

SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE
The Board of Scottish Fire and Rescue Service



Report No: B/SPPC/07-20

Agenda Item: N/A

Report to:	THE BOARD OF SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE						
Meeting Date:	19 MARCH 2020 (CIRCULATED ELECTRONICALLY FOR DECISION)						
Report Title:	SUSPENSION OF PUBLIC ACCESS TO SFRS BOARD PUBLIC MEETINGS						
Report Classification:	For Decision	Board/Committee Meetings ONLY For Reports to be held in Private Specify rationale below referring to <u>Board Standing Order 9</u>					
		<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>
1	Purpose						
1.1	The primary purpose of this report is to present the recommendation for the suspension of public access to all Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Board and Committee public meetings as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.						
2	Background						
2.1	With COVID-19 requiring significant change to normal business the SFRS Board Support Team has already started planning changes to the way Board and Committee meetings may need to be conducted for the foreseeable future in preparation of any decision.						
2.2	The arrangements include limiting agenda items to only those deemed essential between Chairs and Senior staff, whilst also asking the majority or all attendees to attend virtually through Video and/or Teleconferencing.						
2.3	Under normal circumstances the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 requires that the SFRS 'SFRS must ensure that its proceedings and those of its committees and subcommittees are held in public'.						
2.4	Current circumstances are extraordinary and as such it is neither advisable nor wholly possible for SFRS to allow for normal public access.						
3	Main Report/Detail						
3.1	Introduction						
3.1.1	Coronavirus (COVID-19) is placing an unprecedented and dynamic set of challenges on individuals and organisations across the UK and beyond. It is recommended that the SFRS Board follows national guidelines, which will have an impact on how we will be able to conduct our business in the immediate period.						
3.1.2	For the foreseeable future it is proposed, all essential business of the SFRS Board or its committees will be conducted via video or telephone conference with participating members and senior officers dialing in from various locations. As a result, there will be no facilities for stakeholders or members of the public to attend and observe SFRS Board or committee meetings or for any suitable recordings of the public session of the SFRS Board to be captured.						
3.1.3	This is an unprecedented situation and we will aim to be able to revert to business as usual as soon as possible when it is safe to do so.						

3.1.4	Until such time, all agendas and papers for meetings will continue to be published on the SFRS's <u>Website</u> in advance of meetings. A full minute will also be published once it has been approved for the public to access. “
3.2	Legislative and SFRS Standing Order detail, for information:-
3.2.1	The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, Schedule 1A, paragraph 11 entitled Public Access requires the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service ensure the following: <i>SFRS must ensure that its proceedings and those of its committees and subcommittees are held in public.</i>
3.2.2	In addition, the act also allows; <i>SFRS or, as the case may be, any of its committees or sub-committees may decide to hold all or part of any proceedings in private.</i> And that; <i>SFRS must publish, (a) agendas for its proceedings and those of its committees and subcommittees, (b) the papers relating to those proceedings, (c) such reports of those proceedings as it thinks fit. (4) Despite sub-paragraph (3), SFRS may decide that all or part of any agenda, paper or report need not be published.</i> <i>SFRS must publish a statement setting out, (a) the circumstances in which its proceedings and those of its committees and sub-committees may be held in private, and (b) the circumstances in which agendas, papers and reports need not be published.</i>
3.2.3	The SFRS Standing Order 8 (for meetings of the Board and its Committees) states; <i>The SFRS Board and its Committees will hold all their meetings in public, except where the SFRS Members determine that all or part of the meeting ought to be held in private, on the grounds that confidential issues or confidential papers are (or may be) considered at that meeting.</i>
3.2.4	Proposals for temporary suspension of public access to the public meetings of the SFRS Board and its Committees:- SFRS should now consider a temporary change to Board and Committee Governance arrangements that allows the SFRS Board and Committees to continue where essential, however for reasons mentioned previously and for our duty of care, suspend public access for the foreseeable future.
3.2.5	In undertaking this action SFRS aims to limit contact wherever possible between Board members, Strategic Leadership Team, wider staff, stakeholders and members of the public. This is in line with current government advice and SFRS advice on maintaining social and organisational distancing at time of writing.
3.2.6	In the medium term SFRS will look to make alternative arrangements that re-establishes some degree of public access over the coming months.
3.2.7	Please note the Scottish Police Authority and East Lothian Council have also suspended public access to meetings at time of writing and published statements to that effect.
3.2.8	Although being circulated to the Board as a priority and to seek approval this paper will also be presented at the Board meeting on the 26 March 2020, as a formal public record of the decision outcome.

4	Recommendation
4.1	That following national guidelines the SFRS Board approves this approach as a safe, sensible and measure, acting on our duty of care to minimise unnecessary contact between Board members, Strategic Leadership Team, wider staff, stakeholders and members of the public as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will begin from the next scheduled meetings on 25 March 2020 and until further notice.
4.2	That the SFRS Board agree to following statement being published on the SFRS Website: Coronavirus <i>“The SFRS Board is following national guidelines and this is impacting on how we conduct our business.</i> <i>Coronavirus (COVID-19) is placing an unprecedented and dynamic set of challenges on individuals and organisations across the UK and beyond. The SFRS Board is following national guidelines and this is having an impact on how we will be able to conduct our business in the immediate period.</i> <i>For the foreseeable future, all essential business of the SFRS Board or its committees will be conducted via video or telephone conference with participating members and senior officers dialing in from various locations. As a result, there will be no facilities for stakeholders or members of the public to attend and observe SFRS Board or committee meetings or for any suitable recordings of the public session of the SFRS Board to be captured.</i> <i>As you will appreciate, this is an unprecedented situation and we hope to be able to revert to business as usual as soon as possible when it is safe to do so. Until such time, all agendas and papers for meetings will continue to be published on the SFRS’s Website in advance of meetings. A full minute will also be published once it has been approved.”</i>
5	Key Strategic Implications
5.1	Financial
5.1.1	None at this time
5.2	Environmental & Sustainability
5.2.1	None at this time
5.3	Workforce
5.3.1	Limiting any further contact between Board members, Strategic Leadership Team, wider staff, stakeholders and members of the public is in line with current government advice and SFRS advice on maintaining social and organisational distancing at time of writing.
5.4	Health & Safety
5.4.1	Limiting any further contact between Board members, Strategic Leadership Team, wider staff, stakeholders and members of the public is in line with current government advice and SFRS advice on maintaining social and organisational distancing at time of writing.
5.5	Training
5.5.1	None at this time
5.6	Timing
5.6.1	None at this time

5.7 5.7.1	Performance None at this time	
5.8 5.8.1	Communications & Engagement SFRS will place notice of any changes agreed on the SFRS website and SFRS intranet. In addition, SFRS will make key stakeholders aware of any changes agreed.	
5.9 5.9.1	Legal This paper and its contents are intended to ensure compliance with the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 and both the Standing Orders of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.	
5.10 5.10.1	Information Governance The papers and minutes of the meetings will still be made available as normal.	
5.11 5.11.1	Risk (suggested) Failure to protect the reputation of the service, failure to ensure cognisance of national security	
5.12 5.12.1	Equalities EIA completed No.	
6	Core Brief	
6.1	Under normal circumstances the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 requires that the SFRS committees and subcommittees are held with access to the public. However, the COVID 19 is an exceptional situation requiring a significant change to normal business and the SFRS has a duty of care to all concerned. As such it is neither advisable nor wholly possible for SFRS to allow for normal public access for the foreseeable time. As from the 25 March 2020 the SFRS will hold all Board and Committee meetings without public access, until further notice. The SFRS Board will publish a statement that outlines its approach on the SFRS Website.	
7	Appendices/Further Reading	
7.1	Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Standing Orders Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Scheme of Delegations	
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Links to Strategy and Corporate Values		
This links to the desired outcomes within the SFRS Strategic Plan 2019-22 and our SFRS values.		
Governance Route for Report	Meeting Date	Report Classification/ Comments
SFRS Board	19 March 2020	<i>For Decision– circulated electronically for approval by the Board.</i>
SFRS Board	26 March 2020	<i>For Noting – based on outcome of the decision made by the Board.</i>