Supplementary written submission from the Chief Fire Officers Association Scotland

CFOAS welcomes the opportunity to provide further clarity around functions, and associated costs, that the Association believes requires further consideration in drafting a renewed purpose and vision for a modern 21st Century Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland which, in turn, provides a proper statutory basis to these critical functions within the Police and Fire (Reform) Bill:

1. **Marine Incident Response**

1.1 Marine Incident Response references teams trained to be transported off shore to ships at sea that are on fire should a request be made from a vessel to the coastguard for fire teams. There is, currently, no statutory duty on any Fire and Rescue Services to undertake these operations.

1.2 Until recently (Autumn last year) there were 15 Maritime Incident Response Group teams provided by Fire and Rescue Services around the coast line of the United Kingdom. In Scotland these were Lothian & Borders, Strathclyde, Highlands & Islands and Grampian. Last Autumn, Lothian & Borders took the decision to stand down the Maritime Incident Response Group teams as a result of funding that was provided for the MIRG team and response being withdrawn by the Maritime Coastguard Agency. In reality, funding associated with the cost of providing equipment and training has never been fully provided but all funding has now ceased as a result of Coastguard Agency cuts from UK central government.

2. **Rope Rescue**

2.1 Although there is no statutory requirement for Fire and Rescue Services to carry out rope rescue activities within the Act or draft Bill, the outcomes of local Integrated Risk Management Plans has, in some services, highlighted that a community risk exists. On this basis some Services have funded, trained and provided rope rescue teams. It may be worth noting that just because the IRMP has highlighted a community risk this, in itself, does not confer a statutory requirement to provide a rope rescue response. The Scottish Government has recognised the rope rescue response provided by some Fire and Rescue Services, and have financially supported a project within Lothian and Borders to build a rope rescue facility for training for open structures rescues, such as scaffold and tower cranes etc, that can be used both locally and nationally to help train rope rescue operators. This is under construction now and is due to complete in late summer 2012. Work is in hand with the Scottish Fire Services College to include rope rescue training in Scotland within their syllabus.

2.2 The provision, equipment and maintenance of rope rescue teams within FRS is carried out by individual FRs from within their budget settlements, with no associated central funding.
2.3 The draft Bill provides an opportunity to define rope rescue as a statutory function of FRS, to make necessary funding provision and work to provide a pan Scotland response. Alternatively, Ministers may wish to take the opportunity to clarify which alternative Services or agencies should hold that statutory responsibility.

2.4 Of interest is a recent Sheriff’s determination following a Fatal Accident Inquiry where he determined that entering mine shafts is the responsibility of FRS for rescue purposes. However, without the requisite rope rescue equipment and training it is highly probable that it will not be possible for Firefighters to be lowered into shafts etc unless they are trained appropriately.

3. Inland Water Rescue

3.1 Inland Water Rescue is not a statutory function of FRS within the current act or draft Bill.

3.2 Responding to flooding is a statutory duty of the FRS which is generally cited as standing water although many commentators on hydrodynamics would argue that even flood water is moving and presents the same or similar dangers and risks. Whilst flood response is generally considered within the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) documents, and is taught on flood response courses as wading no higher than generally knee-depth in standing water, this in no way provides the appropriate level of response to inland water rescue such as rescue from rivers, lochs or extensive flooding of areas as seen in recent events across the UK.

3.3 In relation to overall costs, within some Services all of these activities are considered to be outwith the scope of the defined role of a firefighter as set out within their role maps and, on that basis, an additional responsibility/ availability allowance is paid to all participating firefighters.

3.4 An approximate estimate of overall costs for these rescue activities across Scotland would be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inland water rescue/ co-ordination of assets</td>
<td>£1.5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rope or Line Rescue</td>
<td>£300/400k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime rescue</td>
<td>£300k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£2-£3 million</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Community Safety Engagement

4.1 Commencement of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 introduced a requirement for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Services (SFRS) to promote fire safety and to make appropriate arrangements for the provision of information, publicity and encouragement in respect of the steps to be taken to prevent fires and death or injury by fire.
4.2 Additionally, the SFRS are required to give advice, on request, about how to prevent fires and restrict their spread in buildings and other property. Also, Services must give advice in relation to the means of escape from buildings and other property in the event of fire.

4.3 The SFRS approach to Community Safety Engagement (CSE) is predicated on partnerships; this position has been developing since the introduction of Community Planning in 2003 and was confirmed in the Scottish Government’s report ‘Scotland Together’, published in 2009. (Scotland Together is available at: http://www.strathclydefire.org/news--campaigns/features/july-2010/scotland-together.aspx)

4.4 CSE is a central aspect of SFRS service delivery; a position that is reflected within Integrated Risk Management Plans.

4.5 The SFRS are involved in a range of public safety engagement initiatives including Home Fire Safety Visits, fire and rescue education programmes for children and young people, road safety projects and the provision of information in relation to water safety.

4.6 A blended approach is employed with local fire crews delivering the bulk of mainstream Services, including Home Fire Safety Visits and some youth engagement programmes. When dealing with the public, complex cases such as those involving dementia or addictions are managed using bespoke teams of specially trained staff.

4.7 Working closely with Community Planning Partners there is an emphasis on targeting at-risk individuals and families through the development of referral pathways with public and third sector colleagues. Also, the Tasking and Co-ordinating process is used to identify trends and inform the deployment of resources in an integrated and focused manner.

4.8 In reality, our expanded CSE activity has taken the Service beyond the parameters of fire safety to engaging with young people on the cusp of offending, contributing to broader community wellbeing initiatives, such as road safety, and working with a range of vulnerable and at risk groups to improve their overall life circumstances.

4.9 CSE funding is provided from core budgets, augmented by external funding; in the main, external funds are received from Community Planning Partnerships. Again, an approximate estimate of costs for CSE for the current year is: £4.9M made up of £3.9M from core budgets and £1M from external funding

5. Cross Border Working

5.1 This matter has been raised, specifically, with Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service by SG officials and relates to the legality of Scottish Fire and Rescue Services crossing the border to operate in England. The issues apply equally to Dumfries and Galloway and any other Service in Scotland involved in UK mutual aid arrangements.
5.2 The exact nature of the illegality has not been shared with the FRSs concerned, which we understand is normal protocol in relation to the provision of legal advice. We understand from correspondence that the opportunity to resolve the matter was to be taken in the drafting of the Bill; however, we are advised that it is a technical matter which needs to be resolved by the UK and Scottish Governments. While the matter remains outstanding, the Committee can be assured that mutual aid arrangements do operate satisfactorily – it is the legality of these arrangements which is in question.

6. Summary

6.1 As outlined in the oral evidence given to the Justice Committee, the current range of rescue services provided across Scotland lack consistency as a number of functions are not appropriately defined within current legislation. The opportunity to bring clarity to these functions should be taken and in doing so, the financial impact of around £2m-£3m should be considered against the overall budget of £388m i.e. it represents a value of less than 1% of spending.

Chief Fire Officers Association Scotland
21 March 2012