



HM Fire Service Inspectorate

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All the members of the inspection team contributed to the development of this report and the quality assurance panel provided a professional challenge to the contents, assumptions and conclusions made. However, the Chief Inspector takes sole responsibility for the report, its contents and conclusions.

1 Introduction

This report presents a detailed examination of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's (SFRS) resources and activities in four distinct areas of Scotland, with a particular emphasis on the variations which the Service inherited from its predecessor organisations. Our conclusions are based on an inspection that took place between December 2013 and March 2014, and this should be borne in mind when considering ongoing initiatives that the SFRS may have in place that address some of the issues concerned.

The Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2013 contains the principle that communities with broadly similar risk profiles should have a reasonably similar level of service from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. This could potentially be difficult to deliver, depending on the scale and nature of the inherited variation.

The starting point for our inspection was to test the assumption that the SFRS had inherited significant variations in the level of its resources across the country that could not be explained simply by reference to the different levels of risk in different locations. This assumption was implied by information available to us from previous inspections and reports from other agencies, and we wished to test whether it was true and the extent of the variation. We compared two pairs of areas: Fife with South Lanarkshire, and islands in the Inner Hebrides that were within Strathclyde Fire and Rescue's area of operations (the *former Strathclyde FR islands*) with islands in the Inner Hebrides that were Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service's responsibility (the *former HIFRS islands*).

Where any variation was identified, that is not to say that we necessarily support arguments for increased resources in any particular geographical area. The challenge for a national service is to achieve an overarching national strategy to resource planning, and to achieve an equitable national distribution of local resources. This may involve reducing provision in some areas, just as much as it may mean increasing it in others.

We anticipate that the SFRS is well aware of many of the matters we record in this report, and that there will be planned actions and strategies to address them. We hope that by highlighting the issues and by reflecting upon them, we can support the Service's senior leadership in its decision making and priority setting.

A summary of our findings

Beyond the exercise of examining and comparing the two pairs of areas, we have formed views on a number of key issues which have arisen from our inspection work and which are common across the areas visited.

The key points we wish to make in respect of the broader Scottish Fire and Rescue Service agenda are:

- **The sustainability of the Retained Duty System (RDS) and volunteer units is one of the major strategic challenges facing the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.**

During the course of our field visits, we were repeatedly advised by local staff of the fragility of many RDS and volunteer units. Although there are examples of strong, viable units, there are also many units across the country which report long-term and growing difficulties in attracting and retaining staff and providing operational cover for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

This is an issue that is well known to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Inspectorate has been briefed on a major project to examine this. However, the issue has been reinforced to us so strongly during the course of our visits that we feel obliged to record this as a key finding.

- **The general condition and age profile of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) might be indicating the need for an expensive replacement programme.**

Inspectors do not have a particular expertise in assessing PPE and firefighting kit. However, during our field visits we did note what we took to be a range of standards. Importantly, most of the kit we looked at in our inspection areas was of relatively similar age and was probably acquired about the time of the introduction of the latest generation of firefighting kit. Our record sampling checks showed that stations generally kept good personal records on the use and care of the PPE. A fair number of the fire tunics we looked at had multiple repairs and looked to be near the end of life (and our caveat here is that the actual lifespan of an item of equipment is a matter for the Service, guided by expert advice). The main reason we are noting this particular issue is that we are concerned that if the picture we have seen is replicated across the country, the Service may need to anticipate a substantial bill for replacement at some point.

- **Potential changes to training delivery are causing some concern amongst staff and initial training available to new recruits to RDS and volunteer units might be better tailored to suit their specific needs.**

Staff are aware of potential changes to training delivery but at the time of our inspection plans for the future were not yet clear to them. We are aware that the SFRS is actively planning for changes and is discussing significant capital investment and expect that some of this disquiet will decrease when plans become clearer.

We also believe that whilst some flexibility in initial training has been inherited by the SFRS, there is an opportunity to build on that and to use national capacity to best suit the needs of RDS and volunteer recruits.

Offsetting these concerns about training, the large majority of staff we spoke to felt they were well able and equipped to deal with local risks and we have been presented with data which confirms that the SFRS has robust monitoring systems in place to ensure the currency of skills and qualifications.

Turning now to the specific objectives of this inspection, the key points we wish to make in this report are:

■ **The variation we identified is less than we had expected, and did not reveal a consistent pattern of weakness in one area.**

The assumption we sought to test with this particular study was that we were likely to find significant variation in the capacity and levels of service provision between the different study areas. Whilst we have seen different business practices and approaches, we found less in the way of variation than we had expected. It is worth noting that we did find particular areas of strength and good practice in all of the areas we visited.

Some key areas where we did find variations are:

■ **The level of training officer support to RDS and volunteer staff is higher in Fife than South Lanarkshire and higher in the former Strathclyde FR islands than the former HIFRS islands.**

Former Strathclyde FR islands have historically benefited from a regular regime of visits from training officers and staff are generally happy with the training support they receive. In the former HIFRS islands, whilst units report significant increases in the volume of training delivered in recent years, there is still some imbalance. We are aware that the SFRS is continuing to use peripatetic training officers to reach these geographically remote areas and that the Service has a strategy to redress the balance.

RDS stations in Fife are programmed to receive weekly visits from Fife's dedicated Learning and Development department. This is in contrast to the provision in South Lanarkshire, which is delivered in the main by the station's Watch and Crew Managers with less support from the Local Senior Officer (LSO) area. Again, we are aware that the SFRS has a strategy to balance resources and it is worth noting that the different levels of support which have been inherited do not mean that there is a difference in the levels of skills and qualifications of staff.

We are not holding up Fife as an area of best practice or criticising the level of support in South Lanarkshire – we are simply highlighting a historical difference in approach.

■ **RDS crews in Fife are not provided with skills maintenance in all topics that wholetime firefighters are trained in, whereas RDS crews in South Lanarkshire follow the same skills maintenance schedule as wholetime firefighters.**

A conscious decision was taken in Fife to limit the number of topics covered by the RDS skills maintenance programme, with the aim of focusing the limited training time on the risks relevant to each RDS station's area. This approach is not followed in South Lanarkshire.

We did not assess the respective merits of the Fife and South Lanarkshire approaches and for the time being merely record it. However, we expect this will be considered as part of SFRS's broader review of the RDS and volunteer system.

■ **The use of SFRS's online training records system PDRPro is patchy across the RDS/volunteer service, with South Lanarkshire the only location where RDS crews commonly use the system.**

PDRPro is a valuable record-keeping tool, but its use is not consistent across volunteer and RDS locations and we received feedback from multiple locations that it is not well-suited to the needs of on-call firefighters (RDS and Volunteer). Generally RDS units in South Lanarkshire had managed to make adaptations to use the system. As record-keeping is an increasingly important facet of the business of SFRS, a nationally consistent approach would be desirable.

■ **There has been a higher level of home fire safety visit activity in Fife compared to South Lanarkshire and in the former HIFRS islands compared to the former Strathclyde FR islands.**

This inherited difference has implications for a new national approach in that a straightforward application of quantitative targets might not result in the best use of resources. Some concerns have been expressed to us by staff about the suitability of national quantitative targets in a location which has benefited from a historically high level of visits. There are also issues about the most effective and efficient way to carry out this type of work which we understand the SFRS will be examining. We would encourage ongoing academic work in this area as a means to continue improving the targeting and effectiveness of this essential work.

We think that it is helpful to assess levels of activity against outcomes (for example, whether significantly greater activity results in a reduced number of dwelling fires). We know that such studies have been undertaken, however, we do not go into that level of detail in this report.

■ **The availability of Operational Guidance varies across the areas.**

This is a theme which we commented on in 'An Overview of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service', and which continued to present itself in the course of this inspection. Mobile Data Terminals have been made available in all primary response appliances, but these have yet to be populated with risk information and operational guidance in some of the former HIFRS islands that we visited. We are aware that an action plan is underway to address this issue. Beyond that, the software in use varies across former Fire and Rescue Service areas and is an obvious candidate for rationalisation and increased consistency across the SFRS. We think there is also an opportunity to tailor operational guidance information presented on the terminals to better reflect local risks.

2 About the inspection

Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland (HMFSI) is a body that operates within, but independently of, the Scottish Government. Inspectors have the scrutiny powers specified in section 43B of the 2005 Act. These include inquiring into the state and efficiency of SFRS, its compliance with Best Value, and the manner in which it is carrying out its functions.

The purpose of this inspection is to consider the effectiveness with which the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is meeting, or planning to meet, the intent of the Fire and Rescue Framework 2013 that

“... the SFRS should aim to create more equal access to national capacity, with an expectation that areas with similar risk profiles should normally have similar provision”

by comparing and contrasting service delivery, support, management and supervision arrangements in areas of Scotland with comparable risk profiles, but which fell within different fire service areas before April 2013 and accordingly had different funding profiles and management arrangements.

An inquiry by the Inspectorate can be self-directed or can be subject to direction by Scottish Ministers. This report on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is self-directed by the Chief Inspector. The decision to carry out this inspection was influenced by our risk assessment of issues facing the SFRS, and by consideration of the findings of our report ‘An Overview of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service’ published in November 2013. It discusses a number of the risks we identified as potentially impacting on the Service, including issues around training, resource allocation and community partnership working.

We consider that the issue of equal access to national capacity is fundamental to the whole process of fire reform and the creation of a national service. Of course, residents of a remote island would not necessarily expect nor require the same level of service provision as those of an inner city with substantial residential and industrial risks. However, what the Fire and Rescue Framework 2013 mandates, and communities should be entitled to, is that a similar service will be provided to areas of similar risk.

Why we inspected the areas that we did

Based both on anecdotal evidence, and on sources such as the report of the Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Authorities (CIFRA) in 2012 on the former Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service¹ and Accounts Commission Best Value² reports, there was a basis for considering that we might find significant levels of variation in the service provision across the areas we selected.

For example, in CIFRA's 2012 report it was said that

“... nothing in [this] report should be taken as underestimating the scale of the challenge which remains in delivering a sustainable Fire and Rescue Service across the Highlands and Islands area”

¹ HM Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Authorities, *Report on an Inspection of Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service*, November 2012

² Audit Scotland, *The Audit of Best Value, Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue*, March 2012 and Audit Scotland, *The Audit of Best Value, Fire and Rescue*, February 2012 (prepared for the Accounts Commission)

and an Accounts Commission report of 2012 said of Fife Fire and Rescue Service that

“[Fife FRS] now faces significant challenges with the need to make further savings of 4-4.5 per cent in each of the following 3 years ... it is difficult to see how further savings can be achieved without the potential for some increase in community risks.”³

Accordingly there was evidence available to us to suggest that these two areas in particular might have brought with them inherited challenges from the predecessor services. We wanted to examine whether this had translated into a different standard of service provision for communities.

We selected Fife and South Lanarkshire as comparators for two reasons. Firstly, we were aware that prior to the amalgamation of the predecessor fire and rescue services, Fife Fire and Rescue Service had faced particular funding challenges as referenced in the Best Value audit report cited above.

Therefore we anticipated that there would be some distinctions in service provision and cost that we could examine and discuss in the context of this report. That was dependent on the second reason that we chose these two comparators – that the geographic area and demographics of the two areas were broadly comparable. That is not to say the areas are identical, there are inevitably some differences between them. However, we tested the socio-demographics and deprivation in the Scottish context and, in the round, we considered Fife and South Lanarkshire to be a valid comparison.

From the CIFRA report into Highlands and Islands FRS in 2012, and also the Accounts Commission Best Value audit report⁴, we were well aware of the challenges which the HIFRS Board had started to address and which have been inherited by the national service. However, our recent report on an Overview of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service⁵ did not focus specifically on the variations between the former HIFRS area and the rest of the Service other than in the broadest sense, and we were therefore keen to consider that issue as part of this inspection.

The 2012 Report characterised the challenge faced by the HIFRS as being a structural one: the provision of an extensive network of fire stations across a large geographical area with limited supporting resources. Some of the most challenging areas for this provision are the islands. This geography is not, however, unique to the former HIFRS area, the former Strathclyde FR also had responsibility for a substantial part of the Inner Hebrides with its associated issues of isolation, difficulty of access, sparse population and often rugged terrain.

We considered that it would be instructive to make the comparison between parts of the Inner Hebrides covered by HIFRS (former HIFRS islands), and those parts covered by Strathclyde Fire and Rescue (former Strathclyde FR islands). We expected to find differences: Strathclyde FR benefited from substantial economies of scale and the existence of a sizeable flexi-duty

³ Audit Scotland, *The Audit of Best Value, Fife Fire and Rescue*, February 2012 (prepared for the Accounts Commission)

⁴ Audit Scotland, *The Audit of Best Value, Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue*, March 2012 (prepared for Accounts Commission)

⁵ HM Fire Service Inspectorate, *An Overview of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service*, November 2013

officer cadre, as fitted a service protecting around 2.3 million⁶ people. The population covered by HIFRS was about one-ninth of that⁷ – and accordingly the financial base was more slender. At the same time the total geographic area falling within HIFRS's responsibility was larger than Strathclyde's⁸. So, we expected to find greater challenges in the provision of service in the former HIFRS islands.

Methodology

Our inspection took place between December 2013 and March 2014. We began the inspection process by requesting a broad range of information from the SFRS and supplemented this with our own research work.

Our intention was to take into account a number of issues identified within the Inspectorate's risk assessment. These were:

- *Incident command training in risk-critical decision-making;*
- *Provision of risk-critical firefighter training across the service;*
- *Continued support of risk-critical training in the former Highlands & Islands FRS area;*
- *Defining levels of service provision based on an analysis of community risk and best use of allocated budgets;*
- *The provision of operational risk information to inform decision making.*

To achieve this, in the course of our inspection we focused our attention on the following service delivery and support areas:

- *The levels of staff and resources available;*
- *Staff management plans and policies;*
- *The levels of management and operational command supervision available;*
- *Operational response plans and policies and supporting risk modelling;*
- *The provision of risk information to operational crews;*
- *Age and condition profiles of buildings;*
- *Age and condition profiles of the appliance fleet;*
- *Devolved and centrally held budgets relating to our areas of interest;*
- *Training, including access to command and control and risk-critical training;*
- *Local planning, local engagement and relationships with partner organisations.*

We did not in the event uncover significant variation in the majority of these areas. For the sake of brevity, this report does not discuss aspects of service delivery where we did not find significant variation.

^{6, 7, 8} Audit Scotland, *Best Value in fire and rescue services in Scotland*, July 2012 (prepared for the Accounts Commission)

Field visits and meetings undertaken

One feature of our inspection has been our visits to fire stations. We visited every station in the study areas⁹, a total of 45 visits. Some of these stations are in relatively remote locations. We considered that it was inappropriate to write a report commenting on the nature of service delivery in different parts of the country without visiting those areas and speaking to the people who deliver the service. We were also keen to gauge the views of these front-line service providers about the challenges they faced in protecting their communities, and ways in which they might benefit from harmonisation of approach across the SFRS.

In the preparation of this report, we visited the five stations on Skye, and Raasay and Muck, (former HIFRS islands) and Mull, Iona, Coll, Tiree, Colonsay, Islay, Jura and Gigha (former Strathclyde FR islands). Both of those former services had service delivery obligations in other islands but these are not within the scope of this report.

We conducted a number of group discussions with station based personnel. We also wrote to staff representative bodies and spoke to those who wished to meet with us. During our station visits, where possible, we briefly examined the building and facilities, appliances and equipment, PPE, and records relating to operational guidance and training.

We held a number of meetings with officials of organisations who have a community planning partnership/community safety partnership relationship with SFRS in the visited areas.

⁹ We excluded from the study area certain inshore islands such as Lismore, Kerrera and Luing, in order to avoid the reference area becoming over-weighted towards the former Strathclyde FR.

3 Variations in service provision – a national view

Overview

When we began this inspection we expected to find differences in the way that predecessor fire and rescue services had allocated resources and managed their business. The predecessor services were structured differently – two formed part of the unitary local authority while the remainder reported to joint boards. The services were of different sizes – ranging from Strathclyde Fire and Rescue, serving a population of around 2.3 million, to Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service serving 280,000 people across a substantial but sparsely populated area¹⁰. Arising out of this, services had disparities in available funding, and did not all benefit equally from economies of scale. Strategic priorities varied across the Services.

It was inevitable in these circumstances that business delivery would vary depending on the circumstances of each predecessor service. This was the underlying theme of the report published by CIFRA in November 2012¹¹ on the former Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service (HIFRS). That Service faced a number of specific challenges related in that report, and it was one of our aims to follow up on the work that had been undertaken in the former HIFRS area to assess whether there remained significant differences in service delivery as compared with similar areas.

For this reason, we took the opportunity to explore with SFRS at a national level its understanding of the variations it had inherited, and the work it was doing to fully appreciate those variations and their consequences.

In the sections below, we discuss some issues that appeared to us to have national application for the SFRS, beyond the regional comparison that we undertook for this report.

Dealing with Diverse Communities

During the course of our visit programme, we routinely spoke to staff about their perceptions of diversity within local communities and how they are responding to that. This topic was designed to introduce discussion on the subject and test and raise awareness of perceptions of equality. Crews reported that they were comfortable in dealing with diversity and recognised the different forms which diversity might take.

In all of our visits, staff were happy to discuss equality and diversity and understood the need for policy and guidance.

Delivery of the training function

During the course of our fire station visits, we heard a range of concerns regarding the delivery of training and uncertainty for the future.

One consistent message which came through was that training on offer from the new centre at Clydesmill is not currently best tailored to the needs of those RDS staff who attend this centre. Staff are not able to gain the best advantage of their visits. We heard of two strands to

¹⁰ Audit Scotland, *Best Value in fire and rescue services in Scotland*, July 2012 (prepared for Accounts Commission)

¹¹ HM Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Authorities, *Report on an Inspection of Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service*, November 2012

this: the times which are programmed for training events do not fit well with the availability of many RDS staff; and some of the training programmes seemed to staff to be repetitive and not making best use of such a comprehensive facility.

More broadly, staff were concerned about changes which might take place with the range of training facilities available to them. In Fife there was wide concern that the local training support given to RDS stations would be reduced or removed and that the use of central facilities at Thornton would cease. We have been briefed on a draft national strategy for training which, once implemented, aims to ensure a consistency of approach and provision across the country and we are aware that recent staff briefings on that strategy (in Fife in particular) have taken place.

Offsetting these concerns, the staff we spoke to felt that they are well prepared, competent and equipped to deal with the large majority of risks and operational scenarios they are likely to encounter in their local area. We are also aware that senior training managers have a robust monitoring system in place which allows them to be confident that staff competence and qualifications are kept up to date.

We found that RDS staff in Fife, and RDS and volunteer staff in the islands (both former Strathclyde FR and former HIFRS islands) do not routinely use the PDRPro training recording system. This in itself may not be an issue – there is no reason that IT based systems cannot be replicated to an extent on paper. However, we thought that existing paper-based training records could be improved significantly if they were designed to capture an individual's training needs, record when those needs were met and that some assessment had been made on the individual's competence.


We also noted differences in the way in which learning content and packages are used and think that there is a good opportunity to focus training on those packages which reflect local risks.

Different contracts and roles

Broadly speaking, there are three types of employment contract in existence for operational firefighters – Wholetime, Retained Duty System (RDS) and Volunteer. Alongside this, there are (again, broadly speaking) two categories of operational firefighter – those who are trained and equipped to work with Breathing Apparatus inside buildings and structures and those who are not so trained and whose work is focussed on other incident types such as wildfire and/or road traffic collisions. In the past, in some parts of Scotland RDS contracted staff were associated with the structural firefighting role and volunteer staff with a more restricted role. However, the SFRS has inherited a variety of permutations.

In our visits to the former Strathclyde FR islands, we met staff on volunteer contracts who are fully equipped and trained to respond to structural fires and other specialist incident types (for example they are provided with gas-tight suits). There is no operational distinction that we can identify between these volunteer units and RDS units elsewhere in the country.

In our visits to the former HIFRS islands, we found a distinction between staff who are equipped to deal with structural fires, all of whom have RDS contracts and staff who were not, who were on volunteer contracts (and to complicate matters further, were referred to as 'Community Response Units').



The biggest practical difference between RDS and volunteer staff in the former Strathclyde FR islands we noted is in the expectation of availability. RDS staff across Scotland are contractually obliged to provide 120 hours availability per week (or a recognised percentage of that) and are asked to monitor their availability through the use of an electronic system. Members of volunteer units have neither of those things (although they will almost certainly be coordinating availability through a local leader).

We have received consistent messages from staff that the requirement to provide 120 hours is a disincentive for RDS staff and can be a barrier to recruitment. By contrast, a volunteer might only be able to offer 50 hours per week, but this might be a crucial 50 hours in terms of keeping the unit available. We think that there is further work to be done here to consider what if any minimum requirements should apply to hours offered by on-call staff. While we understand a free-for-all may be undesirable in the context of limiting the overall number of members of a unit, the experience of volunteer stations suggests to us that there is greater scope to allow local managers discretion in choosing to permit their staff to offer the number of hours availability that will suit them and at the same time support the unit.

In the long term, we do not consider that the distinction between 'RDS' and 'volunteer' contracts can be sustained where functionally, the service being delivered by the units in question is, in one sense, identical and which for the RDS units themselves can vary from remote rural locations to very built up urban environments. We hope that the review of the RDS and volunteer service currently being undertaken by SFRS will look at how greater consistency may be achieved, whilst preserving the features of the current volunteer system that provide flexibility to local managers in rostering personnel.

Our summary view on all of this is that there is a clear need to simplify contracts and roles which we hope can be done in a way which supports firefighter safety and local flexibility.

Local Solutions

Islay is home to around 3,500 inhabitants in 1,479 households spread over 62,000 hectares* with increased numbers during the summer season. The island has various industrial and residential risks with eight separate whisky distilleries as well as a number of hotels and guest houses.

The SFRS has inherited three fire stations from Strathclyde Fire and Rescue, one RDS in Bowmore and two volunteer units at Port Ellen and Port Charlotte. Bowmore is positioned centrally to the two volunteer units which are some 6-7 miles distant.

Islay, like other island communities, can suffer from lack of availability of crews and as a result it is often difficult to provide operational cover. To deal with this issue pragmatically, the Service has been running a pilot which treats the three stations as a virtual unit and alerts all of the stations each time there is an incident on the island. This helps to ensure that a suitable number of personnel respond to an incident. Inspectors were satisfied that crews were well aware of their limitations prior to a full crew forming up.

The pilot has not yet been brought to a conclusion. Therefore, as at the time of writing, there is not a full report on its effectiveness. Whilst crews on the island see the benefit of such an initiative, it does require formalisation with appropriate policy and procedures written to determine the operational limits of such a system.

Inspectors think that this is a good example of a flexible and pragmatic approach to the delivery of services to communities located in remote rural areas such as Islay and is a good example of a model which has been specifically tailored to suit local circumstances on the island.

* Scotland's Census 2011

Strength and viability of the Retained Duty System and volunteer units

During the course of our inspection work, we were briefed by the SFRS on a major project to examine the RDS/Volunteer systems. It is clear to us that whilst there are a number of strong and sustainable units across Scotland, there are many which, despite the best efforts of all involved, have genuine concerns over the long term viability of their local stations. We therefore strongly support the current review.

There are a number of comments we would like to make in relation to that work, borne out of our field visits and arising from the considerations set out above:

1. In the short term, it will be helpful to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to rationalise and minimise the number of variations in contract type and job titles which are used. The use of RDS or Volunteer contracts should be treated as something separate from the scope and role of operational staff;
2. We think that it is important that roles, training and operational guidance are focussed on local risk and local needs. There are improvements which could be made in relation to this across the country;

3. Initial training of staff should be specifically considered and re-designed to best suit people's needs. Ongoing and maintenance training should likewise be designed to suit RDS and volunteer staff;
4. We hope that, along with the clarification of the limitations in cover we have mentioned above, closer working with community planning partners and local businesses might help to deliver an improved approach to operational cover;
5. Although only a minority of crews we have interviewed raised the question of remuneration, we think that a review of the system should include this consideration. It is a fact that reduced operational activity is resulting in less payments to RDS and volunteer staff;
6. Where a traditional, fire-engine based response looks unviable, there may be creative ways in which SFRS can forge community partnerships so that there is still a focal point for Community Fire Safety and education within remote communities;
7. It is often stated that modern working patterns, where local staff travel to work outside their local area, is a major factor in reducing availability – particularly during the daytime¹². However, it is likely that RDS and volunteer units have been challenged in relation to daytime cover for a long time, and that now the closer scrutiny of the units provided by the electronic availability system is simply providing managers with better information. In many cases, expecting RDS and volunteer units to provide 24/7 operational cover is difficult, regardless of the commitment and effort local crews put in. SFRS and local communities should be clear that, in many areas, 24/7 cover cannot reasonably be guaranteed locally and that operational cover from further afield is part of the normal arrangements the SFRS has in place;
8. In addition to all of this, the challenges of recruitment and retention of staff is equally under strain. In many locations we visited, staff report great difficulties in attracting new recruits despite considerable and sustained local effort. There is also some dissatisfaction with the operation of the recruitment system and process in respect of delay and communication. A properly streamlined recruitment process that minimises delay should be a given, and work is required to ensure that it is achieved. And further thinking would be beneficial about more flexible participation in the RDS workforce, particularly for people who may not have 120 hours to offer but who can fill important gaps (for example, weekdays) in the availability of particular stations.

Personal Protective Equipment

Effective personal protective equipment (PPE) is of crucial importance in any workplace, and no more so within the SFRS given its reliance on protecting firefighters from a variety of hazards. The Inspectorate recognise this as an essential element in protecting the safety of firefighters and so included within the inspection process an examination of some PPE, including its appearance, maintenance procedures and storage.

¹² For example see Doug Maclean, *Retained, Auxiliary and Volunteer Firefighters in the Scottish Fire Service*, Scottish Executive Central Research Unit 2002

Generally

Our visits have taken us to a wide range of stations with varying demands and specialities. Whilst we found that there was little difference in the equipment overall, there are some variations in the quality and cleanliness of PPE, the way it is maintained and in some cases the storage arrangements.

Both the sets of island communities we visited have similar arrangements for dealing with PPE and both reported the time taken to return equipment after cleaning and repair to the islands can be excessive.

Care and maintenance

Whilst the Inspectorate is not expert in determining the protection afforded, it is evident that different areas investigated have different standards and procedures regarding the care and maintenance of PPE.

Fife stations have industrial washing machines available to crews in the majority of places, with clear washing instructions to ensure the garments remain fit for purpose after washing. In South Lanarkshire, all dirty/contaminated PPE is laundered by a company providing a total care package. In each case, a record of the cleaning and/or maintenance is kept. There are advantages and disadvantages in both systems; for example the capital investment in appropriate washing facilities may provide scope for savings in the future as well as improving the turnaround on island communities and, the added value of engaging a company to provide a total quality care package, which includes maintenance as well as washing the garments may provide best value. Changes to the total care package has (in the view of local crews) seen a reduction in the time taken to return garments as they are washed and repaired at the same time.

Storage

In general, PPE was stored neatly on stations and on fire-engines and was available for use as required. A number of stations visited did not have adequate locker, kit cleaning and storage facilities. It was also reported to us that drying facilities on some stations are inadequate. These stations would benefit from improving their facilities to ensure there is provision for cleaning, drying and stowage for both the working and second set of firefighting kit.

Stations where wildfire suits have been issued, highlighted the difficulty in stowing the equipment on appliances when required.

Age of fire kit

Of note is the age of the PPE inherited from predecessor services. In general terms fire kit is of similar age as services took advantage of the procurement arrangements in place at the time. The main reason we are commenting on this particular issue is that if the picture we have seen is replicated across the country, the Service may be faced with a substantial bill for replacement if kit from eight predecessor services all reaches the end of its useful life at the same time.

At the time of the investigation we were informed that there is a tendering process underway for the replacement of structural fire fighting kit. This, however, does not include the maintenance of the garments. A further piece of work has been commissioned to look at the future maintenance arrangements for PPE across the SFRS.

Local planning, local engagement and relationships with partner organisations

As part of the inspection process we were keen to engage with key Community Planning partners within all of the target areas to get an understanding of any changes since the advent of the single service. We held interviews with representatives from the Police, and Council officers from a variety of departments including Environmental Services, Housing, Policy Planning and Community Safety.

One of the things we were interested in testing was whether local FRS managers remained empowered to make decisions and commit resources to local initiatives. This seems to be the case.

Many of the partners reported business as usual with the SFRS continuing to provide the same if not higher levels of response and commitment to Community Planning Partnerships (CPP) and Community Safety Partnerships (CSP). Partners agreed that the Local Senior Officer's role at CPP/CSP level is pivotal in ensuring that not only the outcomes of SFRS are fully embedded into the strategy but the Service can influence wider community planning outcomes. In the North Service Delivery Area (SDA), for example, the Police Divisional Commander and the LSO have been asked by Highland Council to rationalise the CSP landscape, which has provided a welcome opportunity for embedding strategy and outcomes within the planning process.

Although not part of the inspection's scope, we noted that scrutiny arrangements vary across Scotland, and for the LSO and staff this will add a degree of complexity to their planning process. In all areas the LSO is fully engaged with the scrutiny arrangements which continue to develop as the new committees adapt to the new structures. All areas have engaged in activities aimed at developing members in their new role, which is providing essential information on joint member training.

Each of the areas visited have provided their Local Plan to the committees which provides statistical performance information down to local authority ward level. Partners welcome these plans, and the enhanced local information which they provide. We found that the Councils had been involved with the consultation process and had added value to the local area plans.

4 Comparing Fife and South Lanarkshire

Risk Profiles in Fife and South Lanarkshire

In Fife there are 13 fire stations, five crewed by wholetime staff and eight crewed by RDS staff. In South Lanarkshire there are 12 fire stations, three crewed by wholetime staff, one by wholetime and RDS staff, seven by RDS staff and one crewed by volunteers.

There are some specialist resources provided from the fire stations within these areas – such as line rescue, urban search and rescue, environmental protection, water rescue and high volume pumping – these are national resources and outwith the scope of our study.

The rationale for comparing these two particular areas has already been discussed in the chapter ‘About the Inspection’. As part of the preparatory work for our inspection we carried out some in-depth analysis of the risk profiles of these two areas.

Figures 1 and 2 show risk estimates derived from the Fire Service Emergency Cover toolkit (FSEC). Further information on the FSEC toolkit is provided in the *Assessing Risk appendix* to this report. The risk levels shown indicate predicted risk to life per person, and take into account the fire service response.

Fire stations are labelled for stations inside the study area. Some station areas are shown although the stations themselves are outside the study area so these are not labelled.

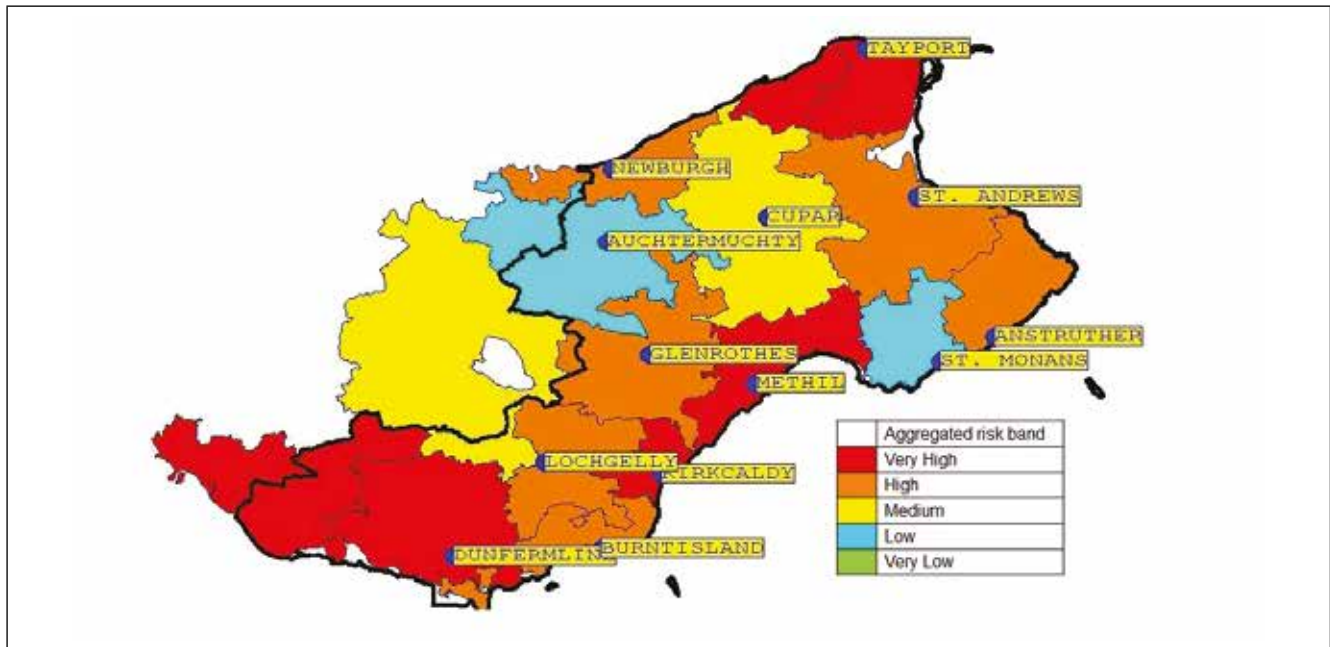


Figure 1: Fife area risk map – rate of life risk per person

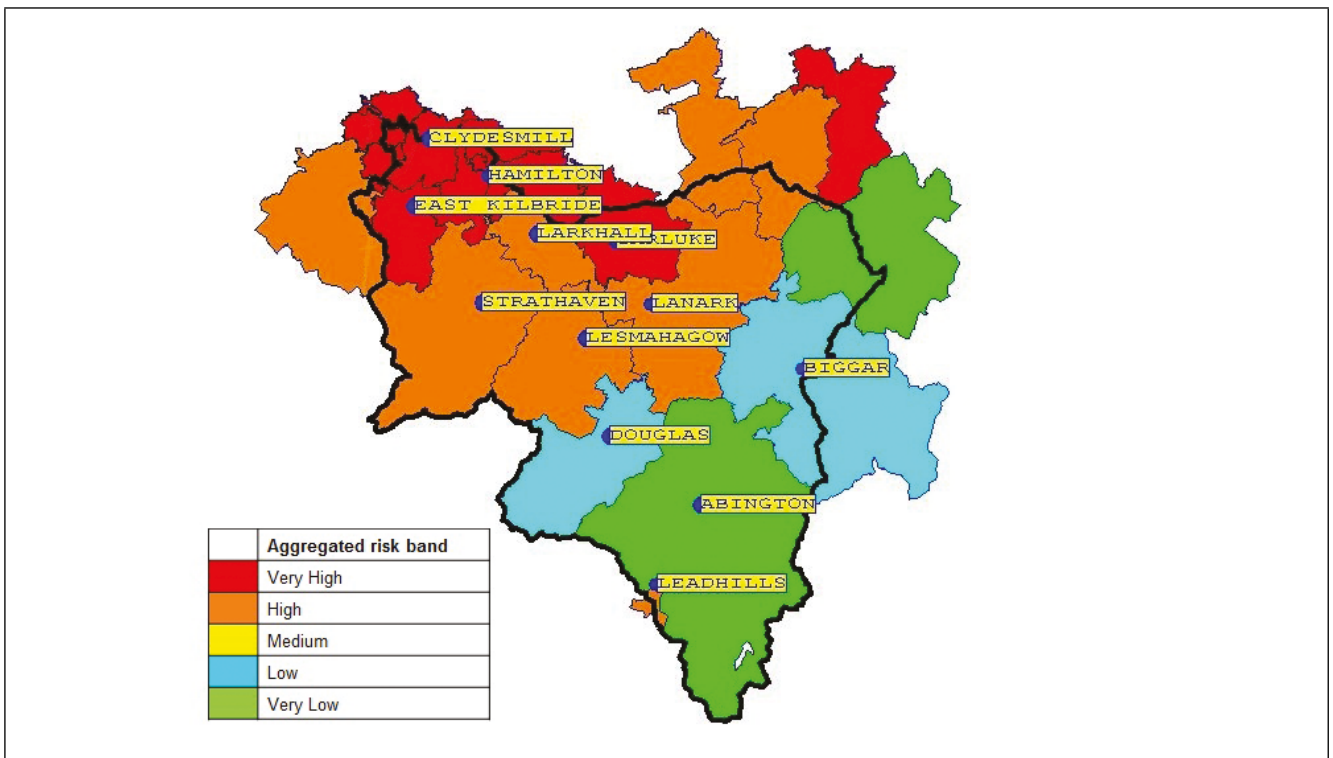


Figure 2: South Lanarkshire area risk map – rate of life risk per person

The maps show the similarities between Fife and South Lanarkshire, with concentrations of risk in urban areas and rural parts of the counties generally presenting a lower risk profile – while illustrating that there are some differences in risk distribution between the two. However, our inspection did not reveal any variation in service provision that we could confidently ascribe to these differences in risk.

Key variations between Fife and South Lanarkshire

The principal variations we noted between Fife and South Lanarkshire are as follows

- The level of professional training officer support to RDS and volunteer staff is historically greater in Fife than it has been in South Lanarkshire;
- RDS crews in Fife are not provided with skills maintenance in all topics that wholetime firefighters deal with, whereas RDS crews in South Lanarkshire follow the same skills maintenance schedule as wholetime firefighters;
- There was a higher level of Home Fire Safety Visit activity in Fife than there was in South Lanarkshire;
- With a single exception, RDS crews in Fife do not use the SFRS’s online recording system PDRPro to record training and development activities, in contrast to the situation in South Lanarkshire.

We discuss these in more detail below.

Level of professional training officer support

Access to professional training officers is available to both Fife and South Lanarkshire with dedicated officers providing support from within their own area. Both areas have access to purpose built training facilities, at Clydesmill for South Lanarkshire and Thornton for Fife, where many of the risks a firefighter may be exposed to, can be simulated effectively. Wholetime and Retained Duty System crews attend these facilities on a regular basis for confirmation exercises and training as part of the training maintenance planner.

We found a significant variation on the support provided to RDS staff between the two areas. In the Fife LSO area, training officers have been scheduled to attend all of the RDS training evenings providing the input required as detailed on the maintenance planner. This level of support is welcomed by the RDS staff who feel that they receive a high quality of input. The electronic Learning Content Management System (LCMS) is widely used to complement the training. Crews regularly attend specific training events at Thornton to confirm and consolidate training topics. This support is made possible by the Learning & Development department having resources and providing two shifts to accommodate the training demands. Current staffing levels of the shifts are five Watch Managers (grade B). There are obviously increased budgetary costs in this model compared to that provided in South Lanarkshire detailed below.

By contrast, South Lanarkshire's dedicated training officers visit RDS stations less frequently with a lower number of training officers – two Watch Managers (grade A). These training officers attend RDS stations once every three weeks. Whilst we did not receive any concerns from RDS staff during the inspection regarding their perceived level of training and preparedness for the risks they might encounter, the general view was that more input from training staff would be beneficial. Some station personnel were concerned at the additional time required to travel and train at Clydesmill which often meant a 4-5 hour commitment and were keen to point out the impact this has on their family life. Although the travel time does not encroach in their training time, the impact on crews needs to be considered by SFRS.

Fife LSO team has rationalised its training planner for RDS and is based on risks likely to be encountered within the station area. This has seen a reduction in the number of training topics required for RDS staff to maintain competence. In contrast, South Lanarkshire trains all RDS staff in all topic areas equivalent to the wholetime firefighters.

There is no evidence to suggest that the competency of staff varies across the two areas inspected. Consequently, we do not draw attention to this variance as an argument for increasing the support in South Lanarkshire to that in Fife and we do not argue that training provision is structured around these Local Senior Officer areas. Rather, and as we have stated earlier, we expect that the SFRS will implement a delivery model which offers good quality access to training and development across the country as a whole and which is not limited by local authority boundaries in a way which was common with the eight separate Services.

Skills maintenance provision

Following an incident in which two RDS firefighters were seriously injured, Fife FRS undertook a review of the training and skills maintenance of RDS firefighters. A concern identified was that in the 2-3 hours available for training RDS firefighters per week, it was simply not possible to provide meaningful skills maintenance training on all the subjects that a wholetime firefighter would train on.

The solution that Fife FRS put into place was to analyse the activity of RDS stations against 15 defined incident types, and then allocate a green, amber or red response for each incident type where 'green' was a full response, 'amber' was a partial operational response pending the arrival of support and 'red' was a holding role, attending to issues such as scene safety and command and control until suitably trained firefighters could arrive from another location.

As a result, skills maintenance training did not have to be provided to stations in relation to 'red' incident types, and only limited training for 'amber' incident types. The effect of this was to limit the number of skills maintenance modules that RDS firefighters in Fife had to deal with.

In contrast, no similar work has been undertaken in South Lanarkshire. The online training recording system PDRPro is still set up for South Lanarkshire crews to record skills maintenance on all the subjects that a wholetime firefighter would cover. During our station visits in South Lanarkshire we found some evidence that where a particular module (for example underground railways) was considered of low relevance to the operational profile of a station, that training would not be done: but that was an informal rather than a formal solution.

We recognise the pressures placed on RDS crews by the limited training time they have available to maintain existing skills and develop new ones. It would therefore seem appropriate that this training time is targeted to the skills that crews will actually use in day to day operations. On the other hand, we understand the value in having as broad a base of training as reasonably practicable to maximise the versatility of RDS crews. If it is the case that local solutions are being applied where 'low relevance' training modules appear in an RDS station's skills maintenance planner, we think that this would benefit from a review and formalisation of the situation.

As noted above the SFRS is conducting a broad-based review of the RDS, and we anticipate that this will cover issues of training, the breadth of skills which RDS crews should be expected to maintain, and the tailoring of skills maintenance planning to the risks actually faced by RDS stations.

Home Fire Safety Visits

From our visits to stations it is clear that there is an understanding of the benefits of carrying out community safety activities and in particular Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs). However, there was a variance in the level of engagement across the areas visited.

Research carried out elsewhere in the UK has shown that community safety activities are more effective when they are targeted at higher risk households¹³. Data from the Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) toolkit shown in table 1 identifies that a higher proportion of the Fife population has been assessed as having a dwelling fire risk that is either above or well above average, than South Lanarkshire which has more people in the lower risk bands, though it is not extreme in either case.

Fife has carried out a greater number of HFSVs than South Lanarkshire overall. The totals of the visits detailed in tables 2 and 3 below represents around 23% of the 160,000 households in Fife and around 4% of the 140,000 households in South Lanarkshire.

¹³ Department for Communities and Local Government, *Interim evaluation of the Home Fire Risk Check grant programme*, March 2009

From 2011-12 Fife Fire and Rescue Service had undertaken a targeted approach to the delivery of HFSV by focussing on dwellings in the above and well above average risk categories. This approach followed a successful pilot within the Levenmouth area of Fife where targeting, based on the FSEC information was supplemented by the Mosaic household classification tool. Therefore the lack of any clear concentration of visits within the higher risk bands may in part be down to a low take-up of the offer of a visit rather than to a lack of focussed targeting.

FSEC dwelling fire risk level	Fife		South Lanarkshire	
	Population	% of total population	Population	% of total population
Well Above Average	39,872	11	23,341	8
Above Average	85,983	25	57,360	19
Average	95,200	27	62,032	21
Below Average	53,179	15	68,122	23
Well Below Average	75,106	22	91,503	30

Table 1 – proportion of the population in the dwelling fire risk levels

Note: the percentage columns may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Overall, taking full visits and advice only visits into account, the FRS in Fife has carried out over 24,000 full visits, while the FRS in South Lanarkshire conducted 3,600 full visits. Tables 2 and 3 show how these visits are distributed according to the FSEC dwelling fire risk level. (The HFSV data was taken from the Community Safety Engagement Toolkit (CSET) data, imported into FSEC and covers 2005-06 to 2012-13).

	Fife			
	Total population in the risk band	Full HFSV advice and alarms installation	HFSV advice only	Total visits
Well Above Average	39,872	2,391	2,201	4,592
Above Average	85,983	6,352	3,768	10,120
Average	95,200	7,004	3,813	10,817
Below Average	53,179	3,724	1,493	5,217
Well Below Average	75,106	4,732	2,007	6,739
Total	349,340	24,203	13,282	37,485

Table 2 – distribution of HFSV amongst the population by risk – Fife

	South Lanarkshire			
	Total population in the risk band	Full HFSV advice and alarms installation	HFSV advice only	Total visits
Well Above Average	23,341	230	238	468
Above Average	57,360	833	564	1,397
Average	62,032	973	712	1,685
Below Average	68,122	780	329	1,109
Well Below Average	91,503	851	312	1,163
Total	302,358	3,667	2,155	5,822

Table 3 – distribution of HFSV amongst the population by risk – South Lanarkshire

There has been a greater focus on prevention, through the delivery of HFSVs, in Fife than in South Lanarkshire. Whilst we acknowledge the time constraints placed on crews, for example, the need to maintain operational skills, particularly within the RDS, that make it difficult to find the time to undertake community safety work, the value and importance of performing such activity cannot be understated. We therefore support the continuing efforts being made in relation to prevention. In particular, we are very supportive of the targeting of community safety activity at those most at risk in the community, such as that work previously undertaken in Fife.

Use of PDRPro to record training and development activities

PDRPro is the online system used across SFRS for staff to record training and skills maintenance activities, including skills maintenance gained in the course of operations. It was introduced as a joint initiative of the Fire and Rescue Services in Scotland before reform, so that SFRS inherited it as a national system. However, we found that it is used differently in different parts of the Service.

The intent of PDRPro is to provide a convenient and paperless method of recording skills development and maintenance. It does however require a certain investment of time to log on to the system and populate the relevant parts of it. This is not a significant issue for wholetime firefighters who are present on station for periods of time each shift. For RDS firefighters, the time required to operate PDRPro, coupled with limited access to IT facilities at RDS stations, means that this can be more of a challenge.

A typical training session is 2-3 hours per week. If 10 firefighters each have to use 10 minutes to record their activities on PDRPro, and there is only one computer terminal available to do so, that implies at least 100 minutes spent after training to record what has been done – and similarly for recording activity at operational incidents. Even if two terminals are available – which was not the case in all locations we visited – the time taken would be 50 minutes.

A general decision appeared to have been taken across RDS units in Fife, with one exception, not to use PDRPro, because of these issues. In South Lanarkshire this was not the case – although in some South Lanarkshire units we went to, additional IT resources had been

obtained and multiple computers were available. Although it is not our intent to compare Fife and South Lanarkshire directly with the Inner Hebrides, we noted that PDRPro was hardly used in any of the island units be they former HIFRS or former Strathclyde FR.

Training can, of course, be recorded on paper: but this is still a time burden for someone (in more than one unit we went to the unit leader was completing all training records). The SFRS may wish to review the use of PDRPro in RDS/volunteer units, consider the barriers to its effective use, consider also the adjustments that have been made in units where PDRPro is successfully used by RDS (typically, the provision of multiple IT stations), and chart a course for harmonisation of PDRPro use across the Service.

5 Comparing former Strathclyde Fire and Rescue islands and former HIFRS islands

Risk Profiles in former Strathclyde FR islands and former HIFRS islands

As for Fife and South Lanarkshire, we have discussed the rationale for looking at these islands in the chapter 'About the Inspection'.

In the former Strathclyde FR islands that we visited, there are 13 fire stations, two crewed by RDS staff and the remainder volunteer units. In the former HIFRS islands, there are seven units: six fire stations crewed by RDS staff, and a volunteer Community Response Unit.

Figures 3 and 4 show the risk estimates derived from the Fire Service Emergency Cover toolkit (FSEC) as risk to life per person, taking into account the fire service response.

Fire stations are labelled for stations inside the study area.

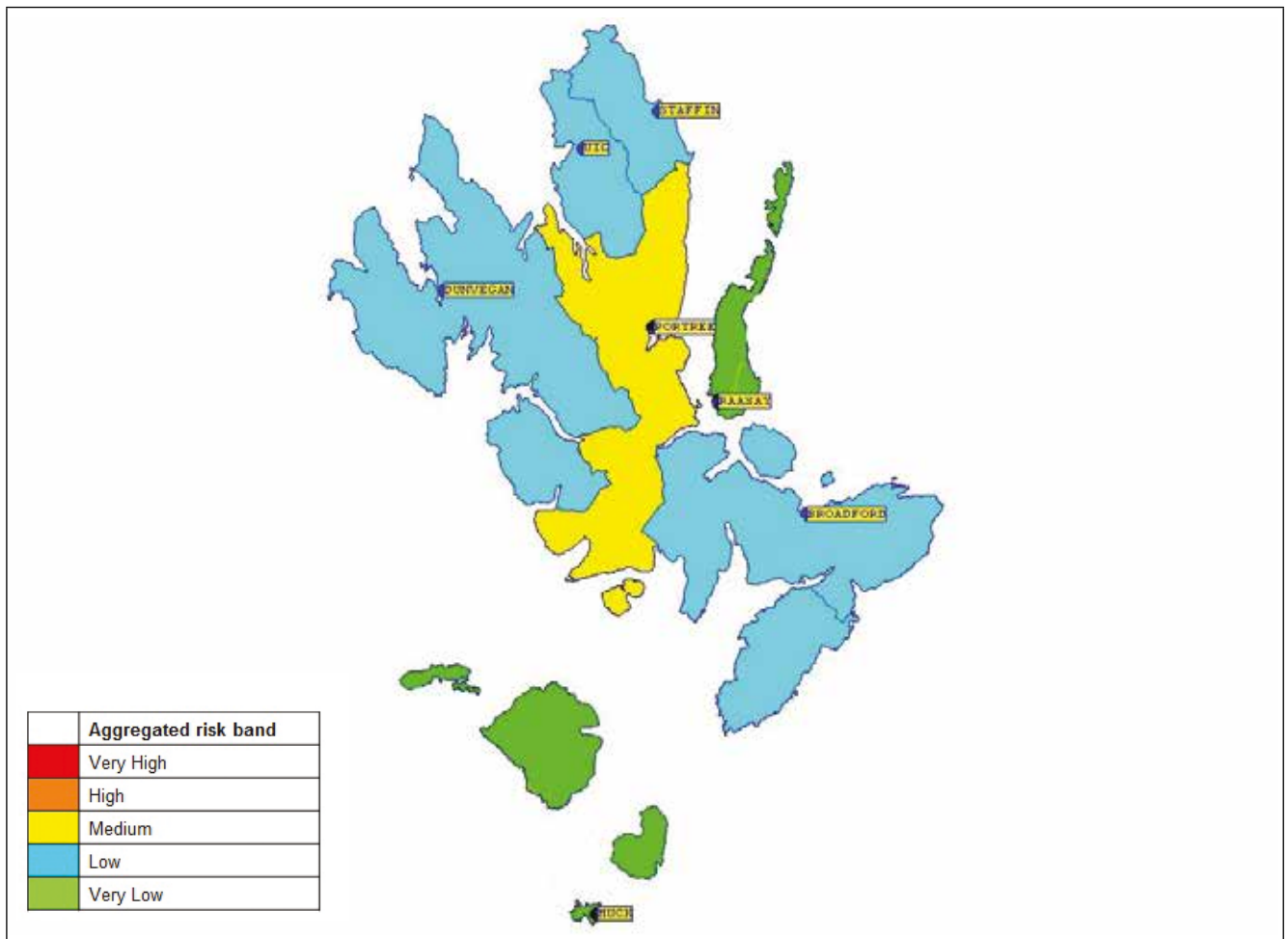


Figure 3: Former HIFRS islands risk maps

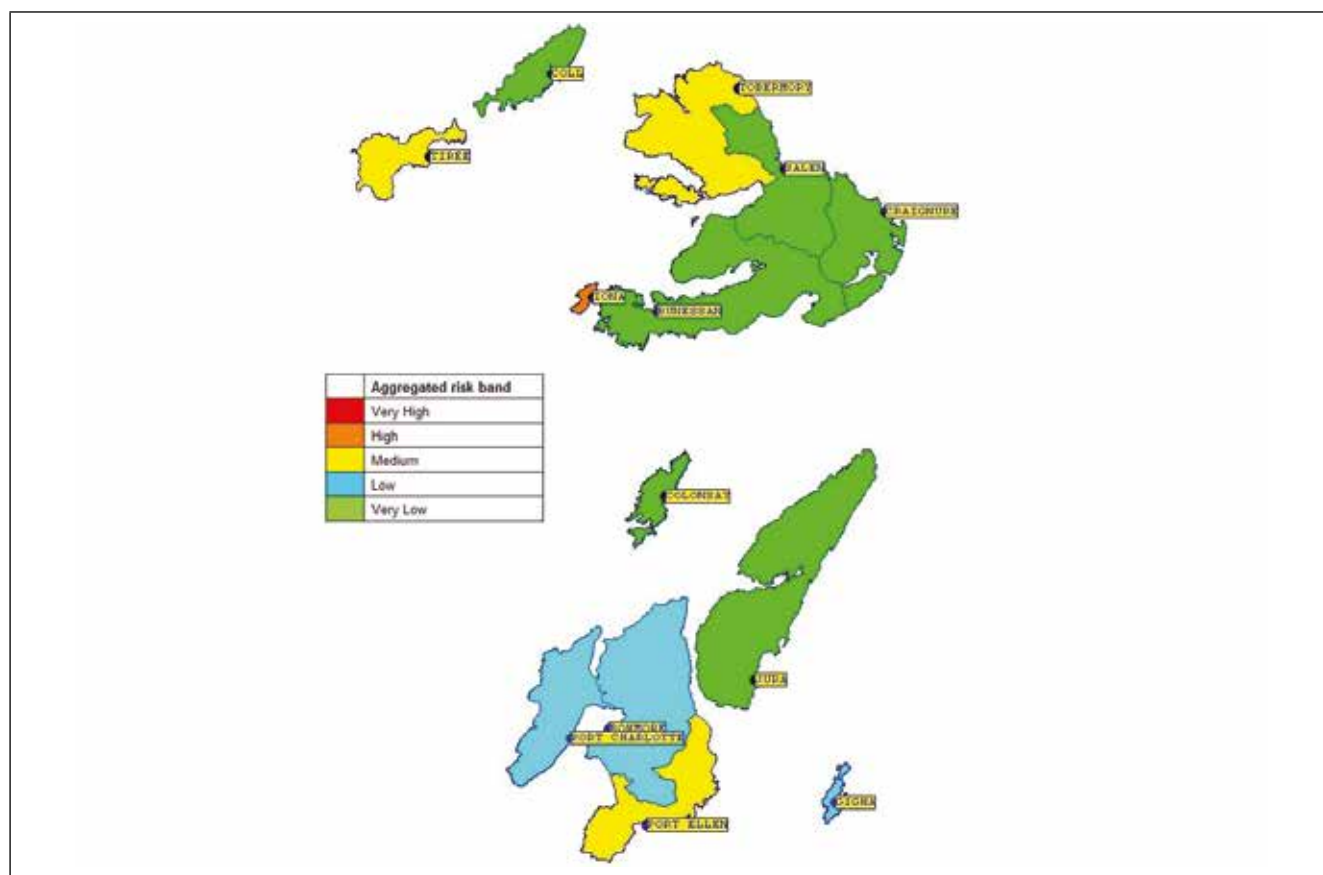


Figure 4: Former Strathclyde FR islands risk maps

Broad similarities can be seen in the distribution of risk in the Hebrides regardless of former Fire Service area – as might be expected given the geography.

Providing service in remote island locations

The islands of the Inner Hebrides group which feature in this report are some of the least populated parts of Scotland (a density of 0.04 dwellings per hectare¹⁴ compared to the Scottish average of 0.32¹⁵). Island people are used to being self-supporting and resilient in their isolated communities – and part of that has included, for many years, some form of fire and rescue service. Over time, the fire and rescue service has evolved within an increasingly sophisticated world and this presents very specific challenges with the many isolated units which form part of the Service’s ‘family’.

It is important to recognise that the SFRS has the same obligations towards its employees on remote islands, who are provided with equipment and training and dispatched to operational incidents, as it does to its mainland employees. Although the term ‘volunteer’ is still used to describe a number of island and remote units in contrast to ‘retained’ (RDS) crews, it is our view that this distinction is not a real one, at least from the point of view of legal responsibility.

¹⁴ FSEC: data from UK Census 2001

¹⁵ Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics www.sns.gov.uk

Although some units clearly have low risk to contend with in their area because of low incident activity and a limited incident type potential, and consequently may not need the same equipment or level of training as other on-call stations, this does not mean that the SFRS does not owe these employees the same obligations to assess the risks they face and maintain an adequate level of training and supervision. Arguably, because of their remoteness, they require an enhanced level of operational guidance and support.

A Community Response Unit

Uniquely among the locations we visited, the Isle of Muck, a small isolated community of around 30, has a Community Response Unit which is nominally being supported by the SFRS. Our visit to this location revealed a unit that was currently unable to operate because issues with its equipment trailer had gone unresolved, and which did not have the station, appliance or equipment we had seen elsewhere.

What was brought home to us was the level of isolation this community experienced, and the need for some kind of formal support to promote fire safety in the community and to provide a form of 'first response' if a fire incident took place. This would not necessarily look like the 'response-based' fire service provision on other islands, with an appliance and fire station. This may in any event not be justified in very small, low risk communities: but that does not mean that the SFRS cannot provide support to the community to enhance its own fire safety. The community on Muck was willing to support a voluntary organisation but we felt that SFRS had perhaps not provided the necessary reciprocal support tailored to the community's needs.

We consider that there would be a way for SFRS to provide support to community groups who wished to promote fire safety where they lived, without necessarily providing unsustainable services such as a BA capability or a fire appliance. By working with groups to provide basic training in 'first response' measures, a limited amount of equipment, and resources to allow home fire safety visits and installation of smoke alarms, the needs of isolated communities could be met with little ongoing cost to the service. Because of the narrow role that groups like this would have, the fitness requirements appropriate to an operational firefighter could be relaxed, allowing a broader community-based membership of these groups.

Key variations between former HIFRS islands, and former Strathclyde FR islands

- The level of professional training officer support to RDS and volunteer stations has historically been higher in the former Strathclyde FR islands than in the former HIFRS islands (although two years of peer support from across Scotland has allowed a large backlog in training needs to be addressed);
- Mobile data terminals were not in use in the former HIFRS islands at the time of our inspection, in contrast to former Strathclyde FR islands;
- Nearly all units in the former HIFRS islands work under RDS contracts, whereas substantial numbers of stations in the former Strathclyde FR islands are volunteer;
- There was a higher level of Home Fire Safety Visit activity in the former HIFRS islands than there was in the former Strathclyde FR islands.

Professional training officer support to RDS and volunteer stations in former Strathclyde FR islands compared to former HIFRS islands

As stated above, the challenges associated with reproducing the arrangements within remote island communities found on the mainland can be significant.

We experienced first-hand the difficulties in accessing the islands, particularly during the winter months. Access to the islands by training and supervisory officers can be adversely affected to the extent that some island communities do not see their supervisory or training officers for long periods. Adding to this is the limited access to IT facilities in the stations which limits access to PDRPro, LCMS and other learning tools available to firefighters on the mainland.

We found that there are substantially fewer training staff available to crews in the former HIFRS islands. During the peer support period which was introduced following the Accounts Commission report in 2012¹⁶, the former HIFRS islands received significant support from trainers across Scotland which was largely successful in reducing the backlog of training and improving the development of staff. It was pointed out in the report produced by CIFRA in 2012¹⁷ that the SFRS would have to ensure that it addressed the structure, staffing and general resources required to maintain the positive progress made over that time. Many of the staff reported to us that they perceived a marked reduction in the provision of training and supervision visits since the initial burst of activity from peer support. Whilst a reduction in activity is to be expected and we are aware that support from peripatetic officers is continuing, we do not expect that long term stability will be in place until the SFRS has had time to implement its new training strategy.

Importantly, we are confident that senior training managers have a robust system in place to monitor staff competence and qualifications.


Use of Mobile Data Terminals

Appliances in both the former Strathclyde FR and former HIFRS islands are fitted with mobile data terminals, referred to variously as VMDS and MDTs. At the time of our inspection, these were functional on the former HIFRS appliances but lacked content. Where operational risk information was provided on former HIFRS appliances at all, this was in paper format. An action plan was underway to bring about improvements.

MDTs are a valuable resource. Similar to a tablet computer, they provide touchscreen access to operational risk information, including standard operating procedures and site-specific instructions and plans. We note here that the provision of operational risk information and operational guidance is not dependant on the availability of Mobile Data Terminals. Traditional paper-based systems can be effective if managed well. Nor does the provision of an MDT mean that operational guidance is suitable and sufficient – the key to this is that the information content which is held on the system should be accurate, meaningful, up to date and easily accessed.

¹⁶ Audit Scotland, *The Audit of Best Value, Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue*, March 2012

¹⁷ HM Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Authorities, *Report on an Inspection of Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service*, November 2012



Former Fire and Rescue Services across Scotland have invested in the acquisition of MDTs, and as a convenient, easily navigable way to carry this information and provide it to crews quickly on the way to, or at an emergency scene, MDTs have proved their value across Scotland. We were aware prior to this inspection taking place, that the commissioning of MDTs had not been completed in the former HIFRS area (including, but extending beyond, the islands we looked at in this inspection), and we held separate discussions with SFRS senior management about this in late 2013.

Allied to this is the collection of local risk information which seems to us to be an important role for local crews. Whilst we did note variations in this type of activity, we did not see a specific difference between the two sets of islands.

Use of RDS as opposed to volunteer contracts

It was a notable feature of our inspection of service provision in the Inner Hebrides that the contractual arrangements for staff varied markedly between former HIFRS islands, and former Strathclyde FR islands. In the former HIFRS islands all stations are on RDS contracts: Muck, which has a community response unit, remains a volunteer body but has no fire station or fire appliance. In contrast, many stations on former Strathclyde FR islands are on volunteer contracts, which means that most staff are not paid an annual retainer but only for hours actually in attendance: but conversely do not have to provide any minimum level of availability (subject to approval of the unit leader) whereas RDS staff are contractually bound to be available for calls 120 hours per week or a fixed proportion (usually 75%) of that.

This leads to clear anomalies where staff on very similar islands not too far apart geographically may be receiving substantially different remuneration for providing similar service. Whereas we understand that SFRS has inherited this and many other pay anomalies from the predecessor services which have not as yet been harmonised, it is a matter that in the fullness of time will have to be addressed.

The more flexible conditions under which volunteers serve may, however, be beneficial to recruiting and retaining staff. As discussed above, it may be a barrier to recruitment to insist that staff have to be available for calls 120 hours per week. An individual may only have 50 hours per week to offer. But if those 50 hours are crucial; to the availability of the station – for example, business hours during the week – it seems logical to allow the local unit leader to decide whether, within the constraints of the overall staffing allowed to the unit, to recruit that individual.

We know that the SFRS is in the course of reviewing the RDS and volunteer system as a whole, and we hope that this will encompass the best and most efficient way of harmonising contractual arrangements.

Home Fire Safety Visits

From our visits to island stations it is clear that there is an understanding of the benefits of carrying out community fire safety activities and in particular Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs). Likewise with the islands the levels of engagement varied between the two areas. As can be seen in tables 4 and 5 the level of engagement through HFSV was higher in the former HIFRS islands than the former Strathclyde FR islands. The overall higher level of engagement may in part be down to the fact that Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service had, until recently, a dedicated Community Safety Advocate for a number of years.

	Former Strathclyde FR Islands			
	Total population in the risk band	Full HFSV advice and alarms installation	HFSV advice only	Total visits
Well Above Average	1,784	28	24	52
Above Average	4,089	101	92	193
Average	861	47	38	85
Below Average	656	28	11	39
Well Below Average	233	10	5	15
Total	7,623	214	170	384

Table 4 – distribution of HFSV amongst the population by risk – former Strathclyde FR islands

	Former HIFRS Islands			
	Total population in the risk band	Full HFSV advice and alarms installation	HFSV advice only	Total visits
Well Above Average	1,969	131	175	306
Above Average	5,366	305	464	769
Average	1,606	112	120	232
Below Average	452	9	28	37
Well Below Average	183	5	6	11
Total	9,576	562	793	1,355

Table 5 – distribution of HFSV amongst the population by risk – former HIFRS islands

Overall, the number of HFSVs carried out in the former HIFRS islands was more than three times the number carried out in the former Strathclyde FR islands. The totals represent around 30% of the 4,500 households in the former HIFRS islands and around 11% of the 3,400 households in the former Strathclyde FR islands.

6 Issues for the SFRS to consider

As with our report 'An Overview of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service', we have avoided making any formal recommendations in this report. This remains a time of transition for the SFRS, and one of the aims of this inspection was to identify and record variation that the SFRS had inherited – in the expectation that the Service would be aware of many of these issues and would already be developing strategies to address them.

That said, our inspection has disclosed a number of areas both locally and nationally where the SFRS either is working, or will need to work, to bring greater consistency to its operations so that equitable access to SFRS service delivery may be maintained.


The 2005 Act requires that the SFRS must have regard to this report and, having done so, must take such measures (if any) as it thinks fit in relation to the report. We are therefore confident that where we have expressed a view on particular issues, SFRS will consider what we have said and will take it into account in its forward planning. In order to assist with this, we have gathered together below some comments on issues raised in this report that we consider the SFRS may wish to focus on.

1. The long term sustainability of the RDS/volunteer service is in question. We strongly support the recently initiated review of the RDS/volunteer service and encourage SFRS to develop previously untried solutions, as we think that many efforts have been made to date which have not been able to bring about fundamental change.
2. Within that review, we support the principle that skills and training should focus on local risk and that SFRS formalises the pragmatic approach which is taken by local crews.
3. We support the current strategic review of training delivery across the country and would encourage a strong focus on meeting the needs of RDS and volunteer staff.
4. The SFRS may wish to review the use of PDRPro in RDS/volunteer units and chart a course for harmonisation of PDRPro use across the Service.
5. The provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for staff is a crucial element of firefighter safety. We encourage the SFRS to undertake a strategic review of PPE provision and maintenance arrangements across the country.
6. The importance of the delivery of community safety activity is recognised and, overall, there is an understanding that most benefit is gained when these activities are provided to those most at risk. However, evidence suggests that this understanding is not necessarily resulting in a demonstrable focus on dwellings in the higher risk categories. We continue to support a drive to reduce the number of fires and fire casualties through the provision of fire prevention activities targeted towards those most at risk.
7. We encourage ongoing actions to build on and improve operational guidance available to front-line operational staff.

Glossary and abbreviations

Throughout this report, at the risk of some repetition, we have minimised the use of abbreviations in the interests of readability. There are some exceptions, particularly where an abbreviation is used so widely within or outside the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service that spelling it out on each occasion would look unnatural. Examples are ‘SFRS’ for Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and ‘LSO’ for Local Senior Officer. An explanation of abbreviations used can be found below.

CPP	Community Planning Partnership
CSP	Community Safety Partnership
FRS	Fire and Rescue Service
FSEC	Fire Service Emergency Cover: the FSEC Toolkit is a tool that enables fire and rescue services to assess the risks from fire and other incidents and to allocate responses appropriate to that risk.
HFSV	Home Fire Safety Visit – A visit to a member of the public in their own home by SFRS personnel to provide fire safety advice and, where necessary, install one or more smoke alarms.
LCMS	Learning Content Management System is an electronic E-Learning system developed to provide E-learning training and assessment modules aligned to the National Occupational Standards and the Firefighter Development Programme.
LSO	Local Senior Officer
Operational guidance	The term we use to cover operational risk information, standard operating procedures, technical information notes and any other material which is available to operational staff to support and inform their decision making at incidents.
MDT	Mobile data terminal, a tablet-type computer provided on fire appliances to carry operational guidance and provide a communications function.
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment, in this report used principally to refer to fire resistant outer clothing used by firefighters at incidents.
PDRPro	An online system for recording training and skills maintenance activities of firefighters, including use of skills at operational incidents.
Predecessor organisations	The eight fire and rescue services in Scotland, and the Scottish Fire Services College, that were combined into SFRS.



RDS	Retained duty system. Firefighters live and work away from their fire station and are alerted to attend emergency calls by means of a pager.
SDA	Service Delivery Area. SFRS is organised into three geographical areas for service delivery.
Senior leadership	The term we use to describe the Board and Strategic Leadership Team acting together to provide governance and management of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.
SFRS	Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
SLT	Strategic Leadership Team. The most senior operational leadership group within SFRS.
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
2005 Act	The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005

Appendix – Assessing Risk

In this report we have included a comparison of *risk* to help us illustrate the similarities and differences between the different parts of Scotland we have been looking at.

There are of course many ways in which *risk* can be defined and assessed and we have used just one. The approach we have taken here, or a variation on it, is widely used across the UK and we think that it is likely that the SFRS will adopt a similar approach in their own analysis.

Specifically we have used the Fire Service Emergency Cover Toolkit (FSEC) to provide a numerical risk level that is comparable across Scotland. The data we use has been provided by the SFRS. In brief, FSEC looks at things like population demographics, historical incident data, non-domestic premises and so on to establish an underlying risk level, then it looks at the road network and the FRS resources to estimate the likely outcome if an incident happens in a given area in the future.

Risk types

FSEC assesses risk in four different modules, each using different inputs and approaches to best suit the data and analysis. The modules are:

- Dwelling fire risk;
- Other buildings fire risk (i.e. non-domestic);
- Special services – i.e. all non-fire risks;
- Major Incidents.

Risk outputs

The modules all predict potential life loss, while the other buildings module also predicts property loss. In most of the tables and risk maps, the predicted life loss from each of the modules has been summed to provide an overall level of risk. In the HFSV discussion, only the outputs from the dwellings fire module have been used as they are directly relevant to the HFSV activity.

Station areas

For the risk maps, station administration areas have been generated from FSEC. These show areas grouped by which station is closest. The road network is used to calculate how long a vehicle from each station will take to arrive at a census output area, and the area is then allocated to a station administrative area. These are not necessarily the station areas that crews or control rooms would know, but they are logically based and cover the whole of Scotland.

On the risk maps, the stations within the project areas have been labelled. Where neighbouring stations arrive at an area first, the station has not been labelled. An example of this is the South Lanarkshire risk map. In the North East of the local authority area are two patches of yellow that are not labelled with their station, these are areas where West Calder and West Linton fire stations have shorter travel times to census output areas in a neighbouring station area – they can get there quicker.



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