

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2040](#): Increase funding to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to prevent serious cuts to the service provided to the public, lodged by Anthony McManus

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The [petition](#) calls for the Scottish Government to review the annual budget provided to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and take action to prevent job losses and the removal of frontline fire appliances from fire stations across Scotland.

The petitioner is a serving firefighter and his station was due to lose its dedicated height appliance, a turntable ladder, in September 2023. The SFRS also temporarily removed 10 frontline fire appliances from fire stations across Scotland on 4 September 2023. The petitioner states:

“the present budget is not only leading to the loss of jobs within the SFRS but, more importantly, is drastically reducing fire cover for many communities.”

Scottish Government Action

The SFRS was established as a single national organisation by the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 to provide fire and rescue services across Scotland. The [Fire and Rescue Framework](#), published in March 2022, states that the Scottish Government will work closely with the SFRS to ensure it has the resources it needs, within the context of meeting all the demands on the Scottish budget.

The [Resource Spending Review Framework](#) set out the Scottish Government's plans for budget spending over the four remaining financial years of the current Scottish Parliament session (2023/24 – 2026/27). These proposals represented an across the board, flat cash settlement for almost all parts of the criminal justice system in Scotland. Following the submission of the [Criminal Justice Committee's Pre-budget Scrutiny Report](#) for the year 2023/24 the [Scottish Government's response to this report](#) stated that they would provide SFRS with a further uplift of £10 million in their resource budget, with the capital budget being maintained at £32.5 million.

The Scottish Government has responded to several parliamentary questions on funding for SFRS and the removal of appliances from fire stations. For example:

- [S6W-21048](#) – “To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to mitigate any risks posed by the reported removal of four fire appliances in Fife.” – answered 12 September 2023
- [S6W-19351](#) – “To ask the Scottish Government what annual budget saving it anticipates will be achieved from the reported removal of 10 appliances from fire stations across Scotland.” – answered 4 July 2023
- [S6W-18963](#) – “To ask the Scottish Government what impact the reported withdrawal of fire appliances at Maryhill, Govan and Cowcaddens in Glasgow, Kingsway East in Dundee, Greenock, Dunfermline, Glenrothes, Methil, Perth and Hamilton will have on the safety of the public.” – answered 19 June 2023
- [S6W-16970](#) – “To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has appropriate levels of resources to respond to every incident in a safe and timely manner.” – answered 19 April 2023

The [Scottish Government’s written response to this petition](#) (2023) states that operational decisions on the number and location of appliances is a matter entirely for SFRS. However, they go on to state that they 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.”

And that:

“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.”

They outline that the changes to appliances are currently only temporary and that there would be an assessment of the impact of these changes along with a full public consultation before they were made permanent.

In terms of the overall budget, the Scottish Government states that it is providing SFRS with a budget of more than £368 million this year, an increase of £14.4 million on 2022/23 and that, with changes to VAT, the equivalent annual budget is now over £55.3 million higher than it was in 2017/18. This increase is in cash rather than real terms.

Scottish Parliament Action

A [Members’ Business Motion \(S6M-10053\)](#) was lodged on 1 August: Supporting Crewe Toll Fire Station. It has achieved cross-party support.

The SFRS provided a [written response to the Criminal Justice Committee](#) as part of its pre-budget scrutiny process. The [Committee also took oral evidence](#) from SFRS on 13 September 2023.

Key points from this written and oral evidence were:

- Ten appliances have temporarily been removed from multi-pump stations. High reach appliances have been placed in the most strategic locations. The crewing for water rescue at Polmadie Community Fire Station has been amended so that it is more in line with the other water rescue stations in Scotland.
- If changes in appliances at this scale were to be made permanent, the Target Operating Model for wholetime firefighters could be reduced by 166 posts.
- When asked how much of the cuts to appliances were due to budget pressures, Chief Officer Ross Haggart stated they had been looking at their service delivery model prior to the resource spending review and there was an “imbalance of fire cover” largely due to cover arrangements being based on those inherited from the eight legacy fire and rescue services. He went on to say, “We understand that we need to modernise as an organisation and we believe that, with some modest investment in the SFRS, we can do that. However, the alternative to reducing budgets year on year is that we take more resources out of the front line, which will ultimately impact on community safety.”
- Planning scenarios suggest between £14.1 and £26.5 million will require to be saved from the resource budget next year (2024/25). This is on top of the £11 million savings for 2023/24. Over the four-year period to 2026/27 cumulative savings of between £37 and £48.4 million will be required.
- To achieve the anticipated savings of £14.1 million required next year SFRS would need to reduce their firefighter posts by 339 – the equivalent of 18 appliances. This is in the context of having 116 full-time appliances across Scotland (reduced to 106 with the temporary removal of appliances in September 2023). Chief Officer Ross Haggart stated that “We would always model that and we would remove crew from appliances based on what would have the minimum risk to community safety. However, with changes of that magnitude, we would not be able to meet our current response times, so we would not be able to keep communities as safe as they currently are.”

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19 September 2023

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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