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News release

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Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue provides an effective service with a clear strategic vision

Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue provides an effective service with a clear strategic vision supported by good integrated risk management planning.

The Accounts Commission's findings published today say the service has a strong approach to financial management but improvements need to be made in its management of its assets and equipment.

Workforce planning has some strengths such as a new approach in day shift duty where whole-time firefighters work alongside retained colleagues. High levels of sickness absence are a concern and Lothian and Borders also needs to invest more resource in the development of retained firefighters.

The Commission says it is encouraged by the service's clear focus on preventative work and its innovative approaches working with partner organisations and engaging with communities, most notably with young people.

But to make its preventative work more effective, the service needs to do more to establish the reasons behind the relatively high casualty figures in the region. The Fire and Rescue Board has good self-awareness, but it should strengthen its scrutiny of the service, which should be supported by better performance information.

Chair of the Accounts Commission, John Baillie, said: "Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue provides an effective service with a clear strategic vision supported by good planning for matching its resources to levels of risk. It needs to do more to establish the reasons behind the relatively high casualty rate in the region."

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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 seventh Best Value audit of fire & rescue. The Accounts Commission will review its findings from this audit alongside those 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