

Address:
110 George Street
Edinburgh
EH2 4LH

Telephone:
0845 146 1010

Website:
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk



News release

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Tayside Fire & Rescue service has strong culture of continuous improvement, but board should provide better scrutiny and challenge

Tayside Fire and Rescue service has a strong focus on prevention, as reflected in decreases in the numbers of fires and fire casualties. The service has many of the essential elements of Best Value. The board should develop its strategic governance role, with more effective scrutiny and challenge and a clearer role in shaping strategy and prioritising use of resources.

The Accounts Commission's findings say that Tayside is making substantial progress in its transition from a fire and rescue authority to a fire prevention authority. It has made good progress with risk management planning. There is a strong culture of continuous improvement, which is seen throughout the service and there are many good examples of this, including self-evaluation, information sharing and performance reporting.

But the Commission urges the board to do more to meet its Best Value duties. It is especially important to have good management practices at times of financial challenge and change such as this. Tayside needs to keep its focus on improving its service to the public whilst fire and rescue services are being restructured on a national basis.

The board should be doing more to scrutinise and challenge the service on its performance, with a clearer role in shaping the service's strategy, and prioritising its use of resources. Councils can help support the councillors on the board to develop their skills.

Chair of the Accounts Commission, John Baillie, said: "Tayside Fire and Rescue has a strong focus on prevention and it is helping reduce the number of fires and casualties. It has a strong culture of continuous improvement and many of the elements which are essential to providing Best Value. However councillors on the fire board need to do more to scrutinise and challenge the service's performance and help shape its strategy and use of resources."

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.
2. This is the second Best Value audit of fire & rescue. The Accounts Commission will review its findings from this audit alongside those of the audits of all other fire and rescue services in Scotland. Later in 2012 it will produce a national overview commenting on the overall messages from these audits. This 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.

5. 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/>

6. 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