



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF PENSION BOARD: FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION SCHEMES held on 1 December 2015 at FSHQ, at 10am

PRESENT:

Board Members: Councillor D Marren (Chair), M Cashin DCFO, N McElroy, FOA, G Peers, FBU

Officers: A Harvey, J Nixon, J Swift

1. Revised Membership

The revised membership of the Board was confirmed as follows:

Employer Representatives:

Councillor David Marren, Pensions Member Champion (Chair)
Mark Cashin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Pension member Representatives:

Neil McElroy, FOA
George Peers, FBU

Scheme Manager

Andrea Harvey, Head of People and Development

Advisors to the Board:

Jayne Nixon, Solicitor, Legal and Democratic Services
Jill Swift, HR Business Support Manager

2. Apologies

None

3. Declaration Of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

The Service's Solicitor explained that the next item on the agenda provided further information on conflicts of interest and Officers were advised that they may wish to consider whether they had any declarations of interest to make after this item was discussed.

4. Notes from the Previous Meeting

The notes of the previous meeting on 6 August 2015 were presented to the Pension Board.

Action Agreed:

[1] That the notes be approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising

6. Pensions Update

Communications – The HR Business Support Manager confirmed that more detailed information had been provided on the relevant intranet pages and an article had been published in The Green. She added that the guidance on transitional protection which was being developed by CLG would be made available to employees once it was published.

The Service's Solicitor commented that she had reviewed the publication requirements for the agenda and notes of the meetings and it was suggested that they were published on the Fire Authority section of the website so that they were available for public inspection. The information could also be signposted on the Pensions page on the intranet to assist employees in locating the information. The Board agreed with this approach.

Action Agreed:

[1] That the agenda, reports and notes for the Pension Board meetings be published on the Service's website and signposted on the HR Pensions page on the intranet.

5. Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy

In accordance with the Regulations which govern Pension Boards for the Firefighters' Pension Scheme, and under the Pension Regulators Code of Practice on the governance and administration of public service pension schemes, the Scheme Manager must be satisfied that any person appointed as a member does not have a conflict of interest

The Service's Solicitor introduced the report which provided details of what needed to be in place to ensure this requirement was met. She explained that the draft Code of Conduct and Conflicts Policy, which was appended to the report, described the standards of conduct expected of Pension Board members, gave examples of conflicts of interest and included a copy of the declaration of interest form which all Pension Board members were required to complete and return to the Scheme Manager. Copies of the form were provided for members at the meeting and they were asked to complete and return them to the address provided.

The Board discussed the report and the Chair queried whether the Declarations of Interest form would be reviewed periodically. The Service's Solicitor responded that the form would be refreshed annually but there would also be a standing item on the agenda for each meeting to ensure that Board members consider whether they have any conflicts of interest at each meeting.

Actions Agreed: That

- [1] the requirements of the Pension regulations be noted; and**
- [2] the Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy (attached as an appendix to the report) be approved.**

6 Pension Board Training

The Head of People and Development updated the Board on the proposals for future training of the Board which included reviewing the completed Training Needs Analysis (TNA), a regional workshop and the online Pensions Regulator training.

She explained to the Board that the regional workshop, which was provisionally scheduled for 6th January 2016, would be hosted by Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service and would be held at the Service's Training Centre in Manchester. Pension Board members from Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Staffs FRS would be invited to attend the training session along with Board advisors. The completed TNAs would be sent to the training provider so that they could tailor the programme accordingly.

The online Pensions Regulator Toolkit was also highlighted as a valuable training intervention that would provide a basis of knowledge and understanding. It was agreed that all Members of the pensions board would undertake this training by the next meeting. Further discussions would be held at future meetings for more specific training if there were still outstanding training requirements following attendance at the regional training session and following completion of the online Pensions Regulator toolkit.

The Head of People and Development informed the Board that she and the HR Business Support Manager had recently attended the LGA's firefighter pensions administrators and employers AGM. Essex FRS made a presentation at the meeting detailing a training and development policy which mapped out a two year programme of training for Pension Board members. She queried whether this was something that the Board would want developing for Cheshire.

The DCFO commented that this may be rather over-engineered for a Board with no powers and wondered how the value of such a programme would be evaluated. The Chair added that he felt that the current approach being taken seemed appropriate as long as there was a mechanism to ensure that Board members could maintain their skills. The FBU representative commented that a rolling training programme was required and re-iterated his view from the previous meeting that if the membership of the Board was increased this would help with continuity of skills.

The Head of People and Development concluded that the Board were satisfied with the current approach and added that whilst there was an expectation that all Board Members would be knowledgeable and able to interpret issues relating to the various Firefighter pension schemes, the Board advisors were also available to assist members with information and guidance. The FBU representative commented that this could mean that there would be a gap in skills for the employee side. The Chair suggested that it would be useful to make the online toolkit more widely available so that any employees could access this to gain more knowledge on the schemes if required.

The FOA member added that it would be difficult to gain comprehensive knowledge of such a complex subject but he was satisfied that the training provided would assist him with the broad principles and was reassured by the offer of additional training if required. He also commented that it would be useful for Board members to have a copy of the presentation from the initial training session in July.

Actions Agreed:

- [1] That the Board were satisfied with the current proposals for training;**
- [2] That all members of the Pension Board would complete the Pension Regulator Online training by the date of the next meeting;**
- [3] That the link to the pensions regulator online toolkit be published on the Pensions page of the Intranet; and**
- [4] That copies of the presentation from the training event in July be distributed to Board members.**

7 Pensions Update

The HR Business Support Manager presented her report which provided an update on current issues relating to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

The Board discussed the information provided and a number of comments/queries were raised:

Member Statistics – These included statistics on Pensioner members, Deferred members, Active members, Opted Out vs Active members, Opt Out – Gender and Ethnicity. The DCFO queried if those opting out were asked to provide a reason for their decision. The HR Business Support Manager explained that there was a form to fill in as part of the auto-enrol exercise in 2013 and those opting out were also made aware of the consequences. The main reason given was for financial reasons.

The Board discussed options for raising awareness of the benefits of being a member of the Pension fund to coincide with the re-enrolment exercise which was scheduled to take place in October 2016. Options included using Payroll week in September 2016 to promote the benefits of the workplace pension, FBU communications and workshops for members including specific marketing to attract those members who have opted out to attend.

The HR Business Support Manager was asked if she could provide the member statistics by age groups and she confirmed this could be done.

The FBU representative asked for clarification on the firefighters compensation scheme and whether those not in the Pension scheme were covered by this scheme. The Head of People and Development advised that this was a separate scheme but that further information on the compensation scheme would be sought.

Pension Ombudsman Decision – The HR Business Support Manager informed the Board that CFRS had 130 pensioners who may be affected. The Government had recently advised that all re-calculations of pension should be completed by the end of December 2015 and any additional payments made by 31st March 2016. The pension provider had confirmed they were on track to meet this deadline.

End of Contracting Out – The DCFO queried whether all members were aware that there would be an increase in the NI contributions. The FBU representative confirmed that members were aware of the costs and the HR Business Support Manager added that letters to all individuals whose NI contributions were changing would be sent out in March 2016 and there would also be a reminder published in the Green Bulletin in January 2016.

Annual Benefits Statements - Full ABSs would not be provided for 2014/15 due to on-going configuration work by the pension provider. The DCFO queried whether there was a statutory requirement to provide forward projections on the statements. The HR Business Support Manager said she would check to ensure that the pension provider was not breaching any statutory requirements.

Actions Agreed: That

- [1] the Pensions Update be noted;**
- [2] the HR Business Support Manager provides the following information:
Age stats for Opt-outs
ABSs – Statutory information requirements;**
- [3] further information be sought on the cover provided by the Firefighters Compensation Scheme.**

8 Meeting Dates Remainder of 2015/16

The Board discussed meeting frequency and it was agreed that future meetings would be held on a 6 monthly basis, with an understanding that ad-hoc meetings could be arranged in between, if necessary.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the next meeting of the Pension Board be arranged for May 2016.**