

APPENDIX 2

INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Investment Policy

Both the CIPFA Code and the CLG Guidance require the Authority to invest its funds prudently, and to have regard to the security and liquidity of its investments before seeking the highest rate of return, or yield. The Authority's objective when investing money is to strike an appropriate balance between risk and return, minimising the risk of incurring losses from defaults and the risk of receiving unsuitably low investment income.

Investment instruments identified for use in the financial year are listed below under the 'Specified' and 'Non-Specified' Investments categories. Counterparty limits will be as set through the Council's Treasury Management Practices – Schedules.

The strategy of this policy is to set outer limits for treasury management operations. In times of exceptional market uncertainty, Council Officers will operate in a more restrictive manner than the policy allows, as has been the case during recent years.

As a result of the second Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID II), local authorities will be treated as retail clients but can "opt up" to professional client status, providing that they meet certain criteria which includes having an investment balance of at least £10 million and the persons authorised to make investment decisions on behalf of the authority having at least a year's relevant professional experience. In addition, the regulated financial services firms to whom this directive applies must assess that these persons have the expertise, experience and knowledge to make investment decisions and understand the risks involved.

The Council has met the conditions to opt up to MiFID professional status and intends for this to continue in 2018/19 in order to continue to have access to products including money market funds, pooled funds, treasury bills, bonds, shares and to continue to receive the same level of support from our treasury management advisors.

Avon Pension Fund Investments

The Council's Treasury Management team also manage the Avon Pension Fund's internally held cash on behalf of the Fund. The cash balance held internally is a working balance to cover pension payments at any point in time and it is estimated will be an average of £20 million, being around 0.45% of the overall assets of the Fund. The regulations require that this cash is accounted for separately and invested separately from the Council's cash.

Investments held will operate within the framework of this Investment Strategy, but the maximum counterparty limit and investment term with any counterparty are set annually by the Avon Pension Fund Committee. These limits are in addition to the Council's limits for counterparties as set out in Appendix 3.

The Fund's investment managers, are responsible for the investment of cash held within their portfolios and this policy does not relate to their cash investments. The Brunel Pension Partnership does not have any direct impact on the Council's treasury management activities.

The West of England Combined Authority

The West of England Combined Authority was established in 2017. The Authority has its own investment and borrowing powers, and is required to approve its own Treasury Strategy Statement.

The Council's Treasury Management Team undertake a lead role for the Treasury Management Function for the combined authority, with recovery of cost through an agreed Service Level Agreement.

Approved Investment Counterparties

The Council may invest its surplus funds with any of the counterparties in the following table, subject to the cash and time limits shown:

Credit Rating	Banks Unsecured	Banks Secured	Government	Corporates	Registered Providers
UK Central Govt.	N/A	N/A	£unlimited 50 Years	N/A	N/A
AAA	£10m 5 Years	£15m 20 Years	£10m 50 Years	£10m 20 Years	£5m 20 Years
AA+	£10m 5 Years	£15m 10 Years	£15m 25 Years	£5m 10 Years	£5m 10 Years
AA	£10m 4 Years	£15m 5 Years	£15m 15Years	£5m 5 Years	£5m 10 Years
AA-	£10m 3 Years	£15m 4 Years	£10m 10 Years	£5m 4 Years	£5m 10 Years
A+	£10m 2 Years	£15m 3 Years	£10m 5 Years	£5m 3 Years	£5m 5 Years
A	£10m 13 Month	£10m 2 Years	£10m 5 Years	£5m 2 Years	£5m 5 Years
A-	£10m 6 Months	£10m 13 months	£10m 5 Years	£5m 13 Months	£5m 5 Years

(continued)

Credit Rating	Banks Unsecured	Banks Secured	Government	Corporates	Registered Providers
BBB+	£5m 3 Months	£10m 6 Months	£10m 2 Years	£3m 6 months	£3m 2 Years
BBB	£5m Overnight	£5m 3 Months	N/A	N/A	N/A
None	£1m 6 Months	N/A	£10m 25 Years	£50,000 5 Year	£3m 5 Years
Pooled Funds	£10m Per Fund*				

* Amount refers to the principal invested (excluding any market valuation changes)

The majority of the Council's investments will be made for relatively short periods and in higher credit rated investments, giving priority to security and liquidity ahead of yield. However, where the Council has identified a core cash balance that is not required for any cash outflows in the short term, these funds will be considered suitable for a wider range of investments, with a greater focus on achieving a level of investment income that can support Council services. These may include long-term investments with registered providers of social housing, small businesses or corporate bond funds where an enhanced return is paid to cover the additional risks presented. Standard risk mitigation techniques, such as wide diversification and external credit assessments, will be employed, and no such investment will be made without a specific recommendation from the Council's treasury management adviser.

In addition, the Authority may invest with organisations and pooled funds without credit ratings, following an external credit assessment and advice from the Authority's treasury management adviser.

Banks Unsecured

Accounts, deposits, certificates of deposit and senior unsecured bonds with banks and building societies, other than multilateral development banks. These investments are subject to the risk of credit loss via a bail-in should the regulator determine that the bank is failing or likely to fail.

Current Bank Account: The Council's current accounts are held with National Westminster Bank plc (NatWest), which is close to the bottom of the above credit rating criteria. The Council will treat NatWest as "high credit quality" for the purpose of making investments that can be withdrawn on the next working day, subject to the bank maintaining a credit rating no lower than BBB-.

Banks Secured

Covered bonds, reverse repurchase agreements and other collateralised arrangements with banks and building societies. These investments are secured on the bank's assets, which limits the potential losses in the unlikely event of insolvency, and means that they are exempt from bail-in. Where

there is no investment specific credit rating, but the collateral upon which the investment is secured has a credit rating, the highest of the collateral credit rating and the counterparty credit rating will be used to determine cash and time limits. The combined secured and unsecured investments in any one bank will not exceed the cash limit for secured investments.

Government

Loans, bonds and bills issued or guaranteed by national governments, regional and local authorities and multilateral development banks. These investments are not subject to bail-in, and there is an insignificant risk of insolvency. Investments with the UK Central Government may be made in unlimited amounts for up to 50 years.

Corporates

Loans, bonds and commercial paper issued by companies other than banks and registered providers. These investments are not subject to bail-in, but are exposed to the risk of the company going insolvent.

Loans to unrated companies will only be made as part of a diversified pool in order to spread the risk widely. They will however only be made following a favourable external credit assessment and on the specific advice of the Council's treasury management adviser.

Registered Providers

Loans and bonds issued by, guaranteed by or secured on the assets of Registered Providers of Social Housing, formerly known as Housing Associations. These bodies are tightly regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency and, as providers of public services, they retain the likelihood of receiving government support if needed.

Pooled Funds

Shares in diversified investment vehicles consisting of any of the above investment types, plus equity shares and property. These funds have the advantage of providing wide diversification of investment risks, coupled with the services of a professional fund manager in return for a fee. Short-term Money Market Funds that offer same-day liquidity and very low or no volatility will be used as an alternative to instant access bank accounts, while pooled funds whose value changes with market prices and/or have a notice period will be used for longer investment periods.

Bond, equity and property funds offer enhanced returns over the longer term, but are more volatile in the short term. These allow the Authority to diversify into asset classes other than cash without the need to own and manage the underlying investments. Because these funds have no defined maturity date, but are available for withdrawal after a notice period, their performance and continued suitability in meeting the Authority's investment objectives will be monitored regularly.

The Council is considering investment in the CCLA Property Fund during 2018/19 with a view to providing further diversification of its commercial property investments and the potential for earning a higher investment yield

on the core investment balance the Council must hold to maintain the “Professional” investor status required under MIFID II. Any future investment is already covered under the existing Investment strategy for pooled funds and any final investment decision is delegated to the S151 Officer and will be subject to consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance & Efficiency.

Other Organisations

The Council may also invest cash with other organisations, for example by making loans to small businesses. Because of the higher perceived risk of unrated businesses, such investments may provide considerably higher rates of return. They will however only be made following a favourable external credit assessment and on the specific advice of the Council’s treasury management adviser.

Risk Assessments & Credit Ratings

The Council uses long-term credit ratings from the three main rating agencies Fitch Ratings Ltd, Moody’s Investors Service Inc and Standard & Poor’s Financial Services LLC to assess the risk of investment default. The lowest available credit rating will be used to determine credit quality, unless an investment-specific rating is available.

Long-term ratings are expressed on a scale from AAA (the highest quality) through to D (indicating default). Ratings of BBB- and above are described as investment grade, while ratings of BB+ and below are described as speculative grade. The Council’s credit rating criteria are set to ensure that it is unlikely that the Council will hold speculative grade investments, despite the possibility of repeated downgrades.

Credit ratings are obtained and monitored by the Council’s treasury advisers, who will notify changes in ratings as they occur. Where an entity has its credit rating downgraded so that it fails to meet the approved investment criteria then:

- no new investments will be made,
- any existing investments that can be recalled or sold at no cost will be, and
- full consideration will be given to the recall or sale of all other existing investments with the affected counterparty.

Where a credit rating agency announces that an BBB+ rating is on review for possible downgrade (also known as “rating watch negative” or “credit watch negative”) so that it may fall below the approved rating criteria, then only investments that can be withdrawn on the next working day will be made with that organisation until the outcome of the review is announced. This policy will not apply to negative outlooks, which indicate a long-term direction of travel rather than an imminent change of rating.

If further counterparties are identified during the year that meet the minimum credit rating criteria and conform to the other criteria set out in the Treasury

Management Practice Schedules, they can be added to the lending list following the agreement of the Chief Financial Officer.

The Authority understands that credit ratings are good, but not perfect, predictors of investment default. Full regard will therefore be given to other available information on the credit quality of the organisations in which it invests, including credit default swap prices, financial statements, information on potential government support and reports in the quality financial press. No investments will be made with an organisation if there are substantive doubts about its credit quality, even though it may meet the credit rating criteria.

When deteriorating financial market conditions affect the creditworthiness of all organisations, as happened in 2008 and 2011, this is not generally reflected in credit ratings, but can be seen in other market measures. In these circumstances, the Authority will restrict its investments to those organisations of higher credit quality and reduce the maximum duration of its investments to maintain the required level of security. The extent of these restrictions will be in line with prevailing financial market conditions. If these restrictions mean that insufficient commercial organisations of high credit quality are available to invest the Authority's cash balances, then the surplus will be deposited with the UK Government, via the Debt Management Office or invested in government treasury bills for example, or with other local authorities. This will cause a reduction in the level of investment income earned, but will protect the principal sum invested.

Foreign countries

Investments in foreign countries will be limited to those that hold a AAA or AA+ sovereign credit rating from all three major credit rating agencies, and to a maximum of £15m per country for those rated AAA and £10 million per country for those rated AA+. There is no limit on investments in the UK, irrespective of the sovereign credit rating.

Sovereign credit rating criteria and foreign country limits will not apply to investments in multilateral development banks (e.g. the European Investment Bank and the World Bank) or other supranational organisations (e.g. the European Union).

Investments in pooled funds and multilateral development banks do not count against the limit for any single foreign country, since the risk is diversified over many countries.

Specified Investments

Specified investments are those expected to offer relatively high security and liquidity, and can be entered into with the minimum of formalities. The CLG Guidance defines specified investments as those:

- denominated in pounds sterling,
- due to be repaid within 12 months of arrangement,
- not defined as capital expenditure by legislation, and
- invested with one of:
 - the UK Government,
 - a UK local authority, parish council or community council, or
 - a body or investment scheme of “high credit quality”.

The Council defines “high credit quality” organisations as those having a credit rating of A- or higher that are domiciled in the UK or a foreign country with a sovereign rating of AA+ or higher. For money market funds and other pooled funds “high credit quality” is defined as those having a credit rating of A- or higher.

Non-Specified Investments

Any investment not meeting the definition of a specified investment is classed as non-specified. The Council does not intend to make any investments denominated in foreign currencies, nor any that are defined as capital expenditure by legislation, such as company shares. Non-specified investments will therefore be limited to long-term investments, i.e. those that are due to mature 12 months or longer from the date of arrangement, and investments with bodies and schemes not meeting the definition on high credit quality. Limits on non-specified investments are shown below.

	£m
Total long-term investments	50
Total investments without credit ratings or rated below A- (except for UK Government and Local Authorities)	10
TOTAL	60

The time limit for long-term investments in UK Local Authorities & Local Government will be 50 years.

Long-term investments will be limited to 50% of a counterparty’s limit where it meets the above credit rating criteria (except the UK Government). The combined value of short-term and long-term investments with any organisation will not exceed the limits for specified investments highlighted above.

Liquidity management

The Council regularly reviews and updates its cash flow forecasts to determine the maximum period for which funds may prudently be committed. Limits on long-term investments are set by reference to the Council's medium term financial plan, levels of reserves and cash flow forecast.

Planned investment strategy for 2018/19

Investments are made in three broad categories:

- Short-term – cash required to meet known cash outflows in the next month, plus a contingency to cover unexpected cash flows over the same period.
- Medium-term – cash required to manage the annual seasonal cash flow cycle, including amounts to cover forecast shortages, planned uses of reserves, and a longer-term contingency.
- Long-term – cash not required to meet cash flows, and used primarily to generate investment income.

Short-term funds are required to meet cash flows occurring in the next month or so, and the preservation of capital and liquidity is therefore of paramount importance. Generating investment returns is of limited concern here, although it should not be ignored. Bank deposit accounts and Money Market Funds will be the main methods used to manage short-term cash.

Medium-term funds which may be required in the next one to twelve months will be managed concentrating on security, with less importance attached to liquidity but a slightly higher emphasis on yield. The majority of investments in this period will be in the form of fixed term deposits with banks and building societies. Preference will continue to be given to investments with UK banks with approved credit ratings.

Cash that is not required to meet any liquidity need can be invested for the longer term with a greater emphasis on achieving returns that will support spending on local authority services. Decisions on making longer term investments (i.e. over 1 year) will be considered during the year after taking account of the interest rate yield curve, levels of core cash and the amount of temporary internal borrowing related to funding of capital spend. A wider range of instruments, including structured deposits, certificates of deposit, gilts and corporate bonds may be used to diversify the portfolio. The use of external fund managers that have the skills and resources to manage the risks inherent in a portfolio of long-term investments may be considered.

The Council has already reduced its cash position to repay fixed interest debt held at higher rates. The continuing low level of short-term interest rates will mean the on-going use of internal cash resources to minimise the new borrowing. This approach will be regularly reviewed in light of market conditions and the wider economic outlook.

Review Reports

The revised CIPFA Code of Practice requires that both mid year and annual review reports on treasury activities are reported to Full Council.

Other Matters

The CLG Investment Guidance also requires the Council to note the following matters each year as part of the investment strategy:

Treasury management advisers

The Council's has appointed Arlingclose Limited as treasury management advisers and receives specific advice on investment, debt and capital finance issues, although responsibility for final decision making remains with the Council and its officers. The services received include:

- advice and guidance on relevant policies, strategies and reports,
- advice on investment decisions,
- notification of credit ratings and changes,
- other information on credit quality,
- advice on debt management decisions,
- accounting advice,
- reports on treasury performance,
- forecasts of interest rates, and
- training courses.

The quality of this service is monitored by officers on a regular basis, focusing on supply of relevant, accurate and timely information across the headings above.

Investment training

The needs of the Council's treasury management staff for training in investment management are assessed every year as part of the staff performance development review process, and additionally when the responsibilities of individual members of staff change.

Staff regularly attend training courses, seminars and conferences provided by Arlingclose and CIPFA. Relevant staff are also encouraged to study professional qualifications from CIPFA, the Association of Corporate Treasurers and other appropriate organisations.

Investment of money borrowed in advance of need

The Council may, from time to time, borrow in advance of spending need, where this is expected to provide the best long term value for money. Since amounts borrowed will be invested until spent, the Council is aware that it will be exposed to the risk of loss of the borrowed sums, and the risk that investment and borrowing interest rates may change in the intervening period. These risks will be managed as part of the Council's overall management of its treasury risks.

The total amount borrowed will not exceed the 2018/19 authorised borrowing limit of £434 million. The maximum periods between borrowing and expenditure is expected to be two years, although the Council does not link particular loans with particular items of expenditure.