

**Letter from the petitioners of PE1511
31 August 2017**

The SFRS is now 42 months old and much of the warnings given to the Scottish Government prior to the creation of the centralised service have come to fruition. The Service has not made the savings promised to the Scottish Public and is heading towards a financial overspend crisis. It is worth reminding ourselves of the warnings given to Kenny MacAskill, the former Cabinet Secretary for Justice, as he consulted on the creation of a Single Service for Scotland.

1. Warnings were issued that a Single Service centrally funded would become liable for Tax to HM Revenue and Customs.
2. The proposed new Fire Board was not representative of the diverse communities across Scotland and would not be capable of providing effective governance and local accountability required, nor would it be effective in managing and controlling the Service.
3. The proposed centralisation of Control Centre's would mean a major loss of local knowledge and Command and Control. The proposed reliance on technology to replace local knowledge would not be reliable and robust enough to ensure a secure control and operational management of mobilising or operations command.
4. The major loss of senior and middle management across Scotland would result in a system where the remaining managers would have a far too large span of control. This would lead to Sharp End Failures and a breakdown of command and management across all areas of the Service.
5. The centralisation would inevitably lead to a one size fits all management which would lead to inappropriate decisions, equipment and procedures being forced on areas where they are not practical or suitable.
6. The Mott Macdonald Report which recommended the Single Service as an economical and viable option was fraud and was full of major inaccuracies and assumptions, such as the sale of properties in years 2 and 3 to help make savings, when many of these premises were grossly overvalued and indeed many of the properties and land were not owned but on 100 year leases for community good.
7. Moral and therefore sickness levels would be an increased issue due to ineffective management due to span of control. Freelancing would become an issue due to lack of sufficient middle management.

These warnings have all come true and we would offer the following as examples of some areas where this is the case for each.

1. The Treasury has repeatedly denied any exception to the TAX liability of the Single Service.
2. The Fire Authority is made up of paid volunteers none of whom have practical knowledge or understanding of the Fire Service. None of the Authority members are locally elected or representative of the highly diverse communities they represent. Repeatedly they have failed in managing the service effectively and have been found wanting in holding private behind closed doors meetings.
3. The Systems have failed repeatedly and continue to fail on a daily basis. These failures have been well documented in the press over the last year since the closure

of Aberdeen and Inverness Control Centres. The lack of local knowledge has become very apparent with crews being mobilised from the mainland to Islands, Thurso called to Dundee, complete radio system failures requiring crews to use private mobile phones to remain in contact with Fire Control.

4. Span of Control failure is demonstrated where Island Appliances and Equipment have not received statutory 13 week or annual tests for 18 months. The CFO informed an Island MSP that the work had been done which was incorrect this clearly demonstrates a lack of management control in the fact that the CFO obviously did not know he was going false information and you would assume the Senior management Team and SFA were not aware of the freelancing which lead to these 50+ Stations not having received legal required routine maintenance checks.

5. The Highlands had Community Response Units which were pertinent to the Highlands only. The SFRS repeatedly under uses these stations and has on record at Council Meetings stated that the SFRS does not really agree or understand the need for these stations.

6. Many Closed Facilities were considered for Sale only to be found to be not owned or overvalued. The old Sumburgh Fire Station and Inverness HQ Building are two examples.

7. Morale is at an all time low with resignations, retirements and sickness levels at an all time high.

It's worth elaborating on some of the more recent issues affecting the Single Service. The Dundee Control radio Communications System recently failed completely, which meant that for a few days the only appliance communication with control was via the crews own personal mobile phones. This is clearly a safety system failure and is totally unacceptable especially in most of the North of Scotland and Islands where Mobile Phone Coverage is very sparse. Repeatedly the public have reported Control Staff's inability to take a call without a post code, resulting in public concern and mistakes.

Back up Crews and Relief Crews have been sent out to the wrong location 10 miles apart, this could have had catastrophic consequences had it been a make-up request for help at a serious incident.

Since the inception of the SFRS on 1st April 2013 there has been in the former HIFRS area 5 station closures (2 Retained and 3 CRU according to the HMI's figures) and many more are on the brink of closing. This is mainly due to the inflexibility in Recruitment with the one size fits all SFRS policy. In some locations such as the island of Fetlar on Shetland the Retained Station has closed, this now has increased the attendance times dramatically as it requires the call out of a Ferry and a 35 minute one way ferry crossing as well as mobilisation of the nearest stations (Mid Yell and Baltasound) 15 miles away.

There have been two FOI requests by MSP'S which have failed in the last few months. Both failures identify and effectively admit that the Single Service is failing the public, they were as follows.

1 :- The first one was a request for the appliance and equipment maintenance inspection and test dates for the last couple of years

Response given to ourselves include -

Providing information was too big and difficult a task.

Vehicle maintenance and equipment test information is on "Fleet Management Computer System" with knowledge we know this information takes minutes to provide.

We believe that information on the FOI was disclosed because it showed that island Appliances were not maintained (5 x 13wk mandatory inspection) that no annual tests were carried out in major safety equipment over this period. This raises severe concerns of Crew and Public safety, also the CFO clearly didn't know or we question the fact that , he in statements to MSPs Press and Public reassured that "All" routine maintenance had been undertaken.

2:- The second FOI request was for call handling times, mobilising times at the Dundee Control Centre compared with the historic information from both Aberdeen and Inverness Control Centres.

Responses given to ourselves were and indeed we question these.

SFRS no longer record call handling times, or record mobilisation times anymore, stating that there is no requirement to do so. A bold statement from SFRS as it prevents interrogation or comparison studies of data from the new Centralised Control Systems or mobilisations effectiveness in comparison to the previous services.

This draws attention and consideration to the fact that a single service cannot be measured against any other services provider. Previous services (8x) were KPI assessed against one another in order to provide the public with performance and quality information.

However more damning is SFRS admission that they no longer record Call handling and Mobilisation times shows complete contempt for their accountability to the communities and public they serve

We request on behalf of the petitioners of PE1511, and the communities of the Highlands and Islands, an immediate investigation and response on the findings from the Scottish Government.