

Questions and Answers with our Trustee Board Chairman – Clive Gilchrist



I'm Clive Gilchrist and I'm the independent chair of trustees for the Kingfisher Pension Scheme. I've been Chair for twelve years. I've worked in pensions for over forty years and am also Chair to a number of other schemes through my role at BESTrustees, a firm of independent trustees.

As Chair to the Kingfisher Pension Scheme, I'm independent from all the companies in the Kingfisher group including B&Q and Screwfix.

The Kingfisher Pension Scheme has over 91,000 members and £4.4 billion worth of assets. The pension scheme is your long-term savings plan and it's a tax-efficient way to save money during your working life.

Our trustee board has 10 members and by law we must ensure that at least one third of that board is member selected and representative of the members in the Scheme.

We're looking for additional Member Nominated Directors for our backup pool. We normally have a reserve of trustees, but we don't have one at the moment. Hence why we are now running this recruitment campaign.

Tell me about your role, what do you do in your role as Chair?

The chair of a trustee board should be prepared to assume similar governance responsibilities to those expected of a chair of any corporate board but adapted to suit the needs of the pension Scheme.

The Chair needs to be an effective leader, with an independent viewpoint and capable of setting high standards for the board as a whole. They should be able to recognise each individual trustee's potential and ensure their knowledge and skills are used effectively.

Trustee boards need to look strategically across all the issues that affect their scheme. A chair who can remind trustees to take the broad, long-term view, and can help achieve compromise and consensus, is an asset. They should also involve and encourage participation from all board members.

And, as you mentioned earlier, you're looking for additional Member Nominated Directors, can you tell us, what exactly is a Member Nominated Director?

A Member Nominated Director (MND) is a trustee who is nominated and selected by members of the Kingfisher Pension Scheme.

Under current Pension Act legislation, as I said, at least one third of the trustees of schemes like the Kingfisher one must be member-nominated appointments.

An MND stands for a minimum four-year term with the opportunity to serve another four-year term. The maximum time to stand as an MND is eight years.

Who can stand as an MND?

We are looking for pension scheme members currently employed by one of the banners and pensioner members of the scheme to stand as an MND. If you're eligible and interested, we will write out to you and give you more details on the whole process.

If this is for the reserve pool, what exactly will someone be doing?

When the next vacancy for an MND becomes available they will come from our existing pool of reserve MNDs. We find this to be a good introduction to trusteeship. You'll attend trustee meetings, undergo training and learn about the role. That means when a vacancy comes up our reserves are in an excellent position to hit the ground running.

Why is having an effective trustee board important?

Because as a pension trustee board we are looking after your money - your future. It's a responsibility we take extremely seriously. We make sure that benefits are paid promptly and correctly, that your money is well invested and that the scheme has a good governance framework. The assets of the scheme are kept separate from those in Kingfisher, B&Q and Screwfix.

The scheme needs to be managed by a strong Trustee Board made up of a diverse mix of capable people with the right range of skills and knowledge.

Are any specific skills or knowledge needed to apply?

No specific qualifications are required for you to stand as an MND.

It's an important role and it's not easy however training is provided to help develop your knowledge and support you in the role. You will need to have a basic interest in pensions and a willingness to increase your knowledge of the Scheme and how it is run.

People have many skills in their day-to-day jobs which are transferable. We're looking for people who are willing to learn and complement or add to the skills of the existing Board. The ability to listen, grasp concepts quickly and act impartially is extremely important.

As a trustee board we listen to everyone's points of view, our trustees aren't afraid to speak their minds and raise difficult questions. But you do need to understand other people's points of view and be open minded and pragmatic.

As trustees we also need to know what we don't know and when to seek advice and input from our professional advisers.

So, as an MND of the Kingfisher Pension Scheme, what sort of things will you be doing?

We have a main board which meets four times a year and where we discuss and make decisions on general scheme business. In addition there are four committees:

1. DC Committee which oversees the Money-Purchase section of the scheme including administration, investments and member engagement.
2. DB Committee which oversees the investments of the Final Salary section and makes sure this section is funded and is involved in the funding statements we must prepare annually.
3. Administration, Audit and Governance Committee which oversees the governance of the scheme including the annual audit of the scheme; and
4. Benefits Committee – this committee makes decisions on behalf of the Trustee in complex death cases ie how to pay the monies out and ill-health early retirements cases.

The work we do is very varied as you can see.

How much time would you need to devote to this, and can you get involved if you're still employed?

The board meetings and committee meetings take place four times a year. You will probably sit on two committees so you will be attending roughly twelve meetings a year.

We have been conducting all meetings remotely since the beginning of 2020 and we envisage that this will continue for the future for committee meetings but with trustee board meetings in person. So the time commitment will be 12 days a year for meetings plus two additional trustee training days.

You'll also need time to read and digest the papers which we would suggest two to three hours for each meeting.

If you're still employed by either Kingfisher, B&Q, or Screwfix it would be a good idea to discuss with your manager before applying. The UK banners are supportive of our member nominated trustees' time commitment to the scheme and by law an employer must allow the time.

The scheme pays reasonable expenses ie travel, hotel if necessary etc and we'll provide you with an iPad for meeting papers.

What do you like about being a trustee and what do you think someone has to gain from the experience?

I have worked with trustees and as a trustee for over forty years. People say pensions is boring, but it is such an enormous, varied area of activity encompassing investments, administration, governance, actuarial, legal and so on. Every meeting, every day, is different. And it is satisfying because we are doing something useful – trying to ensure that people have a better life in retirement.

Because it is so varied, encompassing a very wide range of skillsets we need people from differing backgrounds bringing their various experiences to the table. In a trustee meeting there are no stupid questions, though sometimes the same can't be said for the answers.

If you are interested, then we will be writing to those eligible early 2022 with further details and how to apply.