

## **Metal Improvement Company Hourly Paid Pension Scheme – Governance Statement**

### **Introduction**

I am pleased to present the Trustees' annual statement of governance, covering the period 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024. This statement describes how the Trustees seek to ensure that the Metal Improvement Company Hourly Paid Pension Scheme (the "Scheme") is well-managed and delivers excellent services to members. In doing so, we provide the various statutory disclosures required by the Occupational Pension Schemes (Charges and Governance) Regulation 2015 (the 'Regulations'). This statement covers the following key areas:

- The Default Arrangement;
- Processing of core financial transactions;
- Member borne charges and transaction costs, including Value for Members; and
- The Trustees' compliance with the statutory knowledge and understanding requirements.

### **1. The Default Arrangement**

The Scheme is closed to new entrants and future accrual. No contributions have been paid to the Scheme since the Regulations came into force and the Scheme is not a qualifying scheme for auto enrolment purposes. The Scheme therefore has no requirement for a default arrangement, as defined by the Charges and Governance Regulations. The requirements in relation to a default investment strategy do not apply to the Scheme and are therefore not covered in this statement.

The Scheme's DC and AVC investments are managed by Scottish Widows in a With-Profits Fund with some additional non-member investments managed by Legal and General Investment Management ("LGIM") in an Index-Linked Gilts Fund. The allocation to Index-Linked Gilts was decided in 2018 in order to reduce risk relative to the Guaranteed Minimum Pension (GMP) liabilities. The Scheme also holds cash deposits with HSBC.

The Scheme also holds insurance policies with Canada Life and Prudential which provide annuity income to cover pensions for certain members. Please note that the Trustees have not included further information on these insurance policies, as they are not considered relevant in relation to the overall investments of the Scheme.

### **2. Processing of Core Financial Transactions**

The Scheme is closed to new entrants and future accrual. There are no contributions payable to member accounts. All member transactions are undertaken on behalf of the Trustees by a combination of LGIM, Scottish Widows and Aon (the Scheme administrators). All investment transactions are processed by the investment managers. A schedule of transactions and compliance with Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are provided in the Aon administration reports. Aon makes available frequent administration monitoring reports and any issues are raised as part of the Trustee meetings. Should there be any significant administration issues which require immediate attention, these will be raised directly with the Trustees outside of regular meeting cycle.

The requirements of regulation 24 of the Regulations have been met and core financial transactions have been processed promptly and accurately by:

- Appointing a professional third party administrator, currently Aon

- Having in place SLAs with the administrator that cover all core administration processes, including payments of benefits in respect of members and the transfers of assets into and out of the Scheme. The SLA target level and SLAs over the Scheme year are as shown below:

<b>Case Type</b>	<b>SLA Target in days</b>
AVC / DC	10
Data Change	10
Deaths	5
Divorce	10
General Enquiries	10
Retirement Quote	10
Retirement Settlement	5
Transfer Out – Quote	10
Transfer Out – Settlement	10
Subject Access Request	10
Other	10

Source: Aon

<b>Quarter</b>	<b>SLAs Achieved</b>
Q1 2024	77%
Q2 2024	92%
Q3 2024	92%
Q4 2024	95%

Source: Aon.

- Monitoring SLAs on a frequent basis as part of the review of management information provided by the administrator. The administrator also attends Trustee meetings where appropriate and the Trustees question and seek to understand the reasons for any dips in service levels, in order to identify any areas to make improvements.
- Obtaining an AAF internal controls audit report from the administrator each year. The last report received was dated 30/09/2024. The AAF internal control audit reports are referred to if the Trustees ask to see them or if the Scheme Administrators feel there is something to raise.
- Maintaining close working links between the in-house Human Resource and Payroll teams, along with the administrator.
- Monitoring the quality of the Scheme membership data held by the administrator on an ongoing basis.
- Maintaining and monitoring a risk register, which includes risks in relation to core financial transactions.
- Appointing a professional firm, RSM UK Audit LLP, to undertake an annual audit.

The Trustees consider that the requirements for processing core financial transactions have been met.

### **3. Member Borne Charges and Transaction costs, including Value for Members**

As required by the Regulations, the Trustees are required to report on the charges and transaction costs of the investments used by the Scheme and their assessment on the extent to which the charges and costs represent good value for members.

#### **Charges**

Charges are comprised of the Annual Management Charge ("AMC"), the annual fee charged by the investment managers for investing in a fund, as well as additional expenses. Together, these are known as the Total Expense Ratio (TER), which is the total cost of investing in the fund. The TER will be the same or higher than the AMC and includes any additional costs met by the fund – such as custody costs.

The Scheme's member DC assets are currently invested in the Scottish Widows With-Profits Fund and, given its structure, Scottish Widows has stated that it is not possible to determine the extent of the charges levied by the provider. In these circumstances, due to the lack of information available regarding the costs and charges, it is therefore not possible to make a general statement as to the value to members. Due to the way in which With-Profits funds are structured, any fee is charged as an implicit fee within the funds. With this in mind, please note that for the projected illustrations, a representative TER of 0.875% p.a. has been assumed.

The Scottish Widows With-Profits Fund offers a capital guarantee and provides annual bonus payments, together with a terminal bonus payment at retirement. The Trustees acknowledge that although the member may derive value from the guarantee and bonuses paid, further discussion is required with Scottish Widows to determine the actual costs and charges borne by the members of the Scheme.

We note that the Scheme also has non-member assets invested in the LGIM Over 15 Year Index-Linked Gilts Fund, which has a TER of 0.35%.

There are no performance-based fees for any of the funds within the Scheme.

#### **Transaction costs**

In addition to the investment managers' expenses included in the TER, investment funds are subject to other implicit costs, such as the investment managers' expenses associated with trading the underlying securities, including commissions and stamp duty. These expenses are not explicitly deducted from the fund but are captured by a reduction in investment returns.

The Financial Conduct Authority has provided guidance (PS17/20) to investment managers regarding the calculation and disclosure of transaction costs, which comply with the updated Regulations. The Trustees fully support transparency of costs for members and have requested this information from both Scottish Widows and LGIM. Scottish Widows subsequently confirmed a transaction cost of 0.21% for the year to 30 September 2024, whilst LGIM confirmed a transaction cost of 0.01% for the year to 31 December 2024. Transaction costs to December 2024 were requested from Scottish Widows but were not available in time for the production of this document.

The Trustees have made this information publicly available on the Company website as required by the Regulations.

The Trustees fully support transparency of costs for members. However, the key consideration for members is the performance produced net of fees and member outcomes at retirement and a cheaper fund does not necessarily deliver the best value for members.

### Projected Pension Pot Illustration

Using the transaction cost data provided by Scottish Widows and LGIM as at 31 December 2024, and in accordance with regulation 23(1)(ca) of the Administration Regulations, as inserted by the 2018 Regulations, the Trustees have prepared an illustration detailing the impact of the costs and charges typically paid by a member of the Scheme on their retirement savings pot. The statutory guidance provided has been considered when providing these examples.

The below illustration has taken into account the following elements:

- Savings pot size;
- Contributions;
- Real terms investment return gross of costs and charges;
- Adjustment for the effect of costs and charges; and
- Time.

To illustrate the impact of charges on a typical member's pension pot, we have provided examples below.

Year	Scottish Widows With-Profits Fund	
	£500 Pot Size with no Charges Incurred	£500 Pot Size with Charges Incurred
1	£509	£503
3	£526	£509
5	£545	£515
10	£593	£531
15	£646	£548
20	£703	£565
25	£766	£582
30	£834	£600
35	£909	£619
40	£990	£638
45	£1,078	£658

Notes – Scottish Widows With-Profits Fund
Projected pension pot values are shown in today's terms
Inflation increases are assumed to be 2.5% p.a.
The starting pot size is assumed to be £500
The Scottish Widows With-Profits Fund offers a capital guarantee and a guaranteed investment return on retirement of 4% p.a. after charges
All Scheme members are deferred therefore no allowance has been made for future contributions
We note that Scottish Widows has confirmed a TER of 0.875% and transaction costs of 0.21% for the year to 30 September 2024

The Scottish Widows illustration above is based on the guaranteed value, demonstrating how this will increase by 4% p.a. after costs and charges. The Scottish Widows With-Profits Fund provides a guaranteed return of 4% p.a. up to each member's normal retirement age. If a member retires before normal retirement age or transfers out, they may not receive the guaranteed value.

### Net return on investments

The Occupational Pension Schemes (Administration, Investment, Charges and Governance) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 ('the 2021 Regulations') introduce new requirements for trustees of 'relevant' occupational pension schemes.

From 1 October 2021, trustees of all relevant pension schemes, regardless of asset size, are required to calculate and state the return on investments from their default and self-select funds, net of transaction costs and charges.

The tables below set out annualised net performance for the 1 Year, 5 year and 10 year periods for the Scheme's arrangements.

Fund	Annualized returns to December 2024 (%)		
	1 Year	5 years	10 years
Scottish Widows With-Profits Fund*	7.1	2.3	3.6
LGIM Over 15 years Index-Linked Gilts Fund**	-15.4	-12.4	-

\*Scottish Widows performance has been calculated by Mercer due to the provider being unable to provide net performance at time of writing.

\*\*10 year period is unavailable due to fund inception of May 2019.

### Value for Money

Trustees of DC schemes with less than £100 million in assets must compare their scheme's costs, charges and investment returns against three other schemes. They must also carry out a self-assessment of their scheme's governance and administration in line with seven key metrics.

The Trustees are required to assess the extent to which the Scheme delivers value for members across three main areas:

Assessment area	Type of Assessment	Conclusion
Costs and charges	Comparative assessment of the Scheme's most popular investment options, against the closest-match investment options offered by three larger DC comparator arrangements, considering the level of ongoing member-borne charges and transaction costs.	The Scheme's costs and charges across the most popular option have been higher than those of default arrangements within the comparator arrangements.  However, due to the nature of the With-Profits fund, it does not incur any regular policy fees like the comparator arrangements.
Net investment performance	Comparative assessment of the Scheme's most popular investment options against the closest-match investment options offered by three larger DC comparator arrangements, considering investment performance net of all member-borne costs and charges.	The Scheme's net investment returns across the most popular option have been lower than those of default arrangements within the comparator arrangements over the long term (annualised five-year period).
Governance and administration	Standalone assessment of the Scheme's governance and administration arrangements, covering core financial transactions; record keeping; default investment strategy; investment	The Scheme's governance and administration arrangements have been assessed as reasonable to ensure the well-running of the

	governance; Trustee knowledge and understanding; member communications; and management of conflicts of interest.	scheme. However, significant improvements could be made.
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Overall, the Scheme has been assessed as providing poor value for members in the latest assessment but note the following:

- Providing a comparison between a With-Profits Fund and its peers is extremely challenging. Each With-Profits Fund offers different terms and guarantees and hence will invest very differently from one another, which in turn impacts the performance received through payouts. Indeed, a specific With-Profits Fund will often provide different guarantees dependent on when a member started contributing or when each contribution was actually invested. The available universe of With-Profits funds is not sufficiently alike to enable relative assessments based on past or potential performance.
- Payouts on surrender and maturity will reflect all charges incurred, though they are not separately identified. Moreover, the actual performance received by members, net of charges, is only ever known upon maturity/surrender, after any augmentation for guaranteed terms and after the effect of 'smoothing'.
- 'Smoothing' is an additional comfort factor within With-Profits funds. In years when investment performance is high, some of the return is held back to 'top-up' returns when lower performance occurs. Hence, at the point a specific member disinvests, smoothing may reduce or increase the payout relative to the underlying investment performance of the assets, thereby reducing investment risk for the individual investor and providing a steadier pattern of return. Insurers are required to stipulate that the payout in the event of early disinvestment will fall within a specified percentage of the underlying share of the assets attributable to the specific investor. Their ranges are targets, they are not guaranteed.
- Finally, With-Profits investments may be subject to a Market Value Adjustment, which means that it is very difficult to predict whether a member will suffer an exit penalty on transfer out to another arrangement.
- Assessing Value for Money of a With-Profits fund is also directly related to an individual's attitude towards, and capacity for, investment risk, as well as their individual circumstances. A member may find comfort in the fact that a With-Profits fund provides guarantees; whether that is a guaranteed pension, investment return or capital security. Therefore, we consider it inappropriate to reach a general conclusion on value for money from the With-Profits arrangement, as this will vary greatly by member.
- In relation to the LGIM Over 15 Year Index-Linked Gilts Fund, the Trustees considered the value for members as part of the investment arrangement review in January 2018 and the subsequent appointment of LGIM in 2019. The Trustees were comfortable with the member charges being offered and concluded that the Fund delivered good value for money. The Trustees also annually monitor the member charges for the Fund.

We understand the Trustees are currently considering potential options for the future of the Scheme which may impact timeframes, however the Trustees will continue to monitor the overall value being delivered by the Scheme.

#### **4. Trustee Knowledge and Understanding (“TKU”)**

In accordance with sections 247 and 248 of the Pensions Act 2004, the Trustees are required to maintain an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding which, together with the professional advice that is available to them, enables them to properly exercise their functions and duties in relation to the Scheme.

Trustee training is of high importance to the good running of the Scheme. The Trustees acknowledge how vital it is that they maintain their knowledge of pension law, trust law, investment principles and are conversant with the Scheme documentation including the Trust Deed and Rules, SIP and Scheme policies.

##### **Training**

In order to maintain this high level of knowledge, the Trustees have procedures and policies in place:

- Trustees have individually or collectively undertaken the training modules from the Pensions Regulator’s site that are relevant to DC schemes;
- Trustees undertake additional training to ensure that they keep up to date with changes in legislation, current issues and the latest developments relating to DC schemes.
- All training activities are recorded in meeting minutes. The Trustees have agreed to maintain a training log going forward;
- Trustee training is considered regularly to determine any specific training and development needs, training sessions are then planned accordingly by the Scheme secretary and with support from the investment advisors, as and when required; and

Over the course of the Scheme year, the Trustees have demonstrated their continuous commitment to learning by carrying out training at each meeting on a topic that they feel is topical at the time.

The following training was held during the Scheme year:

- DC with GMP underpin schemes journey to buyout and wind-up.
- Investment strategy considerations.
- Scheme end game strategy including funding update.
- Annual Actuarial Report.
- Follow up Scheme end game strategy.

##### **Trustees Induction**

An induction process is not currently in place as the current Trustees have been in their positions for a number of years. When a new Trustee is appointed, the Trustees look into relevant induction training at this point.

##### **Examples Demonstrating TKU**

The Trustees undertook a number of activities over the past year, which demonstrates how they have a working knowledge of pension and trust law and funding and investment principles. These activities include:

- The current Trustee board has been in place for a number of years and has had training at various Trustee meetings. The Trustees have agreed to have training at the regular meetings, as and when deemed necessary;

- The Risk Register is reviewed every year and methods to mitigate the risks are discussed. This demonstrates that the Trustees hold relevant knowledge on DC specific internal controls and the regulatory requirements; and
- At the regular Trustees meetings held over the year, the Scheme's advisors reported on forthcoming changes to regulations, their potential impact on the Scheme, and the actions required to ensure compliance. In doing so, the Trustees remained informed about changes to pension law and their duties in relation to those laws. This demonstrates the Trustees have knowledge and understanding of Pension and Trust law.

### **Using Advisors**

The Trustees believe that the best run schemes use the combined skill and knowledge of both the Trustees and their professional advisors. The relevant skills and experience of those advisors are key criteria when evaluating advisor performance and selecting new advisors. Additionally, the following measures have applied during the period:

- The Trustees' professional advisors attend their formal meetings; and
- The Trustees receive briefings from their advisors on all legislative and regulatory developments at each meeting.

### **Assessing Effectiveness**

The Trustees understand that the knowledge and professional advice available needs to be used effectively in order for the Trustees to act properly. The examples below demonstrate the actions that have been taken to ensure this is the case:

- The Trustees undertake ongoing training both within their regular meetings and, when necessary, externally, to keep abreast of relevant developments;
- The Trustees regularly review their training needs;
- The Trustees also receive advice from professional advisors and the relevant skills and experience of those advisors is a key criterion when evaluating or selecting new advisors; and
- The Trustees undertake to complete The Pensions Regulator's Trustee Toolkit, as updated from time to time.

Trustee meetings typically occur each quarter and minutes are taken and then approved at the next meeting. Advisers are invited to all meetings, as required. The meetings are in relation to both Defined Benefit and Defined Contribution matters.

The Trustees demonstrate a diversification of skills, as well as breadth and depth of pension knowledge, primarily based on their roles within the Company, covering areas of finance and investments and legal experience.

I confirm that the above Statement has been produced by the Trustees to the best of their knowledge.