

**Northern Joint Police Board
Finance and Policy Working Group**

Minutes of Meeting of the Finance and Policy Working Group held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday, 3 October 2008 at 11.10 a.m.

Present:

Representing the Highland Council

Mr I Ross
Mr G Smith
Mr A Millar
Mr H Wood
Mr N Donald
Mr B Murphy

Representing Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Mr N M Macleod
Mr M Macleod (Substitute)

Representing Orkney Islands Council

Mr R Leslie

Representing Shetland Islands Council

Mr A Cooper

Also in attendance:

Mr R Durham, The Highland Council, Convener, Highland and Islands Fire Board

Official in attendance:

Mr G Sutherland, Deputy Chief Constable
Mrs R Moir, Clerk's Office

Mr N M Macleod in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received on behalf of Mr I Mackenzie, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, and Mr A Cooper, Shetland Islands Council.

2. Convention of Scottish Local Authorities - Integration of Police and Fire Services

At its meeting held on 29 August 2008, the Board had agreed that an early meeting of the Finance and Policy Working Group be arranged prior to the November Board meeting to consider the issue of COSLA proposals for greater integration of the Police Service into its structures, through the establishment of a new Community Safety Executive Group, to include representatives from some, but not all, Police (and Fire) Authorities/Joint Boards.

There had been circulated Report No F&P2/08 dated 26 September 2008 by the Assistant Clerk inviting Members to comment on both the COSLA proposals and on the recent response by the Scottish Police Authorities Conveners Forum (SPACF), and to consider any further input that might be required from this Board.

While recognising that the introduction of the Scottish Government's Concordat with local authorities and Single Outcome Agreements with individual authorities had resulted in new political relationships within the process of setting and allocating local authority funding, Members were reminded that Police and Fire authorities were separate legal entities independent of their constituent councils and were not members of COSLA, which was not therefore in a position to speak on behalf of Police and Fire authorities. While welcoming closer working with COSLA, it was important to maintain the primacy of the tripartite relationship with the Scottish Government and the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS). SPACF had established a good working relationship with the Cabinet Secretary and met with him regularly.

The Convener explained that SPACF had been disappointed by the lack of consultation by COSLA prior to bringing forward its proposals and by its failure to respond to requests for a meeting with the interested parties (Conveners of Police, Fire and Community Justice Authorities) before calling the first meeting of the new Executive Group, scheduled for 6 October. Although all the interested authorities had in the end been invited to attend the inaugural meeting of the Executive Group on a pilot basis, Police Conveners had decided not to attend this meeting.

Mr R Durham informed Members that the timing of COSLA's announcement had permitted discussion at the most recent meeting of the Highland and Islands Fire Board (HIFB), in September. While having great sympathy with the position of SPACF, the situation of Fire Boards was somewhat different, in that the Scottish Government had given COSLA and local authorities a role in determining the distribution mechanism to be set for the allocation of Fire Capital Grant, and this was to be an item on the agenda for the new Executive Group's first meeting on 6 October. Accordingly, he would be attending the meeting to represent the HIFB interest on this matter and to emphasise the importance of COSLA including within its relevant discussion groups specialist financial expertise from within the eight Fire and Rescue Services, rather than relying on established non-specialist COSLA groups.

Members were advised that SPACF had issued an invitation to meet with the Conveners of the eight Fire Authorities/Joint Boards and Community Justice Authorities to discuss their common interest in these developments.

During discussion, a number of comments were made, including:

- a greater role for COSLA in policing issues might lead to a greater focus on the Central Belt authorities and not be in the interests of Northern Constabulary
- the independent status of police authorities and their direct relationship with the Scottish Government should be emphasised and the position of SPACF supported.

After discussion, the Working Group **AGREED** that:

- i. the Convener write to the President of COSLA to express the Board's support for the SPACF position and its concerns as to the haste with which the new Community Safety Executive Group had been taken forward and the lack of prior consultation on this;
- ii. the letter ask that the meeting scheduled for 6 October 2008 be postponed to permit such prior consultation to take place; and
- iii. the letter be copied to the Cabinet Secretary, Chief Constable, Conveners of the Constituent Authorities, HIFB and Northern Community Justice Authority, and all Board Members for their information.

3. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary - Independent Review of Policing

At its meeting held on 29 August 2008, the Board had agreed to respond to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland's (HMCICS) Independent Review of Policing, to include a request for an early meeting with HMCICS to discuss concerns relating to the consultation process, and that, prior to submission, the draft response be circulated to all Board Members for comment.

There had been circulated Report No F&P3/08 dated 26 September 2008 by the Assistant Clerk inviting Members to consider and comment on a draft response to the Review.

The Convener advised Members that he and the Chief Constable had met with HMCICS as part of the latter's consultation process and had emphasised in particular the work done through the Force Review to maximise efficiencies and improve front line services.

During discussion, a number of comments were made, including:

- whilst there might still be support centrally at official level for a reduction in the number of police forces in Scotland, this was not the agenda of the current Scottish Government
- any merger with another force or forces that might arise from such a reduction would not be in the interests of a predominantly rural force such as Northern
- any lesser adjustment of boundaries would require to be fully evidenced
- the draft response should emphasise Northern Constabulary's understanding of the social, cultural and economic needs of its area
- the introduction of appointed lay members to Scottish police authorities would carry no advantages and would undermine the tripartite relationship and democratic accountability
- the draft response should be strengthened to make clear the range of expertise available to the Board under its present constitution and the robustness of the governance already in place
- the effects of the Force Review needed more time to bed in.

After discussion, the Working Group **AGREED** that:

- i. the draft response be amended to take into account the comments made during discussion;
- ii. the revised draft letter be circulated to all Board Members for comment; and
- iii. the Assistant Clerk consult the Convener on any amendments requested prior to issue of the final text.

The meeting ended at 1.00 p.m.