

For Publication

**Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
Human Resources Policy and Challenge
Group
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Item No. 15**

REPORT AUTHOR: SENIOR HUMAN RESOURCES ADVISER

**SUBJECT: NATIONAL JOINT COUNCIL JOINT WORKING GROUP
(FITNESS) FIRE FIGHTER BEST PRACTICE GUIDE
2016**

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Background Papers: Circular NJC/1/16 (available on request)
Circular NJC/03/15 (available on request)

Implications (tick ✓):

LEGAL	✓	FINANCIAL	✓
HUMAN RESOURCES	✓	EQUALITY IMPACT	✓
ENVIRONMENTAL		POLICY	✓
CORPORATE RISK	Known	OTHER (please specify)	
	New	CORE BRIEF	

Any implications affecting this report are noted at the end of the report.

PURPOSE:

1. Inform Human Resources Policy and Challenge (HRPC) of the content of Circular NJC/1/16.
2. Provide HRPC with a snapshot of the recommendations contained in the Firefighter Fitness Best Practice Guide 2016.
3. Provide HRPC with a benchmark of Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service fitness arrangements against the issues raised in the Circular.
4. Provide HRPC with recommendations in respect of some elements of the Service approach to Fire Fighter Fitness in light of publication of the best practice fitness guide.

RECOMMENDATION:

That HRPCG approve the recommendations in Appendix A of this report.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In February 2015 Circular NJC/03/15 advised Fire and Rescue Services of the creation of a joint DCLG/NJC working group formed to consider fitness issues. Circular NJC/03/15 advised that the working group would produce a Best Practice Guide. Circular NJC/1/16 was published on 8 March 2016 and contained a Home Office/National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services Firefighter Fitness Best Practice Guide. The Firefighter Fitness Best Practice Guide is not mandatory, however, following its introduction a Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) would be expected to take into account its conclusions when considering their standards for the safe occupational fitness requirements and arrangements for firefighters as well as the evidence currently available and presented in the Guide.
- 1.2 The Terms of Reference for the DCLG/NJC joint working group were:
 - To 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;
 - To examine future options and trends in respect of continued employment and develop a best practice guide (the Guide).
- 1.3 The Guide was produced to endorse key principles to underpin best practice. The key principles are designed to enable all Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) to have process in place to assist firefighters in maintaining the necessary physical fitness levels to undertake their role until normal pensionable age.
- 1.4 Appendix A provides a breakdown of the recommendations contained in the Guide, identifies whether BFRS already have the recommendation in place and if not provides a recommendation as to whether the recommendation should be considered for implementation.

2. Best Practice Examples Cited in Circular NJC/1/16

- 2.1 NJC/1/16 outlines areas of best practice currently operating in the UK fire service, highlighting activity in fourteen FRAs quoting examples from amongst others Lancashire, Leicestershire, Durham and Darlington and Scotland. Notable practice from BFRS was also identified.
- 2.2. The best practice related to the need for good communication between FRAs and their employees as well as the management of periodic fitness testing in a FRS. Bedfordshire was quoted for the incremental increase we have seen in operational staff fitness levels during the period 2008/09 to 2015/16 against

a reduction in sickness absence as an example of how fitness testing can impact positively on a healthier, fitter workforce.

3. Occupational Fireground Assessment

3.1 FireFit have conducted a significant amount of scientifically evidenced based research to identify a number of 'single person; fire-fighting tasks' and identify a minimum acceptable pace for each. The essential tasks for all operational firefighters were identified (see bullets below) and the results of the research indicate that firefighters with a cardiorespiratory fitness level of less than 42.3 mL.kg⁻¹.min⁻¹ cannot be guaranteed to be safe and effective in their ability to complete the essential tasks:

- Hose running
- Equipment carry
- Stair climbing
- Casualty evacuation
- Wild-land firefighting
- Lifting, extending and lowering of fire service ladders

3.2 FireFit plan to issue further guidance hopefully in spring 2016 that will contain a realistic occupational fireground assessment including a hose running exercise, a casualty evacuation exercise and an equipment carry exercise that will measure appropriately to the safe standards identified in the previous research.

3.3 In addition to the occupational fireground assessment an assessment flowchart was produced by FireFit, this was followed by an alternative assessment flowchart presented by the FBU. Application of both or either these testing regimes should be subject to the successful completion of the occupational fireground assessment validation and further discussion amongst the joint working group, with further information to follow as necessary to FRAs.

4. Risk Assessment

4.1 Whilst a best practice guide is not mandatory the benchmark of BFRS practice to the contents of The Firefighter Fitness Best Practice Guide has identified some areas for improvement in relation to female firefighter fitness that the recommendations at Appendix A are designed to address.

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APPENDIX A

Best Practice Guide Recommendation	BFRS Practice	Recommendation to HRPCG
Physical Fitness at Recruitment		
Essential for Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) to ensure that selected recruits are able to cope with the physical demands of the firefighter role.	The firefighter selection process includes a practical assessment (the simulation of a number of physical activities routinely performed in the role) as well as having a Service Fitness standard on entry.	Adequate measures currently in place, no further action.
Raise applicant awareness that those with a higher degree of fitness are more likely to be able to maintain the required level of fitness for the duration of their career	Applicants are advised of the entry fitness standard requirements and the Service promotes the need to maintain and where necessary improve individual fitness levels throughout their employment.	Adequate measures currently in place, no further action.
Maintaining physical fitness		
FRAs have a responsibility to provide appropriate support to assist firefighters in maintaining their fitness to undertake the role	Annual fitness testing process. Gyms on all stations. Dedicated time to maintain fitness provided to those on all duty systems (excluding retained). However all RDS stations have an equipped gym that employees can use in their own time.	Adequate measures currently in place, no further action.
Culture & Communication		
Effective communication strategy that explains the aims of the fitness policy to all concerned	Amnesty in first year that the Fitness Policy was implemented. Presentations to all employees prior to and during initial policy implementation. Presentations to HR Policy & Challenge, SDMT and FRA.	Adequate measures currently in place, no further action.
Active Service representation on the FireFit Steering Group	In place in BFRS for a number of years at Principal Officer level and at practitioner level with the Service Fitness Adviser (SFA).	Adequate measures currently in place, no further action.
Dedicated Service Fitness Adviser (SFA)	In place at BFRS since 2005.	Adequate measures currently in place, no further action.

Regular periodic fitness testing		
Annual or six monthly fitness testing should take place as this is more effective than that which takes place over a longer period.	Annual fitness testing process in place.	Adequate measures currently in place, no further action.
Dedicated workplace fitness advice		
Advisers available to offer professional advice and support to assist firefighters in maintaining or regaining the required fitness level.	Dedicated SFA in place (see above) in addition a number of trained Service PTI's in place to support and assist the maintenance of fitness levels. Bespoke advice and assessment is provided to any employee in order to support them in regaining the required standard.	Adequate measures currently in place, no further action.
Fitness equipment		
Consider the provision of station based fitness equipment.	Gym on every station and a renewal programme linked to the Capital Strategy Programme.	Adequate measures in place, no further action.
Self-health checks		
Facility for self-health checks such as weight, BMI etc.	Weight and BMI taken at annual fitness test Blood pressure taken at annual fitness test to highlight any issues. Opportunity to have body fat analysis and/or dietary advice. Intranet (Fitness & Wellbeing Section) provides useful resources and links for employees. EAP provides nutritional and other wellbeing information.	Adequate measures in place, no further action.

Fitness issues specific to women firefighters		
Consider targeted programmes addressing strength, muscular endurance and cardiorespiratory fitness along with lifestyle advice.	Targeted programmes available to all employees on request. Female firefighters can and do self-refer or can be referred if there are fitness issues or concerns (eg re strength etc). There are links from the Fitness & Wellbeing website to the FireFit site which contain preparatory and maintenance fitness plans however these aren't targeted to women.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Continue to deal with on a case by case basis as generic advice can be more of a hindrance than a help. b. Promote the availability of targeted programmes amongst the workforce (particularly to female firefighters).
Facilitate contact between women who have experienced similar issues.	Women's focus group formed as part of the Service Positive Action Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establish a women's forum on the Fitness & Wellbeing site with access restricted to female Firefighters to use and share information etc. b. Publicise the forums existence.
Consider support to assist the maintenance of fitness throughout pregnancy.	Sector specific best practice guidance on exercise during pregnancy obtained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Provide best practice information to all expectant mothers, or b. Make the best practice information available on the Fitness & Wellbeing site and promote it
Signpost women to appropriate external support and guidance during pregnancy.	In response to feedback from the Positive Action focus group OH have already developed some information (available on the intranet)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Expand the current provision and put the hyperlinks from the Circular onto the Fitness & Wellbeing area of the Service intranet. b. Publish a BB item to inform the workforce of their existence.
Before returning to operational duty consider providing women returning from maternity leave or long-term sick leave with a fitness programme, the opportunity to access a fitness adviser and fitness equipment to assist their return.	The SFA can develop individual fitness programmes for those returning to work. As part of the return to work process employees are required to pass a fitness test overseen by the SFA and have access to any Service gym whilst on maternity leave or long-term sick leave (dependent on the nature of their illness/injury and medical advice).	Adequate measures in place, no further action.

FRAs to develop appropriate policy on the menopause .	Some information is available on the Service intranet.	Review information already available on the Service intranet in light of the recently issued ACAS guidance on Managing the Menopause at Work and ensure relevant alignment.
Consider offering advice and guidance on the potential issues that employees may face throughout and post menopause (eg encourage women to undertake weight training to assist with strength and bone density).	Some information is available on the Service intranet.	Review the information already published and incorporate relevant advice.
Signpost women to relevant external support and guidance.	FBU Guidance is highlighted on the Service intranet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Expand the current provision and put the hyperlinks contained in the Circular onto the Fitness & Wellbeing area of the Service intranet. b. Publish a BB item to inform the workforce of their existence.
Regaining physical fitness		
In cases where a firefighter may need to regain fitness assistance in the form of access to a physiotherapy service, a phased return to work and access to fitness support.	<p>Internal assessment and treatment for some conditions in place.</p> <p>Access to subsidised external physiotherapy embedded in the Service, modified duty process enables a phased return to work as necessary.</p> <p>Fitness support in the form of tailored advice/programmes from the SFA.</p>	Adequate measures in place, no further action.
Regular periodic monitoring to assist the individual, identify the current position and monitor sufficient progress.	As part of the Service Fitness Policy employees unable to pass their fitness test are provided with regular assessment/tests administered by the SFA. In addition all employees can request fitness advice and assessment from the SFA.	Adequate measures in place, no further action.

Redeployment		
Consider redeployment for those unable to maintain fitness levels.	Temporary redeployment opportunities for those unable to maintain the fitness standards are managed through the modified duty procedure. Permanent redeployment would always be considered on a case-by-case basis in advance of any dismissal.	Adequate measures in place, no further action.
In cases where redeployment is not an option (for those aged 55 or over) consider the content of the Addendum to the National Framework for Firefighter Fitness in England plus the statement of the then Government Minister in the House of Commons on 15 December 2014 concerning access to an unreduced pension for those aged 55 years and older.	Whilst there was a Ministerial Statement as quoted in the Circular the Addendum to the National Framework says that an FRA must ' <i>consider</i> ' an Authority initiated retirement. It does not say it must give an Authority initiated retirement.	Adequate measures in place, no further action as the Service Fitness Policy is consistent with the content of the Addendum to the National Framework for Firefighter Fitness in England.
Service fitness testing regimes and methodology		
Ensure appropriate risk assessment is undertaken prior to fitness testing.	Individual risk assessment is embedded in the fitness testing process.	Adequate measures in place, no further action.
Once available incorporate the occupational fireground assessment into the fitness testing regime.	The Fitness Policy contains the use of such assessments once available.	Communicate to employees using the Blue Bulletin when available and prior to implementation.
New technologies		
Services will wish to be mindful of technological innovations and keep under review areas such as PPE, BA, fire appliance design and firefighting equipment.	Contractual arrangements exist as does a replacement strategy for each element.	Adequate measures in place, no further action.