

## Pension Board

30 March 2021 at 09.00 hrs by digital Meeting

Attendance: Neil Chamberlain Chair of Pension Board  
Adam Harper, Employee Representative  
Emmett Robertson, Employee Representative  
Alan Tranter, Employee Representative  
Julie Felton, Employer Representative  
Kal Shoker, Employer Representative  
Paul Gwynn, Pensions Adviser  
Cllr Catherine Miks, Chair of Fire Authority Audit  
and Risk Committee  
Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Fire Authority

1. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Wendy Browning-Sampson (Employer Representative).

2. **Minutes of Pension Board 09 December 2020**

The Board resolved the minutes of the meeting held on 09 December 2020 be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

3. **Response to McCloud Sargeant consultation (Fire)(July 2020)**

Paul Gwynn provided an update on actions undertaken since the response from Government in January 2021 to the consultation. It was confirmed that West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) was the first metropolitan brigade and West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA) as Scheme Manager to adopt the Home Office guidance and payments based on same. The Board was requested to confirm their satisfaction and understanding of the Scheme Manager having taken independent legal guidance (from the Monitoring Officer to WMFRA) upon the guidance provided by Government, having adopted the same and that the decision-making process being applied in a

transparent and assured manner. Board Members unanimously confirmed this position.

Paul Gwynn confirmed a process for engaging Pension Schemes Membership had been agreed with Employee Representatives. Communications were being enacted both in writing and by virtual meetings. Adam Harper requested thanks to Paul Gwynn be recorded in the minutes, for the approach he has taken to support Employee Representatives and Fire Brigade Union members. Paul Gwynn in return thanked Adam Harper for assisting to manage membership expectations during this recent period.

The Chair stated assurance with the process for decision making and the Board having been kept informed of legislative developments. Paul Gwynn was requested to ensure documentation related to the process were archived. The Clerk to WMFRA stated the Pension Board should in future review the minutes of each Audit and Risk Committee (in their role as Scheme Manager). This Committee receives the minutes of the Pension Board as a standing agenda item for review. Paul Gwynn advised that the Pension Regulator may in future investigate how a Pension Board has advised the Scheme Manager, WMFS may consider itself in a good position having regular liaison between the Chairs of the aforementioned entities and a contract for legal advice from a Monitoring Officer, but any enhancement of process as described by the Clerk is a valuable addition to existing practice.

Paul Gwynn stated that intermediate detriment payments have commenced, and pension scheme members are signing for their chosen option. The Board discussed potential items of focus relating to these payments, including interest payment, recovery of any money owed from lump sums, tax relief and adjustments, estates where death has occurred prior to payment. There remains uncertainty upon some items, for which the Board will be appraised of developments by level of importance and awareness for decision.

The Chair thanked Paul Gwynn and the WMFS Payroll and Pensions Team for their administratively prompt response to manage the evolving circumstances and their on-going advice to pension scheme members on Remedy. In so doing, the Chair enquired of the projections for team resourcing and scale of work to deliver. Paul Gwynn confirmed the numbers of people retiring were as anticipated, however the process time is estimated to triple to accommodate the changes. There is sufficient experience in the Payroll and Pensions Team to manage at present, together with implementation of some revised processes for calculating estimated projections (limiting to those members retiring within six months or cases involving divorce or death). There would be recruitment of one wholetime pension administrator from April 2021 to enable sustainable efficiency in implementing payment/scheme changes and an upgrade to the pension administration system which would be integrated by November 2021. A budgetary allocation had been identified for both investments.

Julie Felton enquired about the impact of the availability of estimates upon employees who could engage on WMFS provided pre-retirement courses eighteen months in advance of their leaving the Service. Paul Gwynn responded the Annual Benefits Statement provided estimates to advise context within these courses and subsequent retirement planning.

The Chair requested that such administrative discussion and resourcing be circulated outside of the Board meeting. He asserted the specific detail was not a Board role, however the impact to generate risk was and should feature in the Risk Register as appropriate.

Kal Shoker enquired of actions and associated timelines prior to the next Board meeting. Paul Gwynn confirmed there were nil at present, and should that change he would inform Board Members accordingly.

In conclusion to this agenda item, Paul Gwynn appraised the Board of the prospective timetable for revision of Pension Scheme rules. Government has indicated an implementation date of October 2023 following parliamentary approval; hence first consultation draft can be expected approximately April 2023.

4. **Risk Register**

The Board were updated by Julie Felton on the action agreed at the last meeting that four nominated Board Members liaise regarding process and format of the Risk Register. The outcome of a revised structure was presented to the meeting, detailing the level and direction of existing identified risks. Discussion ensued on each risk and the impact of the format revision to content.

The Chair commended the revisional work undertaken to ensure the Register provided a consistent and assured representation of risk. He summarised arising tasks for progression; the format includes columns for mitigation action and comments; Members review all risks to ensure items are relevant and dependencies identified; emerging issues are included and; the Register is re-circulated prior to the next meeting with these updates.

5. **Any other Business**

Paul Gwynn updated the Board of on-going scoping work to realise a cloud-based payroll system. This includes the potential for online access to pension payment details. It was additionally confirmed the process for scanning documents was almost complete.

Adam Harper sought clarification on developments arising from the O'Brien legal case. Paul Gwynn provided a brief overview of the case, which focussed upon access to pension schemes for part-time staff. It was envisaged there would be minimal impact on WMFS, however an administrative process would need to be progressed to locate any previously employed part-time staff or the

estates of these individuals. The legislative parameters for action required are awaited.

The Board meeting ended at 10.30 hrs.

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