

PENSION FUND COMMITTEE – 8 SEPTEMBER 2023

REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMMITTEE

Report by the Director of Finance

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is RECOMMENDED to

- a) note the key issues arising from the survey undertaken at the end of the June Committee meeting,**
- b) consider the questions raised in paragraph 9 of the report and**
- c) determine what actions, if any, are appropriate at this time.**

Introduction

1. At the conclusion of the Committee meeting in June 2023, Members were asked to complete a short survey to gain their reflections on the meeting and to identify any issues relating to the effective delivery of the Committee's responsibilities. This report highlights the main issues identified within the survey responses and potential actions for the Committee to consider.

Matters Identified within the Survey Responses

2. There were 8 members present at the June Committee meeting and 7 of these returned a survey response. All questions except the final question were looking for a Yes or No answer, with the option to add any additional comments to each question. The final question was an open question to allow any comments on issues not covered by the specific questions.
3. In almost all cases members responded yes to the question indicating that they were happy that:
 - a) The meeting had gone well (one member commented on the problems with the sound quality for those on-line)
 - b) All information had been satisfactorily presented (one member whilst responding yes, noted that one of the answers on a question of the administration report seemed confused, and that it would have been helpful to have received the printed agenda pack earlier to allow more time to consider the papers in advance)
 - c) They had sufficient knowledge to understand the agenda items. One member did respond both yes and no to this question, and stated that their level of knowledge did vary across the range of subjects being discussed
 - d) They understood their responsibilities in respect of each item
 - e) They were able to contribute

- f) The meeting was inclusive. One member responded No to this question and noted that there needed to be more encouragement to ensure all members contributed to the meeting.
 - g) There was sufficient time to discuss each item
 - h) All members contributed to the meeting. Again, one member responded no to this question and commented that whilst most members contributed well, others were silent or made limited contribution
 - i) The meeting was well chaired. The Chair himself did not feel it was appropriate that he responded to this question.
4. There were two comments in respect of the final open question. One member felt that the Administration report contained too much detail and should be more focussed. Whilst it is noted that the Administration report seeks to cover all aspects of the administration function in a single item and therefore will be wide ranging, the feedback has been noted, and the report this quarter seeks to contain most of the detail in separate annexes, so allowing the main body of the report to be more focussed. Further feedback from the Committee on the content of the Administration report, and other reports on today's agenda is welcomed.
5. The second comment related to the long-term risks to the Committee's effectiveness given the reduction in voting members to 5, and the vagaries of the political process. There was a concern that the Committee could lose a significant element of the current skills and knowledge following the next Council elections.
6. The current Committee constitution was agreed in March 2021 following the independent governance review undertaken by Hymans Robertson. The changes which reduced the number of voting members and increased wider representation on the Committee by the introduction of new non-voting roles sought to address two key issues. The first was the lack of a representative voice on the Committee for some of the biggest employers within the Fund, including the Academy Sector (30% of active membership) and Oxford Brookes University (10%). The second was to try and ensure those appointed to serve on the Committee had a genuine interest in the position, and were happy to engage in the required training, and work of the Committee.
7. As the new constitution has now been in place for over 2 years, it is appropriate to reflect on whether the changes have delivered the desired outcomes. Whilst the National Knowledge Assessment results indicated higher than average skills and knowledge scores when compared to other LGPS Committees, there are questions whether the wider representation on the Committee has in fact led to the voice of the larger employers being heard. The survey feedback following the June Committee plus observations over the last two years has indicated that whilst there are regular contributions from the representatives of Oxford Brookes University, the District Councils and Scheme Members, there has been little contribution from the academy representatives.
8. It is also worth considering whether the reduction in voting members has increased the risk associated with the vagaries of the political process as

highlighted in the June survey responses. Any increase though in voting members though needs to be considered against the risk that new recruits will be less committed to the work of the Committee and the training required to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively meet the responsibilities of a committee member.

9. The Committee are therefore invited to consider the following questions and determine what action if any to propose to the full Council take in respect of any further changes to the constitution of the Committee itself:
 - a) Has the addition of new scheme employer representatives to the Committee met the objective of ensuring the voice of significant employers is heard in all key policy discussions? If not, does this reflect limited differences in requirements of the largest employers, or are there further changes required to ensure effective representation of the largest employers?
 - b) Has the reduction of the number of voting members increased the risk associated with the loss of skills and knowledge following the cycle of County Council elections? If so, would increasing the number of voting members be an effective mitigation, or act to dilute the skills and knowledge of the Committee as a whole?
 - c) What is an effective size of the Committee going forward to ensure all members do have the necessary skills and knowledge required to meet their responsibilities, and can effectively contribute to the Committee meetings without the meetings becoming unwieldy?
 - d) Are there any other changes Members would wish to see to ensure the effective working of the Committee going forward?

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