



## FPS Bulletin 38 – October 2020

Welcome to issue 38 of the Firefighters' Pensions Schemes bulletin.

We hope that readers remain safe and well.

Face-to-face meetings and training remain suspended for the time being due to restrictions on travel and social distancing. However, the Bluelight team are available at home by mobile, email or video (MS Teams, Skype, or Zoom).

If you are looking for information on a certain topic, issue and content indexes are held on the [main bulletin page](#) of the website and are updated following each new issue.

If you have any comments on this bulletin or suggested items for future issues, please email [claire.hey@local.gov.uk](mailto:claire.hey@local.gov.uk).

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## Calendar of events

Please see below a calendar of upcoming events relevant to the Firefighters' Pension Schemes. Only those events which are hyperlinked are currently available to book. If you have any events you would like to be included in a future bulletin, please email [claire.hey@local.gov.uk](mailto:claire.hey@local.gov.uk)

Table 1: Calendar of events

Event	Date
<a href="#">FPS coffee and catch up</a>	Every second Tuesday from 3 November 2020
Eastern regional FPOG	19 November 2020
SAB	10 December 2020
North East regional group	17 February 2021
SAB	11 March 2021
SAB	24 June 2021
SAB	9 September 2021
SAB	9 December 2021

## Actions arising

Readers are asked to note the following actions arising from the bulletin:

[Immediate detriment request for information](#): FRAs in England to submit numbers of members who qualify for immediate detriment.

## FPS

### Age discrimination consultation responses

Between 16 July and 11 October 2020, HM Treasury (HMT) consulted on changes to the transitional arrangements of the unfunded public service pension schemes introduced in 2015.

On 9 October, responses were submitted by the LGA and Scheme Advisory Board (SAB). These responses can be found on our dedicated [age discrimination remedy webpage](#), along with the submissions from the Wales and Scotland SABs.

### **[Immediate detriment information note](#)**

We advised in [FPS Bulletin 37 – September 2020](#) that we had drafted a note to provide additional information to FRAs on the key considerations on implementing the Home Office informal guidance on immediate detriment.

The [LGA immediate detriment information note](#) and accompanying [template matrix](#) have now been published and can be found on the [Age Discrimination Remedy \(Sargeant\) page](#).

Please note that each FRA's nominated contact for the Sargeant litigation will have further information in order to inform your authority's approach to immediate detriment cases. This is for reasons of legal privilege. Please ensure that you liaise with the nominated contact for your FRA before taking any action.

### **[Special Members of FPS 2006 - Second options exercise](#)**

We understand stakeholders are keen to receive updates on the expected second special members options exercise, sometimes referred to as Matthews or O'Brien. While at this stage we cannot provide more definitive information, we have published a new [special members factsheet](#) which provides a brief background on the introduction of special members and comments on the expectations of a second exercise.

Special members were introduced to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2006 (FPS 2006) in 2014, following [Matthews v Kent and Medway Towns Fire Authority \[2006\] UKHL 8](#) which allowed retained firefighters employed between 1 July 2000 and 5 April 2006 to join the FPS 2006 with retrospective effect to 1 July 2000.

Following the [European Court of Justice's decision in O'Brien v Ministry of Justice](#) which is a case concerning [fee paid judges in the Judicial Pension Scheme](#), the UK Government have recognised the right for retained firefighters employed before 1 July 2000 to elect to become a special member from the start date of their employment.

This will necessitate a second options exercise, for which legal discussions have commenced between central government, the LGA on behalf of FRAs and trade union legal representatives to consider who is in scope and the details of the settlement exercise.

Regulations for England will be drafted and consulted on following the conclusion of the legal discussions. It is expected further regulations and consultations for the devolved governments will follow later. Unfortunately, no timescales are known at this stage.

There is no further action needed at this time by FRAs or their administrators.

## Scheme sanction charge

From time to time we have been asked to clarify who pays the [scheme sanction charge](#) on an unauthorised payment. We can confirm that this is the responsibility of the Fire and Rescue Authority as [sub scheme administrator](#). Further we can confirm that:

- There is no provision to deduct the scheme sanction charge from the member, unless the scheme rules provide for it which the FPS does not, and
- The scheme sanction charge is payable from the operating account and is **not** chargeable to the notional pension fund.

More information on frequently asked questions for scheme sanction charge can be found under *Unauthorised payments* in the technical queries log published monthly on the [technical queries page](#).

## Medical retirement IQMP certificates

We have been receiving an increased level of enquiries related to medical retirement certificates for use by IQMPs.

Medical retirement is leaving employment from the FRA under either ill-health retirement or injury. Ill-health retirement can and often does occur on its own. Injury retirement occurs due to a direct result of the firefighter's work and will always also trigger ill-health retirement.

An injury pension is paid under the regulations of the [Firefighters' Compensation Scheme 2006](#) (FCS 2006). The amount of benefit payable does not depend on what pension scheme the member may be in, however, it will be calculated in reference to the service attributable to the employment in which the injury is received.

Ill-health retirement occurs under the pension scheme rules, and benefits may be different depending on the pension scheme the member is in:

- Firefighters' Pension Scheme 1992 (FPS 1992)
- Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2006 - Standard and Special members (FPS 2006)
- Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2015 (FPS 2015)

Which ill-health form to use is not laid down in legislation, subsequently it is for FRAs to satisfy themselves that the forms meet the requirements of the legislation and that the IQMP has answered the relevant questions.

In 2009, following meetings of an [ill-health review group](#), a form was developed that brought together the requirement to consider redeployment as a result of the [Marrion case](#), and the different rules and eligibility for FPS 1992, FPS 2006 and FCS 2006.

In 2015, following feedback that the forms were unwieldy to use and had led to errors of interpretation the forms were simplified and separated across the schemes. The new forms considered the questions for IQMPs only and did not try to give guidance on employment considerations.

Those forms are held on the password-protected [ill-health and injury webpage](#) and **must** be downloaded each time to ensure the most recent version of the form is being used.

Each approach to the forms has pros and cons and the SAB are considering a programme of work to ensure that more resources and information about medical retirement are readily available to FRAs and members. More detail can be found in the [minutes of the SAB meeting of 13 June 2019](#).

This work may take some time and may be impacted by the Court findings in the age discrimination case known as Sargeant and the resulting [HMT consultation on age discrimination](#) in public service schemes.

In the short term we are drafting a short summary factsheet on medical retirement issues and will be making some changes to the forms. We will advise a timescale for this work in the next bulletin.

### **Fire and Rescue workforce and pensions statistics published**

The Home Office published [workforce and pensions statistics](#) for Fire and Rescue Services (England) on 22 October 2020. The pension scheme statistics, covering April 2019 to March 2020, reflect data returns on income, expenditure and membership submitted by all 45 FRAs in England.

Some key results:

- Firefighters' Pension Scheme expenditure in 2019-20 was around £908 million.
- In 2019-20, 80 per cent of expenditure was "recurring outgoing payments" and 19 per cent was "commutation payments". "Transfers" and "miscellaneous expenditure" totaled less than 1 per cent
- Firefighters' Pension Scheme income in 2019-20 was around £387.5 million.
- Employer contributions nearly doubled from £135 million in 2018-19 to £260 million in 2019-20 as a result of changes to the discount rate set by HM Treasury from April 2019.
- In 2019-20, 67 per cent of income was "employer contributions", 30 per cent was "employee contributions" and the remaining 3 per cent comprised transfers, miscellaneous income and ill-health charges.
- The Firefighters' Pension Scheme deficit in 2019-20 was around £520 million.
- As at 31 March 2020, the total number of pensioner members was 46,228. Of these, 94 per cent were members of FPS 1992.

### **Website and resources update**

We have added the following page to the Firefighters' Pension Schemes Regulations and Guidance website this month:

[Consultations](#). This page has been created to hold consultations on the FPS and wider public service pension schemes.

The following factsheets for members have been updated for the current financial year by the LGA Bluelight team in collaboration with the Fire Communications Working Group (FCWG) and are available from the website:

[Annual Allowance](#)

[Topping up your State Pension](#)

### **October query log**

The current [log of queries and responses](#) is available on the FPS Regulations and Guidance website. The queries have been anonymised and divided into topics. The log will be updated on a monthly basis in line with the bulletin release dates.

Queries from earlier months have been grey shaded to differentiate from new items. New queries have been added under the following categories: compensation scheme, ill-health retirement, Protected Pension Age, and salary sacrifice (updated).

## **FPS England SAB updates**

### **Immediate detriment request for information - reminder**

In [FPS Bulletin 37 – September 2020](#), the SAB asked for information on the number of members who are likely to become eligible for payment of benefits under the terms of the [Home Office immediate detriment note](#). This includes:

- Any member refused ill-health retirement under the FPS 2015 as the lower ill-health criteria was not met.
- 1992 transition members of FPS 2015 who reach age 55 before 31 March 2022.
- 1992 transition members of FPS 2015 who reach 30 years' service before 31 March 2022.
- 1992 transition members of FPS 2015 who will have 25 years+ service and be over 50 by 31 March 2022.

The SAB also want to understand what percentage of the FPS 2015 membership within the immediate detriment (ID) category are likely to be affected by complicating factors, such as divorce or transfers.

To date we have only received responses from eight FRAs.

The SAB kindly request that FRAs complete the [ID information sheet](#) by 30 November 2020. Please note that clicking the link downloads an Excel spreadsheet. Completed returns should be submitted to [bluelight.pensions@local.gov.uk](mailto:bluelight.pensions@local.gov.uk).

### **SAB levy 2020-21 update**

We informed readers in [FPS Bulletin 35 – July 2020](#) that collection of the SAB levy would begin in August/ September.

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The budget remains with the minister's office, so we have not yet been able to request purchase order numbers from FRAs. We are continuing to chase this up with the Home Office.

## Other News and Updates

### Restriction of exit payments in the public sector

[The Restriction of Public Sector Exit Payments Regulations 2020](#) come into force on 4 November 2020.

As expected, the regulations have limited application for the FPS, as exemptions apply to two of the exit payments which would otherwise fall within the scope of the £95,000 cap: [enhanced commutation](#) (FPS 1992) and [Authority Initiated Early Retirement \(AIER\)](#) (FPS 2006 and FPS 2015) on fitness grounds.

In some limited circumstances of AIER the cap would still apply and we understand that the Home Office is working with the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) to establish how the assessment against the cap can be undertaken for the fire scheme. This will be achieved either through regulatory change or statutory GAD guidance.

### Public Service Pensions GMP indexation consultation

On 6 April 2016, the government introduced the new State Pension which removed the mechanism that enabled public servants in "contracted-out" employment between 1978 and 1997 to have their Guaranteed Minimum Pension (GMP) fully price protected. The interim solution of full indexation was brought in, which was later consulted on and extended until 5 April 2021. This ensured that public service pensioners had the GMPs they had earned in public service fully indexed by their public service pension scheme.

On 7 October the government published a consultation on [Public Service Pensions: GMP indexation](#). The consultation sets out how the government proposes to ensure it continues to meet its past commitments to public service employees regarding the full indexation of public service pensions, including for any GMP element.

The consultation will last for 12 weeks and closes on 30 December 2020.

The consultation and supporting [written ministerial statement](#) can be found on the new [consultations page](#) of the Regulations and Guidance website.

The LGA will be responding in due course.

### Update on TPR scheme return 2019-20

We reported in [FPS Bulletin 36 – August 2020](#) that the Pension Regulator's (TPR's) statutory scheme return was scheduled to be released in Autumn in line with the usual timescales.



TPR has advised us that the scheme return campaign for public service schemes has been slightly delayed and notices are now due to be sent out during week commencing 2 November 2020.

### **TPO factsheet: Complaining to TPO on behalf of a deceased's estate**

On 19 October the Pensions Ombudsman (TPO) published a factsheet for survivors who may want to bring or continue a complaint on behalf of the deceased's estate.

Factsheet: [Complaining to TPO on behalf of a deceased's estate](#).

### **Pensions Dashboard Programme update**

On 28 October 2020 the Pensions Dashboard Programme (PDP) published its [second progress update report](#). The report summarises the work the PDP has undertaken since April 2020 and sets out a timeline for the development of the project.

## **Events**

### **Local Pension Board virtual training**

We are attending an increasing number of virtual pension board meetings to provide an update on current issues affecting the FPS and how to use the [six key areas of governance](#) as measured by TPR to support the scheme manager through various complexities, such as Sargeant / Matthews, pensionable pay, and ill-health decisions.

If you would like to arrange a session for your board, please email [bluelight.pensions@local.gov.uk](mailto:bluelight.pensions@local.gov.uk).

### **FPS coffee mornings**

We are continuing to run our MS Teams coffee mornings every second Tuesday while social distancing measures remain in place. These informal sessions lasting up to an hour allow practitioners to catch up with colleagues and hear a brief update on FPS issues from the LGA Bluelight team.

The next event is scheduled to take place on 3 November 2020.

If you would like to join us, please email [bluelight.pensions@local.gov.uk](mailto:bluelight.pensions@local.gov.uk) and we will add you to the invite list for the sessions.

## **HMRC**

### **HMRC newsletters/bulletins**

On 6 October HMRC updated [pension schemes newsletter 124](#) to confirm that the protected pension age easement in relation to COVID-19 will not be extended and will expire on 1 November 2020.

HMT has previously confirmed that anyone re-employed between 1 March and the deadline would be deemed as having satisfied the re-employment conditions, regardless of how long the employment lasted. Therefore, we understand that the PPA easement ceases to apply for any new appointments from 1 November 2020.

## Legislation

### SI number    Reference title

2020/122    [The Restriction of Public Sector Exit Payments Regulations 2020](#)

## Useful links

- [The Firefighters' Pensions \(England\) Scheme Advisory Board](#)
- [FPS Regulations and Guidance](#)
- [Khub Firefighters Pensions Discussion Forum](#)
- [FPS1992 guidance and commentary](#)
- [The Pensions Regulator Public Service Schemes](#)
- [The Pensions Ombudsman](#)
- [HMRC Pensions Tax Manual](#)
- [LGA pensions website](#)
- [LGPS Regulations and Guidance](#)
- [LGPS member site](#)

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