



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE**

Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service
Five Rivers Health & Wellbeing Centre,
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Simon Hoare MP
Member of Parliament for North Dorset

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Your ref: AC
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Sent by email only to: simon.hoare.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Simon,

Thank you for your letter of 17 February regarding the proposed closure of Cranborne Fire Station, as requested this is my written response to the questions you raised.

1. Risk of a Rural “Fire Cover Not Spot”

Your concern regarding Cranborne and Alderholt becoming overly reliant on neighbouring stations is entirely understood.

As previously explained by Area Manager Jason Moncrieff when we met, the Service’s modelling assumes 100% availability of all Dorset & Wiltshire resources and measures system resilience with and without Cranborne fire station in place. This approach removes variability and allows Members to understand the *true structural impact* of any change.

The Cranborne Station Review confirms that, even assuming the station were available 100% of the time (which contrasts with its average availability of 40.24%), closure would result in modelled average response time increases of:

- **1 minute 17 seconds** – property fires with sleeping risk
- **2 minutes 5 seconds** – property fires without sleeping risk
- **2 minutes 49 seconds** – road traffic collisions

These increases were assessed as low operational impact at Service level, with activity largely transferring to neighbouring stations such as Verwood and Blandford. It should be noted that this is the level of response currently received for the 60% of the time Cranborne is not available.

Importantly, this does not create an uncovered area; rather it redistributes response responsibility within an already integrated county-wide response model.

2. Impact on Verwood and Blandford - Morale, Recruitment and Retention

This issue has been specifically considered.

Approximately 95% of Cranborne’s operational activity would transfer to neighbouring on-call stations, meaning demand increases are modest rather than transformational.

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Neither Verwood nor Blandford would permanently lose firefighters as a consequence of closure. The modelling demonstrates manageable increases in mobilisations rather than sustained overstretch. Workforce wellbeing and availability form part of the ongoing consultation assessment and would continue to be monitored should any decision be taken by the Authority.

3. Percentage of Savings Generated

Closure of Cranborne would generate estimated savings of:

- £142,776 annual revenue saving
- £31,239 annual capital cost avoidance

These savings contribute toward addressing the Authority's projected financial shortfall (currently forecast to rise to £1.705m by 2028/29) rather than representing a standalone solution.

4. Station Land Ownership and Capital Receipt

You referenced correspondence from Viscount Cranborne regarding historic land gifting.

The current proposal does not rely upon a capital receipt in order to deliver the identified revenue savings. With each of the stations, any potential capital value is therefore treated as an opportunity rather than an assumption within the financial case.

Should the Viscount redeem the property, this will not materially undermine the recurring revenue savings, which arise primarily from removal of ongoing operating and lifecycle costs.

5. Firefighting Equipment

If the station were to close, appliances and equipment would not be removed from the Service.

In line with existing arrangements for all of our fleet and equipment, resources would either be relocated to elsewhere within the operational system aligned to risk and demand requirements.

This ensures the redistribution of assets rather than reduction in overall operational capability.

6. Future of Cranborne Firefighters

As previously discussed, my clear preference is always to ensure we look after staff in the best possible way. Unfortunately, our financial position means in order to achieve the level

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of savings required it is highly likely some staff will be made redundant should the Authority choose to close fire stations.

However, as part of our redundancy arrangements, where possible affected staff would be supported to:

- transfer to neighbouring stations where feasible, or
- continue to work for DWFRS in a suitable alternative role where feasible.

Redundancy costs have been modelled only as a prudent financial assumption (£16,950 estimated) rather than an intended outcome.

7. Recruitment and Retention at Cranborne

You are right that recruitment challenges are not unique to Cranborne, and I want to reassure you that the Service has continued to invest significantly in strengthening On-Call recruitment and retention more broadly.

Across the Service, on-call recruitment is now showing sustained improvement. For the second consecutive quarter, more firefighters are joining than leaving, with 56 starters compared to 48 leavers year-to-date. Application levels have also increased, rising from 798 applications during 2024/25 to 863 applications within the first ten months of 2025/26.

This improvement reflects a range of Service-wide changes rather than activity focused on any single station, including:

- introduction of online information sessions and interviews to widen access;
- improved pre-screening and earlier commencement of pre-employment checks;
- reduction in average recruitment timelines from 48 days to 34 days;
- increased training capacity through expanded Basic Skills Acquisition Courses;
- refreshed recruitment materials and targeted social media attraction campaigns;
- closer working between Operational Training, Communications and Business Fire Safety teams to improve local attraction;
- strengthened governance and earlier escalation where recruitment challenges persist.

These changes are designed to remove structural barriers that historically affected rural on-call recruitment across many areas nationally.

It is also important to clarify that Cranborne was not subject to a recruitment freeze during the recent contractual review period, despite commentary suggesting otherwise on social media. Recruitment remained open throughout, and the station has recently welcomed a new starter.

Notwithstanding these Service-wide improvements, recruitment and sustained availability at Cranborne have remained challenging over a prolonged period. The station review

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therefore reflects operational evidence about long-term availability rather than any withdrawal of recruitment effort.

8. Response Times and Coverage Area

Detailed response modelling, including incidents involving sleeping risk, non-sleeping risk and road traffic collisions, has already been shared with you following our meeting and is explained fully within Appendix A of the Cranborne Station Review (from page 9 onwards).

This modelling is based on 67,516 incidents over a five-year period, plotting each incident geographically and recalculating attendance times with Cranborne both present and removed.

I would be very happy to walk through this data again if it is helpful.

9. Reliance on Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service

Cross-border mobilisation is longstanding national practice and already forms part of normal operations.

I maintain regular professional dialogue with my counterpart in Hampshire. There is no dependency on goodwill; assistance operates through established mobilisation agreements designed to ensure the closest appropriate resource attends irrespective of administrative boundary.

Our modelling deliberately excludes Hampshire assets to ensure Dorset & Wiltshire resilience can stand independently as required through the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

10. Future Housing Growth and Engagement with Planning Authorities

This was a point you also raised when we met.

As confirmed in my follow-up correspondence, the Service has used the adopted Christchurch and East Dorset Core Strategy 2014–2028, which remains the relevant Local Plan for Cranborne. Current allocations indicate approximately 87 additional dwellings locally.

The Members' Working Group specifically requested assurance that the most up-to-date adopted planning information was used and is satisfied that this is the case. The Group benefits from planning expertise within its membership, and I would be happy to facilitate further discussion with Dorset Council colleagues should that assist.

Future development demand is incorporated within our Community Risk Management Planning process rather than assessed solely at individual station level.

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11. Overall Impact on Public Safety

In simple terms, closure would:

- slightly increase response times in parts of the station ground;
- have low knock-on operational impact across the wider system;
- allow reinvestment or savings necessary to maintain sustainable fire cover across Dorset and Wiltshire as a whole.

The central issue facing the Authority is balancing local reassurance with long-term Service sustainability across a predominantly rural Service area.

12. Public Engagement Meeting

As previously mentioned, we have a number of public meetings planned in the Cranborne area, therefore, at this time I am unable to commit to any further public meetings.

Thank you again for the supportive way you continue to engage with the Service. I remain very happy to meet again at any stage during the consultation period.

Yours sincerely,



Andy Cole QFSM
Chief Fire Officer

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