

Criminal Justice Committee
Wednesday 4 February 2026
5th Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)

Challenges and reforms facing the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service: evidence from Fire Brigades Union (Scotland) and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Note by the Clerk

Introduction

1. Following oral evidence taking from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) on 12 November 2025 and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) on 3 December 2025, the Committee agreed to invite both organisations back to give oral evidence on the SFRS's plans for its Service Delivery Review (SDR) and the implications for the provision of fire and rescue services across Scotland.
2. The resource allocation for the SFRS for 2026/27 were announced in the Scottish Budget on 13 January 2026. The allocation, especially the capital allocation, is substantially less than the Fire Service said it required for 2026/27.
3. The Committee agreed to question both organisations on the impact the 2026/27 Budget will have for the Service as well as the longer-term funding provision set out in the Scottish Spending Review.

This evidence session

4. The focus of today's session is to assess the progress of the SDR and allow an opportunity for the Committee's views to be considered by the SFRS Board.
5. The Committee also wished to hear from the SFRS and FBU on their views of the implication for the Service of the Scottish Government resource provision going forward.
6. At this evidence session the Committee will hear from-
 - **Colin Brown**, Executive Council Member for Scotland, Fire Brigades Union, and
 - **John McKenzie**, Scottish Regional Secretary, Fire Brigades Union.

And then from-

- **Mhairi Wylie**,¹ Chair of the SFRS Board;
- **Stuart Stevens**, Chief Officer of the SFRS;

¹ Mhairi Wylie has been a member of the Board of the SFRS since 2018. On 31 January 2026 she was appointed Chair of the Board for a four-year period, succeeding the previous Chair, Dr Kirsty Darwent: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/public-appointment-chair-appointed-to-scottish-fire-and-rescue-service-board/>.

- **Andy Watt**, Deputy Chief Officer of the SFRS, and
 - **Deborah Stanfield**, Interim Director of Finance and Contractual Services, SFRS.
7. An additional written submission from the FBU in support of today's session is included in **Annexe A**, and a submission from the SFRS in **Annexe B**.

Scrutiny to date

8. The Committee has already received numerous submissions from the SFRS and FBU in relation to the future funding and structure of the fire service across Scotland.
9. In October 2023, the FBU published its [Firestorm Report](#) to inform MSPs and the public of the challenges faced from issues like climate change, changes to employment and working patterns, problems with recruitment and retention of firefighters, firefighter safety and wellbeing on issues such as decontamination facilities, and backlogs in maintenance and the SFRS's fleet and estate development.
10. The SFRS provided a written [pre-budget submission](#) to the Committee as part of the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny of the 2026/27 Scottish Budget. The Committee took pre-budget [oral evidence](#) from the SFRS on 12 November 2025.
11. As part of the Call for Views on the budget, the Committee also received written pre-budget submissions from [the FBU](#) and [HM's Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland](#).
12. On 3 December, the Committee took [oral evidence](#) from the FBU on the ongoing SDR. A [cover paper from the clerk](#) set out the challenges facing the SFRS and the concerns of the FBU, as well as the options for change set out by the SFRS in its 2025 public consultation document on the SDR.²
13. The [FBU's submission to the SFRS consultation](#) on the SDR from June 2024 is also available.

Action

14. **Members are invited to discuss the Service Delivery Review and budget funding with the FBU and SFRS witnesses at today's meeting.**

Clerks to the Committee January 2026

² SFRS Service Delivery review consultation document (June 2025):
<https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/publications/document/?id=8976>

Fire Brigades Union Submission Scottish Criminal Justice Committee: Scottish Fire and Rescue Service – Service Delivery Review. January 2026

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is the democratic, professional voice of firefighters and other workers within fire and rescue services across Scotland and the UK. The union represents the vast majority of wholetime (full-time), retained (part-time / on-call), volunteer operational firefighters and operational control firefighters in the UK.

The FBU have returned detailed submissions in response to consultations and reviews undertaken by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and to the Scottish Criminal Justice Committee (SCJC) in response to calls for evidence as part of their pre-budget scrutiny process. A list of previous relevant submissions was provided in the FBU's submission to the SCJC request for evidence as part of their pre 2026/27 budget scrutiny and is available within Annex A CJ/S6/25/33/5 of the subsequent report.

The SCJC has asked for a written submission relating to the SFRS Service Delivery Review (SDR) ahead of their meeting on 4 February 2026 where both the SFRS and FBU have been invited to give evidence. The FBU direct SCJC members to our previous submissions provided ahead of our evidence session in front of the committee on 3 December 2025 (supplied alongside this document). These two submissions provide the FBU's considerations ahead of the Scottish Government draft 2026/27 budget announcement on 13 January 2026 and our detailed response to the SFRS 'Shaping Our Future Service: Your Say' Stakeholder consultation process of April 2024.

Since the April 2024 FBU submission to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service 'Shaping Our Future Service: Your Say' consultation, the SFRS developed a long list of over 300 "change options". These were gradually reduced via internal merits assessment processes to a short list of 23. These 23 options were taken forward to a stakeholder "options appraisal scoring exercise/balanced room event" held in Stirling on 29 April 2025 with the intention of further reducing the short list of options based on the responses from attendees at this event.

Throughout the SDR the SFRS have been supported by an external company (ASV) who have experience of supporting organisations with managing change and consultations. Representatives from the FBU attended the options appraisal process in Stirling, this was facilitated by ASV. On the day attendees were briefed on the 23 change options the SFRS had shortlisted and were asked to score each option against five criteria; Deliverability, Impact on communities, Sustainability, Financial viability, Impact on workforce.

The FBU make the following observations regarding the options appraisal scoring exercise/balanced room event;

- Theoretically there is merit in including a broad range of interested stakeholders into such a process. However, on the day it was apparent that many attendees had limited understanding of the multiple roles modern fire and rescue services provide, how they operate, safety considerations, or how

proposed changes would impact on the workforce or communities. The SFRS sought to explain the complexity of the service alongside detailed financial considerations and data from their Community Risk Index Model (CRIM). Whilst there was opportunity for attendees to make points and raise questions throughout the presentation, it is questionable whether attendees fully understood the complexity and potential impact of some of the options such as replacing wholetime fire cover with Retained Duty System (RDS) cover. Other than in answer to questions from FBU representatives, there was no information or consideration of how new RDS crews would be established, those answers amounted to little more than “we won’t know until we try”. It is noteworthy that of the 311 RDS pumps SFRS currently operate, over 200 of these can be unavailable on any given day. This is overwhelmingly due to crew shortages. It is also noteworthy that 8 of the 23 change options are to close “long term dormant” Retained Volunteer Duty System (RVDS) stations. These are stations where SFRS have been unable to recruit or retain sufficient crew members for up to 10 years. This demonstrates the vulnerability of reliance on the RVDS.

- The real-world impact of further increasing response times to emergency incidents as a result of the 23 options was routinely described as a “tolerable risk”. The FBU do not accept ever increasing response times are tolerable. SFRS listed increased response times as a disbenefit under many of the options presented. The lack of detailed explanation of what impact this may have on incident outcomes had the effect of diminishing the potential impact to attendees that were not from a Fire and Rescue or emergency service background. The most recent SFRS Incident Statistics, published on 30 October 2025 state that non-fatal fire casualties for 2024/25 were 1,069, up 30.8%. Whilst it is difficult to evidence what impact increased response times may have had on any of these non-fatal casualties, it can be assumed that without early intervention from firefighters the fatality rate would have been much higher.
- Financial considerations were presented as a significant factor for many of the options with the presentation highlighting potential savings from closure of stations or not requiring to provide overnight accommodation if wholetime stations were made either RDS or Day Shift Duty System (DSDS) (This is a duty system that provides wholetime cover during the day and RDS cover overnight and at weekends). The SFRS have stated they would look to reinvest any savings into other areas of their estate, this intention is positive given the £818 million capital deficit the SFRS currently face, but FBU representatives in attendance felt there was little consideration of the potential real world impact of removing wholetime fire cover in local communities. It should also be noted that through reform and amalgamation of the 8 legacy Scottish Fire and Rescue Services SFRS report savings nearing £900 million. It is questionable whether this has been invested back into the service raising concerns that capital savings from any SDR options that progress may not be reinvested.
- The presentation on change options to deliver permanent solutions to the removal of 10 wholetime appliances temporarily removed in September 2023 made no mention of the associated loss of 166 firefighter posts or that these temporary reductions were due to immediate budget pressures the SFRS

faced in 2023. The direct workforce impacts were not set out within the presentation to attendees.

- The online scoring system used by ASV experienced problems that meant attendees did not see any of the final scores and were therefore unable to apply scrutiny to the process. It is unknown, to the FBU, whether all scores were recorded accurately and what, if any, impact the technical problems on the day had on the decision to take all 23 change options to full public consultation.

SFRS SDR public consultation

The SFRS launched a 12-week public consultation on 25 June 2025 for all 23 change options with detailed briefing packs and a series of public engagement events across Scotland.

The FBU held similar public engagement events in potentially impacted communities and encouraged members of the public, councillors, MSPs and MPs to fully engage in the consultation process. It was evident that communities were concerned about the potential loss of fire cover, loss of overnight cover and increased response times. There was overwhelming recognition that Scotland's firefighters do much more than emergency response and of the importance of firefighters delivering community safety and community engagement. Repeatedly there was anger expressed that the options within the consultation did not include any option to maintain the status quo. This option was subsequently added at some point after the consultation had opened.

There was repeated concern that the consultation was only available online, preventing some members of communities from engaging and completing the online form. The FBU received report back that there were difficulties navigating the online form and that frustration with the online portal led some to not complete the consultation. We do not have any data to evidence the scale of this issue.

All 23 options were open to anyone to record a response, this left the potential that anyone from anywhere in Scotland, or abroad could contribute to the consultation, potentially influencing decisions that had significant impact on local communities.

Further, and more significantly there was no information provided as to how consultation responses would be weighted or assessed against the SFRS data that was used to develop the 23 options, the scores from the balanced room event or any of the other elements of the SDR. Recent comments and communications from SFRS managers have introduced a narrative that the consultation process was undertaken to allow staff, stakeholders and communities the opportunity to share their views, offer alternative suggestions, and highlight anything SFRS may not have considered. There has been no indication of what process will be undertaken to assess the viability of alternative suggestions. The impression from this narrative is that the consultation responses will play a limited part in deciding whether to progress any of the 23 change options

Current situation

The public consultation closed in September 2025, the SFRS Board were due to meet on 18 December 2025 to receive and review an independent report following the close of the consultation and to make decisions on the 23 change options. On or around 11 December the SFRS made a decision to postpone this Board meeting citing the need for careful consideration of the 3,700 responses, a requirement to review the consultation process to ensure there were no gaps for challenge and a need to consider how information regarding the options was presented throughout the consultation.

Given the FBU observations regarding the consultation process listed above, and the potential impact of implementing many of the change options, the FBU broadly welcome the decision to postpone making rushed decisions of this scale on a self-imposed arbitrary timeline to allow the SFRS to undertake a fuller review of all considerations and consultation responses. The FBU do however have concerns that delays leave our members and the communities they serve facing a high degree of uncertainty regarding their future and the fire and rescue provision in local communities.

Since the close of the consultation, the FBU have submitted a number of Freedom of Information requests (FOI) regarding the consultation responses. FOI-1386-2025.6 stated that the consultation had received a total of 3,673 survey responses, 20 substantive responses by letter and emails, a petition opposing the SDRS option for Hawick with 1,934 signatures and circa 119 campaign emails opposing the Lochgelly option.

FOI responses received from the SFRS show, with the exception of proposals for the 9 long-term dormant volunteer stations, there is overwhelming opposition for the 14 remaining options. The rate of opposition to the 14 remaining change options was between 5 and 36 times the rate of support.

The FBU return to our previous concern, given the overwhelming opposition returned from the consultation, it remains unknown how consultation responses will be measured and weighted against the rational SFRS presented when developing these options.

Current availability and daily impact

The FBU have consistently made the case that the current situation faced by our members is untenable and not conducive to a modern fit for purpose emergency service. The SFRS Senior Leadership Team, Board, and by default the entire organisation are forced to continue to operate within budget constraints that have driven a capital backlog now in excess of £800 million. It is now well known that there are a large number of fire stations across Scotland that are unfit for purpose, with internal scaffolding required to manage the ongoing risks from Reinforced Autoclaved Aeriated Concrete (RAAC) construction, many stations without the ability to implement zoning as part of mitigation against cancers and other diseases, many unable to provide dignified facilities for SFRS staff. The SFRS see elements of their SDR as a means to resolve some of these issues. However, the scale of the capital issues faced are not going to be resolved with the 23 options presented for public consultation.

Alongside the capital backlog, operational headcount (the number of firefighters) has consistently been cut. Scotland now has over 1200 fewer firefighters than in 2013 when the single service was created. The FBU recognise that a small number of this 1200 was driven by the removal of duplication in the initial years of the SFRS. This argument cannot be used to justify the loss of 371 RDS staff or 144 volunteer staff. On top of the loss of RVDS staff, there has been a cut of 721 wholetime firefighters, a generous assumption would be that it took 5 years for the SFRS to remove duplication from wholetime operational roles. Since 2018 there has been a cut of 215 wholetime firefighters and 18 control firefighters. The FBU dispute that there was duplication of 506 wholetime operational roles lost between 2013 and 2018.

Faced with immediate budget pressures in 2023 the SFRS temporarily removed 10 wholetime fire appliances and reduced the agreed target operating model (frontline operational headcount) by 166 posts. This action was supposed to reduce the number of occasions when wholetime appliances were placed off the run (unavailable to respond to emergency incidents) and/or appliances were mobilised with crewing levels below the agreed safe crewing model. As stated in previous evidence to the SCJC, the SFRS continue to place further appliances off the run on a daily basis, specialist resources across Scotland are either regularly unavailable or operate with crewing levels below the agreed and recognised safe team typing, and further appliances are mobilised with crewing levels below the agreed safe crewing model. Operational control rooms continue to operate at critical and often below critical crewing levels. Agreed safe crewing of control rooms, fire appliances and team typing for specialist resources is in place to allow firefighters to, so far as reasonably practicable, safely perform the tasks asked of them when responding to the wide range of emergency incidents they can be mobilised to. Too often it has been in response to harrowing experience of injury and loss that safe crewing levels have been developed and agreed. These should be non-negotiable and should not be ignored on a whim due to cuts driven by budget considerations.

Between 2013 and 2026 the real terms resource budget allocated to the SFRS has amounted to a staggering accumulative shortfall of £839,326,714. The year-on-year real terms budget cuts SFRS continue to face is putting the safety of communities and Scotland's firefighters, our members, at increasing risk. The SFRS have stated their intention to reinvest any resource and capital savings from the 23 proposed SDR change options, this is welcomed however, the FBU do not believe that there will be savings on the scale required to have meaningful impact on the multiple capital and resource issues the SFRS face.

Spending review consideration

Alongside the draft budget announcement, the Scottish Government published the Scottish Spending Review (SSR) 2026 setting out the Scottish Government's indicative spending plans up to 2028-29 for resource, and up to 2029-30 for capital.

Within the foreword of the SSR the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government stated;

Building on our Public Service Reform Strategy, we will prioritise prevention, join up services locally, and drive efficiency across the system – protecting frontline delivery while reducing duplication and corporate costs. Portfolio Efficiency and

Reform Plans set out actions to deliver cumulative, recurring savings of £1.5 billion over the spending review period.

In the context of the SFRS already delivering savings anticipated to exceed £900 million by 2027/28 through reform, through prevention and through the removal of duplication, this statement is alarming. The cuts SFRS have made to operational roles is already around 16% of the 2013 total headcount, deeper cuts dressed up as further reform will decimate the service and further impact the SFR Score functions of prevention and emergency response.

Chapter 1 of the SSR states;

The Public Service Reform (PSR) Strategy also outlines our commitment to reforming public services. Through a focus on prevention, joined up services, and efficiency, we will drive systematic change across the public sector. We recognise that in order to deliver high quality services and improve outcomes we must take a different approach. The principles and actions outlined in these strategies must be reflected in our spending, and this SSR demonstrates our strong commitment to this agenda.

This statement is at odds with the 2022 in principal agreement between the FBU and SFRS to develop the role of Scotland's firefighters. This agreement would have delivered further reform in line with the Scottish Government reform strategy, allowed joined up services, and delivered societal and economic savings. This agreement has not been realised due to a failure to recognise the need for a different approach from Government and an ongoing failure to provide the required funding to the SFRS to deliver.

Chapter 1 of the SSR goes on to say;

Reforms to organisational leadership, design and culture, are critical to achieving fiscal sustainability and delivering a managed reduction of 0.5 per cent per annum to 2029-30. As set out in the FSDP, this will align with service redesign, automation where appropriate, and smarter resource use. This approach is designed to protect frontline services while reducing corporate costs and improving productivity.

A further 2% cut to SFRS by 2029/30 is unmanageable whilst protecting the front line and will not only prevent SFRS from delivering their strategic priorities, but will unquestionably see further cuts to firefighter numbers, further proposals to close community fire stations and further increasing response times to emergencies. Any proposed reform that involves even deeper cuts to a vital emergency service must be opposed at every opportunity and ultimately must be rejected

Budget impact considerations

In evidence to the SCJC on 12 November 2025, the SFRS Chief Fire Office CFO stated;

...sustained investment is essential if we are to ensure the resilience of our front-line emergency service and provide safe, modern facilities for our staff while ensuring that our critical infrastructure remains fit for purpose. To deliver that, we

are seeking capital funding of £61 million in 2026-27, rising to £77 million by 2029-30. To cover our baseline and unavoidable cost pressures, SFRS requires a resource budget uplift in 2026-27 of £30.854 million. An additional £5.7 million would enable us to advance our strategic priorities.

The 13 January 2026 draft budget announcement delivered a resource budget of £353.6 million and capital budget of £48.4 million, a £9.35 million shortfall on what the CFO stated was required in resource funding and £12.6 million shortfall in required capital funding. Funding gaps of this magnitude will inevitably lead to the SFRS struggling to recruit the required number of firefighters to deliver the revised target operating model, maintain the agreed safe crewing model and deliver any of the strategic priorities the SDR process was intended to deliver.

Closing

The FBU have consistently sought to take a pragmatic approach to the SFRS SDR. It was recognised that factors such as deindustrialisation and changing trends in societal factors such as employment practices and where people live, alongside environmental changes that are driving increasing extreme weather events and wildfires meant that SFRS should assess whether their operating model and where they have stations and personal located remains fit for the risks of today.

On paper many of the proposed or anticipated benefits from the 23 change options are welcomed by the FBU, resolving the ongoing issues from RAAC construction across the SFRS estate, implementing DECON zoning and dignified facilities, and bolstering training and fire safety department. Unfortunately, the continuing budget constriction will likely negatively impact on all of these aspirations. To the proposed benefits of SDR the SFRS needs the investment the CFO asked for in November 2025, not further cuts masked as reform.

Throughout the SFRS SDR consultation documents and at the public meetings two consistent themes emerged; anticipated financial savings from capital receipts delivered by closing or reconfiguring stations to avoid the need for overnight accommodation, and under the heading of “Disbenefits” increased response times to communities faced with removal of stations and/or fire appliances.

The FBU maintain the view that a genuine review of service delivery by the SFRS should not have options that include financially driven cuts and reductions to services and should not increase the risks faced by communities.

End

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Submission to the Criminal Justice Committee on the Service Delivery Review. January 2026

Introduction

In November 2025, the Criminal Justice Committee sought information regarding the financial pressures facing organisations in the criminal justice sector, and the main priorities for 2026/27. The Committee requested that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service return in February to discuss the impacts of the draft budget and spending review on both SFRS and its modernisation programme, the Service Delivery Review.

Financial Pressures Facing the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

As highlighted in our submission last November, there has been an 18 per cent real-terms reduction in the SFRS resource budget since the creation of the single service in 2013.

By 2027/28 we will have delivered more than £900m in savings exceeding the original £328m set out in the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act.

We achieved these savings through a combination of reductions in the Target Operating Model (TOM) for wholetime firefighters, across frontline, off station and specialist roles; reduction in supervisory, middle management and senior officers; rationalisation of Control Rooms from 8 to 3; rationalisation and removal of duplication within corporate support functions, and rationalisation of our non-operational property estate.

Despite this we have continued to improve community safety with an overall reduction in fatal fire casualties since 2013 of c.9% and non-fatal casualties of c.48%. The number of fires has reduced by c.9%, whereas the number of non-fire incidents attended has increased by c.75%, in areas such as flood response and assisting other agencies, highlighting our contribution to wider outcomes.

The reduction in fire-related incidents a testament to the effectiveness of our prevention work and it essential that we continue to develop and invest in preventative work and community engagement and to ensure this trend is not reversed and that we can respond to changes in society, such as an ageing population.

SFRS is not immune ongoing financial challenges which face both Scottish Government and the wider public sector and we have recently been required to make additional savings in order to balance our budget. In 2023 we temporarily removed 10 appliances and the 166 associated firefighter posts from multi-pump stations and in 2025/26 we removed a further £2.6m from our budget, reducing our spend on fuel, utilities, travel and subsistence.

We have made significant savings over more than a decade without impacting on frontline delivery or the support we provide to our communities.

However, in order to meet our ongoing strategic priorities we need additional funding.

This would allow us to invest in

- Training
- Prevention
- Our estate
- Fleet, equipment and technology

We have been clear at previous committees that continued real-terms cuts to the SFRS budget would potentially impact on our operational response.

Impact of Draft Budget and Spending Review

We had originally requested a £36.6m uplift in our resource budget to allow us to progress our strategic objectives and investment in the Service. As we updated the Committee in November the minimum we needed to ensure we meet critical requirements was £30m.

The draft budget statement for 2026/27 outlined a proposed £18m uplift in SFRS's resource budget and a £1.4m uplift in our capital budget.

We are still reviewing the impact of this and are in discussions internally and with Scottish Government to determine if we can further reduce this gap.

Impact on resource spending

We are reviewing where additional savings can be made to achieve a balanced budget however, given the savings already achieved within SFRS, and the fact that 80 per cent of our budget is attributed to staff costs and 80% of those costs are operational staff, there is limited scope for savings.

As an emergency service, our priority is, of course to protect the service we provide but we cannot guarantee that we can protect our frontline from budgetary pressures. The spending review has also indicated that SFRS will receive a flat cash budget in subsequent years and this will continue to create significant pressure on our budget. We will now have to make choices which balance risk and compliance and against workforce impacts.

For example, for every £1m we need to save that would equate to one appliance and 24 firefighters.

While we have to ensure we prioritise the frontline, our support staff are absolutely integral to the service we provide. Support staff reductions have a compounding impact: they absorb functions that free operational crews to focus on emergency response and training. Without them, operational staff must take on additional duties, reducing time available for essential training and preparedness.

Impact on capital spending

As highlighted in the November submission we have a backlog of £818m across our estate, fleet, equipment, digital technology and business systems to bring all assets up to a modern standard. Our estate alone requires £496m to address significant

issues as some of our buildings are no longer fit for purpose, including 14 stations which have Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). We also want to reduce firefighter exposure to harmful fire contaminants which means we need to invest in PPE, cleaning processes and infrastructure upgrades. We have been fortunate to receive an increase in the capital budget for the past two years which has allowed us to make progress.

The draft budget will see an uplift this year of £1.4m which along with potential capital receipts would be in line with our requirements for 2026/27. However, as we set out previously our modernisation programme requires £62, £63m and £67m in the three subsequent years. Following the draft budget, we now need to plan on the basis of funding over the next three years of £53m, £51m and £51m.

This will impact significantly on the modernisation of our fleet and estates which also means slowing progress on delivering our programme to provide safe, clean and dignified facilities for our staff.

To offset the shortfall in our capital requirement, it is imperative that we are able to retain any capital receipts to allow us to continue to invest in our estate, fleet and equipment.

Service Delivery Review

The Service Delivery Review is SFRS's modernisation programme to ensure we can meet the evolving risks which Scotland is facing.

The types of incidents we are responding to is changing so we need to change how we work to meet these challenges. For example, we are seeing increased wildfire and flooding, often in areas which do not have permanently staffed fire stations, while other stations are placed in areas to support historical risks which are no longer there.

Along with the challenges we face around our buildings which are no longer fit for purpose, we need to change how we deliver our services to become the modern fire and rescue service that Scotland needs.

Our key aim is to better match our resources to risk and demand in our communities, including reviewing where our stations and appliances are situated, how we crew our appliances and how we operate from stations.

We began engaging with communities in 2024 to help inform the development of a suite of options for change. Then, in June 2025, we launched a public consultation on 23 options for change focusing on three priority areas

- Finding a permanent solution to the areas impacted by the temporary appliance withdrawal in 2023
- Addressing the stations impacted by RAAC
- Dormant stations – those where we have been unable to maintain a crew over an extended period of time

The options also included the implementation of a day shift duty system in targeted areas and the transfer of resources to better align to operational risk and demand or support organisational priorities such as training.

Throughout the consultation, we held 52 staff engagement events, 18 public meetings, seven drop-in sessions and nine online engagement events. We also ran an online survey which received more than 3,700 responses from the public, staff and stakeholders across Scotland.

The consultation was an important opportunity to actively engage with the public and staff to listen to their views, gather alternative suggestions, and for communities to highlight anything we may not have considered.

In line with the Gunning principles, all of this feedback is currently being carefully analysed alongside the operational evidence that informed the proposals. Due to the timeline of completing the required work, it is unlikely that we will be in a position to make a final decision before the pre-election period begins in March.

Potential impact of budget on Service Delivery Review

The focus of the Service Delivery Review is about ensuring our resources meet risk and demand and modernising the Service. While some options do achieve savings or could secure capital receipts, others require significant investment to support implementation.

The Service Delivery Review is not, and never has been, a cost-saving exercise; it is a safety- driven/intelligence-driven modernisation programme designed to ensure Scotland has a fire and rescue service fit for the next 20 years. Underfunding risks delaying or diluting the very changes required to maintain- public safety.

We now also need to review our proposals in light of the draft budget statement, and particularly against the backdrop of the Scottish Spending Review, as this may impact on what we can deliver while making the in-year savings required to balance our budget.

This may mean that some of the options we have consulted on are no longer viable. We may also need to review the original long list of options to identify if there are others we would choose to prioritise if we are required to deliver additional savings.

If the budget gap persists, we will be forced to prioritise measures that deliver short-term financial savings over long-term system improvement. This would undermine the operational and safety benefits that the SDR was designed to achieve.

Conclusion

We know that SFRS is not the only public service facing a challenging financial environment and recognise the difficulty in balancing public finances.

However, we have also stated that continued real-terms budget reduction was not sustainable and would inevitably impact on our frontline provision at some stage. Regrettably the latest draft budget statement is likely to be this tipping point.

We have worked hard to shield communities from the effects of financial constraint, but the combination of sustained real terms- reduction and increased operational demand has created a structural gap that can no longer be managed through efficiencies alone.

We remain committed to achieving the savings we can through change and innovation and will do everything we can to protect our frontline services.

We need continued investment to allow us to move forward with our modernisation programme in a planned and measured way. This will ensure we can evolve to meet the changing needs of Scotland while keeping our communities and staff safe.

End