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Our Ref: MW/sll

4 March 2022

The Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson MP
Chair - Home Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA

[By email: homeaffcom@parliament.uk]

Dear Dame Diana Johnson

Re: Home Affairs Committee holds a one off session on the state of the Fire and Rescue Service

This letter relates to the Home Affairs select committee session held on Wednesday 2 March 2022.

The FBU was glad to see fire scheduled, as unfortunately this vital public service has not had the attention it deserves from this committee for many years, often overshadowed by policing or immigration.

However the FBU is disappointed that none of our senior representatives were invited to attend, particularly as the witnesses who did appear used the platform as an opportunity to make false assertions about the union. Therefore we should correct these for your records.

HMICFRS chief inspector Tom Winsor stated that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the FBU "attempted to prevent in some parts of the country the firefighters from helping with the vaccination programme because they said it was not part of their function". This is simply not true, as is clear from the FBU circular of 9 December 2020, which stated:

"Firefighters are ready to assist the UK's rollout of Covid-19 Vaccines after an agreement was reached between the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and the fire and rescue service national employers....The FBU and national employers said fire and rescue services are open to assisting with the vaccine rollout if requested by Local Resilience Forums."

The union has written to Mr Winsor to correct his previous assertions, yet he continues to state this in public, as he did to your committee.

There was discussion of the 'industrial relations climate' from your witnesses, and claims that it is adversarial. There is myriad evidence to the contrary, where the FBU has worked constructively alongside employers to achieve the best outcomes for firefighters.

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For example, Mr Winsor told the committee “the conduct of the FBU is a drag on reform, particularly in matters concerning the true role of the firefighter”. He indicated Manchester and London are the most problematic brigades when it comes to broadening the role. This is completely inaccurate and is especially surprising, because the FBU is currently in the process of negotiating agreements with the employers and chief fire officers in Manchester and London.

Firefighters on the frontline are disappointed about the tenor of your evidence session, where once again Mr Winsor inexplicably attacked their work and their union. I am keen for the record to be corrected. In the interests of balance, I would welcome the opportunity to appear at your committee so MPs can hear the concerns of our members – firefighters on the frontline – rather than exclusively the views of a politically motivated chief inspector and out of touch chief fire officers.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack', with a stylized, cursive script.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary