

Hampshire Pension Services Employer Focus Group – 26th November 2025

Employers Attended: Angela Edgar (Sussex Police), Alison Ells (Crawley Borough Council), Nicola Frith (Martlet Homes), Sarah Groom (Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish Council), Zoe Grove (Bishop Luffa Trust), Sian Holmes (Adur District Council), Paula Moore (Mid Sussex District Council), Keith Osman (Horsham District Council), Tanya Peters (Shoreham Port Authority), Dee Woollard (The Chief Constable of Sussex), Teresa Porter (Southampton City Council), Judith Sarpong (The Chief Constable of Sussex), Edyta Wisniewska (West Sussex County Council), David Atkinson (West Sussex County Council), Ruth Street (Arun District Council), Charlotte Meneely (University of Chichester)

Presenters / Organisers: Jonathan Brandrick, Lucy Bernardez, and Christopher Nobbs (all Hampshire Pension Services)

Introduction

Jonathan thanked everyone for attending and explained the structure/duration of the session and that notes would be sent out afterwards and requested that any feedback/comments on the notes be shared with us.

Purpose:

- Employer feedback to help improve communications and online processes
- Review of processes
- Review of documents for members and employers
- Opportunity for Pensions Services to understand employer issues
- Help improve the customer journey for members

Agenda:

- Employer Training Review
- Employer Hub Developments
- Monthly Returns
- Upcoming Events

If the attendees have any questions, they are welcome to raise their hand or ask questions.

Employer Training Review

Essentials of the LGPS

Leavers and Absences in the LGPS

Online Support Videos

Employer Webinars and Demos

Chris explained that following feedback received in previous focus groups, we have updated the training we offer. There are two new workshops – Essentials in LGPS and Leavers & Absences. Chris explained the workshops are more in depth with case studies to practice applying knowledge. We have also produced three employer support videos as it is not always possible for employers to attend our training dates and times. We continue to offer our other training in the meantime. We have also introduced a new webinar for payroll providers.

Poll: Has anyone attended any of these sessions? Yes: 25% No: 75%

Chris requested any additional feedback from those who have attended these new sessions or why employers may not have attended. Angela Edgar stated she was aware of them and hadn't had time to attend yet. Chris explained at the start of each year, we organise when we plan to hold the sessions and aim to have two each year so there will always be more opportunities to book onto them. Teresa concurred she hadn't had a chance to attend the new sessions but intends to book onto them in the future. Edyta commented that the popular sessions are filling up very quickly. Chris explained that currently we use Eventbrite but may move away from this which means there isn't a cap on the number of attendees. Paula stated the sessions are not recorded and it would be useful if they were.

Chris asked for feedback from those who have attended. Tanya Peters stated she attends them as a reminder for action points as an employer. They are good to touch base with Hampshire Pension Services, and they are valuable sessions. Sian stated that the employer training sessions are good, but they run over time which means attendees often must leave before it finishes. Chris stated we are aware of this and are reviewing the sessions which run over, such as The Essentials of the LGPS.

Chris asked for feedback on the best way to collect feedback on the sessions. He asked if a poll during the session is best, or a survey form afterwards, or yearly feedback. Edyta claimed feedback just after the session would be best, when the session is fresh in the mind.

Upcoming Training

Chris outlined what is coming next year: new estimate training, payroll provider responsibilities, discretions eLearning and improvements to event booking and webinar delivery. He explained the plan was to move everything into Teams Webinars instead of using Eventbrite, which would automatically create an event in attendee's calendars and send reminders before the event takes place which would hopefully increase attendance.

Chris asked for feedback on these planned new sessions. Angela stated she received feedback from a staff member who had attended employer hub training and wanted examples on how to do different actions rather than just on how to log in to the system, such as more detailed demonstrations on how to complete a leaver notification, for example. Chris explained one of the reasons we don't do this is because of data protection purposes, but if employers have several staff members who want to learn more about the Hub, we can set up demonstrations on a case-by-case basis. Also explained we can look at creating dummy records so we can demonstrate more specific actions without breaching any member's personal data.

Zoe Grove asked if we offer any training sessions on ways in which members can increase their pension benefits. They explained that recently they have had quite a few members interested in AVCs etc. Chris explained that we have lots of information on our website but don't currently offer any training on this. Zoe said they already refer these members to our website. Chris claimed the main thing members are usually concerned about is how much increasing their benefits would cost them and explained we would investigate providing additional benefits training if there is more interest from employers. Tanya concurred with Zoe's claim that they have a growing number of requests from members for more information on additional benefits.

Estimate Training

Any employer contact who requests estimate access is given basic training about how to run an estimate on the Employer Hub, before being given the access. We wish to understand better what training may be useful and we would like to provide more information to employers about how estimates work, what is required from employers, and the limitations of the Hub in providing this information. This will help Employers understand better what the estimate output information is able to provide for them.

Poll: Do you run estimates on the Hub? Yes: 45% No: 54%

Chris claimed our assumption is that estimates are mainly run by employers for ill-health/redundancy strain costs. Chris went on to publish a poll about the reason for requesting an estimate, with the vast majority voting on strain charge. 12% voted for ill-health quote and 12% voted for other.

Tanya asked if employers have access to run ill-health/strain charge estimates whether this would give access to run retirement estimates. Chris explained if you run an estimate on the Hub, you can select the reason for estimate and select the relevant dates. *[Note – if an ill health quote is required for West Sussex, it is advised that Hampshire Pension Services are contacted directly to accurately calculate the strain charge]* We do know some employers may want to have a bulk estimate run to cover multiple staff members and that some are run by employers to help staff members who could run estimates themselves on the member portal. Chris explained the estimates provide the same information as member estimates, just with the addition of strain costs.

Alison claimed she runs them for members who are not confident or able to run them on the portal, and the member portal does not allow members to run estimates if they are over 75. Chris explained we plan to include some training on member estimates, as if staff are asking employers to run estimates for them, we can give more information about the member portal so this can be communicated to members to make them more self-sufficient. Alison says some members don't have access to technology to run estimates themselves which is true for those that do not work in computer-based roles.

Chris asked if any employers encounter issues when running estimates on the Hub or if there are any developments they'd like to see. Angela stated some members get confused by the dropdown options prior to running an estimate. This will be investigated, and we will also see if this is highlighted in our estimate survey.

Chris published a poll on attendees' preferred training format:

Webinar Event – 10%
Interactive workshop – 60%
Online video – 20%
eLearning – 10%

Chris asked what resources employers currently use when running employer estimates and if there were any additional resources that we could provide that would be helpful. No responses from attendees.

Chris advised that we are also putting out a survey to members who have recently run estimates on the portal to gather their feedback. Chris asked for further thoughts or feedback on the question we intend to ask members in this survey. No feedback/comments from attendees.

Employer Hub Developments

Document Upload within Leaver Process (raised at last year's focus group)
Active Members Report
Document Upload for 50:50 and CETV (raised at last year's focus group)
Monthly Returns Pilot

Discussion

Poll: Do you use the Employer Hub? Yes: 70% No: 30%

Chris asked if there was a specific reason why those who said they don't, choose not to use it. Sarah Groom stated it was because they only have five staff members.

Poll: Do you submit starters and leavers through the Hub? Yes: 87% No: 12%

Teresa stated she normally submits starters via the bulk starter spreadsheet. Chris explained we are trying to incorporate this into the Hub directly but don't currently have this ability. Chris asked for feedback on new developments just mentioned and if there were any other reasons that prevent employers from using the Hub. Edyta said it is overcomplicated. Teresa said uploading leaver forms via the hub saves time as they no longer must type the information into the relevant fields. Tanya commented the submission confirmation is much appreciated. Sian liked Tanya's comment.

Monthly Returns (Jonathan Brandrick)

File uploaded through the Employer Hub every month
Updates to earnings, contributions and some position changes
Individual leaver forms still required
Not i-connect

Update:

Summary: this is a file to upload each month and needs earnings and contributions but can also make basic changes to 50:50 status and hours. Starters can also be uploaded via the file. Leavers cannot be done this way as we will almost always have service queries to query before leavers can be finalised online. However, the possibility of automated leaver forms isn't being ruled out.

Currently: Testing thoroughly and have live data coming in from employers. Piloting April 2025-March 2026 then will review the information and lessons learnt, understand if further work required and collate the feedback received so far and development requirements before implementing. We are identifying some pain points, and we need to understand better whether this is improving the overall returns process. We appreciate that employers and payroll providers are keen for us to move to monthly returns. Generally, our data quality is good across different employers we administer and there will be a period where data quality will be more challenging while we get use to the new process which is why we are doing lots of testing before implementing. Monthly return will be due on 10th of every month.

Discussion

Poll: Would you prefer Monthly returns over Annual returns? Yes: 50% No: 11% Maybe: 33%

Alison stated her hesitation is that, now, they have people opting in and out and annual returns give more time to validate data and ensure all details are correct considering the changes that occur throughout the year. Alison expressed the concern that monthly data would be less accurate. Sian asked how it would work when calculating FTEs as it could change each month. Jonathan stated that if the FTE changes each month employers can give us a different figure each month and the system would calculate the average across the year. Tanya asked what the format would be, and Jonathan confirmed it would be populating a spreadsheet.

[Note - for most members we expect an annualised final pay figure to be provided each month with member earnings. A separate final pay figure is requested if a member is flagged as having a reduction in pay and leaving on the monthly return. As we will still need separate leaver notifications, the existing mandatory fields for leavers will still be required, including a confirmed final pay figure at the date of leaving.]

Edyta asked if the figures don't equal would the system flag it as orange/red like annual return currently does. Jonathan said no because the system automatically generates the number based on what employers put on the file, so employers don't need to worry about this as the numbers should be the same. Angela asked if employers could see an example of the template. Jonathan agreed employers would be shown the template before anything was implemented and said the data is the same, but the format is slightly different.

Jonathan asked if attendees thought monthly returns would have a significant resource impact on employers. Paula stated it would be useful to gain feedback from the people doing the pilot. She has spoken with business partner who oversee pensions and are keen for monthly returns, but it would be useful to understand the time commitment monthly and the work involved to better understand potential resourcing concerns.

Sian stated if a bespoke report had to be created to pull the exact data out and expressed it could end up causing the employer a lot of money as the payroll provider would end up charging consultancy time.

Jonathan asked how much notice attendees think would be useful for employers before HPS implement monthly returns. Alison stated it all depends on the complexity of the spreadsheet and if a new report would need to be constructed. Tanya stated it is difficult to comment but her concern is that it would be like doing an annual return monthly due to all the checks that need to be done. Jonathan stated that a comparable resource would be needed, but over time it would reduce amount of time needed to upload the data due to automated starters, hours change etc. Jonathan also answered Tanya's question about inputting a pension reference, explaining the process doesn't currently require

inputting a folder reference (it is an optional field) but it saves a lot of time and potential queries if we have the number., and that we may look to make this a mandatory field.

Sian asked how those who are currently testing it are finding it. Jonathan explained general feedback is quite positive and it simplifies workstreams for them as they have designated staff responsible for it, but we understand that this might not be the case for all employers, especially councils with payroll teams with other responsibilities.

Tanya also commented that employers need sight of the template so we can see if we can build a report around it or whether we need to request a bespoke file created. Jonathan clarified there is no guarantee this is going to be implemented any time soon, so employers shouldn't invest resources to prepare at this time.

Upcoming Events

Completion of 2025 Valuation

Pensions Dashboard – we are connected, expected to go live in 2026. Employers must ensure their member info is accurate as this is how matches are made. Queries on data must be resolved very quickly! 10 working days to collate queries according to TPR including asking and receiving responses from employers which means scheme employers have 5 working days to respond to our queries. Jonathan asked for feedback on this. No feedback given.

Edyta asked if DC pensions will be visible as well. Jonathan confirmed they will be.

LGR – potential to cause huge change to the way pensions are administered.

Consultations:

*Access and Fairness: Consultation has ended, outcomes pending.
Points on slides.*

*Access and Protection Consultation: live closing on 22 December 2025.
Points on slides.*

Sarah Groom asked what the justification is for Town and Parish Councillors not being allowed into the LGPS, when regular Councillors were. Chris clarified that we don't yet know for certain, and there is some conflicting information about this currently. We are waiting for the final information to be published.

David Atkinson stated all costs for moving Pension Funds incurred by both the receiving fund and sending fund would be borne by the Multi Academy Trust. Jonathan confirmed this would be something to consider before making the decision.

Any Other Business

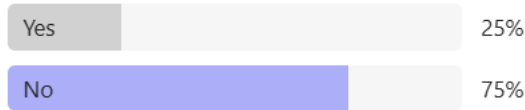
None.

Presentation and discussion ended 15:26



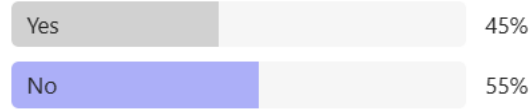
Poll Results – Focus Group, 26th November 2025:

Have you attended one of these new sessions or watched the online support videos?



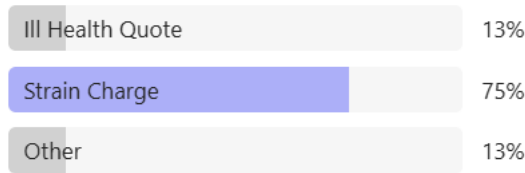
12 responses

Do you run estimates for members on the Employer Hub?



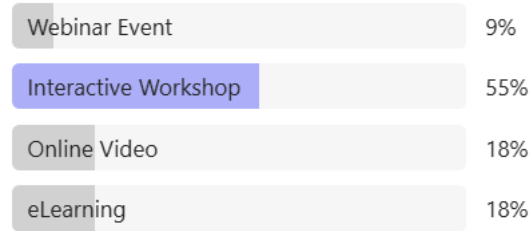
11 responses

Main reason for running estimates (pick one):



8 responses

Preferred training format (pick one):



11 responses

Do you use the Employer Hub?



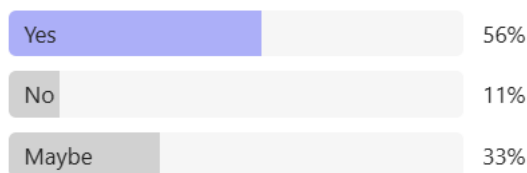
10 responses

Do you submit either starters or leavers on the Hub?



8 responses

Would you prefer monthly data submissions over annual returns?



9 responses

