

Integration of the Police & Fire Services into COSLA's Mainstream Activity

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to outline a number of key issues behind a proposal to integrate police and fire services more fully into the mainstream work of COSLA and to propose some structural options for achieving this. Leadership Board has considered this matter and this report reflects their views.

Recommendations

2. The Convention is recommended to :
 - i) endorse the principled position reached by Leadership Board in respect of in integration of police and fire into COSLA's structures, including the opportunity to create a Spokesperson from the Conservative Group; and
 - ii) agree that models and options are now worked up building on the framework outlined in this report and in discussion with police and fire interests, the existing Spokespersons, Political Group Leaders and the Presidential Team. These would be presented to Leaders for final approval in August.

Background

3. For a variety of reasons, the police and fire services although clearly part of the local government family of services have never been as fully integrated into COSLA's work as other major services such as education and social work. These reasons relate to the method of funding these services, the relative operational autonomy that they have over some issues, their governance arrangement through police authorities in some areas and police and fire joint boards in others a more well developed relationship with the Police and Community Services Directorate relative to the extent of relationships with COSLA. What is clear from a look at Leaders' agendas over an extended period is that these services have never figured as regularly or with such high priority on COSLA's agenda as their importance, cost and sheer size might indicate.

Detail

4. Over recent months, COSLA officers and the Chief Officers of fire and police services have been meeting to discuss greater involvement and integration of these services into the way COSLA works. There are clearly a variety of reasons for this. In essence, we should always have had a closer relationship but the Concordat and local government's place in the governance of Scotland makes this a more urgent matter.
5. In the new relationship, it seems less appropriate that any department of Government (in this case the Police and Community Services Directorate) should have a better developed relationship with service areas within the local government family than COSLA does itself. Furthermore, given local government's increased and growing influence as part of the governance of Scotland it is clear that in pursuit of their interests, the police and fire services will gain considerable value from a more integrated and embedded relationship with COSLA.

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6. All this takes place at a time when both police and fire services have a number of issues, for instance the SPSA (with its centralising agenda), a proposed review of policing services, a new fire framework and potential restrictions on the flexibility of capital funding within the fire service, which direct lobbying activity. Both fire and police also have very significant issues regarding the funding of their respective pension arrangements. Any of these issues would attract the full force of COSLA's political lobbying activity if they were to occur in any other mainstream local government service. That this is not happening is a result of the lack of an embedded relationship between COSLA and these services.

Proposal

7. In considering how best to integrate these services, there are two separate sorts of issues to be considered. There are a set of governance issues that have to be addressed concerning how Convention and Leaders relate to the political governance structures of the police and fire services. In some areas where there are Joint Boards, Leaders may take the view that they can speak for the fire and police services at Leaders meetings because it is individual Councils who nominate members of their local Joint Boards. This may, however, slightly underplay the seniority of the Conveners and Chairs and the statutory autonomy of Police and Fire Boards. These Councillors hold very senior positions and are accountable to their Joint Board. Given that all Joint Boards cover more than one Council area how would individual Council Leaders reflect the views of police and fire Conveners, furthermore in two areas, governance is through police authorities which exist in their own right. Some thought therefore has to be given to a mechanism for involving police and fire Conveners in Leaders deliberations. The recommendation of Leadership Board was that attendance of all of the Conveners and Chief Officers of police and fire police would be unwieldy at meetings of Leaders. An alternative option would be that police and fire be asked to nominate representatives to attend on their behalf and that this could operate on the same basis as Spokespersons who lead or contribute to debates, depending on the issue, but do not have voting rights. If the Convention agrees to the principle of police and fire involvement at Leaders meetings and Convention meetings, we will work with police and fire to identify possible models.
8. The second issue relates to how police and fire are engaged in our general policy development and political lobbying activity that is driven by our Executive Group structure. In looking at this, 3 possible options were considered.
9. The first option was that we simply kept our 6 Executive Groups as they are and without altering them invite police and fire services to be more active participants in the policy and lobbying activity that they carry out. There might have to be some alteration to the membership of the Executive Groups to reflect this involvement at a political level and an alteration to how reports and issues are prepared and developed to reflect a greater involvement at an officer level. From our viewpoint, this option required little or no alteration required to COSLA's structure and secondly, in an outcomes driven world it reflects the notion that both the police and fire services have core interests that are more broadly defined than the straightforward issues of policing and fire safety. The downside is that this arrangement provides little or no new focus on these two large and very important services and may give the impression police and fire are joining an unaltered COSLA rather than that we are all changing to develop a bigger integrated unit.
10. The second option which is perhaps at the other extreme is that a new Executive Group could be developed for police and fire services only. This option would certainly provide a new focus for those services but would tend to pigeon hole police and fire services as being separate from all the rest but in some way linked to each other. This idea of a single "blue light" service may not be one that we would wish to promote nor one that sits comfortably with the police and fire services. This option would also make integration with the general issues and broader outcomes that COSLA is committed to more difficult.

11. A third option was to review the remits of 2 of our existing Executive Groups – Community Well Being & Safety and Regeneration & Sustainable Development. Out of such a review plus some input from the other Executive Groups, it would be possible create a new Executive group relating specifically to Community Safety. The focus of the Group being community safety would certainly allow a discussion of overtly police and fire matters but would equally discuss what we needed to do to tackle broader issues like anti social behaviour, the integration of regulatory and specific services that bring about safe communities and very difficult political issues like how we guarantee community safety in a world where less people may be going to prison but will be serving sentences in the community. It would provide a clear focus for the police and fire services and would afford them considerable representation on the Executive Group without the downside of any suggestion of a single “blue light” service. Alongside this, the police and fire interests would make contribution and input where appropriate across all Executive Groups at either or both elected member and officer level. This recognises that a Community Safety Executive Group, whilst providing an important focus doesn’t capture all that they do.
12. This proposal would also have the advantage that the breadth of some of our other Executive Groups would be reduced by the creation of this new structure and Leadership Board favoured this latter option.
13. Leadership Board also proposed that the creation of an additional Executive Group should be used as an opportunity to create a Spokesperson for the Conservative Group.

Conclusion

14. The Convention is invited to consider the proposal to achieve the greater integration of police and fire services within COSLA’s mainstream structure by reviewing the existing Executive Group remits and amending them to create an additional Executive Group focusing on Community Safety the remit of which would cover police and fire but also broader community safety issues. Subject to the Convention’s agreement, we would propose a further working up of these proposals through a joint process of development driven by meetings with our Spokespersons and at both elected member and officer level with the police and fire services.

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