Justice Committee

Fire and rescue service reform

Written submission from Laura Ross

I understand that the committee is looking for responses to the reform of the fire and rescue service within Scotland.

I write to highlight my own concern, and that of many I have spoken to, regarding the decision made by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to close the Inverness Fire Service Control Room, that decision being made without Public Consultation, and I feel without due regard to the safety of the people, communities, and businesses of the Highlands and Islands area served by this Control Room.

Quoting the Background section of the webpage calling for evidence: “The Scottish Government identified three potential benefits to fire reform. First, to safeguard and improve local services while reducing costs. Second, to create more equal access to specialist fire and rescue services across the country. And third, to strengthen the connection between the fire and rescue service and local communities.”

The decision to close the Inverness Control Room I believe will not safeguard and improve local services, as the loss of local knowledge of the Control Room staff who live and work in the Highlands and Islands (an area with a land mass larger than the country of Belgium, with diverse Mountainous terrain, thousands of miles of remote coastline, and miles of remote rural single track roads leading to some of our most remote communities). The Highlands and Islands has one of the broadest range of regional dialects and accents (not further taking into consideration the Gaelic language and place names used throughout the region) which can be confusing to those who do not understand them, and knowledge of these cannot be overlooked when seeking a fast response to a 999 call.

The lack of Public Consultation, being presented as it were with a fait accompli decision to close the Inverness Control Room will not strengthen any connection between SFRS and the local community. If anything it will only weaken the connection between SFRS and the community, through a loss of trust.

I have launched a Facebook support page because the people of the Highlands and Islands deserve to have their voices heard, they have been given no other forum in which to do so, and at this moment in time are feeling greatly let down. In the first week alone we have gained over 4000 members. I am awaiting a petition going live on the Parliament’s own petition site to allow the people of the Highlands and Islands to show their own support in retaining the Inverness Control Room which has served the region so well for so many years, and the people of the Highlands and Islands wish to keep this service at all costs. The centralisation of this service is not in the best interests of the people, communities, and businesses of the Highlands and Islands.

Laura Ross
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