



THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

CONFERENCE 2018

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

PAY IN THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

The past eight years have seen huge challenges to all workers in the public sector – and to their unions – as a result of the pay freeze and unprecedented levels of cuts as a result of austerity policies. The FBU has fully participated in all campaigning by the wider trade union movement. There have been important developments over the last year that affect the next steps in the union's pay discussions with our employers.

Conference in May 2017 instructed the executive council to submit a pay claim to the National Joint Council (NJC), based on the union's evidence of a real terms fall firefighters' pay over the past decade, as well as the additional work firefighters have undertaken over that period. The executive council submitted the FBU's pay claim to the NJC meeting on 1 June. The employers' side consulted fire and rescue authorities during June.

On 1 July the employers' side made an offer, which included an immediate 2% increase on basic pay and CPD payments. The offer also included a further 3% increase with effect from 1 April 2018, with arrangements for the pay awards for 2018, 2019 and possibly 2020 being staged fitting into the overall pay framework, subject to agreement on broadening the role of firefighters (such as the introduction of emergency medical response) and obtaining central government funding.

The executive council welcomed the commitment to exceed the pay cap, but on the 25 July, after consultation with members, the union told employers the proposals were inadequate in that form. After further correspondence with the employers, that provided further clarification on their position, the executive council consulted members again. On 13 September, and after membership consultation, the executive council decided not to accept the proposals. The immediate effect was that the emergency medical response trials ceased. The FBU nevertheless remained committed to discussing the future of the service and to address firefighters' pay and conditions.

On 19 September, the employers proposed that NJC pay rates be increased by 1%. Further discussion on pay continued, including at 5 October NJC meeting. On 1 November the employers confirmed that their revised proposal was not conditional on any other matters, nor would it be considered as necessarily a final settlement of pay in the current pay round.

The executive council consulted members on the proposal. On 7 December the executive council announced that agreement had been reached that pay and CPD rates would be uplifted by 1%, effective from 1 July 2017. Talks with the national employers representatives on the scope of the work of the fire and rescue service and have continued since then to attempt to address pay, including pay for 2017/18.

NJC Work-stream discussions

FBU policy remains to negotiate a pay rise through the NJC. Following discussion, the NJC agreed the following commitment:

Both sides commit to work jointly on changes identified by each side to ensure that there is a pay framework alongside terms and conditions in the fire and rescue service which reflect the responsibilities of, and current and future demands on, the service and the profession.

This has included consideration of how the workforce's skills and commitment can be utilised, including the type of activities undertaken. The workstreams are about developing potential areas of work, such as environmental challenges, emergency medical response (EMR), multi-agency emergency response, youth

and other social engagement work, inspections and enforcement. *It is important to note that not all the work discussed through the work-streams is 'new' or non-contractual work.*

The two most difficult areas of these discussions have been around emergency medical response and MTFA. In relation to MTFA this has largely resulted from the failure of central government to appreciate or acknowledge the scale of the challenge facing the fire and rescue service in such circumstances. Instead government has concentrated solely on the need for small specialist teams and have refused to acknowledge the role of all firefighters in any such response. This wider role of firefighters (i.e. outside of specialist teams) was highlighted in particular by the response to the Westminster Bridge attack. The union continues to seek to address both the operational concerns around MTFA and the various contractual and related issues set out by previous decisions of Conference.

Emergency medical response by firefighters has been carried out in many brigades for a decade or more. This activity is a socially useful supplement to the public before the arrival of paramedics. It is not a substitute for a properly-resourced ambulance service. Firefighters' work, alongside other community first responder initiatives, has been supported by ambulance trade unions.

FBU conference 2015 agreed to allow for emergency medical response trials in brigades, subject to national agreement. The trials were extended after discussion at the 2016 conference and continued following the 2017 recall conference, as well as 2017 conference. The trials were independently evaluated by the University of Hertfordshire's Broadening Responsibilities report and by the New Economy report.

Conference believes that the trials showed that firefighters can make a significant, life-saving contribution to our communities, for example through intervention in cardiac arrest incidents. Firefighters were able to arrive swiftly, professionally use defibrillators and provide care to members of the public suffering cardiac events.

Conference believes that the trials also raised a number of serious concerns, which indicate failings on the part of the employers to run the schemes properly. These include:

- The introduction of some completely inappropriate work into the fire and rescue service through the NJC trials
- The failure of some employers at local level to address the serious concerns of staff on operational, safety, training and welfare issues in relation to the NJC trials
- Inconsistent standards between different trials e.g. on inoculations
- Failure to provide adequate mental health support
- Inconsistent mobilisation, sometimes by-passing our control members
- Inadequate provision of work wear, PPE and equipment
- Lack of local consultation mechanisms.

The executive council notes that whilst some FBU members believe the trials were worthwhile, other members found the work arduous, were put into invidious situations and were not adequately supported by principal managers.

The executive council believes that oversight of the trials should have been more rigorous, with more clarity about the work commitments and higher common standards collectively agreed before any trial work took place.

Conference notes the lobbying of government ministers that has taken place to date and the discussions that have taken place with ministers responsible for fire services.

Wider union campaign

Conference notes the pay squeeze suffered by firefighters and other workers in the public and private sectors since the 2007/08 financial crash. Conference notes the Westminster coalition government's imposed two year pay freeze on public sector workers, followed by a 1% cap on the pay of firefighters and other public sector workers since 2012. Conference notes recent statements made by current ministers in the UK government that "nothing has changed" in relation to the 1% pay cap, despite inflation of 3% or more.

FBU delegates raised the issue of firefighters' pay at TUC Congress in September 2017. The FBU has participated in TUC and wider labour movement campaigning against the pay cap. The union will continue with this work – but acknowledges that this strategy has not yet moved the Westminster government's austerity on pay.

Conference resolves to:

1. To continue to negotiate through the NJC for a decent and sustained pay rise of firefighters.
2. To continue to work with other unions and the TUC to end the pay cap on public sector workers.
3. Instruct the executive council to campaign on firefighters' pay using every avenue as appropriate and necessary, including political lobbying and industrial action.