

Commissioner's response to Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS) Public Performance Report

Staffordshire Police, Fire & Rescue and Crime Commissioner Ben Adams' ninth Fire Public Performance Meeting, on 3 December 2025, was an opportunity to discuss publicly current pressures facing the Service, and progress made since the last meeting against the priorities in his Fire & Rescue Plan and the Chief Fire Officer (CFO)'s Safety Plan.

The Commissioner welcomed all to the meeting including Deputy Commissioner Dave Evans, CFO Rob Barber, Deputy CFO Glynn Luznyj and Chief Financial Officer David Greensmith.

1. Current areas of priority

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS)

CFO Barber thanked the team who put together the comprehensive and transparent performance pack, enabling the detailed conversations in the Public Performance Meeting.

HMICFRS published their State of Fire report for 2024-2025, recognising ongoing issues with recruitment and retaining talented staff in fire safety. Staffordshire was recognised for addressing areas for improvement, and the health partnership Falls Response and Home from Hospital schemes were highlighted as promising practice. HMICFRS referred to Staffordshire's clear strategic planning, robust action plans, and clear focused leadership.

CFO Barber discussed that the work with the NHS is positive, and the academic evaluation report received from the University of Chester demonstrates the benefits of the two initiatives across the whole system, supporting vulnerable people and taking some demand out of the overstretched NHS. The next piece of evaluation will include looking through a financial lens at what reducing future readmittance through Accident & Emergency has saved the system.

Staffordshire has now implemented all 18 Grenfell recommendations, reinforcing its commitment to building safety. HMICFRS recognises the risk for Fire & Rescue Services (FRS) in how experts are trained and retained in statutory roles, as the private sector is much more attractive once staff are trained. In addition, upcoming changes to building consultations and planning could add responsibilities for fire safety teams, particularly around lithium battery storage, requiring additional funding to meet these demands.

CFO Barber discussed the increases in operational demand across all incident types, closely related to warm, dry weather between February and October. Impacts have been seen across operational response, prevention and protection, as well as finance. Most significant was secondary fires – small outdoor fires not involving people or property. In the last 6 months there were 1,794 incidents – a 68% increase (727 incidents). Much proactive partnership work has been carried out to try and curb this increase, but dry conditions have continued, and the Service recognises these clear effects of climate change. Derelict building fires have provoked concern from residents, particularly in Longton recently, and the new ariel ladder platforms with new technology were deployed to protect these buildings.

A major milestone was achieved this quarter with the launch of new breathing apparatus with the associated procurement, health and safety, vehicular adaptations and training completed on time and in budget.

The Staffordshire FRS Statement of Assurance was published last month reviewing the last financial year and is available on the Service's website. The Commissioner discussed this at the recent Fire Panel reviewing Service achievements against his Fire & Rescue Plan using last year's council tax contributions.

Although the final fire settlement has not yet been received, recent budget reductions are making it harder to deliver within an already lean FRS. The Service is committed to protecting response functions to keep communities safe as well as investing in prevention and protection.

7. Finance Performance Update

It is positive that a 3-year settlement has been confirmed, but there is a significant gap in funding following the impact of increases in National Insurance and wages, and reductions in grants for Staffordshire due to the fairer funding formula. The Commissioner passed on his thanks to the team on the work completed on transformation and efficiency gains which have been tremendously successful over the last 4 years.

CFO Greensmith discussed that the Medium-Term Financial Strategy budget 2025/26 – 29/30 approved at Police Fire & Crime Panel includes the full £5 increase in council tax. The authority lost £1.2m grant funding as part of the settlement so there is an absolute need to increase council tax by the full amount. Forecasts are on track but there is an overall overspend of £400k (1.3%), driven by increased operation demand 22% year on year.

Lower operational activity in September, combined with strong income, capital financing savings, and transformation efficiencies, has fully offset this year's pay increases. The Service is reviewing the final modelling but must assume the full £5 council tax increase is taken up over the 3 years to mitigate the lost grant funding. The Commissioner made clear his anxiety at the prospect of going out to public consultation and asking all Band D properties to pay £5 extra to make up the shortfall in government funding and will take every opportunity to lobby for change and ensure the Service has the funding it needs to keep communities safe.

CFO Barber confirmed that although the public want firefighters to have the appropriate vehicles, PPE, stations and be remunerated appropriately, this is becoming more difficult as reductions hit. The Service is already lean, and further reductions will impact on safety.

Government plans mean FRS will move to a mayoral model after 2028. In Staffordshire, this will involve two transitions: first to a multi-authority board, then to a Deputy Mayor. The Commissioner has reassured staff that leadership remains committed to transparent governance and a smooth transition over the next few years. Concerns remain about costs, redundancies, and the complexity of the process.

2. An Outstanding Fire & Rescue Service

Between April and September 2025, the Service attended a total of 5,409 incidents, an increase of (21.93%) from the 4,436 incidents attended in the same period in the previous year. The Service attended 728 Primary Fires compared to 673 in the same period in the previous year, an increase of (8.17%).



Secondary Fires are the most significant change in demand over the period, with 1,794 incidents attended – a (68.13%) increase compared to the 1,067 in the same period in the previous year. There has been a significant increase in demand from Secondary Fires in the same period in the previous three years, with similar demand levels to those noted under national SPATE conditions in Q2 of 2022.

433 Road Traffic incidents were attended over the period, an increase of (18.95%) compared to 364 for the same period in the previous year.

This increase has had a small effect on response times within the Service area. The Service looks to achieve a target that **80%** of the time a response is completed within either **8 minutes for areas of high risk, 10 minutes for areas of medium risk, and 18 minutes for areas of low risk**. Between April and September 2025, the overall pass rate was **79.16%**, mainly due to the **71%** figure recorded for August 2025, a period of significant demand for the Service.

Overall, Service attendance times fluctuate between **8 mins 30 secs** and **10 mins 30 seconds** and will be dependent on whether appliances are busy at an incident or unavailable due to crewing, meaning the next nearest appliance will then attend.

In most cases, the Service is meeting the **80%** monthly target for high, medium, and low risk area attendance. Some of the current challenges are due to an increased attendance at prison fires in the South Staffs area, where it is challenging to meet the 10min target time and which affects the ability to meet the **80%** target for attendance standards. Further work is ongoing around this. There are also some rural locations which will, in some cases, take longer to attend due to reduced road infrastructure and access issues.

Exceptional periods, such as national SPATE conditions, affect the Service response standard due to high levels of demand for attendance across the county, particularly at incidents associated with secondary outdoor fires.

Deputy Evans discussed emerging climate issues and the fact that the Service is not funded for flood services, equipment, training and accredited competency for high-risk situations. There is a significant amount of flooding due to cutbacks in local authority budgets for gully cleaning and keeping drains clear. Housing targets and new buildings on existing greenfield sites are also contributing to flood risks across the county. CFO Barber confirmed that after 10-15 years of demand dropping off, there are now increases.

The Commissioner invited CFO Barber to update the meeting on firefighter safety and the investment in equipment, battery powered equipment, aerial platforms and progress in cleaner cab concept.

Transformation update

The Service is progressing through a multi-phase transformation to ensure a modern, efficient, and sustainable service without compromising safety.

Phase 1 (2022–2025): Successfully delivered £1.3m recurring savings through workforce efficiencies, process improvements, and strategic projects (eg on-call service investment, new appliances).

Phase 2 (2025–2029): Target of £1m recurring savings by 2028/29.

- **Declared savings for 2025/26:** £500k achieved through role changes, HR restructure, project closures, and income adjustments.
- **Remaining savings:** £500k still to be delivered; £200k yet to be identified.

One of the projects closed is the Community Sprinkler Project, which successfully fitted sprinklers in 21 out of 47 identified high-rise buildings, with two more in progress. Where other building owners want to implement sprinklers, the Service will continue to work with landlords to support future implementation.

Early delivery of savings has exceeded initial expectations for 2025/26. A continued focus on ICT optimisation, environmental sustainability, and efficiency reviews will support financial goals while maintaining service quality.

Collaborative Shared Estate

The Commissioner highlighted that there may be requests to ask the Service to bring forward collaborative projects to move at pace to pre-empt any potential future disruption during the transition phases following 2028. The CFO is keen to ensure any joint premise opportunities are delivered to support communities. The Commissioner responded that he would be keen to support investigation of projects wider than estates.

3. Protecting

Between April and September 2025:

284 Fire Safety Audits were carried out, in line with the **281** completed in the same period in the previous year. Care Homes, Hotels, Tall Buildings and Hospitals made up the majority of those audited.

409 Building Regulation Consultations were completed, an increase on the **367** completed in the same period in the previous year.

436 Licensing Consultations were completed, a significant increase on the **368** completed in the same period in the previous year, due to a full complement of staff and seasonal activity.

71 Post Fire Inspections were completed, an increase on the **67** completed for the same period in the previous year.

4. Preventing

7,665 Safe and Well Visits were completed between April and September 2025, which is over the target of **7,404** set for the period. As target setting is relatively new for the Service, we will work to review the targets as some teams are exceeding their set targets, but others are not reaching theirs. It is pleasing to see that the overall target was exceeded and particularly important to note that these achievements were delivered when there was high demand due to secondary fires.

On further inspection of the data, Safe and Well Technicians have not met their target for 5 consecutive months, however, in September the cohort exceeded their target. Again, Central Prevent and Protect (CPP)'s Management Team will work with the teams to ensure we understand any barriers and that we have consistency in performance in the future.

The Service has been delivering the Falls Response and Home from Hospital initiatives to the communities of Staffordshire since December 2022 and December 2023 respectively. The Service continues to work closely with Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board (SSOTICB) and Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust (MPFT) to achieve this.

Future funding has now been secured by the Service to continue these initiatives, with funding for the Home from Hospital team confirmed until 31 March 2026 and the Falls team confirmed until 31 December 2025, with the aspiration to obtain additional funding to extend this to March 2026 to align the funding cycle of both initiatives.

On reviewing the data, the Home from Hospital and Falls teams are not routinely meeting their targets. This could be because the Home from Hospital jobs are often for the same patients who have already had a Safe and Well Visit, and occasionally the team is performing jobs when the patient is still in hospital – for example, fitting key safes or moving furniture. These jobs are important and help to get the home ready for the patient to be discharged from hospital. It also means the team cannot do a Safe and Well Visit as the patient is still in hospital. However, details are passed to other staff to conduct the visit so the opportunity for engagement is not missed. The Falls team also often visits repeat fallers who have previously received Safe and Well Visits, however, CPP's Management Team will continue to seek improvements in these areas.

The Commissioner and CFO highlighted the wide range of career opportunities within Staffordshire FRS. They emphasised that the Service offers varied and rewarding roles beyond frontline firefighting, providing pathways for professional development and progression.

The Commissioner notified the meeting that both CFO Barber and Chief Financial Officer Greensmith had tendered their notice to retire in the next few months and sought assurance for the plans for the succession process. Both vacancies have been advertised, and the closing date for applications for CFO is 24th December.

The Commissioner thanked both for their service, noting it would be their last Public Performance Meeting, and closed the meeting with a Merry Christmas. He also thanked the whole team and urged everyone to stay safe and continue doing a good job to keep Staffordshire safe.