



SIMON HOARE MP
NORTH DORSET

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON, SW1A 0AA

Andy Coles Esq QFSM
Chief Fire Officer
Dorset Fire & Rescue Service
Five Rivers Health & Wellbeing Centre
Salisbury SP1 3NR

By post & email

17 February 2026

Dear Andy,

Proposed closure of Cranborne Fire Station

I have been pleased to play a role in helping the Service secure the compensatory Bellwin money from Government to help recover the costs of last summer's fires and in organising the meeting with you and the Minister to discuss the £5 precept uplift which has now been secured. While you and I welcome the Government's three year funding settlement we are both, I know, acutely aware that additional employment costs as a result of the Chancellor's Budgets erode any funding uplift. Our local Fire Service has always been innovative, for example the merger with Wiltshire to help deliver savings.

I am aware of the proposals to close a number of fire stations including the one at Cranborne. No one will instinctively welcome this as we all have concerns regarding the resilience of public safety particularly in rural areas. While I am conscious of the challenges in recruitment you have at Cranborne, I do have a number of questions which I hope you will answer and that will be taken into account as the public consultation and Fire Authority deliberations take place. I am, as you will know, concerned about the impact in risk to my constituents if these closure plans proceed. I am also anxious about the persistent chipping away of rural services and the fact that the national funding formula does not place sufficient weight on rurality. This is an issue I continue to press Ministers on in the House of Commons.

- Being on the near edge of Dorset and close to the Hampshire border I am concerned that Cranborne and Alderholt could become a fire cover 'not spot' reliant upon Verwood and the goodwill of Hampshire. This would lead to a lengthening of response times and the ability to save life and property;
- The Stations at Verwood and Blandford are already serving a growing town and catchment and I am aware of officers being deployed to backfill across Dorset. If Cranborne is to close what assessment has been undertaken as to the impact on morale, recruitment and retention among the Officers at Verwood and Blandford. A reduction in firefighters at Verwood and Blandford as a result of being overstretched permanently would be bad news for the town specifically and impact negatively on Cranborne and Alderholt;
- What percentage of savings is estimated to be generated by closing Cranborne;
- I am aware of Viscount Cranborne's letter to you of 4th February highlighting the station land was gifted to the former Cranborne & Wimborne Rural District Council by the Estate only for use as a fire station. The Estate has signalled that in the event of it closing it would expect the land to be returned.

Working Hard for North Dorset

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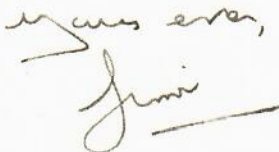
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Can you confirm whether or not an expectation of a capital receipt from redevelopment has been put into the closure proposal. If it has and it is not deliverable what impact does that have on the savings proposals;

- If Cranborne Fire Station closes what would happen to the firefighting equipment it has? Would it be relocated to Verwood? If not, how can we have confidence that local people would be kept as safe as they are now without a fire station at Cranborne **and** a reduction in locally based firefighting equipment;
- Would fire fighters at Cranborne be relocated to Verwood or are their services dispensed with;
- While I appreciate the recruitment challenges at Cranborne they are not unique. I would be interested to hear how your Service has tried to recruit and retain new fire fighters over the last three years. Many will worry that Cranborne has been allowed to wither on the vine to allow its closure, based on fire fighter numbers, to become a self-fulfilling prophecy;
- I would be interested to see data covering the current and anticipated response times to a fire in 1) Cranborne and 2) Alderholt based on Cranborne open and Cranborne closed. Likewise I would like to see the sq. miles coverage expectation of Verwood Fire Station based on Cranborne open and closed;
- Would the closure of Cranborne make the area more reliant upon the 'goodwill' of Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service. Can you advise that you and your opposite number in Hampshire have discussed these plans and can guarantee that they are not proposing station closures in the vicinity, which, if delivered concurrently with yours, would have a demonstrable negative impact on the local community as it relates to coverage and call out/response times;
- The local authorities that you cover will see significant residential and other development in the coming years. What assessment has been made of the impact in demand on your Service should these closure plans proceed? What engagement have you had with the Planning Departments of the local authorities to understand as fully as possible the impact of new housing and other development.

I am conscious of the peace of mind that the existence of Cranborne Fire Station brings to my constituents. So, what they and I want to know is simple: what impact would Cranborne Fire Station's closure have on public safety and response times for the communities of Cranborne and Alderholt? I look forward to your response to the points raised above. I would be more than happy to meet you to discuss. I am also minded to organise a public engagement meeting with the community but such a meeting would require your attendance. Would you be happy to do so?



SIMON HOARE MP

Member of Parliament for North Dorset