

LOCAL PENSION BOARD

MINUTES of the meeting held on Friday, 23 January 2026 commencing at 10.30 am and finishing at 12.42 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Matthew Trebilcock – in the Chair

Alistair Bastin
Stephen Davis
Liz Hayden
Janet Wheeler

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Nick Cotter

Officers: Mark Smith (Head of Pension Services), Vicki Green (Pension Services Manager), Mukhtar Master (Governance and Communications Manager), Anna Lloyd (Governance and Communications Officer), Josh Brewer (Responsible Investment Manager), Gregory Ley (Financial Investment Fund Manager) and Lucy Brown (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

1/25 WELCOME BY CHAIRMAN

(Agenda No. 1)

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting.

2/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda No. 2)

Apologies were received from Susan Blunsden, Scheme Member Representative, and Cllr Peter Stevens, who was represented by the Vice-Chair of the Pension Fund Committee, Cllr Nick Cotter.

3/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE BELOW

(Agenda No. 3)

There were no declaration of interests received.

4/25 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 4)

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2025 were a true and accurate record.

5/25 UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE PENSION FUND COMMITTEE ON 12 DECEMBER 2025

(Agenda No. 5)

The unconfirmed minutes of the Pension Fund Committee meeting held on 12 December 2025 were noted.

6/25 REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN

(Agenda No. 6)

Mark Smith, Head of Pension Services presented the report which reviewed the position against the Annual Business Plan for 2025/26 as considered by the Pension Fund Committee at their meeting on 12 December 2025 and invited comments from the Board.

He outlined the introduction of new draft regulations, including the requirement for a governance and training strategy, and the extension of individual knowledge requirements. It was noted that the Board and the Pension Fund Committee had submitted feedback on the technical consultation which had been submitted in January.

The Board were informed of the new requirement of an Independent Person to join the Pension Fund Committee as a non-voting member, and following questions from the Board, Mark Smith advised that he was not able to confirm the level of necessary qualifications required for this post, the qualifications named in the draft guidance were focused private sector schemes and not LGPS specific, it was also undecided whether the non-voting Committee member would attend both the Board and Committee meetings. Following a query from the Board as to whether the Independent Person would be FCA regulated, Mark Smith advised that he would update the Board further as they continued to develop the strategy, currently the draft guidance issued did not require FCA authorisation.

Mark Smith further highlighted that the fund's valuation was on track, and had received positive feedback from the employer forum, and that there was an underspend on staff costs due to recruitment challenges, and this could be discussed further in the Workplace Planning report presented later on the agenda. He also flagged the additional costs that would be caused by the need to run the two Pools at the same time during the transition period.

The Board noted the report.

7/25 RISK REGISTER

(Agenda No. 7)

Mukhtar Master, Governance and Communications Manager presented the Risk Register report as considered by the Pension Fund Committee at their meeting on 12 December 2025 and invited comments from the Board.

He highlighted the increased risks related to asset manager performance and local government reorganisation, and it was noted that the Board had previously recommended that these risks be increased. He also advised of ongoing challenges with Committee member training compliance, and board composition risks.

In response to a query from the Board on the challenges highlighted with Committee member training compliance, Mark Smith advised that three members of the Committee had not completed their mandatory training as at the 31 December 2025 deadline, and that this had been escalated to the Section 151 Officer. He advised that if this remained unresolved, the political group leaders would be informed.

Board members raised concerns regarding the ongoing Employer Member Representative vacancy on the Board, which could affect quorum and decision making. Mukhtar Master explained that ongoing efforts had been made to recruit an additional employer representative, particularly those from the academy groups. He advised that this was an operational risk, and therefore not included on the risk register, but assured Board Members that a resolution was in hand. The Chair advised that this would be a piece of work that was currently being undertaken by the Head of Pensions when reviewing the Constitution of the Board.

The Board noted the report.

8/25 GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

(Agenda No. 8)

Mukhtar Master, Governance and Communications Manager presented the Governance and Communications Report which had been presented to the Committee on 12 December 2025.

He summarised the recent government developments as detailed within the report, including board member term extensions, progress of the General Code of Practice compliance, committee training updates, breach reporting and the upcoming review of the board constitution.

Cllr Nick Cotter left the meeting and did not return.

Mukhtar Master provided additional detail on the General Code of Practice compliance, and Mark Smith, Head of Pensions, added that completion of the 17 modules of the General Code of Practice and additional scrutiny performed by Hymans, to be completed by March 2026 had put the Fund in a good position for the independent governance review, and the Board congratulated the team for their work towards completion of the modules of the General Code of Practice.

In response to a query from the Board, Mukhtar Master advised that the 'Other' GCOP breach related to the delay in issuing Firefighters' Pension Scheme annual benefit statements to members who were eligible for the remedy in the McCloud/Sargeant cases and did not affect the LGPS.

Mukhtar Master provided a verbal update on the forthcoming review of the Board constitution, which had been prompted by audit recommendations, and invited Board members to provide feedback on the proposed minor changes via email outside of the meeting.

The Board noted the report.

9/25 ADMINISTRATION REPORT

(Agenda No. 9)

Vicki Green, Pension Services Manager presented the Administration Report, presented to the Pension Fund Committee on 12 December 2025 which included the latest performance statistics for the service. She advised of the following:

- There had been an increase in outstanding cases due to a data project that improved transparency but revealed a backlog. The team completed 84% of work within service level agreements, with ongoing efforts to improve efficiency.
- A consultation was launched with employers to align service level targets with national key performance indicators, with responses focusing on fines, engagement, and timescales. Adjustments are being made to address employer feedback.
- The new member portal, Engage, was set to go live, offering improved user experience and security. A soft launch was planned, with phased communication to members to encourage re-registration.
- The Board were informed of the ongoing recruitment challenges, with currently nine vacancies, and an increased reliance on agency staff to cover support roles. She reported that senior positions were more difficult to fill, and a mass recruitment project was underway with the Council's talent team.

The Board raised their concerns regarding staff wellbeing and retention during the ongoing issues with staff recruitment and retention, and Mark Smith, Head of Pensions advised that there were known issues across the LGPS, however continued to project a supportive culture whilst acknowledging the sector wide pressures. Vicki Green added that whilst the implementation of new systems would ultimately save time in the long run, the team were aware of the additional pressures and time in setting these up which had added to the availability of resources.

The Board noted the report.

10/25 FUNDING STRATEGY AND INVESTMENT STRATEGY REVIEWS UPDATE

(Agenda No. 10)

Gregory Ley, Financial Investment Fund Manager presented the report which reviewed the progress with the reviews of the Funding Strategy Statement and Investment Strategy Statement as considered by the Pension Fund Committee at their meeting on 12 December 2025 and invited comments from the Board.

He confirmed that the consultation on the Fund Strategy Statement had closed, with a final version to be presented to the March Pension Fund Committee meeting for approval.

Mark Smith, Head of Pensions provided feedback on the Employer Forum of which the consultation period had been extended to ensure an engaged process. A broad spectrum of feedback had been received, and they had acknowledged some of the challenges within the different sectors around financing some of the benefits and contribution costs, and whilst there was some support available, they maintained a balanced prudent approach within financial constraints. A full analysis of this feedback would be reported to the March Pension Fund Committee.

Greg Ley updated the Board on the Investment Strategy Statement review by Apex which had led to proposed adjustments in asset allocation, including reduced equities and increased private markets to lower risk and increase inflation linkage. He reported that there had been good attendance from both the Board and Committee at the Investment Strategy workshop and thanked the Board for their time. He reported that he had taken away the action to review investment fees with Apex, which would be reported to the March Committee meeting. The Board thanked the team for a very informative workshop, however noted the low attendance from members of the Pension Fund Committee, and Greg Ley advised that he would ensure that a note of the workshop was circulated to all members for information.

In response to a query from the Board regarding when the Fund planned to include the investment pool in the post-March consultation and were advised that Central would be included in the consultation process and were already involved in the asset allocation workshop to ensure inclusion throughout the consultation process.

The Board noted the report.

11/25 MEMBER INVESTMENT SURVEY UPDATE

(Agenda No. 11)

Josh Brewer, Responsible Investment Manager, provided a verbal update on the results of the Member Investment Survey which was closed on 16 January 2026, which included areas such as responsible investment priorities and attitudes towards aerospace and defence investments.

The following were noted:

- There were 2,000 responses, primarily from members aged 55 and over, noting possibly survey fatigue and timing issues affecting participation.
- Respondents showed strong support for the current responsible investment policy, engagement, and escalation where necessary. Most agreed the Fund should manage negative impacts on society and the environment.
- A majority supported continued investment in the sector for financial returns but also wanted enhanced engagement to reduce harm to civilians. 56% supported continued investment, while 30% opposed.
- Definitions of 'local' varied, with 30% identifying Oxfordshire and 20% the UK as a whole. Climate change mitigation, renewables, biodiversity, SME investment, and affordable housing were top priorities for local investment.

The Board considered the low-level return of surveys and advised that future surveys could employ trade union communication channels to increase future participation.

The Board thanked the officer for the update.

12/25 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION UPDATE

(Agenda No. 12)

Mark Smith, Head of Pension Services presented the report which provided an update on Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution and possible impacts to the Fund.

He explained the differences between local government reorganisation and devolution, outlined possible scenarios for Oxfordshire, and noted that new councils could be formed from 2028, with a government decision expected in summer. He emphasised the potential changes to the Committee and Board, which included the potential need for a new host authority, revised constitutions and a possible turnover of membership on the Committee and Board. He brought to the Board's attention the anticipated increased administrative workload, with more retirements and internal transfers, and the need for clear communication to ensure that scheme members were reassured that their benefits would be unaffected by these changes.

In response to a query from the Board regarding the implications of boundary changes with potential combined authorities, and the risks of member confusion if multiple funds were involved, Mark Smith advised that further information would be provided as developments progressed.

The Board agreed that any developments should be reported at each meeting, and Mark Smith agreed to add this as a standard item included within the Annual Business Plan report.

The Board noted the report.

13/25 ITEMS TO INCLUDE IN REPORT TO THE PENSION FUND COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 13)

The Board agreed to include the following items in the report to the Pension Fund Committee:

- Training for members of the Pension Fund Committee and possible escalation to the Section 151 Officer and/or Group Leaders.
- Filling the vacancy of Employer Representative on the Board.

14/25 ITEMS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE AGENDA FOR THE NEXT BOARD MEETING

(Agenda No. 14)

The Board agreed to include the following as an agenda item for the next meeting:

- Inclusion of the item Local Government Reorganisation as a regular update in the Annual Business Plan.
- Feedback on the comments received on the Board constitution review.

15/25 EXEMPT ITEMS

(Agenda No. 15)

The Board was **RESOLVED** that the public be excluded for the duration of items 16, 17, 18 and 19 in the Agenda since it was likely that if they were present during those items there would be disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and specified in relation to the respective items in the Agenda and since it was considered that, in all the circumstances of each case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

16/25 TRANSITIONAL HOUSING INVESTMENT UPDATE - EXEMPT

(Agenda No. 16)

The Board received a report which updated the Board on the Transitional Housing Fund.

The Board discussed the item in private session.

The Board noted the report.

17/25 WORKFORCE PLANNING UPDATE - EXEMPT

(Agenda No. 17)

The Board received a report from the Head of Pensions which updated the Board on the progress of the Workforce planning project.

The Board discussed the item in private session.

The Board noted the report.

18/25 2025 VALUATION RESULTS - UPDATE INCLUDING DRAFT FUNDING STRATEGY STATEMENT - EXEMPT

(Agenda No. 18)

The Board received a report with the 2025 valuation results and updated draft Funding Strategy Statement prior to consultation with employees in the Autumn as presented to the Pension Fund Committee on 12 December 2025.

The Board discussed the item in private session.

The Board noted the report.

19/25 LGPS POOLING REFORM

(Agenda No. 19)

The Board received a report which covered the recently proposed reforms to pooling proposed by central government as presented to the Pension Fund Committee on 12 December 2025.

The Board discussed the item in private session and Mark Smith, Head of Pension Services answered questions from the Board.

The Board noted the report.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing