

Minutes of National Pension Officer Group (NPOG) meeting

Friday 7 February 2025 11am to 1.30pm

Attendees – standing members

NPOG member	POG
Phil Drury	East Midlands Pension Officer Group
Vinny Kinder	East Midlands Pension Officer Group
Martin Doyle (Chair)	London Pension Officer Group
Richard Smythe	London Pension Officer Group
Heather Chambers	Northeast Pension Officer Forum
Zena Kee	Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee
Erin Savage (Secretary)	Scottish Pensions Liaison Group
Vicky Jenks	Shrewsbury Pension Officer Group
Helen Tomkins	Shrewsbury Pension Officer Group
Joel Ellner	Southeastern Counties Superannuation Officer Group
Matt Mott (Deputy Chair)	Southeastern Counties Superannuation Officer Group
Dave Kellond	Southern Area Pension Officer Group
Sandy Armstrong	Southern Area Pension Officer Group
Emma Sanders	Southwest Area Pension Officer Group
Joanne Griffiths	Welsh Pension Officer Group
Kevin Gerard	Welsh Pension Officer Group

Attendees - Others

Name	Organisation
Steven Moseley	LGA
Ben Lavelle	MHCLG
Heidi Twort	Equiniti (part meeting only)
Claire Hey	Heywood (part meeting only)
Paul Kateley	Heywood (part meeting only)

Apologies

NPOG member	POG
Nicky Russell	Southwest Area Pension Officer Group
Kevin Gerard	Welsh Pension Officer Group

HC advised that there is still a vacancy for a second representative from NEPOF, however this will be discussed at their next meeting so there will be a second representative in place by the next National POG meeting.

Minutes of the last meeting

MD noted that this would include discussion on the Terms of Reference (TOR) which was circulated with the draft minutes.

SM confirmed that Rachel Abbey had made some comments and had sent these to MD and ESavage. MM asked that page numbers be included and also highlighted a typo in the TOR – Technical Group mentioned rather than National POG.

MD outlined comments from Rachel:

- 1) Rachel suggested that SAB should be included as representative members.
All agreed with this
- 2) Rachel suggested that due to the nature of the group, the role should be 'Secretary' rather than 'Secretariat' as LGA will retain some relevant functions.
- 3) Rachel confirmed that LGA will review minutes to ensure accessibility requirements are met.
- 4) Rachel noted that four issues were put forward for potential regulatory change:
 - Forfeiture: amend regulations to allow employers to apply for forfeiture certificate regardless of reason for leaving employment
 - Refunds: revert to pre-2014 position (ie remove five year rule)
 - AVCs: allow pre-2014 deferred members to use their AVC fund to purchase additional pension on retirement
 - Increase the current probate limit from £5,000 to £20,000, in line with limit set in Northern Ireland.

At the meeting in December, it was suggested that these issues are raised with Regional POGS. VJ mentioned that the change to probate limit was included as a recommendation in the LGA response to the Inheritance tax consultation, therefore this change may come this way. PD also suggested adding a request for clarity around potential protections to the changes to the normal minimum pension age (NMPA). SM confirmed that a paper on this was being produced and will be sent to MHCLG and SPPA. VJ noted that at the recent LGPC Governance Conference Paul Duggins from MHCLG discussed New Fair Deal and the Gender Pensions Gap – suggesting a Government focus on equalities issues. BL said that the regulatory

changes included issues covered in the upcoming consultation, however there is work ongoing on issues raised by the National POG as well as other groups and asked that the group continue to raise priority issues.

MD said that details of the four issues above will be circulated to POGs for discussion at the next POG meeting. Information will be sent to the group following this meeting.

SM asked for clarification on publication of minutes: all agreed that minutes should be published as draft in the first instance with any changes made before publishing a final version.

The group agreed to accept the TOR.

Feedback from POGs

JG advised that the Welsh POG had met recently. They are meeting Heywood next week to discuss timescales for updating the system for transfers.

PD advised that the East Midlands POG had met. Key issues discussed included the provision of AVC information for use in Pension Dashboards – there does not seem to be a consistent approach. Is it worth writing to the AVC providers or potentially setting up a sub-group? The group also discussed the consultation on inheritance tax.

MD advised that Jayne Wiberg had contacted him regarding the AVC issue and this will be discussed later on.

LGA update

SM provided an update on issues that have arisen since publication of the latest bulletin.

Work has been ongoing to make all GAD guidance available in HTML format on a central website. Consideration needs to be given how this will fit with the LGA website which currently holds this information. Options would include leaving historical guidance on the LGA site and signposting to the new site or only leaving supplementary guidance on the LGA site.

LGA are working with MHCLG on an upcoming Statutory Instrument and BL will provide a further update.

LGA have provided Club calculators for England & Wales and Scotland.

The next bulletin will include an article on the increase to NMPA, including guidance

on what administering authorities should do now, such as highlighting the change in communications. SM advised that there may be protections for certain members, however this has not been confirmed. Communications should include deferred members, to those transferring in and in pension sharing cases. Funds should also advise the receiving scheme when processing transfers-out if there is a protected NMPA and if so what this is, and if it applies to all benefits. For transfers-in, funds should ask the sending scheme for this information. Funds should also caveat estimates, both those generated by members online and those issued by the fund. ESanders asked about the potential protection. SM said that it's currently not known what MHCLG will do. MD asked if funds should add caveats to annual pension forecasts. SM recommended communicating as widely as possible and to include deferred statements given that we don't know details as yet. SM advised there is wording within the Member Guide (brief guide) that could be used. VK asked when it is likely we will know about protections. SM said this depends on MHCLG.

MHCLG update

BL noted that joining these meetings is very helpful to understand current issues. BL explained that the team is split into two parts with half of the team working on the Pensions Review. BL is part of the Member Benefits team who are working on a number of issues. A consultation will be launched shortly. In addition, the team is looking at opt-out data, the Gender Pensions Gap and Fair Deal. MD noted the focus on opt-outs: his fund has reviewed but there has been no spike due to cost of living. VK highlighted that the issue with opt-out data is that funds do not hold all the data – some is with employers. HC agreed that she has not seen an increase in opt-outs.

BL noted on NMPA that this will be fitted into the timetable of work. It would be useful to understand from the group what the members plans are in terms of early retirement. On opt-outs, BL agreed that there is nothing to compel employers to retain data, however it is important to understand baseline data. JG highlighted that the change in NMPA will require updates to pensions administration software and providers will require a lead-in time to prepare these updates so early notice on protection is needed.

Software provider update

Prior to the providers joining the call, the group discussed current issues.

MD noted that Jayne Wiberg had contacted him regarding AVC information for dashboards: it would be helpful if funds could unite to agree on a format. ZK advised that Utmost have decided on a format and therefore funds will have no control over this – the issue is having more than one AVC provider means that they can both say they will do it their way. Also needed to consider what software suppliers will do.

HC said that it would be good to understand what decisions funds have made – could information be collected from the POGs? MD will contact Jayne Wiberg and ask if a survey can be circulated to funds.

Software updates for McCloud were discussed.

JG advised that Heywood have started work on transfers and the Welsh POG is meeting Heywood to discuss the two year timescale that has been provided for completion of this work. JG will circulate further information to the group. SM asked if the underpin calculation will be in place for non-Club transfers before April? JG confirmed this won't be in place. SM will feed back to Rachel Abbey and ask for existing spreadsheets to be updated.

MM noted issues with interfund calculations with Civica and HC advised that she and others are meeting Civica next week to raise concerns and discuss timetables for the required developments.

MD asked about annual benefit statements – Heywood have advised that information should be available – what is the position with Civica? HC expects that she will need to issue statements later than normal.

MD asked about the ability to exercise discretion on including underpin data. SM said that information must be included, but funds have discretion to exclude this for certain classes of member – however if they use the discretion, members must be advised. The original intention was for guidance to be issued on use of this discretion to ensure consistency in approach. In general, however, this should generally be applied to issues that are out of your control. VK asked if this includes deferred members – SM confirmed that deferred members are in scope.

MD asked SM if it would be possible for guidance to be provided – SM suggested BL may wish to comment on this. BL agreed to take this away and will update. HC suggested a poll for funds to indicate whether they are utilising the discretion and if so, the reasons why. MD will ask that a survey is issued to funds.

Heywood – proposed timescales for the development of McCloud transfer calculations

PK and CH joined the meeting. MD said that the group wished to discuss timelines for McCloud transfer calculations and also a suggestion raised by Civica regarding electronic data transfer for interfunds.

PK confirmed that the two-year timescale provided to funds is for the full transfer lifecycle with work being carried out in phases. The next software release (25.2) will include Club transfer outs for groups 3 and 4. PK advised that work is being carried

out based on priorities agreed with the CLASS group. PK also highlighted that transfers-in were the most complex due to the amount of information that needs to be recorded and factored into other calculations. MD asked about annual benefit statements. PK confirmed functionality will be in 25.2 release and if information is on ALTAIR records, then the benefit statement will be used. VJ advised her fund uses Engage for benefit forecasts and had raised with her CRM that there is no breakdown of McCloud data. PK advised that calculations have all been done and conversations are ongoing with the Engage team.

MD said that a template from John Dale for dashboard AVC information had been shared via Jayne Wiberg and the intention was to do some further work on this with the Regional POGs.

MD said that Equiniti had been in touch to propose that software suppliers produce an electronic template for provision of interfund data – this would be something similar to a previous approach used by Heywood.

PK commented that the previous Heywood solution (Electronic Interfund Adjustment) was pre-CARE and only worked with Heywood clients and there were issues with location codes being used and it was not well-used. The sheer amount of data that is needed for interfunds makes it difficult with some required fields being open-ended. In addition, funds don't all hold data in the same way. PD and ESanders suggested taking it back to basics in the first instance and asking providers to agree the format. CH noted that this had been considered for Police, however the lack of consistency in the way data was held by funds was an issue.

Equiniti – template for the electronic transfer of interfund data

HT joined the meeting and discussed the proposal: it would be good if suppliers could get together and agree a template in the same way as with the Universal Data Extract (UDE). Encryption would need to be considered, however automation of this data transfer process would help funds. PK noted that the UDE holds fields with fixed amounts of data, whereas interfund data includes open-ended lists which is more complex.

The group agreed that anything would be helpful.

PK and CH left the meeting.

MD asked HT if she could provide any update on Equiniti's progress with system developments for AVCs for pensions dashboard. HT will raise with colleagues and feed back to the group.

HT left the meeting.

Civica

An invitation to attend the meeting was sent to Civica however there may have been a change in contact details. HC offered to ask Civica to contact MD and ESavage for details of future meetings.

AOB

JG provided an update on Scottish Widows. A number of funds had been experiencing issues with Scottish Widows and Clerical Medical. Jayne Wiberg at LGA had passed on contact details and JG has passed on details of all issues, she is now receiving responses but not fully resolved as yet. Any new issues should be passed to JG.

ESavage confirmed that placeholder invites for future meetings will be issued shortly now that Terms of Reference have been agreed. In order to confirm attendee details with LGA a further email will be sent closer to the date of each meeting.

Next meeting Friday 4 April 2025.

MD closed the meeting by thanking all for attending.