

Scottish Government submission of 30 August 2023

PE2040/A: Increase funding to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to prevent serious cuts to the service provided to the public

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) is a vital service which is why, despite difficult financial circumstances due to UK Government austerity, the Scottish Government is providing it with a budget of more than £368 million this year, an increase of £14.4 million on 2022/23. Since 2017-18 the Scottish Government has supported SFRS service delivery and reform with substantial year on year increases, meaning that with changes to VAT, the equivalent annual budget is now over £55.3m higher than it was in 2017-18.

The 2022 Resource Spending Review provided indicative budget allocations for SFRS based on the expected overall budget position for the Scottish Government. However, the actual budget allocated to SFRS will continue to be set annually as part of the Budget (Scotland) Act process. The Scottish Government will continue to work closely with SFRS when setting the annual budget but that has to be done in the context of a very challenging fiscal environment.

Community and firefighter safety continues to be the priority and the number of firefighters in Scotland is higher than other parts of the UK.

It is important to highlight that operational decisions on the number and location of appliances are entirely a matter for the SFRS Board and Chief Officer. In common with all public bodies in Scotland, it is right that the SFRS reviews its operations to modernise the service it provides, along with ensuring it is meeting its statutory duties, and delivers value for money in delivering its statutory duties to provide fire and rescue cover.

Whilst the SFRS is seeking to ensure they deliver their service effectively and efficiently to make the best value of taxpayers money, their decision to withdraw appliances is not all about cost saving. By removing appliances in a planned and measured way SFRS can make sure full crews are available for the remaining 625 operational

appliances more of the time. It is appropriate for SFRS to assess the risks present in communities and the resources it needs to address those risks to ensure that the right response continues to be available on a consistent basis across the whole of Scotland, to every incident that occurs.

On the issue of the SFRS temporary appliance withdrawal, the Scottish Government have sought and received assurances from the SFRS Chief Fire Officer (CFO) that the decision to temporarily remove appliances has not been taken quickly or lightly by SFRS. The service is proposing these changes based on robust data and on the premise that community and firefighter safety will be maintained.

An information pack was published on 7 August by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) concerning Operational Changes 2023-24 [SFRS Operational Changes 2023-24](#). This document contains data concerning the rationale underpinning the SFRS decisions in relation to the temporary withdrawal of appliances at 10 locations across Scotland.

On the specific issue of high reach appliances, SFRS have assured that the reduction of the fleet of high reach appliances, which will be implemented on a phased basis, will remove aging vehicles from active service and redeploy or introduce a series of modern, specialist vehicles dedicated specifically to dealing with such incidents. This decision is also based on robust data which tells SFRS how busy these appliances are and the types of incidents they attend. Removing the oldest and less efficient appliances will reduce maintenance costs as well as helping lower carbon emissions.

The Chief Fire Officer has also assured that there will be a rigorous assessment of the impact of these temporary changes along with a full public consultation on the package of changes before any permanent changes to service provision are made. As part of such a public consultation by SFRS, all relevant information would be provided, including that gathered during the period when appliances have been temporarily removed.

SFRS have been engaging with staff, affected communities and local representatives to provide information and assurances concerning the changes in the areas affected and that will remain the case. SFRS have confirmed that it remains committed to working with staff, representative bodies and stakeholders in shaping how it best delivers its vital services to our communities.

Safer Communities Division