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

a) In terms of benefits the 2012 Act has enabled the establishment of a local scrutiny process at a local authority level. Scottish Borders Council was one of the original six pathfinders for this local scrutiny process. The Council established a Police, Fire and Rescue and Safer Communities Board comprising local authority members from both its administration and opposition together with members from outside bodies i.e. NHS Borders, a representative from Registered Social Landlords, the voluntary sector and business. This has been seen as a model of best practice within Scotland.

Since its formation in 2012 the Board has scrutinised the performance and operation of the police on a quarterly basis. These meetings have been attended by both local and divisional police commanders and at times representatives of the Scottish Police Authority. Recommendations from the Board have been taken account of by the local police service and have led to a number of successful innovative and preventative initiatives such as: tackling under-age drinking; support for young and older drivers; and preventing theft on farms.

b) In terms of negative consequences there have been concerns about issues arising from decisions taken nationally without local consultation and input on matters such as the withdrawal of traffic wardens, restrictions on the opening hours in police stations, armed policing and reductions in police analytical staff. The Scottish Borders Police, Fire and Rescue and Safer Community Board was in the vanguard in advocating for processes to be put in place to ensure there are early discussions between local authorities and the Police Scotland on any changes to national policy that may have a local impact. This has led to the establishment by COSLA of a Police Conveners Scrutiny Forum attended by senior officers from Police Scotland.

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

In the Scottish Borders, the policy intention of the 2012 Act in relation to strengthening the connection between services and communities, involving many more local councillors and better integrating with community planning partnerships etc., has been met with the establishment by Scottish Borders Council of its Police, Fire and Rescue and Safer Communities Board. This is based on the community planning approach involving elected members and representatives from local partners.
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.

a) Since its formation of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in 2012 Scottish Borders Council’s Police, Fire and Rescue and Safer Communities Board has scrutinised the performance and operation of the fire and rescue service in the Scottish Borders on a quarterly basis. These meetings have been attended by senior fire officers and at times representatives of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Recommendations from the Board have been taken account of by the fire and rescue service and have also led to a number of successful local preventive initiatives including providing support for people with Cardiac arrests; youth diversion projects; and assistance for vulnerable people to stay in their own homes.

b) In terms of negative consequences there have been concerns about issues arising from decisions taken nationally such as the locations of special services. Processes have been put in place to ensure there are early discussions between the Scottish Borders Police, Fire and Rescue and Safer Communities Board and the Local Senior Officer of Scottish Fire and Rescue Service take place on any changes in national policy that may have a local impact.

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

In the Scottish Borders the policy intentions of the 2012 Act in relation to strengthening the connection between services and communities etc. have been met with the establishment by Scottish Borders Council of its Police, Fire and Rescue and Safer Communities Board. This is based on the community planning approach involving elected members and representatives from local partners.

Other issues

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

None.

Scottish Borders Council
30 May 2018