



SCOTTISH
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Working together for a safer Scotland

WORKING TOGETHER FRAMEWORK

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Board of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), its managers and recognised Representative Bodies are committed to working together to create a model of employee relations that is based on mutual respect and trust.

This Working Together Framework formally outlines the principles of partnership as the foundation for the relationship between the Board, the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT), Management, Employees and their Representative Bodies.

The Scottish Government has set out a number of strategic priorities for the SFRS within the Scottish Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland. The Strategic Plan Working Together for a Safer Scotland sets out the SFRS's Vision, Values and Objectives in support of the achievement of these strategic priorities.

Partnership involves a commitment to work together. In setting joint objectives, the interests of employees and their Representative Bodies can be taken into account alongside any specific risks, issues and opportunities for service improvement.

Our partnership must:

- Deliver benefits for the evolving organisation and Service development;
- Face the challenges associated with change;
- Seek opportunities for continuous improvement and to further develop our services and employee relations;
- Respond to the changing needs of our Communities across Scotland;
- Create a working environment that is responsive to individual aspirations and which encourages employee engagement, motivation and commitment.

The Working Together Framework is designed to create an environment where mutually acceptable solutions can be found; however, it is recognised that management and employees may at times have conflicting interests. Therefore, a

number of separate arrangements are contained within this Framework which set out how the Board, Management and the Representative Bodies will “work together”.

The success of this partnership approach is dependent on strong and visible leadership from the Board, the SLT and the Representative Bodies in addition to the participation and commitment of all employees and their managers.

Where individual SFRS projects warrant their own arrangements, the mutually agreed Terms of Reference for these Projects will incorporate how agreements will be reached for consultation and negotiation purposes. Details of this are contained within the Consultation and Negotiation Procedure.

The Chief Officer retains the legal and moral responsibility to manage SFRS resources to ensure the safety of Scotland’s communities.

2. OUR PARTNERSHIP

This Working Together Framework is agreed between the SFRS and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU).

Whilst the SFRS is committed to partnership working, we recognise that, where some employees may decide not to join a Representative Body, the SFRS will seek to ensure that these employees are fully engaged for the purposes of consultation.

The Framework sets out our common interest in ensuring the future successes of the SFRS. All parties are committed to recognising the SFRS Vision, Values and Objectives, as contained within the Strategic Plan, and to delivering our Service within a flexible and responsive employee relations environment which is based on a shared belief that partnership will benefit both the SFRS and individual employees.

The Framework does not replace those procedures required of the SFRS under employment law and each of the separate arrangements contained within it are designed to support our partnership whilst complying with all relevant employment legislation, regulations and guidance.

The effectiveness of the Framework will be kept under regular review, as set out within the terms of individual annual recognition agreements with relevant Representative Bodies, and as a standing item at the Employee Partnership Forum (EPF).

By partnership, we mean that the SFRS, its Management and the Representative Bodies will work together in accordance with the principles of partnership, as defined by the Representative Bodies Congress. Within the context of the Working Together Framework, these principles can be defined as:

2.1 Joint Commitment to the success of the SFRS: All parties are committed to the success of the SFRS and believe this will be attained through the delivery of jointly agreed objectives based on the stated SFRS Vision, Values and Objectives. All parties are committed to continuous improvement; working together to deliver a flexible, efficient and effective emergency service.

2.2 Recognising Legitimate Interests: The SFRS accepts the legitimacy of Representative Bodies as employee representatives and that their involvement and participation will improve decision making at all levels of the organisation. As such, the SFRS recognises the value of Representative Bodies' involvement and encourages its employees to join a Trade Union.

The Representative Bodies recognise that the SFRS is required to operate within a framework of Government legislation and accepts that it has a duty to deliver against the objectives of its Strategic Plan in order to provide efficient and effective services to the Communities of Scotland.

2.3 Commitment to employment security: It is recognised that external factors may emerge which could influence matters of employment. However, all parties will work together to provide security in employment and support the Scottish Government's position on no compulsory redundancies.

- 2.4 Focus on the quality of working life:** All parties will work together to provide the highest quality fire and rescue services, whilst maintaining the best possible conditions of employment and our reputation as an employer of choice.
- 2.5 Transparency and Information Sharing:** All parties agree to be transparent in their business processes, to inform and consult meaningfully with each other and to ensure factual accuracy of information with employees at the earliest opportunity on all matters concerning their employment to build trust and support negotiation.
- 2.6 Win-win partnership:** All parties agree that working in partnership will deliver mutual benefits. The aim is to have open, constructive and candid discussions that support transparent decision making at all levels within the service; avoiding “winners and losers” by focusing on the agreed objectives and joint problem solving rather than the securing of respective positions. All parties will refrain from the use of threatening, offensive or intimidating language and agree to manage employee relations within the principles and practices of this Working Together Framework.
- 2.7 Communications:** All parties agree that communication is an essential part of any partnership; communication processes will be open and transparent and conducted in accordance with our joint commitment to the success of the SFRS.

Through this Working Together Framework, we aim to reassure employees that their voice will be heard at a national and local level.

3. PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

3.1 Purpose

The partnership arrangements are designed to provide practical support to the Working Together Framework.

3.2 Flexibility

Each arrangement is flexible in that it may be amended, merged with others or withdrawn by mutual agreement. In addition, new arrangements may be mutually agreed and introduced as and when appropriate.

3.3 Review

The Working Together Framework and all its component parts will be reviewed on a regular basis, in accordance with the terms set out within individual recognition agreements.

3.4 Termination of Overall Agreement / Individual Agreements

The Working Together Framework and all its component parts can be terminated following twelve months' notice by the Regional Secretary or the Chief Officer (unless this timescale is varied by mutual agreement).

3.5 Functions

The function of each arrangement is set out below:

Promoting Our Partnership

Sets out how the parties will work together to promote a positive image of the SFRS and engage in effective communication.

Working in Partnership

Refers to the steps the parties should take during negotiations to solve problems and resolve disputes.

Partnership Structures

Outlines structural arrangements under which the Working Together Framework will operate.

Developing in Partnership

Outlines the importance of continuously developing our skills and learning from examples of good practice.

4. RECOGNITION ARRANGEMENTS

This section sets out the basis for recognition as separate and bilateral arrangements between the SFRS and each of the individual recognised Representative Bodies that agree to abide by the Working Together Framework. Appropriate arrangements for facilities, including time off and facility time arrangements for Trade Union Representatives, are detailed within the Time Off for Trade Union Duties Policy.

4.1 Representative Bodies Recognition

The Working Together Framework defines a Representative Body as an organisation of workers created to protect and advance the interests of its members by negotiating arrangements with employers on pay and conditions of work.

This Working Together Framework is agreed between the SFRS and the FBU, which is recognised for the purposes of negotiation, collective bargaining, collective consultation, and the provision of information.

The SFRS sets out separate recognition arrangements with each of the recognised Representative Bodies, with the terms of each agreement aligned with the principles of partnership as laid down within this Framework.

Recognition also extends to the representation of individual Representative Bodies members when discussing matters directly affecting their individual employment with the SFRS.

4.2 Scope of Recognition

The FBU is recognised for the purposes of collective consultation and negotiation for those matters which have a significant impact on the group of employees represented by it and which relate to any of the following:

- a) Terms and conditions of employment, including their reference to pay;
- b) Machinery for negotiation or consultation and other procedures relating to these, including the recognition by SFRS of the right of a Representative Body to represent employees in such negotiation and consultation;
- c) All policies and procedures related to conditions of employment;
- d) Facilities for accredited representatives of Trade Unions;
- e) Allocation of work or the duties of employment between employees or groups of employees.

4.3 Geographical Bargaining Unit

The geographical bargaining unit for all recognised Representative Bodies is national in extent (i.e. covering all sites, services and designated employee groups within the SFRS). No local geographical bargaining unit exists. 'National' in this context means SFRS wide and differs from the national bargaining arrangements in place for Uniformed staff which is UK wide.

4.4 Level at which Collective Bargaining Processes are Conducted

All collective bargaining processes commence via the Consultation and Negotiation Procedure, in the first instance. Thereafter, collective bargaining processes continue to the SLT and Regional Officials.

The Remuneration, Appointments and Nominations Sub Committee (RANSC) consists of four members, two of which must be members of the People Committee appointed by the Board, with any one of the four members appointed as a Chair and a Deputy Chair. The Sub-Committee will be supported by the Chief Officer and Director of People and Organisational Development (POD). The Sub Committee will have a scrutiny role for local (SFRS) negotiations and collective bargaining. Matters of negotiations are referred to RANSC for discussion where the matters may be:

- Novel;
- Contentious;
- Reputational or political;
- May set precedence or may incur significant costs to the Service.

All collective agreements that regulate or change contracts of employment are arrived at by negotiation between the relevant parties exclusively:

Uniformed Staff

At the date of this agreement, collective bargaining on pay and other contractual issues continues to take place in National Joint Council (UK) and local application via the RANSC forum. Therefore, to streamline the management of collective bargaining, all parties agree that any relevant NJC agreements recognised as applicable to the SFRS will be jointly reviewed and agreement reached on their application or implementation.

Where there may be a failure to agree within the boundaries of collective bargaining, the issue(s) may be escalated to the Partnership Advisory Board (PAG), in the first instance. The Consultation and Negotiation Procedure provides details of external resolution.

All other collective bargaining processes take place exclusively at SFRS service level.

5. PROMOTING OUR PARTNERSHIP

Promoting our approach to partnership and presenting a positive image of the SFRS is paramount to ensuring that our communities have faith and trust in our ability to provide an emergency service that is effective, efficient and high performing.

The success of our partnership is dependent on strong and visible leadership from the Board, the SLT and the Representative Bodies in addition to the participation and commitment of all employees and their managers.

To promote our partnership and the image of the SFRS, we will:

- Actively support the stated SFRS Vision, Values and Objectives through jointly agreed objectives;
- Actively promote the service provided by and the achievements of the SFRS and its employees;
- Demonstrate commitment to our partnership using joint communications whenever appropriate;
- Convey agreement on matters resolved;
- Deal professionally with all matters affecting the SFRS by maintaining confidentiality, representing our separate interests fairly without undue criticism of the parties involved and refraining from making destructive comments or personalising issues via internal or external media.

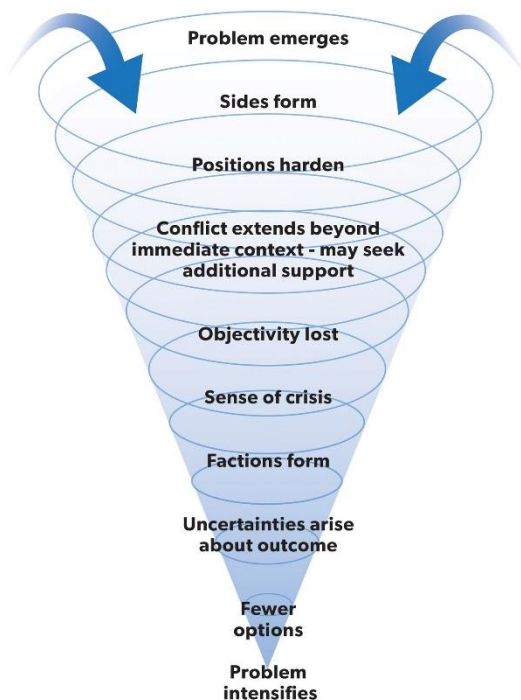
In addition, all parties recognise that effective communication is vital to the success of our partnership. In this regard, all parties commit to:

- Communicate all relevant matters through the EPF and/or RANSC, unless an issue is identified as a local or single union matter;
- Meet regularly, formally and informally, to discuss matters affecting the operation of the SFRS or matters significantly affecting employees;

- Provide consistent representation throughout discussions and negotiations, in a timely manner;
- Professionally manage partnership business (e.g. advance agenda and papers, minutes of meetings, decision / action log);
- Provide regular updates and briefings to employees with regard to on-going discussions between Management and the Representative Bodies;
- Produce formal collective agreements and/or joint communications to employees regarding the outcomes of a consultation or negotiation exercise. Where a joint communication cannot be produced, each party will discuss the text of its own communication prior to this being issued.

6. WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

The fundamental principle of the Working Together Framework is that the focus should remain on the matter under negotiation and the associated issues, not the respective positions of the parties involved which can create winners and losers and a “spiral of conflict”:

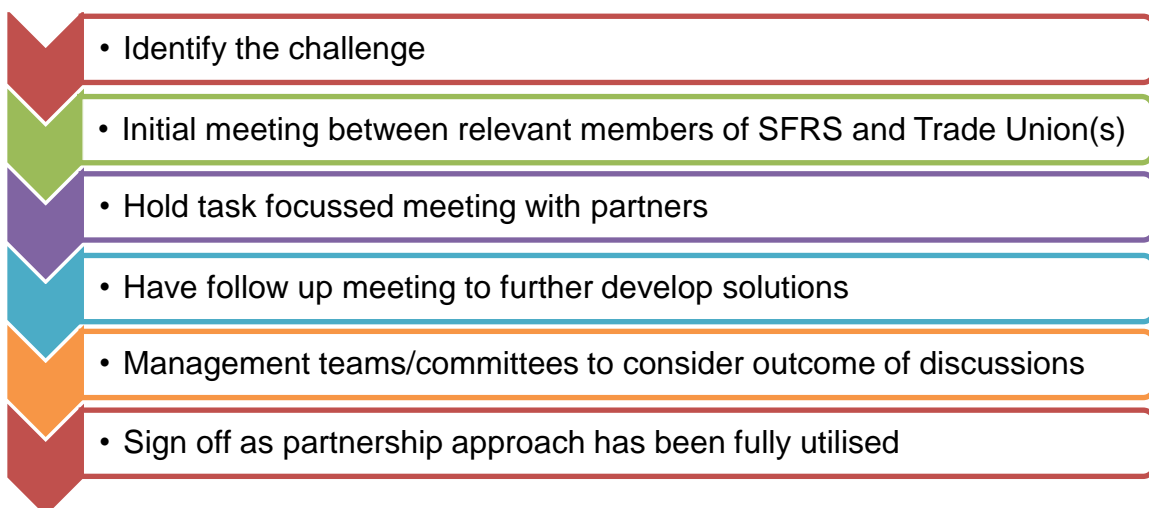


SFRS Values

The decisions that the SFRS makes support and reinforce associated constructive behavioural norms and expectations:

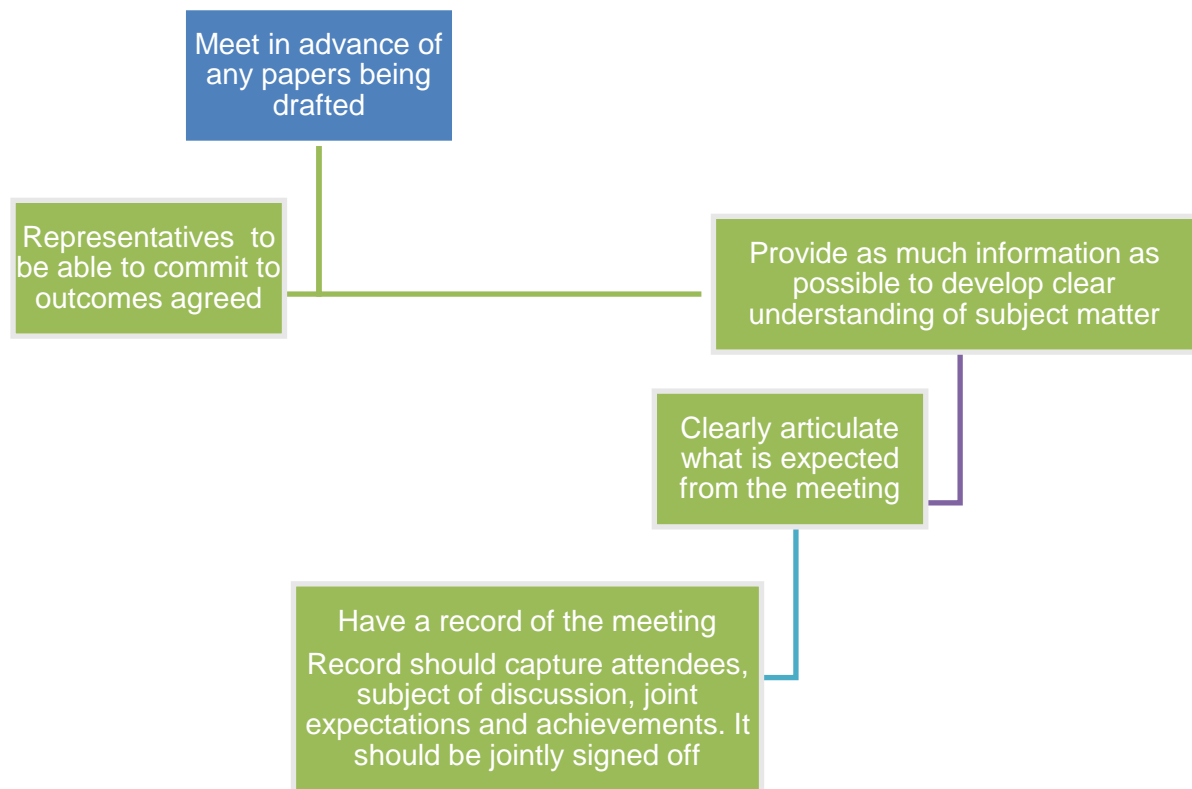
- Safety – we work together for a safer Scotland and safety is at the core of everything we do;
- Teamwork – is the foundation of what we do and what we achieve and is essential across the SFRS;
- Respect – everyone has the right to be treated with dignity at work and respect is an important principle for our desired organisational culture;
- Innovation – being innovative will help us grow, adapt and be more responsive to change and the needs of our communities.

Where issues do arise, the partnership approach should ensure that these are resolved at the lowest possible level, that the parties adopt joint problem-solving techniques that focus on common organisational improvement and development objectives and that they maintain communications at all levels. The partnership structures will support the Working Together methodology outlined below:



Step 1 – Focus on the task

The parties involved should focus on the issue they are seeking to resolve, the facts of the matter under discussion and any progress previously made. This will allow the discussion to focus on the outcomes / issues to be resolved rather than individual positions.



Step 2 – Discuss the issues

Under the terms of the Working Together Framework, each of the parties involved agrees to an open discussion on the issues. In terms of this, it is recommended that the parties:

- Agree what is to be discussed;
- Separate the people from the issues;
- Rely on concrete examples rather than anecdotal evidence.



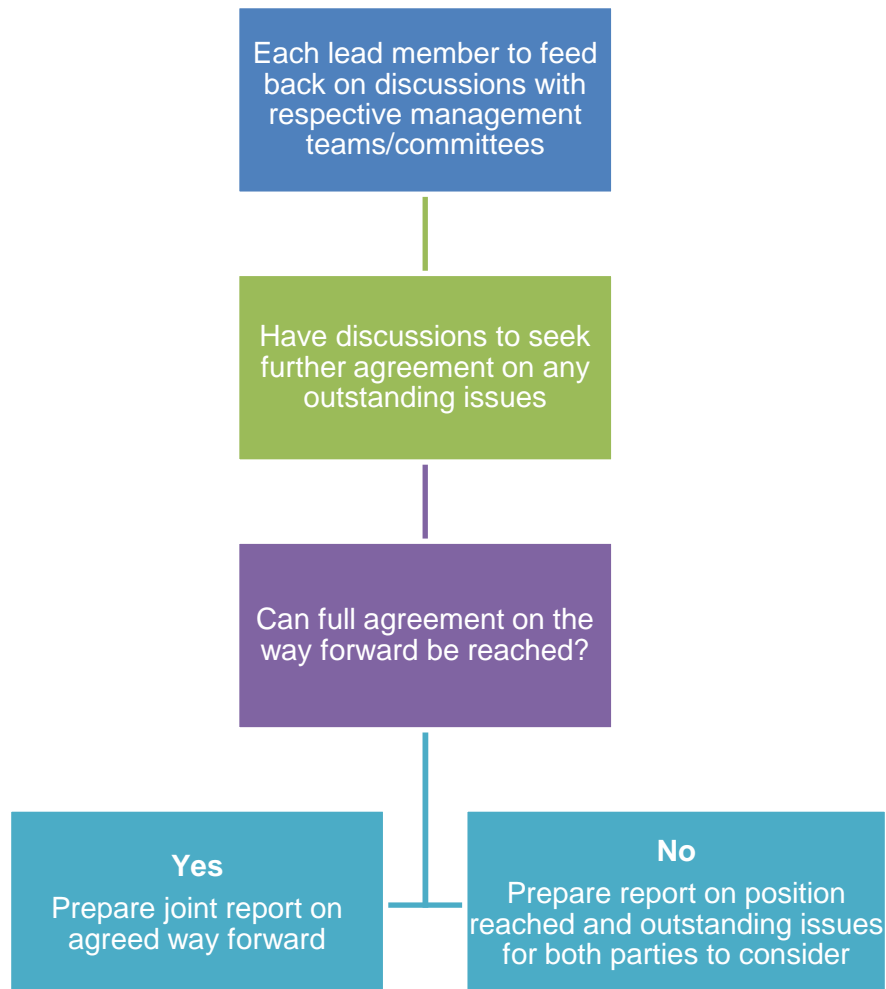
Step 3 – Understand interests

Interests cause people to take a position. To avoid conflict, it is important that all parties understand each other's interests and agree to consider the issues from each other's perspectives; the focus should be on what each party needs from the process to achieve a satisfactory resolution.

Step 4 – Develop options

It is possible to satisfy various interests without there being winners and losers. The right solution is the one that satisfies most interests. In seeking a solution, each of the parties involved should agree to develop a range of potential options, for example:

- Generate ideas;
- Don't judge ideas until the process is exhausted;
- Relate the ideas to the issues; which ones could provide possible options?



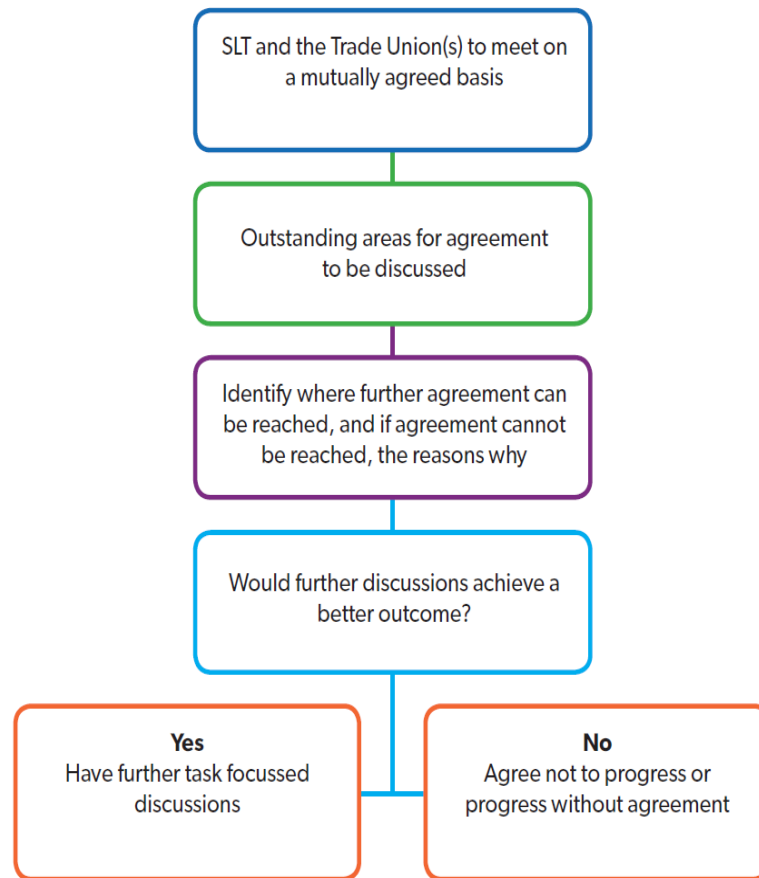
Note: Timescales for this process should recognise where each partner is required to consult wider.

Step 5 – Choose a solution

In order to choose a solution, each option must be assessed, for example, in terms of:

- How does each option meet each party's relevant interests?
- Are there resources available to deliver the solution?

- Does the solution meet wider stakeholder requirements?
- Whose buy-in is required?



Step 6 – Implement the solution

The last step is to create an action plan to implement the solution. The responsibility for the actual implementation of Action Plans may be delegated to Working Groups or functional teams who would be answerable to and monitored by the sponsoring Partnership Forum.

Joint Problem Solving

At any stage in the above process, when a dispute on a particular issue is emerging, each of the parties involved will agree to taking time away from the issue to avoid positions becoming fixed and the conflict escalating. “Time out” should be used to

reflect on the issues that are emerging, to consider all viewpoints and to review the matter they are seeking to resolve.

It should be noted that the commitment to joint problem solving does not affect legal rights or the right to access other forms of dispute resolution, such as collective grievance, conciliation, mediation or arbitration using ACAS and/or NJC arrangements. However, the SFRS will use these processes as a last resort when internal problem solving arrangements have been exhausted.

Individual grievances, disciplinary action or any type of individual complaint should be dealt with through the appropriate SFRS procedure; however, line managers and employees alike are encouraged to adopt similar problem solving techniques before initiating formal processes to avoid the escalation of individual disputes and complaints.

7. PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURES

The partnership structures are designed to support the efficient and effective progression of joint business in that they will:

- Build trust and mutual understanding;
- Place an emphasis on discussion and the exchange of ideas (without prejudice);
- Provide opportunities for regular meetings;
- Avoid unnecessary bureaucracy;
- Ensure that those who attend have the necessary skills and experience to add value to the partnership process and that they are empowered to make decisions.

7.1 National Arrangements

These include:

Partnership Advisory Group and the Employee Partnership Forum (EPF).

Partnership Advisory Group

The Partnership Advisory Group will:

- Address any issues that have been escalated from the EPF;
- Ensure that outcomes of the Group are communicated appropriately to all employees and key stakeholders;
- Establish the Working Together Framework, the ethos of joint working and the structures required to support it;
- Act as the custodians of the Working Together Framework, principles, policy and procedures;
- Provide advice and support to the SFRS to devise and maintain its partnership arrangements; acting as a vehicle for the discussion of any partnership issues which may arise.
- Provide support to negotiations and facilitate the resolution of disputes (as required).

The Group consists of the Chair of the SFRS Board, the Chief Officer of SFRS, the Director of POD, senior Trade Union representatives and senior members of SFRS staff as appropriate to the agenda.

Employee Partnership Forum

The Forum consists of the Chair / Vice Chair of the People Committee, one other Board Member from the People Committee, senior Trade Union representatives and senior members of SFRS staff as appropriate to the agenda.

The Employee Partnership Forum will:

- Meet regularly to discuss and review proposed and ongoing developments;
- Meet annually to agree an annual action plan that sets out joint objectives in support of the SFRS;
- Ensure that the work of the Forum is communicated to all employees and key stakeholders;
- Ensure that any necessary resources, facilities and training are in place to support the partnership arrangements; seek appropriate opportunities to build capacity within the forums;
- Commission work on its behalf from either a Local Partnership Forum or by establishing a defined Working Group;
- Identify areas of 'good practice' to assist the partnership arrangements;
- Ensure that we engage in robust consultation, negotiation and joint problem solving techniques to implement change within the SFRS;
- Provide support / facilitation to resolve issues that have been escalated by a Local Partnership Forum.

7.2 Local Arrangements

The partners at a local level will have autonomy to establish Local Partnership Forums. Each Local Partnership Forum will comprise of the relevant Director and their Management Team, together with recognised Trade Union representatives and an HR Business Partner.

The Local Partnership Forum will:

- Ensure that the nationally agreed and shared objectives of the EPF guide the work carried out at a local level;
- Create a Forum for the sharing of ideas, the exchange of information and the identification / development of opportunities for partnership working;
- Support local planning processes, e.g. the production of Local Plans;
- Work together on issues of a local nature within the agreed principles, policy and procedures of the Working Together Framework;
- Ensure that any necessary resources, facilities and training are in place to support the partnership arrangements;
- Regularly consult and communicate with local managers and the local Trade Union representatives;
- Be responsible for the set-up and monitoring of specific Working Groups;
- Provide regular reports to the EPF and share examples of 'good practice';
- Provide support / facilitation to other Local Partnership Forums as required.

7.3 Working Groups

Working Groups will be set up, as and when required, to explore, examine, analyse, research and make recommendations relating to specific issues as identified and agreed by the relevant Partnership Forum. The sponsoring Forum will select members for these working groups on the basis of specialist knowledge, skills or interest in a specific topic; employees from all levels, roles and departments are eligible for inclusion.

The Working Groups will:

- Agree the Terms of Reference with the sponsoring Forum;
- Ensure members possess the requisite skills to engage in joint problem solving and consensus decision-making;
- Prepare an action plan to complete the objectives set by the sponsoring Forum within the specified timescales;
- Undertake the work required to complete the objectives set; requesting resources from the sponsoring Forum as necessary;
- Provide regular reports to the sponsoring Forum on progress;
- Present outcomes and recommendations on conclusion of their work.

8. DEVELOPING IN PARTNERSHIP

To successfully achieve the aims of the Working Together Framework, parties will commit to learning and developing together in order to acquire the skills, knowledge and behaviours associated with partnership working.

The SFRS POD directorate will support the Working Together Framework by facilitating relevant development opportunities that will enhance joint working. To support the development of our partnership culture, we will:

- Identify the skills, knowledge and behaviours required to support the Working Together Framework;
- Regularly consider the training needs of all parties in support of partnership working;
- Ensure that training in support of partnership working is jointly designed and delivered at the appropriate level (e.g. induction, management development, Trade Union courses);
- Establish a joint partnership learning sub-group to oversee and evaluate partnership learning outcomes and to report any recommendations for further development to the EPF;
- Encourage the sharing of good practice and learning from experience via the Employee and Local Partnership Forums.

9. AGREEMENT

On behalf of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Signature: 

Print Name: Ross Haggart, Interim Chief Officer

Date: 7 September 2022

On behalf of the Fire Brigades Union

Signature: 

Print Name: John McKenzie, Regional Secretary

Date: 7 September 2022



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