

Minutes

Name of meeting	ISLE OF WIGHT FIRE AUTHORITY FIRE FIGHTERS PENSION BOARD
Date and time	WEDNESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2019 COMMENCING AT 2.00PM
Venue	CONFERENCE ROOM 4, COUNTY HALL, NEWPORT, ISLE OF WIGHT
Board Members	Ross Singleton (Chair), Cllrs Reg Barry, Tig Outlaw
Also Present	Leo Atkinson-Goffe, Sarah MacDonald, Jo Thistlewood

1. [Election of Chairman](#)

The Technical Finance Manager reported that Nigel Probert had resigned as Chairman but that another scheme member had expressed an interest in filling the vacancy on the Board. A meeting was to take place with him later in the week.

There was a need to elect a Chairman for the next twelve months, and Ross Singleton was proposed by Cllr Outlaw and seconded by Cllr Barry.

RESOLVED:

THAT Ross Singleton be elected as Chairman for the next twelve months.

2. [Minutes](#)

RESOLVED:

THAT the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2019 be approved as a true record.

3. [Declarations of Interest](#)

There were no declarations of interest.

4. [Membership Numbers](#)

There were 353 members in the scheme at 31 July 2019. Data cleansing work had been carried out and the number of 'undecided' members had reduced and been categorised appropriately. Clarification was provided that those firefighters who were not members of the scheme were included in the figures. Members were asked to note the membership numbers and the work that had been done.

RESOLVED:

THAT the membership numbers and the data cleansing work be noted.

5. Annual accounting information

The information provided was taken from the council's accounts in respect of the Fire Fighters' Pension Scheme (FFPS). The paper listed the council's responsibilities in respect of the collection of contributions and the payment of benefits. The difference was either paid to or recouped from central government.

The accounts for the previous two years showed that the council had been in receipt of a top up grant of just over £1 million per year. Members were reminded that the contributions depended on the scheme in which they were enrolled (1992, 2006 or 2015). Contributions were banded depending on salary and employer contributions were set nationally by Regulations every four years. A separate accounting structure was used on SAP, known as Company 3000, but there was no separate bank account. Members were asked to note that the council was a net recipient of funding from central government in terms of the FFPS.

RESOLVED:

THAT the accounting information be noted.

6. Automatic re-enrolment results

The council as employer had a statutory duty to automatically re-enrol all eligible employees into the FFPS every three years. This had been carried out on 1 May 2019 and was deemed successful.

20 people had been automatically re-enrolled, of whom 13 had requested to opt out. Members was noted that retained fire fighters would be under the salary threshold of £10k to be auto-enrolled. Clarification was provided that all new staff were automatically enrolled into the pension scheme at the start of their employment but could opt out at any time.

A questionnaire was proposed to be sent to those who had opted out to find out the reasons for opting out, including whether they had another pension, whether it was unaffordable and their age range which would be fed back to the Board. Depending on the responses received there could be further communications or briefing sessions locally, or it could be fed back nationally to inform decisions. Contact for the survey was best made by email. Those opting out would also receive a letter directly as appropriate. The routine notice would notify people of the survey.

The Pensions and Payroll Team Leader confirmed that communications had been sent before auto-enrolment to each member with an explanation for the requirement to auto-enrol and that contributions would be taken but refunded the following month if they opted out, the steps to be taken if hardship resulted. There had been a 3-month window to opt out.

Members proposed to accept the survey and to follow the course of action suggested with regard to the content of the survey and communications both prior to and following the issue of the survey.

The Technical Finance Manager confirmed that the Declaration of Compliance had been filed with the Pensions Regulator earlier in the week, therefore complying with the council's statutory responsibility.

Clarification was provided that the fire service did not have a 50/50 option as with the LGPS. The NHS was looking to consider it as an option. Depending on the affordability responses that come back, this could be fed back nationally as a potential option.

RESOLVED:

THAT the proposed survey be sent out to all firefighters who had opted out of the pension scheme following the re-enrolment exercise, and results be fed back to the Board.

7. [Feedback from Hampshire Fire Pension Board meetings 26 April 2019 and 9 July 2019](#)

The Technical Finance Manager (TFM) reported that she and Cllr Barry had attended the Hampshire Fire Pension Board meeting on 26 April 2019. Both the Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Fire Pension Boards had decided not to combine in advance of the Combined Fire Authority (CFA). The TFM had been able to benefit from shared good practice, including the employee survey, with the Pensions expert in Hampshire. Cllr Barry was confident in Hampshire's approach and competency. The TFM would circulate papers for further meetings in Hampshire when issued. Any relevant information would be shared with members.

The TFM would continue to attend Hampshire meetings. The next meeting was to be held in October and an invite will be sent to all members of the Board. The Chairman expressed concern over representation on the new Board when the fire authorities had combined. It would depend on the size of the new Board and what the representation would be. The new CFA would determine the number of representatives. Scheme members would be canvassed for representatives. Cllr Outlaw was currently attending all meetings of the Hampshire Fire Authority as a guest. The Shadow Board was already informally in place. He was also attending policy advisory group meetings and would raise the subject of representation of the Board at the next meeting on 25 September for clarification and would feed back. The next meeting of the Hampshire Fire Pension Board was to be held on Wednesday 9 October. Papers would be circulated, and members could attend if they wished.

RESOLVED:

THAT the report be noted.

8. [The Pension Regulator's 2018 survey results](#)

The paper gave a summary of the survey responses of all public service pension schemes. The TFM highlighted the following key issues.

Pension Board Meetings - The council's FFPS was one of the schemes mentioned which had held less than four Board meetings in the previous 12 months. This was due to quorum issues and would be the same in the current year due to members'

availability. There were mitigating circumstances as it was a small board which was due to combine with another authority. However, the scheme was technically in breach of the regulations.

Knowledge and understanding - The scheme manager and pension board had sufficient time and resources to do the work of the board and members had access to the knowledge and skills to run the scheme. However, it was not regularly evaluated, and this may need to be addressed going forward. Cllr Outlaw confirmed that he had done the knowledge training since joining the Board.

Board Membership – During 2018 there had been one change of member on the board, but this had not made a significant difference. Board membership was fully compliant with equal representation although there was currently a vacancy.

Risk registers – The Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) pension board and committee had held a briefing on risks the previous week. The LGPS board would be looking at the risk policy and processes for LGPS for the council and the Board may be able to tag on to this and identify some solutions for the Board.

Data Collection – the FFPS is a single employer fund (the Council as Fire Authority), and the council submitted all data electronically. Data quality scores had not been measured for FFPS because the system on offer was too expensive and was deemed not best value for money.

The TFM confirmed that the LGPS data scores had been submitted with 90% accuracy for Common Data (e.g. names, addresses and national insurance numbers) and 71% accuracy for scheme specific data (e.g. such as service history, salary, etc). Data quality within the pensions administration system was a known issue, therefore a lot of work has been done with both the LGPS and FFPS – almost all FFPS members records had undergone an individual manual check and this should give greater assurance. All annual benefit statements had been issued on time with only one query raised.

Cyber Security - Nothing had been done in relation to the assessing or monitoring of the FFPS's exposure to cyber risk. The system was hosted externally by Haywards who had provided assurance that they had appropriate safeguarding controls for data and there were also the council's own internal data security protocols. A development session was planned for LGPS which would also be relevant to the Board. A session with Heywood's and the council's own ICT department would be useful for an overview of protocols and security which was in place. All board members would be given the opportunity to attend.

The Chairman confirmed that he had requested his statement online and had received a spreadsheet and separate password, complying with GDPR. In summary, the FFPS was in a fairly good position but there was still work to be done to ensure that standards were maintained.

RESOLVED:

THAT the report be noted.

9. **The Pensions Regulator's scheme returns 2019**

There was a requirement to submit an annual national return. A survey was due to be launched in summer 2019 but it had not yet been released. It was expected that the launched would now be by the end of September with a submission date at the end of November. The TFM would work with her admin team to gather data required ready for the survey responses. Any qualitative questions that needed input would be shared with the Board. The TFM would ensure that it was circulated once submitted.

RESOLVED:

THAT the report be noted.

10. **Combined Fire Authority**

The Combined Fire Authority (CFA) had been pushed back to April 2021. Work was going on behind the scenes. The Employment Services Lead Officer had been attending regular meetings with the person responsible for managing the transfer of pensions and payroll to the CFA. The pensions team had scanned paper records electronically to ensure the smooth transfer of data and ensuring that all FFPS records were up to date. A report was due to be presented to Full Council on 18 September 2019 to obtain approval for a joint Integrated Risk Management Plan for the next five years.

Cllr Outlaw and the TFM were of the understanding that all pension matters will transfer on same day when the CFA comes into existence.

RESOLVED:

THAT the report be noted.

11. **Report on breaches and complaints**

There had not been any breaches for a while but had recently received one breach and one complaint. These had been recorded and reported to the Board. They had been assessed in accordance with the relevant flowchart and it had been determined that there had been an error, which was notified to the member concerned. Professional advice had been sought for a resolution. Amendments would be made to the council's system and the Altair system to reduce the impact going forward. As it was a 'green' breach there was no need to report it to the Regulator but it was recorded on the breaches log and reported to the Board.

Members were comfortable with the process which had been followed.

Clarification was given that the breach had not led to the complaint, which was a separate matter.

The complaint had been received via an email to the pensions team. Professional advice had again been sought. The action had been communicated back to the member and their representative. Nothing further had been heard since June 2019 but the member could take further action through the internal dispute resolution process if they remained dissatisfied.

RESOLVED:

THAT Members note the process followed and action taken.

12. Items circulated for members' attention

The LGA Annual Fire Pensions Conference would be held on 24 and 25 September in London, the first day consisting of a 2-hour session on governance arrangements, the second day for technical practitioners. Neither the TFM or administration team colleagues were able to attend but colleagues from other authorities had agreed to share the information and would feed back.

The TFM had received the latest Fire Pension Bulletin and would highlight anything of importance and circulate it to members.

RESOLVED:

THAT Members noted the items which had been circulated.

13. Workplan

The next meeting had been changed to 5 December 2019. It was proposed to start the meeting as early as possible. It was agreed to hold the meeting at 8.30am to enable all members and the additional scheme member to attend.

The following meeting would be held on Wednesday 18 March 2020 at 2.00pm.

RESOLVED:

That the date and time of the next meeting be amended to Wednesday, 5 December commencing at 8.30 am.

CHAIRMAN