

# Fire Brigade Union (FBU) submission of 5 December 2023

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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