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Press release

Embargoed until 00.01hrs on Friday 10 December 2004

Police forces are clearing up more crime but serious violent crime remains a major problem

Performance information published today by the Accounts Commission reveals that Scottish police forces cleared up nearly 47% of crimes in 2003/4, continuing the year-on-year improvement trend. Forces cleared up 56% of serious violent crimes; 30% of housebreakings; and 25% of car crimes. While the new Scotland-wide targets for reducing housebreaking and road accidents were met, the target for reducing serious violent crimes was not achieved. The report also includes performance information on Scotland's fire services which shows the number of accidental house fires continuing to fall.

Commenting on the police figures, Accounts Commission Chairman, Alastair MacNish said:

"These figures reflect an improvement in the overall clear up rates for crimes, continuing the trend of previous years. Police forces also have contributed to reducing the number of housebreakings and car crimes and these achievements need to be recognised. However the increase in the number of serious violent crimes is worrying and requires urgent attention."

During 2003/04, police forces:

- cleared up almost 56% of serious violent crimes, a 1% improvement on the previous year. However the target to reduce the number of serious violent crimes by 5% was missed. Serious violent crime includes murder, rape, robbery and assault to serious injury. There were 14,310 serious violent crimes reported in 2003/04, 12% above the target of 12,722.
- cleared up almost 30% of housebreakings, a slight increase compared with the previous year. Forces exceeded targets to reduce the number of housebreakings by 10%. 19,031 housebreakings were reported in 2003/04, 34% less than the target of 28,850
- cleared up 25% of car crimes, a slight fall compared with the previous year. But the target to reduce the number of car crimes by 17% was exceeded. 51,128 car crimes were reported in 2003/04, 5% less than the target of 53,983.

The performance information published today also reveals that there were 1,116 fire incidents leading to casualties in 2003/04, and a total of 6,149 accidental dwelling fires. This represents a continuing reduction over the past four years.

Commenting on the fire figures, Alastair MacNish said:

“It is encouraging to see the number of accidental house fires continuing to fall. This reflects the effectiveness of brigades’ fire prevention and safety programmes.”

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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 2003/04 is the eleventh 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 police and fire services. It is the first in a series of six pamphlets comparing the performance, over a range of services, achieved for 2003/04 by all 32 Scottish councils, eight fire brigades and eight police forces.
5. Information considered by an authority’s appointed auditor to be unreliable has been excluded from the Scotland figures.
6. Crime numbers (overall crimes, serious violent crimes, housebreakings and car crimes) for Northern Constabulary are excluded from the Scotland totals as the information provided in 2003/04 was unreliable.
7. The new targets for the Scottish police service were set by The Scottish Executive, Association of Police Chief Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) and the Police Authorities.
8. The various police targets were set to demonstrate improvement in comparison with figures representing the average of a number of years. The years chosen as the base year vary depending on the issue and are discussed in the body of the pamphlet.
9. The performance indicator relating to response times to fires has been excluded from the pamphlet this year, as national standards for attendance at incidents are to be withdrawn from April 2005. Thereafter, Fire Authorities will be using internal performance indicators to measure response times to all emergency incidents in the Integrated Risk Management Plans for their own areas. We have, however, included all the performance indicator information for 2003-04 in our compendium of data which can be accessed on our web site.
10. Information relating to benefits, finance and corporate issues and cultural & community services will be published on 13 January. A further pamphlet, covering housing and social work will follow on 27 January. Finally, two pamphlets covering information relating to environmental & regulatory services and education and children’s services will be published on 3 February. This information can also be found on the Commission’s web site on www.audit-scotland.gov.uk