

Cost Management, Benefit Design and Administration Committee

8th June 2020
Item 5 Paper C

Covid-19 PRACTITIONERS GROUP

Issue

1. To update the committee on the establishment and work of the Covid-19 Practitioners Group.

Background

To help gauge the extent to which the covid-19 pandemic will impact on the delivery of the pensions function and to assist authorities in dealing with emerging issues on pensions administration, a Covid-19 Practitioners Group was established with the following terms of reference :-

- To consider queries associated with the impact of the COVID-19 virus on pensions administration referred to them by the LGA or SAB;
- To assist LGA/SAB staff in the delivery of online FAQ resources for administrators and employers as well as scheme members
- To advise on further information that could usefully be collected via online surveys
- To advise the SAB secretariat in matters that should be referred to MHCLG
- To consider and respond to proposals submitted to the group by either the LGA or SAB, and
- To provide a representative (normally the Chair) to participate in weekly practitioner calls with the LGA, SAB, MHCLG and representatives from Scotland and Northern Ireland

Membership of the group includes :-

Rachel Brothwood (WMPF) – Chair
George Graham (SYPA)
Philip Latham (Flintshire/Wales)
Jo Quarterman (Norfolk)
Heather Chambers (Tyne & Wear)
Neil Mason (Surrey)
Kevin Gerard (Dyfed/Chair of National Technical Group)
Jenna Fisher (NILGOSC)
Linda Welsh (Glasgow)
Glyn Jenkins (UNISON)

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The Group is supported by :-

Lorraine Bennett (Senior Pensions Adviser, LGA)

Bob Holloway (Pensions Secretary, LGA)

Consideration

The group first met on the 16th April and has since met fortnightly, the last occasion on the 4th June.

The group has considered a wide range of issues including :-

- LGPS specific guidance on covid-19 issues from the Pensions Regulator;
- Impact of the NHS Life Assurance Scheme on LGPS members including scope of local government injury allowance provisions;
- Scheme member mortality data collection;
- Impact of home working on administration and processing;
- Preparation in anticipation of consultation on McCloud remedy;
- Long term impact of home working on mental health issues and capacity for managers to manage the workforce;
- Feedback from group members on local issues affected by the pandemic;
- Impact of the pandemic on end of year issues, eg, annual benefit statements.
- Ill-health retirements and inconsistencies in Independent Registered Medical Practitioners continuing to accept LGPS work.
- Communications with scheme employers and employees on furlough policy and related matters.

Conclusion

The work of the group has proved to be very helpful to a variety of scheme stakeholders including SAB, LGA, MHCLG and the Pensions Regulator in better managing the flow of queries on covid-19 related matters and to help assess the challenges to pensions administration during the covid-19 emergency.

A key element of the group is the inclusion of representatives from Northern Ireland and Scotland to ensure that common issues and solutions can be shared across the whole LGPS community.

Recommendation

Cost Management, Benefit Design and Administration Committee

That the committee notes the work of the group and recommends to SAB that the group should continue to meet on a regular basis.