



The Fire Brigades Union

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TO: ALL MEMBERS

Dear Brother /Sister

FIREFIGHTERS PENSION SCHEME - UPDATE

Over the past few weeks FBU officials have been trying to keep the pressure on the Government on the issue of the DCLG Fire Minister misleading Parliament.

The Fire Minister has continually refused our written requests for a meeting to discuss the assurances given in the House of Commons in December 2014 and February 2015 despite several attempts. She has continued to argue that the assurances given in Parliament are robust. This is despite a clear written confirmation from employers both nationally and locally that they are undeliverable under current arrangements.

Is the Prime Minister happy for his Government to mislead Parliament?

We have written to the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Prime Minister asking them what they are doing about Parliament being misled in this manner. The Speaker of the House has responded and his letter states that he can only operate within his powers and can only intervene if the words or actions of an MP are 'out of order'. The Speaker does highlight that there is a mechanism in place to deal with situations when MPs have been inaccurate or misled Parliament.

This mechanism, the ministerial code clearly says in section 1.2(c) that:

It is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity. Ministers who knowingly mislead Parliament will be expected to offer their resignation to the Prime Minister;

We were already aware of this code which carries an introduction from the current Prime Minister.

Our new government has a particular and historic responsibility: to rebuild confidence in our political system.

After the scandals of recent years, people have lost faith in politics and politicians. It is our duty to restore their trust. It is not enough simply to make a difference. We must be different.

We have promised the people a coalition government united behind the key principles of freedom, fairness and responsibility. Every day of this government we must make good on that promise, acting in a way that reflects these principles.

In everything we do - the policies we develop and how we implement them, the speeches we give, the meetings we hold -we must remember that we are not masters but servants. Though the British people have been disappointed in their politicians, they still expect the highest standards of conduct. We must not let them down.

Despite this foreword the Prime Minister has simply not responded to our letter. From this it appears that he is content for his Government to mislead Parliament. We will continue to press on this issue.

Letter to coalition MPs

The DCLG Fire Minister recently wrote to all coalition MPs with her update on the situation. This letter included numerous inaccuracies and again misrepresented the current situation. We responded to this letter by writing to all MPs. We have already started to receive supportive responses to our letter from MPs indicating that they will continue to raise this issue when they get the opportunity.

We have arranged a further meeting with the Shadow Fire Minister and Shadow Secretary of State where we will be raising several key issues. This meeting which is scheduled to take place next week will give us the opportunity to discuss what we can expect from a potential Labour Government.

FBU members protest at the LGA Conference

FBU members from the North East and neighbouring regions protested in front of the Hilton Hotel in Gateshead on Tuesday 10 March at the Local Government Association Fire Conference. Members from across the country have expressed a determination to challenge the Minister and other members of the Government at every possible opportunity as the general election approaches.

It should be made clear to members of the Government that firefighters are not going away on this issue.

Local Pension Boards

The Public Service Pensions Act 2013 (2014 in Northern Ireland) instructs the setting up of local pension boards to govern all public service pension schemes. The firefighters' pension schemes are covered by this and have various rules that must be adhered to. One rule requires that a scheme manager must be appointed and that the board, designed to assist the manager, must have equal numbers of representatives from the employer and employees. The scheme manager must be the Fire Authority in the case of the firefighter pension scheme board. FBU local officials are seeking to ensure that we represent the employees on these boards. It appears that many employers are trying to hand-pick the employee representatives potentially diluting the effectiveness of these boards. We are quite clear that the FBU is the only organisation that is able to represent all sections of the workforce. We have suggested a democratic process whereby scheme members have a say in who should represent them on these boards but to-date no scheme manager has taken up this suggestion.

We will continue to monitor this situation very carefully and report any progress to members.

Membership of the schemes

While our pension dispute continues and key concerns remain unaddressed it is also vitally important, that members are aware that the FBU supports occupational pension schemes and membership of the schemes for firefighters.

Our strong message to members is to remain in the firefighters' pension scheme/s. We are still trying to gain improvements and are urging members to consider all the pitfalls of opting-out before they take what could be a life-changing decision. This consideration must include looking at the impact of becoming a deferred member, the potential effective reduction in salary (due to the loss of employer pension contributions) and other important financial issues. Members have been let down by a Government and employers who are imposing a new pension scheme but have utterly failed to explain its impact on current members. The FBU has sent out a significant amount of information but this cannot excuse the way that Government and the employers have shirked their responsibility in relation to this.

Next Steps

Firefighters have already demonstrated that they are not going away and that they will continue to campaign against these unworkable proposals and for improvements for the future.

We are preparing further advice for members on the detail of the current and new schemes so that members can make informed decisions. Further information will follow.

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack'.

MATT WRACK
GENERAL SECRETARY

MW/sll