

FBU PRAISES BIGGEST RESCUE EFFORT IN PEACETIME BRITAIN



Up to 3,500 people have been rescued from the floods and thousands more evacuated to safe areas. Union said the Government had not understood the scale, gravity and severity of what has happened.

In a press statement last week, the Union said fire crews have been working to the point of collapse in what has turned out to be the biggest rescue effort in peacetime Britain. It said the fire service has been stretched to its very limits with as many as 3,500 people being rescued from the floods.

General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "The Government has not understood the scale, gravity and severity of what has happened. We have witnessed the biggest


rescue effort in peacetime Britain by our emergency services and it's not over yet.

"Sadly there have been deaths but as many as 3,500 people have been rescued by the fire service alone. Thousands more have been evacuated to safe areas, although their homes and businesses have been flooded.

"Fire crews and officers have been working to the point of collapse. Emergency fire control operators have been under major pressure with thousands of extra calls for assistance from the public.

Massive, outstanding effort

"Fire crews and officers from other brigades have been moved in to help their colleagues in the flooded areas. There has been a massive and outstanding national



effort involving fire and rescue services from across the country.

"If Government wants to see how local public services are delivering for their communities then they just have to go to the flooded areas. They are delivering with a commitment and determination which you cannot buy off the shelf from the private sector.

"We don't mind the politicians turning up for photo opportunities. We just ask them to bring their chequebooks because the cost of these floods is enormous and these communities may take years to recover."

Floodings: the fire service will keep coming

Yorkshire and Humberside fire crews have worked their socks off in terrible conditions and with little rest, the Union has said. Some fire service staff even returned home after working 16 hours in water to find their own homes have been flooded.

Sean Starbuck, FBU Executive Council member for Yorkshire and Humberside said: "There has been an outstanding professional effort during the biggest rescue effort in peacetime Britain. Firefighters, officers and control staff have volunteered to come back on duty so they can help their communities.

"In Yorkshire and Humberside fire crews have worked tirelessly over the last 3 days to try and protect local communities from

conditions nobody was prepared for. Our local emergency fire controls have coped with everything thrown at them and ensured responses to thousands of emergency calls from the public. Fire crews and emergency fire control staff who came to work on Monday could not have expected what was in store for them but despite everything they coped proving once again that our members are adaptable to the situations they face.

Tremendous job

"The National Co-ordination Centre based in West Yorkshire control has done a tremendous job in mobilising the new high volume pumps and bringing them in from other brigades. Fire crews and officers have come from brigades across the country to help.

"The incident grounds are filled with fire crews and officers with a range of accents from around the country. The local fire crews and people of Yorkshire and Humberside will not forget the help and assistance we have had when we needed it.

"We have had some tragic deaths in the last few days. But we have also rescued thousands of people in this region, pumped out flooded properties, evacuated thousands of people and reassured others.

"There may be challenging days ahead. The buses and trains may stop running and power supplies may be lost but people can be reassured that the fire service will keep coming."

FBU prompts Service to go public with criticism

The FBU's move to highlight the scale of the flooding and the emergency response prompted one fire chief to go public with criticism of weaknesses in co-ordination between the various agencies responsible for dealing with flooding and the current lack of clarity over who exactly is responsible for responding to flooding incidents. He reportedly said this meant that the response to the floods hadn't been as effective as it could have been.

Chief fire officer of the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, Paul Hayden, reported as speaking for the Chief Fire Officer's Association (CFOA), was quoted by the BBC on Friday 29 June as saying:

"With flooding and with water rescue we sometimes need to bring resources together from all across the country, as we have seen this week, to operate together, to operate with our colleagues and partners and the other agencies."

Last November, Mr Hayden continued, CFOA identified that "many different agencies" were involved in both major and minor flooding and in inland water incidents.

"We [could] separate off the management of the floods themselves, which is a much more broad issue, but from the fire and rescue perspective we're suggesting that the rescue effort

needs to be better co-ordinated with a single body in charge."

He also was quoted as saying:

"Because we haven't got standardisation of our equipment and our training it does mean we aren't as effective as we otherwise could be."

He also touched on the fact that fire and rescue services do not have any official duties in relation to floods.

No statutory duty for floods

"I think we've managed for many, many years in the fire service where we don't have a statutory duty to do all of the things that we do, but we have a general duty to protect the public," Mr Hayden said.

"We took over 300 calls in less than an hour the week before last, and to have said to those people: 'Well actually we don't do floods, that's another government department', would have been silly and of course that would never happen."

"Frankly at the sharp end my firefighters or members of the public are less interested in which government department is responsible, but more that someone comes and does something about it," he said.

The BBC reported that he had said that recommendations had been made after the floods in Boscastle and Carlisle and research work carried out by the

CFOA had prompted a major government exercise, Exercise Trident, back in 2004.

"Sadly when you look at all the major events both here and in Europe and in the United States the same recommendations come out time and again," he reportedly said.

"Preparation for response to floods less well co-ordinated than for other emergencies"

In a document - Management of Major Flood Events FRS Contribution to the Emergency Phase Report for CFOA Board - posted up on the CFOA website a day earlier (28 June), Mr Hayden wrote "it was recognised that preparation for operational responses to inland water emergencies is less coordinated and developed than responses to other types of emergency."

Amid warnings of further outbreaks of severe weather, Mr Hayden established a national "Flood Co-ordination Centre" in Hereford and Worcester under his control, the BBC reported.

This is reportedly gathering information from emergency services around the country and has been feeding it back to a central office in Manchester, which will coordinate the deployment of any extra resources.

Mr Hayden was quoted by the BBC as saying that the centre was allowing the service to "both

monitor the incoming weather systems, to speak with our colleagues and partners in the Environment Agency and find what's happening in the rivers."

Minister: "prepared to consider" giving FRS statutory flood duty

Following a statement on Monday 2 July on the flooding, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Hilary Benn responded to parliamentary questions on the issue.

This included questions on the response to the floods and the role of the fire and rescue service in responding to them.

Minister Benn said: "We are prepared to consider giving the fire and rescue services a flood rescue duty, if and when full equipment and training are in place - but they contribute enormously already, as I saw for myself in Doncaster on Thursday evening, when I talked to firefighters from that area and to some from Herefordshire and Wales who had come with high-volume pumps to help pump the water out."

Referring to a question as to whether there were "too many agencies" involved, Minister Hilary Benn said: "The system appears to have worked pretty well, and has been well co-ordinated, so I do not recognise the problem that was identified by one chief fire officer."

27,000 homes, 5,000 businesses affected, £1bn clean-up costs

The Association of British Insurers (ABI) said on Friday that 27,000 homes and 5,000 businesses had been affected and that clean-up costs could reach £1bn. One UK insurance price comparison site, Confused.com, has suggested that the scale of claims will push up premiums.

"Insurers that are particularly hard hit by claims may have little choice but to increase premiums over the coming year." said Debra Williams, managing director of Confused.com, the BBC reported.

The latest reports say there are 600 casualties. Six people are confirmed to have died during the flooding last week, according to the latest press reports. In addition, a body was discovered on 1 July.

By last Thursday, June 28, 4.72in of rain had fallen during the month, just short of the record of 4.77in of June 1980. Heavy rain at the weekend meant the record for the wettest June may have been broken, forecasters said, the Daily Telegraph reported.

A service to be proud of A service worth defending

The General Secretary Matt Wrack has written to the new Prime Minister Gordon Brown highlighting the tremendous professional job and humanitarian

commitment of FBU members displayed these past days in responding to the floods in various parts of the country and the terrorist incidents in London and Glasgow.

The General Secretary highlighted the crucial contribution to the rescue effort of members from a number of brigades - officers, wholetime, retained and, in particular, control members, who, working in the various brigade emergency fire control rooms, have dealt with huge numbers of calls, have coordinated responses across many parts of the country and have done so with the utmost professionalism, demonstrating that we have efficient, effective and resilient systems in place to deal with the most extreme of demands.

The General Secretary also told the new PM that while performing their duties to protect communities some FBU members have seen their own homes and families affected by flooding.

Lessons to be learned

Among a range of issues already identified by members involved in the incidents in recent days, the Union will be carefully examining issues relating to:

- Equipment;
- Training;
- Planning and Coordination;
- Conditions of service issues;
- Welfare arrangements;
- Working in other fire authority areas;

The General Secretary will be calling on government and fire service politicians to enter a genuine dialogue on the issues the Union identifies.

See circular 2007HOC0372MW

Secondary contracts

Chief fire officers in some brigades have been misinforming FBU members that a circular issued by the Union on secondary contracts was inaccurate.

The circular - dated 6th June 2007, numbered 2007HOC0305MW - highlighted the problems posed to members who have secondary contracts in the event of them sustaining an injury whilst performing duties under the terms of a second contract.

It alerted FBU members to the fact that pension and compensation entitlements under a second contract may be different to those under the primary contract.

This circular is entirely accurate.

The senior civil servant, Martin Hill, who chairs the Firefighters' Pensions Committee on behalf of CLG (the Administrator of the firefighters' pension schemes) confirmed at the most recent meeting of that committee on the 20th June 2007 that the FBU circular was entirely correct.

Stakeholders represented on the Firefighters Pensions Committee

who were present included the FBU, CFOA, LGA, APFO, the Scottish Public Pensions Agency and the Government Actuaries Department.

Stop the misinformation

General Secretary Matt Wrack has written to the representative of CFOA who was present at the meeting, calling on him to "ensure that all operational members employed within the UK fire and rescue service are not misinformed by their managers" and to give assurances that "the facts as confirmed by CLG have been circulated by CFOA to all chief officers and senior managers in the UK, through CFOA and the three associations in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland."

Brigade Secretaries in those fire and rescue services where secondary contracts are offered to operational personnel are also to write to their respective chief fire officers on this matter.

See circular 2007HOC0370MW

The new Department

Hazel Blears MP, a (failed) contender in the Labour Party's deputy leadership race, is the new Communities and Local Government Secretary, replacing Ruth Kelly, who is now Transport Secretary. Minister of State is John Healey MP, replacing Phil Woolas, who is now Minister of state, Department for

Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs.

The three parliamentary under-
secretaries of state are Baroness
Andrews, Parmjit Dhanda MP and
Iain Wright MP. It has yet to be
announced who will have
responsibility for the fire and
rescue service. Former Fire
Minister Angela Smith MP is now
Mr Brown's Parliamentary Private
Secretary.

Brother Paul Mallaghan - Memorial Fund

Following the tragic death of
Bro. Paul Mallaghan, a member of
Blue Watch, Stevenage,
Hertfordshire, a memorial fund
has now been set up:
The Paul Mallaghan Fund

Cheques made payable to -

The Paul Mallaghan Fund
Nat West bank
Account no: 14021943
Sort code 60-10-39

Cheques or cash can be paid
into this account or cheques sent
to the service accountant at:

Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue
Service
Old London Road
Hertford
Herts
SG13 7LD

FBU freephone legal advice line

0808 100 6061

For advice on personal injury,
family law, wills conveyancing,
personal finance and consumer
issues.

For disciplinary and employment-
related queries contact your
local FBU rep

On the Move?

Members are reminded to advise
their Brigade Membership
Secretary of any change of
address.

Head Office should be advised of
any changes of next of kin or
nominations for benefits.

Get the e-bulletin and other FBU
campaign news by email. Visit
www.fbu.org.uk, type in you email
address in the bottom left hand
side of the homepage and "Sign
Up". It takes less than 2 minutes