Justice Committee

Fire and rescue service reform

Written submission from South Lanarkshire Council

We welcome the opportunity offered by the Justice Committee to provide evidence on the impact of fire and rescue reform within our local area.

Prior to 1 April 2013 there already existed in South Lanarkshire a strong track record in relation to joint working with fire and rescue service. Fundamentally this was based upon the recognition of the importance of local fire and rescue services in delivering an effective response to tackling fire related matters, whilst at the same time proactively promoting community safety. In relation to the specific topics set out by the Justice Committee, we would comment as follows.

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

The legislation for Police and Fire Reform did not specify requirements for local scrutiny arrangements and provided partners with flexibility to develop appropriate local arrangements to ensure the effective scrutiny of local fire and rescue plans. In this context, new local arrangements were established within South Lanarkshire which we believe provide a sound basis for scrutiny of the service and promote continuous service improvement. The new Safer South Lanarkshire Board oversees local fire and rescue plans along with the wider community safety strategy, to ensure all partners effectively progress key priorities.

2. **The consultation process for local fire plans**

The recent review of community planning, nationally and locally, created opportunities to develop a more collaborative approach to support the existing partnership working between the council and local fire and rescue services. Since 1 April 2013, local fire and rescue has continued to deliver an excellent and responsive service, underpinned by meaningful engagement, by utilising local community planning arrangements. This partnership approach to engagement strengthens the connection between Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, elected members, community planning partners and the communities they serve. Locally, it is recognised that this focus has enhanced public confidence in that the new single service is still very much committed to the delivery of local services and continues to meet the particular needs of our communities.

3. **The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service’s Strategic Plan**

Having reviewed the document, it clearly sets out the role of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and its main functions. The plan provides a clear strategic direction in relation to what must be done to achieve national objectives. The plan supports the national framework, which promotes consistency across Scotland, while giving the scope to progress priorities which are relevant at a local level.
The plan is appropriate and consistent with the requirements of the National Performance Framework, which local community planning partners have used to establish new Single Outcome Agreements. It will, however, be important to ensure that over time, as the performance framework develops, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service continues to ensure that coherence is maintained.

The plan clearly identifies the vision and values of the service to meet the challenges it faces over the next few years and the aspirations that will allow Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to become a more responsive service, to meet the demands of a modern and changing Scotland.

4. 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

We understand the sensitivity regarding the decision to reduce the number of fire service control rooms from eight to three, particularly the implication for those staff affected by this decision. We are of the view that effective consultation on such strategically important issues is key to ensure changes to be implemented are in partnership with all concerned.

The scale of change involved in establishing a national service from eight separate services, will require, over time, appropriate structures to meet the emerging needs of the new single service. Control rooms play an integral part in how emergency services are delivered and we note that any changes will prove to be challenging in the initial period, as each locality will have its own unique issues, which may require different solutions.

We also recognise the sensitivity of the decision to move the national fire training college from Gullane to Cambuslang. However, the Cambuslang centre provides a state-of-the-art facility for the future of a modern Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. The facility will allow firefighters to be trained and equipped to deliver robust, professional and innovative front line services, in keeping with our diverse communities across Scotland safe.

We would recommend that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service continue to monitor these changes, to ensure they continue to meet the aspirations of the service and the needs of the public.

5. Any other issues arising from fire reform

Addressing the potential tension between the vision and values which underpin public services, whilst continuing to deliver services which meet public expectations, is one of the fundamental challenges facing partners locally and nationally over the next few years. The need to make the most effective and efficient use of resources, coupled with ensuring we work with communities to ensure we are delivering against priority service areas, is at the heart of the public service reform agenda in Scotland, and at both a local and national level requires the coordination of partner activities to support planning and the delivery of agreed outcomes.
We trust the above comments are helpful, and would ask to be kept informed on the outcome of the consultation.

South Lanarkshire Council
28 February 2014