
RESPONSE TO A CONSULTATION ON THE SAFE AND PLANNED FUTURE OF THE SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Report by Chief Executive Scottish Borders Council

31 May 2018

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this Report is to agree a formal Scottish Borders Council response to 'Your Service Your Voice: A consultation on the safe and planned future of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service' published on 13 February 2018 which can be found at the following link:-
<http://www.firescotland.gov.uk/transformation/public-consultation.aspx>
- 1.2 Summary of the main points of the report.
- (a) The Consultation envisions a four-year programme that will transform both the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and the role of its firefighters.
- Potential areas of change include:-
- (i) a more effective crewing model;
 - (ii) new fully-harmonised conditions and more flexible working arrangements and mobility;
 - (iii) use of the latest technology and new types of vehicles;
 - (iv) a review of the national 'fire station' footprint,
 - (v) a strengthening of services to rural communities through the appointment of new whole-time rural manager positions in key locations across Scotland
- (b) Sub-paragraphs iv) and v) have particular resonance in the Scottish Borders.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **I recommend that the Council:-**
- (a) Agrees the draft response to 'Your Service Your Voice: A consultation on the safe and planned future of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service' set out in Appendix 1

3 The Consultation

- 3.1 The Consultation document (see Appendix 1) follows a narrative format from which key drivers and objectives of a proposed transformation of the Fire and Rescue service can be extrapolated. These drivers and areas of potential change are highlighted below.
- 3.2 Drivers of change
- (a) The Consultation begins by describing the extent to which the nature of risk has changed. Most pertinently from a SFRS perspective, the number of fires in Scotland has reduced by 55% since 1994. At the same time, new risks have emerged with severe weather and international terrorism becoming more frequent and far-reaching in their impacts. The demographic challenges Scotland faces present a different kind of risk, but one to which society in general and the SFRS in particular need to respond. Expectations around the kind of role firefighters should play have also been evolving. Emergency Medical Response or assisting older people to circumvent preventable harms, such as trips and falls in the home, or identifying early signs of dementia are examples of the extended role firefighters can and are playing.
 - (b) The Consultation states that "The main purpose of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is to work in partnership with communities and with others in the public, private and third sectors, on prevention, protection response, to improve the safety and wellbeing of people throughout Scotland." This strongly accords with the 2011 Christie principles of prevention; public engagement; partnership working; and increased efficiency. However, acknowledging that resources are finite, it also implies a change in the balance of the services within SFRS. As the Consultations puts it: 'At present, our operating model limits the time firefighters can spend on meaningful prevention, intervention and diversion work. A transformed operating model would see more availability at the optimum time to conduct this work - further reducing the risk of fires but also delivering real benefits in demand and cost reduction for health, social care and justice.' It is these changes and their potential implications for Scottish Borders, which are of interest to Council and the people it serves.

3.3 Areas of potential change

The fundamental precept of the consultation is that SFRS's resources need to be aligned much more closely with needs. This has the following implications.

(a) **A more effective crewing model**

While SFRS deploys fire crews on the basis of a minimum 5 crew first deployment, and minimum 4 crew second deployment (5 plus 4), it is noted that in England and Wales a 4 plus 4 system is used. It is

asserted that moving to a more efficient operating system in Scotland would 'free up resource to reward firefighters for taking on a new role.'

Reflecting the fact that incidents and calls to SFRS occur overwhelmingly during the day rather than at night (80% v 20%), 'a more flexible solution for night-time crewing which would safely meet the demand between the hours of 11pm and 7am' is proposed.

(b) **Reviewing our national 'fire station' footprint**

The corollary of changes to the focus, skill set and shape of SFRS is a review of the current station footprint. The Consultation observes that 'our stations and the resources within them were designed for another era. Many were built around industries that no longer exist, housing that has changed and moved, and are also based on older firefighting techniques.' It is accepted 'fire stations are focal points within their local communities' but concluded that reassessment of where resources are located and their configuration is essential if a coherent plan for transformation is to be delivered. 'By looking at activity levels, instances of false alarms and the concentration of stations in given areas', SFRS notes that it will be in the best position to determine if a more effective approach can be achieved. This could see new stations built, others disposed of, and re-shaping resource and combining local capabilities, including sharing facilities with our police and ambulance partners.

SFRS says it will look at these issues in the context of a national service, allowing them to deploy resources from right across the country into communities with the greatest need.

It is also noted explicitly that there is no plan to close some stations simply in the interests of saving money.

(c) **Using the latest technology and new types of vehicles**

SFRS should continue to improve its capabilities by learning from and using proven technologies from across the world. The use of the Ultra High Pressure Lance (UHPL) system, which enables firefighters to initially tackle fires in enclosed spaces from outside the building, and deployment of faster mid-sized vehicles are cited as examples.

(d) **Strengthening our services to rural communities**

The Consultation highlights significant difficulties in recruiting Retained Duty System (RDS) firefighters upon which the effective operation of the service heavily relies in rural areas. This has been in challenge within the Scottish Borders

In a reassuring statement of intent for rural areas, the Consultation states that 'We need to take positive steps to improve availability of RDS appliances as our rural communities should expect the same level of protection as those in urban areas.' This means:

- an integrated programme to strengthen the RDS and improve availability
- use of the latest technology and firefighting technology referred to above
- introduction of more flexible mobilising protocols referred to above.

Significantly, it is also proposed that new whole-time rural manager positions be introduced in key locations across Scotland. These are described as 'high value and skilled roles [which] will support the delivery of local training, undertake preventative work and increase the availability of appliances during daytime.'

(e) **The future firefighter**

As well as revision to crewing models, mobilising arrangements and the new technology and techniques, it is proposed all Scotland's firefighters will benefit from new fully-harmonised conditions and more flexible working arrangements and mobility. This recognises that the future firefighter will have a significantly expanded role, expected to provide Emergency medical response, take part in the multi-agency response terrorism, respond to environmental events, assist with wider youth and social prevention work, and undertake inspection and enforcement. The benefits of this approach have already been seen in the Borders with the support for dealing with out-of-hours cardiac arrests, the involvement of the service in supporting young people with training initiatives, and wider prevention advice and support given to vulnerable people in their own homes.

4 HOW SHOULD THE COUNCIL RESPOND?

- 4.1 The long-term constraint on public sector resources, a changing operational environment and increasing public expectations mean that, like councils, SFRS is compelled to review its objectives and transform how it operates. The Consultation seeks to do this and to solicit public and stakeholder views on its plans for the future.
- 4.2 For Scottish Borders Council, three considerations are important. These are:-
- (a) The impact of the consultation proposals upon the type and quality of service provided by SFRS in the Scottish Borders
 - (b) the impact of the proposals upon the outcomes to which both the Council and the SFRS are committed through Community Planning; and
 - (c) how the proposals are viewed by the public of the Scottish Borders in the Council's roles as democratic representative body and community leadership.

- 4.3 A draft response has been prepared and is presented for the consideration of Council. This seeks to take a balanced view of the drivers for change, potential areas of change and to measure these against the three considerations referred to. An obvious challenge is that proposed changes are currently at a high level, so the detailed implications and specifically the precise consequences for the Scottish Borders are not clear.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

No costs attach directly to this report, but it is possible that decisions taken by the SFRS could have implications for the services of public sector partners including the Council. These implications could mean some increase in costs or a decrease in costs to the Council. The precise consequences are likely only to become clear once SFRS's detailed proposals for the Scottish Borders area are known.

5.2 Risk and Mitigations

The risks associated with this report relate to SFRS's proposals for change in pursuing a programme of transformation for the service. There is a need for more detail to understand the positive and negative consequences of change for the Council and the Scottish Borders generally.

5.3 Equalities

No equalities implications flow directly from this report, but it is possible that SFRS's detailed proposals will have an equalities impact on people in the Scottish Borders. This is something that the Council would expect the SFRS to assess through compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty. However, it is also something that the Council will be attentive to in considering the implications of the SFRS's detailed proposals for the Scottish Borders.

5.4 Acting Sustainably

No direct economic, social or environmental effects flow from this report, but SFRS's detailed proposals may have an economic, social or environmental impacts and the Council will need to be attentive to this in assessing detailed proposals so that it may respond appropriately.

5.5 Carbon Management

No carbon management issues flow directly from this report, but they may flow from the SFRS's detailed proposals, and should be highlighted in the Council's response where appropriate.

5.6 Rural Proofing

It is clear from the focus of the SFRS Consultation upon 'strengthening our service to rural communities' that there will be an impact on rural communities. The Council welcomes such focus in its draft response to the Consultation, with the whole-time rural manager positions suggesting a positive development for rural communities. Again, however, much will depend on the detailed proposals which emerge from the Consultation, and the Council will need to assess and respond further in light of the details.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Corporate Management Team, Chief Financial Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, the Service Director Strategy and Policy, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Chief Officer HR, and the Clerk to the Council and Members of the Council's Police, Fire and Rescue and Safer Communities Board have been consulted on the report.

Approved by

Tracey Logan
Chief Executive

Signature

Author(s)

Name	Designation and Contact Number
Douglas Scott	Senior Policy Advisor, 01835 825155

Background Papers: Consultation Paper - 'Your Service Your Voice: A consultation on the safe and planned future of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service'

Previous Minute Reference: None

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Douglas Scott can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

Contact us at Douglas Scott, Senior Policy Adviser, Scottish Borders Council
dscott@scotborders.gov.uk tel: 01835 825155