

# Firefighters Pension Scheme (England) Scheme Advisory Board



## To Chairs of Fire Authorities and Local Pension Boards

26 March 2020

Dear Chairs

### Firefighters Pension Scheme: COVID-19 and FPS resilience

I am writing in my capacity as Chair of the Scheme Advisory Board for the Firefighters' Pension Scheme in England.

On 23 March the Prime Minister asked that everyone stay at home except for a few restricted activities one of which is 'travelling to and from work, but only where work absolutely cannot be done from home'.

Previously, the Government published [a list of key workers](#) in the advice to schools who are critical to the COVID-19 response. These include administrative occupations, 'delivering essential public services such as the payment of benefits', which in the case of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme would include administrators and Fire and Rescue officers in the role of scheme manager.

It is of course for each organisation to take a view on how they best balance the need to manage and administrate the Firefighters' Pension Scheme against delivering critical needs of the service and health and wellbeing of staff.

In order to support authorities in this difficult time the LGA pensions team will be asking authorities to feedback, via an [online survey](#), issues in terms of resources, the ability to process data, the situation of scheme employers together with any local challenges to service provision. This will enable us to raise the awareness of government, seek the clarification needed and to issue necessary guidance and advice.

This information will also enable the LGA and SAB to identify potential issues to assist in our discussions with Home Office and The Pensions Regulator about the potential for easement in regulatory demands to prevent unavoidable breaches of the law and scheme regulations in these unprecedented times.

I fully appreciate that Fire and Rescue Authorities priorities will now be focused solely on the operational function of the service, but against this background I would strongly urge you to ensure the delegated scheme manager takes some time to complete the survey. It is only by assessing the national picture that we will be in a strong position to argue the case to government and regulators for specific and targeted measures to assist in delivering the pensions function and safeguarding the entitlements of scheme beneficiaries.

There will be a Q&A for scheme administrators and scheme managers on [www.fpsregs.org](http://www.fpsregs.org). A link to the Q&A will be provided once it becomes available – anticipated to be early in the week beginning 30 March.

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We understand that board meetings may need to be postponed or suspended during this time to allow members to focus on other priorities, however, we would urge pension boards to make arrangements for at least one virtual meeting during this time and for chairs to be in contact with the scheme managers and administrators. The LGA pensions team will be looking to make an online update available for board members to view.

The pensions regulator has issued useful [guidance](#) on their expectation of those charged with governance during this time, they advise that there is a need to be alive to risks that would have significant consequences for your scheme and members. Assess whether your business continuity plan (BCP) is still adequate and contact your administrator or service provider to find out what contingency is in place to mitigate their impact of increases in work volumes or unavailable staff.

You should make it clear which activities should be prioritised in the event of under-resourcing, such as pensioner payments, retirement processing and bereavement payments. Confirm this priority order with your administrators or providers and work with them if there are any issues with these activities.

Finally, I can assure you that the SAB secretariat and LGA pensions team remain available to support the FPS during this challenging time and will continue to update on all new developments.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Malcolm Eastwood', written over a horizontal line.

Malcolm Eastwood  
Chairman of the Firefighters (England) Pension Scheme Advisory Board