

SSE Southern Group of the ESPS

Cover Note: Statement of Investment Principles

Introduction and Purpose

This cover note accompanies the Statement of Investment Principles (“the Statement”) for the SSE Southern Group of the ESPS (“the Group”). The Statement sets out the key investment principles that the Trustee applies in the management of the Group’s assets. The Statement sets out the Trustee’s approach to the following areas:

- Scheme Objective
- Investment Objective
- Return Objective
- Risk Statement
- Sufficiency
- Investment Strategy
- Choosing Investments
- Performance Monitoring
- Kinds of Investment to be Held
- Balance Between Different Kinds of Investments
- Risk
- Expected Return on Investments
- Realisation of Investments
- Portfolio Turnover
- ESG Considerations
- Selecting Investment Managers
- Stewardship
- Voting and Engagement
- Monitoring
- Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVCs)
- Governance Arrangements

Key Points:

Objectives and Investment Strategy

The Trustee’s primary objective is to ensure that the Group holds sufficient and appropriate assets to meet members’ benefits as they fall due. The Statement sets out the goal of achieving full funding on a self-sufficiency basis, with the investment strategy balancing the need for long-term growth with prudent risk management.

Risk Management and Expected Return

The Statement describes the Trustee’s approach to managing risks associated with the Group’s investments, which are considered under three broad categories: funding risks, asset risks, and other provider risks. The Trustee seeks to identify, monitor, and manage these risks through strategic asset allocation, diversification, regular review of investment performance and funding levels, and robust oversight of service providers. In setting the investment strategy, the Trustee aims to achieve a return on the Group’s assets which, together with contributions, is sufficient over time to meet the growth in the Group’s liabilities and support the long-term objectives of the Group.

Responsible Investment and Stewardship

The Trustee integrates ESG factors into investment decision-making, recognising their potential impact on returns. The Statement describes how ESG considerations, including climate risk, are incorporated into investment decisions. Stewardship responsibilities, such as voting and engagement with investee companies, are delegated to investment managers, with the Trustee monitoring their activities and reporting on significant issues.

Governance Arrangements

The Trustee retains ultimate responsibility for the management of the Group and its investments, while delegating specific duties to advisers and investment managers with appropriate expertise. The Statement sets out the governance framework, including the division of responsibilities, guidelines for delegated parties, and processes for reviews, to ensure that all parties act in accordance with the principles set out in the Statement.

Further details on how the Group’s investment policies are implemented in practice are set out in the Investment Implementation Document (IID), which is maintained by the Trustee and can be made available upon request.

SSE Southern Group of the ESPS

Statement of Investment Principles

This is the Statement of Investment Principles (the “Statement”) made by the SSE Southern Group Trustee Limited (“the Trustee”) as Group Trustee of the SSE Southern Group of the ESPS (“the Group”) in accordance with the Pensions Act 1995 (as amended). The Statement is subject to periodic review by the Trustee at least every three years and more frequently as appropriate.

In preparing this Statement, the Trustee has consulted with the Sponsoring Employer, SSE Services Plc (“the Company”) and has taken written advice from the Investment Practice of Hymans Robertson LLP. The Trustee is satisfied that the investment adviser has the knowledge and experience required by the Pensions Acts to perform this role.

Further details on how the Group’s investment policies are implemented are set out in the “Investment Implementation Document” which is maintained by the Trustee. This document can be made available by the Trustee upon request.

Scheme objective

Primary funding objective

The Trustee is required under section 222 of the Pensions Act 2004 to adopt a “*Statutory Funding Objective*”. The *Statutory Funding Objective* is that the Group must have “sufficient and appropriate” assets to cover the expected cost of providing members’ *past service benefits*¹.

In addition, the Group aims to maintain a position where there is not, and there is unlikely to be, a material financial reliance on the Company to support the ability to pay members’ benefits beyond that required to meet future benefit accrual.

The Trustee’s long-term funding objective is to be 100% funded on a self-sufficiency basis by 2030, where “self-sufficiency” is assumed to be 100% on a gilts basis.

Investment objective

The Trustee’s primary objective is to provide sufficient assets to pay benefits as they fall due. The Trustee has translated its objectives into a suitable strategic (asset allocation) benchmark for the Group. The strategic benchmark is consistent with the Trustee’s view on the appropriate balance between seeking an enhanced long-term return on investments and accepting greater short-term volatility and risk. The strategic benchmark is reflected in the choice and mix of funds in which the Group invests.

The investment objective is a quantifiable statement comprising of a return objective and risk statement:

Return Objective

The Trustee aims to achieve a return on the Group’s assets in excess of the return on the liability benchmark. The liability benchmark is the portfolio of gilts that best matches the liability profile of the Group.

The Trustee has set the asset allocation such that the projected excess returns generated by the assets over the liability benchmark together with the contributions paid into the Group provide an appropriate probability of achieving the long-term funding target (100% funded on a self-sufficiency basis by 2030).

¹ The phrase used in the legislation to refer to the expected cost of members’ past service is “technical provisions”.

Risk Statement

The risk statement defines the level of confidence the Trustee has in the funding ratio (i.e. the ratio of assets to liabilities) being above a certain level over a defined period.

The Trustee has set the current asset allocation so that the projected funding level on the Technical Provisions basis in 2027 must not be less than 60% (based on the average of the worst 5% of outcomes).

Sufficiency

The Trustee has a secondary *funding objective*, of there being an expectation of surplus assets, over and above the cost of providing members' *past service benefits*, being generated as actual experience, particularly investment returns, turns out more favourable than the assumptions adopted for the *Statutory Funding Objective*. The aim will be over the longer term to use some, or all of this surplus, to reduce the proportion of higher risk assets, and to adopt an investment strategy that is more closely matched to the nature of the *past service benefits*.

Investment strategy

The Trustee has translated their objectives into a suitable strategic asset allocation benchmark for the Group. Day-to-day investment decisions have been delegated to a number of authorised investment managers. The strategic benchmark has been translated into benchmarks for the individual managers which are consistent with the Group's overall strategy. The Group benchmark is consistent with the Trustee's views on the appropriate balance between seeking an enhanced long-term return on investments and accepting greater short-term volatility and risk.

The investment strategy takes due account of the maturity profile of the Group (in terms of the relative proportions of liabilities in respect of pensioners and non-pensioner members), together with the level of disclosed surplus or deficit on an ongoing and gilts basis. The Trustee monitors fund performance relative to their agreed asset allocation benchmark. It is intended that the investment strategy and liability benchmark will be reviewed at least every three years following actuarial valuations of the Group. In addition, the Group's de-risking and hedging framework and associated funding level triggers will be sense-checked on an annual basis.

To achieve their objectives the Trustee has agreed the following:

Choosing investments

The Trustee has appointed a number of investment managers who are authorised under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 to undertake investment business.

The Trustee has appointed each of its investment managers to deliver a specific benchmark or performance target, which overall will align to deliver the broader Group investment strategy. The Trustee ensures that all manager engagements have clearly defined benchmarks, objectives and management parameters.

Where appropriate, and where commercial considerations permit, the terms of the mandate and the basis on which the manager is engaged will be defined specifically for the Group. Where such tailoring is not directly achievable, the Trustee will invest in pooled funds where the objectives of the fund and the policies of the investment manager will be evaluated by the Trustee to ensure that they are appropriate for the needs of the Group.

Remuneration for each mandate is determined at the inception of each mandate according to value. Where appropriate to the nature of the mandate, the term of the mandate and the role the mandate plays within the investment strategy, the Trustee may agree to a fee structure where the manager is incentivised to deliver outperformance relative to an agreed benchmark, typically in conjunction with a lower proportionate fee. The Trustee periodically reviews the fees paid to all of its managers against industry standards.

The Trustee reviews the nature of the Group's investments on a regular basis.

The Trustee seeks and considers written advice from a suitably qualified source when determining whether:

- Each manager and mandate are appropriate for the Group, particularly in relation to diversification, risk, expected return and liquidity;
- Any proposed investment in a security or product not previously known to the Group is suitable.

The Trustee recognises the long-term nature of its liability profile and appoints its managers to invest in such a way that generates long-term sustainable returns. The Trustee will carry out necessary due diligence on the underlying investment decision making process, to ensure the manager makes investment decisions over an appropriate time horizon aligned with the Group's objective.

The duration of each mandate is determined by the Trustee at the inception of each mandate. For open-ended investments, the Trustee generally engages managers on an ongoing basis with no pre-determined term of appointment. For such mandates, the Trustee expects the minimum duration of the appointment will be three years, this being the period over which performance of the mandate can be appropriately evaluated although all mandates are subject to ongoing review against various financial and non-financial metrics in addition to their continued appropriateness within the investment strategy. For close-ended investments, the Trustee expect the term of the appointment to be the lifetime of the investment.

Performance Monitoring

The Trustee reviews the performance of each of its managers and mandates on a regular basis against a series of metrics, including financial performance against the benchmark and objectives of the mandate, the exercise of stewardship responsibilities (including engagement with issuers) as set out in greater detail below, and the management of risks. Material deviation from performance or risk targets is likely to result in the mandate being formally reviewed.

The Trustee monitors its managers' performance against their respective benchmarks or targets on a quarterly basis over a long-term time horizon of 3 years or since inception where appropriate. Managers are expected to provide explanation for any significant deviations away from benchmark or target. The investment advisor monitors the investment managers for any changes in key personnel and significant business developments informing the Trustee and will advise if any action is required.

Kinds of investment to be held

The Trustee seeks to achieve the Group's investment objective by investing in a suitably diversified mix of assets. The Group may invest in quoted and unquoted securities of UK and overseas markets including equities, fixed interest and index-linked bonds, cash, property, infrastructure, asset backed securities, private debt and other forms of alternative credit assets, and pooled funds. The Group may also make use of contracts of insurance, derivatives and contracts for difference (or in pooled funds investing in these products) for the purpose of efficient portfolio management or to hedge specific risks. The Trustee considers all of these classes of investment to be suitable in the circumstances of the Group. In deciding the suitability, the Trustee considers the role of each in targeting the overall investment objective, taking into account the associated risks and potential rewards.

Balance between different kinds of investments

The Group's investment managers will hold a mix of investments which reflects their views relative to their respective benchmarks or return targets. Within each major market, each manager will maintain a diversified portfolio of underlying assets through direct investment or pooled vehicles.

Risk

The Trustee recognises that the Group faces a number of risks in relation to the investment of its assets. The Trustee accepts that a certain level of risk is inevitable in the effective management of investments and monitors these risks on a regular basis. The principle risks affecting the Group are:

Funding risks

The main funding risks affecting the Group are:

- Financial mismatch – 1. The risk that Group assets fail to grow in line with the developing cost of meeting Group liabilities; 2. The risk that unexpected inflation increases the pension and benefit payments and Group assets do not grow fast enough to meet the increased cost.
- Changing demographics – The risk that longevity improves, and other demographic factors change, increasing the cost of Group benefits.
- Systemic risk - The possibility of an interlinked and simultaneous failure of several asset classes and/or investment managers, possibly compounded by financial ‘contagion’, resulting in an increase in the cost of meeting Group liabilities.
- Sponsor risk – the risk that the sponsoring employer does not/cannot make sufficient contributions to support the payment of Group benefits. This may lead to a greater reliance on investment returns to pay for benefits.

The Trustee measures and manages financial mismatch in a number of ways. They have set a strategic asset allocation benchmark for the Group which allocates a proportion of the Group’s assets to “matching” assets. They assess risk, relative to the strategic benchmark, by monitoring the Group’s asset allocation and investment returns relative to the benchmark. They also assess risk relative to the Group’s liabilities by monitoring the mismatch in exposure of the assets and the exposure of the liabilities to changes in interest rates and inflation.

The Trustee keeps under review mortality and other demographic assumptions which could influence the cost of the benefits. These assumptions are considered formally at the triennial actuarial valuation and more often where appropriate. The Trustee seeks to mitigate systemic risk through a diversified portfolio, but it is not possible to make specific provision for all possible eventualities that may arise under this heading.

The Trustee considers the ability and willingness of the sponsor to support the continuation of the Group and make good any current/future deficit. The Trustee periodically reviews a number of key factors including sponsor covenant and size of deficit relative to a number of metrics.

Asset risks

- Concentration - The risk that significant allocation to any single asset category and its underperformance relative to expectation would result in difficulties in achieving funding objectives.
- Illiquidity - The risk that the Group cannot meet its immediate liabilities because it has insufficient liquid assets.
- Currency risk – The risk that the currency of the Group’s assets underperforms relative to Sterling (i.e. the currency of the liabilities).
- Manager underperformance - The failure by the fund managers to achieve the rate of investment return assumed in setting their mandates.

- Environmental, Social and Governance (“ESG”) risks – the extent to which ESG issues, including the transition to a low carbon economy, are not reflected in asset prices and/or not considered in investment decision making, leading to underperformance relative to expectations.
- Climate risk - The extent to which climate change causes a material deterioration in asset values as a consequence of factors including but not limited to policy change, physical impacts and the expected transition to a low-carbon economy.

The Trustee measures and manages asset risks as follows: the Trustee has set guidelines to ensure assets are invested in a range of asset classes and investment mandates each of which has a defined objective, performance benchmark and manager process which, taken in aggregate, constrain risk within the Trustee’s expected parameters.

By investing in a range of assets, including quoted equities and bonds, the Trustee recognises the need for some access to liquidity in the short-term. The Trustee limits the value of assets invested in illiquid assets. The Group hedges a proportion of its exposure to global currencies back to Sterling to mitigate currency risk.

In appointing several investment managers, the Trustee has considered the risk of underperformance by any single investment manager. The Trustee regularly monitors the performance of investment managers. The Trustee does not expect managers to take excess short-term risk and will regularly monitor the managers’ performance against the benchmarks and objectives set on a short, medium and long-term basis.

Other provider risks

Further third-party risks affecting the Group are:

- Transition risk - The risk of incurring unexpected costs in relation to the transition of assets among managers.
- Custody risk - The risk of losing economic rights to Group assets, when held in custody or when being traded.
- Credit default - The possibility of default of a counterparty in meeting its obligations.
- Operational risk – The risk of loss as a result of fraud, cyberattacks, poor advice, acts of negligence or lack of suitable process.
- Legislative risk – The risk that managers of the Group fail to comply with changes to legislation such as General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The Trustee monitors and manages risks in these areas through a process of regular scrutiny of its providers and audit of the operations they conduct for the Group or has delegated such monitoring and management of risk to the appointed investment managers as appropriate (e.g. custody risk in relation to pooled funds).

Electricity Pensions Trustee Limited (“EPTL”) is the Scheme Trustee to SSE Southern Group’s parent Scheme, the Electricity Supply Pension Scheme (“ESPS”). EPTL regularly review the suitability of the Group’s custodian and use the assistance of a third-party provider to examine the services provided. This review is undertaken annually with periodic discussions throughout the year.

When carrying out significant transitions, the Trustee seeks professional advice, as required by law and recommended by the regulator, and (where appropriate) considers the appointment of specialist transition managers. The Trustee ensures that all advisers and third-party service providers are suitably qualified and experienced. Suitable liability and compensation clauses are included in all contracts for professional services.

Expected return on investments

The investment strategy aims to achieve a return on Group assets which, taken in conjunction with contributions, is sufficient over time to match growth in the Group's pension liabilities.

Realisation of investments

The majority of the Group's investments may be realised quickly if required. The property, secured finance and private debt investments may be difficult to realise quickly in certain circumstances. The Trustee's policy is to consider a range of factors when realising investments including:

- The established cashflow policy;
- The potential future returns and risks of the investment;
- The liquidity of the investment; and
- The ongoing appropriateness of the investment as part of the Group's long term strategy.

The Trustee takes advice before realising assets of the Group.

Portfolio Turnover

The Trustee has expectations of the level of turnover within each mandate which is determined at the inception of the mandate, based on the Trustee's knowledge of the manager, investment process and the nature of the portfolio. Whilst the Trustee expects performance to be delivered net of costs, including the costs of trading within the portfolio, the Trustee expects managers to report on at least an annual basis on the underlying assets held within the portfolio and details of any transactions over the period. The Trustee will challenge its managers if there is a sudden change in portfolio turnover or if the level of turnover seems excessive. The Trustee will request the turnover costs incurred by the asset manager over the Group reporting year. Where possible the Trustee will compare costs to the theoretical portfolio turnover and cost for an appropriate index.

Environmental, Social and Governance ("ESG") considerations

The Trustee recognises that the consideration of financially material factors, including ESG factors such as carbon reduction as part of the transition to a low carbon economy, is relevant at different stages of the investment process.

The Trustee has established a set of Responsible Investment ("RI") beliefs, which are used as a framework for decision making. The Trustee has explicitly acknowledged the relevance of ESG factors in framing their investment beliefs and these beliefs are reflected in the principles set out below and the broader implementation of strategy.

Strategic considerations

The strategic benchmark has been determined using appropriate long-term economic and financial assumptions from which expected risk/return profiles for different asset classes have been derived. These assumptions apply at a broad market level and are considered to implicitly reflect all financially material factors.

Given the inherent uncertainty, the Trustee carries out climate risk scenario modelling when undertaking a formal investment strategy review, the results of which are considered when making strategic investment decisions. The Trustee periodically discusses climate change with their investment adviser and investment managers to consider the potential implications for the Group's investments. The Trustee reviews the managers' climate change and ESG policies on an annual basis and actively challenges the Group's managers where appropriate.

Structural considerations

Given the discretion afforded to the active investment managers, the Trustee expects that the Group's investment managers will take account of all financially material factors, including the potential impact of ESG factors and the move to a low carbon economy, in the implementation of their mandate.

Within active mandates, the Trustee has delegated responsibility for the consideration of stock specific issues to their individual investment managers.

Within passive mandates, the Trustee recognises that the choice of benchmark dictates the assets held by the investment manager and that the manager has limited freedom to take account of factors that may be deemed to be financially material. The Trustee accepts that the role of the passive manager is to deliver returns in line with the benchmark and believe the choice of benchmarks will deliver appropriate risk adjusted returns. The Trustee will review the index benchmarks employed for the Group on at least a triennial basis.

The Trustee has discussed the extent to which ESG issues are integrated into the investment processes across all of their investment managers and are satisfied that the investment managers are following approaches which take account of all financially material factors in relation to their respective mandates.

Selecting investment managers

In selecting new investment managers for the Group, the Trustee explicitly considers potential managers' approach to RI and the extent to which they integrate ESG issues (including climate risk) in their investment processes, as a factor in their decision making.

Consideration of non-financially material factors in investment arrangements

Given the objectives of the Group, the Trustee has not considered any non-financially material factors in the development and implementation of their investment strategy. The Trustee has not imposed any restrictions or exclusions to the investment arrangements based on non-financially material factors.

The Trustee should adopt, or ensure their investment managers adopt, the Financial Reporting Council's guidance on the responsibilities of shareholders and agents to act diligently and in the best interests of the ultimate owners. In particular, the Trustee believe that the Group's investment managers should sign-up and adhere to the principles set out in the UK Stewardship Code, or the equivalent relevant country-specific regulations, and explain any non-compliance.

In the event that a manager does not adhere to a recognised set of principles for responsible investment, the Trustee will take reasonable steps to ensure that they are comfortable with the policy that the manager has in place in respect of this. The Trustee ensures that any manager appointed has a social and ethical policy that is aligned to the Trustee's expectations.

Stewardship

The Trustee recognises that stewardship encompasses the exercise of voting rights, engagement by and with investment managers, and the monitoring of compliance with agreed policies.

The Trustee has selected the following as priority stewardship themes to help guide discussions with appointed investment managers and to report on significant votes in the preparation of the Group's annual implementation statement. These themes are reviewed annually:

- Climate Change
- Modern Slavery
- Board Composition

- Biodiversity

Voting and engagement

The Trustee has adopted a policy of delegating voting decisions on stocks to their investment managers on the basis that voting power will be exercised by them with the objective of preserving and enhancing long-term shareholder value. The investment managers are expected to exercise the voting rights attached to individual investments in accordance with their own house policy.

Where relevant, the Trustee will review the voting policies of their investment managers and determine that these policies are appropriate. The Trustee will request their investment managers provide details of any change in their house policy periodically.

The Trustee does not engage directly but believes it is sometimes appropriate for its investment managers to engage with key stakeholders – which may include corporate management, regulators and governance bodies relating to their investments –to consider the management of conflicts of interest and improve corporate behaviours, improve performance and mitigate financial risks.

Where necessary, investment managers are expected to notify the Trustee of any issue on which it may be beneficial for the Trustee to undertake further engagement. The Trustee will review engagement activity undertaken by their investment managers as part of its broader monitoring activity.

Responsibility for investment decisions has been delegated to the investment managers which includes consideration of the capital structure of investments and the appropriateness of any investment made. Where managers are responsible for investing in new issuance, the Trustee expects the manager to engage with the issuer about the terms on which capital is issued and the potential impact on the rights of new and existing investors.

The Trustee separately considers any conflicts of interest arising in the management of the Group and its investments and has ensured that each manager has an appropriate conflicts of interest policy in place.

Monitoring

Investment managers report on voting activity to the Trustee on a periodic basis. The Trustee will formally review the voting behaviours of the Group's investment managers on an annual basis in conjunction with producing an implementation statement. The Trustee will proactively engage with their managers where necessary.

The Trustee maintains a rotational engagement programme with the Group's managers and records a log of these engagement activities. The Trustee may also monitor investment managers' voting on particular companies, or issues affecting more than one company.

The Trustee aims to meet with all their investment managers periodically. The Trustee provides their managers with an agenda for discussion, including issues relating to individual holdings and ESG issues. Managers are challenged both directly by the Trustee and by their investment advisers on the impact of any significant issues, including ESG and carbon reduction considerations, that may affect the prospects for return from the portfolio.

Notwithstanding the regular monitoring of the managers, the Trustee will engage with and may seek further information from their investment managers on how portfolios may be affected by a particular issue where appropriate. The Trustee also independently monitors the carbon intensity and wider ESG risk exposure within the Group's listed assets on an annual basis, and pertinent ESG metrics for certain portfolios quarterly. If the Trustee has any due concerns, they will bring a manager meeting forward on the meeting schedule, to ensure timely intervention.

Additional voluntary contributions (“AVCs”)

The Trustee gives members the opportunity to pay additional contributions to purchase additional service within the Group. The Trustee monitors the performance, costs, management and ESG considerations of AVCs in line with the Pensions Regulator’s requirements, in proportion to the value of the investments.

Governance Arrangements

There are a number of parties involved in the Group’s investment arrangements. The Trustee has ultimate responsibility for the management of the Group and its investments but delegates a number of decisions and responsibilities to specialist advisers and fund managers.

The Trustee confirms that all parties to whom responsibility has been delegated have the appropriate knowledge and experience required to take on these roles. The Trustee expects each party to carry out the duties delegated to them with a view to giving effect to the principles in this statement, insofar as is reasonably practical.

The Trustee has set guidelines and restrictions within which their advisers and investment managers can act. More detail on how the responsibilities are divided between the parties involved is set out in the Investment Implementation Document.

Signed for and on behalf of the Trustee of the SSE Southern Group of the ESPS.

Trustee

Date

Trustee

Date