

# **Responsible Investment in the Local Government Pension Scheme**

## **A Guide to the duties of Investment Decision Makers in LGPS Administering authorities**

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## Introduction and purpose

1. This guidance has been prepared by the Local Government Scheme Advisory Board (SAB) in England and Wales to assist administering authorities and in particular those individuals delegated to make investment decisions on behalf of the authority. It sets out their duties with regard to developing and maintaining responsible investment (RI) policies according to the relevant scheme regulations, statutory guidance and public law and references developments to private sector pensions legislation in this area.
2. The guidance is further to and should be read in conjunction with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) revised *Guidance on Preparing and Maintaining an Investment Strategy Statement* published in July 2017.
3. This guidance is based on the extant LGPS investment regulations 2016 and associated statutory guidance together with our understanding of related legislation. It does not anticipate or include any work undertaken by the SAB in conjunction with scheme stakeholders to explore the scope for recommending changes to MHCLG to amend the scheme's RI requirements to reflect recent changes made to the regulatory framework applying to schemes based on trust law. If changes to regulations and statutory guidance are made, this guidance will be updated to reflect them and will then be regularly reviewed to ensure that it remains timely and relevant.
4. This guidance is intended to be permissive in that it does not seek to provide operational direction but rather seeks to clarify the parameters within which decisions can be made and policies formulated with regard to the integration of ESG considerations into the overall investment strategy of the authority. It is recognised that there will be variation between different administering authorities in terms of their approach to RI and no one guidance document could successfully cover all local situations..
5. The guidance is intended to assist investment decision makers, irrespective of their investment beliefs. In doing so it is recognised that different administering authorities will be at different stages of the RI journey as shown in the "Spectrum of Capital" below :-

The spectrum of capital



\* This integration of sustainable practices across an organisation's core business may also be termed Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), although many organisations have a separate (often philanthropic) CSR 'carve-out' that is distinct from their approach to sustainability  
Source: G8 Social Impact Investment Taskforce, Asset Allocation Working Group (2014)

6. The guidance is intended to empower and equip administering authorities and those delegated to make investment decisions on behalf of the authority to meet their obligations in line with the Regulations and statutory guidance. It also sets out our understanding of the relevant fiduciary, general public law and code of conduct duties when making investment decisions based on extant case law and QC opinion.

7. The guidance is also relevant to local pension boards in the context of their statutory duty to assist their administering authority in complying with the policies set out in their Investment Strategy Statement (ISS) and that the ISS has been completed in accordance with MHCLG's statutory guidance on preparing and maintaining an ISS.

8. The guidance will be formally reviewed by the SAB, at least on an annual basis, after consultation with the Cross Pool Collaboration Group Responsible Investment Subcommittee and other key stakeholders.

## **Part 1 – Definitions**

### **1A. What is Responsible Investment?**

9. According to the PRI (Principles for Responsible Investment) established by the United Nations in 2006, responsible investment is an approach to investing that aims to incorporate environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors into investment decisions, to better manage risk and generate sustainable, long term returns.

There are six defined “principles” that signatories to PRI agree to:-

- Incorporate ESG issues into investment analysis and decision-making processes;
- Be active owners and incorporate ESG issues into ownership policies and practices
- Seek appropriate disclosure on ESG issues by the entities in which they invest
- Promote acceptance and implementation of the Principles within the investment industry
- Work together to enhance effectiveness in implementing the Principles
- Report on activities and progress towards implementing the Principles

Further details about PRI's approach to responsible investment can be found at <https://www.unpri.org/pri/what-is-responsible-investment>

## **1B. What are ESG factors?**

10. These are many and varied but according to PRI these typically include:-

### **Environmental**

- Climate change, including physical risk and transition risk
- Resource depletion, including water
- Waste and pollution
- Deforestation

### **Social**

- Working conditions, including slavery and child labour
- Local communities, including indigenous communities
- Conflict
- Health and safety
- Employee relations and diversity

### **Governance**

- Executive pay
- Bribery and corruption
- Political lobbying and donations
- Board diversity and structure
- Tax strategy

11. More examples of ESG factors are given at Appendix 1.

## **1C. What about climate risk?**

12. Authorities will be aware of the growing concerns around the financial risks associated with climate change with particular emphasis both on the risks that are associated with climate change on the sustainability of companies in which pension funds invest and the role of pension funds could play in achieving a net zero carbon economy. In response to such concerns DWP have announced that from October 2019, private sector pension trustees will be required as part of their Statement of Investment Principles to publish their policy on ESG considerations, including the financially material risks associated with climate change.

## **1D. Financially Material Factors**

13. Although statutory guidance refers to financial and non-financial factors it does not define them. Therefore, the definitions in this section are drawn from the private sector pensions world.

14. In their 2014 report, the Law Commission made clear that private sector pension trustees' fiduciary duty is to take account of financially material considerations, whatever their source. Where ESG considerations are financially materially, decision makers should take account of them. The Law Commission went on to say that this applies in exactly the same way as other risks in pension scheme investment, for example, interest rate risk, liquidity risk, market risk, political and counter party risk.

15. More recently, the Occupational Pension Schemes (Investment and Disclosure) (Amendment) Regulations 2018 (the 2018 Regulations) that will apply to private sector pension trustees with effect from October 2019 defines financially material considerations as including, but not limited to, environmental, social and governance considerations, including climate change.

### **1E. Non-Financial Factors**

16. Investment decisions will often have a mixture of motivations and therefore a clear non-financial motivation may be difficult to identify. However, for the purpose of this guidance non-financial factors are those which influence investment decisions and are primarily motivated by considerations other than financial. This is taken to mean any decision to disinvest or invest for which the primary motivation excludes consideration of the potential financial outcome. For example, withdrawing from tobacco investments purely on the basis of public health considerations or investing in a local social enterprise purely to achieve societal benefits.

17. Assessing whether a non-financial decision would have a significant financial detriment to the fund will always be a question of fact and degree. Divesting from a sector which makes up of 15% of a fund is likely to represent financial detriment whereas a portfolio of 3% may not.

18. According to the Law Commission, when making an investment decision based on a non-financial consideration, private sector trustees have a duty to ensure that the decision would not involve a risk of significant financial detriment to the fund and that it would be reasonable to assume that the scheme members agree with that decision. A similar provision may be found in LGPS statutory guidance.

### **1F Asset Stewardship**

19. The 2012 UK Stewardship Code defines stewardship as the promotion of long term success of companies in such a way that the ultimate providers of capital also prosper. Effective stewardship benefits companies, investors and the economy as a whole. The UK Stewardship Code is recognised as an effective standard for asset owners and asset managers to comply with and demonstrate best practice in discharging their stewardship responsibilities

## **Part 2. - Statutory Duties and Responsibilities of administering authorities**

20. The duties of administering authorities are set out in the Local Government Pension Scheme (Management and Investment of Funds) Regulations 2016 (the Regulations).

21. Administering authorities are also required by the Regulations to comply with statutory guidance published by MHCLG in July 2017 in preparing and maintaining their Investment Strategy Statement (ISS). Under that guidance, administering authorities are required to set out their policies in a number of key areas including responsible investment, risk, pooling, diversification and asset allocation.

## **2A – The Regulations**

22. Regulation 7 of the Regulations requires that

*(8) The authority must invest, in accordance with its investment strategy, any fund money that is not needed immediately to make payments from the fund.*

The Regulations do not define ‘investment’ beyond clarifying in Regulation 3 a number of items that are included in that term.

*(a) a contract entered into in the course of dealing in financial futures, traded options or derivatives;*

*(b) a contribution to a limited partnership in an unquoted securities investment;*

*(c) a contract of insurance if it is a contract of a relevant class, and is entered into with a person within paragraph (2) for whom entering into the contract constitutes the carrying on of a regulated activity within the meaning of section 22 of the 2000 Act(7).*

Accordingly, investment is assumed to have the commonly understood meaning as set out in the Oxford English Dictionary:

*The use of money or capital to purchase an asset or assets (such as property, stocks, bonds, etc.), in the expectation of earning income or profit over time.*

23. The Regulations contains the following provisions that relate to RI and which requires policies to be established in accordance with statutory guidance:

*“7.— (1) An authority must, after taking proper advice, formulate an investment strategy which must be in accordance with guidance issued by the Secretary of State.*

*(2) The authority’s investment strategy must include— (a) a requirement to invest fund money in a wide variety of investments;*

*(b) the authority’s assessment of the suitability of particular investments and types of investments;*

*(c) the authority's approach to risk, including the ways in which risks are to be assessed and managed;*

*(d) the authority's approach to pooling investments, including the use of collective investment vehicles and shared services;*

*(e) the authority's policy on how social, environmental and corporate governance considerations are taken into account in the selection, non-selection, retention and realisation of investments; and*

*(f) the authority's policy on the exercise of the rights (including voting rights) attaching to investments.*

## **2B – Statutory Guidance**

24. An LGPS administering authority with the assistance of their local pension board, will be principally concerned with ensuring that it meets the legislative requirements of the Regulations (detailed above) and associated statutory guidance published.

25. For the avoidance of doubt under the Regulations, as detailed above, an authority must, after taking proper advice, formulate an investment strategy which must be in accordance with guidance issued by the Secretary of State. It should be noted that this is a sterner test than “have regard to” on which most statutory guidance is based. In the matter of responsible investment, an authority must publish its policies on how ESG considerations are taken into account in the selection, non-selection and realisation of investments and the exercise of the rights, including the voting rights, attaching to investments.

26. To accompany the Regulations, MHCLG published revised statutory guidance in July 2017. The extant statutory guidance entitled ‘Preparing and maintaining an investment strategy statement’ expands upon earlier guidance, specifically on the regulations that relate to RI.

27. The guidance states that administering authorities will be expected to make their investment decisions within a ‘prudential framework’ with less central prescription. It goes on to describe a prudent approach to investment as a duty to discharge statutory responsibilities with care, skill, prudence and diligence.

28. In establishing RI policies, the statutory guidance differentiates between things that an authority must do, should do, and may do. The matters shown below that must be done under statutory guidance represents the minimum statutory requirement that authorities must comply with. Where the statutory guidance points to things that should be done, there is a clear expectation that where appropriate, these ought to be done unless the reasons for not doing so can be objectively justified.

## **2C - An administering authority must;**

- Take proper advice when formulating their investment strategy
- Explain the extent to which non-financial factors will be taken into account in the selection, retention and realisation of investments

- Must give reasons for not adopting a policy of exercising rights, including voting rights, attaching to investments

## **2D - An administering authority should;**

- Explain the extent to which the views of their local pension board and other interested parties whom they consider may have an interest will be taken into account when making an investment decision based on non-financial factors
- Explain their approach to social investments
- Where appropriate, explain their policy on stewardship with reference to the Stewardship Code
- Strongly encourage their fund managers, if any, to vote their company shares in line with their policy under regulation 7(2)(f) (of the 2016 Regulations)
- Publish a report of voting activity as part of their pension fund annual report under Regulation 57 of the 2013 Regulations

## **2E -An administering authority may;**

- Wish to appoint independently a voting agent to exercise their proxy voting and monitor the voting activity of the managers, if any, and for reports on voting activity to be submitted annually to the administering authority”

## **2F Pooling guidance and RI**

31. In ‘Investment Reform Criteria and Guidance’ published by DCLG in November 2015, the section ‘strong governance and decision making’ (page 6) requires that authorities should;

- Explain how they will act as responsible long term investors through their pool including how the pool will determine and enact stewardship responsibilities

32. The section ‘Responsible investment and effective stewardship’ (page 17) include provisions that authorities;

- Will want to consider the findings of the Kay review including what governance procedures and mechanisms will be needed to facilitate long term responsible investing and stewardship through the pool
- Will need to determine how their individual investment policies will be reflected in the pool
- Should consider how pooling could facilitate implementation of their ESG policy, for example by sharing best practice, collaborating on social investments to reduce costs or diversify risk, or using scale to improve capability in this area



33. Further guidance on pooling including provisions on responsible investment have been published as a first draft but are subject to further drafting and consultation and therefore have not been included at this time.

### **Part 3 - Non-statutory duties of investment decision makers**

34. Those tasked with making investment decisions on behalf of the administering authority will, in the main, be elected members of that authority. As well as acting within the statutory duties as set out above, decision makers must also act in accordance with a range of non-statutory duties deriving from public law.

35. Unlike private sector trustee who have a clear fiduciary duty to act in the best interests of scheme beneficiaries the position of LGPS investment decision makers is not so easily defined.

#### **3A Duty to local tax payers**

36. As set out in CIPFA guidance 'Role of the CFO in the LGPS' there is a fiduciary duty owed by elected members to local tax payers which stems from *Roberts v Hopwood* (1925). This case upheld sanctions against elected members who had chosen to raise the minimum wage for their lowest paid employees (women) and in doing so had been found to have not taken sufficient account of the interests of local tax payers. In his judgement Lord Atkinson defined the failure of the elected members in their duty as;

*'..they put aside all these aids to the ascertainment of what was just and reasonable remuneration to give for the services rendered to them, and allowed themselves to be guided in preference by some eccentric principles of socialistic philanthropy, or by a feminist ambition to secure equality of the sexes in the matter of wages in the world of labour.'*

He went on to state that;

*'A body charged with the administration for definite purposes of funds contributed in whole or in part by persons other than the members of that body, owes a duty to those latter persons to conduct that administration in a fairly businesslike manner with reasonable care, skill and caution, and a due and alert regard to the interests of those contributors who are not members of the body. Towards these latter persons the body stands somewhat in the position of trustees or managers of the property of others.'*

And that;

*Acts done 'in flagrant violation' of the duty should be held to have been done 'contrary to law' within the meaning of the governing statute.*

37. Such a duty was also referenced in *Bromley v GLC* 1981 as the fiduciary duty owed to all rate payers and council tax payers.

38. CIPFA guidance also references a duty to local taxpayers applying to officers and cites *Attorney General v De Winton* (1906) where it was established that the

Treasurer is not just a servant of the authority but has a fiduciary duty to local taxpayers.

### **3B Duty to scheme employers and scheme members**

39. In his legal opinion for the SAB dated 25 March 2014 Nigel Griffin QC concluded that those making investment decisions on behalf of the administering authority; *'...owe fiduciary duties both to the scheme employers and to the scheme members...'* and cites *White v Jones 1995* which held that fiduciary duties exist *'where one person administers the ....financial affairs of another'*.

40. However he importantly caveats this statement as follows

*'I rather doubt that the existence of fiduciary duties will in this context make very much difference to what the position would be if analysed simply in terms of the obligations imposed upon administering authority as a matter of public law - notably, the normal Wednesbury type obligations'*

*This view derives from (amongst others) Charles Terence Estates v Cornwall Council 2013 where the court acknowledged that local authorities owe a fiduciary duty but nevertheless treated the content of that duty as indistinguishable from Wednesbury.*

41. He goes on to define the Wednesbury obligations and therefore the duty to employers and scheme members as *the requirement 'to exercise discretionary powers rationally, for a proper purpose and by reference only to legally relevant considerations'*

42. There appears to be a clear distinction between the fiduciary duty of private sector pension trustees to always act in the best interests of scheme beneficiaries and the public law duties applying to LGPS investment decision makers to;

*'conduct ... administration in a fairly businesslike manner with reasonable care, skill and caution, and a due and alert regard to the interests of those contributors who are not members of the body'*

And;

*'exercise discretionary powers rationally, for a proper purpose and by reference only to legally relevant considerations'*

### **3C – Elected member code of conduct**

43. Councillors are required to adhere to their council's agreed code of conduct for elected members. Each council adopts its own code, but it must be based on the Committee on Standards in Public Life's seven principles of public life (see below). These were developed by the Nolan Committee, which looked at how to improve ethical standards in public life, and are often referred to as the 'Nolan principles'. All public office holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources.

44. The principles also apply to everyone in other sectors delivering public services. All councils are required to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by

councillors, but individual councillors must also take responsibility. Holders of public office should uphold the following seven principles:

### **Selflessness**

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

### **Integrity**

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

### **Objectivity**

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

### **Accountability**

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

### **Openness**

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for doing so.

### **Honesty**

Holders of public office should be truthful.

### **Leadership**

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour.

They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

## **Part 4 – Recent developments in trust based pensions**

45. Historically, the LGPS in England and Wales has adopted pension legislation that has been introduced specifically for schemes based on trust law. The following information is provided as a guide to possible developments in LGPS regulation and/or guidance but at the time of publication none of the following applies to the LGPS.

46. To meet the RI challenge, the government has adopted a number of legislative measures but only in relation to those responsible for making investment decisions in trust based schemes (not LGPS). As from October 2019, trustees will be required to include in their Statement of Investment Principles new regulatory requirements including:

- How financially material factors (including, but not limited to, ESG considerations, including climate change, over the time horizon of the scheme, are taken into account in the selection, retention and realisation of investments,
- The extent, if at all, that non-financial factors, for example, members' ethical views, are taken into account, and
- Engagement and voting activities in respect of investments, including stewardship.

47. By October 2020, trustees will be further required to include in their Statement of Investment Principles:

- Their arrangements with asset managers including how they incentivise their appointed investment managers to align investment strategy with their policies and to make investment decisions based on long term performance, and
- A form of implementation statement on their engagement and voting practices

48. Trustees will also be required to publish on a publicly available website both their Statement of Investment Principles and Implementation Statements. To assist trustees comply with the new regulatory requirements, the PLSA has published a made simple guide a copy of which can be found at

<https://www.plsa.co.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Made-Simple-Guides/2019/ESG-Made-Simple-2019.pdf>

## Appendix 1 – Example RI issues

NB: this is not intended to be read as an exhaustive list, nor as a prescriptive list.

Environmental	Social	Governance	Other/ sector specific
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Fossil fuel exposure</li> <li>◦ Carbon emissions</li> <li>◦ Adaptation risks</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Resource &amp; energy management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Storage</li> <li>◦ Fuel source</li> <li>◦ Water</li> <li>◦ Waste</li> <li>◦ Mineral use</li> <li>◦ Efficiency</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Planning/ permitting/ operational controls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human/ labour rights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Supply chain (UK Human Slavery Act/</li> <li>◦ Child labour</li> <li>◦ Human capital management</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Employment standards</li> <li>• Employee representation</li> <li>• Health and safety</li> <li>• Community relations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment (long term)</li> <li>• Board independence</li> <li>• Executive remuneration</li> <li>• Board composition and effectiveness (conduct and culture)</li> <li>• risk management</li> <li>• Tax transparency/ Fair tax</li> <li>• Auditing &amp; accounts (Reliable accounts/ auditor rotation)</li> <li>• Diversity / equality (board, company-wide)</li> <li>• Succession planning</li> <li>• Disclosure/ transparency e.g. Integrated reporting/FSB TFCD</li> <li>• Shareholder protection &amp; rights e.g. say on pay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business strategy &amp; risk management</li> <li>• Political change</li> <li>• Operating in controversial or challenging locations</li> <li>• Cyber security</li> <li>• Disruptive technology</li> <li>• Nutrition</li> <li>• Access to products (medicine/ finance)</li> <li>• Bribery &amp; corruption</li> <li>• Site security/ terrorism</li> </ul>

## **Appendix 2: Useful responsible investment sources**

Memberships of the following organisations might be considered by an administering authority, as part of the responsible investment strategy.

- British Venture Capital Association (BVCA)
- Focusing Capital on the Long Term (FCLT)
- Global Real Estate Sustainability Benchmark (GRESB)
- International Corporate Governance Network (ICGN)
- Investment Association
- Institutional Investors Group on Climate Change (IIGCC)
- Local Authority Pension Fund Forum (LAPFF)
- Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association (PLSA) (formerly National Association of Pension Funds)
- Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI)
- Transition Pathway Initiative (TPI)
- UK Sustainable Investment Forum (UKSIF)
- CDP (formerly the Carbon Disclosure Project)

### **Further RI Resources**

#### **INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL**

- PRI's Building the Capacity of Investment Actors to use Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Information
- PRI: Understanding the impact of your investments
- PRI: How asset owners can drive responsible investment
- PLSA: ESG Made Simple Guide
- RIA: Guide to Responsible Investment
- CERES: Blueprint for Sustainable Investing
- Sustainable Returns for Pensions and Society: Responsible Investment and Ownership
- USSIF: The Impact of Sustainable and Responsible Investment
- Willis Towers Watson: Sustainable investing – we need a bigger boat.
- World Economic Forum: Accelerating the Transition towards Sustainable Investing

- World Economic Forum: Global Risks Report 2015PRI: Investment Practices, Asset Owner Insight
- NAPF: Responsible Investment Guidance for Pension Funds
- EUROSIF: Corporate Pension Fund & Sustainable Investment Study
- EUROSIF: Primer for Responsible Investment Management of Endowments (PRIME Toolkit)
- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
- UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
- PLSA Guide to Responsible Investment Reporting in Public Equity

#### ASSET-CLASS-SPECIFIC GUIDANCE

- PRI: A practical guide to ESG integration for equity investing
- PRI: Integrated analysis: How investors are addressing ESG factors in fundamental equity valuation
- PRI: Fixed income investor guide
- PRI: Corporate bonds: Spotlight on ESG risks
- PRI: Responsible investment and hedge funds
- PRI: Responsible investment in private equity: A guide for limited partners
- PRI: Limited partners' responsible investment due diligence questionnaire
- PRI: Responsible investment in infrastructure
- UNEP FI: Implementing responsible property investment strategies
- INCR, IGCC, IIGCC, PRI, UNEP FI and RICS: Sustainable real estate investment, implementing the Paris Climate Agreement: An action framework

#### PROCUREMENT FRAMEWORK

- National LGPS Stewardship Services Framework

### **Appendix 3: Bibliography of regulations and guidance**

The Local Government Pension Scheme (Management and Investment of Funds) Regulations 2016

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/479562/draft\\_LGPS\\_Investment\\_Regulations\\_2016.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/479562/draft_LGPS_Investment_Regulations_2016.pdf)

Guidance on Preparing and Maintaining an Investment Strategy Statement, July 2017 (Department for Local Government and Communities)

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/553342/LGPS\\_Guidance\\_on\\_Preparing\\_and\\_Maintaining\\_an\\_Investment\\_Strategy\\_Statement.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/553342/LGPS_Guidance_on_Preparing_and_Maintaining_an_Investment_Strategy_Statement.pdf)