



MSP BRIEFING NOTE

AUTUMN 2025

SERVICE DELIVERY REVIEW – UPDATE

MSPs will be aware of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) [Service Delivery Review \(SDR\)](#) and the associated public consultation which ran throughout the summer, closing on 16 September.

The options covered in the public consultation include station closures, changes to duty systems and reductions in emergency cover across the country, on top of over a decade of sustained frontline cuts.

FBU branches across the country ran visible and highly effective campaigns setting out how dangerous further cuts to firefighter numbers and front line resources would be. Many MSPs will have attended local FBU public meetings and have been briefed by FBU officials and firefighters over the summer. A number of you also attended the FBU briefing session in the Scottish Parliament on 9 September.

The opposition to further cuts to the fire and rescue service in Scotland has been universal from the public, clearly setting out how highly local communities value 24/7 fire cover, and how opposed they are to the continued increases in response times. FBU members know that many of these proposals are deeply unpopular with the communities they protect.

This consultation follows the FBU's own [Firestorm report](#) which was published in the autumn of 2023, and highlighted the consequences of years of sustained underinvestment in Scotland's firefighters and their Service.

The FBU have set out key outcomes which must be delivered as part of this review if fire and rescue cover is to be maintained and improved across Scotland. If the current process is to truly modernise the fire and rescue service in Scotland for the decades to come, rather than serve as a smokescreen to further cuts, then it is crucial that we see:

1. No further cuts to firefighter numbers
2. No further cuts to emergency fire and rescue cover at any time of the day or night
3. The safe crewing model maintained
4. Significant investment in fire station welfare and decontamination facilities made
5. Increased and sustained real terms investment from the Scottish Government

2 OCTOBER MSP DEBATE – PROTECTING SCOTLAND’S FIRE SERVICE

Following the close of the public consultation, a dedicated debate was held in the Scottish Parliament on 2 October, titled [Protecting Scotland’s Fire Service](#). The wording to the original motion, submitted by Labour’s Katy Clark, clearly laid out the link between sustained real terms budget cuts, the loss of firefighter posts and increasing response times. The wording of the original motion was:

That the Parliament expresses concern at the cuts proposed by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS); recognises the Cuts Leave Scars campaign, which was set up in 2023 in response to a decade of underfunding by the Scottish Government; notes the loss of over 1,250 firefighter jobs across Scotland since the establishment of the SFRS in 2013, leading to pumps being unavailable as a result of too few firefighters to crew them; regrets that, as a result of cuts, call handling times have increased in control rooms and response times have increased from 6 minutes and 51 seconds to 8 minutes and 20 seconds, which risks lives in Scotland; notes with concern the plans to close 13 stations and permanently withdraw 10 appliances, and encourages the Scottish Government to work alongside the SFRS and the Fire Brigades Union Scotland to ensure that there are no further cuts to firefighter numbers or fire cover and that safe crewing levels are guaranteed.

Many MSPs spoke as part of the debate, with cross party support against cuts a clear theme throughout. Of particular interest to firefighters was the contributions of the Minister with responsibility for the fire and rescue service in Scotland, Siobhain Brown, the Minister for Victims and Community Safety.

During her two contributions, the Minister made a number of statements which, at best, were misinformed, and at worst consciously untrue. So misleading were these assertions that it is incumbent upon the FBU as the trade union representing the overwhelming majority of Scotland’s firefighters to provide corrections, and spell out to MSPs the reality faced by our members. All of the Minister’s highlighted quotes are timestamped and can be viewed here - [Protecting Scotland’s Fire Service](#).

JOB CUTS ARE DOWN TO REDUCING DUPLICATION

Fiction (8.38) – “The vast majority of the reduction in firefighter numbers quoted in the motion we are debating today can be attributed to the reduction in duplication and layers of management....”

Fact – This is blatantly untrue, and is so wholly inaccurate as to be impossible for the Minister not to have been aware of how misleading this statement was at the time. Indeed, it is a point the FBU has made clear to the Minister on numerous occasions, both through briefings and during face to face meetings. The plain facts are:

- Since 2012/13, the year before SFRS was created, to 2024/25 (latest published figures) there has been a reduction of **1239** firefighters in Scotland
- Of those 1239 jobs lost, **721** were wholetime operational firefighters and a further **371** were retained operational firefighters – these are direct cuts to front line services
- On a daily basis as many as **17** of the **115** wholetime crewed fire appliances across Scotland are unavailable due to staffing shortages. These staffing shortages are so significant that in September 2023 the SFRS temporarily withdrew **10** of these appliances as they no longer had the necessary firefighters to crew them
- As many as half, of the **345** retained and volunteer crewed fire appliances across Scotland are unavailable due to staffing shortages on any given day

- Even [SFRS own figures](#) show that the organisation is critically understaffed. As of 30 June 2025, SFRS was short of 950 frontline firefighters across wholetime, retained and volunteer operational fire stations

The table below shows the impact of cuts on firefighter numbers in detail:

Year	Wholetime Firefighters	Retained Firefighters	Control Firefighters	Volunteer Firefighters	Uniformed Total
2012/13	4151	3076	234	417	7878
2024/25	3430	2705	171	273	6570
Reduction in numbers from 2012/13 to 2024/25					
Number	721	371	63	144	1239
Percentage	17.37%	12.06%	26.92%	34.53%	15.73%

Front line firefighter numbers have been decimated since the creation of SFRS, and the Minister knows this. These are overwhelmingly cuts to front line services, and have directly led to appliance availability falling and public safety being put at risk.

NEW AND EMERGING RISKS

Truth (10.15) – “*What has changed in that time though is the risks that our country faces and it is right that we make sure that we are ready to respond to any new challenges.*”

But only half of the truth – The Minister is right to point out that some of the risks facing Scotland’s communities are changing, with new risks emerging. What is so frustrating to firefighters though is that the Scottish Government have been sitting on a proposal to expand the role of Scotland’s firefighters to respond to such risks [since the autumn of 2022](#).

The proposal was negotiated between the FBU and SFRS, and addressed a significant number of the expectations Scottish Ministers themselves had set out for the SFRS to achieve in the [Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2022](#).

The proposal required limited additional investment in order to deliver on the key priorities identified by the Scottish Government itself. For three years though it has sat on the shelf gathering dust, rather than improving outcomes for communities across the length and breadth of Scotland.

CUTS NOT ABOUT SAVING MONEY

Fiction (12.35) – “*I would like to emphasise that the driver for the changes proposed by SFRS is to better align resources to the current risks. This is not about saving money.*”

Fact – The entire existence of the SFRS since it was formed in 2013 has been driven by a political desire to save money. In September 2023 [ten wholetime appliances](#) were removed from operational duty specifically because the SFRS could not afford to retain them with the

allocated resource budget for that year. Since the creation of the SFRS in 2013 the resource budget which funds day to day employee costs has been slashed:

- In 2012/13 the combined resource budget for the then eight regional fire and rescue services in Scotland stood at a combined £290.7 million – [see page 17 of Audit Scotland report](#)
- The resource budget set for SFRS in [2025/26 is £332.1 million](#), almost a **£84 million** real terms cut from the resource budget available in 2012/13
- Cumulatively in the resource budget alone the Scottish Government has cut a total of **£751,405,150** from the fire and rescue service in Scotland from 2012/13 to 2025/26. These figures are from the Scottish Parliaments own [SPICe](#) calculator

It is these savage real terms cuts that has resulted in firefighter posts being cut and response times increasing. In just over a decade, a cumulative total of over three quarters of a billion pounds has been slashed from the budget directly funding the recruitment, retention, training and delivery of front line, operational firefighters. **The driver for change since the introduction of the SFRS in 2013 has been about saving money, which has directly impacted public safety.**

RESPONSE TIMES

Fiction (1.01.40) – *“It is important to recognise that response times alone do not provide a meaningful measure to determine emergency response.”*

Fact – There is no more accurate a measure to determine the effectiveness of an emergency service than response times.

Given that response times have increased year on year across fire and rescue services throughout the UK for a number of years, it is hardly surprising that those responsible for these increases, both politicians and chief fire officers, wish to diminish their importance.

However, any member of the public who has suffered the experience of being trapped in a house fire, involved in a road traffic collision, or urgently needed firefighters for any other type of emergency will understand the absolute life and death implications of such increases. Every firefighter knows what such increases in responding can mean.

It is entirely unsurprising to firefighters that as their numbers have been cut year on year, appliance availability levels have dropped, and response times have increased.

The Minister went on in her contribution to blame rising traffic levels, congestion, road works and farcically, even firefighter safety in pre-rigging in PPE before entering an appliance (a practice which has been routinely ongoing for over 20 years) for rising response times. Perhaps she should consider the impact that cutting over 15% of the frontline workforce has had in the period where response times have spiralled as detailed below.

Median response time of first appliance arrival		Median response time of first appliance arrival to possible life risk	
2014	06:51	2014	07:13
2024	08:20	2024	08:42

The impact of sustained real terms budget cuts to SFRS over the last decade is clear. The Service's own statistics lay bare the reduction of almost 1250 firefighter posts in Scotland since the creation of SFRS.

Budget cuts = less firefighters = increased response times = risk to public safety

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NOW?

This is now a critical juncture for the fire and rescue service in Scotland. With the SDR public consultation closing a final decision on the options set out within it is due to be made by the [Fire Board](#) in December of this year.

MSPs need to consider what the Scottish Parliament is, and should be, accountable for in scrutinising the service SFRS is able to provide to protect the communities of Scotland.

Both past, current and future cuts to SFRS are as a direct result of the real terms financial cuts which have been forced on the SFRS through Scottish Government budget allocations.

These proposed changes could fundamentally change how fire and rescue emergency services are provided in the local communities which you serve. Some would see the most significant cuts made in a generation within these communities. The FBU expect politicians of all levels and parties to be actively engaged in considering the impact of what is proposed.

The outcomes to the SFRS Service Delivery Review have to recognise the impact of cuts over the past decade. If Scotland is to have a modern, fit for purpose fire and rescue service for the future, it must be built upon a programme of investment, not highjacked and used as a smokescreen for further cuts to firefighters, their profession and Scotland's communities.

Decreased real terms budgets, overseen by politicians, have driven these proposed cuts and those that have been imposed over the last decade. The Scottish Parliament bears a collective responsibility for any reductions to fire and emergency cover within the communities of Scotland. The FBU is clear that any proposals that come forward from the Fire Board's decision in December must come back before the Scottish Parliament to be debated and voted on.

