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News release

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Dumfries & Galloway Fire & Rescue is effective and making progress in delivering Best Value

Dumfries & Galloway Fire and Rescue provides an effective service. It uses the principles of risk management well and is making progress in developing a culture of continuous improvement. Dumfries and Galloway Council needs to ensure that councillors overseeing the service have sufficient skills, so they can put in place stronger scrutiny and challenge of the service to ensure Best Value.

The Accounts Commission's findings say that Dumfries & Galloway has clear vision and priorities, which it shares with other organisations responsible for community safety. It has a good approach to operational risk management, as seen in the way in which it uses retained firefighters, and the service should now do more to integrate risk management into its overall strategic planning.

Councillors overseeing the service need the right skills and performance information to improve their scrutiny and challenge of the service. The council should help support councillors to develop their skills and the service should provide better performance information. The service's management also needs to improve how it evaluates its preventative work in order to demonstrate better value for money.

Chair of the Accounts Commission, John Baillie, said: "Dumfries & Galloway Fire and Rescue is effective and is developing a culture of continuous improvement. Management and councillors need to continue with this work and have good strategic planning and oversight in order to provide Best Value. Councillors should develop their skills and have access to better performance information so they can scrutinise and challenge the service.

"Dumfries & Galloway needs to keep its focus on improving its service to the public whilst fire and rescue services are being restructured on a national basis. It is especially important to have good management practices at times of financial challenge and change such as this."

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Notes to editors

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