

Public Document Pack

AT A MEETING of the HIWFRA Firefighters' Pension Board held at Fire and Police HQ, Eastleigh on Wednesday, 12th October, 2022 at 14:00

* Present

Chairman:

* Stew Adamson

Vice-Chairman:

Richard Scarth

* Sean Harrison

* Mark Hilton

* Richard North

* Councillor Roger Price

Ross Singleton

* Dan Tasker

47. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Richard Scarth and Ross Singleton.

48. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were mindful of their duty to disclose at the meeting any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest they had in any matter on the agenda for the meeting, where that interest was not already in the Authority's register of interests, and their ability to disclose any other personal interests in any such matter that they might have wished to disclose.

No interests were declared.

49. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the last meeting held on 5 July 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Under matters arising in relation to the Minutes, the Chairman confirmed in relation to Minute 46 that he had discussed with a contact from the Service's Diversity Group 'Inspire' as to whether gender was a factor in firefighters' opting out of the pension scheme. Some light-touch research hadn't proven that gender was a factor, and it was noted that cost being more of an issue for female firefighters' was purely anecdotal. The Chairman would meet with the Chairman of the Group to explore this further, and whether having children impacted on opting out.

50. **DEPUTATIONS**

There were no deputations.

51. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

52. **SCHEME ADVISORY BOARD**

The Board received a verbal update from the County Councillor Employer Representative. Councillor Price highlighted that issues relating to the Scheme Advisory Board were covered very well in reports later on the agenda, but did highlight the forthcoming Firefighters' Pension Schemes (FPS) AGM taking place at the LGA offices in London on the 25-26 October. It was noted that Ross Singleton, a Scheme Representative Member of the Firefighters' Pension Board and Claire Neale, Employer Pension Manager would be attending.

53. **LEGISLATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT (LGA) UPDATE REPORT**

The Board received an update on legislation and the Local Government Association (LGA), (Item 7 in the Minute Book).

Officers presented the report and highlighted that since the last Board meeting, three bulletins had been issued by the LGA which were attached at Appendices A-C of the report. Board Members attention was drawn to paragraphs 9-11 of the report which detailed the issue of the Scottish Public Pensions Agency and their amendment to their commutation provisions from 1 April 2022 to remove the commutation restriction for those retiring before age 55 with less than 30 years' service. Officers highlighted that there had been a significant rise in the number of retirements since 1 April 2022 which may be due to this change. It was heard that the SAB would continue to monitor this, and if wanted to pursue this then would need to present a business case to Government.

Board Members also heard further information relating to the Judicial Review over the McCloud Cost Remedy, and The Pensions Ombudsman (TPO) factsheet recently published on McCloud giving TPO's views. Attention was drawn to details of the FPS AGM which was highlighted by Councillor Price earlier in the meeting. A discussion ensued about inviting colleagues from the LGA to deliver training on key topics to Pension Board Members, and Officers highlighted that the LGA do offer Fire Authority Pension Boards one free training session a year. Board Members were keen for this to be organised and the Clerk would take this forward after the meeting. Board Members also discussed the benefit of Officers providing further training sessions for pension scheme members around issues such as annual allowances, higher taxes, promotions and additional benefits and pensions. This would be explored further by Officers.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report was noted by the HIWFRA Firefighters' Pension Board.

54. **FIRE PENSION BOARD STATUS REPORT AND RISK REGISTER REVIEW**

The Board received a report which provided an update on ongoing issues (Item 8 in the Minute Book), and also the Board's Risk Register for review. The report was introduced and key issues were highlighted.

The Board heard that in relation to member portal registration, figures at the end of August showed that those registered had surpassed 50% for the first time, and had risen again in September. In response to a Board Member query, it was confirmed that an address tracing programme was used to trace deferred members who may have moved address. It was also noted that pensioner scheme members could opt out of receiving their annual benefit statement electronically and receive a paper copy, and Officers would find out the percentage of pensioners who had requested to receive a paper version. Officers highlighted that once scheme members approached retirement age, they were written to and encouraged to sign up to the portal if they haven't already.

Paragraphs 7-11 of the report highlighted the one outstanding issue in relation to the Combined Fire Authority (CFA), which concerned on-call members who had paid the wrong employee contribution rate. It was heard that letters had gone out to affected members, and queries received had been clarified. Officers would check whether the cost of this would come out of HIWFRA reserves. Officers highlighted other issues detailed in the report including potential strike action, risk review and the Board's risk register which had been presented in an easier to read format as requested by the Board.

Paragraphs 21-32 of the report provided information relating to the Matthews/O'Brien case, and attention was drawn to the cohorts of members and those in scope. It was heard that HIWFRA has been asked to provide more detailed analysis to the LGA to assist in work to introduce the Matthews Remedy, which will run at the same time as the McCloud Remedy implementation and will be a busy period for Officers. Officers asked Board Member views on membership of a project team as detailed at paragraph 32. A query was raised as to whether any representative bodies would be included on the project team and officers would look into this. Suggestions were raised about the possibility of involvement of On-call Support Officers, as well as support from the Past Members Association. Signposting to information about Matthews Remedy, and including in the routine notice was also felt to be useful.

Board Members also heard details relating to Immediate Detriment, McCloud/Sargeant Remedy and the McCloud Remedy Working Group. It was heard that the Working Group had been considering some communications before the implementation of the McCloud Remedy, and Board Members were asked their views on this. Board Members felt that there was a lack of general understanding around this subject amongst scheme members, and more communication and accessible information was needed. The use of webinars and also including information on both the portal and Hampshire Pension Service website was discussed, and thought to be useful. Further advice on implementing this would be sought from the Internal Communication Lead Officer.

In concluding, Board Members were presented with information relating to Ill Health retirements, In Scope Members and McCloud project costings.

RESOLVED:

- i. That the content of the report was noted by the HIWFRA Firefighters' Pension Board.
- ii. That the Risk Register as set out in paragraphs 18-20 and Appendix A was approved by the HIWFRA Firefighters' Pension Board.

Chairman,