



LANCASHIRE UNISON CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT OUR PENSIONS

LGPS MEMBERS GET THE CINDERELLA TREATMENT

Act now to save the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS)!

LAST week at the start of negotiations, the local government employers announced that they want to reduce LGPS benefits and increase employee contributions for at least two years (full details of the Employers' proposals are on the local UNISON website – www.unisonlancs.org.uk) The changes apply to our members in local government, police, HE, FE, probation, meat hygiene, housing associations, Passenger Transport Executives, the Environment Agency the voluntary and private sectors.

UNISON will now be pulling out all the stops to change the employers' minds and organise industrial action if we can't make them see sense. We need YOU to be involved in our campaign to make it a success. And we need your friends and family to join in to let the public know the truth behind the employers' lack of good sense.

They propose to:

- Remove the 85 Year Rule from 1 April 2006. They say this is necessary under the Age Discrimination legislation
- Offer NO protection to existing members of the scheme
- Increase employee contributions by 1% from 1 April 2006 and 2007 and review it in 2008
- Increase the age at which benefits can be taken from 50 to 55 from 1 April 2006, four years ahead of the date necessary under the 2004 Finance Act

To add insult to injury they say that negotiations must be concluded by mid October so that any changes can be reflected in the November local government settlement. This would be an impossible timetable

for most local negotiations, let alone on a pension scheme covering over 2 million workers.

Other public sector pensions

Parallel talks going on via the TUC with Alan Johnson, DTI Secretary of State, seem likely to result in very different proposals for other public sector pension schemes and a very much more realistic negotiating timetable. At the moment, the talks are suggesting that there will be no imposed increase in the public sector pension age, more flexibility around retirement and a realistic timetable for negotiations and consultation with members of pension schemes.

It looks as if our members in the LGPS – already the least favourable of all public sector pension schemes - are getting the Cinderella treatment!

'Very few pension fat cats in the LGPS'

It could mean that teaching assistants working alongside teachers will have to pay more for an even worse pension. The same goes for social care staff working with NHS employees. Other groups of LGPS members in police, probation, FE, HE, the voluntary and private sectors, Passenger Transport Executives and the Environment Agency are also increasingly likely to be involved in 'Local Area Agreements' and other forms of joined-up working the Government is asking for.

What will happen next?

The Trade Union Side is scheduled to meet the employers again on 7 October. It comprises UNISON, TGWU, AMICUS, GMB, NAPO, UCATT and CYWU. In the meantime, the T U Side will be meeting to work out a detailed response to the employers' proposals, which we have said are completely unacceptable. We are also hoping to receive all the information on the LGPS we asked them for way back in June and which we need for negotiations.

We have also started planning for another industrial action ballot. It is vital that if it becomes necessary, it is carried out without hitches and that all members who should be balloted are involved.

We also need to take our campaign out to the public. We need to tell them that the average pension is only £3,800 and that many members without long service and on low pay get even less. There are very few pension fat cats in the LGPS!

What can individual members do?

There are lots of things members can do to make sure our campaign is a success:

- Make sure your workmates, friends, family and neighbours know what's going on
- Recruit non members into UNISON. They need the protection of the union and we need their involvement to give us maximum possible bargaining power
- Write to your MP and councillors protesting about the employers' proposals using the model letter on the web site - www.unisonlancs.org.uk or ring the Branch Office to obtain a copy. Details of MPs and County Councillor and their constituencies can be found on the website.
- Write to your local paper highlighting the facts about the LGPS and the important work our members do within local communities (sending also a copy to the Branch Office).
- Get involved in activities organised

by your branch and Region

- Volunteer to tell your story to the press and media (please inform the Branch Office)
- Let us know how the proposals would affect you – we need stories to tell the national press and media

Who does what?

The UNISON members on the Trade Union Side negotiating team are:

- Heather Wakefield, Head of Local Government
- Jon Richards, Senior National Officer, Education Services
- Jean Geldart, Chair, Local Government SGE
- Stephen Mead, Higher Education SGE, job sharing with Carol Nobbs, Police SGE

Glyn Jenkins, Pensions Officer is providing technical support to the Trade Union Side.

Watch this space!

Look out for details in our next bulletin of the Trade Union side's response which is due to be tabled at the next Tripartite meeting on 7 October 2005. Also be sure you visit the Unions websites (www.unisonlancs.org.uk or www.unison.org.uk) to keep yourselves updated.

Members are encouraged to put forward comments on these proposals especially in relation to the prospect of taking industrial action against implementation of these proposals.

Please circulate to non-members and encourage them to join. For an application form contact the Branch Office on 01772 533072 or email at unison@unison.lancscc.gov.uk