

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION SCHEME LOCAL PENSION BOARD

At the meeting of the **Firefighters' Pension Scheme Local Pension Board** held at Conference Room 2 - County Hall on Tuesday, 18 July 2023 at 11.30 am.

PRESENT

S Richards (SR) (Chair) (in the Chair)

EMPLOYER REPRESENTATIVES COUNCILLORS

M Robinson (MR)

SCHEME MEMBER REPRESENTATIVE

M McKendrick (MM)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

P Hedley (PH) (virtually)	Chief Fire Officer
S Kennedy (SK)	Area Manager
L Nicklen (LN)	Lead HR Adviser
H Scargill (HS) (virtually)	Client Relationship Manager (WYPF)
N Turnbull (NT)	Democratic Services Officer

Definition of Terms

ABS	Annual Benefits Statement
CARE	Career Average Revalued Earnings
Common Data	E.g. name, address and date of birth, held for pensions processing
FPS	Firefighters' Pension Scheme
FRA	Fire and Rescue Authority
GAD	Government Actuary's Department
GMP	Guaranteed Minimum Pension
HMT	HM Treasury
ID	Immediate Detriment
IDRP	Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure
LPB	Local Pension Board
PASA	Pensions Administration Standards Association
SAB	Firefighters' Pensions (England) Scheme Advisory Board
Scheme Manager	The Scheme Manager (a function not a person) is responsible for managing and administering a scheme

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Scheme Specific (Conditional) Data	E.g. employment record and contribution history held for pensions processing
TOR	Terms of Reference of the Board
tPR	The Pensions Regulator
WYPF	West Yorkshire Pension Fund, as provider of shared administration service for NCC and other FRAs

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Beynon and Graeme Binning (DCFO).

2 CONSIDERATION (DECLARATION) OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Chair informed Board members that they would need to consider whether they had a conflict of interest arising from any of the agenda items to be discussed at each meeting. None were declared.

3 MINUTES OF THE FPS LOCAL PENSION BOARD MEETING HELD ON ON 25 APRIL 2023

It was noted that the minutes of the meeting of the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme Local Pension Board, held on Friday 25 April 2023, had already been adopted and signed by the Chair as a true record (in accordance with the Board’s terms of reference), and were received for information.

4 CHAIR’S BRIEFING (VERBAL UPDATE)

The Chair reported that a new date of 31 October 2026 had been announced for the Pension Dashboard which would be discussed under item no. 14 on the agenda papers.

He thanked Paul Hedley, Chief Fire Officer, for his supporting the Board and wished him an enjoyable retirement in August 2023. Graeme Binning, DCFO, had been appointed as his replacement and it was hoped there would be smooth transition given his recent participation in Board meetings and involvement in pension issues.

He welcomed Michael McKendrick to his first meeting of the Board. Michael had been appointed as the FBU representative and replacement for Amanda Cregin who had left for a promotion at the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

5 WYPF BUSINESS CONTINUITY UPDATE (VERBAL UPDATE)

HS reported that:

- A full test of the disaster recovery process had been carried out successfully the previous week with no issues having been encountered. Operational systems had been moved to a secondary site including the transfer of servers and upn system. Finance systems had been migrated with document imaging and applications available to staff working at home. The ‘my

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pension' system for members and employer website had been operational and the largest local government payroll run had also been completed during the period. Further updates were expected and would be reported at the next meeting.

- 100% of Annual Benefit Statements had been issued for all eligible Northumberland members. Regular reports would be run until the 31 August deadline to check for updates to members records to ensure that these would also be issued.
- Work at WYPF continued for the original Pension Dashboard staging date and therefore the pushback of the final date should not impact their work or the procurement and tender processes for a successful connection to the dashboard.

6 WYPF REPORT TO NCC'S FPS LPB ON 18 JULY 2023

The Board received a copy of the WYPF report which provided:

- A brief summary of the contents of the LGA Bulletins issued since the last meeting.
- An update on recent meetings of the Fire Technical Community, Fire Scheme Advisory Board and Fire Quarterly Client meetings.
- Updates from the Home Office, regulations and the DWP and Pensions Dashboard.
- WYPF Update on Northumberland KPIs, ABS, Pension Savings Statements, Breaches, Data Improvement Plan and Data Scores.

There were no questions from Board members.

7 MONTHLY CLIENT REPORTS FOR NCC FROM WYPF

Members of the FPS Local Pension Board received a copy of the following reports (copies of which are filed with the signed minutes and marked as Item 7). Standard headings within the reports included: Regulations, Member Issues, Administration Update including Member Web registrations, Membership Numbers and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

- a) April 2023
- b) May 2023
- c) June 2023

The reports were noted.

8 UPDATE REGARDING WYPF DISASTER RECOVERY POLICY

LN reported that confirmation had been received that the disaster recovery exercise formed part of the annual audit carried out by Mazars, external auditors for WYPF.

9 GAD CALCULATOR:

LN reported that GAD had been working with the Home Office to develop a calculator for FRAs to correctly calculate the cost to eligible members of

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purchasing service back for their continuous retained employment. This was to ensure that part-time firefighters be treated equally when compared with full-time firefighters. (A copy of the update and scope detail were filed with the signed minutes and marked as Item 9).

HS commented that she was a member of the Matthews Technical Working Group which was feeding into GAD regarding the development of the calculator. Four FRAs and their providers had volunteered to test the calculator to identify the data required for input, to ensure that the explanation for each field was understandable, and the calculator was laid out in a way that could easily be followed. The testing was expected to commence in the near future.

In answer to a question, the CFO, had confirmed that Northumberland FRA was agreeable to the £50,000 for the cost of the work to be shared between FRAs. The current cost-sharing arrangement was based on the retained firefighters' legal claims.

10 **PENSIONS CONSULTATIONS**

LN reported that Home Office consultations on Retrospective Remedy and Matthews had closed in May and June respectively. NFRS had not submitted an individual response. (A copy of the LGA responses to the Remedy and Matthews Consultations were filed with the signed minutes and marked as Item 10).

He highlighted concerns raised by the LGA regarding response periods and who had proposed that the time allowed for firefighters to respond be reduced from 6 months to 3 months and that the period for FRAs to process requests be increased from 3 months to 6 months.

11 **MINUTES OF THE WYPF FIRE CLIENT MEETING HELD ON 19 APRIL 2023**

The Board received a copy of the minutes of the WYPF Fire Client meeting dated 19 April 2023. (A copy was filed with the signed minutes and marked as Item 11).

12 **NCC PAYROLL'S FPS EMPLOYER ROLE: UPDATE**

LN reported that an update had been received from the Payroll Team Leader who confirmed that they had experienced some delays due to not having access to archive payroll data for a few weeks. This had been raised with IT. It was estimated that 80-90% of the work would be complete by the deadline. Yearend queries were also being processed.

In answer to a question, the Chair reported that extra staff had been employed to manage the additional workload and some training had been provided by HS. The CFO stated that most of the payroll team had attended the recent LGA training on 3 May 2023 at West Hartford Fire Headquarters. Feedback from the Payroll Manager and Payroll Team Leader had been positive.

13 **MATTHEWS SECOND OPTIONS EXERCISE**

LN reported that NFRS continued to invite expressions of interest in the second options exercise. Posters with information about the exercise and how individuals

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could register had recently been displayed in fire stations which had resulted in the registration of current and former firefighters.

An item was to be included in the Routine Notice for the next few weeks to publicise the exercise. Letters would also be sent to retired members in due course.

The CFO commented that the FRA was making use of formal and informal networks for contacting staff. Current staff were being asked to share the information with former colleagues, who were no longer employed by NFRS, particularly at retained fire stations. The level of response was as anticipated.

In response to a question, he explained that not having an up to date correspondence address had contributed to a recent IDRPs as the member had moved a number of times within a relatively short period.

LN stated clarification was being sought by the LGA of 'reasonable endeavors' as part of the recent consultation exercise.

HS reported that WYPF as administrator, would not be involved in the process until the final stage when an individual had elected to become a member. Tracing, calculations, correspondence with firefighters and processing of election forms would be undertaken by Northumberland FRA.

14 **PENSIONS DASHBOARDS: UPDATE**

The Board received a copy of the statement from the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Pensions on 8 June 2023 which commented that more time was required for the Pensions Dashboard as it was a complex project and more time was required to allow a more collaborative approach with the pensions industry. A connection deadline of 31 October 2026 was now proposed although accessibility by the public could be sooner than this date.

The Pensions Dashboard intended to collate all pension rights for individuals with other periods of employment and also state pension details to provide an accurate picture of the financial position for an individual when they retire. Accurate data was required so that the information on the dashboard was meaningful.

HS confirmed that the majority of this work would be carried out by WYPF and there would be little that NFRA would be required to do. However, NFRA had responsibility to ensure that dashboard implementation was as successful as it could be. It was essential that FRAs submitted data promptly and ensured that it was correct and of good quality, particularly any change of circumstances including change of hours, career breaks as well as change of names and addresses as the latter would form part of the matching criteria.

In answer to questions, HS confirmed that:

- WYPF had sufficient resources to implement and connect to the Pensions Dashboard. The biggest area of work was likely to be data mismatching and the cleansing and checking of data was an unknown quantity. The Chair

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obtained clarification that the onus was on organisations to provide accurate data.

- The Pensions Dashboard initially would provide individuals with information about pensions and not provide suggestions or advice.
- The Department for Work and Pensions and MAPs were leading on the Pensions Dashboard. WYPF had no input in the design and or decisions regarding accessibility etc.

15 **RESIGNATION OF BOARD MEMBER**

The Board were informed that Amanda Cregin had resigned from the Board after the last meeting due to accepting a promotion at Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

16 **APPOINTMENT OF BOARD MEMBER**

The Board received confirmation from Mark Douthwaite, FBU Secretary that Michael McKendrick had been appointed as the new FBU representative on the Board with effect from 1 May 2023.

17 **ACTIONS FOR FRAS: BOARD FOLLOW UP**

A summary of actions arising from the LGA monthly bulletins was included as a standing item on agendas to ensure any action was followed up appropriately. (A copy was filed with the signed minutes and marked as Item 17).

LN commented that a number of the actions had been completed or were in progress and were being monitored. He highlighted:

- June 2023
 - Remedy readiness self-assessment tool for completion by scheme managers and to report back to the Board. A meeting was to be arranged with the Board Secretary, CFO / DCFO to discuss prior to his retirement.

The Chair suggested that a spreadsheet be created from the actions to more easily monitor those that were completed or in progress. The Board Secretary agreed to liaise with SK to create a spreadsheet Action Log. HS made reference to best practice at other Boards which used colour coding and moved completed actions to a separate tab to enable closer monitoring of ongoing actions between Board meetings.

18 **REPORTS OF THE NCC FPS SCHEME MANAGER:**

Members of the FPS Local Pension Board received a copy of the following reports (copies of which are filed with the signed minutes and marked as Item 18):

18a **BREACHES IN THE QUARTER TO 30 JUNE 2023**

It was noted that there had been no new breaches identified.

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18b **COMPLAINTS, APPEALS, IDRPS IN THE QUARTER TO 30 JUNE 2023**

There were no new issues to report.

18c **DISCRETIONS EXERCISED IN THE QUARTER TO 30 JUNE 2023**

No new discretions had been exercised.

19 **FUTURE MEETING DATES**

The Board was next scheduled to meet on 31 October 2023 at 11.30 in County Hall.

20 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

LN would shortly be circulating an EDI survey by email which Members were asked to complete.

He also explained that AON had been commissioned to review the Conflicts of Interest and Breaches policies. The CFO referred to the transitional arrangements put in place following the retirement of the previous Board Secretary, Clare Gorman, to give the Board assurance that processes and policies were being managed effectively.

The CFO thanked the Board for their work and the support given to him in his position as Scheme Manager. He wished members well in the future.

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