

Crystal Deal "Done and Dusted"



The 'maximum amount of pension possible' has been secured for former Waterford Crystal workers in final talks between trade union UNITE and officials from the Department of Social Protection.

The talks were organised to 'iron out' all outstanding settlement issues in the €180 million deal negotiated at the Labour Relations Commission and approved by Cabinet last December.

Their conclusion means payment to members can now start in line with the agreement. The settlement will see 1,774 deferred members offered €1,200 a year in lump-sum payments per year of service and ensure accrued benefits are paid – with cuts applied on a sliding scale depending on the size of their annual value.

Well-placed sources say UNITE officials are satisfied that they have achieved as much as possible for their members at the closing talks. It's understood many of the issues raised at a workers' meeting in the Woodlands Hotel in December have now been resolved.

This includes agreement on a percentage offset of between two and three per cent, affecting those who already received a considerably reduced pension and lump sum when they turned 50.

UNITE also secured 'full acting service' entitlement for workers who may have been on a contract for their first few years' employment at Waterford Crystal.

This follows considerable concern at the Woodland's Hotel meeting that craft workers, for example, did not join the pension until they had worked for the company for five years, whereas non-craft workers joined the scheme after two to three years.

Last week's talks concluded with the agreement that company service would be taken into account when compensation was being calculated on.

The pension administrator wrote to each member on January 29th seeking their consent to transfer their personal data to the Department of Social Protection, to enable the terms of the agreement to be implemented.

In excess of 90 per cent of those letters have been responded to date, according to the Department.

UNITE is now in the process of compiling a newsletter to all those affected by the pensions claim, informing them of the talks' conclusion and setting out the union's position.

Mercer is also due to contact the workers shortly, to inform them of their entitlement under the terms of the agreement. Members will then be requested to sign a Deed of Release, agreeing that any payment issued under the agreement will be in full and final settlement of any claim a member may have under the scheme.

Payment cannot be made until the Deed of Release is signed. It's expected that the monthly pension payment should be completely finalised by late summer/ early autumn, while the lump sum is due in the coming weeks.

The only formality left to UNITE at this point is to contact the Irish High Court and confirm that an agreement has been reached in the test case of 10 plaintiffs who originally brought the case to the European Court of Justice in 2010.

One of those plaintiffs is Tommy Hogan, who said he and his colleagues can never be compensated for the years of anxiety and misery caused by their battle for pension justice.

"We are being financially compensated for the last six years and that is, of course, welcome," he said. "But we can't relive those six years, when so many people suffered all that worry and hardship. There are people out there in all sorts of circumstances waiting for that money to come through. Quite a few of them have been hard times over the past six years.

"Then you have the approximately 35 workers who passed away during the fight. The funeral of the most recent of them, Kevin Barry, of Barrack Street (and formerly Hennessy's Road), took place just last weekend.

"Kevin worked at Waterford Crystal for approximately 40 years, without ever receiving the pension he was entitled to.

"Under the terms of the agreement presented at the Woodland's Hotel last December, his family will be entitled pension justice on Kevin's behalf but they'll never get back the last six years when he should have had his pension."