



Home Office

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Roy Wilsher, Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council

Cllr Ian Stephens, Chair, Fire Services Management Committee

CC: All Chief Fire Officers

FRA Chairs and PFCCs

BY EMAIL ONLY

23rd April 2020

FURTHER SUPPORT TO FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES DURING COVID-19

I am writing further to my recent letter supporting the work that is being done nationally to tackle Covid 19 and to outline a number of ways in which Government is seeking to further support local services in this challenging period.

First, I wanted to introduce Lord Stephen Greenhalgh, who has been appointed recently as a joint Minister of State with responsibility for Fire in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Home Office. We are both delighted that our responsibilities cover the fire service. This essential and much-loved public service has a proud record in keeping people of this country safe, never more so than during the current Covid-19 emergency.

We are grateful to all those working in the fire and rescue sector to ensure that essential functions are maintained and that the sector can support partner agencies as we tackle the crisis at hand. We welcome the agreement which NFCC has reached with employers and unions to allow firefighters to provide support to the ambulance service, to coroners and to the vulnerable, and we want to thank fire fighters and staff for their incredible service and the often challenging roles they are stepping up to volunteer for. Our officials are working closely with the National Fire Chiefs Council to ensure that services have everything they need to carry out their critical role and to keep people safe.

We have also asked our officials to identify those areas where we can temporarily reduce burdens on fire and rescue services and fire and rescue authorities, so you are all able to focus on the issue at hand. We have listened carefully to the issues that have been raised, and this letter sets out the measures on which we are currently working.

[Requirements regarding FRA meetings](#)

We have worked with MHCLG and legislated so that the requirement for Annual Council meetings, including those for FRAs, to take place has been removed – and that, while essential council meetings should continue, these are able to take place remotely for a temporary period.

National framework, annual assurance statements and IRMPs

Whilst FRAs must continue to have due regard to the National Framework, we appreciate that fire and rescue services need to focus on maintaining essential services and supporting the wider COVID-19 effort. For this reason, we wanted to make clear that, if a service's annual assurance statement and/or IRMP are due to be prepared and published in the coming months, we understand there may be a delay in the publication during the current circumstances, however any risk could be mitigated by taking such action as you are able to during this period. We should be clear, however, that this does not mean that the Secretary of State would not take intervention action against an FRA for failing to have due regard to the framework during this period.

The Secretary of State is also due to make the biennial report to Parliament in July on the extent to which FRAs are acting in accordance with the national framework. Previously, when preparing this report, we have contacted all FRAs asking for confirmation of compliance. We are confident that we will not need to do that this time, providing that all FRAs have published their previous annual statements of assurance, IRMPs and financial plans, and it is clear that they have been agreed by the FRA or the elected responsible member.

Personal Protective Equipment

We are working closely with the National Fire Chiefs' Council to ensure that Fire and Rescue Services have the PPE they need to carry out their duties. The NFCC has done excellent work in this regard, has a supply chain in place and is monitoring stocks nationally to ensure that supplies are distributed where they are needed. We will continue to work extremely closely to ensure services receive the equipment they need, when they need it, in order to carry out their jobs safely.

Testing

Our top priority for testing is patients in hospital, to inform their clinical diagnosis, followed by NHS and social care workers having to self-isolate because either they, or a member of their household, have symptoms. We now have the capacity to give every person in these categories a test who needs one. As a next step, we now have the capacity to start to test other frontline workers in England who are having to self-isolate because either they, or a member of their household, have symptoms. This includes firefighters. Like with NHS and social care workers, we want to find out if they have the virus – and, if they don't, they might be able to return to their important work.

Retired firefighters

Firefighter pensions and policy officials are continuing to work closely with HM Treasury officials and the National Fire Chiefs Council to build a case for re-engaging retired firefighters in England. The measures being considered would

enable the re-employment of retired key workers to maintain an effective emergency response alongside the work agreed to contribute to the government's key priorities.

On-call fire fighters

We have worked with HMRC and they have now issued new guidance to employers and employees to ensure retained staff are not ruled ineligible for the COVID-19 loss of earnings benefit due to their secondary on-call firefighter contract of employment. The FRS is playing a critical role during this unprecedented time and all staff should be able to access the Government support available.

Driver licencing

We have worked with DfT to relax the requirement to provide a medical report as part of the renewal of driver licences. The temporary relaxation will now ensure that those who are fit to drive can continue their crucial role, and services can continue keep fire appliances on the road.

This work is moving at pace and our officials will provide an update when we have clarity on any outstanding issues. We would ask you to let our officials know, working through the NFCC, should other similar issues arise.

Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP

Security Minister

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Brokenshire', written in a cursive style.

**RT HON JAMES BROKESHIRE
MINISTER OF STATE FOR SECURITY**