Justice Committee

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

Written submission from the Retained Firefighters Union

Please accept this letter as the RFU’s written response to the Justice Committee’s call for evidence, regarding the specific questions raised, our response pertains to questions 3, 4 and 5 which are ‘fire’ related.

**Question 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.

**RFU response**

The RFU welcomed the move to create one Fire & Rescue Service in Scotland, it is our view that it provides genuine opportunities to improve service delivery for the local communities and standardise procedures. However, the reality has been that the service has become an extension of one service (formally Strathclyde) rather than a new identity. This geographical focus has been to the detriment of other areas across the country, with some operational staff feeling isolated within the organisation.

The perception is that standards have dropped both in terms of training and equipment provision. When this is challenged by our members the common response is that current circumstances are due to budget restraints.

In terms of health and safety and sustaining a minimum standard of emergency provision to the public, budgetary issues should not be an excuse.

**Transformation**

As a modern representative body, we welcome any change that furthers the provision of service to the public and we have long supported Co-Responder schemes in England and Wales. We therefore welcome the move to introduce Emergency Medical Response (EMR) across the service where a need has been identified.

As an organisation that represents Retained/On-Call firefighters, our members have sustained a reduction in wages due to a fall in call levels. The introduction of EMR calls for our members will help to overcome this shortfall and will in turn assist ongoing recruitment and retention issues.

Additionally, we note that at present there is a lack of formal involvement in arrangements for Marauding Terrorist Firearms Attacks (MTFA). The RFU welcome the intent to contractually incorporate such additional duties into the firefighter rolemap as part of the transformation agenda.
**Industrial Relations**

While the RFU has been afforded recognition within Scottish FRS on a par with both the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and the Fire Officers’ Association (FOA), the reality is that the service is paying lip-service to this formal agreement. The FBU continue to run the rule over service management, with nothing progressed without their approval, irrespective of the issue up for negotiation/consultation and the benefit to the workforce and/or public. While we would expect early meaningful dialogue between employer and employee representatives, the current environment is more reflective of 1970s industrial relations than it does the 21st century. Unfortunately we see little appetite for change in this area. An example of this arrangement is where the FBU refuse to sit in the same room as other representative bodies during consultative/negotiation meetings, preferring a separate meeting to discuss the exact same issues. The service continues to comply with this request causing a duplication of these meetings.

**Question 4. Have the policy intentions of the 2012 Act in relation to the fire and rescue service been met?**

**RFU response**

See answer to previous question.

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

**RFU response**

See answer to question 3.

Please excuse the short response to the call for evidence, however, we were not notified of the process until today, giving little time to formulate a more detailed response.

If you wish to follow up on our reply, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Tristan Ashby
RFU Chief Executive Officer
23 May 2018