Communications Policy
Statements of policy concerning communications with members and Scheme employers

Background

West Sussex County Council is the administering authority for the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) on behalf of the employers participating in the LGPS through the West Sussex Pension Fund (WSPF). The LGPS is governed by statutory regulations.

This Communication Policy Statement reflects the LGPS Regulatory requirement for the administering authority to maintain a Statement concerning communications with members, representatives of members, prospective members; and Scheme employers.

Related Policies

The Strategy should be read in conjunction with:

- The Administration Strategy

Principal Regulations and Guidance

The principal Regulations underpinning this Policy are:

- Occupational Pension Schemes (Disclosure of Information) Regulations and the Public Sector Pensions Act 2013
- The Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013 (and any amendments thereto)
- The Pension Regulator Code of Practice

Publication

This Policy will be published on the Pension Fund’s website, sent to each of its Scheme employers and sent to the Secretary of State.

Review

Employers may submit suggestions to improve any aspect of this Policy at any time.

The administering authority will keep this Policy under review.

Queries

Any enquiries in relation to this Communications Policy Statement should be forwarded to Tara Atkins, Principal Pensions Consultant (Administration and Employers) (0330 222 8787 or tara.atkins@westsussex.gov.uk)

Responsibilities and Resources

The responsibility for communication material for each Scheme rests with the County Council working in partnership with its Pension Administration provider, Hampshire Pension Services.
For the LGPS and Firefighters Pension Schemes Hampshire Pension Services will write, design and produce most of the communications.

**Accessibility**

The County Council is committed to using technology to enhance services, improve accessibility and broaden inclusion. The County Council will work with Hampshire Pension Services to develop further our use of electronic means of communicating through e-mail and our internet site (including a Member Portal). Wherever possible, responses will be sent by electronic means.

The Council recognises that individuals may have specific needs in relation to the format or language of our communication. Alternative material will be provided on request.

Details of the objectives of the communication strategy with the various stakeholder groups and details of how this is achieved have been set out in the following sections.

**Communication Objectives and Methods**

The delivery of the benefits involves communication with a broad range of stakeholders and this statement provides an overview of how the Authority will communicate with each.

**Communication Relevant to All Stakeholders**

For the LGPS the following documents are considered to be relevant to all stakeholders:

- **Administration Strategy** which set out levels of performance which the administering authority and its employing authorities are expected to achieve in carrying out their Scheme functions.

- **Annual Report & Accounts** which sets out details of the value of the Pension Fund during the financial year, income and expenditure and how the fund is managed.

- **Investment Strategy Statement** Which outlines how investment decisions are made, the types of investment held, fees paid, risk and corporate governance.

- **Business Plan** which deals with the functions carried out by the Pension Fund as administering authority on the investment side

- **Governance Policy and Governance Compliance Statement** which provides details pension fund governance arrangements, such as the remit of the Investment Panel and representation

- **Funding Strategy Statement** which sets out how employer liabilities will be calculated and the strategy for covering future service accrual, and past service deficits.

- Details of the **Pensions Panel** including meeting dates, membership details and meeting papers.

- Details of the **Pension Advisory Board** including meeting dates, membership details and meeting papers.
For the Firefighters Schemes the following documents are considered to be relevant to all stakeholders:

- Details of the West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service Local Pension Board including meeting dates, membership details and meeting papers.

Communication with active, deferred and pensioner members and prospective members

Objective:

- i. For the Schemes to be used as a tool in the attraction and retention of employees;
- ii. To improve the understanding of how the Schemes works;
- iii. To inform scheme members of their pension rights, the full benefits of scheme membership, and the contributions that employers make;
- iv. As a result of improved communication, for queries and complaints to be reduced;
- v. To improve take up of the Scheme;
- vi. To comply with our statutory obligations

We do this by:

- i. Working with Hampshire Pension Services to maintain webpages which provide detailed information about the Schemes, including who can join, how much it costs, the benefits of the Schemes (including 50/50) and how to increase the value of benefits.
- ii. Providing members with access to information about their current and projected benefits via a secure Member Portal.
- iii. Producing an annual newsletter or briefing (for current members and pensioners) which provides updates in relation to changes to the Schemes as well as other related news, such as national changes to pensions, forthcoming seminars, a summary of the accounts for the year, contact details, etc. These are published on the relevant Scheme websites (see above).
- iv. Providing annual benefit statements for active members which includes details about the current value of benefits, the associated death benefits and projected retirement benefits. Annual Benefit Statements will be made available to all members through the Member Portal by 31 August each year (and as hard copy on request).
- v. Providing annual benefit statements for deferred members which includes the current value of the deferred benefits and the earliest payment date of the benefits. Annual Benefit Statements will be made available to all members through the Member Portal by 31 August each year (and as hard copy on request).
- vi. Providing payslips for pensioner members at least annually where their pension varies by £1.
vii. Providing **calculations of pension benefits, transfers, deferred benefits, pension shares, increasing pension benefits, and other processes** as requested, in the format requested by the member.

viii. Providing **latest news updates** which provide information on specific topics, such as changes to the regulations, topping up pension rights, and transfer values in and out of the Schemes on the relevant websites.

ix. Advertising the **Pre-Retirement course** (via the County Council’s Learning and Development Gateway).

x. **Responding to all letters, e-mails, enquiries and phone calls** appropriately and within reasonable timescales, in the format requested by the member. Timescales are included within the [Administration Strategy](#).

xi. **Requesting feedback** from customers as part of the Customer Services Excellence accreditation
Communication with Scheme Employers

Objective:

i. To assist them in understanding costs/funding issues;

ii. To work together to maintain accurate data;

iii. To ensure their members are provided with all the necessary information;

iv. To ensure they are fully aware of developments within the Schemes;

v. To ensure they are aware of the policies in relation to any decisions that need to be taken concerning the Scheme and to assist them in making the most of the discretionary areas within the Schemes.

We do this by:

i. Working with Hampshire Pension Services to maintain webpages with key information for Scheme employers.

ii. Providing employer workshop sessions set up as and when required to debate current issues and regulations changes as required and requested.

iii. Providing calculations and costings of early retirement scenarios as requested, in the format requested by the employer.

iv. Provide employer newsletters including Scheme specific information.

v. Provide Stop Press publications for timely notifications and actions required.

vi. Holding an Annual General Meeting to discuss the Pension Fund’s Annual Report and any other pertinent issues.

vii. Providing training for small groups to improve understanding of pension administration, legislation, the principles of the Scheme, changes and costs e.g. as a result of restructuring.

viii. Holding focus group meetings on key issues as necessary with all scheme employers.

ix. Holding Actuarial Valuation meetings with the Fund Actuary leading up to and during an Actuarial Valuation year to discuss the results and implications of the Actuarial Valuation and other actuarial matters.

x. Providing training on provision of end of year member data, including the completion of the appropriate data capture spreadsheet.

xi. Requesting feedback from customers as part of the Customer Services Excellence accreditation
Pensions Panel (LGPS only)

Objective:

i. To ensure members are aware of their responsibilities in relation to the Scheme;

ii. To seek members approval to the development or amendment of discretionary policies, where required;

iii. To assist members in making decisions about investment, administration and governance of the Scheme;

iv. To seek members approval to formal responses to government consultation in relation to the Scheme;

v. To ensure that the required level of knowledge and understanding is maintained.

We will do this by:

i. Drafting, reviewing and publishing key Scheme documents,

ii. Publishing formal papers setting out relevant issues in respect of the Scheme, in many cases seeking specific decisions or directions.

iii. Attending formal and informal meetings of Pension Panel members, at which local decisions in relation to the scheme are taken

iv. Responding to all requests for information by members of the Pension Panel.

v. Facilitating training in line with the knowledge and understanding requirements and the Pension Fund’s Training Strategy.

Communication with Members of the Pension Advisory Board (LGPS) and West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service Local Pension Board

Objective:

i. To ensure they are aware of their responsibilities in relation to the Scheme;

ii. To ensure they are aware of their responsibilities in relation to the Scheme Manager, the Pensions Regulator and the National Scheme Advisory Board;

iii. To ensure that the required level of knowledge and understanding is maintained.

We will do this by:

i. Publishing formal papers setting out relevant issues in respect of the Scheme.

ii. Attending formal and informal meetings of the Pension Advisory Board and West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service Local Pension Board.
iii. **Responding to all requests** for information by members of the Pension Advisory Board and West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service Local Pension Board.

iv. **Facilitating training** in line with the knowledge and understanding requirements and the Pension Fund’s Training Strategy (LGPS only).

**Communication with Hampshire Pension Services and WSCC Pensions Staff**

**Objective:**

i. To provide in depth and practical training to new employees;

ii. Provide training updates to existing employees;

iii. Provide working manuals to all employees;

iv. Document any procedural changes;

v. Monitor/review service standard to strive for continual improvement;

vi. Be aware of changes and proposed changes to the scheme;

vii. To provide on the job training on specific Scheme issues such as admission arrangements;

viii. To develop improvements to services, and changes to processes as required;

ix. To agree service standards.

We will do this by:

i. Monthly **Service Review meetings**.

ii. **Regular catch up meetings** between West Sussex County Council legal services, corporate finance team, and Hampshire Pension Services.

**Communication with Media and Other Stakeholders**

**Objective:**

i. To ensure the accurate reporting of Fund valuation results, the overall performance of the Fund and the Fund’s policy decisions against discretionary elements of the scheme;

ii. To ensure accurate reporting on any issues relating to the Schemes.

iii. To meet our obligations under various legislative requirements such as the Freedom of Information Act and the requirements of the Pensions Regulator (tPR);

iv. To ensure the proper administration of the scheme;

v. To deal with the resolution of pension disputes;
vi. To administer the Schemes AVC arrangements (LGPS only),

We will do this by:

i. **Responding to consultations** about regulatory changes and the future of the Scheme.

ii. **Publishing notices** such as via the Members Information Services or OJEU following specific Pension Panel decisions and to advise on votes cast by the investment managers on behalf of the pension fund, specifically relating to remuneration.

iii. **Publishing press releases** providing statements setting out the County Council’s opinion on Scheme matters concerned, e.g. Fund valuation results.

iv. **Responding to Freedom of Information** and other requests.