

Consultation on the Future of the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland – Consultation Response

Responses are provided in accordance with the questions posed by the consultation document.

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

The vision is felt to be relevant with the caveat on the need for prominence to be given in meeting local needs through a Fire and Rescue Service which has a strong, meaningful and visible local presence.

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

There needs to be more explicit reference within the key principles for the local contribution which the Fire and Rescue Service make towards the attainment of local priorities and outcomes and in particular, towards Community Safety outcomes based on a preventative approach.

It is only in recent years that the priorities of the Fire and Rescue Service have been widened to focus on a more holistic and preventative approach on Community Safety. Continuing commitment and priority needs to be given to this approach within any new structure.

The Fire and Rescue Service must continue to effectively contribute to local emergency planning arrangements.

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

The option to decentralise the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service should be seriously considered to promote an effective locally devolved structure which local communities and other key stakeholders from the public, third and private sectors will be able to identify and make local accountability much easier to secure.

We take the view that an effective locally focused Fire and Rescue Service is key in being able to best meet local needs and our ability to deliver on local priorities and outcomes. Examples of existing successful partnership working involving Central Scotland Fire and Rescue Service include:

- Act Safe, Keep Safe, where the Service works with marginalised young people at risk of entering the Criminal Justice System by educating them on the Service, its aims, fire prevention and safety and other aspects of good citizenship through a programmed course of support and events;
- Safe Drive, Stay Alive, which is a high impact campaign aimed at secondary school pupils to reduce accidents, deaths and serious injuries amongst young people; and
- The Young Fire Setters Intervention Scheme which works with young people who have started or who have a fascination with fire. The service works with each young person

and their families over a defined timescale to make a positive impact on their behaviour. A follow-up meeting is also organised to monitor on-going progress.

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

The achievements of local brigades such as Central Scotland Fire and Rescue Service, have been many and considerable. These need to be preserved within any new structure. This includes performance on a number of statutory indicators which is ahead of the Scottish average.

The current structure reflects de-centralisation and priority must be given to provide a clear local fire and rescue presence, which will be accountable and make a meaningful contribution to the attainment of local priorities and outcomes. The Fire and Rescue Service must maintain its presence within local CPPs and have a reporting responsibility for its contribution towards the attainment of local priorities and outcomes.

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

While agreeing in general with the desired benefits of restructuring, there is a need to ensure the risks in creating a potentially remote, large and unresponsive nationally focused organisation are avoided. Any new structure must therefore be capable of demonstrating that it can deliver benefits and added value at a local level through contributing to the attainment of local priorities and outcomes.

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

We take the view that local accountability and scrutiny must be preserved in some form. The Central Scotland Fire and Rescue Service Joint Board has been highlighted as an example of good practice in recent times and we would therefore argue for its continuation.

The Fire and Rescue Service can also be held to account by the Scottish Parliament through its committee structure, thus giving MSPs a role on both accountability and scrutiny.

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

There are aspects of the proposed accountability framework which are to be commended, such as continuing to support work through Community Planning and SOAs. Concern is expressed however, on the proposed approaches at a very local level and whether they will be:

- Effective through lack of decision-making powers and holding the service directly to account;
- Able to overcome traditional public apathy on engaging with public services; and
- A barrier to other forms of local community engagement by complicating and duplicating an already crowded landscape.

It is essential that any proposals on community engagement and participation are developed and worked through with local CPPs. If joint boards are to be stood down, Elected Members already hold Council Services to account through scrutiny committee or equivalent. As an alternative to joint boards it would be pragmatic for local senior officers to have a direct reporting and accountability responsibilities to these existing arrangements, rather than establishing a 'Blue Light' committee covering all emergency services.

The local aspect of the Fire and Rescue Service needs to be relevant, meaningful and value adding. Critical to this, is the role of local senior officers. Both Elected Members and Senior Officers from Local Authorities and/or CPPs need to have a strong influence in their recruitment and in developing their roles and responsibilities.

The link between local funding and local service accountability needs to be retained in some form within any new structure to help achieve the locality aspirations proposed by restructuring.

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

This is outlined within the response to question 7.

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

The same structural solution should be sought for both the reform of the Fire and Rescue Service as well as the Police Service. This will also promote co-terminosity of management, leadership and service delivery at a local level.

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

In providing a preference account has been taken of the following factors that appear to have influenced this consultation exercise:

- The lack of a clear rationale and evidence within the consultation to justify the pursuit of either the single service or reduced regional structure options; and
- It is the local face of the Fire and Rescue Service which is most important to meet the needs of both our communities and citizens. Our response is therefore focused on giving constructive comment on this perspective.

Question 11: To assist with our Equality Impact Assessment on the reform, please describe any equality issues (in relation to race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, transgender people and religion) relevant to each of the options.

Not applicable.

Question 12: To assist with our Regulatory Impact Assessment, please describe any financial or other impacts for business, charities and the voluntary sector relevant to each of the options.

Not applicable.

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?

While there are likely to be a number of issues where collaboration across the emergency services at a national level would be beneficial; the most beneficial form of collaboration often takes place at a very local level to resolve what are very often operational issues. The latter must be recognised and maintained within any new structure.

There is scope at a local level for wider collaboration between the three key emergency services on home and personal safety.

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?

The concept of community resilience needs to be more fully developed in a wider partnership context. Most CPPs across Scotland are either currently developing, or indeed progressing ideas on how communities and citizens can have greater responsibility for their own wellbeing and for improving the areas in which they live. This will take place within the context of Community Planning and will include community resilience. Hubs and asset sharing are concepts which we are currently progressing locally.