

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

Staffordshire Police, Fire & Rescue and Crime Commissioner Ben Adams' eighth Fire Public Performance Meeting, on 20 May 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 Dave Evans, CFO Rob Barber and Chief Financial Officer David Greensmith.

Before updating the meeting, the CFO noted his condolences for the two firefighter fatalities from Oxford this week.

1. Current areas of priority

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

HMICFRS Thematic Inspection: This November 2023 inspection on handling misconduct resulted in 15 national recommendations, 12 of which are now complete, with the remainder monitored for progress through internal governance. The Commissioner and CFO discussed the current level of assurance delivered through local governance procedures, with SCO representatives attending and contributing to operational meetings for additional assurance.

HMICFRS Service Inspection: Good progress has been made on the five recommendations in the 11 September 2024 report, including safeguarding, quality assurance and monitoring, ED&I and positive action training with robust processes for equality risk assessments and NFCC guidance. An open, fair process to identify high-performing employees and talent development process is being developed. The Commissioner is interested in the impact of additional safeguarding work with data from Health partners to cross-map vulnerability to support SFRS' work.

Progress has been made on all 20 recommendations for the Fire service in the March 2023 Values & Culture inspection, and scrutiny will remain ongoing until improvements are embedded. Noting the opening of CFO Wayne Brown's inquest, the Commissioner asked about the availability of a wellbeing offering for all staff, including senior officers and operational teams. The CFO is working with NFCC senior leaders to provide support documents advising on the process to access support in a confidential environment. The Firefighter's Charity is also supporting this clear gap.

The CFO raised the white paper on Fire reform which has had limited national progress. This is a critical opportunity to the maturing role of NFCC, National Fire Standards Board and HMICFRS and College of Fire can develop significant improvements across the sector, with tangible benefits for public.

The CFO was hopeful that the movement of FRS under MHCLG will perhaps place renewed emphasis on fire reform. The Commissioner agreed, commenting that he had written to the Minister to explain how Staffordshire are continuing to support the ambulance service, and how this could be an opportunity across the country to support the NHS.



The CFO's final report in his foreword is the Grenfell Phase Two report, investigating the causes of the fire and how the building itself contributed to its spread. The report supported the Staffordshire sprinkler implementation scheme, which started in 2016 and recently concluded, with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Lichfield retrofitting sprinklers with 46 high-rise buildings made safe in total. Fire Hoods are now in use following Grenfell. SFRS is proactive in continually highlighting learning from Grenfell, Manchester Arena, the Oxford incident and others. The partnership approach of Staffs and Stoke-on-Trent Local Resilience Forum is considered best practice with the Civil Contingency Unit dealing with wildfires and flooding. Government officials have been invited to come and see the Staffs approach.

5. Emerging Issues

5.1. Battery and Energy Storage Systems

The Deputy Commissioner asked whether Fire moving to MHCLG would make a difference to expectations in contributing to environmental impact and Fire's role in planning consultations for future battery and energy storage facilities. The CFO confirmed that SFRS are not a statutory consultee and would not be able to cope with the increase in demand. With increased funding, SFRS could reconsider but in the meantime would continue working with planning authorities to ensure safety, entry and egress, and residential proximity – a key community issue. The Commissioner said concerns had been raised about the number of applications for battery storage facilities nationally, which were seemingly four times the ambition of net zero. He would not be against the application of a statutory duty for Fire, if it was properly funded.

7. Finance

A number of Financial Challenge workshops, open to all staff, took place in March and April 2025, with a full update included in the spring edition of Burning Issues. So that everyone understands their obligations in the current financial climate, the sessions explained the challenges ahead and the need to save an additional £1m by 2029 due to the reduction in funding incorporated into the Local Government Finance Settlement (LGFS) for 2025/26.

These pressures were highlighted at the Police, Fire & Crime Panel in March 2025. The revenue budget for 2024/25 was approved by the Commissioner at £50.1m in February 2024, with Band D council tax set at £86.77, an increase of 2.99% in line with the 3% referendum limit set by Government within the LGFS. The reported revenue spend as at 31 March 2025 was £49.9m against the £50.1m budget, including an additional contribution to support the capital financing requirement for the Authority and to maintain a stable position for Earmarked Reserves.

The year-end position included the receipt of £0.5m following the resolution of the Airwave legal case against Motorola. In total, £18.6m was returned to Fire & Rescue Authorities after the Competition Appeal Tribunal decided in December 2023 to uphold the Competition & Markets Authority's decision to impose a charge control mechanism for Airwave.

Total pay spend for the year was £33.6m against a budget of £33.5m. Pay spend represents 67% of the total revenue budget and despite some small variances the outturn position finished within 0.3% of the approved budget. This also included a shortfall of £0.14m in the grant received to support increased contribution rates into the 2015 Firefighters' Pension Scheme.



A 3% pay award was incorporated into the budget forecast and 3.2% was accepted yesterday. The next round of pay negotiations needs to look at Fire reform and negotiate nationally as part of the deal, which the FBU are happy to discuss.

The Commissioner was pleased pay costs are sorted, albeit higher than the 2.8% anticipated last year – a prudent 3% had been included in the budget. Other employee costs were updated to include Employer Liability savings resulting from the move to the Fire & Rescue Indemnity Company (FRIC) for employer liability insurance and there have been no ill-health retirements payments this year, resulting in a more favourable position to budget and forecast.

Total non-pay and income closed favourable to both budget and forecast. Interest receivable closed at £1.1m for the year (£585k better than budget), with additional interest arising from the higher cash balance due to the additional pension grant funding received (pension remedy). Consequently, the cash balance at the end of the year was £19.9m, £8.9m higher than the original budget. Interest receivable rates are forecast to reduce to 4% next year (2025/26) and the Bank of England reduced the headline rate to 4.5% in March 2025. Non-pay costs are also favourable which reflects a saving this year for gas and electricity costs which has been reflected fully within the budget approved for next year.

Pensions ‘Matthews Remedy’ allows on-call firefighters to buy back a pension from when they started with the service (previously allowed to year 2000). SFRS have made good progress, however the pension administrator is trying to resolve the ‘McCloud Remedy’ first, addressing age discrimination in public service pension schemes. It allows affected members to choose between benefits from the 1995/2008 Scheme or the 2015 Scheme during the remedy period. Any service in the 2015 Scheme during this period will also be returned to the 1995/2008 Scheme. Delays are exacerbated by IT issues at the pension administrator and SFRS apologised but it is out of their hands. They are providing as much information as they can and appreciate the frustrations and impact on life decisions for those affected.

The Commissioner is keen to work with council leaders to support contingency planning and happy to share the financial position, as in Staffs it is his role to set the budget.

The capital programme closed the year at £4.0m, £0.4m below the latest forecast. Capital work included refurbishment at Stafford Fire Station and training facilities at HQ. £1m of spend was incurred on operational equipment with £0.4m invested in hydraulic cutting equipment for all appliances, and the final spend on breathing apparatus equipment (totalling £1m in the last 2 years). Two new Enhanced Rescue Pumps were operational in 2024/25 providing additional response capability at Longton and Stafford stations (investment £0.75m).

An additional £1m needs to be saved by 2029 due to the reduction in funding incorporated into the LGFS for 2025/26. The Deputy commented that the move to MHCLG should not mean the Fire service is used by government to bail out councils. Longer-term settlements would be welcomed. SFRS’s positive position is only possible due to a quality financial director and system in place understanding the balance of investment and savings. Thanks to David Greensmith and team and the rigour around budget holders.

Much of the PFCC role focuses around finance and council tax, providing assurance that it is well invested. The Commissioner discussed future plans for devolution which could see mayoral



oversight for Staffordshire, responsible for public safety. The Commissioner was comfortable with this model which could highlight areas to collaborate. When asked if SFRS is ready for this, the CFO noted the NFCC is drawing together information for a meeting where GMP and North Yorkshire will share their experience of this model. Police and Fire co-locations in Staffordshire are considered good practice and SFRS have offered visits to other FRS and the Home Office.

2. An Outstanding Fire & Rescue Service

2.1. Incidents Attended

Between October 2024 and March 2025, SFRS attended 4,120 incidents in total – an increase of 10% on the 3,729 incidents attended in the same period in 2023/24.

Primary Fires (3.93%) attended increased slightly, compared to the same period in 2023/24.

Attendance at Secondary Fires is the most significant change in demand, with a (28.19%) increase in comparison to the same period in 2023/24. There was also an increase in demand from the same period in the previous 3 years.

There has been a reduction of (-6.07%) in the number of Special Service Calls attended by the Service in comparison to the same period in 2023/24.

Attendance at Road Traffic incidents decreased by (-9.95%) in comparison to the same period in 2023/24. SFRS carries out a number of educational interventions for young drivers and children to ensure their responsibilities are understood, including distractions from mobile phones.

There was an increase of (18.04%) in attendance at False Alarm incidents caused by equipment compared to the same period in 2023/24. There was also an increase in demand from the same period in the previous 3 years. After 15-20 years of fitting fire alarms, many are coming to end of life but each visit to replace is an opportunity to engage and carry out a Home Safety visit.

False Alarm Good Intent attendance also increased by (18.06%) compared to the same period in 2023/24. Demand also increased in the same period in the previous 3 years.

Recent good weather is reminiscent of previous wildfire issues of scale in Moorlands in 2018, and the Commissioner asked whether SFRS is ready for potential issues. The CFO said there have been some incidents already this year on a smaller scale than in 2018, but equipment such as lightweight PPE and partner agency engagement has been crucial to dissuade activity that causes these issues, eg public space orders.

The CFO highlighted issues with immersion in open water, which can result in a cold shock response: sudden gasping, rapid breathing, increased heart rate and blood pressure, and stress on the heart. Fatalities can be avoided with education for parents, carers and young people.

2.2. Service Availability

Whole-time firefighter availability is consistently above 98% and in January 2025 on-call availability was its highest ever. The on-call 3-person crewing trial was approved as BAU in December 2024 and operational support in crew management has supported this achievement.

2.3. Service Response Times and Standards

Attendance times are being met across the board. The on-call three-person crewing trial costs SFRS more as on-call staff are mobilised more often. The trial provides extra capacity for incidents, more experience for on-call staff, and has a significant impact on safety at scenes. Since the trial began, 822 emergencies were attended including 237 fires in buildings – 9mins 45 earlier on average than other whole-time crews could have arrived, preventing the further spread of fire. On-call teams thanked the senior team for making better use of their services.

The Commissioner and Deputy noted they had attended long service awards ceremonies for on-call staff and were impressed with their dedication to keeping their communities safe.

2.4. Transformation Update

There is spare capacity in SFRS premises, so co-location schemes for Police and Fire make best use of the premises and are already showing benefits, sharing intelligence in real time to identify vulnerability. The Commissioner noted that where possible community groups could continue to use the facilities but operational need and improving public safety takes priority.

Ongoing work to minimise firefighter exposure to contaminants is managed through ERT, Learning & Development and JETS. Key initiatives include investment in appliances, breathing apparatus and improvements to facilities, as well as staff education and policy development.

2.5. Collaborative Shared Estates

There is a permanent Police presence at Stone and Uttoxeter Fire stations and shared Police facilities at Kinver, Chase Terrace and Penkridge. Plans for Kidsgrove are under review as part of the broader estate strategy, maximising opportunities for efficiency and collaborative working.

Following on from the successful refurbishment of Abbots Bromley Fire Station, the Estates Team are undertaking design and feasibility work to refurbish Brewood. In addition, following a review of the joint estate in Stafford by the SCO, a first phase of investment to refurbish Stafford Fire station at Hydrant Way was undertaken and successfully completed.

Phase 2 of the works are at design stage and expected to commence shortly, further improving facilities at the site for staff and fire crews. Improvements to the learning and development facilities at Pirehill were completed in February 2025, and improvements to the JETs site at Trentham Lakes have been finalised, with a view to implementing the works in summer 2025.

3. Protecting

3.1. Protection Activity

The number of Fire Safety Audits completed increased significantly from October 2024-March 2025, due to a new Risk-Based Inspection Programme giving greater insight and overview of premises to be audited, as well as improved performance statistics for Protection Teams. A slight drop in audits in Q4 2024/25 is due to a number of staff members retiring or leaving the service. Retention is an issue for trained fire safety officers, as the private sector pays much more than SFRS. A recruitment campaign is currently ongoing until the end of May 2025.



SFRS has recently updated its methodology for defining risk in non-domestic premises. The updated inspection programme launched on February 14 2024, and is the Service's primary method for prioritising risk for premises covered by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. This has impacted on the premises proactively chosen for fire safety audits by Protection Teams. As at the end of March 2025, SFRS has achieved a 92% completion rate of the Risk Based Inspection Programme, which has since further increased to 94%.

3.2. Fire Hydrants

18,436 fire hydrants are currently adopted within Staffordshire. A hydrant management system was introduced on 1st January 2024 and since then 38.9% of these hydrants have now been subject to a test or inspection as at the end of March 2025. These hydrants are subject to an ongoing testing programme in accordance with the requirements off the Fire Services Act 2004.

4. Preventing

4.1. Safe and Well Visits

A target of 1,220 visits a month was established from April 2024, to drive performance and aid planning in relation to executing the reduction of risk in domestic premises. Targets represent something new for teams to aim for, for the benefit of the community.

7,685 Safe and Well visits were completed between October 2024 and March 2025 – an increase in the number of visits in the same period in 2023/24 (7,356) and 2022/23 (7,069).

4.2. Fire and Health Partnership Team

The falls response service went live on 7 December 2022, providing live service every day since. Funding was confirmed until December 2025 but further funding is expected to the end of the financial year. There were 2,331 mobilisations, 2.76 calls on average a day, but more recently over 3 calls a day. The majority of patients are elderly, with 94% over 60, which is a risk factor associated with fire. 83% of the time the patient is picked up and has no injuries. SFRS have completed 1,201 Safe and Well visits as a result of these mobilisations.

The Home from Hospital service (HfH) went live on 4 December 2023, providing live service every day since, excluding Christmas day. Funding has been confirmed until March 2026. There have so far been 2,625 mobilisations, with 2,105 of these for the Discharge and Settle In service (DSI). The majority of patients are elderly, with 95% over 60, which is a risk factor associated with fire. With all activities combined, the team now completes between 6-7 jobs a day on average. Since taking on new responsibilities in July 24 the team has also:

- Fitted 513 key safes
- Completed 103 moving furniture jobs
- Completed 13 property inspections

An evaluation of SFRS by Chester University is well underway, with the draft report expected imminently. In February the team received the Chief Executive Award from University of North Midland NHS Trust, recognising the success and impact of these initiatives. SFRS is the first external partner to receive this award. These are system-wide impacts reducing readmissions (to date, only one 24hr readmission) and putting the patient at the centre of everything we do.

4.3. Education Update

Although not discussed, the report contains an update of activity in the education space.



6. Enabling Services

6.1. Recruitment Activity

Of the 596 shortlisted candidates, 16 were successful in achieving whole-time firefighter posts.

Diversity Breakdown of Shortlisted Candidates

- 14% identified as Female
- 8% identified as having an ethnicity other than White British
- 13% identified as LGBT+
- 7% identified as having a Disability

Diversity Breakdown of Appointed Candidates – of those appointed:

- 31% identified as Female
- 7% identified as having an ethnicity other than White British
- 38% identified as LGBT+
- 13% identified as having a Disability

6.2. Workforce Diversity

These charts, for workforce diversity for all whole-time, on-call and support staff including Principal Officers in 2023, 2024 and 2025, are based upon declared data collected during the recruitment and on-boarding process provided voluntarily by individuals. Changes to numbers in the overall workforce can also influence the percentages shown.

6.3. Workforce Sickness

Short and long-term absence is a focus for HR, management, Occupational Health (OH), and the Fitness Advisor. Monthly case conferences with all relevant parties explores and progresses cases appropriately. This collaborative approach ensures a proactive and coordinated strategy for supporting staff and managing absence. Training presentations are developed and delivered with OH at Operational Forums, to improve managers' referral skills and understanding, and support the OH team's ability to produce robust and actionable reports.

Wellness Support Plans are being introduced which help managers tailor their questioning and develop structured support strategies, particularly for individuals experiencing poor mental health. Through increased focus in this area, it is clear that some absences are the result of significant and long-term health conditions, where a return to the workplace is not feasible. In response, capability processes have been revised to reflect the sensitivity and complexity of such cases, including a more structured and compassionate approach to ill-health retirement, supported by newly developed guidance and a dedicated OH contact.

Additionally, a new HR tracking system for absence has been implemented. Weekly meetings are held with the Head of Response to review absence cases in detail, ensuring transparency around timelines and enabling effective management of crewing. In addition, a Fitness Advisor now attends all case conferences to ensure appropriate support is provided where relevant.

The Commissioner offered his thanks to the whole team and urged everyone to keep safe and continue doing a good job to keep Staffordshire safe.