



The Fire Brigades Union

General Secretary: Matt Wrack

Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, KT2 7AE

Telephone: 0208 541 1765

Facsimile: 0208 546 5187

E-mail: office@fbu.org.uk

Circular: 2014HOC0646MW

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To: ALL MEMBERS

Dear Brother/Sister,

PENSIONS: STILL FIGHTING ON ALL FRONTS

The Executive Council met earlier this week to discuss various issues, including the ongoing campaign over pensions. The strategy which the union has followed from the start has included various aspects. This approach has been democratically endorsed at FBU Conference and remains the guide to decisions made by the Executive Council. This follows our debates at Conference and the assessment of the scale of challenge that we faced as a result of the central government decision to attack all public sector pensions, including our own.

Evidence-based case

The background to our campaign has been an extremely strong, evidence-based case. Our research and the various documents we have produced has meant that the government has never been able to answer the arguments we have presented. This strong evidence has also enabled us to follow a campaign which was always likely to be long and difficult. It has also allowed us to engage in debates and discussions with politicians who might not normally agree with the Fire Brigades Union on many issues. This approach has been essential because the pensions issue is a *political* matter. Firefighter pensions (like other public service pensions) are set up through legislation at the decision of politicians. Our central aim therefore is to convince politicians to change their stance on key issues.

Political campaigning

FBU members have put a great effort into campaigning for support for our 'prayer' against the DCLG pension regulations. This is done by means of an Early Day Motion (EDM), as was explained earlier this week. Our campaign has now resulted in the EDM 454 now being supported by 209 MPs. This includes the leader of the opposition, Ed Miliband. This was a significant breakthrough, since the Labour leadership had largely remained silent on the pension dispute until that point. It will not be lost on members that this raises clear questions for any possible Labour Government which might emerge after the general election in May.

The aim of this campaigning has also been to win support more widely. Again, this has seen very effective campaigning from FBU members at local level and has resulted in five Liberal Democrat MPs supporting EDM 454. This means five members of government parties opposing government policy on this matter - an important development. All members are urged to take part in this activity which can be done through the lobbying page of the FBU website.

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Political campaigning/Cont....

A template letter is available to assist members who wish to contact their MP.

<http://www.fbu.org.uk/news/2014/11/lobby-mp-firefighter-pensions/>

FBU members can be completely confident in making such approaches. Firefighters know far more about the firefighting profession and the implications for pensions than any MP of any party. MPs may try to respond with standard DCLG drafted letters. However, these too can and should be answered.

Legal action

The union has submitted a legal challenge in relation to 'early retirement options' i.e. to the way in which DCLG proposes that a pension should be reduced if a firefighter wishes to retire before the age of 60. We believe the calculation is incorrect and unnecessarily penalises the scheme member. We are therefore advised that it is unlawful. The alternative suggestion is cost neutral, but significantly improves the reduction for firefighters at the age of 55. Significantly, the Scottish government has accepted our argument (without the need for a legal challenge) and has slashed the actuarial reduction from 21.8% to 9%. This makes a significant difference to the pension options available to firefighters. The Welsh Government has also taken account of this point and is consulting publicly on regulations that would also include the reduction of 9% rather than 21.8%. This matter ('early retirement options') is not an issue in Northern Ireland as the government there has agreed a Normal Pension Age of 55.

Other challenges are also being prepared for submission in England on other issues, and the union is discussing them elsewhere (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) to see if we can achieve them without such legal challenges.

Industrial action

A national meeting of officials held recently in Liverpool discussed the industrial action so far and the views of Brigade Committees regarding future action. All members will appreciate that there is a range of views regarding strike action, action short of strike and the various options available to the union. Differences of opinion are inevitable in such circumstances and are part of the democratic debate. Head Office has been tasked by the Executive Council with making plans for our next action and announcements on this will follow shortly.

During next week, discussions are arranged with the Welsh government and with our lawyers on various issues. Discussions also continue with various politicians in relation to EDM 454. Members should also await further clarification in relation to both strike action and action short of strike and be prepared for any calls made by the Executive Council.

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally



MATT WRACK
General Secretary

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