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David Linden MSP
Deputy Convener
Criminal Justice Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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Date: 2 September 2026

Dear Convener,

I write in my capacity as Executive Council Member for the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in Scotland to highlight key priorities for FBU members who account for over 80% of employees in operational roles within the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).

Over recent years the FBU have provided written submissions to the Criminal Justice Committee (CJC) and given evidence to the committee in hearings covering pre budget scrutiny and the recently concluded SFRS Service Delivery Review (SDR). This evidence built upon the FBU's previous submissions to the SDR consultation process, the SFRS review of previous strategic plans, and pre-engagement for the 2025 – 2028 strategic plan.

Within the Justice portfolio the SFRS budget accounts for a comparatively small proportion of the overall budget, (£436 million compared to £1.7 billion for police) but, as has been witnessed in recent weeks and months at emergency incidents such as the fire on Glasgow's Union Street, the Ladybank landfill fire in Fife, the former Debenhams store on Edinburgh's Princes Street, and of course the major wildfires that raged across the Cairngorms and Arthurs seat, it is Scotland's firefighters that provide Scotland's insurance policy when fires and other emergency rescue incidents occur.

The FBU have long campaigned for increased investment in the SFRS to allow the service to meaningfully invest in addressing the capital deficit that currently exceeds £800 million, and to end the continued erosion of firefighter numbers, with Scotland having lost over 1200 firefighter posts since the single service was created in 2013. Now, with the Fire Board ratifying the reduction of 166 posts when they made their decisions on the SFRS SDR in June this year, this long-term erosion has been further compounded.

The FBU have sought to take a pragmatic approach and recognise that the loss of much of Scotland's heavy industry and manufacturing base and economic flight into city centres from remote rural communities, accompanied by advances in



technology, have led to changed risk for a number of local communities across Scotland.

However, changed, and changing risk does not necessarily mean reduced risk. The large high-profile fires we have seen recently demonstrate the incredible work Scotland's firefighters undertake when they are called upon, but they also expose the inherent vulnerability in a system that has been cut so lean that firefighters are increasingly breaching their own contractual terms and conditions, working time regulations, and health and safety when such foreseeable large scale incidents occur.

The SFRS face challenges on multiple fronts that are often hidden from public view. Culture, training, recruitment and retention in control rooms and within the retained duty system (RDS) that provides the primary emergency cover to 80% of Scotland's landmass in remote rural and island communities and a crumbling estate. Indeed, SFRS own statistics highlight that over 100 stations do not have the minimum toilet facilities, dedicated drying facilities or rest and canteen facilities, with over 150 with insufficient showering facilities and a further 13 stations without a water supply. Additionally, 282 stations do not have any form of dignified changing area, and according to the SFRS *Strategic Asset Management Plan: Property 2023-28* no stations have physical contaminants control measures in place. Overall, SFRS assess that 15 of their stations are in a bad condition and 218 are in poor condition.

There continue to be significant concerns about the guilty knowledge both the SFRS and the Scottish Government have in relation to firefighter cancers and diseases. Groundbreaking research funded by the FBU evidenced that firefighters can be up to 6 times more likely to contract cancers, at a younger age, than the general population due to accumulative exposure to fire and other contaminants throughout their careers. There are steps that can be taken to mitigate some of these exposures and the subsequent risks, however again, SFRS are ill equipped to implement many of these measures due to financial constraints that prevent SFRS being able to implement a relief strategy that allows firefighters to shower within an hour of exposure to toxic and carcinogenic fire effluents (smoke), or to ensure firefighters have access to appropriate showering and toileting facilities on many of Scotland's fire stations.

Ultimately, the issues faced by the SFRS require a level of funding that has not been delivered in any of the 13 years of the single service. Historically, the CJC have successfully advocated for increased investment in the SFRS. However, the increases in funding over recent years have been outstripped by inflation and other costs faced by the SFRS. The SFRS submission to the CJC pre budget scrutiny process set out that they are on track to deliver over £900m in savings from reform by 2027/28, substantially exceeding the £328m set out in the Financial Memorandum to the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act. The FBU dispute that these have been savings, as previously set out, SFRS have a capital backlog of over £800 million and have cut over 1200 frontline firefighter posts whilst continuing to run a vacancy factor of 30% in support staff roles.



The FBU would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and members of the committee out with a formal evidence session to discuss the current and future budget pressures SFRS face as well as considerations on the response and resilience across Scotland in relation to large scale protracted incidents such as those we have seen in the Cairngorms and our major city centres in recent months.

In previous years, we have held informal round table discussions with members of the CJC, and are happy to offer this forum again, particularly for new members of the committee, if this would assist in allowing members to explore and understand any of the issues in more detail.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colin Brown".

Colin Brown
Executive Council Member
Fire Brigades Union
Scotland