



# Governance Compliance Statement 2017

June 2017

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## Governance of the Fund

The Fund's governance arrangement has three elements:



## Pensions Committee

The management, administration of benefits and strategic management of the assets is fundamentally the responsibility of the Pensions Committee established by the City of Wolverhampton Council (the administering authority) which has representation from the seven West Midlands metropolitan district councils and local trade unions.

The Committee administers the scheme in accordance with the regulations and best practice, and determines the strategic management of the assets based upon the professional advice it receives and the investment objectives set out.

**The roles of the members and the Committee are as follows:**

- 1** To discharge the functions of the administering authority for the application of the Local Government Pension Scheme regulations in the West Midlands.
- 2** To put in place and monitor the arrangements for the administration of contributions and payments of benefits as required by the regulations, and the proper management and investment of monies held for the purpose of paying benefits.
- 3** To determine and review the provision of resources made available for the discharge of the function of administering authority.
- 4** To set strategic asset allocation monitoring investment performance

**The key duties in discharging this role are:**

- 1) To be responsible for compliance with legislation and best practice.
- 2) To determine admission policy and agreements.
- 3) To monitor pension administration arrangements.
- 4) To determine investment strategy based on a medium-term benchmark.
- 5) To approve policy.
- 6) To appoint committee advisors.
- 7) To determine detailed management budgets.
- 8) To monitor the Fund's investment performance.
- 9) To monitor investment activity and the implementation investment strategy.
- 10) To monitor and review the Fund's investment of management awareness
- 11) To monitor and review detailed plans for individual asset classes.

The Director of Pensions oversees the implementation of Committee policy and the management of the day-to-day operational functions through the Fund's staff delivering Fund services. The Committee and its elected members are advised and supported by the Managing Director, Director of Pensions and Senior Finance and Legal Officers from the City of Wolverhampton Council.

## **Trade Union Representations and Provision of Information to Interested Parties**

The Fund invites relevant trade unions to send local representatives to sit as observers on the Pensions Committee by annual nomination.

The Fund is aware that good governance means an organisation is open in its dealings and readily provides information to interested parties. This is achieved through the Fund's communication strategy.

## **Local Pensions Board**

The Local Pensions Board assists the Pensions Committee with the good governance of the scheme ensuring the Fund's adherence to legislation, statutory codes of practice and guidance.

Consisting of six member representatives and six employer representatives, two of which are City of Wolverhampton Council councillors, the Board ensures the good performance of the Fund through monitoring of the Scheme Advisory Board's benchmarking criteria and working with officers to ensure the highest standards are met.

## **Advisors and Officers**

Investments and pensions administration are complex areas and the Fund recognises the need for its trustees and Pensions Board members to receive appropriate and timely advice. Against this background, its principal advisors are as follows:

- i) High level advice on general management from the Managing Director of the City of Wolverhampton Council.
- ii) Legal and general administrative advice and management from the Senior Legal Officer of the City of Wolverhampton Council who is also the monitoring officer for the Council.
- iii) Financial and technical advice from the Director of Pensions who is the lead senior support officer and has direct responsibility for the in-house management, as well as implementing the investment strategy through a team of professionally qualified staff and external managers.
- v) Senior pensions staff responsible for pensions benefits administration and communications.
- vi) The Council's Director of Finance is also the Section 151 Officer for the Fund (with the Head of Finance, as the Deputy Section 151 Officer for the Fund, having operational responsibility on a day-to-day basis). The Director of Finance is also the Fund's Compliance Officer as set out in its *Compliance Manual*.

vii) A range of external specialist advisors are appointed, covering areas such as:

- Investment strategy, asset allocation and investment matters generally.
- Actuarial matters.
- Property management matters.
- Corporate governance and responsible investment issues.

Details of the Fund's advisers are published in the Fund's annual report and accounts.

## **Role of Council Members**

The City of Wolverhampton Council is responsible for administering and discharging the functions as administering authority for the West Midlands Pension Fund. In addition to discharging the administration of benefits, recording of contributions, etc, the Council is also responsible for the investment of the employer and member contributions. Because the Fund covers the majority of local government employees in the West Midlands, as well as many admitted bodies, representatives from all seven district councils serve on the Committee. There is also active representation on behalf of the employees and pensioners from trade union representatives.

When considering the advice and determining investment policy, members are effectively acting as trustees and as such need to understand the special obligations placed upon them. These responsibilities are additional to those carried out as an elected member of a local authority. Members' duties as trustees are to manage the Fund in accordance with the regulations and to do so prudently and impartially on behalf of all the beneficiaries. This sometimes means that they may have to make decisions that in other political circumstances they may choose not to make. The overriding consideration for them as trustees, however, has to be for the benefit of the Fund and its contributors and beneficiaries. The advice of the Fund's advisors is very important in discharging this responsibility. Trustees can delegate some of their powers but not the responsibilities that go with them. They are not expected to be qualified to give investment advice or to initiate investment policy but must be aware of what is proposed by their advisors and be sure that it is relevant to the needs of the Fund and within their powers.

In practice, trustees typically discharge their duty by ensuring that they have a systematic and clear way of agreeing their investment policy with managers and advisors they employ. Testing adherence to policy on a regular basis is essential. These requirements will consist of meetings and regular written reports with professional advisors whose skills and judgments can be relied upon. So far as the Fund is concerned, the advice is provided mainly by Council officers and the advisers detailed in the annual report and accounts.

In addition to the setting of policy and investment parameters for the Fund, there should be a formal meeting each year at which the investment returns are reviewed. There might well be other formal meetings of trustees to which managers make a brief report, or supplement their written material. The following are extracts from leading court judgment's made about the role of trustees. These extracts stress the independent fiduciary duty required of a trustee and the requirement to put the needs of the beneficiaries first at all times. These comments apply to all trustees, including members, involved in pensions work.

## The Duty of Trustees

The duty of the trustees is to exercise their powers in the best interests of the present and future beneficiaries of the trust. Holding the scales impartially between different classes of beneficiaries is paramount. They must, of course, obey the law but, subject to that, they must put the interests of their beneficiaries first.

When the purpose of the trust is to provide financial benefits for the beneficiaries, the best interests of the beneficiaries are normally their best financial interests. In the case of a power of investment, the power must be exercised so as to yield the best return for the beneficiaries, judged in relation to the risks of the investment in question and the prospect of the yield of income and capital appreciation, both have to be considered in judging the return from the investment.

## Standard Required of a Trustee

The standard required of a trustee in exercising their powers of investment is that they must take such care as an ordinary prudent man would take if he were minded to make an investment for the benefit of other people for whom he felt morally bound to provide.

That duty includes the duty to seek advice on matters which the trustees do not understand, such as the making of investments, and on receiving that advice to act with the same degree of prudence. This requirement is not discharged merely by showing that the trustee has acted in good faith and with sincerity. Honesty and sincerity are not the same as prudence and reasonableness. Accordingly, although a trustee who takes advice on investments is not bound to accept and act upon the advice, unless in addition to being sincere, he/she is acting as an ordinary prudent person would act.

## Role of a Pensions Board member

*"The scheme manager (Pensions Committee) for a scheme has a Pensions Board with responsibility for assisting the scheme manager to comply with the scheme regulations and other legislation relating to the governance and administration of the scheme and any requirements imposed by the regulator. The Pensions Board must also assist the scheme manager with such other matters as the scheme regulations may specify."*

A member of the Pensions Board of a public service pension scheme must be conversant with:

- the rules of the scheme, and
- any document recording policy about the administration of the scheme which is for the time being adopted in relation to the scheme.

A member of a Pensions Board must have knowledge and understanding of:

- the law relating to pensions, and
- any other matters which are prescribed in regulations.

The degree of knowledge and understanding required is that

- appropriate for the purposes of enabling the individual to properly
- exercise the functions of a member of the Pensions Board

In appointing representatives to the Pensions Board, the Committee must be satisfied:

- that a person to be appointed as a member of the Pensions board does not have a conflict of interest and
- from time to time, that none of the members of the Pensions Board has a conflict of interest

Each member or proposed member of a Pensions Board must provide such information as is reasonably required for the purposes of reviewing actual or potential conflicts of Pensions Board members.

A conflict of interest may arise when Pensions Board members must fulfil their statutory role of assisting the scheme manager in securing compliance with the scheme regulations, other legislation relating to the governance and administration of the scheme and any requirements imposed by the regulator or with any other matter for which they are responsible, whilst having a separate personal interest (financial or otherwise), the nature of which gives rise to a possible conflict with their statutory role.

## **Members and Officers' Knowledge and Skills**

Member and officer knowledge and skills is recognised as important, and a range of measures are in place to equip members to undertake their role.

This is a major factor in the governance arrangements of the Fund in ensuring Committee and Pension Board members and officers have the relevant skills and knowledge. The Fund applies the CIPFA Knowledge and Skills Framework to achieve this objective and meets the legislative requirements set out in the Public Service Pensions Act 2013.

### **Framework**

Six areas of knowledge and skills have been identified as core technical requirements for those associated with LGPS pension funds:

- pensions legislation and governance context
- pension accounting and auditing standards
- financial services procurement and relationship management
- investment performance and risk management
- financial markets and products knowledge
- actuarial methods, standards and practices

It is not the intention that Committee members should individually become technical experts, but collectively they have the ability, knowledge and confidence to question and challenge the information and advice they are given, and to make effective and rational decisions.

Officers advising members and implementing decisions should have a more detailed knowledge appropriate to their duties.

Officers are expected to demonstrate their professional competency against the framework through appropriate 'continuing professional development' (CPD) arrangements.

The Fund has an approved trustee and Pension Board member training policy, and includes in its annual report and accounts details of the knowledge and skills development undertaken by its these members. The Fund also has in place effective training monitoring and is able to demonstrate

- how the framework has been applied
- what assessment of training needs has been undertaken
- what training has been delivered against the identified training needs

## **Representation of Other Interested Parties**

The Fund is open to any organisation with a direct interest attending the regular committee meetings to observe proceedings, and the Fund will engage with employing bodies on significant issues affecting them so their views can be taken into account before a decision is made, eg, three-yearly actuarial valuations.

The Fund will provide information on its website and directly to employing bodies on issues in which they may have an interest.

The Pensions Board is seen as the main area of involvement of active, deferred and pensioner members. The Fund does engage directly with individual members providing relevant information, the content determined by the responses to the information provided and requested.

## **Origins of the Fund and Responsibilities**

Following the 1974 reorganisation, all Council employees in the area (excluding teachers, police and fire officers) were members of the West Midlands Superannuation Fund with the former county council as administering authority. The 1986 reorganisation led to Wolverhampton Council becoming the administering authority for the Fund and local government employee pensions other than teachers, police and fire officers in the West Midlands. Responsibility for discharging the administering authority role is delegated to the Pensions Committee which has representatives from the district councils as the largest employers and four trade union representatives nominated from across the region.

The changes in responsibility for the delivery of Council services has seen a growing number of private sector firms and voluntary organisations becoming members of the Fund in respect of the workforce that delivers public services with the largest employer group being academies.

The LGPS regulations set out the responsibilities of the key parties which are summarised below. Further details are available on the Fund's website where operational and management arrangements are set out.

### **The administering authority (the City of Wolverhampton Council) through the Fund:**

- Collects employer and employee contributions.
- Invests surplus monies in accordance with the regulations and agreed strategy.
- Ensures that cash is available to meet liabilities as and when they fall due.
- Manages the valuation process in consultation with the Fund's actuary.

- Prepares and maintains an FSS (Funding Strategy Statement) and an ISS (Investment Strategy Statement), both after consultation with interested parties.
- Monitors all aspects of the Fund's activities and funding.

The administering authority discharges its responsibilities with the active involvement from the major employers, the district councils and trade union representatives combined with consultation with other interested parties.

#### **The individual employers:**

- Deduct contributions from employees' pay.
- Pay all contributions as determined by the actuary, promptly by the due date.
- Exercise discretions within the regulatory framework.
- Make additional contributions in accordance with agreed arrangements in respect of, for example, early retirement funding strain.
- Notify the administering authority promptly of all changes to membership, or as may be proposed, which affect future funding.
- Discharge their responsibility for compensatory added years which the administering authority pays on their behalf and is subsequently recharged to them.

#### **The Fund's actuary:**

- Prepares valuations including the setting of employers' contribution rates after agreeing assumptions with the administering authority and having regard to the FSS.
- Sets employers' contribution rates in order to secure the Fund's solvency having regard to the aims of maintaining contribution rates that are as constant as possible.

## **Compliance and Best Practice**

The Fund is required to publish a compliance statement under Regulation 73A of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations and review that statement on an ongoing basis under Regulation 31 of the 2008 Regulations. There is also a requirement to declare their compliance in meeting the guidance given by Secretary of State.

The Fund aims to comply fully with the guidance given by the Secretary of State and relevant guides produced by CIPFA.

## **The West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority**

In addition to the management and administration of pensions on behalf of the local authority employers within the West Midlands, the Fund also undertakes this role on behalf of the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority (WMITA) by delegation under S101 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The governance arrangements set out in this policy apply to the Fund's management of the WMITA Fund also with the additional requirement to report back to WMITA once a year.

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