



ACCESS JOINT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the ACCESS Joint Committee held at 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ on Monday, 16th June, 2025.

PRESENT: **Chair:** Cllr Susan Barker (Essex CC), **Vice-Chair:** Cllr Gerard Fox (East Sussex CC), Cllr Vanessa Churchman (Isle of Wight), Cllr Sarah Emberson (Kent CC), Cllr Jeremy Hunt (West Sussex CC), Cllr Mark Kemp-Gee (Hampshire CC), Cllr Scott Packer (West Northamptonshire), Cllr Greg Peck (Norfolk CC), Cllr Geoffrey Seeff (Cambridgeshire CC) and Cllr Tim Williams (Hertfordshire CC).

LOCAL PENSION BOARD OBSERVERS: Cllr Richard Van Dulken (Essex CC), Nicola Mark (Essex CC), Neil Simpson (East Sussex CC) and Cllr Andrew Willson (East Sussex CC)

ALSO PRESENT: Kevin McDonald (ASU), Richard Smith (ASU), Alistair Coyle (ASU), Sallie Wilson (ASU), Chris Harper (Squire Patton Boggs), John Wright (Hymans Robertson) and Felix Western (Squires).

OFFICERS: Andrew Boutflower (Hampshire), Nick Buckland (Kent), Glenn Cossey (Norfolk), Patrick Towey (Hertfordshire), Mark Whitby (West Northamptonshire / Cambridgeshire), Ben Barlow (West Northamptonshire / Cambridgeshire), Tracey Woods (Suffolk), Rachel Wood (West Sussex), Susan Greenwood (East Sussex), Steve Harrison (Isle of Wight), Amanda Crawford (Essex), Sharon Tan (Suffolk), Ian Gutsell – s151 Officer representative), Jody Evans (Essex), Joel Cook (Kent - Clerk), and James Clapson (Kent).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Election of Chair. *(Item. 1)*

The out-going Chairman, Cllr Kemp-Gee (Hampshire), conducted the election of Chairman and expressed his thanks to those who supported him in the role during his tenure. He was grateful for the support received from the ACCESS Support Unit, Kent Democratic Services, the s151 Officers, and the guidance offered by ACCESS's consultants. He also thanked his fellow Committee Members, both past and present, for their contributions.

It was proposed by Cllr Churchman (Isle of Wight) and seconded by Cllr Fox (East Sussex), that Cllr Barker (Essex) be elected as Chair. No other nominations were put.

RESOLVED that Cllr Barker be elected as Chair of the ACCESS Joint Committee.

Cllr Barker offered her thanks to Cllr Kemp-Gee for his commitment as Chair of the Committee. This sentiment was also expressed by a number of Committee Members who praised and thanked Cllr Kemp-Gee for his stewardship as Chair.

2. Election of Vice-Chair.

(Item. 2)

It was proposed by Cllr Hunt (West Sussex) and seconded by Cllr Churchman (Isle of Wight), that Cllr Fox be elected as Vice-Chair. No other nominations were put.

RESOLVED that Cllr Fox (East Sussex) be elected as Vice-Chair of the ACCESS Joint Committee.

3. Apologies/Substitutes.

(Item. 3)

Apologies had been received from Cllr Soons (Suffolk).

4. Declaration of interests in items on the agenda.

(Item. 4)

Cllr Emberson (Kent) declared that she worked for Patrizia Property Investment Management, however she was unaware of any conflict of interest in relation to any item for consideration on the agenda.

5. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2025.

(Item. 5)

RESOLVED that the minutes from the meeting held on 24 March 2025 be approved as a correct record.

6. Chair's Remarks.

(Item. 6)

There were no remarks made at this meeting.

7. Business Plan, Budget & Risk Summary.

(Item. 7)

1. Mr McDonald (ASU) introduced the report and highlighted that the 2025/26 Business Plan was now dominated with work streams responding to the Government's pension review. He added that there were a lot of changes on the horizon, and the Plan would be kept under review.
2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. A budget update would be circulated before the next meeting to ensure Members were kept up to date.
 - b. There were a number of external factors impacting upon the Pool that made accurate budgeting more difficult than normal. This could lead to additional charges and unexpected budget overspends. It was

more important than ever to keep the Committee up to date with any significant budget challenges at this time.

3. RESOLVED that the Joint Committee note the:
 - 2024/25 Business Plan summary;
 - 2024/25 financial outturn; and
 - 2025/26 Business Plan update; and risk summary.

Motion to Exclude the press and public

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 & 5 of part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

8. Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2025.
(Item. 8)

RESOLVED that the exempt minutes from the meeting held on 24 March 2025 be approved as a correct record.

9. Project Castle.
(Item. 9)

1. Mr McDonald (ASU) introduced the report and advised that there had been a number of developments since the last meeting. To keep Members updated, there had been an informal virtual committee meeting in April and an update was also circulated in May.
2. Government did not support the business proposal submitted by ACCESS. In response to this a joint letter from the S151 Officers, and a joint letter from the Chief Executive Officers of the ACCESS Authorities had been sent to Ministers. The letters requested clarification on the rationale behind the Government's decision and Members would be updated as soon as a response is received.
3. Mr McDonald outlined some of the work undertaken to explore the merger option, as supported by Government. Questionnaires had been sent to other Pools, seeking information to assist ACCESS in making a clear assessment of the suitability of each Pool in terms of how their operations aligned with ACCESS preferences. This work also explored the appetite across different Pools for admitting additional Administering Authorities and on what terms such a merger might progress if it were supported. The results of the information gathering and assessment was undergoing detailed review with support from Hymans Robertson colleagues, so as to support the presentation of a recommended course of action at the next formal meeting.
4. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. An in-principle agreement about the direction of travel would be needed at the meeting in September.

- b. Scenarios were developed in response to the Ministerial letter received on 9 April 2025. This would require an additional milestone to be added to the 2025/26 Business Plan.
- c. Some informal and formal discussions with other pools had taken place around potential mergers. A virtual update would be organised to keep Members apprised of the situation if required.
- d. Representatives from the Treasury and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government planned to contact each of the ACCESS Administering Authorities in June.
- e. At the meeting in September the Committee would be presented with a proposal on the next steps.
- f. In order to achieve an in-principle agreement by the Government's deadline of 30 September, it was important that the Administering Authorities had appropriate governance in place to decide upon the Committee's recommendations.
- g. The Government currently had an implicit authority to dictate the fund membership of pools, however, once the new Pension Schemes Bill was enacted, this authority would be explicit.
- h. Consideration would be given to moving the September meeting a week earlier than currently scheduled. This would enable more time for the Administering Authorities to consider the Committee's recommendations at their meetings.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- note the report; and
- recommend to ACCESS Authorities the inclusion of an additional milestone within the 2025/26 Business Plan as detailed at paragraph 5.1 in the report.

10. Alternative Assets.

(Item. 10)

1. Mr Coyle (ASU) introduced the report outlining workstreams that, due to the future uncertainty of the Pool, would be paused.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the paused or continued workstreams within the non-listed theme of the 2025/26 Business Plan.

11. Investment Performance.

(Item. 11)

1. Ms Tan (Suffolk) introduced the report. As at 31 March 2025, pool and pool aligned assets totalled £49.3bn. This represented 74% of all assets under management. She added that overall, the five-year investment performance continued to be encouraging

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the performance report.

12. Risk Register.

(Item. 12)

1. Mr Smith (ASU) introduced the report, outlining key updates relating to the risk register. The focus of risk changes related to Project Castle and associated Government Pension Review issues.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the matters highlighted within the report.