



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

Cllr Kay Hammond  
LGA Fire Services Management Committee  
Local Government House  
Smith Square  
London  
SW1P 3HZ

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

Our Ref: BL/BL/035161/13

16 DEC 2013

Thank you for your letter of 22 November reiterating key points of the Local Government Association's Autumn Statement submission. You will by now have seen the Autumn Statement published by the Chancellor, which provides good news for local government, with financial stability so councils can freeze council tax and implement local service transformation. We will be publishing the provisional 2014-15 settlement as soon as possible now, following on from the Autumn Statement.

First, let me emphasise again that I appreciate the work all fire and rescue authorities have done and are doing to help reduce the deficit whilst maintaining the high level of service the public rightly expects of them. I have been particularly impressed with the many good examples I have seen of sensible savings delivered by authorities as I have travelled round the country.

On referendum principles, I was surprised at your suggestion fire and rescue authorities should be exempt. We cannot go back to the days where council tax would regularly increase by double digit percentages, regardless of burdens on council tax payers. As for other branches of local government, people deserve the right to take a view on excessive increases set by fire and rescue authorities. I expect the Secretary of State to propose the 2014-15 principles in due course and these will be subject to approval by the House.

I am glad that you have highlighted some of the important findings made by Sir Ken Knight in his independent report, including the importance of prioritising prevention and protection work and closer working across the emergency services in delivering efficiencies and a better service. I have asked my officials to work across Whitehall to support those fire and rescue authorities who want to work more closely with other emergency services. As you may be aware, I recently announced a consultation on the bid process for £75 million of transformational funding for 2015/16. We are also continuing to advise and help those fire and rescue authorities who want to consider merging. However, in all local government restructurings to date (including some very complex ones) it has been possible to equalise council tax precepts without government support by doing this over a five year period.

Finally, I note that the Fire Services Management Committee previously recommended that the Government should limit the savings delivered from employee contribution increases in 2013-14, which would impact on fire and rescue authority's budgets. I await your response to this year's consultation. The scheme valuation, due to report early next year, will set the employer contribution rate from 2015 and measure whether there has

been any increase in scheme costs since 2007. It is too early to predict whether there will be any medium term savings as part of the reforms, much will depend on whether fire and rescue authorities have managed pension scheme costs appropriately. A more robust approach to pay awards, particularly for senior officers, would help deliver further pension savings.

I look forward to meeting with you in the New Year to discuss these matters further.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'B' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

**BRANDON LEWIS MP**