



FIRE BRIGADES UNION

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Dear MP

Re: Large Scale Floods in the South West

I am writing to you in my position as the senior official of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) within the South West Region regarding the large scale flooding which impacted so seriously upon our Region.

I hope you will join with me in recognising the professionalism and commitment shown by members of the Fire & Rescue Service who worked around the clock, for days on end and in the most difficult of circumstances, in order to serve and protect their communities before, during and after the floods. The highly effective teamwork within the Service was there for all to see, from the Emergency Fire Control Staff who received and co-ordinate extraordinary high levels of calls to the Fire Crews on the ground carrying out numerous rescues and assisting their communities in every possible way.

In joining with me to recognise the extraordinary professionalism of the Fire Crews involved, I hope you will also recognise the clear expectation that any suggestion of cuts in the frontline of the Fire & Rescue Service is now removed and the necessary investment is made in equipment and resources required to deal with this type of large scale incident.

As the very serious weather situation developed, plans were initiated by the Fire & Rescue Service which provided crews and equipment from other areas of the UK who arrived in the region in order to assist with the situation. This co-ordination doubled the specialist capacity in the South West but was only possible because no other region, at that time, was affected to the same extent. It should be clear that, even with this extra assistance, the Service has been pushed to the limit with enormous demands placed on the capacity of the Service at every level.

Large scale flooding is becoming a regular feature of the work of the Fire & Rescue Service and every Region should have the necessary equipment and resources at its immediate disposal in order to deal with the demands that it brings. The reliance on other Fire & Rescue Services to provide additional equipment and resources from other areas of the country is based on the unsustainable premise that this equipment etc will not be required within the area it is based. It also, even with the high degree of co-ordination and pre planning currently in place, creates a delay in the deployment of the equipment and resources due to travel distances etc. I will also add that once the equipment is taken to and deployed in another region it will be unable to be redeployed to its "home" region even if this subsequently becomes affected.

With incidents of large scale flooding becoming such an issue in the South West it is necessary, in order to provide the appropriate level of resilient and sustainable response, for the Region to become self sufficient in terms of the equipment and resources necessary to deal with such an incident.

This will require an increase in specialist equipment such as high volume pumps and boats etc, as well as an increase in basic personal safety equipment such as dry suits etc. You may have noticed the images on television of Fire Crews working in floods whilst wearing equipment designed to protect them from burns and heat. Clearly this is an area that requires immediate attention. Such a necessary increase in equipment must also be matched by a necessary increase in the number of staff to work it.

I also wish to raise the issue of statutory duty with you. In England and Wales, there is no specific duty requiring Fire and Rescue Services to respond to major flooding. Scotland and Northern Ireland do have a duty in place. The TUC wants the law clarified, so that Firefighters can turn out in sufficient numbers and have the right specialist boats, swift water rescue kit and other equipment to protect the public. This measure is supported by the major stakeholders in the sector, notably the Fire Brigades Union and the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA). Statutory duty is achievable through an Emergency Order to the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

This issue has been consistently raised by the FBU in the past and I would ask, in light of the large scale flooding which has once again occurred, that you raise it with the Government as a matter of urgency.

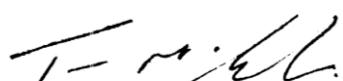
A further issue relates to costs incurred as a result of the large scale floods. We understand the arrangements for services to recover costs from each other for mutual aid under national arrangements but we became aware of many movements in support of services which, whilst vital to the overall response, were not undertaken at the request of any one service. We seek an absolute assurance that the indirect costs that contributed to such an effective response will be met centrally without falling to a service acting in the interests of a larger geographical area.

I would like to finish by informing you of the unacceptable context that the current high level work being undertaken by the Fire & Rescue Service falls within. The government has recently been told by the Chief Fire Officers Association that proposed budget cuts will lead to over 4,050 firefighter posts being cut, 60 fire stations closed, 150 fire appliances cut and 40 fire stations downgraded across England. These are all lifesaving frontline posts and equipment. The current and ongoing situation in the South West and elsewhere should be a stark wake up call regarding the consequences of proposed cuts to the front line Fire and Rescue Service and the Government needs to pay heed.

Large scale floods are becoming a regular feature of the work that we do and every Region should have the necessary equipment and front line firefighting staff needed to deal with it effectively. This requires further investment and I ask that you raise this, together with the points I have made above, with the Government as a matter of urgency.

Any suggestion of further cuts which, as can now clearly be seen, will compromise public safety, must now be removed.

Yours sincerely,



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FBU SOUTH WEST

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