



19 December 2018

Dear Friends & colleagues,

If you're reading this, 'Congratulations!', you have virtually made it to the end of another busy year working in and supporting the Fire Pensions domain; only a few more days and you can officially relax, chill and hopefully enjoy your Festive celebrations with family and friends.

It has undoubtedly been a busy year and especially for Clair Alcock and Claire Hey who have arranged and run several important Seminars and Training opportunities designed to keep everyone abreast of changes and requirements affecting Fire pensions and pension schemes overall.

[GDPR](#) 'arrived' and, thanks to the successful training and guidance provided, those of us in Fire Pensions were prepared for it.

We started the year off by running Tax Awareness seminars across the country back to back with our colleagues in Police, these proved to be very popular thanks to Annemarie Allen from Barnett Waddingham who facilitated and ran the seminars for us.

The '2016 Valuation - Rectification of breach to cost cap', has challenged the SAB and continues to be 'work in progress'; we have been greatly assisted in this work by First Actuarial, our contracted actuaries, along with Jane Marshall, our Legal adviser, to whom we are very grateful. You will be able to monitor progress on this critical topic via the monthly Bulletins and specific announcements.

We also started work on the 'Benchmarking project', which we believe will assist FRA's to ensure their policies and procedures are streamlined, efficient and effective. The 'Benchmarking Survey' was sent to our key FRA contacts on 23 November and I would encourage you to complete it and return it to us by the given deadline of 31 December.

We try wherever possible to avoid sending out questionnaires and surveys as we know how busy you all are but on this occasion, it is one you actually identified as being helpful and I look forward to seeing the outcome from it which we are sure will be beneficial to us all.

Clair & Claire have carried out several training sessions for Local Pension Boards, LPB's, out in FRA's, I have tagged along to a number of them and have been impressed by the quality of the training given and the enthusiasm of those receiving it. Remember, these training sessions are provided free of charge and each LPB is entitled to one free session per annum and I would encourage those of you out there responsible for your LPB's to contact [Clair Alcock](#) and book a date in her diary.

I am keen to see LPB's improve their level of Governance, which you are measured against by TPR and the Home Office in particular. As you will remember from the outcome of last year's TPR Governance & Administration survey, one of their recommendations was that LPB's should hold four meetings a year, a view supported by the SAB; hopefully you will already have these entered in your new 2019 diaries...?

The 17th & 18th of September saw many of us gathered for what was a very successful 'AGM Seminar', which in business terms would have been classed as a 'sell out', but in fact it is yet another free event. A full summary of the event can be found on our [Events](#) page.

Besides gaining a lot from the sessions laid on, one of the main benefits was the opportunity for all those who attended to Network with each other, we learn so much from listening to the experiences of others and, on this occasion, taking the opportunity to plan some joint, collaborative working, which we on the SAB encourage and applaud...

So, now we look forward to 2019; it already promises to be a busy and challenging time for us all and especially as we endeavour to negotiate the best outcome from the Cost Cap Valuation exercise.

The Tax Awareness seminars mentioned earlier proved so popular that we are looking towards running more of these later in the year and, following on from comments received from those of you who attended the previous seminars, potentially upgrading them to cater for Fire pension practitioners in particular.

We will be continuing our collaboration with the Pensions Tax working group, led by Andrew Hopkinson, the Secretary of the Fire Leaders Association, FLA, which now includes representatives from across the Public Sector Pensions domain, and which the SAB fully support. We understand that the impact of pensions tax is currently seen to be adversely affecting recruitment, retention and motivation and we will be exploring ways in which the scheme might be better managed to give choice and flexibility on managing tax liabilities, as well as continuing our work on education and awareness of pensions tax. To this end we urge you to complete and return the '[request for information](#)' that will help inform the working group.

Data continues to be high on the agenda and as, I type, the current TPR Governance & Admin survey results are being scrutinised and we will receive their findings and recommendations early in the New Year and which we will feed through to you at our earliest opportunity.

Data will also feature heavily as the Governments Dashboard project is rolled out; we believe that the Department for Work & Pensions, DWP, will consider a Dashboard specifically suited to those of us in the Public Service Pension domain and which is likely to be brought into being over the next three to four years while the commercially designed Dashboard, more suited to the Private Sector Schemes, is scheduled to come into force during 2019.

To fulfil the Dashboard criteria, data will feature highly as we will be required to provide accurate data in a prescribed format which we will be invited to comment on with a view to ensuring we do not incur significant additional costs and adversely affect our limited existing resources to fulfil their requirements.

As many of you will be aware, the Transitional Protections Challenge is still ongoing and we still await the outcome of the last round of appeals, we will update you when they are made public...

We continue to enjoy a good rapport with the associated Pensions domain organisations we link with and in particular our colleagues in the Home Office Fire Pensions team. We are also actively involved with TPR and would once again commend their [website](#) to you all as it is full of valuable, dynamic advice, information & training opportunities, especially for those of you who sit on LPB's...

I must also mention the work & commitment given by my colleagues on the Scheme Advisory Board, they also face a busy year and I look forward to working with them over the coming year as we deal with the critical issues facing our Fire Pension Schemes.

I believe we are in a better position than ever before to meet the above challenges and opportunities head on through the continued support of you our practitioners, etc. out in the field, along with the budget we secured to enable us to provide the training and seminars, etc. we offer to you and, as a look forward, don't forget to enter in your new diaries the provisional dates for the next AGM of the 24th & 25th of September 2019.

All of the above is of course managed and delivered via the Local Government Association's Fire Pensions team of Clair Alcock & Claire Hey without whom we would not have made the excellent progress we have to date or receive the most informative monthly Bulletins they put out; I am sure you will join me in saying a most sincere, "Thank You", to them for all they continue to do on our behalf.

Christmas is traditionally a time for giving, so please, give yourselves some time to relax and enjoy a change of pace, although I am sure for many of you it will be hectic, but in a different way...

I close by wishing you all a safe, peaceful and relaxing Festive break over which you can hopefully recharge your batteries for all that 2019 will undoubtedly bring and I look forward to working with you in the coming year.

Festive Best Wishes,

Malcolm.

Malcolm Eastwood, CBE, CStJ, QFSM, FIFireE.

Chairman, English Firefighters' Pension Scheme Advisory Board.

