

Scheme Advisory Board

November 2016

Dear colleagues,

Firefighters Pension Scheme (England) Scheme Advisory Board Chairman's Update

It is just over 6 months since I took up my appointment as chairman of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme Advisory Board (SAB). To say it has been a busy six months is an understatement and I thought I would share with you what your board is doing.

We have met as a board on three occasions now and I am pleased to advise you the board is settling down well to its work and I am grateful to our members for their commitment to the task in hand with good progress being made in developing and agreeing our terms of reference along with an ambitious work-plan, which I will come onto later.

The board is fortunate to have the support of Marc Sherratt, Anthony Mooney and Philip Perry, our liaison team from the Home Office who are the link to our Minister, Brandon Lewis MP, who is the Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service, and I am delighted to enclose the attached letter from Brandon, thanking the Fire and Rescue Authority officials, pension administrators and LGA for the smooth implementation of the 2015 scheme.

We are also extremely fortunate to have the services of Clair Alcock from the LGA, who in addition to her role as technical adviser providing advice and support to Fire Authorities supports the board as acting secretariat, organising and running the SAB meetings and events, providing advice to the board, as well as supporting the Local Pension Boards by providing training.

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I have personal reasons to be grateful to Clair as she has encouraged me to develop my knowledge and understanding of the 'dark art' of fire pensions. Clair has arranged for me to attend a number of regional group meetings, attend and assist at local pension board training sessions, attend and speak at national pension seminars and introduced me to key players in the pensions industry, like The Pensions Regulator (TPR) and commercial companies with specialist fire pensions expertise with whom, through Clair's good offices we now have a good, useful and productive working rapport.

Budget:

At the last SAB meeting, we were advised that the Minister had approved the budget as submitted by the board. This is now in the process of being levied on the Fire Authorities as directed by the 2014 regulations. The budget includes provision for an additional full time post at LGA to act as communications officer and board secretary. This post will as well as providing secretariat support for the SAB provide support to Local Pension Boards.

On setting the budget, the objective was to look for cost savings for Fire Authorities and an improved service to scheme members by reducing duplication and undertaking to secure and circulate guidance and communications centrally.

All of the above links in to the objectives the Minister set me on my appointment to reduce the overall costs of fire pensions to the government, fire authorities, scheme members and above all, the tax payers.

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Work Plan:

The Board has set itself an ambitious Work Plan which it is intended will:-

- Support and advise Local Pension Boards
- Take a lead on communications
- Ensure cost effectiveness of scheme administration
- Advise on 'Best Practise'
- Look to Benchmark administration

Besides all the above, board members have been actively involved in board work representing the board at:-

The Pensionable Pay Workshop

The Annual LGA Fire pensions Conference

Firefighters Pensions Tax Seminar, (a training event organised for SAB members).

Sub-Committees:

In order to achieve these objectives, the board has agreed to set up three strategic sub committees which will explore and develop:-

- Cost Effectiveness
- Improved Scheme Administration
- Ensuring the Effectiveness of Local Pension Boards

As you will appreciate, it sounds easy in print, but will require a lot of work, analysis and cooperation; the sub committees will have a selected Chairman and will be supported by volunteers from both the SAB and fire pensions practitioners, like many of you reading this update (Hint!). Anyone who would like to consider volunteering to work on one of the above groups should contact Clair Alcock on Clair.Alcock@local.gov.uk she will be pleased to hear from you.

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Personal Observations:

Since taking up my appointment I have been extremely impressed and heartened at the level of commitment, knowledge, enthusiasm and professionalism of the people I have met who work so diligently on fire pensions within the English fire authorities.

Fire pensions are undoubtedly complex and quite different from the Local Government Pension Scheme in many ways and, whilst the number of members in the schemes are smaller, their needs are just as great and there is a big responsibility on those working on the schemes to get it right.

I am keen therefore to work closely with those of you working in the Fire pensions industry to facilitate through Clair; training, workshops and seminars, to assist and enable you to develop personally and ensure there is a consistency of knowledge and development of best practice. Again, Clair and I would welcome suggestions as to what you would like to see coming out from the board on the above.

As mentioned above, I have visited a number of our regional group meetings, the technical Group and attended some local pension board training sessions. It is my intention to continue with such visits and should you wish to invite me to one of your meetings / events, preferably along with Clair, please feel free to get in touch and I will do my best to come along.

I have learned a great deal about fire pensions over the last six months and have represented the board at a number of pension events run by the commercial sector including speaking on the work of the board at the CLASS AGM earlier in the year, where it was useful to learn more about the wider pensions' world. I also presented on the SAB and its work to the Fire Commission, an important opportunity to speak to the Chairs of the Fire Authorities of the essential work being carried out in their Authorities on Fire pensions'.

In August, I met with The Pensions Regulator at their offices in Brighton, where we were well received and as a consequence I believe we now have a good working rapport with their officials which I'm sure will benefit us all overall.

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Given the complexity of the 1992, 2006 (including special members) and 2015 schemes, along-side the compensation scheme and the five different types of Fire & Rescue Services / Authorities ranging in size and scale from the London Fire Brigade to the Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Service **and**, the potential of Governance of the Fire & Rescue service in some Authorities being undertaken in the future by Police & Crime Commissioners it is obvious that there is much to be done by the Scheme Advisory Board to assist and support Local Fire Pension Boards and Scheme Managers in their work, a challenge the Board members and I look forward to.

I close by thanking you for making me so welcome, encouraging me to be an active part of the fire pensions family and above all to those of you working on fire pensions for all you are doing for those of us in the various firefighters pension schemes.

Sincere Best Wishes,

Malcolm.

Malcolm Eastwood CBE, CStJ, QFSM, FIFireE
Chairman, English Firefighters' Scheme Advisory Board