



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: 2014HOC0718MW

12 December 2014

To: ALL MEMBERS

Dear Brother/Sister,

PENSIONS UPDATE: 24 HOUR STRIKE: HOUSE OF COMMONS DEBATE SECURED: MARCH AND RALLY IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

On 9 December, FBU members in English fire and rescue services took further strike action to defend their pensions. Once again, FBU members demonstrated immense strength, unity and determination and I would like to pass on the thanks of the Executive Council. The Fire Minister Penny Mordaunt wrote to firefighters in England on the 5 December, questioning the strike and accusing the FBU of being clear about what would end the dispute.

It is incredible that after almost three years of discussion with three different Fire Ministers, full engagement by the union in all their reviews, submitting responses to all their consultation exercises, and presenting them with legal challenges, the Minister can write this. It is even more incredible that as you read this, they are pushing regulations through Parliament that they will use to impose their ill-thought-out scheme. Penny Mordaunt has written previously (24 November 2014) saying that if the commons do not reject the regulations '*they become law and the new scheme will come into force in April 2015*'.

Now she writes that she does not know what would end the dispute. We have written to her again, asking her to clarify whether or not she is willing to discuss alternative pension arrangements, because she has previously told us categorically that no further changes will be made.

Differences between schemes

Penny Mordaunt also claims that the DCLG proposals differ little from those in Wales and Scotland. This statement is inaccurate and misleading. It either ignores or misunderstands the details of the different pension scheme proposals.

For example, firefighters in Scotland will have a **guarantee** that they will **not** face dismissal should they be unable to maintain their operational fitness as a result of ageing. This guarantee will be supported by a pension scheme regulation. DCLG has not provided this guarantee and firefighters are still facing this threat of no job or no pension in this situation.

/Cont...

Differences between schemes/Cont....

Penny Mordaunt claims that she will address these concerns by means of guidance issued under the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework. This is simply not the case. The FBU's legal advice and the response from the Local Government Association to the government's consultation confirms our understanding that the national framework document is **guidance only** and allows the employers to maintain discretion on these issues. It would not provide the protection that would be provided by a pension scheme regulation. At an earlier meeting, Penny Mordaunt did state that she could provide the regulation and asked the union to provide a draft form of words. At a subsequent meeting, she announced that she would not be able to provide any such regulation.

Firefighters in Scotland also have a better protection provision which is based on length of service as well as age, unlike the current DCLG position which is restricted to the age element. The Scottish and Welsh proposals include a much fairer actuarial reduction of 9% for firefighters aged 55, rather than the 21.8% reduction in the DCLG proposal. Our actuarial advice outlines that this would be beneficial to all firefighters age 55, 56, 57 58 and 59. One of the examples shows that for a firefighter aged 55, this could be a difference of between £1,500 and £2,000 per year. It is clear that there are very significant differences between the proposals and it is misleading for DCLG or the Minister to claim otherwise. I am confident that firefighters will see through any such claims.

Democratic processes

FBU officials and members have been extremely busy lobbying MPs to support early day motion (EDM) 454 which asks for the 2015 firefighters pension scheme regulations to be annulled.

To date, 281 MPs have signed the EDM. This includes the Labour Leader, the Labour front bench, the majority of the opposition parties and 22 MPs from the government benches.

We have been busy trying to secure a debate and vote in the Commons rather than the issue being dealt with in a procedural committee as is the norm.

The shadow Secretary of State Hilary Benn wrote to Penny Mordaunt requesting a debate and vote on this issue. The letter also heavily criticised the way government has handled the fire service pensions issue, and outlined that the regulations are 'not fit for purpose'. After even more lobbying, we have secured the debate and vote which will take place on **Monday 15 December 2014**.

We are under no illusion that it will be a tough task to overturn the government's majority on this, but we all need to continue to lobby MPs to firstly make sure they turn up and secondly that they support the call for the regulations to be scrapped.

Rally in Buckinghamshire

Around 3000 FBU members gathered in Aylesbury on 9 December to show their support for Buckinghamshire members who are being unduly victimised and for Ricky Mathews, who was singled out and sacked for taking part in strike action on 31 October 2014. Although this was a demonstration called at very short notice, the turnout was incredible, and took Aylesbury by surprise as firefighters from Buckinghamshire and across the UK marched through the town and past the Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters where they clearly told the Chief and his team what they thought of their actions.

/Cont...

Rally in Buckinghamshire/Cont....

We have formally challenged Buckinghamshire FRA to prove its claim that the strike we called for 31 October was unlawful and if it cannot, to reinstate Ricky. This is only the start of a campaign to challenge this unacceptable behaviour which threatens not just Ricky but every single one of us. It is an attack on our union and an attempt to undermine our ability to organise and protect members.

Next steps

The Executive Council is scheduled to meet on Tuesday 16 December to assess the situation in the light of the most recent strike action and the debate in Parliament, and to decide what immediate steps to take. A further update will follow this meeting.

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally

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

MATT WRACK
General Secretary