



CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 10 MAY 2019

ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT 2018/19

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee on the action taken and the performance achieved in respect of the treasury management activities of the Council in 2018/19.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Under the CIPFA Code of Practice it is necessary to report on treasury management activities undertaken in 2018/19 by the end of September 2019. This report will be referred to the Cabinet in May 2019.

Background

3. The term treasury management is defined as: -

“The management of the organisation’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”.

4. The Director of Corporate Resources is responsible for carrying out treasury management on behalf of the County Council, under guidelines agreed annually by the County Council.

Treasury Management 2018/19

5. The Treasury Management Policy Statement for 2018/19 was agreed by the full Council on 21st February 2018, in relation to the sources and methods of borrowing and approved organisations for lending temporarily surplus funds.
6. The criteria for lending to Banks are still derived from the list of approved counter parties provided by the County Council’s advisors, Link Asset Services. The list is amended to reduce the risk to the County Council by removing the lowest rated counterparties and reducing the maximum loan duration.
7. During the year all outstanding loans were repaid on time with the interest due.

8. For local authority lending the policy is unchanged with no loans permitted in excess of 12 months duration or £10 million in value. In May 2018, Moody's, one of the world's best-known credit rating agencies, re-affirmed its view that the UK local government sector has a high credit quality. The implication being that the sector continues to be a good risk for lenders.
9. During the year there were no divergences from the agreed Policy.
10. In 2016 this Committee agreed that when a counterparty was downgraded whilst a loan was active, and the unexpired period of the loan, or the amount on loan, would then breach the limit at which a new loan could be made to that counterparty, this would be included in the quarterly treasury management report to this Committee. There were no such incidents during 2018/19.
11. Following the August 2018 increase in UK base lending rates to 0.75% the impact on short-dated investments in Money Market Funds improved in line with the increase by October 2018. However, the medium to longer term rates included the impact of the rate increase immediately and also priced in expectation for future base rate rises which created opportunities to improve returns.
12. At the August 2018 Bank of England (BoE) Monetary Policy Committee meeting, market guidance from the BoE indicated that any increases in Bank rates are likely to be at a gradual pace and to a limited extent. The premium for lending long to highly rated UK financial institutions continued to out-weigh the risk of a rate increase, so investments for periods of 6 months and 12 months were made during the year. Rates have remained on hold since August 2018.
13. The BoE stated in the March 2019 Monetary Policy Committee meeting that any future rate changes will depend significantly on the nature and timing of the UK's withdrawal from the EU and the movement could be in either direction. The BoE Governor Mark Carney has remained dovish due to the prospect of Brexit, but did imply in his press conference that in case of a long Brexit extension, the MPC may move to raise rates in the summer. However, the Council's treasury advisers suggest the chances of a near term rate hike are slim at best and the prospect of a move towards the end of the year is only 50%. They also reiterated their stance to always act to achieve the 2% inflation target.
14. On the debt portfolio, no new loans were taken. A total of £0.5m was repaid in the year which was in respect of three Equal Instalments of Principal loans, thereby reducing the overall balance of the loan portfolio, but marginally increasing the average 'Pool' rate.
15. The Authority has not raised any external loans since August 2010 and external debt is around £100m lower than it was at its peak in November 2006. There are no current plans to raise any further external debt, and opportunities to reduce it will be considered if they are cost effective.

Position at 31st March 2019

16. The Council's external debt position at the beginning and end of the year was as follows: -

	31 st March 2018			31 st March 2019		
	Principal	Average Rate	Average Life	Principal	Average Rate	Average Life
Fixed Rate Funding						
- PWLB	£161.1m	6.77%	32 yrs	£160.6m	6.77%	31 yrs
-Market	£ 0.0m	n/a	n/a	£ 0.0m	n/a	n/a
Variable Rate Funding:						
- Market (1)	£103.5 m	4.37%	1 yr	103.5m	4.37%	1 yr
Total Debt	£264.6m	5.83%	20 yrs	£264.1m	5.84%	20 yrs

(1) The lenders all have an option to increase the rates payable on these loans on certain pre-set dates, and if they exercise this option we can either repay or accept the higher rate. The average life is based on the next option date.

17. The position in respect of investments varies throughout the year as it depends on large inflows and outflows of cash. Over the course of the year the loan portfolio (which includes cash managed on behalf of schools with devolved banking arrangements) varied between £204.1m and £299.8m, and averaged £248m. Investments as at 31 March 2019 totalled £247.5m.

Debt Transactions

18. The Council began the financial year £7.7m over-borrowed compared with the amount required to fund the historic capital programme - the Capital Financing Requirement.
19. Although the term over borrowed suggests an unusual situation, it is simply caused by the County Council setting aside money each year so that when the loan becomes due it can be repaid. Historically this situation did not arise because new borrowing was undertaken each year. Recently, however, there has been no requirement to borrow to fund the capital programme (which leads to debt financing costs that fall on the revenue budget), particularly as the Government changed a number of years ago to award grants to fund the capital programme rather than continue its previous approach of supporting borrowing. Ideally the situation would be remedied by repaying loans early. However, given the large penalties that would be incurred from early repayment the position is unlikely to change unless long-term interest rates rise significantly.
20. At the end of the financial year, after the repayment of debt and setting aside funding for the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) - a charge (c. £10m) that is intended to ensure that loans raised to finance capital expenditure are paid off over the longer term – the Council was £17.6m over-borrowed.

21. The lack of opportunity to reduce the debt portfolio because of historic stagnant interest rates makes the punitive redemption costs prohibitive. The debt portfolio stands at £264.1m and the average pool rate 5.84%.
22. Only £0.5m of repayments were made during the year meaning that the average pool rate was stagnant.

Investments

23. The loan portfolio produced an average return of 0.83% in 2018/19, compared to an average base rate of 0.67% and the average 7-day LIBID (London Interbank Bid Rate) index (representative of what could be achieved if only short-term loans within the money market were made) of 0.52%.
24. The loan portfolio has outperformed both the average base rate and the average 7-day LIBID in every one of the last 24 years, which is when the figures started to be produced. The level of the out performance is flattered somewhat by the significant over performance achieved both during and in the immediate aftermath of the credit crunch. The average rate of interest earned on the portfolio in the last 24 years is 3.84%, and this compares to an average base rate and the average LIBID index which have both produced a return of 3.2%.
25. The variability of balances makes it difficult to calculate the excess interest that the over performance has achieved over the whole of the 20+ year period for which performance records are available, but it is estimated to be at least £28m. Almost half of this added value came in the five financial years from 2008 to 2013, which can be categorised as the start of the financial crisis and a period in which a number of loans placed during the financial crisis were earning interest at rates that (relative to base rates) were extraordinary.
26. The numbers in paragraph 23-25 exclude investments relating to private debt. The total value of private debt investment as at 31st March 2019 was £20m and is performing in line with expectations.

Summary

27. Treasury Management is an integral part of the Council's overall finances and the performance of this area is very important. Whilst individual years obviously matter, performance is best viewed on a medium / long term basis. The action taken in respect of the debt portfolio in recent years has been extremely beneficial and has resulted in significant savings. Short term gains might, on occasions, be sacrificed for longer term certainty and stability.
28. The loan portfolio has produced an exceptional level of over performance in the period in which performance figures have been calculated. Adding significant value in a period of extremely low interest rates is very difficult. Ironically a period in which there begins to be differentiation in expectations for both the pace and extent of future base rate rises will make the cash sums that can be gained larger, whilst also giving a higher level of risk that the decisions taken might be wrong. Such a period has intermittently seemed to get closer in recent years, only to be consistently put back.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

29. None.

Background Papers

Report to County Council on 22nd February 2018 – ‘Medium Term Financial Plan’:

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s135701/MTFS%20report.pdf>

Appendix L ‘Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy 2018/19’

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s135713/Appendix%20L%20-%20Treasury%20Management%20Strategy.pdf>

Circulation under local issues alert procedure

None.

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