



Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE1510](#)

Main Petitioner: Jody Curtis, on behalf of Emergency Service and Non-Emergency Service Call Centres

Subject: Emergency Service and Non-Emergency Service Call Centres

Calls on the Parliament to undertake a committee inquiry into the closure of Police, Fire, and Non-Emergency Service Centres north of Dundee. In particular, the major concerns raised have been the loss of public knowledge; public safety; officers being off the street and overwhelmed in managing the increased workload this would create.

Introduction

This briefing provides information on the decision of Police Scotland to close police Area Control Rooms and Service Centres and the decision of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to close fire and rescue Control Rooms. It also provides information on the work of the Justice Committee and the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing consideration of this issue.

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Government reformed police and fire and rescue services through the [Police and Fire Reform \(Scotland\) Act, 2012](#). The 2012 Act abolished the pre-existing eight police forces and eight fire and rescue services and in their place created a single police force¹ and a single fire and rescue service², both commencing operations on 1 April 2013. The Scottish Government intended that the Act would remove duplication, improve police and fire and rescue services and enhance accountability to local communities.

Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority

Police Scotland³, provides Contact, Command and Control through 10 legacy police force Area Control Rooms and nine Service Centres. These operate

¹ The Police Service of Scotland, but commonly known as Police Scotland

² Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

³ As at 17 February 2014

from two locations in Aberdeen, two locations in Glasgow and from locations in Bilston Glen, Glenrothes, Dumfries, Dundee, Inverness, Motherwell, and Stirling. 362 police officers and 1,133 civilian staff deal with around 600,000 emergency (999) and 3,600,000 non-emergency (101) calls a year. In addition to operational Area Control Rooms and Service Centres, Police Scotland also has a further seven sites which are unused and mothballed. These mothballed sites are to be disposed of.

At its meeting on [30 January 2014](#), the Scottish Police Authority agreed the strategic direction for Police Scotland's Contact, Command and Control arrangements. The paper setting out the strategic direction is available [here](#).

In summary, the paper states that the existing structures, technologies and processes inherited from the eight legacy police forces include barriers to the effective deployment of resources (officers and specialist units). The single force is unable to ensure that incidents are always responded to by the nearest available policing resource and this prevents it from delivering consistently high levels of service.

The strategic remodelling of Contact, Command and Control includes the closure of operational sites in Aberdeen, Dumfries, Glenrothes, Motherwell, Stirling, and Glasgow (Pitt Street); investment in ICT and the development of a wholly integrated service. Police Scotland states that remodelling will:

- improve productivity and performance;
- allow the release of between 155 and 212 staff;
- reduce overhead costs; and
- provide savings of between £5.2 million and £6.8 million per annum (between £46.62 and £73.68 million by 2026).

Voluntary exit, early retirement and redeployment schemes are in operation and a no compulsory redundancy policy is in place.

Timetable

Closure of Area Control Rooms and Service Centres are scheduled to take place between 30 April 2014 and 31 December 2015, while ICT⁴ investment is scheduled to conclude on 1 July 2016.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

The [Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland, 2013](#) sets out the Ministerial expectation that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) will bring together the best from the previous eight Fire and Rescue Services and create a modern, effective and efficient service.

The specific aims of fire reform are to protect and improve local services, to create more equal access to specialist support services and national capacity, and to strengthen the connection between fire services and communities.

⁴ C3i ICT systems

The SFRS has eight Control Rooms, which it inherited from the eight legacy fire and rescue services. Control Rooms answer emergency (999) calls and mobilise appliances to incidents. Control Room staff provide fire fighters and members of the public with safety critical and lifesaving information and advice and also strategically manage fire cover and quality-assure incident reports. Control Rooms are located in Maddiston (Falkirk) Dumfries, Thornton (Fife), Aberdeen, Inverness, Edinburgh, Johnstone, and Dundee.

At its meeting on [26 September 2013](#), the SFRS Board considered a [Strategic Intent](#) paper on property requirements. The paper advises that the existing Control Rooms have limited technological interoperability and flexibility and that this impacts adversely on their ability to always identify and mobilise appropriate resources to incidents.

The paper states that in recent years the number of emergency incidents taking place has declined as a result of a greater emphasis being placed on preventative work. Between 2008/09 and 2012/13 the number of incidents dealt with by Control Rooms fell from 104,368 to 83,586, a fall of 19%. The decline in incidents dealt with by individual Control Rooms varies between 8.09% in Aberdeen and 27.01% in Thornton.

The SFRS receives around 400 calls every 24 hours which results in the service responding to around 250 emergency incidents. The Johnstone Control Room is the busiest in Scotland and deals with 50% of the calls and incidents, responding to around 125 incidents per day. Edinburgh deals with 75, Dundee and Aberdeen 40, Inverness, Maddiston, and Thornton 15-20 and Dumfries 5.

The SFRS Strategic Intent paper advises that eight separate ICT and telephony systems for the existing Control Room estate cost £1 million per annum. The paper proposed reducing the number of Control Rooms to two which would reduce the number of staff by 71. This option, the paper estimates, would cost between £5.4m to £5.6m in voluntary severance and £566,000 for equipment. Voluntary severance costs would be recovered in two years. Staff reductions would thereafter save SFRS £2.8m per annum.

On 26 September 2013, the SFRS Board agreed to reduce the number of Control Rooms to three, subsequently deciding on 30 January 2014, after considering an [Options Appraisal](#)⁵ paper, to retain Control Rooms in Johnstone, Tollcross (Edinburgh) and Blackness Road (Dundee) and to close those in Aberdeen, Inverness, Dumfries, Thornton (Fife) and Maddiston (Falkirk).

The five Control Rooms to be closed employ 98 staff, which is 42% of all Control Room staff. The SFRS has a range of options available for affected staff: voluntary severance or early retirement / redeployment / relocation / pay

⁵ SFRS Report Number B/RR/1-14, Fire Control – Option Appraisal for Final Locations, 30 January 2014

protection and travel expenses as appropriate. As for the police service, a no compulsory redundancy policy is in place.

Timetable

The SFRS estimate that closing five Control Rooms and establishing a three Control Room model will conclude in 2-3 years, although a timetable is yet to be announced.

Scottish Parliament Action

The Justice Committee took oral evidence on the SFRS from a number of stakeholders on [18 June 2013](#). The evidence sessions only briefly examined the closure of Control Rooms.

At this evidence session John Duffy (Fire Brigades Union) advised that he was encouraged about how the work around Control Rooms was developing and that he was confident that a decision would be made which ensures that the service had the right number.

Sarah Duncan (Unison) advised that the decisions on how many Control Rooms are needed should be evidence-based and take into account the skills and experience of staff. She also advised that Unison are satisfied that the right elements are being looked at and that the right weight will be given to decisions about where Control Rooms are located in the future.

Following this evidence session, the Justice Committee decided to re-examine fire reform again in early 2014. It issued a call for written evidence on the impact of fire and rescue reform on 31 January 2014 but the proposed closure of Control Rooms is not being examined specifically.

The Justice Sub-Committee on Policing has been scrutinising the operation of the single police service, holding sessions on ICT, local policing and complaints and investigations. It has not specifically examined the rationalisation of police Area Control Rooms and Service Centres.

Gordon Scobie
Senior Researcher

4 March 2014

SPICe researchers are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@scottish.parliament.uk

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.