



**FIRE BRIGADES UNION**

**General Secretary: Matt Wrack**

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

Telephone:

020-8541-1765

Facsimile:

020-8546-5187

E-Mail :

office@fbu.org.uk



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**TO: ALL MEMBERS RETAINED BRANCHES**

Dear Brother/Sister,

**HANDS OFF OUR PENSIONS:  
THE GOVERNMENT'S ATTACK ON RDS FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION RIGHTS**

As the FBU campaign to protect firefighter pensions gathers momentum it is important to remember that there are four Pension Schemes in the fire service and that all schemes are under the same attack.

If the Government pushes through these changes all these schemes will be affected:

- the 1992 Firefighters Pension Scheme (FPS);
- the 2006 New Firefighters Pension Scheme (NFPS);
- the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS);
- and the proposed Modified Pension Scheme (for RDS members who joined the service before April 2006).

Each scheme will see an employee contribution increase of around 3% from April 2012 and will be closed in 2015 with current members being placed into a new scheme(s).

It is important to note that these attacks will also have an impact on the proposed Modified Scheme.

The Modified Scheme came about after the FBU fought for over 8 years on a legal challenge to gain part-time status for RDS members and in doing so gained the right of access to the FPS that had previously been denied to them. This Modified Scheme is based upon an administration structure similar to that of the NFPS, but importantly has a benefit structure which reflects the FPS.

Since the legal victory the FBU has been in detailed negotiations with representatives for the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and their legal representatives to agree what the New Scheme will look like, eligibility and when it will be implemented.

After several meetings an agreed remedy was reached on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2010 which gave FBU members what they were entitled to and extended the eligibility to this scheme to all RDS firefighters with service between 1<sup>st</sup> July 2000 and 5<sup>th</sup> April 2006 regardless of them having lodged an initial claim with the Employment Tribunal.

Since this date Government officials have dragged their heels and completely failed to meet agreed timescales.

To date the FBU has still not been presented with a blueprint which shows the rules and regulations of this new Scheme. This is a clear responsibility for CLG and their legal representatives and these delays are firmly their responsibility. The FBU has previously offered to assist in any way possible to speed up this process because until we are presented with this blueprint the process is stalled. We have contacted CLG and their legal representatives on several occasions highlighting our anger and frustration with this unacceptable delay.

As a result of these unacceptable delays, Thompsons solicitors wrote to the Treasury Solicitors recently informing them that unless this issue is resolved without further delay the FBU would be taking further legal action which may result in further involvement of the Tribunal. A subsequent letter has also been sent to the Fire Minister Bob Neill.

We have made it quite clear in this correspondence that these delaying tactics are unacceptable. It is also outrageous that these delays are continuing when Government has set further timescales to introduce detrimental changes to public sector pensions. This highlights that the Government is quite willing to pull out all the stops and use all possible resources when they are attacking the pension provisions for FBU members, but equally are quite happy to drag their heels when beneficial changes are being considered.

### **How the pension attacks will affect RDS members who joined the service pre-2006**

As well as being affected by the proposed contribution rise, members who opt to join the Modified Scheme have been promised a normal retirement age of 55, a final salary pension scheme with accrual rates of 45ths, commutation rates in line with the FPS and a flat rate employee contribution rate (currently 11%). The proposed recommendations contained in Hutton will mean that the normal retirement age will be increased to 60; final salary schemes will be replaced by career average schemes with much worse accrual rates, changes to future commutation rates and new contribution rates with tiered contributions from 2015.

In addition to this, the Government has already changed the way pensions are uprated from one that used the Retail Price Index (RPI) to one that uses the Consumer Price Index (CPI). This means that the value of future pension benefits will be reduced by at least 15%. The FBU has submitted a legal challenge to this in the form of a Judicial Review which is scheduled to be heard on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

The FBU will not accept that this hard fought victory is undermined in this way by CLG delaying its implementation any longer and then snatching away the benefits that have been promised and agreed.

We are looking at the long term costs to members of all fire service Pension Schemes that will result from proposed attacks. This work includes potential costs to Modified Scheme members who thought that they were being promised a scheme based on an 11% contribution rate, only to

find they are now facing a 3% hike in employee contribution rates and a worsening of future benefits before they have even had a chance to join it.

The FBU is opposing a rise in the normal retirement age for the FPS and is campaigning to reduce the normal retirement age in the NFPS from 60 to 55. This will also impact on the Modified Scheme which reflects the benefits of the FPS.

FBU members can be assured that defending the Modified Scheme and its promised benefit structure is a fundamental part of the Hands off our Pensions Campaign, potentially attacking the scheme benefits before the scheme has even been made available. It is an absolute insult to RDS firefighters that the Government is making plans to detrimentally change the Modified Scheme before they have had the decency to ensure that they play their part in implementing it.

I am sure you will recognise that neither our employers nor the Government readily accept that RDS firefighters should be given part-time worker status or given access to the Firefighters Pension Scheme. In truth, they fought us every step of the way and it took us over eight long years to secure this victory. Even now they are utilising every stalling tactic they can think of to avoid keeping their end of the bargain. To add insult to injury they are now rushing through detrimental changes even before the scheme is implemented. We cannot let them continue to stall; we cannot let them attack the future pension benefits in this manner.

Remember: The Government plans to make members of all four fire service Pension Schemes Pay More, Work Longer and Get Less.

The FBU is committed to defending **all four** fire service Pension Schemes.

Make sure you attend your branch meeting and support the model Resolution from the Executive Council.

Yours fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Wrack". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**MATT WRACK**  
General Secretary

SS/EMH