

Fire strike threat after ill-health pensions cut

DICK MURRAY

LONDON today faced the threat of a strike by firefighters.

It follows anger after three former firefighters had ill-health pensions stopped. Fire Brigades' Union boss Matt Wrack said the three were at the "sharp end" of the Government's pension reform and is demanding the payments be restored.

The London Fire Brigade said the three had been "invited" to return to work in operational and other roles. The union denies this. Mr Wrack said more former firefighters in receipt of ill-health pensions also faced having them withdrawn.

He said: "Firefighters need to know they will get a pension if they can't work because they have been injured at an emergency incident. If this issue isn't settled we will be looking at balloting for industrial action."

Mr Wrack said the three are "simply the first" to have ill-health pensions withdrawn. "We undoubtedly face the prospect of many, many more joining them as the Department for Communities and Local Government effectively attempts to end any form of ill-health retirement from the service." He has written to fire minister Parmjit Dhandra demanding an "urgent" meeting.

Martin Marrion, 50, a firefighter formerly based at Knightsbridge and then Orpington, said his disability was caused by hearing loss suffered through work.

He said: "I was a really good firefighter. I didn't want to go. I was forced to go and now they are not even paying my pension." Mr Marrion said he has missed two payments on his mortgage and could lose his home. He claimed that he asked if he could return to work in a non-operational capacity but was refused.

The ill-health pensions were withdrawn following a ruling by the independent Board of Medical Referees which concluded the three were capable of performing some duties within the firefighters' role.

A London Fire Brigade spokesman said: "We are keen to resolve this situation.

However, the issue is primarily one between the FBU and the CLG and the Board of Medical Referees.

"It was never the [fire] authority's intention that these firefighters should be dismissed without a pension."