

## LGPS responds to Israeli settlements database complaint

By [Alex Janiaud](#) | August 8, 2022

The Local Government Pension Scheme's advisory board has provided an update regarding a database that lists companies active in the occupied Palestinian territories, after the UK Lawyers for Israel criticised the LGPS's summary of a January meeting with the then-UN special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, Michael Lynk.

Last year, Lynk urged the LGPS funds to divest from holdings in companies listed on an Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights database as having links to contested Israeli settlements.

Lynk then met with the LGPS advisory board's chair Roger Phillips and the Local Authority Pension Fund Forum's chair Doug McMurdo in January 2022. The meeting had been sought in part to clarify whether Lynk's appeal had been made as part of his UN role or in a personal capacity.

LGPS funds including the Merseyside Pension Fund have mulled divesting from Israel on ethical grounds.

### **LGPS funds' primary objective in investment is to ensure pensions are paid, but they can and do take human rights issues seriously**

#### **LGPS Scheme Advisory Board**

The government, however, included a bill in this year's Queen's Speech that was designed to stop local authorities from boycotting Israel.

The bill was created in order to prevent "divisive behaviour that undermines community cohesion across the country by stopping public bodies from imposing their own boycott, divestment or sanctions campaigns", the government said.

#### **'A somewhat misleading impression'**

In April, UK Lawyers for Israel wrote to the LGPS board seeking amendments to a statement on its website which followed the meeting with Lynk in January.

The group said that the summary presented "a somewhat misleading impression of the tenor of the discussion and it does not mention that Mr Lynk has failed to provide the information that he undertook to provide".

The LGPS board had updated that Lynk would provide more information on the database, in particular giving detail on the process for removing companies from it. UK Lawyers for Israel said that Lynk had not provided this information and urged the LGPS to amend its statement to reflect this.

It also called on the LGPS to state that the purpose of the meeting with Lynk "was to clarify and correct some of the assertions and misrepresentations" it accused him of making in his own letter to the LGPS.

In response, the LGPS board stated on its website: "It has since been clarified that the UN Human Rights Office produced the database referenced by Mr Lynk which details business enterprises involved in certain specified activities related to the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory."

It added that the list is updated annually and that Lynk is no longer in his UN role.

"LGPS funds' primary objective in investment is to ensure pensions are paid, but they can and do take human rights issues seriously, and there is statutory guidance which funds should have regard to in framing their ESG policies," the LGPS said.

"It is also noted that LAPFF are already actively engaging with some of the companies listed on the database."

The matter of investing in the companies active in the occupied territories is one that has generated interest from LGPS members.

#### **LGPS funds should not join the Israel boycott movement**

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Comment: Deputy editor Alex Janiaud argues that LGPS funds should not take part in the BDS movement.

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In November 2021, the Wirral Council Pensions Committee was asked by a member about the Merseyside fund's investment in nine companies said to be operating in the occupied Palestinian territories, which include Expedia and Motorola, and how this was compatible with the fund's responsible investment policies.

Councillors responsible for the fund decided in February to delay making a decision over the fund's investments in these companies, choosing to wait for the outcome of a proposed anti-boycott amendment to the public service pensions and judicial offices bill. The amendment was backed by MPs.

Labour councillor Brian Kenny, who opposes a boycott, told the committee that he had "never known any issue to attract so many emails, so many comments, from so many people as the issue before us today".



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