Justice Committee

Fire and rescue service reform

Written submission from Police Scotland

At the request of the Justice Committee, Police Scotland has been asked to provide views on aspects of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service since its inception on 1 April 2013. In particular we were asked for comment on the following key areas:

**What impact there has been at a local level of the single fire service**

As with local policing the ability of Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to deliver a locally based service is critical to maintaining community safety and providing public confidence. This has required the Fire Service to restructure to drive local and national efficiencies as well as establish specialist support services that are equally available across the whole of the country.

From an operational perspective it is the position of Police Scotland that the ability of the Fire and Rescue Service to respond to local fire incidents, road collisions and other emergency scenarios has not been compromised as a consequence of reform and there remains a strong bond between agencies that allows the effective co-ordinated deployment of both emergency services.

The establishment of a national Fire Service has allowed us to work together more effectively. There are examples emerging across the country that suggest having unitary structures can provide more joined up working practices around for example domestic abuse, joint counter terrorism raising awareness. This coupled with the ability to create national protocols such as the preservation of forensic evidence and fire investigation which would have been more difficult to achieve under the previous legacy structures.

Under the reform arrangements Police and Fire Services are also required to be part of Local Authority scrutiny arrangements. While many of these are still developing, anecdotal evidence suggests that these structures provide an opportunity for Elected Members, Local Police Commanders and Senior Fire Officers to mutually examine local arrangements and drive activity towards local solutions. It is suggested that where local scrutiny arrangements form part of the Community Planning and Single Outcome Structures it enables both services to make a direct and tangible contribution to improving community wellbeing and directly supports the benefits articulated by the Christie Commission for public sector reform.

One area where both services differ is the number of commands or divisions that have been established to support local services. While there is no evidence to suggest there is anything inherently wrong with this approach it may be that this is a subject that both organisations would wish to consider in the future in order that local police commanders and senior fire commanders can share geographical responsibilities which would perhaps further enhance partnership delivery.
The consultation process for local fire plans

The planning process adopted by Fire and Rescue Service is based on the Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland as well as the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Strategic Plan 2013-2016. This has resulted in the publication of 32 local fire plans which have been made available for public comment. Plans will then have to be agreed by the relevant local authority in the same way as local police plans.

There is no criticism of the process adopted in establishing these plans which appears entirely valid. There is however perhaps a question around whether in fact local fire plans and indeed local police plans are needed in the broader context of community planning where both agencies are a statutory part of that process. Both services are required to contribute to single outcome agreements and work alongside a range of agencies for the benefit of communities. The planning landscape at a local authority level is therefore a community plan and Single Outcome Agreement (SOA), a local fire plan and a local police plan all providing similar information to communities and it may perhaps be beneficial to rationalise this area.

One opportunity that may exist for future development flows from the fact that the Police undertake a face to face survey of around one hundred residents in each multi-member ward area to confirm priority setting and planning. This is not replicated by the Fire and Rescue Service and it may be that Fire and Rescue would wish to consider a similar process or work collaboratively to develop a joint consultation process to ensure that local peoples’ views are at the centre of service planning.

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service’s strategic plan

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Strategic Plan was published on the services website and runs from 2013 until 2016. The Strategic plan recognises the diversity of Scotland and its population and clearly states the importance of working with communities.

Like Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service puts communities at the centre of service delivery and additionally shares our focus on the three strategic benefits of reform.

The Police and Fire and Rescue Service’s have long enjoyed close and positive working relationships. The Strategic Plan focus on improving outcomes through partnership is an important springboard to continuing to develop such outcomes for the people of Scotland.

The fact that the Police and Fire and Rescue Services now share the same footprint for the delivery of locally developed and focussed plans presents a more streamlined landscape for working with communities, local authorities and non-statutory partners. The activities outlined in the Strategic Plan under each aim identify an approach that reflects those of Police Scotland and no referenced activity would conflict or impact negatively on the strategic aims of Police Scotland.

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is continuing to develop in parallel with Police Scotland and their Strategic Plan clearly articulates the intention to build in
continuous improvement mechanisms. There will be undoubted value in seeking to learn from each services reform experiences as well as each other’s development of respective ongoing change programmes. This, coupled with opportunities to explore greater working together and potential for consideration of shared services may be beneficial to service delivery and communities.

**The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service’s proposals on its estate including the proposals that there be three control rooms in Scotland and one fire college**

Proposals regarding the future use of the Fire Service Estate are to be the subject of discussion with Police Scotland looking from two perspectives. Already discussion takes place at Local Authority levels between the Local Senior Officers and Local Police Commanders either bi-laterally or as part of Community Planning Partnerships to explore opportunities for shared use of property to deliver efficiencies and maintain or enhance public access and service. A similar approach is being developed from a central and strategic perspective with the lead officers for matters of estate coming together to discuss opportunities.

Police Scotland and the Fire and Rescue Service have engaged in discussions at both strategic and project team levels in relation to the two organisations’ respective proposals to remodel their Contact, Command and Control arrangements. The discussions identified significant differences in terms of capacity and operating models that in themselves are significant inhibitors to integrated operating and these are compounded by each service having greater capacity than is required going forward in terms of the Contact, Command and Control provision in terms of staff and premises.

In effect each service requires to downsize the number of locations, staff and capacity in recognition of each no longer requiring to operate eight separate self resilient Contact, Command and Control arrangements as we can now provide an improved service across a reduced number of locations. Each service has also established that there would be significant costs to move our staff and equipment out of our own premises to those of another agency.

The combined effect of these factors has been that each service is seeking to operate from fewer operating bases, each with some enhanced capacity, using existing premises to reduce costs and maximise staff retention whilst also seeking to make savings and improve service quality. Discussions continue between the two services as we move to implementation of our respective change projects with a view to seeking opportunities for collaboration on issues such as procurement, developing commonality of ICT and joint working where appropriate, such as in facilities from which major incidents and planned events might be commanded.

Police Scotland do not have sufficient information and are therefore not in a position to offer comment regarding the proposed development of a single fire college.

Police Scotland
6 March 2014