

Report to: Pension Board

Date: 2 November 2023

By: Chief Finance Officer

Title: Employer Engagement and Communications Report

Purpose: This report provides an update on activities by the Employer Engagement team including Communications

RECOMMENDATION

The Pension Board is recommended to note the report.

1. Background

1.1 This report is brought to the Pension Board to provide an update on employer engagement tasks that directly affect the East Sussex Pension Fund (the Fund).

1.2 Scheme Employers (scheduled and admitted bodies) are required to pay both employee and employer contributions to the Fund monthly, no later than 19 days of the following month in which the contributions were deducted from payroll. The contribution rates for members are set annually by the LGPS and are based on salary bandings. The Employer contribution rate is set at the triennial valuation and recorded in the rates and adjustment certificate issued by the Funds actuary or set on admission to the Fund agreed by the Fund's actuary.

1.3 The Fund has a Communications Strategy which defines the main methods of communication we provide for our key stakeholders. This includes making the best use of technology where appropriate, to provide quicker and more efficient communications for the Fund's stakeholders. The Fund will ensure that communication methods are accessible to all.

2. i-Connect

2.1. The i-Connect onboarding project is continuing; the focus over the past few months has been improving training and engagement with some larger employers that have had changes in payroll systems and staff. The team have started to organise meetings and calls with remaining non i-connect employers to start the process of getting them to build i-Connect files ready for onboarding.

2.2. The team have been working alongside the projects team to ensure end of year queries picked up from the ABS project have been investigated and where possible resolved. This allows for more confidence in data and taking the next stage of onboarding.

2.3. The current numbers for the i-connect project:

Still to onboard/engage with	Initial enquiries ongoing	In Progress to onboard	Onboarded
0	12	8	123

2.4. Fund Officers are continuing to work with Brighton and Hove City Council to continue their onboarding for file submission on a monthly basis. A training session was run with the BHCC team to go through common errors and provide background to the i-Connect system and how it works.

This should allow their whole pension and payroll team to have better clarity on successful uploading on an ongoing basis.

2.5. The i-Connect team are continuing to build a robust monthly process to allow the output from i-Connect files flow through to the workflow of the Pensions administration team. The data is looked at for each employer and any issues or errors in the data loaded are reviewed and resolved.

3. Training

3.1. The team launched a pilot programme of bite size/lunchtime learning sessions within ESCC in September. There have been over 120 active members who have attended the sessions so far. The feedback on these sessions has been very positive. The training covers an introduction to the LGPS, a pensions MOT and planning for retirement sessions.

3.2. The next few months will see further sessions to ESCC active members. Once these sessions have been piloted and full feedback received, this training will be rolled out to all scheme employers reflecting any improvements in training materials from the feedback. Sessions will be rolled out virtually to allow access to active members across the employer base and where possible in person at employer officers. Management of attendance and communications for the training will need to consider in more detail as the ESCC learning and development team have managed this through the online training portal for the pilot.

4. Employer Forum

4.1. The Employer Forum is set to take place on 30th November 2023. Invites for the Forum, with the agenda, have been sent to employers, as well as board and committee members.

4.2. The draft agenda for the day includes:

- Welcome and introductions from the Chairs of Pension Board and Pension Committee
- Presentation from an Investment Manager on environmental investment
- Updates on key work streams including Pensions Admin, i-Connect, Governance issues
- Presentation from the Fund Actuary
- Communications update including the system upgrade from the MSS self service portal to TME
- There will also be an opportunity for employers to speak directly with Fund officers and the Fund Actuary.

5. Employer Contributions

5.1. The below table sets out the number of late payments, received after 19 days have elapsed following contributions deducted from payroll. Up to August 2023.

Overall	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Total Payments Due	136	138	138	138	139	140	140	141	141	141	140	139
Payments Received Late	3	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1

5.2. In the last 12-month period, there have been 9 late payments of contributions out of 1,671 expected payments (<1%).

5.3. The Fund have implemented control checks on forms received by employers following a recommendation by Internal Audit.

6. Communications

6.1. Surveys – Surveys for Active and Deferred members have been issued in October.

6.2. Website – The website continues to be updated with relevant and engaging information for members and employers. The Fund is reviewing improved website analytics data. Visitor

numbers to the website continue to be healthy with more than 4,500 visits to the website per month.

- 6.3. Branding – work continues across the Fund to implement the Funds style guide and branding. This includes reshaping letters/templates/forms within the Pensions Administration software to issue to scheme members.

7. Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

- 7.1. The Pension Board is recommended to note the updates provided in the report.

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