



**ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY FIRE SAFETY AND RESCUE GROUP**

Chairman: David Amess MP

Vice Chairman: Lord Brookman

Secretary: Bob Russell MP Treasurer: Lord Evans of Parkside

Hon Administrative Secretary: Douglas Smith

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1 June 2010

Bob Neill MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Department for Communities and Local Government  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU

*Dear Minister,*

**All-Party Fire Safety Seminar, 7 June**

We despatched the attached letter to you last week, as you can see, but I do not yet know whether you safely received it. In any event, our Group officers felt you should see the current Group policy on fire safety which will reach all 80 or so delegates on the day.

We did not, of course, have the Coalition Programme for Government at the time but the message in this will also reach them next Monday.

We do hope to see you then, ideally over lunch, for what is a common message to reach them personally.

*Yours,  
Douglas Smith*

**DOUGLAS SMITH**  
Hon Administrative Secretary

## **ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY FIRE SAFETY AND RESCUE GROUP**

Joint Chairmen: Michael Clapham MP, David Amess MP  
Vice Chairman: Lord Brookman  
Secretary: Bob Russell MP Treasurer: Lord Howie of Troon

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25 May 2010

Bob Neill MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Department for Communities and Local Government  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU

### **Fire Safety Policy for a New Parliament Seminar in the Palace of Westminster Monday, 7 June 2010**

It was good to learn of your appointment to the DCLG recently and particularly of your responsibility for fire and resilience within it. Since our Group's formation in 1997 we have enjoyed a close relationship with ministers in this role as well, of course, as those within the building regulations area. Our officers and supporting Parliamentarians - usually a score or more in number - trust this will continue as we re-form ourselves within this new Parliament.

As you will see from the attached outline programme, we shall be looking at broad fire safety policies during our initial Seminar, hoping to present a well-consulted reshaped pattern before the summer recess. The attached Seminar background shows that this is an area we have already been covering in an all-party way over recent months because of concerns at the present shape of FiReControl especially. Clearly there is a need for rapid action here with considerable cross-party agreement on what is properly a matter of major fire safety management.

Our Seminar programme has been broadly shaped to allow a wide expression of views (speakers list also attached) but an opportunity has been left open over our lunch in the Cholmondeley Room to hear from a Ministerial Speaker on his thoughts for the new Session. You yourself would clearly be a welcome guest if you find it possible. We will, however, adjust our programme if another time is more suitable.

Our programme commences in Portcullis House at 10.15 am, moving to Committee Room 10 after lunch and concluding with a closing Reception in the Attlee Room of the House of Lords (4.30 - 5.30 pm) when new Parliamentarians particularly will be amongst our guests. Alex King from Kent County Council and Ed Lister from Wandsworth will be especially welcome participants in this event.

We would welcome a representative from the DCLG to attend throughout as our guest to ensure proper coverage of the occasion. Fire safety media are also attending.

Apologies for this lengthy letter and attachments but we wanted to give you a proper picture of our current aims. We certainly look forward to hearing your own thoughts and very much hope this will be possible on 7 June.

**DOUGLAS SMITH**  
**Hon Administrative Secretary**  
**on behalf of the Group**



## **Background to the All-Party Group Seminar - 7 June 2010**

The emergence of a Conservative-Liberal Democratic Coalition was a surprise to the UK Fire Safety scene as to many others but particularly welcome since we had in a significant sense anticipated it.

A need for achieving greater fire safety has, of course, recently been recognised by everyone concerned with that scene. When the last Labour Fire Minister himself scathingly condemned the failure of moves by the quango, FiReControl to establish an effective pattern of control centres, he was only supporting what others had recognised. Yet this failure currently limps on. Condemnation is clearly not enough. An adequate replacement must swiftly and directly be put in place to ensure fire and rescue appliances reach emergencies with proper speed.

Our All-Party Parliamentary Group has for some while been a natural but by no means exclusive focus for this discussion. It has become clear to our Parliamentary members that the most favoured route would be for local fire authorities to be sensibly mobilised in the task. There is no need for a remote body such as FiReControl to perform this role, nor for that matter its sister concern, FireBuy to exist as a cost-effective system for bulk fire safety product service. Both aims are seen as a clear case for sensible 'Government by Community'. Such a change should, for financial as well as time reasons, be immediate.

Writing recently in the 'Daily Telegraph' Philip Johnson has put the broader points in a clear-cut way. He comments: "For a nation strapped for cash, Britain is almost comically profligate when it comes to managing big projects in the public sector." He congratulates Edward Leigh when stepping down after ten years as Chairman of the public accounts committee for "blasting the insouciance of public servants when the odd £100m goes missing."

Johnson's article especially refers to the fire safety scene. "A classic case is the Government's woeful attempt to build a network of mini state-of-the-art fire control centres, a supposedly cost-effective plan to deal with major civil emergencies. Idiotically rebranded (no doubt at great expense) as 'FiReControl', the project was scheduled to be operative in 2008 at a cost of £72m. Now we learn the final bill will be at least £240m and that the network may not be ready until 2014. There's even talk of scrapping the whole thing."

Our Group has, of course, noted the recent appointment of a Minister, Greg Clark, to study greater community involvement. In the fire safety field there is a first-class case for action to be taken directly, saving substantial sums of public money as a result. It seems that the Deputy Prime Minister's Office may also be looking at this area.

Whether they combine or not remains to be seen - as does so much in the present political world. Very much a matter of watching this space but also arguing for rapid action in the public good.

**DOUGLAS SMITH**  
**Hon Administrative Secretary**  
**All-Party Parliamentary Fire Safety & Rescue Group**