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UNIONS UNITE TO LOBBY MHKS AS PENSION ROW ESCALATES

Despite recent assurances given by the Chief Minister, Island unions representing approximately 10,000 workers, have united in opposition to proposals to change public sector pensions on the island. Unions believe the proposals will mean a massive cut in existing benefits, a longer working life and little income protection for retired members. The row is driven by tough representations from members of the unions, who are furious that Tynwald members and the judiciary have been excluded from future pension reform. The unions have pledged to launch a strong and sustained campaign to support their members' views.

IOMTUC met last month and agreed a campaign to protect existing members' current pension provision and to lobby hard to protect future entitlement for new workers. This includes an offer to brief MHKS in October on the unions' position.

Speaking on behalf of the IOMTUC, Social Legislation Officer Angela Moffatt who is also the full time official for Prospect who have led opposition to the proposals said:

"We all recognise the need to consider pension provision and take a realistic approach to the future. However we do not agree this should be achieved off the back of broken promises to current employees. This doesn't just affect them. It affects their families and the service to the public. We are already receiving interest from politicians and are taking the logical step of providing more information to the decision makers. The only person Tony Brown is reassuring is himself with recent statements. Our members are not getting ANY reassurance or answers from the messages going out."

Health unions have been vociferous in their opposition to the proposals. IOMTUC Welfare Officer and RCN official Voirrey Kewley stated:

"We cannot emphasise enough the effect these proposals will have on recruitment in essential service areas. When the public cannot access these services it will be too late to turn back. We urge the Government to view the wider effects on the island, and the detrimental impact breaking the link with the UK will have on the island's economic position and international standing long term."

The Government's recent launch of a consultation process on current pension legislation has fuelled union concerns. Despite Government claims, unions believe the consultation on the Superannuation Act 1984, is the start of a process to change the law to make future pensions change quicker and easier to achieve.

IOMTUC delegate and UNITE Regional Industrial Organiser, Mick Hewer stated:

"The Government's position is contradictory. On the one hand they say our members have nothing to fear and nothing has been decided. However, we see this process as a way to introduce many of the mechanisms needed to support future change which will have a detrimental impact on our members."

Isle of Man Trades Union Council c/o
Prospect, Nivison House, Prospect Hill, Douglas, Isle of Man

The IOMTUC intends to begin its campaign by lobbying politicians direct, surveying and publishing politicians' views and providing materials for its members to lobby Government.

The campaign is backed by the following public sector unions Prospect/Government Officers' Association, Unite (TGWU/Amicus), Unison, Royal College of Nursing/Midwives, British Medical Association, Whitley Council Employees' Side, CWU - representing nearly 10,000 public sector workers.

Ends

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The following letter has been sent to MHKs/MLCs

PUBLIC SECTOR PENSIONS PROPOSALS

As you may be aware the Isle of Man Trades Council has recently met to discuss and agree a cross union approach to public sector pensions proposals, as outlined for discussion in the Hymans Robertson report released in May 2008.

We do recognise that there is a need to consider future pension liability, and to proactively address issues. We believe this is a responsible approach and support the Government's aim of working towards a sustainable future for the island. We are totally committed to working with the Isle of Man Government towards appropriate and reasonable solutions.

We are aware of the stance taken by the Chief Minister's Office that, as yet, there are no firm proposals for the future provision of public sector pensions on the Island.

Nonetheless, all the unions representing public sector workers on the IOMTUC, as well as UNISON and the BMA, are now seriously concerned that there are no firm guarantees to existing members of the current schemes as to protection from future detrimental change. We are also concerned about future pension provision for new members.

We view the absence of assurances, when there has been ample opportunity to provide them, as an ominous sign.

Furthermore, we view the current consultation on the Superannuation Act 1984, as a means to introduce enabling legislation for future change in this area.

We seriously urge you to question the timing of this process. We would urge you to consider how this balances with the assurances that no definite decisions have been taken at this point. ***We urge you to oppose changes to this legislation until the full implications of the current process to change public sector pension provision are known, debated and decided.***

We strongly condemn an approach that provides no conduit for feedback and discussion for those affected and which provides no clear information for the thousands of our members and their families across the island.

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We also believe that the current approach denies you, as our elected representatives, full information on the impact of the main points contained in the report. We consider these to include:

- A pay cut in real terms of 4-10% + for workers
- A rise in pension age for some – meaning a longer working life
- A cap on inflation linking of pensions – causing a real risk to members that their income will drop in real terms, when they are least able to do anything about it
- A break in the link to UK schemes – which will have a detrimental impact on recruitment in essential service areas across the public sector

We believe that there are massive implications for the future of the Isle of Man beyond public sector concerns. We would invite you to a briefing on the subject, to ensure you are fully aware of the strength of feeling of our members, and the wider public support for them. We will also be able to tell you more about the campaign we are mounting over the coming months.

As such, we would cordially invite you to a briefing and discussion to be held on **Thursday 9 October at 6.30pm, at Transport House, Fort Street, Douglas**. I would be grateful if you could reply to the above address to indicate if you are able to attend. We will be providing refreshments so please advise us of any special dietary requirements.

Alternatively if you cannot attend we would be willing to provide one to one meetings to discuss the issues in more detail. Please contact me to discuss a suitable time to meet as soon as possible.

We will be asking you at the end of this process to state your views, and we intend to release the results to members and their families, as we feel this is an important part of an open and democratic process. We, and our members, feel this is the single most important issue that the public sector has ever had to face. We sincerely hope you can work with us to understand the reasons for this strength of feeling and support us moving forward to protect your constituents' rights.

ENDS