

**SERVING FIREFIGHTERS**



**SERVING THE COMMUNITY**

**RFU**

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**John Barton:** National General Secretary

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Your ref:

Our ref: JB/ Hazel Blears/Pension

24 January 2008

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP  
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London  
SW1E 5DU

Dear Secretary of State

### **THE FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION SCHEME CRISIS**

I write to you on our members' behalf to express our deepest concerns regarding the Firefighters' Pension Scheme and its operation.

As you know, the retained firefighters of this country provide a service second to none in ensuring that 91% of the UK land mass not only receives an appropriate level of fire cover, but also rescues from serious traffic accidents, flooding and other emergencies.

They undertake this work for small remuneration and at no little disruption to their primary employment and family life. These ordinary men and women are often faced with horrific and distressing scenes which they deal with professionally. They are proud to serve their local community, and when there is a national crisis, their country. In return for this, they naturally expect that if they are injured doing a job which has so many potential dangers, they can expect to receive a reasonable pension to cover the loss of their primary employment as well as their retained earnings. While this was until recently the case, it is no longer.

Retained personnel have been hit by two major changes to the pension scheme.

Firstly, to obtain any pension it will have to be proved that they cannot undertake any part of the role map. This means that unless they are very severely disabled they will receive no support at all and will be dismissed from the service.

Secondly and as result of changes to the pension scheme, if they were employed after 2006, (and even if they meet the onerous new requirements) they will get a pension based on part-time pro-rata earnings, whilst in all probability losing their primary income. As you can imagine I am inundated with enquiries from concerned firefighters who are now also extremely angry and feel let down.

This issue has been ongoing since July last year, we have indeed met with Parmjit Dhanda MP who was very supportive and we are confident that he understands our concerns. However I am desperate to give these brave men and women the reassurance that you will

resolve these two problems for retained personnel immediately, but as yet I have had no assurance from anyone that there is any real prospect of any change of stance.

Within the UK fire and rescue service, one in five retained posts remains unfilled and the changes to the pension scheme by their very nature have created major disincentives to becoming or remaining a retained firefighter. How can I advise RFU members to remain in a job where if they are injured they may lose their homes and impose great economic suffering on their families?

Unbelievably, one of your officials has suggested that retained personnel "*should take out their own insurance*" to cover themselves should they be injured, I feel personally insulted and appalled by this comment.

This is the thanks they get for putting their lives, health and family wellbeing on the line for their community on a day to day basis, not forgetting that RFU members have also remained on duty during the disruption caused by industrial action.

I can only imagine such an insensitive idea would not have your support, especially considering the difficulties we have in persuading people to do the job at all.

Can I urge you to give me the reassurances I need on the issues I have raised, for the protection of both retained firefighters and the communities they are proud to serve.

I am copying this letter to John Healey and Parmjit Dhanda.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Barton', written in a cursive style.

John Barton  
National General Secretary

Copies            John Healey MP  
                         Parmjit Dhanda MP