

## TAYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE BOARD

## JOINT REPORT BY THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND THE CLERK

15 NOVEMBER 2010

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**CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED BEST VALUE AUDIT  
OF FIRE AND RESCUE****Abstract**

This Report advised Members of the consultation paper issued by the Accounts Commission on the proposed Best Value audit of fire and rescue authorities and services, attached as Appendix 1 to this Report, and seeks approval to submit the response, attached as Appendix 2 to this Report, to Audit Scotland.

**1 RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Members:

- i Consider the contents of the attached consultation paper.
- ii Consider the contents of the attached proposed response from the Board.
- iii Approve the submission of the attached proposed response from the Board to Audit Scotland.

**2 BACKGROUND**

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced duties of Best Value, community planning and public performance reporting for all local authorities, including fire and rescue authorities. The attached consultation paper seeks the views of stakeholders in the proposed Best Value audit of fire and rescue authorities and services.

**3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications associated with responding to this consultation paper.

**4 CONSULTATION**

The Treasurer has been consulted in the preparation of this report

G A Taylor  
Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Board

**Background Papers**

No background papers, as defined in Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

Tayside Fire and Rescue Board  
PERTH



# CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED BEST VALUE AUDIT OF FIRE & RESCUE



 ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Prepared By Audit Scotland  
October 2010

# The Accounts Commission

The Accounts Commission is a statutory, independent body which, through the audit process, assists 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 41 joint boards (including police and fire and rescue services). Local authorities spend over £19 billion of public funds a year.

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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# Foreword

This consultation paper invites you to comment on the Accounts Commission's proposals for the introduction of Best Value audit in Scottish fire and rescue authorities and services.

Local authorities in Scotland have a statutory duty to deliver best value and continuous improvement in their services. We have now completed audits of Best Value and Community Planning in every council in Scotland and have now started a programme of work to cover all police authorities. These audits have helped to improve performance and accountability in local government and have brought unsatisfactory performance to the public's attention report to the public.

Fire and rescue forms a vital part of emergency response and community safety services. Some aspects of Best Value have been covered in earlier exercises, particularly the national *'Review of service reform in Scottish fire and rescue authorities'*, carried out in 2007. So far, however, we have not carried out any dedicated audit, covering all key aspects of Best Value in fire and rescue.

There is, therefore, a case for now extending the audit of Best Value to fire and rescue, in line with the broad timetable set out by the Accounts Commission in 2008. However, we are conscious of the financial pressures currently facing fire and rescue and the potential restructuring of the service. Any audit will, therefore, need to be proportionate and risk-based and sensitive to this wider context.

Before making any decisions about the introduction of Best Value audits of Scottish fire and rescue, we want to consider comments on our proposals from the general public, members and officers in fire and rescue authorities and services, and representatives of partner organisations, such as COSLA, SOLACE, and the Scottish Government. We will be holding meetings with council convenors and chief fire officers, with to discuss our proposals in more detail.

Following this consultation, we will reach a decision in early 2011 about the audit of Best Value in fire and rescue and will then publish our proposed approach and any relevant timetable for carrying out this work.

I hope that you will take the time to respond to this consultation exercise to help us shape the development of the audit of Best Value in fire and rescue and ensure that our audits continue to contribute to improving local government throughout Scotland.



John Baillie  
Chair, Accounts Commission for Scotland

# 1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 Fire and rescue forms an important part of Scotland's emergency services. As well as dealing with fires, it is responsible for addressing fire prevention, responding to road traffic collisions, flooding and major emergencies. Around £345 million is spent on fire and rescue in Scotland, with just under 8,500 staff employed. This is delivered by eight authorities and services which vary significantly in size and in the nature of the areas that they serve.
- 1.2 Scottish fire and rescue has undergone significant changes in recent years. The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 and the accompanying statutory guidance, the *Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland*, provided a legislative framework for service reform and set out national priorities, objectives and guidance for fire and rescue authorities and services. This modernisation agenda saw a shift in emphasis from emergency response to preventative work, with fire and rescue expected to give a greater priority to community safety by reducing the risks from fire and other emergencies and to workforce training and development.
- 1.3 The Audit Scotland report, *A review of service reform in Scottish fire and rescue authorities*, published in 2007, assessed the progress made by fire and rescue in modernising services. This touched on many key aspects of Best Value, such as leadership and governance, financial and performance management, and workforce management, highlighting areas where more progress was needed. However, this was not designed to provide a comprehensive picture of Best Value in fire and rescue authorities and services. In addition, the significant financial pressures now facing fire and rescue, along with all other parts of the public sector, increase the need to assess its capacity to continue to deliver a high quality service.
- 1.4 This paper invites stakeholders to consider our proposals for our approach to carrying out and reporting Best Value audit at fire and rescue authorities and services.

## **2. Best Value**

- 2.1 The Local Government Scotland Act 2003 introduced duties of Best Value, community planning and public performance reporting for all local authorities including fire and rescue authorities. Statutory guidance from Ministers was published in 2004 to support implementation of the Act.
- 2.2 Best Value requires organisations to establish management arrangements, aimed at securing continuous improvements in their performance while maintaining an appropriate balance between quality and cost. The statutory guidance provides a detailed description of the main elements of these processes, setting out the key characteristics of Best Value, such as good leadership, effective management and making sure that services provide good value for money and meet the needs of local people.

## **3. The Audit of Best Value**

- 3.1 In 2004, the Accounts Commission introduced the Audit of Best Value and Community Planning for local authorities. Audit Scotland, on behalf of the Commission developed and introduced an audit approach which for the first time independently assessed the corporate leadership of local authorities, the quality of local service performance and the extent to which councils were able to demonstrate that they were achieving good value for money and continuous improvement in services.
- 3.2 Best Value reports are made by the Controller of Audit to the Accounts Commission under section 102(1) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. After considering these the Commission may do any or all of the following:
- direct the Controller to carry out further investigations
  - hold a hearing
  - state its findings
  - make recommendations.
- 3.2 By 2009, reports on all 32 Scottish councils had been completed by Audit Scotland and considered by the Accounts Commission. An independent assessment of the Best Value audit process was commissioned from Cardiff University. Their report, *Decisive Moment*, found that the audits were well established and credible, and had improved the accountability of councils. The report also identified a number of improvements that could be made in the audit process. Following a series of pathfinders, a new risk-based and proportionate approach has now been introduced for future Best Value audits at councils. This is designed to provide audits which are

more tailored to local risk assessments and to strengthen joint working with other scrutiny bodies.

- 3.3 In 2009, Audit Scotland and HMICS began a series of joint Best Value audit and inspections of police authorities. Two reports have now been published, on Tayside and Northern police, with a third, on Grampian, due to be completed later this year.
- 3.4 External assessments of the revised approach to the audit of Best Value in councils and its application to police authorities has been commissioned from ipsos-MORI. These have confirmed that it has helped to promote improved performance and accountability, but their detailed findings are now being used to make further improvements in the audit approach in aspects such as the clarity of risk assessments and the reporting format.

## **4. Best Value and fire and rescue**

- 4.1 At its meeting in July 2008, the Accounts Commission approved outline proposals for the development and introduction of Best Value audit and inspection in police and fire and rescue. The Commission agreed that the initial audits should be conducted for joint boards responsible for police services and that extension of the audit to fire and rescue should follow later. In 2009, Audit Scotland, working with HMICS, began carrying out a programme of joint audit and inspections of police authorities and services.
- 4.2 The development of a Best Value audit and inspection framework for fire and rescue comes at a time of significant uncertainty about the future funding and structures. For that reason, a flexible forward-looking approach is required. It is important, therefore, that any audit is designed to focus on the key issues that are facing fire and rescue and to help inform its improvement agenda
- 4.3 In addition, the Commission is well aware of the concerns regarding the 'burden of scrutiny' on public bodies and is keen to promote a risk-based and proportionate approach to the audit of Best Value. This means that wherever possible, the audit approach should draw on existing performance information and self evaluation evidence from within fire and rescue services and be conducted in such a way that it complements and does not duplicate other scrutiny functions, such as internal and external audit and SFRAU.

- 4.4 Earlier work carried out by Audit Scotland should also help shape any Best Value audit of fire and rescue. The *'Review of service reform in Scottish fire and rescue authorities'*, which was published in 2007 and a follow-up report in 2008, covered many aspects of Best Value and should provide a useful benchmark to help assess the progress of fire and rescue in areas such as the role of members, performance management and scrutiny, and workforce management.
- 4.5 At the same time, there are other aspects of Best Value, such as responsiveness & consultation, competitiveness, review and option appraisal, and sustainability within the fire and rescue services which have never been subjected to external scrutiny and are likely to feature as a specific focus in the Fire and Rescue Best Value audit approach.

## 5. Options for auditing Best Value in fire and rescue

- 5.1 There are three main options for applying the audit of Best Value to Fire and Rescue, which are detailed in Exhibit 1:
- Carrying out a full programme of Best Value audits at all eight authorities
  - Produce a national summary of Best Value in fire and rescue, based on focused BV audit work at all eight authorities
  - Delay any specific Best Value audit.
- 5.2 The Commission's preferred approach is to proceed with option 2. We believe this combined national and local reporting model will help the service as a whole to improve whilst at the same time providing an appropriate degree of local accountability. However, before making any final decisions the Commission is keen to seek the views of interested parties on the merits of the other options available to it.

**Consultation questions: main options for Best Value audit framework**

- Which of the three main options do you favour for applying the audit of Best Value to Scottish fire and rescue, and why?

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Exhibit 1

## The main options for auditing Best Value in fire and rescue

<b>Option 1</b>	<b>Carrying out a full programme of Best Value audits at all eight authorities.</b>
<p>This would be in line with the approach taken for the police service. After carrying out some development work, this series of audits could begin in early 2011 and be completed by 2013. However, there is a significant risk that the current structure of eight fire and rescue authorities and their related services will change significantly before this programme of work is completed, with implications on its relevance and value.</p>	
<b>Option 2</b>	<b>Produce a national summary of Best Value in fire and rescue, based on focused BV audit work at all eight authorities</b>
<p>Reflecting the potential changes taking place with the fire and rescue services, the audit could focus on a single national report based on proportionate and targeted audit work at all eight authorities and services, supported by summary local audit reports with local findings and improvement recommendations.</p> <p>The national report would promote public accountability by summarising the key strengths and weaknesses across Scotland's fire and rescue services. The emphasis of this national report would be forward-looking, helping the service as a whole to improve.</p> <p>Local accountability would be achieved through the local short summary audit reports which would contain local findings and improvement recommendations. These would be considered by the Commission, alongside the national report, and would be published on our web-site, along with any local or national Commission findings. This would be a more focused approach than Option 1 and use significantly less resources. After carrying out some development work, this could be completed during 2011</p>	
<b>Option 3</b>	<b>Delay any specific Best Value audit</b>
<p>There is a case to delay any specific Best Value audit of fire and rescue. There is no evidence of widespread service failure and, in relative terms, fire and rescue is a relatively low-spend service. Our audit resources could be used elsewhere where there is a greater perceived risk. With fundamental uncertainty about the future governance arrangements, including the number of joint boards, it may make sense to wait until any new, merged, authorities have been established. This would also give time for any national fire and rescue performance framework to become fully established. In the meantime, the local auditors could monitor progress on the issues raised in the 2007 and 2008 reports.</p> <p>However, there is no certainty that there will be any fundamental changes in fire and rescue in the foreseeable future. Any further delay may mean that potential weaknesses in Best Value continue to be hidden from public scrutiny. As indicated at paragraph 4.5, we think that there are significant aspects of Best Value which have never been subjected to audit or where it is likely that weaknesses remain</p>	

## 6. Proposed Best Value audit framework

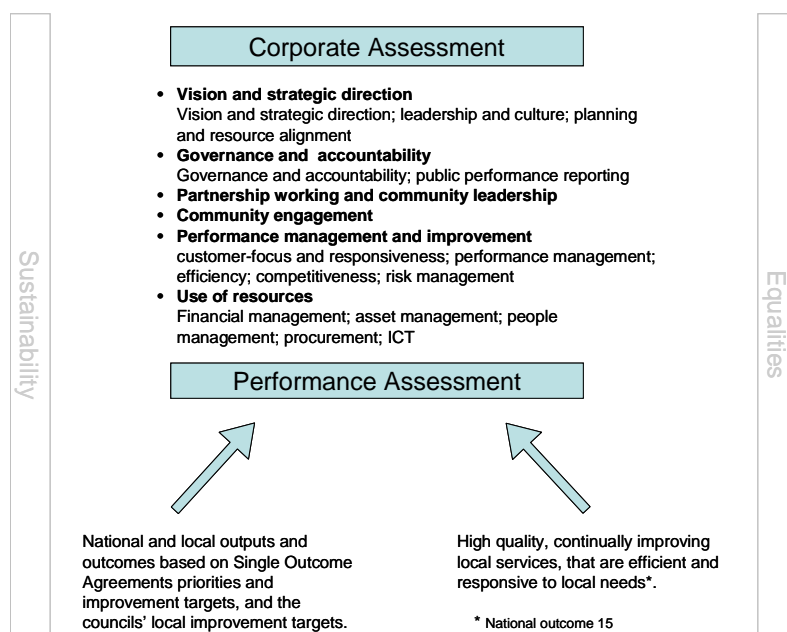
6.1 In broad terms, it is proposed that the audit of Best Value in fire and rescue will be based on the approach currently being used in the audit of council and police authorities and services. The audit framework will consist of two main components:

- A corporate assessment of fire and rescue authorities and services
- A performance assessment of fire and rescue services.

6.2 The **corporate assessment** of fire and rescue authorities and services will focus on how they discharge their duties of Best Value. This will be assessed in terms of the elements of the Best Value shown at Exhibit 2. This is based on the statutory guidance provided by Ministers for local government in 2004. A more detailed description of the proposed characteristics of a Best Value fire and rescue authority is set out at Appendix 1.

Exhibit 2

### Proposed Best Value audit framework



Source: Audit Scotland

6.3 At a time of significant financial pressures in fire and rescue, as well as in the rest of the public sector in Scotland, some aspects of Best Value - such as financial management, partnership working, and performance management - are of particular importance in helping officers and members continue to deliver high quality services

at the same time as reducing their expenditure. It is expected that the corporate assessment of fire and rescue will need to reflect this national context and focus on these issues.

**Consultation questions: corporate assessment**

- How do you view the proposed characteristics of a Best Value fire and rescue authority, as set out in Exhibit 1 and, in more detail, at Appendix 1?
- What do you think are the key aspects of Best Value in fire and rescue, nationally as well as locally, that should be the focus of an audit?

6.4 A **performance assessment** of fire and rescue services will form the second element of the Best Value audit. This will need to reflect the wider priorities and objectives set out in the *Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland*, covering preventative as well as emergency response services.

6.5 In the absence of a national performance framework, the audit will need to draw on a range of existing sources of information, such as reports published by SFRAU and local performance reports used by senior officers and members of each authority and by community safety partnerships.

6.6 It is likely that any assessment of service performance will include:

- The impact of enforcement and preventative work, such as home fire safety visits, in reducing fires and casualties
- Call handling and response times
- Costs, compared with previous years and with other UK fire services.

**Consultation question: assessment of service performance**

- What do you think are the main measures of performance which should be used to assess fire and rescue services

6.6 Judgements on service performance will be made using the appropriate application of professional expertise based on a range of complex, context sensitive, qualitative

and quantitative evidence. These will be expressed in consistent narrative language with no grading system used in either the local or national reports.

## 7. Peer involvement

7.1 Over the past year, Audit Scotland has introduced the involvement of peers in the Best Value audits. These have usually been serving members and senior managers who have helped provide constructive challenge at the scoping and reporting stages of audits and also with some parts of the fieldwork. This has brought some important benefits to the audit process, in terms of bringing the perspective of service practitioners to the audit process and strengthening the degree of independent challenge.

7.2 The assessment of service performance is particularly challenging in an area as specialised as fire and rescue. In order to help support the audit team's capacity to assess the performance of services, it is therefore proposed that a secondment is sought from outside Audit Scotland. Depending on the availability of suitable individuals, this peer support could be drawn from a variety of sources, such as:

- A serving member of staff, or a recent retiree, from a Scottish fire and rescue service.
- A serving member of staff, or a recent retiree, from a fire and rescue service elsewhere in the UK.
- The Scottish Fire and Rescue Advisory Unit (SFRAU).
- A member of staff from the Audit Commission, experienced in the audit of fire and rescue services in England.

7.3 It is anticipated that peer support could be used in the following ways as part of the audit process.

- A member(s) of the **audit team**, helping to carry out the fieldwork and analyse information on service performance and/or providing independent challenge when draft audit judgements are being made.
- As an independent member of Audit Scotland's **Quality Assurance Panel** which considers the scope of each local audit and the resulting draft report.

7.4 In addition to this formal peer involvement the Accounts Commission will continue to engage with key national stakeholders, including convenors and Chief Fire Officers, as the BV audit development work and subsequent roll-out takes place

**Consultation questions: peer support**

- Do you think that some form of peer support should be built into the audit process?
- What are the main ways in which peer support could be used to help add value to the audits?
- Where do you think this peer involvement should be drawn from?

## **8. The role of the Accounts Commission in considering and responding to Best Value audit reports**

8.1 The role of the Accounts Commission is to:

- consider the Controller of Audit's Best Value report and make findings
- publish its findings, issuing a media release and discussing the findings with the media and stakeholders
- visit each authority to discuss its improvement plan
- receive an improvement plan from each authority
- where necessary, hold a public hearing (this has happened three times since 2004)
- comment on Best Value themes in findings on the Controller of audit's annual overview report
- commission national studies on Best Value themes.

## **9. Audit follow-up**

9.1 If an audit of Best Value is carried out, there may be a need for some follow up work in individual authorities or services to assess their progress in implementing their improvement plan. This would be carried out by local auditors as part of their annual audit.

## 10. Audit fees

- 10.1 The costs of carrying out the Best Value audit will have no direct impact on the audit fees charged to individual fire and rescue authorities.

## 11. Other issues

- 11.1 This consultation paper sets out what we think are the key questions on the proposed approach for the Best Value audit of fire and rescue. However, we would welcome comments on other issues which stakeholders feel are important.

### Consultation questions: other issues

- Are there any other issues that you would like to raise about the proposed approach to the audit of Best Value in Scottish fire and rescue?

## 12. Responding to these proposals

- 12.1 We would welcome your comments on the proposed approach and, in particular, on the issues listed at Appendix 2. The Commission will be meeting conveners and Chief Fire Officers to discuss these proposals in more detail.

- 12.2 Responses should be returned to:

Best Value in Fire & Rescue  
Audit Scotland  
18 George Street  
Edinburgh  
EH2 2QU

Email : [bvfireandrescue@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:bvfireandrescue@audit-scotland.gov.uk)

by the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2010.

## **13. Next steps**

- 13.1 The Accounts Commission will consider the feedback from this consultation at its meeting in January 2011. It will then publish its proposed approach and any relevant timetable for carrying out this work.

## Appendix 1: Proposed characteristics of a Best Value fire and rescue authority and service

<p><b>Vision and strategic direction</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The authority has a clear and ambitious vision for what it wants to achieve for its area and communities to secure high quality services and effective outcomes for local people.</li> <li>• The authority understands and balances national and local priorities, with clarity about how they are linked.</li> <li>• Elected members exhibit strong leadership of Best Value and ownership of the vision, strategic plan and priorities.</li> <li>• The role of the authority is strategic and does not dwell on detailed operational matters.</li> <li>• Strategic priorities and plans are regularly reviewed by the authority to ensure that they remain relevant to changing circumstances.</li> <li>• Key supporting strategies are considered by the authority.</li> <li>• The authority maintains an effective working relationship with the Chief Fire Officer and other senior officers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Partnership working and community leadership</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The authority ensures that effective partnership relationships are maintained and that the service is participating and working effectively with partners to improve outcomes.</li> <li>• The authority ensures that consideration is given to sharing and combining resources between partners.</li> <li>• Elected members play an active, visible role in partnership activities, assuming responsibility for creating and promoting a vision on behalf of the community.</li> <li>• The authority considers all partnership strategies and plans and monitors both what is and what is not being delivered.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Community engagement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The authority understands the needs of its different communities and ensures they are involved in developing a local vision, setting priorities and shaping services.</li> <li>• The authority ensures there is a clear approach to consultation, representation and participation.</li> <li>• The authority is clear about the outcomes it wants to see from any community engagement activity.</li> <li>• The authority ensures that relevant information is provided in understandable and appropriate languages and formats to all its communities.</li> <li>• The authority scrutinises whether community engagement activity is securing improved outcomes for local people.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Governance and accountability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision-making arrangements are open, transparent and well publicised, and are understood by both members and officers.</li> <li>• Members clearly understand their role and the decisions they are able to make.</li> <li>• The Joint Board or Committee is open to the public and their work is well documented and made accessible to local citizens.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy and decision-making and scrutiny functions are properly resourced, with sufficient professional officer support.</li> <li>• Relevant policy and decision-making and scrutiny functions are member-led, with elected members taking full responsibility for the brief that they hold.</li> <li>• Members receive appropriate and timely information to enable them to make informed decisions. They have been provided with appropriate training to support them in their role (convenor, scrutiny, or board/committee member) and are confident in exercising their challenge and scrutiny role.</li> <li>• The authority is committed to effective and balanced public performance reporting as a key element of effective public accountability.</li> <li>• It ensures that service standards which reflect the needs of local people and other stakeholders are clearly set out.</li> <li>• Member/officer relationships are constructive and cordial. The respective responsibilities of members and officers may be codified in a formal protocol setting out respective roles and responsibilities.</li> </ul>
<b>Performance Management and Improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elected members receive regular performance and improvement reports and actively scrutinise the information and secure agreement for improvement actions.</li> <li>• The authority ensures that performance reporting is effectively linked to the reporting of risk and resources (finance, people, IT, information, and property).</li> <li>• The authority scrutinises the progress and performance of the service in relation to its contribution to implementation of Community Plan, SOA and other relevant partnership strategies and plans.</li> <li>• The authority ensures that it monitors customer satisfaction, customer response and complaints.</li> <li>• The authority considers performance and unit cost data to ensure services are delivered cost-effectively.</li> <li>• The authority pursues the achievement of efficiencies and regularly scrutinises progress.</li> <li>• The authority ensures there is a systematic service review process in place and being reported.</li> </ul>
<b>Use of Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The authority scrutinises how the service is making use of its key resources (people, money, assets) to deliver strategic objectives.</li> <li>• The authority considers regular financial monitoring reports and has an input into the annual budget setting process.</li> <li>• The authority ensures there is a medium to long term financial strategy, workforce plan, asset management plan and ICT strategy in place.</li> <li>• The authority scrutinises how these plans and strategies are linked and are contributing to the achievement of corporate objectives.</li> <li>• The authority robustly scrutinises new investment proposals.</li> <li>• Savings and efficiency gains are profiled over the year and there is monitoring throughout the period by the authority to ensure their achievement.</li> </ul>
<b>Equalities and Sustainability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Authority ensures that appropriate strategies and monitoring are in place and that equalities and sustainability are considered in discharging relevant aspects of its statutory functions.</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX 2

### Consultation questions and response form

#### Main options for audit of Best Value

1. Which of the three main options do you favour for applying the audit of Best Value to Scottish fire and rescue, and why?

#### Corporate assessment

2. How do you view the proposed characteristics of a Best Value fire and rescue authority, as set out in Exhibit 2 and, in more detail, at Appendix 1?

3. What do you think are the key aspects of Best Value in fire and rescue, nationally as well as locally, that should be the focus of an audit?

**Service performance assessment**

4. What do you think are the main measures of performance that should be used to assess fire and rescue services ?

## Peer involvement

5. Do you think that some form of peer support should be built into the audit process?
6. What are the main ways in which peer support could be used to help add value to the audits
7. Where do you think this peer involvement should be drawn from?

## Other issues

8. Are there any other issues that you would like to raise about the proposed approach to the audit of Best Value in Scottish fire and rescue?

# TAYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE BOARD



Best Value in Fire and Rescue  
Audit Scotland  
18 George Street  
EDINBURGH  
EH2 2QU

Gillian Taylor  
Clerk to Tayside Fire and  
Rescue Board  
Tayside Fire and Rescue  
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2 High Street  
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15 November 2010

Dear Sir

## **CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED BEST VALUE AUDIT OF FIRE AND RESCUE – RESPONSE FROM TAYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE BOARD**

Tayside Fire and Rescue Board welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Audit Scotland Consultation on the Proposed Best Value Audit of Fire and Rescue and hopes that this response will contribute to the continued positive development of the fire and rescue service in Scotland.

### **Main Options for Audit of Best Value**

#### **1 Which of the three main options do you favour for applying the audit of Best Value to Scottish fire and rescue, and why?**

Tayside Fire and Rescue Board favours Option 1. A full audit of each fire and rescue authority would highlight areas of good practice and identify areas requiring further development within each authority. The results of the audit would then be able to be utilised by the authority as part of its continuous improvement process. If there was to be structural reform of the service in Scotland a full audit of each of the eight current authorities would be extremely valuable as identified areas of best practice within each authority could be implemented across the reformed service. A full audit of each of the eight current authorities would also provide an extremely useful benchmark for any future audit of a reformed service. If however there was no reform, each of the current services would benefit from the identified areas of good practice and areas requiring further development highlighted within the audit reports of the other services.

Option 2, the production of a national summary, albeit a summary based on focused BV audit work at all eight authorities, has the risk that areas of good

and bad practice could be lost in a national summary report. The level of detail in a national summary report is unlikely to have a positive impact on the performance improvement possible which could be achieved through a full audit of each authority.

Tayside Fire and Rescue Board does not support Option 3. If there was to be structural reform of the service then the 2011 audits of each authority could be reviewed as part of the first audit of the reformed service to identify whether the strengths identified at authority level had been built upon and the areas for development addressed within the reformed service.

## **Corporate Assessment**

### **2 How do you view the proposed characteristics of a Best Value fire and rescue authority, as set out in Exhibit 2 and, in more detail, at Appendix 1?**

Tayside Fire and Rescue Board supports the proposed characteristics of a Best Value fire and rescue authority, as set out in Exhibit 2 and, in more detail, at Appendix 1.

### **3 What do you think are the key aspects of Best Value in fire and rescue, nationally as well as locally, that should be the focus of an audit?**

Tayside Fire and Rescue Board considers it appropriate to consider the national operating context when conducting the audit of each fire and rescue authority. The ability of each authority to deliver high quality community safety and emergency response services to all the communities it serves during a period of public sector funding constraints should be a key aspect of this audit process. Are fire and rescue authorities able to deliver greater levels of effectiveness whilst simultaneously delivering greater levels of efficiency?

## **Service Performance Assessment**

### **4 What do you think are the main measures of performance that should be used to assess fire and rescue services?**

The measures of performance used should seek to assess the performance of the organisation against the outcomes it is seeking to deliver. The outcomes of the Integrated Risk Management Planning process are as follows:

Reduce the loss of life from fire and other emergencies.

Reduce the number and severity of injuries from fires and other emergencies.

Reduce the number of fires and other emergencies.

Reduce the commercial, economic and social impact of fires and other emergencies.

Safeguard our environment and heritage.

Provide value for money.

The effectiveness of an authority's prevention activities, at both community safety level and through the application of Part 3 of the Fire (Scotland) Act

2005, should link to a corresponding reduction in intervention activities. As well as assessing an authority's performance in terms of its ability to increase community safety, its performance and actions in terms of firefighter safety should also be assessed.

In addition to the more obvious service delivery performance aspects of the authority the performance of the equally important service support functions should also be assessed. For example, the desired outcome of increased firefighter safety relies on high performance in the areas of learning and development and occupational health, safety and wellbeing and in having an effective operational assurance process in place.

The consideration of qualitative as well as quantitative evidence during any assessment of service performance is essential. It is important to remember that the fire and rescue service is as much about its preparedness to respond as it is about its effectiveness in its response. Tayside Fire and Rescue Board supports the assessment of performance being expressed in consistent narrative language with no grading system used in either the local or national reports.

The management of Tayside Fire and Rescue would welcome the opportunity to discuss the area of assessment of service performance in greater detail with the members of the Audit Scotland team during the development phase of the audit process.

## **Peer Involvement**

### **5 Do you think that some form of peer support should be built into the audit process?**

Tayside Fire and Rescue Board considers that some form of peer support would be beneficial to the audit process.

### **6 What are the main ways in which peer support could be used to help add value to the audits?**

Tayside Fire and Rescue Board considers it beneficial that peer support be available at all stages of the audit process ie the scoping phase, fieldwork phase and reporting phase. The peer support would be extremely helpful in identifying measures of service performance, as discussed in our answer to Question 4 above. This approach would also bring professional support and challenge and encourage the sharing of good practice.

### **7 Where do you think this peer involvement should be drawn from?**

Tayside Fire and Rescue Board considers the choice of peer support to be of critical importance to the credibility of the audit process. Ideally that support should be provided by someone with a sufficiently strategic knowledge of the fire and rescue service and its operating environment within Scotland, a strategic knowledge of performance and audit and bring as much independence to the process as would be possible to achieve.

These skills are only likely to be available at principal management level within the service. Although we are aware of the pressures services are

under at this time the credibility of the audit process is critical. In order to be as helpful as possible in relation to the consideration and selection of appropriate peer support we would offer you a meeting with Assistant Chief Fire Officer David Boyle of Tayside Fire and Rescue who is currently a member of the Board of the Public Sector Improvement Framework within Scotland.

### **Other Issues**

**8 Are there any other issues that you would like to raise about the proposed approach to the audit of Best Value in Scottish fire and rescue?**

As we are entering a period which could potentially lead to the structural reform of the service in Scotland, Tayside Fire and Rescue Board considers it appropriate that the effectiveness and efficiency of all aspects of the service be included within this audit. We therefore advocate that the effectiveness and efficiency of Scottish Resilience within the Justice and Communities Department of the Scottish Government be included within the remit of this audit process.

Should you require any additional information or wish to discuss any of the points raised within this consultation response please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

G A Taylor  
Clerk to Tayside Fire and Rescue Board