

The Audit of Best Value

Grampian Fire and Rescue Service



Prepared for the Accounts Commission
March 2012



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 Grampian Fire and Rescue.
2. Grampian Fire and Rescue provides an effective service and demonstrates clear vision and areas of strength. Its use of integrated risk management planning is particularly strong. It also works well with its partners and uses its resources effectively, seen for example in sound financial management and reviewing its use of information technology.
3. While the service's use of risk reduction targets and response standards is commendable, the board needs to review the effectiveness of its preventative work. For example, the board should assure itself that its resourcing of home fire safety visits is sufficient.
4. The Commission recognises the importance that the service places on maintaining the skills of staff and the challenges that it faces in recruiting sufficient numbers of retained firefighters.
5. The Commission is encouraged that the board has carried out a self-evaluation of its role, and urges the board to make better use of the outputs of this exercise to improve further its approach to scrutiny, challenge and developing strategy. Better use by board members of training and development is also needed to this end.
6. The Commission notes that any substantial issues arising for the service will be considered as part of the annual audit process.
7. The Commission will review its findings from this audit alongside those of the forthcoming audit of all other fire and rescue services in Scotland, with a view to producing in 2012 a national overview of its work in fire and rescue.

The Audit of Best Value

1. Local authorities in Scotland, including fire and rescue, have a statutory duty to deliver best value in their services. This requires them to establish management arrangements, aimed at securing continuous improvements in their performance while maintaining an appropriate balance between quality and cost.
2. Since 2004, Audit Scotland has carried out audits of Best Value in each of the 32 councils in Scotland and in most police authorities. These audits have helped to improve performance and accountability in local government and have brought unsatisfactory performance to the public's attention through the public reporting process.
3. The responsibilities of fire and rescue services have changed significantly over the past decade. In 2003, all Scottish services were required to produce Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMP), identifying the level of local risks and determining the appropriate allocation of resources. The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 introduced further changes, placing a strong emphasis on prevention rather than simply emergency response.
4. Some aspects of Best Value in fire 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. The Scottish Government has subsequently announced its commitment to deliver a single fire and rescue service for Scotland, with details on the Police and Fire Reform Bill (Scotland) 2012 published in January 2012.
6. During 2011, audits were carried out at each of the eight Scottish fire and rescue services and authorities. These focussed on core issues, such as strategic planning, the role of members, financial management, and service performance and costs. These local reports, which aim to support improvement and local accountability, will be followed by the publication of a national overview report later 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 Grampian Fire and Rescue during July 2011. We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided to the audit team by the

Chief Fire Officer, David Dalziel; the Convenor of the joint board, Councillor Mike Raeburn, and all other elected members and staff involved.

Summary

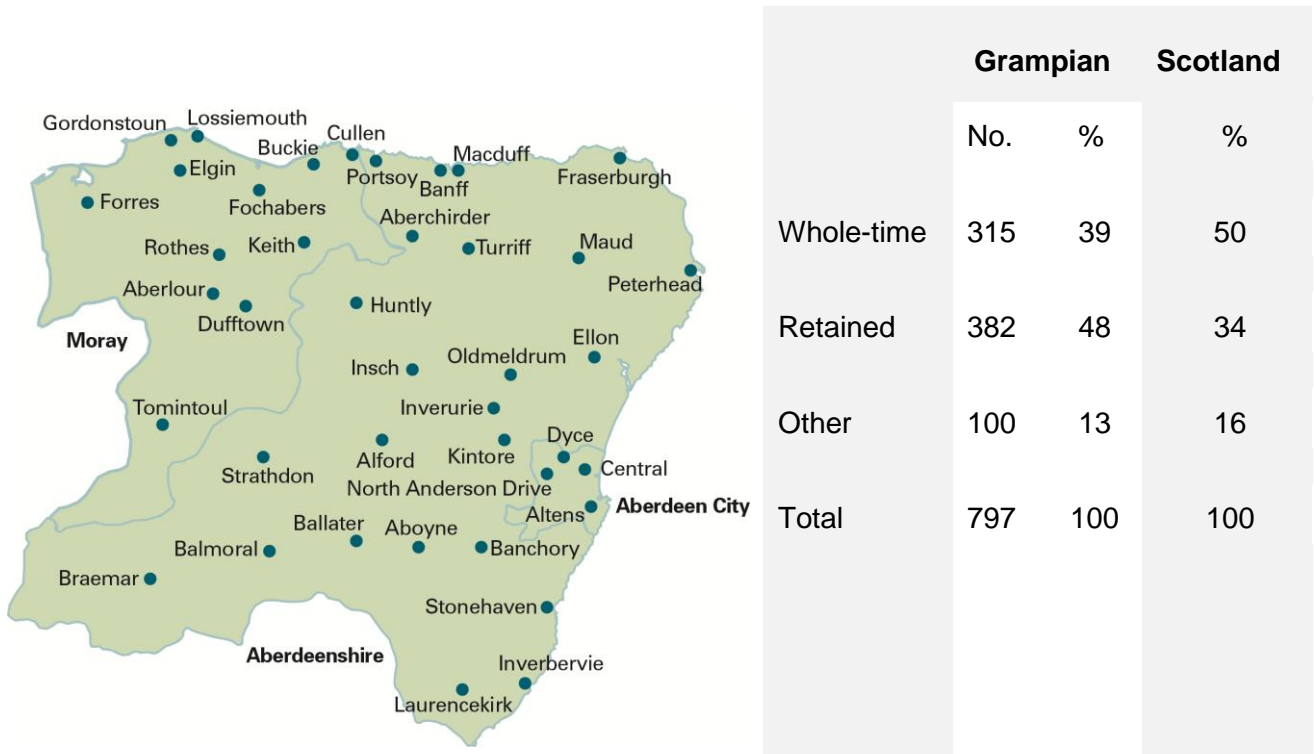
8. Grampian Fire and Rescue provides an effective and relatively low cost emergency response service. Its work has contributed towards Grampian experiencing a below average number of primary fires and the lowest level of secondary fires in Scotland. The time it takes to respond to emergencies has remained relatively constant over time and is in line with a published set of local risk-based targets.
9. There is scope for Grampian Fire and Rescue to strengthen its focus on prevention. It works effectively with partner organisations in helping to prevent fires and in reducing road traffic collisions. However, it carries out the lowest proportion of home fire safety visits and statutory fire safety audits of any Scottish fire and rescue service, although it is targeting its activity more towards high risk individuals. It also records one of the highest levels of fire related casualties, indicating the potential for its prevention activity to have a much greater impact.
10. Grampian Fire and Rescue has strengthened its management arrangements in recent years to better support the delivery of its vision. It has clear aims that cascade through corporate strategies and well-structured business plans. Its recently updated IRMP demonstrates a good analysis of local risks, with associated risk-reduction targets and response standards. Its *Community Risk Reduction Focus* document supports the IRMP well in prioritising operational activity towards minimising areas of identified risk.
11. Members have been improving their strategic leadership role and scrutiny of resources and performance. They have also taken the positive step of evaluating their own effectiveness using the Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF), although the results of this exercise highlight significant scope to carry out their role more effectively.
12. Grampian Fire and Rescue works well with its partners and through effective partnership working has been able to positively influence outcomes, such as significantly reducing secondary fires and the number of people killed or injured in road traffic collisions. As with many other fire and rescue services, it can better share information with other agencies to target community safety work more effectively towards identified areas of risk. Board members need to play a more proactive role in influencing and coordinating strategic partnership working.
13. Grampian has a well-developed performance planning and management framework. It reports a good range of performance information to the joint board and the public, but this would benefit from the inclusion of additional information and comparative data. At an operational level, its Service Improvement Team promotes a strong culture of improvement, carrying out a programme of station audits and helping provide assurance on the maintenance of training and safe working standards.
14. In the face of significant financial challenges, Grampian Fire and Rescue has demonstrated strong financial management and has been proactive in making efficiency savings. It has a

range of strategies for managing its workforce but continues to face difficulties in filling supervisory manager vacancies and recruiting sufficient Retained Duty System (RDS) firefighters. It has a strong focus on the health and safety of staff and its Safe Person project is central to all of its business planning. It is improving the way in which it manages its assets and addressing problems in its information and communications technology.

Part 1. Context

15. Grampian Fire and Rescue delivers services to a population of over 550,000 people across 3,373 square miles of the Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray Council areas. The Grampian area is a popular location for tourists and the overall population rises to over 850,000 at peak times. The region has great diversity, from Scotland's third largest city to large areas of sparsely populated and remote rural areas and this presents challenges for fire and rescue operations.
16. Grampian has a number of sites that present significant fire and rescue risks including a busy industrial harbour, major oil and gas terminals and the most frequently used heliport in the country. In addition, there is the biggest single site hospital in Europe, two operational RAF bases, two prisons and the Royal Residence at Balmoral Castle. Grampian experiences a high number of road traffic collisions (RTCs), with the most people killed or seriously injured per million vehicle kilometres in Scotland.
17. Grampian Fire and Rescue spends £25.7 million, and employs 797 staff, including 315 whole-time and 382 retained firefighters. As well as its headquarters in Aberdeen, staff are based in 39 fire stations throughout the area. Three stations in Aberdeen are staffed by whole-time crews, two through a combination of whole-time and retained crews (Elgin and Peterhead), 34 stations are staffed by retained fire crews, and there is a volunteer unit at Gordonstoun School ([Exhibit 1](#)). It has 81 fire appliances, including a range of specialist units for water rescue, urban search and rescue, etc.

Exhibit 1: Staffing ratios and fire stations in Grampian



Source: Grampian Fire and Rescue

- 18. Grampian Fire and Rescue Service is governed by a joint fire and rescue board that comprises 15 councillors from Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils. The board and its two subcommittees, the Strategy Committee and Scrutiny Committee each meet five times a year.

Part 2. Governance and management

Vision and strategic direction

Grampian Fire and Rescue has been developing its management arrangements in recent years to better support the delivery of its vision. It has clear aims that cascade through corporate strategies and well-structured business plans. Its IRMP provides a clear strategic analysis of local risks, helping to drive local response standards and the allocation of resources. There is scope, however, to strengthen the links between IRMP and its fire prevention strategy. Elected members' leadership has been improving in recent years, with considerable support from officers, but still requires further development.

19. Grampian Fire and Rescue's strategic vision captures six main themes that the service will concentrate on over the next ten years (Exhibit 2). Each of these themes is supported by a specific strategy to help service managers align their plans, projects and tasks to the organisational vision.

Exhibit 2: Themes of Grampian Fire and Rescue's ten year strategic vision

- **Reducing** risk
- **Communicating** more effectively
- **Working** more efficiently
- **Maximising** staff potential
- **Promoting** diversity and equality
- **Protecting** the environment

Source: *Grampian Fire and Rescue*

20. In recent years, Grampian Fire and Rescue has strengthened its management arrangements to deliver its vision. This includes the development of its six thematic strategies and publication of its IRMP 2011-2014. Grampian also has a comprehensive business planning framework, through which it has developed medium-term service plans and detailed business plans.
21. Grampian Fire and Rescue's IRMP 2011-2014 provides a clear strategic analysis of incidents experienced across the area, with supporting risk maps for different geographic areas, based on Fire Services Emergency Cover (FSEC) and other risk profiling software. It is a three-year plan, underpinned by a specific annual action plan that is subject to public consultation. In addition, potential options to balance risk and resources are outlined for years two and three, for example re-assessing the level of cover required across the

Grampian area and what fire engines and specialist vehicles are needed, where they should be located and how they should be crewed.

22. The current IRMP annual action plan focuses on two significant actions: to introduce more robust demand reduction measures for calls generated from automatic fire alarms (AFAs); and relocating the whole-time crew from Dyce to Altens fire station in order to improve risk management and reduce activity within Aberdeen City fire station. Following public consultation carried out jointly between Grampian Fire and Rescue senior management and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), the move from Dyce to Altens was completed in August 2011 and provides a positive example of using IRMP to redeploy resources to meet risks.
23. Grampian Fire and Rescue support its IRMP with its annual *Community Risk Reduction Focus* document. This assigns risk to different incidents across its three command areas and supports managers in prioritising their activity towards minimising areas of identified risk.
24. During 2011, Grampian Fire and Rescue has been developing its IRMP framework to station level, with the introduction of station based plans and targets. This has been a recognised gap, with the need to develop plans for retained stations identified in the Accounts Commission's previous study in 2006. Station plans are a positive development to Grampian Fire and Rescue's IRMP framework, although at the time of our audit, these were just beginning to be rolled out and therefore it was not possible to judge how they would contribute to local outcomes.
25. In recent years, members of Grampian Joint Fire and Rescue Board have been improving the way they deliver their strategic leadership and scrutiny roles. The strategy committee in particular has demonstrated leadership in discussions on reserves, identifying the need for an environmental strategy and getting more involved in agreeing IRMP action plans. The board has also been willing to take difficult policy decisions, in particular, its decision to transfer the whole-time fire crew from Dyce to Altens to better align resources with identified risk.
26. Despite the level of recent progress by the board, there remains significant scope for it to deliver its role more effectively. This is highlighted in the self-evaluation exercise carried out by the scrutiny committee in 2010 using the PSIF. It is encouraging that members of the board have carried out a self-evaluation of their role. The outputs of this exercise show that, among other things, there is scope for the board to increase its accountability and for board members to become more involved in strategy development.
27. Grampian Joint Fire and Rescue Board revised its governance structure in April 2010, after looking at other governance models. The current structure has introduced a Strategy Committee and Scrutiny Committee to support the board and the remit of the committees complement the role of board well. While members have been improving the way they deliver their leadership and scrutiny role, in practice, however, the revised structure has had limited impact in strengthening governance and members have not fully differentiated

their different roles on the joint board and the new committees. This needs to be addressed if they are to be more effective in meeting their aims.

28. Administrative support and the clerk function for the board and its committees is provided by Aberdeenshire Council. The resource requirement in providing this support is proportionate to that of the council's own committees. In addition to this, Grampian Fire and Rescue service has provided a range of training to board members to support them in carrying out their role more effectively. Members' PSIF self-evaluation highlighted scope for them to receive more effective continued professional development (CPD). However, members' attendance at training and development sessions has been relatively poor and finding ways of overcoming this will be an important consideration for the formation of a new board in 2012.

Partnership working

Grampian Fire and Rescue works well with its partners to positively influence outcomes. While there is scope for further improvements, it has established good levels of information sharing with other public organisations to help improve the targeting of community safety work. Board members need to be more proactive in influencing and coordinating strategic partnership work.

29. 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.
30. Grampian Fire and Rescue works closely with partners in planning for civil contingencies. It is an active participant in the Grampian Strategic Co-ordinating Group, which carries out high-level risk planning for major incidents which could disrupt the area. All of this activity is summarised in the Grampian Community Risk Register, setting out the major risks facing the area and the action taken by each partner to manage these risks. It has used this to inform local resourcing decisions, for example developing flood rescue provision across a range of stations, as well as to inform local operating procedures.
31. Grampian Fire and Rescue also works effectively in partnership with other local organisations, particularly through its local community safety partnerships in the Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and the Moray Council areas. Its commitment and input into these partnerships has developed positively over time and is highly valued by the relevant community safety partners. Working with community planning partners has influenced a number of positive outcomes. For example, through working in partnership with Grampian

Police, countryside rangers and local schools, Grampian Fire and Rescue has helped significantly reduce wilful secondary fires in the 'Gramps' area of the city. The success of this partnership initiative was recognised through the achievement of a COSLA bronze award. Similarly, the 'Safe Drive Stay Alive' campaign with the Aberdeenshire Community Safety Partnership has helped influence the significant decreases in the number of road deaths and casualties in the area.

32. Across its three constituent councils there is local flexibility in the way it plans and coordinates effort with community safety partners. As may be expected, given the concentration of whole-time stations, coordination of plans with partners is strongest in Aberdeen City. Fire and rescue issues, particularly wilful fire raising, feature prominently in Aberdeen City's single outcome agreement (SOA) and this is reflected in their prominence in the Community Safety Partnership's strategic assessment. The effectiveness of the planning process and resulting prioritisation through these strategic assessments is useful in directing partnership activity, especially with substantial reductions in Aberdeen City's community safety budget.
33. The benefits of sharing information between partners to reduce risk are widely recognised. Grampian has a range of information sharing protocols in place with partners to facilitate this and can demonstrate that information sharing has led to better ways of working, for example a council housing refurbishment programme (including the installation of fire alarms) in Aberdeen City being reprioritised on the basis of fire risk. However, similar to other fire and rescue services, Grampian recognises that better information sharing to allow more effective targeting of community safety work is an area needing further development.
34. Grampian has a partnership register to monitor the work it is involved in and has carried out an evaluation of some of its partnership initiatives, such as Safe Drive Stay Alive. It recognises, however, that it can use its partnership register as a basis to more effectively assess and evaluate the value its partnership arrangements are adding to local communities.
35. Grampian Fire and Rescue has produced a useful publication, *Our Contribution to Local Authority Single Outcome Agreements*. This provides a good reference point and source of information for officers, members and partners on how it aligns its business planning and corporate objectives to support the SOAs in its constituent local authorities. It not only highlights the outcome measures it is contributing to, but also provides examples of partnership initiatives to deliver improved outcomes.
36. Members of the board, however, provide little strategic coordination of partnership activity and have no consistent oversight of how community safety strategies are being delivered or the service is influencing SOA outcomes. There is some recent improvement to this in Aberdeen City where, reflecting the high prominence of fire issues, there is now provision for a member of the joint fire board to sit on the community safety partnership.
37. Grampian also works effectively with other emergency services. This is best exemplified in it seconding officers to the 'Road Safety Grampian' unit within Grampian Police. The unit

aims to reduce risk on Grampian's roads by delivering educational programmes in the risk sectors of the community. Grampian Fire and Rescue had originally seconded three officers to the unit, but due to the unit's success in reducing RTCs by over 20 per cent, this has been now reduced to one officer.

38. Grampian Fire and Rescue also operates a life saving partnership with the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) in Maud, Aberdeenshire and has shared facilities with the SAS at Fraserburgh fire station. An agreement has also been established to allow SAS paramedic fast response vehicles to periodically operate from a number of fire stations in Aberdeen City thereby increasing the speed of attendance at medical emergencies. It also has an award winning collaborative agreement, whereby Aberdeen College run some higher education courses from ten of its fire stations.
39. Grampian Fire and Rescue also works in collaboration with neighbouring fire and rescue services. For example, it has provided a lead role nationally on improving carbon management and procurement and plays a lead role regionally, working with Highlands and Islands and Tayside Fire and Rescue services, in running staff assessment development centres. Beyond this, however, there are no significant shared services.

Performance management and improvement

Grampian has a well-developed performance planning and management framework. It reports a range of performance information to the joint board and the public that is linked to its priority themes. In some areas, performance information needs to provide a clearer picture of performance and would benefit from the inclusion of comparative data. It has been developing a stronger performance culture across the service in recent years and now carries out a range of review and continuous improvement activity. Members' scrutiny of performance is improving.

40. Grampian has a well developed performance planning and management framework, with clear links between its strategies, plans and performance monitoring. Grampian's business planning framework generates a consistent structure for its business plans. The resulting business plans clearly outline an initial impact assessment, a business case for possible options, risk assessments, consultation, resources required and delivery milestones. This is a positive development in allowing it to manage its performance effectively.
41. Grampian Fire and Rescue monitors and reports a good range of performance information to members and the public, with measures clearly linked to its priority themes. It reports its performance using a five-year trend analysis where possible, so that overall performance is not skewed by short-term fluctuations. This is a useful way of reporting its performance. Performance information would benefit from including benchmarks so that members can also judge comparative performance. Members of the scrutiny committee have identified this as a potential improvement through their PSIF self-evaluation exercise.
42. Similar to other fire and rescue services, the performance measures that Grampian Fire and Rescue reports to the board contain a range of indicators, including some of those

reported nationally by the Scottish Government. While it has agreed the range of indicators to be included in reports with board members, the current range of indicators would be enhanced by ensuring that they provide a clear picture of performance. For example, it reports the number of incidents in which there were fatalities and casualties, but not the actual number of people who lost their life or were injured. To ensure greater transparency for members and other stakeholders, Grampian Fire and Rescue should ensure that this distinction is clear in performance reports.

43. Board members also need to satisfy themselves that they are receiving the most appropriate data on which to scrutinise performance. With the data available, they are improving the way they scrutinise performance and do focus attention on some of the key issues facing the service, for example reducing demand through minimising AFAs. However, as highlighted by the scrutiny committee's self-evaluation, there still remains scope for more active challenge from members.
44. Grampian Fire and Rescue has been strengthening its performance culture. This is reflected in: its introduction of performance targets during 2011; alternative corporate management team meetings now being performance management meetings, to review performance indicators and business plans; and increasing its emphasis on improvement and review, for example, the establishment of the Service Improvement Team (SIT) in 2008. The SIT carries out a programme of operational audits, identifying best practice and making recommendations for continuous improvement and has contributed heavily to the Safe Person project. It has also used other self-assessment techniques, such as *Kaizen Blitz*, and is now planning to apply the PSIF model to various areas of the service.

Part 3. Use of resources

Grampian Fire and Rescue has generated significant efficiency in its use of resources to deliver services. It manages its financial resources well. It has a range of strategies for effective management of its workforce but continues to face challenges in recruiting retained fire fighters and supervisory managers. It has strengthened its strategic management of assets, and problems in information and communications technology are now being addressed. The joint board's oversight and scrutiny of the use of resources is improving.

45. Grampian Fire and Rescue has been proactive in reducing the financial demands on its constituent authorities. This is supported by effective financial controls and generating efficiency savings. It complements this with plans and strategies to manage its workforce and assets effectively within available budgets.
46. Members of the board approve and monitor the revenue budget and capital programme. The board now gets more actively involved at an earlier stage in determining budget options and its scrutiny of financial performance is improving. The scrutiny committee is also more frequently monitoring progress in achieving efficiency savings across the service.

Financial management

In the face of significant financial challenges, Grampian Fire and Rescue has demonstrated strong financial management and has been proactive in making efficiency savings. It faces tough decisions to balance its budget in 2012/13.

47. Grampian Fire and Rescue demonstrates strong financial management and has managed necessary budget cuts effectively to maintain service performance. It has had a healthy financial position, with reserves above its five per cent ceiling in 2010/11. This has allowed it to front-load savings in its medium-term financial plans, to take into account the challenges facing its constituent authorities. In 2011/12, against a backdrop of 2.6 per cent reductions in local government grant funding, Grampian Fire and Rescue cut its requisitions from constituent authorities by 8.3 per cent. This strategy was adopted in recognition of the financial difficulties facing some of Grampian's constituent authorities and was achieved through 4.6 per cent cash savings, as well as using £1 million of its available reserves.
48. Grampian Fire and Rescue's financial strategy has included a range of significant savings, including; a reduction of four watch manager posts from moving whole-time crewing from Dyce to Altens; the success of the road safety Grampian unit allowing a reduction of two crew manager posts; better application of its charging policy; and cutting out all non-essential expenditure. It has also invested £1.5 million of capital expenditure in upgrading

its appliances to rescue pumps (ie, including equipment to deal with road traffic collisions) to avoid the need for specialist appliances.

49. Due to the current reform programme for fire and rescue services in Scotland, for 2012/13, Grampian Fire and Rescue is working to a one year rather than a three-year budget as would be the norm. It is planning to operate with no increase on its 2011/12 revenue budget, but plans to supplement this with £1 million of funding from its current reserves of £1.5 million, with no increase in the funding requirements from the constituent authorities.

Workforce management

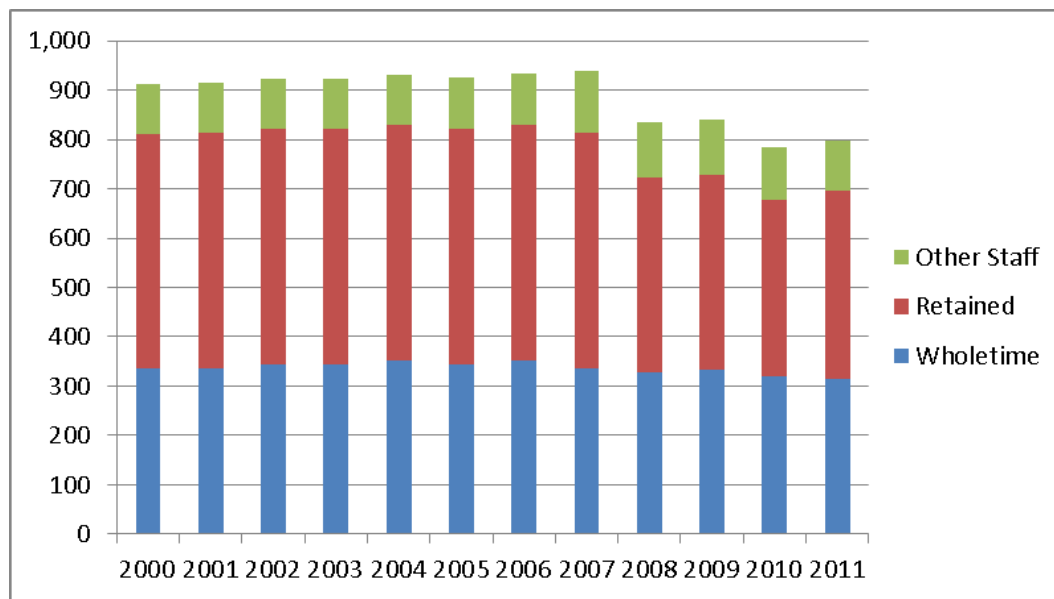
Grampian Fire and Rescue has a good range of strategies and business plans to manage its workforce effectively, although it faces recruitment and retention difficulties, particularly for supervisory managers and RDS firefighters. It has a strong focus on the health and safety of its staff. It operates a staff appraisal system, although it does not yet apply to senior officers. It has been successful in generating efficiency through reducing sickness absence levels.

50. Grampian Fire and Rescue has a range of strategies, with clear aims and objectives, which inform its approach to managing its workforce. This includes its:
- Maximising Staff Potential strategy, which focuses on standards for operational training and career pathways, integrating core fire fighting skills, such as incident command, with other management and leadership skills.
 - Working More Efficiently strategy, which outlines key roles and responsibilities to support its aim of being recognised as a high achieving, best value organisation.
51. Its strategies are supported by business plans and are monitored through a range of workforce related performance information.
52. Strategic workforce planning in Grampian Fire and Rescue is linked into its budgeting process and during 2010/11 it reviewed the need for every whole-time post and potential impact on the business if each post was removed. This highlighted a number of areas where its staffing levels needed immediate review. For example, following a review it has removed four posts in command support and realigned to the focus of the remaining command support staff towards the development of RDS firefighters, in line with organisational need.
53. Grampian Fire and Rescue faces a number of challenges in workforce planning. In particular, it is experiencing difficulties in recruiting RDS firefighters and filling promoted posts, particularly at crew manager level. Difficulties in recruiting crew managers results from both low numbers of firefighters applying for assessment development centres (ADCs) for promotion and a low ADC pass rate. This is heavily influenced by its relatively young workforce profile, where around a third of firefighters are trainees and have yet to complete their three-year competency period. It has also been overcoming some of its current difficulties by recruiting civilian staff to fill applicable crew manager posts, such as community safety HMO inspectors and education officers. Beyond this, its Career Pathway

programme has been designed to provide a more structured approach to developing staff and managers in future, but this is still in its infancy.

54. As a predominantly rural area, Grampian Fire and Rescue relies heavily on its RDS firefighters. Largely due to difficulties in recruiting RDS firefighters, its average staffing level has fallen in recent years, as shown in [Exhibit 3](#). This has meant that, at times, there can be difficulties in maintaining crew levels in some areas. This, combined with increasing staff turnover, means recruitment remains a service priority in the medium to long term.

Exhibit 3: Staffing trends (full time equivalents), 2000-2011



Source: CIPFA

55. RDS firefighter recruitment is the responsibility of individual area commands. To support this, Grampian Fire and Rescue has established a RDS forum group to review and progress a range of RDS issues, including recruitment and training and development. To address its current recruitment difficulties, the service is running a major recruitment campaign in early 2012.
56. Linked to its Maximising Staff Potential strategy, Grampian Fire and Rescue's staff appraisal system is becoming more systematic. It is currently in the third year of its annual development review (ADR) process. The ADR process applies to whole-time firefighters and support staff and is being rolled out to all RDS firefighters. However, it does not apply to the chief or deputy chief fire officers. It has had issues in ensuring all staff appraisals are completed, but has overcome this, by assigning all managers an objective within their own ADR to complete their staff appraisals.
57. Staff appraisals link the performance of individuals with service and business objectives and training needs. During 2011/12, the ADR process is being integrated into the personnel system, with the aim of making it much easier to interrogate and analyse training needs.

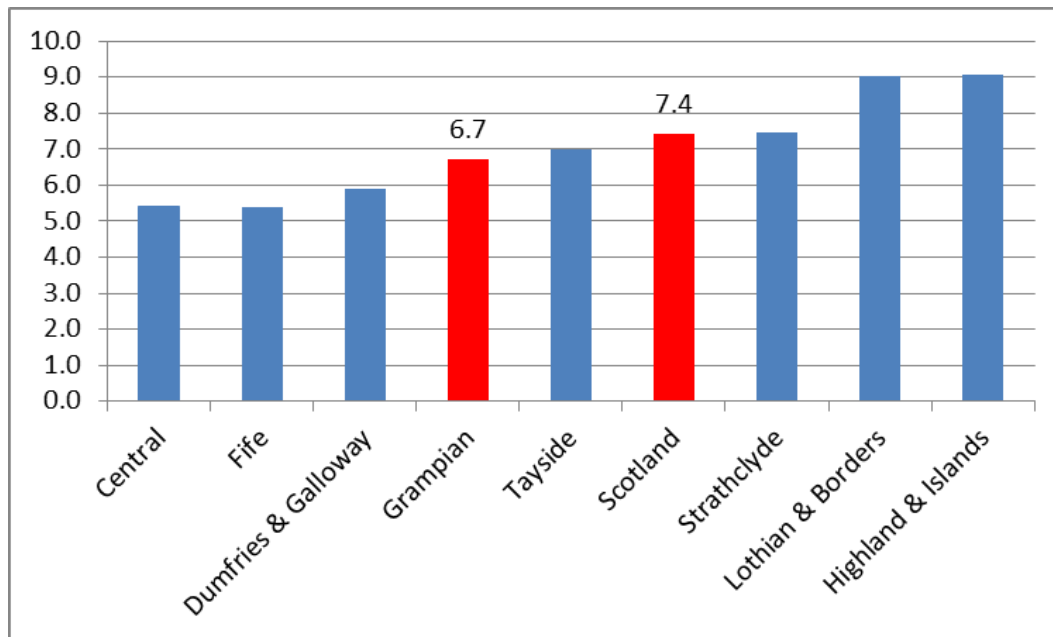
58. Firefighter training plans have typically been developed separately by each area command, according to local risks. This flexible local approach is supported corporately by an operational development standards group, which ensures that common standards for operational training are identified and maintained across the service. Grampian Fire and Rescue's learning and development team has set training standards, which are driven by its development centre. This is a positive development given that it recognises there has been decay in some core skills of its RDS firefighters. Similarly, it is taking a positive step in commissioning a training needs analysis to ensure its 2012/13 training programme is better focused on needs.
59. Grampian Fire and Rescue has a strong focus on and very good facilities for practical 'hot fire' training. It also carries out a range of training linked to its priority themes. For example, it has demonstrated its expertise in responding to road traffic collisions through performing well in extrication challenges with other UK fire and rescue services.
60. Grampian Fire and Rescue has established a local collaborative training group across local organisations to support the professional development of its senior officers. Through this, three members of Grampian Fire and Rescue have participated in a collaborative leadership pilot scheme linked to SOAs and national objectives. Officers have also participated in a cross sector mentoring scheme that has been running for the last four years. Partners in the mentoring scheme include; Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils, NHS Grampian, Grampian Police and more recently Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations. They are also looking at collaborative work shadowing to break down organisational barriers and encourage greater partnership working.
61. Grampian Fire and Rescue has a strong focus on health and safety. This is reflected in its investment in a health, safety, environmental and quality (HSEQ) manager, and health and safety team to drive health and safety issues forward. It has also adopted and applied its Safe Person project. In addition, a dedicated team collect risk information on buildings ensuring that there is a consistent and quality product available for firefighters.
62. The Safe Person project has been operating for over three years and is core to Grampian Fire and Rescue's business planning. It provides a baseline of acceptable Safe Person standards and comprises six key strands, including recruitment, personal protective equipment (PPE), competent supervision, etc, each with its own business plan. It has resulted in significant improvements in firefighter development and competent supervision resulting from the work of the SIT. Due to a number of significant challenges, the full Safe Person project is yet to be applied to RDS firefighters, although health and safety issues are being considered through an evaluation of the competence of RDS officers.
63. Grampian Fire and Rescue was the only Scottish fire and rescue service to be inspected by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in 2010¹. The HSE found that operational personnel

¹ The Management of Health and Safety in the GB Fire and Rescue Service (Health and Safety Executive, 2010). This report was based on the inspection of eight UK fire and rescue services.

are well equipped and trained and that the excellent facilities provided by the development centre, the level of support provided by the command support team to ensure consistency of training delivery at station level, particularly for retained firefighters, were particular strengths. In addition, the 'Infozone' intranet system and IRIS (Incident Risk Information System) have the potential, once fully developed and applied, to be excellent health and safety information communication tools. Grampian Fire and Rescue has responded positively to the HSE's recommendations, and has made good progress in addressing its resulting action plan.

64. The overall level of sickness absence within Grampian Fire and Rescue is below the national average. It recorded an average of 6.7 days per employee in 2010/11, compared with a national average of 7.4 days (Exhibit 4). Within this overall picture, absence among firefighters has fallen by 20 per cent over the past two years and Grampian Fire and Rescue currently has the second lowest level of recorded absence for firefighters among Scottish fire and rescue services. It has achieved this success by more closely monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of its policy during the past couple of years and through early intervention of occupational health services and absence prevention through services such as counselling.

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



Source: Audit Scotland Statutory Performance Indicators

Asset management

Improving asset management has been an objective for Grampian Fire and Rescue in recent years. It has recently formalised its approach to procuring, maintaining and managing assets through its asset management strategy and supported this with an asset management system. It has commissioned independent consultants to address deficiencies in information and communications technology (ICT).

65. Grampian Fire and Rescue has recognised the need for a more systematic approach to managing its assets. To guide its approach to the procurement, lifespan and maintenance of assets, the board approved an asset management strategy in September 2011. Strategically, its management of assets is also influenced by its participation in the North East Public Sector Property Group, along with its partners in NHS Grampian, Grampian Police and the local councils.
66. It has also strengthened its approach to managing its assets through the implementation of an asset management system and the appointment of a facilities manager. The asset management system provides improved information on property and vehicles that can be used to inform its budget setting process more effectively. Grampian Fire and Rescue carries out a five-year rolling programme of asset valuations for accounting purposes and is now working to mirror this with condition surveys to make sure its assets are fit for purpose and that its backlog maintenance can be more reliably identified and managed.
67. In 2010, Grampian Fire and Rescue identified a range of deficiencies in its ICT systems and infrastructure, including, insufficient broadband width for providing rural access to corporate systems and e-learning tools. These deficiencies had arisen due to weaknesses in the way the service managed its ICT service. To address this, in 2011 it commissioned an independent review from ICT consultants. The review has resulted in a prioritised improvement plan and the service is investing £195,000 during 2011/12 to addressing all the necessary improvements. The review has also recommended a robust ICT governance model which Grampian Fire and Rescue has chosen not to implement due to impending changes as a consequence of structural reform across the Scottish fire and rescue services. It is, however, in the process of introducing some changes to governance in the interim to ensure the benefits of the investment are realised and reliable ICT is maintained as it moves towards a the future single service.
68. Grampian Fire and Rescue has been investing in providing its fire crews with far better risk information on local buildings. It has used the efficiency savings to fund risk-based inspections of buildings, and to date over 1,000 have been carried out. This risk information can be provided electronically to crews through the mobile data terminals on Grampian Fire and Rescue's fire appliances.

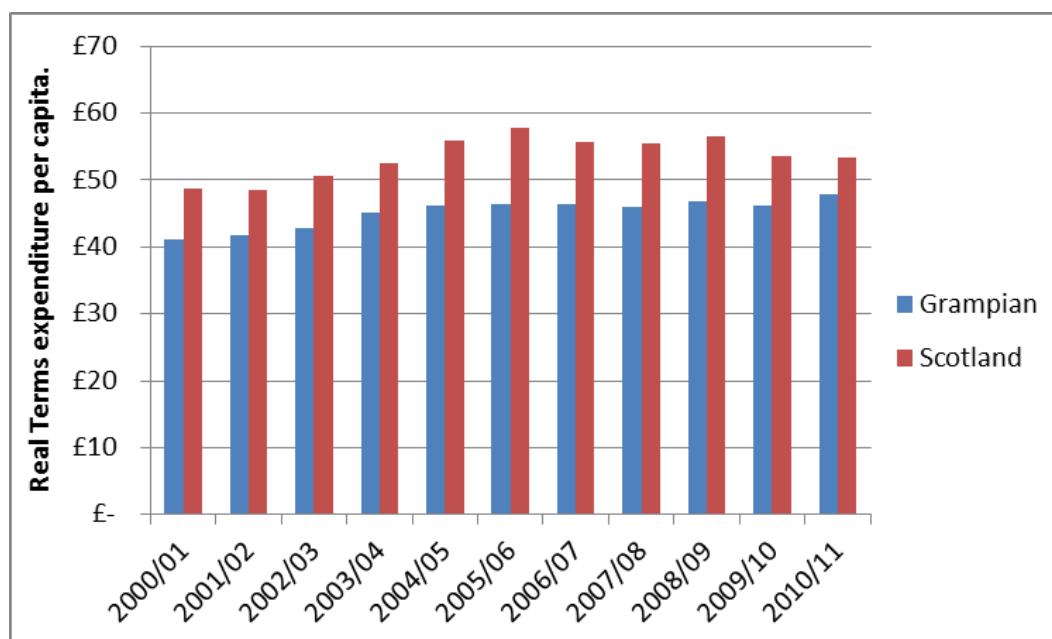
Part 4. Service performance

Grampian Fire and Rescue provides an effective and relatively low cost emergency response service. Its work has contributed towards Grampian experiencing a below average number of primary fires, the lowest level of secondary fires in Scotland and a significant decline in road traffic accidents. However, it needs to strengthen its focus on prevention. It works well with its partners in delivering prevention initiatives but carries out the lowest proportion of home fire safety visits and statutory fire safety audits of any Scottish fire and rescue service. Grampian Fire and Rescue records the highest level of fire related casualties, indicating the potential for its prevention activity to have a much greater impact.

Service costs

Grampian Fire and Rescue's operating costs are below the Scottish average but, in real terms, have increased by around three per cent over the past five years.

69. Grampian Fire and Rescue's operating costs have consistently been below the Scottish average over the past ten years ([Exhibit 5](#)). In 2010/11, excluding pension costs, it spent £48 per head of population, well below the Scottish average of £53. The bulk of operating costs are made up of employee costs and Grampian Fire and Rescue has consistently had the lowest employee related expenditure per head of population over the past decade.
70. Despite it having relatively low operating costs, Grampian Fire and Rescue's real term costs per head of population have increased by around three per cent since 2005/06, compared with an average decline of 7.5 per cent nationally. It is the only Scottish fire and rescue service to experience a real terms increase over this period. Much of the cost increases have been due the building and running of a new fire station on North Anderson Drive without yet disposing of the old station, an additional investment of £0.5 million in ICT and increased training costs.

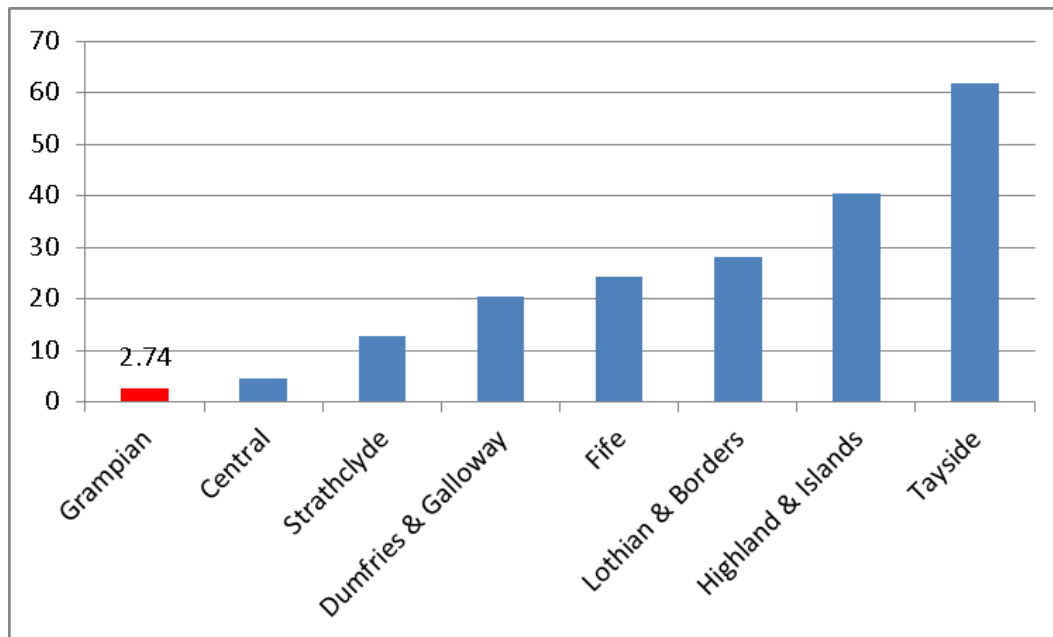
Exhibit 5: Real terms costs per head of population, 2000/01 to 2010/11

Source: CIPFA data adjusted by HM Treasury GDP deflator

Prevention

Risk reduction through prevention activity is a priority in Grampian Fire and Rescue's vision. It works well with its partners in delivering prevention initiatives, but relative to its size, it carries out the lowest number of home fire safety visits and statutory fire safety audits of any Scottish fire and rescue service. Its number of home fire safety visits is continuing to fall, although it is focusing on targeting its activity towards high risk areas.

71. A key feature of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 and the introduction of IRMP was an increased emphasis on preventative work. A key challenge in targeting prevention activity for all fire and rescue services is sharing information with partners to identify those people at most risk from fire. Grampian Fire and Rescue has been developing information sharing protocols with community safety partners and is beginning to get better information on people at greatest risk, particularly through tactical and coordination groups and single shared risk assessments. However, in practice, recent fire fatalities were people known to partner agencies, highlighting that information sharing remains an area to be strengthened further to better target prevention activity.
72. Although risk reduction through fire prevention activity is a priority in delivering its vision, Grampian Fire and Rescue carries out the lowest number of home fire safety visits (HFSVs) in Scotland ([Exhibit 6](#)). It recognises that it carries out a comparably low number of HFSVs and attributes this primarily to trying to strike a balance between HFSVs, its range of other prevention activities and the increased amount of firefighter time taken up in completing its three-year apprenticeship and training under the Safe Person project.

Exhibit 6: Home fire safety visits per 1,000 dwellings, 2009/10

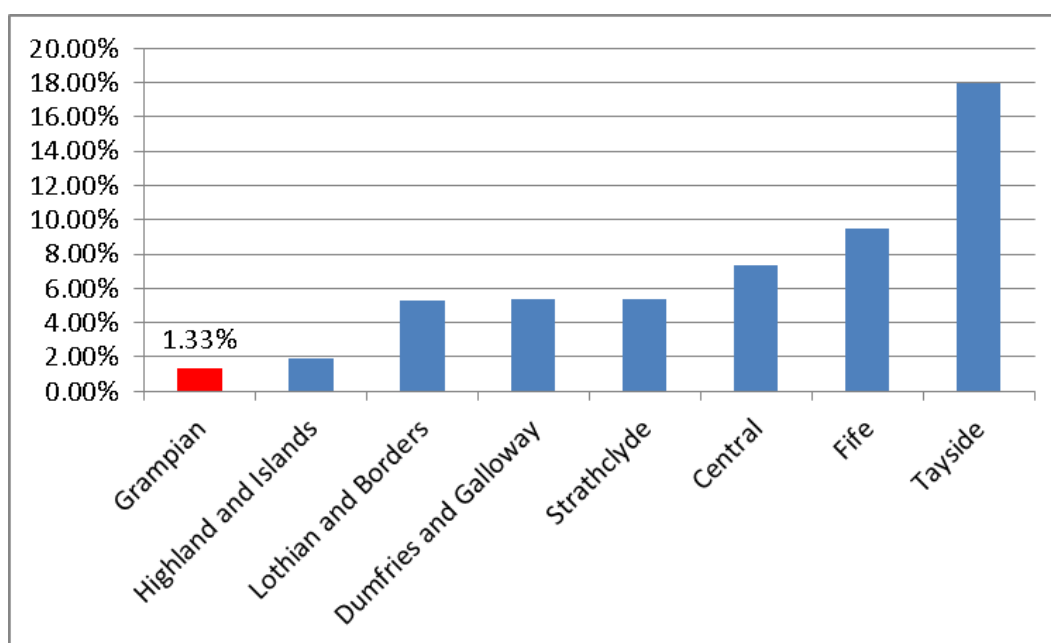
Source: CFOAS Performance Indicators 2009/10

73. Grampian Fire and Rescue's number of HFSVs have declined by approximately three-quarters over the past three years. It believes that delivering fewer, but better targeted HFSVs, along with a range of other risk reduction campaigns, provides better use of its resources. This is in recognition that much of its HFSV activity has been reactive and delivered within low-risk areas and to low-risk individuals and therefore unlikely to deliver best value for money. While targeting effort towards risk is important, recent fire fatalities in Grampian have occurred in areas assessed as low risk, highlighting the importance of continuing to do at least some HFSVs in low risk areas.
74. Although its number of HFSVs is relatively low, the Scottish Government's fire statistics shows that within Grampian, smoke alarms were present and successfully activated in just over half of all primary dwelling fires. This was the second highest level in Scotland during 2010/11. However, smoke alarms were not present in around 38 per cent of all primary dwelling fires, higher than the Scotland average. Combined with the fact that accidental dwelling fires and casualty numbers have remained consistently above the national average, this highlights the need for Grampian Fire and Rescue to increase its focus on preventative work.
75. In July 2010, it developed a targeted policy for HFSVs, but at the time of our audit this had yet to be rolled out across the service. To deliver this policy it has introduced a home fire safety visit coordinator and is aligning the activity of individual watches to specific neighbourhoods. It is also supporting implementation of the policy with lifestyle information from Active Phoenix to help target effort and a revised policy for 'hot strikes' in surrounding properties immediately after a fire has occurred. The emphasis of its new policy is on

reducing deaths rather than on the number of HFSVs it carries out and this is reflected in the fact that it has not set HFSV targets.

76. Statutory fire safety audits of non-domestic premises are an important part of preventative work. Landlords and business owners are responsible for ensuring fire safety in their premises through, for example, carrying out self-assessments. However, a programme of fire audits is essential to provide guidance and to help enforce fire safety standards. In 2010/11, Grampian Fire and Rescue carried out 179 statutory fire audits on non-domestic premises, a decline of over 25 per cent from the previous year. This was the lowest number of any fire and rescue service and also equated to the lowest proportion of known premises having been audited (Exhibit 7). Despite its low number of statutory fire audits, it recorded only seven fires in non-domestic properties during 2010/11. Grampian Fire and Rescue believes that based on outcomes, its programme of audits is proportionate to risk.

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



Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

77. Grampian Fire and Rescue also works with its local partners on a broader range of preventative work. Beyond some of the more common initiatives across fire and rescue services, such as *Safe Drive*, *Stay Alive*, it has also worked on a number of good practice initiatives. In particular, this includes work that has significantly reduced wilful secondary fires in the 'Gramps' area of the city and reduced road traffic collisions, which is a top priority in the Aberdeenshire area. For example, in relation to preventing road traffic collisions, it had seconded three crew managers to Grampian Police's dedicated Road Safety Grampian unit. This has brought significant benefits in exchanging information and intelligence in developing local strategies and its success has allowed Grampian Fire and Rescue to reduce its input to one seconded officer. Grampian Fire and Rescue has also participated in Operation Zenith, a five-year partnership initiative launched in April 2010 with the core aim of reducing motorcycle casualties on roads within the Grampian region.

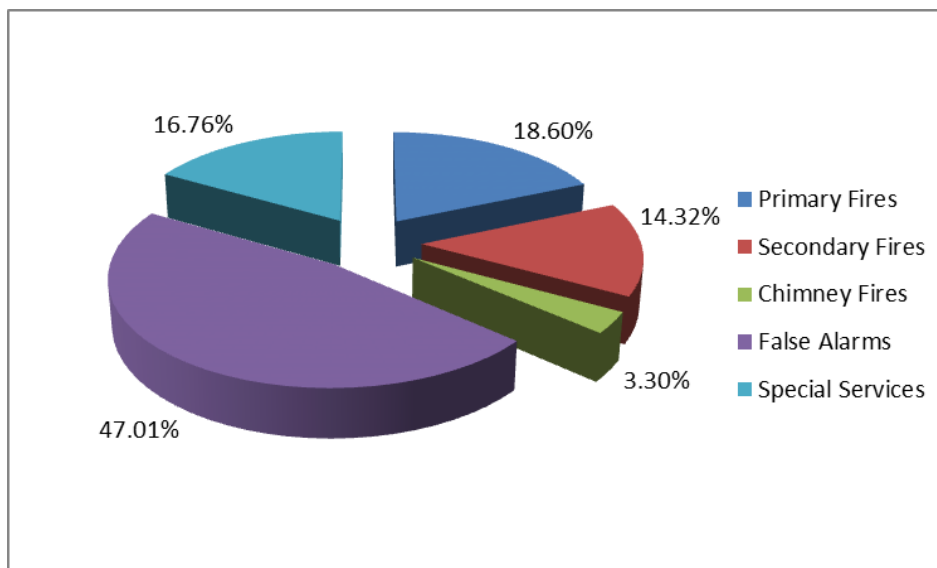
Operation Zenith made contact with around 4,000 motorcycle riders during the course of the first year and helped bring about a 22 per cent reduction in fatal and serious motorcycle collisions, resulting in it winning five national awards.

Emergency response

In line with national trends, there has been a long-term decline in the number of fires in Grampian. The area experiences a below average number of primary fires and the lowest level of secondary fires in Scotland. Grampian Fire and Rescue records the highest level of fire casualties, indicating the potential for its prevention activity to have a much greater impact. Its work has contributed towards a significant decline in road traffic accidents, although these still remain high. False alarms have declined over time and are below the average level, although they still account for almost half of all calls. It meets its published emergency response standards in almost all cases and its response times are in line with other fire and rescue services.

78. In 2010/11, Grampian Fire and Rescue responded to just under 6,500 incidents. A significantly higher proportion of these related to primary fires (those in buildings, vehicles or involving casualties) and 'special services' (primarily road traffic collisions and flooding) compared with the Scottish average. However, the proportion due to secondary fires (typically outdoor fires in heathland, rubbish bins or derelict buildings) was the lowest in Scotland. Just under half of its emergency responses related to false alarms ([Exhibit 8](#)).

Exhibit 8: Analysis of emergency incidents in Grampian, 2010/11



Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

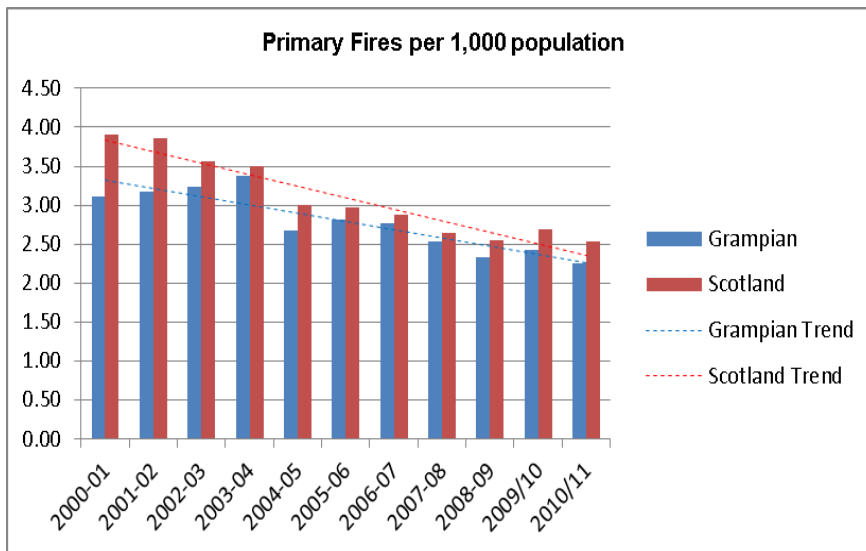
Fires and casualties

79. The number of fires within Grampian relative to population has consistently 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). As may be expected from Grampian starting at a relatively low level, primary fires have fallen at a slower rate than the Scottish average over the last decade. In 2010/11, there were approximately 2.3 primary fires per 1,000 population, slightly below the national average.

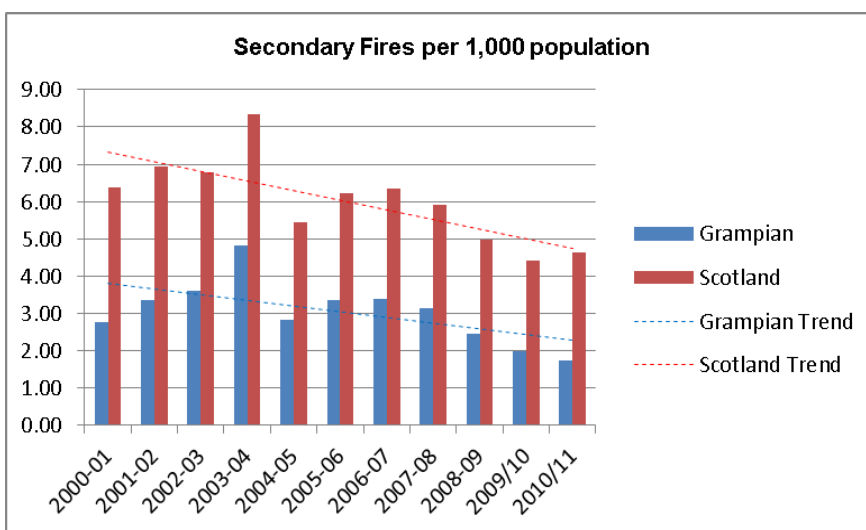
- 80. Secondary fires have declined by over 34 per cent during the last decade, well above the national decline of around 26 per cent and one of the fastest rates in Scotland. Grampian's incidence of secondary fires of 1.7 per 1,000 population is the lowest in Scotland and less than half the national average.

Exhibit 9



Source: Audit Scotland

Exhibit 10

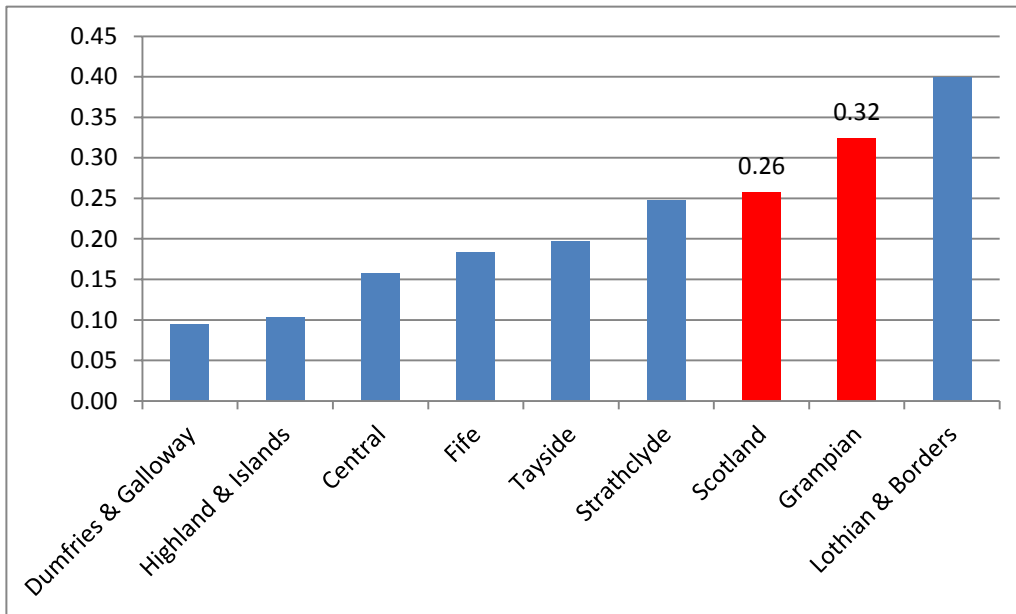


Source: Audit Scotland

- 81. Casualty rates per head of population in Grampian are one of the highest in Scotland (Exhibit 11). 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 2010/11, there were 0.32 fatal and non-fatal casualties per 1,000 population in Grampian, the second highest level in Scotland and noticeably above the national average of 0.26 casualties per 1,000 population. This high level of casualties may in part be influenced by local recording practices, but does indicate the scope for Grampian Fire and Rescue to increase the impact of preventative work such as home fire safety visits.

Exhibit 11: Total casualties per 1,000 population in 2010/11



Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

Special services

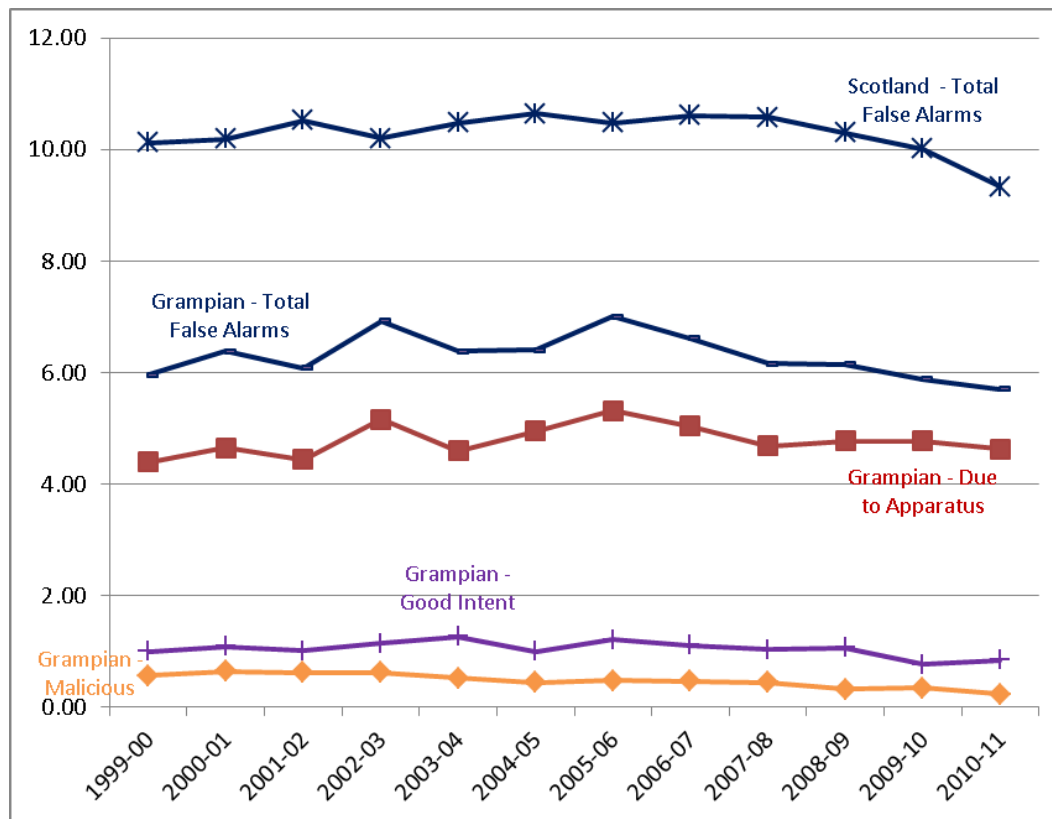
82. Grampian Fire and Rescue also deals with a high number of ‘special service incidents’, mainly flooding and road traffic collisions. These represent around 17 per cent of its emergency responses. There are no performance measures available locally or nationally to assess the standard of this work, although the number of road traffic collisions has fallen in recent years.

False alarms

83. False alarms can be caused by a range of factors, such as malicious hoax calls or faulty automatic alarms. They account for around 47 per cent of Grampian Fire and Rescue's emergency calls. This is below the national average of 49 per cent, but still 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.
84. Grampian Fire and Rescue's overall level of false alarms is well below the Scottish average (Exhibit 12). In 2010/1, it dealt with 3,144 false alarms, most of which were generated by AFAs. Grampian Fire and Rescue has, however, been successful in reducing the overall

number of false alarms, receiving around 200 less than it did in 2000/01. This represents a decline of 6.2 per cent over the last decade, broadly similar to the average decline of 6.5 per cent nationally.

Exhibit 12: False alarms per 1,000 population



Source: Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin

- 85. In dealing with its decreasing but still significant number of false alarms, Grampian Fire and Rescue is reviewing its predetermined response to AFAs as part of its demand reduction measures outlined in its IRMP year one action plan. This review has yet to be concluded.

Emergency response times

- 86. 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.
- 87. Grampian Fire and Rescue is one of only three services in Scotland to have established its own local risk-based set of response standards (Exhibit 13).

Exhibit 13: Emergency response standards

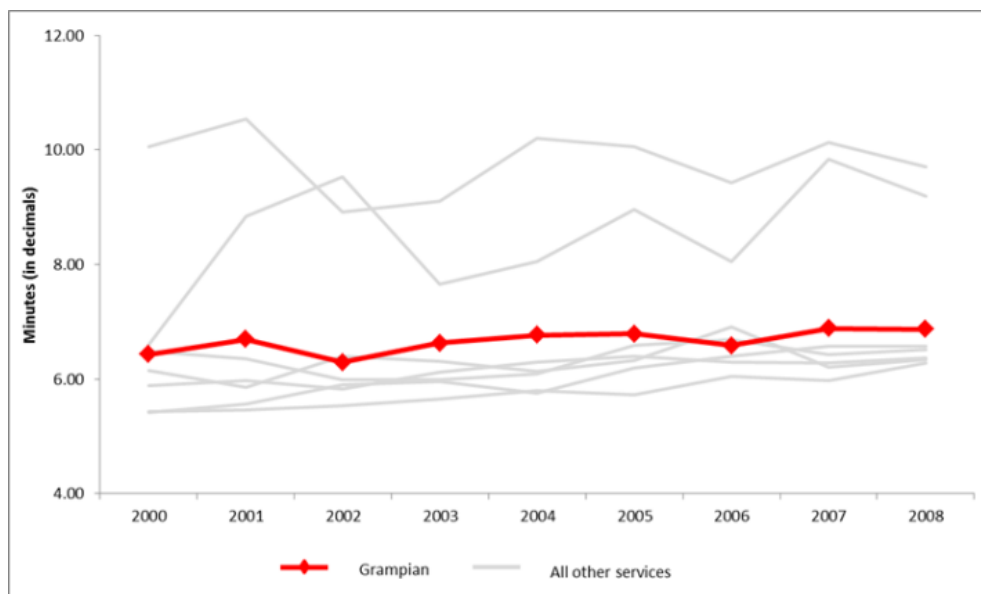
All Critical Incidents (Life Risk)		
Risk Category	Response Standards for 1 st Fire Engine in minutes	Response Standards for 2 nd Fire Engine in minutes
Very High	Less than 5	Less than 8
High	Less than 8	Less than 11
Medium	Less than 15	Less than 18
Low	Less than 20	Less than 23
Very Low	Less than 25	Less than 28

Where a third fire engine is required as part of the attendance, the response standard for this will be three minutes or less after the standard set for that of the second fire engine.

Source: Grampian Fire and Rescue

88. Grampian Fire and Rescue's management team monitor its performance in meeting these local response standards on a quarterly basis. Its latest data for the second quarter of 2011/12 shows that across all risk categories it is currently meeting its response time for the first engine in 97 per cent of incidents, for the second engine in 99 per cent of incidents and for a third engine in 97 per cent of incidents. Grampian Fire and Rescue plans to report its quarterly performance data against the response standards to the scrutiny committee and annually to the joint board.
89. 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 and Rescue Advisory Unit (SFRAU), tested a national sample of response times for dwelling fires. This showed that Grampian Fire and Rescue's average response times for primary dwelling fires have remained consistent over the past decade and are also broadly in line with the national pattern (Exhibit 14).

Exhibit 14: 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

- Station plans should be embedded as a management tool that more clearly address local risks and the local delivery of Grampian Fire and Rescue's key strategies.

Role of members

- To improve their strategic leadership of the organisation and scrutiny function, Grampian Joint Fire and Rescue Board members need to address key areas for improvement identified in their PSIF self-evaluation, including the need for members to participate in more effective continued professional development (CPD).
- Grampian Joint Fire and Rescue Board members need to play a more proactive role in influencing and coordinating Grampian Fire and Rescue's work with partners at a strategic level.

Performance management

- Performance information needs to provide a clear picture of performance to improve transparency for members and can be further enhanced with the inclusion of comparative data.

Use of resources

- Staff appraisals need to be extended to all staff.
- Taking into account the current programme of fire and rescue reform, Grampian Fire and Rescue should implement the relevant recommendations from its independent review of ICT.

Service delivery

- The service needs to review the preventative work it carries out to ensure that it is having the greatest possible impact.

Grampian Fire and Rescue Service

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