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**NATIONAL JOINT COUNCIL  
FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY  
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES**

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**To: Chief Fire Officers  
Chief Executives/Clerks to Fire Authorities  
Chairs of Fire Authorities  
Directors of HR (Fire Authorities)**

**Members of the National Joint Council**

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20 February 2015

**CIRCULAR NJC/03/15**

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Joint Working Group (Fitness)**

1. Further to the recent meeting of the NJC, this circular provides an update on the matter of the joint (NJC/DCLG) working group in connection with the maintenance of fitness issues, including the terms of reference and purpose.
2. The first meeting of the Strategic Group (NJC/DCLG), which will steer the work of the Joint Working Party, took place last month. As agreed, the meeting was chaired by Peter Holland (DCLG). NJC representatives were Cllr Maurice Heaster (employer) and Sean Starbuck (employee).
3. Members noted the **attached** document and agreed that the work would be taken forward on that basis.
4. Whilst the joint working party will be chaired by DCLG it will nonetheless be mindful of issues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland given the joint involvement of the Employer and Employee Sides (including advisers) of the NJC.
5. The intention is to hold the first meeting of the Joint Working Group itself in March. Employer representatives will be Justin Johnson, DCFO Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service and Karen Palframan, Brigade Manager Service Delivery, Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service. Employee representatives will be Sean Starbuck and Andy Noble, both from the Fire Brigades Union. DCLG representatives will be Peter Holland, Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser (England) and Claire Cooper, Assistant Director.

Yours faithfully

**SIMON PANNELL  
MATT WRACK**  
Joint Secretaries

## JOINT WORKING GROUP ON FIREFIGHTER FITNESS

### *The role of a firefighter*

The role of a firefighter continues to evolve. Whilst fighting fires remains a major activity, there is a greater emphasis on community-based, prevention activities, and dealing with special service incidents like flooding and road traffic accidents. This may impact on fitness requirements over the coming years.

The joint approach below has been discussed and agreed by DCLG, NJC Employer and NJC Employee representatives.

### *Terms of reference*

The joint working group notes that pension age will undergo a separate, regular review.

This joint working group will:

- consider aspects of the role that have been identified as the most physically intensive and how they impact upon an individual's ability and fitness to carry out their role over time;
- examine future options and trends in respect of continued employment and develop a best practice guide.

### *Purpose of the Joint Working Group*

In line with the draft terms of reference, the Joint Working Group will:

- consider the aspects of the role of firefighters which are the most physically intensive
- identify external drivers affecting the role of firefighters and how such new technology that may be identified and new ways of working that also may be identified might change the future fitness and physical demands of firefighters

The Group will produce a best practice guide which will include:

- approaches to address and mitigate aspects of the firefighter role that are the most physically demanding
- identifying how best fire and rescue services could provide occupational fitness support to firefighters throughout their career,
- identifying actions that employees should take to maintain their fitness, health and well-being; and
- identifying best practice within the fire and rescue service which supports firefighters in maintaining their fitness and meeting the obligation of fire and rescue services to provide appropriate training to their employees to reduce the potential for work-related injuries.
- taking account of similar work that may have taken place in other parts of the UK
- ensuring that recommendations within the best practice guide on fitness issues have been effectively evaluated to ensure they do not unfairly discriminate against any firefighter/ groups of firefighters

### *Further context*

The Joint Working Group will be mindful of work that has taken place elsewhere such as the recent studies into firefighter fitness, including:

- that prepared in relation to the Normal Pension Age for Firefighters (Dr Williams);
- the findings of the BDAG trials in the context of data relating to the physiological demands of firefighting; and
- the on-going Fire Fit project.

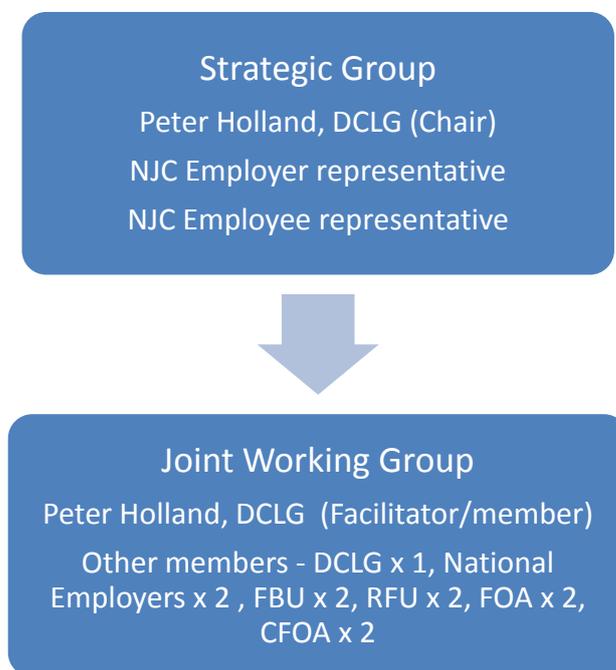
It is recognised that the FBU may wish to bring its position on a preference for national fitness standards to the attention of the JWP.

It is also recognised that:

- the establishment of this Joint Working Group arises from a trade dispute between the FBU and DCLG
- the Joint Working Group will be mindful of the FBU's concerns as part of that trade dispute that an outcome of the pension scheme changes will be an increase in 'capability' dismissals and the DCLG/National Employer view that this should not be the case

### **Structure**

The structure for this work shall be as set out below and directed by a Strategic Group.



Secretariat: To be provided by the LGA.

The Strategic Group will:

- meet as and when required to provide direction in accordance with the terms of reference and additional information provided in this note. Meetings are expected to be infrequent.
- receive, consider, and decide upon outcomes developed within the joint working group and provide further direction to the joint working group as necessary
- comprise 1 representative each from DCLG, NJC Employers, NJC Employees. This does not preclude any party from being accompanied by an officer and/or adviser.

The Working Group will:

- be facilitated by Peter Holland, DCLG
- operate in accordance with the terms of reference and additional information provided in this note as directed by the Strategic Group
- provide the necessary HR and operational technical expertise to the Strategic Group.
- comprise two representatives from each organisation. (It is recognised that the usual NJC practice of attendance by Employer and Employee Secretariats and where appropriate an adviser will apply.)
- undertake research (either calling upon its own resources or through alternative means e.g. research commissioned by DCLG).
- consider, in accordance with the terms of reference and additional information provided in this note, appropriate and relevant information in order to draft the required best practice guidance, which may include inviting an appropriate specialist/s to attend a particular meeting or meetings
- report periodically to the Strategic Group, including for its consideration the final proposal for the best practice guide.
- conclude within 1 year.