

## AUDIT COMMITTEE – 28 NOVEMBER 2024

### PART I - DELEGATED

#### TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REPORT 2024/25 (DoF)

##### Summary

- 1.1 This mid-year report has been prepared in compliance with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management and covers performance against the Council's Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Policy.
- 1.2 The report is presented to the Audit Committee as the body delegated by Council to undertake the role of scrutiny of treasury management strategy and policies.

##### Details

#### 2.1 **Background**

2.1.1 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 (revised 2017). The primary requirements of the Code are as follows:

- i. Creation and maintenance of a Treasury Management Policy Statement which sets out the policies and objectives of the Council's treasury management activities.
- ii. Creation and maintenance of Treasury Management Practices which set out the manner in which the Council will seek to achieve those policies and objectives.
- iii. Receipt by the full Council of an annual Treasury Management Strategy Statement - 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.
- iv. 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.
- v. 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 the Audit Committee.

2.1.2 This mid-year 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 half of the 2024/25 financial year;
- A review of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy;
- The Council's capital expenditure, as set out in the Capital Strategy, and prudential indicators;
- A review of compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits for 2024/25;
- A review of the Council's borrowing strategy for 2024/25;
- A review of the Council's investment portfolio for 2024/25.

2.1.3 In addition to the treasury investments discussed in this report, the council also holds non-treasury related investments, however they are excluded from this report.

2.2 **Economics and interest rates**

2.2.1 The second quarter of 2024/25 saw:

- Interest rates fall by 0.25%, taking Bank Rate from 5.25% to 5.00%.
- An expansion in GDP growth of 0.5% for the second calendar quarter of the year, but with month on month decline in July.
- Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation fell from an annual rate of 2.3% in April to 2 % in May, then rebounding marginally to June to 2.2% in July and August, as was expected, due to base effects from energy prices.
- Core and services price inflation remained higher at 3.6% and 5.6% respectively in August.

2.2.2 The Council has appointed Arlingclose as its treasury advisors and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. The PWLB rate forecasts below have been provided by Arlingclose and are based on the Certainty Rate (the standard rate minus 20 bps). The Certainty Rate has been available to local authorities since 1 November 2012 subject to an annual application. Watford Borough Council is able to access the Certainty Rate for 2024/25.

2.2.3 The latest interest rate forecast, dated 11 November 2024, sets out Arlingclose view that the base rate will fall over the next year and then remain flat until the end of the forecast term.

2.2.4 As set out in the following table, the bank rate is expected to remain at 4.75% until March 2025, with a reduction of 0.25%, then fall by a further 0.75% over the following 12 months with shorter term PWLB borrowing will fall steadily over the next two years then rise slightly towards the end of the forecast term. Long term PWLB will fall slightly then remain flat, whilst very long term PWLB will increase, fall slightly and then remain flat by the end of the forecast.

	Current	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26	Mar-27	Jun-27	Sep-27
<b>Official Bank Rate</b>													
Upside risk	0.00	0.00	0.25	0.50	0.50	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75
Central Case	4.75	4.75	4.50	4.25	4.00	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75
Downside risk	0.00	0.00	-0.25	-0.25	-0.50	-0.50	-0.75	-0.75	-0.75	-0.75	-0.75	-0.75	-0.75
<b>3-month money market rate</b>													
Upside risk	0.00	0.00	0.25	0.50	0.50	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75
Central Case	4.95	4.80	4.60	4.35	4.10	3.90	3.85	3.85	3.85	3.85	3.85	3.85	3.85
Downside risk	0.00	0.00	-0.25	-0.25	-0.50	-0.50	-0.75	-0.75	-0.75	-0.75	-0.75	-0.75	-0.75
<b>5yr gilt yield</b>													
Upside risk	0.00	0.60	0.70	0.80	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90
Central Case	4.30	4.20	4.10	4.05	3.95	3.90	3.90	3.90	3.95	4.00	4.05	4.05	4.05
Downside risk	0.00	-0.40	-0.50	-0.60	-0.65	-0.65	-0.70	-0.70	-0.75	-0.75	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80
<b>10yr gilt yield</b>													
Upside risk	0.00	0.60	0.70	0.80	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90
Central Case	4.41	4.40	4.30	4.30	4.25	4.20	4.20	4.20	4.20	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25
Downside risk	0.00	-0.40	-0.50	-0.60	-0.65	-0.65	-0.70	-0.70	-0.75	-0.75	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80
<b>20yr gilt yield</b>													
Upside risk	0.00	0.60	0.70	0.80	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90
Central Case	4.84	4.80	4.75	4.70	4.65	4.65	4.65	4.65	4.65	4.65	4.65	4.65	4.65
Downside risk	0.00	-0.40	-0.50	-0.60	-0.65	-0.65	-0.70	-0.70	-0.75	-0.75	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80
<b>50yr gilt yield</b>													
Upside risk	0.00	0.60	0.70	0.80	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.90
Central Case	4.35	4.50	4.45	4.40	4.35	4.35	4.35	4.35	4.35	4.35	4.35	4.35	4.35
Downside risk	0.00	-0.40	-0.50	-0.60	-0.65	-0.65	-0.70	-0.70	-0.75	-0.75	-0.80	-0.80	-0.80

PWLB Standard Rate (Maturity Loans) = Gilt yield + 1.00%; PWLB Certainty Rate (Maturity Loans) = Gilt yield + 0.80%  
PWLB HRA Rate (Maturity Loans) = Gilt yield + 0.40%; National Wealth Fund Rate (Maturity Loans) = Gilt yield + 0.40%

2.2.5 Further information, provided by Arlingclose, about the economic context during the first six months of 2024/25 is provided in Appendix 1 – Economics Update.

### 2.3 Capital Investment Strategy Update

2.3.1 The Capital Strategy, containing the Treasury Management Policy for 2024/25, was approved by Council on 20 February 2024.

2.3.2 Although there has been a significant shift in the external operating environment, there are no policy changes to the Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Policy.

### 2.4 The Council’s Capital Position (Prudential Indicators)

2.4.1 The Council’s capital expenditure plans are one of the key drivers of treasury management activity. This table shows the revised estimates for capital expenditure to 30 September 2024 against the latest capital programme budget, from the quarter two capital monitoring report. The total forecast capital investment for 2024/25 is £18.77 million compared to the latest budget of £18.59 million. Variances to budget are set on in the Council’s Budget Management Report to Policy and Resources Committee.

#### Prudential indicator for Capital Expenditure:

*Note the structure of the capital programme has been revised to reflect the updated committee structure.*

Service Area	Latest Budget 2024/25 £M	Forecast Year End 2024/25 £M	Actual to Date September £M
General Public Services, Community Safety & Infrastructure	3.73	3.91	0.75
Climate Change, Leisure & Housing	3.68	3.68	0.95
Policy & Resources	1.42	1.36	0.25
Property Investment Board	0.00	0.00	0.00
Local Authority Housing Fund	9.76	9.82	4.04
<b>Total Capital Programme</b>	<b>18.59</b>	<b>18.77</b>	<b>5.98</b>

- 2.4.2 The latest forecast for the CFR, which is the underlying need to borrow for a capital purpose, is set out in the table below. The reduced forecast for the CFR reflects the forecast reduced need to borrow for capital investment in 2024/25.

**Prudential indicator for the Capital Expenditure Requirement:**

Capital Financing Requirement	2024/25	2024/25	2024/25
	Original Indicator	Forecast Indicator	Current Indicator
	£M	£M	£M
Capital Financing Requirement in relation to Capital expenditure	24.76	43.53	30.74
<b>Total</b>	<b>24.76</b>	<b>43.53</b>	<b>30.74</b>

*Note the CFR may be subject to restatement following the conclusion of the 2023/24 external audit.*

- 2.4.3 The first key control over the treasury activity is a prudential indicator to ensure that over the medium term, net borrowing (borrowings less investments) will only be for a capital purpose. Gross external borrowing should not, except in the short term, exceed the total of CFR in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional CFR for 2024/25 and next two financial years. This allows some flexibility for limited early borrowing for future years. Where external borrowing is below the underlying need to borrow, this is financed in the short term through internal borrowing. This currently forecast to be £35.53 million at year end.

Internal Borrowing Position	2024/25	2024/25
	Original Indicator	Forecast Indicator
	£M	£M
Capital Financing Requirement in relation to Capital expenditure	24.76	43.53
Less Gross Borrowing	8.00	8.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>16.76</b>	<b>35.53</b>

### Prudential indicator for the operational boundary for external debt:

- 2.4.4 The operational boundary is the expected borrowing position of the Council during the year. Periods where the actual position is either below or over the boundary are acceptable subject to the authorised limit not being breached.

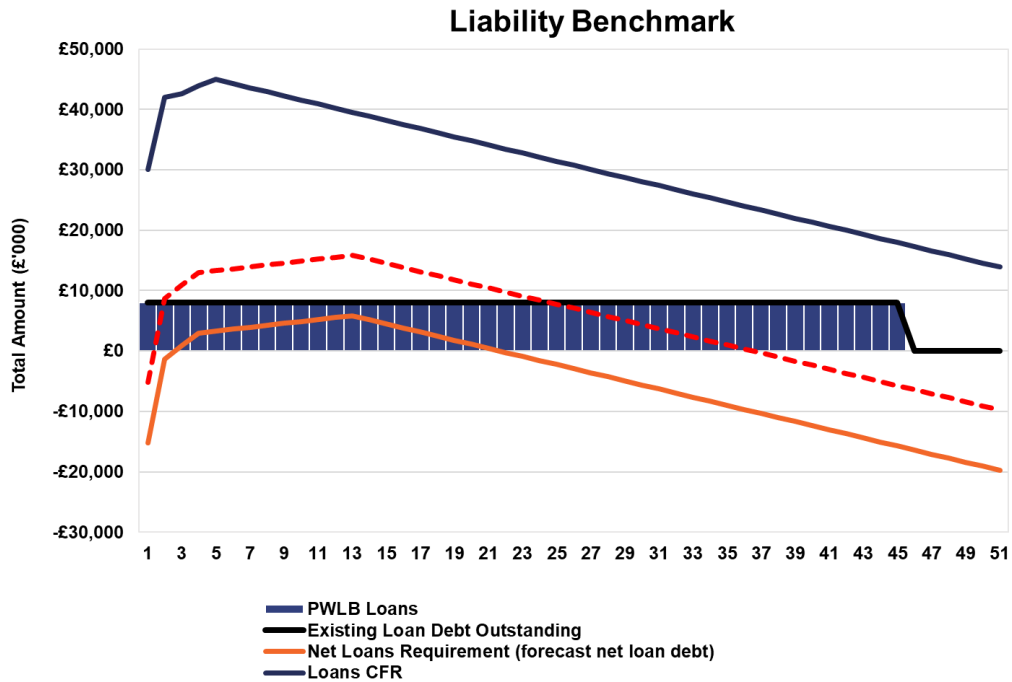
Operational Boundary	2024/25	2024/25
	Original Indicator	Forecast Indicator
	£M	£M
Borrowing - Capital Programme	20.00	20.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>20.00</b>	<b>20.00</b>

- 2.4.5 A further prudential indicator controls the overall level of borrowing. This is the Authorised Limit which represents the limit beyond which borrowing is prohibited and needs to be set and revised by Members. It reflects the level of borrowing which, while not desired, could be afforded in the short term, but is not sustainable in the longer term. It is the expected maximum borrowing need with some headroom for unexpected movements. This is the statutory limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003.

### Prudential indicator – the Authorised Limit for external debt:

Authorised Limit	2024/25	2024/25
	Original Indicator	Forecast Indicator
	£M	£M
Borrowing	25.00	25.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>25.00</b>	<b>25.00</b>

- 2.4.6 The Treasury Management Code of Practice requires local authorities to calculate their Liability Benchmark. The benchmark includes a projection of external debt required over the long term to fund the organisation's approved budgets and plans compared to the forecast of total borrowing outstanding. The benchmark should be used to evaluate the amount, timing and maturities needed for new borrowing in relation to the organisation's planned borrowing needs in order to avoid borrowing too much, too little, too long or too short.
- 2.4.7 The Liability Benchmark, based on the latest estimates for the capital financing requirement and borrowing at 30 September 2024, is shown in the graph below. The cash currently invested in externally managed funds has been incorporated in the available cash, reducing the net and gross loans requirement. The graph shows that the Council is expected to have capacity to continue utilising cash to borrow internally beyond the MTFP period.



2.4.8 Under the Prudential Code, the Council is also required to report on the affordability of the Council's capital plans to ensure that the capital assets proposed means that the total capital investment of the authority remains within sustainable limits. The revised estimates reported are based on the position reported in the Council's Budget Monitoring Report – Quarter 2 which is based on information as at 30 September 2024.

2.4.9 The first of these indicators is Financing Costs to net revenue stream. This indicator identifies the trend in the cost of capital, (borrowing and other long-term obligation costs net of investment income), against the net revenue stream. The net revenue stream is the Council's core funding of Council Tax, Business rates, and unringfenced central government grants. Investment income includes interest from Treasury Management activities and interest from loans to joint ventures and subsidiaries.

Cost of Capital/ Net Revenue Stream	2024/25 Original Estimate £M	2024/25 Revised Estimate £M
Cost of Capital	0.04	(1.21)
Net Revenue Stream	13.97	13.97
<b>Percentage (%)</b>	<b>0.27%</b>	<b>(8.62%)</b>

2.4.10 The second indicator is the Net income from commercial investment to net revenue stream. This indicator is intended to show the financial exposure of the authority to the loss of income.

2.4.11 Net income from commercial investments comprises net income from financial investments (other than treasury management investments), together with net

income from other assets held primarily for financial return, such as commercial property.

Commercial Investment/ Net Revenue Stream	2024/25	2024/25
	Original Estimate	Revised Estimate
	£M	£M
Commercial Investment	0.95	1.15
Net Revenue Stream	13.97	13.97
<b>Percentage (%)</b>	<b>6.80%</b>	<b>8.23%</b>

## 2.5 Compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits

2.5.1 It is a statutory duty for the Council to determine and keep under review the affordable borrowing limits. During the half year ended 30 September 2023, the Council has operated within the treasury and prudential indicators set out in the Council's Capital Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Policy for 2024/25. The Director of Finance reports that no difficulties are envisaged for the current or future years in complying with these indicators.

2.5.2 All treasury management operations have also been conducted in full compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Practices.

## 2.6 Borrowing

Counter-Party	Principal	Type	Weighted Average Interest Rate	Weighted Average Maturity
	£M		%	(Years)
PWLB	8.00	Fixed Rate	2.41%	44.49

3.1.1 The Council's forecast year end capital financing requirement (CFR) for 2024/25 is £43.53 million. The CFR denotes the Council's underlying need to borrow for capital purposes. If the CFR is positive the Council may borrow from the PWLB or the market (external borrowing), or from internal balances on a temporary basis (internal borrowing). The balance of external and internal borrowing is generally driven by market conditions. At 30 September 2024 the Council has external borrowing of £8 million. The balance of £35.53 million is financed in the short term by the utilisation of cash flow funds in lieu of borrowing. This is a prudent and cost-effective approach in the current economic climate but will require ongoing monitoring in the event that any upside risk to gilt yields prevails.

3.1.2 The Council's current external borrowing portfolio is comprised of one loan of £8 million from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB). The loan is a long term loan with repayment on maturity, reflecting the expectation that the Council will have a long term borrowing requirement. The loan commenced in March 2019 and will run to September 2068 (49.5 years) at an annual interest rate of 2.41%.

3.1.3 The capital programme is being kept under regular review due to the effects of inflationary pressures, shortages of materials and labour. Our borrowing strategy will, therefore, also be regularly reviewed and then revised, if necessary, in order to achieve optimum value and risk exposure in the long-term.

### 3.2 Annual investment strategy

3.2.1 In accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice, the Council's Annual Investment Strategy sets out the Council's investment priorities as being:

- Security of capital
- Liquidity
- Yield

3.2.2 The Council will aim to achieve the optimum return (yield) 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, but also to seek out value available in periods up to 12 months with high credit rated financial institutions.

3.2.3 Officers can confirm that the approved limits within the Annual Investment Strategy were not breached during the period ended 30 September 2023.

### 3.3 Creditworthiness

3.3.1 The credit rating agency Fitch continues to hold the UK sovereign debt rating on Negative Outlook, reflecting a downside bias to the current ratings in light of expectations of weaker finances and the economic outlook. Standard and Poor and Moody's credit rating agencies both report a stable outlook.

### 3.4 Investment Counterparty criteria

3.4.1 The current investment counterparty criteria selection approved in the Annual Investment Strategy is meeting the requirement of the treasury management function.

3.4.2 The Council has continued to limit exposure to banks and building societies with deposits limited to the Council's bank, Lloyds, and the UK government through investments with the Debt Management Office (DMO).

### 3.5 Investment balances

3.5.1 A summary of the Council's investment position, including bank deposits as at 30 September 2024 is shown in the table below:

Counter party	Principal £M	Type
DMADF (HM Treasury)	30.00	Fixed Rate
Local Authorities	5.00	Fixed Rate
Banks (Current Account)	0.24	Variable Rate
RLAM Cash Plus Fund	5.00	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>40.23</b>	



- 3.5.2 The average level of funds available for investment purposes during the first half of the financial year was £31.4 million. These funds were 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 average interest rate earned on investments was 5.11% (low 4.93%, high 5.11%). This compares to average Bank of England Base Rate of 5.16% (low 5.00%, high 5.25%). The Sterling Overnight Index Average (SONIA) benchmark is based on actual transactions and reflects the average of the interest rates that banks pay to borrow sterling overnight from other financial institutions and other institutional investors. Over the same period, the average SONIA rate was 5.12% (low 4.95%, high 5.20%). Performance against these benchmarks reflects effective short-term cash management, avoiding excessive exposure to the lower rates paid on overnight bank deposits while maintain liquidity and investing with high credit quality counterparties.
- 3.5.3 Although interest receivable rates have remained high during 2024/25, the cost of borrowing remains higher than the benefit of investing cash, known as the 'cost of carry.' Therefore, the Council will continue to maximise the use of internal borrowing, utilising internal cash balances to offset the need to borrowing in the short term and reducing the net interest cost.
- 3.5.4 The Council's investment portfolio is set out in appendix 3.

### 3.6 Externally Managed Funds

- 3.6.1 During 2020/21 the Council identified an amount of core cash available for longer-term investment. The cash was invested in a Money Market Fund managed by Royal London Asset Management. The classification of the fund was changed during the second quarter of 24/25 to a 'distributing' fund, which means it does pay regular interest. The first interest amount will be received at the end of the third quarter of 24/25. A total of £2.35 million was invested in November 2020, with a further £2.4 million invested in September 2024. The fair value at 30 September 2024 was £5.009 million. This represents an unrealised gain of £0.256 million, however £0.009 million of this unrealised gain will be redistributed from the fund as income receivable at the end of the third quarter of 24/25.

### 3.7 Credit Ratings

- 3.8 Credit rating information is supplied by our treasury consultants, Link Asset Services, on all counterparties that comply with the Council's criteria. Any counterparty failing to meet the criteria would be omitted from the counterparty (dealing) list. Any rating changes, rating watches (notification of a likely change), rating outlooks (notification of a possible longer term change) are provided to officers almost immediately after they occur and this information is considered before dealing. There have been no changes to the Council's approved counter party list as a result of changes to credit ratings during the year.

## Financial Implications

- 4.1.1 The Council has set an income budget of £0.39 million for 2024/25. At 30 September the Council had received £0.711 million, benefiting from the increase in interest rates and higher cash balances than expected.

4.1.2 Based on current external borrowing, the Council will incur interest payable costs of £0.193 million. No additional borrowing is expected to be required during the year. The interest expense budget for 2024/25 is £0.302 million.

4.1.3 The additional income and reduced borrowing cost forecast has been reported in the Budget Monitoring Report to Policy and Resources Committee and will continued to be monitored during the remainder of the year.

### Legal Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

### Equal, Staffing, Environmental, Community Safety, Public Health, Customer Services Centre, Communications & Website, Health & Safety Implications

6.1 None specific.

### Risk Management

7.1 The Code of Practice on Treasury Management identifies eight key risks that are inherent in Treasury Management activity. The Council's Treasury Management Policy sets out the risks that it is seeking to manage:

1.	<b>Credit and Counterparty Risk</b>	That the entity holding Council funds is unable to repay them when due.	This risk is managed through the maintenance of a list of authorised counterparties, with separate limits to ensure that the exposure to this risk is limited.
2.	<b>Liquidity Risk</b>	That the Council may not have the cash it needs on a day to day basis to pay its bills.	This risk is managed through forecasting and the retention by the Council of an adequate working capital balance. In addition, through the Public Works Loan Board and other organisations, the Council is able to access short term borrowing, usually within 24 hours.
3.	<b>Interest Rate Risk</b>	That the costs and benefits expected do not materialise due to changes in interest rates.	This risk is managed through the placing of different types and maturities of investments, the forecasting and monitoring of the interest budget (with assistance from the Council's retained advisors).
4.	<b>Exchange Rate Risk</b>	That losses or gains are made due to fluctuations in the prices of currency.	The Council does not engage in any significant non-sterling transactions.

5.	<b>Inflation</b>	That Inflation erodes the value of investments.	The Council priorities security and liquidity over yield but where possible investment returns will aim to match inflation to preserve the capital value.
6.	<b>Refinancing Risk</b>	That the loans taken by the Council will become due for repayment and need replacing at a time when there is limited finance available or interest rates are significantly higher.	The timing of loan maturities is monitored along with interest rate forecasts. Officers ensure that due dates are monitored and seek advice from the Council's advisors about when to raise any finance needed.
7.	<b>Legal and Regulatory Risk</b>	That the Council operates outside its legal powers.	This risk is managed through the Council's training and development of Officers involved in Treasury Management, the independent oversight of Internal and External Audit, and the advice (for example on the contents of this strategy) taken from the Council's Treasury advisors.
8.	<b>Operational e.g. Fraud, Error and Corruption</b>	The risk that losses will be caused by impropriety or incompetence.	This risk is managed through the controls in the Council's financial procedures. For example, the segregation of duties between those making investment decisions and those transferring funds
9.	<b>Market / Price Risk</b>	That the price of investments held fluctuates, principally in secondary markets.	The majority of the Council's investments are not traded, but where they are (e.g. Property investment portfolio) the main investments' value comes from the income they generate which is generally long term and secure. The Council's investment in Royal London Asset Management, relating to the Croxley Park reserve, is held for the long term which enables the Council to reduce the risk of needing to divest when prices fall.

7.2 In the current macro-economic environment, the two most high-profile risks remain interest rate risk and refinancing risk. This is a shift in focus from credit and counterparty risk which had been the prevailing concern from the 2008 banking crisis through to 2022/23 when interest rates started rising rapidly.

7.3 The principles set out in the Treasury Management Policy and Annual Investment Strategy remain appropriate to manage these risks.

**Recommendation**

8.1 That the Committee notes the contents of the 2024/25 mid-year review of the Treasury Management function and recommends the report to Council.

Report prepared by: Hannah Doney, Head of Finance

**Data Quality**

Data sources:

Link reports

Data checked by:

Hannah Doney, Head of Finance

Data rating: Tick

<b>1</b>	<b>Poor</b>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Sufficient</b>	
<b>3</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>x</b>

**Background Papers**

Capital Strategy & Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024/25

Treasury Management Annual Report 2023/24

Quarter Two Budget Monitoring Report 2024/25

**APPENDICES / ATTACHMENTS**

- Appendix 1 – Economics Update
- Appendix 2 – External Borrowing Portfolio
- Appendix 3 – Investment Portfolio