



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Brandon Lewis MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

**Department for Communities and Local
Government**

Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Councillor Fred Brown
Chairman
Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Authority
Fire Service Headquarters
Hinchingsbrooke Cottage
Brampton Road
Huntingdon
Cambridgeshire
PE29 2NA

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

www.communities.gov.uk

05/02/2013

Dear Cllr Brown,

ARMED FORCES COVENANT AND RETAINED FIREFIGHTERS

I am sure that you are aware of the recent media coverage of the resignation of a retained firefighter who was in your employment, who was also a Royal Air Force firefighter. He was apparently asked to resign as a result of your blanket policy of not employing servicemen and women. I was surprised to learn of your Authority's position on this issue, and from soundings we have made it seems that this approach is not uniform across fire and rescue authorities.

The Armed Forces fulfil a vital role in protecting our country at home and abroad. This is recognised by the Armed Forces Covenant, which explicitly states that that the Armed Forces community should be able to participate as citizens to the same extent as any UK citizen. The Covenant also applies to local government. The blanket ban on participation by the Armed Forces, irrespective of their individual circumstances, seems to go against this commitment.

I am also worried that your Authority's approach could send a signal that it is somehow acceptable for employers not to employ someone purely because they have an Armed Forces commitment. This would be a wrong and unhelpful signal, particularly at a time when we are attempting to build up the Army Reserve.

I am struck by the fact that while fire and rescue authorities expect other employers to be flexible in their approach towards the release of retained firefighters, this appears not to be being reciprocated by your Authority.

I am aware of the problems that there are in recruiting retained firefighters, and the need for fire and rescue authorities to be flexible and creative in their approach. Yet, by virtue of their training, teamwork and bravery, I believe members of the Armed Forces would make very good retained firefighters, should they wish to spend their spare time in such a way.

Of course, responsibility for recruitment rests with the individual fire and rescue authority. Yet, I understand that your authority might now be considering reviewing its policy. I would encourage you to remove this blanket policy – not only for the benefit of your Authority, but also to send a signal about how we value and appreciate the work of our Armed Forces.

I am placing this letter in the public domain, to make clear to other local authorities the stance of the Government in upholding the Armed Forces Covenant.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brandon Lewis'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B'.

BRANDON LEWIS MP