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Press release

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Progress report on Fire Services modernisation

Overall, Scotland's Fire Services have made some progress towards implementing the modernisation agenda and are assessed as "amber" in an Accounts Commission report published today.

The Commission uses a traffic light scoring system to show the progress of each Fire Authority. All authorities are assessed as having made some progress and are classified as amber overall. (see exhibit).

Accounts Commission Chairman Alastair MacNish says:

"The overall results suggest progress by all authorities but there is still a considerable way to go."

The report does not comment on the pay award as recommendations and decisions on pay are matters for the employers to address. Alastair MacNish says, "It is now for the employers to judge whether the progress to date against the timetable in Scotland is satisfactory."

The Accounts Commission assessed progress made so far by fire authorities in implementing the modernisation agenda as set out in the national pay agreement. The pay and conditions agreement describes a five-stage pay award, with stages 2 and 3 subject to the completion of certain negotiations and, in Scotland, subject to verification by the Accounts Commission that the intended benefits (including savings) of the various national changes are being delivered locally.

The Commission will carry out a second verification audit in the summer of 2004 to provide an updated assessment of further progress made in implementing the modernisation agenda. The resulting report will then be considered by the employers when taking decisions on the next stage of the pay award.

Separate arrangements for verification and reporting were made in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The same structure and methodology have been used as this verification relates to a UK pay settlement. The Audit Commission is publishing the findings of its verification audit today.

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Notes to editors

1. (see next page...)

The detailed judgements for each fire authority were as follows:

Fire authority	Overall	IRMP	Rank to role	IPDS	Overtime	Duty systems	Part time	Modernisation agenda
Central	Amber	Red	Amber	Amber	Red	Red	Red	Amber
Dumfries & Galloway	Amber	Red	Amber	amber	Red	Red	Red	Amber
Fife	Amber	Red	Amber	Amber	Red	Red	Red	Amber
Grampian	Amber	Red	Amber	Amber	Red	Red	Amber	Amber
Highlands & Islands	Amber	Red	Red	Amber	Amber	Red	Amber	Amber
Lothian & Borders	Amber	Amber	Red	Amber	Red	Red	Amber	Amber
Strathclyde	Amber	Amber	Red	Amber	Red	Red	Red	Amber
Tayside	Amber	Amber	Red	Amber	Red	Red	Red	Amber

Red = little or no progress

Amber = some progress

Green = good progress

2. The Accounts Commission is responsible for securing the audit of 32 Scottish councils and 34 joint boards, including police and fire services. The Commission investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Accounts Commission is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Executive or the Scottish Parliament.

3. 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 Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland.