TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR UPDATE

Cabinet – 13 November 2014

Report of the:	Chief Finance Officer
Status:	For Consideration
Also considered by:	Finance & Resources Advisory Committee – 11 November 2014
Key Decision:	No

Executive Summary: This report gives details of treasury activity in the first half of the current financial year, recent developments in the financial markets and fulfils the reporting requirements of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management.

This report supports the Key Aim of Effective Management of Council Resources.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Ramsay

Contact Officer Roy Parsons, Principal Accountant - Ext 7204

Recommendation to Finance and Resources Advisory Committee: That Cabinet be asked to approve the Treasury Management Mid-Year Update for 2014/15.

Recommendation to Cabinet: It be RESOLVED that the Treasury Management Mid-Year Update for 2014/15 be approved.

Reason for recommendation: As required by both the Council's Financial Procedure Rules and the CIPFA Code, a mid-year report of treasury management activity is to be presented to Members for approval.

Background

1 The Council is required through regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003 to produce an annual Treasury Management Strategy Statement, which includes the Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy, for the year ahead, a mid-year review report and an annual report covering activities during the previous year.

2 During 2014/15 the minimum reporting requirements are that the Council should receive the following reports:

- an annual treasury strategy in advance of the year (Council 18/2/2014).
- a mid year treasury update report (this report).

- an annual report following the year describing the activity compared to the strategy.

3 In addition, monthly reports from our treasury management advisors, Capita Asset Services, are emailed to Members of the Finance and Resources Advisory Committee.

Introduction

4 The Council operates a balanced 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.

5 The second main function of the treasury management service is 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 operations. This management of longer term cash may involve arranging long or short term loans, or using longer term cash flow surpluses, and on occasion any debt previously drawn may be restructured to meet Council risk or cost objectives.

6 Accordingly, treasury management is defined as:

"The management of the local authority'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."

7 This mid-year update report, prepared in compliance with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management, covers:

(a) An economic update for the 2014/15 financial year to 30 September 2014;

(b) interest rate forecasts;

(c) a review of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy;

(d) a review of the Council's investment portfolio for 2014/15; and

(e) an update on the Icelandic bank investment.

Economic Update

<u>Economic performance to date and outlook</u>

<u>United Kingdom</u>

8 After strong UK GDP quarterly growth of 0.7%, 0.8% and 0.7% in quarters 2, 3 and 4 respectively in 2013, (2013 annual rate 2.7%), and 0.7% in Q1 and 0.9% in Q2 2014 (annual rate 3.2% in Q2), it appears very likely that strong growth will

continue through 2014 and into 2015 as forward surveys for the services and construction sectors, are very encouraging and business investment is also strongly recovering. The manufacturing sector has also been encouraging though the latest figures indicate a weakening in the future trend rate of growth.

9 However, for this recovery to become more balanced and sustainable in the longer term, the recovery needs to move away from dependence on consumer expenditure and the housing market to exporting, and particularly of manufactured goods, both of which need to substantially improve on their recent lacklustre performance.

10 This overall strong growth has resulted in unemployment falling much faster through the initial threshold of 7%, set by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) last August, before it said it would consider any increases in Bank Rate. The MPC has, therefore, subsequently broadened its forward guidance by adopting five qualitative principles and looking at a much wider range of about eighteen indicators in order to form a view on how much slack there is in the economy and how quickly slack is being used up. The MPC is particularly concerned that the current squeeze on the disposable incomes of consumers should be reversed by wage inflation rising back above the level of inflation in order to ensure that the recovery will be sustainable. There also needs to be a major improvement in labour productivity, which has languished at dismal levels since 2008, to support increases in pay rates.

11 Most economic forecasters are expecting growth to peak in 2014 and then to ease off a little, though still remaining strong, in 2015 and 2016. Unemployment is therefore expected to keep on its downward trend and this is likely to eventually feed through into a return to significant increases in pay rates at some point during the next three years. However, just how much those future increases in pay rates will counteract the depressive effect of increases in Bank Rate on consumer confidence, the rate of growth in consumer expenditure and the buoyancy of the housing market, are areas that will need to be kept under regular review.

12 Also encouraging has been the sharp fall in inflation (CPI), reaching 1.5% in May and July, the lowest rate since 2009. Forward indications are that inflation is likely to fall further in 2014 to possibly near to 1%. Overall, markets are expecting that the MPC will be cautious in raising Bank Rate as it will want to protect heavily indebted consumers from too early an increase in Bank Rate at a time when inflationary pressures are also weak. A first increase in Bank Rate is therefore expected in Q1 or Q2 2015 and they expect increases after that to be at a slow pace to lower levels than prevailed before 2008 as increases in Bank Rate will have a much bigger effect on heavily indebted consumers than they did before 2008.

13 The return to strong growth has also helped lower forecasts for the increase in Government debt by £73bn over the next five years, as announced in the 2013 Autumn Statement, and by an additional £24bn, as announced in the March 2014 Budget - which also forecast a return to a significant budget surplus, (of £5bn), in 2018/19. However, monthly public sector deficit figures have disappointed so far in 2014/15.

United States

14 In September, the Federal Reserve continued with its monthly $10bn reductions in asset purchases, which started in December 2013. Asset purchases have now fallen from $85bn to $15bn and are expected to stop in October 2014, providing strong economic growth continues. First quarter GDP figures for the US were depressed by exceptionally bad winter weather, but growth rebounded very strongly in Q2 to 4.6% (annualised).

15 The U.S. faces similar debt problems to those of the UK, but thanks to reasonable growth, cuts in government expenditure and tax rises, the annual government deficit has been halved from its peak without appearing to do too much damage to growth, although the weak labour force participation rate remains a matter of key concern for the Federal Reserve when considering the amount of slack in the economy and monetary policy decisions.

Eurozone

16 The Eurozone is facing an increasing threat from weak or negative growth and from deflation. In September, the inflation rate fell further, to reach a low of 0.3%. However, this is an average for all EZ countries and includes some countries with negative rates of inflation. Accordingly, the ECB took some rather limited action in June to loosen monetary policy in order to promote growth. In September it took further action to cut its benchmark rate to only 0.05%, its deposit rate to -0.2% and to start a programme of purchases of corporate debt. However, it has not embarked yet on full quantitative easing (purchase of sovereign debt).

17 Concern in financial markets for the Eurozone subsided considerably during 2013. However, sovereign debt difficulties have not gone away and major issues could return in respect of any countries that do not dynamically address fundamental issues of low growth, international uncompetitiveness and the need for overdue reforms of the economy (as Ireland has done). It is, therefore, possible over the next few years that levels of government debt to GDP ratios could continue to rise for some countries. This could mean that sovereign debt concerns have not disappeared but, rather, have only been postponed.

China and Japan

18 Japan is causing considerable concern as the increase in sales tax in April has suppressed consumer expenditure and growth. In Q2 growth was -1.8% q/q and -7.1% over the previous year. The Government is hoping that this is a temporary blip.

19 As for China, Government action in 2014 to stimulate the economy appeared to be putting the target of 7.5% growth within achievable reach but recent data has raised fresh concerns. There are also major concerns as to the creditworthiness of much bank lending to corporates and local government during the post 2008 credit expansion period and whether the bursting of a bubble in housing prices is drawing nearer.

Interest Rate Forecasts

20 The Council's treasury advisor, Capita Asset Services, has provided the following forecast:

	Sep-14	Dec-14	Mar-15	Jun-15	Sep-15	Dec-15	Mar-16	Jun-16	Sep-16	Dec-16	Mar-17	Jun-17
Bank rate	0.50%	0.50%	0.75%	0.75%	1.00%	1.00%	1.25%	1.25%	1.50%	1.75%	2.00%	2.00%
5yr PWLB rate	2.70%	2.70%	2.80%	2.90%	3.00%	3.00%	3.10%	3.20%	3.30%	3.40%	3.50%	3.50%
10yr PWLB rate	3.40%	3.50%	3.60%	3.70%	3.80%	3.90%	4.00%	4.10%	4.10%	4.20%	4.30%	4.30%
25yr PWLB rate	4.00%	4.10%	4.20%	4.30%	4.40%	4.50%	4.60%	4.70%	4.80%	4.80%	4.90%	4.90%
50yr PWLB rate	4.00%	4.10%	4.20%	4.30%	4.40%	4.50%	4.60%	4.70%	4.80%	4.80%	4.90%	4.90%

21 Capita Asset Services undertook a review of its interest rate forecasts in mid August, after the Bank of England's Inflation Report. By the beginning of September, a further rise in geopolitical concerns, principally over Ukraine but also over the Middle East, had caused a further flight into safe havens like gilts and depressed Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) rates further. However, there is much volatility in rates as news ebbs and flows in negative or positive ways. This latest forecast includes a first increase in Bank Rate in quarter 1 of 2015.

22 Capita Asset Services' PWLB forecasts are based around a balance of risks. However, there are potential upside risks, especially for longer term PWLB rates, as follows: -

- A further surge in investor confidence that robust world economic growth is firmly expected, causing a flow of funds out of bonds and into equities.
- UK inflation being significantly higher than in the wider EU and US, causing an increase in the inflation premium inherent to gilt yields.

23 Downside risks currently include:

- The situation over Ukraine poses a major threat to EZ and world growth if it was to deteriorate into economic warfare between the West and Russia where Russia resorted to using its control over gas supplies to Europe.
- UK strong economic growth is currently dependent on consumer spending and the unsustainable boom in the housing market. The boost from these sources is likely to fade after 2014.
- A weak rebalancing of UK growth to exporting and business investment causing a weakening of overall economic growth beyond 2014.

- Weak growth or recession in the UK's main trading partners - the EU and US, inhibiting economic recovery in the UK.

- A return to weak economic growth in the US, UK and China causing major disappointment in investor and market expectations.

- A resurgence of the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis caused by ongoing deterioration in government debt to GDP ratios to the point where financial markets lose confidence in the financial viability of one or more countries and in the ability of the ECB and Eurozone governments to deal with the potential size of the crisis.

- Recapitalising of European banks requiring more government financial support.

- Lack of support by populaces in Eurozone countries for austerity programmes, especially in countries with very high unemployment rates e.g. Greece and Spain, which face huge challenges in engineering economic growth to correct their budget deficits on a sustainable basis.

- Italy: the political situation has improved but it remains to be seen whether the new government is able to deliver the austerity programme required and a programme of overdue reforms. Italy has the third highest government debt mountain in the world.

- France: after being elected on an anti austerity platform, President Hollande has embraced a €50bn programme of public sector cuts over the next three years. However, there could be major obstacles in implementing this programme. Major overdue reforms of employment practices and an increase in competiveness are also urgently required to lift the economy out of stagnation.

- Monetary policy action failing to stimulate sustainable growth in western economies, especially the Eurozone and Japan.

- Heightened political risks in the Middle East and East Asia could trigger safe haven flows back into bonds.

- There are also increasing concerns that the reluctance of western economies to raise interest rates significantly for some years, plus the huge Quantitative Easing measures which remain in place (and may be added to by the ECB in the near future), has created potentially unstable flows of liquidity searching for yield and therefore heightened the potential for an increase in risks in order to get higher returns. This is a return of the same environment which led to the 2008 financial crisis.

Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy update

24 The Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) and Prudential Indicators for 2013/14 were approved by the Council on 18 February 2014. There are no

policy changes to the TMSS thus far and the details in this report merely update the position in the light of updated economic data.

25 The same goes for the Council's Prudential Indicators, namely the Capital Financing Requirement, External Debt and the Operational Boundary and the Limits To Borrowing Activity.

Investment Portfolio 2014/15

26 In accordance with the Code, it is the Council's priority to ensure security of capital and liquidity, and to obtain an appropriate level of return which is consistent with the Council's risk appetite. As described above, it is a very difficult investment market in terms of earning the level of interest rates commonly seen in previous decades as rates are very low and in line with the 0.5% Bank Rate. Indeed, the Funding for Lending scheme has reduced market investment rates even further. The potential for a prolonging of the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis, and its impact on banks, prompts a low risk and short term strategy. Given this risk environment, investment returns are likely to remain low.

27 The Council held £41.970m of investments as at 30 September 2014 (£33.050m at 31 March 2014) and the investment portfolio yield for the first six months of the year is 0.57% against 7 Day and 3 Month LIBID benchmarks of 0.34% and 0.41% respectively. A full list of investments held as at 30 September 2014 appears in the Appendix.

28 The approved limits within the Annual Investment Strategy were breached just once during the first six months of 2014/15. At the end of July 2014, an oversight resulted in the balance held in the Business Premium Account at Barclays to reach £4.055m, which, together with £2m of fixed deposits, exceeded the £6m limit we had set. The position was corrected the following day.

29 The Council's budgeted investment return for 2014/15 is £268k and performance for the year to date is £12k below budget. At this stage, the year-end forecast is expected to remain at £12k below budget.

Icelandic bank defaults

30 This authority currently has an investment of £1m frozen in Landsbanki Islands hf. The investment was placed on 25 June 2007 at 6.32%, to mature on 25 June 2009. The bank went into administration during the global financial crisis in October 2008.

31 The Icelandic Government has stated its intention to honour all its commitments as a result of their banks being placed into receivership. The UK Government, Administrators and other agencies continue to work with the Icelandic Government to help bring this about. The Local Government Association has been coordinating the efforts of all UK authorities with Icelandic investments.

32 At the current time, the process of recovering assets is still ongoing with the Administrators. Following the successful outcome of legal test cases in the Icelandic Supreme Court in late 2011, the deposits made by local authorities rank as priority claims. The Administrators have now commenced the process of

dividend payments and four such payments have been received amounting to approximately 54% of our claim. The latest assumption is that 100% of the Council's investment (and interest up to 22 April 2009) will be recovered in the period up to 2018/19.

33 In January and February 2014, a large number of local authorities sold their collective claims against the Landsbanki estate via a competitive auction process. The price at which the sale was concluded did not meet the Council's reserve and hence we remain part of a small group of authorities still holding their claims.

34 Members have been updated periodically on the latest developments in these efforts.

Key Implications

Financial

35 The management of the Council's investment portfolio and cash-flow generated balances plays an important part in the financial planning of the authority. The security of its capital and liquidity of its investments is of paramount importance.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

36 Under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Section 151 Officer has statutory duties in relation to the financial administration and stewardship of the authority, including securing effective arrangements for treasury management.

37 This annual review report fulfils the requirements of The Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy's Code of Practice on Treasury Management 2009.

38 Treasury management has two main risks :

- Fluctuations in interest rates can result in a reduction in income from investments; and
- A counterparty to which the Council has lent money fails to repay the loan at the required time.

39 Consideration of risk is integral in our approach to treasury management. However, this particular report has no specific risk implications as it is not proposing any new actions, but merely reporting performance over the last six months.

Equality Impacts

Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty:		
Question	Answer	Explanation / Evidence
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to disadvantage or	No	The recommendation is concerned with investment management and does not directly impact upon a service provided to the community.

Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty:		
Question	Answer	Explanation / Evidence
discriminate against different groups in the community?		
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have the potential to promote equality of opportunity?	No	
c. What steps can be taken to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		No mitigating steps are required.

Conclusions

40 The overall return on the Council's investments up to the end of September 2014 is £12k below budget and is forecast to remain at that level by the end of the financial year.

41 The economic situation both globally and within the Eurozone remains volatile, and this will have consequences for the UK economy. Treasury management in the current and recent financial years has been conducted against this background and with a cautious investment approach.

42 Recovery of the Icelandic deposit is ongoing and further updates will be provided as and when monies are received.

Appendices:	Investment Portfolio at 30 September 2014
Background Papers:	Treasury Management Strategy for 2014/15 - Council 18 February 2014 http://cds.sevenoaks.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=121&MId=1666&Ver=4

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