

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Local Pension Board of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme

Thursday 26 November 2020

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Keith Bray (Chair)
Barnaby Briggs
Councillor David Reilly
Sian Marsh
Tony Morgan

Officers

Neil Buxton, Technical Specialist - Pension Fund Policy and Governance
Liz Firmstone, Service Manager (Transformation)
Victoria Jenks, Pensions Admin Delivery Lead
Deborah Moseley, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Jane Pollard, Legal Service Manager (Corporate)

Others Present

Martin Reohorn

1. General

The Chair welcomed the new Members of the Board, Councillor David Reilly and Sian Marsh, together with Martin Reohorn, who was attending as the proposed new Independent Chair of the Board (subject to agreement by the County Council).

2. Apologies

Caroline Jones and Paul Morley

3. Board Members' Disclosures of Interest

None.

(1) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting held on 21 July 2020.

4. Pension policies and review dates for Warwickshire Fire & Rescue

Neil Buxton, Technical Specialist - Pension Fund Policy and Governance, presented this report to the Board which explained that several policies and statements needed to be in place to ensure the successful administration of the Firefighter Pension Schemes. Historically, the authority had relied upon and followed the policies that were in place for the Local Government Pension Scheme for administering the Firefighters' Pension

Schemes, but the recent Finance Service restructure had presented an opportunity to increase the capacity within the Pensions Service, thus allowing a greater focus on developing policies that were specific to the requirements of the Firefighters' Pension Schemes, and ensuring that the governance requirements of the Pensions Regulator were met. An appendix to the report set out the required policies, three of which would be presented to the next meeting in March: Breaches Policy, Conflicts of Interest Policy and Terms of Reference.

In response to a question on when breaches may occur, Neil Buxton gave the examples non-payment of employer contributions or annual benefits statements not being issued.

In relation to a query regarding the preparation of the Risk Register and the inclusion of the potential impact of devolution proposals, Liz Firmstone, Service Manager (Transformation), advised that the Risk Register would be developed over the coming weeks and months, following an horizon scanning process which would take into account the potential for local government reorganisation. The Chair invited Mr Rehorn to comment from his position of experience in relation to proposals for a police and crime commissioner to take on fire governance, and he responded that the proposals had not made a significant difference to the risk of making sure members received the benefits they were entitled to.

The Chair shared with the Board that he had recently attended an informative training session by AON in relation to Cyber Security and he indicated that he would share the presentation slides with Officers to send to the Board Members.

5. Regulatory Update Firefighter Pension Schemes

Neil Buxton, Technical Specialist - Pension Fund Policy and Governance, presented this report to the Board which provided an update on current developments in the Firefighter pension schemes. The report particularly detailed the current position in relation to McCloud/Sergeant and the Special Members of FPS 2006 – second options exercise.

Barnaby Briggs, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, thanked the authority for the way it had recently dealt with immediate detriment cases.

Tony Morgan's commented that there had been good discussions between the government and representative bodies in the Fire Service but that historic administrative practices around paperwork in some fire and rescue services may lead to potential difficulties and suggested this be added to the risk register.

6. Pensions Administration Update

Victoria Jenks, Pensions Admin Delivery Lead presented this report which provided an update on the proposed appointment of Martin Reohorn as the Board's new Chair, the Pensions Administration Service in terms of personnel and membership numbers, issue of Annual Benefits Statements, and data quality.

In response to a question on data quality and improving the level of scheme specific data, Victoria Jenks advised that the service would seek to improve the score within the next 6 months. She explained that there were some legacy issues with the way data was collected across the three schemes and records in the 1992 scheme were particularly sparse and, in some cases, only the data needed to calculate benefits had been collected. The Team would be carrying out work to improve the data on the 2015 scheme and with the changes in personnel in the team, improvements were already been seen.

Barnaby Briggs noted that as the figures improved, members would begin to get letters about their scheme membership and he urged Employee Representatives on the Board to work with the Team to correct membership records and ensure members were being properly represented. The improved resources in the team were noted and thanks were extended to the Team for the work to date.

7. McCloud - Age Discrimination Remedy and Immediate Detriment Guidance

Victoria Jenks, Pensions Admin Delivery Lead presented this report which set out the current position on the approach to removing the age discrimination as found in the McCloud/Sargeant Employment Tribunal litigation. The report detailed the government's proposals set out in the Age Discrimination (McCloud) consultation which related to the option for members to choose between receiving legacy or reformed scheme benefits in respect of their service during what was known as 'the remedy period' (between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2022) and the two possible approaches (an immediate choice or a deferred choice underpin). The report also explained the guidance issued by the Home Office in relation to the processing of 'immediate detriment' cases in advance of a decision on the Government's final approach.

Victoria Jenks explained that some challenges had been created by the guidance as members had complex records and benefits and therefore each case had to be assessed on its own merits and where it was possible to do, the guidance would be followed so that retiring members could get benefits on final salary now rather than await a recalculation in April 2022.

Barnaby Briggs reiterated thanks to the Pensions Team for their approach to immediate detriment cases.

8. Next Steps

In response to a query on the Board receiving an update on the outsourcing arrangements, Liz Firmstone indicated that the Team wanted to get data quality up to a higher standard before moving ahead with outsourcing to ensure that the best quality data was handed over.

9. Any Other Business

None.

10.Future Meeting Dates

The schedule of future meeting dates was agreed as follows:

Thursday, 4 March 2021

Tuesday, 14 September 2021

Tuesday, 9 November 2021

Monday, 14 February 2022

Tuesday, 10 May 2022

All meetings would be held at 2.00pm in Shire Hall or virtually (subject to government guidance).

The meeting rose at 2.36pm

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Chair