

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee  
Wednesday 11 September 2024  
13th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

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

### Introduction

**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>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 25 October 2023.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and the Fire Brigades Union.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and the Fire Brigades Union, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial position on this petition on 30 August 2023.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 734 signatures have been received on this petition.
8. Members may wish to note [the pre-budget scrutiny undertaken by the Criminal Justice Committee of the Scottish Government's budget for 2024/25](#), which expressed the view that "the funding situation facing the criminal justice sector [including fire and rescue services] cannot be allowed to continue". [The Criminal Justice Committee is continuing to gather evidence on the current challenges and proposed reforms to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.](#)

## **Action**

9. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

**Clerks to the Committee**  
**September 2024**

## **Annexe A: Summary of petition**

**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: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2040 on 25 October 2023**

**The Convener:** The last of our new petitions for consideration this morning is PE2040, which is on increasing funding to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to prevent serious cuts to the service provided to the public. There was a session on that in Parliament yesterday that members could attend.

The petition, which has been lodged by Anthony McManus, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the annual budget provided to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and to take action to prevent job losses and the removal of front-line fire appliances from fire stations across Scotland. The petitioner tells us that he is a serving firefighter at one of the fire stations that is due to lose its dedicated height appliance. In the petitioner's view, the decision by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to remove 10 front-line fire appliances from fire stations across Scotland could lead to potentially disastrous consequences for the communities affected.

The Scottish Government responded to the petition to state that it has supported the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service with year-on-year increases, including an increase of £14.4 million in this year's budget. The response goes on to note that operational decisions on the number and location of appliances are entirely a matter for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service board and the chief officer. It is, however, stated that the decision to withdraw appliances is not all about cost savings and is intended to ensure that full crews are available for the remaining operational appliances more of the time.

The Scottish Government also indicated that it has received assurances from the SFRS that the decision to temporarily remove the appliances has not been taken quickly or lightly and that a rigorous assessment of the impact of the changes, along with a full public consultation on the package of changes, will take place before any permanent changes to service provision are made.

Members may be aware that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service provided written and oral evidence to the Criminal Justice Committee on this issue as part of that committee's pre-budget scrutiny process.

Do colleagues have any comments?

**Fergus Ewing:** I wonder whether we should inquire—maybe the clerks can inform us about this now—whether the Criminal Justice Committee reached any conclusion. Plainly, it heard detailed evidence, and we have not. That is narrated clearly in the material before us, but it is not clear what the Criminal Justice Committee will do about it. It may be that it will make recommendations in its budget report.

Would it be prudent for us to make informal inquiries to see where matters stand with the Criminal Justice Committee? It has started to look at the issue in detail, so it does not seem appropriate that we duplicate that work. On the other hand, our duty to the petitioners is to make sure that we do not prematurely close the petition when we do not quite know where its fate lies.

**The Convener:** Yes. My hesitation in opening up the discussion was because I was struck by a similar point: I do not want us to embark on a duplicatory chain of investigation. On the other hand, I am not clear that the investigation to date has worked in quite the way that the petitioner seeks.

I understand that we are likely to see the Criminal Justice Committee's submission in November, which is next month. It might be right to ask the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Fire Brigades Union to give their views to this committee on the aims of the petition. We can then take those into account when we next consider the petition, along with that submission, and decide whether there is further work that this committee could do in advancing the aims of the petition.

**David Torrance:** I agree. Yesterday, I was at the event held in Parliament. Every MSP was sent a briefing at the end of it—it is in their inboxes, and it is very comprehensive. The chief officer of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has a lot to do with this. If we are writing to that service and the Fire Brigades Union, I wonder whether you could get his views on the matter directly from him, because he has been advising the Government.

**The Convener:** We could ask specifically for the views of the chief officer. I know that it is an issue of huge public interest. Since the petition was lodged, there has been a very high-profile major fire in Ayr. As I recall, Ayr's height appliance was no longer in service, and one had to be provided from Glasgow. Issues were raised about all of that, and that is very much one of the issues that is raised in the petition.

**Foysol Choudhury:** I had a few meetings with some of the firefighters as well. The chief officer, however, has been put in a situation where, if the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service does not have enough funding, it has to make decisions. Sometimes, it depends on the funding. It is important that we find out about the issue.

**The Convener:** We will potentially get an indication of whether that has been incorporated into the evidence heard by the Criminal Justice Committee. When we next consider it, we will be in a better-informed position, if colleagues are content with that.

## **Annexe C: Written submissions**

### **Scottish Fire and Rescue Service submission, 23 November 2023**

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

Thank you for your letter dated 26 October 2023 and for providing me with the opportunity to respond to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee regarding the above. The petition references several points which I will attempt to address in this response.

In addressing these points, please be assured that the safety of our communities and our firefighters is always the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's (SFRS) priority.

#### **Operational Changes 2023/24**

The petition references some of the operational changes implemented across SFRS in September 2023.

These include the temporary withdrawal of ten wholetime (fulltime) fire appliances, which will help us to meet financial savings during this and into the next financial year. This decision-making was based on data and modelling that helped to identify which appliances would have the least impact on our emergency response.

By way of context, SFRS has received an additional £14.4 million from the Scottish Government during 2023/24, to support the enhanced and backdated firefighter pay offer, however we are still required to make £11m savings this year.

We also reduced our provision of High Reach Appliances (HRAs) across Scotland from 26 to 16 and amended crewing arrangements for one of our water rescue resources based in Glasgow.

All of these above changes were implemented concurrently to minimise the impact upon our staff.

[Ahead of implementation, we published an information pack on our website](#); this was also sent to all elected members via email. This document sets out the impact of the changes and the data that underpinned our decision making.

We appreciate that there has been a lot of focus and opposition to our operational changes. Over the past few months, we have met with elected members across Scotland, including some individual members of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, to discuss the changes and address any concerns.

Following implementation of these changes, we will undertake a review in due course to ensure our resources continue to be in the right place to meet risk and demand across Scotland.

**Crewe Toll Community Fire Station, Edinburgh**

The petition specifically references the relocation of the HRA, which was previously based at Crewe Toll Community Fire Station in Edinburgh.

We operate as a national Service and our HRAs are national assets, strategically placed to protect our communities across Scotland. In support of our ten-year Operational Strategy (2022 - 2032) we have recently undertaken a review of these resources to ensure they are best placed to protect communities across Scotland. This review has enabled us to remove older vehicles, and in particular aging combined Aerial Rescue Pumps from our fleet, which incur significant expense to maintain, replacing them with dedicated height or pumping appliances.

Under our review, the HRA at Crewe Toll has been redeployed to Dunfermline Community Fire Station. Simultaneously, the ageing HRA stationed at Kirkcaldy Community Fire Station has been removed from service.

As noted above, the change in our provision of HRAs had already been planned to ensure a more even distribution of our assets and remove older vehicles from our fleet, which were unreliable and expensive to maintain. This was implemented at the same time as our temporary appliance withdrawals to minimise impact upon our staff, albeit in support of our Operational Strategy referenced above.

The East of Scotland will now be served by four dedicated HRAs. Crewe Toll Fire Station is in close proximity to fire stations at Tollcross and McDonald Road in Edinburgh, where there are modern, dedicated HRAs at each station. There are also dedicated HRAs at Dunfermline and Falkirk.

These changes under our Operational Strategy are based on robust, evidence-led data from our Incident Recording System (IRS), which tells us the number of times an appliance is mobilised to an incident and what it is used for.

Over the last five years all three HRAs across Edinburgh have been mobilised to a total of 1,160 incidents. Please note this is where attendance has been for more than 20 minutes duration which is the minimum time it takes to set up the appliance. Of this total, the HRA at Crewe Toll was mobilised the least. The breakdown of mobilisations (incidents over 20 minutes in duration) being: Crewe Toll (15.52%), McDonald Road (27.84%) and Tollcross (56.64%).

We always send the nearest available appliances, with an appropriate weight of response, based on the incident type. Due to the way our Operations Control staff manage and flex our resources, SFRS will maintain height appliance cover across Scotland.

### **Financial challenges**

Overall, SFRS faces significant budgetary pressures in both our resource and capital budgets. As a Service we have a legal obligation to deliver a balanced budget and we must live within our means.

This is based on the Scottish Government's Resource Spending Review published in May 2022, which sets out an indicative flat cash budget position for the Service until

2026/27 which, with the impact of pay rises for staff and inflation, will represent a cut in real terms in our budget over that period.

While our actual confirmed annual budget is not known until December prior to the new financial year beginning in April, current projections based on the flat-cash assumption show that next year (2024/25) we would need to find between £14 million and £26 million of savings.

Over the four-year RSR period, cumulative savings of between £37million and £48.4million would be required, but this will vary in line with pay awards and inflationary pressures.

During my attendance at the Scottish Parliament's Criminal Justice Committee's (CJC) pre-budget scrutiny meeting on 13 September 2023, and supported by SFRS's written submission, I was very clear that the predicted flat-cash settlement for the following three years, and continued increase in operating costs, mean that we cannot generate the levels of savings required without negatively impacting upon the service we provide.

The challenges we face are significant and this will ultimately require difficult decisions to be made to ensure we deliver a modern fire and rescue service while maintaining financial sustainability.

SFRS is already an extremely lean organisation that has undergone significant reform to achieve savings over the past decade. For example, as part of the reform programme that created SFRS, the Service was asked to make £328 million in cumulative savings by 2027/28. By the end of 2022/23 we have delivered £486 million in savings. This has been achieved through the reduction in staff numbers, removal of duplicated posts, disposal and consolidation of assets, and standardisation of duty patterns and crewing arrangements.

The large majority of our running costs as a Service relate to our staff; 80% of our budget is spent on staff, and of that figure, 80% is spent on operational staff costs. Ultimately, this leaves us with extremely limited scope for further efficiencies without reducing workforce numbers, including wholetime firefighters.

To put this into context, to achieve the conservative projection of £14 million savings for next year, we would need to reduce our wholetime firefighter numbers by 339. This would leave us unable to maintain our firefighter target operating model, resulting in SFRS no longer being able to crew the equivalent of an additional 18 wholetime appliances from next year.

We would therefore need to review our stations and resources, which may lead to the permanent removal of, or changes to crewing arrangements of, some fire appliances and closure of some fire stations. Any such changes would be undertaken on a risk-based approach to minimise impact upon community safety and would follow full stakeholder engagement and consultation.

As outlined in evidence provided to the CJC, while SFRS would always seek to minimise impacts upon community safety, we believe the levels of cuts to frontline

services outlined above would ultimately compromise the current levels of safety of Scotland's communities.

However, this is the stark reality of what we may face as a service based on current financial planning.

While the above has focused on SFRS's resource budget, it is also well documented that the Service has an insurmountable capital backlog and needs critical investment to ensure that we have the right community fire stations, facilities, vehicles and equipment fit for the 21st century.

I hope that this response helps to address the points raised in the petition.

Yours sincerely  
Chief Officer  
Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

## **Fire Brigade Union (FBU) submission, 5 December 2023**

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

The FBU have been clear, since the announcement of the Scottish Government May 2022 Resource Spending Review (RSR) gave the Scottish Fire and Rescue service (SFRS) an indicative flat cash budget between 2023 - 2027, that this magnitude of real terms budget cuts would compromise Firefighter and public safety.

On its creation a decade ago, SFRS inherited a capital backlog that by 2018 [Audit Scotland had described as insurmountable](#). The year on year lack of real terms investment has seen this backlog grow significantly, SFRS have reported that they are increasingly utilising resource budget to maintain buildings that are far beyond expected lifespan, there are 14 fire stations throughout Scotland that have been identified as containing RACC panel construction, this is a significant risk that requires costly ongoing monitoring and mitigation. The estimated cost to remedy these 14 stations is in the region of £60 million. There are a number of fire stations in Scotland that have no running water, a large number that have no dignified toilet, shower or changing facilities. This is impacting diversity with gender mix stuck at around 94% male, 6% female.

The World Health Organisation declared firefighting as a Class 1 cancer causing profession due to firefighters' exposure to carcinogenic toxins at operational incidents. Early post incident decontamination is one measure that can be put in place to reduce the health risks to firefighters, the SFRS estate is increasingly unable to facilitate such measures and without significant capital investment SFRS will be unlikely to be able to resolve this issue.

SFRS have made significant structural changes delivering savings far in excess of those anticipated on creation of the single service, as set out in [the SFRS written evidence to the Criminal Justice Committee's 2024 pre-budget scrutiny consultation](#). This submission sets out the SFRS view that the anticipated magnitude of savings, based on the 2022-2027 RSR, will mean they can no longer keep communities safe

to the extent they do now. This follows the removal of 10 frontline, wholetime fire appliances and a reduction of over 160 firefighter posts. In September 2023, the Chief Fire Officer gave oral evidence to the Criminal Justice Committee and stated that without significant investment SFRS would have to cut a further 18 frontline, wholetime appliances and a further 339 firefighter posts in 2024. This follows a decade of erosion of firefighter numbers that has already seen the loss of 1200 firefighter posts from Scotland. On this trajectory SFRS are likely to exceed a 20% reduction in firefighter numbers.

Another area of significant concern is within the RDS/On Call duty system, currently SFRS have a persistent vacancy rate of around 30% in this duty system and significant retention issues with this employee group that sees an annual turnover of around 10%. This regularly results in an average of 150 RDS/On Call appliances being unavailable for emergency response, due to crew shortages. The RDS/On Call cover approximately 80% of Scotland's land mass.

[The FBU submission to the Scottish Criminal Justice Committee pre budget scrutiny meeting is attached.](#) This sets out the FBU view of the need for significant and sustained investment in SFRS to prevent deeper cuts that ultimately impact public safety.

[The FBU Firestorm report,](#) gives voice to Firefighters struggling to maintain public safety whilst facing chronic under investment that is impacting safe crewing, training, the stations they work on, and ultimately their ability to do their job safely and well.

The FBU Criminal Justice submission and Firestorm report form the substantial body of the FBU response to this request.