

The Audit of Best Value

Central Scotland Fire and Rescue



 AUDIT SCOTLAND

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 Central Scotland Fire and Rescue.
2. The Commission finds that Central Scotland Fire and Rescue provides an effective and low-cost service. The Commission notes an effective approach to budgeting and financial control. There are good aspects of how the service manages staff, seen for example in consistently low sickness absence levels, although this approach could be strengthened further by putting in place a more strategic approach to workforce planning.
3. But the Commission is concerned that many building blocks of Best Value are still not in place, despite a number of weaknesses being noted by the Commission in its review of service reform in Scottish fire and rescue authorities, published in 2007. This compromises the understanding by the service of its strategic role and ability to improve.
4. In particular, the Commission is concerned that there is a lack of a culture of continuous improvement. This is seen in an underdeveloped approach to performance management, and more specifically to the management of assets. Further, the Commission emphasises the need for Central Scotland Fire & Rescue to develop a more effective approach to Integrated Risk Management Planning. There also needs to be a clearer focus on prevention.
5. The Fire and Rescue Board is passive and not proactive. Members of the board need to develop their capacity to scrutinise and challenge the service on its strategy and performance. To this end, there is an important role for constituent councils. In tandem with this, managers of the service need to do more to enable members to develop and carry out their strategic role.
6. The Commission welcomes the recognition by Central Fire and Rescue of the need to change and improve. The Commission underlines the need for Central Fire and Rescue to maintain its focus on improving its service to the public in this time of likely change to fire and rescue services nationally.
7. The Commission notes that any substantial issues arising for the service will be considered as part of the annual audit process.
8. 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.

Introduction

1. Local authorities in Scotland, including fire and rescue, have a statutory duty to deliver best value in their services. This requires them to establish management arrangements, aimed at securing continuous improvements in their performance while maintaining an appropriate balance between quality and cost
2. Since 2004, Audit Scotland has carried out audits of Best Value in each of the 32 councils in Scotland and in most police authorities. These audits have helped to improve performance and accountability in local government and have brought unsatisfactory performance to the public's attention through the public reporting process.
3. The responsibilities of fire and rescue services have changed significantly over the past decade. In 2003, all Scottish services were required to produce Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMP), identifying the level of local risks and determining the appropriate allocation of resources. The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 introduced further changes, placing a strong emphasis on prevention rather than simply emergency response.
4. Some aspects of Best Value in fire and rescue have been covered in earlier Accounts Commission reports, particularly the *Scottish Fire Service: verification of the progress of modernisation*, published in 2004, and *Review of Service Reform in Scottish Fire and Rescue Authorities*, published in 2007. So far, however, there has not been any dedicated audit, covering all key aspects of Best Value.
5. Following a formal consultation with stakeholders in late 2010, the Accounts Commission decided that the audit of Best Value should be extended to fire and rescue. With the Scottish Government signalling a potential restructuring of the services, however, it was recognised that the audit needed to be proportionate, seeking to identify the key strengths which should be retained in a future structure and any significant weaknesses which needed to be resolved. Subsequently in September 2011, the Scottish Government announced its commitment to deliver a single Fire and Rescue Service for Scotland and published its outline business case. Between October and November 2011 it published a further consultation paper, *Keeping Scotland Safe and Strong*, on how the future service will work in practice. The outcome of this consultation process is not yet known.
6. During 2011, audits are being carried out at each of the eight Scottish fire and rescue services and authorities. These are seeking to focus on core issues, such as strategic planning, the role of members, financial management, and service performance and costs. These local reports, which will support improvement and local accountability, will be followed by the publication of a national overview report in 2012. A number of best value issues, including equalities, sustainability and procurement have not been covered directly in the scope of the local audit work. These, along with a range of other issues, will be covered in the national overview report.

7. We carried out the Best Value audit of Central Scotland Fire and Rescue (CSFR) during May and June 2011. We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided to the audit team by the chief fire officer, Kenny Taylor; the convenor of the joint board, Councillor Alan Nimmo, and all other elected members and staff involved.

Summary

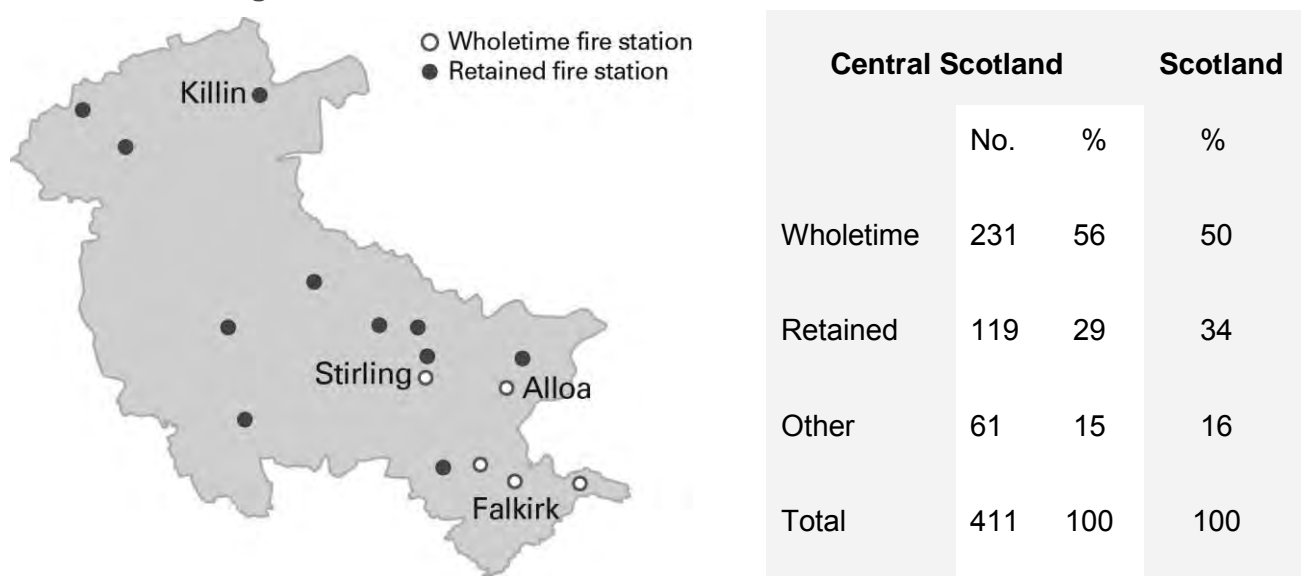
8. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue provides an effective and low cost emergency response service. Over the past ten years there has also been a significant fall in the number of fires and related deaths and injuries in the area it serves. Its cost per head of population has remained below the Scottish average, with significant reductions in staff numbers and costs made in recent years.
9. There are strengths in some of the organisation's management arrangements, particularly those relating to workforce management. Its workforce has been streamlined, a staff appraisal system has been introduced and sickness absence levels are the lowest in Scotland. There is a strong emphasis on health and safety, with important improvements made in the arrangements for maintaining the skills of retained firefighters. It also been able to make significant cuts in its expenditure.
10. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue demonstrates a clear commitment to partnership working. It takes part in a range of community safety initiatives aimed at educating young people and shares some facilities with local police and ambulance services. There remains scope for greater coordination and scrutiny of partnership work to evaluate its impact in reducing risks and saving lives.
11. However, several key aspects of Best Value are not fully established within Central Scotland Fire & Rescue. While the board has appropriate governance arrangements, members provide a limited role in helping to set the organisation's strategic direction, prioritising its use of resources and in monitoring and scrutinising its progress in delivering its objectives. Integrated risk management planning is used at a local level to help drive the use of resources, but it is not used to provide a clear strategic overview of community risks and the action being taken to mitigate them.
12. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue's fire prevention work lacks a clear strategy. It carries out a relatively high level of statutory fire audits in non-domestic premises but a low number of home fire safety visits. It is improving the way it targets preventative work towards risk groups, although it can better share risk information with partners to improve this further. After many years of decreases, the number of fires within Central Scotland has increased during the past two years, in contrast to the national trend. This highlights the need for an increasing focus on fire prevention.
13. Performance management has been weak. The Service Development Plan sets out a programme of actions which are linked to its strategic aims, but it lacks measurable objectives against which success in delivering its vision can be judged. Until recently, performance monitoring has been limited and has not been used, at a strategic level, to help inform scrutiny and drive improvements. Managers have recognised these weaknesses and have now started to establish a more comprehensive performance management framework. Similarly, they have started to address significant weaknesses in asset management and information and communications technology (ICT).

14. The pace of change has been slow within Central Scotland Fire & Rescue, with many of its weaknesses having been raised by the Accounts Commission in 2006. The board and senior managers are aware of the issues facing them and more importantly, have recently shown a willingness to make difficult decisions to address them.

Part 1. Context

15. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue is one of the smallest fire and rescue services in Scotland, serving a population of around 286,000 across 1,015 square miles in the Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannanshire Council areas. This represents 5.5 per cent of Scotland's population and 3.4 per cent of its area.
16. While this area is relatively small, it is diverse; covering densely populated urban areas in the central belt to sparsely populated and remote rural areas in the Trossachs. As well as containing comparatively affluent areas, it also contains significant pockets of deprivation with heightened fire risks. The area also contains one of Europe's largest petrochemical complexes at Grangemouth which, along with the docks and timber yards, make it one of the largest fire risks in Scotland.

Exhibit 1: Staffing and fire stations in Central Scotland



Source: Scottish Fire and Rescue Advisory Unit (SFRAU)

17. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue spent £14.6 million in 2010/11, employing 411 staff (full time equivalent), including 231 wholetime and 119 retained firefighters. As well as its headquarters in Maddiston, near Falkirk, these are based in 17 fire stations throughout the area. Of these, five are staffed by wholetime fire crews (Stirling, Falkirk, Larbert, Alloa and Bo'ness) with the remaining 12 staffed by retained fire crews (Exhibit 1). It has 34 fire appliances. Most of these are standard fire engines, although it has some specialist appliances for instances such as water rescue and urban search and rescue.
18. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue is governed by a Joint Fire and Rescue Board (the board) that comprises 11 councillors from Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling Councils. The board meets five times per year, and is supported by the Best Value & Scrutiny, and Resources and Joint Consultative subcommittees.

Part 2. Governance and management

Vision and strategic direction

Central Scotland Fire & Rescue's approach to Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) does not provide a clear overview of community risks and its planned use of resources. Risk analyses are used to inform changes in resources, but these tend to be at local station, rather than at a strategic, level. Members of Central Scotland Joint Fire and Rescue Board need to provide greater strategic oversight of the service in fulfilling their governance and scrutiny role.

19. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue's strategic objectives are clearly set out in its annual service development plan (SDP) (Exhibit 2). Within its SDP there is a clear programme of risk based actions linked to each strategic aim, but lacks measurable objectives against which success in delivering its vision can be judged.

Exhibit 2: Central Scotland Fire & Rescue's strategic objectives

- Protecting our community
- Influencing community behaviour
- Reducing our impact on the environment
- Providing good value for money to our communities
- Acting as a good employer

Source: Central Scotland Fire & Rescue, Service Development Plan 2010/11

20. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue has integrated its approach to risk management planning (IRMP) within its SDP risk based. It uses its community risk register as a focus for developing its annual objectives, although the links between this and its SDP are not clear.
21. It has used its IRMP framework, underpinned by risk analysis using Fire Services Emergency Cover (FSEC), to inform some resource changes, for example, upgrading Larbert fire station from retained to wholetime, primarily to provide a better response to the new Falkirk Royal Infirmary. It also used risk analysis to develop proposals for two single pump stations in Stirling rather than the current two pump station, despite this not going ahead due to prolonged delays in major housing development.
22. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue recognises its SDP does not provide a complete strategic overview of the key risks facing the community, planned measures to mitigate these risks and how this influences its use of its resources. It is working to more directly link information on the risks to, and the make up of, its communities to its work plans.
23. In 2009/10, it extended its IRMP framework with the introduction of risk profiles for its five whole-time fire stations. These describe risks relevant to the area, for example, hospitals,

care homes, schools, flooding and industrial risks, etc., but the nature of the specific risks facing each station and how they determine local priorities is not clear. Station risk profiles contain targets for home fire safety visits, but these are standard across all five stations, and would benefit from being tailored towards the specific local context and risks. Beyond these targets, the risk profiles do not serve as a useful management tool as there are no station specific actions or targets.

24. Station risk profiles do include activity statistics that help inform how resources have been used. These relate to 2008/09, and are yet to be updated since the profiles were developed. To ensure the risk profiles provide a more useful tool to support discussion with partners and communities it is important that they are kept up to date. Central Scotland Fire and Rescue plans to extend risk profiles to the remaining retained stations over the next year. This will be a potentially positive development in targeting the training needs and work of retained stations.
25. In recent years, Central Scotland Joint Fire and Rescue Board has taken steps to strengthen its leadership role. Members have been playing a more active role in determining the organisation's strategic direction, although there remains scope for them to have a greater strategic oversight of the service and to engage in strategic discussions around desired outcomes.
26. Four members of the joint board act as thematic “champions” in the areas of operations, community safety, health and safety and equal opportunities. The purpose of champions is to take on a specific role in: representing the board at service forums/management groups; contributing to discussion and monitoring of issues in their area of responsibility; and providing feedback to the board to supplement the chief fire officer's written reports. Champions take an active involvement in their areas of interest, visiting front line staff and developing a good understanding of their subject. The principle of the champion role is positive in strengthening governance, however, the value that the champion role has added in influencing strategic direction and scrutinising performance in order to help drive improvements is not significant. As such, the champion role can be developed further.

Partnership working

Central Scotland Fire & Rescue demonstrates a clear commitment to partnership working, but there is little coordination or scrutiny of this work by board members. The service takes part in a range of community safety initiatives aimed at educating young people, but can better evaluate the impact this work has in reducing risks and saving lives. There are examples of shared facilities with local police and ambulance services, but only limited examples of shared services with other fire and rescue services.

27. 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 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.

28. There is a clear commitment within Central Scotland Fire & Rescue to working in partnership with other local organisations, particularly through the three community safety partnerships established for the Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannanshire Council areas. Senior officers from Central Scotland Fire & Rescue are active members in each of these partnerships as are members of the constituent councils. Only one community safety partnership has representation from a member of the joint fire and rescue board. Whilst members' representation on partnerships is not essential, there is a need to strengthen the joint board's coordination and scrutiny of this partnership work.
29. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue plays an active role in a range of local partnership activities that help promote a greater awareness of safety issues amongst the local community. For example, it is a key player in the „Safe Drive, Stay Alive“ project, aimed at young car drivers. Similarly, with „Crucial Crew“, it works with local schools, police, ambulance and voluntary bodies to help educate Primary 7 children on risks that they might face. Another project, „Act Safe, Keep Safe“, is targeted at young people at risk of being excluded from the education system. These initiatives have the potential, among other things, to save lives and reduce future demands on fire and rescue services. An annual review of „Safe Drive, Stay Alive“ is carried out to help continuously improve this major prevention initiative. Beyond that, there has been no evaluation to determine whether partnership initiatives deliver the desired outcomes and make best use of available resources.
30. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue also works closely with partners in planning for civil contingencies. It takes part in the Central Scotland Strategic Coordinating Group, which carries out high level risk planning for major incidents which could disrupt the area. For example, there is an active partnership at the Grangemouth petro-chemical works, involving police, local authority and industry representatives. All of this activity is summarised in the Central Scotland Community Risk Register (CSCRR), setting out the major risks facing the area and the action taken by each partner to manage these risks. At an operational level, however, it is difficult to see how the risks identified in the CSCRR inform the risk profiles and resourcing of individual fire stations.
31. There are also other examples of successful partnership working at a more operational level, aimed at generating efficiencies. For example, a vehicle maintenance service is shared with Central Scotland Police. In addition, local stations are shared with the Scottish Ambulance Service in Larbert and Callender and proposals are now being considered to share stations at Aberfoyle and Bridge of Allan with the police.
32. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue also works in partnership with neighbouring fire and rescue services, particularly in providing additional resources for emergency responses. This forms

part of resource planning with, for example, increases in its mobilisation arrangement in Alloa and Larbert to take account of reduced cover in neighbouring areas of West Fife.

33. There are no significant shared services with other fire and rescue services. Many options have been explored, with initial investigations carried out into 19 areas of possible collaboration and four of these subject to a detailed appraisal. The cost of the human resources (HR) service, for example, was expected to have been halved by shared arrangements with Fife and Tayside. Despite 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

Central Scotland Fire & Rescue has not had a strong culture of improvement, with significant weaknesses in performance monitoring and scrutiny by elected members and no strategic approach to self-assessments to help drive improvements. A performance management framework has recently been introduced to help address some of these concerns.

34. There has not been a strong organisational culture of improvement within Central Scotland Fire & Rescue. Many of the issues raised in Audit Scotland's 2006 report have still not been addressed effectively. For example, its draft human resources strategy has yet to be finalised and weaknesses in performance management have only begun to be addressed very recently.
35. Performance management and scrutiny has been weak. While a wide range of operational monitoring is carried out, performance monitoring has not been used effectively at a strategic level to identify areas of under performance and to help drive improvements. The range of performance information routinely monitored by senior managers and reported to board members and the public has been limited and infrequent. For example, no performance reports were presented to the scrutiny committee between April 2009 and March 2011.
36. Managers have recognised the importance of improving performance management and, in November 2010, established a performance management framework. More detailed, quarterly monitoring reports are now being reviewed by the senior management team and by the scrutiny committee. Whilst this demonstrates a positive improvement, the implementation of the performance management framework is still in its early stages. As such, there remains scope for including more comprehensive performance information against which the success of objectives can be measured. For example, they lack information on automatic fire alarms (AFAs) which represent the bulk of calls or operational assurance and would be strengthened by more qualitative information and benchmarks with other fire and rescue services. Members are however, provided with annual monitoring information for the indicators that the service contributes to in each of the Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) for the three constituent councils.

37. There are also weaknesses in the scrutiny of performance by board members. To some extent, this reflects the weaknesses that have existed in performance monitoring and reporting. Members provide strong, independent challenge on specific operational issues, such as the maintenance of buildings and replacement of vehicles, and they do monitor budgets effectively. However, they provide little challenge on monitoring more strategic issues, such as the implementation of IRMP, the deployment of resources to match identified risks, or on the achievement of strategic aims.
38. Performance management is stronger at an operational level, with a range of activity reports monitored at station level. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue also carries out debriefs for all significant incidents, seeking to identify weaknesses in working arrangement or crew performance. However, there are also gaps in operational performance management. There is currently no consistent system of operational audits or quality assurance, to proactively ensure that stations are complying with standards. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue are aware of these gaps in their arrangements and have plans to address them over the next year.
39. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue also lacks a systematic approach to using self-evaluation or review to help drive improvements in service delivery. Although it is now taking action to improve the service, for example implementing a management restructure, much of this has been driven by budget constraints. The absence of a systematic improvement programme has contributed to longstanding areas for improvement having not been addressed.

Part 3. Use of resources

Central Scotland Fire & Rescue manages its financial and human resources well, but there are significant weaknesses in its systems for managing assets and information communications technology (ICT). It is generating greater efficiency from its human resources to deliver better value services but is not yet able to demonstrate efficiency from its other assets. The joint board's oversight and scrutiny of the use of resources is underdeveloped.

40. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue has been developing a greater focus on reducing cost and improving efficiency. It has effective financial controls and well-established processes for setting and monitoring budgets, but lacks effective plans and strategies to best manage its workforce and assets within the budgets available.
41. Members of the joint board approve and monitor the service revenue budget and capital programme. The board regularly scrutinises financial performance and its champions are playing an increasingly active role in examining other operational resource issues, such as health and safety and equality and diversity. This is particularly evident through the Resources and Joint Consultative subcommittee. However, the long-standing absence of systematic approaches to managing important resources highlights that the joint board's oversight and scrutiny of the use of resources is a significant area for development. It needs to address this to meet its Best Value duties and to deliver savings and efficiencies for Central Scotland as funding reduces across the public sector.

Financial management

Central Scotland Fire & Rescue currently has a sound financial position and steps have been taken to meet budget cuts for 2011/12.

42. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue currently has a sound financial position, with reserves of £2.2 million. However, it is now facing significant financial challenges. Its revenue budget for 2011/12 has been set at £14.9 million which, after adjusting for pension costs and lump sum payments, represents a cut of around five per cent compared to the previous year. A range of short-term efficiency measures, such as reductions in overtime and managing vacancies have been identified by management in order to meet this reduced funding. These have already generated reported savings of £0.8 million in 2010/11.
43. Consistent with projected cuts in future public sector funding, Central Scotland Fire & Rescue has developed a budget reduction strategy for the coming years. At the time of our audit, a number of further efficiency measures, such as a new shift system or charging for some services, were being considered to meet projected budget cuts of around four per cent in each of the next four years. The willingness to tackle these difficult issues to deliver savings is a very positive move towards achieving better value services. During the transition period to the creation of a single fire and rescue service in 2013, it is important that there is a clear

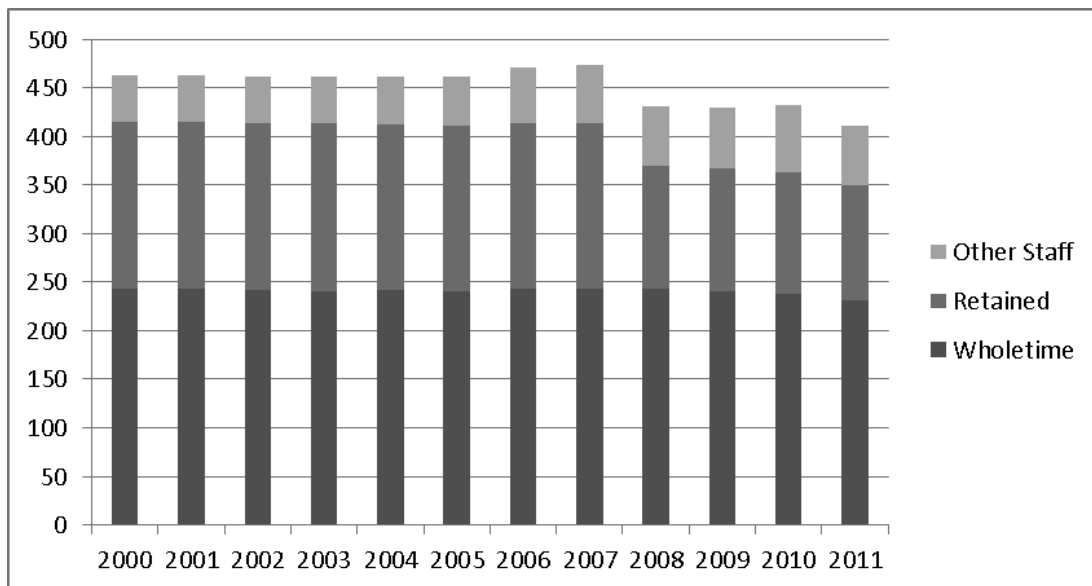
approach to managing resources and that the joint board maintains appropriate financial oversight of Central Scotland Fire & Rescue.

Workforce management

Central Scotland Fire & Rescue has an effective approach to workforce management. An organisational restructuring has reduced the number of senior managers and support staff. Over the past four years, there has also been a significant fall in the number of firefighters. A staff appraisal system has been introduced, although it does not yet apply to principal officers or retained firefighters. It demonstrates a strong commitment to health and safety, with significant improvements made to the training for retained firefighters. Its sickness absence levels are the lowest in Scotland.

44. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue does not have an overall workforce strategy, to ensure that the number, grade, location, and training of staff are in line with its service priorities, but it does have a managed approach to restructuring and reducing the size of the workforce in light of reducing resources. A number of important workforce policies and changes have been implemented over the past year to generate savings. A management restructure has reduced the number of senior managers, six support posts have been deleted, and further support and firefighter posts have remained vacant. Over the past four years, there has also been a significant reduction in the size of the workforce, reflecting the long term fall in the number of fires and changes in risks. This reduction is particularly noticeable in the number of retained firefighters, which has fallen from 170 in 2007 to 119 in 2011 (Exhibit 3).

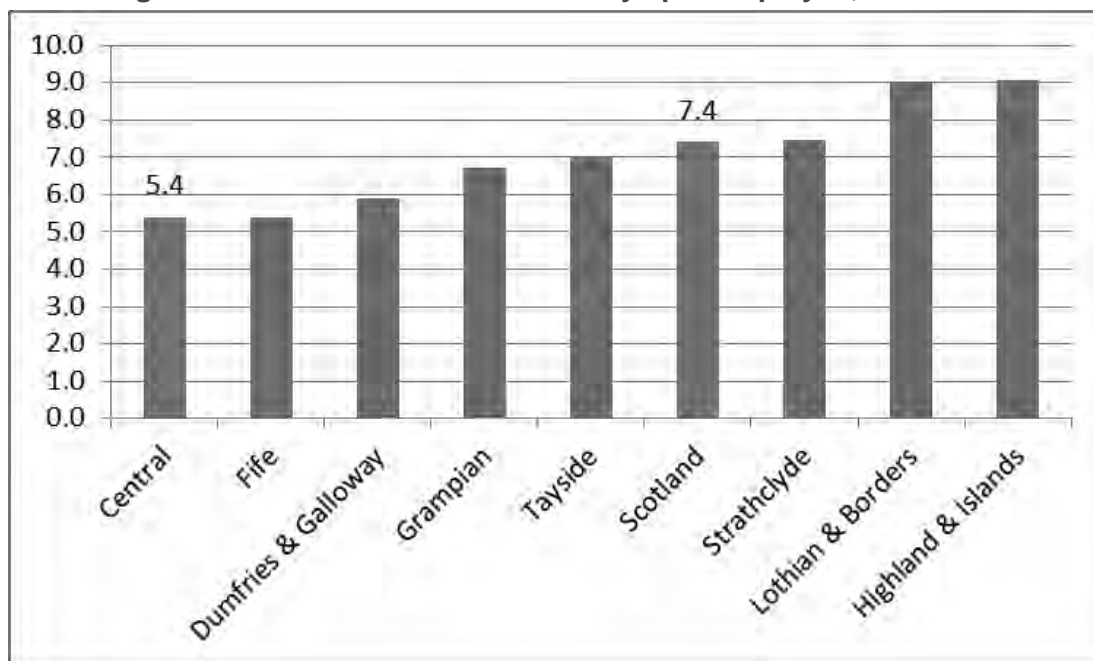
Exhibit 3: Central Scotland Fire & Rescue, staff numbers (full time equivalent)



Source: Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)

45. A staff appraisal system was introduced during 2010, linking training needs with the performance of individuals and with service and business objectives. This aims to cover all staff, but it does not apply to the chief fire officer and his two directors, or to retained duty firefighters.
46. Staff are provided with appropriate training and their skills regularly maintained. A Learning and Development Procedure for Firefighters has recently been implemented, helping to standardise the training provided. Responsibility for managing the delivery of training to whole-time firefighters is fully devolved to station level and is prioritised according to local risks identified in the station plans. Coaching is also available for senior managers during their first 100 days in post to support them in their leadership role.
47. Each retained station now has a whole-time station manager dedicated to overseeing the coverage and quality of training programmes. Evidence suggests that this is having a positive impact on the competence demonstrated by retained firefighters when responding to emergencies. However, there are still some challenges in delivering the training and development for retained firefighters. The absence of local risk profiles for retained stations means that training is generic, rather than driven by local risks. There may also be a need to consider increasing the time currently dedicated to retained firefighter training. Retained staff that we met with expressed some concerns that their locally-contracted level of two hours per week was not sufficient to meet their increased range of responsibilities and maintain health and safety standards. Some other fire and rescue services provide three hours of training each week for their retained firefighters.
48. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue has a strong commitment to health and safety. It has a dedicated Health and Safety Advisor, its policy was updated in early 2011, and a board member acts as a health and safety „champion“. Regular six-monthly health and safety updates are provided to the Resources and Joint Consultative Committee. 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 and Safety Executive's (HSE). This strong commitment looks to have had a positive impact, with the annual number of firefighter injuries falling from 30 to 23 over the past three years.
49. There is also an effective approach to managing sickness absence, with a clear absence management policy and an effective occupational health service. In recent years, Central Scotland Fire & Rescue has consistently maintained low levels of sickness absence. It recorded an average of 5.4 days per employee in 2010/11, the lowest of all the fire and rescue services in Scotland (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4: Average number of sickness absence days per employee, 2010/11



Source: Audit Scotland Statutory Performance Indicators

Asset management

Central Scotland Fire & Rescue does not have a systematic, corporate, approach to managing its assets. Overall, however, we found no significant concerns about the suitability of operational equipment or the maintenance of property. In 2005/06, it invested heavily in two aerial rescue pumps (ARPs) to deliver improved efficiency, but these were unsuitable for use. It has under invested in ICT in recent years but is now seeking to address this.

50. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue does not have a systematic, corporate approach to managing its assets, providing a clear link between its service priorities and its capital investment. It has information on the condition of some of its assets, such as property and appliances, but it does not have a comprehensive asset register. Similarly, while it has separate plans for maintaining buildings and equipment, there is no unified asset management plan. These weaknesses were raised by Audit Scotland in 2006. The need for robust asset management arrangements is recognised in the Service Development Plan, with a commitment to address the issue during 2011/12.
51. This lack of management information makes it difficult for our audit to assess the condition of its buildings and equipment. However, in meetings with front line staff and their representatives, we found no significant concerns about the suitability of operational equipment or the maintenance of property. As part of a programme of efficiency savings, the operational life of fire appliances has been extended from 12 to 15 years. However, we found no concerns expressed about their maintenance or effectiveness.

52. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue owns two aerial rescue pumps (ARPs), purchased in a 'spend to save' initiative in 2005/6 for over £0.8 million. The specification of these vehicles has proved to be unsuitable for operational use and Central Scotland Fire & Rescue has now put them up for sale.
53. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue has acknowledged that it has under-invested in IT during recent years. It has identified around 50 areas where IT systems need to be better developed and integrated to improve the accessibility and reliability of data. It has now formed an IT steering group, with a prioritised action plan to address these issues. This will be an important area to consider over the next few years within the context of a new national structure.

Part 4. Service performance

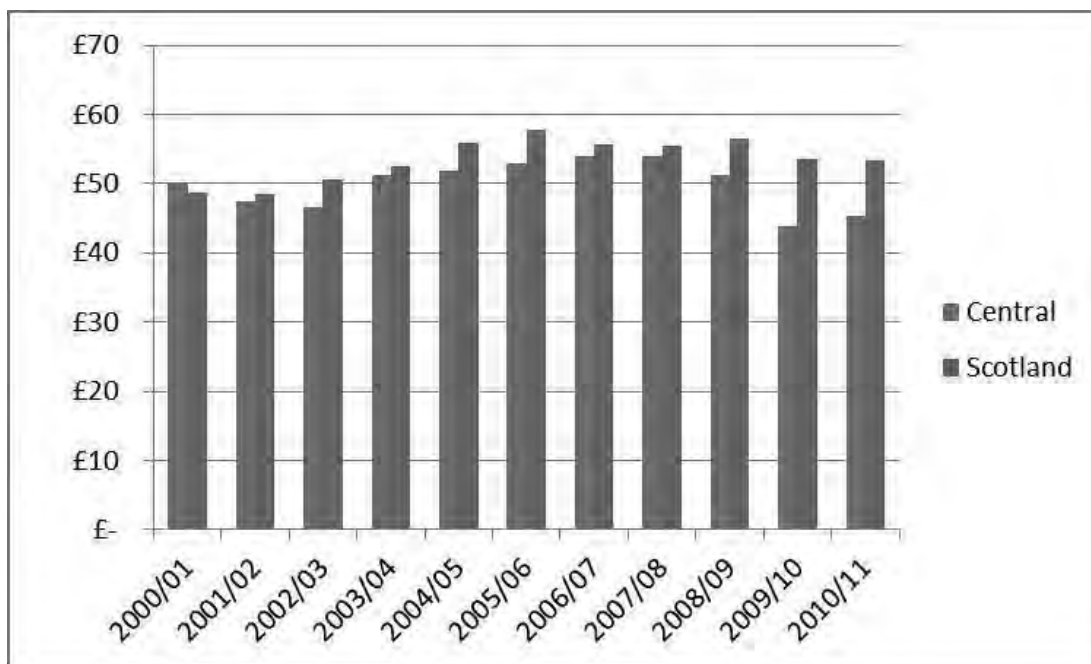
Central Scotland Fire & Rescue provides an effective and low cost emergency response service. However, it lacks a clear focus on prevention. While it carries out a relatively high level of fire safety audits in non-domestic premises, it carries out very low numbers of home fire safety visits. This work has not been strongly targeted by risk assessments, although this is now starting to be addressed. In line with national trends, there have been significant falls in the number of fires, although these have increased slightly over the past year.

Service costs

Central Scotland Fire & Rescue provides a relatively low cost service. Its operating costs are below the Scottish average and, in real terms, have reduced by around five per cent over the past three years.

- 54. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue’s operating costs per capita are the third lowest in Scotland. In 2010/11, excluding pension costs, it spent £50 per head of population, below the Scottish average of £53 (Exhibit 5). This may simply reflect the specific needs of the area it serves. However, over the past decade, there have been only modest increases in its expenditure. In turn, over the past four years, its costs have fallen. Reflecting the decrease in the size of its workforce, its costs have fallen by around five per cent in real terms since 2007/8.

Exhibit 5: Real terms costs per head of population, 2000/01 to 2010/11



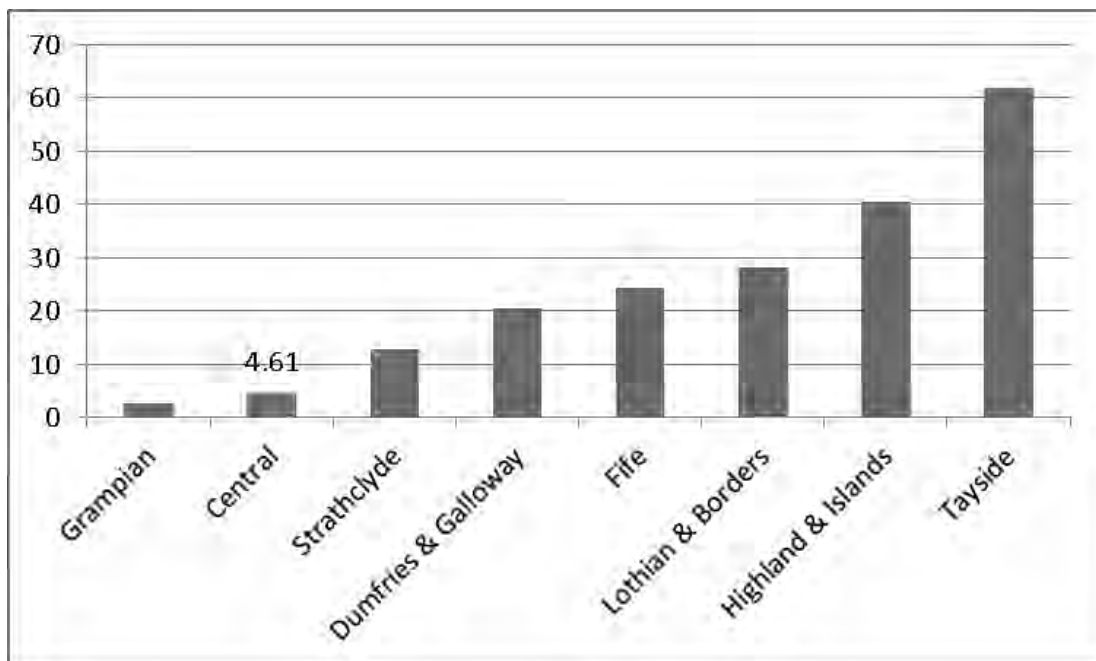
Source: CIPFA data adjusted by HM Treasury GDP deflator

Prevention

Central Scotland Fire & Rescue does not have a clear strategy to direct its preventative work. It delivers a high level of prevention activity to non-domestic premises but a low number of home fire safety visits (HFSVs). It has begun to target its HFSVs towards individuals at greatest risk but this needs to be developed further.

55. A key feature of the introduction of IRMP and the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 was an increased emphasis on preventative work. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue does not have an up to date community safety strategy and lacks a clear approach to its preventative work. In broad terms, however, it seeks to meet its preventative responsibilities through home fire safety visits, statutory fire audits, and various community safety education projects.
56. Compared with other fire and rescue services, Central Scotland Fire & Rescue carries out a low number of home fire safety visits (Exhibit 6). Options to increase the level of this work have been explored over the past year, but there has not yet been any clear improvement. A scheme for using retained firefighters to carry out some visits was piloted in 2010 but has not yet progressed further. In line with the national report *Scotland Together* consideration is also now being given to recruiting voluntary staff but again this has not yet been implemented.

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

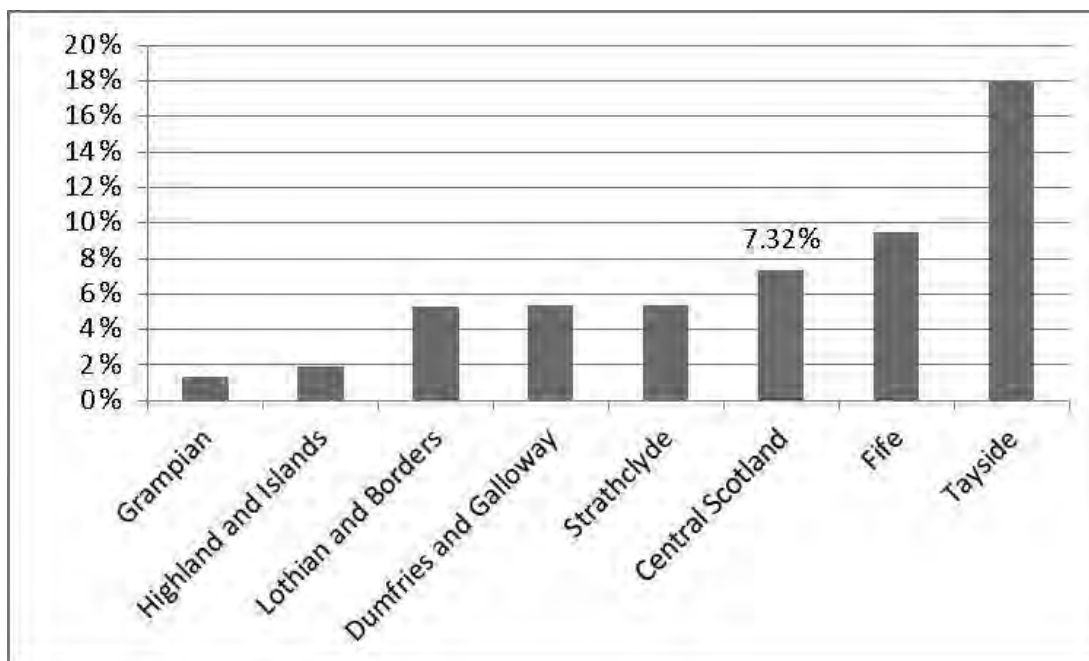


Source: Chief Fire Officers Association for Scotland (CFOAS) Performance Indicators 2009/10

57. Targeting HFSVs towards those individuals at most risk is of great importance in maximising the potential impact of preventative work. There has generally been little targeting of this work towards high risk areas in Central Scotland. In previous years, the completion of home fire safety visits has been predominantly reactive to requests from the public and “hot strikes” carried out in surrounding properties immediately after a fire has occurred, rather than driven by clearly identifies risks.

58. A more proactive, risk-based approach is now being taken to HFSVs. In 2010, a Vulnerable Persons Referral (VPR) scheme was established in partnership with Central Scotland Police, helping to identify individuals who represent a higher level of risk. The VPR scheme is still at a relatively early stage but now generates around 20 per cent of the HFSVs carried out. The service is looking to build on this further by targeting a greater proportion towards risk. In better targeting its HFSV activity, Central Scotland Fire & Rescue has indicated that it expects its number of visits to fall. However, comparing prevention activity levels with other fire and rescue services indicates capacity to significantly increase activity in home fire safety visits across Central Scotland.
59. A key challenge in targeting prevention activity for all fire and rescue services is sharing information with partners to identify those people most vulnerable to fire. Beyond its VPR scheme with Central Scotland Police, this is an area for Central Scotland Fire & Rescue to develop further.
60. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue has a stronger 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, 482 statutory fire audits were carried out in Central Scotland, representing just over seven per cent of non-domestic properties in the area. This is the third highest proportion in Scotland (Exhibit 7). This work was also targeted, with a focus on higher risk properties such as care homes, hotels and houses in multiple-occupation.

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



Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

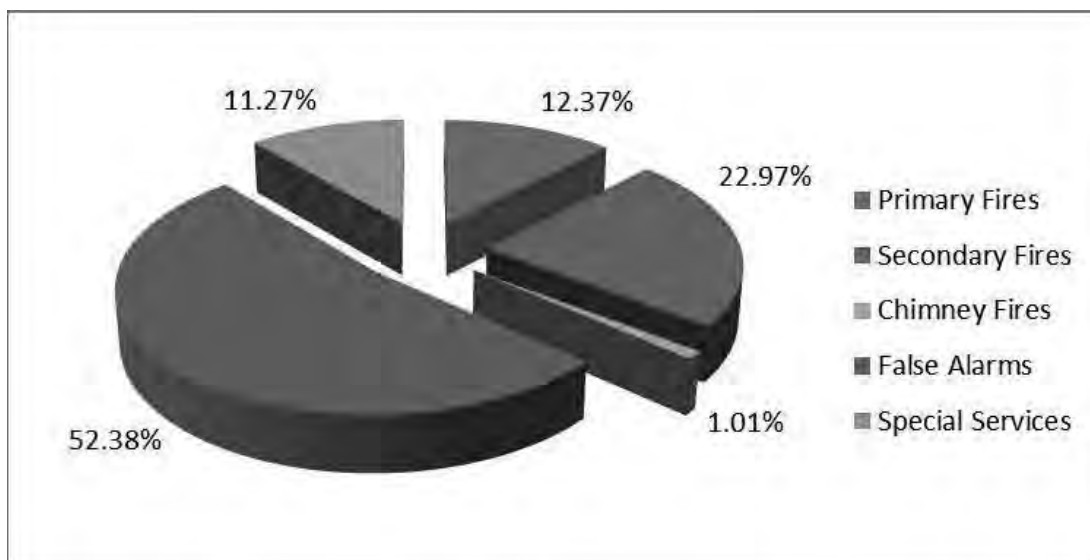
61. As part of its preventative work, Central Scotland Fire & Rescue also works with its local partners to provide community safety advice through a programme of school visits, public events and other initiatives. Initiatives such as „Crucial Crew“, „Safe Drive, Stay Alive“ and „Act Safe, Keep Safe“ are targeted on risk groups, such as 18 to 25 year olds, and are well regarded by participants and partner organisations. However, it lacks clear evidence to demonstrate which initiatives are most successful and provide best value in helping to reduce fires and other accidents.

Emergency response

In line with national trends, there has been a long-term decline in the number of fires in Central Scotland, although these have increased in recent years. There has been some success in reducing the number of hoax calls, but this has been offset by significant increases in the number of false alarms. It has yet to effectively review its response to false alarms, which is the biggest demand on its resources. Emergency response times have remained consistent over the past decade and are in line with other fire and rescue services.

62. In 2010/11, Central Scotland Fire & Rescue responded to just under 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 Central Scotland, 2010/11

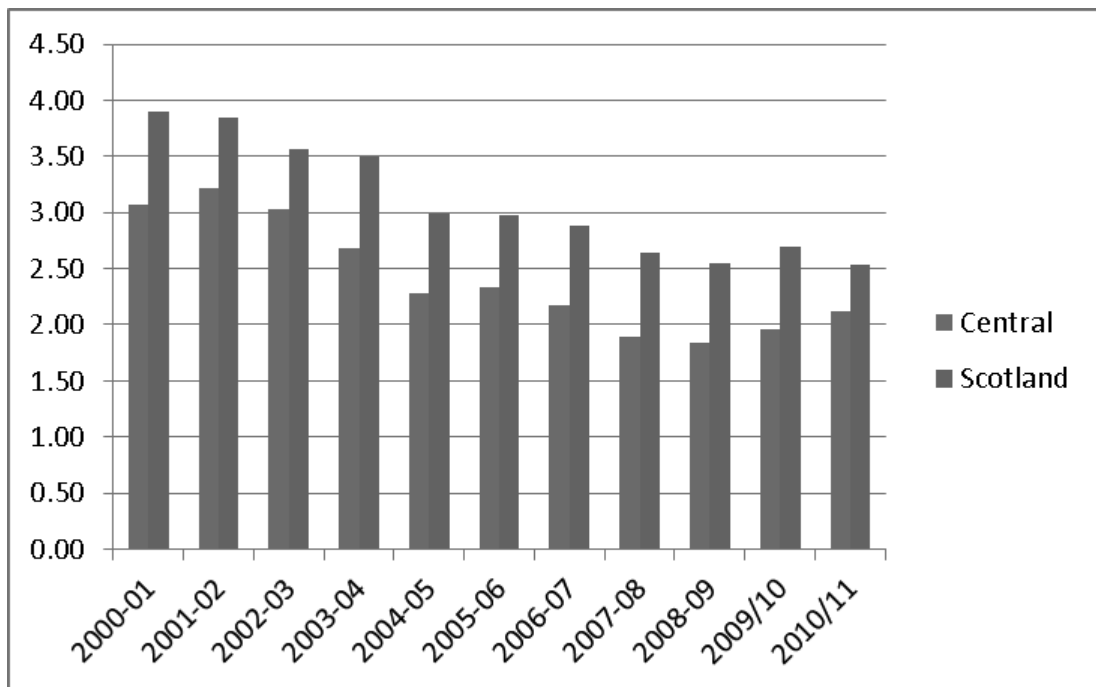


Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

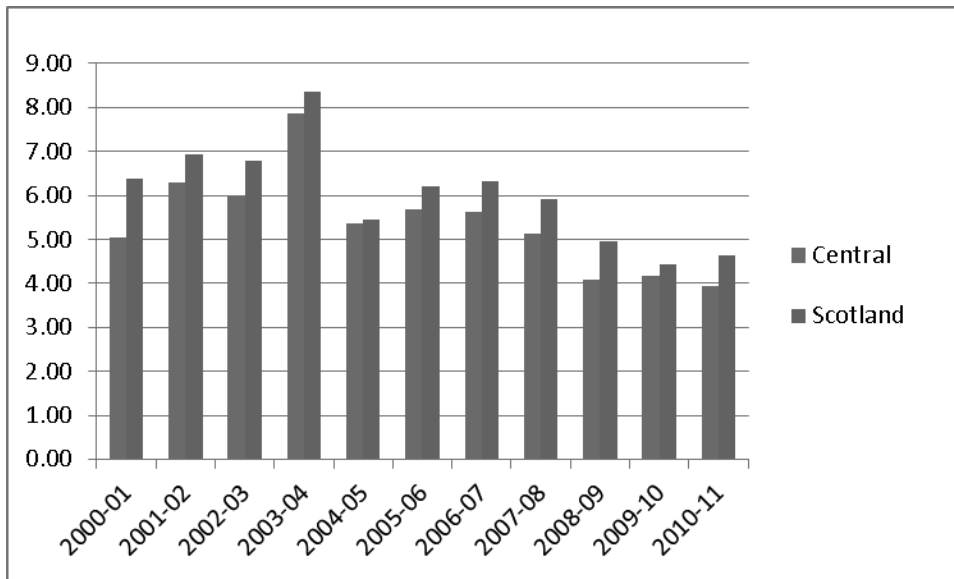
Number of fires and casualties

63. Historically, the level of fires and casualties within Central Scotland has been below the Scottish average. In line with national trends over the past decade, however, there has continued to be significant falls in the number of primary and secondary fires (Exhibits 9 and 10). This can only act as an indirect indicator of Central Scotland Fire & Rescue's performance as these trends are likely to be influenced by wider social issues, such as improvements in the housing stock or a decline in the number of people smoking. The spike in secondary fires during 2003/4, for example, was due to a dry summer and an increase in grassland fires.
64. Within this overall decline, there have been increases in the number of primary and secondary fires since 2008/9. This may be influenced by the current economic conditions or a simply a short-term statistical anomaly and it would be difficult to draw any firm conclusions. However, in line with the concerns raised earlier in this report about the number and targeting of home fire safety visits, this may suggest that Central Scotland Fire & Rescue needs to place a greater emphasis on its preventative work.

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

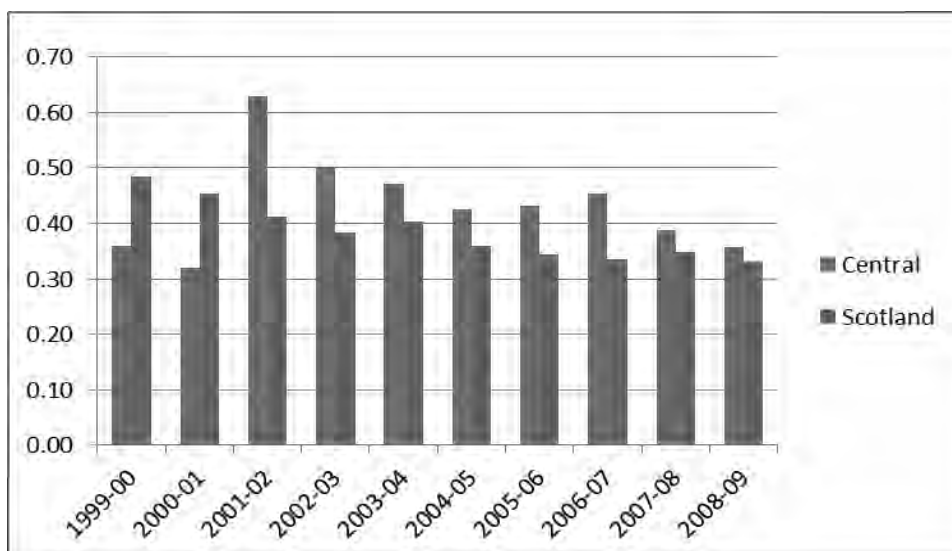


Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

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

Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

65. Over the last decade, casualty rates in Central Scotland have been consistently above the national average but have fallen by 46 per cent in line with the national rate (Exhibit 11). However, in 2009/10, Central Scotland recorded a significant decrease in casualties to 0.18 per 1,000 population. This primarily reflects a definitional change in the way casualties are recorded nationally¹. It now records the third lowest rate in Scotland, significantly below the national average.

Exhibit 11: Casualties per 1,000 population

Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

¹ In 2009/10, the Scottish Government changed its definition for casualty statistics, meaning that it is not possible to compare data from 2009/10 with that for previous years.

Special Services

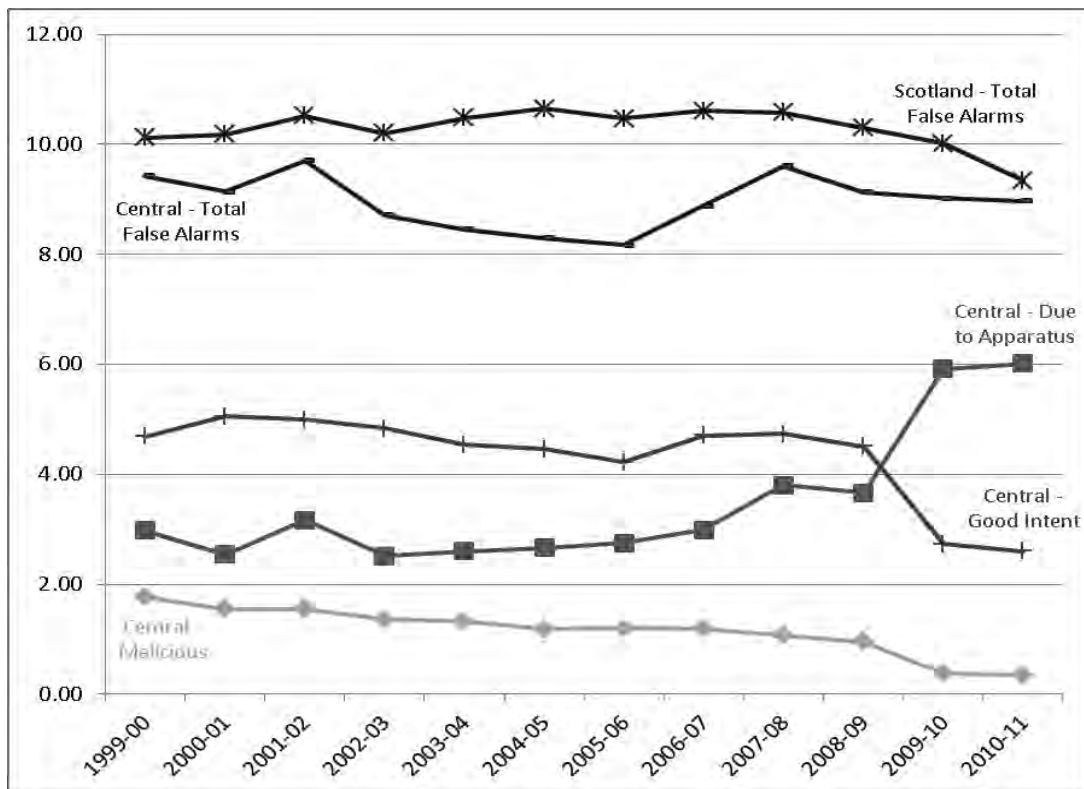
66. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue responds to an increasing number of „special service incidents“, such as flooding and road traffic collisions. These now represent around 11 per cent of its emergency responses. However, there are no performance measures available locally or nationally to assess the standard of this work. However, it is clear that Central Scotland Fire & Rescue has improved its capacity to deal with these incidents. In particular, it has responded to increased flooding incidents through the introduction of a water rescue capability in Stirling.

False alarms

67. 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 Central Scotland Fire & Rescue'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.

68. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue's overall level of false alarms is close to the Scottish average (Exhibit 12). In recent years, Central Scotland Fire & Rescue has been successful in helping to reduce the number of hoax calls. By methods such as call screening, these have reduced by around two thirds, from 276 in 2008/09 to 102 in 2010/11. Overall, however, it has been less successful in reducing the total number of false alarms, the bulk of which are generated by automatic fire alarms (AFAs) which account for over half of all calls received.

Exhibit 12: False alarms per 1,000 population



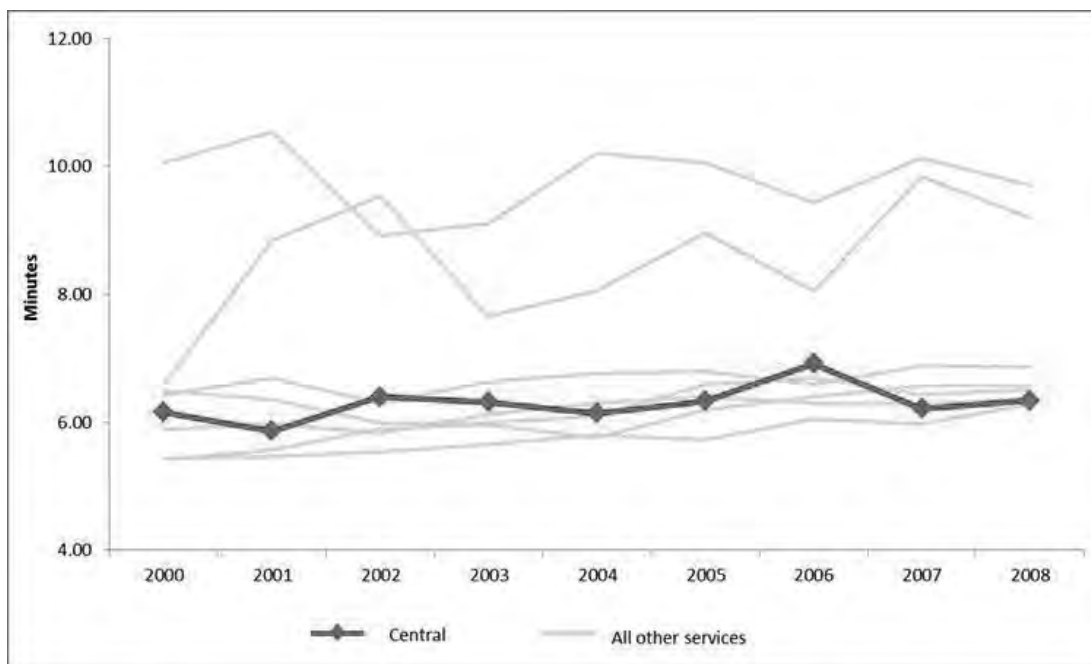
Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

69. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue does not routinely monitor and report on the number of AFAs as part of its performance management system and has been comparatively slow in analysing and reviewing its response to AFA risks. It has recently been considering its pre-determined responses, having identified that there is significant scope to make its responses more efficient. For example, despite sending out a high reach appliance to several hundred AFA calls each year (around 17 per cent of all AFA calls) it has never been used.

Emergency response standards

70. 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.
71. Central Scotland Fire & Rescue has adopted a general emergency response standard for dwelling fires of 80 per cent of all incidents attended within ten minutes, although this is not further categorised by risk. It is currently meeting this standard, with an average response time of nine minutes in 2010/11.
72. As part of its 2011 report, *Review of the Implementation and Impact of Integrated Risk Management Planning in Scottish Fire and Rescue Services*, the Scottish Fire & Rescue Advisory Unit (SFRAU), showed that Central Scotland Fire & 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 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)

Part 5. Improvement Agenda

Strategic planning

- Central Scotland Fire and Rescue's IRMP needs to more clearly align strategies and resources with identified community risks and its service development plan requires more measurable objectives against which success in delivering its vision can be judged.
- Station risk profiles need to provide a clearer link between local risks, actions and targets and should be extended to all stations to better target training and service delivery.

Role of members

- Members of Central Scotland Joint Fire and Rescue Board need to provide greater strategic oversight of the service in fulfilling their governance and scrutiny role.
- The board needs to improve its monitoring and scrutiny of Central Scotland Fire and Rescue's performance in delivering its strategic vision.
- Consideration should be given to developing the "champion" role further, with the emphasis more on influencing strategic direction and scrutinising performance.

Performance management

- Performance management needs to be further developed, with an emphasis on measuring impact rather than just activity levels.
- Public performance reporting should be comprehensive and consolidated in a single report to be easily accessible.
- A more systematic approach to self-evaluation is needed to drive service improvement.

Partnership working

- Information sharing with partners on individuals at risk can be improved to better target prevention activity.
- The relative value of community safety initiatives needs to be better evaluated to ensure reducing resources are being most effectively directed.

Use of resources

- A systematic approach to managing all assets needs to be introduced.
- Staff appraisals need to be extended to senior managers and to retained duty firefighters.

Service delivery

- A community safety strategy needs to be developed to provide a clearer approach to preventative work.
- The pre-determined response to AFAs should be reviewed

Central Scotland Fire and Rescue

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Audit Scotland, 110 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4LH
T: 0845 146 1010 E: info@audit-scotland.gov.uk
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