

# Investment Strategy Statement

## 1. Introduction and background

This is the Investment Strategy Statement ("ISS") of the Gwynedd Pension Fund ("the Fund"), which is administered by Gwynedd Council, ("the Administering Authority"). The ISS is made in accordance with Regulation 7 of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Management and Investment of Funds) Regulations 2016 ("the Regulations").

The ISS has been prepared by the Fund's Pension Committee ("the Committee") having taken advice from the Fund's investment adviser, Hymans Robertson LLP. The Committee acts on the delegated authority of the Administering Authority.

The ISS, which will be approved by the Committee on 16 March 2017, is subject to periodic review at least every three years and without delay after any significant change in investment policy. The Committee has consulted on the contents of the Fund's investment strategy with such persons it considers appropriate.

The Committee seeks to invest in accordance with the ISS, any Fund money that is not needed immediately to make payments from the Fund. The ISS should be read in conjunction with the Fund's Funding Strategy Statement (which is currently being reviewed).

## 2. The suitability of particular investments and types of investments

The primary objective of the Fund is to provide pension and lump sum benefits for members on their retirement and/or benefits on death, before or after retirement, for their dependants, on a defined benefits basis. This funding position will be reviewed at each triennial actuarial valuation, or more frequently as required.

The Committee aims to fund the Fund in such a manner that, in normal market conditions, all accrued benefits are fully covered by the value of the Fund's assets and that an appropriate level of contributions is agreed by the employer to meet the cost of future benefits accruing. For employee members, benefits will be based on service completed but will take account of future salary and/or inflation increases.

The Committee has translated its objectives into a suitable strategic asset allocation benchmark for the Fund. This benchmark is consistent with the Committee's views on the appropriate balance between generating a satisfactory long-term return on investments whilst taking account of market volatility and risk and the nature of the Fund's liabilities.

It is intended that the Fund's investment strategy will be reviewed at least every three years following actuarial valuations of the Fund.

The fund carried out an asset liability modelling exercise in conjunction with the 2016 actuarial valuation. A number of different contribution and investment strategies were modelled and the future evolution of the Fund considered under a wide range of

different scenarios. The Committee set a target of having a minimum 67% chance of achieving their long term funding target – returning to a fully funded position within the next 20 years. They also considered the level of downside risk in the various strategies by identifying the low funding levels which might emerge in the event of poor outcomes.

This approach helps to ensure that the investment strategy takes due account of the maturity profile of the Fund (in terms of the relative proportions of liabilities in respect of pensioners, deferred and active members), together with the level of disclosed surplus or deficit (relative to the funding bases used).

In addition, the Committee monitors investment strategy on an ongoing basis, focusing on factors including, but not limited to:

- Suitability given the Fund's level of funding and liability profile
- The level of expected risk
- Outlook for asset returns

The Committee also monitors the Fund's actual allocation on a regular basis to ensure it does not notably deviate from the target allocation.

The long term asset class returns assumed within the modelling exercise were as follows:

Asset Class	Median expected return 10 years (%pa)	Median expected return 20 years (%pa)
UK equities	5.0	5.9
Overseas equities	4.6	5.6
Private equity	5.9	7.0
UK Property	2.8	3.7
Absolute Return Bonds	2.6	3.6

### **3. Investment of money in a wide variety of investments**

#### **Asset classes**

The Fund may invest in quoted and unquoted securities of UK and overseas markets including equities and fixed interest and index linked bonds, cash, property and commodities either directly or through pooled funds. The Fund may also make use of contracts for differences and other derivatives either directly or in pooled funds investing in these products for the purpose of efficient portfolio management or to hedge specific risks.

The Committee reviews the nature of Fund investments on a regular basis, with particular reference to suitability and diversification. The Committee seeks and considers written advice from a suitably qualified person in undertaking such a review. If, at any time, investment in a security or product not previously known to the Committee is proposed, appropriate advice is sought and considered to ensure its suitability and diversification.

The Fund's target investment strategy is set out below. In line with the Regulations, the authority's investment strategy does not permit more than 5% of the total value of all investments of fund money to be invested in entities which are connected with that authority within the meaning of section 212 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007".

**Table 1: Fund allocation**

<b>Asset class</b>	<b>Target allocation %</b>
UK equities	19.5
Overseas equities	53.0
Total equities	72.5
Property	10.0
Bonds	15.0
Infrastructure	2.5
Total	100.0

### **Managers**

The Committee has appointed a number of investment managers all of whom are authorised under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 to undertake investment business.

The Committee, after seeking appropriate investment advice, has agreed specific benchmarks with each manager so that, in aggregate, they are consistent with the overall asset allocation for the Fund. The Fund's investment managers will hold a mix of investments which reflects their views relative to their respective benchmarks. Within each major market and asset class, the managers will maintain diversified portfolios through direct investment or pooled vehicles. The manager of the passive funds in which the Fund invests holds a mix of investments within each pooled fund that reflects that of their respective benchmark indices.

### **4. The approach to risk, including the ways in which risks are to be measured and managed**

The Committee is aware that the Fund has a need to take risk (e.g. investing in growth assets) to help it achieve its funding objectives. It has an active risk management programme in place that aims to help it identify the risks being taken and put in place processes to manage, measure, monitor and (where possible) mitigate the risks being taken. One of the Committee's overarching beliefs is to only take as much investment risk as is necessary.

The principal risks affecting the Fund are set out below, we also discuss the Fund's approach to managing these risks and the contingency plans that are in place:

## **Funding risks**

- Financial mismatch – The risk that Fund assets fail to grow in line with the developing cost of meeting the liabilities.
- Changing demographics –The risk that longevity improves and other demographic factors change, increasing the cost of Fund benefits.
- Systemic risk - The possibility of an interlinked and simultaneous failure of several asset classes and/or investment managers, possibly compounded by financial ‘contagion’, resulting in an increase in the cost of meeting the Fund’s liabilities.

The Committee measures and manages financial mismatch in two ways. As indicated above, the Committee has set a strategic asset allocation benchmark for the Fund. This benchmark was set taking into account asset liability modelling which focused on probability of success and level of downside risk. The results from the 2016 analysis highlighted that the Fund has a 77% probability of achieving full funding over the period to 2037 and a downside risk measure equivalent to a funding level of 38% at that date in the average of the worst 5% of outcomes. This analysis will be revisited as part of the 2016 valuation process. The Committee assesses risk relative to the strategic benchmark by monitoring the Fund’s asset allocation and investment returns relative to the benchmark. The Committee also assesses risk relative to liabilities by monitoring the delivery of benchmark returns relative to liabilities.

The Committee also seeks to understand the assumptions used in any analysis and modelling so they can be compared to their own views and the level of risks associated with these assumptions to be assessed.

The Committee seeks to mitigate systemic risk through a diversified portfolio but it is not possible to make specific provision for all possible eventualities that may arise under this heading.

## **Asset risks**

- Concentration - The risk that a significant allocation to any single asset category and its underperformance relative to expectation would result in difficulties in achieving funding objectives.
- Illiquidity - The risk that the Fund cannot meet its immediate liabilities because it has insufficient liquid assets.
- Currency risk – The risk that the currency of the Fund’s assets underperforms relative to Sterling (i.e. the currency of the liabilities).
- Environmental, social and governance (“ESG”) – The risk that ESG related factors reduce the Fund’s ability to generate the long-term returns.
- Manager underperformance - The failure by the fund managers to achieve the rate of investment return assumed in setting their mandates.

The Committee measures and manages asset risks as follows.

The Fund's strategic asset allocation benchmark invests in a diversified range of asset classes. The Committee has put in place rebalancing arrangements to ensure the Fund's "actual allocation" does not deviate substantially from its target. The Fund invests in a range of investment mandates each of which has a defined objective, performance benchmark and manager process which, taken in aggregate, help reduce the Fund's asset concentration risk. By investing across a range of assets, including liquid quoted equities and bonds, as well as property, the Committee has recognised the need for access to liquidity in the short term.

The Fund invests in a range of overseas markets which provides a diversified approach to currency markets; the Committee also assess the Fund's currency risk during their risk analysis. Details of the Fund's approach to managing ESG risks are set out later in this document.

The Committee has considered the risk of underperformance by any single investment manager and have attempted to reduce this risk by appointing more than one manager and having a significant proportion of the Scheme's assets managed on a passive basis. The Committee assess the Fund's managers' performance on a regular basis, and will take steps, including potentially replacing one or more of their managers, if underperformance persists.

#### **Other provider risk**

- Transition risk - The risk of incurring unexpected costs in relation to the transition of assets among managers. When carrying out significant transitions, the Committee seeks suitable professional advice.
- Custody risk - The risk of losing economic rights to Fund assets, when held in custody or when being traded.
- Credit default - The possibility of default of a counterparty in meeting its obligations.
- Stock-lending – The possibility of default and loss of economic rights to Fund assets.

The Committee monitors and manages risks in these areas through a process of regular scrutiny of its providers, and audit of the operations it conducts for the Fund, or has delegated such monitoring and management of risk to the appointed investment managers as appropriate (e.g. custody risk in relation to pooled funds). The Committee has the power to replace a provider should serious concerns exist.

A separate schedule of risks that the Fund monitors is set out in the Fund's Funding Strategy Statement.

## 5. The approach to pooling investments, including the use of collective investment vehicles and shared services

The Fund is a participating scheme in the WALES Pool. The proposed structure and basis on which the WALES Pool will operate was set out in the July 2016 submission to Government.

### Assets to be invested in the Pool

The Fund's intention is to invest its assets through the WALES Pool as and when suitable Pool investment solutions become available. An indicative timetable for investing through the Pool was set out in the July 2016 submission to Government. The key criteria for assessment of Pool solutions will be as follows:

- 1 That the Pool enables access to an appropriate solution that meets the objectives and benchmark criteria set by the Fund
- 2 That there is a clear financial benefit to the Fund in investing in the solution offered by the Pool, should a change of provider be necessary.

At the time of preparing this statement the Fund has already invested the following assets via the WALES Pool:

Asset class	Manager	% of Fund assets	Benchmark and performance objective
Passive Equity	BlackRock	22.5	FTSE All-Share and FTSE All-World Indices  Benchmark Return

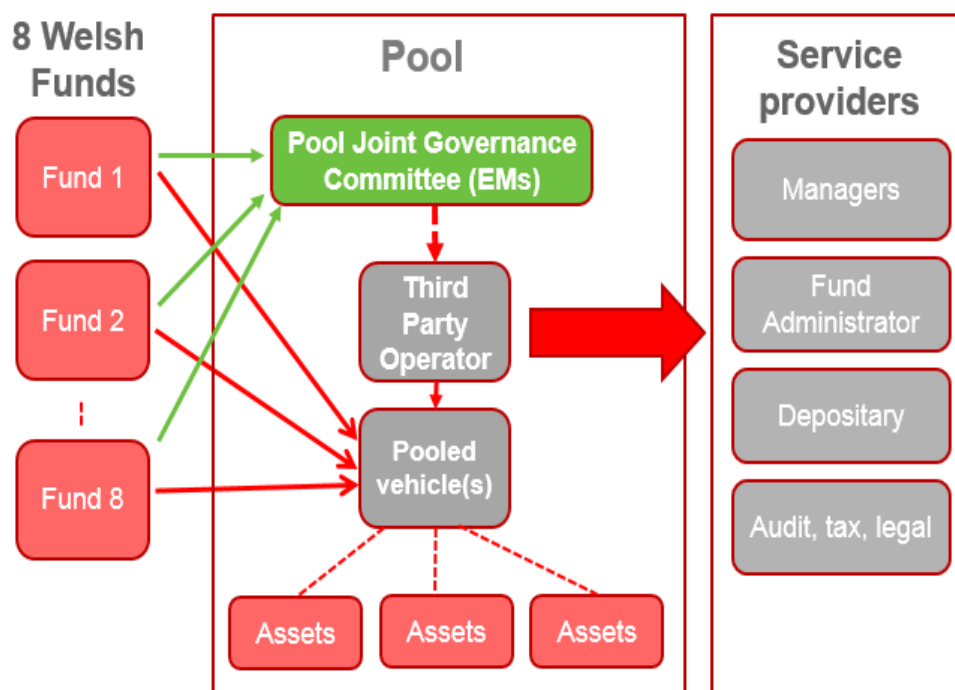
At the time of preparing this statement the Fund has elected not to invest the following assets via the WALES Pool:

Asset class	Manager	% of Fund assets	Benchmark and performance objectives	Reason for not investing via the WALES Pool
Private Equity	Partners	5.0	MSCI World Benchmark + 5% per annum	Existing contractual commitments in funds which have a finite life.
Infrastructure	Partners	2.5	MSCI World Benchmark + 5% per annum	Existing contractual commitments in funds which have a finite life.

Any assets not currently invested in the Pool will be reviewed at least every three years to determine whether the rationale remains appropriate, and whether it continues to demonstrate value for money. The next such review will take place no later than 2020.

## Structure and governance of the WALES Pool

The Pool will appoint a third party operator authorised by the FCA to provide a series of investment sub-funds in which the assets of the participating funds will be invested.



A Joint Governance Committee (JGC) will be established to oversee the operator. The Committee will comprise elected members – one from each of the eight participating funds. It is anticipated that this is likely to be the Chairs of the respective Pensions Committees though administering authorities may choose to nominate alternative members if appropriate. This arrangement will provide accountability for the operator back to individual administering authorities.

The Joint Governance Committee (JGC) will be set up formally as a Joint Committee between the participating administering authorities. Each fund will have one elected member on the Committee. It will operate on the basis of 'One Fund, One Vote', though the intention is that any decisions are reached by consensus wherever possible. A formal Terms of Reference for the Committee will be drawn up.

The Committee will be responsible for ensuring where practical that there are an appropriate range of sub-funds available to allow administering authorities to implement their own desired asset allocation. The JGC will be in regular discussions

with the operator as to the specific sub-funds which should be set up within the Pool, both at the outset and on an ongoing basis.

Officers from each administering authority will attend JGC meetings (in a non-voting capacity). The officers already work together as the Pensions Sub Group of the SWT (Society of Welsh Treasurers). The formal terms of reference of this officer group will be revised in light of the new pooling arrangements. The officers will advise the JGC on the establishment and monitoring of the various sub-funds as well as liaise directly with the operator on any day-to-day investment matters.

In the first instance, it is anticipated that the fund representatives on the JGC will report back to their respective individual funds' Pensions committees who will be responsible for satisfying themselves as to the effectiveness of the pooling arrangements overall and the operation of the JGC. However, the local Pensions Boards may also seek reassurance on aspects of the management of the funds' investments.

External scrutiny and formal due diligence of the operator and depositary will also be carried out by the FCA in their role as regulator.

The operator will be responsible for selecting and contracting with investment managers for each of the sub-funds as well as appointing other service providers such as depositary asset servicer, and an external valuer as necessary.

We anticipate at this stage that listed bonds and equities are likely to be invested through a UK based Authorised Contractual Scheme (ACS) in order to benefit from the tax transparent nature of the vehicle, though we will discuss this issue with the appointed operator. It may be that alternative vehicles are more appropriate for some other asset classes. As well as considering the options with the operator, we will also take external advice on the final proposed approach from a tax efficiency and legal compliance basis.

Under the proposed structure, the depositary will hold legal title to the assets of the Pool. The operator will be responsible for managing and operating the Pool, including entering into the legal contracts with the investment managers.

The appointed operator will provide and operate a range of investment vehicles to allow collective investment by the participating funds.

The operator will be responsible for selecting and contracting with investment managers for the management of the underlying assets. They will also be responsible for administration in relation to the vehicles in terms of unit pricing, valuation, handling cash flows in and out of the various sub-funds, trade processing and reporting on performance.

They will be responsible for due diligence from an audit, legal and tax perspective for the respective sub-funds and also for electing a depositary to the Pool.

The Pool will also procure independent external legal and tax advice as necessary to support them in their relationship with the operator.



## **5. How social, environmental or corporate governance considerations are taken into account in the selection, non-selection, retention and realisation of investments**

It is recognised that ESG factors can influence long term investment performance and the ability to achieve long term sustainable returns. The Committee consider the Fund's approach to responsible investment in two key areas:

- **Sustainable investment / ESG factors** – considering the financial impact of environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors on its investments.
- **Stewardship and governance** – acting as responsible and active investors/owners, through considered voting of shares, and engaging with investee company management as part of the investment process.

At the present time the Committee does not take into account non-financial factors when selecting, retaining, or realising its investments. The Committee understand the Fund is not able to exclude investments in order to pursue boycotts, divestment and sanctions against foreign nations and UK defence industries, other than where formal legal sanctions, embargoes and restrictions have been put in place by the Government.

To date, the Fund's approach to Social investments has largely been to delegate this to their underlying investment managers as part of their overall ESG duties. The Fund's managers report on this matter as part of the Fund's annual ESG review.

The Fund does not hold any assets which it deems to be social investments.

### **The exercise of rights (including voting rights) attaching to investments**

#### **Voting rights**

The Committee has delegated the exercise of voting rights to the investment manager(s) on the basis that voting power will be exercised by them with the objective of preserving and enhancing long term shareholder value. Accordingly, the Fund's managers have produced written guidelines of their process and practice in this regard. The managers are strongly encouraged to vote in line with their guidelines in respect of all resolutions at annual and extraordinary general meetings of companies under Regulation 7(2)(f).

#### **Stewardship**

The Committee has agreed in principle to become signatories to the Stewardship Code as published by the Financial Reporting Council. The Committee expects both the WALES Pool and any directly appointed fund managers to also comply with the Stewardship Code.

The Fund believes in collective engagement and is a member of the Local Authority Pension Fund Forum (LAPFF), through which it collectively exercises a voice across a range of corporate governance issues.