

Capital Strategy Report 2021/22

Introduction

This capital strategy report gives a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of local public services along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future financial sustainability. It has been written in an accessible style to enhance members' understanding of these sometimes technical areas.

Decisions made this year on capital and treasury management will have financial consequences for the Authority for many years into the future. They are therefore subject to both a national regulatory framework and to local policy framework, summarised in this report.

Capital Expenditure and Financing

Capital expenditure is where the Authority spends money on assets, such as property or vehicles, that will be used for more than one year. In local government this includes spending on assets owned by other bodies, and loans and grants to other bodies enabling them to buy assets. The Authority has some limited discretion on what counts as capital expenditure, for example assets costing below £10k are not capitalised and are charged to revenue in year.

- For details of the Authority's policy on capitalisation, see Note 2.15 in the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2020

In 2021/22, the Authority is planning capital expenditure of £4m as summarised below:

Table 1: Prudential Indicator: Estimates of Capital Expenditure in £ millions

	2019/20 actual	2020/21 forecast	2021/22 budget	2022/23 budget	2023/24 budget
General Fund services	1.03	1.45	4.06	6.02	0.60
Capital investments	0.00	19.62	0.00	0.00	0.00
TOTAL	1.03	21.07	4.06	6.02	0.60

The main General Fund capital projects include the replacement of the Vehicles which are used to deliver waste and recycling services, delivery of the ICT strategy, the delivery of the Ashchurch bridge project and also payment of Disabled Facility Grants.

Governance: Service managers must take a report to full Council in order to include projects in the Council's capital programme. Finance calculate the financing cost (which can be nil if the project is externally financed) and review any business case for the proposal to ensure it meets the council requirements over payback periods (if applicable). Council appraises all proposals based on a comparison of service priorities against financing costs and approves the use of capital resources. The final capital programme is then presented to Executive Committee and to Council in February each year.

All capital expenditure must be financed, either from external sources (government grants and other contributions), the Council's own resources (revenue, reserves and capital receipts) or debt (borrowing, leasing and Private Finance Initiative). The planned financing of the above expenditure is as follows:

Table 2: Capital financing in £ millions

	2019/20 actual	2020/21 forecast	2021/22 budget	2022/23 budget	2023/24 budget
External sources	0.57	0.56	3.59	5.87	0.50
Own resources	0.46	0.89	0.47	0.15	0.10
Debt	0.00	19.62	0.00	0.00	0.00
TOTAL	1.03	21.07	4.06	6.02	0.60

Debt is only a temporary source of finance, since loans and leases must be repaid, and this is therefore replaced over time by other financing, usually from revenue which is known as minimum revenue provision (MRP). Alternatively, proceeds from selling capital assets (known as capital receipts) may be used to replace debt finance. Planned MRP and use of capital receipts are as follows:

Table 3: Replacement of debt finance in £'000

	2019/20 actual	2020/21 forecast	2021/22 budget	2022/23 budget	2023/24 budget
Own resources	537	552	882	905	1,000

The Authority's cumulative outstanding amount of debt finance is measured by the capital financing requirement (CFR). This increases with new debt-financed capital expenditure and reduces with MRP and capital receipts used to replace debt. The CFR is expected to be £54,130k during 2021/22. Based on the above figures for expenditure and financing, the Authority's estimated CFR is as follows:

Table 4: Prudential Indicator: Estimates of Capital Financing Requirement in £'000

	31.3.2020 actual	31.3.2021 forecast	31.3.2022 budget	31.3.2023 budget	31.3.2024 budget
Capital investments	36.15	55.00	54.13	53.22	52.22
TOTAL CFR	36.15	55.00	54.13	53.22	52.22

Asset management: To ensure that capital assets continue to be of long-term use, the Council has an asset management strategy in place. This plan is set in the wider context of ensuring a sustainable future for Council expenditure and revenue and aims to:

- Identify and explain the context and objectives of Asset Management at Tewkesbury Borough Council.
- Identify and explain how the plan links with our Corporate Plan and processes that will be followed to deliver Asset Management to Tewkesbury Borough Council.
- Identify the specific challenges and opportunities that currently affect Tewkesbury Borough Council's land and building assets and the ability of those assets to deliver the priorities, goals and promises set out in our Corporate Plan.
- Identify and recommended strategies to address and resolve issues and opportunities within the asset portfolio.
- Establish an annual Service Action Plan summarising the required actions arising from those recommendations.

The Council's asset management strategy can be found on our website.

Asset disposals: When a capital asset is no longer needed, it may be sold so that the proceeds, known as capital receipts, can be spent on new assets or to repay debt. The Council is currently also permitted to spend capital receipts on service transformation projects until 2021/22. Repayments of capital grants, loans and investments also generate capital receipts. The Council plans to receive £20,000 of capital receipts in the coming financial year as follows:

Table 5: Capital receipts receivable in £'000

	2019/20 actual	2020/21 forecast	2021/22 budget	2022/23 budget	2023/24 budget
Asset sales	115	66	0	0	0
Right to buy receipts	21	20	20	20	20
TOTAL	136	86	20	20	20

- The Authority's Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Policy is available alongside this report.

Treasury Management

Treasury management is concerned with keeping sufficient but not excessive cash available to meet the Authority's spending needs, while managing the risks involved. Surplus cash is invested until required, while a shortage of cash will be met by borrowing, to avoid excessive credit balances or overdrafts in the bank current account. The Authority is typically cash rich in the short-term as revenue income is received before it is spent, but cash poor in the long-term as capital expenditure is incurred before being financed. The revenue cash surpluses are offset against capital cash shortfalls to reduce overall borrowing.

Due to decisions taken in the past, the Authority currently has £39.66m borrowing at an average interest rate of 1.19% and £26.99m treasury investments at an average rate of 1.79%.

Borrowing strategy: The Authority's main objectives when borrowing are to achieve a low but certain cost of finance while retaining flexibility should plans change in future. These objectives are often conflicting, and the Authority therefore seeks to strike a balance between cheap short-term loans (currently available at around 0.10%) and long-term fixed rate loans where the future cost is known but higher (currently 1.5 to 2.5%).

Projected levels of the Authority's total outstanding debt (which comprises borrowing, PFI liabilities, leases are shown below, compared with the capital financing requirement (see above).

Table 6: Prudential Indicator: Gross Debt and the Capital Financing Requirement in £'000

	31.3.2020 actual	31.3.2021 forecast	31.3.2022 budget	31.3.2023 budget	31.3.2024 budget
Debt	44.5	39.44	38.9	38.36	37.82
Capital Financing Requirement	36.15	55.00	54.13	53.22	52.22

Statutory guidance is that debt should remain below the capital financing requirement, except in the short-term. As can be seen from table 6, the Authority expects to comply with this in the medium term

Liability benchmark: To compare the Authority's actual borrowing against an alternative strategy, a liability benchmark has been calculated showing the lowest risk level of borrowing. This assumes that

cash and investment balances are kept to a minimum level of £10m at each year-end. This benchmark is currently £31.00m and is forecast to fall to £26.12m over the next three years.

Table 7: Borrowing and the Liability Benchmark in £ millions

	31.3.2020 actual	31.3.2021 forecast	31.3.2022 budget	31.3.2023 budget	31.3.2024 budget
Outstanding borrowing	44.5	39.44	38.9	38.36	37.82
Liability benchmark	10.55	31.00	28.93	27.12	26.12

The table shows that the Authority expects to remain borrowed above its liability benchmark. This is because a deliberate decision has been made to borrow additional sums due to the volatility of the Councils cash flows.

Affordable borrowing limit: The Authority is legally obliged to set an affordable borrowing limit (also termed the authorised limit for external debt) each year and to keep it under review. In line with statutory guidance, a lower “operational boundary” is also set as a warning level should debt approach the limit.

Table 8: Prudential Indicators: Authorised limit and operational boundary for external debt in £m

	2020/21 limit	2021/22 limit	2022/23 limit	2023/24 limit
Authorised limit – borrowing	60	60	60	60
Operational boundary – borrowing	55	55	55	55

Further details on borrowing are in the treasury management strategy

Treasury investment strategy: Treasury investments arise from receiving cash before it is paid out again. Investments made for service reasons or for pure financial gain are not generally considered to be part of treasury management.

The Authority’s policy on treasury investments is to prioritise security and liquidity over yield, that is to focus on minimising risk rather than maximising returns. Cash that is likely to be spent in the near term is invested securely, for example with the government, other local authorities or selected high-quality banks, to minimise the risk of loss. Money that will be held for longer terms is invested more widely, including in bonds, shares and property, to balance the risk of loss against the risk of receiving returns below inflation. Both near-term and longer-term investments may be held in pooled funds, where an external fund manager makes decisions on which particular investments to buy and the Authority may request its money back at short notice.

Table 9: Treasury management investments in £’000

	31.3.2020 actual	31.3.2021 forecast	31.3.2022 budget	31.3.2023 budget	31.3.2024 budget
Near-term investments	15.0	6.45	9.98	12.25	12.71
Longer-term investments	11.99	11.99	9.99	8.99	8.99
TOTAL	26.99	18.44	19.97	21.24	21.70

Further details on treasury investments are in the treasury management strategy

Risk management: The effective management and control of risk are prime objectives of the Authority's treasury management activities. The treasury management strategy therefore sets out various indicators and limits to constrain the risk of unexpected losses and details the extent to which financial derivatives may be used to manage treasury risks.

Governance: Decisions on treasury management investment and borrowing are made daily and are therefore delegated to the Head of Finance and Assets and staff, who must act in line with the treasury management strategy approved by council. Half yearly reports on treasury management activity are presented to Executive Committee along with quarterly performance being reported as part of the quarterly budget reporting. The Audit & Governance Committee is responsible for scrutinising treasury management decisions.

Commercial Activities

With central government financial support for local public services declining and uncertainty around future funding sources (e.g. New Homes Bonus), the Council has no choice but to invest in commercial property purely or mainly for financial gain. Total commercial investments are currently valued at £42m as at 31.03.20 (with a cost value of £37m) providing a net return after all costs of 3.6%.

With financial return being the main objective, the Council accepts higher risk on commercial investment than with treasury investments. The principal risk exposures include voids, fall in capital value and high asset management costs. These risks are managed by using professional property advisers who are used to analyse the risk of voids, advice on alternative uses or exit strategies for investment properties. In order that commercial investments remain proportionate to the size of the authority, these are subject to an overall maximum investment limit of £65m and contingency plans are in place (including a contingency reserve) should expected yields not materialise.

Governance: Decisions on commercial investments are made by the Head of Finance and Asset Management alongside the Commercial Investments Board in line with the criteria and limits approved by Council. Property and most other commercial investments are also capital expenditure and purchases will therefore also be approved as part of the capital programme.

- Further details on commercial investments and limits on their use are in the investment strategy.
- Further details on the risk management of commercial investments are also within the investment strategy.

Liabilities

In addition to forecast debt of £39.44m detailed above, the Council is committed to making future payments to cover its pension fund deficit (valued at £28.8m as at 31 March 2020). It has also set aside £3.3m to cover risks of provisions (of which £2.9m relates to business rates appeals).

Governance: Decisions on incurring new discretionary liabilities are taken in line with the Financial Procedure Rules by service managers in consultation with Head of Finance and Asset Management and the Borough Solicitor.

Revenue Budget Implications

Although capital expenditure is not charged directly to the revenue budget, interest payable on loans and MRP are charged to revenue, offset by any investment income receivable. The net annual charge is known as financing costs; this is compared to the net revenue stream i.e. the amount funded from Council Tax, business rates and general government grants.

Table 10: Prudential Indicator: Proportion of financing costs to net revenue stream

	2019/20 actual	2020/21 forecast	2021/22 budget	2022/23 budget	2023/24 budget
Financing costs (£m)	0.51	0.57	1.08	1.11	1.19
Proportion of net revenue stream	5.89%	6.34%	11.31%	11.67%	11.39%

Further details on the revenue implications of capital expenditure are in the 2021/22 revenue budget.

Sustainability: Due to the very long-term nature of capital expenditure and financing, the revenue budget implications of expenditure incurred in the next few years will extend for up to 40 years into the future. The Head of Finance and Asset Management is satisfied that the proposed capital programme is prudent, affordable and sustainable because it has all been full costed and the full revenue implications have been included within the Medium Term Finance Strategy (MTFS).

Knowledge and Skills

The Council employs professionally qualified and experienced staff in senior positions with responsibility for making capital expenditure, borrowing and investment decisions. For example, the Head of Finance and Asset Management is a qualified accountant with over 20 years' experience, the Asset Manager has many years' experience and is supported by an experienced team including engineers and building surveyors. The Council pays for staff to study towards relevant professional qualifications including CIPFA and AAT.

Where Council staff do not have the knowledge and skills required, use is made of external advisers and consultants that are specialists in their field. The Council currently employs Arlingclose Limited as treasury management advisers, Lambert Smith Hampton as property consultants and Womble Bond Dickinson as legal specialists. This approach is more cost effective than employing such staff directly and ensures that the Council has access to knowledge and skills commensurate with its risk appetite.