

Agenda Item	13
Report No	HC/11/18

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: The Highland Council

Date: 10 May 2018

Report Title: **SFRS Transformation – Consultation Response**

Report By: Acting Head of Policy

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) outlined in the autumn its intention to consider a programme of transformation in order to redesign the service to address current needs and demands. SFRS are now seeking views on their proposals.
- 1.2 This report introduces the Council's draft response to the consultation and asks Members to consider the response found at Appendix 1 and to agree a final response to the transformation proposals.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - Consider and agree a final response to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Transformation consultation.

3. Background

- 3.1 The consultation sets out the rationale for transformation of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. The current operating model for the SFRS dates from after the Second World War and the current model is no longer efficient nor flexible enough to address the current challenges; a decrease in fires and new and emerging risks including severe weather and international terrorism. The Scottish Government has provided funding to support this transformation of £15.5m.
- 3.2 Key features of the proposed transformation are:
- Change in operating model – including crewing shift patterns, footprint of stations and vehicle crewing levels;
 - Expanding the firefighter role – a focus on preventative work and emergency medical response; namely out of hospital cardiac arrests and falls within the home;
 - Using new technology to operate more effectively – including the use of smaller rapid response vehicles in rural areas and technology to fight fires from outwith buildings;
 - Strengthening the service in rural areas – use of new vehicles and technology to enable greater flexibility and response and new full-time officer roles to build capacity in rural communities.
- 3.3 The service are seeking views on their proposals including the vision for transformation, the change in operating model, the new role for firefighters and the use of new technology. Views are also sought on any further areas or ideas for transformation for the future.

4. Highland Council's Draft Response

- 4.1 The Council's draft response to the consultation can be found at appendix 1. This is based on feedback from discussion with SFRS personnel at Ward Business Meetings and a wrap-up session with the Local Senior Officer held at Glenurquhart Road.
- 4.2 The response reflects the positive feedback from Members regarding the proposals, particularly the impact upon rural communities. It expresses support for the overall vision of transformation which builds on the strengths of the existing service but also develops new, complementary roles. This will support other public services to manage demand but also, more significantly, benefit the communities they serve.

The response:

- Supports the proposed change in operating model including the move to greater flexibility and recognition that the needs of communities vary. Notes that it is critical to retain the footprint of stations in rural areas.
- Supports the change in firefighter role, particularly in relation to responding to out of hospital cardiac arrests and falls within the home. It notes the positive impact this will have in building capacity in rural areas.

- Welcomes the introduction of new vehicles and accompanying technology for many rural stations. This addresses a long-standing concern by the Council regarding crewing numbers and will enable improved response from RDS crews.
- Supports the introduction of full-time rural officers which will build capacity in rural areas including supporting RDS crews, local recruitment, prevention work and partnership activity.
- Suggests a number of areas of activity that could be considered for further development including the use of new technology on existing vehicles and crewing levels for emergency medical response.

4.3 Members are asked to consider and agree a final response for submission to SFRS.

5. Implications

5.1 *Resource, Risk and Legal* – there are no resourcing, risk or legal implications of the proposals for the Council.

5.2 *Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural)* – the proposals will strengthen and develop the service in rural communities.

5.3 *Climate Change and Gaelic* – there are no climate change or Gaelic implications.

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Date: 27 April 2018

SFRS Transformation Consultation

Response from The Highland Council

DRAFT

The Highland Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Consultation on its transformation agenda.

There is strong support for the vision outlined for the future of the service. It is truly transformational. The proposals build on the strengths of the existing service but develop complementary roles. These will support other public services to manage demand but also, more significantly, benefit the communities that it serves.

The Council recognises and agrees with the changing risks identified and believes that the proposals outlined will future-proof the service.

There is particular support for the range of proposals related to the Retained Duty Service (RDS) and that these significantly address the concerns outlined by this Council for some time. The proposals are seen as creating greater flexibility within the operating model and recognise that the needs of communities across Scotland vary. What is proposed is a more responsive structure that will result in safer communities for the future.

There is trust in the local SFRS and crews working within our communities and the proposals will enable and support crews to better serve their communities.

The following responds to the key proposals outlined:

Changing the Operating Model

The Council recognises the need for the service to change its operating model in order to reflect the needs of the organisation within the current environment and to operate as efficiently and effectively as possible. There is support for considering changing crewing models to reflect demand, but we would suggest that this should be done on an area basis to reflect the different population needs i.e. the patterns of deployment are likely to be different in the centre of Glasgow than within Inverness.

As with all public services, it is understood that the service will need to review its footprint of stations. However, given the significant distances between stations across the Highland Council area at present, the Council would struggle to see where any reductions could be made within this area and would be strongly opposed to any attempt to reduce station numbers across such a wide geographical area.

Expanding the Firefighter Role

The Council supports the proposals to expand the role of firefighters. This recognises the change in risk and challenge facing the fire service today and the broader range of incidents that officers are sent and respond to.

There is strong support for the expansion of the role to respond to emergency medical response; namely out of hospital cardiac arrests and falls within the home. Within rural communities, supporting and complementing the role of the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) will provide resilience for our remote and rural areas. It is recognised that the service is not replacing the role of SAS staff but providing a first responder role which can only have a positive and beneficial impact for the population. The Council is also reassured that based on trials to date, that the RDS can absorb this additional role and that it will not impact upon the capacity of the service.

Using New Technology

There is strong support for the new technology proposed to strengthen and improve the service, particularly in rural communities. The introduction of rapid response vehicles will greatly enhance the service within rural areas and enable crews to deploy to incidents on a more frequent basis. This use of smaller vehicles is more appropriate for many rural, single track roads and the proposed pattern of deployment to still enable support from larger, traditional vehicles, appears logical and sensible.

The introduction of 'cold-cut' technology alongside the new vehicles is also welcomed, both from the perspective of improved firefighter safety and from greater efficiency for tackling fires. Whilst it is recognised that that smaller vehicles do carry a reduced range of equipment, it is believed this is balanced against the introduction of this technology to enable crews to fight fires from outwith buildings and consideration about the technology needs within rural areas.

Improving Services to Rural Communities

The Council strongly welcomes the proposals and the very positive impact it is believed these will have within rural communities. The current proposals recognise that rural communities have different needs and that flexibility is crucial.

As outlined above, the introduction of new vehicles that will enable lower crewing levels directly addresses a long-standing concern of this Council. The changing nature of living and working patterns means that there are significantly lower numbers of people available during the day within rural communities. These proposals therefore directly address this issue and will enable local crews to respond more frequently which will have a positive impact on safety.

There is support also for the proposed full time rural posts and the additional capacity that this will bring to the SFRS in rural areas. This will enable greater

preventative, partnership and education work within rural areas but also provide stronger support to RDS staff, including around recruitment. The Council welcomes the reassurance that these additional posts will not impact upon the numbers of RDS volunteers within communities.

Overall, the impact of these proposals on rural areas and the RDS is seen to be extremely positive. This will provide a sustainable and reliable service for rural areas and is future proofing the service within these communities.

Suggested Areas for Development

In addition to the current proposals outlined, the Council believes that there are a number of further opportunities for development which the service may wish to consider:

- Expanding the new 'cold-cut' technology to traditional vehicles. The efficiency and safety of the new technology is impressive and could potentially provide additional capability for existing vehicles.
 - The reduced crewing levels proposed for the new rapid response vehicles will have a significant positive impact on the ability of RDS crews to respond to incidents. It is suggested that consideration is given to the numbers required to respond to out of hospital cardiac arrests and falls and whether it is possible for two staff (rather than 3/4) to respond to such incidents. This would increase capacity for response.
 - At present, crews can only respond to incidents within an emergency vehicle with an appropriate crewing number. However, on occasion, it may be that personnel would be available to support a nearby crew but cannot respond due to insufficient numbers to man the vehicle. Consideration should be given on how best to enable *additional* personnel to respond to an incident and support an already deployed team.
 - To consider whether SFRS staff could be supported to drive other emergency vehicles to enable them to deploy and vice versa, therefore increasing rural capacity. This could particularly support SAS crews where a paramedic is available but no second crew member to drive the vehicle is in place at that time.
 - The change in operating model for the service, greater focus on prevention and wider first responder role for the firefighter provides a good opportunity for refocusing recruitment. Within rural areas, combined with the increase in childcare hours, there is a particular opportunity to focus recruitment on women.
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