

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Scottish Borders Council Response to 'Your Service Your Voice' A consultation on the safe and planned future of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service**

**On 13 February 2018 the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service published 'Your Service Your Voice' A consultation on the safe and planned future of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. This document is Scottish Borders Council's response to that consultation, and was formally approved by the Council's Executive on [date] and the Council's Community Safety Panel on [date]. As the proceedings of these meetings are a matter of public record, the Council expects its response to be published by SFRS.**

1. 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
2. Scottish Borders Council is supportive of the SFRS's ambitions to transform, and grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the Consultation SFRS has established to validate its proposals. The Council concurs fully with the SFRS's expression of its main purpose as '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. Furthermore, the Council puts on record its strong relationship of joint working with SFRS in the Scottish Borders, where SFRS is a highly valued partner in Community Planning.
  3. The need for transformation is an established reality of public sector service provision. The Council has been implementing its own transformation programme for well over a decade in response to an environment of declining resources, the need for increased efficiency, productivity and better

outcomes, and increased public expectations. As the Consultation 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.' This means 'increased focus on effective harm prevention measures through a more holistic approach to assessing risk and taking action to reduce or remove it.' In response, the Council acknowledges that the nature of risk has changed, and is supportive of the precept that changes are required in the shape of the service, and the skills and training of firefighters. It is the precise nature of these changes and their potential implications for Scottish Borders, which are of interest to the Council and the people it serves.

4. In assessing those implications three factors are important to the Council. These are:-

- the impact of the consultation proposals upon the type and quality of service provided by SFRS in the Scottish Borders
- the impact of the proposals upon the outcomes to which both the Council and the SFRS are committed through Community Planning; and
- how the proposals are viewed by the public of the Scottish Borders in the Council's roles as democratic representative body and community leadership.

5. The Council extrapolates five key areas of change as being identified in the Consultation. They comprise:-

- 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

6. The rationale for all five potential areas of change is the need for resources to be aligned much more closely with needs. As noted, the Council fully understands and is sympathetic to the imperative which underpins such thinking. It is right however, that specific proposals are tested with the public and stakeholders to establish not simply whether they objectively deliver the outputs sought by SFRS, but whether they will deliver intended outcomes and respond to public expectations. In the Scottish Borders, Sub-paragraphs iv) a review of the national 'fire station' footprint and v) new

whole-time rural manager positions have particular resonance. However, we consider each of the proposals in turn.

## **7. A more effective crewing model**

- 7.1 The Council has no issue with a move to a 4 plus 4 system for first and second deployments. Scottish Borders is heavily dependent on the Retained Duty System (RDS). A lower numerical threshold for deployment should ensure greater use of fire appliances, which might otherwise not have been deployed on account of crew unavailability.
- 7.2 Similarly, with incidents and calls to SFRS occurring overwhelmingly during the day rather than at night, the Council supports a more flexible solution for night-time crewing to ensure better correlation between demand and resources.

## **8. Reviewing our national 'fire station' footprint**

- 8.1 The corollary of changes to the focus, skill set and shape of SFRS is a review of the current station footprint. This is an issue of interest and potential concern to the Council. The Council accepts there is force in the Consultation's contention that 'our stations and the resources within them were designed for another era.' The Council also accepts the rationale that assessment of where resources are located and might be optimised is essential if a coherent plan for transformation is to be delivered. However, the Consultation is also right that 'fire stations are focal points within their local communities'. Thus, assessment of the value of stations should not be a purely mechanistic exercise which looks only 'at activity levels, instances of false alarms and the concentration of stations in given areas'.
- 8.2 A broader approach is needed, especially in the light of the broader role envisaged for firefighters and the supervening Christie principles which animate the Consultation. In short, assessment of the future fire station footprint should also pay reference to community wellbeing.
- 8.3 The assurance that there is no plan to close some stations 'simply in the interests of saving money' is reassuring, but, for the Council, as for others, 'the devil is in the detail'. While generally supportive of the SFRS assessment of its asset needs, the Council's views will be shaped by the specific proposals for the Scottish Borders. With this in mind, the Council positively welcomes dialogue with SFRS to consider detailed proposals for the Scottish Borders.

## **9. Using the latest technology and new types of vehicles**

- 9.1 The Council supports SFRS's efforts to continue to improve its capabilities by learning from and using proven technologies from across the world.

## **10. Strengthening our services to rural communities**

10.1 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. The Council recognises that recruitment to the RDS has been a significant challenge in parts of the Scottish Borders. Thus, the statement 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' is particularly welcomed. The Council notes and supports the proposed integrated programme to strengthen the RDS, use of technology, and more flexible mobilising protocols to enhance service provision and cover in rural areas.

10.2 The Council also notes with particular interest the new whole-time rural manager positions which it is proposed be introduced in key locations across Scotland. 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', it appears to the Council that these individuals would provide the foundation stones on which the most comprehensive and most effective coverage in rural areas might be built. The Council would welcome discussion with SFRS about the details of this proposal and how it would relate to the Scottish Borders.

## **11. The future firefighter**

11.1 Like the Council, the Fire and Rescue Service is nothing without the people who deliver its services. The Consultation envisages a significantly expanded role for the future firefighter, 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 Council welcomes this, and views it as strongly supportive of the partnership working agenda of Community Planning. The benefits of this approach have already been seen in the Scottish Borders with the support for dealing with 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.

11.2 It will be important for partners to continue a dialogue about how such developments support their collective efforts to drive improved outcomes. New fully-harmonised conditions and more flexible working arrangements and mobility are an acknowledgement of the new demands which will be placed on firefighters, and should facilitate development of more flexible crewing models, mobilising arrangements and the use of new technology and techniques.

## **12. Conclusion**

12.1 Scottish Borders Council is generally supportive of the aims of transformation agenda highlighted in the Consultation. However, the potential exists for differences of view between the Council and SFRS over specific impacts from SFRS's proposed 4 year transformation programme. The Council regards early discussion with SFRS about detailed proposals for the Scottish Borders as essential and looks forward to engagement with SFRS to this end.