

The Audit of Best Value

Fife Fire and Rescue



Prepared for the Accounts Commission
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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.

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Commission findings

1. The Accounts Commission accepts the report of the Controller of Audit on the Best Value audit of Fife Fire and Rescue.
2. Fife Fire and Rescue provides an effective service which has a clear vision based on preventative work. The Commission is particularly encouraged to note the successful outcomes being achieved by the service and its partners, shown in reduced numbers of fires and casualties.
3. The service works well with its partners and has a good understanding of risk management. There is scope, however, for better use of integrated risk management at a strategic level. This will help the service face challenges in finding savings and better employing its resources. The service needs to better demonstrate that it is achieving value for money and fully considering all options for savings.
4. Fife Council needs to assure itself that the scrutiny of the service is effective, particularly in terms of its Police, Fire and Safety Committee having skills and adequate time for debate and challenge in relation to fire service matters.
5. The Commission notes that any substantial issues arising for the service will be considered as part of the annual audit process.
6. 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. Some aspects of Best Value in fire and rescue have been covered in earlier reports by Audit Scotland, 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.

6. We carried out the Best Value audit of Fife Fire and Rescue during June 2011. We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided to the audit team by the Chief Fire Officer, Neil McFarlane; the Chair of the Police, Fire and Safety Committee of Fife Council, Councillor George Kay, and all other elected members and staff involved.

Summary

7. Fife Fire and Rescue Service (FFRS) has a strong focus on preventative work and provides an effective emergency response service. Over the past ten years there have been significant falls in the number of fires and in the number of deaths and injuries in Fife.
8. FFRS has a clear vision and priorities that reflect the community safety objectives of Fife Council. It has established the principles of Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) and both officers and elected members show a good understanding of community risk. Opportunities have been taken to make some changes in the use of resources, but IRMP has not been utilised fully at a strategic level to help drive improvements in the matching of resources to community risks. The current challenging financial position has forced a more focused consideration by the service and authority of all the options for change to deliver more effective risk based use of resources.
9. FFRS has a strong record on preventative work. The level of home fire safety visits has been above the national average and is increasingly targeted on areas of greatest risk. The number of statutory fire audits of non-domestic properties is well above the Scottish average. There is also a strong emphasis on carrying out much of this preventative work in partnership with other public organisations, such as the police, social work and housing services. As part of a unitary council, there is a common framework and set of priorities promoted through a single Community Planning Partnership (CPP) and Single Outcome Agreement (SOA). There is also a good, and improving, level of data sharing between these organisations, helping to identify individuals in particular need of support.
10. There is a strong culture of improvement within FFRS, seeking to identify weaknesses in its processes and addressing them. It has twice carried out a structured self-assessment using Fife Council's Fife Excellence Model. At an operational level, it also carries out a programme of station inspections and case conferences with partner organisations to identify areas where improvements can be made.
11. As part of a unitary council, FFRS has to compete directly with other services within Fife Council for resources. In principle, this matching of resources to council priorities is sound and is a fundamental element of Best Value. In practice, however, it can mean that FFRS is facing the need to make budget reductions in advance of other fire and rescue services which are overseen by joint boards. In addition, unlike most other fire and rescue services, it has no dedicated financial reserves to help balance its budget in the short-term.

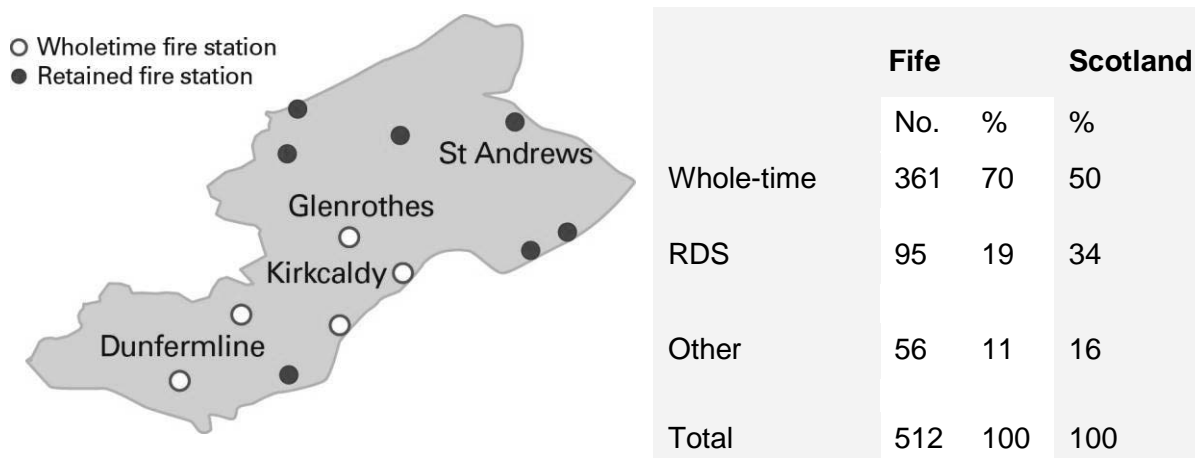
12. FFRS has been required to make significant financial savings over recent years and faces the need to make further budget reductions. So far, it has managed this effectively, maintaining service delivery standards at the same time as reducing the size of its workforce. However, it now faces significant challenges with the need to make further savings of 4 - 4.5 per cent in each of the following three years. It now faces a specific challenge to maintain its standard crewing levels for all emergency responses. Managers have worked creatively to help minimise the impact of this, but it is difficult to see how further savings can be achieved without the potential for some increase in community risks.
13. Governance arrangements are fundamentally sound. However, the wide remit of the Police, Fire and Safety Committee (PFSC) can mean that scrutiny by members is insufficient, with inadequate time available to fully discuss and consider fire and rescue issues.
14. FFRS has effective arrangements for workforce management. The service demonstrates a strong commitment to and effective arrangements for health and safety and training. The service recognises the need to improve systematic workforce planning arrangements, which have been focused over the past two years on handling a reduction in the workforce. This has been managed well, but the service faces increasing challenges in this area, as staff reductions continue and pressures on the workforce increase.

Part 1. Context

15. Fife covers 1,325 sq. km between the Forth and Tay estuaries. The population, of around 365,000, predominantly reside in a number of large towns including Glenrothes, Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy, Lochgelly and Methil; and in the many small towns of the area, but Fife also has rural areas.
16. Fife's communities range from those of relative affluence, such as St Andrews and the surrounding area, to some pockets of significant deprivation. It also has a rising population, with increases in the number of children and the elderly predicted to be above national trends. The changing demographics of the area will increase the demands on services for the community including those of the fire and rescue services.
17. FFRS is delivered from its headquarters in Thornton and from five whole-time stations covering the most populated areas and eight Retained Duty System (RDS) stations (Exhibit 1). The service has a budget of £21.1 million in 2011/12. FFRS employs 512 staff (full time equivalent), including 361 whole-time and 95 RDS firefighters - a higher proportion of whole-time firefighters than nationally (Exhibit 1). It has a fleet of 29 response vehicles. Twenty of these are standard fire engines, but there are other specialist vehicles such as those for aerial rescue, urban search and rescue, water rescue, line rescue and command and control.

Exhibit 1

Staffing and fire stations in Fife



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

18. FFRS is one of two services in Scotland that are part of unitary authorities (the other being Dumfries and Galloway). This means that it is a service of Fife Council. Fife Council is the legal Fire and Rescue Authority, but its PFSC is the decision-making forum for most FRS related issues through its scheme of administration. The chief fire officer (CFO) is not part of the council Corporate Management Team (CMT) but reports directly to the chief executive and is a member of the Extended Council Management Team that includes heads of service.
19. FFRS is also aligned to a single Community Planning Partnership (CPP) and has common borders with the police and NHS partners.

Part 2. Governance and management

Vision and strategic direction

FFRS has established the principles of IRMP and both officers and elected members show a good understanding of community risk. Opportunities have been taken to make some changes in the use of resources, including the amalgamation of two whole-time stations, but IRMP has not been utilised fully at a strategic level to help drive improvements in the matching of resources to community risks.

20. The responsibilities of fire and rescue services have changed significantly over the past decade. In 2003, all Scottish services were required to produce 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. FFRS has responded well to this change in its role and the emphasis on risk in planning.

Exhibit 2

Fife Fire & Rescue's priorities and goals

Priorities	Goals
Prevention	Educational community safety programmes Home fire safety visits Non-domestic fire audits Reduce accidents and injuries
Intervention	Effective emergency response Effective command and control infrastructure Prepared to deal with major incidents
Workforce	Health and safety and well being of staff Culture of learning Fairness, equality and diversity Leadership that promotes professionalism Contribution management

	Activities are customer focused
	Develop the organisation
Performance	Demonstrate Best Value and continuous improvement
	Demonstrate best practice and innovation
	Contribute to sustain and improve environment
	Demonstrate value through partnership working

Source: Fife Fire & Rescue Service Plan, 2009-12

21. FFRS has a good and developing planning framework. Its priorities are clearly set out in its service plan (Exhibit 2). As part of a unitary council, there are clear links between its priorities and goals and those of the Fife community safety partnership and Fife Council's SOA. It has had an IRMP in place since 2004. This is now being replaced by a revised IRMP, covering 2011 to 2014. Both of these plans provide a high level description of community risks in Fife. The first IRMP set out a range of reviews to be undertaken, but did not set out specific commitments to medium or long term shifts in resources. The revised IRMP does identify a number of resource areas that will be considered for change, but it does not set out a clear plan of how resources will be matched to community risks.
22. Risk management forms a clear part of the organisation's culture. During our audit, officers and elected members showed a strong and informed awareness of the impact of shifts in resources on community risk. The closure of Rosyth and Dunfermline fire stations and their replacement with a single new-build station at Pitreavie, for example, was recognised as leading to a slight increase in risk in emergency response times. This was met with an increased emphasis on preventative work in the west Fife villages in order to reduce the risk of an emergency response being needed. Similarly, we found quite a sophisticated use of risk information to target home fire safety visits throughout Fife.
23. However, in line with many other fire and rescue services, we did not find a strategic use of IRMP to provide an overview of risk throughout Fife which would allow a fundamental review of resource allocation. We were made aware of potential station mergers, with only marginal changes in risk, which had not been taken forward. Shifts have been made in resources as opportunities have arisen, rather than as part of a long-term strategy. There are signs that this may be starting to change with a focus on integrated risk management, evident in the recent work of the service's Emergency Response Working Group and the Risk Analysis Working Group. Fundamentally, IRMP is about moving, rather than reducing, resources. However, the impact of budget reductions has forced FFRS to begin to reappraise how it matches risks and resources and to now consider options which may save money.

24. As a unitary authority, Fife Council is the statutory fire authority for the service. Strategic oversight of fire and rescue is delegated to the PFSC. Financial decisions, within normal budget parameters, are the responsibility of PFSC, however, any financial decisions outwith these are taken by the Council's Policy, Finance and Asset Management (PFAM) Committee or ultimately the Full Council if appropriate. Although these arrangements are clearly defined, and no specific issues have arisen to date, members of the PFAM committee and Full Council will need to ensure that they are fully informed of the potential impact of their financial decisions on community and firefighter risks.
25. As a service of a unitary authority, FFRS has different management reporting arrangements to those of a CFO reporting to a joint board. The CFO reports directly to the chief executive of Fife Council, and although he is not a member of the council's CMT, he is a member of the Extended Council Management Team. This group includes the heads of services from across the council departments. The direct relationship with the council provides a number of opportunities to the service, such as an additional level of challenge and scrutiny, the infrastructure and economies of scale of the council and close working arrangements with services that are also involved in community safety. It also introduces a number of challenges, in particular FFRS has been directly exposed, as a service of the council, to the financial challenges facing the council and the need for budgetary reductions in 2010/11, 2011/12 and also anticipated in 2012/13.

Partnership working

FFRS demonstrates a strong commitment to partnership working, particularly with other parts of Fife Council. There is a good level of information sharing, with referrals made between fire and rescue and other departments about vulnerable individuals. At an operational level, there are good links with neighbouring fire and rescue services.

26. Fire and rescue services work through a range of partnership arrangements. They plan for civil contingencies with public and private sector partners through Strategic Coordinating Groups (SCGs). Prevention activity is typically delivered through community safety partnerships, working with local authorities, police, health, social landlords and the voluntary sector. Sharing information on individuals at risk is key to ensuring prevention activity is most appropriately targeted. Fire and rescue services deliver their response services in conjunction with other emergency services such as police, ambulance service, and the coast guard service. 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.

27. FFRS has common boundaries with its key partners, including other Fife Council services and the NHS. These organisations work within a single CPP and SOA, providing a common framework and set of priorities.
28. Information sharing is good between partners and there is continuing work to progress this further. A data sharing protocol has been established and information and intelligence from partners, including the police and other council services, is being used by FFRS in strategic planning and preventative work.
29. There is a strong culture of partnership working at both a strategic and operational level. At a strategic level, there is strong engagement from members and officers in the Fife Community Safety Partnership, where it works closely with partners on community safety priorities. In particular the service has a focus on one of the four Community Safety Partnership's priorities – 'Fewer injuries and loss of life in homes and on the road.' The service is involved in subgroups that focus on road safety and home safety and integrates this work into its planning at a strategic and operational level.
30. A particular strength of the Fife approach to community safety is a dedicated community safety task group that includes fire, police, housing, and social services. This coordinates a range of activities to support all aspects of the community safety agenda. The group includes a jointly-funded FFRS firefighter. The current focus of this individual's work is to identify overlap work with deliberate fire starting and work being undertaken around antisocial behaviour with other agencies.
31. FFRS takes a lead role in the Community Safety Partnership subgroup, the Safer Homes Task Group. This has taken forward a number of initiatives, including the promotion of sprinkler systems in new-build council housing agreed early in 2010 by the council's Housing and Communities Committee. The initial focus of this group was home fire safety but this has now been extended to a wider accident prevention agenda.
32. Within the umbrella of the community safety task group, FFRS contribute to coordinating referrals for services for vulnerable members of the community, for example to 'Fife Cares'. This integrated partnership structure provides a strong community focused approach to community safety and effective sharing of information and intelligence. FFRS community safety staff work closely with the Fife care team and now undertake a broader approach to home safety visits. As well as fitting fire alarms and providing basic fire safety advice they also look at other risks such as electrical risks, microwave oven safety and trip hazards. Community safety firefighters will test electrical equipment, remove faulty items and replace them where possible. Firefighters also make referrals to the Fife care team for other services such as housing repairs, occupational therapy, home energy advice and financial advice.

33. Since November 2010, FFRS has worked in partnership with the occupational therapists of the council social work department on a project to fit smoke detection equipment for the deaf and hard of hearing. The equipment consists of a Wi-Fi smoke detector, a vibrating pad and flashing strobe light. To date over 300 alarm systems have been fitted.
34. The engagement in community safety with partners is also evident at an operational level in other areas of work. The service is working with the NHS in an effort to target high risk individuals for Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSV). For example, NHS staff consider home safety in their assessment of elderly and vulnerable people, where appropriate making referrals to FFRS. Risk information about individuals, such as individuals who are immobile or use oxygen cylinders, is recorded in a shared system. Referrals are also made from the NHS in relation to home births so that mothers receive a Home Fire Safety Risk assessment and advice on medical gases. Whole-time station facilities are used by NHS staff for delivering physiotherapy treatments and for well-being clinics where individuals are offered advice on lifestyle issues, such as weight loss and smoking cessation. Information about HFSVs is provided to these groups and in return FFRS promotes smoking cessation programmes to the community. Less progress has been made with developing arrangements with drug and alcohol support services but pilot work is being undertaken in this area in relation to repeat admissions.
35. It is difficult to demonstrate the effectiveness of the impact and value for money of partnership approaches and initiatives. Some work has been undertaken on this and the service recognises this as an area for improvement.
36. Community safety activity and performance is regularly reported in a number of forums. The Community Safety Partnership reports to the CPP twice per year on progress against outcomes and also quarterly to the PFSC. Reports are also presented to members at an area level, showing a developing level of local community planning and accountability. However, discussions at this level tend to focus on policing matters, with limited consideration of fire and rescue.
37. FFRS has a significant role in civil contingency planning with partners. It takes part in the Fife Strategic Co-ordinating Group, which carries out high-level risk planning for major incidents which could disrupt the area. This is summarised in the Fife Community Risk register, setting out the major risks facing the area and the action being taken by each partner organisation to manage these risks. In 2009, Fife Council's emergency planning function was transferred from the direct remit of the chief executive to the chief fire officer, strengthening the role of FFRS in strategic partnership planning for the area.
38. At an operational level, FFRS works in partnership with neighbouring fire and rescue services, particularly in providing additional resources for emergency

responses. Its fire training facilities are also used by other services. At a more strategic level, however, there are no significant shared services with other fire and rescue services. This is largely due to its position within a unitary council, with its ICT systems and management arrangements aligned with those of Fife Council. Detailed assessments were carried out on a number of proposals, such as a shared human resources service with Tayside and Central Scotland Fire and Rescue Services. Despite the significant investment of management time and resources by all parties, this work has not been implemented, largely as a result of it being overtaken by work on the national reform agenda.

Scrutiny, performance management and improvement

FFRS has a strong culture of improvement and a developing approach to performance management. Elected members demonstrate a good level of scrutiny but there can be insufficient time set aside to focus on fire and rescue issues.

39. There is a strong culture of improvement within FFRS, with managers seeking to identify weaknesses and addressing them. It has twice carried out a structured self-assessment, using Fife Council's Fife Excellence Model. The most recent exercise was carried out in the autumn of 2010. The findings of the assessment are a clear and good reflection of the strengths and areas for improvement within the service. The service has engaged in this exercise constructively and the actions identified through the assessment have been effectively integrated into its annual improvement plan.
40. It has also addressed the key issues raised in Audit Scotland's 2006 performance audit report. For example, improvements have been made in the training and development arrangements for elected members, partnership working has been developed to help fire prevention and community safety, and good progress has been made in reducing the number of false alarms.
41. FFRS has also made good progress in developing its performance management, an area of some criticism in the 2006 report and in Audit Scotland's 2009 Best Value report for Fife Council. Performance reports are provided each month to senior managers within FFRS and to the Police, Fire and Safety Committee every six months. These reports are well presented and accessible with both quantitative data and qualitative information outlining performance and progress with activities. As part of its self-assessment, however, FFRS has identified the need to improve the range and relevance of measures that it uses and reports, to provide a better match with its priorities and the impact of the services it delivers. There is also some benchmarking with other fire and rescue services, with the annual Chief Fire

Officers Association (Scotland) Primary Indicators Report being presented to the Police, Fire and Safety Committee.

42. There is a sound approach to performance management at an operational level. A programme of operational audits is carried out, with regular station inspections helping to ensure that training and local procedures meet the required standards. Where there are casualties, case conferences are held with partner organisations to consider each incident casualties and identify where improvements can be made. Debriefings are also held for all incidents, identifying the potential for local station improvements or, where appropriate, being disseminated throughout FFRS.
43. There are, however, some weaknesses in the arrangements for elected members to scrutinise fire and rescue issues. The work of FFRS is overseen by Fife Council's PFSC. The wide remit of the PFSC attracts engaged members, able to provide a good standard of independent challenge. It also promotes a more integrated approach to cross-service issues, such as crime prevention, criminal justice services, consumer safety, public health and emergency planning.
44. However, while there is a good standard of reporting to the PFSC and elected members can provide a good level of independent challenge and scrutiny, the wide remit of the committee means that there is often insufficient time to discuss fire and rescue issues. There have been occasions recently where, for example, committee discussions were taken up entirely by policing matters and there was no time remaining to consider significant papers from FFRS. This issue was commented on in Audit Scotland's 2009 Best Value report on Fife Council.
45. Recognising this issue, the council has introduced supplementary arrangements, designed to provide more time to consider fire and rescue matters. A PFSC scrutiny group has been established, consisting of the same members of the PFSC. In practice this does not perform a formal scrutiny role but is used as an extension to the main committee for further discussion. However, these meetings do not have the same constitutional standing as the PFSC and are not held in public, with an impact on the openness and transparency of the governance arrangements. The council has also recently introduced arrangements for short-life working group to undertake in-depth scrutiny on defined issues. This arrangement has not yet had time to make an impact, but it does not fully resolve this ongoing issue for the PFSC. Further consideration of the governance arrangements for the committee is needed to ensure that the range of issues that should be considered by the committee for decisions and scrutiny have adequate time for debate and challenge.

Part 3. Use of resources

FFRS faces severe financial pressures. With no dedicated reserves, it has coped well in recent years with the need to make significant reductions in expenditure. It has an unusually high proportion of whole-time firefighters, but it has made some reductions in its workforce through early retirements and transfers to neighbouring services. However, faced with the need to make further cuts, there is now a specific challenge to maintain its standard crewing levels.

Financial management

FFRS faces severe financial pressures, creating potential risks to the sustainability of the current levels of service. As part of a unitary council, it has to compete directly with other services for resources, trying to ensure that the impact of budget reductions on community risk is fully taken into account. Unlike other fire and rescue services in Scotland, it often has to reduce crewing levels below its standard levels.

46. As part of Fife Council, FFRS has delivered annual efficiency savings of two per cent between 2005/06 and 2009/10. This has been followed by a requirement for further savings of 4 - 4.5 per cent, or £0.8 million, in each of the following three years. Unlike most other fire and rescue services, it does not hold any dedicated reserves to help it balance its budget over the short term. Instead, as part of a unitary council, it needs to compete directly with other services within Fife Council for financial resources.
47. FFRS's revenue budget is determined by Fife Council. In practice, this responsibility is delegated to its Policy, Finance and Asset Management Committee (PFAM), which has a strategic oversight of all council revenue and capital budgets. PFAM provides an overall corporate framework for the development of service budgets, helping to match resources with service priorities. The chair of the PFSC is a member of PFAM. However, most members of PFAM are not familiar with the fire and rescue service's IRMP and its detailed risk assessments. There is, therefore, a risk that the impact of budget reductions on community safety may not be fully taken into account as part of the budget setting process.
48. Senior managers within FFRS have shown a clear focus on achieving the required budget reductions without negatively impacting on the risks to the community or to firefighters. An efficiency team, involving staff from across the service and including trade union representation, has been established and provides an effective source of advice to senior managers.

49. In previous years, FFRS has made savings through a range of measures, such as a management restructure, reductions in the workforce through retirements, and restrictions on overtime. It is currently managing its 2011/12 budget reduction through a range of further measures which include: changes to the crewing arrangements for special appliances, reductions in the number of control room personnel and other support staff, and further changes to the senior management structure. It has also considered the need for voluntary or compulsory redundancies, the only Scottish fire and rescue service to have reached this stage, although this has been avoided by transferring 15 firefighters to neighbouring services.
50. It is difficult to see how FFRS will be able to make further savings without the potential for some increase in community risks. Even with its current workforce, it is a challenge to maintain its standard crewing levels on fire appliances. At times, it is forced to provide four firefighters on both the first and second vehicles attending an incident, instead of the usual five and four pattern. This can mean that, for some incidents, a third appliance will be needed to provide sufficient numbers of firefighters. It is the only Scottish fire and rescue service currently in this position. However, managers have minimised the impact on the community by, for example, anticipating the need for a third appliance and mobilising resources from neighbouring stations.
51. The difficulties of balancing the need for financial savings with community safety look to be even more challenging over next year. FFRS is now seeking to identify further savings for 2012/13, which is likely to involve further reductions in its workforce and potential changes in duty rotas.

Workforce management

In recent years, FFRS's workforce strategy has been focused on the need to reduce its staff numbers. It has made significant reductions in its workforce, although its unusually high proportion of whole-time firefighters has remained. A staff appraisal system is established and applies to senior officers as well as other staff. It has good arrangements in place for training and health and safety.

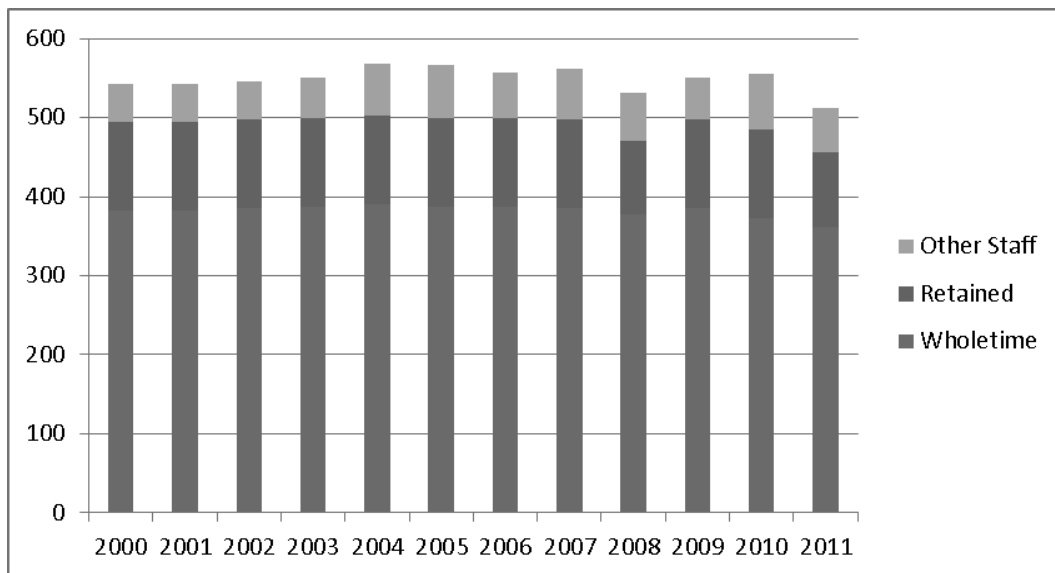
52. With the current financial pressures, FFRS's workforce strategy is focused on the need to reduce its staff numbers. Whole-time firefighters form an unusually high proportion of its workforce, representing around 70 per cent compared with 50 per cent for Scotland as a whole. There is no clear reason for this, although it is a key driver in the costs of the service. It also means that FFRS staffing costs are relatively high. It has made significant reductions in staff numbers, with a projected fall of 13 per cent between April 2010 and March 2012. This has been achieved by

a range of measures, such as a recruitment freeze that has been in place since 2008, and the reduction of 45 posts following the replacement of Dunfermline and Rosyth stations with a single station at Pitreavie. However, this predominantly whole-time profile has remained (Exhibit 3).

53. As part of the drive to reduce workforce numbers FFRS has transferred 15 experienced firefighters to neighbouring services during 2011 in order to avoid compulsory redundancies. This has led to the loss of specialist knowledge in areas such as water rescue and the need for additional investment in training other staff. There is also a potential problem in succession planning, with six of its 11 senior officers due to retire before the end of 2012/13.

Exhibit 3

Staff numbers 2000 to 2011



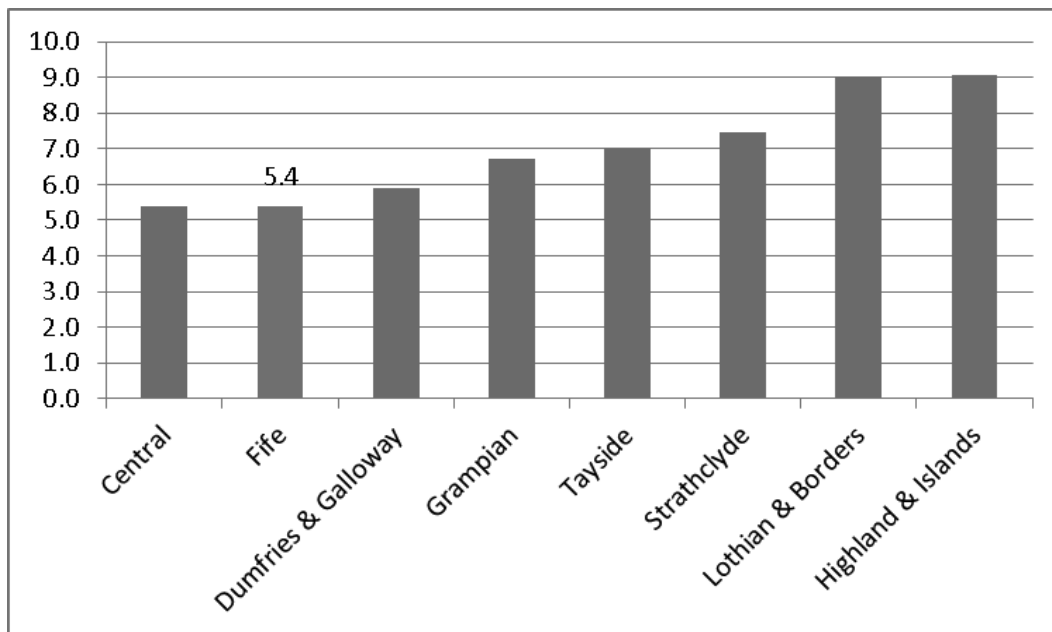
Source: CIPFA

54. Apart from RDS firefighters, all staff receive an annual appraisal of their performance. This includes senior officers and the chief fire officer, who receives his appraisal from the chief executive of Fife Council.
55. FFRS has sound arrangements for the training and development of staff, with clear policies and arrangements for monitoring standards. All firefighters are assessed on a set of modules as part of a three year programme of training. These are prioritised according to local risks. In addition, there are good facilities for providing practical training.

56. FFRS has a strong approach to the health and safety of its firefighters, with a dedicated health & safety manager and access to an occupational health advisor. It is particularly conscious of the risks facing RDS firefighters, following an incident in 2010 where two firefighters were seriously injured. The role of RDS firefighters has now been restricted to a more limited set of core functions, allowing a greater focus on their weekly three-hour training sessions. There is a programme of station inspections, helping to ensure that individuals are able to meet the expected standards or are removed from operational duties until they receive additional training. It has also drawn up a local action plan to address the issues raised in the recent UK-wide review of fire services carried out by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE).
57. There is also an effective approach to managing sickness absence, with a clear absence management policy and an effective occupational service. In 2010/11, FFRS recorded an average of 5.4 days lost per employee, the joint lowest rate for fire and rescue services in Scotland.

Exhibit 4

Average number of days lost per employee, 2010/11



Source: Audit Scotland Statutory Performance Indicators

Asset management

FFRS has an asset management plan which is integrated with Fife Council's strategic approach to capital investment and maintenance programmes. It is supported by council arrangements for areas such as fleet management, building maintenance and ICT. These provide a satisfactory approach to asset management, although they lack some flexibility in meeting the specific needs of a fire and rescue service.

58. There are satisfactory arrangements for managing assets, with the fire and rescue service drawing on Fife Council's corporate arrangements for capital investment and fleet and property maintenance. All of the property, which belongs to the council, is subject to a condition survey every five years, helping to prioritise its maintenance programme. We found no significant concerns about the suitability of operational equipment or the condition of property, apart from Cupar fire station which is not meeting acceptable standards in terms of station facilities.
59. FFRS is part of Fife Council's ICT arrangements, bringing economies of scale and important benefits. It is, for example, able to access the council's secure network, allowing it to send and receive sensitive information from national and local partners. The council's ICT department has also developed a range of systems which are used by all fire stations, allowing officers to access common management information, policies, forms, performance and risk data, and online recording systems.
60. However, there are some weaknesses in current ICT systems. Most of the RDS fire stations are not directly linked to the council's network and rely on broadband connections which can be unreliable. In addition, the limited number of computers at RDS stations means that RDS firefighters tend to record their training on a paper-based system rather than PDRpro, the more efficient electronic system used by whole-time firefighters. The service is also obliged to use software which is compatible with Fife Council's arrangements, rather than with other fire and rescue services. There are, for example, some weaknesses in the in-house system for recording the availability of RDS firefighters. Staff view this system as an improvement on previous arrangements, but it can be unreliable and has some significant limitations compared with systems used by other fire and rescue services.
61. 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. In most cases, this should be relatively straightforward but it is likely to be more complex for FFRS, which is part of Fife Council. As well as fire appliances and stations, decisions will need to be made on other assets such as computer equipment and software, training facilities, and any community partnership assets.

Part 4. Service performance

FFRS provides an effective emergency response service. It also places a strong emphasis on its preventative responsibilities, providing targeted home fire safety visits and community safety education projects in partnership with other services within Fife Council. There is some evidence that this activity correlates closely with reductions in the number of fires within Fife.

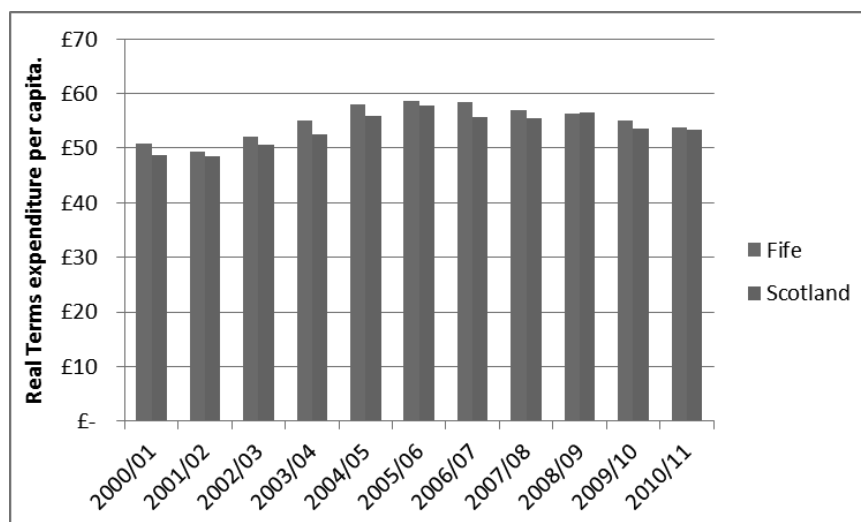
Service costs

FFRS costs are close to the Scottish average and, in real terms, have reduced by 5.5 per cent over the past three years.

62. FFRS's operating costs are close to the Scottish average. In 2010/11, excluding pension costs, it spent £53.8 per head of population, marginally above the Scottish average of £53.3. Over the past four years, its costs have fallen. Reflecting the decrease in the size of its whole-time workforce, its costs have fallen by 5.5 per cent in real terms since 2007/08, compared with a fall of 3.7 per cent nationally, and are now close to the levels recorded a decade earlier (Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5

Real-term costs per capita

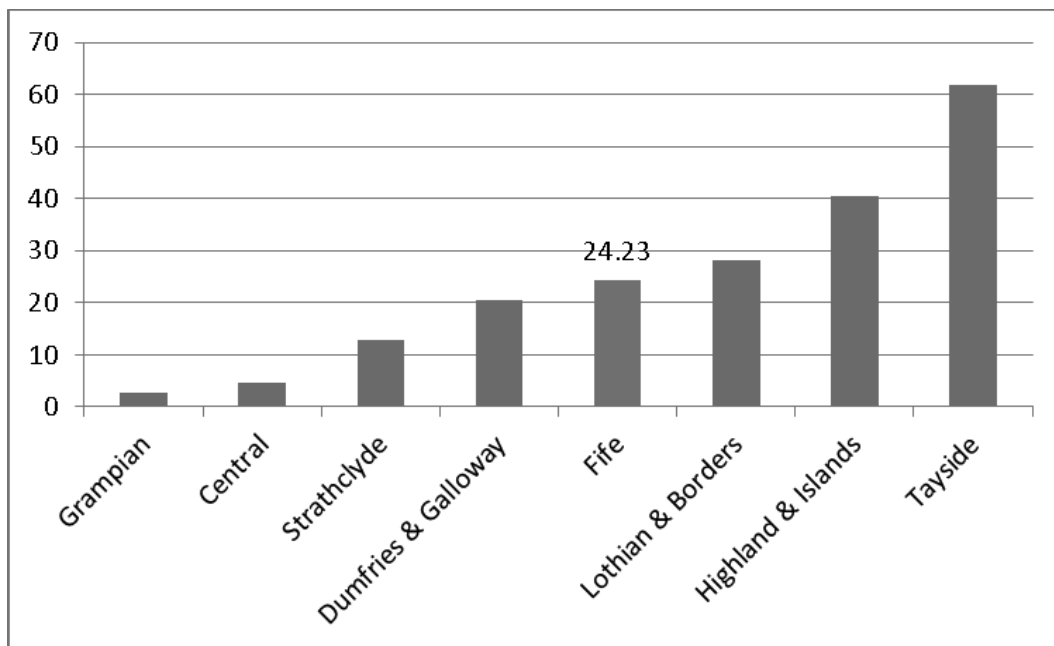


Source: CIPFA data adjusted by HM Treasury GDP deflator

Prevention

FFRS's preventative work plays a strong role in helping to deliver Fife Council's community safety strategy. Home fire safety visits and community education projects are carried out in partnership with other council services, helping to target this work on higher risk groups and covering a wide range of safety issues. It also carries out a high level of statutory fire audits.

63. Fife Council has a clear community safety strategy, involving a range of partners such as the police, social work and fire and rescue. FFRS's preventative work contributes to the delivery of this strategy, mainly through a mixture of home fire safety visits, statutory fire audits, and various community safety education projects.
64. Home fire safety visits form a core part of FFRS's preventative work. In 2009/10, it carried out around 24 visits per 1,000 dwellings, which is slightly above the Scottish average (Exhibit 6). However, with an increased emphasis on targeting this work towards higher risk areas, it has now halved the number of visits that it is aiming to carry out during 2011/12. As well as 'hot strikes', carried out in surrounding properties immediately after a fire has occurred, most visits carried out by FFRS are now based on an annual programme. A prioritised list of visits is drawn up for each station, identifying individual streets and properties that are above average risk. The prioritisation is done using the national risk modelling tool, FSEC, Mosaic software (a tool for analysing socio-demographic profiles) and other demographic and historic information held by FFRS and Fife Council. Referrals are also routinely received from social work and housing services, highlighting individual households of particular concern.
65. Much of this work is carried out by whole-time firefighters, with relatively little carried out by RDS firefighters. In addition FFRS has a team of community safety officers who tend to carry out more comprehensive home safety visits, testing electrical equipment, fitting stair gates and covering other potential hazards. They also make referrals to other community safety partners, such as social work or the NHS, when they identify other concerns.

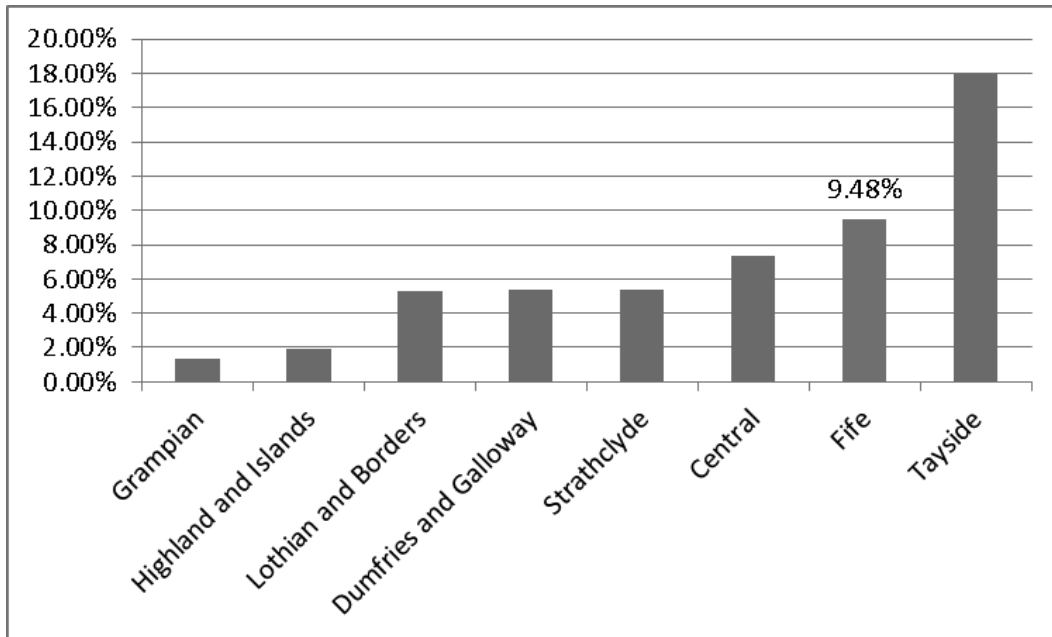
Exhibit 6**Home Fire Safety Visits per 1,000 dwellings, 2009/10**

Source: CFOAS Performance Indicators 2009/10

66. FFRS has a strong record in carrying out statutory fire audits in non-domestic properties. 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 carried out to provide guidance and to help enforce fire safety standards. In 2010/11, 948 statutory fire audits were carried out in Fife, representing 9.5 per cent of non-domestic properties in the area. This is the second highest proportion in Scotland (Exhibit 7). This work was also targeted on higher risk properties such as hospitals, care homes, hotels and houses of multiple-occupation.

Exhibit 7

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



Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

67. As part of its preventative work, FFRS also works with its local partners such as Fife Constabulary to provide community safety advice through a programme of school and university visits and other public events. These include initiatives such as 'Blue Light Discos', and the Junior Warden Scheme, which aim to reduce antisocial behaviour by young people. Other initiatives such as 'Safe Drive Stay Alive' are targeted at risk groups, such as 17 to 24 year olds, and are well regarded by participants and partner organisations. However, there is limited evaluation of the impact of the range of activities and the value for money they provide.

Emergency response

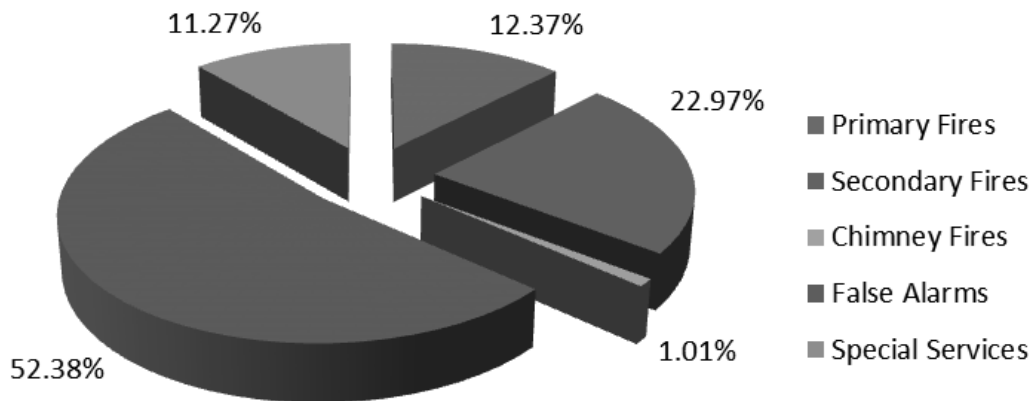
There has been a long-term decline in the number of fires in Fife, slightly ahead of national trends. The number of false alarms has also reduced and is below national levels. Emergency response times have remained consistent over the past decade and are in line with other fire and rescue services.

68. In 2010/11, FFRS responded to around 5,000 incidents. In line with the national pattern, about an eighth of these related to primary fires (those in buildings, vehicles or involving casualties), a quarter to secondary fires (typically outdoor fires in heathland, rubbish bins or derelict buildings), and just over half to false alarms

(Exhibit 8). The remainder related to a range of 'special services', primarily road traffic collisions and, to a lesser extent, flooding.

Exhibit 8

Analysis of emergency incidents in Fife, 2010/11



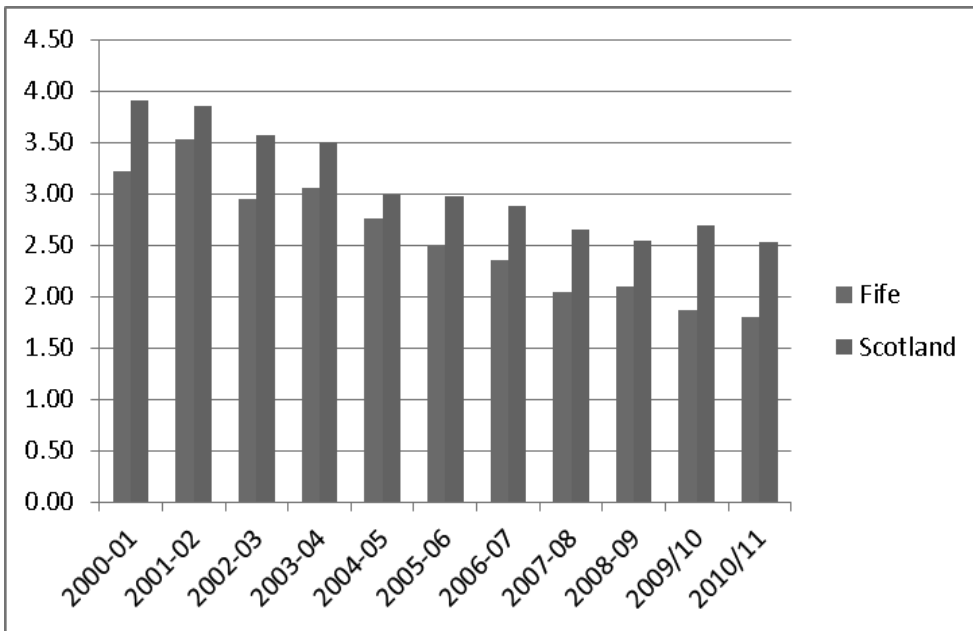
Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

Number of fires and casualties

69. Historically, the level of fires and casualties within Fife has been below the Scottish average. Over the past decade, the number of primary and secondary fires within Fife has continued to fall and there is some evidence that this fall has exceeded national trends (Exhibits 9 and 10). This can only act as an indirect indicator as these trends reflect 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 FFRS's preventative work. The spike in secondary fires during 2003/04, for example, was due to a dry summer and an increase in grassland fires. However, the rate of decline in the number of incidents does suggest that FFRS's preventative work has had some impact in reducing the risk of fires and related casualties.

Exhibit 9

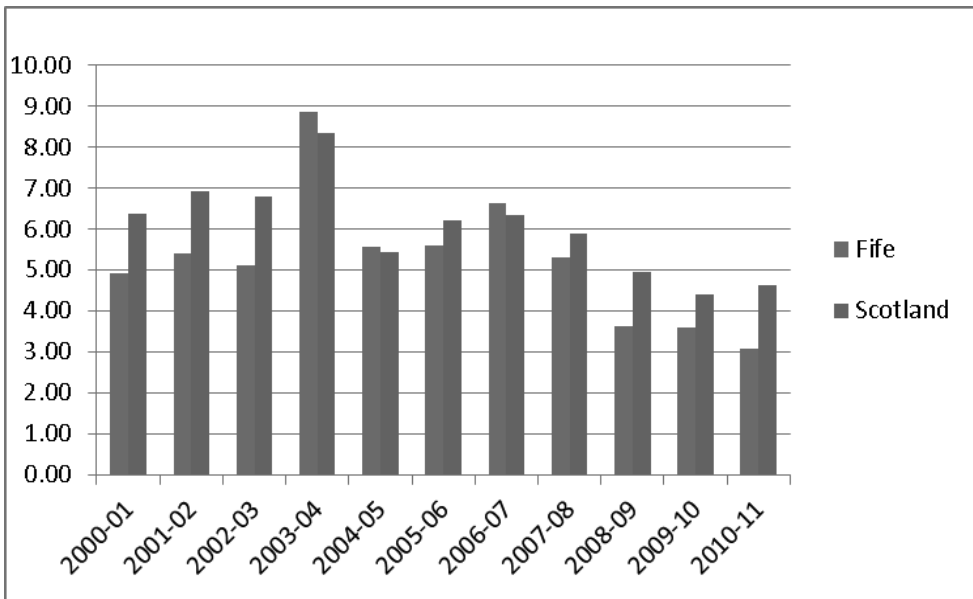
Number of primary fires per 1,000 population



Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

Exhibit 10

Number of secondary fires per 1,000 population

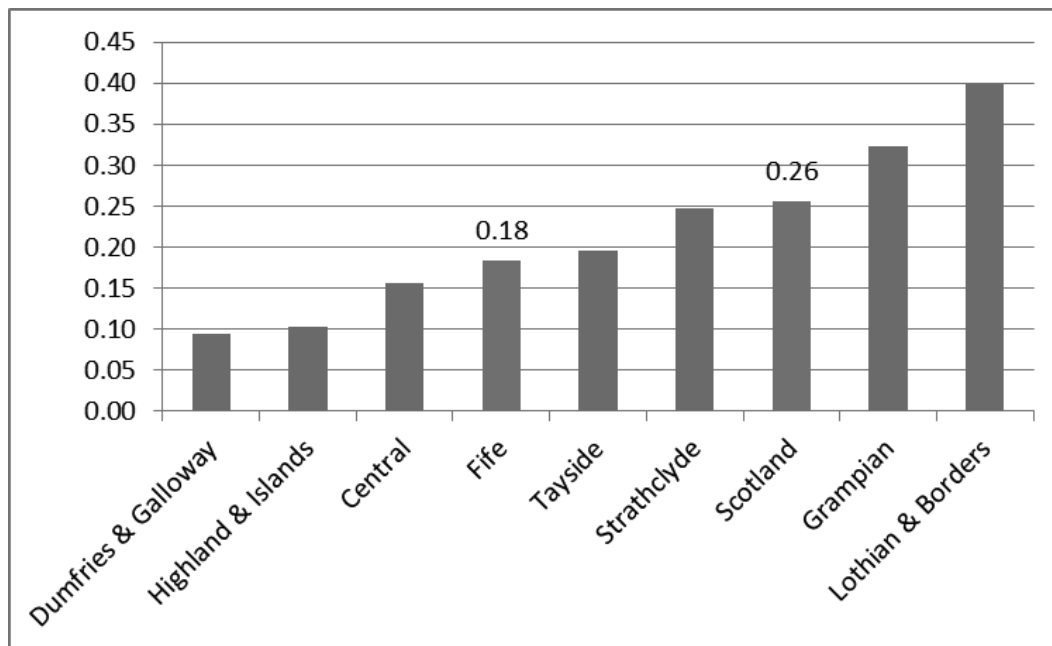


Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

70. Over the past decade casualty rates in Fife have fallen by around a third, in line with the rate of decline across Scotland. 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. In previous years, Fife has had the lowest casualty rate in Scotland. Even with the revised definitions, it still has one of the lowest casualty rates in Scotland, suggesting that its preventative work is having a positive impact (Exhibit 11).

Exhibit 11

Total casualties per 1,000 population - 2010/11



Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

Special services

71. FFRS responds to an increasing number of 'special service incidents', such as road traffic collisions and flooding. These now represent around 12.5 per cent of its emergency responses. However, there are no performance measures available locally or nationally to assess the standard of this work.

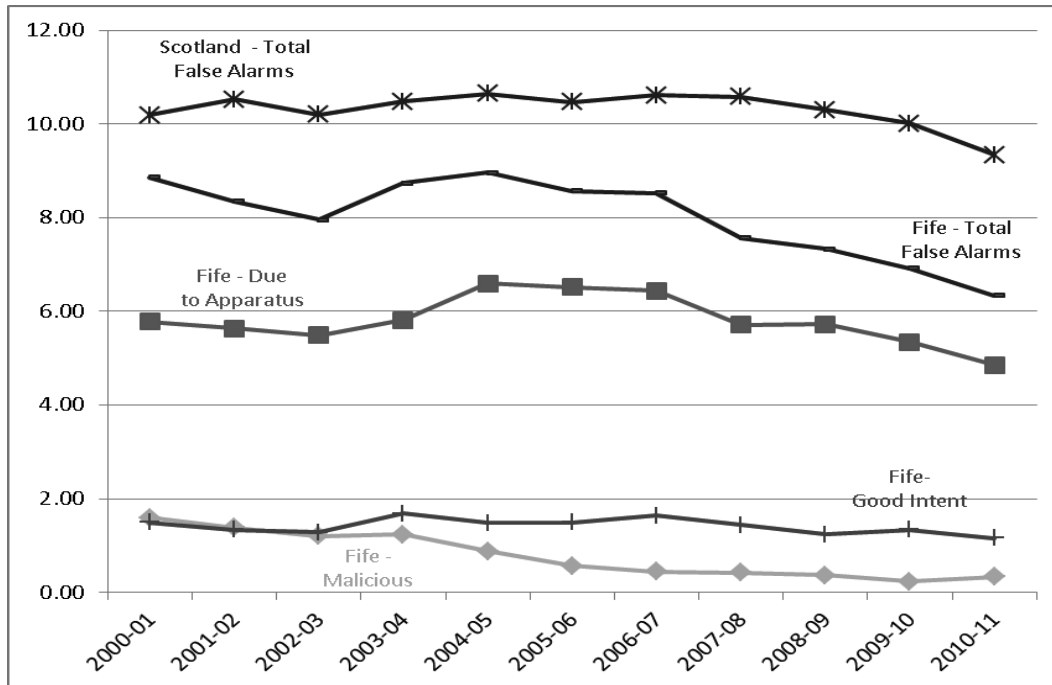
False alarms

72. False alarms can be caused by a range of factors, such as malicious hoax calls or faulty automatic alarms. They account for just over half of FFRS'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.

Exhibit 12

False alarms per 1,000 population



Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

73. FFRS's overall level of false alarms has continued to fall in recent years and remains significantly below the Scottish average (Exhibit 12). In recent years, it has been successful in helping to reduce the number of hoax calls, by methods such as call screening, education programmes and use of the criminal justice system. It has also made good progress in reducing the number of automatic fire alarms (AFAs). This has been achieved by challenging organisations producing repeat AFA calls and then working with them to develop better systems and practices.

Emergency response standards

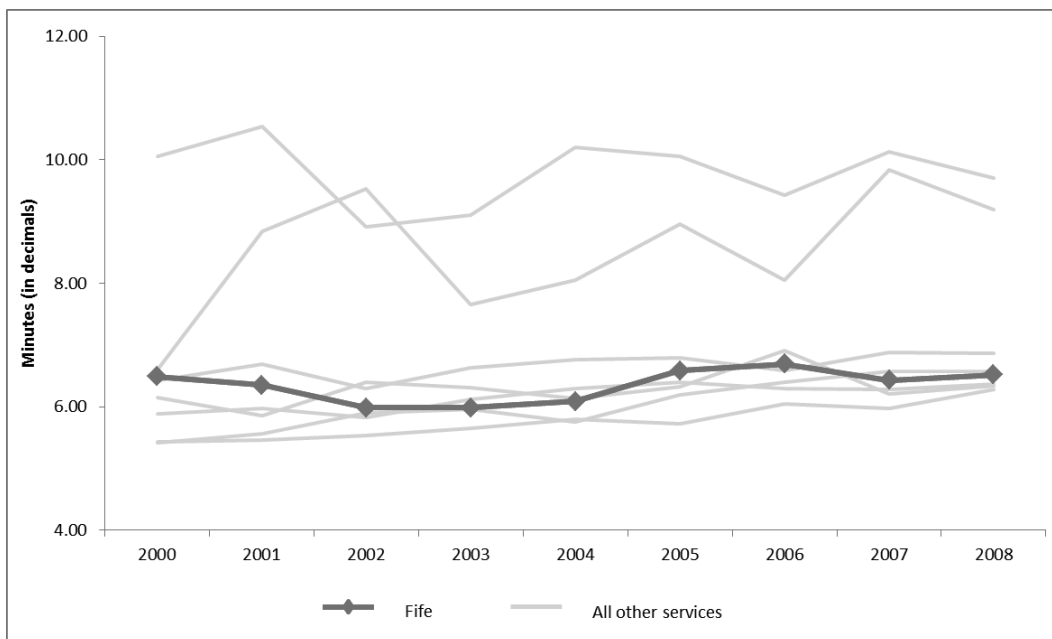
74. The speed of emergency response and number of vehicles and firefighters mobilised can be important factors in securing positive fire and rescue outcomes. Prior to 2005, standards of emergency response were set out in the National Standards of Fire Cover, with standards varying according to risk factors 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 weight of response to meet the specific level of risks identified in their IRMP.

75. FFRS is one of only three services in Scotland to use its own local risk-based set of response standards. For comparative purposes, 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 FFRS's average response times for primary dwelling fires have remained consistent over the past decade and are in line with the national pattern (Exhibit 13).

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)*

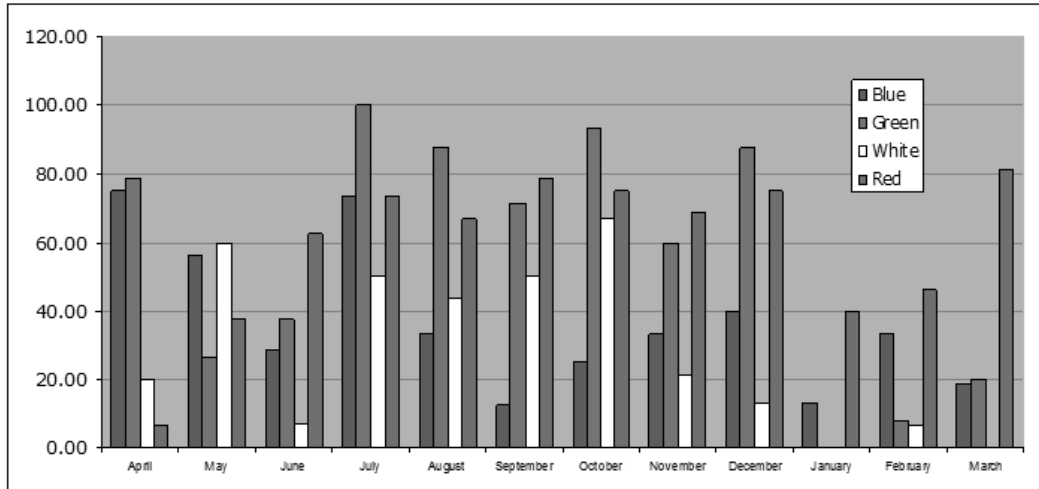
76. However, FFRS has recently been reducing its workforce numbers quite significantly. As mentioned earlier in this report, it is expected to have reduced its establishment by 13 per cent between April 2010 and March 2012. This has already had an impact on its emergency response, with FFRS at times unable to maintain its standard crewing level of five fire fighters on the first vehicle attending and four on the second. A significant number of shifts were understaffed during 2010/11, particularly during the summer holiday months (Exhibit 14). For example, the graph shows that 100 per cent of Green watch shifts in July 2010 were understaffed. This position will have subsequently worsened with the continuing reduction in the

Part 4. Service performance

number of firefighters during 2011/12. So far, through careful contingency planning, managers have been able to minimise the impact on community risk.

Exhibit 14

Whole time Staffing Levels, April 2010 – March 2011 - percentage of each watch's shifts that were understaffed



Source: Fife Fire and Rescue Service

Part 5. Improvement Agenda

77. The Members of the Police, Fire and Safety Committee should adopt a stronger leadership role in identifying the priorities and driving and scrutinising value for money in the service.
78. Consideration should be made of how to improve scrutiny arrangements to ensure there is sufficient time and opportunity for good quality discussion and scrutiny of fire and rescue issues that it has responsibility for.
79. Members of Fife Council and the Policy, Finance and Asset Management Committee will need to ensure that they are fully informed of the potential impact of their financial decisions on community and firefighter risks.
80. The service should consider how it can evaluate the effectiveness and value for money of its preventative work.
81. The service should review the balance of its whole-time and RDS workforce.
82. The service should ensure that, despite pressures on capacity, it progresses its own improvement agenda appropriately within the context of the development of the national service.
83. Service management and elected members need to continue to ensure changes to service arrangements, such as shift and crewing levels, are undertaken with minimum impact on risk to firefighter and community safety and appropriate monitoring arrangements are established.
84. In advance of the creation of a national fire and rescue service, ownership of assets should be agreed at an early stage between Fife Council and the new organisation.

Fife Fire and Rescue

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