

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

Monday 6 November 2023

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Martin Reohorn (Chair)
Caroline Jones
Sian Marsh
Sally Waldron

Officers

Liz Firmstone, Head of Finance Transformation and Transactions
Victoria Jenks, Pensions Admin Delivery Lead
Andy Carswell, Democratic Services Officer
Jan Cumming, Senior Solicitor and Team Leader
Lisa Eglesfield, Team Lead Benefits
Martin Griffiths, Technical Specialist Pensions Fund Policy and Governance

Others Present

Matthew Mott (West Yorkshire Pension Fund)

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Brian Hammersley, Paul Morley and David Vazquez.

(2) Board Members' Disclosures of Interest

There were none.

(3) Public Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

2. Risk Register

The item was introduced by Vicky Jenks (Pensions Admin Delivery Lead), who provided updates on the items on the risk register.

An integrated service provider had been procured by West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF), which would enable the dashboards to connect to data held by WYPF on behalf of Warwickshire. The dashboards would allow pension scheme members to log in and see all of their different pensions in one place. However some more work was needed to ensure the correct data was supplied to the WYPF by Warwickshire payroll, so that data accessed by members was as accurate as it could be. The connection date was originally due to be in September 2024, but due to more information regarding IT infrastructure being needed this had been pushed back to October 2026. The data access point (DAP) where members would be able to access the dashboards was yet to be confirmed.

Regarding the second modified retained exercise, Vicky Jenks said Warwickshire held pay data back to 2000. However, for some firefighters there was a need for pay data going back to the 1960s. As pay pre-2000 was no longer available the calculations would be based on rates of pay available on the LGA website, and firefighters would be given the option of purchasing 25 per cent of a wholetime firefighter's service for each year they were employed. Vicky Jenks said the end date for this piece of work was 31 March 2025.

Responding to a question from the Chair regarding remedy cases (age discrimination) and the level of risk indicated on the risk register, Vicky Jenks confirmed all the information required by WYPF had been supplied by Warwickshire, so the level of risk had decreased. There wasn't a specific risk included on the register associated with remedy cases, as it was included within another risk.

Members noted the content of the update report.

3. Governance and Policy Update

Martin Griffiths (Technical Specialist) said there had been a training session for new members of the Local Pension Board the previous week.

The update was provided by Vicky Jenks. She reminded members the legislation required for the second modified retained exercise had taken effect from 1 October. It was believed all scheme members within scope had been identified, and information informing them of the benefits and options available to them was in the process of being prepared for circulation before 31 December.

Regulations relating to the age discrimination remedy had also taken effect from 1 October. Vicky Jenks said the regulations meant all members within scope would be rolled back into their legacy scheme for the remedy period, which was from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2022. Three retirement

options would be presented to those approaching retirement. There had been a delay to the creation of remedial service statements, however. Matthew Mott (WYPF) said the statements were unlikely to be available before the end of the month. He expressed disappointment at this, particularly considering how long the information had been known by the Home Office.

It had now been confirmed that compensation payments arising from the age discrimination remedy would be covered by the annual managed expenditure top up grant, and there would not be a requirement for the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service to cover any extra costs.

Responding to a question from Sally Waldron, Vicky Jenks said there had been some messaging shared with Paul Morley that went out in the fire newsletters. However an update could be provided to share by the fire service that would inform members when the member portal would be updated to show the roll back into legacy schemes.

The incorrect rates for the increases applied to CARE benefits were being corrected by WYPF, before the legislation had been corrected. The Chair said some of the issues had been caused by the government using the incorrect inflation rate in their calculations, and the need for administrators to recalculate. Vicky Jenks said this had caused some minor differences.

Members noted the update report.

4. Forward Plan

Vicky Jenks informed members a proposed item for the next meeting regarding discretions had been pulled as more work needed to be done. It was hoped this could be ready by September 2024 at the latest. Vicky Jenks said officers had been studying discretions policies from other Pension Funds to see what might be usefully incorporated into Warwickshire's policy. Members noted it would need to be ratified by the Staff and Pensions Committee for final approval.

Martin Griffiths said the Warwickshire Fund collaborated with three other organisations with training, and suggested the other Funds could take the lead on the next round of training.

5. Administration Update

The update was provided by Matthew Mott (WYPF). There had been some meetings nationally regarding how to communicate the technical and regulatory updates. Delivery of the information had been delayed slightly while the messages in online videos for pension scheme members was tweaked.

Regarding staging for the Dashboards, Matthew Mott advised the final cut-off had been set at October 2026. However the WYPF wanted the work associated with staging to be completed a couple of months beforehand in case there were any unforeseen issues that needed to be resolved. An update on an expected completion date would be provided as the project progressed.

All pension saving statements had been sent out by 6 October.

Pension holders were receiving all the options available to them on retirement. Members were told that due to the amount of work that entails WYPF were encouraging members to only request estimates for the next 12 months.

Progress on the key performance indicators had generally been good. Matthew Mott said that in cases where performance had been below par, this was due to a high volume of work being caused. However there were no significant issues that should cause alarm.

Vicky Jenks said there were no plans for a mass communication to be circulated regarding the roll back into legacy schemes. It was felt that doing so would raise a significant number of queries from pension scheme members. However people who were retiring in the near future would be advised of all the options available Sian Marsh said she was aware some pension holders had discussed the issue amongst themselves, and said the clarity of information to be provided was important. Sally Waldron said the Fire and Rescue Service was looking to strengthen its internal communications.

Responding to a question from the Chair, Matthew Mott said retirement cases would be marked as either active or pending. There was a target to complete each case within 15 days. If more information was required then the case would be put on hold, with the number of days being paused, until the information was sourced. Delays were most often caused in cases relating to deaths of pensioners living abroad. The highest number of queries came from cases relating to deferred benefits.

Members noted the contents of the report.

6. Any Other Business

Vicky Jenks said she would be leaving Warwickshire County Council and this was her final meeting. Members thanked her for all her help supporting the Board and wished her well in her new position. An internal replacement would be made on an interim basis while consideration was given to advertising the vacancy externally.

7. Future Meeting Dates

The dates of future meetings were noted.

The meeting rose at 1.52pm

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Chair