EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

The Firefighters' Pension Scheme (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

SR 2015 No.

1. Introduction

1.1. This Explanatory Memorandum has been prepared by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to accompany the Statutory Rules (details above) which are laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

1.2. The Statutory Rules are made under powers conferred by sections 1(1) and (2)(f), 2(1) and 3(1), (2), (3)(a) and (4) of the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 and is subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.

2. Purpose

2.1. The Firefighters' Pension Scheme (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 ('the Regulations') make consequential provisions in relation to the new public service pension scheme for firefighters under the Public Service Pension Act 2014 (c.2). They modify the effect of other statutory provisions in their application to the firefighters' pension schemes.

3. Matters of special interest to the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments

3.1. The Regulations make modifications to provisions in primary legislation.

4. Legislative Context

4.1. The regulations implement reforms to public service pension schemes under the Public Service Pensions Act 2014 ('the 2014 Act').

4.2. The 2014 Act was enacted in response to the recommendations of the Independent Public Service Pensions Commission led by Lord Hutton of Furness. The Commission reported on 10 March 2011. Under the 2014 Act, new pension schemes ('new schemes') are being established for persons in public service by regulations ('scheme regulations') made under section 1.

4.3. To date, scheme regulations have been made to establish pension schemes for teachers in England and Wales: the Teachers' Pension Scheme Regulations 2014 (S.I. 2014/512); for civil servants and other Crown employees: the Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions Regulations 2014 (S.I. 2014/1964); for the armed forces: the Armed Forces Pension Regulations (S.I.

2014/2336); and for firefighters in England: the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (England) Regulation 2014 (S.I. 2014/2848).

4.4. This rule is being laid with the Police Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations 2015, the Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Consequential and Amendments) Regulations 2015, the Armed Forces Pension (Consequential Provisions) Regulations 2015, the National Health Service Pension Scheme (Consequential Provisions) Regulations 2015 and the Teachers' Pension Scheme (Consequential Provisions) Regulations 2015.

5. Territorial Extent and Application

5.1. The Regulations for firefighters apply only in relation to Northern Ireland.

6. European Convention on Human Rights

6.1. Penny Mordaunt, Minister at the Department for Communities and Local government has made the following statement regarding human rights:

In my view the provisions of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (England) (Consequential Provisions) Regulations 2015 are compatible with the convention Rights.

7. Policy Background

What is being done and why

Modification of contracting –out provisions

7.1. Some employers choose to set up company pension schemes to provide a pension which replaces all, or part, of the additional State Pension provided the scheme meets minimum standards known as the Reference Scheme Test. This is known as 'contracting-out' of the additional State Pension. Individuals who are members of a contracted-out scheme and their employers pay lower National Insurance contributions. This arrangement is known as the National Insurance rebate. The Government intends that the new schemes, like the existing schemes, should be contracted-out of the additional State Pension, until contracting-out ends in April 2016. Part 2 of the Regulations deals with contracting-out under the Pension Schemes Act 1993 (c.48) ('the 1993 Act') for the period from 1 April 2015 to 5 April 2016, inclusive. Certain procedural requirements are disapplied that would otherwise apply by virtue of the Occupational Pension Schemes (Contracting-out) Regulations (1996 S.I. 1999/1172): for example, formal notices to earners. New schemes must still meet the requirements in section 9 of the 1993 Act: in particular, they must satisfy the Reference Scheme Test.

Provisions about pensionable service and early leavers

7.2. The effect of the 2014 Act and scheme regulations is that existing schemes must close, and current members (except for specific protected groups) transfer into new schemes. However, these transferring members will retain certain benefits in their existing scheme (described in the Regulations as their 'old scheme'). Although they will accrue new benefits in the new scheme only, the member will strictly speaking, belong to both schemes at once. Part 3 only applies in respect of the firefighters' pension schemes when a member of the old scheme benefits from the'final salary link' (see paragraph 2 of Schedule 7 to the 2014 Act) which means that the final salary in their new scheme will be used to determine their final salary for the purpose of their old scheme.

7.3. Part 3 of the Regulations reflects the policy intention that those with ongoing service in an old scheme and a new scheme should generally (subject to certain conditions) be treated as if they remained active members for particular purposes or in "pensionable service" for their old schemes until their pensionable service in their new scheme is terminated. The objective is to prevent them from being treated as deferred members in respect of certain rights that are inconsistent with them remaining in service with the same employer in a successor pension scheme.

7.4. The 1993 Act contained provisions about occupational pension schemes – not only public service schemes – including as to their contracting-out of the additional state pension (see Part 3 of the 1993 Act); and as to members who leave their scheme before retirement age ("early leavers") (Part 4 of the 1993 Act).

7.5. For the purposes of the 2014 Act and scheme regulations, a number of those provisions need to be modified in relation to a member of an old scheme who transfers to a new scheme and benefits from the final salary link.

7.6. One reference to "pensionable service" in Part 3 of the 1993 Act, which concerns certification requirements for contracted-out pension scheme, is modified so that the person is treated as having a single period of pensionable service in one scheme.

7.7. There are further provisions in Part 4 of the 1993 Act, which concern the rights of early leavers. Chapter 1 provides for preservation of benefits and sets out the principle of short service benefit for those persons. The Regulations provide that a person will not have access to short service benefit until pensionable service terminates in the new scheme, rather than when the person transfers into the new scheme. Certain provisions will apply as though the old scheme and the new scheme were a single scheme.

7.8. Chapter 2 of Part 4 concerns the revaluation of a person's benefits during the period between the person leaving their occupational scheme and reaching normal pension age. The requirements of that Chapter should not apply to someone's old scheme benefits when the person transfers into the new scheme

but remains in service in the new scheme whilst the final salary link applies. Instead, the amount of their old scheme benefits will be determined in accordance with the scheme rules and the member's final salary in the new scheme. The Regulations provide that old scheme benefits are not to be revalued under Chapter 2 whilst the person remains in pensionable service in the new scheme. This is to ensure that their old scheme benefits are not effectively revalued twice.

7.9. Chapter 3 of Part 4 concerns "anti-franking", or the protection of increases in guaranteed minimum pensions which contracted-out schemes had to provide until 1997. For this purpose, the Regulations provide that the "cessation date" when a person ceases to be in contracted-out employment under the old scheme (and from which point guaranteed minimum pensions may need to be increased) is treated as the date when the person leaves their new scheme, and not the date when they transfer from the old scheme to the new scheme. The Regulations include a subsequent modification of the definition of "cessation date" in section 87 of the 1993 Act, which will take effect when that definition is amended by the Pensions Act 2014)c.19) as part of the abolition of contracting-out.

7.10. Chapter 4 of Part 4 concerns cash equivalent transfers for early leavers. The Regulations provide that a person will not acquire the statutory right to a cash equivalent under the old scheme until pensionable service terminates in the new scheme, rather than when the person transfers into the new scheme.

7.11. There are also modifications to the Occupational Pension Schemes (Transfer Values) Regulations 1996 (S.I. 1996/1847) which were made under that Chapter, to enable scheme managers in certain circumstances to delay transfers of preserved benefits until the transition member has left new scheme employment. This is designed to restrict transfers out (from either scheme) by a person who has voluntarily opted out of membership of the new scheme, but remains in employment.

Ill-health benefits

7.12. The Government has chosen to adopt a 'single source model' for the payment of ill-health pensions in the new schemes. Under the single source model. All payments of ill-health pension will be made from the new pension scheme during the period between retirement and the scheme member reaching normal pension age in the old scheme. This model delivers certainty over the ill-health pensions that are payable to members with service in both schemes, and prevents the administrative difficulty of performing two parallel ill-health calculations.

7.13. Accordingly, the pension payable to the scheme member from the new scheme will contain 3 elements:

(1) An element in respect of the lower tier ill-health pension entitlement in respect of service in the old scheme;

(2) A pension in respect of service in the new scheme; and

(3) In the case of upper tier ill-health pensions, an uplift.

7.14. When the person receiving an ill-health pension from the new scheme reaches their normal pension age in the old scheme, then the first element will cease to be paid out of the new scheme and the element in respect of the lower tier ill-health pension entitlement from their old scheme pension will come into payment from the old scheme. They will see no difference in the amount that they receive.

7.15. Part 4 of the Regulations modifies the tax regime in order to correct some unintended consequences.

7.16. Under the current legislation, element (1) would count as an increase in the value of the pension over the pension input period. If that increase meant that the amount of the annual allowance for the pension input period was exceeded, than a tax charge would arise. Regulation 14 modifies the application of the current legislation to remove element (1) from the calculation of the pension input period during the pension input period in which the member takes ill-health retirement.

7.17. Under the current legislation, the initial value of the ill-health pension – elements (1), (2) and in cases of ill-health, (3) – would be measured against the lifetime allowance. However, when the member taking ill-health retirement reaches the normal pension age under the new scheme, the current legislation would measure the element in respect of the lower tier ill-health pension entitlement from the old scheme coming into payment against the member's remaining lifetime allowance, notwithstanding that element (1) will cease to be paid from the new scheme. If that second measurement results in the total amount of pension exceeding the lifetime allowance, then a tax charge will arise. Regulation 13 modifies the application of the current legislation to ensure that the payment of the element in respect of the lower tier ill-health pension entitlement paid from the old scheme will not count against the lifetime allowance.

7.18. Accordingly, both regulations operate so that a member will not suffer any unexpected tax consequences as a result of the way the Government has chosen to structure the ill-health provisions of the new scheme.

Deferred pension age for the uniformed services

7.19. Part 5 of the Regulations concerns pension age and short service benefits.

7.20. That Part resolves a conflict between the short service benefit provisions in Chapter 1 of Part 4 of the 1993 Act, and the requirements as to pension age in section 10 of the 2014 Act, that an active member has a normal pension age of 60 but a deferred member has a pension age set equal to the state pension age.

7.21. The short service benefit provisions in the 1993 Act operate to ensure that the benefits of a deferred member (short service benefits) are calculated in the same way as the equivalent benefits held by an active member (long service benefits).

7.22. Section 10 of the 2014 Act requires different calculations for active and deferred members.

7.23. The Government's policy in relation to active and deferred member of the new scheme is clear. Active members of the firefighters' pension schemes are exempted from the requirement on most other public service pension schemes to have their normal pension age equal to the deferred pension age. This is to reflect the specific occupational requirements of firefighting. However, deferred members of the scheme have left service and so no longer need the protection of the lower pension age put in place for active members to recognise the demands of the occupation.

7.24. Regulation 14 resolves this conflict by ensuring that any difference in the calculation of the short service benefits of deferred members and the long service benefits of active members resulting from the necessary requirements of section 10 about pension age does not breach the short service benefit provisions in the 1993 Act.

Consolidation

7.25. There are no plans to consolidate these Regulations.

8. Consultation

8.1 From 24 November 2014 until 14 December 2014 the Department ran a targeted consultation in relation to the HMT requirement to introduce modifications to primary legislation as a result of the introduction of the Firefighters' Pension

8.2 The consultation was targeted at the main stakeholders namely The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, The Fire Brigades Union and The Retained Firefighter's Union.

8.3 Two responses were received from the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) and The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS). There was general agreement from stakeholders on the proposals outlined.

9. Equality Impact

9.1. The Order will have no adverse differential impact on equality of opportunity.

10. Regulatory Impact

10.1. As the Order will impose no additional costs on businesses, charities or the voluntary sector a full Regulatory Impact Assessment has not been completed.

11. Financial Implications

11.1. There are no Financial implications

12. Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

12.1. It is the view of the Department that this Order is compatible with section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

13. EU Implications

13.1. Not applicable

14. Parity or Replicatory Measure

14.1. This Order will ensure Northern Ireland maintains parity with their counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales.