

MINUTES

LOCAL PENSION BOARD

DATE	Thursday, 12 June 2025	TIME	10.00 am
VENUE	G-02 - Ground Floor, 169 Union Street, London SE1 0LL		

Minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of Local Pension Board held G-02 - Ground Floor, 169 Union Street, London SE1 0LL on Thursday, 12 June 2025

Present:

Clair Alcock, Independent Member
Nick Davis, Deputy Assistant Commissioner, South West Area
Frazer Ferguson, DAC Learning and Professional Development
Gareth Beeton, Regional Chair, FBU
Adam Shaw, Regional Treasurer, FBU
Karl M Smith, FBU Official

In Attendance:

Mostaque Ahmed, Director for Corporate Services
Adrian Bloomfield, Assistant Director, Finance
Catharine Gregory, Assistant Director Finance, Transformation
John Crowhurst, LPPA
Tania Legore, Employment Law and Litigation Unit Manager
Rory Murphy, Finance Administration Manager
Kat Pilarska, Pension Analyst
Ozu Okere, Governance Manager

1. Apologies

The Chair opened the meeting by sending her condolences to the London Fire Brigade and families of the firefighters, Martyn Sadler and Jennie Logan, who lost their lives on 15 May 2025 tackling the Bicester fire in Oxfordshire. It was noted that Martyn Sadler was a Leading Firefighter with the LFB as well as a retained Sub Officer with Oxfordshire FRS.

Apologies were then received from Keeley Foster, Assistant Commissioner, Learning and Professional Development; Tom Goodall, Head of Risk, Assurance, Strategy and Portfolio; Pat Goulbourne, Assistant Commissioner, Operational Resilience and Control; and Dan Kipling, Deputy Assistant Commissioner, Learning and Professional Development (employer side); Gareth Cook, FBU; Jon Lambe, FBU, and David Shek, FBU (employee side).

2. Declarations of Interest/ Breaches of the Law

There were no declarations of interest.

Breaches of the law were dealt with under item 6 (Remedy - Assessment of Compliance with Regulations).

3. Minutes and Actions arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2025 were approved.

The Actions log was noted and amended.

4. Membership and Terms of Reference

The Board noted that on the employer side, Keeley Foster, the Assistant Commissioner, Learning and Professional Development had sent out a letter to Deputy Assistant Commissioner (DAC) cadre to seek expressions of interest to join the Pension Board. The Chair then welcomed Kevin McKenzie, Deputy Assistant Commissioner, Operational Resilience and Control who had expressed an interest but was attending as an observer. She also welcomed Catharine Gregory, Assistant Director, Finance Transformation to her first meeting of the Board and noted she will take over from Adrian Bloomfield, Assistant Director, Finance.

On the employee side, the Board noted that a vacancy still existed for a Fire Officers Association (FOA) representative (to replace Clive Robinson who retired in March 2025) and for a substitute member. Karl Smith, FBU substitute member, was welcomed to his first meeting of the Pension Board.

On a separate but related matter there was discussion on whether the terms of reference allowed the attendance of a Prospect representative. The Board noted that Frazer Ferguson had asked to step down as an employer representative but would like to take up the Prospect position on the Board. The Board agreed that members should have sight of the terms of reference to clarify the position. As such, it was agreed that the Clerk send members the terms of reference after the meeting.

[Post-meeting – the terms of reference were sent to all members of the Board which states under paragraph 5 that "Prospect may nominate one representative to be an observer at Board meetings with speaking rights."]

Concern was raised that neither Penny Mitchell, the Communications representative; nor Sarah Martin, HR representative were present at the meeting or given their apologies. The Chair agreed that their attendance at the meetings was key given the importance of communication on all remedy related issues for members. The Director for Corporate Services agreed to follow up about their attendance.

5. LPB-079 Local Pensions Board Annual Report 2024/25

The Chair introduced the report and highlighted that the focus for the year had been on remedy issues, its challenges and how to manage it. She confirmed that whilst the Board's scrutiny on this had been robust there were some challenges that were beyond their remit such as the tax issues for unauthorised payments and the pause on opt-out contingent decisions which are still ongoing. She also highlighted the importance of the Scheme Manager putting in place robust compensation mechanisms as there is no end date to when members can claim compensation.

The Chair informed the Board that in her last appearance as the LPB Chair she will, in the following week, attend the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) public sector conference. The conference will be attended by Chairs from the Scheme Advisory Board

(SAB) and Local Pensions Boards where she will present on her experience as LPB Chair and give her opinion on whether Local Pensions Boards and SAB work well together. As regards this, the Board asked that she draw attention to the fact that Local Pensions Boards and SAB do not, currently, work well together. The Chair agreed and added that she would ask that LPB members have a sit on the SAB.

The Board noted the report and that it would next be presented at Commissioner's Board.

6. Remedy - Assessment of Compliance with Regulations

The Finance Pensions Analyst introduced the report, listed as Appendix 1 to item 10 report (LPB-082 Firefighters' Local Pensions Board - Update Report) which set out steps taken by the Scheme Manager to ensure that it met the 31 March 2025 deadline by which to send out Remediability Service Statements (RSS). It set out those factors that contributed to the London Fire Commissioner being unable to meet all remedy requirements and concluded that whilst there had been a breach of the pensions remedy requirements, it was not a material breach.

The Board noted the actions taken by both the Scheme Manager and Administrator to address and reduce the impact of the challenge. Furthermore, that action is continuing to keep to this to a minimum and allow all scheme members to receive an RSS as soon as possible.

The Chair welcomed the well drafted report with its balanced outcome. In response to a question, the FBU representatives reserved the right to raise any concerns they might have later whilst they continue to monitor the situation. The Assistant Director, Finance confirmed that the assessment of the situation was ongoing as progress continues to be made in sending out RSS. The Director for Corporate Services added that the LFB had been transparent with The Pensions Regulator and had informal discussions with the Regulator even though it was not reporting the breaches as material.

The Chair agreed that the report was clear on what is considered a material breach by TPR, the challenges faced by the Scheme Manager and review undertaken. The Board noted that what is considered a material breach will depend on the local circumstances of each Fire Rescue Service.

The Local Pension Board noted the report.

7. LPB-080 Firefighters Pension Scheme Risk Plan

The Finance Pensions Analyst presented the risk plan which provided an update to the Risk Plan for the London Fire Commissioner (LFC) Firefighter's Pension Scheme. The plan addressed the significant risks which are likely to have a material impact on the scheme and a summary of the controls in place to mitigate those risks. She highlighted two risks, set out below, that exceed the LFC's risk appetite and sought the Board's input:

- **R8** Computer system and database failures although this is mitigated by system recovery plans and data back-up procedures.
- **R24** Failure in the collection and provision of remedy data to the administrator given the significant data challenges.

There followed discussion and concerns raised by the Board on the low score of 1 for both risks that could have a catastrophic impact should it occur. It was agreed that the Board members, as owners of the risks, would meet with the Finance team to understand the

rationale for the scores and have an input on the risk rating and. The Director for Corporate Services agreed that risk plan required constructive challenge from the Board. It was also agreed that the Finance Pensions Analyst will update the risk register with controls and mitigation in place for both risks. It was agreed that the Finance Pensions Analyst would arrange a workshop on risks for members of the Board and to extend the invite to the Assistant Director, Finance Transformation.

The Board noted that risk **R14** (related to LPPA project PACE changing software suppliers) had been removed as the project has been successfully implemented. The Board agreed the amendment proposed to **R13** (Pension administrator's business continuity arrangements failing to deal with Covid19 pandemic leading to members not getting pensions) – 'Covid19 pandemic' to be replaced with 'potential pandemic'.

The Local Pension Board noted the report.

8. Local Pensions Partnership Update

Mr Crowhurst, Chief Customer Officer Local Pension PPA introduced the report and provided key highlights including the following:

- Remedy Update
 - (i) There are still 735 Removable Service Statements (RSS) to be issued and the target date for completion is the end of October 2025. The Board noted the good progress that has been made with the issue of RSSs since the March meeting.
 - (ii) LPPA has made good progress on receipt of 638 member forms including remedy election forms. The aim is to commence remedy payments from mid-July 2025. In response to questions from the Board, Mr Crowhurst confirmed that issues with the system functionality have led to the delay in making the payments. Following further discussion, Mr Crowhurst agreed to send communication to members to this effect.
- Membership Update
 - (i) LPPA had had good discussion with the Scheme Manager about member communications so, agreed to tailor communications for people less versed with remedy, such as beneficiaries, to enhance their understanding. They would also be assigned a direct LPPA contact to deal with their enquiries. The Chair added that at the recent pension session for retired members, it was clear there was confusion amongst members on receipt of RSS as there was no information as to the next steps. Mr Crowhurst admitted that the LPPA did not currently have a step-to-step guide for members but agreed to take this away to LPPA's communication team to provide straightforward steps on what to do next on receipt of an RSS. There followed discussion about perception held by members that the London Fire Commissioner, as Scheme Manager, should be doing more in the way of communication. The Assistant Director, Finance confirmed that each Fire Scheme operates differently on how they communicate with their members but recognised that communication was important hence the need for the attendance on the Board of the Scheme Manager's HR and Communications representatives.

The Chair spoke of the need to keep improving communications with members. As such, she asked that there be follow up communication to retired members following up from her briefing session for them. The Chair asked that this action be assigned

initially to the Director for Corporate Services, in his absence, who should determine who would be responsible for the action.

[Post-meeting: The Director for Corporate Services asked that the action be assigned to Sarah Martin, Head of HR Operations]

- Retirees – Update Position

The report now contained an overview on the time frame within which payments are made to members when they retire. This was reintroduced following the request of the Chair at the March meeting.

- Civica Update

Mr Crowhurst confirmed that Civica, its software provider, has still not provided a date for the implementation of the pension online calculator. LPPA has informed Civica that it would be disappointing if this is not in place by the end of this calendar year. There followed discussion and the Chair agreed to write to LPPA about its concerns with the delay and copy in the Scheme Advisory Board.

The Local Pension Board noted the report.

9. LPB-081 Firefighters' Local Pensions Board - Provision of Information

The Finance Pensions Analyst introduced the report by highlighting some of the key points in the report especially that there were more people, than not, in the firefighters' pension scheme at 89 per cent of the workforce. However, women and those of ethnicity made up a high number of those not in the scheme with the main reasons for opting out being other financial commitments and the cost of the scheme. The Assistant Director, Finance Transformation added that this was worrying and asked whether the dropout rate by these two groups might be due to a lack of understanding of the benefits of the scheme. There followed discussion and the Board noted that with auto-enrolment procedure is due to happen in August 2025, it would be the ideal time to set out clearly the benefits of joining the scheme and that consideration be given to how to disseminate that information effectively to the workforce.

It was then agreed that the Director for Corporate Services will work with People Services and the Communications team on how best to disseminate the information.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Assistant Director, Finance confirmed that there had been no increase in the number of Initial Dispute Resolution Procedures (IDRP) cases as regards remedy and members not receiving their statements. However, he was aware that there are 13 complaints, not entered in the report, about non-receipt of RSSs by the deadline 31 March 2025 but it is not clear if they are remedy related. Gareth Beeton, FBU representative confirmed that the majority of the 13 cases related to members who have tried or are trying to consolidate other pensions with the LFB scheme outside the time scale which has now been refused. He added that there should be a communications strategy informing members of the time limit in which to consolidate their pensions. In response, the Assistant Director, Finance agreed that whilst it is the responsibility of individuals to request for the consolidation of other pensions they might have, the communications about the two years limit from when they join the scheme should form part of their onboarding process. The Chair added that the complaints show why it is important to have processes in place that will give a robust audit of communication that was sent to members when joined the pension scheme.

The Local Pension Board then noted the report.

10. LPB-082 Firefighters' Local Pensions Board - Update Report

The Finance Pensions Analyst presented the report highlighting, amongst other things, that the Scheme Manager had submitted five statutory reports in May, one for HMRC and the others for the Home Office and the Government Actuary Department. Following clarification sought from LPPA, she confirmed that project PACE had been completed and will be highlighted in the report for LPB in September .

The Director for Corporate Services then informed the Board of the successful appointment of a replacement Chair following Clair's resignation notice in March. The role was offered to Virginia Burke a very experienced pension consultant and Vice Chair of Scottish Teacher's Pension Board and it is expected that she would commence the role in September. It was noted that she had given her apologies for the June meeting which she would have attended as an observer.

The Chair welcomed the very detailed and helpful report.

The Local Pension Board noted the report.

11. Workplan - Future Look

The workplan for future meetings, with the addition of training, as set out below was accepted by the Board.

- Business as usual pension
- Dashboard
- Opt-outs
- Member communications
- Training

12. Training

Following discussion, it was agreed that there were no specific training needs. However, members were encouraged to keep with their own personal pension training by booking sessions with the Local Government Association as set out in the report under item 10 (LPB-082 Firefighters' Local Pensions Board Update). The Clerk to be informed of all training sessions undertaken so an accurate record be kept as required by The Pensions Regulator.

The members training log for 2024/25 as set out under Appendix 2 of item 10 (LPB-082 Firefighters' Local Pensions Board Update) was noted.

13. Any Other Business

The Board noted that this would be Adrian Bloomfield's last meeting as he leaves the Fire Brigade at the end of the month. The Chair thanked him for his invaluable contribution to the Board and to LFB.

The Chair then confirmed that this was her last meeting following notice in March that she was leaving for a new role in. She thanked all the members, officers and clerk for their

contribution and assistance in making it a pleasurable experience. The Director for Corporate Services, on behalf of the Scheme Manager, and Gareth Beeton, FBU, on behalf of the employee side, thanked the Chair for the wealth of knowledge and expertise she brought as well as her constructive challenge of the Board.

14. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board was scheduled for 11 September 2025 at 10:00.

Ozu Okere, Governance Manager

Clerk to Local Pension Board