

## **Extract from The Pension Regulator Code 14: Governance and administration of public service pension schemes**

### **Reporting breaches of the law**

#### Legal requirements

241. Certain people are required to report breaches of the law to the regulator where they have reasonable cause to believe that:

- a legal duty which is relevant to the administration of the scheme has not been, or is not being, complied with
- the failure to comply is likely to be of material significance to the regulator in the exercise of any of its functions

For further information about reporting late payments of employee or employer contributions, see the section of this code on 'Maintaining contributions'.

242. People who are subject to the reporting requirement ('reporters') for public service pension schemes are:

- scheme managers
- members of pension boards
- any person who is otherwise involved in the administration of a public service pension scheme
- employers: in the case of a multi-employer scheme, any participating employer who becomes aware of a breach should consider their statutory duty to report, regardless of whether the breach relates to, or affects, members who are its employees or those of other employers
- professional advisers including auditors, actuaries, legal advisers and fund managers: not all public service pension schemes are subject to the same legal requirements to appoint professional advisers, but nonetheless the regulator expects that all schemes will have professional advisers, either resulting from other legal requirements or simply as a matter of practice
- any person who is otherwise involved in advising the managers of the scheme in relation to the scheme.

243. The report must be made in writing as soon as reasonably practicable. See paragraph 263 for further information about how to report breaches.

#### Practical guidance

244. Schemes should be satisfied that those responsible for reporting breaches are made aware of the legal requirements and this guidance. Schemes should provide training for scheme managers and pension board members. All others under the statutory duty to report should ensure they have a sufficient level of knowledge and understanding to fulfil that duty.

This means having sufficient familiarity with the legal requirements and procedures and processes for reporting.

#### Implementing adequate procedures

245. Identifying and assessing a breach of the law is important in reducing risk and providing an early warning of possible malpractice in public service pension schemes. Those people with a responsibility to report breaches, including scheme managers and pension board members, should establish and operate appropriate and effective procedures to ensure that they are able to meet their legal obligations. Procedures should enable people to raise concerns and facilitate the objective consideration of those matters. It is important that procedures allow reporters to decide within an appropriate timescale whether they must report a breach. Reporters should not rely on waiting for others to report.

246. Procedures should include the following features:

- a process for obtaining clarification of the law around the suspected breach where needed
- a process for clarifying the facts around the suspected breach where they are not known
- a process for consideration of the material significance of the breach by taking into account its cause, effect, the reaction to it, and its wider implications, including (where appropriate) dialogue with the scheme manager or pension board
- a clear process for referral to the appropriate level of seniority at which decisions can be made on whether to report to the regulator
- an established procedure for dealing with difficult cases
- a timeframe for the procedure to take place that is appropriate to the breach and allows the report to be made as soon as reasonably practicable
- a system to record breaches even if they are not reported to the regulator (the record of past breaches may be relevant in deciding whether to report future breaches, for example it may reveal a systemic issue), and
- a process for identifying promptly any breaches that are so serious they must always be reported.

#### Judging whether a breach must be reported

247. Breaches can occur in relation to a wide variety of the tasks normally associated with the administrative function of a scheme such as keeping records, internal controls, calculating benefits and, for funded pension schemes, making investment or investment-related decisions.

#### Judging whether there is 'reasonable cause'

248. Having 'reasonable cause' to believe that a breach has occurred means more than merely having a suspicion that cannot be substantiated.

249. Reporters should ensure that where a breach is suspected, they carry out checks to establish whether or not a breach has in fact occurred. For example, a member of a funded pension scheme may allege that there has been a misappropriation of scheme assets where they have seen in the annual accounts that the scheme's assets have fallen. However, the real reason for the apparent loss in value of scheme assets may be due to the behaviour of the stock market over the period. This would mean that there is not reasonable cause to believe that a breach has occurred.
250. Where the reporter does not know the facts or events around the suspected breach, it will usually be appropriate to check with the pension board or scheme manager or with others who are in a position to confirm what has happened. It would not be appropriate to check in cases of theft, suspected fraud or other serious offences where discussions might alert those implicated or impede the actions of the police or a regulatory authority. Under these circumstances the reporter should alert the regulator without delay.
251. If the reporter is unclear about the relevant legal provision, they should clarify their understanding of the law to the extent necessary to form a view.
252. In establishing whether there is reasonable cause to believe that a breach has occurred, it is not necessary for a reporter to gather all the evidence which the regulator may require before taking legal action. A delay in reporting may exacerbate or increase the risk of the breach.

#### Judging what is of 'material significance' to the regulator

253. In deciding whether a breach is likely to be of 'material significance' to the regulator. It would be advisable for those with a statutory duty to report to consider the:
- cause of the breach
  - effect of the breach
  - reaction to the breach, and
  - wider implications of the breach.
254. When deciding whether to report, those responsible should consider these points together. Reporters should take into account expert or professional advice, where appropriate, when deciding whether the breach is likely to be of material significance to the regulator.

#### Cause of the breach

255. The breach is likely to be of material significance to the regulator where it was caused by:
- dishonesty
  - poor governance or administration
  - slow or inappropriate decision making practices

- incomplete or inaccurate advice, or
  - acting (or failing to act) in deliberate contravention of the law.
256. When deciding whether a breach is of material significance, those responsible should consider other reported and unreported breaches of which they are aware. However, historical information should be considered with care, particularly if changes have been made to address previously identified problems.
257. A breach will not normally be materially significant if it has arisen from an isolated incident, for example resulting from teething problems with a new system or procedure, or from an unusual or unpredictable combination of circumstances. But in such a situation, it is also important to consider other aspects of the breach such as the effect it has had and to be aware that persistent isolated breaches could be indicative of wider scheme issues.

#### Effect of the breach

258. Reporters need to consider the effects of any breach, but with the regulator's role in relation to public service pension schemes and its statutory objectives in mind, the following matters in particular should be considered likely to be of material significance to the regulator:
- pension board members not having the appropriate degree of knowledge and understanding, which may result in pension boards not fulfilling their roles, the scheme not being properly governed and administered and/or scheme managers breaching other legal requirements
  - pension board members having a conflict of interest, which may result in them being prejudiced in the way that they carry out their role, ineffective governance and administration of the scheme and/or scheme managers breaching legal requirements
  - adequate internal controls not being established and operated, which may lead to schemes not being run in accordance with their scheme regulations and other legal requirements, risks not being properly identified and managed and/or the right money not being paid to or by the scheme at the right time
  - accurate information about benefits and scheme administration not being provided to scheme members and others, which may result in members not being able to effectively plan or make decisions about their retirement
  - appropriate records not being maintained, which may result in member benefits being calculated incorrectly and / or not being paid to the right person at the right time
  - pension board members misappropriating any assets of the scheme or being likely to do so, which may result in scheme assets not being safeguarded, and
  - any other breach which may result in the scheme being poorly governed, managed or administered.

259. Reporters need to take care to consider the effects of the breach, including any other breaches occurring as a result of the initial breach and the effects of those resulting breaches.

#### Reaction to the breach

260. Where prompt and effective action is taken to investigate and correct the breach and its causes and, where appropriate, notify any affected members, the regulator will not normally consider this to be materially significant.
261. A breach is likely to be of concern and material significance to the regulator where a breach has been identified and those involved:
- do not take prompt and effective action to remedy the breach and identify and tackle its cause in order to minimise risk of recurrence
  - are not pursuing corrective action to a proper conclusion, or
  - fail to notify affected scheme members where it would have been appropriate to do so.

#### Wider implications of the breach

262. Reporters should consider the wider implications of a breach when they assess which breaches are likely to be materially significant to the regulator. For example, a breach is likely to be of material significance where the fact that the breach has occurred makes it appear more likely that other breaches will emerge in the future. This may be due to the scheme manager or pension board members having a lack of appropriate knowledge and understanding to fulfil their responsibilities or where other pension schemes may be affected. For instance, public service pension schemes administered by the same organisation may be detrimentally affected where a system failure has caused the breach to occur.

#### Submitting a report to the regulator

263. Reports must be submitted in writing and can be sent by post or electronically, including by email or by fax. Wherever possible reporters should use the standard format available via the Exchange online service on the regulator's website.
264. The report should be dated and include as a minimum:
- full name of the scheme
  - description of the breach or breaches
  - any relevant dates
  - name of the employer or scheme manager (where known)
  - name, position and contact details of the reporter, and
  - role of the reporter in relation to the scheme.
265. Additional information that would help the regulator includes:

- the reason the breach is thought to be of material significance to the regulator
  - the address of the scheme
  - the contact details of the scheme manager (if different to the scheme address)
  - the pension scheme's registry number (if available), and
  - whether the concern has been reported before.
266. Reporters should mark urgent reports as such and draw attention to matters they consider particularly serious. They can precede a written report with a telephone call, if appropriate.
267. Reporters should ensure they receive an acknowledgement for any report they send to the regulator. Only when they receive an acknowledgement can the reporter be confident that the regulator has received their report.
268. The regulator will acknowledge all reports within five working days of receipt, however it will not generally keep a reporter informed of the steps taken in response to a report of a breach as there are restrictions on the information it can disclose.
269. The reporter should provide further information or reports of further breaches if this may help the regulator to exercise its functions. The regulator may make contact to request further information.
270. Breaches should be reported as soon as reasonably practicable, which will depend on the circumstances. In particular, the time taken should reflect the seriousness of the suspected breach.
271. In cases of immediate risk to the scheme, for instance, where there is any indication of dishonesty, the regulator does not expect reporters to seek an explanation or to assess the effectiveness of proposed remedies. They should only make such immediate checks as are necessary. The more serious the potential breach and its consequences, the more urgently reporters should make these necessary checks. In cases of potential dishonesty the reporter should avoid, where possible, checks which might alert those implicated. In serious cases, reporters should use the quickest means possible to alert the regulator to the breach.

#### Whistleblowing protection and confidentiality

272. The Pensions Act 2004 makes clear that the statutory duty to report overrides any other duties a reporter may have such as confidentiality and that any such duty is not breached by making a report. The regulator understands the potential impact of a report on relationships, for example, between an employee and their employer.
273. The statutory duty to report does not, however, override 'legal privilege'. This means that oral and written communications between a professional legal adviser and their client, or a person representing that client, while

obtaining legal advice, do not have to be disclosed. Where appropriate a legal adviser will be able to provide further information on this.

274. The regulator will do its best to protect a reporter's identity (if desired) and will not disclose the information except where lawfully required to do so. It will take all reasonable steps to maintain confidentiality, but it cannot give any categorical assurances as the circumstances may mean that disclosure of the reporter's identity becomes unavoidable in law. This includes circumstances where the regulator is ordered by a court to disclose it.
275. The Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA) provides protection for employees making a whistleblowing disclosure to the regulator. Consequently, where individuals employed by firms or another organisation having a statutory duty to report disagree with a decision not to report to the regulator, they may have protection under the ERA if they make an individual report in good faith. The regulator expects such individual reports to be rare and confined to the most serious cases.