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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 Human Resources at Fire Authorities**

Members of the National Joint Council

10 June 2008

CIRCULAR NJC/08/08

Dear Sir/Madam

**FAIRNESS AND DIGNITY AT WORK
SECTION 2 OF THE SCHEME OF CONDITIONS OF SERVICE (GREY BOOK)**

1. At its meeting today the NJC considered the outcome of a Joint Working Party which had reviewed the content of Section 2 of the Grey Book.
2. The NJC accepted changes recommended by that Joint Working Party.
3. A copy of the new, revised, Section 2, which replaces the existing section in its entirety with immediate effect, is attached. .

Yours faithfully
SARAH MESSENGER
MATT WRACK
Joint Secretaries

Section 2 of the 6TH Edition of the Scheme of Conditions of Service

1. The NJC expects fire and rescue authorities to set out and communicate the principles and strategies that are fundamental to developing an organisation which values all. These should encourage continuous improvement to identify and implement best practice.

In this context, the NJC strongly encourages fire and rescue authorities to:

- a) develop equal opportunities and work/life balance in employment;
 - b) ensure that equality is a core principle that underpins service delivery, training and development opportunities and employment relations;
 - c) remove all unlawful discrimination; and
 - d) take a positive approach to the development of a diverse workforce.
2. In support of these principles the NJC affirms that:
 - a) employees should be afforded equal opportunities in employment irrespective of sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy, colour, race, ethnic or national origins, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, trade union membership or because someone is married or a civil partner. In Northern Ireland it is also unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of political opinion.
 - b) fire and rescue authorities should ensure non-discriminatory practices prevail in all areas of employment and working practices including recruitment, training and assessment, development and selection; and
 - c) fire and rescue authorities should take lawful positive action within their employment initiatives to achieve and maintain a workforce representative of the communities they serve.
 3. Employees have clear responsibilities actively to support their employer in creating a working environment free from unlawful discrimination, harassment or bullying. The NJC recommends that fire and rescue authority policies in this area should include clear statements on the standards of behaviour expected of individuals and that all employees are aware of their responsibilities to others.

4. Fire and rescue authorities, employees, managers and trade union representatives will need to work together to achieve these principles. A key element of which would be joint initiatives.
5. Authorities should take into account the need for trade union participation when deciding reasonable facilities for representatives in joint fairness and dignity at work initiatives.
6. The NJC recognises that helping employees to reconcile work, family, caring and other responsibilities can be a key feature in making equal opportunities and work/life balance a reality. The NJC welcomes flexible working procedures and encourages the adoption of job-sharing, part-time working and career break arrangements.
7. Employees have the right to expect their religious faith to be respected by both their employer and fellow employees. Fire and rescue authorities should recognise that an employee's faith may require the wearing of specific forms of headwear or facial hair, and therefore will make every effort to provide appropriate personal protective equipment in such cases, mindful of legislative requirements. Authorities may also wish to ensure that appropriate faith facilities, such as prayer rooms, are made available.
8. The requirement to attend residential training courses can pose particular difficulties for employees with family responsibilities. Fire and rescue authorities are encouraged to consider alternative methods of delivering training and/or contributing in some way towards additional care costs incurred by employees, particularly where the parental income is such that hardship would otherwise arise.
9. Fire and rescue authorities should introduce a voluntary register of employees' interests that invites employees to declare membership of any organisation that is not open to the public without formal membership and commitment of allegiance, and which has secrecy about rules or membership or conduct.
10. Further guidance on best practice on fairness and dignity at work may be issued by the NJC from time to time.