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21 April 2020

Dear Matt,

Thank you for your letter on the 15th April. We are writing to you jointly as the Ministers responsible for fire policy.

The spread of Covid-19 across the world has brought unprecedented challenges and everyone is being called upon to play their part to reduce its spread and save lives. Firefighters and our frontline emergency services are doing incredible work responding to the coronavirus outbreak and are leading community efforts to support the most vulnerable and other emergency services. Firefighters are working through this difficult time with commitment and courage and we pay tribute to all of them for the work they are doing as part of this national effort.

The rules set out on self-isolating to reduce the spread of Covid-19 will have an impact on workforces across the emergency services. It is notable, however, that fire and rescue services are not currently reporting significant levels of staff absences. Absences have fallen over the past weeks with Fire & Rescue Services (FRS) reporting a national average absence rate due to Covid-19 of just over 4% as of 20th April. No fire and rescue service is currently reporting an overall level of absence above 10% due to Covid-19. We remain vigilant on what is an evolving picture and are working closely with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) to monitor the situation daily - including in respect of specific roles such as in control rooms.

NFCC has provided assurance that critical functions can continue to be delivered and there are no significant risks at this stage. Moreover, we are grateful that Fire & Rescue Services have been able to identify significant additional capacity to help the country respond to this pandemic. The work that firefighters are doing every day from driving ambulances, to supporting the most vulnerable and isolated in our communities and working as part of multi-agency teams is to be commended hugely at this time of need. It has underlined the 'can do attitude' of our firefighters in

serving the public and has shown the service at its best. Your support to date for this is welcome and we would encourage you to continue to work with the NFCC and employers to ensure firefighters are able to do all they can to support our communities.

The Government is doing all it can to ensure all fire and rescue services have the resources and support they need to carry out their vital roles and to keep people safe. We recognise the importance of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) being available to ensure firefighters can fulfil their public safety role safely. We will continue to work closely with the Department of Health and Social Care and with fire chiefs to ensure they receive the equipment they need, when they need it. No fire and rescue service is currently reporting critical shortages of PPE. NFCC, with the support of the Home Office, is closely monitoring the position and acting where necessary to ensure access to appropriate levels of equipment is maintained.

In respect of the roll-out of testing, we have been working closely with NFCC over recent weeks and are pleased that since the Easter weekend firefighters have started to access NHS testing facilities. The Coronavirus National Testing Programme has now expanded capacity to test other frontline workers, including those working in fire and rescue services, who are having to self-isolate due to having coronavirus-like symptoms or because a member of their household has symptoms.

The Government will continue to support the sector to ensure that services get the advice, equipment and resources they need. The Government has already announced an additional £3.2 billion of funding for Local Authorities in two tranches. Stand-alone Fire and Rescue Authorities have received a £5.9 million share of this additional un-ringfenced funding in the first tranche of funding which totalled £1.6 billion. Allocations from the second tranche for individual local authorities, including stand-alone Fire and Rescue Authorities, will follow as soon as practicable.

We have sought to ensure that the way is free for Fire & Rescue Services to play their full part in this national endeavour safely and confidently. We know fire officers and staff are keen to do so and have our backing for their outstanding work. Together, we can help protect the NHS, support those in need and save lives.

Yours sincerely,



RT HON JAMES BROKESHIRE
MINISTER OF STATE FOR SECURITY



LORD GREENHALGH
MINISTER OF STATE