

CHECKING AND DISPUTING PENSION SCHEME AND/OR COMPENSATION SCHEME DECISIONS MADE BY NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL IN ITS ROLE AS FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY FOR NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



Introduction

This guide is to help you understand what you need to do now that Northamptonshire County Council, in its role as Fire & Rescue Authority for Northamptonshire has made a decision that affects your rights under one or more of the Firefighters' Pension Schemes or the Firefighters' Compensation Scheme. It details the procedures for settling any disagreement or complaint you may have about this decision that does not involve an issue of a medical nature.

What is a decision?

From the day you first join as a firefighter to the day that Northamptonshire County Council, in its role as Fire & Rescue Authority for Northamptonshire, is responsible for making a range of decisions that affect your pension benefits and any entitlement under the Compensation Scheme. The fact that you have received this guide means that a decision has just been made. You should have received a letter, or a form, telling you what the decision is, alongside this guide. You may have also received information on specific action you need to take.

What do I do now?

Check, as far as you can, to see if you think the decision is based on the correct details and that you agree with it. If you are happy please follow any instruction contained in the letter.

If you are unhappy about something that does not involve an issue of a medical nature, you need to start a dispute process – this is a four stage process:

1. An **informal stage**;
2. A **first, formal, stage of the internal dispute resolution procedure (IDRP)**, this is carried out by the Chief Fire Officer;
3. A **second, formal, stage of the IDRP** which is carried out by an ad hoc group of 3 elected members convened by Northamptonshire County Council's Democratic Services Manager;
4. A final referral to the **Pensions Ombudsman**. He will not take cases until they have been through both stages of the formal IDRP process.

How do I start the disputes process?

Start by making an informal enquiry to the person who sent you the letter explaining the decision. Ask them to explain the decision again and why it has been made and, if you still believe the decision is wrong, ask them to change their decision and explain why.

Most problems are, in fact, resolved in this way. They are often caused by misunderstandings, wrong information or human error which can be explained or put right quickly and easily.

The informal approach did not work; what next?

If you remain unhappy with the decision (or the lack of one), and this does not involve an issue of a medical nature, then, under the dispute rules, you have the right to have the decision looked at again by the Chief Fire Officer – this is known as the first, formal stage of IDRPs.

You should now contact the Chief Fire Officer in his role as adjudicator for Stage 1 disputes that do not involve an issue of a medical nature and ask for a full guide to the dispute procedure that applies to the decision you are challenging, which may be in connection with either:

- the Firefighters' Pension Scheme 1992, the Firefighters Pension Scheme 2006 or the Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2015, or
- the Firefighters' Compensation Scheme

A separate full guide to each is available; the guides will give you all of the details you need and explain the process in detail, including what happens if you are unhappy with the first stage IDRPs decision. Each guide also contains an appropriate application form.

There is no charge made for investigating any dispute at any stage under the dispute rules - the only expenses you will have to meet are those of your own (or your representative's) time, stationery and postage.

Are there any time limits for my application?

Yes – if you want to use the dispute procedure you must make your application to the adjudicator within the specified period from the date the decision was notified to you or should have been notified to you; this period is 28 days for Pension Scheme decisions and 6 months for Compensation Scheme decisions.

Can I get help to resolve my dispute?

The Pensions Advisory Service (TPAS) can provide free advice and information to explain your rights and responsibilities. There are a number of ways of contacting them to get information or guidance:

The TPAS Helpline phone number is 0300 123 1047

Lines are open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

The TPAS website <http://www.pensionsadvisoryservice.org.uk/contacting-us>

also offers:

- a live webchat service from Monday to Friday 9am to 6.20pm, and also on Tuesdays from 7pm to 9pm, and
- an online enquiry form.

You can also write to them at:

The Pensions Advisory Service, 11 Belgrave Road, London, SW1V 1RB

How do I contact the LGSS Pensions Service?

LGSS Pensions Service

One Angel Square

4 Angel Street

Northampton

NN1 1ED

Email: FirePensions@northamptonshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01604 366537

Website: <http://pensions.northamptonshire.gov.uk>