

Nottinghamshire Pension Funds Communications Policy Statement October 2009



1. Introduction

1.1 This is the updated communications policy statement of the Nottinghamshire Pension Funds which are administered by Nottinghamshire County Council (the council). It has been prepared as required by the Local Government Pension Scheme (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2005.

2.0 Groups

2.1 There are a range of stakeholders that the funds' communicates with in terms of local government pension scheme matters. The stakeholders are:

- a) Trustees
- b) Scheme Members
- c) Prospective Scheme Members
- d) Deferred Members
- e) Pensioners
- f) Scheme Employers
- g) Other Bodies

2.2 The key features of the strategy are as follows:

a) Governance

The Nottinghamshire Pensions Funds continue to report on all aspects of administration, investments, and funding strategies to the Pensions Committee, the Administration Sub Committee, and the Investment Sub Committee. At the annual meeting of the pensions funds held every October, officers explain to the representatives of the employing authorities and trade unions the funds' accounts and investment performance. At this meeting, guest speakers are also invited to provide updates on current themes within the LPGS.

b) Website Development (Pension Fund)

The website (<http://www.nottspf.org.uk/>) was launched in July 2007 to inform and educate all stakeholders of the LGPS. They include active members, councillors, deferred members, pensioners, dependants, and employers. Through feedback, and on-going development, other interactive features have

been added for the benefit of the member, e.g. Benefit Calculator, Additional Regular Pension Contributions, and Contribution Calculators. It is proposed, that subject to approval by the ICT Strategy Board and the Pensions Committee, the pensions office purchase the Axis (Pensions Administration System) Internet Member Self Service module which would provide an electronic mechanism to enable scheme members to access their own data, update personal details, and undertake benefit modelling and estimates of benefits. This will increase the flexibility in the way administrators communicate with members and provide greater and faster access to more information.

c) Website Development (Employer)

A separate micro-site has been developed for employers and was launched in June 2009. This website (<http://employers.nottspf.org.uk/>) provides guidance for employing organisations who participate in the Nottinghamshire Pension Funds. The aim of the site is to make the content relevant and accessible and assist with the administration procedures and interpretation of the LGPS regulations. It is proposed, that subject to approval by the ICT Strategy Board and the Pensions Committee, the pensions office purchase the Axis (Pensions Administration System) Internet Employer Self Service module which would provide an electronic mechanism for the employer to undertake administration of its members' records and to produce its own estimates and management information reports. This would increase the flexibility in the way administrators and employers communicate and provide greater and faster access to information.

d) Helpline

The Pensions Helpline is serviced by the Pensions Office on a daily basis and 90% plus of calls from members and external organisations are dealt with instantly. It is scheduled for this service to be transferred to the County Council's Customer Service Centre by the end of December 2009. This would allow general calls on the scheme to be taken by the centre and for any case specific queries to be dealt by the Pensions Office.

e) Nest Egg

The bright and informative newsletter, Nest Egg, is now in its 20th edition, and is sent twice yearly to all active members, deferred members, and pensioners of the fund. This publication is sent to approximately 73500 members and informs the scheme member, in plain English, of issues related to the pension scheme, e.g., complex regulation, fund performance, meeting dates/times, etc. The 20th edition is scheduled to be despatched on 7 December 2009.

The publication is sent to all members in hard copy. While this provides good accessibility it does not take advantage of advances in new technology. In the past, comments have been received querying whether Nest Egg could be distributed electronically or placed on the website. With these comments in mind and to improve the cost effectiveness of the publication, it is proposed to

make more use of the funds' website, employers' website, and electronic mail technology. Therefore, it is proposed that future editions of Nest Egg will be distributed as follows:

Active Members (35,000) - Nest Egg to be made available electronically via the employer intranet website/distribution and via the pensions fund website. Where a personalised copy is required, it will be sent via e-mail or by post.

Deferred Members (18,000) - Nest Egg to be made available electronically on the pensions fund website, and where a personalised copy is required, then it can be sent via e-mail or by post.

Pensioners (20500) - Nest Egg to continue to be sent by post, however, where e-mail addresses are made available a copy to be sent by electronic mail.

An article will be placed in issue 20 detailing the proposed changes noted above, and a form included for members to notify the Pensions Office of their requirements, if they wish to receive an issue by post or by electronic mail.

It is to be noted however that in compliance with The Occupational Pension Schemes (Disclosure of Information) Regulations 1996, the funds are required to notify all members and beneficiaries (except excluded persons) of any change in relation to the scheme. Therefore, where a situation arises, then appropriate members will be notified in writing of the change, e.g. a special edition of Nest Egg was issued to all active members in summer 2008 notifying them of the 'New Look' scheme.

f) Annual Benefit Statements

The personal LGPS Annual Benefit statements for active members, deferred members and councillors, have been further developed in terms of presentation and information, taking into account member feedback. They are sent annually to inform the member of their current and future value of benefits. It is proposed that further work be undertaken with the Department of Works & Pensions in order for a statement detailing a members' state pension value be sent with the LGPS Annual benefit statement.

g) Client Liaison

The Client Liaison function liaises with scheme employers on a range of LGPS matters, including: the organisation of events for scheme members; the development of improved communication methods between the Pensions Office and its members/employers; the provision of support and training for employers and the review and improvement of information and administrative systems. Since January 2008, the Client Liaison Team has undertaken 168 events, which include the following:

Roadshows and stands	34
Employer meetings	20

Induction and pre-retirement	35
Presentations	79

An important factor in the design and delivery of pensions roadshows/events at employer venues is that they are tailored to meet the needs of the individual employer and their employees. The team also works in partnership with the funds' AVC providers, Prudential and Scottish Widows, who attend most organised pension events.

The team has undertaken face to face contact with over 5000 members (12.5% active members of the funds) at employer venues. A range of innovative communication methods have been used. They include:

- a) PowerPoint presentations to members with Question & Answer sessions;
- b) DVD showing at roadshows/events of the LGPS to members;
- c) Meetings with employers to inform of the important aspects of the LGPS;
- d) Workshops with employers to train representatives on the administrative requirements of the LGPS. An employer guide and an end of year procedure guide have been developed to assist the employer in undertaking their responsibilities;
- e) Stands at staff conferences to discuss issues with members/prospective members the LGPS
- f) One-to-one sessions with members at roadshows, where they can discuss issues relating to their membership, but also view their records, and have a retirement estimate calculated and printed for their information;
- g) LGPS slot on induction courses across the county at employer venues to inform new employees of the LGPS;
- h) Documents in braille format for members who are blind or partially sighted;
- i) Translators are available at pensions roadshows/events for members who are hard of hearing; and
- j) Attending venues outside of normal working hours, e.g. Elderly Persons' Homes, Community Homes, to inform members about the LGPS.

A range of promotional material and literature has been produced (<http://www.nottspf.org.uk/index/members/schemeguides.htm>) for members, which are also used at the different pension events and roadshows, for example, specific guides and fact sheets on how the LGPS works. All the material contains clear information about the LGPS and advertises the

pension office telephone helpline number and website address. It is proposed that the Client Liaison Team continues and progresses with the communications work noted above.

h) Partnership

Liaison with the Trade Unions allows the Pensions Office to ensure that the details of the LGPS's availability are brought to their members' attention. The management of the Pensions Office regularly attend various national and regional forums to share issues of common interest and develop and establish best practice, i.e. the National Information Forum, and the East Midlands Pensions Officer Group. The Pensions Manager attends the annual Pension Managers conference to discuss various common and pertinent issues. The meeting of the Additional Voluntary Contribution (AVC) Providers are also attended on a regular basis to discuss various issues, and to, as required, circulate information to scheme members. The AVC Providers play a key part in our communications, especially in terms of their attendance at roadshows and pensions events, but also, specific pensions bulletins e.g. additional contributions, are developed with them and sent to scheme members, with their organisations absorbing member queries/questions and the cost of publications. It is proposed that the Pensions Office continues and progresses the partnership work on pensions matters.

i) Benchmarking

The Pensions Office is a member of the Pensions Benchmarking Club which is run by the Institute of Public Finance. The Pensions Office provides information on membership numbers and administration costs and subsequently benchmark the fund's administration costs and service with all members and specified members of the Club. All pertinent information from the annual benchmarking club report is made available in the funds' annual report.

j) Collaboration

Staff from the Pensions Office undertakes visits to Comparator Administering Authorities across the country to learn and share new practices and systems, and to facilitate new ideas and solutions which have a common goal. In September '09, a meeting of the five East Midlands and three Midlands administering authorities took place to discuss close collaboration work on a range of pensions areas including technical/regulatory issues, communications material, systems administration, training; and annual benefit statements. It is proposed that the Pensions Office maximises the opportunities potentially available through this group in terms of providing high quality and consistent service to its stakeholders on a cost effective basis.

3.0 Policy Review

3.1 This statement will be kept under review and will be revised following any material change in the governance arrangements of the pension funds.