



FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE MATTERS

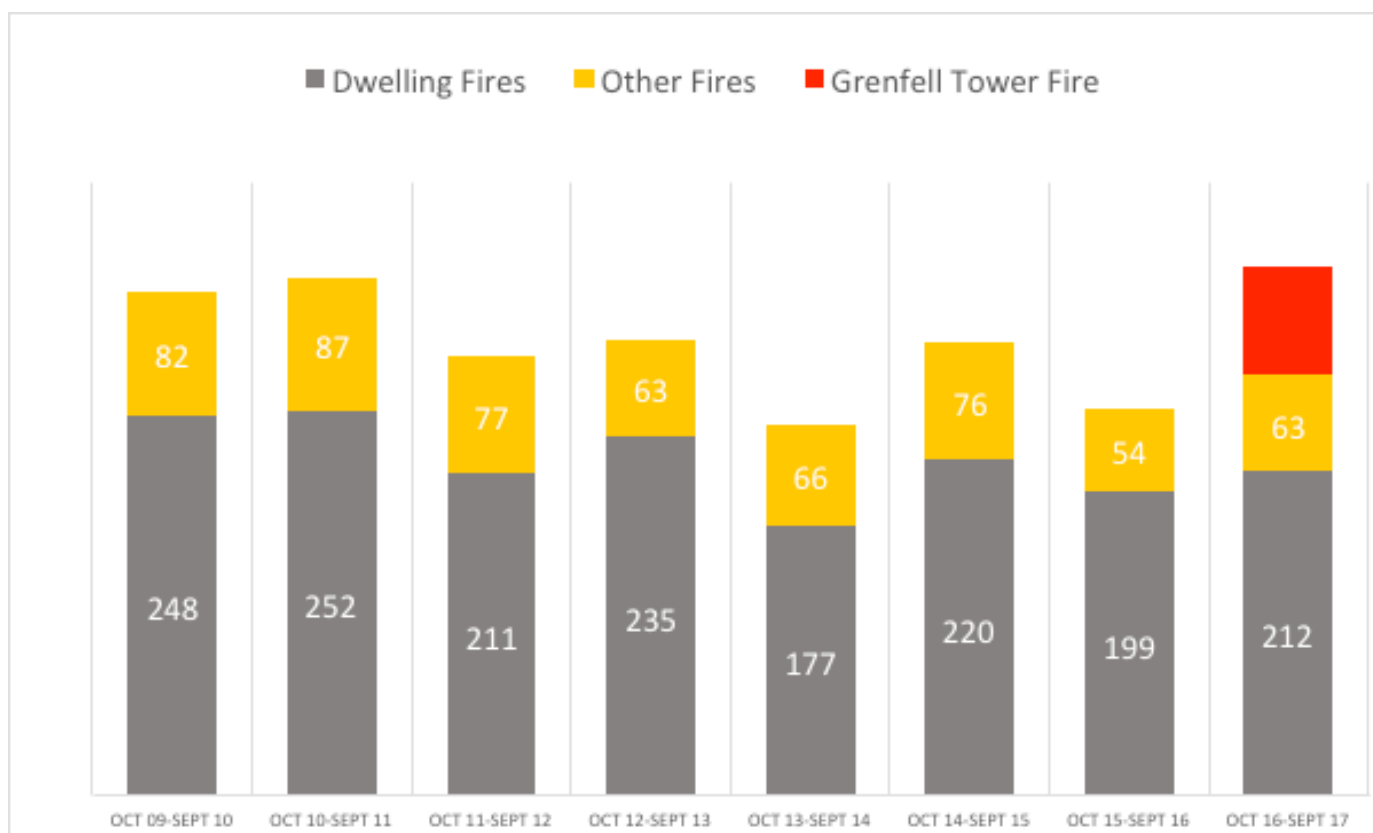
A PARLIAMENTARY BULLETIN FROM THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION | MARCH 2018

OFFICIAL FIGURES SHOW FIRE DEATHS UPTURN – YET THE CUTS KEEP COMING

Politicians tell the public that there are now fewer fires and fire deaths than ever before, so they don't need to worry about cuts to their fire and rescue service. This is no consolation to people who make the nightmare call for life saving assistance, only to have to wait longer. But analysis by the Fire Brigades Union shows that there is no room for such complacency, with fatal fires on the increase even before the Grenfell Tower fire. The total number of fire deaths in England is now at its highest level since 2010.

New official figures indicate that the number of fires and fire deaths is no longer falling and show both a plateauing in recent years and a significant increase last year. Home Office statistics show that in the year ending September 2017, there were 346 fire-related fatalities (including 71 from the Grenfell Tower fire) compared with 253 in the previous year – a 37% increase (and up 9% even without Grenfell). The figures for England are set out in the bar chart below.

Figure 1: Total fire-related fatalities in dwellings or other fires, England; year ending September 2010 to year ending September 2017



LONG RUN TRENDS

Fires have gone down in the long run as safety regulations have been tightened, as fewer people smoke and because firefighters do proactive prevention work, fitting smoke alarms and helping vulnerable people. But over the last five years the number of incidents and fire deaths has remained at the same level, suggesting that funding cuts are now undermining the great work done in the past. Governments ignore evidence that it is firefighters’ active intervention which makes our communities safer.

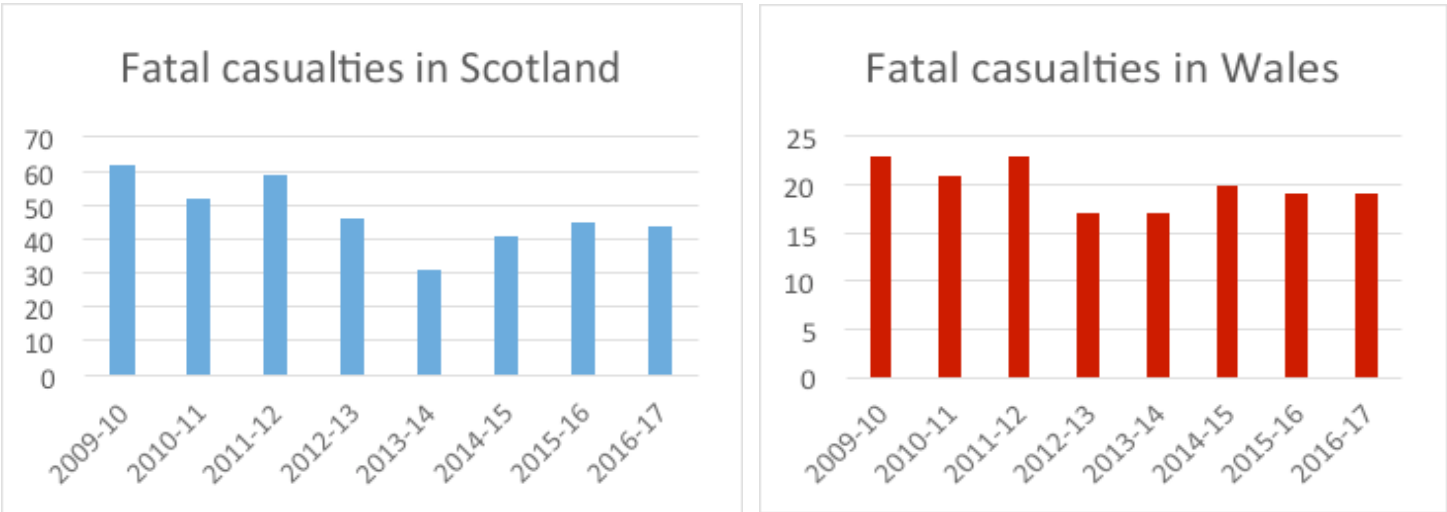
Sadly, fewer fires and fire deaths do not mean a ‘reduction in demand’ for the fire and rescue service, as the market-driven apologists like to tell us. It is the role of the fire and rescue service to reduce the number of fires and emergencies where possible and to reduce their impact if they do happen.

The ‘product’ of a fire and rescue service is safer communities. The long run improvements show that the fire and rescue service is more productive than it has ever been in the past. There is no sense in making cuts to a productive industry.

UK WIDE PICTURE

Similarly, in Scotland over the last eight years, the downward trend in fire deaths has stalled, with some increases after years of fewer fatalities. In Wales over the last eight years, the downward trend in fire fatalities has also plateaued, with more deaths than previously. Official figures published by the Scottish fire and rescue service and by the Welsh government indicate a comparable trend to the one highlighted in England.

Figure 2: Fatal casualties at fires in Scotland and Wales, 2009-10 to 2016-17



Source: Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Fire and Rescue Statistics in Scotland, Table 2 (26 October 2017)

Source: StatsWales, Fatal and non-fatal casualties by quarter, (28 February 2018)

Over the same period, fire deaths in Northern Ireland annually total around 15, although in two out the last three years the number of deaths has been down. This is interesting because Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has suffered fewer funding cuts as a result of decisions taken by its government to invest to maintain the same number of firefighters.

These fire death figures are set in the context of cuts to the fire and rescue service. Since 2010, more than **11,000** firefighter jobs have been cut across the UK – one-in-five frontline firefighter jobs, hitting every community and anyone who might one day need to call the fire and rescue service.

The FBU is campaigning for more investment in the fire and rescue service, with the immediate recruitment of a new generation of firefighters. The union wants a moratorium on cuts in light of the Grenfell Tower fire.

The FBU is the democratic, professional voice of firefighters and other workers within fire and rescue services across the UK. We represent the vast majority of wholetime (full-time) and retained (part-time, on-call) operational firefighters and control staff.

CONTACT: Dave Green, National Political Officer - Dave.Green@fbu.org.uk