Justice Committee

Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from the Scottish Police Services Authority

1. Overview

SPSA has responded to both of the consultation exercises which preceded the Bill and we are pleased to note that a number of comments made have been reflected within the Bill. We have also made separate recent written submissions to the Finance Committee (9th February) and to the Local Government & Regeneration Committee (10th February). In the latter we focussed on our experience of transferring staff into a new national body at the formation of the SPSA.

This paper summarises the key points covered within these documents which we believe are worthy of emphasis.

2. The Role of Police Staff

SPSA understands and welcomes the positive commitment to policing outcomes that lies behind the current policy to protect police officer numbers.

It is widely recognised that staff provide many professional functions in support of the police service, for example through HR, Finance and ICT specialists. However police staff also play a vital role within operational policing itself making the distinction between police officers and police staff less clear than it might seem in that:

- not all police officers are currently employed on the “front line” or in roles that require the use of warranted powers;
- many police staff are employed in roles that, while not requiring warranted powers, are at the “front line” of policing for example within Forensic Services and often as the first point of contact with the public.

This has been recognised by forces over recent years with a healthy and efficient balance of police officer and staff roles achieved. There is a significant danger that this balance and inherent efficiency will be degraded under current constraints.

SPSA hopes that Reform will provide an opportunity for the single police force to review its resourcing requirements to achieve efficiency, effectiveness and flexibility through an appropriate blend of police officers and police staff, skills, experience and rank or grade profile.

3. Forensic Services

In our response to the consultation published on 8th September 2011 we commented that:

“We welcome the proposal for Forensic Services and the management of related information and databases (specifically DNA and Fingerprint (IDENT1)) to report and
to be directly accountable to the new Scottish Police Authority. Forensic Services plays an invaluable part in the investigation of crime and protection of its impartiality is considered of paramount importance...

...We recommend that, within this model, there would be appropriate service level agreements between Forensic Services and the force and that Forensic Services would be “maintained” by the single force in the delivery of its corporate and support functions.”

We stand by that view and are pleased to note that the Bill makes provision for Forensic Services to be directly accountable to the new Scottish Police Authority (SPA) whilst continuing to serve Scottish Policing and maintaining the “crime scene to court” approach which was introduced at the formation of the SPSA in 2007. Clear demonstrable impartiality is important in maintaining confidence in forensic evidence presented within the criminal justice system and also protects the police from any impression of undue influence.

Since 2007 we have made a range of efficiency improvements and changes to working practices in all areas of the Forensic Service, including crime scene examination. We see this work, which is based on close working with and feedback from our partners in policing, continuing as we move into the single service.

We also support the intention that the Forensic Service will have arrangements in place for corporate resources (for example, HR and Finance) to be provided by the Chief Constable.

4. The Financial Case

Overall, our view is that the savings associated with Reform seem reasonable as a proportion of the overall costs of policing in Scotland. We believe that it is essential that these savings are delivered through genuine efficiency rather than top down cost-cutting and that priority is given to driving down non-staff costs.

SPSA is concerned by the assumption that the reduction to staff numbers will be achieved through natural attrition and voluntary redundancy. While this may be achievable in theory, these are blunt instruments and unlikely to result in the optimum skill, experience and grade profile. This could, for example, constrain the ability to reduce expensive, senior staffing levels where excess capacity is most likely.

SPSA does not have access to the forces projections of out-turn for 2011/12 but believes that it is essential to model the 2011/12 efficiency delivered by forces and review the profile of future savings in that context.

5. ICT

ICT is a key enabler of Reform. SPSA remains concerned over the current assumptions relating to the cost of ICT. SPSA agrees that there is potential to divert spend from existing projects – although this requires robust re-prioritisation by ACPOS and forces. However, we believe that significant ICT spend is likely to be
required to support changes to business processes. As such SPSA believes that, even with the 100% optimism bias provided for ICT costs within the Financial Memorandum, the cost of change relating to ICT may be under-stated.

In this context, SPSA is also pleased to note that the Financial Memorandum recognises that the detail and profile of cost and savings may change as the programme progresses.

6. Conclusion and SPSA Contribution

The SPSA supports the conclusion of the Outline Business Case that there are opportunities for substantial efficiencies and greater effectiveness across support services and Scottish Policing in general.

The set up of the SPSA, 5 years ago, represented the most substantial change in Scottish policing in decades. Much of our work since set-up has been based on a model of national service provision with appropriate local delivery – effectively mirroring the broader plans for Reform. This recent experience positions us well to apply the lessons learnt and fully support the next stages of Police Reform.

SPSA
22 February 2012