

Andy Roe
London Fire Commissioner

Hina Bokhari AM
Chair of the Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee
City Hall
Kamal Churchie Way
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The London Fire Commissioner is the
fire and rescue authority for London

Date: 30 September 2024

Dear Assembly Member Bokhari,

Thank you for writing to me on 1 August 2024 on behalf of the London Assembly's Fire Committee so that I may answer further questions on London Fire Brigade's (LFB's) summer readiness.

I am glad that the Committee were able to hear from Deputy Commissioners Jonathan Smith and Charlie Pugsley and the Committee had the opportunity to hear about the improvement and investment which has taken place since the 2022 Major Incident Review.

In your letter you have asked for assurance that the trials of lightweight PPE currently running in the east of London are concluded and the resulting decisions over procurement taken quickly. You also requested a timeline for when the decisions will be made.

I will echo what my colleagues said during the Committee and affirm that the safety and wellbeing of firefighters is of the utmost importance and our approach will always be driven by data. We have introduced new protective headwear and additional hydration packs as the data showed that these were needed.

A trial of lightweight personal protective equipment (PPE) for firefighters working outdoors in extremely hot conditions is currently ongoing and data from that trial will be used to help determine the best approach going forward. As was mentioned by colleagues in the Committee session, this data can only be collected when we are operating in high temperatures and the lightweight PPE can be used.

This trial is not the only source of information guiding future procurement decisions. LFB has also held several roadshow events, offering firefighters the chance to look at various PPE options from different suppliers and provide feedback. This all supports our work to enhance our response to these types of fires, which includes new equipment, training and planning.

There are more than 4,500 firefighters to equip in London so it is critical that the Brigade does not bring equipment which is not fit for purpose on the run. LFB is part of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) procurement of PPE, which has approximately 18 months remaining. We will continue to trial different sets of PPE, and where appropriate consider different options but the next contract is likely to see us move away from a 'one size fits all' approach, which will ensure that there are increased options for firefighters to choose from.

In your letter you have asked us to confirm whether LFB supports the FBU's view that we need a national strategy for wildfires. As an organisation we work closely with the unions and have regular discussions with them about our strategies and approach.

I would support what was said by Deputy Commissioner Smith that there would be merit to a national strategy for wildfires being introduced. This strategy could put in place specific standards whether this is for PPE, policy

or procedure. Currently services have slightly different approaches across the country, which is understandable as the local risk will vary across the country. Therefore, a national strategy would need to consider both differences in regional risk profiles, as well as different operating models across services.

During the session, Deputy Commissioner Pugsley confirmed that the NFCC is producing a position statement and that we are supporting this work. These discussions will play a key part in future strategic planning for LFB and other services.

Finally, to assist the Committee's understanding of the work with local authorities you requested that we provide the following:

- the letter sent to local authorities this year
- a station delivery plan from a station located in an area at risk of fires in a period of heat
- the toolkit on engagement provided to Borough Commanders.

You will find these attached to this letter. We have shared the Station Delivery Plan from Wennington and the Committee will note the focus on tackling outdoor fires near urban areas, the station will work with local authorities and other stakeholders throughout the year to deliver on the commitment.

I hope the Committee is assured that there has been a clear change in how the Brigade approaches fires in open spaces with regular exercises run to test how we are using our resources in the most intelligent way. Firefighters at every level, from the strategic to the tactical and operational, have also received significantly more training.

If you have any queries on any of the above or would like any further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy Roe', is shown within a light gray rectangular box.

Andy Roe
London Fire Commissioner