

Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority – 30 June 2026

Public Questions

Public Question 1. Nigel Kieser, Station Reviews

QUESTION: A "Station Optimisation Programme" is outlined in Appendix C as a part of the "Service Modernisation Programme". This Station Optimisation Programme will include consideration of "station mergers, amalgamations, relocation". The Authority is being asked today (30th June) to approve implementation of the Service Modernisation Programme. Can the Chair please clarify whether this means the CFO would implicitly also be granted permission to proceed with any station mergers, amalgamations or relocation without public consultation? If so, I wish to challenge this on the basis of paragraph 3.3 of the Member's Handbook, which requires the Authority to "undertake a public consultation on options" where it "contemplates making material changes to prevention, protection and/or response service provision". The most recent public consultation clearly demonstrates that closure of a community's fire station is a material change from their perspective. Surely Authority members should adopt this same perspective, as they are elected by those same communities?

Public Question 2. Julie Doyle, Station Reviews

QUESTION: Fire & RTA risks are increasing and we will need more full & part time staffed stations to deal with the increasing pressures. Is the authority prepared to accept that a larger ratio of fire fighters to management & admin, than is the case now in Wilts & Dorset, is essential going forward and that seriously considering outsourcing aspects such as finance is necessary?

Do you accept that addressing these matters may help to avoid costly and deeply unpopular consultations on cutting important rural fire stations and firefighter posts in the future?

Public Question 3. Andy Corben, Station Reviews

QUESTION: Over the past six months, Fire Brigades Union members in Dorset and Wiltshire have worked tirelessly to highlight the risk of fire station closures and job losses to local communities, councillors, MPs and the fire minister. The chronic under funding of the Fire Service nationally over the last 15 years has been felt more acutely in Dorset & Wiltshire and the FBU welcome the very recent £1.8m grant from government.

Does the Fire Authority agree the highest priority of a Fire & Rescue Service must be operational response, which protects the public and ensures firefighter safety? Securing an increase to the council tax precept is a direct result of all staff, including SLT and the local communities of Dorset & Wiltshire who have

lobbied their MP's demanding action to prevent station closures and job losses. The collective efforts from all parties should be recognised and applauded.

The decision taken to vote in favour of raising the precept will provide FBU members some stability at work and protect the communities of Dorset & Wiltshire. However, FBU members have significant safety concerns regarding the modernisation programme, specifically reducing the number of firefighters on an appliance. The data provided by the service indicate the demand from incidents require more firefighters, not necessarily more appliances.

To be clear, the FBU position is to 'strive for 5' on a fire engine, endeavour to improve operational response and fight against cuts to the frontline.

If the Fire Authority vote in favour of raising council tax precept, will they ensure the CFO is held accountable to improving response times across Dorset & Wiltshire, improving the health & safety of firefighters and ensure no stations are closed and no jobs are lost?

Public Question 4. Alice Alliott, Station Reviews

QUESTION: Availability was a concern raised throughout your own consultation meetings.

Your Modernisation Programme acknowledges the fragility of the on-call duty system as a core strategic risk, yet the programme doesn't contain a specific on-call objective.

The consultation process has likely damaged recruitment, especially with the conditions being placed in today's vote on station closures early next year. Nationally on-call firefighters are being targeted and treated as lesser than their wholetime counterparts, which also undoubtedly impacts the morale of our crews.

Given these factors, what specific actions are you taking to address your difficulties with on-call recruitment and retention, what is the timeline for those actions, and how will you ensure they are sufficient to ensure sustainability of the on-call workforce?

Public Question 5. Lesley Elliott, Station Reviews

QUESTION: Question 1: During the public meetings, members of the public were encouraged to submit questions via the online survey, particularly if they didn't feel that they had received a full answer at the meeting. I was one of those that submitted questions. Having read the PAG report and Appendices, I do not see that any of these questions have been answered. When and how will the questions submitted during the online survey be answered?

Question 2: One of my questions relates to how the 4 selection criteria were initially applied to all 50 fire stations and how each criteria was weighted to select the final 8 stations. This was not answered clearly through any FOI

requests. When can I see a simple table or document that illustrates how all 4 selection criteria were applied to all 50 fire stations?

Public Question 6. Andy Elliott, Station Reviews

QUESTION: The FA has insisted that it has followed the Gunning Principles throughout the Public Consultation. My concern relates to Principle 2: Sufficient information needs to be supplied for the public to give the consultation 'intelligent consideration'. The PAG report concludes that by producing the leaflets and documents and holding the public meetings, it has met principle 2. However, the report goes on to say "A substantial number noted that confidence would increase if local fire stations were kept open, if the proposals were reconsidered, or had stronger transparency and clearer monitoring." This clearly calls the principle for 'intelligent consideration' into question. Further to this, all 8 reports on the station specific meetings concluded that members of the audience challenged the accuracy, completeness and transparency of the data. There have also been over 50 FOI requests since February that appear to be linked to this proposal, again pointing to the fact that the public could not decipher the official documents. As the PAG report confirms that the public perception of the data provision was poor, does the Fire Authority believe that the Public Consultation process correctly followed the Gunning Principles and if so, how do you account for the public confusion regarding information?

Appendix B Data Assurance Report, states several times how impressed it is that DWFRS has published substantial information describing the methodology supporting transparency and helping stakeholders understand how the analysis has been undertaken. I have requested an explanation of this methodology and access to basic data such as the response isochrones numerous times. This has consistently been denied. I have had various verbal explanations, but these have been inconsistent. Cllr Small tried to explain Isochrones several times at public meetings, but was again inconsistent and confused. Why will DWFRS or the DWFRA not release such simple data?

Public Question 7. Pauline Church, Station Reviews

QUESTION: Firstly, I would like to thank the officer team and Andy Cole for tabling revised recommendation (1) to members regarding station closures. It goes without saying that if the voting outcome concurs with this recommendation, it will be a relief to DWFRS colleagues, our communities and give us all a sense of reassurance and safety.

A continual programme of modernisation in recommendation (2) is a must – it improves outcomes, upskills colleagues, reduces cost and delivers best value for taxpayers. Conversely it is recognised inadequate funding, in whatever form, is an issue and let's not forget, government needs to resolve the council tax base growth anomaly to ensure a sustainable funding package into the future; I will personally continue to lobby for just that.

However, I challenge recommendation (3). I am concerned members are being compromised on a station closure vote and expected to agree to close all 8 fire

stations today if the funding demands as set out in 2a), 2b) and 2c) are not met by February next year. So, my question is:

As it is impossible to know DWFRS financial position in 8 months' time, will members please put forward an amendment to recommendation (3), to ensure the Fire Authority is not, under any circumstances, blindly agreeing to station closures today?

Recommendation (3) current wording:

Should all of these conditions, in a), b) and c) above not be met, confirmation of which will be clear in budget setting papers presented to the Authority in February 2027, the Authority agree that all eight fire stations, namely, Bradford on Avon, Cranborne, Charmouth, Hamworthy, Maiden Newton, Mere, Ramsbury and Wilton will be closed.

Recommendation (3) suggested wording:

Should all of these conditions, in a), b) and c) above not be met, confirmation of which will be clear in budget setting papers presented to the Authority in February 2027, the Authority agree that all eight fire stations, namely, Bradford on Avon, Cranborne, Charmouth, Hamworthy, Maiden Newton, Mere, Ramsbury and Wilton will be reviewed.

Public Question 8. Gabriella Buchanan, Station Reviews

QUESTION: The consultation has provided no surprises when it comes to the public's views about station closures and their willingness to pay towards their funding by increasing council tax, with more than 80% of them opposing closures and willing to pay more. Surely the money spent on the consultation would have been used more wisely if it had been used to employ an independent executive advisor to look at the service's spending and what it could do to improve their financial situation, as any corporate business would in the same situation. After all, the writing has been on the wall since 2015 when the National Audit Office warned that all fire services would face a deficit in the future if they did not begin looking at their finances imminently. Had you actioned this process over 10 years ago we would not have reached this point. Or do you not want to hear the reality of where your money is being wasted?

Public Question 9. Peter Edge, Station Reviews

QUESTION: Q1

I welcome the CFO's latest advice to the CFA that the proposed station closures should not now go ahead, however the Sword of Damocles still lingers for next year should the funding not be forthcoming. I would like an assurance from the CFA that the threat of station closures and station mergers be removed on purely financial grounds and more innovative alternative financial savings be investigated.

As an example, a recent FOI request showed that DWFRS paid £624,833 in 2024/25 in "unitary charges" linked to office space at Poundbury as well as £64,000 incurred for energy costs over the same period. Separately the service

is now paying £134,000 a year for the Five Rivers HQ. These figures alone amount to nearly £3/4M!

Savings could be made by moving the HQ to Salisbury Fire Station. Other savings could be made by moving personnel to on call stations and other locations such as the training centres. The need for everyone to be in one central location is not necessary especially as there are so many staffing meetings.

In Swindon there is no need for 3 stations to deal with the risk there, Westlea was closed for months whilst renovation work was being carried out and the staff and equipment decanted to Swindon with no detriment to cover. Currently I believe that Stratton station is closed and is similarly decanted to Swindon.

Q2

Why didn't DWFRS apply for an uplift of its precept in 2025 to be implemented this financial year like other services did, and when did they know that the £1.8m grant and the 11.8% government uplift had been granted. If the service were aware of uplifts weeks ago, the undue stress to all involved at Hamworthy and Wilton could have been avoided.