

Communications strategy

May 2022

DRAFT



Introduction

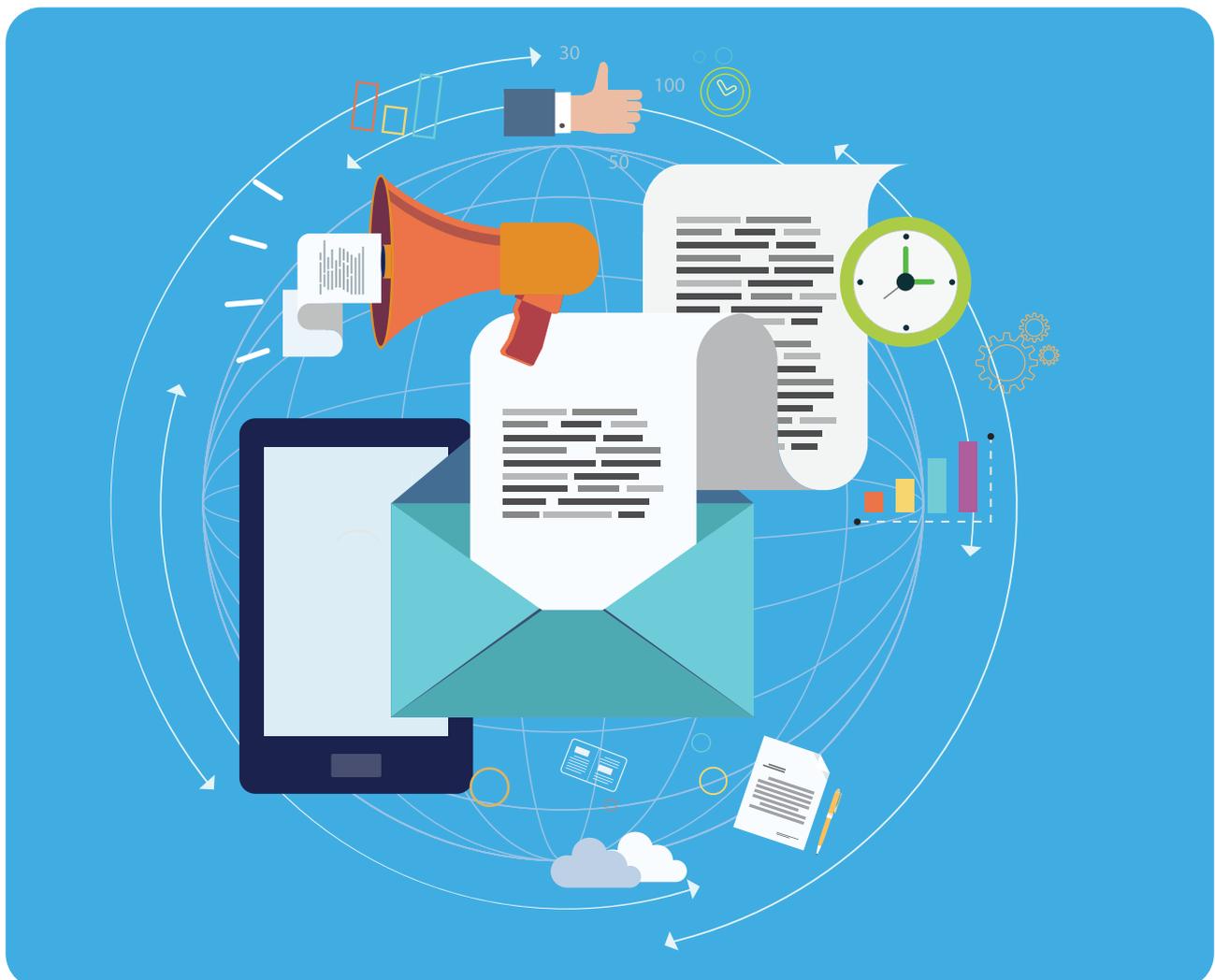
Who we are

The Cheshire Pension Fund ('the Fund') is a regional pension fund, in the North-West of England, who administer the statutory Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) on behalf of people working in Local Government and for other qualifying employers within the county.

The Fund is administered by Cheshire West and Chester Council.

The purpose of our communications strategy

As we strive to provide a high quality and consistent service to all members and stakeholders, our communications strategy is key to meeting this aim. We will regularly ensure the work we undertake as part of the strategy is measured for success, quality, and consistency.



Why have we renewed our communications strategy?

We want to assure our members that we will communicate effectively.

We want to ensure that all stakeholders are clear about our vision, objectives and the ways in which we will deliver them. Ensuring that the objectives are consistently and appropriately delivered.

The strategy will aim to provide value for money on all communications activities we carry out. We will ensure that we use services that provide not only value for money but also, reliable, and effective services which members can be confident in.

- Our digital first ambition*, through the introduction of a member self-serve portal, called 'My Cheshire Pension' is where active and deferred members can access their own records including personal details, length of service, their death grant nomination, and use the portal as a means of contacting the Fund.

The portal will; provide the Fund with savings, free up staffing resources, reduce postage, and will also reduce our carbon footprint through printing and posting fewer items.

The portal will be supplemented by improvements to the fund's website, in particular through feedback from our members on how it can better serve them.

- We will ensure, that where we tender for communications work, we look for the best service, not necessarily the cheapest and that it provides the best outcome for all parties.
- We will ensure that services provided are befitting for all members and cost efficiencies are appropriately balanced across all member types.

**Digital First means that we will look to communicate via digital methods as standard. For those members who choose to opt out of receiving electronic communications, we will continue to correspond with them using the method they prefer.*

We will use best practice, ensuring that we always look to the industry as well as peers for insights on success, and failure, to learn and deliver for our members. We will also strive to be a benchmark for other Funds, and our peers within the Pensions industry as a whole.

The objectives have considered our member types and will constantly be monitored to ensure that they best represent the majority audience, as well as observing changing environments, and taking member feedback into account to ensure we provide all members with a high-quality service.

Executive Summary

The aim of our communications strategy is to underpin the Fund's vision that its members 'understand, value, and engage with their Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) pension, whilst planning their journey to retirement.' In-order to achieve this vision, we have six core objectives, along with a supporting set of delivery vehicles which will work together to achieve the overall aim.

We will launch a member self-serve portal (My Cheshire Pension) in 2022/3 for Active members and 2023/4 for Deferred members. Roll out to Pensioner members will then be considered, this will also fall in line with changes to payroll which will support online activity. This will provide members with an easier way to interact with their benefits and allow them to take a greater ownership of their Local Government Pension. This will be a key area of communication and development in 2022 and 2023 as member engagement will be vital to the success in the take up of My Cheshire Pension.

Our key audience will always be our members; Active, Deferred and Pensioners. However, we have many other audiences and recognise their vital input and support – not limited to but including Employers, Committee, (and) Board members, prospective members, Unions, and Press.

A key risk that needs to be mitigated is that pensions as a subject matter is often viewed as 'complex' or 'boring' or 'confusing'.

We also recognise that a key risk is the internal Subject Matter Expert (SME). This is an area that will provide key subject matter, it will need to be appropriately and carefully managed to ensure consistency across our communications material(s).

We know that pensions aren't a subject that most people will actively engage with on a regular basis, if at all. In fact, a study by Capita confirmed that of their 2,000 respondents, 72% were not engaged with their pensions and 61% were confused by their pension. We also know from our own survey for Active members, in December 2021, that 86% want to know more about their Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) pension. So, whilst the subject matter itself is a risk, we find some mitigation in the fact our members want to know more.

Our communication channels will continue to evolve as we plan to launch My Cheshire Pension (MCP) for active members in 2022/23. Digital will become our default by choice; however, we will support all major channels including post, telephone, and email. We will look to develop other methods where appropriate, for all member types. We will actively encourage our website as the first port of call for basic information, forms, and member education. The website will be re-developed (2022/3/4) to ensure that this is a key pillar in our communications offering.

We will always evaluate our communications work using success measurements amongst other forms of objectivity, from business as usual, to ad-hoc campaigns, to ensure that whatever we deliver is effective and well received, and if not, that we learn lessons, for future work.

Regulatory Framework

This strategy has been produced in accordance with Regulation 61 of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013.

The full regulations can be accessed here – [The Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2013/0001/eng/sched/61)

The regulatory framework that we follow is the baseline minimum for which we will offer communication services. We will aim to always go above and beyond this baseline where possible.

Stakeholders and typical communications

Fund Members are defined as –

- **Active**, those who are currently contributing into the fund and employed by a fund employer.
- **Deferred**, those who were members of an employer who paid into the fund but are not yet drawing a pension.
- **Pensioner**, those who were contributing into the fund and are now retired and claiming their pension, or their dependents.
- **Prospective Active members** – these are member who are considering joining an employer of the Fund. They would become full active members upon joining.

Committee and boards – Not limited to, but including Pension Fund Committee, Local Pension Board, Investment Sub-Committee and Employer Consultative Forum.

Employers – Any organisation which has been admitted into the Fund and has members who contribute towards their Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) through the Fund. We currently have over 300 employers within the Fund.

Unions – Any union which represents members and employers, and who we actively recognise and engage with in-order to discuss appropriate matters and opinions.

Stakeholders – Any person who has a vested and legitimate interest in the Fund. This is not limited to, but is likely to include: Councillors, MPs, HM Revenue and Customs, the Pensions Regulator (tPR), the Pensions Ombudsman (tPO), Money and Pensions Service, and other such professional agencies.

Press – Any journalist, publication both in print and online who has an active and legitimate interest in the fund and the activities it carries out.



Objectives

When setting our objectives, we have kept members at the forefront of what we do. In late 2021, we conducted a survey amongst Active members which gave us both qualitative and quantitative information, helping us to understand what worked well and areas for improvement.

The survey in 2021 told us the following.

Active members want to know more about their Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) Pension (86%); They do not fully understand their Annual Benefit Statement (ABS – estimate of benefits at normal retirement age) (64%);

Members underuse our website (with only 48% having used it);

Women are more likely to interact about their pension than men (73%);

Younger generation interaction remains low (9%).

As a result, the main areas for development were identified as **Annual Benefit Statements (ABS), Retirement interaction and support**, and providing **more general support** for all members but specifically – a younger demographic, and also encouraging more men to engage with their pensions.

We will commit to holding regular surveys for all member types, where possible and relevant, to inform the work that we undertake.

Our vision

Our objectives should always be striving towards the overarching vision that members: understand, value, and engage with their Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS pension), whilst planning their journey to retirement.

Our core communication objectives are:

- Our communications are always clear and with explainable definitions and terms, we avoid pension jargon where possible, and plain English is used.
- Our communications are evaluated, and feedback is used to measure their effectiveness. in-order to provide the service that best supports our members
- To encourage engagement and interest in member's pensions, we will ensure that the services we offer are accessible, intuitive, attractive and engaging.
- We will proactively market and promote the member self-serve portal, where possible, in all our core communications, to encourage members join and use the service.
- We will improve understanding of the Fund and enable members to make informed choices about their pension.
- We commit to clear and transparent communications of the fund's investments, including Responsible Investment (RI).

The objectives within this strategy are to be achieved in the next one to five years (2022-27), notwithstanding any unforeseen external or internal pressures which render them unachievable or delayed. They are dependent upon employer and other stakeholder support, as well as member involvement.



We will aim to achieve our core objectives through the following delivery vehicles:

- Regular focus groups (with all member types, where possible and appropriate).
- Regular webinars for members (delivering 'focus' sessions on particular subjects or 'meeting the expert' sessions and ask your most pressing question(s)).
- Regular engagement with employers (at least one per year), and other stakeholders; where relevant and appropriate.
- Deliver engaging content, both online and in person.
- Increase our digital content for members and employers.
- Provide all member types with effective tools to understand their pension and the choices available to them.
- Member and employer surveys to measure the satisfaction levels from members. At least one survey per year and at least one full member survey every 18 months.
- National awards entry and recognition to validate the communications including independent assessment and measurement of effectiveness of our communications
- Proactive media relations, within the industry, locally and wider afield. Sharing positive news from within the Funds activities.
- We will promote Responsible Investment (RI) through a series of informative and engaging documents. We will also ensure that our content around this subject is easily available to any Fund member or member of the public.
- Review, and redesign Annual Benefit Statement (ABS), so that it becomes easier to understand for members and is then used as a benchmark by peers.
- Providing a communications activities report on the work in the calendar year, and their successes, which will be part of the Fund's Annual Report.
- Develop and deploy My Cheshire Pension (MCP) as a primary means of communications between members and the Fund, the aim is that we encourage members to use this function first, as it'll provide the quickest possible way to access their data.
- MCP will evolve each year, based on member use and technological developments. We will look to improve the communications aspect and ensure that members have a seamless experience, improving the overall customer experience. Member feedback will be assessed annually, and actioned, where appropriate, to provide the best possible user interaction for members.



Communications channels

Communications channels should be varied with the ability to meet the majority of our audiences. Communications channels in the last twenty years have shifted away from traditional methods of telephone and letters (via post) to email and online delivery (self-serve).

We will continue to offer the following methods, without ruling out the need to add additional methods or withdrawing methods that are no longer necessary:

- Website and online services
- Digital delivery via video and webinar functionality
- Self Service (via My Cheshire Pension) – from 2022-23
- Emails
- Telephone service*
- Letters delivered via post*
- Roadshows / Pensions in Person*
- Social Media will be kept under review

Resources

Some items will be carried out in business-as-usual activity – such as annual reports and Annual Benefit Statements, and some will require a defined input in-order to be realised – such as a webinar on a set subject or a video on a set subject.

Where possible, the Fund will take the lead for costs and organisation. There will be no costs to members for the activities we provide. There will be no additional financial cost to employers for this activity. However, it will require some resource support. We will ask that employers take responsibility when we provide materials, events and other items that will benefit members – such as sharing the materials and ensuring members have access to them.

Key risks, issues and dependencies

With any communications activity there will always be a risk that it doesn't achieve the primary aim. We will always be mindful of our audiences and manage risks appropriately to best serve our members.

The key risks identified in this strategy are as follows:

- Members do not want to engage with their pension.
- Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) leave the business and are not replaced in a reasonable timeframe, leaving communications work exposed to delays.
- Employers do not engage with Fund or are unable to support the work being offered.
- The cost of the work outweighs the benefits by too much.
- When spending money on communications work, externally, we ensure the effective use of public money in delivering a set outcome.
- Internal resource constraints (when required to carry out additional communication work, alongside business as usual).
- External influences such as Covid-19, geo-political issues, and technology developments.
- Staff turnover.
- Stakeholder pressures.
- Overarching business objectives may need a greater support, i.e., Valuation, McCloud.

Risks are mitigated through a Risks Actions Issues and Decisions (RAID) risk log. A RAID log is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure all key areas of risk are properly investigated and actioned where appropriate. This allows a full governance of the work being undertaken and proposed and keeps an appropriate overview.

Evaluating our work

Every piece of communications work we carry out, from Annual Benefit Statement (ABS) distribution to ad-hoc campaigns to lunchtime webinars, will need to be evaluated. This means that we will take views from our staff, employers (and their staff), and crucially from members. We will also seek other stakeholder feedback where possible and relevant. Evaluating our work will also provide key intelligence on what areas we have improved and what areas we can then look to further improve.

Our commitment

We will commit to:

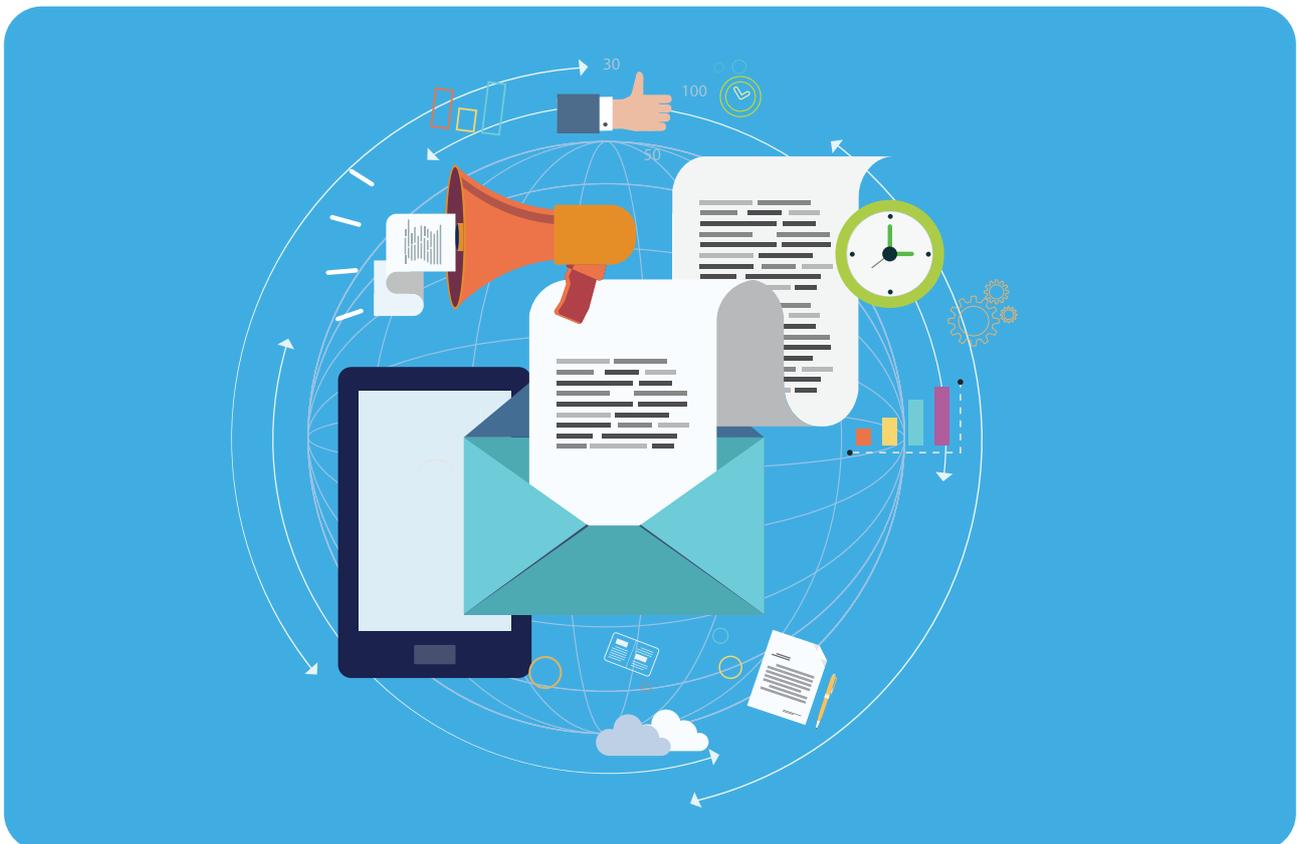
- always seeking feedback from an activity, where possible.
- always being transparent with that feedback, where possible, and sharing this on our website.
- always seeking to improve the services we provide and offer, to members and key stakeholders.

For every major piece of work we do, as outlined in our objectives, we will commit to seeking feedback.

We will not seek feedback on 'business as usual' activities. However, we will routinely review and recognise where improvements can be made and implement them as soon as feasibly possible.

Annual evaluation

We will commit to proving an annual evaluation review in which we will take stock of activities and results. We will look at the overall communications strategy and review what has changed and what potentially needs to be added or removed, in-order to provide a better service for members.



Published by: **Cheshire Pension Fund**
The Portal
Wellington Rd
Cheshire
Ellesmere Port
CH65 0BA

www.cheshirepensionfund.org

