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Evaluation of Police and Fire Reform: Year 2 Report Annexes



CRIME AND JUSTICE



Evaluation of Police and Fire Reform

Year 2 Report

Annexes

SIPR, ScotCen and What Works Scotland

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1 Annex 1: Police and fire reform evidence review: Year 2

This updated evidence review is part of a four year evaluation commissioned by the Scottish Government to examine whether the aims of Police and Fire reform have been met and consider what lessons might be learnt for any future public service reforms.

The evidence review for Year 1 (Annex 1) was published in June 2016 and consisted largely of published reports by public bodies associated with the implementation of the reforms or with their oversight up to the end of November 2015.

This updated evidence review will draw on published reports between the end of November 2015 and December 2016. In this period 43 reports have been published and added to a directory of evidence.

The following report will summarise how the documentary evidence relates to each of the three aims of reform, as well as highlighting some additional emerging themes.

1.1 Reform Aim 1: To protect and improve local services despite financial cuts

The majority of the evidence relates to Reform Aim 1. The evidence base is diverse and includes audits; local inspections, performance and annual reports; and reports on specific issues such as stop and search.

1.1.1 Police

- Much of the evidence is internally focused and the work undertaken by Police Scotland and SPA provides updates on how reform aim 1 is being achieved. Issues are identified in relation to the constraints and cost pressures facing the SPA, the need for strategic financial leadership and the challenge of retaining staff in certain areas where closures are taking place.
- Concerns are raised by Reform Scotland (2016) who outline the need to scrap the pledge to increase police officer numbers, to instead ensure that this is an operational decision and resources go where needed.
- The Scottish Parliament (2016) 'Justice Sub-Committee on Policing: Legacy Paper' expresses concern about changes to local policing taking place without consultation with the community, and as such damaging public confidence. They also suggest that local community officer voices are very different to senior officers and should be monitored.

1.1.2 Fire and Rescue

- The evidence is internally focused and based in the main on local inspections, performance management reports and the Service Transformation Programme report.
- The SFRS (2016) Service Transformation Programme report has found evidence of reform aim 1 being prevalent with the greatest focus being on reducing duplication, with 27 projects closed contributing to this aim.
- The evidence from local inspections and performance managements report refers to reform aim 1 but does not explicitly discuss how it is being achieved. Instead, key issues include:
 - Widening of the SFRS role e.g. greater involvement in emergency medical work
 - Inheriting legacy systems which is creating a fragmented picture of national performance. The HMFSI (2015) state they understand the need for robust performance management information systems and is making good progress in their implementation.
 - Geographical challenges e.g. a lack of broadband in rural locations.
 - Despite financial cuts investment is being made in training and station facilities e.g. Western Isles

1.2 Reform Aim 2: To create more equal access to specialist support and national capacity

1.2.1 Police

- On a national level, the SPA (2016) 'Annual Review of Policing 2015/16: Improving Policing for Scotland's Communities' explains that the delivery of reform aim 2 is dealt with under evidence provided in support of strategic police priority 2 - Strengthen Scotland's reputation as a successful and safe country by demonstrating excellence in effectively planning for and responding to major events and threats.
- The SPA (2016) state that becoming a single police force has enabled them to better deliver access to specialist services for communities. The SPA claim that policing evidence in 2015/16 suggests that Police Scotland are able to draw more readily on resources from across the organisation whilst at the same time maintaining frontline policing delivery to communities with minimum disruption. To improve the use of specialist support services, local scrutiny committees have been well established across the country.
- Areas for development include:
 - The need for more evidence of the operational benefits of more routine, day-to-day flexible deployment of resources nationally to meet local needs and demand (e.g. the Campaign Against Violence/Local Days of Action, the use of Flexible Policing Teams across Scotland, and national campaigns in support of Road Safety).

- The need for more consistent evidence of equal access to specialist resources across Scotland, where and when required. More in-depth analysis and assessment work is needed on the impact of more complex forms of criminality and geographical resourcing demands in the future. This will form part of the Policing 2026 Programme.
- On a local level, an inspection of Dumfries and Galloway found that local skills were being overlooked by specialist support. Recommendations were made that there should be consideration of where specialist resources should be geographically located to meet local demand and need.

1.2.2 Fire and Rescue

- Much of the evidence is from local inspections, national planning documents for resources and flooding and the Service Transformation Programme draft report.
- On a national level, HMFSI (2015) 'Planning and Defining Service Resources in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service' report outlines that SFRS has inherited the assets of predecessor organisations, but has the flexibility to match resources to risk when determining the appropriate level of resources across Scotland.
- In planning for a serious flooding incident, the HMFSI (2015) state that they have a significant number of flood and water rescue resources available and they have been trained to a good level. For this reason, if a serious flooding incident occurred now, the SFRS would be able to deploy substantial resources to it, and would be in a position to discharge its statutory responsibilities in relation to serious flooding. However, opportunities for improvement were identified, for example, national policy and procedures, multi-agency flood planning and training.
- The SFRS (2016) Service Transformation Programme report states that reform aim 2 is a prevalent aim and that 12 of the projects that have closed have contributed to this aim e.g. delivery of a specialist fire investigation team for each service delivery area, development of national databases for local use on skill set of flexi duty managers, volunteer groups and full range of resources available.
- On a local level, inspections in Dundee and West Lothian suggest that there is access to specialised resources but that implementation plans still need to be determined as a result of the specialist appliance review.

1.3 Reform Aim 3: To strengthen the connection between services and communities they serve

1.3.1 Police

- On a national level, according to the SPA (2016) there is evidence that local scrutiny committees are well established.
- The minutes from an SPA board meeting in March 2016 outline that the SPA Review of Strategic Police Plan identifies a key issue – that assurance that

SPA's planning process would link to community planning partnerships and planning partnerships at a local level and Police Scotland's local police plans are further developed to meet the needs of local communities.

- On a local level, a local area inspection in Dumfries found evidence of good partnership working.
- Evidence is provided externally from Reform Scotland.
- In regards to governance, Reform Scotland (2016) would like to see representation from each local authority area on the SPA to ensure the different needs are represented.

1.3.2 Fire and Rescue

- On a national level, the SFRS (2016) Service Transformation Programme report states that the programmes contribution to reform aim 3 has been limited and for the most part a secondary or tertiary benefit.
- The HMFSI (2016) Annual Report 2015/16 highlighted partnership working as an area of good practice and outlined that local scrutiny arrangements are in place in all areas inspected.
- Evidence towards reform aim 3 in the main is discussed in the local area inspection reports.
- In Western Isles, Dundee, West Lothian and South Ayrshire strong local partnerships are identified.
- In Western Isles the local partnerships are said to be supplemented by increased focus on data sharing.
- In West Lothian, it is believed the strong local partnerships are perhaps a by-product of the co-location of SFRS staff in the council civic centre.

1.4 Additional Emerging Themes

There are a number of emerging themes impacting on both Police Scotland and SFRS that fall outside the aims of reform, but may be critical to achieving the aims. These include:

1.4.1 Training

Opportunities for improvement in training were identified in the HMFSI inspection reports, specifically in relation to the local area inspections and preparedness for a serious flooding event.

1.4.2 ICT

The need for robust performance management information systems and better broadband connections is highlighted in HMFSI reports. It is also suggested that they are making progress towards this.

Audit Scotland (2016) outline the financial implications of the termination of the I6 programme for the benefits of police reform. The SPA (2016) in their annual report recognise the improvements which still need to be made and suggest that work is

underway to implement alternative ICT solutions to match or possibly exceed the benefits I6 set out to achieve.

1.4.3 Prevention

Prevention is a theme which featured in the HMFSI, HMICS and Police Scotland reports, as a priority for the future. For SFRS, prevention is linked to widening the firefighter role in the community to emergency medical work. For Police Scotland, prevention is forming one of their policing priorities for years to come, which includes re-investing capacity into prevention work.

1.4.4 Local scrutiny

The HMFSI local inspections in 2016 found that there are local scrutiny structures in place in all areas visited in the local inspections. In the HMICS Annual Report (2016) it suggests that there are opportunities to streamline local scrutiny structures by integrating local policing plans into the new Local Outcomes Improvement Plans. The SPA found that from 2015-16, local scrutiny committees were well established across the country with approaches to performance being described as 'maturing' and developmental learning between the committees being supported by the SPA. A Review of Governance in Policing by the SPA (2016) did however, state that local scrutiny bodies do not feel they are sufficiently listened to regarding local policing and feel they are unable to input into national policy issues. As such, the SPA (2016) outlined a number of recommendations including a more formalised relationship between local scrutiny bodies and the SPA.

1.4.5 Localism

Localism is predominantly discussed in relation to Police Scotland. HMICS (2016) state that localism is one of the themes which will inform policing priorities. One of the proposed strategic police priorities set out by the Scottish Government (2016) includes ensuring that the needs of local communities are understood and reflected in the planning and delivery of policing at a local and national level. Reform Scotland (2016) feel it is necessary to 're-inject localism back into the current structure'.

1.4.6 Financial leadership

Audit Scotland (2016) in the 2015/16 audit of the Scottish Police Authority explain that due to the challenging financial circumstances and with the Scottish Government's commitment to maintain an increase in the policing budget, makes strong effective financial leadership essential. Steps are reported to have been taken by the SPA and Police Scotland to improve financial leadership and management, and governance arrangements but these have not had time to have an impact.

1.4.7 Public confidence

A proposed strategic police priority (Scottish Government, 2016) includes continuously improving public confidence in policing and inspire trust by being transparent, accountable and acting with integrity, fairness and respect. The Scottish Parliament (2016) paper outlines that changes to local policing practices

have been introduced with little or no consultation with local communities and public confidence in local policing has been damaged as a result. Consequently, the Sub-Committee recommended that police reform on local policing should continue to be monitored and capturing the voices of local community officers was seen as invaluable.

1.5 Conclusion

This report has provided a summary of the evidence relating to police and fire reform in Scotland between November 2015 and December 2016. As well as summarising how the evidence relates to the three aims of reform, additional emerging themes have also been identified. As with the year 1 evidence review the picture is complex and this evidence review is intended to supplement the geographical case studies. The next stage of the evaluation will produce thematic case studies which will draw on emerging themes from the geographical case studies and evidence reviews from year 1 and 2.

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2 Annex 2: The local experience of police reform in Scotland: perspectives from four case study areas

2.1 Area A

Area A is an urban environment out with the legacy Strathclyde Police force area. The local station where interviews with police officers were carried out covers an area with a range of levels of deprivation and is responsible for a geographical area that is larger than it was prior to reform.

2.1.1 Delivering a local service

The view among local officers is that compared to the period before reform their resources are more stretched. The reasons given for this include the loss of civilian staff resulting in additional administrative roles, an increased geographical area to cover due to the closure of neighbouring stations, and officers moving to national specialist teams. Officers describe having to fulfil additional roles such as covering the front desk, implementing new protocols that lead to extra paperwork and the centralisation of support functions that has made it more difficult to access administrative resources. Officers feel that there is too much time spent being office-based rather than being out in the community:

‘There seems to be...we spend most of our time in an office typing at a computer as opposed to being out there and patrolling and dealing with people proactively, searching people and proactively dealing with things. We don’t do that as much...’ (Area A – police officer)

Local officers are particularly concerned by what they see as the reduction in community team resources as officers have moved to national specialist teams and have not been replaced. There is also a view that more experienced officers have also moved to the specialist teams, leaving a lack of experience in the local areas and a reduction in capacity for mentoring probationers.

The role of the local community police officer is felt to have diminished leading to a loss of connection with local communities. This is in part related to the increased geographical areas for which individual officers are responsible compared with the previous beat system but officers also describe not having enough time to attend local meetings or meet with local businesses, or to undertake proactive preventative activities, resulting in little difference now between community and response roles:

‘Community officers are only community officers in name. I would say there's very, very few officers that would actually go out and do the role of a community officer, so albeit they're called community officers, they probably shouldn't be, coz they're not’ (Area A – police officer)

This is a view shared by some local councillors and members of community councils who feel that the role of the community police officer has changed since reform and these officers are not as engaged with the local community. The perception is that this affects the amount of local knowledge and intelligence that the officers have as the public are not passing on information to them:

‘They would also help in terms of intelligence gathering. I think that might have been lost slightly, local officers don’t necessarily know all the troublesome families or also the points of contact that might be useful for them and I think hopefully we’ll get back to that. As I say with some further tweaks to the force that maybe take account of more of that local context’
(Area A - councillor)

While councillors recognise that officers do regularly attend the local community planning partnerships and attend and report to the council committees, their attendance at more local meetings, such as resident association meetings and community council meetings is seen as being much less consistent since reform, although there is a view that this has started to improve in the last six months:

‘There has been a consistent feedback that the police haven’t been attending those meetings in the same consistency that they did under the various forces that did exist previously’ (Area A - councillor)

In terms of physical resources, there is a perception that officers do not have access to enough vehicles to perform their role effectively and the quality of the cars is described as poor. There is also a view that having a single IT system for all officers would be beneficial in allowing them to quickly share information.

2.1.2 Accessing specialist support

There are mixed views in Area A about access to specialist teams. Many see that the area now has access to a broader range of services compared with the period before reform and that accessibility to certain specialist teams and resources has improved, particularly for pre-planned events where there is a straightforward process to follow to request resources. Officers have also had positive experiences of working with the specialist teams, in particular the murder investigation, rape investigation, missing persons and dog teams. The resources that the specialist teams bring with them means that local resources can continue to be used to maintain business as usual.

Those more critical of the arrangements for specialist support point to a lack of knowledge about what the specialist teams do and how they operate and how it can be difficult to know who to contact for specific incidents. There is also a view that, as the teams are now a national resource, they may be deployed elsewhere when local officers want to access them. In addition, the centralised nature of the specialist teams is seen as leading to the local officers becoming ‘de-skilled’ as well as specialist officers losing the skills needed for local policing:

‘...we're never getting the chance to be involved in [major investigations], or getting the chance to investigate that to sharpen my skills and really put myself to the test’ (Area A – police officer)

‘...to me it's a waste of an officer they're getting de-skilled by staying in that unit for too long’ (Area A – police officer)

‘...the organisation needs to have a look at the structure and speak to the officers and find out you know how bad the resourcing is at street level and then whether they slim down the resources in departments to get people back on the street that's...that's the way it has to be. Uh...otherwise the way it is just now it will just continue to be that way’ (Area A – police officer)

As these quotations indicate, there is some frustration among local officers that they are not able to be involved in a wider range of incidents as these are passed to the specialist teams which also has implications for their future career opportunities.

2.1.3 Working with communities

The public interviewed in Area A generally have a positive view of the police and describe feeling safe in their local area. Those with direct experience of the police are complimentary about the way officers have handled emergencies. However, the public are aware that the police are now covering larger geographical areas than previously and they feel this means officers are not as aware of what is happening locally compared to the period pre-reform.

Much of the negative perceptions of local policing relate to the introduction of the 101 non-emergency number and the closure, or reduced opening hours, of local police stations. The inability to contact the local police station directly in person or by phone was viewed as particularly problematic when trying to contact the same officer who had dealt with an incident to find out what was happening:

‘You know even in, in the past if you were in a police station there was always someone behind the counter that could take some information and get somebody to come out to you or, or point you in the right direction, but now as you said you can't get into a police station’ (Area A – public focus group)

Partnership working

Local officers describe very positive experiences of working with partner organisations. They highlight being able to refer people to local third sector organisations with specialist skills in relation to issues such as homelessness and drug and alcohol dependency, and working with the council community wardens who tackle anti-social behaviour:

‘...they sometimes know the kids better than us to be honest so it's just...a case of sharing information with them. That's probably done as and when we see each other rather than you know communicating with them through email or anything like that. It's more...sort of chance meetings and you could speak to them and what not at the side of the road’ (Area A – police officer)

Council staff also describe working closely with local community officers in community engagement activities, for example visiting schools or attending gala days. Communication with these local officers is felt to be very effective and they see them on a regular basis. Both council staff and councillors also feel that the police play a key role in partnership working, bringing different agencies together to tackle crime and they feel this is working well. Police are involved in initiatives to try to prevent crime, for example, working with other agencies to signpost young people to services, working as part of the alcohol and drug partnership and developing initiatives to inform the public of local incidents, such as bogus callers. The role of the police in these partnerships was praised as they are open to working towards supporting people as well as fulfilling their enforcement role. For example, in relation to tackling drugs, they are receptive to working with partner agencies so that the appropriate support services can be in place for those with drug dependency who may have no access to drugs after a raid has taken place. However, some partner agencies often felt that the police wanted things to happen at a faster pace than partners were comfortable with given the need for consultation and dialogue.

The co-location of representatives from a range of different local agencies, including the police and council staff in one building to work together on community safety is seen by council staff to have improved partnership working and communication on joint initiatives with the police. However, the council staff and community groups feel that in more day to day matters they no longer have a personal relationship with the local community officers in their area which would facilitate sharing intelligence and assist in asking for advice and support. There is also a view that information sharing between the police and the council, in general, has declined, as they are not as aware of local crimes being committed and issues that have occurred locally compared with the position pre-reform leading to speculation that this is due to changes in police protocols around information sharing.

The perceived reduction in resources in other local statutory agencies is described as impacting on policing as they take on roles which they feel should lie with other services. In particular some local officers feel that there is an over-reliance on the police as a resource by other agencies. Examples include officers being tasked with responding to noise complaints and dealing with those experiencing mental health problems. Officers describe feeling that social services are 'passing the buck' to the police and not taking on incidents which the police feel they should be involved with:

'For example, a domestic incident where there are children in the house we will get in touch with social work and let them know and there are occasions where they're aware of the family, however, it just seems to be they're quite happy to just pass the buck and say just take them to a family member where I feel that they should get more involved and maybe attend to deal with the children but that doesn't happen a lot' (Area A – police officer)

In particular, officers describe assisting people with mental health issues as having a negative impact on policing resources. They describe both social services and the NHS as passing on responsibility to the police to assist people with mental health issues, which officers also feel they are not appropriately trained to deal with:

‘We're not trained how to diagnose mental health so all I can do is deal with them as a police officer and take them to the place that they need to be, a place of safety and we look after people you know but we're not babysitters’
(Area A – police officer)

2.2 Area B

With relatively high levels of deprivation and high levels of crime, Area B is located within a large urban environment which was part of the former Strathclyde Police area. Some local police stations have been closed since reform resulting in a larger geographical area now being covered by a single station.

2.2.1 Delivering a local service

Across all the groups interviewed in Area B, there is a shared perception that local police resources are stretched more thinly than they were prior to reform, impacting on the visibility and presence of officers within the community and the capacity to respond to non-emergency calls. Officers interviewed attribute the diminution in local resources to a combination of factors. In some cases they are now undertaking tasks previously done by civilian staff including dealing with public inquiries at the front desk, preparing citations, and carrying out person and vehicle checks. Officers are also dealing with the local impacts of centralisation and consolidation. They perceive the new centralised support functions as having been ‘cut down to the bare minimum’ leading to some administrative tasks taking longer. The consolidation of custody suites into fewer stations is also of concern to officers because the process for ‘booking’ in prisoners is perceived as taking longer due to having to travel further to the nearest custody suite and waiting longer to get detainees processed. The deployment of local officers to specialist teams is also seen as reducing the numbers available locally for undertaking community and response roles. Finally, officers also raised concerns about more difficult access to equipment and physical resources as impacting on their efficiency, ranging from uniforms to computers and vehicles and the lack of a single IT system across Police Scotland:

‘I feel that the priority has changed a little bit. Like before it was focused on the community and you were told “In your downtime, go in this area and patrol it, and ..”, you know, do all these sort o' things, now you're getting pressure for your paperwork, so, whenever we get downtime – which is very rarely – we're .. We're coming back to... to clean up our paperwork or go round doing enquiries for stuff we've dealt with, you know? and, that said, there's definitely no .. From a Response perspective, definitely no focus on the community whatsoever’ (Area B – police officer)

2.2.2 Accessing specialist support

Local officers' experiences of working with specialist teams are positive. They are seen as professional and helpful and will proactively offer support on occasions (for example, if the helicopter is already airborne and becomes aware of a local incident over the radio, the crew will ask if the team on the ground need assistance). However, some officers still feel that they do not have a good understanding of the range and remits of different specialist teams and there are mixed views about the process for accessing specialist resources. Some officers describe the new process as working well, particularly for pre-planned events. Others view the process as overly bureaucratic, particularly in dealing with immediate incidents when time can be lost due to the process of filling in forms and gaining the correct permissions:

'When a spontaneous incident happens, you've got Sergeants..., or inspectors, trying to get these resources, and sometimes you just cannae get them. You're left wi' yourself to deal with it' (Area B – police officer)

Local officers also raised some concerns about the capacity and capability of specialist teams. In terms of capacity, there is a perception that roads policing, dog, and scenes of crime teams are all experiencing high levels of demand relative to their resources. In terms of capability, the relocation of specialist investigative units away from the local policing teams means that officers feel they have lost the day to day connection leading to a potential lack of local intelligence being passed to investigating officers:

'...there would be links being made...in passing which would inform lines of enquiry that's lost. That's totally gone because you don't have that...day to day contact with these departments' (Area B – police officer)

2.2.3 Working with communities

Although officers feel that they are less visible in Area B and that their interaction with the public has reduced, the view from local councillors is more positive. As levels of crime have reduced in the local area, they see police as having more time to engage with the community, be out on patrol and be involved in prevention work. Councillors also describe having good direct access to the police officers if they want to report to the police concerns raised to them by the public and they feel that the police respond well. The police are seen as role models in the local community, in particular, through their involvement in youth work.

The view from the public and local third sector organisations is more mixed. Many view the police positively and appreciate that they do a difficult job in challenging circumstances and third sector organisations in particular praised the increased police use of social media as a way of engaging with the public in different ways. Others feel they have lost the local connection with individual officers that they had prior to reform and when they report incidents it is not always a local officer who knows the area who attends. Some members of the public in this area perceive a 'them' and 'us' culture has developed, and they highlighted in particular the intensive stop and search policy which is viewed negatively due to the way people are searched in public and younger people are targeted by the police.

The public are aware that there are local police stations which have been closed, meaning that the areas which officers cover are far larger than in the past. There is a view that there should still be somewhere local in the community that the public can have direct access to police officers and although the public in Area B are aware of the 101 number for non-emergencies, they also have concerns about getting access to a direct number for the local police station:

‘...if they're shutting down the local police stations then they should - they should still have a place, even if it's not as big a place, but somewhere where the local community can go and see a couple of police officers and whatever.’
(Area B – public focus group)

Community engagement and partnership working

There are diverse views on the nature and extent of community engagement in Area B. From a positive perspective, there is a view among council staff and third sector organisations that the level of consultation about the local police plan has been good and that the police are interested in hearing the views of both the public and the third sector. Consultation is described as taking different forms including a survey of the public, focus groups and local community events where local priorities are discussed. Although councillors expressed some concerns that the local policing plan is actually agreed centrally, they acknowledge it does seem to be fairly reflective of issues in the local area.

However, the capacity of the police to engage with local community organisations is seen by some to have diminished and it is felt they have less commitment to work with them. The informal interaction that the third sector had with officers is perceived to have reduced and staff do not know who the officers are as there is a larger pool of them who respond and the high turnover of officers is making it difficult to build relationships. However, on more strategic bodies with a senior police presence there is a more positive view of engagement. Councillors describe senior police officers regularly attending a range of different committees and making positive contributions. Councillors have contact with local officers through their attendance at community councils where local concerns from the public are discussed and officers feed back to the community on local policing issues. Local officers, however, feel that they are unable to prioritise such engagement in ways they would like:

‘It's sometimes hard, as much as we are community officers we don't always get to be community officers a lot of the time because the response police are quite often so small in numbers that a lot of the time we are missing community meetings. We don't get to...pop into schools we should be visiting the schools every couple of weeks. We don't get to do it a lot of the time due to all the other factors covering front bar, police officers covering prisoner watches, just doing different things that a lot of the time it does feel like you're not a police officer’ (Area B – police officer)

Council staff report very good partnership working across a very wide range of initiatives with a high level of police involvement. The perception is that the role of

partnership working and community policing has been supported from local senior management and is given a high priority. The view is that the police are committed to joint working as they acknowledge it as an effective way to reduce crime levels. Council staff feel that there has been a greater sharing of information at the local level since reform and increased strategic partnership working based on working together and agreeing solutions based on intelligence.

Council staff also describe good partnership working at the local level, particularly between the police and housing associations and the police's involvement with the local community councils. Council staff have regular contact with senior officers, perhaps several times a week by email or phone, as well as meeting face to face on a regular basis. Council staff also agree that there is good engagement with the local community to understand concerns and that the police are responsive to local intelligence, by providing additional resources to tackle specific local issues that are identified. The police are also viewed as good at providing feedback to the community when they have investigated concerns raised by the public. The area has several local joint initiatives with the police targeted at local crimes and anti-social behaviour as well as at early intervention with offenders to prevent them becoming involved in more serious crimes. Police also do joint patrols with council staff to local areas to target anti-social behaviour and issue fixed penalty notices.

Although overall the view on partnership working with the police is viewed very positively, there are some concerns raised by council staff and third sector organisations. First, where there is a high turnover of local police officers this can lead to a lack of consistency, delays as new officers familiarise themselves with initiatives and it also takes time to build up a good working relationship with members of partnerships. Second, there is a perception that the police are under-pressure to deliver to targets in the shorter term leading to situations where the timescales that the police want to work to are seen to lead to projects not being given enough time for the planning process. Council staff express a view that they would like the police to see the initiatives as long-term and based on strong foundations which would require fewer changes in local officers and less of a focus on short-term gains.

A good example of positive partnership working was described by the third sector in relation to domestic abuse in Area B. The perception is that new procedures around dealing with domestic abuse cases have led to great improvements in the support given to victims of domestic abuse and an increased ability to convict offenders. The police are described as very open to working with and listening to the experience of third sector organisations in this field and that the changes introduced by the police have also had a positive impact on the approach of third sector organisations.

In terms of working with statutory agencies, the local police are very much aware of the resource pressures being experienced locally by other organisations, such as the NHS, social services and the ambulance service. This has important implications for policing, ranging from delays in communication and information sharing to the need, on some occasions, to provide additional police resources to assist the ambulance service. With regard to the latter, officers describe taking

members of the public to hospital themselves, performing first aid when required or being taken away from their policing role to perform a medical role assisting ambulance crews.

2.3 Area C

Area C is in a remote rural, low crime location, at some distance from the central belt. With the closure of several local police stations following reform, officers are now based in one station in a small town covering a large geographical area.

2.3.1 Delivering a local service

As in Areas A and B, there is a general view across all groups interviewed that the police are operating with fewer resources in the area than before reform. As in other areas, response and community officers attribute this diminished capacity to deliver a local service to a combination of factors. They are undertaking tasks previously provided by civilian staff particularly in relation to firearm enquiries, having to cover the front desk and take responsibility for aspects of managing the custody suite. The loss of officers to specialist teams is seen as having had a negative impact on the number of officers in the local area:

‘The biggest thing for us is staff, since Police Scotland came along are the specialist units up here that we never used to have before, taking frontline officers and putting them in there, and never ever replaced them on shift’
(Area C – police officer)

This is not only perceived as having decreased the skill set in the local area but also raised questions about equity on service delivery given the area does not get the benefit from these specialist teams due to the low levels of crime in the area. The impacts of centralisation and consolidation have also raised concerns locally with officers feeling that it now takes longer to undertake some basic tasks due to the centralisation of administrative support functions. Officers views about the impacts of the consolidation of command and control functions is more mixed. Some believe this has led to improvements in response, as there is a clear system of passing on the details of calls to the local team while others express concern that call handlers do not have local knowledge of the area and that reliance on postcodes in rural areas can be problematic because of the large geographical areas. Finally, in terms of access to equipment and IT, officers rely heavily on access to vehicles due to the rural nature of this area and while this is adequate, the lack of a single IT system across Scotland, continues to affect officers’ ability to work efficiently.

2.3.2 Accessing specialist support

When specialist teams are deployed in the area, local officers view them as highly skilled and helpful. Improvements are also being seen in the relationship between specialist teams and local police, so they are working better together in the local area, rather than the national teams working in the area independently.

However, there are mixed views on the process for accessing specialist support: some officers view this as straightforward, others as overly bureaucratic. Given the

remote rural location, some officers feel that specialist teams would not be routinely sent to their area. This leads to a feeling that the area does not get the full benefit of the specialist teams:

‘...probably a kind of feeling that the likes of the major investigation teams, unless something really, really major goes on, we don’t get any benefit from them’ (Area C – police officer)

(In relation to the helicopter) ‘...the requests I think have been in before, and they don’t ...nothing happens... it’s not gonna come all the way...here to give us help’ (Area C – police officer)

2.3.3 Working with communities

There is consensus among all groups that rural policing relies on people working together and the police receiving information and intelligence from the community. Officers feel that they are respected by the local population and that they have cooperative relationships with local people. Councillors agree that the public have a positive view of the police and that there is a good relationship between the police and community. The public in the area describe positive interactions with the police when they have had to call them although they describe not knowing the local officers. The public express concerns that when using the 101 number, the staff answering the calls are not familiar with the local area which may make it difficult for police officers to know where an incident has occurred.

However, sustaining a visible and accessible police presence in the local community is seen as being under pressure. Officers feel that the closure of some police stations has a negative impact on the level of interaction with the public and the amount of intelligence they gather from the public. Many officers are also not based locally, leading to a lack of local knowledge and the loss of an informal off-duty connection between officers and the community.

The move from the public being able to go to a local police station, or call their local police station directly, to using the centralised 101 number is also described by officers and members of the local community councils as impacting on the level of crimes and intelligence being reported. Officers feel that the public are less likely to give the police information on local issues through the 101 number and are more likely to report issues if they know a local officer. Members of the local community councils in particular said they feel more confident that they will receive feedback after reporting an issue to a specific officer than they do if reporting through the 101 number. These concerns and challenges around communication are very much recognised by community respondents and local officers:

‘So it’s just you’ve lost the kind of...I think the police have lost a source of information you know they’re not in...They’re not in touch with the grassroots if you like...the people, because they’re behind call centres, or...you know?’ (Area C – community organisation)

‘...And then they’ll tell you something like this guy is selling drugs, or this guy is doing that or whatever. And uh...they say ah yes this is 2 weeks ago but I

just can't get hold of the front counter staff to let the police know and I don't bother with 101...' (Area C – police officer)

Partnership working

Communication with partners is viewed positively in this rural community. Officers feel they know who to contact to address different types of issues. Officers identify that living in the same area as you work improves communication between the police and partner agencies as the officers have links both personally and professionally with partners. However, fewer officers now live locally since the restructure into a single national force and officers feel that having less time and resources leads them to have a reduced capacity for either phone or face-to-face interaction with partner organisations.

Councillors and members of the local community councils view the local police officers positively, knowing the local officer who is assigned to the local community councils, working closely together with them and feeling that there is an effective partnership. Communication between the councillors and the police is direct, either via email, face-to-face or use of a direct phone number. They contrast this ability to contact the police directly with the situation for the public of relying on the 101 number, which their personal experience of has not always been positive.

There is a lack of knowledge amongst local officers about more strategic partnerships, such as the role of the community planning partnership, and other strategic planning groups and committees as these are mostly attended by more senior officers, at Inspector-level or above. Councillors do attend these strategic committees which they describe positively, feeling that they have very good working relationships with the senior police officers and that there are successful local partnership initiatives.

Council staff feel that since reform there has been an increase in partnership working by the police and that they are no longer just focused on the traditional role of policing in terms of investigating incidents and catching criminals. The police now sit on a range of different committees and community planning forums, and are involved in joint initiatives, where they work closely with the council, and other agencies, and give regular reports on progress against local priorities.

There is public consultation on local priorities that feed into the community planning partnerships, so that they respond to the public's concerns. Council staff are most likely to have regular contact with Inspectors and Chief Inspectors, and only occasionally with Sergeants. They feel the communication at this level is very clear and that senior officers communicate what is, and what is not, possible.

However, there have been problems with communication between the national Police Scotland and the local area. For example, when dealing with incidents that require a media response, council staff have found coordinating with Police Scotland has been challenging. This is particularly a problem when it is about smaller, local incidents, whereas if it is a major incident, which is of national interest, the communications process is much more effective.

In terms of working with statutory agencies, the police regularly work alongside other statutory agencies in carrying out their duties. Officers describe cutbacks and reorganisation in the partner organisations as having an impact on their ability to work with other agencies, in particular statutory agencies such as the NHS, social services, youth services, fire and ambulance services are mentioned.

Information sharing between the police and these statutory agencies is also regarded as problematic by officers. Formal requests for information are viewed as taking too long to be useful in informing their work, and some information is not seen as freely shared. For example, the social work department used to be locally based and officers knew the local social workers and could phone them up directly to ask for information on a particular individual's personal circumstances. Officers feel that this local, personal connection has been lost.

In addition, the police feel that they respond to incidents that should be dealt with by other agencies. As they have to respond, they are often left to deal with cases when no other agency will step in to assist. For example, officers were called to attend to an elderly person who had fallen, but the GP was not available to attend, NHS 24 would not deal with it as it was during the day time and the ambulance service would not attend as it was not an emergency. However, the two police officers felt that the elderly person needed a medical assessment and they did not feel they could leave the person without passing the case to another service.

Members of the public believe that when they call the police to respond to an incident, officers may not come from the local area, so the officers may not know the area and it may also take longer to respond to a local incident.

A councillor view is that the public feel there are not enough police officers on the street which means that low level crime does not get picked up and dealt with and that resources are seen as focused on the more populated areas to the detriment of the more remote areas or villages. The public expressed concern that the police would not necessarily deal with certain types of crime, for example, vandalism.

Officers feel that the reduction in resources means that, particularly in local towns where stations have closed down, there is often no police presence, particularly at the weekends when there might be trouble on the streets. This leads to the perception that people are 'getting away with it' as there are no police around to intervene.

There was concern expressed by officers, local councillors and community council members about the lack of local autonomy of the police in their area. The perception from officers, councillors, members of the local community councils and the public is that the rural element of policing has disappeared since reform and that the centralisation of the police service has led to issues that are important to the central belt being prioritised and issues relating to rural communities being ignored. There has been a consultation on local policing priorities which the local community councils took part in but they have not been kept up-to-date with progress with the findings. The standard ways of operating across Scotland are perceived as not fitting with the different needs and priorities of rural areas.

2.4 Area D

Area D is a rural location outside the legacy Strathclyde Police force area. The area has low levels of crime but has seen local police stations closed and officers are now based in one station in the town.

2.4.1 Delivering a local service

There is a general view among officers, councillors, council staff, third sector organisations and the public that policing resources are stretched. Officers describe a lack of personnel to cover the large geographical area they have responsibility for and this is seen by officers as having an impact on their ability to provide a local policing service. Officers mention having less time to do prevention work, to be proactive to gather local intelligence through talking to local groups and to engage with members of the public. Officers attribute this to a combination of factors including undertaking tasks previously provided by civilian staff (in particular firearms enquiries, staffing the front desk or answering the station door when the front desk is not staffed); the local impact of centralisation and consolidation (particularly in terms of access to custody suites which are now fifty miles away from their station); and the allocation of officers to specialist teams (with officers having moved to take on roles within the national specialist teams and not been replaced as well as local officers taking on roles which previously have been done by locally based teams, for example investigating minor crimes). As one officer observed:

‘We need to rein in our specialist services, and have local officers dealing with local issues’ (Area D – police officer)

A further concern is accessing equipment and physical resources. Officers mention the lack of available cars for officers to fulfil their duties, which they feel are especially needed in a rural area with large distances to cover. There are mixed views on the IT systems. The IT support helpdesk is seen as a useful resource and the introduction of mobile devices is seen as helping to speed up their work. However, there are concerns about not being able to log in to the system and the lack of a single IT system across the force is raised as a concern and the need to still fill in the same information into different systems taking time away from other activities.

2.4.2 Accessing specialist support

Specialist support teams are seen as willing to help and accessible, particularly if officers are seeking advice from a team by phone. However, local officers also feel that there is a lack of resources available in the specialist support teams and that there is a high demand for their services. This leads to the perception that there are often long waiting times for specialist teams to respond and that local policing teams have to pick up demand that cannot be met centrally. There is also a perception that the national specialist teams may lack local knowledge of the area and that their lack of geographical responsibility means they do not have the same desire as local officers to sort out local issues.

2.4.3 Working with communities

The public, local councillors, community council members and third sector organisations generally view the local police positively. Although they feel the police are less visible in their local area than before reform and they are less likely to know the local officers, there is an awareness that officers are engaging with the community through school visits, attending community council meetings and meeting with third sector organisations. In addition, the police are using channels such as producing newsletters and using new media such as text messaging alert services.

However, councillors, community council members, third sector organisations and police officers also describe negative impacts of the closure, or reduced hours, of local police stations alongside the introduction of the 101 number. They feel that these are barriers to crimes being reported or intelligence being passed to the police as the view is that the public find it easier to talk to someone local. The perception is that long delays in waiting for a 101 call to be answered and the time it can take for an officer to follow up on a call means that the public do not report incidents and it leads to people 'giving up'. In addition, the perception that the staff in the centralised 101 control centres do not know the local area leads to concerns that it is difficult for the public to describe where an incident has occurred. The local police echo some of these concerns:

'And I think 101 would be an issue for, you know, getting through to the Police, getting to actually speak to Police. And sometimes jobs are dealt with by the call taker at 101, and they get put in a pile, and then, by the time it gets filtered through, it could be a month later that the call's a ... you know, the complaint's coming through – which could be a vandalism – but chances are if...you know, say somebody's spray-painted your door or something, you've washed it off within a month, so there's nothing there' (Area D – police officer)

The public and councillors also perceive an increase in police officers who come from outside the area to work in the police and that this has had a detrimental effect on policing in their local area, as the police officers do not know the community in the area they work:

'I'm not saying there's none but it's more and more...not locals. So they're no' aware of the area, they're no' aware of where there is trouble' (Area D – public focus group)

Partnership working

Officers describe having regular contact with social work departments, council staff, including housing officers and local wardens, ambulance and the NHS. Close working relationships are also described between the police and council staff in housing on initiatives to tackle anti-social behaviour and resolve neighbour disputes. Constables also have contact with third sector organisations, such as Victim Support. Council staff describe a wide range of initiatives that the police are involved with which focus on particular issues of concern in the local area. The police are described as being proactive in initiating programmes of preventative work. However, for the third sector they feel that there is a lack of partnership

working with the police as they do not have the resources available to attend meetings or take part in preventative work. Third sector organisations, in particular, feel that the loss of contact with specific officers is having a negative impact on their ability to work together with the police.

There is direct contact between locally elected councillors and the local police, both with constables, sergeants and inspectors. One officer describes conducting 'walkabouts' with the local councillor to highlight local issues, and others have direct contact through the local community council meetings. Councillors and officers describe councillors contacting the police directly, either by phone or email. Officers also have access to councillors' contact details to make direct contact with them.

In terms of working with statutory agencies, cutbacks across other public services, in particular NHS, ambulance and social work departments, are seen as having a negative impact on the police's ability to provide a service to the community. There is a view that, contrary to other agencies, the police have to respond to all types of incidents. This can leave the police dealing with incidents which they are not best placed to deal with, for example assisting people with mental health problems.

Information sharing is highlighted as an issue, specifically in relation to working with hospitals and social work departments. There are information sharing protocols that are in place between the local hospitals and the police to facilitate sharing information for crime detection or prevention. In relation to sharing information with the social work department, officers describe the positive introduction of the Vulnerable Persons Database. Among third sector organisations and community council members there is a view that the police do not share information, for example, on incidents of crime with the community and that they are not consulted adequately in relation to local policing priorities.

3 Annex 3: The local experience of fire and rescue service reform: perspectives from four case study areas

3.1 Area A

Case study Area A covers an area with a range of levels of deprivation located out with the legacy Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Service area.

3.1.1 Delivering a local service

The general view of the firefighters is that the community have not noticed any changes since reform and although the public, community groups, councillors and council staff were aware that reform had had an impact (such as call centres being centralised) they generally felt the community received a good service.

Concerns were expressed by some firefighters that they are not as available to the public as they used to be, with the headquarters reception not being fully staffed and calls to the local station automatically going through to an answer machine but these concerns were not raised by the public, community groups, councillors or council workers.

There were mixed views amongst firefighters about the impact on the reduction in the level of support staff. Although more senior officers believed that changes to support staff have not impacted on their workloads at the station, firefighters in community liaison roles expressed a view that the decrease in the number of administrative support staff means that the workloads of the remaining staff have greatly increased.

The number of non-fire emergency calls is felt to have increased, particularly where the fire and rescue service attends an incident in support of the ambulance service which is seen as having an impact on resources. However, this change is viewed positively by firefighters, as they feel that through working together with a partner agency this produces a positive outcome.

Firefighters in case study Area A acknowledged that the central management of equipment could support a broader, national perspective resulting in effective targeting of facilities and equipment to local areas. The standardisation of equipment and protocols was also seen as a crucial step towards the successful sharing of resources and equipment across Scotland:

‘...it's important that, if you're going to work with someone, you ... you adopt the same practices’ (Area A - firefighter)

There was however an expression of frustration with the systems for providing equipment, tied to a broader concern that local officers were not being sufficiently

consulted on issues of procurement, with the result that the needs of localities were being lost in the pursuit of national goals:

‘...it's all done at headquarters and I don't know if we get enough consultation on what we actually need in our local area’ (Area A - firefighter)

Firefighters generally expressed negative views about IT provision, with network performance described as poor and IT provision seen as having a negative impact upon the ability of firefighters to perform their duties. Poor IT performance is seen as compounded by the difficulties encountered by firefighters when attempting to arrange IT equipment and repairs. There was however praise for the IT support staff who are seen as helpful and as performing a vital function despite being perceived as very busy due to changes to the systems they are working on.

3.1.2 Accessing specialist support

The centralisation of access to specialist resources was viewed positively by firefighters as this system was perceived as ensuring that allocation is shared between areas based on need. There are however, concerns raised about resources being stretched and consequently whether the specialist teams would be able to cope if multiple incidents occur at the same time across the country. This was viewed as a particular concern given the geographical distances the teams may need to travel and some of the logistics involved in moving a team of people across the country and ensuring the welfare of the firefighters.

There was an understanding amongst the firefighters that they are still going through a ‘harmonisation’ period in which different practices, terminology and training is in the process of being nationalised and that this would take time.

3.1.3 Working with communities

Firefighters felt they are viewed positively by the community. The general public described the local service as ‘fantastic’ and ‘amazing’ and this positive view is reinforced also due to the community work they see the fire service doing, such as charity car washes the firefighters had organised.

A view amongst the firefighters was that despite now being a national service they have not lost their localism. This was reiterated by older members of the public who reported seeing firefighters in their area regularly and continue to feel that it is a local service. There was a mixture of views amongst the fire fighters in regards to their level of understanding and the impact they feel local fire plans have on their role. Local fire plans were predominantly viewed as the responsibility of more senior officers, with an expectation they will feed down what firefighters need to know to perform their role. There was an awareness of the local plans amongst community groups and a view that the fire service had conducted a consultation with the community when drawing them up, even if they had not personally been consulted. Councillors viewed the plans as being local, based on consultation in which they have fed into and they receive regular reports about whether the fire service are meeting their objectives.

Generally firefighters felt they are engaging with the community, but that they could make improvements in relation to hard-to-reach community members through visits to mosques, women's groups, talks to refugee families and joint working to engage with those with drug and alcohol dependency.

Firefighters identified prevention as being a key part of the fire service engaging with the community. Post reform targets for home safety visits were viewed positively as they focus on reaching most at risk community members. A standardised recording system has also been introduced for home safety visits which are perceived as providing more accessible information and reminders for follow-up visits.

Through the prevention and awareness raising role, the firefighters described regularly engaging with the community including work in schools, nurseries, youth groups, businesses, groups for the elderly, churches, women's groups as well as organising fun days, galas, fetes and open days at the station every year which hundreds attend. Although firefighters engaged widely with the community there was a view that their resources are stretched and that they do not have enough staff to take on the prevention role. One suggestion was to have non-operational firefighters working as community safety advocates in the local fire service, focusing on prevention and community engagement.

The public, council workers, community groups and councillors were also aware of the prevention role that the firefighters have in their community and viewed this role positively, with a view that the fire service are proactive in this area. Both the younger and older age groups described firefighters carrying out home safety visits, visiting schools, nurseries and their workplaces.

A barrier to the transformation of the fire and rescue service was identified by firefighters as needing to ensure that the community understand their changing role and recognise the wider contribution they make:

'It's possibly the biggest barrier to us...changing our role, really reforming, transforming the service is that if we try and do these things and the public perception is still well they just put fires out then it's kind of pointless. So we need to...we need to do something that...reinforces this wider contribution that we make whilst at the same time maintaining the brand' (Area A - firefighter).

Partnership working

Firefighters detailed experiences of working in partnership with a number of organisations across various sectors. These included public sector organisations such as council, social services, schools, the NHS and environmental services, other first response services such as the police, the ambulance service and the coastguard, and a number of voluntary and third sector projects and organisations. In regards to the police and ambulance, the firefighters were positive about their interactions with the officers and paramedics, but these generally only took place at meetings or at incidents, there was some joint working but generally this was yearly for certain multi-agency initiatives, this had not changed since reform.

Community planning partnerships (CPPs) were identified by the firefighters as key facilitators of community engagement and partnership working, with a view that they help to ensure community needs are understood and addressed. This opinion was shared by the councillors who viewed the fire service as playing an active part in CPPs and that they feel they have an opportunity to feed into local fire priorities, helping ensure the local plans are local. The co-location of some firefighters in a council building was also identified by the councillors and council staff as leading to strong partnership working, with regular meetings and joint initiatives.

A number of barriers to partnership working were also identified by the firefighters. This included, despite support from senior council members, high workloads for council employees which resulted in partnership work being designated low priority. Data sharing was another barrier identified due to some bodies being perceived as unwilling to share information. Firefighters also highlighted some technical issues when sharing data with other organisations due to incompatible computer systems. There was a view that there is a lack of a system for scaling up examples of positive partnership working and disseminating these across the national service, the creation of which would be beneficial for future partnership working across Scotland.

Firefighters felt that in general, formal partnership working occurs at the upper levels of the fire service rather than at front-line firefighter level. This view was shared by the councillors who explained that if they have any issues generally they contact the commanders directly or at the meetings held at the co-located council building.

Firefighters expressed mixed opinions as to whether the nature of partnership working had materially changed since reform. One view was that the focus of partnership working has shifted with a greater emphasis on fire prevention, and the quality and strength of broader ties with the local community has dropped since reform. Another view was that although the procedures surrounding partnership working may have altered, the level of successful partnership working has remained more or less unchanged.

3.2 Area B

Case study Area B is located in a large urban area which was part of the former Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Service area. The station is situated in an area with high levels of deprivation.

3.2.1 Delivering a local service

There was consensus amongst the firefighters that the public would not have noticed any changes since reform and council staff, community groups and councillors all viewed the fire service on the whole as performing a good role in the community.

However, some firefighters described the reduction in the number of support staff as having a negative impact on their workloads. In principle they supported the reduction in support staff where there was a duplication of roles. However, in

practice it was not always viewed as cost-saving as firefighters felt they are now fulfilling some of the support roles. Due to cutbacks in the number of office assistants, the middle managers described spending more time running the office. This was viewed as having an impact on the amount of time they are able to spend on managing their crew and affects their capacity to deliver training.

The firefighters also described taking on additional responsibilities which was increasing their workloads, such as attending more ambulance-related incidents. The firefighters were very positive about their new role but stressed that in order to deliver this work to a high standard they need more personnel and better equipment and training:

‘If we do turn up to something and we are having to wait for an ambulance to come I think there will be a lot of guys who will be a bit nervous and a bit right...I can kind of remember some of this stuff as opposed to being constantly trained on it and refreshed and qualified, and being more confident with it.’ (Area B - firefighter)

Resourcing was viewed as being affected by having to provide back-up to other areas of the city, which in their view poses a risk as their area could be left without an appliance. Officers also described having to rely on resources from other areas, for which they sometimes have to wait for up to a couple of hours. Firefighters also explained that since reform crewing requirements per appliance had reduced from six firefighters down to four. In addition, pre-reform the station used to operate as a two-pump station, however now due to the low number of firefighters at the station they often have to operate with only one pump. Firefighters felt that these changes are leading to a reduction in the standard of the service that they are providing the public.

3.2.2 Accessing specialist support

Before reform, Area B had a pool of specialist resources based locally, but this equipment has been redistributed and concern was expressed by the firefighters that certain equipment is now located at a greater distance:

‘...the issue that we've got with that is the further away you go the longer it takes you to get there and the higher chance of you getting there and it's too late, or you're just completely ineffective when you get there because something has changed, and evolved and you're no longer going to be any use’ (Area B - firefighter)

An example was provided where a major incident had occurred and the response was viewed as a ‘disaster’. This was due to the delays experienced in receiving help as the local service was instructed to wait for specialist resources, despite being equipped to deal with the incident using local resources.

Some firefighters also felt that ‘dual crewing’ and the perceived reduction in the number of officers who are trained to use specialist equipment led to increased time delays in deploying specialised resources. Reinstating specialist teams, instead of dual crewing was suggested as an area for improvement. Officers also felt that if

they received some basic training in skills that could support the specialist teams this would ensure that they could be usefully deployed at an incident. The lack of specialist training was leading to some officers feeling de-skilled:

'If it's a fire call it's your normal job and that's fine! You're on an even keel but if its water rescue you're just kind of there for the ride. It seems a waste because you've got an extra pair of hands and you certainly get put to work, you have something to do, either to carry stuff, or help as best you can but you've got no idea what you're doing! It's not a great feeling that because you kind of think sorry! You feel apologetic and as if you're in the way' (Area B - firefighter)

3.2.3 Working with communities

One of the key ways firefighters engage with the local community is around prevention. Prevention was viewed by the firefighters as being part of their everyday role; in particular they mentioned their involvement in open days at the station and visiting schools, nurseries, community groups and youth groups. Firefighters described the previous system whereby there was a community engagement team who carried out the prevention work and one view was that they would like to see this team reinstated.

The move to the prevention role being carried out by all firefighters meant that some felt that they do not have the necessary skills to deliver talks, for example to children and young people. One suggestion was to have some standardised information which they could deliver to specific groups in the community.

There are mixed views among firefighters regarding home safety visits. The visits are seen as providing an opportunity to show the community they are there to help. There is also a view that the targets that are set around the home visits are too focused on the quantity of calls rather than on targeting those most at risk. The process of knocking on all doors in an area in order to reach their targets was described as feeling like 'cold calling', a process that was perceived as uncomfortable:

'We will be tasked to kind of...knock the doors, maybe the houses surrounding, across the street and just say there's been a slight incident, everything is fine, would you like a home fire safety visit? It's like a kind of cold calling thing um...and its...it's pretty humiliating to be honest, because people don't really want...I agree with putting a thing through the letterbox or something but I mean you feel like a door to door salesman and they look at you ... it feels quite intrusive but they want that done because they want the numbers up for whoever reads the report of how many fire safety visits we've done which seems to be what it's all about now' (Area B - firefighter)

A councillor view was that the prevention role is helpful to the community, particularly firefighters delivering talks in schools, attending community events and holding open days at the station. A concern, however, was raised that using highly trained, professional firefighters to perform this community role may not be the most

effective use of resources and that perhaps less skilled people could take the role of advising the community on fire safety.

The community groups, council staff and members of the public were aware of the prevention role of firefighters and viewed this positively. Community groups particularly mentioned the delivery of prevention talks in the community as a positive activity. However, they were concerned that firefighters are being less proactive than they used to be in relation to how they deal with community engagement following an incident or fire. In the past they would have engaged with community groups to ask for help to contact members of the public who were seen as at risk, whereas their approach now is to put leaflets through the doors of everyone in the community, to raise awareness of home safety visits.

Community groups, council staff and the public could all provide examples of the role the fire service play in the local area, including open days, fire safety checks, fun days, galas and school visits.

In terms of the challenges of engaging with specific social groups, firefighters felt they are still not reaching those with drug and alcohol dependency. A view is that the only ways to reach them are after an incident or if they are referred by social work. Firefighters viewed the work they had undertaken with young people as having had a positive impact in reducing rubbish fires. A view amongst the community groups, was that it was only a few years ago when the engines were being attacked and consequently the service spent time building relationships with young people through running fire safety programmes. They believed this is not happening anymore and so expressed concern that this is impacting on the relationship between the fire service and the community.

Partnership working

The firefighters viewed partnership working as focused on engaging with the local community and sharing information with other agencies in order to provide targeted support to vulnerable people. In regards to the police service, the general view was that though they work together at significant local events, the majority of the communication is at particular incidents and at meetings, this is not viewed as having changed since reform.

There was little reported contact between the firefighters and councillors. The firefighters did not refer to community planning partnerships in the context of partnership working. This view was shared by the councillors who reported little contact with the fire service, apart from at meetings. Though they have little contact, they viewed the service positively and would know who to contact if they had any issues. They do not discuss any joint working with the fire service, but they do not feel this has changed since reform.

There was some evidence from the firefighters of partnership working with housing organisations, however, there was also a view that contact was 'very limited with other agencies'. This was reiterated by the council staff and community groups. A worker from a housing association discussed the joint working they used to do with

the service, but feels that due to a lack of resources in the fire service as a result of reform they have now lost their partnership working.

Processes were said to be in place for referring vulnerable people to other agencies e.g. social services. Firefighters however, expressed concern about the impact of referring members of the public to other agencies. Currently the fire service are making first contact with vulnerable people who may be less trusting of other agencies such as the police or social services, but they were concerned that the public may lose trust in the fire service should they feel that their information is being passed to other organisations.

Firefighters asserted that formal partnership working and communication with other organisations occurs largely at the upper levels of the service rather than at front-line firefighter level. There was a degree of frustration by the firefighters about the lack of communication with other services at firefighter level, particularly in relation to receiving feedback on the outcome of cases where they have referred a vulnerable person to other agencies.

Firefighters expressed a view that due to limited resources, working in partnership with other organisations represented a strain on their already stretched workload. They also felt unable to deal with particular situations, such as domestic disturbances, in partnership with other agencies as they had not received adequate training.

A variety of views were expressed by the firefighters as to whether the nature of partnership working has changed since reform. One view is that there is now a greater focus on community engagement, however another view is that the level and quality of partnership working has not altered as a result of reform. There is a view that partnership working has simply been rebranded by the national fire service, but that the nature of partnership working has not changed.

3.3 Area C

Case study area C is located in a rural location, at some distance from the central belt and not part of the former Strathclyde Region. It has a retained fire station.

3.3.1 Delivering a local service

Firefighters believed that the public have little awareness of reform and have noticed little change, as they are getting a very similar service as before. Indeed, firefighters drew attention to what they see as the enhancement of local services through the process of standardising all appliances. They believed that this would mean they would not have to wait for specialist equipment in the event of, for example, a chimney fire, because every appliance would have a thermal imaging camera. It was believed this would save money in the long-term:

‘...there's standardisation of things which is going to be very positive. So we have new Breathing Apparatus sets, you know?, and they're a higher standard than we had before, and I think the fact that it is being delivered as a

national project makes a lot of sense, but I think it will make us safer within our working environment' (Area C - firefighter)

This was also a view expressed by the public, community groups, councillors and council staff. There were two concerns expressed about the service post-reform, the council staff and firefighters expressed concern about control room closures and amongst community groups there was concern about how the local service would cope if a major incident was to take place.

The view of the firefighters was that the number of middle managers and administrative staff at the station has been reduced since reform. As a result middle managers described spending more time on administrative tasks, for example, answering the phone or preparing spreadsheets for payroll. The middle managers believed that as they deal with a lot of low level management issues means they have less time for partnership working. These changes to support staff provision were not perceived as cost-efficient as more highly paid officers are doing the tasks of support staff. There was a suggestion that more investment in IT could help reduce the amount of time spent on administrative work at the station.

Firefighters also described the centralisation of support functions, such as finance, HR and IT support, as having a negative impact on their workloads. The view was that processes are now more bureaucratic making it time consuming to deal with things which previously would have taken just a simple phone call, such as vehicle repairs. Firefighters reported that it is more difficult to contact the centralised teams and that they are not always clear about where to find the right support. There was also a view that the remaining support staff teams are stretched and overworked.

Poor IT provision is seen as having a negative impact upon the ability of firefighters to perform their duties as they spend a considerable amount of time using the IT system:

'I do quite a bit of my work from home. I have no access to the intranet from home. Retained staff, we just don't... Therefore I can't access our standard operating procedures. I can't access probably half the information that I need to from home' (Area C - firefighter)

Firefighters also describe the impact this has on the ability of firefighters to carry out their training. This is viewed as particularly problematic as it could impact on the safety of firefighters when carrying out their duties. One firefighter described having to wait 40 minutes to connect to a computer which is particularly problematic for the retained firefighters if they are attempting to complete an online training course when they only have a two and a half hour session to complete their training.

3.3.2 Accessing specialist support

Due to the centralisation of specialist resources, the firefighters believed they have a better understanding of where resources are allocated:

'I think the communication has got better as it has been opened up because...people know exactly what everybody else has got now. So...for

larger scale emergency situations yeah it's easier to get...what you need to that job...' (Area C - firefighter)

Due to the rural location, firefighters did express concern about the amount of time it takes for certain teams to reach incidents, especially if there was a major incident. A senior firefighter explained that there are no local resilience plans in place which take into account geographical distances for specialist teams to get to rural areas. Due to these concerns about the length of time rural areas sometimes have to wait for specialist support, there was a view among local firefighters that they should be trained in and allowed to perform certain roles, such as fire investigation.

Training in specialist roles was seen by the firefighters as a challenge in their rural location, due to a lack of trainers. It was however identified that due to being a retained station, training should be on a 'need to know basis'. Before reform the firefighters felt they were not adequately trained to deal with incidents requiring specialist skills but since reform it was viewed positively, that they can now draw on expertise from outside their area.

3.3.3 Working with communities

Firefighters generally felt they are viewed positively by the community. This was reiterated by the public who expressed a positive view about their local service whether they have had direct interaction with them or not. There was also a sense amongst the public that the service would attend quickly in an emergency, which increased their sense of safety. The community groups, councillors and council staff also expressed positive views of the local service, especially in relation to the community role the firefighters play. The public also explained that they recognise local firefighters in their community and they appeared to have more faith in the local service because the officers were local people.

Much of the engagement of firefighters with the community focuses on prevention via home safety visits. This was viewed positively by the firefighters, community groups, council staff, councillors and the public. There are targets for conducting the home safety visits and reaching at risk community members. There was, however, a view among firefighters that carrying out these visits can be challenging as they are a retained fire station and do not always have the staff to carry out these visits. There was a suggestion that dedicated community safety advocates in their area would help with this. Another challenge identified by the firefighters was that generally the home safety visits are conducted with people who have requested them but may not be those most at risk. It was felt, having community safety advocates may help them reach the most hard-to-reach groups, including the elderly and those with drug or alcohol dependency.

As part of their prevention agenda firefighters promote community fire safety through delivering awareness raising talks and holding stalls at schools, fairs, gala days and fetes. These events were viewed positively by all groups. Firefighters viewed the shared agenda for delivering talks across Scotland critically as different areas are seen to have different priorities so they would prefer more flexibility when delivering talks.

Council staff viewed home safety visits as a good way of engaging with hard to reach community members, potentially saving lives through referring at risk people to the appropriate agencies. This referral process is identified by the firefighters as a new role for them, in which they actively look for sign of abuse, radicalisation etc. and pass on any concerns to other statutory agencies. There were mixed views about this, first there were concerns that if the community learn that this is part of their role, they may start refusing to let firefighters into their homes. However, there was also the view that as the fire service are seen as a neutral service they are in a good position to take on this role and reach community members who are not accessible to other agencies.

Another part of the prevention agenda includes running a fire safety programme with young people who have disengaged from school. Council staff highlighted this as good practice for helping to improve confidence, self-esteem and employment opportunities for young people.

Partnership working

The firefighters felt that partnership working had not changed since reform, with structures for joint working having been in place prior to the move to a single fire and rescue service. The firefighters saw community planning partnerships (CPPs) as key facilitators of community engagement and partnership working. There was a view that CPPs had the potential to play a significant role in the planning of future fire and rescue provision, particularly as their area was thought to have one of the fastest-growing accident rates in Scotland. There was a feeling that CPPs are being under-utilised in this respect.

Firefighters detailed experiences of working in partnership with a number of organisations across various sectors. These included public sector organisations such as social services, the environmental protection agency, the NHS and schools, other first response services such as the police and ambulance services, private bodies such as the owners of large estates, voluntary groups such as the scouts, guides and air cadets, and local networks such as the Emergency Liaison Group.

There was evidence of firefighters being proactive in building relationships with community groups as there was a desire to maximise community engagement by actively seeking out partnerships with community groups. They recognised that the fire service is often best placed to make first contact with vulnerable people, and can often connect people with other agencies who may be able to provide additional assistance. It was also acknowledged however that this relationship can be reciprocal, with other agencies putting people in contact with the fire service who may benefit from advice on fire safety.

Firefighters felt that formal partnership working and communication with other organisations occurs largely at the upper levels of the service rather than at front-line firefighter level. This was reiterated by council staff who discussed interacting directly with senior officers.

The firefighters identified a reduction in informal networks as representing a barrier to effective partnership working. Whilst case study area C is a predominantly rural area where 'everybody sort of knows everybody else' the introduction of more formal structures for partnership working which may be more appropriate for an urban setting has resulted in information being passed around less frequently. There was a view amongst the firefighters that new formal arrangements governing engagement with local councillors were overly complex and lacking in clarity. This was not a view shared by the councillors who described close working relationships with the fire service which had not been threatened by centralisation. The councillors discussed the regular meetings and committees which take place and their experience of being able to contact the station manager directly if they have any issues. They are also provided with quarterly reports from the fire service, which they find engaging as they have pictures, training photos, details about who is retiring and prevention promotion. The councillors were happy with the service and could not think of anything which could improve it.

Some barriers to partnership working were identified by the fire fighters who felt that their reduced capacity and lack of resources were a factor limiting the level and quality of partnership working, with pressures on already stretched firefighters. There was also a view that the lack of useful information provided to firefighters by other agencies hinders the ability to provide the level of support that some members of the public need. There was a suggestion that information sharing between agencies could be improved by re-introducing the role of a dedicated community safety advocate.

3.4 Area D

Case study Area D is located in a rural location which was not part of the former Strathclyde Region. The station is a mixed whole-time/retained station covering a wide geographical area. The number of fire emergencies is low in the area, but there is full time cover at the station in case of an emergency call. All the firefighters interviewed were whole-time.

3.4.1 Delivering a local service

The view amongst the firefighters was that the general public have not noticed any changes since reform and were satisfied as long as engines are available to attend emergencies. This was reiterated by the general public who had not noticed any major changes, though they did have an awareness of reform.

The changes in the provision of support staff and the centralisation of the support teams were viewed by management as having a detrimental impact on their workloads. Firefighters did not report noticing any difference in their own workloads. The loss of an administrative assistant at the station led to managers stating that they complete administrative work at the station themselves such as ordering equipment and uniforms, and organising and conducting recruitment for retained firefighters.

Middle managers also reported having difficulties contacting the centralised support teams. The perception was that the support teams are stretched and so it is more

difficult to access equipment and uniforms or contact IT and payroll. Middle managers would like to see some local support staff back at the station, as the current workload is seen to be having a detrimental effect on their work-life balance.

Low staffing levels were described by middle managers as leading to firefighters being called in to work and that at times appliances not being able to go out as they did not have a full crew available.

Resourcing levels at the station were also believed to be affected by firefighters frequently having to attend calls in other areas, particularly as the neighbouring stations were mostly retained and often required additional resource. This was perceived to be happening more frequently in recent years.

3.4.2 Accessing specialist support

The fire station in Area D was in the process of becoming a specialist station. There was a view by the firefighters that some specialist equipment is not located in the most accessible locations. Although there was an understanding that it is taking time for decisions to be made about where equipment should be located, there was also frustration about the level of uncertainty. There was also a view amongst the council workers that they had not been consulted on the location of specialist equipment and were informed 'at the very last minute'.

Due to the rural location, there was concern about the amount of time it takes certain specialist teams to reach areas during major incidents. An example was provided of the firefighters waiting 45 minutes for a specialist team who could enter the water to reach someone who had jumped off a bridge.

3.4.3 Working with communities

There were mixed views expressed by the firefighters about how they felt they were perceived by the general public. Though it was generally felt that their interaction with the public had not changed, there were opposing views that the community see them extremely positively but another view was that the community perceive them as lazy. This view appeared to be rooted in a belief that the community do not understand their role and the level of training required to fight fires and the perception that they spend their shifts playing games:

'I think there's some you'll never please, regardless, because they just see the Fire Service sleeping at night, and .. They...they think we play pool all day, and darts and stuff. We don't have a pool table, but there are times you hear people saying, "Oh aye. How's the pool table? Being playing pool all day, have you?"' (Area D - firefighter)

This case study area has been used as a pilot for the firefighters being trained in dealing with cardiac arrests and there was a belief that this is helping improve perceptions of their role in the community. There was also a view that more positive publicity of when they save lives could also further improve perceptions. These concerns about negative perceptions were not expressed by members of the public. Instead, they discussed the firefighters doing a 'brilliant', 'excellent' job, they believed they are community orientated and go above and beyond, with examples

being provided of the way they dealt with the flooding crisis. The general public stated they see the service in the community regularly and they believed they would be responsive in an emergency:

‘They don’t just do their job they go beyond that within care within the community’ (Area D – public focus group)

The fire service is considered to be local enough by the firefighters and members of the general public. From the firefighter perspective they know the community well which has both positive and negative impacts. This familiarity means that when there is an incident to attend it is possible they will personally know those who have been hurt, and though there is a view that they feel good to be serving the community this can also be challenging. An example was also provided of over-familiarity, in which during flooding members of the public felt they could come directly to the station for help because they knew the firefighters rather than going through the control room, a process required to prioritise calls.

The general public also have the view that the service is local enough. There was awareness that they could still call the local station and there was a belief that they were lucky to still have a local station.

Prevention and awareness raising are identified as important roles for the firefighters. However, it was felt that they have been important roles for the last 10 years and not something which has particularly altered since reform, except there was a view that they are attending more community events. They described having a prevention and protection calendar which outlines what their priorities should be and they are encouraged to propose initiatives.

Home safety visits were explained as an important part of their role, but other than their method of recording, this has not changed since reform. However, there was discussion about the additional elements that have been introduced to the home safety visits including looking for slip, trip and fall hazards, and referring community members to the relevant agencies if they are deemed to be at risk. There are targets for home safety visits, but these are felt to be easily achievable, though there was a view that some community members are still not aware they can have free smoke detectors fitted.

The firefighters described as part of their prevention role, visits to schools, workplaces, youth groups, care homes, supermarkets and sheltered housing. The prevention role also included running initiatives with young drivers and organising international days partly to promote fire safety to international residents.

Community groups, councillors and council staff all recognised the preventative role that the service plays. The general public also discussed the prevention role and provided positive examples of firefighters conducting home safety visits. They also discussed the awareness raising role through the service attending community events, being part of parades, organising charity car washes and school visits. There was a view in the younger focus group that they would like the fire service to have an open day at the station and provide more fire safety training to children.

Partnership working

Firefighters saw partnership working as an opportunity to bring organisations together to solve problems in an effective manner. An example of effective partnership working was a view that the fire service were able to work successfully with the police and ambulance service to react to a recent episode of flooding in the local area.

Firefighters discussed working with a number of other first response agencies including mountain rescue and the coastguard, in addition to dealing with referrals from social services. The firefighters had been recently trained as part of a pilot scheme as first responders for out-of-hospital cardiac arrests. This was viewed positively by the firefighters who appreciated that at times they could attend incidents quicker than the ambulance service and they could recall positive examples of when they had saved someone's life. There was a concern expressed about being called to incidents they were not sufficiently trained for, for example, someone who had had a heart attack and was also bleeding. But, on the whole they felt positive about working with the ambulance service to help serve the community.

There was a view amongst the firefighters that they had 'a good working relationship' with councillors. Interactions took place in the form of meetings between councillors and other agencies at the request of councillors, who approach firefighters directly when they feel a multi-agency approach would be beneficial. The councillors also viewed partnership work with the fire service positively and saw the station manager regularly at meetings. The firefighters also noted that these formal partnerships occur at the upper levels of the fire service rather than at front-line firefighter level.

The firefighters highlighted a lack of informal networks as representing a barrier to partnership working. Due to the rural location, there was believed to be more opportunity for informal engagement with councillors and community organisations. However, the format of community council meetings was seen as 'rigid' and does not make the most of the existence of such informal ties between the fire service and the community. This issue was not raised by the councillor who felt the communication was good especially as they could call the station manager outside of set meetings. The council workers were positive about their working relationship with the fire service, with their interactions in the main taking place at meetings. All the community groups were positive about their interactions with the fire service; there was however, a mixture of contact between them and the service. For some it was infrequent and mainly at meetings, for a housing group they ran joint initiatives with the fire service to tackle domestic violence.

There was a view amongst the firefighters that there was a lack of reciprocity of data sharing between bodies, stating that although the fire service provided information to other organisations and agencies, these same agencies were often unwilling to provide similar information to the fire service.

Firefighters expressed mixed views as to whether the nature and extent of partnership working has altered since the introduction of a national fire and rescue

service. There is a general view that they are doing more partnership working and that it might have improved because it is more coordinated and spread out than before reform.



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