

**Report to:** Pension Board

**Date:** 5 June 2024

**By:** Chief Finance Officer

**Title:** Employer Engagement and Communications Report

**Purpose:** This report provides an update on activities by the Employer Engagement team and on Fund Communications activities.

---

## 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) and Communications activity of 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 last few months, the i-Connect Team have continued to onboard any employers who were ready in time for year end. The position now is that all employers know what i-Connect is and many of the remaining employers to be onboarded are currently working on building a test file. It will continue to be challenging and time consuming to onboard remaining employers as a lot of work is needed to review the test file, provide feedback, and bring the employer/payroll provider into a position where they are ready to proceed.

2.2. The i-Connect team have also been busy maintaining existing employers and all onboarded employers (aside from one large employer) have submitted their March end-of-year data in time for this year's annual benefit statement production. An update on the large employer will be included in the Breaches Report.

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

Still to engage with	Initial enquiries ongoing	In Progress to onboard	Onboarded
0	5	12*	132

\*8 of this 12 are Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust (DCAT).

### 3. Employer Contributions

3.1. The below table sets out the number of late payments, received after 19 days have elapsed following contributions deducted from payroll. Up to February 2024.

<b>Overall</b>	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
<b>Total Payments Due</b>	140	141	141	141	140	139	143	142	142	149	150	149
<b>Payments Received Late</b>	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	1	2	0	2

3.2. In the last 12-month period, there have been 11 late payments of contributions out of 1,857 expected payments (<1%).

3.3. The same employer failed to pay in September, October, November and December 2023, and this has been recorded as a breach. The employer is an admitted body who has ceased trading, and the Fund are engaging with the audit and compliance team of the letting employer to resolve.

3.4. The two late payments in February related to employers breaching the deadline for the first time within a 12-month period. Both payments have since been received (on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>). The Fund have not yet been informed the reason for the lateness of these payments.

### 4. Communications

4.1. Employer newsletter – An employer newsletter was issued in March centred around reminding employers about the support material available to both themselves and their employees. It also provided the updated contributions rates for members together with a reminder about the primary and secondary rates payable for the financial year. See link - Employer newsletter - March 2024 | East Sussex Pension Fund.

4.2. Active member newsletter – The first active newsletter of the year was issued to members in early March 2024. This edition reminded members about contribution levels, forthcoming changes to member self-service, early retirement, CARE Scheme increases and a host of other topics aimed at keeping members informed. See link - Newsletter (active members) - March 2024 | East Sussex Pension Fund.

4.3. Website – The website continues to be updated with relevant and engaging information for members and employers. The Fund is reviewing improved website analytics data. The main website and MSS portal need work to ensure the latest accessibility guidelines are embedded by October 2024. The Fund have now taken the analytics software in-house so are working out how to use this in order to report website statistics.

4.4. Training – we have now finalised the feedback from the 10 training sessions we piloted with ESCC employees. The results are very encouraging, so we will now need to plan how this is rolled out wider across different employers.

4.5. GMP rectification – the Communications Manager has been working alongside the Technical and Administration team to issue letters to members affected by the GMP rectification exercise. These letters outlined where members had been either underpaid or overpaid and more work is needed on this going forwards.

4.6. New version of member self-service – A lot of recent communications effort has been in testing and configuring with appropriate wording and branding specific to the Fund for the new version of member self-service. A pilot is planned within ESCC prior to a full Scheme roll out to ensure the helpdesk and team is prepared for potential queries in advance of the full go live. The launch of this updated functionality will help transform the way members access and engage with vital pension information online. The platform has been built to empower members and give them back control of their pension information. Created with the user in mind, it offers intuitive navigation and a range of easy tools.

4.7. Pensioners move to electronic communications – The Fund carried out communication with Pensioners to advise future payslips and P60s would be made available online as the default instead of by post. To ensure pensioners had sufficient knowledge of this change and the ability to

opt out of electronic communications and continue to receive payslips by post, the Fund sent three letters to the members.

## **5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendation**

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

**IAN GUTSELL**  
**Chief Finance Officer**

Contact Officer:  
Email:

Sian Kunert, Head of Pensions  
Sian.Kunert@eastsussex.gov.uk