



Agenda Item 5 - Appendix 3

**Joint statement issued by
Avon and Somerset Police Federation, Avon Fire Brigades Union and
UNISON Great Western Ambulance Branch**

For immediate release - 1st May 2008

**Poor ambulance provision affects services provided by
the Police and Fire & Rescue Service**

In an unprecedented move, the Fire Brigades Union, the Police Federation and UNISON, representing ambulance staff, have raised concerns about the lack of ambulance availability following a recent reorganisation within Great Western Ambulance Service.

Staff representatives from the three emergency services have joined forces to call for an improvement in traditional ambulance provision, fearing the current shortfall of double crewed ambulances is impacting on the other 999 services.

GWAS now places greater emphasis on single crewed 'target busting' ambulance response cars, which has been achieved by decreasing in real terms the number of traditional ambulances available during the week, in particular during daylight hours. The changes have been felt by all front line staff in the three emergency services who have seen increased delays in conveying patients from incidents, delaying their ability to clear in a prompt manner.

Whilst the ambulance service has increased its solo response capability to achieve government set targets, it does not automatically follow that the presence of a solo responder equates to the public getting a quality service.

UNISON Branch Chairman, Ian Whittern said:

"In a recent incident, I attended a multi vehicle accident as a response paramedic. Two patients were cut out of separate cars by the Fire and Rescue Service. The first ambulance to arrive was a private ambulance which arrived 2 hours after the 999 call was made. The second patient had to wait 2 ½ hours before they were removed from the scene by an NHS ambulance."

"Although this is an extreme example of how stretched the ambulance service is, it is not an isolated incident. Although the arrival of a solo responder may

“stop the clock” as far as the government target is concerned, the patient may wait an inordinate amount of time before an ambulance arrives to convey them to hospital.”

“At times when ambulance resources are limited, and outstanding 999 calls exceed available resources, solo responders often find themselves in an invidious position, and sometimes forced by necessity, to convey seriously ill patients in an inappropriate vehicle, unable to closely monitor the patients condition as should occur. “

The availability of ambulance resources has a direct impact on the other 999 providers by tying up their resources at medical incidents.

Chris Jackson, Brigade Secretary of Avon Fire Brigades Union said:

"Our members work very closely with the staff of Great Western Ambulance Service and note the professional way that they carry out their duties toward the public. However we recognise that on occasions due to the ever increasing workload on ambulance crews and the restricted financial resources afforded the service, crews sometimes are unable to meet the prescribed attendance times."

"These delays cause our members problems in that at times, Fire Service personnel are delayed at scene awaiting the arrival of ambulances. These occasions have caused Fire Service operations to be affected in as such resources are redirected to cover shortfalls of delayed Fire Crews."

Paul Green, Chairman of Avon and Somerset Police Federation said:

"Police officers in Avon and Somerset have always enjoyed a close working relationship with the Ambulance Service, providing mutual support at the scene of incidents and dealing with the public in the most trying of circumstances. In recent years there has been increasing interference from the government who have imposed a target lead culture in both services."

"This has led in turn to less police officers being available for emergency response calls and increased waiting times for ambulance personnel to attend."

"There has been an increase in police officers conveying injured persons to hospital in police vehicles. This is either because of the non-availability of an ambulance or ambulance personnel have responded in an inappropriate vehicle capable of transporting the patient away from the incident. Police officers are being tied up in transporting people to hospital and removing them from their primary role."

“Police vehicles are also not equipped for the safe transfer of injured persons placing the public at risk. There are ancillary issues of police vehicles needing specialist cleaning and officers placing themselves at risk of litigation which seriously impacts on our service delivery.”

The three unions are calling on Great Western Ambulance Service Trust to improve and increase its provision of ambulance conveyance capability, to reduce the impact experienced since the ambulance service was restructured. The unions are also calling on the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to monitor more closely conveyance and attendance times, irrespective of the response times published by the ambulance service.

Information for editors

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Both UNISON contacts are operational ambulance staff employed by Great Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust.

Great Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust is an amalgamation of the former Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire ambulance services.