



To All Fire and Rescue Service Staff

1 April 2020

Dear Colleague,

The COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak represents one of the biggest challenges anyone of us have experienced. Governments around the world have been forced to take some of the most drastic actions known in peacetime.

I am writing to each and every one of you today to express my sincere gratitude for your service and to let you know you have the full support of the Welsh Government.

This pandemic has had – and will continue to have – a significant impact on our fire and rescue services. Many of you will be short-handed as colleagues are either off sick or at home because they are self-isolating. This will put extra pressure on frontline operations.

The service has a high level of expertise in planning for and managing emergencies and the contingency plans developed by your Chief Officers are robust. My officials are working with your senior management teams to identify and address any problems as they emerge.

The pandemic may present the service with some particular challenges. Social distancing and self-isolation mean people will be at home for much longer, increasing the risk of dwelling fires. A prolonged school closure at this time of year may increase the risk of deliberately-set grass fires in some parts of Wales. If widespread staff absence result in local authorities reducing waste collections, we may also see a rise in fires involving loose and fly-tipped waste. We are aware of these issues and are monitoring the situation closely.

Responding to a crisis of this size requires us to think and act differently.

Firefighters have a unique and extensive set of skills and capabilities and are rightly held in very high regard by the public. There may be ways in which you can use those skills to help the response to the pandemic – particularly by supporting or relieving pressure on the NHS. This would be subject to protecting your own health and safety and maintaining the service's core role.

I am aware of the discussions within the National Joint Council and the broad agreement reached, particularly in regard to driving ambulances. If, between us, we can bring this

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

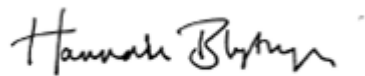
We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

agreement into action, it will make a positive difference by increasing the capacity of the Welsh Ambulance Service and its response to the public at this time.

While we will need to move quickly in this area, I want to do so in partnership. I hope your senior officers and union representatives will agree this partnership approach is strengthening considerably.

Our fire and rescue services have a long and proud tradition of reacting and working swiftly, effectively and above all selflessly in times of crises. There has never been a greater need for us to call on that tradition. I know you will respond accordingly and I thank you all for your service.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hannah Blythyn'.

**Hannah Blythyn AC/AM**

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol  
Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government