



**Anne Clarke AM**  
**Chair of the Fire Committee**

Rt Hon Mr Alistair Carmichael MP  
Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee  
House of Commons

(Sent by email)

21 May 2026

**Response to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee Call for Evidence:  
Wildfire Risk and Response**

Dear Mr Carmichael,

I am writing to respond to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's call for evidence on 'Wildfire risk and response' on behalf of the London Assembly Fire Committee. The Fire Committee reviews the work of the London Fire Commissioner and examines fire and rescue matters in Greater London. The Committee is keen to ensure that London is well-equipped to respond to wildfires and extreme heat events, having previously examined London Fire Brigade's (LFB's) summer readiness in July 2024.<sup>1</sup> The evidence gathered as part of that investigation forms the basis of this submission.

What became worryingly clear in our investigation is that wildfires are no longer a remote risk for London. On 19 July 2022, LFB experienced its busiest day since the Second World War, responding to an unprecedented number of fires across the capital driven by record temperatures exceeding 40°C.<sup>2</sup> Fires broke out across areas of open green space in London, destroying homes and stretching firefighting resources to their limits. LFB's then Deputy Commissioner Jonathan Smith, described

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<sup>1</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [Letter to London Fire Commissioner](#), 1 Aug 2024

<sup>2</sup> London Fire Brigade, [Firefighters' heroic actions prevented fatalities on Brigade's busiest day since World War II](#), 20 July 2022

that day as a “genuine watershed moment for the LFB and London, more broadly in terms of the threat and risk and challenge that climate change poses”.<sup>3</sup>

Since our investigation in 2024, LFB experienced its busiest summer since the extreme wildfires of 2022.<sup>4</sup> We therefore welcome the Committee’s attention to this topic.

In 2024, the Assembly’s Research Unit compiled data on wildfires in London.<sup>5</sup> As part of this submission, that data has been updated and is included here as an annex. Otherwise, we have responded to the questions for which we have evidence-informed Committee views.

**Question 1: How can land management techniques be best used at a regional level to prevent and control wildfires whilst balancing the needs of different land users? What evidence-gaps are there and how can they be filled?**

The Committee heard compelling evidence that land management must be utilised as a primary mechanism to reduce wildfire risk. Matthew Oakley, the National Tactical Advisor for Wildfire, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, warned that if Fire and Rescue services (FRSs) are deployed to tackle wildfires, something has already gone very wrong, as wildfire prevention “starts and finishes with land management.”<sup>6</sup>

As temperatures in the UK rise, and our climate becomes more similar to the Mediterranean<sup>7</sup>, we should be learning from examples of effective land management used there. In our investigation, we heard from Luis Rincón, Inspector of Operations at Comunidad de Madrid Fire Brigade, about the vital preventative work that Madrid’s Fire Brigade undertakes in the winter months. He told us that in the winter almost half of the fire department is working in forestry, rather than in fire stations, ensuring that vegetation is managed, paths are maintained, and spaces are well-defended against the risk of wildfires.<sup>8</sup>

LFB is the largest fire service in the country. It has made significant strides in improving how it responds to wildfires and wildfire risk in recent years. It also carries out “environmental visual audits of open spaces, parkland, and areas with grassland or heathland [...], aimed at identifying areas of concern using local knowledge and operational data.”<sup>9</sup> We feel there is an opportunity for UK FRSs to learn from international examples and treat the prevention work of land management with even greater prominence as the risks continue to grow. Where responsibility for this type of activity rests – and the associated funding and guidance – will need to be resolved urgently.

A pressing concern for London, and across the UK, lies in the risk at the rural-urban interface. Ordnance Survey identified nearly 50,000 homes within 100 metres of the edges of Greater London that are more exposed to wildfires.<sup>10</sup> Between 2022 and 2025, over 6,000 grass fires were recorded in Outer London, more than three times as many as in inner London.<sup>11</sup> We share the position of

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<sup>3</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [Meeting Transcript – Panel 3](#), 11 July 2024, p.1

<sup>4</sup> London Fire Brigade, [London Fire Brigade had its busiest summer since extreme wildfires of 2022](#), 19 September 2025

<sup>5</sup> London Assembly Research Unit, [Extreme heat and outdoor fires](#), 1 August 2024

<sup>6</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [11 July 2024 Meeting Transcript – Panel 2](#), 11 July 2024, p.12

<sup>7</sup> Sky News, [UK weather: London summers 'will be as hot as Nice by 2070' if carbon emissions keep rising, Met Office warns](#), 21 June 2023

<sup>8</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [11 July 2024 Meeting Transcript – Panel 1](#), 11 July 2024, p.4

<sup>9</sup> See pp.7-9 of the Prepare service strategy in LFB, [Service Strategies 2026 \(Prepare, Prevent, Protect, Respond, Recover\)](#), 5 May 2026

<sup>10</sup> Ordnance Survey, [How location data supports wildfire preparedness](#), 12 August 2025

<sup>11</sup> London Fire Brigade, [London Fire Brigade urges Londoners to spring clean gardens to help prevent grass fires](#), 9 April 2026

Matthew Oakley who highlighted the need for specific firebreak areas to create “defensible space” at these rural-urban borders.<sup>12</sup>

**Question 4: What impact does the monitoring of wildfires have on our understanding of the causes and risks of these events in the UK, and how can this be improved? Are there international examples or best practices that can be used in a UK context?**

In our investigation, we sought evidence from FRSs with extensive experience of fighting wildfires, particularly in countries that experience a greater frequency of wildfires.

The evidence we heard from international guests made clear that early detection is the single most important factor in limiting wildfire size. As part of this, we heard about how Madrid’s Fire Brigade is planning to replace 50-year-old human-staffed fire watch towers with AI-powered automatic cameras that provide continuous 24-hour wildfire monitoring to help prepare for increasing wildfire risks.<sup>13</sup> We also heard about the rapid development of drone technology that could be used for both detection and suppression of wildfires in Finland.<sup>14</sup>

What this shows is the extraordinary potential of emerging technologies to transform how we predict, detect, and respond to wildfires. As the London Fire Commissioner told us in July 2025, “we are only really limited by our own imagination in terms of what we can do with that technology.”<sup>15</sup> The Committee strongly supports continued ambition, investment, and collaboration to ensure the UK becomes a leader in the development and deployment of next-generation wildfire technologies.

**Recommendation 1:** The Government should work with fire and rescue services, technology providers, and research institutions to accelerate the adoption of early detection systems, predictive modelling tools, and emerging technologies for wildfire prevention and response.

**Question 5: What resources and training do emergency services and local authorities need to respond to the increasing number of wildfires, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas?**

Our response to this question focuses on personal protective equipment (PPE), specialist wildfire expertise, and the need for enhanced operational training.

The availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) to firefighters in London is an issue we have repeatedly raised concerns about with LFB.<sup>16</sup> The major wildfire incident in July 2022 shone a light on a distinct challenge: the inconsistent availability of lightweight wildfire PPE in London. As we heard from Luis Rincón, of Madrid FRS, this is important because of the risk of “extreme thermic stress” for firefighters using heavy suits, making fighting wildfires impossible.<sup>17</sup>

LFB subsequently told the Committee it is moving away from a ‘one size fits all’ approach to PPE, adding that there could be merit to a national strategy on wildfires, which could establish standards for PPE used to tackle fires in extremely hot conditions.<sup>18</sup> As part of the ongoing national procurement of PPE for FRSs, there is an opportunity to ensure that appropriate lightweight wildfire PPE is available consistently to firefighters across the country. Given the challenges female

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<sup>12</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [11 July 2024 Meeting Transcript – Panel 2](#), 11 July 2024, p.12

<sup>13</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [11 July 2024 Meeting Transcript – Panel 1](#), 11 July 2024, p.7

<sup>14</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [11 July 2024 Meeting Transcript – Panel 1](#), 11 July 2024, p.4

<sup>15</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [1 July 2025 Meeting Transcript – Panel 3](#), 1 July 2025, p.4

<sup>16</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [Exposure to fire contaminants in London: A hidden, growing risk?](#), 4 February 2026  
London Assembly Fire Committee, [London Fire Brigade Summer Readiness Letter](#), 1 August 2024

<sup>17</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [11 July 2024 Meeting Transcript – Panel 1](#), 11 July 2024, p.3

<sup>18</sup> London Fire Commissioner, [Response from London Fire Commissioner to Summer Readiness letter](#), 30 September 2024

firefighters endured during the major incident in 2022<sup>19</sup> – including inadequate welfare facilities – there is a specific need for that procurement to be designed to be suitable for women firefighters.

The Committee also heard strong evidence on the value of specialist wildfire tactical advisers. As Chris May (Group Commander at Surrey Fire and Rescue Service) explained: “They can tell, using the weather forecasting, the vegetation, wind direction, they can give a tactical plan, which means that we are keeping our crews as safe as possible while still dealing with the fire.”<sup>20</sup>

Alongside the need for wildfire response expertise nationally, we also heard about the importance of investing in training for firefighters to understand how to implement the tactical response. Jonathan Smith told us that 21<sup>st</sup> century firefighting in London responds to “such a range of different incident types that the only way you can really prepare for that is with significant investment in what our training offer looks like”.<sup>21</sup> With the probability of firefighters facing wildfires likely to increase, the Committee would like to see investment in focused, high-quality training rolled out as part of a national standard. Two and a half years on from the Government’s response to its consultation on fire reform, the currently unrealised commitment in the Fire Reform White Paper to establish a College of Fire and Rescue presents an opportunity to embed this within a new national training standard.<sup>22</sup>

**Question 6: What are the most effective activities for tackling the human causes of wildfire ignition, for example public engagement and campaigns? How can the UK Government best support the delivery of these activities at both a local and national scale?**

The Committee heard evidence emphasising that public engagement around wildfire risk is most effective when conducted at a genuinely local level, by people who know their communities. Jonathan Smith described LFB’s communications approach as being most effective when carried out by “Borough Commanders, station commanders and crews [who] know their communities really well.”<sup>23</sup> He highlighted the range of backgrounds and languages spoken in London and the need to make sure that messaging resonates and is accessible to the communities in each area.<sup>24</sup>

We also heard that taking a localised approach to public engagement requires collaboration with local authorities on practical measures such as signage, barbecue bans, litter management and vegetation clearance.<sup>25</sup> In London, this engagement is underpinned by station delivery plans which set out the seasonal priorities for local stations and the commitment to work with local authorities and other stakeholders to deliver these. Marli Holland (Rural Affairs Officer, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service) told the Committee that in her role, she engages with various stakeholders, including land managers and local communities, through attending council meetings, providing residents with wildfire preparedness literature, building familiarisation and understanding among those at risk of wildfires.<sup>26</sup>

The Committee believes the UK Government could usefully support local and national public engagement by funding a sustained, coordinated public awareness campaign on wildfire risk, similar to previous campaigns on flooding, while allowing for local adaptation of messages. Government

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<sup>19</sup> London Assembly Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee, [Meeting Transcript](#), 19 October 2022, p.3

<sup>20</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [11 July 2024 Meeting Transcript – Panel 2](#), 11 July 2024, p.2

<sup>21</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [11 July 2024 Meeting Transcript – Panel 3](#), 11 July 2024, p.7

<sup>22</sup> Home Office, [Response to the fire reform white paper](#), December 2023

<sup>23</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [11 July 2024 Meeting Transcript – Panel 3](#), 11 July 2024, p.11

<sup>24</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [11 July 2024 Meeting Transcript – Panel 3](#), 11 July 2024, p.11

<sup>25</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [11 July 2024 Meeting Transcript – Panel 3](#), 11 July 2024, p.7

<sup>26</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [11 July 2024 Meeting Transcript – Panel 2](#), 11 July 2024, p.4

could also support the development and sharing of evidence-based engagement tools and best practice across fire and rescue services.

**Question 8: Given that responsibility is spread across government departments and bodies (e.g. Defra, Forestry Commission, MHCLG), how should the government coordinate a cross-departmental approach to tackle the increasing risk of wildfires?**

The Government's response to wildfires needs to be rooted in the knowledge that climate change will likely continue to worsen wildfire risk in the UK. London's experience – as a city that was rarely impacted by wildfires to one that experienced its busiest day since the Second World War in July 2022 – illustrates how climate change is rapidly escalating wildfire risk. Gareth Cook (Regional Organiser, London, Fire Brigades Union) warned the Committee that climate change “is very real” and therefore the response needs to be “ahead of the curve”.<sup>27</sup>

As part of our investigation into London's summer readiness, we heard explicit calls for a UK-wide wildfire strategy to deliver consistent and effective funding, research, training tactics and equipment standards across fire and rescue services. Gareth Cook told the Committee that a national strategy is important to provide the “correct level of funding to allow the research to take place” and that the research will “give us the equipment [and the] tactics that we need”.<sup>28</sup>

A national strategy would create the platform for consistent standards while allowing regional adaptation to local risk. In the former London Fire Commissioner's letter to us, he emphasised the need for a national strategy to “consider both differences in regional risk profiles, as well as different operating models across services.”<sup>29</sup>

**Recommendation 2:** The Government should establish a UK-wide wildfire strategy that sets consistent standards for training, equipment, and public engagement. The strategy should be evidence-based and support a coordinated effort to understand wildfire behaviour, risk and the use of monitoring and detection technologies.

Yours,



**Anne Clarke AM**  
**Chair of the Fire Committee**

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<sup>27</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [11 July 2024 Meeting Transcript – Panel 2](#), 11 July 2024, p.2 & p.5

<sup>28</sup> London Assembly Fire Committee, [11 July 2024 Meeting Transcript – Panel 2](#), 11 July 2024, p.2

<sup>29</sup> London Fire Commissioner, [Response from London Fire Commissioner to Summer Readiness letter](#), 30 September 2024