

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET: 4 MAY 2011

CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE IN SCOTLAND

Report by the Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the key principles of the Consultation issued by the Scottish Government on the Future of the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland and to seek approval of the Council's proposed response to the Consultation.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The Consultation on the Future of the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland was published on 12 February 2011 with responses requested by 5 May 2011. Given that this date coincides with the Scottish Parliamentary elections, it is anticipated that consultation activities will extend beyond this date.
- 2.2 The Consultation focuses on three options for the future structure of fire and rescue services in Scotland, namely:
- Option A – a single Scottish service
 - Option B – a regional structure
 - Option C – retain the existing eight service structures with increased collaboration
- 2.3 The consultation assesses strengths and weaknesses of the current structure of Fire and Rescue Services and invites views on:
- Delivering improved outcomes and how the quality of the service our communities receive can be improved;
 - Local and national accountability and how local engagement can be improved;
 - What this might mean for existing structures and roles, including opportunities for de-centralisation, and
 - Financial benefits and savings.
- 2.5 The consultation invites responses to 14 specific questions. The proposed response to these questions is set out in the Appendix to this report, for consideration by Cabinet.

2.6 A copy of the full Consultation paper is available from the Members' portal.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The future financial and resource challenges facing the public sector are acknowledged and generally understood. The consultation on the Fire and Rescue service is being considered alongside the broader public reform reviews that are also taking place, including the Christie Commission and a separate consultation on the future of policing in Scotland.

4. PROPOSED CONSULTATION RESPONSE

4.1 The proposed response to the Consultation is attached as an Appendix to this report. In summary, whilst a strong case has been made for the reform of the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland, a number of issues remain that require to be further considered and assessed before a final position could be taken on a preferred option relating to organisational structures, namely:

- The efficiencies that change would deliver and the cost of structural reform;
- Protection of the delivery of positive outcomes at a local level, and
- Governance arrangements that protect local democratic accountability.

Efficiency savings and the cost of reform

4.2 Unlike the work carried out in respect of the proposed reform of police services, the Consultation does not quantify potential efficiency savings that could be derived from structural reform of the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland. This assessment would be required to enable a fully informed position to be taken in respect of any of the preferred options.

4.3 Whilst it is accepted the identification and delivery of efficiency savings is currently a matter for each individual Fire and Rescue Service, a stated priority for a reformed Scottish Fire and Rescue Service should be the continued identification of efficiency opportunities.

4.4 On a related point, there has been no assessment or quantification of the cost of structural reform either in terms of the establishment of new governance arrangements or associated with contractual or employee matters.

Protection of the Delivery of Positive Outcomes at a Local Level

4.5 Whilst it is accepted that reform of the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland provides an opportunity to improve services at some levels, improvement and the continued delivery of outcomes at a local level must be protected.

- 4.6 The consultation paper does not make it clear how structural change would protect the delivery of positive outcomes for local communities. For instance, there has been no apparent consideration of the risk that existing local partnership working will be lost, damaged or hampered under a different structure, or of how a single Fire and Rescue Service would effectively respond to the local agenda and the demands of partnership working.

Governance Arrangements and Local Democratic Accountability

- 4.7 It is considered essential that local democracy and accountability is maintained at the heart of any reform process and should be enhanced rather than diminished.
- 4.8 Any governance arrangements adopted should not introduce unnecessary layers of bureaucracy that would negate some of the efficiency savings that may accrue from structural change.
- 4.9 The key issue here, as recognised in the consultation, is that the Fire and Rescue Service discharges its functions across both national and local contexts and, accordingly, the balance of accountability needs to reflect that. The current arrangements for local accountability through Joint Boards and CPPs achieve that, but there needs to be consideration of how it would be affected by any structural reform.

5. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial, legal or risk implications arising directly from this report.

6. COMMUNITY PLAN / POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership is responding separately to the consultation.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
1. Notes the key principles set out in the Consultation issued by the Scottish Government on the Future of the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland;
 2. Considers and approves the proposed response to the Consultation as detailed in the Appendix to the report;
 3. Remits the Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services to submit the final response to the Scottish Government by the due date, and

4. Agrees that, given the timescales involved, this matter be excluded from the call-in procedure, in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

Elizabeth Morton

Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

27 April 2010

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Scottish Government Consultation on the Future of the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland dated February 2011

Any person wishing further information should contact Iain Tough, Corporate Business Manager, Chief Executive's Office (Telephone 01563 576575)

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