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An open letter to firefighters in England

## **FIREFIGHTER PENSIONS**

### Retained Firefighters' Pensions

I am delighted that I was able to announce plans to put retained firefighters on an equal footing to wholetime firefighters. Retained firefighters were historically unable to access a pension scheme until 2006. The pensions will be available to any retained firefighter who was employed during the period 1 July 2000 and 5 April 2006 and the pension terms will be comparable with those available to a regular firefighter employed at the same time.

The consultation document can be found here: [consultation document](#).

### Pension Calculators

The pension calculators that we have placed on the website have attracted over 20,500 hits. It is clear to me that you are keen to make up your own mind regarding the pension scheme. If you have not already checked out the calculator, I urge you to do so [here](#).

You can still send any specific queries you have to [firepensions@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:firepensions@communities.gsi.gov.uk).

### Two Areas of Clarification

The FBU leadership have stated that they have not had clarification on two issues. First is the status of the proposed joint working group which was part of the final offer, and the contribution rates for future years. In terms of the proposed joint working party, I proposed that a working group is set up to consider aspects of the role which have been identified to be the most physically intensive and how they impact on an individual's ability and fitness to carry out their role over time. I also proposed that the working group examines future options and trends in terms of continued employment with a view to developing a best practice guide. To be clear, if such a group were to be set up it would have representative bodies on it.

Secondly, I also indicated that the contribution rate set out in Proposed Final Agreements is the rate that can be delivered across all of the schemes for that workforce. The likely effect of this is that the average rate in the 2015 scheme could be 12.6% in 2015, rather than the 13.2% set out in the Proposed Final Agreement. However we will need to monitor the average rate over the next year before we can confirm the final figures and it is important to note that the 2015 scheme will need to deliver 13.2% over the long-term.

## Capability

Some anxiety has been expressed about capability issues and the threat of large scale dismissals. We have undertaken a review of 20 fire and rescue authorities' fitness policies. This found that each fire and rescue authority kept their firefighters on operational duties at a VO<sub>2</sub>max of 35 or 36 mL.kg.min<sup>-1</sup>. This is why Dr Williams stated that 100 per cent of firefighters would remain operationally fit until age 60. It is worth quoting the relevant paragraph:

"Based on current practices of setting a standard of 42 mL.kg.min<sup>-1</sup> VO<sub>2</sub>max but allowing firefighters to remain operational at a 35 mL.kg.min<sup>-1</sup> VO<sub>2</sub>max would ensure that 100% of firefighters who remain physically active will still be operational at age 60 assuming they remain free from injury and disease."<sup>1</sup>

For those few firefighters that cannot maintain operational fitness, there will be an assessment by the fire and rescue authority about why that may be the case. If firefighters cannot maintain operational fitness for a medical reason and that reason is permanent, then they will be considered for ill-health retirement. Where there is no medical reason, or the reason is not permanent, Dr Williams' found that fire and rescue authorities provide remedial training and the great majority of firefighters are able to increase their fitness levels within a few months.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Following the teleconference we have received a lot of enquiries from firefighters about the reforms. I have today published responses to the most [frequently asked questions](#).

## Reply to FBU General Secretary

I have provided a detailed reply to the FBU General Secretary concerning the letters he has sent to me. I have made this [public on our website](#); I do encourage you to read it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brandon Lewis', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

**BRANDON LEWIS MP**

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 11.2.3, Normal Pension Age for Firefighters: A Review for the Firefighters' Pension Committee.