

The Highland Council
Communities and Partnerships Committee
23 March 2016

Agenda Item	8
Report No	CP/04/16

**Feedback from the Meeting of the Scrutiny Chairs for the North of Scotland
March 2016**

Report by Head of Policy and Reform

Summary

This report outlines the feedback from the meeting of the scrutiny chairs for the North of Scotland held in March 2016.

1. Background

- 1.1 Members are aware that the Chair of the Committee and his predecessors has met with the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees for the island authorities over the past 3 years to share their practise in engaging with and scrutinising police and fire and rescues services. These meetings were informal and took place once or twice a year. Following consideration at the last Committee meeting on the review of police governance, one of the suggestions the Council fed back to the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) was the scope to create a forum of Chairs for the North of Scotland to engage with the Minister as well as the national boards for police and fire and rescue.
- 1.2 Since then the Chair of the Committee extended the invite to the forum to the respective Chairs in Moray Council, Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council. He also arranged for any Board members to participate along with senior officers from Police Scotland and the SFRS. The Forum met on 11 March 2016 in Inverness. This report outlines the feedback from that meeting for Members information.

2. Developing a forum for the North

- 2.1 The meeting was well attended with the Chairs from six local authorities, with Aberdeen City Council submitting apologies. The new Chair of the SPA, Andrew Flannigan, attended along with senior officers from Police Scotland. The Local Senior Officer from the SFRS also participated.
- 2.2 The agenda included:
- an up-date on Police control rooms and the progress with the assurance required for the migration of functions from Inverness to Dundee;
 - how the forum should operate in the future.

The key discussion points and the actions agreed at the meeting are summarised below.

2.3 Police control rooms

Chief Superintendent Allan Spiers described the process of change Police Scotland has embarked on and the progress being made with the assurance required by HMICS and the SPA for the migration of functions, following the decision by the SPA to move from 11 to 5 centres for Scotland. He confirmed:

1. The rationale for the change (the need for a consistent command and control system to support a national police force and the difficulties presented by the stand alone facilities inherited from the former 8 regional forces).
2. The need to have a support service that handled calls, despatched the response and made sure that officers despatched had the best possible information to respond.
3. The model of a virtual service centre to receive calls, three control rooms (Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh) and a national data facility in Inverness, staffed by staff with the right training and the right systems in place to respond well. There will be further recruitment of up to 20 new posts to staff the Inverness centre.
4. The requirement that all 30 recommendations set out by the HMICS are completed before any transfer of functions take place. Assurance internally is also being sought through peer review and testing of systems and strong project management around systems changing.
5. Assurance for local members on the transfer process and good and early communication before any change takes place. The aim is that the public does not notice any change to the service they receive when functions transfer. The staff deployed are all local officers.
6. The challenges in the process of change were recognised as resourcing and staff turnover while ensuring business continues uninterrupted. Issues of dialect, accents and local descriptions of places were all recognised too.
7. The arrangements in place to make sure staff were properly supported, including: increasing recruitment to cover posts; training staff; temporarily relocating staff from Dundee into Aberdeen and Inverness to get to know the area and be more familiar with regional dialects and descriptions of places; consulting with staff on the changes affecting them and the options open to them.
8. There is a recognition that different areas need different things to be in place and that there are skills and practises to learn from the current call centres in operation. Many of the processes currently in place in Inverness will continue when the function transfers.

2.4 The Chair of the SPA confirmed that the SPA had made the decision to move from 11 to 5 centres so the current function in Inverness will migrate to Dundee. He confirmed that the SPA had to be satisfied that the transition would be safe and that the change would not create problems for the public before the function moves.

2.5 The concerns and questions raised about the planned transfer of functions by the Chairs of the Committees included:

- In the north there are major infrastructure installations of national significance e.g. oil and gas terminals and there needs to be a speedy

and accurate response if a major incident arises.

- Dealing with incidents in extremely remote areas needs good local knowledge of places to respond well.
- Locating all the control centres to the central belt raises issues of national resilience.
- How quickly can despatches happen from when the call is received?
- Power outages are experienced affecting BT coverage and mobile coverage is patchy across the region.
- Understanding dialects and local geographies, especially where several communities have the same name and official names e.g. for roads are not used locally.
- How does the system deal with misspellings of places?
- What are the succession training plans for staff?
- What scope is there for the SPA decision to relocate the function from Inverness to be reversed?
- Is the decision on timing of any change purely budget driven?
- Will the call handlers be able to speak to callers in Gaelic, especially important for some older people seeking assistance?
- What is the timetable for migrating the functions from Inverness to Dundee?
- Could the plans be postponed until 4G coverage is in place across the region?

2.6 In response the following points were made:

- Staff are trained to a high standard and they record everything in a Customer Relationship system and this is saved for future reference to make handling future calls from the same people quicker.
- When taking a call, if it is a priority or major incident, it can be despatched simultaneously and before the call ends through the electronic systems in use.
- The address gazetteer used is populated by Councils is up-dated by Police using it. As part of the system testing they are identifying obscure, problematic or less common descriptions of addresses from local officers and including them in the system. There is work to develop the gazetteer for common use with other emergency services so the best possible information is available to all.
- The time taken to close calls varies depending on the call. Getting the right response is just as important as the time taken to answer the call.
- Workforce planning is used to ensure the right staff with the right skills are in place now and in the future. Police Scotland recognises that their staff are their greatest asset and there is a programme of work to demonstrate their value to the organisation.
- Local police staff are now more assured having seen the process in operation and they have raised 103 points to be addressed before handover would be safe. These are all being worked on. Getting the right process in place is driving the timescale for change and not cost as costs have already over run.
- The indicative timescale for migrating the functions from Inverness to Dundee is late August 2016 and from Aberdeen late October 2016, but

this is conditional on the processes being in place for a safe transfer.

- The location of the three control rooms was based on the facilities available and infrastructure in place. The infrastructure costs of making Inverness a control room for calls are prohibitive.
- As well as relocating staff temporarily to Inverness and Aberdeen to understand dialects, accents and place names, staff with ability to speak other languages are also recruited. Currently there is active recruitment of Gaelic speakers and speakers of other languages including Polish and Romanian.
- In Northern Constabulary's time changes were made initially to reduce the number of places calls could be received from 72 to 13 and latterly from 13 to 1. That process was managed and the learning from it is being applied to the current change.
- Issues with mobile coverage and power outages were acknowledged.
- Inverness will still have a critical incidents control room when needed as well as the new national data centre with additional jobs.

2.7 Actions agreed

The following actions were agreed:

1. The Committee Chairs welcomed the presentation and felt the questions raised had been answered well and they agreed to visit the Glasgow control room in April as a group to see call handling and despatch in action. They agreed to feed back their views following this visit to the Chair of the SPA.
2. The Committee Chairs agreed to support the call for a single address gazetteer to be developed for all emergency services.
3. Further presentations on control rooms will be made to all Scrutiny Committees for members to ask questions and have answers.
4. Given that changes are planned too for the SFRS control room, although with much lower call volumes, a visit to the centre in Johnstone would be arranged to coincide with the observation of the Police control room in Glasgow.
5. Police Scotland was grateful for the points raised and will consider them further.

2.8 The operation of the forum in the future

As all present found the discussion above productive and helpful, it was agreed that an informal network should continue to operate, meeting 6 monthly and hosted by different local authorities. The next meeting is to be hosted by Aberdeenshire Council in Aberdeen in September 2016. The network would enable sharing good practice in scrutiny and engagement, joint representation of the chairs for the North of Scotland on community safety matters and improve engagement with the national boards, MSPs and Ministers.

2.9 It was also agreed that it might be helpful to expand the geography of Councils covered to coincide with the operational areas for the North for Police and SFRS to include Perth and Kinross, Angus and Dundee City Councils. This could lend weight to the North Forum. The Chair has agreed to invite them to participate.

2.10 The SPA Chair agreed that he would welcome the opportunity to attend annually as a way of engaging and consulting with local authority scrutiny chairs. The Assistant Chief Constable and local Divisional Commanders would attend all meetings. A similar arrangement was agreed for the SFRS.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource implications: staff and Member time are required to participate in the forum. Convening, chairing and secretariat support would be shared across the local authorities participating thus minimising the costs associated with hosting the meetings.

Legal implications: Members have a legal duty to engage with and scrutinise the national services for police and fire and rescue. A north forum is an effective way of doing that.

Equalities; Climate Change/Carbon Clever implications: None are identified

Risk implications: A North Forum should minimise the risk of national policy being insensitive to community safety issues for the region.

Gaelic and Rural implications: A North Forum should be able to influence national community safety policy on rural issues and the importance of the Gaelic language and culture.

4. Recommendation

4.1 Members are asked to note the issues raised in the first meeting of the North Forum for scrutiny chairs.

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