

Shropshire County Pension Fund

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY STATEMENT

Agreed by Pensions Committee on 26 June 2015



**SHROPSHIRE COUNTY
PENSION FUND**

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 61 of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Administration) Regulations 2013.

Shropshire Council, in its capacity as an Administering Authority deals with over 120 employers and approximately 15,000 scheme members, 13,000 deferred members and 10,000 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 26 June 2015 and the membership details were correct as of that date.

Any enquiries in relation to this Communications Policy Statement should be made to:

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

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.** The principal aim of the Shropshire County Pension Fund is to provide secure pensions, effectively and efficiently, administered at the lowest cost to the contributing employers.
- 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.

- 1.4.** The Fund is now part of a Joint Communications Group with neighbouring Local Government Pension Fund Authorities. Thus the funding and resourcing of elements or our communication service is shared, such as the development and production of newsletters and Annual Benefit Statements. This has already, and will continue to, provide Fund efficiency savings.
- 1.5.** The Fund Officers will endeavour to ensure that value for money and quality of service is obtained from sourcing both imaginative, cost effective designers and reliable printing departments.

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 takes on the developments and improvements in new technology and different channels.*
- *Communication is planned, Co-ordinated and evaluated*

- 2.2** The Fund will make every effort to make communication materials available in large print, Braille, audio tape and different languages if requested.
- 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, email or by letter. Information is provided within set timescales. Our turnaround time for dealing with requests is normally ten days.

3. HOW DOES THE FUND COMMUNICATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS?

3.1 Printed /Electronic Literature

Any paper or electronic based communications is produced using the Fund branding, be that newsletters, guides or individual letters.

3.2 Drop in Service

For those members who prefer 'face to face' communication the Fund's office is situated at the Shirehall and is easily accessible by public transport from all areas of Shropshire.

Appointments can be made to discuss specific pension options or problems, but generally this is not necessary as members of the team are available during office hours. If members do drop in, appointments held are confidential and private.

3.3 Telephone

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

3.4 Website

The Fund has a website (www.shropshirecountypensionfund.co.uk) 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 secure area on the site which allows Scheme members to access their own records, calculate benefit estimates, projections and to update home address

information. This is called Member Self Service or MSS.

3.5 Contacting the Fund by post or email

For general communications, the Fund has an email account and postal address. These details can be found on the back cover of this statement.

3.6 Email alerts

The Fund asks all new members for an email address and has made efforts to capture the email addresses of deferred and pensioner members. This is so all members can be sent out email notifications when there has been a significant update to the website or an upcoming event.

3.7 Presentations and 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.

3.8 Roadshows and Member Consultations

The Fund organises events on a consultation/surgery basis with time slots for members and prospective members. This is particularly useful for employers with small numbers of staff.

Fund membership is dispersed over a large rural area and therefore these consultations are an ideal way to reach members. These consultations are generally held after Annual Benefit Statements have been sent.

3.9 Newsletters

'Pension update' is the Fund's in-house newsletter and is sometimes produced in conjunction with our Joint Communications Group. This in-house newsletter is issued periodically. 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.

InTOUCH is the Funds in-house newsletter for retired members. Published twice a year, the newsletter proves to be a useful way of providing updates on relevant changes in legislation, topical news, competitions and member's articles.

Deferred members also receive a newsletter, normally sent with their Annual Benefit Statements. These newsletters are sent when information needs to be communicated to them, 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.

Newsletters or email bulletins are also issued to Scheme Employers frequently. These provide legislation, operational items and technical updates and support. They also advertise upcoming training and events.

Annual Report, Accounts & Meeting

The Annual report is a financial reporting document showing the Funds accounts over the previous twelve months, along with details on both investments and administration performance.

The report and accounts are the main focus of the Annual Meeting held in November.

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. Also, the Funds management team provide updates on the latest Fund news. The Fund is committed to making the meeting widely accessible to the membership and ensuring its content is of both interest and relevance. The Annual Meeting regularly covers scheme benefit changes, 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 provided to all active and deferred members. The statements include various pension details such as the current value of benefits, how they are calculated, and when they become payable. The format of the statements is continually being developed to provide members with the information they require in a clear and concise manner.

Scheme Literature

A large range of literature, including scheme guidance and frequently asked questions, is produced by the Fund and is made available to both Employers and Scheme members.

A different guide is available for councillors to whom different rules apply. Councillor members of the scheme also have a different section of the Funds website.

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 a Brief Scheme Guide 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 – some employers choose to email this to new employees.

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 to members who have opted out.

Corporate Induction Courses

Officers of the fund are invited to attend or to contribute to Corporate Inductions (including e-learning) for prospective members.

Other Employer Communications

The increasing role of communication within all organisations means that more employers have staff newsletters, intranets and other communication facilities. The Fund actively works to provide their employees with the best information and opportunities in regard to the Scheme and often provides information to be made available on intranets and websites.

4.3 Retired Members

Pay Advices

The Fund issues a pay advice slip to scheme pensioners only when net pension payments vary by £5 or more from the previous month.

Online access to Payslips and P60s

Members can view P60's and payslips by logging onto a secure area on the Fund website.

Combined P60 Payslip and P.I.

Every retired member and/or their dependents will receive a P60, Payslip and P.I. notification normally at the end of April.

The pension increase notification informs them of the inflation increase on their pension, if any.

Retired Members Meeting

Every summer a dedicated meeting is held for retired members. These include a presentation from an outside speaker on a non-pension related subject and an update on the latest pensions news.

Cards & Flowers

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

Validation - Retired Members 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 issues with employers, specifically benefit regulation changes, any administration changes, employer contribution rates and the funding level of the Shropshire Fund.

Employers' Guide

An Employers' Guide is available to all employers, detailing the processes, procedures and forms required to effectively discharge their pension administration responsibilities. The employers guide is held on the employers area of the website www.shropshirecountypensionfund.co.uk

Employers Bulletins

Regular email bulletins are periodically sent out to all employers. These aim to inform employers on latest news, issues, events and regulatory changes. The bulletin is also used to communicate any consultations in regard to policy and regulations.

Monthly returns and end of year procedure

There is data that employers must submit to the Pensions Team in respect of Scheme members on a monthly basis to ensure their pension record is accurate. The monthly return template can be found in the employers pages of the pension's website and the notes on completion are contained within the spreadsheet. The spreadsheet should be securely sent to the Pensions Team to update member records each month.

Each year employers are required to submit a year end return. Employers are emailed towards the end of the financial year with the year-end template and instructions for completion.

Some employers in the Fund are using a "middleware" facility called I-Connect that assists the fund and employers by improving the flow of member data between the two

parties. It is equipped for the 2014 CARE scheme requires and addresses automatic enrolment obligations together with minimizing the risk of fines from the Pension Regulator. The main cost of this system falls on the Pension Fund with a small cost to the employer.

4.5 Pension Committee & Fund Staff Pensions Committee

The Committee is comprised of 9 members representing the principal employing authorities, trade union representatives representing the Fund employees 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 www.shropshire.gov.uk and by following the link for 'Committees, meetings and decisions' and on the 'Pension Committee' page or at www.shropshirecountypensionfund.co.uk

Pensions Board

In accordance with the LGPS Governance Regulations 2015, a Pension Board has been introduced from 1 April 2015 to ensure effective governance and administration of the Scheme.

The Local Pension Board is be responsible for assisting Shropshire Council, the Scheme Manager, to: -

Secure compliance with:

- The Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations;
- Any other legislation relating to the governance and administration of the Scheme, and;
- Requirements imposed by The Pensions Regulator in relation to the Scheme, and; to ensure the effective governance and administration of the Scheme.

From the date of its set up on the 1st April 2015 the Board will be an oversight body and not decision making. It does not replace existing governance arrangements in place in the Shropshire County Pension Fund in respect of the administration of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

The Pension Board shall consist of 4 voting members and be constituted as follows:

- 2 employer representatives
- 2 scheme member representatives

Pension Board reports will be available on the council's website www.shropshire.gov.uk and by following the link for 'Committees, meetings and decisions' and on the 'Pension Board' page or at www.shropshirecountypensionfund.co.uk

Service Management Team

The Scheme Administrator (s 151 officer) is responsible for the Pensions Administration and Pension 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 Administration Manager and Team Leaders. A similar monthly meeting is held between the Head of Treasury & Pensions, the Pensions Administration manager and 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 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 storage drive which contains electronic copies of many of the Key documents, manuals, minutes and circulars.

Local Authority Pensions Web

All senior members of the pension's team have access to the Local Authority Pensions Web where information can be exchanged with other Local Authority Pension colleagues.

4.6 Communication with Other Bodies Mercer (Pension Fund Actuary)

The Fund performs and Actuarial Valuation every three years as required by the Regulations. Mercer also deals with Interim valuations when required and information and advice on a range of issues affecting the Fund, such as new employers, bulk transfers and regulatory changes.

Legal Advice

The Fund obtains legal advice from Shropshire Council as appropriate on benefits administration and investment matters. External legal advice is also obtained as and when required.

DCLG

The Fund communicates with the Department of Communities and Local Government (*DCLG*) while in consultation on proposals for change to the scheme and with regard to providing information under disclosure regulations.

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 member's 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.

Shrewsbury Regional Pension Officer's 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.

Joint working with other pension funds

To reduce costs the Fund leads on collaborative working with other pension funds. Representatives from each fund meet quarterly to discuss communications issues.

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 employers, 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 or comments made in letter, e-mail or verbal format are recorded on a monthly basis. The fund aims to always learn from the feedback received and continue to make improvements to the service provided.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

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 party is carrying out an administrative function of the Fund.

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

6. INFORMATION GOVERNANCE

Data Agreement

To protect any personal information held electronically the Administering Authority is registered under the Data Protection Act 1998. 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.

Members who wish to apply to access their data on data protection grounds should contact the Data Protection Officer on: (01743) 252774

Shropshire Council is the Administering Authority for the Shropshire County Pension Fund and is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office as a Data Controller. Your information is processed for the sole purpose of administering your pension.

The Fund may, if it chooses, pass certain details to a third party, where the third party is carrying out an administrative function of the Fund or where we are legally obliged to do so.

Members who wish to see a copy of information held about them by the

Shropshire County Pension Fund should make a subject access request under the Data Protection Act 1998 to the Information Governance Team at Shropshire Council. For details ring 01743 252774 or 01743 252179, email;

information;governance@shropshire.gov.uk

or visit the website at:

www.shropshire.gov.uk/access-to-information/

Protecting Information Staff Training

Information is vital to the work undertaken by the Pension Funds administrators and each member of staff is responsible for safeguarding information held by the Fund. Staff who come into contact with, or use, personal information about members of the public are required complete a formal data handling training on an annual basis. This training helps to ensure personal information is handled appropriately and every member of the pensions team completes this training once a year.

Freedom of Information Requests

The Freedom of Information Act (FOI) means that members of the public and organisations have new rights of access to information held by public bodies. Upon request we must tell individuals if we hold information and if so, provide it within 20 working days.

For requests of information under the Freedom of Information Act or similar legislation, please forward your request to: information.request@shropshire.gov.uk

7. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information can be obtained from:

Pensions Helpline: (01743) 252130

Email: pensions@shropshire.gov.uk

Website: www.shropshirecountypensionfund.co.uk

FUND PUBLICATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Communication Document	When Issued	Available To	Format	When Reviewed
Brief Scheme Guide	Upon commencing employment/ when requested	Prospective/Active/Deferred/ Retired Members/Dependents	Paper/ PDF on Website	As regulations change
Topical Booklets	When required	Active/Deferred/ Retired Members/ Dependents	Paper/ PDF on Website/	As regulations change/ new leaflets introduced regularly
Benefit Statements	Annually by 31 st August (rolling programme)	Active/Deferred Members/ Pension Credit	Paper /online via Member	Annually
Encouraging New Members Campaign	When Required	Prospective Members	Paper-Flyer	When required
Members Newsletter	As Required	Active/Deferred Members	Paper/PDF	As regulations change/as required
Pension Consultations	As Required	Active Members	Face to face	As required
Retirement Process Booklet	To Retiring Members	Prospective/Active/Deferred/ Retired Members on website	Paper/PDF on website	As regulations change/as required
Service Quality Survey	Continually	Active/Deferred/ Retired Members	Paper/email	As required
Presentations	As Required	Prospective/Active Members	Presentation/ Face to face	As required
Induction Presentations	When requested by employer	Prospective/Active Members	Face to face	As required
Statutory notification	When member record changed	Active Members	Paper	As regulations change/as required

Website	Continually	All Members/ Employers/Fund Managers/Non Scheme Members	Website	Monthly
Annual Meeting	Annually (November)	All Members/ Employers/Fund Managers	Presentation/ Face to face/film	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
Payslip	Monthly	Pensioner Members/ Dependents	Paper/ MyView	Paper copy issued when £5 variation in net pay
P60	Annually (April)	Pensioner Members	Paper/ MyView	Annually
Pensions Increase Notification	Annually (April)	Pensioner Members	Paper	Annually
InTouch-Pensioner Newsletter	Biannually (April/October)	Pensioner Members	Paper/ Website	Biannually
Retired Members Meeting	Annually (June)	Pensioner Members	Invites by Paper/Face to face/ Website	Annually
Age 100 Pensioners	As Required	Pensioner Members	Paper/Gift	As required
Pensioners Living Abroad	Annually	Pensioner Members	Paper	Annually
Employers Guide including PEN forms	As Required	Employers	Held on Pensions Website	As regulations change/as required
Employers Bulletin	As Required	Employing Authorities	Email alerts	As regulations change/as required

Employer Meetings and Training	As Required	Employing Authorities	Face to face/ Training videos on website	As regulations change/as required
Pension Administration Strategy	Annually and as required	Employing Authorities	PDF on website	Annually
Employer Satisfaction Survey	As Required	Employing Authorities	Paper/ Online survey	Annually
iconnect	As Required	Employing Authorities	Electronic	As required
Data Transmission	As Required	Employing Authorities	Electronic	As required
Annual Report and Accounts	Annually (October)	All Members	Paper/Website/ Intranet/ Email	Annually
Valuation Report	Every three years	Employing Authorities/ all Stakeholders	Paper/ Website (Overview)/ AGM	Every three years
Statement of Investment Principles (SIP)	Annually	All Members/ Stakeholders	Website	As required
Governance & Compliance Statement	Quarterly	All Members	Website	Quarterly
Pension Committee Training Day	Annually	Committee Members/Fund Staff	Face to face	Annually
Other body Communications inc. SPOG, NIF, Media/Press, Trade Unions, Joint Communication meeting	As Required	All Relevant Bodies	Paper/ Website/ Face to face	As required
Fund Staff Training and Meetings	Monthly/ as required	Fund Staff	Face to face/ Paper	As regulations change/as required
Email alerts	As required when there is a significant	All members	Email	As required

	website update /event/ regulation change			
--	--	--	--	--