

Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

Scope of Responsibility

The Authority is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently, and effectively.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Authority is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, which include arrangements for the management of risk.

The Authority's Local Code of Corporate Governance, available on our website at: [Local Code of Corporate Governance \(sypensions.org.uk\)](https://www.sypensions.org.uk) complies with the principles of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)/Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016. The Authority reviews and updates this Local Code every two years (as a minimum) and the next review will be carried out by December 2025.

The Local Code and this statement are also supported by the Governance Compliance Statement which the Authority is required to produce under s 55(1) of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013, which is also available on our website: [here](#).

This statement explains how the Authority has complied with the Local Code and meets the requirements of regulation 6(1) of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 relating to the preparation and approval of an annual governance statement.

The Purpose of the Governance Framework

The governance framework comprises the systems, processes, culture, and values by which the Authority is directed and controlled, and the activities through which it accounts to and engages with employing bodies, pensioners, contributors, and other stakeholders. It enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk: it can only provide a reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is designed to identify risks to the achievement of the Authority's policies, aims and objectives. The system attempts to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised and how to manage them efficiently, effectively, and economically. The governance framework has been in place during the year ended 31 March 2025 and up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts.

Outline of the Governance Framework

The Authority's framework of governance continues to evolve in line with best practice and is based upon the 7 Core Principles set out in the 2016 CIPFA/SOLACE guidance, Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework. More details about the Authority's arrangements for ensuring compliance with each of the 7 Core Principles are set out in the Authority's Local Code of Corporate Governance.

Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

Arrangements in Place

Codes of conduct covering the behaviour of both members and officers, form part of the Constitution, with appropriate mechanisms for ensuring that action can be taken where transgressions are reported. For officers these are reinforced through a framework of values and behaviours, including specific management behaviours, which are reflected upon at individual level as part of the appraisal system.

A review and update of the Constitution was undertaken in the last year to incorporate recommendations from the independent governance review. The revised document was approved in March 2025 and is available here: [Constitution \(sypensions.org.uk\)](https://www.sypensions.org.uk/constitution)

The Independent Governance Review that was carried out by Aon at the end of 2023/24 and reported in June 2024, concluded that:

“... the governance of the SYPA is of an excellent standard in most areas, meets nearly all legal requirements in the matters we have considered, and is demonstrating best practice in several areas. In our view, the governance of the SYPA is of much higher quality than the majority of other LGPS funds, and we believe much of this is driven by the fact the organisation is a single purpose Local Authority”.

Whilst no significant weaknesses were identified, the report included some recommendations for further improvement or consideration. An action plan to address these was developed by a working group of Authority and Local Pension Board members along with officers. This was approved in December 2024 and progress is being reported at regular intervals to the Audit & Governance Committee and the Local Pension Board.

As required under local government law, elected members are required to complete declarations of interest which are publicly available and to declare any conflicts which might arise in discussion of specific matters at meetings of the Authority and its committees. Similar arrangements apply to members of the Local Pension Board, under requirements governed by the Local Government Pension Scheme regulations and the Public Service Pensions Act 2013.

Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

Registers of potential conflicts, including personal relationships, for staff and a register of gifts and hospitality for both staff and officers are all in place. The register of gifts and hospitality has been reviewed and updated during the year.

A Counter Fraud and Corruption policy and a Whistleblowing policy are in place should any individual wish to make a confidential disclosure. These policies have been reviewed and updated during the year. There have been no cases of fraud or uses of the whistleblowing procedure in the year. The Authority also participates in the National Fraud Initiative.

The Authority has a formal policy on the reporting of material breaches of the relevant pension regulations and any breaches which occur are reported to the Local Pension Board (LPB) at each of its meetings. Work to improve the identifying and recording of breaches not deemed to be material has been carried out during the year and training in this area delivered to staff and to Authority and LPB members. The next steps during the forthcoming year are to formalise the process for decision-making regarding when breaches are to be reported to the Pensions Regulator.

Complaints policies exist in relation to quality of service, and statutory appeals processes in relation to decisions made under the Pensions Regulations. During the year, a new role of Complaints Resolution Officer was established in the Pensions Administration department, with the purpose of improving consistency and timeliness of responses to complaints, collating and learning from complaints and other customer feedback received including root cause analysis and implementing solutions to prevent recurrence of issues.

Procurement arrangements are in place to comply with legislative requirements, good practice, achieve value for money and demonstrate accountability. This includes a gateway approval document that guides staff through the process and ensures all stages are appropriately documented. Training from CIPFA has been provided for all staff involved in procurement activity. The Contract Standing Orders that form part of the Constitution have been updated during the year to reflect changes new procurement legislation and regulations that came into force in February 2025. The Governance team attend regular training on procurement rules and practices and the Governance Team Leader is undertaking a Diploma in Contract Management to further strengthen knowledge to support making improvements in the Authority's processes in this area.

The Authority operates with an extremely strong value base in relation to ethical standards and values reflecting the seriousness of its responsibility as steward of the pension savings of a very large number of individual scheme members. The values and behaviours framework is central to both the Corporate Strategy and the appraisal process and the wider policy and constitutional framework covering issues such as recruitment and selection and procurement. The Authority also seeks to bring its commitment to these values into the role it plays within any partnership in which it participates, particularly the Border to Coast Pensions Partnership which is central to the delivery of its corporate objectives. The Authority ensures that it is aware, through the employment of specialist officers and advisers, of the statutory requirements which are placed upon it and takes steps to ensure that it complies with them in an open and transparent way. This includes the maintenance of an up-to-date

Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

Constitution which is regularly reviewed and includes definitions of both the Corporate Planning Framework and Pensions Policy Framework, together with terms of reference for committees and an appropriate scheme of delegation to officers.

The Authority maintains up to date role profiles for all posts within the organisation and ensures that it has appropriately qualified statutory officers in post who are able to operate in a way which complies with the relevant professional codes.

Formal records are kept of decisions taken by both officers and members together with the advice considered in making such decisions.

The Authority's Governance team oversees and manages democratic services, governance and assurance, and compliance with regulations.

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Arrangements in Place

The Authority seeks to be as open as possible with stakeholders, conscious that it is the steward of the savings of over 180,000 individuals, working for close to 600 different employers. To this end it complies with its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act and makes a considerable volume of information automatically and freely available through its website. The Freedom of Information Act Publication Scheme, which specifies the information published by the Authority and how to access this, is used as one means of signposting information electronically.

This includes a range of information on investment holdings, performance, the policy frameworks, and responsible investment issues such as how shares have been voted. In addition, meeting agendas and papers for the Authority, the various committees and the Local Pension Board are published online a week before each meeting and all meetings are open to the public, and webcast.

Key decisions made by officers are formally recorded and details published on the website.

To promote clarity in the information provided to support decision making, reports for decision making bodies follow a standard format which ensures that, for example, implications for the financial position of the Authority of a decision are clearly explained. In addition, all reports for decision are required to outline relevant risk considerations, so that these can be understood by decision makers. All reports must be reviewed and cleared by the relevant statutory officers prior to submission for decision to Authority / Committee / Local Pension Board meeting agendas.

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

The Authority has in place clear protocols regarding its participation as a Partner Fund in the Border to Coast Pensions Partnership. Clearly defined roles are set out for each participant in the Partnership in its Governance Charter and the relevant legal agreements. Regular reports are provided to the Authority by officers on the activity and performance of the Partnership, including a comprehensive annual review which considers the achievement of both the Authority's and the Partnership's objectives.

The forthcoming year will require the Authority to prepare for and respond to the impact of the emerging outcomes from the Government's 'LGPS – Fit for the Future' consultation with more work to be carried out around the overall governance of the Border to Coast partnership and in particular how performance concerns can be addressed. Given the likely need to respond to the process of the membership of the Partnership increasing, it is likely that a significant amount of senior input will be required to the management and development of the partnership over the coming year.

To ensure the views of stakeholders are considered in a systematic way by decision makers when relevant, the Authority has adopted a Communications, Consultation and Engagement Strategy which provides a standard framework for engaging with stakeholders.

The triennial review of the Authority's Investment Strategy to be completed during 2025 will be informed by views gathered from scheme members in a large consultation exercise undertaken during February – March 2025 as part of our aim to ensure that stakeholder views can help to shape our policies.

Resources are specifically allocated to support engagement with employers to support the maintenance of a productive and supportive relationship between them and the Authority. All engagement with employers takes place within the context of the Communications, Consultation and Engagement Strategy which requires the results of any consultation process to be reported back alongside the actions proposed following the consultation.

Emphasis is placed on increasing the volume and improving the quality of interaction with employers and an employer forum session and surveys have been undertaken during the year. The Authority's website includes an area for employers and an employer newsletter is sent to all employers with updates on relevant information, training, and events. The newsletter is now being issued monthly rather than quarterly in order to provide more timely updates and a more concise and easy-to-read format.

There is a current focus on engaging with all our employers as part of the triennial valuation process that will set the employer contribution rates to be paid from April 2026 to March 2029.

The processes for engaging with and understanding the views of scheme members are also set out in the Communications, Consultation and Engagement Strategy. Surveys are also used to gather feedback on our communications and inform improvements.

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Interaction with scheme members includes offering appointments to meet with staff either through online / virtual sessions or in-person appointments at our office in Barnsley.

The Authority's complaints and appeals processes are available to scheme members in relation either to quality of service, or specific decisions made under the LGPS regulations. The addition of a new role of Complaints Resolution Officer this year is designed to enhance the focus on responding to complaints and other customer feedback, as well as identifying common trends and root causes that can be tackled to improve performance. Information from the complaints and appeals processes forms part of the Authority's performance management framework and influences the development of policy, practice, and processes, including specific projects reflected in the Corporate Strategy.

As part of its assurance and scrutiny role, the Local Pension Board receives a quarterly report outlining the nature of all appeals and complaints and the subsequent actions and learning as well as quarterly information on the results of various rolling customer satisfaction surveys which examine specific aspects of the service to scheme members, which also include information on learning and actions from this feedback.

Areas for Improvement:

- Work needed to further strengthen the governance of the partnership arrangements with Border to Coast in light of emerging developments from Government legislation and policy in respect of pooling and governance in the LGPS. It is likely that a significant amount of senior input will be required to the management and development of the partnership over the coming year.

Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits

Arrangements in Place

The Authority sets out a clear vision supported by specific objectives for achieving that vision within its Corporate Strategy which is at the heart of its corporate planning framework. Delivery against these objectives and key quality of service standards is reported quarterly to members of the Authority within a comprehensive report, allowing action to be taken to address any variations if required. All activity is undertaken within a risk management framework which covers all aspects of the Authority's work.

Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits

In addition, given the centrality of being a responsible investor to the way in which the Authority invests the Pension Fund, regular publicly available reports are provided to the Authority detailing responsible investment activity undertaken and the outcomes achieved through this activity. These include summaries of the Fund's votes at company annual meetings.

The Authority's Responsible Investment Policy sets out how it reflects the balance between economic, social, environmental and governance issues within its investment decision making process and the areas where it seeks to move partners within the Border to Coast Pensions Partnership to a shared position. Responsible investment is central to the Authority's approach to the management of the funds for which it is responsible, and it is an active participant in a range of initiatives which seek to support the achievement of its objectives in this area. Reporting on the impact of various investments, including place-based impact investing, is now well established and included each year in the Authority's annual report. It is planned, working with Border to Coast colleagues, to extend this work to include reporting on the positive impact on climate from the investments made within the Climate Impact Portfolio.

During the year, the Authority was confirmed as a signatory to the UK Stewardship Code. Overseen by the Financial Reporting Council, this Code sets high stewardship standards for those investing money on behalf of UK savers and pensioners. Stewardship is the responsible allocation, management and oversight of capital to create long-term value for clients and beneficiaries leading to sustainable benefits for the economy, the environment and society. In order to be confirmed as a signatory, the Authority had to demonstrate in its Stewardship Report how we meet these standards across the 12 core principles for asset owners. The report is published on our website at: [Stewardship](#). The Authority will annually report on this basis in order to remain a signatory.

The Authority includes information in our annual report each year in line with TCFD - Taskforce on Climate- Related Financial Disclosures. This is an industry-led group which helps investors understand their financial exposure to climate risk and works with companies to disclose this information in a clear and consistent way. It was launched at the Paris COP21 in 2015 by the Financial Stability Board (FSB) and Mark Carney, the UN Special Envoy on Climate Action and Finance and UK Finance Adviser for COP26.

In the last year, the Authority has taken this further and produced its first standalone [TCFD Report for 2023/24](#), which is ahead of the proposed legislative timetable for production of this report by LGPS Funds. The report sets out SYPA's approach to managing climate risk within the four thematic areas of governance, strategy, risk management and metrics and targets of the TCFD. The TCFD report will be published annually and will show the progress the Fund is making towards its carbon emission reduction targets through the metrics agreed in the Climate Change Policy.

Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits

The Authority's decision making on key issues of this sort is transparent with appropriate decisions either taken in public meetings or published and supporting information placed in the public domain whenever possible. (Exceptions to this are limited and would include, for example, commercially sensitive market information that cannot be made public).

The Authority actively engages with groups seeking to influence its policies in different ways and uses its Communications, Consultation and Engagement Strategy to seek views on issues where appropriate and to consider differing views when making decisions. An example of this is the large consultation survey of all scheme members undertaken in Feb – Mar 2025 on responsible investment issues to inform the forthcoming review of the Investment Strategy.

Beyond the investment sphere, the Authority maintains a Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Scheme to guide its approach to the delivery of fair access to its services for any individual with a protected characteristic. This scheme has been fully revised and updated in February 2025 with a strategic action plan defined for delivery during the three-year period of the corporate planning framework, 2025 to 2028.

During the year, internal audit reviews have taken place on the controls and processes for the Investment Strategy & decision-making, Corporate Strategy & Planning Framework, and Climate Change / Net Zero – all of which concluded with substantial assurance.

Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

Arrangements in Place

The Authority's officers ensure that when making decisions, elected members have access to as much objective information as possible, as well as to the views of appropriately skilled and experienced independent advisers where specialist areas such as investment strategy are under consideration. Where members require additional information, officers agree specific timescales for its provision. The corporate planning process and the medium-term financial strategy are how the Authority agrees the relative priority and resource requirements of specific interventions.

Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

The Authority's discretions policy statement (as administering authority of the South Yorkshire Pension Fund) sets out clearly how the Fund will exercise discretions in relation to the LGPS regulations, including detail of the level to which decisions on each item are delegated and how applied.

The Authority has a well-defined and robust corporate planning framework with the review cycle linked at a high level to the major cyclical events impacting its operations (principally the triennial actuarial valuation of the Pension Fund). This framework is supported by well-established consultation arrangements ensuring that stakeholder views can influence plans where appropriate. The Corporate Strategy is reviewed and updated annually, with a comprehensive review of the whole framework every three years in line with the triennial cycle of the Fund's valuations. This full review was completed this year, and the new Corporate Planning Framework for the period April 2025 to March 2028 was approved by the Authority in February 2025.

A risk management framework is in place that ensures that both risks to service delivery and risks impacting the assets and liabilities of the Pension Fund can be addressed holistically.

A framework for monitoring the delivery of all the various plans and strategies is in place with a comprehensive report including both financial and performance information presented to the Authority on a quarterly basis with more detailed reports covering pension administration presented quarterly to the Local Pension Board and on investment performance to the Authority. These reports highlight deviations from plans and identify and assess the risks relevant to the achievement of objectives as well as including information around feedback received and how it has been acted on. There has been significant work undertaken this year on developing performance reporting – with the introduction of dashboards and a series of incremental improvements implemented by the Assistant Director – Pensions on the quarterly pensions administration performance reports to the Local Pension Board and the Authority.

The Authority's medium-term financial strategy and corporate strategy draw on inputs from both stakeholder feedback mechanisms, the views of elected members and the Senior Management Team's assessment of developments in the wider external environment to direct resources to address priority areas. The medium-term financial strategy examines both the Authority's operating budget and the financial position of the Pension Fund ensuring that all areas of cost and income are fully considered. Strong budgetary control is evident, and managers are conscious of the need to demonstrate financial probity.

The Authority sets out clear rules on procurement in its Contract Standing Orders within the Constitution. This has been updated during the year to comply with new legislation that came into force from February 2025 – the Procurement Act 2023. The Governance team have the role of ensuring compliance with procurement policy and regulations, arranging training as required and providing support and guidance to managers alongside forms and documentation that lead staff through the process and ensure appropriate controls and approvals are in place and evidenced.

Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

Having strengthened the procurement arrangements in place over the last couple of years, the focus has now shifted to developing and improving the framework and arrangements in place for contract management, with plans to update the guidance and support available to relevant managers responsible for managing the supplier relationships and contracts for key services / software systems relied upon by the Authority.

An Independent Governance Review was carried out and reported in June 2024. The overall results of which were very positive, the reviewers finding that the governance at SYPA is of an excellent standard in the vast majority of areas. There were no significant weaknesses highlighted but some recommendations were made for consideration for further improvement. A small working group of Authority and LPB members along with officers worked together to produce an action plan in response to these – many of the actions identified have already been completed or are in progress, with regular updates to be reported to both Authority and LPB.

This also aligns with regular assessment of compliance with the Pensions Regulator's General Code of Practice – the Authority assesses itself against both the essential requirements and the good practice standards in this Code, with actions planned to address any gaps and updates provided to the Local Pension Board every 6 months.

Areas for Improvement:

- Contract and Supplier Management – There is a need to develop and improve arrangements in place for managing contracts, providing a framework of policy, guidance and training for managers to follow. This will also need to incorporate procedures we will take to ensure that our service providers meet the Pensions Regulator's standards for maintaining their own IT systems.

Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

Arrangements in Place

The Authority's statutory role holders – the Director as Head of Paid Service, the Assistant Director – Resources as Chief Finance Officer and the Head of Governance & Corporate Services as Monitoring Officer, meet along with the Deputy Clerk on a quarterly basis.

The Clerk and Deputy Clerk roles are fulfilled by officers of Barnsley MBC under a service level agreement. During the year, these arrangements for the Clerk role have been reviewed at the request of Barnsley MBC, and the Authority approved a proposal to bring the Clerk role in-house to be fulfilled by the Director from 1 April 2025. This is a logical culmination of a process that has been in train for a number of years, of the Authority developing its capacity and 'self-sufficiency' in respect of all of its governance arrangements.

Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

Independent Advisers with suitable skills and experience are employed to support both the Local Pension Board and the Authority. An independent member with appropriate professional experience and expertise is also appointed to the Audit & Governance Committee, in line with recommended practice, and to support the Committee's role in providing challenge and scrutiny.

Both the Audit & Governance Committee and the Local Pension Board conduct annual effectiveness reviews to assess their own effectiveness and impact, identifying areas for improvement. In addition, the Authority conducted its own effectiveness review for the first time in February 2025. This will now become an annual process to align with those already in place and to inform the assurance gathering process undertaken each year as part of preparing this Statement and the annual report of the Authority.

Joint meetings of the Authority and Local Pension Board Chairs and Vice Chairs are held regularly throughout the year. The members holding these roles also attend a training course on Chairing Skills for councillors.

A Learning and Development Strategy is in place for elected members supported by the allocation of specific time within the overall programme of meetings. This strategy is set within the context of the CIPFA Knowledge and Skills Framework and has regard to the requirements of the Pensions Regulator. The Governance team focus proactively on supporting and ensuring all core training is completed and to strongly encourage take-up of a wide range of learning opportunities provided throughout the year. A 12-month induction programme is in place for new members with one-to-one reviews at regular intervals with the governance officer. All Authority and LPB members completed a National Knowledge Assessment during the year, the results of which have informed the Learning & Development (L&D) Strategy for 2025/26. To further strengthen the L&D provided for members, a self-assessment knowledge and skills matrix and individual learning plan will be introduced from April 2025 to ensure that each member has an individual plan tailored to their role, experience and needs in order to support them to fulfil their role on the Authority, its committees or the Local Pension Board most effectively.

An annual Authority and LPB Member Away Day is held to provide training on a range of relevant topics as well as an opportunity for collaboration and networking between Authority and Local Pension Board members and with officers, advisers and guest speakers. The November 2024 Away Day included presentations on investments, governance review, cyber security and pensions dashboard.

For staff of the Authority, an appraisal system is used to manage individual performance, plan learning and development, and support the succession planning process which is in place in key risk areas. In the last year, the staffing capacity growth plans in pensions administration that were approved in 2023 have been implemented successfully. These changes were designed to strengthen capacity, enhance capability, and increase sustainability.

Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

Work also continues to reduce the risk of single points of failure, and this is identified in the strategic risk register, with actions identified to mitigate this risk. These include actions around building internal resilience, sharing knowledge and documenting procedures etc. as well as continued actions around improving retention.

During the last year, this has been managed in practice as a result of the retirement of the former Assistant Director – Investment Strategy; with actions taken to ensure a smooth transition, involving the design and execution of a recruitment strategy to ensure successful appointment of a suitably experienced officer to the role in a timeframe that enabled a handover period of eight weeks.

Ongoing learning and development plans for the Authority's workforce are devised annually to support the goals set out in individual appraisals and are kept under review throughout the year. In addition to competency-based progression through the pension administration career grade, this can include professional qualification training, external training courses, and internally provided technical updates and system specific training. In the last year, this has included providing support for relevant staff to complete the newly developed Level 3 qualifications tailored to the LGPS in pensions administration.

The arrangements relating to career grade progression have been subject to a comprehensive review over the course of the last year, with the aim of developing a new corporate policy setting out a consistent set of principles to be followed across the organisation for managing career progression, underpinned by documentation detailing the assessment criteria and process attached to each career graded role. This work is in progress and is expected to be completed and launched in the first half of the 2025/26 year.

Learning and development activity for staff is further supported through access to online resources through a range of systems such as online reading rooms, SharePoint, and LinkedIn Learning.

The Director has an annual appraisal with the Authority's Chair and Vice Chair to review performance against objectives, set objectives for the next year and consider learning and development needs as relevant to the role. This is informed by 360-degree feedback from a range of internal and external stakeholders and is supported and facilitated by the Head of HR from Barnsley MBC. The appraisal is then presented to the Authority for discussion and approval in March each year.

The current Director has confirmed an intention to retire at the end of 2025. The Authority has approved a recruitment plan that will conclude in July 2025 and allow for an eight week handover period if successful. Following the appointment decision, a tailored induction programme will be developed for the individual to help ensure an effective 'on-boarding' to the organisation and the role.

Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

The Authority's management team continue to be mindful of the need to monitor the extent to which resourcing and officer capacity is available to meet the ambitions reflected in the corporate plans, particularly in respect of target timescales. Although this is in the context of constraints regarding the fact that many of the detailed plans are to meet statutory requirements and deadlines that do not allow for flexibility.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing arrangements are prominent and embedded across the organisation. An external Health & Safety adviser is retained, an annual independent audit of our H&S arrangements is undertaken, and any recommendations are acted upon, and the range of additional health and wellbeing support continues to grow each year, including workplace health checks and a range of webinars and other activities which target a variety of key physical, emotional, and mental health and wellbeing topics.

Areas for Improvement:

- The retirement of the current Director will require robust planning and practical arrangements to be put in place to ensure an appointment is made and a smooth transition and handover is achieved.

Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

Arrangements in Place

Managing Risk

A risk management policy framework is in place reviewed annually by the Audit and Governance Committee. Specialist risk management training was again delivered to relevant managers and officers during the year. The framework sets out clearly the responsibilities for managing the risks facing the organisation, how they should be assessed and reported. The strategic risk register is reviewed monthly by the Senior Management Team with reporting on a quarterly basis to meetings of the Authority as part of the overall performance management framework, together with review and challenge by the Local Pension Board.

Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

The use of a risk management software system is now embedded as part of the overall process. This will be further developed during the coming year, with the addition of operational level risk registers for each service to support and inform the strategic risk register. A post implementation audit review on the controls and processes for the system was completed during the year and provided substantial assurance.

Managing Performance

Arrangements for the reporting and monitoring of performance are in place, including clearly defined timetables for the reporting of information across the full range of activity, integrated with financial monitoring. Wherever possible, data is placed in the public domain and statutory reporting timescales are adhered to.

The Authority undertakes benchmarking of its cost base and performance across both the main streams of operational activity, pensions administration and investment.

A small team supports and co-ordinates the management of programmes and performance across the organisation. The use of an agreed project management methodology and central oversight and reporting of projects is now in place and used consistently. A new performance management framework was approved by the Authority in September 2024 and the team are continuing to develop the analysis and reporting of performance metrics, use of dashboards and a range of indicators. This is already having a positive impact in providing managers with a clear view of performance that they are able to use to inform and drive where intervention is required, and to building improvements in the reporting to Authority and Local Pension Board. The performance management framework continues to be an area of focus for the action plan for 2025/26.

Progress has continued in relation to the implementation of the pensions administration improvement plan, including the clearance of backlogs and this is reported quarterly to Authority and Local Pension Board. This will continue to be an identified action on the AGS action plan for the coming year and will additionally include development and implementation of the Data Improvement Strategy.

High quality data is central to the effectiveness of the organisation in its core function as a pension administrator. The Authority has a policy framework in place to ensure both the security and integrity of the large quantities of data which it holds.

The Authority's Head of Governance and Corporate Services is the Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO). In addition, resourcing is provided through the Governance team to provide a focus on compliance and continued development of the Authority's information governance framework. The Data Protection Policy Statement was updated during 2024/25 and plans for 2025/26 include the next phase of work which will focus on updating and improving the policy and procedures in place for data retention, classification and disposal as well as information asset registers.

Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

The Service Director for Customer Information and Digital Services at Barnsley MBC acts as the Authority's Data Protection Officer and his work is supported by an annual programme of internal audit review activity to ensure compliance with the policy framework.

The Authority has received the Cyber Essentials + accreditation from government in relation to its arrangements for information security. The controls in relation to cyber security are well embedded, and continually being developed and enhanced, making use of specialist tools, awareness training and with support available from external specialists on retainer. There is an identified need for the suite of ICT policy documentation, including the cyber security policy document, to be reviewed and updated. This was planned for 2024, but only limited progress was made (due to other pressures on the team resourcing available) so this is now in the action plans for the team for 2025/26. From the Independent Governance Review and reviewing compliance against the Pensions Regulator's new General Code of Practice, a need has also been identified to carry out ongoing specialist assessments of third party service providers' arrangements. This will be addressed in the relevant action plans.

Robust Internal Control

The Authority has an Audit and Governance Committee in place whose terms of reference are consistent with the relevant professional standards. The Committee has produced its own Annual report, available within the Governance section of the Authority's website, which sets out the work it has undertaken during the year.

The Committee is responsible for overseeing the work of Internal Audit, provided by Barnsley MBC's Corporate Assurance Service, and in particular ensuring that the Internal Audit plan addresses key control risks facing the Authority. The Head of Corporate Assurance, in her role as Head of Internal Audit for the Authority, is required under the relevant professional standards to produce an annual opinion on the adequacy of the control environment. *For 2024/25, this opinion is that "based on the systems reviewed and reported on by Internal Audit during the year to date, together with management's response to issues raised, I am able to give a reasonable (positive) assurance opinion regarding the effectiveness of the control, risk and governance environment."*

**NB: This conclusion is a draft only and will be updated for 2024/25 following the completion of the Head of Corporate Assurance's annual workplan and annual report for the year to the Audit & Governance Committee.*

Progress made in implementing actions agreed following audit reviews is reported to every meeting of the Committee and this helps to ensure that the control environment continues to be strengthened through the audit process.

The importance of internal control is well-embedded across the organisation and officers ensure a strong and effective working relationship is maintained with both Internal and External Audit, including regular liaison meetings, and ensuring independent access is available to the Audit

Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

and Governance Committee Chair and members. A separate meeting is held between the Chair and the external and internal auditors without any officer presence before each and every Committee meeting.

Strong Public Financial Management

The Authority is steward of a very large pension fund and therefore strong financial management is crucial to its effective operation. A strong framework of budgetary control is in place and monitoring against the operational budget, along with monitoring of investment performance, is reported quarterly to the Authority. Key projects are required to operate within defined budgets which receive approval through the appropriate decision-making processes.

The Authority's Medium Term Financial Strategy defines various fiscal rules which constrain the growth in expenditure, mirroring to some extent, the constraints which apply to conventional local authorities through the council tax capping regime.

Assurance over the financial controls and framework is provided through comprehensive audit arrangements. During the 2024/25 year, seven internal audit compliance reviews were undertaken on core financial systems and all of these concluded with a substantial assurance opinion. External audit provided an unmodified audit opinion on the Authority and Fund's statements of accounts and concluded that the Authority has appropriate arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the use of resources and identified no significant weaknesses in this respect.

Areas for Improvement

- Information Governance – Further work is required to review and update the remaining aspects of this framework in respect of data retention and classification policies and procedures and information asset registers.
- Pensions Administration Plan – Continued progress on this over the coming year is required, with further development of a data improvement strategy to be implemented.
- Policy Framework – There is a need to ensure that the full suite of ICT policies is updated during 2025/26 and procedures put in place to ensure this is kept up-to-date on an ongoing basis.

Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency and audit to deliver effective accountability

Arrangements in Place

The Authority seeks to be open and transparent in all its activities, seeking to minimise the amount of information that must remain confidential.

A substantial amount of information about the Authority's services and activities is published on its website: www.sypensions.org.uk including, for example, details of investment holdings and voting records. The agendas and public reports for all meetings of the Authority, its committees and the Local Pension Board are published and the public parts of meetings of the Authority, its committees and the Local Pension Board are webcast. The Authority's annual report also contains a significant amount of information on its activities in a more user-friendly format. The annual report for 2023/24, published in November 2024, was fully re-formatted to improve the design and presentation for readers, as well as being revised in line with new guidance for LGPS annual reports issued by the Scheme Advisory Board.

The Freedom of Information Publication Scheme provides clear signposting to the information which is publicly available and where it can be found. The Authority regards telling its story as a key activity, to report and demonstrate its performance, achievement of value for money and effective stewardship of scheme members' savings. For key documents such as the Annual Report and Accounts, the Authority follows the relevant professional codes in terms of the provision of information and seeks to go beyond them where possible, particularly in terms of presenting the information in a way which allows the reader to set information in the context of the Authority's work and easily understand it.

The Authority has continued to publish its audited accounts and annual report in advance of the statutory publication deadlines every year, ensuring that information for stakeholders is provided on a timely basis to promote effective accountability.

The Authority uses the governance framework set out in the Local Code of Corporate Governance to ensure that the information provided in reporting is accurate and consistent and that the same standards are met by key partnerships such as the Border to Coast Pensions Partnership. The Internal Audit function operates under a charter which conforms to the relevant public sector internal audit standards ensuring that the Authority complies with the relevant professional standards.

The Audit and Governance Committee reviews progress on implementation of actions agreed following audit reviews carried out by both internal and external audit and potentially other review agencies when the Scheme Advisory Board's Good Governance reforms are introduced. All these arrangements also apply to the way in which the Authority engages with various partners and a comprehensive process of gathering assurance from those managing money on behalf of the Authority is undertaken each year. The Authority seeks to ensure that the activity undertaken on its behalf by the Border to Coast Pensions Partnership reflects the agreed Governance Charter which applies similar standards to the Authority's arrangements in the Partnership's unique context.

Governance Action Plan – 2024/25 Progress Update

The table below sets out the actions identified for improvement and development in last year’s Annual Governance Statement and the progress made against these during 2024/25.

Action Plan from 2023/24 AGS	Responsible Officer	Target Date	Progress Update 2024/25
<p>Recording of Regulatory Breaches Develop and implement a dedicated recording mechanism for regulatory breaches, supported by training for staff and a decision-making process for reporting material breaches.</p>	Assistant Director – Pensions	September 2024	<p>Completed A new process has been developed and training has been delivered to staff across pensions administration teams. This is reflected in updated information now included in the Pensions Administration Quarterly updates to the Local Pension Board.</p>
<p>Review of Counter-Fraud and Whistleblowing Policies Complete a review and update of the Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy Statement and the Whistleblowing Policy.</p>	Head of Governance and Corporate Services	December 2024	<p>Completed Approved by the Authority in December 2024 and published on the Authority’s website.</p>
<p>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Undertake a thorough review of the EDI scheme – prioritising a series of agreed specific actions.</p>	SMT	February 2025	<p>Completed This action is now owned by the Assistant Director – Investment Strategy. A full review was undertaken and a new Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) Scheme for 2025 to 2028, including a detailed action plan, was approved by the Authority in February 2025.</p>
<p>Complete Independent Governance Review Independent Governance Review to be completed in June 2024 and an action plan to be developed to address any recommendations.</p>	Head of Governance and Corporate Services	December 2024	<p>Completed The review was completed as planned by June 2024, with very positive results. An action plan to address identified areas for improvements was developed and approved by the Local Pension Board and the Authority in December 2024.</p>

Action Plan from 2023/24 AGS	Responsible Officer	Target Date	Progress Update 2024/25
<p>Career Grade Scheme Develop an Authority Career Grade Scheme that provides a central policy applicable across the organisation supplemented by appropriately tailored schemes for individual roles that include assessment procedures and incorporate relevant accredited training / professional qualifications alongside development of workplace experience and skills.</p>	Assistant Director – Resources and HR Business Partner	March 2025	<p>Partially Completed Work commenced in autumn 2024, with the support of an expert external consultant, and is well in progress with a corporate scheme policy document drafted and work on-going to develop the individually tailored scheme assessment forms for each of the relevant service areas. Largely on track for completion, although to allow enough time for consultation and implementation, the date for completion may be slightly later than initially planned, now anticipated by June 2025.</p>
<p>Business Continuity Complete a full review and refresh of business continuity procedures and documentation, with support from external experts as required.</p>	Head of ICT	March 2025	<p>Partially Completed This work is well in progress. The review and a full business impact analysis was completed by the end of March 2025 – the remaining work to collate and finalise the documented plan and procedures will be carried out in the early part of 2025/26.</p>
<p>Performance Management Develop and implement a new framework which will include central production of performance information that will ensure improved reporting and enable service managers and heads to focus on interpretation and taking remedial actions as necessary.</p>	Head of Finance & Performance and Service Manager – Programmes & Performance	In stages over the course of the year to March 2025	<p>In Progress, Carry Forward to 2025/26 The performance management framework document was approved by the Authority in September 2024. A suite of dashboards have been developed and are now in use by management for performance monitoring and for reporting purposes. Work is ongoing to continue development of the framework and updated performance indicators, that is likely to continue into 2025/26.</p>
<p>Pensions Administration Improvement and Backlog Clearance Plan Deliver the elements of the Pensions Administration Improvement Plan and clear the backlog of casework.</p>	Assistant Director – Pensions	In stages to March 2026.	<p>In Progress, Carry Forward to 2025/26 Good progress is being made on delivery of this action, with detailed updates being reported to the Local Pension Board and to the Authority at each meeting. The current aim is for clearance of the backlog to be concluded by end of December 2025.</p>

Review of Governance – Areas for Improvement and Action Plan for 2025/26

The table below sets out the actions planned to be undertaken during the forthcoming year to address the areas for improvement identified from this year’s review of governance effectiveness, along with any actions carried forward from last year as outlined in the progress update above.

Area for Improvement	Actions Required in 2025/26	Responsible Officer	Date for Completion
<p>Carried Forward from 2024/25:</p> <p>Performance Management Framework</p> <p><i>[Linked to Principle F: Managing risks and performance]</i></p>	<p>Continue development and implementation of the framework for performance monitoring and reporting on updated performance indicators. This will enable service managers and heads to focus on interpretation and taking remedial actions as necessary.</p>	<p>Head of Finance & Performance and Service Manager – Programmes & Performance</p>	<p>In stages during the year to March 2026</p>
<p>Carried Forward from 2024/25:</p> <p>Pensions Administration Improvement Plan – including clearance of backlogs</p> <p><i>[Linked to Principle F: Managing risks and performance]</i></p>	<p>Continue with the progress to deliver the elements of the Pensions Administration Improvement Plan and clear the backlog of casework.</p>	<p>Assistant Director - Pensions</p>	<p>Backlog to be cleared by December 2025</p>
<p>Governance of the partnership arrangements with Border to Coast</p> <p><i>[Linked to Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement]</i></p>	<p>The process and governance for the partnership to be reviewed and strengthened in light of emerging developments from Government legislation and policy in respect of pooling and governance in the LGPS.</p>	<p>Director</p>	<p>December 2025</p>

Area for Improvement	Actions Required in 2025/26	Responsible Officer	Date for Completion
<p>Contract and supplier management</p> <p><i>[Linked to Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes]</i></p>	<p>Develop and implement a contract / supplier management framework – including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy, guidance on procedures and delivery of training for relevant managers. • Procedures to ensure that our service providers meet the Pensions Regulator’s standards for maintaining their own IT systems. 	<p>Assistant Director – Resources and Team Leader – Governance</p>	<p>In stages during the year to March 2026</p>
<p>Succession planning and risk management for turnover in Director role</p> <p><i>[Linked Principle E: Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment for new Director to be carried out during May to July 2025 to ensure sufficient time to enable new role holder, following any notice period, to commence a few weeks prior to the current Director’s departure. • To be supported by recruitment consultants in order to target and drive interest from the widest possible pool of potentially suitable candidates. 	<p>Director and HR Business Partner</p>	<p>Over the course of the period May 2025 to December 2025</p>
<p>Information Governance</p> <p><i>[Linked to Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management]</i></p>	<p>Complete the work to develop and implement revised policy and procedures for data retention, classification and disposal, and information asset registers.</p>	<p>Head of Governance and Corporate Services</p>	<p>March 2026</p>

Area for Improvement	Actions Required in 2025/26	Responsible Officer	Date for Completion
<p>Pensions Administration – Data Improvement Strategy</p> <p><i>[Linked to Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management]</i></p>	<p>Data Improvement Strategy to be implemented. Monitoring, reviewing and improving Data Quality to be developed and an annual programme to be embedded.</p>	<p>Assistant Director – Pensions and Service Manager – Technical, Support & Training</p>	<p>In stages to March 2026</p>
<p>Policy Framework</p> <p><i>[Linked to Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management]</i></p>	<p>Complete review and update of the suite of ICT-related policies. Consider policy coverage in relation to the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and the governance and controls required around this.</p> <p>Ensure arrangements are in place to review and keep these policies up to date thereafter.</p>	<p>Head of ICT</p>	<p>September 2025</p>

