



## Department for Communities and Local Government

**Penny Mordaunt MP**

*Parliamentary Under Secretary of State*

**Department for Communities and Local  
Government**

4th Floor, Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

E-Mail: [penny.mordaunt@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:penny.mordaunt@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

[www.gov.uk/dclg](http://www.gov.uk/dclg)

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Dear Fire Fighter,

I wanted to update you on a number of issues of particular concern to you at the moment.

### **A job or pension**

At the end of 2014 Parliament debated the pension reforms and the accompanying statutory instrument on fitness principles which came into law on 11<sup>th</sup> December. Both the Government and Parliament were very clear in what we want to see happen and I have emphasised this in letters to the unions and the employers. In addition to enshrining the principles in law, DCLG auditing and the sanction of the Secretary of State's powers of intervention, I will be working with the employers to ensure this new framework is understood and adopted swiftly and correctly. The work of the fitness group will be very important in identifying good practice, and I will keep you informed about its work as things progress. I know that many MP colleagues very much appreciate meeting with you and I hope that you will maintain regular dialogue with your MPs on these matters and others.

### **Local Government Finance Settlement**

This is traditionally a time of year to look to the future as budgets and business plans are being consulted on and set. I know you will be concerned about how services in your area will be funded and how they will develop. I am pleased that although money remains tight we have been able to secure a fair funding settlement for FRAs in this parliament. The Local Government Finance Settlement is currently out for consultation and subject to the outcome of the consultation, figures will be finalised in February. I am expecting single-purpose fire and rescue authorities (outside London) to receive **£1.417billion** of revenue spending power for 2015-16. The Government will also continue to fund existing national resilience capabilities (for radios, national resilience events such as flooding and search and rescue equipment), around £32 million will be provided in March 2016. Of course further funds can be raised locally. These figures mean that every fire and rescue authority should be able to deliver sensible savings while protecting frontline services.

### **More money into the frontline**

To make the most of that money we need to ensure that we focus resources on the front line of service delivery in fire and rescue, making the most of every penny of taxpayers' money and ensuring our service remains world class. I know many of you are frustrated when you see inefficiencies in the service which eat up money which could be spent on frontline services. I am pleased to say that further progress has been made in addressing that.

### Dorset and Wiltshire

Dorset and Wiltshire fire and rescue authorities have agreed to explore potential merger ('combination') of their authorities from April 2016, to deliver savings and improve resilience. The authorities believe it will strengthen local accountability and deliver better working arrangements with local partners, and estimate they can save £4million a year by merging. I

am pleased to inform you that the public consultation for the proposed revocation of Dorset Fire Authority and Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority and the creation of the new combined fire and rescue authority is underway and due to close on 28 January 2015.

### Procurement

Clearly there is much that can be done to reduce back office costs short of merger. Procurement is a key area where the rewards of better collaboration are potentially huge. *The Fire and Rescue procurement aggregation and collaboration report*, the result of a joint research project with the Chief Fire Officers' Association, found that the sector spends £127 million every year on fire and rescue specific products such as clothing and vehicles. Collaboration on this portion of spending alone could achieve savings of at least £18 million. In addition, if products were standardised it is likely that even bigger savings could be realised, not least if non-fire specific goods and services were bought together with other public bodies. I am pleased to say that the Chief Fire Officers' Association have taken on board the recommendations from the report. They have not only developed a national procurement strategy but are also considering creating a national fire back office which could mean that procurement and other policy areas would be co-ordinated nationally. I am pleased to say that my department recently awarded £370,000 from the fire transformation fund to support this work which is now underway. I hope you will be able to see the benefits of the work in your frontline resources in short order.

### Transformation Funding

Work on the Transformation fund projects is well underway. This will improve local services but will also yield a projected £300 million. From my brief time in this role the best ideas for new services, smart working and efficiency savings have come from you so I hope that you will be fully engaged in developing these ideas locally. Much of the transformation fund is supporting greater collaboration with other emergency and other public services through co-location of stations and services, sharing of back office functions. I know many of you are interested in this area, in particular how it can improve the public's experience of these services. At the last meeting of the Emergency Services Collaboration Working group we discussed arranging a separate meeting to consider how the three services can better coordinate and respond effectively to road traffic collisions. I hope to be able to update you about this in the near future.

### **Ebola Response**

Finally, I was very encouraged to hear of the work carried out recently by fire fighters over a seven week period, where 44 staff from different fire and rescue services provided logistics assistance to the Department for International Development. This assistance included the preparation of 40 cargo planes with equipment to assist in the efforts to tackle Ebola in Sierra Leone. I am aware that some individuals used their own leave to assist in these efforts resulting in 203 days of assistance. I received very positive comments from colleagues which only confirms my view of the professionalism of the UK fire service in times of need and for this I thank you.

I will continue to keep you updated. In the meantime, I wanted to take this opportunity to wish each of you a Happy New Year.



**PENNY MORDAUNT MP**

