

Communication strategy statement

Introduction

Under the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013 [SI 2013/2356], each administering authority in England and Wales must prepare, maintain and publish a statement setting out their policy on communicating with members, members' representatives, future members and employers whose employees are members in the fund.

This document represents the Communication Strategy of the Somerset Council Pension Fund. This strategy will be continually reviewed to make sure it provides for effective and efficient communication with the range of stakeholders in the Fund.

Peninsula Pensions is a shared service with Devon County Council and provides the administration of the LGPS on behalf of Somerset Council Pension Fund. Communication may be from/with Peninsula Pensions or Somerset Council as appropriate.

Purpose of this document

The Somerset Council Pension Fund encourages engagement between members and employers and its officers and representatives. The sharing of information amongst all stakeholders promotes good fund governance and fund management as well as developing a greater understanding of the complexities of planning for retirement.

This Communication Strategy Statement describes the intentions, processes and practices that facilitate good communication between all parties related to or engaged with the Fund and summarises the methods of connecting the stakeholders with information about personal benefits and the operation of the Somerset Council Pension Fund.

Occasionally different methods of communication will be deployed as circumstances require. This Communication Strategy Statement does not limit the methods that may be used by the Fund to produce effective communication with stakeholders.

How the Fund connects with stakeholders

The Fund uses a range of communication channels and when deciding which to use consideration is given to the message, it's customers, and the cost to the Fund. Each time, the aim is to use the most appropriate and efficient means for connecting with stakeholders, whilst delivering concise, clear and accurate information.

To contain administration costs and embrace the use of technology, the fund aims to communicate as much as possible electronically. This helps to ensure that the Fund maintains contact with members and removes the need for member tracing services. However, members are given the option to elect to receive communication via other means.

Here are some of the common communication channels provided:

Online information sources

The Somerset Council Pension Fund has made information available electronically for access by members and employers. The most efficient source of information are the Pensions page on the Somerset Council website and Peninsula Pensions website

- a) The Somerset Council Pension Fund: - <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/finance-performance-and-legal/pensions/>

This website provides useful and concise information about the Fund, including the:

- Annual Report and Accounts – including the annual financial statements
- Investment Strategy Statement

- b) Peninsula Pensions: - <https://www.peninsulapensions.org.uk>

The Peninsula Pensions website provides administrative information and guidance to employers as well as anyone who may be thinking of joining, is already a member, or may be a previous member or a pensioner member.

Member benefit information

After registration on the Member Self Service Portal members may:

- view their current benefit information
- model their own projected benefit calculations
- • update personal details
- • add or update Expression of Wish information
- • view pay slips, P60s and annual benefits statements
- • view newsletters
- • print nomination and other forms for completion
- • Interact with the administrator and raise questions or to upload or send documentation
- • find out about methods of increasing future retirement benefits through options like Additional Voluntary Contributions and Additional Pension Contributions

Employer information and administration guidance:

There is also a section for employers on the Peninsula Pensions website: <https://www.peninsulapensions.org.uk/employers/>

Employers can obtain guidance and information on how to interact with the administrator to pay contributions, process member information (have benefits paid and access to forms and documents) and the practicalities of Outsourcing Services.

- c) The Local Government Pension Scheme website

The LGPS web pages: <https://www.lgpsmember.org/> contain information about many aspects of the overarching LGPS arrangements useful to members and employers.

Annual Benefit Statements, Pensioner Pay Advice and P60

Active contributory members and deferred members have online access to their annual benefit statement showing current and prospective values of member's benefits.

Pensioners receive pay advices in April and May each year. These show the effect of the annual pension increase and will include a P60 tax document summarising pay and the tax deducted from it for the previous year.

A pay slip is also issued to pensioners if there has been a change of more than £1 to their net monthly income.

Newsletters

The Fund provides regular electronic newsletters:

a) Pensions Line Newsletter

Peninsula Pensions distributes monthly Pensions Line Newsletters which is the main method of informing employers of regulatory updates as well as their responsibilities and processes to be followed to assist the smooth administration of the Fund. These are found at: <https://www.peninsulapensions.org.uk/employers/pensions-line-newsletters/>

b) Member Newsletters

The Fund regularly publishes member and pensioner newsletters sent directly to members. These inform about investment performance, investment and ESG strategy, changes to pensions legislation or improvements to the methods of obtaining their personal retirement benefit information.

Employer Liaison

Employer Communication Officers support employers in:

- Administrative and actuarial funding queries and liaison with other parties to provide information and advice to employers.
- Training and advice which are provided to Fund employers about administrative activities and tasks, tailored to the specific needs of any employer as well as actuarial and funding information.

The Fund also holds an annual Pension Liaison Officer Group meeting for all employers, set at a technical level, providing opportunity for the exchange views and news and addressing technical benefit issues, as well as changes to the Fund Administration Strategy.

Annual Employers Meeting

Employer organisations can meet senior Investment and Pension Fund managers at the Annual Employers Meeting. Pitched at the employer decision makers, these meetings provide formal and informal opportunities to exchange information and ask questions about fund performance, actuarial issues, changes to workplace pension's law, and developments in the reform of public pensions and LGPS specifically.

Annual Fund Report

The Somerset Council Pension Fund's Annual Report and Accounts is available at:
<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/finance-performance-and-legal/pensions/>

Archived annual reports and accounts can also be accessed via this website.

Communications with key governance partners

Pensions governance is all about monitoring pension schemes to make sure they are run in their members' interests. Officers of the Somerset Council Investments team and Peninsula Pensions work closely with the Pension Fund Committee and the Pension Fund Board to ensure that representatives are fully informed about Pension Fund matters and that they are fully supported in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities and able to make critical decisions.

The Governance Policy and Compliance Statement: outlines the arrangements for the Somerset Council Pension Fund as maintained by Somerset Council in accordance with Regulation 55 of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013. Under this provision all LGPS Funds in England and Wales are required to produce a Governance Compliance Statement, revise it following any material change in their delegation arrangements and publish it.

The Pension Fund Committee

The Pension Fund Committee fulfils the duties of Somerset Council as the Administering Authority of the Pension Fund.

The committee is made up of representatives from Somerset Council, other non-council employers, and members.

Pension Fund Committee meetings are held at least quarterly and are open to the public as observers, other than where information is exempt from public disclosure under the Local Government Act 1972. Committee agendas, reports and minutes are made available on the Somerset Council website at:
<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=197>

The Pension Fund Board

The Board meets four times a year, with meetings falling roughly a month after those of the Pension Fund Committee.

Board agendas, reports and minutes are made available on the Somerset Council website at:
<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=198>

Peninsula Pensions Communication documentation

This document does not attempt to address or include all the Somerset Council Pension Fund administrative communications matters. Information relating to these topics are available on the Peninsula Pensions Website: <https://www.peninsulapensions.org.uk>

Complaint handling

The Fund makes every effort to get things right so that members do not have any complaints. However, should you have a grievance please contact us to resolve issues as quickly as possible.

Members who are not satisfied with any decision made should contact Peninsula Pensions in the first instance either by phone, letter or using the contact us page on the Peninsula Pensions website. The Fund will always aim to resolve issues informally though there is a formal complaint process known as the Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure. This process has two stages though most complaints are resolved at the first stage. Any complaint made will be treated seriously and considered thoroughly and fairly.

More information can be found on the Peninsula Pensions webpage:

https://www.peninsulapensions.org.uk/document/https-devoncc-sharepoint-com-b-s-publicdocs-corporate-eanpk4t4icrnluvq_zrrwgcbgnljod0b-9xnve1y0wwxsqeixldq/

Data protection

The Somerset Council Pension Fund Administering Authority is a Data Controller under the General Data Protection Regulations. This means the Fund stores, holds and manages member personal data in line with statutory requirements to enable us to provide pension administration services.

To enable the Fund to carry out its statutory duty, it is required to share member information with certain bodies, but only do so in limited circumstances.

For more information about how the Fund holds member data, where this is shared and what rights members have, please see the privacy notice:

<https://www.peninsulapensions.org.uk/employers/guidance/privacy-and-data-protection/>

Rights to information

This document outlines the Fund's strategy for communications with members, participating employer organisations and the wider LGPS world.

The Fund predominantly uses electronic forms of communication in the interests of economy, efficiency and environmental issues. Members have the opportunity to receive paper copies by post. Face-to-face and telephone communications will continue to be important channels for members to interact with the Fund and vice-versa.

There is nothing in this Strategy Statement that affects rights to access or receive information under the Freedom of Information Act or the Disclosure requirements of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) available at:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/finance-performance-and-legal/your-rights-on-the-information-we-hold-about-you/>

Summary of methods of sharing Pension Fund information with Members

| Expectation | Product | Source | Frequency | Updated |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| Knowledge of benefits Fund information and news Fund contact details | Information | Somerset Council and Peninsula Pensions websites Peninsula Pensions Member self-service portal | Available online | Within one month of significant changes |
| Personal benefits and information Fund and transfer credit information for prospective and new members | Welcome letter at entry Member self-service portal Annual member benefit statement Annual pensioner statement, P60 | Peninsula Pensions Peninsula Pensions website | New members: on entry Active members: annual via email or web link Pensioners: annual pension pay slips by post | As soon as practical after event |
| Information about Fund finances, triennial actuarial valuation, investment performance, and general investment principles | Fund Annual Report Fund annual financial accounts | Somerset Council website | Annual | When audit, statutory and actuarial work completed |
| Ways to improve personal pension benefits | Information about Additional Voluntary Contributions and Additional Pension Contributions | Peninsula Pensions website | Available online | Within one month of significant changes |
| Information about pension matters | Members newsletter | Email and post and websites | Annual | As required |

| Expectation | Product | Source | Frequency | Updated |
|--|-----------------------|---------------|---|---|
| Information about pension benefits in payment – after retirement | Pensioners pay advice | | Annual or within one month of any notable change April & May annually, including P60 for previous year | Within one month of significant changes |

Summary of methods of sharing Fund information with employers

| Expectation | Source | Frequency |
|---|--|--|
| Fund literature, guides, forms; policies and reports | Peninsula Pensions website | Updated as required |
| Information about changes in legislation and revisions to fund requirements. | Pensions Line newsletters Quarterly and special bulletins Fund website | Updated as required |
| Information about fund finances | Fund annual report & financial accounts | Annual and archived reports via the Somerset Council website |
| Information about the Fund's progress, the pension landscape, developments, news, and information exchange. | Annual Employers Meeting | Annual and unique events according to need |
| Information about actuarial matters including funding levels and employer contribution rates. | Annual Employers Meeting | As required |
| Technical information about administrative activities and tasks | Specialist Training Pension Liaison Officer Group | On demand Annual and as need arises |
| Enrolment of employees | Information, template letters, forms, and flowcharts Project guidance | Online Dedicated specialist support |
| Access to Investment & Pension Fund Committee papers and minutes | Somerset Council website | Available online |

Arrangements for reviewing this strategy

This strategy statement will be regularly reviewed by the Pension Fund Committee. If we need to make any significant changes, we will consult all employers whose employees are members of the fund and publish the amended strategy.

**Approved by the Pensions Committee
Somerset Council Pension Fund
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