

Staff and Pensions Committee

Monday 9 December 2024

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Yousef Dahmash (Chair)

Councillor Bill Gifford (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Brian Hammersley

Councillor Christopher Kettle

Councillor Mandy Tromans

Officers

Lisa Eglesfield, Pensions Administration Service Manager

Chris Norton, Head of Investments, Audit and Risk

Paul Morley, Area Commander

Alistair Wickens, Technical Specialist Pensions Fund Policy and Governance

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Sarah Millar

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes from the meeting held on the 9th September 2024 and from the additional meeting held on the 25th November 2024 were both agreed as true and accurate records.

There were no matters arising.

2. Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service - Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2023-24

Paul Morley, Area Manager – Prevention (WFRS) presented the report to the committee which included performance against several key Health, Safety and Wellbeing indicators and measures to identify any emerging themes.

The committee noted the continuing need for training; the “workplace” can often be somewhere firefighters have never been before. The new training centre in Paynes Lane,

Rugby will make training much more realistic. The centre will be open in January 2025. Training will help to improve operational response by crews with realistic training being carried out by our own instructors.

Other highlights from the report include –

In relation to the Derby Firefighter case, the service is waiting for the results from the National Learning Investigation and how it might relate to Warwickshire.

The subject of post fire contaminants and their control is a subject high on regional and national agendas. Warwickshire has good working practices, awareness, and education in this area. A control of contaminants working group has now been established with stakeholders from across the service. This group meets every 6 weeks to work on improving our culture and practices around the control of contaminants.

WFRS Health, Safety and Wellbeing information is presented at the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee Meeting held every 8 weeks. This is a statutory meeting and allows the sharing of information and good practices.

It was confirmed that there are 8 specialist accident investigators and that a regional peer review was due to have taken place by now, but this has been pushed back to May 2025.

The committee learnt that following the last inspection, two areas highlighted for improvement have now been closed. The backlog of accident investigations has reduced and the management of risk assessments has also been completed.

There has been an increase in the number of operational defects reporting but this is in part due to the wider scope within the category which includes vehicular defects. It was noted that there have been 3 new Volvo fire engines for the service this year, with another 6 ordered for the coming year.

In relation to RIDDOR reportable incidents, it was confirmed that there have been no recorded "Specified Injuries" within the Service that would be required to be reported under RIDDOR. There were 3 reported "over 7-day" injuries reported; all were musculoskeletal and sustained during operational incidents or training. One incident was reported to the HSE under RIDDOR regulations as a non-fatal, non-work injury.

In relation to wellbeing, it was confirmed that there has been a reduction in the number of violent and aggressive incidents against staff. However, 2 of the reported 4 incidents over the last year, were aimed at Fire Control Centre Staff during emergency or hoax calls. All staff involved were officers supported from Wellbeing Ambassadors and managers. Incidents are reported to the Police if deemed necessary. Councillor Bill Gifford expressed concern about the number of incidents, saying it was unexpected given why most people would be calling the service. Paul Morley agreed that it was always a shame to see these incidents and added that these incidents are significantly lower in Warwickshire than other areas. It was confirmed that the service does a lot of work in schools, and with police colleagues to engage with the community to try and prevent future incidents.

It was further confirmed that incidents are regularly monitored for any spikes, and to look at why such things might happen.

There are now 30 Wellbeing Ambassadors across the service: an increase of 11. There are also 5 additional Trauma Support Officers. Following a question from the Chair, it was confirmed that the Wellbeing Ambassadors are officers within the service who support team members who may have recently suffered some trauma in or out of work. They have been trained to recognise if that person may need more external support. This is part of their day-to-day role – they are not paid any additional salary. Ambassadors may be approached out of work hours, but this is very rare. It was confirmed that the training is from Banbury Health Psychotherapists – there are 2 days of initial training followed by annual refreshers.

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

Resolved

That the Committee consider and comment upon the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS) Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report.

3. Pension Fund Regulatory and Policy Update Report

Alistair Wickens, Technical Specialist Pensions Fund Policy and Governance presented the report to the committee.

It was confirmed that Aon recently conducted a full review of the fund's governance arrangements, including its compliance with The Pension Regulators new code of Practice. The results will present a check against the new code of practice and how compliant the fund is. The full governance review will be presented at the March 2025 Staff and Pensions Committee meeting.

It was confirmed that section 4.2 of the report shows a summary of the report and that they have been separated into RAG ratings. This is the first time that an analysis has been completed so is the first time that officers have been able to prioritise those areas in red. A progress update will be provided at the next committee meeting.

In relation to conflict of interests it was confirmed that the fund will require all advisers to provide their own respective Conflicts of Interest policy on appointment.

The new code of practice suggests that pension funds carry out their own risk assessments (ORA) for good practice. It was noted that the code is not clear on what the assessment should entail and officers are waiting for further clarification.

It was confirmed that the new training policy was due to be presented at this meeting but following the compliance check completed by Aon, several recommendations were highlighted. It was noted that the new training policy will be presented at the next committee meeting in March 2025.

In relation to the Regulatory Updates the following headline results were presented to the committee –

- Total employer contribution payments of 10.5 billion (an increase of 24.6% from 2022/23)
- Total Employee contribution payments of 3 billion (an increase of 8.3% from 2022/23)
- 99,505 retirements (an increase of 6.3% on the number of retirements from 2022/23)
- Across all Funds total expenditure was 17.1 billion (an increase of 11.9%) and total income was 20.7 billion (an increase of 19.3%)

The full LGPS Statistics for England and Wales 2023/2024 report can be found [here](#).

It was confirmed that the Office of National statistics announced the CPI rate of inflation for September 2024 as 1.7%.

It was confirmed that the LGA conference will be taking place in January 2025 and if members are interested in attending please contact Alistair Wickens.

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

Resolved

That the Committee notes and comments on the updates contained within this report.

4. Pension Administration Activity and Performance Update

Lisa Eglesfield, Pension Administration Service Manager presented the report to the committee and started with an update on the member self-service portal. It was confirmed that the fund is working hard on the current update to a new system called Engage; and this includes access to retirement planning. The current switch on date is planned for 31st March 2025. There will be a 2 factor log on to increase security for members.

The committee noted that 98.5% active members have received their statement by the deadline; all outstanding statements will be received by the 31st December 2024

In relation to KPI data collection, it was noted that the system is being updated so officers are currently working on two systems. The new system will improve the ability to meet statutory deadlines which are occasionally missed on the current system.

In relation to McCloud, it was confirmed that it is now drawing to a close with 24 pensioners still owed money; the plan is to have them all paid by the end of 2024.

It was confirmed that the pensions team is currently in the first stage of the implementation of the new Pensions Dashboard Programme, a government project which will enable individuals to access their pension information online, securely and in one place. The aim is that the first stage will finish in January 2025, and the second stage, in summer 2025. The main issue at the moment is deciding on the criteria to use and data quality. Councillor Bill Gifford asked if

the new dashboard was likely to reduce the number of calls made to the pension team. Lisa Eglesfield stated that this seemed unlikely – the more information someone has access to, the more questions they are likely to have. In relation to a question from Councillor Brian Hammersley in relation to the cost of the new dashboard programme, it was confirmed that the ongoing costs will be exactly the same as the current costs, although there is an additional set up cost of around £35k.

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

Resolved

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

5. Review the minutes of the Local Fire Pension Board 23/09/24

Lisa Eglesfield, Pension Administration Service Manager presented the report to the committee and asked them to note section 2 of the report in relation to the Age Discrimination Remedy (McCloud). It was confirmed that the data collection had been finalised and the first compensation payment has been made. Warwickshire's pay roll team has completed all the data collection needed to meet the deadline in relation to the age discrimination.

In relation to the Matthews Project, it was confirmed that the Warwickshire fund is progressing well with calculations and that 144 firefighters have been identified. Full details can be found in section 3 of the report.

The committee noted that the risk register for the Firefighters Pension Scheme has been updated in line with the updated risk scoring method now used by Warwickshire County Council.

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

Resolved

That the Staff and Pensions Committee receive, consider and comment on the minutes of the meeting of the Warwickshire Fire Local Pension Board on 23 September 2024.

6. Employers Joining and Leaving the Pension Fund

Lisa Eglesfield, Pension Administration Service Manager presented the report to the committee and confirmed that it was the standard report with details of employees joining and leaving the pension fund.

This will always be an area of constant change and there are regular meetings with legal colleagues to ensure controls are in place.

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

Resolved

That the Committee delegates authority to the Executive Director for Resources to approve applications to the Pension Fund from the employers listed in Appendix 1, subject to the applications meeting the criteria set out in the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013.

The meeting rose at 14:43

.....
Chair