

Scheme Advisory Board

Questions received for 21st August Pooled Investment Event.

Q1. The current regulatory framework within which the LGPS operates makes it difficult for funds to collaborate on investments without a requirement to achieve FCA registration which entails additional cost and complexity. It should be possible to revise the Investment Regulations to allow funds to work together, within guidelines, without unnecessary regulation.

Are ministers receptive to a revision of the regulatory framework to enable funds to work together more easily? If so, will this be undertaken at the same time as the pooling consultation?

A1. Yes, as part of the package, government will consult on revising the investment regulations. It has been noted that the initiatives to be implemented in the near term, i.e. the London CIV, have needed to work through barriers in order to get the current stage. Although amended investment regulations might be required to facilitate ease of implementation of investment pooling without having to establish third party companies and FCA regulation, it is not currently clear that this will achieve the intended aim.

Q2. How do low cost internally managed LGPS schemes fit into their view for the LGPS?

A2. The intention is for all LGPS assets to be pooled, there will not be exemptions for any fund. However, the package for the LGPS is deliberately not over-prescriptive. The criteria for investment pools will include some detail on governance, size, and cost, but it will be up to LGPS funds to work together to uphold proposed investment pools against the criteria. There is an issue of scale to address, and a need to collaborate with others with the same goals. Government can help proposals through regulatory change.

Q3. Funds are required to demonstrate cost savings, however as investment arrangements are income contracts as returns improve you pay higher fees, arguably you want to be paying more as it demonstrates you are earning more? Is “cost savings” the right question or should it be “Value for Money”?

A3. Both costs and the return on investments are important. It is recognised that i) there are industry-wide issues with investment expenses transparency, and ii) each fund will be starting from a different point. There is evidence to suggest larger pools may be more cost effective, benefitting from economies of scale. The government is looking at a timescale longer than term of office for any cost savings to fully materialise. Without having set the criteria, questions around demonstrating cost savings against them are difficult to answer.

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Q4. There has not been any work to achieve a consistent fee base or fee budget for the wider LGPS to measure against, so how is the integrity of fee saving submissions established.

A4. LGPS policy has moved on from 2013 when the call for evidence brought investment costs into focus and ignited the passive versus active debate. Since then it has been shown that LGPS Funds had managed to negotiate competitive fee bases. Fee savings are one of the reasons, but not the primary reason, for pooling investments. As above, the criteria have not been set, nor the nature of the pools; therefore submissions would need to be backed up with evidence.

Q5. How are CIV structures more likely to generate savings over shared procurement initiatives, especially as CIV's have an operating cost, governance and access challenges to overcome?

A5. The policy intention would not be met by frameworks and/or procurement initiatives alone. If the end result is that the investments of the LGPS are to be held in four or five robust CIVs, similar to the London CIV, the government would not be disappointed. CIVs, however, were not prescribed in the budget, and there are other, just as acceptable, means for investment pooling.

One of the long term detractors in performance is investment manager turnover; its extent would be reduced as a result of pooling investments. The eventual solutions would need to be considered, backed up by research and require a lead in time to implementation.

Q6. How do we ensure that our proposals are not a patchwork quilt many of which may not meet the size criteria and/or overlap with each other? Do we need a moratorium on any new initiatives while we develop proposals and will the Board be looking to compile responses into a number of cohesive options?

A6. The criteria consultation is a continuum, with the 21st August Q&A/forum forming part of the process. Grouping for pools have yet to be defined, but regional, asset, liability and philosophy bases have been discussed. The Board will have a central role in coordinating responses and analysis to support the proposals and the development of suitable proposals is a challenge for the room.

Q7. I would like to know if there are any particular plans for funds with low cost, outperforming internal investment teams.

A7. As above, the intention is for all LGPS assets to be pooled, there will not be exemptions for any fund. However, outperforming internal investment teams are well placed to work together to lead and influence the pooling proposals.

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Q8. Has the option of negotiating an LGPS fee with external managers been considered without the need to pool funds? I understand that some managers are offering this already.

A8. As above, the policy intention would not be met by frameworks and/or procurement initiatives alone. A “keep doing what you’re doing”, “business as usual” option would not be acceptable to government.

Q9. Can it be confirmed if this issue/consultation includes Scotland or is it purely England & Wales.

A9. The consultation is for England and Wales, and the criteria setting will be carried out by DCLG. The regulations for the LGPS in Scotland are devolved, therefore Scotland is not included.

Q10. Some asset class mandates are restricted by capacity, for example, private equity. Are these sorts of asset class exempt from pooling?

A10. It is the intention that all asset classes would be included in pooling, including alternatives asset classes, property, private equity etc.

Q11. What are the timescales?

A11. Criteria should be available in the autumn, and government will expect a report on how work has moved forward by next March. A ‘clear direction of travel’ would be useful within the next six months. Proposals are expected to be realised within the lifetime of this parliament. It is recognised that this is a challenge – but Secretary of State has a preference for collaboration over prescription.

Q12. Will financial support be provided to help establish investment pooling infrastructure (i.e. setting up systems, processes and staff etc, not infrastructure as an asset class)?

A12. Funds will be expected to meet the costs of restructuring investments from their own budgets. As mentioned earlier, and in the knowledge that expenses will be considerable, the government is looking at a timescale longer than term of office for any cost savings to fully materialise.