

At a meeting of the HAMPSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY PENSION BOARD held at Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Eastleigh on 8 January 2016.

PRESENT:

p	Cllr Mark Cooper (Chairman)	a	Charlie House
p	Malcolm Eastwood	p	Alex Rhodes
p	Cllr Hannah Hockaday	p	Cllr John Wall

**Broadcast Statement:**

The Chairman announced that the press and members of the public were permitted to film and broadcast the meeting. Those remaining at the meeting were consenting to being filmed and recorded, and to the possible use of those images and recording for broadcasting purposes.

**22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Charlie House.

The Chairman of the Fire Authority, who was observing the meeting, was welcomed.

**23 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

Members were mindful of their duty to disclose at the meeting any disclosable pecuniary interest they had in any matter on the agenda for the meeting, where that interest was not already entered in the Authority's register of interests, and their ability to disclose any other pecuniary or personal interests in any such matter that they might have wished to disclose.

There were no declarations of interest received for the meeting.

**24 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting on 30 September were agreed to be a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chief Financial Officer provided an update on correspondence with the LGA since the last meeting, confirming that he had written with regards to: sharing of Board documentation, the National Pension Board membership, the communications strategy and pensions advice to firefighters. It was agreed that any further correspondence be shared with Board Members prior to the next meeting.

**25 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had no announcements.

## **26 DEPUTATIONS**

There were no deputations.

## **27 PENSION SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT**

[The Chief Financial Officer declared that his role included responsibility for Hampshire Pension Services]

The Board received a report from the Chief Financial Officer regarding the performance of Hampshire Pension Services (HPS) in administering the Firefighters' Pension Scheme in 2015/16. (Item 6 in the Minute Book).

It was highlighted that performance had been high throughout the year, with the only missed target being as a result of the introduction of a new system, the Customer Excellence Award had been maintained and partial compliances that had been identified were for minor matters. With regards to the outcome of the GAD vs Milne case, it was confirmed that Hampshire was ahead of other Authorities in implementing resolution. The Board congratulated HPS on their high performance.

Concerns were raised about difficulties experienced in contacting the Integrated Business Centre (IBC) to obtain employer pension information. It was acknowledged that there was some confusion stemming from the fact that the pension admin team (within Payroll/the IBC) and HPS were both based within the County Council, also that contact to the IBC was predominantly via an online form, which was not available to retired employees. It was confirmed that an interim solution of providing phone and email access to the pension admin team had been implemented and longer term improvements were under consideration.

The complexity of pension arrangements was discussed, particularly with regards to the provision of pension benefit estimates for employees. There was a growing need to keep employees informed in order that they could make decisions about their own future, however the level of individual variation made a blanket solution unreliable and a personalised solution very resource intensive. It was agreed that to resolve more basic queries some information could be shared via Moodle, with the caveat that it was general information. It was also agreed that information sessions could be provided following publication of care benefit statements.

### **RESOLVED:**

- That the performance of Pension Services in administering the FFPS is noted.
- That training for Board Members be arranged regarding pension data and the use of Moodle.

## 28 PENSION ISSUES LOG

The Board received a report from the Chief Financial officer and the Director of Human Resources regarding ongoing issues (Item 7 in the Minute Book).

The report was introduced and the position regarding officer capacity and resources to tackle issues was clarified.

Action being taken to support firefighters who had joined the Service aged 18-20 and therefore were liable to contribute to the pension scheme longer than necessary before retirement was questioned. It was confirmed that payment holidays were being suggested but that further detail from government was awaited. The Board noted that once a solution was found there would be a significant amount of work involved in implementing it.

Members were updated on the ongoing situation regarding additional pension benefits. They heard that a number of firefighters faced a significant tax liability as a result of the impact on pension contributions stemming from temporary promotion. Regulations had come into force to resolve the issue, however the Fire Authority (as Scheme Manager) had at that time not taken the necessary decision as to whether temporary promotion should be pensionable or not. A decision on this was therefore required and a report would be presented to a future meeting of the F&GP Committee. It was confirmed that once a decision had been taken, it would be possible to take retrospective action, according to HMRC regulations, to adjust tax deductions for those individuals affected. However it was acknowledged that this would constitute a significant administrative challenge and furthermore a communications strategy would be developed to inform those involved. It was noted that those affected who had since retired were in a particularly complex position and solutions to this were being investigated with the pension ombudsman.

The Board considered whether allowing this situation to develop amounted to a breach of compliance with pension regulations and concluded that it most likely was. It furthermore considered whether this breach was material and concluded that it was, given the significant impact on individuals. It was therefore agreed to advise the Chief Financial Officer and the Chief Fire Officer that the matter should be reported to the pension regulator.

### RESOLVED:

- That the contents of the report summarising progress toward resolution of the pensions issues for Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service be noted.
- That the Board advise the Chief Financial Officer and the Chief Fire Officer that the likely breach of compliance with pension regulations be reported to the pension regulator.