



# Northern Ireland Fire Brigades Union

## Budget Cuts 2017/18



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## **Background & Budget**

In the last financial year (2016-17) the budget for Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) was £72.5m.

For this financial year (2017-18) The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer (CFRO) requested **£74.4m** to maintain a safe and efficient Fire & Rescue Service.

The Department of Health (DoH) refused this request and were only prepared to offer **£72.2m**.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) commenced a lobbying & press campaign which has helped to get an extra £700k therefore the 2017-18 budget is now **£72.9m**.

The NIFRS accounts for approximately **1.5% of the DHSSPS budget**

NIFRS is one of the higher performing FRSs in the UK with a **cost per head of population of £38.90** against the **National average of £41.4**. (Source - NIFRS & CIPFA) This means that **fire and rescue cover is provided for each person in NI for £0.75 per week or £0.11 per day!**

83% of the NIFRS budget is wages and salaries; therefore it is impossible to find savings without a reduction in service delivery. The FBU believes this would be catastrophic for emergency fire and rescue cover in NI.

## **NIFRS efficiency**

NIFRS has been modernising and doing **more with less** in recent years. Some high profile examples are;

- Setting one of the most ambitious targets for standards of emergency response to dwelling fires anywhere in the United Kingdom
- Since 2006 NIFRS have enhanced fire cover by introducing wholetime crewing during the highest risk periods at 7 stations (Newtownards, Portadown, Omagh, Antrim, Coleraine, Armagh & Carrickfergus) to meet these new response standards.
- Firefighters have been driving down dwelling fire risk across NI by carrying out home fire safety checks in communities right across NI. This drives down the risk, but regardless of this work significant risk still exists and the stark facts are that there are still too many people losing their lives in house fires.
- New Flood Response Teams in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry.

- New duty systems and ways of working jointly agreed between NIFRS Management and the Fire Brigades Union.
- **Not one day lost to industrial action in 14 years!**

All this achieved as a result of the most progressive industrial relations in the UK, within existing resources and against a background of year on year savings.

Additional Gaps in fire cover remain in Strabane, Dungannon and Downpatrick.

Prior to budget issues arising, NIFRS had been exploring with the FBU the possibility of upgrading emergency response cover in the 3 fire stations above to some form of whole-time/day crewing . This would involve personnel transferring from within the existing establishment to these stations. The FBU are keen for this to happen but it can only be achieved by maintaining our establishment levels and undertaking recruitment over the next 2 years!

NIFRS already have significant issues and gaps in fire cover due to retained availability during the day time. NIFRS have also struggled to meet their existing standards of response since 2006 and we believe this will get dramatically worse with these proposed budget cuts!

## **IMPACT**

Currently NIFRS are now looking at a **£1.5m** deficit and had already been requested by the DoH to submit savings proposals in order to make the **£2.2m** deficit.

What **will** this mean in real terms for our local communities?

- Specialist High Rise Appliance in Derry/Londonderry no longer immediately available. This means slower response times in that, if this appliance is needed, firefighters would have return to the fire station causing an obvious delay.
- Specialist Rescue Appliance in Derry/Londonderry crewed with 2 instead of 4 personnel.
- Antrim Fire station to be downgraded. This means that the full-time emergency response cover at Antrim Fire Station will be reduced from 84 hours per week to 50 hours per week. This includes no full-time emergency response cover on Saturdays and Sundays. Again, slower response times when the whole-time crews are no longer available.
- Reduction in the number of supervisory Officers. This means that there will be significant delays in the setting up safe systems of work necessary at all major incidents.

- Reduction in the number of safety critical training days for part-time fire-fighters (major health & safety implications). Every fatal fire investigation in the past 20 years has identified that the “lack of training” is a significant factor in fire-fighters losing their lives at incidents.
- No full-time recruitment in the past 5 years meaning not enough personnel available to upgrade high risk stations in Downpatrick, Dungannon & Strabane. In 2014 these 3 towns were identified as needing full-time fire-cover during the day Monday to Friday. 3 years later, due to the lack of recruitment, this has still not happened.
- Reduction in important prevention and community engagement activities with a consequential and predictable rise in future years of fire injuries and fatalities.

### **Conclusion**

- NIFRS provides excellent value for money for the NI Public at a cost of **11 pence per day**
- NIFRS accounts for **1.5% of the DHSSPS budget**
- The FBU believes **NIFRS is frontline** and should be ring-fenced against any further cuts
- The FBU believes that there is little room for further efficiency following a real terms cut of almost **£10m over the last 6-7 years**. Any further budget cuts will inevitably affect emergency fire cover. This will **increase the risk to the NI Public** and make **firefighters less safe!**