Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS)

Follow Up Questions from Criminal Justice Committee

February 2026

1. Can the SFRS provide estimates of the potential reduction of wholetime firefighter which might result from the near flat cash funding provision for the Service across each of the three years of the Scottish Spending Review

If we receive £18m in 26/27 and flat cash for the next two years, we will have a gap of £6m in 26/27, a further £10m in 27/28 and a further £10m in 28/29

This equates to 128 firefighters in 26/27, 198 firefighters in 27/28 and 191 firefighters in 28/29 – a total of 517 FF

This means on top of the 10 appliances temporarily withdrawn in 2023 there would be a further 6 appliances off the run in 26/27 and a further 10 in 27/28 and another 10 in 28/29.

This is a total of 36 appliances the equivalent of removing all pumping appliances from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

2. Can the SFRS share information on the academic work is has commissioned on modelling response times to emergency calls, and in due course the outcomes of this research.

The SFRS is supporting work being carried out by Dr Colin Richardson of Northumbria University on an academic study looking at why response times to incidents in Scotland are changing, and what this means for people and communities in Scotland. This is fundamental academic research – it is about improving our understanding of patterns and causes. The university is not being paid by SFRS to provide recommendations or assurance. Instead, we are contributing our data and operational insight to help shape a piece of peer-reviewed research.

SFRS will:

- Co-develop the research questions, methodology, and agree how SFRS data is used, shared, and stored throughout the project lifecycle
- Retain full ownership of all SFRS data, with the right to withdraw access if data handling obligations are not met
- Nominate a named point of contact to facilitate timely access to data and relevant operational context
- Review and approve all draft outputs prior to submission or publication, to ensure they are accurate, respectful of staff, and do not compromise operational, organisational, or personal confidentiality

- Have the right to request redaction or amendment of any content that could identify individuals or compromise operational security

Northumbria University will:

- Lead the technical analysis, research design, and academic writing in collaboration with SFRS
- Ensure the work complies with all applicable academic, ethical, and data protection standards, including GDPR and Northumbria University's research ethics framework
- Provide SFRS with reasonable advance notice and opportunity to review all outputs before external dissemination
- Acknowledge SFRS as a co-author and equal research partner in all publications and presentations arising from the collaboration
- Securely store and process all SFRS data in accordance with an agreed data management plan, and destroy or return data upon project completion
- Not share SFRS data with any third party without prior written consent

The intention is to produce a jointly authored paper for an academic journal that will be submitted for publication later in 2026. The initial report will be developed for SFRS by May 2026. Any findings relevant to our strategy, planning or performance reporting will be shared internally, with our Board, Fire Brigade Union, Scottish Government, the Criminal Justice Committee and will be published on the SFRS website in due course

3. Can the SFRS confirm if the 3,700 public submissions received on the SDR consultation will be published online in due course, alongside any analysis of those submissions,

- Yes, the submissions will be published along with full staff and public engagement reports

4. Can the SFRS outline the mitigation actions it is taking on the risks facing firefighters (like exposure to contamination materials etc.) given the SFRS's legal obligations as an employer to provide safe working environment for firefighters,

SFRS Mitigation Actions to manage and oversee Firefighter Contaminant Exposure

Legal Duties and Commitment

The SFRS has a statutory obligation to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of its firefighters. This includes compliance with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Control of Substances Hazardous to

Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH), and the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992.

SFRS remains committed to proportionate and evidence-based health and safety management. Key mitigation measures include the publication of the Fire Contaminants Generic Risk Assessment, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and Training Safe Systems of Work (SSOW), supported by £2.46 million of investment in PPE and equipment.

Evidence-Based Understanding of Risk

Following the UCLan/FBU research led by Professor Anna Stec, SFRS established a dedicated Contaminants Group to analyse findings and develop operational and organisational responses.

In 2023, the International Agency for Research on Cancer classified occupational exposure as a firefighter as carcinogenic to humans (Group 1), shaping both SFRS's approach and the NFCC's subsequent 2025 position statement.

Governance Structures

The SFRS Contaminants Group, chaired by the Director of Training, Safety and Assurance, reports to the Training, Safety and Assurance Board, the Service Delivery Board, and the People Committee. Operational performance is monitored through established Operational Assurance processes.

SFRS also contributes actively to national work through the NFCC Contaminants Committee.

Policies, Procedures and Training

The Fire Contaminants SOPs establish the framework for Safe Systems of Work, guiding Incident Commanders in minimising exposure through effective use of people, equipment, and partner resources.

The Fire Contaminants Management Arrangement outlines wider organisational controls.

Training on contamination risks and PPE handling is embedded in BA initial and refresher courses. Two Learning Content Management System (LCMS) modules further support ongoing competency as part of TfOC.

Operational Mitigation Measures

SFRS has implemented a range of frontline control measures, including:

- Additional PPE, supported by 36 reserve hubs, to ensure timely laundry and replacement (£1.4 m).
- Airing racks and cages to reduce contaminant release from PPE (£267k).
- External PPE storage boxes at 353 stations (£206k).
- Shampoo/bodywash dispensers to promote post-incident decontamination ("shower within the hour") (£74k).
- BA washers/dryers at Cambuslang, Perth, and Portlethen (£200k).
- Zoning (green/amber/red) across premises to control secondary contamination (£29k).

- SFRS is also partnering with Professor Stec and FireHazResearch through the Scottish Government CivTech programme to develop exposure-tracking systems linking operational conditions with health markers.

Infrastructure and Investment

The ongoing Premises Compliance Project supports local identification of contamination risks and informs decisions on further control measures. Findings will inform the Strategic Asset Management Plan (Property) 2023–2028.

Continuous Improvement and Research

SFRS continues to engage with academia and national bodies, contributing to emerging research, best practice, and future national guidance.

Workforce Engagement and Consultation

The Contaminants SOP underwent comprehensive service-wide consultation, including engagement with representative bodies and Professor Stec. Ongoing communication, training, and audit processes ensure continued learning and reinforcement of required behaviours.

Assurance and Monitoring

A thematic audit of the Contaminants SOP and implementation is planned for 2026–27.

A gap analysis has confirmed SFRS's compliance with both the ISO laundry standard for firefighting PPE and NFCC guidance.

Forward Look

SFRS will continue to:

- Roll out exposure-tracking technologies.
- Enhance infrastructure using a risk-based approach (e.g. BA facilities, dignified decontamination areas).
- Review SOPs, management arrangements and training as evidence develops.
- Maintain engagement with academic partners and NFCC to incorporate emerging research.

SFRS remains committed to reducing firefighter exposure to contaminants and safeguarding the health, safety and wellbeing of its staff.

5. Can the SFRS provide links to the published information on the scoring methodology used in the public engagement sessions for the options in the SDR,

- The reports and analysis from pre-consultation are available on the SFRS website [Publications | Scottish Fire and Rescue Service]

6. Can the SFRS provide information on how the SDR engagement process, and consideration of options, models the impacts of station closure in one region on the wider community footprint on neighbouring regions (for example how decision on the SFRS footprint in say Glasgow might impact communities in neighbouring areas like North Lanarkshire etc.).

- SFRS used operational modelling to simulate how potential changes to the number, location or crewing type of pumping appliances would be likely to impact on average pumping appliance vehicle response times.
- Each modelling run simulates 108 versions of a years' worth of operational time. This method is implemented to improve statistical stability, but the results still reflect model assumptions and cannot anticipate rare or unprecedented events.
- Impacts on average vehicle response times were only observed within neighbouring local authority areas if the impacted fire station was the closest to a local authority boundary.
- In the case of both Glasgow options, the withdrawal of three wholetime pumping appliances from the heart of the Glasgow City local authority were simulated. Modelling showed no impacts on response times within any neighbouring local authorities.
- In the case of the Lanarkshire options, a change in the crewing model of the Cumbernauld 2nd pumping appliance was simulated. Modelling identified impacts within the North Lanarkshire local authority area and minor impacts to the average 2nd attending pumping appliance response times in the Falkirk local authority area.
- The levels of these impacts were considered during the development of each change option to ensure that SFRS could maintain sufficient resilience to provide adequate speed and weight of response within wider geographic areas to handle larger scale incidents. The occurrence of such incidents is relatively low.