

Conference highlights

Pensions UK Local Authority Conference, 15-17 June 2026



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With the World Cup briefly relegated to the subs bench, Team LGPS gathered at Wyboston Lakes for a high-tempo exchange of ideas and challenges. This note captures the highlights, with big tackles on governance, strategic play on investments, and a few VAR-worthy debates, offering a quick-fire roundup of the key themes shaping the future of the LGPS.

Day 1: Monday 15 June

Conference welcome

Delegates were welcomed to the conference by Zoe Alexander, who neatly summarised the agenda for the following days whilst highlighting the strong position the LGPS is currently in. 2026 is the year that the LGPS moves from focussing on policy to being ready to deliver change, and the conference agenda was designed to support officers take the action required to safeguard a strong and positive future for the LGPS.

Advisors were unable to join all sessions during the conference, so the following notes relate solely to the sessions we were given access to.

Ten years of change

Roger Phillips, Chair, England & Wales Scheme Advisory Board

- What has been the greatest challenge over the last 10 years? Roger responded with an unequivocal “Fit for the Future”. This has been all-encompassing, and the forced timetable created a lot of stress for funds. He also mentioned McCloud and dashboards being a close 2nd and 3rd choice.
- He hopes the new crop of Elected Members leave “politics at the door” when operating on pension committees, and that they train for the role and build the knowledge required to become effective decision makers. The new Independent Person will have a key role in making this happen.
- Noting that the LGPS is the 6th largest pension fund in the world, the pools can help the LGPS to access a new and wider array of investment opportunities. Further, he expressed a desire for Partner Funds to collaborate more on non-investment matters.
- As he prepares for stepping down as the Chair, he concluded by encouraging all delegates to be more confident when celebrating the successes of the LGPS

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

Clair Alcock, LGA; Jo Darbyshire, LPPA; Neil Mason, Surrey Pension Fund; Nick Buckland, Kent Pension Fund

- LGR poses a challenge to funds, particularly given the timing. It was felt that there can be a mismatch between the role of the s.151 officer and the Senior LGPS Officer, especially at smaller funds.
- Neil explained that the Surrey Fund is in the process of setting up a Single Purpose Pensions Authority and has received permission from MHCLG to move forward. It is now working on how to implement the changes. Advantages of the SPPA model include stronger governance and removing sources of conflict. Whilst Surrey is satisfied with the model, it may not be the right approach for all funds.
- Previous devolution experience in administering the Cheshire Fund highlighted several operational challenges, including increased TUPE transfers and the creation of new member records. Clear member communications are essential, alongside system reconfiguration or integration of multiple databases. New bank accounts may be needed. Supplier contracts must be updated to reflect changes in administering authority, and reporting processes, including MI collection and storage, will also need to be adapted.

Productive partnerships between funds and pools

Jo Kempton, Lincolnshire County Council; Ewan McCulloch, Border to Coast; Peter Wallach, Merseyside Pension Fund; Joanne Donnelly, Pensions UK

- The session discussed the need, and willingness, for difficult conversations to be held with a focus on evolution rather than revolution in the relationship between pools and the funds.
- Pools need to be seen to deliver on the objectives and expectations set by the government – there is a view that this will not just lead to less need for intervention but will also allow help persuade the Government to elevate its view of the LGPS.
- It was discussed that there is a need to streamline communications between pools and funds. It is felt that the LGPS Senior Officers will be instrumental in achieving this, although there is an appreciation as to how busy fund officers are.
- It was often repeated that the funds own the pools. Achieving a balance between bespoke/local and the benefits of scale can be a challenge. Funds are looking at using their Investment Strategy Statements to guide pools towards their particular needs.

Day 2: Tuesday 16 June

Using AI Effectively and Efficiently

Kristy Cotton, PWC; Martin Davidson, LPPA; Rachel Wood, West Sussex Pension Fund; Matthew Blakstad, Pensions UK

- Martin explained how AI can improve member service by using contact-centre technology to triage queries, verify identity, guide users to the right information, send links, schedule callbacks and, in some cases, update records via integrated tools. His organisation is not building its own large language models, but configuring existing tools pragmatically and cautiously.

- Rachel focused on using AI and automation to make pension information easier for members to access, and more relevant and trustworthy, while recognising that digital channels will not suit everyone. This is an iterative, governance-led approach that supports rather than replaces people, with members kept at the centre, human judgment retained, and safeguards built in so AI complements existing services and improves insight into what members need.
- Kristy's main message was that AI offers real potential in pensions operations, especially for data extraction, triage, reporting and member engagement. Success depends on strong data quality, governance and controls. AI should be applied to clear operational problems rather than as an end in itself, with human review, audit trails, secure data handling and careful oversight of third-party tools to manage risks around privacy, accountability and model use.

Local growth in a pooled environment

Sarah Forster, The Good Economy; Nadeem Hussain, LGPS Central; Philip Latham, Clwyd Pension Fund; Euan Millar, West Yorkshire Pension Fund

- Sarah noted that while schemes exist to pay pensions, investment impact matters given the UK's deep social and regional inequalities. She outlined how place-based impact can be achieved mainly through private markets, supported by clear reporting. Although the ecosystem is complex, with new strategic authorities and data gaps, she highlighted examples of locally focused funds using specialist managers.
- Philip described Clwyd's move from private markets and impact investing into local investment, citing renewables via Capital Dynamics, affordable housing with Octopus, and the Welsh Pool's three private markets allocators. He noted three Good Economy impact reports and a shift from an 8% impact target to a proposed 2–5% local target range, aligned with the overall risk/return strategy and objectives on social inclusion and low-carbon transition.
- Nadeem outlined LGPS Central's approach, noting that local investment is an emotive issue. The pool needs to understand partner funds' targets and definitions, focus on private markets with appropriate risk and return, and ensure investments can demonstrate impact across geographical boundaries.
- The Q&A covered whether funds can meet local investment targets without compromising returns, the investible opportunity set given LGPS and DC scale, open versus closed-ended solutions, measuring impact over time, the respective roles of funds, authorities and pools, and balancing competition with collaboration. It also raised the potential for an LGPS-wide report on the scheme's investor impact.

Beyond good governance: Securing a confident future for your fund

Michael Burton, Hymans Robertson; Kate Dickson, Hymans Robertson

- The importance of transparency was discussed to demonstrate good governance, reducing the risk of challenges and the perception that Conflicts of Interest are not correctly managed.
- Funds need to be pragmatic and flexible, thinking ahead on how they will tackle change to secure the necessary resource and value for money on appointments to statutory roles. The people appointed need a wide range of skills and will have particular strengths and weaknesses, so funds should consider what strengths they are seeking.

- Strong record keeping is essential for ensuring new officers and committee members can refer to previous decisions they may not have had sight of to ensure they can drive their fund forward.
- The key takeaways were noted as being transparency, officers working together to provide peer support through different forums and the need to be proactive and quick as opposed to trying to be fast and reactive.

Independent by design: The evolving role of independent oversight in the LGPS

Mandy Kaur-Sadler, Dalriada Trustees; Alison Murray, Barnett Waddingham

- Independence in the LGPS is shifting from a compliance requirement to a practical tool for improving governance. It helps committees to make better, more informed decisions, provided they are clearly defined, well-implemented, and focused on adding real value rather than just meeting regulatory expectations.
- Mandy noted the importance of using independence to make decisions better, not just meet a requirement. The independent person's real role is to act as a trusted, objective "critical friend" and to help committees focus on what matters and avoid getting lost in detail. The role needs clear expectations, strong relationships, and the right person with good judgement and communication skills. It should be tailored to fit each fund's governance rather than applied as a one-size-fits-all solution.
- Alison explained how independent governance reviews have the potential to genuinely improve how funds operate, especially in areas like planning, governance, and how meetings run. They will only add real value if they lead to clearer focus, stronger challenge, and better decision-making.

Proximity matters: The role for small funds in regional growth

Emma Hardcastle, Foresight Group; James Livingston, Foresight Group; Matthew Smith, Foresight Group

- The team from Foresight shared their experience and views on the potential for investment in UK private equity. They gave examples of the investments and companies that they had been able to invest in including the support they had received from a range of LGPS funds.
- They reflected on the new requirements around local investments and how more regionally focussed approaches can be adopted when deploying capital and the benefits of expertise across regions, sectors and types of companies. They also looked to debunk views around practices in private equity investing and the importance of working with companies to drive success and generate new opportunities.
- The session also discussed how they had developed the ability to measure positive impact from private equity investing on companies and the areas around them.

Under attack: A cyber security incident simulation

Rebecca Durrant, Aon; Daniel Kanaris, Aon

- Delegates took part in a cyber security incident simulation to identify the key considerations that should be made in the event of a real-life incident. Noting that most cyber incidents start small and start with human error, delegates engaged with the simulation with enthusiasm.
- The simulation was one that delegates could easily envisage happening in real life – a phishing attack from what appeared to be a friendly email, leading to a data breach and a ransom demand. The failure in this case arose, in part, due to the ability of AI tools to enhance the realism of phishing and vishing

communications. Teams should continually train for such events and develop understanding around how to spot such an attack.

- The need for incident management plans, that were well understood by all staff and available in the event of a system shut-down, was made clear through the simulation. We expect all delegates will be refreshing themselves on these plans, and their business continuity procedures, on return to the office!

Surplus + employers = ...exit?

Riaz Nurennabi, South Yorkshire Local Pension Board; Debbie Sharp, South Yorkshire Pensions Authority; Euan Miller, West Yorkshire Pension Fund

- This session explored how LGPS funds and employers are responding to widespread funding surpluses following the 2025 valuations. The discussion highlighted the tension between reducing contributions, maintaining long-term fund stability, and considering whether surpluses could support employer exits.
- A key theme was that surpluses introduce complex governance challenges which require careful communication, robust decision-making, and a long-term mindset to avoid repeating past mistakes where surpluses quickly reversed.
- Debbie highlighted the importance of strong, structured engagement with employers, including segmented communication approaches such as finance director summits and employer forums. She stressed that “one size doesn’t fit all,” with different employer groups requiring tailored approaches to contribution changes and surplus sharing.
- Riaz highlighted improved collaboration, transparency and consultation between funds and employers. Early visibility of contribution rates and valuation assumptions helps employers plan, while demand remains for stability, clarity and potential use of surpluses to ease financial pressures. This must be balanced against long-term fund sustainability and risk management.

Handing public pressure in times of tension

Brenda Hall, Merseyside Pension Fund; Andrien Meyers, London CIV; Nemashe Sivayogan, London Borough of Merton

- The merits of engagement vs divestment were discussed with Merseyside pointing to successes in engagement with major high street brands and driving improved behaviour.
- The health and safety challenges were noted with an increase in security requirements in an era of increased pressure and inappropriate behaviours from the public in meetings and (potentially) beyond.
- Transparency is seen as key in demonstrating members are being put at the heart of decisions that are being taken and that due process is observed. Funds are designed and required to operate for their members, not pressure groups, and fiduciary duty is key.
- There is a need for asset pools to work with funds to establish a consensus on the approach to responsible investment, with decisions led by funds as the owners of the pools.

Day 3: Wednesday 17 June

Are valuations under threat?

Sherief Loutfy, Worcestershire County Council; Steven Scott, Hymans Robertson

- Steven opened by highlighting the results from Hymans Robertson's review of the 2025 actuarial valuations, as set out in the [LGPS 2025 valuations: The Big Picture](#) report. The aggregate funding position has risen (from 107% to 122%), and aggregate employer contribution rates have fallen (from 21.1% to 16% of pay). The reason for the funding level improvements was a general increase in asset return assumptions.
- Sherief described the 'modern' actuarial valuation as less focused on funding levels and contribution rates, and more on risk management. He highlighted the use of quantitative risk metrics, including the 2025 risk of regret measure, to support decision-making and improve employer engagement on contributions.
- Following a brief power outage (!) the challenges around inter-valuation contribution reviews were discussed, with both speakers expressing hope that the promised consultation on Regulation 64(A) brings clarity around the roles of both the fund and the fund actuary in future reviews.

Navigating the new: Managing the latest governance and admin requirements

Daniel Chessell, Essex County Council; Becky Clough, LGPS Scheme Advisory Board; Vickie Hampshire, West Sussex Pension Fund

- In the current time of change it is felt stakeholder engagement is critical. The challenges faced by fund officers were noted, along with the need to maintain their buy in and engagement. There are challenges around staff retention and turnover where key skills can be lost.
- Where there is a need for software developments, these can take a year (or more) to plan, create, test and implement. This poses a challenge to Funds in a fast-moving environment as technical solutions may not be readily available. This will potentially lead to an increase in the amount of manual work, which is inefficient.
- LGPS experience is not always available for recruitment, so funds need to consider hiring people with appropriate transferable skills and provide high quality training. This must be done against a backdrop of the need for staff retention so funds don't train staff who then immediately leave.

The talent recruitment workshop

Anouska Ramsay, LGPS Central; Gillian Taberner, South Yorkshire Pension Authority; Neil Mason, Surrey Pension Fund

- Attendees were invited to discuss their views on recruitment and retention within the LGPS as a group activity. It was noted by South Yorkshire that it is valuable to demonstrate the wider benefits of the LGPS rather than focusing on salary.
- There was a suggestion of involvement with local schools and colleges, helping students to explore the options around a career in finance and using the relationships to smooth the path to provide apprenticeships, with many funds keen to "grow their own" talent.
- Funds should recognise that not all employees are seeking management positions and that a range of talents and ambitions are required amongst the staff. Officers who are not seeking senior roles play a

- crucial role in the day-to-day operation of the fund as they fill important roles and develop crucial experience needed to deliver effectively for members.
- The importance of skills mapping was discussed, allowing funds to either recruit to fill a particular need and/or provide training focussed around skills gaps to ensure the officer team is well rounded and able to meet the challenges of the day.

Fit for a reformed future?

Professor Tony Travers, London School of Economics

- The UK is now operating in a more volatile environment, shaped by a series of “once-in-a-generation” shocks since 2008 (financial crisis, Brexit, Covid, and geopolitical tensions). This has led to weaker economic growth, higher government debt, and a tax burden that is close to its practical limits. At the same time, politics has become increasingly fragmented, with polarised parties and voters. Trust in government has declined significantly, and public attitudes towards political leaders are more hostile than in the past.
- There’s been a prolonged squeeze on public spending, particularly within local government. While overall spending may soon return to 2010 levels (in real terms), population growth means spending per head remains significantly lower. Many councils are now under severe financial stress, compounded by growing demand pressures (e.g. SEND, housing, social care) and ongoing reforms such as reorganisation and devolution.
- There’s a growing political interest in the LGPS as a means of meeting wider economic objectives. While reforms are often framed around improving efficiency and consolidation, there is also a stronger push to direct investment towards UK growth and infrastructure. This creates tension with the primary purpose of pension funds, which is to pay pensions to members. In a more pressured political environment, there is a risk of pension assets being seen as a substitute for public funding, and so LGPS stakeholders will need to be proactive in resisting policy shifts that could undermine member outcomes.

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