

Impact of one fewer height rescue fire engines 'minimal', says fire chief

Public safety fears sparked by a decision to reduce the number of fire engines in Edinburgh fitted with turntable ladders have been dismissed by the city's fire chief.

News that a turntable ladder from Crewe Toll Fire station was being moved to Dunfermline, leaving the capital with just two height rescue appliances, raised concerns from residents, politicians and union leaders that people living on the upper floors of high-rise buildings would be at greater risk in the event of a blaze.

Edinburgh Area Commander David Dourlay reassured councillors the impact of having one fewer truck capable of reaching higher than four storeys would be "minimal".

Speaking at the Culture and Communities Committee on Thursday (August 10) he said a Scotland-wide review of height appliances was initiated to address an "old, dated and unreliable" fleet. While Crewe Toll's turntable ladder would be relocated to Dunfermline to cover Fife, Falkirk and West Lothian, it would still be able to be deployed to Edinburgh in emergencies.

Mr Dourley added "modern and new" dedicated height appliances would still be stationed at McDonald Road and Tollcross fire stations.

“Crewe Toll statistically is the one mobilised the least,” he said, “the other two are much busier appliances and are positioned strategically.

“Rescues from a height by height appliance are very much a last resort and are very rare in nature.

“The impact for the City of Edinburgh should be minimal and we will still have access to that height appliance and bring it in from Dunfermline if it’s needed.

“The evidence we’ve got from previous incidents and the data that is there indicates that the minimum impact on community safety determines we can have two height appliances to service the needs of Edinburgh city.”

Hal Osler, Lib Dem councillor for Inverleith which includes Crewe Toll, said there had been “a lot of disquiet” locally following the decision by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, which has to cut £11 million from its budget over the next year.

In a motion to the committee she called on the council leader to establish the “full implications of this service change and what funding or other resource is needed to maintain current service and safety levels”.

Fire Brigade Union (FBU) regional chair Gus Sproul said last month the service was “in crisis already”.

He said the move to relocate the height rescue appliance would “plunge us further into that crisis,” adding: “The FBU is completely opposed to these cuts.

“The service will be stretched even thinner than we saw last year during the wildfires, when we ran out of fire engines and firefighters for the first time, certainly in my 23 years.

“When Crewe Toll’s goes that will leave Tollcross and McDonald Road. But it doesn’t mean they’re always available.

“They will be covering Midlothian, East Lothian and the Scottish Borders.”

By. Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

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