

"We plan to hold the Government to its commitment to negotiate and not dictate. Members will play a key role in ensuring that happens."

General Secretary Matt Wrack has written to Fire Minister Jim Fitzpatrick MP seeking the Government's views on the Firefighters Pension Scheme now the initial consultation period is over and asking details about any proposed new timetable.

We are taking an active role in the TUC co-ordinated campaign across the public services. The FBU will continue to work with other trade unions whose members are also affected by proposed public sector pension reforms.

The campaign across the public sector is formidable and involves nearly 5 million other public sector workers. The FBU is not battling on its own, we are part of a much wider struggle across public services.

What do we want?

When we joined the service we all joined the same scheme, paying the same contributions and entitled to the same benefits. Our scheme is not "generous". We pay 11% of our gross pay, one of the highest contributions. We get out what we pay in.

It is unreasonable and unfair for the Government to suddenly decide it wants to change the rules at this stage.

The FBU is not against modernising pensions such as the granting of partners' pensions to unmarried partners. We also welcome, subject to the detail, of the move towards the Firefighters Pensions Scheme actually having a fund.

This would prevent one critical problem of the current "unfunded" scheme which means the contributions could and were spent as fast as they came in. This was at a time when the scheme had huge annual

surpluses as there were far more paying in contributions than there were being paid a pension.

We believe that our control members should also be able to join the FPS. Control members belong to the Local Government Pensions Scheme which the Government also says it intends to cut.

We are opposed to making you work longer for no additional benefit. We are opposed to raising the minimum retirement age to 55.

We want Government to carry through its commitment given before the general election to stop and think again. We want the genuine negotiations which were promised to take place.

We are opposed to having a workforce with a two-tier pension with a worse pension for new entrants. None of these discussions should begin from a starting point that benefits have to be cut.

FIRE FIGHTER

Pensions Special July 2005

KICK-STARTING OUR CAMPAIGN

THE UNION IS GIVING A KICK START TO OUR PENSION CAMPAIGN. THE CAMPAIGN HAS, UP TO NOW, BEEN VERY EFFECTIVE WITH LARGE NUMBERS OF OFFICIALS AND MEMBERS LOBBYING THEIR MPS AND FIRE AUTHORITIES.



The Government effectively put public sector pension changes on hold before the General Election campaign. It is only now that the first tentative talks on pension reforms are taking place in some areas of the public sector, including Local Government.

National officer Paul Woolstenholmes said: "A lot of work has gone into getting us where we are with the promise

of real negotiation rather than change by diktat. There will be more hard work to come and we need to prepare for that.

"We can secure an agreement acceptable to our members if we stick together. It also means re-invigorating our campaign and keeping members involved and informed.

Key changes: Government proposals



No retirement at 50 after April 2013:

"Ministers... have concluded that the scheme should be amended to raise the minimum pensions age to 55 with effect from 2006. Those who retire before April 2013 aged 50 or older with 25 or more years service will be exempt from this change."

There will also be no compulsory upper retirement age. It would be possible to work in excess of 30 years, continue to make contributions but with those contributions not counting as additional years for pension purposes.

Deferred pension age raised to 65: "the pension age for firefighters who leave the service early with a deferred pensions is 60... (we)... propose that the deferred pension age for firefighters in the FPS should be raised to age 65 from April 2006, in respect of future service." This affects those who resign or are forced to leave the service before retirement (e.g discipline, capability, refusal to take non-operational deployment). Instead of your pension kicking in at 60, it would kick in 5 years later.

Ill-health retirement: if you are allowed to retire on ill-health grounds (whether as a result of your work or not) but you are deemed capable of taking other regular full-time employment then you receive a pension, but with no enhancement. If you are permanently disabled and retire on ill-health grounds you will receive an enhancement, but there are no further details as to the amount.

A new and worse scheme: for new entrants from April 2006 although that date may be subject to change.



What you can do:

- Keep up to date and attend branch meetings
- Ensure pensions is on the agenda of all meetings
- Think of setting up branch campaign group
- You can become your brigade pensions contact at your branch
- Assist us in lobbying MPs to stop cuts to the pensions scheme
- Be prepared to work with and support other public service unions in their campaigns to stop cuts to their pension scheme e.g. rallies or other demonstrations

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FBU – always fighting cuts in pensions



What is the Government saying?

Government spin is that the FPS pension scheme needs to be “modernised”. It talks of the scheme dating from 1948, when in fact it was updated in 1992.

The fact is that there are proposals to cut back pensions across the public sector. One of the few exceptions is MPs’ pensions with another being judges’ pensions.

Before the general election it offered what it called genuine negotiations over changes rather than simply centralised diktat.

Protecting your pension has been a cornerstone of the union’s campaigning work for over 15 years. There have been numerous calls for strike ballots at annual conferences to protect the pension scheme.

1990 annual conference: London and Strathclyde proposed and secured a resolution demanding a recall conference with a recommendation for industrial action if the Government went ahead with proposals to increase contributions to the scheme. The context was the Adam Smith Institute (an influential Thatcherite “Think Tank”) proposing the pension scheme should be privatised.

1994 annual conference: Somerset, Strathclyde, Derbyshire, London, Surrey and Grampian proposed and secured resolutions which called for strike ballots to oppose numerous cuts and changes being proposed.

1995 annual conference: Devon, Cheshire, Dorset and Greater Manchester proposed and secured resolutions which called for strike ballots in opposition to proposed cuts and changes.

1996 annual conference: Merseyside and Strathclyde proposed and secured a resolution which called for a defence of pensions rights through industrial action if necessary.

1997 annual conference: West Sussex, Strathclyde, West Yorkshire and Royal Berkshire proposed and secured resolutions calling for strike action against any proposed cuts in the pension scheme.

1998 annual conference: the Executive council proposed and secured an Emergency Resolution which called for a recall conference with a recommendation for strike action if a number of proposals to cut the scheme were implemented.

1999 annual conference: Northern Ireland and Derbyshire proposed and secured a resolution which called for a recall conference with a recommendation for strike action if cuts were proposed to the pension scheme, including those for new members.

2000 annual conference: London, Merseyside and Kent proposed and secured a resolution which called for a recall conference with a recommendation for strike action if proposals to introduce a two-tier scheme or cut the existing scheme are pushed through by the employers.

2001 annual conference: Cambridgeshire, Lancashire and West Yorkshire proposed and secured resolutions which called for strike action against proposed cuts to the pension scheme.

2002 annual conference: Strathclyde, Devon, South Yorkshire, Lothian & Borders proposed and secured a composite resolution calling for national strike action against cuts to the existing scheme or the introduction of a worse scheme for new entrants.

2004 annual conference: Gloucestershire and London propose changes to the scheme that would allow benefits under the scheme to be paid to unmarried or same-sex partners.

2005 annual conference: the Executive Council proposed and secured an emergency resolution calling for opposition to the current proposals and for a recall conference if any detrimental changes are proposed at the outcome of negotiations with the Government.

