

THE HIGHLAND AND ISLANDS FIRE BOARD

23 January 2009

Agenda Item	
Report No	

Firefighter Fitness Standards upon Entry to the Fire Service

Report by Chief Fire Officer

Summary

With increasing interest from the Health & Safety Executive into equality of fitness standards across the retained and whole time duty systems, new work has been progressing through the FireFit Steering Group in England and Wales and, as a consequence, a new national fitness standard has been agreed. This standard is now currently being considered for agreement and implementation through CFOA Scotland. The standard being considered is a VO2 max of 42, which, whilst significantly lower than the current guidelines of 45, is significantly higher than the level of 36 HIFRS currently use within the part time service.

1. Background

New entrants to the whole time duty system are tested as part of their recruitment, and successful candidates meet the required minimum VO2 max of 45. (VO2 max is the maximum ability of the body to take oxygen from the air and pump it via the heart to the muscles. It is measured in millilitres of oxygen per kilogramme of bodyweight per minute of exercise, and is considered by many trainers to be the best indicator of a person's cardiovascular fitness.) However, within the Retained Duty System and Volunteers, given the extremely limited recruitment pool of potential recruits that are available to HIFRS in some of our smaller and remote rural communities, the Service has traditionally taken a risk based approach to recruitment. Consequently, we have employed firefighters with a VO2 max as low as 36. If a national standard is agreed, HIFRS may no longer be in a position to justify this risk based approach. However, it is clear that, if we were to adopt the fitness level currently under discussion, our ability to recruit within the retained and volunteer service would be severely restricted, and could impact the sustainability of some stations.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the ongoing national work into determining agreed national fitness standards, and the likely impact upon recruitment within the retained and volunteer service of HIFRS if adopted as a national standard.

BRIAN A MURRAY
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
15 January 2009