

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	Executive Board
<b>DATE:</b>	12 February 2026
<b>REPORTING OFFICER:</b>	Director of Finance
<b>PORTFOLIO:</b>	Corporate Services
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2026/27
<b>WARD(S)</b>	Borough-wide

## 1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To consider the Treasury Management Strategy Statement which incorporates the Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Strategy for 2026/27.

## 2.0 RECOMMENDED:

**That Council be recommended to adopt the policies, strategies, statements, prudential and treasury indicators outlined in the report.**

## 3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 This Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) details the expected activities of the treasury function in the forthcoming financial year (2026/27). Its production and submission to Council is a requirement of the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

3.2 The Local Government Act 2003 requires the Council to 'have regard to' the Prudential Code and to set Prudential Indicators for the next three years to ensure that the Council's capital investment plans are affordable, prudent and sustainable.

3.3 The Act requires the Council to set out its treasury strategy for borrowing and to prepare an Annual Investment Strategy; this sets out the Council's policies for managing its investments and for giving priority to the security and liquidity of those investments.

3.4 Government guidance notes state that authorities can combine the Treasury Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy into

one report. The Council has adopted this approach, and the Annual Investment Strategy is therefore included as section 4.

3.5 The Council is also required to produce a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement. There is a formal statement for approval detailed in paragraph 2.3 and the full policy is shown in Appendix A

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The successful delivery of the Strategy will assist the Council in meeting its budget commitments.

#### **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Treasury Management can have a major impact on the financial position of the Council. The strategy enables the Council to maximise its financial yield whilst keeping within the principals of security and liquidity as set out in the prudential code.

#### **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

- 6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**
- 6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**
- 6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families**
- 6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**
- 6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future**
- 6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

There are no direct implications, however, the revenue budget and capital programme support the delivery and achievement of all the Council's priorities above.

#### **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The Council operates its treasury management activity within the approved code of practice and supporting documents. The aim at all times is to operate in an environment where risk is clearly identified

and managed. This strategy sets out clear objectives within these guidelines.

7.2 Regular monitoring is undertaken during the year and reported on a quarterly basis to the Executive Board.

**8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 None

**9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The Treasury Management Code states The Council should consider the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) impacts when considering their counterparties, but this is secondary to the fundamental principals of Security, Liquidity and Yield when considering counterparties.

**10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Working Papers	Financial Management	Matt Guest
CIPFA TM Code	Halton Stadium	
CIPFA Prudential Code		

**HALTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY  
STATEMENT**

**2026/27**

**Revenues and Financial Management Division  
Finance Department  
January 2026**

# TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT 2026/27

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

The Council is required to operate a balanced budget, which broadly means that cash raised during the year will meet cash expenditure. Part of the treasury management operation is to ensure that this cash flow is adequately planned, with cash being available when it is needed. Surplus monies are invested in low-risk counterparties or instruments commensurate with the Council's risk appetite, providing adequate liquidity initially before considering investment return.

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 that the Council can meet its capital spending obligations. This management of longer-term cash may involve arranging long or short term loans, or using longer term cash flow surpluses. On occasion any debt previously drawn may be restructured to meet Council risk or cost objectives.

The contribution the treasury management function makes to the Council is critical, as the balance of debt and investment operations ensure liquidity or the ability to meet spending commitments as they fall due, either on day-to-day revenue or for larger capital projects. The treasury operations will see a balance of the interest costs of debt and the investment income arising from cash deposits affecting the available budget. Since cash balances generally result from reserves and balances, it is paramount to ensure adequate security of the sums invested, as a loss of principal will in effect result in a loss to the General Fund Balance.

CIPFA defines treasury management 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.”*

### 1.2 Reporting requirements

#### Capital Strategy

The CIPFA 2021 Prudential and Treasury Management Codes requires all local authorities to prepare, a capital strategy report, which will provide the following:

- a high-level long-term overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services
- an overview of how the associated risk is managed
- the implications for future financial sustainability

The aim of this capital strategy is to ensure that Council fully understand the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting capital strategy requirements, governance procedures and risk appetite.

### **Treasury Management Reporting**

Council is required to receive and approve the following reports each year, which incorporate a variety of policies, estimates and actuals.

**Prudential and treasury indicators and treasury strategy** (this report) - which covers:

- The capital plans (including prudential indicators)
- A minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy - how residual capital expenditure is charged to revenue over time
- The treasury management strategy – how the investment and borrowing are organised, including treasury indicators
- An investment strategy – the parameters of how investments are to be managed

**A mid-year treasury management report** – This will update members with the progress of the capital position, amending prudential indicators as necessary, and whether any policies require revision.

**An annual treasury report** – This provides details of a selection of actual prudential and treasury indicators and actual treasury operations compared to the estimates within the strategy.

### **Scrutiny**

The above reports are required to be adequately scrutinised before being recommended to the Council. This role is undertaken by the Executive Board.

**Quarterly Reports** - In addition to the three major reports detailed above, quarterly reporting (end of June/end of December) is also required. However, these additional reports do not have to be reported to Full Council but do require to be adequately scrutinised. This role is undertaken by Executive Board and Audit and Governance Board and the reports, specifically, should comprise updated Treasury/Prudential Indicators.

## **1.3 Treasury Management Strategy for 2026/27**

The strategy for 2026/27 covers two main areas:

### **Capital issues**

- the capital plans and the prudential indicators
- the minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy

### **Treasury Management Issues**

- The current treasury position
- Treasury indicators which limit the treasury risk and activities of the Council
- Prospects for interest rates

- The borrowing strategy
- Policy on borrowing in advance of need
- Debt rescheduling
- The investment strategy
- Creditworthiness policy
- Policy on use of external service providers

These elements cover the requirement of the Local Government Act 2003, the CIPFA Prudential Code, MHCLG MRP Guidance, the CIPFA Treasury Management Code and MHCLG Investment Guidance.

#### **1.4 Training**

The CIPFA Code requires the responsible officer to ensure that members with responsibility for treasury management receive adequate training in treasury management. This especially applies to Members responsible for scrutiny. Training was last undertaken by Members in November 2025. The training needs of treasury management officers are periodically reviewed.

#### **1.5 Treasury management consultants**

The Council uses MUFG Corporate Markets (formally Link Asset Services) as its external treasury management advisors.

The Council recognises that responsibility for treasury management decisions remains with the organisation at all times and will ensure that undue reliance is not placed upon our external service providers.

It also recognises that there is value in employing external providers of treasury management services in order to acquire access to specialist skills and resources. The Council will ensure that the terms of their appointment and the methods by which their value will be assessed are properly agreed and documented and subjected to regular review.

### **2 THE CAPITAL PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2026/27 – 2028/29**

The Council's capital expenditure plans are the key driver of treasury management activity. The output of the capital expenditure plans is reflected in the prudential indicators, which are designed to assist members' overview and confirm capital expenditure plans.

#### **2.1 Capital Expenditure**

This prudential indicator is a summary of the Council's capital expenditure plans, both those agreed previously, and those forming part of this budget cycle.

Table 1 shows planned capital spend by directorate and summarises how these plans are being financed by capital or revenue resources, any shortfall of resources results in the need to borrow.

**Table 1 – Capital Expenditure**

	2024/25 Actual £000	2025/26 Estimate £000	2026/27 Estimate £000	2027/28 Estimate £000	2028/29 Estimate £000
<b>Capital Expenditure:</b>					
Adult Services	3,570	4,125	1,900	1,700	1,700
Childrens Services	2,540	5,882	4,287	66	68
Public Health	-				
Enviornment and Regeneration	36,153	51,650	27,577	5,371	4,385
Chief Executive	4,254	5,422	11,070	1,200	1,200
Exceptional Financial Support	10,000	30,666	33,872	56,503	74,735
	<b>56,517</b>	<b>97,745</b>	<b>78,706</b>	<b>64,840</b>	<b>82,088</b>
<b>Financed By:</b>					
Capital receipts	(3,240)	(3,116)	(400)	(400)	(400)
Capital grants	(29,176)	(52,526)	(22,610)	(2,954)	(2,368)
Revenue	(64)	(205)	(395)	-	-
<b>Net financing need for the year</b>	<b>24,037</b>	<b>41,898</b>	<b>55,301</b>	<b>61,486</b>	<b>79,320</b>

The above financing need excludes other long-term liabilities such as PFI and leasing arrangements which already include borrowing instruments.

## 2.2 The Council's borrowing need – The Capital Financing Requirement

The second prudential indicator is the Council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). The CFR is simply the total historic outstanding capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for from either revenue or capital resources. It is essentially a measure of the Council's underlying borrowing need. Any capital expenditure above, which has not immediately been paid for will increase the CFR.

The CFR does not increase indefinitely as the minimum revenue provision (MRP) is a statutory annual revenue charge which broadly reduces the borrowing need in line with the life of each asset, and so charges the economic consumption of capital assets as they are used.

The CFR includes any other long-term liabilities (e.g. PFI schemes, finance leases). Whilst these increase the CFR, and therefore the Council's borrowing requirement, these types of scheme include a borrowing facility and so the Council is not required to separately borrow for these schemes.

**Table 2 – Capital Financing Requirement**

	2024/25 Actual £000	2025/26 Estimate £000	2026/27 Estimate £000	2027/28 Estimate £000	2028/29 Estimate £000
<b>Capital Financing Requirement</b>	<b>669,636</b>	<b>694,944</b>	<b>730,858</b>	<b>769,499</b>	<b>821,572</b>
<b>Movement in CFR due to:</b>					
Net financing need for the year	24,037	41,898	55,301	61,486	79,320
PFI / finance leases	48,801	-	-	-	-
Use of Reserves to reduce MRP liability	(558)	(564)	(580)	(594)	(796)
Less Minimum Revenue Provision	(13,308)	(16,026)	(18,807)	(22,251)	(26,451)
<b>Increase / (Decrease) in CFR</b>	<b>58,972</b>	<b>25,308</b>	<b>35,914</b>	<b>38,641</b>	<b>52,073</b>

## 2.3 Minimum revenue provision (MRP) statement

The Council is required to pay off an element of the accumulated General Fund capital spend each year (the CFR) through a revenue charge called the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP).

MHCLG regulations require Council to approve an MRP Statement in advance of each year. A variety of options are provided to councils, so long as there is a prudent provision. The full statement is detailed in Appendix A.

The Council is recommended to approve the following MRP Statement.

For capital expenditure incurred before 1 April 2008 the MRP policy will be to follow Option 1 (regulatory method), which will be charged on a 2% straight line basis.

For all unsupported borrowing since 1 April 2008, the MRP policy will be Option 3 (Asset Life Method) and is based on the estimated life of the assets. This will usually be charged using the equal instalment method, but the annuity method may also be used.

One exception to the above is expenditure that the Council has incurred on the construction of the Mersey Gateway Bridge. As this debt will be repaid from future toll income the Council will not charge any MRP on this expenditure until the income is received. When received, MRP payments will be matched with income received thus having little impact on the Council's revenue budget.

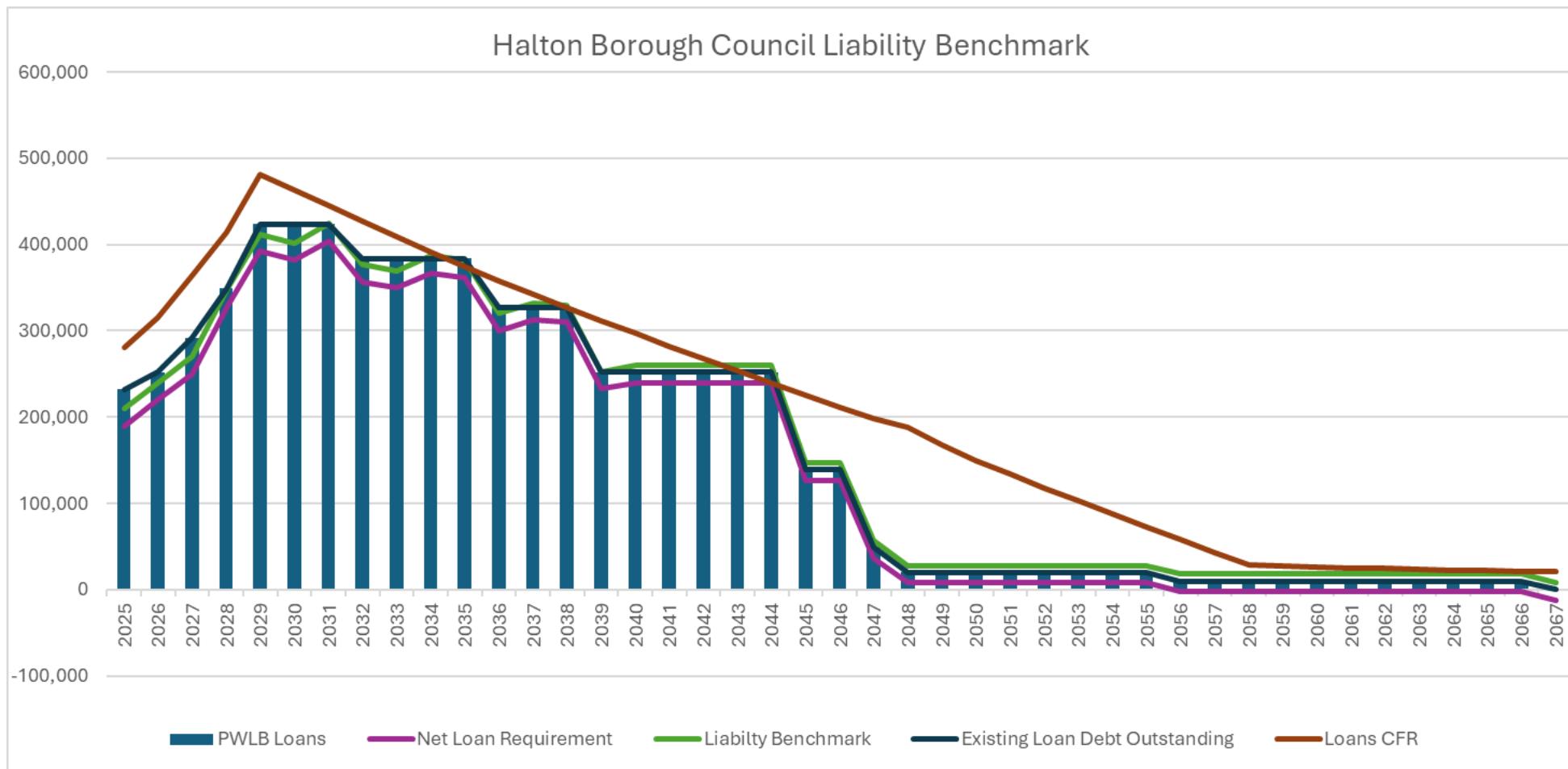
The MRP relating to PFI schemes, finance leases and Mersey Gateway unitary charge payments will be based on the annual lease payment, and will have no direct impact on the Council's revenue budget.

## 2.4 Liability Benchmark

The Authority is required to estimate and measure the Liability Benchmark for the forthcoming financial year and the following two financial years, as a minimum, but has decided to show the full debt maturity profile, up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2067.

There are four components to the Liability Benchmark: -

1. Existing loan debt outstanding: the Council's existing loans that are still outstanding in future years.
2. Loans CFR: this is calculated in accordance with the loans CFR definition in the Prudential Code and projected into the future based on approved prudential borrowing and planned MRP.
3. Net loans requirement: this will show the Council's gross loan debt less treasury management investments at the last financial year-end, projected into the future and based on its approved prudential borrowing, planned MRP and any other major cash flows forecast.
4. Liability benchmark (or gross loans requirement): this equals net loans requirement plus short-term liquidity allowance.



## 2.5 Affordability prudential indicators

The previous sections cover the overall capital and control of borrowing prudential indicators, but within this framework prudential indicators are required to assess the affordability of the capital investment plans. These provide an indication of the impact of the capital investment plans on the Council's overall finances.

## 2.6 Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream

This indicator identifies the trend in the cost of capital (borrowing net of investment income) against the net revenue stream.

**Table 3 – Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream**

Ratio of finance costs to net revenue stream	2024/25 Actual £000	2025/26 Estimate £000	2026/27 Estimate £000	2027/28 Estimate £000	2028/29 Estimate £000
<b>Council's net budget</b>	<b>149,496</b>	<b>153,667</b>	<b>190,364</b>	<b>189,314</b>	<b>194,279</b>
<b>Finance Costs</b>					
Net interest costs	2,610	5,117	6,844	8,666	11,305
Minimum Revenue Provision	3,070	4,586	6,910	10,059	13,364
	<b>5,680</b>	<b>9,703</b>	<b>13,754</b>	<b>18,725</b>	<b>24,669</b>
	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>6.3%</b>	<b>7.2%</b>	<b>9.9%</b>	<b>12.7%</b>

MRP and Interest cost relating to PFI schemes and finance leases have been excluded from the figures above as they have no impact on the revenue budget.

## 3 BORROWING

The capital expenditure plans set out in Section 2 provide details of the service activity of the Council. The treasury management function ensures that the Council's cash is organised in accordance with the relevant professional codes, so that sufficient cash is available to meet this service activity. This will involve both the organisation of the cash flow and, where capital plans require, the organisation of appropriate borrowing facilities. The strategy covers the relevant treasury / prudential indicators, the current and projected debt positions and the annual investment strategy.

### 3.1 Current portfolio position

The overall treasury management portfolio as at 31 March 2025 and the position as at 31 December 2025 are shown in Table 4 for borrowing and investments.

**Table 4 – Current Portfolio Position**

	31st March 2025		31st December 2025	
	£000	%	£000	%
<b>Treasury Investments</b>				
UK banks and building societies	213	0%	11,192	12%
Non-UK banks	-	0%	20,000	22%
Local authorities	42,000	67%	42,000	46%
Money market funds	10,500	17%	8,200	9%
Property funds	10,000	16%	10,000	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>62,713</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>91,392</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Treasury External Borrowing</b>				
Local authorities	(10,000)	4%	(40,000)	16%
Public Works Loans Board (PWLB)	(222,000)	96%	(212,000)	84%
Other long term borrowing	-	0%	-	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>(232,000)</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(252,000)</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Net treasury investments / (borrowing)</b>	<b>(169,287)</b>		<b>(160,608)</b>	

The Council's treasury portfolio position at 31 March 2025, with forward projections are summarised in Table 5. The table shows the actual external debt (the treasury management operations), against the underlying capital borrowing need (the Capital Financing Requirement - CFR), highlighting any over or under borrowing.

**Table 5 – External debt**

External debt	2024/25 Actual £000	2025/26 Estimate £000	2026/27 Estimate £000	2027/28 Estimate £000	2028/29 Estimate £000
<b>Borrowing</b>					
Debt at 1 April	207,000	232,000	252,000	292,000	349,000
Expected change in debt	25,000	20,000	40,000	57,000	75,000
<b>Debt at 31 March</b>	<b>232,000</b>	<b>252,000</b>	<b>292,000</b>	<b>349,000</b>	<b>424,000</b>
<b>Other long-term liabilities</b>					
Debt at 1 April	394,215	383,976	372,536	360,639	348,447
Expected change in debt	(10,239)	(11,440)	(11,897)	(12,192)	(13,086)
<b>Debt at 31 March</b>	<b>383,976</b>	<b>372,536</b>	<b>360,639</b>	<b>348,447</b>	<b>335,361</b>
<b>Total external debt at 31 March</b>	<b>615,976</b>	<b>624,536</b>	<b>652,639</b>	<b>697,447</b>	<b>759,361</b>
<b>Capital Financing Requirement</b>	<b>669,636</b>	<b>694,944</b>	<b>730,858</b>	<b>769,499</b>	<b>821,572</b>
<b>Under / (over) borrowing</b>	<b>53,660</b>	<b>70,408</b>	<b>78,219</b>	<b>72,052</b>	<b>62,211</b>

Within the prudential indicators there are a number of key indicators to ensure that the Council operates its activities within well-defined limits. One of these is that the Council needs to ensure that its gross debt does not (except in the short term) exceed the total of the CFR in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional CFR for 2026/27 and the following two financial years.

This allows some flexibility for limited early borrowing for future years but ensures that borrowing is not undertaken for revenue purposes.

### 3.2 Treasury Indicators: limits to borrowing activity

#### The operational boundary

This is the limit beyond which external debt is not normally expected to exceed. In most cases, this would be a similar figure to the CFR, but may be lower or higher depending on the levels of actual debt. Please note that £20m cash flow borrowing has been added in addition to the estimated debt levels as shown below.

**Table 6 – Operational Boundary**

<b>Operational boundary</b>	<b>2025/26 Estimate £000</b>	<b>2026/27 Estimate £000</b>	<b>2027/28 Estimate £000</b>	<b>2028/29 Estimate £000</b>
Debt	272,000	312,000	369,000	444,000
Other long term liabilities	372,536	360,639	348,447	335,361
<b>Operational boundary</b>	<b>644,536</b>	<b>672,639</b>	<b>717,447</b>	<b>779,361</b>
<b>Total external debt at 31 March</b>	624,536	652,639	697,447	759,361
<b>Estimated headroom</b>	<b>20,000</b>	<b>20,000</b>	<b>20,000</b>	<b>20,000</b>

**The authorised limit for external debt**

A further key prudential indicator represents a control on the maximum level of borrowing. This represents a limit beyond which external debt is prohibited. It reflects the level of external debt which, while not desired, could be afforded in the short term, but is not sustainable in the longer term.

This is the statutory limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003. The Government retains an option to control either the total of all councils' plans, or those of a specific council, although this power has not yet been exercised.

**Table 7 – Authorised Limit**

<b>Authorised limit</b>	<b>2025/26 Estimate £000</b>	<b>2026/27 Estimate £000</b>	<b>2027/28 Estimate £000</b>	<b>2028/29 Estimate £000</b>
Capital Financing Requirement	694,944	730,858	769,499	821,572
Contingency	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>714,944</b>	<b>750,858</b>	<b>789,499</b>	<b>841,572</b>
<b>Total external debt at 31 March</b>	624,536	652,639	697,447	759,361
<b>Estimated headroom</b>	<b>90,408</b>	<b>98,219</b>	<b>92,052</b>	<b>82,211</b>

### 3.3 Prospects for Interest Rates

The Council has appointed MUFG Corporate Markets (formally Link Asset Services) as its treasury advisor and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. Table 8 and supporting narrative gives their central view:

**Table 8 – Interest rate forecast**

	Bank rate %	PWLB borrowing rates %			
		(including certainty rate adjustment)			
		5 year	10 year	25 year	50 year
Mar-26	3.75	4.6	5.2	5.8	5.6
Jun-26	3.50	4.5	5.0	5.7	5.5
Sep-26	3.50	4.3	4.9	5.6	5.4
Dec-26	3.25	4.2	4.8	5.5	5.3
Mar-27	3.25	4.1	4.8	5.5	5.3
Jun-27	3.25	4.1	4.7	5.4	5.2
Sep-27	3.25	4.1	4.7	5.3	5.1
Dec-27	3.25	4.1	4.7	5.3	5.1
Mar-28	3.25	4.1	4.7	5.3	5.1
Jun-28	3.25	4.1	4.6	5.2	5.0
Sep-28	3.25	4.1	4.6	5.2	5.1
Dec-28	3.25	4.1	4.6	5.2	5.0

### Interest Rates

Interest rates have dropped three times during the 2025/26 financial year. Dropping from 4.5% to 4.25% in May 25, down to 4.0% in August 25, then to 3.75% in December 25.

As shown in the forecast table above, the Bank Rate is expected to drop to 3.5% in June 26, and then it is predicted to stay flat at 3.25%. Further detail on interest rate forecasts are given below.

### Forecasts for Bank Rate

The forecast reflects a view that although rates would continue on a “gradual downward path” but will depend on MPC members who will want to assess incoming evidence on labour market activity and wage growth. With annual wage growth still over 4.5%, the MPC reiterated that the case for further rate cuts would be “a closer call”, and Governor Bailey observed there is “limited space as Bank Rate approaches a neutral level”.

Because of this the MUFG Corporate Markets forecast has been revised to price in a rate cut in Q2 2026 to 3.5%, likely to take place in the wake of a significant fall in the CPI inflation reading from 3% in March to 2% in April (as forecast by Capital

Economics), followed by a short lull through the summer whilst more data is garnered, and then a further rate cut to 3.25% in Q4.

### **Gilt yields / PWLB Rates**

The overall longer-run trend is for gilt yields and PWLB rates to fall back over the timeline of our forecasts, but the risks to our forecasts are generally to the upsides. Our target borrowing rates are set two years forward (as we expect rates to fall back).

### **Investment and borrowing rates**

- **Investment returns.**

Short term investment returns (up to three months) are expected to fall from 4.7% in 2025/26, to 3.50% in 2026/27, remaining at this level during 2027/28.

- **Borrowing for capital expenditure**

The long-term (beyond 10 years) forecast for the neutral level of 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.

## **3.4 Borrowing Strategy**

The Council is still maintaining an under-borrowed position, meaning that the capital borrowing need (the Capital Financing Requirement), has not been fully funded with loan debt as cash supporting the Council's reserves balances and cash flow have been utilised instead, but further borrowing will need to be utilised in the coming months and years.

Due to the cost of funding the capital programme, and funding Exceptional Financial Support, the Council has borrowed £80m in short term loans over the last twelve months, £50m from PWLB and £30m from other Local Authorities. We expect to replace this borrowing during 26/27, as well as borrowing an additional £65m. This will be taken from other Local Authorities if rates continue to be lower than those from the PWLB. But caution will be adopted with the 2026/27 treasury operations and the Director Finance will monitor interest rates in financial markets and adopt a pragmatic approach to changing circumstances.

Due to the current cash need of the Council, it would not be possible to postpone borrowing due to economic conditions, but will use the duration of the borrowing to reduce the risk of falling or rising short or long-term rates accordingly.

### **3.5 Policy on borrowing in advance of need**

The Council will not borrow more than or in advance of its needs purely in order to profit from the investment of the extra sums borrowed. Any decision to borrow in advance will be within forward approved Capital Financing Requirement estimates and will be considered carefully to ensure that value for money can be demonstrated and that the Council can ensure the security of such funds.

### **3.6 Debt Rescheduling**

There are currently no plans to reschedule any of the Council's current borrowing.

## 4 ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

### 4.1 Investment Policy

The Council's investment policy has regard to the following:

- DLUHC's Guidance on Local Government Investments ("the Guidance")
- CIPFA Treasury Management in Public Services Code of Practice and Cross Sectoral Guidance Notes 2021 ("the Code")
- CIPFA Treasury Management Guidance Notes 2021

The Council's investment priorities will be security first, liquidity second, then yield.

The above guidance from the MHCLG and CIPFA place a high priority on the management of risk. This Council has adopted a prudent approach to managing risk and defines its risk appetite by the following means: -

1. Minimum acceptable **credit criteria** are applied in order to generate a list of highly creditworthy counterparties. This also enables diversification and thus avoidance of concentration risk. The key ratings used to monitor counterparties are the short term and long-term ratings.
2. **Other information:** ratings will not be the sole determinant of the quality of an institution; it is important to continually assess and monitor the financial sector on both a micro and macro basis and in relation to the economic and political environments in which institutions operate. The assessment will also take account of information that reflects the opinion of the markets. To achieve this consideration the Council will engage with its advisors to maintain a monitor on market pricing such as "credit default swaps" and overlay that information on top of the credit ratings.
3. **Other information sources** used will include the financial press, share price and other such information pertaining to the banking sector in order to establish the most robust scrutiny process on the suitability of potential investment counterparties.
4. The Council has defined the list of **types of investment instruments** that the treasury management team are authorised to use. These are split into specified and non-specified investments, as detailed below:

#### **Specified investments**

These are sterling denominated with maturities up to a maximum of 1 year and include the following:

- Debt Management Agency deposit facility
- UK Government gilts
- Bonds issued by an institution guaranteed by the UK Government
- Term deposits – UK Government
- Term deposits – other local authorities
- Term deposits - banks and building societies
- Certificates of deposit with banks and building societies

- Money market funds (rated AAA)

### **Non-specified investments**

These are investments that do not meet the specified investment criteria. A variety of investment instruments can be used, subject to the credit quality of the institution:

- Term deposits – UK Government (maturities over 1 year)
- Term deposits – Other local authorities (maturities over 1 year)
- Term deposits – Banks and building societies (maturities over 1 year)
- Certificates of deposit with banks and building societies (maturities over 1 year)
- Property funds

5. Non-specified investments limit. The Council has determined that it will limit the maximum total exposure to non-specified investments as being 40% of the total investment portfolio at the time of investing.
6. Lending limits, (amounts and maturity), for each counterparty will be set through applying the creditworthiness policy detailed in 4.2, and the Counterparty Limits detailed in 4.4.
7. The Council will set a limit for the amount of its investments which are invested for longer than 1 year, (see paragraph 4.4).
8. Investments will only be placed with counterparties from countries with a specified minimum sovereign rating, (see paragraph 4.3).
9. The Council has engaged external consultants, (see paragraph 1.5), to provide expert advice on how to optimise an appropriate balance of security, liquidity and yield, given the risk appetite of this authority in the context of the expected level of cash balances and need for liquidity throughout the year.
10. All investments will be denominated in sterling.
11. The Council will consider the implications of investment instruments which could result in an adverse movement in the value of the amount invested and resultant charges at the end of the year to the General Fund (IFRS9). Though it should be noted that there is currently a temporary statutory override to allow English local authorities time to adjust their portfolio of all pooled investments and to delay implementation of IFRS 9. This was originally for five years and has since been extended until 31/03/29.

## **4.2 Creditworthiness Policy**

Council applies the creditworthiness service provided by MUFG Corporate Markets. This service employs a sophisticated modelling approach utilising credit ratings from the three main credit rating agencies - Fitch, Moody's and Standard

and Poor's. The credit ratings of counterparties are supplemented with the following overlays:

- credit watches and credit outlooks from credit ratings agencies
- CDS spreads to give early warning of likely changes in credit ratings
- Sovereign ratings to select counterparties from only the most creditworthy countries

This modelling approach combines credit ratings, credit watches and credit outlooks in a weighted scoring system which is then combined with an overlay of CDS spreads for which the end product is a series of colour coded bands which indicate the relative creditworthiness of counterparties. These colour codes are used by the Council to determine the suggested duration for investments. The Council will therefore use counterparties within the following durational bands:

• Yellow	5 years
• Purple	2 years
• Blue	1 year (only applies to nationalised and part nationalised UK Banks)
• Orange	1 year
• Red	6 months
• Green	100 days
• No Colour	May not be used

Typically, the minimum credit ratings criteria the Council use will be a Short Term rating (Fitch or equivalents) of F1 and a Long Term rating of BBB. There may be occasions when the counterparty ratings from one rating agency are marginally lower than these ratings but may still be used. In these instances consideration will be given to the whole range of ratings available, or other topical market information, to support their use.

All credit ratings will be monitored whenever new lending takes place. The Council is alerted to changes to ratings of all three agencies through its use of MUFG Corporate Markets creditworthiness service.

- If a downgrade results in the counterparty / investment scheme no longer meeting the Council's minimum criteria, its further use as a new investment will be withdrawn immediately.
- In addition the Council will be advised of information in movements in credit default swap spreads against the iTraxx benchmark and other market data on a weekly basis. Extreme market movements may result in downgrade of an institution or removal from the Council's lending list.

Sole reliance will not be placed on the use of this external service. In addition the Council will also use market data, market information, and information on any external support for banks to help support its decision making process.

#### 4.3 Country Limits

Other than the United Kingdom, the Council has determined that it will only use approved counterparties from countries with a minimum sovereign credit rating of AAA from Fitch or equivalent.

#### 4.4 Counterparty Limits for 2026/27

The Council has set the following counterparty limits for 2026/27 and will invest in line with the creditworthiness policy detailed in 4.2.

**Table 11 – Counterparty limits**

	<b>Maximum limit per institution £m</b>
UK Government	40
UK banks/building societies with:	
- Minimum rating of AAA	30
- Minimum rating of AA	25
- Minimum rating of A	20
- Minimum rating of BBB	10
Foreign banks in countries with a sovereign rating of AAA and:	
- Minimum rating of AAA	25
- Minimum rating of AA	20
- Minimum rating of A	10
Money market funds	
- Minimum rating of AAA	20
Local authorities	40
Property fund	10
Note: No more than 25% of the total portfolio will be placed with one institution at the time of investing, except where balances are held for cash-flow purposes	

#### 4.5 Investment strategy

Investments will be made with reference to the core balance and cash flow requirements and the outlook for short-term interest rates (i.e., rates for investments up to 12 months). Greater returns are usually obtainable by investing for longer periods. The current shape of the yield curve suggests that the risks are relatively balanced between Bank Rate staying higher for longer, if inflation picks up markedly through 2025 post the 30 October 2024 Budget, or it may be cut quicker than expected if the economy stagnates. The economy only grew 0.1% in Q3 2024, but the CPI measure of inflation is now markedly above the 2% target

rate set by the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee two to three years forward.

Accordingly, while most cash balances are required in order to manage the ups and downs of cash flow, where cash sums can be identified that could be invested for longer periods, the value to be obtained from longer-term investments will be carefully assessed.

### **Investment return expectations**

Base Rate forecasts for financial year ends (March) are shown below:

- 2025/26 4.10%
- 2026/27 3.70%
- 2027/28 3.50%
- 2028/29 3.50%

### **Investment treasury indicator and limit – Total principal funds invested for greater than 1 year**

These limits are set with regard to the Council's liquidity requirements and to reduce the need for early sale of an investment and are based on the availability of funds after each year-end.

**Table 12 – Maximum principal sums invested over 365 days**

<b>Upper limit for principal sums invested for longer than 1 year</b>	<b>2025/26 £000</b>	<b>2026/27 £000</b>	<b>2027/28 £000</b>	<b>2028/29 £000</b>
Upper limit of principal sums invested for longer than 1 year	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000
Current investments in excess of 1 years outstanding at year-end'	22,000	17,000	5,000	-

#### **4.6 Investment rate benchmarking**

The Council will use an investment benchmark produced by MUFG to assess the investment performance of its investment portfolio of 7 days, 1, 3, 6, 12 months.

#### **4.7 End of year investment report**

At the end of the financial year, the Council will report on its investment activities as part of its Annual Treasury Report

### Minimum Revenue Provision

Capital expenditure is generally expenditure on assets which have a life expectancy of more than one year e.g. buildings, vehicles, machinery etc. It would be impractical to charge the entirety of such expenditure to revenue in the year in which it was incurred therefore such expenditure is spread over several years in order to try to match the years over which such assets benefit the local community through their useful life. The manner of spreading these costs is through an annual Minimum Revenue Provision, which was previously determined under Regulation, and will in future be determined under Guidance.

#### Statutory duty

Statutory Instrument 2008 no. 414 s4 lays down that:

- “A local authority shall determine for the current financial year an amount of minimum revenue provision that it considers to be prudent.”
- The above is a substitution for the previous requirement to comply with regulation 28 in S.I. 2003 no. 3146 (as amended).
- There is no requirement to charge MRP where the Capital Financing Requirement is nil or negative at the end of the preceding financial year.
- The share of Housing Revenue Account CFR is not subject to an MRP charge.

#### Government Guidance

Along with the above duty, the Government issued guidance which came into force on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 which requires that a Statement on the Council’s policy for its annual MRP should be submitted to the full Council for approval before the start of the financial year to which the provision will relate. This guidance was updated in February 2018.

The Council is legally obliged to “have regard” to the guidance, which is intended to enable a more flexible approach to assessing the amount of annual provision than was required under the previous statutory requirements. The guidance offers four main options under which MRP could be made, with an overriding recommendation that the Council should make prudent provision to redeem its debt liability over a period which is reasonably commensurate with that over which the capital expenditure is estimated to provide benefits. The requirement to ‘have regard’ to the guidance therefore means that: -

1. although four main options are recommended in the guidance, there is no intention to be prescriptive by making these the only methods of charge under which a local authority may consider its MRP to be prudent.
2. it is the responsibility of each authority to decide upon the most appropriate method of making a prudent provision, after having had regard to the guidance.

## **Option 1: Regulatory Method**

Under the previous MRP regulations, MRP was set at a uniform rate of 4% of the adjusted CFR (i.e. adjusted for “Adjustment A”) on a reducing balance method (which in effect meant that MRP charges would stretch into infinity). From the 2016/17 financial year the Council changed this to a 2% straight line as the new method:

- will aid forecasting as option 1 MRP will remain unchanged each year and enable the Council to link additional MRP costs to specific assets
- will ensure that option 1 MRP is paid off by 2065. If the reducing balance method was used, there would still be a balance of £5.4m by this date

## **Option 2: Capital Financing Requirement Method**

This is a variation on option 1 which is based upon a charge of 4% of the aggregate CFR without any adjustment for Adjustment A, or certain other factors which were brought into account under the previous statutory MRP calculation. The CFR is the measure of an authority's outstanding debt liability as depicted by their balance sheet.

## **Option 3: Asset Life Method**

This method may be applied to most new capital expenditure, including where desired that which may alternatively continue to be treated under options 1 or 2.

Under this option, it is intended that MRP should be spread over the estimated useful life of either an asset created, or other purpose of the expenditure. There are two useful advantages of this option: -

- longer life assets e.g. freehold land can be charged over a longer period than would arise under options 1 and 2
- no MRP charges need to be made until the financial year after that in which an item of capital expenditure is fully incurred and, in the case of a new asset, comes into service use (this is often referred to as being an ‘MRP holiday’). This is not available under options 1 and 2

There are two methods of calculating charges under option 3: -

- a. equal instalment method – equal annual instalments
- b. annuity method – annual payments gradually increase during the life of the asset

## **Option 4: Depreciation Method**

Under this option, MRP charges are to be linked to the useful life of each type of asset using the standard accounting rules for depreciation (but with some exceptions) i.e. this is a more complex approach than option 3.

The same conditions apply regarding the date of completion of the new expenditure as apply under option 3.

## **Date of implementation**

The previous statutory MRP requirements ceased to have effect after the 2006/07 financial year. Transitional arrangements included within the guidance no longer apply for

the MRP charge for 2009/10 onwards. Therefore, options 1 and 2 should only be used for Supported Capital Expenditure (SCE). Authorities are however reminded that the MHCLG document remains as guidance and authorities may consider alternative individual MRP approaches, as long as they are consistent with the statutory duty to make a prudent revenue provision.

### **Strategy Adopted for 2026/27 and future years**

In order to determine its MRP for 2026/27 and taking into consideration the available options the Council has applied the following strategy:

- For all capital expenditure incurred before 2009/10 and for all capital expenditure funded via supported borrowing MRP to be calculated using Option 1 – The Regulatory Method, calculated using a 2% straight-line charge.
- For all capital expenditure incurred from 2009/10 financed by prudential borrowing MRP to be calculated using Option 3 the Asset Life Method, with the MRP Holiday option being utilised for assets yet to come into service use.
- For Mersey Gateway expenditure the options above will not be used. The MRP Holiday option will be utilised until the Council receives toll income to repay outstanding capital expenditure. MRP payments will then be matched with income received.
- For credit arrangements such as on-balance sheet leasing arrangements (finance leases), the MRP charge will be equal to the principal element of the annual rental.
- For on balance sheet PFI contracts MRP charge will be equal to the principal element of the annual rental.
- For the unitary payments for the Mersey Gateway, the MRP charge will equal the principal repayment elements of the payments made.
- For assets that have an outstanding balance in the Capital Adjustment Account at the time of disposal, the Council have the option of using the capital receipts raised from the sale to repay the balance. Although this will not affect the MRP charge in year (this will be a direct charge from Capital Receipts Reserve to the Capital Adjustment Account) this will reduce an MRP charge for future years. Please note:
  - If the sale of the asset does not raise sufficient receipts to repay the outstanding balance the council has the option to use the Capital Receipts Reserve to make the charge.
  - If the Council choose not to use the methods detailed above, the MRP should be repaid over a period that is considered prudent.