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Date 12 December 2007  
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Dave Williams  
FBU  
FSHQ

Dear *Dave*

### LETTER TO ELECTED MEMBERS

I refer to your letter to members suggesting that there has been a "breakdown" in industrial relations and requesting a private meeting with group leaders of the Authority.

The days of "deals done behind closed doors" between members and unions are long gone for all manner of good reasons. I therefore took your letter to the full Fire Authority for discussion on Wednesday 6 December. I subsequently undertook to the Fire Authority to respond to you.

Firstly, on the notion that there has been a "breakdown"; we simply do not agree.

It seems to me that you have not got your own way on your interpretation of the CPD Scheme, nationally and locally, and because officers have not given into you, that represents a breakdown.

Secondly, and turning to the question of CPD itself, Members support the stance taken by management.

The dispute resolution agreement that enabled the current 2x2x4 Duty System based on the 9/15 hour split to be retained is unequivocal as far as we are concerned. We support the view of management, therefore, that your current stance is an attempt to renege on an agreement made in good faith. Not only is this disappointing and frustrating – in our view it is also in contravention of the new national IR Protocol that we, as employers, paid an extra 0.4% for as part of last year's pay negotiations.

Thirdly, on the matter of protocols and your request to meet. We now have a national IR Protocol in addition to the local Protocol we have had for some years. Although you have "refused" to sign this local Protocol, you have enjoyed its benefits and in our view, therefore, it is accepted.

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That protocol sets out quite clearly how you interact with officers and members and we are not intending to circumvent those considered processes as a knee jerk reaction to you being "unhappy" with a perfectly reasonable decision. To do so calls into question the merit or value of any protocol and would send entirely wrong signals to the workforce. We all therefore need to stick to the Protocol.

What our JCNP meetings on CPD and other modernisation issues have called into question, though, is the validity of the generous support contained within the local Protocol for the FBU in Cheshire. We are significantly out of line with neighbouring authorities and we have, therefore, supported officers' recommendations to review the protocol itself and to review the time off and facilities we fund for the FBU.

This matter will be considered further by the Policy Committee in January, but I need to alert you to the acceptance of the principle of withdrawing funding for a fulltime seconded FBU official.

I have offered many times to meet with you informally as Chairman and I have afforded every opportunity to you to state your case in person at Fire Authority meetings. We have invited you to the Members Away Day in January where we will consider the budget and I urge you to attend so you can see for yourself how Cheshire's approach has placed us in one of the most stable financial positions of any authority in the country and in a position to invest in our Firefighters – your members.

You really do need to get used to the idea of working with members and officers to deliver positive change alongside "sensitive" change. The alternative is that your automatic rejection of everything and portrayal of every disagreement as a "breakdown" increasingly calls into question the legitimacy of your view.

Yours sincerely



**Tony Hooton**  
**Chairman**  
**Cheshire Fire Authority**