Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: PE1511

Main Petitioner: Laura Ross

Subject: Inverness Fire Service Control Room

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the decision made by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to close the Inverness Control Room.

Petition

The petition calls on Parliament to ask the Scottish Government to review the decision of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Control Room to close the Inverness Control Room.

This briefing provides information on the decision of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) to close fire and rescue Control Rooms. It also provides information on the work of the Justice Committee on this.

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Government reformed fire and rescue services through the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act, 2012. The Act abolished the pre-existing 8 fire and rescue services and in their place created a single fire and rescue service\(^1\), commencing formal operations on 1 April 2013. The intention of the Act is to remove duplication and improve fire and rescue services and enhance accountability to local communities.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

The Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland, 2013 sets out the Ministerial expectation that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) will bring together the best from the previous 8 Fire and Rescue Services and create a modern, effective and efficient service.

The specific aims of fire reform are to protect and improve local services, to create more equal access to specialist support services and national capacity, and to strengthen the connection between fire services and communities.

\(^1\) Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
The SFRS has 8 Control Rooms, which it inherited from the 8 legacy fire and rescue services. Control Rooms answer emergency (999) calls for help and mobilise appliances to incidents. Control Room members of staff provide fire fighters and members of the public with safety critical and lifesaving information and advice and also strategically manage fire cover and quality-assure incident reports. Control Rooms are located in Maddiston (Falkirk), Dumfries, Thornton (Fife), Aberdeen, Inverness, Edinburgh, Johnstone, and Dundee.

At its meeting on 26 September 2013 the SFRS Board considered a Strategic Intent paper on property requirements. The paper advises that the existing Control Rooms have limited technological interoperability and flexibility and that this impacts adversely on their ability to always identify and mobilise appropriate resources to incidents.

The paper states that in recent years the number of emergency incidents taking place has declined as a result of a greater emphasis being placed on preventative work.

Between 2008/9 and 2012/13 the number of incidents dealt with by Control Rooms declined from 104,368 to 83,586, a fall of 19%. The decline in incidents dealt with by individual Control Rooms varies between 8.09% in Aberdeen and 27.01% in Thornton. The number of incidents dealt with by the Inverness Control Room declined by 14.83%.

The SFRS receives around 400 calls every 24 hours which results in the service responding to around 250 emergency incidents. The Johnstone Control Room is the busiest Control Room in Scotland and on its own deals with 50% of the calls and incidents, responding to around 125 incidents per day. Edinburgh deals with 75, Dundee and Aberdeen 40, Inverness, Maddiston, and Thornton 15-20 and Dumfries 5.

The SFRS Strategic Intent paper advises that 8 separate ICT and telephony systems for the existing Control Room estate cost £1 million per annum. The paper proposes reducing the number of Control Rooms to 2 which would reduce the number of staff by 71. This option, the paper estimates, would cost between £5.4m to £5.6m in voluntary severance and £566,000 for equipment. Voluntary severance costs would be recovered in 2 years. Staff reductions would thereafter save SFRS £2.8m per annum.

The SFRS Board on 26 September 2013 agreed to reduce the number of Control Rooms to 3, subsequently deciding on 30 January 2014, after considering an Options Appraisal paper, to retain Control Rooms in Johnstone, Tollcross (Edinburgh) and Blackness Road (Dundee) and to close those in Aberdeen, Inverness, Dumfries, Thornton (Fife) and Maddiston (Falkirk).

---

2 SFRS Report Number B/RR/1-14, Fire Control – Option Appraisal for Final Locations, 30 January 2014
The 5 Control Rooms to be closed employ 98 members of staff, which is 42% of the total number of Control Room staff. Seventeen members of staff are employed in the Inverness Control Room. The SFRS has a range of options available for affected staff: voluntary severance or early retirement / redeployment / relocation / pay protection and travel expenses as appropriate. A no compulsory redundancy policy is in place.

**Timetable**

The SFRS estimate that closing 5 Control Rooms and establishing a 3 Control Room model will conclude in 2-3 years, although a timetable is yet to be announced.

**Scottish Parliament Action**

The Justice Committee took oral evidence on the SFRS from a number of stakeholders on **18 June 2013**. The evidence sessions only briefly examined the closure of Control Rooms.

At this meeting John Duffy (Fire Brigades Union) advised that he was encouraged about how the work around Control Rooms was developing and that he was confident that a decision would be arrived at which ensures that the service had the right number.

Sarah Duncan (Unison) advised that the decisions on how many Control Rooms are needed should be evidence-based and take into account the skills and experience of staff. She also advised that Unison are satisfied that the right elements are being looked at and that the right weight will be given to decisions about where Control Rooms are located in the future.

Following this evidence session, the Justice Committee decided to re-examine fire reform again in early 2014. It issued a call for written evidence on the impact of fire and rescue reform on 31 January 2014 but the proposed closer of Control Rooms are not being examined specifically.

**Gordon Scobie**  
**Senior Researcher**  
4 March 2014

---

SPICe researchers are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at **spice@scottish.parliament.uk**

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.