
COMMUNICATION POLICY REVIEW

Report by Director People Performance and Change

JOINT MEETING OF PENSION FUND COMMITTEE AND PENSION BOARD

15 September 2022

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 **This report provides a review on the Communication Policy and provides an update on the review of forms and communication, including annual benefit statements. In line with the Pension Fund business plan the Policy should be reviewed on an annual basis. This report discharges that requirement.**
- 1.2 **Appendix 1** contains the revised Communication policy which has a number of amendments made to the previously approved version, these are within sections 5 and 6 to update on the improved communication methods that will be deployed by the Fund in response to feedback received in the Stewardship Code application and recognise the implementation of the Member Self Service portal for the delivery of Annual Benefit Statements.
- 1.3 The Pension Fund website continues to prove to be a useful resource and has been visited on a regular basis. This continues to be updated to reflect the current Regulations and any relevant documents or news stories are published accordingly. Additionally, the link to the Member Self Service portal has been added.
- 1.4 The Pensions Administration team have carried out a review of the supporting information published along with the Annual Benefit Statements and officers continue to encourage scheme members to sign up to the Members Self Service portal. Work continues to review processes and associated Forms making use of emerging digital technologies wherever possible.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **It is recommended that the Pension Fund Committee:**
- (a) Approves the Communication Strategy as set out in Appendix 1;**
 - (b) Notes the website performance;**
 - (c) Notes that work has continued on the review of Forms and the Annual Benefit statement documentation has been reviewed**

3 BACKGROUND

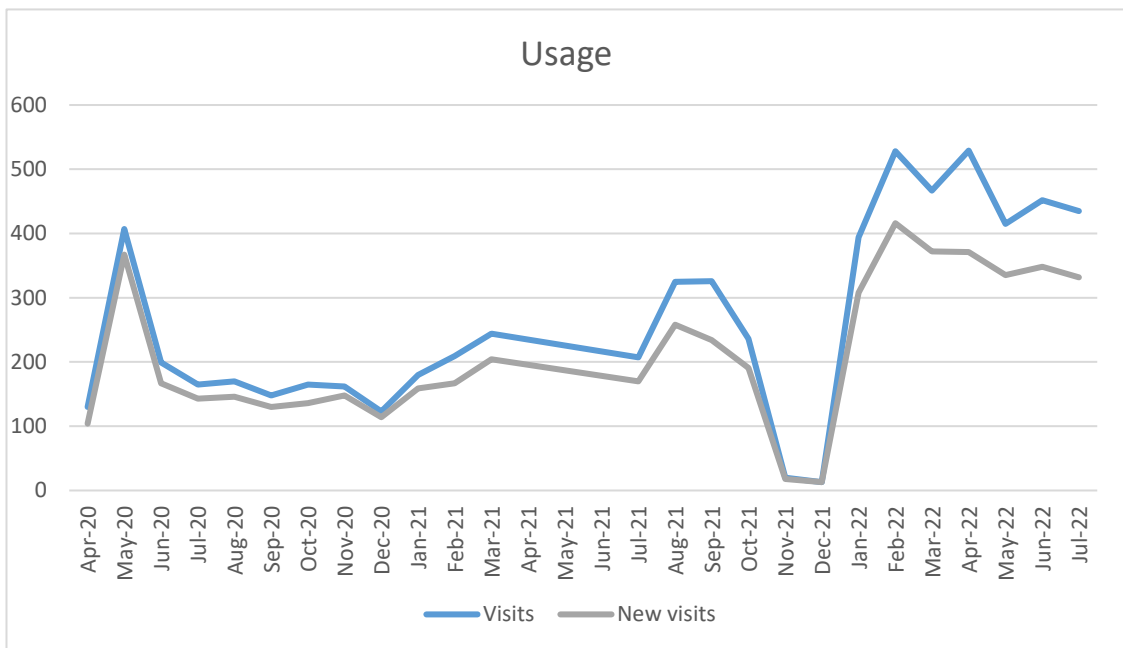
- 3.1 Regulation 59 of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Scotland) Regulations 2018 advises that an administering authority should have a Communications Policy. This should then be published by the administering authority.
- 3.2 In accordance with the Regulations the statement must be revised and published by the administering authority following a material change in their policy on any of the matters listed within Regulation 59.
- 3.3 The Pension Fund Business Plan also outlined a requirement to review the Communication Policy and Action plan, including all forms and communication material, on an annual basis, making sure that this is in line with best practice and technological advancements.

4 PENSIONS COMMUNICATION POLICY REVIEW

- 4.1 **Appendix 1** contains the updated Communication Policy.
- 4.2 The changes made within the Policy are to ensure that this is reflective of the technologies available have been reflected. The updates were made in the following sections:
 - Section 5 – updated Pensions Administration Team to The Pensions Team
 - Section 5 – inclusion of the Scheme Newsletter, being introduced to address feedback received in the previous Stewardship Code application
 - Section 5 - updated Pensions Administration Team to The Pensions Team and introduce time periods for in person meeting requests due to the continued home working arrangements for staff and recognition that online meetings can be accommodate much more readily through the use of the available technology
 - Section 6 – updated to reflect the implementation and availability of the Member Self Service portal for the delivery of Annual Benefit Statements
- 4.3 In the final quarter of 2021 a new version of the Pension fund website (www.scottishborderscouncilpensionfund.org) was developed by Hymans Robertson. Part of the implementation of the new version saw more officers being upskilled in the use of the website, as a result of this there are now more officers able to load content to the website. A link to the Member Self Service portal was also added which gives a further reason why scheme members are visiting the website.
- 4.4 Officers have obtained statistical information from the Website and the following graphic details the number of visits that there have been to the site, this reaffirms the view that the addition of the Member Self Service portal link increases site visits.



The following graphic shows the usage of the website and if the visitor was a first time visitor, with the gap being repeat visitors.



4.5 Prior to the issuing of the Annual Benefit Statements for deferred members the content was reviewed and updated to take account of current Regulations and to encourage members to sign up to the Member Self Service online portal. Annual Benefit statements for all active members have been published on the Member Self Service online portal, an email or letter has been issued to all active members to make them aware, with further follow up messages issued through Yammer for Scottish Borders Council employees.

4.6 Officers within HR Shared Services continue to review processes in light of the continued home working to make sure that they remain fit for purpose.

Further review of the communication policy will be carried out in line with the business plan and this will reflect any changes to process that have an impact on the way in which we communicate with all stakeholders.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

There are no costs attached to any of the recommendations contained in this report

5.2 Risk and Mitigations

This report is part of the governance reporting framework to manage the operation of the Pension Fund and reflects the compliance with the best practice recommendations. Risks regarding the admission of any new employer organisation have been identified and form part of the considerations for admission to the Fund.

5.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

There is no impact or relevance to Equality Duty or the Fairer Scotland Duty for this report. This is a routine good governance required under the Local Government Pension Scheme (Governance)(Scotland) Regulations 2018. Nevertheless, a light touch assessment has been conducted and this will be published on SBC's Equality and Diversity Pages of the website as in doing so, signifies that equality, diversity and socio-economic factors have duly been considered when preparing this report.

5.4 Sustainable Development Goals

There are no direct impacts from this report on the sustainable development goals of the Council.

5.5 Climate Change

There are no direct climate change impacts as a result of this report.

5.6 Rural Proofing

It is anticipated there will be no adverse impact on the rural area from the proposals contained in this report.

5.7 Data Protection Impact Statement

There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

5.8 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

No changes are required as a result of this report.

6 CONSULTATION

6.1 The Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (Finance and Corporate Governance), the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

Approved by

Clair Hepburn

Director People Performance and Change Signature

Author(s)

| Name | Designation and Contact Number |
|-----------|---|
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Background Papers:

Previous Minute Reference: Joint Meeting of Pension Fund Committee and Board on 16 September 2021

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Ian Angus can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

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