



Attendees:

William Littleboy (WL)	Chair
Alan Duncan (AD)	Board Member
Alexander Miller (AM)	Board Member
Denise Christie (DC)	Board Member
Ross Haggart (RH)	Board Member
Dev Dey (DD)	SPPA Head of Customer Services
Gerry McGarry (GMcG)	SPPA Senior Customer Service Manager
Stuart MacArthur (SMacA)	SPPA Governance Manager
Rachel Miller (RM)	SPPA Senior Customer Services Manger
Janet McDougal (JMcD)	SPPA Project Manager
Finn McKenzie (FMcK)	SPPA Change Manager
Iain Coltman (IC)	SPPA Senior Policy Manager
Molly Wyllie	SPPA Governance - minutes

Apologies:

Brian Cameron	Board Member
Stephen Wright	Board Member

1. Welcome and introductions (including declaration of conflict of interest)

1.1 WL welcomed everyone to the meeting and covered the logistics and protocols for conducting the meeting virtually. WL advised that the meeting would concentrate on how the Agency had coped during the pandemic.

1.2 No conflicts of interest noted.

2a. Draft minutes from previous meeting

The minutes from the meeting of 12 February 2020 were adopted without amendment.

2b. Actions outstanding

The outstanding actions were reviewed and the following noted:

- F19.01 of 19/11/20 – WL advised that monthly update from CE was sufficient – action closed

- F20.02 12/2/20 – RM advised starter letters had been amended to include information about the benefits of Member Self Service – action closed
- F20.03 12/2/20 – covered at item 6. on the agenda – action closed
- F20.04 12/2/20 – covered at items 3a. and 3b. on the agenda – action closed
- F20.05 12/2/20 - covered at item 7. on the agenda – action closed
- F20.06 12/2/20 – covered at item 8. on the agenda – action closed
- F20.07, F20.08 and F20.09 - 12/2/20 – covered at item 7. – action closed

3a and 3b. Customer Service Update and Dashboard

DD advised that the presentation of Customer Service information had been revised. The presentation covered three of the strategic aims of the Agency – Customer First, Operational Excellence and Developing our People.

3a.1 Customer First - Critical Tasks

DD advised that Customer Service has a full complement of senior managers, each with responsibility for different areas of the business. Rachel Miller has responsibility for the Firefighters Board.

DD advised that all staff, with the exception of Mailroom staff, were now working from home. The assumption was that staff would remain working from home for the rest of 2020. Managers worked with staff to ensure they had the appropriate tools and skills.

RM advised that Customer Service had focussed on dealing with critical tasks. This included Bereavement, Ill Health and Injury claims. WL asked if the changes made focus had resulted in feedback. RM advised that the level of service had remained consistent and no adverse feedback had been received.

DD advised that homeworking had been challenging for some, however, staff had adjusted their hours to suit circumstances. Welfare and wellbeing has remained a priority. DD advised that recruitment would be undertaken to fill vacancies across Customer Services.

WL asked if the move to reducing telephone contact would become the norm. DD advised that the intention was to return to normal call handling as soon as possible. DD also advised that the introduction of a Webchat facility was being considered. GMcG explained that Webchat provided members with another option for contacting the Agency, particularly when staff are working from home.

RH asked what was in place across Customer Services to safeguard staff wellbeing during this period. DD advised that line managers contacted staff daily and this was also supported by HR colleagues.

RM advised that the impact of answering critical calls only has not reduced the overall service provided to members. WL commented that the overall time to respond to emails had increased and asked how this would be addressed. RM advised that the figures for June showed a reduction on the response time. It was anticipated that offering the option of Webchat would help by answering quick and simple enquiries. All forms of communication would be open for members to use as it best suited their

needs. DD also advised that an update had been uploaded to the Liberty telephone system which would allow for more accurate reporting.

3a.2 Customer Firest - Bereavement Process

FMcK provided an update of the changes made to the Bereavement process. Following a review of the process in April 2020, 52 proposals had been put forward. These were assessed for feasibility and 18 products were selected for development. From this, 12 products have been adopted which applied across all schemes. One of the main benefits from this exercise was to establish a relationship with National Records for Scotland (NRS). A Memorandum of Understanding was being developed which would allow SPPA to search the NRS image bank directly. This would be piloted then rolled out across SPPA.

Further changes include:

- members would no longer be required to 'sign' forms, an electronic signature would be accepted
- a 'scribe' service can be offered to members
- provisional access to funds for those suffering hardship and cannot provide verification while shielding

DC asked how SPPA would inform members that the provisional hardship funds would be available. FMcK advised that this would be a safety net for people who were unable to provide the documentation and verification required.

3a.3 Customer First – non-critical tasks

GMcG advised that the Customer Service team were working as near normal capacity and working from home would be the 'new normal' for the rest of 2020.

GMcG advised that I-Connect had greatly improved the annual return process. A Project Manager had been appointed to take forward the production of Annual Benefit Statements by 31 August 2020. A Project Manager had also been appointed to lead the Annual Allowance exercise to issue statements by 6 October 2020. Both teams were now involved in the background work to meet the deadlines for these exercises.

DC asked what work was being done regarding risk assessment to ensure the safety of staff on their return to the office. GMcG confirmed that the Customer Service Management Team would work closely with the Union Side on this. DD confirmed that the Board would be kept up to date of progress.

AP1	SPPA to advise Board members of the progress related to staff returning to working in the office
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3a.4 GMP Reconciliation Project

GMcG advised that the rectification process for GMPs had been undertaken in February 2020. Pension and dependants advisory letters had been issued, but little responses received from these. The final data cut was expected from HMRC by the end of 2020.

3a.5 Develop our People

GMcG advised that moving to working from home had resulted in changes to working practices, as previously mentioned. A full skills analysis across Customer Service had been undertaken. Objectives for staff would be amended to take account of new processes and procedures. Welfare remains a top priority, with daily contact from line managers as part of that. Staff would have the opportunity to ensure they have the right equipment to continue working from home.

3b.1 Dashboard

GMcG advised that there had been a small dip in performance in April, but that this had returned to normal in May.

4. Overpayments

WL advised that there were no comments.

5. Risk

SMcA advised that recruitment for a Risk Assurance Manager was underway. Work had been undertaken to develop the Risk Management Framework and the formation of a new Strategic Risk Group. This would result in a refresh of the operational risk registers brought to Pension Boards and the strategic risk registers presented to the Audit and Risk Committee. WL welcomed the changes being undertaken and encouraged external comment. SMcA agreed that Board members would be fully engaged in the refresh of risk registers.

AP2	MV to advise progress of changes to Risk Governance and engage with Board members as required
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WL asked if the risks associated with moving to working from home had been addressed as this had happened quickly. There was also a requirement to manage risk when moving back to working in the office. In addition this may be a matter that would not wait until the new Risk Assurance Manager was appointed. WL asked if a risk evaluation and the plan to return to the office can be shared with the Board. SMcA advised that the Chief Executive was in touch with colleagues within Scottish Government regarding the return to the office, however, it has already been cascaded to staff that this is not likely to happen this year.

AP3	MV to share the risk assessment and the plan for returning to the office with the Board
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DC asked why the normal risk register had not been supplied at this meeting. SMcA advised that work was underway for the changes proposed, however, the redesign of the Risk Management Framework would result in a fundamental change to how we identify, record and manage risk across SPPA. WL suggested that the Board continue to use the current register meantime.

6. Policy Update

6.1 McCloud/Sargeant Appeal Case

IC provided a short background to the McCloud/Sargeant Age Discrimination Appeal Case. Legal procedures were now cisted until 8 August 2020, when they will be reviewed again. Technical discussions have taken place across all schemes in Scotland. The Scheme Advisory Board had responded to HM Treasury, raising concerns about how things would work in practice and whether discrimination had been fully removed. IC advised that in the coming week, HM Treasury would issue a public consultation on the two key proposals that may address the discrimination. SPPA would issue a circular to alert members, employers, Unions etc to the consultation. There may be a role for the Pension Board, in forming a response in terms of the administration process.

The first choice, referred to as 'immediate choice', for members would be that at some point in the next year or two, all members would be consulted to determine if they wish to be considered a member of the old scheme or a member of the 2015 scheme. The second choice, 'deferred choice underpin', would mean postponement until the point of retirement.

The Consultation would also contain a statement from the UK Government on the cost cap process. Finally the consultation would also address immediate detriment cases which included ill health retirements. A comparison of benefits would be required and work was already underway to review these cases.

IC advised that information would be added to Annual Benefit Statements to highlight this issue and that there may be changes to benefits in future. A working group had been created within SPPA to ensure consistency across schemes.

WL asked if there was anything the Board should do with regard to the consultation. IC advised that at this point, there is nothing for the Board to be involved other than reviewing the consultation, but would keep the Board updated on progress. When the outcomes from the consultation are known, the Board would look at the administration implications.

6.2 Internal Dispute Resolution Process

IC advised that there were 2 outstanding cases at the end of May 2020. No trends have been identified.

7. Governance Update

SMcA advised that he had been in consultation with The Pension Regulator (TPR) regarding amendment to the approach taken regarding terms and tenure for Board members. This would extend the ultimate period of tenure from 6 years to 8 years. SMcA also asked the Board to review the topics included in the proposed training pack. SMcA asked that Board members feedback any items they think should be included in the list of training.

AP4	Board members to feedback any further training topics to be added to the training module
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RH commented that, as a new Board member, he was reassured by the list of training material being provided. RH offered his thanks to the Governance team for pulling

together the training pack. DC asked about succession planning to replace a current member who is due to retire in approximately 9 months, and whether they could undertake some training in advance. Following discussion it was agreed that a potential nominee would attend the Board as an observer.

8. i-Connect, Member Self Service and Annual Pension Increase

8.1 i-Connect

JMcD advised that i-Connect had been live for 4 months. This had allowed SPPA to receive annual returns. Thanks to Linda Graham, Payroll Manager at SFRS and colleagues in SPPA, the data received was in the best condition possible with only a few manual adjustments to be made. JMcD wanted to record her thanks to Linda Graham for the huge effort undertaken to get this in place.

8.2 Member Self Service (MSS)

JMcD stated that the team would be working with SFRS to raise awareness of MSS for members, pensioners and deferred members. The team were working with the supplier to obtain training on the MSS system to allow SPPA to update the system in-house.

8.3 Annual Pension Increase

JMcD advised that the pension increase had been applied and that no complaints had been received. The increase had also been added to deferred member records so that history would build up over time.

DC asked if there was anything the Service could do to promote MSS. Following discussion, it was agreed that SPPA Communications Team would work with SFRS to promote MSS.

AP5	SPPA Communications Team to work with SFRS to promote MSS to members
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9. Any other competent business

9.1 WL advised that Catherine Skinner had stepped down as Vice Chair and wished to record his and the Boards thanks for her participation and contribution. SMcA confirmed that a letter of thanks had been sent to Catherine from the Chief Executive.

9.2 SMcA advised that the next Board meeting date would be in October. The Governance Team would contact the Board to confirm a suitable date.

No other business was raised. WL thanked everyone for their attendance.

**These minutes were approved on 5 November 2020 as a
correct record of the meeting held on 7 July 2020.**