish us to consider this further, then please let us know. Please get in touch with us, and we were happy to sit down and get a meeting with any of the solicitors involved in the case and discuss it with you. Conference, that's it, unfortunately, on the NFPS 2006 claimants. We did initially take them on, looked at them, but once we had the KC opinion that they would not succeed, we wrote to all the members.

Nobody but the executive council would like more to take those on. But we had to act on the legal advice and not burden conference with a huge cost and challenge to government that would've come from our funds and having to pay legal fees. And it was deemed that the challenge itself, if we did challenge it, would have attracted the other side's costs. And believe me, government legal department costs are astronomical. So unfortunately, Neil, that's where we were with that one. Happy to share any correspondence with you, Neil, if you need it. Thanks, president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, thanks. Mark. Conference, when I opened yesterday, I did say the injuries to feelings was the icing on the cake of the pensions victory itself. When we started it, we weren't sure if we'd get it, but we started it and we got it.

And I've seen some of the horrendous emails coming to head office from members demanding where is their money. You'd think, we've got it in our personal bank accounts. We haven't. We're dealing with the government legal department here, and they do it at their pace, certainly not our pace. So I would urge you if you're still getting asked by people about what's happening with me, just be patient if they are still waiting. Okay. Thank you.

We're now moving on to B4, B5, B6, B7, B8, B9, and B10.

Right, conference, we are now moving on to section A, Pay and Conditions. Para A1. Conference, you'll have seen that in the light of the ballot result this week, the EC have brought an emergency resolution on pay. There are a number of resolutions that need to be considered alongside this, so I will call all of the following as part of the same debate.

Emergency resolution 10 Pay from the executive council, resolution 6. Retained Pay Negotiation moved by Northern Ireland, resolution 18 Rolemaps and Contractual Obligations moved by Hereford and Worcester, resolution 54 Marauding Terrorist Attack, MTA, moved by Cheshire, resolution 57 Review of Marauding Terrorist Attack MTA Response Strategy and Negotiating Rights moved by South Yorkshire. They will all be called in the same debate. Cheshire and South Yorkshire have informed the standing orders committee they are remitting resolutions 54 and 57 respectively with the right to speak and as such, they will still be called into the debate. To be clear, the following resolutions can carry alongside the emergency resolution 10. That's resolution 6 Retained Pay Negotiations, Northern Ireland, resolution 18 Rolemaps and Contractual Obligations by Hereford and Worcester. So I now call emergency resolution 10 Pay from the executive council. Moved by the general secretary, seconded by Merseyside. Steve, thank you.

Emergency Resolution 10 PAY

Conference notes the pay offer from the national employers contained in a letter dated 23 April 2025.

Conference acknowledges that the offer was accepted by FBU members following a consultative ballot, where members voted 82% to accept the offer on a 59% turnout.

Conference recognises that a key part of the employers' offer was a commitment to negotiate changes to the existing pay structure. This commitment follows the FBU's longstanding criticisms of the flat pay structure introduced in 2003, which allows for very little pay progression within roles.

Conference notes that the majority of FBU members – wholetime, retained and control – are paid at competent firefighter/firefighter control rates, with few opportunities to increase their earnings in role other than through promotion.

Conference opposes all forms of pay inequality, such as the difference between Firefighter and Firefighter Control, and Continual Professional Development (CPD).

Conference condemns the efforts of some chief fire officers to impose work outside the agreed National Joint Council (NJC) Rolemaps.

Conference acknowledges the commitments in the 2025 employers' pay offer. These commitments affirm the broad principles of previous NJC task and finish group discussions on pay progression, retained pay, control pay, new firefighter roles and CPD which the employers believe remain a good starting point for negotiations. These principles include:

- ***structuring around a principle of upskilling within role***
- ***that development should be demonstrable 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.***

Conference further notes the national employers' commitment to making a joint case for funding to all four governments.

Conference believes that future negotiations must address the real terms reduction in firefighters' pay since 2010. This will require additional funding and investment in our service.

As a result of the agreed 2025 pay offer, Conference instructs the Executive Council (EC) to undertake intensive negotiations over the coming year, with the intention of introducing improvements to the pay structures from the 1 July 2026.

Conference welcomes the willingness of the new government at Westminster to listen to the FBU's concerns and to engage with FBU representatives through official channels, but this must result in action not just words.

Conference instructs the EC via the NJC and MMNB to:

- 1. Commence pay structure negotiations following the close of Conference 2025.***
- 2. Regularly report the results of negotiations to members.***
- 3. Make pay reform and the role of a firefighter the main negotiating priority, over the next year with clear progress reports following the June, October and February NJC/MMNB meetings.***
- 4. Progress outstanding matters, such as retained pay, control pay, maternity and paternity pay, officer's pay and conditions, CPD and apprenticeships.***

Any final proposals on the pay structure and/or changes to the nationally agreed Rolemaps must be agreed by members.

Conference demands that every fire employer implement the new pay rates by the beginning of our pay period, 1 July 2025, so that our members rightly receive their pay rises straight away.

Should, by Conference 2026 or earlier, it become apparent to the EC that sufficient progress has not/or is not being made, Conference 2026 (or if necessary, an earlier recall of Conference) will debate the next steps, considering all available options to achieve our aims including all forms of industrial action.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you, president. Good morning, conference, moving EC Emergency Resolution 10 on Pay. The need and the purpose of this emergency resolution should be self-evident to all of us. The membership consultation finished and closed on Monday. It has taken place, and the result is clear. The pay deal has been accepted, but for us, the executive council are absolutely clear, that that is the beginning of a process and not the end.

I want to note that, firstly, an important part of our democracy is that members make the key decisions: their pay, their decision. And that is the reason why the executive council put this decision out to all members. So I therefore want to thank all members that participated in the decision-making process.

Members voted 82% to accept on a 59% turnout. By any stretch, that is a clear result and an 82% accept that the executive council have noted. But look, our members have spoken, but now we need to act, conference, and the executive council will now act. On the offer itself that, and you have all had debates and discussions, I'm sure over the last three, four weeks when members have been discussing this offer.

But I want to draw out an important element, an important part of the pay offer itself, which is something many delegates at this conference, over many years, will have spoken on this and have complained about for good reason for two decades, and I'm talking about pay progression, the reforming of pay, pay strategies, and importantly the role of a firefighter. Conference, the truth of the matter is since 2003, that pay settlement, which some of us who were in the job then and will have voted on, that saddled our members with the flattest pay structure in the whole of the public sector. And that pay structure that we've had for over 20 years has made it very difficult for members to increase their earnings other than by taking promotion, or by the annual pay review.

And we know what that pay review has delivered for us with the years of austerity, the pay freezes and the pay caps and the impact that's had on our members and their earnings. It's been very difficult for our members to increase their pay. The current pay structure means that the majority of our members, whether they're wholetime or retained, whether they work in a control room or an officer member, that they get to competent firefighter rate or competent control firefighter rate, and often get stuck there for the rest of their career.

That's around 70% of our members are firefighters who have no opportunity to increase or up their pay. Yes, some fire and rescue services pay allowances, some don't, and you all know the disparity across the UK of what is being paid to our members. Allowances are sometimes not even pensionable, and allowances can sometimes be taken away by our members.

Conference, it has been that flat pay structure, from that dispute back in 2003, that also gave us the rolemaps that we've had for those two decades. The rolemaps have quite clearly given chief fire officers the ability to abuse and try to force our members to work outside of their NJC agreed role, and in most cases, doing so for nothing.

And look, many of you have been very successful in fighting that, but on other occasions we haven't always been able to achieve that. And we've seen the rolemaps used against us. And look, there is no blame on anyone, and we've all faced those significant challenges from chief officers: our services being cut. We have faced these challenges and you've been on the front line facing those.

But look, we've got an opportunity right now, but what we need to say is it's not acceptable, it's not acceptable that our members are getting picked off in different parts of the country. It is not acceptable to our union, to our conference that the national employers are allowing their chief fire officers to get away with this. Therefore, conference, we need to call a halt to this today. And again, there is no blame on what has gone before, but we need to seize this opportunity to try to build a modern and future-proofed fire and rescue service.

So I want to be clear to everyone in this room that we've had some useful negotiations. The AGS has been having negotiations with the employers for longer than I have, but when I came into office in January, we started those negotiations, we met with the National Joint Council in February, and we've put this information on the table of where we wanted these negotiations to go.

And they've committed to intensive talks immediately after conference, and we will push them on that. The AGS has already set up meetings. He's already set up strategy meetings of the executive council, which I hope you will all feed into through our structures. And the EC full-time officials will begin that work. We will begin that immediately after conference. That is a commitment. That is a commitment from those that sit on this table. We will start immediately after this conference closes. We will take the matter to the National Joint Council. We will take the matter to the Middle Managers' Negotiating Body on 5 June.

And as many people – Pete, Caroline at the back, from your sections that sit on the National Joint Council, they will be in the room and they will hear us taking these issues directly to the employers. We will negotiate over the summer and into the autumn. We've made it crystal clear to the employers that we want to see an improved pay structure for next year's pay round.

We will not tolerate any further delay and nor should you. We've made it clear to ministers. We've made it clear to Alex Norris who is coming to our conference today, the fire minister, that we will not tolerate any further delay. Because firefighters cannot, and firefighters will not and should not, endure a pay structure that is unfair to the majority of our members.

So we're making sure that they need to stop the mission creep on our nationally-agreed roles. And we need to be clear to them that if you want firefighters to do additional duties well, you pay them, if you want firefighters to do additional duties, you train them appropriately and properly. And if you want our members, our firefighters to do additional work, you get nationally agreed standards for the additional work that they want us to do. *Applause*

And look, I've got it written down that we will make clear that RDS pay needs to be resolved. And we've been doing that, myself and the AGS, sat in the room with the employers and said last year was good and we made progress, but we need to go further because it doesn't go far enough to address the recruitment issues and retention issues that our NRC members and officials have raised for a number of years.

Every fire and rescue service is struggling in regards to that and we need to fix it. The fight for our control members, the fight for their pay has not gone away, nor will it until we have attained what we have set out for. We all know our control members are highly skilled and do a fantastic job on the front line of the fire and rescue service. A vital part of our response to all emergencies that we attend nowadays, and it's about time the employers recognised that as well. And I'll be clear that the policy of this union is for pay parity. We will continue to raise it. We have raised it continually in every meeting with the employers and we will do at every opportunity throughout these intense negotiations that are forthcoming.

Conference, we must also address the inequality that we see, that you see from the CPD postcode lottery. Again, another important issue that has been raised on this conference floor over many years, it is not right that there is a disparity of £800 between the lowest and highest what is paid to our members in the fire and rescue service. All firefighters, as you know as firefighters in our stations and in our control rooms, you continually, professionally develop. It doesn't matter where you're stationed, or where you're located to determine that figure.

So I stand here today and I commit, and you'll have seen emergency resolution 10, and the commitments within that. It goes a long way but you need to follow us on this. I commit on behalf of the EC, the EC commit to their regions that there will be regular updates to you, to our officials, and to our members on how this is progressing. We'll give a progress report after the NJC meeting in June. We'll be clear with how those negotiations are going. I will be clear on what is happening so you can be confident that, as the resolution states, you will know what is happening at each step of the way. Our members will know. You will know. We'll feed this back through all of our structures. And if ultimately you decide or we decide that what is happening in those negotiations is not acceptable, then we will put a halt to them. We brought this emergency resolution so that we can lay down our intentions from the start.

We've brought it to conference so that the employers, so that every minister, the fire minister here today, chief fire officers will know that we have a mandate, a mandate from this room, from the highest decision-making body of our union to make progress on pay, or they will face the consequences. *Applause*

And conference, if it becomes apparent that we are not making progress at any time in these negotiations, myself, Ben, the EC, commit that we will take those necessary actions. And yes, this will include if necessary, recalling this conference before May 2026 to make those important decisions.

Conference, we have many debates this week, important and critical debates. And what I want and what the executive council wants, and I hope you want it as well, is to start our campaign on pay. Join these negotiations here in Blackpool with a clear show of unity that we are together on pay, that we are going to take this forward, that we are going to deliver.

We want a clear show of determination, of strength on the issue of pay, because we know that is important and it matters to our members. Therefore, I ask you to get behind this emergency resolution. I ask you to report back to your members on the pay ballot, but importantly on the plans of how we're going to progress this issue of pay.

But we need to be organised, and we talked about this yesterday. We need to be committed and we need to be united. We have got an opportunity in front of us to sort this 20-year-old problem that we've been wrestling with, this conference has been wrestling with for decades, once and for all.

Let's end pay inequality. Let's end mission creep of our role. Let's end the flat pay structure for the overwhelming majority of our members. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Merseyside to second.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, seconding emergency resolution 10 by the EC on Pay. Comrades, the decisions to withdraw resolution 10, Broadening the role in order to support this policy was not taken lightly. Those of you unfortunate enough to have had a telephone call from me over the last few weeks, will know just how strongly I felt about the issue. I still do, and I still believe in the intent of that resolution.

However, I am here to ask you to support this emergency resolution and to do so pragmatically. And I know that pragmatism isn't one of my biggest strengths normally. Conference, we've spoken to the GS, the AGS and the president on this, and we acknowledge that there has been a change of GS and there will be a new way of thinking and a new approach. Not that I believe that the former GS didn't do everything to get the best for our members. So we are happy to give the time that's been asked for, but as we raised in our original resolution, that time has to be limited to ensure that our members are protected. And we look forward to the full and regular updates from those talks.

But I want to go back to the resolution that we originally put in and just say quickly that the MTA agreements in Greater Manchester and London, were not going to be pulled by that resolution, in our opinion. They are NJC agreed work, and as such, do fall inside the rolemaps. We are fully aware that our EC officials, president, national officers, AGS, and GS, have made themselves available for talks on the broadening of the role. This is a warning to the employers: get around the table and engage in meaningful talks that bring this to a conclusion, or we will bring it to a conclusion for you. *Applause*

Conference, broadening the role is around 10 years old and when it first came about, we had all the talk of work streams and what the new work would look like. I'll be honest, I couldn't even remember what the five work streams were. I had to look them up and I'd be surprised if many here could cite all of the work involved.

However, now, many years down the line, broadening the role is simply not fit for purpose and that is why we need that new discussion. I had to look into it and what was included in there? Fitting of children's car seats, mountain rescue, missing persons, and much more besides. Is this really the work that we wanted our members to be undertaking?

And meanwhile, chief fire officers have taken the opportunity to undermine talks and agreements and have simply imposed work on our members without agreement, without pay, without training. Conference, this statement and the work from it can make this stop. It is time for us to regain control of this issue and make broadening of the role work for our members and communities.

For too long, it has been a stick to beat us with whenever we come to pay negotiations. Pay offers with strings attached, have blighted us as we were told that next year will be the big pay rise when the additional work came in. This emergency policy statement puts the power back into our hands and forces the employers to the table to work out exactly what the role of a firefighter is and what it is worth.

I have spoken to comrades around the country who tell me that rural areas and their services rely on firefighters undertaking work outside the role. It's what helps their communities to survive. We absolutely understand and sympathise with that, but we do ask should those members not be paid, trained, and supported for that work?

Conference, in supporting this emergency policy statement, I will be putting everyone on notice. Since coming into Merseyside brigade's secretary's role, I've made a big issue of accountability at all levels of the FBU and in our services. Members are accountable for their actions. The employers have to be made accountable. If they don't enter into these talks openly and with real ambition to bring those talks to fruition the EC, the AGS and the GS need to be held accountable. And if next year we come back to conference or earlier and we do not have those decisions on and the progress that we need, then conference, we need to be held accountable as well, because if the employers cannot deliver the results that are acceptable to our members, then the next time we are here, I will be demanding that we immediately begin our arrangements for industrial action, however that looks. We owe it to our members as this is the work they will be carrying out. An experienced firefighter once said to me: it's not your job, this, you're just holding it for the next person. Your real job is to make sure you leave it in a better condition, and that is exactly what we need to do. Conference, please support this emergency resolution. I second. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lee. I now call resolution 6 Retained Pay Negotiations moved by Northern Ireland, the EC are supporting.

Resolution 6 RETAINED PAY NEGOTIATIONS

Conference notes that as a result of the work conducted by the National Joint Council (NJC) Retained Duty System (RDS) pay and reward working group that the 2024 pay offer included changes to how the RDS retainer was to be calculated, by amending the Grey Book and creating pay bands based on the hours of availability a firefighter committed to give each week.

Conference also notes that the fire service employers stated in their pay offer, in relation to the amendment to the Grey Book;

“We note the challenges facing the existing model, and do not claim that this amendment will solve all those challenges. Nevertheless, we do consider it a useful and important step at this moment in time, with additional reward being available to RDS firefighters, and greater flexibility for services.”

Conference agrees with the fire service employers that the changes to the retaining fee with a maximum band of 15% of a wholetime firefighters wage for 120 hours availability, do not solve all of the challenges in recompensing RDS firefighters for the commitment and service they provide to their communities.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to continue to negotiate, through the NJC, to review and increase the percentages within the above mentioned Grey Book pay bands.

NORTHERN IRELAND

JAKE DRINKWATER (Northern Ireland):

Conference, president, general secretary, moving resolution 6 Retained Pay Negotiations. Conference recognises the work conducted with the NJC to secure the pay award in 2024 and the increase in the retainer for the RDS. This offer introduced a banded system with a top rate of 15%. However, that required you to give 120 hours per week of availability.

It was also noted that the employer side of the NJC stated that the agreed pay offer and the amendment to the Grey Book to facilitate the banded system did not solve all the challenges faced by the RDS. Conference believes that the changes are 15% for 120 hours per week for availability, and that does not solve the compensation versus commitment ratio and that region 2 believes that 120 hours per week is not conducive to a proper work/family life routine. And that if an RDS firefighter gives that commitment week in, week out, months, years, that their pay and their retainer should reflect that commitment.

Whilst we acknowledge that the uplift in the retainer is a start, that is all it is. It is a starting point for further negotiations to increase the retainer. Therefore, conference instructs the EC to continue negotiations through the NJC to review and increase all banded percentages in the retainer currently agreed in the Grey Book to properly recognise the commitment to their communities shown by every single retained duty system firefighter in the UK. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Jake. Does that have a seconder?

OLLIE BALDAM (NRC):

Conference, president, seconding resolution 6 Retained Pay Negotiations. Firstly, I would like to thank the GS for today, his words on the retained pay issues included in emergency resolution 10. But today I speak in support of this vital motion specifically on retained pay negotiations, not just because it's the right thing to do, because fairness still demands it.

Our retained firefighters step forward when their local communities need them most. They commit their time, their skill, and often their safety. And yet, under the current arrangements, the pay does not reflect the true value of that commitment, even with the most recent wins that we've received. Let's make it clear, commitment deserves proper reward. Let's back this motion and keep fighting for the respect and compensation our retained members have earned and that they deserve. We continue to push the NJC to review and increase the retainer fee and ensure fair pay for the vital work our members do.

Let's stand united in demanding better. Our members deserve no less. So our stance is yes, this uplift in the recent retainer fee with the bandings was a significant step forward, which was long overdue and took us over a decade to get to. But this was only the first step, and we need to continue to push for a substantial change which has not yet been received. Conference, please support this resolution. I second. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ollie. I now call resolution 18 Rolemaps and Contractual Obligations moved by Hereford and Worcester. The EC are asking Hereford and Worcester to withdraw to support emergency resolution 10 or they will oppose. Have a think about it. You can still speak. He can. It can carry with the emergency resolution, but the EC still oppose some of its content. Sorry if you don't like that, but that's –

Resolution 18 ROLEMAPS AND CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS

Conference is concerned that despite the current rolemaps having existed for 20 years there is still a level of uncertainty and debate surrounding them. All members should have a very clear idea of what is contractually required of them regarding the rolemaps.

Conference is aware that the duties of Fire Brigades Union members have been looked at in great detail yet there is no clarity given as to what duties are considered voluntary or non-contractual.

Conference therefore demands that the Executive Council enter into discussions at the National Joint Council regarding rolemaps as part of the ongoing working groups to clearly define the contractual obligations. A result of these discussions will be to provide clarity to all members regarding the rolemaps. This document will be an invaluable resource and help determine what duties are simply voluntary and can therefore be refused, and what duties must be carried out.

HEREFORD AND WORCESTER

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

Thank you, president. President, conference, moving resolution 18 Rolemaps and Contractual Obligations. Conference, we've been discussing rolemaps for years now and we believe now is the time to resolve this issue. This year's final agenda contains no less than 11 resolutions that refer to the rolemaps and contractual obligations. Clearly, something must change. Conference, we welcome the general secretary's commitment to moving emergency resolution 10, and I would ask you to support that resolution, but now I've just been told that they're opposing my resolution, so you make that decision.

After we brought a similar resolution to last year's conference, we were assured by at the time that rolemap seminars that were on the executive council action tracker would take place. These seminars have not taken place and therefore brigade officials still do not know what work is contractual or voluntary or how to navigate the rolemaps.

In 2019, conference agreed to begin preparations for the withdrawal from all non-contractual, non-agreed or non-NJC rolemap work activity. This was agreed under the passing of Cambridgeshire's resolution Pay Strategy and the executive council emergency resolution, Fire Service Pay, and the Future of the Fire And Rescue Service.

At that time, we were all asked to return to our brigades and ask members if they would be willing to withdraw from non-contractual work to support the pay campaign. Conference, how can we ask that question if we do not know what is contractual? Conference, we've heard about the fights members and officials have taken on all over the UK regarding enforced changes to shift systems and working conditions.

On behalf of Hereford and Worcester FBU members, I send solidarity to all brigade officials and members who face these challenges. However, we must recognise that our campaigns and arguments would significantly be stronger if we had the clarification we seek through this resolution. At a time when our members are already overstretched, under-resourced, and expected to do more with less, the blurring of contractual lines is not only unfair, it's unsustainable. That's why we are demanding the executive council enter into formal discussions at the NJC using existing working groups to bring clarity to the rolemaps once and for all. Not more ambiguity, not more interpretation, but clarity, clear guidance that defines in no uncertain terms, the boundaries of our contractual roles.

And once these boundaries are defined, the message must be equally clear. If it isn't in the rolemap and it hasn't been agreed nationally, then we will not do it, not until it's been negotiated, recognised, and treated with the respect our members deserve. This is about defending professional standards. It's about industrial strength for every member in every brigade, regardless of their rank or role. For far too long our goodwill and desire to serve our communities has been used against us. Now is the time to force a reset and arm brigade officials for the next round of attacks on our terms and conditions. Conference, I urge you to support this resolution. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Neil. Does that have a seconder? Have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you.

I now call resolution 54 Marauding Terrorist Attack MTA moved by Cheshire. Cheshire have agreed to remit with the right to speak.

Resolution 54 MARAUDING TERRORIST ATTACK (MTA)

Conference notes the collective agreements reached in London and Greater Manchester with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), with regards to training for and responding to MTA incidents.

These agreements extend the role of a firefighter to the roles and responsibilities associated with an MTA response and have seen an uplift in pay as well as setting out conditions for training, a concept of operations, and protections for the financial rights of those who are killed or seriously injured whilst attending an MTA incident.

These agreements were reached after discussions facilitated by the National Joint Council (NJC).

Conference notes that no other fire and rescue service in the UK has an agreement with the FBU on the matter of MTA.

Conference does not accept that responding to declared MTA incidents, participating in MTA training, other than an awareness of and managing MTA operations, is within the role of a firefighter (Firefighter to Area Manager).

Conference is aware that a number of fire and rescue services have published policies requiring FBU members to be deployed to the warm and hot zones of a MTA, without entering into a collective agreement with the FBU.

Conference notes the employers in these services have effectively expanded the firefighter role in response to the publication of and the implementation of Joint Operating Principles Two and Three without the agreement of the FBU or the NJC.

Conference is of the view that not only does this present a significant risk to FBU members in these services, it also creates a two-tier model for the pay and the terms and conditions of firefighters.

Conference instructs the Executive Council (EC) to establish which services have a policy requiring FBU members to be deployed to an MTA incident within 8 weeks of the close of Conference 2025. Once this data has been gathered the EC must ensure a dispute is lodged in every service where this has been identified. Further to this, the EC must approach the employers' side of the NJC before the end of 2025 to demand that these policies are immediately withdrawn. If the employers' side of the NJC refuse or fail to get the policies withdrawn then the EC agrees to terminate the collective agreements in London and Greater Manchester.

CHESHIRE

JAMES MEREDITH (Cheshire):

President, conference, we've decided to remit this resolution 54 on reflection due to the detriment that it may cause to our comrades in London and Manchester. The intent was never to take anything away. It was in the hope that it would unify us nationally.

But I'm going to say a few words as this is a pressing matter in Cheshire and I'm sure it will be in your service at some point, if it isn't at the moment. While we fully support firefighters responding to MTA incidents and providing support to the emergency services, as firefighters always do to the best of their ability, we cannot continue to ignore the clear disparity between those fire and rescue services that have come to an agreement on the matter and those that have not.

What we are asking for here is no more than has already been agreed in Manchester and London, as we cannot have the rest of the UK fire and rescue service continue to respond to these sorts of incidents without the uplift in pay, the training, the PPE, and the protections that are already in place elsewhere.

There are disparities between services that have provided the funding and those that claim they cannot, with principal officers taking advantage of policies and procedures and abusing the goodwill of their firefighters, as they know that firefighters will always act in the best interests of the public and put themselves in harm's way when necessary, not to mention the use of terminology like limits of exploitation, to muddy the waters around response. One control measure on Cheshire's MTA risk assessment states that if caught or entrapped by terrorists, crews are to remain quiet and out of sight. This in itself is an acknowledgement that not only are we expected to work in the hot and warm zones, but that we are also unequipped to do so. The agreements in Greater Manchester and London have not influenced others to implement the same terms and conditions as was hoped. And so what we're left with is a two-tier fire and rescue service. This should not and cannot continue. Members must stand together on what is a national issue, not a local one, in order to stop the further expansion of disputed policies and procedures.

I do feel this is also part of a wider issue with some fire and rescue services neglecting the health and safety and the wellbeing of their firefighters with varying standards across the industry. It's time that firefighters' health and safety is put first. How can we possibly be expected to do our jobs to the best of our ability if we don't have the right equipment or training?

Employers that have the gall to put their firefighters in this position need to be held to account. If we are to uphold the standards that are expected of us and continue to look after those in need, then we must first and foremost look after ourselves and each other and make sure we're in a position to provide the service that's required of us. Only then can we truly fulfil our roles as firefighters. As I've said, we need to stop the further expansion of disputed policies and procedures. We support the EC's emergency resolution 10. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, James. I now call resolution 57 Review of Marauding Terrorist Attack MTA Response Strategy and Negotiating Rates moved by South Yorkshire. South Yorkshire have agreed to remit with the right to speak. South Yorkshire.

Resolution 57 REVIEW OF MARAUDING TERRORIST ATTACK (MTA) RESPONSE STRATEGY AND NEGOTIATION RIGHTS

Conference acknowledges the unwavering dedication of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) officials nationwide in maintaining our stance on MTA protocols.

Conference understands that despite the 2% pay enhancements secured in London and Greater Manchester for MTA related duties, no other brigade has successfully replicated these agreements.

Conference further understands that the unilateral implementation of Joint Operating Procedures Three by some fire and rescue services, without FBU consultation undermines our collective position.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to conduct a comprehensive review of our current MTA response strategy. This review should consider reinstating negotiation rights to brigade officials to empower localised decision making. The findings and any proposed policy adjustments are to be presented no later than October 2025.

SOUTH YORKSHIRE

MATT NICHOLLS (South Yorkshire):

Conference, president, being from Yorkshire, I will be brief because I don't use that many words. Speaking on resolution 57, review of MTA response strategy and negotiation rights. Conference, for years now, our union has held the line on MTA response. No imposed duty systems, no work outside of training, no equipment, no remuneration, and in South Yorkshire, our members have honoured that position with great discipline and solidarity. Now, conference, I led our members into the trenches on this fight and now they're growing tired. They're growing tired, not of each other, but of a strategy that's not delivered. The same strategy has not moved since it began. Yet the NFCC and chief fire officers have circumnavigated us with jobs free that now sees untrained, unequipped members placed at risk.

Now, the reality is that the agreement of 2% in Manchester and London was not a victory for this union. It smashed collective bargaining and it's left the rest of us in the dark. Now we find ourselves standing in opposition to the emergency resolution.

It means that we will remit. But, conference, this is done with a clear message that inaction cannot continue. We'll not stand by in the trenches with no clear strategy on MTA. Our members are at risk now and it needs action now. South Yorkshire remit. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Matt, thanks for that. Conference, that's all the resolutions in this debate that have been called. It is now open for debate.

ANDY WARREN (London):

President, conference, first time delegate, first time speaker. *Applause* Conference, I want to remind you what our pay offer said two years ago, which is in here, pages 11 to 12. But I'll quote, "*The national employers commit to further talks with a view to doing further work in relation to a skills knowledge framework for consideration in time for the next annual pay review date, July, 2025.*"

That was our pay deal two years ago. Now, the pay deal we just voted to accept commits the employer to immediate negotiations on pay progression talks for July 2026. Now, I don't know about you, conference, but I don't want to be here next year talking about the employers' commitment to pay progression talks in 2027.

That means we need a strategy to win. So that's why I'm speaking in favour of this motion. (Forgot to mention). A decent headline pay offer will need central government funding, increasing pay via progression, that can mean several different things from what I can tell, that will need central government funding too. And getting government funding out of this Labour government is going to be getting blood out of a stone. So we need to be going into these negotiations with our eyes wide open and we need to organise accordingly. Yesterday Tam mentioned, as part of the organising strategy that he set out, about being ballot-ready at all times. And I think that's the spirit in which we need to take this motion. It needs to be our starting point in building collective confidence of members so we can restore our pay. We need clear direct demands and we need to be ready for a scrap. Without that, unity and strength are just a comfort blanket.

We need to go on the offensive. We need to build a strategy across the union for a coordinated campaign on pay, and things will change when workers re-find their confidence and, conference, that's our job. It's our job to give them that, to find that. Wildfires, heat waves and floods, they are skills that we can be paid for, but they're also industrial leverage.

We need to be ready next summer. We need to be proactive around this, so I don't think we can wait until next year to debate the next steps. This resolution sets out the possibility of an early recall of conference, and I think that eventuality needs to be prepared for now. We need to be working on the dispute all throughout this year from today, getting those wheels in motion. Support the motion.

SHERRY KITSON (CSNC):

I am going to be speaking on the EC's emergency resolution on pay. But first of all, I just wanted to say congratulations to the national retained committee on the increase to the retainer fee, that was for a resolution brought to conference the same year that the CSNC brought the resolution to close the pay gap.

Despite the fact the CSNC convinced the EC to remove a qualification on our resolution to close the pay gap in 2023, and despite the fact a job evaluation was completed following agreement at NJC pay negotiations, despite the fact the pay gap has closed control firefighters are still on 95% of operational firefighters pay.

To say we're disappointed is a massive understatement. Control are a small, specialised section of the workforce and our union, and we sometimes feel like we're an afterthought. That's within the fire service and in our union. So let me put it in another way. We never feel like we are the main priority, not that we want to be the main priority. We'd just like to be equally as important.

So let's take a look at the EC's emergency resolution on pay. Point 3, *"Make pay reform, and the role of a firefighter the main negotiating priority."*

I'll read that again so it can sink in. *"Make pay reform and the role of a firefighter the main negotiating priority."* And you wonder why we feel the way we do. We don't think that the opportunity to increase pay through upskilling within the role will be fair across every fire control because there are some stark differences in the work already being carried out.

It depends on whether you're a Shire brigade, a county council-run brigade, or a Met brigade. We have some control rooms that are adherent to National Occupational Guidance and some that aren't. Some of those that are, are being trained on how to handle calls on unresponsive casualties and casualties with severe uncontrollable bleeding. I suppose you could call it EMR.

I'll go back to the start. The work has been done, the scores are in, we're worth 96.24% of a firefighters' salary, but we fail to make the employers' side pay up. We've been fighting for 40 years on control pay, and it looks like we'll be fighting for another 40. So despite a hundred percent effort from your control staff, we're only getting 95% reward.

We want the bottom line to be the 96.24%, and that's what we need to campaign for. So even though the CSNC section won't get a vote on this, we don't support it with how it's been written, even though we've been told how important we are. But it's written in black and white. The role of a firefighter is the FBU's main negotiating and priority, and I'm being told to get off now. So thanks for that. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks for that, Sherry. We're going to take one more speaker, then we'll be having the tea break. Andy.

ANDY MURRAY (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, for all of my 20 years as being a firefighter, I've seen the role of a firefighter being eroded, the terms and conditions of a firefighter being eroded.

For 14 years under a Tory government, we saw either paltry or zero pay. All the talks were stifled by a government that didn't want to and didn't have the capacity to understand what we need, what we are, what we provide. There was no meaningful dialogue on the role for those in fire stations or in fire control, and we only achieved a significant pay rise once we were at breaking point and our members said, enough is enough.

We showed that government that there is power in a union. And we saw a not insubstantial rise to our pay over a two-year deal. This year, following the pay offer, we spoke to many members across our stations about what this pay offer means. Whilst there were a few who could not agree with accepting the pay offer, many understood to accept the pay offer with a view to next year.

Next year is important. Where we go is important. We need to build over this year, as Tam said yesterday, as the organising strategy says, we need to build, so we are ready for that fight.

Pay progression and the role of a firefighter are two elements that are now being talked about with a government that at least has an understanding. We can have those talks. They are meaningful talks. Before, it wasn't ever going to go anywhere. Now we have that power and we can take it forward.

We need to put support in our new GS and the negotiators who will speak on our behalf at those talks. This resolution gives us a clear strategy for that. That is why we support emergency resolution 10. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Andy. Right, we are going to break for tea break. Scott, first one up, next one when we reconvene at 11.15, but I know you will all try and pinch a minute. Try not to.

Break for tea

THE PRESIDENT:

Conference, come to order. First question is, has anybody left a tent in reception?

Yes? If you would like to go collect your tent at some point. Never had one of them brought to me before, but there you go.

I now call the chair of standing orders, Phil Millar, to give a report.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Thank you, president. Conference, can you turn to your programme of business, please? And go to page 8, resolution 12 has been withdrawn to support resolution 19, and resolution 16 has been remitted with the right to speak, which means the amendments from London and Hereford and Worcester fall.

Turn to page 9. Resolution 61 has been withdrawn. And if you could turn to page 16, resolution 89 has been remitted with the right to speak. Thank you. President.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Phil. Is that report agreed? *Agreed* Thank you.

Conference, we're carrying on with section A, the debate on pay. Scott said he was next up.

SCOTT MacRORY (Scotland):

Good morning, president, conference. supporting emergency resolution 10 on pay. Conference, region 1 are supporting this emergency resolution. The last paragraph has satisfied our committee's concerns that these promises of meaningful discussions and commitments are not just being repeated every year with no real progress.

We welcome the statement of the options to recall conference on industrial action should no progress be made by this time next year, as our comrade from Merseyside put so well before me. One concern that was brought from reps and members in Scotland was the lack of time to consult prior to the opening of the ballot with the EC recommendation. We ask that this be considered in any further working groups.

One last point on the broadening of the role, Scotland have managed to negotiate through the NJC an agreed proposal of appropriate work and remuneration in 2022, which we would suggest forms the basis of any talks on this aspect. I support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Scott.

SCOTT MATTINSON (Cumbria):

Conference, President, speaking on emergency resolution 10. On this, I'm just going to quickly quote the EC report para A10 where it claims the intention was for an early settlement delivering pay for 1 July. This most recent pay offer and its acceptance will be sold as a success for members and democracy.

However, to quote the new booklet National Organising Strategy. Section 2(1) paragraph 2 *"Meetings are held regularly, chaired effectively, and are well attended. All members have fully participated and take responsibility for putting into action democratic decisions of the meeting"* and para 7 *"Effective comms between the branch and the FB structure."*

So just to carry on what Scotland have said there, this most recent pay offer for me was rushed through for quick success, with limited to no opportunity to engage and debate with members and just the message, "accept" from the EC. This cannot be the way forward for future pay awards and future pay claims.

We need to encourage time to debate for activism and participation amongst members. For future claims, we also need to hold that key word of task and finish groups. We need to hold them to account. For me, personally, they seem to be all task and no finish. The resolution discusses the same topics that are brought forward every year.

We're still waiting for the 2022-23 CPD. Like rise in award. It talks about, again, the task and finish group that needs done. Let's encourage activism. Let's encourage participation, and let's encourage debate amongst our members. I hear what the GS is saying and the intent of this resolution, but words must come with action. That's all. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Scott.

RICHARD BEEBY (Suffolk):

Conference, president, CPD payments have been a large source of pay disparity for 18 years now, and with every pay rise that we secure, the gap between the top and the bottom of CPD payments grows. Conference, this amounts to nearly 2% a year difference in salary between brigades who do the same work on the same rolemap.

The CPD payments are a historic decision, and we welcome them being brought to the forefront to pay reform to end yet another postcode lottery for our members. We also welcome renewed talks around control pay parity. They are the front line of the front line and deserve equal pay. This too needs to be addressed, as do all the pay issues surrounding our job. Suffolk supports this resolution. *Applause*

DAVE PIKE (Greater Manchester):

Conference, president, Greater Manchester welcomes EC emergency resolution 10 on pay and speaks in support of it. That said, we support our Merseyside comrades' position that seeks to ensure conference understands its responsibilities in holding the EC to account.

Comrades, we acknowledge the new leadership of our union, but it's important to remember that the 2023 pay offer included a letter from the employers that agreed to joint discussions to progress pay, which would conclude within eight months. Conference, Greater Manchester supports Hereford and Worcester's resolution 18 and commends Merseyside for seconding resolution 10. It is vitally important that we do not see a repeat of history, and everyone here today totally understands what this means to our wider membership.

Greater Manchester requests that all updates on pay progression for firefighters and firefighter control are provided to brigade officials in a consistent and structured manner so that can be communicated to the branch and brigade committees. This will ensure our members are kept as informed as possible, ensuring the debates on pay progression take place on branches and at brigade committees, and it's consistent with our Rule Book and ensures all members have the opportunity to hold their EC to account. Conference, let's ensure all members have a voice on this critically important issue over the next 12 months. Greater Manchester supports emergency resolution 10. *Applause*

SASHA HITCHINS (West Midlands):

President, conference, speaking in opposition to resolution 18 from Hereford and Worcester. We understand the intent behind this, so it is with regret that we will be opposing this resolution. To have something so defined means that disputes will be considerably harder to get off the ground.

The rolemap, as it stands, gives us the opportunity to fight, and fight hard locally. Having defined roles won't necessarily resolve the issues, but will create more problems. It will give chief fire officers leverage to make their proposals fit a definition. The way to defeat imposition of additional work should be driven by an organised membership rather than relying solely on a written rolemap.

We also stand in solidarity with our control members in their concerns relating to the wording contained within the executive council emergency resolution. Oppose the resolution from Hereford and Worcester. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Sasha.

HARRY BRANT (Leicestershire):

I'm a firefighter control. I am a firefighter. I consider that the emergency resolution 10 from the executive council is inclusive of all firefighters and that does include those within control. We are one and the same. We are operational. Leicestershire supports emergency resolution 10. *Applause*

MARK HARRISS (Cambridgeshire):

President, conference, Cambridge withdrew its own rolemap resolution yesterday. Not because we no longer believe in it or how important it is, but because of the assurances that have been given to us at this conference.

Let me be absolutely clear on this. Cambridgeshire members are not new to this fight. We, like many of you here, have brought resolutions to conference time and time again, calling for clarity on rolemaps. Rolemap resolutions go back to at least 2007, and have been a regular topic at almost every conference since then. Conference, we ask ourselves why.

Quite simply, it's because all we seem to get back is words and not action. Meanwhile, employers across the UK have been exploiting our members, your members, for at least 18 years. That's why, last year, Cambridgeshire members voted to boycott conference 2024. Not out of apathy, but out of frustration. Frustration that the resolutions we all pass in this hall are far too often left on the shelf. This year we're back and, based on these sort of discussions, we will be backing the EC resolution because it draws a line. It says to employers, we are willing to negotiate, but we will not be exploited. That's the line we've needed for years. We've had enough of informal agreements, of mission creep, of blurred expectations, and unpaid labour. We are not a catch-all service. We are firefighters, and if more is to be asked of us, then it must come through national negotiations with proper training, suitable resources, and of course, fair pay.

Anything less than that is not evolution; it's exploitation. So we welcome Hereford's sort of stance, but we'll be backing the EC resolution. But we need to say, let's end the ambiguity, let's defend the role, and let's finally stand up for our members. We're going to support the EC resolution. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Mark. Chris.

CHRIS TAPP (Derbyshire):

President, conference, speaking in support of emergency resolution 10, speaking in solidarity with the original resolution 10 from our comrades in Merseyside, and still debating where we're going with number 18, but it's not concluded yet.

Comrades, conference, the time has come. And how long? And colleague before me just said, how long this has been going on. It's time to rip the plaster off, rip the scab off, and sort out what is in the rolemap. We cannot ask for anything over and above something if we do not know what something is. Now is the time to do that. I think Hereford and Worcester's resolution clarifies that and supports emergency resolution 10. So that is the area that I think we should be supporting.

Just a few notes that I made in here when originally looking at this. In the original resolution 10 on broadening the role, it says "*Conference is aware that some FBU members are being utilised to carry out work outside of their agreed rolemaps.*"

They are because they don't know what the rolemap is. They can't fight for anything because they don't know what they're fighting against, because they don't know if it's in the rolemap or not. They don't know if doing water rescue is in the rolemap. We brought a resolution. They don't know if working at height is in the rolemap because you know they've got all this.

So the only way we can fight back against anything or achieve anything is going to be defining that. Again, in original resolution 10, it says at the very last part "*Any work which is deemed to be out of role*". We don't know what's out of role. That's the problem. That's why we've been bringing resolutions on rolemaps.

There's plenty of them in your final agenda. Surely that is now telling conference that we do not know what's in the rolemap and we need to clarify it. But there is going to be some pain and I'm sure our negotiators will have to be the bearers of bad news and bring that pain to us and tell us, look, that is in the rolemap, that is agreed, we are not going to achieve extra pay on that.

So I think let's go into this. Let's establish what's in the rolemap and if at the end it boils down to MTA and emergency medical responding, which is where I think this is heading, then so be it. We'll have that debate, we'll decide what that's worth and we'll do it or we won't. We'll all have different views on that.

But conference please, I ask you to support emergency resolution 10, solidarity with Merseyside, and I hope we can support resolution 18, comrades. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Chris. Any more in the debate? No, I'm now going to bring the general secretary in. There's a lot of assurances sought on certain ones and the opposition to 18.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, president. And that pay debate clearly, there's going to be a lot of discussion, a lot of debate, so thanks for breaking me in gently. I'll try and refer to most of my notes and cover most of the points. But look, I'm going to start off by thanking Merseyside and the discussions that a number of us had last night for withdrawing resolution 10.

But I want to be clear that the direction that we are setting today has not changed.

That special conference in 2012 met and set the direction when they had the discussions around broadening the role, when we took on emergency medical response in a trial in 2016-17. And look, the only reason that stopped was because the Tory government would not fund it and the employers wanted a list as long as the length of your arm.

But look what has changed. Now we have got an opportunity, and there has been a change of perspective from the NFCC on their commitments around having these discussions, on their position regarding the spending review and the investment in the fire and rescue service. We've got the commitment right now with the employers to have these discussions. So that's what's changed. That's what's given us the directional change to have these discussions.

I'll cover a couple of the other points around the MTA, the important points raised by James and Matt. And again, thanks for remitting these, but we know this is an important issue that we need to get to grips with.

Yes, we've got deals, I suppose, that we've managed to get on the table and through the auspices of the NJC in London and Manchester. And our members are equipped, they're trained and they've got the ability to attend terrorist incidents, and that is a good thing that we've been able to do as a fire and rescue service. And that will be front and centre of these negotiations.

The AGS sent out a circular end of last year, I believe it was, which set out our position on MTA and members and officials should note that, and what that says. So it will be front and centre. We will look at those templates we've got in place in London and Manchester, where our members are trained and how that fits. The points raised by Jake on the RDS matters, that is still our policy, wherever you are, Jake. And we set that out in our pay letter in December or when Matt Wrack wrote to the employers in December with our pay letter. And that fight continues.

Our cover of control. And I think Harry made the point, a firefighter is a firefighter. We've had that discussion. On committees we've had that discussion in this conference hall before. I covered it in my opening contribution. RDS is going to be front and centre, control, pay. And our position, our policy position, is for pay parity. There was a review done, which the CSNC section know, which did recommend a slight uplift. But this policy has been set by this conference to get pay parity and we will take that to the negotiating table. We raised it in the negotiations this year around pay, and we'll continue to do that. That is part of these negotiations, comrades. So is RDS pay, so is CPD, exactly as the policy statement says and exactly as I set out in my opening speech. The AGS attended the CSNC meeting on Monday and said just that: we are fighting for pay parity. That is a fight we're all taking on and we've got an opportunity to do that now.

President, I'll cover resolution 18 and look, Neil, we agree. We agree it's time to look at the rolemaps. As Chris just said, we've all been attacked by these. We face these issues on our roles, and we need to start dealing with it now.

But I think what we want to do, we want to focus immediately on these negotiations next week. The meetings have already been set. We will take this to the NJC. We will take it to the Middle Managers' Negotiating Body on 5 June. Enough talk internally. Actually, we need to get round the table now.

Look, we know what's going on in brigades. We know our members have been picked off. We have clearly set that out. We don't think this can be dealt with any more as a local issue that – we want to take that on nationally. We want to get in the room with the national employers. They've given us that commitment.

Yes, we are basing it on their words at the moment. But look, Ben's been in that room longer than I have. They have committed to that. We've committed to it. So we want that mandate to get in that room and start progressing these issues. We don't want it to be a local issue. We don't want brigade officials, area officials, regional officials dealing with these issues about role, what's in role, what's not in role any longer. We want to put a line in the sand and fix this once and for all.

I think as well within the resolution, it talks about producing the list and look, we've seen how that can benefit the employers. Yes, we've seen how it can benefit us, and we have won and made some wins in Nottingham and Lincolnshire on some of those issues around roles.

But we see this list that could be produced mid negotiations, but it's utterly insane that we would do that. It would hand over our points, our negotiation elements that we can take into those rooms. If we produce the list now, it would assist the NFCC potentially. It would assist chief fire officers and it would assist the employers.

So look, we are asking for Hereford and Worcester, for Neil to withdraw this. We feel we can make real progress on the issues that we've set out today on the role of a firefighter and on pay progression. And the best route to do that and to define that work is in the negotiating room. And we can start that next week, but I cannot say any more. We are in the room next week, I give you those commitments and then whatever comes from that, the bold line in the policy statement sets out that any decision that will be taken on pay progression, on reforming of pay, on the role of a firefighter will come back to our members. So what that looks like, will come back to our members to decide.

So what I ask is that you don't weaken the negotiators in that room. The employers are going to be doing everything to strengthen their arm. We need to do everything to strengthen our arm. So don't weaken that position. We hope you can withdraw it. Or if not, we're calling for that to be opposed.

So look, just to be clear, and these are the final points, the debate has been great. It always is on pay and it needs to be, these are the issues when you turn up at a branch meeting, a brigade committee meeting, and the hundreds of meetings I've done over the past year with our members in stations and control rooms, pay is the number one priority as are terms and conditions, as are pensions – bread and butter issues that we need to get to grips with. And we've got a plan and we've got a strategy to do that. So I note the points from Scott and others around how we have taken this decision or how we've put this decision to our members and we as executive council members have debated how we would review the pay.

And that was a long debate when that offer was put on the table to us, how we would negotiate, how we would consult with our members on this and an issue as important as pay, where we might be asking our members to take strike action, we wanted to make sure that every member across the UK had the ability to have their say and that's reflected in the 59% turnout. It's reflected in the 82% accept. We know we have hard-to-reach places across the UK. So the EC wanted to make sure that we got the money in our members' pockets as soon as possible. So look, we've done this in previous years, we did it last year. We put that decision in our members' hands, making sure that they could vote electronically or in the ballot box with a paper copy.

So that's why we did it. And I backed the EC and the EC made that call and that's the reason we took it. So look, that's where we are. This is a turning point for us now to take on the rolemaps and to take on pay reform. We hope

that you back it. I think the statement that the EC have agreed is strong, it's robust, but it also gives the ability to hold us to account. Thank you, president. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Steve. Right of reply, Hereford and Worcester.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, using my right to reply. Firstly, I just want to thank Greater Manchester for supporting the resolution. And I also just want to say thank you to West Mids. I appreciate speaking in opposition, but that's what this debate is about.

It's important to hear both sides, and so thank you, Sasha. *Applause* I'm a little bit bewildered as to why the EC are opposing this and I don't agree that the premise of a list would hamper our negotiators in these important negotiations that are going to take place. At some point, comrades, a list will exist. In order to expand the role, in order to have that conversation with our employers, we need to have a base starting point and that starting point is what we are contractually obliged to do. How do we expand from that position if we don't know what that position is? That clearly makes no sense to me. However, at the end of the process, a list of some sort will exist. Now, whether or not it's in black and white or whether or not that could be communicated through the seminars that we were promised at last year's conference that have not happened yet. If those seminars could take place and we could have that information, maybe that's a way that we could have this information so that we are armed for the fight ahead.

How can we and our members know where we are, our positions, our contractual obligations so that when the employers do come to us with something that we don't want to do, how do we say no if we don't know what is and what isn't contractual? For me, that's the fundamental issue that sits behind this resolution. Brother Tapp very eloquently said that members don't know. I think that's really important, comrades. I think we need to consider those points and thank you to Chris for raising them. The employers have a position. We need to have a position as the GS just said, we need to draw a line in the sand once and for all. Comrades, please support the motion. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Neil. You're not withdrawing it then. Only kidding. Right, conference, that concludes the debate. I'm now going to put emergency resolution 10 Pay from the executive council to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put resolution 6 Retained Pay Negotiations moved by Northern Ireland to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put resolution 18 Rolemaps and Contractual Obligations moved by Hereford and Worcester to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That falls.*

Right, conference, just before we move on to our next business, I'm going to remind you that there is a ballot box for the standing orders election at the back of the room.

If you haven't filled those in yet, could you please complete them and get them in the ballot box.

Conference. I now call resolution 1 Coronation/Jubilee Medals for Control moved by London.

Resolution 1 CORONATION/JUBILEE MEDALS FOR CONTROL

Conference notes the Kings Coronation medal, and previous Jubilee medals, are issued to 'serving frontline members of the emergency services, dealing with emergencies as part of their conditions of service, that have completed five full calendar years of service'.

Conference is aware that some Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) around the country consider their control room as frontline emergency service responders and have successfully requested medals

on their behalf, others believe the Home Office criteria does not apply to control room officers and do not apply for medals.

Control room personnel around the country are the first point of contact for members of the public experiencing an emergency, they assess, reassure and coordinate the response, managing the incident until the arrival of crews. They deal with harrowing calls and incidents and face the same scrutiny as responding firefighters and officers in enquiries. The Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 Report (Volume 5, Chapter 78.3) specifically acknowledges that control room officers providing fire survival guidance ‘become a first responder, giving critical advice to someone facing a life-threatening situation’.

Conference believes all control room officers, regardless of their location, should be eligible to receive such medals.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to support efforts to recognise eligibility for control staff by;

- contact all FRSs requesting their support to ensure all control room officers are considered and classified as frontline/first responder*
- contact Government to request their eligibility criteria specifically includes control room operators*
- create template letters that can be sent to MPs requesting their support to get the criteria changed from members*
- contact trade unions for police & ambulance and request their support/coordinated action on the above points.*

LONDON

AMENDMENT 1

5th paragraph, delete 4th bullet point.

SCOTLAND

AMENDMENT 2

Delete bullet points, replace with

- contacting all FRSs requesting their support to ensure all control room officers are considered and classified as frontline/first responder*
- contacting the Government to request their eligibility criteria specifically includes control room operators*
- creating template letters that can be sent to MPs requesting their support to get the criteria changed from members*
- contacting trade unions for Police & Ambulance and request their support/ coordinated action on the above points.*

HEREFORD AND WORCESTER

NIKKI HAXTON-JONES (London):

President, general secretary, conference, I just need to start this by acknowledging and thanking the people in this room that have supported previous efforts to ensure that control room staff are recognised for jubilee medals and coronation medals, etc. As a direct result of that, last year when I was working for Kent Fire and Rescue, I received my coronation medal. Three weeks later I transferred to London Fire Brigade and found that my colleagues in London were ineligible for the medals. Tad awkward. So there's a number of control rooms, some of them that do receive the medals: Kent, Scotland, Merseyside, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and among those that don't, London, Essex, Herts and North West Fire Control.

The Grenfell Report phase two, which was released earlier this year, specifically acknowledges that control operators giving fire survival guidance become first responders. So under this criteria, we are definitely eligible, but there is widespread differences across the country. Some are recognised, some are not.

I think it's important that we continue the work to ensure that everybody across the country is eligible to receive those medals. I have my medal. I don't feel like I can bring that out of the envelope that I received it in until all my colleagues across the United Kingdom are able to receive those medals as well. *Applause*

Conversely, I'm aware of one control room that were eligible to receive medals one year, and they had a change of chief, which meant the second year they were not eligible to receive the medals. So while this threat is potentially hanging over members who do receive the medals already, I think we just need national continued local efforts and coordination to ensure that we don't lose the medals that have been won for people across the country. So conference I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

(off mic) Scotland and Hereford and Worcester to move their two amendments.

That's my job to remind people.

Just two seconds, Scott, while I just clarify this. Both amendments stand in opposition to each other so they both cannot carry. So therefore, if amendment 1 from Scotland carries, Hereford and Worcester falls automatically. Okay, so Scott, you're going to second and move the amendment. The EC are supporting amendment 1 from Scotland and opposing the amendment from Hereford and Worcester.

SCOTT MacRORY (Scotland):

President, conference, seconding resolution one and moving Scotland's amendment. Conference acknowledges and appreciates the contributions and commitment our firefighters in control give to their respective fire and rescue services and our communities. Their dedication in ensuring that the best possible service is delivered in often difficult circumstances is to be applauded.

Firefighters in our control rooms work on the same terms and conditions as operational firefighters. They operate under the same policies and procedures, and are expected to demonstrate the same values and professionalism in the roles that they hold. Historically, control rooms the length and breadth of the country operated in isolation, but with amalgamations and recommendations following public inquiries, control rooms are supporting each other and working together more than ever. Policies and mobilising procedures may differ slightly, but fundamentally the job is the same. Our firefighters in control are an integral part of all that we do. The backbone of the fire and rescue service. They're an essential part of incident resolution. Their presence is required from the initial emergency call, during resource mobilisation and incident management through to the stop message and organising reliefs. Their feet may not be on the ground, but with one press of the mic, they're right there beside us always. When we need something at an incident, we ask control. When something goes wrong, we inform control. When we've got crewing issues, we contact control. They're woven into every part of our working day.

It is for these reasons there is no doubt in our minds that our firefighters in control deserve the same recognition as every other firefighter. While this has been observed on some occasions within individual fire and rescue services, this has not been consistent.

I challenge anyone to dispute that our control firefighters are not serving frontline members of the emergency services dealing with emergencies as part of their conditions of service. We second this resolution and move our amendment. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Scott. Neil.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, speaking on amendment 2 for resolution 1 Coronation/Jubilee medals for control. Comrades, if you have a look at the amendment, all that we've done is added the letters "ing" to the bullet points to make sure that the resolution itself is grammatically correct.

So I'll just read the line before the bullet points. It says, "*Conference instructs the Executive Council to support efforts to recognise eligibility for control staff by: contact all FRSs*". And it goes on. Comrades, all we've tried to do here is make our resolutions legible and grammatically correct. I don't see why this can't be supported. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks for that, Neil, and I'll try and explain it. Obviously in the standing orders my job is to just look at the resolutions. I don't care who they are from, whatever. I just look at them and look whether they stand. One resolution calls for a deletion of a bullet point. Your resolution calls for an amendment to a bullet point that's been deleted, if the amendment carries. That's why they both can't carry. Okay. On amendment one from Scotland, does that have a seconder? Have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. On amendment two from Hereford and Worcester, does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody? Yep.

SASHA HITCHINS (West Midlands):

President, conference, speaking in support of resolution 1 and supporting Hereford and Worcester's amendment in the hope that I'll get a drink later. Each FRS has had a different approach to medals for fire control - often depending on what the chief fire officer feels about it. Often it can be determined on how industrial relations are at the time, fire control being used as some kind of payoff or punishment. In the West Midlands Fire control for the Golden Jubilee in 2002, we were not presented with anything. In 2012 for the Diamond Jubilee Medal, we were given a West Midlands pin badge, the same as our Green Book colleagues. And in 2022 for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal, after some magnificent local campaigning we did actually receive a medal with the instruction that we absolutely can't wear it on our uniform and we can't tell anyone about it.

Not quite sure what the point was, and I'm pretty sure by telling you all now that kind of breaks it. A little secret medal that sits in the drawer next to the pin badge of 2012. This shouldn't be the case. Control staff couldn't be more frontline. They couldn't deal with emergencies more as part of our conditions of service, even if they tried.

The decision as to whether to include fire control should not be something that chief fire officers can reward us with if we play nice or punish us by withholding, if industrial relations are strained. Support the resolution and make it absolutely loud and clear that fire control are eligible like they always should have been. Thank you. Support the resolution. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Sasha.

HARRY BRANT (Leicestershire):

Speaking in support of resolution 1. Within Leicestershire, we were lucky enough to receive coronation medals recently. We didn't receive the platinum jubilee medals the couple of years previous. And again, albeit on the quiet, "don't tell anybody that you're getting these medals".

That simply isn't good enough. As I said in the last debate, control are operational. The NFCC wants control rooms to follow national operational guidance. The key word in that being operational. The NFCC recognises that control are operational. The Home Office at the time should also recognise that. Leicestershire supports this resolution. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Harry. Anybody else? Yep. Come down.

MATT SENIOR (Avon):

President, conference, speaking in support of resolution 1, in opposition to amendment 1 and in support of amendment 2. This is about the bullet points. The fourth bullet point is fine, okay. The police don't have a trade union, so don't contact them. Don't worry about it. Definitely engage with the ambulance and engage with the association if you can. And the grammatical corrections perfectly fine. So that's our position. Thank you very much. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Matt. Matt, can I remind you to wear your delegate credential at all times? Thank you. Yep.

JACK FELLOWS (Cheshire):

President, conference, whilst I totally agree with the sentiments of parity and yes, control members, fire service members throughout should be recognised in the same way for the great work that they do, these medals, let's remember, are referring to a monarchy that doesn't support union. So yes, let's have some medals that recognise our work and not symbols of empire. So I suggest if we all get the same medals, we can all line up on the sea front and see how far we can throw them into the sea. *Applause* Or failing that at least we can put them on eBay and maybe make a couple of quid. So thank you. I support.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Jack. Anybody else? Mark Rowe.

MARK ROWE (National Officer):

Thanks, president. Just quickly on Matt's point. Coming up and amending a resolution from the rostrum, Matt. The resolution does say to contact. You can't just say okay, we'll amend the resolution, so just don't contact them. So we have to carry out the request of the amendment.

The reason why the executive council is giving qualified support is because the union's been fighting this for a good number of years. What if we go to the police and the ambulance and we get support from one and not the other? It's just felt that it's a lot cleaner if conference accept and support the Scottish amendment and just delete that fourth bullet point.

I can reassure conference that as the national officer that has the remit for CSNC, we have repeatedly challenged and insisted control are frontline. We have lobbied consistently. So all the work has been undertaken, which is the qualification. A brigade secretary circular was issued with letters to every chief fire officer demanding it.

I notice that some comrades coming up to the rostrum are saying that they've started to get them in recent years, but not previous years yet. That is in large part due to the work that CSNC has been doing and advising on these circulars. So there was another brigade secretary circular went out to Naomi Cook.

There was an NJC/FBU joint circular called on the fire minister, Bob Neill, to recognise fire control as front line. We actually wrote to the fire ministers several times. We've even written to the Parliamentary Under Secretary, and the name of the guy escapes me. But as the comrade from Cheshire says in relation to these we wrote to a Lord - his name does escape me - who was involved in the setting of what they referred to as the standards for these medals.

So the qualification is yes, the work has been done, undertaken to a large extent. We will continue to do that work and when the situation arises again, we'll make sure that we continue to push to get those medals for control. Thanks, president. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, thanks Mark. I now put amendment 1 to resolution 1 from Scotland to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put amendment 2 to resolution one from Hereford and Worcester to the vote. All those in favour. Oh, no, sorry. Apologies. Conference, *it falls*. I do apologise. I now put resolution 1 as amended by Scotland to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 2 Tax thresholds moved by London. London have agreed to remit with the right to speak.

Resolution 2 TAX THRESHOLDS

Conference notes the importance of annual pay discussions and the recent increases in pay secured, in order to keep members' wages in line with inflation and the general rising costs of day to day living.

Conference believes that there is a forgotten element linked to pay of firefighters and other lower paid workers, which is income tax and the higher rate of 40%.

This tax bracket has remained relatively similar for a considerable time and was originally set as an amount that should only affect those with higher paid incomes. Due to the threshold not increasing significantly in line with pay awards lower paid workers including firefighters, firefighters control and other fire and rescue service staff are now affected and it is not difficult to be pushed into the higher rate tax threshold.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to lobby the Labour Government for an increase in the 40% tax threshold and place more emphasis on higher earners who can afford to pay more.

This lobbying should be done in conjunction with other unions where possible.

LONDON

BRIAN FLANAGAN (London):

President, conference, speaking on resolution 2 tax thresholds. The share of adults paying higher rates of tax has increased enormously in recent decades. In 1991-92 just 3.5% of UK adults paid the 40% higher rate of income tax. By 2022-23 11% were paying higher rates with that figure set to reach 14% by 2027-28. As a result in the 1990s, no nurses and just 5% to 6% of teachers paid a higher rate tax. With income tax thresholds failing to keep up with average wages it means that by 2027-28, more than one in eight nurses and one in four teachers are set to be higher rate earners. This also applies to firefighters.

Many public sector services, as we know, depend on goodwill and overtime. Whilst additional hours should not be the norm, it does happen and firefighters and control staff work extra hours throughout the UK. This can, and in some cases has, forced us into this high rate of tax. Recognising the good work that our EC and other unions have done with securing recent pay increases, it won't be long before this begins to push our core pay into this higher tax bracket. I know there will be some that think this is a London-centric resolution, and yes, many in London are feeling this already, particularly junior officers and those with specialist qualifications doing overtime to both keep appliances on the run and to supplement their income. In fact, even some of our area officials are being pushed into the high rate purely by being in receipt of their brigade officials' allowance. But this will begin to hit all areas of the country if we do not start acting now to prevent the continuous freeze on the higher rate of tax not increasing in line with wages and inflation.

By the time it's run its course, the freeze is set to represent the largest single tax raising measure since Geoffrey Howe near-doubled the rate of VAT in 1979. This is not just a resolution for firefighters, it's a resolution for all public sector workers, and we believe work needs to commence with lobbying government alongside other unions to have this higher tax threshold increased to a fairer amount.

Nurses, teachers, and firefighters, etc, should not be paying a higher rate of income tax, which is only subsidising the corporations, big businesses and executives who are getting away with evading paying their fair share. Because of assurances we've been given by the EC that this work will be considered, we remit the resolution. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Brian. I now call resolution 4 Paternity Pay and Leave moved by Scotland. The EC are seeking remit.

Resolution 4 PATERNITY PAY AND LEAVE

Conference applauds the work of Fire Brigades Union members and officials in the 'Fight for 52' campaign and notes that while the campaign is still ongoing, it has already had success in contributing to the recent increase in the minimum Grey Book maternity provisions.

Conference agrees that minimum arrangements for paternity leave should also be improved for firefighters. Having six weeks leave on full pay would give non-birthing partners the opportunity to provide support and create the natural strong bond between parent and child during the early stages of a child's life, without a detrimental financial impact.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to commence negotiations with the National Joint Council employers side with the intention of achieving six weeks of paternity leave at full pay, for all Grey Book non-birthing parents, after their child is born.

SCOTLAND

JORDAN FALCONER (Scotland):

President, conference, moving resolution 4 paternity pay and leave. I just want to start by saying thank you to national school last year, which is where Will Burt and I came up with Paternity 6. I'm no IT guy, so that's not too bad. Will couldn't be here today as his partner has recently had a healthy little baby girl, and both mother and baby are doing well. *Applause*

We applaud the work of the members and officials in the Fight for 52 campaign and the success they have achieved, which is part of the reason that inspired Will and I to come up with this resolution. It's clear from research and information gathering from the NHS and multiple other sources that six weeks is the minimum time needed for a baby to bond with her parents and for the non-birthing partner to support the mother.

As anyone who has gone through the birth of a child will know, labour has a huge impact on a woman's body. Even more so if a medical intervention is required, or birth by caesarean section. In fact, the minimum recovery time for a caesarean section is six weeks during which time the mother should not drive or lift anything, including her baby.

And the support of a non-birthing partner is paramount during this time. Having a minimum of six weeks' full pay for non-birthing partners, I don't think is a big ask. The bond and support this leave would help create is what every partner should be entitled to without financial constraint.

At the moment in Scotland, we only get one week full pay and the second week statutory pay. The second week sees a loss of £536 from a firefighter's pay and is reduced from £720 a week to statutory pay of just £184. Most partners only take one week because having just had a baby losing over £500 is simply not feasible.

Only having one week means that people have to rely on having a good support network of friends, family, when their partner has to return to work. But what happens when the parents don't have a support network in place? The partner goes back to work worried and stressed. Then if it's bad enough, you go to your doctor because of the stress you're under and get a sick line, which is full pay. Whereas if they just had the six weeks paid leave to begin with, they wouldn't be in that position or have such an unnecessary strain on their mental and physical health with added risks that are being distracted when working as an emergency service. The most important point is the parent gets to bond with the child and can be there to support the birthing partner.

So wear the Fight for 52 T-shirts, hand out the leaflets. Conference, region 1 will be remitting this resolution to the EC. Whilst I disagree with the rationale given, we could be taken to have placed a restriction within the resolution to six weeks.

However, we will be bringing this back next year with the word minimum inserted should there not be any significant progress to the increase in paternity pay. Conference I remit. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Jordan. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Look, firstly thanks for that speech and for the remittance there. We did feel that it was quite restrictive in terms of setting out six weeks. Just for example, just looking across Europe, Spain offers 16 weeks of parental leave for fathers and partners on full pay, Finland 22 weeks, Sweden, 32 weeks. There are some examples, at least which we want to take into those negotiations and we will do, and we want to be very clear in our commitment, which I've given to Scotland privately already, that we are making this a fundamental effort this year in terms of looking at paternity and partners' pay around this subject like we have done with maternity.

It is quite linked to that, obviously, and we'll draw it into those debates as we continue our fights for both birthing parents and non-birthing parents. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. Thanks, Scotland. I now call resolution 5. Time Off In Lieu For Retained Duties. Who rung the bell? Stewards are running about like crazy. I'll start that one again. I now call resolution 5 Time Off In Lieu For Retained Duty System, RDS staff moved by the national retained committee. The EC are seeking remit. Thank you.

Resolution 5 TIME OFF IN LIEU FOR RETAINED DUTY SYSTEM (RDS) STAFF

Conference recognises that full time firefighters can elect to take ‘Time Off in Lieu’ as compensation for time spent at work which is over and above their contractual time.

Conference is concerned that the majority of our part time RDS members are not afforded the same option in relation to the additional time they spend giving cover, ‘On Call’.

Conference believes that as the majority of Fire and Rescue Services are not recruiting sufficient numbers of RDS firefighters and are relying heavily on RDS employees giving additional ‘Goodwill Hours’, this situation seems unfair and may possibly breach the Part Time Workers legislation.

Conference instructs the Executive Council (EC) to establish, through legal channels, whether our RDS members are being treated less favourably, and, if this transpires to be the case, then the EC are to use all means available to them to ensure that our RDS members are given the entitlement to ‘Time Off in Lieu’ or that they are paid the additional hourly Retaining Fee rate as suitable compensation for each additional hour of cover provided.

NATIONAL RETAINED COMMITTEE

JAMES SALT (NRC):

President, conference, resolution 5 with last minute remission. Time off in lieu for retained duty system staff. First time speaker. *Applause*

For clarity, when we talk about time off in lieu, we simply refer to a fair reward for any additional retained duty system cover. Retained duty system staff are currently paid just over £1 an hour for each hour of their contracted availability. For this, they need to stay typically within five minutes of their fire station and would not be able to carry out childcare or any other such duties.

They will often be under pressure to book on call for additional hours over and above their contracted hours to maintain appliance availability in their communities. This could be due to a lack of numbers or a lack of skills, but will always be as a result of fire and rescue services not recruiting sufficient numbers. These hours are goodwill to the fire and rescue services that their members work for, and they help their employers to maintain their targets for availability and efficiency.

Under current RDS Grey Book terms and conditions of pay, this does not attract a single penny of additional remuneration. They will only receive any extra pay if their station gets a call during these hours. In previous times, RDS operational activity was higher and members were more likely to be remunerated via mobilisation payments.

In these times of lower activity, the retaining fee of just over £1 an hour is more important to keep our RDS firefighters and FBU members engaged. Taking time off in lieu is often not practical because the whole issue is down to the fact that RDS stations are often not adequately crewed with the required numbers or skills.

To be clear, all we are asking for with this resolution is that we work together to ensure that all members who give on call cover over and above their contracted hours are rewarded fairly by having those additional hours paid at this normal basic retaining fee hourly rate.

Following assurances from the AGS, we are happy to remit based on the work that the EC will carry out in this matter with the NRC. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, James and the NRC. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Again, I’m not going to keep conference long, president. The reason we were seeking remittance was because of the link to the part-time workers’ settlement. And we don’t consider that we’d be able to locate a comparator with those arguments, but we have committed to work with the NRC to obtain some legal opinion on wider considerations and then raise with the national employers. Thanks for the remittance.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. I now call resolution 11 Nationally Agreed Minimum Housing Allowances For The Day Crewing Shift System, moved by North Yorkshire, the EC give qualified support. North Yorkshire.

Resolution 11 NATIONALLY AGREED MINIMUM HOUSING ALLOWANCE FOR THE DAY CREWING SHIFT SYSTEM

Conference notes that fire services nationwide are reducing fire cover by shifting from traditional shift systems to the more cost-effective day crewing model. While this approach may lower operational costs, it demands twice the commitment from our members, requiring them to be continuously available for up to 96 hours to respond to emergencies. This heightened expectation means members must arrive at their stations within as little as four minutes, placing considerable strain on their family life and personal well-being.

Conference believes these demands also create significant financial challenges for members and their families. The requirement to live within a tight radius, sometimes as little as one mile from their home station severely limits housing options, often forcing members into areas where affordable homes are scarce.

Conference acknowledges that some fire and rescue services have taken steps to ease this burden by providing housing allowances, sometimes exceeding several hundred pounds per month, to help members afford to reside near their workplace. However, this practice is far from universal. Many services overlook the additional hardships their employees face and offer no support to offset rising living costs.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to address these disparities by pursuing pay parity across all services operating the day-crewing model by negotiating, through the National Joint Council, a nationally agreed minimum housing allowance for those working the day crewing shift system. This measure would support both current and future members, ensuring they can live affordably in the communities they serve while meeting the demands of their critical roles.

NORTH YORKSHIRE

ANDY SAVORY (North Yorkshire):

President, conference, moving resolution 11 Nationally Agreed Minimum Housing Allowance For The Day Crewing System. Conference, fire services across the UK are adopting a day crewing model to reduce costs. The system requires members to be continuously available for up to 96 hours and places considerable strain on members and families.

Members are obliged to live close to the station, which can force members to live in unaffordable areas. Some services are providing housing allowances, but this is inconsistent across the UK. This is clearly the postcode lottery of financial support for members. Even in North Yorkshire, my own brigade, there's a big disparity in housing costs. We have affluent areas in the west like Harrogate. Contrast that with an ex-mining town like Selby. No disrespect to anybody from Selby, Tony.

So house prices have gone bonkers as we know, mortgage rates have gone up, rents becoming unaffordable. My own stepson is now looking down the barrel of a 40-year mortgage. Can't imagine what that must be like. Young members to the service, those with families, are all hit hard, as are those seeking promotion, perhaps going from a shift station to day-crewed. Everyone's affected.

In North Yorkshire, sleeping on a day manning station is forbidden. So we're now in the situation where members are running to sleep in cars, vans, sleeping on sofas, sleeping in vehicles in all weathers. In 2025, I'm sure you'll agree, that's a disgrace.

Conference therefore calls on the EC to negotiate an agreed minimum housing allowance. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Andy. I know it wasn't intentional. It's day crewing. Thank you. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's open for debate. Anybody? AGS to give the qualification.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Andy, thanks for bringing the motion. The qualifications are that, first of all, we think there's a body of work that needs to be done by brigade committees.

What I'll do is put a request out to brigade committees so we can obtain what we believe is best practice across the fire sector. And then we'll raise that directly at the NJC with the national employers. And just probably a clarification as what we're looking at here is the Grey Book day crewing option and not systems similar to CPC or DPC.

And again, as you've said Andy, it's frankly unacceptable that our members are having to sleep in their cars or bunk at other houses when working the day crewing duty system, and that needs to be addressed. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks for that, Ben. I now put resolution 11 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 19 Equal Pay Day Crewing Duty System. moved by Dorset and Wiltshire. The EC are giving qualified support.

Resolution 19 EQUAL PAY DAY CREWING DUTY SYSTEM

Conference commends the recent work to increase pay for the Retained Duty System, however members working the Day Crewing Duty System who undertake retained duties have been ignored.

Conference is aware that from 1 January 2025, the retainer for working 31 hours per week, up to and including 60 hours per week is 7.5%. Members working the Day Crewing Duty System receive 5% retainer but should have been included in the pay uplift to 7.5% as they work the hours required.

Conference demands that the Executive Council urgently undertake negotiations with the employers side of the National Joint Council to ensure equality for members working the Day Crewing Duty System. A backdated payment of 7.5% retainer from 1 January 2025 would provide fairness for all members.

DORSET and WILTSHIRE

LEAH SMITH (Dorset and Wiltshire):

President, conference, third time at conference, first time speaking. *Applause*

Thank you. I am extremely nervous. I'm proud to move resolution 19 Equal Pay Day Crewing Duty System. Conference, we rightly commend the recent work to increase pay for members on the retained duty system. These changes reflect long overdue recognition the commitment and hours worked by our retained colleagues.

Despite this progress an injustice still stands, wholetime members working the day crew duty system, who also undertake retained duties, have been left behind. They work the same hours, they carry the same responsibilities, yet they are paid less.

On 1 January 2025 members on the retained duty system working 31 to 60 hours per week have received a 7.5% retainer. Wholetime day crewing firefighters meeting the same threshold will continue to receive just 5%. Conference, this is not a technicality, this is a clear question of equal pay for equal work. This is about valuing our members equally, not creating a two-tier system that undermines solidarity and morale. This resolution calls on the EC to urgently enter into negotiations with the employer side of the NJC to ensure that day crewing members receive 7.5% retainer that they have earned. It also calls for that up uplift to be back dated to 1 January 2025 to reflect the principle that equality delayed is equality denied. Conference, this is a fair, reasonable, and deliverable ask. It already has qualified support from the EC. It does not create new duties. It simply ensures existing work is paid fairly. Let's send a clear message that no member of this union is second class.

Let's stand for equality, not just in words, but in pay. I urge you to support this resolution. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Leah. Does that have a seconder? Yep. No, come on.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, seconding resolution 19 Equal Pay Day Crewing Duty System. Conference, I want to thank Dorset and Wiltshire for bringing this resolution, and I also want to thank North Yorkshire for bringing their resolution. All duty systems should be considered during pay negotiations and as our comrade said, leaving no member behind.

I highlighted at last year's conference that the 2024 pay offer should have increased retaining fee for the day crewing duty system, which is now covered under Part B, paragraph 8 of the Grey Book seventh edition, in line with the retaining fee for the retained members who provide between 31 and 60 hours' cover.

I also asked for a commitment from the EC that this is included in any future negotiations at the NJC to achieve parity for all members. In his response, the general secretary brother Wrack said *"We can certainly explore and raise those issues in the next round of discussions. Also, we can discuss at the Executive Council what advice we can give to local officials as to whether some of those matters can be raised locally."*

Conference, it is disappointing that those issues weren't raised in the recent round of pay offer. Unfortunately, conference, there was no uplift in the retaining fee for day crewing in the latest pay offer and so members working the day crewing duty system have again been left behind.

To be clear conference, we did raise the issue locally. However, unfortunately, we cannot rely on the benevolence of our employer and senior managers to improve the pay of our members. And this is why I ask you to please support the resolution. Conference, I second. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks for that, Neil. That's now open for debate. Anybody?

OLLIE BALDAM (NRC):

Conference, president, we welcome the progress made in securing the improved pay for retained duty system members. However, we now must turn to the clear and unjustifiable oversight of members working the day crewing duty system, who also take retained duties who have been left behind.

These members perform the same demanding hours up to 160 hours per week, and yet only receive a 5% retainer while others are uplifted to 7.5%. This discrepancy undermines the principles and the fairness, and the equality that should guide all of our pay structures. The executive council now must act decisively.

We urge them to enter into immediate negotiations with the NJC to correct this imbalance. Let's ensure all our members are valued equally for the work they do. Conference, please support this resolution. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ollie. Any more? AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Look, well done, Leah. First speech, absolutely outstanding. There's no need for the nerves. Neil, I actually think you've been up more than me today. There's no chance, even though it's your last conference, that you're slowing down. But just before I get into the qualification, just a slight point of order on what Neil said, president, if that's okay. He said it wasn't raised in the negotiations. I can confirm to conference it was raised at least twice during the period of negotiations.

I'm going to set out some reasons for the qualification, but I just want to be very clear. It is the objective in those negotiations to improve pay for everybody. And that's certainly the objective we take into each and every negotiation. And when I say everybody, I'm talking about wholetime retained officers and control members, everybody. But the focus of the working groups was in response to a retention and recruitment issue amongst the RDS duty system. It wasn't looking at any duty systems associated with other parts of our membership in the UK fire and rescue service.

So it wasn't an oversight, comrades, at all. It wasn't an oversight. It was focused in on the issue of recruitment and retention within the RDS duty system. So that's where the point of clarification and the qualified support comes from. But you have the assurance from myself, the GS, in the negotiations we will raise this immediately in the discussions we're having in the pay negotiations discussions that the general secretary set out clearly earlier in the day. It's a matter we want to address, and we understand the motion and therefore we support. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks for that, Ben. I now put resolution 19 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Before anybody picks me up before I go back in standing orders and they're telling me that one carries. Thank you. Well remembered, VP. Right I now call resolution 14 Water Rescue from Derbyshire with amendment from Scotland. The EC are giving qualified support.

Resolution 14 WATER RESCUE

Conference is aware of differing allowances and remuneration for undertaking module three and module four water rescue responsibilities at various fire and rescue services within the UK. For firefighters who undertake these same responsibilities, it is unfair that some are receiving a level of additional remuneration and others are not. This appears to acknowledge that this work is outside the role of a firefighter.

Conference is aware some firefighters are not receiving any form of additional remuneration for their additional skillset and those who are getting remuneration are receiving this at varying rates.

Conference instructs the Executive Council (EC) to discuss a strategy of approaching the employers' side of the National Joint Council with a view to agreeing a nationally recognised remuneration package for this work. It should be ensured that those in receipt of a form of remuneration do not suffer as a result of any national agreement reached.

Conference believes this work could also mean a conclusion to the issue of water rescue being in the rolemap of a firefighter or not. If it is concluded that it is not within the role of a firefighter and no national agreement can be reached Conference instructs the EC to determine a national strategy on the issue and begin its implementation at the most appropriate time before Conference 2026.

DERBYSHIRE

AMENDMENT

3rd paragraph, 3rd line after 'recognised' insert ' , fully pensionable,'

SCOTLAND

CHRIS TAPP (Derbyshire):

President, conference, moving resolution 14 on Water Rescue. Here we are again on rolemaps. Woo. We still don't know what we're doing. Okay. Also welcoming the amendment from Scotland. As I get greyer and older, I'm even more welcoming of that amendment. Thank you.

So, conference, the issue has been spoken about and considered a lot and resolutions have come forward on water rescue on this subject. And we still have the uncertainty that remains around water rescue. But what also remains is inequality. And we had a day yesterday around equality and that still remains in this subject.

A firefighter in one brigade receives one thing, a firefighter in another brigade receives something completely different. And in Derbyshire, like many other brigades I'm sure, we receive nothing. Derbyshire's members now firmly support the FBU position to protect collective bargaining. We have supported other strategies to discover what is in the role and what is out of the role, as I've previously talked about.

And we have lobbied and campaigned for the statutory duty on flooding to try and move this subject forward. Derbyshire members now want the conversation firmly in the hands of the national negotiators at the NJC with our employers, and in a way that has outcome specifics, and strategy coming out of it.

Conference, we don't want anyone to lose out as a consequence of this, but we do want the issue put back in the control of the national negotiations. The ask here from this resolution is very simple. Is water rescue in the rolemap or not? If it is, then pay up and treat us equally across the UK fire and rescue service, regardless of where we serve. And if it isn't, then the executive council can determine a strategy and get on with implementing that strategy. And we know the direction of travel.

But I have to be honest, conference, the dial is changing in Derbyshire. We as officials are now struggling to not progress this on a local basis. Our members are seeing and hearing discussions of remuneration. So we are struggling to hold that back, but we do want to work in conjunction with national negotiators and try where we can to assist all FBU members in being remunerated appropriately for the work that they are undertaking along with ourselves.

So on that basis, I hope we will get the support. I will be interested to hear the opposition to Scotland's amendment, but I welcome it personally as you can probably see. And conference, I move. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Chris. Scotland to move amendment. I've got down the EC are supporting, so I don't know if there's been some miscommunication somewhere, Chris. Scotland, move your amendment. Yes, that's what's down on my sheet before. And you've got it now, Gus, because I've just read it out. Sorry about that, conference. I will try and do some digging on that. I don't know why there's been some confusion on that one.

ANDREW SOUTHWARD (Scotland):

Good afternoon, president, conference. Speaking to move our amendment and in support of resolution 14. Water rescue is clearly outside of role. It requires additional training and equipment, yet many members across the UK are carrying out this work without any formal payment or recognition.

In Scotland, firefighters receive a payment of £62.50 a month for maintaining their water rescue qualification and availability. I think that's appropriate and fair, but what isn't fair is that this is not the case everywhere and it's creating a patchwork of inconsistent payments for the same work.

We're not asking for anything extraordinary, just appropriate remuneration that's fully pensionable for the work our members are already doing. If it's outside the agreed role, it should be negotiated and paid accordingly. This resolution is about fairness and consistency. Support it, and let's ensure our members are properly rewarded for the specialist skills they bring. Thank you. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Andrew. That's now open for debate. Anybody? No. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, Chris. Thanks, Scotland, there for moving that amendment too. It's a helpful amendment. I think probably the confusion, president, was because it's our view that all core pay is pensionable anyway, but the amendment just reinforces that.

So thanks for that. And look, conference, you may have to brace yourselves for some clarity here. Executive council and the union, therefore, believe that water rescue is not in the role of a firefighter. The premise to this resolution is helpful in that we need to include that in part of our discussions that are ongoing around pay progression, pay reform, and we'll be doing that directly with the national employers.

But what we want to remind conference is, part of that campaign has been the discussions we've been having, difficult discussions, for some years around a statutory duty in England for flooding. What we have managed to achieve in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, is exactly that. We need that in England too, so that fire services do have the ability then to receive some funding, to do that additional activity. And some of that, frankly, does need to go towards paying firefighters.

So there is a new government in place. The early signs of that government is that this is a discussion they are willing to at least take forward. That's a promising sign and we need to build that into that wider discussion around pay, Chris. So thank you very much for the resolution. It's an important one. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

I now put the amendment to resolution 14 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put resolution 14 as amended to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Right, conference, we're about to break for lunch. However, there is a lunchtime fringe building and running on effective and inclusive member meeting 1pm in the Imperial Room downstairs. Also, I will remind you that the ballot box is at the back of the hall. The ballot closes at 2pm so please, if you haven't voted, please vote. Thank you. Back in here for two o'clock. Thank you.

Break for lunch

AFTERNOON SESSION

THE PRESIDENT:

I do love that hammer! Right, conference, we are about to start proceedings. I have had raised with me that when speakers are speaking, there's still a little bit of chatter going on in the hall and people are getting a bit distracted about that. So when speakers are speaking, can you please keep that down? Keep it quiet and respect the speaker. Okay, thank you. I now call the chair of standing orders, Phil Millar, to give his report.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Thank you, president. Conference, can you please turn to your delegate list, so region 10, remove Ross McLaren and replace with, I haven't written his first name down. Ascough. Is it Dan? Dan Ascough. And CSNC. Can you remove Sherry Kitson and replace again with Lyndsey Burton?

And can you now turn to your programme of business page 10 and at the bottom of the page after resolution 64 insert emergency resolution 1, Gaza and Beyond. And then on page 11, resolution 65 has been withdrawn. And then on page 15, resolution 47 has been withdrawn.

So conference, you'll be aware that as we move through the programme of business, you're agreeing each of the paragraphs in the executive council's 2025 annual report. I therefore need to bring to your attention that yesterday you agreed section H, paragraph 11. However, there is a typo in the body of the report in which paragraph 11 has been incorrectly numbered as paragraph 12, we therefore ask conference that by agreeing this standing orders report, you're also agreeing to both the paragraph as it appears in the index as para 11 and in the body of the report as 12.

Furthermore, it has also come to the attention of standing orders that some of the detail in section L6 may not be entirely correct and as it is envisaged that section L will be heard on Friday; we aim to have a correction/amendment issued to delegates by then to allow L6 to be agreed. Thank you. president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Phil. Is that report agreed? *Agreed.*

Thank you, conference. Conference, we now move to our guest speaker and I want you to give a warm welcome to Labour fire minister Alex Norris. Alex was appointed Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in July 2024. He's currently Parliamentary Under Secretary of the State Building Safety, Fire and Local Growth. So he is officially the fire minister within the Westminster government.

He's the first fire minister from Westminster to address our conference since 2008. The last one was Parmjit Dhanda. Alex has been the Labour MP for Nottingham North and Kimberley and its predecessor at Nottingham North since June 2017. In November 2021, he became Shadow fire minister for Levelling Up. In September 2023, Alex became Shadow Minister for Policing and Fire at the Home Office.

In all of those roles, he has worked closely with FBU officials, both locally and nationally. Alex speaks up for the FBU in parliament and is a good friend to this union. Alex has stood alongside FBU members outside Stockhill fire station, Nottingham, when the fire service were trying to close it. So please put your hands together and give Alex a warm welcome. *Applause*

ALEX NORRIS MP (Fire Minister):

Thank you, conference, and thank you for having me this afternoon. I want to start by paying tribute to Jenny and Martin, your colleagues who tragically lost their lives in the line of their work in Oxfordshire last week, and to the member of public who sadly passed away in the same incident. And I also want to express the best wishes of all who serve in the government to your two colleagues who remain in hospital. Our hearts are with the families, friends and colleagues of those who lost their lives and have been injured, and their loved ones. Firefighters and wider fire and rescue service workers act with incredible dedication and bravery every day in order to protect the public. You have our deepest respect and gratitude. *Applause*

I'm really pleased to be here. First fire minister to be here in 17 years is a real honour. As when I mentioned this to one of my mates earlier today, said you might find out quickly why that's the case, but we'll soon find out one way or the other. I'm a big boy. But it is a privilege to address you today.

The incident last week reminds us of the risks that you put yourselves through day in, day out, and that risk that you balance and you put yourselves at that risk so the rest of us can live our lives safely. And that needs to be recognised. I want you to know that we understand that, but also to recognise that it's not just the firefighters within the service but all in fire rescue services, whether it's the call handlers, coordinating and managing incidents, whether it's those who do the support functions, that mean that services run all year round whenever we need them, and those who do that critical prevention and protection activity as well. These are crucial roles and all work together. And I had a chance, I served on my fire and rescue authority, seems a little while ago now in Nottinghamshire, but I had the chance to work with brilliant staff then, and I'm looking forward to working with yourselves now in this role, having been appointed in April, the new fire minister.

And I have to say, as a minister, you go through a lot of firsts and you stand in a lot of - certainly after years and years in opposition - you end up standing in a lot of unfamiliar rooms and often out of your comfort zone. I have to say, of all the events I've had to do, this is probably the most relatable experience. These are rooms I've been in my entire adult life, in conferences like this. So it is great to be with you today. The union movement has shaped me as a person, has shaped me as a professional, has shaped my life. And I know that your union does the same for yourselves. And I know from personal experience of having been to the political school not so long before the election, Steve, that you get that training and development to talk truth and to talk truth to power. I think that will stand you in good stead and in great stead for our relationship.

At the root of our purpose as a government is to improve public services and to improve workers' rights. You saw what we said in our manifesto, and you've seen in the Employment Rights Bill, which is making its way through parliament that we're making good on that commitment.

This will be real world improvements in workers' rights, ending zero hours contracts, ending fire and rehire, strengthening sick pay. And you know that the Secretary of State with fire responsibilities, Angela Rayner and my boss, who also carries the Employment Rights Bill brief as well, you will always have a good ally in government, and the union movement will always have lifelong friends in us.

That leads me to your union because your union's got a proud history, over a hundred years old and today, as you were then, standing up for firefighters and being a strong voice in the wider trade union movement. You've been ever-present through difficult times and have been an important voice in calling for change, even when the system wouldn't listen to you. And only after events bore out those truths that you had been talking of did you get that change. But you've stood and you fought for change to improve the lives of you and yourselves at work, but also the public that you serve too.

I welcome and I am proud of the relationship between the union and the Labour Party. We have fought together, and we have secured power together. After 14 very long years in the wilderness, we've come together. We've made that case with our neighbours, we've made that case in our workplaces, and we've secured power in the interests of working people. That is a great prize.

It is a difficult world. There's no doubt. You only have to open your newspapers or stick on the BBC website, and you'll see challenges all around the world, see challenges in the financial arrangements as well. But we now have the opportunity to create that change in Britain that we all want to see. And I really want to do that with yourselves now.

And for my part of government, I want to make very clear from this platform my commitment to work with yourselves, to work with your leadership, to work with yourselves on those important issues that matter to you. And I'm going to touch on a couple of them shortly. We've already started much more close relationships between departmental officials and senior leadership so that those issues are being discussed and policies being developed together.

Steve has already been on us pretty hard, as you would expect him to be. Similarly, just before entering into this room, I was with Mark and Steve talking about pensions, because I know how important that is to you and making that commitment to work with the union. So it's not letters going back and forth, taking months to get any answers, but we're having proper dialogue about how to move forwards together.

At the heart of this will be the Ministerial Advisory Group. I'm really excited about this. This is the forum that brings together everybody with a stake in our fire and rescue services and anybody who can drive change. This is going to be a crucial forum. And as I've made clear to colleagues, not one where I want us to have circular conversations on a surface level, about the same old issues, and then just go back and do the same thing in three months' time. I want deeper engagement than that.

We have common challenges that we have to address together, and I think that's best done with the union in the room, having those conversations. It won't always be easy, but I want us to have difficult conversations so that we can drive forward change together. And I think that forum's going to provide us that space to do.

And there are lots of challenges, and I know that will be a theme of your discussions this week. You'll know that culture is of uppermost importance to us in the government. I know that's something that you've talked about.

We've seen the reports, we've seen the reviews, including your own independent report on sexual harassment. We've seen the work in culture and in FRSs more generally, and in some cases that has highlighted unacceptable behaviours and ways of working. There's no place for that. I know you know that just as I do, our people are our greatest asset, and our environments must be safe and welcoming in order for those members of staff to thrive.

And where there are incidents, they've got to be investigated and action has to come from them. But under the umbrella of the MAG, we're going to have a task and finish group focusing on culture that's going to bring all the experience together, including our very important diversity networks that you have and the insight that they have, that's coming together for the first time shortly.

Again, I want to be very clear from this platform that is not the business of any one organisation, nor can that be commandeered by any one organisation. That must be a multi-party approach from everybody who touches the system to make sure that we not just deal with specific incidences, but we drive forward sustained improvement in culture. I know you want that too, and I know that we can do that together.

And we have to face the future together too, because we know things are changing and I don't need to say that to you because you will know over your careers how the nature of the challenges that you face have changed too. So we've got to make sure that we've got the right skills, we've got the right equipment, we've got the right capacities, we've got the right responsibilities to make sure that we've got a fire and rescue system that's fit for the current day and for the days to come with the challenges that we know are ahead of us. Again, that will be driven together collectively. Not the business of a government minister pulling levers and making individual judgements, but working together with yourselves to make sure we get to that point. Again, difficult conversations along the way.

I know that, I know one such (because I can't get within about three metres of Steve without him saying it). I know that climate and that climate responsibility is really important to yourselves, and we're going to have that very significant conversation about what that means and how that can work. And I've made that commitment and I will keep that commitment.

Similarly, as part of that, we've made one of the important recommendations in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, that's the most challenging is around the College of Fire and Rescue. And we've made the commitment, I know you've seen this over the years, go round and round the mountain. We are doing it. It's happening in this phase.

The model has to work. And again, I know you know what it takes to do learning development because that is in your DNA as a union. So I want you to work with us to get a model that works. We're going to be launching the consultation on that later in this year. And we'll be moving that forwards.

Similarly, and as I say, I've got a number of years, the good and bad of this from my time on a fire and rescue authority. We've got to make sure that the governance is right for the future. And I know that, certainly after people have just had their lunches, probably piling into a debate about governance might not be the best way to hold people's attentions. But it is important because that's how we make sure. I want to see decisions taken at a local level because I believe, wherever it is you are serving in the country, that it's you, your elected representatives, your community, know it better than I do. So I want to make sure those structures as are as good as possible because they haven't changed since 2007.

So in a new world where there's plenty of devolution going down the line, we actually are going to have to have a look at that to make sure that that keeps pace. And again, I know that the future role of firefighters within all the challenges, particularly with the changes that we're seeing with our climate, that is a really live conversation. Again, that is one that we will be doing with you, not to you.

There are critical conversations that we need to have with yourselves around health and safety. I know that DECON's a really important piece and we want to be making sure we're building on the insights that you've produced through your work with world class academia, as well as the other developing evidence base to make sure we're doing all the right things to keep you as safe as possible.

And of course, and the thing perhaps, as you can see, a little wry smile on my face as I'm coming to an end, funding underpins all of this. I'm not daft, I understand this, I have to be a little bit careful because we're just coming up to the multi-year spending review, and if I run ahead of that, I get kind of smited down. They're always following us somewhere, the Treasury.

But just to say, your case has been strongly made, I understand it strongly. The LGA have made it as well. The chiefs have made it as well. And I know that's about day-to-day spending, but I also know that's about capital investment too. We want to make sure that the estates that you work from are suitable for your needs, are designed for women to be working there as well, which we know in many cases isn't the case. We want that to be as good as possible. So I have heard that.

So that's a start. As I say, I've been in role now for just coming to the end of two months. I have a longstanding passion in making sure that fire and rescue in this country is as good as possible. For my constituents in Nottingham, but for the rest of the country as well.

I commit this, that the spirit that we are going to do some important things together, not changing, will not be an option. And I know that can be difficult, but that is my commitment to you and I want to make in total clear terms from this lectern today that we will work with you in this process. We will get you in the room, we'll have challenging conversations, I don't mind them. And we will come together to find the best way forwards. We know the British public are counting on you day in, day out for the work you do. And they're also counting on us together to make sure that the services are fit for the future too. And I'm really looking forward to working with you. Thank you very much. *Applause*

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Alex, on behalf of conference, on behalf of our union, we thank you for giving up your time today and coming to speak to us. I do want to put on record from the Oxfordshire officials from my own service their record of thanks to you for reaching out last Thursday and Friday and for visiting the scene in Bicester. So we thank you for that. We have got a small memento so you can remember your visit here. The last one given out, as you said, was in 2008, president. So honoured to have you here. And thanks for your time today. *Applause* Thanks again, Alex. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, conference. Just give us a few minutes and we'll get things sorted. Right, conference. Come to order. Right, conference. I am pleased to inform you that Gareth Beeton has been re-elected to the standing orders committee. Congratulations, Gareth. *Applause*

We're now moving on to section F Trade Union and Labour Movement para F1. I now call executive council policy statement, Opposing the Threat of the Far Right with amendments from Hereford and Worcester and Scotland. General secretary. Yep.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you. President, conference, this is a policy statement that I and many others wished wasn't necessary to be brought before our conference, but sadly, because what we are seeing on the political stage unfolding before our eyes, makes it absolutely necessary. Conference, unfortunately, we are seeing the far right rise again.

Donald Trump, the president of the United States, a man who incited a coup, a violent coup attempt, bragged about assaulting women, and his rhetoric inspires fascists across the globe. And closest to home we have Nigel Farage on the political frontline, rebranded, reconditioned, but no less dangerous. The so-called mainstream media treats him like a national character.

But look, we know who he is. We've seen his game before. Scapegoating migrants, stoking division, and playing to the gallery of hate. It is the same old trick, just dressed in a new tweed blazer. Conference, the recent local elections showed the warning signs: low turnout, rising support for candidates pushing nationalist anti-immigrant agendas, and a growing sense that the traditional parties have lost touch with the communities they claim to represent.

We have witnessed recently Reform take control of councils. Reform now have two mayors. They'll have a seat on the employer side at the National Joint Council. We are seeing politicians compete over how hostile they can be to migrants, how punitive they can be to the poor, how tough they can be on protest and dissent.

This is the political space the far right thrives on, and that's why this political policy statement matters. Because, conference, unfortunately we are really seeing the far right rise again. And they may not come in their jack boots or marching on our streets, although sometimes that is still the case. But this is the creeping, calculated politics of hate in scapegoating, in warped nationalism, in conspiracies, and in corrosive cultural racism dressed up as legitimate concerns.

That's why this policy statement matters, and it matters to us all because we in the FBU have never been passive observers to the threats of the far right. We've stood up, we've organised, and we've put ourselves on the line because our movement knows exactly where fascism leads. And let's be absolutely clear, the far right doesn't just threaten our communities.

It threatens our class, and it threatens the very principles of trade unionism built on solidarity, equality, and collective action. Conference, fascism is a tool of division. When working class people organise, the ruling class reaches for its old trick, divide and rule. They stir up racism. They scapegoat migrants. They demonise LGBT+ communities. They try to turn working class communities against each other. They do that so that we don't unite against the real enemy, and that real enemy is the hoarders of wealth, the profiteers, the ones running this country into the ground.

But look, we've seen this before. We saw it in 1936 when a hundred thousand workers; Jews, Irish migrants, trade unionists and anti-fascists; stopped Mosley's Blackshirts at Cable Street. They took to the streets and made it clear that the far right will not pass. That moment, that fight, is our tradition, comrades.

So let's remember that the state protected those fascists. The police tried to clear a path, but it was the working class that stood firm. Women formed barricades, Jewish trade unionists organised in their communities, Irish workers came out of the docks to stand side by side with their neighbours. That is what anti-fascism looks like: working class unity in action.

And that wasn't a one-off. It's been repeated in the fights against the National Front in Lewisham, the BNP in Welwyn, the EDL in Tower Hamlets. Every time the far right rise, every time they have tried to rise in Britain, it's trade unionists, it's community campaigners, it's anti-racist activists who've pushed them back.

And our union, the Fire Brigades Union, has been there every single time. Not because it's fashionable, not because it's populist, but because it's who we are and it's the right thing to do. Our role isn't symbolic. It's absolutely essential. *Applause*

And look, each and every one of us know that the far right doesn't just pop up. It grows in the cracks of austerity. It grows when there's poverty and it grows because there's political failure. When public services are stripped to the bone, when wages are squeezed, when people are desperate, that's when the far right start offering their poison.

When there is a political void to be filled, because the mainstream parties have completely disillusioned the electorate, they see their opportunity. They tell people to blame migrants and not millionaires, to fear their neighbour, not question the landlord, to hate the poor, rather than fight the rich.

And make no mistake, they are organising. They're organising on social media, in the streets, in workplaces, in local communities. And they're trying to worm their way into trade unions.

Conference, we need to be honest with ourselves too, that some of our members will be voting for these alternative parties because they see their own political home abandoning them. This is a serious danger that we need to wake up to. Fascism and trade unionism are fundamentally incompatible. One demands obedience, hierarchy, and submission. The other is about democracy, solidarity, and resistance. So, conference, we must be absolutely firm. There is no space in this union, in our union, for the far right, for their ideas, for their sympathisers, not in our branches, not in our picket lines, and not in our campaigns. *Applause*

And we are not neutral on this. We are anti-fascist. We will not let our members or our movement be delivered by those who peddle hate. And that's why this policy statement is so important. It doesn't just condemn the far right, which is what we should all do. It sets out a clear strategy for action. Conference, we must educate our members about the dangers of the far right, its history, its tactics, but also its modern forms. We need to equip our reps to challenge racism, challenge Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia and transphobia, wherever they appear. *Applause*

And further, that we must build alliances with groups like Stand Up To Racism, like Hope Not Hate, and other comrades across the trade union movement. But importantly, we've got a job to do in our communities, because that's where the far right are trying to gain a foothold. We know the far right is not just an electoral threat, it's a cultural threat, and that's why our fight has to be everywhere, not just in the ballot box, not just in motions, but in the workplace, on our streets, in our fire stations, in our schools, and on social media.

And we need to do that in every room. Every room where people are told they are less because of who they are. We need to push back against the media and the political class that has given cover to the far right for too long. We need to say "enough", comrades. The problem isn't in the family crossing the Channel in the dinghy. It's the government cutting your fire cover and privatising your services. The problem isn't in your neighbour who wears a hijab, it's the bosses paying poverty wages, and laughing all the way to the bank because fascism thrives when the left retreats. Comrades, we cannot retreat. We have to organise. We have to offer hope and not just outrage.

And we need to understand that people join the far right, not because they're evil necessarily, they join because they're angry, desperate, and misled. We need to give them something better, something rooted in class, in solidarity and in justice. We need to speak plainly about internationalism. The far right wants to divide us by nation, to tell us that British workers are in competition with workers in other parts of the world. Our movement knows better, we know that a firefighter in Paris, in Palestine, in Poland, that they're not our enemy. We must never allow a situation where calling for a ceasefire in Gaza is treated as controversial.

It is not enough though to just condemn the far right in principle. We have to oppose the conditions that allow it to grow: poverty, scapegoating, nationalism, and state violence. And that also includes every political party, every single one that tries to win votes by punching down. Conference, this union has always been on the right side of history. We were there when it counted. We stood up for LGBT+ rights before it was popular. We stood against racism when it was dangerous, and we'll stand against fascism now because our future depends on it.

I'm proud of that tradition. I'm proud to carry it forward, but it's not enough to be proud. We have to be prepared. So in summing up, conference, let's leave Blackpool, not just with fine words, but with a fighting strategy. Let's educate our members. Let's equip our reps to challenge far right ideologies. Let's call out racism and hate wherever we see it. Let's build alliances within our movement. Let's organise in our communities, and if the far right comes for one of us, they'll find the whole union standing in their way. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Steve. Secnder, Scotland.

LEWIS CLARK (Scotland):

President, conference, seconding. We withdrew resolution 61 because it aligns wholeheartedly with what's just been said and we will withdraw our amendment to this as well. I will get into the meat of it. Years of underfunding, cuts, neoliberal big business-friendly actions only to the benefit of the capitalist class have created that void that has been filled with the far right. The far right scapegoat is our most vulnerable in society as a solution to people's poor living standards and poverty.

As it stands, there is no visible alternative that is available to point people in the direction of Labour, that rightfully gets laughed at. After they have implemented Tory-esque austerity policy impacting pensioners, families, LGBT+ and disabled within our communities. And then instead of challenging the hateful rhetoric that comes from the far right, they start leaning into it. Words are just fluff if there's no action that we can take from it. We can't just say, don't vote for these parties. Don't buy into what they're saying, without having the answer to the problems affecting people, and show them that there is a route to take that is not the one that's been offered to them by the populist far right.

The EC and everyone here must use all in their power across the whole political spectrum to ensure that there is an option there to fill that void and give a real plan to improve life and not let the far right continue to spout their scapegoating and hateful rhetoric. Make no mistake, they are winning the fight right now.

We can see that across the globe. They are winning and they continue to do so, and that's a wave that has just grown in mass and we need to be the thing that breaks it. Now is the time for us to show our strength and our commitment to this. Pin our colours to the mast, far right and fascism isn't fought with a pandering centrist wishy-washy attitude. We fight this without movement of organised labour and socialism. We need to be the option that people can pick. It's socialism or barbarism, comrades. Let's lead this fight. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Lewis. Hereford and Worcester to move their amendment.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, moving the amendment to the EC policy statement. Comrades, it's so small and it might not be something that you would even vote on, but it was just something that stuck out like a sore thumb to myself. So I'll just read it. So in the first sentence of the second paragraph under the heading, Far Right In Britain there's the word "fixture".

It didn't look right to me. It looks like it should say figure. I don't know what the EC's position is on this, but I'm happy either way. If you want to vote it down, please do. Thank you. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Neil. I should have said the EC are opposing it, but they'll explain why. Okay. Does that amendment have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. B&EMM.

DWIGHT WILLIAMS (B&EMM):

Conference, president, speaking on the EC policy statement, Opposing the threats of the far right. The power, and the right to feel justified in spouting racist and hate rhetoric at any opportunity has risen its ugly head once again. With the rise of the far right, this feels like déjà vu to the sixties and seventies when my parents were greeted with hate and hostility when they were invited here to the UK to help rebuild the infrastructure of the nation crippled by a previous war.

The actions of the current-time far right are disguised as concern over lack of affordable housing, poor education, a broken NHS system and job cuts attributed to immigration. Haven't we been here before? Surely even those affiliated to those disgusting far right groups with limited educational ability and little common sense can see that once again, crumbling infrastructure is born out of poor leadership in government.

Surely those with limited intellect affiliated to far right groups can see that without migration, there will be no NHS provision and other key services in the UK. It can only be pure unjustified hate, ignorance, stupidity that fuels these

groups. Indeed, a recent undercover exposé featured on ITV in February this year, highlighted the ignorance and lack of intellect of the members of one such far right group, their thoughts and conversations laughable.

As a union, we have the duty and responsibility to support those marginalised, educate those who need education, call out those who undermine our commitment to eradicate discrimination and equality, and hold those in power to account for their failings to redress the crumbling nation due to their inability and reluctance to build a fair and sustainable nation we support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Dwight.

KERRY McCRONE (NWC):

Conference, president, speaking in support of the EC policy statement Opposing the Threat of the Far Right. Conference, the rise of the far right and extremism is also encompassing the growing prominence of misogyny, which this EC policy statement did fail to cover and the speech to move it also. Women have fought long and hard to be treated as equals to men, and this is under threat. From 1928 when women, following the suffragette movement, won the right to vote, to 1968, where women had the right to access abortion, 1985, giving women the right to equal pay under the amendment of the Equality Pay Act and 1992, seeing rape in marriage outlawed in the UK.

Misogyny in far right movements often manifests itself in more overtly violent forms, including the justification of violence against women who are seen as challenging the traditional gender roles, the rise of the so-called incels, they're involuntary celibate groups where men who are often disenfranchised and frustrated by perceived societal rejection, resort to violence against women as a way to assert control and power.

The recent shocking mass rape case of Giselle Pelicot, where her husband arranged for 50 men to rape his wife after being drugged, showed thousands of men had viewed that advertisement to take part in this abhorrent behaviour and said absolutely nothing. The men included lorry drivers, soldiers, security guards, firefighters, a journalist and a DJ.

This showed that violence against women and girls is being normalised. The alarming rise of incel culture has further exposed the entrenched nature of misogynistic attitudes in British society. This hostility towards women threatens to undo progress in gender equality. Andrew Tate being given a platform to spout his misogynistic rhetoric and influencing young men and boys is only feeding into this extremism.

Firefighters are entrusted positions within our community and in a unique position to make change, often being looked up to by the youth of today. Misogyny within far right extremism intersects with other forms of hate, including racism and homophobia. The far right constructs an enemy that includes women's rights activists.

So how do we tackle this rise in misogyny? We must educate our girls about misogyny, empowering them to recognise, challenge, and resist the harmful effects of gender-based discrimination and prejudice. Equipping girls with knowledge, skills, and sense of agency will help them navigate and confront these issues in their daily lives.

But we must also educate our boys in resisting misogyny. It's not simply enough to understand what misogyny is. It's essential that they learn to actively resist it, both in their own behaviour and in the world around them. We must call upon our brothers to support us with this. We are entering a period in time where the right wing are rising. We must work together to mobilise our movement to resist this. The NWC supports. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kerry.

MATTHEW BLACK (LGBT+):

President, conference, speaking in favour of the EC statement. Conference, as the LGBT+ section of our trade union, we are deeply concerned about the direction our society's being pushed. The far right attacks LGBT+ people and they attack the very fabric of our movement. When the far right targets LGBT+ communities, it's about division.

It's a calculated strategy to fragment the society that underpins trade unionism. Their aim is to turn worker against worker. Just like our general secretary said, they know they can't win a fair debate on austerity, pay justice, workers' rights. So instead they spread hate, scapegoating minorities, targeting LGBT+ people with lies and fear-mongering.

Why? Because if we're fighting each other, we're not fighting them. Unity is our strength. When the far right attacks, any of us, whether it's LGBT+ people, refugees, or working class communities, they attack all of us. That's why this statement matters. When we challenge hate, we protect the integrity of our movement.

We show that the Fire Brigades Union stands for dignity, equality, and justice for all workers. So conference, let us confront the far right, not with just words, but with action. Let us educate, agitate, organise, and unite, because the best answer to their hate is our solidarity. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Matthew.

PATRICK BRENNAN (Greater Manchester):

President, conference, speaking in support of the EC policy opposing the threat of the far right. Language is important. The words we use have impact. This week we will all stand up here and attempt to impart influence over each other in the aim of moving our union in a certain direction.

I don't know about you, but I can't do it off the cuff. It has to be measured and practised and it's deliberate. Last week, Keir Starmer delivered a speech to a company, a new White Paper on immigration. The language he used sounded chillingly familiar, proving that the Labour Party is not only failing to fight the far right, but is actively facilitating its terrifying rise. When Starmer referred to immigrants as strangers, let's be clear, it was fully loaded with intent. He or his speech-writer was completely aware of the similarities to Enoch Powell's Rivers of Blood speech in 1968. In fact, the fallout from this speech was the very aim.

When Starmer uses terms such as "squalid chapter" and "incalculable damage" later on in his speech, he isn't referring to decades of lost wage growth or the managed decline of our public services, or the fact that a third of the kids who live in Salford where I work are classed as living in poverty. No, this language is reserved for the number of people that decided that jumping into a blowup dinghy across the busiest shipping lane in the world was their best bet. Because the thing is, Starmer's policies are that bland, that unimaginative, that far removed from addressing the real economic issues that affect working people in this country, that he has to resort to racist dog whistles to attract the attention in a desperate attempt to draw the populist vote from Reform. It says to those disenchanted voters that they're right. That it's not the continuation of a neoliberal agenda that creates wealth and equality, but simply those other people, the ones who are not the same as you.

This is Labour's populist strategy: not to fight the far right but to chase it, with zero inclination of providing economic answers. They too are jumping on the bandwagon of nationalism. Enoch Powell was in the end forced to resign from the Tory front bench, but his influence was there to see. That speech was, until last week, unthinkable by a Labour leader.

But let's not forget in the late sixties, a lot of people actually agreed with Powell. Thankfully, the Labour movement stood against that populism and stuck to what they knew was right. And of course, time has told us they were correct because the thing is, fascism never goes away. It lurks in the shadows, and it's only let out when there's no sign of a fight.

The Labour Party have created that safe space for fascism. What is written within this FBU EC policy is really important. The language chosen is important, but to omit any mention of Labour's responsibility in this shift is alarming. When have Labour fought back against this rebirth of fascism? And if not, why not?

This union must ask itself: if the Labour Party won't stand against the far right, why are we still standing with them? Now without doubt, this EC policy is something we all believe in as trade unionists, as FBU members. But the silence surrounding the way in which this Labour government have facilitated the far right vacuum is deafening.

We know that some members are thinking about voting for Reform and maybe some --

THE PRESIDENT:

Delegate, can you start winding it up now?

PATRICK BRENNAN (Greater Manchester):

Already have, yes, president. That should shake us, that should motivate us. We must send a message clear and unequivocal that this is not acceptable, that Starmer's language isn't acceptable, that the Labour Party as it stands today is not acceptable. We support this motion. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Well done, Patrick.

NICK CAIN (Cleveland):

President, conference, we withdrew resolution 69 to support the EC's policy statement on the Rise of the Far Right. The policy statement is excellent and says what needs to be said perfectly without me having to stand there repeating what's already in there.

We'd just like clarification that the courses will be opened up to everyone, not just national and regional section officials, as was the original course that was pending. I'm sure I'm not alone when I say I hear alarming statements on fire stations about a certain party I would rather not name on the platform of the parliament of our great union and how they're going to solve the problems that we currently face. The rise of the far right is a serious threat to the trade union movement, and we all need the tools to fight and resist it across fire stations UK wide. Conference, we support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Nick, just before you depart, you asked for clarification. I missed what it was. No, just go back to the mic. Sorry. Just go back there. You let 'em all in the hall hear as well, just because they might have missed it as well. Sorry Nick, but I missed that one.

NICK CAIN (Cleveland):

You've put a course on for the rise of the far right and it's only open to national and regional section officials. So we want it opened up to everybody because we all need the tools to fight the rise of the far right.

THE PRESIDENT:

Yep. Brilliant. Thanks, Nick. Lee.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, speaking in support of the EC policy statement. The attacks that happened in Southport last year that led to the deaths of Bebe King, Alice da Silva Aguiar, and Elsie Dot Stancombe, and it's very important that we carry on to say their names, Merseyside members were the first emergency service in attendance at that. And they dealt with the terrible scenes.

The same crew the next night were attacked by rioters in Southport, who were undoubtedly stirred up and led by fascists. A week later, Stand Up To Racism, arranged a rally at St George's Hall in Liverpool, and I was honoured to be asked to speak at it.

Afterwards, we marched to the Pier Head in Liverpool where a right wing demonstration was taking place, to oppose them, as we must. Comrades, I'm 47 years old and for 44 of those years I've lived in Liverpool. I've never been scared to walk the streets of my city until that day. I was scared.

These fascists attacked us. They attacked the police. I saw the elderly, the disabled, and children genuinely in fear of their lives. The far right have become emboldened by the press and by some politicians, including Keir Starmer, who seem to condone and encourage their actions. I spoke at a Love Music Hate Racism event last week, and I was approached after I'd spoken by a lady who had moved to Liverpool recently. And told me she was moving away from Liverpool because in the last two weeks she had twice been the victim of targeted racist abuse and attacks.

That should not happen in my city. It should not happen in this country. The FBU has to oppose the far right. That opposition has to be robust, which is why the final bullet point of this policy statement is so important.

We need to be out on the streets. We need to counter these fascists in any way possible. Members from Cheshire, Merseyside and head office staff stood on the streets of Runcorn earlier this year to oppose Reform UK as they stood in the by-election for Runcorn and Helsby. Unfortunately, we couldn't do enough to stop Reform UK from gaining yet another MP. They won by just six votes there.

Conference, the work done by Matt Partridge, Nina Reece, and many others in head office on this needs to be supported and worked on. Each and every one of us must oppose Reform UK. We must oppose the fascists. They are a far right party. They oppose all that the FBU stand for. We must oppose it in our fire stations, in our control rooms, in our offices and online. Comrades, don't just support this policy statement. Live it. I support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lee. Anybody else? No. General secretary.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you, president. I'll cover the amendment, but firstly thanks to Scotland for withdrawing their amendment and the important contribution that Lewis has made. And look, a number of contributions have really added to that debate, added to that statement.

The debate is for tomorrow. I think that is when we're scheduling it around the Labour Party, president. But we don't need a prime minister, we don't need anyone in Westminster to tell us what to do, how to organise our class, how to organise our union, and that is the fight against misogyny, as Kerry rightly pointed out, against fascism and against all forms of hate.

So on the amendment, president, look, that line regarding a fixture relates to Nigel Farage. That he's not just a figure, the right wing press want you to think he's just a figure, and he is this character that goes around spouting his hate. No, he's a fixture. He's been a fixture for a long time. One of the longest serving politicians in the UK, gaining traction with working class communities.

So that word was chosen. It was chosen for a reason. He's a fixture. And he's a fixture that we need to get rid of. Thanks, president. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Steve. Hereford and Worcester, are you withdrawing? Sorry if you shouted. I didn't hear it.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, with the clarification from the general secretary in solidarity with the motion, with the statement and in solidarity with all speakers, Hereford and Worcester will withdraw the amendment. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Neil. Appreciate that. I now put executive council policy statement, Opposing the Threat of the Far Right to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 62 Trade Union Facilities For Retained Duty System RDS Reps, national retained committee with an amendment from Scotland, the EC are supporting.

Resolution 62 TRADE UNION FACILITIES FOR RETAINED DUTY SYSTEM (RDS) REPS

Conference notes that it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain Trade Union leave to attend training courses and to carry out the duties of a trade union representative.

Conference is further concerned that our part time members working the RDS, may not be afforded the same opportunity to attend training courses and carry

out Trade Union Duties. This may be that our RDS members are not included within Trade Union Facilities agreements, or that the agreement(s) does not provide payment at the National Joint Council agreed hourly rate, for our RDS members, thus making it financially impossible for them to take up the role of Branch or Brigade Rep.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to conduct a survey of all Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) Trade Union facilities agreements, identify if the agreement is treating our RDS members less favourably, and to take the appropriate action to rectify any shortcomings with the relevant FRS.

NATIONAL RETAINED COMMITTEE

AMENDMENT

3rd paragraph, 4th line after 'to' insert 'support brigade officials to'

SCOTLAND

JAMES SALT (NRC):

President, conference, moving resolution 62 Trade Union Facilities for RDS. I stand before you today at conference as a member of the national retained committee. I'm only able to do this because I'm a dual contractor. I'm lucky that I benefit from good facility time in my wholetime contract and the opportunity to carry out trade union work while on shift.

However, in my retained duty system role for the same service, I get no facility time at all. We understand that this is the same in many other services throughout the UK. This is fundamentally wrong. If I was solely retained with an alternative primary employment, my work-life balance would not afford me the luxury of carrying out the role of a regional rep on a national committee, attending courses, national meetings and conferences.

I have RDS colleagues that would be an asset to the FBU, who are now reluctant to take on the roles for this very reason of the lack of facility time. How can we as a union expect to have grassroots branch representation and recruit reps from the retained duty services where there are no facilities in place?

Even with my good wholetime trade union facility, I've needed to negotiate unpaid leave from my RDS responsibilities with my station manager to allow me to be released from being on call this week. We would not expect wholetime members to take unpaid leave to be here. Please support this resolution and make sure that every FBU member is entitled to trade union facility time, regardless of their duty system. Thank you. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, James. Does that have a seconder? Are you seconding, Gus, and moving your amendment? Thank you.

GUS SPROUL (Scotland):

Conference, president, seconding the resolution and moving our amendment. Conference, region 1 fully supports this resolution from our RDS comrades. We've managed to make good progress on this in Scotland, and we have an agreement for RDS reps in place that they can claim payment for time spent on TU duties and attendance on FBU education courses.

If it can be done in Scotland, it can be done elsewhere. And brigade officials can do this work now. And if we can help in any way, we can, please just get in touch. Support the resolution, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Gus. The EC are supporting the amendment. Does that have a seconder? Seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody? No. AGS

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Small comment from the executive council, president and conference. First of all, look, it's a really important motion and thank the NRC for bringing it here. And we certainly appreciate you and conference appreciates you being here for this. The support for this is linked to a comment because it's important that we won't just be surveying RDS schemes in this regard. We need to look for the comparator if we're going to compare it to others and certainly in terms of looking at it through the lens of the part-time workers settlement. So we will do that. We'll look at that.

How we look to survey may vary, so it may be that it's a brigade secretary's request to bring back each individual policy, but we may be able to ascertain this information through something similar to a freedom of information request. But we will get to work soon after conference. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, thanks, Ben. I now put amendment to resolution 62 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put resolution 62 as amended to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 66 Facility Time Agreements For Brigade Officials Mid and West Wales. Mid and West Wales have remitted with the right to speak, I believe.

Resolution 66 FACILITY TIME AGREEMENTS FOR BRIGADE OFFICIALS

Conference is concerned at the huge differences in facility time agreements for brigade officials in the Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) across the UK.

Conference is aware that some brigades see facility time as an investment, which is applaudable. However, many brigades see facility time as a cost, which is extremely concerning. Many brigade officials are struggling to get the required time off to undertake their role effectively. The workload for officials is ever increasing, and these battles for facility time are constant and tiring and add unnecessary stress to the role.

Conference instructs the Executive Council (EC) to write to all FRSs in the UK, reaffirming the importance of good facility time agreements for brigade officials and the benefits to industrial relations.

Conference also instructs the EC to raise this important matter with the employers side of the National Joint Council.

Conference demands a toolkit and strategy is made available for all officials to utilise, for those who are having difficulties in accessing facility time to undertake their role.

MID AND WEST WALES

DAN BARTLEY (Mid and West Wales):

President, conference, we remit resolution 66 Facility Time Agreements For Brigade Officials. But we do so with the assurance from the AGS that this critical issue is not set aside, but addressed with urgency. The right to reasonable time off for trade union duties as outlined in sections 168 to 170 of the other Trade Union and Labour Relations Consolidation Act 1982 is essential for effective member representation, fair negotiations, and the overall strength of our union.

Reports of officials being denied or restricted for time off, not only undermine our ability to defend members, but also risk breaches of employment law, potential tribunal claims, and deteriorating industrial relations. We recognise the importance of developing unified and enforceable standards within our own frameworks.

Therefore, in remitting this resolution, we seek clear assurance from the executive council that this matter will be addressed in the next revision of the Fire Brigades Union Grey Book. We expect that these revisions will include explicit protections and entitlements for union officials to take reasonable paid time off for all duties on all duty

systems, establish clear processes for resolving disputes around time off, and ensure employer accountability where legal obligations are not met.

We remit this resolution in good faith, but make clear that failure to act on or progress this matter will result in its return at future conferences with stronger demands. Our members deserve full, fair and protected representation. Nothing less will do. We remit. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Dan. AGS to give those assurances.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

I'm giving the assurances, but just explaining why we were seeking remittance as well, president, is there is a groundbreaking employment rights bill going through parliament right now, which is making clearer provisions in relation to facilities times, and that also includes facility times for our equality reps as well. So we give the commitment that we will continue to raise it through the NJC structures. And I'll also give the reassurance that in the work we do with the national employers around the Grey Book, we will ensure that any changes to legislation open the door for us to make further demands in relation to facilities times for FBU reps in workplaces. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. I now call resolution 63, migration and asylum, moved by Cheshire, the EC support.

Resolution 63 MIGRATION AND ASYLUM

Conference believes that our movement must exemplify its commitment to working-class solidarity, social justice and anti-racism by standing up for migrants' rights.

Conference recognises that migrant workers are amongst the most vulnerable to exploitation and are made more vulnerable by anti-migrant policies, which limit their bargaining power with employers.

Strengthening migrant workers' rights strengthens the position of all workers. More broadly, working-class solidarity and socialist politics cannot flourish in a political environment in which anti-migrant agitation is running rampant. Pushing back against the right-wing offensive on this is essential for our movement.

Conference 2023 passed strong policy for defending migrants' rights, including to "explore how the Union can offer full support to those organising to resist anti-migrant and anti-refugee activity in our workplaces and our communities". We believe that since then this stance has become even more important.

Conference is appalled by the current government's approach. We have seen exploration of replacements for the Rwanda scheme, a blitz of raids against migrant workers, maintaining the limitation on asylum-seekers working, expansion of detention facilities and the refusal to create safe routes into the United Kingdom.

Conference believes the trade union movement must demand Labour changes course and implement our movement's humanitarian principles by expanding asylum rights and strengthening migrant workers' rights as part of strengthening rights for all workers.

Conference therefore instructs the Executive Council to work with the wider trade union movement, labour organisations and migrants' and asylum rights campaigners, to improve the rights of migrants. This work should include;

- ***campaigning publicly around migrant's rights***
- ***producing materials for use amongst members***
- ***lobbying government to create safe routes for asylum seekers.***

A report on the progress of this should be commissioned in time for Conference 2026.

CHESHIRE

JACK FELLOWS (Cheshire):

Thank you, president, conference, we are gathered here to put policies in place to help the cause of our union and ourselves as workers. We know what defending and building on workers' rights is all about. We must not forget, the most vulnerable worker is the migrant worker.

You know the ones, coming over here, providing care, propping up our economy, enriching the cultural fabric of our society whilst being exploited in the process. These people don't have the privilege of negotiation rights. Often scammers posing as recruitment agencies charge high fees to secure their work. This leads to forced labour that results in the workers living in and working in slave conditions, chained to their traffickers through debt.

There are now thousands of migrant workers living in modern slavery in the UK in our society. Conference, if we are to improve our lot as workers, we need to raise the bar for all workers. Now more than ever, as we're seeing the rise of the far right embodied by Nigel Farage and Reform, and let's make no mistake, the space for them to thrive has been in no small way created by a Labour Party who have now systematically failed poor, and working people, choosing instead to placate the rich continue austerity, and market capitalist projects.

This has led to a disillusioned population susceptible to false claims that migrants are the root cause of their lives not improving. Instead of opposing Reform, who are anti-worker, anti-public sector, anti-NHS, Labour have chosen not to create a credible alternative to the politics of the elites, but to reform themselves.

Last week saw Keir give his "island of strangers" speech, in which he described a period of high immigration as a squalid chapter that's caused incalculable harm. He visited Albania trying to set up return hubs for failed asylum seekers, like a Labour version of the Rwanda scheme, only to be told that the Albanian government weren't interested.

Conference, in Labour's absence, we need to drive the support for all workers and dispel the myths about migrants. We have a below-replacement birth rate in this country and the West. That means in not-too-distant future generations to come, when the population is declining, we will wholeheartedly be reliant on migrants and asylum seekers to prop up our economy. But more importantly, we're talking about human beings. It should be all of our duty to speak to power and fight to ensure these people have a safe and fair route into this country. All we can lose is their chains. Conference, please support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Jack, does that have a seconder?

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, when people come to our country, they are not strangers, whatever Keir Starmer says, I'll tell you who the strangers are. The strangers are the politicians who don't recognise what being a part of a community really is. The strangers are the billionaires who fund the politicians but don't pay their taxes.

The strangers are the right wing media who stir division by telling us that those who are escaping from famine and war are the enemy, while they are the real enemy with their hate speech and lies. These people are not our enemy. They are the people who hold our NHS together. They are the people who take the lowest paid but essential jobs to keep our communities safe and clean. They are the people who, whilst unable to work here because they are claiming asylum or applying for asylum, help out with charities to provide essential help to those most in need. They are not strangers. They are our neighbours, our workmates, our friends. These attempts at division should not work in our union.

We see our friends who may not be the same colour as us or speak with our accents, but who are our comrades. And I want them on my side before Starmer or Farage. And if those politicians do want to lessen the number of people seeking asylum and migration here, what about a wild thought like stop bombing their countries and forcing them to flee and look for somewhere where they can live safely. *Applause*

Comrades, I stood here last year seconding an emergency resolution moved by Nottinghamshire, where Brendan Woodhouse demanded that Labour rescind the Rwanda Bill. They did. But what they do now is brag about how many people they have deported. Many of those people are sent back to countries that may not be safe for them.

One from my own city, Fortua, who is currently awaiting deportation to a country that she has not been in for 19 years, where she has no money, no family, and no friends. And she will be sent back there where she will be persecuted because her family stood against the people who are in power there.

Conference, comrades, migrants add to our culture and our society. Please support this resolution. I second. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lee. That's now open for debate.

HAYLEIGH MARKS TALABIS (CSNC):

President, conference, first time speaking. *Applause* As the proud wife of an immigrant, when the prime minister says an island of strangers, he's talking about my family. Sorry if I get bit choked up, I get very emotional. Migrants improve our country. My husband moved here 25 years ago. He had the privilege of coming here on a plane. He didn't have to take that chance to get in a boat. He didn't have to apply for asylum. He had those routes available to him. He had the privilege of being able to have a safe and legal route. He didn't have to risk his life. He didn't have to take a chance.

He has supported our movement, the trade union movement. He's been able to be safe while he's been here. He's seen the rhetoric change over that 25 years. I think the least we can all do is give back and support migrants and asylum seekers now, and encourage our government to create those safe and legal routes now. So the CSNC is asking you to support this motion. Thank you. *Applause*

NEIL ANDERSON (Scotland):

President, conference. supporting resolution 63. First time at conference. First time speaking. *Applause*

I'd like to echo the comments made so eloquently by Tam yesterday, and also thank him because it's reduced my speech to one page now. My mum came to the UK about four years ago to work in the care industry. She didn't come here to steal somebody's job. She came here to provide valuable work to vulnerable people in our community.

The Home Office published figures last week, showing there are currently in excess of 130,000 vacancies in the care sector. Labour suggested policies on migration will be disastrous for care in this country. The fact that at last week's PMQs, Nigel Farage congratulated the PM while qualifying that he hadn't gone far enough, is absolutely vile.

If characters like Farage congratulate you on your work, you need to severely look at your moral compass. We need to make every effort to resist and defy dehumanising policies and show our support for workers no matter where they come from. Conference. I'll finish on this. My mother was a care worker. It's something that's very personal to me. Conference, we support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Neil. Anybody else? Mark Rowe.

MARK ROWE (National Officer):

Thanks, president. Thanks conference. Just a very brief point. So in the final sentence it talks about commissioned research. We just wanted to be clear that we do intend to do that in-house, Cheshire. We have the expertise with the people with that knowledge. So it's not something we're going to outsource. We will commission that research, but we're going to commission it in-house. Thanks, president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, thanks Mark. I now put resolution 63 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call para F2, para F3, para F4, para F5, para F6 - oh F5.

ROB LEWIS (B&EMM):

President, conference, at this year's TUC Black Workers Conference we moved a resolution for strategic litigation improving training for trade union officials. This was voted on unanimously. However, at the same conference they voted on a motion titled, And Then It Clicked.

Gender-based violence is now widely being spoken about and challenged, but a key area being forgotten is gender-based violence against Black women. For Black women facing violence is often coupled with race-based violence, the intersection of gender and race compounding the reality of the violation against them. The voices of the Black victim not being heard, and therefore support not given. Misogynoir is a term that we should all be aware of and impacts of the unrecognised violence that Black victims face.

Let's look at the experience of Black women facing misogyny. This is given a term misogynoir. We urge you all to research and read about it. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Dwight. I now call para F6.

Sorry, was that Rob? I do apologise, Rob.

Sorry, I thought someone was getting up there and he's gone out to toilet. Never mind. Para F7. Yep.

MARIA BUCK (LGBT+):

President, conference, members, comrades, the importance of the equality congresses within the regions and nations give trade unions the opportunity to focus on issues that affect those members who belong to the equality sections. When the motions and resolutions are brought to these equality conferences, it's the voices of the equality section members that delegates bring to our officials.

While some people believe that issues may not be relevant to the fire service, we don't. We stand up for the FBU members and we stand up for the working class and anyone who is denied rights. There are attacks on the equality section motions in the right wing press, upset by these motions that we sent. As equality members, we upset the right wing press by just existing. It's even worse when we organise. When the right wing press is upset, you know you must be doing something right. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Maria. I now call para F8, para F9, para F10, para F11, para F12, para F13, para F14. I now call resolution 60 Gaza - A Future Of Occupation, moved by Scotland, the EC support.

Resolution 60 GAZA – A FUTURE OF OCCUPATION

Conference notes with despair the recent comments by the President of the United States (US), suggesting that Gaza will be owned by the US, to be developed as they see fit with the population removed to neighbouring countries.

Conference recognises that the ethnic cleansing of Gaza, and the replacement of the Gazan population with Zionist settlers, has been deemed illegal under international law with Benjamin Netanyahu having warrants out for his arrest by the International Criminal Court, and the actions of his government being viewed a 'plausible genocide'.

Conference is appalled that the West Bank is now under occupation, with the same strategy being applied as was in Gaza, with infrastructure and healthcare destroyed, dense urban areas indiscriminately bombed and the civilian population fearing for their lives, with men, women and children being killed and maimed, or arrested and held without charge in Israeli jails, facing abuse and torture.

Conference is proud of the support the Fire Brigades Union has shown for the Palestinian people and calls on the Executive Council to exert pressure in whatever way they can on the governments of all devolved nations to ensure that the violence is brought to an end, that the rebuilding of Gaza is done for the Gazan people and that ethnic cleansing is opposed in the strongest possible terms.

SCOTLAND

COLIN EDGELY (Scotland):

President, conference, moving resolution 60 Gaza – A Future of Occupation. Comrades, you will need to forgive the tone and emotive language used in moving this resolution, but I'm afraid there's no other way to address this situation. Firstly, as I'm sure most of us are, I'm proud to be part of an organisation that is openly opposed to the genocide of a people.

But isn't that sentence just a little bit ridiculous? Proud to oppose genocide? The very fact that many of us would associate or align ourselves with that statement is testament to the ludicrousness of the more general view of the situation Palestinians face today in their homeland. Our mainstream media and our government have been infiltrated by callous murderous Zionists, and their reach is far and poisonous. They threaten and intimidate with wild, baseless accusations of antisemitism purely for calling out their barbarism and lack of humanity.

They pay off our politicians to spin their lies and use their influence to prevent the world from seeing the truth. But we see you. We see you slaughtering children whilst they play. We see you bombing humanitarian services like paramedics and firefighters and blowing up hospitals. We see you using sexual torture.

We see you starving those who still have the temerity to have survived the bombs and the bullets, and as if that wasn't enough, we also see you attacking aid workers in international waters. It's hard for us to see comrades, but we mustn't look away. We can't allow this abhorrence to be normalised, and we also need to do more.

As part of the trade union movement, we can do more practically as the resolution calls for, but first, I want to address what each and every one of us can do as soon as we return to the workplace. I hear and see many social media comments from members asking questions like, what's Palestine got to do with me? Why don't you spend more time on our terms and conditions than Palestine? And I'm sure everyone in this room will have experienced similar.

We need to challenge that, and we need to re-educate people. We can't rely on our media or our politicians to do it, so we as trade unionists and the defenders of the working class need to do it. I saw and heard no such comments when our society opened its hearts to Ukrainians being bombed and shot. In fact, we've seen Ukraine flags flying from houses, and families housing Ukrainian refugees, which was beautiful and amazing.

Maybe there's something I'm missing that makes people think Palestinian lives are less worthy. I'll leave that there for comrades to ponder. Whatever the reasoning, it must be challenged. In terms of practical support, the trade union movement must begin to use its collective power to press governments into action. Between the nations of the UK, there are some 7 million trade union members. That collective power should be more of a threat to government than any Zionist. Perhaps we need to be more forceful and radical in applying our power. Many comrades may have seen the film *Nae Pasaran*, and if you haven't, I would recommend it. An amazing story of working class solidarity across oceans and thousands of miles between two working class communities who had never met. A perfect example of how action here detrimental in the short term to the workers and their employer can save the lives of countless people elsewhere. The workers at a factory just outside Glasgow in my area in Scotland in the seventies, refused to repair the engines of the Chilean dictatorship's bomber planes after hearing news of the killing and disappearance of innocent people by the military junta. The film tells of stories by the survivors who cite this act of solidarity as saving an unimaginable amount of lives. Perhaps we could learn something from that. We have fire and rescue services in the UK still using companies like Babcock, a known weapons manufacturer and genocide enabler, to provide their training and other services. This union could take similar action to those workers in the film to really make a practical stand.

However, what this resolution calls for today, is for the EC to call on government to make public opposition to the displacement of Palestinians and to press for commitment to rebuild Gaza for the Palestinians, and to demand that the UK government work as hard for peace in Palestine, if not harder than they have done so in Ukraine, even if their American puppeteers oppose it. We cannot stand idly by whilst Imperialists forcibly remove what's left of the Palestinian population from a land they have every right to exist in.

To conclude, comrades, we're living through a moment in history that will never ever be forgotten. And if Zionists are allowed to eradicate an entire people what's to stop other powerful, maniacal, nuclear armed nations from doing the same to someone else?

History will also remember those who allowed it to happen and did nothing. Granted, we should all be striving to do more and more, but I know my conscience will be clear. It's not enough to be neutral and consider it someone else's problem. To quote the great Desmond Tutu, *"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."* Comrades, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Colin. Does that have a seconder? Have a seconder. *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Mark Rowe.

MARK ROWE (National Officer):

President, conference, just a couple of comments on behalf of the executive on this resolution. So it is just on the final paragraph, it refers to "all devolved nations". The executive council just want to be clear that does include the Westminster government in that as well. And I guess you could say that people power is having quite dramatic effect as well, particularly in relation to the leader of the Labour Party. And last week there was half a million people on the streets of London demonstrating in support of Palestine.

There have been constant demonstrations in cities across this country and beyond in relation to the situation in Palestine. And I suppose for Keir Starmer, the view is that it's probably better late to the table and better late to condemn this than not at all. And you will have seen Starmer yesterday lashed out at what he called the utterly intolerable actions by Israel in Gaza.

They are clearly the strongest words yet from him, and he's also issued a stark warning to Netanyahu to halt the egregious actions in Gaza, warning that the Labour Party, and he as leader of the Labour Party, will take concrete actions over the insolvable human suffering that has been inflicted and bring in sanctions, bringing commitment to resolve some of the outstanding issues that are being brought in relation to Gaza. And nobody in this room, I'm sure, will doubt that the situation in Gaza is utterly horrific at the moment.

As I say support from the executive council and in relation to Keir Starmer, it's good to see that at last he is listening to the people. And it is only because people in this room have been on the streets week in, week out, demonstrating and making sure that the Labour Party sit up and pay attention to the feelings of people and the trade union movement on this issue. Thanks, president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Mark. I now put resolution 60 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Right, conference, that's coffee break or tea break, whatever takes your fancy. See you back in the room at 15.45. Thank you.

Break for tea

THE PRESIDENT:

Conference, come to order. *(Bangs gavel)* Change of underwear for the AGS! Right, conference we're back in the room. Before we move on, if any regions want photographs taken, we've got our photographer at the back, Mark Thomas. He tells a real good joke as well on the side. So if anybody does, just approach Mark, he'll take the photographs of your regions up against the stage or wherever. I think he's done a couple, but it's there if anybody wants it. Okay.

We're now carrying on with section F. I now call resolution 64 Practical Support For Palestine moved by Merseyside, the EC support.

Resolution 64 PRACTICAL SUPPORT FOR PALESTINE

Conference recognises that the people of Palestine have suffered greatly in the onslaught of genocidal attacks by Israel.

Conference 2024 saw resolutions passed for support for the people of Palestine.

Conference also recognises that the attacks have continued leading to the death, injury and displacement of Palestinian people.

Conference instructs that the Executive Council now moves into more practical support. This should include;

- ***lobbying against the forced displacement of Palestinian people from Palestine***
- ***contacting Chief Fire Officers (or equivalent) to request equipment, fire kit and fire appliances to be sent to Palestine***
- ***lobbying for the safe passage of all equipment sent to Palestine***
- ***lobbying for the right of self-determination for Palestinian people***
- ***encouraging Fire Brigades Union members to practically support these lobbies and any others that support the Palestinian people.***

MERSEYSIDE

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, moving resolution 64. Practical Support for Palestine. Comrades, it's a stain on this country that we have to be debating this resolution today. That firefighters are having to beg fire and rescue services to donate equipment to a country and a people who have undergone 19 months of relentless genocidal attacks is abhorrent.

The number of people killed in Palestine cannot be properly estimated. Reports from within Gaza put the number at over 50,000. However, the use of weapons that have been deemed as contravening humanitarian law has, in some cases destroyed bodies completely. Men, women, and children targeted deliberately and viciously.

Sometimes by artificial intelligence, their bodies obliterated, so they are not even allowed the dignity of a funeral. The number of children killed in Palestine in six months is more than the total number of children killed in all other war zones worldwide, over three years multiplied by four, as reported by Professor Norman Finkelstein, an American political scientist and a son of Holocaust survivor parents.

And then we look at the attacks on our comrades in the ambulance and fire services in Palestine. On 23rd March this year, the IDF deliberately and mercilessly killed 15 emergency workers who were traveling in marked ambulances, a United Nations car, and the fire engine with flashing lights as they made their way to help wounded Palestinians.

The Israelis then repeatedly lied about the attack, changing their story each time new evidence came out including video footage of the attack filmed by some of the victims. The IDF then buried not only their bodies, but also their vehicles in order to cover up yet another heinous war crime. Comrades, what we are currently witnessing is the normalisation of genocide. The annihilation of Palestinian people is played out on our TVs, our tablets, and our phones, and that some people, including MPs and even the prime minister, can sit by and try to rationalise it or explain away Zionist war crimes shows just what the future holds for us. Yesterday's joint statement between the UK, France, and Canada is too little, too late.

Every inhumane act carried out in these attacks on Palestine and not called out is another step to acceptance. Every time we see this played out in the future, it will be less shocking to us. And so it will escalate. Every war, every conflict, every genocidal attack from this day will continue to get worse because we have allowed the victims to become dehumanised and it will get worse because we have not made it stop. So the aggressors will keep pushing those boundaries and I'm horrified at what images we are going to see next. because the ones we've already seen are already burnt into my soul and are keeping me awake at night.

Conference, this resolution needs to pass and with it the hope that we can force the safe passage of new equipment to Palestine that also allows the safe delivery of the fire engine donated by our Scottish comrades that still sits awaiting delivery because the Israelis will not allow a right-hand drive vehicle into Palestine because their shoot-to-kill-the-driver policy is based on left-hand drive vehicles.

I also hope that this may help in allowing aid into Palestine. What we are seeing with the blockage of aid and food is yet another humanitarian crisis being wreaked on the people of Palestine. Food is being withheld, which is putting hundreds of thousands of people at the risk of starvation. The UN said today that 14,000 children risk dying of starvation in the next few days in Palestine. Medical supplies are also being withheld, which was causing even more death and causing more avoidable suffering to continue. And the recent allowance of some food into Palestine by Israel is once again not enough. Comrades, we must support the Palestinian people and that support has to have a more practical element immediately. Conference, support this resolution. Free Palestine. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lee. Does that have a seconder? Yep.

JACK FELLOWS (Cheshire):

President, conference, seconding the Practical Support for Palestine. I really struggled to write on this. And Lee you've done an amazing job. So I really, don't know what I can add to it. Sorry. *Applause*

There is practical stuff we can be doing. There is the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign. Please go out. There is a stall outside for Palestine Solidarity Campaign. We can do practical things to put pressure. I recognise what Mark said about Keir Starmer changing his tone on this. I'm sorry, but Keir Starmer is changing whatever direction he feels the wind's going to blow him into a more popular position. Where was he for the last 19 months? It pains me that we are complicit in this, the UK are complicit. We're sending RAF drones or planes, sorry, over Gaza. We give intelligence to the IDF. We sell arms to Israel. And it's got to stop. And, Keir Starmer, shame on you and David Lammy. Shame on you. We support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Jack. That's open for debate. Open for debate. Anybody? No. Right, I now put resolution 64 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Conference, I now bring emergency resolution one, Gaza and Beyond, from Scotland.

EMERGENCY RESOLUTION 1 GAZA AND BEYOND

On 19 April 2025 the Freedom Flotilla Coalition (FFC) set sail from the Republic of Türkiye heading for Palestine to again challenge the illegal and inhumane blockade of the people of Gaza.

The FFC is an international grassroots solidarity movement that through education, legal challenges and direct protest raise awareness of the illegal and devastating blockade of the people of Gaza.

On 2 May 2025 the vessel was attacked in a drone strike in international waters, disabling the vessel. Fortunately, no casualties have been reported. This attack follows the heinous murder and cover-up of fellow emergency workers in Palestine. In that attack 15 humanitarian workers were executed and buried by Israeli forces.

Conference recognises the essential role non-violent, direct action has had in working class and humanitarian struggles throughout history and the vital, non-partisan role emergency workers and humanitarian services play in areas of conflict. Conference condemns the loss of innocent life during any conflict but especially condemns the murder of our fellow humanitarian workers.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to make the necessary arrangements to:

- ***Raise awareness of the assassination of emergency workers in Gaza and the subsequent attempted cover up amongst members and trade union partners***

- **Contact other trade unions to jointly condemn the attack against the FFC and on all humanitarian and emergency workers in conflict areas**
- **Discuss and enact meaningful ways in which the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) can further assist humanitarian and emergency workers in conflict areas**
- **Discuss and enact meaningful ways in which the FFC can be supported by the FBU.**

These actions should be reported back to Conference 2026.

SCOTLAND

LEWIS CLARK (Scotland):

President, conference, moving Emergency Resolution 1. The previous speakers have covered the harrowing realities and the actions that we have to take in regards to the Palestinian people in their struggle. The speakers spoke eloquently and add to these great contributions.

But the attack on the Freedom Flotilla is just another example of the far-reaching rogue occupational Israeli state that they can act in such ways out with their so-called borders shows that they fear no repercussions, judgment or detriment for their actions. Why would they? They've received unwavering support from many states, including our own, and they must be shamed regardless of the more positive movements recently. They've had a damn long time to act on this - 19 months, and they didn't do a damn thing. This attack on the humanitarian flotilla is an attack on the solidarity humanitarian movement. In Sweden, Erik Helgeson, the Swedish Dockworkers Union national deputy chair, has been sacked for organising a blockade. An attack on the trade union movement.

The emergency workers murdered and cruelly hidden in shallow graves is an attack on our comrades. It's been said before, but we must do all we can and more to oppose this cruel regime and the cruel genocide of the Palestinian people. It's reaching out with their borders that they do not respect. They don't respect international law. We need to do everything that we can. Please support the resolution. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lewis. The EC are supporting that. Has that got seconder? That got a seconder? *Formally* Right, that's open for debate. Anybody? No. I now put emergency resolution one, Gaza and Beyond from Scotland to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call para F15. Yep.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, talking under paragraph F15. Comrades, you'll see at the top of the page under paragraph F15 a number of Labour movement organisations, one of which is the Labour Party, which we might be discussing later. So one of them at the bottom of the left-hand column is the Labour Research Department.

So we used to receive some useful publications in the post that went out to brigade officials along with other publications like the *Hazards* magazine and the *Fire Magazine*. It's a way that we can keep in touch with other parts of the trade union movement, really good resources, a way of looking outwards rather than just inwards.

And I just wanted a bit of clarification on why that's dried up and why we no longer receive those publications. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Neil.

TAM McFARLANE (National Officer):

That's me then.

THE PRESIDENT:

Sorry, we didn't know who was going to respond to that one.

TAM McFARLANE (National Officer):

We do supply some Labour LRD documents. They do get sent to head office. I was under the impression they did get sent to officials. If that's not happening, we'll double check that. I will say though, there are plans at head office to use the electronic subscription far more. We have had that in the past. It has been sent out to officials, but we know from the LRD it's just not getting used. We'd far rather that was used: (1) the sheer cost of it and (2) obviously the sort of green aspect of it in terms of sending out documents. But yeah, I'll definitely check in regard to officials who receive them or don't. The subscription will be moved on electronically as well.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, thanks Tam. I now call resolution 67 Political Donations moved by Tyne and Wear with an amendment from London. Tyne and Wear have remitted with the right to speak.

Resolution 67 POLITICAL DONATIONS

Conference notes the hard work that is done by both brigade and regional officials building working relationships with political allies that can be used to further the cause of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and its members not only within local arenas, but also nationally.

Conference also notes that it is necessary to reciprocate the support that some affiliated politicians have shown to the FBU and our campaigns. This support, whilst shown in a number of ways, can be shown financially, through a political donation.

Conference believes that local officials are best suited to know the level of support that local politicians have provided to the FBU and therefore should be able to determine who should be supported with a political donation and how much should be allocated, within the financial constraints set by the Executive Council (EC).

Conference instructs the EC that no political donations should be made to local politicians by head office without the consent of the regional committee for whom those local politicians represent and that it is down to the committee to decide the value of the donation, within the rules of the Union.

TYNE AND WEAR

AMENDMENT

4th paragraph, 4th line after 'rules' insert 'and policies'

LONDON

CHRIS COOK (Tyne and Wear):

Good afternoon, conference. Good afternoon, president, everybody all right? I am speaking to remit the resolution 67 Political Donations in the spirit of unity into trust; our general secretary and the executive council, Tyne and Wear remit this resolution. Thank you.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, president. Thanks to the Tyne and Wear officials for meeting with me the other evening to discuss this. We know the importance of brigade officials, local officials, regional officials when we give our money, our members' money, to political parties or whether we give it to those standing in elections.

So I'll assure you that we will bring a policy, we'll bring a procedure to follow and that will be adhered to. Thanks, Chris.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Steve. Chris, I'm fine, thank you. But we haven't got time to go around the room, so I'm assuming everybody else is fine or they'll be telling us. Okay.

Conference, I want to ask for your agreement. I'm going to take a bit of licence here. I'm going to jump slightly out of sync with the rest of it because I'm going to take a resolution out of section C Operations, Health and

Safety. So I am calling para C1, and the reason I'm doing this is because we've got Isle of Man in attendance today, but they have to return to their brigade in the morning, and they have submitted their first ever resolution to FBU conference. *Applause*

So rather than it fall, because they're not here to move it, I'm going to take it early. So, Isle of Man, I now call resolution 50 Decontamination Standards moved by the Isle of Man. EC are giving qualified support. Sorry, we've moved to support.

Resolution 50 DECONTAMINATION STANDARDS

Conference recognises the outstanding work carried out by the Fire Brigades Union and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) in their efforts to study and bring into focus the issues surrounding contaminants and cancer(s) within our profession.

Conference also recognises the disparity between different Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) in their approach to decontamination, and their acceptance of the findings of these studies.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to establish a minimum standard of procedures for decontamination that should take place for all work carried out by our members and issue a minimum standard of equipment that should be used to ensure safe and effective decontamination post incident.

These standards should then be presented to the Ministerial Advisory Group to ensure compliance across all FRSs.

ISLE OF MAN

NICK HAYES (Isle of Man):

President, conference moving resolution 50 Decontamination Standards. Thank you for going out of sync for me.

Thanks to the work carried out by the FBU and the University of Central Lancashire to create the DECON campaign a few years ago; we are now more aware than ever regarding the effects contaminants and cancer can have on those within our profession. If that wasn't enough, since the results of DECON have been published, the WHO have also declared firefighting to be a carcinogenic occupation. This has still failed to lead employers to address the disparity between the different services in their approach to decontamination and their acceptance of the findings of these studies.

Now that the risks are known, we should not be placed in a position that puts us at risk of suffering now or in the future, especially when the equipment, PPE, and techniques are already in use in some areas and an improved level of standards is available. This should be limited by the safeguards and a unified system of dealing with contaminants as laid out in the DECON campaign.

We often hear the same excuses for slow movement on improving existing decontamination practices and purchasing of equipment that it costs. So what's the value of a firefighter's life? To have to quibble over purchasing of what is essentially lifesaving equipment is not only ludicrous, but it shows how little value we have and how little esteem our employers hold us in.

It also shows a lack of foresight on their behalf as simply in pragmatic terms, cancer treatment is estimated to cost in the region of £14.4 billion per annum to the NHS. To knowingly add to this is simply lunacy.

What we currently have in many areas is frankly inadequate, outdated, and probably unsafe. We already have the facts and figures to support this argument, and now it is time for our services to support their workers. The equipment exists to limit the exposure and services need to be brought to task to ensure that they are made available to all of us.

We need to issue a requirement for a minimum standard of equipment that will be used to ensure safe and effective decontamination post-incident and that decontamination procedures are updated nationwide to ensure that the risk to firefighters is controlled and minimised exactly as we would with any other risk.

Thank you. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Nick. Does that have a seconder? Yep.

GRAEME JONES (Merseyside):

President, conference, speaking to second resolution 50, conference. Again, we recognise and applaud the work done by the EC national officials and the study by UCLan around decontamination and the formation of the Ministerial Advisory Group. But if you don't use these studies and these platforms to demand a change that is at the forefront of every firefighter's mind, what good are they?

I would say that this is probably the most talked about topic around a mess table, bar maybe pensions like my comrade from Scotland mentioned before. I'm tired of the phrase "postcode lottery", but that's exactly what this is. Chief fire officers pick and choose the levels of care and safety that they give to firefighters. We know the levels of decontamination and many brigades are not sufficient, but until we have national standards, chief fire officers are under no obligation to improve them, so they won't. We know that countries like Sweden have far more robust decontamination standards following the Skellefteå model. We must press legislation to ensure chief fire officers are obliged to enforce the same standards.

In Merseyside, we have a state-of-the-art training facility complete with motorway, high-rise training area, oil rig, railway incident among everything else. But crews still clean the BA sets with rags and soapy water, despite set cleaning machines being available on the market. And the reason we don't have them is because the chief fire officer didn't have to buy one. It wasn't a good use of his budget. It's not his budget, it's ours.

I know there are people here that have BA set cleaning machines available on station, but for many of us the reassurance and improved decontamination those machines give are a long way off. Conference, I understand that work is ongoing, but this doesn't have to be a one-time ask.

We demand national standards now, and if further data becomes available, we demand that they're updated. But there must be a starting point and that starting point must be today. The longer we leave this, the longer we have to put ourselves and our colleagues in unnecessary risk. I welcome the support from the EC. Conference, Merseyside seconds. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Graeme. That's open for debate? Anybody? No. Steve?

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, president, and thanks Nick for bringing such an important resolution. And look, we know it's important and you're quite right, this is one of the top issues and top topics that members are raising with us when I've visited stations across the UK.

We know there is a massive and huge disparity across our fire stations on what resources and what equipment is in place. So we know we need funding, we know we need national standards around it. It talks about minimum standards and that was originally the talk of a qualification. We want maximum standards.

We know that DECON will save lives and we will continue to raise this. As the resolution asked, we will raise it at the Ministerial Advisory Group. We will raise it in any department or any arena that we need to, to get this delivered. So thanks for the resolution and thanks for being here again, Isle of Man. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Conference, I now put resolution 50 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

And Nick, you can leave tomorrow saying "I've never lost a resolution at conference." Not everybody can say that. I can't say that so there you go. Right, we are now moving on to section G Education, para G1, para G2, para G3, para G4.

CARI McINTYRE (Scotland):

President, conference, I wanted to speak on paragraph G4 to express on behalf of Scotland our thanks to Lindsey McDowell and the rest of the FBU education team for the amazing work that they do. *Applause*

I attended the IBO course in January. That was a fantastic course that encouraged respectful debate and provided us all with a well-rounded foundation of knowledge and understanding of trade unionism. It also facilitated networking between members from different regions and brigades, which is arguably just as valuable as educational content.

I also have to mention that, as a result of the IBO course, we have a rep in the far northerly reaches of Scotland on the Isle of Shetland, and he's also in attendance in conference this year. *Applause*

To put this in relative terms, it's the same distance to Blackpool from Shetland as it is from Blackpool to Paris. This is around 500 miles, but I'll leave the jokes. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Cari. Para G5, para G6, para G7, para G8, para G9, para G10, para G11. I now call resolution 68. TUC Training For Reps moved by Humberside. The EC give qualified support.

Resolution 68 TUC TRAINING FOR REPS

Conference acknowledges the success and importance of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) education programme, this has trained and supported our reps for many years but since the removal of the union learning fund reps have struggled to access TUC training. Reps face a patchwork of access to the TUC rep courses around the country with some being unable to participate in them at all.

Conference believes that these courses not only offer a longer form course but that they also allow interaction and networking with reps from other industries. By exposing FBU reps to the problems, solutions and success of other industries they gain exposure to new ideas and draw strength from their experience.

Conference instructs the Executive Council (EC) to lobby the government to re-instate this vital piece of funding which would allow universal access to the TUC courses. While a return to the full funding is the best outcome, Conference accepts that this is an aspiration, therefore Conference also instructs the EC to create a comprehensive list of those regions that cannot access TUC courses, and look to facilitate a way for all reps to access this vital training resource. The EC will report back to Conference 2026 on the availability of courses to the Union and any ways that reps can access these courses in areas that have lost access.

HUMBERSIDE

SAM MILLER-HODGES (Humberside):

Conference, president, you've caught me somewhat by surprise as I didn't bring my speech with me, so I will have to do this somewhat ad hoc. Conference, technology is a success and importance for the Fire Brigades Union education programme. This has trained and supported our reps over many years.

One of the things which I want to support is what was made before. The education department of the FBU has been fantastic, but one of the things which I think would further and has really benefited me is the access to TUC courses. These courses are fundamentally better at allowing us to have access to other trade unions.

We are improved and we are helped by access to other trade unions. By working with those trade unions, by accepting what their battles are and seeing what their methods of organising are and how they've overcome those battles, we improve as a union. Conference believes that these TUC courses not only offer a longer form course, but they also allow interaction and network with reps and with those industries.

By exposing FBU reps to problems, solutions, successes of other industries, we will grow and be better as a union. I will read my policy out. Conference instructs the EC to lobby the government to reinstate this vital piece of funding.

The vital piece of funding is access to TUC courses. It is a hodgepodge of where you can. There are many areas around this country which cannot receive TUC funding because of lack, as mentioned in I believe it's section F11, which was put before. This is not universally acceptable. Not everybody can get these courses. But by reinstating the vital piece of funding, that will allow universal access to TUC courses. While a return to the full funding is the best outcome, conference accepts that this is an aspiration. Therefore, conference also instructs the EC to create a comprehensive list of those regions that cannot access TUC courses and looks to facilitate a way for all reps to access this vital training resource.

The EC will report back to conference on the availability of courses to the union and any ways that reps can access these courses in areas that have lost access to them. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Sam. Does that have a seconder? Have a seconder. *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody? Tam McFarlane to give the qualification.

TAM McFARLANE (National Officer):

Thanks, president, conference, the qualification is basically, this work is underway, but just to be clear to conference, this doesn't refer to the union-learning-funded ULF which continues to fund adult learning opportunities. Importantly not trade union education, but it does that of course, in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Trade union education is the kind that's typically known as a TUC course as well. And it's the ones where you typically do it one day a week over a 10-week period, and you get a certificate at the end of it.

Now, that has been clearly substantially affected by cuts. Because back in 2017 funding for the trade union education was cut essentially in half with funding only available to cover half the cost of the course as opposed to the full cost. In fact, recently it's been even further reduced, and the rest of the cost is usually down to the college that's supplying the education to cover. So that's the fundamental reason why three quarters of the colleges that used to offer these courses no longer do so. It's no longer economically viable because of these cuts.

Now to restore trade union education to the way it used to be, it's going to need two changes. (1), we need to get the restoration of the pre-2017 funding levels in place. And then (2) we then need to get the colleges to reinstate the trade union studies departments that have been lost as a result of that. So just to reassure conference and Humberside that we continue to lobby and we've done that for many years, in actual fact. The FBU has been lobbying through the TUC and other unions to address this. We work in collaboration with the TUC and others to do so. However, and you've just heard it from the other speakers, there is an alternative. The FBU education programme: and what a programme it is.

Those of you who have been to the workers' stately home up in Wortley, you'll have seen that plaque there and it says "knowledge is power" and knowledge in the hands of the working class is a power that's going to change the world. And I tell you what, that's what Lindsey McDowell is leading through the FBU, a trade union programme that is second to none, specific to our reps, right from the branch officials, right through our programme.

The feedback and reviews we are getting through these courses seriously is second to none. And soon if we carry on about this, we won't need to worry about funding because a future generation of FBU reps through our education programmes will be so inspired that they're going to lead a revolution and we will be in charge and we won't need any funding because we'll have all the money. So yeah, that's the qualification and well done to the education department. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Tam. I now put resolution 68 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call para G12, para G13. Conference, we're now returning back to section A to carry on the pay section. Okay. I now call resolution 15, Menopause and Attendance Management from the national women's committee with the amendment from Hereford and Worcester. The EC are supporting and they're supporting the amendment.

Resolution 15 MENOPAUSE AND ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT

Conference notes that many women in UK Fire and Rescue Services (UKFRSs) who are menopausal or perimenopausal experience symptoms that can require them to take time away from work through no fault of their own.

Conference understands that many UKFRSs operate sickness procedures or attendance management policies where certain triggers are met after an employee is absent from work due to sickness, for a certain period of time, or after a certain number of occasions.

Conference also understands if a woman takes sick leave due to the symptoms of menopause or perimenopause this can contribute to sickness triggers being met, meaning that women can experience sanctions or find themselves too afraid to take sick leave for fear of hitting the triggers. This can mean that they are at work when they are not feeling well enough to do their job to the best of their ability, potentially putting themselves and others at risk.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to lobby employers of all UKFRSs to remove the symptoms of menopause and perimenopause from their attendance management or sickness procedure triggers in order to make a fairer workplace.

Conference instructs that these negotiations begin immediately with a report back on progress by Conference 2026.

NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

AMENDMENT

5th paragraph, delete 'immediately' replace with 'without delay,'

HEREFORD AND WORCESTER

KERRY McCRONE (NWC):

Conference, president, moving resolution 15 Menopause and Attendance Management. Conference, menopause is a part of life. This is not something that can be avoided. This motion seeks to address the issues and concerns from our members who are going through perimenopause or menopause, or who will inevitably do so in the future.

The menopause can cause a wide range of symptoms from brain fog, heavy periods and flooding, depression, anxiety, heart palpitations, hot flushes, joint pain, extreme fatigue, many more. Every person's experience will differ. But firefighting is one of the most physically demanding professions. Imagine going through hot flashes in fire gear or either a hot compartment fire, a grass fire season.

It's hard enough for us without the physical symptoms of menopause being added on top. Can you imagine doing a night shift in a control room, not being able to leave your desk to deal with the symptoms you may be experiencing? Night sweats during a night shift, sleep disturbances, again, hard enough at the best of times without the added symptoms of menopause.

All of these symptoms add into the stress of knowing that if your symptoms are particularly bad and being too frightened to take time off work due to absence management practices that could see you hitting attendance triggers and having to go through stressful attendance management processes. This is the reality faced by many of our members.

FBU reps have supported members who have been treated unfairly by their employer simply because they're going through a completely natural process. There is quite a disparity amongst UK fire and rescue services when it comes to how managers treat those who are experiencing the symptoms of menopause and perimenopause.

Some fire and rescue services have good policies which incorporate menopause leave days such as London, which allows women 16 days of paid special leave due to the symptoms of menopause if they feel too unwell to attend work, but others have no policy with little understanding of how this can affect the people in their service.

The national women's committee feel it is extremely important there is national guidance on this and that this is applied fairly and equally across all fire and rescue services in the UK. By the EC lobbying employers to remove the symptoms of menopause from absence criteria triggers, this will significantly reduce the worry and stress about taking time off work when needed.

This time is already incredibly difficult. The least employers can do is take some of that stress away. Conference I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kerry. Does that have a seconder? Yeah.

SCOTT MacRORY (Scotland):

President, conference, seconding resolution 15 Menopause and Attendance Management. Conference, as we've just heard so eloquently from my sister in the NWC, the symptoms of menopause can be debilitating, limiting, exhausting, embarrassing, draining, and frustrating.

The list of adjectives with 'ing' is non-exhaustive. Most importantly, though, the symptoms of menopause are not normal sickness and nor should they be regarded as such. Menopause is an unavoidable phase in a woman's life, and it's disappointing to see such disparity across the UK fire and rescue services, in how it is managed and how it is understood.

Currently, a woman firefighter in London is treated completely differently from a woman firefighter in Edinburgh, even though they do the same job and are suffering from the same condition. Conference, this postcode lottery is fundamentally wrong. Attendance management processes are designed to discuss the reasons for excessive absence and to implement any measures necessary to help support the employee in the workplace.

More often than not though, these processes are used as a threat under the grey cloud of capability, and to have that hanging over a woman who's going through something entirely out of their control is, at best, inappropriate, and at worst, shameful. Conference, women suffering from perimenopause or menopause should not have to be worried about their sickness records while they suffer from an unavoidable part of life, or the threat of attendance management.

That's a fact. The environment our firefighters work in is inherently dangerous by the nature of the work we do, and this means we need to be performing at our optimal level at any moment's notice. To think there are women who undoubtedly hide their menopause symptoms and attend work when potentially unfit to do so, is terrifying, but entirely understandable.

This resolution from the NWC will go a long way towards fixing this problem and I urge you to support it. Scotland emphatically seconds. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Scott. Hereford and Worcester to move the amendment.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, moving amendment 1 and speaking in support of resolution 15 Menopause and Attendance Management. Conference, it is unacceptable that our members are being managed because of absence that is due to symptoms of menopause or perimenopause.

I have recently represented two members for exactly this reason, so on behalf of women members in Hereford and Worcester, I would like to thank the national women's committee for bringing this resolution. Conference, the amendment is only minor and was only proposed simply due to the achievability of the original wording.

I hope it speaks for itself as I would prefer to say a few words about the resolution itself. This resolution comes from the position that every member should be treated with understanding, compassion and fairness in the workplace. Across the UK fire and rescue services, our women members are being failed by outdated, unfit policies that punish them simply for going through a natural part of life.

According to a 2022 Fawcett Society report, one in 10 women in the UK will leave the workplace due to menopause-related symptoms. That's a damning statistic and one we must work to change. This resolution is a step towards that change. Our women members are taking sick leave for things like brain fog, chronic fatigue, anxiety, insomnia, or excruciating joint pain - all symptoms of menopause or perimenopause.

But instead of being supported, they hit sickness triggers and they're dragged into attendance management reviews. They are made to feel like problems, like liabilities, just for experiencing something totally natural. Conference, vote for this resolution and let's create a culture where women do not suffer in silence, where they do not fear taking time off work when they need it, where their experiences are met with support and not punitive sanctions. Thank you. Conference. I support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Neil. Does that have a seconder? Have a seconder? *Formally*. Thank you. That's open for debate. Anybody. Yep.

REBEKAH UDEN (North Wales):

President, conference, speaking in support of Motion 15 Menopause and Attendance Management. This is also a request to speak on behalf of region 8's women's committee. But also on a personal note. Our wholehearted support is felt and given to this resolution. While not all women experience symptoms of perimenopause and menopause, a significant majority do. 80 to 90% of women will experience several symptoms, with 25% experiencing severe symptoms. Women's health is quite rightly being talked about in society more and more, and menopause awareness specifically is improving and the challenges women face when experiencing symptoms at work is finally starting to be understood.

However, perimenopause and menopause are only two of women's health conditions. Our fire service policies must do more for women. Other common conditions such as endometriosis, hormonal headaches, ovarian cysts, and all the associated mental health issues, can be regularly debilitating. I myself have suffered with endometriosis for the last seven years and had four surgeries in this time, including an ectopic pregnancy.

This has left me with bladder issues and at times severe pain, which is not ideal for my job as a firefighter. Also, at the age of 36, I'm already worried about my role as a firefighter and how I will continue in this job during my menopause. Our sentiment is simply this. If the fire and rescue services really are serious about breaking down the barriers to women joining the ranks, we must stop penalising women for being women. *Applause*

This resolution will go a long way to making us feel valued, supported, and sustain a job that we love and be able to bring the best of ourselves to work without being left disadvantaged simply for being born female. Menopause, as has been pointed out before, is the body's process of stopping a female's natural way to carry and birth children. It is unavoidable.

Conference, women do incredible things. I, like many, have birthed children, I've lost a baby, I've got ongoing issues, and I will definitely reach the menopause. The least my employer can do for me and all others is give us well deserved leave when it is necessary. I support. Thank you. *Applause*

ROB LEWIS (B&EMM):

President, conference, in support of resolution 15. Conference, it is not widely known or appreciated by those that do know that Black women are three times more likely to experience menopause than white women before the age of 40, which is considered premature menopause. With the premature menopause come all the symptoms attributed to menopause that are now widely known about: hot flushes, mind fog, and night sweats. Additionally, the symptoms last longer than for those for white women. To compound the noted disparity, it is widely recognised that racial disparity exists within healthcare, resulting in Black women being less likely to receive hormone therapy, as well as medical and mental health support. All the disparities noted directly contributing to the increased need by Black women to take additional time away from work, often making Black women look lazy or a burden to employers.

Conference, we appreciate and support all actions to protect our Black women and all women who, due to no fault of their own, require additional support and understanding at work. Conference, we support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Rob. Matt.

MATT SENIOR (Avon):

Sorry?

THE PRESIDENT:

I said thanks, Rob. Matt.

MATT SENIOR (Avon):

Oh, sorry. speaking in support of this resolution. And before I start, thank you to our comrade from Wales for sharing your experiences. I've seen firsthand what a disease like endometriosis does to somebody, and I wish you every strength. *Applause*

Thanks. This is a really quick one. In our service, occupational health providers are already telling the service that menopause requires attendance trigger adjustment, or changes to shift patterns such as removal from night duty. Unfortunately, the service may be too foolish to listen. The door's open on this one, but some fire service leaders need a bit of help finding it, so just to say please executive council, just show them the way. This is a win, an easy win. Thank you. *Applause*

MARIA BUCK (LGBT+):

President, conference, living with menopause and perimenopause can be a unique and challenging experience for trans men and non-binary people. These individuals often face a combination of physical, emotional, and social challenges that are distinct from the experience by women.

For trans men and non-binary people assigned female at birth, menopause and perimenopause can occur naturally as they age or as a result of hormone therapy or surgical procedures. Those who undergo testosterone therapy may experience changes in their menstrual cycles with some seeing a reduction or complete cessation of periods.

However, they can still experience symptoms of menopause such as hot flushes, mood swings, and changes in bone density. Our significant challenge is the potential for gender dysphoria, which can be exaggerated by physical changes associated with menopause. The decrease in oestrogen levels can lead to symptoms that may feel incongruent with their gender identity causing discomfort and distress.

Additionally, there is often lack of awareness and understanding amongst services about the specific needs of trans and non-binary individuals during the stage of life leading to inadequate support overall. While the journey through menopause and perimenopause can be complex with trans men and non-binary people, with the right support and resources, they can manage their symptoms and maintain their wellbeing. We want to support this motion, and we just wanted to raise the issues that our section face. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Maria. Anybody else? No. I now put amendment to resolution 15 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against, please show. *That carries.*

I now put resolution 15 as amended to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 16 Pregnancy and Maternity Return to Work moved by the national women's committee. They have agreed to remit with the right to speak. Kerry.

Resolution 16 PREGNANCY AND MATERNITY RETURN TO WORK

Conference applauds the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) 'Fight for 52' campaign calling on fire and rescue services to implement 52 weeks full pay maternity leave. Since the launch of the campaign five fire and rescue services across the UK have implemented 52 weeks full pay for maternity leave, with many more still in negotiations.

Conference is aware that the 2024 pay agreement with the National Joint Council included a new minimum provision of 26 weeks full pay maternity leave for all UK fire and rescue services. In addition to pay, the way in which women are treated by employers whilst pregnant or on their return to work varies significantly across the UK.

Conference instructs that the Executive Council (EC), with input from the National Women's Committee, provide clear guidance to employers by updating and republishing the FBU 'Negotiating Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Rights' guidance. This is to include a fitness strategy designed specifically for pregnant employees and returning to work mothers.

Conference instructs the EC that the FBU document 'Negotiating Maternity, Paternity and Adoption' is reviewed immediately and for it to be republished by Conference 2026.

NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

KERRY McCRONE (NWC):

Conference, president, speaking on pregnancy and maternity return to work. Conference, the national women's committee's Fight for 52 weeks of maternity pay, has had great success across the country. However, pregnancy and maternity and the way in which members are treated in fire and rescue services across the UK can differ significantly.

Many members are forced on to day duty systems away from their watches and having to find additional childcare with the financial implications of this, just because they fall pregnant. The Grey Book states that pregnant employees should be able to follow their watch duty pattern. But despite this, we find our reps time after time having to represent women to get to this position.

Most women we represent who have to go through the whole grievance procedure to get what is already agreed by the NJC find this so stressful and upsetting that they find themselves having to take time off work due to stress, ruining what should be a happy time and putting in their own and their unborn child's health at risk due to stress.

This is also reflected when members want to return to work following maternity leave. For those fire and rescue services who have not implemented 52 weeks maternity leave, members who have been forced back to work early and who continue to breastfeed often find themselves in a fight with their employer to remain on shift in a non-operational capacity.

The Grey Book already states in Part D, Maternity Childcare and Dependency 0.7. *"Pregnant employees will normally remain on their watch or in their department unless it is deemed inappropriate following an individual risk assessment."* And in point 22, *"The employee shall have the right to return to the job in which they were employed under their original contract of employment, and on the terms and conditions not less favourable than those that would have been applicable if they had not been absent."*

However, despite this, pregnant women and returning mothers find themselves time after time caught up in grievances where their employer tries to force them onto an alternative shift pattern, usually a five-day week. This resolution sought for the EC with the national women's committee to provide guidance to employers by updating and republishing the FBU's negotiating maternity paternity and adoption rights guidance.

This was to include a fitness strategy designed specifically for pregnant employees and returning to work mothers. This will enable our employers and reps to have up-to-date accurate information and takes the stress away from pregnant and returning mothers, which should have been a happy time and not marred by unnecessary stress and upset. Conference, we would like to remit this resolution with the assurances that the assistant general secretary has given us that he will raise the above concerns at the National Joint Council meeting in June. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kerry. AGS to give the assurances

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

More than happy to. And thanks, NWC, for both bringing the resolution but also remitting it. And the reason we asked for it to be remitted was simply because it's this union's policy, it's this conference policy to try and achieve any uplift or any clarifications through national sectoral collective bargaining.

We felt this was trying to localise that issue. And again, we applaud the NWC for remitting it following the conversation. But I just want to request that brigade secretaries take an avid interest in this subject and where there are attempts locally to circumnavigate the provisions already in the Grey Book that you register that failure to agree, that local dispute and you escalate it to the level of joint secretaries where there will be clarification given.

I will also and Steve will also raise it in the national joint secretaries' meetings to make sure that we are absolutely affirmed to the position as set out in the Grey Book. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. I now call resolution 20 Adoption Leave Provision and Pay, move by Northumberland. The EC give qualified support.

Resolution 20 ADOPTION LEAVE PROVISION AND PAY

Conference notes that there is currently a disparity between adoption leave and maternity leave, with adoption leave pay covering 39 weeks of the 52 week entitlement at 90% of an individual's average weekly earnings for the first 6 weeks and £184.03 or 90% of an individual's average weekly earnings (whichever is lower) for the remaining 33 weeks.

Conference believes that the barriers that these financial disparities between maternity and adoption leave pose for both couples and individuals looking to start a family through adoption, means that for some adoption is not a viable option.

Conference is aware that in 2024 the rate of adoption for same sex couples was 20% of the total number of adopted children in the UK. For those individuals and couples where the traditional means of starting a family are not practicable, this disproportionately disadvantages them.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to explore the possibility of bringing adoption leave provisions and pay in line with maternity provisions and pay as set out within the Grey Book and report back to Conference 2026.

NORTHUMBERLAND

HANNAH MARSHALL (Northumberland):

President, conference, I know it's the very end of the day, but I really hope I can engage everybody with our resolution. I move this resolution to address the current disparity between adoption leave and maternity leave within the Grey Book. Firstly, I want to thank the NWC and every single person involved in the Fight for 52.

The Fight for 52 has paved the way for us to start having wider conversations about parental leave, IVF, fertility and adoption to ensure that all of our members have the appropriate support that they need to start a family - financially and with time at home with their child. I'm a gay woman and I carry a genetic cancer-causing mutation, which means that a successful journey of IVF for me is very unlikely. Therefore, adoption may be the only option for me to start a family of my own. However, it is still not a viable option for me and many other members due to the lack of financial support from the employer.

Adoption leave is 39 weeks of the 52-week entitlement. An adoptive parent will currently receive six weeks' pay at 90%, meaning our members don't even receive a single day of full pay. Following that, they'll be entitled to 33 weeks' statutory adoption leave at £184.03 per week or 90% of their average weekly earnings, whichever is lower.

The number of children being adopted in the UK has declined every year since 2018-19, with the cost of living crisis, cited as a major contributory factor to this decline. This resolution helps to ensure that our members who want to start the adoption process can do so without the worry of financial hardship.

We recognise that the Fight for 52 brought forward issues around occupational hazards and the importance of breastfeeding and the other physical aspects of pregnancy and childbirth. This resolution focuses on the experiences of those in the adoption process and reflects the reality of the life-changing transition of becoming a parent.

The adoption process is a long, complex and emotional journey that can last anything from six months to several years. From application to background checks, assessments, approval, to then hopefully being matched with a child. Children in the care system are some of the most vulnerable in our society. Many have experienced significant adversity and trauma, and their relationships with caregivers have often been inconsistent, unpredictable, and unsafe.

Children in the care system can present with complex learning, physical and neurodevelopment needs. Therefore, when adoption is considered, we need to ensure that children have the opportunity to experience good enough and consistent care, and are able to have the time they need to settle into their new family system and establish their new safe and secure home.

Our current adoption leave does not go far enough to ensure that these children have that stable start. It also sends a message to our members that their experience as an adoptive parent is lesser than the experience of a maternal parent. This resolution can provide better, more inclusive and diverse support for all primary carers in our fire service, where shift work already presents a challenge to family life.

Conference, we ask you support this resolution to help build a fit-for-purpose adoption leave policy for all. No exceptions, no disparity. In the FBU, we talk about how much equality matters to us, but often our policies and procedures don't reflect that. This resolution helps all of our members on their journey to becoming a parent, no matter how they get there. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Hannah. Does that have a seconder? Yep.

MATTHEW BLACK (LGBT+):

President, conference, seconding this motion of adoption leave provision and pay. Conference, when someone says adoption, I react like a meerkat, ears up, full alert and I could talk about the subject for hours, but don't worry, I've only got a few minutes.

My husband and I adopted two little boys when they were four and five. They're now 15 and 16. So we've traded sleepless nights and tantrums for hormones and Wi-Fi arguments. But I want to tell you behind the curtain, there'll be people here who have adopted or have been adopted. Unless you've been through the process, it's hard to grasp just how intense, emotional, and frankly exhausting this is.

And I just want to say this is not a comparison to maternity, I'm just speaking purely on adoption. Adoption is not a fairytale process. In fact, it starts in sort of two intense parts. First, you get the approval stage. You're asked to unpack your entire life, finances, trauma, relationships, even your dog gets a profile.

Think about it. It's like your own episode of *This Is Your Life*. And then comes matching, being introduced to the children who might become yours. Emotional doesn't even come to cover it? Sorry, I'm thinking about my boys. *Applause*

Once matched, you start a two-week bridging period. You gradually take over care from the foster carers, learning routines, building trust, step by step. Then one day they move, and that's when adoption leave starts. But let's be honest, children aren't left at the orphanage door anymore. Today, most adopted children have been removed from birth families due to neglect, abuse, or unsafe environments.

They've already experienced trauma and it shows. But forget visions of a cute family picnic. When you first get them, you're advised to isolate with your children to bond. It's too much to introduce them to everyone at once, all your friends and family. It's often called the honeymoon period. Everything's lovely until the trauma kicks in, and that's when the real work starts. Sleepless nights, grief, fear, trauma responses, and a desperate need for stability, love, and time. Scientific and psychological studies tell us that adverse experience, even in the womb, has lifelong impacts.

Whether you adopt a child, toddler, or baby, you are parenting through trauma, and some challenges don't surface until they hit school age, or even later. You become a two-minute dad in my case at school, you got a "excuse me, I've just got two minutes". You're educating not just your children, but teachers, family, friends, and yourself.

You're attending meeting after meeting, learning about ACEs, which is Adverse Childhood Experiences, which is like asking a child in a wheelchair to walk upstairs. And that's what we expect when you send ACE-affected children to operate in schools and society without support. And it's adoptive parents who become their champions, constantly advocating, learning and fighting for understanding.

And that's why six weeks' statutory pay isn't enough. It's not even enough to catch your breath, never mind build the safe, loving environment your child desperately needs. It takes time to recognise the needs, time to strategise, time to build attachment, trust and stability, and time costs money. In 2024, it's had it said, 20% of UK adoptions were by same-sex couples.

For many of us, adoption is the only route to family. When adoption leave doesn't match maternity leave, it's not just a policy gap, it's a barrier, one that disproportionately affects the LGBT+ people. Conference, the reason I share this personal story isn't because it's unique. It's because it's not.

It's a snapshot of what adoptive parents are dealing with in your watches, your stations, and in your communities. It's about recognising the extra needs these children and their families carry. Adoption leave and pay must reflect the reality. Please support this motion. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Matthew. That's now open for debate.

KERRY McCRONE (NWC):

President, conference, supporting resolution 20 on Adoption Leave Provision and Pay, calling for alignment of adoption leave provisions, and pay for those on leave as outlined in the Grey Book. This resolution addresses a pressing issue, the financial disparity between adoption and maternity leave.

This discrepancy creates barriers for individuals and couples considering adoption, potentially making an unviable option for some. In 2024, same-sex couples accounted for 20% of all adoptions in the UK, highlighting the need for equitable support for all families. However, many same-sex couples face additional challenges due to the current leave provisions.

Firefighters are exposed to hazardous chemicals and physical stresses that can adversely affect reproductive health. Studies have shown that exposure to toxic substances in smoke and combustion byproducts can lead to reduced fertility and other reproductive health issues. Our members should not be further penalised at a time when they need our support the most.

We need to ensure we grant them the financial viability to consider adoption. As we know, the statutory adoption pay is often insufficient to cover living expenses, further combined with the financial challenges faced by adoptive parents. Aligning adoption leave provisions and pay with those for maternity leave would not only ensure fairness, but also support the wellbeing of adopted children by allowing their new parents to spend crucial bonding time without financial strain.

I urge the executive council to explore this possibility and report back to conference in 2026. By doing so, we take a significant step forward to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all families, regardless of how they have come together. Conference, we support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kerry.

STEVE MATTINSON (Cumbria):

Conference, president, Northumberland, I must apologise. If I had seen this, I would have made an amendment. Locally, I know at least two brigades in this room that have had to deal with guardianship, which doesn't fall under adoption, where a member of our service, and I think Lancs, both had to take three months off unpaid.

So I'd like to see the term guardianship in that because that is unpaid, often forced upon by a member of family not able to look after the child properly and they take it in. Got to incorporate anywhere up to 11-year-old into their family with no time off from work, no paid benefits, and I just think we need to be mindful of that as well. Conference, I support. *Applause*

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, speaking in support of resolution 20. Comrades, on 7 May 2019, we brought Oscar home from the foster carer he had lived with for the previous five months. The week later I attended my first FBU conference here in Blackpool, returning home on a Friday in time to celebrate Oscar's first birthday that Saturday.

For the next 10 months, we lived on decreased wages whilst my partner took the time off from work. This was the decision we made together and the bond we formed was cemented. Oscar may be adopted, but he is my son. Then Covid lockdown hit, and whilst it was a horrific time for everyone, one of the impacts it had for us was that we got that time to strengthen the bond.

Oscar and Naomi forged their brother and sister relationship with all the issues that brings, and if you have any siblings or you have more than one child, I'm sure you know what I'm talking about. Comrades. I don't want another global epidemic to allow adoptive parents to be able to bond fully with their children.

This resolution is a much better way to go about it. The adoption process is difficult. Matt put it much more eloquently than I could, but your life is put under the microscope. Every relationship you have and every relationship you've had is looked at. I had to provide details of ex-partners with contact details, and they got in touch with them to make sure that I was suitable to be an adoptive father. It takes its toll.

Conference, Oscar turned seven last Sunday. He's a beautiful, loving and funny child who loves sharks, and Oscar has this message for you. Firstly, stop polluting the oceans; it's killing the sharks he loves. *(Laughter)* And secondly, support this resolution. We support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lee. AGS to give the qualification.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Hannah. Matt, thank you for that. We hear you, you nailed your speeches. Look, before I get into the qualification again, I'm going to take a liberty and just say that I've got a close comrade in this room that's going through some issues in this space.

And I just want to be clear, he has our solidarity. The qualification is that there is some movement in Westminster in relation to some of these things, and we're going to keep a close eye on that and ensure that when that move happens, if that move happens, we'll make sure we capitalise on it with the national employers.

But even if that move doesn't happen, we're going to make this a firm part of the work we do around pay and conditions over the next year. And look, Steve, we'll give you the assurance that will include guardianship. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. I now put resolution 20 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 22 Fitness Training Facilities Provision For Retained Duty System RDS Employees moved by Avon. The EC give qualified support. Avon.

Resolution 22 FITNESS TRAINING FACILITIES PROVISION FOR RETAINED DUTY SYSTEM (RDS) EMPLOYEES

Conference notes the Grey Book Part B – Occupational health, General Principles, paragraph 1, states;

“Authorities are encouraged to provide facilities to enable employees to maintain and/or improve their levels of fitness as part of an overall health and fitness culture.”

Conference understands that wholetime and Retained Duty System (RDS) firefighters are required to meet high physical standards to perform their duties safely and effectively. While wholetime firefighters are usually provided fitness training time during shifts, RDS firefighters often receive no equivalent support. This creates an unfair disparity, despite both roles having the same physical demands and fitness testing requirements.

Conference believes that this could be addressed in a range of different ways for example;

- *RDS employees being able to claim for time spent fitness training on station*
- *financial contribution to gym memberships where suitable training facilities are not provided in the workplace.*

Conference further believes that by properly supporting firefighter fitness, UK Fire and Rescue Services (UKFRSs) can reduce injury risks, improve performance, and promote well-being across the workforce.

Conference instructs the Executive Council, in order to increase fairness and operational effectiveness, to demand that UKFRSs provide adequate fitness provision for all employees subject to fitness testing, regardless of their duty system.

AVON

MATT SENIOR (Avon):

President, conference, moving resolution 22. This resolution is about people being valued and it's about culture. So the Grey Book mentions an overall health and fitness culture. How can you have a health and fitness culture if you don't provide provision to your employees for their health and their fitness?

And I think it is patently obvious what this is about and how employees are valued. This came about because a retained station in our brigade were told that they had to move their own self-funded kit out of the station because they're redeveloping it, and when they're done, there won't be any space for it to go back in.

Various solutions were suggested, all dismissed because of cost, but we'll continue that fight and I think eventually we can win it. I note the amendment from Scotland, and I do wholeheartedly agree with the bullet point. I just wish they'd put "add a third" instead of deleting the second. The second is intended as a potential alternative or a potential interim measure whilst we get some of these things sorted out in our brigades.

But I totally agree. Suitable training facilities for all employees should be in place always for our RDS colleagues. Not just because they deserve it, but because they've earned it. We move. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Matt. Does that have a seconder?

JAMES SALT (NRC):

President, conference. Just a few short words in support, and thanking Avon and Matt for raising this. Just wanted to highlight to conference just a few of the additional challenges that we have of fitness facilities for retained duty firefighters. There may not be any alternative facilities for keeping fit within the five-minute turn in turnout area. There may not be a gym in the patch. When people are on call, which tends to be when they've got free time, they can't go for a run or a walk unless they just do laps with the fire station. Can't take your dog for a walk while you're on call, unless if you get a call you got to take the dog with you or tie it up outside the station.

People are balancing primary employment alongside being on call, so the evenings may be busy with drill nights, fire calls, etc. Despite these challenges, and probably many more that I've not remembered just to write down and to share with you today, retained firefighters still have to achieve the same fitness standards, so any recognition and support of barriers to maintaining fitness for retained duty firefighters is welcomed by the national retained committee, and for that reason, we support. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, James. That's open for debate.

GUY LAWES (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, standing in support of resolution 22 Fitness Training Facilities for RDS. The reasons for meeting physical standards for RDS firefighters should be fairly self-evident. Not only the contractual requirement, but an operational necessity as well as a comradely responsibility. And that really should be enough to support this resolution. But earlier this year in Durham, we were made aware of the attitudes of some members of this conference, which we feel it's necessary must be addressed.

Throughout the course of my firefighting career, I've attended countless fires, both wholetime and retained. And we've always had a bit of a running joke on the two retained stations that I've worked on between the dual contractors that it's always hotter in retained fires. Don't know why. Never really had a reason for that, but it was brought to us by our training department in Durham not that long ago that potentially there is actually a reason for that.

As firefighters, I think we're probably all aware that we don't attend as many fully developed fires as we used to. We either get there soon enough that we're there in the growth stage, or we get there later once it's started to decay. But with the retained, you add on five minutes, you add on six minutes. Retained firefighters do tend to turn up to fires when it's at its hottest, so the necessity for them to have that physical capability is definitely at least equal to that of their wholetime counterparts. It's paramount. The equipment in order to be able to maintain it is essential, and as it's also for work, it being paid for, I think is a no-brainer.

The lack of parity is quite clear in this. In recent conferences we've heard from a couple of other services, Scotland, no washing machines, no toilets, in some cases no water. Cleveland, a brand new policy for DECON, but washing machines not provided to everybody. It's not just fitness equipment. There is a mismatch in parity between RDS and the wholetime.

The RDS are not second class firefighters and they shouldn't be treated as such. Durham support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Guy. Any more? No. Mark Rowe to give the qualification.

MARK ROWE (National Officer):

Thanks, president. It is slight qualification, but it is support. The executive council do support, obviously. So again, it's the achievability angle. We can demand it. And it is something that we're going to raise in the ministerial advisory group. The points that the comrades have just made will be raised directly with the ministers. So in the quote it refers to "provide facilities", line one of the quote refers to the equipment, not the time to undertake it, is our understanding of that. So para 3 refers to training time during shifts.

And again, the executive council want to look at that in some detail. Some stations don't have the space, some retained stations, for that to be undertaken. So it may well be that gym passes are the best solution to that, because what we don't want to do is push fire and rescue services into cobbling together some sort of old gym, some loose weights that the likes of me used to train on in the station many years ago.

We've got our DECON campaign. That's not something we want. So yes, absolutely support and look at that. They're just some minor qualifications. Thanks, president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Mark. I now put resolution 22 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Right conference, we are about finished for today. However, following the great debate today, Standup to Racism is hosting a fringe downstairs in Imperial 3 at 6pm to discuss how we take on the threat of Reform UK and can confront the rise of the far right. This will be followed at 7pm by our fringe trade unionists for trans rights, which will explore how the FBU can foster inclusive workplaces for all in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling, which is trying to roll back the rights of trans people in Britain.

So please if you can make those, attend them. That will do for today. Well done. We've done a great day. Conference is adjourned, thank you.

Conference adjourned

MORNING SESSION

THE PRESIDENT:

Morning, conference. Come to order before I get the gavel out.
Fantastic. I now call Phil Millar, the chair of standing orders committee.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Thank you, president. Conference, can you please turn to your programme of business and go to page 11, so between F15 and resolution 67, insert emergency resolution 6, Labour Disaffiliation from Merseyside. And then if you can turn to page 13 after section E1 Introduction, insert emergency resolution 8, No LGB without the T. And then if you turn to page 14, resolution 82 has been remitted with the right to speak.

And then can I ask you to turn to your delegate list for those that have them?
So region 1 Scotland, remove Andrew Southward and replace with Iain Ballantyne.
Region 3 Cleveland remove Nick Cain and replace with Davy Howe.
Region 4 West Yorkshire remove Martyn Bairstow and replace with Mathew Herrin.
Region 7 West Midlands remove Carl Goode and replaced with John Sims.
Region 10 London remove Corneil Power and replace with Vicky Shaw.
Region 11 Kent remove Rob Parkin and replace with Tim Green.

So conference, when the stewards come in this morning, there was a number of posters and items distributed around the conference hall. They were stuck to things and placed in places. Can I be very clear? Nothing, and I mean nothing, goes on this conference floor, regardless of what it is, unless it's been through standing orders. Can that be agreed? *Agreed*. Thank you, president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Phil. Is that report agreed? *Agreed*.

Thanks. Conference. We must stress whatever items you want distributing, it must go through the standing orders committee. There may be some literature out there that none of us agree with apart from one person, and they're coming in the middle of the night and put it all out. So we got to make sure nothing goes on the conference floor unless it's been through the standing orders committee.

Can I also make sure all your phones are on silent please? I just heard a couple of bing bongs. Whoever you are, we're watching you.

Okay. Good morning, conference and as Phil said, we are first going back to para F15 Affiliations to take emergency resolution 6. So I now call emergency resolution 6 Labour Disaffiliation moved by Merseyside. The EC are opposing. Merseyside.

Emergency Resolution 6 LABOUR DISAFFILIATION

Conference notes that the Labour Party has been back in government for just under a year and in that time has made some decisions that have not aligned with the values of the Fire Brigades Union.

This conference believes that Sir Kier Starmer's speech on Monday 12th May where he talked about the United Kingdom (UK) becoming, "...an island of strangers.." is divisive and could lead to issues for minority groups.

Conference is further concerned by reports that were circulated in early May 2025, regarding research jointly conducted by Palestinian Youth Movement, Progressive International and Workers for a Free Palestine, which claims that thousands of military items, including munitions have been exported by the UK to Israel, between September 2024 and March 2025, despite the UK suspending key arms export licenses in September 2024. The suspension was due to a clear risk that Israel may use the arms to commit serious breaches of international humanitarian law.

Conference believes that the Labour Party no longer reflects the beliefs and values of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and therefore instructs the Executive Council to immediately begin the process to disaffiliate the FBU from the Labour Party.

MERSEYSIDE

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, moving emergency resolution 6, Labour Disaffiliation. Comrades, seven minutes is not long enough to me to stand here and list the many reasons why this Labour government have let us all down - as firefighters, as voters, and as decent people. So please forgive me if this speech misses out anything that has affected you, your families, and your comrades.

The Labour Party was founded on the back of trade unions. We should be their lifeblood. *Applause*

Yet, under this Labour leadership, we've been marginalised, worked against and betrayed. MPs forbidden to join picket lines under fear of being thrown out of the party, our own fellow FBU members unceremoniously kicked out of the party that they have worked to grow and support for decades, by a leadership that don't hold even a shred of decency and true meaning of what being a socialist and a real Labour Party member should mean. Conference, we were asked to judge this Labour government on its first hundred days in power. Then we were told even before then, even before they were voted in, in this very room, that 100 days was not even enough time to get the keys to their offices. So we had to give them a year. Conference, that year is nearly up and the results are in. We've been failed by this Labour Party. The two-child benefit cap, literally taking food out of the mouths of families and children who dare to have over three children. The Winter Fuel allowance. Cut. Yes, they appear to have U-turned on that yesterday, but we've had that reported through social media and the left wing press that this sadistic policy led to people taking their own lives because of the fear of not knowing whether they could pay the bills and survive another winter.

The Green Paper on Pathways to Work, which will review personal independence payments, the PIP reform. Comrades, this repulsive policy is estimated to remove PIP from 370,000 current recipients losing their entitlement when their cases are reviewed. Another 430,000 future recipients not receiving PIP payments altogether, and additional changes to the universal credit scheme, meaning that around 2.25 million people, existing recipients, potentially losing an average of £500 per year.

Conference, let us be clear, £500 a year for those people may be the difference between life and death, as some of the most vulnerable people in our society are forced into absolute poverty. Our own general secretary rightly called out on social media when he called these attacks a Thatcherite attack on the welfare state.

The Green Paper also talks about giving the government the ability to check the bank account of claimants. This is the original Big Brother that George Orwell talked about. Comrades, on the Orwellian calendar it is not quite 1984, but it's December 1983 and the clock's ticking.

Comrades, Palestine. This Labour Party stance on the absolute and unequivocal genocidal attacks by Israel has been abhorrent. The pandering by Starmer, Lammy, and their acolytes to the Zionist butchers, is something that I simply cannot bear, none of us should be able to bear, and especially when we see, *Applause* the mangled bodies of babies and children who have been forced from their homes and then from the hospitals where they were being treated and then bombed in the tents in safe zones by munitions that we were told the UK had stopped supplying to Israel in September last year.

But a recent report shows that over 8,000 packages labelled as munitions have been delivered from the UK to Israel since the export licences were supposedly suspended. Comrades, how can we continue like this? The "island of strangers" speech by Starmer that we discussed yesterday, and his echoing of Enoch Powell, which the AGS rightly called out on social media saying that the strangers exist within government, not in our NHS, not in our communities. That is all correct. Comrades, Labour promised the Hillsborough families by 15 April 2025, that a Hillsborough law will be in place that addresses all of the points that the families have raised and makes the assurances that are desperately needed to make sure that the shambolic acts taken out by government after the 1989 disaster never happen again, and no other families had to go through that. 97 of my comrades died as a result of that, and their families still do not have the justice that they need.

Comrades, this resolution does not say we cannot work with the good people who still remain in Labour, and there are still some good people in Labour. I work with some of them, I work with some really good MPs in Liverpool and Merseyside, and I will continue to work with them. Even if we disaffiliate, we can still all do that, but the leadership of this Labour Party is rotten, and we should not give money to them anymore. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Lee. Does that have a seconder? Yep.

SASHA HITCHINS (West Midlands):

President, conference, seconding Merseyside's, emergency resolution on Labour Disaffiliation. In 2015, the delegation from West Midlands voted against the Reaffiliation to the Labour Party. The delegates, of course, had their own personal views, but took the overwhelming position from our brigade committee and voted in the way our members expected them to.

As I stand here today, that position remains. We recognise the importance that the introduction of the Employment Rights Bill will have, along with the repealing of the 2016 Trade Union Act and the Strikes Minimum Service Levels Act not only for our members, but for the wider Labour movement.

However, since coming into power, Labour have also refused to remove the two-child benefit cap, one of the easiest and most effective ways to reduce child poverty that would've seen a real difference to a huge part of our membership. They removed the whip from MPs calling for this. They have repeatedly attacked the most vulnerable members of our society with the removal of the Winter Fuel allowance and the introduction of the benefit cuts for the disabled. In Birmingham, we have a Labour-run council supported by central government. They have proposed to slash the wages of bin workers who are affiliated to Labour and are trying to force union members to accept an unacceptable deal that will impact their income and ability to support their families for the rest of their lives.

Following the introduction of the White Paper on restoring control over the immigration system, Labour have shown that they are more interested in chasing swing votes by parroting the language and ideas of the far right than sticking to traditional trade union and Labour principles. All of this has happened under the backdrop of continued austerity and a below inflation increase in central government funding to an already stretched and breaking fire service. They are failing to please any section of the electorate and will likely become one of the most unpopular governments in British history.

The position this Labour government have taken in relation to the genocide and ethnic cleansing in Palestine, something that we are all watching in real time on our phones and in the media, is something that we cannot, should not, must not let pass without consequence. *Applause*

Let's imagine that we didn't reaffiliate in 2015. Imagine with all of that, that's been said an emergency resolution was in front of you here today to reaffiliate to Labour. What would we all choose? Would we be clambering to get back into the room with them, to sit round a table with the very people that have caused so much pain to our members and our members' families? For the members in the West Midlands that have family and friends in Palestine, we support the disaffiliation from Labour.

For the members in the West Midlands that are seeing devastating cuts to their own family, we support the disaffiliation from the Labour Party. For the members in the West Midlands that will suffer from the lack of funding being provided to the fire service, we support the disaffiliation from the Labour Party. For the bin workers in Birmingham who are being asked to lose thousands of pounds and being told by Keir Starmer that they're the ones that must give in, we support the disaffiliation from the Labour Party. Support the resolution. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Sasha. That's now open for debate. Open for debate. Yep. Like London buses. Davy.

DAVY HOWE (Cleveland):

First time I've ever been glad to get up here first! *Applause*

Conference, president, speaking in opposition to emergency resolution 6. Conference, if this was personal, I'd support the emergency resolution all day long. I'm one of the expelled. I was expelled by Starmer's Labour Party for ironically liking a tweet from a Merseyside community group, but this isn't personal. This is about what's best for our union now. Conference, some of you in the room might be old enough to remember how many times Cleveland has stood on reaffiliation and disaffiliation - far too many times on both sides of the argument. Honestly, this is the thing that's followed me throughout my whole conference career. And that tells me something. It tells me that political engagement and power and influence is so important to our union, more now than ever. To put it simply, we absolutely a hundred percent agree with the sentiment and the reasons behind bringing the resolution. But we now have a foot in the door after 14 long years. Conference, don't slam the door in our own faces. We oppose. *Applause*

ANDY MURRAY (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, speaking in opposition to emergency resolution 6. I condemn a large number of the abhorrent positions and policies that the Labour Party has taken that ultimately attacks the most vulnerable in society. I understand and sympathise wholeheartedly with the intent of this resolution. However, we cannot meaningfully challenge any of these issues or policies from outside of the rooms where the debates are happening. We must be at the table to hold Labour and Keir Starmer to account. Lee has quite rightly and passionately spoken, moving, seconding, and speaking on many of the resolutions that we've passed. This resolution will undermine the ability of our EC to negotiate and enact those resolutions. We cannot remove the bargaining power that we currently have. We must represent our members' best interests in every decision that is made at conference. We cannot in good conscience say that removing our bargaining position at such a critical time in the discussions over pay and the role will benefit our members.

We must hold the Labour Party to account in the strongest of ways. But we cannot disaffiliate to do this. We ask that conference opposes this resolution. We oppose. *Applause*

ANDY WARREN (London):

President, conference, speaking in opposition. Despite speaking in opposition, I'm not going to stand here and tell you that this Labour government is a great thing for workers. It's not. Their immigration policy is racist and inhumane, their cuts to welfare will kill people. They're complicit in genocide, in Gaza.

But they have done some good things. We're feeding into the spending review and then in his opening address, the president talked about the Employment Rights Bill and sure, that's good, but even with that, the government is now rowing back on the repeal of the 50% threshold. But, conference, you can think all of that and still oppose this motion. The Labour Party is a part of the trade union movement. That's not a relationship based on values or how nice the Labour brand is. It's a fact that's rooted in history and class politics. There's always been a fight between the trade unions and the members on one side and the managers and professional politicians on the other who run the party. That's always been the case and that was also the case, let's be honest, conference, under Jeremy Corbyn, on questions like free movement and closing detention centres. So it's not new. That means the Labour Party is a site of struggle, and it's a site of struggle where we have a duty to fight and to bring our weight to bear on the party. That's more than having a seat at the table, that's about holding Labour's feet to the fire. Why would we quit a party that our movement founded without even having a proper industrial fight? We are no strangers to negotiating with reluctant people. And we need to treat Labour the way we treat our employers, mobilising our members, building leverage, breaking the industrial peace, bringing together a coordinated industrial campaign to restore pay with coordinated strike action if necessary.

If we wanted to break from Labour, let's not do it like this, as an emergency resolution, as a spasm in a conference hall, and with no alternative strategy. We need a major escalation in class struggle in this country. And a serious alternative to the rotten Labour leadership and to Reform. But that begins with an industrial and political fight, not with walking out into the wilderness. I oppose. *Applause*

CHRIS COOK (Tyne and Wear):

Conference, president, speaking in opposition to emergency resolution 6 on the Labour Disaffiliation. Honestly, Merseyside, I completely get it and if this was personal, I would be up here pushing the disaffiliation, but unfortunately it's not. It's about our members.

We've had a pay debate where the fire minister himself has stood up here and more or less given us some assurances and we'd be crazy to come away from that. I think, yes, Keir Starmer is no friend of the trade union movement. But the MPs and the councillors on the ground that we work with on a daily basis, who hold our values and our movement, the likes of Kate Osborne, Emma Lewell-Buck and councillor Joanne Chapman, these are the people, they are making these things happen.

And I get that they're pushed against Keir Starmer. For me, I was done when Keir Starmer said that Margaret Thatcher made meaningful change. At that point, I thought that's me done. *Applause*

But I'm up here to represent the members. When I go back into my brigade and I've got to look them in the eye and I say, yeah, we voted in opposition for this. It's because of pay. It's because of that, that we oppose. Thank you. *Applause*

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, speaking in support of emergency resolution number 6, Labour Disaffiliation from Merseyside. Conference, I haven't really prepared a speech on this one. I'd just like to read from the FBU website the reasons that we gave for reaffiliation back in 2015.

So there's a statement from the then general secretary Matt Wrack reads, *"Firefighters recognise that the Labour Party has changed for the better since the election of Jeremy Corbyn, who has given our members and supporters hope that we can shift the political debate in favour of working people. We have a Labour party leader and shadow chancellor who are vehemently opposed to austerity, who are ready to fight for a fair alternative that doesn't attack the living standards, livelihoods and hard won rights of working people."*

Conference, I want to ask you to ask yourselves, do we still have that position? Does that still exist? Do we still have a Labour Party that will not attack and will stand by working people? Is the Labour Party standing by working people when they instruct their own MPs not to visit picket lines, to show solidarity to striking workers?

Are they supporting working people and our comrades in Palestine, when they're supplying arms to Israel that are being used in Gaza? Are they supporting working people when they cut the two-child benefit cap and suspending MPs who voted against it? When they use the far right language, specifically echoing the comments of Enoch Powell's, Rivers of Blood speech? Cuts to winter fuel payments, forcing 100,000 pensioners into relative fuel poverty. Conference, are they supporting working people when they turn their backs on the WASPI Women? Conference, I ask you to support this resolution. Thank you, *Applause*

BEN CURSON (Nottinghamshire):

President, conference, first time conference, first time speaking. *Applause* Last year, brother Brendan Woodhouse, on behalf of Nottinghamshire, brought a disaffiliation motion to this very conference on the backdrop of relentless Tory attacks, cuts and contempt of the working people. Since then, the political landscape has dramatically changed. Thankfully, the Tories now feel like a distant memory.

Unfortunately, though Reform UK has swiftly emerged to fill the void, become a serious and present danger, not just to politics, not just to decency, but to our movement and to our members. Let's be clear, if we want to win political battles, we must fight them in the political arena.

I will be echoing some of what has already been said this week. Sir Keir Starmer isn't the Labour leader that we dreamed of. He isn't even the Labour leader that many of us wanted. But, conference, the Labour Party is bigger than one man. The Labour movement is bigger than any single politician because, at the moment, we are Labour. We are the movement. We are a socialist union born from hard times. We have been tested time and time again.

And time and time again we have prevailed. In 2024, the Labour Party won 411 seats, up by 209 from 2019. The Tories crashed, losing 244 seats, now holding just 121. Reform UK. Who are they? Just five MPs in parliament. But look what's happened now. In 2025 Reform UK has won 677 council seats and representation across all 23 councils that were contested.

They now also hold majorities across 10 councils, including Lancashire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Durham, Lincolnshire, and Staffordshire. Conference, three of those counties are in my region. One of them is my brigade, my home. We are under attack.

I want to talk about Nottinghamshire because that's not just a name on a map to me.

It's where I serve, fight, and stand side by side with members of this union. In 2017, we faced brutal cuts. We were faced with losing fire appliances. Alex Norris, now our fire minister, stood with us. He supported us outside Stockhill fire station. In 2019, we were back there again. Same place, same fight, same Tory agenda. Once again, Alex Norris was with us. That fire station still has two fire appliances today. To Nottinghamshire, that matters.

We now have something that we haven't had in years, a fire minister who is a genuine ally, a Labour MP in a position to influence central government. Not someone making empty promises in opposition, but someone delivering in government. We finally have someone who understands our struggle and stands with us when it matters.

So if not Labour, who? What party can we genuinely all stand behind, united, with the same agenda, same ideologies, same alliance? So conference, let me be absolutely clear. We cannot in good conscience support this resolution at the moment. We do not see a credible alternative to the Labour Party in our fight against the far right. Disaffiliation may feel principled, but it won't protect jobs, it won't save fire stations and it won't stop the rise of hate and division in our communities. Conference. I urge you, vote with your heads, do what is right, not what is easy.

Conference, Nottinghamshire opposes this resolution. *Applause*

HARRY BRANT (Leicestershire):

President, conference, speaking in opposition of emergency resolution 6 brought by Merseyside. Conference, it may appear from the first part of this speech that I support this resolution, but it'll become clearer later why I do not. The Labour Party in its current guise is not the political party that made me fall in love with politics.

The Halcyon days of a dream of a socialist utopia under Jeremy Corbyn are now long gone. That dream, conference, was just that, a dream, a long shot, and if we wanted to achieve government under Labour, we needed to move to the middle ground.

This middle ground are taking winter fuel payments off our pensioners, arming Israel in their genocide in Gaza, and robbing our disabled of much needed benefits. It wasn't the middle ground I anticipated or voted for. However, throughout this conference, chinks of light are appearing at the end of a dark tunnel. Our president has a seat on the National Executive of the party, and our general secretary has a direct line into the now dedicated fire minister.

Up and down our country, we face the uprising populous explosion of Reform.

We need to stop them in their tracks. From inside the tent we can guide, pressure, lobby our ministers, MPs and councillors into our way of thinking, lighting the path ahead. From the outside, we are an isolated voice shouting from the sidelines, critique that isn't heard and is lost. Our support and affiliation to the Labour Party should never be taken for granted by them or by us. It should always be up for debate. And at this time, under a new government department and a dedicated fire minister, a new general secretary, and a mandate from this conference towards progress, walking away now would harm our fight and our cause beyond repair. Leicestershire opposes. *Applause*

MATT SENIOR (Avon):

President, conference, speaking in opposition to the emergency resolution. I really should have gone up first. There's nothing left to say. So I'll curtail this a little bit. My first speech was about the Labour Party about two years ago.

It's got worse, not better. There's a lot of talk about being inside the tent, a lot of talk about using the position we have and not going into the wilderness. And I understand the sentiment, but I really struggle at this point to see what good we can do inside what's basically a vessel for clapped-out dead neoliberal dogma, with a smattering of imperialist sympathy on top. That's all that's left of the Labour Party as far I can see. *Applause* So really quickly, we elected a new general secretary because we trusted him to have a strategy to win our struggles. From their position you can assume that they see affiliation to Labour Party as part of that strategy. I may not agree. Some of our members may not agree, but I think they've earned the right to try and implement it. But personally, I can't give it long. If the content of Lee's resolution, which I agree with every single letter of, is still the same in the new year, personally, I'll be lobbying my members for disaffiliation, and I think I can achieve that and I urge others to consider doing the same. But for now, Avon opposes. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Matt. Tim.

TIM GREEN (Kent):

I'm speaking in opposition to this emergency resolution put forward by Merseyside. President, conference, excuse me while I get my phone back up. Why shouldn't we disaffiliate from the Labour Party? Friends, comrades. I stand before you today with heavy heart and a mind full of questions. I know I'm not the only one who's torn in this room. I've listened to a great comrade, Lee Hunter, give a fantastic speech and I really don't know what I can do to console him because it was fantastic.

I know many of us feel like our relationship with the Labour Party has become what, quite frankly is an abusive relationship, something we wouldn't tolerate in any other part of our lives. They've taken from us. They've let us down and sometimes, I feel like they're taking money straight from the pockets of people like my son Harrison and his mum. That's real and it really hurts me.

But here's the thing, I'm not ready to walk away. Not just yet. The only reason I'm not standing up here with those calling for disaffiliation to this is I believe we owe it to ourselves and to everyone we represent to give our executive council one last chance, one chance, and one chance only to sit down with Alex Norris and fight, really fight for better terms, for broadening the role and for the funding that we duly deserve to be able to carry out our jobs properly. Let's be clear. This isn't about blind loyalty. It's about using every bit of leverage that we have, about exhausting every possible avenue before we make a decision we can't take back.

Disaffiliation is a one-way street. Once we're out, we lose our seat at the table, we lose our voice in the party that, for all its faults, is still the best chance we have of shaping the future of working people in this country. So I say, let's give our EC that mandate. Let's demand real negotiation, real change, and real respect. If they can't deliver, then we'll have this conversation again, and I'll be right there with you, ready to make the hard call. But for now, let's hold our ground. Let's fight for what we deserve. Let's not walk away. At least not yet. Big love to you all, and thank you for the incredible speeches and the passion you've brought to this room. Let's keep fighting together. Kent opposes. *Applause*

GUS SPROUL (Scotland):

Conference, president, this is not an easy debate for us in Scotland. We essentially disaffiliated from Labour a number of years ago, and as such, have abstained or not taken a position on this the last four times that Merseyside have brought it. We've discussed this as a regional committee and then as a delegation at length and we agree with every point made by our comrades at Merseyside and West Mids and by all the speakers in this debate.

The Labour Party has lurched to the right and the courting of the Reform vote is anathema to us as a movement. Their attacks on the disabled, the elderly, our LGBT+ comrades, immigrants and families, and support for the Israeli death machine should be reason enough for any trade union to disaffiliate. But right now, how do we best represent our members and make a positive change in society?

We've got an opportunity now that we haven't had for nearly two decades. Yesterday's speech by the fire minister and the commitments made alongside the EC policy statement on pay that we agreed give us a first opportunity to deliver meaningful change within the fire service. Labour's current domestic and foreign policy is abhorrent to us

all in this room. But the recent U-turn on the winter fuel allowance shows that pressure from within can change the direction of the party. The FBU's voice in these spaces has undoubtedly played a significant role in this, alongside the campaigning of our Merseyside comrades and the collective Labour movement. But we have not had this opportunity for nearly 20 years.

Conference, we reiterate that we agree with every point made by Merseyside and all the speakers and comrades who spoke in this debate. So, conference, this is our offer to you and to Merseyside and to West Mids. This doesn't die. This isn't kicked into the long grass for another year. This is us putting the Labour Party on notice at this conference that the FBU will hold this Labour government to account if they do not deliver the meaningful progress that we voted on yesterday when the GS moved the EC policy statement, and if they don't start to deliver positive social change for the people of this country, then Scotland will bring this back to conference next year. We'll move it and we'll ask for you to all support. Comrades, you have our word on that. So let's give the GS, the AGS and the president of the NEC, the chance to do the necessary work backed by this position, in the knowledge that should they not deliver, we know where we'll be this time next year.

This is the opportunity for us as conference, as the FBU, to take control of the pay strategy and to actually hold the Labour Party and our elected officials properly to account. This, if you agree it, is a collective statement from this conference that they've got 12 months to convince us that there does remain any reason to stay affiliated. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Gus. No more in the debate? General secretary.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you, president and conference. Look, let me start by being absolutely clear on this, that over recent weeks, on the conference floor this week, today, I've heard people describe Labour's policies as disgraceful, disgusting, and abhorrent. I disagree. I think they're worse than that. Cutting winter fuel allowance for pensioners, that means the elderly freeze; scrapping disability benefits, that means the most vulnerable pay instead of the wealthiest; talking about immigration, making people strangers in their own country. Now that's not just shameful, it's racist, it's divisive, and it hands votes straight to Reform. *Applause*

Conference, we know that you don't beat the right by trying to outright them. You create a void and Reform are more than happy to fill it. These policies from Reform, they push good Labour-voting people away. And yes, we should be angry. This is our party, the one we are affiliated to. And it's pushing policies that we don't just disagree with but actually we detest.

So what do we do about it? And that's the debate today. Look, we need to fight back and we fight from the inside. Affiliation gives us power, it gives us a platform. And the truth is they want us to leave. Keir Starmer does not want us in his party. It would make things easier for his leadership. They'd love to get rid of us, but we shouldn't give them that satisfaction, comrades.

We should stay, we should take them on, and we make the arguments and we do it from the inside where it counts. You just need to look at the local elections, Labour's current direction is turning people off. It's not just morally wrong, it's electorally stupid. But if we want to change that, we have to be in the room to drive that change.

When we speak on benefit cuts, it's national news, but it's national news because we're in a Labour affiliated union. When we go to the Labour Party conference, as many of you have and many of us have, and we speak, we don't just watch, we get up on the rostrum and we make our points count and we can change policy, and we challenge and we move our policies forward because it's our party too.

As many speakers have said, look, we have a seat on Labour's National Executive Committee. Ian Murray, our president, sits there and that matters. That's the table where Keir Starmer, Angela Rayner are quite rightly told, you are getting this wrong. In a Hull accent, you're getting this wrong. I can't do it. And he's told me that as well sometimes.

But look, that's where we push for change, face to face, not shouting through a locked window. Look, we can, and we must fight for the politics that speak for our members, as you have all spoken for today. Things like a wealth tax, public ownership of rail, mail and utilities, a pay rise for workers, for working people, a real plan on climate change, a properly funded fire and rescue service, a public NHS, housing people can afford. Conference hope, because that's what Labour should stand for and what we need to push for when we are in the room. If it doesn't change, then quite rightly, yes, we warn them. We tell them what's coming, we tell them they will lose, and it won't just be Labour that suffers. It'll be all of us under a far right government of the Tories and Nigel Farage.

But here's the truth of it. Affiliation works. This union is one of the most vocal critics of the Starmer government. We have been in the news again and again in recent months on welfare cuts, on the winter fuel allowance, and importantly on immigration. Affiliation isn't a barrier to that. It's quite the opposite. When an affiliated trade union calls out a Labour government then people pay attention. It's not true to say that we've not got anything from being in the Labour Party. Look without us, without our union and other affiliated unions, there would be no workers' rights package. There'd be no Green New Deal.

The Employment Rights Bill is passing through parliament, the biggest improvements to workers' rights in generations. Minimum service levels, the strike ban gone because Labour are in power, and we have a voice. And affiliated unions, they played a huge part in getting that to where it finally ended up. The Fire Brigades Union were in numerous meetings with Angela Rayner fighting the corner for our members.

It made a difference, comrades. And for the first time in two decades, look, we are advising ministers on fire policy. The AGS meets with policy makers on a monthly basis in the Home Office and in the MHCLG. We're talking to them about national standards on crewing, national standards on training and national response times.

Yesterday on this platform, the fire minister, Alex Norris, addressed our conference for the first time in 17 years. It wasn't just that he spoke to conference, we had a meeting with him, a good meeting about pensions. Mark chewed his ear off quite rightly. On a statutory duty, on flooding, on DECON, on national standards. There are things that this government can deliver and they're within touching distance. Let's not walk away from that.

And in recent times, look, this union has played a really positive role in the Truth about Zane Campaign. That resolution that was brought from region 11 many years ago. A fight for justice for the family of a child killed by toxic waste water. And why have we, why has our union been so useful? Because it was our national president who sits on the Labour Party NEC who asked, he did a bit more than asking the prime minister for a meeting and the prime minister said yes. And we walk away from Labour now and we hand the influence, our influence that we have in the room over to the NFCC and the employers. We'll be shut out while they shape our service. We'll be shouting from the sidelines, conference. And the NFCC would quite rightly be delighted if we left. Keir Starmer's most right wing advisors would love it if we left as well.

So let's be honest, after 10 years of being affiliated while Labour were in opposition, are we seriously saying we should leave now just as they've taken office? We haven't even tested this government yet. That's what we need to do, all of us need to do. I'm committed to do that. Locally, many of you will have those relationships with councillors and MPs. We'd be disaffiliating from them too. That weakens our hand in negotiations at a local level.

I want to make one point as well. Let's all be clear that this isn't about individual politics, that there are various views around this room. You can be in Labour, that is your choice, but you can also be in something else. But this is about what we do as a union. That is the question that we're posed. And the answer to us, the answer to the executive council is clear: that we serve our members better as an affiliated union. And I spoke to the president and Tam McFarlane, wherever he is, last night about this. They sat on the executive council when we weren't affiliated to the Labour Party. And they told me what it was like and the difference we have now. And there's a lot of talk about new left parties, coalitions, movements. But that's all it is. It's all talk. No structures, no clear policies, no affiliation process.

They're not ready. The Green Party, no mechanism for union affiliation. The Workers Party led by George Galloway, anti-migrant, polling under 1%. Look, that's not a future for us. Maybe one day there will be a real alternative. But that day isn't today conference. And until it comes, disaffiliating now is not a bold move; it's just walking

away without a plan. So let's be honest, once again. This motion, it's not being discussed with our members. Our members in fire stations, our members in control rooms, training centres, and in any fire and rescue service premises. It wasn't consulted on. It's been sprung on conference last minute with no time to debate a serious political strategy.

That's not how we make big decisions. That's not leadership. Conference, the vote you cast here today matters. And I'm sure you all will be taking this seriously. It's about setting a new direction, but with no strategy. This isn't just a protest vote. This is a vote to walk away from a political strategy that's given us a seat at the table.

It's a vote to lose our voice when we need it most. And I end up on a personal note, look, this year I was elected as the general secretary, the union's first general secretary for 20 years. Thousands of members, including members that you represent, voted for that result. So like you conference, I speak with a mandate and I'm asking, please do not rip up our union's political strategy at no notice on a whim as an emergency.

Again, this is no serious way to do business. I'm asking you, the executive council is asking you: vote against this resolution, not because Labour is perfect. It isn't. But because walking away now weakens our union, weakens our movement. Let's stay in this fight. Let's challenge this leadership. Let's push for real change from the inside. Let's stand with the MPs who are resisting these rightward shifts. Let's be in the room. Let's be heard. Let's lead.

And I'll finish with this. Ask yourselves this: will the Fire Brigades Union members you are here to represent be better off with the FBU remaining as an affiliated union? Or would they be better off if we disaffiliated?

There is no question in mine and in the executive council's opinion. Vote against, stay affiliated and keep fighting. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Merseyside, right of reply.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, right to reply on emergency resolution 6, Labour Disaffiliation. I would first like to start by picking up on a point that the general secretary just made, conference. Comrades, if you haven't been discussing this on your fire stations, in your control rooms, in your workplaces, then you have not been doing your job. *Applause*

Comrades, thank you for the debate on this. I know how much people care, as I do, about all of the issues raised. We've been told that we have a foot in the door, that we have a seat at the table, that we need to be inside the tent. Peeing out, not outside peeing in. We are currently inside the tent and we are peeing out, but we forced other people outside the tent. We forced out children, we forced out the disabled, we forced out migrants, and they are now outside the tent and we are peeing all over them.

If we carry on with the policies that the Labour Party are currently pushing, then we're going to see what Friedrich Engels talked about when he described social murder. Please look up what Engels wrote on that because it is what we are living right now. Conference, Merseyside members have been demanding disaffiliation since Starmer wrote for that paper, which I will not mention, which was something he said that he would never do.

Another lie, another betrayal. Conference, why should us giving money to the Labour Party be the reason that they treat us with decency and respect? If it takes affiliation to allow us to be able to speak and move MPs, what does that say about the Labour Party? Many people in this room have approached me to tell me how they support the reasons that we've moved, but that we need more time.

Comrades, we moved this in 2022, 2023, and seconded this in 2024, and we have been given those same arguments every time: we need another year. How much time do we give them? How many times do we go back? It was described earlier by one of the comrades as an abusive relationship. That's what it feels like.

Comrades, I have listened and I understand the reasons that have been given. The words from Avon and from Scotland have moved us. Comrades, I will have to go back to Merseyside and tell our members that Graeme and myself have taken the decision to withdraw broadening of the role, look the members who elected me in the eye and ask them to trust me. In doing that I am putting my trust in you, conference. If we are here next year and we are still discussing the policies that are hurting us, hurting our communities, and you don't back disaffiliation, then, conference, you will have failed. We will have failed.

And I will tell you in no uncertain terms of all the reasons why we have failed. Conference, I am putting you, I am putting the EC and I'm putting the Labour Party on notice. You have one year. No more. I'm struggling with this, comrades, I genuinely am. And it is with great regret and a heavy heart and with genuine concern that Merseyside withdraws. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Conference. What a great debate. 13 speakers. Each with passion. None more so than Lee. I don't think, after coming to conference for over 20 years now, where speaker after speaker have got up and said they agree with the sentiments of a motion, then gave the reasons why they was voting against it reluctantly and then opposed it. So I think, conference, from this you can say you've sent a loud and clear message to the Labour Party: you are on notice; you'd best start putting it right or we'll be out. Thank you. *Applause*

Right, conference, we now move to the solidarity medal presentation and the vice-president will take the chair. Thank you, Adam.

THE VICE-PRESIDENT:

Thank you, president. Conference, at its December 2019 meeting, the executive council agreed to instigate a special solidarity award within the Fire Brigades Union, which will be undertaken on an ongoing basis against the backdrop of chief fire officers and fire and rescue service politicians receiving establishment medals and awards for introducing cuts.

The executive council believed it was time for the voices of FBU members to be heard, and for a set of democratic trade union awards to be introduced. In stark contrast to the establishment, these awards will be based on solidarity. They will be based on democracy, and they will be based on integrity. And we want all FBU members and branches to have the opportunity to nominate potential recipients.

We believe it is important that these awards are made here at the parliament of our union, in front of delegates representing all FBU members from across the UK. Interest in the award is now becoming mainstream across the union, and we continue to encourage nominations to be made through brigades, sections, and regional committees. Called the solidarity medal, the award is made on behalf of all FBU members, and although inclusive of serving and retired FBU members, the criteria for this award also includes persons or groups outside of our structures.

Conference, the criteria is clear: to recognise or dispense solidarity, or specific acts of solidarity, on behalf of members of the FBU, which are clearly of exceptional merit. Comrades, the following recipient meets the criteria in abundance. Retired Dundee firefighter Jim Malone is a former FBU official, and now ROOT member, who is known to many. Joining the FBU in 1983, becoming a Scotland region 1 official in 2009. He has championed the cause of the Palestinian firefighters and the wider Palestinian people for decades, and has visited the West Bank seven times, providing practical solidarity with the people of Palestine.

Jim's hometown of Dundee is twinned with Nablus, and it's the first UK city to be twinned with a Palestinian city back in 1980. Links forged through twinning by Jim and other Dundee firefighters have been at the forefront of delivering the FBU's constructive, practical support and solidarity.

This has included the delivery of a fire appliance to the Annapolis Municipal Fire Department. In 2015, one of Jim's visits was featured in *Firefighters Under Occupation*, an award-winning documentary made by South Wales firefighter Ciaran Gibbons, and supported by the FBU. In the film, Jim witnesses the appliance he helped deliver serving the people of Nablus, and he also hears compelling testimony about the impact of occupation from Palestinian firefighters.

Jim then organised a second appliance, with the support of Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, that contained firefighting equipment, PPE, medical kit, and other supplies to support the firefighters in Palestine. Disgracefully, this vital appliance and equipment has been held by Israeli authorities in the port of Ashdod.

Despite setbacks, and in the face of immense difficulties, Jim has continued to fight for justice for the people of Palestine. And his example has been an inspiration to many. The local FBU members in the north area who nominated Jim for this award state that they are incredibly proud of him and all that he has accomplished to date.

They closed their nomination by stating: *"We feel that Jim and all that he has achieved for the people of Palestine is what the solidarity medal truly embodies."* That is surely a sentiment expressed by us all. This is also a sentiment shared by Jim's daughters, Lori, Jodi and Clare, who have asked that we share a message with you today.

"We are incredibly proud to be the daughters of Jim Malone and so pleased that he is being recognised here today. Dad's work shows that being a firefighter means being part of a family, crossing oceans and borders, providing solidarity and support. We have been brought up in a household of trade unionism. Our activism instilled in us by our dad from a young age. Visiting the picket lines, standing in the snow during the strikes of 2002-03, showing us pictures of him and FBU colleagues marching down Timex Hill in the 80s, supporting my mum and her colleagues in the fights to retain their jobs in Dundee. When Dad, supported by the FBU, arranged for fire appliances to be delivered to Nablus in the occupied West Bank many years ago, we were so proud. When he told us he was driving said appliance from Dundee, pride turned into a bit of apprehension, but we knew that he'd be doing something that he believed in to his core, helping his brothers and sisters in the fire service and in Palestine. Everywhere Dad goes, Palestine is at the forefront of his mind."

He has worked to twin East Craigie with Nablus Ibal football club, delivering football kit donated from Dundee's oldest junior football club. He used a trip to Denmark as an opportunity to speak with a Palestinian ambassador, and during his last trip to London to visit his daughter, he spent the day in Westminster lobbying MPs about the still impounded fire appliance sent to the West Bank in 2024.

We are grateful to the FBU for acknowledging the work and dedication of our dad, a lifelong trade unionist, a proud internationalist, and above all, a strong and dedicated advocate for the Palestinian people. Congratulations, Dad, and apologies from the middle one. Apparently, he's at the PCS conference down in Brighton. Free Palestine".

Conference, in recognition of the outstanding commitment and dedicated solidarity to the cause of justice for the people of Palestine, the FBU solidarity medal is awarded to Jim Malone. *Applause*

Conference, can I ask region 1 to come to the front, please?

Conference, I now invite Jim Malone to say a few words. Thank you. Cheers, Jim.

JIM MALONE:

Thanks, comrade. That was difficult, listening to that. It was humbling. And that's a great honour. Tam says, Jim, it's not like you having notes - when you used to speak, it usually just came from the heart, obviously with the support of the comrades of region 1.

But I'm truly humbled and I accept this on behalf of so many people, great advocates of the Palestinian people in our movement and our great union. We are always standing in this movement on the shoulders of giants. We all know that. And the greatest giant that I knew was Ken Cameron.

And Ken Cameron was and still is to me an inspiration. Ken's motion as FBU general secretary to the TUC in 1982 condemning the massacre of refugees in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon was a first, the first trade union to stand up against Zionist aggression. And Ken's words moved the room but also won the day. And that motion was the first ever critical of the Zionist regime and that's why he's a giant.

His internationalism was also humbling. And Ken passed a few years ago. His coffin had the Palestinian flag on it. And one of his last attendances was at a hotel in Glasgow where we, me and my comrades from region 1, were hosting Palestinian firefighters.

And he was a very old man, but he made his way. And I knew he was old because when I asked him what he wanted to drink, he said water. And those of us who knew Ken, that was very unusual. And by the end of that meeting he had with these young Palestinian firefighters, thankfully he was drinking drams.

But there's a shared history between my union, the FBU, and my city Dundee. As the AGS mentioned, we were the first city to twin with a Palestinian city in the world in 1980. The year prior to that, in Dundee University, there was a meeting of trade unions and the Dundee trade union movement, along with comrades throughout the country, decided to set up the Trade Union Friends of Palestine, the first ever.

And that was in 1979. And then we've got Ken's involvement and the rest, as we say, is history.

I'd like to run you through a very quick history of the work that our union has done in support of the Palestinian Fire Service firefighters and the Palestinian people. In 2008 Ken Rosser, ex-secretary, went over as a part of a Scottish TUC delegation and came back with an idea of training Palestinian firefighters here in the UK, and the following year we did that. We brought what we called the Nablus 8, 8 firefighters from that beleaguered city in the West Bank under occupation. Came to the UK and they received firefighter training in Scotland, in Lancashire and in London.

That was the start of a real impetus in region 1 to do more practical support, and we continue to do that to this day. But that first visit led to the purchase of two fire appliances from the Scottish – the Tayside Fire Brigade it was – and we bought those fire appliances, filled them with kit and drove them: myself, Steve Harmon from Lancashire, John Docherty from region 1, Gavin Barry from region 1, and Davie Kay from region 1. And we eventually got one of the fire engines in. And we were told, as this history repeats itself, it wasn't going to be allowed in. It was the wrong the right-hand drive was the issue and we said, what is that for? And they went well, as you go through the checkpoints, we've got fixed lines of fire. We'll be unable to shoot the driver. That was the Israelis' position then, and is still the Israelis' position now, as our fire appliance sits in Ashdod port as the AGS said. But these comrades supported me then in the region. Roddy Robertson, John Duffy, Alan Patterson, and I've stated John McFadden as well, who took over the role as organiser when I retired. Great support. We met Ken Brand, who was the British consul in 2011, an ex-Northamptonshire, firefighter. And Ken was working as the British consul as part of the British support team in Ramallah.

And he asked if we could train more firefighters. So since then, your union has facilitated the training of over 100 Palestinian firefighters in the UK. An astonishing achievement, and one that you should all be rightly proud of as a union. *Applause*

And we worked in partnership with the Scottish government, the Scottish TUC, and agencies like International Fire and Rescue based at Pitreavie in Fife. And we continued to train and we continued to deliver kit and equipment. You did kit and equipment parked on shipping containers, taken over to Israel.

And they at that time allowed Palestinian firefighters from the municipalities of Hebron and Nablus to get new breathing apparatus and new kit donated by UK firefighters. And that was a great achievement. The first time we sent kit and equipment went to Gaza, and that was in 2010. And that was from Tayside Firefighters, Tayside FBU members.

The latest proposal obviously saw us once again, in partnership with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, purchase a fire appliance, kit it out and send it over where you've heard it's stuck now. But we'll continue to fight for that. We'll continue to approach our politicians and ask you to do that, to ask your members of parliament to push for the release of that vehicle because the Israelis could do it in a minute, but they won't.

They'll continue to make Palestinian people suffer and make it a more dangerous job for Palestinian firefighters.

I spoke about other comrades from different areas. One of the great comrades I had was Dave Chappell from the southwest. Dave was a passionate advocate of the Palestinian people, and I spoke to him last week and he mentioned to me the importance of me mentioning today and reminding you of the horrors inflicted on Palestinian humanitarian workers.

In March we saw them being killed in their dozens and then buried under a sandpit. And the horrors are unimaginable to most of us, but as humanitarians, as firefighters, to understand that happened to them while they were attending an emergency incident is beyond belief. But that's what's happened, and that's why we keep on fighting, and we fight with comrades throughout the trade union movement.

I've got to mention Mike Arnott and Dundee TUC, the ex-president of the Scottish TUC, who has been standing with us shoulder to shoulder over these last two decades, the Dundee Nablus Twinning Association. Mary MacGregor, a sister who again I feel humble to know, never mind work with her. I've got to thank the current executive in Scotland and the members that have nominated me. Great friends, great brothers, sisters: Colin, John, Gus, Seona, Kerry, Simon, Ian among many. *Applause*

To Denise Christie, to John McGhee. Again, great brothers and sisters. And finally to my family, Pam, Jodi, Lori, Clare, my sons-in-law, the two Chrises, my grandkids Casey, who was 20 today, Zack, Carter and Nora.

Without our family support, as trade unionists, we are nothing. I spoke to Shams this morning in Nablus, I phoned him just to ask him how he was, how things are, any word on the fire appliance and he passed on his love and his greetings to everybody here today, from the municipality in Nablus and the fire service there.

So to my friends, my sisters and brothers in Palestine, Shams, Sultan, Bilal Magdi. My commitment to continue to fight for Palestinian freedom is there. You deserve peace. You deserve your own country. You are heroes. Solidarity. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Conference. Well done, Jim, and as usual, speaking about everybody else and not yourself. Well done.

Right, conference, at this point again, I'm going to be a really good chair and I'm going to break you off early. Tea break. Back in here at 11:15 please.

Break for tea

THE PRESIDENT:

Conference, come to order. I now call the chair of the standing orders committee, Phil Millar, to give a report.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Thank you, president, conference, I know I said at the start of conference in the opening statement that we wouldn't be doing delegate changes during the comfort break, but we're going to do one. It's compassionate grounds, and so never let it be said that standing orders don't have a heart. Can you turn to your delegate list please? So region 6 Northamptonshire remove Jed Goodfellow and replace with Helen Durman. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Phil. Is that report agreed? *Agreed* Thank you. I now call section D Fire and Rescue Service Policy para D1. I now call executive council policy statement, Fund Our Fire and Rescue Service with amendments from Hereford and Worcester, Merseyside and Scotland.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you, president, conference. Let me get straight to the point that everything we want to achieve, everything we need to protect the public, everything we need to protect our members and everything we want to improve in our service depends on one thing. It depends on sustained investment in the fire and rescue service.

Without investment, we cannot deliver the service the public needs and deserves, we cannot keep our members safe, we cannot maintain safe crewing levels, ensure enough staffing or guarantee appliance availability, and we cannot improve pay, pensions, health and safety, or promote diversity in our workforce.

Investment affects every single part of our service. It affects our jobs, it affects our safety, and it affects our ability to serve the public. And let's be clear, and we've all witnessed this, after 14 years of underfunding, the consequences are plain to see. We've lost 20% of our workforce. We've had unsafe crewing models imposed upon us. We've lived through pay freezes, pension cuts, and constant attacks on our terms and conditions. We've faced privatisation and we've seen repeated attempts to weaken our union and undermine our rights. Conference, this has been by no accident. 14 years of Conservative-led governments have deliberately damaged our service. Their actions have been calculated, their actions have been coordinated, and their actions have been completely reckless.

Back in 2010, and many of you would've been serving in the fire and rescue service back then, we had 60,000 firefighters and emergency control members of staff across the UK. Today that number is down to 48,000. That's 12,000 fewer staff members, and every part of our service feels that loss. Every part of our community feels that loss. We faced a decade of real terms pay cuts. Between 2012 and 2017, we endured a 1% pay cap. We're paying more into our pensions, working longer and getting less out. But conference, the debates we've had today have indicated this: for the first time in 15 years, we have a Labour government at Westminster, and that does change the political landscape, but it does not end our campaign. Labour's manifesto, which we will hold them to account on, contained promises to improve building safety, to develop national standards, and to strengthen public service resilience.

But we know promises alone are not enough. So I've been clear, the executive council are clear, and I think by the debates we've had here today, we will hold Labour's feet firmly to the fire until they deliver real change. *Applause*

But look, we face challenges. We all know that. You just need to look at the recent 1.4% funding increase for the fire and rescue service in 2025-26. And look, we can all be honest with ourselves. It's not enough, not in the face of inflation, not in the face of the scale of risk our service deals with, from climate change, to aging populations, to unsafe buildings.

We don't just need a funding boost. We need a long-term strategic commitment to rebuild and future-proof the fire and rescue service for the future. Yes, we've made progress. The establishment of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Fire and Rescue Service is welcome. Yes, the Fire Brigades Union has a seat at that table.

And yes, for the first time in decades, we've got the fire minister Alex Norris, proactively engaging with our union. He addressed this conference yesterday, and you all heard the commitments he made, which is historic in itself.

But again, conference, that dialogue is not enough. We need action, not just access. We need investment, not just engagement. To secure that we need to organise, and we had that long debate on the first day of conference, about how we organise, how we build our density, how we grow our grassroots activism, and we're going to need that. We're going to need that over the next year to take this fight and take this battle on.

So we must lobby Westminster. We must lobby devolved governments, as comrades in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales are doing. We must apply pressure on fire authorities and fire boards because nothing, as we know, will be handed to us. We have to demand it and we have to fight for it. Conference, this is our moment.

If we want to secure the future of the fire and rescue service, if we want to ensure our communities are safe, we can build a better service for future generations of firefighters. And the decisions we make in this room are about the next generation of firefighters, but we can only do that if we act, and we act collectively.

I want to address the amendments that have been made to the policy statement. Amendment 1 from Hereford and Worcester, the EC supports this amendment. It quite rightly highlights the appalling Trade Union Act of 2016, an attack on our rights to protest and organise. These laws must be repealed, and we stand with all other trade unions in fighting to scrap them once and for all.

Amendment two from Merseyside, this amendment calls for a 12% pay rise or £4,000 in a single year. Conference, we understand the anger behind that, that we've all faced pay restraint, pay caps in our careers, but we also need to be honest with ourselves. Without a clear strategy or plan to deliver it, this demand is unachievable right now.

We've had great debates this week. We've already had a democratic decision made on this year's pay offer, and we've agreed the next steps for our campaign. You've agreed those next steps in our campaign. So this amendment doesn't move us forward. So we ask Merseyside, the executive council ask Merseyside to withdraw it. If they don't, we urge you to oppose it.

Amendment from Scotland. Look, the core points in this amendment already exist in the executive council's policy statement, but this amendment rewrites that statement and, in the executive council's position, weakens it in some places. What's more, because it's submitted, as I've said before, as a complete document, we can't accept the parts we agree with and reject the rest. So on that basis, we ask conference to oppose the amendment from Scotland.

But let me be clear about this, that some suggested amendments from Scotland would've improved that statement. So I think there's a lesson there that when you move your amendments next year, you do it in a piecemeal approach. Others would've probably changed its direction, some for the better and some for the worse. So Scotland, please take this in the spirit it's offered, and submit your submissions and your amendments in a different way next time. So look, the EC oppose that.

But I'm going to finish on this. Look, we have an opportunity in front of us. We've all seen that this week on the debates that we've had, perhaps the first in the generation actually to help shape the direction of the fire and rescue service, to make sure that it is once and for all properly funded, properly staffed, properly resourced. I think we owe it to our members that we explore that, and we take it as far as we can. If we don't try, we'll never know if we could have succeeded. If we do try, if we do stand together, if we commit here in Blackpool this week, I think we've got a real chance of making history so support the executive council policy statement. Let's stand united in a call for a fully funded, properly resourced modern fire and rescue service. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Steve. Does that have a seconder? Yep.

REBEKAH UDEN (North Wales):

President, conference, comrades, there is a funding crisis in the fire and rescue services in Wales and the rest of the UK. Over the last three years in North Wales, we have faced a series of challenges and faced threats of serious cuts. In 2022, the fire authority in North Wales identified the lack of fire cover in our southern counties.

These are the service areas that are more rural and sparsely populated. The service set up a piece of work known as the Emergency Cover Review. This was a public consultation, which looked at potential ways to crew this area. This was to be wholetime firefighters to create day shift retained stations, stations that receive between 30 and 60 shouts a year. To do this, the proposals were the closure of five rural retained fire stations and the loss of all firefighter jobs on those stations, the downgrading of 2-2-4 stations, two of which are two of our busier, 2-2-4 stations, to day-crewed stations, and finally, the removal of a fire appliance from our busiest station in Wrexham city centre. All of these were successfully overturned. *Applause*

The hard work of members, representatives, and officials in North Wales saw the back of these options in a series of well-organised campaigns and national support from our assistant general secretary, Ben Selby. Following this, I quickly found myself as acting brigade secretary due to the toll that this had taken on our previous secretary.

We then headed into the next part of the emergency cover review. This came in the form of a service working group called the ECR task and finish group. This group was made up of a cross-section of staff and members of SLT. Most of the group were FBU members. The terms of reference for this group were along the lines of achieve permanent daytime cover in the south of Gwynedd, using only existing staff with no additional funding available.

It became clear over the course of a very frustrating nine months that followed, that not only were the remits of this group completely unachievable, but the conversations were constantly being steered towards dropping our crewing levels. Each brigade committee meeting became more concerning, and members began to feel extremely compromised by even being in the room whilst discussing crewing appliances with crews of four. The committee decided, given the direction of the working group, that we should request all members cease involvement. The last working group meeting saw the mass exit of members with no further conversations between our members and management around crews of four. That morning, I attended to explain our union position on crewing levels and also our negotiation structures, which would only involve elected officials on such discussions. I was beyond proud of each and every member as one by one they followed me out the door without hesitation. *Applause*

Since then, the committee in North Wales and regional officials have worked tirelessly with managers to keep these changes and cuts at bay. Each and every conversation has always come back to one thing. Funding. We don't have the money. A lack of funding within Wales, and particularly North Wales, has been the root cause of almost three years' worth of sleepless nights and battles. However, we remain vigilant because we know that these proposals could come back at any time. And the only way to stop these dangerous, unsafe erosions on our members and our communities is adequate funding for all fire and rescue services in the UK. If our fire and rescue services want a fire engine in every town, they need to pay for it, and our members will not pay for it.

We fully support the EC's policy on funding, because without proper investment, each and every fire service in this country will look to our members' terms and conditions to make these cuts. And these cuts will put pressure on our members, both morally and physically. We will see more accidents and injuries on the incident ground, and it is my belief that we will see more firefighter deaths. North Wales supports. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Rebekah. Hereford and Worcester to move their amendment.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, moving amendment 1 to the EC policy statement. Comrades, it's a quite simple statement underneath the heading 14 Years Of Hurt on page 2 of the policy statement. There are a number of bullet points at the bottom of that section, there's a paragraph that reads *"These efforts were designed to ratchet up the pressure on firefighters to make our members do more for less. They were all designed to weaken the FBU, deny our members' rights to organise, speak out and take action."* The amendment simply adds the additional sentence that reads: *"They even introduced laws preventing protest Public Order Act 2023 and added to the anti-union legislation through the 2016 Trade Union Act."*

Conference, thank you for the support from the EC. Please support the amendment. Support the policy statement conference. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Neil. Does that have a seconder? Secunder. *Formally* Thank you. I now call Merseyside to move Amendment 2.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, we will not be withdrawing. I've done enough of that. *Applause*

Yes, this amendment is asking for a lot, but we must ask. We must lobby and we must fight. We believe that this amendment strengthens the policy statement and mandates the general secretary, the assistant general secretary, and the EC to fight for the pay that our members deserve. The firefighter manifesto called for this where it talked about real terms pay being down by at least 12% since 2010. Our members, even with the pay rises that we've achieved, are still suffering, are still below the pay that we deserve for the roles we undertake. If we're not going to fight for this now, when are we going to fight for it? I'm fed up of waiting till next year. Conference, please support this amendment. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lee. I forgot to say at the beginning that the EC are opposing Merseyside's amendment. I now call amendment 3 from Scotland, which the EC are also opposing. Ah, who said that? Who said, have we got a seconder? Well-remembered. Amendment 2 from Merseyside, does that have a seconder? *(Laughter, applause)*

JON STABLER (London):

President, conference, during the recent pay ballot members said many things to me. They mentioned that it wasn't a great offer that has been recommended by the EC, so there's no point voting against it. Which way should I vote? What nobody ever said to me was this was a great, above-inflation pay offer that has solved my financial problems. Technically, we achieved our goals, but it does not feel that way. It just feels the same old same old. By backing this amendment, we are drawing a line in the sand. We'll be sending a message to the employers that we mean business.

We are giving our negotiators the backing and the strongest hand to negotiate. We'll be sending a message to our members and reps that we are ready. We are ready for the fight. We are ballot-ready. We are still in the cost of living crisis, and we must provide a solution to the problem for our members. We are the only ones that can give that hope.

Yesterday on this platform, I saw an antique from Cumbria. I'm not on about the comrade, but the T-shirt he was wearing. *(Laughter)*, The classic "Why is he worth it?" "Why are we worth it?" I can't fit into mine anymore. They've all shrunk in the wash over the last 20-something years.

But it got me thinking about our members. We were worth it in 2002 and 2003 when we went out the doors. We were worth it when we were balloted in 2022 during the last pay campaign. Are our members worth what we got paid in 2010? Are we not worth it? Are we not still doing the same job? Why are we getting paid less for it?

Pay rises shouldn't always be about doing more work. It should be about getting paid for the work that we've done in the past and catching up with that. With this, region 10 seconds the amendment because our members are always worth it. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Jon. And thanks for doing the VP's job. I'm only kidding, Adam. Right, I now call amendment 3 from Scotland.

GUS SPROUL (Scotland):

President, conference, we are happy to withdraw our amendment, but I just wanted to state that we did submit all our amendments piecemeal and then we had advice to then submit them as a "delete all after". But in keeping with the tone of unity and the vibe in the room this morning, we're happy to submit and point taken and lesson learned for next time. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Gus. That's now open for debate. No. Steve.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, president, thanks conference. No, thanks Scotland. And I don't have responsibility for standing orders, so I'll take it up with them, but thanks, in the spirit of that. Thanks, Gus. I appreciate that. On Merseyside, look, Lee, you talk about lobbying and fighting that is central to this.

I said when I opened up and moved this policy statement, we need to lobby. Actually, I think we need to go further than one-off one-yearly lobbies of Westminster. We need to get in their faces a little bit more, be more persistent, more consistent with how we lobby. Scotland are doing that at the moment. We've got experience of doing that in Westminster, camping out, in their faces, in their backyard, and convincing them that the fire and rescue service needs funding and investment. And, look, less than a year ago, last October-November time, we launched the Rebuild Our Fire and Rescue Service campaign, and that was about getting more staff, getting more firefighters, more equipment, more diversity policies and investment in that, investing in health and safety in DECON, in more fire and rescue service inspectors.

That's what this policy is about. It builds and builds on the *Firefighters' Manifesto*, the campaigns we launched last year, the campaigns we have launched over the last five years. But look, I've talked about the opportunity that we have in front of us now, this is our opportunity, to get investment in the fire and rescue service to start building it for the next generation of firefighters. If anyone came to any talk I gave during the election campaign, I talked about we are here to get investment and funding for the next generation of firefighters. And not to embarrass him, but he is sat at the back of the room, my son joined the service 18 months ago. He's probably never ridden a fire engine with five people on. They've always got four. They're always being detached to different places. The fire service that people are joining today is in a right state, different to what I joined, different to what many of you joined. It's our opportunity to start fixing that. We know, we can think back to what it was like before the years of austerity. It is our job to get it back there.

This sets out a plan and this sets out a strategy to do that. We've had the debate on pay. You've agreed that strategy. I've said we are going to lead on that. Next week, me and Ben will be meeting with the employers. We'll be taking that fight on pay. What Merseyside's resolution does, it ties us to get a 12% pay rise, £4,000 in one year. I don't think that is realistic. I'm not going to stand up here and lie to you saying we are going to pull things out of trees like a money tree. We're not going to be able to do that. Look, we need to start building our campaigns at many different levels, organising grassroots level politically in any way we can to get the funding we need. So that's why we oppose it.

Support this resolution. We know we need the funding. We know that we need the investment, and that's going to take each and every one of us to fight for that. That won't be won in a negotiating room by me or by Ben or anyone on the EC. That'll be won by all of us. So that's why we oppose it.

Hereford and Worcester, a fantastic addition to this statement, and I thank Neil for bringing that on. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Steve. I now put amendment 1 from Hereford and Worcester to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put amendment 2 from Merseyside to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That falls.*

I now put executive council policy statement, Fund Our Fire and Rescue Service as amended to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against, please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 53 Reinstatement of Fire Service Promotion Exams moved by Northern Ireland. The EC give qualified support.

Resolution 53 REINSTATEMENT OF FIRE SERVICE PROMOTION EXAMS

Conference believes that a fair, transparent, and consistent promotion process is essential for maintaining professional standards and operational excellence within UK Fire and Rescue Services (UKFRSs).

Conference also believes that the removal of national promotion exams has led to inconsistencies in promotion criteria, reducing members' confidence in many UKFRSs in their promotion process, potentially undermining merit-based progression.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to negotiate through the National Joint Council the reinstatement of nationally agreed and recognised fire service promotion exams for all roles and to secure;

- ***a standardised examination process to ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of location or fire service***
- ***a clear, merit-based system that rewards knowledge, skills, and experience, enhancing leadership and operational effectiveness***
- ***protection against localised or arbitrary decision-making that could disadvantage competent and experienced personnel.***

NORTHERN IRELAND

ANDY SPRULES (Northern Ireland):

Conference, president, moving resolution 53 Reinstatement of Fire Service Exams. Conference, when national standards for fire and rescue services were removed, this led to individual fire and rescue services having to set their own promotional processes with no control, guidance, or governance.

Region 2 believes that this has led to chaos and unfit processes for promotion. For example, why would a firefighter going for promotion to crew commander be asked how they would deal with an irate customer within an airport setting? A question which I myself have had to answer as part of a promotional process.

Conference instructs the EC to negotiate through the NJC the reinstatement of nationally agreed and recognised promotional exams for all roles and ensuring protections are put in place for all sections of our diverse membership conference. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you. Does that have a seconder? *Seconder? Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Yep.

STEVE MATTINSON (Cumbria):

Conference, president, I was going to do this response to resolution 56, but it kind of fits the same thing. Again, I feel this fits into the postcode lottery for the competence of incident commanders. I like to use the term crew commander there. In Cumbria we use the term crew manager, but I think we should be commanders. We command incidents and I think because our job is 3% operational incidents, isn't it, I think now we use the term management and across the sector now we have station managers, crew managers, watch managers, or we have station managers with five years' service in. Now they're not competent operational station commanders in my eyes.

We need a national standard. It fits within the postcode lottery of response and capability to lead an incident. We don't want operational commanders that can send an email, at an incident where it's six pumps. We want someone who can come and bring something to the fire ground. And I think coming away from the fire promotion boards has been detrimental.

I've been there where you've had to talk about airports, what you're going to do when an irate customer returns a car 'cause it's got one wheel. Like it's not relevant to the job. We need strict like IFEs. I looked at the NFC jobs last night across the sectors for station commanders. Some need IFEs, some need to be substantive in role. Some you just need to be competent in role. Some you can jump from firefighter to watch manager. We need a national standard and a national promotion board to make sure that everyone is at the same level, or we will have more firefighter injuries, more firefighter deaths.

I'm trying to think what the right words are. I'm not very good with words as you've seen. I talk like Forrest Gump, don't I? It takes away from like the competence of our role and you have to respect the rank, not necessarily the person in it, as I'm sure we all agree with across here.

But we need to make sure there's credibility in role. I think we do lack credibility in role across our sector sometimes. It's good to see that a lot of brigades have come away from that direct entry scheme. I think there's only six left. That narrows down our, again, I'm useless with words - like the credibility of that role.

So I speak in support of this resolution. Thank you very much. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Steve. And not at all. Yep.

GARETH JIANIKOS (ONC):

President, conference, the ONC support this resolution. The present exams consist of a range of criteria going from the IFE exams that were just mentioned to brigade-based standard operating procedure list regurgitation. My brigade exams are non-transferrable to other fire and rescue services, either across my own nation or across the other three nations in the UKFRS. This will and can restrict our members' movements within the sector. A national

exam or a national standard may be a quicker way for our sector to react to national trends and other elements of technical knowledge, theoretical knowledge that is required by our sector as a fast-moving sector. Conference, the ONC support this resolution. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

AGS to give the qualification.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Again, it's quite a minor one, president, and that is because we support most of what's been said today. I suppose the only slight divergence on that, president, is the fact that we believe that these discussions are better had in the discussions we're having about national standards, in amongst the work we're doing on the MAG.

And then the final small qualification is that we need to make sure that, when we approach this fight, we do it in an inclusive way, because currently the IFE exams aren't necessarily completely as inclusive, and taking into account the needs of our neurodivergent members as well. Okay. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. I now put resolution 53 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 55 Temporary Promotions - End The Abuse moved by the officers national committee. The ONC have agreed to remit with the right to speak. ONC.

Resolution 55 TEMPORARY PROMOTIONS – END THE ABUSE

Conference instructs the Executive Council to seek to ensure that the use of temporary promotions within fire and rescue services is monitored and where necessary challenged, a limit of six months should ensure fairness of opportunity and help to reduce the inherent risks to our members at all levels.

While temporary promotions are clearly necessary, they are open to abuse by our employers, who may use this limited advancement to create a compliant and obedient workforce.

Conference is aware of employers who have deliberately used temporary promotions as a strategy to unsettle their workforce, for their own selfish agenda and to enhance their own position.

Conference understands that employers will blur the boundaries between operational and non-operational senior managers, to artificially create the apparent need for temporary operational roles.

Conference believes that our members and officials should be made aware of this threat in order to be able to recognise the impact it can have.

Conference further believes that this proactive measure will assist in managing the associated work-related stress of our members.

OFFICERS NATIONAL COMMITTEE

GARETH JIANIKOS (ONC):

President, conference, speaking on resolution 55 Temporary Promotions - End the Abuse. Conference, we recognise that there is an established pattern of behaviour by strategic managers, chiefs, and employers to use temporary promotions to ensure compliance in the workforce, and it's also used as a tool to crush resistance within the workplace. As the ONC, we recognise this isn't limited to middle management, and this is often abused at supervisory level too. This has also reinforced the secondary impact as we've just talked about with the secondary effect of the 2015 pension scheme, which actually promotes and creates an atmosphere of pushing through the ranks as quickly as you can, because of the average earnings aspect to the pension itself.

In my region, when we went through the independent cultural review, Fenella Morris KC recognised that members reported feeling resentment, suspicion, dissatisfaction. The temporary promotion element reinforced a perception of “keep your head down, don’t kick up a fuss, you won’t get the job if you make too much of a noise.”

The review was released in South Wales on 3 January 2024. Over a year later, the temporary promotion situation has worsened. Even though the review forced the Welsh government and South Wales Fire and Rescue Service to reduce temporary promotions within six months. The brigade have hidden under the cover and the emotional blanket of operational readiness; temporary promotions are a necessary aspect of the role.

Conference believes our members and officials should be made aware of the threat in order to recognise the impact it has on our members. The ONC will remit this resolution and recognise the time limit mentioned within would have unintended consequences for long-term secondments. We will look to work with the AGS and the executive council in relation to this subject over the forthcoming year in preparedness for the next conference.

And if you want more information on this subject, we are running an officer school at the start of October. Please make sure you’re represented. Conference, we remit. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Gareth. I now call resolution 56. National Standards Must Include Promotion moved by the officers national committee. The EC are supporting.

Resolution 56 NATIONAL STANDARDS MUST INCLUDE PROMOTION

Conference commends the excellent work by the Executive Council (EC) and head office to establish National Standards in our Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and the successful lobbying which saw this critical aspect included in the Labour Party manifesto.

Conference demands the EC ensure that National Standards equally apply to promotion arrangements.

Conference believes that since the disestablishment of the Fire Service Examining Board, promotion processes have become haphazard and bespoke to individual FRSs, often with little emphasis placed on the ability to command complex incidents.

Conference understands that the act of passing a command course, which is intended to acquire the relevant skills, is often the only operational requirement to progress.

Conference believes that the issue for our employers is that the critical promotional tool of operational command has the potential to restrict their preferred candidates from progressing.

Conference recognises that this affects all our members as without operational command responsibilities FRS commanders are simply managers.

OFFICERS NATIONAL COMMITTEE

GARETH JIANIKOS (ONC):

President, conference, moving resolution 56, National Standards Must Include Promotion at all levels.

Conference, firstly, we commend the excellent work by the EC and the head office to establish national standards in our FRS with the successful lobbying that saw this critical aspect included in the Labour Party manifesto. Conference, we demand the EC ensure that national standards apply equally to promotion arrangements. Since the removal of the fire service examining board, promotion processes have become haphazard and bespoke to individual fire and rescue services, often with little emphasis placed on the ability to command. Often, again, the act of passing a command course, which is in all initial courses, deals only with the acquisition of the skillset.

This is the only operational stop check to progress to the next rank. Under existing processes, we have seen individual brigade leaders choosing to sponsor individuals to aid their progression. Members, we have seen promotion processes interfered with, ensuring preferred candidates progress through, to the detriment of our members.

Our members have faced issues and barriers of nepotism, creation of boys' clubs at various tiers within the fire service management. Our members deserve managers and leaders who show more than just agreeing with chiefs and senior strategic level. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Gareth. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Nobody. I now put resolution 56 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 58 Governance Observer Role Status, moved by Shropshire, the EC give qualified support.

Resolution 58 GOVERNANCE OBSERVER ROLE STATUS

Conference recognises that Fire Brigades Union (FBU) officials and members have the right to question and challenge decisions made by fire service management. That right is often limited or silenced when it comes to decisions made by a fire authority.

Conference notes that not all fire services fall under the governance of fire authorities and their constitutions.

Conference believe that whatever model of governance is in place in each brigade/area it is essential that workforce representatives have the ability to speak directly to, to challenge and to influence those decision makers.

Conference recognises that where FBU representatives have been given positions or observer status in governance structures, their contribution has been conducive to positive industrial relations.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to fully support the furtherance of such arrangements at a national level by raising this issue directly with employers at the National Joint Council, requesting that a position or at least an observer role is created within their constitution for an FBU representative to provide a voice for members during their meetings and other business. This will increase accountability and scrutiny for elected persons who oversee fire services.

SHROPSHIRE

SIMON MORRIS (Shropshire):

President, conference, moving resolution 58, Governance Observer Role and giving my comrade from the ONC a break from the stand!

Last autumn, following the summer of shame that some of our senior service management brought on our service, along with the support from our regional officials, we attended the fire authority meeting, submitting our questions prior to the meeting, seeking reassurance for all our members that the fire authority, our governing body, would address and stop this appalling behaviour towards our members and our union. Their response, and I quote, *"In accordance with standard order 14, precludes questions being asked at a fire authority meeting by any employee of the authority in relation to any matter connected to their employment, any representative of an employee or group of employees, or any person appointed or engaged to speak on behalf of another."*

In other words, anyone who has anything to do with anyone who works for the service. We as officials work tirelessly, being pulled from pillar to post, often without thanks to hold our management to account. Should we not be able to hold our employers to that same account?

Conference, our members deserve the fundamental right to challenge, question and have their voice heard in order to influence those decisions that affect their working conditions, not only at a national level through the NJC, but also at a local level, through local governance bodies. Where some of our comrades have managed to change the governance constitutions to gain that special observer role, subsequently, this has demonstrated their contribution has positively improved industrial relations. Shropshire is calling the EC to raise this as a best practice approach directly with the employers at the national level at the National Joint Council to encourage change within governance constitutions, and create a positive position for an FBU representative at said meetings in order to increase accountability and scrutiny for those elected persons who oversee our fire services. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Does that have a seconder? Yep.

SASHA HITCHINS (West Midlands):

President, conference, seconding resolution 58 from Shropshire. In the West Midlands, one brigade official has a status of special observer on our fire authority. What this means is that we receive all of the documents at the same time as our fire authority members. We have a seat at the table, and we have a microphone in front of us to be able to contribute to any discussion that takes place. We don't get to vote, but what it does mean is that we can make our positions clear on how our members would be affected by any proposal or discussion. It hasn't been an easy process to achieve that special observer status, but it has been absolutely worth it.

It would've been impossible without the support of our previous chair of the fire authority. Having the NJC behind this position, and moving it from that level, would make it easier for officials to achieve the same where fire authorities are in place. Support the resolution. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Sasha. That's open for debate. Anybody? No. AGS qualification.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

And look, Simon, thank you for bringing motion, and the irony is not lost on us that when calling for an improved culture in Shropshire, they are silencing the workers' voice. It's pretty disgusting. The qualifications are quite simple, that really this is the position and policy of the union already. You can thank, I think it was Lancashire a few years ago, for bringing a motion in this regard. It is to sit at the table as Sasha outlined. It is to be able to voice our arguments in debates, but not to vote and therefore be tied up with the kind of collective responsibility. Probably some advice to comrades in the room that are facing similar, but also to Shropshire. We think it's important that you refer the matter as a complaint if you like, to the Local Government Ombudsman and see if they will investigate that for you.

You mentioned observers at the NJC. There is already observers at the NJC. I would point out it's probably not the most exciting of rooms to observe in a sense. Thank you, president. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, AGS. I now put resolution 58 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call para D2, para D3, para D4. Para D5. Yep.

DAVE PIKE (Greater Manchester):

Thank you, president, conference speaking on para D5 MTA. Conference, Greater Manchester officials want to place on record their thanks for the assistance and support given to Greater Manchester comrades late last year. When the over-the-border MTA deployment issue was identified by local officials, the chief fire officers took the position that they could deploy at any time Manchester firefighters to an MTA anywhere in the UK, as MTA specialist responders under the terms of the collective agreement agreed with the FBU.

Members and officials quite rightly disputed this exploitation of the collective agreement and very quickly mobilised in opposition to it. In December 2024, over 200 members gathered at a rally, which was attended and supported by local, regional, and national officials. Further meetings with those same officials took place with local politicians and the Greater Manchester mayor, Andy Burnham, with the AGS also meeting with the CFO directly.

I'm proud to say that, with this pressure and support and with the threat of Manchester FBU members withdrawing from the MTA collective agreement in its entirety, the employers conceded their position. The Greater Manchester brigade committee have also since resolved that no member will volunteer for out of county national resilience deployments to another service that does not have an already-agreed MTA agreement in place with the FBU. Again, thank you for your support, comrades. In solidarity. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Dave. Para D6, para D7, para D8, para D9. Yep, Steve.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, president. Just a bit of a note on para D9, the Truth about Zane campaign, and important to reflect and remember, that was a resolution, as I said previously, brought from region 11 on this campaign and on this issue, and I've been asked to update conference on some important developments over recent weeks.

Zane's mum and dad, Nicole and Kye, have been trying since the general election to get a meeting with Keir Starmer in relation to the campaign and the need for an independent panel inquiry. They tried all sorts of routes, but it was the president that managed to achieve that through the NEC and got in the room with them.

I want to place on record my thanks to Ian for doing that, and also for Joe Weir and the work that he's done on behalf of the region in pursuing this campaign alongside the family for the last six years. We can't go into the details of what was said in the meeting, but it was productive, and I think it's going to move things in the right direction, which I'm sure we're all pleased to hear.

And then the final note is Zane's mum and dad, Kye and Nicole, have asked that, placed on the record today at this conference, the thanks to everyone within this union from 2019 when we took on that campaign with them, beside them, and for our unwavering support towards them in their campaign to get truth for their son, Zane. Thanks, president. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Steve. I'll just echo, Kye, Nicole, really do want to pass on the thanks to the national union and the local officials who are really making a difference in this campaign. So thanks for that.

Right, I now call para D10, para D11. Hereford and Worcester.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, talking under paragraph D11. Comrades, I appreciate that this is about DBS checks, and I have cleared it with the AGS that I can talk about vetting under this paragraph. So thank you, AGS. Comrades, I'm sure our situation isn't unique in Hereford and Worcester. In 2019, London moved an emergency resolution entitled Blurring the Thin Blue Line. That blue line is well and truly blurred right now. We have joint police and fire facilities in Hereford and Worcester. And like I say, I'm sure that's not unique. We have our members going through police vetting and we have members failing that vetting.

Now in 2017 (and thank you to the AGS for bringing this to my attention because it was him that actually moved the resolution in 2017) where conference agreed that police vetting is not within the terms and conditions of our members and instructs the executive council to raise this matter formally with the national employers. That is what this conference agreed.

Now, comrades, like I say, our members are being vetted under the police vetting system. They are failing that vetting system. And where does that leave our members? If it was a member, they could be redeployed into another position in another location. We've got retained wholetime members that are being vetted, and they are failing that process. Where does that leave those members? I'd just like some reassurance that the conference position, that it does not fall within our terms and conditions, is just restated at the NJC with our national employers, and to safeguard our members from police vetting. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Neil. Yep. Ben.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks Neil. Just to be clear to Mark and standing orders, I certainly didn't give any permission. The issue of vetting is quite similar in some sense to DBS, so I think this is certainly the right section to bring it up in. And as Neil and I were

talking, actually, we reflected on the fights that we had in Lincolnshire previously where they were in dispute and they brought about joint secs facilitated conciliation. I'm happy to work with the local officials there, Neil, in getting all that documentation across to you so you can provide the arguments for your members in Hereford and Worcester. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks for that, Ben. Right, conference. I'm now going to try and outline some plans what we're going to do just before we break for lunch. We're not breaking for lunch yet. But when we do, don't everybody run out the door! We're going to do one of our usual, "everybody hold the poster" photographs. Who did the "ah"? We're going to try it again.

Look, we tried it last year and maybe the posters were a little bit big. We're going with a smaller version this time and I'm going to ask the stewards to start handing them out shortly. They will be placed on the end of your rows, so please take one and pass it along. We do it at the EC and there's only 13 on there, and it gets halfway and then stops. Somebody forgets to pass it on. So make sure you take one and pass it along please. And then just before lunch we will call you to order and then I'll get Mark, the photographer, to come up here and start directing operations. And that will be like usual, it'll be like herding cats, but we'll do our best.

Also, while I'm just doing that, while they're just handing those out. I'll remind you that we do have two fringes at lunchtime. At one o'clock. These are in the Imperial 1: How To Have An Effective Organising Conversation, and Hope Not Hate in Imperial 3. So please, let's not forget about those.

I'll just let those carry on being handed out. Right, conference, that now completes section D. So what I am going to do, because - did I not call D12? No. I call para D12. Anybody? Somebody could have gone up to speak, aren't they? No. All right, thank you for that. Good reminder. And because we have got a short space before lunch, I'm going to try and fill in with a resolution from somewhere else and they have been informed.

So we're going to jump back to section A on the report. So we're still in section A, para A2 and I call resolution 8 Driver Protections moved by South Wales with amendments from Scotland and London. The EC are giving qualified support.

Resolution 8 DRIVER PROTECTIONS

Conference is concerned at the lack of protection that is currently in place for our members who undertake driving as part of their role within the fire and rescue service, and all other emergency service employees across the UK.

Conference recognises that this is having an adverse effect upon the number of people actually undertaking emergency fire appliance response driving. This, in turn, has a negative impact on drivers, with those individuals burdened with driving more frequently thus further exacerbating the problem. This also deprives drivers of fulfilling other roles within the crew such as BA wearer or Entry Control Officer.

Emergency service drivers face additional added pressures, risks and additional responsibilities. If involved in an accident while on duty, there is a real financial risk to their personal and family vehicle insurance policies. There is also potential for disciplinary and legal action.

Conference is concerned at the reducing numbers of firefighters now undertaking emergency response driver training, due to this insurance protection issue.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to explore all avenues available to protect our members from personal financial detriment, to mitigate the risks to increased personal insurance premiums due to accidents while driving fire service vehicles on duty.

Conference instructs that appropriate added responsibility allowance and / or remuneration is considered as a way of alleviating this ongoing exponential problem.

SOUTH WALES

AMENDMENT 1

1st paragraph, 3rd line delete ‘and all other emergency service employees across the UK’

SCOTLAND

AMENDMENT 2

5th paragraph, 4th line after ‘duty.’ insert new sentence ‘If the current laws prevent or present an obstruction to providing protection then the Executive Council should seek guidance from lawyers and/or politicians for changes to legislation.’

LONDON

AMENDMENT 3

6th paragraph, 1st line delete ‘responsibility allowance and / or’ insert ‘pensionable’

SCOTLAND

ROSS DAVIES (South Wales):

Good afternoon, conference, while everyone’s trying to fiddle with this.

THE PRESIDENT:

Conference, come to order.

ROSS DAVIES (South Wales):

So, conference, president, funny story for this one. Turns out positive constructive discussion works, which is great. When we came to conference, we had much discussion with the EC on this resolution and they’ve actually changed their position, which is a win for all of us. So first off, thank you so much for the healthy debates of the EC. *Applause*

We spent hours last night working on a speech to vocally oppose the information from the meetings we’d had with several of the EC members. And after meeting Mark Rowe, I quickly realised I was somewhat intellectually outclassed. *(Laughter)* So after many hours of work, the original speech I’m not going to use because it’s a bit pointless, but instead, what I’d like to lead on is some of the information that we’ve had from our members and the reason that we brought this resolution in the first place.

At our brigade, a series of events have happened that have negatively impacted our members. This has led to threats of disciplinaries, rises in insurance premiums and threatening suggestions from managers of legal consequences. Having had time to talk to some of you in the room and lobby for our position, it’s definitely something that is shared by a lot of people here. So we think it’s a really important issue that needs to be addressed.

The passion and stories shared by many of you to us shows that this is a major concern, and it’s a growing one. To our brothers and sisters from London and Scotland, thank you for the amendments. We agree with all of them and I’m kind of annoyed we didn’t notice them in the first place. So thank you for those.

After much debate, we at region 8 end on this thought. What isn’t a debate for us is the real financial risks to our members through their insurance premiums. What isn’t a debate for us is the increased stress and pressure put on drivers with zero incentive for this extra skillset. What isn’t a debate for us is the very real drop in driver numbers, which is now impacting and affecting most, if not all, brigades in the room and across the UK. As this issue has a history with conference, we ask you to support our position on this and act on it now. Conference, support us. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ross. Does that have a seconder? Thank you.

GRAEME JONES (Merseyside):

President, conference, seconding resolution 8 Driver Protections. I too have had to change my speech a little bit. I would be interested to hear the original reasons for opposition from the EC though. If it’s around whether this is or isn’t in the rolemap, I don’t think it matters.

I think we need protections for drivers regardless. If it's because of concerns changing in legislation, comrades, is that not why we are here? And if it's concerns around whether they were or weren't aware of whether this is or isn't an issue, I'm afraid they simply haven't been listening. I remember Scotland bringing a very similar resolution, Mid and West Wales have brought a resolution to this conference that they've withdrawn. We've heard brigades struggle to recruit drivers due to lack of protections. In Merseyside, we actually have the opposite issue. Our former chief, now the chair of the NFCC, has used FF 9.1 of the firefighter's rolemap, driving to incidents, particularly paragraph G, Appropriate Use of Warning Devices, to say that this is in the rolemap of the firefighter. He's even wrote it into the contracts of new firefighters, stating that they must drive to complete their apprenticeship.

This has led to a number of drivers joining the service with having only just passed their driving test, or in some cases still to attain it, with less than two years in the job and even less driving experience; we have drivers driving 18-ton vehicles on blue lights, many of whom are under 25, with insurance premiums already the most expensive they will ever be. Lack of driving experience, as well as a lack of operational experience, puts them under even increased pressure. Any driver will tell you bumps and grazes in the truck happen.

For me, this isn't a call to just give drivers carte blanche to drive however they want and protect them at all costs. We still have to bear some personal responsibility, but the blame almost certainly falls at the firefighter's feet every single time. Even though it might be that a banks person who doesn't drive so doesn't understand how a truck can swing, has gave them the wrong instruction, even though it might be that as the traffic parts so to get the truck through, someone shoots into the gap, you are still held liable.

All we're asking for is recognition and protection. Protection that helps to offset the impact that this has on the driver's personal insurance premiums, because in Merseyside at least, we are legally obliged to tell our insurance companies if we have a bump in the truck.

And the impact isn't just financial. We see it in Merseyside. The unfortunate situation on two occasions in recent years where new firefighters forced to drive, despite raising concerns about their confidence while behind the wheel, have been involved in RTCs that have resulted in serious long-term injuries to members of their crew, one of whom is looking at being pensioned out the job.

My worry is that we'll see the conditions we have in Merseyside, inexperienced drivers with low confidence, taking a financial hit for minor bumps and psychological impacts for major bumps, because more experienced firefighters and more experienced road users feel it's not worth the risk for them when they're obligated to inform their insurance companies. The least we can do is seek to detect, seek to protect them, and offset the financial burden to make the role more appealing. We welcome the amendments, and I welcome the EC's position on this. Conference, I second. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Graeme. Scotland to move your amendments. Are you moving both of 'em together, Scott? Excellent. Thank you. The EC are supporting both amendments and the third, sorry.

SCOTT MacRORY (Scotland):

Good. President, conference, speaking in support of resolution 8 and moving Scotland's amendments. Conference, year after year, a resolution about driving emergency service vehicles comes to the floor, and year after year we hear both the positives about recognising driving as a skill that should receive some form of financial incentive, but also the negatives about why it shouldn't be an additional responsibility allowance and the challenges around where it sits within the rolemap.

Let's be absolutely clear. Driving a 15-ton fire engine, or indeed any other fire service vehicle under blue light conditions, is an advanced skill that comes with enormous risks. I'm pretty sure nobody here would debate otherwise. Yes, we are reasonably well trained, and for the most part we give blue light driving the respect and care it deserves. But it is a huge responsibility to put onto a firefighter.

They're in charge of their own lives, the lives of their crew members, the public and other road users - for what? No extra pay, no advanced driving qualification, no insurance premium discount, and all while putting their personal driving licence on the line every single time they get behind the wheel of a fire engine.

In region 1, we have huge issues with driver numbers. Where I'm from in the north of Scotland, we rely heavily on crew managers driving outside of the rolemap and against the national advice of our union simply to boost the numbers. I was included in those crew manager driver figures until falling out catastrophically with our central staffing department, who informed me I would be driving on a day shift, whether I liked it or not.

Needless to say, my driving skill was removed as an attribute less than five minutes later, after a heated conversation with words I won't repeat from the rostrum. Conference, we have firefighters in development being forced to drive before they're ready to do so, and retained incident commanders driving under blue lights to then swap hats on arrival and take command of the incident.

We've seen social media videos of trainees under huge pressures while the IC is in the background trying to get into their leggings at the side of the appliance with no spans of control whatsoever after driving. All of these issues are a disaster waiting to happen. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service spend close to £1 million a year on slow speed manoeuvre accidents alone, and have now developed a disciplinary matrix for investigating officers to use to determine the right level of disciplinary sanction. All of this, before we even get to the more significant accidents.

Conference, I ask you, why would anyone willingly put themselves on the line to do this? We do it because we're firefighters. While Scotland's amendment addresses the non-pensionable ARA element of the resolution, we wholeheartedly agree with our comrades in South Wales that there is a dire need for better protection for emergency service drivers, as well as the right incentives to undertake the advanced skill of blue light driving. Scotland supports this resolution, and I move our amendments. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Scott. Does amendment 1 have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. Does amendment 3 have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. I now call amendment 2 from London. The EC position is support. *Formally* Thanks, Jon. Does amendment 2 from London have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate.

REBEKAH UDEN (North Wales):

President, conference, I'm going to talk you all through a little scenario. It's 8.30am. You've nearly reached the end of your shift. You've been out during the night at fire calls. You're tired, but the bells drop. House fire, persons. You are a BA wearer and your fellow firefighter is the driver.

You turn out of station and it's rush hour. It's Wales, so it's raining heavily. It's a weekday and the traffic is heavy. There's pressure on each crew member, but particularly the driver. They have a hazardous route. The roads are wet and busy, and they're driving a 15-ton fire engine at speed on blue lights with significant noise and distractions in the cab.

The junction up ahead is busy. The driver proceeds at reduced speed, but a car pulls out and there's a collision. The car carries a family with three children on board en route to school. The road traffic collision between the appliance and the car causes significant damage to both vehicles and injuries and hospitalisation.

The firefighter driving is now at risk of a criminal investigation, the loss of their own licence, and months and months of legal battles and FBU intervention. Does this sound too dramatic? Because it's happened. That's exactly what's happened. And what about the driver?

They agreed to do the additional role. They agreed to do the additional training and give that additional commitment and take the additional risk and responsibility that comes with it, not only for the crew in the cab, but for the members of the public on the roads. Why are we not giving reward and recognition for our members that give additional value to fire crews across the UK and get our crews out of the door?

Why aren't we giving them protection for their own licences that they need for their private lives? It's my hope one day that I'm sat around the mess table and I hear someone say, "do you remember years ago when drivers didn't get paid for driving? I'm glad we do now, and that was down to the FBU". Conference, we support. *Applause*

PHILIPPA SMITH (West Midlands):

President, conference, speaking in support of resolution 8. In 2023, West Midlands carried out a survey of its drivers receiving nearly 250 responses. The results demonstrated time and time again that drivers were worried about a lack of exposure to roles outside of driving, that whilst they enjoyed driving, it did stop them from experiencing other roles on the fire ground, and that they felt taken for granted as they were being paid the same as those who didn't drive, yet had far more responsibility. Responses cited drivers needing to be recognised for a fair pay reward, and to be supported when mistakes are made rather than questioned and probed. Drivers felt undervalued, underappreciated, drained, and that it should be seen as career progression.

Knowing we are supported by the brigade would offer a reassurance to all. All this resolution asks for is a consideration for a responsibility allowance and/or remuneration. Conference, we support. *Applause*

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, speaking in support of resolution number 8, Driver Protections. Comrades, I apologise if you've heard this before, and I've spoke to a colleague recently this morning on this matter. So this is something that I've raised before at conference in 2023.

One of our members was dismissed after breaking a wing mirror. That member was on a final written warning after he was in charge of a vehicle that was driven into flood water causing irreparable damage to a vehicle. However, he didn't have control of the wheel. He didn't have control of the pedals. He had no actual control over that vehicle because, like my comrade said earlier, we don't have dual controls in our fire engines.

However, he found himself on a final written warning, and he accepted that warning because on the day that he had his disciplinary he had a phone call, excuse me. He had a phone call from the hospital to say that his – (*Applause*). Thank you conference. He had a phone call from the hospital to say that his daughter had four days left to live.

Conference, he didn't have it in himself to challenge the outcome. He didn't have it in himself to challenge that final written warning. So he accepted it, and he carried that final written warning, and he was told that, in order to return to work, it was an expectation that he would drive. So he drove and he broke a wing mirror. Conference, because he was on a final written warning, the brigade in 2023 sacked our member. It will be no surprise to you that is exactly where the resolution calling for confirmation of our contractual obligations came from. Because in 2023, I wanted to tell all of our members who were under the same risk of dismissal for breaking a wing mirror, no less, to withdraw from driving, to hand in the keys. Do not drive. And I couldn't do that, because that would be unlawful industrial action. So that's the importance of knowing our rolemap, and our obligations in terms of our contractual obligations. That member has thankfully found himself other employment, and I thank all those involved in that process, and especially the GS for your support.

I just want to say, please support the resolution. I know that you will. But please get protection for your members. Can we all say, hand on heart, that we've all had adequate training in all foreseeable eventualities in terms of driving? Comrades, are expected to drive off-road. Have we had specific driving in all eventualities, all foreseeable conditions, be that mud, be that ice, be that snow? If we were to break another vehicle, we are all at risk. Please support the motion. Conference, I support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Neil. Anybody else? Mark Rowe.

MARK ROWE (National Officer):

President, conference, thanks for the contributions, and I'd like to say a couple of words in relation to some of the things raised before I do move to the qualifications. Comrades, when the executive council do have opposition to things, it's not just because it's thought that it's difficult, or we don't particularly like the wording of the resolution. There's legitimate concerns and reasons why, and I'll go into them. What you have to understand, and I'm sure that

you do and recognise, is that every single person sat here is a firefighter, or a firefighter control. We know the issues, we've done it. I myself understand the issues quite intimately. And Graeme, just to reassure you, as you know, comrade, as a firefighter in Merseyside for 36 years, 25 of them driving, I've took wing mirrors off, I've dragged whole lockers off, I've written a fire engine off into the back of another one. All in all, a pretty dreadful driver of fire engines.

And I think it's fair to say that the public, and my watch in particular, breathed a collective sigh of relief when I took the brigade secretary's role. I've been through the discipline, I've been through the capability. We've organised to fight locally. So there are things that we can do.

And I know that the organising stuff that we're talking about will pay dividends in this and fighting, and we did fight off locally threats of dismissal, etc. Graeme has asked for the reason. The reason is that is the ARA reference was the main reason the EC were concerned. We don't work with ARAs, and that's why we wanted the amendment to be in there in relation to Scotland making this pensionable.

So, finally getting round to the qualification, comrades. The qualification of the executive council is that we don't accept that there's a lack of protection. That shouldn't be there for our members. Absolutely, it shouldn't be there.

On a personal point, as the legal officer over the last five years, when it's been brought to my attention, no member has ever been left without protection, legal or otherwise. If the bosses have abandoned members, and they have, and we know they have, the union steps in. Liability protection is the bosses' responsibility.

But the FBU will never, and I've got to repeat it, we will never leave members high and dry when the bosses walk away as a result of accidents while undertaking driving duties. The matters raised in this resolution, discussing it again this morning with the general secretary and the assistant general secretary, are going to be moved now into the pay reform negotiations. So we are going to use that vehicle (sorry, for the bad pun) to get this delivered for you. But, conference, what I'm going to ask for is the dreaded brigade secretaries' circular response, and reply from yourselves. We need the information; we want to know. I'll be sending it out with a number of questions in relation to how many drivers you've got, how many times the drivers are having to drive constantly for several weeks at a time. And I do recognise that, because that was the situation I found myself in. We need all this information. How many occasions has people's own vehicle insurance gone up? To what extent? How much we need that. And we'll be doing this in conjunction with the NJC as well. We'll be pushing it and asking for that from the bosses, that information as well, if you are finding that difficult to get.

So when you get that circular asking for that information, please respond. Please respond. Even if it's a nil return, we need that information, because the first thing they're going to say when we go in is, where's your evidence? Prove this is a real issue out there. We know it's an issue. Give us that evidence and let us get into the pay reform negotiations with a big file to evidence it. Thanks, president. Thanks, conference. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Mark. I now put amendment 1 to resolution 8 from Scotland to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put amendment 2 to resolution 8 from Scotland to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put amendment 3 to resolution 8 from Scotland to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put resolution 8 as amended to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Right, conference, just before we break for lunch, and I did pre-warn you, we're going to have another go at these posters, so I'll ask Mark.

Photographs were taken

Conference, straight after we have finished the photograph, it's lunchtime. Don't forget the fringe meetings. Thank you.

Break for lunch

AFTERNOON SESSION

THE PRESIDENT:

Afternoon, conference. I now call the chair of the standing orders committee, Phil Millar, to give his report.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Thank you, president. Conference, it's just a delegate change. It's a reversal. Region 3 Cleveland, removed Davy Howe and replace with Nick Cain, back as it was this morning.

Also, conference, can I just ask, I've spoken to the stall providers and footfall has been quite light, understandably given the weather, but could I please encourage you to at least go in and have a look around? Thanks very much. Thanks, president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Phil. Is that report agreed? *Agreed*. Thank you.

Conference, as I think it has been reported to you, we've got the Birmingham bin workers coming tomorrow who are on strike. So we're going to have a collection for them. Obviously, that makes it very difficult, because not a lot of people have cash anymore, so I would ask of you, it could help if you are passing a mini bank tonight, get some cash out if you're into donating that. We have got a card machine, apparently (I'm looking at Lindsey now). So hopefully we've got a card machine, apparently my bank details on it, but not going to me. But I'm some sort of authoriser - or coming outta my bank. So if you want to make a donation via card, we can do that. It would be really good if we can hand over a donation to them tomorrow, and I'll give further details on that tomorrow morning. Thank you.

Right, we're now back in the programme and we are on section E, Government Policy And Legislation, para E1. Conference, as per the standing orders report, I'll now be taking emergency resolution 8. However, before I do that, conference, this debate is a really important debate for the union. And as we know from past experiences, it can be a very emotive subject. And I want to remind any speakers, language is really important. I don't think anyone in this room would intentionally say anything transphobic or anything like that. But please be careful on the language you use. And I've said in the opening address, we can disagree, but be respectful, treat each other with respect, and also respect other views. But above all, be nice and be respectful. I now call emergency resolution 8, No LGB Without The T. Moved by the LGBT+ committee. The EC are supporting. Maria.

EMERGENCY RESOLUTION 8 NO LGB WITHOUT THE T

Conference stands firmly in the belief that the trans community is an intrinsic and inseparable part of the broader LGBT+ movement. The struggles for equality, dignity, and safe spaces have always been shared, and any attempt to divide our movement weakens us all.

Conference condemns the recent Supreme Court ruling, driven by far-right ideologies, which directly threatens the rights of trans individuals. This ruling is neither sensible nor workable. It fails to recognise that both gender and sex are far more complex than a simple binary and disregards the real-life consequences for those impacted.

Conference reaffirms that trans rights and women's rights are not in opposition. Women's sex-based rights can and must be respected while advocating for trans liberation. The fight for equality must be rooted in solidarity, ensuring that all women, cis and trans alike, are protected and empowered. We stand against all forms of discrimination and affirm that safeguarding trans rights strengthens the broader movement for justice and equity.

Now, more than ever, unity must be our strongest tool against division. Conference calls on the EC to:

- ***reject fragmentation and instead work together to strengthen solidarity across all marginalised communities***
- ***instruct brigade committees and regional committees to seek the advice and support of equality sections to help members through this difficult time***

- ***call upon employers to recognise the urgent need for fairness and common sense. Workplace policies must protect and uplift trans individuals, ensuring their right to safe and inclusive spaces, free from discrimination***
- ***develop and implement a model trans-inclusive policies that provide resources to assist officials in bargaining for safe and affirming workplaces***
- ***call for strong lobbying efforts directed at the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to safeguard protections for trans individuals and uphold their legal rights.***

LGB and T have always been, and must remain, intertwined in our fight for equality.

Conference calls for unwavering solidarity with our trans siblings, advocating for safety, dignity, and justice for all. Together, we will reject division, stand as one, and fight for a future where every LGBT+ person is protected, valued, and supported.

LGBT+

MARIA BUCK (LGBT+):

President, conference, I move this resolution today on behalf of the LGBT+ section, because what we're talking about here isn't just policy, it's people. It's about our colleagues, our friends, our family. It's about the kind of movement we want to be and the kind of world we want to build.

We are facing a coordinated and dangerous backlash. The recent Supreme Court ruling is not just legally incoherent, it's a political statement, one that seeks to erase the existence of trans and non-binary people under the guise of legal clarity. It's a ruling that ignores the complexity of sex and gender, and instead, imposes a rigid, outdated framework that simply doesn't reflect reality.

Let's start with the reality we are facing. The recent Supreme Court ruling is not just unworkable, it's dangerous and driven by an increase in far right ideas across public discourse. For Women Scotland, who took the case to the Supreme Court, consider themselves feminists, not far right gender critical feminists at that. But their view that women are defined by biology and biology alone has always been challenged.

Some feminists see that womanhood is also defined by personal identity and social experience, that sexuality, ethnicity, and society also define the type of woman that someone can be. So this ruling that tries to reduce gender and sex to a rigid binary, ignores the lived realities of millions of people.

It's a ruling that creates confusion, not clarity. It undermines rights rather than upholding them. And it's a ruling that sends a chilling message to our trans and non-binary siblings that their identities, their dignity, and their safety is up for a debate. Far right ideologies rooted in rigid hierarchies, traditionalist values, and a briefing in unchanging social categories, particularly around ethnicity, nation, and gender.

This worldview often manifests in hostility towards those who challenge cisgender, heterosexual and white supremacist norms, including Black and brown people, lesbian, gay, and transgender people.

In recent years, transphobia has become a central rallying point for far right movements, uniting different factions around a shared opposition to trans rights and visibility. However, it's important to distinguish between ideology, extremism, and legal interpretation. While the UK Supreme Court's ruling on the Equality Act may align with a biological definition of sex, supporting or agreeing with that legal outcome does not inherently make someone far right. Legal reasoning can stem from statutory interpretation rather than ideological belief. And many who support trans rights may still find aspects of the ruling legally sound or necessary for clarity.

But conference, we must be honest about the political landscape that we're in. We are witnessing a coordinated attack on bodily autonomy, on equality legislation, and on the very idea of inclusive rights. The so-called Reform agenda is not about fairness or balance. It's about rolling back progress for women, for the LGBT+ community and the Black and brown people. It's about using fear to divide us, and it's about targeting the most marginalised to distract from the real issues: underfunding of services, rising inequality and a broken system.

This ruling isn't about protecting rights; it's about restricting them. It's part of a broader agenda we're seeing across the political landscape. An agenda that targets our right to make decisions about our bodies, undermines the equality law that we as trades unions that have fought for and use division as a weapon, and let's call it what it is, it's a shift to the right, emboldened and organised, trying to turn back the clock.

But we've seen this before. The LGBT+ community has always had to fight for recognition, for safety, for the right to live openly and authentically. And we know that progress doesn't come from playing it safe. It comes from standing up, speaking out, and standing together. This resolution is about doing just that. It's about saying we will not be divided. We will not allow trans people to be scapegoated, and we will not let misinformation and fear dictate our values.

Now, I want you to acknowledge something important. These conversations can be difficult. Not everyone feels confident talking about gender identity or trans inclusion, and that's okay. It's okay to have questions. It's okay to be on a journey of learning. What matters is that we approach each other with respect, with openness, and a shared commitment to justice. You don't need to be an expert to stand in solidarity. You just need to believe that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity.

This resolution lays out a clear and practical path forward. These are not abstract goals. They are urgent, necessary steps for the union to protect people who are under attack right now. This isn't just about trans people; this is about all of us. Because when one group's rights are rolled back, it sets a precedent. It opens the door for further erosion of protections for women, for disabled people, for Black and brown communities, and for workers. The LGBT+, women's and Black and brown communities have always shared common ground. We've all had to fight hard. We've all had to be told to wait our turn. We've all been accused of asking for too much, and we've all learned that the only way that we win this is by standing together.

This resolution is rooted in our shared history. It's about recognising that our struggles are linked, and that our strength lies in our unity. So, conference, let's be clear about our message. Trans people are not a threat to women or anyone else. They are part of our movement. They are part of our workplaces, they are part of our union, and they deserve to be safe, respected, and supported.

Let's move this resolution with pride, with purpose, and with the full force of our solidarity behind it. Because there is no equality without inclusion. There is no justice without unity, and there is no LGB without the T. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Maria. Does that have a seconder? Kerry.

KERRY McCRONE (NWC):

President, conference, I second this resolution today on behalf of the national women's committee because it is not just a policy motion. It's a call to action, a call for unity, for courage, and for compassion in the face of growing division and hostility. Let me be absolutely clear, there is no conflict between women's rights and trans rights. *Applause*

The idea that we must choose between them is a false narrative pushed by those who benefit from our division. We reject that narrative. We reject the politics of fear, and we reject those that seek to turn us against one another. We've seen this before. Women's rights were never handed to us. We fought for them. We fought for the right to vote, to work and to control our own bodies, and we remember those fights and how they were framed as too radical, too confusing, a threat to tradition. Does it sound familiar? The fight for LGBT+ rights has followed a similar path, from section 28 to marriage equality. Every step forward has been met with resistance, and yet we've kept going because we know that justice doesn't come from standing still; it comes from us standing together.

That's why this resolution matters because it says clearly, we will not be divided. We will not allow women's rights to be weaponised against trans rights. We will not allow fear to replace facts, and we will not let it dictate the terms of our solidarity. It is okay if some people feel unsure or don't fully understand everything about gender identity or trans experiences. These are complex topics and many of us are still learning. What matters is that we approach these conversations with respect, empathy, and a willingness to listen. We don't need to have all the answers to stand in solidarity. We just need to stand on the side of dignity, equality, justice. There was a fringe meeting last night, so if anybody did have questions, that was your chance to ask those questions.

This resolution is not about shutting down debate. It's about ensuring that debate happens in a space that is safe, respectful, and rooted in our shared values. It's about recognising that trans women are women, that non-binary people deserve protection, and that women's sex-based rights can and must be upheld alongside trans rights.

We are not in competition. We are a coalition. And let's be clear, this isn't abstract. This is personal. For our trans and non-binary siblings, this political climate is not just hostile, it is terrifying. It means being misgendered at work. It means being denied healthcare. It means facing harassment in public spaces. It means being told again and again that you do not belong. We cannot allow that to continue. We must be the movement that says you do belong, you are valued, and you are protected. This resolution calls for real practical action, and these are the tools that we need to turn our values into action. Conference, we are at a crossroads. We can choose fear, or we can choose solidarity. We can choose division, or we can choose unity. We can choose to be bystanders, or we can choose to be allies. I know which side this union stands on.

Let us move forward together. Let us protect women's rights and trans rights, because they are not a conflict. They are part of the same fight for freedom, for fairness, and for a future where everyone can live with dignity. There is no LGB without the T. There is no women's liberation without trans liberation. So let's move this resolution, let's stand together and let's show the world what real solidarity looks like. The NWC, as the elected voice of women in our union, second this resolution. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kerry. That's now open for debate.

SCOTT MacRORY (Scotland):

President, conference, speaking in support of emergency resolution 8. Conference, over the course of this week, we've already debated and agreed a number of resolutions on equality. We've agreed EC policy statements on opposing the threat of the far right and on unity and strength in the workplace.

Sadly, only today we once again see online attacks against our LGBT+ siblings. An increasingly familiar pattern whenever our LGBT+ comrades take resolutions to conferences, with the usual right wing media outlets only too eager to leap on the anti-trans bandwagon as a means to distract political and industrial discourse away from our fights for decent pay, terms and conditions, and equality for all. To those journalists I offer this advice: you're not going to win a Pulitzer Prize with the story of an equality section of a union with a flagship equality campaign, moving an equality resolution to equality conferences or at their own union national conference.

Scotland does have some issues with some of the language within this emergency resolution, but not with the intent. We do not believe the Supreme Court's ruling was driven by far right ideology, but we do recognise that the far right have mobilised behind and supported anti-trans campaigners to drive their own toxic narrative. Just look at the comments sections on any of the blogs and articles covering the judgment if you need to be convinced of this.

Scotland also wished to highlight that many of our women members are uncomfortable with the term cis women, and do not find this to be inclusive language. But, conference, our LGBT+ and specifically our trans comrades are under attack, and are feeling even more marginalised and isolated than ever on the back of the Supreme Court ruling, and as allies, as comrades, as trade unionists, it is our duty to give our unwavering solidarity. Advocate for safety, dignity and justice for all, and reject all attempts to divide us.

These are the very principles we stand on. An injury to one is an injury to all. Conference, Scotland stands in complete solidarity with our LGBT+ comrades. We support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Scott. Rebekah.

REBEKAH UDEN (North Wales):

President, conference. Rebekah Uden, straight, 36 and female. Speaking as a female, I've never felt threatened by any trans individual. I have felt threatened by men. The trans community ask to be accepted and supported, and we should offer that freely without judgment and without any support of the hate.

I'm not going to say much more than what Maria and Kerry have already touched on, and they've done a really good job in explaining to everybody, but I feel as though we should all be at a point where we are ready to willingly support the LGBT+ section within this union. We need to support them just as they support our members who identify as LGBT+ and have done so for us in North Wales during a difficult time recently.

We are grateful that they are there for our members across the UK whose rights are being violated. Well done on raising this, and the awareness around it here in conference. I know I've definitely learned quite a lot this week myself. So to all in the LGBT+ community: we see you, we hear you. We support you. There is no LGB without the T. Solidarity. *Applause*

MATT NICHOLLS (South Yorkshire):

Conference, president, back to say it in just a couple of words. Conference, when I first saw this motion, I thought firstly to our women's section, and it's clear our women's section within South Yorkshire support this motion. And then I thought to myself as a short, bald, white British male, what do I think? And it's simple. Everyone deserves dignity. South Yorkshire support. *Applause*

DWIGHT WILLIAMS (B&EMM):

President, conference, speaking in support of the emergency resolution 8, No, LGB without the T. We must remember when we speak of underrepresented groups, we speak of women, Black and ethnic minorities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. There is also a plus that fall under the LGB and let's not forget the T section.

We have spoken on protecting those vulnerable people who fall victim to discrimination and hate. You, conference, voted on protecting their identities, their dignity and respecting them. You all voted on parental rights, which all sections have spoken on and shared their experiences. You voted on fighting back against the far right. You voted on the EC policy statement to rise up against the far right yesterday. Their ideologies don't fit our journey in this movement. Why would we not fight to protect all rights of all firefighters? Our minority firefighters are underrepresented firefighters. We don't want to take away from other minority groups. What we want to do is protect everyone, and that includes all those individuals who may not fully understand.

They need protecting from the likes of people who don't want to accept different people. "You are Black, go to the back. We will not protect you." "You are a woman. You will not get equal pay. We will not protect you." "You are gay. You will not marry. We will not protect you." "You are trans. You will not have a safe space. There is none. We will not protect you." Is this the message that we want to give? Conference, discrimination is discrimination. We don't want to remove rights. We want to improve them.

Our equality sections are committed to working together and intersectionality is what we do. Conference, by not supporting this resolution, you too will be someone who doesn't accept or welcome a person who doesn't quite fit into what an ideal world is as per those who follow the likes of the far right, fascist, racist, inexpressible group of people.

What we are looking for is that same narrative driven by hate against Black and ethnic minorities. Have your votes before now been half-hearted? Did you mean them? Those raised hands, do they count? Do you support a world where equality matters? Conference, we urge you to support this resolution. Conference, we ask for equality. Conference, we support. *Applause*

EMILY HOLLANDS (Greater Manchester):

President, conference, I don't want to be in this position whereby I find myself opposing this resolution, but particular language used within it leaves me no option. The intimation that because I hold a particular view on the Supreme Court ruling suggests that I also hold far right ideologies is too strong a feeling for me not to stand up and to speak to conference on this resolution. *Applause*

This resolution speaks of division and the need for unity whilst using language that, in my opinion, is offensive and could result in alienating members for their views that are protected by law. This resolution, and the recent statement put out by the FBU, condemns the Supreme Court ruling when it should be thankful for the clarification that the ruling has given.

For those that don't know what the clarification is, for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010, the definitions of woman, man and sex refer to biological sex, meaning that women's rights to have single sex spaces in certain situations where women are vulnerable or require dignity and privacy or fairness are protected from all males, as has always been the case since the Equality Act came into place. Women can't have human rights if we can't name who's a man and who's a woman. The organisations that support this ruling were founded by left wing trade union women, and not by far right ideological groups, as the resolution suggests. Women who are sexual assault survivors, who want to be assured that there is a safe space without any males, for other women who will go through such an ordeal, women who compete in sport, who don't want to see their hard-earned efforts taken away by someone who has a biological advantage. And members of this union that I speak to that agree that this is a reasonable approach. I feel deeply for my trans comrades and the uncertainty that they must be feeling right now. I welcome the request for fairness and common sense to create policies that work for all of our members. And the new equalities network that was voted in this conference is a great starting point to bring together all the sections on complex issues like this where we can discuss members' different views, comradely.

But the rhetoric that the women who believe in single sex spaces are bigots has to stop. We cannot work together to be inclusive if women are still too scared to share their opinions for fear of being labelled far right. The law has not changed, and belief in single sex spaces is protected by law. Also, I need clarification from the FBU what their stance will be if a female makes a complaint about a male using female-only facilities on station. Would she be going against union policy by exercising her right under the Equality Act? Conference, with a heavy heart, I oppose. *Applause*

MO AHMED (London):

Conference, president, general secretary, so I don't know how to follow any of that on all of the things, and I certainly don't know how to follow that. We at London have had so much debate on this subject, more than anything else. We've gone this way, we've gone that way, to the point that we actually tried to get an amendment. We were refused that amendment. But it's with a heavy heart that we can't support this resolution. And I'll go back to why we can't do that. When the Supreme Court made that ruling I remember the day, it was a day after my daughter's 19th birthday. And I remember thinking to myself, like, this ruling is going to be horrible for people from the LGBT community. It's going to be grim. The amount of genuinely vile, far right nutters are going to go: "Yes, this is a chance to discriminate." They're going to be doing that. I was clear about that in my mind and then that would lead to discrimination against people of colour, women and everything that follows with that.

But, conference, for me, that's one part of it. The reason we cannot at London - and history will look back on this conference - we cannot support a motion that says the recent Supreme Court ruling is driven by far right ideologies, I have to go back to London and see my members on the fire station who are not here. I've got female firefighters who are not part of the women's action committee in London. They're not part of the national women's committee. They're not part of the LGBT+ community. They're not part of B&EMM. And I've got to look at them in the face when they say that they support this ruling from the Supreme Court. And I have to say to them that we as the FBU think you are coming from a far right ideology. I can't do that, conference, and I can't do that with all the colleagues that I work with, male or female. It does not matter. It does not sit comfortably with me, and it does not sit comfortably with our region.

And what I'll also say, guys, on the Supreme Court, the biggest thing that we've talked about positively, pensions that we've won. Yeah. So we won our pensions. The Court of Appeal gave it to us. The Supreme Court said to the Tory government, you haven't got a right of appeal. Was that right wing? Does anyone want to say that that's right wing? Yeah, we're happy when the Supreme Court ruled in our favour then. I don't think there's anyone in this room that also doesn't support when the Supreme Court ruled that the Rwanda policy was illegal, and you shouldn't send people coming and leaving war zones on a boat; anyone call that right wing at the time just 'cause us people on the left, when we lose something, we should not go to calling each other names and things like that. We should continue to campaign. That's how you do it.

And the last thing I'll leave here in this conference that I've been at compared to last year's one, like I can't say enough. I've spoken to Maria, I've spoken to people, I've spoken to the people from the national women's committee and we need to talk and we need to do better. On the left we can't keep just going to one thing yet. We criticise the right wing, we criticise Trump, we criticise people like that. Conference, thank you. *Applause*

ROB MARTIN (Buckinghamshire):

Conference, president, this is a tough one, and the level of these debates is incredible, and it just makes my point even more relevant. And that is that I come to you from a place of honesty. That is that I have to admit that this is a subject the complexities of which I do not fully understand. That can change, conference, and you have my promise that it will change.

And on that, I'd just like to thank comrades for the fringe event that they put on last night. I think it's important that these subjects are talked about. What I can say though, is that I stand here in solidarity. I stand here in solidarity with the LGBT+ section. I stand here in solidarity with the women's section.

The world needs change, and it needs positive change. And who better to help shape that change than the equality sections who represent and fight for our brothers and sisters, day in, day out? Let us put our trust in those equality sections to ensure that our union, our workplace, and the world that we live in become a safe space for all. Conference, I support. *Applause*

STEVE MATTINSON (Cumbria):

President, conference, - or the other way around - speaking on emergency resolution 10, I'm speaking with caution. Just to echo what Mo said there. I would struggle to go back to members without having the debate. I agree with the premise and the intention of the resolution, and I can't imagine the experiences, the emotions of those directly impacted by this ruling.

I've witnessed the divisive conversations on stations. I've witnessed them everywhere. You can see it online. But as has been mentioned at this conference, language is important, and it can be divisive and it can be inclusive. If you want it to be inclusive, make it inclusive. And I don't think we can label everyone right wing, just to echo what he said. We can't label everyone right wing for their beliefs. It might be a case of miseducation, misunderstanding or bare ignorance. It just depends. But you have the right to your belief, as long as you're respectful. Just to echo what the president said before, we've got to be respectful to each other, and we've got to make sure that we do treat people this way and we just need to educate people, if that's what it's come down to. Everything should be education rather than just, "we need to do this right now. We need to do that right now." Have the debates on station. That's my big thing with this. We need to debate it on station and get the belief from all the members, rather than make a decision now because I haven't got a chance to speak to all 400 members in Cumbria right now for a decision. Conference, I speak in caution. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Steve.

GRAEME JONES (Merseyside):

President, conference, speaking in support of emergency resolution 8. We've all seen the hatred and bile, the misinformation, the purposeful deception on trans rights across social and mainstream media, and indeed, this very resolution just within the last 24 hours. We've seen how this non-issue - because comrades, the trans issue is not an issue - we have seen how it's been hijacked, twisted, and utilised to shift the focus away from real issues facing society, and used to keep people relevant in their own small echo chambers. I understand that there've been some concerns around the language used within this resolution. To echo what a few people have already said, language is important: the words we use, the way that we say them and the intent behind them.

I don't believe, personally, having read the resolution, that it looks to label anyone with questions, anyone seeking to understand, as far right. For me, what it clearly does do is highlights that the furore behind this topic has been pushed and has been weaponised by far right elements within our society. Weaponised by far right elements such as JD Vance, trying to force his gender ideology onto our society in exchange for trade.

Conference, what this resolution does, in my opinion and the opinion of Lee, is asks for calm, calculated, and a sensible response to a court ruling that pushed around 0.5% of our society, even further into the fringes. It doesn't seek to divide; it merely seeks to include. And if we are not a union of inclusion, then what are we? Inclusion is our very fabric. Inclusion and unity are the only reasons we are here. Conference, I ask that you support this resolution, but for my trans comrades, and indeed any of my comrades fighting for equality, know this. Even if this resolution falls, you will always have the unwavering and unequivocal support of Merseyside stood beside you. Conference, we support. *Applause*

KARL KEUNEKE (Lincolnshire):

President, conference, at the heart of this resolution is a simple truth: our strength lies in unity. The trans community is not separate from our movement. They are an essential part of it, and they are our members. And right now, in the face of this dangerous and dehumanising ruling, we are called to act for our members and community.

The asks in this resolution are clear and practical. It asks for commitment and to engage with the section. So let's be clear. Trans rights are workers' rights. Support the resolution. *Applause*

MATT SENIOR (Avon):

I'm stood here because I owe the LGBT section that much. I've told them today that previously I would support the motion, but I'm here to actually speak in opposition and I am sorry. I agree with Merseyside. The content of the resolution does not seek to divide us, but it will. Saying that the ruling comes from far right ideology, if endorsed by this conference, will detach us from our membership, potentially without debate. It can't happen because that is what the far right would actually want. This is about division. The debate around trans rights is confected mostly from the far right to try and split the working class.

Unfortunately, because of the wording in this resolution, we would be aiding them in that aim because we haven't consulted our members on it, first and foremost. But I apologise wholeheartedly. I'm very sorry. Avon opposes. *Applause*

NICOLE MARVIN (Leicestershire):

Conference, I guess the debate around this resolution instructs us that we still have work to do. We have differing opinions. That's fine. But we've just got to be respectful and lift each other and leave no one behind. It serves as a clear example of the very kind of division we've been warned about all week: warnings that came from the general secretary in his address on the far right, warnings echoed by every section and brigades up and down the UK on this very floor this week, met with a standing ovation. Well, conference, now you're up.

Let's be clear. The resolution isn't claiming that feminism is problematic. It's talking about how the far right shapes things, how it shapes ideologies, because these ideologies don't appear from nowhere. They're fuelled, deliberate from our politics and our media class. The UK media has played a massive role in shaping public opinion. *Outlet, The Telegraph, Daily Mail, GB News*. They've spent years running stories to frame trans people, especially trans women, as a danger to women's safety. I'm a Black gay woman. I have been scared of many things. Trans women is not one of them. *Applause* That does sound like I ran the risk of sounding like a Jay-Z song then.

These are not neutral concerns, conference. The far right narratives are rooted in fear and division, dressed up as common sense. And it's not just about the media. During her tenure as Home Secretary, conservative MP Suella Braverman regularly echoed far right rhetoric in her speeches attacking wokeism, questioning LGBTQ+ families and inclusions in schools, and calling for British values to defend from the so-called gender ideology.

These aren't throwaway comments; they're not sound bites. They create real political pressure that seeps into our institutions. This is the climate we are talking about, the climate that this ruling was made in, and I feel that is what the resolution is referring to. It's not set to divide. In fact, it reminds us that women's rights and trans rights are not in conflict. Both deserve protection; both deserve solidarity. And I'll remind you again of yesterday's standing ovation which included we must offer hope. That is what this resolution is asking for. Is that too much to ask? Hope? What are we without hope? Hope to support our reps, doing the work on the ground to create spaces that are safe and inclusive, and to demand legal protection for our members.

These aren't controversial demands. They are fundamentals of a trade union. We cannot let the fight for trans rights be twisted, weaponised, and framed as a threat to others. Standing with trans people is not a rejection of women. It's a rejection of hate. And let's not forget, trans people are not fighting for privilege and preference, and we all have some of it. He's flashing.

THE PRESIDENT:

I don't think he is. *(Laughter)* However, can you start winding up, delegate. Thank you.

THE DELEGATE:

Okay. One second. Okay, I'm wrapping up. Trans women are fighting to exist with dignity. Do the right thing. Support the resolution. *Applause*

ADAM BARNES (Warwickshire):

President, conference, standing in support of emergency resolution 8 No LGB without the T, and first time speaker here at conference. *Applause*

Conference, the trans community is not separate from our struggle. It is a part of us. Any attempt to divide LGB from T weakens a whole LGBT+ movement. And in turn, the union. As a union, we've always stood together, and we must continue to do so. Recent attacks on trans rights are dangerous, and they ignore the real lives of trans people and put them at risk.

As trade unionists, we have a responsibility to fight back with solidarity. This resolution calls for action, support for members, inclusive policies at work, pressure on the EHRC and above all, unity. We need to send a clear message that in our union there is no LGB without the T, and that we all stand together. Conference, Warwickshire supports. *Applause*

BEN CURSON (Nottinghamshire):

President, conference, first time conference, second time speaking. Conference, I understand why this has been brought forward as an emergency resolution on the back of the Supreme Court ruling, which in my opinion belongs in the bin to soak up the Farage.

We are not labelling anyone as right wing, but right wing ideology is being forced into our workplace under this umbrella of twisted knowledge. As we sit here right now in this hall, Nottinghamshire has received a message from one of our members asking for guidance. They've been singled out. Sorry, I'm getting angry. They've been singled out and instructed by a group manager that they are banned from using the female toilets at all fire stations on the back of the Supreme Court ruling.

Conference, this isn't a slow burning issue. This ruling is affecting our members at this very moment. I'm in disbelief that this resolution is having to be discussed.

We are a union built on solidarity and support. We stand together strong to protect the little person against hardship and wrongdoing from the rest of the world. Conference, when our B&EMM brothers and sisters need us, we stand by them. Conference, when our women's section needs us, we stand by them. Conference, when our DND comrades need us, we stand by them. When our LGB members need us, we stand by them. For us to have to bring this resolution forward to support our fellow comrades, just because they are transgender, I feel is appalling. It should go without saying. It is LGBT. Trans women are women.

We do not segregate; we do not ostracise. We do not discriminate. We are talking about our members here, our friends, our family. So we will stand strong together as this is all of our union. We support emergency resolution 8. Thank you. *Applause*

ANDY MURRAY (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, I'm going to be honest. Durham and Darlington are going to be abstaining from this vote because, as is shown, it's a vote that is causing division. We need to go back, and we need to speak to our members. We need to find out exactly where we are with it.

We fully support the resolution with regards to what it's asking for. However, language is important. We need to make sure that what is made through conference is correct, and represents all of our members.

I also wanted to share a story. We had the privilege of standing on a picket line with UCU just last week. And as you could imagine from a union picket line, there was a vast majority of people from different backgrounds, different standpoints. And we were approached by a trans woman who thanked us for the comment that was made by the FBU and put out on social media.

She then emailed the regional secretary to say that the trade union movement, and how we represented them, had given her hope in trade unions. It's a really tough decision, but I think it's a decision that we need to make, and that's why we're abstaining. *Applause*

JIM DAVIES (West Yorkshire):

President, conference, we've had a discussion about this, and as much as we agree with the sentiment that's been put across, we can see absolutely the emotion that it's causing. We have got another option here of rewriting and withdrawing that, and coming back another day. West Yorkshire asks for withdrawal. *Applause*

HANNAH MARSHALL (Northumberland):

President, conference. I haven't written anything down, so this runs a risk of just a total emotional breakdown on stage. So I apologise in advance for that. I wasn't going to get up and speak, but I've been so moved by the room today. Particularly on the comments from Maria and from Kerry.

People have talked so much about language. We have to be really careful in the message that we send to the trans community about what they are and who they are, and what this means for them if we oppose this resolution or we send a message. I'm so proud to be part of this union, to be part of this movement. The post that was put out in social media, I thought was absolutely fantastic, one of the best things I've seen written by anyone on this. And people have talked about that we've all stood together, that we've stood up and we've applauded in this room, and it all rides on standing together, not being divided, and never, ever leaving anybody behind - trans people and gender non-conforming people are some of the most misunderstood.

We talk about it as a debate. These are real people; they live among us. And the language that is used about them is just so dehumanising. This is a pivotal moment where we decide what type of union we want to be, what type of movement we want to be, what type of message we want to send to our members.

And, of course, talking about women's safety is not a far right ideology, and nobody is ever saying that. Okay? But this is not just about trans people. I stand here is a cisgender woman, but how do you know that? How do you know that I'm a cisgender woman? And the Supreme Court ruling and the workings of it within our workplace is totally impractical, unworkable. We forget about trans men in this discussion. We forget about non-binary people. This resolution is asking for a sensible discussion to make sure our workplaces are inclusive for everybody. I don't want to work in a place where we have the potential to out people about their gender, about their gender assignment at birth, or where I potentially have to go to work with my ID, my birth certificate, to prove that I'm a woman, because that is what's coming.

It's the same idea that tells us how to be, how to dress, how to be a woman. The same idea that would've stopped us being in the fire service all those years ago as women. I just think that this is a moment where, again, we need to decide: are we going to stand with our trans siblings? Are we going to leave them just behind in either the guise of women's safety or a far right ideology? It's not controversial, it's decency. And we must support this resolution. *Applause*

JAMES MEREDITH (Cheshire):

President, conference, I've had a bit of an internal battle with whether to speak on this matter or not, and whether someone like myself should be taking up space in this kind of debate, but maybe because of the demographic I fall into, that's why it's important that maybe I do say a bit on it.

I think we're getting too hung up on the wording on the far right ideologies, whether it was driven by far right ideologies or not. It's open season for the far right at the moment, and it's really playing into their hands, and I think it's part of a bigger picture in terms of a potential rollback on human rights. I think we need to look at what the resolution is proposing. Reject fragmentation, instruct brigade committees and regional committees to seek advice and support, recognise the urgent need for fairness, develop and implement policies. I've always considered myself an ally to the LGBT community.

No lesser emphasis on the T and I'll challenge any behaviour that threatens this community. As a heterosexual, white cis man, I've never been subject to discrimination based on my sexual orientation, my skin colour, or my gender. So I can't possibly begin to understand what it must feel like to experience this. And so I cannot speak on behalf of the trans community, but I speak in solidarity with them. I feel it's important not to shy away from the uncomfortable fact that some firefighters and FBU members hold views that threaten this community, and this happens on fire stations. I say this because it's important that we see this and that we call it out.

It's particularly important that people like me call it out, and I say people like me because it is often straight white men that are part of the problem. You know the type, the privileged majority that somehow think they're part of a minority. I also speak in solidarity with women firefighters and promise to call out the behaviour of my own demographic as it is not the trans community that is a threat to women; it's men, and as men, we must weed out those amongst us. To our comrades in the LGBT community, to wrap up, you are not alone in this fight. And I welcome anything that will help me to further educate myself on this matter and give me the tools to make the fire service a workplace that welcomes all of those who wish to be a part of it. I see no other option but to support this resolution. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

President, conference, this is a critical time for this debate. And look, Emily, we thank you for coming up, having that bravery to come here and share your views. You are part of us. We know what you are, and we're glad you are here. I just want to address the point Mo made from London as well, because he did share that we refused an amendment. It's your constitution, conference, they're your standing orders, conference. It's those standing orders that prevented London making those changes. And it's true that we do need to talk, but we need to do that in a comradely fashion, like happened in this debate. But also, we need to listen. To the delegate that came up from Nottingham, this week I've been told that this is a non-issue. So your contribution here today is very important to show that, in the fire service right now, right today, this is an issue for our members and thank you for coming up and saying that.

The executive council recognise how important and how critical this debate is, and they, rightly so, unapologetically, stand with our trans siblings. We support the motion with one very minor qualification and other delegates have been up today to speak that. That qualification is small and it's in relation to the second line second paragraph where it states *"Conference condemns the recent Supreme Court ruling driven by far right ideologies, which directly threatens the rights of trans individuals."*

That condemnation is fair, but we don't believe the intent of the motion is to say that the Supreme Court or some of our members that have differing views are far right or have far right tendencies. They don't and neither does the Supreme Court. What is fair to say though, is that alongside misogyny and racism, transphobia is a cornerstone of far right ideology. Now, right now, fascist groups have long and openly been transphobic, but now they're better organised, better funded, and their message has become mainstream.

Right-wing MPs have also jumped on the bandwagon, publicly referring to the trans liberation movement as madness and as nonsense. And more recently, and disappointingly, Labour has shifted its position too.

It is in this context the Supreme Court ruling has concluded that when the Equality Act refers to sex, it means biological sex, thereby effectively excluding from single sex spaces people that have changed their sex legally. This poses a real problem as you have heard today, comrades, for our members.

By changing the spaces they use, trans comrades living with their gender for many years may have to out themselves. While many fire stations across the country still don't have women's bathrooms or changing facilities, let alone third spaces, third spaces the EHRC is calling for.

Now, I want to speak to those here today that are concerned about what some of this means. I do understand. We understand that the world is changing, and I'm not an expert on gender or sex either, but we move together and we learn together. But as trade unionists, we cannot be drawn into a moral panic created by some bad faith actors that pit workers against workers. We must stick to the facts. And the facts are this: that every three days in the UK, a woman is killed by a man and just over 60% of those women are killed by current or former partners. Now I know, like me, many brothers in this room find that statistic abhorrent, and we stand in solidarity with our sisters. The facts also tell us there is no evidence that trans people are disproportionately a threat to women in bathrooms, changing rooms, or anywhere else. *Applause*

We reject this division of our class, and fight for answers to the real problems: misogyny, racism, gender-based violence, and bigotry. Women's hard-fought sex-based rights can be and must be upheld, and trans people's rights to safety, to justice, and to dignity can and must be protected. I want to thank all of our equality sections for their work and working alongside the executive council in bringing about what I believe is the best statement on this subject the trade union movement has. And it's an absolute credit to the executive council and to our sections. *Applause*

Steve, Ian and I are proud of our stance. The EC are proud of their stance. The B&EMM committee are proud of their stance. The NWC are proud and fully behind this stance. The LGBT+ committee, you are behind this stance, and we stand with you. We have your backs. There is no liberty unless we are all free. Please support the motion. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. LGBT+ right reply.

MARIA BUCK (LGBT+):

Thank you, president, conference, I want to respond with clarity and compassion to the concerns that have been raised about this resolution today, particularly those rooted in fear and misinformation or ideological framing. Advocating for trans inclusion is not about denying the importance of women's rights or safety. It's about recognising that trans people, including trans women, are not a threat. They are part of our communities. They are part of our workplaces, and they are in our movement. The idea that trans inclusion undermines women's rights is false dichotomy, often weaponised by far right narratives that seek to divide us.

Yes, I get it. There are legitimate conversations to be had about how we design inclusive spaces, but those conversations must be grounded in evidence and not fear. They must be rooted in solidarity and not suspicion, and they must never be used to justify the exclusion or dehumanisation of an already marginalised group.

To those who may support the Supreme Court ruling, I respect that legal interpretation can differ. Supporting a legal definition does not make someone far right, and I'd like that to be put on the record and the following, the intent of the resolution isn't to label anyone far right. We want to show the ruling has taken place in a backdrop of increasing transphobic narratives driven by a far right and radical right.

But we must also be honest about the broader political context. Far right movements are actively using transphobia as a wedge to roll back rights, to sow division and to distract from the real crisis that we're having, which is inequality, underfunding, and injustice. As we've heard on the conference floor only a day ago, and all agreed here, the rise of the far right is a threat. The general secretary gave a speech, which you all applauded. The EC policy statement speaks to the division which the far right wished to create. Some of you came up to speak about it, and you all supported it and voted it in. I respect the debate, and I welcome it. In fact, I wholeheartedly believe that more comradely discussion between those with trans-inclusive views, and those who do not currently hold them in our union, is vital.

I'd like to thank everyone here, and Emily for standing up and speaking, taking the time with their committees at conference. And for those that have gone back to their regional LGBT+ reps and engaged with them and their members to listen to their opinions and not just debated this without the consultation of their equality sections.

And for those that attended the fringe event last night for the education and information, it does sadden me somewhat that those opposing here today did not attend, but yet chose to stand up here to speak on behalf of a membership, but they didn't consult, nor did they contribute.

It is clearer now more than ever that we need this resolution to pass. That a sentence that has been clarified, not only by myself, but the AGS, would still prevent someone from agreeing this resolution. This resolution is not about silencing debate. It's about standing against division. It's about affirming that our movement is stronger when it's inclusive. It's not about ensuring that no one is - no one - is left behind, and fight for equality. Let's not allow a fear to define our values. Let's lead with courage, compassion, and unity. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Maria. I now put emergency resolution 8 No LGB without the T from the LGBT+ section to, the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries. Applause*

Conference, obviously there's 21 contributions in that, 21 excellent contributions in that. These are difficult issues that we've got to wrestle with. However, this union has come to a democratic decision, and we now need to make our democracy win. There will be those out there who want to attack us for taking this decision, but it is our union's democratic decision. So let's go out there, defend it together. That's unity. Thank you. *Applause*

Right, conference, I now call para E2, para E3, para E4, para E5, para E6, para E7, para E8, para E9, para E10, para E11, para E12, para E13, para E14. Yep.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, just to show that I don't solely put the boot in on Labour, I would like to thank Zarah Sultana for the work that she did as the chair of the FBU parliamentary group. And I would also like to congratulate Liverpool Riverside MP Kim Johnson as the new chair of the FBU parliamentary group and Nav Mishra, who is another MP in our region, who is now the vice-chair. Thank you. *Applause*

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks Lee. And the president wrote to Zarah, thanked her for her commitment and her support to our union as part of the parliamentary group and her role chairing it for the last couple of years.

THE PRESIDENT:

Right, I now call para E15. Right, conference, it is now tea break. Could we have - are we - oh, sorry. No, we're not. *(Boos)* See, I was going to let you. Wow. *(Calls for card vote)*. We can keep going and you might get away a bit earlier tomorrow. Yes. Carry on? Okay. Yeah, he won that one.

We're now moving on to Section J Legal Report, para J1. I now call resolution 80. Strategic Litigation for Racial Discrimination Cases moved by the B&EMM committee, the EC are giving qualified support.

Resolution 80 STRATEGIC LITIGATION FOR RACIAL DISCRIMINATION CASES

Conference believes that standardised processes, targeted support, and strategic litigation are essential to improving outcomes for race discrimination cases.

Conference calls on the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) through the Executive Council to;

- ***enhance training for FBU Representatives – develop standardised training to equip representatives with the skills to gather thorough and accurate information during interviews with victims of racial discrimination. Strengthening case evidence will improve tribunal success rates***
- ***implement a specific and appropriate Case Recording System – establish a structured system to track historical and current discrimination grievances/claims, allowing data-driven strategies and interventions to challenge systemic racism in fire and rescue services effectively.***

By adopting these measures, the FBU can lead the way in tackling racial discrimination, ensuring fairer outcomes for Black and Ethnic Minority members, and promoting a more equitable workplace.

Conference demands that progress on this work is reported to all officials by 31 December 2025.

B&EMM

ROB LEWIS (B&EMM):

President, conference, I could stand here and list the numerous instances of racism I have faced both as a child and as an adult. But this would take longer than the seven minutes I have. Neither do I have the time to list the numerous incidents I've witnessed and challenged, and the victims I've supported both during my everyday life and my time within the fire and rescue service.

This is not a pity speech; it's simply the truth, our truth. Up and down the country, the B&EMM section are witnessing an increased and worrying number of incidents where cases of racial discrimination are being dismissed or result in unsuccessful outcomes. It is evident, however thoroughly these cases are researched and presented, they're being deemed to have insufficient evidence to support the claim.

We are under no illusion that cases of racism are going to be easy to win. In this day and age, racists have become more subtle in their behaviours and actions, employing methods of torment that can often appear ambiguous or disguised as just banter, therefore making the job of a rep even harder. When a victim comes forward to report incidents of race-based discrimination, much like when cases of sexism, homophobia, and transphobia are reported, it is more often than not because of one single incident, but rather a consequence of a prolonged victimisation leading to the straw that breaks the camel's back.

As a nation of Black and brown people, we are often known for our strength and resilience. Indeed, our resilience stemming back hundreds of years from when we were bought, sold, raped and silenced, but still we rose up and survived. Now jump forward to modern day times when we face racism, all too aware of the daily microaggressions used to threaten our very existence. These microaggressions, often the early signs of a person's underlying attitude towards us, pointing to bigotry and irrational hatred of us because of the colour of our skin or religious belief. We are forced to navigate systems that work against us, again, just to survive.

So when we do find the additional strength to speak out about our discrimination? All we are asking for is a fighting chance to be heard and understood. When Black or brown people confide in their appointed or chosen rep to support them and help them navigate the judicial system during what for most is a time in their lives that's causing them and their family immense anguish, they expect support from people who have a measure of awareness of their true plight. It is recognised that due to the demographic of our union and of the wider judicial system, it is more than likely that their representative team will neither look like them or have the learnt tools to understand them and the violation and discrimination that they have faced.

This is no slight on their ability. It's just the fact. We can't change how our reps look. Nor can we give them their members' lived experience. But what we can do is support our reps by giving them the tools to look deeper than the on the face of the presented case. History has shown us the impact of poor representation due to a lack of greater insight. You only have to look at the media and look at the number of Black people wrongly convicted of crimes sent to prison, and then released decades later, when new legal teams have either lived experience of discrimination or better racial education to bolster their legal skills. It's not okay for the victim to suffer further due to lack of a bespoke beneficial education available to their rep. Our education team do a wonderful job in providing some great opportunities for all to grow within the union. However, more is needed to protect all.

A case recording system would assist in tracking current and historical discrimination cases. It would identify patterns, highlighting trends in behaviours and outcomes, thus enabling both those feeling not fully supported and those supporting members the ability to challenge and demand tangible change.

Thompsons' data shows that 2017 to 2021, they received two thirds more race discrimination cases than that of sex discrimination cases, an increase of 130% above the previous accounting years. The TUC know that there is

only 3% success rate on racial discrimination cases brought to them. At present, the poor success rate of bringing racial discrimination cases to tribunal is so weighted against the victim that most would rather simply suffer in silence in a toxic environment or simply walk away from a profession that they love simply to avoid the inevitable additional trauma bringing such a case would add to their already overburdened daily struggles. It is not okay to further victimise the victim.

So please, conference, all we're asking for is a system to support our members, the tools to bolster our knowledge, and the right for our Black and brown brothers and sisters not to be another statistic data in failure to recognise and deal with our trauma. Conference, I move.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Rob. Does that have a seconder?

MARIA BUCK (LGBT+):

Conference, president, we second this resolution on behalf of the LGBT+ section because when we talk about tackling racial discrimination, we're not just talking about individual cases, we're talking about challenging systems. We're talking about building structures that don't just respond to injustice, but actively prevent it. And that's exactly what this resolution sets out to do.

Strategic litigation, standardising training, and robust case recording aren't just technical fixes. They're tools for justice. They are how we move from reacting to racism, to dismantling it, and from an LGBT+ perspective, we know how vital that shift is.

Many of our members live at the intersection of multiple identities. Black LGBT+ firefighters, for example, face not only racism, but sometimes also homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia, and often at the same time, and often in ways that are invisible in traditional reporting systems. That's why we need a case recording system that is not only structured and consistent, but also sensitive, especially when it comes to data about sexuality and gender identity. We must ensure that any system we build protects confidentiality and respects the fact that not all of our siblings are out.

For some, being recorded as LGBT+, even in a secure system, could carry real risks. So we must design these tools with care, with consent, and with the understanding that privacy is protected. This isn't just about data; it's about outcomes. It's about making sure that when someone experiences racism or any form of discrimination, they are believed, supported, and represented by reps who are trained, confident, and equipped to act.

That's why the call for enhanced training is so important, because we know that the quality of case often depends on what happens in those first conversations. When reps know how to ask the right questions, how to document clearly, and how to build a strong foundation for legal action, we improve the chances of success, not just for one member, but everyone who comes after.

And we mustn't forget the power of precedent. Strategic litigation isn't just about winning individual cases. It's about setting legal standards that force change across the board. It's about holding employers accountable. It's about sending a message that racism will not be tolerated, not in our workplaces, not in our union. This resolution also speaks to something bigger: the need for fairer outcomes across all equality strands, because whether we're talking about race, gender, sexuality, disability, or class, the goal is the same: equity, dignity.

So conference, let's support this resolution, not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it's the smart thing to do. Because when we build systems that work for the most marginalised, we build systems that work better for everyone. Let's lead the way. Let's make the union a model of fairness, accountability, and inclusion. We second. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Maria. That's now open for debate.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, speaking in support of this resolution. We have had several racial discrimination claims brought from Merseyside members in the last few years, and I've seen the toll that it has taken on those members

as they sit in those rooms at the ETs, scared they thought they would lose their jobs at some point, their mental health very nearly destroyed by it. And I and the other officials in Merseyside give the support we can, but we do not have the lived experience that our Black and brown comrades have. And whilst we can never have that, what we can do is fill the gap with the education so that we have got the tools available to support them. Please support this resolution. I support. *Applause*

HARRY BRANT (Leicestershire):

Conference, president, speaking in support of resolution 80 brought by the B&EMM committee. Within Leicestershire, two of our B&EMM officer members brought an employment tribunal against our service for racial discrimination. We recognised the difficulty of improving racial discrimination cases at employment tribunal. The merit assessment from Thompsons originally advised against proceeding. However, I'd like to place on record our thanks to our EC member and vice-president who convinced Thompsons to proceed in this case. Ultimately, the case was lost. However, the employment tribunal judge did land some hefty blows in the oral judgment. We got the burden of proof put back on the employer. However, as is the case in a lot of these cases, there was no silver bullet of discrimination. We need to continue to improve the success rates at ET for discrimination cases. Conference, Leicestershire supports. *Applause*

GEOFFREY MILLER (North Wales):

Prynhawn da, general secretary, Prynhawn da, conference, Geoff Miller region 8 (*Greeting in Welsh*). Good afternoon, conference. Good afternoon, executive council. I'm nervous. Okay. Forgive me. I'm Geoff Miller from North Wales Fire and Rescue Service. That's what I said in Welsh. *Applause* So this subject is hard for me to speak about. Very hard, especially working and living in North Wales, a rural area. Now I know everybody have their differences and different experiences living in the cities. Yeah. But I wonder today, 2025, if you guys know what it's like living in a rural area and being Black or brown. And working with the fire service as well.

I've been through some stuff even recently and, yes, things need to be recorded down properly and investigated properly. I would need that assistance, especially your rep. I forgot to say I'm a B&EMM rep as well, didn't I? Yeah. Sorry. Okay. So that people like myself don't feel alone and, trust me, that's why this is a touchy subject for me. I didn't want to come speak about it, but I just need you guys to be aware that you have other different ethnicity in different part of the country where it's not London, it's not Manchester, not the city, but they're there. And some of them feel alone, guys. If we get together in unity, as you said it in solidarity as you, you're preaching it, please practise it. Don't say it because it sounds good - unity, solidarity, yay. No, just you have to practice it. You have to, live it, walk it, eat it. The thing that your guys said about education, educate as well. Sometimes you have to be brave enough to talk about the elephant in the room. Address the elephant in the room, and be brave.

I don't have big words. I'm a simple man. I say things in layman terms. Okay. So some of the terminology that you guys use there I'm, like, a different language for me. I'm, like, I don't understand that, but when I finish I'll ask some people - what that mean? What is that? But we all need to help each other. That's what I'm saying. Help each other, especially with people like me that, in the corner, somewhere in a pocket, and I'm glad to say, and I'm really proud to say, I have some colleagues here that I've met now during schooling and so forth, live all the way in Scotland and if I'm in trouble, I take up the phone and ring them and say, "Hey, I don't know what to do".

This just happened. And they advise me and point me in the right direction and educate me as well. So we need to educate each other on stuff like this and help each other. Practise what you preach. You want to stick together, you want unity, you to take practise what you preach. Because sometime, I do feel alone there. Things happen and when things happen and I go through a different - it happened to me, your rep, your own B&EMM rep. And investigators start, it's easy for them to go, "just push that under the carpet". It's alone, it doesn't have any back active. But I want you guys to be that, have my back. Be that back active. Say no, he's not alone. We are here for you. We are all here. Take up the phone, call me, show me. You know what I mean? Let your voice be heard, all of our voice together. Right be heard. And so they know that they're frightened. They'll go, whoa, he's not alone. He got help. You know what I mean? So we have to do things right. We have to say the right things, do the right thing.

THE PRESIDENT

Can you start winding up, please. I'm really sorry, I really am enjoying it.

GEOFFREY MILLER (North Wales):

Sorry, man. I'm sorry guys. Sorry. Sorry. *Applause* Support this resolution.

THE PRESIDENT:

Absolutely fantastic contribution. Right, have we got anybody else in the debate? No. Mark Rowe.

MARK ROWE (National Officer):

Thanks, president. Anything I say now is going to be rather flat, isn't it? So look, we know the law ain't our friend. The law ain't structured to support workers. It's designed to protect bosses and keep us working and cast us aside and get another worker in our place when they see fit.

So never believe that when we get to tribunals, we've got a fair shot. We haven't. But we need to build our cases, record our cases to give ourselves the best chance, particularly conference, in discrimination cases. You know, our B&EMM members, our women members, our LGBT+ members, when they come out of training school, we go into our workplaces, we put up with things. We just want to get our head down, we want to get on with the work, and we put up with things. And that sometimes is where the problem is, because that is before we gain our confidence in the workplace to say, hang on, this ain't right what's being done to me here. That is when an awful lot of this discrimination occurs.

So the executive council are giving qualified support. One of the things we are putting in place, and I did provide Amit all the data that we had and then Corneil, all the data we had in relation to how we're tracking discrimination cases, particularly in relation to our B&EMM members. But we just need to raise a note of caution because on the second bullet point where we're talking about tracking this, grievances, etc. A lot of the grievances contain category 3 medical data and category 3 data is the most restricted in all the GDPR. So the note of caution there is, yes, we can track it, but as delegates have said in their contributions, we need to be really cautious of how we handle that data once we've got it all together.

And I can reassure the equality sections in particular, we've already run for the regional officials two employment law courses, which have been really well received. The intention is to run those courses for the equality sections. We've been discussing that with Lindsey, and that is all about arming our officials to be able to record this stuff accurately and build the best cases we have so we can hold these bosses to account. We can hold to account the people in our workplaces that are discriminating against us and give us the very best chance on each and every occasion we get into that courtroom. Thanks, president. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, thanks, Mark. I now put resolution 80 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Right conference, it is now tea break. We've run a little bit over. So being so generous, I'm going to give you an extra five minutes of a break anyway. So can we have you back in the room at 16.00 hours please? Thank you.

Break for tea

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks for that, Mark. Conference, as you will recall, yesterday we took the Isle of Man's resolution from para C1 because it would've fallen because they would not been here to deliver it today. So we have started section C, Operations, Health and Safety, and I have called para C1. So we now move on to the executive council policy statement, A Safety First Fire Brigades Union with an amendment from the national women's committee. General secretary.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you, president, conference, moving the EC policy statement, A Safety First Fire Brigades Union. But before I move to the detail of this policy statement, I want to speak about something much closer to home. A week ago today, I was driving to Banbury in Oxfordshire, my own fire and rescue service, to attend a retirement event for a long serving Fire Brigades Union rep, and a good friend, a celebration of a proud career, and a moment to recognise the contribution of one of our own.

On the way there, I passed several emergency service vehicles - fire engines, police, ambulances - something that at first didn't feel out of the ordinary, but then the phone calls started. It started to come through, and it was the incident in Bicester, Oxfordshire. Within the first hour I attended the scene. What I witnessed there will stay with me for the rest of my life.

The devastation, the scale of the incident, and the toll it was already taking on our members, my friends who responded. And we know the tragic outcome: two of our members, Jenny Logan and Martin Sadler, losing their lives. Also, two of our members, Dan O'Brien and Matt Haddy, seriously injured. A member of the public also losing their life. And our thoughts are with all their families, friends, and loved ones.

The impact of this incident will be felt for a long time by those who were on the scene, by those in our control room who took the calls and mobilised the response, by the investigators, by those in supporting roles and in back room teams across our fire stations and across the entire fire and rescue service. These are all our members. And every one of them, and each and every one of us, will carry this with us for days, weeks, months, and years to come.

And it was right that the Fire Brigades Union was there. There from the very beginning, supporting, assisting and standing shoulder to shoulder with our members, and we will continue to be there. We'll continue to support and we will investigate because that's what we do. That is what trade unionism looks like in the fire and rescue service. We stand together when it matters most, and we fight relentlessly for safer workplaces, for better protections, and for our members' health and wellbeing. *Applause*

Because, conference, that is our job as FBU representatives and because, conference, there is nothing more fundamental to our work than protecting the health, safety, and welfare of our members. This union has rightly fought for that since its foundation in 1918. And we won't stop now, but we must press on.

Conference, it is 10 years since we launched one of the most successful health and safety campaigns in our history, the campaign on firefighter cancers. And it was this conference in 2015 that passed resolution 63, Taking Action Against Cancer in the Fire and Rescue Service. And that resolution came from Merseyside and was moved by our very own Mark Rowe, who now sits on the top table of our union. And that resolution referenced the 2013 report of the same name and the work of the Firefighter Cancer Support Network in North America. And it tasked the executive council with commissioning the first large-scale representative study of cancer risk among UK firefighters. And from that instruction came our collaboration with UCLan.

From that research came the DECON campaign, and from DECON came international recognition. And that work led by this union has changed the conversation in fire services across the UK. But we all know the findings were stark. Toxic contaminants are harming our members at work on the fire ground, in our fire stations, and on the back of our fire engines.

So we published best practice, we created a cancers database. We've launched workplace guidance, and we've influenced legislation and regulation. The World Health Organisation, as you know, has now classified firefighting as a class one carcinogenic occupation. The risks that we face in our workplaces are real and they are recognised.

But that was no accident. It was a result of organisation, action and persistence by firefighter unions across the globe, including our own. But, conference, we need to go further, and we need to do more. The DECON campaign must be expanded. We need real change in every fire station, control room, training centre, headquarters, and every workplace across the UK fire and rescue service. And that means the right equipment, the best equipment, the right procedures, and the right investment to prevent exposure to harmful contaminants. It also means proper health monitoring because when the science tells us that our members are being harmed, we cannot wait. We must act.

Conference, in this statement from the executive council, it sets out the next phase of that work. So we commit to accelerating DECON implementation, updating and republishing best practice guidance, reviewing the demand for national health monitoring and fighting for presumptive legislation that recognises firefighter cancers as occupational diseases. This is how we turn evidence into protection. *Applause*

But, conference, safety doesn't begin and end with contaminants. Our members face a wide range of hazards. None more pressing than the mental health crisis in the fire and rescue service. Look, we know that because we know it from the reps that do the case work, from the legal cases we've taken against employers, from the members we've lost and from the resolutions passed at this conference.

The impact of trauma: disrupted sleep, bullying, chronic under-resourcing and toxic cultures is enormous. So we've commissioned new research again with UCLan to assess the scale of the problem and develop a robust and evidence-based response. The survey is almost done, and the analysis will get underway, and I and the executive council give you the assurance that we will act. Because if we can lead the way on physical health, we can lead the same way on mental health.

Conference, when we're talking about health and safety and welfare in our workplaces, we must talk about workplace culture because every firefighter, every control firefighter, every member, deserves to be safe, deserves to be supported, and must be respected at work. That's why the executive council welcomes the NWC amendment that recognises sexual harassment as a health and safety issue.

And let's be absolutely clear, conference: equality is a safety issue, racism is a safety issue, homophobia, sexism, bullying - these are all threats to our members and a threat to their wellbeing, and they must be treated with the same urgency as any other hazard in the workplace. *Applause*

So what this statement does, is it commits us to that wider vision and wider work and conference, a modern health and safety strategy must also be international. Just weeks ago, I returned from Geneva, where I attended the United Nations Stockholm Convention representing our members, UK Firefighters, on the world stage, alongside our comrades from the United Firefighters Union of Australia. We raised the alarm on PFAS and other persistent organic pollutants, harming firefighters across the globe. But we didn't stop there. We brought those international experts to Westminster, to brief MPs, and we brought them into our national health and safety committee meeting to educate our reps and strengthen our campaign.

That's what global solidarity looks like, and it's how we make sure the FBU takes forward these global issues here in the UK. But look, none of this works unless it's rooted in our own structures and in our own reps. So we are going to rebuild. We're going to retrain and we're going to reinvigorate our safety reps across the country.

We're going to revive safety committees and demand meaningful engagement with every fire and rescue service. We're going to organise a national health and safety summit, bringing together reps, academics, and campaigners and our allies to plan the next phase of our work. And most importantly, conference, we're going to mobilise our members on health and safety issues because we know too well that rights without enforcement are not real protections because we've seen years of deregulation. We've seen governments try to water down the very laws that were won by trade union struggle, laws like the Health and Safety at Work Act. Well, conference, this union will not allow our members' health and safety to be deregulated or dismissed. *Applause*

In closing, conference, we will defend the law and we will organise far beyond it. This statement gives us the tools to do that. It gives us a strategy, a focus, and a drive to protect and improve lives of firefighters and control staff members across the UK. Conference, support this statement. Let's reaffirm our commitment and let's build a truly Safety First Fire Brigades Union. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Steve. Does that have a seconder? Yep.

CHRIS COOK (Tyne and Wear):

Conference, president, seconding the EC policy statement, A Safety First Fire Brigades Union, and speaking in support of the amendment from the national women's committee. First of all though, I would just like to take a second to remember sister Jenny Logan and brother Martin Sadler, who tragically lost their lives in the line of duty. It is quite upsetting. But also the member of the public, David Chester, and to their friends and families and colleagues, Tyne and Wear are sending love. Also, the national health and safety subcommittee are sending love as well.

So since 1918, the Fire Brigades Union has fought for the health and safety and wellbeing of its members. We've done this since 1977 using the health and safety representatives and the safety committees regulations 1977, or the SRSC regs or the Brown Book. And honestly, right at this point you've all switched off. You're thinking: yep, he's a health and safety nerd. So bear with us though, right? Because I'm going to try and make this as cool as I possibly can, or cooler than it was before. The SRSC regulations are legally binding and these use language, and we know how important language is, but they use language like "must" and "shall" on the employers. Bear with us.

So the must and the shall. So the key employer duties under the SRSC regs, and I'll just name a few of some of the important ones: *"The employer must consult with safety reps on a range of matters, including reductions to new equipment, making changes to the work environment, or any reviewing of the health and safety policies."* Now for the exceptionally big one, which makes it really cool, right? And honestly this is groundbreaking if you don't know. So employers - whoa, where am I? Apologies. Trying to read me own writing. Did I leave the page on there? Honestly, I'm really sorry. I've got dyslexia and a few other bits and bobs (*Laughter*) carrying out inspections necessary. Oh right, yeah. Apologies. I'm back on it. One of the big ones, though, is that they must allow health and safety representatives time off with pay.

How many people in this room struggled to get TU leave for this conference? Yet there's 20 resolutions and a policy statement on health and safety. If we were more organised, we would've had leave under the SRSC regs as health and safety reps. And that is really important.

And when we come back to our organising strategies, this is what we're going to have to do. We're going to have to be better at organising not just the members, but organising health and safety. So what we need to do is we need to empower the membership. We need to get them organised and mobilised, but more importantly, we need to hand them and arm them with a copy of the SRSC regs, which gives them that legally binding protection.

This would commit our union into making health and safety a central priority. The general secretary put it across so brilliantly in that address for the policy statement, which I could never do, but that's what it needs to be. We need to be a safety first, health and safety organised Fire Brigades Union.

Also we need to recognise that sexual harassment is a health and safety issue. So that amendment is very welcome. But just to quickly close - I don't want to stand up here any longer. Thanks for bearing with us. But I'm going to quote Billy Bragg: *"So now the lessons of the past were all learned with the workers' blood, the mistakes our bosses we must pay for"*. This policy statement says not anymore. We support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Chris. National women's committee to move the amendments.

KERRY McCRONE (NWC):

President, conference, moving our amendments to the EC policy statement, A Safety First FBU. Last year, the national women's committee stood in full support of the executive council's policy statement on sexual harassment. We were deeply saddened and concerned that sexual harassment was not explicitly included in this current health and safety policy statement. Conference, sexual harassment is not a women's issue. It's not a women's issue to solve; it is one that our entire union must confront and eradicate. Sexual harassment is one of the most significant health and safety risks facing our women members. It causes long-term harm, creates hostile work environments, and undermines the values we stand for.

This is not just a personal issue; it is a trade union issue. We must therefore call on the FBU to include in this policy statement their commitment to provide training to all FBU officials to proactively address and eradicate sexual harassment within our union and our workplaces, recognise sexual harassment as a health and safety issue and treat it with the seriousness it demands.

I remind you that the FBU commissioned a research project that revealed that 30% of women had experienced sexual harassment within an FBU setting. We need to continue the work that we started to eradicate this behaviour. Sexual harassment has no place in our union, no place in our workplaces, and no place in our communities.

Sexual harassment is a health and safety issue. It is a trade union issue, and it needs to stop now. Conference, please support our amendments. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you for that, Kerry, and the EC are supporting the amendments. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate.

SAM MILLER-HODGES (Humberside):

Conference, president, I'm speaking in support of this statement. Particularly, I wanted to highlight the mental health survey. This is a really important thing as a way of supporting this policy and supporting our members. We can only evidence what people are, and what position people have, if we have that evidence. I really would like people to try and get a last big push on this because it will give us evidence to take forward on that mental health survey, but fundamentally, I support the EC's position. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Sam. Andy.

ANDY MURRAY (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, since the disruption caused by the pandemic in 2019, we recognised that health and safety needed to be built within our region. The structures needed to be improved, the work needed to be renewed, reinvigorated. We've been doing that work, we've been putting those structures in place, and we've been constantly bringing to the national health and safety committee the need for that to happen at a national level because, sadly, that work has dropped off slightly. Since the election of the GS, that has been reinvigorated, that has been happening.

This policy statement cements the GS's commitment to health and safety, because health and safety is the only way that we can move anything that we want. We have the power through what Chris rightly said, the SRSA regs. So we support both the policy statement and the amendments. *Applause*

ELLIE HATHAWAY (South Wales):

President, conference, I just wanted to say, because I have literally just finished the health and safety pathway, or not quite finished, but been inducted into the recent health and safety pathway including completing the Serious Accident Investigations second course two weeks ago. Whilst I've been at conference, I've been notified of quite a significant accident in our region, so that's really helpful to me to get started. I'm already doing the work whilst I'm here. What I would like to just re-emphasise again what Chris Cook said, that this is a key to a door, guys, right? You go back into your regions and make people health and safety reps, get them on your branches, get them everywhere because it gives us the power. I learned this and it blew my mind. It gives us the power to move everything. It gives us the power to move those equality matters that matter to us. If you want to be pushing through your maternity leave, you will get into the room guaranteed, and you will get heard at every mandatory meeting they have to hold with you as a health and safety person. Okay?

If you're a control rep, and your environment is destroying your mental health and dignity as it is in our region right now, we can have that conversation at every single health and safety committee that they have to hold. If we want our facilities to suit all our members of any gender, we can get in that room. This is what I'm telling you. Because I learned this and I'm saying it to you, and I'm going to reiterate it until the cows come home, please nominate health and safety reps, please get them on the courses, complete the excellent pathway, and I want to congratulate the FBU EC and the officials that led that work because it is absolutely invaluable. So thank you very much for that. And thank you to all the people that have been doing that work for us. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ellie. Anybody else for the debate? General secretary.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Just again, to place on record the thanks of the EC for the amendment from the national women's committee, an important amendment. Sexual harassment is a health and safety issue, and must be treated as one. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, thanks, Steve. I now put the amendment from the NWC to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put the executive council policy statement, A Safety First Fire Brigades Union, FBU as amended to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 36 National Resilience, moved by Greater Manchester. The EC are giving qualified support.

Resolution 36 NATIONAL RESILIENCE

Conference notes the long standing National Resilience arrangements that have been in place for UK Fire and rescue services (FRSs) to support each other when local resources are insufficient to deal with large-scale critical incidents, most notably during widespread national flooding and wildfire incidents.

More recently though, employers are seemingly utilising National Resilience arrangements to avoid having to train, equip and at times, pay their own firefighters to respond to known risks within the boundaries of their own Fire and Rescue Service. This tactic, if not stopped, has the potential to spread further and could inevitably see the decimation of some FRSs.

Conference instructs the Executive Council (EC) to conduct an urgent review to be concluded within 6 months into;

- ***what incident types should and shouldn't form part of National Resilience***
- ***what each FRS should provide as a minimum local response before requesting national resilience support.***

Once concluded the findings of the review must be presented to brigade officials and the EC must enter into negotiations with the National Joint Council to ensure employers are meeting their minimum response requirements before asking for national resilience support.

GREATER MANCHESTER

DAVE PIKE (Greater Manchester):

Thank you, president, conference, moving resolution 36 on National Resilience “*Conference notes the longstanding national resilience arrangements that have been in place in the UK Fire and Rescue Service across the whole country to support each other during large scale incidents most visible to the public would be widespread flooding and wildfire incidents.*”

In 2018, we experienced this firsthand where many of you in the room may well have travelled to assist with the devastating wildfires across Manchester and beyond that lasted for nearly a month. More recently though, it's clear that the employers through the National Fire Chiefs Council are seemingly exploiting national resilience arrangements to avoid having to train, equip, and at times pay their own firefighters to respond to known risks within the boundaries of their own fire and rescue services.

Comrades, there have been many resolutions brought to conference regarding MTA. This conference is no different. Until 2024 MTA was not officially classed as a response that could be called upon under National Resilience. The NFCC have now decided that it is. Conference, today marks the eighth anniversary of the Manchester Arena attack, where 22 innocent lives were lost.

The subsequent inquiries concluded the fire service response was wholly inadequate, and that firefighters did not get to the scene quick enough on that fateful night. I don't intend to go into any more detail, but we know at least one of the victims would have survived, had the emergency response been faster. A fact, albeit not of their own making, that will haunt many Manchester firefighters, including myself, who attended that devastating incident, for the rest of their lives.

Manchester and London aside, it will be no secret to some in this room that approximately half of the UK fire and rescue services across the country have declared that they have specialist response MTA teams that are available to be used locally and nationally. Take away from this debate that these teams are not agreed with the FBU.

It indicates that the other half of the brigades have no MTA specialist response in place whatsoever. They will have to rely on another service providing that response. Whilst it could be argued that some parts of the country may be more at risk from an MTA than others, what history can tell us is that an MTA can happen anywhere at any time. Chief fire officers across the UK are seemingly content with the devastating outcomes of the Manchester Arena inquiry. They're happy to wait and potentially risk the safety of firefighters who may well be in attendance already at the incident, but who aren't trained, who aren't equipped and wouldn't know what to do in that situation.

They're happy for members of the public to bleed out and die rather than train, equip, and pay their own firefighters to respond to an event that can happen anywhere in this country at any time of the day. That, comrades, is despicable. This underhand tick-box approach to addressing known risks, which hoodwinks the public into believing they are safe, risks lives on a daily basis.

Conference, MTA aside, this brings us to the crux of the resolution. If we do not stand up against these rogue chief fire officers who believe they can just utilise another FRS, even place another FRS into their standard operating procedures, then where does it end? The connection here to national standards is clear. Every fire and rescue service should be able to respond to all known risks within their communities to keep them safe.

What happens when a chief fire officer would rather save money and not replace the aerial appliance? What happens when a chief fire officer would rather save money and not invest in flexi duty officer cover? If left unchecked, the answer is clear. Unless we tackle this head-on and instruct our executive council to undertake the work asked for in this resolution, the race to the bottom will continue. The fire and rescue service needs investment. It needs national standards. It needs us as FBU officials and members to stand up to the dilution of the front line to be sure we do not see a repeat of what happened on that fateful night in Manchester. Conference, please support this resolution. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Dave. Does that have a seconder? Seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody? AGS to give the qualification.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Dave, firstly, thanks for bringing this. I think we recognise how certainly important this issue is for not just you in Manchester and in region 5, but right across the union, and the work you've done to expose some of these links has been really helpful for the executive council.

I suppose the qualification, president, is really around what it's asking us particularly to do in terms of directly raise this with the NJC. We think the best place to do this now, and I appreciate you've heard a lot about it this week and maybe not beforehand, is the established MAG we've got. So speaking directly to ministers and try and link it to that space around our work for standards. And also, it might not necessarily be best to trawl through each individual policy out there. It might be best to use something like CAST Pathfinder to look at how we set minimum standards going forward.

And I've got a message, and I know you touched on it, Dave, but we want to be very clear to the chief fire officer in Cheshire: get Manchester's capability out of your policies. It's quite simple. Get your own, pay your firefighters, train them, and develop them to do this work. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. I now put resolution 36 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Can the stewards start distributing the posters? Thank you. While they're doing that, I will call resolution 37, Hearing Loss Amongst Firefighters. Moved by Greater Manchester, the EC are, giving qualified support.

Resolution 37 HEARING LOSS AMONGST FIREFIGHTERS

Conference understands that many Fire Brigades Union members suffer from hearing loss and tinnitus.

Conference believes that many of these members have suffered this injury in the workplace.

Conference is unaware of what research has been carried out on hearing loss amongst firefighters in the United Kingdom.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to carry out the relevant research, with a view to;

- ***investigating the extent of this Health & Safety issue nationally***
- ***working towards the formation of a compensation scheme for members if applicable.***

For reference a compensation scheme has been developed within the Armed Forces for hearing loss.

GREATER MANCHESTER

PATRICK BRENNAN (Greater Manchester):

President, conference, moving Hearing Loss Amongst Firefighters. But first of all, can you all hear me? Okay, I will crack on. This resolution came about after numerous members contacted FBU health and safety reps within Greater Manchester in regards to a marked deterioration in their hearing. Many members reported that after failing workplace hearing tests, they were referred to NHS audiology specialists, a common conclusion being that the noise-induced hearing loss that they are suffering could be attributed to workplace exposure. A lack of investment in the fire service has resulted in outdated or unnecessarily loud machinery. Our occupational health departments are often inept, understaffed, or both, and are incapable of accurately assessing noise exposure. Together, these have led to an unacceptable level of risk that is not being adequately managed by the employer. As firefighters, it's no surprise that we're exposed to high levels of noise in the workplace. Yet at the same time, that doesn't mean our employers shouldn't put in the necessary controls to mitigate the potential damage.

Nobody should have their hearing impacted as a result of going to work. BA sets, sensory control boards, hand brake alarms, sirens, fans: they all regularly exceed the exposure limit value that, according to the current legislation, no worker should be exposed to. Yet we are, on a daily basis, for a whole career. Under the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005, employers are required to determine whether employees are exposed to levels of noise at work that could be considered harmful to health. In Greater Manchester, we know this is not being carried out effectively, and I'm sure we are not alone. Employers are then required to introduce engineering controls to reduce the noise levels. Only when this is not possible, hearing protection is mandatory.

The hearing protection issued to firefighters is often substandard. Specific frequency-cancelling ear protection does exist, meaning that, for example, a driver could cancel out the noise of the sirens, but still hear instruction from personnel in the cab. Yet, of course, the fire service are reluctant to even tell you this, let alone supply this control measure due to the additional cost.

So what if the hearing loss becomes seriously debilitating? And there have been some cases of firefighters successfully being awarded PIP to assist with their hearing loss. Though it's blatantly apparent that this Labour government is no friend of anyone that lives with any form of disability; military personnel have recently been able to claim compensation for workplace-induced hearing loss. Their case is similar to ours, in that when the noise levels cannot be controlled, the hearing protection provided was unsuitable for the task being carried out, resulting in individuals removing the issued PPE, or eventually not even bothering to use it at all. The cases are that easily won, that it's often law firms that seek out the claimants to take the action.

I urge the EC to look into this in more detail nationally, but also that we as health and safety reps across the UK start asking questions of our employer to demand that they carry out their legal obligations to protect our members. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Patrick. Does that have a seconder? Yep.

TIM GREEN (Kent):

President, conference, supporting this resolution from Greater Manchester. Conference, delegates, I rise, and I'm speaking in support of this resolution on hearing loss which is suffered by firefighters, an issue which is personal to myself and urgent for many of us. Throughout my career, I've served both in the military and in the fire service, and, like many of my colleagues, my hearing loss began during my time in the armed forces. I was exposed to loud and persistent noise without adequate protection. That damage was only compounded when I joined the fire service, standing around the back of a noisy fire appliance at incidents, and exposed again and again to high noise levels.

As a result, I now live with moderately severe hearing loss in both ears, tinnitus alongside that. I failed my last four (I think it's four - it may be more) hearing tests at our four-yearly periodical medicals. Despite clear medical evidence, and the impact this has on my ability to work and live, my claim against the Ministry of Defence has dragged on for more than three years, only compounded by the claim against the fire service, and there is no resolution in sight. I've also had to provide all of my occupational health records.

But my story's not unique. Across our union, many members are suffering in silence, struggling with hearing loss that is a direct consequence of their service. This is a health and safety issue, a welfare issue, and a matter of justice for those that have given so much. Our union's Rule Book is clear: we're committed to securing the highest standards of health, safety, welfare at work, consistent with the provision of a frontline emergency service. We have a duty to each other to ensure that no member is left behind when their health has been compromised in the line of duty.

Supporting this resolution means demanding timely recognition and fair compensation for hearing loss linked to the work of a firefighter. Improved occupational health standards and proactive measures to prevent further cases would also be useful. Proper workplace adjustments and support for those that are already affected. Conference, we ask so much of our members. The least they can expect in return is that their injuries – seen and unseen – are recognised, supported, and compensated. I urge you to support this resolution. Stand up for the health, dignity, and rights of firefighters who have suffered hearing loss in service to others. Thank you. Kent seconds. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Tim. That's now open for debate.

LYNDSEY BURTON (CSNC):

Good afternoon, CSNC welcome the instruction of the resolution to investigate the extent of the hearing loss in firefighters, also including control firefighters. This issue is a national issue, but it also affects control fire staff as well. In particular, control staff suffer from acoustic shock caused by feedback or unexpected loud tones. There is constant ambient noise. In addition, the length of time control staff wear headsets (I must apologise, I'm a little bit hoarse. I've caught a conference lurgy, I'm afraid, so I've OD'd on Beechams), so yeah, so the length of time control staff wear headsets. Certainly for Tyne and Wear where I'm based, we only remove those when we have a break. So we work the same shifts as the firefighters, a nine-hour day shift, a 15-hour night shift. And we only take our headsets off at a break. Even when we're at our desks not on a call, the headsets are on constantly.

In addition, the length of career of control staff, the average retirement age is 67, so we work beyond the operational firefighters. And another big concern, we were chatting amongst ourselves, we believe about 95% of alarm calls that were received from the general public rings us while standing under the fire alarm. So that noise is deafening. So you're speaking to them, sometimes they're in hysterics, you're trying to get the location, the address - can you smell smoke, is there signs of fire, follow your building procedures - all while there's an alarm constantly blaring in their ear and in ours, and you can physically feel that through your ear. So just to confirm, CSNC are in support of this resolution 37. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lyndsey.

KIRSTY WRIGHT (NWC):

President, conference. speaking in support of resolution 37 Hearing Loss Amongst Firefighters. Two years ago, a resolution was passed on PPE for our firefighters in control. In control, you are exposed to constant noise, whether that's fire alarms sounding, people screaming, or the commotion of handling multiple incidents; the noise levels reach worrying levels.

Yesterday, the fire minister referred to our firefighters in control as call handlers. This is disrespectful and insulting. We are seeing increasing rates of hearing loss and tinnitus in our control members, and not enough is being done for their hearing health. The workforce in our control room is predominantly women, and we are being let down time and time again with inadequate checks on equipment, a lack of periodic hearing tests, and support when hearing is affected. Control firefighters must be recognised in the ask of this resolution. Conference, the national women's committee supports. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kirsty. Anybody else for the debate? AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

A few points, president. Conference, the qualification actually is similar to what the CSNC raised here. I think the intent is to consider all of our members, but we wanted to make sure we include our control members there too. And I suppose the rest of the qualification is more compliments to it, really.

I think we want to assure you that this work will be done, and it'll be done between the health and safety subcommittee and our newly formed DND forum. They're the two kind of avenues by which this work needs to be taken forward. And just also want to reassure conference as well, we have been supporting members quite extensively recently in PI claims and health retirement. And that work by the union will continue.

I suppose the list Patrick read out, president, was quite helpful, but I'm wondering if we could add your gavel to it as well!

THE PRESIDENT:

How dare you? I now put resolution 37 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Conference, do you agree to suspend standing order 16 so I can get a couple more resolutions out of the way out of this section, which will enable you to leave earlier tomorrow. Is that agreed? *Agreed.* It's easy.

I now call resolution 38 Base Layer Standards moved by Durham and Darlington. EC are supporting with comment.

Resolution 38 BASE LAYER STANDARDS

Conference notes that currently there are standards in place for protective clothing for firefighting, which include, BS EN 469:2005, ISO 15538, and BS EN ISO 20471 for protective clothing for firefighters, BS EN 15614:2007 for wildland clothing, EN 13911:2004 for fire hoods, EN 659:2003 for gloves, and BS EN 15090:2012 for footwear.

Conference also notes that currently there is no standard for base layer clothing, especially regarding dermal absorption of toxic contaminants and heat stress regulation.

The ongoing work of the Fire Brigades Union in the areas of toxic contaminants and heat stress has shown that the hazards posed to firefighters from the absorption of toxic contaminants through the skin and the exposure to heat stress is putting firefighters at an increased risk of occupational diseases, including cancer, heart attacks and strokes.

Conference is aware that over the last few years there has been progress made with textile technology that has led to the production of garments that can both reduce exposure to contaminants and increase the breathability of the fabric, thus reducing heat stress.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to explore all available avenues to achieve a clothing standard for base layers to be included within the standards for protective clothing for firefighters, that reduces the risk of dermal absorption of toxic contaminants as well as reducing the risk of heat stress and report back with a progress report no later than six months from the end of Conference 2025.

DURHAM AND DARLINGTON

ANDY MURRAY (Durham and Darlington)

President, conference. I'm not going to go on for very long. I think it's quite self-explanatory what the resolution calls for. I just want to make sure that everybody's aware, if we didn't have those standards for fire kit, we would still be wearing rubber leggings. It's of great import for the DECON that we push this.

There is base layers out there. We're trialling it in our service. £900 a set. The service are trialling it. Whether we take that up or not is all down to cost. If there is a standard, cost will not matter. We will have that; we will be protected. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Andy. Does that have a seconder? Formally Thank you. That's now open for debate.

MATTHEW BLACK (LGBT+):

President, conference, speaking in support of resolution 38 Base Layers Standards. Just briefly, it's right to demand safer materials, but we also demand ethical procurement. It's just a note, really. Hopefully services will supply us with safe base layers, but we want it noted we also want fire and rescue services to obtain these from ethical suppliers, suppliers who support and reflect our values, who stand for fairness, inclusion, and respect for human rights. We must not procure clothing from any company associated with the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church Rapid Relief team. The PBCC is not just a private religious organisation; it has a documented history of promoting discrimination practice against LGBT+ individuals, women and racial minorities.

Their organisations have been repeatedly linked to QWERTY behaviour, political lobbying, conversion therapy, and a lack of transparency. So when we procure PPE from companies like Flame Pro Programmer Oxford Safety Supplies, we are not just buying gear, we're indirectly endorsing a network that stands in stark opposition to the values of our service. Public money must never be used to fund or support organisations like this. We have a moral and legal opportunity on the Equality Act and the public sector equality duty to ensure that our procurement practices are ethical. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Anybody else? AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Again, no qualification, just some support for it really. And it's just to say, look, Andy, we will get on with this and do that work. We do have someone called Dave Matthews, used to be a former national officer of the union, that sits on many PPE standard boards right across the globe. We'll get him to follow up on some of this work and feed back into our health and safety subcommittee. And then again, thanks LGBT+ for those comments. We're aware of the concerns you've got in relation to the procurement of all sorts actually the fire services are using across the country, and the executive council is aware of it and have been discussing it. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, thanks, Ben. I now put resolution 38 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 42 National Fire Chiefs Council, NFCC, moved by Cheshire, the EC are supporting.

Resolution 42 NATIONAL FIRE CHIEFS COUNCIL (NFCC)

Conference notes the managed decline of the UK Fire and Rescue Services (UKFRSs), since the abolition of the Central Fire Brigade Advisory Council (CFBAC).

The CFBAC was described by home secretary James Callaghan in 1968 as a body that "provided the ground on which all interests, the unions, the local authority associations and the Home Office, could get together to discuss the efficiency and welfare of the service."

In recent years we have seen the growth and influence of the NFCC, who claim to be the strategic voice of the UKFRSs.

NFCC Limited is a registered charity. Their financial statement for the year ending 31 March 2024 records a total income of over £10 million, of which over £6 million came in the form of a government grant.

The NFCC provide guidance to government on issues such as culture and leadership, operational preparedness, response and resilience, fit for the future and reform, to name but a few. It does so without any democratic mandate.

Conference is alarmed that the NFCC are introducing or changing operating procedures that fundamentally risk our member's health and safety at work without adhering to the legally required consultation and negotiation machinery. Neither do they act within the agreed NJC framework.

The NFCC code of ethics is used against our members in discipline cases yet we have no input into this code.

Conference notes the appalling behaviours and conduct by a number of Chief Fire Officers and senior leaders as reported in recent inspections, the NFCC have no authority to advise on values and behaviours in UKFRSs.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to call for the funding of the NFCC from the public purse to cease immediately.

CHESHIRE

JACK FELLOWS (Cheshire):

Thank you. President, conference, moving number 42 NFCC. No, not a multi-storey car park, but the National Fire Chiefs Council, or to give their full title, the National Fire Chiefs Council Limited, established as a limited company and charity in 1998. Since then, their rise has been a rapid one. In a few short years, their power and influence has insidiously crept into all corners of our industry, from advising government, concocting frameworks on how our fire service should be run, claiming codes of ethics, whilst a number of their own fall slightly short of these ethical codes, to coming up with operational procedures.

You may remember the one where firefighters would be expected to go above the bridgehead in a high rise incident whilst not being under air, a life threatening proposal that cost our union time, effort and resources to fight back against. And this was one of theirs. They do this by completely circumnavigating the agreed structure of the NJC, totally disregarding the channels of negotiation and consultation that not only give us workers a voice, but safeguard our fire service from being a vanity project for a handful of chiefs. They are, by their very essence, anti-union. Conference, for everyone in this room, for all our members, for everyone on a fire station, anyone in a control room, our Green Book workers, prevention protection departments, middle managers: the NFCC does not represent you. They're a small committee of chief fire officers and principal officers that are unelected, unscrutinised, and undemocratic, and yet we pay for them. By the end of the financial year 2024, over £6 million was paid to the NFCC in the form of government grants. The chair of the NFCC pays himself a six-figure salary. Our fire service is funded, albeit underfunded, through central government and council taxes, our taxes, and then on top of that, we pay again for a small band of dictators (*Laughter*) whose voices are getting louder.

Conference, our voices need to be louder still and say, stop the public funding of the NFCC. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Jack. Does that have a seconder? Yep.

I know it might be difficult, but please use appropriate language on this resolution.

SCOTT MacRORY (Scotland):

Has anybody got a pen? (*Laughter*)

President, conference, seconding resolution 42. Conference, the NFCC are no friends of ours. They are no friends of firefighters, and they are certainly no friends of health and safety. As Jack said, along with most of the other things I'm going to say, the NFCC is a private company with charitable status, which gives them access to a significant government grant every year funded by public money.

Last year, this grant was reduced just slightly to a mere £6.9 million. According to their readily available financial accounts in 2024, they had a turnover of £10.6 million. Of that they spent just over £5 million on salaries, including a salary of £130,000 to the chair. I don't know about you, conference, but that doesn't seem particularly charitable to me, charitable to their stakeholders perhaps, and to the cadre of ex fire chiefs within their ranks.

The NFCC produces national operational guidance for the UK fire and rescue service. Although compliance with the guidance is not a requirement of the Fire and Rescue Services Act, the Fire Standards Board make compliance with the guidance, a requirement of the operational competence and operational preparedness, fire standards, and His Majesty's Inspectorate inspect services against the fire standards. This effectively makes guidance produced by the private sector using public money compulsory for the UK fire and rescue service. Make that one make sense.

Also, it is worth noting that national operational guidance is fundamentally flawed. It relies on a hazard and control measure approach that skips the vital step of assessing risk. As a consequence, many of the hazards identified by NOG aren't actually a hazard, which is something with the potential to cause harm, but simply the absence of a control measure, making the guidance self-fulfilling.

This is also the same charitable organisation that pumped a significant amount of money into commissioning their own study on the effect of contaminants on firefighters, public money used to carry out the work that had already been done by Professor Anna Stec and her team at UCLan. One can only imagine the need for this work to be done, or perhaps I'm just being overly sceptical.

Either way, this money could have gone a long way towards improving firefighter safety at the coalface. I was going to finish by talking on the NFCC campaign to put our members above the bridgehead without going into air. But if you need me or Jack to tell you why that's a dangerous practice, I hear the NFCC is recruiting! Scotland supports. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Scott. That's now open for debate.

CRAIG CARTER (Bedfordshire):

President, conference, speaking in support of this resolution. Conference, NFCC's code of ethics is a small part of the problem. We've had to fight to ensure that anything written in policy locally does not link to an external company's code written on a website somewhere, and open to continuous change that we have no say in.

But the problem is much bigger than this. The NFCC's influence on the fire and rescue service is now far-reaching. We've seen the implementation of National Operational Guidance across all of our services. Local reps, whilst dealing with all their representation duties locally, are also being asked to claw back decisions from the National Fire Chiefs Council being made at a national level, decisions that have dangerous impact on the health and safety of our members.

We need to call for this to stop immediately. The NFCC should be being tackled at a national level. These decisions should be negotiated at a national level. We must call on the Labour government to abolish the NFCC and reintroduce the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council or similar so that we can negotiate these procedures at the national level. Stop the funding of the NFCC. Bedfordshire supports. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Craig.

STEVE RATCLIFFE (Cumbria):

President, conference, in support of resolution 42. The NFCC describes itself as the professional voice of the UK fire and rescue services. In this year's response to the spring statement, the previous chair of the NFCC highlights the 11,000 job losses since 2008 and that the emergency incidents have risen 18% and are now pushing back to ask for additional funding, stating that without investment, the fire and rescue services risk being the forgotten member of the emergency service family.

We have been raising this for years. And now I quote, *"they stand ready to work with ministers to ensure that services are properly resourced and to meet the increasing risks and demand they face."* Let's not forget, over the years, the NFCC have pushed their policy and their own agendas and their cuts, which as a union we have fought, and pushed back policies which are dangerous and put our members at risk.

The NFCC members are part of the reason for the postcode lottery of the issues we talk about today with the ad hoc implementation and personal opinion on response, rolemaps and broadening the role. Where has their voice been and pushback been over the last 15 years of austerity? Let's not forget there is only one voice for the fire service. Conference, we support this resolution.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Steve. Guy.

GUY LAWES (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, I just wanted to add a couple of bits to some of the pieces that were read out by Jack and Scott with regards to funding of this organisation. They also receive a substantial amount in local funding from every service in the country. You won't know how much that is because it's undisclosed; it isn't in our financial records, but if you are interested in how much you pay into it, you can find out via a freedom of information request.

Beyond the failings that they have created through their National Operational Guidance, BA being one issue which has allowed crew-deficient mobilisation in most brigades around, they also have their influence within JOPS 3, which has created an unsafe environment that's already been discussed at this conference. And they have their boat code, which was the subject of a resolution that we brought to conference last year which has been agreed by the training staff at the Welsh Water Rescue Centre that we all go to, to be non-compliant with safety legislation.

Additional to this, I think a lot of people will be aware that they're trying to get their hands into the pensions. I advise you to look into that if you don't know about it. And more worryingly, well not more worryingly, additionally, we just heard in the last couple of weeks that they are trying to increase their influence with the Firefighters' Charity.

Now for ourselves, when we have rejoiners coming back into the union, we ask for a donation to the Firefighters' Charity. That's something we're going to start looking at over the next couple of weeks, because we don't want our members paying a single penny towards the National Fire Chiefs Council. And it'll be an interesting one for everyone to keep an eye on. Durham support. *Applause*

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside)

President, conference, speaking in support of the resolution. The new chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council is the ex-chief fire officer of Merseyside, Phil Garrigan. It is no surprise to anyone that Phil and I don't get on. What he tried to do in Merseyside and what he did, managed to bring it in Merseyside, despite us starting to fight off, I believe is going to come countrywide.

Phil Garrigan tried to bring in riding threes in Merseyside, in a metropolitan brigade that doesn't have any retained. He wanted it on wholtime stations. Phil Garrigan took the minimum staffing of a nighttime in our fire control room down below an agreed figure. Phil Garrigan tried to make us go above the bridgehead, not under air, and he's now the chair of the NFCC.

We have to fight this nationally, but we also have to fight it locally. When policies come to myself and Graeme in Merseyside, anything that is going to affect our members' terms and conditions and contracts that has the NFCC

on it simply unagreed, we should all be doing that. We have to oppose the NFCC on pushing their terms and conditions onto us and changing our contracts. Everyone should be doing that. We support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Lee. I now put resolution 42 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

Right, conference, we have nearly finished, so I'm just going to remind you of tonight's fringes 6pm Campaign against Climate Change in Imperial 3 and at 7pm Campaign Planning and Tools in Imperial 1.

Remember we do have the minute's silence. I want you regathering in here at 18.30. You've already agreed to suspend standing orders, so we're still in session, but I am going to break you in a minute. When we do reconvene, I will go through the procedure that we're going to use for the minute's silence.

And then, finally, we are just going to do this photo opportunity. But I'm going to do a test run here because I want to make sure the cards aren't mixed up. So all of you lift your cards up, point them towards me with the colour pointing towards me, which is the writing towards you.

It's looking pretty good, right. The sections, when we go back down to that end, so on the sections to go down to that end, because we're taking it this way. Where you are sitting in your mirror at the back, because we want the colours to look like 60% red, 40% blue. Yeah. We don't want hodgepodge and mixed-up all-over hodgepodge.

All right, that's Hullism. Okay. If you all go to the back. Can the stewards make sure we've got some posters for the EC, please, who are coming down.

Conference adjourned

MORNING SESSION

THE PRESIDENT:

Morning, conference. I now call the chair of standing orders, Phil Millar to give his report.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Morning, conference. Can you turn to your delegates list please, region 1. I'm quite disappointed Gus isn't here to hear me mispronounce his name again. Can you remove Gus Sproul and replace with Seona Hart.

Region 3 Northumberland remove Hannah Marshall and replace with Mark Douthwaite. Region 5 Cumbria remove Steve Mattinson and replace with Patrick McManus.

Then also region 5 Greater Manchester remove Patrick Brennan and replace with James Collier.

Region 7 Shropshire remove Simon Morris and replace with Chris Short.

And on region 9, add a delegate Anthony Appadoo as a delegate.

Region 10. Remove Mohamed Ahmed and replace with, I haven't written the first name down. Trousdale who? Okay.

And then NWC remove Kirsty Wright and replace with Katie Holloway.

Conference, I reported earlier in the week that there were some discrepancies in section L6 of the annual report. L6, for those of you that have a copy in front of you, is on page 79. And the first amendment that is required is region 3 Durham where it reads "Dave Walsh" it should read as "vacant".

Still on page 79, Northumberland "Ash Fox" should read as "David Habberjam".

On page 82, region 9 Norfolk "Kevin Game" should read as "Al Jaye". Still on that page for Suffolk "Kevin Driver" should read as "Richard Beeby". Point of clarification.

THE PRESIDENT:

Andy, come up to the rostrum.

ANDY MURRAY (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, Guy Lawes is our brigade chair.

THE PRESIDENT:

What? *(Laughter)*

ANDY MURRAY (Durham and Darlington):

You said it should read "vacant", but it should read "Guy Lawes".

THE PRESIDENT:

Andy, unless he was elected before 31 December. The annual report goes from the 1 January 2025 to the 31 December, even 2024 to 31 December 2024.

ANDY MURRAY (Durham and Darlington):

Withdraw. *(Laughter, applause)*

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Come to standing orders at the break. *(Laughter)*

I forgot where I was now. Kevin Game should read as Al Jaye. Still on that page Suffolk Kevin Driver should read as Richard Beeby. Page 83, region 11 regional treasurer should read as "Dave Turner", not "Andy Petch". And finally, on page 85, under Other Representatives, region 10 Fairness at Work, rather than reading as "vacant" should read as "Vicky Shaw".

So, conference, these are the corrections to the entries contained within L6 of the annual report required to make it competent. By agreeing this standing orders report, you're agreeing the corrections to the annual report, and in

doing so, when the president calls for the whole of the report to be agreed in the closing of conference, you'll be agreeing L6 as amended. Thank you, president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Phil. Is that report agreed? *Agreed*. Thank you.

Conference, it gives me great pleasure and it is my honour to introduce the Birmingham bin workers, William Jordan and John Collins who, as we all know, have been on strike now for a considerable amount of time defending attacks on their terms and conditions.

I'll let Billy explain that more to you. We are going to do a bucket collection. So get your cash ready as we break for coffee at whatever time it is. VP, 11, is it? And for those of you who say I ain't got any cash, we've got a card reader, remember we got the card reader. Also, conference, I can tell you the EC met and we have agreed to make a £5,000 pound donation to their strike fund.

So, conference, I'll now hand over to William or Billy and he will talk you through their dispute.

WILLIAM JORDAN (Birmingham bin worker):

Thank you. Good morning and everyone to the FBU, and we've just had an excellent welcome, really, from the fire union. Absolutely brilliant. I don't know if some of you are aware, we're most proud of you lot that for turning down the offer by Birmingham City Council to use the service to pick up our own bins. Absolutely disgusting behaviour. *Applause*

Absolutely disgusting behaviour, trying to get another union to break our strike. We always knew that the union here was definitely fully behind us, so we thank you for that. So just going on to the strike a little bit, 4 January was the first time we went out in the snow. It was only a planned one-day strike, but because of the other four days, they tried to break the strike by employing another 300 agency workers.

So therefore, we was put into a situation where we had no choice on 11th March to go all out. An all-out strike, which Angela Rayner said, we've got a good deal on the table now. I urge Angela Rayner to show me this good deal on the table, and we'll go back to work. She visited Birmingham and never once visited the picket.

We couldn't believe it as an ex-trade union lady herself that she didn't even bother to come in and engage with the workforce. Yet she employs Max Caller - Max the Axe as he's known - and he claims £20,000 a month from Birmingham City Council to try and break our strikes. He was brought in under the Tory government. Now Angela Rayner is his boss. She could sack him. I urge Angela Rayner to be sacking him. We urge if any of the members want to message Angela or email your local MP, to say, sack Max the Axe. *Applause*

So the impact is on my comrades back in Birmingham, that we're losing 25% of our wages, up to £8,000 a year. And they're saying it was a good deal on the table. They offered us a one-off payment of a thousand pounds to pay off our credit cards after Christmas. I was actually in that meeting discussing and walked out of it. How can they say like a one-off payment of a thousand pounds is appropriate to the lowest paid workers within the council?

So the fight goes on now. We're on the line now. The lads this morning have blocked 95% of the wagons. We do let five wagons out from each yard and that's only because it's high rise flats. And high rise flats are important. No one here, and especially the union and me as health and safety, would ever want to see like a Grenfell Tower incident in Birmingham.

The only thing, I would say, the goodwill of Birmingham City Council managers didn't send the wagons to the flats. They sent them to McDonald's because we got a million-pound contract. So, therefore, they lied to us yet again; we're trying to stop a major incident in Birmingham by keeping bin shutes free, and now their priority is McDonald's.

So this is what we operate against in the city of Birmingham at the moment. Yeah, and the thing is we're the water of the dam holding this together; I think if Birmingham falls, it's going to be a domino effect up and down the UK. Every council has got their eye on Birmingham to attack low paid workers. It's like a race to the bottom. It's about

time that the council stepped up and give everyone a proper day's wage for proper day's work. *Applause* I thank you. Once again, we'd like to thank you everyone for the donation and the support what we had at the mega picket by the FBU. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Steve.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Good morning, conference. Firstly, Billy and John, thanks for attending conference and speaking so passionately on behalf of your workers. We want to congratulate you for what you are doing. We want to congratulate Strike Map for what they are doing and we attended the mass picket, we brought members, and we stood with you there. We will stand with you for the rest of this strike as well.

Like you mentioned, when councillor Roger Harmon suggested that firefighters would go out and do your job, the EC member, Andrew Scattergood, was right on the money when he said they were having a laugh when they thought our members would cross picket lines, would undermine those workers. And West Mids firefighters quite rightly said no. *Applause*

That message was loud and clear a couple of weeks ago. But let's send a message from our conference today. Firefighters are trade unionists. We don't cross picket lines, we don't break strikes, and we certainly don't undermine any other worker. *Applause*

So, my message to Roger, my message to Birmingham Council and any other clown out there who thinks that our members are going to undermine workers: we don't get used as pawns in other workers' disputes. We don't do the bosses' dirty work. Not now, not ever. The FBU quite rightly will stand shoulder to shoulder with the refuse workers in Birmingham. That's why that donation is so important. We will not allow other workers to be starved back to work. So you have our full solidarity. Our message is loud and clear to Birmingham Council: get round the table and sort this out. But louder than that, our message to Labour as an affiliated trade union of the Labour Party: get round the table, intervene, and sort this mess out. I move. Thanks. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Right, conference, we now get on with the business of the day. We are back to section C, Health and Safety. I now call resolution 44. Artificial intelligence moved by West Midlands. The EC are giving qualified support

Resolution 44 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Conference recognises the inevitable advance of artificial intelligence technology and the potential for fire and rescue services to introduce its use.

Conference understands that there is a need to fully understand the risks and benefits for fire and rescue services in order to ensure that the health and safety of our members remains at the forefront of any decision making which proposes to introduce artificial intelligence technology.

Conference believes that it is also essential that we understand any potential risks posed to our members' job numbers, mental health and terms and conditions.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to commission a report by those with the relevant expertise to advise the Union on;

- ***the potential for the introduction into our industry of artificial intelligence technology and in which forms***
- ***the potential risks and benefits for our members across all roles***
- ***measures that workers within our industry can take to protect their safety, job numbers, mental health, terms and conditions***
- ***developing an industrial strategy which seeks to protect our members with regards to any threats identified by the report.***

WEST MIDLANDS

PHILIPPA SMITH (West Midlands):

President, conference, moving resolution 44 on Artificial Intelligence. Excuse me. We've raised this resolution not with the intention of proposing any particular vision for the union or pretending that we understand the subject area deeply. Rather, it is prompted by our collective lack of understanding around a fundamental shift in the way technology may assist or impose itself on working people in the future. We know that throughout history, technological advances that have the potential to revolutionise working life are invariably put to use to draw wealth upwards towards those who are already rich to automate production, whilst trapping working people in long and low-paid hours to give the illusion of safety by outsourcing, risk assessment and accountability to software.

But we know that we can, in theory, harness technology to make us safer and to improve our work-life balance. We just don't know how to do this yet. And so we ask that a conversation is started on this issue, that we are proactive in preparing for the inevitable. You can be absolutely certain that those whose interests are opposed to ours, will be doing just that.

The future is unclear, but we cannot sit on our hands whilst others shape how technological advances are put to use. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody?

MATTHEW BLACK (LGBT+):

President, conference speaking in support of this resolution. Morning conference, artificial intelligence may be dressed up in the language of progress and efficiency, but when left unchecked, it can become a modern tool of inequality.

Last Saturday, I organised an open day at my fire station. I asked AI to create multiple posters of the stalls we were holding, things like bouncy castles, a bungee run and football. In every single case, it created fantastic images of the stall, of the fire station and of firefighters, but every single one was a white male. I had to remind AI that females could be firefighters too. It apologised and quickly drew a female firefighter and a Black firefighter.

AI systems don't exist in a vacuum. They're trained on data and data drawn from our society, our workplace, and our histories, and that data includes our biases. So when AI is used to assess job applicants, to monitor performance or allocate work, it can automatically replicate the inequalities that have existed.

Let me give you some real-world examples. A female applicant searches for jobs and is shown ads for nursing and hairdressing. A male applicant doing the same searches, sees ads for mechanics and the fire service. A Black worker is denied access to platform for driving work because the facial recognition system doesn't recognise their features, and a disabled person is penalised in an automated interview because the system wrongly interprets a facial disfigurement as a negative expression.

These aren't speculative. These are actually documented cases. We must talk about how AI affects our LGBT+ members. Many AI systems operate using observable data, but sexuality and gender identity are often invisible in data sets. They're private, unmeasurable and deliberately unrecorded, and this makes my section particularly vulnerable.

AI-driven hiring platforms have shown bias against CVs that contain LGBT+ signals, repeating historical discrimination and reinforcing barriers to employment. Workers don't even know when it's involved in the decision. You could be turned down for a promotion and marked as unperforming.

So we must ensure AI is used to be transparent, accountable, and free from bias. Our members deserve fairness. They deserve to know how decisions are made and to challenge them when they're wrong. Comrades, support this motion. Let's not let tomorrow's technology embed yesterday's discrimination. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Matthew. Yep.

ROB LEWIS (B&EMM):

President, conference. Conference recognises the need to understand AI and how it fits in with our union as a necessity. We also appreciate the uses and benefits it may have. However, we ask that we approach this with caution, and when looking at this, guidelines are put in place to include considerations for underrepresented groups. Within Google, Microsoft and Facebook, roughly only 2% of the workforce are non-white, and that workforce is 80% male. Often with this technology, it's only as good as the people that programme it and create it.

So whilst we must move with the times and bring ourselves into the present with technology, we must ensure that we do not become reliant, complacent, and step back in time. Conference, we welcome the resolution to ensure the protection of our members. Conference, we support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Rob. Is there anybody else? No. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you, president. I did think, when I opened the preliminary agenda, that this resolution was all about me! Comrades, the qualifications are quite small, and thank Phillippa, Matt and Rob. Matt and Rob certainly covered one of our qualifications in terms of the disproportionate effect it can have on minority groups.

But I suppose the other qualification is that the TUC are already working on a programme to look into AI and the effect it has on workers right across the globe. And we are going to work with them in this, and we will report back to conference next year. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Ben. I now put resolution 44 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 45 Fitness Testing, Improved Flexibility moved by the national women's committee, the EC are giving qualified support.

Resolution 45 FITNESS TESTING – IMPROVED FLEXIBILITY

Conference understands most UK Fire and Rescue Service's have a fitness testing program that is rigid in the way it is implemented.

Conference recognises that the current standard of fitness for a firefighter to obtain is 42.3 V02 max, which can be demonstrated through various methods of fitness testing such as the shuttle run, Chester step test or Chester treadmill test.

Conference believes that this can cause a significant disadvantage to our women members who may be suffering from the symptoms of women's specific health issues such as menopause, endometriosis, ovarian cysts or heavy periods if their symptoms are particularly bad on the specified day they are required to undertake their fitness assessment.

Conference also believes that having a one size fits all approach is not inclusive and that providing more flexibility on how fitness testing is undertaken will ensure fairer working practice.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to produce a best practice document for employers, for flexible fitness testing and this should be undertaken in consultation with the equality sections.

Conference believes that this should include a proposal that employers provide a 28-day window in which employees can complete their fitness test to take into account that they may be suffering from the symptoms of menopause, menstrual cycle or a women's specific health condition.

Conference instructs that this work should be undertaken within six months with a report back to Conference 2026.

NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

KERRY McCRONE (NWC):

Conference, president, the UK fire and rescue service has around 9% female operational firefighters. In this room today, the majority of delegates are men. So can I ask you a question? Have you ever experienced an extremely heavy period with the associated discomfort, fatigue and dizziness? Have you ever experienced the effects of menopause and the associated joint pain, light-headedness and hot flushes? Have you ever experienced the symptoms of endometriosis and the excruciating stomach cramps, and other associated pain that comes with that?

Can you imagine feeling like this, having to double-up on sanitary products to make sure that you don't seep through and then get into your gym kit and run a bleep test or undertake a treadmill test?

When it comes to menstrual health, for many women, hormonal fluctuations during the menstrual cycle can affect performance. For instance, during the luteal phase, a woman's heart rate is elevated, impacting test results. Hormones are also elevated, which can lead to fatigue, decreased endurance, and even increased risk of injury due to changes in joint elasticity. If a woman is tested at this point in her cycle, her performance might not reflect her true fitness potential.

Endometriosis is a chronic and often painful disorder causing pelvic pain, nausea, and fatigue. Imagine trying to pass a VO2 max test while experiencing these symptoms.

But that's only a couple of examples. The list is wide and varied. Research from many health professionals consider VO2 max of 42.3 for a man between the ages of 20 to 50 to be fair or good displays of cardiovascular fitness. For a woman, in these age ranges it is measured as excellent, superior, or athlete.

And yet this resolution is not asking for special treatment. This resolution is not asking for a different standard of fitness testing to men's. This resolution is not asking for women's fitness to be treated at a lower level than men's. The resolution is simply asking for all of the women-specific health conditions and their symptoms to be taken into account when arranging the day or time when the fitness test is to take place. It is asking for flexibility to undertake the test without unnecessary discomfort, and when a true performance can be evaluated.

And let's remember as we discuss this, that women make up just over half of the UK population. And what we are talking about here is a natural part of being a woman. If the fire and rescue service are serious about a fair and equitable workplace, they cannot deny what it is to be a woman.

With that said, a best practice document would take away the unnecessary worry, stress, upset, and discomfort that a woman does not need to feel. We need more inclusive fitness protocols, ones that recognise and adapt to women's unique health conditions. We must de-stigmatise conversations around women's health. No one should feel embarrassed to speak up about how their body is functioning or what limitations they're experiencing. And let's remember that we're not talking about every woman and every fitness test. In most cases, consideration may not be necessary, but in too many cases it is just not considered. Conference, we ask you to support this resolution. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kerry. Does that have a seconder? Yep.

LEWIS CLARK (Scotland):

President, conference, we heard the moving words from the NWC there directly from the lived experience of their members. I can't speak to that lived experience; a lot of us here can't speak to that lived experience, which is why I will listen. In our jobs, we respond to emergency incidents, subjecting ourselves to heat risk, high levels of physical effort, mental strains, sweat and tears, generally all uncomfortable things.

We do this to save lives. All good, that is the job. It's not unreasonable to ask for the reasonable flexibility when we have to conduct our fitness test or any non-emergency work so that we can do it in comfort and with dignity. Conference, we second. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lewis. That's open for debate. Anybody? AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you again, president. The qualification's just about the undertaking of doing this within six months from the close of conference. That could require quite a comprehensive project of research to be able to provide an evidenced argument to some of this.

But that's not to step away from the experiences our women members have, but we'll do that work soon after conference in conjunction, not just with the women's section, but with LGBT+ and B&EMM as well. And we'll get that best practice document available to all officials. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. I now put resolution 45 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 46. Justice for Members Diagnosed With Cancer moved by Hereford and Worcester, the EC are giving qualified support.

Resolution 46 JUSTICE FOR MEMBERS DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER

Conference is proud of the work commissioned by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) to protect firefighters from the risks of cancer, including the UK Firefighters' Cancer and Disease Registry (FCDR) used to collect information on firefighters' work routines, exposure to effluents, lifestyle and health.

Conference is concerned that despite overwhelming evidence of the risks firefighters face throughout their daily duties and careers there has been a lack of action by the government to put in place the presumptive legislation required. Whilst researchers at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) and clinicians working at the Royal Preston Hospital continue to investigate possible causes of cancer the FBU must continue to campaign.

Conference is confident that the FBU will succeed in securing presumptive legislation to cover firefighters who contract certain types of cancer and demands that a database where all firefighters who have been diagnosed with cancer can register so that they, or their families can access compensation.

HEREFORD AND WORCESTER

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, moving resolution 46 Justice for Members Diagnosed With Cancer. Conference, at the beginning of this conference I think it was the president that said it might be worth giving a trigger warning for anything that might be triggering.

This speech and this resolution contains details about members who've recently passed away, and I just wanted to give you that opportunity. Conference, this resolution was written after one of our members received a terminal diagnosis. This speech was drafted the day after his funeral last month. Please bear with me while I try to read it. Conference, this resolution is in memory of brother, Brian Kendall.

Every quarter, the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority receive a report detailing the most common reasons for staff absences. Over the last five years, the main reasons for absence have changed from musculoskeletal injuries to respiratory illnesses to mental health, and for the last two consecutive quarters, the main reason has been cancer.

Conference, as with every year, we have heard the obituaries and paid our respects to the members we've lost over the last year. I'm mindful that with the odds that are stacked against us within our profession making us many times more likely to get certain types of cancer, our experiences in Hereford and Worcester will not be unique.

So my solidarity goes out to every one of you and to all the members you are supporting.

Hereford and Worcester members extend their gratitude to everyone who has been involved in the DECON campaign, notably Professor Anna Stec and the teams at the University of Central Lancashire and the Royal Preston Hospital.

Through the work they've done, commissioned by the FBU, we have the evidence that firefighting is not just dangerous because of the fires themselves, but because of what lingers long after the flames are out, the deadly toxins that seep into our bodies. Despite the mountain of evidence, what action have we seen from the government? Precious little. Our members who run towards danger every day are still being let down by a system that refuses to recognise the risks they face.

Conference, let me be clear, the Fire Brigades Union will not wait for the government sympathy. We will not settle for empty promises. We will continue to campaign.

We will continue to fight for what we know is urgently needed: presumptive legislation. We are confident that the FBU will succeed in securing presumptive legislation to compensate members who are diagnosed with cancer. This is an ongoing fight: a fight we will win. One day that presumptive legislation will be in place, and on that day, all members, all their families will be compensated and must be compensated.

In order to achieve this, we ask that a database be created where every member diagnosed with cancer can be registered specifically for the fight ahead of us. We must remind our members that their union has their back, and it will never stop fighting for them even after they have died.

Conference, next year Brian Kendall's name will appear under the obituaries. Please report the resolution and send a message to his family that the Fire Brigades Union has their back, and we leave no one behind. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Neil. Does that have a seconder?

MARK DOUTHWAITE (Northumberland):

Trigger warning noted. Thanks. President, conference, what I'm about to talk about wasn't written for this conference hall. In fact, it's worth saying I only actually wrote 50% of it and I'll just read it verbatim.

Saturday, 21 December 2024, 12.25pm, dinner time. Subject: Heartfelt Appreciation.

"Dear Anna, I'm writing to express my deepest gratitude for carrying out health screening for firefighters as part of your wider research in identifying the causes of cancers in firefighters. I am Northumberland FBU brigade secretary, and I spoke to you on the day of the screening at Tyne and Wear. We have met on other occasions relating to the DECON campaign and at the conference where you were deservedly awarded the Solidarity Award by the FBU.

The screening results passed to my GP highlighted a slightly raised PSA of 3.5. It was a subject matter I was completely ignorant to. That quickly changed. I'm now just over 12 months after the screening, recovering from a radical prostatectomy surgery as part of my treatment for prostate cancer.

Prior to screening, I had no symptoms whatsoever. Although I will not be getting the pathology results for a few weeks, it's likely that undetected, therefore untreated, my prostate cancer would've impacted on my life in a very different way to what I am experiencing now. Thank you. It's been a tough 12 months, but I can approach my treatment with optimism as well as inevitable apprehension.

Thank you once again from me and my family for your hard work, expertise and dedication. Please extend my gratitude to all members of your team who contributed to this important programme. I'm truly blessed to have had access to your services, and I'll always be thankful for the positive impact on my life. I hope you all enjoy a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. With sincere appreciation. Mark Douthwaite."

Reply, Saturday 21 December 2024, 16.06 just before tea time. “Dear Mark, Thank you so much for your heartfelt message. I’m truly touched by your words and incredibly grateful that our health screening programme played a role in identifying your condition early, allowing for timely intervention.

I feel privileged for your openness and sharing your journey, which is deeply motivating me to work even harder. I’m also really glad to hear you’re recovering well. Your message highlights the importance of these programmes, not only for early detection, but also for raising awareness about issues many might not be familiar with, such as PSA levels and their implications. It’s a reminder of why this work is so critical, and I’ll be sure to pass on your kind words to the entire team who contribute to the screening programme. On behalf of all of us, we are wishing you continued strength and optimism as you navigate the next stages of your treatment and recovery. Wishing you and your family a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year filled with health, happiness, and hope. With sincere appreciation. Anna.”

I hope most of you have joined the dots there. And some of you may have noticed that Anna Stec was here yesterday and she was delighted to hear (*Applause*) that following treatment, that had been successful, and that the PSA readings were undetectable in my body. She got a bit sciencey as to how that had happened. It’s been a long week. I can’t really remember the science. In a nutshell, I’ve ingested nasties at some point, and my prostate has reacted in the way that it does. All men, you need to get tested for your PSA. It’s really important to get it early.

Some simple control measures could help reduce cancers in our workplace, wearing gloves when we’re handling dirty equipment and washing our hands before we use the bathroom. And start touching our NFCC. Sorry. (*Laughter, applause*)

Excuse me. Genitals. NFCC have been reluctant to accept Anna’s report. Why? Because it’s not cheap or easy to make our workplaces safe. We’re not asking them to cure cancer. We just need to reduce the risks and detect the cancer early whilst it’s treatable. I second. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Mark. That’s open for debate. GS

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, president and Neil, condolences to Brian Kendall’s family, friends, and well done for moving this resolution. And Mark for sharing your story, and the important points and advice that you give to all of us. Fantastic to also recognise the work of Anna, and Anna was here yesterday, and we always place on record our thanks to Anna for the work that she has done.

And look, Neil, you’re quite right to raise the need to fight for presumptive legislation. That is a fight that we need to advance. That is a fight that we need to take on and we will continue our campaign and push to achieve this.

It’s a minor qualification. It’s just around the register that we launched as part of the DECON campaign about the capabilities of that or whether it’s a need for a new one. But fantastic resolution and thanks for raising, Neil.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Steve. I now put resolution 46 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 48. Transportation of Casualties in Fire Service Vehicles moved by Cleveland. The EC support the resolution, not the subject matter.

Resolution 48 TRANSPORTATION OF CASUALTIES IN FIRE SERVICE VEHICLES

Conference is concerned that some Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) are creating policies and guidance that allow firefighters to transport seriously ill or injured casualties to hospital in fire service vehicles.

Conference believes this work to be unsafe for firefighters and the public alike and outside of nationally agreed rolemaps.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to form a national position to reject this work and re-iterate this position at the National Joint Council at the earliest opportunity in order that any examples of this work are halted in all FRSs as soon as possible.

CLEVELAND

CHRIS PORTER (Cleveland):

Conference, president, speaking to move resolution 48 Transportation of Casualties and Fire Service Vehicles. We are firefighters. We are trained, equipped, and committed to saving lives. No one in here disputes that, but we're not paramedics, and our fire service vehicles are not ambulances. Yet increasingly, some fire and rescue services are putting us in positions where we're expected to transport seriously ill or injured casualties in fire appliances. Let me be absolutely clear: this is not safe for the casualty, for the public, or for us as firefighters.

Transporting a seriously ill patient requires specialist medical skills, equipment, and training, none of which we are provided with as standard. Something goes wrong in the back of a fire appliance, the consequences could be catastrophic. Are we supposed to be providing advanced care en route? Are we insured? Are we protected legally? And are we prepared to make life or death decisions outside of our competence? Conference, we all know the answer.

And beyond our professional boundaries, we all must consider health and safety. If we were attending to a casualty in the back of an appliance, how are we expected to wear seat belts? What happens if there's a collision? We could be seriously injured or even worse. And then what about the condition of the vehicles after transporting casualties? Blood, vomit, and other bodily fluids are inevitable in serious incidents.

Who's cleaning that? Where are the decontamination protocols, and are we expected to keep responding in contaminated cabs? These aren't minor concerns. These are critical safety failings. This is a creeping expectation and is a dangerous form of role drift. It's outside nationally agreed rolemaps. It's a blurring of professional boundaries that puts pressure on already overstretched firefighters to pick up the slack for an under-resourced ambulance service. And this is not our job, and it never should be.

Don't get me wrong, conference. We're not against collaboration. We're not against helping people, but we must absolutely be against being used as a stop gap to paper over the cracks in other services. This is a health and safety issue, a professional boundary issue, and a trade union issue. Therefore, conference demands the executive council take a firm national stance against this dangerous practice, and bring it to the National Joint Council and demand an immediate halt, wherever it's happening.

Let's be clear in our message: Firefighters are not paramedics. Our fire appliances are not ambulances, and no firefighter should be put in this position, ever. Please support this motion, protect your members, protect the public. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Chris. Does that have a seconder? Yep. I remembered this time, Jon.

JON STABLER (London):

We're on, aren't we? President, conference, I won't take much of your time because that was a very good speech that covered a lot of the points I'd like to cover. But I think one of the main points, if you want a fully funded ambulance service that attends within time limits, then we should oppose policies like this coming into place.

We paper over the cracks, ferrying people to hospital, and it will make it worse in the end, ambulance times and attendance times. If they can find any way, the ambulance service, of not attending incidents that we're on, then they will do. And you can easily see a time when we'd end up, say, taking non-urgent patients to hospitals.

And then you've got the whole issues of handovers at hospitals as well. It's that mentality of just getting us back on the run as quickly as possible, rather than waiting around for the hour for the ambulance, get them to the hospital, drop them off and get back on. So there's definitely a mission creep that they would like to do with that.

And secondly, let us remember that there's always an underlying fear with any sort of policies around transportation with ambulances and that is co-responding. At my station in 2005, we were involved in the first attempted trial, which we fought off with action short of a strike. Then we had the 2016 trial in stations bordering my station, which were an unmitigated disaster really, with reports of some horrendous incidents that people went to.

And the amount of casualties that people were going to, and seeing deceased members, were far above what ambulance drivers and technicians and paramedics were seeing. Sometimes five, six, seven, eight times as many. They're seeing one person. We're seeing, like, seven or eight deceased people.

So anything that allows any move to further cuts in the ambulance services that brings co-responding nearer, and puts the public in more danger, must be opposed. And that's why region 10 seconds this amendment. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Jon. That's open for debate. Anybody? No, I now put resolution 48 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 51 Long Covid moved by Cumbria with amendment from Hereford and Worcester, the EC give qualified support.

Resolution 51 LONG COVID

Conference recognises that the many effects of long covid are still being discovered by medical experts.

Conference understands that these effects can be extremely detrimental to Fire Brigades Union (FBU) members and in some cases can lead to members being forced to leave the profession.

Conference notes that some employers are not recognising long covid as a recognised disability, again this has a detrimental effect on our members.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to set up a task and finish group to look into this matter and if necessary, set up further research into the effects of long covid on FBU members. This task and finish group should be formed within three months of the close of Conference 2026.

CUMBRIA

AMENDMENT

4th paragraph, delete '2026' insert '2025'

HEREFORD AND WORCESTER

STEVE RATCLIFFE (Cumbria):

President, conference, speaking on resolution 51. Whilst the Covid era seems like a very strange and distant memory for most of us, it should not be forgotten. The countless families that could not say goodbye to loved ones, and those that still suffer from the effects of long Covid to this day.

Within my own service, as I'm sure it was in many of yours, we had to represent many members suffering from this and a lack of knowledge and compassion with no end in sight and facing the possibility of being forced out of the career that they love. It is noted that some employers are still not recognising long Covid as a disability, with detrimental effects for our members. Conference instructs the executive council to set up a task and finish group to look into this matter, and if necessary, to set up further research into the effects of long Covid on our FBU members. The task and finish group should be formed within three months of the close of conference 2026. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Steve. Does that have a seconder? Have a seconder. *Formally* Thank you. Hereford and Worcester to move the amendment. *Formally* Thanks. EC are supporting the amendment. That's now open for debate. No, Steve.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, president. Look, thanks Steve, and thanks Cumbria for bringing this resolution on Covid. And I want to start by thanking everyone in this conference for the work that you did during the pandemic, whether that was in a fire station, a fire control room, or on behalf of the union.

And we know we lost members during the pandemic, but it was our vigilance at that time that also saved many of our members. We've made submissions via the TUC to the Covid public inquiry. The president this year has given oral testimony to the public inquiry as well, and we've worked with the TUC on the specific issue of long Covid and the rights of more than two million workers potentially suffering from it.

And we've supported the TUC's call in 2022 for long Covid to be recognised as a disability and as an occupational disease.

A couple of qualifications around it when supporting this resolution. Conference, you may be aware that we're aware that the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC), that's the central government committee responsible for occupational diseases, has already produced and published a report on long Covid. But many of you'll know that IIAC, and their position on presumptive legislation on occupational cancers for firefighters, and their unwillingness over the past few years to define any of the cancers our members have as sufficient for compensation. So we need to be mindful of that.

I think the other qualification the executive council wants to make is that we want to progress this work and the resolution through the national health and safety committee, that these are our top safety reps from around the UK from every region and from each section. And they're the ones with the best knowledge of the law and the system.

So the EC wants to progress this through the health and safety committee before setting up a task and finish group, and making sure that, actually, when we put resources into this, we make sure that we do it in the right and correct way. So at the very least, the health and safety committee will produce a summary report of the evidence gathered which we'll put out in a circular. And if the need for a task and finish group is there, that committee will decide upon it. Thanks, president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks for that, Steve. I'd like to put on record our thanks to Paul Hampton and his research team that worked for the FBU, because they did fantastic work on that Covid inquiry. We attended it and the NFCC never turned up. We don't know if they were invited or not, but because they didn't, me and Paul made hay while the sun shone. So they got it all from just the FBU, right? Thank you for that.

I now put resolution 51 as amended – no. I now put the amendment to resolution 51 to the vote. All those in favour please show. *That carries.*

I now put resolution 51 as amended to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now move on to para C2, para C3, para C4, para C5, para C6. I now call resolution 33 Mental Health Support For The Fire Brigades Union FBU Officials moved by London. London have agreed to remit with the right to speak. London.

Resolution 33 MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR FIRE BRIGADES UNION (FBU) OFFICIALS

Conference notes mental health is a real issue in fire and rescue services and one that the FBU takes very seriously. The FBU recognises the importance of policies in our workplaces that support individuals who are suffering with mental health issues. This includes stress and work life balance.

Conference notes our officials carry the additional responsibility to support members who are going through disciplines, hearings and grievances. This involves our officials working outside of their full-time jobs, hearing harrowing details of cases, and offering tireless support to our members.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to put in place robust mental health support for our officials.

LONDON

DAN ASCOUGH (London):

I'm on. Good morning, conference, president, general secretary. I'm going to read from my notes directly because I am known to ramble, and we do need to get away at some point. I'm speaking on behalf of London region to explain that while we are happy to remit this resolution, we want to make sure that the reasons behind it are clearly heard.

We want to start by recognising and thanking the executive council for the clear steps already being taken around mental health. The mental health national campaign shows a genuine understanding that poor mental health is a serious issue affecting our members across the service, and we welcome that.

Our motion is to acknowledge and highlight that our reps and officials are, of course, facing the same risks as our members, whether that's on the incident ground, in the control room, or through the day-to-day pressures of the job. We carry that same weight. But on top of that, we take on the added responsibility of supporting others. We're sitting with members through some of the hardest moments of their working lives, hearing trauma, absorbing stress, often on our own time, often without the chance to offload ourselves and that burden adds up.

So we remit this resolution in good faith. We trust that the ongoing work will be meaningful, but we want to gently but firmly ask, please don't overlook the impact this work has on reps themselves. Supporting others has consequences. And without proper support structures in place, that emotional labour becomes isolating and unsustainable.

To be clear, this is not a criticism, it's an appeal. Please, let's make sure our own officials don't become the invisible casualties of the care that they give. So with trust, we remit. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you for that, Dan, London. I now call resolution 35 Workplace Stress moved by Scotland, the EC support.

Resolution 35 WORKPLACE STRESS

Conference recognises that while carrying out the functions of their role, our members can be exposed to hazards which result in them experiencing the psychological and physiological symptoms of stress.

Conference recognises that some Fire and Rescue Services are making progress in understanding their responsibility as employers to protect the mental health, wellbeing and safety of our members, however this progress has not gone far enough and often remains reactive rather than proactive.

Conference understands that Health and Safety Executive (HSE) statistics show that work related stress continues to be one of the highest causes of sickness absence in the workplace. Despite this, work related stress is not considered as reportable under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases & Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) as it is deemed to result from prolonged exposure to stressful situations, cannot be attributed to a single event and does not result in physical injury. Due to this determination within the regulations, employers do not have to show the same vigilance when dealing with the causes of workplace stress, as they would with hazards that can cause physical harm.

Conference therefore instructs the Executive Council to begin a lobbying campaign of both the Government and the HSE to recognise workplace stress as a defined workplace injury/illness and to review the RIDDOR regulations accordingly. This work should be carried out as part of a wider campaign through the Trade Union Congress.

SCOTLAND

SCOTT MacRORY (Scotland):

President, conference, moving resolution 35, Workplace Stress. Conference, stress in modern day employment is not just a temporary inconvenience. It can have long-term detrimental effects on workers. High workloads, unrealistic expectations, chronic underfunding and reduced crewing levels are all common themes in today's fire and rescue services. Add to this, the hazards and stressors faced by our firefighters on the incident ground and in control rooms on a daily occurrence are viewed as being part of the job. Neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky has spent decades studying stress and its consequences on the human body, particularly its biological and long-term impacts.

His research examines how stress influences various systems, from the brain to immune function, and offers insights into the relationship between environmental challenges and biological responses. Cortisol, often called the stress hormone, is central to Sapolsky's findings. It was generally understood that the increased release of these hormones when faced with stressful situations reverted back to normal state once the event had concluded, but Sapolsky made a concerning discovery.

He noted that individuals who were exposed to chronic or repeated stressful events were evolving and are adapting to this environment, resulting in their physiological state remaining in the fight or flight phase in anticipation of the next stressful event. While cortisol is essential for survival, Sapolsky highlights that chronic stress leading to prolonged elevation of cortisol levels can wreak havoc on various bodily symptoms.

This includes high blood pressure and an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases like heart attacks or strokes, increase the risk of type two diabetes, weakening of the immune system, making individuals more susceptible to infections, slower wound healing, and autoimmune diseases, dementia, osteoporosis, disruption to the balance of other hormones, notably thyroid, reproductive hormones leading to irregular menstrual cycles, along with infertility and decreased libido in all genders.

Currently, HSE guidance states that employers have a legal duty to assess the risks to employees' health from stress at work, and advise that they follow the management standards approach. By adopting and following it correctly, employers are deemed to be taking a suitable and sufficient action. As is the case in most, if not all, fire and rescue services, the approach to assist employees who are suffering from workplace stress is to help them increase their resilience to it. Whether the support is via stress management arrangements, employee assistance programmes, wellbeing workshops, or signposting to external agencies, these are only taken up after the employee displays the negative effect of stress.

This means the physical impact on the human body resulting from the release of stress hormones has already occurred, rendering reactive psychological supports ineffective when dealing with the physical outcomes. So why does HSE guidance state that workplace stress isn't reportable under RIDDOR? To cause RIDDOR's over seven-day absence from work accident category to be triggered, the lost time needs to be caused by an accident which, under the regulations, is a single definable event causing physical injury. Mental health conditions, under which workplace stress falls, are not defined as physical injuries.

Conference, we believe different. It is clear from the research conducted by Robert Sapolsky that exposure to hazards that result in employees being subjected to stress does cause physical harm, therefore should not be categorised as purely a mental health condition. But regarding the impact on the human body as physiological, as well as psychological, it should be categorised as reportable.

There are several occupational diseases and conditions that must be reported by employers if they're likely to have been caused or aggravated by work. Conditions like carpal tunnel syndrome, occupational dermatitis and occupational asthma are RIDDOR-reportable and, like workplace stress, they can't be attributed to a single event. By categorising exposure to workplace stress as reportable, organisations will better assess the hazards that cause it. This, in turn, will encourage them to proactively eliminate and reduce them, as would be the case for any other hazard that could cause you physical harm.

Reporting will also increase employer accountability, meaning organisations will have to improve the environment in which we work, rather than proving the worker's inability to deal with environment. For several years, HSE reports have shown workplace stress has been one of the top causes of sickness absence. Despite guidance being available, year on year, these statistics have not improved. The current system for managing the effects of workplace stress is inadequate and needs to be reviewed. It is for this reason that conference instructs the executive council to begin a lobbying campaign of both the government and the HSE to recognise workplace stress as a defined workplace injury or illness, and to review the RIDDOR regs accordingly.

Only by doing this will we see fundamental changes in our organisations like fire and rescue services seeking to proactively reduce the hazards that cause workplace stress rather than the reactive approach we see now.

Conference, only by tackling the complex issues of workplace stress and mental health can we do our bit to see no more names needlessly added to the obituary section at the back of the EC report. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Scott. Does that have a seconder? Have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody. No. I now put resolution 35 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 49, Strengthening the Fire Brigades Union Mental Health Emergency Campaign, moved by South Yorkshire with amendments from Hereford and Worcester. The EC give qualified support.

Resolution 49 STRENGTHENING THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION (FBU) MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCY CAMPAIGN

Conference congratulates the FBU on the launch of its Mental Health Emergency campaign, a vital step in addressing the mental health crisis affecting firefighters. This campaign highlights the urgent need for improved mental health support and greater recognition of the psychological impact of the job.

Conference understands that while significant progress has been made, with many brigades now offering mental health first aid and counselling services, these provisions remain insufficient in addressing the long-term effects of trauma. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) continues to be a major issue within fire and rescue services, with many members facing unacceptable delays in accessing specialist care.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to ensure that the Mental Health Emergency campaign includes a demand for fast-track, fully funded mental health therapies specifically tailored to PTSD in firefighters. This must prioritise access to trauma-informed care, guaranteeing that no firefighter is left without the professional support they need.

SOUTH YORKSHIRE

AMENDMENT 1

2nd paragraph after '(PTSD) insert '/Post Traumatic Stress (PTS)'

HEREFORD AND WORCESTER

AMENDMENT 2

3rd paragraph after '(PTSD) insert '/Post Traumatic Stress (PTS)'

HEREFORD AND WORCESTER

MATT NICHOLLS (South Yorkshire):

Conference, president, I've got the best brigade chair in the world and he often gets really frustrated with me because I write nothing down and I often say it's in your head. And a lot of this is in my head. And I will talk a little bit about PTSD. So if you bear with me in regards to just how it feels. So conference, this is a really important resolution. We've come a long way in the last few years around mental health in your brigades across the country. But my fear is that we've got a tick-box mental health approach from fire and rescue services.

And I need to talk about myself. So I've been in fire service for 22 years, and the majority of that I was a crew watch manager. And 10 years ago, I attended the incidents that you'll all have. I was on paternity leave. I took some extra leave and I got that message off of my crew manager saying, can you come and work for the night? And at around 10 o'clock at night the turnout sheet went, and it said RTC five people trapped and about two minutes away from our station.

When we arrived at scene, it was five children that was trapped, and I had to make decisions that night, and the decisions of that night will live with me for forever.

But needless to say, one after one in whatever decision I made, we lost every single one. And after spending two hours at the scene with entrapment that I could only describe like being a film and listening to children crying for their dads, I will never be the same again.

Three and a half years after that incident, I was in my house at two o'clock in the afternoon, I'd had the flashbacks, I'd had the changing mood, the pulling away from the family. I'd had no support. I'd had no help. And the only reason that day that I never took my life was, who was going to pick up my kids? My wife recognised this. She's a mental health nurse and she got me some fast track EMDR. And if you don't know what EMDR is, you need to know. You need to know because it changed my life.

12 sessions later, I'll always have it with me and I'll always carry it. But I get to be a dad, and my kids deserve me to go home. My three boys deserve that. If you allow tick-box mental health therapies - we've got a mental health first aider that's been on a course of half a day - and let that be your tick-box response - we're doing a disservice. We need fully funded appropriate mental health support for our members. That includes CBT, it includes EMDR, it includes mood management therapies, not cheap counselling. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Matt. Does that have a seconder? Yep.

JAMES SALT (NRC):

President, conference, speaking in support of resolution 49. Now, a few years ago, we carried out a piece of research around the mental health challenges of firefighters in Staffordshire. We carried out a number of discussions of various watches across the county and compiled the findings into a report.

One thing that became apparent is that while a number of themes are shared amongst both wholetime and RDS firefighters, there were also a number of challenges that were unique to RDS staff. I feel I should just share some of these now with the conference to highlight the challenges faced by RDS firefighters and to illustrate why the mental health emergency and this resolution is particularly pertinent to the NRC.

Some of the findings were, we all have work-life balance. RDS firefighters have work, work-life balance. We all have full-time jobs and around 80 hours' commitment to their local station. Sleep deprivation, which is something we all suffer with, but pretty much any retained crew that's on call overnight at any station, most of those people will be doing a day's work the next day. That's just how it works.

We miss out on a normal social life, miss out on normal family activities where we're on call at weekends. There's huge pressure on partners, especially in the case of young families, which can put strain on relationships. So those with young children, their partner's on call, their partner can't go out and leave the on-call firefighter carrying out childcare, transparency of crewing systems means that everyone can see the hours you're booking on and off, and notice patterns, question what you're doing and why. It often leads to friction between colleagues, people feeling their whole lives are being watched, the guilt of booking off or even taking leave if it affects availability of your local appliance. Even more so if an incident does occur. It's your own community that's been affected. And PTS, which has just been talked about which we're all prone to. There's some additional challenge for retained duty staff. Very likely to be someone that you know in your own community. If you don't know them, you will know someone that does know them. Most of the time you'll go straight home to your family after a traumatic incident. There's no decompression time with colleagues. You'll be asked about it when you walk into the local pub the next day. Were you on that job? What happened? You'll see it in the local paper. You'll see flowers at the roadside every time you drive past your house or within a few minutes of where you live. And also there's a local expectation and pressure. Everyone in your community knows you're a firefighter. There's no escaping it. And sometimes that's a good thing, but sometimes that brings pressures.

These are just a few of the issues we experience as retained firefighters that I can share with you in the time that I have. And this is why national retained committee supports this resolution. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, James. Hereford and Worcester to move your amendments. Are you doing them both together, Neil? The EC are supporting both amendments.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, moving amendments 1 and 2 to resolution 49. Strengthening the FBU Mental Health Emergency Campaign.

Conference, I just want to say thank you to our comrade for moving this resolution. I imagine it was immensely emotional, and it absolutely resonates with me. Thank you. Conference, last year, brother Madden moved Warwickshire's resolution that asked for executive council to ensure PTS is included alongside post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, in all future literature produced by the FBU. Warwickshire's resolution, amended by Scotland was agreed by conference and received qualified support from the EC to allow them to consult with and work through the mental health experts that were working with the union on the ongoing project.

The two amendments we have proposed are to support the current conference position agreed last year. Conference, please support the amendments and the resolution. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Neil. Does amendment 1 have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. Does amendment 2 have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate.

HAYLEIGH MARKS-TALABIS (CSNC):

President, conference. I think we can all safely say all of us as members need mental health support. Our members on the crews, RDS members, control members, we all face that psychological trauma from incidents. In the control room, all we have is a mental picture. We don't see it, but we hear it. We have the callers screaming at us down on the phone asking us why we're not there, why we didn't get them there quick enough. If anything goes wrong at the jobs, we have people questioning, why didn't we press the button quick enough? Did we press the button quick enough? Did we get the address right? And that's why the CSNC fully supports this motion. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Hayleigh. Yep.

DAN ASCOUGH (London):

First of all just want to show solidarity with my comrade from South Yorkshire for speaking. So, there you are. It's hard to see. It's like just a sea of bald, white heads.

It's like a box of eggs. This is why I stick to notes, normally. I just want to show solidarity with you there. It's hard to speak so openly and candidly when it comes to things like PTSD and really appreciate it. I'm not quite there yet, but maybe one day. So I really appreciate hearing your notes.

President, conference, I'm speaking in support of South Yorkshire's motion on Mental Health and PTSD, and I want to thank them for bringing this forward. The mental health emergency campaign is a vital and timely step, and this resolution pushes it in exactly the right direction. We fully support the call for fast track, fully funded trauma-informed care for firefighters, because while some progress has been made - mental health first aid, counselling, peer support - it isn't enough, especially not for something as serious and as insidious as PTSD.

I also want to take a moment to highlight something that often gets missed in these conversations and often misunderstood, and that's complex PTSD. Unlike the single acute incidents people often associate with trauma. Complex PTSD is a result of an accumulation of traumatic experiences over time. It creeps in slowly, quietly, call by call, year by year, and for many of our members, especially those who have gone without support, who have absorbed trauma silently for years, it doesn't look dramatic. It looks like burnout. Irritability, disconnection, alcohol abuse, trouble sleeping, relationships breaking down. And by the time they reach out for help, it's often because things have already gone too far. That's why trauma-informed care is so important. Not just any therapy, not just

being put on a waiting list, but being seen quickly by someone who understands the job and what it does to you even years later.

This isn't just about health, it's about dignity, it's about protecting our people. South Yorkshire's motion speaks to that urgency. It's clear, it's necessary, and it deserves our full support. Conference, please support this resolution. *Applause*

MATTHEW BLACK (LGBT+):

President, conference, speaking in favour of the resolution. Just to repeat, thank you so much South Yorkshire for bringing this resolution along. I know it's going to be very important for all the members in the fire service.

Conference, when we're having a conversation about mental health, it would just be remiss of me not to stand up and add a focus to mental health in our section. And I ask the executive council when they're looking at this just to go in the Office of National Statistics, to look at the figures of how mental health affects the LGBT+ community.

We absolutely support fast track, fully funded post-traumatic stress treatment for all firefighters. And this support must be trauma-informed, which means that people are aware that behaviour struggles might be shaped by the past traumatic experiences, and adjust how we support or interact with them, to avoid causing further harm and distress. And this must be inclusive of LGBT+ identities.

Too many mental health services and too many workplace cultures don't understand the impact of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia. So when the FBU are seeking a service provider, please consult with your equality sections, I know you will, and get LGBT+ specific care. Thank you very much. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Matthew. Anybody else?

CHRIS TAPP (Derbyshire):

President, conference, I just thank the resolution for coming. I wanted to speak on a previous resolution from a comrade from London. Thank you for bringing resolution 33, and I noticed it was remitted. And for this resolution, just thanks for hopefully letting me shoehorn this a little bit in here.

But I just really want to know within the campaign that if the executive council and maybe the qualified support will just cover what support's going to be put in place for us as FBU officials, because the stories that you've heard, the harrowing events that you've heard, we are listening to that stuff. We are absorbing that stuff. We are taking that stuff on. I recognise some of the things from the previous speaker that happens to you when you go to these incidents. I have done that myself. I recognise some of the impacts that has and things that start to happen to you in your own life, as you can probably tell from my voice.

Yeah, I just hope that in the qualification, or the executive council, or speaker might just be able to give us a little bit of reassurance of how and what they intend to put in place for us as officials. Because I think without us all officials, our union is so weak, we need to provide the support to our members. But we must, and always, first and foremost, provide the support to ourselves. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Chris. Anybody else? Nope. General secretary.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, president. And I echo the comments from the comrades that have spoken to Matt, and I agree with Matt and South Yorkshire, what another important resolution to come to our conference today and the EC fully support the aim of this resolution, and of course it will likely be a demand.

And I say likely, because we've got the ongoing mental health survey that you've all pushed within your brigades, I'm sure, but we need to do more actually. And I suppose my call today and a plea is that you go back to your brigades, you go back to your regions, and you get as many members to fill this in.

We have extended that deadline, and the reason we've extended that deadline is we haven't got enough of our members completing that survey at this point in time. So please, I ask you and urge you to go back. We've heard it on this conference floor for many years, the issues that our members are facing, both within the roles that they do for the union, and also as Matt has described quite passionately, that our members are facing on the front line.

So please go back and do that work. Look, Chris, you make an important point, and we've had discussions with London around resolution 33. And, again, they make some important points. And what I will say is I think it's incumbent upon all of us, me as general secretary or any branch rep, to make sure that we're putting that support in place for our members.

But we need to make sure that when that information comes back from the survey, with hopefully more people completing that over the next couple of weeks, we analyse that data, we make those demands, and we put everything in place that we can. That is why we've invested in this survey. That's why we'll invest and make sure we commit to anything that comes out of that so that we give that assurance, we give that commitment. And the executive council are keen to progress this issue. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Steve. I now put amendment 1 to resolution 49 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put amendment 2 to resolution 49 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put resolution 49 as amended to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show.

Thank you, conference. That covers the mental health section off now. Thank you everybody who contributed to that really important stuff that we are debating here. Right, we are now moving on to para C7 BA Safety, London. Hereford and Worcester, do you want to come down as well?

BRIAN FLANAGAN (London):

President, conference, having worked extensively on the issues surrounding the introduction of MSA BA equipment in London, this paragraph only touches the surface of the problems that we encountered. Following the Grenfell inquiry report, BA and communications were supposed to be improved. However, we find ourselves in a situation where we have actually taken a step backwards with the equipment that has been provided.

One of the main elements remaining from an initial snagging list of over a hundred problems is telemetry, which is not mentioned here, and quite frankly, is not fit for purpose. We need BA sets connecting to BA boards immediately, not waiting to connect like a dial up internet line from 1995. Also not inexplicably wiping committed BA wearers off, and the inconsistency of this equipment is unacceptable.

The statement that advisors found no evidence of smoke ingress into face masks during operation is a bit disingenuous. We had dozens of reports of this amongst our members, which ended up being eradicated by us insisting that MSA replaced all our fabric Kevlar head harnesses, which were shedding fibres into the masks, and disrupting the exhalation valves with rubber head harnesses which were also easier to decontaminate.

Another example in London, due to recharging issues, is we have so far had 60 entry control board batteries out of 140 boards replaced by MSA under warranty in only a year, and this number is still rising. As firefighters, we always make do and just try and adapt and overcome a problem when it is put in front of us. We should not be making do with the very piece of equipment that is there to keep us not only safe but alive.

Myself and Barry Jackson over the last year passed all of our findings to as many of yourselves as we could in regions that we were aware were likely to be introducing MSA to their brigades. I'd like to say it's been very rewarding for us to hear that many of you have been able to use these findings to put pressure on your own brigades to ensure that a lot of the snagging issues we had to deal with whilst the equipment was on the run were able to be dealt with and resolved before you went live with it.

Whilst we have managed to resolve many of the problems and force MSA through the employer to make necessary improvements, this work is ongoing, and should any of you in other regions feel you could be having similar issues, please get in touch and we'll be happy to share any information. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Brian. Neil.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, I assumed that London would get up and say a few words, so thank you, comrade. I've got a list of issues, not quite 150, but just things that we thought were pertinent that were not included in this paragraph that we thought should be raised regarding the new MSA BA sets, which, as our comrade said, are a massive step backwards. There is no progress here. So low pressure warning whistles going off outside parameters, I don't know if that's something that you're familiar with, comrade. Cylinder straps falling apart, causing cylinders to fall and ending up hanging between the wearer's legs. As the comrade said, entry control board batteries failing which actually results in crews having to do manual calculations on boards. Like I said, massive step backwards.

Connectivity between the board and the hub itself. The excuse that we've been given is that the hub, which is a little box that sits inside the cab, the issue there is because we've got this big body of water on this thing called a fire engine, that's causing the problems with a connectivity problem. Unbelievable. And then we had an issue - I don't know if it's a unique issue in Hereford and Worcester - but the hub itself, as with the BA sets, they have these magnetic chargers, the magnetic charger on the hub came loose, it touched a metal part of the trim on the truck and it caused a spark that led to a fire hazard inside the fire engine. Comrades, the equipment we are using should be fit for purpose. We should be moving forwards and not backwards. Thank you, conference. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, president. I place on record thanks to Brian and Barry Jackson, recently retired, for the work they've done and also the national officer for health and safety and the health and safety national committee. It has been reported to the HSE and I suppose just to put on record the work that London have done that has assisted many other brigades to take these issues forward. And the FBU raising this issue, the FBU taking this issue forward and fighting and protecting our members. So thanks for London for bringing the resolution.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks for that, Steve.

We are now on morning tea break, so let's have you back in at 11.15. Thank you, conference.

Break for tea

THE PRESIDENT:

Conference, can you start coming to order. Thank you, conference. I now call Phil Millar, the chair of the standing orders committee.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Thank you, president. Conference, for those of you who are staying tonight. There will be a gala dinner at 7pm this evening in the Washington Suite, and anyone who has been staying in the Grand this week relocate to here, you'll be staying here.

So, conference, you'll be glad to hear that this is the final standing orders report, and it's usually at this stage I blow smoke in your face and tell you you've been magnificent and congratulate you on how well you've conducted yourselves throughout, etc. However, conference, you have actually been magnificent, you've conducted yourselves impeccably, even when the debate has been difficult, and you treated each other with the utmost respect. When you disagreed, you agreed to disagree. Although I personally think you were a wee bit tough on Merseyside. You've

set a very high benchmark this year, conference. Don't take the foot off the accelerator, and I genuinely look forward to seeing you next year. Thank you, president. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Phil. Is that report agreed? *Agreed.* Thank you.

Conference, I'm now going to call Luke Fowler, the Oxfordshire delegate who just wants to say a few words of thanks to us. Luke.

LUKE FOWLER (Oxfordshire):

Conference, president, on behalf of Oxfordshire FBU, I would just like to thank all of you for your kind words, messages, support and solidarity you've shared with us all during this tough time. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Luke. I now call resolution 34 National Campaign Against Crews of Three on Fire Engines moved by Lincolnshire with an amendment from Merseyside. Lincolnshire. The EC are supporting.

Resolution 34 NATIONAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST CREWS OF THREE ON A FIRE ENGINE

Conference believes that Fire and Rescue Services across the country are increasingly facing pressures to operate fire engines with only three firefighters.

Crews of three severely compromise firefighter safety, operational effectiveness and the ability to carry out safe firefighting and rescue operations. Some fire and rescue services are resisting this practice, while others are being forced to accept it, leading to inconsistencies in response capabilities and safety standards across the country.

A minimum crew of five on a fire engine is essential for safe and effective firefighting and rescue operations, the reducing of crew numbers to three places both firefighters and the public at unnecessary risk.

Conference instructs the executive council to;

- ***launch a national campaign that gives all committees the ability to challenge the introduction of three-person crews with the backing of a strong, unified national position***
- ***provide all members and officials with clear guidance, resources, and support to challenge any attempts to introduce or maintain three-person crewing***
- ***support legal, industrial, and political action where necessary to maintain safe crewing levels.***

LINCOLNSHIRE

AMENDMENT

Delete 1st paragraph, replace with 'Conference notes that some Fire and Rescue Services across the country are choosing to operate fire engines with only three firefighters.'

MERSEYSIDE

KARL KEUNEKE (Lincolnshire):

President, conference, for several years services across the country have compromised firefighters' safety by operating with below-safe crewing levels. I want to recognise the good work carried out by officials in some services to stop this unsafe practice, but unfortunately, this hasn't been replicated in all our services.

This is a particular challenge where we have high numbers of RDS stations, but it's not limited to RDS stations and not limited to county or shire fire and rescue services either. I appreciate firefighters join to ride the fire engines unless they go into our control rooms, but unfortunately, bosses are using the goodwill and desire to help the public to push through their agenda of more trucks being available, but at what cost?

This issue has been brought to conference for several years, but officials have been left to fight this in brigades on their own. It's time we take this on nationally, and not just pay lip service to this, with a coordinated and robust campaign.

We are asking the executive council to launch a campaign that gives all committees the ability to challenge the introduction of three-person crews, provide all members and officials with clear guidance, resources and support to challenge any attempts to introduce or maintain three-person crewing. Support legal, industrial, and political action where necessary to maintain safe crewing levels. We welcome the amendment brought by Merseyside. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Karl. Does that have a seconder? Yep. Moving your amendment as well, Lee? Thank you.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, moving the amendment and seconding resolution 34. On the amendment, I did speak to our comrades in Lincolnshire just to explain our reasoning behind the amendment. And as Karl said there, they were fully accepting of it. There are chief fire officers out there who are choosing to bring these dangerous practices in, rather than being forced to. And, conference, this is a fight we simply cannot back down from. We know it's already happening. It must be fought, and it must be reversed where it already exists. In Merseyside, they tried to have this imposed on us and I won't lie, comrades, it took a lot of hard work to fight it off. My predecessor in this role, Ian Hibbert, Graeme Jones, and myself, with the assistance from region from Andrew Fox-Hewitt and from Mark Rowe and a lot of others put in a lot of hours, visiting branches and speaking to members, lobbying MPs, writing countless unreturned letters to the fire authority, and generally shouting loudly at anyone nearby why this was unsafe and why it would lead to disaster and conference, I know you find it hard to believe that I will shout at anyone.

Chief fire officers will put forward messages that crews of three can put in the initial work at incidents when they first arrive on scene and await the arrival of other crews before they commit. What absolute nonsense! We know that with a 'persons reported', our members, our mates, us, we're going to see if we can save that life. And apart from that, if we do it, we may face disciplinary action when we come out because we haven't followed policy, or worse, we don't come out. Conference, we used this argument and many more in fighting against these proposals with the chief fire officer, with the authority, when they finally agreed to engage. Didn't really get us anywhere, but with the public, with our members, we got the point across clearly. People got angry, people got involved. At a lobby at the fire authority meeting where they were due to vote on this proposal, so many of our members and retired members from Merseyside and other brigades standing together and demanding that these dangerous proposals were not allowed to go through. That, along with some political leaning, worked. And as a result, no appliance in Merseyside leaves station without at least four firefighters on board. And that is what we need to do across the UK, we need that engagement, we need our members standing up to authority meetings and telling the councillors and the members that they simply will not stand for these unsafe practices.

They need to stop, and they need to stop being introduced, and they need to be reversed where they already are. And we need that national help. Conference, riding three or less is dangerous to the public, and it is dangerous to firefighters. No firefighter should ever face the moral decision of whether to break the health and safety laws that we fought for that our predecessors have fought for, simply to try and save a life. Please support this resolution. I second. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lee. Does the amendment from Merseyside have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate. Anybody.

GEOFF MILLER (North Wales):

Sorry, just checking what I should say. Conference, president, all of us support this resolution. The reason being, guys. Sorry. Conference. I'm getting used to this. We are here talking about riding three, right? We shouldn't have even be riding four. Got the stress level, right. *Applause*

Hold on guys, I got to be quick because I can't take long. The stress level, that Scotland just talked about, stress at work, mental health and all that stuff. This affected all of us. Injuries. Look into it carefully. Injuries and all that. Because we ride four in North Wales, and it cause detrimental and we fought it. And, like I said, they will do threat. Threaten us to do that. We said no, we're not doing, we stand, we'll come back, we stand together as a team.

So North Wales fire and rescue service - all of us together with the Welsh dragon are behind you on this one. This one we're not letting go because we're not riding four. We're talking about three. But we're not riding four. So much less to go ride three. Yeah. I rode up my blood pressure more, and my mental health, that's gone. Imagine three on a fire ground incident. Geoff, go to a reccy. Where's Geoff? He don't come back. It's three of us. We need more people. Where's Geoff? No, we're riding three. No. I'm telling you. *(Laughter, applause)*

Conference, we spoke about health and safety. Put that in the forefront. Put that first. Health and safety for you, the intelligent Merseyside gentleman just said, the public, your colleague, your firefighting colleague, put that first. Save lives. Save our lives as well. We're saving each other, bound together as one. We are one family. So show them that. Let's prove that to them. I don't know who made this decision, whether it's the NFCC or BBD, whatever, but I don't know, but put them on a pump and tell them ride three to house fires and see what happens.

They won't do it. That's goes to show they don't care about us. We have to care about us. We care about each other. We fight together, we come together in unity, and if we have to go into this country to support each other. Do it. If I have to ride to Scotland on a bicycle, go there and do it. Anything. No. No. I'm telling you. *Applause*

No. Guys, I'm a simple guy. I'm just telling you the truth. I'm Jamaican, I'm tell you the plain truth, whether they like it or not. That's where it goes. They work for us, not we work for them. They all money go in their pocket, take it back. Yeah, I'll get rid of them. We'll vote them out or we ballot and whatever we have to do with the council, we'll do it right, but we support this.

All of us should support this and all of us should stand up. Don't do it for love nor money. Do it for your fellow man. Look to your right, your left, you this and that. Conference, look at each other and say, you know what, we'll come together. We're not doing this. Not. We support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Conference, come to order. Geoff, thank you for that. Although I was expecting a point of order when you call Lee Hunter from Merseyside a gentleman. I thought there'd be somebody call that one. Delegate, follow that.

JACK LEE (Staffordshire):

President, conference, I know when our colleague got up yesterday, he said he was a bit nervous, so I'd dread to see what he's like when he gets fully into his flow.

Like it's a tough one to follow. So yeah, don't get expecting anything special here, but we are battling threes in Staffordshire, as many people are in this room. We've heard various accounts. Prior to the introduction of the trial of riding threes in Staffordshire, we had a sit down with our PFCC, our chief fire officer, and our deputy chief fire officer, and all three shared the view that we should be going to 'persons reported' house fires in every type of incident as a crew of three.

Fortunately, they were convinced that 'persons reported' fires were removed from that trial, but despite opposition, the trial commenced. During the trial, health and safety concerns were raised after crews of three were sent to 'persons reported' house fires, despite it not being on the agreed list of jobs they should be attending. And as you may have seen in *Firefighter* magazine, a crew of three was sent to a seriously developed migrant hotel fire, which put them under considerable stress. We spoke to our rep at the retained station involved and got him to put a health and safety concern in on that. And our group manager approached him and said was he put into duress by FBU officials to make him do that.

So, when there's genuine health and safety concerns, they're trying to be shut down in Staffs. So we've continued to challenge the unsafe practice at service management boards, via local media, through contact with local councillors who've challenged the police, fire and crime panels, and we've raised further health and safety challenges, which have seen a number of on-call stations removed from the trial.

In December 2024, the trial was reviewed, and it's been moved to business as usual. We've managed to have structural fires removed from those lists of jobs, so hopefully that's protecting the majority of our members from the

type of job that's going to cause them the most harm. But unfortunately, despite it being a watered-down version of the initial plan, we do still have crews of three attending incidents in Staffordshire.

We have opposed three riders, and we will continue to oppose three riders, and we've had the continued support of region and head office throughout. As Lee Hunter mentioned yesterday, we've got Phil Garrigan, the chair of the NFCC, who tried to implement riding threes on wholetime pumps in Merseyside. And until we have national standards which cover crewing, and outlaw any possibility of having reduced numbers of crews on pumps, no doubt more chief fire officers are going to blindly follow this dangerous crewing model. Therefore, it's vital that we are as prepared as possible and for that reason, Staffordshire support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Jack.

LLOYD PRICE (South Wales):

President, conference, first time speaker, first time conference. *Applause*

Speaking in support of resolution 34. South Wales Fire and rescue Service members' safety is something we take very seriously. Rider numberships are issues with us, optimum crewing of five, repeatedly being pushed down to four wholetime trucks due to staffing levels. Apologies. Recently suggestions were made to reduce RDS rider numbers to three to get trucks on the run, only acting in a defensive mode on incident.

South Wales fire and rescue service opposed to anything that can and will put our members in unnecessary dangerous situations where the road is dangerous enough. Conversations for three riders, frankly, should never happen. For this reason, South Wales support the resolution. *Applause*

GUY LAWES (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, I just want to highlight, although I love the term, "crews of three not for me", that I'm sure came from Cambridgeshire a couple of years ago, crew-deficient mobilisation is the term that we use in Durham, because what we're seeing more and more is chiefs are trying to push through, essentially riding three by having a fourth member that is under-skilled. In Durham, the way that they've tried to utilise this recently is by riding with development firefighters. Two incidents, including PRT, where the instruction is that the driver, as a competent firefighter, will then don BA and enter as BA1 into the risk. So obviously we are fighting that. But yeah, crew-deficient mobilisation of all forms, including riding three, is absolutely something that must be fought at every corner. And so we will support the resolution.

The other thing that I wanted to say, and Geoff absolutely stole my thunder on it, is when the Cambridgeshire lobby came for the crews of three campaign, region 3 mobilised quite a strong support down to stand on that picket. If you need to fight it, make sure everybody knows about it and you will get support from regions, from brigades all over the place.

We will come and we will stand with you, and we'll make sure we have that fight by your side. You're not alone on this. Durham support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Guy.

OLLIE BALDAM (NRC):

Conference, president, I would just like to ask the EC next, conference, please use Geoff as much as possible. Incredible, and I'm not sure how I can follow. *Applause*

Let me be absolutely clear. This is not just a numbers game, this is about safety, capability and the lives of both our firefighters and the public. A fire engine with only three crew members cannot deliver a safe and effective firefighting or rescue operation. The risks are real, and as we all know, the risks are rising.

Some brigades have successfully managed to fight off crews of three over the years. This has been mainly on the wholetime, but unfortunately not so for many of the RDS members. We must speak up for our RDS, the backbone of fire cover in many services in rural areas, who are disproportionately affected by this issue.

These are highly trained professionals, often juggling second jobs or family commitments, who are now being asked to respond to emergencies with dangerously understaffed appliances. We are being sold crews of three, under the line that a fire engine is on the run in your local community. Don't you want to serve your local community, our communities that we live in?

Fundamentally, this is unsafe, and we are putting members and the public at risk. In my local service, we are told that wholetime crews won't ride crews of three. So why should any of us? This is an inconsistent approach across fire and rescue services. It's leading to confusion, delay, and worst of all, avoidable danger. We owe it to our members, especially those retained crews, to say, enough is enough. We need national consistency. We need a minimum crews of five, and we need our union to stand together against three-person crewing, not just in words, but in action. Conference, the NRC supports. Thank you. *Applause*

GARETH JIANIKOS (ONC):

President, conference, it pains us to hear time and time again, when the people have spoken on this subject, about the fact that it's our officers that are coming to you and trying to propose these things going forward. It's a bit of work that we will carry out, but let's just remind these officers that they are FBU members, and if they are FBU members, there are ways that we can deal with them if they're breaching the union rules, and they're pushing policies that go against what we stand for as a union.

We give our assurance that we will work with our members within the ONC, with our regional officials, to make sure that our FBU officers are pulling their weight in this battle on the not riding three. The ONC supports. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

General secretary.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, president. Geoff stole most of my lines, so I won't repeat those. Thanks Lincolnshire, for bringing this resolution. We know from our own experience as firefighters that riding with crews of three compromises firefighter safety, but it also compromises public safety. And we also know from studies that have been carried out into our industry that nearly every activity, every incident that our members attend, requires five firefighters on a fire engine. And that is the position of the union, and quite rightly so.

I just want to recognise the work that Staffordshire over the last year have taken on this battle and taking on this fight. We will continue to support any brigade that has this fight, but we want to take it as a national issue. We will raise this as a part of our national standards when we have those discussions and have those negotiations that we demand five on a fire engine, so that the executive council is fully committed to this resolution without qualification and support the resolution. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Steve. I now put the amendment to resolution 34 from Merseyside to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put resolution 34 as amended to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call Para C8, C9. Yep.

PHILIPPA SMITH (West Midlands):

President, conference, speaking on para C9 Toilets and Welfare Facilities At Work. We held a women's workshop in region 7 recently, where one of the key points raised was about the poor provision of toilets and welfare facilities.

Members spoke of toilets not being requested, even at protracted incidents, of men urinating in behind bushes or walls, whilst women held onto their urine for so long that they developed urinary infections, of HP operators being unable to leave their posts due to the time it would take to get to toilets on the other side of the incident ground. Members spoke of not drinking too much liquid, so as to ensure they didn't need the toilet at jobs, as they knew there would most likely not be one available. It's often women at jobs who have to request the location of toilets, or summon the courage to ask for them to be requested.

Holding in urine has links to bladder cancer, and yet it's still too often seen as a pain to request toilets.

Whilst we can encourage members to be more vocal about requesting welfare, we must also put pressure on employers to make our welfare as important as the tactical modes. *Applause*

SCOTT MacRORY (Scotland):

President, conference, speaking on C9. Conference, contrary to what most of you may think, the HSE do actually have teeth and can actually show them. Allow me to explain. In 2024, Scottish officials carried out 17 health and safety inspections of some of our most rural island stations across Orkney and Shetland.

Over the course of two visits by the regional second chair to Shetland, and myself, and North Sec to Orkney, we visited stations and branches and training centres, talked to dozens of members, recruited new members, recruited new reps, one of whom made it to conference this year. We also identified a whole range of concerning station defects and gaps in legislatively required welfare facilities.

Gaps previously reported to this conference: stations with no showers, no toilets, and often with no running water, stations in some places that are no more than a cow shed with a fire engine in it, nowhere to eat, nowhere to decontaminate, nowhere to use a toilet. I even found myself in the back of a particularly rural station after a long ferry journey and too much water.

Our members' concerns had fallen on deaf ears for decades, but after a local councillor contacted the FBU, we took this on and have managed to make real progress. We knew the work we were embarking on is the tip of the iceberg, but enough was enough. As expected, the reports we submitted to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service were recognised, but no commitments to meaningful investment could be given. The service couldn't afford to make the necessary adaptations to stations. It wasn't in the budget.

Based on this information, we picked three of the most concerning stations, and submitted our concerns about them to the HSE. Fast-forward two months, and the service were issued with an improvement notice to cover multiple concerns over the three stations, citing lack of basic welfare, dignity, and an inability to manage contaminants.

The work's ongoing, and we have a further list of dozens of stations ready to be reported in the same manner if we don't see acceptable improvements. Comrades, use the HSE as the resource they claim to be, and the resource we expect them to be. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks. I now call para C10.

PHILIPPA SMITH (West Midlands):

Okay. Hello again. Speaking on para C10 Health and Safety Committee Meetings. I suffered a partial thickness burn last year. That injury led to a potential resolution requesting some kind of burns register for the FBU. I wasn't sure what the register would look like or what information would be useful. However, a recent conversation led to the revelation that the FBU health and safety committee have already got a burns register; it just hasn't been recorded on since 2023, and doesn't record trends such as gender. Let's reinvigorate this register by reminding everyone of its existence, and ensuring it's an agenda item, if it's not already on the FBU health and safety committee. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, Phillipa, first of all, for bringing that up in this section, and certainly it's something we will pick up on. As you say, there is the burn register. It probably does need some work doing to reinvigorate it, as you said. But the health and safety committee members here today are welcoming the comments, and we'll pick that up. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. I now call para C11. I now call resolution 23. Establishing a National Standard for Control Room Staffing. Moved by the CSNC with amendment from Hereford and Worcester. The EC give qualified support.

Resolution 23 ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL STANDARD FOR CONTROL ROOM STAFFING

Conference recognises the continued under investment in control rooms and the loss of over 500 control posts since 2010.

Conference notes that while there is a national rolemap for control staff, there is no consistent method of determining the minimum number of staff required for a control room. This has resulted in employers using their own calculations to determine staffing numbers, including the use of mathematical formulas developed for call centres which do not take into account the unique nature of command and control room work.

Conference calls for the Executive Council (EC) to commence investigations into a UK wide standard for calculating crewing levels in a control room based on agreed factors including;

- ***national control rolemaps***
- ***predicted call volumes***
- ***resilience arrangements for surge and spate conditions***
- ***previous "Rule 43" recommendations regarding call monitoring.***

Conference instructs the EC to report back to members no later than Conference 2026.

CONTROL STAFF NATIONAL COMMITTEE

AMENDMENT

After 3rd bullet and before 4th bullet point insert new bullet points

- ***consideration of minimum crewing levels for welfare reasons and to facilitate statutory breaks***
- ***fire survival guidance at high-rise buildings***
- ***continual professional development and routine training***

HEREFORD AND WORCESTER

HAYLEIGH MARKS TALABIS (CSNC):

President, conference, speaking today on resolution 23, establishing a national standard for control room staffing. Since 2010, control room staffing has been decimated with the loss of over 500 jobs. This has resulted in hardworking members keeping control rooms staffed, using stick plaster methods: working extra shifts, not having adequate rest breaks, working during leave periods, continually swapping shifts, regular watch moves, and that continual feeling of guilt when they can't cover shortfalls, or when they just take their annual leave or rota days, and they know their comrades have been busy or short.

Conference, we will not accept fire appliances being crewed at dangerously low levels, and we will not accept it within our fire control rooms, yet it is happening. Control rooms across the country are working at or below their minimum crewing consistently, even as low as one control operator on duty.

This is unacceptable and cannot continue. The mental and physical toll on our control members, the impact on training, welfare, our ability to train the next generation of control staff, as well as our ability to mobilise, handle makeups, relief crews, high-rise incidents, persons in crisis, and, depending where you are in the country, sickness,

fleet issues and the thing that everybody knows we do, just answer the phone, is all impacted by the staffing levels in control.

I also would not want to imagine what would happen if, I really hope this never happens, a crew of three on a fire engine attend an incident and request help from a control room on two, and they send that message that they urgently need help, and we can't answer that call for help.

Also, before I finish, I ask, if you have not been to your local control room, go and spend time with them. If you have been to your control room, go and spend time in another control. If you're a met brigade, go visit a shire brigade. They work so differently. Learn as much as you can, so you can help and support us to fight the narrative that we are just call handlers, as the fire minister called us yesterday.

I'm sure he meant no disrespect, but every time someone refers to the fire control room as a call centre, or fire control operators as call handlers, they diminish our skill, and we need you to fight that narrative as much as we are fighting it. We already give a 100% effort for 95% pay, and our 100% subs.

So we are asking you to help us, and support our motion asking for a national standard for fire control room staffing. Conference, I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Conference, apologies for that. I should have said we are now returning to section A of A1 of the annual report, just before I called resolution 23. So thank you for that. Does that have a seconder? Yep. Neil. Oh, don't be fighting over seconding and if you can move your amendment at the same time, you get it.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, seconding the resolution and moving the amendment. Resolution 23 Establishing a National Standard for Control Room Staffing. Conference, Hereford and Worcester members thank the CSNC for this resolution and for raising such an important, but unfortunately growing issue. Austerity, budget constraints and chronic underinvestment have decimated staffing levels in all control rooms, resulting in the devastating loss of over 500 control posts since 2010, leaving our control rooms dangerously overstretched.

Let's be clear, control rooms are not call centres; they are the nerve centres of our emergency response, where seconds matter and decisions carry life-or-death consequences. And yet, despite the vital role our control members play in protecting lives, there has been a shameful failure to properly invest in their resources, their safety, and their welfare.

The latest Hereford and Worcester fire authority report shows an increase in control staffing levels. However, these misleading figures include part-time members, members who are working their notice period, staff on maternity leave temporarily seconded into control who won't return there, and staff employed as resilience crews who receive minimal condensed training and who are only contracted to work two shifts per month.

The real crewing figures are a reduction rather than the reported increase. This reduction of staffing has meant, all too often, breach of minimum crewing levels in Hereford and Worcester, where it isn't uncommon for there to be just two members on duty, and as our comrade said, it is not unheard of for there to be just one.

This impacts our ability to protect the public, fire crews and each other. This has led to members who work a 12-hour shift feeling that they are unable to use the toilet due to leaving their colleague alone, impacting massively on the mental health and physical health of our members. When crewing is down to just two with no OIC, our members are still expected to take emergency calls and deal with the daily running of control.

On some occasions, they are supported by a flexi duty officer that has no training. They are not trained to answer calls or pass them on to other agencies. They cannot use the mobilising system or answer the main scheme radio, or take messages. Where there is only one competent firefighter control on duty, they feel obliged to act up and take on the role of OIC and make decisions that are not within their remit. When is that person supposed to have time away in their 12-hour shift? They can't leave the development firefighter and officer in the control room on their own. It is not safe. Conference, this is unacceptable, and must be resolved as a matter of priority.

This resolution calls on the executive council to begin investigating a UK-wide standard for crewing levels in our control rooms. A standard based, not on flawed maths or budget constraints, but on the reality our members face. Conference, I ask that you support the resolution and the work that the executive council will undertake.

Stand up for our control members and show them they are not invisible. They are indispensable. Conference, I second. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Neil. The EC are supporting that amendment. Does that have a seconder? *Formally* Thank you. That's now open for debate.

KATIE HOLLOWAY (NWC):

President, conference, speaking in support of resolution 23 Establishing a National Standard for Control Room Staffing. Control room staffing sits at the very heart of safety for the public we serve, and for the firefighters attending incidents. It is paramount that our control rooms are properly resourced.

The control room is often described as the beating heart of the fire and rescue service, the first port of call, and the initial area of incident command. In moments of crisis when every second counts, it's our firefighters in control that take the call. They assess the risk and mobilise accordingly. They bring calm in the chaos, comfort to the caller, and strategic command. But how can they do that job safely and effectively if there simply aren't enough of them? We are seeing dangerously low staffing levels becoming the norm. Control rooms operating with skeleton crews, workers doubling up on roles, control rooms running with no managers, and staff going entire shifts without breaks.

This is not sustainable. It is not acceptable. This is a workforce that is predominantly women: highly skilled, highly trained professionals, who are too often overlooked and undervalued for the role that they do. This is reflected in their pay also. They are our members who are being let down by a system that does not respect the critical nature of the role. The dynamic nature of the work means we need resilient teams in place 24/7. Every shift must be staffed adequately, not just to cover the basics, but to handle the unexpected, the surges, the major incidents, that require rapid expert coordination. While we do have some resilience measures in place, such as call filtering and Operation Willow Beck, the reality is that control rooms often become overwhelmed, especially during spate conditions.

The wildfires in 2022 put immense pressure on control rooms, and we are anticipating a similar challenge this summer ahead. Understaffing is not just a numbers game, it's a safety issue. It puts lives of both the public and our crews on the ground at risk. Conference, we demand investment. We demand safe staffing.

We demand recognition of the essential role our control room members play in protecting lives. Conference, we support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Katie. Lee.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, speaking in support of resolution 23. As an operational firefighter and a former firefighter in control, which so long ago it was still called a control operator, but never a call handler, we welcome and support this resolution and the support from the EC.

We as a union have a duty to fight for national standards in all aspects of our industry, and that must absolutely include in fire control. In Merseyside, we are very familiar with the fight for correct and appropriate staffing in the control room. The unity and resolve shown by our control members during the control dispute in Merseyside was nothing short of inspirational, but it took its toll, and it saw members leave because of the stress that was being placed on them.

One of those members was on duty in some capacity for 12 days straight. We must make it work for us. As a firefighter, when it's two o'clock in the morning with an ongoing job, and the nearest hydrant is 15 lengths away and

the second attendance is coming from two station areas over, the calm and professional voice that we hear on the radio is a welcome sound. So hearing it when you're making a 999 call must be a feeling beyond belief.

For too long, overzealous chief fire officers have used control to cut corners, or companies like North West Fire Control Limited have used it simply to make profits. £355,000 last year alone. National standards will improve conditions for firefighters in control, firefighters on the incident ground, and the community as a whole. This resolution will help us to start that. Conference, we support. *Applause*

SCOTT MacRORY (Scotland):

President, conference, speaking in support of 23. Following the FBU-commissioned *Firestorm* report, which looked into the future of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, region 1 health and safety section conducted a study into the levels of workplace stress being experienced by firefighters within Scotland's control rooms.

With an engagement level of over 50%, it was evident that the strength of feeling on the matter was high. A significant number of respondents cited crewing levels and workload as being issues that were causing them the greatest stress. New guidance and call handling procedures, and a lack of sufficient training time to become familiar with them, was also causing considerable concern.

Supervisory managers reported a perceived inability to properly support their firefighters during call handling, due to an inability to establish manageable spans of control. Administrative line manager responsibilities, like attendance management and appraisals, were regularly being sidelined or not conducted to the required standard, due to insufficient personnel and high operational demand. To ensure that every crew member within our control rooms can fulfil the requirements of their role, there must be sufficient crew on duty to allow it.

To achieve this, there must be national guidance as to what minimum crewing levels should be, and what processes should be implemented, should these numbers not be achieved. Call handling is changing to support the needs of an evolving operational response. Increased levels of information-gathering and call-challenging are extending the length of time it takes to process emergency calls. Incident management and the recording of radio transmissions is also becoming more involved, due to the timestamping of critical safety information and the management of incident command. Liaison with partner agencies is increasing, especially when dealing with larger incident, like wildfires and flooding, that have a profound effect on local communities.

Fire and rescue control rooms have traditionally worked independently, but it's becoming more common for them to support each other operationally. Whether this is due to implementation of Operation Willow Beck, or as part of fallback procedures resulting from equipment failures, we need to ensure that there are sufficient personnel in all control rooms to support these processes.

Without a national standard for optimum and minimum crewing, there is no requirement to report on instances where the standard has not been met. Without reporting, there is no accountability or requirement to review and act to rectify. And without acting to rectify, our control rooms will continue to operate under the pretext of, "don't worry; it'll be all right. After all, it is always all right until it's not." Thank you. *Applause*

HARRY BRANT (Leicestershire):

President, conference, a proud firefighter control. I'd like to thank the CSNC for bringing this resolution to conference. And I just want to make conference aware of the list, a little list of extras we have to do in the control room in Leicestershire. We do service sickness. We look after the officers' leave and their rota. We manage crewing levels throughout the service. We arrange overtime. We do equality monitoring calls. We take after-the-incident survey calls. We do home fire safety checks by phone. All of this whilst maintaining our competences, training, and dealing with the operational needs of the service, including the emergency calls, radio transmissions, and admin calls. Leicestershire fully supports this resolution. *Applause*

SASHA HITCHINS (West Midlands):

President, conference, speaking in support of resolution 23 and the amendment from Hereford and Worcester. Control room understaffing has been a significant issue for as long as I can remember - 27 years - most of them coming to conference, hearing the same arguments.

It is often based on what they can staff, as opposed to what they should staff. If they have trouble meeting the minimum levels management propose, to change it, and control staff struggle with the insecurity that this brings. This in turn results in higher levels of sickness, desperately low morale and people leaving the role completely.

When numbers are low, the easiest and first thing to drop off is training, and then welfare. We are all familiar with the phrase, “you can’t knock fire control off the run” because it’s true. So they are expected to deliver the same standard with less, which often comes at a high cost for their own personal resilience.

Having a national standard would provide structure and a position that we can hold firm on. Without one, it allows fire controls to be the easy target of cost-cutting for brigade managers that just don’t get the amazing skills that fire control staff have, and their extraordinary role as the heartbeat that keeps everything going. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Sasha. Mark Rowe to give the qualification.

MARK ROWE (National Officer):

Thanks president, conference, and thanks CSNC and Hayleigh for bringing this important resolution. Yes, we want to reassure CSNC and the whole of conference that we are pushing for national standards across a whole range of issues, as we’ve discussed this week. National standards through the Ministerial Advisory Group for control rooms will be one of those key pushes from the union and be foremost in that work.

The qualification, conference, is simply that this is quite a big piece of work. And we just wanted to put on to the verbatim report that it might take just a little longer than the 12 months, but if we can complete and conclude that in that 12 months, we most certainly will. Thanks, president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Mark. I now put amendment to resolution 23 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now put resolution 23 as amended to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 24 Residential Training Courses moved by Tyne and Wear. The EC support.

Resolution 24 RESIDENTIAL TRAINING COURSES

Conference acknowledges the Scheme of Conditions of Service, Sixth Edition 2004 Part E – Allowances and Reimbursements, para 3 Out-of-pocket allowance, states;

‘An employee who attends a residential training course (other than a recruits’ training course) as a student shall be entitled to the overnight out-of-pocket allowance set out in circulars issued by the NJC.’

Conference also acknowledges that the out-of-pocket allowance no longer reflects the true cost of living.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to begin work on enhancing the out-of-pocket allowance and report back no later than Conference 2026.

TYNE AND WEAR

MATTHEW LAIDLER (Tyne and Wear):

President, conference, moving resolution 24 Residential Training Courses. I’m a firefighter on the green watch at South Shields fire station. We primarily staff the special rescue tender at South Shields. We specialise in line rescue, heavy rescue, initial structural collapse, trench rescue, large animal rescue, bariatric rescue, and we are level 2 swift water rescue. Our fire station at Byker primarily staff the fireboat. They specialise in boat operations and swift water rescue.

This resolution came directly from members around the mess table at that branch. We receive no extra payment for being at these specialist stations, or undertaking the huge commitment to training courses that come with these specialisms. As many of you'll know, these training courses are often one to two weeks in length, residential, and held at various locations around the country out of our brigade area. Despite this, our members willingly sacrifice precious time at home with their families to attend these courses. They do so, so that when the bells go down and we turn out to these complex, dangerous incidents, they are confident and competent enough to effectively rescue members of the public and ensure the safety of their colleagues.

However, our members are increasingly finding themselves out of pocket for attending these courses. The overnight out-of-pocket allowance for such a residential course is a mere £5 a night, the same £5 that was set by the NJC in 2009, 16 years ago. We will all be able to agree in this room today, that the cost of living now is significantly higher than it was in 2009. £5 does not reflect the true cost of living.

Conference instructs the EC to begin work on enhancing this allowance, and report back no later than conference 2026. We ask you to support this resolution. We thank the EC for their support, too. Our members should not be at financial detriment for voluntarily sacrificing their personal time to learn and develop skills that are required to do their job as a firefighter safely and effectively. Conference, thank you. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you. Does that have a seconder? Have a seconder *Formally* Thank you. That is now open for debate. No.

I am now going to put resolution 24 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. Thank you. *That carries.*

I now call para A2, para A3, para A4. Hereford and Worcester. Conference, I just want to be clear on this paragraph, this is about last year's pay, not this year's pay.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference. speaking under paragraph A4 Pay Discussions. Conference, I just wanted to bring to your attention the assurance that we were given following, as the president said, last year's pay discussions, that fire employees agreed to begin discussions on some elements of the pay structure in the fire and rescue service, including the pay of retained duty system firefighters, the system of CPD, and possible new systems of pay progression.

They also agreed a new job evaluation comparison for control firefighters. Conference, we've had the debate, we've agreed the statement. We, as a union, have agreed this year's pay offer, but I think it's fair to say that not much of that was included, if any. We need to do better.

I just want to make note of the results of the public sector pay that was offered yesterday. I want to offer solidarity to the resident doctors, formerly known as junior doctors, as they ballot for industrial action following the inadequate offer, as in their words that they were offered, and I want to wish them best in that dispute. Thank you, comrades. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Neil. I now call para A5. Oh, sorry, Ben.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

President, thanks. Your name's gone, you get up all the time, and you, Neil, for coming up. *(Laughter)* Just to respond slightly to some of what Neil said, some of that work was undertaken, actually, Neil. And certainly RDS firefighters are now today receiving an increase in addition to where those discussions were a year ago. That went into their pay packets as from 1 January this year.

And I commend the work the NRC have done in those working groups. And then there was also the working group on pay progression, which has given rise to the furtherance of that this year, in terms of we've done the research; now we're getting into the discussions and negotiations. So those discussions that came from conference last year have been helpful, and thanks, Neil for raising them here.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, thanks, Ben. I now call para A5, para A6. Lee, this is last year's pay ballot. Yep.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, speaking on paragraph A6. Conference, on the Labour disaffiliation resolution debate yesterday, we were told by the GS that this was sprung upon us. The pay ballot in 2024 was run in a very quick turnaround, the same as the pay ballot for 2025 - three and a half weeks. As officials, that was sprung on us. We did not have time to get around and speak to the members on branches as we should do. As our Rule Book states: *"The foundation of the union's democratic structures shall be the organisation and representation of all members at their place of work, uniting them in workplace branches in pursuit of common aims. The organisation of members at their workplace branch shall be constituted in accordance with rule C7 in order to build upon this workplace foundation. Branches shall be collectively organised through the establishment of Brigade Committees constituted in accordance with Rule C6."*

In taking the decision to consult members directly by home ballot, we feel in the way it was done, that may not be pursuant with the Rule Book, and we ask that, in the future, we get the time to go out and speak to our members in branches so we can engage fully before we make a decision on what pay is. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Lee. And I can give you every assurance EC always act within the Rule Book. I can give you that assurance. Are you coming back? Yep.

GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, president. I'll leave the complaint to you to deal with. An important part of our democracy is to put key decisions to our whole membership. Decisions that our members will take, like this, may result in them taking strike action. I can assure you, last year and this year, executive council debated all options available to them regarding consultation. Your elected representatives that sit on this top table; you've elected them quite rightly to have those decisions made by them, and those discussions, importantly, around consultation. And what they did consider was making sure that the money that our members deserve is in their pay packets from 1 July. So we did need to act quickly last year and this year, and I'll reiterate the same process has been followed in 2023, 2024, and, again, this year. This year accepted by 82% of those that voted, last year by 73% of members.

But I will say this as well: there's nothing to stop a committee meeting within that period of time - a branch, a brigade, or a region - and taking a different view to the executive council and putting that view forward. But the executive council stand by the decision that was made on those figures that responded, and, as the president said, they do act within the Rule Book.

I think it was the right decision that they have taken this year and last year on consultation. Thanks, president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Steve, I now call para A7. Yep.

IAIN BALLANTYNE (Scotland):

President, conference, we welcome the commitment from the fire service employers, as part of the 22-23 pay settlement, to undertake a job evaluation of the role of firefighter control, to assess whether there should be an alteration to the pay gap between control-specific roles and firefighting roles.

However, we are emphatically disappointed, as our sister Sherry pointed out in her valuable contributions earlier in business, that the report concluded, identifying that the pay gap should lessen with a minimum pay rate of 96.24% of a wholetime firefighter's pay. As agreed previously, we should be getting at least an additional £476 pounds per year into their pockets.

We all know the role of our firefighter control has expanded significantly in the last 20 years since the gap lessened from 92 to 95% in 22-23. And our firefighter control deserve better than this. The GS has spoken previously in

conference business about his commitment to close the pay gap by fighting for pay parity, but meantime, let's get our 96.24% for our control members. That's £476 a year. And I'll ask you this, are they not worth it? Because I think they are. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

I now call para A8. Oh, sorry.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks, Iain, for bringing it up. It is an important point, and certainly the previous general secretary, myself and the new general secretary have raised this point at every single meeting with the national employers, Iain, and I don't want to be too sharp; there was a big debate yesterday and the day before about funding into the fire and rescue service, and pay the day before that. It's crucial that we do this as part of those pay progression talks, where we're not just trying to narrow the gap; we're trying to eradicate all pay inequality, and we'll be doing that over the course of the next year. So thanks again.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. I now call para A8, para A9, para A10, para A11, para A12. para A13. We're now moving on to section L, Internal Administration. Para L1. I now call resolution 89 Outside Employment Or Paid Work By The Senior Fire Brigades Union Officials moved by London. They have agreed to remit with the right to speak. Are you just remitting? Just remitting? Remitted? Thank you, London.

I now call resolution 90 Transition from X to an Alternative Social Media Platform moved by Scotland. They have agreed to remit with the right to speak. Scotland.

Resolution 90 TRANSITION FROM X TO AN ALTERNATIVE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

Conference believes that the social media platform X, under the ownership of Elon Musk, has increasingly engaged in the open promotion of fascism, bigotry and discrimination, using its algorithms to amplify such content to all users.

Conference therefore instructs the Executive Council to urgently identify a viable and appropriate alternative social media platform for official Fire Brigades Union (FBU) communications. A clear transition plan should be developed and implemented without delay, ensuring that all official FBU accounts on X migrate to the new platform as soon as possible, and by no later than 31 December 2025.

SCOTLAND

LEWIS CLARK (Scotland):

President, conference, this resolution has been a thorn in my side when I mistakenly thought it was a good idea to bring it through every committee I sit on, not just the FBU. At the time of submitting it, it was right; Trump was running rampant, and the endless deluge of Musk's drivel was pouring out.

And this is important: we must recognise the risk of these spaces, when that nugget can turn the tap on for a very powerful algorithm to push the dangerous rhetoric that comes out of it. My mind was changed though when we had the discussions where NUJ, Musicians' Union, campaign groups, politicians, other FBU reps, and realising our voice is important in this space. Some need this space to earn a living, and we all need to continue the good fight on it.

So months after submitting this motion, and many months of continuing to discuss it, I'll be happy to not talk about it again for a while, and remit it to the EC to do the good work. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Lewis. I now call resolution 91 Mandatory Training for Fire Brigades Union (FBU) Officials moved by Scotland, the EC are supporting.

Resolution 91 MANDATORY TRAINING FOR FIRE BRIGADES UNION (FBU) OFFICIALS

Conference acknowledges the need for FBU officials to represent and advise members on a wide range of challenging issues.

Conference agrees that in order for elected officials to be properly supported they should be clear in regard to the expectation, requirements and necessary training required to carry out their roles.

Conference therefore instructs the Executive Council (EC) to create a working group to review what FBU education courses are deemed a mandatory requirement for elected brigade officials, regional officials and EC members positions. This work should be completed by, and any subsequent necessary rule changes brought to Conference 2026.

SCOTLAND

SCOTT MacRORY (Scotland):

President, conference, moving resolution 91, Mandatory Training for FBU Officials. Conference, this resolution is asking for the work to be done to identify the courses appropriate for each of the roles of officials in our union. This is designed to help the officials and reps who do so much work on behalf of FBU members across the country.

The FBU education courses and the fantastic team behind them help prepare and educate our officials and reps to take on difficult work, often with responsibilities for the most serious issues facing our members. If you are handling ADAE courses, doing investigations, hearings, interviews, then you should have done the ADAE course. If you're processing applications for legal assistance, then it's imperative that you should have done the employment law and practice course.

All reps should go through the pathway of IBO, and then rep members to give them the basic knowledge, understanding, and confidence to best represent their members. Conference, we understand that there will be concern at the mandatory element of this, but unless we mandate these courses, we will continue to leave our officials and the union itself exposed and ill-equipped to best represent our members. I will leave it to the NWC to raise the yet-to-be-implemented mandatory training recommended in the sexual harassment report. Conference, support the resolution. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Scott. Does that have a seconder?

KERRY McCRONE (NWC):

Conference, president, seconding resolution 91, Mandatory Training for FBU Officials. Conference, the national women's committee welcomes this resolution brought by region 1 to conference. The national women's committee believe that mandatory training is extremely important when undertaking the role of an FBU official and rep.

As representatives of our members, we are tasked not only with supporting them, but also with making difficult decisions and navigating the many issues that arise within our roles. We must be well equipped with the right skills, knowledge and understanding to best support and represent our members with confidence and competence.

The FBU education programme is second to none in providing education to our officials and reps, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to represent our members' best interests at all levels in our union. When dealing with sensitive cases, it is vitally important to have the appropriate level of knowledge and skills.

I want to draw your attention to the recommendations arising from the sexual harassment survey that was conducted by our union. The survey highlighted deeply concerning levels of sexual harassment, findings that cannot be ignored. Recommendations that emerged must become an integral part of our training framework. These recommendations included: the FBU should work to undertake to train and educate officials and members on a number of key points arising from this project, including sexual harassment is not a women's issue; it is a trade union issue. It constitutes misogynistic behaviour and sexual harassment, and to ensure mandatory sexual harassment training for brigade officials up to and including national officials.

The executive council in circular 2024 HOC 0082 MW accepted the report and its recommendations in full. That circular referred to the EC's initial action plan, including compulsory education for all officials, from brigade level upwards. Let's be clear on one point: compulsory does not mean optional. To date, the compulsory sexual harassment training has not taken place, and the other training recommendations have been fragmented across the regions. We cannot afford to water this down, particularly around issues like sexual harassment, equality, and dignity in the workplace, or for it to be treated as a tick-box exercise, or something that people can opt out of.

If we are serious about change, real change, then these expectations must be enforced and upheld without exception. The FBU sexual harassment survey made painful reading. It showed us that too many of our sisters are still being let down by the systems and people that were meant to protect them.

The recommendations were clear. We need leadership, we need accountability, and we need proper training at every level in this union. That starts by making sure the people elected to represent us are trained, prepared, and ready to uphold our values. Training is not just beneficial. It is essential for trade union officials. It ensures they're competent, confident, and capable of fulfilling their duties effectively, which ultimately strengthens the union and benefits all of its members.

Well-trained officials are more likely to earn the respect of both union members and employers. This professionalism helps build trust and enhances the union's ability to influence workplace policies. It is vitally important that this resolution is agreed at conference, not only to ensure that training going forward is undertaken, but to ensure that the recommendations and commitments previously made by the EC regarding training are adhered to. So let's not just pass this motion. Let's commit to making it count. I urge you all, support it, enforce it. Conference, the national women's committee seconds. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Kerry. That's open for debate.

MARIA BUCK (LGBT+):

President, conference, this resolution acknowledges the necessity for our elected officials to be well equipped to represent and advise members on a myriad of challenging issues. It is imperative that these officials are clear about the expectations, requirements and mandatory training needed to effectively carry out their roles.

However, we must go beyond merely recording mandatory training. It is crucial that this information is readily accessible to all members, especially when officials and executive council members run for election and re-election. By making this training information public, we empower our members to make informed choices when voting their representatives.

Transparency in these records will allow us to see not only the mandatory courses completed, but also any additional development, training, or education related to equality. This is of the utmost importance to us. Knowing the extent of an official's training and development in areas such as equality ensures that we are electing individuals who are not only competent, but also committed to fostering an inclusive and equitable environment within our union.

Informed choice is the cornerstone of our democratic process. We can better assess the qualifications and dedication of those running for office. This transparency will help us elect officials who are truly prepared to lead and advocate for our members' best interests. Therefore, I urge the executive council to take this resolution further.

Let us establish a system where records are not only recorded, but also made publicly available. Let us include any outside development, training, or education, in relation to equality. This will ensure that our members have all the necessary information to make informed decisions when voting for their officials, because together we can build a union that is transparent, accountable, and committed to continuous improvement for equality. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Maria. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks for bringing the resolution. It's very helpful. And it reaffirms the position we brought last year in response to the sexual harassment survey. And the truth is, we haven't got round to implementing all of those recommendations yet, but the work is ongoing.

There are some mandatory training courses being provided this year in relation to this subject, and we will further that work over the period of time. But in relation to the points Maria mentioned, Steve and I have just had a brief moment there just to say we think it sits within the third working group, which is promoting democracy, accountability and decision making. And we'll make sure that within that working group, the discussions are had. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Ben. I now put resolution 91 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call resolution 96 Fire Brigades Union (FBU) Rule Book moved by Derbyshire. The EC give qualified support.

Resolution 96 FIRE BRIGADES UNION (FBU) RULE BOOK

Conference notes the numerous resolutions that have been agreed at previous conferences and now accepts the urgent need for the FBU Rule Book to be updated and made available to all members and officials of the FBU.

Conference believes there have been rule changes and amendments that all need to be implemented and the FBU Rule Book brought up to date.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to agree a method for a full review of the Rule Book and look at required updates as a consequence of other FBU business and the language used. The outcome of this review should ensure a more inclusive language is adopted and that the proposed updated Rule Book represents an up to date position and reflection of our Union and its structures. The proposed updated Rule Book should then be presented to Conference 2026 for agreement and/or amendment.

DERBYSHIRE

CHRIS TAPP (Derbyshire):

President, conference, moving resolution 96 the FBU Rule Book. This resolution was born, really, out of discussing rule changes with our committee, and not actually understanding or knowing what rules we're amending from what to what, because the Rule Book, as you know, isn't completely up to date in terms of the ones we have access to.

What I will say first, is that I do recognise the work that's underway at the moment, and has already been done. And I thank those that have been involved in that, in bringing this forward. But the resolution itself does just seek to ensure that we have an up-to-date Rule Book available to all officials and members to refer to at all times.

We can't submit accurate rule changes without access to the up-to-date rules, to know what we are changing. The resolution does deliberately reference using a more inclusive language for all FBU members, which you'll hopefully recall or probably not now, back on Tuesday when I came up and remitted a rule change based on that.

So it was to give me a potential insurance policy that if that fell, or, as was, I withdrew it, then this was another opportunity to promote that agenda. Derbyshire members do want access to a Rule Book that speaks to them, that supports them, and is available to them, and one that is up to date with a language that we all recognise.

Hard copies are nice, but they do come at a cost, and we recognise that. But online information up to date is possible, in my opinion, is vital. So conference, thank you. And I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Chris. Can I have a seconder? Yep.

NEIL BEVAN (Hereford and Worcester):

President, conference, seconding resolution 96. Fire Brigades Union (FBU) Rule Book. Conference, I think you'll be pleased to hear, last-time speaker. *Applause*

Conference, Hereford and Worcester members thank Derbyshire for bringing this resolution. As the resolution states, there is an urgent need to update the Rule Book, so it accurately reflects all amendments agreed through rule changes and resolutions. Conference, since the Rule Book was last updated, we voted on many resolutions and Rule Book changes that need to be incorporated. This includes the Accident and Injury Fund, Internal Union Discipline, and making the language and terminology more inclusive.

In 2022, sister Maria Buck spoke about the need to incorporate the plus with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans in the Rule Book, and the abbreviation when it's used in publications in order to bring the FBU in line with the rest of the trade union and equality movements in the UK. This still hasn't been done. Conference, in addition to the changes that have been agreed, there are also many changes required in order to modernise our Rule Book, so that it is relevant and accurate. For example, with the *Branch Handbook* now available online, surely we don't expect any member to pay for replacement in the event of its loss.

Additionally, when was the last time brigade organisers had to collect members' contributions and promptly dispatch them to head office? In three years' time, there'll be another Rule Book change, conference. And if the Rule Book is not updated, we run the risk of inadvertently agreeing amendments that could conflict with previously agreed positions. Conference, I urge you to support this resolution. I second. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Neil. That's open for debate. AGS.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thanks for bringing the motion, and Chris and Neil; I've got your name this time, and Neil, before you go, thanks for everything you've done for our movement and for our members. It's certainly the end of an era.

The qualified support is that the work is already ongoing, and at last year's conference we made the commitment in terms of putting the plus following LGBT. So that work has been done, but this is the rule change, conference, and this will bring about a new version of the Rule Book. But if there are things missing, I just want to give you the assurance, we'll continue to work with our equality sections to make sure that the executive council bring, if necessary, emergency rule changes to conference next year. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Ben. I now put resolution 96 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. Thank you. *That carries.*

Right, conference, it is now three minutes away from dinner time. Some call it lunch. We're not having that debate, what I'm going to do with your agreement is, if you want to, we reconvene at half past one to hear the last few resolutions we've got. Is that agreed? Agreed. Thank you. Lunch break. Oh, dinner. Dinner break.

Break for lunch

AFTERNOON SESSION

THE PRESIDENT:

Conference, can you start taking your seats please? Right, afternoon, conference. We are now on the last lap. You'll be glad to hear and it won't take us long. Hopefully, anyway. That's up to you. Right, I now call para L2 executive council meetings.

I now call resolution 100, Strengthening Representation on the Executive Council moved by the LGBT+ committee. The EC are giving qualified support.

Resolution 100 STRENGTHENING REPRESENTATION ON THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (EC)

Conference believes that the reinstatement of equality focused EC positions is crucial for ensuring that the union effectively represents and advocates for all its members, particularly those from marginalised groups.

Conference further believes that reviewing the EC positions will help the union make the changes necessary to create parity within our structures. This initiative will strengthen the union's commitment to promoting a fair, inclusive, and supportive environment for all members. The commitment to forming a dedicated working party to conduct a comprehensive review of the current EC positions is the beginning of our commitment to equity. The establishment of a working group could identify barriers to restoring equalities representation at EC level, and how to remove them, to ensure the Fire Brigades Union can return to having democratic input from people with lived experience into decision making at senior levels of union structure, in order to maintain its commitment to equality, equity, respect and unity.

Conference instructs the EC to establish a working group to assess the capacity and necessity to reinstate previously held equality focused EC positions and ensure its findings and recommendations are presented at the 2026 Conference for agreement and implementation.

LGBT+

MARIA BUCK (LGBT+):

President, conference, I want to emphasise the critical importance of hearing the voices of our equality sections. These voices bring diversity of thought, a wealth of opinions, and invaluable lived experiences that truly reflect our membership. We understand that a working group has been established to review the reinstatement of equality-focused positions on the executive council.

Whilst this is a first step, we must be vigilant. We must ensure that this working group works with us and not to us. Decisions that impact our equality sections must not be made without our voices being heard. We cannot allow the creation of groups that replicate the very issues we face on the conference floor, where matters affecting our sections are debated and voted on, without our consultation and without our right to vote.

The intent of this resolution is clear. It is not to review, agree, and make changes without bringing them back to this conference for debate. Any recommendations must go through our democratic structures, as with any other change. We must put on record that the resolution aims to ensure our voices are not just heard, but are integral to the decision-making process.

I would like to thank the executive council for setting up this working group. We look forward to collaborating with them to explore how our union can lead in equality. Our goal is to make our voices louder and more influential, ensuring we are not just advisors, but decision makers in the room. I urge this conference to look at the resolution and accept it for what it is asking: a review of our structures to explore if equality sections could be included in decision making.

This resolution is not about reclaiming our EC positions without your support. The intricacies of the review should be left to the working group. I encourage you to all go back and discuss this with your equality sections. Listen to them about the advantages that this will bring, not only to them, but to our union as a whole.

The resolution, strengthening representation on the executive council, is crucial for ensuring our union effectively represents and advocates for all its members, particularly those from marginalised groups. Reviewing the EC positions will help us make the necessary changes to create parity within our structures.

This initiative will strengthen our commitment to promoting a fair, inclusive, and supportive environment for all members. The formation of a dedicated working party to conduct a comprehensive review of the current EC positions is the beginning of our commitment to equality. This working group will identify barriers to restoring equalities representation at the EC level, and find ways to remove them. This will ensure that our union can return to having a democratic input from people with lived experience in decision making at senior levels, maintaining our commitment to equality, equity, respect, and unity. Conference, I urge you to support this resolution. Let us work together to ensure that our union remains a beacon of fairness and inclusivity. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Maria. Does that have a seconder?

KATIE HOLLOWAY (NWC):

President, conference, seconding resolution 100, Strengthening Representation on the EC. Today, I stand in full support of this motion to strengthen the representation of marginalised groups on our executive council. As a union, our core values are built upon equality, respect, and unity. But it is critical to recognise that these values are not just aspirational. They must be actively embedded in our structures, starting at the very top. By reinstating equality positions on the EC, we will ensure that our leadership is truly reflective of the diversity within our membership, and that all voices, especially those from underrepresented communities, are heard.

For too long, decisions have been made without the meaningful input of people who experience discrimination or exclusion. The absence of dedicated equality-focused roles has created a gap, one that this motion seeks to address. We must not only talk about equality, but demonstrate our commitment through action. Reintroducing these positions will allow us to move away from words to tangible change, strengthening our union as a truly inclusive, fair, and representative body. The need for gender equality in the EC cannot be overstated. Women bring unique perspectives, challenges, and insights to the table, and without their inclusion, we miss out on critical contributions.

This working group that this motion proposes is a step in the right direction. By conducting a thorough review, we can assess the barriers that have prevented the restoration of these vital roles, and develop a plan to remove them. It is essential that we have voices on the EC who understand the lived experiences of our diverse membership, people from all backgrounds, whether they're from the LGBT+ community, B&EMM background, those with disabilities, or any other marginalised group. Bringing these unique perspectives together can only strengthen our work.

I urge every delegate here to support this motion, not only because it's the right thing to do, but because it aligns with our fundamental values as a union. Let us be the leaders of change, setting an example for others to follow.

The implementation of this motion will ensure that they stay true to our commitment to equality, equity, and respect for all members. It also sends a powerful message to all of our members that their voice matters, that they belong, and that their place is in this union. Conference, we second. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Katie. That's now open for debate. No? AGS. Thank you.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY:

Thank you, president, and thanks to LGBT+ for bringing this important motion, and for the women's committee's points there as well. Katie, thank you. And the points you've made are really important to us: making sure that our union reflects the diversity of our membership, especially at the top levels, like at the executive council.

And it is crucial, and we know that. But it means that we've got to listen to people with lived experiences, making sure that our structures support proper representation. You've heard from Steve a few times this week, and he's regularly set out that when he took office, he set up a series of working groups. One of those working groups

directly looks at sectional structures. One of the others directly looks at the structure of the executive council, looking at how effective it is, and how accessible those roles are, and how we better can support our members.

We need to be honest with each other. We need to have conversations about what's working and what's not working. I just want to be clear, though, that the groups that have been set up already are established, working alongside our sections and the sectional reps. So the qualification, president, is that we won't be setting up an additional working group. Those working groups exist, and we'll have those proper conversations and bring proposals back here in the future. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Ben. I now put resolution 100 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call para L3, para L4. I now call resolution 88, and we have just been informed that London have remitted this without the right to speak. That fooled me!

So resolution 88 is remitted and I now call resolution 99 The Use of Fire Brigades Union (FBU) Funds To Purchase Alcoholic Beverages, moved by Suffolk with an amendment from Hereford and Worcester. The EC are seeking remit or oppose.

Resolution 99 THE USE OF THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION (FBU) FUNDS TO PURCHASE ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Conference believes that the use of the FBU funds should not be used to purchase alcoholic beverages.

Conference instructs the Executive Council that this practice is put to an end within six months of Conference 2025 and that the FBU ceases using its funds to purchase alcoholic beverages.

SUFFOLK

AMENDMENT

2nd paragraph, delete 'within six months of Conference 2025' insert 'immediately'

HEREFORD AND WORCESTER

PHIL JOHNSTON (Suffolk):

We made it up here without doing an Indiana Jones. So that's a good start. President, conference, 10th and final conference, last time speaking. *Applause*

Thank you, conference. It's been emotional. Conference, who would've thought that the shortest of the 102 resolutions that made it to conference this year would've created such a stir? The FBU has been working for its members for over 100 years. It is without doubt one of the hardest working of the unions in the UK. And it punches well above its weight, and our members benefit from well-trained and well-organised reps and officials, but it can't operate without member contributions. The FBU has one of the highest subscription rates of UK unions. This money pays for a multitude of things: staff costs, ballots, IT, hotels, mileage and travel, legal services and education, amongst a number of other things, as detailed in the executive council's report released each year. The cost for conferences alone in 2024 was £353,000. Our member subscriptions also provide a monthly allowance of differing and increasing amounts to union officials, from brigade level up to and including the president of the FBU.

These range from £141 pounds a month up to £1,096 pounds a month, taxed as income. Conference, when it comes to the use of our members' money, we should have nothing to hide. We can, of course, also claim from a range of subsistence rates for daily out-of-pocket expenses. The FBU also provides credit cards to a number of officials.

Conference, this resolution was specific in its intent. It would not stop any union official from buying alcohol. It would just stop them from buying it directly from union funds. Conference, with the election of Steve Wright as general

secretary, a working group has already been set up to review the use of FBU expenses. Suffolk officials have been informed that a draft guidance document is currently being produced. I have to say, we are a little disappointed that we couldn't be trusted enough to have sight of this draft to satisfy our concerns. However, we won't let that upset us.

We hope that this will be a task and finish group, and not just a task and task group, that will produce some strict guidelines, which will be followed, are fully auditable, and will be open to member scrutiny. Conference, as brigade officials who took this resolution to conference on behalf of our members, we put our trust in the new general secretary, Steve Wright, to ensure that our members' money is used efficiently, effectively, and appropriately. If not, there's always next year. Conference, Suffolk remit resolution 99. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Phil. Tam?

TAM McFARLANE (National Officer):

Just quickly, and thanks to Phil and Suffolk, and all the very best for the future, Phil. Yes, there has been previous discussions with us. I met region 9. I'll have to tell you, conference, in a previous life, I undertook resistance to interrogation training, but nothing prepared me for a discussion with region 9! That was name, rank, and number, and the end of it.

Now, look in terms of the nothing to hide, of course, we've got nothing to hide with finance. That's why we publish the accounts in our annual report every single year. We've got absolutely nothing to hide. And then the discussion around this issue was more, it was not about the general principle; there's clearly a principle here about the purchase of alcohol, and there's clearly a general principle here, and no one's, by the way, got a monopoly of making sure that members' funds are used properly. It was more about this sort of process in regard to this. So this has been to the executive council, this issue. It was actually moved by region 9.

There was a good debate and a good discussion, including the general secretary, and the EC took up a position, and that's now been fed into a wider working group. Myself and the national treasurer have been tasked to produce guidance, not as a direct result of this issue, I have to say, but something far bigger. And it's about the annual audit, which now for three years running, has told us we need to get much stricter guidance in regard to expenses. So myself, the national treasurer and our finance department are actually producing that, but we will include it in there. And, actually, just on the guidance, I just want to reassure conference that we've gone through conference policies in the past, and we'll be including that as part of the guidance.

So, for instance, the issue of home care for child home care is now getting included in that. We've gone out to other trade unions. We sought best practice and we're including that in the policy as well. We're also for the first time, including in the policy central provision of booking accommodation and booking travel. So no longer will we have to mess about with cards or seek somebody else's permission. What you can do is, through a travel company that's specific to the trade union movement, you'll be able to book your travel and accommodation. And the main reason behind that is we have to reduce the amount of cards in the organisation. The auditors now, for the third year running, they've told us this is no longer a request. It's a requirement for us to do so. Obviously, we can't do that until we give you an alternative. So that's part of it.

In regard to the alcohol, the principle that we are proposing that's set out is that alcohol shouldn't be purchased on union cards, unless there's prior approval by the general secretary, because we do think there are exceptions to this. For instance, some of the things we're looking at is memorial-type events run specifically by the Fire Brigades Union, hosting of international delegates and other delegates at FBU-specific events, hosting of events to recognise an official's contribution to the FBU and/or trade union movement.

And just in regard to being trusted with it, I know we've had this discussion. Look, this guidance is going through the structures of the union, and there's no way I'm going to go outside the structures of the union or our democracy. Jim and I are simply producing this guidance. I have to say, there could have been an issue if we'd shown the guidance to Suffolk. It could have changed as it went through the structures, because it was developed through consultation with regional treasurers. It's then going to go back to regional treasurers, and then it's going to go to the executive council.

That's the route that the guidance should take. So I welcome Suffolk remitting to us. As I said, we have considered it; it has gone through the EC. This guidance will be produced and I'm very glad that the debate happened in a very comradely way. Thanks very much indeed, conference. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Yeah, thanks Suffolk, and thanks Phil for that. I now call para L5 Elections. I now call resolution 93 Conduct And Canvassing During Fire Brigades Union Elections moved by Scotland. The EC are seeking remit or oppose.

Resolution 93 CONDUCT AND CANVASSING DURING FIRE BRIGADES UNION (FBU) ELECTIONS
Conference acknowledges that as FBU members, all Executive Council (EC) members, regional officials and brigade officials are entitled to hold their own opinion on their personal preference of candidates in internal FBU elections.

Conference however believes that as elected officials with significant responsibility and influence, it risks undermining the democratic processes, structures and governance of our union for such officials to declare their support publicly for any candidate before the processes for any such elections have been formally announced to members. Additionally, no official should be able to use their position to amplify their personal opinions and preferences for any candidate, rather than reflect formal endorsements of candidates decided through brigade, sectional and regional committee structures.

Conference agrees that it should be a breach of canvassing rules for elected officials to publicly voice their support for any candidate without having the endorsement of their respective committees beforehand.

Conference therefore instructs the EC to establish a working group to review the current canvassing rules for internal elections. This working group should seek external advice to ensure objectivity. The outcome of this working group should be the production of clear guidance on canvassing and conduct for elections for all levels of officials in the FBU. This work should be completed by no later than Conference 2026.

SCOTLAND

SEONA HART (Scotland):

President, conference, moving resolution 93 Conducting Canvassing During FBU Elections. Conference, the EC are reported to be emphatically opposed to this resolution, and we're struggling to see why. All this resolution is asking for is a review into the canvassing rules and the production of clear guidance for FBU elections.

Conference, EC members and other elected officials are entitled to their opinion on any candidate, and to participate in any election as FBU members. But, as it says in this resolution, for public support to be declared before members are even aware an election is running risks undermining the democratic process we should all look to protect.

Conference, we all saw in the weeks and months before the GS election was even called that all but one EC member had declared public support for a candidate. Doing videos and making social media posts before members knew there was an election, before other members had been given the opportunity to consider standing, and certainly before there had been any democratic consideration of all potential candidates. We also doubt whether any of those EC members had met with their regional committees to have an agreed position on which candidate they were backing as a region. Let's face it, how could they, when the election schedule hadn't even been announced? Surely in their role, they have a responsibility to the members who elected them to represent their views.

This in no way infringes their right to participate openly in any election process. EC members have the same voting rights as any member in such elections. The result of the actions of those EC members was a perception that the majority of the regions, not just those officials, but whole regions, were backing a candidate and the election was a foregone conclusion.

Maybe that's just smart politics. But it would seem to push the limits of the vague canvassing rules we are all currently bound by. The question of governance is also a serious one for conference to consider. The Rule Book is clear that the EC are responsible for the governance of the union between conferences. It was reported back to our region by our EC member who, for transparency, was one of those who publicly declared for a candidate in that election, that the ability of the EC to govern during that period was diminished to the point of near inertia, creating significant issues with their decision making around the election they had already declared an interest in. Conference, we all saw this; we all know that the current canvassing rules are unclear at best, don't make sense, and at worst, were abused or ignored.

Conference, we are only asking for a review. Only asking that guidance is improved. That's it. We cannot accept such serious risks to the good governance of our union.

This resolution offers an opportunity to resolve or mitigate that risk. Conference, please support the resolution. I move. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Seona. Does that have a seconder?

SASHA HITCHINS (West Midlands):

President, conference, seconding resolution 93. This resolution is not about restricting views or silencing debate. It is about recognising a fundamental pillar of trade union democracy that elected officials are placed in their positions to represent the members who voted for them, not to act as individuals, but as voices for the collective.

When we are elected, whether at brigade, regional, sectional or national level, we take on a duty. That duty is to reflect the views and concerns of our members. It is a responsibility grounded in trust, and with that trust comes the expectation that we act with fairness, with integrity, and without using our positions to sway or skew the democratic processes of this union.

Publicly endorsing candidates in internal elections before those elections have even been formally announced, undermines that trust. It gives the appearance, rightly or wrongly, that influence is being exercised unfairly, that decisions are being made behind closed doors before our members have had their say. This includes our own EC member, which we have held him to account for. This resolution rightly says if officials want to make endorsements, those endorsements must come from collective structures, brigade, sectional, and regional committees, not from individuals speaking with the weight of their title rather than the mandate of their members. It shouldn't be the members' responsibility to work out whether their elected officials are speaking personally or on their behalf, as lines become blurred. Many video endorsements were made, including myself. We should learn from this. We should grow from this. We should constantly evolve when something causes such division.

That's democracy, that's accountability, and that's conducting ourselves with integrity. Importantly, this resolution calls for a clear, fair, and objective review of the canvassing rules with external input to ensure that what we put in place works for everyone and upholds the high standards our members expect. Conference, elected positions should never be platforms for personal influence. They are positions of trust, of service, and of representation. Supporting this resolution is about protecting that principle. Support the resolution. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Sasha. That's open for debate.

JON LAMBE (London):

Conference, president, general secretary, speaking in opposition. This resolution doesn't just call for review. Conference agrees that it should be a breach of canvassing rules for elected officials to publicly voice their support for any candidate without having the endorsement of their respective committee beforehand.

We can talk about the last election. I think I possibly see a couple of endorsements that claimed people's positions in them. Now, people make mistakes, but let's be clear. I might be the regional secretary for London, but I'm a

member first. So if I want to support someone and I want to make it clear who I support as a member, I'm going to do that. And I'll be honest, pass this rule, conference, if I want to do that as a member, then roll up the IUDs, make the complaints. because that's what this is about. Now I would ask that you remit it because I just think this is overly draconian and we should not be doing it. Democracy's important, but we are all officials in this room. But we are members first. I oppose. *Applause*

ANDY MURRAY (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, speaking in opposition to this resolution. The election, as has quite rightly been said, things happened before it was called. The first thing that happened before it was called was that our ex-GS said he was standing before we knew an election was going to be held. He was going to stand, following that our new GS said he was going to stand. At that point, members can make up their mind. Nobody that I know put their position on their statements. We cannot silence our members. We must make sure that we don't silence our members. We oppose. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Mark Rowe.

MARK ROWE (National Officer):

President, conference, Seona, Scotland, the executive council are asking Scotland to remit this resolution or the executive council, if remission isn't forthcoming, are asking conference to oppose. And with respect, Scotland, this resolution is possibly slightly superfluous now, since it was put in. There are the task and finish groups that have been set up looking at all election elements. And this is certainly going to be considered in that group. The executive council do disagree slightly with the premise of the resolution, as they believe that officials, abiding by the canvassing policies, do have a responsibility to lead. Often officials are best placed to advise who is best for what position, but the EC are very conscious that we do need to maintain the ability to function as a union, and move on after election outcomes.

So the EC do acknowledge the matters raised, not just by Scotland, but by an awful lot of brigade committees over the last few months. Scotland, if you do remit this, the work will be undertaken through the current task and finish group. The title of that group is Promoting Democracy, Accountability and Decision Making. It does have a very specific remit to be considered by the group, and that is elections and member engagement. So, Scotland, we do ask for remission. This work is going to be done; it will be looked at. So please allow us to conclude this work, and we do ask remission. Thanks, president.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Mark. Scotland, right of reply.

SEONA HART (Scotland):

Thanks, president. Conference, just on a couple of points raised by our comrade in London. EC members are members and should be allowed to participate fully in the process. We addressed that in moving our resolution, but it shouldn't need to be spelled out that the EC members under rule are responsible for the good governance of our union between conferences. As high-profile figures that the majority of members and regions will know, it's impossible for their position not to be a factor. Even if they don't use their titles in videos or posts. Clearer guidance would protect them from the accusation of breaching canvassing rules.

In relation to the complaint process, we're all aware that there's a route to raise concerns and complaints regarding canvassing conduct. I myself was subject to public shaming online by the self-appointed arbiter of canvassing rules, who also happens to be our former AGS.

But why expose members and officials to potential IUD proceedings and all the additional stress, workload, and risk to the election, when this issue has already been raised and the solution reviewing and issuing clear guidance is obvious? In light of what Mark said, we're willing to put our trust in the working group to come up with some clearer guidelines, and Scotland remits. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Seona and Scotland. I now call resolution 94 Pre-Election Period, moved by Durham and Darlington. They have agreed to remit with the right to speak.

Resolution 94 PRE-ELECTION PERIOD

Conference notes that the recent General Secretary election was robustly contested by the two candidates who stood for the position.

Conference also notes that where an incumbent stands for re-election, there is inherently an advantage for that individual by virtue of the position they hold and the influence that any official correspondence sent to members in their name can have.

Political elections within the United Kingdom are currently subject to ‘pre-election periods,’ commonly referred to as ‘purdah,’ where specific restrictions on communications activity are in place.

Conference calls on the Executive Council to explore the idea of a pre-election period and restrictions on communication for those already in post who stand for re-election in the following positions, general secretary, assistant general secretary and national officer and report back to conference no later than Conference 2026.

DURHAM AND DARLINGTON

ANDY MURRAY (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, speaking remitting resolution 94 Pre-Election Period. Mark's just made the comment reassuring that there is ongoing work going on with the election periods and the way our democracy is done. So those reassurances are the reasons why we're remitting, but it's important for our members that democracy is robustly upheld and very strong.

We will provide support to the EC in any which way to make sure that happens. However, if the work's not done, we will be bringing this back. Thank you. We remit. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Andy and Durham. I now call resolution 98 Video Debates for Fire Brigades Union (FBU) National Elections moved by West Midlands. The EC are seeking remit or oppose.

Resolution 98 VIDEO DEBATES FOR FIRE BRIGADES UNION (FBU) NATIONAL ELECTIONS

Conference recognises that digital technology has advanced significantly over the years and as such, more options are available to us to ensure our members are more engaged than ever before.

Conference also recognises that the FBU has utilised technology such as video streaming to enable members to receive updates on a variety of issues in a timely manner, and this has been welcomed and positively received by those participating.

Conference agrees that using video streaming technology is an appropriate method to engage with members when it comes to our national internal elections and agrees that this should be facilitated by the Executive Council (EC) on a national basis. The ability to ask questions of those standing for election is expected by our members.

Conference instructs the EC to establish a working group to develop clear guidance around facilitating a national debate for candidates standing for election to general secretary, assistant general secretary and national officers. This work should be completed no later than Conference 2026.

WEST MIDLANDS

SASHA HITCHINS (West Midlands):

President, conference, moving Resolution 98 Video Debates for FBU National Elections. Last year, an all-reps event held in West Midlands, following the discussion around what this event was actually called for, brigade officials raised the topic of the general secretary election.

This was reminding branches to participate in the democratic process. We spoke about the two candidates that our members had seen all over social media, but our members did not know both of the candidates, nor did they know who all the other people were telling them to vote one way or another. It was raised by a branch rep in that meeting that we should invite both to come and speak to us so they could get an understanding.

It was deemed, due to the significant issues directly affecting our members and officials in West Midlands at the time, and the capacity of us as officials, to ask for one event. For representing our members, we were attacked on social media. We were told West Midlands officials should reflect hard on their actions: childish gesture-politics at members' expense, accused of some underhand tactics, when, in reality, we were doing exactly what our members had asked us to do: simply asking for both candidates to come and speak to them so they could make their own minds up. Isn't that exactly what we're elected to do, representing our members? Day one, point one stuff.

Some of the arguments used against us for having the audacity to facilitate this was that it would turn into some toxic bun-fight. It wasn't a level playing field. I'm not sure how meetings are conducted elsewhere, but I can tell you categorically without doubt, this does not happen in our brigade or our region, and would not. Factually incorrect information had to be addressed, taking us away from what was already an incredibly difficult time in the West Midlands.

It was draining. But more than that, it was disappointing. National elections shouldn't turn us all against each other. Over the years, we have witnessed a remarkable evolution in digital technology. It has changed the way we live, work, and communicate. And crucially, it has changed and transformed the way we organise. When we use video streaming to provide timely updates to members, the response is overwhelmingly positive. Members across the country, regardless of geography, can access crucial information, ask questions, and engage with their union in ways that were previously impossible. We have brought the union closer to its members, and our members welcome it. Comrades, this resolution recognises that we should build on that success. Nowhere is this more important than our internal elections, elections that shape the future of our union. Members want, deserve and expect the chance to hear directly from the people putting themselves forward for national leadership. The positions of general secretary, assistant general secretary and the national officers are different to the roles that we carry out, and indeed, the EC members.

These positions are leading us on a national level, and are no longer secondments to the union. As such, our members on branches are unlikely to know candidates that are not from their FRS or region.

Members in the West Midlands expressed a clear and legitimate desire to hear from both candidates. They asked to be informed, to be engaged, and incredibly were accused of mischief making for doing so. That should never happen in our union. Wanting to hear from candidates is not mischief; it's democracy. Enhancing member engagement through digital technology by video streaming debates provides a simple, fair and effective way to give all members equal access to the voices and visions of those standing for leadership. It gives them the chance to question, to listen and decide, not on hearsay or half-truths, or indeed because someone tells them that they should vote a particular way, but on the strength of ideas and clarity of commitment.

This resolution gives the executive council the structure, authority, and responsibility to manage this process properly in a fair and consistent way across all future national elections. It ensures that these national debates are not ad hoc, not regionally fragmented, and not left open to accusation or confusion. Instead, they will be transparent, well managed, and supported by clear guidance developed through a national working group with a deadline set for conference 2026. There is no reason why this then couldn't happen and apply wider. Comrades, this is about trust. It is about transparency, consistency, and it's about giving every member from the West Midlands and beyond an equal opportunity to inform themselves before they vote.

Let's move forward together. Let's pass this resolution for the benefit of our union, for the strength of our democracy, and most of all, for the expectations of our members. I move. Please support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Sasha. Does that have a seconder? Yes.

COLIN EDGELY (Scotland):

President, conference, seconding resolution 98. Video Debates for FBU National Elections Comrades, we've all been ordinary members long before anyone in the room was a regional official, brigade official, or before any of us were even a branch rep. If we're all being completely honest, the vast majority of members will know next to nothing about our national elected officials, other than their name, perhaps.

I can recall being a branch rep and having no clue what to tell members when it came to nominate a candidate at branch meetings. Of course, you had the opportunity to ask a brigade or a regional official for advice, but how would you know if they are telling you what's right for the union or just peddling an agenda?

After all, human nature could lead an individual to back a candidate and then encourage others to go along with them. Surely members should be able to see and hear both candidates under scrutiny and make their own choice. It's 2025, comrades. We really need to be looking beyond a small pamphlet stating the candidates' FBU positions held, and a short blurb full of buzzwords and rhetoric to try and convince members who to nominate and vote for.

In 2020, the University and College Union held an online debate and Q and A session via Zoom between its general secretary candidates. Unite did similar with a livestreamed debate in 2021, whilst there are examples from the NEU and the PCS of having multiple hustings events, albeit not streamed. So there's precedent out there for video debates.

With only 29% of our members bothering to cast a vote in the election for what is the most important senior position of our union, it's clear that we have a problem. Even some of the members that I spoke to who did vote couldn't give a plausible reason for the person they voted for, and that was true of votes for both candidates in the most recent general secretary election. Video debates could, and I would argue definitely would, boost engagement and participation.

We must ensure we have the right people in the right positions, and that the membership are able to confidently put their faith in who they can see and hear as their preferred candidate. We often talk about the union being a democratic member-led organisation, but that can't be the case if members are simply being regaled by more senior members and officials as to why one candidate is better or worse.

I can see no reasoned argument why we wouldn't want to see those going for national position debating, in a comradely way and facilitated properly, all the key issues of the time and what they would bring to the position. Failing to do so could see us elect national officials whose first experience of such scrutiny may well be on primetime news, or from a senior government politician. Electing a national official shouldn't be a punt. It should be an educated decision, and our members are entitled to put these candidates under scrutiny before being asked to decide who's right for the job. Conference, we second this resolution. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Colin. That's open for debate.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, speaking in support of resolution 98. Comrades, we believe that passing this resolution will help those candidates standing for national elections speak to more of our members, and hopefully increase the numbers of those voting. 28% was pointed out by our comrade from Scotland.

We believe it will encourage engagement from members. We believe it will show that those standing for these national positions embrace the accountability that comes with those positions. When we ran the GS election, region 5 did invite both candidates to come and speak to our regional committee. Both came and we welcomed them. We didn't ask them to joust to the death. We put the questions to them that were fed through to us by our members across the region separately. We then fed those answers back through the regional committee to our brigade committees. This was the right way to do it at the time, but we could have caught a lot of time out, and our members could have asked those standing the questions directly and received those answers directly from the candidates. This is how we should be doing our business. Conference, we support. *Applause*

ANDY MURRAY (Durham and Darlington):

President, conference, speaking in opposition to this resolution. We definitely need to have transparency and access to the candidates, and if your branch, your region, or your brigade ask to speak to a candidate and they don't want to speak to you, then that should 100% inform the decision that you make. But that is already open. There is nothing stopping anybody asking to speak to a candidate, asking to do it via Zoom. Doing those. What we cannot stand for is hustings or a TV spectacle. They do not inform political debate. They are there to divide. They are there purely for viewership, nothing more. We have in place robust ways of speaking to candidates. We oppose. *Applause*

STEVE TUCKER (Nottinghamshire):

President, conference similar to my comrades from West Midlands and Merseyside, we in Notts also held a hustings-style event. As asked for by our members, we invited both the incumbent GS and Steve Wright down to speak. We did it because we thought we were doing the right thing for our members. We thought we could have a debate. We had preset questions that we could vet, so that the questions weren't attacks on any individual candidate.

That event was very good. It was still divisive. The person who went first answered their questions. The person who went second, where their answers were similar, was then accused of mirroring what the original candidate said. Where the answers were different, they clearly had different views on where our union should be. I echo what our comrade from Scotland said. Members don't know who is standing, but that's where we failed our members. I failed my members in the last election. I should have been on branches telling them my experience for both candidates. This is what I know of this individual. This is what I know of this individual. I didn't. I left it up to members to find out information, and that was a failing on me.

I think the way forward, if I'm being honest, is separate meetings. There's nothing stopping us inviting a candidate to a committee meeting and the next month, the next week, whenever, invite the next candidate. Hold separate meetings, have different questions, let members ask the questions that they want to ask. Conference, Nottinghamshire oppose. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Steve.

JON LAMBE (London):

Conference, president, general secretary, speaking in opposition. I'm not going to talk about the last election. We are moving on. Let's get on with it into other elections. Let's not go back to what that was like. What I will talk about is video debates. Let's put the people running for election to be our leader as general secretary on a video debate, so they can discuss what the plans are, what we are going to do, their views. So the chiefs can see it within 10 seconds.

You're going to put the foxes in the hen house. They will know the ins and outs; they will see any arguments that happen. This is not a good idea. If we are not informing our members, and you are right, we're not doing that job, now branch sec, area, borough, regional sec, I've always been able to inform my members and have a conversation about it, and that is the way to do it. I just think this would be damaging to ourselves. I speak in opposition. *Applause*

CHRIS TAPP (Derbyshire):

President, conference, speaking in support. Conference, I'll just simply get to the point, because the elegant stuff's been done. It asks to talk about working groups. It talks about clear guidance, and it talks about facilitating debate. I can't vote against that on behalf of my membership. That's what they want to see. That's what they want to do. Members engage in different ways nowadays. We've just passed a resolution on AI. Do you know what I mean? We are moving in a different direction, so we've got to engage with some of this. Our new members and the way they want to engage with their union.

As my brother from Nottinghamshire said, I did watch one of these things unfold in that way. And I've got to say, a guidance and support from our union would've helped not make the mistakes that Steve has already talked about. So I don't think you need to be too harsh on yourself.

I think you did a good job of trying to help your members make their decisions. And conference, there's two points I make. If somebody doesn't want to do it, they don't have to do it. That's fine, isn't it? That's up to them. That's their business. There's no nothing here. We're not mandating a candidate that they must go on video and do this, that, and the other.

And again, people might talk about behaviour, and it becomes divisive and all these sort of things; it might get personal. We just had four days of saying to each other, let's be nice, let's be comradely. Let's do it all the right way. But now we're saying officials standing for these highest offices that our union members' money pays for, it might get all really bad, and they won't be able to behave properly. Someone needs to get a grip of that then, don't they? That's what the chair of a meeting or something is all about. That's what you're supposed to do. Stamp on bad behaviour and make that not the case. And if our people wanting to stand for these posts can't behave properly, then that's your members' minds made up, isn't it?

If they can't behave properly, they don't represent this union, do they? So for me, I don't see the issues here. I think it's about providing the guidance, having a look at it, having a look at new ways, working groups have been talked about. Brother Rowe has said there's some work being done there, whether it filters into that or not, that's not for me to decide, but conference, shutting down your members' opportunities to find out who's doing what. I urge you to be careful, and I urge you to support. Thank you. *Applause*

CHRIS COOK (Tyne and Wear):

Conference, president, speaking in opposition. We have our structures within our union. You can request someone to come to your brigade committee, regional committees, and have a debate. Grandstanding in front of cameras as just madness, in front of members and in front of our chief fire officers. I honestly think that we use the structures that are already in place. We've heard from regions where both candidates have come down and have debated it out within the regional and committee and brigade committee structures. That's the way that this should be done, not grandstanding.

And I've also got a concern. So what happens and where does it stop? Do we come back to conference in a year's time to discuss EC members doing hustings and videos? And then when a branch rep stands against a branch rep, do we put them two in front of each other and have a debate? Where does it stop? We have our structures, and I suggest that we use them. Tyne and Wear oppose. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Mark Rowe, opposition.

MARK ROWE (National Officer):

Thanks, president, conference. A very important debate and a very important decision for conference to make. Can I draw your attention to the final paragraph of the resolution? It calls for the establishment of a working group to develop clear guidance around facilitating a national debate for candidates.

So conference, the resolution means these debates will go ahead if the resolution is passed. Just guidance to be put together to facilitate that. But conference, the general secretary, assistant general secretary, and national officers don't have a vote on the executive council. The executive council are the decision makers, and yet the resolution cuts them out from any video debate, as Chris has raised.

Why is that? Why not EC members? Why not the president? Why not regional officials?

Lee mentioned accountability. Are we not all accountable? Every official in this room, accountable to the members? Conference, the executive believe that the resolution is flawed. Our election process and our canvassing during elections policy and guidance is designed to set a level playing field. It's a fact that a lot of those named in this resolution – the general secretary, the assistant general secretary, and the national officers – are media trained, media experienced, and therefore more polished (this is me being polished, by the way), in any online debate between an experienced official in a position for many years, perhaps as a national officer and perhaps a newer regional official, seeking to challenge. Conference, no one denies that the election most recent was contentious.

You know that; we know that. Would having that debate online really improve the debate, or does it actually disadvantage individuals standing in those elections, individuals with possibly less experience of video debating or media training? And as has been said, would discussing our very clear differences in the direction of the union, our relationships with employers, our relationships with government, our plans all in front of the bosses, strengthen or weaken us? The executive council believe that would weaken us. West Midlands, as with the previous resolution, there is the task and finish group looking at elections. Please allow that work to conclude. We'll look at it. Please remit or the EC urge conference to oppose. Thanks, president. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Mark. West Midlands, right of reply.

SASHA HITCHINS (West Midlands):

President, conference, right of reply. We've listened to the debate. I can't say I'm convinced that anyone has given any reason to contradict our position on this. My comrade from Durham, hustings, TV spectacle, they're there to divide; we already have robust procedures in place. There is nothing within the resolution that talks about a TV spectacle. We're not going to be on ITV. This is the same format as the ones that we currently have, which is everybody gets accepted into a big Teams meeting or a Zoom meeting. Membership databases are checked the same way that we do pension updates.

Comrade from Nottingham, if it didn't work in Nottinghamshire, no disrespect in any way, shape or form that I'm going to say this, but if it doesn't work in Nottinghamshire, this resolution would help facilitate a national consistent approach to it. Comrade from London, every single word that we utter within this room is written verbatim in a report of proceedings for our chief fire officers to read our strategies, our discussions verbatim, even when someone coughs, brackets cough.

Comrade from Tyne and Wear, structures, you reference brigade and regional committees. This resolution was brought to us by a member on a station asking for members on stations to hear from candidates within a national election. Brigade and regional committees are not what this resolution is about.

We sit here, we see these people, and I didn't mean that in a disrespectful way, that came out a little bit wrong. We see the people that put themselves forward. We know more about them than the people on the branches, but we have unconscious bias. We all have it. We learn about it in our jobs. It's really difficult. How do you decide if you've got no strong opinion one way or the other, and then that comes down to your own strong opinion? The resolution would address this.

The opposition from the executive council. Again, the same way as I just mentioned, this is not a YouTube available forever. This is the same structure. I'm turning on red. With the greatest respect, we will not be remitting. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Right, conference. I now put resolution 98 to the vote. All those in favour, please show. All those against please show. *That falls.*

A card vote was called

Conference, they are delivering the voting cards now. Could the tellers and scrutineers come to the front?

Conference, can you remain seated and not be walking all over the place? Thank you. Unless you're desperate.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Conference, it would appear that one of our tellers has gone home without informing us. So it'll come back on him. Matthew Black has put himself forward as a replacement. Can that be agreed? *Agreed.* Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Right, conference. Can you all confirm to me you have got a voting card? Anybody not got a voting card? Phil, we are good to go.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Okay, conference, can those who are voting for the resolution, please come forward and put it in the relevant box.

Can those voting against the resolution, please put their card in the relevant box. Conference, can I just check if anybody has abstained, can you hold your voting card up for the stewards to collect. No. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT:

Right, conference, while those votes are being counted, we will carry on.

Right, conference, I now call para L6, para L7, para L8, para L9, para L10, para L11, para L12, para L13. Yep.

SIMON LEROUX (Scotland):

President, conference, speaking on para L13 Firefighters 100 Lottery. Conference, a byproduct of the lottery is the ability to support and fund many great causes, one of these being the red plaque scheme. You'll have to forgive me, but I'll also be speaking briefly on that next paragraph too.

At every red plaque event we organise, there is a part of that unveiling that informs everybody in attendance of the history and the founding of the lottery, and that it funds those Red Plaque schemes. We also make sure that the lottery leaflet is left on every single seat alongside the order of ceremony, and, following some information from Tam, have seen a significant uplift of ticket sales following the Red Plaque events within Scotland. So please make sure that you promote the lottery during these events.

Conference, the importance of this lottery and the associated causes it supports cannot be underestimated. Every single one of us should have at least one ticket, if not multiple, and I set a challenge to everyone in the room today, when you're back on your branches: get one member to sign up to play, and challenge them to do the same, and spread the word throughout family and friends. Conference, let's keep the lottery growing and the special causes it funds able to function and thrive.

And you never know, you may just win a bit of cash in the process. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Simon. He's absolutely correct. It's a firefighters' lottery for firefighters and their families when they most need it. So please do whatever you can on that. I now call para L14. Simon.

SIMON LEROUX (Scotland):

President, conference, speaking for the final time at this conference on para L14 Red Plaque Scheme. Conference, the ability to honour our fallen comrades who have given their life in the line of duty is a pleasure and a privilege. Allowing a permanent display of this means their sacrifice does not go forgotten. And the subsequent generations of firefighters understand the significance of our role and the potential danger the job brings.

In Scotland, we've ran 16 Red Plaque events, and I would like to place on record the amazing work that the regional treasurer Seona Hart does in organising all of them. Each one we have done is different, and when possible, organised with the wishes of the family.

I'd also like to acknowledge and make conference aware of the work undertook by Professor Shane Ewen from Leeds Beckett University, and the Forged by Fire project he carries out, which brings an added part to every Red Plaque event that they are part of. The project brings school children from the local area, and over an eight-week period leading up to the Red Plaque unveiling event day, educates our children about the fire and rescue service and the history of that incident.

This has even culminated in the children being a part of the day itself, bringing a brilliant spin on an excellent event. I recommend anyone that plans a Red Plaque event in the future to consider utilising Shane and his project. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Simon. Lee.

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President conference, sadly, not speaking for the last time at this conference. I do apologise. Speaking on paragraph L14. Conference, on 5th October 1940, auxiliary firefighter Hector MacDonald Graham was killed when a bomb exploded in the warehouse fire he was fighting in the Liverpool Docklands. Hector should not have been at work at that time. Another auxiliary firefighter was not able to attend, and so Hector had stayed behind after his shift had finished. Hector's body was swept into the adjacent dock and not recovered for two weeks. At the time, Hector's daughter Jean was six years old.

She was not told of her father's death until after Hector's funeral, as she was sent to live with family in a different part of the city. Jean spent years trying to find out more about her father, including joining the auxiliary fire control department in the hope of meeting people who knew Hector.

But that information was very scarce. Years later, Jean's own daughter Dee joined the search for information on Hector, the grandfather she never met. They were told that much of the information had been destroyed during the war. Jean and Dee came across the Red Plaque scheme almost accidentally, and sent an exploratory email to head office to see if Hector would be eligible for a Red Plaque.

Tam and the brilliant head office team who deal with this immediately went to work putting into place the work for the Red Plaque scheme, and also the wonderful restoration of Hector's headstone as the family had moved away, and it had fallen into a state of disrepair. Because the Docklands in Liverpool have heritage status, having the plaque placed proved problematic over three years of work until, finally, the good people at Leonardo Hotel in Liverpool agreed that the plaque could be placed on the wall outside their hotel. In January this year, we unveiled the plaque. We were delighted to welcome the new GS in one of his first roles, the president, and the vice-president to the event.

I had the absolute honour of spending several hours with Jean and Dee as I drove them from Sheffield, where they now live, to Liverpool. I heard from them how Jean had not really been able to get closure on Hector's death. Later on that day, after the unveiling pictures, which have been shown on the screens here over the last few days, I noticed Jean and Dee standing looking at the dock.

They called me over, and Jean told me that they believed they were standing on or very near the spot where Hector would've been when the bomb exploded. Conference, driving Jean and Dee back to Sheffield that evening, what they told me absolutely adhered in my head and heart that this Red Plaque scheme is absolutely essential.

After almost 85 full years, Jean finally got the chance to say goodbye to Hector, and we could see exactly what that meant to both Jean and Dee. The FBU did that for them.

Conference, I wish we never had to place another Red Plaque. But the truth is, we will probably shortly be making arrangements to place a Red Plaque to honour Jenny and Martin. The Red Plaque scheme, and by extension, the Firefighters' Lottery, are essential in us honouring fallen comrades. Thank you. *Applause*

TAM McFARLANE (National Officer):

Thank you, Lee. Thank you, conference, just on that one. I remember that very well, and the years it's taken us to get through that, and I was absolutely gutted I couldn't be there for that. But thank you very much for putting on that event. As you just mentioned at the end there, I'm very aware of the context in which we're currently discussing this scheme, and I'll always bear that in mind.

Conference, it doesn't seem that long ago when a small group of us were walking through central London, and we saw one of them blue plaques in the wall. It was actually to a guy that was in *Carry On* films. I thought then, if it was good enough for them, good enough for so-called celebrities, it's good enough for real heroes, isn't it? FBU members, firefighters who gave their lives in the line of duty, and so the Red Plaque scheme was born. And since then, it's gone from strength to strength. So to date we've laid 73 plaques, honouring 117 firefighters, and we've got

two more national plaques in Northern Island and Essex. Currently on ongoing, we've got 52 plaques in the process of going through, and that will honour a further 123 firefighters, as well as the Flixborough disaster as well.

I want to thank all the officials involved in these schemes and especially I want to thank Sara Hughes at head office who, whilst I was off, has been running it, and runs it even now to such effect. The plaques ensure that the sacrifice of fallen members, fallen firefighters, will always be remembered in the communities for whom they gave their lives, and remembered by previous, current and future generations.

However, it's not just the plaques themselves, as you've heard from region 1, there's also the events that we put on and how important they are. And I have to say, there is one comrade who has taken the project on to a new level using events to bring families together, bring communities together, and even engage, as you've heard, local schools so that children, school children, learn not just about our profession and the people who've given their lives in it, but also about our union and the sacrifice of our members throughout it. And that is sister Seona Hart, sitting over there. Absolutely incredible work that Seona has taken on. *Applause*

Bringing together people, as I've said, but also building in place a foundation for us to put future Red Plaques in place because it's not just the Red Plaque project. We have to get the funding for it, and that means the Firefighters 100 Lottery. And at these events, it's made clear how the plaques are funded, and the importance of the lottery within it.

I'll give a bit more information on that. Currently we've got 6,956 tickets getting sold for the lottery. That's 2,531 players. It wasn't always like that. Can I just say, before April, it was 1,367 tickets less because that's the tickets that Seona and region 1 managed to engage with people and increase it by.

And then, not content with that, in May, when another Red Plaque was put in place for John Farrow and David Wilson, a further 1,859 tickets came as a result of that, building the lottery up to, as I said, a new level. And let's be clear what the lottery does, conference. The lottery supports injured firefighters.

We've converted the houses of seriously injured firefighters so that they're wheelchair-friendly, so that these firefighters don't have to leave the family homes. That's the lottery that's done that, of course; we've done DECON through it, and we've also helped the families of fallen firefighters, recently providing funding for childcare cover for a young widow in London, so that she could go on and study at the Open University.

And of course, lastly, there's a Red Plaque project as well. Now we're going to build this even further, because we're all about learning good practice, aren't we? And sharing good practice. So I'm pleased to tell conference that we'll be running a seminar, and hopefully in the not-too-long future. And we're going to ask sister Hart to come down to London, going to get everyone interested in the project together, and hopefully learn from the tremendous work she and region 1, indeed all of you, have been doing to make sure our people are properly remembered. Well done, and well done conference. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

I can see the chair of standing orders and the chief scrutineer coming. We have a result.

THE CHIEF SCRUTINEER (Kerry McCrone):

Conference, the result of the card vote on resolution 98 as those for, 14,209 and against 16,782.

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Kerry. *That falls.*

I now call para - Oh sorry.

CHAIR OF STANDING ORDERS (Phil Millar):

Thank you, president, conference, as you just heard, that vote was quite close. There wasn't a whole lot in it. So with the exception of Norfolk, and the Isle of Man, who told us yesterday that they were going home, we have

East Sussex, West Sussex, Gloucestershire, Cornwall, and North Yorkshire, none of whom voted in that. So can I re-emphasise that next year, whenever you're planning your travel arrangements, etc, conference is – the standing orders – it is scheduled to quarter past five. We've done our best and we're going to get finished early. Last year it was 10 past five. You can't be moving resolutions. The ones at the end of conference are as important as the ones at the very start, so please pass that on to your fellow delegates. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thank you, Phil. Absolutely agree with that. And I usually say at the beginning, it's not fair on those who, through no fault of their own, have resolutions that get pushed to the Friday. It's just the way that somebody's got to be there, and it's not fair on them. Okay? Thanks.

We move on. Para L15. I now call resolution 95 Solidarity Merchandise, moved by Lancashire, The EC are giving qualified support. Lancashire, just wait a minute, Kev. We're just moving business back to L15 FBU online shop. Tam wants to do an advertisement promotion for high quality merchandise at reasonable prices!

TAM McFARLANE (National Officer):

I was actually going to give the qualified support for that, so I may get two goes at this! Conference, sorry I wasn't here last year. I want to make up for that because there was something I was going to do last year that I want to do today. That is to ask the comrades from Kent to pass on my sincere thanks on behalf of the FBU shop to their chief fire officer, because their chief fire officer saw an advert for the FBU shop for a Member With Backbone T-shirt, and immediately sent a communication out to all the members there, banning them from stations. Two and a half hours later, we sold 250, all from Kent. *(Laughter, applause)*

Well done, Kent. Well done everyone. Keep using the shop and I'll do the qualification as well, if that's okay, president.

Resolution 95 SOLIDARITY MERCHANDISE

Conference applauds the work that members of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) have undertaken in support of affiliated groups, such as Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Care4Calais, Cuba Solidarity Campaign and others.

Conference further notes the success that the Care4Calais 'Paddington' T-Shirt had with members and supporters.

Conference believes that this is something we should encourage and grow.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to develop a 'Solidarity Range' through the FBU Shop that combines both the FBU logo and the logos and designs from affiliated groups. A percentage of any profits from this range should be donated to the affiliated group(s).

LANCASHIRE

KEVIN WILKIE (Lancashire):

President, conference, moving Resolution 95 Solidarity Merchandise. Comrades, every day we look at the news and we see refugees in Northern France and the Israeli war crimes on the Palestinian people of Gaza. A couple of years ago, the FBU launched a sale of the Care for Calais Paddington T-shirt. What we would like is to expand our merchandise and to help others with the solidarity range through the FBU shop. Thank you. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Kevin. Does that have a seconder? Oh,

LEE HUNTER (Merseyside):

President, conference, I'll send Oscar next year. You can all have a big chat about sharks, and everyone will be much happier. President, conference, speaking very quickly on resolution 95. Conference, like many of you, I have very strong views on a lot of the issues that the FBU support and the affiliated groups that we work with.

I was delighted to buy the Care for Calais Immigration is Not a Crime T-shirt when it was brought out, which is beautifully modelled by Kev just a moment ago. I've even begun to add badges and other merchandise to some

of my own FBU hats and t-shirts. Definitely not to the standard that the FBU shop could design and create in conjunction with our affiliated comrades.

Conference, I have no doubt that this merchandise would be highly sought after by our own members and the supporters of those affiliated groups who undoubtedly hold our union and the support it gives to these groups in the highest regard. We can even trial a small run on any agreed merchandise to see what the response is like and to ensure that the cost can be managed.

I'm sure that these affiliated groups would be welcoming of this, and I know that I would wear it with pride. Conference, support this resolution. I second. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks, Lee. That's open for debate.

LEWIS CLARK (Scotland):

President, conference, supporting the motion. I do love a T-shirt. It's no secret. I've got about 47 of them, I think. I just chucked away three, and that was the only three I could give up. Showing solidarity in this way is great, and it's supporting the great causes that we can see like the Care for Calais T-shirt. It is obvious that putting this message out there, and aligning ourselves with these movements, is very important.

We should make our best efforts to be as ethical as possible in our sourcing of all of our merch. There's no ethical consumption under capitalism, but we can try and do our best. Solidarity must be shown at all times, and our solidarity merch should not be at the detriment of environments from across the seas. We support. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Thanks Lewis. Nobody else? Tam.

TAM McFARLANE (National Officer):

Conference, I know exactly what you're thinking. How gutted everyone who's left by now will be, having missed this debate. Look, there is a quick qualification. Yes, we do it already. We're going to continue to do it. We've done for Care for Calais, we've also worked with Unite Against Fascism with providing T-shirts, and we'll continue doing that as well.

And by the way, Lee, yeah, thanks very much for the T-shirts and stuff like that. That's ideal. Do you know, I'll be honest, conference, when you look at the FBU shop, if we don't sell it, you don't need it. High quality merchandise at a reasonable price in every size available: small, medium, large, extra large. We even sell EC size.

We've got everything going there. And you think we're finished just with T-shirts and that? Never. Rebekah, are you ready? Right behind you a new product coming to the FBU shop. Solidaritea. Tea. Tea. *Applause*

No, I'll tell you what, president. Everyone laughs, but you're all wearing it. So on the train home, you can relax back, pick up your groundbreaking national organising strategy to read. You can then put on your headphones, download the FBU app and listen to the soon-to-be award-winning FBU podcast. And you're wearing your shirt.

And somebody comes up to say to you: "Are you a firefighter?" You can say "I'm better than that. I'm an FBU firefighter. An FBU firefighter control. And I'm going to go back, I'm going to organise, I'm going to put our members together, and I'm going to take over the world."

Conference, it has been a fantastic thing. I'm so glad we finished the shop, and can I just say on a personal note, thanks for all the well wishes. I'm so glad to be back. Unity. Strength. FBU. *Applause*

THE PRESIDENT:

Was that a qualification, was that a qualification in there somewhere? I think there was, but I'm not quite sure.

I now put resolution 95 to the vote. All those in favour please show. All those against please show. *That carries.*

I now call section I Accident and Injury Fund (AIF) section. I1. No. Conference.

That concludes all of the sections, all of the paras out of the annual report. And I'm now required to get the endorsement of the executive council report, by conference. So can that report be agreed, conference? *Agreed.* Thank you.

And now I come to the vote of thanks. Conference, we have now concluded the business we've come here to do, and I want to thank every single one of you for your candour and your behaviour this week. We've had some outstanding contributions in the debates. We've had some very tough debates with different views expressed. However, it was done with dignity and respect. And just as I requested, I think you should give yourselves a very big round of applause now, because of the way you've conducted yourselves. *Applause*

Just before I do close, I've got some really important people to thank. So please bear with me as it is a bit of a long list, but as you would expect, putting conference on is a massive operation, and Phil Millar and Mark Rowe will probably start plans for next year's conference next week, maybe two weeks, because we've let Mark have two weeks' annual leave straight after this.

So as soon as he is back, we'll get him back on it. I can also inform you that Tuesday's Mark Thomas fundraising event, we raised over £1,215 for medical aid for Palestinians. So thank you to Mark, and to all of that, conference. *Applause*

I can also update you on today's bucket collection for the Birmingham bin strikers, you raised £1,410.07 plus one euro. *(Laughter)*

Now the VP has looked up the exchange rate and it's 84p. So whoever put that in, if you want to come and buy that, it's a pound and there's a handling fee in that. So that is excellent. And that, on top of the £5,000 what the EC have agreed to donate, gives a total of £6,410 to the Birmingham bin strikers. Thank you very much. *Applause*

Conference, we know being a union official can sometimes be a thankless task, but we do it because it's what we believe in. And I have been made aware that some officials are retiring and, as such, it will be their last conference. So please wait until I've read all of the names out before you applaud, but I'll let you know when, and if I have missed anybody from the list, I do apologise. But these are the only ones that I have been provided with. And it gets even more difficult when I get to one of 'em when I explain it. So on behalf of the national union and every single member, our thanks go to the following officials: Phil Johnston, brigade chair Suffolk, Chris Kemp, Northants brigade chair, and region 6 chair, Andy Sprules of Northern Ireland and formerly of West Midlands. And I'm finally, I'm repeating this one because I give him a send-off message at last year's conference, but I didn't realise that you have to give about 18 months' notice, apparently, in Cleveland before you can retire. So he is still here on his 23rd annual conference, and he will probably come back next year. And that is Cleveland's brigade secretary, region 3 regional treasurer Davy Howe. Please give them all a round of applause. *Applause*

Conference, as some of you may know, it is also Nicole Marvin's, the brigade chair of Leicester and region 6 LGBT+ rep, it's her last conference, as she will be soon jetting off to start a new life in Australia. We wish Nicole all the best in her new life venture. Our loss of a brilliant rep is Australia's gain. All the best, Nicole. However, remember the creepy crawly things down there are massive, and they kill you. So if you want to come back at any time, you're more than welcome.

Conference, I've also been informed this is Neil Bevan's last conference, so wishing him all the best. And probably will be able to knock a day off next year if Neil is not attending. So thank you to all of them. *Applause*

Also, the hotel staff and especially Rachel, who keeps us all in check and delivers whatever we need to do. And she makes sure we get some dinner, makes sure we get some tea, and everything else. Did you see how I did that – dinner and tea. So that's the way it should be. I'd like to thank Steve and his team at Mascol.

They do a fantastic job for the union and all the techie stuff. And I've been told this might also be Steve's last conference, after coming for 25 years. So all the best to Steve, and well done to Mascol's as well. So a big thank you to them. *Applause*

I'd also like to thank all the fantastic FBU staff, and all of those who are here, and they've been at the back right-hand corner all week and walking about. You'll have all seen them, but also all of those staff at head office who aren't here. They are without doubt the engine of the FBU, without which the union would not function.

They do a brilliant job on behalf of our members. So thank you to each and every one of you. Be it in education, facilities, IT admin, membership, finance, comms. research – all of them, every department, they all work so hard for our members. So thank you very much to all of them. *Applause*

And finally, to the standing orders committee. Without them, conference, it just simply wouldn't happen. They start here at six in the morning, and they finish well after we've all packed up and are having our well-earned refreshments. As I've said, Mark and Phil will be cracking on with the 2026 conference planning in a couple of weeks. So thanks to them.

I've got a special mention of my three amigos: the vice-president Adam Taylor, who's been outstanding for me this week, keeping me on point with proceedings, and also Rebecca and Ian Hibbert, two in standing orders committee who work with me on my timetable. They turn up at my room at God knows what time in the morning, and we have to go through the day's proceedings and all that. And then they stay late on the night, and they're sorting everything out and generally try to stop me looking an idiot while I'm up here. So thank you very much to all of those. *Applause*

I now come on to Steve, our brand new general secretary. As far as conferences go, Steve, I don't think it could have gone any better. So well done for this week. So brilliant job there. *Applause*

And finally, to the EC and national officers and all officials and members in this room: without doing what you do on a daily basis, our union would simply not exist. Conference, I started off this week saying it would be a tough one after last week's tragedy, and it has been, but we did get through it, and you did what you are elected to do. You came here and you represented members as well as you could.

Also for the hi-vis warriors, massive thank you to all of the stewards. Did a fantastic job this week. Really appreciate all the work that you do. *Applause*

Conference, I'd also like to say special thanks to Luke and Matt who came to cover for the Oxfordshire officials. Thank you. *Applause*

And I've got two last requests. Firstly, the banners. If you have brought a banner, before you all dash off, if your region or your brigade banner is here, can you make sure it goes away in the correct bag? Because it is a nightmare. We'll be tidying up in here for the next two or three hours, and we don't know what bags go with which banners, unless they're clearly labelled. But that will really help us if you do that.

Also, we have at the back somewhere, some large bins outside. After you all go, we just carry on. We start packing up. And, honestly, last year you left this place in a right state. Absolute state. So in order to assist us and the staff, because look, we always like to help other workers, don't we? Could I ask that if there's any rubbish that you're not taking home, you take it out with you, and put it in the bin on the way out. It would just help everybody so much.

Conference, other than that, safe journeys home. Been a fantastic week. Conference is closed. Thank you.

Conference closed



Established 1 October 1918

**OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS OF THE
FIRE BRIGADES UNION
ALONG WITH
LIST OF DELEGATES**

MAY 2025

OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS OF THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

PRESIDENT – Ian Murray

VICE-PRESIDENT – Adam Taylor

NATIONAL TREASURER – Jim Quinn

GENERAL SECRETARY – Steve Wright

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY – Ben Selby

NATIONAL OFFICER – Riccardo la Torre

NATIONAL OFFICER – Tam McFarlane

NATIONAL OFFICER – Mark Rowe

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS

REGION 1	Colin Brown
REGION 2	Jim Quinn
REGION 3	Tony Curry
REGION 4	Pete Smith
REGION 5	Andrew Fox-Hewitt
REGION 6	Adam Taylor
REGION 7	Andrew Scattergood
REGION 8	Gareth Tovey
REGION 9	Jamie Newell
REGION 10	David Shek
REGION 11	Joe Weir
REGION 12	Chris Wycherley
REGION 13	Val Hampshire

REGIONAL AND SECTIONAL SECRETARIES

REGION 1	John McKenzie
REGION 2	Phil Millar
REGION 3	Brian Harris
REGION 4	Gavin Marshall
REGION 5	Ian Hibbert
REGION 6	Mark Stilwell
REGION 7	Billy Holland
REGION 8	Duncan Stewart-Ball
REGION 9	Rebecca Lewington
REGION 10	Jon Lambe
REGION 11	Edward Fox
REGION 12	Mark Chapman
REGION 13	Dave Roberts
B&EMM	Amit Malde
CSNC	Caroline Saunderson
LGBT+	Pat Carberry
ONC	Peter Trayner
NRC	Paul Revill (acting)
NWC	Robyn Richardson

REGIONAL AND SECTIONAL CHAIRS

REGION 1	Gus Sproul
REGION 2	Dermot Rooney
REGION 3	Karl Wager
REGION 4	Steve Howley
REGION 5	Lee Hunter
REGION 6	Chris Kemp
REGION 7	Martin Starkey
REGION 8	Ruth Bateman
REGION 9	Kevin Driver
REGION 10	Gareth Beeton
REGION 11	Tim Green
REGION 12	David Hunt
REGION 13	Scott Young
B&EMM	Karen Bell
CSNC	Sherri Kitson
LGBT+	Maria Buck
ONC	Tony Walker
NRC	Paul Farman
NWC	Katie Holloway

REGIONAL TREASURERS

REGION 1	Seona Hart
REGION 2	Chris Blayney
REGION 3	Davy Howe
REGION 4	Matt Nicholls
REGION 5	Dave Pike
REGION 6	Clare Hudson
REGION 7	Sasha Hitchins
REGION 8	Gemma Thomas
REGION 9	Harry Powell
REGION 10	Adam Shaw
REGION 11	Dave Turner
REGION 12	Lee Newport
REGION 13	Amanda Hills

LIST OF DELEGATES

REGION 1	Scotland	Cari McIntyre Colin Edgely Angus Sproul Iain Ballantyne Jordan Falconer Lewis Clark Neil Anderson Simon Leroux
REGION 2	Northern Ireland	Andrew Sprules Jake Drinkwater Mark Montgomery Dermot Rooney
REGION 3	Cleveland	Nick Cain Chris Porter
	Durham	Andy Murray Guy Lawes
	Northumberland	Stephen Hanley David Habberjam
	Tyne and Wear	Matthew Laidler Chris Cook
REGION 4	Humberside	Jan Hayton Sam Miller-Hodges
	North Yorkshire	Jay Fildes Andy Savory
	South Yorkshire	Matt Nicholls Stu Smith
	West Yorkshire	Martyn Bairstow Jim Davies
REGION 5	Cheshire	James Lewis Meredith Jack Fellows
	Cumbria	Steven Ratcliffe Steve Mattinson
	Greater Manchester	Patrick Brennan David Pike Emily Hollands
	Isle of Man	Nicholas Hays
	Lancashire	Kevin Wilkie
	Merseyside	Graeme Jones Lee Hunter

LIST OF DELEGATES

REGION 6

Derbyshire	Tony Dempsey Chris Tapp
Leicestershire	Harry Brant Nicole Marvin
Lincolnshire	Karl Keuneke Dan Taylor
Northamptonshire	Jed Goodfellow Chris Kemp
Nottinghamshire	Stephen Tucker Benjamin Curson

REGION 7

Hereford and Worcester	Neil Bevan
Shropshire	Rob Cartwright Simon Morris
Staffordshire	Jack Lee Craig Elson
Warwickshire	Adam Barnes Adam Hemmings
West Midlands	Carl Goode Philippa Smith Sasha Hitchins

REGION 8

Mid and West Wales	Dan Bartley Carwyn Evans
North Wales	Geoffrey Miller Rebekah Uden
South Wales	Lloyd Price Ross Davies Eleanor Hathaway

REGION 9

Bedfordshire	Craig Carter Darren Barrett
Cambridgeshire	Scott Newbon Mark Harriss
Essex	Martyn Wager Richard Maddams
Hertfordshire	Robin Fortune
Norfolk	Ruth Tolbart Alan Jaye
Suffolk	Richard Beeby Phil Johnston

LIST OF DELEGATES

REGION 10

London

Mohammed Ahmed
Nikki Haxton-Jones
Gareth Cook
Brian Flanagan
Kelly Kelly
Annie Green
Andy Warren
Ross McLaren
Jonathan Stabler
Dave Young

REGION 11

East Sussex

Ben Ashton
Simon Herbert

Kent

Tim Green
Dave Turner

Surrey

Karl Jones
Graham Kitchen

West Sussex

Pascal Volant
Peter Horner

REGION 12

Berkshire

Stephen Collins
James Hunt

Buckinghamshire

Rob Martin
Kieron Thomas

Hampshire and Isle of Wight

Gareth Smith
Jamie Kelly
Mark Chapman

Oxfordshire

Lee Newport
Luke Fowler
Heather Rowan-Robinson

REGION 13

Avon

Amanda Mills
Matt Senior

Cornwall

Jon Walker

Devon and Somerset

Chris Grantham
Alex Smith

Dorset and Wiltshire

Adam Moss
Leah Smith

Gloucestershire

Ben Gwyer
Katie Yhnell

LIST OF DELEGATES

B&EMM	B&EMM	Rob Lewis Dwight Williams
CSNC	CSNC	Lyndsey Burton Hayleigh Marks Talabis
LGBT+	LGBT+	Gemma Betts Matthew Black
NRC	NRC	Oliver Baldam James Salt
NWC	NWC	Kerry McCrone Kirsty Wright
ONC	ONC	Chris Evans Gareth Jianikos



Established 1 October 1918

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