



SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Working together for a safer Scotland

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Date 10 November 2017

Dear Mr McGrath

The following is a response to the letter from the petitioners of PE1511 - 31 August 2017.

The creation of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) has been good for Scotland and is acknowledged as the public sector reform success story. We continue to meet the expectations of reform with improved outcomes whilst protecting frontline services; more equitable access to specialist resources and the full national capacity of the UK's largest fire and rescue service; and strengthened connections between the SFRS and local communities. We have done so whilst meeting the requirements of the financial memorandum of understanding with the delivery of total gross recurring financial savings of £55.3million up to 2019/20, and on track to exceed expected savings of £328million by 2027/28.

In creating the national service, the SFRS adopted Audit Scotland's guidance to merging public bodies, which indicates four main areas of savings - staffing synergies, asset and contract rationalisation, streamlined processes and shared support services. The delivery of efficiencies has been planned and co-ordinated through the SFRS Service Transformation Programme, supported by regular independent Gateway Reviews. We have removed duplication and created the right operational and administrative infrastructure (eg single payroll, single HR systems) for the future. We recognise that change is not easy but our achievements in four short years are a credit to every member of the SFRS, as well as our staff representative bodies, which together have been instrumental in the very genesis of the Service. We recognise that we still have work to do, but the benefits we are delivering to the people of Scotland outweigh these challenges. Throughout the reform period, the SFRS has responded to every emergency call and have ensured we always have the right resources in the right place at the right time.

Turning to specifics within the petition:

- 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.**

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 \(Audit and Risk Committee 29 March 2017\)](#)

- 2. Warnings were issued that a Single Service centrally funded would become liable for Tax to HM Revenue and Customs.**

This is a matter for the Scottish Government.

- 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.**

The highly diverse, significantly experienced and clearly representative composition of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Board can be reviewed [here](#).

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](#).

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.

- 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.**

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](#)".

- 5. 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.**

We would draw the petitioner's attention to the following reports which counter this statement:

HM Fire Service Inspectorate service delivery inspection reports:

[HM Fire Service Inspectorate Local Area Inspection Scottish Borders](#)

[HM Fire Service Inspectorate Local Area Inspection South Ayrshire](#)

[HM Fire Service Inspectorate Local Area Inspection West Lothian](#)

[HM Fire Service Inspectorate Local Area Inspection Western Isles](#)

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.](#)

- 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.**

We would draw the petitioner's attention to the report by [Audit Scotland](#) in May 2015. This states "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".

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.

- 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.**

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:

"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 outwith the area. Further, call handlers were aware of the CRUs appliances and their capability."

- 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.**

It is not appropriate for the SFRS to respond to unverified claims made against the author and contents of the Mott Macdonald Report.

- 9. 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.**

The SFRS does not feel it is appropriate to directly respond to unverified or baseless claims.

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.

- 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.**

Since inception in 2013, the SFRS has not closed any operational stations.

We would draw the petitioner's attention to The "[Fire Safety and Organisational Statistics Scotland 2015-16](#)"

We trust the provision of this factual evidence will address the claims made in the petitioner's letter.

Yours sincerely



Iain Bushell
Deputy Chief Officer