

# David Cameron to hold Downing Street press conference on flood crisis

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[David Cameron](#) is returning from his tour of the flood-hit south-west to hold a rare press conference in Downing Street on Tuesday afternoon in a bid to show that the government is getting a grip on the crisis.

Cameron tweeted that the conference would take place at 4.45pm on returning from his second day in the south-west, where he has seen the scale of the devastation and heard reports of the extent of the flooding in the Thames valley.

The prime minister's last full press conference in the UK was 238 days ago, when he was in Northern Ireland for the G8 summit.

It is understood Cameron has not been impressed by the performance of some of his ministers and an order has gone out to clamp down on the infighting over their handling of the crisis, including recriminations over the performance of the Environment Agency chairman, Lord Smith. Ministers have also been told to postpone other policy announcements while the crisis continues.

Amid forecasts of more storms and flooding on the way, the prime minister all but declared a blank cheque to help victims of the flooding, saying "money is not an object". It comes after the Ukip leader, Nigel Farage, suggested the foreign aid budget should be raided to pay for damage and flood protections sparking a campaign by the Daily Mail.



The prime minister talks to army reservists in Taunton, Somerset. (Matt Cardy/PA)

Speaking on LBC 97.3 radio, Cameron firmly rejected that suggestion as the government will "make available the money that's needed here in Britain".

"Whatever it takes, **money will not be the object,**" he said. "**We are a wealthy country,** we have a growing economy. If money is needed for clean-up, money will be made available. If money is needed to help households get back on their feet, that money will be made available.

**"Money is not an object.** There's no 'either/or' here. It's not either protecting our overseas aid budget or spending the money here at home. What we need at home will be spent here at home. As prime minister, I will absolutely guarantee that that will be done. I've spoken to the chancellor about this.

"Yes of course there are financial constraints, yes of course we still have a big budget deficit but we are a wealthy country, we have a growing economy, we've looked after our nation's finances carefully. This is an emergency for our country and we will spend the money where the money is needed."

Cameron will face tough questions over the extent of the involvement of the army, the performance of the various emergency gold commands and whether HS2 investment remains a viable option ahead of fixing the south-west rail line.



A resident sandbags a property in the village of Datchet. (Lefteris Pitarakis/AP)

Cameron is facing an all-party demand from eight south-west MPs to explain why there has not been additional **£31.3m rail investment in the region since the last floods in 2012.** The MPs had been expecting an announcement in the autumn statement.

There is also a Daily Mail-fuelled and Ukip-backed campaign calling for the government to divert funding from the overseas aid budget to flood victims in the UK. Cameron has insisted that all money necessary will be available to help victims of floods, but polls show strong support to divert funding. An ITV News Index poll carried out by ComRes shows 50% think the problems with Britain's flood defences are probably a result of the government's programme of spending cuts.

Some 23% think that the government is doing enough to help with the flooding in Somerset by providing the armed forces and £150m of funding over the next two years, while 44% think the government is not doing enough.

Seventy nine percent of people believe there should be an immediate halt on new homes being built on flood plains, even if there is a chance this will increase property prices.



Cameron meets members of the Environment Agency on Chesil beach between Portland and Weymouth in Dorset. (WPA Pool/Getty)

Cameron said: "It is a huge challenge and we have had the wettest start to a year for 250 years, some of the most extreme weather we have seen in our country in decades. We have to recognise it is going to take time before we get things back to normal.

"We are in for the long haul but the government will do everything it can to co-ordinate the nation's resources. If money needs to be spent, it will be spent; if resources are required we will provide them; if the military can help, they will be there."

Ed Miliband also pledged extra spending. "We must do everything but it will take time to put these things right," he said. "Clearly they are going through some pretty tough times. I think what they want is investment in flood defences, so that this kind of thing, which has happened before in this area, doesn't happen again. I totally understand that, I'm very sympathetic."

During a trip to Berkshire, defence secretary, [Philip Hammond](#) was tackled by residents of Wraysbury, who said they were seriously in need of more help. Hammond was repeatedly asked by one flood victim what had happened to promises of help from the army.

Volunteer Su Burrows said there were 100 people helping, many risking their lives, "but not one of them is from the Environment Agency". "They're sat in an office and they need to be here," she said in an encounter with Hammond filmed by Sky News. "We need the army here. We said that yesterday but no one is taking us seriously. What will it take for you to understand? We are seriously in need of help."

The defence secretary said there were 1,600 military personnel ready to help with the response to the floods. However, Downing Street was unable to say exactly how many troops were on the ground. "Army and navy personnel have been deployed already as part of the response," the prime minister's official spokesman said.

Hammond said there was a combined military and police effort to deliver sandbags, and told her: "I thought they would be here by now." But he added: "There is no task immediately for the military other than delivering sandbags."