PUBLIC MEETING - SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

THURSDAY 27 AUGUST 2026 @ 1000 HRS

BRAIDWOOD SUITE, SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE HEADQUARTERS, WESTBURN DRIVE, CAMBUSLANG, G72 7NA / VIRTUAL (MS TEAMS)

PRESENT:

Mhairi Wylie, Chair (MW)
Stuart Ballingall (SJB)
Neil Mapes (NM)
Andrew Smith (AS)
Paul Stollard (PS)
Angiolina Foster, Deputy Chair (AF)
Therese O'Donnell (TO'D)
Malcolm Payton (MP)
Madeline Smith (MS)
Tim Wright (TW)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Stuart Stevens (SS)	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
Craig McGoldrick (CMcG)	Assistant Chief Officer, Director of Training, Safety and Assurance
Mark McAteer (MMcA)	Director of Governance, Strategy and Change
James Wallace (JW)	Director of Finance, Digital and Infrastructure
David Johnston (DJ)	Risk and Audit Manager (Item 20 only)
Christopher Casey (CC)	Group Commander, Board Support Manager
Heather Greig (HG)	Executive Officer Board Support
Debbie Haddow (DJH)	Board Support/Minutes

OBSERVERS:

Andrew Hearn, HMFSI
Colin Brown, FBU

1 CHAIR'S WELCOME

1.1 The Chair opened the meeting welcoming those attending and observing via MS Teams. Attendees were reminded to raise their hands, in accordance with the remote meeting protocol, should they wish to ask a question. Due to the volume of business, the Board were requested to keep questions concise to allow sufficient time for all agenda items.

1.2 On behalf of the Board, the Chair extended her thanks and appreciation to Board Members Brian Baverstock, Tim Wright and Paul Stollard for their hard work, focus and contributions, throughout their tenure, ahead of their pending retirement/resignation.

1.3 On behalf of the Board, the Chair extended a welcome to James Wallace, Director of Finance, Digital and Infrastructure and, in absentia, Penny McIntyre, Director of People, Communications and Engagement to their first formal Board meeting.

2 APOLOGIES

2.1 Brian Baverstock, Board Member
Andrew Watt, Deputy Chief Officer
Penny McIntyre, Director of People, Communications and Engagement

3 CONSIDERATION OF AND DECISION ON ANY ITEMS TO BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE

3.1 The Board agreed that the *Draft Private Minutes* and *Private Action Log* would be taken in private. The Board agreed that the *SFRS Board Insurance Report* would be taken in private due to matters subject to legal proceedings (Standing Order 9D).

3.2 No further items were identified.

4 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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

- Paul Stollard, Chair of Board of Institute of Fire Engineers
- Tim Wright, Trustee of Dementia Heroes Charity

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

5 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS:

5.1 **Monday 22 June 2026**

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

5.1.2 In regard to the governance arrangements relating to the review of performance and delivery of the Service Delivery Review, it was noted that this had been discussed at the recent Integrated Governance Forum meeting and workshop, however no definitive assurance pathway had been identified. The Board requested that proposals on the assurance pathway though the Committees and Board, including recognition that different perspectives may need to be considered, be developed and brought to the next IGF meeting.

ACTION: SS

5.1.3 **The minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2026 were approved as a true record of the meeting.**

5.2 **Thursday 9 July 2026**

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

5.2.2 **The minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2026 were approved as a true record of the meeting.**

5.3 **Matters Arising**

5.3.1 There were no matters arising.

6 ACTION LOG

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

6.2 **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 assessments provided for decisions made 12 months ago.

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

8 CHAIR'S REPORT

8.1 MW presented the Chair's Update report which noted events that had occurred since the Board meeting held on 9 July 2026 and highlighted the following:

- Regular meeting with Stuart Greig, Deputy Director of Safer Communities and CO Stuart Stevens had been cancelled (20 August 2026).
- Initial introductory meetings had been held or were scheduled with the new Board Members ahead of the formal induction programme commencing in October 2026.
- Minor typographical errors were noted and amended.

8.2 **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 9 July 2026 and highlighted the following:

- Welcomed James Wallace and Penny McIntyre to the Service and noted that Alison Hardie, new Head of Communications and Engagement would commence in role in September 2026.
- Increased operational demand during this period, notably wildfire activities, significant RTCs and building fires as well as the Commonwealth Games.
- Publication of open letter in response to recent wildfire activities. The open letter recognised the exceptional support of communities, staff, partners and volunteers during the protracted incident. It highlighted how the national response enabled the incident to be managed safely alongside other significant demands. The Service's ongoing engagement with partner organisations and the Scottish Government would focus on building on recent work and strengthening the partnership approach. Both external and internal debriefs would help to capture learning and inform future action. Moving forward the key priority would be for greater preparedness and prevention activity. Recent incidents across the UK and overseas had reinforced the need for prompt and immediate action.
- Recent graduation celebrated 72 trainees passing out with high professional standards and values being achieved through improvements to recruitment and training processes. It was noted that the cohort reported the Service's highest number of female trainees. A further cohort of 24 trainees had commenced their training under the new model of smaller, continuous courses.
- Attendance at the Kilbirnie Street Memorial.
- Visit from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) focused on fire reform and UK wildfire matters.

9.2 In regard to the open letter, the Board queried the response from Scottish Government and partners and whether there would be any change to the Service's legal powers. SS advised that the letter had received broad support from the Scottish Government and partners. SS noted that the Cabinet Secretary had publicly supported the focus on prevention and the need to strengthen the existing action plan. SS further noted that several partner organisations had already engaged with the Service regarding preventative work such as fire breaks, etc. It was noted that further engagement and discussions were required on any additional legal powers in relation to managing fire risk in the natural environment.

9.3 The Board acknowledged the impact of the recent protracted incident and the pressure this placed on operational resilience, particularly on-call firefighters. SS advised that the majority of attending firefighters were on-call personnel and that their contribution, efforts

and personal sacrifices were recognised. DF noted that the incident had provided an opportunity to test elements of the on-call improvement programme, including station clusters and more flexible deployment of personnel. Internal debriefing process would consider wider staffing, mobilisation, accommodation, shift and relief arrangements to identify lessons and strengthen resilience for future prolonged incidents.

9.4 JH reiterated the opportunity to improve partnership work relating to wildfire preparedness as there was a recognition for the need for collective action and the vital role of specialist resources. JH noted that both internal and external debrief processes would help to develop a single, co-ordinated action plan.

9.5 JH advised that the Scottish Wildfire Forum and another Scottish Government group provided established structures to sustain partnership discussions and collaborative working. A single Scottish Government multi-agency action plan, comprising 14 actions with shared ownership, had been created as the central source of truth. It was noted that debrief findings would inform and strengthen this work. This work would remain subject to continued senior-level oversight which would help to maintain momentum and avoid fragmented plans. The Board were advised that the action plan was the embodiment of the Wildfire Strategy and actions have been prioritised and concepts of operations/ strategy for delivery had been identified.

9.6 The Board were advised that the Service were sharing wildfire learning across the UK through the National Fire Chiefs Council with a dedicated think-tank meeting being stood up for this purpose. SS noted the UK Government's intention to convene a UK Wildfire Summit which indicated a clear commitment to strengthen resilience, preparedness and collaboration across the UK.

9.7 The Board expressed their thanks to the local communities, operational personnel, particularly on-call firefighters, the Strategic Leadership Team and supporting colleagues for their exceptional commitment during the five-week incident.

9.8 SS advised the Board that community engagement would form a key element of the follow-up work. This would help to ensure local views were captured within the debrief process and that relationships were maintained. SS noted that the need for clearer public communication and simpler terminology was also needed to improve understanding of operational procedures and safety measures.

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

10 COMMITTEE UPDATES

10.1 **Strategic Planning and Change Committee (SPCC)**

10.1.1 Verbal Update of Meeting: 6 August 2026

TO'D reported that the Committee held a public meeting on 6 August 2026 and highlighted the following key areas:

- Change Lifecycle Survey Results report was presented as the Committee had previously raised concerns about process. The report provided an honest overview of the survey results and reflected similar findings as the recent audit reports. The Committee would continue to maintain oversight on the implementation of the changes.
- Review of the People, Payroll and Finance Closure Report which captured lessons learned that would be taken forward.
- Update on Corporate Business Solutions procurement process with the outline business case being circulated outwith the meeting for comments/information.

10.1.2 It was noted that the Change Lifecycle Survey Results had identified significant lessons relating to defining project scope, recognising capabilities and capacity of resources, and adoption of standard systems. However, the Committee had stressed the importance of

learning from and embedding of these lessons to avoid repeating the same issues.

10.1.3 It was noted that the Committee had felt that other significant lessons had not been captured and these would be taken to the Integrated Governance Forum for wider discussion.

10.1.4 **The Board noted the draft minutes.**

10.2 **Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC)**

10.2.1 Verbal Update of Meeting: 16 July 2026

MP reported that the Committee held a public meeting on 16 July 2026 and highlighted the following key areas:

- Four internal audit reports were considered. The Budget Management and Investment Prioritisation report was largely positive, although consistent application across the Service had been identified for improvement. Stronger links were required between budget management, investment decisions and organisational change.
- Four draft terms of reference were considered.
- Annual Report to the Accountable Officer was presented
- Update on the Power BI integrated assurance mapping tool. The Committee commented on the need to ensure alignment with strategic objectives and deliverables rather than operating in isolation.

10.2.2 Committee Annual Report 2025/26 to the Accountable Officer

MP presented the Committee Annual Report 2025/26 to the Accountable Officer for information, noting that the report has previously been scrutinised and approved by the Committee. The report outlined the work of the Committee and provided reasonable assurance.

10.2.3 Within the appendix (paragraph 6.3), reference to the HMFSI Organisational Culture had been incorrectly recorded as Volume 2. This should read Volume 1.

ACTION: BST

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

10.3 **People Committee (PC)**

10.3.1 Draft Minutes of Meeting: 18 June 2026

MS presented the draft minutes from the public meeting held on 18 June 2026, noting that a verbal update had been provided at the last meeting.

10.3.2 **The Board noted the draft minutes.**

10.4 **Service Delivery Committee (SDC)**

10.4.1 Draft Minutes of Meeting: 4 June 2026

TW presented the draft minutes from the public meeting held on 4 June 2026, noting that a verbal update had been provided at the last meeting.

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

10.5 **Reform Collaboration Group (RCG)**

10.5.1 MW advised that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on 29 September 2026.

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

11 THREE-YEAR DELIVERY PLAN 2025-28: QUARTER 1 2026-27 PROGRESS REPORT

11.1 MMcA presented the Board with the quarter one progress report on how we are performing against the 2026/27 actions within the Three-Year Delivery Plan 2025-28. The following key points were highlighted:

- Overall 21 actions were contained within the plan, of which 19 were reporting Green and 2 were reporting Amber.
- A further 4 residual actions from 2025/26 (Year 1) were carried over, of which 2 reporting Amber and 2 reporting Red.

11.2 The Board commented on and asked that future report avoid using the term "competing priorities" as this does not provide sufficient detail.

11.3 MMcA clarified that the People Strategy had been renamed the People Plan and that reference to the Strategy meant the Plan. The Board commented on the completion rate of 55% and queried whether this accurately reflected the progress made. The Board noted that the original commitment had been to develop a People Strategy. The Board commented on the potential narrow view of the current year as opposed to the overall three-year objective. SO'D reminded the Board that the original intention had been to develop a People Strategy, and preparatory work had been undertaken on that basis. However, to afford the new Director of People, Communications and Engagement the opportunity to influence the strategy, it had been agreed to rename the current work the People Plan. Following an 18-month delivery period, the People Strategy would be developed and aligned with the Service's direction of travel. It was noted that the next update should clearly articulate the revised position.

11.4 In regard to the governance framework (No. 18), the Board noted the extended end date, queried whether milestones would be identified and sought clarification on the governance route for this work. MMcA noted that the extension to the due date was due to limited capacity and capability. He advised that this work related to protocols, policy, processes and procedures. He commented on the challenges with embedding the data governance framework, as part of the wider digital and data strategy, in both practices and systems across the Service. MMcA acknowledged the skills gaps/specialist capabilities required to develop and support systems and processes.

11.5 The Board reiterated their request for milestones to demonstrate progress and delivery of incremental benefits. MMcA noted that the scrutiny arrangements of the Digital and Data Strategy's five-year implementation plan which included defined stages and milestones would be reviewed. This would be presented to the Board in due course.

11.6 The Board sought clarify on the risk associated with the delayed data governance framework. MMcA highlighted several risks such as fragmented, outdated systems, reliance on offline data sources and limited internal capabilities. The Board commented on the need to identify the fundamental risk, the associated risk appetite and the associated mitigation actions. It was noted that a phased, prioritised approach with clear milestones and governance oversight would be required to address any immediate weaknesses whilst supporting longer-term digital improvements

11.7 The Board noted and welcomed the future design enhancements as outlined in paragraph 3.6.1. The Board commented on the need for clearer reporting on progress across the full three-year plan. It was noted that future updates would capture completed actions, current progress, remaining gaps and the benefits achieved to date. This would enable the Board to assess whether investment priorities remain appropriate within budget constraints.

11.8 In regard to the SFRS Values (No. 8), the Board sought assurance that the process would not be overly complicated. SO'D advised that the Service's intention was to undertake a balanced, proportionate process and that the review would support the ongoing culture

and leadership work. SO'D noted that additional resources had been allocated to support this and other projects within the wider programme.

11.9 In regard to the Rostering project (Action 11.4), SO'D commented on the challenges with this project and that work continued to resolve, progress and deliver the final product.

11.10 The Board sought clarity whether a specialist services review was planned, highlighting that reference to a specialist operations future model had been referenced within the covering report. DF confirmed that this did not relate to the specialist appliance review which was commissioned through the Service Delivery Review process. This specifically related to specialist operational resources such as drones, etc.

11.11 **The Board scrutinised the report with reasonable assurance.**

(The meeting broke as 1116 hrs and reconvened at 1125 hrs)

12 RESOURCE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT – JULY 2026

12.1 JW presented a report to the Board advising of the resource budget position for the period ending 31 July 2026, highlighting a revised budget total of £358.900 million. JW outlined the analysis of the financial position and referred Members to Appendix A of the report, which identified the current resource position showing an overspend of £1.954 million and a forecast year-end overspend of £3.784 million. The following key points were highlighted:

- Forecast overspend was mainly contributable to increased property, transport (fuel costs due to international instability) and supplies and services (hydrant) costs.
- Ongoing engagement with Scottish Water regarding hydrants.
- Unallocated savings of £1.254 million remained to be identified.
- Confident of an emerging path to achieve a balanced year end position. Identification of underspends, additional income and transition to emergency repairs would help to support this.
- Increased level of income of £0.159 million was forecast mainly due to biomass income. Although the Service would continue to seek environmental and decarbonisation opportunities, it was noted that these projects would have to demonstrate an acceptable return and compete with wider demands on the capital programme.
- Variances in employee costs for all staffing groups. Wholetime and On-Call were forecasting small overspends due to operational activities and continuous professional development (CPD) payments. Control and Support staff were forecasting underspends.
- Overview of CPD payments process, difficulties in forecasting costs and the planned review of future modelling.

12.2 The Board sought assurance that the £4.000 million funding, moved from the spring to the autumn budget revision, would be included in the baseline budget. JW confirmed that Scottish Government had advised the Service to plan on that basis and the Service were doing so.

12.3 In regard to CPD payments, JW advised that the year-end forecast was a variance of £0.130 million in wholetime employee costs.

12.4 The Board sought assurance that the early move to emergency repairs, due to budgetary pressures, was not cause for concerns. JW noted that the budget pressures were anticipated and were due to the condition of the estate and the continued increasing costs associated with the significant capital backlog. He further noted that as the capital backlog increased it created revenue consequences. He advised that the position, albeit not cause for alarm, was a clear indication of the impact of constrained capital budgets.

12.5 The Board questioned whether there was an accurate record of the condition of the estate and adequate planned maintenance programme. SO'D advised the Board that the planned preventative maintenance programme was progressing as expected. However, the budgetary pressures related to unplanned work, which had limited funding available. SO'D noted that the Service had, and would continue, to seek additional funding from Scottish Government.

12.6 In regard to potential access to red diesel, SO'D confirmed that this had previously been explored however consideration could be given to revisit this due to renewed exceptional circumstances.

12.7 In regard to costs associated with wildfire activities, JW advised that Scottish Government had been advised that these additional demand-led costs had been incurred, however the exact figures were still unknown. He noted that costs associated with wildfire activities were significant and achieving a balanced budget position would not be possible without support from Scottish Government.

12.8 The Board commented on the wording relating to high-impact risks and unallocated savings being difficult to interpret. JW noted the comments and advised that this would be revised. He noted that the position had improved and the emerging route to balance could close the gap in full, albeit several matters remained unconfirmed.

12.9 It was confirmed that reference to July 2026 being period 4 was incorrect and should read as period 1.

12.10 The Board sought clarity on the reduction in anticipated retirements, increased salary costs and increased overtime due to vacancy numbers. SS advised that the increased overtime was necessary to cover for skill gaps, and as such related to capability rather than overall staffing numbers.

12.11 Brief discussion took place on the potential for a wider review of our risk-based investment plans to ensure that decarbonisation and environmental considerations were embedded in the prioritisation framework. It was noted that a broader discussion may be required on this.

12.12 Brief discussion took place on the baseline, expected additional funding, and the projected year end deficit. The Board were advised of various scenarios and projections and were reminded that they had accepted £1.200 million of unallocated savings at the start of year. A realistic position of £3.800 million overspend had been presented, however several developing actions could still support a balanced outcome.

12.13 **The Board scrutinised the resource budget position for the period ending 31 July 2026 with reasonable assurance.**

13 CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT – JULY 2026

13.1 JW presented a report advising the Board of the actual and committed expenditure against the 2026/27 capital budget position for the period ending 31 July 2026. It was currently anticipated that a forecasted expenditure of £49.063 million for 2026/27 against the budget of £49.221 million. The following key points were highlighted:

- Year end forecast of £0.158 million underspend which was mainly attributable to major property work.
- Areas of risk related to new build projects, in particular Dalkeith due to higher than anticipated indicative costs and further work required prior to finalise contracts.
- Groundworks had commenced at Liberton and following completion, estimated project costs would be available.
- Opportunities remained to vary elements within the programme to ensure continued prioritisation and spend.

13.2 The Board queried whether limited internal project management capacity could prevent or delay delivery of the major works programme. JW advised that the constraints related to internal staffing, however the pending recruitment of 2 project managers would increase capacity. He noted that the RAG rating for the overall capital programme was amber due to the risk of delivery of the new build project at Dalkeith and Liberton. The remainder of the capital programme continued to progress as planned.

13.3 In regard to CivTech, JH advised that, as Chair of the Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Group, discussions continued to identify and progress other potential initiatives with CivTech. It was noted that the Service delivery capacity for new initiatives must be considered alongside existing projects and priorities. JH reiterated that other innovation opportunities were being explored, particularly those that could attract funding or offset organisational costs, however, any such initiatives would require a long-term view.

13.4 In regard to Cowcaddens, the Board requested that a report be prepared providing a retrospective analysis of the starting position, subsequent changes and end position.

ACTION: JW

13.5 In regard to Portree, the Board sought clarification on the status update of the new modular hub and wider programme. The Board noted that previous assurances had been provided that should Portree not proceed, an alternative pilot community resilience hub would be progressed to demonstrate the model. SO'D reminded the Board of the difficulties in securing funding and suitable land in Portree. SO'D to provide an update on the project, including the current land position at Portree and whether the pilot would be delivered at another location.

ACTION: SO'D

13.6 **The Board scrutinised the level of actual and committed capital expenditure for the period ending 31 July 2026 with reasonable assurance.**

14 ARRANGEMENTS AND OUTCOMES OF ANNUAL REVIEW AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE BOARD

14.1 MMcA presented the report which outlined how the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Board Member arrangements have been reviewed to ensure their continued effectiveness. It was noted that within Appendix A there was a retrospective summary review from the last financial year.

14.2 The Board queried whether all the recommendations arising from the Governance audit had been actioned. MMcA advised that there was one outstanding action, which related to the review of the resource within the Board Support team, and that this remained under review.

14.3 Brief discussion took place on how the Board could consider their effectiveness going forward, including how other boards assess their performance, etc. It was noted that this was already on the Strategy Day programme for February 2027.

14.4 Within the covering report, reference to Kirsty Darwent's planned resignation to be amended to accurately record the completion of her second term.

ACTION: BST

14.5 **Subject to the above amendment, the Board approved the arrangements for reviewing the effectiveness of the SFRS Board as set out in section 3 and Appendix A with reasonable assurance.**

15 RISK THEMES

15.1 There were no new or emerging risks identified during this meeting.

16 FORWARD PLAN

16.1 The Forward Plan was noted and would be kept under review and subject to change.

16.2 The Board sought clarification on the governance route for the AI Policy. MMcA advised that it was scheduled to be presented at the Strategic Leadership Team meeting (2 September 2026) and consideration would be given to bringing it before the Board.

16.3 The Board were advised that ARAC had requested that AI be considered within each individual audit/inspection. The Board noted that the AI policy should address risks associated with AI use, however opportunities should form part of the broader digital and data considerations. The Board further noted that AI-related risks would fall within ARAC's remit, however broader opportunities, etc may need to be considered through different governance routes.

16.4 In general, the Board requested that consideration be given to identifying clear governance routes and better alignment of forward planning processes across Executive and Non-Executive meetings to enable sufficient time at each stage.

17 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

17.1 A special public meeting of the Board is scheduled to take place on Thursday 24 September 2026.

17.2 The next public meeting of the Board is scheduled to take place on Thursday 29 October 2026.

17.3 There being no further matters to discuss in public, the meeting closed at 1220 hrs.

(The meeting broke at 1220 hrs and reconvened in private session at 1225 hrs)
(J Henderson left the meeting at 1220 hrs)
D Johnston joined the meeting at 1225 hrs)

PRIVATE SESSION

18 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS PRIVATE MEETINGS:

18.1 **Thursday 9 July 2026**

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

18.2 **Thursday 30 July 2026 (Special)**

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

18.3 **The minutes of the private meetings held on 9 July 2026 and 30 July 2026 were**
18.3.1 **approved as a true record of the meetings.**

19 PRIVATE ACTION LOG

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

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

20 SFRS BOARD INSURANCE REPORT

20.1 DJ presented a report which provided an overview of insurance claims being managed by the Service.

20.2 **The Board scrutinised the report with reasonable assurance.**

There being no further matters to discuss in private, the meeting closed at 1240 hrs.