



MEDIA RELEASE

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New Water Rescue Teams for Seven Fire Stations

Seven fire stations across Herefordshire and Worcestershire will now have 'first responder' water rescue teams to provide additional rescue support during floods.

Following the 2007 flooding event, Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) carried out a significant piece of work which determined that improvements were necessary to strengthen its response to floods and ensure the safety of its responders.

All fire fighters across Herefordshire and Worcestershire are trained in water / flood awareness and have basic equipment to undertake rescues from the bank side. We also have highly trained specialist water / flood rescue teams at Worcester, Hereford and Evesham who are trained and equipped to enter the water if necessary to carry out rescues, either swimming or in specialist rescue boats.

However, taking account of local flood/water risks and our experience in 2007, this year's risk management plan identified a need for a number of trained 'first responder' teams equipped with dry suits and other equipment to enable them to work safely in flood water.

At its meeting on Friday, December 18, the Fire and Rescue Authority approved the establishment of seven new flood rescue 'first responder' teams at Kidderminster, Tenbury, Upton-on-Severn, Ross-on-Wye, Pershore, Bromyard and Leintwardine. These teams will be formed by providing additional training and equipment for existing personnel, and together with the three existing specialist teams and the capabilities on each front line fire engine, will provide extra flexibility and resilience across the two counties.

Water and flood incidents are already supported by a number of personnel who have been trained to supervise these specialist operations. With additional response teams, these arrangements will be strengthened through the creation and maintenance of a formal cadre of staff with specialist knowledge in this area to reduce risk to responders and the public.

Chief Fire Officer Paul Hayden said: "It is disappointing to note that despite the recommendations made by Sir Michael Pitt in his review of the 2007 floods, there has been no government money made available for flood rescue. As fire services still do not have a statutory duty to rescue people from flood water, the costs fall entirely on our local service and local communities.

We know all too well that we have a significant need for flood rescue capability in our two counties and we typically rescue between 30 and 60 people from the water each year. Less frequent major floods, as were last seen in 2007, resulted in the rescue of more than 1100 people across Herefordshire and Worcestershire alone.

Whilst we could undoubtedly do even more given government funding support, we have to take into account the costs involved to ensure that we continue to offer both an effective service and value for money. The cost of providing this specialist service across our two counties, including equipment such as boats and dry suits, amounts to 30 pence per year for a Band D council tax payer.”