

Pensions Board

04 July 2023 at 13:00 hrs

Conducted at headquarters and digitally via Microsoft Teams

Attendance:

Chair: Alan Tranter – Employee Representative

Employer Representatives:

Julie Felton

Kal Shoker

Kamla Devi-Ahir

Employee Representatives:

Adam Harper

Paul Bennett

Officers and advisors in attendance:

Wayne Brown – Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Richard Stanton - Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Kelly Harding – Head of People Support, Tom Embury – Deputy Clerk to the Authority, Paul Gwynn – Pensions and Payroll Manager, Kirsty Tuffin – Democratic Services Officer

Please note: Wayne Brown, CFO, left at 13:05pm.

1. To receive apologies for absence

There were no apologies received.

2. Declarations of Interests

No declarations of interest were submitted.

3. Minutes of the Previous Pension Board held on 29 March 2023

Resolved:

1. That the minutes of the Pension Board held on 29 March 2023 be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

4. Matters Arising

The CFO provided an introduction, following the changeover of Scheme Manager. He advised that he would be delegating the responsibility of the Scheme Manager to the Director of People,

currently ACFO Richard Stanton to represent him on Pensions Board. He looked forward to working with the Pension Board moving forward. The Chair of Pension Board welcomed the change, seeking to move forward, but also emphasised the desire of scheme member representatives to see the reintroduction of an independent Chair for the Board.

5. Risk Register

Julie Felton, Employer Representative, presented the Risk Register that outlined the key risk areas, categorised and scored against their likelihood to occur and the impact that would have.

The Board were advised that, as previously agreed, the Risk Register had been reviewed and updated on 30 May 2023, by Alan Tranter, Julie Felton and Paul Gwynn. Following the last Pension Board meeting, the register had been circulated for any comments prior to this. Thanks was given to Paul Bennett for his feedback.

The following changes were agreed:

Reference	Update
1	That Risk 1 (RR) Operational Disaster/Pension records be included in the PB Business Cont. Plan.
2	Remain as it was.
3a/b/c	That the Pensions Manager circulates the audit reports conducted by internal auditors, as per Risk 3.
4	Remain as it was.
5	Remain as it was.
6	That Risk 6 be reduced.
7	That Risk 7 be removed due to duplication.
8	That risk 8 remain as it is until the pension review had been concluded. That any risks referencing Mike Griffiths be updated.
9	That risk 9 remain the same subject to the description being updated on current progress.
11	Remain as it was.

14	Remain as it was.
17	That risk 17 be reworded to avoid confusion over the work remit.
18	That Adam Harper circulates guidance on contingent decisions to the DSO to circulate to the Board.
19	That Risk 19 be reduced to 2 likelihood.
20	Following Adam Harper's retirement announcement, It was agreed that Tom Embury discuss the best approach with him to create an expression of interest in his replacement. It was agreed that Adam remain on the Board until an appointment be made. Wording on the risk to be updated to reflect this.
21	Remain as it was.

Resolved:

1. That subject to the approved changes listed in the above table, the Risk Register be approved.

6. Pension Board – Action Plan

Tom Embury, Deputy Clerk, presented the Pension Board – Action Plan that outlined the actions arising from the Pension Regulator Supervisory Report 2020-2021 and actions arising from previous Pension Board meetings.

Tom Embury provided an overview/update on the action plan, as per agenda pack, as follows:

Reference	Update
A2	As per agenda item 12.
B2	Now RAG rated green.
E1	As per agenda item 10.
E2	Paul Gwynn to meet with team on 5 July 23. Update to be provided at September meeting of PB.
J-M	Aligned to the implementation of Altair. Data scores to be conducted in September/November 2023 and updates were required following the change of Scheme Manager.

P	To be updated.
Q1	A report to be put to the Scheme Manager – dates to be updated.
2	Following change of Scheme Manager, discussions would be had with them to determine comms.
4	As per agenda item 5.
6	Circulated to members.
8	Issues around Oracle had been dealt with.
13	Complete.
14	TOR approved by Audit and Risk Committee on 19 June 2023. Final versions had been published on CMIS.
15	Circulated.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the Pension Board – Action Plan be approved.
2. That it be agreed that the independent review recommendations are not included on the action plan.

7. External Communication Plan

Tom Embury provided a verbal update on the External Communications Plan. He advised the Board that following the change in Scheme Manager, contact details were still being determined and would be included once confirmed. It was agreed that Paul Gwynn would circulate the contact details of his team to include on the Pension Board website.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the verbal update on the External Communications Plan be noted.
2. That it be agreed that Paul Gwynn would circulate the contact details of his team to include on the Pension Board website.

8. Pensions Section Supporting Information

Paul Gwynn, Pensions and Payroll Manager, presented the Pensions Section Supporting Information Report, that outlined the basic demographics, activity levels/performance and the Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure.

The Board were advised of the following key figures:

1. Active firefighters = 1,388
2. 2015 scheme members = 1216
3. Non-members = 172
4. Pensioners = 2281
5. Dependants = 431

Following queries around the increase in non-members (opt-outs), it was agreed that Paul Gwynn would look into what data could be provided such as the age breakdown, to provide an update back to the Board.

The following key indicators were highlighted:

1. 36 estimate requests received during March - 31 May 2023. 14 of which were responded to during the above period. 3 cases were outside of the target response times.
2. Divorces had reduced since the last report to 1 case.
3. 11 transfers had been received during March - 31 May 2023.
4. No IDRPS had been received during the period March - 31 May 2023. 2 cases had been received following the report being published. Responses to both cases had been agreed and an update would be provided in the next report update to the Board.

The Board were advised that following the roll out of Altair Member Self-Service in May, this had generated a large number of queries to the pensions team. The Oracle trial had been successful, with a number of pensioners accessing payslips via the system. It was desired that all pensioners would be able to access payslips online via the system by May 2024, to ensure that any proposed changes to the system could be implemented effectively. The cost of this would need to be determined.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the Pensions Section Supporting Information Report be noted.

2. That it be agreed that Paul Gwynn look into what data could be provided such as the age breakdown on out-opt members, to provide an update back to the Board.

9. Reporting Breaches Procedure

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that Tom Embury update the Reporting Breaches Procedure with proposed changes and bring back to the next Pension Board for further comments and approval.

10. Draft Business Continuity Plan

Tom Embury, Deputy Clerk, presented the draft Business Continuity Plan that outlined the Pensions Board contingency plan should there be any disruption to the service that would hinder the Boards role.

He advised the Board that all proposed changes discussed as per agenda item 5 would be incorporated.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the draft business continuity plan be approved, subject to the additions raised under agenda item 5 being incorporated.

11. Systems/Process Update

Paul Gwynn, Pensions and Payroll Manager, advised the Board that tests had now be conducted and the document was no longer required.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the Systems/Process update be noted.

12. Draft Pension Board Training Plan

Tom Embury, Deputy Clerk to the Authority, presented the draft Pension Board Training plan that outlined the proposed plan for members of the Board to ensure they were fully equipped to undertake their role.

Tom advised the Board that a training needs assessment was conducted following the Boards training from the Local Government Association in March 2023, as per appendix A of the plan. This showed two key areas for training:

1. Understanding of the law relating to pensions, such as the Pensions Act 2013
2. TPR Code of Practice No. 14 Governance and Administration of Public Service Pension Schemes

It was highlighted that most members rated their knowledge as average for the areas raised in the analysis. The plan included an overview of policies from the Scheme Administrator for September 2023 meeting and the LGA training in March would remain. Members were asked to complete the Pension Regulator Pensions Education Portal (online course) by January 2024.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the Draft Pension Board Training Plan be approved.

13. Annual Report of the Pensions Board 2022-2023

Tom Embury provided an overview of the Annual Report of the Pension Board that outlined the work conducted by the Board over the 2022-2023 municipal year. It was anticipated that following the change in Scheme Manager, the report would be included within the Scheme Manager's report to Fire Authority moving forward.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the Annual Report of the Pension Board 2022-2023 be approved.

14. Pension Board Work Programme 2023-2024

Tom Embury provided an overview of the Pension Board Work Programme for 2023-2024 that outlined the proposed agenda items for upcoming meetings. Following today's meeting, the additions would be added where required.

Resolved:

1. That the Pension Board Work Programme for 2023-2024 be approved.

15. Update on Topical, Legal and Regulatory Issues (Verbal Report)

Following queries around contingent decisions, Paul Gwynn advised members that that it needed to be established on a case by case basis and had been subject to legislation in October 2023. An update would be given following the legislation publication in October 2023. It was agreed that Kirsty Tuffin, Democratic Services Officer, would work with the comms team to ensure that the LGA Bulletins are published on MESH, following Adam's retirement.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that Kirsty Tuffin, Democratic Services Officer, would work with the comms team to ensure that the LGA Bulletins are published on MESH, following Adams retirement.

16. Date of the next meeting

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the following dates be approved:
 - Thursday 7 September - 11am
 - Thursday 2 November - 11am
 - Thursday 11 January - 11am
 - Thursday 7 March - 11am
 - Thursday 2 May - 11am
 - Thursday 4 July - 11am

17. Any other business

Adam Harper emphasised the need to continue progression around pension tax bill issues. He advised that he would speak with James White to see who would be able to assist with colour watch engagement on pensions in the lead up to his retirement.

The Pension Board meeting ended at 15:14hrs.