



**Department for
Communities and
Local Government**

Brandon Lewis MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

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

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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
and rescue authorities in England
Fire service representative bodies
CFOA

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Dear Colleagues

CONSULTATION ON FITNESS AND CAPABILITY

The national employers and the Fire Brigades' Union have been unable to come to agreement on some basic principles regarding promoting fitness and managing capability in fire and rescue authorities.

To attempt to resolve the area of disagreement between them, I have indicated to both sides that I will consult on a set of draft principles with the intention that they become national guidance, to be adopted and elaborated upon by individual fire and rescue authorities. It is my intention to commission an independent review of the adopted principles three years after they have been issued to assess whether they are fit for purpose and being properly implemented. I will also reference agreed principles in the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework.

I have asked the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser to prepare and administer a consultation on these principles. This consultation is attached, and closely follows the principles provided by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Scottish Government to the Fire Brigades Union, and also by the employers in their letter to the Fire Brigades Union on the 17 October.

I believe that the working of these principles, along with robust management systems and existing employment law, will ensure that no conscientious firefighter will leave the service without access to a job or a pension after they are age 55. Dr Williams in his independent report, found that 100 per cent of firefighters, following an appropriate exercise regime, should be able to maintain fitness to the age of 60. Naturally, where there is a genuine permanent medical condition, ill-health arrangements will provide access to a pension. I also believe that there is considerable scope for authorities to implement workforce management policies that provide for alternative operational roles. These include driving, pump operating, small fires units, specialist external rescue and fire safety.

I would also like to reiterate that these are not new issues. The 2006 scheme introduced a normal pension age of 60. It is also the case that there are very strong transitional protections in place for the existing workforce, and the new arrangements for those continuing work over


55 years of age, will not impact for at least a further nine years. As a consequence there will be a considerable amount of time to get appropriate arrangements in place across all fire and rescue authorities, including developing the right and most accurate regimes for fitness and tests, and the development of alternative operational roles.

I should also point out that there is a considerable amount of experience in dealing with older workers in fire and rescue authorities, as over 500 operational firefighters are already 55 and over, and we are not aware of any capability issues putting them at risk of dismissal.

It is also a fact that firefighters would not have to retire at 55 without a job or a pension. All firefighters will have the right to access an actuarially reduced pension at 55. All pension earned before transfer to the 2015 scheme will be fully protected.

A firefighter who earns £29,000, and retires after a full career aged sixty, will get a £19,000 a year pension, rising to £26,000 with the state pension. An equivalent private pension pot would be worth over half a million pounds and require firefighters to contribute twice as much.

Yours sincerely

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

BRANDON LEWIS