Justice Committee

Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Steven Torrie, Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Authorities/Head of the Fire and Rescue Advisory Unit

Introduction

1. I currently perform two roles within Scottish Government. My primary function is as an adviser to Ministers where, as a consequence of my fire and rescue service background, I am able to advise Ministers and officials on fire and rescue service matters. I provided advice to Ministers throughout the development of the Bill and the work leading up to that.

2. My secondary role is as Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Authorities – where I act independently of Ministers (but am subject to their direction in certain circumstances).

Response

3. My position is that reform of the Scottish fire and rescue services is both appropriate, and necessary, if the quality of the Service is to be protected during what is, for the modern fire and rescue service, an unprecedented period of financial pressure. I also believe that reform offers the Scottish Government and fire and rescue service managers the opportunity to build on the best that the Service has to offer, and design a high quality, locally engaged organisation which will benefit the people of Scotland. I am certain that Service managers are willing and able to rise to that challenge.

4. The Committee will note that the Bill proposes what might effectively be described as a reinvigoration of the Inspectorate function. I have begun the process of exploring the practical implications of that and am engaging, or planning to engage, with stakeholders on the future shape and operation of the Inspectorate.

5. I anticipate that a new Inspectorate will be built on:

   1. A principle that scrutiny will be proportionate and risk-based;
   2. A complementary relationship with the Auditor General and Audit Scotland;
   3. A partnership between the Service, the Scottish Ministers and the Inspectorate; and
   4. An ongoing requirement to provide professional advice to Ministers.

6. I would be happy to take questions from the Committee on the thinking behind these matters.

7. Beyond that, I would be happy to respond to the Committee, to the best of my ability, on any matter relating to its consideration of the Bill.