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News release

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Fife Fire & Rescue is an effective service and now needs to show how it is providing value for money

Fife Fire and Rescue provides an effective service. It has a clear vision based on preventative work, as reflected in reduced numbers of fires and casualties, and the service works well with other organisations. It now needs to put in place better strategic management and show that it is demonstrating value for money and fully considering all options for savings. The council needs to ensure that councillors' scrutiny of the service is more effective.

The Accounts Commission's findings say that Fife's preventative work achieves successful outcomes and this is helped by the service working well with its partners and having a good understanding of risk management. However there is scope for better use of integrated risk management at a strategic level. This will be particularly useful to the service as it faces challenges in finding savings and better employing its resources.

Fife needs to keep its focus on improving its service to the public whilst fire and rescue services are being restructured on a national basis. It is especially important to have good management practices at times of financial challenge and change such as this.

The Commission also says that Fife Council needs to assure itself that the scrutiny of the service is effective, particularly in terms of how its Police, Fire and Safety Committee fulfils this task.

Chair of the Accounts Commission, John Baillie, said: "Fife Fire and Rescue's preventative work is reflected in reduced numbers of fires and casualties, and the service works well with other organisations. It now needs to put in place better strategic management and show that it is value for money. Meanwhile the council needs to ensure that councillors' scrutiny of the service is more effective."

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Notes to editors

1. The Accounts Commission's findings comment on the audit report prepared by Audit Scotland.
2. This is the fourth Best Value audit of fire & rescue. The Accounts Commission will review its findings from this audit alongside those of the audits of all other fire and rescue services in Scotland. Later in 2012 it will produce a national overview commenting on the overall messages from these audits. This audit work will form a useful information resource ahead of the creation of a single fire service. The Bill is currently being considered by the Scottish Parliament.
3. Best Value is the duty placed on local authorities to demonstrate their on-going commitment to providing better services to local people. The Audit of Best Value is undertaken by Audit Scotland on behalf of the Accounts Commission. It responds to the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. 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. 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.
4. 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.
5. The Accounts Commission for Scotland checks how well Scotland's councils, fire and police boards perform. It operates independently of local and central government. For more information about the Accounts Commission see <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/about/ac/>

6. Audit Scotland provides services to the Accounts Commission for Scotland and carries out work as directed by the Accounts Commission. Its reports are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk