

Address:
110 George Street
Edinburgh
EH2 4LH

Telephone:
0845 146 1010

Website:
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk



News release

Embargoed until 00:01 hours, Thursday 26 January 2012

Central Scotland Fire & Rescue service is effective but further improvement needed to provide Best Value

Central Scotland Fire & Rescue provides an effective, low cost service. But it would be better placed to provide Best Value if it had stronger performance arrangements. Many of the basic building blocks are not yet in place. It needs to develop a culture of continuous improvement, with the board being more proactive in its scrutiny role.

The Accounts Commission's findings say that the service is effective and low cost, with a sound approach to budgeting and financial control. There are good aspects to how it manages staff, as can be seen in consistently low sickness absence rates.

But the Commission is concerned that many of the building blocks which would help the service meet its Best Value duties are still not in place, compromising the service's understanding of its strategic role and ability to improve. It is especially important to have good management practices at times of financial challenge and change such as this.

Its approach to performance management and assets is underdeveloped and there also needs to be a more effective approach to risk management, with a clearer focus on prevention. The Fire Board is passive rather than proactive in its role and should be doing more to scrutinise and challenge the service on its strategy and performance. The councillors need more support to be better able to do this.

Chair of the Accounts Commission, John Baillie, said: "Central Scotland Fire and Rescue provides an effective service and it is encouraging to know that it wishes to improve and change. It still needs to do more to ensure that it is providing Best Value. There needs to be a stronger focus on management of performance and risks and councillors on the fire board need to do more to scrutinise and challenge strategy and performance."

The Commission also emphasises the need for Central Fire and Rescue to keep its focus on improving its service to the public whilst fire and rescue services are being restructured on a national basis.

Media contact: Anne McCubbin, Tel: 0131 625 1653 amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk

Notes to editors

1. The Accounts Commission's findings comment on the audit report prepared by Audit Scotland.

The Accounts Commission will review its findings from this audit alongside those of the forthcoming audits of all other fire and rescue services in Scotland. Later in 2012 it will produce a national overview of the audits of fire and rescue. The audit work will form a useful information resource ahead of the creation of a single fire service. The Bill is currently being considered by the Scottish Parliament.

2. Best Value is the duty placed on local authorities to demonstrate their on-going commitment to providing better services to local people. The Audit of Best Value is undertaken by Audit Scotland on behalf of the Accounts Commission. It responds to the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. Local authorities in Scotland, including fire and rescue, have a statutory duty to deliver best value in their services. This requires them to establish management arrangements, aimed at securing continuous improvements in their performance while maintaining an appropriate balance between quality and cost. Since 2004, Audit Scotland has carried out audits of Best Value in each of the 32 councils in Scotland and in most police authorities. These audits have helped to improve performance and accountability in local government and have brought unsatisfactory performance to the public's attention through the public reporting process.

3. The responsibilities of fire and rescue services have changed significantly over the past decade. In 2003, all Scottish services were required to produce Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMP), identifying the level of local risks and determining the appropriate allocation of resources. The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 introduced further changes, placing a strong emphasis on prevention rather than simply emergency response.

4. The Accounts Commission for Scotland checks how well Scotland's councils, fire and police boards perform. It operates independently of local and central government. For more information about the Accounts Commission see <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/about/ac/>

5. Audit Scotland provides services to the Accounts Commission for Scotland and carries out work as directed by the Accounts Commission. Its reports are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk