



**Department for
Communities and
Local Government**

Matt Wrack
General Secretary
The Fire Brigades Union
Bradley House
68 Coombe Road
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey
KT2 7AE

Brandon Lewis MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

***Department for Communities and Local
Government***

Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Tel: 0303 444 3430
Fax: 0303 444 3986
E-Mail: brandon.lewis@communities.gsi.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/dclg

12/11/2013

Dear Matt

Thank you for your letter of 11 November, in response to mine of 6 November.

Despite your elaboration, the simple facts of the matter are that you have chosen to focus your campaign on fitness and capability and your members in Scotland have been sufficiently impressed with the Scottish proposals to let the strike mandate fall there.

The offer that I have made has significant advantages over the Scottish fitness principles: there would be an independent review after three years to ensure authorities are putting the right policies and procedures in place, and the fitness and capability principles would be given strong statutory underpinning through the National Framework. You belatedly asked for the fitness principles to be put in regulations, but pension scheme regulations are there to deliver the terms of the pension scheme not to regulate the fitness processes, procedures and assessments of fire and rescue authorities.

Contrary to your assertion, I have seen nothing from Scotland which indicates that there will be a scheme provision that someone over the age of 55 facing dismissal will receive an immediate full and unreduced pension. In any event, I would see no need for this. The principles themselves should ensure that no firefighter will ever face this theoretical risk you have identified.

You have quoted selectively from a letter from the President of the Chief Fire Officers' Association on this matter. In fact, as you must know, the thrust of that letter was to highlight the misinformation that firefighters over 55 would be left with no job or pension. That is simply not the case.

With regard to the early retirement enhancements for firefighters aged 55 to 57, these were, as you know, the same as in Scotland. Despite my making it crystal clear to you in person and in writing that these arrangements were conditional on acceptance, you took a conscious decision to reject the offer for all firefighters by going on strike for a second time, and consequently you let it fall. Reverting back to the original offer in the Proposed Final Agreement now means that a firefighter will receive a larger pension for working beyond age 57.

You comment on the reform terms of the Police Pension Scheme. You will be aware that the average contribution rate in the Police Pension Scheme 2015 is 13.7%, larger than the proposals in the Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2015. And in relation to protection arrangements, the fact is that a greater proportion of firefighters are protected under the proposals on the table than in any other large public service workforce. Less than a quarter of firefighters will see any change in their retirement age in 2015. There is no case for extending these already generous terms. That would be unfair to tax payers and other public sector workforces.

I look forward to receiving your submission to the consultation on firefighter fitness standards and assessments and to discussing this further with you at the Roundtable in due course. The protection in the new scheme is already excellent, and the proposal made on fitness and capability provides a firm basis for resolving this dispute. As a consequence you should call off the industrial action and continue discussions.

As always, my door remains open should you wish to discuss any of these matters further.

I am copying this letter to Lyn Brown MP and John McDonnell MP.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brandon Lewis', written in a cursive style.

BRANDON LEWIS MP