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Members' Circular 01/08

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To: Regional Representatives, Branch Secretaries and FRS Contacts

FOR THE ATTENTION OF ALL MEMBERS

Pay Protection and Central Grant Settlements

Pay protection

Members who, prior to rank to role changes, held the rank of Station Officers, Fire Control Officer or Principal Fire Control Officer will be aware that their pay was to be protected until 2007 when the situation was due to be reviewed.

To clarify the position, the matter of pay protection remains part of the 2003 Heads of Agreement that brought an end to the national pay dispute. As the agreement was made between the national employers and FBU, the FOA was not in a position to contribute to the review. We are aware that there remains no outcome to the review process since no agreed position was reached.

We realise that the matter of rank to role and pay protection remains a major issue for many members and it is unfortunate that, more than 4 years on from the agreement, members in the service are still in the position where, having lost status, they also face losing income.

Whilst we are unable to intervene in negotiations on the matter, having discovered that Ministers and Civil Servants administering the fire and rescue service were not aware of the ongoing impact of the 2003 agreement. We have stressed that it is affecting morale and feeling of value (not just amongst people directly affected) to help them understand that changes being made to the service at local level are not likely to be well received unless local management take steps to show that the opinions of their staff are valued. Making an effort to consult, explain and listen before bringing forward proposals might be a good starting point.

Central Grant Settlements

We are aware of concerns being expressed about the levels of financial settlement for fire and rescue services. There had not been an even distribution and some services have done well whilst others may be facing reductions (in real terms). Whilst we may disagree with Government policies, we understand that all public services are facing a difficult period in terms of funding over the next few years and regardless of what pressure might be brought to bear, efficiency savings are still likely to be required.

The actual impact of the settlement is difficult to quantify at this stage since our fire and rescue authorities will always paint the blackest picture in an effort to maintain income. The FOA will monitor the position around the country but our members are best placed to say whether any proposed cuts in service provision are the only realistic option available to management or whether the government has provided sufficient resources to maintain a satisfactory level of service.

We acknowledge that the public service reform programme is geared to reducing costs and this is difficult to square against a parallel agenda for improving service to communities. It is also difficult to understand how this can be achieved at a time when the FRS is attempting to develop new service areas. There might be scope to improve efficiency but there is a limit to the amount of work that staff can absorb. If services are being stretched then someone must draw a line and say that we simply cannot deliver with the resources available – we do not hear this being said – our experience is that the service is becoming littered with superficial policies and procedures that might look as though they are working but scratching beneath the surface might tell a different story.

We must be sure that any proposals emanating from our fire and rescue services are robust and capable of demonstrating that measurable benefits in terms of risk reduction or community well-being will be delivered. Attempting to disguise cost savings within IRMP, for example, is not appropriate. If, at the end of the day, our local employers are attempting to save money, we urge them to be open and honest so that the FOA, and others, can work with them to find alternative solutions.

Should you become aware that your service is considering unacceptable cost-cutting proposals, please inform your Branch and Regional officials so we can take steps to intervene with a view to finding alternative options.