

Call for Evidence
Post-legislative scrutiny of the Police and Fire Reform
(Scotland) Act 2012
by
The Scottish Parliament

Response from

Joint Universities Emergency Services Research Team

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Nottingham Trent University 

1. Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the call for evidence on the post-legislative scrutiny of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012.

We are a research team based at Nottingham Business School, which is part of Nottingham Trent University but also includes colleagues in Nottingham University Business School. We are responding on behalf of the Joint Universities Emergency Services Research Unit, which is a member of the Fire Sector Federation.

Over the last eight years, members of the Joint Research Team have been, *inter alia*, undertaking a series of comparative studies between the FRS in Scotland and the FRS in England, particularly since the devolution of powers and the Police and Fire Reform programme in Scotland.

In the past we have formally responded to the *Scottish Government Consultation: Fire and rescue framework for Scotland 2016* (Murphy and Greenhalgh, 2016) and more recently the *Your Service... Your Voice: A consultation on the safe and planned future of Scottish Fire and Rescue Service* (Murphy et al 2018).

We will address some questions outlined in the call for written views but note that we do not have to answer every question. Although we have some expertise in the policy, performance and governance of police services, our evidence relates to the Fire and Rescue Services.

2. Questions: Fire and Rescue Services

3. In your view, what have been the consequences of the 2012 Act for the fire and rescue service? Please set out your views on (a) any benefits and (b) any negative consequences of the 2012 Act for the fire and rescue service.

4. Have the policy intentions of the 2012 Act in relation to the fire and rescue service been met?

5. Are there any other issues you would like to raise in connection with the operation of the 2012 Act?

3. Response

We have set out our view of the high level consequences of the development and implementation of the 2012 Act between 2010 and 2016 in a series of presentations and publications reflected in Taylor *et al* (2018).

In our view from 2010/2011, the purpose, legislation, structure, objectives, and performance of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Services all started to diverge significantly from their English equivalents. Between 2013 and 2016 we were independently evaluating these changes at the same time that Audit Scotland were preparing their review (Audit Scotland, 2015), which was published after our field work in Scotland had finished.

The conclusions to our study which were generally similar to the views of the Audit Scotland can be summarized as follows

“Scotland, at least in terms of its Fire and Rescue Service, had witnessed a successful transformation project that demonstrated individual and collective leadership and a strategic and holistic approach to the service. It led to more robust governance and scrutiny arrangements and improved service outcomes. During the same period, England saw an abdication of leadership responsibilities particularly from the DCLG; and minimal and ad hoc restructuring, resulting in loss of public accountability, sub-optimal delivery and significant risks to the achievement of Value for Money. We added the caveat However SFRS had not yet addressed reform of the services operational stations which were scheduled for a later phase of reform.” (Taylor et al 2018 page 202-203).

In our response to the subsequent FRS Framework consultation from the Scottish government, we also expressed concerns over the draft targets and measures included in appendix B. These we summarised as follows

“Not surprisingly, there are a few areas where we believe it could be improved. It does not, for instance, mention the service’s inter-relationship with the insurance industry, nor its nontangible assets such as trust and reputation. It does not clarify any joint objectives with the NHS or other services, although it does provide good examples of current joint working.

Some of our concerns revolve around judgements about what is appropriate for a national framework, and what you might reasonably expect to appear in the strategic and/or operational plans developed from a national framework. In our view, detailed targets and measures are usually best included in the strategic and operational plans required of the service rather than a high-level strategic framework.....The current suggestions for measures and targets are very traditional, unsophisticated and exclusively quantitative targets (an issue Audit Scotland pointed out about the previous frameworks’ targets)..... They do not reflect the latest thinking or good practice in performance, measurement, management and monitoring.....On their own, they are clearly inadequate, as they do not reflect the width and scale of the organisation’s services nor the ambitions and objectives of the service and its strategic stakeholders.” (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2016 p 12).

In response to the SFRS’s latest consultation *“Your Service....Your Voice: A consultation on the safe and planned future of Scottish Fire and Rescue Service”* we commented

“Overall, we consider that the current document, which attempts to operationalise the next stage of the service reform, builds on this strategic and holistic approach and presents a compelling narrative, although there are areas we would like to see strengthened and others where we would seek more details and/or additions and/or amendments.”

On balance we agree with the contention that “the creation of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) has been good for Scotland” and with the three statements that follow i.e. that

“The Service has continued to improve the safety and wellbeing of communities while benefiting from the operational and financial efficiencies of bringing eight brigades together as one.

SFRS has proven that it is capable of delivering major reform. It has laid the foundations for future transformation, and it has continued to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the communities it serves.

That SFRS needs to continue to transform”.

In our view, Scotland is effectively implementing a resource or asset based vision and strategy – valuing its assets and attempting to optimise its use of available resources while evaluating inputs, outputs and outcomes against the creation of both public and private value. England, as the recent consultations on the new national framework (Home Office 2018) and the new inspection proposals clearly demonstrate (HMICFRS 2018), is implementing a financially-led strategy, through a shrinking resource envelope, allied to evaluating services and initiatives against the financial return on investment primarily (but not exclusively) in the short term (Murphy et al 2018).

4. Summary

The benefits of the 2012 Act significantly outweigh any negative consequences and have clearly outperformed the parallel reforms in English fire and rescue services.

The policy intentions of the 2012 Act are being met; although they are not, as yet, fully realised and operational. We would welcome the opportunity to expand on these views.

References

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