

REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 25 APRIL 2011

REPORT ON: CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE IN SCOTLAND

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT NO: 159-2011

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To advise Committee of a Scottish Government consultation document on the future of the Fire and Rescue Service and to seek instructions on how to respond.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members' instructions are requested on how the Council should respond to the consultation document.

3. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications from this report.

4. **MAIN TEXT**

4.1 **Consultation Document**

4.1.1 The Scottish Government has published a consultation document inviting contributions to the debate about the future of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). Copies have been sent to the group secretaries, the Lord Provost and Depute Lord Provost.

4.1.2 The consultation document provides detailed contextual information on the service today, the challenges and threats it faces, and the history of its structures and organisation, and it assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the current model. The consultation document says that the Scottish Government's vision for the service includes:

- the full benefits of the SFRS decentralised as far as possible and financially sustainable in the long term
- the maximum amount of resources directed towards front-line delivery, with the service being responsive to the needs of local communities within the context of consistent national standards
- fire safety legislation applied consistently across Scotland

4.2 **Options for Change**

4.2.1 The Scottish Government says it believes that options for the future of the service should be tested against their ability to deliver the following benefits:

- improved service outcomes
- protecting front-line services while lowering costs

- close engagement with local communities and other stakeholders
- ability to respond quickly to future challenges

- national resilience and interoperability

- simplification of governance

4.2.2 The consultation document expresses the view that the vision and benefits outlined above cannot be achieved the way the service is currently structured and organised. The document sets out three options for change, but makes clear that the Scottish Government believes there are compelling arguments for pursuing the single service approach.

4.2.3 The three options considered are:

1 A Single Fire and Rescue Service

This option envisages a national service, bringing together the assets and staff of the eight regional services and the national services currently delivered by the Scottish Government. The new organisation would have a single structure and leadership, one HQ (with support functions spread across the country) and a national solution to command and control. The document argues that a single service would provide improved capacity at national level through a consistent approach to risk management. Savings achieved through reducing duplication would be used to sustain and support local front-line delivery. Concerns have been expressed that a single service would be remote from communities and reduce accountability and local identity, but the document argues that a single service could also provide clear and formal responsibility and accountability which would enhance opportunities for the service to get closer to communities and develop an ever greater understanding of their diverse needs. The consultation document says it would deliver consistent standards of performance management and reduce the complexity of governance and co-ordinating mechanisms.

2 A Regional Structure

This option envisages some form of regional structure with fewer Boards than at present, covering much larger geographic areas. While the document says this has the potential to offer some opportunities for standardisation and savings through economies of scale, these will be less than in the first option. The Scottish Government says it does not believe that this option would deliver the savings or improvement in effectiveness which are required.

3 Current Eight Service Structure With Enhanced Collaboration

This option envisages no formal change to boundaries, but joint delivery of most back-office functions, possibly expanding into control rooms. The Scottish Government feels that collaboration will not deliver the economies of scale required, offers the least scope for savings and, given the financial challenges ahead, would probably require reductions in front-line services and is not financially sustainable. The structure does allow for diverse approaches and geographical variations in standards matched to local needs, and maintains existing local accountability arrangements, but the document says this could hinder rather than benefit national and local accountability.

4.2.4 The Scottish Government believes there is a compelling case for a single service, but recognises that further work needs to be done to develop a detailed business case which fully quantifies the costs and benefits of change. The consultation document says that decisions on the way forward will be informed by a combination of views received in the course of the consultation and the information developed as part of this business case. Although supporting the principle of a single service, the Scottish Government say this does not mean one centralised service - it says that local delivery is key. The document says that many elements of the service could be decentralised and that their vision for the service is one of balancing its benefits across the country, ensuring that the main centres across Scotland (including Dundee) benefit from the opportunities available. One option discussed in the consultation document is for each local authority or Community Planning Partnership to have a consultative 'blue light' committee, with responsibility for scrutinising plans and performance in their area.

4.3 **COSLA's Position**

4.3.1 In considering its approach to public sector reform in general, COSLA has set out a number of principles:

- reform should be framed in terms of the improvement of outcomes - the effect which services have on people's lives
- reform should look at the whole of the public sector not just one element
- reform should be based on robust evidence and a business case that generates community benefit - and this implies integration of public services at a local level, rather than central aggregation
- reform should not focus on structures and boundaries to the exclusion of other issues relating to finance, policy, systems and governance
- local democracy and accountability should be at the heart of the reform process and should be enhanced by reform rather than diminished

4.3.2 In relation to the consultation document on Fire and Rescue Service reform, COSLA has expressed the view that the work on this service is not as developed as it is for the Police, so respondents to the consultation are being asked to consider structural options on the basis of assumptions rather than information.

4.4 **Request for Instructions on Response from Dundee City Council**

The consultation document includes fourteen questions on which comments are invited, which are listed in Appendix 1. These require reference to the full consultation document. Members' instructions are requested on how the Council should respond.

5. **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Equalities, Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty and Risk Management. There are no major issues. The consultation document is seeking comments on any equality issues relevant to the options as part of the Scottish Government's Equality Impact Assessment.

6. **CONSULTATIONS**

The Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) and Director of Finance have been consulted on the content of this report.

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

A Consultation on the Future of the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland : Scottish Government - February 2011.

David K Dorward
Chief Executive

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19/04/2011

Appendix 1

Questions from Consultation Document

The consultation document invites responses on the questions set out below, which require reference to the full document.

Question 1 : Is this the right vision for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service?

Question 2 : Do you agree that these should be the key principles for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service?

Question 3 : Do you agree that the option to de-centralise the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service should be considered?

Question 4 : How well is the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service performing against what you believe to be the key principles and what do you consider to be the priorities for improvement?

Question 5 : Do you agree that these should be the desired benefits for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Question 6 : What are your views on an appropriate mechanism for Ministers and MSPs to hold the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to account?

Question 7 : What are your views on an appropriate mechanism for local communities to hold the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to account?

Question 8 : What is the right balance between the national and local mechanisms set out in questions 6 and 7?

Question 9 : Do you think that the number of fire and rescue services needs to be reduced?

Question 10 : If so, which option do you think should be pursued and why?

Question 11 : To assist with our Equality Impact Assessment process, please also describe any equality issues (in relation to race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, transgender people and religion) relevant to your chosen option?

Question 12 : To assist with our Regulatory Impact Assessment, please also describe any financial and other impacts for business, charities and the voluntary sector relevant to your chosen option?

Question 13 : What aspects of collaboration and joint working between the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and other emergency services do you believe should be a key focus in future?

Question 14 : Do you think local fire stations should be developed into community resilience hubs, and, if so, what new services would you see them deliver?