

ACCESS ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

“I am pleased to introduce the ACCESS 2019/20 Annual Report.

We find ourselves in challenging times, facing a national emergency, but we will continue to manage these very substantial LGPS assets to the best of our abilities. I am truly grateful, at this time, that ACCESS has built a strong partnership that allows each of the 11 member authorities to support each other in this difficult period.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Cllr Andrew Reid of Suffolk for the contribution he made as the first chairman of the ACCESS Joint Committee, which was critical in building a strong foundation for the Pool. It goes without saying that I was honoured by the confidence shown in me by my fellow Joint Committee members in choosing me to succeed Cllr Reid last December.



It has been another busy year for ACCESS with good progress made by our operator, Link, in launching new sub-funds, which has brought the total AUM under ACCESS auspices to £21.4bn. Equally important work has also taken place in reviewing the governance of the Pool and progressing options for pooling alternative investment categories.

I’m sure that 20/21 will be another busy year for ACCESS, not only in continuing to issue further sub-funds, but also in other crucial areas such as deepening the Pool’s approach to Responsible Investment.”

At a glance



* FTE = Full Time Equivalent
ASU = ACCESS Support Unit
** Technical Leads drawn from ACCESS Authorities

Background

ACCESS (A Collaboration of Central, Eastern and Southern Shires) is made up of 11 Local Government Pension Schemes (LGPS) Administering Authorities: Cambridgeshire County Council; East Sussex County Council; Essex County Council; Hampshire County Council; Hertfordshire County Council; Isle of Wight Council; Kent County Council; Norfolk County Council; Northamptonshire County Council; Suffolk County Council and West Sussex County Council in response to the Governments pooling agenda across the LGPS. The first ACCESS Inter Authority Agreement was signed in late June 2017.

The ACCESS Administering Authorities are committed to working together to optimise benefits and efficiencies on behalf of their individual and collective stakeholders, operating within a clear set of objectives and principles that drives the decision-making process.

Collectively as at 31 March 2020, the ACCESS Authorities have

total assets of **£44 billion** (of which **49%** has been pooled)

serving **3,534** employers with **1.1 million** members including **288,248** pensioners

Governance

An extract from the ACCESS governance model is shown below:



Strategic oversight and scrutiny responsibilities remain with the Administering Authorities as does all decision making on their individual Funds asset allocation and the timing of transfers of assets from each Fund into the arrangements developed by the ACCESS Pool.

The Joint Committee (JC) has been appointed by the 11 Administering Authorities under s102 of the Local Government Act 1972, to exercise specific functions in relation to the pooling of LGPS assets. The JC's functions include the specification, procurement, recommendation of appointment of pool Operators (for active asset management) and pool- aligned asset providers (for passive asset management), to the Administering Authorities. The JC also reviews ongoing performance.

The Section 151 Officers of ACCESS Authorities provide advice to the JC in response to its decisions ensure appropriate resourcing and support is available to implement the decisions and to run the ACCESS Pool.

The JC further supported by Officer Working Group (OWG) and the ACCESS Support Unit (ASU).

The Officer Working Group are officers identified by each of the Administering Authorities whose role is to provide a central resource for advice, assistance, guidance and support for the Joint Committee.

The ACCESS Support Unit (ASU) provides the day-to-day support for running the ACCESS Pool and has responsibility for programme management, contract management, administration and technical support services. 2019/20 saw the completion of appointments to each of the three full time ASU roles, hosted by Essex County Council. These roles are also supplemented with additional technical support from Officers within the ACCESS Authorities.

The Operator: Link Fund Solutions

Appointed 2018 Link Fund Solutions Ltd pooled operator service, overseeing an Authorised Contractual scheme for the sole use of ACCESS Authorities. Link are responsible for establishing and operating an authorised contractual scheme along with the creation of a range of investment sub-funds for active listed assets and the appointment of the investment managers to those sub-funds. This is designed to enable Administering Authorities to execute their asset allocation strategies

Pool Aligned Assets: UBS

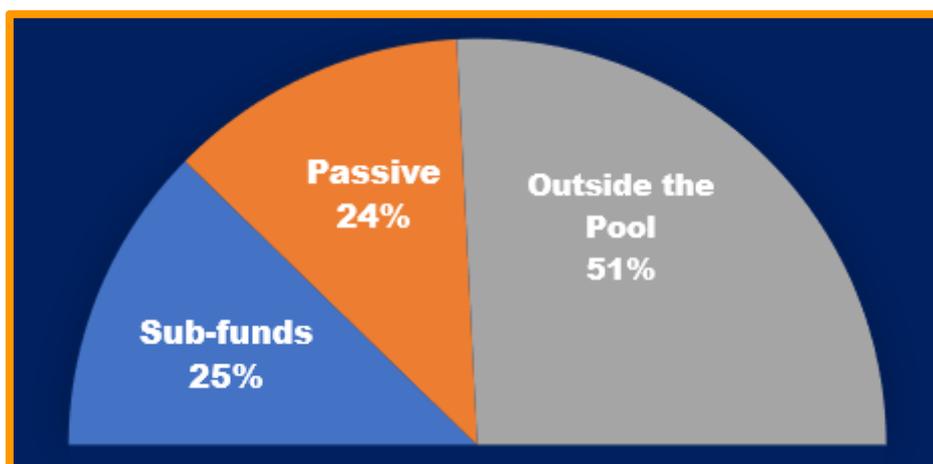
Appointed following a joint procurement in 2017, UBS act as the ACCESS Authorities' investment manager for passive assets.

Progress on Pooling

ACCESS submitted its pooling proposal to Government in July 2016 with detailed plans for establishing and moving assets into the pool. Included in the proposal was an indicative timeline of when assets will be pooled, and ACCESS has continued to make excellent progress against the principal milestone of having **£27.2 billion** assets pooled and estimated savings of £13.6 million by March 2021.



As at 31 March 2020, **49%** of assets have been pooled:



Pooled Assets

As at 31 March 2020 ACCESS has the following assets pooled:

Pooled Investments	£ Billion
Passive Investments	10.486
UK Equity Funds	1.588
Global Equity Funds	7.189
UK Fixed Income	0.834
Diversified Growth	1.262
Total Pooled Investments	21.359

The passive investment funds are held on a pool governance basis under one investment manager as these assets are held in life fund policies, which cannot be held within an authorised contractual scheme.

Key milestones achieved in 2019/20

- Recruitment of an interim Director to lead the ACCESS Support Unit.
- Establishment of business as usual functions of the ACCESS Support Unit being undertaken by the ACCESS Support Unit officers and technical leads officers.
- Approval and launch of a range of sub-funds further rationalising the existing range of mandates whilst reflecting the strategic asset allocation needs of the ACCESS Funds.
- Re-procurement of a legal advisor for ACCESS.
- Provision of updates of progress of pooling to Government and responding to consultations.
- Commencement of a review of Environmental, Social and Governance and Responsible Investment guidelines for ACCESS.



- In conjunction with Link Fund Solutions, held the first investor day for members and officers of the individual funds to hear from the investment managers in the ACCESS pool.
- Commencement of a review to formulate an approach to pooling and managing illiquid assets such as private equity and infrastructure. This will involve reviewing various structures and platforms and assessing these to identify the best fit to meet with the Funds current and future requirements.

Objectives for 2020/21

ACCESS is well placed to continue to develop the pool and progress will continue unabated despite the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 lockdown. Virtual meetings are well established and productive. It is anticipated that 2020/21 will see key activities within the following themes:



- Actively managed listed assets: the completion of pooling active listed assets within the Authorised Contractual Scheme (ACS).
- Alternative / non listed assets: the initial implementation of pooled alternative assets.
- Passively managed assets: ongoing monitoring and engagement with UBS.
- Governance: the application of appropriate forms of governance throughout ACCESS.
- ACCESS Support Unit (ASU): the size and scope of the ASU will be kept under review.

Expected v Actual Costs and Savings

The table below summarises the financial position for 2019/20 along with the cumulative position since the commencement of ACCESS activity in early 2016.



A budget for ongoing operational costs is set by the Joint Committee and is financed equally by each of the 11 Authorities. 2019/20 saw an underspend primarily due to lower than anticipated costs of external advice combined with the establishment of the ACCESS Support Unit reducing the reliance on external project management support.

	2019 – 2020		2019 – 2020	
	Actual In Year £'000	Budget In Year £'000	Actual Cumulative to date £'000	Budget Cumulative to date £'000
Set Up Costs	-	-	1,824	1,400
Transition Costs	-	-	674	2,499
Ongoing Operational Costs	811	1,203	2,208	2,469
Operator & Depository Costs	3,247	2,000	3,632	2,500
Total Costs	4,058	3,203	8,338	8,868
Pool Fee Savings	13,456	13,200	20,515	18,450
Net Savings Realised	9,398	9,997	12,177	9,582

Operator and depositary fees are payable by each Authority in relation to assets invested within the Authorised Contractual Scheme established by Link Fund Solutions as pool operator. The initial ACCESS business plan to MHCLG anticipated Operator costs of 2bps.

The 2019/20 fee savings have been calculated using the CIPFA price variance methodology and based on the asset values as at 31 March 2020. This approach highlights the combined level of investment fee savings, across all ACCESS Authorities stemming from reduced charges.

In summary, since inception ACCESS has demonstrated excellent value for money, maintaining expenditure broadly in line with the MHCLG submission whilst delivering savings ahead of the timeline contained in the original proposal.

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) and Responsible Investment (RI)

The ACCESS Authorities believe in making long term sustainable investments whilst integrating environment and social risk considerations, promoting good governance and stewardship.

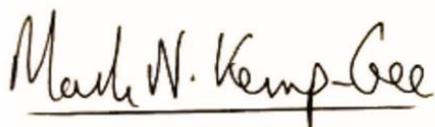


Whilst the participating authorities have an overriding fiduciary and public law duty to act in the best long term interests of their LGPS stakeholders to achieve the best possible financial returns, with an appropriate level of risk they also recognise the importance of committing to responsible investment alongside financial factors in the investment decision making process.

Over the course of the last year a number of ACCESS Authorities have reviewed and developed their individual ESG /RI policies. Building on this ACCESS will, in the current year review its own ESG /RI guidelines to reflect both the requirements of the Authorities and the expectations associated with this fundamental aspect of institutional investment.

The ACCESS pool has a set of voting guidelines which seeks to protect and enhance the value of its shareholdings by promoting good practice in the corporate governance and management of those companies.

The voting guidelines sets out the principles of good corporate governance and the means by which ACCESS will seek to exercise its influence on companies. During the year ACCESS voted at **383** meetings on **6,000** resolutions.



Mark Kemp-Gee

Cllr Mark Kemp-Gee - Chairman, ACCESS Joint Committee