

MINUTES of the meeting of the **SURREY LOCAL FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION BOARD** held at 2.00 pm on 14 October 2019 at Conference Room, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Croydon Road, Reigate, Surrey, RH2 0EJ.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Friday, 17 January 2020.

Elected Members:

- * Mr Nick Harrison (Co-Chairman)
Richard Jones
- * Glyn Parry-Jones
- * Sally Wilson (Co-Chairman)

10/19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Richard Jones.

11/19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 2]

None received.

12/19 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 3]

None received.

13/19 ACTION TRACKER [Item 4]

Witnesses:

Andrew Marson, Pensions Lead Manager

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Pensions Lead Manager provided the Board with an update on A1/19, which was concerned with deferred members' addresses. He explained that the tracing exercise had started and ITM were going to be appointed to assist this process. The service had identified 94 Surrey Fire Scheme members who were marked as "gone aways" and, with the rates that had been negotiated with ITM, they would be paying an estimated cost of £194 for the initial tracing exercise. The Pensions Lead Manager went on to say that there was an option to undertake further tracing if there was not an immediate match and that he would provide an update on progress at the next Board meeting.
2. The Chairman highlighted A2/19 and explained that the Board would be discussing the matter at the meeting.

Actions/further information to be provided:

None.

Resolved:

The Board reviewed and noted its action tracker.

14/19 ADMINISTRATION UPDATE (1 JUNE 2019 - 31 AUGUST 2019) [Item 5]

Witnesses:

Andrew Marson, Pensions Lead Manager

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Pensions Lead Manager introduced the report and explained that actions had been put in place to steady the ship due to issues in the Pensions Administration department relating to resilience and resource. They were steadily growing their resource skills across the team, and overall the Pensions Lead Manager felt the service was in a good position.
2. The Board was informed about fire bulletins that had been released since the last meeting. It heard that Fire Bulletin 21 had sections concerned with age discrimination and transition protection, which was being felt across all public sector pension schemes. The service would keep a close eye on those issues as they were likely to result in a significant amount of work needing to be done. Fire Bulletin 21 also discussed the need to fund a Technical Advisor to support FRAs with their understanding and management of the Firefighters' Pension Schemes, and the Vice-Chairman confirmed that the Chief Fire Officer had received a letter and that it was now a case of confirming payment had been made.
3. Moving on to page 19 of the report and the updated advice on terms of reference, the Vice-Chairman explained that the draft terms of reference produced by the Firefighters' Pensions England Scheme Advisory Board would be used to make any future changes. These would need to go to the Audit and Governance Committee for approval but would first be agreed with Board Members.
4. Responding to a question about the June query log on page 20, the Pensions Lead Manager explained that query logs were used as reference source if administrators had a query that fell outside their sphere of knowledge.
5. Regarding the administration and benchmarking review discussed in Fire Bulletin 23, the Pensions Lead Manager informed the Board that a summary of the service's findings had been produced and would be presented at the next meeting.
6. The Pensions Lead Manager explained that since writing the report the requirement for FRAs to provide the name, address, telephone number and email addresses for pensions managers had been completed by the 30 September 2019 deadline. He also informed the Board that a report was produced on the scoring for the quality of the data using the pensions regulator guidance. That had progressed well and they were hoping to receive the report from Heywoods in the following weeks.
7. The Board heard that the service was in a good place regarding split pensions and that paragraphs 19 through 22 of the report explained what had been found based on membership data.
8. The Pensions Lead Manager spoke about GMP reconciliation and explained that, from the perspective of the service, the progress of the project was in a comfortable place. It was agreed that he would report back on the progress made at the next meeting.

9. The Board turned its attention to Annex 1, which was a full list of tasks that had been undertaken during the reporting period. The Pensions Lead Manager explained that aged items had been found in the backlog and brought to the top of queue.
10. The Chairman questioned why the first actual retirement listed on Annex 1 stated that it took zero days to complete despite the case starting on 8 July 2019 and finishing on 16 July 2019. In response, the Pensions Lead Manager explained that when Pensions Administration officers asked for a piece of information, the clock was effectively stopped. The number of days completed column thus referred to the number of days' worth of effort that were used in completing the task.
11. The Vice-Chairman asked if there was any way that information could be captured on when notifications were received, and for this to be separate from the actual days taken to complete cases.
12. The Chairman made reference to the retirement quote case on page 12 and the time taken to complete it, which was showing as zero actual days but had been completed over three and a half months after the case was started. The Pensions Lead Manager explained that the data included in Annex 1 acted as a flag for his team to ask questions and look into the cases in more detail.
13. The Board discussed cases relating to death letters and the time it had taken for the cases to be completed. The Pensions Lead Manager explained that these were legacy issues that were coming to light as the service worked through the backlog. He went on to say that a column would be added to the performance report that highlighted the number of days' worth of effort that were used as well as the overall elapsed time.
14. Discussing the backlog of cases, the Pensions Lead Manager informed the Board that this formed a key part of the Service Improvement Plan and that the service were looking to outsource work to Shropshire County Council. This was because one of the main difficulties with the backlog within fire pensions was that it was much harder to find people with the skills needed to undertake the required administration tasks. The Pensions Lead Manager went on to explain that a draft contract for the outsourcing of work to Shropshire County Council had been received the previous week and was currently with Legal Services for feedback. It was subsequently agreed that a meeting would be organised for 12 December 2019 for the Board to review the contract and remediation plan.

Actions/further information to be provided:

1. The Pensions Lead Manager is to report at the next Board meeting on the progress made regarding GMP reconciliation.
2. The Pensions Lead Manager is to amend the performance report so that the overall elapsed time is highlighted alongside the number of days' worth of effort.
3. The Pensions Lead Manager is to explore the possibility of capturing information on when notifications were received, and for this to be separated from the actual days taken to complete cases in future reporting.
4. A Board meeting is to be organised for 12 December 2019 to review the outsourcing contract and remediation plan.

5. The Pensions Lead Manager is to present at the next meeting of the Board a summary of the service's findings regarding the administration and benchmarking review.

Resolved:

The Board noted the content of the report.

15/19 RISK REGISTER [Item 6]

Witnesses:

Ayaz Malik, Pensions Accountant Advisor

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Pensions Accountant Advisor explained that the risks discussed at the last Board meeting had been updated and that there was a typo in F9i which would be updated in time for the next meeting. He also informed the Board that a data improvement risk relating to the issue raised in the Administration Update would be added.
2. It was agreed that a red risk would be added relating to the Council's future move from County Hall.
3. Referring to F19, which was concerned with the current valuation of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme potentially having its cost ceiling breached, the Vice-Chairman asked for clarification that the issue had been reported to the Section 151 Officer and was told by the Pensions Accountant Advisor that he would check in time for the next meeting if any update needed to be added to the risk register.

Actions/further information to be provided:

1. The Pensions Accountant Advisor is to amend the typo in F9i.
2. The Pensions Accountant Advisor is to add a risk relating to data improvement.
3. The Pensions Accountant Advisor is to add a risk relating to the Council's future move from County Hall.

Resolved:

The Board noted the content of the report.

16/19 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING [Item 7]

The next meeting of the Surrey Local Firefighters' Pension Board will be held on 17 January 2020 (not 12 December 2019).

Meeting ended at: 3:14 pm

Chairman