

# Conference highlights

LGA LGPS Governance Conference 29-30 January 2026



Con Hargrave  
Governance, Administration & Projects Consultant

The venue was Cardiff this year, with much discussion of the range of challenges and opportunities facing the LGPS. As well as hearing from the Minister on her hopes and aims for the scheme, delegates heard the latest from colleagues on local government reorganisation, peer support, investment pooling and more, ahead of another busy year.

## Day 1: Thursday 29 January

### Welcome from the conference chair

#### Clair Alcock, LGA

- Clair noted this was LGA's biggest Governance Conference yet, reflecting how busy things are across many front. She congratulated two LGPS community recipients of OBEs in the recent New Year's Honours, Cllr Roger Phillips, chair of the Scheme Advisory Board, and Teresa Clay, Head of Local Government Pensions at MHCLG.
- A video from the Local Government Minister, Alison McGovern MP, set out how she wants to achieve a 'world class' LGPS, not just in scale but in quality. The Minister thanked Scheme Advisory Board for their continued work, noting that she was aware of the scale of change in the scheme at the moment.
- In relation to specific areas of reform the Minister said:
  - there is concern from parts of the sector on elements of the investment reforms, commenting that the government has no intention of diminishing funds' fiduciary duties.
  - she wanted to make the scheme fairer and highlighted recent proposals on survivor benefit reforms, and the opening up of the scheme to councillors, as steps towards this.

### Pensions Dashboards

#### Richard Smith, Independent Dashboards Expert; Chris Curry, Pensions Dashboards Programme; Angela Bell, The Pensions Regulator

- Chris gave an update from the PDP, noting how 60 million live pension records are connected to the Dashboard as of December 2025, around 75% of the total overall. They are currently in a 'low-volume'

testing phase and are getting feedback from around 24 individuals from a range of backgrounds. Later this year they will move to a high-volume testing phase.

- Angela stated that TPR are pragmatic but will act robustly where they see intentional non-compliance. TPR see the connection to the Dashboard as just the beginning of the journey and asked funds to focus on the next phase.
- Richard gave some wider context to the Dashboard. Internationally, they are an important part of the pension landscape, with around 90% of Swedes nearing retirement using the Swedish equivalent. Private Dashboards are seen as being important to the success of the Dashboard project, with most international users accessing this through a private provider e.g. such as banking apps.

### Peer support: sharing LGPS Good Governance experience

#### Becky Clough and Jeremy Hughes, LGPS Scheme Advisory Board

- Becky and Jeremy gave an overview of the SAB's peer support project. This is in development and distinct from the upcoming triennial independent governance reviews. The SAB sees this as a way for the LGPS community to work together, modelling LGA's corporate peer challenge model.
- In 2026, they are planning to undertake two pilot projects, where volunteer LGPS specialists will visit a fund to consider its local ways of working and provide challenge and support. The SAB envisages that peer support projects could be general or tailored to reflect specific challenges that a fund is facing. The SAB is seeking volunteers to build on its initial bank of 22 colleagues from 18 funds.

### Balancing the LGPS equation: legislation, administration and leadership

#### Lorraine Bennett, LGA; Debbie Sharp, South Yorkshire Pensions Authority

- Strong administration is essential for many reasons, including protecting member's benefits, reducing risk, supporting regulatory compliance, strengthening data quality and delivering VFM
- At the same time LGPS administration teams face many challenges – McCloud, Dashboard, Access and Fairness changes, New Fair Deal etc.
- In the subsequent Q&A session the following topics were discussed:
  - SYPA analysed its key metrics over the last 10 years. The fund's grown from 100,000 to 190,000 members. They're thinking about how they can rationalise the academy employer base.
  - New skills are vital to successful administration. The fund has experts in data manipulation to analyse problems and help workflow and project planning.
  - Options to outsource backlog clearing exist but it is not a quick fix and it is important to find the right provider to work with.
  - To attract and retain staff SYPA focuses on providing a good employment experience. There is regular engagement with staff, and the Authority has a high net promoter score among employees.

### Pooling: LGPS relationships in transition

#### Richard Law-Deeks, LGPS Central

- Fit for the Future sees new roles and responsibilities for pools, as they will now provide investment advice and carry out due diligence on local investments. Funds will no longer manage any assets.

- This is a big change, requiring additional skills and involving new stakeholders. Challenges include the scaling up and onboarding of new funds, geography (Central is no longer contiguous), changes at administering authorities because of LGR, and incredibly tight delivery timescales.
- Good communication and empathy are essential. One-to-ones between pool and funds are proving valuable. A summit meeting in December last year set the vision and mission for the pool and its funds.

### An update from the Pensions Ombudsman

#### David Craddock, Senior Counsel at the Pensions Ombudsman

- David highlighted the longstanding issue that the PO has had of receiving more complaints than resolving them, and the steps they have taken to make their case resolution more efficient and speedier.
- Before Christmas, the PO published an [information sheet](#) for members on overpayments. The sheet contains a summary of the rules governing overpayments and may be beneficial for administrators too.
- The PO had generally not been dealing with McCloud cases until now, but they were now beginning to consider these and may take an approach where they consider an issue through a lead case, with the principles of that outcome being applied to other similar cases. They are also planning an 'issues-led' approach rather than a 'scheme-led' approach, where similar McCloud complaints in different schemes may be considered together where they relate to similar issues.

## Day 2: Friday 30 January

### MHCLG Update

#### Bramman Rajkumar, MHCLG

- Bramman gave an update on the government's reform agenda, thanking the audience for their responses to recent consultations. Comments included:
  - On the independent person, the government's view is that this should be a single person (although they can work for a firm, like a professional trustee firm). Their role will be akin to that of a non-executive director, with no requirement for professional liability insurance.
  - The statutory guidance on the administration strategy is on the government's radar but not a focus for now.
  - On independent governance reviews, the government is reviewing the red/amber/green classifications from the guidance and anticipates that these categories will be for overall categories, not individual elements.
- In questions, there was a plea for engagement from the government and a request for them to consider the substantive comments made by the sector on the draft pooling and governance guidance. The government is currently unable to confirm precise timings for regulations and guidance as the Pension Schemes Bill continues to work its way through Parliament.

### Implications of Local Government reorganisation

#### Ian Colvin, Hymans Robertson

- LGR will see the biggest shake up of local government in England in decades. It will affect 21 regions and 20 million people.
- In affected areas a new LGPS administering authority will be needed which will mean a new constitution and delegations, a new terms of reference for the committee and many new committee members.

- The default model when areas move to single tier local government is for one of the new unitary authorities to become the administering authority. However, there has been increasing interest in the single purpose pensions authority model (such as that used by the South Yorkshire Pensions Authority).
- Under this alternative model, the unitary authorities in a region form a joint authority. This is a local authority, with the single purpose of managing the LGPS fund. The joint authority is a legal entity and can hire staff and enter contracts independently. The model means that the pension fund is independent from any host authority and so has a greater freedom over employment decisions and procurement. It also provides a complete focus on pension fund matters, since the organisation has no other competing functions.

### Being an effective pension committee or board member

#### Catherine Pearce, Aon

- Catherine gave an overview of the elements that go into pension boards and committees being effective, namely 1) having the right structures in place, 2) having good knowledge and understanding, and 3) ensuring members and officers exhibit positive behaviours to support good decision making.
- In respect of behaviours, it was noted that we have all individual decision-making styles, which are equally valid, and an important part of being effective is to recognise what our styles are. This helps us to understand how we like to consider issues and identify if we need more information to help take a decision.

### Legal update

#### Gary Delderfield, Burges Salmon

- Gary outlined the pensions legislative process. Primary legislation (Acts of Parliament) sets out the legal framework and confers power to ministers to make secondary legislation (Statutory Instruments that fill in the detail). Statutory guidance is not binding but should be followed. If there is a breach of the law, failure to follow guidance will be taken into consideration. Problems occur if secondary legislation or guidance are issued without proper primary powers.
- The Pension Schemes Bill is working its way through Parliament. The relevant sections for the LGPS are:
  - Asset pooling and investment
  - Independent governance reviews
  - Power of government to merge funds
- There are also many private sector clauses which are causing the Bill's slow progress. With two months to go, we have no final act, regulations or guidance.
- New Fair Deal is not being extended to include the LGPS. Instead a separate form of pension protection has been designed to comply with the principles of New Fair Deal.

### Managing cyber risk

#### Jonathan Perera, Mercer; Richard Hamilton, Marsh

- Jonathan and Richard noted the striking statistic that 90% of cyber-attacks come from varieties of 'phishing', where attackers impersonate trusted companies or individuals. People should not click on links if they have doubts about the source of an email and should check with the sender or their IT department.

- Jonathan set out why managing cyber risk is so important for pension schemes – 1) the volume and sensitivity of data pension schemes hold, 2) the reliance many sectors have on the actions of third-party suppliers, like software providers, and 3) the increased scrutiny of regulators on the actions schemes should be taking to protect themselves.

### Investment outlook

#### Atul Shinh, Ninety One

- Atul provided an analysis of why markets have held up despite global uncertainty.

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