

## Workforce update

### Purpose of Report

For information.

**Is this report confidential? No**

### Summary

To update the Fire Services Management Committee on workforce matters in relation to industrial relations and more widely.

**LGA Plan Theme:** Support to the LG Workforce

### Recommendation

**That the Fire Services Management Committee note the issues set out in the paper.**

### Contact details

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## Workforce Update

1. This report updates the Fire Services Management Committee on current workforce and industrial relations matters within Fire and Rescue Services, and provides some brief updates on wider industrial relations issues within the local government workforce.

### **NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (Grey Book)**

2. As part of the NJC pay agreement reached in 2023, a commitment was given to explore the more complex issues of the employees' side pay claim through a series of joint working groups:

#### **Retained Duty System firefighters**

3. The offer letter from the National Employers said: "Firefighters employed on the retained duty system are an important part of the workforce. It is proposed that both parties commit to a joint working group to include review of the retained duty system pay and rewards package. Membership of the group and a schedule of dates should be agreed as soon as possible once the current pay award negotiations are concluded with the intention of the joint working group concluding its work within 8 months."
4. The joint working group has met regularly and debated a wide range of subject areas, with the summation of that work captured in a report which was recently shared at the February NJC. It will be up to each side of the NJC to now decide how to take that work forward.

#### **Firefighters (Control)**

5. The offer letter from the National Employers said: "The employers' side of the NJC recognises the important contribution of emergency fire and rescue control employees. To inform NJC consideration on the matter of the pay differential it is proposed that a joint job evaluation process be undertaken as soon as possible once the current pay award negotiations are concluded."
6. The Joint Secretaries are currently progressing this issue, with the intention that this work will be concluded before the end of June.

#### **Pay progression:**

7. The offer letter from the National Employers said: "The employers' side of the NJC is content to continue discussions around pay structure and progression. It is proposed that both parties commit to a joint working party commencing as soon as possible once the current pay award negotiations are concluded with the intention of the joint working party concluding its work within 8 months." And: "The employers' side notes the issues raised in the claim and is open to exploring further. Given the overlap with the pay progression point, it is

proposed that consideration be incorporated into that proposed working party.”

8. The joint working group has met regularly and debated a wide range of subject areas, with the summation of that work captured in a report which was recently shared at the February NJC. It will be up to each side of the NJC to now decide how to take that work forward.

#### **New roles**

9. The 2023 pay agreement also said: “The employers’ side of the NJC also remains committed to developing the work of the fire and rescue service and to do so by agreement. It also recognises the need for this to be supported by appropriate investment as well as employee reward.” This issue has been a theme throughout the working group and working party discussions.

#### **Pay negotiations 2024**

10. There has been an exchange of correspondence between employee and employer sides of the NJC to signal the intention to begin formal negotiations. Both sides are committed to reaching an agreement in advance of the pay review date of 1 July. Reflecting on the issues discussed in the joint working groups and more widely at the NJC, the National Employers will be consulting shortly to understand priorities and views across FRAs/FRSs in relation to what shape any offer from the National Employers should take.

#### **Culture in the Fire and Rescue Service**

11. The Inclusive Fire Service Group has reviewed and updated the Improvement Strategies. Along with the statement of intent issued in 2023, and an increased engagement more widely this group (an NJC owned body, with representation from all trade unions across Fire and Rescue Services in the Grey Book space, the NFCC, as well as the National Employers) remains committed to working together to ensure genuine progress is made in improving culture across FRAs/FRSs. Meeting dates have been set for the year ahead.

#### **NJC Employers self-led review**

12. Following the response to the White Paper, the National Employers intend to engage with stakeholders and partners across the sector in order to lead a review the NJC. Noting various external and internal commentaries, the national employers intend this review to be based around the following themes:
13. Consultation and Input – how does engagement currently operate, are NJC decision makers hearing all the views they need, are there improved mechanisms that can improve the collection of views and facilitate their

conclusions.

14. Transparency – how are these considerations captured, explained and justified, is there more that should be done in this space. How does it compare to other models of pay decision making?
15. Collective Bargaining models – can we learn from other models of national or local bargaining? What are the costs and experiences and what can we learn from alternative models of industrial relations?
16. A key thread running through the review should also seek to improve the shared understanding of the purpose, approach and accountability of the NJC. The intention is to conclude this work during the summer period of this year.

#### **“Gold Book” pay agreement 2024**

17. The National Joint Council for Brigade Managers of Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services agreed an increase on basic pay of 3.0 per cent with effect from 1 January 2024.

#### **NJC for Local Government Services**

18. The [2024 pay claim for council chief executives](#) has been received and will be discussed at next month's [regional pay briefings](#). Separate pay claims have not yet been received from the Staff Sides representing NJC local government services ('Green Book'), JNC Craftworkers ('Red Book') and JNC Chief Officers although they are expected to arrive imminently.

#### **Teachers Pay: STRB process 2024**

19. The [remit for the 2024 School Teachers' Review Body](#) was published in December. In January, over 400 members participated in a webinar where Local Authorities were invited to contribute to our biannual teachers' pay and conditions survey to inform the written evidence submitted to the STRB by national employers ([NEOST](#)). The STRB oral evidence session for NEOST has been scheduled for 9 April.

#### **Employment Law Updates**

20. [Advisory bulletin 720](#) provides an overview of the latest employment law issues including Trade union act 2016 check-off guidance (as flagged at the last FSMC workforce report), plus strikes and minimum service levels: Code of practice and guidance and other issues.

## **Financial Implications**

21. Any cost implications will also need to be included in the work of the NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services' joint working groups.

## **Equalities implications**

22. Equalities issues are taken into account in all workforce issues.

## **Next steps**

23. Workforce issues will continue to be progressed as set out above.