



SCOTTISH
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Working together for a safer Scotland

Scottish Parliament

Criminal Justice Committee

Pre-Budget Scrutiny

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Submission by the Scottish Fire
and Rescue Service

Working together for a safer Scotland

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Criminal Justice Committee of the Scottish Parliament has asked for information regarding the impact of the Resource Spending Review (RSR) on services within the Justice and Veterans Portfolio including the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).

Our ambition, as set out in our Strategic Plan 2022-25, is to modernise our Service by doing more for our communities and changing how we work to address the changing risks our communities face.

We also have to modernise to address the significant challenges we face in terms of replacing our ageing buildings and fleet of vehicles while reducing our carbon consumption (Sections 4 and 5).

But to achieve the modernisation we aspire to requires investment. We want to invest in developing the role our firefighters play in Scotland and we need to invest in training, innovation and technology to improve firefighter and public safety.

While there is the potential to achieve some limited efficiencies within the Service, we have to recognise that we are an extremely lean service which has already undergone significant reform to achieve savings (Section 2).

We recognise the current funding challenges across the public sector in Scotland, however the predicted flat cash settlement for the following three years and continued increase in running costs (Section 3) means that we cannot generate the level of savings required without impacting on the Service we provide.

We have introduced a series of changes within this financial year (Section 3) which our modelling shows will have the least impact on the emergency response we provide or the risk communities face but in doing so we have also had to reprioritise investment in other areas (Section 7).

Undoubtedly, with investment, we could do much more for our communities and support our public services partners in improving broader outcomes.

SFRS is currently providing a safe and effective service to the people of Scotland.

But, if we are required to make further changes to address the budget gap - and without investment in the areas that would help us to deliver benefits across the communities we serve - then we will have to introduce changes which will impact negatively on community safety.

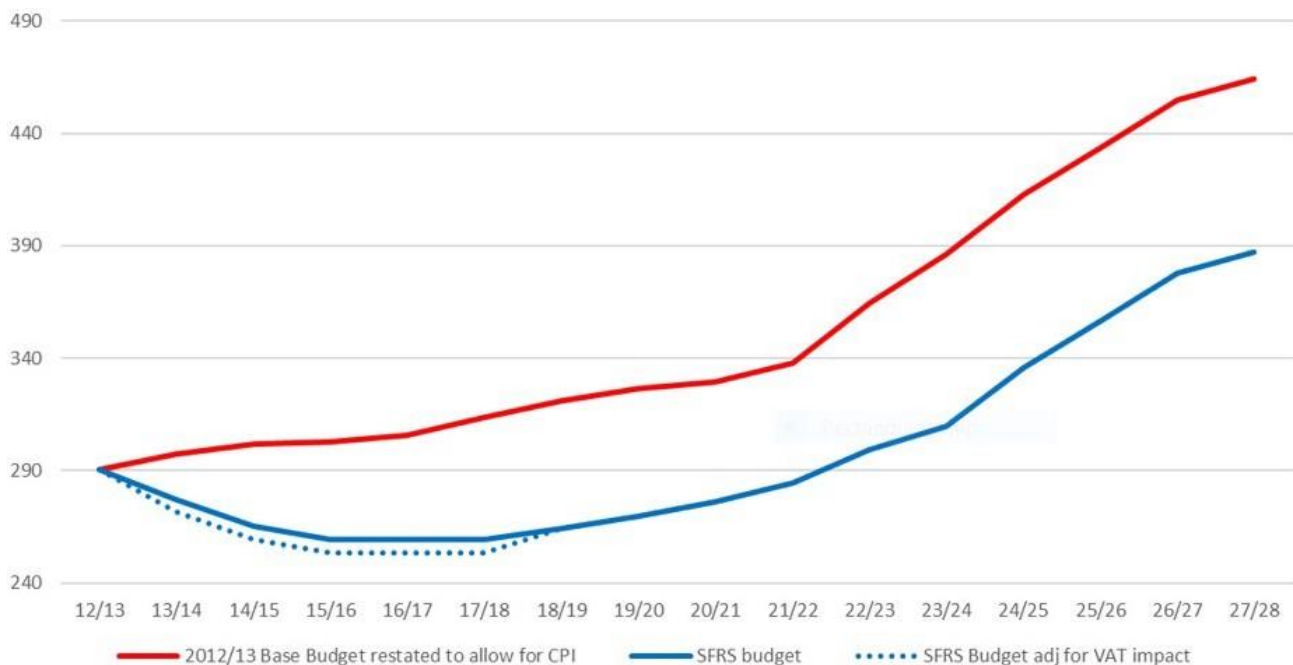
2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Impact of Reform

The Scottish Government's (SG) Reform of the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland Outline Business Case, September 2011 (OBC) was clear that a single national fire and Rescue Service for Scotland would deliver the highest levels of savings in comparison to the pre-reform services. It was estimated in the OBC that this would generate efficiency savings of £293m over 15 years. This was not based on what the actual structure and cost base of a single national service would be, as that was unknown at the time, but represented the best estimate of savings arising from Reform. We are, in fact, on track to exceed the efficiency savings that were anticipated in 2011.

As part of reform, SFRS was asked to achieve £328 million in cumulative savings by 2027/28. As at the end of 2022/23, SFRS has delivered £486 million with a further estimated £36.5million in additional savings required by 2026/27 to meet the Resource Spending Review. The graph below shows the reform savings based on a baseline budget in 2012/13 and applying Consumer Price Index (CPI) to compare against actual SFRS budget. SFRS was unable to recover VAT until 2018/19 which was a disbenefit from reform.

SFRS Reform Savings



Graph 1: SFRS Reform Savings

Our forecasted position, as a consequence of reform, is cumulative gross savings of £871 million by 2027/28.

To achieve efficiencies, we reduced the headcount of support staff through a voluntary severance programme and vacancy management; disposed of assets through our Strategic Intent programme; removed duplication and standardised terms of employment and staff grading. We also consolidated and standardised ICT, operational equipment, fleet, business processes and procedures. In terms of operational services, we developed a Target Operating Model (TOM) for a single national service which enabled a reduction in some areas of duplication and the standardisation of our duty patterns, specialist rescue provisions, off station structure and appliance crewing arrangements.

Our success in achieving savings has not been without challenge. We have seen a reduction in headcount from the pre-reform position, in particular a reduction of 661 Whole Time operational posts and a significant reduction in executive and senior management.

2.2 Summary of 2022/23 submission

The Interim Chief Officer, Interim Deputy Chief Officer and Acting Director of Finance and Procurement of the SFRS appeared before the Committee on 26 October 2022. Below is a summary of the key points from last year.

- In managing the financial consequences posed by the RSR, the Service adopted a two-stage approach. We sought tactical and proportional savings across the whole organisation in 23/24, followed by more strategic change and savings options from 24/25 onwards.
- We were clear that the challenges in achieving our required savings would mean very hard choices having to be made by the Service.
- To reconcile the anticipated budget gap, and as 80% of our budget is spent on staff and of that figure 80% is spent on operational staff costs, we needed to explore opportunities to reduce the staff cost base. Whilst adhering to our commitment to no compulsory redundancies, this would inevitably lead to a reduction in staffing, including firefighter numbers, which would be achieved through retirements and vacancy management.
- In such circumstances, we would be unable to maintain the wholetime firefighter TOM as we moved to meet short term financial targets. This would create challenges in managing appliance availability across Scotland and would reduce appliance availability within communities affected.
- Any changes in our operational response model would be undertaken on a risk-based approach using robust, externally assured data and evidence to minimise impacts upon community and firefighter safety through use of our Community Risk Index Model (CRIM).
- Planned modernisation of the Service that required upfront investment would have to be delayed and reprioritised, which would impact our ability to meet our Long-Term Vision (LTV) ambitions and meaning new investment in some areas would be reduced.
- We would need to review stations and resources which may lead to fire appliance removals and possibly some station closures. This could also mean there would be fewer local community resources dedicated to prevention work and wider community resilience activities.
- We were actively seeking further collaboration with Police Scotland, the Scottish Ambulance Service and others to explore how we can collectively make savings.
- In making savings we would always do so in a manner that minimises impact upon community safety.
- However, any retrenchment in our services to our communities may nevertheless ultimately have an impact on those same communities.

3. CURRENT FINANCIAL PRESSURES

3.1 Pay and Inflation

At the beginning of this year, we faced the prospect of Industrial Action (IA) from firefighters over pay. In March 2023 through the National Joint Council (NJC) a national pay agreement was reached with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). The offer for all firefighters was a 7% increase in pay and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for 2022/23, effective from 1 July 2022 and a further 5% increase in pay and CPD, effective from 1 July 2023. This settlement increased the annual operational staff budgeted pay bill by £21.9m over the two years. A further £2.5m will be required in 2024/25 as firefighter pay is calculated on a July-to-July basis.

For support staff a one-year pay settlement covering the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 was agreed. This comprised a fixed increase of £1,500 for support staff earning below £25,000 (based on full-time equivalent) which equated to an increase of between 6.5 % and 7.97% for affected staff, a 5% increase for support staff earning above £25,000 (based on full-time equivalent) and a 5% increase in the standby allowance to £25.15 per day from 1 April 2023. We also moved all support staff on the first incremental pay point to the second incremental pay point. These developments increased the support staff pay bill by £2.1m.

SG were able to offer additional financial support to the Service of £14.4million in 2023/24 to help meet the cost of the firefighter pay award. SG previously provided one off funding of £3.3m in 2022/23 and permitted SFRS to incur a planned overspend in 2022/23 up to £2.9m to cover the pay offer.

In the same period, our non-pay related costs for goods and services was £62.2m. This is 20% of all SFRS costs and is subject to inflationary pressures calculated using the CPI which is built into existing contract terms. Headline inflation last year was at 10.1% and these cost increases were passed on to existing contracts. To manage these increases we have spent less on smoke detectors as part of our prevention activities, less on learning and development, and less on property maintenance for our stations. Our electricity and fuel costs were well above inflation rates with increases in budget of £1.9m (59%) for electricity and £0.98m (46%) for fuel. Whilst the inflation rate is now reducing the current 6.89% level will add approximately £4million to the cost of services for next year.

3.2 SFRS 2023/24 Savings Plan

To balance our budget for 2023/24 the SFRS Board approved an initial savings plan across the whole organisation.

Area of Saving / Efficiency	£000
Wholetime	1,190
On Call	1,624
Support	1,875
Employee Other	1,304
Sub Total Employee Costs	5,993
Property Costs	1,223
Supplies & Services	2,356
Transport Costs	647
Third Party Payments / Council Charges	215
Financing	303
Income	320
Total	11,057

Table 1: Area of Saving / Efficiency Totals

While developing these options for 2023/24, the Service was faced with the prospect of IA being taken by the FBU over pay. While this was eventually avoided through an agreed national pay settlement, we could not conclude our financial planning for the year until we knew the outcome of the pay negotiations.

The time pressures we faced were incredibly challenging and highlight a key issue we face: that is the need to plan our budget annually rather than taking a more strategic budget planning approach over a three or four-year period. The short-term savings options we identified are set out below and more detail can be found in our Operational Changes Information Pack.

The CRIM provided us with a detailed understanding of how community risk is changing in Scotland and enabled us to build an evidence-based approach to identify where change to SFRS resources (people and assets) across our station network could be made.

Based on our evidence-led modelling, and to assist in the amelioration of our budget pressures during 2023, we have temporarily removed 10 second or third appliances from multi pump stations that will have the least impact on community safety across Scotland.

Aligned to this we have implemented changes identified in our Operational Strategy to our high reach appliances, placing them in the most strategic locations where they can provide more optimised and effective community safety on a national basis. We have also amended the crewing for water rescue at Polmadie Community Fire Station so that it is more in line with all other water rescue stations throughout Scotland.

From 1 July 2023, we introduced a change to how we respond to Automatic Fire Alarms as part of the modernisation of our Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS) policy. Initial analysis is showing that we are attending 55-60 fewer false alarms per day – more than a 50% reduction. As well as creating additional capacity within the Service, this also reduces the number of journeys our crews make under blue light conditions, improving road safety and reducing our carbon output.

3.3. 2024 and beyond

The RSR set out an indicative flat cash budget position for the Service until 2026/27 and we initially estimated total savings of £36.5m would be required of the Service.

The SFRS budget is set on an annual basis by SG and we are legally required to deliver a balanced budget each financial year. The SFRS Board approved an annual resource budget for 2023/24 of £308.133million for resource and £34million for our capital which reflected core capital funding of £32.5million and the potential of an additional £1.5million ring fenced funding for net zero projects.

As detailed at 3.2 above, to achieve a balanced position for 2023/24 £11million of savings were identified and included in the budget for this year. These savings will be delivered through our Strategic Service Review Programme (SSRP) covering all elements of our service provision.

As outlined above, some temporary changes have been made this year in respect of second and third appliances which are based at our multi-pump stations.

If changes of this scale were to be made permanent following stakeholder consultation, the TOM for wholetime firefighters could be reduced by 166 posts. Such a reduction would lead to annual savings of up to £9.8million. However, as our figures show below this is well below the predicted level of savings we require to make based on current financial modelling.

Our central planning scenario suggests that next year (2024/25) we will require resource budget savings of between £14.1million to £26.5million on top of the £11million savings for 2023/24. Over the four-year RSR period cumulative savings of between £37million and £48.4million will be required but this will vary in line with pay and inflation pressures.

Financial Scenarios	Savings 2024/25 £M's (No change to TOM)	Savings 2024/25 £M's (Reduce TOM by 166)
Upper	£36.0	£23.3
Central	£26.5	£14.1
Lower	£23.4	£11.1



4. THE SFRS ESTATE

Our estate is largely not fit for purpose and the problem is getting worse. Our assets are worth around £0.5 billion comprising land and buildings, including 357 fire stations, 1,620 fleet vehicles and tens of thousands of items of operational equipment.

The SFRS Property and Fleet estate has an insurmountable backlog in capital spend requirements and needs critical investment to ensure that we have the right stations, training facilities and vehicles fit for the 21st century to support evolving community risk including the impacts of climate change.

Our core capital funding has remained at £32.5million for the last seven years. As a minimum we need at least £60million per annum in investment in our assets. The lack of increased funding and reduction in real terms not only impacts our ability to modernise our assets but increases the pressure on our resource budget as more reactive maintenance is required to fix problems in our ageing estate. Our required budget for maintenance is £15million and the Service has only been able to allocate £10million per annum, thereby adding £5 million to the maintenance backlog which has an adverse effect on the planned to reactive maintenance ratio.

Ensuring we have the right resources at the right location is key for both our response and prevention activities. We also need modern training facilities to support training for new and emerging risks. To help address the challenges of our investment needs against a limited capital programme, the SFRS Board approved a Risk Based Approach to investment. The latest report highlights that 44.7% of the operational property estate is in poor or bad condition, and in terms of suitability 75.5% of the operational estate is classed as poor or bad. Around 61% of our buildings are over 30 years old. While priority is given to the most urgent needs, our current capital funding means it will take years to resolve urgent problems while the condition and suitability of our estate continues to deteriorate.

We are committed to prioritising investment in those stations affected by Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete, (RAAC) roof panel problems. This form of construction was common in the 1960s through to the 1980s and now brings a risk of roof collapse as the concrete ages. We have 14 stations which have RAAC roofs, and they are key stations within our network. Since becoming aware of the issue in 2019, we have taken remedial actions to protect firefighters in those stations but without permanent improvements or rebuilds neither we nor our partners, who share many of those facilities with us, or the communities who also make use of our buildings will be able to do so safely in the future.

At the same time, we recognise the growing evidence of the health risks associated with exposure to a range of contaminants for firefighters. We have established an Executive-led, cross-Service working group to manage this issue and we will continue to work closely with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) as we do so. This issue is of vital importance to us and to the safety of firefighters. But we need to invest in - and modernise - our estate. In simple terms we need to establish in our stations 'clean' and 'dirty' work zones and deploy new technology and working practices in managing potential exposure to contaminants to protect the health of firefighters.

4.1 Modernising the Estate

The SFRS has, rightly, set out its ambition to be both an employer of choice and one that reflects more closely the make-up of our communities. To help attract a more diverse set of people to join the Service we need to have modern facilities. However, over 100 stations have minimum toilet facilities and no dedicated drying area, no rest or canteen area. Over 120 stations are without a dedicated locker room and over 150 have insufficient showering facilities. Most concerning of all 282 stations lack proper dignified facilities and none of our stations are properly designed to manage contaminant issues. In the short term we simply do not have the budget to address these issues.

To help in our efforts to improve the property estate, including controlling the spread of contaminants and providing dignified facilities, we are exploring innovative design options based on modern methods of construction using modular building technology. This is essentially a building that can be prefabricated offsite, and provides a modern, carbon neutral, contaminant safe and low-cost community fire station. This is particularly appropriate for rural and island stations. The design concept is such that if other community services require space or accommodation, additional modules can be added to the initial fire station at low cost. Building these new stations will require investment and in

conjunction with the Scottish Futures Trust and our partners, we are producing a business case to seek additional investment for this project.

Based on community risk assessments and following full public consultation, there is the potential to move, merge or close some stations across a locality. The income this could potentially generate, if we are allowed to retain the capital receipts, would be reinvested into our plans to modernise our estate and wider Service. However, this is not a quick solution and we already know that would not be sufficient to fully address our capital backlog.

To ensure that we get maximum public value from our estate, we also share our buildings with other public service partners and communities. To date we have 65 stations being shared with the Scottish Ambulance Service, Police Scotland and others. We want to continue to expand on this and make our stations public service hubs that are fit for that purpose. We also regularly share our training sites with partners either for their own use, when our premises are more suitable than their own, or for multi-agency exercising.

We know that many other public services face similar investment needs. We believe that investment in our plans would also help meet those wider demands too. The nature of our Service is such that we need to retain a physical presence across Scotland to respond quickly to communities when the need arises. As part of the modernisation of our estate, we would also look to share those assets with our partners; enabling them to work in partnership with us and others while retaining their presence in the same communities. We want our community fire stations to become full community resilience hubs hosting a range of public and other services. By investing in this community asset concept, we believe that it makes economic sense and will provide better value for money to Scotland. But even more importantly, this would support the building of community resilience and provide a base for a wider array of public services to remain within local communities, helping to improve wellbeing.

In that sense a modernised fire service would become a true community anchor for wider public service reform.



5. THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The need to respond to the climate emergency is a key priority for SFRS and our Service Delivery model needs to adapt to this. Scotland is likely to see more wildfire and flooding incidents in both rural and urban areas because of climate change. In much of Scotland, we are likely to see prolonged periods of heightened risk of wildfires as the effects of the climate emergency materialise.

As part of the SFRS Wildfire Strategy, we have provided additional vehicles, equipment, training and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in a risk based and tiered model across Scotland. This enhances the existing model for dealing with this challenging incident type and has incorporated the latest thinking and developments in this field. The wildfire specific PPE that has been provided as part of this strategy is currently deployed to the 25 strategically situated stations identified in the tiered approach, however providing this PPE to all personnel if budgets allow will be an ongoing consideration.

In those periods of prolonged wildfire risk, we will also have to explore the implications of fighting such fires while being largely dependent upon On Call firefighters across large parts of the country. Extended periods fighting wildfires will have implications for them in their primary employment. Therefore, the modernisation of the On Call Service which we initiated in recent years will have to be sustained and will require further investment.

We will also see more extreme rainfall patterns across Scotland with heightened risks of flooding in many cities, towns and villages. In working with our partners, we will need to identify which critical national infrastructure sites, public services, high risk commercial premises and households are most vulnerable to the impacts of flooding. When these events occur, we need to be able to swiftly respond to protect those communities and households over prolonged periods and likely with multiple events occurring concurrently. As with wildfires we need to ensure our firefighters are appropriately trained and equipped to support people during these emergencies. The challenge of the climate emergency is real, is materialising now, and requires us to continue investing in our Service Delivery model to ensure that we can respond appropriately.

We also have to play our part in reducing our energy use and other carbon emitting activities across our estate and our fleet. Investment in our aging estate is key to reducing our energy consumption and the Service requires significant ongoing investment to have a realistic chance of meeting the Scottish Government's net zero targets. In 2020 we set out [our plans in our Climate Change Response Plan 2045](#), which is supported by our [Energy and Carbon Strategy](#). In support of our actions, SG have made additional ring-fenced funding available to us and other public services to help meet our energy and carbon reduction commitments. But the size and scale of investment required to meet our targets is significant. Our Carbon Management Plan 2020-25 estimated a need for £48 million to decarbonise our activities over the five-year period, however due to inflation this figure is expected to be closer to £60 million. To date we have invested £11.5 million. New technology will play a part in helping us to further reduce our energy consumption in our estate but as highlighted above our estate is old and difficult to bring up to modern environmental standards.

We have made significant progress in decarbonising our light fleet by introducing electric powered vehicles and to support that we are building a joint charging network with our Blue Light partners. However, due to the nature of our heavy fleet, which accounts for over one third of our total carbon footprint, we are severely restricted in our options to reduce these emissions. New technology to replace our reliance on diesel-fuelled vehicles is progressing but it is slow to develop in the wider market, presents significant operational challenges, and is expensive to acquire. As a result, our estate will have to be net zero by 2030 in order to meet SG's 2030 target of a 75% reduction of emissions against our baseline.



6. SERVICE DELIVERY CHANGES

If we cannot change our operating model, we will find it progressively more difficult to make our saving requirements and adapt to the changing risks across our communities. Furthermore, failure to change will compromise our ability to identify reinvestment from within the Service. Modernising our Service Delivery model in conjunction with our assets is the key to both the financial and operational sustainability of the Service.

Our work to better understand changing community risk in Scotland and what that might mean for our Service Delivery model and station footprint predates the RSR pressures. The Service needs to adapt and modernise to meet the changing needs and risks of our communities.

For the last few years, we have been building our knowledge of changing community risk across the country and developing plans for our Service Delivery model. By using the CRIM, we will explore not just where we need to locate stations and resources but how we crew our appliances and operate from our stations; this applies to both Wholetime and On Call services.

We will explore options around changes to crewing models that might result in proposals to move from a single crewing model for the whole of Scotland to models that are appropriate to the level of the risk facing local communities. There are potential options to change the number of and crewing arrangements for appliances in some stations. We will also explore options for where we place specialist equipment and skills in our stations to ensure they provide maximum value to the communities who need them most.

We remain committed to working in partnership with representative bodies to develop the role of the firefighter in Scotland to encompass wider life-threatening emergency responses and contribute further to preventing risk and harm.

To achieve this, we need to renegotiate the employment contract and role map of firefighters with their representative bodies. We will further need to invest in training and equipment to support our firefighters to take on new roles. But we are clear that the benefits to the people of Scotland in us doing so would be significant and the potential financial savings across the wider public service system would also be significant.

To sustain our service delivery model, the Service will continue to use the CRIM to identify where we can deliver change, safely, across our three Service Delivery Areas (SDAs) in the North, West and East of Scotland. We know delivering change, even with a strong risk assessed evidence base will be challenging, complex and time consuming. While there are some areas where reductions can be safely made there are other areas which we know require investment to enhance the current levels of provision.

Due to our existing structure, which has already been streamlined through reform, the only real option we have is to reduce firefighter numbers.

To achieve our anticipated savings of £14.1m next year we would need to reduce our firefighter posts by 339 – the equivalent of an additional 18 second appliances.

If we only pursue those areas where reductions can be made, we believe we will compromise the safety of Scotland's communities to a level which we cannot in good conscience support.

7. IMPACT OF FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

7.1 Impact on planned initiatives

We are committed to using our full organisational capacity and capability to modernise our Service. However, within the existing resource and capital envelope available to us we need to make hard choices in how we prioritise our budgets. With more investment we can achieve significantly more, but as it stands, we have had to prioritise developments while balancing our budget. The key reprioritisation steps we have taken to date are set out below.

The modernisation of our business systems is a priority for the Service to enable us to work better and in more efficient ways. We need to invest in core business support systems such as our People, Payroll, Finance, Training (PPFT) systems. We initiated a major project intended to modernise our PPFT systems and redesign how our support functions operate. This work has had to be delayed in part through cost estimates to replace our aging systems. Consequently, we have scaled back the scope of the programme and are seeking collaboration opportunities with other partners to see if we can secure improvements in how we work while reducing our operating cost base.

Our Corporate Support Services accounts for around 6% of expenditure and provide critical support to Operational Service Delivery. We are however seeking to improve how our support services work by streamlining processes, reducing duplication, automating where we can and through that seek to generate savings. We are exploring these issues jointly with Police Scotland, and where appropriate other public services, with an intention of building collaborative solutions that add further value to the internal improvement work that we are undertaking.

As detailed above in recent years we have sought to reach agreement with the FBU about developing the role of firefighters to take on wider prevention and emergency response, including medical response and to reflect that in both the firefighter employment contract and their pay. Given the financial constraints we are faced with this potential development has been delayed. Without funding to support agreed changes in firefighters' terms and conditions of employment we cannot bring this about. An Outline Business

Case setting out this development in more detail, including the costs and benefits of the proposal, was submitted to SG with the backing of the FBU, but has not been progressed.

We remain committed to reducing our carbon footprint but investment in decarbonisation of our activities and building a blue light electric vehicle infrastructure is not progressing at the rate we would like. Due to the wider operational pressures we are facing, and the need to invest our limited budgets in other areas, we are simply not investing enough to reach net zero. We have not met our targets on the five-year climate change response plan due to lack of investment. We are faced with the eternal conundrum of meeting today's priorities at the expense of the longer term. Ideally, we wish to do both.

To help meet our budgetary pressures we are slowing down investment in our Fleet replacement. We have 1620 vehicles within our fleet and of that 577 are older than their planned replacement age. This means 29% of our light fleet, 39% of our heavy fleet and 56% of our specialist vehicles are older than planned. To free up limited capital investment, we are now slowing down our replacement programmes which, in the years to come, will lead to maintenance and other costs increasing within the Service.

As we noted above the SFRS estate is large, ageing and deteriorating. Our minor repairs programme has been slowed down to enable us to use our limited resources to meet our most significant pressures. This impacts on staff perceptions of the Service and on morale as minor repairs to things like windows are put off. These 'hygiene' factors in the estate are important but we simply need to sacrifice them to pay more focussed attention on the more pressing concerns we have. As noted above we have prioritised stations with RAAC panel roof issues but on current levels of funding it will take over 10 years to deal with this problem, during which time the 14 sites remain subject to an ongoing quarterly inspection regime at a cost of £100,000 per annum to monitor condition, whilst the risk of further deterioration increases significantly. This results in limited opportunities for the Service to invest in other much needed replacements and refurbishments across our property portfolio.

7.2. SFRS Contingency Savings Options

The SFRS operates on an annualised budget and as an Other Significant Public Body we cannot hold reserves and any borrowing we incur counts against SG's borrowing and therefore requires SG authorisation. These restrictive financial management arrangements mean contingency planning is incredibly difficult to achieve. It also means our ability to plan changes and reinvest in the Service to generate savings over several financial years is compromised. The need to function on an annualised basis means our savings currently must be planned and delivered in year and consequently long-term planning becomes very challenging.

This is why we have made changes to our operating model in 2023/24 to help balance the budget for the year without unduly increasing community risk. That approach is not viable in perpetuity. As we have set out above, we believe that through modernisation, supported by an ability for us to reinvest internally generated savings and with modest additional investment, we can do more to protect and enhance community safety and wellbeing. We firmly believe that this is the route to a more sustainable Service that will continue to meet the challenges generated by changes in community risk across Scotland. If we must keep making in-year savings we anticipate that community safety will be compromised.

The only real contingency plan open to us is the modernisation of the Service or we will, by force of circumstance, end up in a scenario whereby we are retrenching our Service provision across Scotland. That would bring additional risks to community safety, and it is not a road that we wish to go down.



8. CONCLUSION

In realising savings, we have placed maintaining community and firefighter safety at the heart of our decision making. However, the more we need to find in-year savings and the longer the period over which we will have to make those savings, the more difficult it becomes to maintain that commitment.

The immediate in year savings to ensure we can balance our 2023/24 budget have generated considerable public, political and stakeholder debate and subsequent pressure on the Service to reconsider our actions. In the communities directly impacted by the temporary removal of appliances, the alterations to our high reach provision and the amendments to the water rescue crewing model in Polmadie in Glasgow, stakeholders have made their concerns known to the Service.

Following our announcement of the operational changes for 2023/24 we have undertaken more than 100 engagements with local elected members across affected areas and received in excess of 60 media and Freedom of Information enquiries. We were also asked by three Local Authority scrutiny committees to meet with the full council in their area to explain the changes we were implementing. As part of our engagement approach, we published details of how we had arrived at these operational changes and met with those councils who requested that of us.

The level of concern generated illustrates the high value that communities and other stakeholders place in the services provided by SFRS. This therefore makes change as part of a savings programme very complex and challenging whilst also ensuring we can deliver balanced budgets on an annual basis.

Despite these challenges, we remain committed to modernising our Service because it is the right thing to do to meet the changing needs of communities across the country. But we do not underestimate the challenge. Unless we can plan and implement Service modernisation over time, our ability to reach a sustainable financial model that provides the platform for our Service Delivery model to meet the changing risks across communities will be compromised. And, without investment it is our firm belief that the changes we will be forced to implement, may ultimately come at the cost of public safety.



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FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Working together for a safer Scotland

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