

# Protect Our Pensions LGPS campaign



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## DEFEND THE LGPS

Welcome to Protect Our Pensions LGPS Campaign Issue 2! In this edition we:

- Bring you up to date with the government's attempts to attack the Local Government Pension Scheme and UNISON's fight back
- Highlight preparations for an industrial action ballot if the government won't see sense in negotiations
- Share a helpful response by the Wales Local Government Association to the proposed contribution increase
- Tell you about our action against the use of CPI to index your pension and the consultation over 'Fair Deal' for members transferred to private companies or the voluntary sector
- Advertise a new leaflet for members about the LGPS and a 'Defend Our Pensions' recruitment leaflet
- We also ask you to get your MP and local councillors to make a big noise about the attacks on your future income in retirement
- Are also asking you to volunteer to be a 'pension contact' in your workplace so that you can keep your workmates up to date...
- ...and update your UNISON membership details

### So what's happening in negotiations?

Dave Prentis, UNISON's General Secretary, is leading ongoing talks involving the public sector unions via the TUC on the government's plan to increase your LGPS contributions by between 50% and 100%, raise the retirement age to as much as 68, end Fair Pensions for privatised members and reduce your pension benefits. These talks are due to continue until the end of June – or beyond.

The government wants to start implementing the higher contributions from 1 April 2012. UNISON is clear that the combination of a second-year pay freeze, high inflation and cuts to conditions will mean that many members are unable to afford to stay in the LGPS so we are fighting hard against an increase in contributions.

## **UNISON research supports our case...**

The LGPS is cash rich. It takes in far more than it pays out in pensions each year. It also plays an important role in the UK and global economies. In March 2010, the combined funds were worth about £160 billion – yes billion – equivalent to almost 12% of GDP. That's the equivalent of nearly one third of the total value of all the companies on the London Stock Exchange!! Pushing the LGPS into decline would have massive ripple effects on our fragile economy. Is that really what the government wants?

## **What happens if negotiations fail? Working together in UNISON and beyond.....**

If negotiations fail, we will have to look to industrial action – with the other LGPS unions – to defeat the Coalition's attack on our income in retirement. Preparations are already underway to make sure that we can hold a successful ballot of our members in the LGPS and the NHS Pension Schemes. The Local Government Service Group Executive has called for us to work with the other public sector unions towards joined-up industrial action in the autumn, if talks fail. All of UNISON's sectors in the LGPS met today to discuss how we take a co-ordinated campaign to defeat the government's proposals forward. This included probation and police support staff, members in further and higher education, the Environment Agency, the utilities, transport and in private companies and the voluntary sector. There will be further regular meetings as negotiations progress.

Detailed preparations are underway to make sure that, if we need to, we ballot everyone who should be balloted, that as many of our members vote as possible and that we get a big 'yes' vote if there is no alternative to industrial action. The restrictive law on industrial action means that we need to get it right. If not, we could be challenged by the government in the courts and we don't want that to happen!

## **What are the employers saying?**

The Local Government Employers and the Local Government Association have said that they are worried that an increase in LGPS contributions will drive members out of the scheme. 70% of LGPS members earn less than £21,000 a year and many are finding it hard to make ends meet. Some may decide to leave the LGPS. That could lead to a downward spiral of rising contributions and falling membership. On Monday, the Joint Council for Wales, which brings trade unions and councils in Wales together, and the Welsh Local Government Association wrote to Eric Pickles - Secretary of State for Local Government, George Osborne – the Chancellor and Danny Alexander - Chief Secretary to the Treasury. They informed him of "members' opposition to the substantial increases in employee contributions and said that all the evidence suggest that "such changes will undermine the financial viability of local government schemes across the country". The concluded:

“We ask that you reconsider the matter in the interests of sustaining the financial viability of the LGPS and safeguarding the long-term welfare of local government employees who may otherwise become increasingly dependent on welfare benefits in retirement in years to come”.

We will be keeping the pressure up on all employers across the UK to make sure that they stick with us.

## **In the courts...challenging the CPI**

The government has already changed the way that your pension keeps pace with living costs by moving away from the Retail Prices Index (RPI) to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The CPI excludes housing and other costs and is generally lower than the RPI, so your pension will be badly affected.

UNISON is joining with other unions, including Unite and the GMB, to challenge this unfair switch in the courts. We will keep you updated on the case.

## **A Fair Deal for all**

Members transferred to the private or voluntary sectors have had their right to a pension protected under the ‘Fair Deal’ provisions brought in by New Labour. Now the Coalition wants to end your right to any pension should you have the misfortune to be transferred without a choice to a private company or voluntary sector employer.

UNISON has responded to the government consultation which ends this month, calling strongly for ‘Fair Deal’ to remain. Watch this space for the government’s response...

## **New campaign materials on their way...Recruit a friend!**

A new leaflet for UNISON members telling them about the government’s attack on the LGPS is being produced.

There is also a new ‘Protect Our Pensions’ recruitment leaflet. It is vital that we build our membership in this period to make us strong in the face of government attacks, but also for the long-term good of our union.

Make sure that you recruit all the non-members in your workplace. They need the protection of UNISON.

You can place advance orders for both these leaflets by using the attached order form.

## **Women and Pensions – A UNISON Guide and Briefing**

UNISON’s Pension Unit has produced a very useful guide to Women and Pensions. It takes you through the State Pension System and discusses issues like Pension Credit, part-time workers rights and divorce.

There will be two briefings for delegates to National Delegate Conference on Women and Pensions on Tuesday, 21 June from 10.00 am – 12.00 noon and 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm.

## Working with MP's and councillors

We are working closely with the UNISON group of MP's to keep up the pressure over the LGPS in Parliament. We need **you** and your work mates to pile the pressure on locally and to get your MP and councillors working for you. That's what they are there for! Saving the LGPS needs to become number 1 issue in their postbags and at their surgeries.

There are three Early Day Motions in Parliament at the moment, calling on the government re-think its attack on our pensions. **It is vital that you press your MP to sign up.** Here are the details and how you can check on your MP:

Early Day Motion 1629 – Just click on <http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2010-11/1629>

Early Day Motion 1625 – Just click on <http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2010-11/1625>

Early Day Motion 1032 – Just click on <http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2010-11/1032>

## Who is my MP?

If you don't know, don't fret! All you need to do is click on <http://www.writetothem.com> and put in your postcode. The name of your MP will appear!

## Your union needs you!

We want to have a Pension Contact in every workplace who can pass round information to colleagues and provide a link with your branch and the UNISON campaign. If you aren't one already – volunteer now! Just contact your branch secretary or e-mail your details to [protectourpensions@unison.co.uk](mailto:protectourpensions@unison.co.uk) and we will add you to our mailing list.

## Update your membership details

We need to make sure that we have your correct UNISON membership details so that we can keep you updated on LGPS – and other – UNISON issues.

You can now update your details on-line by going to UNISON website at <http://www.unison.org.uk/membership/update.asp>

If you have never used the 'my details' option before, you will need to register at <https://registration.unison.org.uk/unisonb280ee89ff4c27a19dfaba5ecaa2ca26/unison1/> and will need your membership number to register.

Once you have registered, if you then wish to update anything else, you can go straight in and use your membership number and the password you created on the registration page [https://my.unison.org.uk/unisonb280ee89ff4b27a1f2e32879/unison0/unison\\_mwu\\_liv\\_e.php/interface/SessionLogin/](https://my.unison.org.uk/unisonb280ee89ff4b27a1f2e32879/unison0/unison_mwu_liv_e.php/interface/SessionLogin/)