



SCOTTISH
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Working together for a safer Scotland

PUBLIC MEETING - SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

THURSDAY 24 APRIL 2025 @ 1000 HRS

VIRTUAL (MS TEAMS)

PRESENT:

Kirsty Darwent, Chair (KD)
Brian Baverstock (BB)
Neil Mapes (NM)
Andrew Smith (AS)
Tim Wright (TW)

Paul Stollard, Deputy Chair (PS)
Angiolina Foster (AF)
Therese O'Donnell (TO'D)
Madeline Smith (MS)
Mhairi Wylie (MW)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Stuart Stevens (SS)	Chief Officer
Andy Watt (AW)	Deputy Chief Officer
Sarah O'Donnell (SO'D)	Deputy Chief Officer (Corporate Services)
David Farries (DF)	Assistant Chief Officer, Director of Operational Delivery
Jon Henderson (JH)	Assistant Chief Officer, Director of Prevention, Protection and Preparedness
Craig McGoldrick (CMcG)	Assistant Chief Officer, Director of Training, Safety and Assurance
Mark McAteer (MMcA)	Director of Strategic Planning, Performance and Communications
Fiona Ross (FR)	Director of People
Chris Casey (CC)	Group Commander Board Support
Heather Greig (HG)	Executive Officer Board Support
Debbie Haddow (DJH)	Board Support/Minutes

OBSERVERS:

Dawn Forrest, Fire Brigades Union
John Joyce, HMFSI

1 CHAIR'S WELCOME

- 1.1 The Chair opened the meeting welcoming those present and those attending/observing via MS Teams.
- 1.2 Attendees were reminded to raise their hands, in accordance with the remote meeting protocol, should they wish to ask a question.

2 APOLOGIES

- 2.1 Stuart Ballingall, Board member
Malcolm Payton, Board member

3 CONSIDERATION OF AND DECISION ON ANY ITEMS TO BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE
3.1 The Board agreed that the *SFRS Strategy 2025-28* would be taken in private due to the confidential nature of the issue (Standing Order 9G).

3.2 The Board agreed that an additional item relating to *National Joint Council – Update on Pay Negotiations* would be taken in private due to the confidential nature of the issues (Standing Order 9G).

4 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

4.1 For transparency, the following standing declarations of interests were recorded:

- Madeline Smith, Board Member of Scottish Ambulance Service
- Paul Stollard, Chair of Board of Institute of Fire Engineers

4.2 There were no other declarations or conflict of interests made.

5 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS:

5.1 **Thursday 27 March 2025**

5.1.1 The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

5.1.2 **The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2025 were approved as a true record of the meeting.**

5.2 **Matters Arising**

5.2.1 There were no matters arising.

6 ACTION LOG

6.1 The Board considered the action log and noted the updates.

Action 15.5 Resource Budget 2025/26 (27/03/2025): The Board approved the closure of this action. BB and SO'D to further discuss the level of detail provided outwith the meeting and if appropriate, further information would be circulated to the Board.

Action 19.6 Equal Pay and Gender Pay Gap Report 2025 (27/03/2025): MW to clarify at the People Committee Forward Planning meeting whether the information required to be presented at the next People Committee or whether it could be circulated, as per the action, off table to the full Board.

6.2 In regard to forms of external assurance, it was noted that this had been discussed by the Service Delivery Committee and would be taken to the Integrated Governance Forum for consideration.

6.3 **Members noted the updated Action Log and approved the removal of completed actions.**

7 DECISION LOG

7.1 The Board considered the Decision Log noting the impact assessment provided for decisions made 12 months ago.

7.2 **Members noted the updated Decision Log.**

8 CHAIR'S REPORT

8.1 KD presented the Chair's Update report which noted events that had occurred since the Board meeting held on 27 March 2025 and highlighted the following:

- Ongoing programme of Local Authority Chief Executive meetings with the Chief Officer. Topics of discussion included local issues, partnership working, Strategic Service Review Programme (SSRP) and Chief Officer priorities.

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- Met with Tom Steele, Chair of Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) to discuss issues relating to integrated governance and sharing of good practice.
- Regular meeting with Tom Steele, Chair of SAS and Fiona McQueen, new Chair of Scottish Police Authority (SPA).
- Completion of Board appraisals process. Common themes document to be compiled and circulated to Board and Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) in due course.
- Attendance at various National Joint Council (NJC) meetings to discuss the uniformed pay settlement in advance of the June 2025 date. Due to the confidential nature of these discussions, an update would be provided in the private session.

8.2 In relation to the proposed joint meeting of the SFRS, SAS and SPA Boards, KD advised that this was discussed at the recent meeting the SAS/SPA Chairs and consideration was being given to the agenda. MMcA reminded the Board that the SPA were currently recruiting for 5 new Board Members. MMcA to contact SPA to get an indication of the timescales and potential scheduling of the joint meeting of the Boards.

ACTION: MMcA

8.3 **The Board noted the report and verbal update.**

9 CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT

9.1 SS presented the Chief Officer's report noting events which had occurred since the Board meeting held on 27 March 2025 and highlighted the following:

- Met with Ivan McKee, Minister of Public Finance along with SO'D to discuss public service reform. This included the Service's journey to date, the continued ability to deliver reform, the focus on prevention, as well as the ambitions to be a leader and driver of public service reform, shared services/estates and ambitions to deliver more for communities through a broadened role.
- Discussions had taken place on the recent High Court judgement on gender identity and would be considered further by the SLT. An update would be given to the Board in due course.

9.2 The Board queried whether there was an update on the recent media reporting on bullying and harassment within the Service. SS noted that there was no further media interest at this time. SS stated that the Service had a zero-tolerance approach to any form of bullying/harassment behaviour. SS reminded the Board of the work undertaken in terms of culture, leadership and development and the Cultural Development Group. SS noted that a major project had been commissioned through the Portfolio Office which would drive and take forward leadership and cultural work.

9.3 SS advised that Scottish Government's (SG) new vision for public service reform was not discussed during the meeting with the Minister of Public Finance, but the Minister himself had raised this at a recent seminar.

9.4 The Board noted that SG's production of the Programme for Government had been brought forward to May 2025, and queried whether this had been discussed during the meeting with the Minister of Public Finance. SS advised that this was not discussed.

9.5 In relation to seeking investment for reform, SS advised that this issue would be discussed at the upcoming SLT development session in June. This session would be used to develop the narrative on where the Service sees investment and what investment is required. This would be brought back to the Board for input to allow a joint organisational narrative to be developed on how the Service views investment, its importance and how it can help drive public service reform.

9.6 **The Board noted the report and verbal update.**

10 COMMITTEE UPDATES

10.1 Strategic Planning and Change Committee (SPCC)

10.1.1 AF reported that the next Committee meeting was scheduled on 1 May 2025.

10.1.2 **The Board noted the verbal update.**

10.2 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC)

10.2.1 BB reported that the Committee held a public meeting on 8 April 2025 and provided a verbal update, highlighting the following:

- New Internal Auditors, BDO, had now commenced, however, Azets final report (Change Management) had still to be completed. Overall positive assurance had been provided by Azets.
- Audit report on Anti-Fraud Arrangements was presented and recommendations were noted. The audit highlighted that improvements had been made in the Service's response to recent incidents.
- Proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2025-26 presented and recommended for approval (Agenda Item 12).
- Revisions and improvements made within risk reporting (Agenda Item 14).
- Revised Whistleblowing Policy was presented and the Committee were content with the amendments made.

10.2.2 **The Board noted the verbal update.**

10.3 People Committee (PC)

10.3.1 MW reported that the Committee held a public meeting on 6 March 2025 and referred the Board to the attached draft minutes, noting that a full verbal update had been provided at the previous meeting.

10.3.2 **The Board noted the approved minutes and verbal update.**

10.4 Service Delivery Committee (SDC)

10.4.1 TW reported that the Committee held a public meeting on 25 February 2025 and referred the Board to the attached draft minutes, noting that a full verbal update had been provided at the previous meeting.

10.4.2 **The Board noted the approved minutes and verbal update.**

10.5 Reform Collaboration Group (RCG)

10.5.1 KD advised that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on 20 May 2025. The Service would hand over the role of Chair and leadership of the Group to SAS.

10.5.2 **The Board noted the verbal update.**

11 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW OF BOARD AND COMMITTEE RELATED MATTERS

11.1 MMcA presented the Board with the Annual Governance Review of Board and Committee related items, which ensures continued effectiveness of governance arrangements for approval. The following key points were highlighted:

- Annual review of core documentation to ensure they remain appropriate for the Board and Committees to undertake their duties.
- Summary of changes were listed within Appendix A.
- Within Appendix E, reference to the Change Committee would be updated to the Strategic Planning and Change Committee.

11.2 The Board were reminded of the various development events, including benchmarking, in the coming months which would provide the opportunity to consider further changes

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and improvements. The Board were also reminded of the pending Corporate Governance audit to be undertaken by BDO.

11.3 The Board noted and welcomed the thoroughness of the review, and the quality of the support provided to the Board and Committees.

11.4 The following amendments were agreed:

- Employee Partnership Forum (EPF) Terms of Reference (ToR): Reference to the forum meeting four times per year to be amended to include provision of the meetings to be stood down if agreed by all parties.
- EPF and Partnership Advisory Group (PAG) ToR: Quality control to be amended to Mhairi Wylie and Kirsty Darwent, respectively.
- Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment: Reference to elderly relatives was outdated and limiting, to be amended to be more inclusive.

ACTION: MMcA

11.5 Within the Good Governance Framework (GGF), consideration to be given to clarify the difference between the Corporate Board and SFRS Board within future iterations. MMcA advised that this would be considered during the review of the GGF later this year. The Board commented on the statement that “*the aim of SFRS is to be risk managed...*”, and it was explained that this was taken from the risk management maturity assessment and had a specific meaning.

11.6 Clarity was provided on the Chief Officer’s delegated powers to authorise the use of the SFRS Arms and Badge.

11.7 Brief discussion took place on the accessibility of Board information/meeting locations, it was noted Board meetings were held in public and offered accessibility via a hybrid approach. It was further noted that a future Board meeting would be held outwith SFRS premises, however the date and location would be identified in due course. At this meeting, the Board would have the opportunity to engage with stakeholders, local communities, etc.

11.8 In regard to making governance more understandable, it was noted that this was a complex area for the general public. The potential for a short overview, or video, of governance, role of the Board, etc to be considered and potential material available from SG. KD and MMcA to discuss further off table.

ACTION: KD/MMcA

11.9 The Board queried whether the corporate report template, or during presentation of the report, consideration could be given to include the “so what and now what, why does it matter or risk of not doing it” elements. It was agreed that following the conclusion and outcomes of the Corporate Governance Audit, consideration would be given to the next iteration of the corporate report and whether these elements could be incorporated. It was proposed that the “so what” element could be highlighted during the presentation of the papers and the guidance for presenting papers should be updated to include this.

11.10 **Subject to the proposed amendments, the Board approved the reviewed and amended governance related documents of the Board and its Committees.**

(D Farries left the meeting at 1100 hrs)

(Meeting broke at 1100 hrs and reconvened at 1115 hrs)

12 ANNUAL INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2025-26 DRAFT

12.1 BB presented the Board with the internal audit activity planned for 2025/26 for approval. The following key points were highlighted:

- Outline of the process and engagement during the development of the plan.
- Proposals for 6 substantive audits during the first year.
- Outline for the proposed 3-year plan with the caveat that years 2 and 3 remain subject to change.

12.2 The Board noted that there were past or planned audits in the areas of legal compliance, treasury management and artificial intelligence (AI). The Board further commented on the developments within the AI area and that it was ambitious for the Service not to consider this as a potential audit. SO'D commented that the proposed audits were standard and as the Auditors gained a better understanding of the Service the plan may be refined. SO'D acknowledged the comments relating to AI and reiterated that the plan would be refreshed annually, and this could be added to the plan if necessary.

12.3 SO'D noted the ongoing work in relation to the Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) Strategy which would include AI and could help determine what assurance the Service required on this area moving forward.

12.4 The Board were advised that there was no contingency within the audit plan. Should any additional audits be required, the proposed plan would have to be reviewed and reprioritised or additional budget identified.

12.5 The Board were reminded that Internal Audit was only one source of assurance and work was ongoing to develop assurance mapping within the Service. Assurance mapping would be presented to ARAC in due course.

12.6 The Board briefly discussed a potential audit on AI.

12.7 It was noted that during discussions at the recent ARAC meeting, it was suggested that Subject Access Requests be considered within the Freedom of Information audit.

12.8 The Board noted that the Service would continue to consider AI and future assurance.

12.9 **The Board approved the Internal Audit Plan 2025/26.**

13 PREVENTION STRATEGY

13.1 JH presented the Board with the Prevention Strategy, which had been approved by the SLT, for final approval. The following key points were highlighted:

- Further minor typographical and grammatical amendments have been made since the report was circulated.
- Business continuity had been added to the remits and thematic areas table, under Preparedness, on page 8 of the strategy.
- First Prevention Strategy to include the 3 elements: prevention, protection and preparedness.
- Overview of the key areas of focus and work within each element.

13.2 In regard to community resilience work, JH noted that dedicated analysing resilience training was being provided to Flexi Duty Officers (FDO) as these officers were embedded within communities and local planning forums. The Service would also be building upon the Marmot principles to engage and extend beyond fire prevention within communities. JH further noted that this area was evolving, and the Service were engaging and developing conversations to help meet the wider needs of local communities. AW commented on the role of the Service within the Scottish Resilience Partnership and the opportunities this would provide.

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- 13.3 In regard to preparedness work linking with Community Safety Teams, JH advised that these teams worked closely together on a daily basis and shared learning.
- 13.4 In regard to actively working with other UK or international fire and rescue services, JH advised that the Service were continually learning from national events, engaging with national/international bodies, etc. JH noted that this could have features with the Strategy more explicitly but was comfortable with the activities being undertaken by the Service.
- 13.5 The Board welcomed the statement within the strategy: *“This Strategy aims to set the tone for a universal Prevention offering for the whole of Scotland, with dedicated efforts proportionate to the needs of our specific communities.”* The Board noted that that was an important, clear statement and moral compass for the Service going forward. The Board noted their aspirations for this point of principle would be that it was applied throughout the Service Delivery Review element of SSRP.
- 13.6 In regard to protection, the Board commented on the importance of the Service using their technical knowledge and expertise to influence SG on legislation. JH advised that the Service continued to engage with SG on current and future legislation.
- 13.7 In regard to income generation, the Board commented on the potential opportunities for cost recovery on activities in line with legislation and for consideration to be given to this. JH noted that the Service were exploring potential opportunities for cost recovery.
- 13.8 The Board welcomed the opportunity to consider and provide feedback on the strategy during the early development stages. With reference to the finalised glossy version, the Board suggested that consideration be given to the accessibility and presentation of this document on the website.
- 13.9 The Board noted that the statement *“Prevention is critical for the SFRS being a sustainable service for the future”* could be considered protectionist and asked for consideration to be given to the intended messaging ie critical to responding to changing risk, etc. JH noted and would consider the Board’s comments.
- 13.10 **Subject to final amendment, the Board approved the Prevention Strategy.**

14 RISK UPDATE REPORT

- 14.1 SO'D presented the Board with the annual report providing an overview of the work undertaken and the current risk positions for scrutiny and highlighted the following key points:
- Review of risk management process and the development of risk appetite statements.
 - Overview of risks rated 15 or over and aligned risk appetite.
 - Overview of all risks rated below 15 and aligned risk appetite.
 - Summary of risk alignment to the stated risk appetite.
 - Summary of risk spotlights identified and considered by Committees during 2024/25.
 - Overview of alignment to the current strategic outcomes and would be subject to realignment following approval of the SFRS Strategy.
- 14.2 In regard to Risk SD001 (failure to mobilise), the Board sought clarity on the significance of the Vision 5 disaster recovery system. AW offered his assurance that there was no mobilising issue as this was a back-up system within the Edinburgh and Dundee Operations Controls (OC). AW explained the issue and advised that discussions were ongoing with the suppliers to resolve the situation.

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- 14.3 Brief discussion took place on some target risks remaining above risk appetites and when reviewing to challenge whether the risk appetite was appropriate. SO'D advised that work continued with risk owners to review their targets relative to the risk appetite. SO'D noted the potential to increase the risk appetite for risks which were rated below target.
- 14.4 The Board acknowledged the progress made over the last 12 months in terms of improving the risk management process and embedding/integrating risk appetite. This was evident in how the risk register was being used to provoke discussions, scrutiny and challenges.
- 14.5 **The Board scrutinised the Risk Update Report.**
- 15 RISK THEMES**
- 15.1 There were no new or emerging risks identified during this meeting.
- 15.2 The Board noted that AI was not featured specifically within the risk register. SO'D to review and update as necessary.
- ACTION: SO'D**
- 16 FORWARD PLAN**
- 16.1 The Forward Plan was noted and would be kept under review and subject to change.
- 17 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**
- 17.1 A special Private Board meeting is scheduled to take place on Thursday 29 May 2025.
- 17.2 The next full public meeting of the Board is scheduled to take place on Thursday 26 June 2025.
- 17.3 There being no further matters to discuss in public, the meeting closed at 1207 hrs.

(The meeting broke at 1207 hrs and reconvened in private session at 1215 hrs)

PRIVATE SESSION

- 18 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS PRIVATE MEETING:**
- 18.1 **Thursday 27 March 2025**
- 18.1.1 The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.
- 18.1.2 **The minutes of the private meeting held on 27 March 2025 were approved as a true record of the meeting.**
- 18.2 **Matters Arising**
- 18.2.1 There were no matters arising.
- 19 PRIVATE ACTION LOG**
- 19.1 There were no outstanding private actions.
- 20 NATIONAL JOINT COUNCIL – UPDATE ON UNIFORMED PAY NEGOTIATIONS**
- 20.1 In strict confidence, the Chair provided a verbal update on the current position in relation to the proposed Uniformed pay offer.
- 20.2 **The Board noted the verbal update.**

21 SFRS STRATEGY 2025-28

21.1 MMcA provided a verbal update on the results of the consultation on the SFRS Strategy 2025/28.

21.2 **The Board noted the verbal update.**

There being no further matters to discuss in private, the meeting closed at 1245 hrs.