

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

Monday 10 October 2022

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Martin Reohorn (Chair)
Barnaby Briggs
Caroline Jones
Sian Marsh
Tony Morgan

Officers

Andy Carswell, Democratic Services Officer
Jan Cumming, Senior Solicitor and Team Leader
Lisa Eglesfield, Team Lead (Benefits)
Liz Firmstone, Service Manager (Transformation)
Victoria Jenks, Pensions Admin Delivery Lead

Others Present

Helen Scargill (West Yorkshire Pension Fund)

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Brian Hammersley, Paul Morley and Matthew Mott.

(2) Board Members' Disclosures of Interest

There were none.

(3) Public minutes of previous meetings

The minutes of the meetings held on 14 February 2022 and 6 June 2022 were approved as an accurate record.

2. Forward plan

The item was introduced by Vicky Jenks (Pensions Administration Delivery Lead), who reminded members that the meeting had been rescheduled from 30 September. As a result the item on abatement would be considered at the November meeting and the item on the discretions policy would be discussed in February. Members were told the November meeting date had been incorrectly listed as being on the 15 when it had been scheduled for 7 November. Vicky Jenks said the proposed training relating to Matthews had been postponed as the processes behind it had not been agreed yet.

Members noted the contents of the forward plan.

3. Pensions Administration activity and performance update

The item was introduced by Vicky Jenks, who reminded members that administration for the Fund had moved to the West Yorkshire Fund from 1 April. There had been some minor issues but the transition had generally gone well, and the teams were aware of their expectations and responsibilities and staff at the West Yorkshire Fund had been quick to raise queries when needed. The major ongoing project was to identify the correct information in instances where there were inconsistencies between the details held by payroll and administration. This would look at whether any records were being paid incorrectly, and what the correct figure should be. This would be retrospectively as well as going forward.

Helen Scargill (West Yorkshire Pension Fund) said all of Warwickshire's annual benefit statements had been processed and all but one had been released by 31 August, and the year end return had been completed. The one that had missed the deadline had been due to a payroll issue with a previous Fire and Rescue Authority that the scheme member worked for before transferring to Warwickshire. Helen Scargill said there had been some issues in terms of required data content and quality but the situation was now improving and the returns were being completed on a monthly basis. An update would be provided at the next meeting.

Regarding pension saving statements, Helen Scargill said there had been 18 instances of scheme members breaching the allowance threshold in the previous tax year. Of these, 15 had been notified before the 6 October deadline and the remainder needed confirmation of pay before the final calculation could be carried out. However this would not result in a breach for missing the deadline as the legislation stated it could be completed within three months of receiving all the required financial information.

Members were told that the West Yorkshire Fund had recently recruited a new pension administration representative, although there had been a desire to recruit two. This allowed an existing representative to take a new role focusing on Fire Pension administration. Training could be offered to anyone in Fire and Rescue Services who handled pensions materials. Helen Scargill informed members that a full disaster recovery exercise took place on 14 September and this had been successful. A report was being compiled by the Fund's Head of IT and would be made available to Warwickshire when complete.

When the annual benefit statements were issued, members were also informed there was information regarding pensions available online. This included the My Pensions portal, with a guide being sent to members on how to register and navigate the website.

Helen Scargill said there were two types of data held by the Pension Administrator. Common data referred to things such as date of birth or National Insurance number, whereas specific data related to details that were solely relevant to the fire scheme and pensions history. There was quite a lot of missing information from the 2006 data, although this was mainly from the scheme members' home addresses not being known. All of the common data for the modified 2015 data was complete and 25 per cent of the scheme specific information was missing for 2015 modified members, although Helen Scargill clarified this only related to three individuals. Barnaby Briggs and Tony Morgan said they were both happy to assist with helping to supply missing information if possible. Helen Scargill said that West Yorkshire are just data processors for Warwickshire, therefore the information belongs to Warwickshire. Information regarding members where addresses were not up to date could be shared with Warwickshire to see if members could be traced. Responding to a question from the Chair, Helen Scargill said the overall scores were towards the lower end compared with other clients. However she said many of the issues related to conflicting start dates for members of the modified scheme and this did not represent a cause for alarm as this would not affect the calculation of benefits. It was acknowledged some authorities would pass their data as being acceptable as the missing data did not make a material difference to its accuracy, whereas West Yorkshire Pension Fund would not pass it even if there was a small difference in the data.

The Chair noted that, according to the data, the number of members had dropped from 1,400 to 1,100. Helen Scargill explained this was from duplicates from more than one data set being merged together, and 1,100 was now the correct membership number.

Members noted the contents of the report.

4. Regulatory and Policy Update

The item was introduced by Vicky Jenks, who said that although the abatement policy would be discussed at the next meeting, it would also come back in February after being discussed at December's Staff and Pensions Committee. It needed to be updated in line with the Ombudsman ruling so that it was not a blanket policy, as cases should be looked at on an individual basis. The policy was being worked on by the HR advisory team. Regarding issues surrounding McCloud and immediate detriment, Vicky Jenks said Warwickshire was now paying Category 1 cases for anyone retiring between now and October 2023, after the previous decision to pause payments. Barnaby Briggs (Assistant Chief Fire Officer) said he was aware discussions about a possible class action relating to immediate detriment were taking place. He added that as his pension was an immediate detriment case he needed to declare an interest and would not take part in the vote on the recommendation.

The Chair asked for clarification that additional costs to the Council had been considered when making the decision to unpause payment of Category 1 cases. Vicky Jenks confirmed the LGA spreadsheet calculator had been used to assess costs per individual case and this had formed part of the report to the Scheme Manager in order to make a decision.

It was resolved that members noted the contents of the report and endorsed the decision regarding the payment of Category 1 cases in relation to immediate detriment.

5. Risk Monitoring

Vicky Jenks told members that the data quality scores for pensioner, payroll and administration records was now being included as an item on the risk register. The Chair said he would like to receive some training to improve his understanding of how the risk scoring matrix rationale worked, as it was different from the ones he was familiar with.

Members noted the contents of the risk register.

6. Any Other Business

Barnaby Briggs asked if there was an update on the retirement pathway process. Lisa Eglesfield (Team Lead, Benefits) said the last steps of the process were being worked on and it was due to be completed and signed off the following day. She said there were two sets of pathways; one related to those affected by immediate detriment and those who were not, and the other set of pathways related to those who had to retire on the grounds of ill health and those who had not.

Vicky Jenks said in future it should be easier for members to access their information regarding their pension now that the supply of data between the Warwickshire and West Yorkshire Funds was improving and people were clearer on their responsibilities.

Regarding the annual benefit statement that had not been issued before the deadline, the Chair said this did not amount to a reportable breach. He said this would be noted as a technical breach instead. Vicky Jenks said the member in question had been informed of the delay and was satisfied with the explanation for it.

The Chair said he would be attending the upcoming LGA Fire Pensions Conference and he would report back on what happened.

7. Future Meeting Dates

Members noted the future meeting dates.

8. Reports Containing Confidential or Exempt Information

Resolved: To approve the motion to exclude the public.

9. Exempt Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 6 June were approved as an accurate record.

The meeting rose at 11.09am

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Chair