

APPENDIX 1

TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY – 2015/2016

Introduction

In February 2012 the Council adopted the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice Fully Revised 2011 Edition (the CIPFA Code) which requires the Council to approve a treasury management strategy before the start of each financial year.

In addition, the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) issued revised guidance on local authority investments in March 2010 that requires the Council to approve an investment strategy before the start of each financial year.

This report fulfils the Council's legal obligation under the Local Government Act 2003 to have regard to both the CIPFA Code and the CLG Guidance.

The Authority has substantial amounts of borrowing and lending, and is therefore exposed to financial risks including the loss of invested funds and the revenue effect of changing interest rates. The successful identification, monitoring and control of risk are therefore central to the Authority's treasury management strategy.

Treasury Borrowing Limits for 2015/16 to 2017/18

It is a statutory duty under s.3 of the Local Government Act 2003, and supporting regulations, for the Council to determine and keep under review how much it can afford to borrow. This amount is termed the 'Affordable Borrowing Limit'.

The Council must have regard to the Prudential Code when setting the Affordable Borrowing Limit. The Code requires an authority to ensure that its total capital investment remains within sustainable limits and, in particular, that the impact upon its future council tax levels is 'acceptable'.

The Affordable Borrowing Limit must include all planned capital investment to be financed by external borrowing and any other forms of liability, such as credit arrangements. The Affordable Borrowing Limit is to be set on a rolling basis for the forthcoming year and two successive financial years.

Treasury Management Indicators for 2015/16 – 2017/18

The Council measures and manages its exposures to treasury management risks using the following indicators. The council is asked to approve the following indicators:

Security: average credit rating

The Council has adopted a voluntary measure of its exposure to credit risk by monitoring the weighted average credit rating of its investment portfolio.

	2015/16
Minimum Portfolio average credit rating	A-

Interest rate exposures

This indicator is set to control the Council's exposure to interest rate risk. The upper limits on fixed and variable rate interest rate exposures, expressed as an amount of net principal borrowed will be:

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Upper limit on fixed interest rate exposures	£182m	£193m	£190m
Upper limit on variable interest rate exposures	£104m	£115m	£112m

Fixed rate investments and borrowings are those where the rate of interest is fixed for the whole financial year. Instruments that mature during the financial year are classed as variable rate.

Maturity structure of borrowing

This indicator is set to control the Council's exposure to refinancing risk. The upper and lower limits on the maturity structure of fixed rate borrowing will be:

	Upper	Lower
Under 12 months	50%	0%
12 months and within 24 months	75%	0%
24 months and within five years	75%	0%
Five years and within 10 years	100%	0%
10 years and above	100%	0%

Time periods start on the first day of each financial year. The maturity date of borrowing is the earliest date on which the lender can demand repayment.

Principal sums invested for periods longer than 364 days

The purpose of this indicator is to control the Council's exposure to the risk of incurring losses by seeking early repayment of its investments. The limits on the proportion of total principal sum invested to final maturities over 364 days will be:

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Limit on proportion of principal invested over 364 days	£50m	£50m	£50m

Borrowing limits

The Authorised limits for external debt include current commitments and proposals in the budget report for capital expenditure, plus additional headroom over and above the operational limit for unusual cash movements.

The Operational boundary for external debt is based on the same estimates as the authorised limit but without the additional headroom for unusual cash movements. This level also factors in the proposed approach to use internal cash-flow and future capital receipts as the preferred financing method for the capital programme.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Operational boundary – borrowing	£182m	£193m	£190m
Operational boundary – other long-term liabilities	<u>£2m</u>	<u>£2m</u>	<u>£2m</u>
Operational boundary – TOTAL	£184m	£195m	£192m
Authorised limit – borrowing	£219m	£227m	£224m
Authorised limit – other long-term liabilities	<u>£2m</u>	<u>£2m</u>	<u>£2m</u>
Authorised limit – TOTAL	£221m	£229m	£226m

External Context & Prospects for Interest Rates (Arlingclose Ltd)

The Council has appointed Arlingclose as its treasury advisor and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. The following section gives their commentary on the economic context and views on the prospects for future interest rates.

Economic background: There is momentum in the UK economy, with a continued period of growth through domestically-driven activity and strong household consumption. There are signs that growth is becoming more balanced. The greater contribution from business investment should support continued, albeit slower, expansion of GDP. However, inflationary pressure is currently extremely benign and is likely to remain low in the short-term. There have been large falls in unemployment but levels of part-time working, self-employment and underemployment are significant and nominal earnings growth remains weak and below inflation.

The MPC's focus is on both the degree of spare capacity in the economy and the rate at which this will be used up, factors prompting some debate on the Committee. Despite two MPC members having voted for an 0.25% increase in rates at each of the meetings between August and December 2014, the minutes of the January 2015 meeting showed unanimity in maintaining the Bank Rate at 0.5% as there was sufficient risk that low inflation could become entrenched and the MPC became more concerned about the economic outlook.

Credit outlook: The transposition of two European Union directives into UK legislation in the coming months will place the burden of rescuing failing EU banks disproportionately onto unsecured local authority investors. The *Bank Recovery and Resolution Directive* promotes the interests of individual and small businesses covered by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme and similar European schemes, while the recast *Deposit Guarantee Schemes Directive* includes large companies into these schemes. The combined effect of these two changes is to leave public authorities and financial organisations (including pension funds) as the only senior creditors likely to incur losses in a failing bank after July 2015.

The continued global economic recovery has led to a general improvement in credit conditions since last year. This is evidenced by a fall in the credit default swap spreads of banks and companies around the world. However, due to the above legislative changes, **the credit risk associated with making unsecured bank deposits will increase** relative to the risk of other investment options available to the Authority.

Interest rate forecast: The Authority's treasury management advisor Arlingclose forecasts the first rise in official interest rates in August 2015 and a gradual pace of increases thereafter, with the average for 2015/16 being around 0.75%. Arlingclose believes the normalised level of the Bank Rate post-crisis to range between 2.5% and 3.5%. The risk to the upside (i.e. interest rates being higher) is weighted more towards the end of the forecast horizon. On the downside, Eurozone weakness and the threat of deflation have increased the risks to the durability of UK growth. If the negative indicators from the Eurozone become more entrenched, the Bank of England will likely defer rate rises to later in the year. Arlingclose projects gilt yields on an upward path in the medium term, taking the forecast average 10 year PWLB loan rate for 2015/16 to 2.7%.

Arlingclose Interest Rate Forecasts

Arlingclose central interest rate forecast – January 2015

	Bank Rate	3 month LIBID	12 month LIBID	20-year gilt yield*
Q1 2015	0.50	0.55	0.95	2.10
Q2 2015	0.50	0.60	1.00	2.20
Q3 2015	0.75	0.80	1.20	2.30
Q4 2015	0.75	0.90	1.30	2.35
H1 2016	1.00	1.15	1.55	2.50
H2 2016	1.25	1.40	1.80	2.75
H1 2017	1.50	1.65	2.05	3.00
H2 2017	1.75	1.95	2.35	3.20

* The Council can currently borrow from the PWLB at 0.80% above gilt yields

The Council has budgeted for investment interest rates to remain constant at 0.45% for 2014/15 & beyond, reflecting the planned short-term duration of investments.

Local Context

Current Portfolio Position

The Council's treasury portfolio position at 31st December 2014 comprised:

	Principal	Ave. rate
	£m	%
External Borrowing		
Fixed rate funding – PWLB	50	4.79
Fixed rate funding – LA's	28	1.28
Variable rate funding – LOBOs	20	4.50*
Other long term liabilities	Nil	N/A
TOTAL GROSS EXTERNAL DEBT	98	3.73
Investments		
Short Term Investments	22.1	0.47
Long Term Investments	Nil	N/A
TOTAL INVESTMENTS**	22.1	0.47
NET DEBT	75.9	

* The market loans are 'lenders options' or LOBO's. These are fixed at a relatively low rate of interest for an initial period but then revert to a higher rate of 4.5%. When the initial period is over the loans are then classed as variable, as the lender has the option to change the interest rate at 6 monthly intervals, however at this point the borrower has the option to repay the loan without penalty.

** Total Investments includes Schools balances where schools have not opted for an external bank account and cash balances related to B&NES CHC Pooled budgets and West of England Growth Points funding.

Borrowing Strategy

The Council currently holds £98 million of long-term loans (a increase of £28m on the previous year) as part of its strategy for funding previous years' capital expenditure, and we will continue to monitor appropriate opportunities for borrowing in line with the overall Capital Financing Requirement.

The Council's capital financing requirement (CFR, or underlying need to borrow) as at 31st March 2015 is expected to be £187 million, and is forecast to rise to £219 million by March 2016 as capital expenditure is incurred.

The Council's chief objective when borrowing money is to strike an appropriately low risk balance between securing low interest costs and achieving cost certainty over the period for which funds are required. The flexibility to renegotiate loans should the Council's long-term plans change is a secondary objective.

The maximum expected long-term borrowing requirement for 2015/16 is:

	£m
Not borrowed in previous years	89
Forecast increase in CFR	32
Loans maturing in 2015/16	10
TOTAL	131

Given the significant cuts to public expenditure and in particular to local government funding, the Authority's borrowing strategy continues to address the key issue of affordability without compromising the longer-term stability of the debt portfolio. With short-term interest rates currently much lower than long-term rates, it is likely to be more cost effective in the short-term to either use internal resources, or to borrow short-term loans instead.

By doing so, the Authority is able to reduce net borrowing costs (despite foregone investment income) and reduce overall treasury risk. The benefits of internal borrowing will be monitored regularly against the potential for incurring additional costs by deferring borrowing into future years when long-term borrowing rates are forecast to rise. Arlingclose will assist the Authority with this 'cost of carry' and breakeven analysis. Its output may determine whether the Authority borrows additional sums at long-term fixed rates in 2015/16 with a view to keeping future interest costs low, even if this causes additional cost in the short-term.

In addition, the Authority may borrow short-term loans (normally for up to one month) to cover unexpected cash flow shortages.

Sources of borrowing

The approved sources of long-term and short-term borrowing will be:

- Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) and its successor body
- any institution approved for investments that meets the investment criteria (this includes other local authorities)
- any other bank or building society approved by the Prudential Regulation Authority to operate in the UK
- UK public and private sector pension funds (except the Avon Pension Fund)
- Capital market bond investor
- Local Capital Finance Company and other special purpose companies created to enable local authority bond issues

In addition, capital finance may be raised by the following methods that are not borrowing, but may be classed as other debt liabilities:

- operating and finance leases
- hire purchase
- Private Finance Initiative
- sale and leaseback

The Authority has previously raised the majority of its long-term borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board, but it continues to investigate other sources of finance, such as local authority loans and bank loans, that may be available at more favourable rates.

LGA Bond Agency: The Local Capital Finance Company was established in 2014 by the Local Government Association as an alternative, and in competition to, the PWLB. It plans to issue bonds on the capital markets on behalf of participating local authorities. The Municipal Bonds Agency as it is referred to, is a company set up and owned by Local Government to provide access to Capital Finance at advantageous borrowing rates. The Company will also seek to facilitate inter-local authority lending and access to other financial instruments. Whilst the Municipal Bond Agency will be a more administratively complicated source of finance than the PWLB, it has the potential to directly or indirectly reduce borrowing costs for local authorities. Borrowing authorities will be required to provide a joint and several liability to other participating local authority borrowers at each bond issuance, although the risks associated with this are likely to be very small given the statutory protections relating to local authority defaults. Any decision to borrow from the Municipal Bonds Agency will be subject to specific approval of the Cabinet

The Authority holds £20m of LOBO (Lender's Option Borrower's Option) loans where the lender has the option to propose an increase in the interest rate as set dates, following which the Authority has the option to either accept the new rate or to repay the loan at no additional cost. All of these LOBOS have options during 2015/16, and although the Authority understands that lenders are unlikely to exercise their options in the current low interest rate environment, there remains an element of refinancing risk. The Authority will take the option to repay LOBO loans at no cost if it has the opportunity to do so.

Short-term and variable rate loans leave the Authority exposed to the risk of short-term interest rate rises and are therefore subject to the limit on the net exposure to variable interest rates in the treasury management indicators below.

Debt Rescheduling

The PWLB allows authorities to repay loans before maturity and either pay a premium or receive a discount according to a set formula based on current interest rates. Some bank lenders may also be prepared to negotiate premature redemption terms. The Authority may take advantage of this and replace some loans with new loans, or repay loans without replacement, where this is expected to lead to an overall saving or reduction in risk.

Policy on use of Financial Derivatives

Local authorities have previously made use of financial derivatives embedded into loans and investments both to reduce interest rate risk (e.g. interest rate collars and forward deals) and to reduce costs or increase income at the expense of greater risk (e.g. LOBO loans and callable deposits). The general power of competence in Section 1 of the *Localism Act 2011* removes much of the uncertainty over local authorities' use of standalone financial derivatives (i.e. those that are not embedded into a loan or investment).

The Authority will only use standalone financial derivatives (such as swaps, forwards, futures and options) where they can be clearly demonstrated to reduce the overall level of the financial risks that the Authority is exposed to. Additional risks presented, such as credit exposure to derivative counterparties, will be taken into account when determining the overall level of risk. Embedded derivatives, including those present in pooled funds, will not be subject to this policy, although the risks they present will be managed in line with the overall treasury risk management strategy.

Financial derivative transactions may be arranged with any organisation that meets the approved investment criteria. The current value of any amount due from a derivative counterparty will count against the counterparty credit limit and the relevant foreign country limit.

Derivative counterparties

Financial derivative transactions may be arranged with any organisation that meets the approved investment criteria. The current value of any amount due from a derivative counterparty will count against the counterparty credit limit and the relevant foreign country limit.