

EMBARGO: not for use before 0001hrs on Thursday 19 December 2002

FIRE SERVICES CONTINUE TO IMPROVE AND POLICE COMPLAINTS ARE REPORTED FOR THE FIRST TIME

Fire

Performance information published today by the Accounts Commission shows that fire brigades in Scotland attended over 3,600 more fires on time than in 2000/01, despite an overall increase in the number of fires. They attended 92.3% within target times compared 91.7% in the previous year.

Accounts Commission Chairman, Alastair MacNish says:

“The figures reflect an improvement in the number of fires attended on time, continuing the trend of the past four years. This year brigades attended more fires on time despite there being more calls to attend.”

The proportion of firefighter shifts lost to sickness absence in 2001/02 was 8%, nearly 16 shifts per firefighter, which is a slight improvement compared with the previous year (8.2%). Sickness levels varied considerably across forces, with Highland and Islands losing least time (4.8%) and Tayside losing most (9.3%).

Police

This year it is not possible to compare the number of crimes reported or cleared up with previous years. This is due to a problem with differing interpretations of guidance on crime recording which has resulted in inconsistent recording practices across forces. The problem has been recognised and action is being taken by the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland to resolve this for future years. (See note 5)

The Accounts Commission is reporting the number of complaints made against on-duty police officers for the first time this year. The figures show that on average a complaint has been made against one in five officers across Scotland. In total in 2001/02, 1608 complaints were made which included all complaints, even those regarded as relatively minor, such as rudeness or lack of courtesy.

The number of racist incidents reported increased from 2,700 to over 3,100. The Commission says this may reflect an increase in public confidence in the ability and willingness of the police to deal with these issues.

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Notes to editors:

1. The Accounts Commission is responsible for securing the audit of 32 Scottish councils and 34 joint boards, including police and fire services. The Commission investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Accounts Commission is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Executive or the Scottish Parliament.
2. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. It provides services to the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland.



3. Since 1993/94 councils have been required by law to provide information on how well they are carrying out their activities. Under the Local Government Act 1992 the Accounts Commission has to decide what information councils provide. The information for 2001/2002 is the ninth annual comparison of council performance. It provides important benchmarks against which performance will continue to be measured in future years.
4. The pamphlet published today relates to Scotland's fire and police services. It is the first in a series of six pamphlets comparing the performance, over a range of services, achieved by all 32 Scottish councils, eight fire brigades and eight police forces.
5. This year, for the first time, information considered by an authority's appointed auditor to be unreliable has been excluded from the Scotland figures. Since this includes the number of recorded crimes in two forces – a problem arising from differing interpretations of the Criminal Statistics Handbook issued by the Scottish Executive – no comparison has been made with previous years.
6. Staff on sickness and light duties include those who, whilst available to be at work, are unfit for operational duties as part of a fire crew. Brigades' policies vary on the number of firefighters who can be accommodated on non-operational light duties.
7. The complaints indicator did not highlight the number of complaints which were upheld.
8. Information relating to benefits, finance and corporate issues will be published on 15 January. Two further pamphlets covering education, housing and social work will follow on 29 January. Finally, information relating to leisure & library services, and environmental & regulatory services will be published on 5 February. This information can also be found on the Commission's web site on www.audit-scotland.gov.uk