

Dear MP

You will be well aware that firefighters have been responding to the devastating floods that have hit large parts of the UK over the last few weeks. Such extreme weather has caused destruction across huge swathes of country, with life and property put at real risk. But thankfully, wherever a flood has occurred firefighters have been on hand, working tirelessly for hours on end to keep people safe and reduce damage to homes and businesses. These are the same firefighters who will put out a fire in your house, rescue you from a road traffic collision, who will play a major role in the event of a large-scale emergency such as a terrorist attack. And, of course, they're the same firefighters who help keep property safe by making sure fire safety standards are being met by landlords, who will visit nursing homes to install smoke detectors and will come into your children's school and teach them about the dangers of fire.

The role of the modern firefighter is more diverse now than ever. As a result, it's not just keeping people safe from the effects of fire that is threatened by the government's cuts to our budgets. The Fire Brigades Union has estimated that firefighter jobs will reduce by at least 6,000 between 2011 and 2015, and could total 10,000, or one in five firefighters, overall. This has affected our ability to respond to the many incidents that have occurred over the past weeks with firefighters working long hours, often with inadequate equipment and in parts of the country hundreds of miles from their home stations.

There is further confusion over flooding specifically. Despite an expectation that fire and rescue services will attend such incidents, there is no formal statutory duty that they must do so in England and Wales. As firefighters we dedicate our professional lives to keeping people safe, and do not shirk from the chance to help save lives. But in order to best prepare for future flooding events, and of course more extreme weather is expected soon, there must be a statutory duty for fire and rescue services to attend flooding incidents. The major stakeholders in the fire and rescue service have long recognised this need. This confusion threatens our ability to plan effectively and we worry it will lead to massive problems further down the line.

This threat to the ability of the fire and rescue service to attend major incidents due to cuts is exacerbated by the release of the report by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee into the effect of budget cuts on the ability of the government to respond to floods. They believe that "massive" and ongoing cuts to the budget of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs mean its ability to respond to emergencies such as flooding is in danger. There is no doubt that this twin threat to our country's resilience will endanger lives and put more properties at risk.

As my local MP I am asking that you use all your influence to lobby on behalf of the fire and rescue service to ensure that the government acts to impose a statutory duty on the service to respond to flooding incidents, as is the case in Scotland and Northern Ireland and stops the cuts agenda that is jeopardising our ability to deal with flooding, fires, road accidents and everything else the modern firefighter does.