



<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Paper</u>
Pensions Committee 30 June 2009 10.00am	<b>12</b>  Public	<b>E</b>

## COMMUNICATIONS POLICY STATEMENT

**Responsible Officer** Graham Chidlow  
e-mail: [graham.chidlow@shropshire-cc.gov.uk](mailto:graham.chidlow@shropshire-cc.gov.uk)

Tel: (01743)  
252072

Fax (01743)  
252184

### Summary

The report provides Members with an update to the Communications Policy Statement that the Fund is required to publish under Local Government Pensions Scheme (LGPS) Regulations. It formally outlines the communication channels that are used by the Fund to communicate with its stakeholders.

### Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- A. Agree the revised Communications Policy Statement.

## REPORT

### Background

1. The Shropshire Fund has for many years used innovative communication techniques to communicate with its wide range of stakeholders. The Fund's communication activities are formally outlined in its Communications Policy.
2. The Fund published its first Communications Policy in February 2006 in accordance with the Local Government Pension Regulations introduced at that time. The Fund is required to periodically review its content.
3. The creation of Shropshire Council, as Administering Authority for the Fund, on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 and developments in the communication activities of the Fund necessitates revisions to the Communications Policy Statement.

## Purpose of Communications Policy Statement

4. Regulations 106B of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 1997 require an administering authority to prepare, maintain and publish a written statement setting out the policy concerning communications with:-

(a) *Members;*

(b) *Representatives of members;*

(c) *Prospective members*

(d) *Employing authorities*

The regulations require the statement to be regularly revised and updated.

## Revised Communications Policy

5. The Communications Policy has been updated to incorporate changes made to the communication techniques used by the Fund and the creation of the unitary council. A revised Communications Policy is attached in Appendix A for Members approval.
6. The Communications Policy will be published and made available on the website and in hard copy.

<b>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</b> Pensions Committee, 28 <sup>th</sup> May 2008, Item 12, Paper D, Communication Policy Statement.
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<b>Human Rights Act Appraisal</b>
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The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998
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<b>Environmental Appraisal</b>
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N/A
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<b>Risk Management Appraisal</b>
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Risk management is considered as part of on-going communication activity.
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<b>Community / Consultations Appraisal</b>
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N/A
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<b>Cabinet Member</b>
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N/A
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<b>Local Member</b>
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N/A
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<b>Appendices</b>
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A - Communication Policy Statement
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## Communication Policy Statement

This Statement has been prepared by Shropshire Council (the Administering Authority) to set out the communications strategy for the Shropshire County Pension Fund (the Scheme), in accordance with Regulation 67 of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Administration) Regulations 2008.

Shropshire Council, in its capacity as Administering Authority deals with over 70 employers and approximately 15,000 active scheme members, 9,300 deferred members and 7,500 pensioners in relation to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). The delivery of benefits involves communication with the membership and a whole range of other interested parties. This statement provides an overview of how we communicate and how we intend to measure whether our communications are successful.

This statement is effective as of 1 April 2009. Any enquiries in relation to this Communication Policy Statement should be made to:

Debbie Sharp, Pensions Manager,  
Shropshire Council, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire  
SY2 6ND

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Shropshire County Pension Fund aims to provide an efficient and effective pensions administration service for employing organisations, scheme members, and other stakeholders.
- 1.2 The Fund is committed to providing comprehensive information to all stakeholders, through the most appropriate communication methods. Effective communication cannot be left to chance and this document outlines the ways in which the Fund aims to meet this objective.
- 1.3 The Shropshire County Pension Fund has experience of using innovative communication techniques and intends to continue using a wide variety of communication tools in the future.

### 2. Principles of Communication

- 2.1 The Fund has adopted five key principles that support all of its communication. The Fund is committed to ensuring that :-
  - Communication is factual and presented in plain language
  - Communication is designed in a manner appropriate to its audience
  - Communication is looked upon as involving a dialogue with others
  - Communication exploits the developments and improvements in new technology
  - Communication is planned, co-ordinated and evaluated.

- 2.2 The Fund makes communication materials available in large print, Braille, audio tape and different languages on request.
- 2.3 The Local Government Pension Scheme is a useful tool in attracting employees to work in local government. For Employers it is a key part of their recruitment and retention package. Pension Services are also the last, and often the only, link between former staff members and their employers. The Fund therefore has an important role in ensuring that it communicates effectively with all its stakeholders.
- 2.4 Pension Services work to maintain a thorough knowledge of the regulations in order to retain the confidence of its members. Pension Services should always be the first place staff members turn for pension information during their working life and in retirement.
- 2.5 Pension Services are committed to responding promptly to members' requests for information, whether it's by face to face communication, e-mail or by letter. Information is provided within set timescales.

### **3. How does the Fund Communicate with Stakeholders?**

#### **3.1 Printed Literature**

The Fund produces all paper based communications in a corporate style, be that brochures, guides or individual letters. All key communications are produced in a printed format and made available to members as appropriate.

#### **3.2 Enquiry Counter**

For those members who prefer 'face to face' communication the Fund's office are centrally situated in Shrewsbury and are easily accessible by public transport from all areas of Shropshire.

The Council has an enquiry counter on the ground floor from which Pension Staff can be contacted during working hours. A private interview room is available if required if members wish to discuss confidential matters.

Appointments can be made to discuss specific pension options or problems, but generally this is not necessary as a member of the team is generally available.

#### **3.3 Telephone**

All Fund communications have a published telephone number. The number may be our general helpdesk number (01743) 252130 or the direct telephone number of the staff member responsible for carrying out your request.

#### **3.4 Internet**

The Fund has a website ([www.2shrop.net/shropshire-county-pension-fund](http://www.2shrop.net/shropshire-county-pension-fund)) that is extremely popular amongst members and other stakeholders as a source of information. Electronic copies of Fund Literature, policies and

reports are available for download: such as this Communications Policy Statement.

The Fund provides a number of online forms and secure areas on the site which allow Scheme members to access their own records, calculate benefit estimates, projections and to update home address information.

### 3.5 Fax, Mail and E-Mail

For general Communications, the Fund has a central FAX number, e-mail account and postal address.

### 3.6 Presentations & Courses

The Fund delivers standard or tailored presentations on a wide range of subjects for both Employers and their staff. These presentations are provided at the request of Employers at geographically convenient locations by Fund staff and other specialists.

Presentations are held around the county to keep members informed of any changes that may alter their benefits. Presentations are in PowerPoint and use other media technology, including DVDs and CD Roms.

### 3.7 Roadshows / Consultations

The Fund organise 'Roadshow' events. They are run on a consultation/surgery basis with half-hour time slots for members and prospective members. This is particularly useful for employers with small numbers of staff, although all our employers are catered for.

Our membership is dispersed over a large rural area and therefore these consultations are an ideal way to reach them.

### 3.8 Newsletters

Pension Planning is the Fund's in-house newsletter published throughout the year. With an audience of Scheme and eligible non-members the newsletter aims to provide topical news, articles and the latest information about the Scheme and pensions in general.

In TOUCH is the Fund's in-house newsletter for retired members. Published twice a year, the newsletter proves to be a useful way of providing up dates on relevant changes in legislation, topical news, competitions and members articles.

Deferred members receive a newsletter with their Annual Benefit Statement, again providing updates on relevant changes in legislation, topical news and reminding the member to keep the Fund notified of any future changes in address.

### 3.9 Annual Report, Accounts & Meeting

The aim of the report is to publish the audited accounts of the Fund and important issues affecting the Fund over the previous twelve months, along with detail on both investment and administration performance.

The Report & Accounts are distributed at the Annual Meeting that we hold in November, made available on our website and an abridged version sent to all active, deferred and retired members.

All retired, active and deferred members are invited to attend the Annual Meeting. The meeting gives members the opportunity to meet the Pension Committee and the members of staff who administer the Scheme on a one to one basis. The Fund is committed to making the meeting, widely accessible to the membership and ensuring its content is of both interesting and relevant. The Annual Meeting aims to cover scheme benefits, valuation position and investments in an interesting and informative manner.

## 4. Who are the Stakeholders of the Fund and what is provided to them?

### 4.1 Active & Deferred Scheme Members

#### Certificate of Membership

Within thirteen weeks of joining the Fund, each Member receives a Statutory Notification detailing the information recorded on the Pension Administration System about them, such as date they joined the Scheme and whether or not they have transferred service into the Fund from elsewhere. A new notification is issued every time a member's record is amended.

#### Annual Benefit Statement

An Annual Benefit Statement is sent direct to the home address of all current and deferred members. The Statements include various pension details including the current value of benefits within the scheme. The format of our statements is continually being developed to provide members with information they require in a clear and concise manner.

#### Scheme Literature

A large range of literature is produced by the Administering Authority and is made available to both Employers and Scheme members. The literature includes Scheme guides, Information sheets, an Interactive CD Rom and Frequently Asked Questions leaflets.

A different guide is available for councillors to whom different rules apply.

#### Retirement Booklet

All active members on reaching retirement receive a comprehensive booklet providing information on the Scheme and the retirement process.

## 4.2 Prospective Scheme Members

### Scheme Booklet

The Fund produces an information booklet on the Local Government Pension Scheme. This should be provided by Scheme Employers to all new employees as part of their letter of employment, terms and conditions.

### Scheme Website

The Fund's website contains specific information on joining the Scheme and the benefits of membership

### Promotional Campaigns

Periodically the Fund produces dedicated marketing literature that is sent to those who choose not to join or opt to leave the Scheme. This literature promotes the benefits of having an occupational pension and gives an option to join the Scheme.

### Pay Advice

Periodically, the Fund in collaboration with Scheme Employers identifies prospective members and utilises the payroll process to distribute targeted communication.

### Corporate Induction Courses

Officers of the Fund attend Corporate Induction Courses in order to present to prospective members the benefits of joining the LGPS.

### Other Employer Communications

The increasing role of communication within all organisations means that more Employers have staff newsletters, intranets and other broadcast communications. The Fund actively works to provide their employees with the best information and opportunities in regard to the Scheme.

## 4.3 Retired Members

### Pay Advices

The Fund issues monthly pay advices to Scheme pensioners. They are used as a communication mechanism, as messages can be placed on the payslips and they also reinforce the need for retired members and their families to ensure that in the event of death or change of address the Fund is notified promptly.

### P60s

Every retired member and/or their dependents will receive a P60 each year normally at the end of April.

## Annual Pension Increase Letter

Retired members will receive a pension increase letter each year to inform them of the inflation increase on their pension. This letter will include details of the monetary value of their revised pension and details of the amount to be paid in April.

## Retired Members Meeting

Every summer a dedicated meeting is held for our retired members. These include a presentation from an outside speaker on a non-pension related subject.

## Cards & Flowers

The Fund sends Birthday Cards and Flowers to all our retired members' age 100 years and over.

## Validation – Pensioners Living Abroad

The Fund undertakes a regular exercise conducted through correspondence in order to establish the continued existence of pensioners living abroad.

### 4.4 Employing Authorities

#### Employer Meetings & Training Sessions

Meetings and training sessions are arranged for employers on a regular basis. They are used to communicate major issues with employers, specifically benefit regulation changes, employer contribution rates and the funding level of the Shropshire Fund.

#### Employers' Guide

An Employers' Guide is issued to all employers, detailing the processes, procedures and forms required to effectively discharge their pension administration responsibilities.

Each employer has named contacts that perform the duty of Pensions Liaison Officer. The primary contact for the Fund, this person is contactable by e-mail, telephone and in-person to assist the Fund in communication and supporting members.

#### Employers Bulletin

A technical newsletter/bulletin is periodically sent out to all employers. It aims to inform employers on common problems, issues, queries and regulatory changes. The bulletin is also used to communicate any consultations in regard to policy and regulations.



## Data Transmission

A secure system of data transmission has been developed which allows employers to forward information directly to the Fund in order for the administering authority to update their records.

### 4.5 Pension Committee & Fund Staff

#### Pensions Committee

The Committee is comprised of 9 members, representing the principal employing authorities, trade union representatives and a retired member representative.

The Fund has an ongoing training programme for Members and Officers to ensure that decision making is on an informed basis.

Knowledge building and training is provided via the Fund's Officers, advisors and external training courses. An annual training day is held for all Pension Committee Members and their substitutes.

Pension Committee reports are available on the council's website and in hard copy at customer information points around the country.

#### Service Management Team

The Director of Resources acts as Scheme Administrator and is responsible for the Pensions Administration and Investment Teams.

The Pensions Management Team meets on a monthly basis to discuss items in relation to the running of the team and regulation changes. It comprises the Pensions Manager and Team Leaders. A similar monthly meeting is held between investment staff. Any items raised from such meetings can be escalated to the Scheme Administrator.

#### Team Meetings

Team Meetings involving all staff are held on a monthly basis.

Notes of all meetings and items arising from such meetings are passed through to the Head of Finance (Treasury & Pensions) and to the Scheme Administrator if necessary.

#### Training

The Fund seeks to continually improve the ability of staff to communicate effectively and to understand the importance of good communication. Both general and pension-specific training is provided to all staff as part of the Fund's commitment to staff development. The Fund conducts performance appraisals for its entire staff.

## Intranet and E-Mail

Each member of staff has access to e-mail and the Fund's Intranet which contains electronic copies of many of the Key documents, manuals, minutes and circulars.

### 4.6 Communication with Other Bodies

#### Trade Unions

Trade Unions are valuable ambassadors for the Pension Scheme. They ensure that details of the Local Government Pension Scheme's availability are brought to their members' attention and assist in negotiations under TUPE, in order to ensure, whenever possible, continued access to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

#### Press & Media

The Fund in conjunction with the Council's Communications Unit, actively engages with the press and other media organisations in order to ensure clarity, facts and fair representation.

#### National Information Forum (NIF)

Representatives of the Fund attend regular meetings of the National Information Forum, which was the main force in establishing best practice in Communications with members.

#### Shrewsbury Regional Pension Officers Group (SPOG)

The Shropshire County Pension Fund (SCPF) hosts the Shrewsbury Pension Officers' Group which meets on a quarterly basis. The group which comprises a number of local authority funds discuss technical queries and legislation matters of common interest.

#### Investment Practitioner Group

The Fund has an active involvement in the Investment Practitioner Group for the region where common investment issues between Funds are discussed.

#### Software Provider Group

Members of the team attend meetings with the pension's administration software provider, to ensure the computerised administration system is able to deal with regulation changes when they occur.

### 4.7 Measure of Successful Communication

#### Service Quality Questionnaire

A questionnaire is issued to members with various correspondences, including retirements and benefit quotes. This allows the fund to evaluate the service provided. Survey responses are collated and reviewed twice a year.

### Employer Satisfaction Survey

A survey is issued to employer's, periodically to allow the fund to evaluate the service and methods of communication provided to employers. The responses are collated and used to identify any employer requirements and possible areas for improvement.

### Compliments, Complaints and Comments

Any compliments, complaints are comments made in letter, e-mail or verbal format are recorded and reported back to the Director of Resources on a monthly basis. The fund aim to always to learn from the feedback received and continue to make improvements to the service provided.

## 5. Confidentiality

5.1 To protect any personal information held on computer the Administering Authority is registered under the data Protection Act 1988. This allows members to check that their details held are accurate. The Fund may, if it chooses, pass certain details to a third party, if the third party is carrying out an administrative function of the Fund.

5.2 Members who wish to apply to access their data on Data Protection Grounds should contact the Data Protection Officer on (01743) 252774.

## 6. Further Information

Further information can be obtained from:-

Pensions Helpline (01743) 252130

Email: [pensions@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:pensions@shropshire.gov.uk)

Website: [www.2shrop.net/shropshire-county-pension-fund](http://www.2shrop.net/shropshire-county-pension-fund)

## FUND PUBLICATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

<b>Communication Document/Tool</b>	<b>When Issued</b>	<b>Available To</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>When Reviewed</b>
Pension Scheme Booklet	Upon commencing employment/ when requested	Prospective/Active/Deferred/Retired Members	Paper/Website/Intranet	As regulations change
Brief Pension Scheme Booklet	Upon commencing employment/ when requested	Prospective/Active/Deferred/Retired Members	Paper/Website/Intranet	As regulations change
Short Guide Information Sheet	Upon commencing employment/ when requested	Prospective/Active/Deferred/Retired Members	Paper/Website/Intranet	As regulations change
F.A.Q Leaflets	Upon request	Active/Deferred/Retired Members	Paper/Website/Intranet	As regulations change/new leaflets introduced regularly
Benefit Statements	Annually (rolling programme)	Active/Deferred Members	Paper	Annually
Encouraging New Members Literature	Annually	Prospective Members	Paper-Flyer	Annually
Members Newsletter	As Required	Active/Deferred Members	Paper/Website	As regulations change/as required
Pension Consultations	As Required	Active Members	Face to face/Paper	As required
Induction and Retirement Packs	As Required	Prospective/Active/Deferred/Retired Members	Paper	As regulations change/as required
Service Quality Survey	Continually	Active/Deferred/Retired Members	Paper	As required
CD ROMs and DVD Presentations	As Required	Prospective/Active/Deferred/Retired Members	CD Rom/DVD/Presentation	As regulations change/as required
Presentations/Road shows	As Required	Prospective/Active Members	Presentation/Face to face	As required
Induction Courses	Upon commencing employment/ when requested	Prospective/Active Members	Face to face	As required

## **FUND PUBLICATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

<b>Communication Document/Tool</b>	<b>When Issued</b>	<b>Available To</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>When Reviewed</b>
Membership Certificate	Upon commencing employment/ when requested	Active Members	Paper	As regulations change/as required
Retirement Courses	When Requested	Retiring Members	Face to face	As required
Internet and Intranet	Continually	All Members/ Employers/Fund Managers/Non Scheme Members	Website/ Intranet	Monthly
Annual Meeting	Annually (November)	All Members/ Employers/Fund Managers	Presentation/ Face to face	Annually
Annual Report	Annually	All Members/ Employers/Fund Managers	Paper/Website/ Intranet	Annually
Helpdesk	Continually (within Office Hours)	All Members/ Employers/Fund Managers	Face to face/ Telephone/ Paper/E-mail	As required
Correspondence	Continually (within Office Hours)	All Members/ Employers/Fund Managers	Face to face/ Telephone/ Paper/E-mail	As required
Pay Advice	Monthly	Pensioner Members	Paper/ Resource Link	Annually
P60s	Annually (April)	Pensioner Members	Paper/ Resource Link	Annually
Pensioner Newsletter	Biannually (April/October)	Pensioner Members	Paper/Website	Biannually
Retired Members Meeting and invitations	Annually (June)	Pensioner Members	Paper/Face to face/Website	Annually
Pensions Increase Correspondence	Annually (April)	Pensioner Members	Paper/Official Booklet	Annually
Age 100 Pensioners	As Required	Pensioner Members	Paper/Gift	As required

## **FUND PUBLICATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

<b>Communication Document/Tool</b>	<b>When Issued</b>	<b>Available To</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>When Reviewed</b>
Pensioners Living Abroad	Annually	Pensioner Members	Paper	Annually
Employers Guide	As Required	Employing Authorities	Paper	As regulations change/as required
Employers Bulletin	As Required	Employing Authorities	Paper/Website	As regulations change/as required
Employer Meetings and Training	As Required	Employing Authorities	Face to face/ Paper	As regulations change/as required
Service Level Agreement	Annually (February/March)	Employing Authorities	Paper	Annually
Employer Satisfaction Survey	As Required	Employing Authorities	Paper	Annually
Online Access to Pensions Administration	As Required	Employing Authorities	Electronic	As required
Data Transmission	As Required	Employing Authorities	Electronic	As required
Abridged Reports and Accounts	Annually (October)	All Members	Paper/Website/ Intranet	Annually
Valuation Report	Tri-Annually	Employing Authorities	Paper/Website	Triennially
Statement of Investment Principles	Annually	All Members	Website / Intranet	Annually
Corporate Governance & Responsible Engagement Reports	Quarterly	All Members	Website / Intranet	Quarterly
Pension Committee Training Day	Annually	Committee Members/ Fund Staff	Face to face/ Paper	Annually
Fund Staff Training and Meetings	Monthly/ as required	Fund Staff	Face to face/ Paper	As regulations change/as required

## **FUND PUBLICATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

<b>Communication Document/Tool</b>	<b>When Issued</b>	<b>Available To</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>When Reviewed</b>
Other Body Communications inc. SPOG, NIF, Media/Press, Trade Unions	As Required	All Relevant Bodies	Paper/Website/ Intranet/Face to face	As required