



Merseyside Pension Fund Funding Strategy Statement 2009

This Statement has been prepared by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (the Administering Authority) to set out the funding strategy for the Merseyside Pension Fund (the Fund), in accordance with Regulation 76A of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 1997 (as amended) and the guidance paper issued in March and November 2004 by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Pensions Panel.



Amended: 22 September 2009

Merseyside Pension Fund

Funding Strategy Statement (FSS)

1. Introduction

The Local Government Pension Scheme (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2004 provide the statutory framework from which the Administering Authority is required to prepare a Funding Strategy Statement. The key requirements for preparing the FSS can be summarised as follows:

- After consultation with all relevant interested parties involved with the Fund the Administering Authority will prepare and publish their funding strategy;
- In preparing the FSS, the Administering Authority must have regard to :-
 - the guidance issued by CIPFA for this purpose; and
 - the revised Statement of Investment Principles (SIP) for the Fund dated **26 November 2007** published under Regulation 9A of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Management and Investment of Funds) Regulations 1998 (as amended);
- The FSS must be revised and published whenever there is a material change in either the policy on the matters set out in the FSS or the Statement of Investment Principles.

Benefits payable under the Fund are guaranteed by statute and thereby the pensions promise is secure. The FSS addresses the issue of managing the need to fund those benefits over the long term, whilst at the same time, facilitating scrutiny and accountability through improved transparency and disclosure.

The Fund is a defined benefit final salary scheme under which the benefits are specified in the governing legislation:

the LGPS (Administration) Regulations 2008,
the LGPS (Benefits, Contributions & Membership) Regulations 2007 and
the LGPS (Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2007, “the Regulations”.

The required levels of employee contributions are also specified in the Regulations.

Employer contributions are determined in accordance with the Regulations (currently principally Regulation 39 and 36) which requires that an actuarial valuation is completed every three years by the actuary, including a rates and adjustments certificate. Contributions to the Fund should be set so as to “secure its solvency”, whilst the actuary must also have regard to the desirability of maintaining as nearly constant a rate of contribution as possible. The actuary must have regard to the FSS in carrying out the valuation.

2. Purpose of the FSS in policy terms

Funding is the making of advance provision to meet the cost of accruing benefit promises. Decisions taken regarding the approach to funding will therefore determine the rate or pace at which this advance provision is made. Although the Regulations specify the fundamental principles on which funding contributions should be assessed, implementation of the funding strategy is the responsibility of the Administering Authority, acting on the professional advice provided by the actuary.

The purpose of this Funding Strategy Statement is:

- **to establish a clear and transparent fund-specific strategy which will identify how employers' pension liabilities are best met going forward;**
- **to support the regulatory requirement to maintain as nearly constant employer contribution rates as possible; and**
- **to take a prudent longer-term view of funding those liabilities.**

The intention is for this strategy to be both cohesive and comprehensive for the Fund as a whole, recognising that there will be conflicting objectives which need to be balanced and reconciled. Whilst the position of individual employers must be reflected in the statement, it must remain a single strategy for the Administering Authority to implement and maintain.

3. Aims and purpose of the Pension Fund

The aims of the Fund are to:

- enable employer contribution rates to be kept as nearly constant as possible and at reasonable cost to the taxpayers, scheduled, resolution and admitted bodies
- manage employers' liabilities effectively
- ensure that sufficient resources are available to meet all liabilities as they fall due, and
- maximise the returns from investments within reasonable risk parameters.

The purpose of the Fund is to:

- receive monies in respect of contributions, transfer values and investment income, and
- pay out monies in respect of Fund benefits, transfer values, costs, charges and expenses,

as defined in the various Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations:

The Local Government Pension Scheme (Management and Investment of Funds) Regulations 1998 (as amended).

The Local Government Pension Scheme (Administration) Regulations.

The Local Government Pension Scheme (Benefits, Contributions & Membership) Regulations, and

The Local Government Pension Scheme (Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2007.

4. Responsibilities of the key parties

These are as set out in the relevant regulations as amended from time to time – The LGPS (Administration) Regulations, the LGPS (Benefits, Contributions & Membership) Regulations and the LGPS (Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2007, “the Regulations”.

The Administering Authority should:

- collect employer and employee contributions
- invest surplus monies in accordance with the Regulations
- ensure that cash is available to meet liabilities as and when they fall due
- manage the valuation process in consultation with the actuary
- prepare and maintain an FSS and a SIP, both after due consultation with interested parties, and
- monitor all aspects of the Fund’s performance and funding and amend FSS/SIP.

The Individual Employer should:

- deduct contributions from employees’ pay correctly
- pay all contributions, including their own as determined by the actuary, promptly by the due date
- exercise discretions within the regulatory framework
- make additional contributions in accordance with agreed arrangements in respect of, for example, augmentation of Fund benefits, early retirement strain, and
- notify the Administering Authority promptly of all changes to membership or, as may be proposed, which affect future funding.

The Fund actuary should:

- prepare valuations including the setting of employers’ contribution rates after agreeing assumptions with the Administering Authority and having regard to the FSS
- prepare advice and calculations in connection with bulk transfers and individual benefit-related matters, and
- advise on funding strategy, the preparation of the FSS, and the inter-relationship between the FSS and the SIP.

5. Solvency issues and target funding levels

The funding objective

To meet the requirements of the Regulations the Administering Authority's long term funding objective is for the Fund to achieve and then maintain sufficient assets to cover 100% of projected accrued liabilities (the "**funding target**") assessed on an ongoing basis including allowance for projected final pay.

Determination of the funding target and recovery period

The principal method and assumptions to be used in the calculation of the **funding target** are set out in the Appendix.

Underlying these assumptions are the following two tenets:

- that the Scheme is expected to continue for the foreseeable future; and
- favourable investment performance can play a valuable role in achieving adequate funding over the longer term.

As part of each valuation separate employer contribution rates are assessed by the actuary for each participating employer or group of employers. These rates are assessed taking into account the experience and circumstances of each employer (or employer grouping), following a principle of no cross-subsidy between the various employers in the Scheme. In attributing the overall investment performance obtained on the assets of the Scheme to each employer a pro-rata principle is adopted. This approach is effectively one of applying a notional individual employer investment strategy identical to that adopted for the Scheme as a whole.

The Administering Authority, following consultation with the participating employers, has adopted the following objectives for setting the individual employer contribution rates:

- LEA Schools and certain other employers within the Fund have been grouped with the respective Council.
- A maximum deficit recovery period of 25 years will apply for scheme employers and a 15 year maximum period will apply to admitted bodies. For employers who do not admit new members, the recovery period will be limited to the future working lifetime of the membership. Shorter periods will also be applied for employers who have a limited participation in the Fund. Employers will have the freedom to adopt a recovery plan on the basis of a shorter period if they so wish. A shorter period may also be applied in respect of particular employers where the Administering Authority considers this to be warranted (**see Deficit Recovery Plan below**).

- Where the employer contribution rate required from 1 April 2008 increases by 1% of pay or more following completion of the 2007 actuarial valuation, the increase from the rates of contribution payable in the year 2007/08 may be implemented in steps, over a maximum period of 3 years.
- On the cessation of an employer's participation in the Scheme, the actuary will be asked to make a termination assessment. Any deficit in the Scheme in respect of the employer will be due to the Scheme as a termination contribution, unless it is agreed by the Administering Authority and the other parties involved that the assets and liabilities relating to the employer will transfer within the Scheme to another participating employer.

Depending on the circumstances of the termination event this assessment and in particular whether another Fund employer is prepared to act as guarantor to the residual liabilities will incorporate a more cautious basis of assessment of the final liabilities for the employer. Where it may be appropriate to use a more cautious basis the financial assumptions used will be derived to be consistent with the equivalent assumptions adopted for the FRS17 accounting standard. This is subject to the financial assumptions used being no less cautious than the equivalent valuation assumptions updated appropriately based on the advice of the actuary. Full details of the approach to be adopted for such an assessment on termination are set out in the separate termination policy report dated 28 January 2008.

In determining the above objectives the Administering Authority has had regard to:

- the responses made to the consultation with employers on the FSS principles
- relevant guidance issued by the CIPFA Pensions Panel
- the need to balance a desire to attain the target as soon as possible against the short-term cash requirements which a shorter period would impose, and
- the Administering Authority's views on the strength of the participating employers' covenants in achieving the objective.

Deficit recovery plan

If the assets of the scheme relating to an employer are less than the **funding target** at the effective date of any actuarial valuation, a recovery plan will be put in place, which requires additional contributions from the employer to meet the shortfall.

Additional contributions will be expressed as a level percentage of pensionable payroll or as a monetary lump sum.

In determining the actual recovery period to apply for any particular employer to employer grouping, the Administering Authority may take into account some or all of the following factors:

- the size of the funding shortfall;
- the business plans of the employer;
- the assessment of the financial covenant of the Employer;
- any contingent security available to the Fund or offered by the Employer such as guarantor or bond arrangements, charge over assets, etc.

For those employers with no guarantor or bond arrangements in place, a higher **funding target** will be adopted. The contribution rate for these employers will be determined to target a funding position of 120% for the liabilities of the current active membership. The **funding target** for the non-active liabilities will be as defined earlier.

The normal cost of the scheme (future service contribution rate)

In addition to any contributions required to rectify a shortfall of assets below the **funding target** contributions will be required to meet the cost of future accrual of benefits for members after the valuation date (the “normal cost”). The method and assumptions for assessing these contributions are also set out in the Appendix.

Funding For Non-III Health Early Retirement Costs

Employers are required to meet all costs of early retirement strain either by immediate capital payments into the Fund or in certain circumstances by agreement with the Fund, by instalments over a period not exceeding 5 years or if less the remaining period of the body’s membership of the Fund.

6. **Link to investment policy set out in the Statement of Investment Principles**

The results of the 2007 valuation show the liabilities to be 80% (compared to 76% at 31 March 2004) covered by the current assets, with the funding deficit of 20% being covered by future deficit contributions.

In assessing the value of the Fund's liabilities in the valuation, allowance has been made for asset out-performance as described in the **Appendix**, taking into account the investment strategy adopted by the Fund, as set out in the SIP.

It is not possible to construct a portfolio of investments which produces a stream of income exactly matching the expected liability outgo. However, it is possible to construct a portfolio which closely matches the liabilities and represents the least risk investment position. Such a portfolio would consist of a mixture of long-term index-linked and fixed interest gilts.

Investment of the Fund's assets in line with the least risk portfolio would minimise fluctuations in the Fund's ongoing funding level between successive actuarial valuations.

If, at the valuation date, the Fund had been invested in this portfolio, then in carrying out the valuation it would not be appropriate to make any allowance for out-performance of the investments. On this basis of assessment, the assessed value of the Fund's liabilities at the 31 March 2007 valuation would have been significantly higher and the declared funding level would be correspondingly lower at 63%.

Departure from a least risk investment strategy, in particular to include equity investments, gives the prospect that out-performance by the assets will, over time, reduce the contribution requirements. The funding target might in practice therefore be achieved by a range of combinations of funding plan, investment strategy and investment performance.

Proposed Benchmark Investment Strategy and Asset Allocation

MPF MULTI ASSET PORTFOLIO		
Asset Class	Bench mark	Benchmark index
UK Equities	30	FTSE ALL SHARE INDEX
Overseas Equities	29	
US Equities	8	FTSE AW NORTH AMERICA
European Equities	10	FTSE WORLD EUROPE EX UK
Japan	4	FTSE AW JAPAN
Pacific ex -Japan	3	FTSE AW DEV ASIA PAC EX JAPAN
Emerging Markets	4	MSCI EMERGING MARKETS FREE
Fixed Interest	20	
UK Gilts	4	FTSE A ALL STOCKS
Overseas Gilts	0	JPM GLOBAL GOVT EX UK
UK Index Linked	12	FTSE UK GILTS INDEXED ALL STKS
Corporate Bonds	4	ML £ NON GILTS
Property	10	IPD ALL PROPERTIES INDEX
Venture Capital/ Other Investments	10	GBP 7 DAY LIBID
Cash	1	GBP 3 MONTH LIBID
TOTAL	100	SPECIFIC BENCH MARK

The proposed benchmark investment strategy and asset allocation to be set out in the SIP is shown in the table above.

The funding strategy adopted for the 2007 valuation was based on an assumed asset out-performance of 2% in respect of liabilities pre-retirement, and 1% in respect of post-retirement liabilities. Based on the liability profile of the Fund at the valuation, this equated to a long term overall asset out-performance allowance of 1.4% p.a.

The Administering Authority believes that this is a reasonable and prudent allowance for asset out-performance, based on the investment strategy adopted as set out in the SIP.

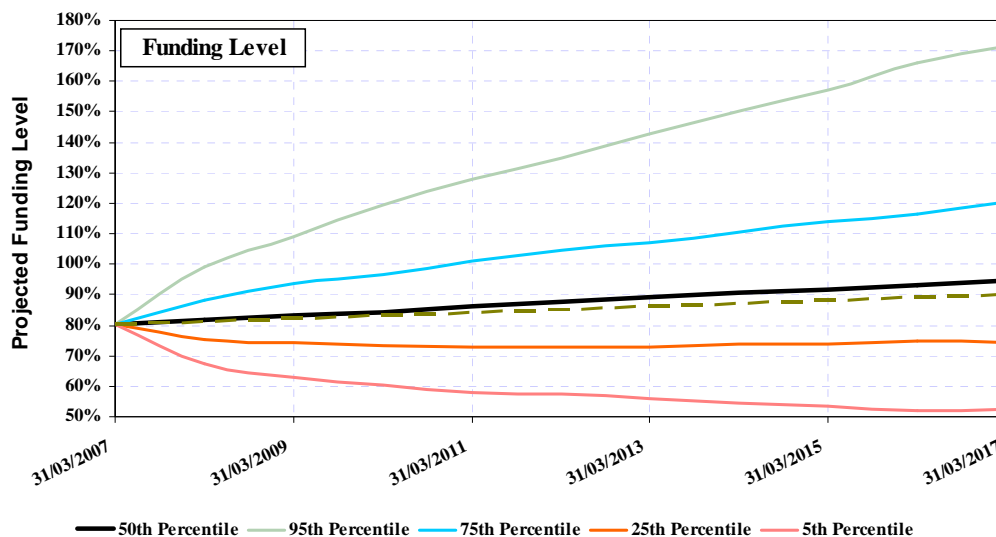
7. Identification of risks and counter-measures

The funding of defined benefits is by its nature uncertain. Funding of the Fund is based on both financial and demographic assumptions. These assumptions are specified in the actuarial valuation report. When actual experience is not in line with the assumptions adopted a surplus or shortfall will emerge at the next actuarial assessment and will require a subsequent contribution adjustment to bring the funding back into line with the target.

The Administering Authority has been advised by the actuary that the greatest risk to the Fund's funding is the investment risk inherent in the predominantly equity based strategy, so that actual asset out-performance between successive valuations could diverge significantly from the overall 1.4% per annum assumed in the long term.

The chart below shows a "funnel of doubt" funding level graph, which illustrates the probability of exceeding a certain funding level over a 10 year period from the valuation date. For example, the top line shows the 95th percentile level (i.e. there is a 5% chance of the projected funding level at each point in time being better than the funding level shown and a 95% chance of the funding level being lower). The graph adopts the 2007 actuarial valuation results as a starting point, and allows for the expected contributions into the Fund assuming a 25 year recovery period. An overall out-performance over and above gilts yields has been assumed in line with best estimate market expectations, together with a continuation of the current investment strategy as outlined above.

Projected Future Funding Levels:



The following key risks have been identified.

Financial

- Investment markets fail to perform in line with expectations
- Market yields move at variance with assumptions
- Investment Fund Managers fail to achieve performance targets over the longer term
- Asset re-allocations in volatile markets may lock in past losses
- Pay and price inflation significantly more or less than anticipated
- Effect of possible increase in employer's contribution rate on service delivery and admitted/scheduled bodies

Demographic

- Longevity horizon continues to expand
- Deteriorating pattern of early retirements

Regulatory

- Changes to Regulations, e.g. more favourable benefits package, potential new entrants to Fund, e.g. part-time employees
- Changes to national pension requirements and/or Inland Revenue rules

Governance

Wirral Borough Council as the administering authority for Merseyside Pension Fund has delegated responsibility and accountability for over seeing the Fund to the Pensions Committee.

The Pensions Committee is made up of ten Members nominated by Wirral, one nominated from each of the other four metropolitan authorities and a representative of the other admitted and scheduled bodies elected by ballot. Aside from the representative Member, changes to Committee membership are subject to the political leadership of the Councils, although efforts are made to limit rotation where possible.

The Committee meets 4-5 times a year and has set up an Investment Monitoring Working Party which meets at least 4 times a year to monitor investment performance and developments.

The Committee has delegated powers to the Director of Finance for the day to day running of the Fund.

There is a clear decision making process for the operations of the Fund, major decisions are taken and minuted at monthly Fund Operating Group meetings attended by the Director and Deputy Director of Finance and senior MPF managers.

There is a significant resource dedicated on an annual basis for Member training which is provided both internally and externally.

There are service level agreements between the administering authority and employers which set out the requirements for the two way flow of information. The employer should notify the administering authority of the following events.

- *Structural change in employer's membership e.g. large fall in employee numbers or large number of retirements.*
- *A closure in accessibility of the scheme to new entrants.*
- *An employer ceasing to exist.*

It is the responsibility of the Director of Finance to monitor information flows identifying risks to the Fund and to inform the Pensions Committee / take appropriate action where required.

8. Monitoring and Review

The Administering Authority has taken advice from the actuary in preparing this Statement, and has also consulted with the employers participating in the Fund.

A full review of this Statement will occur no less frequently than every three years, to coincide with completion of a full actuarial valuation. Any review will take account of then current economic conditions and will also reflect any legislative changes.

The Administering Authority will monitor the progress of the funding strategy between full actuarial valuations. If considered appropriate, the funding strategy will be reviewed (other than as part of the triennial valuation process), for example:

- if there has been a significant change in market conditions, and/or deviation in the progress of the funding strategy
- if there have been significant changes to the Fund membership, or LGPS benefits
- if there have been changes to the circumstances of any of the employing authorities to such an extent that they impact on or warrant a change in the funding strategy
- if there have been any significant special contributions paid into the Fund.

APPENDIX

Actuarial Valuation as at 31 March 2007

Method and assumptions used in calculating the funding target

Method

The actuarial method to be used in the calculation of the funding target is the Projected Unit method, under which the salary increases assumed for each member are projected until that member is assumed to leave active service by death, retirement or withdrawal from service. This method implicitly allows for new entrants to the scheme on the basis that the overall age profile of the active membership will remain stable. As a result, for those employers which are closed to new entrants, unless specifically agreed otherwise, an alternative method is adopted (The Attained Age method), which makes advance allowance for the anticipated future aging and decline of the current closed membership group.

Financial assumptions

Investment return (discount rate)

A yield based on market returns on UK Government gilt stocks and other instruments which reflects a market consistent discount rate for the profile and duration of the Scheme's accrued liabilities, plus an Asset Out-performance Assumption ("AOA") of 2% p.a. for the period pre-retirement and 1% p.a. post-retirement.

The asset out-performance assumptions represent the allowance made, in calculating the funding target, for the long term additional investment performance on the assets of the Fund relative to the yields available on long dated gilt stocks as at the valuation date. The allowance for this out-performance is based on the liability profile of the Scheme, with a higher assumption in respect of the "pre-retirement" (i.e. active and deferred pensioner) liabilities than for the "post-retirement" (i.e. pensioner) liabilities. This approach thereby allows for a gradual shift in the overall equity/bond weighting of the Fund as the liability profile of the membership matures over time.

Individual Employers

Having determined the AOAs as above for the Fund overall, it is important to consider how the financial assumptions in particular impact on individual participating employers. As employers in the Fund will have different mixes of active, deferred and pensioner members, adopting a different pre/post retirement investment return approach is equivalent to hypothecating a different equity/bond mix investment strategy for each employer. Such an

approach would be inconsistent with the Fund practice, as set out in the FSS, of allocating investment performance pro rata across all employers based on a “mirror image” investment strategy to the whole Fund. In completing the calculations for individual employers therefore, a single, composite, pre and post retirement asset out-performance assumption of 1.4% p.a. has been calculated which, for the Fund as a whole, gives the same value of the funding target as the separate pre and post retirement AOA's.

Inflation (Retail Prices Index)

The inflation assumption will be taken to be the investment market's expectation for inflation as indicated by the difference between yields derived from market instruments, principally conventional and index-linked UK Government gilts as at the valuation date, reflecting the profile and duration of the Scheme's accrued liabilities.

Salary increases

The assumption for real salary increases (salary increases in excess of price inflation) will be determined by an allowance of 1.25% p.a. over the inflation assumption as described above. This includes allowance for promotional increases.

Pension increases

Increases to pensions are assumed to be in line with the inflation (RPI) assumption described above. This is modified appropriately to reflect any benefits which are not fully indexed in line with the RPI (e.g. Guaranteed Minimum Pensions in respect of service prior to April 1997).

Mortality

The mortality assumptions will be based on the most up-to-date information published by the Continuous Mortality Investigation Bureau, making allowance for future improvements in longevity and the experience of the scheme. The mortality tables used are PA92 Year of Birth tables with medium cohort improvements, with an age rating reflecting Scheme specific experience of +2 years.

Members who retire on the grounds of ill health are assumed to exhibit average mortality equivalent to that for a good health retiree at an age 5 years older.

Commutation

It has been assumed that, on average, 50% of retiring members will take the maximum tax-free cash available at retirement and 50% will take the standard 3/80ths cash sum. The option which members have to commute part of their pension at retirement in return for a lump sum is a rate of £12 cash for each £1 p.a. of pension given up.

Method and assumptions used in calculating the cost of future accrual

The cost of future accrual (normal cost) will be calculated using the same actuarial method and assumptions as used to calculate the funding target except that the financial assumptions adopted will be as described below. The financial assumptions for assessing the future service contribution rate should take account of the following points:

- contributions will be invested in market conditions applying at future dates, which are unknown at the effective date of the valuation, and which are not directly linked to market conditions at the valuation date; and
- the future service liabilities for which these contributions will be paid have a longer average duration than the past service liabilities.

The financial assumptions in relation to future service (i.e. the normal cost) are not specifically linked to investment conditions as at the valuation date itself, and are based on an overall assumed real return (i.e. return in excess of price inflation) of 3.75% per annum, with a long term average assumption for price inflation of 2.75% per annum. These two assumptions give rise to an overall discount rate of 6.5% p.a.

Adopting this approach the future service rate is not subject to variation solely due to different market conditions applying at each successive valuation, which reflects the requirement in the Regulations for stability in the "Common Rate" of contributions. In market conditions at the effective date of the 2007 valuation this approach gives rise to a somewhat more optimistic stance in relation to the cost of accrual of future benefits compared to the market related basis used for the assessment of the funding target.

At each valuation the cost of the benefits accrued since the previous valuation will become a past service liability. At that time any mismatch against gilt yields and the asset out-performance assumptions used for the funding target is fully taken into account in assessing the funding position.

Summary of key whole Fund assumptions used for calculating funding target and cost of future accrual (the “normal cost”) for the 2007 actuarial valuation

Long-term gilt yields	
Fixed interest	4.4% p.a.
Index linked	1.3% p.a.
Implied RPI price inflation	3.1% p.a.
Past service Funding Target financial assumptions	
Investment return pre-retirement	6.40% p.a.
Investment return post-retirement	5.40% p.a.
Salary increases	4.35% p.a.
Pension increases	3.10% p.a.
Future service accrual financial assumptions	
Investment return	6.5% p.a.
RPI price inflation	2.75% p.a.
Salary increases	4% p.a.
Pension increases	2.75% p.a.
Demographic assumptions	
Non-retired members' mortality	PA92 MC YoB tables + 2 years (+7 years for retirements in ill health)
Retired members' mortality	PA92 MC YoB tables + 2 years (+7 years for retirements in ill health)
Commutation	One half of members take maximum lump sum, others take 3/80ths
Withdrawal	Increased allowance compared to 2004 valuation for younger members to leave service
Other demographics	As for 2004 Valuation