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Criminal Justice Committee

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Wednesday 25 November 2026

Session 7

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CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
13th Meeting 2026, Session 7

CONVENER

*David Linden (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Amanda Bland (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Ind)
*Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green)
*Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
*Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
*Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Colin Brown (Fire Brigades Union)
Michael Bruce (Scottish Wildfire Forum)
Jon Henderson (Scottish Fire and Rescue Service)
Don McGillivray (Scottish Government)
Lisa McGuinness (Scottish Government)

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Criminal Justice Committee

Wednesday 25 November 2026

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:01]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (David Linden): Good morning, and welcome to the 13th meeting in 2026 of the Criminal Justice Committee. I have received no apologies.

Our first item of business is a decision on whether to take item 3 in private. Do members agree to take item 3 in private?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Wildfire Resilience

10:01

The Convener: Our next item of business is an evidence session on wildfire resilience in Scotland. Earlier this month, the committee agreed to undertake scrutiny of the issue, with a focus on emergency response arrangements, operational preparedness, workforce implications and the resources that are available to responding agencies. Wildfires are an increasingly significant issue, so it is important that we focus on it and I am grateful to colleagues for agreeing to do so.

I am delighted to say that we are joined in the room by Jon Henderson, who is director of prevention at the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Joining us virtually is Colin Brown, who is an executive council member at the Fire Brigades Union. You are both incredibly welcome, and we are grateful to you for taking the time to join us. We are quite tight for time. We have two panels, so we will try to keep our questions brief. If the answers can be brief, as well as informative, that would be helpful.

I will start with a question for Mr Henderson relating to the challenges that we saw over the summer. Has the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service been able to put a figure on the overtime bill that has arisen as a result of that?

Jon Henderson (Scottish Fire and Rescue Service): Good morning, everybody. I recognise that you have asked us to be succinct, convener, but I might go through a couple of quick points and then come back to try to answer the question, if that is okay.

The wildfires in Scotland during 2026 placed significant demands on our service and the communities that we serve. I put on record my thanks and appreciation for the hundreds of firefighters who responded to those incidents, many of whom are on-call or volunteer firefighters who selflessly gave their time. They worked exceptionally hard in exceptionally challenging conditions over long periods of time, and that deserves recognition. The response was supported by many others, and I express my genuine appreciation and thanks to the local communities, land managers, partner organisations and agencies that worked alongside us and supported our crews.

The response to the incidents demonstrated again that dealing effectively with wildfires is a shared endeavour and partnership work. As such, we have written to all local resilience partnerships and asked them to consider how prepared they are for the threat of wildfire and of climate-related incidents in future, and how the SFRS can support

them to develop local prevention and preparedness plans in that area.

As a service, we are a listening organisation. We recognise that we do not always get everything right, which means reflecting honestly on our experiences and listening to our people and partners. The work that has been ongoing since before the Dava incident last year and through the Cairngorms incident this year has seen continued investment in specialist equipment, personal protective equipment and training.

We are working alongside partners and the Scottish Government on the wildfire strategic action plan. We now have 37 stations with specialist wildfire PPE and equipment. A further three stations—Grantown, Nairn and Inverness—will come online with PPE in this calendar year, and we plan to do the same at a further six stations in this financial year. We have strengthened wildfire assessment with a contracted tool, and we now have the ability to place helicopters on standby.

Climate-driven events such as wildfires are growing in number and are an increasingly complex challenge for Scotland. We cannot address that challenge alone, and we have to recognise that we do not have all the answers. However, we will continue to learn from the significant incidents that we faced this year.

On the question about this year's overtime bill, the cost for aerial assets—helicopters—was approximately £300,000 to £305,000 and, for overtime, we are looking at running into the best part of £1 million-plus once we have calculated everything. That is for a combination of overtime and pay for the on-call firefighters who responded.

The Convener: That is helpful. The overtime bill for the SFRS was £4.5 million in 2021-22, and it was almost £6 million in 2025-26. Is it a fair expectation that, given all the challenges, by the time that we get to the end of this financial year, the overtime bill will have gone up further?

Jon Henderson: Yes, although I do not have the specific figures in front of me. The overtime bill is for a combination of things; it is not just wildfire related, although wildfire obviously has an impact on it. There was a significant wildfire for 35 days, for which there will be a significant response bill.

The Convener: Excellent. That brings me to the issue of staffing resource, which has been well rehearsed. The committee has produced what I think is a strong report on staffing challenges, and, during pre-budget scrutiny, Colin Brown mentioned the loss of 1,250 firefighter posts and the withdrawal of appliances. As I understand it, the retained duty service has a 31 per cent vacancy rate. Are the challenges that we see in that significant overtime bill a direct consequence of the fact that you do not have enough full-time staff or retained duty service firefighters in place?

Jon Henderson: There are a few parts to that, as you can imagine. Colin Brown and I work closely on supporting on-call availability and appliance availability in a general sense. A lot of the numbers that you talk about relate to what I would call on-call. Retained duty system numbers are built from the legacy services. They are projections from how many personnel were required by legacy services to staff an on-call fire station; those numbers are not necessarily the same numbers that are required moving forward, because they are from a moment in time.

Recruitment remains a challenge in the on-call area across the United Kingdom. The on-call system was designed at a time when people lived and worked in the same location, but that happens less regularly than it used to. However, we cannot fault our on-call crews on their dedication or the amount that they do, and we work closely with the FBU, other union bodies and our staff networks to support on-call availability, whether that is about contractual issues or working conditions.

The Convener: Am I right in thinking that, due to recruitment and retention challenges, somewhere in the region of 200 of Scotland's 345 on-call fire appliances are off the road or unavailable on any given day?

Jon Henderson: That picture changes daily or even hourly. We and our on-call colleagues are keen to have as many appliances available as possible. Key to that is the work that we are doing with Colin Brown and other colleagues from the FBU on ensuring that we have the working conditions and contractual conditions that allow us to proactively project availability and support on-call availability. That overall conversation definitely feeds into our service delivery review conversation, whereby, as an organisation, we are trying to ensure that we have resources in the correct place—that is, where they are needed now and into the future, instead of where they have been located historically.

The Convener: Before I come to Colin Brown to touch on staffing and workforce issues, I note that you mentioned appliances, and I want to come to an issue that was covered a bit in the media: the eight Ford Ranger ultralight pumping units that the Fire and Rescue Service bought back in 2023. As I understand it, they are still not active, and, obviously, they were not deployed for the wildfires. My understanding is that they can be driven off road and into tight spaces, and we know that there are issues with terrain. What is the situation with those eight vehicles that cost the taxpayer up to £1 million? Are they now being used?

Jon Henderson: We have had really positive conversations recently about ensuring that they can be deployed for a variety of incident types. We have had specific conversations with the Fire and Rescue Services Association, which is a union body that represents many of our on-call firefighters at many of the stations where those vehicles are located. We always want to work together, and we want to listen to potential concerns, to ensure that we get the most out of the vehicles. We want those vehicles to be deployed to as many incident types as possible.

The Convener: Just to clarify, did the taxpayer spend the best part of £1 million on eight vehicles that were not used while Scotland was on fire during the summer?

Jon Henderson: The investment is really positive for the service. We are investing in equipment and vehicles for our workforce, and we are working with the workforce to try to ensure that those vehicles can be used in as many ways as possible. As you have said, they were not used in the Cairngorms incident—we had other equipment that was being used.

The Convener: Have they ever been used?

Jon Henderson: We are trying to get the vehicles on the run as things stand. We have had some really positive conversations recently, and some of the vehicles are now based at stations.

The Convener: Just for clarification, the taxpayer spent almost £1 million on those eight vehicles three years ago, and they have never been deployed or been operational. Is that right?

Jon Henderson: I do not believe that there has been an operational deployment that they have been used for so far, but I can check that.

The Convener: I know that Audit Scotland is looking into that issue, too. What I would say is that the committee has been a strong ally of the Fire and Rescue Service with regard to the £800 million capital backlog, but I think that we would have questions if £1 million of taxpayers' money has been spent on eight vehicles that have been sat in their wrappers for three years.

I will bring in Colin Brown to respond to the issues that I raised in my second question on overtime and staff resources in relation to the retained service.

Colin Brown (Fire Brigades Union): Good morning. I apologise for not being with you in person, but thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

I start by echoing Jon Henderson's comments. Our members—our firefighters—across Scotland did amazing work this summer. That was mirrored across the United Kingdom, which saw some of the most significant and large-scale fires that we have had in the post-war period. The levels of work required were really significant.

We have been campaigning on the issue of staffing costs for a considerable time. It is not adequate just to keep removing and reducing head count in response to budget pressures that the service faces and then wonder why we have issues with resourcing such incidents. Although the service—our firefighters, those in control, FBU members and others—did a fantastic job of resourcing that incident, and although the incident commanders did good work, too, we were ultimately relying on firefighters to go well above and beyond their contractual obligations and, many times, to breach their contracts.

I can give an example. Such incidents are a challenge for our retained duty system firefighters who had to travel from Helmsdale to attend the incident at Nethy Bridge. That is 100 miles away, and it takes two and a half hours to get there. A positive view is that it shows the pan-Scotland resourcing of incidents, but the fact is that those individuals are primarily employed in their local community, and their primary employers generally release them to protect their local community, not to go two and a half hours away from their community for days on end and for protracted periods. They leave a gap in cover in their community, because their employers are gracious enough to allow them to come off the run.

Also, firefighters in the retained duty system lose money, because they are not earning in their primary employment. Our members are being asked to work the time that they spent protecting places in Scotland such as the Cairngorms from wildfires, or lose their holidays.

In the face of those challenges, we need to think differently about how we resource incidents and how the retained duty system fits into the modern, forward-facing Scotland of the future. Money is not the sole answer, but it is a significant issue.

The Convener: Thank you. I am going to bring in Pauline McNeill, who has some questions.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Good morning. How does the service link up with private contractors to provide water-bombing helicopters? The issue arose during the wildfires in the summer, and I note that, according to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice's statement,

"additional … water bombing would have been helpful to supplement the resources that commercial operators … were already providing."—[*Official Report*, 3 September 2026; c 28.]

The cabinet secretary went on to say:

"That is why we requested military assistance for that specific purpose, at the request of the … Fire and Rescue

Service."

In addition, he said that

"we had been made aware that the UK military did not have … assets in the UK."

Can you say any more about that? Has there been any further discussion about how those assets might be freed up if we face the same thing in the future? Unfortunately, that looks very likely.

10:15

Jon Henderson: I will briefly circle back to the issue of the Ford Rangers. Part of the reason for the delay was the fact that those vehicles were subject to a manufacturer's recall. However, I absolutely take your point, which still stands. The vehicles are fit for purpose, and we are keen to be able to use them operationally.

When it comes to aerial firefighting capability, we now have a contract in place that means that the Fire and Rescue Service has the ability to place helicopters on standby. We are very fortunate to have three providers that are based in Scotland, two of which have very good water-bombing capability. We have the ability to place those helicopters on standby when our wildfire danger assessment indicates that it is necessary to do that. We can have them on standby at their base location or we can deploy them to suitable locations, depending on where the danger assessments relate to.

With regard to military support and the UK Government's recent announcements, we are actively engaging on how we could access that support, what it would look like and what processes are in place for that. We do not have full details on that at the moment.

Pauline McNeill: Before I follow up on that, I will bring in Colin Brown.

Colin Brown: Large-scale wildfires are not new, but our thinking needs to change, because the scale of them is growing significantly. There are issues. I believe that the airspace over the Cairngorms could support only four aerial assets operating at the same time, so it is not simply a case of throwing more resources at the problem.

As a public sector union, we have concerns about the outsourcing of that capability. I am not suggesting that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service should have a fleet of helicopters, but is spending money on private industry the best use of resource when it is possible for military aid to civil authorities—MACA—arrangements to be made? We should perhaps look at the use of civil contingencies, which allow partner organisations, whether the UK military or similar bodies, to provide taxpayer-funded resource. That would avoid our having to spend money on private industry. However, that is a much wider conversation for others to have.

Although the aerial assets that operate in the Cairngorms were incredibly valuable in the summer and undoubtedly turned the situation around in dealing with the fire—we know that from some of the reports that we have had—it is necessary to have boots on the ground to put out deep-seated fires that have made their way into the peat and the undergrowth.

Other considerations include the communications and the training that are required alongside aerial assets, which need to be much more closely linked. It has been reported to us that helicopters were deployed without the pilots having clear detail of where the water bombing was needed. They were not able to communicate with crews on the ground because, at times, there was an absence of interoperable communications. That creates a risk of helicopters water bombing areas where firefighters are actively working or where volunteers from the likes of the RSPB are on the hillside. An awful lot of work needs to be done to join up those aspects.

In a previous session with the committee, I was asked about the use of new technology and the potential use of drones. The deployment of such technology in the service in Scotland is likely to evolve. However, the operators of aerial assets that were involved in water bombing would need to be aware of any drones that were operating in that environment.

The issue is multifaceted, and an awful lot needs to be considered as we move forward.

Pauline McNeill: That is really helpful.

I will go back to Jon Henderson. Colin Brown has said that one lesson that needs to be learned relates to communication and training, so that we can ensure that we use the resource in the right place. Has there been any development on that since the summer?

Jon Henderson: There has been significant development in a number of areas of wildfire response in Scotland over the past three or four years. As I said, it is a partnership endeavour. We have a variety of expertise in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, other Government agencies and the private sector. I recognise—

Pauline McNeill: Can I stop you there, Jon? I am interested specifically in the lessons that have been learned from the summer. Colin Brown said that one of the issues with regard to aerial water bombing is that the right communications were not always in place to enable the right places to be targeted. I presume that some discussion has taken place since then about how to change that.

Jon Henderson: As Colin Brown said, any response to such incidents is multifaceted. Helicopters play a role in that response, and how helicopters are directed is key to that. Helicopters were used extensively in dealing with the Cairngorms incident. I refer back to my statement at the start—we are constantly learning about what needs to be done and how we can continue to develop those relationships. The helicopter companies that we have been working with have been absolutely fantastic, as has the dialogue between us. We continue to work together—

Pauline McNeill: It is important to note that.

As I understand it, the issue in the summer, which we heard about in the minister's statement, was that, when the UK Government was asked for military support, the assets were not free because they were abroad. Is there any indication that, if we face the same issue next summer and additional capacity is needed—as it was during the Cairngorms fire—the situation will change?

Jon Henderson: Don McGillivray, in the second evidence session, might be better placed to answer that question with specifics about the conversation with the minister. The UK Government's announcement, which I referred to, seemed to suggest that there will be additional capacity in the system, although we are unclear about what that will look like or how we will access it. We are engaging in that conversation.

The elements that are directly within our control—that is, our contractual arrangements with the companies that we work with—have definitely been reinforced and strengthened. The joint training and dialogue as part of that has been very healthy.

The Convener: Mr McGillivray has now had quite good advance notice of a question that he might be asked in the second panel.

I will hand over to Stephen Kerr.

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Let us go back to the matter of the Ford Rangers that were bought three years ago. Ironically, it was a year ago, almost to the day, that Siobhian Brown said that they would be in operation within weeks. I did not quite grasp what you said about the current timescale for their deployment, given that they have been in their wrappers since they were bought, three years ago.

Jon Henderson: We are actively trying to get them on the run. We want them to be on the run.

Stephen Kerr: Is there something wrong with them, so that you cannot get them out of the wrappers?

Jon Henderson: No—the vehicles are fit for purpose.

Stephen Kerr: So, what is the problem?

Jon Henderson: We are in conversation with the rep bodies. We always look to work with our staff bodies to develop—

Stephen Kerr: But they want new equipment, do they not?

Jon Henderson: Yes, they do. We are in conversation about how we can get those vehicles on the run most effectively, how they will be stowed and those sorts of issues.

Stephen Kerr: You must be careful not to undermine the case that we want to make for your having new equipment. If we get you new equipment and you do not use it, that is not an advert for getting you more new equipment. That is what you need, is it not?

Jon Henderson: I completely recognise the point, Mr Kerr. The investment in those vehicles is a significant step towards replacing ageing vehicles in our stations, and we are keen to get them into service.

Stephen Kerr: We have the evidence to suggest that that investment is needed. However, you must deploy them. You cannot have them sitting around for two or three years. A year ago, the minster said that it would take a few weeks; yet, here we are, a year later, and they have still not been deployed.

I will move on to helicopters. The thing about having helicopters on standby is that heatwaves intensify in the south and come north. So, by the time we need them in Scotland, the helicopters in those contracts that you have talked about are probably already in the south. What do the contracts say about our pulling them out of England—if that is where they are—and using them in Scotland?

Jon Henderson: The wildfire danger assessments are not only linked to heat. When the threat of wildfire is high or extremely high, that is not only linked to heat. With a warming climate, we are seeing an increase in wildfires, but there are other factors than heat involved. Our contracts with the helicopter companies have specific terms that allow us to put helicopters on standby.

Stephen Kerr: I know, but I am saying that the helicopters that are on standby might already have been drawn south because their capabilities are needed in the south, and they might then not be available in Scotland. Does the contract specifically say that your requirement pre-empts any other contract for the use of those helicopters at a peak time?

Jon Henderson: The contract that we have in place allows us to prioritise the access to

helicopters and aerial assets. That is what the contract says.

Stephen Kerr: Does that mean that, if they are in England, they will be brought back to Scotland to be used in Scotland?

Jon Henderson: The specifics of how they would be used will likely be different in different incidents. It will always be done with sensible dialogue between ourselves, as the agency contacting helicopter companies—

Stephen Kerr: These are very woolly answers. I just want to know, will we have the helicopters when we need them in Scotland?

Jon Henderson: We have a contract in place—

Stephen Kerr: Is it a yes? Will we have them in Scotland when we need them, ahead of any other demands that there might be on the helicopters?

Jon Henderson: I promise that I am trying to answer—and I am trying not to give a woolly answer.

We have a contract in place with the helicopter companies that allows us to have prioritised access to put them on standby. So, when the danger assessments tell us that we need them, we will be able to access the helicopters.

I will share some information about the actual use of helicopters within the past two years. In the current year, we have used the helicopter at one incident for 34 days, which was at the Cairngorms. In the previous year, we used the helicopter at five incidents for 35 days across the whole of the wildfire season. Therefore, we used it for 34 days this year and 35 days last year.

Stephen Kerr: Just help me. Just say yes or no to this. I understand you to be saying that we have a contract that means that, if we need the helicopters in Scotland, those helicopters—no matter where they are in the rest of the United Kingdom—will be brought back to Scotland and used to tackle a Scottish fire. Is that right?

Jon Henderson: We have a contract in place that—

Stephen Kerr: No, no, no. It is just a yes or a no. Am I understanding that correctly?

Jon Henderson: I am trying to answer your question, Mr Kerr. I promise that I am. We have a contract in place that is designed to do exactly as you have said.

Stephen Kerr: It is designed to do exactly that. Okay. That is interesting. Are you sure about that?

Jon Henderson: I have tried to answer your question.

Stephen Kerr: It is on the record now. The contract matters.

Let us move on. Can the Fire Service sustain a response to two fires on the scale of the Cairngorms incident at the same time and still provide normal emergency cover elsewhere in Scotland?

Jon Henderson: Over the course of the multiple days of the Cairngorms incident, we had a total of 12 wildfires active across the whole of Scotland. We responded to every single one of those wildfires. We also had other significant incidents, including large industrial incidents, in the north of the country at the same time. Being the national service allows us to deploy resources nationally. It allows us to drag an awful lot of resources from all over the country.

Through service delivery review—the committee has obviously seen our budget submissions and our submissions to the CJC—we are in the position of looking to amend our resource profile across the organisation, to ensure that we have the right resources in the right place and that the response is fit for the future. Through the Cairngorms incident and other incidents that were ongoing at the same time, we have shown that we are able to resource multiple incidents at any given moment.

Stephen Kerr: Okay. I think that the answer to my question is that you can maintain an emergency service throughout Scotland and deal with at least two of these major incidents.

Jon Henderson: We have seen our ability to do that. Our ability to do that is demonstrated.

Stephen Kerr: Colin Brown, what is your response to that? Is it your view, on behalf of the firefighters, that we have the ability to fight two major fires in Scotland and also provide that emergency cover?

Colin Brown: There are some real challenges. The reality is that we do not know when and where fires will happen. However, we see indications that these fires are more likely and are happening more regularly.

As I referenced earlier, if we have crews being taken two and a half hours across the country to resource one incident, and if there are two 34-day incidents running at the same time, we will exhaust that resource pretty rapidly. As I said before, firefighters are going well above and beyond: 17 hours on a hillside is not reasonable. All the peripheral elements that go around supporting those incidents, such as the laundry of PPE, would be a real challenge for the service. A wing and a prayer is not really the best way to ensure that Scotland's insurance policy is maintained adequately across the whole of the country.

Stephen Kerr: A wing and a prayer, if we have two major fire incidents like that in the Cairngorms and you need to provide emergency response—that is not a healthy position to be in.

I think that my time is up.

The Convener: You can have one more question.

Stephen Kerr: I will put one more question to Colin Brown. I have lots of questions about safety and communications on the ground—issues have come out of the July experience in relation to that, so please comment freely on that aspect. In addition, if one thing could have been done differently, which would have improved the ability and capability of our response to the fires, what would that have been? Please address any of those issues that you can in the time that I have.

Colin Brown: It requires a change of thinking, including from the FBU side, in relation to some of these elements. We need to be open to ideas, as opposed to being fixed in the systems that we have had in place before. The fixed-duty systems and the RDS elements cause a challenge. People have contracts, which we, quite rightly, will defend to the hilt.

We spoke about the MACA arrangements and the request in that regard, and I do not understand why we are not having the necessary conversations about that right now. When we send emergency group crews to disaster zones around the world to support earthquake relief and so on, the first thing that happens is that they build a tented village where the rescuers can rest, eat and shower, if possible, so that they can operate in a sufficient and adequate manner. Similarly, given that we are now seeing incidents in Scotland that can span a month, we should consider asking members of the crews that we bring in whether they are willing to, for example, spend the next week working every day at the Cairngorms, so that we are not relying on crews travelling up and down the country every day, using additional diesel and bringing into play all of the peripheral elements that start to stack on top of that. That might not be the solution to the situation that we are facing, but I think that we need to have a conversation about how resourcing works.

Stephen Kerr: We did not have that tented village facility in July.

Colin Brown: No. It is not something that has been spoken about.

Stephen Kerr: That is remarkable.

10:30

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Good morning, both of you, and thanks for joining us.

Colin Brown, I want to follow on from Stephen Kerr's line of questioning around firefighter wellbeing. We know about the challenges of prolonged wildfire operations, which include issues related to smoke exposure, fatigue and difficult terrain, challenges around hydration and the need for adequate welfare facilities. You told Stephen Kerr that a change in thinking is needed. Do the current contract arrangements for RDS firefighters and others inhibit us from addressing the welfare issues in the way that we might wish to?

Colin Brown: There are some significant challenges in that regard. Our members consistently report that, although the service has done some good work in partnership with us, as a union, to drive forward the decontamination elements on the back of our DECON campaign, the infrastructure in the remote rural stations and RDS stations in general cannot support the services that are required. The assessment is that there were in the region of 3,977 individual firefighter deployments across that 34-day period, and it is impossible for those stations to sustain the decontamination elements for that level of activity. There probably is no answer that resolves the issues around laundering PPE, showering facilities, giving people adequate time to rest and so on.

We have also had reports that, when some of our RDS members who had been deployed for many hours on a hillside came off the hillside to rest, they were instantly deployed to stand by at another station, in order to provide a degree of fire cover while the whole-time crew were deployed on the hillside, and they were then redeployed to the hillside the next morning, which means that there was no ability to rest.

Although the incident was resourced and was ultimately successfully dealt with, the service needs to learn lessons with regard to those elements. As Jon Henderson said, the service needs to listen to the lived reality of its staff, who went above and beyond—by a country mile—in response to what was asked of them.

Maggie Chapman: You paint a picture of firefighter personnel going above and beyond, and you said that we are living on a wing and a prayer, hoping that there are not multiple serious incidents around the country. The head count point that you raised earlier is one element of the solution, but it is not the only one—you have spoken about some of the other elements. On head count, where do

you see the biggest challenges in creating and sustaining wildfire resilience?

Colin Brown: I will be honest: I do not think that anyone has all the answers to that. In response to the challenges that we have seen across the UK fire and rescue services, the FBU has called for the recruitment of an additional 5,000 firefighters. That is because, across the UK, we have lost in excess of 12,000 firefighters in a 10 to 15-year period—in Scotland, there has been a reduction of 1,200. There is a need for a standing group of firefighters that can be deployed to major incidents when they occur.

Roughly a fifth of our whole-time firefighters are available at any given time, because the SFRS has a five-watch duty system. The issue that we see with the RDS, which Jon Henderson referred to, is that those people have a primary employment. The nature of employment in Scotland and the UK means that people no longer live and work in the same local community to the extent that they did—there is a drift to business centres, with people going back to their rural community in the evenings. In those periods during the day, there are huge gaps in the system. The convener mentioned potentially 200 pumps being unavailable at any given time, and that is the impact that those gaps have. Recruitment will fill some of the gaps, but we must recruit people who are available at the times of day when there are challenges.

Maggie Chapman: Thanks, Colin. That is very clear and helpful.

Jon, following on from that, how does the service ensure that the response to prolonged wildfire incidents is not simply a question of how long you can sustain having individual firefighters work in those difficult conditions? How do we get a shift to new thinking and different ways of planning workforce rotation models and such like?

Jon Henderson: I completely agree with Colin's points about the tented village. My background is in disaster management, so I am very familiar with tented villages. As an organisation, we are completely open to that approach. We are looking to explore different opportunities, different ways of doing things and different shift patterns. As I have said before, in essence, the service delivery review is about ensuring that we have the right resources in the right place, that we are able to deploy them flexibly and that we are not constrained by where resources were located historically, based on historical risks. We are definitely looking to get into that conversation.

Colin made another general point earlier. All these bits are complementary—pardon the terminology, but there are very few silver bullets. It is about complementary systems working together to help one another at any given time. We are working across a variety of areas in constantly looking to improve the service. We are a learning organisation and we want to move things forward, and that is being done across a variety of areas. We are looking to bring together complementary conditions that will allow us to do the things that we need to do.

Maggie Chapman: I have a final question for Jon, following up on the investment in PPE and equipment, which he talked about earlier. Given what we have seen in the previous couple of summers and what we know about the impact of smoke inhalation, heat exposure and prolonged dehydration when firefighters are on the hillside for extended periods of time, are you confident that the service has what it needs to keep firefighters safe, in relation to not only fire but their apparatus, the training that they get and all the equipment that they need? Where are the gaps in that?

Jon Henderson: I promise that I will try to be concise. I have been in the fire service for a little over 20 years now. When I started, we did not think about wildfires particularly and there was very little specialist wildfire PPE. From a standing start, the organisation has invested significant finances in the past three or four years, to the point where, as I have said, we now have 37 stations with PPE and equipment, and it is our intention that a further nine stations will have it in this calendar year and that that number will grow further. Those stations are across Scotland. They are predominantly in the Highlands, as you would expect, but they are also in the Borders, Dumfries and Galloway and other areas.

We are looking to invest in this area. You will have seen our budget submission. I know that the chief and other SFRS colleagues have sat here and talked about what that investment should look like. We have already touched on our investment in PPE, which comes from our capital budget and is the best part of £3 million-plus so far over the past few years. We have talked about the overtime budget and on-call pay, which comes from our resource budget and is in the region of £1 million-plus, as well as the figures for previous years that the convener has set out.

We know that wildfire incidents will not go away and that they will increase in number. We know that the risk of further climate-driven demand and new and emerging risks are increasing, and, as an organisation, we must evolve to tackle that. We have set out fairly clear budget submissions on what we think we need for that, using a red-amber-green approach, with amber being the bare minimum for us to stand still.

Maggie Chapman: That represents a shift to recognising wildfire as a core operational issue

rather than a one-off situation or something that happens now and again.

Jon Henderson: Yes. Later, colleagues will talk about prevention and preparedness for working with wildfire, which we are 100 per cent behind. However, we need to recognise that we will continue to have wildfires. We want to mitigate their impact, but it is likely that we will continue to have them.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Good morning. I will take us back to the lessons that have been learned. There are the two events that have happened already, and we have a national force, but are you sharing good practice with forces outwith Scotland as well—in Europe, for example? If so, what discussions are you having?

Jon Henderson: We have regular discussions at all levels. Colin Brown and his colleagues sit on the executive council, so he represents Scotland but is involved in UK-wide discussions, too.

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is also part of the National Fire Chiefs Council—the NFCC—which is made up of all the fire and rescue services across the UK. There is an NFCC strategic steering group on wildfire, which I am part of. As part of that, I have conversations with colleagues from services that are particularly impacted by wildfire; Lancashire is one of the key services.

We also do work overseas. We send colleagues for training in Canada and we have discussions with services there. We work with services in Europe, too. I am sure that Michael Bruce will talk about that when he gives his evidence, and he will also talk about the learning that we get from countries that have more significant wildfires and that are further ahead of us on this journey.

The conversations are constant. We are a learning organisation; we recognise that we do not have all the answers, and we want to learn. Specifically, we want to learn from countries that have had to deal with incidents of this kind for more years than we have.

Marie McNair: Following on from Maggie Chapman's question, if we experience a worse season than 2026, do we have the capacity to deal with that? If not, what is missing?

Jon Henderson: Colleagues will know more about climate change than I do; I am absolutely certain about that. However, clearly, the overall trajectory of climate change means that we will experience more incidents, but there will be peaks and troughs through the years. Although there was a very significant fire in the Cairngorms last year, we had fewer wildfires last year than in the previous year. There were approximately 60 this year, and in the previous season there were 240. We will probably continue to experience peaks and troughs such as that, but the overall trajectory will be that the number of wildfires will increase.

Coming back to the budget conversation that we had, part of the issue for SFRS, and for me, as the strategic lead for wildfire, is maintaining our focus during seasons when there are fewer fires and recognising that more fires will happen, as that is the path that we are on. We have to maintain our focus when fires get less political, media and public attention, because we recognise that that is the journey that we have to prepare for.

We will clearly articulate our budget asks and will do the same when we set out what we are trying to do and what the future looks like, especially during periods when fires perhaps drop off the radar in conversations.

Marie McNair: Can you remind the committee what the budget allocation for wildfires is at the moment?

Jon Henderson: We have a specific wildfire budget, but it is not clean enough for me to tell you a specific amount. The number would probably be misleading in relation to the matters that we have talked about, because it is a mix of capital and resource. It is also affected by whether there is overtime to consider or whether on-call crews respond to an incident. However, during the past three years, we have spent more than £3 million on PPE and equipment for such incidents.

Amanda Bland (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Ind): Good morning, Jon and Colin. I am going to focus on the strategic action plan that the Government published on 5 March 2026. There are 18 actions in it. I am not going to ask you about all 18, and I do not expect you to know them off by heart, so do not panic. I have picked out five of the recommendations to get your views on. I want to understand where we are on this journey and what engagement is like.

Recommendation 2 says:

"SFRS should engage with land and estate owners to encourage the production, and sharing of, relevant risk assessments and incident response plans".

10:45

Jon Henderson: The use of the term "journey" is really helpful, because this whole piece is a journey, and each of the actions is on its own journey, so they will be on slightly different trajectories.

We have a colleague from the Scottish Wildfire Forum on your second panel. The forum is made up of a number of partners, which include the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and—

Amanda Bland: Are you engaging with the document?

Jon Henderson: Yes, we are, absolutely.

The point that I was trying to make is that, as I said previously, the response, prevention and preparedness in this area are absolutely a partnership endeavour. No single organisation has all the answers, but we are working collaboratively—

Amanda Bland: I appreciate that.

Jon Henderson: —through the forum and other avenues.

Amanda Bland: Recommendation 4 says that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service,

"in consultation and collaboration with Local / Regional Resilience Partnerships and SMARTEU",

should

"consider jointly what planning, training and exercising is required to achieve shared understanding of response, equipment available and safe systems of work".

Jon Henderson: The Scottish multi-agency resilience and exercise unit, and the resilience partnerships that you referenced, sit under the Scottish resilience partnership. Ms McGuinness, who will be on the second panel, can talk about that in a bit more detail.

We are an active partner in the Scottish resilience partnership. We have developed a concept of operations, which, in effect, is an operational plan for wildfires. Whether wildfires are in the Cairngorms or in the Borders, the generic elements of the plan apply, and we then fit the specific elements into that.

We have developed the concept of operations for wildfire, which the SRP has signed off. The plan is, as you would imagine, being further amended as a result of the lessons learned from recent incidents and will continue to be developed. A schedule is in place to ensure that the concept of operations is tested thoroughly prior to the next wildfire season.

Amanda Bland: Recommendation 6 says:

"SFRS should review their resilience and provision of tactical advisers."

Jon Henderson: We have 14 specific wildfire tactical advisers. We are always looking to develop and grow that.

Amanda Bland: Is that enough? The figure does not really mean much to me in terms of what you need now and what the projected need is.

Jon Henderson: The real-life example would be the Cairngorms incident and beyond. As I said, over that 35-day period, we had 12 wildfires concurrently, and we had enough wildfire advisers to mitigate that. We absolutely will bring more online, but that number is suitable at present.

Amanda Bland: Recommendation 7 might be a good one for Colin Brown. It says:

"Scottish Fire and Rescue should consider a review of welfare support provision following mobilisation and how best to utilise all personnel to respond to the crisis and support those responders, including using any excess personnel, including whole-time and on-call personnel, to best effect."

Colin, do you want to comment on that?

Colin Brown: Yes. Welfare in such instances will always be a challenge, but support is currently wholly inadequate. We are deploying people on to hillsides for 10, perhaps 17, hours at a time, and we do not have the welfare support units to resource that. Equally, how do you create welfare support units that would be able to sustain operations over 34 days, with more than 3,000 firefighter deployments across a 21-mile fire front?

There are some real challenges, and we need to refresh our thinking on how we provide support. One point on welfare is that it is a shameful situation that the community had to fundraise in order to feed emergency responders in the Cairngorms. That is one of those community partnership things that worked very well, and the community was very proud of the work that it did. However, I must ask whether people consider it adequate for the arrangements to rely on voluntary support for public sector workers in order to sustain them at such incidents.

Amanda Bland: Colin, I must say that you have articulated the concerns and the welfare needs of firefighters extremely well today, and I thank you for that. That has been really useful.

I will move on to recommendation 8. I am not trying to catch you out—I am genuinely interested in where we are at. This is the final one that I want your views on. It says:

"SFRS should explore with Scottish Government and partners suitable and sustainable options in respect of insurance for volunteers / responders wildfire response equipment including estates."

Jon Henderson: I am happy to answer my part of the question, although it is probably a question for colleagues rather than for the SFRS. We are actively engaged in that level of dialogue, and we recognise that there is still some work to do. That plays into the co-ordination of assets on the ground and how we use them. It involves looking at the multi-agency response and how responders, whether they are categorised or uncategorised, are being co-ordinated in that space.

We are involved in that dialogue, and we know that we need to further develop, through that concept of operations and other areas, how we co-

ordinate the responses on the ground on the basis of our learning. However, although we are involved in the conversations, the specifics of finances and insurance are not a question for the SFRS.

Amanda Bland: I have one final question. Looking at the action plan, we need to be honest about what resources, investment and changes are needed to fully engage with it. I completely understand that it is a journey that involves partnership working. However, given where we are now, what is needed to fulfil those recommendations? I open up that question to Colin Brown and Jon Henderson.

The Convener: I ask the witnesses to be brief, as I need to bring in Ben Macpherson.

Jon Henderson: I will try to be brief. It is about partnership working, and that partnership is a combination of—as I said—categorised and non-categorised responders, and Government agencies and non-Government agencies. I appreciate that I am sitting here making calls from a fire and rescue perspective, and the committee will hear from others. There are colleagues in environmental forestry and other areas who need to be involved in that work, because it is a governmental, not a single-agency, piece of work—it is for Scotland PLC, and Scotland is a nation.

Amanda Bland: It is a large piece of work. Colin, would you like to add something?

Colin Brown: I am very supportive of Jon's comments—there is no way that any fire and rescue service in any part of the world could deal with incidents of that scale on its own. We need a really close command-and-control co-ordination element, and we need to be much more joined up. There were some real challenges exposed in the Cairngorms in relation to individuals' understanding of some of the terminology used in fire and rescue parlance. We need a constant refresh to ensure that we have interoperability between community-based responders and the professional Fire and Rescue Service that, under the legislation, takes the lead on these things.

Amanda Bland: That is helpful.

The Convener: Finally, we go to my colleague Mr Macpherson.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP): Thank you, convener—there is just one overarching question from me. In the Fire and Rescue Service, as in defence, there is a collective need to prepare for the worst and hope for the best. What concerns me is what would happen if we had multiple major incidents occurring at once in our country. I know for a fact that there were firefighters from my constituency, in urban Scotland, who were helping out in the Cairngorms in the summer and—like you, Mr Henderson—I commend everyone for the response that they undertook. You said that wildfires come in peaks and troughs, but it looks like the future trajectory, based on consideration of the scientific evidence, is that we will, unfortunately, potentially see more of these incidents. With that in mind, working with the Government, what long-term planning are you doing to ensure that there is investment in capital resource and resilience for—as Mr Brown rightly put it—Scotland's insurance policy? Are the one-year cycles of budget considerations problematic, particularly with regard to capital procurement?

Jon Henderson: I will try to take all those points. To start at the end, my answer is yes. The chief has been before the committee and is on record as saying the same—that yearly budget setting is problematic for us as an organisation, especially in the capital space, whether it be investment in wildfire personal protective equipment or in stations, or simply investment in new equipment in a general sense. In effect, we have to start over every year, which is not helpful. I believe that most of the submissions that the committee has had have said very similar things.

With regard to what the future of resilience in this area in Scotland looks like, I think that it is a resilience issue, and we are currently working actively with Lisa McGuinness and colleagues on how we collectively plan for that. Clearly, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service will have a fairly significant part to play in that, but it requires a whole resilience response.

We have got ourselves into a positive space with flooding, storm responses and things along those lines in a way that probably preceded our response to wildfires, which needs to be dealt with in the same vein. It is about the expectations that are placed on local authorities, on local resilience partnerships and down to a community planning level, and how we can all help ourselves to help each other. That is where we need to go.

Funding will clearly be an issue, partly due to the budget-setting cycle, as we have said. Our submission is effectively on a red-amber-green scale, and amber means standing still—it will not allow us to fully address the future risks. Anything less than amber would be a backwards step.

Ben Macpherson: That is very clear—thank you. Mr Brown, do you want to add anything to that?

Colin Brown: Generally speaking, response is only one element of everything that the Fire and Rescue Service does. Our members have done amazing work to drive down traditional incident types, as people would imagine traditional Fire and Rescue Service business to be. However, there

also needs to be the way of thinking that you outlined. To give credit to the Fire and Rescue Service, the chief's open letter in August called for refreshed thinking about prevention and preparedness. Those will be the key, significant elements for our future as a country, considering the direction of travel with the climate and other things.

I encourage the committee to look at the response to wildfires across the UK this summer. At one point, I believe that Wales had no firefighters available to respond to incidents, so firefighters from across the UK—south of the border—were deployed. Firefighters from London were in Wales while firefighters from Yorkshire were deployed all over the country, and there were other deployments similar to that. It has always been the case that major incidents receive a response and support from other services, but, when chief officers from the southern parts of England must ask the Scottish chief officer to send firefighters to help them to put out their own fires, we can see that there are significant gaps in the system to respond to what is becoming a significant part of our future.

I will also add that new evolving technology such as large-scale data centres and battery energy storage systems tends to be put in remote rural locations because nobody wants them on their doorstep. When those things go wrong, they go significantly wrong. We are talking about a landscape that is already vulnerable at certain times of the year. I draw members' attention to a publication by the House of Commons library, which commented on a data centre fire in Korea that required 200 firefighters to put it out. Had that happened during the peak season in a remote part of Scotland, there would have been a resourcing issue straight away. We need to keep the existing risk and the growing risk from climate and wildfire-type incidents under consideration when it comes to the planning cycle for data centres and where they are located.

Ben Macpherson: Thank you.

The Convener: Thank you, Mr Brown and Mr Henderson. We have, sadly, run out of time. Whether it is you or your staff, Mr Henderson, I thank you for the work that you do to run into danger when we all run away from it. The same applies to you, Mr Brown, and the members whom you represent. This committee will always be in favour of scrutiny and asking questions—that is our job—but please understand that you have our eternal respect and thanks for the work that you do to protect our communities.

I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow for a brief comfort break and a change of witnesses. We will resume shortly after.

10:58

Meeting suspended.

11:04

On resuming—

The Convener: Welcome back. We will continue our evidence on wildfire resilience in Scotland.

I welcome our second panel of witnesses: Lisa McGuinness, director of resilience at the Scottish Government; Don McGillivray, director of safer communities at the Scottish Government; and Michael Bruce, chair of the review and analysis group at the Scottish Wildfire Forum. We are grateful to them for making the time to meet the committee.

I will start with a question to you, Mr Bruce. As I prepared for this evidence session and examined the topic more, it struck me—I might be completely wrong—that there is a degree of ambiguity about the role of the fire service and how that fits with land management. I am interested in a piece of work that you authored, I think, about the situation in Portugal, where, I gather, there is a funded body that integrates land and fire management. Will you tell me a bit more about that, to inform my understanding?

Michael Bruce (Scottish Wildfire Forum): Yes. I welcome the cross-party nature of the inquiry into wildfire. It makes a welcome change from when I started trying to influence the strategy in Scotland, in 2003.

I am a director of the Glen Tanar estate and Firebreak Services Ltd. I chair the south Grampian wildfire group and, as you mentioned, I chair the review and analysis group in the Scottish Wildfire Forum. I am representing the forum today.

Your question relates to something that came up at the UK conference that the Scottish Wildfire Forum hosted in Aberdeen in 2024, at which the chair of the Agency for Integrated Rural Fire Management—AGIF—which is a specific rural agency in Portugal, spoke. The main aim of AGIF is wildfire prevention and preparedness. It is legally separate from the fire service and from other rural agencies, and it has a budget of €111 million. It is a huge concept. Obviously, Portugal's journey in the wildfire arena is different from ours and its level of threat is much higher than ours, so we do not need to go anywhere near creating such an agency. It is a multi-stakeholder organisation and is chaired by a professor, who is incredibly intelligent. It gives us a model of integrated fire management to think through the issues.

We are on a journey, as Jon Henderson said. I note that the main purpose of the fire service,

according to the Scottish Government's website, is to work in partnership with private, community and other interests in prevention, protecting people and response. What does "partnership" mean if not working together? That is what we are trying to do now—and we are trying harder than ever. We have some thorny issues to talk through and work through, but we are doing it together.

The Convener: Mr McGillivray and Ms McGuinness, does either of you want to comment on the international examples? Are the Portuguese wrong?

Don McGillivray (Scottish Government): I would not say that they are wrong. As Mr Bruce highlighted, there is a different context in Portugal. However, we have tried to strengthen partnership working in Scotland significantly, and the Scottish Wildfire Forum is a significant part of that. We have created a wildfire strategic oversight group at Government level to provide senior Government oversight of the matter, and I reinforce the comments from the previous panel of witnesses and Mr Bruce that that partnership is absolutely needed to tackle the increasing threat of wildfire.

The Convener: I am keen to talk about the role of Police Scotland, wilful fire-raising, byelaws and fixed-penalty notices. What is your sense of how wildfires are starting? Is it because of heat magnified through glass, people using barbecues or a pattern of wilful fire-raising? What is the Government's assessment of that?

Don McGillivray: Human activity is a big factor in the starting of wildfires.

The Convener: Could you put a percentage on that? For example, is it 50:50?

Don McGillivray: My understanding is that the majority of wildfires are started by human activity, and there are a range of causes. I could not put a split on the balance between wilful fire-raising and carelessness—for example, people leaving a campfire thinking that it is out and not realising that it is still smouldering, then the surrounding vegetation catching fire. As it stands, I do not think that there is strong research to tell us what that split is.

People access the countryside in significant numbers for a whole range of reasons and activities, and there are campfires and disposable barbecues. Vehicles are also a source of ignition. It is very clear that human activity is a significant factor.

The Convener: I have one last question before I pass over to colleagues for their questions. Given that we have acknowledged that human activity is a big factor, are the legislative powers—such as fixed-penalty notices and the enforcement of byelaws—adequate to deal with the issue, given that the phenomenon appears to be increasing?

Don McGillivray: Significant work is in progress on that front. The Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026 created additional powers around byelaws and fixed-penalty notices that relate to fire prevention. I understand that my colleagues in the environment and forestry directorate are in the process of moving towards the commencement of the powers that have not already been commenced.

Already, organisations such as the Cairngorms National Park Authority are passing byelaws in relation to things such as the use of disposable barbecues in the park, and they are improving their signage and pursuing preventative activities. My understanding of the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026 is that it will give stronger powers locally to create byelaws for the specific purpose of fire prevention.

The Convener: In theory, following that commencement, we should start to see a reduction.

Don McGillivray: Obviously, it is up to the local authorities and other authorities that hold those byelaw powers to decide how to use them. Active discussions are going on with specific councils that are very interested in using those powers. The commencement will create the powers, but the action to create the byelaw takes place at a local level.

The Convener: You got a bit of a preview, earlier, of some of the questions that you might be asked about water bombing. Without further ado, I pass over to Pauline McNeill.

Pauline McNeill: I am interested in that area, as you have heard. When the cabinet secretary made his statement on the Cairngorms fire, he said that it took 36 hours after the start of the incident for the contractors to release the water-bombing helicopters. Do we know why that was?

Don McGillivray: It was simply that those helicopters were deployed on other commercial work. Those helicopters are run by commercial operators, which have a range of contracts, including for commercial work such as surveying, filming and photography. In addition, as was alluded to, they are sometimes contracted to fight fires in other parts of the UK. They are deployed on a range of things that they may have in their schedule.

When there is a wildfire and they are approached by the SFRS, the helicopter companies are incredibly good at juggling their schedule to prioritise the wildfire work. We are incredibly grateful to the helicopter companies for doing that. You saw that throughout the 35 days of

the fire in the Cairngorms. However, in the first two days, that was not possible.

Pauline McNeill: Those helicopters are on standby as part of the contract. Will that continue to be the case?

Michael Bruce: I am not sure whether the committee is aware that, normally, the helicopter is paid for not by the Government but by the landowner, who—normally but not always—has some form of woodland insurance to cover that. Quite often, the first thing that the helicopter companies ask to see is the landowner's credit card. It is an example of the huge amount of resource for fighting wildfires that is being held in the land management sector. I listened to the evidence in the previous session, and I am not sure that that issue came out at all.

11:15

Don McGillivray: I would endorse that. In this case, one of the major landowners was Forestry and Land Scotland, which is a Government agency. In general, though, it is the landowner who pays for helicopter services.

The change that we have made, which Mr Gray announced in his statement, is that, when a wildfire danger assessment suggests a particular level of risk, the SFRS will now be responsible for putting the helicopters on standby and paying for them. We have made that change, and it was announced by the minister a few months ago.

Pauline McNeill: That is helpful to know. With regard to that standby arrangement, if there were another fire like the Cairngorms one, could we still experience the same delay?

Don McGillivray: Putting the helicopters on standby as soon as the wildfire danger assessment comes out gives you a better chance. Essentially, you get ahead of the game by, hopefully, a day or two—maybe more. So, it is an improvement on the current situation.

Going back to Mr Kerr's earlier questions, I realise that that is not a complete solution or guarantee, which is why I was pleased that the UK Government's England and Wales wildfire summit resulted in a move towards acknowledging that another layer of resilience is needed. I am pleased with the progress that has been made in trying to engage the Ministry of Defence to provide that additional layer of resilience, which we will still need.

Pauline McNeill: Lisa McGuinness, I saw you in the public gallery when I asked the previous panel about discussions with the UK Government, and you seemed to want to respond. Can you say any more about whether those assets are likely to be more available should we need them in the future?

Lisa McGuinness (Scottish Government): We have a good relationship with the UK Government and good, strong processes for providing military aid to civil authorities that work really well. Indeed, early on, we started conversations to understand what capability there was. As Don McGillivray has alluded to, it is our understanding that the UK Government recently announced additional capability within the MOD, which will, I think, provide that additional layer of resilience. The processes are there, but the capability needs to be there, too, if we are to be able to deploy it more readily.

Pauline McNeill: We are learning all the time this morning. Indeed, we have just learned from Michael Bruce who used to pay for the helicopters. On the question of capability, Colin Brown said that one of the issues was that the helicopters were not able to communicate with those on the ground. That astonished me, and it seems like something that we need to look at.

Michael Bruce: First of all, Forestry and Land Scotland has radios that can communicate with the pilot. Secondly, the pilot is the one who is in charge. Thirdly, helicopters should always be deployed in support of ground crews, and expectations that they are the cavalry that will come and save the day are overblown.

There is another thing that I think is not being looked at enough. Everyone says that they want the resource, but people are not asking how, tactically, helicopters should be used. For example, how might we make the existing helicopter resource in the country more efficient at extinguishing our types of fire? There are lots and lots of other questions to be asked in addition to the bald one of whether or not the resource is there.

My thought is this. If a major wildfire in England is threatening people, major infrastructure or whatever, we should expect the normal triage system to be put in place to allocate this scarce resource. When I was first asked to help with a fire investigation—it was in 2003, for the Ardnamurchan wildfire, which was 7,000 hectares, or a little bit bigger than the one this summer—one of the issues that I was asked to look at was the efficiency of the helicopter use. I discovered that the Forestry Commission's director for the north forest district was basically doing that triage on behalf of the UK, because the commission had a standby contract with the main helicopter company.

I therefore applaud the move by the Scottish Government. It is proportionate and appropriate. We cannot expect to have this scarce and

expensive resource at our beck and call the whole time, so we must also look at other potential sources of response resources.

Pauline McNeill: That is helpful and very valid. I focused on the Cairngorms fire because it lasted 34 days and the cabinet secretary mentioned it specifically in his statement.

On the issue of people on the ground co-ordinating with helicopters, can anything more be done to improve communication?

Michael Bruce: The normal procedure is that the helicopter will turn up to the fire ground and find somewhere suitable to land. It also needs its ground crew close by, so that they can support it with further fuel and other things. Then there will be discussion between the pilot and the senior fire officer in charge, and usually also the senior land manager there, and they will carry out a reconnaissance flight. You can see that, even in the existing procedures, that communication is embedded in the tactical plan.

Where it gets a bit more difficult is in the detail when someone specifies that they want a water-bombing drop in a specific area. Forestry and Land Scotland, because it had the ability to communicate with the pilot, did better than others in that regard.

My knowledge of working with helicopter companies is that the pilots do not like too much interference with what is already quite a tricky job. They are very experienced. They will carry out reconnaissance and, if they need to, will tell people on the ground how the fire is developing.

A lot of communication happens already, but, yes, it could be improved. The systems are partially there; perhaps we simply need to expand them a little bit.

Maggie Chapman: Good morning, and thank you for joining us. I want to pick up on a couple of different issues, some of which you have alluded to. I would like to hear from Don McGillivray first. The committee previously recommended an assessment of long-term wildfire operational risks. How is that work going? How is the Government's thinking shifting in terms of how we tackle wildfires through the fire service and ensure that a long-term resilience plan is in place?

Don McGillivray: There are several strands to that. The first strand is research. We need to understand what the scientific research tells us about the nature and prevalence of wildfires and what we might expect in the future. That is closely linked to research on related matters such as land management and climate change.

As I alluded to earlier, we have created new structures in Government to address the risk, particularly through the wildfire strategic oversight group, and we published our first wildfire action plan last year, as was mentioned. We are in pretty much constant dialogue with SFRS and other partners about the shift that we need to make. The action plan sets that out, but our understanding of this area is developing all the time, and we need to keep it under review and continue thinking about what the next frontier in the challenge is.

Maggie Chapman: In answer to one of the convener's questions, you talked about the lessons learned and about looking at experience from elsewhere, which is helpful. However, given what we heard from our first panel of witnesses this morning about head count and staff resourcing—not only in relation to their numbers but in relation to their equipment—how are those conversations being included in budget discussions and resource allocation conversations? We have lost 1,200 firefighters in Scotland over the past few years, and significant additional demands are being placed on the SFRS as we adapt to this new way of working with the risk of wildfires. I am interested in how those conversations are going in Government.

Don McGillivray: The arguments around firefighter numbers are well rehearsed. A lot of the change took place at the time of reform and related to duplication and middle management folks, rather than the folks who were actually staffing appliances.

Looking forward, it is absolutely a feature of budget discussions. The fire service conducted its service delivery review over the past couple of years, and a significant part of the purpose of that was about better aligning resources to the shifting and changing nature of the risks that it is seeing, particularly around flooding and wildfires. A significant part of the dialogue that we have had around the budget for the coming year has been about the implications for the SFRS's resourcing of the shift in risk around wildfires. That is absolutely part of our dialogue.

Maggie Chapman: Does it concern the Government that, as we have heard, there were regular and frequent breaches of the RDS contracts over the summer, with retained firefighters not having the time to look after their own welfare or the cover to come off the hillside when they needed to? How does the Government respond to repeated breaches of employment contracts?

Don McGillivray: As the previous panel discussed, we have challenges in the RDS space and with recruitment and so on. The SFRS, with our support, has taken various steps to improve the position on RDS over the past couple of years. However, I state clearly that it is still not where we

would want it to be. Some of that is about exactly what Mr Brown referred to in the earlier panel: the changing nature of employment, commuting and all that kind of stuff. Yes, it is a concern to me when I hear stories about firefighter welfare not being where it should be and about people feeling exhausted and being asked to go beyond their contract. That is not where we want to be.

The SFRS has huge resilience across Scotland—it has more than 100 appliances available at any given time—but the 35-day fire was pretty unprecedented. The important point is what we have learned from it about rotation, firefighter welfare and the kind of issues that you are raising, so that we can do better on them the next time, in relation to the next iteration of the concept of operations.

Maggie Chapman: As you say, there is a conversation to be had about how we respond to and implement the lessons learned.

I will raise one final point on this issue. Colin Brown talked about the need for adequate decontamination facilities, which it is very difficult to provide in rural and retained stations in some cases. We also heard from Jon Henderson that 37 stations have had some investment in PPE and equipment and that it is coming on stream in another nine this year. Is that progress happening quickly enough? Are there shifting resource allocations that the Government can support to speed it up, so that we are giving firefighters not only the resources that they need to fight fires, but the resources that they need to keep themselves and their health safe?

Don McGillivray: Those are the choices that ministers face in every budget. It is about how they balance the budget across the demands of many public services. We have made real progress in the fire service, There is continuing progress in relation to wildfire PPE and kit, but it is incremental. That is the reality. I think that we are well ahead of England and Wales in terms of PPE kit, specialist wildfire kit and specialist wildfire units. However, we still saw firefighters in the Abernethy and Glenmore wildfire turning up in structural PPE—not necessarily the first crews, but the relief crews. It was an incident that went on for a long time, and some of the relief crews turned up in structural PPE, which is far from ideal for fighting wildfires.

Maggie Chapman: I will leave it there.

11:30

Marie McNair: Good morning, panel. Mr McGillivray, I want to go back to your comment that most wildfires are caused by human activity. Are members of the public significantly aware of the wildfire risk? Will you talk about your messaging and communication with regard to barbecues and campfires?

Don McGillivray: I do not have hard research to show this, but my perception is that the level of understanding of those risks among the general public is highly variable. Folk who are experienced in being in the outdoors probably understand those risks pretty well, whereas people who are much more casual visitors to rural areas maybe understand them much less.

We have done various things to enhance our communications on that over time. I mentioned earlier that Cairngorms National Park Authority has had enhanced signage and so on in relation to those issues over the past year or two. The Scottish Government uses its own communication channels, including social media and so on, as do the SFRS and other partners and public sector partners.

As to how well that is getting through or changing behaviours, I think that the jury is still a little bit out on what we are achieving. It still feels like work in progress to me.

Marie McNair: It is a collective responsibility for all of us, including MSPs, to share communications in that respect. In my area, we had small wildfires in the Kilpatrick hills, which is worrying for the summer ahead. Your strategic action plan includes reference to wildfire volunteers. What would that model look like in practice?

Don McGillivray: People come to us with the example of the mountain rescue model. As various people have alluded to, fighting a wildfire in such areas is a partnership between the SFRS, landowners, land managers and other public bodies. There is a role for the local resilience partnership and lots of people. The question is whether, instead of creating that on an ad hoc basis for each incident, we can have a standing arrangement with those partners to create a more ready-to-go and resilient cadre of people who are ready to stand up in relation to any incident. Am I getting that right, Lisa?

Lisa McGuinness: Yes. I, too, am happy to come in on that key point about preparedness and partnership. I will also talk about the private sector, but in terms of both not-for-profit and for-profit organisations—often, the voluntary sector is now, in fact, the private sector but just not for profit. It is about our preparedness not only for wildfires, but for the risks and threats that exist across the country. That is why we are thinking about the resilience of the system in Scotland. We are working on that closely with others.

In the previous session, Mr Henderson spoke about the Scottish resilience partnership, which has representation from voluntary organisations.

The issue is how they stand up to support in relation to storms, as well as other big events such as pandemics, as we saw through Covid. It is important to take a more systematic approach, so that we know exactly what will stand up at the right times. It is also about care, not only for the people affected, but also—picking up on the welfare points made earlier—importantly, for the responders themselves. There is very much a piece of work there. We met St Andrew's First Aid last week, and we are working with the British Red Cross and a bunch of others to systematise a wider approach to preparedness and response.

Marie McNair: It is good to hear that.

The Convener: Mr Bruce is looking to come in on that question as well.

Michael Bruce: The south Grampian wildfire group was partially mobilised in response to the Abernethy-Glenmore fire. We have 193 staff on our books, collectively, among 64 members. We created the group in 1997, after a significant wildfire in 1996. We have been developing our standard operating procedures in conjunction, first of all, with Grampian Fire and Rescue Service and, latterly, with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service ever since. Every year, we put our procedures up for consultation and then agree them at our annual meeting.

We have also deployed to other incident types. We organised a three-day clean-up operation in the form of the Ballater clean-up, in which we cleared the flood plain beneath Ballater. That involved up to 70 staff for three days and the equipment to do that.

The point that I am trying to make is that there is a huge resource available in the private sector, the not-for-profit sector and the land management sector in general, but, as yet, that resource has gone unseen by the official resilience system. If you go out and ask locals who cleared the roads after storm Arwen, they will tell you that it was local farmers, foresters and gamekeepers—the people who have windblow tickets for their chainsaws, because using a chainsaw is one of the most dangerous things that you can do. Incidentally, an awful lot of local authority staff who are asked to use chainsaws do not have a windblow ticket. There is huge resource available in the private sector, but the question is how we get that to work in partnership with the official system in an organised, co-ordinated way, with command and control and all the rest of it.

We are actively working with the SFRS at the moment on the preparedness piece and to consider how we can improve our procedures. There are huge cultural differences: the fire service is a large organisation with lots of procedures, whereas most people in the rural sector work for small or microsize business. Even large estates are actually small businesses. How do we mesh those cultures together?

The Convener: Marie McNair, I do not know whether you want to come back in on that point.

Marie McNair: No, I am fine—thanks.

Stephen Kerr: Michael Bruce, you left a question hanging there. I suspect that you already know the answer, so why not tell us? How do you get those cultures into a partnership?

Michael Bruce: There already is partnership. There is the Scottish Wildfire Forum at a national level and the south Grampian wildfire group at a local level. There are other areas with local arrangements—

Stephen Kerr: If that partnership already exists, why did you say a few moments ago that there is an unrecognised resource in the private sector, business sector and not-for-profit sector that has not been harnessed and is not visible in resilience planning?

Michael Bruce: I said that because resilience planning tends to happen at a much higher level. We start at the local level by thinking about how we collect local resources together. Even what we call a local resilience partnership actually operates at a regional level. The south Grampian wildfire group covers just a small part of two valleys. Incidentally, it has 25 all-terrain vehicles with fogging units, while the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has only 10.

To go back to the earlier question about vehicles, we must ask about Ford Rangers' off-road capability—that means off a track—and the answer is that it is not very good. Consider all the deer managers around Scotland who use Argocats, Can-Ams and other brands that are real off-road vehicles, whereas there is just a slip-on unit for wildfires. Bang—you put on a tank and high-pressure pumps and you are there. It takes 20 minutes.

Stephen Kerr: You would not be talking about this if you did not think that there are gaps in planning.

Michael Bruce: The south Grampian wildfire group is the only fire group left in Scotland that is really working. It takes an investment each year to keep the resources list up to date, to have the annual meeting and to do all the basic stuff that is required to keep a social organisation going. There is no money. If we ask our colleagues in Scottish Forestry and the Scottish Government rural payments and inspections directorate how much funding there is for wildfire prevention in the rural grants scheme, we will hear that the answer is zero. The only funding that comes through is from

the Cairngorms climate adaptation fund—we get a bit from there—and there are occasionally other bits and pieces of grant funding.

How do we mobilise the private and not-for-profit sector resource? It is there, but it needs to be properly trained. At the moment, Bright Spark Burning Techniques has trained several hundred people, so there are already several hundred people in the rural sector who have some form of relevant qualification.

Stephen Kerr: But that needs to be marshalled, brought together and made part of a preparedness plan, which is currently lacking.

Michael Bruce: We are dealing with an emerging threat that is growing in importance. Of course, there are gaps, but we are working as hard as we can within the limited resources that we have. Remember, the people from the private sector who go to all those meetings are doing that work voluntarily. If we are to have a whole-society response to the issue, we need to look as much at the needs of the private and not-for-profit sectors as at those of the official public sector.

Stephen Kerr: What is your response to that, Don? Sorry, have I asked the wrong person?

Lisa McGuinness: You probably mean me.

I absolutely agree. We have had a predominantly incident-based response model for a good few years now, and we need to move towards a much more integrated model of national resilience, as you put it.

Stephen Kerr: What does that mean in terms of action?

Lisa McGuinness: A bunch of actions are happening. We are currently working in partnership across the country to deliver a resilience strategy for Scotland.

Stephen Kerr: Who is that partnership with?

Lisa McGuinness: It is being done through the Scottish resilience partnership, with regional resilience partnerships and local resilience partnerships, and across the bodies that sit across each of those things.

Stephen Kerr: Does that include the group that Michael Bruce mentioned?

Lisa McGuinness: Yes, it includes that group. I now know much more about it. It is absolutely in line with the Scottish Wildfire Forum and all those other things. We want the model to be built together, to deliver the framework through which we can do the preparedness work in the same way as we have done for storms and other things.

Stephen Kerr: That is interesting. As director for resilience for the Scottish Government, you have learned a great deal today by sitting next to Michael Bruce.

Lisa McGuinness: I have, about the south Grampian wildfire group, because the operational response is—

Stephen Kerr: But why is that? Especially in the light of the events of last summer, why was that information not known?

Lisa McGuinness: It is probably known to my colleagues. I have learned a lot more today. I am not talking on behalf of the whole Government.

Stephen Kerr: All right. Michael Bruce wants to come in.

Michael Bruce: I have a quick response. We are in discussions with the Aberdeenshire Council planning officers. We have been invited to community resilience conferences. Straight after the Dinnet wildfire, which was mentioned in Parliament—and which the south Grampian group responded to and helped to put out, which was not mentioned in Parliament—I was invited to the next community resilience conference in Aberdeen. Unexpectedly, I was invited on the spot to give a little presentation. People are responding; however, I would not expect national people to know what we are doing locally.

Stephen Kerr: You are very modest, because I would expect them to know. There you go—that is the difference between us. I would expect the Scottish Government to know about such a substantial resource in a hotspot, so to speak.

Lisa McGuinness: We have liaison officers who work in the north, and others, so I am very sure that there will be people in my teams who absolutely know about those things and will be able to give me assurance that they are happening.

Stephen Kerr: My next question is for Don McGillivray—I am sure, this time. To build on the comments that Michael Bruce made a few moments ago, how much additional funding has the Scottish Government committed to wildfire preparedness since the March plan was published? How much is additional? I do not mean the £1.6 million that was announced in November 2025; how much more?

Don McGillivray: We do not ring fence the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service budget. We give it a global amount, which the board—

Stephen Kerr: So, has there been no new money, as such, since March?

Don McGillivray: In the autumn budget revision, we uplifted the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service budget by five-point-something million

pounds, for a range of pressures. There was £5 million of additional money at the time of the ABR.

Stephen Kerr: My time is up. I thank you for the clarity on the helicopters. I also thank Michael Bruce, because, had I left without that additional information, I would not have known the real situation with any clarity from the previous witnesses. I voice my frustration that many of the public sector organisations that appear before the committee do not give us the clarity that, thankfully, you gave about the availability of those helicopters.

Michael Bruce, your comments about who pays were incredibly illuminating. That was news to me, at least. Maybe others were shaking their heads as well. I am very grateful for that.

I will leave it at that.

The Convener: Great. It is not often that Mr Kerr finishes his line of questioning with such happiness, so you have definitely done something right.

11:45

Ben Macpherson: Good morning. I caveat my questions by appreciating that, although Don McGillivray and Lisa McGuinness are accountable to Scottish ministers and Scottish ministers are accountable to this committee, we are grateful to you for coming here.

I think that I am also right in saying that Don McGillivray has been in post for quite some time now.

Don McGillivray: I have been in post for five and a half to six years now, so I have been doing this for a long time.

Ben Macpherson: And it has been really helpful. Thank you.

I want to go back to the questions that Stephen Kerr and Maggie Chapman asked about resource allocation. There has, for good reason, been quite a focus on the Scottish Government's—and the Parliament's—net zero agenda and the economic, health and social returns that it brings, as well as the climate impact that it has. In fact, I see that you are both wearing the "Let's Do Net Zero" lanyards from when the United Nations climate change conference of the parties was in Glasgow, so we are seeing a legacy of that in more ways than one.

Obviously, to govern is to choose, and at the moment we are having to think about the nice-to-dos and the need-to-dos. The resilience of our fire and rescue safety measures is, of course, very important. The budget for next year is going to be published in the coming weeks, but, when I looked back at the 2026-27 budget, I noticed in chapter 12, on climate action and energy, the £26 million nature restoration fund. That seems like an area of spending that could bring benefits in limiting and preventing wildfires. Should other budget areas such as the climate action and energy portfolio surrender some of their resources to your directorate, to ensure that we can invest in capability and implement prevention measures in the years to come and give the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service the capital, security and longevity that it needs to procure and invest in the way that must happen if we are to plan for the future?

Don McGillivray: There are a range of things in play here. Some nature budgets contribute directly to wildfire prevention. Michael Bruce and I were talking about this before we came in, but peatland restoration, which is funded by the nature and environment budget, is one measure that is directly linked to wildfire risk, as well as a range of nature and environment and climate change objectives. A lot of the forestry budget comes from the same directorate, and the forestry sector has a huge preventative role to play with regard to forest management, fire breaks and all of those issues.

What I would say, then, is that those budgets are already contributing in some form to the agenda—

Ben Macpherson: But do we need to do more?

Don McGillivray: —but how you balance those budgets is absolutely a question for ministers, not for officials.

Ben Macpherson: I know that, in a number of days, the Parliament will be apprised of the plans for the financial year ahead, but I just think that, given what we have seen this summer, we need resource to be shifted into the justice portfolio. Our pre-budget scrutiny report evidenced that very clearly, and I hope that other portfolios, such as the climate action and energy portfolio, are thinking about what they can do to support fire prevention, including wildfires.

I do not know whether Ms McGuinness or Michael Bruce wants to add anything from a resilience perspective.

Michael Bruce: Some people ask whether wildfire is a land management issue. With regard to the questions that you put to officials in charge of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, I would point out that it is largely a response organisation that also does preventative work. The question, then, is about how we are going to get resources allocated to the type of integrated fire management that is appropriately focused on long-term landscape resilience and prevention.

Peatland restoration improves the resilience of the peat, because it increases the number of days when it is wet, but it does not stop the spread of wildfires or burning surface vegetation. In forestry,

it is very often the dense Sitka spruce plantation that creates the firebreak, because there are no surface fuels underneath it. Where we have issues is with natural regeneration and low tree density, because that is where heather, grass, bracken and other surface vegetation, or surface fuels, grow.

Wildfire prevention is normally a matter of risk management; it is not the primary land-use objective. However, if we, as a nation, are investing a huge amount of money in nature restoration and climate adaptation, I agree that perhaps a small proportion of that should be directed towards risk management. That may mean doing some quite radical things, which, at the moment, I do not think there is political consensus for.

Ben Macpherson: What would those be?

Michael Bruce: One would be prescribed burning.

The Convener: We are very tight for time, and I have still one other colleague who wants to contribute before we conclude our session. I hand over to Amanda Bland.

Amanda Bland: I have taken some notes of what a best-practice strategy might comprise. These are not necessarily correct, but I will read out what I have written down. Such a strategy requires a national response to ensure the welfare of firefighters over a sustained period; a multi-stakeholder, whole-resilience response; table-top exercises involving a wide range of partners; climate response strategic teams; and the use of expert research to improve wildfire risk assessments and mapping. Further, all of that must be co-ordinated.

Earlier, I mentioned that the Scottish Government's strategic action plan has 18 actions. Where do we go from today? What are the next steps? What would best practice look like? Where will this journey go? That is what I need to understand. Lisa McGuinness, would you like to start?

Lisa McGuinness: Yes, I am happy to start. The action plan is important because it encourages us to think about this in terms of the emergency management planning cycle. That includes better anticipation of, and preparation for, risk. We have already talked about welfare risk assessments, for example. We are also introducing further tools. Don McGillivray might be able to say more about how those tools help us to anticipate threats and understand risk levels.

This is about prevention and reducing the likelihood of wildfires, which links to land management. It is also about limiting the consequences of wildfires, which links to public communications and a bunch of other measures. Further, it is about preparing appropriately. A lot of that sits within the current resilience structures. They are not just there for response; they are there for planning as well. You mentioned testing and exercises. We now have a national wildfire programme that includes those aspects.

One thing to remember is that wildfires can be a consequence of a number of linked risks, such as the geopolitical situation and climate change. A lot of our tests and exercises focus on those common consequences and on how we test multi-agency partnerships, preparedness and co-ordination, for example.

Importantly, we are also examining our governance structures. We have preparing Scotland, which is our national resilience doctrine, which addresses those issues as well. It is about ensuring that we come together at the right times.

Amanda Bland: To avoid silo working, how do you bring all the stakeholders together to provide a co-ordinated response, so that everybody understands what needs to be done? There are key stakeholders, there is excellent work being done and there are experts in their own right, but it still feels like silo working. That is the part that I am trying to understand. How does that co-ordination happen?

Lisa McGuinness: I do not think it feels as though people are responding in silos.

Amanda Bland: That is what it feels like to me, given what I have heard today.

Lisa McGuinness: I note that the operational response on the ground was not siloed. The response to the Cairngorms incident was absolutely a multi-agency response. The fire and police services were there, as were land managers and local authorities. Don is happy to come in on that.

At various levels, we bring agencies together operationally, tactically and strategically.

Amanda Bland: Can I ask Michael Bruce to come in here, before coming to you, Don?

Don McGillivray: Of course.

Michael Bruce: I will add some context. Ninety per cent of the area that is burned in wildfires happens on some form of moorland, whether that is heather, semi-natural grasses or peatland bog. That represents some 70 per cent of Scotland. The scale of the issue is big. If you look at the average population density in the areas where wildfires occur, you will see that it is extremely low. Our national resilience structures are largely based around urban centres, so how will we create support for rural areas in Scotland, which have some of our biggest socioeconomic challenges?

Look at the demographics of rural Scotland—it is not good.

People in rural areas are the people who understand the land. They understand land management and wildfires, they know the terrain and they have the Argocats and all that stuff. However, they are at the end of the chain that starts from quite an urban centre; they are the rural end of that chain. Culturally, we need to think about those issues.

We have to think about the options that landowners have in those areas, because two thirds of Scotland's land mass is in a less favoured area, in agricultural definition terms, which means that it is at high altitude, has poor soils and poor climate and cannot produce much. There are a lot of underlying issues that create the context for how we can be resilient to the wildfire threat.

Don McGillivray: This is very much a partnership. We have the forums and so on. You heard the SFRS refer to the concept of operations. That should be the thing on the ground that brings together a co-ordinated approach across the various partners that are involved. The Abernethy and Glenmore wildfire was probably the first big live test of that new concept of operations, which was introduced last year. It was inevitable that we would learn a lot from that experience, and it is really important that we build those lessons in. You heard the commitment from the SFRS to update and exercise the new concept of operations ahead of the next wildfire season. That is a really important step.

The Convener: Thank you, all. The evidence that you have provided to us has been very helpful, and I have no doubt that we will consider it when we move into private session shortly to review the evidence that we have heard from the first and second panels of witnesses.

Thank you for giving your time today. It has been much appreciated by all of us in the committee, and I wish you a very good afternoon. I am sure that this will not be the last time that we speak—you are here fairly regularly, Mr McGillivray. I am sure that there will be more work on this issue in the future.

I will allow our witnesses to leave, and then we will move into private session.

11:57

Meeting continued in private until 12:26.

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