



19 December 2019

Dear Friends & Colleagues,

Christmas is traditionally a Family Time and it is my pleasure to send to all of you within what I fondly refer to as my Fire Pensions Family my personal 'Festive Best Wishes' for Christmas, the New Year and 2020.

It doesn't feel like it is 12 months ago that I sat down to write last year's Festive Message to you all...and yet, here we are again, frantically getting ready for the "Big Day", and the closure of another busy year.

Christmas is generally a time for reflection and when I look back over the year, we have seen so much happening within the Fire Pensions domain, much of which has involved the majority of you reading this message in one way or another.

At the start of the year, we were continuing our work on the [2016 Valuation](#) breach of Cost Cap which challenged the SAB and our Cost Committee with the figures this produced; we were busily trying to establish what this would actually mean for Fire Authorities when the process was suddenly paused....

Taking its place on our agendas came the outcome of the 'Sargeant' transitional protections case and that the provisions were indeed deemed to be age discriminatory and therefore unlawful.

The preliminary ET remedy hearing has now taken place and I suspect much of next year's endeavours will be focused on dealing with the outcome and the ensuing administrative challenges this will present, which I have every confidence you will deal with efficiently and professionally.

It is worth mentioning here that there is still a lot speculation and social media attention with regards to this case given its affect across public sector. While there is now an interim order for immediate cases there is still an ongoing legal case and the outcome for individuals has yet to be determined, it is not simple and straightforward and could take some time as there are a lot of legal and procedural details to be determined. As and when details become known I expect these will be published in a bulletin /advisory note and would advise you to keep a close eye on the bulletins.

Earlier in the year, we put before you our Questionnaire produced by AON for the Benchmarking Survey to determine the average costs of managing Fire Pensions for FRA's; we are grateful to AON for all their work and also those of you who completed and returned

this survey which showed us that FRA's have difficulty in accurately determining their actual costs in order for us to establish a benchmark of an average figure.

Whilst this was somewhat disappointing it was not unexpected as it isn't what we could call an exact science given the variables across the numerous types of FRA's out there; we have discussed this at length and we will now be looking to collaborate with the 'Fire Finance Network' to collect the cost data required.

The key themes emerging from the [AON report](#) where improvements could be made on effectiveness of administration were: Complexity, Reporting Breaches, Communication, Data & Relationships.

Having considered all of the above, we will be forming working groups through the LGA to take forward actions recommended within the report and its outcomes; we will continue to keep you updated and advised via the Bulletins.

The Annual [TPR Governance & Admin Survey for 2018](#) provided interesting outcomes for us, in general we accredited ourselves well and showed improvements over the previous year. TPR's main concerns were that a number of FRA's LPB's were still not meeting quarterly as per their guidelines; they were concerned at the number of LPB's which did not appear to have a 'Risk Management Process' in place and identified issues around Data and frequency of Data Reviews.

TPR also expressed concerns as to low number of 'Breaches' reported to them by Fire; we are discussing these findings with TPR and will be formulating advice and guidance for FRA's / LPB's as to ways to make improvements...

TPR have also advised us that during 2020 they will be undertaking what they call, "Relationship Supervision", with 4 FRA's on an anonymous basis; this is a process they have carried out with other pensions schemes and is something we should welcome and not be concerned about as their findings will surely assist us in our aim to improve the way we work and ensure higher levels of efficiency and service to our scheme members.

Our Local Pension Board Committee is working closely with FRA's and TPR to assist our LPB's in their work schedule to ensure they tick all the right legislative boxes and deliver the service and safeguards they were designed to provide. This is a good place to remind those of you with responsibilities for Fire Pensions within your FRA / LPB that you are entitled to an annual training / Update session from the LGA via the Clair(e)s; something to get on your new 2020 calendars quickly while diary space is available...

During 2019 we have held a number of extremely successful events covering topical subjects on, Data, Governance, Ill Health, Pensionable Pay and Pensions Tax; these sessions were all complimented by our annual LPB wrap up training and of course the ever popular AGM which was again a great success and a fantastic opportunity for those attending to network with each other; details of these events are contained on our website for those who were unable to attend <http://www.fpsboard.org/index.php/events>.

Watch out for the announcement early in the New Year of the programme of exciting events for 2020 - "book early to avoid disappointment", is good advice as I am delighted to say all the events run for you in 2019 have been total "sell outs"...

Other 'ongoing matters of interest' we are involved with are, the old favourite, 'Dashboards', currently this initiative is progressing via DWP and we are still monitoring it closely to ensure the input required from FRA's is not too resource intensive. We did get an assurance that 'Fire' will not be asked to participate immediately and it is likely to be another 2 to 3 years before DWP will invite us to supply the data they require. The SAB & LGA will of course continue to monitor and comment on any aspects of interest / concern.

As many of you are aware, I was unfortunately taken ill the day before the Tax Seminar on the 12th of November, which I was looking forward to Chairing, and I am grateful to those of you who kindly sent me your good wishes for a speedy recovery which helped me considerably.

Whilst I am recovering well, the results of numerous tests, etc. have shown that I am, 'work in progress' during 2020 for my medics, which has also confirmed to me that my decision to reluctantly stand down as your Chair of the SAB on the 31st of March next year is the right one...

After I have left, I will keep an external eye on all that is going on within the SAB, FRA's, LPB's and above all, those of you who do so much for those of us privileged to be Scheme Members, as it is my intention to keep drawing my Fire Pension for many years to come...

I will of course write to you all again before I actually 'sign off' from the role I have cherished and enjoyed for the last four years.

It is a privilege to work with you all and in particular "The Clair(e)s", Clair Alcock & Claire Hey, both of whom do so much for us all and, without their unstinting work and support, the SAB and 'Fire Pensions' in general would not be as effective as it is.

I am conscious of the excellent work that is done by those of you out there in your various roles on a day to day basis within your FRA's etc., often enhanced by the additional tasks you take on through your work of the Regional FPOG's, the Technical and Communications groups. A number of you also sit on our Cost, Admin & Benchmarking and Local Pension Board working groups, for which we are very grateful as your contributions at these meetings are extremely useful.

I close by wishing you and your families a very Merry Christmas and New Year, enjoy yourselves, relax and build yourselves up for what I'm sure will be a very busy, challenging but enjoyable 2020...

Warmest Festive Wishes To You All...

Malcolm.

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