



# Responsible Investment Policy

**November 2018**

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## Introduction and background

Regulation 7(2) (e) The Local Government Pension Scheme (Management and Investment of Funds) Regulations 2016 requires an administering authority to demonstrate that it considers any factors that are financially material to the performance of the Fund's investments, including social, environmental and corporate governance factors, depending on the time horizon over which their liabilities arise.

The East Sussex Pension Fund ("the Fund") is a long term responsible investor aiming to deliver a sustainable Pension Fund for all stakeholders. The Fund complies with and follows the principles of the UK Stewardship Code and working within the spirit of the United Nations Principles of Responsible Investment ("UNIPRI").

East Sussex County Council ("the Council") is the administering authority of the Fund and has a fiduciary duty to act in the best, long-term, interests of the Fund's employers and scheme members. The Fund believes that in order to fulfil this duty, it must have a clear policy on how it invests in a responsible manner.

Responsible Investment is a fundamental part of the Fund's overarching investment strategy as set out in its Investment Strategy Statement. That is, to maximise returns subject to an acceptable level of risk whilst increasing certainty of cost for employers, and minimising the long term cost of the scheme. The Fund believes that consideration of Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance ("ESG") factors are fundamental to this, particularly where they are likely to impact on the overarching investment objective.

The Fund's approach aims to ensure that consideration of ESG factors is embedded in the investment process, utilising the various tools available to manage ESG risks and to harness opportunities presented by ESG factors.

## What is our policy on Responsible Investment?

The Fund's core principles of responsible investment are:

- a. We will apply **long-term thinking** to deliver **long-term sustainable returns**.
- b. We will seek **sustainable returns** from **well-governed assets**.
- c. We will use an **evidence-based** long term investment appraisal to inform **decision-making** in the implementation of RI principles and consider the costs of RI decisions consistent with our fiduciary duties.
- d. We will evaluate and manage **carbon exposure in order to mitigate risks to the Fund from climate change**.

## What will we do to ensure that these core principles are met?

Core Principle	Associated Actions
<p><b>We will apply long-term thinking to deliver long-term sustainable returns</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Fund’s long-term investment objectives will be detailed in its Investment Strategy Statement.</li> <li>• The Fund will set longer-term performance objectives for its investment managers.</li> <li>• The Fund will seek to ensure that its long term interests are aligned with that of its investment managers on all issues including on RI considerations.</li> <li>• Policies relating to RI will be considered at the Fund’s annual investment strategy day as part of the Fund’s long term investment planning process.</li> </ul>
<p><b>We will seek sustainable returns from well-governed assets</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Fund will apply a robust approach to stewardship, linked to the Fund’s belief that engagement can positively and effectively influence behaviours.</li> <li>• The Fund will engage with companies when we believe engagement will add value to the Fund or change corporate behaviour for the better.</li> <li>• The Fund is committed to compliance with the UK Stewardship Code and working within the spirit of the United Nations Principles of Responsible Investment (“UNIPRI”).</li> <li>• We will hold our investment managers to account to ensure compliance with this policy.</li> <li>• The Fund is committed to collective engagement through its membership of the Local Authority Pension Fund Forum (LAPFF), the ACCESS LGPS pool and other opportunities that arise from time to time.</li> <li>• The Fund will exercise its voting rights in all markets where practicable.</li> </ul>
<p><b>We will use an evidence-based long term investment appraisal to inform decision-making in the implementation of RI principles and consider the costs of RI decisions consistent with our fiduciary duties.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Fund will consider the potential financial impact of RI related issues on an ongoing basis (e.g. climate change or executive remuneration).</li> <li>• The Fund will consider the potential financial impact of investment opportunities that arise from RI related factors (e.g. investment in renewable energies or housing infrastructure).</li> <li>• The Fund will consider investment opportunities that have positive impacts and recognises that the changing external environment presents new opportunities i.e. Renewable energy and social impact investments.</li> </ul>
<p><b>We will evaluate and manage carbon exposure in order to mitigate risks to the Fund from climate change</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Fund has identified climate change as a potential long-term financial risk.</li> <li>• The Fund will regularly review the tools and solutions available to assess and manage carbon exposure.</li> <li>• The Fund will review its carbon foot print annually both at the Fund and investment manager level.</li> <li>• The Fund will incorporate climate risk assessment as part of the annual investment strategy review (considering the Fund’s investment strategy under a range of climate change scenarios, including a 2°C scenario).</li> <li>• The Fund will review the Fund’s passive equity benchmarks and consider increasing the use of indices tilted towards low carbon.</li> </ul>

## **How will we monitor our performance on Responsible Investment?**

The Fund will ultimately be transparent and accountable in terms of its performance on Responsible Investment. This will be achieved through the following approach:

- The Fund will publish its Investment Strategy Statement on its website in line with the scheme regulations.
- Decisions relating to the setting of investment policy will be explained.
- The Fund will publish its RI policy on its website. We will review it on an ongoing basis, including consulting the Local Pension Board, at least every three years in line with the fund ISS.
- The Fund will monitor closely its appointed investment managers whom the Fund rely on to implement its RI policy.
- The Fund (through the Pension Board) will undertake an annual review of corporate governance, voting and engagement activity undertaken by the Fund and its underlying managers.
- The Fund will publish an annual summary of voting and engagement activity.
- The Fund will disclose the results of the Fund's equity carbon footprint.
- The Fund will ensure that its decision makers are properly trained and kept abreast of ESG issues in order to make informed decisions, including regular RI/UN Sustainable Development Goals training.
- The Fund will include RI as a standing item on Pensions Committee and the Pension Board agendas (with a view to reporting on manager performance in relation to RI investing and noting any hot topics / issues arising).
- The Fund will undertake a fundamental review of any specific RI issues considered by the Pension Committee to be of potentially material financial impact.
- The Fund actively considers RI capabilities and advice when selecting and monitoring its investment advisors.
- The Fund expects its investment advisors to proactively consider and integrate RI issues when providing investment advice to the Fund.
- The Fund will consider and respond to feedback from stakeholders in relation to issues of concern.

## **Responsible Investment and ACCESS LGPS**

The implementation of the Fund's investment strategy will be undertaken by the ACCESS Pool. These are eleven funds committed to collaboratively working together to meet the criteria for pooling and have signed an Inter Authority Agreement to underpin their partnership. It is expected that the Fund's ability to invest in a responsible way will be enhanced through the ACCESS LGPS Pool due to the inherent benefits of scale and innovation that will result from the collaboration.

## **Engagement versus Exclusion**

East Sussex Pension Fund has never sought to implement a policy that explicitly excludes certain types of investments, companies or sectors except where they are barred by UK law. The Fund believes that its influence as a shareholder is better deployed by engaging with companies, in order to influence behaviour and enhance shareholder value. The Fund believes that this influence would be lost through a divestment or screening approach. Ultimately the Fund will always retain the right to disinvest from certain companies or sectors in the event that all other approaches are unsuccessful and it is determined that the investment is no longer aligned with the interests of the Fund or that the issue poses a material financial risk. Under pooling it is likely that any such decision will need to be made in conjunction with other members of the ACCESS pool.

The Fund's approach to engagement recognises the importance of working in partnership to magnify the voice and maximise the influence of investors as owners. The Fund appreciates that to gain the attention of companies in addressing governance concerns; it needs to join with other investors sharing similar concerns. It does this primarily through:

- Membership of representative bodies including LAPFF;
- Membership of the Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association (PLSA);
- Giving support to shareholder resolutions where these reflect concerns which are shared and affect the Fund's interests;
- Joining wider lobbying activities when appropriate opportunities arise.

## **Exercise of Voting Rights**

The Fund continues to exercise its ownership rights by adopting a policy of actively voting stock it holds, and delegate's responsibility for voting to its appointed investment managers who are required to vote wherever the Fund has a voting interest. Wherever practicable, votes must be cast in accordance with the voting guidelines for investment managers of ACCESS ACS (Authorised Contractual Scheme).

The ACCESS Pool appointed operator, Link Fund Solutions Limited ("LFS") recognises that as the Manager of the ACCESS ACS, it has a responsibility as a shareholder, and to its investors the ACCESS funds, to promote good corporate governance and management in the companies in the ACS, which the Fund invests and it requires investment managers appointed to manage the Fund to exercise the voting rights attached to investments held in the Fund unless market circumstances make it impossible to do so. The document sets out guidelines to which LFS expects investment managers to have regard in the exercise of voting rights on behalf of the Fund however LFS recognises that in certain cases there may be good reasons not to follow the guidelines set out in this document and in those circumstances LFS expects its investment managers to exercise their discretion having regard to the long-term interests of the shareholders in the Fund and the principles of good corporate governance. LFS requires investment managers to report on voting activity monthly.

Where investment managers do not adopt the positions set out in these guidelines, it is required that they should provide a robust explanation of the position adopted. LFS also expects that investment managers will be signatories to and comply with the Financial Reporting Council's Stewardship Code (the Code) and United Nations Principles of Responsible Investment (UNPRI). If they have not signed up to either the Code or UNPRI they should be prepared to explain the reasons.

The Fund is committed to the UK Stewardship Code and has developed a statement of compliance for assessment by the Financial Reporting Council.