

Firefighters' Scheme Advisory Board (England)

Knowledge and Understanding Policy

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Policy statement

The Public Service Pension Act 2013¹ established the framework for the regulatory oversight of the governance and administration of public service pension schemes.

The Scheme Advisory Board (“the Board”) is responsible for providing advice:

- In response to a request from the Secretary of State on the desirability of making changes to the Scheme and any connected scheme
- To scheme managers and Local Pension Boards in relation to the effective and efficient administration and management of the Scheme and any connected schemes.

The Board comprises of an equal number of employer and member representatives² to ensure a fair and transparent balance of skills, experience, and representation.

This policy is to support the Board in developing and maintaining the knowledge and understanding required to discharge their responsibilities effectively and to represent the best interests of both scheme employers and members.

While the Pension Regulator (TPR) does not impose a statutory requirement on Scheme Advisory Board members to meet the same knowledge and understanding standards as those set out in the Code of Practice³ for Local Pension Board members, it is considered good practice for the same underlying principles to apply.

Accordingly, the Scheme Advisory Board (“the Board”) is committed to ensuring that all members have, and maintain, the knowledge and understanding necessary to perform their role effectively, in line with the Pensions Regulator’s General Code of Practice and other relevant statutory guidance.

The Board adopts a risk-based and proportionate approach to knowledge and understanding, reflecting the advisory nature of its role and the diverse experience and expertise of its members.

This policy outlines:

- [Areas of knowledge and understanding required](#)
- [Degree of knowledge and understanding required](#)
- [Acquiring, reviewing, and updating knowledge and understanding](#)
- [Demonstrating knowledge and understanding](#)

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/25/crossheading/governance>

² <http://www.fpsboard.org/index.php/about-the-board/board-membership>

³ <https://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/en/document-library/code-of-practice/the-governing-body/knowledge-and-understanding-requirements>

Scope

This policy applies to those individuals appointed as members or nominated substitute members of the Scheme Advisory Board by the Secretary of State.

Areas of knowledge and understanding required

Scheme Advisory Board members are expected to have a clear understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Board, together with an awareness of other key stakeholder groups involved in the [administration and management of the Firefighters' Pension Schemes \(FPS\)](#).

Board members should have a working knowledge of the rules of the FPS sufficient to enable them to carry out their duties effectively. This includes an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding of the legislative framework governing the FPS, proportionate to the advisory nature of the role.

The originating scheme orders and the history of subsequent amendments are published in the [Regulations](#) section of the FPS regulations and guidance website.

To support the Board in carrying out its responsibilities and in addressing technical, actuarial, and legal matters relating to scheme rules and administration, the board has appointed three advisers in accordance with regulation 4F⁴ of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (Amendment) (Governance) Regulations 2015.

The chair of the FPS technical working group acts as the Board's technical adviser. Legal and actuarial advisers are appointed through a formal procurement process advertised in the [invitation to bid](#) section of the FPS board website. Details of the current post holders are published on the [board membership](#) page.

In addition, members are expected to be familiar with the key policies and governance documents that support the effective operation of the Board. These include, but are not limited to:

- Terms of reference
- Sub-committee terms of reference
- Budget Setting policy
- Business Plan
- Code of Conduct policy
- Conflict of Interest policy
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy
- Risk register
- Cyber Security

⁴ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/465/regulation/4/made>

Degree of knowledge and understanding required

To be conversant with the scheme regulations and Board's documented policies, Scheme Advisory Board members are expected to be familiar with those documents to the extent that they have a basic understanding of which regulations are relevant to matters under discussion, and where specific provisions may apply.

The appropriate level of knowledge of relevant law and policies will vary depending on each member's role, background and experience. For example, a Board member with a legal background will have a greater depth of knowledge than would otherwise be required and is encouraged to share this expertise for the benefit of the wider Board.

Regardless of background, all Board members are expected to be familiar with key case-law that has a direct or consequential impact on the FPS. A list of relevant determinations is published in the [Relevant case law](#) section of the FPS regulations and guidance website

Most importantly, Board members should have a sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge to ensure that they can understand all information and advice presented to the Board, appreciate how Board recommendations and decisions may impact the scheme and its stakeholders, and confidently challenge information or advice where appropriate.

As Board members may be required to report a breach of the law in their capacity as "any other person involved in advising the scheme manager in relation to the scheme"⁵, members should be able to identify and appropriately challenge any failure to comply with legislation or with requirements imposed by TPR.

Although Board members are not expected to be experts in all aspects of pension administration, management, governance, or law, they are expected to be aware of where relevant information, guidance and professional support can be obtained. Key sources of information include the www.fpsregs.org, www.fpsboard.org and www.fpsmember.org websites.

Acquiring, reviewing, and updating knowledge and understanding

Training and development are integral to the role of a Scheme Advisory Board member. Members are expected to allocate appropriate time to undertake training and development activities to maintain the level of knowledge and understanding required to perform their role effectively.

⁵ <https://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/en/document-library/code-of-practice/reporting-to-tptr/whistleblowing-reporting-breaches-of-the-law/who-must-report>

The Board will operate a structured [Training Needs Analysis](#) (TNA) framework, as approved by the Board and updated from time to time. Members are expected to complete the TNA at agreed intervals, reflecting on their skills, competencies and knowledge, to help identify both individual and collective training needs.

The outcomes of the TNA will be used by the Board secretariat to inform the Board's training and development programme and to support a proportionate, risk-based approach to training.

Training and development activity will include, where appropriate, content relating to equity, diversity and inclusion, reflecting the Board's EDI Policy and the knowledge areas set out in the TNA.

Newly appointed members are expected to familiarise themselves with the provisions of the scheme and Board's key policies as soon as practicable after accepting appointment. The secretariat may offer pre-appointment training, followed by a formal induction programme.

The Board secretariat will support Board members by facilitating access to appropriate training, including induction and periodic refresher sessions. Members are also encouraged to attend relevant learning and development events, including those organised by the Local Government Association, to broaden their knowledge and enhance engagement with Firefighters' Pension Scheme stakeholders.

Board members will be circulated with the monthly FPS bulletin, which provides updates on topical issues affecting the scheme and serves as a useful reference resource.

Members are encouraged to volunteer to participate in one of the Board's sub-committees, which consider issues in greater detail before reporting to the full Board. The sub-committees currently cover:

- Scheme management and administration;
- Cost-effectiveness; and
- Local Pension Board effectiveness.

Participation in a sub-committee provides an opportunity to deepen knowledge and understanding of the scheme while working alongside fire and rescue authority practitioners.

Members may also find elements of the TPRs Public Service learning toolkit helpful in supporting their understanding of pension scheme governance. While these materials are primarily aimed at local-level governance roles, some modules may be of relevance to the advisory role of the Board.

The [Public Service learning toolkit](#) is available on the TPR website.

Demonstrating knowledge and understanding

Board members' knowledge and understanding will not be subject to formal examination or individual performance assessment. Each member is expected to take responsibility for maintaining their knowledge and understanding, including undertaking appropriate reading,

research and training to familiarise themselves with the role of the Board and the provisions of the scheme, in order to carry out their duties effectively.

To support assurance at Board level, the secretariat will maintain a training log recording the training and development activities completed by each Board member. This log will provide a record of engagement with agreed learning activities and support the Board in demonstrating that appropriate steps are being taken to maintain knowledge and understanding and to remain up to date with developments affecting the Firefighters' Pension Schemes.

The training log and TNA outputs may be used to provide collective assurance that the Board is operating in line with this policy and good governance practice.

The training log will be published in the [Knowledge and Understanding](#) section of the secure area of the FPS Board website, alongside slides of training received.

Further matters

Having a diverse, inclusive and well-informed Scheme Advisory Board supports balanced, evidence-based advice and helps ensure that the best interests of all scheme members and employers are appropriately considered. An inclusive approach to the Board composition and operation enables the Board to fulfil its dual remit of providing advice to the Secretary of State upon request, and to scheme managers and Local Pension Boards in relation to the effective and efficient administration and management of the Scheme.

In line with the [Board's EDI Policy](#), the Secretary of State will consider the mix of skills, experience, perspectives and backgrounds required for the Board to operate effectively. This includes ensuring that appointments support fairness, inclusivity and diversity of thought, and that members are able to exercise their responsibilities objectively, without prejudice and with independent judgement.

Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed every two years or at such times as needed by the Board secretariat. The next review will be due in June 2028.

Version Control

Date	Author	Publication	Reason for Change
22/01/2020	Board secretariat	V1	N/A
17/06/2026	Board secretariat	V1.2	General review and addition of version control