

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

An update



AUDITOR GENERAL 

Prepared by Audit Scotland
May 2018

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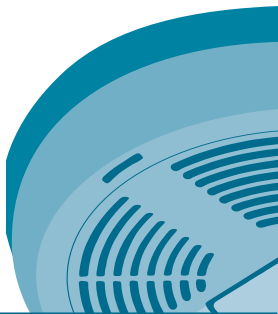
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Audit team

The core audit team consisted of: Mark Roberts, Kathrine Sibbald, Michael Duff, Lucy Carter and Lynsey Davies, with support from other colleagues and under the direction of Angela Canning.

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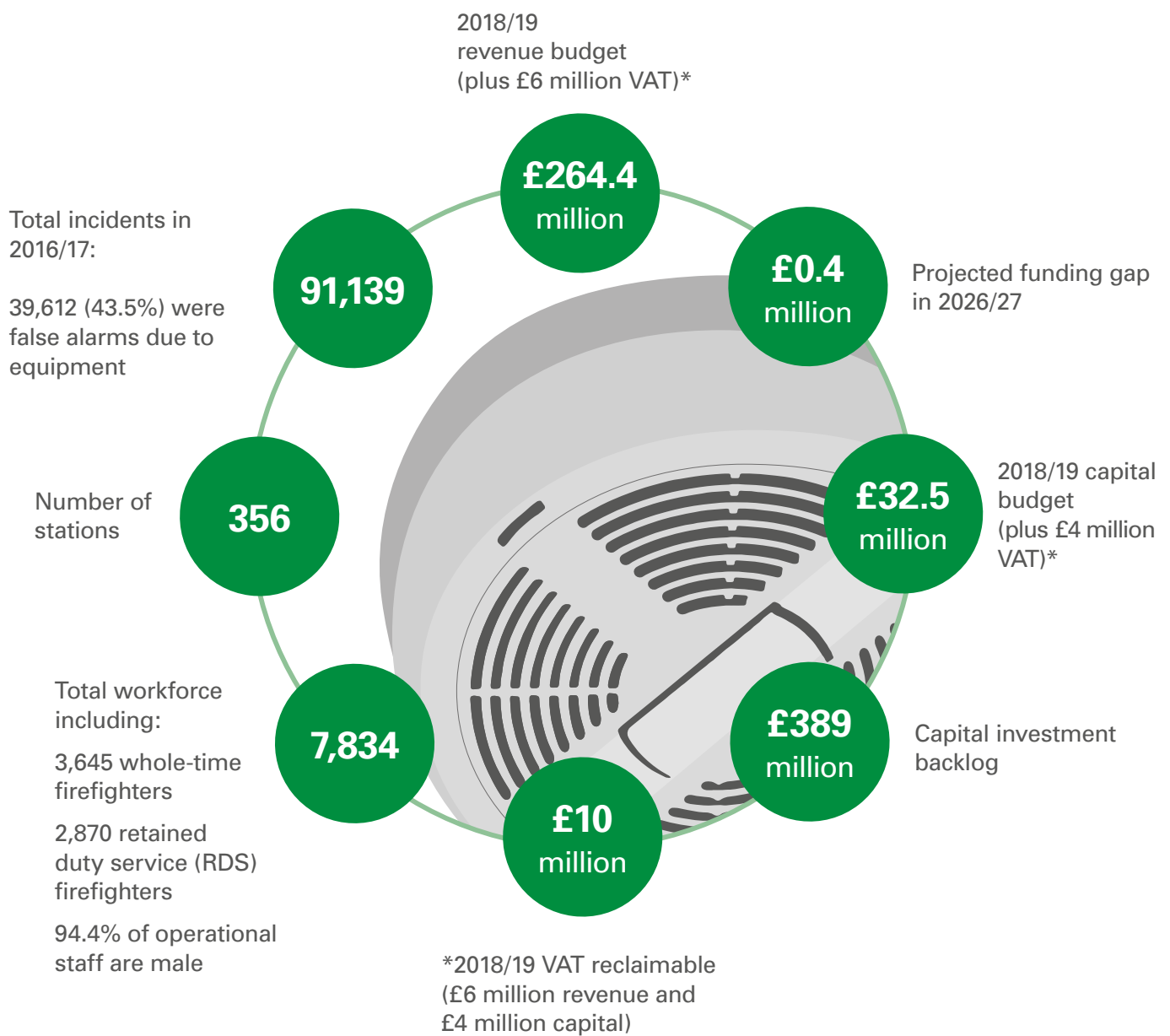
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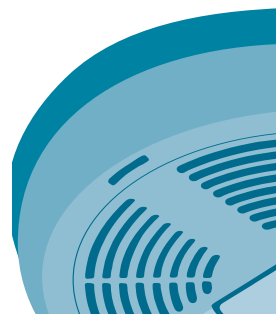
Exhibit data

When viewing this report online, you can access background data by clicking on the graph icon. The data file will open in a new window.

Key facts



Summary



Key messages

- 1** The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) continues to deliver emergency and prevention services while progressing a complex and ambitious programme of reform. This involves integrating the resources, policies and practices of the eight former services into one, and transforming the service to meet current and future priorities and risks.
- 2** The board continues to work well, with real strengths in the quality of discussion and scrutiny and challenge of management. The board and management display mutual respect, a constructive tone and genuine shared ownership of the issues facing the SFRS.
- 3** The SFRS has an ambitious vision that involves significant changes to make it a more flexible, modern service. Progress with developing and implementing the plans for transformation has been steady but slow, due to a range of contributing factors:
 - The SFRS has taken a cautious approach with the aim of securing and maintaining political, staff, trades unions' and public backing for its vision.
 - The need for sufficient funding to begin the implementation of change.
 - Limited capacity and continuity for leading transformation projects; experienced officers' skills and time are in high demand, and changes in the leadership of projects are common through changes in role, promotions and retirement.
- 4** The SFRS has continued to make progress with integrating different ways of working but has not yet achieved full integration. Harmonised pay and conditions for firefighters were agreed in April 2018, placing the SFRS in a good position to complete integration of the service.
- 5** The SFRS has strong financial management and has developed a good approach to long-term financial planning. It is now in a position to progress with transformation. However, it has inherited a backlog of £389 million needed to maintain and invest in its property, vehicles and equipment. This backlog is insurmountable without transforming its current model for delivering services and additional investment.

- 6** The Scottish Government's 2016 Scottish Fire and Rescue Framework requires the SFRS to report progress on outcomes for communities. The SFRS has been very slow to develop a performance management framework to inform this. The available performance measures show signs of increasing demands on the SFRS since 2013, such as the number of fires, false alarms and non-fire incidents.
- 7** Work at a local level with partners and communities continues to be well received, but the impact of community safety and prevention work needs to be evaluated. The SFRS recognises the need to work more effectively in partnership with its national partners, particularly Police Scotland and the Scottish Ambulance Service, but progress is needed collectively to make the best use of public resources.

Recommendations

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service should:

- increase its pace of reform and implement its plans for transforming into a more flexible, modern service. In particular:
 - agree as soon as possible, revised terms and conditions for its uniform staff that reflect the changes to the role planned as part of the programme for transformation ([paragraph 45](#))
 - ensure through comprehensive and up-to-date workforce planning that it has the right skills and capacity in place to deliver its programme of transformation effectively ([paragraphs 35, 38, 58–65](#))
 - agree a long-term strategy for asset management and a medium-term asset management plan by December 2018, that reflect the aims of transformation ([paragraph 57](#))
 - ensure that well-developed performance management systems are effectively implemented by October 2018, so that the board, strategic management and local management can access good quality information to effectively drive progress towards its priorities and those set out in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Framework ([paragraph 23](#))
 - with its national partners and the support of the Scottish Government, establish and begin implementing plans by December 2018 to progress the Reform Collaboration Group's strategy and vision for partnership working ([paragraph 70](#))
 - progress its plans to develop and implement a framework for monitoring, evaluating and reporting the impact of community safety activity by December 2018 ([paragraph 78](#))
 - include Equality Impact Assessments with papers to inform board decisions ([paragraph 68](#)) and set out in its workforce planning how it plans to eliminate the gender pay gap ([paragraph 66](#)).
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About our audit

1. In May 2015, we published a report, [The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service](#) , which concluded:

- The Scottish Government and the SFRS followed good practice and managed the 2013 merger of the eight former fire and rescue services effectively. There was no impact on the public during the merger and the SFRS's performance is improving.
- The board of the SFRS was starting to perform well. The move from eight local fire and rescue services to a national organisation had enhanced the scrutiny and challenge of the fire and rescue service.
- Although the SFRS was on track to exceed expected savings of £328 million by 2027/28, future cost pressures and likely reductions in funding produced a potential funding gap which we estimated at £42.7 million in 2019/20.
- The SFRS faced a major challenge in reviewing how it delivered a sustainable national service that meets current and future demands in the context of decreasing budgets. Completing these reviews and developing a long-term (five to ten year) financial strategy were matters of urgency.

2. Progress against the recommendations made in our 2015 report is set out at [Appendix 1 \(page 26\)](#).

3. Our 2018 audit work considered:

- How effectively has the SFRS responded to the recommendations of our May 2015 report? [\(Appendix 1\)](#)
- Has the SFRS continued to make good progress with integrating and transforming the service [\(paragraphs 24–26, 36–45\)](#)
- How effectively is the SFRS responding to the Scottish Government's Scottish Fire and Rescue Framework and does the framework adequately reflect the future challenges for the service? [\(paragraph 18\)](#)
- How effectively is the SFRS delivering its integrated and transformed arrangements at a local level? [\(paragraphs 25, 26, 72–77\)](#)

4. We provide an outline of our audit methodology at [Appendix 2 \(page 27\)](#).

5. The main finding of our audit work relates to the pace of progress with reform and therefore our report focuses on this issue.

About the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

6. The Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 (the Act) established the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). The SFRS started work on 1 April 2013. It replaced eight former fire and rescue services and the Scottish Fire Service College.

7. The SFRS provides essential emergency services to the communities of Scotland. In 2016/17, it responded to 91,139 incidents. The types of incidents it responds to are wide ranging. As well as fires, it deals with, for example, road traffic collisions, flooding and water rescue. As well as responding to emergencies, the SFRS has a significant focus on prevention. It works closely with national and local partner organisations to identify the risks faced by communities and make plans to improve their safety. It delivers advice and training to individuals and groups to promote safety, through visits to individuals' homes and community safety education programmes.

8. In 2018/19, the SFRS's revenue budget is £264.4 million for day-to-day spending, for example paying staff wages. Its capital budget is £32.5 million. The capital budget is for spending on property, vehicles and equipment. In 2018/19, the SFRS also has an increased spending power of an estimated £10 million (£6 million revenue and £4 million capital) due to changes to VAT conditions ([paragraph 47](#)).

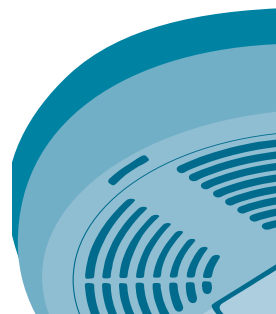
9. The SFRS has 356 stations across Scotland. The number and location of the stations has not changed notably since regional services were established in the late 1940s.

10. The SFRS employs over 7,800 people. Over 800 of its staff are non-uniform, providing support services such as ICT and vehicle maintenance. Its uniform staff (6,996) are trained firefighters and officers based across Scotland. The majority of the almost seven thousand uniform staff are whole-time firefighters and officers (3,645); 2,870 are retained duty system (RDS); 316 are volunteers; and 165 work in control rooms.

11. RDS and volunteer firefighters are men and women who live and work close to a specific station and commit to providing an emergency response within their community. They are called to emergencies, while at home or at work, and are requested for duty at the local station if they are available. RDS firefighters receive a basic pay of up to £2,993 a year for their commitment and additional payments linked to their level of activity. The system relies on the goodwill of the firefighters' primary employers.

12. The SFRS has a board which sets the strategic direction for the organisation, oversees its work and holds the chief officer to account. The board is appointed by and accountable to Scottish ministers. Three out of the ten current board members have joined the board since our last report in May 2015. In October 2017, Scottish ministers appointed the SFRS's second chair.

Reforming the SFRS



Introduction

13. Reforming public services, including fire and rescue, requires a long-term programme of change. We identify three phases in the reform of Scotland's fire and rescue service:

- merger
- integration
- transformation.

Merger

14. In our 2015 report, we considered the initial phase of reform, the merger of the eight former services and the Scottish Fire Service College to form the SFRS. We concluded that the Scottish Government and the SFRS managed the 2013 merger of the eight fire and rescue services effectively.

Integration

15. Following the merger, the SFRS had to integrate different ways of working from the eight former services into common national arrangements. For example:

- restructuring arrangements to make the best use of the SFRS's combined resources, such as training facilities, control rooms and support staff
- developing and implementing strategies, policies and procedures for the whole service, such as a corporate annual operating plan, a response and resilience strategy and standard procedures for activities such as property inspections.


16. The SFRS has continued to make progress with integrating the resources and different ways of working of the eight former services. We set out details at [paragraphs 24–26](#).

Transformation

17. Reform also includes transforming the SFRS. This is a complex and challenging process. It requires redefining what services it provides and how it provides them, to reflect the needs and risks of modern Scotland. The SFRS has set itself an ambitious vision for transformation so that it can respond to changing risks, such as the needs of an ageing population and changes in how we live and work. Risks also include a greater threat of terrorism and increasingly severe weather. The SFRS is at the beginning of its transformation programme. We set out details about the need for transformation and the SFRS's progress at [paragraphs 27–65](#).

the SFRS has set itself an ambitious vision for transforming so that it can respond to changing risks

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Framework challenges the SFRS to be innovative

18. In September 2016, the Scottish Government published the [Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2016](#)  (the Framework). This sets out Scottish ministers' expectations of the SFRS. It also sets out the need for the SFRS to respond to change and to work effectively with other organisations to deliver the best outcomes for Scotland's communities. It describes a range of objectives and sets out ten strategic priorities ([Appendix 3, page 28](#)) for the SFRS to deliver.

19. The Framework does not specify how the SFRS should achieve the priorities and objectives. It gives the SFRS scope to respond as it judges most efficient and effective. However, it requires the SFRS to 'explore through service redesign new and innovative ways in which it can improve the safety and wellbeing of communities throughout Scotland by building on the traditional roles carried out by the service'. The SFRS considers that the 2016 Framework provides an appropriate vision and challenge for the SFRS to work towards that is in line with its own ambition.

The board is working well but needs a clearer focus on performance against its priorities

20. In our 2015 report, we concluded that the SFRS board was starting to perform well. It has continued to develop and improve, with real strengths in the quality of discussion and scrutiny and challenge of management. There is continual work to review and improve governance arrangements. The board and management display mutual respect, a constructive tone and genuine shared ownership of the issues facing the SFRS.

21. The quality of reporting to the board and its committees is generally good. In particular, financial information is of a high standard. Performance information provided to the board is the weakest area. The SFRS reports progress against strategic action plans and service performance information, collated from multiple systems. It has failed to meet the requirement of the 2016 Framework to report outcome-focused performance management information.

22. There has been very slow progress with developing and implementing effective performance management systems to report against the Framework and for wider performance management needs. Five years after the merger, the SFRS still does not have an effective corporate performance management system in place so that management and the board can access good quality information. This is important to help drive progress towards its priorities and the objectives set out in the 2016 Framework.

23. In September 2017, the SFRS assured the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs that the performance management framework (PMF) would be in place for 1 April 2018. The board approved the new PMF in February 2018.¹ However, the PMF includes limited outcome-focused measures and the performance targets need further development. Considerable work is still required to establish a fully operational performance management system to underpin the PMF.

five years after the merger, the SFRS still does not have an effective corporate performance management system in place

The SFRS has made steady progress with integration

24. The SFRS continues to plan, develop and put in place the building blocks for a single integrated service. It has established its national and regional headquarters and integrated its ICT systems, such as payroll, into a single system. It has standardised the pay and conditions for non-uniform staff. It has also made progress with integrating other corporate arrangements such as asset management, procurement and communications.

25. National operational arrangements that are now successfully in place include:

- **Control centres** – The SFRS has completed the move from eight to three control rooms.
- **Training arrangements** – The SFRS has standardised training arrangements for all officers and firefighters across Scotland.
- **Breathing apparatus** – The roll-out across the service of standardised Self Contained Breathing Apparatus equipment was completed in 2016. Standardising the equipment brings consistency in operational situations, training and in supply and maintenance.
- **Shift patterns** – The SFRS implemented a common five-watch duty system for whole-time firefighters in April 2017. Although there were initial difficulties with the transfer to this system, this common system means available whole-time firefighters can be deployed more efficiently across stations and areas.
- **Inspection arrangements** – The SFRS is an enforcing authority for general fire safety legislation in most non-domestic premises, such as schools and industry. In January 2018, Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) reported that the SFRS 'has achieved a significant level of consistency of approach to fire safety enforcement'.²

26. The SFRS has made steady progress with integration but some aspects have taken time to be addressed. The main barrier has been standardising the terms and conditions of employment (T&Cs) for uniform staff. Standardised T&Cs have recently been agreed (April 2018) with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). However, not having these in place has restricted progress in establishing a fully integrated single service. To maintain services and comply with employee T&Cs, the SFRS has continued to operate with a range of the eight former services' policies and procedures. This means that at the time of auditing, the SFRS still retained many procedures and cultures from the former services. For example, across different areas there are variations in:

- the ability to temporarily deploy firefighters across different stations
- the total weekly training hours allocated to RDS stations
- allowances for travel time and expenses for firefighters attending practical training sessions.

With standardised T&Cs now agreed, the SFRS is well placed to complete integration of the service.

Transformation is needed to meet changing risks and challenges

27. The 2016 Framework ([Appendix 3](#)) requires the SFRS to find new ways to continue to improve the safety and wellbeing of the Scottish population.


The risks to the safety of the population are changing

28. The demographics of Scotland, our lifestyles and the risks to the population have changed over the decades since regional fire services were established in the late 1940s. The number of fires has fallen from 48,585 in 2006/07 to 27,240 in 2016/17. The number of fatalities from fires has decreased from an average of 55 per year between 2009/10 and 2012/13 to 40 per year between 2013/14 and 2016/17. Other risks to the population have come to the fore. These include more frequent severe weather, the threat of terrorism and ensuring the safety and wellbeing of an ageing population. The over-75 population is expected to increase by 79 per cent by 2041.³

29. While the number of fires has declined over the long term, this does not reduce the need for a service that covers the whole country. Work is still needed to further reduce the level of fatalities and number of fires. When incidents occur, whether small fires or major incidents such as the fire in March 2018 on Glasgow's Sauchiehall Street, there remains a need for an emergency response.

30. In 2016/17, there were 27,240 fires, which is an increase of three per cent compared to the average for the previous three years. This reflects an increase in deliberate fires. Over the same period, deliberate secondary fires (such as fires in refuse bins and wildfires) have increased by seven per cent to 13,173 fires and deliberate primary fires (such as fires in dwellings and road vehicles) have increased by six per cent to 2,690 fires. In particular, deliberate road vehicle fires have increased by 18 per cent to 909 fires in 2016/17. The SFRS recognises the need to work in partnership with local communities and other services to reduce the prevalence of deliberate fire raising ([paragraph 77](#)).

31. The number of other types of incidents that firefighters are called to has increased by seven per cent, from 11,495 in 2009/10 to 12,344 incidents in 2016/17, 13.5 per cent of all incidents ([Exhibit 1, page 13](#)). A breakdown of the type of incidents as a percentage of total incidents in 2016/17, and how the figures compare to previous years are shown in [Exhibit 1](#) and [Exhibit 2 \(page 14\)](#).

32. In 2016/17, the most common type of incident (39,612 or 43.5 per cent of all incidents) was **false alarms due to equipment**  ([Exhibit 1](#)). While this has been the most common incident since 2009/10, the number in 2016/17 was eight per cent higher than the previous three-year average ([Exhibit 2](#)).

33. False alarms are a significant burden on firefighter time, available resources, performance and finances. They also increase the risk to the wider community with SFRS vehicles travelling unnecessarily and reducing the availability for other emergencies. In 2013, the SFRS implemented an Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS) policy to address the level of false alarms in non-domestic buildings. However, the number of UFAS has continued to increase until recently. There is some evidence of improvement when comparing figures between 2016/17 and 2017/18. The SFRS has committed to reducing UFAS by 15 per cent between 2017/18 and 2019/20.⁴ In each local area, SFRS has tasked individual staff with identifying trends and developing strategies to reduce UFAS. Strategies include working with organisations to manage their fire alarm systems more effectively.

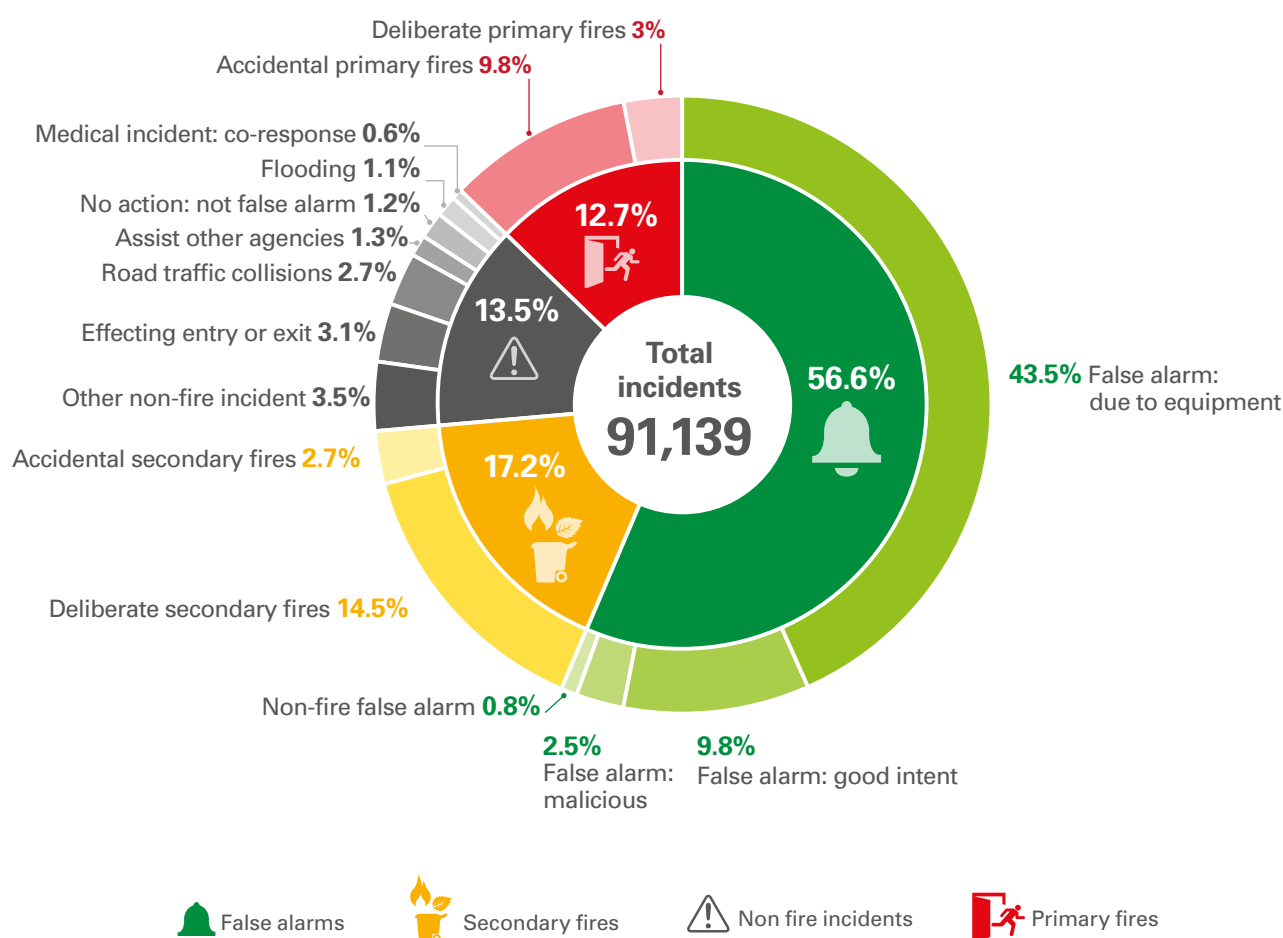


The majority (68 per cent) of false alarms due to equipment are a result of fire alarm systems in non-domestic buildings (such as schools, hospitals and offices) that automatically call the SFRS on activation.

Exhibit 1

Incident type as a percentage of total incidents in 2016/17

False alarms due to equipment were responsible for 43.5 per cent of all incidents.



Notes:

1. All figures are expressed as the percentage of total incidents (91,139). Some figures may not total due to rounding.
2. Secondary fires include refuse fires (7,928), and other outdoor fires including wildfires (7,707).
3. Primary fires include dwelling fires (5,541), other building fires (2,281), road vehicle fires (2,117), chimney fires (710) and others (956).

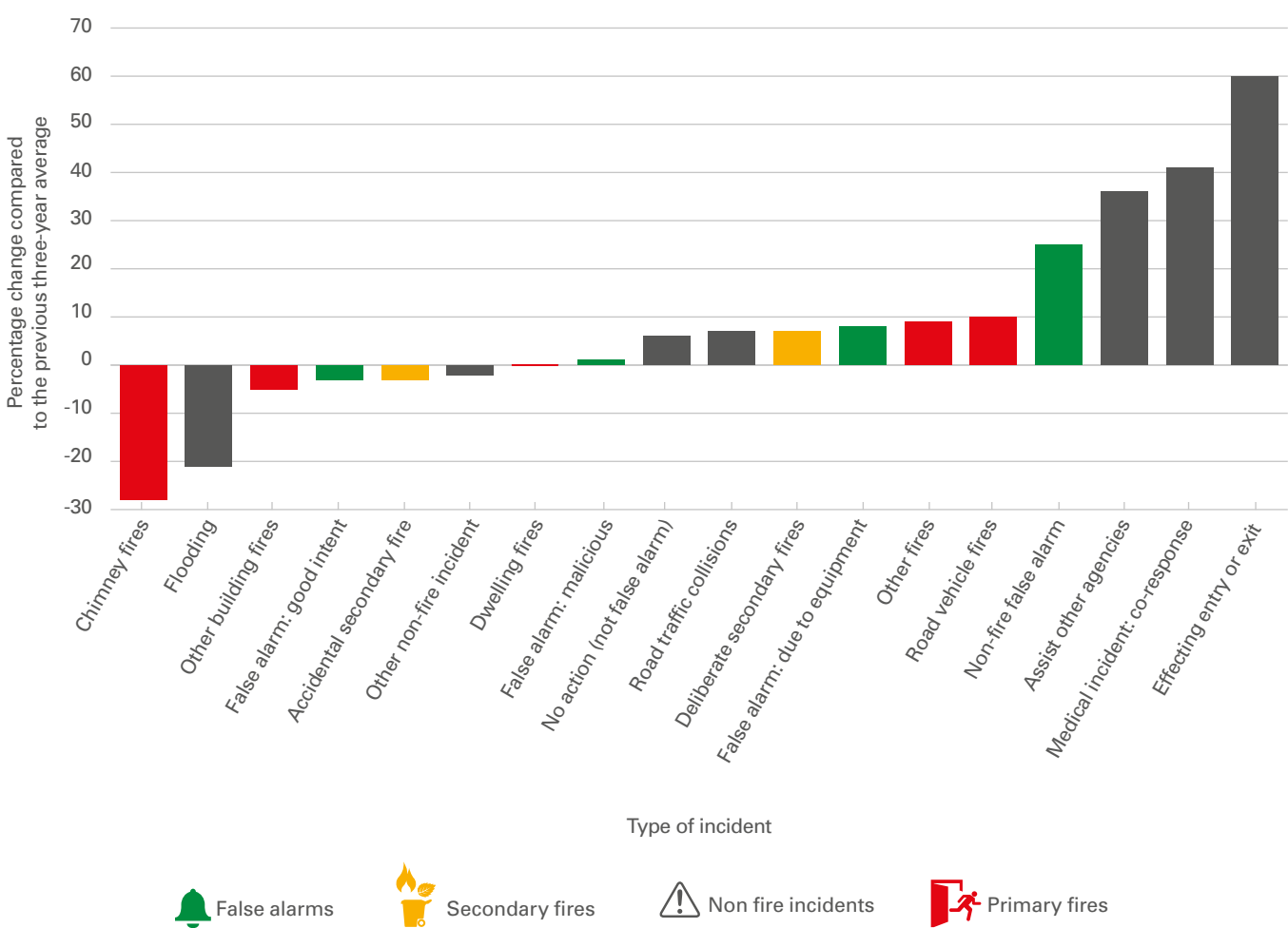
Source: Audit Scotland, using *Fire and Rescue incident statistics 2016/17 Scotland*, SFRS, October 2017

Changing lifestyles and an ageing population have made it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain RDS firefighters

34. Four out of five of Scotland's 356 fire stations rely wholly, or in part, on RDS or volunteer firefighters. Where and how people live and work has changed over the decades since the regional services were established in the late 1940s. For example, more people tend to commute to work, rather than live and work within the same town or village. These changes, combined with an ageing workforce, have made it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain the required number of RDS and volunteer firefighters, particularly in remote rural areas. The number of RDS staff has fallen from 3,125 in 2010/11, to 2,870 in 2016/17. On average, 20 RDS or volunteer staff leave the SFRS every month.⁵

35. The availability of RDS crews varies by area and time of day but overall it has decreased from 86 per cent in 2015/16 quarter one, to 82 per cent in 2017/18 quarter one. The availability of RDS crews during weekdays is consistently lower than during weekends or evenings. In 2017/18 quarter two, the availability of RDS crews during weekdays was 67 per cent, compared to 81 per cent at weekends and 91 per cent in the evenings. While the availability of RDS firefighters is not an issue that is unique to Scotland, the current RDS model in Scotland is no longer fit for purpose.

Exhibit 2
Percentage change in incident numbers in 2016/17, compared to the previous three-year average
The number of non-fire incidents has increased by 13 per cent compared to the previous three-year average.



Note: Secondary fires include refuse fires (7,928), and other outdoor fires including wildfires (7,707).
Source: Audit Scotland, using *Fire and Rescue incident statistics 2016/17 Scotland*, SFRS, October 2017



The SFRS has a bold vision for transformation and is taking a cautious approach

36. The SFRS has a clear understanding of the need to transform and shows significant ambition to make fundamental changes to what it does and how it works. It recognises that the way the service is currently organised is based on the historic needs of the population and does not reflect the risks and needs of Scotland in the 21st century.

37. Since our 2015 report, the SFRS has continued to develop options and plans for transformation, alongside its work on integration. The pace has been slow but five years into its existence the SFRS is now in the early phases of progressing transformation. It intends to do this over four years.

38. A number of factors have contributed to the slow pace of transformation:

- Caution:
 - The SFRS has a bold vision for change that involves genuine transformation of the service. It recognises the sensitivities of such a programme and has taken a cautious approach, as it aims to secure political, staff, trades unions and public backing for the changes.
 - Negotiations with the main trades union body, the FBU, are sensitive and complex. The FBU negotiates terms and conditions at a UK-wide level. There are different priorities and issues across the UK for firefighters and the fire and rescue services. This contributes to the challenge of negotiations and importance of maintaining good dialogue with the trades unions.
 - The SFRS has been wary of the increasingly challenging public sector financial position. The SFRS needed sufficient funding to begin the implementation of change. Without securing sufficient funding, the SFRS anticipated making cuts to services rather than progressing transformation. The SFRS considers it has sufficient funding in 2018/19, with changes to its VAT liability, to now progress transformation.
- Capacity:
 - Experienced officers have skill sets that are in demand and are often responsible for transformation projects as well as their core responsibilities. This limits the time available to lead these programmes.
 - Changes in leadership of projects are common with a high turnover of managers through changes in role, promotions and retirement. A loss of continuity of leadership across many of the integration and transformation projects is evident, slowing their progress.
- Project interdependence:
 - The programme of work to develop options for transformation involves a wide range of projects and sub-projects. Many of these are interdependent and delays in one project, such as the SFRS's review of its emergency cover arrangements, slows progress across a wider scope of the work.

39. In our 2015 report, we referred to some of the main reviews taking place to inform the plans for transformation. These include reviews of:

- prevention and protection work
- the retained and volunteer duty system
- emergency cover (to assess the existing portfolio and location of properties and vehicles in terms of risk and need).

40. The reviews were intended to contribute to an overarching project, the National Risk Reduction project. The aim of the project is to identify and prioritise all risks within the SFRS's remit, evaluate the effectiveness of current arrangements and provide a foundation for planning future arrangements. The SFRS continues to carry out a range of review work to inform the options and plans for its transformation programme.

41. In January 2018, the SFRS shared its vision and an outline of its transformation strategy with the public. Its vision is *'to deliver a modern, flexible and efficient fire and rescue service to meet the changing risks in our communities'*. The first phase of the public consultation closed in May 2018.

42. Through transformation, the SFRS aims to take on a wider range of new responsibilities beyond its traditional scope. The scope of work being considered within a four-year programme of transformation includes:

- expanding the firefighter role to respond to increasing risks, including terrorism and severe weather, as well as increasing demands on the NHS and social services through providing a broader preventative and intervention role
- modifying how firefighters are trained and equipped to meet these changes
- aligning pay and conditions to reflect changes in firefighters' role
- reviewing and redistributing its assets and resources, including stations, to better reflect modern risk and need
- increasing the range of vehicles in the fleet to include rapid response vehicles, and using new technology such as ultra-high-pressure lances
- reviewing the crewing models to establish more flexible arrangements, duty patterns and terms and conditions.

43. The SFRS is already testing some of the options for different ways of working. To improve the reliability and effectiveness of the RDS service, it is introducing a new staffing model which places a whole-time member of staff in some RDS stations to build staff numbers and improve availability. The SFRS is also introducing rapid response vehicles which require smaller numbers for crewing, increasing the level of availability.

44. The SFRS has successfully piloted approaches to expanding the role of the firefighter. One example is a pilot where firefighters simultaneously responded to cardiac arrest incidents with paramedics. The exercise was part of the Scottish

Government's out of hospital cardiac arrest (OHCA) strategy that was launched in March 2015.⁶ The initial pilot was a success, and in April 2017, the board agreed to broaden the trials and implement a service-wide delivery plan for response to OHCA.⁷ However, on 18 September 2017, the FBU informed its members across the UK that the work was non-contractual and therefore fire and rescue services, including the SFRS, could not instruct staff to do this work. The SFRS suspended the trials. Further development of the OHCA co-response work is linked to ongoing negotiations with the trades unions.

45. Changing the delivery model and expanding the role of firefighters involves changing how they work. This also means changes to firefighter T&Cs beyond those needed to standardise the conditions of the eight former services. In April 2018, the SFRS and the FBU agreed terms for standardising the T&Cs for uniform staff. At the time of drafting this report, negotiations about the wider proposals for changing the role of the firefighters and the T&Cs to reflect this are ongoing. Successful conclusion of these negotiations is critical to allow transformation to progress. As described in [paragraph 38](#), this is challenging.

The SFRS is now in a financial position to begin transformation

46. The SFRS has strong financial management. As part of reform, the Scottish Government required the SFRS to achieve savings through the integration of the eight former services. The Financial Memorandum to the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 suggested that reform could generate £328 million net savings by 2027/28. The SFRS remains on track to deliver this. The SFRS has managed its annual budget effectively and has not overspent. In 2016/17, its budget was slightly underspent by £0.133 million. This was primarily due to staff vacancies in support staff roles.

47. For 2018/19, the SFRS's total funding from the Scottish Government for revenue and capital spending is £296.9 million. In addition, **changes to conditions on VAT**  mean that since 16 March 2018, the SFRS has no longer been subject to VAT. In 2018/19, this increases the SFRS's spending power by an estimated £10 million (£6 million revenue and £4 million capital).

48. The SFRS's revenue budget has fallen by 12 per cent between 2013/14 and 2018/19 in real terms, that is, adjusting for inflation ([Exhibit 3, page 18](#)). From 2016/17 to the 2018/19 budget the SFRS has had a relatively consistent funding allocation. The SFRS has confirmed that, with the change to its VAT liability, its 2018/19 budget is enough to allow progress with implementing transformation.

49. In our 2015 report, we recommended the SFRS produce a long-term financial strategy (LTFS) by the end of March 2016. The SFRS did prepare a well-considered and structured [LTFS](#)  by March 2016, although the board did not agree it until December 2017.⁸ It highlights that the savings made from the merger and integration have largely been achieved and future savings have to come from changing how the SFRS provides its services. The strategy sets out potential future funding scenarios. It is a valuable high-level tool for the board to set context for the range of decisions yet to be made in terms of transformation.

50. The LTFS and the SFRS's medium-term financial strategy now need to be updated to reflect the 2018/19 funding position, the shift in VAT status and further changes to the terms and conditions for uniform staff, when these are agreed.

the SFRS has managed its annual budget effectively and has not overspent

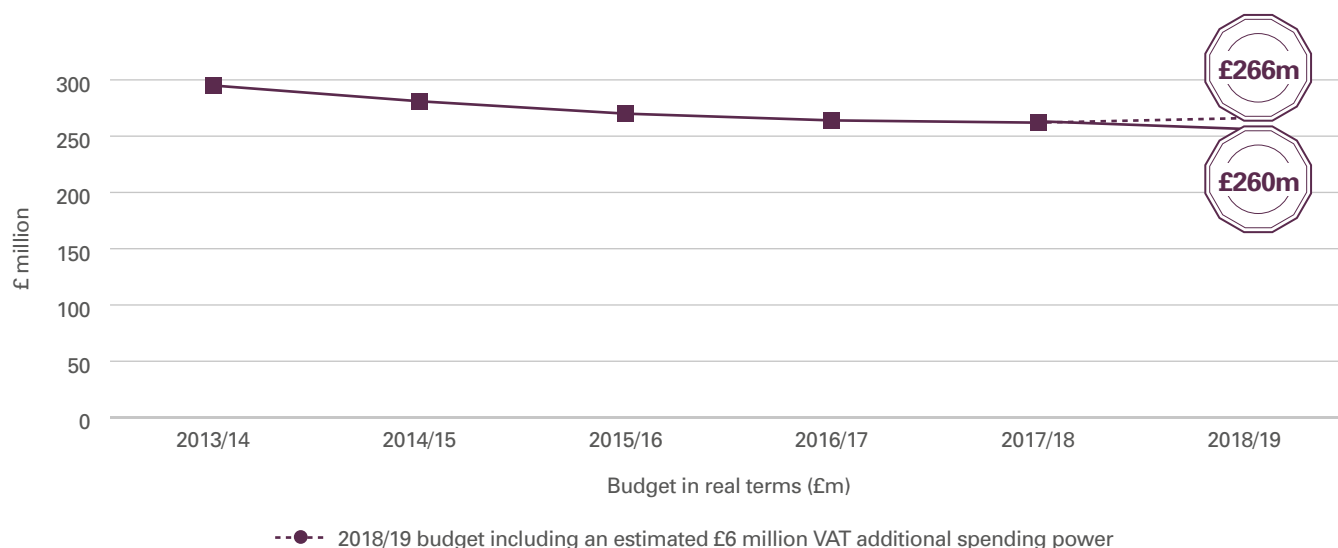


In the November 2017 Budget, the UK Government announced that it would legislate to allow SFRS and Police Scotland to recover VAT.

Exhibit 3

The SFRS's revenue budget in real terms 2013/14 to 2018/19

The SFRS's revenue budget has fallen by 12 per cent since 2013/14 in real terms but has had a relatively consistent funding allocation since 2016/17.



Notes:

1. Real terms figures are adjusted for inflation based on 2018/19 prices.

2. Contribution to funding of the UK-wide Firelink programme has been excluded across all years. Firelink is a digital communication system used across the UK fire and rescue services for vehicle mobilisation, vehicle locating and for communications. In 2018/19 the budget for Firelink is £4.3 million.

Source: Audit Scotland



51. In our 2015 report, we projected a potential funding gap of £42.7 million by 2019/20. This reflected costs and projected funding reductions. Our updated model suggests a more positive position. Our projection is a potential surplus of £2.7 million in 2019/20, given current levels of funding, the change in VAT status and an assumption of increased staff costs of two per cent. The SFRS's LTFS estimates the funding gap in 2019/20 to range between a worst case scenario of a £25.1 million funding gap, a best case of a £14.8 million surplus and a midpoint of a £5.1 million funding gap.

52. The SFRS's LTFS sets out projected funding scenarios that estimate a funding gap ranging from up to £77.2 million to a £43.4 million surplus by 2026/27 ([Exhibit 4, page 19](#)). Our projection for 2026/27 is for a £0.4 million funding gap, with the current service delivery model and a two per cent inflation of staff costs.

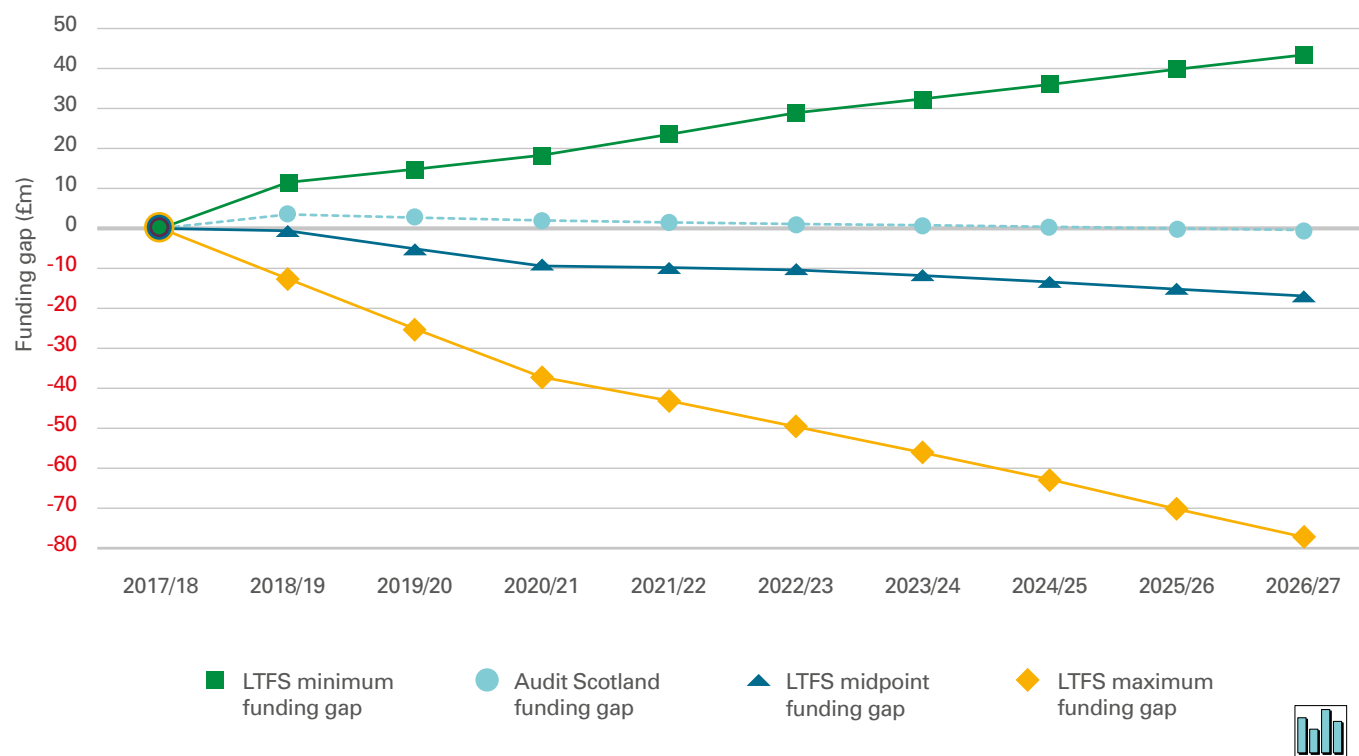
The SFRS has inherited an insurmountable capital funding backlog

53. Although the SFRS's revenue outlook is more positive than in 2015, it has a capital backlog inherited from the eight former services that is insurmountable without transforming its current model of working and further investment. Since the merger in 2013, the SFRS estimates it has invested £94 million in its property, vehicle fleet and other assets. The LTFS estimates that a further £389 million is needed to address the condition and suitability of its assets. For context, at March 2017, property held by the SFRS was valued at £432 million and its vehicle fleet was valued at £48 million.

Exhibit 4

SFRS LTFS and Audit Scotland funding gap projections for 2026/27

Our projection for 2026/27 is for a £0.4 million funding gap.



Source: SFRS and Audit Scotland


54. If capital spending remains at 2017/18 levels the capital backlog will reach £406 million over the next ten years and the risk of asset failures, such as vehicle breakdowns, will increase significantly.⁹ HMFSI plans to conduct a thematic review of the SFRS's fleet arrangements during 2018.

55. To bring its property, vehicles and other assets across Scotland up to a minimum satisfactory condition and maintain them over the next ten years, the SFRS requires an average annual investment of £80.4 million (three years at £170 million and seven years at £42 million). To simply ensure that current assets do not deteriorate any further than the current condition would require an annual investment of £37.8 million over the next ten years but this would mean the SFRS's property, fleet and other assets do not meet the needs of a modern service. It is unlikely that funding will be available to achieve either of these options.¹⁰

56. It is imperative therefore that the SFRS uses transformation to review and develop options for how it can reshape its property, vehicles and equipment to meet the needs of a modern service while also being financially sustainable. This may mean closing, moving, sharing or changing the use of some of its properties as well as considering the range and deployment of its fleet of vehicles.


57. The SFRS now needs to complete the review work required to inform the options appraisal and ensure that this is clearly set out in agreed asset management strategies and plans. The SFRS has a draft high-level asset management strategy (2015-19). It still needs to develop a long-term asset management strategy to reflect its vision for transformation and support this with a refreshed medium-term strategy.

Workforce planning has progressed but needs to be kept current

58. For any programme of change, such as the SFRS's integration and transformation, comprehensive workforce planning is fundamental. Staff costs account for 80 per cent of the SFRS's revenue budget. The SFRS has recently updated its workforce plan.¹¹ In line with recommendations in our [2014 report](#)  on public sector workforce planning, the plan reflects legislative requirements, internal strategies and reviews.¹²

59. The workforce plan identifies a single Target Operating Model (TOM) for all staff groups. At December 2017, whole-time firefighters were 3.3 per cent (101 staff) below the TOM. The plan does not include any scenarios of potential reductions to the target. Neither does it make any forecasts around the ability of future recruitment campaigns to reach the target. The SFRS plans to develop annual resourcing plans to reflect these details. The plan will need to be refreshed to reflect strategic decisions about transformation. This should include the profile of current and future staff costs and skills.

60. The plan sets out the main workforce pressures facing the SFRS. These include the following:

- Financial pressures and uncertainties around transformation.
- Staff turnover and **retirement profiles**  - 48 per cent of employees are over 45 and by 2025/26 this will rise to 67 per cent if existing employees are still in post.
- Balancing the workforce profile in terms of diversity.
- Managing attendance – absence levels have increased since 2015/16. The control staff group consistently has the highest absence level, which was 11 per cent at September 2017.

61. As outlined at [paragraph 34 \(page 13\)](#), recruiting and retaining RDS and volunteer staff is a challenge for the SFRS. Compared with the collective targets of the eight former services, at December 2017, RDS staff were 16 per cent (500 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff) below the target and volunteer staff 40 per cent (161 FTE staff) below. Until a single RDS and volunteer TOM is finalised, it will be difficult for the SFRS to analyse trends and make plans for improving recruitment and retention of these staff.

62. Many of the challenges for integration and for transforming the service rely on support services. The SFRS has experienced challenges in maintaining adequate skills and numbers in some of its support services. At December 2017, support staff was eight per cent (65.5 FTE staff) below the TOM. Within this, the finance and procurement function was 16 per cent (10.9 FTE staff) below the TOM, and the strategic planning, performance and communications function was six per cent (3.8 FTE staff) below the TOM. The variance was greatest for ICT staff, which was 20 per cent (15 FTE staff) below the TOM. The SFRS needs to ensure its ICT arrangements will meet the growing demand on and changing needs of the service as it progresses with its programme of transformation.



The majority of current firefighters will receive maximum pension benefits after 30 years' service at a minimum retirement age of 50. For firefighters who have joined the service since 2006, this has increased to 40 years of service and a minimum retirement age of 60.

63. The SFRS recognises the importance of involving employees in discussions around transformation and has put in place a range of communication measures. These include members of the strategic leadership team leading briefing sessions at over 100 fire stations across Scotland and dedicated pages on the intranet, where staff can comment on the plans for transformation. However, change can be unsettling and many members of staff that we spoke to expressed dissatisfaction with communications about transformation. Following a cultural audit in 2014, SFRS developed an SFRS values framework and now plans to develop an employee engagement framework. Analysis of absence rates, results from exit interviews and a staff survey (planned for 2018) should help to develop strategies to improve communications, retention and absence rates.

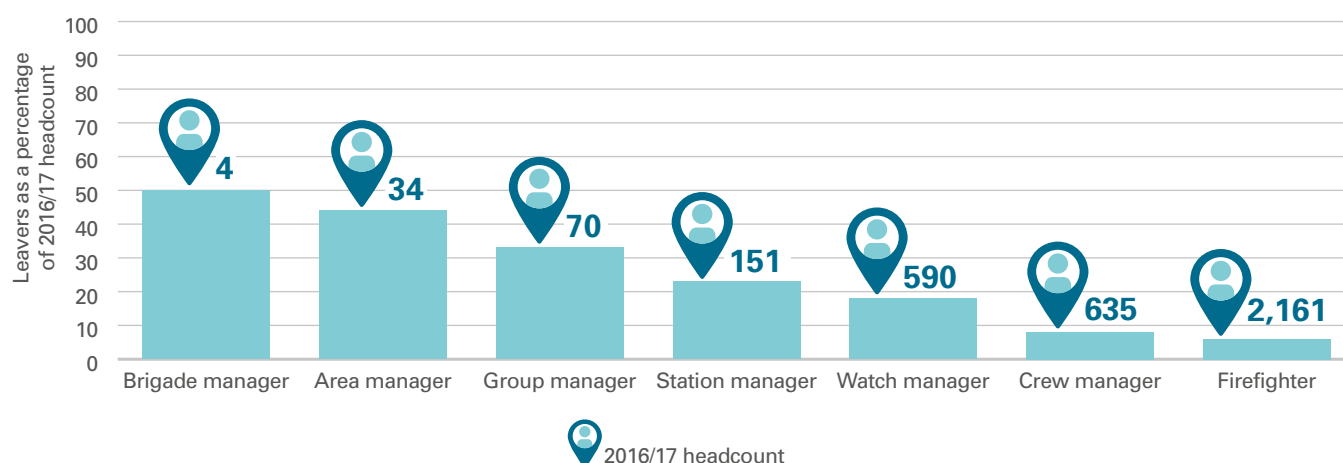
A high turnover of senior officers poses a risk to the pace of transformation

64. The age profile and therefore retirement rates of senior officers are a significant challenge for the SFRS. Current taxation and pension arrangements deter officers from continuing after they have completed 30 years' service. At March 2017, 45 per cent of whole-time firefighters and officers were aged between 45 and 55. Two of the four most senior officers in the SFRS are expected to retire by 2019/20 ([Exhibit 5](#)). The chief fire officer has chosen to defer his retirement. Of the 34 officers at the next level (deputy assistant chief officers and area managers), 15 (44 per cent) are expected to retire by 2019/20, and the majority of these (11) were expected to retire in 2017/18.

Exhibit 5

Estimated retirement rates by 2019/20, as a percentage of whole-time staff at 2016/17

Two of the four most senior officers are expected to retire by 2019/20.



Notes:

- Projections are based on those who are at least 50 and have served a minimum of 30 years.
- The graph is ordered by decreasing levels of seniority. Brigade manager level includes the chief fire officer, deputy chief officer and two assistant chief officers. Area managers include deputy assistant chief officers, who lead the three service delivery areas and key corporate functions. Area managers also include local senior officers who liaise with the 32 Scottish councils. Group managers support area managers in delivering services in local areas.
- Thirteen whole-time firefighters and officers have chosen to defer their retirement.

Sources: Audit Scotland, using data from the *Workforce and Strategic Resourcing Plan 2018-21*, SFRS, February 2018 and *Fire and Rescue organisational statistics 2016-17 Scotland*, SFRS, August 2017



65. One of the factors affecting the pace of progress to date with integration and transformation has been the lack of continuity of leadership on some projects. The SFRS recognises the need for a more proactive approach to succession planning, especially at executive and supervisory levels. In September 2017, it introduced a leadership and development framework.¹³ This includes a programme for the development of technical skills, people management, leadership and academic skills for all levels and type of staff. While it is too early to assess the impact of this programme, it aims to maintain the required numbers and capability of staff to effectively lead the transformation process.

The SFRS recognises the need to make further progress on equalities

66. At March 2017, 87.4 per cent of the total SFRS staff were male. Of firefighters and officers, 94.4 per cent were male, which is a slight reduction from 94.7 per cent in 2014. At January 2017, men in the SFRS earned on average five per cent more than women.

67. The SFRS's recent recruitment campaigns encourage applications from individuals with diverse backgrounds. For a campaign in 2016 for whole-time firefighters this resulted in female applicants making up eight per cent of all applicants and 14 per cent of all successful applicants were female.

68. The integration of the SFRS has reduced the percentage of posts held by women. Since 2014, female staff numbers have decreased by 13 per cent to 989 and male staff numbers have decreased by seven per cent to 6,845. This is because the majority of control staff (84.2 per cent) and support staff (55.6 per cent) are women. The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for the decision to rationalise control centres was comprehensive and acknowledged that female staff were likely to be disproportionately affected. However, the final decision was considered to have the least negative impact and the board emphasised that the SFRS would work with affected staff to minimise the impact. EIAs have not been completed for every policy decision submitted to the SFRS board and are not publicly available on the SFRS website.

69. Progress has been made in the gender make-up of the board. Two of 12 board members were female in 2015. In March 2018, five of the ten board members are female, including the chair.

Partnership working has been slow to progress at a national level but continues to be effective at a local level

70. The 2016 Framework requires the SFRS to embed partnership working ([Appendix 3, page 28](#)). In 2014, the Reform Collaboration Group (RCG) was established to improve collaborative working between the emergency services. The RCG includes leaders from the SFRS, Police Scotland and the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS). In May 2016, the SFRS took over as chair of the RCG. The SFRS has been proactive in promoting partnership arrangements, but this is a shared responsibility with the other services and, collectively, progress has been slow.


71. In January 2018, the RCG finalised its strategy and vision for partnership working.¹⁴ The RCG's strategy identifies four key priorities:

- **Co-location** – Out of all 925 SAS, SFRS and Police Scotland buildings, 63 are occupied by more than one of the three emergency services. The RCG plans to finalise an asset-sharing strategy in 2018/19 to facilitate more co-location.

one of the factors affecting the pace of progress has been the lack of continuity of leadership on some projects

- **Co-response** – This includes plans to improve response to dementia and mental health incidents, as well as extending the OHCA pilots across Scotland ([paragraph 44](#)).
- **Sharing knowledge and data** – The RCG is leading a plan to make it easier for the SFRS, Police Scotland, SAS and health and social care partners to share data to help identify vulnerable individuals. For the SFRS, this will enable preventative work to be targeted towards those at the highest risk.
- **Integration** – The RCG plans to explore options for the SFRS, SAS and Police Scotland to share services.

Working with local communities continues to be effective

72. The SFRS has successfully maintained effective relationships at a local level through local senior officers (LSOs) who liaise with the 32 Scottish councils and **community planning partnerships (CPPs)** . The council officers and councillors that we interviewed during our audit consistently said that they valued the enthusiasm and contribution of the LSOs very highly, particularly in relation to their community work on prevention and protection.

73. LSOs lead the development of local fire and rescue plans for each CPP. These plans are more tailored to local risks than previous plans and are focused on improving outcomes for local people, such as better home safety.

74. Scrutiny arrangements vary between local areas. In four of the five council areas we visited during the audit, the LSO provides quarterly reports to the council scrutiny committee. In contrast, Highland has eight area scrutiny committees, where group managers provide quarterly performance reports. In addition, on an annual basis, the LSO reports each year to a full council meeting on how the SFRS is performing in Highland.

75. The level of local engagement of SFRS board members is stronger in some areas than others, and largely depends on geographical connections of board members to certain areas. The liaison role that board members can bring is valuable, particularly with the forthcoming transformation work.

Community safety and prevention work continues to be well received but its impact needs to be evaluated

76. Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs) are the main tool the SFRS uses to deliver its preventative work. This is supported by a process where social workers and police can refer vulnerable individuals for a HFSV. The number of HFSVs has remained relatively consistent since 2013/14 with 70,686 homes visited in that year and a slight increase to 70,744 in 2016/17. The percentage of the HFSVs carried out in homes classified as high risk has decreased from 40 per cent in 2013/14 to 37 per cent in 2017/18. The SFRS plans to improve its ability to identify vulnerable individuals and households to ensure it targets the highest risk homes for HFSVs ([paragraph 71](#)). Following the Grenfell Tower fire in June 2017, the SFRS launched a high-rise fire safety campaign that included prioritising the delivery of HFSVs to those living in high-rise flats. In the nine months following the incident, it carried out 1,900 HFSVs and 1,500 additional visits to reassure residents in high-rise flats.



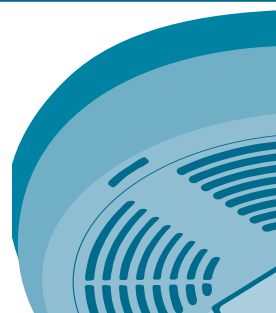
There are 32 CPPs in Scotland, one for each council area. They are a statutory forum for bodies, such as councils, NHS boards and emergency services, to work with local communities in planning and delivering services.


77. The Scottish Government has noted improved coordination and sharing of resources for preventative work since the 2013 merger.¹⁵ The wide range of community safety and prevention work the SFRS carries out in partnership with local communities and other services includes, for example:

- Young Firefighter programmes – Youth engagement programmes led by the SFRS which teach a range of skills including firefighting, first aid, teamwork, leadership and communication. The programmes aim to reduce the prevalence of deliberate fire-raising, which in 2016/17, accounted for 84 per cent of all secondary fires (such as fires in refuse bins and wildfires) and 25 per cent of all primary fires (such as fires in dwellings and road vehicles).
- Community Safety Partnership Hubs – Partnerships, primarily between the SFRS, Police Scotland and the relevant council, meet frequently to share information on individuals and safety issues in the community. This approach enables early interventions by the most appropriate agency to deal with issues such as antisocial behaviour, crime and fire-raising.
- Biker Down – This initiative involves training motorcyclists on increasing visibility, accident scene management and first aid.

78. The SFRS is now planning to evaluate the impact of its preventative work on community safety. SFRS staff and board members commented on the difficulty of evaluation, but it is important to assess whether the benefits justify their costs and staff time. As the Scottish Government emphasises in its most recent report on police and fire reform, understanding what approaches are effective in improving safety is essential to sharing and spreading best practice across Scotland.¹⁶

Endnotes



- 1 *Performance management framework 2018*, report to the board of the SFRS, February 2018.
- 2 *Fire Safety Enforcement by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service*, HM Fire Service Inspectorate, January 2018.
- 3 *Projected population of Scotland (2016-based)*, *Key findings*, National Records of Scotland, October 2017.
- 4 *Performance management framework 2018*, report to the board of the SFRS, February 2018.
- 5 *Workforce and Strategic Resourcing Plan 2018-21*, SFRS, February 2018.
- 6 *Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest: a Strategy for Scotland*, Scottish Government, March 2015.
- 7 *Scottish Fire and Rescue Service co-response to out of hospital cardiac arrest incidents*, report to the board of the SFRS, 27 April 2017.
- 8 *Long Term Financial Strategy 2017-27*, SFRS, December 2017.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 *Workforce and Strategic Resourcing Plan 2018-21*, SFRS, February 2018.
- 12 [Scotland's public sector workforce: Good practice guide](#) , Audit Scotland, March 2014.
- 13 *Leadership and development framework*, report to the SFRS governance committee, September 2017.
- 14 *Scottish emergency services national collaboration strategy*, SFRS, SAS and Police Scotland, January 2018.
- 15 *Scottish Government evaluation of police and fire reform*, Scottish Government, February 2018.
- 16 Ibid.

Appendix 1

Progress against recommendations made in our 2015 report

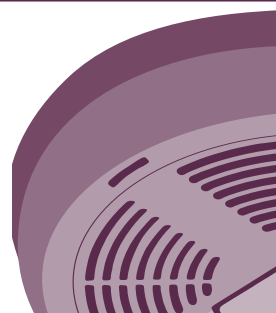


Recommendation	Progress as at May 2018
<p>Carry out a comprehensive lessons-learned exercise by December 2015 and share findings with the Scottish Government, and with other public bodies that are starting a merger process.</p>	<p>The SFRS undertook a lessons-learned exercise and reported its findings in March 2016.¹ The review included consulting a range of stakeholders but would have benefited from including some staff. The report includes useful insights for other organisations.</p>
<p>Provide board papers that are timely with an appropriate level of detail. There should be a balance between quantity and quality, and papers should differentiate between operational information and information the board needs for strategic decision-making.</p>	<p>The quality of reporting to the board and committees is broadly good, provided in a timely manner and the volume of information provided is reasonable.</p> <p>In particular, financial information is of a high standard. Performance information provided to the board is the weakest area.</p> <p>A well-structured template for reporting is used that clearly differentiates between information provided for decisions and for information.</p>
<p>Agree a long-term financial strategy by the end of March 2016, developed from evidence-based options for achieving savings.</p>	<p>The SFRS has produced a long-term financial strategy covering up to 2026/27. The strategy is well considered and structured but was not agreed by the board until December 2017.</p>
<p>Agree long-term strategies in the main areas that will contribute to savings and form the basis of the long-term financial strategy, including workforce, asset management and procurement</p>	<p>A new SFRS workforce and strategic resourcing plan 2018-21 has been produced but this does not yet include the workforce implications of transformation.</p> <p>The SFRS has a draft, high-level asset management strategy (2015-19) which also needs to be refreshed to reflect the SFRS's LTFS and vision for transformation.</p> <p>In 2015, the SFRS produced a procurement strategy and updated this in December 2016.</p>

Note: 1. *A fire and rescue service for Scotland: findings from the reform process*, SFRS, 31 March 2016.

Appendix 2

Our audit approach



Our objective To assess the SFRS's progress in integrating and transforming the service since our 2015 report.

Our audit questions	How effectively has the SFRS responded to the recommendations of our May 2015 report?	Has the SFRS continued to make good progress with integrating and transforming the service?	How effectively is the SFRS responding to the Scottish Government's Scottish Fire and Rescue Framework and does the Framework adequately reflect the future challenges for the service?	How effectively is the SFRS delivering its integrated and transformed arrangements at a local level?

Our methodology	As part of the fieldwork for our audit, we carried out the following:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reviewed relevant documents from the SFRS, Scottish Government and HMFSI.• Worked with HMFSI to review progress with integration and transformation.• Carried out a range of interviews, focus groups and meeting observations.• We interviewed:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• senior staff in the SFRS and the Scottish Government• a selection of SFRS board members• trades unions representatives• councillors and senior staff from five sample councils: Fife, Highland, North Lanarkshire, Perth and Kinross, West Dunbartonshire• representatives from partner agencies including Police Scotland and the Scottish Ambulance Service.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We held focus groups with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• uniform staff from four whole-time stations• uniform staff from four RDS stations• non-uniform support staff at one whole-time station.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We observed meetings of the SFRS board and its committees.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We analysed data on:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• performance, using data from the SFRS• finances, using data on the SFRS's budget, costs and savings to date• the cost pressures on the SFRS's budget and spending levels to 2026/27, based on the following assumptions:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– an annual two per cent rise in staff costs– general inflation applied to non-staff costs– no surplus or deficit in savings carried forward into the following year.

Our conclusion The SFRS continues to deliver emergency and prevention services while progressing a complex and ambitious programme of reform. The pace of progress with integration and transformation is steady but slow. The key messages and recommendations on [pages 5 –6](#) provide more details on our conclusions.

Appendix 3

Scottish Fire and Rescue Framework 2016 – strategic priorities



Performance measures

- The SFRS must, in discussion with the Scottish Government, specify appropriate performance measures to support its Strategic Plan, for the delivery of outcomes relating to the strategic priorities and objectives set out in this Framework.

Safety, well being and prevention

- The SFRS should fully contribute to improving the safety and well-being of Scotland's communities and must continue to build on the successful focus on prevention. It should ensure that there is a clear process for working with partners to identify the risks faced by communities and individuals so that the SFRS can target activity on a risk-based approach and where it can most effectively improve safety and contribute to addressing inequalities within and between communities.

Response and resilience

- The SFRS should work with other public sector partners to evolve a holistic and dynamic process of identification, evaluation and assessment of community risk and Best Value in order to prioritise and target its use of resources to ensure an appropriate response to incidents across Scotland and support improved outcomes for communities. As part of this approach, the SFRS should promote optimal command, control, communication and tri-service cooperation in response to incidents.
- The SFRS should support effective multi-agency emergency planning and response arrangements including contributing fully to the work of Regional and Local Resilience Partnerships in assessing risk; and preparing, planning for, responding to and recovering from major and catastrophic incidents and threats. When working with other responders, the SFRS should play a key role in building community resilience and protecting both Scottish and UK critical infrastructure assets.

Partnership

- Community planning and partnership working with other services and communities should be embedded throughout the SFRS. Building on its existing Engagement Strategy, the SFRS should proactively seek collaborative opportunities and innovative ways of working in partnership with other blue light services/key stakeholders to improve outcomes for communities and should ensure effective stakeholder engagement in its approach to all its work including partnership working.

Service transformation

- The SFRS should continue to ensure that the benefits of Fire Reform are fully realised, evidenced and tracked, and it should explore through Service redesign new and innovative ways in which it can improve the safety and wellbeing of communities throughout Scotland by building on the traditional roles carried out by the Service.

Modernising response

- The SFRS should develop and implement dynamic, innovative and sustainable operating systems throughout Scotland which are fit for purpose and meet local needs (covering both the Retained Duty System and whole-time firefighter work patterns).

Unwanted fire alarm signals

- The SFRS should develop a new approach to reducing unwanted fire alarm signals (UFAS) demand and road risk. This approach should involve the SFRS Board setting stretching targets to support the Service's Strategic Plan in relation to this priority.

Effective governance and performance

- The SFRS should ensure it has an effective approach to performance management to support robust scrutiny of the Service at national and local levels. This approach should be regularly reviewed and evaluated in pursuit of continuous improvement. The SFRS should also collect, produce and analyse data and other intelligence to promote the safety and well being of communities, support operational efficiency and performance improvements (including its partnership contributions) and enable effective public reporting of performance.

People

- The SFRS should aim to be an employer of choice – maximising the effectiveness of its approach to workforce planning; promoting the safety, health and wellbeing of all staff; and being a learning organisation with opportunities for all. The SFRS should also seek to be an organisation that is more representative of the people and communities of Scotland that it serves.
-

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

An update

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ISBN 978 1 911494 57 7 AGS/2018/3

This publication is printed on 100% recycled, uncoated paper

