

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE



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PORTFOLIO	Resources and Performance Management
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2023/24 Treasury Management Quarter 3 (April – December)

PURPOSE

- To report treasury management activity for the period 1 April to 31 December 2023.

RECOMMENDATION

- The Executive is requested to;
 - Note the treasury management activities undertaken during the period 1 April to 31 December 2023, and;

Recommend that Full Council;

- Endorse the quarterly update on the Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 in compliance with the requirements of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- To inform members of the treasury management activity in the first three quarters of 2023/24 and to fulfil statutory and regulatory requirements.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Background**

The Council operates a balanced budget, which broadly means cash raised during the year will meet its cash expenditure. The first main function of treasury management operations is to ensure this cash flow is adequately planned, with surplus monies

being invested in low risk counterparties, providing adequate liquidity initially before considering maximising investment return.

The second main function of the treasury management service is to ensure the funding of the Council'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 commitments. This management of longer term cash may involve arranging long or short term loans, or using cash flow surpluses, and, on occasions, any current debt may be restructured to meet Council risk or cost objectives.

Treasury management is defined as:

“The management of the organisation's borrowing, investments and cash flows, including 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 monitoring requirements for treasury activity were set out in the Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) which included the Prudential and Treasury Indicators for 2023/24 – 2025/26, approved by Full Council on 22 February 2023.

5. **Introduction**

This report has been written in accordance with the requirements of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management (2021).

The primary requirements of the Code are as follows:

1. Creation and maintenance of a Treasury Management Strategy which sets out the policies and objectives of the Council's treasury management activities.
2. Creation and maintenance of Treasury Management Practices which set out the manner in which the Council will seek to achieve those policies and objectives.
3. Receipt by Full Council of an annual Treasury Management Strategy - including the Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy for the year ahead, a Mid-year Review Report and an Annual Report (stewardship report) covering activities during the previous year.
4. Additionally from 2023/24, quarterly reports for scrutiny to the Executive, to include updated Treasury/Prudential Indicators. These are included at Appendix 1.
5. Delegation by the Council of responsibilities for implementing and monitoring treasury management policies and practices and for the execution and administration of treasury management decisions.
6. Delegation by the Council of the role of scrutiny of treasury management strategy and policies to a specific named body. For this Council the delegated body is Scrutiny Committee.

This quarterly report has been prepared in compliance with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management, and covers the following:

- An economic update for the first nine months of 2023/24;
- A review of the Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy;
- The Council's capital expenditure, as set out in the Capital Strategy, and prudential indicators;
- A review of the Council's investment portfolio for 2023/24;
- A review of the Council's borrowing strategy for 2023/24;
- A review of any debt rescheduling undertaken during 2023/24;
- A review of compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits for 2023/24.

6. **Economic Update (Provided by Link Asset Services)**

- The third quarter of 2023/24 saw:
 - A 0.3% m/m decline in real GDP in October, potentially partly due to unseasonably wet weather, but also due to the ongoing drag from higher interest rates. Growth for the second quarter, ending 30th September, was revised downwards to -0.1% and growth on an annual basis was also revised downwards, to 0.3%;
 - A sharp fall in wage growth, with the headline 3my rate declining from 8.0% in September to 7.2% in October, although the ONS "experimental" rate (a term used by the ONS for statistics under development) of unemployment has remained low at 4.2%;
 - CPI inflation continuing on its downward trajectory, from 8.7% in April to 4.6% in October, then again to 3.9% in November;
 - Core CPI inflation decreasing from April and May's 31 years' high of 7.1% to 5.1% in November, the lowest rate since January 2022;
 - The Bank of England holding rates at 5.25% in November and December;
 - A steady fall in 10-year gilt yields as investors revised their interest rate expectations lower.
- The revision of GDP data in Q2 to a 0.1% q/q fall may mean the mildest of mild recessions has begun. Indeed, real GDP in October fell 0.3% m/m which does suggest that the economy may stagnate again in Q3. The weakness in October may partly be due to the unseasonably wet weather. That said, as the weakness was broad based it may also be the case that the ongoing drag from higher interest rates is more than offsetting any boost from the rise in real wages.
- However, the rise in the flash composite activity Purchasing Managers Index, from 50.7 in November to 51.7 in December, did increase the chances of the economy avoiding a contraction in Q3. The improvement was entirely driven by the increase in the services activity balance from 50.9 to 52.7. (Scores above 50 point to expansion in the economy, although only tepid in this instance.) The press release noted that this was primarily driven by a revival in consumer demand in the technological and financial services sectors. This chimes with the further improvement in the GfK measure of consumer confidence in December, from -24 to -22. The services PMI is now consistent with non-retail services output growing by 0.5% q/q in Q3, but this is in stark contrast to the manufacturing sector where

the output balance slumped from 49.2 to 45.9 and, at face value, the output balance is consistent with a 1.5% q/q fall in manufacturing output in Q3.

- The 0.3% m/m fall in retail sales volumes in October means that after contracting by 1.0% q/q (which was downwardly revised from -0.8% q/q) in Q2, retail activity remained weak at the start of Q3. That suggests higher interest rates are taking a bigger toll on real consumer spending.
- Higher interest rates have filtered through the financial channels and weakened the housing market but, overall, it remains surprisingly resilient with only marginal falls showing year on year on the Halifax (-1%) and Nationwide (-1.8%) indices. However, the full weakness in real consumer spending and real business investment has yet to come as currently it is estimated that around two thirds to a half of the impact of higher interest rates on household interest payments has yet to be felt.
- Overall, we expect real GDP growth to remain subdued throughout 2024 as the drag from higher interest rates is protracted but a fading of the cost-of-living crisis and interest rate cuts in the second half of 2024 will support a recovery in GDP growth in 2025.
- The labour market remains tight by historical standards, but the sharp fall in wage growth seen in October will reinforce the growing belief in markets that interest rates will be cut mid-2024. Wage growth eased in October much faster than the consensus expected. Total earnings fell by 1.6% m/m, which meant the headline 3myy rate eased from 8.0% in September to 7.2% in October. This news will be welcomed by the Bank of England. Indeed, the timelier three-month annualised rate of average earnings growth fell from +2.4% to -1.2%. Excluding bonuses, it fell from 5.3% to 2.0%. Furthermore, one of the Bank's key barometers of inflation persistence, regular private sector pay growth, dropped from 7.9% 3myy to 7.3%, which leaves it comfortably on track to fall to 7.2% by December, as predicted by the Bank in November.
- The fall in wage growth occurred despite labour demand being stronger in October than expected. The three-month change in employment eased only a touch from +52,000 in September to +50,000 in October. But resilient labour demand was offset by a further 63,000 rise in the supply of workers in the three months to October. That meant labour supply exceeded its pre-pandemic level for the first time, and the unemployment rate remained at 4.2% in October. In the three months to November, the number of job vacancies fell for the 17th month in a row, from around 959,000 in October to around 949,000. That has reduced the vacancy to unemployment ratio as demand for labour eases relative to supply, which may support a further easing in wage growth in the coming months.
- CPI inflation fell from 6.7% in September to 4.6% in October, and then again to 3.9% in November. Both these falls were bigger than expected and there are clear signs of easing in domestic inflationary pressures. The fall in core CPI inflation from 5.7% to 5.1% in November was bigger than expected (consensus forecast 5.6%). That's the lowest rate since January 2022. Some of the decline in core inflation was due to the global influence of core goods inflation, which slowed from 4.3% to 3.3%. But some of it was due to services inflation falling from 6.6% to 6.3%. The Bank views the latter as a key barometer of the persistence of inflation and it came in further below the Bank's forecast of 6.9% in its November Monetary Policy Report. This will give the Bank more confidence that services inflation is now on a firmly downward path.

- The Bank of England sprung no surprises with its December monetary policy committee (MPC) meeting, leaving interest rates at 5.25% for the third time in a row and pushing back against the prospect of near-term interest rate cuts. The Bank continued to sound hawkish, with the MPC maintaining its tightening bias saying that “further tightening in monetary policy would be required if there were evidence of more persistent inflationary pressures”. And it stuck to the familiar script, saying that policy will be “sufficiently restrictive for sufficiently long” and that “monetary policy is likely to need to be restrictive for an extended period of time”. In other words, the message is that the MPC is not yet willing to endorse investors’ expectations that rates will be cut as soon as May 2024.
- Looking ahead, our colleagues at Capital Economics forecast that the recent downward trends in CPI and core inflation will stall over the next few months before starting to decline more decisively again in February. That explains why we think the Bank of England won’t feel comfortable cutting interest rates until the second half of 2024.
- The fall in UK market interest rate expectations in December has driven most of the decline in 10-year gilt yields, which have fallen in line with 10-year US Treasury and euro-zone yields. 10-year gilt yields have fallen from 4.68% in October 2023 to around 3.70% at the time of writing, with further declines likely if the falling inflation story is maintained.
- Investors’ growing expectations that the Fed will cut interest rates soon has led to an improvement in risk sentiment, which has boosted the pound and other risky assets. In addition, the rise in the pound, from \$1.21 in November to \$1.27 now, has also been supported by the recent relative decline in UK wholesale gas prices.
- The further fall in 10-year real gilt yields in December has supported the recent rise in the FTSE 100. That said, the index remains 5% below its record high in February. This modest rise in equities appears to have been mostly driven by strong performances in the industrials and rate-sensitive technology sectors. But UK equities have continued to underperform US and euro-zone equities. The FTSE 100 has risen by 2.2% in December, while the S&P 500 has risen by 3.8%. This is partly due to lower energy prices, which have been a relatively bigger drag on the FTSE 100, due to the index’s high concentration of energy companies.

7. **Interest Rate Forecast (Provided by Link Asset Services)**

The Council has appointed Link Group as its treasury advisor and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates.

The latest forecast on 7th November 2023 sets out a view that short, medium and long-dated interest rates will be elevated for some little while, as the Bank of England seeks to squeeze inflation out of the economy.

The PWLB rate forecasts below are based on the Certainty Rate (the standard rate minus 20 bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1st November 2012.

Link Group Interest Rate View 07.11.23													
	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26
BANK RATE	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.50	3.25	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
3 month ave earnings	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.50	3.30	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
6 month ave earnings	5.60	5.50	5.40	5.10	4.60	4.10	3.60	3.40	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10
12 month ave earnings	5.80	5.70	5.50	5.20	4.70	4.20	3.70	3.50	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30
5 yr PWLB	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.70	4.40	4.20	4.00	3.80	3.70	3.60	3.50	3.50	3.50
10 yr PWLB	5.10	5.00	4.80	4.70	4.40	4.20	4.00	3.80	3.70	3.70	3.60	3.60	3.50
25 yr PWLB	5.50	5.30	5.10	4.90	4.70	4.50	4.30	4.20	4.10	4.10	4.00	4.00	4.00
50 yr PWLB	5.30	5.10	4.90	4.70	4.50	4.30	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.90	3.80	3.80	3.80

In the upcoming months, our forecasts will be guided not only by economic data releases and clarifications from the MPC over its monetary policies and the Government over its fiscal policies, but also international factors such as policy development in the US and Europe, the provision of fresh support packages to support the faltering recovery in China as well as the on-going conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and Gaza and Israel.

On the positive side, consumers are still anticipated to be sitting on some excess savings left over from the pandemic, which could cushion some of the impact of the above challenges and may be the reason why the economy is performing a little better at this stage of the economic cycle than may have been expected. Nonetheless, with approximately 400,000 households per quarter facing a mortgage interest reset at higher levels than their current rate, the economy will face on-going headwinds from that source, in addition to lower income households having to spend disproportionately on essentials such as food, energy and rent payments.

8. Autumn Statement (November 2023)

The Economic Update and Interest Rate forecasts reflect the current economic position at the time of this report. No changes to the interest rate review of 7th November 2023 resulted from the Autumn Statement of 22nd November 2023.

This reflected a view that the MPC would be keen to underpin its anti-inflation credentials by keeping Bank Rate at 5.25% until at least the second half of 2024. Link expect rate cuts to start when both the CPI inflation and wage/employment data are unequivocally supportive of such a move, and that there is a strong likelihood of the overall economy enduring tepid growth (at best) or a mild recession (at worst) over the coming months

Timing on this matter will remain one of fine judgment: cut too soon, and inflationary pressures may well build up further; cut too late and any downturn or recession may be prolonged.

9. Treasury Management Strategy update

The Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) for 2023/24, which includes the Annual Investment Strategy, was approved by this Council on 22 February 2023. There are no policy changes to the TMS included in this report.

10. The Council's Capital Position

The table below shows the financing of the Original Capital Budget approved by Full Council on the 22 February 2023 and the latest Revised Capital Budget as per the established Budget Monitoring Cycle and included elsewhere on the agenda. The

net increase is due to a combination of in year budget monitoring adjustments and reprofiling of capital expenditure into future years.

Capital	2023/24 Original Estimate £'000	2023/24 Revised Estimate £'000
Total Budget	41,357	41,717
Financed by:		
Capital receipts	2,547	3,143
Capital grants	22,525	22,091
Revenue	1,062	3,329
Total financing	26,134	28,638
Borrowing need	15,223	13,154

11. **Investment Portfolio 2023/24**

The Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) for 2023/24, which includes the Annual Investment Strategy, was approved by the Council on 22 February 2023. In accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice, it sets out the Council's investment priorities as being:

- Security of capital
- Liquidity
- Yield

The Council will aim to achieve the optimum return on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity and with the Council's risk appetite. In the current economic climate it is considered appropriate to keep investments short term to cover cash flow needs and avoid high borrowing costs where possible (internal borrowing), but also to seek out value available in periods up to 12 months with high credit rated financial institutions where cashflow projections are considered robust, using the Link suggested creditworthiness approach, including a minimum sovereign credit rating and Credit Default Swap (CDS) overlay information. As per the approved Investment Strategy, longer-term investments will be carefully assessed.

Investment Counterparty criteria

The current investment counterparty criteria selection approved in the TMSS is meeting the requirement of the treasury management function.

CDS prices

It is noted that sentiment in the current economic climate can easily shift, so it remains important to undertake continual monitoring of all aspects of risk and return in the current circumstances

The average daily level of funds deposited during the financial year to date is £7.5m with an average rate of return of 5.04%. Excluding longer-term property funds, the long-term loan to Burnley College and the Council's 'Sweep' account, the actual value of surplus funds under investment as at 31 December 2023 was £16.5m. These funds have been available on a temporary basis, and the level of funds available was mainly dependent on the timing of precept payments, receipt of grants and progress on the Capital Programme.

The table below shows the amount invested as at 31 December 2023, and the rate of return against the market benchmark.

Counterparties	Date of Investment	Investment As at 31 Dec 2023 £m	Current Return	Benchmark (average return)*
LCC SIS Instant Access**	08/06/2023	6.0	5.00%	5.20%
Lloyds Bank Corporate Markets – 3 mth fixed	09/11/2023	4.0	5.39%	5.25%
Goldman Sachs – 3 mth fixed	07/11/2023	2.0	5.34%	5.25%
Debt Mgmt Office (DMO)	24/11/2023	2.5	5.20%	5.21%
Debt Mgmt Office (DMO)	04/12/2023	2.0	5.19%	5.21%
Burnley College Loan – 15 years fixed	28/03/2022	2.0	4.45%	N/A

* Benchmark: SONIA Compounded Backward Looking rate for date of investment

** Rate is linked to movement in Bank Rate

The Council has an approved list of counterparties which governs treasury management investment activity. This list is a restricted list taking into consideration the credit rating of the institution concerned and there are also limits on the amount which can be invested with any particular institution from a particular sector e.g. building society, bank etc. and also any group of institutions within an overall banking group. As part of the daily operations of the treasury management dealings, in consultation with guidance from Link Asset Services and the money market brokers, decisions are taken by the Director of Resources, temporarily suspending/revising operations with individual counterparties. The latest deposit counterparties list was approved by the Full Council on 22 February 2023.

Within the approved list of counterparties is scope to invest sums with other Local Authorities, up to a maximum of £8m, and not to exceed £6m per Local Authority. The Council has reinstated the Shared Investment Scheme (SIS) facility with Lancashire County Council to provide instant access to sums on deposit as an alternative to the 'Sweep' account. The SIS rate is linked to movement in the Bank Rate (unlike the Sweep account), and thus provides an improved return on sums deposited plus is instantly accessible to provide improved liquidity should this be necessary when compared to current notice account arrangements (31 day notice required).

The table below shows the maximum amount invested with any of the counterparties at any one time during the period April 2023 to 31 December 2023 against the maximum limits approved in the 2023/24 Treasury Management Strategy.

Counterparties	Maximum Limits £m	Highest level of Investment 2023/24 (£m)
HSBC*	50.0	13.0
Santander	4.0	4.0
Lloyds Bank Corporate Markets	4.0	4.0
Goldman Sachs	4.0	4.0
Lancashire CC SIS	6.0	6.0
Debt Mgmt Office (DMO)	Unlimited	9.0

*Includes Sweep Account balance

12. **Property Funds**

The council made two investments totalling £2m in property funds in 2018/19 for the purpose of increasing and diversifying our risk in investment income receivable and to help alleviate future revenue budget pressures. Dividends are receivable in the month following quarter end and for the period April to September 2023 amounted to £39,530 earning an average yield of 3.9%, compared to £33,830 for the same period 2022/23.

13. **Borrowing**

The Council's capital financing requirement (CFR) for 2023/24 is £80.097m. The CFR denotes the Council's underlying need to borrow for capital purposes. Below is a summary of the Councils' external indebtedness, as at 1 April 2023, and as at 31 December 2023.

Borrowing	1 Apr 23 £'000	31 Dec 23 £'000	Change Apr – Dec £'000
Public Works Loan Board	59,510	59,012	(498)
Temporary Market Loans	13	13	-
Total	59,523	59,025	(498)

PWLB Loans – No maturity loan repayments were made during the period 1 April to 31 December 2023. Three scheduled annuity repayments were made during the period totalling £498k.

Temporary Market Loans – The Council entered into a temporary loan for cashflow purposes during the reporting period, as previously reported in the first quarter, as below:

Loan	Loan Advanced £'000	Date From	Date To	Interest Rate	Total Interest Payable £'000
London Borough of Havering	3,000	21/04/2023	05/05/2023	4.15%	4.78
Total	3,000				4.78

14. **Debt Rescheduling**

Debt rescheduling opportunities have been very limited in the current economic climate and following the various increases in the margins added to gilt yields recently linked to increases in the Bank Rate. No debt rescheduling has been undertaken to date in the current financial year. Only prudent and affordable debt rescheduling will be considered.

15. **Compliance with Treasury & Prudential Limits**

It is a statutory duty for the Council to determine and keep under review its affordable borrowing limits. The Council's approved Treasury and Prudential Indicators (affordability limits) are included in the approved Treasury Management Strategy.

During the financial year to date the Council's treasury management activities operated within the treasury limits and Prudential Indicators set out in the Council's

Treasury Management Strategy in compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Practices.

An extract of the Prudential and Treasury Indicators are shown in Appendix 1.

16. **Interest Payable on External Borrowing / Interest Receivable**

Provision is made in the revenue budget to meet the net interest payable on external borrowing. The figure in the original budget for 2023/24 was set at £2,068,168 and remains unchanged, although delaying any decision to externalise borrowing will reduce the amount of interest payable in the year.

The total interest receivable for temporary deposits placed in the period 1 April to 31 December 2023 is £696k, excluding dividends due for the period. The budget for the year for interest and dividend receipts was approved at £575k. On current projections, owing to a rising bank rate environment during the reporting period, additional interest from temporary surplus monies on deposit, is forecast to exceed the budget by £220k.

The above will help support the Council's Revenue Account and ensure a balanced financial position.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND BUDGET PROVISION

17. None arising as a direct result of this report.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

18. Compliance with the revised CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS).

DETAILS OF CONSULTATION

19. None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

20. None.

FURTHER INFORMATION

PLEASE CONTACT:

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