



Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Shaping Our Future Service: Your Say

Information pack

April 2024

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1. Introduction

It has been 200 years since the world's first ever municipal fire service was established in Scotland. We have a proud history of serving our communities and have always worked hard to keep people safe.

The role of the firefighter has evolved over time and we want to build on this success to be a modern fire and rescue service that is ready for the challenges of Scotland's future.

As we outlined in our Long Term Vision, we want to do more for our communities – not just by responding to incidents but by stopping them from happening in the first place.

The types of incidents we respond to are changing and different parts of Scotland need different services from us. This means we need to change how we work.

For example, we are seeing fewer house fires but more flooding and wildfire incidents – often in areas that do not have permanently staffed fire stations.

Where we do have stations, some are located in areas to support historical risks that are no longer there – such as heavy industry like shipyards or coal mines. Some of our stations are also no longer fit for purpose and require significant investment to make them safer and more suitable for our staff.

To make sure we have the right resources in the right place at the right time we need to change. We believe the status quo is no longer an option.

This is why we are developing a Strategic Service Review Programme (SSRP) to look at how we deliver our services to become the modern service Scotland needs.

There are different ways to do this and we have outlined some of the areas we could change in this booklet.

But we need your help to make sure we get this right for the communities we serve.

This is the first stage in our engagement with staff, communities, trade unions, partners,

elected representatives and people across Scotland. We will be running events and speaking to communities over the next two months to find out what you want and need from your fire and rescue service.

You can also complete our online survey or return our questionnaire.

The views we gather will help us to develop change options for full public consultation later this year.

2. What we do

At any given time, we can send our firefighters to any incident across Scotland.

We have specialist appliances and resources that are used across Scotland. These appliances are crewed by firefighters from local community fire stations, but they provide specific skills and equipment to support complex emergencies across the whole country.

We respond to every emergency and will always send the nearest appropriate and available appliances based on their location and the type of incident.

But keeping people safe starts long before any 999 call is made and our role is to prevent an emergency incident or harm from happening in the first place.

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We have a proven track record in delivering effective prevention activity across a wide range of issues. This means helping people to make their homes and communities safer.

We also regulate businesses and workplaces to ensure that the places we visit or work in are safe from fire.

We support all of Scotland's communities, from educating children and young people, through to supporting adults and older people to live safely and independently.

As a service, we exist to make Scotland a safer place. We do this by:

- Responding to fires
- Promoting fire safety

- Responding to serious transport incidents
- Enforcing fire legislation
- Responding to road traffic collisions
- Responding to chemical, biological and nuclear incidents
- Dealing with structural collapse of buildings
- Undertaking inland water rescue
- Responding to serious flooding
- Carrying out rescues at height

3. Why we need to change

Scotland is changing and this means we are responding to different types of incidents.

We want to ensure communities are resilient and safe from extreme weather events, such as flooding and wildfires.

Our communities are changing too with more people living longer at home. Some people are vulnerable and require additional support so we need to adapt to meet these needs.

We know we can do more to keep Scotland safe. We want to focus on prevention so we can reduce demand on us and other public services.

This means considering how we can develop our prevention work through the use of our people, technology and safety interventions, making communities, homes and businesses safer and more resilient.

We are also committed to reducing our carbon footprint which means investing in more energy efficient buildings and vehicles.

3.1 What we respond to

Fires still make up the majority of incidents we attend. But the number of fires has reduced over time. This includes house fires and other building fires.

While fires overall have decreased, the number of other incidents we attend has increased.

Non-fire incidents increased from 11% in 2013-14 to 17% last year of the total incidents we attended. We expect this rise to continue.

At the same time, we have witnessed a continued reduction in fire-related deaths and casualties

2022/23 statistics

- 26,825 fires, 56% decrease since 2003/04
- 4,305 house fires, 47% decrease since 2003/04
- 1,893 other building fires, 55% decrease since 2003/04
- 18,217 outdoor fires, 5% increase since 2013/14*
- 16,783 non-fire incidents, 83% increase since 2013/14*

**Incident statistics of this type are not held for 2003/04*

Wildfire

2,500 wildfires since 2010 average of 178 each year.

Wildfires in Scotland are getting bigger, last longer. Ultimately this requires a more significant response.

Since 2010 there have been eight wildfires recorded which have lasted more than five days. All eight of these incidents have been since 2018. In that same time, there have been 15 wildfires lasting two to five days. Incidents of this duration involve hundreds of staff and resources, mainly our on call staff in rural communities.

We know that wildfires are becoming larger in scale, burning for longer periods of time and requiring a more significant volume of emergency response. This is damaging to the environment and causes significant disruption to local communities.

Due to the impact of climate change, we are seeing milder, wetter winters and drier, warmer summers. The expansion of vegetation growing seasons and changes in land management practices in Scotland are creating more fuel for wildfires, so we expect this trend to increase.

Wildfires are classified as outdoor fires with more than 1,000 square metres of burned area.

Flooding

15,000 flooding incidents attended since 2013-14.

Flooding incidents have increased steadily over the past decade and as the impact of climate change is predicted to intensify, we anticipate this trend to continue.

More than 280,000 homes and buildings are at *risk of flooding* in Scotland; with an additional 110,000 properties at risk by 2080. *

In 2023, we witnessed the impact of Storm Babet, in which people sadly lost their lives and communities in the north east were devastated by flooding.

This type of large-scale incident presents a significant demand on our service, local and specialist national crews, and requires the deployment of hundreds of staff from across Scotland to the affected areas.

We must ensure that we have the resilience and the correct equipment in place to respond effectively.

* *Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) reference: www.sepa.org.uk/data-visualisation/nfra2018/*

3.2 Matching resource to risk

We have spent years building our knowledge of changing community risk across Scotland through the development of our Community Risk Index Model (CRIM).

This model considers historical incident data and captures information about the people we serve, including where they are located, the types of buildings and environments they occupy and the way that nature may impact them.

This helps us to identify where our stations and appliances should be based to best meet current risks and keep communities safe.

The modelling we have done has shown that some stations and appliances are not in the right places to meet risk and demand.

Our knowledge of risk will help to inform where we need to locate stations, how we crew our appliances and how we operate from our stations.

3.3 Our people

The success of SFRS is down to our staff. Our firefighters, operations control, fire enforcement officers, community action teams and support staff are all dedicated to keeping Scotland safe.

We want all our staff to receive the highest quality of training which equips them with the skills, expertise and values the public expect.

For operational staff we want to invest in more training sites and more instructors across Scotland to better prepare our staff to deal with the modern risk and challenges.

We also need to work harder to make SFRS representative of the communities we serve. Diversity is important in creating a workplace where everyone feels welcome and included.

Having a diverse workforce has been proven to improve decision making and performance.

We are committed to improving diversity and building the leadership and culture to ensure that SFRS is a great place to be for everyone.

We also need to do more to support our on call firefighters. On call firefighters respond to emergencies via a pager but often have other jobs. There are significant challenges with our on call system and as our communities change, we cannot recruit enough to crew appliances in remote and rural areas.

While this is not unique to Scotland, our geography means that we rely heavily on our on call firefighters.

This model needs to be sustainable so that communities can remain resilient. To do this we need to consider what response and – more importantly – prevention activities could better serve these communities.

3.4 The state of our estate

Many of our ageing buildings are no longer fit for purpose and require urgent action. It will require significant investment to make them safer and more suitable and we must find a way to rectify this. Doing nothing is not an option.

In 2018 Audit Scotland described our backlog in capital spend requirements as “insurmountable”. That means we will never be able to modernise all our buildings and vehicles without additional investment or changing how we work.

Our capital funding has remained at £32.5million for the last seven years. We have received an additional £10million for 24/25 but as a minimum we need at least £60million each year to bring our buildings and equipment up to standard. We are also spending more money on repairs as the condition and suitability of our estate continues to deteriorate.

We have 14 fire stations with Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) panel issues.

This was identified in 2019 and we took measures to protect our staff and operations, however we have been unable to repair or replace the stations and this requires a permanent solution.

We need £60m each year to bring our buildings and equipment up to standard.

3.5 Contamination risk to firefighters

There is growing evidence of the health risks associated with exposure to a range of contaminants for our firefighters.

*Firefighters' mortality rate from all cancers is 1.6 times higher than the general public, and firefighters are developing cancer at higher rates and at younger ages. **

The safety of our staff is paramount, and we continue to work with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and other representative bodies to reduce contamination risk for our firefighters.

We have undertaken a substantial review of how our appliances, staff and personal protective equipment (PPE) are decontaminated during and following an incident. We know that some of our buildings do not have appropriate decontamination provisions and, in some cases, limited welfare facilities.

To mitigate this risk, specialist decontamination wipes have been supplied to all fire appliances and training centres; a station zoning system has been trialled to limit contaminant spread; and our medical tests now include enhanced cancer screening questions.

But we know there is more we must do. Further investment is needed, particularly in relation to creating proper decontamination facilities in our stations.

**Scottish Firefighters Occupational Cancer and Disease Mortality Rates: 2000-2020:*
academic.oup.com/occmed/article/73/1/42/6964909?login=false

4. Investing in change

We recognise that the need to modernise as a service and address the issues with our estate requires investment.

But this comes against a backdrop of economic and financial challenges for the whole public sector in Scotland. SFRS is not immune to this. We face pressures in both our resource and capital budgets so we must find ways to better use our resources.

4.1 Balancing our budget

Our budget is set annually by the Scottish Government and we have a legal duty to deliver a balanced budget.

The Scottish Government's Resource Spending Review published in May 2022 predicted our budget will remain the same for the next three years.

In 2023, the SFRS Board approved an initial savings plan across the whole organisation.

This included the temporary withdrawal of 10 second or third wholetime fire appliances for an initial 12-month period. This decision was supported by data and modelling from our CRIM which identified the appliance withdrawals that would have the least impact on emergency response times.

However we need to make permanent changes to move forward.

In December 2023, the Scottish Government increased our budget by £13.6million for 2024-25, from our budget allocation at the start of 23/24 and increased capital investment by £10.3million.

We need to plan beyond 2025 and ensure we are a sustainable organisation that is able to continually improve and invest in the services we provide. This is why we are seeking your views.

This budget increase gives us an opportunity to look at how we best use our staff, equipment, estate and fleet over future years to make sure we develop and improve for years to come.

5. What changes could we make?

These are some of the areas we think could change to use our resources differently and invest in developing our services.

5.1 Developing the firefighter role

We are committed to working in partnership with our staff and trade unions to develop the role of the firefighter in Scotland to take on wider prevention and emergency response activities.

To achieve this, we would need to agree a new employment contract and role of firefighters with their representative bodies. We have an 'agreement in principle' with the Fire Brigade's Union (FBU) but this would need additional funding to fully implement.

We would also need to invest further in training and equipment to support our firefighters to take on any new roles.

We believe that diversifying the role of firefighters could provide additional support to meet the needs of local communities. For example, we could provide an emergency medical response and support the most vulnerable in our communities. The benefits to the people of Scotland in working closer with our public service partners could be significant.

Building upon our success in delivering preventative activities and interventions, we believe that we could go beyond the traditional role of the fire service and further enhance our partnership working. This could improve wider community outcomes, reduce demand on partners services and ultimately reduce the risk to the most vulnerable within Scotland's communities.

We also want to be a leader in reforming how our public services are delivered. An example of this would be to build on our current approach of sharing premises with our partners. This

provides a more integrated delivery model that reduces the need for separate buildings while providing the services that communities need and the facilities that staff deserve.

5.2 Changing where our stations and appliances are based

£1m each year for one wholetime fire appliance crewed 24/7.

The location of our community fire stations and fire appliances across Scotland has not changed significantly over time.

As we outlined in section 3.2, we know that some of our stations are not located in the best places to meet the current risks faced in communities.

There are potential options to change where our stations and appliances are located. This could involve merging stations in similar geographical locations to better reflect risk and demand.

Merging or moving stations would allow us to better use our resources elsewhere in the Service and invest in new stations where required. By changing our footprint, we can reduce our running costs, reduce our capital backlog and potentially generate income from sites being sold.

The construction of new buildings would also help to address issues with contamination and suitable welfare facilities while providing staff with a newer, modern workplace.

5.3 Changing how and when we staff our resources

Our wholetime firefighters are split across five groups (watches). This is called the 5 Watch Duty System (5WDS) and allows us to provide permanent crews at our wholetime stations 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Our on call (retained) firefighters respond to emergencies via a pager but often have other jobs while carrying out these duties. They also undertake training and carry out community safety and prevention work.

We also have a number of on call (volunteer) stations and Community Response Units (CRUs) who respond to specific types of incident via a pager system.

We currently have 23 stations which operate using a mixed duty system arrangement.

This is where a station has more than one pumping appliance – typically two pumping appliances and/or a specialist vehicle. One pumping appliance is crewed by wholetime firefighters on the 5WDS whilst the other pump is crewed by on call firefighters who respond from their home or primary workplace.

We also have one community fire station which combines a wholetime and day duty crewing model.

The day duty system and other alternatives mean appliances are crewed based on data which shows when they are needed.

A mix of duty systems is common elsewhere in the UK.

There may be some areas where changing our duty systems would be appropriate to meet the risk and demand. This could allow staff to be deployed into other risk critical areas such as training and prevention.

5.4 Changing how we attend emergencies

Our crewing model – which is the number of firefighters in appliances that attend an emergency – is another area we could explore for change.

Different models are used throughout the UK and there could be options to change the crewing arrangements for different appliances in individual stations.

We could also adopt bespoke measures to increase availability in other areas. For example, blended crewing, where on call firefighters can be temporarily posted to wholetime stations to ensure appropriate levels of crewing are maintained or wholetime firefighters are deployed to on call stations to fill short-term crew or skills shortages.

5.5 Rationalising our corporate buildings

Our corporate buildings provide working space for both uniformed and support staff.

We have already closed our West Service Delivery Area Headquarters (HQ) at Hamilton after the site was designated as surplus to requirements.

The closure of this site will save approximately £500,000 in annual running costs with future potential for capital receipt following the sale of the corporate building.

There is similar potential to achieve further savings by closing additional sites in other parts of the country.

6. Summary and next steps

Scotland has changed and so must its fire and rescue service.

We have analysed the changing community risk and we know that some of our stations and appliances could be better located. At the same time, many of our ageing buildings are also no longer fit for purpose and require urgent action to make them safer and more suitable.

Through our Strategic Service Review Programme (SSRP), we want to address those challenges and free up or redistribute our resources to invest in other areas such as training, innovation and prevention.

To achieve this, we may need to consider changes to where our stations and appliances are based; and how and when we staff our resources.

So we want to hear your views on what you want from your fire service now and in years to come.

We are engaging with communities across Scotland to find out what people think of the potential changes we have outlined in this document and what the future role of the Service could be in communities.

To share your views please complete our online survey. You can also fill out the questionnaire and send it to: SFRS.PublicInvolvement@firescotland.gov.uk

You can also return a copy of the questionnaire to:

FREEPOST SFRS Communications,
Scottish Fire and Rescue Service,
Westburn Drive,
Cambuslang,
G72 7NA.

If you require this information in a different format, such as braille or audio, please email: SFRS.PublicInvolvement@firescotland.gov.uk

Once we have completed this exercise at the end of June 2024 we will review all the feedback we have received. We will then use this feedback to help develop options for change before running a full public consultation exercise later this year.