



FIRE BRIGADES UNION

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TO: ALL MEMBERS

Dear Brother/Sister

HANDS OFF OUR PENSIONS CAMPAIGN: UNHELPFUL MISINFORMATION ON PROTECTION OF PENSION RIGHTS

I am informed that members in various Brigades have seen a message circulated by the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) which purports to outline the latest discussions around the proposed changes to Fire Service pensions. This information is contained in an email, which was sent on or around 19 December 2011, claims to give details of the individual protection arrangements for accrued pension benefits but is inaccurate and seriously undermines the ongoing discussions around this issue.

FBU members will be aware that the Union is currently discussing the Government's pension proposals and has raised a range of serious concerns around the changes that they are intending to introduce. As part of the Union's opposition to these proposals it is important that the issue of protection for existing members is carefully considered. To this end the FBU has been attempting to ensure that the protection offered by Government is applicable to as many Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) members as possible. As you would expect, we continue to seek the best possible protection arrangements for the maximum number of members.

We have argued that any protection arrangements must take full account of the retirement provisions currently available i.e. that members of the 1992 Firefighters' Pension Scheme have the ability to retire from age 50 subject to fulfilling certain criteria around qualified pensionable service. Members of the scheme have legitimate expectations arising from the current retirement provisions.

Discussions between the Union and representatives from the Department for Communities and Local Government **are not yet concluded** on the issue of protection including potential additional tapering arrangements and the Union has not yet had clarification on the extent of protection available. These discussions **have not at any time included representatives of CFOA**. Despite this, a Chief Fire Officer, on behalf of CFOA has felt it necessary to publicise his opinion on the extent of protection available. To make matters worse this intervention has undermined the ongoing discussions by misinterpreting the protection proposals and accepting the position offering least advantage to scheme members.

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CFOA have accepted that the Normal Pension Age for the purposes of protection should be 55. The FBU have argued that that the protection should be wider as a result of the early retirement provisions currently available. We believe there are strong legal grounds to support our position.

FBU members will be aware that the Union has submitted extensive evidence to support our opposition to many of the Government's proposals. Much of this evidence challenges the proposal to increase the Normal Pension Age. We are unaware of any such evidence that has been submitted by any other organisation including CFOA, who claim to be the professional voice of the UK Fire and Rescue Service. CFOA have had numerous opportunities to advise Government and the Employers that the pension proposals completely fail to take account of the operational demands of the profession. Instead the CFOA People and Organisational Development (POD) Director, has decided to widely publicise CFOA's opinion on this one issue and seriously undermine the ongoing negotiations. All this despite the fact, that CFOA has not even been party to these discussions. It is quite staggering that Chief Fire Officers, the best paid employees within the Fire and Rescue Service, should in such a manner undermine the negotiations currently underway on behalf of the majority.

Despite this unwelcome intervention the FBU are continuing to discuss protection and tapering and the implications of both with representatives from the Department for Communities and Local Government and can confirm that to-date these are not yet concluded.

I can assure members that as soon as the protection arrangements have been clarified members will be accurately informed of their implications.

The FBU is continuing to defend Fire Service pensions but once again seems to be the only organisation challenging the Government's proposals.

As for CFOA, the FBU would welcome its support in our attempt to ensure that the Normal Pension Age reflects the specific occupational demands of the job. Unfortunately, such assistance has been completely lacking throughout these discussions. Claiming to be the professional voice of the UK Fire and Rescue Service is a bold statement considering the confusion which has been created on this issue. Perhaps it is a voice which should have kept quiet on this occasion.

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally

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

MATT WRACK
GENERAL SECRETARY

MW/sll