

County of Yolo

Administrative Policies and Procedures Manual

TITLE: PENSION FUNDING POLICY	DEPARTMENT: FINANCIAL SERVICES
TYPE: POLICY	DATE: May 8, 2018

A. PURPOSE

This Policy statement pertains to the actuarial, funding and cost recovery aspects of Pension benefits. This policy does not purport to address the sustainability of established pension benefits under current defined benefit formulas, which are the subject of Human Resources administrative policies. This policy may also be referred to, in brief, as “Pension Policy”.

This Policy will be updated periodically in light of actuarial valuation results, changes in benefits, other material changes in Pension benefits or obligations, or other changes caused by state laws.

B. APPLICABILITY

This policy is an extension of the County *Policy on Cost Recovery and Fees* (adopted 06/07/2011) and the *Policy on Borrowing, Debt, and Obligations* (revised 02/06/2018), and is generally consistent with best practices recommended by the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA). Variances from best practices are identified herein together with the underlying reasons.

This policy is applicable to the County’s two key defined benefit plans which are administered by the California Public Employees’ Retirement System (CalPERS):

- Miscellaneous Plan of the County of Yolo hereafter referred to as the “Miscellaneous Plan”. The Miscellaneous plan includes employees of the County and employees of the Yolo County Superior Court which separated from the County through the Trial Court Employment Protection and Governance Act in 2001, but whose employees still remain part of the County’s pension plan.
- Safety Plan of the County of Yolo hereafter referred to as the “Safety Plan”.

The County receives actuarial valuations prepared by the actuarial office of CalPERS on an annual basis for funding purposes. The County has ordered accounting valuations since 2015 to report its obligation for pension benefits in accordance with Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) *Statement No. 68 Accounting and Financial Reporting for Pensions – An Amendment of GASB Statement No. 27*.

C. DEFINITIONS

Key actuarial or accounting terms related to pensions are defined below:

Accrued Liability (also called Actuarial Accrued Liability) – The total dollars needed as of the actuarial valuation date to fund all benefits earned in the past for current and retired members and their beneficiaries.

Actuarial Assumptions – Assumptions made about certain events that will affect pension costs. Assumptions can generally be broken down into two categories: demographic and economic. Demographic assumptions include such things as mortality, disability and retirement rates. Economic assumptions include discount rate, salary growth, and inflation.

Actuarial Valuation – The determination, as of a point in time (valuation date), of the Normal Cost, Accrued Liability, and related actuarial present values for a pension plan.

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Actuarially Determined Contribution (ADC) – An amount that is actuarially determined in accordance with GASB Standard No. 68 and Actuarial Standards of Practice (ASOP) so that, if paid on an ongoing basis, would be expected to provide sufficient resources to fund both the normal cost for each year and amortize the unfunded accrued liability.

Funded Status – A measure of how well funded, or how “on track” a pension plan is with respect to having sufficient assets to fund liabilities. A ratio greater than 100 percent means the plan has more assets than liabilities and a ratio of less than 100 percent means liabilities are greater than assets.

Normal Cost – The annual cost of service accrual for a fiscal year for current active employees. The portion that is allocated to future years of service are referred to as future normal costs.

Prepayment Contribution – A payment made by the employer in advance toward the Unfunded Accrued Liability at the beginning of a fiscal year to reduce or eliminate the year’s required employer contribution on each bi-weekly payroll period.

Pension Benefit – Pension benefits are provided pursuant to a defined benefit formula. The formula used by the retirement system will be based on key factors such as the benefit factor, service credit and final pensionable compensation. A simplified example is below:

$$\boxed{\begin{array}{c} \text{Service Credit} \\ \text{(Years)} \end{array}} \times \boxed{\begin{array}{c} \text{Benefit Factor} \\ \text{(percent per} \\ \text{year)} \end{array}} \times \boxed{\begin{array}{c} \text{Final Pensionable} \\ \text{Compensation} \\ \text{(dollars)} \end{array}} = \boxed{\begin{array}{c} \text{Pension Benefit} \end{array}}$$

Pensionable Compensation – Pensionable compensation is defined in government code and retirement law and generally refers to the normal monthly rate of pay or base pay of the member paid in cash for employment rendered on a full-time basis during normal hours according to publically available pay schedules.

Present Value of Benefits (PVB) – The total dollars needed as of the valuation date to fund all benefits earned in the past or expected to be earned in the future for current members.

Unfunded Accrued Liability (UAL) – When the value of the plan’s assets is less than its Accrued Liability, the difference is the plan’s Unfunded Accrued Liability (or unfunded liability). If there is an unfunded liability, the plan will have to pay contributions exceeding the Normal Cost.

D. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. INTERGENERATIONAL EQUITY

Pension benefits are offered as part of a compensation package for employees as a benefit by the County of Yolo for a career of public service. The employee accumulates (or earns) the benefit through accrual of years of service with the agency over their service life (or career). The County as a matter of principle strives to comply with maintaining intergenerational equity. As this relates to pension benefits, the objective is to ensure that adequate employee and employer contributions are made to the pension system during the service lives of employees to avoid shifting the cost or burden to future generations of employees and taxpayers.

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2. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Financial Sustainability is the overarching principle in Yolo County financial operations. Within the context of pension funding, this principle expresses that the county provides and fund benefits to its employees within available means while proactively taking measures to build and preserve its ability to continue providing these benefits in the long run.

E. POLICY

1. ACTUARIAL VALUATION

In accordance with best practices and generally accepted accounting principles, the County will receive an Actuarial Valuation for both (1) funding and (2) accounting for pension benefits annually from the Actuarial Office of CalPERS. CalPERS, as the pension plan administrator, establishes actuarial assumptions for all pension plans under their administration.

The County Administrator and Chief Financial Officer annually shall review the actuarial report including actuarial assumptions applied by the pension plan administrator for conformity with best practices as established by GFOA including but not limited to:

- Actuarial Cost Method – Ensure methods conform to actuarial standards of practice and are designed to fully fund the long-term costs of promised benefits.
- Asset Smoothing – Ensure that: the same smoothing periods are used for both gains and losses; market corridors if used are symmetrical; and smoothing occurs over fixed periods not longer than five years.
- Amortization – Ensure that: the unfunded actuarial accrued liability is amortized over fixed (closed) periods to balance the goals of demographic matching and volatility management; the amortization period does not exceed 25 years; and a layered approach is used to amortize the various components.

The County Administrator and Chief Financial Officer shall transmit the actuarial report, together with a lay summary regarding the funded status of the pension plans, any noted deviations from best practices, and any additional recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.

The Chief Financial Officer shall use the actuarial valuation report as the basis for financial reporting in accordance with *generally accepted accounting principles*. The Chief Financial Officer should allocate the liability to participating agencies and enterprise or internal service funds to show their respective share of the long term pension liability. The Chief Financial Officer, at his discretion, may contract an external auditor to opine on the allocation of the liability to other agencies or segments of the governmental agency.

2. TRANSPARENCY IN GROWTH OF LIABILITY

The County Administrator shall evaluate opportunities and implement procedures to enhance transparency in collective bargaining on the employee and employer share of pension contributions, with the purpose of identifying clearly any significant financial impact of any proposed salary or benefit modification.

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All future benefit modifications (including those that effect the key pension benefit factors of the defined benefit formula) for members and beneficiaries should be carefully considered and impacts of such proposed changes on the County's pension plan shall be evaluated by the County Administrator and the Chief Financial Officer (utilizing actuaries if required) and presented to the Board of Supervisors prior to adoption so the effect of the modifications can be understood and considered in relation to the plan's actuarial accrued liability, funded ratio, and contribution rate.

3. FUNDED STATUS

The target Funded Status is 100% (full funding) of the Actuarial Accrued Liability related the County's pension plans. The County's goal is to accumulate sufficient assets to fund all projected benefit payments.

4. FUNDING PENSION COST

a) ACTUARIALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTION (ADC)

The ADC is determined annually by the pension plan administrator CalPERS for subsequent fiscal years (for example: CalPERS Actuarial Valuation report as of June 30, 2016 determines 2018-19 required contributions). The County Administrator shall each year budget the Actuarially Determined Contribution to CalPERS and establish and maintain the necessary reserve to ensure that this obligation is met annually. The County will prioritize the funding of the ADC above the funding of any supplemental contributions.

b) PREPAYMENT OF ANNUAL REQUIRED CONTRIBUTION

The pension plan administrator (CalPERS) at times may provide an incentive (or discount) for the County to pay a full year of UAL contribution in advance at the beginning of the fiscal year, rather than remitting the contribution with each monthly period during the fiscal year.

The Chief Financial Officer shall prepare a financial analysis on an annual basis when a financial incentive is offered to make a prepayment of the UAL contribution to determine whether this is in the best interest of the County. The analysis should take into account the savings and cash flow impact from remitting the pension contribution in advance compared to any costs of borrowing or financing. This recommendation shall be submitted to the County Administrator as part of the County's recommended budget.

c) OPPORTUNITIES FOR SAVINGS

CalPERS applies an amortization period of up 30 years for the amortization of the Unfunded Accrued Liability (UAL) arising from each event (change in actuarial assumptions; investment gain/loss; change in benefit, etc.). Without any additional action, provided that the actuarial assumptions are accurate, the plan would move to a fully funded status within 30 years of the last event that created the liability. In line with industry best practices, CalPERS has recently revised its amortization policy to shorten the period for amortizing future actuarial gains and losses to 20 years, beginning from the actuarial report for June 30, 2019, and effective in 2021-22 for Yolo County.

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CalPERS new amortization policy does not affect the current unfunded liabilities (\$310 million as of 6/30/2018), which are still being amortized over 30 years. CalPERS has offered alternative 20-year and 15-year amortization schedules available for voluntarily election that would result in substantial long-term savings to the County (\$49 million and \$147 million respectively). As part of long-term financial planning, County staff should periodically evaluate the feasibility and cost-benefits of adopting one of these alternative amortization schedules and make appropriate recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.

d) **PENSION FUNDING STABILIZATION PROGRAM**

Although there is no legal requirement to make a pension contribution above the Actuarially Determined Contribution (ADC), the Board of Supervisors has determined that fulfilling its full pension obligation is a primary objective of the County and directed staff to establish safeguards to ensure that this obligation is met annually. As a result, based on staff research and recommendation, the Board has approved a formal pension funding stabilization program that is centered on the establishment of an irrevocable trust, hereafter referred to as Pension Trust.

As shown in Exhibit A, the Board of Supervisors has considered various options to addressing pension funding prior to adoption of this program.

5. **PENSION TRUST**

a) **ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUST**

The Chief Financial Officer shall establish a Section 115 Trust for the purpose of Pension Funding Stabilization. The Section 115 Trust, which is exempt from federal income taxes, will be the vehicle to accumulate assets for the sole purpose of pension funding, as authorized by the Board.

b) **OBJECTIVE OF TRUST**

The purpose of the pension trust is to accumulate assets incrementally in the long-run for the sole purpose of supplementing the County's effort to fulfill its pension funding obligation. To this purpose, the trust is maintained for the primary objective of bolstering the County's ability to pay the ADC; and the secondary objective of obtaining long-term savings that result from paying down the unfunded actuarial liability earlier.

c) **MINIMUM BALANCE**

The initial target balance for minimum level of the pension funding stabilization program will be sixty (60) days-worth (based on 360 days) of the County's required pension contributions (including normal cost and UAL) from the CalPERS funding valuation. The minimum balance will be calculated annually by the Chief Financial Officer. For the initial year (2018/19), this target would approximately be \$3,730,000 for the Miscellaneous Plan and \$1,415,000 for the Safety Plan for an aggregate Trust target balance of \$5,145,000.

An illustration of projected future target balances based on the June 30, 2016 actuarial valuation is provided in Exhibit B of this policy. After the minimum target balance is achieved, it shall be maintained every year and shall be used to ensure sufficient funding for the actuarially determined contribution.

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Balances accumulated above the minimum target balance for the trust shall be utilized to explore methods described above as *Opportunities for Savings* to further reduce the County's Unfunded Actuarial Liability, upon Board approval.

d) FUNDING TRUST

(1) INITIAL FUNDING

The Section 115 Trust shall initially be funded by the \$800,000 Pension Reserve established in the 2017/18 Adopted Budget.

(2) ON-GOING FUNDING

To provide a dedicated on-going funding source for the Pension Trust, a supplemental pension charge will be applied to all departments as a percentage of basic salary. This charge will be set annually as part of the County budget process, and will be in the range 0.5% - 2.5%. The rate would initially be set at 1.0% for fiscal year 2018/19. However, a proposed ramp-up of funding of the trust is shown below:

- 2018/19 = 1.00%
- 2019/20 = 1.25%
- 2020/21 = 1.50%
- 2021/22 = 1.75%
- 2022/23 = 2.00%
- 2023/24 = 2.25%
- 2024/25 = 2.50%

An illustration of the accumulation effect of the ramp-up on the trust funding is shown in Exhibit C. According to this estimated ramp-up, the County is expected to achieve the minimum trust balance by the fourth year, in 2021-22.

(3) PREPAYMENT SAVINGS

During the annual budget process, the County Administrator shall provide a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors on the amount to transfer from savings generated by prepayment of annual contributions to the Pension Funding Stabilization Program based on consideration of available balances in the Internal Service Fund (refer to Section 7(a)).

e) INVESTING ASSETS

The Board of Supervisors delegates the plan administrator function to the County Treasurer (now Chief Financial Officer) who may contract with third party providers. The purpose of investing funds is to accumulate sufficient assets to implement this pension funding policy. Assets that are in the irrevocable Pension Trust are not subject to County Investment Policy and laws governing county treasury investments.

Pension trust assets should be invested to achieve an objective of capital preservation prior to the target balance being achieved. After the target balance has been achieved, the trust assets should be invested to achieve a return that matches the discount rate used by actuaries to determine the actuarial liability, and that is equivalent to the average return on the pension assets invested by CalPERS.

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The Chief Financial Officer should regularly review and monitor the investment results. Annually the Plan Administrator shall assess and recommend any adjustments to the investment strategies to the Board of Supervisors.

f) **WITHDRAWING ASSETS**

Assets contributed to the Irrevocable Trust can only be withdrawn to pay pension costs of the pension plans listed above. The County's stated intention is to specifically reserve these assets to support the funding of the ADC and to reduce the unfunded actuarial liability. Therefore, these assets will be drawn on to provide pension rate stabilization during periods of fiscal distress.

The Chief Financial Officer shall request board approval prior to the withdrawal of assets from the trust. If assets are being withdrawn due to fiscal distress, some of the factors that should be considered in determining whether the County is in a period of fiscal distress are as follows:

- Uncertainty regarding ability to pay short term obligations on time.
- Ability to meet long term obligations including those from debt issuances, pension plans or other postemployment benefits is uncertain given the extent of obligations in comparison to available resources.
- Ability to maintain financial stability is impaired including reductions to credit rating, reliance on declining or unstable sources of revenue, and inability to raise revenues to support commitments.
- Ability to maintain services is not possible based on fiscal condition and the County is required to layoff personnel.

g) **RESTORATION OF TRUST BALANCE**

In the first year of funding, or after drawdown, the Pension Trust shall be funded or replenished to the target level within five fiscal years.

6. **RECOVERING PENSION COSTS**

Pension costs including the normal cost and the monthly (or annual if prepaid) UAL contribution to CalPERS will be translated to a percentage of payroll. The employer contribution of pension cost will be charged as a percentage of payroll as calculated by CalPERS in the annual actuarial report consistent with the employee's specific benefit plan. Similarly, any supplemental funding to the Pension Trust will be charged to County departments and programs as a percentage of payroll.

7. **ACCOUNTING FOR PENSION COSTS**

a. **INTERNAL SERVICE FUND**

The Chief Financial Officer shall create a Pension Internal Service Fund to record the following:

- Pension contributions deducted from Payroll
- Contributions paid to CalPERS and to the Pension Trust.
- Transactions related to prepayment of UAL contributions.
- UAL contributions from other plan participants (e.g. Yolo Superior Court).

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Beside the normal transactions that are authorized by the Board of Supervisors or the County Administrator, the Pension Internal Service fund will hold any savings realized through investment or prepayment until recommendation by the County Administrator through the budget process.

b. PENSION TRUST FUND

The Chief Financial Officer shall create a Pension Trust fund in the accounting and financial reporting system. The fund will track all of the assets, investment gains, and losses and other activities of the Section 115 Pension Rate Stabilization Trust. All assets of the Pension Trust shall be restricted to the purpose of funding pension obligations.

The Chief Financial Officer shall report annually to the Board of Supervisors on the financial condition and performance of the Pension Trust Fund, within six months of fiscal year end. Such report shall include appropriate recommendations regarding the investment and use of assets to achieve the purpose of the Trust.

Exhibit A – Pension Funding Stabilization Options

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Pension Funding Stabilization Options
 (Listed in increasing degree of commitment)

Funding Stabilization Options	Definition of Option	Advantages of Option	Disadvantages of Option	Chargeable to Grants	Reduce Contribution Rates	Reduce Pension Liability
1 Accounting Reserve	Reservation of fund balance by Board of Supervisors to be used toward pension liability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reserve level can be adjusted up or down by Board to respond to unforeseen circumstances. ✓ Withdrawal can be made to supplement contributions. ✓ Easiest option to implement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Assets would not be invested long-term and therefore would not keep up with inflation. ✓ Undisciplined saving since reserve is susceptible to changing organizational priorities. 	No	No	No
2 Discretionary Contributions (to CalPERS)	Additional lump sum contributions made to the pension plan as cash flows allow.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provides flexibility since contributions can be made whenever cash is available. ✓ No long term commitment in relation to other options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Undisciplined approach to reducing liability. ✓ May require buy-in or method to address other employers in the pension plan. ✓ Costs must be allocated cost centers for claim purposes. 	May be	Yes, delayed	Yes
3 Prepayment of Annual Contributions	Prepay the required contributions in a lump sum to CalPERS by July 15 th rather than bi-weekly for the entire fiscal year to take advantage of discount	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reduces amount payable annually to CalPERS ✓ For FY16/17 potential \$1 million premium saving for a net cash saving of about \$900K. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Requires County to find \$24 million by July 15th to make contribution. ✓ May require buy-in from other employers in the pension plan. ✓ Is mainly a cash saving mechanism; must direct saving toward pension funding. 	Yes	No	No
4 Section 115 Trust	Open an irrevocable trust account for additional contributions which are invested similar to the OPEB trust to provide a mechanism for pension contribution stabilization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Local control of assets and can be used to offset future contribution increases ✓ Likely higher returns since assets invested by trustee outside of county treasury. ✓ Positive effect on credit rating. ✓ Don't need buy-in from other employers in plan. ✓ Could reduce pension liability on financial statements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Assets are restricted to pension funding. ✓ Assets would not be included by CalPERS in their funding valuations to determine future contributions ✓ Risk of market volatility and underperforming investments in relation to CalPERS ✓ Additional cost and effort to administer. ✓ Discipline plan required. 	Yes	No	Yes
5 Alternative Amortization Schedule as offered by CalPERS	Refinancing of the net pension liability to amortize and pay off liability over a shorter time period, at a level rate. 15-year or 20-year amortization instead of 30.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Quickest way to reduce unfunded liabilities. ✓ Substantial long term savings of interest on pension liability (Total \$18 million for 20-yr option; \$86 million for 15-yr option) ✓ Reduces negative amortization as keeps contribution percentage level and eliminates ramp up/down. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased annual budgetary burden due to accelerated payments (Add'l \$1.7 million for 20-yr option; \$5.1 million for 15-yr) ✓ No flexibility to change once alternative amortization base has been selected. ✓ Would affect other employers in the Misc. Plan require their agreement. 	Yes	No	Yes

Exhibit B – Projection of Target Balance of Trust

Pension Trust Minimum Balance

Note: Data based on June 30, 2016 CalPERS Actuarial Valuations.

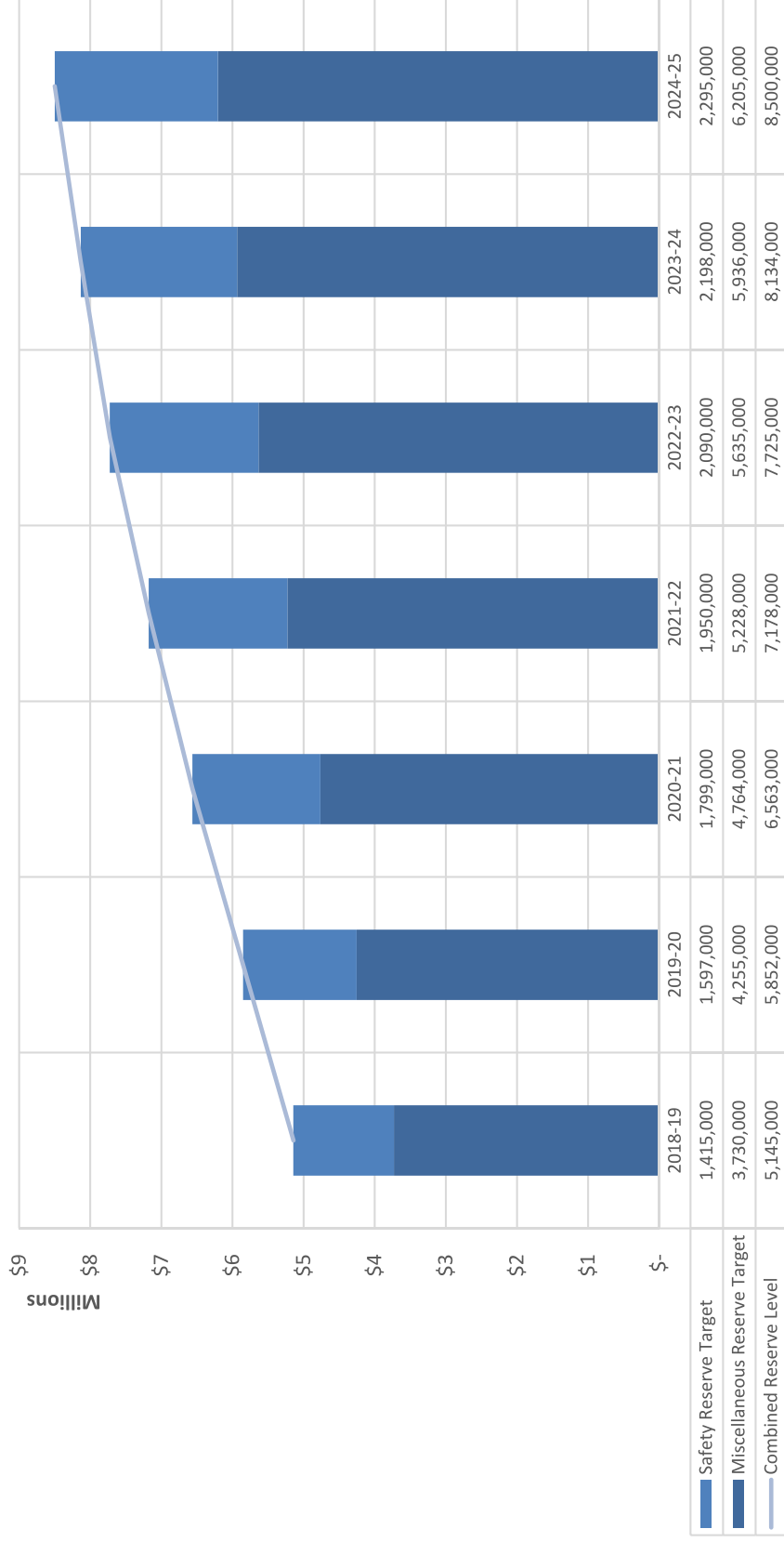


Exhibit C – Proposed Pension Funding Ramp-up

Pension Funding Policy Proposed Ramp-up

Note: The chart looks forward 5 years in accordance with the policy to ensure that the reserve target will be achieved.

