

# Speech: Fire service reform must go further and faster: article by Brandon Lewis

Last month I visited the firefighters working in gold commands in Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk responding to the flooding threats on the east coast. As always, they showed the utmost professionalism in their roles and again highlighted how dedicated our firefighters are to protecting and serving communities in their wide-ranging roles. The Prime Minister delivered radical and ambitious reforms in policing while she was Home Secretary. Last May she set out an equally ambitious reform programme for the fire service.

The aim was clear: to make the fire service more accountable, efficient and professional than ever before – so we can better protect the public. I am pleased that these reforms were met with genuine optimism from a sector which knows it must modernise to meet the changing demands upon it.

While we have been laying the groundwork for this in the last 6 months, 2017 will be the year when we see real change. Today I will update the fire service on the next stage of fire reform.

Progress has been made, but I want to us to go further and faster.

That is why I'm going to introduce independent inspection, which, for the first time, will consider the operational effectiveness of each service. This independent scrutiny will ensure fire services are held to the highest possible standards. It will bring an end to the current peer review process through which, in practice, chief fire officers handpick their own reviewer, set their own terms of reference, and decide whether or not to publish the results.

[The Prime Minister described the practice in her speech last May](#) as 'not so much marking your own homework as setting your own exam paper and resolving that you've passed'. It has to change.

I also want to further professionalise the service and to make sure that all fire personnel are offered opportunities to enhance their skills so they are equipped with the knowledge they need to provide the best possible services to their communities.

Our workforce must better represent the communities it serves. I expect services to find solutions to the current lack of diversity so clearly highlighted in the statistics we published last year, with just 4% of the workforce from an ethnic minority background and just 5% female. We can, and must, do better.

I also want to see services collaborate further in more innovative ways. Better joint working can strengthen our emergency services, deliver

significant savings to the taxpayer and – most importantly – enable them to better protect the public. Last week, the [Policing and Crime Act](#) received Royal Assent, giving the fire service the legislative platform it needs to seize collaboration opportunities.

A new duty requiring the emergency services to keep collaboration opportunities under review and to take on collaboration opportunities where it would be in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness to do so, will come into force in April. Police and crime commissioners will be able to make a local case to take on responsibility for governance of fire and rescue services, to maximise the benefits of joint working.

To ensure the public have trust in how the service is performing, services must also be more transparent. Last year, [data published for the first time by this government](#) highlighted stark differences between what different fire and rescue services were paying for similar items of uniform and kit. For example, prices that authorities pay for breathing kit were shown to range from £328 to £1,504.

That is why in 2017 we will collect and publish even more information to allow the public to compare whether their service is getting the best value for money. Services must work together much more closely to improve how they buy their kit and on what they pay for things like training and buildings, to drive down costs and maximise savings. This will demonstrate how local government can deliver sensible savings, whilst protecting frontline services and keeping council tax down.

Delivering this ambitious reform agenda does not simply rest with me, or with the government. Ultimately, the fire service itself must shape and deliver these changes. It is for their benefit and the benefit of the communities they serve, and I look forward to seeing the results.

---

## [This is a significant victory for Parliament, and follows months of concerted pressure from Labour – Starmer](#)

Commenting

on the Government's concession regarding a meaningful vote in Parliament on a final deal to leave the EU, **Keir Starmer, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union** said:

"This is a significant victory for Parliament, and follows months of concerted

pressure  
from Labour.

“Labour  
has repeatedly said that Parliament must have a meaningful vote on any final  
Brexit deal – that means MPs are able to vote on the final deal before it is  
concluded; that the Commons has a debate and vote before the European  
Parliament does; and that the vote will cover withdrawal from the EU as well  
as  
our future relationship with the EU.

“This  
eleventh hour concession is therefore welcome, but it needs to be firmed up  
as  
the Bill progresses through both Houses.”

---

## [News story: Civil news: delivery of family mediation work from 2018](#)

From:  
First published:  
7 February 2017

Headline intentions document covering mediation work from 2018 published on 7 February 2017.

Our approach to family mediation work from 1 April 2018 is set out in a headline intentions document which is now available – see link below.

The previously published headline intentions document for all other areas of civil legal aid work confirmed that existing family mediation contracts will end on 31 March 2018. This was made available on 20 January 2017 – see link below.

We also explained on 20 January that we would separately publish information giving further details about the way ahead for family mediation work.

The intention is for the delivery of family mediation services to operate under the new 2018 Standard Civil Contract from 1 April 2018.

### **When will the tender open?**

A tender process for these contracts will open in April 2017. All organisations must successfully tender for a contract if they wish to deliver

legally aided mediation services from 1 April 2018.

## **Service delivery remains similar**

The government remains committed to family mediation as a key route to helping family disputes avoid court proceedings. So, we will not be making significant changes to the delivery of family mediation services when compared with current contracts.

## **Quality assurance**

We will maintain the quality of mediation services under current contracts but will no longer require family mediation providers to hold the Mediation Quality Mark (MQM).

Instead, the contract will include the key quality standards set out in MQM and will require that mediators and mediation organisations meet the standards set out by the:

- Family Mediation Council
- Family Mediation Standards Board

Further details are provided in the mediation headline intentions document.

## **Further information**

[Civil 2018 contracts tender](#) – to download mediation-specific headline intentions document and headline intentions document for all other areas of civil work

---

# **“Brexit and independence are two sides of the same coin”**

7 February 2017

**Speaking in a debate in the Scottish Parliament today, Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said that Brexit and independence are two sides of the same coin. Here is the full text of Kez’s speech:**

I welcome the chance to speak in today’s debate.

It’s important that this chamber makes its voice heard, although we must accept that ultimately it is for the UK Parliament to have the final say.

Those on the SNP’s benches may not like that, but people in Scotland voted to remain part of the UK and that should be respected.

Labour's amendment accepts that the UK is leaving the European Union.

There was a UK-wide vote and those of us who backed remain lost.

The strength of our democracy rests on our respect for the will of the people.

Now I am not happy about the result.

I fear what will happen to our nation.

I fear what will happen to EU nationals who have made Britain their home, but who have yet to receive any reassurances about their future.

I fear the impact Brexit will have on our economy, on jobs and on our public finances.

So while I accept that the UK is leaving the European Union, I do not accept the terms Theresa May has set out.

And that's why I don't believe article 50 should be triggered right now.

Not when the Tories seem determined to deliver a settlement that will do incalculable damage to the country.

I cannot and will not sign up to Theresa May's vision of Brexit.

Leave voters didn't back Brexit to make themselves poorer.

But that is exactly what will happen under the current plans.

Presiding Officer, I want to address another part of our amendment.

That's the section on SNP plans for another independence referendum.

The only thing worse than Brexit for Scottish jobs and the economy would be independence.

The SNP government's own figures show that being part of the UK is even more important to Scotland than remaining in the EU.

The economic links built up during our 300 year Union are deep and of great benefit to Scotland.

On trade, currency, jobs and so much more – together we are stronger.

As our amendment makes clear, Labour will not support any SNP plan to impose another independence referendum on the people of Scotland.

Our nation is divided enough.

Another referendum would do irreparable damage to the very fabric of communities across Scotland.

The message from a clear majority in September 2014 was that we should remain in the UK.

And the SNP should respect that.

But the reality is that the SNP has only been given the excuse to seek another referendum because of the mess the Conservatives have made of this whole process.

Ruth Davidson never fails to try and tell us that the Union is safe in Conservative hands.

She spends her days straddling tanks and waving a Union flag just to emphasise the security of the realm.

Meanwhile the actions of her own government have exploited the insecurities people feel in their own lives and reopened the divides of the last referendum, despite their apparent willingness to move on from it.

Yet let's look at how the Conservatives have behaved since the independence referendum in 2014.

We had David Cameron's half-baked English votes for English laws plans.

Playing straight into the hands of the Nationalists.

Then there was the 2015 General Election campaign, fully signed up to by Ruth Davidson, which sought to divide our country further by setting Scotland against England.

A gift to the SNP.

And now we have Brexit.

The EU referendum was a device designed entirely to appease the right wing of the Conservative Party.

Instead of standing his ground, David Cameron capitulated in the hope of buying off a few UKIP votes and the applause of people like David Davis and Liam Fox.

I haven't got time to do to go into the detail of Tory attacks on social security and there multiple attempts to undermine workers' rights – again pouring petrol on the fire for independence.

Time and again the Conservative and Unionist Party has put Scotland's place in the UK at risk.

And yet the Tories have the brass neck to come to this place and claim to be the party of the Union.

Ruth Davidson now finds herself voting for something she knows will damage the UK economy and Scottish job prospects – issues she claimed UK-wide

plaudits for following the TV debates.

She does so without a word of regret.

And we wonder why faith in politics and politicians is so low.

I want to conclude, Presiding Officer, by saying this.

I voted to remain in the EU last year for many of the same reasons I voted to stay in the UK in 2014.

Because I reject a narrow nationalist view of the world.

The view that blames something or someone else for our country's problems – whether that's England or Westminster, immigrants or the EU.

Nationalism, an ideology on the rise the world over, is about breaking apart and creating division.

Brexit and independence are two sides of the same coin.

I believe in working together.

In solidarity with our friends and neighbours.

I believe that we can achieve more together than we ever could apart.

I believe in pooling and sharing resources.

Whether that's with the EU to tackle climate change, the refugee crisis or international terrorism.

Or whether that's with the rest of the UK to fund our public services, pay pensions or to grow our economy.

That's what Labour's amendment calls for and I urge members to back it.

---

## **Land urgently needed to avert 'drastic deterioration' in Burundian refugee camps in neighbouring countries**

7 February 2017 – Stalled peace talks in Burundi are forcing hundreds to flee every day seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, the United Nations refugee agency warned today, appealing for more support, particularly land to shelter for new arrivals and to ensure protection of children and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), since April 2015, more than 384,000 Burundian refugees have fled to Tanzania (222,271), Rwanda (84,866), Uganda (about 44,000) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (32,650) and its projections indicate that numbers will cross half-a-million by the end of the year.

“Without allocation of new land to extend capacity in existing camps or build new ones, these countries will struggle to provide sufficient shelter and life-saving services in the camp sites,” William Spindler, a UNHCR spokesperson, told the media at the regular bi-weekly press briefing in Geneva today.

“Camp facilities also need to be upgraded, including construction of more homes, schools, health centres and better drainage systems to lessen the risk of disease,” he added, noting that host countries have been generous with their support but more action is needed to avert a dangerous slide in standards and conditions.

UNHCR also appealed to donor nations to step up their assistance and funding.

Last year, the UN agency received a \$96.1 million in contributions for the Burundi situation, however, it was 53 per cent of the amount needed.

#### ***Relief organizations struggling to meet needs***

The pressure is most intense in Tanzania, where average arrivals in January reached almost 600 persons daily.



A girl walks past a pile of firewood in Mahama refugee camp, Eastern Province, Rwanda, which is hosting thousands of refugees from Burundi. Photo: UNICEF/Mike Pflanz

Of the three camps hosting refugees, only Nduta – that recently passed its current capacity of 100,000 persons – is taking new arrivals.

According to Mr. Spindler, humanitarian agencies are struggling to provide minimal basic services and fear outbreaks of health emergencies if the crowding gets worse and facilities fail to keep pace.

Similarly, land shortages are also hitting the Lusenda camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where risk of fire is rising as shelters are getting closer due to paucity of land.

In Rwanda’s Mahama camp (hosting more than 53,000 against its capacity of 50,000), many are living under plastic sheeting in overcrowded communal hangars, waiting to move to a family shelter. In addition to poor hygiene, living conditions present serious protection risks due to lack of privacy.

***Even a ‘progressive settlement approach’ is struggling to cope***



Uganda, which presently hosts 44,000 Burundian refugees in total, according to the UN agency runs a “progressive settlement approach” to refugee management and protection.

The country provides refugees with plots of land to build new homes and grow crops, and live among the Ugandan host communities.

However, Mr. Spindler added that significant investments are needed in local infrastructure to ensure that refugees are able to access key basic services.