Justice Committee

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

Written submission from the Safe Glasgow Group

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.

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

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

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

Other issues

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

Qs 1a and 3a – on every performance marker, both Police and Fire and Rescue in Glasgow have shown continued improvement. Crime figures are at an all-time low (Q1a) and public confidence at a high (Q1a). The move to local scrutiny arrangements have fostered a more local ownership of our emergency services, and in Glasgow there has been the opportunity to link this with Community Planning, drawing in wider partnerships. A lot of high profile issues for Police Scotland over the past 5 years have not had the same negative impact in Glasgow the way they have for some other Local Authorities. Under the new arrangements ‘Stop and Search’ significantly reduced in Glasgow compared to the rest of Scotland and Glasgow adopted a Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) regime in 1999, therefore was unaffected by the ending of Police Traffic Wardens.

Qs 1b and 3b – 5 years in, and during a particularly turbulent time for Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority, the relationship between local scrutiny arrangements and national ones remains unclear. There is scope to develop the local/national dynamic. Decisions taken at a national level can have a direct impact at a local level with no clear way for this to be influenced locally. For example, the
recent and ongoing issue with the police policy change in managing public processions through the use of Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTRO’s).

Qs 2 and 4 – Of the three main policy intentions stated by the Scottish Government, at a local level, our main focus has been on the intention: To strengthen the connection between services and communities, involving many more local councillors and better integrating with community planning partnerships.

This is being achieved, though without a benchmark, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which it has been met and the extent to which there remains further work to progress.

Q5 – There remain opportunities to enhance local scrutiny, and to ensure local scrutiny committees understand what “scrutiny” is and how to focus the scrutiny power of influence to improve local services. There are good guidance documents (for example from the Improvement Service) on scrutiny for local councillors, but limited guidance or support for the specific role of Police/Fire and Rescue scrutiny. There remain opportunities to enhance the direct scrutiny skills of elected members (including through training) and to consider opportunities for benchmarking across local arrangements.

It should also be noted that scrutiny in Glasgow has not extended to consideration of how resources are prioritised and applied, and it is unclear if this should be part of the scrutiny role.

There should be more discussion about how far local scrutiny mechanisms can be expected to be able to test public opinion on individual issues/consultations, particularly given the statutory role of scrutiny and the relatively limited resources available to undertake such exercises which can be difficult to respond to meaningfully.

Now that we are 5 years into the new arrangements, SFRS have recently consulted on a transformation programme to modernise, embrace new technology and expand the role of the firefighter. SFRS are a very proactive member of community planning and this transformation programme demonstrates their willingness to diversify by expanding their remit. This shows how committed they are to partnership working, which in turn will assist other public services.

Safe Glasgow Group
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