# Fire stations face critical decline as £1bn funding gap deepens over decade



Fire stations across England are facing critical deterioration amid a drastic funding shortfall of approximately £1 billion over the past decade. Fire chiefs have raised alarms about the implications this reduction has for public safety and the well-being of firefighters. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) emphasised that despite a significant increase in emergency callouts—rising by 20% in the last ten years—financial support for fire services has lagged woefully behind.

With the government nearing its spending review, the NFCC has called for recognition of the fire service, fearing it may become the "forgotten emergency service," overshadowed by substantial investments promised for the NHS and defence sectors. Phil Garrigan, the NFCC chair, pointed to alarming trends: a quarter of firefighter positions—an estimated 11,000 full-time staff—have vanished over the past seven years. He stated that the financial strain has not only hindered services from maintaining or upgrading aging infrastructures, such as fire stations, but has also exacerbated risks to both public and firefighter safety.

The NFCC's concerns come in the wake of a tragic incident in Oxfordshire where two firefighters, Jennie Logan and Martyn Sadler, tragically lost their lives during a fire. The inquest into their deaths underscores the harrowing dangers that firefighters face while responding to emergencies, which have been compounded by staffing declines amidst rising responsibilities.

Statistics from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) highlight a complex landscape: while the total number of fires has decreased by 11%, other non-fire incidents have surged. Services dealt with over 600,000 incidents in the year leading to December 2024, with a staggering 65% increase in non-fire callouts. Furthermore, 2025 is projected to surpass 2022 in wildfire responses, showcasing the growing challenges linked to climate change and extreme weather.

The ongoing strain is felt acutely in local areas. For instance, at Poole fire station, the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has raised concerns about the dangerous reduction in operational capacity—now a single crewed fire engine is on duty instead of two. This reduction is particularly alarming given the increased pressure on remaining crews and the potential for delays in response times, crucial during emergencies.

Moreover, recent data indicates a rise in fire response times, hitting a decade-high average of nine minutes and 13 seconds to primary fires. The FBU attributes this trend largely to the cuts in staffing and resources, arguing that the fire service is increasingly unable to cope with climate-related emergencies like wildfires without adequate investment.

In light of these pressures, the NFCC has urged the government for immediate action to ensure proper investment in fire and rescue services. They assert that without it, the safety of both the public and firefighters will be at increased risk during natural disasters and other emergencies.

While the NFCC has called for this renewed focus and support, local fire authorities, such as the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, are also grappling with budget constraints, prompting proposals for a modest council tax increase to help maintain service quality amid ongoing financial pressures.

Local fire chiefs and unions are united in their call for action, warning that without significant governmental investment, the fire service's capability to respond effectively to emergencies will continue to decline, directly affecting community safety at a time when climate-related incidents are on the rise.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/04/fire-stations-in-england-falling-apart-amid-1bn-funding-cut-chiefs-say), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/04/fire-stations-in-england-falling-apart-amid-1bn-funding-cut-chiefs-say)
* Paragraph 2 – [[5]](https://nfcc.org.uk/investment-essential-for-protecting-public-safety-say-fire-chiefs/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cew2k4z2ypeo), [[4]](https://www.fbu.org.uk/magazine/october-november-2023/cuts-drive-response-times-record-high)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/04/fire-stations-in-england-falling-apart-amid-1bn-funding-cut-chiefs-say), [[5]](https://nfcc.org.uk/investment-essential-for-protecting-public-safety-say-fire-chiefs/), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce90elm1lp2o)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/04/fire-stations-in-england-falling-apart-amid-1bn-funding-cut-chiefs-say> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/04/fire-stations-in-england-falling-apart-amid-1bn-funding-cut-chiefs-say> - Fire stations in England are deteriorating due to a £1bn funding reduction over the past decade, while emergency callouts have risen by 20%. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) warns that these financial strains jeopardise public and firefighter safety. Firefighter numbers have decreased by 25% in seven years, equating to 11,000 fewer full-time staff. The NFCC urges the government to address these issues in the upcoming spending review to prevent further decline in fire services.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cew2k4z2ypeo> - The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has raised concerns over cuts at Poole fire station, which now operates with only one 24-hour-crewed fire engine after the removal of a second unit. The FBU argues that this reduction places both firefighters and the public at immediate risk, highlighting increased pressure on retained crews and potential delays in response times.
4. <https://www.fbu.org.uk/magazine/october-november-2023/cuts-drive-response-times-record-high> - Fire response times in England have reached a decade-long high, with the average total response time to primary fires at nine minutes and 13 seconds. The Fire Brigades Union attributes this increase to staffing cuts and reduced resources, emphasising the impact of under-crewing and the challenges posed by climate-related emergencies like wildfires.
5. <https://nfcc.org.uk/investment-essential-for-protecting-public-safety-say-fire-chiefs/> - The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has expressed disappointment with the 2025/26 Local Government Finance Settlement, highlighting a 25% reduction in firefighter numbers over 17 years and an 18% increase in incidents over the past decade. The NFCC stresses the need for investment to address these challenges and ensure public safety.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce90elm1lp2o> - Facing significant budgetary pressures, the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority proposes a £5 increase in council tax for a Band D property to £86.31 annually. Despite £863,000 in cuts, the service anticipates a funding shortfall and aims to invest in firefighter training and new equipment to maintain service quality.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-63293520> - Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service warns of potential cuts, including the closure of at least three on-call fire stations, due to a £1.1m budget deficit. Chief Fire Officer Chris Strickland calls for flexibility in council tax precept to prevent service reductions and ensure adequate pay for firefighters.