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## News release

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# Strathclyde Fire & Rescue is an effective service with a strong focus on improvement and efficiency

Strathclyde Fire and Rescue provides an effective service and makes good use of integrated risk management planning, with clear evidence of shifts in resources to better match community risks.

The Accounts Commission's findings published today say the service shows innovation in working with other organisations, demonstrated by its highly effective Community Safety Partnership Unit which has helped improve the targeting of preventative work.

While the service has a good focus on improvement and efficiency, it also has relatively high operating costs. The Commission said it is particularly encouraged by the service's commitment to self evaluation as demonstrated by the peer review exercise of it by London Fire Brigade - the only such review of a Scottish fire service.

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 ensure that it is sufficient in helping members meet their Best Value responsibilities.

Strathclyde has strengths in how it manages its workforce. It has also introduced a new shift system, aimed at providing greater flexibility and significant financial savings.

Chair of the Accounts Commission, John Baillie, said: "Strathclyde Fire and Rescue is an effective service with a strong culture of performance management and continuous improvement. The Board needs to assure itself that crewing its appliances with more firefighters than other fire and rescue services demonstrates value for money and fulfils the suggested benefits to public safety"

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### Notes to editors

1. This is the last in a series of eight Best Value audits on Scotland's fire and rescue services. It does not deal with issues relating to the retirement and re-engagement of Strathclyde's chief fire officer. These were considered by the Accounts Commission last month when it asked the Controller of Audit to carry out further audit work and report back. It is expected that this will be completed this summer.
2. The Accounts Commission's findings comment on the audit report prepared by Audit Scotland. The Commission will review its findings along with the other seven and later this year 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](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)