

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



## RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

### 1. Name/Organisation

Organisation Name

Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership (CPP)

Title Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  *Please tick as appropriate*

Surname

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### 3. Permissions - I am responding as...

Individual

/

Group/Organisation

*Please tick as appropriate*

(a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?

*Please tick as appropriate*  Yes  No

(b) Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis

*Please tick ONE of the following boxes*

Yes, make my response, name and address all available

or

Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address

or

Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

(c) The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).

Are you content for your **response** to be made available?

*Please tick as appropriate*  Yes  No

(d) We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

*Please tick as appropriate*  Yes  No

## CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

### Question 1: Is this the right vision for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service?

Yes  No  Don't know

Argyll and Bute CPP would be particularly interested in ensuring that local needs are met and that continuing to meet the priorities of the Single Outcome Agreement are prioritised through any structure put in place.

### Question 2: Do you agree that these should be the key principles for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service?

Yes  No  Don't know

These key principles appear to be appropriate and Argyll and Bute would be particularly interested in ensuring that accountability is localised ensuring that local outcomes are achieved and fire and rescue activities, in line with those of their partners, are locally accountable. As part of the review for the future of fire and rescue services, it is essential that any restructuring of public services is considered in the round and fed directly into the work of the Christie Commission to ensure that the cross agency impact of proposed restructures are fully considered before any changes are implemented. Other rescue services should be given full consideration such as the mountain rescue services and the coastguard service. A focus on 'outcomes for the people of Scotland' is essential, not the restructuring for the sake of restructuring.

### Question 3: Do you agree that the option to de-centralise the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service should be considered?

Yes  No  Don't know

This should be at least considered. However it is important to consider at the same time other models such as the Single Public Authority model which is being taken forward in the Islands Councils area to examine how decentralisation may operate in different areas. Again coordination with the Christie Commission is an essential element of pursuing options.

From the point of view of Argyll and Bute CPP, there is clear support of the current Strathclyde model and if any amalgamation of Fire and Rescue services were to go ahead, Argyll and Bute would wish to remain linked with Strathclyde. The rationale for this relates to the planning and management of potential incidents relating to the six hazardous sites that are located in Argyll and Bute. The geographical proximity to and close working relationship with partners in this area is a key part of civil contingency planning as is the scale of specialist resource that is available in the Strathclyde area.

Argyll and Bute CPP has benefitted from the partnership approach taken within Argyll and Bute. A regional approach to delivering future Fire and Rescue provision may help to ensure local accountability is maintained whilst at the same time having suitable size to ensure service continuity and support can be provided

centrally.

A single service may impact upon the ability to deliver on local challenges as it would require to be run centrally making it more likely to adapt policies that meet the needs of the majority and have difficulty separating the urban and rural environments. Accountability at a local level would be lost.

The ability to maintain close links with partners that build upon successes and further reduce incidences of fire, road traffic collisions (RTC), anti social behaviour etc can, based on recent experience, only be delivered in partnership with local personnel who understand the complexities of managing resources over a wide geographical area.

**Question 4: How well is the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service performing against what you believe to be the key principles and what do you consider to be the priorities for improvement?**

It appears to be performing well and local arrangements in place work well in Argyll and Bute with local performance being good and improving further. Continuing pursuit of shared assets and shared service with public sector partners is desirable and will be beneficial. The continued monitoring and development of the Single Outcome Agreement facilitates a scrutiny of performance and a collective approach to service prioritisation and improvement. This is an important and core element of local accountability, community consultation, improvement and communication across the community planning partnership.

**Question 5: Do you agree that these should be the desired benefits for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service?**

Yes  No  Don't know

**Are there others we should add?**

The desired benefit on close engagement with local communities should be expressed more strongly with implications of the potential for greater integration between key agencies as opposed to 'collaboration'.

**Question 6: What are your views on an appropriate mechanism for Ministers and MSPs to hold the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to account?**

Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Service is a member of the local government family and is accountable through local government on that basis. This should remain as is. The Single Outcome Agreement contains the agreed performance outcomes and related measures for the public sector and this should be the vehicle used for scrutiny. The Scottish Government maintains attendance at and close liaison with Community Planning Partnerships through link Directors. The creation of additional tiers of scrutiny should not be necessary. Local accountability would be diluted if scrutiny were to be removed to the Scottish Parliament and Ministers. A Blue Light Consultative Committee may be useful if it held a strategic, national role.

**Question 7: What are your views on an appropriate mechanism for local communities to hold the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to account?**

Use of Community Planning Partnerships and the monitoring/scrutiny of SOAs is essential in this process and is the most appropriate mechanism. The SOA process is maturing and further work still needs to be done to address some of the difficulties in performance management monitoring as this would aid scrutiny, but the creation of further layers of accountability will not assist this process. A Blue Light Consultative Committee may be useful in setting national standards or strategy. It is very important not to further complicate local accountability and consultative landscape and to channel engagement and accountability through CPP.

**Question 8: What is the right balance between the national and local mechanisms set out in questions 6 and 7?**

One suggestion would be to look at the level of themes / responsibilities accountable at the local and national levels. For example, at a national level, the Parliamentary Blue Light Committee (or any similar / equivalent future body) would be scrutinised against national themes such as terrorism and other national / transnational issues, whilst at a local level, the Blue Light Consultative Group (or any similar / equivalent future body) as part of Community planning would be scrutinised against local performance and outcome targets in the SOA. On the latter point, it would be sensible to submit performance outcomes at both levels to one or the other for information and overview so that issues could be raised across the structure.

**Question 9: Do you think that the number of fire and rescue services needs to be reduced?**

Yes  No  Don't know

The current governance arrangements appear to be too complex and this will inevitably create an unnecessary level of bureaucracy for few additional benefits. However, Argyll and Bute's relationship with Strathclyde Fire and Rescue service is positive and current arrangements in place work well. Argyll and Bute area is the largest geographical area within the nine areas of Strathclyde Fire and Rescue (SFR). This brings unique challenges that can only be dealt with by working closely with partners from the Community Planning Partnership and the current arrangements allow for this to work well.

**Question 10: If so, which option do you think should be pursued and why?**

Single service  Regional Structure

In line with the above comment, the current working arrangements between Argyll and Bute and Strathclyde Fire and Rescue work particularly well. Whether or not the fire service is nationalised or regionalised is not the key issue here for Argyll and Bute but the important view is that the area would not want to lose the current level of provision, support and positive working arrangements under either of the above structures. The most important issue is not the structure but the outcomes

for the people of Argyll and Bute.

**Question 11: To assist with our Equality Impact Assessment process, please also describe any equality issues (in relation to race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, transgender people and religion) relevant to your chosen option?**

Argyll and Bute CPP is not aware of any equalities issues in line with the above.

**Question 12: To assist with our Regulatory Impact Assessment, please also describe any financial and other impacts for business, charities and the voluntary sector relevant to your chosen option?**

It is difficult to assess in detail but any loss of local fire and rescue facilities could have a knock-on effect to the local economy related to the servicing of these premises and the placing of staff within a local community therefore supporting local businesses and facilities. The rural and island nature of Argyll and Bute relies heavily upon volunteers and retained fire fighters based in communities. This is an essential element of the service.

**Question 13: What aspects of collaboration and joint working between the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and other emergency services do you believe should be a key focus in future?**

The work of the Christie Commission should be the mechanism to bring all discussions on the future of public service together, rather than examine the blue light services in isolation. The current consultation does not facilitate radical solutions for shared services across public sector agencies, particularly in remoter areas. A sectoral approach should be resisted if the public sector is to make best use of lesser resources whilst protecting frontline services. As part of the Christie Commission work, the potential of a single blue light service in the future could be considered as could the 'Single Public Authority' model (currently being developed in the islands council areas). This must include the Scottish Ambulance Service as a key element of the sector. Fundamentally the focus for collaboration and joint working should be co-ordinated through CPP where performance scrutiny and accountability can be carried out effectively.

**Question 14: Do you think local fire stations should be developed into community resilience hubs, and, if so, what new services would you see them deliver?**

Yes  No  Don't know

Close working through Civil Contingencies planning is currently very effective and does, in some areas, use the Fire Station as the resilience hub. Further consolidation of this approach would be a helpful and effective addition to local resilience and clear planning. However it is important that it takes place in the context of a joint approach to asset management across all local and regional services, which will result in the most appropriate venue being used in each local area as the resilience hub. Again this underlines the importance of looking at reform across the whole public sector in a coordinated manner, focussing on

outcomes rather than solely single blue light.