



Department for Communities and Local Government

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**Department for Communities and Local
Government**

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To all firefighters in England

20/03/2015

I would like to update you on a number of issues which I think will be of interest to you.

1) Fitness processes

I have had successful meetings with the National Employers, regarding fitness issues – both the detail of supporting firefighters in maintaining their fitness, based on the National Framework principles, and on the application of the factors set out in Pension Regulations for fire authority consideration in relation to Authority Initiated Early Retirement. The National Employers will be leading on this work which will have input from the Fire Brigades Union. Both approaches will provide reassurance to operational employees that fire authorities will continue to treat their employees in a fair and consistent manner. We expect the LGA to issue guidance to all employers soon.

2) Finalisation of Firefighter Pension Arrangements

On Tuesday 10 March, the final regulations relating to the new pension scheme were laid in Parliament. The latest regulations ensure that the rights that members have accrued in the existing firefighter pension schemes are protected and are appropriately reflected in the benefits which members receive. These final pieces of legislation, along with the statutory changes to the National Framework, means that the legislative processes for getting the new scheme up and running have now been put in place. The new pension scheme will come fully into effect on 1 April 2015.

The Department has produced several resources to help firefighters establish how these reforms affect them. These include the online calculator, which gives firefighters a personalised projection of their pension at various retirement ages. The calculator is publically available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/firefighters-pension-scheme-reforms-pension-scheme-calculator>. In addition, the Department has published an FAQ document to help firefighters understand the 2015 Scheme: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/226064/13073_1 - Further guidance for firefighters Combined Document.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/226064/13073_1_-_Further_guidance_for_firefighters_Combined_Document.pdf)

These are some of the best sources of information for firefighters wanting to understand the reforms and how you will be affected. Your fire authority should be providing you with information and support in relation to pension changes. If you need further assistance please raise this with your Authority.

3) Budget announcement

I was pleased that the Chancellor was able to announce in the Budget that changes to the 1992 pension scheme rules will bring it into line with the 2006 and 2015 schemes by ensuring that the spouse of a firefighter who dies on duty will continue to receive their pension if they

choose to remarry. Similar changes are being announced for the police and bring both workforces more into line with changes announced in the autumn for the armed forces.

4) Conditions of Service Review

Adrian Thomas' review into conditions of service has been delivered to the Department. We are now carefully considering this report, and it is the Government's intention to publish the Government's response alongside the report in due course. This will now be in the next Parliament, due to general election purdah. I would like to thank Adrian for his hard work, and I hope the final report and Government response will contribute to a constructive debate, and further consultation, in the months ahead.

5) Values and Culture of the Service

As you know I raised this as a key concern in my speech to the LGA fire conference. The Thomas Review chimes with others that have been produced in the last 12 months, including, I understand, the FBUs own survey which shows that 60% of those who responded had been bullied or harassed. While it is important to keep this in perspective; experience of it might be common, but that doesn't mean it is rife within the service, the feedback I have received since the LGA fire conference from delegates, and others in the service, demonstrate a widespread acceptance that it is an issue which needs to be tackled. The values and culture of the service must come from the service if they are to be both relevant and cherished and I anticipate this area will be a key focus for the future workstreams of all service organisations.

6) Smoke Alarms

On the theme of prevention, I was delighted to announce at the LGA fire conference the Government's intention to regulate to ensure private rented sector landlords install a working smoke alarm on each storey of their rented properties, and in some circumstances, a carbon monoxide detector. The regulations will take effect from October 2015 and will help to further reduce fire fatalities and injuries. I was also pleased to confirm that DCLG will provide English fire and rescue authorities with additional funding to help private landlords meet their new responsibilities with the provision of free alarms. Here is a link to the press release: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tenants-safer-under-new-government-measures>

7) Retained Firefighters Union Insurance Scheme for Retained Firefighters

The Retained Firefighters Union have recently improved the insurance cover available to their members. The special nature of on-call firefighters employment could mean that any injury sustained whilst at an incident may have an affect on their earning potential in their primary employment. The policy provides for a payment to be made should an on-call firefighter be unable to work due to an injury caused by an accident or a long term illness occurring whilst they are employed by the fire service and are an RFU member. Further details of the policy can be found on the RFU website here: http://therfu.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/OnCall_Leaflet_2015.pdf

Naturally you will need to take your own advice before purchasing any insurance policy, but it is good to see something positive being done for retained firefighters.

8) Recent Meetings:

a) Visit to Humberside

I recently visited Humberside Fire and Rescue Service where I had the privilege of officially opening the new control centre which has been refurbished in preparation for the completion of the East Coast and Hertfordshire Control Room Consortium Project. During the opening I met with members of the control centre team and was shown some of the recent upgrades which I was told have improved the working environment for staff and have made Humberside one of the most technically advanced control centres in the country. I was also shown the Emergency First Responder Scheme a joint initiative with Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust that see's firefighters responding to selected emergency calls at the same time as an ambulance – a great example of firefighters working collaboratively. I also took the opportunity to discuss Humberside's arrangements for maintaining firefighter fitness and was rather impressed with the response and attitude of Chief Fire Officer, Dene Sanders who was clear in his belief that Humberside was the 'fittest fire and rescue service in the country and is set to remain so'.

b) Fire Officers Association

I was grateful to Glyn Morgan and Ade Robinson from the Fire Officers Association for coming to see me recently. We discussed a range of issues, including firefighter fitness, and the working group set up under Peter Holland, the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, equality and diversity, and expanding the role map of firefighters to undertake a greater range of activities. Glyn kindly arranged for me to meet with some women representatives of the Fire Officers' Association, which I did on 24 February. I was very interested to hear from them on their experiences of life in the fire and rescue service, and the challenges they face.

c) Asian Fire Service Association

On 4 March I met with Jagtar Singh, Daryl Oprey and Yasmin Bukhari of the Asian Fire Service Association. The association champion good practice and latest thinking in equality, diversity and inclusion – in terms of both employment and service delivery. I heard some fascinating examples of where education and training on diversity issues can play a key role in prevention and protection. The importance of groups such as AFSA cannot be underestimated. I strongly believe the key to delivering the best service to the local community is to have a diverse, representative workforce, equipped to understand and meet the needs of those it serves and capable of delivering a first class service to everyone.

d) Targeting Risk and Fire Prevention Seminar

Finally, the Department co-hosted a Targeting Risk and Improving Fire Prevention Seminar with CFOA and Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service. The event, aimed to facilitate greater understanding and collaboration on research and risk identification by fire and rescue authorities to improve the effectiveness of targeting. The morning featured presentations on research undertaken across the country, including an evaluation of the sharing of Exeter Health data in Cheshire. The afternoon challenged attendees to consider how we all might better use research and data to improve fire safety activities. Heads of prevention, research and analysis from many authorities attended the event which I hope will generate further discussion and improved outcomes.

And finally

As DCLG goes into purdah can I take this opportunity to thank you for all your hard work over the last year in improving the service and delivering excellence for your communities, and the support you have given me: the briefings, the visits and your time. I have always had an interest in and high regard for the service and this role has enabled me to learn so much more about the remarkable job you do. I have been continually impressed with the vision, drive and passion that is so evident in all you do, and I know what a privilege it is to be part of that.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "PM Mordaunt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'P' and 'M'.

PENNY MORDAUNT MP