Justice Committee
Post-legislative scrutiny of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012
Written submission from Dumfries and Galloway Council

Police Service

1. In your view, what have been the consequences of the 2012 Act for the police service? Please set out your views on (a) any benefits and (b) any negative consequences of the 2012 Act for the police service.

Dumfries and Galloway Council’s good partnership working arrangements with Police Scotland V Division have, in the main, been unaffected by the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 (‘the Act’). However, the establishment of Police Scotland saw a reduction in the local workforce due to the transfer of services from the ‘legacy force’ of Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary. This included a reduction in back office and administration support staff and the closure of the control room. This reduction in services and job opportunities was a negative challenge to Dumfries and Galloway Council’s priority to grow the local economy.

Dumfries and Galloway Council had previously enjoyed significant strategic influence and control over resources, staffing and service interventions through the local Constabulary. The change to a scrutiny role was therefore a challenge to Elected Members’ and Council Officers’ experience and former roles. Good working relationships with the Local Divisional Commander has helped address this change in role and progress has been such that we now undertake a very robust and effective scrutiny role of our Police Division. This is demonstrated in, for example, focussed reviews of stop and search and C3, including a visit to Govan to review control centre operations.

V Division has benefited from access to additional support services through Police Scotland and police officer numbers have remained consistent for the Division since the implementation of the Act.

V Division does continue to face some operational difficulties as staff based in Dumfries and Galloway are led and managed at central/national level and the Local Divisional Commander has not been able to utilise these staff within his resources. We are aware that there are potential changes to the operational use of national resources locally, such as armed response vehicles.

While the number of police operational staff has remained static, the significant reduction in back office/administration support staff has led to more operational staff doing administrative work when they would be better utilised on direct operational service provision.

2. Have the policy intentions of the 2012 Act in relation to the police service been met?

The co-terminosity enjoyed by Dumfries and Galloway Council, the former Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary and now V Division, has contributed to stability, effective communication, robust partnership working and the ability to influence police service
planning and delivery. The local services delivered by Police Scotland V Division have been protected; however there has been no improvement that would not have taken place under the previous legislation.

Dumfries and Galloway has a low level of crime and specifically murders; the region has benefited from the experience that the Murder Investigation Teams are able to provide. Firearm Teams are also of benefit across the region with prompt deployment. There have been issues relating to the centralisation of national support services and there continues to be concerns about a reducing workforce in Dumfries and Galloway. There is no national divisional footprint in Dumfries and Galloway. There are many services which can be deployed from Dumfries and Galloway given the developments within technology.

So it can be seen that prior to the changes implemented through the introduction of the Act, partnership working between Dumfries and Galloway Council and the legacy force of Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary was of a strength and level that saw full involvement of, and participation by, local Elected Members. Prior to Community Planning, the Chief Constable at that time was integral to the Council’s senior management team and there has been no change or enhancement since the introduction of the Act.

Fire and Rescue Service

3. In your view, what have been the consequences of the 2012 Act for the fire and rescue service? Please set out your views on (a) any benefits and (b) any negative consequences of the 2012 Act for the fire and rescue service.

Similar to the Police Scotland changes as a result of the Act, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service significantly reduced the back office and administration workforce locally, including the closure of the control room based in Dumfries. This reduction in services and job opportunities was a negative challenge to Dumfries and Galloway Council’s priority to grow the local economy.

There has been a reduction in the number of local whole-time fire fighters, but this has not impacted negatively on the ability for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to respond to emergencies. However, due to national recruitment campaigns and training of staff outwith the local area, we did experience a negative impact on recruiting retained fire fighters. There have been challenges in local staffing as many experienced Scottish Fire and Rescue Service staff retired following transition to the national service. The recruitment and training of new whole-time and retained staff has in the past resulted in disruptions in service at the more rural stations.

The decision by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to appoint a shared Local Senior Officer for Dumfries and Galloway and South Lanarkshire was not without its challenges. One practical example being the availability of the Local Senior Officer to participate in scrutiny-related and Community Planning activities across the two areas. This has since been resolved with the appointment of a Local Senior Officer dedicated to Dumfries and Galloway.
4. Have the policy intentions of the 2012 Act in relation to the fire and rescue service been met?

The co-terminosity enjoyed by Dumfries and Galloway Council, the former Dumfries and Galloway Fire Service and now the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Dumfries and Galloway, has contributed to the stability, effective communication, robust partnership working and the ability to influence fire and rescue service planning and delivery. The local services delivered by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service have been protected; however there has been no improvement that would not have taken place under the previous legislation.

Dumfries and Galloway has retained two flood rescue appliances and these are used throughout the year in both the East and the West of the region. The transfer of services to national support has enable local whole-time fire fighters to enhance their training on equipment and appliances which directly meet the needs of Dumfries and Galloway.

The service remains predominantly a retained duty system and whilst the immediate response to incidents in rural areas to the West is satisfactory, the potential time to respond with specialist equipment may be significantly delayed in its arrival. We would hope that through transformation, the national Scottish Fire and Rescue Service will establish systems which will ensure greater access to support in the west of Dumfries and Galloway.

There has been no change in the involvement of Elected Members and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service within local communities and Community Planning as a result of the Act.

Other issues

5. Are there any other issues you would like to raise in connection with the operation of the 2012 Act?

There is a requirement that resources and staffing based in Dumfries and Galloway should be accessible to both the Local Divisional Commander (Police Scotland) and Local Senior Officer (Scottish Fire and Rescue Service) and that they should have control and full call on use wherever appropriate.

The Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 has seen a reduction of employment opportunities within both the Police and Fire services in Dumfries and Galloway. A policy intention of the Act was to stop the duplication of support services eight times over. This policy has been to the detriment of Dumfries and Galloway. The support services have been located outwith our region. There are examples of increased employment opportunities within other local authority areas hosting national support services. There remains no national service footprint in Dumfries and Galloway. Technology can enable a more flexible workforce and as a region, we would like to see other employment opportunities from both national services within Dumfries and Galloway.

Dumfries and Galloway Council
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