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Press release

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Scottish fire and rescue services making progress on reform, but need to continue their efforts to make communities safer

Scottish fire and rescue authorities are giving more emphasis to fire prevention and community safety, but it is too early to demonstrate a sustained reduction in risks from fire.

This is the conclusion of a report published today by Audit Scotland on behalf of the Accounts Commission, looking at progress made by the eight Scottish fire and rescue authorities in modernising their services since the introduction of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005.

The new approach is bringing about changes in how fire and rescue authorities deliver services. Authorities are increasingly involved in working with other organisations like the police and councils to improve the safety of local communities. New procedures to manage hoax calls and respond to automatic fire alarms have delivered efficiency savings and freed up staff for community fire safety activities.

Alastair MacNish, Chairman of the Accounts Commission, said: "Fire and rescue authorities are putting more effort into the prevention of fires, and there is some early evidence that home fire safety visits and partnership initiatives have helped to reduce the number of people killed in domestic fires. However, there is no clear pattern of improvement across Scotland in the first year of change."

Whilst the number of deaths through house fires fell from 74 in 2004/05 to 54 in 2005/06, the number of incidents attended by fire and rescue services in the same period increased by 3.7 per cent despite targeted safety initiatives. All fire and rescue authorities need to do more to evaluate the impact of their community safety work to ensure they are making best use of their resources.

The report also highlights the need for a more modern attitude within fire and rescue authorities towards their workforce. The lack of diversity in the workforce is an area in need of urgent improvement. Even after targeted recruitment campaigns only 3.9 per cent of firefighters are women and 0.5 per cent of the total workforce from minority ethnic groups.

Elected members need to be more involved in the strategic development of their fire and rescue service and in scrutinising performance. The report recommends more specialised training for elected members on Fire and Rescue Boards and Committees.

Ends

Further Information from Leon Thompson tel: 0131 625 1651 or Anne McCubbin tel: 0131 625 1653.

Notes to editors

1. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. Audit Scotland has prepared this report jointly for the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission for Scotland:
2. The Accounts Commission for Scotland was set up in 1975 and is independent of both central and local government. The Commission checks whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend £9 billion of public money properly and effectively.
3. The full national report, *A review of service reform in Scottish fire and rescue authorities*, can be found on Audit Scotland's website. www.audit-scotland.gov.uk
4. A podcast of the report's key findings and recommendations is also available on the Audit Scotland website.

5. Individual reports on each of the eight Scottish fire and rescue authorities are also available on the Audit Scotland website