HYMANS ROBERTSON

LARGE DB SCHEME CASE STUDIES

Working together to deliver a complex and large-scale journey to buy-out

In the UK, a significant proportion of defined benefit (DB) scheme assets are held by a small number of large schemes. These large schemes have unique needs and face different challenges compared with smaller ones. As advisers to half of the 20 largest schemes in the UK and one in five with assets above £1bn, we're keen to share our insights through this series of case studies.

For large schemes, the journey from buy-in to buy-out involves a significant number of stakeholders, advisers and interdependent workstreams. Close collaboration is essential. A clear governance structure, with well-defined roles and responsibilities, helps the parties work efficiently, supports timely decisions and reduces the risk of important issues falling between workstreams.

The client's situation

Our client since 2015, the trustee of a multi-billion-pound scheme, had been pursuing a long-term risk-transfer strategy. The scheme completed its first and largest buy-in in 2019, followed by smaller transactions in 2021 and 2022. Before it could move to buy-out, the trustee needed to resolve significant data issues, reach decisions on the treatment of surplus and complete the insurer's extensive due diligence for residual risk cover.

Their ask of us

The trustee asked us to provide focused support in areas where the scale and complexity of the project created particular challenges. Our role combined detailed advice and delivery in a number of critical areas with governance support to help the trustee navigate complex decisions in a structured and well-evidenced way. We worked closely with the trustee and the wider adviser team, bringing our specialist input into the broader programme and enabling a joined-up approach to delivery.

What did we do?

Strengthened the governance around key decisions

We developed a structured governance approach to navigate and document the decisions taken throughout this complex, multi-year journey. This brought together the relevant analysis, advice and stakeholder input, and helped the trustee consider the available options in a consistent way. We also helped plan the sequencing of decisions and identify where further evidence or engagement was needed before the trustee could proceed.

We supported the trustee through its deliberations by clearly setting out the matters to be decided, the factors relevant to each decision and the rationale for the conclusions reached. The resulting governance documentation provided a robust audit trail, demonstrating that the trustee had followed an informed and disciplined process. This was particularly important for decisions on surplus and for responding to the insurer's due diligence on residual risk cover.

Provided detailed advice in the most complex areas

Alongside this governance role, we provided detailed advice and hands-on support in selected areas where our specialist expertise could add the greatest value.

- **Data and benefit calculations:** Working with the administrator, specialist data advisers and the insurer, we led large-scale calculation and verification exercises. These covered complex data items, benefit calculations, contingent pensions and Guaranteed Minimum Pension (GMP) equalisation. Our work supported the pricing and settlement process, helped the trustee understand the cost implications of the benefits being secured and enabled information to be provided to the insurer in stages, supporting steady progress throughout.
- **Surplus analysis and decision support:** We helped the trustee assess the available options by analysing how the surplus had developed, potential benefit improvements and their cost. We continued to monitor the emerging funding position so that the trustee and its advisers had a current and consistent basis for decision-making.
- **Member engagement:** We established a structured process to monitor and analyse a large volume of member submissions during the surplus consultation process. We identified recurring themes, provided regular reports to the trustee and helped ensure that the points raised by members were considered as part of the trustee's deliberations and follow-up communications.
- **Residual risk due diligence:** We coordinated the extensive information and evidence required by the insurer to assess and price residual risk cover. We brought together input from the scheme's advisers, managed the initial information request and supported responses to follow-up queries. Close collaboration across the adviser team helped the trustee manage this demanding, multi-stage process alongside the other steps needed for buy-out.

A great outcome for the client

The scheme moved to buy-out and secured all members' benefits with the insurer in April 2026. Our governance support helped the trustee approach key decisions in a structured, informed and well-evidenced way. Our detailed work on selected complex areas helped address potential barriers to progress and gave the trustee the analysis and evidence it needed at critical points in the journey.

The case study also highlights a wider lesson for large schemes. Where many stakeholders and advisers are involved, close collaboration and a clear governance structure, including defined roles and responsibilities, are essential. Within that structure, focused specialist support can help address the areas of greatest complexity and give trustees confidence in both the decisions reached and the process followed.

To discuss how we can support schemes in their journey to buy-out or hear more about our insights from advising a wide range of large DB schemes, please contact one of our experts below, or get in touch here.



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You can catch-up on more large DB scheme case studies in our series by accessing our hub page.

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