

## Fire chief retires with £425,000 pension... and returns to work in SAME role on £75,000 a year

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A chief fire officer who retired with a pay-out of £425,000 returned to work soon after to do the same job with a salary of £75,000.

Peter Holland, from Lancashire Fire and Rescue, has even claimed that the deal has saved taxpayers a 'fortune'.

In a bizarre twist the 57-year-old will actually keep his old job but on half the salary.

Mr Holland, who has been chief fire officer since 1999, said the move will save cash and help plan for the future.

'It's a fixed-term contract while I am setting out succession planning for my successor in conjunction with the Fire Authority,' he said.

'I could have retired six and a half years ago. At that point I was retiring on full pension, I continued to pay 11 per cent contributions, which is what everybody else pays.'

He added: 'I was quite happy to retire as of March 31, that is what I would have done. It is the authority who wanted me to stay on.'

'It is saving a fortune at a time of austerity. They decided they wanted to save more money and that is what they have done.'

However, a pension expert has branded the move as 'galling'.

Greg Heath, managing director of Derbyshire Booth Financial Management said: 'It is typical of what has been going on in the public sector and it needs to be stopped.'

When we have got people with senior positions in councils, etc., although they are not breaking any rules, they are very careful about that, the public will find it rather galling.

'Not only are they getting rather generous gold-plated pension schemes, they are manipulating systems at the public expense.

'I understand why they are doing it, but the rules need changing to stop it.'

Mr Heath disputed the claim that the payout, combined with a stop to Mr Holland's employer pension contributions, would save significant amounts of money.

'I don't think it is a good deal for the taxpayer. It might turn out to be saving from the budget but it is coming out of somewhere else, it is more number shuffling than a real saving to the taxpayer.

'They might save on the wage and payroll but they have moved it over to pension liability.

'It comes back to the argument about perks and benefits that people in the public sector have had for so long.

'How can they walk away with almost half a million pounds and come back to work the next day?

Lancashire County Councillor David O'Toole, the Tory chairman of the fire authority, said the deal as agreed unanimously.

'It is a massive saving for the authority which is particularly in line with the reduction in the grant.

'If anybody is making a complaint it is sour grapes because it is in line with the savings we are looking to make, and it gives Mr Holland the opportunity to continue work, while we make succession planning.'

Cllr Frank De Molfetta, from the opposition Labour group, said: 'When Mr Holland applied for retirement everybody supported the temporary appointment. Obviously we are looking for a successor but at this moment in time it is important we keep him for a short period until we get his successor.

'Peter Holland is an excellent officer who has been here for many years and has done an excellent job for the authority.

'He has brought it to excellent status which is the top award which any authority can get - it is the envy of the North West.'

The Fire Brigades Union declined to comment.

Ironically Mr. Holland is currently the 'independent' government fire advisor to Mr.E.Pickles M.P. Secretary of State for the DCLG.

Presumably Mr.Pickles will allow Mr.Holland to take early retirement under the terms of the Contract which no doubt Mr.Holland will have written for the government and

Mr. Pickles when he took up his appointment, during which he failed to declare on his application, and to other applicants, that he has a criminal conviction.

Doubtless Mr.Pickles(or that of his political replacement's) defence, if he is still an MP come next May and Secretary of State at the DCLG which seems highly unlikely, will be that the department is bound by the terms of Mr. Holland's Contract, when the time comes for Mr.Holland to retire, yet again, thus making him a record breaking 'triple dipper'.