



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

# Firefighter Fitness Standards and Assessment

Consultation on amendment to the fire and rescue national  
framework



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# Firefighter Fitness Standards and Assessment: consultation

Last year the Department consulted on a set of fitness principles which at that time were considered to provide the possible basis of dealing with fitness and capability issues, which had emerged during the previous months. After that consultation closed, a series of discussions have taken place with key stakeholders regarding how fitness and capability are measured in the fire and rescue service, the ability of firefighters to maintain a reasonable and safe standard, the appropriate methods by which firefighters' fitness can be measured and monitored, along with possible legislative changes which would help support that. In addition, the Department for Communities and Local Government is also in the process of setting in train a joint working group on fitness issues chaired by the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser.

The Department remains committed to ensuring that fitness standards and assessments are transparent and fair, that all firefighters who have difficulties in maintaining fitness are fully supported, and that those who are unable to maintain fitness are treated sympathetically in looking for redeployment, alternative employment, or in the event of them having to leave the service. The Department believes that the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England provides the best means by which fire and rescue authorities can be guided in their responsibilities, while continuing to serve the interests of both their employees and communities. Placing such requirements in the pension regulations is not appropriate due to the lack of a power for the Secretary of State to make regulations requiring the fire and rescue authorities to take steps in relation to assisting their employees return to fitness or requiring employers to consider redeployment of employees. The power to establish a pension scheme only enables a pension to be paid in certain circumstances.

Clearly there is a balance to be struck between preserving the ultimate discretion of an employer, and providing a degree of certainty and security for the employee. We have no doubt that the vast majority of fire and rescue authorities, if not all, are excellent employers, and the Department sees it as its task to support them in this where appropriate and possible.

In the light of the last consultation, we now wish to offer two alternative revisions to the National Framework for consideration. These are presented at Annex A. We consider that with the passage of time and experience, it is worth respondents revisiting the issues, and identifying areas where their approach might have changed. We would also value comments on whether the proposed text could be improved.

We would be grateful if you could submit your response to the consultation to [melanie.gillett@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:melanie.gillett@communities.gsi.gov.uk) by **9 December 2014**. Please contact 030 3444 1047 with any queries.

# Annex A

We are consulting on two possible changes to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. The two proposed textual changes are as follows:

## Proposed change 1

### **Fitness**

Firefighting is a physically demanding occupation and it is essential that firefighters have sufficient levels of fitness to enable them to carry out their tasks as safely and effectively as possible. As such, this requires higher levels of fitness than most other occupations and therefore the National Joint Council role maps set out a specific requirement for operational personnel to maintain levels of personal fitness

The Government believes that fitness standards must reflect the occupational demands of firefighting and the Secretary of State has agreed that the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser will chair a joint working group, which will include an evaluation and assessment of safe standards.

The Government has also agreed to undertake an independent review in due course to ensure that appropriate fitness standards, training, testing, monitoring and management policies and procedures are in place in each fire and rescue authority .

It is also recognised that fitness levels may decline with age and whilst this may be mitigated by fitness training, diet and other lifestyle changes it is acknowledged that there may be a general decline in fitness as a result of the ageing process.

Fire and rescue authorities have an important role in helping to ensure their firefighters remain fit, and are supported in remaining in employment.

### **Each Fire and Rescue Authority must:**

**have a process of fitness assessment and development to ensure that operational personnel are enabled to maintain the standards of personal fitness required in order to perform their role safely;**

**ensure that no individual will automatically face dismissal if they fall below the standards required and cannot be deployed operationally;**

**ensure that all operational personnel will be provided with support to maintain their levels of fitness for the duration of their career;**

**consider where operational personnel have fallen below the fitness standards required whether an individual is able to continue on full operational duties or should be stood down, taking into account the advice provided by the**

**authority's occupational health provider. In making this decision, the safety and well-being of the individual will be the key issue;**

**commit to providing a minimum of 6 months of development and support to enable individuals who have fallen below the required fitness standards to regain the necessary levels of fitness;**

**refer an individual to occupational health where underlying medical reasons are identified that restrict/prevent someone from achieving the necessary fitness and that individual must receive the necessary support to facilitate a return to operational duties; and**

**fully explore opportunities to enable the individual to remain in employment including through reasonable adjustment and redeployment in role where it appears the medical condition does not allow a return to operational duties.**

In those circumstances where there are no such opportunities and suitable alternative employment is either unavailable or, where available, is not agreed by the individual, then the Fire and Rescue Authority will commence an assessment for ill-health retirement through the IQMP process.

## Proposed change 2

### Proposal 2

The same as proposal 1, but with the addition of a further principle after the last paragraph above:

If no underlying medical issues are identified and following a programme of development and support it becomes apparent that an individual will be unable to regain the necessary levels of fitness, then a fire authority will fully explore opportunities for reasonable adjustments and/or suitable alternative employment. In those circumstances where there are no opportunities for reasonable adjustments or suitable alternative employment, the fire authority will in the case of an employee aged at least 55 consider commencement of the authority initiated early retirement process for it to determine whether the individual should be retired with an authority initiated early retirement pension.

Please give your views on each of the proposed revisions, if possible indicating any preferences and or textual amendments:

Proposal 1

Proposal 2