



FIRE BRIGADES UNION BRIEFING

Government dithers while response times slow

New figures show why it's time for national standards

Firefighters know that the primary purpose of the fire and rescue service is prompt and efficient mobilisation in response to a fire or other incident, in order to save lives and protect property. And the public agree - lives are saved and serious injuries prevented by rapid attendance at incidents.

There should be howls of outrage at new official figures on response times, which continue to show that fire engines are arriving more slowly than used to be the case.

New response times

On 10 November 2010, fire minister Bob Neill was asked for the latest figures for response times. He told parliament that for the period April 2009 to March 2010, England's dwelling fire average response time was 7.3 minutes (see table). This compared with 6.5 minutes in 2006 and 5.5 minutes in 1996 (according to a CLG report, Review of Fire and Rescue Service response times).

This means that the average response time in England is now almost two minutes slower than it was a decade or so ago.

The minister also revealed the response times for individual fire and rescue services in England. Most reflect the national trend and show slower responses times. A few show small improvements - tiny changes that are statistical noise, not a trend. Some of the records may not be recorded properly, while attendance times for appliances that are

mobile (doing community fire safety for example) are not counted. Another limitation is that the figures record only the time taken for the first appliance to get to an incident.

In other words, the service is probably even worse than the overall figures suggest. When there were national standards, fire and rescue services not only had to record attendance times for the first appliance, but also the attendance time of the second appliance in A and B risk areas, and crewing levels.

The FBU nationally is taking every opportunity to lobby for meaningful national standards, wherever we can. Members have taken the argument to governments in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast and pressed law-makers to act.

No plans

However there is only cold comfort from the Westminster government. The fire minister told parliament on 10 November that: "The government has no plans to reintroduce national standards for fire and rescue service response times." He added: "Decisions made by local politicians and practitioners according to local circumstances will be more effective than blanket requirements across the country."

If this is what localism means, the FBU rejects it. We want national standards for attendance times.

Average response times⁽¹⁾ by fire and rescue services, England⁽²⁾, April 2009 to March 2010

	<i>Dwelling fires⁽³⁾</i>	<i>Other building fires</i>
Avon	7.5	8.1
Bedfordshire	7.6	8.0
Berkshire	7.5	8.3
Buckinghamshire ⁽²⁾	-	-
Cambridgeshire	9.1	9.5
Cheshire	8.4	8.9
Cleveland	5.6	6.1
Cornwall	11.0	10.2
Cumbria	8.6	8.8
Derbyshire	7.5	8.2
Devon and Somerset	9.3	9.1
Dorset	8.4	9.5
Durham	8.0	7.8
East Sussex	7.1	7.4
Essex	8.1	9.0
Gloucestershire	9.5	9.0
Greater London	6.2	6.2
Greater Manchester ⁽²⁾	-	-
Hampshire	7.2	7.3
Hereford and Worcester	8.9	9.5
Hertfordshire	7.7	7.4
Humberside	7.0	7.9
Isle of Wight	9.0	7.1
Kent	6.9	7.9
Lancashire	6.8	7.3
Leicestershire	7.9	8.6
Lincolnshire	9.1	9.4
Merseyside	5.6	5.7
Norfolk	8.9	8.7
North Yorkshire	8.9	9.8
Northamptonshire	8.2	8.6
Northumberland	9.4	9.7
Nottinghamshire	6.6	7.0
Oxfordshire	9.5	9.0
Shropshire	8.8	9.4
South Yorkshire	7.4	7.7
Staffordshire	8.2	8.6
Suffolk	8.9	10.1
Surrey	8.5	8.5
Tyne and Wear	5.3	5.5
Warwickshire	9.0	7.7
West Midlands	6.6	6.8
West Sussex	8.7	9.6
West Yorkshire	6.8	6.9
Wiltshire	9.3	10.3
England ⁽¹⁾	7.3	7.9