Justice Committee

Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from the Scottish Countryside Alliance

The Scottish Countryside Alliance (SCA) champions the countryside, country sports and the rural way of life. Essentially the SCA exists to promote and protect and campaign for and on behalf of rural communities.

The SCA welcomes the chance to submit written evidence to the Scottish Parliament Justice Committee inquiry regarding the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill.

PART 1. POLICE

1. The main point that the SCA would wish to bring forward to the Justice Committee regarding the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill – ‘the Bill’ - is the fact that we wish to ensure that the proposed new single Scottish Police Force and Single Scottish Fire Service are set-up to serve the needs of all Scotland – both urban and rural.

2. In the Scottish Government consultation regarding the Bill, a new proposed ‘purpose of policing’ is set out as follows:

   PURPOSE OF POLICING: The purpose of policing is to improve the safety and well-being of individuals, families and communities in Scotland.

The Scottish Countryside Alliance (SCA) believes that the proposed ‘purpose of policing’ might be strengthened by emphasising that the new single Scottish police service will serve families and communities across all of Scotland. We believe that a subtle change in the suggested wording of the purpose would help, the SCA suggestion is:

   The purpose of policing is to improve the safety and well-being of individuals’ families and communities throughout the whole of Scotland.

The SCA believes that our suggested wording for the ‘purpose of policing’ will help to remind police officers that their duties are not only in crime-hotspots. We believe that the suggested SCA wording will also help to assure Scotland’s remote rural communities that the new Scottish police service exists to improve their safety and well-being as much as it exists for inner-city families and communities.

3. Representative organisations such as the SCA and rural people themselves have built up working relationships with the police on both a local and national scale. The Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW Scotland) and neighbourhood watch initiatives are just two examples.

The SCA believes that for policing to be effective, community involvement and partnership working initiatives are important. We would hope that a new single
Scottish police service would seek to keep these working relationships at local and national levels.

4. The SCA believes that rural areas of Scotland may sometimes differ from urban areas in their specific policing requirements. The SCA believes that the Scottish Police Authority should be composed of individuals with both urban and rural skill, experience and expertise if it is to perform its roles effectively.

5. The SCA believe that a key role and responsibility of the proposed Local Police Commanders, in developing and delivering Local Policing Plans, will be to take account of issues particular to their areas. Local policing priorities in rural areas may vary from those in urban areas and this variation must be recognised in Local Policing Plans.

PART 2. FIRE SERVICE

6. The Scottish Countryside Alliance (SCA) believes that the proposed ‘Purpose and Functions of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service’ might be strengthened by emphasising that the new single Scottish Fire and Rescue service will serve families and communities across all of Scotland. We believe that a subtle change in the suggested wording of the purpose would help, the SCA suggestion is:

   *To improve the safety and wellbeing of people across all of Scotland.*

The SCA believes that our suggested wording (above) will help to remind fire service personnel that their duties are not only in urban centres. We believe that the suggested SCA wording will also help to assure Scotland’s remote rural communities that the new Scottish Fire and Rescue Service exists to improve their safety and well-being as much as it exists for inner-city families and communities.

7. The SCA believes that rural areas of Scotland may sometimes differ from urban areas in their specific fire and rescue requirements. The SCA believes that the Board of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service should be composed of individuals with both urban and rural skill, experience and expertise if it is to perform its roles effectively.

The SCA believe that a key role and responsibility of the Local Senior Officers, in developing and delivering Local Plans, will be to take account of issues particular to their areas. Local fire and rescue priorities in rural areas may vary from those in urban areas and this variation must be recognised in Local Plans.

Ross Montague
Director
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