

Talking Pensions

September 2019

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Talking Pensions is the primary method for passing administration information to fund employers from Pension Services.

Please share Talking Pensions with your colleagues to make sure this information gets to the correct person in your organisation. Pension administration touches the work of those in your finance, human resources and payroll services.

Use the employer contact form on this page www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/employerforms to tell us about any changes. Please send completed contact forms to pension.employers@oxfordshire.gov.uk

We keep all the details you supply secure, using them only for the purposes of our administration



Annual benefit statements and data quality

Data quality

A key part of our ongoing work with the Pensions Regulator is to raise the quality of our data. This is a national requirement, and the latest feedback suggests we are well on target to reach our goals here. We had very positive feedback from the Fund Actuary about the quality of the data we submitted for the 2019 Fund Valuation process. We also received positive feedback from our software supplier (interim scores of **95.3%** and **96.3%** in respect of our common and scheme specific data respectively), who commented that our results placed us at the top end relative to other Funds to date.

Annual Benefit Statements 2019

We are also delighted to report that we issued **99.3%** of the Annual Benefit Statements to our LGPS Active members within the statutory deadline of 31 August. We are working hard on the remaining 0.7%.

This is a brilliant result for the whole team following a tough 18 months under the scrutiny of the Regulator, and it reflects the hard work put in by our fantastic Pensions Team, whether working directly on the end of year process, or by helping to cover those staff by picking up additional work across the service, hopefully without a drop-in standards.



We were working up to the wire to deliver this result, as on a massive 48% of returns submitted the total contributions paid at the end of year, did not balance with the payments made throughout the year, which generated far larger volumes of queries than anticipated. This was a huge drain on time and resource and we'd like to put some changes in place to try and avoid the same situation next year from both your end and ours.....



...so, what was your experience of End of Year?

Did your return balance? Did you get the support you needed? Did you understand what was required of you? **We have recently sent out a survey to employers**, and we hope you will feed back to us honestly. You can answer the questionnaire anonymously, but if you want a response on any issues you raise, please fill in your name and contact details at the end.

We will use your feedback to shape our future approach. **Please take the time to respond before the questionnaire closes at the end of the day on Friday 4th October.** It should take no longer than 5-10 minutes.

https://consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/pension_services_end_of_year

Please note – this survey is aimed at all fund employers, not at outsourced service providers such as a payroll supplier or accountancy arm.

What has been achieved since the last Talking Pensions?

83 Employers are now LIVE on i-Connect, we hope to hit over 100 by Christmas. The final deadline for all employers to be on i-Connect is 31 August 2020....less than 1 year to go.

What's next?

We will be contacting employers with over 50 members (if we have not already) by 31 October 2019. This will be to start the process, arrange training, and provide support. Please make sure we have your up to date contact details.

Need any further Information or have any questions?

We are aware this may require some development time for larger employers, and additional support to all our employers we are here to help with the transition to keep it as smooth as possible. Please tell us what you need!

The i-Connect page on the employer toolkit is up and running here:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/business/pensions/employer-toolkit/forms-employers#paragraph-2972> We will continue to add information as more employers go LIVE. If you want to see anything specific let Julie Skelly know.

Annual Allowance / Pension Saving Statements Q&A

What are Pension Savings Statements?

Pension Saving Statements (PSS) are a summary of the amount of pension growth into a member's pension scheme during the tax year. The statement allows members to check their contribution to their pension against the Annual Allowance to determine if there is any tax owing.



We are currently in the process of calculating and verifying PSS for the 2018/2019 tax year. You may receive requests from the Pensions Team for specific pay details. Please respond as soon as possible so we can complete our work. Thank you.

Who will receive one?

Statements will be issued to your employees if they meet **any** of the following criteria:

- If our records show that the increase in their pension savings in the Scheme in 2018/2019 exceeds the standard Annual Allowance.
- If the member has requested a statement.
- If a third party has requested a statement on their behalf (this will be sent to the member to forward on).
- If a notification of data change for your employees requires the issuing of a new statement.

When will they go out?

We are legally obliged to issue these statements by 5th October. They will be sent to members' home addresses, and we will also make them available on *My Oxfordshire Pension*.

What should members do with their statements?

It is the member's responsibility to seek independent financial advice to assess the impact of their statement, in line with their own personal circumstances. **Neither employers, nor Pension Services should be providing any such advice.** It is clearly explained in the letter that is sent out that taxation is a personal issue – we cannot get involved in discussions about tax.

Why do I need to know this?

Once the statements have gone out, you may receive some queries from members. We are finding that the Annual Allowance is increasingly catching out people who you may previously not have expected to be caught. For example:

- A member who has a significant % pay rise and has lots of membership, even if they would not traditionally be classed as a high-earner
- A member who starts a large AVC or APC
- A member who transfers in a previous pension, or who combines two pension records, again, even if they would not traditionally be classed as a high-earner

If you can't help them with their questions, please refer members back to Pension Services although as previously stated, we will not be able to give advice. You may also like to direct them to the following factsheet on the website.

<https://www2.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/pensions/membersguide/leaflets/AnnualAllowanceleaflet.pdf>

Update from the Pensions Committee

At the meeting on 6 September officers gave updates on:

2019 Valuation

There have been two major workstreams to date:

- The first is the submission of all the data which is now complete bar some residual queries
- The second is the valuation approach. Our actuaries, Hymans Robertson, operate a risk based framework recognising the differences in employer risk profiles and covenants. Officers are currently working with Hymans Robertson on a revised Funding Strategy Statement to reflect this new approach. The Funding Strategy Statement will be sent out to scheme employers, for consultation, early in 2020.



Administration Team

It was reported that the administration team were still carrying 6 vacancies due to another resignation and one newly appointed administrator being unable to take up the post. There will be recruitment to one vacancy, but others are on hold until the impact of other changes such as the implementation of i-Connect is fully assessed. As a result, the team has been working to a reduced SLA which is in place until 31 December 2019.

The annual review of AVCs (additional voluntary contributions)

This is an exempt report due to containing information in relation to the financial or business affairs of any particular person. It was confirmed that Prudential would remain as the Fund's AVC provider.

All documents at: <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=140&Year=0>

Employers' Quarterly Meeting

The Employers' quarterly meeting took place on 25th September. The meeting was largely dedicated to the subject of employer discretions and policy writing. I have to admit there would have needed to be a background understanding to the scheme for this particular session, but as always we took questions as we went along.

Within the session we outlined the areas an employer must include in their policy, looking into their history, some frequently used phrases and possible outcomes to consider when preparing a statement. In addition to the mandatory areas, we also looked at the more common, 'good to have on record' areas where an employer can exercise their discretion.

During the session everyone had an opportunity to critique and discuss anonymised policy samples, a way perhaps to start your critical review of your own statement.

We admitted that our website pages were lacking detail about the areas employers must include in a policy statement, and that we would publicise in Talking Pensions when we had uploaded the information. In the meantime, and referenced during the Employer meeting, you will find listings and technical guidance on an employer's discretion policy statement on www.lgpsregs.org under the 'sample documents and guides' section of that website.

Pension Services will be checking their records soon and contacting employers where we do not hold a policy statement. Knowing how an employer is exercising a discretion is essential for correct benefit assessments, we cannot assume we know your response.

We welcome your feedback after these meetings and also suggestions for topics for future meetings. *JW*

Activation Codes for *My Oxfordshire Pension*

**TIME
TO GET
Online**

A new batch of Activation Codes for our online portal *My Oxfordshire Pension*, will be sent out to home addresses in the first half of October, to active members who have not yet registered online, nor told us that they prefer to receive paper correspondence.

As *My Oxfordshire Pension* is now our default method of communicating with members including benefit statements, a regular activation code run is part of our strategy to try to capture the attention of members who do not appear to be engaging with the Scheme, and who possibly do not understand how it works or what benefits it brings to them and their families.

You can play your part in this as well, by encouraging your employees to check their payslips, and look at their pensions statement, and by publicising the Scheme, for example, how much you as the Employer contribute on their behalf and the benefits of membership – pension, lump sum, ill health benefits, partners' pensions, children's pensions etc.

Regular Monthly Round Up:



1. Things we are asking you to do this month....

		✓ or ✕
1	Please respond to our Employer Survey before 04 October https://consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/pension_services_end_of_year	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Send us your discretion policy if you know you have not, otherwise be sure to timetable your next review	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Encourage your Active members to sign up for <i>My Oxfordshire Pension</i> when the letter arrives later this month	<input type="checkbox"/>
		...thank you

2. And, dates for your diary

Remember for your returns, these are the last dates; earlier submissions are very welcome.

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|--------------------|---|
| 6 October | Deadline to issue pension saving statements |
| 19 October | Deadline for receipt of monthly returns and contributions |
| 24 October | 'New To LGPS' Introduction to scheme administration for fund employers
NOTE - CHANGE OF DATE |
| 19 November | Deadline for receipt of monthly returns and contributions |
| 21 November | 'New To LGPS' Introduction to scheme administration for fund employers |
| 5 December | Quarterly Employers' Meeting |
| 12 December | Pension Fund Forum |
| 19 December | Deadline for receipt of monthly returns and contributions |

*Details about the meetings will be in the invitation we issue nearer to the event.

Our contacts and links

My query is:	Please contact:
A general enquiry: recorded message to direct calls to each section of Pension Services.	0330 0241 359 - Option 1 if you are calling regarding an individual member . - Option 3 if you are calling regarding an employer issue or a data submission.
A pension payroll enquiry: only for questions and concerns about the pensions we are currently paying	0330 0241 369
An i-Connect query: for questions about your i-Connect implementation, or monthly data submissions	01865 323663 pension.employers@oxfordshire.gov.uk
A My Oxfordshire Pension enquiry: for questions about our online service	03300 536 760 pension.MSSEnquiry@oxfordshire.gov.uk
An employer enquiry such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outsourcing questions and new employer enquiries• Employer facing enquiries• LGPS roles and employer responsibilities	pension.employers@oxfordshire.gov.uk
A data enquiry such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• MARS and the contribution returns• 'End of Year' returns• Follow up on queries from these submissions.	pension.returns@oxfordshire.gov.uk
A scheme member enquiry: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• including employer 'member facing' enquiries such as estimates	pension.services@oxfordshire.gov.uk
Have you checked the Employer Toolkit? https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/business/pensions/employer-toolkit	

DON'T FORGET! Unless replying to a direct email enquiry from us, **please avoid** using an individual's own email address.

Keep your information safe - always use an encryption service or password protected message when including personal details

... and vital links further afield

www.lgpsregs.org Glossaries, HR and payroll guides, documents and administration guides. These are regularly reviewed and kept up to date. Keep the link for the time-line regulations to hand these are there to help you. Also keep an eye on the monthly bulletins.

www.lgpsmember.org National site for LGPS members, and helpful interactive tools

<https://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk> Automatic Enrolment toolkits, Public Service Scheme Governance, Pension fraud – SCAM awareness for trustees and members, and reminders about responsibilities of third-party contracts.

www.pensionsadvisoryservice.org.uk Provides independent and impartial information about pensions, free of charge, to members of the public. TPAS is available to assist members and beneficiaries of the scheme with any pension query they have or any general requests for information or guidance concerning their pension benefits.

www.pensions-ombudsman.org.uk Deals only with pension complaints. It can help if you have a complaint or dispute about the administration and /or management of personal and occupational pension schemes Contact with the TPO about a complaint needs to be made within three years of when the event(s) you are complaining about happened

Where to find us



Pension Services
Oxfordshire Pension Fund
4640 Kingsgate
Cascade Way
Oxford Business Park South
Oxford
OX4 2SU

Please make an appointment before visiting the office, to ensure that whoever you need to see is here. There is no allocated public parking at our office

The small print

Pension Services compile Talking Pensions, basing their understanding of recent legislation and events. We prepare the notes monthly. This newsletter is a general summary of current LGPS and pensions issues and is not specific to the circumstances of any employer. We do not intend the information contained to constitute advice and should not be considered a substitute for specific advice in relation to individual circumstances.

All employers should be aware of their responsibilities within the LGPS and the regulations and take their own legal advice on these matters. Oxfordshire Pension Fund accepts no liability for errors or omissions. Contact Pension Services to discuss any issue in detail. If you have any suggestions to include for future issues, please email Communications on pension.services@oxfordshire.gov.uk 30 September 2019