



**Department for
Communities and
Local Government**

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***Department for Communities and Local
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To: Chairmen of fire and rescue authorities in
England
Chairman of the LGA's Fire Service Management
Committee
Chief Fire Officers and Chief Executives of fire
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CC: CFOA, LGA

Last week, after a lot of hard work on all sides, considerable progress was made towards resolving the most significant issue in current dispute with the Fire Brigades Union regarding pension reform. I understand that you are being consulted on a form of words agreed between the Local Government Association and the Fire Brigades Union on fitness assessments and associated policies.

I support the intent behind the draft wording, and am keen to see the very best workforce planning and management procedures put in place by fire and rescue authorities. I am clear that with good will on all sides this can be achieved without any changes to the existing Pensions Regulations, which would be neither practicable nor desirable. If followed through by all parties, the principles outlined ensure that operational firefighters will remain fit enough to remain in post beyond 55 years of age. I am also pleased to see that there are processes put in place involving the National Joint Council, to deliver the principles contained within the draft document, and address any difficulties that might arise.

It has been put to me that there may be very rare occurrences where a firefighter, after conscientiously following a prescribed fitness regime, and without a permanent underlying ill-health condition, may not regain fitness. I do not believe that if the principles suggested by the Local Government Association are followed fully, this situation would arise, and I am sure that many employers will have already been considering these issues, in the light of the 2006 scheme. However, if this rare situation did happen, I am sure that you would wish that such a person is redeployed, or if that is not possible and the person is over 55, an authority initiated early retirement is offered. I believe that this is the type of reassurance any fire and rescue authority would wish to give to its employees, particularly as they grow older.

Acceptance of the proposals made by the Local Government Association and the intent behind them will go a long way to relieve anxiety amongst firefighters. I am certain that you will embrace these principles as they stand without unworkable amendments to the Pensions Regulations to help bring this unnecessary dispute to an end.

BRANDON LEWIS