

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

15th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
25 October 2023

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

Petitioner	Anthony McManus
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge 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.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2040

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 3 August 2023.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition can collect signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 725 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.
6. Members may wish to note that the Criminal Justice Committee has heard evidence from the Chief Officer of Scottish Fire and Rescue on this matter as part of its pre-budget scrutiny of the Scottish Government's 2024-25 budget. The

Official Report of the evidence session, which took place on 13 September 2023, is available on the Committee's [webpage](#).

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

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

Petitioner

Anthony McManus

Date lodged

3 August 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge 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.

Previous action

I have sent emails and letters to MSPs. I will also be engaging with my local MSPs at surgeries and community events.

Background information

I am a current member of the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) and a serving firefighter at Crewe Toll Community Fire Station. Crewe Toll is due to lose its dedicated height appliance in September 2023. This has potentially disastrous consequences for the residents of Northwest Edinburgh and the city in general.

More generally, the SFRS are removing 10 frontline fire appliances from fire stations across Scotland. Again, this has potentially disastrous consequences for the communities affected.

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. Surely the people of Scotland deserve a fully funded fire service which can react to all emergencies irrespective of postcode?

Annexe B



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.”

Kirsty Deacon
Senior Researcher
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

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C

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