

The Highland Council

Community safety, public engagement and equalities committee

Agenda Item	12
Report No	CPE 38/13

Consultation on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Strategic Plan – Highland Council's draft response

Report by Assistant Chief Executive

Summary

This report includes a draft response to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's consultation on its first strategic plan.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is consulting on its [first strategic plan for 2013-16](#). It is to be complemented with annual operating plans. A draft response to the consultation questions is appended. Although the consultation closes on 31st August 2013, we have been given an extension so that the Committee can consider the response.
- 1.2 We previously provided feedback on the Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2013 which sets out the Government's 58 priorities for the service. This was agreed at the Council meeting in March 2013.
- 1.3 Our Programme contains a commitment that we will plan for effective engagement with the new national services for police and fire and rescue and the Scottish Ambulance Service. By responding to this consultation we will support the Programme commitment.

2. The consultation questions and draft response

- 2.1 The consultation questions focus on the vision; values; and aims of the service. These are summarised below and a draft response is appended.
- 2.2 Vision
The strategy sets out the vision as follows:
'We will be a world leading service that others look to because our approach of working together for a safer Scotland is delivering real improvements in our communities. As a valued partner we will work with the communities of Scotland to make them safer and stronger; helping them to help themselves; continuously improving our services to meet local needs and responding where required.' It also describes approaches such as innovation, creativity and challenging thinking to ensure the right resources are in the right place to manage risk effectively and for services to be available 24/7.
- 2.3 Values
Eight values are identified and explained. They are: safety; dignity;

excellence; diversity; fairness; equality; integrity; and respect. The descriptions of these values refer to how the SFRS will support communities and how they will support SFRS staff.

2.4 Aims

Four strategic aims are identified. They are:

1. Improved safety of communities and staff;
2. More equitable access to fire and rescue services;
3. Improved outcomes through partnership; and
4. Develop a culture of continuous improvement.

The strategy also sets out for each aim what the SFRS will do, how they will do it and the targets to use.

2.5 The draft response attached welcomes the vision, values and aims set out in the strategy document. National targets are also aligned with those agreed locally through the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA). The response also highlights areas for clarification, improvement and reinforcement. Key suggestions to feed back in the consultation response are around:

- Making a closer connection to the SOA and partnership processes that are already in place and work well, e.g. plans for more partnership engagement with local communities, partnership evaluation and the importance of the SOA in influencing local plans. There are risks if a single agency approach is taken to these activities so local flexibility for the local senior officer should be supported where that makes sense.
- Reinforcing the appreciation that different arrangements are needed in different parts of the country given the varied operating context. This includes the need for more reassurance that there will be effective engagement with partners and communities as the asset rationalisation plan is developed.
- Stronger recognition of climate change and equalities implications and preventative activities.

3. **Implications**

3.1 Resource implications – there are no new resource implications for the Council arising from the draft consultation response.

Legal implications – the SFRS has a legal duty to involve the Council in setting its priorities and in agreeing local fire and rescue plans. The Council's feedback can demonstrate its engagement in the process.

Equalities implications – included in the draft response is the need for flexibility for the local senior officer to contribute to agreed partnership action to provide more community reassurance to people with disabilities and in areas of multiple deprivation.

Climate Change/Carbon Clever implications – included in the draft response is the need to include climate change in the risk profile for Scotland and the scope for flexibility for the local senior officer to contribute to the Carbon Clever initiative.

Risk implications – in addition to the climate change comments above, included in the draft response is the need to support partnership processes to avoid risks to the SOA and to provide reassurance that there will be engagement on any asset rationalisation.

4. Recommendation

4.1 Members are asked to consider and agree the final response to the consultation on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Strategy, with a draft response appended.

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Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Strategic Plan 2013-16 Consultation Questions

Introductory remarks

Highland Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's (SFRS) first strategic plan.

Engagement by the local senior officer of SFRS has been positive with the Highland Community Planning Partnership (CPP) in developing the new Single Outcome Agreement. SFRS board members have agreed to participate in the CPP too. The local senior officer and board members have also been involved in the Council's new scrutiny committee for community safety. Further engagement is planned through Ward Forums and Area Committees.

This response takes into account the alignment between the Highland SOA and the SFRS strategic plan and seeks to build on the good working relationship between the SFRS, the CPP and the Council.

Section 3 - Vision and values

Vision

1. Does our vision clearly set out what the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is trying to achieve?

Yes. The Council welcomes the ambition for the SFRS to be a world leading service, aiming to provide the best service 24/7 and seeking continuous improvement. We particularly welcome the inclusion in the vision to be innovative and creative with partners and communities and in our role in facilitating community planning we would be keen to support this part of the SFRS vision.

2. Would you have expected to see anything different?

The recognition of different challenges in different areas of Scotland is set out well in the operating context in the strategy document and this is helpful. Given that the Council's area presents particular challenges in delivering fire and rescue services in rural and remote areas including populated islands and with a long coast line that requires particular responses to emergencies, we would welcome some acknowledgement of this varied operating context in the vision.

Values

3. Do these values meet your expectations of a modern public service?

Yes. We note they refer to the communities the SFRS serves as well as the role of SFRS as an employer.

4. Would you have expected to see anything else that is not reflected in this values set?

Perhaps a reference to partnering could be made given the importance recognised elsewhere in the strategy of community planning and engagement with communities, but these may be seen as implicit in the values identified. There may be scope to add 'Our partners' in the diagram that shows how the values relate to 'Our staff' and 'Our communities'.

Section 4 – Our aims for the development of the service

We have set four strategic aims for the service to help us deliver our vision and meet the Government's expectations of reform.

5. Would you have expected to see different/additional strategic aims?

No, a small number of strategic aims makes sense.

We have set out what we will do to achieve those aims and how our activities will meet specific targets set for the service by Government e.g. reduce fire casualties by 5% each year.

6. Is it clear to you how our activities will achieve our four strategic aims and targets?

To some extent. While it is helpful to see a description of the type of action to support the aims, sometimes this does not explain that activity well enough or how that will be done in partnership. Examples include: develop process for on-going evaluation of partnerships and rationalisation of the SFRS estate.

7. Would you expect the service to be engaging in different/additional activities to achieve those aims?

Support for targeted diversionary activities, such as the Firesetters programme would be worth including, rather than focusing only on national public safety campaigns. This would support the Government's and the CPP's preventative approach. Further feedback on specific aims is provided below.

It is important to us that as a key stakeholder/partner in our service, these aims and activities are meaningful to you and that they will:

- Make communities/businesses safer and stronger;
- Demonstrate our desire to work in partnership to support activities and initiatives that help to make communities/business safer and stronger
- Drive improvement in the way we do things.

In that context, please consider each strategic aim and associated activities.

Strategic aim 1: Improved safety of our communities and staff

8. Do our aims and activities in this section meet your expectations of the service – if not, why not?

Yes, it can be seen that the activities will work towards the aim and it is helpful to see the timescales for these. A few other suggestions are:

- One of the activities in the strategy is to develop a process of on-going evaluation of partnerships. In Highland the model we have used for partnerships so far is the Public Service Improvement Framework and other CPPs may use other models. Given that CPPs may have invested already in particular models it would be helpful if the SFRS could take that into account before creating something new that might duplicate effort and undermine local partnership processes.
- One of the targets is to reduce special services casualties (non-fire). It would be helpful to clarify each time this is mentioned that this includes casualties from Road Traffic Collisions including collisions involving motor cyclists. It is not until the end of the strategy document that this becomes clear. SFRS plays an important part in responding to these in Highland where we have several arterial routes as well as B routes and rural roads. Road safety is also a priority for partnership action in the Highland SOA and it is a top community safety concern of the Highland public. Clarifying the definition of special services casualties earlier would be helpful.
- Another target relates to reducing the number of non-domestic fires. It would be useful to clarify what these might be, for example wild fires, as these have been an issue in Highland and are included in our SOA.
- We wonder whether having a target to reduce deliberate fires set would be helpful. This is included in our SOA.

Strategic aim 2: More equitable access to fire and rescue services

9. Do our aims and activities in this section meet your expectations of the service – if not, why not?

Yes, providing the local plans developed include the community risk profile and the type of service that is needed to effectively respond to incidents. A key concern for the Highland area would be any reduction in responsiveness to incidents in rural and remote areas. This should be taken into account in the national review of specialist and national resources. We note that in the description of aim 3 below you give the commitment to working with partners and to involve communities in the design, delivery and evaluation of services.

Strategic aim 3: Improved outcomes through partnership

10. Do our aims and activities in this section meet your expectations of the service – if not, why not?

Yes, although there are three points that could strengthen this outcome:

- Stronger reference to emergency planning in the 'what we will do' table might give this better prominence than its inclusion elsewhere in the strategy.
- We note that one of the actions is to develop a stakeholder engagement strategy. It would be helpful if this allowed flexibility for local senior officers to use any locally agreed partnership engagement approaches. For example in Highland the local senior officer is working with Police Scotland to engage with communities on local plans through the Ward Forums organised by the Council. We would also encourage more partnership surveys, rather than single agency surveys, especially where mechanisms already exist for this activity. In Highland we will be promoting the use of the Council's Citizens' Panel for partners to use and contribute to. Our CPP is also trying to develop more integrated ways of building capacity in communities and for community development. We would favour local flexibility for local senior officers to do this in partnership rather than through separate agency arrangements.
- In our community safety section of the SOA with partners we have identified a partnership outcome to reduce fear of crime particularly for people with disabilities and for people living in areas of multiple deprivation. SFRS has a key role to play in providing community reassurance. Also given the values in the strategy around diversity, equality, fairness and respect, it might be helpful to make reference to any targets relating to reducing the inequality gap for particular groups or particular places in local plans. While these will be identified locally, some acknowledgement in the national strategy that these should be included in Local Plans would be useful.

Strategic aim 4: Culture of continuous improvement

11. Do our aims and activities in this section meet your expectations of the service – if not, why not?

Yes, but we note that from September 2013 to March 2016 there is a stated action on the rationalisation of the SFRS estate. As noted under aim 2 above, a key concern for the Highland area would be any reduction in responsiveness to incidents in rural and remote areas. It would be helpful if the reference from aim 3 to involve communities in the design, delivery and evaluation of services and responding to their ideas on how to meet their needs better is also included in aim 4. This would provide further assurance in the strategy that there would be engagement of partners and communities in the planned rationalisation process.

Additional comments

12. Please make any additional comments that have not been covered in previous questions.

There are two areas to highlight:

- In section 2 of the strategy on the Scottish operating context a description of the risk profile is provided. However this does not

mention climate change and it would be useful for the strategy to include a section on the potential climate change impacts for SFRS, drawing on the national adaptation strategy as well as work done in CPPs to identify regional risks and adaptive capacity. This may include for example the increased likelihood of responding to emergencies such as wild fires, flooding and landslides. In addition, the Council is leading a major initiative for Inverness to be carbon neutral in a low carbon Highland by 2025 (branded as carbon clever) and we would seek the local SFRS to participate in that. Flexibility for the local senior officer to contribute to reducing regional carbon emissions would be helpful.

- In section 7 of the strategy the relationship between the strategic plan, annual operating plans, functional, local and team/personal plans is illustrated; however no mention is made of the community plan or SOA. Given that community safety is one of the national priorities to be addressed in SOAs and the SFRS strategy highlights the importance of partnership working, this omission does not make sense. It is the Council's view that the local plan for fire and rescue should flow from the SOA, as community safety priorities were identified in partnership, as well as addressing the requirements of the SFRS strategic plan.