



To: SPA Board Members

07 September 2017
MD/AC/rm

Dear Board Members

RE: Inverness Control Room and National Database Enquiry Unit

I am writing to you as Leader of The Highland Council, to set out Highland Council's thoughts and concerns about the decisions you will be asked to make later this month regarding the future of the Inverness Control Room and the future location of the National Database Enquiry Unit (NDEU). I do not believe that you are currently in possession of all the relevant information and I would therefore ask you to consider the information below, prior to making your decisions on the 28 September.

As was reported at the SPA Board meetings in both June and August, this Council has had a number of concerns, particularly regarding the future of the National Database Enquiry Unit. Undoubtedly, as I will set out below, this has been related to a lack of communication. However, I do feel it important to acknowledge that, since the end of June, ACC Hawkins and his team have met with us twice and their openness and transparency on these occasions has been greatly welcomed. I have also had the opportunity to meet with the Chief Constable, on 2 August 2017.

Inverness Control Room

As is well documented, this Council has been deeply unhappy with the proposal to close the Inverness Control Room since the strategic direction for contact, command and control was agreed by The SPA Board in January 2014. We have always been of the firm view that the alternatives proposed by this Council – for example a joint control room between Police, Fire and the Ambulance Service for the north, reflecting the unique geographical circumstances – were not considered, nor taken seriously. This remains a significant disappointment and, we believe, a missed opportunity. We also remain concerned about the loss of local knowledge through the centralisation of call centre function across an area which is more than a third of the Scottish landmass. Anecdotal evidence, since the transfer of the Fire control room in December 2016, suggests that the loss of this local knowledge has resulted in challenges in the deployment of services.

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Whilst the Strategic Direction Report from January 2014 sets out the rationale for change, it does not provide an in-depth business case for the choice of locations, with size appearing to take precedence in the proposals. I am not aware whether you as Board members were able to consider documentation that set out a full options appraisal for this very significant change.

I do wish to acknowledge that there have clearly been significant improvements to contact, command and control within Police Scotland since the tragic events on the M9 in July 2015. The actions taken to address the recommendations of HMICS have clearly led to significant improvements and we do accept the assurance that measures have been put in place to make the control rooms safer going forwards. I would also like to acknowledge the steps and processes put in place to ensure readiness for transfer and I have been reassured by the information that has been shared with us. However, this does not detract from our firm belief that such investment in infrastructure and staffing could have taken place in the North, in Highland, instead of situation 3 call centres in the central belt.

National Database Enquiry Unit

The original C3 Strategic Direction report that was considered by the SPA Board in January 2014 proposed that the NDEU would be based in Inverness. The paper clearly noted that:

“The proposed profile of five Area Control Room sites ensures we fully achieve our operating requirements, particularly in respect of meeting the large demand from front line officers for checks of national databases and intelligence systems. This critical front line function will be based within the current Inverness ACR, and will provide immediate support to front line officers right across the service area.” C3 Strategic Direction Report January 2014.

The paper went on to note that the indications were that this would result in an increase in staffing.

The position and role of the NDEU has been reiterated on many occasions in SPA papers, the HMICS Call Handling Assurance Reports and in person to us by a member of the C3 team at a meeting of our Communities and Partnerships Committee in March 2016:

“.....we are centralising that facility in Inverness and the former Inverness control room will become the national database enquiry unit for Scotland” Communities and Partnerships March 2016

Alongside the location of the unit within Inverness, it was noted that this would require an uplift of jobs:

“...there will require to be an uplift of staff unto Inverness to allow Inverness to provide that national facility.” Communities and Partnerships March 2016

The position outlined above has long been our understanding and, whilst this did not lessen our concerns regarding the location of the control room, we did reluctantly accept that at least jobs would be retained within the community and additional jobs created. Within an area such as Highland, the retention and creation of well-paid jobs is extremely significant for the local economy.

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We were unaware this position had changed until nuances contained in an update report to the SPA Board on 7 June 2017 suggested that different options to the original proposed model were being considered. This change in position was confirmed by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice in response to questions in Parliament on 6 June 2017, when he noted Police Scotland's intention that the NDEU be *largely* based in Inverness but that a *partnership arrangement* with Govan was also being explored.

Until that point, there had been no communication by Police Scotland with the Council to suggest that any alternative arrangement was intended. This is despite a meeting with the C3 team in March 2017.

We have since met with the C3 team on two occasions and also with the Chief Constable. Whilst the C3 team were very honest in their engagement with us, we are still unconvinced of the rationale for this change in position.

The current preferred proposal by Police Scotland is that the NDEU in Inverness will not be a national service, but serve the north and east of the country with Govan serving the west. As a result, there is a significant change in the number of jobs required to run this operation from Inverness. We are led to believe 28 full time equivalent (FTE) posts will be required. This is a significant departure from the 53.2 FTE staff running the service centre and area control room back in 2014 (37.5 police staff), combined with the expectation that there would be a staffing increase. Currently, our understanding is that there are only 30.7 police staff in the Inverness Control Room which suggests a strategic decision to reduce staff resources prior to the decision to transfer.

We are told that the new model will achieve resilience, achievability, cost and future proofing, but without the ability to thoroughly interrogate the data or the rationale set out in the business case, it is impossible for us, or I would suggest you as the SPA Board, to know that this is a fact.

We were briefly allowed to see the options appraisal document, which sets out the new rationale for change, but given this document is protectively marked, the team were of the view that they could not provide this to us to read in depth. Having viewed the document, it is our view that there is nothing that should be withheld from the public domain. Hence I wrote to ACC Hawkins to request a copy of the options appraisal document. My request was refused. Therefore, embarrassingly, I have been forced to request this document under Freedom of Information. I would hope to access this prior to your meeting on 28 September and share further thoughts on the details at that point.

Decisions by public sector organisations should not be taken in unnecessary secrecy. I was also disturbed to learn that you as Board members will not be given sight of this document and only be presented with the option the Chief Constable wishes to proceed with. I do not believe that this enables you, the SPA Board, to effectively scrutinise the decisions of Police Scotland. It is not sufficient that the SPA C3 Governance and Assurance Group has had sight of the document and discussed it in private. The full SPA Board is making the decision and therefore you should all have possession of all the facts. I would implore you not to make a decision without having sight and scrutiny of all related documentation.

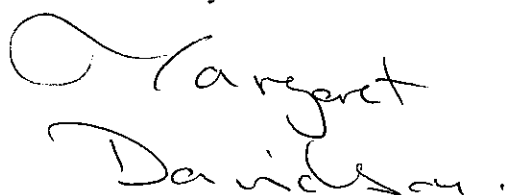
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On the 28 September you will be making very significant decisions regarding the future of the Inverness Control Room and the National Database Enquiry Unit. Prior to making this decision, I would ask you to consider whether you are confident that you are in possession of all the facts and have sufficient information to make and defend this decision.

The SPA is the body responsible for scrutinising police services on behalf of the Scottish people. It is imperative that you acquit yourselves well of that task. I thank you for your considering my letter. I and my colleagues would be more than happy to meet with one or more of you in person to further discuss our concerns.

Yours sincerely

Handwritten signature of Margaret Davidson in cursive script.

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