The Audit of Best Value

Strathclyde Fire and Rescue
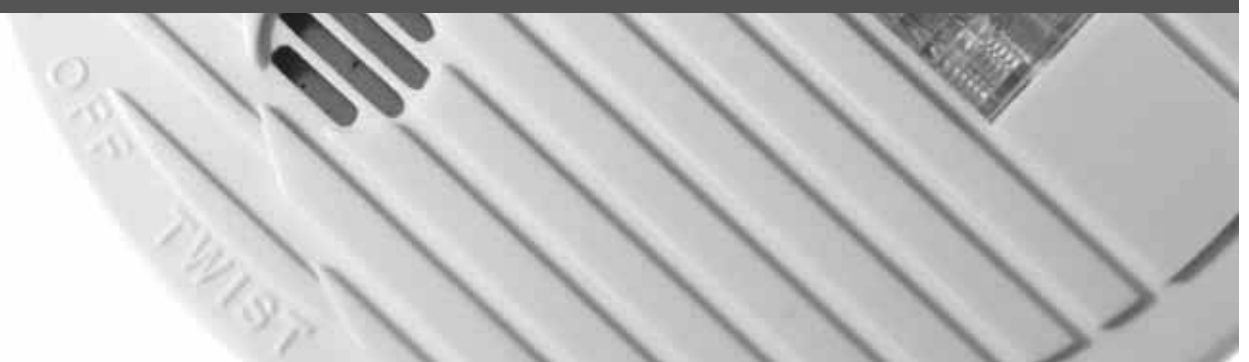
AUDIT SCOTLAND

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).

Contents

Commission findings

1. The Accounts Commission accepts the report of the Controller of Audit on the Best Value audit of Strathclyde Fire and Rescue.

2. Strathclyde Fire and Rescue is an effective service with a strong culture of performance management and continuous improvement. The Commission is particularly encouraged by the service's commitment to self evaluation, demonstrated by the peer review exercise undertaken with London Fire Brigade; the only such review carried out by a Scottish fire service.

3. There is an effective use of integrated risk management planning, with clear evidence that this has led to transfer of resources to better match community risks.

4. There is scope for board members to take a greater role in setting the strategic direction of the service. The board should review the support provided to members to ensure that it is sufficient to help them meet their Best Value responsibilities.

5. The service shows innovation in working with its partners, demonstrated by its highly effective Community Safety Partnership Unit which has helped improve the targeting of preventative work.

6. The service has strengths in how it manages its workforce, and the Commission notes the development of the 'Ticket to Ride' scheme, which has subsequently been adopted by other fire and rescue services. The service has also introduced a new shift system, aimed at providing greater flexibility and significant financial savings.

7. While the service has a good focus on improvement and efficiency, the Commission notes its relatively high operating costs. The board needs to assure itself that crewing appliances with more firefighters than other fire and rescue services demonstrates value for money and fulfils the suggested benefits to public safety.

8. The Commission notes that any substantial issues arising for the service will be considered as part of the annual audit process.

9. 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 & rescue have been covered in earlier Accounts Commission reports, particularly the *Scottish Fire Service: verification of the progress of modernisation*, published in 2004, and *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. The Scottish Government has subsequently announced its commitment to deliver a single Fire and Rescue Service for Scotland, with details on the Police and Fire Reform Bill (Scotland) 2012 published in January 2012.

6. During 2011, audits were carried out at each of the eight Scottish fire and rescue services and authorities. These focused 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 Strathclyde Fire and Rescue (SFR) during November 2011. We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided to

the audit team by the chief fire officer, Brian Sweeney, the convener of the joint board, Councillor Brian Wallace, and all other elected members and staff involved.

Summary

8. SFR provides an effective emergency response service, with an increasing emphasis on preventative work. Its operating costs are above the Scottish average but, through a series of efficiency measures, these have reduced in recent years.

9. Its Community Safety Partnership Unit, established in 2010, provides a highly effective model for working effectively with other public bodies. This has helped to increase the volume of preventative work, such as home fire safety visits, and to help target it on areas or individuals of greatest need. There is emerging evidence that this has had a positive impact, with a long-term decline in the number of fires and casualties in Strathclyde.

10. Board members have a limited role in setting strategic direction, but officers provide strong leadership. SFR has a clear strategic direction. This is supported by a coherent corporate planning framework. Its published Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) is relatively generic, providing little detail on specific risks within Strathclyde and the action taken to mitigate them. However, this is supported by a series of local station plans and risk maps which help target resources. There is clear evidence that IRMP has led to shifts in the use of resources to better match community risk.

11. There is a well developed approach to performance management within the service. At a strategic level, performance reports provide a detailed range of information and allow the achievement of corporate priorities to be easily monitored. At an operational level, there is a strong emphasis on quality assurance processes, with a programme of station visits and reviews. Its 'Ticket to Ride' scheme also helps ensure that staff training and skills are maintained and health and safety standards are met.

12. There is also a strong culture of improvement throughout the organisation. Service performance is subject to detailed monitoring by senior officers at a Corporate Performance Team and regularly scrutinised by elected members in a Performance Audit Forum. A peer review of SFR was carried out in 2010 by the London Fire Brigade, the only peer review carried out in a Scottish fire and rescue service. It has also established the Strathclyde Improvement Model, a framework for carrying out self-assessments, and a staff survey.

13. There is evidence to show that this range of review activity is used to drive service improvements. SFR has delivered significant efficiency savings through a more effective use of its resources. It has merged some fire stations, realigned its allocation of fire appliances within Glasgow to better match identified risks, successfully introduced aerial rescue pumps, reviewed the location of all specialist vehicles on the basis of risk, and reduced its number of directorates.

14. SFR has also introduced a new duty system for whole-time firefighters. It is the only Scottish service to use this five group duty system, replacing the traditional four group system. It is an annualised hours system that helps provide greater flexibility in matching its

available workforce to organisational needs. The service has estimated that this has resulted in significant savings and reduced the number of firefighters by 45 posts.

15. Despite these significant achievements, and reserves of £11 million, SFR continues to face financial challenges, with continuing long-term pressures on public sector funding. Its operating costs are above the Scottish average, partly due to factors of geography and levels of deprivation within the area it serves. However, it also maintains crewing levels that are higher than other Scottish and UK fire and rescue services. While it believes that its crewing levels help support firefighter and public safety, these may provide a potential area for further savings.

Part 1. Context

16. SFR is the second largest fire and rescue service in the UK. It serves a population of around 2.3 million people across 5,260 square miles in 12 council areas. This represents around 42.6 per cent of Scotland's population and 17.5 per cent of its area.

17. The Strathclyde area is geographically diverse, comprising Glasgow, Scotland's largest city, large urban centres in Scotland's central belt, as well as significant rural areas and 23 inhabited islands with many remote communities. It also has around 1,760 miles of coastline. As well as containing comparatively affluent areas, it also contains more than two-thirds of the most deprived communities in Scotland, which presents increased risks of fire and greater challenges for prevention activity.

18. SFR spent £137 million on its running costs in 2010/11. It employs around 3,300 members of staff, including approximately 2,800 fire fighters. Its firefighting crews are based in 110 stations and operate a fleet of 225 emergency vehicles that include specialist units as well as 13 aerial rescue pumps (ARPs). As well as its headquarters in Hamilton, frontline services are coordinated from the Operations Support Centre in Johnstone, which deals with more than 50,000 calls per year (Exhibit 1).

19. In recent years, SFR has responded to a number of Scotland's most high profile emergency incidents, including the Stockline factory explosion, the major fire at Rosepark care home and the terrorist attack at Glasgow Airport.

Exhibit 1: Staffing and fire stations in Strathclyde

	Strathclyde		Scotland
	No.	%	%
Whole-time	1,947	59	50
Retained / Volunteers	867	26	34
Other	503	15	16
Total	3,317	100	100
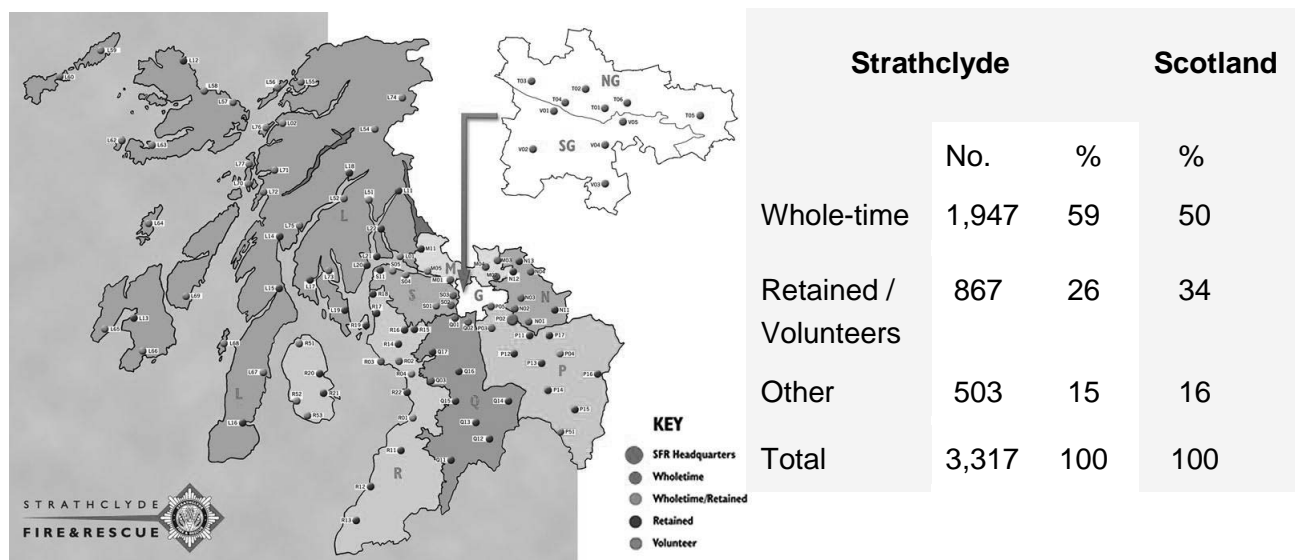
Source: Strathclyde Fire and Rescue

20. SFR is governed by a Joint Fire and Rescue Board that comprises 34 councillors who represent the 12 local authorities that cover the Strathclyde area – Argyll & Bute, East Dunbartonshire, East Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire,

North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire councils. The board meets six times per year, and is supported by a Budget Scrutiny Forum, Performance and Audit Forum, Employee and Equality Forum and Executive subcommittee.

Part 2. Governance and management

Vision and strategic direction

SFR's vision is underpinned by a clear set of priorities and values. It supports delivery of its vision through a coherent corporate planning framework, in which IRMP is well integrated. The service is building on its corporate approach to IRMP, with the introduction of station plans and local ward-based assessments, although this still needs further development. The role Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Joint Board members play in influencing strategic direction and scrutinising service outcomes has been improving but needs to be stronger.

21. SFR's vision is to make the communities across its diverse area safe places to live, work and visit. It aims to deliver its vision in partnership with other organisations, by closely engaging with its communities and in recognition of its responsibilities to the environment.

22. Five corporate priorities (community, people, protection, partnership and environment) guide the work of the service in delivering its vision. These priorities are clearly reflected in all strategies and plans, with key objectives and actions directly aligned to them. It also has a clear set of values that underpin all its activities in delivering its vision.

23. SFR's strategic direction is set by its corporate management team and then agreed by the joint board. The joint board then provides ongoing oversight of issues that impact on the delivery of the service's strategic direction, along with its subcommittees, namely the Budget Scrutiny Forum, Performance Audit Forum, Employee and Equality Forum and Executive subcommittee. Elected members' scrutiny of SFR's service outcomes in delivering its vision has improved over time, but can be strengthened further. In the main, the greatest level of challenge and scrutiny comes from a small core of elected members, and as such there is scope for other members to carry out their role in these committees more effectively.

24. Elected members on Strathclyde Fire and Rescue's Joint Board have limited support to carry out their role. The part-time provision of a clerk and committee administration function is consistent with the low levels of support provided to other fire and rescue boards and committees. Board members do receive training on new operational developments, for example a detailed two day training programme was provided by officers on the new Community Safety Partnership Unit (CSPU). Given the level of expenditure that the board has responsibility for overseeing, greater support may be appropriate to help improve members' ability to help set the strategic direction and provide challenge and scrutiny of performance.

25. The responsibilities of fire and rescue services have changed significantly over the past decade. In 2003, all Scottish services were required to produce IRMPs, 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.

26. SFR has made good progress in embedding IRMP. Plans have been produced covering three-year cycles since 2004, with its current plan covering 2010–13. Its IRMP outlines how it proposes to deliver both prevention and intervention objectives and is supported with corresponding annual action plans.

27. SFR has focused its IRMP on its delivery of prevention and intervention activity and as such has positioned it within a broad and coherent corporate planning framework developed in 2010 (Exhibit 2). The planning framework links all the relevant plans and strategies together well, with measures of success outlined in its constituent plans and strategies. While SFR has defined a range of success measures and local area-based targets, its corporate planning documents do not quantify the degree of improvement to local outcomes that it is striving to deliver. This could be made clearer to allow success to be more effectively judged.

Exhibit 2: Strathclyde Fire and Rescue's corporate planning framework
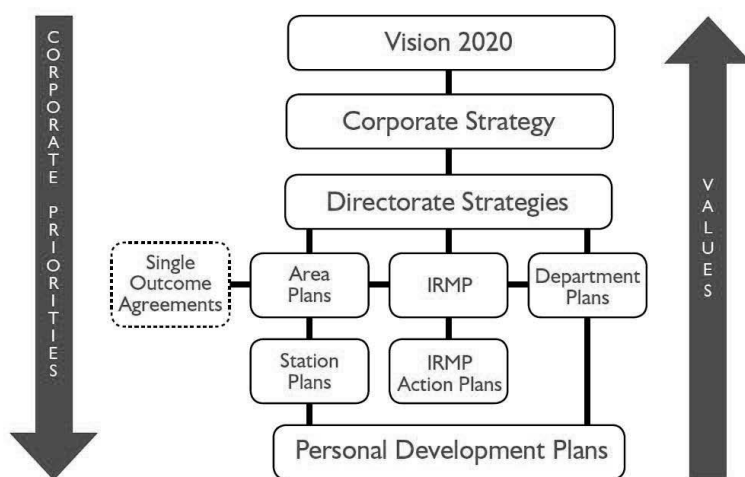
Source: Strathclyde Fire and Rescue

28. SFR uses risk information effectively to plan and manage the service. In recent years, it has used IRMP to drive a number of significant initiatives that use resources more effectively and better matched resources to risk. These include: the merger of Parkhead/ Cambuslang fire stations; the redeployment of a fire appliance from Yorkhill to Knightswood; dual crewing and strategic redeployment of specialist appliances; the redeployment of height appliances (including the reintroduction of two additional vehicles) to provide better coverage based on risk; and the provision of water rescue on the River Clyde.

29. SFR's IRMP is fairly generic, providing little detail to the public, partners and members on risks within Strathclyde and actions to mitigate them. Importantly therefore, the corporate IRMP is supported with local risk maps and station specific plans for its whole-time stations

to support targeting of resources. IRMP at a local level is also enhanced by ward-specific tactical assessments, which highlight particular local problems and provide monthly updates for local councillors. These tactical assessments are the primary intelligence source for multi-agency joint tasking and problem-solving groups, and also complement strategic assessments for each local authority area, which assists Strathclyde Fire and Rescue in contributing to the delivery of Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) across its 12 Community Planning Partnerships.

30. Station plans are a positive development to SFR's IRMP framework. However, they are of variable quality and not being used consistently to connect corporate priorities to front line services or to effectively capture all local planning and performance monitoring information. In addition, as they have only been developed for whole-time stations, they need to be developed for retained stations to provide more comprehensive coverage.

Partnership working

SFR demonstrates some real strengths in partnership working. Its Community Safety Partnership Unit provides a highly effective model for integrating the work of partners. It can more consistently apply the good practice developed through the partnership unit across the whole of Strathclyde.

31. 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.

32. SFR is an active participant in the Strathclyde Emergencies Coordinating Group (SECG), which carries out high-level risk planning for major incidents that could potentially disrupt the area. All of the SECG's activity is summarised in six local area-based community risk registers that set out the major risks facing the area and the action taken by each partner to manage these risks. At an operational level however, there is no clear evidence that risks identified in the community risk registers inform Strathclyde Fire and Rescue's plans and strategies.

33. Resulting from the national report, *Scotland Together*[1], Strathclyde Fire and Rescue has adopted good practice in partnership working. This is particularly evident during the last two years through the development of its CSPU. The CSPU covers all nine of SFR's command

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[1] *Scotland Together* (September 2009) is a Scottish Community Safety Fire Study examining fire deaths and injuries in Scotland.

areas and includes seconded staff from key agencies across the public and voluntary sectors, including: constituent councils (Glasgow City, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire), Glasgow Housing Association (GHA), NHS Ayrshire & Arran, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Strathclyde Police, Strathclyde Youth, Impact Arts and the Fire Protection Association.

34. The CSPU was originally developed to reduce fire calls and now also focuses on reducing antisocial behaviour, enforcing fire safety standards across commercial and industrial premises and developing a multi-agency approach to policy development, sharing intelligence, shared risk assessments, home fire safety checks and case conferences. This integration in managing risks is fundamental to SFR's IRMP.

35. The CSPU's annual report for 2010/11 highlights its success in the short time it has been in operation. For example: 2,516 high-risk Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs) were completed during the year, a 110 per cent increase from the previous year; and 3,637 premises that had received a fire safety enforcement audit reached an appropriate level of fire safety compliance, three times as many as in 2009/10. Also, as a result of enhanced training and the development of SFR's enforcement framework, officers spent 28,851 hours auditing premises and engaging with owners to assist them in complying with the law. This represents a dramatic increase from the previous year's total of 8,442 hours.

36. The partnership unit has also brought a number of other benefits. As well as increasing HFSV referrals being generated from partners working with high-risk individuals with issues such as addictions, addiction awareness training has also been provided to a large number of firefighters across Strathclyde to facilitate reciprocal referral arrangements. Similarly, SFR officers have also been seconded into partner agencies such as Strathclyde Police and the Glasgow Housing Association, to strengthen preventative work and support better operational intelligence sharing.

37. SFR has supported developments in the partnership unit with a new electronic management information system, the Community Safety Engagement Toolkit (CSET), launched in May 2011. CSET has been designed to significantly improve its management information on HFSVs, its various partnerships and community safety evaluations and is seen as an important step in targeting community safety activity more effectively. CSET is supported by staff in an outsourced call centre, who carry out initial risk-assessments over the phone and initiate a HFSV record into the system. Since its introduction it has handled an estimated 600 calls and generated about 450 HFSVs per month. The system has a range of useful features that support much more effective targeting of community safety activity. This includes: being able to identify any previous contact; recording how callers got referred to or heard about the HFSV program; an automated process of assigning HFSVs to the most appropriate local station; the ability to record information generated by the actual visit, eg if a smoke alarm was in place; and the calculation of a new risk rating, with the need for any follow up visit identified.

38. As part of its CSET, SFR is currently developing a partnership register centred around Community Planning Partnerships, including locality groups, community safety partnerships

and alcohol and drug partnerships. The partnership register has been developed to capture the history and structure of each partnership, to aid evaluation and to also help with handovers between managers. The register contains: guidance notes on partnership working and use of the system; partnership details, eg contacts, decision-making, performance indicators, targets, etc; how each partnership links to SFR's objectives; and details of funding arrangements. Once the partnership register is fully populated its intention is to begin evaluating its partnerships, to aid action planning.

39. SFR has a number of partnership arrangements with other emergency services. Through a partnership agreement with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency it has become an identified resource for tidal water rescue within an agreed stretch of the River Clyde. Greenock community fire station is a shared facility with Strathclyde Police and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and since 2007 has had a partnership Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG), one of only 15 MIRG resources in the UK. The MIRG comprises a team of specially trained fire service personnel who can board a vessel at sea to fight fires, effect rescues or deal with incidents involving hazardous materials.

40. SFR also has some partnership arrangements with the private sector, including fleet maintenance partnerships with GlaxoSmithCline, Hunterston power station, and the Glasgow Training Group which generates around £60,000 in income per year.

Scrutiny, performance management and improvement

SFR has a well developed approach to performance management and improvement and is generating a stronger improvement culture across the organisation. It reports on a wide range of performance information, linked to its corporate priorities, and this is supporting improvements in scrutiny from members. More generally, public performance reporting needs to be more balanced.

41. SFR has a well developed approach to performance management and improvement. Performance reports cover all important aspects of the service and are easy to interpret, presenting information against targets, trends and five-year averages. Indicators are clearly aligned to its corporate priorities and where appropriate, broken down by division and/or directorate for comparative purposes. In addition, all of its key strategies highlight qualitative measures against which success can be judged.

42. Performance across the service is monitored on a quarterly basis, with relevant staff held effectively to account for performance through quarterly corporate performance team (CPT) meetings. CPT meetings are chaired by the deputy chief officer and bring together all relevant directors, divisional commanders and heads of service. The meetings analyse a good level of data and are an effective forum for challenging operational performance and generating a more performance-focused culture across the service. There is, however, an opportunity to use CPT meetings to share learning and best practice more effectively to ensure corporate learning.

43.   Challenge and scrutiny of performance by board members is carried out quarterly at the Performance Audit Forum (PAF) and twice a year by the joint board. On occasions, PAF has demonstrated a good degree of challenge on key performance issues, particularly around alcohol-related incidents and the cost of staff absence. Positively, it has also recently prompted the service to include benchmark comparisons with other fire and rescue services in future reporting of sickness absence. However, including benchmark comparisons more generally with other fire and rescue services, and if applicable other public bodies, is an improvement that Strathclyde Fire and Rescue can make across its range of performance data.

44.   SFR's annual public performance report provides a good range of information related to its corporate priorities. However, in common with many other organisations, its public performance reports tend to focus on successes and achievements. In meeting its public performance reporting (PPR) duties more effectively its reports need to be more balanced, highlighting where the service fell short of its goals and how it intends to address this in future.

45.   SFR has a sound approach to continuous improvement. Improvement activity is driven at a senior level by the management team's corporate improvement subgroup (CISG) which identifies, prioritises and recommends new corporate improvement projects and monitors their progress. SFR's range of improvement activity is detailed in its audit strategy. This outlines how continuous improvement is driven through a range of operational audit work, such as station audits, process reviews and operational reviews, and business audit work, such as best value reviews and self-evaluation using the Strathclyde Improvement Model (SIM), which is based on the public sector improvement framework (PSIF). Strathclyde Fire and Rescue has completed a cycle of SIM reviews and is currently working through a second cycle of reviewing the whole service using the SIM over a three-year period.

46.   The audit strategy has been fully costed, so that a cost/benefit judgement of its continuous improvement activity can be made. Resulting benefits from this work are based on the economic cost of fire calculations and while this does not directly relate to organisational efficiency, SFR has generated a number of efficiencies using the SIM, for example downsizing its legal services, and these have contributed to the £20 million of tangible efficiencies reported since 2004.

47.   In 2010, SFR invited London Fire Brigade, in conjunction with the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government (IDeA), to carry out a corporate peer review to assess its current achievements and its capacity to change.

48.   Overall, the outcome from the peer review was very positive, with the report highlighting that SFR is a well managed and run organisation. The resulting action plan SFR has formulated shows that it has responded positively to areas for improvement, including, improving communication with staff and managers and developing information management.

Part 3. Use of resources

SFR manages its resources well. It has delivered significant efficiency savings through more effective use of its resources, particularly through innovative use of its emergency vehicles and its shift system for firefighters. It has substantial reserves to help meet future budget reductions. However, its crewing levels are the highest of any Scottish fire and rescue service, and these provide a potential area for further savings. Scrutiny of resources from board members is generally improving but needs to be more consistent from all members.

49. SFR is clearly focused on reducing cost and improving efficiency. Its focus on efficiency is supported by effective financial controls and well-established processes for setting and monitoring budgets. It is also complemented by a range of plans and strategies to manage its workforce and assets within the budgets available.

50. The peer review carried out by London Fire Brigade in 2010, provides a clear indication that it is using its resources to good effect. Its report highlighted that SFR "is prepared to allocate significant resources to achieve its aims and objectives and there has been an impressive level of strategic change, particularly in recent years, and a well calculated risk to do things that are innovative."

51. Members of the joint board approve and monitor the service revenue budget and capital programme. The board's scrutiny of how effectively resources are being used takes place through its Budget Scrutiny Forum, Performance Audit Forum and Employee and Equality Forum. Scrutiny from members through these forums has been improving, although it is recognised by both members and officers that there is scope for better and more consistent challenge by all members. This is increasingly important as funding reduces across the public sector. During the transition period to the creation of a single fire and rescue service in 2013, it is important that there is a clear approach to managing resources and that the joint board maintains appropriate financial oversight of SFR.

Financial management

SFR has a sound financial position. It has made a range of efficiency saving to meet its financial challenges and has a high level of reserves to offset future reductions in grant funding, in line with its medium-term financial strategy.

52. For 2011/12, SFR's revenue budget was £137.5 million and its capital budget was £28.3 million. Its revenue budget represents a 2.8 per cent reduction from 2010/11, broadly in line with national reduction in grant funding for local government. To help it operate most effectively with this reduced level of funding it has made savings of around £2.1 million, primarily from reducing its number of directorates and director posts, moving to a five group duty system, merging Parkhead and Cambuslang stations and realigning its services in Glasgow. These savings have contributed to its reported £20 million of efficiencies realised since 2004.

53. In October 2009, SFR approved a medium-term financial strategy for 2010-2014. This has been updated following the government's subsequent comprehensive spending reviews. The medium-term strategy is supplemented by annual budget strategies that are presented to the joint board to outline assumptions to be adopted in formulating coming year's budgets.

54. All Scottish fire and rescue services are facing significant financial pressures and uncertainties. In addition to reduced public sector funding, there will also be potentially greater demands on their services from issues such as the economic recession and an ageing population.

55. In the face of these financial challenges, SFR currently has a sound financial position. In 2010/11, it added £3.5 million to its reserves as a buffer for future reductions in grant funding. This took its reserves at the beginning of 2011/12 to £11 million, equivalent to 8.7 per cent of local authority contributions, and well above the standard threshold of five per cent. During 2011/12, it has used £1 million of these reserves to supplement a 2.6 per cent funding from its constituent authorities. Its budget for 2012/13 is the same as for 2011/12 and in line with its budget strategy, it will use a further £2 million of reserves during 2012/13 to supplement capital expenditure. It projects that its reserves will remain above the five per cent threshold until the new Scottish fire and rescue service is established in 2013.

56. SFR has also identified a range of potential efficiency savings, most significantly reducing crewing levels on aerial rescue pumps (ARPs). To meet projected cuts in previous budget considerations, the board approved reducing staffing on ARPs from six to five. So far, however, with budget reductions not as severe as initially predicted, SFR has chosen not to implement these reductions, believing this could impact on firefighter and public safety.

57. SFR also has clear arrangements for budgetary control. Each directorate has an agreed budget with directors having responsibility for ensuring that it is aligned to the corporate objectives. Area commanders also hold budgets for their areas and the corporate finance team provide support and challenge to the budget holders on their areas of expenditure. Its budget management arrangements are also supported by a corporate budgeting system that facilitates good budget monitoring.
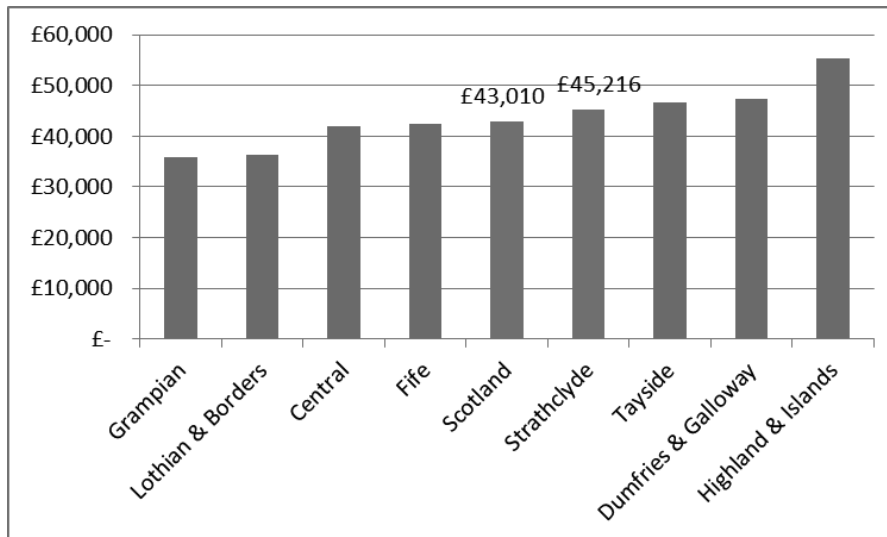
Workforce management

SFR's staffing costs are above average. It has introduced a number of changes, including new shift systems and crewing arrangements, which have delivered significant staff savings over recent years. Its crewing levels remain higher than those of other fire and rescue services and provide potential area for savings. It has a strong focus on health and safety and staff training.

58. Compared with other Scottish fire and rescue services, SFR's staffing costs are above average on a per population basis (Exhibit 3). Its staffing costs are influenced by a range of factors, including; providing services both in Glasgow and across large rural areas,

including island and remote communities; its relatively high number of support staff and its high crewing levels.

Exhibit 3: Strathclyde Fire and Rescue, staffing costs per 1,000 population

Source: CIPFA statistics 2010/11

59. Despite its above average cost per head of population, SFR has demonstrated efficiency in its workforce management over time (Exhibit 4). Its overall staffing numbers have reduced in recent years. This has been achieved through a range of measures, such as: the introduction of ARPs and the dual-crewing of some specialist appliances, which have reduced the number of firefighter posts required by around 170; the introduction of a five group duty system (5GDS) saving around 45 firefighter posts; the merger of Parkhead and Cambuslang stations into the new Clydesmill station saving around 30 posts; and directorate reorganisations having reduced the number of directors from seven to four since 2004.

60. To plan its workforce requirements at a strategic level it has a workforce planning group. The role of this group is to examine staffing numbers on a quarterly basis by rank and role and plan how to address gaps and surpluses. SFR is developing a new human resource system which will allow it to better analyse skills across the organisation and subsequently allow its workforce planning to be more driven by the skills needed and those available amongst its staff.

61. Uniquely, SFR delivers its emergency response service through its 5GDS rather than a more traditional four group system (see Appendix 1). It reports that the 5GDS has brought significant staffing efficiencies, with the cost savings for a multi-pump station on 5GDS being around £187,000 or around six firefighters.

Exhibit 4: Strathclyde Fire and Rescue, staff numbers (full-time equivalent)
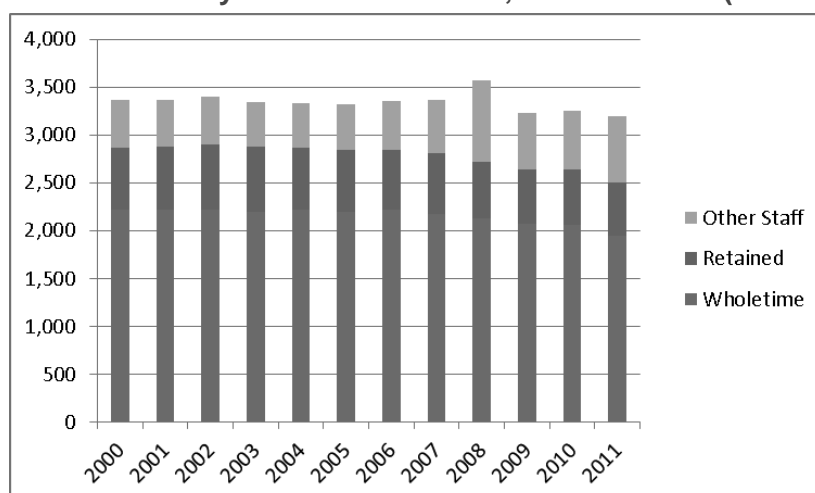
Source: CIPFA

62. Similarly, SFR operates a higher crewing level than other fire and rescue services in the UK, with five firefighters crewing both first and second appliances, rather than the more common five and four crewing. It routinely uses its second pumps to provide standby at other multi-pump stations during periods of high activity or during training events and it maintains five and five crewing to ensure that the first appliances attending an incident have sufficient resources available to them. SFR is very clear in its belief that maintaining higher crewing levels ensures that crews will not be overstretched, minimising the associated risk to firefighters and members of the public.

63. Although crewing its appliances at five and five is more costly than at five and four, SFR believes that the introduction of the 5GDS allows it to run multi-pump stations more cost effectively with its higher crewing level than running them on a four watch system with a lower crewing level. It also argues that any reduction to its current crewing levels will impact on firefighter and public safety, and lead to some increase in overtime costs. However, given that no other Scottish or UK fire and rescue services operate with crewing levels of five and five, this is an area that may potentially offer future savings.

64. SFR has a relatively high number of support staff. In part, this is due to its organisational scale, allowing it to directly employ staff to carry out a range of functions in-house that would not be viable in smaller organisations, such as: legal services, audio visual, graphics, communications, etc. In its support functions, and in others such as health and safety, fire safety education and enforcement and in civil contingencies, it has progressively moved towards employing non-uniformed posts on the basis of specialisms and cost efficiency, and to mitigate any consistency and skills problems associated with the high turnover of uniformed staff.

65. The overall level of sickness absence within SFR is broadly in line with the national average. It recorded an average of 7.5 days per employee in 2010/11, compared with a national average of 7.4 days (Exhibit 5). The board and SFR are focused on addressing

sickness absence, have set a sickness absence target of five per cent[2] and have in place relevant policies and practices to reduce absence. This includes annual fitness tests and three-yearly medical examinations for whole-time, RDS and voluntary firefighters and absence training for managers. This focus has already demonstrated some success with average absence having fallen by around two days per employee since 2008/09.

Exhibit 5: Average number of sickness absence days per employee, 2010/11
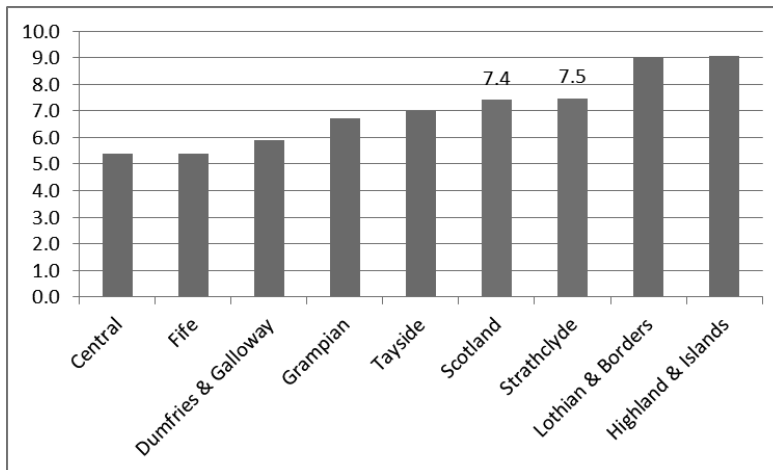
Source: Audit Scotland Statutory Performance Indicators

66. As part of its career management framework, all staff receive an annual appraisal, including the chief fire officer. This includes RDS firefighters who receive a group appraisal. At present, the appraisal system is a paper-based system, making the analysis of organisational training and development needs quite a laborious process. However, a new electronic-based system, that will allow much more effective analysis of performance and development needs, is due to be implemented later in 2012.

67. SFR has a strong focus on both staff training and development, and health and safety. In 2010, it restructured its service to integrate Health and Safety, Operational Review, Process Review and Operational Tactics to form a new Operational Assurance Section within its Training and Operational Review (TOR) Directorate. The aim of its operational assurance section is to engender a stronger culture of self analysis through the application of robust, systematic internal and external evaluation of its processes and practices.

68. SFR's clear emphasis on protecting the health and safety of its staff is also reflected in its development of the 'Ticket to Ride' requirement, where fire appliances are taken off the run unless they are crewed by firefighters with appropriate and up-to-date training. Ticket to Ride has subsequently been adopted by other fire and rescue services.

69. Beyond its restructuring SFR has developed a new training strategy with key themes focused on: using a wide range of data to identify risks and ensure evidence based training needs; enabling watches to train crews in line with their identified needs; maintaining

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[2] The percentage basis of its target differs from the days lost reported through statutory performance indicators and therefore performance data is not directly comparable.

competencies through practical and simulated exercises; and investing in more instructors to build up training capacity. In addition, in partnership with the Scottish Government it is investing £45 million in its new training centre which will begin delivering training in 2012.

70. Its focus on health and safety has had a positive impact in reducing staff accidents and injuries. During 2010/11, the number of firefighter injuries that occurred while carrying out duties reduced by 53 per cent, support staff injuries reduced by 45 per cent and overall, the number of total injuries for all staff has reduced by 13 per cent from 186 to 161. Physical attacks on fire crews and threats of violence against staff also reduced by 31 and 16 per cent respectively. Maintaining these positive outcomes should significantly help in reducing staff absence and improving efficiency.

71. In 2011, SFR carried out an independent staff survey. Fifty-nine per cent of employees responded to the survey and the responses highlighted a number of key areas of strength, including: commitment to the organisational values; health and safety, clarity of role, line management, teamwork, working relationships and dedication to serving the public. Issues raised include the perceived need to take staff views into account when making changes, providing feedback to them before decisions are made and supporting them through change, are currently being addressed through a detailed 36 point corporate action plan.

72. Since 2009, SFR has had a succession plan in place for its corporate management team to ensure business continuity. However, SFR's annual external audit report for 2010/11 has raised some concerns in relation to the board's decision to re-employ the chief fire officer, following his early retirement in July 2011. The Accounts Commission has now asked the Controller of Audit to investigate this matter further.

Asset management

SFR demonstrates some good practice in managing its assets and is strengthening its overall approach to asset management. It has a good range of information on its property assets and has delivered significant savings from its investment in ARPs and in its management and use of its fleet. It manages its properties well and is using information and communications technology (ICT) effectively in supporting its services.

73. SFR manages its assets effectively and is strengthening its overall management arrangements with the recent introduction of its first medium-term, overarching asset management strategy covering the period 2011–14. The strategy provides good information on asset condition and suitability, investment and maintenance requirements, and roles and responsibilities and governance arrangements for managing its property, fleet, equipment and ICT assets. The strategy is supported effectively with detailed annual asset management plans covering each of its main assets. An asset management working group has also been established to monitor that its plans are being delivered.

74. SFR's management arrangements for its 327 properties are well established and consistent with recognised best practice. Its new property management system provides

comprehensive management information and, with links being developed to its financial systems, is expected to enable an effective monitoring of running costs. Its information also helps inform spend to save initiatives and longer-term property options based on costs and risk.

75. The service has very detailed information on its properties, having tagged every space within each property and having attributed them with condition and suitability scores to allow maintenance and investment to be best targeted. It also collects a range of energy efficiency and other carbon management data to inform its environmental strategy. In addition, it carries out a five-yearly rolling programme of property condition surveys and this has helped it reduce the value of its backlog maintenance from £12 million to £9 million during the last three years. SFR has also been reducing the cost of its property management service over the last two years and benchmarks with other large multi-site public sector organisations show its costs are significantly below average.

76. SFR has improved its fleet management to deliver greater efficiency and effectiveness. In 2005, it rationalised its workshops from four to one, saving around £230,000 per annum. Since then, it has adopted the ISO9001 quality standard in managing its fleet and in October 2011, also achieved the ISO14001 environmental quality standard. In 2011, it also invested £40,000 in introducing an automatic vehicle location system (AVLS) to identify when and where people are using its vehicles. This has noticeably changed people's behaviour in using its fleet of vehicles, to the extent that it estimates that in the first year of operation it will save between £20,000-£30,000, having reduced fuel consumption by 15-25 per cent and CO_2 emissions by nine tonnes.

77. SFR has introduced a rescue pump strategy to ensure that its fleet of pumps all carry a more versatile range of equipment than standard fire appliances. Since 2007, it has successfully introduced 13 dual purpose ARPs into its fleet and has introduced dual crewing among many specialist appliances that typically deal with high impact but low occurrence incidents. The introduction of dual crewing and ARPs has resulted in reported efficiency savings of over £5 million.

78. SFR's ICT strategy 2010-13 outlines how ICT will continue to be developed and enhanced to better support its corporate strategy and IRMP. It has a good ICT infrastructure and has awarded a contract to improve broadband connections which, when implemented, will improve connectivity and performance of broadband network links to 60 of its 110 stations, to meet the existing standard of all its other stations. It is also continuing to develop its 'data warehouse'. This is its most significant ICT development that will allow it to more effectively capture and analyse performance related data.

# Part 4. Service performance

SFR provides an effective emergency response service. In line with national trends, there has been a long-term decline in the number of fires and casualties in Strathclyde. The number of false alarms it responds to is relatively low and decreasing. In contrast, it deals with an increasing number of non-fire related emergencies, particularly flooding incidents. Its associated cost of providing its services has been declining. It is improving its prevention work, with increasing levels of activity that are also becoming significantly better targeted towards risk.

Service costs

SFR's operating costs have been consistently above the Scottish average. However, through a series of efficiency measures, it has reduced its costs in recent years.

79. SFR has the second highest operating costs per capita in Scotland. In 2010/11, excluding pension costs, it spent over £55 per head of population, above the average of £50 for the other seven Scottish fire and rescue services (Exhibit 6). For over a decade, its costs have been consistently above average, although this is influenced by the diverse geography and the relatively high levels of deprivation throughout Strathclyde. Since the introduction of the Fire (Scotland) Act in 2005/06, its efficiency measures have achieved a reduction in its real term costs by around 6.4 per cent, slightly below the average reduction of 7.5 per cent across all fire and rescue services in Scotland. However, as highlighted above, there is scope for the service to reduce staffing costs further, particularly through changing crewing levels on second appliances.

Exhibit 6: Real terms costs per head of population, 2000/01 to 2010/11
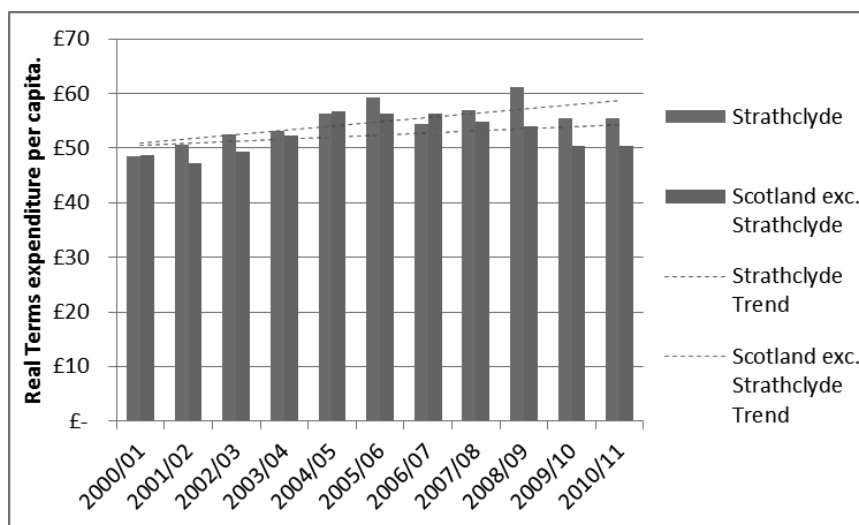
*Source: CIPFA data adjusted by HM Treasury GDP deflator*

Prevention

SFR has carried out a below average number of home fire safety visits (HFSVs), indicating a capacity to do more prevention work. However, it is improving the focus of its prevention work, with HFSVs increasing and becoming significantly better targeted towards risk. Similarly, it has substantially increased the number of statutory fire safety audits of non-domestic premises.

80. SFR carries out a below average number of HFSVs compared with other Scottish fire and rescue services (Exhibit 7). In addition, during 2010/11, it missed its own ambitious HFSV target of 22,000 by almost half.

81. For 2011/12, it projects a positive increase in the number of HFSVs, with around 15,000 likely to be carried out compared to around 11,000 during 2010/11. Within this overall increase, however, several of SFR's area commands are doing fewer HFSVs than last year. Based on higher numbers of HFSVs carried out by other fire and rescue services and the decline in HFSVs in some areas of Strathclyde, there appears to be capacity to carry out a greater volume of prevention activity and therefore increase impact further.

**Exhibit 7: Home Fire Safety Visits per 1,000 dwellings, 2009/10**
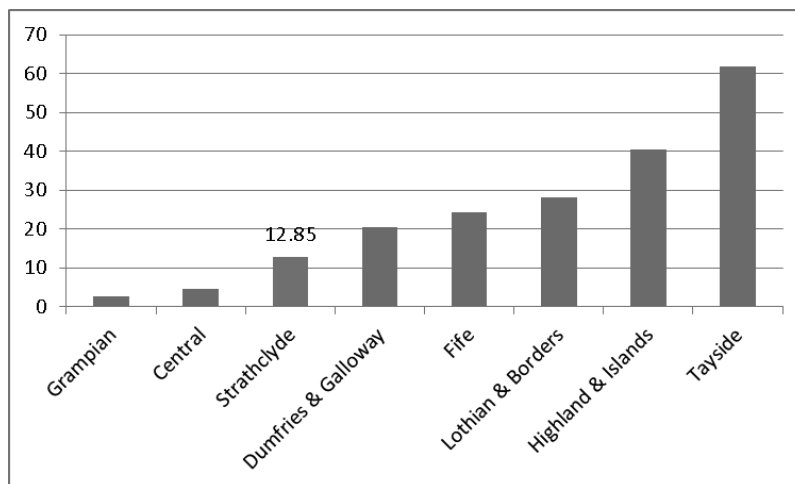
Source: CFOAS Performance Indicators 2009/10

82. In 2011, SFR revised its approach to preventative work through a new HFSV policy, designed to better target risk. Under the new policy, different levels of points are awarded to HFSVs based on assessed risk, with a HFSV to an 'at-risk' household accruing three times as many points as a visit to a low-risk household. To target the more at-risk households, station targets are points based rather than based on the actual number of visits.

83. The introduction of the new prevention policy has seen a positive change in moving preventative work towards higher risk households. While this new approach still needs to mature, with targets for individual stations needing to be fully developed, it has led to a significant improvement in the targeting of its preventative work. In 2010/11, only nine per

cent of HFSVs were targeted at high-risk households with 73 per cent directed at low-risk households. In the first six months of 2011/12, this picture has been reversed with 77 per cent of HFSVs targeted at high and medium-risk households. As a result, through better targeting, both through the points based policy and progress through the CSPU, it is clear that SFR is likely to improve the impact of its prevention activity.

84. Despite its relatively low number of HFSVs, Scottish Government's fire statistics shows that within Strathclyde, smoke alarms were present and successfully activated in half of all accidental dwelling fires. This was the third highest level in Scotland during 2010/11. Similarly, smoke alarms were not present in just over 34 per cent of all accidental dwelling fires, the second lowest level in Scotland. These factors suggest that Strathclyde Fire and Rescue's approach to prevention has had some success.

85. Statutory fire safety audits of non-domestic premises are also an important part of preventative work. Landlords and business owners are responsible for ensuring fire safety in their premises through, for example carrying out self-assessments. However, a programme of fire audits is essential to provide guidance and to help enforce fire safety standards.

86. SFR's approach to fire safety in non-domestic premises is guided by its new risk-based *Fire Safety Enforcement Framework 2011-2014*. This risk-based framework outlines SFR's enabling approach to regulation, where businesses and organisations assume responsibility for compliance. SFR spends around £400,000 annually to deliver its enforcement framework. It does this through its fire safety enforcement team, which provides direction and support to a group of almost 100 area based enforcement officers. Staff are supported by its Fire Safety Enforcement Information System (FSEIS) that gathers data and intelligence, records activity and programmes future audits.

87. Consistent with its framework, SFR targets its fire safety audits effectively, carrying out a higher than average proportion of activity in some of the highest risk properties, such as care homes, hotels and houses in multiple-occupation.

88. SFR's performance in delivering fire safety audits has been fluctuating in recent years. Nationally comparable data shows that in 2010/11, it carried out 3,637 statutory fire audits, equivalent to 5.4 per cent of non-domestic premises (Exhibit 8). Proportionately, this is below the average of 6.2 per cent across other fire and rescue service in Scotland and less than a third of the best performing service. However, its performance represents an increase of around two-thirds on its number of audits in 2009/10. Similarly, Strathclyde Fire and Rescue also more than trebled the amount of hours dedicated to audits from 8,708 hours to 28,983 hours in 2010/11, allowing staff to spend time advising and educating small to medium businesses on how to comply with part three of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005.

Exhibit 8: Percentage of non-domestic properties subject to fire safety audits, 2010/11
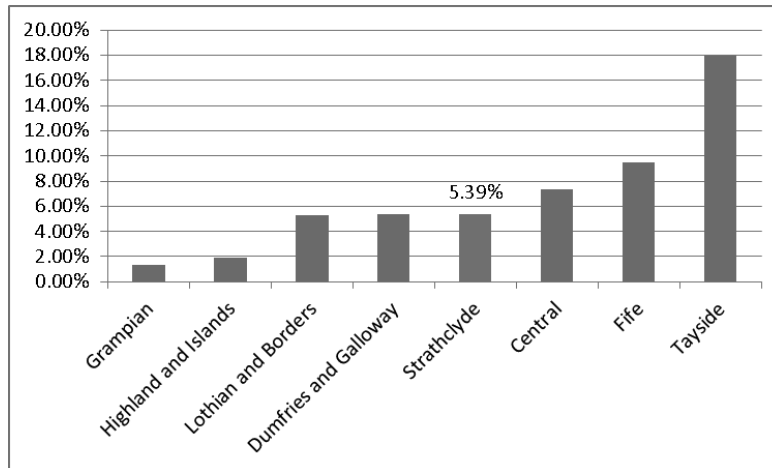
Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

Emergency response

In line with national trends, there has been a long-term decline in the number of fires and casualties in Strathclyde. SFR still experiences a relatively high level of secondary fires. The number of false alarms it responds to is relatively high, but it has made progress in reducing the number of malicious calls and automatic false alarms. The time taken to respond to emergency incidents has remained relatively constant and is in line with national averages.

89. In 2010/11, SFR responded to just over 50,000 incidents, an average of more than 137 incidents every day. In line with the national pattern, about an eighth of these related to primary fires (those in buildings, vehicles or involving casualties). Around three in ten calls were due to secondary fires (typically outdoor fires in heathland, rubbish bins or derelict buildings), the highest level in Scotland.

Exhibit 9: Analysis of emergency responses in Strathclyde, 2010/11
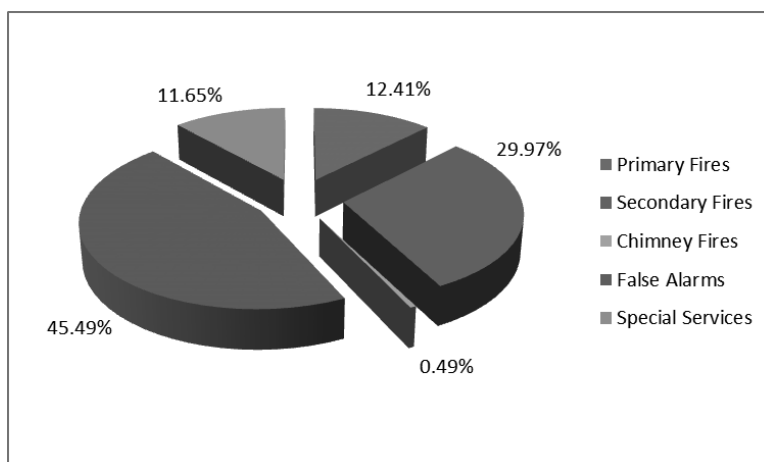
Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

Number of fires and casualties

90. Historically, the level of fires within Strathclyde has been consistently above the Scottish average. This has been influenced by it serving a large population in and around Glasgow, relatively high levels of deprivation throughout Strathclyde and concentrations of high rise and tenement properties. In line with national trends, there have been significant falls in the number of primary and secondary fires (Exhibits 10 and 11). Within Strathclyde, primary fires have declined at a slightly faster rate than the average for other Scottish fire and rescue services, whereas secondary fires have declined at a slightly slower than rate than across Scotland as a whole.

91. These trends are influenced by a wide range of social factors, such as improvements in the housing stock and a fall in the number of people smoking. However, they also indicate that SFR's safety campaigns and preventative work has had an impact in improving community safety.

92. Within this overall decline, however, there have been occasional small increases in primary fires within Strathclyde in recent years. This may be influenced by the current economic conditions or simply a short-term statistical anomaly and it would be difficult to draw any firm conclusions on this change. Similarly, after a five-year trend of decline, there was a noticeable recent increase in secondary fires in 2010/11. It is widely recognised that numbers of secondary fires can be influenced by factors such as weather, but tackling this type of antisocial behaviour is a strategic focus for education and demand reduction initiatives for SFR. For example, it is using partnership arrangements through its community safety partnership unit, particularly with housing providers, to formulate more effective prevention of secondary fires. SFR's latest data for 2011/12 reports that numbers of secondary have significantly decreased compared with last year.

Exhibit 10: Number of primary fires per 1,000 population
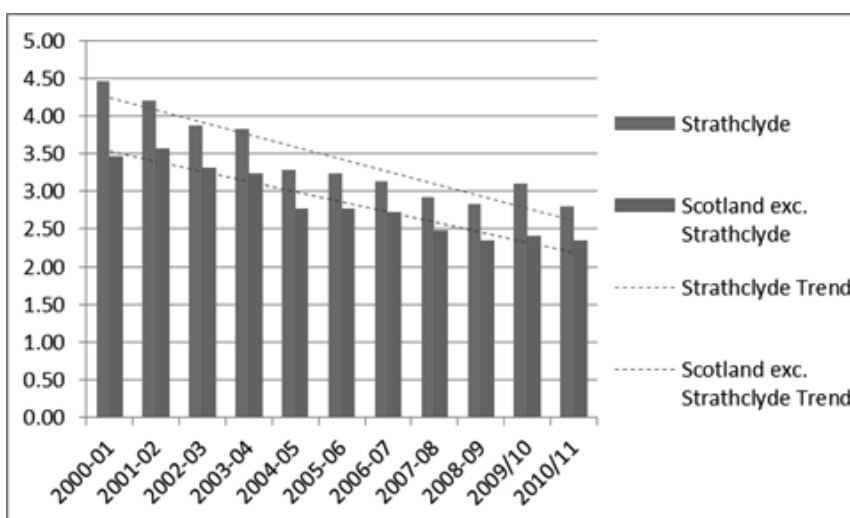

Source: Audit Scotland

Exhibit 11: Number of secondary fires per 1,000 population
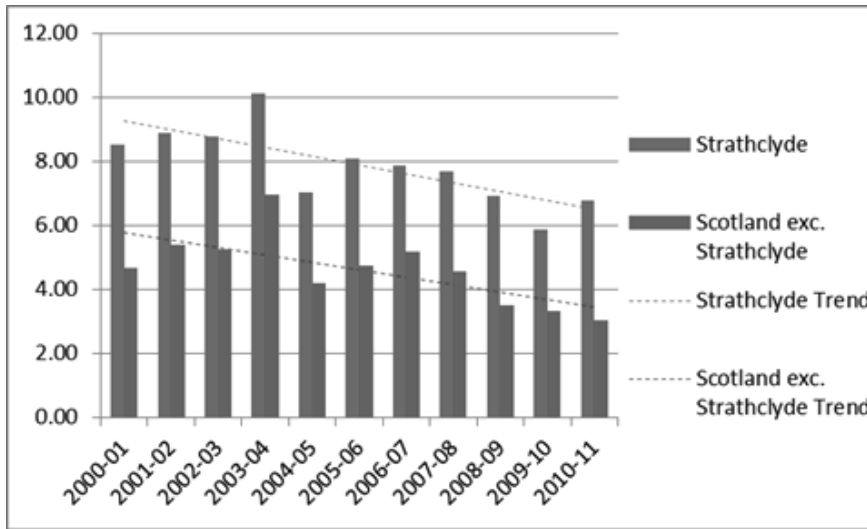
Source: Audit Scotland

93. There have been changes at a national level in the definitions of casualty statistics, making it difficult to directly compare rates with earlier years. However, it is clear that over the past decade casualty rates in Strathclyde have fallen by around a third, slightly greater than the average rate of decline across other Scottish fire and rescue services. In 2010/11, casualty rates in Strathclyde were very close to the Scottish average (Exhibit 12).

Exhibit 12: Casualties per 1,000 population, 2010/11
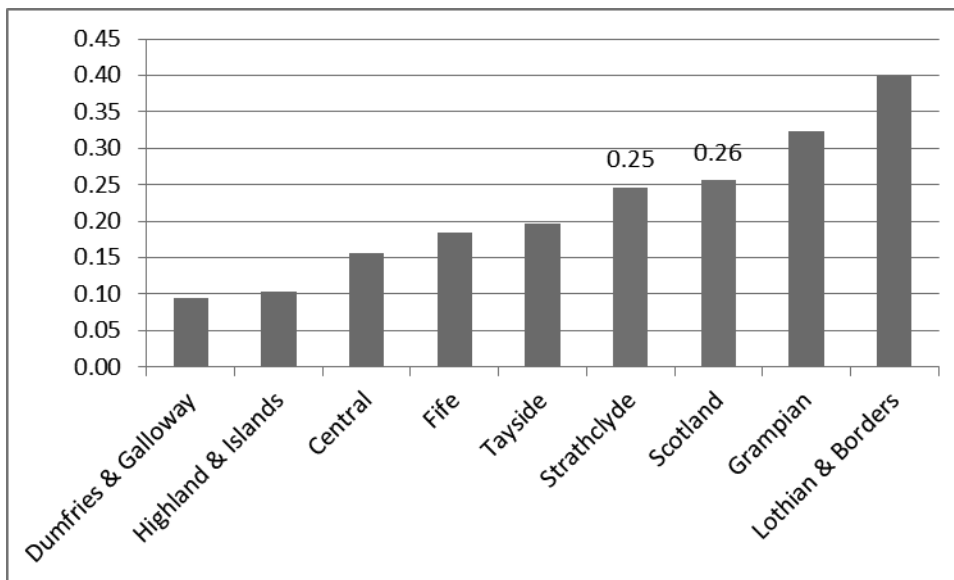
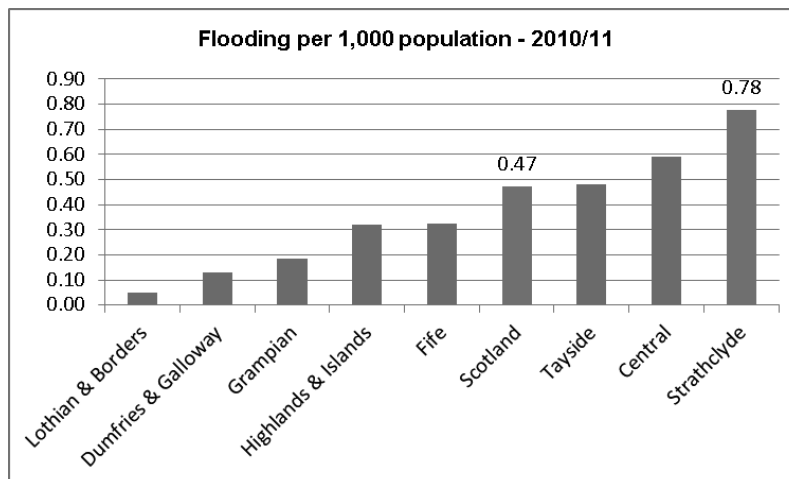*Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin*

Special services

94. SFR responds to an increasing number of 'special service incidents', such as flooding and road traffic collisions. Of the 52,329 incidents it attended in 2010/11, 6,546 were specialist services and a further 1,132 were road traffic collisions (RTCs). These now

represent around 11 per cent of emergency responses. However, there are no performance measures available locally or nationally to assess the standard of this work.

95. RTCs account for a lower proportion of special services than average and there is a lower level of RTC incidents per population in Strathclyde than in Scotland in general. In contrast, flooding incidents in Strathclyde account for a significantly higher proportion of special services than average (29 per cent compared with an average of 22 per cent). Strathclyde was one of only two areas to experience a growth in flooding incidents in 2010/11, with a significant growth of around 50 per cent. During 2010/11, the number of flooding incidents per 1,000 population was the highest level in Scotland and well above the Scottish average (Exhibit 13).

96. However, it is clear that SFR has increased its capacity to deal with these incidents. For example, it has introduced a new flood response programme, 15 stations have now been provided with additional training and equipment to respond to flooding emergencies, and a dedicated Flood and Environmental Response Unit has been procured. This enhanced flood response began to be rolled out throughout 2011 and will be complete in 2012.

Exhibit 13: Flooding incidents per 1,000 population in 2010/11

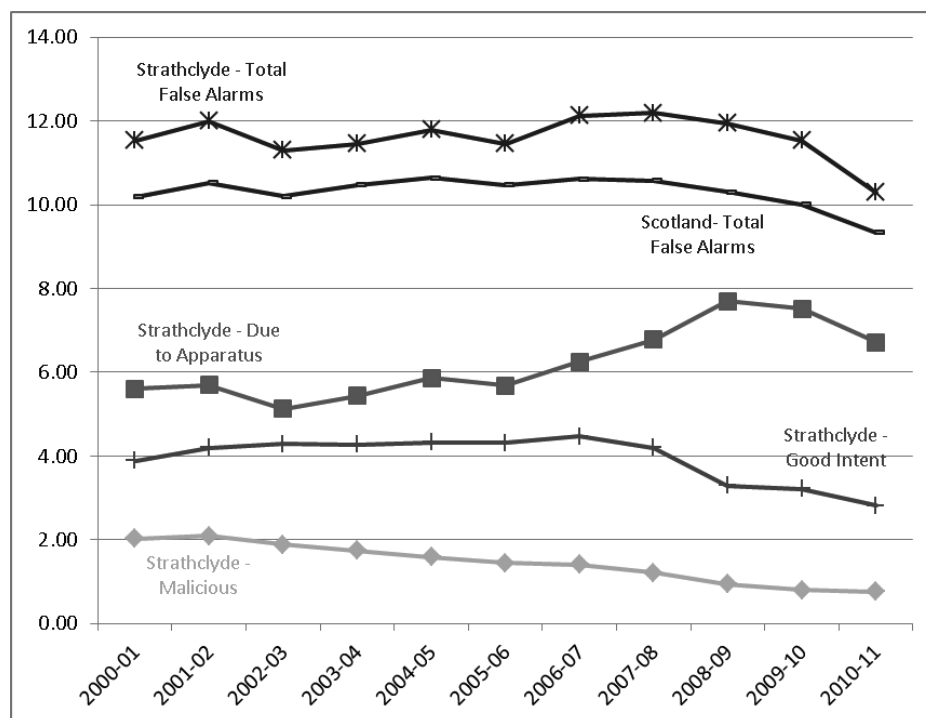*Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin*

97. In addition, SFR has been recognised as a Rescue 3 Europe accredited training provider, one of only two UK fire and rescue services to attain this. As an accredited independent training provider it has facilitated and accredited swiftwater and flood rescue courses to over 800 flood first responders and 300 swiftwater rescue technicians.

False alarms

98. False alarms can be caused by a range of factors, such as malicious hoax calls or faulty automatic alarms. They account for around 45 per cent of Strathclyde Fire and Rescue's emergency calls, representing a significant use of resources on non-productive work and, perhaps more importantly, leading to potential delays in responding to genuine emergencies.

99. SFR receives an above average number of false alarms per head of population (Exhibit 14). It has, however, made some progress in reducing these. It has, for example consistently received the highest number of malicious calls per head of population in Scotland. However, over the last decade, it has successfully reduced the number of malicious calls by almost two-thirds.

100. It has also made some progress in reducing the number of automatic false alarms (AFAs). The long-term increase in AFAs has been influenced by growth in the number of premises with automated fire alarms. Noticeably, however, SFR has been successful in reducing these in recent years. From a high of around 17,000 AFAs in 2008/09, its annual number had fallen by 2,000 (around 12.5 per cent) by 2010/11. This has been helped in part by closer working with the Fire Industry Association and the Association of British Insurers, although it recognises its scope to take more immediate action in following up on AFAs, to try and address nature of the problem at the point of call out.

Exhibit 14: False alarms per 1,000 population

Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

101. SFR has also reviewed its predetermined response to AFAs. It now uses a risk assessment to help prioritise the mobilisation of fire appliances. As a result, despite the increase in false alarms, over the past three years it has reduced by around 24 per cent the overall number of fire appliances being called into action. As well as improving efficiency, the reduction in vehicle movements under blue-light conditions also reduces SFR's own road risk.

Emergency response times

102. 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.

103. SFR has not developed a local risk-based set of response standards, believing them to be a flawed approach to managing both emergency response services and public expectations. It simply aims to attend incidents within the shortest period possible. Monitoring reports analyse response times by urban and rural calls, and by travel time and dispatch time. These show that overall response times have lengthened slightly in recent years, but much of this is attributed to poor weather conditions over recent winters and increases in travel time. The Scottish Fire & Rescue Advisory Unit (SFRAU), as part of its

2011 report, *Review of the Implementation and Impact of Integrated Risk Management Planning in Scottish Fire and Rescue Services*, showed that Strathclyde's Fire and Rescue's average response times for primary dwelling fires have remained consistent over the past decade and are broadly in line with the national pattern (Exhibit 15).

Exhibit 15: Average emergency response times
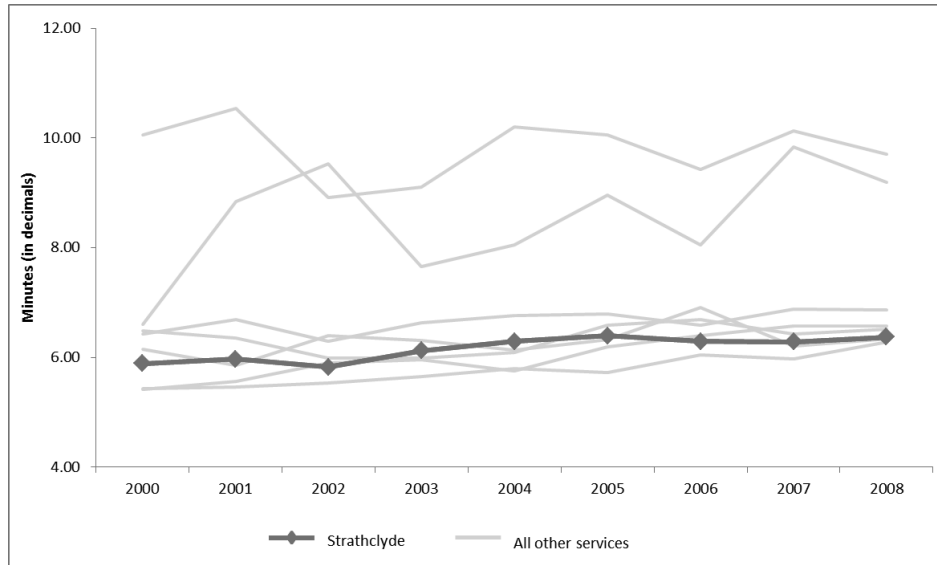
Source: Review of the Implementation and Impact of Integrated Risk Management Planning in Scottish Fire and Rescue Services (SFRAU 2011)

Part 5. Improvement agenda

With the establishment of a national fire and rescue service in 2013, there is a need to prioritise improvement activities. Some issues can be addressed immediately. Other actions, however, will need to be coordinated with the emerging management arrangements for the new national service.

Strategic planning

- Enhance the strategic planning framework further by more clearly providing measurable corporate outcomes against which success can be judged.
- Roll out station plans and local integrated risk management planning to retained stations.

Role of members

- Board members need to strengthen their role in setting strategic direction for the service.
- Review the support available to assist all board members to carry out their role effectively.

Performance management

- Ensure that public performance reports provide a more balanced picture of performance.

Workforce management

- Review crewing levels on second appliances.

Service delivery

- Ensure more consistent performance in carrying out fire safety audits within non-domestic premises.

Appendix 1.

Five group duty system (5GDS)

The five-group duty system (5GDS) for whole-time operational personnel was introduced within SFR on 1 January 2010. The system is based on models which have been introduced in a small number of English fire authorities. It is an annualised hours system that provides SFR with the flexibility to better align its available workforce to meet organisational needs, while ensuring that the needs of individual employees are met.

Traditionally firefighters work a recurring shift pattern of two 10-hour days, two 14-hour nights followed by four days off (known as the four watch system and used by all Scottish fire and rescue services other than Strathclyde). Each fire station's establishment is based on the service's crewing level policy, with resilience built in for absences and leave. In practice this means that there are occasions where there are more than the required personnel on duty and others where there are not enough. 5GDS is a means to predict as far as practicable, where those excesses and surpluses will occur, and realign resources accordingly.

SFR's 5GDS is based on a 10-week, continually repeating, shift cycle. In the 10-week cycle a typical firefighter would have seven periods of working two 10-hour days, two 14-hour nights followed by four days off. At the end of the seven periods, the 10-week cycle is completed by firefighters being rostered off duty for 18 days in a row. Therefore, every 50 weeks, firefighters will have five 18-day break periods. All annual leave is allocated within these 18-day break periods.

Within the basic 5GDS, firefighters are not able to provide their full annual quota of contractual hours and therefore can be required to work a number of additional shifts to make up their additional hours. Each firefighter is therefore given a number of occasions (usually 12) per annum where they may be called in to cover for organisational shortfalls. There are also a few occasions (up to four) where, due to there being surplus available, staff may be told not to report for work. Where this is the case, staff are provided with a minimum of 48-hours notice.

Due to the degree of flexibility in the way staff may be required in the system, staff have the opportunity to swap like-for-like shifts directly with colleagues or to exchange shifts through a central clearing system.

Our Best Value audit process has not attempted to verify the costs/benefits of the 5GDS, however, SFR's own evaluation shows an improved efficiency that has allowed a reduction of 45 posts, savings of £1.364 million in salary costs, a reduction of 75 per cent in overtime payments and a reduction of 55 per cent in detached duty costs.

Strathclyde Fire and Rescue

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