

AT A MEETING of the HFRA Hampshire Firefighters' Pension Board held remotely using Microsoft Teams on Wednesday, 15th July, 2020

Chairman:
* Stew Adamson

Vice-Chairman:
* Richard North

*Councillor Roger Price

*Richard Scarth

*Dan Tasker

*Present

Also present with the agreement of the Chairman:

Jo Thistlewood, Technical Finance Manager, Isle of Wight Council

92. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies received.

93. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Clerk called for nominations for a Chairman until the 31 March 2021, after which point the Combined Fire Authority will be established. Stew Adamson was nominated, seconded and in the absence of any further nominations duly appointed Chairman of the Pension Board until 31 March 2021.

94. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

The Chairman called for nominations for a Vice-Chairman. Richard North was nominated, seconded and in the absence of any further nominations, duly appointed Vice-Chairman of the Pension Board until the 31 March 2021, after which point the Combined Fire Authority will be established.

95. 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 entered 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.

There were no declarations of interest received for the meeting.

96. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting were reviewed, and it was noted that there had been a typing error and Ross Singleton's name had been misspelt.

With this amendment, the minutes were agreed.

97. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations on this occasion.

98. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman thanked the Board on his election to Chairman of the Board, and acknowledged that this would be the last year as a Hampshire only Firefighters' Pension Board before the Combination Order between Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and the Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service.

The Chairman also highlighted that there was currently a vacancy on the Board for a scheme member representative following the retirement of Malcolm Eastwood, and a recommended appointment to this vacancy would be brought to the HFRA meeting on the 22 July for approval.

99. SCHEME ADVISORY BOARD VERBAL UPDATE

The Board received a verbal update from Cllr Roger Price on the Scheme Advisory Board (SAB) (Item 8 in the Minute Book).

Members were informed about recent communication regarding the budget of the SAB and the levy. The Board also heard that the Home Office had confirmed that the McCloud/Sargeant pensions public consultation would be published on Thursday 16 July which would consult on both retrospective pension changes to address discrimination, as well as government future plans. It was noted that an update on the costs control mechanism would also be released at the same time.

Members of the Board also noted the compensation available for families of those who had died from Covid related illnesses whilst undertaking health service work, and there could be difficulties if this occurred in determining where the virus had been caught.

It was heard that because of the complexities of the firefighters' pension scheme, some services were looking to administrators to take these over, and it was highlighted that this was becoming a national issue. It was also noted that there had been discussions with Officers in relation to pensionable pay, and the

possibility of further information being presented to the Board at a future meeting.

The Board were content with the update and no questions were raised. The Chairman thanked Cllr Price for the informative update.

RESOLVED:

That the Firefighters' Pension Board noted the verbal update.

100. FIRE PENSION BOARD ANNUAL REPORT (2019/20)

Members received a report of the Chief Finance Officer which set out the work of the Pension Board throughout 2019/20 (Item 9 in the Minute Book).

The Chairman expressed his thanks to Officers on behalf of the Board for their work in terms of the Pension Regulator returns. Members of the Board were content with the report and no questions were raised.

RESOLVED:

That the annual report was agreed for submission to HFRA Standards and Governance Committee.

101. HAMPSHIRE FIRE PENSIONS ADMINISTRATION REPORT 2019/20

Members received a report from Pension Services providing the Board with an update on pensions administration (Item 10 in the Minute Book).

The report was introduced and Officers outlined that due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, the majority of staff had been homeworking and technology had enabled this to be fulfilled effectively. By using Microsoft Teams software for calls, the telephone contact team's functionality was now back to where it was pre-pandemic, and this software would continue to be used going forward. It was noted that some staff have needed to go into the office during the pandemic and undertake certain office based tasks such as dealing with post and scanning. As part of work being undertaken looking at processes and systems, areas of work which receive paper would also be examined to look at possibilities for future paperless working. Members noted that when exploring possibilities for future paperless working, Officers would need to be mindful of factoring in the older age of clients and any difficulties this may present.

Members attention was drawn to Section 5 of the report which highlighted administration performance, and it was noted that for each quarter of the year, the Service Level Agreement of 15 working days for all processes had been met without exception. It was explained that these figures were pre-Covid but the expectation was that this performance would continue to be high.

Officers outlined Section 6 of the report which illustrated that the uptake in Firefighters' registering for the Members portal was disappointing, with a total figure of 16.2%. It was noted that there had been a change to the process for

new starters, and from April 2020 new starters would be asked to register to the portal to access starter information.

Section 9 of the report outlined work being undertaken to implement the new Combined Fire Authority (CFA) and the actions being taken to ensure all Isle of Wight fire pension data would be transferred by the 1 April 2021, and it was heard that this was progressing well. Officers also highlighted the substantial audit ratings received by the pensions administration team as set out at Section 11, and how difficult it was to receive such a rating. The Chairman extended his congratulations to the Team for all their work and the impressive audit outcome.

Questions relating to the report were asked of Officers. Members of the Board, whilst acknowledging there had been an increase in numbers, were concerned about the numbers registering for the portal, and discussed whether there were any other mechanisms which could be used to encourage sign-up. Officers explained that there were communications linked to the Annual Benefit Statement and reminders were also published on the internal intranet but ultimately was reliant on personal responsibility. It was noted that the new process in place for new starters would help to increase registration numbers and awareness. It was also highlighted that consultations as referred to in the Scheme Advisory Board verbal update were also useful, and these would raise the profile and awareness of pensions.

The Chairman highlighted that in his role as Chairman of the Operations Management Board (OMB), he would take an action back to the OMB to look at communications amongst workforce teams. This would also be an opportunity to look at the promotions route and whether anything could be targeted there to engage people as they progress through promotion. In answer to a query about opportunities to work with the Unions in joint working, the Chairman would also explore this further through the joint trade union mechanism and raise as an agenda item.

RESOLVED:

That the Firefighters' Pension Board noted the contents of the report.

102. **LEGISLATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (LGA) UPDATE REPORT**

The Board were provided with an update on Legislation and the Local Government Association (LGA) (Item 11 in the Minute Book).

Officers introduced the report and drew the Board's attention to paragraph 6 of the report which highlighted that as part of remedy work, numbers had been provided to Government to identify potential areas where people could be affected as a result of the Sargeant case. The table in paragraph 6 illustrated numbers and it was explained that a total of 131 non-claimants could be affected. As a result of the consultation being published tomorrow, and earlier than expected, officers would be busy over the forthcoming weeks analysing this.

Members were content with the report and no questions were raised.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the contents of the report.

103. FIRE PENSION BOARD STATUS REPORT AND RISK REGISTER REVIEW

The Board received a report which provided an update on ongoing issues (Item 12 in the Minute Book). The report was introduced and the Board's attention was drawn to the Risk Register at Appendix A of the report, and Members were invited to suggest any amendments to this. The Chairman queried whether the risk 'Regulatory and Compliance' was still a medium risk? Officers highlighted that the impact was still there but the likelihood after mitigation could be reduced to a score of 'one' as the risk was being managed well with connections to the SAB, information from the Pension Regulator and dedicated resources in place to examine new legislation.

Officers again highlighted the Sargeant/McCloud case as outlined in paragraphs 7 – 11, and the consultation which would be published tomorrow which would help significantly in explaining the timescales that remedy would apply to. The O'Brien case was outlined which related to part-time working and pensions, and it was highlighted that the potential remedy and work involved in this going forward could be significant, and Officers were unsure at this stage how remedy would apply.

Paragraph 21 provided the Board with an update on Covid-19 and it was noted that while some Hampshire Pension Service workers had HCC supplied hybrids or laptops, other fixed desk workers were reliant on home PC's to access systems which didn't offer them full functionality. As working from home would be in place until at least the end of September and possibly longer, HCC has recently made the decision to provide all fixed desk workers with the necessary IT equipment to work from home more effectively and efficiently.

Paragraph 26 highlighted that also as a result of Covid, some scheduled pre-retirement courses have had to be cancelled. It was heard that the next course was scheduled for the 23 November, and the Board were asked to give their view on holding virtual pre-retirement courses if not in a position to run these face to face. The Board supported holding these virtually if not in a position to run these face to face, which was the preferred option. Members agreed that holding these virtually would ensure that those approaching retirement had the opportunity to receive relevant information they needed and also the opportunity to ask questions. Officers were mindful that holding these courses virtually may not enable as much interaction, but separate one to one sessions could be arranged afterwards if needed. The Chairman highlighted that he would follow this up with the academy that organise the courses and discuss the planning for these, potentially catering for both face to face and virtual courses depending on circumstances at the time, and to make people aware in advance. The Chairman would feedback to Officers after academy discussions.

Members noted that there had been a recent appointment panel for a new Scheme Member representative on the Board. It was heard that the successful applicant would be recommended for appointment at the HFRA meeting next week. The other applicant, who was also of a high standard, would be recommended to fill any future Scheme Member vacancy without the need for a further appointment process.

Officers drew attention to some of the preparations for the new Combined Fire Authority (CFA) as outlined at paragraphs 47 – 51 in the report, and arrangements for the creation of a new Firefighters' Pension Board and Terms of Reference. The Board's thoughts were sought on the potential to increase membership on the new Pension Board by two members, to include Members from the Isle of Wight Fire Pension Board. Jo Thistlewood from the Isle of Wight Council highlighted that their Scheme Member representatives were keen to ensure that there was ability for an Isle of Wight Scheme Member to be included on the new Pension Board. It was noted that in governance terms this would need to be examined so were in a position to be able to appoint to the new Board before 1 April 2021.

Members also questioned whether there would be any administration issues in transferring Isle of Wight pension data to the Hampshire pension system, but it was heard that this was progressing well. Jo Thistlewood from the Isle of Wight Council highlighted that the total number of active, deferred and retired Isle of Wight Firefighters' was under 400 and didn't anticipate any difficulties with the transfer of data.

Members also queried about temporary promotions with the formation of the new CFA, and Officers confirmed that this was in the process of being explored.

Questions were also raised about awareness of the new administration of pensions for Isle of Wight Firefighters', and whilst Officers were confident that there wouldn't be any huge differences, it would be helpful for Officers from Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to discuss this further. It was noted that as Isle of Wight Firefighters' didn't have a pensions portal, there could be an increase in numbers signing up to the portal with the formation of the CFA.

Members agreed to add an extra recommendation for an options report to be brought to the next Board meeting setting out options for membership and any other decisions that would need to be made in forming the new Pensions Board. This would then need to be brought to the Shadow Authority for approval.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the content of the report was noted by the Hampshire Fire Pension Board
- b) That the Risk Register as set out in paragraphs 5-6 and APPENDIX A be approved by the Hampshire Fire Pension Board and the Board note that for Risk 4, 'likelihood after mitigation' be moved to a score of '1'.
- c) That the appropriate facilities for the pre-retirement courses as set out in paragraph 26 are endorsed by the Hampshire Fire Pension Board.

- d) That the Hampshire Fire Pension Board ask officers to explore options for the new Hampshire and Isle of Wight Pension Board as discussed at the meeting, and to bring a report to the next meeting of the Hampshire Fire Pension Board.

Chairman,