



**FIRE BRIGADES UNION**

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**TO: ALL MEMBERS (CONTROL) HOME ADDRESSES**

Dear Brother/Sister

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME: FBU CONCERN OVER 'HEADS OF AGREEMENT'**

You will be aware of the ongoing discussions between the Government, Employers and Unions in relation to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) for England and Wales which affects Fire Control members.

The discussions have taken the form of a series of high level meetings with the trade union side Joint Secretaries, which in this case are officials from UNISON, UNITE and GMB. The outcomes of these meetings are then discussed in a meeting of all eleven trade unions who have members in the LGPS. You will also be aware that the Joint Secretary talks culminated in the production of a 'Heads of Agreement' document. (A joint union bulletin outlining this in detail is available on the FBU website [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)).

Following the production of the 'Heads of Agreement', Government suspended the ongoing consultation around the increase in employee contributions and worsening of accrual rates to allow the negotiations on this document to continue. However because the Government have confirmed the default position is the consultation, should the Heads of Agreement process fail, they have confirmed that the responses were still therefore required. (*Local Government Pension Scheme: Consultation on proposed increases to employee contribution rates and changes to scheme accrual rates, effective from 1 April 2012 in England and Wales*). The Union response to this consultation was submitted on 6 January 2012 and is also available on the FBU website.

The suspension of this consultation process is due to an agreement reached with the GMB, Unison and Unite that the Treasury target of £900million savings can be realised from a one stop solution combining an earlier introduction of the Hutton recommendations in 2014. This would replace the previous two stage proposals including:

- 1) Increases to employee contributions.
- 2) Wider pension changes based around the Hutton recommendations.

**Scotland and Northern Ireland**

The situation is different in Scotland as there are currently no proposals to amend the LGPS or increase, employee contribution rates. In Northern Ireland the decision has not yet been made but it is currently expected that they will follow the position adopted in England and Wales.

**Heads of Agreement: England and Wales**

On 9 January 2012 the LGPS trade unions met to discuss the 'Heads of Agreement' and to gauge the response of individual unions to the proposals contained within it. UNITE were not in attendance since they were discussing the document internally with their Executive.

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Several areas of the HOA were discussed and various unions raised concerns about the lack of detail. This detail is not expected until the next stage of the negotiations. Following these discussions the majority of the unions present supported the 'Heads of Agreement' as a foundation to move to a more detailed negotiation process designed to arrive at a new scheme design based around the principles contained in this document.

The FBU took a different view of the situation and voiced our concern that the proposal to introduce an *increased Normal Pension Age* in 2014 did not take account of the operational elements of the role of a Fire Control Operator and that this was unacceptable to our members. The union also outlined that we believe entering further negotiations on the basis of the Heads of Agreement clearly meant accepting an increased Normal Pension Age. We reported that this was not in the best interests of Fire Control Operators, did not take account of the specific nature of their role and could not be supported.

In addition to this the FBU also explained that the protection for low paid workers proposed in the 'Heads of Agreement' would not apply to any Fire Control member. This concern was also highlighted in the FBU response to the consultation process on the proposal to LGPS contribution rate in England and Wales mentioned earlier.

Since this meeting it has been widely publicised that UNISON and the GMB are fully supportive of this 'Heads of Agreement' as a basis for further negotiation on the proposals for the LGPS in England and Wales. Despite this position, the FBU made it quite clear that we could not support the Heads of Agreement in its current form.

It was later reported that UNITE, following their internal discussion, had also taken a decision to reject the 'Heads of Agreement'.

#### **Control Members: Access to Fire Service Pension Scheme**

On 10 January officials from the FBU Control Staff National Committee met with Head Office Officials to discuss the current position within the LGPS. At this meeting officials were given an update on the ongoing discussions, the situation surrounding the Heads of Agreement and the ongoing challenge by the FBU for Fire Control Operators to be eligible to join a Fire Service pension scheme which would recognise the specific factors associated with their role.

This option for Fire Control members to join a Fire Service pension scheme is an important issue as the FBU maintains that it is a fundamental requirement that an occupational pension scheme reflects the occupation it relates to in all aspects including the Normal Pensionable Age. The FBU has already been discussing this option with representatives of the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Fire Minister and has been examining the financial implications with actuaries. These discussions will continue and further information will be made available as they progress but there are obvious hurdles to overcome if this is to be achieved.

The Executive Council are scheduled to meet on or around the 23 January to receive a full briefing on the ongoing pension issues for all Fire Service pension schemes, including the LGPS. Fire Control members will be updated on the discussions around the LGPS following 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**

MW/sll