



North East Scotland Pension Fund
nespf

Training Policy

August 2020

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Purpose Statement

This statement details the training agenda for members of the Pensions Committee and Pension Board of the North East Scotland Pension Fund (NESPF), as administered by Aberdeen City Council.

The training policy is designed to support the Pensions Committee and Pension Board in performing and developing in their individual roles, with the ultimate aim of ensuring NESPF is managed by members with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively carry out their responsibilities.

Application & Scope

All Pension Fund Committee and Board members to whom this policy applies are expected to continually demonstrate their own personal commitment to training.

Induction Process

On appointment to the Pensions Committee or Board, a member will attend an introductory briefing/training session and receive copies of the following documentation to assist in providing a basic understanding of the NESPF;

- [guide to the Local Government Pension Scheme \(LGPS\)](#)
- [the latest Annual Report and Accounts](#)
- [the most recent Actuarial Valuation and Funding Strategy Statement](#)
- [the Governance Policy and Compliance Statement](#)
- [Copy of the LGPS Regulations](#)
- [Copy of the Statement of Investment Principles and Compliance with Myners Principles](#)

All remaining documentation is available to Committee and Board members via the Pension Fund website at www.nespf.org.uk.

Training Agenda

The Pension Fund recognises that attaining, and then maintaining, relevant knowledge and skills is a continual process for the Pensions Committee and Pension Board members, and that training is a key element of this process.

Training is provided to members of the Pensions Committee and Pension Board in respect of the following on a rolling basis;

Scheme Governance

- [LGPS - Status and Legal Framework](#)
- [LGPS Regulations](#)
- [Role of Elected Members](#)

- Advisors and their Role
- Actuarial Valuation and Funding Strategy Statement
- Statement of Investment Principles
- Myners Principles
- Risk Management

Investment Strategy

- Asset Classes
- Risk
- Investment Structure
- Investment Management and Performance Monitoring

Support Services

- Custody Services
- Service Organisation
- Role of the Chief Officer-Finance
- Role of the Pensions Manager and Pensions Section

Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID II)

Since the introduction of MiFID II from 3rd January 2018, financial institutions (including the LGPS) are required to 'opt up' to be classified under 'elective professional client' status, to allow continued access to the full range of vehicles investment managers need to deliver the investment strategy.

In order to maintain this status, the client (i.e. Pension Fund) needs to be able to demonstrate its expertise, experience and knowledge, such that the investment managers can gain reasonable assurance that it is capable of making investment decisions and understanding the nature of risks involved.

This training policy helps to ensure the assessed levels of expertise, experience and knowledge are maintained. The Pension Fund is required to keep this information under review and notify the investment managers of any changes to the collective circumstance which could affect its status.

Policy Performance

Each Committee and Board member is expected to undertake a minimum of 2 days of training each year.

Training is ongoing for members and consideration will be given to the various training resources available, these may include (but are not limited to):

- employer and scheme member events hosted by the Pension Fund
- internally developed training days and pre/post meeting sessions

- seminars and conferences that are offered by industry wide bodies, specifically the LAPFF annual conference, LGC conferences and PLSA conferences
- on-line training
- seminars and training events offered by the Fund’s investment managers and advisors
- use of the secure ‘trustee’ area of the Pension Fund website
- in addition to the above, Fund officers are available to answer any queries from Committee and Board members.

The Pensions Regulator’s E-Learning Toolkit

The Pensions Regulator has developed an on-line toolkit to help those running public service pension schemes to understand the governance and administration requirements set out in its Code of Practice No.14. There are eight short modules covering:

- Conflicts of Interest
- Managing Risk and Internal Controls
- Maintaining Accurate Member Data
- Maintaining Member Contributions
- Providing Information to Members and Others
- Resolving Internal Disputes
- Reporting Breaches of Law
- Pensions Scams (optional)

All members of the Pensions Committee and Pension Board are expected to complete the tPR Toolkit modules following appointment.

Training attendance records will be maintained by the Pension Fund. These will be reported to the Pensions Committee and Board on an annual basis for consideration.

Where instances are identified of a Pension Board member not meeting the minimum training requirements (i.e. failing to attain and/or maintain the appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding as required under S.248A of the Pensions Act 2004, as amended by the Public Service Pensions Act 2013) an initial discussion will be held to establish whether there are any extenuating circumstances; followed by:

- no further action (if extenuating circumstances are shown)
- agreement of an improvement plan; and
- If no improvement can be demonstrated over a reasonable period of time, necessary steps will be taken to remove the Board member and seek a new appointee.

Supporting Procedures & Documentation

A Knowledge and Skills Framework was developed by CIPFA in 2010 along with accompanying guidance. The Fund has formally adopted the Framework, and will assess all relevant individuals against the suggested standards ([Appendix I](#)).

In addition to the training policy, both the Convener and Vice Convener of the Pensions Committee have been provided with a description of their roles and provided further details of training requirements ([Appendix II](#)).

This policy is supported by the policies and procedures that make up the wider governance framework and those prescribed by the Local Government Pension Scheme (Scotland) Regulations. Copies of which are available online at www.nespf.org.uk.

Responsibilities

All training costs are met directly by the Pension Fund.

The Pensions Committee will review this policy annually, or in the event of a policy revision and taking account of the results from any training needs analysis and emerging issues.

Day to day responsibility for the implementation of this policy sits with the Chief Officer-Finance and dedicated staff within the Pension Fund section.

Any questions or feedback on this document should be forwarded to the NESPF Governance Team at:

Resources
Level 1, 2MSq
Marischal Square
Broad Street
Aberdeen
AB10 1BL

Email: governance@nespf.org.uk

Web: www.nespf.org.uk

Knowledge and Skills Framework

This framework identifies the level of knowledge required by members to ensure that they can carry out effective decision making in respect of the Fund.

Level of knowledge required

1 – In depth, 2 – Understanding, 3 – Conversant

CIPFA Knowledge and Skills	Knowledge Requirement	
	Pensions Committee	Pension Board
Pension legislative and governance context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General and scheme pension legislation • Scheme governance • Pension regulators and advisors • Legislative framework • Risk 	2	2
Pension accounting and auditing standards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit and accounting regulations and requirements 	2	2
Financial services procurement and relationship management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding public procurement • Supplier risk management 	2	3
Investment Governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment strategy • Financial markets 	2	2
Investment performance and risk management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund performance • Performance of advisors • Performance of the Committee • Performance of support services and advisors 	2	3
Actuarial methods, standards and practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valuations • Outsourcing 	2	3

Convener of the Pensions Committee

Strategy and operations of the Pension Fund; the proper administration of the Pension Scheme by the administering authority; the performance of the Fund, its advisors and agents; and the proper governance of the Committee and the Fund.

PRINCIPAL RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Convener of the Pensions Committee to determine, after taking the advice of the Chief Officer - Finance and other advisors:
 - The investment strategy of the Fund or Funds for which the Pensions Committee is responsible
 - The contribution rates of the employing organisations whose current and retired employees are members of the LGPS
 - The appointment of investment and actuarial advisors and other third party services
 - The governance framework
 - The communication strategy of the Fund or Funds

2. And to monitor:
 - The performance of the investments, the pensions administration service, the advisors and agents of the Fund and of the Committee itself
 - The costs of running the Pension Fund and Scheme
 - Comments and feedback from stakeholders

3. And to approve:
 - The annual report and accounts of the Fund(s)
 - Audit reports on the performance of the Pension Fund Service
 - Statements on Investment Principles, Governance, Administration and Communication
 - The Risk Register and an annual risk analysis
 - The medium term business plan and annual updates
 - Training and development plans and updates
 - Discretions given by statute and regulation to the Pensions Committee in relation to benefits under the LGPS

4. Work with the Chief Officer - Finance and other officers and advisors to plan an effective work programme for the Pensions Committee

5. Report to the administering authority and other employers, as stakeholders, using practical and appropriate means of communication, to give assurances about the Fund's financial statements, risk management and internal control mechanisms

6. Receive regular briefings from the Chief Officer - Finance and other advisors in order to understand the context and import of forthcoming issues

PERSONAL SPECIFICATION

Requirement	Essential	Desirable
1. Educational	<p>Appropriate financial experience and training.</p> <p>Knowledge of pension funds and schemes.</p>	Demonstrable evidence of knowledge kept up to date.
2. Work Experience	<p>Political awareness in numerous political environments.</p> <p>Chairing high level partnership meetings achieving effective outcomes.</p> <p>Operated for 5 years at a senior level.</p> <p>Experience of risk and performance frameworks.</p>	Previously chaired a pensions committee or similar.
3. Abilities, Intelligence & Special Aptitudes	<p>Chairing skills.</p> <p>Influencing and consensus building.</p> <p>Listening skills.</p> <p>Able to assimilate complex information.</p>	<p>Mathematical/statistical literacy.</p> <p>Knowledge of public sector and local government finance.</p>
4. Adjustment & Social Skills	<p>Ability to establish good working relationships with councillors, officers and advisors.</p> <p>Able to direct discussions in politically sensitive environments.</p>	Diplomacy and tact.

	<p>Able to command respect and demonstrate strong leadership.</p> <p>Assertive in pursuing the correct course of action.</p> <p>Able to work effectively with colleagues who may have different levels of experience and understanding.</p>	
5. Motivation	<p>Enthusiastic, not easily deterred and able to convey enthusiasm to others.</p> <p>Committed to the objectives of the Pension Scheme and Fund(s).</p>	
6. Equal Opportunities	<p>Understanding and commitment to promoting equality of opportunity with an understanding of the pension context.</p>	

The vice convener of the Pensions Committee will also receive a copy of this guidance.

Compliance with the Job Description

1. Pensions Legislative and Governance context

- 1.1 The pension's landscape is characterised by a complex legislative framework. In addition to the legislation of individual schemes, there are industry-wide statutes that apply in whole or in part to public sector schemes, including the way in which schemes interact with state pensions etc.
- 1.2 Also of key importance is a knowledge of the governance frameworks that apply within the pensions industry (such as the Myners principles); within individual schemes (such as the LGPS governance statement requirements); and within the organisations that administer the schemes (for example the CIPFA/SOLACE framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*).

Full details of the scheme governance documentation and wider pension fund industry documentation can be found on the Pension Fund website and in the secure trustee area. In addition to this information regular training sessions are held for 'trustees' given by officers, fund managers, the scheme actuary and other advisors. In order to maintain an up-to-date

knowledge of the pensions landscape the Convener/Vice Convener must commit to attending a minimum of two UK wide pension conferences per annum. Recommended is the PLSA Local Authority Conference held annually in May which covers all aspects of the LGPS and the LGC Investment Seminar held in the autumn giving a focus on investment management. Other events arising during the year that would be of value to the Convener/Vice Convener of the Pensions Committee will be brought to the attention of members by officers.

The Convener/Vice Convener should as a minimum receive a monthly update from officers covering:

- ***Scheme Valuation***
- ***Administration Matters which are ongoing***
- ***Investment Matters ongoing***
- ***Pensions Market issues***
- ***Communication with employers and scheme members***

Where appropriate this report should be accompanied by a meeting with Fund officers.

2. Pensions accounting and auditing standards

- 2.1 The accounting requirements and associated disclosures are complex and involve a large actuarial element. Consequently this demands an understanding of the regime at all levels within the finance structure in order to comply with the requirements and to communicate the requirements and their implications both internally and externally.

Officers report annually to the Pensions Committee on the scheme annual accounts. From 2011 the scheme accounts and audit have been separated out from the administering authority financial statement. The scheme auditor reports directly to the Pensions Committee on the scheme accounts.

3. Investment performance and risk management

- 3.1 In the Local Government Pension Scheme and other schemes where contributions are invested and managed to meet future liabilities, understanding investment risk and performance constitutes a major element of the role of finance professionals. The skills required for managing and controlling investment activities are relatively specialised and at present there is no formal framework against which Funds can test their current skills and competencies.

All investment performance and risk management is reported by the Fund custodian. Regular training sessions are given to all Committee members on understanding investment performance and risk reporting. Understanding investment performance and risk are key functions of the Convener and Vice Convener of the Pensions Committee.

4. Financial markets and product knowledge

- 4.1 In those schemes with invested funds, an understanding of financial markets and products is fundamental. The depth of knowledge will depend to some degree upon the particular approach to investment management undertaken by the Fund. The investment activities of LGPS Funds for example can be split into two groups - those Funds that use external managers to manage all of their investment portfolio and those that undertake some or all of their investment activities using in-house investment managers.

The time given during the quarterly meetings of the Pensions Committee to reviewing financial markets and product knowledge is limited. This fundamental knowledge should be updated regularly not only by the Convener and Vice Convener, but all 'trustees' through attendance at a minimum of one investment conference per annum. There is a wide selection of national conferences such as the PLSA or the Local Authority Pension Fund Seminar held annually at Celtic Manor, however there are also a wide number of conferences hosted by fund managers to which 'trustees' are invited. Likewise attendance at such events as the LAPFF annual conference provides 'trustees' with an insight to future legislation that may impact on the companies in which we invest. A list of forthcoming conferences is reported annually to the June meeting of the Pensions Committee.

5. Actuarial methods, standards and practices

- 5.1 The scheme actuary holds a key position in the financial management of a pension scheme. A successful pension scheme financial manager will need to be able to do more than simply manage the relationship with their actuary. They will need to understand, at some levels in detail, the work of the actuary and the way in which actuarial information is produced and the impact it has on both the finances of the scheme and the employer.

The triennial valuation and funding strategy statement are two key documents in the governance of the scheme. A copy of both documents can be found on the secure 'trustee' area of the Pension Fund website. Through regular meetings with the scheme actuary (at least twice a year) the Convener/Vice Convener, will build up an understanding of the actuarial process and role and influence that key stakeholders such as the Convener and Vice Convener have in the process. Discussions held with other LGPS 'trustees' on an ongoing basis will enhance this process.