



**FIRE BRIGADES UNION**

# PARLIAMENTARY BRIEF

February 2006 Regular Newsletter for all Members of the Scottish Parliament Issue 3

## PENSIONS CRISIS SPECIAL

### National Strike Action Imminent Over Firefighters' Pensions

**Firefighters are being singled out by the Government as the only group of emergency service workers who are not being afforded full protection for their pensions.**

Whilst the Police and the Ambulance Service have settled with the Government to be protected from any change, UK Firefighters are being told that anyone still in service after April 2013, will be forced to work longer, with benefits for all being either reduced or abolished.

For over a year the Fire Brigades Union has been involved in the consultation process with both the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) at Westminster and the Scottish Public Pensions Agency, which is a department of the Scottish Executive.

At Westminster we have been represented on the Firefighters' Pensions Committee, which is chaired by the ODPM.

Unfortunately, our views and concerns have been totally ignored and we now find ourselves, having reached an impasse, with no other alternative but to recall the Union's National Conference, to consider whether or not to ballot Firefighters throughout the UK for National Strike Action.

The Firefighters' and Police Schemes have always been almost identical in that they recognise the limited length of time that individuals can undertake the duties of these professions and are

tailor made accordingly. Due to the shorter length of career, Police Officers & Firefighters pay an 11% contribution from their salary, the highest, by some margin, in the public sector.



#### Is this pay back time for Firefighters' Pay Dispute?

The Home Office has already agreed that the Police Scheme will remain intact for existing members. The official reason why Prescott is not doing the same for Firefighters is because the Police have a "more dangerous job".

Well, actually, according to Government Statistics, Firefighters are higher up the list of dangerous professions than Police Officers are.

Government Ministers are happy to praise firefighters when a major high profile incident occurs. Unfortunately that praise doesn't transcend into affording that dedicated workforce with the Pensions Scheme that they deserve and value so dearly.

#### Urgent Meeting with Minister for Justice Requested

Scottish Officials of the Fire Brigades Union have formally requested an urgent meeting with Cathy Jamieson MSP, Minister for Justice.

In a letter from Ken Ross, FBU Scottish Regional Secretary, he says that "I seek an urgent meeting with yourself to discuss the Firefighters' Pension Scheme, and the Scottish Executive's intentions for it".

He goes on to say that "The Fire Brigades Union in Scotland wishes to explore every avenue possible in order to resolve this matter without having to take the drastic step of initiating Strike Action".

"Firefighters have no desire to undertake Strike Action again, however, this is a very emotive issue and feelings are running high".

The Fire Brigades Union urges the Minister to accede to our request as soon as possible.

Mr Ross has also requested to meet with Pat Watters, President of COSLA. In his letter to Mr Watters, Mr Ross also asks for the opportunity to address the Scottish Fire Interest Task Group, a body made up of all Chief Fire Officers & Fire Authority Conveners in Scotland, which Mr Watters chairs.



# Firefighters' Pension Scheme WHO'S RESPONSIBILITY IS IT?

## DEVOLVED OR RESERVED?

Firefighters who have been speaking to their MSPs are being told that this is a Reserved matter and that they should speak to their MP. MPs have been saying that this is a Devolved matter for the Scottish Parliament and therefore MSPs.

In actual fact, it is a matter for **BOTH**.

Anne McGuire MP, recently made enquiries to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) on behalf of the FBU. She informed us that "*While pensions policy is a reserved*

*matter the issues raised are essentially for Scottish Executive Ministers. They have responsibility to make Scottish regulations for all public sector pension schemes in Scotland, with the exception of the Civil Service.*"

**In light of this, the Fire Brigades Union in Scotland calls upon all MSPs to support a Scottish Firefighters Pensions Regulation that affords full pension protection rights for all serving firefighters.**



**Cathy Jamieson can shape Regulations that would avert Strike Action in the Scottish Fire Service**

## POLITICAL SUPPORT IS GROWING IN SCOTLAND

Scottish Fire & Rescue Authorities have been voicing their opposition to the Government's plans.

Lothian & Borders FRS Authority recently issued a statement, saying "*This Board publicly supports the Firefighters in their attempt to gain protection for pension conditions for existing staff and calls for the Government to enter into negotiations with the Union with a view to resolving the pensions issue*".

It goes onto say that "*This Board believes that the way firefighters have been singled out should not be tolerated and that they should be treated in a fair and proper manner in order that pensions issues can be resolved*".

In a Press Release from the Central Scotland FRS Authority, the Convener, Tom Coll, stated that "*Central Scotland Fire and*

*Rescue Board has agreed unanimously to protest in the strongest possible terms against Government proposals to change the terms and conditions of the firefighters' pension scheme*".

He goes onto say that the Board will write to Mr Prescott "*expressing its outrage at what was seen by board members as a betrayal of one of the cornerstones of the protective services and the inferred intention of splitting public services*".

"*The Board strongly rejects this view and deplores the imputation that firefighters are less valued than other members of the emergency services.*"

"*The Board will also urge COSLA's Fire Interest Task Group to bring the united strength of Fire Boards across Scotland to bear on the Scottish*

*Executive over the issue*".

The Fire Interest Task Group is made up of all Chief Fire Officers & Fire Board Conveners in Scotland and is chaired by Pat Watters, President of COSLA.

The Chief Fire Officers Association in Scotland has also expressed support.

This constitutes **UNANIMOUS** support from all sections of the Fire Service:

- **EMPLOYERS;**
- **MANAGERS;** as well as
- **EMPLOYEES**

**The Fire Brigades Union in Scotland calls upon the Scottish Executive to afford serving Scottish Firefighters FULL protection rights for their pensions.**

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