



Response to the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill

The UNISON Scotland Submission to the Scottish Parliament's Local Government Committee on their call for Written Evidence on the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill

February 2012

Scottish Parliament Local Government Committee Call for Evidence: Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill

Introduction

UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the call for written evidence from the Scottish Parliament's Local Government Committee regarding the above Bill.

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union representing over 162,000 members working in the public sector in Scotland, and represents police staffs as well as Fire and Rescue control room and support staff in Scotland. UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation exercise.

UNISON Scotland's Response

UNISON Scotland submitted a response to both Scottish Government consultation exercises on this Bill and responded to the Scottish Parliament's Finance Committee's Call for Evidence on the Financial Memorandum. As well as participating in this Call for Evidence, we will also be submitting information to the Call for Evidence by the Scottish Parliament's Justice Committee.

The focus of our response is on how the proposed reforms will interact with local government and the impact the changes will have on staff transferring to the new organisations.

Transfer of Staff

UNISON Scotland is concerned about a number of issues relating to workforce planning particularly for staff who may be currently employed by local authorities but are working for police forces. This could include staff in shared services, such as camera safety partnerships and elsewhere, who may be employed primarily with a local authority or other agency. The Bill states that such staff will be transferred, subject to a staff transfer scheme but there is little detail about this within the Bill.

UNISON Scotland would like further clarification on whether police staffs, once transferred to the new SPA, would be subject to the Scottish Government guidance on non compulsory redundancies. There is a concern that the projected savings from the move to a single police force will be mainly achieved by drastically reducing the number of police staffs – a recent ACPOS paper indicated as many as 2,000 posts were under threat. UNISON Scotland would like further clarification on this issue. This is causing anxiety and uncertainty around staff transfer. In order to ensure that Ministerial statements on jobs and conditions are met there may be a need for a statutory transfer order in the legislation.

With regards to the new Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, UNISON Scotland would like clarification on whether control room staff and support staff, once transferred to the new body would be subject to the Scottish

Government guidance on non compulsory redundancies. This would include greater clarification on which staff are transferred in areas where the delivery of services are provided by local authorities.

Local Accountability

One of the key issues for the new Police Service of Scotland will be how it interacts with local government and provides a level of local accountability. The Structure diagram within the original consultation showed that potentially 32 local commanders each will report to their local council but the councils can still call on the chief constable. However, it is the nature of public bodies to want to deal with the head so it is possible that the chief constable would end up attending 32 police authority meetings resulting in doing the same thing 32 times.

UNISON Scotland also has a concern regarding the varying ranks of local commanders. There is a concern that in the police hierarchy, more senior officers will have more control and influence over other officers, and that some councils who have relatively junior local commanders may have less influence and would not be able to access their fair share of resources for local policing. Local authorities may also feel that they deserve the same ranked commander as neighbouring authorities or the same number of police officers as their neighbours, creating an unhealthy competition between councils unless a clear criteria is set on the distribution of resources. UNISON Scotland is also concerned that this could lead to police staff being redeployed to other areas, possibly at short notice and disruption to work life balance.

The Bill also doesn't set out how the relationship between local commander and local authority should operate locally- leaving it up to each local authority to determine. This also raises the question of who is the local commander answerable to – is it the local authority for the area he/she covers and which may argue for one thing on behalf of its electorate, of the chief constable who may have other priorities? The police is arguably the most command and control oriented public service.

Similarly there are concerns about the democratic accountability of a single police force, how much representation will be afforded to areas such as the Highlands and Islands which have to cover a large land mass but has a lower population. There is a concern that any board meetings would be difficult for representatives from all across Scotland to attend and that many areas would have insufficient representation. This would break the link between communities and their local police force. UNISON Scotland is also concerned that the move to a national police force fails to meet the criteria for the Christie Commission for reform of public services.

More detail is also required on the issue of local budgets and whether or not there should be some funding specifically set aside for this. UNISON Scotland is concerned that local authorities may end up with additional budgetary pressures paying for the scrutiny of complaints, training for

members, or even the administration of a local police board – when this should come from the SPA resources rather than from local authorities own funding streams.

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