



# **Communications Strategy**

## **Nottinghamshire Pension Fund**

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## 1. Introduction

This is the communication strategy of the Nottinghamshire Pension Fund, administered by Nottinghamshire County Council (the Administering Authority).

This statement provides an overview of how the fund will communicate with its customers (members and employers) and stakeholders. An effective communication strategy is vital for the fund to meet its objective of providing a high quality and consistent service.

Scheme communications are a critical activity; they are the external face of the fund and provide a key link with its customers and stakeholders. The fund has 320 employers with contributing members and a total membership of over 139,635 scheme members, these members are split into the following categories and with the following numbers of members in each category at 31 March 2017.

Types Of Pension Fund membership	Totals
Active members	45869
Deferred	50858
Pensioners	34745
Frozen Refunds	7073
Total	139635

The Fund continuously looks at ways to enhance its communications, and this policy statement will be reviewed regularly.

## 2. Regulatory Framework

This strategy has been produced in accordance with Regulation 61 of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013. This regulation states that:

61. (1) An administering authority must prepare, maintain and publish a written statement setting out its policy concerning communications with-
- (a) members;
  - (b) representatives of members;
  - (c) prospective members; and
  - (d) Scheme employers
- (2) In particular the statement must set out its policy on-
- (a) the provision of information and publicity about the scheme to members, representatives of members and scheme employers;
  - (b) the format, frequency and method of distributing such information or publicity; and
  - (c) the promotion of the scheme to prospective members and their employers.

The strategy must be revised and published by the administering authority following a material change in their policy on any matters referred to in paragraph (2).

### **3. Minimum Standards**

Under the Occupational Pension Schemes (Disclosure of Information Regulation) 1996, administrators of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) are required to provide the following:

- A copy of the scheme regulations and any overriding legislation, on request, - either through providing a personal copy, a copy for inspection or details of how to obtain a copy; members, employers, prospective members, their spouses, beneficiaries and recognised trade unions are entitled to this information.
- Basic information about the scheme must be given automatically to every prospective member before starting, or, if this is not practical, within two months of joining. This information must be provided on request – unless issued within the previous 12 months – to current members, prospective members, spouses, beneficiaries and recognised trade unions within two months of receipt of a written request.
- Details of any material changes to the LGPS notified to all members and beneficiaries (except excluded persons, that is, deferred pensioners whose present address is unknown) where possible before the change takes effect. Otherwise the change must be notified not later than three months after it has taken effect.
- An annual benefit statement to all active, deferred and pension credit members.

### **4. Key Objectives**

The Nottinghamshire Pension Fund recognise that communicating with scheme stakeholders and customers is a critical activity for the fund and has established communication practices.

The fund has identified the following key objectives of its communication strategy:

- Provide clear, and timely communication to its customers and stakeholders.
- Recognise the requirement for different methods of communication for different customers and stakeholders.
- Seek continuous improvement in the way the fund communicates.
- Inform customers and stakeholders to enable them to make the decisions regarding pension matters.
- Inform customers and stakeholders about the management and administration of the fund.
- Consult major stakeholders about the management and administration of the fund.
- Promote the LGPS as an attractive benefit to scheme members and an important tool in recruitment to employers.
- Support employers to enable them to fulfil their responsibility to communicate and share information with members in relation to the scheme.
- Treat information security with importance and in line with the current data protection legislation.

## **5. Stakeholders of the Fund**

The Strategy outlines the scope of communications, and sets out the mechanisms which are to be used to meet those communication needs. The Pensions Office will use the most appropriate communication medium for the audiences receiving information. This may involve using more than one method of communication.

There are a number of key stakeholder groups with whom the Pensions Office needs to communicate. These are:

- a) Active Scheme members
- b) Prospective Scheme members
- c) Deferred Scheme members
- d) Pensioners and dependants
- e) Scheme Employers
- f) Pension Fund Staff
- g) Trustees of the Fund, which includes the Pensions Committee and the Pensions Board
- h) External bodies

## **6. Active Scheme members**

The Pensions Office have developed a new internet website containing extensive details of the scheme and the Pension Fund and from where scheme leaflets, forms and guides may be downloaded. There are links on the website to other organisations which are relevant to scheme members, such as contacts for Employers, AVC Providers and bodies that may provide independent help for members.

Communications with pensioners are being continually developed using the website to communicate on pertinent issues, such as Finances, etc. The Pensions Office also liaises with the Fund's Scheme Employers to ensure that member's information is kept up to date.

The Pensions Office send benefit statements to all active members on an annual basis, subject to the members Scheme Employer providing timely year end information to the Pensions Administration Team. The statements are sent as soon as the year end data is reconciled but before the 31 August which is the statutory deadline.

A dedicated telephone help line has been established and is widely publicised in the Scheme literature.

There are other miscellaneous actions taken for scheme members, such as dealing with specific customer complaints and commendations, and using appropriate process in the tracking and contacting of deferred beneficiaries.

## **7. Prospective Scheme members**

As part of the Government's aim to encourage the public to save for the future, the Pensions Office targets prospective members through scheme employers. This is done by ensuring that all new appointees receive the scheme booklet and are referred to the Fund's website for further information.

There are a number of factsheets on the website that provide more detail on topics such as increasing benefits and making nominations. These factsheets can be sent out to individual members and are also available to download from the website.

The Pensions Office works with Additional Voluntary Contribution (AVC) providers (Prudential and Scottish Widows) to provide a more informed choice on AVC benefits.

## **8. Deferred members**

A yearly summary of each member's details held including a current valuation of their deferred pension benefits is issued by 31 August each year and sent by post to their home address. This also acts as a prompt to notify the fund of any change of circumstances including current nominations. Undelivered statements which are returned to the fund allow us to trace missing members before their benefits are due for payment.

Deferred members can contact the fund helpline to discuss any issues or specific points regarding membership. The Pensions Office offers information on all aspects of scheme membership and benefits for all active, deferred and pensioner members.

## **9. Pensioners and Dependants**

Pay advices are issued to pensioners 4 times a year March to June, this coincides with the annual pension increase and the annual HMRC tax notification changes. Throughout the rest of the year, a pay advice is only sent if the net pension changes by more than £5. Returned pay advice alerts the Fund to a change in circumstances, allowing the fund to trace missing members. Each member also receives a P60 by post by the end of May each year.

There is a dedicated section on the fund's website that is available for pensioner members. This provides detailed and informative links allowing members to be kept up to date with the latest news and changes. There is also a quick link which allows pensioners to contact the fund using an electronic form.

Pensioners can also send correspondence including changes details, such as address or bank details to both the fund and the pension Payroll by e-mail and post.

## **10. Scheme Employers**

The Pensions Office aims to work in partnership with Scheme Employers to assist them in the application of the Scheme. It is intended to establish a frequent 'dialogue meeting' with District Councils and other group Employers to pass across information, and identify and resolve cases. An Administration Strategy has been developed and circulated to Scheme Employers which includes a

Service Level Agreement which outlines the requirements of employers and the Pensions Administration Team.

A password protected section on the fund's website is available for our employers, this provides detailed and informative links allowing employers to be kept up to date with latest news and changes. Electronic copies of all relevant forms, scheme literature, policies and reports are also available to download, along with training documents and tools, plus links to other organisations e.g. Local Government Employers.

Administration forms are available with guidance notes to notify the fund of key events affecting pension benefits.

Annual meetings are arranged inviting employers to enable the fund to update employers on the requirements of the year end activities.

We currently utilise the website to inform our Scheme Employers of their administration responsibilities. This is available on the employer's part of the website.

The Pensions Office uses the 'CIVICA UPM' database to hold member records. Future developments include achieving greater web compatibility and the transmission of data electronically. A project is currently underway to develop an employer portal so that our larger employers have access through the internet to the pension records of their employees together with a calculation suite, for the provision of estimates direct to employees.

#### **11. Pension Fund Staff**

The Pensions Office currently ensures that all new staff receive induction and training, so that they are able to undertake their duties and responsibilities effectively. The Pensions Office has Team Meetings and Management Team Meetings to discuss issues ranging from planning to communications.

The Pensions website site is also a resource centre for the Administration team as it has links to the National website, and all employer/member documents are available on the site.

#### **12. Trustees of the Fund, which includes the Pensions Committee and the Pensions Board**

The Pensions website contains relevant information for Trustees and Scheme Employers with regards to information about their respective roles. The development of knowledge and training, is also provided by the Fund's Investment & Administration Officers and this is also supplemented by attendance at relevant external training sessions, conferences, and seminars. In addition to the Pensions Committee, following the Public Service Pensions Act 2013 a local Pensions Board has been set up to support the governance and administration of the Nottinghamshire Pension Fund which helps to ensure effective and efficient governance and administration of the Local Government Pension Scheme. The respective Committee and Pensions Board members are provided with information and reports on all relevant pension matters as required.

#### **13. External Bodies**

The fund communicates with additional external bodies these include:

The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) who are the owners of the LGPS, and are responsible for drafting and laying the LGPS regulations before parliament.

The scheme also communicates with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and communicates in relation to the contracting out details of scheme members and combined pension benefit forecasts.

The Nottinghamshire Fund ensures it pays all benefits in compliance with both the lifetime allowance and annual allowance.

The fund is also represented at the East Midlands Pension Officers Group, which meets quarterly to discuss all aspects of the LGPS. Knowledge sharing and collaborative working are key features of this group's discussion.

The Pensions Office is a member of the Pensions Administration Benchmarking Club which is run by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). We provide information on membership numbers and administration costs and subsequently benchmark our costs and service with all members and specified members of the Club.

The Local Government Association

HM Revenue and Customs

Government Actuaries Department

#### **14. Unscheduled Communication**

There will be times throughout the year when the Pension fund will be required to communicate information to fund stakeholders which is unscheduled and ad hoc. This could include changes to LGPS regulations, or other pension information which may have an impact on employers or members of the scheme.

#### **15. Other Relevant Documentation**

In addition to the communication documents produced by the Fund explaining the benefits of the LGPS, for Scheme members and employers the Fund publishes a number of key documents relating to the administration and governance of the Fund. These are as follows:-

##### **a. Funding Strategy Statement**

LGPS Regulations require that all Administering Authorities publish a Funding Strategy Statement (FSS). The Fund's FSS sets out our commitment to meeting our liabilities while at the same time maintaining stable employer rates.

##### **b. Governance Compliance Statement**

LGPS Regulations require all Administering Authorities to publish a Governance Policy Statement. The fund's compliance statement sets out how it delegates its responsibilities including duties and terms of reference and stakeholder representation.

## **16. Equality**

Our communications are tailored to the individual needs of our stakeholders. We will make every effort to provide communications to our stakeholders in their preferred language or format on request.

## **17. Freedom of Information**

This communication strategy identifies the classes of information that each Fund publishes or intends to publish in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act. Anyone has a right under the Freedom of Information Act to request any information held by the Fund which is not already made available. Requests should be made in writing to the Pension Manager at the address at the end of this document.

A fee may be charged and the Fund reserves the right to refuse if the cost of providing the information is disproportionately high; if following prompting the request is unclear; and when the requests are vexatious or repeated.

### **Contact us:**

Tel: 0115 9772727 Option 3

Or Email: [lgpensions@nottscc.gov.uk](mailto:lgpensions@nottscc.gov.uk)

Or visit our website: <http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/npf>

Or write to us at:

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