Justice Committee

Post-legislative scrutiny of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012

Written submission from Orkney Islands Council

Police service

1. The 2012 Act had three main policy intentions and we have set these out below for convenience:
   1. to protect and improve local services despite financial cuts, by stopping duplication of support services eight times over and not cutting front line services;
   2. to create more equal access to specialist support and national capacity - like murder investigation teams, firearms teams or flood rescue - where and when they are needed; and
   3. to strengthen the connection between services and communities, involving many more local councillors and better integrating with community planning partnerships.

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 for the Police service?

The world has moved on since the Act was implemented in 2013 and the risks have changed, with national terrorism threat levels moving from substantial in 2012/13 to severe or critical since 2014, and the UK having sustained several attacks. Cyber-crime is also a growing threat, with public services and businesses at risk of malware attacks and extortion to fund serious organised crime and terrorism. It is therefore increasingly important to have specialist support and national capacity, which is one of the three main policy intentions of the 2012 Act.

(b) any negative consequences of the 2012 Act for the police service.

At a national level, and five years later, it would be fair to say that Police Scotland is still struggling to bed in at the senior leadership level. Senior leadership remains unstable and there is therefore very little opportunity to form professional relationships with senior officers at national and regional level as they keep changing position or do not remain in post. For these reasons, the Scottish Government’s policy intention of ‘strengthening the connection between services and communities, involving many more local councillors and better integrating with community planning partnerships’ has clearly not been met. It is important to emphasise that local relationships have remained strong and stable.

Orkney Islands Council was disappointed by the decision of the inaugural Chief Constable to apply a ‘one size fits all’ approach to the removal of police funded traffic wardens across Scotland. Some basic ‘islands proofing’ would have highlighted that in remote rural areas, the cost of de-criminalisation of on-road parking could not be offset by the installation of parking meters in towns, nor is the introduction of parking...
charges compatible with the need to support fragile town centre small businesses. This remains a significant issue for Orkney. Orkney Islands Council has also been very concerned about the closure of local call handling centres and the prospect of emergency call arrangements being co-ordinated through geographically distant arrangements. We have been particularly concerned about the need for Police Scotland to stabilise staffing, systems, procedures and processes during these changes. We have also articulated ongoing concerns about the resulting potential lack of local knowledge and possibility of confusion with place names and dialect. We are aware that these changes are being very carefully monitored due to incidents reported by HMICS. For these two reasons we do not believe that the third policy intention: to protect and improve local services despite financial cuts, by stopping duplication of support services eight times over and not cutting front line services has been fully met.

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

We refer to our responses to section 1 above.

In short, in relation to police reform, we view the first policy intention to be partially met, but with some significant remaining risks and an unresolved parking issue in Orkney. We view the second policy intention as being achieved and beneficial to all areas of Scotland; and we consider that the third policy intention is not met, despite strong local contributions to our Community Planning Partnership.

**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 for the fire and rescue service?**

The reforms have led to better centralised services, but these are not services which Orkney is likely to benefit from due to the timescales in getting staff and plant to the islands.

There has been significant financial investment in the local training facility at Kirkwall airport. The reduced need to travel to the mainland of Scotland for training will encourage people to apply for the retained fire service. The additional staffing commitment in Kirkwall Fire Station has also been appreciated.

(b) **any negative consequences of the 2012 Act for the fire and rescue service.**

Again, the policy intention to strengthen the connection between services and communities, involving many more local councillors and better integrating with community planning partnerships has not been met. It needs to be emphasised that there has been an ongoing clear commitment from the local senior officers to the community planning partnership, and to the Police and Fire Sub Committee. National leadership seems effective and stable.
4. **Have the policy intentions of the 2012 Act in relation to the fire and rescue service been met?**

Please see responses to 1a and 1b above.

In summary, in relation to fire reform, we view the first policy intention to be largely achieved, with some local benefits. We view the second policy intention as being achieved but with little benefit visible locally; and we consider that the third policy intention is not met, despite strong local contributions from the fire service to our Community Planning Partnership.

**Other issues**

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

Not at present.

Orkney Islands Council
22 May 2018