

## Scottish Trades Union Congress

### Submission to the Scottish Executive on “The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service: Proposals for Legislation”

January 2004

#### Introduction

The Scottish Trades Union Congress is Scotland’s Trade Union Centre. Its purpose is to co-ordinate, develop and articulate the views and policies of the trade union movement in Scotland.

The STUC represents some 630,000 trade union members in Scotland, the members of over 40 affiliated organisations. We speak for trade union members in and out of work, in the workplace and in the community, as workers and as citizens. Our affiliated trade unions have members in every sector of the economy.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the proposals set out in the Scottish Executive’s **“The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service: Proposals for Legislation”** document, noting with concern that Scotland continues to suffer more fire deaths per head of population than other countries in the UK.

Effective fire and rescue services are vital to the safety and well-being of the Scottish population. All our members and their families rely on the work done by fire-fighters and emergency control staff. The way in which the fire service is organised and supported in the future will impact on us all.

We believe that the main aim of legislative change relating to Scotland’s fire service should be to support the reduction to zero of the rate of fire deaths in Scotland.

We are aware that a number of our affiliated trade unions with a direct membership interest and representational role in the fire service have made separate, detailed responses to the Scottish Executive's document. We would associate ourselves with the arguments set out in those submissions and offer the following additional comments.

## **Chapter One - The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service**

We welcome the Scottish Executive's commitment to a fire service that:

- is proactive and focussed on preventing fires rather than only reacting to fires where they occur;
- acts to support the wider agenda of public safety, social inclusion and crime reduction; and
- is a high performing, well-managed, cost efficient and effective public service.

As the Scottish Executive's document acknowledges, the role of the fire service has evolved and developed over many years. The STUC notes the Executive's intention to re-name the fire service as the Fire and Rescue Service to better reflect the role that it now plays. It is important that this name change does not imply additional responsibilities for the role and duties of other emergency services, such as the ambulance service. It is also important that the Executive commits to meeting the additional costs that will inevitably arise from any name change.

We welcome the proposal to replace the title Firemaster with that of Chief Officer, believing that this will help support activities to improve diversity in the fire service workforce.

## **Chapter Two – The Framework and Supporting Structure**

The Scottish Executive proposes the creation of a new National Framework to allow it to provide strategic direction to the fire service at local level. It cites the Standards in Scottish Schools etc (Scotland) Act 2000 as a similar model offering a strong national focus on outcomes for local delivery.

The consultation document implies that the section 19 provisions of the Fire Service Act 1947 would be repealed in light of a National Framework but then goes on to state that:

*“Scottish Ministers would (therefore) also take reserve powers of direction as a means of ensuring that delivery priorities in the National Framework are not undermined”.*

These positions appear inconsistent and it is vital that transparency and democratic accountability remains a feature of Scotland’s fire service.

It is important that the mistakes of the health board delivery model in the NHS are not repeated, where decisions about hospital closures have met with strong disapproval of local communities who are unable to take their case to Ministers.

The Scottish Executive also proposes a new structure for delivering advice and developing policy for the fire service. A new, non-statutory Advisory Group is to be established along with a number of other consultative groups.

The STUC is concerned that the consultation document has insufficiently detailed the role to be played by workers’ representatives in these groups and seeks clarification in this respect.

## **Chapter Three – The Core Duties of the Fire and Rescue Service**

The Scottish Executive acknowledges the gap between what a brigade is required to do under existing legislation and what it actually does.

The Scottish Executive goes on to note that the service has acquired a wide range of equipment to deal with 'special services'. Whether or not legislation is enacted to clarify the role of the fire service, it is vital that the Executive commits to providing adequate levels of funding for investment in appropriate equipment and staff development.

The Scottish Executive proposes to change from the existing standards of fire cover to the delivery of a '*balanced prevention and intervention approach*' through Integrated Risk Management (IRM). However, we are concerned that this approach has been inadequately piloted and that no evidence can be produced to give confidence that it will lead to an improved service.

## **Chapter Four – Organisation and Responsibilities**

The Scottish Executive proposes to take powers to implement new control room arrangements in Scotland, in light of a technical review, which is yet to be carried out. The STUC is concerned that this may lead to the establishment of joint control rooms where operators are expected to handle police, ambulance and fire calls. We believe that this would have serious consequences for service quality in each of these emergency areas: highly trained fire emergency control staff, with well developed local knowledge help save lives; ambulance control staff use their extensive skills to help ensure that patients do not deteriorate further whilst waiting for the ambulance crew to arrive.

## **Chapter Five – The Workforce**

The STUC welcomes the Scottish Executive's recognition of the fire service workforce as a key resource and of health and safety, equal opportunities, training, leadership development and occupational health as key issues.

Our member unions, representing fire-fighters and civilian staff, are also committed to making progress in these areas and we believe that these are matters best dealt with through established collective bargaining arrangements.

Our member unions are particularly committed to action to promote diversity in the service and have advocated change in this regard over an extended period of time. The FBU is on record commending the work that has been taken forward by the Fairness and Diversity Forum.

STUC  
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