

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Hampshire Pension Fund Panel and Board
Date:	15 December 2017
Title:	Investments: Pension Fund cash monitoring report and Annual Investment Strategy 2018/19
Report From:	Director of Corporate Resources – Corporate Services

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1. Recommendations

- 1.1. That the Annual Investment Strategy for 2018/19 be approved.
- 1.2. That, if the Annual Investment Strategy referred to in recommendation 1.1 is approved, that it be implemented from the date of this meeting for the remainder of 2017/18.
- 1.3. That the Director of Corporate Resources be authorised to manage the Fund's cash balance in accordance with the policy set out in this report.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report provides an update on the management of the Pension Fund's cash balances and the Annual Investment Strategy for those cash balances for 2018/19, which is outlined in Section 6 for approval.
- 2.2. In accordance with the Local Government Pension Scheme (Management and Investment of Funds) Regulations 2009, an investment policy must be formulated for the investment of the Fund's cash.
- 2.3. The production of an Annual Investment Strategy is in line with the recommendations of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice for Treasury Management in the Public Services. CIPFA consulted on changes to the Code in 2017, but has yet to publish a revised code.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Pension Fund's Investment Strategy Statement does not include a strategic allocation in cash as an asset class. However, the Pension Fund receives cash each month from contributions by employees and employers, and income from some of its investments, which needs to be managed.

- 3.2. Dividends from shares and interest receipts from bonds are held by the Pension Fund's custodian bank, JP Morgan, and retained by the Fund's external investment managers for reinvestment, but rental income from the Pension Fund's direct property portfolio, distributions from private equity investments, infrastructure investments and indirect property funds are credited to the Fund's cash balance.
- 3.3. The Pension Fund requires a cash balance to meet outgoings on pensions and benefits, existing commitments to invest in property and to fund drawdowns by the private equity and infrastructure funds, as well as covering day-to-day cash flow.

4. External Context

- 4.1. The following paragraphs explain the economic and financial background against which the Annual Investment Strategy is being set.

Economic background

- 4.2. The major external influence on the Pension Fund's investment strategy for 2018/19 will be the UK's progress in negotiating a smooth exit from the European Union and agreeing future trading arrangements. The domestic economy has remained relatively robust since the surprise outcome of the 2016 referendum, but there are indications that uncertainty over the future is now weighing on growth. Transitional arrangements may prevent a cliff-edge, but will also extend the period of uncertainty for several years. Economic growth is therefore forecast to remain sluggish throughout 2018/19.
- 4.3. Consumer price inflation reached 3.0% in September 2017 as the post-referendum devaluation of sterling continued to feed through to imports. Unemployment continued to fall and the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) judged that the extent of spare capacity in the economy seemed limited and the pace at which the economy can grow without general inflationary pressure had fallen over recent years. With its inflation-control mandate in mind, the Bank of England's MPC raised official interest rates to 0.5% in November 2017.

Credit outlook

- 4.4. High profile bank failures in Italy and Portugal have reinforced concerns over the health of the European banking sector. Sluggish economies and continuing fines for pre-crisis behaviour have weighed on bank profits, and any future economic slowdown will exacerbate concerns in this regard.
- 4.5. Bail-in legislation has now been fully implemented in the European Union, Switzerland and USA, whilst Australia and Canada are progressing with their own plans. In addition, the largest UK banks will ringfence their retail banking functions into separate legal entities during 2018. There remains some uncertainty over how these changes will impact upon the credit strength of the residual legal entities.

Interest rate forecast

- 4.6. The County Council's treasury adviser Arlingclose's central case is for UK Bank Rate to remain at 0.5% during 2018/19. The MPC re-emphasised that any prospective increases in Bank Rate would be expected to be at a gradual pace and to a limited extent.
- 4.7. Future expectations for higher short term interest rates are subdued and on-going decisions remain data dependent and negotiations on exiting the EU cast a shadow over monetary policy decisions. The risks to Arlingclose's forecast are broadly balanced on both sides. The Arlingclose central case is for gilt yields to remain broadly stable across the medium term. Upward movement will be limited, although the UK government's seemingly deteriorating fiscal stance is an upside risk.

5. Performance of cash investments

- 5.1. The Pension Fund's cash investment holding was £57.4m as at 30 November 2017 which represents 0.9% of the Pension Fund's total value. As expected, the current cash balance has reduced since last year due to large investments in property, as well as increased draw downs from the Fund's infrastructure and private equity investments.
- 5.2. It is expected that the Pension Fund's cash balances will need to be maintained by disinvesting further from the Fund's passive equity portfolios, as the amounts paid in benefits payments, new property investments, and draw downs to fund private equity and infrastructure investments will be greater than pension contributions and investment income received directly. This will move the Pension Fund closer to its agreed strategic asset allocation.
- 5.3. The priority for cash investments is security and liquidity and the Pension Fund's aim is to achieve a yield commensurate with these principles. This has been maintained by following the Pension Fund's counterparty policy as set out in its Annual Investment Strategy for 2017/18, which was approved by the Pension Fund Panel at its meeting in December 2016. A full breakdown of current investments is provided in the exempt appendix.
- 5.4. Whilst regulations provide an explicit power for pension funds to borrow for a period of up to 90 days for cash flow purposes, such as allowing scheme benefits to be paid and during a transition period when the investment of the Fund's assets is being changed, the Pension Fund's cash flow will be managed on the basis that the need for borrowing for the Fund is avoided and therefore all of the Pension Fund's cash investments are either overnight or for a very short duration.
- 5.5. As at 30 November 2017 the weighted average return on the Pension Fund's cash investments was 0.35%, which should be considered within the context of a recently increased, although still very low, UK Base Rate of 0.5%. This rate largely reflects interest rates available prior to the Base Rate increase, and is likely to increase slightly in the coming months.

6. Annual Investment Strategy

- 6.1. In the past 12 months, the Pension Fund's investment balance has ranged between £34.1 and £117.4 million.
- 6.2. The following Annual Investment Strategy, for the period to 31 March 2019 has been prepared with the advice of the County Council's treasury management advisers, Arlingclose.
- 6.3. The primary objective in relation to the investment of Pension Fund cash remains the security of capital. The liquidity or accessibility of the Fund's cash investments followed by the yields earned on these investments are important but secondary considerations.

Negative Interest Rates

- 6.4. If the UK enters into a recession in 2018/19, there is a small chance that the Bank of England could set its Bank Rate at or below zero, which is likely to feed through to negative interest rates on all low risk, short-term investment options. This situation already exists in many other European countries. In this event, security will be measured as receiving the contractually agreed amount at maturity, even though this may be less than the amount originally invested.

Risk Assessment and Credit Ratings

- 6.5. Credit ratings are obtained and monitored by the County Council's treasury advisers, who will notify changes in ratings as they occur. Where an entity has its credit rating downgraded so that it fails to meet the approved investment criteria then:
 - no new investments will be made,
 - any existing investments that can be recalled or sold at no cost will be, and
 - full consideration will be given to the recall or sale of all other existing investments with the affected counterparty.
- 6.6. Where a credit rating agency announces that a credit rating is on review for possible downgrade (also known as "rating watch negative" or "credit watch negative") so that it may fall below the approved rating criteria, then only investments that can be withdrawn on the next working day will be made with that organisation until the outcome of the review is announced. This policy will not apply to negative outlooks, which indicate a long-term direction of travel rather than an imminent change of rating.

Other information on the Security of Investments

- 6.7. The Pension Fund understands that credit ratings are good but not perfect predictors of investment default. Full regard will therefore be given to other available information on the credit quality of the organisations in which it invests, including credit default swap prices, financial statements, information on potential government support and reports in the quality financial press. No investments will be made with an organisation if there are substantial doubts about its credit quality, even though it may meet the credit rating criteria.

6.8. When deteriorating financial market conditions affect the creditworthiness of all organisations, as happened in 2008 and 2011, this is not generally reflected in credit ratings, but can be seen in other market measures. In these circumstances the Pension Fund will restrict its investments to those organisations of higher credit quality and reduce the maximum duration of its investments to maintain the required level of security. The extent of these restrictions will be in line with prevailing financial market conditions.

Investment Limits

- 6.9. Given the impact of bail-in legislation, which has increased the credit risk that unsecured bank/building society investments could be subject to a loss and/or converted to equities, the following investment limits are proposed to mitigate the risk whilst allowing sufficient flexibility to manage the Pension Fund's investment balances.
- 6.10. A group of banks under the same ownership will be treated as a single organisation for limit purposes. Maximum limits will also be placed on fund managers and industry sectors as below:

Table 1: Investment Limits

	Cash limit	Maximum Term
Any single organisation, except the UK Central Government	£20m each	2 years
UK Central Government	Unlimited	2 years
Any group of organisations under the same ownership	£20m per group	2 years
Any group of pooled funds under the same management	£15m per manager	2 years
Registered Providers	£15m in total	2 years
Money Market Funds	50% in total	Overnight

Approved Investment Counterparties and Limits

6.11. Appendix 1 shows a table of counterparty types which the Pension Fund may invest its cash in, subject to the cash limits (per counterparty) and the time limits shown. The Pension Fund will continue to largely invest overnight with banks and money market funds, given that cash is only held to meet immediate liabilities. Other more secure options that might mitigate the risk of bank bail-ins are available should the Pension Fund be required to hold larger amounts of cash for longer periods. The list of currently authorised counterparties is available in Appendix 2 for information. Therefore the Director of Corporate Resources and her staff will use the guidance of the Pension Fund's treasury management advisers, Arlingclose, in order to place cash on deposit, within the limits shown in Appendix 1.

Liquidity Management

- 6.12. The Pension Fund has due regard for its future cash flows when determining the maximum period for which funds may prudently be committed. Historic cash flows are analysed in addition to significant future cash movements.

7. Other items

Investment Training

- 7.1. The needs of the Pension Fund's treasury management staff for training in investment management are assessed annually as part of the staff appraisal process, and additionally when the responsibilities of individual members of staff change.
- 7.2. Staff members regularly attend training courses, seminars and conferences provided by Arlingclose and CIPFA. Relevant staff are also encouraged to study professional qualifications from CIPFA, and other appropriate organisations.
- 7.3. The Pension Fund's training policy states that all Panel and Board members should receive appropriate training relevant to their needs and understand fully their roles and responsibilities, which includes treasury management responsibilities, and the scrutiny of the treasury management function. All Panel and Board members were invited to a workshop presented by Arlingclose on 29 November 2017, which gave an update on treasury matters. Another workshop is planned for November 2018.

Investment Advisers

- 7.4. The Pension Fund has appointed Arlingclose Limited as treasury management advisers and receives specific advice on investment, debt and capital finance issues. The quality of this service is controlled through quarterly review meetings with the Director of Corporate Resources and her staff and Arlingclose.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

This proposal does not link to the Strategic Plan but, nevertheless, requires a decision because management of the Pension Fund's cash needs deciding.

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equality Duty

1.1. The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- a) The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- b) Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- c) Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

1.2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

Equality objectives are not considered to be adversely affected by the proposals in this report.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1. The proposals in this report are not considered to have any direct impact on the prevention of crime.

3. Climate Change:

a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

No specific impact.

b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?

No specific impact.

Approved Investment Counterparties and Limits

Credit Rating	Banks Unsecured	Banks Secured	Government	Corporates
UK Govt	n/a	n/a	£ Unlimited 2 years	n/a
AAA	£15m 2 years	£20m 2 years	£20m 2 years	£15m 2 years
AA+	£15m 2 years	£20m 2 years	£20m 2 years	£15m 2 years
AA	£15m 2 years	£20m 2 years	£20m 2 years	£15m 2 years
AA-	£15m 2 years	£20m 2 years	£20m 2 years	£15m 2 years
A+	£15m 2 years	£20m 2 years	£15m 2 years	£15m 2 years
A	£15m 13 months	£20m 2 years	£15m 2 years	£15m 2 years
A-	£15m 6 months	£20m 13 months	£15m 2 years	£15m 13 months
None	£1m 6 months	n/a	£15m 2 years	n/a
Pooled funds	£15m per fund			

The table must be read in conjunction with the notes below

Credit Rating

Investment limits are set by reference to the lowest published long-term credit rating from Fitch, Moody's or Standard & Poor's. Where available, the credit rating relevant to the specific investment or class of investment is used, otherwise the counterparty credit rating is used. However, investment decisions are never made solely based on credit ratings, and all other relevant factors including external advice will be taken into account.

Banks Unsecured

Accounts, deposits, certificates of deposit and senior unsecured bonds with banks and building societies, other than multilateral development banks. These investments are subject to the risk of credit loss via a bail-in should the regulator determine that the bank is failing or likely to fail. See below for arrangements relating to operational bank accounts

Banks Secured

Covered bonds, reverse repurchase agreements and other collateralised arrangements with banks and building societies. These investments are secured on the bank/building society's assets, which limits the potential losses in the unlikely event of insolvency, and means that they are exempt from bail-in. Where there is not investment specific credit rating, but the collateral upon which the investment is secured has a credit rating, the highest of the collateral credit rating and the counterparty credit rating will be used to determine cash and time limits. The combined secured and unsecured investments in any one bank will not exceed the cash limit for secured investments.

Government

Loans, bonds and bills issued or guaranteed by national governments, regional and local authorities and multilateral development banks. These investments are not subject to bail-in, and there is an insignificant risk of insolvency. Investments with the UK Central Government may be made in unlimited amounts for up to 2 years.

Corporates

Loans, bonds and commercial paper issued by companies other than banks and registered providers. These investments are not subject to bail-in, but are exposed to the risk of the company going insolvent. Loans to unrated companies will only be made as part of a diversified pool in order to spread the risk widely.

Pooled Funds

Shares in diversified investment vehicles consisting of any of the above investment types, plus equity shares and property. These funds have the advantage of providing wide diversification of investment risks, coupled with the services of a professional fund manager in return for a fee. Money Market Funds that offer same-day liquidity and aim for a constant net asset value will be used as an alternative to instant access bank accounts, while pooled funds whose value changes with market prices and/or have a notice period will be used for longer investment periods.

Operational bank accounts:

The Pension Fund may incur operational exposures, for example through current accounts, to any UK bank with credit ratings no lower than BBB- and with assets greater than £25 billion. These are not classed as investments, but are still subject to the risk of a bank bail-in, and balances will therefore be kept low. The Pension Fund's operational bank account is with National Westminster; therefore the Fund does not unsecured investment with this bank, and aims to keep the overnight balances held in current accounts as close as possible to £0. The Bank of England has stated that in the event of failure, banks with assets greater than £25 billion are more likely to be bailed-in than made insolvent, increasing the chance of the Pension Fund maintaining operational continuity.

List of UK and non-UK banks and building societies

Country / Domicile	Counterparty	Maximum investment	Maximum duration
UK	Bank of Scotland	£15m	6 months
UK	Barclays Bank	£15m	100 days
UK	Close Brothers	£15m	6 months
UK	Goldman Sachs	£15m	100 days
UK	HSBC Bank	£15m	6 months
UK	Leeds Building Society	£15m	100 days
UK	Lloyds Bank	£15m	6 months
UK	Nationwide Building Society	£15m	6 months
UK	NatWest/Royal Bank of Scotland	£10m	35 days
UK	Santander UK/Abbey National	£15m	6 months
UK	Standard Chartered	£15m	100 days
Australia	Australia and NZ Banking Group	£15m	6 months
Australia	Commonwealth Bank of Australia	£15m	6 months
Australia	National Australia Bank	£15m	6 months
Australia	Westpac Banking Group	£15m	6 months
Canada	Bank of Montreal	£15m	6 months
Canada	Bank of Nova Scotia	£15m	6 months
Canada	Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce	£15m	6 months
Canada	Royal Bank of Canada	£15m	6 months
Canada	Toronto-Dominion Bank	£15m	6 months
Denmark	Danske Bank	£15m	100 days
Finland	OP Corporate Bank	£15m	6 months
Germany	Landesbank Hessen-Thuringen (Helaba)	£15m	6 months
Netherlands	Cooperative Rabobank	£15m	13 months
Netherlands	ING Bank	£15m	100 days
Singapore	DBS Bank Ltd	£15m	13 months
Singapore	Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation	£15m	13 months
Singapore	United Overseas Bank	£15m	13 months
Sweden	Nordea Bank AB	£15m	13 months
Sweden	Svenska Handelsbanken	£15m	13 months
Switzerland	Credit Suisse	£15m	100 days

* Please note that the counterparties listed above meet the Fund's minimum credit rating criteria as at 1 December 2017, additional counterparties could be added to this list if, for example, a counterparty/country is upgraded. Alternatively if a counterparty is downgraded, this list may be shortened.