

**Hampshire Pension Services**  
**Employer Focus Group – 6<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

**Attendees:**

**Employer representatives:** Seby Carvalho and Ian Pyke (London Borough of Hillingdon), Vicki Broomfield (NFDC), Teresa Porter (SCC), Doug Correa and Shaun Tetley (PCC), Tim Jones (Capita), Janet Heath (Dolce), Zuzana Kubascikova (Westminster CC), Chantel O'Brien (United Learning Trust), Kate Jolley (Housing Ombudsman), Neil Wood (FBC)

**Hampshire Pension Services:** Amanda Baulcomb, Jonathan Brandrick, Steph Sherwood and Gabbie Bailey

Introduction

Amanda gave a brief background to the purpose of this focus group:

- Employer feedback to help improve member and employer communication
- Review of processes
- Review of documents for members and employers
- Opportunity for Pension Services to understand employer issues
  
- Help improve customer journey for member

and highlighted areas for discussion and feedback:

- Employer Hub recent developments
- Monthly returns
- Employer training

Employer Hub

Steph gave some background that the existing Employer Hub, has been in place since December 2022, with most employers registered to use. HPS are looking to ensure that all registered users are aware of functionalities of the Hub to ensure features are maximised and increase usage, remembering that the Hub ensure a secure way of uploading documents.

Steph covered that at the end of last year we put in place monthly Employer Hub demos to be able to support employers to understand these features and how to use this effectively.

Steph took the opportunity to remind attendees of some of the features within the Hub, as well as remind of some of the new things introduced over the last 12 months.

Steph opened up discussion with employers around the Hub:

- **What are some of your overall impressions of the new developments on the Hub?**
- **Are there any challenges which are stopping you from using the Hub?**
- **If you had an ultimate wish list for Hub developments in the future, what would you like to see?**

Doug (PCC) advised that although he understands that the access to view deferred records was removed to ensure that GDPR was not breached, it does make it difficult to support queries or resolve records which might be muddled. Doug asked if there was a possibility to have limited accessibility. Amanda advised that it might not be possible, but it is something we can investigate. Doug advised the history views that would be helpful would include – payroll no, salary, service.

Teresa (SCC) fed back that it was very user friendly so had no issues, although a bug bear would be that for a ill-health leaver – you need to upload leaver form and ill-health certificate separately rather than together. HPS will take away to see whether there is an option to have a follow on upload, as opposed to coming out then back in to the record to upload completely separately.

Janet (Dolce) – new to Fund so hasn't had the opportunity to use the Hub yet but will feedback in a few months.

Vicki (NFDC) fed back that it would be helpful to see records side by side, where an employee has multiple posts. Steph is going to take this away to understand further and to see if there is anymore that can be done.

Amanda asked how employers were finding the pop up to extend the session, employers fed back this was useful, however would like longer if possible. Amanda advised that she didn't think that would be possible due to security requirements in place, however HPS would investigate further with our systems team.

No-one had any further feedback on anything which would be useful to add to the future development plan for the Hub.

#### Monthly returns

Jonathan gave some background to the current testing that HPS are undertaking and explained that we had previously advised that it would be something that would be revisited after McCloud uploading had taken place, and that we understood it was something a lot of payroll providers were keen to see HPS implement.

Jonathan explained that the monthly returns solution was not i-connect, as this was not compatible with the monthly returns solution offered by our pensions software and explained the elements which were in and out of scope. Jonathan explained that we are testing and seeking feedback, so we can determine whether to proceed to a pilot from April 25.

Jonathan demonstrated the Employer Hub upload and explained the type of queries employers would have through the process, as well as the tight timescales for responses of 5 working days.

Doug asked whether remittance documents would be viewable to employers. Amanda advised that is something that could be made viewable through the Hub. Doug also advised how strict the 5 day turnaround was, Amanda advised that it was required due to the nature of needing to get all parts of the process completed and month returns uploaded within the month before the next months was due.

Janet gave feedback that she works with over 20 different funds, and most have monthly returns in some form with i-connect being by far the most straightforward. Janet fed back that although she only represented 'small' employers, they very rarely get queries and feel that they are on top of their pensions administration because of monthly returns.

Seby (London Borough of Hillingdon) fed back that it looked really good, and would mean records are always up to date. Although time would be needed to ensure reports were in place and there would be a cost outlay for employers which could be challenging. Most Hillingdon schools use Dataplan, and it would be likely payroll provider would recharge these costs back to schools.

Vicki asked whether casuals would need to be included even if they didn't work that month. Jonathan confirmed that this was the case as per annual returns.

Both Teresa/Doug fed back that they might struggle some months with being able to submit leavers before the monthly return, although Teresa fed back that the monthly return upload seemed good and shouldn't cause too many issues for them as they already undertake their own internal monthly return to ensure administration is kept on top of.

Shaun (PCC) fed back that he is attending a software supplier group including LGA, Civica and Heywoods at the end of November as they were looking at a universal monthly return template, which we all agreed would be useful. Shaun asked whether monthly returns would mean members could run more accurate estimates – Amanda advised that although the monthly return data would be uploaded to a members record, only at month 12 would it be uploaded to the screen where calculations are pulled from, this would mean that the estimate a member runs on the portal would be no different, however HPS would not need to ask an employer for additional information and could use earnings to date for any 'actual' estimates run from HPS. Shaun advised he would feedback into the support group.

There was no other feedback on monthly returns.

#### Employer training

Gabbie gave an overview of the bitesize training sessions currently offered, providing a background to how these sessions evolved with changes in Hybrid working from the previous full day.

Gabbie advised that HPS were undertaking a review of the employer training offering to ensure that it continues to be the best use of time for employers, following lots of sign ups but lots of no shows.

Doug fed back that it would be helpful to have some sessions which are more in-depth, with more examples/more calculations. Consensus was that for some sessions it would be more appropriate to just be 20 mins long, for others is better to be longer. Agreed for smaller sessions a pre-recorded session which employers could use when appropriate might be helpful.

Gabbie asked about timing for invites and whether these would be better received at time of booking, a few days before, or on the day of the event – there was a mixed response to this, with individuals having different preferences.

Gabbie asked about survey/feedback – again a mixed response to when would be useful to collect feedback after a session, although Ian fed back that from experience feedback at the point of a session is not necessarily reflective and should take qualitative feedback over quantitative.

Gabbie/Amanda asked for views of placing a charge as per LGA sessions when an attendee does not give notice to cancel. Vicki fed back that she felt this was fair, as did other employers. Ian fed back that this might cause issues and create unnecessary admin/time. Amanda fed back that the intention was to encourage the right behaviours and would hope this would not need to be implemented.

Gabbie asked if there was anything else that Employers felt that HPS could offer. Estimates were suggested. Amanda advised that HPS already provide individual estimate training on the Hub, but that we could look at extending the session to talk more about the estimate outputs.

AOB

Doug asked how quickly HPS write to members after a starter has been sent. Amanda advised that these are processed within 20 working days.

Doug also asked about whether HPS undertake any different checks to employers when running estimates, Amanda advised that the calculations in the system used on the Hub were the same.

Summary

Amanda advised that she would send slides and notes round. Amanda also confirmed that at any time, Employers have any suggestions or ideas of how we could improve our online services, communications or processes, then please get in touch by emailing the Employer Services team ([pensions.employer@hants.gov.uk](mailto:pensions.employer@hants.gov.uk))