

Petition PE1511: Inverness Fire Service Control Room

The petitioners would like to thank the Justice Committee for requesting our concerns relating to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service SFRS which were discussed at the meeting on the 5 September 2017, which were passed to the SFRS and Scottish Government for a response. The petitioners would also like to thank DCO Iain Bushell for the informative and comprehensive although selective reply, the amount of work involved is noted and appreciated. It is however disappointing that the SFRS have "provided a response which also reflected the Scottish Government's position", particularly when in question 2 below there is no response.

The petitioners are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the SFRS and Scottish Governments reply which is to be discussed at the Justice Committee meeting on the 19 December 2017.

The response from the SFRS was selective and failed to provide any response to the main request in our earlier submission regarding the two failed Freedom of Information (FOI) requests made by MSPs. Which were:

"There have been two FOI requests by MSPs 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.

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.

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 not disclosed because it showed that island Appliances were not maintained (5 x 13wk mandatory inspection) and 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 Chief Fire Officer clearly didn't know or we question the fact that, as he stated to MSPs, Press and Public, 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."

The petitioners would like to comment on the response that was given by the SFRS, in order to simplify this we have used the SFRS items and supplied a "Petitioners Comment" below each item:

Initial Comment	1. 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.
SFRS Response	We would draw the petitioner's attention to the following: Audit Scotland Report, May 2015 Deloitte "Scottish Fire and Rescue Service annual audit plan 2016/17 (Audit and Risk Committee 29 March 2017)
Petitioners' response	<p>The Audit Scotland Report (21 May 2015) and Deloitte Report (22 February 2017) identify revenue savings of 16.1m (2013/2014) and 6.6m (2014/2015). However, it also identifies an estimated additional revenue spend of 36m in the first two years in SFRS setup costs. This equates to a nil save in the first two years and in fact indicates that the SFRS cost the taxpayer 13.3m (+18m in VAT) at the same time the service lost 683 staff (8963 to 8281) of which 363 (298 full time operational) were front line operational staff. This equates to very poor value for money in funding a service which has an increased cost of 41.3m providing a vastly reduced service with almost 700 less staff.</p> <p>The Capital Costs for the first two years are very difficult to identify as are the Capital set up costs in creating the SFRS prior to 2013; however, there has been a concerted effort to sell off assets and Capital receipts were 16.1m for 2013/2015, 15.2m for 2015/2016 and 15.2m for 2016/2017 which was given back to the service to help support the creation of a centralised single service. From the report it can be seen that Capital spend is estimated at 21.8m in 2014/2015, 25.3m in 2015/2016 and estimated at 91.1m estimated for 2015/2018.</p> <p>The true costs of setting up the SFRS including Capital and Revenue have never been published and it is estimated that there has been no saving to the public to date, what is known is that the SFRS has seen a total reduction in staff from</p>

	<p>2013/2017 of 1130 (13%), which includes 882 (78%) operational front line staff. The Deloitte report indicates that the SFRS has three areas of Significant Risk, which are Core Expenditure Recourse Limits, Valuation of Property Assets and Management Override of Controls. These reports predict a 42m deficit by 2019/2020 or according to the Deloitte report 47.2m by 2019/2020 and indeed in the CFO's Futures document he has reported in the press that the SFRS is "unsustainable beyond April 2018", this could hardly be called a financial success and we do agree with the CFO.</p>
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Initial Comment	<p>2. Warnings were issued that a Single Service centrally funded would become liable for Tax to HM Revenue and Customs.</p>
SFRS Response	<p>This is a matter for the Scottish Government.</p>
Petitioners' response	<p>The VAT issue has been partially resolved by the Treasury and the SFRS is to be exempt from 2018/2019, this has meant that an additional VAT overspend was applicable since 2013/2018 and that 40m has been spent which has been a direct payment from central government.</p>

Initial Comment	<p>3. 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. Additional statements from the letter: 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.</p>
SFRS Response	<p>The highly diverse, significantly experienced and clearly representative composition of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Board can be reviewed here.</p> <p>The Board operates to an open and transparent ethos and adheres to the SFRS Governance and Accountability Framework. All decisions made by the Board are available here.</p> <p>The parameters in which Board proceedings may be held in private and in which documents need not be published is set out in schedule 1A to the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, as amended by the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012.</p>
Petitioners'	<p>The Scottish Fire and Rescue Board (SFRSB) has seen the</p>

response	<p>Governance of the SFRS managed by 12 individuals who have applied for the position as Board Members, this has replaced some 200+ diversely represented publicly elected members from all local authorities in Scotland which used to provide Governance over the 8 Regional Services. The current SFRSB members are neither representative nor elected and according to the information provided on the SFRS website only one Board Member has stated experience or represents rural communities north of the Central Belt.</p> <p>The Audit Scotland May 2015 report indeed states "The board is starting to perform well and is committed to continue improving how it performs", this was two and a half years after the Board was set up and hardly indicative of a good situation. The report also states "One challenge confronting any board is the need to balance detailed knowledge about how an organisation works with strategic direction and challenge of how the organisation is managed. At the beginning, the level of detail requested by the board, about the operation and management of the SFRS, led to tensions with senior management", this is also not confidence building.</p>
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Initial Comment	<p>4. 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.</p>
SFRS Response	<p>We would draw the petitioner's attention to the recent HM Fire Service Inspectorate Report "The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Operations Control Room in Dundee, and Service Delivery and Support in Highland, Western Isles, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands".</p>
Petitioners' response	<p>The HMI Report clearly identifies that the Dundee Control Staff are doing a great job under very difficult conditions. The Petitioners wish it formally noted that there is and has never been any suggestion that they are not doing a great job. The HMI Report also recognises the valiant efforts being undertaken by the staff and managers in the Dundee Control Centre to mitigate any faults and discrepancies as they arise. The HMI Report does however find that the Dundee Control Centre is operating with only 64% staff and of these, 50% are in Development (Training and not fully competent), which means the Dundee Control Centre is operating with just 32% fully competent staff. The HMI Report also found that the systems in the NEW Control Centre are not fully compatible or integrated, which causes inbuilt delays as multiple systems have to operate in order to deal with calls and mobilise stations and recourses. The shortage of staff and the critical</p>

	<p>shortage of trained staff which means that there is regular pressure on all staff to undertake overtime and other management contingencies, is an absolute disgrace. This astonishing situation and the blame for this lies directly with the Scottish Government and the Fire Board as they have clearly mismanaged the Governance of the centralisation from 8 to 3 Control Centres. The staff shortages were a known problem and to blame the need to allow Inverness and Aberdeen Staff the chance to move to Dundee up until the last minute is an unacceptable excuse. Clearly the Inverness and Aberdeen Control Centres should not have been closed until the Dundee Control Centre was fully staffed with Competent personnel and the system was fully tested. The centralisation has been very badly managed and has been forced upon the SFRS and its staff in an effort to reduce costs and meet savings targets, it has had absolutely nothing to do with operational efficiency or public safety, it has had a detrimental effect on staff morale and confidence.</p> <p>The HMI Report also identifies that the three new control centres in Scotland have NO interoperability as they use different systems and it also highlights the fact that staff cannot even help in other centres due to the amount of training that would be involved. This HMI Report identifies that another new system needs to be procured, a process which can take years before the 3 control centres will be fully interoperable and give the necessary resilience required. This beggars belief as it is now certain that all three centres will have to go through extensive training AGAIN when and if the new National System is installed. The question is now why were the 8 controls moved into a temporary 3 control system when they could have all been moved over to the new system when it was fully installed and all training and testing complete. Inter-operability between the “new” centres. Good communications are the backbone to effective overall response at the largest major incidents. There will be costs of another new call handling system, as suggested by HMI Report. It looks as though the centralised controls have been badly mismanaged in order to save money at the expense of staff welfare, staff morale and public safety. The Petitioners agree with the Highland Council and Shetland Islands Council who supports the retention of local Emergency Services Control Rooms and many Councillors believe that, in the future, combined Emergency Services Control Rooms would save money, retain vital local knowledge and build public confidence.</p>
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Initial Comment	5. The major loss of senior and middle management across Scotland would result in a system where the remaining
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	<p>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.</p>
<p>SFRS Response</p>	<p>We would draw the petitioner's attention to the following reports which counter this statement:</p> <p>HM Fire Service Inspectorate service delivery inspection reports:</p> <p>HM Fire Service Inspectorate Local Area Inspection Scottish Borders</p> <p>HM Fire Service Inspectorate Local Area Inspection South Ayrshire</p> <p>HM Fire Service Inspectorate Local Area Inspection West Lothian</p> <p>HM Fire Service Inspectorate Local Area Inspection Western Isles</p> <p>HM Fire Service Inspectorate Report:</p> <p>The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Operations Control Room in Dundee, and Service Delivery and Support in Highland, Western Isles, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands.</p>
<p>Petitioners' response</p>	<p>The HMI Reports provided have all got a recurring theme regarding Appliance and Equipment Maintenance failures and shortages. They also identify a failure to provide adequate middle management support to stations across the whole country. This was warned about and has come to fruition.</p> <p>It should be noted that the middle managers are deemed to be doing the best they can, but are being let down by the support to them and the support they can provide due to lack of suitably qualified middle managers. These structure and span of control failures have led to the creation in 2015 of 6 new Deputy Assistant Chief Officers, 2 years into the new structure it had to have an injection of 6 new principal managers, hardly good planning.</p> <p>The Report identifies Hot Fire Training failures and indicates a lack of facilities following the closure of these facilities across Scotland. It also identifies a lack of resources and inflexible training system and recording system. The training system and method of recording is a problem across Scotland particularly where broadband and IT facilities are sparse, the Stations all complain and the HMI Report acknowledges that Station Personnel have not got the time, availability or facilities to comply with the inflexibility of a system which was designed for full time personnel.</p> <p>The most astonishing situation is the reason for the FOI regarding Island Appliance Maintenance which was not</p>

	undertaken on 5 occasions over an 18 month period. This was largely due to the inflexibility of the systems and procedures imposed on maintenance staff who all came from 8 different terms and conditions. A clear indication that the Service Structure is too large and diverse to be managed by a single service.
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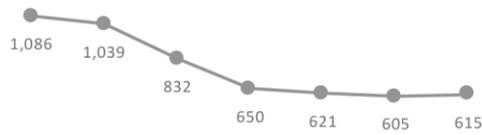
Initial Comment	6. The centralisation would inevitably lead to a one size fits all management which would lead to inappropriate decisions, equipment and procedures being forced on areas where they are not practical or suitable.
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SFRS Response	<p>We would draw the petitioner’s attention to the report by Audit Scotland in May 2015. This state's “The merger followed good practice and the move to being a national organisation has enhanced scrutiny and challenge. There are 17 local senior officers. They have been a successful innovation and have helped in the fire and rescue service’s move from local government to central government. In addition to the statutory role of the 17 local senior officers, board members have a non-statutory responsibility for liaising with the local authorities in each of the SFRS's three operational areas”.</p> <p>A Specialist Resources Review was conducted in 2015 which reviewed the provision and deployment of Special Resources across Scotland with a view to satisfying a principle aim of reform outlined within the Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2013; to create more equal access to specialist support services and national capacity.</p>
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Petitioners’ response	<p>The Audit Scotland Report also identifies that the SFRS Structure was not coping and 2 years into creation, 6 new Senior Management Posts at Deputy Assistant Chief Officer rank had to be created as officers were unable to effectively control the service. This alone indicates our concerns are real and well founded, as the SFRS Structure approved by the Scottish Government was not fit for purpose and that the span of control was far too great for the Structure proposed. The HMI Reports for the Western Isles and Borders both identify failures in Structure and lack of Senior and Middle Management Officer Support for Stations and Communities.</p> <p>The SFRS has indicated in its enclosed 2016/2017 Statistical returns that the service has effectively undone all the good work which the previous 8 services had achieved regarding call reduction, Community Fire Safety and Legislative Fire Safety. I have copied the SFRS Statistical graphs for ease of reading they show that the steady and rapid decline in Accidental Incidents has levelled off and indeed in most cases it has risen since 2013/2014 when the SFRS took over</p>
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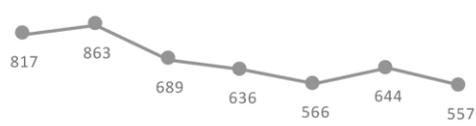
from the 8 Legacy Regional Services.

Dwelling Fires



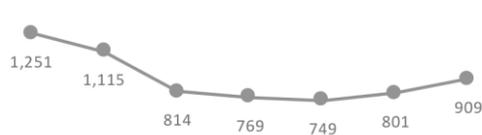
2010-11 2011-12 2012-13 2013-14 2014-15 2015-16 2016-17

Other Building Fires



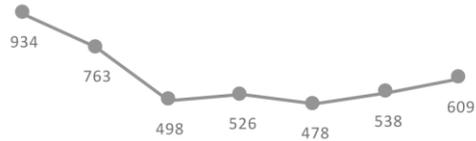
2010-11 2011-12 2012-13 2013-14 2014-15 2015-16 2016-17

Road Vehicle Fires



2010-11 2011-12 2012-13 2013-14 2014-15 2015-16 2016-17

Primary Fires - Others



2010-11 2011-12 2012-13 2013-14 2014-15 2015-16 2016-17

The SFRS Statistics for Deliberate Incidents, Fatalities and Injuries show a similar levelling and rise and make very poor reading. This Statistical Information is a damning indictment to the SFRS and the Scottish Governments decision to centralise the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland against the recommendation of the Fire Service Management at the time. This tragic Statistics would suggest that the SFRS are failing badly in Community Safety and legislative Fire Safety when compared to the previous 8 services and point to our concerns that the SFRS as a single service has not the capacity and management to achieve the results that the 8 services did. The 8 Legacy Services had the management capability and capacity to drive the initiatives and policies that were locally driven and locally focused to meet the local needs of the Communities they serve. The SFRS has not got the experienced staff necessary or the local connectivity to deliver locally driven and locally agreed policies as they are driven by a centralistic management with too few middle managers to achieve meaningful gains. These statistics graphically identify that the public in Scotland are less safe under the SFRS than they were before.

Initial Comment

7. 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.
SFRS Response	<p>This statement does not reflect the position of the SFRS as documented in the Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held in Lochaber House, High Street, Fort William on Friday, 23 June 2017, which state:</p> <p>“In relation to the Community Response Units (CRU), it was queried if the types of incidents they had been called out to had been reduced since control room call handling had been removed from Highland and were call handlers aware of what types of incidents CRUs could respond to. It was advised that there were two CRUs in the Lochaber area and they were called out when required. There was no knowledge of them not being called upon as a consequence of call handling being out with the area. Further, call handlers were aware of the CRUs appliances and their capability.”</p>
Petitioners’ response	<p>The Communities and Partnership Committee Meeting in 9th February in Inverness showed how out of touch senior SFRS managers are with the requirements of Rural Communities.</p> <p>The ACO at the meeting mentions that CRUs are a Highland thing which is not what they are used to in Glasgow or Strathclyde, where he worked. The ACO then tries to support the non-mobilisation of CRUs as they have a reduced equipment level which could make it unsafe to mobilise them to certain incidents. A Highland Council Councillor with many years as a senior police officer, then indicated that with an RTC (which CRUs are trained and equipped to respond to), it does not matter what service attends and what equipment they have, the priority in rural communities is to get the nearest blue light resource to the scene as soon as possible, where they can secure the scene stabilise the casualties, reassure casualties and very importantly give the other services attending vital meaningful up to date on scene information. The Councillor then elaborates on an incident he attended in a very remote area of the Highland's when a tour bus left the road and ended up on its roof, he described the actions taken by the 4 crew member Fire Volunteers who attended 15 minutes before any other blue light service, as fantastic. They provided life critical first aid to the 36 casualties and also reported critical information to responding crews, which meant that the gravity of the incident was clearly understood. This is a critical part to Rural Community Safety and demonstrates dramatically why the SFRS was a bad idea and an increasingly failed project, the Senior Management and Fire Board clearly have no idea of how to provide this critical service across rural areas.</p>
Initial Comment	8. 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.
SFRS Response	It is not appropriate for the SFRS to respond to unverified claims made against the author and contents of the Mott Macdonald Report.
Petitioners' response	Our original comment did include verifiable information Regarding the Old Sumburgh Fire Station being given a Value for resale when the SFRS doesn't own the land it was given for community benefit on a 100 year lease. The other premises was the Inverness HQ Building being given a value when it has insufficient parking to allow it to be sold as a usable premises. These were two specifics from a report which was completely full of inaccuracies and inflated asset values.

Initial Comment	9. Morale 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.
SFRS Response	<p>The SFRS does not feel it is appropriate to directly respond to unverified or baseless claims.</p> <p>The SFRS does, however, monitor its key performance indicators and reports on resignations, retirements and sickness absence rates to the Staff Governance Board, Employee Partnership Forum and Strategic Leadership Team on a quarterly basis. The data within these reports is analysed and remedial management actions are taken at strategic level to develop a workforce and resourcing plan which takes account of succession planning. This ensures that appropriate staffing levels are maintained both in the short and long term planning cycles.</p>
Petitioners' response	<p>BBC 12 October 2017:</p> <p>"The number of fire and rescue staff recorded as being off with stress has increased five-fold in three years.</p> <p>Figures indicated absence with stress has increased from 27 in the year after the single service was created, to 137 last year.</p> <p>The reorganisation of the service had been "traumatic" for staff, according to the Fire Brigades Union (FBU).</p> <p>The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) said the increase reflects a change in how figures are recorded.</p>

	<p>Statistics on the number of staff recorded as being off with stress were obtained after a freedom of information request.</p> <p>FBU Scotland claimed problems with stress increased following the reorganisation of the service from eight brigades to one.</p> <p>It said about a thousand posts have been lost, placing strain on those remaining."</p> <p>The FBU's position on this is clear and we share their concerns.</p>
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Initial Comment	<p>10. 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.</p>
SFRS Response	<p>Since inception in 2013, the SFRS has not closed any operational stations.</p> <p>We would draw the petitioner's attention to The "Fire Safety and Organisational Statistics Scotland 2015-16"</p>
Petitioners' response	<p>Scottish Government Information:</p> <p>"Fire Stations</p> <p>Fire stations in Scotland have been classified in the following manner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wholetime • Retained Duty System (RDS) • Volunteer and • Day. <p>The classification relates to the primary staffing of these stations. For example, if Wholetime and RDS crew the same station is will be recorded as Wholetime.</p> <p>Number of Fire Stations</p> <p>On the 31 March 2013 there were 359 fire stations in Scotland. Of these, 74 were primarily wholetime crewed, 238 RDS, 43 Volunteer and 4 Day crewed.</p>

	<p>Strathclyde FRS had the highest number of stations with 110, followed by Highland and Islands with 102. These FRSs cover the biggest two geographical areas in Scotland.</p> <p>Highlands and Islands stations decreased from 115 to 102 during 2012-13, 10 of these stations were volunteer and 3 were RDS.</p> <p>The majority of stations in Scotland are RDS crewed (66%), then Wholetime (21%), Volunteer (12%) and finally Day (1%) (Chart 1).</p> <p>Of the 74 Wholetime stations, the majority are in Strathclyde (51%) followed by Lothian and Borders (18%). "</p> <p>SFRS Statistics:</p> <p>"2.2 Fire Stations On 31st March 2017 there were 356 SFRS fire stations in Scotland. This is unchanged from 2016.</p> <p>The profile of fire stations is also unchanged from 2016 with two thirds of all stations primarily RDS crewed (240), 21 per cent Wholetime (74 stations) and 12 per cent Volunteer (42 stations)."</p> <p>The SFRS statement that there have been no Fire Station Closures since Inception in 2013 is clearly incorrect. There have been 3 Fire Station Closures and in the year leading up to the SFRS 2012/2013 the Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service closed 13 Fire Stations under the Management of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service as they had no Chief Fire Officer due to long term sickness. The SFRS have effectively closed 16 Fire Stations, the station in Fetlar mentioned in our comments is still on the SFRS Statistics however according to the HMI report it has 1 crew member. The situation in Fetlar and other such remote Islands such as the closed Out Skerries and Foula has been engineered by the inflexible fitness and training requirements required by the Single Service, together with the need to have a minimum of 4 crew members and the need for these remote locations to have a Breathing Apparatus capability. Thankfully the HMI is now questioning this policy and rigidity and recommending a more flexible and practical solution which could see many of these closed stations reopened in the near future.</p>
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No reply to the FOIs as previously mentioned at the start of our representation

The Petitioners would like to again thank the Justice Committee for upholding the Petitions PE1511 and PE1510 and allowing us to comment on the selective response from the SFRS and Scottish Government. We would ask that the SFRS and Scottish Government be required to answer the Justice Committee's request fully, particularly regarding the two FOI requests. It is clear to us that the Single Scottish Fire and Police Services are failing the Communities of Scotland on many levels. Ultimately we feel a full review of the Single Fire and Police Services is needed and a better more Locally Responsive and Governed Service provided that fits the needs and properly protects the Local Communities across all of Scotland.

