

Response to consultation on Reforming Police and Fire and Rescue Services in Scotland

By the Accounts Commission

November 2011

About us

The **Accounts Commission** is the public's independent watchdog which, through the audit process, requires local government bodies in Scotland to achieve the highest standards of financial stewardship and the economic, efficient and effective use of their resources. The Commission holds local authorities to account and helps them to improve by:

- 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 or promoting national performance audits 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 boards).

Audit Scotland helps the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland to ensure public money in Scotland is used properly, efficiently and effectively. This is done by carrying out financial, Best Value and performance audits of various aspects of how public bodies work. It audits public bodies, with a total spend of more than £36 billion a year, and audits the majority of devolved public services in Scotland.

About this response

About this response

We welcome the invitation to contribute to the consultation on the future of policing and fire and rescue in Scotland. Through our work on behalf of the Accounts Commission and Auditor General for Scotland, Audit Scotland has an informed overview of the public sector in Scotland. We have used this experience of the public sector and audit evidence gathered from our work to prepare this submission.

This response draws on a wide range of audit work, including the following reports:

- The Scottish Police Services Authority – October 2010
- Best Value Audit and Inspection reports of Police Boards and Forces carried out jointly with HMICS
- The role of boards – September 2010

It also draws on the emerging messages from the Best Value audit work that Audit Scotland is currently undertaking across all eight fire and rescue services and authorities in Scotland.

Summary

We welcome the invitation to contribute to the consultation on the future of policing and fire and rescue in Scotland and in response would like to highlight a number of important issues which require further consideration as part of the next steps of police and fire reform. These are:

- The proposals suggest that a strong formal relationship between the Council and the Local Commander should be established under the new arrangements, focused around the joint development and delivery of a Local Policing Plan. Each Council will have the right to 'formally comment on the Local Policing Plan' and the Local Commander has to secure the agreement of the Council to the content of the Local Policing Plan. This implies a high degree of local autonomy for each Council in relation to policing priorities and performance objectives for the area (within a nationally agreed resource allocation). It is not clear from the consultation document how any potential conflict between national policing priorities and local choices might be resolved. In addition, the relationship between Local Policing Plans and the annual delivery plan for implementation of the Scottish Policing Plan (approved by the Scottish Police Authority) is not clear.
- The proposals give individual councils an important policing oversight and scrutiny function in relation to local policing performance. This invites questions as to how this new function should be reflected in our Best Value audit work of local authorities under the new national policing model. We will discuss the implications of this matter with the Scottish Government as we take forward our thinking on the future refinement of the local government Best Value audit.
- The proposals highlight the importance of ensuring effective alignment between local community planning activity and the proposed role of Local Commander (acting on behalf of the Chief Constable). It allows for the integration of the Local Policing Plan within the local community planning partnership or Single Outcome Agreement arrangements by mutual agreement between the Local Commander and the Council. This has implications for the development work which the Accounts Commission has been asked to lead, with its scrutiny partners, on preparing a case for how external audit and inspection may support the delivery of better outcomes by community planning partnerships (CPPs). We will discuss the implications of this matter with the Scottish Government as we take forward this development work.

- Greater clarity is needed on how the operational independence of the Chief Constable and Local Commanders will be maintained under the new arrangements.
- Overall, it is not clear from the consultation document what governance arrangements are to be introduced to oversee the transition arrangements to a single service, with important questions arising about transparency and public accountability.

We remain committed to supporting the ongoing delivery of effective, risk-based and proportionate scrutiny of policing and fire and rescue in Scotland and will continue to work with our scrutiny partners to achieve this.

Introduction

1. The legislative framework within which the Police Service in Scotland operates remains largely based on the Police (Scotland) Act 1967. Since then, there have been many changes in Scottish society, including the creation of the Scottish Parliament. There have also been many developments in the justice system, increasing expectations of communities and significant changes in public service delivery. It is therefore appropriate to review policing in Scotland to ensure that it is designed to meet the needs of Scotland in the 21st century.
2. Similarly, until relatively recently the legislative framework within which Fire and Rescue Services in Scotland operated had remained largely unchanged since the Fire Services Act 1947. The 2002 Independent Review of the Fire Service was critical of the lack of strategic direction offered to the fire service by successive governments, which prompted the Scottish Executive's 2002 policy paper The Scottish Fire Service of the Future. This document set out an expectation of 'clear performance improvements [within fire and rescue] aligned to achieving safer communities and efficiencies linked to the Best Value agenda'.
3. The subsequent Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 created a national framework within which locally delivered services, responsive to local communities, could be delivered. Issues of community safety and national resilience were important considerations at that time, and remain so today.
4. The police service in Scotland plays many roles and delivers a diverse range of services. Operational policing and solving crime, including disrupting serious and organised crime, remain the core part of the policing role. The police also play a key role in promoting community safety, dealing with anti-social behaviour and protecting vulnerable groups, crime prevention, preparing for and responding to major incidents and events, and counter terrorism.

5. Scotland's fire and rescue service also delivers a diverse range of services beyond attendance at fire incidents. Its focus on fire prevention and community safety, including partnership work across the public and private sector, is now central to its purpose. As with police, fire and rescue's key role in major incidences and national resilience is now also firmly established. All of this work is underpinned by a focus on risk and the effective targeting of limited public resources. Working in partnership with others from across the public and private sector is an increasingly important element of all aspects of both policing and fire and rescue activity.

6. Given this expanding and changing role for both of these services at a time of reducing resources it is therefore crucial that the reform process builds on a clear, shared understanding of what the Scottish police and fire and rescue services are for, what services they provide, and what outcomes they are expected to deliver. Clarity of purpose, supported by strong governance and accountability arrangements (including proportionate and risk-based audit and inspection), together with appropriate training, qualifications and support for those delivering and governing police and fire and rescue services will continue to be central to their future success. The service reform agenda must be evidence-based, with clarity about the improvements that any change (including planned savings) is intended to deliver whichever structural option is adopted.

A modern purpose for policing

Question 1: What are your views on how we might strengthen the proposed purpose? Should the purpose be set out in national guidance or in some other way?

Summary response

A focus on achieving the best outcomes for communities through securing community safety and well-being, whilst making the most efficient use of resources, are essential objectives for the Scottish policing services.

Detailed response

7. The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework (NPF) sets out its purpose and strategic objectives, underpinned by national outcomes, indicators and targets. Scottish policing contributes to many of these outcomes, in particular in relation to the achievement of the objectives, 'we live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger' (National Outcome 9); 'we have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others' (National Outcome 11);

and, 'our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs' (National Outcome 15)'. Scotland's policing service must therefore be designed to support the delivery of these objectives in ways that balance national priorities with local need. These objectives need to be delivered in a manner that ensures that the police continue to enjoy the consent and support of the public.

8. Audit work across the public sector in Scotland indicates that there needs to be a greater emphasis on outcomes and the effect that targeted early interventions can have in influencing future demand and outcomes. Spending decisions are not always based on evidence of 'what works' or on a full assessment of need.
9. The joint Best Value Audit and Inspections carried out by Audit Scotland with HMICS have highlighted the importance of outcome focussed policing plans that acknowledge the need to balance national priorities with local community policing. The reports have also identified that measures to identify achievements and impact are not always fully developed. For that reason, establishing clear measures of success against which the new purpose of policing can be assessed will be an essential aspect of the reform agenda.
10. The consultation document asks whether the modern purpose for policing should be delivered: through legislation, through a statutory framework or through national guidance. The Scottish Government should use a combination of legislation, the introduction of new statutory duties and national guidance and directions, to specify clearly its expectations of the Chief Constable and the Scottish Police Authority to them and the public. These expectations need to be sufficiently clear to allow public performance reporting by the Chief Constable and the Scottish Policing Service, and for those charged with governance and oversight of the service to hold it to account for its performance.

Governance and Accountability

Question 4: What are your views on the composition of the Scottish Police Authority and the specific skills, experience and expertise required for it to perform its role effectively?

Summary response

It is essential that the Scottish Police Authority has the right skills, experience and expertise required for it to perform its role effectively. When appointing to the new Authority lessons need to be learnt from the experience of the establishment of the Scottish Police Services Authority in 2007.

Detailed response

11. The consultation document sets out the proposed role of the Scottish Police Authority and asks for views on the required range and mix of skills and experience and expertise required to deliver its responsibilities. It also asks whether members should be appointed by Ministers through a formal public appointments process or alternatively whether Ministers should appoint a number of service councillors, nominated by COSLA, to represent the collective voice of local government on the Authority.
12. Decisions on the appointment process to the Authority are matters for the government. The Commission, however, would highlight the importance of ensuring that membership of the Authority provides an effective balance of skills and experience which includes people with expertise in managing and directing the performance of a complex major organisation (with a budget of around £1.4b) and those who are able to represent the voice of citizens and service users to avoid the risks of 'producer capture'. If decisions are made to appoint local councillors on to the board then it is essential that it is made clear that their role is to represent the best interests of the Authority, not their specific council. This was highlighted as a particular problem in the SPSA governance arrangements in Audit Scotland's report on that body¹.

¹ The Scottish Police Services Authority, Audit Scotland, October 2010

13. It will be important that the Scottish Government considers how the accountable officer arrangements for any Scottish Police Authority might operate. If the Chief Constable were to be the accountable officer for the Scottish Police Authority then, depending upon which type of public body is created, there may be a tension between meeting the legislative requirements of an accountable officer, which would make the Chief Constable directly accountable for his/her performance to the either Ministers or the Parliament, and his/her need for operational independence in the allocation and deployment of policing resources to meet policing needs.
14. Given that the concept of operational independence generally relates to tactical and operational policing matters which depend upon the specific expertise of the Chief Constable and their understanding and interpretation of the policing needs of their area, it will be important for the Scottish Government to consider how the principle of operational independence might operate in relation to Local Commanders. Each Local Commander, will have a strong formal relationship with the Council in whose area they operate with each Council having the right to bring forward proposals for how performance could be improved, and particular issues addressed by the police and others. Issues of operational independence might arise as part of these discussions and negotiations, as they have done with joint boards under the current policing governance and accountability arrangements.

Question 6: What are your views on the roles and responsibilities for governance and accountability set out above?

Summary response

Policing services need clear and effective arrangements for governance and accountability to support strong scrutiny and provide public assurance. Greater clarity is needed on how the relationship between any local Policing (or joint Police and Fire and Rescue) Committee and the Scottish Police Authority and Chief Constable might operate in practice in relation to: how any conflicts in relation to the agreement of the Local Policing Plan might be dealt with; and the holding to account of the Local Commander. The arrangements for maintaining the operational independence of the Chief Constable and Local Commanders under the new arrangements are also not yet clear.

Detailed response

15. Clear accountability and strong scrutiny arrangements are critical to holding public bodies to account and encouraging continuous improvement. The boards of public bodies are central to the system of public accountability and to ensuring that they deliver the desired outcomes. Strong and effective governance and accountability is of particular importance

for policing services, given their powers and responsibilities for public order.

16. Where arrangements are complex there is a risk that the lines of accountability are not clear either to those with specific responsibilities or to the public. For example, audit work has found variations in the levels of understanding that elected members had in relation to their responsibilities as members of a joint police board. Further, the links between joint police boards and the constituent councils can be ambiguous.
17. The reform proposals provide a good degree of clarity over the role and purpose of the proposed new Scottish Police Authority and the nature of the relationship between the Authority and the Chief Constable. They also set out a set of rights that each council will have in relation to commenting on the local policing plan, monitoring and scrutinising performance, and monitoring and scrutinising complaints.
18. The consultation document indicates that one of the arguments for introducing these proposed changes is to allow more local elected members to play a direct and formal part in policing in their area so that they can better shape local priorities to meet local needs and better scrutinise the performance of the police in achieving local outcomes. We have already seen good examples, in the Best Value audits, of effective relationships between local elected members and community-based policing staff making a difference to the targeting of local policing resources. However, these are often informal arrangements that fall outwith the formal planning, performance management and accountability structures meaning that their impact can be variable and is not always captured in public performance reporting. There are potential risks here in terms of governance and accountability which require careful consideration.
19. The proposals suggest that a strong formal relationship between the Council and the Local Commander should be established under the new arrangements, focused around the joint development and delivery of a Local Policing Plan. Each Council will have the right to 'formally comment on the Local Policing Plan' and the Local Commander has to secure the agreement of the Council to the content of the Local Policing Plan. This implies a high degree of local autonomy for each Council in relation to policing priorities and performance objectives for the area (within a nationally agreed resource allocation). It is unclear from the consultation document how any potential conflict between national policing priorities and local choices might be resolved. In addition, the relationship between Local Policing Plans and the annual delivery plan for implementation of the Scottish Policing Plan (approved by the Scottish Police Authority) is not clear.

20. In the circumstances where councils are dissatisfied with the performance of the Local Commander, or the proposed content of the Local Policing Plan (including resources allocated locally), it is not clear from the proposals what formal influence they are able to bring bear with either the Chief Constable or new Scottish Police Authority, other than bringing these matters to the attention of either or both of these bodies.
21. On that basis it is not clear how any potential conflict between national policing priorities and local choices might be resolved. Nor is the relationship between Local Policing Plans and the annual delivery plan for implementation of the Scottish Policing Plan (approved by the Scottish Police Authority) clear at this stage.
22. The consultation document and related proposals quite rightly highlight the importance of ensuring effective alignment between local community planning activity and the proposed role of Local Commander (acting on behalf of the Chief Constable). It allows for the integration of the Local Policing Plan within the local community planning partnership or Single Outcome Agreement arrangements by mutual agreement between the Local Commander and the Council. Were this approach to be adopted by any local authority then it would have implications for the development work which the Accounts Commission has been asked by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth to lead, with its scrutiny partners, on preparing a case for how external audit and inspection may support the delivery of better outcomes by community planning partnerships (CPPs). We will discuss the implications of this matter with the Scottish Government as we take forward this development work.
23. Audit work tells us that effective governance depends in part on police authority members having a clear understanding of their role and accessing training opportunities to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to support and challenge senior officers effectively. This issue will be all the more important if a wider group of elected members become involved in the scrutiny and oversight of local policing.
24. Following the joint Best Value audit and inspection of Tayside Police and Tayside Joint Police Board with HMICS in 2009, the Accounts Commission recommended that the Scottish Government, in consultation with COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) and ACPOS (Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland), should consider the existing guidance and its interpretation to ensure that the specific responsibilities of boards and board members are expressed as clearly as possible. Addressing any uncertainties around roles and responsibilities should therefore be an important part of the reform agenda and clarification of the guidance would assist police authorities in achieving their statutory responsibilities for best value and community planning. Central guidance from the Scottish

Government in this area as part of the reform process is likely to be needed.

25. A strong scrutiny function is an essential part of good governance. Police Board members need to be supported in their role and have the capacity and confidence to challenge senior officers on performance and the use of resources. A national training programme to support elected members in their new roles and responsibilities may be needed as part of the report programme.
26. Clear reporting of performance to the public is integral to good governance and accountability. Public bodies are making progress in meeting their public performance reporting (PPR) obligations, but the approach to, and coverage of, PPR remains variable and there is scope for further improvement. This is also the case for police services where our joint BV work with HMICS has found that performance reporting needs to improve so that police boards and the public are in a better position to scrutinise performance and hold forces to account.
27. The consultation proposals make clear that the Chief Constable will be expected to publish performance information against the annual delivery plan (for delivery of the Scottish Policing Plan) and that Local Commanders will be responsible for publishing performance information against their Local Policing Plan. Given the need for effective performance comparisons to be made between different Council areas for public accountability purposes it is essential that the national performance management and public reporting systems generate adequate performance and financial information at the local level to support local benchmarking and the demonstration of Best Value across the service.

Inspection and audit

Question 8: What are your views on the proposals for inspection and audit?

Summary response

These proposals reflect the implications of moving policing from a local authority service operating under the previous tripartite arrangement to a fully national service.

Detailed response

28. These proposals reflect the implications of moving policing from a local authority service operating under the previous tripartite arrangement to a fully national service. However, the local partnership relationship between individual Councils and the police service remains an important aspect of the new arrangements.

29. We would, however, welcome further discussions with Government on how the policing oversight and scrutiny function proposed for individual councils in relation to local policing performance is to be reflected in the Accounts Commission's Best Value audit work under the new national policing model. In addition, it is important that the development work which the Accounts Commission has been asked by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth to lead, with its scrutiny partners, on preparing a case for how external audit and inspection may support the delivery of better outcomes by community planning partnerships (CPPs) complements and aligns with the new national policing audit and inspection model. We will discuss the implications of this matter with the Scottish Government and our scrutiny partners (HMICS, Auditor General for Scotland) as we take forward this development work.

Managing change and improvement

Question 12: Are there any other issues we should consider in creating the Scottish police service?

Summary response

It is important that any new policing arrangements are implemented in a way that manages the risks associated with major change.

Detailed response

30. It is vital that during the process of change, continuity of service is maintained and service performance is not compromised. A clear risk management strategy would be required, as well as an in-depth understanding of the costs and benefits of transition.
31. It is also important that good cost and performance information about current service delivery is available to support the introduction of any new arrangements. Having in place a clear performance management framework from the outset will help set expectations and assess whether change has been successful. For example, the early development of the Scottish Police Services Authority was affected by a lack of clarity on how it was to deliver its long-term benefits, and this was compounded by poor information about the services transferred.
32. That same report came to a number of conclusions, which, though specific to that exercise, highlight important lessons to be aware of if the structure of Scottish policing is to change. We found that:
 - SPSA's early development was affected by a lack of clarity on how it was to deliver its long-term benefits and by limited support from some key stakeholders.
 - A lack of robust information created difficulties in setting the initial budget and when transferring services from police forces.
 - SPSA's early performance was affected by leadership changes and poor customer engagement.
 - Many of the initial actions identified to establish SPSA were not followed through
 - There was a lack of agreement on some aspects of the new organisation and how it was to deliver the long-term benefits
 - SPSA's initial budget was based on incomplete information

- The transfer of staff and assets was affected by poor information, a lack of co-operation and short timescales
 - SPSA's ability to operate effectively was affected by the difficulties it experienced when services were transferred
33. It is not clear from the consultation document what governance and accountability arrangements are planned for managing the period of transition between the existing arrangements and the single national police force. In particular, the ongoing oversight role of existing joint boards and committees will be important and it would be useful if the Scottish Government were to stress the importance of these bodies ensuring effective scrutiny of policing performance at a time when the service will be dealing with the added pressure of managing significant strategic change as well as continuing to deliver existing services.

A modern purpose for Fire and Rescue

Question 13: What are your views on how we might strengthen the proposed purpose? Should the purpose be set out in the Fire framework, or in some other way?

Question 14: What are your views on our plans to retain existing functions for the Scottish Fire and Rescue service?

Summary response

A focus on achieving the best outcomes for communities and making the most efficient use of resources is essential for effective fire and rescue services.

Detailed response

34. The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework (NPF) sets out its purpose, strategic objectives, and the national outcomes, indicators and targets which underpin this. Scottish fire and rescue has an important role to play in contributing to the following objectives 'we live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger' (National Outcome 9), 'we have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others' (National Outcome 11), and 'our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs' (National Outcome 15). The future model of fire and rescue services must therefore be designed in support of delivery of these objectives.
35. Audit work across the public sector in Scotland indicates that there needs to be a greater emphasis on outcomes and the effect that targeted preventative interventions can have in

influencing future demand and outcomes. Spending decisions are not always based on evidence of 'what works' or on a full assessment of need.

36. The Fire Scotland Act (2005) and the Fire (Additional Function) (Scotland) Order 2005 sets out the specific functions of each Fire and Rescue Authority or Joint Board. The proposal to maintain the core functions of the fire and rescue service (including duties in relation to Civil Contingencies) but with a stronger focus on outcomes, partnership working and community safety is a logical suggestion. However, the purpose and functions will then need to be translated into a clear national framework for the delivery of these purpose and functions backed up with service performance and outcomes measures.
37. Developing an agreed national framework for measuring service performance and assessing outcomes from fire and rescue will not be straightforward given the complex range of services provided by fire and rescue services in Scotland. These cover preventative services, responsive services, resilience and major incidents, with a balance of local and national considerations. However, such a framework would provide the basis for clearer and more consistent assessments to be made of the how well fire and rescue services in Scotland are contributing to local and national outcomes and how effectively the resources deployed in this service are currently being used.

Governance and Accountability

Question 16: What are your views on the composition of the Board of the Fire and Rescue Service and the specific skills, experience and expertise required for it to perform its role effectively?

Summary response

It is essential that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Board has the right skills, experience and expertise required for it to perform its role effectively. When appointing to the new Board lessons need to be learnt from the experience of the establishment of the Scottish Police Services Authority in 2007 and the issues raised in Audit Scotland's Role of Boards report.

Detailed response

38. The consultation document sets out the proposed role of the Board of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and asks for comments on the required range and mix of skills and experience and expertise required to deliver its responsibilities. It also asks whether members should be appointed by Ministers through a formal public appointments process or alternatively whether Ministers should appoint a number of service councillors,

nominated by COSLA, to represent the collective voice of local government on the Board.

39. As this question echoes the question posed in relation to the appointment process for the new Scottish Police Authority we would like to restate the points we made on that matter as they apply equally to Fire and Rescue. We would also like to highlight the important messages contained in Audit Scotland's report on the role of boards.²

Governance and accountability

Question 18: What are your views on the roles and responsibilities for governance and accountability set out above?

Summary response

Fire and rescue services need clear and effective arrangements for governance and accountability to support robust scrutiny and provide public assurance. Governance arrangements must be able to balance local and national accountability with clarity about how different elements of any governance arrangements relate to each other.

Detailed response

40. As the proposed arrangement for Fire and Rescue mirror those for policing we would highlight the points made earlier in our consultation response on future governance and accountability arrangements for policing in relation to fire and rescue.
41. In particular, we would highlight the lack of clarity in the consultation document about how any potential conflict between national policing priorities and local choices might be resolved. In addition, the relationship between Local Fire and Rescue Plans and the annual delivery plan for implementation of the National Strategic Plan (approved by the national Fire and Rescue Board) are not clear.
42. In addition, in the circumstances where councils are dissatisfied with the performance of the Local Senior Officer, or the proposed content of the Local Fire and Rescue Plan (including resources allocated locally), it is not clear from the proposals what formal influence they are able to bring bear with either the Chief Officer or new Scottish Fire and Rescue Board, other than bringing these matters to the attention of either or both of these bodies.

² The role of boards, Audit Scotland, September 2010.

Inspection and audit

Question 20: What are your views on the proposals for inspection and audit?

Summary response

Whilst we welcome the overall thrust of this section of the consultation document, with its focus on co-ordinated and risk-based audit and inspection there were a number of aspects of this section which were either unclear or contradictory with earlier statements in the consultation document

Detailed response

43. Whilst we welcome the overall thrust of this section of the consultation document, with its focus on co-ordinated and risk-based audit and inspection there were a number of aspects of this section which were either unclear or contradictory with earlier statements in the consultation document. This means that there are a number of issues which we would welcome clarifying with the Scottish Government.
44. The document talks of SFRAU being given an external scrutiny and audit role, but does not explain what is meant by the term audit in this context. The current arrangements for the audit of central government bodies (including NDPBs and agencies) in Scotland are covered by the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. This Act provides for the Auditor General for Scotland to examine and prepare a report on the accounts of a range of public bodies³. Section 23 of the Act 2000, also provides for 'examinations into the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which bodies and office holders mentioned in subsection (2), which may be undertaken by the Auditor General for Scotland'.
45. As the section of the consultation document referring to police audit and inspection (para 5.7) states that 'no other changes to the powers and functions of... the Auditor General [other than transferring the audit of police across to him from the Accounts Commission for Scotland] are proposed' then there is an apparent contradiction between these two sections of the consultation document. If paragraph 5.7 is correct, and unless changes are made to primary legislation, then following the creation of a single Fire and Rescue Service for Scotland the Auditor General for Scotland will assume financial and value-for-money

³ Those bodies and office-holders and classes of body or office holder are any body or office holder which appears, and any class of body or office holder all the members of which appear, to the Scottish Ministers-

- (a) to exercise functions of a public nature, or
- (b) to be entirely or substantially funded from public money

auditing powers over the new service.

46. The document also states that Audit Scotland is clear that it does not have the competence to scrutinise operational activity or technical issues within sector. It is not clear on what basis this statement is made given that Audit Scotland is currently in the process of undertaking Best Value audits of all eight Fire and Rescue Services and Authorities in Scotland, working closely with SFRAU on this matter. This local work will be followed by the publication of a national overview report of Best Value in Fire and Rescue in early 2012. Whilst these are audits not inspections the audit teams include senior officers from across Scotland's Fire and Rescue services who are able to bring operational and technical expertise to complement the skills and experience of the Audit Scotland staff. In addition, the Accounts Commission has been asked by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth to lead development work, with its scrutiny partners, on preparing a case for how external audit and inspection may support the delivery of better outcomes by community planning partnerships (CPPs). This is likely to incorporate aspects of fire and rescue performance. We will discuss the implications of this matter with the Scottish Government as we take forward this development work.
47. Our colleagues at Audit Scotland remains committed to continuing to work with SFRAU as part of the Fire and Rescue reform agenda to deliver effective, proportionate and well-targeted audit and inspection of Fire and Rescue in Scotland.

Managing change and improvement

Question 26: Are there any other issues we should consider in creating the Scottish Fire and Rescue service?

Summary response

It is important that any new fire and rescue arrangements are implemented in a way that manages the risks associated with major change.

Detailed response

48. It is crucial that during the process of change, continuity of service is maintained and service performance is not compromised. A clear risk management strategy would be required, as well as an in-depth understanding of the costs and benefits of transition.
49. It is also important that good cost and performance information about current service delivery is available to support the introduction of any new arrangements. Having in place a clear performance management framework from the outset will help set expectations and assess whether change has been successful.
50. It is not clear from the consultation document what governance and accountability arrangements are planned for managing the period of transition between the existing arrangements and the single national fire and rescue service. In particular, the ongoing oversight role of existing joint boards and committees will be important and it would be useful if the Scottish Government were to stress the importance of these bodies ensuring effective scrutiny of fire and rescue performance at a time when the service will be dealing with the added pressure of managing significant strategic change as well as continuing to deliver existing services.

Contact details

43. If you would like to contact us in relation to this response please contact:

John Baille
Chair
Accounts Commission for Scotland
110 George Street
Edinburgh
EH2 4LH

e-mail: jbaillie@audit-scotland.gov.uk

Phone: 0131 625 1602