

# Teesside Pension Board

## Annual Report 2021 – 2022



## 1. Background

The **Teesside Pension Fund** is the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) for local authority employees in the Teesside region (and employees working for other bodies that are eligible to participate). The Fund has over 71,500 members, and assets of approximately £5 billion (as at 31 December 2021).

The administering authority for the Teesside Pension Fund is Middlesbrough Council on behalf of all participating employers. The Council has granted authority to manage the investments of the Fund (within the requirements of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations) to the **Teesside Pension Fund Committee** which has plenary powers to make decisions without reference to the Council. The Committee consists of elected members of Middlesbrough Council, representatives from the other unitary authorities and other employers and the trade unions (all of whom have voting rights). The Committee receives support and advice from a number of sources including Council officers and the Fund's Investment Advisers.

Section 5 of the *Public Service Pensions Act 2013* required every LGPS to establish a Board to assist in assuring that the administration of its Pension Scheme complies with all relevant legislation. Pensions Boards are specifically required to assist in:

- (a) securing compliance with:
  - (i) scheme regulations and other legislation relating to the governance and administration of the scheme;
  - (ii) any requirements imposed in relation to the scheme by the Pensions Regulator;
  - (iii) such other matters as the scheme regulations may specify
- (b) ensuring the effective and efficient governance and administration of the Scheme.

In accordance with the *Public Service Pensions Act 2013* and the Local Government Pension Scheme regulations, the **Teesside Pension Board** ('the Board') was created on 1 April 2015 to assist in the administration of the Teesside Pension Fund. The Board's formal statement of purpose is:

To assist the Administering Authority in its role as a scheme manager of the Scheme. Such assistance is to:

- (a) secure compliance with the Regulations, any other legislation relating to the governance and administration of the Scheme, and requirements imposed by the Pensions Regulator in relation to the Scheme; and
- (b) to ensure the effective and efficient governance and administration of the Scheme.

This means that the Board is providing oversight of these matters and, accordingly, the Board is not a decision making body in relation to the management of the Pension Fund. The Board makes recommendations and provides assurance to assist in the management of the Fund.

The Board consists of six voting members – three employer representatives and three member representatives. Two employer representatives are appointed from the Councils of Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees, and one employer representative is chosen from all other Scheme employers. Two member representatives are appointed from the recognised trades unions representing employees who are Scheme

members, and one member representative is appointed from the pensioner Scheme members.

Colin Monson was Chair of the Board for the first two meetings of the year but stepped down from the Board to pursue other interests having served as either Chair or Deputy Chair for six years (since the Board's inception). Gary Whitehouse (the Deputy Chair at the start of the year and also previously the Board's Chair) also resigned from the Board early in the year. The Board formally acknowledged, recognised and thanked both Colin and Gary for their time and valuable contributions to the Board since its inception.

Cllr Barrie Cooper took over the role of Chair from the November 2021 meeting, and Paul Thompson of UNISON took over the role of Deputy Chair from the February 2022 meeting. During the year the Board also welcomed a new pensioner representative, Jeff Bell. There is currently a vacancy on the Board for the 'other scheme employers' representative.

This is the sixth Annual Report of the Board, for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

## **2. Introduction**

Welcome to the sixth Annual Report of the Teesside Pension Board.

The Board seeks to assist the administering authority of the Teesside Pension Fund to maintain effective and efficient governance. We continue to be supported in this role by officers of Middlesbrough Council (the administering authority for Teesside Pension Fund), and we have also been assisted by specialist external advisers, and by staff from XPS Administration who deal with the day to day pension administration.

As highlighted in previous annual reports Teesside Pension Fund has entered into an agreement to pool what now represents most of its investments with other LGPS Funds through Border to Coast Pensions Partnership Limited ('Border to Coast'). Border to Coast was set up, and is wholly owned, by eleven LGPS administering authorities each responsible for an LGPS fund (originally twelve administering authorities were involved until the long-planned merger of two of those authorities was confirmed last year and backdated to 1 April 2020). Border to Coast was established to meet central government's requirement that local government pension schemes pool their investment assets with the aims of providing savings and improving governance. Middlesbrough Council (as administering authority for the Teesside Pension Fund) is one of the owners and customers of Border to Coast.

Initial investments with Border to Coast were in public equities (or shares) and all the Fund's UK equities transferred during 2018/19 to be managed by Border to Coast, using the same low-cost 'internally-managed' approach but delivered by a larger team of investment professionals based in Leeds. The Fund also made a relatively small initial investment in Border to Coast's internally-managed overseas equity fund during 2018/19. During the year to 31 March 2022 the Fund completed the transfer the majority of its overseas equities from being managed passively (by State Street Global Advisors) to being actively managed by Border to Coast. The Fund has also invested in Border to Coast's Emerging Markets Fund. As at 31 December 2021, 57.5% of the Fund's assets were invested through Border to Coast, with this percentage expected to increase over the coming months and years.

Teesside Pension Board has received updates and commented on the process of establishing and developing Border to Coast. The Board is conscious that the Teesside

Pension Fund is fully funded and has benefited from low running costs. The Board will therefore continue to closely monitor the progress of Border to Coast to satisfy itself that any movement of assets into Border to Coast remains in the interest of the Teesside Pension Fund and its members, and that Border to Coast is meeting the aims of providing savings and improving governance.

### **3. Board Activity 2021 – 2022**

For the nine months from April to December 2021 global equity markets were collectively very positive, although with significant variation across regions: the US performing the strongest, followed by Europe and the UK, with Asia Pacific, Japan and emerging markets only really trading water at best. Economic growth was encouraging, following the gradual return to normality as Covid-19 risks appeared to subside. Japanese markets were particularly affected as important industrial sectors were hit by global supply-chain shortages and a slow recovery in consumer spending.

The generally benign outlook was threatened briefly towards the end of 2021 with the emergence of the Omicron variant, although market reaction was short-lived once it became apparent that this looked to be less of a threat than previous variants in areas with high vaccination rates.

Emerging markets did not do well. The usually reliably expansive Chinese economy became a drag on returns: Economic growth slowed, property developers faced financing challenges and an unexpected state intervention effectively removed all capital value from the previously burgeoning private education industry. Elsewhere, emerging markets suffered some issues caused by lower volumes of effective vaccines than developed markets enjoyed.

The first three months of 2022 were dominated by Russia's threats to and eventual invasion of Ukraine and the growing awareness of the serious humanitarian, political and financial consequences of Russia's aggression. The invasion exacerbated already rising fuel costs and inflationary pressures, with the Bank of England increasing its forecast inflation from 7% to "around 8% this spring. We think it could go even higher later this year."<sup>1</sup> Inflation is a global issue, with other central banks increasing their forecast inflationary peaks and measures being taken or planned to increase interest rates from their long-time historic lows. Although the Board has no role in deciding how the Fund is invested, it does have a role in overseeing the Committee's actions in this respect. As the global economy enters a more challenging less benign period, the Fund's investment approach is likely to face challenges and the Board's oversight role will remain important during the coming months and years.

Over the course of 2021/22 all four of the planned meetings were held and were quorate, the first three were held remotely, as a consequence of the restrictions in place to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. The fourth meeting (on 21 February 2022) was held in person, as restrictions eased. The Board has been able to continue in its role and carry out its responsibilities to ensure effective governance. As well as continuing to receiving minutes from Pension Fund Committee meetings (meetings which all Board members are able to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/knowledgebank/will-inflation-in-the-uk-keep-rising> (updated 18 March 2022)

attend and all Board members receive agendas for), over the course of the year the Board has considered papers or had oral reports covering the following areas:

- An update to the Fund's Strategic Asset Allocation
- A revised Funding Strategy Statement for the Fund
- The Fund's annual Business Plan
- The Board's own Annual Report
- The Draft Annual Report for the Fund (containing the Fund's accounts).
- Board membership and training, including an update on participation in the national knowledge assessment
- Administration reports from XPS – these include performance against service level agreement targets, information on general administration activity, statistics on appeals cases and details of current and future issues impacting, or potentially impacting, on the administration of the Fund.
- Updates on current issues affecting the Fund, including:
  - the revocation of the cap on exit payments over £95,000
  - the Scheme Advisory Board's final Good Governance report,
  - the Pension Regulator's consultation on a new single code of practice for pension schemes
  - the consultation on implementing the increase to the minimum pension age
  - the conclusion of the LGPS cost management process
  - the pending climate change reporting regulations expected for the LGPS
  - the 'revised underpin' outcome expected to apply to correct the discrimination identified by the McCloud case
  - the government's announcement of the role it expects the LGPS to take as part of its 'levelling-up' agenda
  - the result of the Government Actuary's Department's Section 13 LGPS scheme valuation comparison report
  - the consultation on introducing pensions dashboards; and
  - the forthcoming valuation of the Fund as at 31 March 2022.
- Updates on work programme items (see below), including Board conflicts of interest, Board and Committee training, Fund procurements and reporting breaches of law.

#### **4. Board work programme**

At its 19 July 2021 meeting the Board confirmed that the focus of its activity would be guided by the general principles set out by the Pensions Regulator. The Pensions Regulator's website lists the following areas of governance and administration that those responsible for running, overseeing or advising a public service pension scheme need to focus on:

- **“Reporting duties**  
Managers of public service pension schemes must ensure that the scheme return we issue each year is completed on time. They must also tell us of any changes to their scheme's 'registrable information' as soon as possible.
- **Internal controls and managing risks**  
Public service pension schemes need to have good internal controls. They are a key characteristic of a well-run scheme and will enable risks to the scheme to be managed effectively.

- **Record-keeping**  
Failing to maintain complete and accurate records can affect the ability of your public service pension scheme to carry out basic functions. Accurate record-keeping is crucial in ensuring that benefits are paid correctly.
- **Communicating to members**  
Members of public service pension schemes need to receive information to help them understand their pension arrangements and make informed decisions.
- **Publishing scheme information**  
Certain information relating to public service pension schemes needs to be published so that scheme members and interested parties know that their scheme is being managed effectively.
- **Maintaining contributions**  
Public service pension schemes need to have procedures and processes that enable you to effectively monitor pension contributions, resolve payment issues and report payment failures.
- **Pension board conflicts of interest and representation**  
In public service pension schemes, potential conflicts of interest need to be identified and managed to prevent actual conflicts of interest arising.
- **Resolving internal disputes**  
Internal dispute resolution (IDR) arrangements play an important part in the management of a public service pension scheme. They enable someone with an interest in the scheme to ask for a matter in dispute to be resolved.
- **Reporting breaches of the law**  
Certain people involved with the governance and administration of a public service pension scheme must report certain breaches of the law to us.”<sup>2</sup>

Taking these principles and its own Terms of Reference into account the Board set out its updated work plan as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> (from <https://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/en/public-service-pension-schemes/scheme-management> )

<b>Teesside Pension Board Work Plan</b>		
<b>Date of Board meeting and any standard items scheduled</b>	<b>Suggested areas of focus (from the Pensions Regulator's list)</b>	<b>Suggested activities (from the Scheme Advisory Board guidance)</b>
July 2021 Draft Report and Accounts		
November 2021 Annual Review of Board Training	Pension board conflict of interest	Review the arrangements for the training of Board members and those elected members and officers with delegated responsibilities for the management and administration of the Scheme
February 2022	Reporting breaches Maintaining contributions Reporting duties	Review procurements carried out by Fund
April 2022 Annual Board Report	Internal controls and managing risks	Review the complete and proper exercise of employer and administering authority discretions.
July 2022 Draft Report and Accounts	Record keeping Resolving internal disputes	Review performance and outcome statistics Review handling of any cases referred to Pensions Ombudsman
November 2022 Annual Review of Board Training	Regulator Code of Practice Gap Analysis	Review the outcome of actuarial reporting and valuations.
February 2023		Review the outcome of actuarial reporting and valuations.
April 2023 Annual Board Report	Communicating to members Publishing scheme information	Review standard employer and scheme member communications
July 2023 Draft Report and Accounts		

## Appendix – Board membership and meeting attendance

### Membership

Barrie Cooper - <b>Chair</b> <i>(member from July 2021 meeting, chair from November 2021 meeting)</i>	Employer representative (Councillor, Middlesbrough Council)
Paul Thompson – <b>Deputy Chair</b> <i>(member from 27 May 2021, deputy chair from February 2022 meeting)</i>	Scheme member representative (UNISON)
Billy Ayre	Employer representative (Councillor, Redcar & Cleveland Council)
Jackie Cook	Scheme member representative (UNITE)
Jeff Bell <i>(from 25 January 2022)</i>	Scheme member representative (retired members)
Vacancy	<i>Employer representative (Other employers – Fund employers with active members excluding the four main councils)</i>
Colin Monson <i>(Chair: resigned after July 2021 meeting)</i>	Scheme member representative (retired members)
Chris Hobson <i>(Resigned after April 2021 meeting)</i>	Employer representative (Councillor, Middlesbrough Council)
Gary Whitehouse <i>(Deputy Chair: resigned 21 April 2021)</i>	Employer representative (Middlesbrough College)

### Meeting attendance:

	19 April 2021	19 July 2021	15 November 2021	21 February 2022
B Cooper		✓	✓	✓
P Thompson		✓	✓	✓
B Ayre	✓	✗	✗	✗
J Cook	✗	✓	✓	✗
J Bell				✓
C Monson	✓	✓		
C Hobson	✓			
G Whitehouse	✗			