

Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27

Maldon District Council

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Authority operates a balanced revenue 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 liquidity initially before considering optimising investment return.
- 1.2 The second main function of the treasury management service is the funding of the Authority's capital plans. These capital plans provide a guide to the borrowing need of the Authority, essentially the longer-term cash flow planning to ensure the Authority can meet its capital spending operations. This management of longer-term cash may involve arranging long or shortterm loans, or using longer term cash flow surpluses, and on occasion any debt previously drawn may be restructured to meet Authority risk or cost objectives.
- 1.3 Accordingly, treasury management is defined as:

“The management of the local authority's borrowing, 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.”
- 1.4 Whilst any commercial initiatives or loans to third parties will impact on the treasury function, these activities are generally classed as non-treasury activities, (arising usually from capital expenditure), and are separate from the day-to-day treasury management activities.

2. UK Context

- 2.1 The third quarter of 2025/26 saw:
 - 2.1.1 A -0.1% m/m change in real GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in October, leaving the economy no bigger than at the start of April.
 - 2.1.2 The 3myy rate of average earnings growth excluding bonuses fall to 4.6% in October, having been as high as 5.5% earlier in the financial year.
 - 2.1.3 CPI (Consumer Price Index) inflation falls sharply from 3.6% to 3.2% in November, with core CPI inflation easing to 3.2%.
 - 2.1.3 The Bank of England cut interest rates from 4.00% to 3.75% in December, after holding in November.
 - 2.1.5 The 10-year gilt yield fluctuate between 4.4% and 4.7%, ending the quarter at 4.5%.

- 2.2 From a GDP perspective, the financial year got off to a bumpy start with the 0.3% m/m fall in real GDP in April as front-running of US tariffs in Q1 (when GDP grew 0.7% on the quarter) weighed on activity. Despite the underlying reasons for the drop, it was still the first fall since October 2024 and the largest fall since October 2023. However, the economy surprised to the upside in May and June so that quarterly growth ended up 0.3% q/q (subsequently revised down to 0.2% q/q). Nonetheless, the 0.0% m/m change in real GDP in July, followed by a 0.1% m/m increase in August and a 0.1% decrease in September will have caused some concern (0.1% q/q). October's disappointing -0.1% m/m change in real GDP suggests that growth slowed to around 1.4% in 2025 as a whole.
- 2.3 Sticking with future economic sentiment, the composite Purchasing Manager Index (PMI) for the UK rose from 51.2 in November to 52.1 in December, suggesting the economy may be benefiting somewhat from pre-Budget uncertainty fading. This may also reflect a diminishing drag from weak overseas demand. While the services PMI rose from 51.3 to 52.1, the improvement in the manufacturing output balance from 50.3 to 51.8 was larger. Indeed, the manufacturing sector has been more exposed to the recent weakness of external demand and has lagged the services sector since the end of last year.
- 2.4 Turning to retail sales volumes, and the 1.5% year-on-year rise in September, accelerating from a 0.7% increase in August, marked the highest gain since April. Nonetheless, the 0.1% m/m fall in retail sales volumes in November built on the 0.9% m/m drop in October, suggesting the longer-lasting effects of weak employment and slowing wage growth are impacting. Moreover, the decline in the GfK measure of consumer confidence from -17 in October to -19 in November suggests that consumers are not that optimistic at present.
- 2.5 Prior to the November Budget, the public finances position looked weak. The £20.2 billion borrowed in September was slightly above the £20.1 billion forecast by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). For the year to date, the £99.8 billion borrowed is the second highest for the April to September period since records began in 1993, surpassed only by borrowing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main drivers of the increased borrowing were higher debt interest costs, rising government running costs, and increased inflation-linked benefit payments, which outweighed the rise in tax and National Insurance contributions.
- 2.6 Following the 26 November Budget, the OBR calculated the net tightening in fiscal policy as £11.7bn (0.3% of GDP) in 2029/30, smaller than the consensus forecast of £25bn. It did downgrade productivity growth by 0.3%, from 1.3% to 1.0%, but a lot of that influence was offset by upgrades to its near-term wage and inflation forecasts. Accordingly, the OBR judged the Chancellor was going to achieve her objectives with £4.2bn to spare. The Chancellor then chose to expand that headroom to £21.7bn, up from £9.9bn previously.
- 2.7 Moreover, the Chancellor also chose to raise spending by a net £11.3bn in 2029/30. To pay for that and the increase in her headroom, she raised taxes by £26.1bn in 2029/30. The biggest revenue-raisers were the freeze in income tax thresholds from 2028/29 (+£7.8bn) and the rise in NICs (National Insurance Contributions) on salary-sacrifice pension contributions (+£4.8bn). The increase in council tax for properties worth more than £2.0m will generate £0.4bn.

- 2.7 After the Budget, public net sector borrowing of £11.7bn in November was comfortably below last November's figure of £13.6bn and was the lowest November borrowing figure since 2021, mainly due to tax receipts being £5.4bn higher, largely because of the hike in employer NICs in April 2025. Cumulative borrowing in the first eight months of 2025/26 was still £10bn above last year's total. However, lower inflation and a disposal of assets ahead of the Budget should mean borrowing in 2025/26 comes in below last year's total.
- 2.8 The weakening in the jobs market looked clear in the spring. May's 109,000 m/m fall in the PAYE (Pay As You Earn) measure of employment was the largest decline (barring the pandemic) since the data began and the seventh in as many months. The monthly change was revised lower in five of the previous seven months too, with April's 33,000 fall revised down to a 55,000 drop. More recently, the 38,000 fall in payroll employment in November was the tenth monthly decline in the past 13 months, causing the annual growth rate to slow further, from -0.5% to -0.6%. The number of job vacancies in the three months to November 2025 stood at 729,000 (the peak was 1.3 million in spring 2022) but the less reliable Labour Force Survey data showed that employment fell by 16,000 in the three months to October, with the unemployment rate rising further, from 5.0% to 5.1%. All this suggests the labour market continues to loosen, albeit at a slow pace.
- 2.9 A looser labour market is driving softer wage pressures. The 3myy growth rate of average earnings including bonuses eased from 4.9% in September to 4.7% in October. And excluding bonuses, the 3myy rate slowed from 4.7% to 4.6%. Regular private sector pay growth continued to slow from 4.2% to 3.9%. That left it broadly on track to meet the Bank's end of December prediction of 3.5%.
- 2.10 CPI inflation fell sharply in November, easing from 3.6% in October to 3.2%. This was the third consecutive softer-than-expected inflation outturn and suggests that disinflation is well underway. There was a widespread easing in price pressures with inflation slowing in 10 of the 12 main categories. Core inflation fell from 3.4% to 3.2% and services inflation dipped from 4.5% to 4.4%. However, a great deal will depend on the adjustments to regulated and indexed prices scheduled for next April. Capital Economics forecast CPI inflation to drop from 3.2% in March to 2.0% in April, thereby leaving inflation on track to settle at the 2.0% target, or below, by the end of 2026.
- 2.11 An ever-present issue throughout recent months has been the pressure being exerted on medium and longer dated gilt yields. The yield on the 10-year gilt moved sideways in the second quarter of 2025, rising from 4.4% in early April to a high of c4.8%, before ending June at 4.50%.
- 2.12 More recently, the yield on the 10-year gilt rose from 4.46% to 4.60% in early July as rolled-back spending cuts and uncertainty over Chancellor Reeves' future raised fiscal concerns. Although the spike proved short lived, it highlighted the UK's fragile fiscal position. In an era of high debt, high interest rates and low GDP growth, the markets are now more sensitive to fiscal risks than before the pandemic. During August, long-dated gilts underwent a particularly pronounced sell-off, climbing 22 basis points and reaching a 27-year high of 5.6% by the end of the month. While yields have since eased back, the market sell-off was driven by investor concerns over growing supply-demand imbalances, stemming from unease over the lack of fiscal consolidation and reduced demand from traditional long-dated bond purchasers like pension funds. For 10-year gilts, by late

September, sticky inflation, resilient activity data and a hawkish Bank of England kept yields elevated over 4.70% although, subsequently, gilt yields fell back after the Budget, supported by a tighter fiscal plan, fewer tax hikes required following a smaller-than-expected downgrade to the OBR's fiscal forecast, and a favourable shift in bond issuance away from long-dated debt. Gilt yields hovered around 4.5% at the end of the quarter.

2.13 The FTSE 100 fell sharply following the “Liberation Day” tariff announcement, dropping by more than 10% in the first week of April - from 8,634 on 1 April to 7,702 on 7 April. However, the de-escalation of the trade war coupled with strong corporate earnings led to a rapid rebound starting in late April. As a result, the FTSE 100 ended June at 8,761, around 2% higher than its value at the end of March and more than 7% above its level at the start of 2025. Since then, the FTSE 100 has enjoyed a further significant jump in value. The stock market hit new record highs above 9,900 in Mid-November, driven by a global rebound on hopes of a US government-shutdown resolution, expectations of a December rate-cut, and strong corporate earnings. Despite some jitters around Budget time, the FTSE 100 closed Q4 at 9,931, 5% higher than at the end of September and 22% higher since the start of 2025.

3. Local Context

- 3.1 As of 31 December 2025, the Council held no borrowing and £17m of investments. This is set out in further detail in Appendix A. Forecast changes in these sums are shown in the balance sheet analysis in Table 1 below.
- 3.2 The underlying need to borrow for capital purposes is measured by the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR), while usable reserves and working capital are the underlying resources available for investment. The Council's current strategy is to maintain borrowing and investments below their underlying levels, sometimes known as internal borrowing.
- 3.3 The Council is currently not forecasting any need for external borrowing. Investments are forecast to fall to £14m by 31 March 2026 after the internal borrowing requirement and as capital receipts are used to finance capital expenditure budget.

Table 1: Expected Investments

Year End Resources	2025/26	2026/27
£m	Estimate	Estimate
Usable reserves	-9,459	-9,306
Capital receipts Reserves	-614	-442
Provisions	-100	-100
Other	-9,727	-8,927

Total core funds	-19,900	-18,775
Working capital*	2,600	2,600
CFR	8,185	8,543
Expected investments	-9,115	-7,632

4. Borrowing Strategy

- 4.1 The Council does not currently have any external borrowing however its capital expenditure plans include expenditure of £5,713k on leisure facilities between 2026/27 and 2027/28 as part of the new Leisure contract. This is planned to be financed through internal borrowing (with a move to external borrowing if needed) and will be repaid over the 20-year Leisure contract.
- 4.2 In addition, the Council may borrow short-term loans, if required, to cover unplanned cash flow shortages.
- 4.3 **Sources of External Borrowing:** The approved sources of long-term and short-term borrowing are:
- 4.3.1 HM Treasury's PWLB lending facility (formerly the Public Works Loan Board)
 - 4.3.2 any institution approved for investments (see below)
 - 4.3.3 any other bank or building society authorised to operate in the UK
 - 4.3.4 any other UK public sector body
 - 4.3.5 UK public and private sector pension funds (except our Local Government Pension Fund)
 - 4.3.6 capital market bond investors
 - 4.3.7 UK Municipal Bonds Agency plc and other special purpose companies created to enable local authority bond issues
- 4.4 **Other sources of debt finance:** In addition, capital finance may be raised by the following methods that are not borrowing, but may be classed as other debt liabilities:
- 4.4.1 leasing
 - 4.4.2 hire purchase (this is currently being utilised to acquire 2 tractors)
 - 4.4.3 sale and leaseback
- 4.5 **Municipal Bonds Agency:** UK Municipal Bonds Agency plc was established in 2014 by the Local Government Association as an alternative to the PWLB. It issues bonds on the capital markets and lends the proceeds to local authorities. This is a more complicated source of finance than the PWLB for two reasons: borrowing authorities will be required to provide bond investors with a guarantee to refund their investment in the event that the agency is unable to for any reason; and there will be a lead time of several months between committing to borrow and knowing the interest rate payable. Any decision to borrow from the Agency will therefore be the subject of a separate report to full Council.

4.6 **Short-term and variable rate loans:** These loans leave the Council exposed to the risk of short-term interest rate rises and are therefore subject to the interest rate exposure limits in the treasury management indicators below.

5. Treasury Investment Strategy 2026/27

5.1 The Council holds significant invested funds, representing income received in advance of expenditure plus balances and reserves held. In the past 12 months, the Council's investment balance has ranged between £19m and £27 million. Levels are expected to decrease in the forthcoming year as internal borrowing is utilised and reserves are used to fund planned capital and revenue expenditure.

5.2 **Objectives:** The CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) Code requires the Council to invest its treasury funds prudently, and to have regard to the security and liquidity of its investments before seeking the highest 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 from defaults and the risk of receiving unsuitably low investment income. Where balances are expected to be invested for more than one year, the Council will aim to achieve a total return that is equal or higher than the prevailing rate of inflation, in order to maintain the spending power of the sum invested. The Authority aims to be a responsible investor and will consider Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues when investing.

5.3 **Negative interest rates:** Since investments cannot pay negative income, negative rates will be applied by reducing the value of investments. In this event, security will be measured as receiving the contractually agreed amount at maturity, even though this may be less than the amount originally invested.

5.4 **Strategy:** The Authority expects to be a long-term investor and treasury investments will therefore include both short-term low risk instruments to manage day-to-day cash flows and longer-term instruments where limited additional risk is accepted in return for higher investment income to support local public services.

5.5 **ESG policy:** Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations are increasingly a factor in global investors' decision making, but the framework for evaluating investment opportunities is still developing and therefore the Authority's ESG policy does not currently include ESG scoring or other real-time ESG criteria at an individual investment level. However, when investing in banks and funds, the Authority has sought to exclude counterparties with any known links to the Russian Federation or Modern Slavery.

5.6 **Business models:** Under the new IFRS (International Finance Reporting Standards) 9 standard, the accounting for certain investments depends on the Council's "business model" for managing them. The Council aims to achieve value from its treasury investments by a business model of collecting the contractual cash flows and therefore, where other criteria are also met, these investments will continue to be accounted for at amortised cost.

5.7 **Approved counterparties:** The Council may invest its surplus funds with any of the counterparty types in Table 2 below, subject to the limits shown.

Table 2: Treasury investment counterparties and limits

Sector	Time limit	2025-26 Counterparty limit	2026-27 Proposed Counterparty Limit	Current Sector limit	Proposed Sector Limit
The UK Government	50 years	Unlimited	Unlimited	n/a	n/a
Local authorities & other government entities	25 years	£2m	£2m	Unlimited	Unlimited
Secured investments	25 years	£2m	£2m	Unlimited	Unlimited
Banks (unsecured investments)	13 months	£2m	£2m	Unlimited	Unlimited
Banks (operational banking)	Ongoing	£3m	£3m	Unlimited	Unlimited
Building societies (unsecured)	13 months	£2m	£2m	£5m	£5m
Registered providers (unsecured)	5 years	£2m	£2m	£5m	£5m
Money market funds	n/a	£5m	£5m	£20m	£20m
Strategic pooled funds	n/a	£5m	£5m	£12m	£12m
Real estate investment trusts	n/a	£5m	£5m	£12m	£12m
Other investments	5 years	£2m	£2m	£5m	£5m

This table must be read in conjunction with the notes below:

- 5.8 **Minimum credit rating:** Treasury investments in the sectors marked with an asterisk will only be made with entities whose lowest published long-term credit rating is no lower than [AA]. Where available, the credit rating relevant to the specific investment or class of investment is used, otherwise the counterparty credit rating is used. However,

investment decisions are never made solely based on credit ratings, and all other relevant factors including external advice will be taken into account.

- 5.9 These investments are not subject to bail-in, and there is generally a lower risk of insolvency, although they are not zero risk. Investments with the UK Government are deemed to be zero credit risk due to its ability to create additional currency and therefore may be made in unlimited amounts for up to 50 years.
- 5.10 **Secured investments:** Investments secured on the borrower's assets, which limits the potential losses in the event of insolvency. The amount and quality of the security will be a key factor in the investment decision. Covered bonds and reverse repurchase agreements with banks and building societies 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 higher of the collateral credit rating and the counterparty credit rating will be used. The combined secured and unsecured investments with any one counterparty will not exceed the cash limit for secured investments.
- 5.11 **Banks and building societies (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. See below for arrangements relating to operational bank accounts.
- 5.12 **Registered providers (unsecured):** Loans to, and bonds issued or guaranteed by, registered providers of social housing or registered social landlords, formerly known as housing associations. These bodies are regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing (in England), the Scottish Housing Regulator, the Welsh Government and the Department for Communities (in Northern Ireland). As providers of public services, they retain the likelihood of receiving government support if needed.
- 5.13 **Money Market Funds (MMF):** Pooled funds that offer same-day or short notice liquidity and very low or no price volatility by investing in short-term money markets. They have the advantage over bank accounts of providing wide diversification of investment risks, coupled with the services of a professional fund manager in return for a small fee. Although no sector limit applies to money market funds, the Authority will take care to diversify its liquid investments over a variety of providers to ensure access to cash at all times.
- 5.14 These allow the Council 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 Council's investment objectives will be monitored regularly.
- 5.15 **Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT):** Shares in companies that invest mainly in real estate and pay the majority of their rental income to investors in a similar manner to pooled property funds. As with property funds, REITs offer enhanced returns over the longer term but are more volatile, especially as the share price reflects changing demand for the shares as well as changes in the value of the underlying properties.

- 5.16 **Operational bank accounts:** The Council may incur operational exposures, for example, through current accounts, collection accounts and merchant acquiring services, to any UK bank with credit ratings no lower than BBB- and with assets greater than £25 billion. These are not classed as investments but are still subject to the risk of a bank bail-in, and balances will therefore have kept below £3m per bank. The Bank of England has stated that in the event of failure, banks with assets greater than £25 billion are more likely to be bailed-in than made insolvent, increasing the chance of the Council maintaining operational continuity.
- 5.17 **Risk assessment and credit ratings:** Credit ratings are obtained and monitored by the Council's treasury advisers, who will notify changes in ratings as they occur. The credit rating agencies in current use are listed in the Treasury Management Practices document at Appendix 2. Where an entity has its credit rating downgraded so that it fails to meet the approved investment criteria then:
- 5.17.1 no new investments will be made;
 - 5.17.2 any existing investments that can be recalled or sold at no cost will be; and
 - 5.17.3 full consideration will be given to the recall or sale of all other existing investments with the affected counterparty.
- 5.18 Where a credit rating agency announces that a credit 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 no investments 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 longterm direction of travel rather than an imminent change of rating.
- 5.19 **Other information on the security of investments:** The Council 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, reports in the quality financial press and analysis and advice from the Council's treasury management adviser. No investments will be made with an organisation if there are substantive doubts about its credit quality, even though it may otherwise meet the above criteria.
- 5.20 When deteriorating financial market conditions affect the creditworthiness of all organisations, as happened in 2008 and 2020, this is not generally reflected in credit ratings, but can be seen in other market measures. In these circumstances, the Council 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 Council's cash balances, then the surplus will be deposited with the UK Government, or with other local authorities. This will cause investment returns to fall but will protect the principal sum invested.
- 5.21 **Investment limits:** In order that available reserves will not significantly be put at risk in the case of a single default, the maximum that will be lent to any one organisation including UK Local Government Authorities (other than the UK Government) will be £2

million (excluding Natwest, the Council's operational bank). A group of banks under the same ownership will be treated as a single organisation for limit purposes. Limits will also be placed on fund managers, investments in brokers' nominee accounts, foreign countries and industry sectors as below. 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.

Table 3: Investment limits

	Cash limit
Any single organisation, except the UK Central Government	£2m each
UK Central Government	unlimited
UK Local Government Authorities	£2m per Council
Any group of organisations under the same ownership	£2m per group
Any group of pooled funds under the same management	£5m per manager
Registered providers and registered social landlords	£2m in total
Unsecured investments with building societies	£5m in total
Money market funds	£20m in Total

- 5.22 **Liquidity management:** The Council uses purpose-built cash flow forecasting methods to determine the maximum period for which funds may prudently be committed. The forecast is compiled on a prudent basis to minimise the risk of the Council being forced to borrow on unfavourable terms to meet its financial commitments. Limits on long-term investments are set by reference to the Council's medium-term financial plan and cash flow forecast.
- 5.23 The Council spreads its liquid cash over at multiple providers to ensure that access to cash is maintained in the event of operational difficulties at any one provider.

6. Treasury Management Prudential Indicators

- 6.1 The Council measures and manages its exposures to treasury management risks using the following indicators.
- 6.2 **Security:** The Council has adopted a voluntary measure of its exposure to credit risk by monitoring the value-weighted average credit score of its investment portfolio.
- 6.3 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.

Credit risk indicator	Investment Criteria	Target
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Portfolio average credit score	UK organisation A- rating or better	3.4
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- 6.4 **Liquidity:** The Council 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 £000
Total cash available within 3 months	£26,000

- 6.5 **Interest rate exposures:** This indicator is set to control the Council's exposure to interest rate risk. The upper limits on the one-year revenue impact of a 1% rise or fall in interest rates will be:

Interest rate risk indicator	Limit
Upper limit on one-year revenue impact of a 1% <u>rise</u> in interest rates	£222,000
Upper limit on one-year revenue impact of a 1% <u>fall</u> in interest rates	-£222,000

- 6.6 The impact of a change in interest rates is calculated on the assumption that maturing loans and investments will be replaced at current rates.
- 6.7 **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 borrowing will be:

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%
10 years and above	100%	0%

- 6.8 As the Council does not have any external debt, the broad limits, above, have been set to allow any borrowing to be undertaken in the appropriate maturity band.
- 6.9 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.

- 6.10 **Long Term Treasury Management Investments:** 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 prudential limits on the long-term treasury management investments will be:

Price risk indicator	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Limit on principal invested beyond year end	£7,500	£7,500	£7,500
Current long term investments	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000

- 6.11 Long-term investments with no fixed maturity date include strategic pooled funds and real estate investment trusts but exclude money market funds and bank accounts with no fixed maturity date as these are considered short-term.

7. Related Matters

The CIPFA Code requires the Council to include the following in its treasury management strategy.

Financial derivatives: Some councils 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 (Lender Option Borrower Option) 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 Council 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 Council is exposed to. Additional risks presented, such as credit exposure to derivative counterparties, will be considered when determining the overall level of risk.

Embedded derivatives, including those present in pooled funds and forward starting transactions, 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, assessed using the appropriate credit rating for derivative exposures. An allowance for credit risk calculated using the methodology in the Treasury Management Practices document will count against the counterparty credit limit and the relevant foreign country limit.

In line with the CIPFA Code, the Council will seek external advice and will consider that advice before entering into financial derivatives to ensure that it fully understands the implications.

Markets in Financial Instruments Directive: The Council has opted up to professional client status with its providers of financial services, including advisers, banks, brokers and fund managers, allowing it access to a greater range of services but without the greater regulatory protections afforded to individuals and small companies. Given the size and range of the

Council’s treasury management activities, the Section 151 Officer considers this to be the most appropriate status.

7.1 Financial Implications of the Council’s Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27

The budget for investment income in 2025-26 is £664,000, based on an average investment portfolio at an average interest rate. The budget for debt interest paid in 2025/26 is currently zero as there no plan for any external borrowing requirement. The estimate for interest lost due to internal borrowing in 2024/25 is £220,000. If actual levels of investments and borrowing, or actual interest rates, differ from that forecast, performance against budget may change.

7.2 Other Options Considered

7.3 The CIPFA Code does not prescribe any particular treasury management strategy for local authorities to adopt. The Section 151 Officer believes that the above strategy represents an appropriate balance between risk management and cost effectiveness. Some alternative strategies, with their financial and risk management implications, are listed below.

Alternative	Impact on income and expenditure	Impact on risk management
Invest in a narrower range of counterparties and/or for shorter times	Interest income will be lower	Lower chance of losses from credit related defaults, but any such losses may be greater
Invest in a wider range of counterparties and/or for longer times	Interest income will be higher	Increased risk of losses from credit related defaults, but any such losses may be smaller
Borrow additional sums at long-term fixed interest rates	Debt interest costs will rise; this is unlikely to be offset by higher investment income	Higher investment balance leading to a higher impact in the event of a default; however long-term interest costs may be more certain

7.4 Prospects for Interest Rates

The Authority has appointed MUFG Group as its treasury advisor and part of their service is to assist the Authority to formulate a view on interest rates. MUFG provided the following forecasts in December 2025.

MUFG Corporate Markets Interest Rate View 22.12.25													
	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26	Mar-27	Jun-27	Sep-27	Dec-27	Mar-28	Jun-28	Sep-28	Dec-28	Mar-29
BANK RATE	3.75	3.50	3.50	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25
3 month ave earnings	3.80	3.50	3.50	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30
6 month ave earnings	3.80	3.50	3.50	3.40	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.40	3.40	3.40	3.40	3.40	3.40
12 month ave earnings	3.90	3.60	3.60	3.50	3.40	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.60	3.60	3.60
5 yr PWLB	4.60	4.50	4.30	4.20	4.10	4.10	4.10	4.10	4.10	4.10	4.10	4.10	4.10
10 yr PWLB	5.20	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.80	4.70	4.70	4.70	4.70	4.60	4.60	4.60	4.70
25 yr PWLB	5.80	5.70	5.60	5.50	5.50	5.40	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.20	5.20	5.20	5.20
50 yr PWLB	5.60	5.50	5.40	5.30	5.30	5.20	5.10	5.10	5.10	5.00	5.10	5.00	5.00

7.5 Gilt yields and PWLB rates

The overall longer-run trend is for gilt yields and PWLB rates to fall back over the timeline of or forecasts, but the risk to our forecasts are generally to the upsides. Our Target borrowing rates are set **two years forward** (as MUFG expect rates to fall back) and the current PWLB (certainty) borrowing rates are set out below: -

PWLB borrowing	Current borrowing rates as at 22.12.25 p.m. %	Target borrowing rate now (end of Q4 2027) %	Target borrowing rate previous (end of Q4 2027) %
5 years	4.81	4.10	4.20
10 years	5.39	4.70	4.70
25 years	6.01	5.30	5.30
50 years	5.78	5.10	5.10

7.6 **Borrowing advice:** MUFGs long-term (beyond 10 years) forecast for Bank Rate remains at 3.5%. As all PWLB certainty rates are still above this level, borrowing strategies will need to be reviewed in that context. Overall, better value can be obtained at the shorter end of the curve (<5 years PWLB maturity/>10 years PWLB EIP) and short-dated fixed LA to LA monies should also be considered. Temporary borrowing rates will, generally, fall in line with Bank Rate cuts.

7.7 MUFGs suggested budgeted earnings rates for investments up to about three months' duration in each financial year are set out below.

Average earnings in each year	Now %	Previously %
2025/26 (residual)	3.80	3.90
2026/27	3.40	3.60
2027/28	3.30	3.30
2028/29	3.30	3.50
2029/30	3.50	3.50
Years 6-10	3.50	3.50
Years 10+	3.50	3.50

7.8 We will continue to monitor economic and market developments as they unfold. Typically, we formally review our forecasts following the quarterly release of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Report but will consider our position on an ad hoc basis as required.

7.9 Our interest rate forecast for Bank Rate is in steps of 25 bps, whereas PWLB forecasts have been rounded to the nearest 10 bps and are central forecasts within bands of + / - 25 bps. Naturally, we continue to monitor events and will update our forecasts as and when appropriate.

Appendix A – Existing Investment and Debt Portfolio Position

	31 Dec 2025 Actual Portfolio £m	31 Dec 2025 Average Rate %
Total external borrowing	0	n/a
Total gross external debt	0	n/a
Treasury investments:		
UK Banks	2	3.6
Building societies (unsecured)	2	4.2
Certificate Deposit	0	0.0
Money Market Funds	5	6.6
Local Authorities	0	0.0
Other Financial Intermediaries	0	4.0
Debt management office *	10	
Total treasury investments **	20	3.5

* Balances invested during the year but £0 as at 31 December 2025

** Excludes £5m of Long Term Pooled Fund investments-