

Staff and Pensions Committee

Monday 12 December 2022

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Andy Jenns (Chair)
Councillor Bill Gifford (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Brian Hammersley
Councillor Sarah Millar
Councillor Mandy Tromans

Officers

Barnaby Briggs, Assistant Chief Fire Officer
John Cole, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Andy Felton, Assistant Director, Finance
Liz Firmstone, Service Manager - Transformation
Marina Fraser-Ryan, Delivery Lead – People Relations
Sioned Harper, Team Lead Senior Solicitor – Governance
Pru Jaques, Trainee Solicitor
Victoria Moffett, Lead Commissioner – Pensions and Investment
Chris Norton, Strategy and Commissioning Manager – Treasury, Pension, Audit and Risk
Max Taylor, Graduate Management Trainee

1. General

The Chair thanked members of the Committee for agreeing to reschedule the time of the meeting.

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Christopher Kettle.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

(3) Minutes of Previous Meetings

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 5 October 2022 and 15 November 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

There were no matters arising.

2. WFRS Re-engagement Following Retirement: Amendment to Service Order

Marina Fraser-Ryan (Delivery Lead – People Relations) introduced the report which outlined proposed changes to the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS) Re-engagement Following Retirement Service Order. This document set out the policy for abatement of pensions when scheme members were re-engaged (either by a fire and rescue authority or another public sector body) following retirement. She advised that the Pensions Ombudsman had recommended that changes be made. Accordingly, amendments had been made to the policy for abatement from a blanket approach to one which allowed for case-by-case consideration of the member's circumstances and any representations from the member prior to deciding whether to apply abatement or, where it was appropriate, to resolve that abatement should not be applied.

Marina Fraser-Ryan highlighted that there was no specific guidance on the criteria which should be considered when making the decision on whether to abate an individual's pension because of re-employment. Decisions would need to take account of the general principle of abatement, i.e., to protect the public purse. In such cases, WFRS would be responsible for the cost of deciding not to abate. She sought the Committee's approval for the proposed changes.

Councillor Gifford stated that it was sensible to follow the guidance of the Pensions Ombudsman. He moved that the recommendation be accepted and was seconded by Councillor Millar. This was supported unanimously by the Committee.

Resolved

That the Staff and Pensions Committee approves the amendments to the name and content of the WFRS Re-engagement Following Retirement Service Order as outlined within the body of the report and in Appendix 2.

3. Pensions Administration Activity and Performance Update

Liz Firmstone (Service Manager – Transformation) introduced the report which outlined key developments affecting pensions administration and the performance of the Pensions Administration Service. She provided an update which covered the roll-out of the Member Self Service (MSS) initiative; performance of the Pensions Administration Service against KPIs; and employer breaches, including good progress to obtain information from a particular Multi Academy Trust leading to a resolution (once payment and i-Connect data had been reconciled). In respect of Valuation, she advised that there had been no significant increases in employer contribution rates. She reported that the Fund had no outstanding Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure (IDRP) cases.

In response to Councillor Millar, Liz Firmstone advised that increased numbers of green breaches in January and April 2022 were due to slower reporting by academies during exceptionally busy periods of the academic year.

Councillor Gifford stated that the increase in the number of eligible members making use of the MSS system was positive. He highlighted the advantages of ensuring that the system was as user-friendly as possible. This would help to attract increased participation.

Liz Firmstone advised that measures were in place to refine the MSS system to make it more intuitive and user friendly. She advised that scheme members had received assurance that the system was secure and confidential. It was hoped that this would lead to increased participation.

In response to Councillor Gifford, Liz Firmstone advised that non-teaching academy staff made up a significant proportion of the Pension Scheme. The Employer Relations Teams played a key role to engage with these members to promote awareness of the MSS resource. She provided assurance that there were no plans to remove existing services for members of the Scheme who chose not to make use of MSS.

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

Resolved

That the Staff and Pensions Committee endorses the report.

4. Employers Leaving and Joining the Warwickshire Pension Fund

In response to the Chair, members of the Committee agreed to approve the delegation of authority to the Strategic Director for Resources as set out within the report.

Resolved

That the Staff and Pensions Committee delegates authority to the Strategic Director for Resources to approve applications from the listed employers subject to the applications meeting the criteria:

New Academies

- Harbury C of E Primary School, 01/09/2022 (Arden Forest MAT)
- English Martyrs Catholic Primary School, 01/09/2022 (Our Lady of the Magnificat)
- Our Lady and St Teresa Catholic Primary School, 01/09/2022 (Our Lady of the Magnificat)
- St Augustine's Catholic Primary School, 01/09/2022 (Our Lady of the Magnificat)
- St Marie's Catholic Primary School and Nursery, 01/09/2022 (Our Lady of the Magnificat)
- St Marys Catholic Primary School, 01/09/2022 (Our Lady of the Magnificat)

New Employers

- None for this period

5. Review of the Minutes of the Warwickshire Local Fire Pension Board Meetings of 6 June 2022 and 10 October 2022

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 held on 6 June 2022 and 10 October 2022.

6. Regulatory and Policy Update (1)

Victoria Moffett (Lead Commissioner – Pensions and Investment) introduced the report. She advised that the Fund’s Corporate Governance Policy Statement had been updated following its scheduled annual review. She highlighted the key changes outlined within the report. The Committee was asked to endorse the draft Corporate Governance Statement and authorise the Strategic Director for Resources to finalise the statement in consultation with appropriate persons. She drew members’ attention to the amendments to the Fund’s Admission and Termination Policy, Conflicts of Interest Policy, and Cyber Security Policy, for which approval was sought.

It had been determined that access to the Cyber Security Policy should be limited to ensure compliance with the Council’s duties to take all necessary steps to safeguard data. Discussion of this Policy (and determination of recommendation 3 of the report) would take place in closed session.

The Chair proposed that recommendations 1 and 2 be accepted. This was seconded by Councillor Gifford and unanimously supported by the Committee.

Resolved

That the Staff and Pensions Committee:

1. Notes the updates contained in the Report.
2. Endorses the draft Corporate Governance Statement of the Warwickshire Pension Fund and authorises the Strategic Director for Resources to finalise the statement in consultation with appropriate persons.

7. 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.

8. Regulatory and Policy Update (2)

Resolved

That the Staff and Pensions Committee approves the amendments to the Admission and Termination, Conflicts of Interest and Cyber Security Policies of the Warwickshire Pension Fund.

9. Future Meeting Dates

Members noted the dates of future meetings.

The meeting rose at 11.29.

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Chair