



Minutes of the meeting of the Local Pension Board held on 24 October 2023 via Zoom

PRESENT

Employer Representatives:

Cllr John Brynmor Hughes

Cllr Gwynfor Owen

Cllr Bryan Apsley

Dafydd Edwards, Treasurer

Gareth Owens, Clerk to the Authority and Monitoring Officer

Employee Representatives:

Stuart Millington, Fire Leaders Association

Stuart Stanley, Fire Brigades Union

Matt Ryan, Fire Brigades Union

Paul Kay, Fire Officers Association

Advisors

Helen MacArthur, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Beccy Marfleet, Pensions Officer

Martin Morgan, Dyfed Pension Fund

Minute Taker

Lisa Allington, Executive Assistant

1 APOLOGIES

1.1 There were no apologies provided.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest to record.

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4 PENSION FUND ACCOUNT

4.1 ACFO MacArthur gave a verbal update on the GAD valuation.



- 4.2 It was noted that the GAD valuation was now imminent and that it was highly anticipated there would be an increase in employer contributions as a result.

5 UPDATE REPORT – SCHEME MEMBERSHIP

- 5.1 Beccy Marfleet presented the Firefighters Pension Scheme Update Report which aimed to provide the Local Pension Board (LPB) with an update on current issues relating to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme.
- 5.2 It was noted that there had been a significant increase in workload for the Pensions Officer relating to the remedy legislation and that this would only increase over the next 18 to 24 months due to both the McCloud and O'Brien remedies.
- 5.3 It was highlighted that there was one individual currently not paying contributions to a pension scheme and some concern was raised that this may be attributed to cost of living issues. ACFO MacArthur confirmed that a great deal of work was put into the promotion of pension schemes but unfortunately, there were no further steps that could be taken in order to help people financially as the Firefighters Pension Scheme (FPS) did not offer a part contribution, unlike the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).
- 5.4 **RESOLVED to:**
i) **note the content of the report.**

6 UPDATE REPORT – ADMINISTRATOR

- 6.1 Martin Morgan presented the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) pensions administration report – October 2023, which aimed to provide a progress update on a number of projects being simultaneously undertaken, along with providing information on relevant issues in the administration of scheme benefits.
- 6.2 It was confirmed that promotion of the My Pensions Online portal remained ongoing.
- 6.3 Comment was made that the statistics on the first page of this report were really insightful and that a consolidated approach with regards to the promotion of My Pensions Online would be required.



- 6.4 One Member noted that there would remain a small percentage of people who would not want to communicate online and that legally, we would need to consider their needs. It was confirmed that paper copies of all communication would still be sent out to those not registered with My Pensions Online.
- 6.5 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) **ensure that employee representatives encourage their members to register with My Pensions Online prior to the onboarding deadline for the pensions dashboard of April 2024.**
- 7 FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION SCHEME UPDATE – AGE DISCRIMINATION AND RETAINED**
- 7.1 ACFO MacArthur presented two reports, which aimed to provide an update to Members on the arrangements to address the age discrimination in the Firefighters' Pension Scheme in Wales, and on the proposed amendments to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme in Wales to extend access for eligible retained (on-call) firefighters with pre-2000 service.
- 7.2 Concern was expressed around the increased workload involved with both of these judgements, and the requirement to have completed them both within an 18-month period, although it was noted that the retained deadline ran three months behind the age discrimination deadline.
- 7.3 It was asked how communication with pension members was being carried out and whether this could be used as an opportunity to promote the My Pensions Online portal.
- 7.4 Confirmation was given that once an individual had been identified as being eligible via the first and second choice exercises, they would be encouraged to provide the Service with an email address and telephone number to enable more effective communication.
- 7.5 It was asked whether the remedies would be an additional strain on the budget. Members were advised that the Service's capacity to be able to cope with the increased workload involved remained a significant risk to the Service. It was therefore felt that additional resources would be required in order to process the remedies within the stipulated deadlines, and this would be raised via the Members' Budget Scrutiny Working Group and the Audit Committee.



7.6 A collaboration with South Wales Fire and Rescue Service was also being looked into whereby a single technical lead would be secured to work across both services and which would help to ease the workload.

7.7 **RESOLVED to**

- i) **note the legislative requirements and timescales established by the age remedy regulations;**
- ii) **note the work undertaken to implement the regulations.**
- iii) **note the background to the legal matter in relation to retained firefighters; and**
- iv) **note the proposals set out by the Welsh Government to address the legal issues arising.**

8 RISK REGISTER

8.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the Risk Register report, which provided Members of the LPB with an update on risk management arrangements.

8.2 It was noted that the Risk Register comprised of three areas, and a different area was covered at each LPB meeting. The risk being covered at this meeting was Regulatory Compliance.

8.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **consider and approve the assessment of the funding risks associated with the firefighters' pension scheme.**

9 TRAINING

9.1 ACFO Helen MacArthur delivered a training presentation on the Age Discrimination Remedy, which included an overview of the primary legislation, the legislation establishing schemes, the practical implications to the Service of the remedy and the timescales within which it must be actioned.

9.2 The complexity and quantity of the work involved with this remedy was acknowledged and at this juncture, thanks were passed to RM and HM for all of their hard work to date. Thanks were also given to FBU colleagues for their support in applying this remedy.



- 9.3 It was asked what would happen if a member did not reach retirement age, and it was confirmed that beneficiaries would always be applied to whichever scheme would mean that they would be better off.

10 SCHEME ADVISORY BOARD FOR WALES UPDATE

- 10.1 ACFO MacArthur gave a verbal update on the Scheme Advisory Board for Wales.
- 10.2 It was noted that the next meeting of the Scheme Advisory Board would take place next week and would be focused on the GAD valuation.

11 MEMBERSHIP – VERBAL

- 11.1 It was noted that the employee membership required increasing and felt that the best way to do this was to request expressions of interest from members of staff. It was agreed that further representation from retained colleagues would be beneficial given the current legal challenges relating to retained colleagues.
- 11.2 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) send out a communication to all staff for expressions of interest in joining the LPB.**

12 MATTERS TO BE ESCALATED TO THE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY (FRA)

- 12.1 Members noted that the pension schemes for firefighters had been subject to a number of legal challenges in recent years. In order to remedy the defects identified by the courts, Welsh Government had enacted a number of changes to the statutory scheme, which the FRA must now implement within a short timescale. The changes were complex and required the processing of a great deal of detail within a limited time frame. As a responsible employer the FRA were obliged to get these changes right for the benefit of its employees, and the LPB therefore request that additional temporary resource be provided to ensure that the changes are made correctly and on time.
- 12.2 It was therefore agreed that the risk surrounding capacity needs, understanding what those needs are and seeking to recruit to fulfil those needs should be requested of the Fire and Rescue Authority.



12.3 It was further agreed that the implications of the GAD valuation, and the potential impact that would have on the budget, be brought to the attention of the FRA.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

13.1 The next meeting would be held on 23 January, 2023 at 09:00hrs.

Meeting closed 10:35