



Communication Policy Statement

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COMMUNICATION POLICY STATEMENT

Introduction

Regulation 61 of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) 2013 Regulations stipulates that all administering authorities are required to publish a statement of policy regarding communication with key stakeholders.

Gwynedd Council is the administering authority for the Gwynedd Pension Fund and the Fund's key stakeholders include:

- Active Scheme members
- Deferred members
- Pensioner members
- Prospective scheme members
- Scheme Employers
- Pension Committee and Pensions Board
- Other Bodies
- Fund Staff

This communication statement sets out the policy for the provision of information and how the Fund intends to publicise, promote and develop the Scheme to each stakeholder group. It will be kept under review and amended when there is a material change in the policy.

The Fund's aim is to provide a high quality and consistent service to their stakeholders in the most efficient and cost-effective manner.

The intention is that all communications are as timely as possible, factual and in plain language, and presented in a manner appropriate to the receiver. Where individuals have specific needs in relation to the format of information, steps are taken to ensure that the required format is available, such as Braille, Audio, and Large Print.

All Gwynedd Pension Fund's publications are bilingual, in line with Gwynedd Council's Language Policy. Information in other languages may be available on request.

Where legislative Scheme changes are known in advance, procedures will be put in place to implement the changes in the most effective manner.

Communicating with Active Members

Active Members (including Councillor Members) are those who are contributing into the LGPS through one of the Gwynedd Pension Fund Scheme Employers. The methods of communication with these members are described below.

- **Website** - The Gwynedd Pension Fund website contains a section dedicated to Active Members. It provides general information about the LGPS including, Transfers, Improving Benefits, Retirement, Divorce, Death Benefits, Tax Allowances and Frequently Asked Questions. News items are added when required to notify members of any Scheme changes. There is a separate section dedicated to the pension benefits for Councillor Members.
- **Member Self Service** - The member self-service web portal on the Gwynedd Pension Fund website allows members to view and update their pension data securely online, such as death grant expression of wish, contact details, annual benefit statements and letters. The planning tools allow members to perform benefit calculations and prepare for retirement.
- **Employer Events** – The Gwynedd Pension Fund is available to attend employer events on request and provide a pension stand where members can discuss any pension issues with the pension fund staff and provide relevant scheme literature.
- **Presentations** – The Gwynedd Pension Fund is always available to offer presentations on the scheme. Presentations are also held when needed to inform Active Members of major changes to scheme regulations. Specialist information sessions can also be held at the request of the employer for members who are affected by the bulk transfer of pensions from the LGPS to other pension providers.
- **Pre-Retirement Courses** – A program of six courses are held by Chadwicks IFA, a firm of financial advisors' from Chester each year. The Gwynedd and Flintshire Pension Funds provide alternate LGPS presentations at these events.
- **Consultation Sessions** – The Gwynedd Pension Fund Communications Officers can hold individual consultation session for scheme members at the request of scheme employers. Consultations are usually held at the employees worksites and they offer the opportunity for scheme members to receive general and specific information about the LGPS and ask any question they may have relating to their LGPS pension.
- **Individual Appointments** - Active Members can arrange an appointment with a member of the Gwynedd Pension Fund staff at the Pension office in Caernarfon. In some cases (e.g terminal illness) a representative from the Gwynedd Pension Fund will visit a member at their home at the request of their employer.
- **Scheme Literature** –
 - **Pension Starter Pack.** Issued when a Scheme Employer notifies us of a new Active Member. This includes a Short Guide to the LGPS, a New Starter Form, Death Grant Expression of Wish form and a Statutory Notification of entry into the scheme.
 - **Short Scheme Guide.** The short scheme guide provides general information on the LGPS and is issued to all new employees and to existing

members on request. Copies of the scheme guide in Braille, large print and audio can be provided on request.

- **Retirement Guide.** The Retirement Guide outlines the arrangements for the payment of pension benefits and sets out the benefits payable to survivors in the event of the member's death and the other most important things to note.
- **Factsheets.** A range of factsheets have been produced for scheme members which give information specific topics relating to the LGPS.
- **Newsletters** - We issue periodic newsletters to Active Members to update them of changes in the scheme regulations.
- **Annual Benefit Statements** - Each year we issue a statement to each member showing the pension they have built up to the previous 31st March and forecasts the benefits payable at State Pension Age. They are uploaded automatically to a member's Member Self Service Online portal or sent directly to their home address if they have chosen not to register.
- **Annual Report and Accounts** - An electronic copy of the Fund's Annual Report and Accounts is available to all Scheme members on the website. Hard copies are also available upon request.
- **Correspondence** - The Fund uses both paper mail and e-mail to receive and send correspondence. Response will be made in the individuals preferred language of choice.
- **Statutory Notification** - Members are notified when any change occurs to their pension record, thus affecting their pension benefits.
- **Pensions Helpline** – A single helpline number is available for all pension enquiries and a dedicated e-mail address is available for enquiries by e-mail.
- **Poster Campaign** – A poster campaign will be implemented when major scheme changes need to be communicated to Active Scheme members. They will be distributed to employers so that they can be displayed at employees work sites.
- **Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure (IDRP) leaflet** – A document covering stage 1 of the IDRP is available on request.

Communicating with Deferred Members

Deferred Members (including Councillor Members) are those who have left their employment with a scheme employer and who have preserved benefits within the fund. The methods of communication with these members are described below.

- **Website** - The Gwynedd Pension Fund website contains a section dedicated to Deferred Members. It provides general information about the LGPS including, Transfers Out, Retirement, Divorce, Death Benefits and Frequently Asked Questions. News items are added when required to notify members of any Scheme changes. There is a separate section dedicated to the pension benefits for Councillor Members leaving before retirement.
- **Member Self Service** - The member self-service web portal on the Gwynedd Pension Fund website allows members to view and update their pension data securely online, such as death grant expression of wish, contact details, annual benefit statements and letters. The planning tools allow members to perform benefit calculations and prepare for retirement.
- **Individual Appointments** - Deferred Members can arrange an appointment with a member of the Gwynedd Pension Fund staff at the Pension office in Caernarfon. In some cases (e.g terminal illness) a representative from the Gwynedd Pension Fund will visit a member at their home at the request of their old employer, the individual or individual's representative.
- **Scheme Literature** –
 - **Retirement Guide**. The Retirement Guide outlines the arrangements for the payment of pension benefits and sets out the benefits payable to survivors in the event of the member's death and the other most important things to note.
 - **Factsheets**. A range of factsheets have been produced for scheme members which give information specific topics relating to the LGPS.
- **Newsletters** - we issue periodic newsletters to Deferred Members to update them of changes in the scheme regulations.
- **Deferred Benefit Statements** - Each year we issue a statement to each deferred member showing the up to date value of their pension benefits. They are uploaded automatically to the member's Member Self Service online portal or sent directly to their home address if they have chosen not to register.
- **Annual Report and Accounts** - An electronic copy of the Fund's Annual Report and Accounts is available to all Scheme members on the website. Hard copies are also available upon request.
- **Correspondence** - The Fund uses both paper mail and e-mail to receive and send correspondence. Response will be made in the individuals preferred language of choice.
- **Pensions Helpline** – A single helpline number is available for all pension enquiries and a dedicated e-mail address is available for enquiries by e-mail.
- **Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure (IDRP) leaflet** – A document covering stage 1 of the IDRP is available on request.

Communicating with Pensioners

Pensioners include retired members and the dependants of deceased members. The methods of communication with pensioners are described below.

- **Website** - The Gwynedd Pension Fund website contains a section dedicated to Pensioners. It provides general information about the LGPS including, Divorce, Death Benefits, Payment Dates, Living Abroad, Pensions Increases and Frequently Asked Questions. News items are added when required to notify pensioners of any Scheme changes.
- **Member Self Service** - The member self-service web portal on the Gwynedd Pension Fund website allows pensioners to view and update their pension data securely online, such as death grant expression of wish, contact details and letters.
- **Individual Appointments** - Pensioners can arrange an appointment with a member of the Gwynedd Pension Fund staff at the Pension office in Caernarfon.
- **Payslips and P60** – A payslip is sent to Pensioner when there is a change of £5 or more in their next payment as compared with the previous month. All pensioners receive a combined P60 and payslip at the end of each tax year.
- **Notice of Pensions Increase** – Each April, pensioners receive a notice informing them of the Pensions Increase which is to be applied on their pension (if applicable) and they also receive confirmation of the pay dates for the next 12 months.
- **Annual Report and Accounts** - An electronic copy of the Fund's Annual Report and Accounts is available to all Scheme members on the website. Hard copies are also available upon request.
- **Correspondence** - The Fund uses both paper mail and e-mail to receive and send correspondence. Response will be made in the individuals preferred language of choice.
- **Pensions Helpline** – A single helpline number is available for all pension enquiries and a dedicated e-mail address is available for enquiries by e-mail.
- **Birthday Congratulations** – Pensioners, including those receiving dependents benefits, celebrating their 100th birthday will receive a birthday card from the Gwynedd Pension Fund.
- **Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure (IDRP) leaflet** – A document covering stage 1 of the IDRP is available on request.

Communicating with Prospective Members

Prospective Members are employees who are eligible to join the LGPS with one of the Gwynedd Pension Fund Scheme Employers but have decided not to. The methods of communication with prospective members are described below.

- **Website** - The Gwynedd Pension Fund website contains a section dedicated to Prospective Members. It provides general information about the LGPS including, Reasons for Joining, Transfers, Contribution Rates, Retirement, Opting Out and Frequently Asked Questions. News items are added when required to notify members of any Scheme changes. There is a separate section dedicated to the pension benefits for Councillor Members.
- **Employer Events** – The Gwynedd Pension Fund is available to attend employer events on request and provide a pension stand where prospective members can discuss any pension issues with the pension fund staff and provide relevant scheme literature and forms.
The Gwynedd Pension Fund encourages employers to include pensions as part of staff induction events and will provide scheme literature and forms. The communications team could attend upon request.
- **Consultation Sessions** – The Gwynedd Pension Fund Communications Officers can hold individual consultation session for scheme members and prospective members at the request of scheme employers. Consultations are usually held at the employees worksites and they offer the opportunity for scheme members to receive general and specific information about the LGPS and ask any question they may have about joining the LGPS.
- **Individual Appointments** - Prospective Members can arrange an appointment with a member of the Gwynedd Pension Fund staff at the Pension office in Caernarfon.
- **Scheme Literature** –
 - **Short Scheme Guide.** The short scheme guide provides general information on the LGPS and is issued to all new employees and on request. Copies of the scheme guide in Braille, large print and audio can be provided on request.
 - **Factsheets.** A range of factsheets have been produced for scheme members which give information specific topics relating to the LGPS
- **Correspondence** - The Fund uses both paper mail and e-mail to receive and send correspondence. Response will be made in the individuals preferred language of choice.
- **Pensions Helpline** – A single helpline number is available for all pension enquiries and a dedicated e-mail address is available for enquiries by e-mail.
- **Poster Campaign** – A poster campaign is periodically implemented which highlights the benefits of joining the LGPS. They will be distributed to employers so that they can be displayed at employees work sites.

Communicating with Scheme Employers

For Gwynedd Council as Administering Authority to efficiently run the scheme it is essential that the flow of accurate, timely and clear information between Scheme Employers and the Fund is maintained through effective communication.

The methods of communication with Scheme Employers are described below.

- **Website** - Our website is under review to develop a section dedicated to Scheme Employers. The Website also contains all the Pension Fund Governance Documents, for example the Actuarial Valuation Report, Policy Documents and the Annual Report and Accounts. There are also links to sources of further information such as the Local Government Association's (LGA's) dedicated LGPS website.
- **i-Connect** - i-Connect is a secure online portal that takes data directly from the payroll system and feeds it directly into the pension system on a monthly basis. It automatically identifies and processes new joiners, opt-outs and leavers and enables the employer to check and cleanse the data before submission.
- **Contact Database** - Regulatory and administrative updates are frequently issued to all employers listed on the contact database via e-mail or letter. The employer Contact database is amended as necessary following updates from the Employers.
- **Annual General Meetings** - The Annual General Meeting is held specifically for Employers and Union Representatives to discuss the Annual Report and Accounts. Representatives from various professional advisory bodies, such as the Fund Actuary and Fund Managers also attend in order to answer on Funding, Investment Performance and Valuations.
- **Employer meetings** - As required to discuss topical issues, significant legislation changes, pre and post actuarial valuation and provide information and discuss improvements in the flow of information.
- **Individual Employer meetings** - Meetings with individual employers can be arranged to discuss matters specific to their participation in the Pension Fund. or to provide advice and guidance on specific issues.
- **Individual Employer Training meetings** - These can be arranged to resolve any administrative training issues identified by either the employer, or the Fund. These sessions are held at employer venues, with development being monitored and reviewed periodically thereafter.
- **Employer Guide** - The new Employer Guide is in the process of being completed and will be circulated electronically to all Employing Bodies and uploaded onto our website.
- **Service Level Agreements** - To improve the standard of service to members we aim to establish Service Level Agreements with Employers. The agreements will provide guidance on statutory obligations and responsibilities and set targets for both Employers and the Administering Authority –
 - To provide correct information
 - To act on, and respond to that information within a given timescaleAny targets for the Service Level Agreements will be agreed beforehand.

Communicating with Pension Fund Staff

Effective communication with Pension Fund Staff is an important part of daily operations and enables the Gwynedd Pension Fund to deliver a quality and accurate service to our key stakeholders.

The methods of communication with Pension Fund Staff are described below.

- **Induction** – All new members of staff undergo an induction program.
- **E-mails** - E-mail is the preferred method of communication for general messages within the unit. Where necessary, this will be followed up with individual or team training.
- **WhatsApp Group Chat** – During emergencies when e-mail is not available general messages will be shared on WhatsApp.
- **In-house Training** – General and pension-specific training on matters arising with regards to regulatory or procedural changes is given as a necessary as part of the unit's commitment to continuous improvement.
- **External Training** – Professional qualifications can only improve the knowledge and confidence of the team in their communication with stakeholders. All new and existing members of staff are therefore encouraged to study for professional qualifications in pension administration with the Chartered Institute of Payroll Professionals (CIPP). Staff also attend LGA and Heywood training as appropriate
- **Staff Meetings** – Staff Meetings are held bi-monthly to discuss any developments in legislation, changes to working procedures and operational matters. Staff are encouraged to participate in these meetings and influence the decisions that affect the whole Unit.

The operational plan, including Key Performance Indicators is also discussed on a regular basis to ensure that the members of the team are aware of and are meeting their targets.

- **Staff Appraisals** - Fund staff of all levels have an appraisal each year to discuss work issues, monitor performance and areas for development.
- **Continuous Monitoring** – Service Standards are monitored regularly to ensure staff are aware of their responsibilities in relation to the Scheme. On a daily basis communication is encouraged between members of staff and the Management team and an open door policy is in place.
- **Internet** - All staff have access to the Internet to ensure timely access to LGPS information. They also have access to Member Self Service to assist them in carrying out their roles.

Communicating with the Pensions Committee and Local Pension Board

As the Gwynedd Pension Fund's administering authority, Gwynedd Council has formed a Pensions Committee and a Pensions Board which meets quarterly to discharge the duties of the Council regarding the governance and administration of the Fund.

The Pensions Committee is responsible for approving the pension fund governance documents, including the Annual Report and Accounts and the Pension Fund Policies. It is also responsible for setting the Pension Fund Investment Strategy and the appointment of Investment Managers. The Pensions Committee is made up of nine elected Councillors.

The Pension Board is responsible for overseeing the work of the Pensions Committee and assists the Pension Fund in complying with all the legislative requirements making sure the scheme is being effectively and efficiently governed and managed. The Pension Board has three scheme member representatives and three employer representatives, one of which is elected as chair.

To facilitate the work of both the Pension Committee and Pension Board they are provided with access to all the Pension Fund Documents including the Annual Report and Accounts, the Actuarial Report, Policy Documents, Pensions Committee reports and decisions and Pension Board reports.

The methods of communication with Pension Committee and Board members are described below.

- **E-mails** - E-mail is the preferred method of communication for general messages.
- **Reports** – The Committee and Board members are provided with the following Reports:
 - **Annual Reports and Accounts** - The key publication on investment and administration.
 - **Actuarial Report** – Following the Fund's triennial valuation
 - **Specialised Reports** – Produced by the Gwynedd Pension Fund for their consideration.
- **Pension Fund Policies** – The committee have access to all the Gwynedd Pension Fund policies for consideration and approval
- **Presentations** – Committee and Board members are invited to presentations by The Gwynedd Pension Fund and advisers on investment, actuarial, and administration matters.
- **Training** - Committee members and Pension Board Members are required to undertake relevant training to enable them to carry out their roles effectively. Training can be done in-house, by LGA, the Pension Fund Investment Managers and advisors or the Pension Fund Actuary.
- **Agenda and Minutes** – The agenda and minutes for each meeting are published on the Gwynedd Council website.

Communication with Other Bodies

To facilitate the administration of the Gwynedd Pension Fund we must communicate with the following bodies:

- **Member Representatives** - These can include any individual or group, such as solicitors, Trade Unions or other Pension Providers, requesting information on behalf of a Scheme Member. This is only provided with the member's authority, in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and GDPR. All Scheme Literature is available on request.
- **Shrewsbury Pensions Officers Group** - Senior Pensions Officers from the Gwynedd Pension Fund meet representatives from other Local Authority Funds in the West Pennines area on a quarterly basis to share information, discuss questions on legislation and prevailing regulations as well as any technical or procedural issues.
- **All Wales Group** - Senior Pensions Officers from the Gwynedd Pension Fund meet representatives from other Local Authority Funds in Wales on a quarterly basis to share information, discuss questions on legislation and prevailing regulations as well as any technical or procedural issues.
- **All Wales Communication Group** - The Group meets as and when required, with a view of formalising and unifying approach to communications within the Welsh Local Government Authorities. The Group have collectively produced:
 - Uniform Annual Benefit Statement for both active and deferred members
 - A Short Scheme Guide
 - A Retirement Guide
 - Death Grant Expression of Wish Forms
 - Ill Health Certificates
 - Pension Fact Sheets on various topics which can be distributed to members.
- **Scheme Actuary** – Regarding Funding Levels, the Triennial Valuation, FRS17, TUPE and all funding issues.
- **HMRC** – With regards to tax issues for Scheme members.
- **Additional Voluntary Contributions** – Officers of the Pension fund have regular contact with the Fund's AVC providers regarding the funds of individual Scheme members.
- **Fund Managers** – Regarding investment and Fund performance.
- **LGA** – The Local Government Association (The Pensions Team) provides technical advice to Pension Fund Administering Authorities and to employers on the LGPS.

Contacting the Gwynedd Pension Fund

You can contact us in several ways:

In person or by post at our offices:

The Gwynedd Pension Fund
Gwynedd Council,
Shirehall Street,
Caernarfon,
Gwynedd.
LL55 1SH

By email:

pensions@gwynedd.llyw.cymru

By telephone:

01286 679982

Online:

www.gwyneddpensionfund.wales