

# INTER-VALUATION CONTRIBUTION REVIEW POLICY

## Lancashire County Pension Fund

**JUNE 2021**

**Lancashire County Council**

### A - INTRODUCTION

This document details the Lancashire County Pension Fund's (LCPF) policy on reviewing employer contributions between valuations, including the circumstances under which a review may take place, and the methodology of the review. It supplements the general policy of the Fund as set out in the Funding Strategy Statement (FSS), and is to be considered part of that document.

### POLICY OBJECTIVES

#### *RISK MITIGATION*

The Fund, in maintaining employer contributions at appropriate levels, aims to mitigate risk as far as possible, within its risk management framework. The inter-valuation contributions review policy reflects this framework.

#### *EFFICIENT PROCESSES*

The Fund aims to operate procedures which minimise both cost and time taken to complete the necessary formal processes.

#### *COSTS OF MANAGING CONTRIBUTION REVIEWS*

Where an employer instigates the review, the Fund may pass on relevant adviser costs to the employers being reviewed, and will also recover its own costs from employers, but will aim to conduct the reviews in a manner that seeks to minimise these costs. Where circumstances warrant, the Fund may also seek to recover costs in cases where the review is instigated by the Fund.

### B – CONTRIBUTION REVIEWS

#### BACKGROUND

In line with the Regulations that came into force on 23rd September 2020, the Administering Authority has the ability to review employer contributions between valuations. The Administering Authority and employers now have the following flexibilities:

- The Administering Authority may review the contributions of an employer where there has been a significant change to the liabilities of an employer.
- The Administering Authority may review the contributions of an employer where there has been a significant change in the employer's covenant.
- An employer may request a review of contributions from the Administering Authority if they feel that either point 1 or point 2 applies to them.

*Regulation reference: Regulation 64A of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013/2356*

#### POLICY STATEMENT

The Fund may conduct a review when:

- There has been a significant changes to the employer's membership which will have a material impact on their liabilities.
- There has been a significant change in the employer's covenant

Where the funding position for an employer significantly changes solely due to a change in assets (and/or changes in actuarial assumptions), contribution reviews are not permitted. However changes in assets would be taken into account when considering if an employer can support its obligations to the Fund after a significant covenant change.

The Administering Authority will consult with the employer prior to undertaking a review of their contributions including setting out the reason for triggering the review.

For the avoidance of doubt, any review of contributions may result in no change and a continuation of contributions as per the latest actuarial valuation assessment. In the normal course of events, a rate review would not be undertaken close to the next actuarial valuation date unless in exceptional circumstances. For example:

- A contribution review due to a change in membership profile would not be undertaken in the [6] months leading up to the next actuarial valuation date.
- However, where there has also been a material change in covenant, a review will be considered on a case by case basis which will determine if and when any contribution change would be implemented. This will take into account the proximity of the actuarial valuation and the implementation of the contributions from that valuation.

The employer would be required to pay the costs of any review conducted at their request following completion of the calculations and is only permitted to make a maximum of [two] requests between

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actuarial valuation dates (except in exceptional circumstances and at the sole discretion of the Administering Authority). Where circumstances warrant, the Fund may also seek to recover costs in cases where the review is instigated by the Fund.

### SITUATIONS WHERE CONTRIBUTIONS MAY BE REVIEWED

Contributions may be reviewed if the Administering Authority becomes aware of any of the following scenarios. Employers will be notified if this is the case.

Consideration will also be given to the impact that any employer changes may have on the other employers and on the Fund as a whole, when deciding whether to proceed with a contribution review.

#### **1) Significant changes in the employer's liabilities**

This includes but is not limited to the following scenarios:

- a) Significant changes to the employer's membership which will have a material impact on their liabilities, such as:
  - i. Restructuring of an employer
  - ii. A significant outsourcing or transfer of staff to another employer (not necessarily within the Fund)
  - iii. A bulk transfer into or out of the employer
  - iv. Other significant changes to the membership for example due to redundancies, significant salary awards, ill health retirements (for employers not included in the captive arrangement) or large number of withdrawals
- b) Two or more employers merging including insourcing and transferring of services
- c) The separation of an employer into two or more individual employers

In terms of assessing the triggers under a) above, the Administering Authority will only consider a review if the change in liabilities is expected to be more than [5%] of the total liabilities. In some cases this may mean there is also a change in the covenant of the employer.

Any review of the rate will only take into account the impact of the change in liabilities (including any underfunding in relation to pension strain costs), and the resulting impact on the Primary and Secondary rate of contributions.

#### **2) Significant changes in the employer's covenant**

This includes but is not limited to the following scenarios:

- a) Provision of, or removal of, or impairment of, security, bond, guarantee or some other form of indemnity by an employer against their obligations in the Fund. For the avoidance of doubt, this includes provision of security to any other pension arrangement which may impair the security provided to the Fund.
- b) Material change in an employer's immediate financial strength or longer-term financial outlook (evidence should be available to justify this) including where an employer

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ceases to operate or becomes insolvent.

- c) Where an employer exhibits behavior that suggests a change in their ability and/or willingness to pay contributions to the Fund.

In some instances, a change in the liabilities will also result in a change in an employer's covenant.

Whilst in many cases the regular covenant monitoring requested by the Administering Authority will identify these changes, in some circumstances (for example where a Deferred Debt Agreement is in place) employers will be required to agree to notify the Administering Authority of any material changes that may affect their covenant. Where this applies, employers will be notified separately and the Administering Authority will set out the requirements.

Additional information may be sought from the employer in order to determine whether a contribution review is necessary. This may include annual accounts, budgets, forecasts and any specific details of restructure plans. As part of this, the Administering Authority will take advice from the Fund Actuary, covenant, legal and any other specialist adviser.

Where there has been a significant change to employer covenant, any review of the contribution rate would include consideration of the updated funding position (both on an ongoing and termination basis) and would usually allow for changes in asset values when considering if the employer can meet its obligations on both an ongoing and termination basis (if applicable). This could then lead to the following actions:

- The contributions changing or staying the same depending on the conclusion, and/or;
- Security to improve the covenant to the Fund, and/or;
- If appropriate, a change in the investment strategy.

### PROCESS AND POTENTIAL OUTCOMES OF A CONTRIBUTION REVIEW

Where one of the listed events occurs, the Administering Authority will enter into discussion with the employer to clarify details of the event and any intent of the Administering Authority to review contributions. Ultimately, the decision to review contributions as a result of the above events rests with the Administering Authority after, if necessary, taking advice from their Actuary, legal or a covenant specialist advisors.

This also applies where an employer notifies the Administering Authority of the event and requests a review of the contributions. The employer will be required to agree to meet any professional and administration costs associated with the review. The employer will be required to outline the rationale and case for the review through a suitable exchange of information prior to consideration by the Administering Authority.

The Administering Authority will consider whether it is appropriate to use updated membership data within the review (e.g. where the change in data is expected to have a material effect on the outcome) and whether any supporting information is required from the employer.

As well as revisiting the employer's contribution plan, as part of the review it is possible that other parts of the funding strategy will also be reviewed where the covenant of the employer has changed, for example the Fund will consider:

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- Whether the employer's investment strategy remains appropriate.
- Whether the Primary contribution rate should be adjusted to allow for any profile change and/or investment strategy change
- Whether the secondary contributions should be adjusted including whether the length of the recovery period adopted at the previous valuation remains appropriate. The remaining recovery period from the valuation would be the maximum period adopted (except in exceptional and justifiable circumstances and at the sole discretion of the Administering Authority on the advice of the Actuary).

The review of contributions may take up to 3 months from the date of confirmation to the employer that the review is taking place, in order to collate the necessary data.

Any change to an employer's contributions will be implemented at a date agreed between the employer and the Fund. The Schedule to the Rates and Adjustment Certificate at the last valuation will be updated for any contribution changes.