

<b>Bath &amp; North East Somerset Council</b>	
MEETING	<b>Avon Pension Fund Pension Board</b>
DATE	<b>27 July 2016</b>
TITLE:	<b>Avon Pension Fund Communications</b>
WARD:	<b>All</b>
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>	
<b>List of attachments to this report:</b> Appendix 1 – Fund communications matrix and audiences	

## **1 THE ISSUE**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to give the Pension Board an overview of the Fund's communication strategy and to highlight the communication function, current activity and future strategy. This report will be supplemented by a Power Point Presentation.

## **2 RECOMMENDATION**

The Pension Board is asked to;

- 2.1 Note the Avon Pension Fund's communication strategy.

## **3 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

- 3.1 The Fund's communication strategy is outlined in the Pensions Administration Strategy 2015 document, specifically building on three key documents 1) the Communications Policy Statement 2015 2) the ICT Strategy and 3) The Customer Charter. Publication of the Communications Policy Statement is a regulatory requirement of the Fund.

- 3.2 The policy statement highlights the Fund's key communication aims, which are to:

- provide clear, relevant, accurate, accessible and timely information to all our audiences and stakeholders
- listen and respond appropriately to feedback we receive
- use plain language and avoid unnecessary jargon
- use communication channels which best fit the audience and the information being passed on

- be a more electronic communication-based Fund, utilising new communication technology (web, email, social media)
  - support members to enable them to make informed decisions about their pensions by making information available
  - be compliant with all legislative requirements with regard to communicating with members, such as the Pensions Regulator, Pensions Committee and Board
- 3.3 The Funds' communications strategy is already well developed providing a wide range of solutions for all parties. However, there are a number of key drivers for change. These include utilising technology for efficiency; increasing member and employer self-service to improve access and to see a reduction in admin work; a reduction in communication and admin costs and increased compliance and monitoring requirements.
- 3.4 With the increasing number of scheme employers and membership creating an increased need for information, the Fund is aiming to develop its communications strategy, embracing technology in a number of key areas, including websites, member and employer self-service functionality and email delivery for communications. These are outlined in section 12.

#### **4 ACCESS TO COMMUNICATION**

- 4.1 We want to ensure that all members can access our services, whatever their needs. All print and electronic communications are designed with consideration for those with additional needs. Our communications media is measured against accessibility standards and we can arrange large print, audio or Braille versions of all printed literature.
- 4.2 Increasingly we are moving towards electronic forms of communication however we will always offer members 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. Approximately 1,000 members have specifically requested "paper" communications.

#### **5 THE COMMUNICATIONS FUNCTION**

- 5.1 The communications function sits within the Pensions Administration structure but it provides support across all areas of the Avon Pension Fund. The Communications & PR Manager and Communications and Marketing Officer have key responsibilities in driving forward the Fund's communication aims and responsibilities. This includes designing, implementing and managing communications activity to all stakeholders and covers all channels and communication methods (such as newsletters, bulletins, websites and benefit statements).
- 5.2 The team sits on the LGA's Communications Working Group, which looks at national communication issues for the LGPS. The APF Administration Strategy Statement (which includes the Communications Policy Statement and Customer Charter) is under goes a period of consultation with scheme employers before publication.

## 6 AUDIENCE / STAKEHOLDERS

- 6.1 We regularly communicate with a wide variety of audiences and stakeholders. These are listed in **Appendix 1**

## 7 CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

- 7.1 Our main methods of communication are listed in **Appendix 1**

## 8 COMMUNICATIONS SPEND

- 8.1 Below is listed the 2016/17 communication spend. The ICT Strategy has budget allocation for communication-related developments such as Member Self Service (MSS), new website development and Employer Self Service (ESS). These sit outside the annual communications budget.

Newsletters x 3 (1 x pensioner, 2 x active) – print & post	£31.5K
Annual Benefit Statements (active & deferred members) – print & post	£26K
Websites x 2 (member & employer) – maintenance, hosting & development	£15.3K
Employer Conference (speakers & venue)	£8K
Pension packs / guides	£1.3K
Annual Report & image/photo library	£0.6K
<b>Total</b>	<b>£82.7K</b>

- 8.2 Cost savings are already being seen by the combining of communications. For example the Summer 2016 active member newsletter is being sent with the annual benefit statement and the pensioner newsletter is sent with the annual P60s – both saving postage costs.

- 8.3 In terms of future cost savings it is in the area of the postage costs for the newsletters and Annual Benefit Statements that these savings can be made as we move to making these available online.

## 9 FEEDBACK

- 9.1 We are increasingly building in feedback mechanisms into our communications. We carry out ongoing surveys with employers following training events and welcome feedback at all opportunities. The “contact us” section of the website provides immediate member feedback and we monitor this and target communications in reaction to these comments if required. For example members asking how to change their address prompted us to promote how they could do this on the website homepage.

- 9.2 Retirement questionnaire

Prior to March 2015 a paper feedback questionnaire was a paper-based form, which had to be manually inputted and reported on. Now the questionnaire has been updated and more relevant and can be reported on automatically. However, take-up has been lower than expected and we are now looking at introducing an incentive (a voucher quarterly draw).

## 10 CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER

- 10.1 The charter sets out standards and timescales for service that customers can expect from the Fund. It outlines our aim to give a consistent level of service to customers, in an efficient, effective and courteous way, no matter how they contact us. The charter is a key element of the Pensions Administration Strategy.

## **11 REGULATORY COMPLIANCE**

- 11.1 Under pensions legislation we are required to publish a Communications Policy Statement. This document is reviewed every year and updated every 3-4 years, the current version being updated in June 2015.
- 11.2 We also adhere to the Pensions Regulator Code of Practice 14 (Administration - Providing information to members). This covers how and when we should provide information on benefit statements; other information about the scheme administration; who is entitled to information; when basic scheme information must be provided and what information must be disclosed on request
- 11.3 We comply with all of the above requirements.

## **12 FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS – GOING DIGITAL**

- 12.1 The key objectives for the communications strategy going forward is to deliver the majority of APF communication and engagement to members through digital means and to increase self-service access.

### **12.2 Websites**

Significant development to the websites (both the employers and members sites) will provide stakeholders with a single secure access point to relevant services and a range of tools to help streamline and improve efficiency, support good governance and be cost effective.

**Members website** – [www.avonpensionfund.org.uk](http://www.avonpensionfund.org.uk)

The website provides the key information hub and platform for member communications. It is the portal for “my pension online”. A new member website was launched in March 2016. This provides content, design, navigation and functionality improvements and well as being multi-device compatible – increasingly users switching to these devices to access information. Currently we are one of only a handful of funds to provide our web services on platforms such as smart phones and tablets. The website also integrates the Fund’s YouTube channels for sharing information videos. Web pages can be shared on social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter).

Future developments to the website will include improvements to online feedback, a FAQs section and full integration with the new MSS portal

**Employers’ website** - [www.apfemployers.gov.uk](http://www.apfemployers.gov.uk)

The site is username and password protected and holds details specific to individual employer organisations, which only they can access (with the Fund having administrator rights). This is a popular and well-received resource as provides a wealth of information and guidance for employers. There are downloadable forms and factsheets, online bookable training system and links to the Employer Self Service facility. We have already developed and implemented

a number of online submission forms, specifically the monthly and annual submission of contributions.

In 2017 the site will be redeveloped, focussing on self-service access and a more knowledge-hub basis, tailored to individual employers' needs. We will also be developing online training modules.

### **13 MEMBER SELF SERVICE (MSS) – MY PENSION ONLINE**

13.1 The “my pension online” is the web-based online access for members to their pension details, with self-service functionality. It allows them to view and update pension details, as well as carrying out estimates on their pension. The annual benefit statement is also available via MSS and this will be a key driver in reducing postage costs as we point members to the online version.

13.2 The product (MSSv2) is to be improved in 2016, with a better customer experience and closer integration in the website. MSSv2 will also be multi-device compatible, a feature not available in the current system.

13.3 The current (as at 1 July 2016) take up of MSS is listed below:

	<b>MSS users</b>	<b>% of eligible users</b>
Active members	5555	16.87%
Deferred members	3606	10.44%
Pensioner members	3383	12.99%
<b>Total</b>	<b>11242</b>	<b>12.95%</b>

13.4 To achieve significant volume MSS take up (65%+)

Promoting the benefits of MSS does have an effect in increasing sign ups. However this alone this will not achieve the high percentage of members using MSS required for the Fund to truly communicate electronically with members. This will only be achieved through a change in the administrative process for new members, leavers and those becoming pensioners. Gathering member email addresses and signing up to MSS must become an integral part of being in the Fund – almost a default setting.

13.5 To achieve this, our processes will need to change as well as engagement with employers to ensure that members are signed up as a matter of course and can access their account. A project to look at these processes will take place towards the end of 2016.

### **14 EMAIL COMMUNICATION**

14.1 In going digital the number of emails sent to members will increase. This will require a ‘vehicle’ to send these bulk emails. Research into the most appropriate, safe and secure method is already taking place. There will be a cost implication in introducing a bulk email ‘vehicle’, however this will enable us to manage bounce-backs and monitor take-up etc and be significantly cheaper than paper postage costs.

### **15 FIREFIGHTERS’ PENSION WEBSITE AND MSS**

- 15.1 We are looking to develop a bespoke website and MSS access for Avon Fire and Rescue Service in 2018.

## 16 EQUALITIES

- 16.1 No items in this report give rise for the need to have an equalities impact assessment.

## 17 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 17.1 The Avon Pension Fund Committee is the formal decision-making body for the Fund. As such it has responsibility to ensure adequate risk management processes are in place. It discharges this responsibility by ensuring the Fund has an appropriate investment strategy and investment management structure in place that is regularly monitored. In addition, it monitors the benefits administration, the risk register and compliance with relevant investment, finance and administration regulations.

<b>Contact person</b>	Stephen Makin, Communications & PR Manager, 01225 395391
<b>Background papers</b>	<p>APF Communications Policy Statement 2015 <a href="http://www.avonpensionfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/Communications-Policy-Statement-20150601.pdf">http://www.avonpensionfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/Communications-Policy-Statement-20150601.pdf</a></p> <p>APF Customer Charter <a href="http://www.avonpensionfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/Customer-Charter-20150601.pdf">http://www.avonpensionfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/Customer-Charter-20150601.pdf</a></p> <p>APF Pensions Administration Strategy Statement 2015 <a href="http://www.avonpensionfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/AS-20150601.pdf">http://www.avonpensionfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/AS-20150601.pdf</a></p>
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