

Strathclyde Pension Fund

Employer Update

Coronavirus and SPFO Service Status



17th April 2020

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SPFO

Office

After a period of closure, Strathclyde Pension Fund Office (SPFO) is currently open, but operating with a minimal staffing base.

Service

We are maintaining most of our services through a combination of staff working from home and some presence at SPFO. We are still processing new transactions and responding to enquiries to SPFO mailboxes. Our call centre is closed and a few services have been altered or suspended. Further details below.

Transactions

Pensions Payroll

Our immediate business priority is to ensure that our current pensioners are paid on time each month. We have robust business continuity and contingency arrangements to ensure that this is the case. The April payrun was processed remotely and all payments, including the annual pensions increase, were in pensioner bank accounts on 15th as normal. If necessary, we can continue to process remotely in future months.

Other Transactions

We are continuing to process new transactions, particularly retirals and deaths. We are prioritising these in line with guidance from the Pensions Regulator (TPR). Following the guidance, we have suspended new Transfer Value quotes and payments.

Electronic Signatures

The UK Government has endorsed the validity of electronic signatures. Accordingly, where necessary, we are accepting authorisation by email with no requirement for physical signature on documents. This includes emails from doctors, employers, and employees. For all retirements, with the exception of deferred members, the employer should continue to liaise with the employee. The employer's email to SPFO will suffice as the final authorisation/instruction which we require.

Identification Verification

Where we need to see certificates (marriage, death, etc.) we will not require these to be verified copies. We will accept good photographic copies.

Ill Health Retirals

We are aware of circumstances where medical certification for ill health retirement cannot currently be provided. Certification by an Independent Registered Medical Practitioner is a requirement of the scheme regulations, so we cannot process an ill health retirement without this. But we are liaising with relevant authorities to investigate possible alternative solutions.

Systems

ESS/SPFOnline/I-connect

All our systems are currently operational and we continue to encourage employers to use Employer Self Service (ESS), and members to use SPFOnline wherever possible.

Important: please use the following (new) link to ESS:

<https://www.axisespfo.org.uk:6444/employerservicesweb/login>

I-connect is fully operational and employers should continue to use it.

Employer Returns

Employer Data and Contributions

Employers should continue to pay contributions to us as normal and to submit contribution breakdown reports and other data. *I-connect* returns should continue to be made as normal.

Year-End Returns

Year-end data should be submitted in line with our requirements by **11th May** as previously advised. That will help us to maintain business as usual as far as possible. There is also a series of dependencies that follows from our deadline – annual report and accounts, actuarial valuation, annual benefit statements, etc.

Information

SPF Website

Current SPFO status information will be shown in the News area of our website. We will also continue to update other areas, and many general enquiries can be answered there.

Updates

In addition to website updates we will provide updates to employers as and when anything significant changes.

Other Websites

There is also plenty of advice and guidance available for LGPS administrators from other sources. A few of the most authoritative sites are:

LGA – A useful source of guidance including LGA Bulletin 196, and FAQs (and answers) for Scheme members and administrators on Covid-19 related pension issues [here](#)

LGA is also planning to produce a set of FAQs for employers. We will be in touch next week to establish the main areas of concern which you might want us to raise with LGA.

TPR – All of TPR's statements on the impact on Covid-19 can be found [here](#).

PLSA Covid-19 information – [here](#)

Information Commissioner's Office – [here](#). Particularly this article [here](#).

PASA Covid-19 guidance for administrators is found [here](#)

Pension Scams and Cyber Attacks

All the relevant authorities are warning about increased risk of both individual pension scams and organised cyber attacks. We should all be particularly vigilant about IT security at this time.

Funding Investments

As stock markets have fallen sharply in recent weeks, the current value of the Fund will also have dropped significantly. This has no impact on our ability to pay pensions right now, and we would expect markets to recover over time. But it will be reflected in the actuarial valuation and in employers' accounting disclosures as at 31st March 2020.

IAS19/ FRS102 Exercise

This exercise is underway and currently progressing as originally planned. The first batch of reports should be delivered to employers in the week commencing 27th April. This is slightly later than originally envisaged due to the need to wait for a confirmed asset value in order to avoid using estimated returns in volatile market conditions.

Actuarial Valuation

This exercise has not yet commenced, but the intention is for it to progress as planned. Clearly the funding level will have suffered as a result of recent investment falls. For employers, the more important result is the employer contribution rate. There will be pressure on this, but it is influenced as much by future return expectations as by historic returns. So it is too early to speculate as to the outcome. Much work remains to be done.

Contact

If you need to contact us please use email. Routine enquiries should be directed to our mailbox: spfo@glasgow.gov.uk. For other enquiries, try your usual contact in the first instance. If they're not available and it's urgent, contact Linda Welsh (linda.welsh@glasgow.gov.uk), Karen Sweeney (Karen.sweeney@glasgow.gov.uk), or Daniel Hughes (Daniel.hughes@glasgow.gov.uk).