

Communications Working Group

Agreements and actions

Thursday 11 January 2024 – hybrid

1. Apologies and introductions

Present

Alastair Johnston (**AJo**) Durham Pension Fund
Amanda Jupp (**AJu**) Kent Pension Fund
Andy Hemming (**AH**) West Midlands Pension Fund
Anna Lloyd (**AL**) Oxfordshire Pension Fund (substitute)
Becky Clough (**BC**) SAB Secretariat
Bethany Goss (**BG**) Surrey Pension Fund
Daniella Howell (**DH**) LGPC Secretariat
Guy Hayton (**GH**) Merseyside Pension Fund
Jacinta Wilmot (**JW**) Environment Agency
Karen Thomas (**KT**) Gwent (Torfaen) Pension Fund
Kath Meacock (**KM**) Flintshire Pension Fund
Kevin Gerard (**KG**) Carmarthenshire Pension Fund
Lindsey Davison (**LD**) Tyne and Wear Pension Fund
Lorraine Bennett (**LB**) LGPC Secretariat
Louise Campbell (**LC**) North East Scotland Pension Fund
Madelena da Costa (**MdC**) Buckinghamshire Pension Fund
Mandy Judd (**MJ**) Hampshire Pension Fund
Martin Griffiths (**Chair**) Warwickshire Pension Fund
Rachel Abbey (**RA**) LGPC Secretariat
Sharon Grimshaw (**SG**) Northamptonshire Pension Fund
Sinead Nicholson (**SN**) NILGOSC
Stuart Duncombe (**SD**) West Yorkshire Pension Fund
Tim O'Connor (**TO**) Enfield Pension Fund

Apologies

Ben Altoft (**BA**) Avon Pension Fund
Rebecca O'Shea (**RO**) Oxfordshire Pension Fund

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, with a special welcome to Bethany Goss who attended her first meeting and Anna Lloyd who attended as a substitute for Rebecca O'Shea.

2. Subgroups

The group discussed the current subgroups and agreed on the changes set out below.

Digital engagement subgroup: Becky O'Shea, Kath Meacock, Stuart Duncombe, Jacinta Wilmot, Amanda Jupp and Sharon Grimshaw.

To stay on the agenda for the next meeting – at that point we will have preliminary results from the 2024 survey and more information about the engagement KPIs that will be included in the Annual Report guidance.

~~**Employer ill health briefing note subgroup:** Stuart Duncombe, Guy Hayton, Mandy Judd (or another rep from Hampshire), Martin Griffiths.~~

~~*Remove – the LGA training team has produced bite-size training and will be working on other ill health resources for employers.*~~

~~**McCloud comms subgroup:** Martin Griffiths, Sharon Grimshaw, Kath Meacock, Lindsey Davison and Amanda Jupp.~~

~~*Removed – with thanks to the subgroup. Producing McCloud communications for members is mainly finished. The group can raise any further McCloud communications requirements at future meetings.*~~

McCloud ABS subgroup: Guy Hayton, Jacinta Wilmot, Louise Campbell, Stuart Duncombe, Kevin Gerard.

Active

McCloud letter templates subgroups: Stuart Duncombe, Martin Griffiths, Amanda Judd, Karen Thomas.

Active

LGPS promotion project subgroup: Guy Hayton, Rebecca O'Shea, Sinead Nicholson, Tim O'Connor and Becky Clough.

Active

Pension awareness week subgroup: Stuart Duncombe, Andy Hemming, Bethany Goss and Louise Campbell

New

3. Actions and agreements from last meeting held 12 October 2023

RA reviewed the actions from the last meeting:

- Action 1: No suggestions for news articles received
- Action 2: Videos subgroup met in January 2024 – covered later at this meeting
- Action 3: Digital engagement survey to be discussed later
- Action 4: McCloud letters subgroup – progress to be discussed later
- Action 5: Statutory guidance on McCloud is almost completed and DLUHC are not minded to include more detail about the order in which pension cases should be prioritised
- Action 6: Website fixed so that the 2023/24 workplan link works
- Action 7: Pension Awareness week 2024 added to the agenda for this meeting
- Action 8: Meetings for the remainder of 2024 have been set up.

4. Member website

General discussion

Good feedback on the McCloud section from administrators. Some funds have used these pages as an educational tool for staff.

An error in one of the 'After you die' FAQs was raised – there is a missing word which means the section does not make sense.

Action 1: RA to correct the relevant FAQ.

News section

The Chair asked the group to share any ideas for the news section or the member website more generally:

- Funds are thinking about communications to pensioner members about annual pensions increase and payment dates. LGA will update the member website once the annual increase is confirmed. We expect this to be late February or early March.
- The member contribution table for 2024/25 – we expect this to be published in the January LGPC bulletin.
- Member videos were successful – it was suggested that we promote them on the carousel.

Action 2: Members of the group to let the Chair and RA know if they have any ideas for news articles to include on the member website.

Action 3: RA to add the annual updates to the member websites and consider changes to the carousel.

5. Engagement

General discussion

The group discussed uptake of self-service portals:

- Three funds represented on the group had achieved sign-up rate of over 50 percent for their member portal in certain groups.
- The general pattern was higher sign-up rates for active and deferred members, but a few funds had experienced the reverse of this with a higher proportion of pensioner members signed up.
- Those with a higher sign-up rate among active and deferred members hope the proportion of pensioner members registered will increase as members retire.
- One-to-one encouragement to sign up at in-person events and employer visits has proved successful at increasing the number of portal users.
- Posting annual benefit statements to members was a significant cost. Making statements available on the portal instead represents a saving, one fund reporting that the saving paid for the additional cost of providing the portal.
- Some funds have taken a very strict approach to pensioner members, with certain information only available through the portal, unless the member has opted out of digital communications.
- One fund has seen lower registration rates among lower earners, both active and deferred members.

Two funds represented on the group had recently adopted a new portal offered by Heywood and offered their feedback:

- Members who had signed up to the old system are not automatically able to access the new system. There were concerns that this would lead to a drop off in user numbers. Funds had let members know that they need to update their details and password to access the new system, rather than badging it as having to 're-register'.

- The new system has two-factor authentication. Improved security is a selling point. People are used to this sort of security from online banking and other services.
- The site is improved from the previous version, but not all pages have been updated. These instead revert to the old site.
- Other positives of the new system include links between multiple records, the retirement planner (although there are some reservations about this feature) and the annual benefit statement. Heywood have also provided videos to help members understand their statement.

A fund that uses a separate system to run pensioner payroll is finding it hard to get pensioners to sign up. This may be because they are not able to show payslips in real time. Funds that use an integrated payroll system are able to show payslips, which makes it easier to encourage pensioner members to use the portal.

Digital engagement survey

RA plans to issue the digital engagement survey later in January or in early February. This will be a more simplified version than the subgroup had previously discussed. This is to encourage administering authorities to complete the survey, and to yield results that are meaningful and comparable. The survey will cover:

- What percentage of different member groups have registered for a member portal?
- What proportion of members have accessed the portal in the past year? This question will be optional as we don't yet know if all funds are able to report on this.
- Any significant problems or successes related to the portal in the past year.

The survey will not include questions on the amount of time spent answering queries on the portal and how to access it. This will vary greatly on the size of the fund, what proportion of members have signed up and what they have done to promote the portal. Benchmarking on this information would not be useful because it is not clear whether more contact is positive or negative. We have already made the point about the work involved in supporting members to use the portal in the digital engagement guide.

Action 4: RA to run the digital engagement survey in the next month. It will be open for a month, with the option of including a reminder in the February bulletin if response is low.

The Scheme Advisory Board (SAB) is working with DLUHC on Annual Report guidance. That may include new KPIs related to member engagement. We will discuss the digital engagement survey at the next meeting to decide whether we should continue to run it periodically, and how often, or whether it has been superseded by the Annual Report guidance.

LGPS promotion project

We set up a subgroup at the last meeting to explore producing material to promote the LGPS to scheme members. The initial aim was to give information to new employees, but a variation could be used to encourage opted out members to opt back in, or to remain in the Scheme when they are re-enrolled. The group discussed what requests that have had for this type of resource:

- Many employers have asked for something that can be used to educate new employees about the LGPS as part of their induction process.
- Three members of the group reported that councils have asked administering authorities for a video that promotes the key benefits of the LGPS.
- One fund has been asked for something that can be used for managers' briefings, to improve understanding of the Scheme in existing staff, including those who have opted out of the LGPS.
- There is some limited evidence that the cost of living crisis is leading to more employees opting out or choosing the 50/50 section of the Scheme. The SAB is trying to find out more about opt out rates across the country.
- Private sector employers are doing more for their employees' wellbeing and financial education and the same is starting to happen in the public sector. Councils are looking for information to include about pensions in wellbeing sessions.

Action 6: SD to share what they produce for Lincolnshire Pension Fund to use to promote the Scheme to existing members. BG to share infographic they used to promote the key benefits of the LGPS to Surrey County Council employees, which they are also rolling out to other Scheme employers.

The subgroup met on 5 January 2024 to discuss this project. The preference of the group was for a video which is about four minutes long to promote the benefits of the Scheme:

- This would include the relevant information from the existing videos, all in one place.
- It would include information for new starters that is not in the existing videos, such as the 12 month deadline for requesting a transfer in.
- We would also provide wording for employers or administering authorities to use with the video, allowing them to pass on fund-specific information to members and prospective members. This could be converted into a factsheet, or more likely a webpage.
- One aim is to educate people about the benefits of the scheme as early as possible. New members can currently opt out or choose to opt out before they have any understanding of what they are giving up. Employers would promote the video as part of a new employee's induction, which could reduce opt out rates.

The group did raise concerns:

- the cost and time resources needed for such a major undertaking
- most of the content is already included in existing videos
- some of the information that would be most useful for new joiners cannot be included in a generic video – how to register for the member portal, where to get an expression of wish form or pension transfer request form
- the length of the video was also a concern. There is a prevailing view that 90 seconds is the recommended maximum length you keep a viewer's attention for.

Other options are possible. The LGA has software that can be used to produce interactive training. See the [Employer bite-size training](https://www.lgpsregs.org) on www.lgpsregs.org. This would be a cheaper option than commissioning a video.

The Environment Agency has already produced a video for new employees. It may be possible to use this as the basis for a national promotional video.

The group decided that we need the opinions of more funds before taking this project further.

Action 7: RA to arrange a meeting of the subgroup in February. The aim of that meeting will be to pull together a more definite plan about what the promotional material is meant to achieve. This will be used to gather views at the next round of Pensions Officer Group meetings in March/April.

Action 8: JW to ask her administrators, who produced the Environment Agency video, whether they would work with the LGA on a national version.

6. Accessibility

General discussion

SN has had problems publishing minutes of committee meetings which include redactions. The removal of metadata has led to accessibility issues with the redacted document. No other members of the group had experience of this issue.

7. McCloud remedy

Latest updates

RA and LB gave an update on the latest developments on the McCloud remedy:

- GAD guidance on early and late retirement and individual transfers is expected later in January.
- A consultation on DLUHC McCloud statutory guidance also expected early this year. The guidance will cover employer data collection, identifying members in scope, prioritisation of cases, what to do if you cannot pay a top-up transfer payment, and some other technical issues.
- DLUHC have asked administering authorities to let them know about any compensation cases. We expect compensation cases will be rare in the LGPS.
- The LGA have published McCloud newsletter templates to be given out at in-person events or sent to members who have opted out of digital communications.

McCloud letter templates subgroup

The McCloud letter templates subgroup has produced further drafts which are with RA for checking. We are waiting for further information before these can be published. We will publish templates for non-Club transfer calculation after the GAD guidance on transfer has been completed.

The information we need from a member whose pension in payment increases because of the McCloud remedy depends on whether any payment is made before the abolition of the Lifetime Allowance is abolished on 6 April 2024.

Retrospective cases – timing

RA asked the group whether they plan to start re-calculating pensions in payment before 6 April 2024. The majority of funds will not be reviewing pensions in payment until after that date. Their current focus is on updating pensioner records with the service information that will be needed to perform underpin calculations.

Action 9: RA and the subgroup to work on re-calculation letters based on the Lifetime Allowance regime that will be in force from 6 April 2024.

McCloud ABS subgroup

The information to include in 2024 annual benefit statements depends on:

- whether administering authorities can identify who is protected by the McCloud remedy
- if these members can be identified, whether administering authorities want to include different messages in their annual statements
- how many different messages are needed. Do funds want different messages for a member who appears not to be protected, but may be protected and for someone who is definitely not protected? A deferred member who left the LGPS before 1 April 2014 (2015 in Scotland or Northern Ireland) is not protected. A member born after 1996 is highly unlikely to be protected.

Action 10: RA to arrange a meeting of the subgroup in February 2024 to discuss what will be possible for the 2024 statements, and what their preference is.

Still to come

LB is considering what changes we could make to the NI database to help administering authorities establish whether a member is protected. The changes under consideration are:

- adding a McCloud indicator to show whether the member is protected
- adding the date of leaving so administering authorities have a better idea about whether a break is disqualifying

- opening up the database so that users get results from England & Wales and Scotland.

Information on the database would not give a definitive answer about McCloud protection, but should help in some cases. LB does not expect that administering authorities will have to sign a new data sharing agreement. It should be possible to reflect the changes by issuing an addendum to the current agreement.

The group discussed when all records must be updated for the McCloud remedy.

- records for active and deferred members must be updated by August 2025 so that the relevant information can be included in annual benefit statements
- in the unfunded schemes, all records including pensions in payment must be reviewed within 18 months because of the deadline for issuing remediable service statements
- in the LGPS, the deadline for reviewing pensions in payment does not appear to be set out in regulations, but the expectation is that the exercise will be completed by the end of March 2025.

8. Pensions dashboards

The group discussed the latest information about pensions dashboards:

- The National LGPS Frameworks will be setting up a framework for ISP providers. The tender process has closed and the frameworks team is evaluating the responses. We expect the framework to be live in the summer.
- The connection date for public service pension schemes has not yet been confirmed, but an indicative date has been shared with administering authorities. The dashboards available point (DAP) has not yet been confirmed, so we don't know whether dashboards will be operational when the public service pension schemes connect.
- The Pensions Dashboard Programme (PDP) is holding a webinar at the end of January which will in part be delivered by a member of the LGA team.
- Conversations with AVC providers about responsibility for supplying data to dashboards are ongoing. The LGA is working with PASA, PDP and the DWP on guidance on AVCs and dashboards.

- The LGA has published draft dashboards connections guidance. We will issue a final version when the staging timetable is confirmed.
- The group agreed on the importance of keeping the pensions board informed about the pensions dashboards project.
- Some funds have already included information about pensions dashboards in member newsletters. Others are considering whether to do so. Most felt that it would be most appropriate to start those communications once the DAP has been confirmed. There will be at least six months' notice.

Action 11: SN and BG to share the pension dashboards articles they have already published with the group.

9. Lifetime allowance abolition

LB updated the group on the latest on the abolition of the Lifetime allowance (LTA):

- the LTA will be abolished from 6 April 2024
- the Annual allowance will continue
- most Benefit Crystallisation Events will no longer exist
- there will be a limit on the amount of tax-free cash an individual can take
- this is 25% of the current LTA, and there is no intention to adjust this figure with inflationary increases
- no more LTA charges, but there will be pension commencement excess lump sum charges
- there will be special rules for members with existing protection from LTA charges.

The LGA is working with Aon to produce a guide on the changes. This will include creating a template declaration form to use to work out if a member has exceeded the lump sum limit. LGA expects to receive the first draft of the guide later in January.

Action 11: MG, GH, AH, SD and KT volunteered to check the declaration form. LGA to share the form with them.

HMRC has produced high-level guidance on the abolition of the LTA. Members of the group did not find this helpful.

Administering authorities are currently required to provide LTA information annually to pensioner members. We expect a similar requirement for lump sum payments in the future. The LGA will confirm once they have had time to review the new rules.

TO has been involved in testing a pilot version of an app for 'real time' annual allowance calculations. The product is not up to scratch, but they will update it.

10. Pension Awareness Week

The group felt that events during Pensions Awareness Week are not of great value to LGPS members and that they are focussed on defined contribution schemes. Some funds use the week to run and publicise their own events and resources.

The Civil Service Pension Scheme delivered a series of podcasts for Pension Awareness Week 2023. They used professional speakers which meant the cost was high, but so was the quality. 70,000 people listened.

RA asked for volunteers to join a subgroup to work on pension awareness week 2024. One suggestion was to produce a toolkit for administering authorities to use to plan their own events.

Action 12: RA to arrange a meeting of the subgroup (SD, AH, BG and LC) in February.

11. Regional communication groups

The Welsh Communications Group met in October and discussed:

- disclosure for the McCloud remedy
- Member portals - common problems scheme members have when registering, praise for KM's video to help people registering, directing people to the portal to run their own estimates, using employers to promote the portal.

At their most recent meeting November, the Joint Communications Group discussed:

- making sure the right people are on the group and sharing the workload
- McCloud communications
- Pension Awareness Week
- encourage feedback to LGA to influence the work of this national group

- PLSA to address their next meeting to see how they could better represent the LGPS, its members and stakeholders
- AVC Wise financial advice and planning toolkits.

12. Communications work plan

The group discussed the annual workplan – the standing items to be repeated in 2024/25, projects to be carried forward from 2023/24 and any new items to add.

Action 13: RA to create the annual workplan for 2024/25.

LB suggested we could produce something on the website akin to ‘Midlife MOTs’ for members in their 40s and 50s. Merseyside Pension Fund already have a similar project underway.

Action 14: Add to workplan and meeting agenda for October 2024. GH to feed back on progress and the group to decide whether to take this forward.

13. AOB

No other business raised

14. Future Meetings

The next meetings will be on:

- 11 April 2024 (in person)
- 4 July 2024 (hybrid)
- 3 October 2024 (in person).