

LOCAL PENSION BOARD – 17 JULY 2020

PENSION ADMINISTRATION REPORT

Report by the Director of Finance

RECOMMENDATION

The Board are invited to note the report.

Introduction

1. In line with other Council colleagues, the Pension Services team has been working from home since the start of lockdown. Overall, the move to remote working has been reasonably seamless. The biggest, immediate issue facing the team was dealing with post where due to either legal constraints, or the capability/availability of suitable IT resources for scheme members there has been a requirement to continue using paper communications.
2. The issue has been addressed by a limited number of team members going into the office once a week to open and scan in post and to print and send out any letters where we are unable to use online communications. Team members going into the office have volunteered and are all aware of the requirements of safe working practices.

Workloads

3. The move to online communications to / from members has slowed down some of our processes simply because of the different formats of documents received and the way in which they have to be scanned on to our system.
4. One benefit of the move to more online is the increased take up of members signing up to our online pension offering (My Oxfordshire Pension) particularly now the system has the functionality to allow members to run calculations of their benefits in certain circumstances.
5. The current take up, in LGPS, for registering for online services is:
 - Active 41.33%
 - Deferred 28.56%
 - Pensioner 39.23%
6. Overall workloads remain relatively stable with 1,144 open benefit administration cases as at time of writing this report, of which around 32% is pended awaiting reply. However, there has been some slippage in meeting our SLA targets most noticeably around transfers and estimates. These are being reviewed and an update will be given at the meeting.
7. End of year reconciliation which leads to the production of member's annual benefit statements (ABS) is going well. This reflects on the successful transition

of scheme employers to the new remote ways of working under the current covid-19 restrictions. Councillor and deferred beneficiary ABS will be issued by mid-July with production then switching to the sending out of active member ABS. It is planned that these will be completed by 20 August 2020, allowing some contingency before the statutory deadline of 31 August 2020.

8. The team is continuing to work on projects:
- GMP Reconciliation – a data cut has now been uploaded for our consultants to compare against the final data offering from HMRC with a report detailing outcomes due in August 2020.
 - MSS – next main improvement is that of data upload to enable members to upload documents directly on to system rather than using email.
 - Administration 2 Pay – change to our system to link benefit side with payroll so that information can be moved across without need for internal memo has been further delayed for more testing. There is also a delay with Heywood resolving costing file changes.
 - Management of frozen refund files – this is going well with payments being made before age 75 / transfers being processed.
 - Address tracing contract just about finalised so project to start shortly.
 - I-connect project to move all scheme employers on to system to upload monthly data so that information can be automatically checked then uploaded to Altair. Currently there are 139 out of 186 active scheme employers who are using this system. Work is continuing to move over remaining employers, but this includes the largest employers e.g. OCC / OBU so testing ongoing

Staffing

9. The maternity leave of one of the team leaders means that she will be absent for twelve months from October 2020. There have also been a couple of resignations within the team. Additionally, in order to properly staff the employer team another two posts need to be created, which overall leaves vacancies as:
- Team leader – to be covered by internal secondment
 - 2 x senior administrators, plus 1 assuming that one will be on secondment covering team leader post.
 - 4 x administrator posts, plus 1 assuming that one will be on secondment covering the senior administrator post.
 - 2 x administration assistant posts, plus 1 assuming one will be promoted to the role of an administrator.
10. The administrator posts have already been advertised and nearly 200 applications received – a sign of the times. It is anticipated that we will be able to appoint to these posts, but training will have to be given as it is likely that candidates will have no or limited direct experience. Given the number of appointments, this will put additional pressure on the team. Planning for a limited return to the office to facilitate face to face training has been completed in line with the current covid-19 guidance.

11. Other vacancies are due to be advertised shortly.

Sally Fox
09 July 2020