

Staff and Pensions Committee

Monday 11 December 2023

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Bill Gifford (Vice Chair in the Chair)
Councillor Brian Hammersley
Councillor Christopher Kettle
Councillor Mandy Tromans

Officers

John Cole, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Jan Cumming, Senior Solicitor and Team Leader, Commercial and Contracts
Lisa Eglesfield, Team Lead – Benefits
Andy Felton, Director of Finance
Liz Firmstone, Head of Finance Transformation and Transactions
Martin Griffiths, Technical Specialist – Pension Fund Policy and Governance
Bal Jacob, Director of Workforce and Local Services
Vicky Jenks, Pensions Administration Delivery Lead
Sally Waldron, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

1. General

The Chair highlighted that Vicky Jenks (Pensions Administration Delivery Lead) would shortly leave Warwickshire County Council to join another local authority. On behalf of the Committee, he thanked Vicky Jenks for her dedication and for the high-quality support she had provided to the Committee.

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Yousef Dahmash (Chair) and Councillor Sarah Millar.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

There was none.

(3) Minutes of Previous Meetings

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 11 September 2023 and 22 November 2023 be

approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

There were no matters arising.

2. Regulatory and Policy Update Report

Martin Griffiths (Technical Specialist – Pension Fund Policy and Governance) introduced the report which provided a summary of recently reviewed Pension Fund policies and gave an update on regulatory developments in the pensions arena. The report included details of proposed changes to the Fund's Conflicts of Interest Policy for which approval was sought from the Committee. He advised that the Cyber Security Policy had also been reviewed by Fund officers. The revised version would be presented to the Committee at the next meeting. Cyber security had been identified as a high risk; therefore, consideration would be given to commissioning an external consultant to also review the Policy.

Martin Griffiths advised that input from Hymans Robertson had been sought to inform the review of the Conflicts of Interest Policy. Hymans Robertson had recommended that reference be made to the relationship between the Fund and Border to Coast Pensions Partnership (BCPP) as well as the relationship between the Fund and Warwickshire County Council, where possible conflicts may arise. The proposed changes were highlighted within the updated Conflicts of Interest Policy appended to the report. He provided a summary of the regulatory and general Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) updates within the report.

Councillor Kettle highlighted that the updated Conflicts of Interest Policy included a proposed amendment that "to mitigate the risk of conflict... the role of Section 151 Officer for the Pension Fund is held by the Director of Finance while the role of Section 151 Officer for the Council is held by the Executive Director for Resources". He queried what provision would be made during the interim period following the departure of Andy Felton (Director of Finance) from the organisation.

Andy Felton (Director of Finance) advised that recruitment for a new Director of Finance was progressing, and internal interim arrangements existed through Virginia Rennie (Head of Strategic Finance) should there be a gap between Andy's departure and the new Director starting. Specifically on pensions, Rob Powell (Executive Director for Resources) remained Section 151 Officer and would be more involved with the Pension Fund as the transitional arrangements progressed.

Councillor Kettle moved that the recommendations be accepted and was seconded by Councillor Tromans. This was supported unanimously by the Committee.

Resolved:

That the Staff and Pensions Committee:

1. Notes the updates contained within the report; and
2. Approves the changes proposed to the Fund's Conflicts of Interest Policy.

3. Pensions Administration Activity and Performance Update

Vicky Jenks (Pensions Administration Delivery Lead) introduced the report which outlined key developments affecting pensions administration and the performance of the Pensions Administration Service (PAS). She reported that the PAS had continued to promote the Member Self Service (MSS) scheme. She advised that the latest figures showed take up of MSS by active members at 33.9%, for deferred members this was 24.2%, and for pensioners, 29.8%. She advised that the PAS made use of opportunities to promote MSS when circulating bulletins. For example, the recent update to members on the McCloud Remedy included a plug for MSS.

Vicky Jenks provided a summary of Pensions Administration Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), as well as details of Pensioner Payroll KPIs, workloads, breaches, the McCloud Project, and pensions dashboards.

In respect of the McCloud Remedy, the Chair noted that the PAS was now able to process all cases going forward from 1 October 2023, and apply the underpin where required, which avoided backlogs. He praised the work that had gone into making this possible.

In response to the Chair, Vicky Jenks advised that pension funds which had adopted MSS earlier than Warwickshire Pension Fund had achieved take up of around 50%. The Fund was close to this level which was positive given that MSS was at an earlier stage. It was not targeted to achieve 100% take up as it was acknowledged that, for a variety of reasons, MSS would not be used by all members. However, continued promotion could see take up of around 50% by the end of 2024 which would be a significant achievement.

Councillor Tromans moved that the recommendation be accepted and was seconded by Councillor Kettle. This was supported unanimously by the Committee.

Resolved:

That the Staff and Pensions Committee notes the content of the report.

4. Employers Joining and Leaving the Warwickshire Pension Fund

Vicky Jenks (Pensions Administration Delivery Lead) introduced this report which provided details of academies and contractors that had applied to join the Pension Fund. It also gave details of an existing employer that had left the Fund for which cessation arrangements would be made. More information about these arrangements would be provided at the next meeting.

In response to Councillor Hammersley, Vicky Jenks advised that each employer was evaluated to ensure that it could cover its own assets and liabilities. When an employer left the Fund, a cessation report was produced which included details of the employer's asset and liability level at the point of its exit from the Fund. At this stage, the PAS would ensure that money was paid to Fund if there was a deficit. Alternatively, an exit credit could be paid if the employer was in credit.

Councillor Kettle moved that the recommendations be accepted and was seconded by Councillor Tromans. This was supported unanimously by the Committee.

Resolved:

That the Staff and Pensions Committee delegates authority to the Executive Director for Resources:

1. To approve applications to the Pension Fund from the employers listed in Appendix 1 of the report, subject to the applications meeting the criteria set out in the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013; and
2. To facilitate those employers listed in Appendix 1 of the report to exit the Pension Fund.

5. Review of the Minutes of the Warwickshire Local Fire Pension Board Meetings of 5 June 2023 and 25 September 2023

Vicky Jenks (Pensions Administration Delivery Lead) advised that following discussion with the Chair of the Staff and Pensions Committee, Councillor Yousef Dahmash, it had been resolved to include a summary of key points from meetings of the Local Fire and Rescue Local Pension Board in future reports to the Committee.

Councillor Hammersley moved that the recommendation be accepted and was seconded by Councillor Tromans. This was supported unanimously by the Committee.

Resolved:

That the Staff and Pensions Committee notes the minutes of the meetings of the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Local Pension Board of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme of 5 June 2023 and 25 September 2023.

6. Reports Containing Exempt or Confidential Information

Resolved:

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the items mentioned below on the grounds that their presence would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1972.

7. Exempt Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved:

That the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2023 be approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

There were no matters arising.

8. Future Meeting Dates

The Committee noted the dates of future meetings.

The meeting rose at 14.35.

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Chair