



Samantha Rye - NWC Secretary
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2015/NWC/JM

20th March 2015

Penny Mordaunt MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Communities and Local Government
4th Floor
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Minister

We met at your request in early September 2014, and provided you in good faith, information to help you to understand the detrimental impact on women of the new pension regulations. During the meeting, you indicated your intention to use the information we supplied, including case studies of women firefighters whose future careers were at risk due to the changes being proposed, to “improve the deal on the table”.

You subsequently did not do this however, choosing to impose the regulations unamended. It is confusing that you have made a number of references to the importance of the information we provided, since then.

We write to you not only to express our feeling that you misled us in this meeting but also to formally state our objections to your continuing and inaccurate references to women firefighters which we believe are solely for the purpose of furthering your political objectives and which we regard as both cynical and manipulative.

Your failure to address proposals which fundamentally threaten the career prospects of women firefighters show your words are hollow. As does your continued rhetoric in areas such as the recruitment of women into the fire service, your ‘new’ ideas about positive action and other culture changes which you state are designed at encouraging women to take up a career in firefighting.

It is our view, as women firefighters, that unless you satisfactorily address the dangers inherent in your pension proposals, future generations of women firefighters are being “recruited to fail”.

Whilst enduring the rhetoric of numerous transient fire ministers the National Women's Committee of the FBU has worked continuously for over ten years to do exactly what you currently say you are intending. That is to raise the issues affecting women across the UK Fire and Rescue Service and to improve the policies on maternity, flexible working, workwear and PPE. However, there is no point in having a great maternity policy only to see your career destroyed due to pension proposals that are simply not fit for purpose. What a shame that this point seems to have escaped you.



‘Women ask for what you want ... and be prepared to get it’



You are right to identify the difficulties that women have had, and are still having, in areas of work that have been traditionally regarded as male. Whilst some of these are a consequence of the actions of men co-workers, do you not consider the root causes sit with the Coalition Government actions such as dispensing with DCLG Equality Strategy? We feel that this is the catalyst which has resulted in FRS Authorities failing to adopt or maintain progressive equality policies and initiatives?

Women in the fire and rescue service live with the outcomes of the disregard and disrespect this government has shown in its decisions.

It is clear to women firefighters that this apparent concern for the examples of bad practice and experience in the fire and rescue service is cynical in its motivation. It is a symptom of a government which has chosen to demonise the fire and rescue service workforce for having the audacity to seek fair pension arrangements. In the Fire & Rescue Service the FBU NWC was organised and set up by women for women in order to identify and resolve the situations that previous prejudice had created and we have been at the forefront in promoting women in the fire service and making their working lives safe, fulfilled and full of opportunity. We have striven to make women firefighters' role models for future generations of young women - as opposed to making crude "cock" jokes for the amusement of men in the workplace.

In your letter of 27th January 2015, you signed off with an anecdote on women's rugby. We want you to know that the women we represent are not worried about their sporting careers or being fit enough to "play for the Brigade". They are worried that they will be unable to maintain the levels of fitness needed to stay in employment.

We believe it is telling that you have not invited the FBU NWC to a second meeting. Rather than being prepared to confront and resolve real issues you appear more comfortable in continually choosing what, for you, is the path of least resistance.

To finish, we would caution you regarding your constant references to women firefighters. You have no special right to trade on our name. You have clearly demonstrated that you either do not understand the issues which we face, or you have absolutely no desire to resolve them. You have let down women firefighters every bit as much as you have let down our male colleagues.

We call on you to replace posturing with negotiation and to provide firefighters with a fair, affordable and sustainable pension. We are available and willing to meet you in order to provide you with information to resolve this situation.

Yours sincerely.

Samantha Rye
NWC National Secretary

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