



pensions grapevine

SPRING 2002 - ISSUE 7

Fund goes euro

Ringling the changes

**Starstruck by Soviet
spaceman**

Welcome to the latest issue of Pensions Grapevine - the official newsletter for everyone drawing a pension from Greater Manchester Pension Fund.

Thanks once again to those of you who have written in with your amusing or interesting memories from the past, and news of what you're getting up to. I hope you enjoy the ones we've featured this time - and if you want to appear in Grapevine, please do drop us a line, and we'll see what we can do.

On the administration front, we're changing over to a brand new phone system. It will be better for us here in the Pensions Office, and most importantly for you our customers. But it will mean scrapping old numbers - see page 3 for more.



I hope you enjoy this issue.

Ged Dale

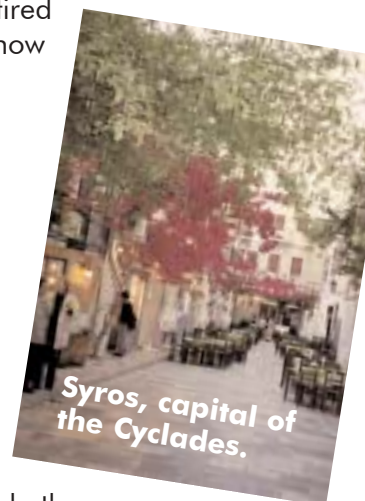
Head of Pensions Administration.

Fund goes euro



A great big "efharisto" (thank you) to **James Adshead**, who sent us some of the new euros from his home in Greece. 'JR' retired from UMIST in 1993, and now lives on the island of Syros, the capital of the Cyclades.

Of course the euro is now the official currency in 12 countries, including three popular retirement destinations, Eire, France and Spain. So over 300 of our pensioners are already receiving their pensions in this new currency.



Don't worry if you live outside the euro zone though - we're still sending your pension in Pounds to Poynton, Roubles to Russia, and Dollars to Denver!

Did you know?

In total, euro banknotes and coins worth €664 billion have been produced. The notes look the same in all countries, but the coins are personalised. While all euro coins look the same on the "tails"

side, each country has a different picture on its "heads" side. So for example Greece's one euro coin features an owl, the Greek emblem of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, and has been inspired by an ancient four Drachma coin.



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Write in and win!

Are you so busy you don't know how you ever found the time to go to work? Have you got an amusing or interesting anecdote from the past? If so we want to hear from YOU! And if we use your story, we'll send you this smart Parker pen as a thank you.



Write to the address below, including your name, pension number, and a daytime phone number if you can.

Pensions Office, Concord Suite, Manchester Road, Droylsden, Tameside, M43 6SF.

email: malcolm.tyrer@mail.tameside.gov.uk

Administered by Tameside Metropolitan Borough

Thanks to Archie Shaw, who wrote in with a nautical yarn from his days in the merchant navy - a cautionary tale of 'look before you leap'!

Having finished unloading their ship in Melbourne Docks, Archie's crew had time to relax, so they headed into town for a meal and a chance to sample the local ale.

On returning to the boat somewhat the worse for wear, a 'gentlemen's discussion' broke out concerning swimming prowess. Several of the crewmates, from a variety of nations, decided to settle the matter using true drunken logic (and a small wager)!

A race from the ship to the riverbank and back was proposed, led by the 6'2" Maori bosun, a keen aquatic enthusiast. No sooner had the race begun, than all the competitors bar the bosun realised the tide had changed, and the

Burly bosun goes AWOL!



current was now dragging the men sideways at a rapid rate of knots.

Wisely giving up, the men straggled back to the boat. Only then did they realise that their gung-ho crewmate - head down and swimming for the glory of New Zealand like a

human torpedo - was now a rapidly disappearing speck in the river!

There followed a very tense hour as the remaining crew debated whether or not the bosun's absence needed reporting immediately. As luck would have it, just as the men were

gathering the courage to approach the officers, they were amazed to see what Archie describes as "a bedraggled, mud covered, shattered New Zealander, staggering up the gangplank wearing the remains of a pair of underpants that barely covered his dignity".

The relief on the ship was to prove short lived. Some of the crew were refusing to pay up due to a technicality (the fact that the bosun had been washed up half a mile down stream and walked back from the opposite bank). On hearing this the bosun really did go 'overboard'! He put forward such a 'forceful argument' that he did eventually collect his prize money. Of course says Archie this is because they were all such 'nice boys' - and not, as we suspect - because they were facing a 6'2" angry Maori who was built like Ayer's Rock!

Ringling the changes

When our telephone system was put in back in the eighties, it really was state of the art. For the first time, we could do 'new and exciting' things like transferring calls and having three way conversations.

But by modern standards, it's the equivalent of two tin cans and a length of string. So we're pleased to tell you that we've just put in a brand new

system, which will be better for both us, and you, our customers.

One big change this will mean is that all our phone numbers will change. So if you need to ring our payroll section, their new general number is:

0161 301 7100.

On top of this, every person in the office will have their own direct line, which will make it

easier if you want to speak to someone in particular. So to help you put faces to the names, here are

some of the people who work behind the scenes arranging your pension each month...



Left to right: Peter, Joyce, Anita, Maxine, and Ann.

And all for 'less than five bob'...

Remember when you could go to the pictures, buy a pint and a packet of cigarettes, and still have change out of 'five bob'? Believe it or not, back in 1950, you could do just that - with the cost of all three coming in at about 23p! But were we better off back then? Not really, because of course income was way lower too.

The same effect hits people like you on pension... Each year prices go up, so unless your pension goes up in line with this, you can't afford to keep buying the same things. The good news is, we do increase your pension each year this way - but who decides by how much?

The rate we use is based on the Government's official measure of inflation - the Retail Prices Index (RPI). They work this out by looking at a "basket" of goods each month and checking their prices against the month before. In fact it would have to be a pretty big basket, as it includes more than 650 items, ranging from everyday items like loaves of bread, to things like computers and holidays.

The annual increase in the RPI each September is the rate we apply the following April. As the annual increase in RPI in September 2001 was 1.7%, your pension went up by this amount in April 2002.

It doesn't seem very much!

The whole idea behind this type of annual increase is that it shouldn't make you any better off or any worse off in real terms. So if on average prices have only gone up by 1.7%, it

means that our loaf of bread has only gone up from say 60p to 61p. So your pension doesn't need to go up by much to keep pace with this.

This system of matching RPI does give you is security. It means that no matter how high inflation gets over the years ahead, your pension will keep pace. And it could happen - back in 1975, inflation peaked at a mind boggling 26% - so that's how much our pensions went up that year.

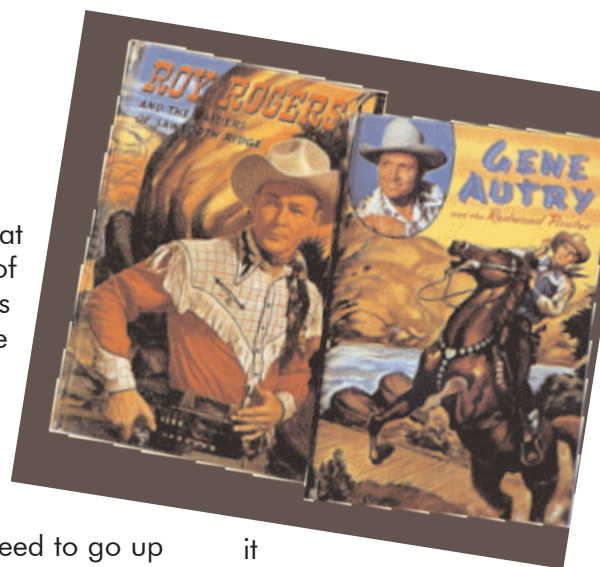
My pension hasn't even gone up by 1.7%

Yes it has! The tricky bit is tracing who has paid the increase. For many of you, part of the annual increase on your Fund pension is actually paid by the Benefits Agency. So you have had the full amount, but

it may have been 'hidden' amongst other State benefits.

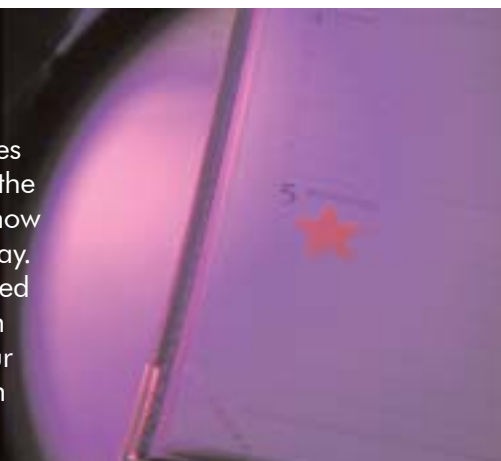
The increase can be further hidden by the effects of income tax. If you pay tax, you don't pay all of it at source. So for example your State pension is taxable, but the Benefits Agency don't take that tax from you. Instead the taxman sets your tax code to include this, and we have to take tax on it. For a brief update on tax allowances, see page 6.

Thanks to Harold Briggs from Leyland and Clifford Stuart from Cyprus who both wrote in asking us to explain how the annual increase works - Parker pens on their way to both of you.



Make a date

As you will know we pay pensions in advance each month, and it goes into your bank account on the first working day of the month. When the first is a normal day - like Wednesday May 1st - all's well. But every now and again it falls on a weekend or Bank Holiday, which causes a delay. Watch out in particular for June 1st, which falls on a Saturday, followed by the Queen's Golden Jubilee Bank Holiday on the Monday, and an ordinary Bank Holiday on the Tuesday. That means you won't get your June pension until **Wednesday 5th June**. You might want to mark it in your calendar now so there are no nasty surprises nearer the time.



Starstruck by Soviet spaceman!

The cold war was a time of fear and mistrust between East and West, but on July 12th 1961, Russia's Hammer and Sickle flew alongside the union flag on Manchester town hall.

The reason for this unusual event was the visit of Yuri Gagarin, the Soviet Cosmonaut who, just three months earlier had made history as the first man to orbit the earth in a spacecraft. A former foundry worker himself, Yuri was visiting Manchester as a guest of the Foundry Workers Union.

The flight of Vostok 1 marked the beginning of a new age of space exploration, and had caught the public imagination all over the world. Yuri Gagarin was welcomed by the people of Manchester as a new type of hero - a real life 'Dan Dare'!

In true Manchester fashion, he arrived in the city in a shower of rain. This failed to dampen the public's enthusiasm, and there were cheering crowds

on every street corner to greet him. His interpreter later reported that when he saw this, he asked the driver to stop the car and pull down the top, saying:

time before the official visit and took up position near the front entrance, carrying a sheaf of papers! We'll let Marjorie take up the story from there...

As Gagarin drew level with her, Marjorie couldn't help shouting out a greeting to him, in the little Russian she knew. This caught his attention, and laughing, he threw his arms around her and broke out into a long stream of Russian, none of which she understood!

Looking back at her experience, Marjorie tells us she wonders whether the man she met, Yuri Gagarin, had actually been into space. Some say he was an actor, chosen for his charm and personality, paraded round the world to prove the USSR could produce a superhuman being. Says Marjorie: "I wish I could make myself believe that for one brief moment I had been held in the arms of the first man in space".

Of course, we can never be 100% sure of the 'pravda' (truth) either, but we would like to think it's true, and thank Marjorie for sharing with us her account of a truly amazing experience!



"If all those people are getting wet to welcome me, surely the least I can do is get wet too!"

Pension fund member **Marjorie Carleton**, who was working for the Treasurer's department at Manchester town hall at the time, wrote to us with a unique first hand account of the day. Marjorie disappeared from her desk some

"Then he arrived, flanked by two enormous Red Army officers and various police and civic dignitaries. He was tanned, with bright blue eyes and a smile as warm as the sun. As he raised his arms in triumph, spontaneous applause broke out from the onlookers, and I felt myself swept up by the magic".



Any organisation which stores personal information has to follow the Data Protection Act - and that includes the Fund. Tameside MBC is the data controller for the Fund. As you would imagine we couldn't run the Fund without storing information - we use it to do things like paying

pensions each month. Sometimes we have to pass details to outside bodies too. For example, once every three years the Fund's actuary carries out a 'health check' to make sure there is enough in the pot to pay out pensioners now and in future. To help him do this, we send him some

of your details - for example your age. But we don't send him details he doesn't need, such as your address or any nomination you have made. We also have to share data with other bodies, such as the Benefits Agency, as part of the National Fraud Initiative (see page 8).

Financial highlights of the year **2001**

Here are some highlights from the latest Annual Report, and details of how you can get hold of the full version...

The Fund achieved excellent relative performance during the last financial year (2001/02), delivering a return of 3.8%, with its value topping £6.3 billion. In comparison, many other funds struggled, achieving **negative** returns of 7.5% on average.

The Fund's sound investment performance was a factor in us scooping Public Treasurer's Fund of the Year Award - the only Fund to have ever won this award twice. Head

Key figures at a glance...

Employee contributions:	£81 million
Employer contributions:	£96 million
Pensions and lump sums paid out:	£248 million
Income from investments:	£225 million
Administration costs:	£9 million

of Pensions Peter Morris was presented with the award by TV presenter Selina Scott. He remarked: "As well as being especially

impressed with our investment performance, the judges also singled out the quality of our Annual Report."



You can view the Annual Report & Accounts on our website, or get your own copy by ringing our helpline on: 0161 301 7000.

Who holds the reins?

Traditionally 'company pension schemes' have trustees to watch over their investments and activities. This Fund has a Pension Fund Management Committee which does a very similar job. This is chaired by Councillor Roy Oldham CBE (pictured standing).

Reporting to this Committee are four Working Groups, each chaired by a Committee member, and responsible for an individual area such as Ethics & Audit. Pictured left to right are three of the Working Group chairs - Councillor Martin Wareing, Councillor Ged Cooney and Councillor Jim Middleton.



Down to brass 'tax'



By the time you read this, Gordon Brown will have revealed the contents of his little red bag in his April Budget. At this stage, we've only got an estimate of tax allowances for the year ahead, but unless it's changed in the meantime, this is how it looks...

Tax allowances 2002 - 2003

Personal allowance (age under 65): **£4,615**

Personal allowance (age 65-74): **£6,100**

Personal allowance (age 75 & over): **£6,370**

(The two higher allowances are subject to an income limit of £17,900)

So in a nutshell, someone under 65 will pay tax on anything over £384 a month.



Your one and only chance to apply for tickets for the **Annual Pensioners Forum** Friday 18th October, 2002

What have an investment expert, a fireman, and a commonwealth games volunteer coordinator got in common? They were all speakers at last year's annual pensioners forum!

We don't know what's in store yet for this Autumn, but you can be guaranteed a super day if you come along. Once again the venue will be New Century House, in the heart of Manchester.

The day will consist of coffee and biscuits on arrival, to give you chance to look round information stands from people like the Inland Revenue. Then there's



A warm welcome...

the main meeting, with a selection of guest speakers. At the end of this you might be a little peckish, so there's a sit down buffet lunch. Then finally there's coffee and cake back in the information centre, with a further chance to 'grill the experts'.

And of course on top of all that, it's a great chance to meet up with

old pals. If you've not been before, the photos should give you an idea of what went on last year.

Sorry, but for practical reasons we can only offer tickets to a limited number of people. So to be in with a chance, simply fill in the enclosed card and send it back to us. We will carry out the draw later in the year, and send you a ticket if your



Lights, music, action...



Ask the expert...

name is 'picked out of the hat'. But out of fairness to people whose names weren't picked last year, they will be given priority.

And please please please, don't apply for a ticket unless you really want to come along. For every person who doesn't bother showing up, there are several disappointed people who could have taken their place!

When experience really counts

Are you a dab hand with a paintbrush? Maybe you're a retired manager eager to share your skills - or maybe you're just the type of person who could cheer up someone who's housebound by spending a few hours with them. Whatever skills you've got, whether from your working life, or life in general, you could put them to very good use!

Something called the Experience Corps has been set up, to get people in the 50 plus

age range to give their time and experience to their local community.

One example is a Corps in the Midlands, which has been working with their local police force to improve home security, by sending round locksmiths and DIY buffs to people's homes.



We found out about this new non-profit making organisation, from **Vernon Cressey**, who worked for GM Police before he retired. Vernon is a fieldworker (Animator) for the Manchester area, and wants to hear from YOU if you think you have something to offer - even if you can only spare a few hours a week. Don't worry if you don't live on Vernon's

'patch' - get in touch with him anyway, and he'll put you in touch with a local contact. Vernon would also welcome a call if you know of an organisation or project which is looking for help.

To find out more, why not get in touch with Vernon, as shown below - remember, YOUR experience could make the world of difference to someone!

Phone: 07789 481835

e mail: vcresse@excrops32.fsbusiness.co.uk

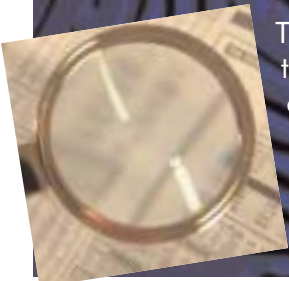
**Or visit the Corps website at:
www.experiencecorps.co.uk**

National Fraud Initiative leaves no hiding place

Remember, if you come to claim any type of benefit, for example housing benefit from your local Council, you **MUST** tell them about your pension from us.

Every year thousands of people across the country fail to do this, and the Audit Commission which 'polices' such things reckons this type of fraud costs something like £40 million!

And it really is a type of fraud - a crime - yet it's funny how many of the people involved wouldn't even steal a Mars Bar from a shop. The Authorities are taking a very hard line on this type of thing, and organisations like this Fund, the Benefits Agency, and your local Council all have to compare records to check for possible fraud.



The people involved will be asked to pay the money back, and even face prosecution. So as all the people who've been caught so far can vouch, there really is no hiding place.

The views of a dinosaur

Thanks to **Joan Garbett** from Suffolk, who wrote to Grapevine about her thespian interests. Joan has been involved in amateur theatre for many years, and says "I've always enjoyed the smell of the greasepaint and the laughter of an audience". Past successes include playing Madam Arcati in Blithe Spirit, and at 78, she performed in Age Concern's Millennium Show. She has written and performed monologues, and has even been introduced on stage by eccentric xylophone playing astronomer Patrick Moore. Here is one of Joan's pieces - it's called "The views of a dinosaur".

*I've done my best to understand,
The modern wonders that are planned,
From 'logging on' to 'world wide web',
It's all a mystery, must be said.*

*The young ones pick it up so quick,
They've all the world from which to pick,
Still, every dog will have its day,
So I'll stick to my old typewriter, come what may,
What say you?!!!*

And the only virus I can get - is the flu!



Keep in touch!

Please remember to keep in touch and let us know about any changes you think could affect your pension including...

If you move house

Simply ring us on 0161 301 7100 and we'll change your records there and then.

If your bank details change

The bank or building society **WON'T** tell us, so make sure you do, either by dropping us a line or calling in person at our offices.

If you start work again

You **MUST** tell us if you get any job in Local Government, even though in many cases it won't affect your pension.

As long as you let us know about address or bank changes by the middle of the month, we can carry them out in time for the month after.



HOUSE
PIC



CREDIT CARD
PIC



WORKER
PIC

Pensions query?



Have your Pension Number handy then call us on:

0161 301 7100

Or to discuss Grapevine, you can ring **0161 301 7043.**

www.gmpf.org.uk

mail@gmpf.org.uk