

Treasury Management Half Yearly Report – 2023/24

1. Background

The Council operates a balanced budget, which broadly means cash raised during the year will meet its cash expenditure. Part of the treasury management operations ensure this cash flow is adequately planned, with surplus monies being invested in low risk counterparties, providing adequate security and liquidity initially before considering optimising investment return (yield).

Accordingly Treasury Management is defined as:

“The management of the local authority’s investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks.”

The second main function of a treasury management service is the funding of an authority’s capital plans. These capital plans provide a guide to the borrowing need of the Council, essentially the longer term cash flow planning to ensure the Council can meet its capital spending operations. This management of longer term cash may involve arranging long or short term loans, or using longer term cash flow surpluses, and on occasions any debt previously drawn may be restructured to meet Council risk or cost objectives.

2. Introduction

In February 2010 the Council adopted the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy’s Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice (the CIPFA Code) which requires the Council to approve treasury management semi-annual and annual reports.

This report includes the new requirement in the 2021 Code, mandatory from 1st April 2023, regarding the reporting of the treasury management prudential indicators.

The Council’s treasury management strategy for 2023/24 was approved at a meeting on 15 February 2023. The Council has invested substantial sums of money 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 remains central to the Council’s treasury management strategy.

The 2017 Prudential Code includes a requirement for local authorities to provide a Capital Strategy, a summary document approved by full Council covering capital expenditure and financing, treasury management and non-treasury investments. The Council’s Capital Strategy, complying with CIPFA’s requirement, was approved by full Council on 15 February 2023.

This Half Yearly Report to members is intended to provide an update of the treasury management strategy and performance for the period April to September of this financial year.

3. Economic Update – as provided by the Council’s Treasury Management Advisors, Arlingclose

UK inflation remained stubbornly high over much of the period compared to the US and euro zone, keeping expectations elevated of how much further the Bank of England (BoE) would hike rates compared to the regions. However, inflation data published in the latter part of the period undershot expectations, causing financial markets to reassess the peak in BoE Bank Rate. This was followed very soon after by the BoE deciding to keep Bank Rate on hold at 5.25% in September, against expectation for another 0.25% rise.

Economic growth in the UK remained relatively weak over the period. In calendar Q2 2023, the economy expanded by 0.2%. However, monthly Gross Domestic Product (GDP) data showed a 0.5% contraction in July, the largest fall to date in 2023 and worse than the 0.2% decline predicted which could be an indication the monetary tightening cycle is starting to cause recessionary or at the very least stagnating economic conditions.

July data showed the unemployment rate increased to 4.3% (3mth/year) while the employment rate rose to 75.5%. Pay growth was 8.5% for total pay (including bonuses) and 7.8% for regular pay, which for the latter was the highest recorded annual growth rate. Adjusting for inflation, pay growth in real terms were positive at 1.2% and 0.6% for total pay and regular pay respectively.

Inflation continued to fall from its peak as annual headline Consumer Price Index (CPI) declined to 6.7% in July 2023 from 6.8% in the previous month against expectations for a tick back up to 7.0%. The largest downward contribution came from food prices. The core rate also surprised on the downside, falling to 6.2% from 6.9% compared to predictions for it to only edge down to 6.8%.

The Bank of England’s Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) continued tightening monetary policy over most of the period, taking Bank Rate to 5.25% in August. Against expectations of a further hike in September, the Committee voted 5-4 to maintain Bank Rate at 5.25%. Each of the four dissenters were in favour of another 0.25% increase.

Financial market Bank Rate expectations moderated over the period as falling inflation and weakening data gave some indication that higher interest rates were working. Expectations fell from predicting a peak of over 6% in June to 5.5% just ahead of the September MPC meeting, and to then expecting 5.25% to be the peak by the end of the period.

Following the September MPC meeting, Arlingclose, the authority’s treasury adviser, modestly revised its interest forecast to reflect the central view that 5.25% will now be the peak in Bank Rate. In the short term the risks are to the upside if inflation increases again, but over the remaining part of the time horizon the risks are to the downside from economic activity weakening more than expected.

The lagged effect of monetary policy together with the staggered fixed term mortgage maturities over the next 12-24 months means the full impact from Bank Rate rises are still yet to be felt by households. As such, while consumer confidence continued to improve over the period, the GfK measure hit -21 in September, it is likely this will reverse at some point. Higher rates will also impact business and according to S&P/CIPS survey data, the UK manufacturing and services sector contracted during the quarter with all measures scoring under 50, indicating contraction in the sectors.

The US Federal Reserve increased its key interest rate to 5.25-5.50% over the period, pausing in September following a 0.25% rise the month before, and indicating that it may have not quite completed its monetary tightening cycle.

Having fallen throughout 2023, annual US inflation started to pick up again in July 2023, rising from 3% in June, which represented the lowest level since March 2021, to 3.2% in July and then jumping again to 3.7% in August, beating expectations for a rise to 3.6%. Rising oil prices were the main cause of the increase. US GDP growth registered 2.1% annualised in the second calendar quarter of 2023, down from the initial estimate of 2.4% but above the 2% expansion seen in the first quarter.

The European Central Bank increased its key deposit, main refinancing, and marginal lending interest rates to 4.00%, 4.50% and 4.75% respectively in September, and hinted these levels may represent the peak in rates but also emphasising rates would stay high for as long as required to bring inflation down to target.

Although continuing to decline steadily, inflation has been sticky, Eurozone annual headline CPI fell to 5.2% in August while annual core inflation eased to 5.3% having stuck at 5.5% in the previous two months. GDP growth remains weak, with recent data showing the region expanded by only 0.1% in the three months to June 2023, the rate as the previous quarter.

4. Credit View – as provided by the Council’s Treasury Management Advisors, Arlingclose

Having completed a review of its credit advice on unsecured deposits at UK and non-UK banks following concerns of a wider financial crisis after the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank purchase of Credit Suisse by UBS, as well as other well-publicised banking sector issues, in March Arlingclose reduced the advised maximum duration limit for all banks on its recommended counterparty list to 35 days. This stance continued to be maintained at the end of the period.

During the second quarter of the period, Moody’s revised the outlook on Svenska Handelsbanken to negative from stable, citing concerns around the Swedish real estate sector.

Having put the US sovereign rating on Rating Watch Negative earlier in the period, Fitch took further action in August, downgrading the long-term rating to AA+, partly around ongoing debt ceiling concerns but also an expected fiscal deterioration over the next couple of years.

Following the issue of a Section 114 notice, in September Arlingclose advised against undertaking new lending to Birmingham City Council, and later in the month cut its recommended duration on Warrington Borough Council to a maximum of 100 days.

Arlingclose continued to monitor and assess credit default swap levels for signs of ongoing credit stress and although no changes were made to recommended durations over the period, Northern Trust Corporation was added to the counterparty list.

Heightened market volatility is expected to remain a feature, at least in the near term and, as ever, the institutions and durations on the Authority’s counterparty list recommended by Arlingclose remains under constant review.

5. Arlingclose's Economic Outlook for the remainder of 2023/24 (based on 25th September 2023 interest rate forecast)

	Current	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26
Official Bank Rate													
Upside risk	0.00	0.25	0.50	0.50	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	1.00	1.00
Central Case	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.00	4.75	4.25	4.00	3.75	3.50	3.25	3.00	3.00
Downside risk	0.00	0.00	-0.25	-0.50	-0.75	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00

The MPC held Bank Rate at 5.25% in September. Arlingclose believes this is the peak for Bank Rate.

The MPC will cut rates in the medium term to stimulate the UK economy but will be reluctant to do so until it is sure there will be no lingering second round effects. Arlingclose see rate cuts from Q3 2024 to a low of around 3% by early 2026.

The immediate risks around Bank Rate lie to the upside, but these diminish over the next few quarters and shift to the downside before balancing out, due to the weakening UK economy and dampening effects on inflation.

Arlingclose expects long-term gilt yields to eventually fall from current levels reflecting the lower medium-term path for Bank Rate. However, yields will remain relatively higher than in the past, partly due to quantitative tightening, with continued elevated volatility.

6. Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy Update

The Treasury Management Strategy for 2023/24 was approved by Full Council on 15 February 2023. The Council's annual Investment Strategy, which is incorporated in the Treasury Management Strategy, outlines the Council's investment priorities as follows:

- Security of Capital
- Liquidity

The Council will also aim to achieve the optimum return on investments commensurate with the proper levels of security and liquidity. In the current economic climate it is considered appropriate to keep investments short term, and only invest with highly credit rated financial institutions using the Arlingclose suggested creditworthiness matrices. Currently investments are only being made with UK financial institutions.

Investments during the first six months of the 2023/24 financial year have been in line with the strategy, and there have been no deviations from the strategy.

It is considered that the strategy approved on 15 February 2023 is still fit for purpose in the current economic climate.

7. Investment Portfolio 2023/24

In accordance with the CIPFA Code, it is the Council's priority to ensure security of capital and liquidity, and to obtain an appropriate level of return which is consistent with the Council's risk appetite. The Bank of England has increased the official Bank Rate from 4.25% to 5.25% during the period. This has fed through into increasing investment returns.

The Council held investments of £28.19m as at 30 September 2023; £24.25m was placed in the Debt Management Account Deposit Facility (DMADF) with the DMO, £2m was held in the Public Sector Deposit Fund, and £1.94m was held in the Council's Lloyds Current Account for liquidity. In comparison £21.35m was held as at 31 March 2023; £17.0m in the DMADF and £4.35m in the Lloyds Current Account. Investments held have been with institutes with a credit rating of A+ or above. This is greater than the average portfolio credit rating target of A or above set in the Council's Treasury Management Strategy 2022/23.

Funds available for investment purposes during 2023/24 to date have varied throughout the year, with up to £34.58m being available for investment, mainly due to advances of the Town Deal and Future High Streets funding streams. There are fluctuations due to cash inflows and outflows during each month. Large cash inflows include council tax and business rate direct debits and the Housing Benefit subsidy from the Department for Work and Pensions. Large cash outflows include payment of the precepts to Staffordshire County Council, the Fire Authority and the Police, payment of salaries and payment of business rates to Central Government and the Staffordshire Business Rate pool.

The investment portfolio yield for the first six months of the year is 4.72%. For all investments held as at 30 September 2023 this yield was 5.26%. The Council's budgeted investment return for 2023/24 is nil. As at the end of the first 2 quarters of 2023/24 £607,446.09 of interest has been earned.

Both the CIPFA Code and government guidance require the Council to invest its funds prudently, and to have regard to the security and liquidity of its treasury investments before seeking the optimum rate of return, or yield. The Council's objective when investing money is to strike an appropriate balance between risk and return, minimising the risk of incurring losses.

Throughout 2023/24 to 30th September 2023 the interest rate on the Lloyds Current Account had risen from 2.3% to 3.0%. A rate of up to 5.36% was received from the DMADF. The return on Money Market Funds net of fees produced returns of up to 5.19%.

8. Borrowing Position 2023/24

The Council's current strategy is to maintain borrowing and investments below their underlying levels, sometimes known as internal borrowing, in order to reduce risk and keep interest costs low. During the first six months of 2023/24 no borrowing has taken place, however it is envisaged that borrowing will be required to cover short-term cash flow deficits together with the capital programme.

The Council consider it to be more cost effective in the near term to use internal resources or borrow on a short-term basis. This is also in line with advice provided by Arlingclose Ltd.

However, a need to borrow in order to fund the Council's capital programme was included within the Revenue and Capital Budgets and Strategies 2023/24 reports presented to Council on 15 February 2023. The impact of borrowing is included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy pressures for 2023/24 and future years.

Borrowing Update

CIPFA's 2021 Prudential Code is clear that local authorities must not borrow to invest primarily for financial return and that it is not prudent for local authorities to make any investment or spending decision that will increase the capital financing requirement and so may lead to new borrowing, unless directly and primarily related to the functions of the Authority. PWLB (Public Works Loan Board) loans are no longer available to local authorities planning to buy investment assets primarily for yield unless these loans are for refinancing purposes.

The Authority has not invested in assets primarily for financial return or that are not primarily related to the functions of the Authority. It has no plans to do so in future.

9. Compliance

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) reports that all treasury management activities undertaken during the year to date have complied fully with the CIPFA Code of Practice and the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy.

Compliance with debt limits:

	Q1 & Q2 2023/24 Maximum	30.09.23 Actual	2023/24 Operational Boundary	2023/24 Authorised Limit	Complied?
Borrowing	£0m	£0m	£75m	£85m	Yes

Compliance with investment limits:

	Q1 & Q2 2023/24 Maximum	30.09.23 Actual	2023/24 Limit	Complied?
The UK Government	£31.5m	£24.25m	Unlimited	Yes
Local authorities & other government entities	£0m	£0m	£7m	Yes
Secured investments	£0m	£0m	£7m	Yes
Banks (unsecured)	£7m	£1.94m	£7m	Yes
Building societies (unsecured)	£0m	£0m	£7m	Yes
Registered providers (unsecured)	£0m	£0m	£10m	Yes
Money market funds	£2m	£2m	£7m	Yes
Other Investments	£0m	£0m	£7m	Yes

10. Prudential Indicators 2023/24

Treasury management activity during the first half year has been carried out within the parameters set by the prudential indicators contained in the approved 2023/24 Treasury Management Strategy. Consequently, there is no intention to revise any of the indicators for the remainder of the year.

Liability Benchmark:

This indicator compares the Authority's actual existing borrowing against a liability benchmark that has been calculated to show the lowest risk level of borrowing. The liability benchmark is an important tool to help establish whether the Council is likely to be a long-term borrower or long-term investor in the future, and so shape its strategic focus and decision making. It represents an estimate of the cumulative amount of external borrowing the Council must hold to fund its current capital and revenue plans while keeping treasury investments at the minimum level of £1m required to manage day-to-day cash flow.

	31.3.23 Actual	31.3.24 Forecast	31.3.25 Forecast	31.3.26 Forecast
Loans CFR	10.7m	26.2m	26.1m	25.9m
Less: Balance sheet resources	(32.1m)	(10.7m)	(26.2m)	(26.1m)
Net loans requirement	(21.4m)	15.5m	(0.1m)	(0.2m)
Plus: Liquidity allowance	-	1.0m	1.0m	1.0m
Liability benchmark	(21.4m)	16.5m	0.9m	0.8m

Maturity Structure of Borrowing:

This indicator is set to control the Authority's exposure to refinancing risk. The upper and lower limits on the maturity structure of all borrowing were:

Refinancing Rate Risk Indicator	Upper Limit	Lower Limit
Under 12 months	100%	0%
12 months and within 24 months	100%	0%
24 months and within 5 years	100%	0%
5 years and within 10 years	100%	0%

Principal Sums Invested for Periods Longer Than One Year:

Price Risk Indicator	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	No fixed date
Limit on principal invested beyond year end	£25m	£25m	£25m	£25m

Security:

The Authority has adopted a voluntary measure of its exposure to credit risk by monitoring the value-weighted average credit rating of its investment portfolio. This is calculated by applying a score to each investment (AAA=1, AA+=2, etc.) and taking the arithmetic average, weighted by the size of each investment. Unrated investments are assigned a score based on their perceived risk.

Liquidity:

Credit Risk Indicator	2023/24 Target
Portfolio average credit rating	A

The Authority has adopted a voluntary measure of its exposure to liquidity risk by monitoring the amount of cash available to meet unexpected payments within a rolling [three] month period, without additional borrowing:

Liquidity Risk Indicator	Target
Total cash available within 3 months	£1m

Interest Rate Exposures:

This indicator is set to control the Authority's exposure to interest rate risk. The upper limits on the one-year revenue impact of a 1% rise or fall in interest rates are:

Interest rate risk indicator	2023/24 Target
Upper limit on one-year revenue impact of a 1% <u>rise</u> in interest rates	(£113,000)
Upper limit on one-year revenue impact of a 1% <u>fall</u> in interest rates	£113,000

Annex A

Treasury Management – Glossary of Terms

- **CIPFA** – the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, is the professional body for accountants working in Local Government and other public sector organisations.

- **CPI** – a measure that examines the weighted average of prices of a basket of consumer goods and services. The Consumer Price Index is calculated by taking price changes for each item in the predetermined basket of goods/services and averaging them; the goods are weighted according to their importance. Changes in CPI are used to assess price changes associated with the cost of living.
- **DMADF** – is provided by the DMO as part of its cash management operations and in the context of a wider series of measures designed to support local authorities' cash management.
- **DMO** – The Debt Management Office is an Executive Agency of Her Majesty's Treasury responsible for debt and cash management for the UK Government, lending to local authorities and managing certain public sector funds.
- **GDP** – Gross Domestic Product is the market value of all officially recognised final goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time.
- **Liquidity** – relates to the amount of readily available or short term investment money which can be used for either day to day or unforeseen expenses. For example Call Accounts allow instant daily access to invested funds.
- **MPC** – the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is a committee of the Bank of England, which meets for three and a half days, eight times a year, to decide the official interest rate in the United Kingdom (the Bank Rate).
- **PWLB** – Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) is a statutory body operating within the United Kingdom Debt Management Office. PWLB's function is to lend money from the National Loans Fund to local authorities, and to collect the repayments.
- **GfK Measure** – GfK's Consumer Confidence Index measures a range of consumer attitudes, including forward expectations of the general economic situation and households' financial positions and views on making major household purchases.