

## **Pensions Administration**

It has been another challenging year for the Pensions Administration team. Our recovery from the twin events of LGPS 2014 and the implementation of our new Pensions Administration system has been the main focus of our attention throughout the period. I am pleased to report that the team have performed magnificently despite a number of setbacks and the sheer volume of work. Whilst the new system is still problematical at times and there's still a way to go we are firmly on the road to recovery.

Despite heavy concentration on clearing casework backlogs there have also been some highlights during the year. In November we launched our new website which was well received and during March we successfully retained our Customer Service Excellence award following our annual inspection. We also consulted upon and introduced our Pension Administration Strategy which clearly sets out the responsibilities of SYPA as administering authority and the responsibilities of our 350+ employers in order to comply with the complex requirements of the LGPS.

On the downside we were extremely frustrated to fail to meet the deadline for issuing annual benefit statements to scheme members. In any year, 31<sup>st</sup> August is a challenging target to achieve but a combination of system problems and late submission of annual returns by employers meant we had no hope of meeting it. On a positive note, however, although we issued the statements late they were subject to a thorough check which overall was preferable to issuing them on time and possibly incorrect. The new version of mypension was launched in conjunction with the new website and whilst it is usable it is rather disappointing. Whilst we have done what we can to improve the look and feel of online member access, the core functionality is largely out of our control. We have however been pushing for improvements to be made and the good news is that a phase 2 version is on the way, incorporating the benefit calculator that many of our members have been asking for.

We continue to operate the formal dispute resolution procedure in compliance with the scheme regulations as well as our local customer service complaints procedure. During the year we had just one formal dispute which went all the way through our two-stage process and onto the Pensions Ombudsman. The appeal was dismissed internally and also by the Pensions Ombudsman. The Ombudsman also ruled in our favour on a case that had been through the internal dispute procedure last year but did award £500 for distress and inconvenience. We had 31 formal customer service complaints during the year which were personally responded to by our Complaints Manager. This is a significant increase in the number of complaints we usually receive and entirely due to the problems associated with the implementation of the new system. Pensions Administration staff also dealt with many more informal complaints during the period. I am pleased to report that in both instances complaints are back to previous low numbers.

The employers of the Fund are required to collect contributions from active scheme members and pay them over no later than the 19<sup>th</sup> of the following month to which the contributions relate. During 2015/16 one employer paid contributions late and was required to pay interest for late payment.

The forthcoming year presents a number of challenges which include the triennial actuarial valuation, the 31<sup>st</sup> August deadline for annual benefit statements, the impact of changes to pension tax legislation and work relating to the end of contracting-out. All this in addition to regular casework and member communication. Just another typical year for Pensions Administration!

**Gary Chapman**

Head of Pensions Administration