

The Audit of Best Value

# Dumfries & Galloway Fire and Rescue



Prepared for the Accounts Commission  
February 2012



# The Accounts Commission

The Accounts Commission is a statutory, independent body which, through the audit process, requests local authorities in Scotland to achieve the highest standards of financial stewardship and the economic, efficient and effective use of their resources. The Commission has four main responsibilities:

- securing the external audit, including the audit of Best Value and Community Planning
- following up issues of concern identified through the audit, to ensure satisfactory resolutions
- carrying out national performance studies to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local government
- issuing an annual direction to local authorities which sets out the range of performance information they are required to publish.

The Commission secures the audit of 32 councils and 45 joint boards and committees (including police and fire and rescue services).

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 Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission. Together they ensure that the Scottish Government and public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.

---

# Contents

<b>Commission findings</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>The Audit of Best Value</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Part 1. Context</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Part 2. Governance and management</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Vision and strategic direction.....	8
Partnership working.....	10
Scrutiny, performance management and improvement .....	12
<b>Part 3. Use of resources</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Financial management .....	14
Workforce management .....	14
Asset management .....	17
<b>Part 4. Service performance</b> .....	<b>18</b>
Service costs.....	18
Prevention.....	19
Emergency response .....	21
Number of fires and casualties .....	21
Special services .....	23
False alarms.....	23
Emergency response standards.....	24
<b>Part 5. Improvement agenda</b> .....	<b>26</b>

# Commission findings

1. The Accounts Commission accepts the report of the Controller of Audit on the Best Value audit of Dumfries and Galloway Fire and Rescue.
2. The Commission finds that Dumfries and Galloway Fire and Rescue provides an effective service. It has clear vision and priorities which are consistent with those of its community safety partners.
3. The Commission is encouraged to note that the principles of risk management are being used well by the service in, for example, its approach to the use of retained fire fighters. The service should now do more to embed these principles through an enhanced use of integrated risk management planning.
4. Dumfries and Galloway Council needs to ensure that elected members have sufficient skills to oversee the service, including stronger scrutiny and challenge of the service. Such oversight would be strengthened by the service continuing to improve the quality and type of performance information being made available to elected members.
5. The Commission commends the progress being made by the service's management in developing a culture of continuous improvement. Management needs to continue to ensure that it has the capacity to be able to accommodate such a challenge. It also needs to improve how it evaluates its preventative work in order to demonstrate better value for money.
6. The Commission notes that any substantial issues arising for the service will be considered as part of the annual audit process.
7. The Commission will review its findings from this audit alongside those of the forthcoming audit of all other fire and rescue services in Scotland, with a view to producing in 2012 a national overview of its work in fire and rescue.

# The Audit of Best Value

1. 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
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Some aspects of Best Value in fire and rescue have been covered in earlier Accounts Commission reports, particularly the *Scottish Fire Service: verification of the progress of modernisation*, published in 2004, and the *Review of service reform in Scottish fire and rescue authorities*, published in 2007. So far, however, there has not been any dedicated audit, covering all key aspects of Best Value.
5. Following a formal consultation with stakeholders in late 2010, the Accounts Commission decided that the audit of Best Value should be extended to fire and rescue. With the Scottish Government signalling a potential restructuring of the services, however, it was recognised that the audit needed to be proportionate, seeking to identify the key strengths which should be retained in a future structure and any significant weaknesses which needed to be resolved. Subsequently in September 2011, the Scottish Government announced its commitment to deliver a single Fire and Rescue Service for Scotland and published its outline business case. Between October and November 2011 it published a further consultation paper, *Keeping Scotland Safe and Strong*, on how the future service will work in practice. The outcome of this consultation process is not yet known.
6. During 2011, audits were carried out at each of the eight Scottish fire and rescue services and authorities. These focus on core issues, such as strategic planning, the role of members, financial management, and service performance and costs. These local reports, which will support improvement and local accountability, will be followed by the publication of a national overview report in 2012. A number of best value issues, including equalities, sustainability and procurement have not been covered directly in the scope of the local audit work. These, along with a range of other issues, will be covered in the national overview report.
7. We carried out the Best Value audit of Dumfries and Galloway Fire and Rescue (D&GFR) during July 2011. We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided to the audit team by the Chief Fire Officer, Colin Scott; the Convener of the Police, Fire and Rescue Committee, Councillor Ian Blake, and all other elected members and staff involved.

# Summary

8. D&GFR provides an effective emergency response service. It deals with a low and reducing number of fires but also responds to significant numbers of road traffic collisions. The service has effective financial management arrangements. It has been able to achieve significant efficiency savings in recent years, without any significant reductions in the delivery of its services. Its operating costs have steadily reduced in real-terms since 2004/05 but remain a little above the Scottish average, reflecting the predominantly rural context.
9. D&GFR has a clear vision and priorities that reflect the community safety objectives of Dumfries and Galloway Community Planning Partnership (CPP) and the council. The service needs to better align its priorities consistently through its various plans and strategies. This will assist the service to direct resources towards these priorities and demonstrate best use of resources.
10. The principles of integrated risk management are evident in some of the service's arrangements, in particular in the additional training and resources directed to retained fire fighters delivering special services, such as water rescue, in locations assessed as higher risk. The service is improving the quality and depth of risk information it is using for planning but it is early days. The service needs to progress the use of this information and integrate risk management throughout its planning framework.
11. D&GFR shows a strong commitment to risk focused preventative work, including providing training to council staff and voluntary organisations that can assist in identifying fire safety risks in the homes of vulnerable people and to promote community fire safety. The service has carried out a high level of home fire safety visits and is now making progress in targeting this work on areas of greatest risk. It has also promoted improved community awareness of flood resilience through a range of activities including home flood risk assessments. There is limited evidence of the service evaluating preventative work it undertakes and therefore it is unable to assess and demonstrate the value for money of these activities.
12. D&GFR has good relations with its partners at a strategic and operational level to address community safety issues. The service works well with other council departments and partners in relation to for example flood resilience and road safety. However, more needs to be done to progress the work of the community safety partnership which has been slow to develop its arrangements and strategy.
13. The service is improving its performance management arrangements, but further progress is needed to establish a well integrated planning and performance information system to support monitoring, management and scrutiny of planned actions, initiatives, performance and value for money. Reporting to members has improved significantly but more can be done to ensure members have access to further performance and cost information for scrutiny.
14. Overall, workforce management is good, with staff appraisals in place for all employees, linked to training needs, and a strong focus on training for retained firefighters. But significant turnover in senior manager posts, coupled with the quickening pace of change at local and national levels, has led to a lack of continuity in many key posts, placing significant pressure on managers, and increasing risks around the organisation's management capacity to deal with future challenges.
15. In previous years, D&GFR has not had a well developed culture of continuous improvement but this is now being addressed. The service management show a good level

of self awareness, with a good deal of work commenced over the last 18 months to improve its arrangements for areas such as risk management, self-assessment, operational assurance arrangements and, planning and performance information systems.

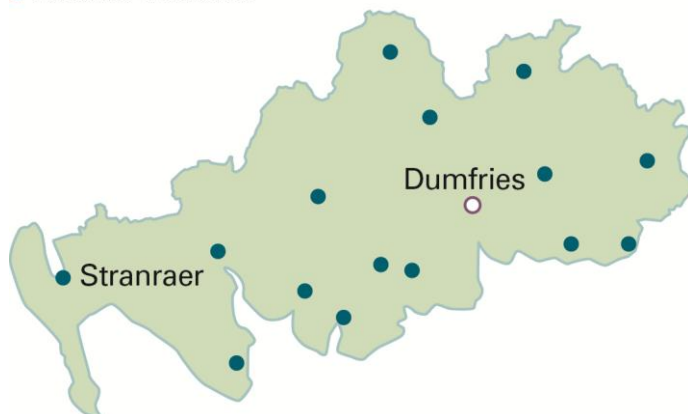
16. Overall, governance of the service is improving but members of the Police and Fire Committee (PAC) still need to provide a stronger lead in setting the strategic direction for the service and strengthen their scrutiny and challenge role.

# Part 1. Context

17. D&GFR serves a population of over 148,000 in a predominantly rural part of south-west of Scotland. The main settlements by population are Dumfries (31,530), Stranraer (10,440), and Annan (8,480). The relatively low population density combined with the size of the area (6,425 Km<sup>2</sup>) presents accessibility issues and related challenges for delivery of the fire and rescue service.
18. The area's population is projected to decline a little over the next twenty years but with a slightly higher increase in its over 65 population than the Scottish average. The number of dwellings in the area is increasing, as is the number of single occupancy householders that are over 65. The combination of these factors present further potential risk issues for service demand and delivery. Older people are a higher risk group and a declining younger population in a low population density area makes sustaining the recruitment of firefighters more challenging in the future.
19. D&GFR has an annual budget of around £9.1 million. It employs 349 staff (full time equivalent), including 99 whole-time and 212 retained firefighters (Exhibit 1). The headquarters in Dumfries is located beside its one whole-time station. There are 16 further retained stations and one auxiliary station (Exhibit 1), serving four territorial areas. It has a fleet of 28 response vehicles and specialist trailers. Twenty one of these are fire and rescue tenders, all equipped with enhanced road traffic collision rescue equipment and some with further specialist resources, such as flood rescue equipment. There are other specialist units such as those for decontamination, urban search and rescue, incident control and breathing apparatus training.

## Exhibit 1: Staffing and fire stations in Dumfries and Galloway

- Wholetime fire station
- Retained fire station



	Dumfries & Galloway		Scotland
	No.	%	%
Wholetime	99	28	50
Retained	212	61	34
Other	38	11	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Map - SFRAU Staffing numbers - CIPFA Statistical Returns (as at 31st March 2011)

20. D&GFR is one of two fire and rescue services in Scotland that are part of unitary authorities (the other being Fife). This means that it is a service of Dumfries and Galloway Council and that the full Council is the legal Fire and Rescue Authority. Responsibility for strategic decision-making is delegated from the Council to the Police, Fire and Rescue Committee. This is made up of 11 elected members from across the area and political groups in



Dumfries and Galloway Council. The committee meets on a four weekly basis with business generally alternating between police and fire items at every second meeting.

21. The chief fire officer (CFO) is a member of the council Corporate Management Team (CMT) and reports to the chief executive of the council. D&GFRS operates within the strategic management, financial and budgeting policies and procedures of the council.
22. D&GFR is coterminous with the other council service departments and some key community planning partners including the Police and NHS.

# Part 2. Governance and management

## Vision and strategic direction

**D&GFRS has a clear vision but needs to ensure that its priorities are consistently reflected in its various plans and strategies. The principles of integrated risk management are evident in many of the service's arrangements, including a strong emphasis on preventative work, but need to be more clearly integrated into its planning framework. Members of the Police and Fire Committee need to provide a stronger lead in setting the strategic direction for the service and strengthen their scrutiny and challenge role.**

## Strategic planning

23. The strategic vision for D&GFR is set out in its service improvement plan 2011/12 as a set of six priorities ([Exhibit 2](#)). These reflect the priorities of Dumfries and Galloway Council's 2007-2011 Corporate Plan, particularly those relating to improved community fire safety and improved road safety. In turn, these reflect the aims of the Dumfries & Galloway Community Planning Partnership's Single Outcome Agreement theme of 'feeling safer and respected within the community.' The priorities are not, however, consistently reflected throughout the services own range of strategies and plans.

---

### Exhibit 2: Dumfries and Galloway Fire & Rescue's strategic priorities

- Reduce the number of fires and other special service incidents and their impact
- Reduce the number of casualties that result from fires, road traffic collisions and other special service incidents
- Utilise and deploy resources effectively
- Develop and maintain a competent, flexible, progressive and diverse workforce
- Procure and maintain assets that are fit for purpose and provide value for money
- Proactively manage risks

*Source: D&G Fire & Rescue's Service Improvement Plan, 2011/12*

---

24. D&GFR has responded to the change in its role required by the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 with a balance of prevention and response activity evident within the service. The number of Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSV) undertaken by the service has been high and it is now developing a more risk targeted approach to this core prevention work. It has also invested in developing skills and awareness within the community to promote fire prevention and flood resilience.
25. In 2005/06 the service produced an initial IRMP through a member officer working group. The IRMP has subsequently been incorporated into the annual Service Improvement Plan (SIP) which is the service's main planning document. Although the SIP outlines the objectives of the service and planned activities for the year, it does not clearly articulate the local risks and community needs and how these are being managed.
26. The original IRMP and subsequent review of risk data by the service have not identified any need for any closures or relocation of stations. However, IRMP has informed

investment in additional training and positioning of equipment for the provision of special services, such as mass decontamination, water rescue and line rescue which are targeted at stations where specific risks have been identified.

27. Over the past two years the service has improved its use of risk modelling information. It combines FSEC (the national Fire Service Emergency Cover modelling system) data with other information such as deprivation levels, details of road conditions and road traffic collisions, and data from other emergency and council services to plot digital risk maps for each fire station. This allows the targeting of community safety activity at those locations that are more likely to have fires and other incidents.
28. Local profile documents are also in place for all stations. These set out local factors and key risks at an operational level. However these tend to be descriptive documents rather than a management plan showing how strategies and resources are being used to meet these risks and improve service performance.
29. The service has recognised the need to both streamline and better embed the integration of risk priorities in its planning arrangements. A risk management team has been drawn together to provide a common hub for the collation and management of risk and performance information, strategic planning and monitoring of activities. Early indications are that this team is making good progress with improving the arrangements and is a good resource for the service in the development of a more robust and integrated planning, monitoring and reporting framework.

## Governance

30. Member oversight of the fire and rescue service has improved over the past three years. In particular, the committee meetings alternating fire and rescue with police business now gives the service dedicated time to present issues to members and for members to discuss and provide challenge on them. The quality and range of information presented to elected members for discussion and scrutiny has also improved. However, there is scope for members to play a more active role in relation to setting the strategic agenda of the fire and rescue service. Whilst the committee approves strategic plans, including the SIP, members have limited input in the development of the service priorities contained within these strategies.
31. Area committees are another important part of the council arrangements in Dumfries and Galloway. These have not provided an effective additional level of governance and scrutiny for the FRS. Until 2011 community safety area committees ran in parallel to wider council service area committees. The Community Safety Area Committees business predominantly related to police issues. The information provided to the committees on fire and rescue was very limited and of an inconsistent quality across the committees.
32. The council is restructuring its area committee arrangements to promote a more robust role for these committees across services. From April 2011 area committees were given delegated local decision-making powers and a performance scrutiny role. The revised remit of area committees includes:
  - undertake area-level monitoring of service performance on a twice-yearly cycle across all services (including community safety)
  - recommend short-term actions that have no policy or resource implications
  - recommend medium-term actions to address failure in policy implications which have policy or resource implications
  - conduct themed meetings to consider performance issues as part of strengthened community engagement.

33. No evaluation of the impact of these changes has yet taken place, but they may provide a framework for elected member oversight and engagement with fire and rescue which supports the direction of travel for future governance under a single fire and rescue service model.

## Partnership working

**D&GFR has good working relations with partners at a strategic and operational level to address community safety issues such as road safety and flooding. Progress has been slower in taking forward a strategic approach to community safety planning. Further evaluation of the impact and value for money of community safety work is needed. The service works well with other council departments to target individuals at risk but there are limited examples of joint or shared resources with other emergency services and other fire and rescue services.**

34. Fire and rescue services work through a range of partnership arrangements. They plan for civil contingencies with public and private sector partners through Strategic Co-ordinating Groups (SCGs). Prevention activity is typically delivered through community safety partnerships, working with local authorities, police, health, social landlords and the voluntary sector and sharing information on individuals at risk is key to ensuring prevention activity is most appropriately targeted. Fire and rescue services also deliver their response services in conjunction with other emergency services such as police, ambulance service, coast guard and mountain rescue. Individual fire and rescue services also work with other fire and rescue services, typically to provide cross-border response services or contributing to national resilience for major incidents.
35. The service's coterminosity with other partners and its unitary authority status provides a good platform for joint planning and partnership working across the community planning partnership area.
36. The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) is funded by and administratively supported by the council and is chaired by the convenor of the Police and Fire and Rescue Committee. It has been slow to develop its strategic approach and oversight of its performance by the council is weak. It produced a draft strategic plan in the Autumn of 2011 and has not yet submitted an annual report the council's Policy and Resources Committee on achievements and areas for improvement within the CSPs objectives, highlighting significant policy or strategic issues and account for its use of funding allocated to it by the council.
37. There are good examples of joint working with partners operationally to promote preventative work such as joint programmes with the education service and police on road safety awareness with target age groups. For example, the fire and rescue service is actively engaged in the Dumfries and Galloway CSP and takes a lead role in the Road Safety Partnership subgroup. This group has developed a Road Safety Strategy during 2011 and is delivering a range of initiatives to promote and educate improvements in road safety.
38. It is a generally accepted principle across fire services that education and awareness programmes to promote community safety are a positive contribution to improving outcomes for communities. Measuring the impact of these initiatives is difficult, particularly with many other contributing factors in wider society. At present in D&GFRS, joint working initiatives are only evaluated where funding is dependant on this. This means that there has been no evaluation of the FRS's youth projects, programme of home fire safety visits, and contributions to wider road safety initiatives. For that reason it is difficult for the service and its partners to demonstrate the value for money and impact of this work.

39. Flooding is a significant risk in the Dumfries and Galloway area and the service works well with other departments of the council, in particular planning and environmental services, and other partner organisations, including the Scottish Flood Forum and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), on flood resilience activities. Since significant flooding in the area in 2009 a range of work has been taken forward:
- Home Flood Information Visits, Subsidised Flood Product Scheme - in 2010 a Home Flood Information Visits initiative was started to provide communities with information on how to protect themselves, their possessions and their properties, including a flooding information pack. A subsidised flood products scheme, offering free flood surveys and the opportunity to purchase grant funded and discounted flood mitigating products was also launched.
  - 'Level 2' Water Response Training - Wholetime firefighters and firefighters at a number of identified retained stations are provided with enhanced water response training. It is planned that a number of council staff will also be provided with water response training.
  - Flood Pod - a bespoke flood pod funded by the council was made available to D&G FRS from November 2011 for deployment to flooding incidents. The Pod contains equipment such as flood gates, flood sacks and drain covers.
  - Enhanced Flood Recovery Equipment - the council has also funded other flood recovery equipment for D&G FRS emergency response vehicles, such as submersible pumps and hoses, wading poles and throw lines.
40. The FRS plays a significant role in civil contingency planning activity through the Dumfries and Galloway SCG. Large scale emergency exercises are regularly carried out and the learning from these exercises is shared across partners and within the service. The Dumfries and Galloway Community Risk Register (2011 - 2012) clearly reflects major risks recognised by the FRS such as industrial explosions, forest fires and major flooding.
41. The FRS works well with other emergency services and fire and rescue services but does not have any joint or shared resources. The service responds to cross border emergencies when requested, offers its specialist services to others in times of need and carries out joint drills and exercises with others. Although the service does not have any formal shared services with other emergency services or FRAs, it does have memorandums of understanding for services such as training and HR support from larger services. Efforts were made to develop some shared resource arrangements for emergency responses with the ambulance service, however funding arrangements could not be agreed.
42. The chief fire officer reports to the chief executive of the council and is a member of the council's CMT. This direct relationship with other council departments supports the service's engagement in the wider strategic planning for the area by the council and close working relations at this corporate level. The direct relationship with the council also provides close operational working and ease of communication for the FRS with other council services that are also engaged with community safety issues, such as housing, social work and education. In particular, the FRS work with other services for referrals for HFSVs for vulnerable individuals, to support and provide advice to other services and to learn from incidents through joint case conferences.

## Scrutiny, performance management and improvement

**D&GFR has not had a strong culture of continuous improvement. It has, more recently, shown improved self-awareness and made progress in addressing weaknesses in performance monitoring and establishing an effective approach to operational assurance. Scrutiny arrangements have improved but there is scope for members to provide more effective challenge.**

43. In the past there has not been a strong culture of improvement within D&GFR. Significant weaknesses in its performance management arrangements were raised in Audit Scotland's 2006 report on D&GFR and, subsequently, in the 2009 Best Value report on Dumfries & Galloway Council. These are only now being addressed. The council has introduced a performance management system and is beginning to establish this in all its departments, including the FRS. The service has made progress in improving the quality and range of the monitoring information reported to elected members and the senior management team. Gaps still remain in terms of benchmarking and areas such as costs data and the availability of retained stations, but there have been significant improvements in the presentation of reports, their timeliness and the provision of trend information.
44. Until recently, D&GFR has not had a systematic approach to using self-assessment or review to improve service delivery. However, in recent years, managers have shown a good awareness of areas, such as risk management, performance monitoring and operational assurance, which need to be improved and have made significant progress in addressing them. In preparation for our audit, the service also used the Public Sector Improvement Framework (PSIF) to carry out a self-assessment of its key management processes. As well as identifying a number of strengths, it showed a good understanding of areas in need of further improvement, such as monitoring the impact of partnership working, consulting with stakeholders on future service developments, and setting more measurable targets for key plans.
45. Good progress has been made in developing performance management at an operational level. While improvements still need to be made in developing operational assurance procedures and records, D&GFR has established the foundations of an effective quality assurance system. A programme of station inspections has been introduced, with evidence that this has improved operational standards. Managers are regularly auditing how well firefighters and crew managers deal with emergencies. Results are fed back to headquarters and evaluated, and then improvements made. This is linked to individual training plans as necessary. All major incidents receive a live audit with learning fed back into the corporate centre for appropriate dissemination.
46. Improvements have also been made in the scrutiny of D&GFR by elected members. Alternate meetings of the Police and Fire Committee (PFC) focus on fire and rescue matters, helping to ensure that an adequate amount of time is set aside to consider strategic plans, financial monitoring and performance reports, and national issues. Performance reports are well presented, providing members with good information about incidents and prevention activity but the depth and range of data in these reports does not provide members with a fully rounded picture of the performance of the service. Members need to have access to more performance information across the activities of the service, including cost information, comparator and trend information, in order to assess whether the service is delivering value for money. There are a small number of informed and active members serving on the PFC, providing a good level of challenge and scrutiny. However, overall member understanding of fire and rescue risk, costs and strategic issues is mixed, and scrutiny and challenge is underdeveloped.
47. Although most scrutiny is carried out by the PFC, some reports are also considered by the council's Scrutiny and Audit Committee and by the council's local area committees.

Scrutiny at this local area level has been limited. Arrangements are currently being implemented by the council to enhance the role of local area committees in the decision-making and scrutiny arrangements of the council. It is too early to assess the impact of these changes on the scrutiny of the FRS.



# Part 3. Use of resources

**D&GFR has good arrangements for managing its financial and human resources. It has been able to find efficiency savings without any significant reductions in the delivery of its services. It also has a staff appraisal system which is linked to training needs and applies to all firefighters.**

## Financial management

**D&GFR has a sound financial position in terms of its revenue expenditure. However, it faces significant challenges in continuing to make efficiency savings without reducing services.**

48. D&GFR currently has a reasonable financial position in terms of its revenue expenditure. Since 2008/09, it has been required, as part of Dumfries and Galloway Council to generate annual efficiency savings of two per cent. It has been able to achieve these savings without significant reductions in services. It currently has general reserves of £455,000, well above its target levels. However, it has a significant backlog of £6 million in its capital programme (discussed at paragraph 61).
49. As part of Dumfries and Galloway Council, the fire and rescue budget is determined by the Council's Budget Development Group and scrutinised by its Policy Committee. This brings a corporate focus to budget proposals, matching resources to competing service priorities. However, as part of the council's budget-setting process, members of the PAC are able to comment on proposals, helping to ensure that the fire and rescue service is still able to maintain its core functions.
50. D&GFR has effective financial management arrangements. Since 2008/09, it has been able to generate efficiency savings totalling £0.6 million, mainly through a management restructuring, early retirements, and delaying filling some posts. The service is facing increasing difficulties in finding scope for savings. As well as rising fuel and energy costs, for example, it is facing unplanned additional costs relating to its retained firefighters, who form the vast bulk of its workforce. As part of a national agreement, it faces a one-off payment of £160,000 (earmarked in current reserves) and additional annual costs of £20,000. At present, the service is not expected to achieve further savings during 2012/13.

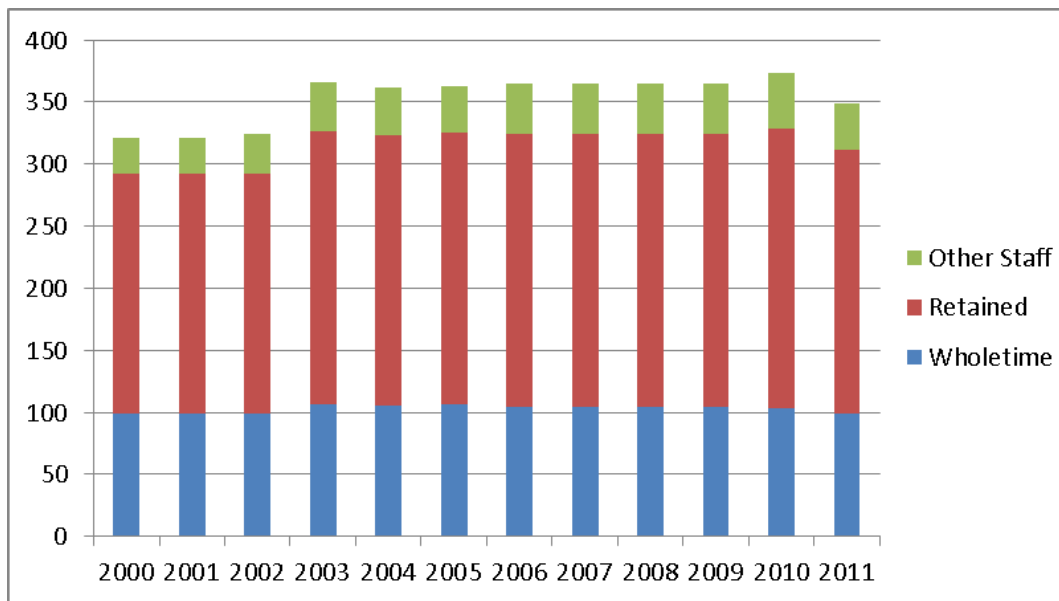
## Workforce management

**D&GFR has good arrangements for managing its workforce. It has introduced a staff appraisal system which links performance and training needs for all firefighters. It places a particular emphasis on the training of retained firefighters, although its resources can be stretched. The high turnover of senior posts in recent years also raises some risks about the management capacity of the organisation to deal with future challenges.**

51. The D&GFRS workforce profile ([Exhibit 3](#)) has remained relatively consistent over the past ten years, with little change in the numbers of staff or in the proportion of wholetime and retained firefighters. However, initiatives to make savings over the past two years are starting to impact on staff numbers. In April 2010 the total number of staff employed in the service was 373; by the end of 2010 this had reduced by 24 staff to 349.



Exhibit 3: Staff numbers 2000 to 2011



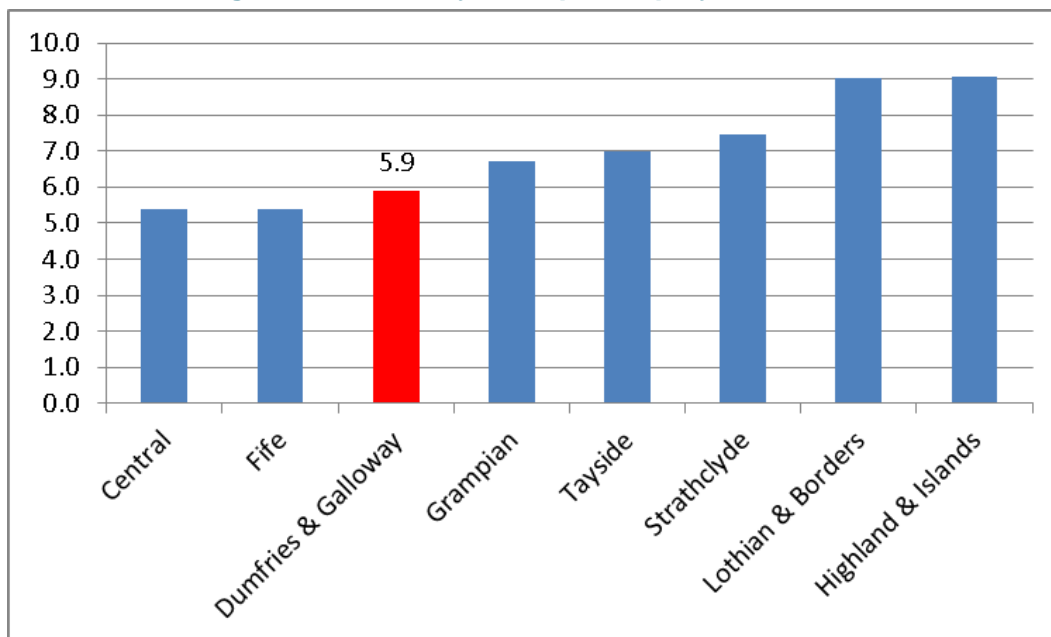
Source: CIPFA

52. D&GFR established a staff appraisal system in 2006. It introduced a workforce strategy in 2009 which sets out a range of other priorities, including management development and staff training.
53. Managers are clear about their individual objectives, although the service faces important challenges in relation to management capacity. As a small service with a predominantly retained firefighter workforce it has a small whole-time management pool. Savings made over the past few years have predominantly been made through vacancy management and this has included some management roles.
54. The service's senior and middle management team has also seen a significant turnover of individuals in posts over the past two years. The pace of these changes, and limited management capacity within the service, has led to a lack of continuity in many key senior posts, loss of skills and knowledge, increasing remits for individuals and a lack of stability. There is a resulting sense of pressure developing amongst managers. A range of leadership and management development opportunities have been introduced for managers, including formal leadership programmes and mentoring and coaching support. However, it is not clear whether there is the capacity within this team to manage the challenges of maintaining the current level of service and manage significant change going forward.
55. D&GFR has good arrangements in place for staff training. During 2009/10 a 'contributions management framework' was introduced as part of the annual staff appraisal system, linking training needs with the performance of individuals. Unlike most other fire and rescue services in Scotland, this appraisal system is used for both wholetime and retained staff. There is a strong emphasis on the training of retained firefighters, who form the largest group of staff within the service. They are provided with regular and structured training to help ensure that their skills are maintained. Three hours per week are allocated for this training, related records and station drill work. Additional training is provided for retained firefighters who provide special services, such as flood response.
56. There are some challenges for D&GFR in relation to staff training, particularly for retained firefighters who attend relatively few major incidents and need to maintain practical skills. Training resources are stretched, with the need for sufficient time for maintenance

activities, drills, training, and the completion of training records. D&G firefighters all receive 'hot fire' training, at least once each year, which compares well with some other services. However, the service has been unable to improve its training facilities for practical 'carbonaceous' fire training. It has submitted bids for capital funding to the Scottish Government but has been unsuccessful to date.

- 57. D&GFR recognises that its systems for managing the availability of retained firefighters is weak. This is a particularly important issue, given that retained firefighters form almost 70 per cent of frontline staff in Dumfries and Galloway. All stations do not use the same system and records can sometimes not be up to date. As a result, control room staff cannot always be confident that retained firefighters are available and sometimes have to mobilise appliances from another station. Alternative systems have been piloted but a new standard system is still to be implemented. That said, actual turnout performance is strong. In 2010/11, there was sufficient crew available on around 98 per cent of occasions.
- 58. There is a strong focus on the health and safety of firefighters. This is a clear common theme throughout the service's revision of its standard operation procedures and policies, as well as operational assurance arrangements, including incident risk assessment.
- 59. There is an effective approach to managing sickness absence. The service has employed a number of approaches such as return to work interviews. In 2010/11, D&GFR recorded an average of 5.9 days lost per employee, well below the national average of 7.4 days for Scottish fire and rescue services in Scotland ([Exhibit 4](#)).

**Exhibit 4: Average number of days lost per employee, 2010/11**



Source: Audit Scotland Statutory Performance Indicators

## Asset management

**D&GFR has an asset management plan which provides a prioritised programme of capital investment. In general, property and equipment is fit for purpose. A significant backlog of £6 million in upgrading some properties is now being addressed in its capital programme.**

60. D&GFR has had an Asset Management Strategy in place since 2009, with a revised document setting out its priorities for 2011 to 2014. This sets out a prioritised programme of capital investment, based on a capital scoring system, in property, vehicles, equipment and IT.
61. Our audit found no significant concerns about the suitability of operational equipment or with the service provided by the council for the maintenance of vehicles. However, with significant slippage in the capital investment programme, D&GFR has a maintenance and construction backlog of over £6 million. This mainly relates to the construction of a new training centre, currently housed in temporary units, and the urgent replacement of the fire station at Thornhill. The service has both of these projects programmed into its current capital programme with work due to commence in 2012.
62. D&GFR has successfully used a combined aerial rescue appliance (CARP) since December 2007. This is used as part of a two-vehicle response and provides greater flexibility to the service. D&GFR has recently purchased a second CARP vehicle from Central Fire and Rescue for a nominal sum, which will be based at its Stranraer station.
63. Although it forms part of the council, D&GFR has established its own independent ICT infrastructure which is able to support its dedicated Firewatch Fire Service Management System, covering areas such as health and safety, training records, and rota management, the Firelink command and control system, and FSEC risk management software.
64. The Scottish Government has recently announced the creation of a national fire and rescue service, merging the existing services. This will involve the transfer of assets to the new organisation as well as responsibility for currently integrated arrangements such as payroll and payment of utilities and other administrative provision. As part of a unitary authority this process is likely to be relatively complex and systems to manage this and support the decision-making required on property and other assets needs to be developed.

# Part 4. Service performance

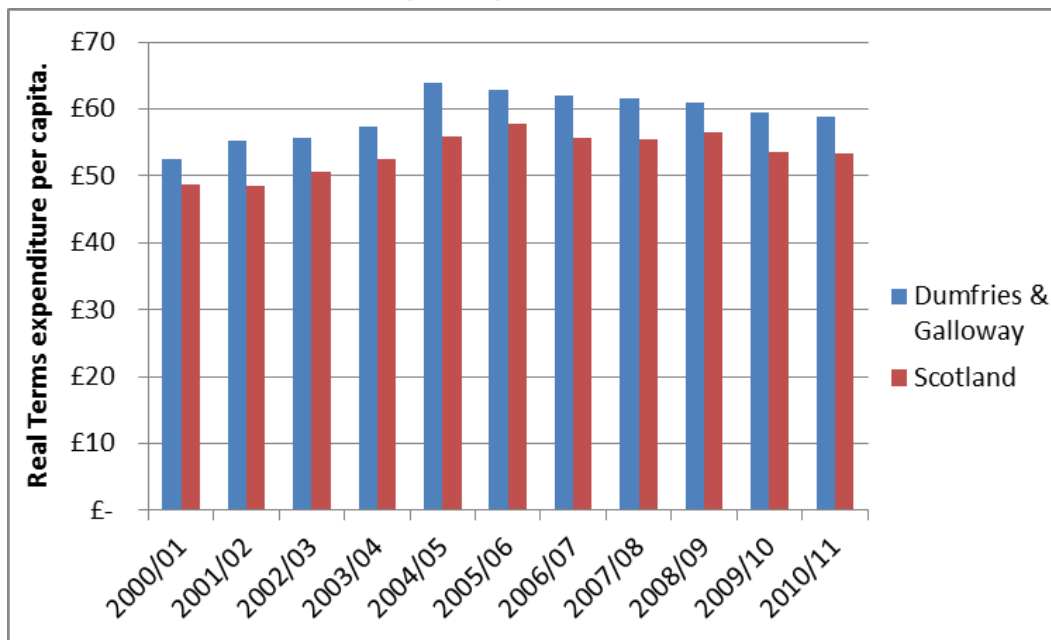
D&GFR provides an effective response to emergencies and a good level of preventative work which is increasingly targeted on areas of greatest risk. In line with national trends, there have been significant falls in the number of fires. Its costs are relatively high, reflecting the predominantly rural nature of the area it serves.

## Service costs

D&GFR operating costs are above the Scottish average, reflecting the rural area it serves. Since 2005, however, its costs in real terms have fallen by around seven per cent.

- 65. D&GFR's operating costs per head of population have consistently been above the Scottish average over the past ten years (Exhibit 5). This reflects the predominantly rural and low density population of the area. In 2010/11, excluding pension costs, it spent £59 per head of population, compared to the Scottish average of £53. Since 2005/06 its costs have fallen by around seven per cent in real terms.

**Exhibit 5: Real terms costs per capita, 2000/01 to 2010/11**



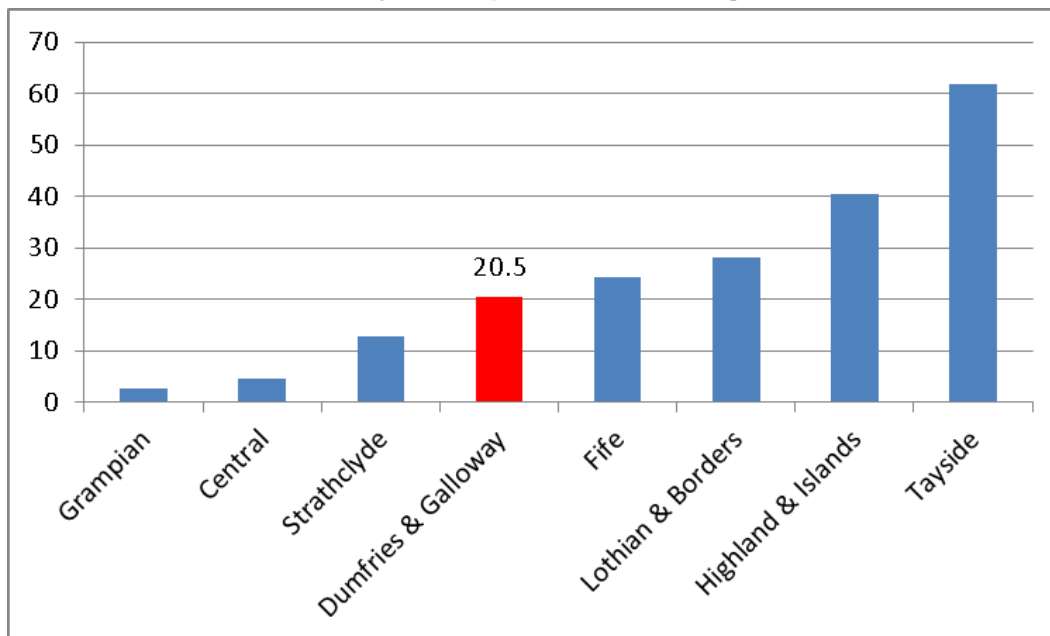
Source: CIPFA data adjusted by HM Treasury GDP deflator

## Prevention

**D&GFR shows a good commitment to preventative work, with the level of home fire safety visits and statutory fire audits close to the national average. It has also showed an innovative approach in training and supporting other organisations to help develop fire safety in the community. This preventative work is becoming more targeted and risk based.**

66. A key feature of the introduction of IRMP and the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 was an increased emphasis on preventative work. D&GFR seeks to meet its responsibilities in this area by a programme of home fire safety visits, statutory fire audits and various community safety education projects.
67. D&GFR carried out 1,533 home fire safety visits HFSVs in 2009/10, equivalent to 20.5 per 1,000 dwellings (Exhibit 6). This is very close to the national average of 20.4 visits per 1,000 dwellings). These are carried out by dedicated community safety officers, whole-time firefighters and by retained firefighters.

**Exhibit 6: Home Fire Safety Visits per 1,000 dwellings, 2009/10**

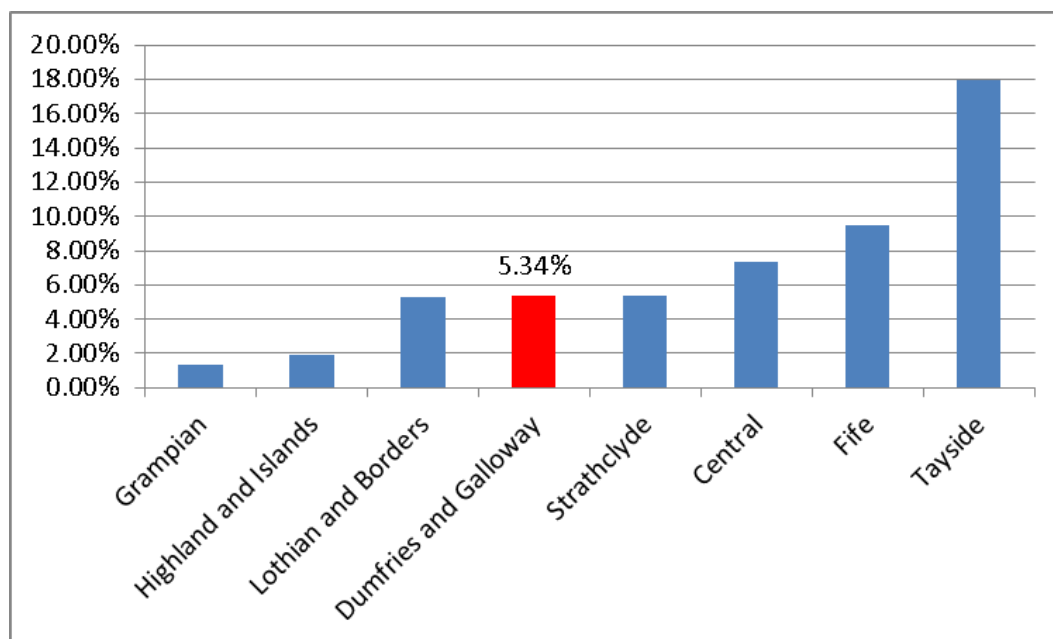


Source: CFOAS Performance Indicators 2009/10

68. Historically, D&GFR has not targeted its HFSVs on communities of greatest risk but has provided a large number of HFSVs across its area. The service reports that as part of its 2006 to 2009 community safety strategy it completed over 10,000 HFSVs. Increasingly, over the past two years, it has developed a more systematic approach. For example, 60 per cent of HFSVs were carried out in houses where the residents were over the age of 60. In addition, 'hot-strikes' are carried out when there has been an incident in an area, to capitalise on the public's heightened awareness of fire risks.
69. Statutory fire safety audits of non-domestic premises are another important part of D&GFR's preventative work. It maintains an up-to-date risk register of these premises and has an inspection framework in place to visit the highest risk properties, such as care homes, hospitals and buildings of multiple occupancy every year. In 2010/11, 180 statutory fire audits were carried out in Dumfries and Galloway, representing 5.34 per cent of non-

domestic properties in the area. This is close to the national average (Exhibit 7). The service also presents fire seminars for local businesses, to promote fire safety.

**Exhibit 7 Percentage of non-domestic properties subject to fire safety audits, 2010/11**



Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

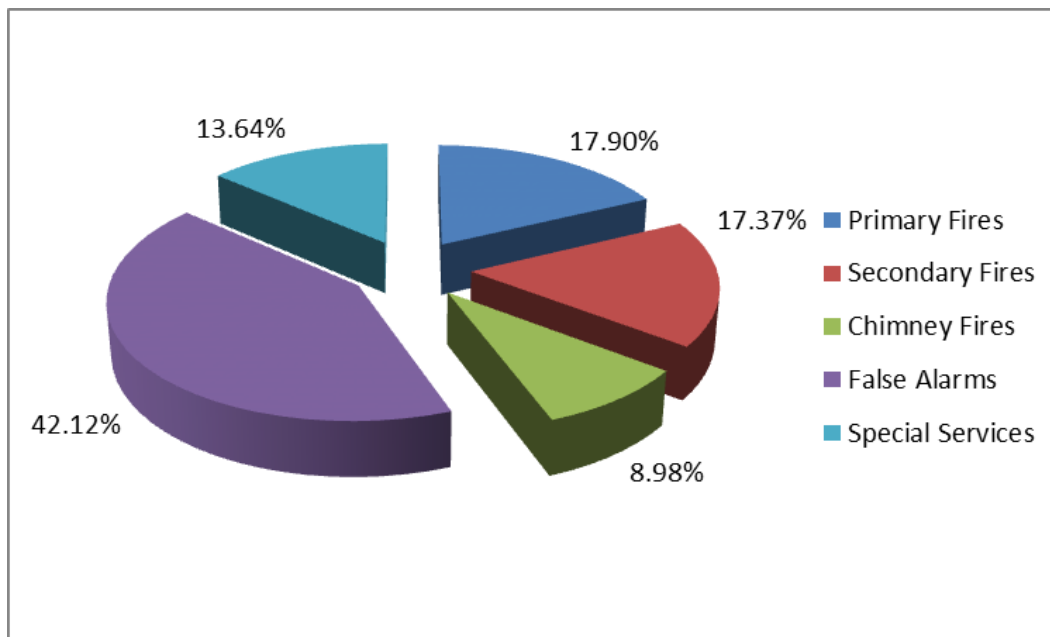
70. D&GFR also works with local voluntary organisations and businesses, training and supporting them to help build fire safety in the wider community. This is particularly important in a rural area such as Dumfries and Galloway, where specialist resources can be spread thinly over a large geographical area. Through its team of dedicated community fire safety officers, D&GFR helps train other organisations to carry out fire safety assessments. Voluntary sector groups working with the elderly are helped to identify and report fire safety risks in the homes of their vulnerable clients. Businesses, schools and hospitals are encouraged to take more responsibility for their own safety by providing them with training on the new fire safety self-assessment process and promoting sprinkler systems and other safety equipment. Staff in other departments within Dumfries and Galloway Council, such as housing, planning, and building control, also receive training and practical support from fire safety staff.
71. As part of its preventative work, D&G FRS also works closely with key partners to support the delivery of the Dumfries and Galloway community safety strategy. This includes working with partners on road safety initiatives, antisocial behaviour programmes and providing community safety advice through educational visits to schools. Initiatives, such as 'Safe Drive, Stay Alive', are targeted at young drivers, with others targeted at other risk groups such as road traffic offenders. Initiatives are well regarded by participants and partner organisations. However, it lacks clear evidence to demonstrate which initiatives are most successful and provide best value in helping to reduce fires and other accidents.

## Emergency response

**Dumfries and Galloway provides an effective emergency response service across its area. It deals with a low and reducing number of fires but also responds to significant numbers of road traffic collisions. A significant proportion of all calls are false alarms but the absolute numbers involved are relatively small and reducing.**

72. In 2010/11, D&GFR responded to 1,503 incidents. Almost a fifth of these related to primary fires (those in buildings, vehicles or involving casualties, another fifth to secondary fires (typically outdoor fires in heathland, rubbish bins or derelict buildings), and 42 per cent to false alarms ([Exhibit 8](#)). The remainder related to a range of 'special services', primarily road traffic collisions and flooding.

### Exhibit 8 Analysis of emergency incidents in Dumfries & Galloway, 2010/11

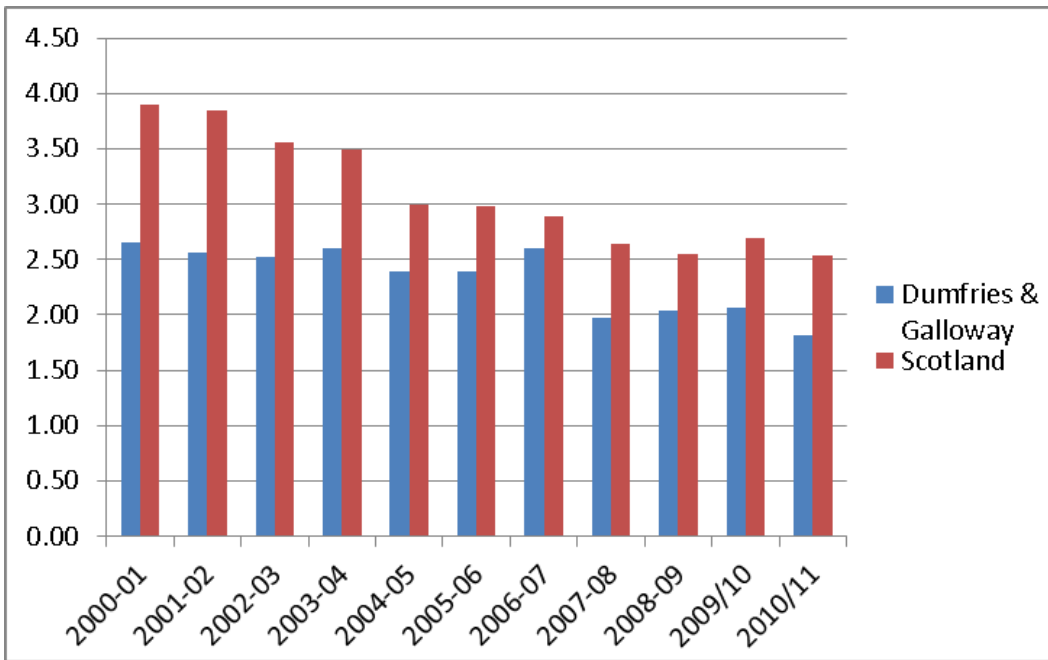


Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

## Number of fires and casualties

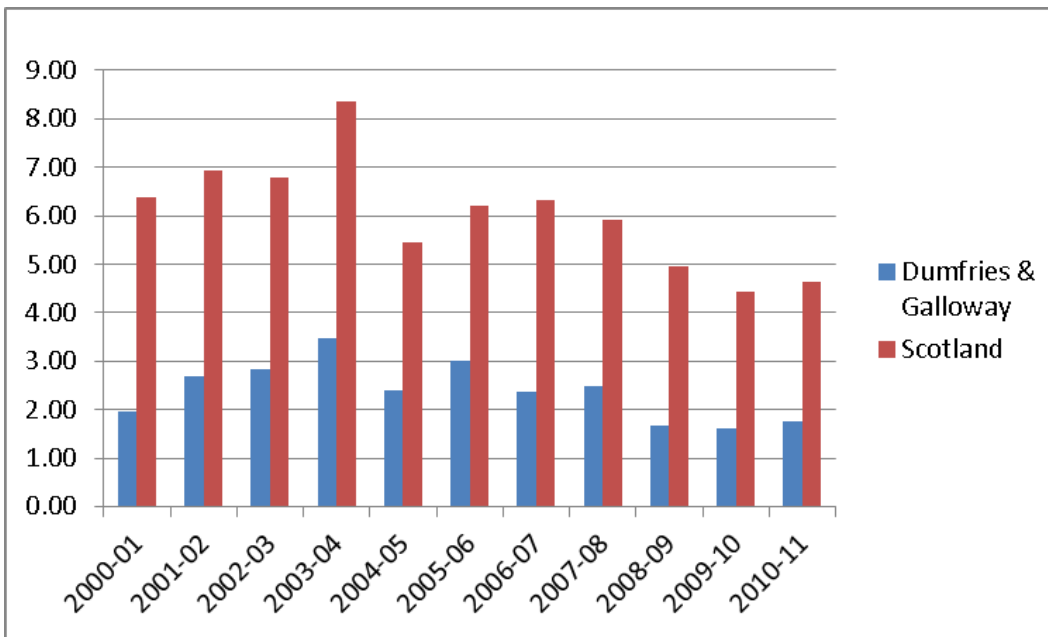
73. Historically, the level of fires and casualties within Dumfries and Galloway has been well below the Scottish average. Over the past decade, the number of primary and secondary fires has continued to fall ([Exhibits 9 and 10](#)). This can only act as an indirect indicator of D&GFR's performance as these trends are likely to be influenced by wider social issues, such as improvements in the housing stock or a decline in the number of people smoking, as well as the impact of its preventative work. However, local reductions in the number of primary and secondary fires are in line with national trends.

**Exhibit 9 Number of primary fires per 1,000 population**



Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

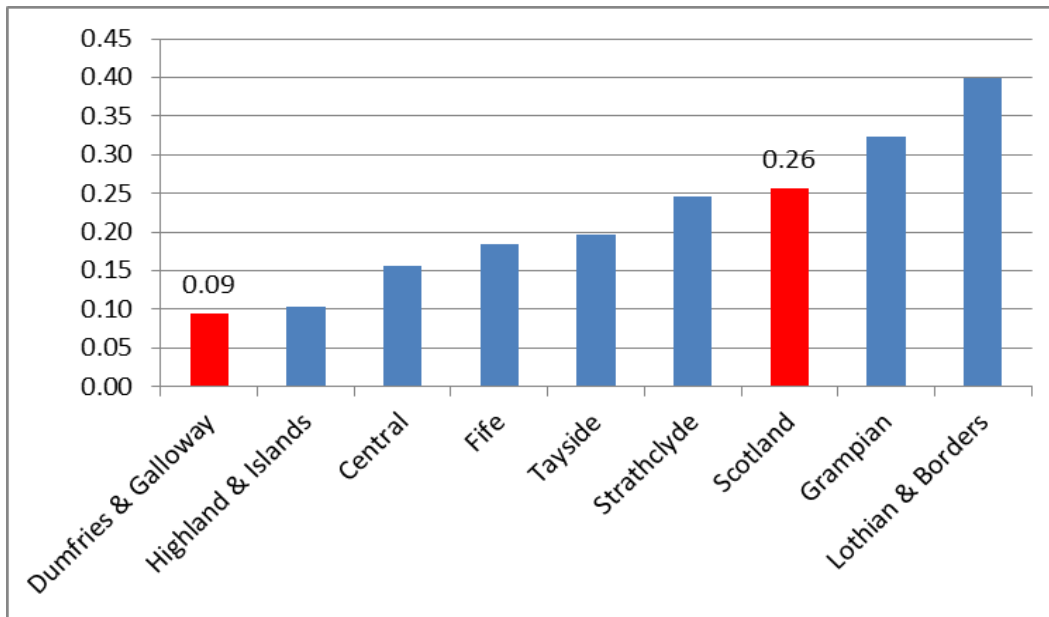
**Exhibit 10 Number of secondary fires per 1,000 population**



Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

74. Over the last decade, casualty rates in Dumfries and Galloway have been consistently below the national average. Since 2009/10, the Scottish Government changed the definitions used to compile casualty statistics. It is therefore difficult to compare current trends with figures from earlier years. However, Dumfries and Galloway has the lowest casualty rate in Scotland, suggesting that its preventative work has a positive impact (Exhibit 11).



**Exhibit 11: Total casualties per 1,000 population – 2010/11**

Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

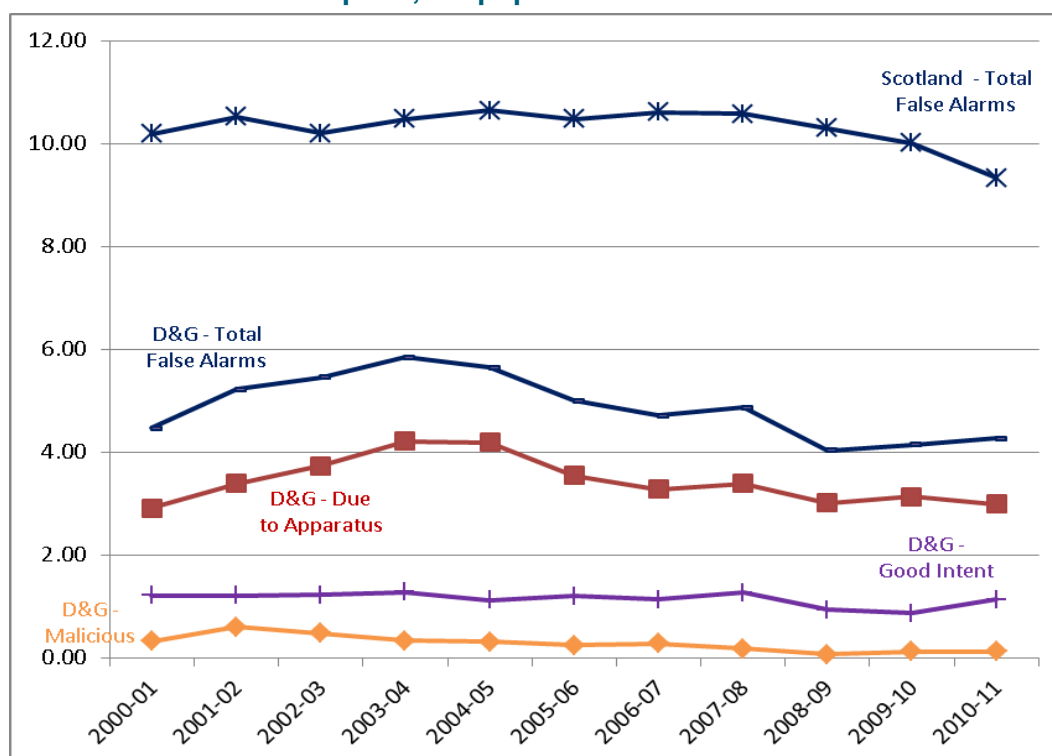
## Special services

75. D&GFR deals with an increasing number of 'special service incidents', such as road traffic collisions and flooding. These now represent around 14 per cent of its emergency responses. There are no performance measures available locally or nationally to assess the standard of the fire and rescue service's contribution to outcomes, such as the decline in recent years in the number of road casualties.

## False alarms

76. False alarms can be caused by a range of factors, such as malicious hoax calls or faulty automatic alarms. They account for 42 per cent of D&GFR's emergency calls. This represents a significant use of resources on non-productive work and, perhaps more importantly, means that there may be delays in responding to genuine emergencies.
77. D&GFR's overall level of false alarms is the lowest in Scotland and less than half the national rate ([Exhibit 12](#)). Most of these are generated by automatic false alarms (AFAs). Through a range of measures, such as fire safety seminars for local businesses, it has been successful in reducing the number of AFAs by around ten per cent since 2006/07. It has also used a number of techniques to further reduce the low levels of malicious calls, such as call screening and agreements with mobile phone companies to assist in tackling this issue.

## Exhibit 12 False alarms per 1,000 population



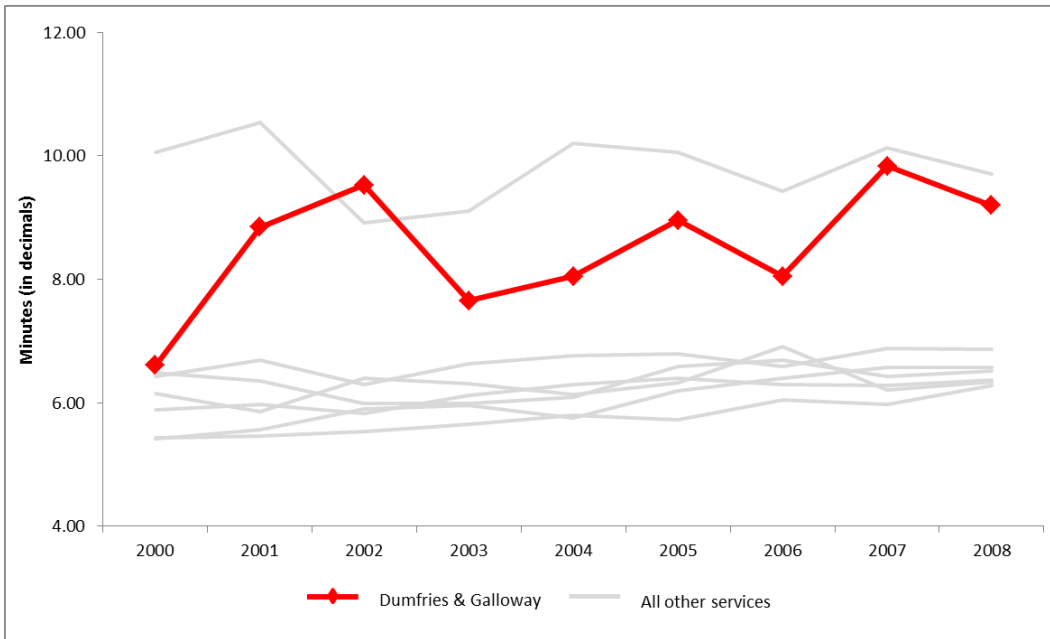
Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

78. In line with good practice, D&GFR has also reviewed how it responds to AFAs. Based on a risk assessment, it has reduced the number of fire engines that would automatically be sent during daytime hours.

## Emergency response standards

79. The speed of emergency response and number of vehicles and firefighters mobilised can be important factors in securing positive fire and rescue outcomes. Prior to 2005, standards of emergency response were set out in the National Standards of Fire Cover, with standards varying according to risk factors associated with different types of buildings. With the introduction of IRMP, these national standards were withdrawn. This allows individual fire and rescue authorities to determine their own speed and level of response to meet the specific level of risks identified in their IRMP.
80. D&GFR is one of only three services in Scotland to use its own local risk-based set of response standards. In 2010/11 D&GFR met its local response time targets on 81 per cent of occasions.
81. As part of its 2011 report, *Review of the Implementation and Impact of Integrated Risk Management Planning in Scottish Fire and Rescue Services*, the Scottish Fire & Rescue Advisory Unit (SFRAU) tested a national sample of response times for dwelling fires. This showed that D&GFR's average response times for primary dwelling fires have consistently been one of the longest in Scotland (Exhibit 13). This reflects the predominantly rural nature of the area and the largely retained firefighter workforce, with response times only slightly lower than for the Highlands and Islands.

**Exhibit 13: Average response times for primary dwelling fires**



Source: *Review of the Implementation and Impact of Integrated Risk Management Planning in Scottish Fire and Rescue Services (SFRAU 2009)*

# Part 5. Improvement agenda

- **Members of the Police and Fire Committee should adopt a stronger leadership role in identifying the priorities and driving and scrutinising value for money in the service.**
- **The Police and Fire Committee should consider the limited management capacity in the service and review how this is being addressed. Issues to be addressed include the clarity of roles and remits, balancing the increasing remits of individual managers, hand-over and mentoring processes, clarity of delegation of responsibilities and authority.**
- **Further progress needs to be made to ensure plans are effectively integrated with clear and consistent priorities and with good risk, financial, and performance information supporting effective monitoring and management of these.**
- **In developing improved performance information systems, the service should consider how elected members can access these systems to support a better range and depth of data for members to scrutinise effectively, and put in place appropriate support so they can use this effectively.**
- **In advance of the creation of a national fire and rescue service, responsibility for currently integrated arrangements, such as payroll, payment of rates and utilities, as well as ownership of assets, should be agreed between Dumfries and Galloway Council and the new organisation.**

# Dumfries & Galloway Fire and Rescue

If you require this publication in an alternative format and/or language, please contact us to discuss your needs.

You can also download this document in PDF, black and white PDF or RTF at:  
[www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)



Audit Scotland, 110 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4LH  
T: 0845 146 1010 E: [info@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:info@audit-scotland.gov.uk)  
[www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)

ISBN 978 1 907916 48 9