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Welcome

Welcome to *Inscribe* the quarterly newsletter for employers within the Royal County of Berkshire Pension Fund.

Each edition of *Inscribe* contains the latest news and updates for LGPS employers within the Royal County of Berkshire Pension Fund.

Annual LGPS updates

Contribution bandings 2024/2025

Below are the employee contribution bands, which are effective from **1 April 2024**. They are calculated by increasing the 2023/2024 employee contribution bands by the September 2023 CPI figure of **6.7%** and then rounding down the result to the nearest £100.

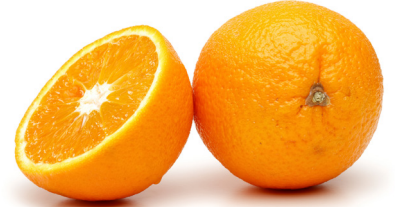
Band	Actual pensionable pay for an employment	Main Section contribution rate
1	Up to £17,600	5.5%
2	£17,601 to £27,600	5.8%
3	£27,601 to £44,900	6.5%
4	£44,901 to £56,300	6.8%
5	£56,801 to £79,700	8.5%
6	£79,701 to £112,900	9.9%
7	£112,901 to £133,100	10.5%
8	£133,101 to £199,700	11.4%
9	£199,701 or more	12.5%



50/50 Section

If you have any employees who are in the 50/50 section you must re-enrol them into the MAIN section of the scheme if the following occurs:

- The member returns to work following a period of unpaid leave
- You go through your auto-enrolment / re-enrolment process.



The [50/50 election form and factsheet](#) is available from our website:

The contribution percentages under the 50/50 section effective from 1 April 2024 are as follows:

Band	Actual pensionable pay for an employment	50/50 Section contribution rate
1	Up to £17,600	2.75%
2	£17,601 to £27,600	2.9%
3	£27,601 to £44,900	3.25%
4	£44,901 to £56,300	3.4%
5	£56,801 to £79,700	4.25%
6	£79,701 to £112,900	4.95%
7	£112,901 to £133,100	5.25%
8	£133,101 to £199,700	5.7%
9	£199,701 or more	6.25%

Example - MAIN section versus 50/50 section based on an annual salary of £20,000.

Scheme Section	MAIN	50/50
Percentage contribution per month	5.8%	2.9%
Annual pension build up	£408.16	£204.08
Death in service grant	£60,000	£60,000

Assessing contribution rates

Employers assess their staff from 1 April every year to determine the employee contribution rate that they will pay for the year ahead based on their pensionable pay and the current contribution table.

However where an active member has a material change in their employment that affects their pensionable pay you can determine if a new contribution rate from a different band should be applied.

This discretion forms part of your policy statement. Your policy statement is a public document which should be made available to your staff and reviewed regularly.

You can find out more about formulating or reviewing your employer policy statement by [downloading our guide](#).

Employer contribution rates

Please ensure you are deducting the correct employer contribution rate from 1 April 2024.

The amount each employer contributes is outlined in the **Rates & Adjustment Certificate** that forms part of the formal valuation of the Pension Fund. Your employer contribution rate for 2024/2025 can be found on the [Rates and Adjustment Certificate](#).

You should have already received an e-mail in March from the Pension Fund's Finance Officer, Renee Passman, confirming your employer rate for the coming year. If you have a query on the employer contribution rate you should be paying from 1 April 2024 please contact:

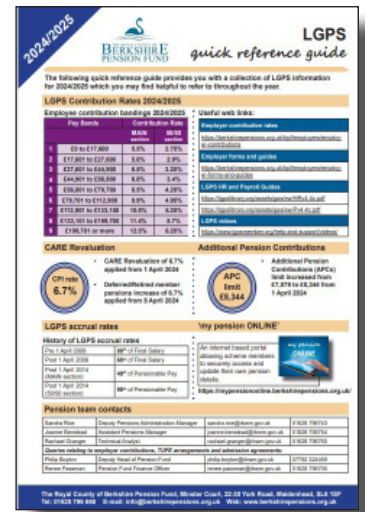
Renee Passman: renee.passman@rbwm.gov.uk 01628 796 705

The 2024/2025 Contribution Return form and accompanying guidance notes can be found in the Employer Forms section of our website:

- [Contribution return guidance 2024/2025](#)
- [Contribution return form 2024/2025](#)

2024/2025 LGPS quick reference guide

- We have produced an '[LGPS quick reference guide](#)' for 2024/2025
- aimed at employers/payroll and HR departments to have as a handy
- guide to the contributions rates, CPI increase, useful links and contact
- e-mail and telephone numbers.



Opting out of the LGPS

As you will be aware once an employee has joined the LGPS they can opt-out at anytime.

As a reminder certain safeguards were introduced by the Pensions Act 2008 prohibiting employers from discouraging members from joining or remaining in a workplace pension scheme (such as the LGPS).

If you have a member of staff who wishes to opt-out of the LGPS please refer them to the Berkshire Pension Fund directly.



Under the Pensions Regulator's rules employers must not provide their staff with opt-out forms (or a link to an opt-out form). Any decision to opt-out must be taken freely by the employee. The pension team can post or e-mail a form if required to scheme members wishing to opt-out of the LGPS.

AVC Wise...an update

If you have entered into a Shared Cost AVC arrangement with your active scheme employees and you use AVC Wise to assist with this, please note AVC Wise changed their name from Monday 22 April 2024 to '**My Money Matters**'

More information about their change in name and the services they provide can be [found on their website](#).



New APC limit - 2024/2025

Under the LGPS regulations members can elect to purchase additional annual pension through the payment of **Additional Pension Contributions (APCs)**.

The maximum amount of additional annual pension that can be purchased under the LGPS can change every April to reflect the rise in cost of living. Please note the maximum amount of additional annual pension which can be purchased from 1 April 2024 has increased to **£8,344** (the 2023/24 APC limit was £7,579). Scheme members can calculate the cost of buying additional annual pension by using an online calculator to provide a quotation:

- [LGPS APC online calculator](#)

In addition regulation 31 gives a Scheme employer the discretion to award an active member of the Scheme additional annual pension up to a value of £8,344.

The cost of providing additional pension is determined in accordance with actuarial guidance issued by the Government Actuary's Department (GAD). If you were considering this as a scheme employer you will need to be fully aware of the cost implications in awarding any additional pension. The discretion to award additional pension in this way forms part of your policy statement which should be regularly reviewed and kept up to date.

LGS1B - Brief guide to the LGPS

As part of an employee's appointment process a Scheme Employer should provide new employees with a copy of the short scheme guide (LGS1B) alongside their contract of employment. The LGS1B provides a summary of the LGPS and what it can provide for members. The 2024/2025 LGS1B can be downloaded from the Employer Forms section of our website. Please include this factsheet in contracts of employment commencing from **1 April 2024**:

- [LGS1B - Brief guide to the LGPS 2024/2025](#)

The LGS1B highlights the benefits of being a member of the LGPS and provides a brief overview of:

- **The cost of being a member of the LGPS**
- **What type of Scheme is the LGPS?**
- **The 50/50 Section**
- **Transferring former pension rights**
- **Death in service information**



Pension Strain Cost Change

You will hopefully be aware of previous communication about the change to factors used in the calculation of employer strain costs.

The change came into effect from 1 January 2024 and as a reminder we have provided detailed information below and a background behind the payment of strain costs.

What is a pension strain cost? Pension strain costs occur when there is a clear shortfall in the assumed level of funding needed to provide a particular entitlement to pension benefit. Strain costs most usually arise when an employer takes a decision to make a member redundant (or to retire them early for business efficiency reasons) and the member is aged between 55 and their Normal Retirement Age. In these circumstances the LGPS regulations dictate that the pension benefits paid to the member cannot have an early retirement reduction factor applied to the pension benefits and so the full value of the pension benefits calculated at the point of redundancy are paid immediately and without reduction. This places a strain on the Fund and the employer has to make a capital payment to the Fund to avoid the funding shortfall.

Pension strain costs can also arise in cases of flexible retirement and early retirement where an employer agrees to waive the percentage reductions. Pension strain costs must be paid by an employer at the point the member's pension benefits come into payment as a one-off payment to the Fund. Further additional strain costs will arise if an employer uses its discretion to award additional pension to the member.

In cases of ill health retirement, a pension strain cost is calculated but on these occasions an employer is not normally required to make a one-off payment to the Fund. Instead, as part of the valuation process, the Fund actuary makes an assumption as to the likely number of ill health retirements and builds into the employer's contribution rate an element to pay for those anticipated costs.

- **SCAPE discount rate** - On 30 March 2023 a written ministerial statement made by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury confirmed that the Superannuation Contributions Adjusted for Past Experience (SCAPE) discount rate had been reduced to a real rate of 1.7% per annum above CPI inflation, from the previous real rate of 2.4% per annum.

Although this change does not impact on employer contribution rates there has been an impact on the LGPS given the SCAPE rate is used by the Government Actuary Department (GAD) to set a variety of actuarial factors used by Fund administrators. One set of actuarial factors LGPS Funds were informed of changed from a later date, 3 July 2023, are those percentages used to reduce a members pension benefits when they retire for reasons not described above. The new percentages used from 3 July 2023 to reduce a members pension benefits are more favourable to the member, although the members pension benefits will still be reduced to take account of the fact that the pension benefits will be paid earlier and for a longer period of time than would otherwise have been envisaged, the reductions will be less putting an increased strain on the Pension Fund.

The change to the SCAPE discount rate led the Fund to commission its actuary to review the factors it uses to calculate a pension strain cost, the first review since 1 April 1998.

New factors were introduced from 1 January 2024 and now generate a higher pension strain cost than would otherwise have been generated for redundancy, business efficiency, employer consent and flexible retirement cases.

- **Estimate Requests** – The Fund cannot stress enough how important it is to request an estimate of the pension strain cost involved before making any decisions about a member you are considering redundancy, business efficiency, employer consent and flexible retirement on behalf of. You can send an estimate request to the Fund by completing form [EST3 found via our website](#) and submitting to info@berkshirerpensions.org.uk The Fund will endeavour to reply in 5 working days of receiving a request.
- **Invoicing** - For all types of early retirement where there is a pension strain cost, an employer will be invoiced for the full cost of the early retirement at the same time as the Fund provides the member with their pension benefit payment options.

The McCloud Remedy - *update*

In 2014 and 2015 the Government introduced changes to public service pension schemes, including the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), for future service, moving from providing Final Salary to Career Average Revalued Earnings (CARE) benefits and increasing normal pension age to be in line with state pension age.



The changes to the LGPS in England and Wales, effective from 1 April 2014, applied to existing scheme members as well as new scheme members, but older scheme members were given protection against the changes.

As a result, two employment tribunal cases were brought against the Government, the claimants arguing that the underpin protection introduced amounted to unlawful discrimination as the protection only applied to certain older scheme members. The Court of Appeal ruled in the claimants favour that these changes were discriminatory to younger scheme members leading the Government to commit to make changes to all public sector pension schemes to remove discrimination.

The changes to regulations are effective from 1 October 2023 and present a significant administrative burden to all LGPS Pension Funds. Scheme members in the scope of the protection will have their post 31 March 2014 benefits calculated as the best of CARE and Final Salary in line with a revised underpin protection. The effect will be retrospective; further data for calculating benefits for current contributing scheme members needs to be collated from scheme employers dating back to 1 April 2014 and benefits will need to be recalculated for qualifying scheme members who have left since 1 April 2014.

Those older scheme members who were already given protection may also be affected given changes to the methodology of the underpin that was originally introduced when the LGPS changed to CARE in April 2014.

At a pension fund level we will need to identify those scheme members in scope of the extended underpin protection, obtain the data needed to calculate a scheme members post 31 March 2014 benefits from scheme employers, update all scheme member records, calculate retrospective benefits, pay any underpayments, communicate with scheme members and scheme employers and make changes to administration systems and processes to carry out ongoing administration under the new regulations.

Following a review of the changes to regulations effective from 1 October 2023 the pension fund finalised a project plan, the foundations of which have been to share all scheme member data with our actuary to help identify those scheme members most likely to be subject to the McCloud Remedy and will require review by the pension fund. Once final details have been received from the actuary a review of what additional scheme member information may be needed will be carried out by the pension fund, where it is identified additional scheme member information will be needed a request will be made to the scheme employer. The additional information most likely to be required is historical details from 1 April 2014 of hours and weeks worked. Further details will follow in due course

McCloud Timeline	
1 April 2012	Members of the LGPS or other Public Sector pension schemes before this date may qualify for 'underpin' protection
1 April 2014	LGPS changed from a Final Salary Scheme to a Career Average Revalued Earnings (CARE) Scheme
31 March 2022	End of Remedy period - pension benefits protected between 2014 and 2022
1 October 2023	The LGPS regulations changed for the McCloud Remedy
31 August 2025	2025 Annual Benefit Statements will include information on the McCloud Remedy for affected scheme members

Ongoing McCloud Remedy communications

We will issue special edition newsletters as well as e-mail communication to employers updating you on the progress of the McCloud Remedy judgement. Look out for our special edition newsletter in November.

A dedicated section of our website has been created to provide [updates on McCloud for our scheme members](#)

Year-end 2024

In preparation for the 2024 year-end process we have provided a schedule below outlining the time line for completion of year-end 2024.

If you complete your year-end return manually and you are not a user of i-Connect, you should have received an e-mail from our Technical Manager, Rachael Granger, containing employer guidance notes and a year-end template for completion.

If you haven't received Rachael's e-mail and you would like a copy please contact our Technical team: technical@rbwm.gov.uk

Year-end Schedule 2024	
During 1 April 2024 to 31 May 2024	The Pension Fund to process year-end files
During 1 April 2024 to 15 June 2024	Scheme employers to respond to year-end queries within two weeks
During 1 April 2024 to 31 July 2024	The Pension Fund to process responses from scheme employers and make Annual Benefit Statements available via 'my pension ONLINE'
During 1 August 2024 to 31 August 2024	The Pension Fund to extract LGPS member data to send to printers. Issue Annual Benefit Statements to those LGPS members who still request a paper copy.
If you have any questions regarding year-end please contact our Technical team - technical@rbwm.gov.uk	

- [Year-end 2024 guidance notes](#)
- [Year-end 2024 template](#)



i-Connect

If you are a user of i-Connect you will not be required to submit a year-end return. However you may still be contacted with queries identified as part of the month 12 reconciliation process but it is anticipated the number of queries will be low in number.

Please upload/submit your i-Connect file as soon as possible after your March payroll has been run. This will assist us in meeting all our year-end deadlines.

New Technical Team e-mail inbox

Due to the level of iConnect related emails received by the team, a 'Technical' inbox has now been created to ensure we deal with these more efficiently.

Going forward, please send all iConnect related emails including submission information queries etc to **technical@rbwm.gov.uk**

You will no longer be required to send these e-mails to individual team members - please just use the Technical e-mail address.

Of course, if you have any queries you would prefer to discuss with the Technical team verbally, you are always welcome to call directly.

Please send the following to the Technical inbox:

- **iConnect enquiries**
- **iConnect submissions**
- **Interface files**
- **iConnect queries**



Berkshire Pension Fund Technical Team contact details:

Rachael Granger (Technical Manager)	01628 796765
Paul Burke (Technical Officer)	01628 796778
Sonal Makwana (Technical Officer)	01628 796704
Please send your iConnect submissions and queries to: technical@rbwm.gov.uk	

As a reminder we also have a communications inbox and pension helpdesk:

Pension communication enquiries	communications@berkshirepensions.org.uk
Berkshire Pension Fund helpdesk	info@berkshirepensions.org.uk

Pension Board vacancy

Would you like to be part of the formal oversight of the Pension Fund?

We have a vacancy for a Member Representative on the Berkshire Pension Board, and also have an option to appoint a substitute representative, so up to two people can be involved.

The Pension Board meet four times annually before each Pension Committee to review the papers being presented for decision to fulfil its role to assist the Administering Authority* in securing compliance with the LGPS Regulations, other legislation relating to the governance and administration of the Scheme and requirements imposed by the Pensions Regulator.

Currently the board has 3 employer representatives and 3 member representatives, but also has provision for substitutes. As well as people with a finance or HR perspective, or one of representing staff (through Trades Unions or otherwise) one of the significant issues pension funds are considering is around appropriate ethical investment and people with an interest or understanding of such issues should be able to helpfully contribute.

There are training requirements for Board members and some learning opportunities to fulfil the role. Meetings currently occur by Hybrid, with the Fund's officers and Board Chair meeting together in the office and most others participating by Zoom or Teams. Some parts of meetings are confidential, and whilst the Board has an advisory role it does not involve any investment decisions.

Initially, those interested should have an informal discussion with Philip Boyton, Deputy Head of Pension Fund, 07792 324459 and those wishing to be considered should submit a letter of application by **30 June 2024** outlining their experience and why they wish to be considered. We anticipate that such letters should be 2-4 (A4) pages in length. Please e-mail this to pensionboard@rbwm.gov.uk



Preparing for Pension Dashboards

The Department for Works and Pensions is introducing Pension Dashboards to the UK to enable individuals to access their pension information online, securely and all in one place.

Dashboards will provide clear and simple information about an individual's multiple pension savings, including LGPS and State Pensions.

This initiative will be launched in phases over the next few years so we will keep you updated with developments.



A few farewells...

As reported in our Autumn newsletter we introduced you to our new Pension Administration Manager - **Gavin Roberts**. Unfortunately Gavin had to leave us sooner than expected but we welcome **Martin Griffiths** as our new Pension Administration Manager from 1 May.

Amy Webb-Morris had been part of the team for over 10 years and has now moved to pastures new. I am sure some of you got to know Amy quite well over the years and will wish her well for the future.

Finally our Head of Pension Fund - **Damien Pantling** left us in February and we welcomed **Jo Thistlewood** as his replacement on 22 April.

Turn to the next page to meet the pension team...



Meet the Team

The Berkshire Pension team provide support in all areas of pension administration and we are committed to providing a high level of customer service to our members and employers.

There have been a few changes to the pension team over the last couple of months so it is a good opportunity to introduce you to our pension colleagues...

Admin Management and Pension Finance Team

Head of Fund	Jo Thistlewood
Deputy Head of Fund	Philip Boyton
Pension Administration Manager	Martin Griffiths (starting 1 May)
Deputy Pension Administration Manager	Sandra Rice
Finance Manager (Pensions)	Patrick Osei
Pension Fund Finance Officer	Renee Passman
Trainee Accountant	Nathan Webb

Technical and Communications Team

Technical Manager	Rachael Granger
Technical Officer	Paul Burke
Technical Officer	Sonal Makwana
Communications Manager	Joanne Benstead



Senior Pension Administration Team

Senior Pension Administrator	Sheila Morris
Senior Pension Administrator	Barry Jones
Senior Pension Administrator	Susan Goldfinch

Pension Administration and Clerical Team

Pension Administrator	Alison Grover
Pension Administrator	Chris Pounce
Pension Administrator	Jake Hume
Pension Administrator	Kirsty Marshall
Pension Administrator	Zoe Godliman
Trainee Pension Administrator	Hanan Mohamad
Trainee Pension Administrator	Nora Miczak
Trainee Pension Administrator	Winnie Ting
Clerical Officer	Vicky Harverson

Pension Payroll Team

Payroll Manager	Jane Young
Payroll Officer	Chloe Crayk



Employer forms 2024/2025

The Employer Forms section on our website contains the pension forms we require for completion at different stages of an employee's LGPS scheme membership.

[All forms can be downloaded via our website](#)

Form	Title	Reason for Use
LGS1B	Brief Guide to the Berkshire Pension Fund	Include with new contracts of employment issued from 1 April 2024
LGS10	Application to opt-in to the LGPS	Employees wishing to opt-in to the LGPS
LGS10B	Application for re-entry to the MAIN Section from the 50/50 Section	Employees wishing to opt back in to the MAIN Section from the 50/50 Section.
LGS5050	Application to opt-in to the 50/50 Section	Factsheet and application form for members wishing to opt-in to the 50/50 Section of the LGPS
LGS15A(5050)	Notification of Entry to the 50/50 Section of the LGPS	Formal notification to Berkshire Pension Fund advising of a member opting in to the 50/50 Section.
LGS15A	Admission to the Scheme	Formal notification to Berkshire Pension Fund advising of a member joining the LGPS
LGS15C	Withdrawal from the Scheme	Formal notification to Berkshire Pension Fund advising of a member opting-out, leaving or retiring from the LGPS
LGS15C (i-Connect)	Withdrawal from the Scheme	Withdrawal notification for users of i-Connect
LGS15D	Opt-out notification	Formal notification to the Berkshire Pension Fund of a member who has opted-out of the LGPS with no further entitlement to a pension. Please complete this form if the member has received a refund through payroll
Employer Estimate Requests		
EST3	Request for an Estimate of Pension Benefits for an active Member	Please complete this form to request an estimate of pension benefits for an active member. Employer estimate requests will be generated within 5 working days of your request.
EST4	Request for an Estimate of Pension Benefits for a former Member	Please complete this form to request an estimate of pension benefits for a former member. Employer estimate requests will be generated within 5 working days of your request.

Promotional material for your employees

We have a range of promotional material about the LGPS which you are welcome to use and distribute to your employees:

- [Pension tools and calculators](#): A series of online calculators are available to help you understand how the pension builds up and the cost to members.
- A4 posters: [A series of A4 posters](#) are available for you to use within your organisation to promote the LGPS to your employees. There are three posters in the series:
 - * **'my pension ONLINE'**
 - * **Boost your LGPS pension**
 - * **Benefits of the LGPS**
 - * **Planning ahead for your retirement**
- [LGPS videos](#): The LGA have made a series of bite-sized videos aimed at Scheme members - "**pensions made simple**". Each video is less than 4 minutes long and provides a short summary around a specific LGPS topic.
- [Member factsheets and forms](#): electronic copies of our factsheets and forms covering all aspects of the LGPS. Paper copies of all the factsheets and forms are also available by contacting the pension team.



How can we help you?

Did you know the pension team can provide a range of information sessions for you and your scheme members?

Pension Surgeries

We can arrange a pension surgery to take place on a particular date and your staff members can request an appointment either via Microsoft Teams or over the telephone.

We offer 20 minute appointment slots and all discussions are conducted in complete confidence.

Employer Training

Training on all areas of LGPS pension administration for HR and Payroll Officers. Topics covered during employer training include:

- New starters
- Leavers
- Final salary calculations
- Retirement
- Completion of standard forms

Scheme Member Presentations

Information for your staff on the benefits of LGPS membership.

- General topics covered include:
- Understanding your pension
- Life Cover
- Retirement options
- Increasing and decreasing monthly contributions
- Examples of pension calculations

Individual Pension Support

We provide individual pension support for your Scheme members if they have any questions about their Berkshire pension.

Members can contact us to arrange a one to one meeting over Microsoft Teams or over the telephone. The pension team are unable to give advice but we can assist with pension queries and help your staff understand their LGPS pension.

Staff benefit events

If you are holding staff benefit/well-being events for your staff, representatives from the pension team can attend to be on hand to help with LGPS pension questions.

Member presentations and employer training sessions can be tailored to your requirements. If you would be interested in arranging any of the above pension sessions please contact **Joanne Benstead** on **01628 796 754** or e-mail **communications@berkshirerpensions.org.uk** Please note any support provided by the Berkshire Pension Fund for you and your staff is completely free of charge.

Useful links

Please find detailed below some further links to external websites containing information relating to the LGPS.

Berkshire Pension Fund website	https://www.berkshirepensions.org.uk
Employer's Section	https://www.berkshirepensions.org.uk/bpf/employers
National LGPS website	https://www.lgpsmember.org/
LGPS Regs website	https://www.lgpsregs.org/
HR Guide	https://www.lgpslibrary.org/assets/gas/ew/HRv4.3c.pdf
Payroll Guide	https://www.lgpslibrary.org/assets/gas/ew/Pv4.3c.pdf
The Pensions Regulator	https://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/
State Pension Age calculator	https://www.gov.uk/state-pension-age
State Pension information	https://www.gov.uk/check-state-pension
'my pension ONLINE'	https://www.berkshirepensions.org.uk/bpf/my-pension-online

Contact us

If you would like to discuss any items contained in this newsletter please do not hesitate to contact us:

Philip Boyton	Deputy Head of Pension Fund	07792 324459	philip.boyton@rbwm.gov.uk
Martin Griffiths	Pension Administration Manager	01628 796668	martin.griffiths@rbwm.gov.uk
Sandra Rice	Deputy Pension Administration Manager	01628 796743	sandra.rice@rbwm.gov.uk
Joanne Benstead	Communications Manager	01628 796754	joanne.benstead@rbwm.gov.uk
Rachael Granger	Technical Manager	01628 796765	rachael.granger@rbwm.gov.uk

Royal County of Berkshire Pension Fund

Minster Court, 22-30 York Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire, SL6 1SF

Pensions Helpdesk: 01628 796 668

lines are open Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 5pm and Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm

E-mail: info@berkshirepensions.org.uk

Website: www.berkshirepensions.org.uk

