AUDIT COMMITTEE
19 JANUARY 2026

PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REPORT 2026/27

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report requests Audit Committee to review and scrutinise the following prior to forwarding to Cabinet and Council for their approval and adoption:

   (a) The Prudential Indicators and Limits for 2026/27 to 2028/29 relating to capital expenditure and Treasury Management activity.

   (b) A policy statement relating to the Minimum Revenue Provision.

   (c) The Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27, which includes the Annual Investment Strategy for 2026/27.

2. The report outlines the Council's prudential indicators for 2026/27 – 2028/29 and sets out the expected treasury operations for this period. It fulfils key legislative and guidance requirements:

   (a) The reporting of the **prudential indicators** setting out the expected capital activities and treasury management prudential indicators included as treasury indicators in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code of Practice

   (b) The Council's **Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy**, which sets out how the Council will pay for capital assets through revenue each year.

   (c) The **treasury management strategy** statement which sets out how the Council's treasury service will support capital decisions taken above, the day to day treasury management and the limitations on activity through treasury prudential indicators.

   (d) The key indicator is the **authorised limit**, the maximum amount of debt the Council could afford in the short term, but which is not sustainable in the longer term.

   (e) The **investment strategy** which sets out the Council's criteria for choosing the investment counterparties and limiting exposures to the risk of loss.

3. The information contained in the report regarding the Councils expenditure plans, Treasury Management and Prudential Borrowing activities indicate that they are:

(a) Within the statutory framework and consistent with the relevant codes of practice.

(b) Prudent, affordable and sustainable.

(c) An integral part of the Council's Revenue and Capital Medium Term Financial Plans.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that the Audit Committee examine the following and pass on any comments to Council via Cabinet in order that they approve them:

(a) The Prudential Indicators and limits for 2026/27 to 2028/29 summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

(b) The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) statement (paragraphs 39 – 48).

(c) The Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 to 2028/29 as summarised in paragraphs 52 to 82.

(d) The Annual Investment Strategy 2026/27 contained in paragraphs 83 to 115.

Reasons

5. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

(a) In order to comply with the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) guidance on investments and MRP Guidance.

(b) To comply with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003.

(c) To approve a framework for officers to work within when making investment decisions.

Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director Resources and Governance

Background Papers

(i) Annual Draft Statement of Account 2024/25
(ii) Draft MTFP (incl Capital MTFP 2026/27 to 2029/30)
(iii) Draft Capital Strategy
(iv) MUFG Corporate Markets Treasury Limited Economic Report Dec 2025

Judith Murray: Ext 5204

Council Plan	The Council's Treasury Management Strategy contributes to all priorities outlined within the Council Plan.
Addressing inequalities	There is no impact as a result of this report.
Tackling Climate Change	There is no impact as a result of this report.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The Council's Treasury Management Strategy contributes towards the efficient and effective use of resources.
Health and Well Being	This report has no implications for the Council's Health and Well Being agenda
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for S 17 Crime and Disorder.
Wards Affected	All Wards
Groups Affected	All Groups
Budget and Policy Framework	This report must be considered by Council.
Key Decision	This is not an executive decision
Urgent Decision	For the purposes of call in this report is not an urgent decision.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Background

6. CIPFA defines treasury management as:

"The management of the local authority's borrowing, 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. 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

8. 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,

when it is prudent and economic, any debt previously drawn may be restructured to meet Council risk or cost objectives.

9. 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.

10. Whilst any commercial initiatives or loans to third parties will impact on the treasury function, these activities are generally classed as non-treasury activities, (arising usually from capital expenditure), and are separate from the day to day treasury management activities.

Reporting requirements

Capital Strategy

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

    (a) A high-level long term overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services

    (b) An overview of how the associated risk is managed

    (c) The implications for future financial sustainability.

12. The aim of the capital strategy is to ensure that all elected members on the full council fully understand the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting capital strategy requirements, governance procedures and risk appetite. The Capital Strategy is reported separately to Council on an annual basis.

Treasury Management Reporting

13. The Council is required by legislation to receive and approve, as a minimum, three main reports each year, which incorporate a variety of policies, estimates and actuals.

Prudential and Treasury Indicators and Treasury Strategy (this report)

14. The first, and most important report is forward looking and covers:

    (a) The capital plans (including prudential indicators);

(b) A minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy (how residual capital expenditure is charged to revenue over time);

(c) The treasury management strategy, (how the investments and borrowings are to be organised), including treasury indicators; and

(d) An investment strategy, (the parameters on how investments are to be managed).

A Mid-Year Treasury Management Report

15. This is primarily a progress report and will update members on the capital position, amending prudential indicators as necessary, and whether the treasury function is meeting the strategy or whether any policies require revision.

An Annual Treasury Report

16. This is a backward-looking review document and provides details of a selection of actual prudential and treasury indicators and actual treasury operations compared to the estimates within the strategy.

17. These reports are required to be adequately scrutinised before being recommended to the Council. This role is undertaken by the Audit Committee.

Quarterly reports

18. In addition to the three major reports detailed above quarterly reporting is also required (end of June/end of December). These additional reports do not need to be reported to the Council but do require to be adequately scrutinised. This role is undertaken by the Audit Committee.

Environmental, social and governance (ESG)

19. The Council consider their credit and counterparty policies in the light of ESG information. All the main rating agencies are now extoling how they incorporate ESG risks alonsgside more traditional financial risk metrics when assessing counterprty ratings. Our Treasury Management advisors update us on any changes to counterparty ratings and look at ESG factors into their creditworthiness asessment service.

Treasury Management Strategy for 2026/27

20. The strategy for 2026/27 covers two main areas:

(a) Capital Issues:

(i) The capital expenditure plans and the prudential indicators;
(ii) The minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy.

(b) Treasury Management Issues:

(i) The current treasury position;

(ii) Treasury indicators which will limit the treasury risk and activities of the Council;

(iii) Prospects for interest rates;

(iv) The borrowing strategy;

(v) Policy on borrowing in advance of need;

(vi) Debt rescheduling;

(vii) The investment strategy;

(viii) Creditworthiness policy; and

(ix) Policy on use of external service providers.

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

22. A summary of the key prudential indicators and limits are contained in Tables 1 and 2 and further details are contained further on in this report.

Table 1 – Capital Expenditure and Borrowing

	2025/26 Revised	2026/27 Estimated	2027/28 Estimated	2028/29 Estimated
Capital Expenditure Tables 3 and 4	68.649	88.502	43.400	18.157
Capital financing requirement - Table 5	261.784	286.391	294.188	295.186
Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream – General Fund - Table 6	4.10%	4.02%	3.54%	3.43%
Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream –HRA - Table 6	12.49%	14.07%	12.51%	12.62%
Operational boundary for external debt - Table 9	205.352	229.650	242.014	247.816
Authorised limit for external debt - Table 10	274.873	300.710	308.897	309.945

Table 2 – Treasury Management

	2026/27 Upper Limit	2027/28 Upper Limit	2028/29 Upper Limit
Limits on fixed interest rates	100%	100%	100%
Limits on variable interest rates	40%	40%	40%
Maximum principal sums invested > 364 days	£50m	£50m	£50m
Maturity Structure of fixed interest rate borrowing 2026/27			
		Lower Limit	**Upper Limit**
Under 12 months		0%	50%
12 months to 2 years		0%	60%
2 years to 5 years		0%	70%
5 years to 10 years		0%	80%
10 years and above		0%	100%

Training

23. 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 undertaken by a number of Members during a session held in January 2024. Further training sessions are to be arranged as soon as practically possible. The training needs of treasury management officers are periodically reviewed.

Treasury Management Consultants

24. The Council uses MUFG Corporate Markets Treasury Limited as its external treasury management advisors. The Council recognises that responsibility for treasury decisions remains with the organisation at all times and will ensure that undue reliance is not placed upon the services of our external service provider. All decisions will be undertaken with regards to all available information, including, but not solely, our treasury advisors.

25. 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 officers of 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 subject to regular review.

The Capital Prudential Indicators 2026/27– 2028/29

26. 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.

Capital Expenditure

27. 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. Members are asked to approve the capital expenditure forecasts:

Table 3 Capital Expenditure

	2025/26 Revised £m	2026/27 Estimate £m	2027/28 Estimate £m	2028/29 Estimate £m
General Fund	34.550	33.381	11.595	5.191
HRA	29.509	35.007	24.210	12.203
Estimated Capital Expenditure	**64.059**	**68.388**	**35.805**	**17.394**
Loans to Joint Ventures	4.590	20.114	7.595	0.763
Total	**68.649**	**88.502**	**43.400**	**18.157**

28. The financing need above excludes other long-term liabilities, such as PFI and Right of Use Assets arrangements which already include borrowing instruments.

29. The table below summarises the above capital expenditure plans and how these plans are being financed by capital or revenue resources. Any shortfall of resources results in a funding borrowing need.

Table 4 Financing of the Capital Programme

	2025/26 Revised £m	2026/27 Estimate £m	2027/28 Estimate £m	2028/29 Estimate £m
General Fund	34.550	33.381	11.595	5.191
HRA	29.509	35.007	24.210	12.203
Loans to Joint Ventures	4.590	20.114	7.595	0.763
Total Capital	**68.649**	**88.502**	**43.400**	**18.157**
Financed by:				
Capital receipts -General Fund	4.182	4.064	3.355	0.650
Capital receipts - Housing	0.312	0.312	0.300	0.300
Capital grants	31.290	20.513	9.113	4.541
JV Repayments	1.000	4.894	9.151	8.808

Self-financing - GF	0.275	0.146	0.160	0.000
Revenue Contributions (Housing)	19.644	29.591	15.210	11.903
Total excluding borrowing	**56.703**	**59.520**	**37.289**	**26.202**
Net financing need for the year	**11.946**	**28.982**	**6.111**	**-8.045**

The Council's Borrowing Need (the Capital Financing Requirement)

30. 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 indebtedness and so its underlying borrowing need. Any capital expenditure above, which has not immediately been paid for through a revenue or capital resource, will increase the CFR.

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

32. The CFR includes any other long-term liabilities (e.g. PFI schemes & Right of Use Assets) brought onto the balance sheet. Whilst these increase the CFR, and therefore the Council's borrowing requirement, these types of scheme include a borrowing facility so the Council is not required to separately borrow for these schemes. The Council currently has £8.519m of such schemes within the CFR.

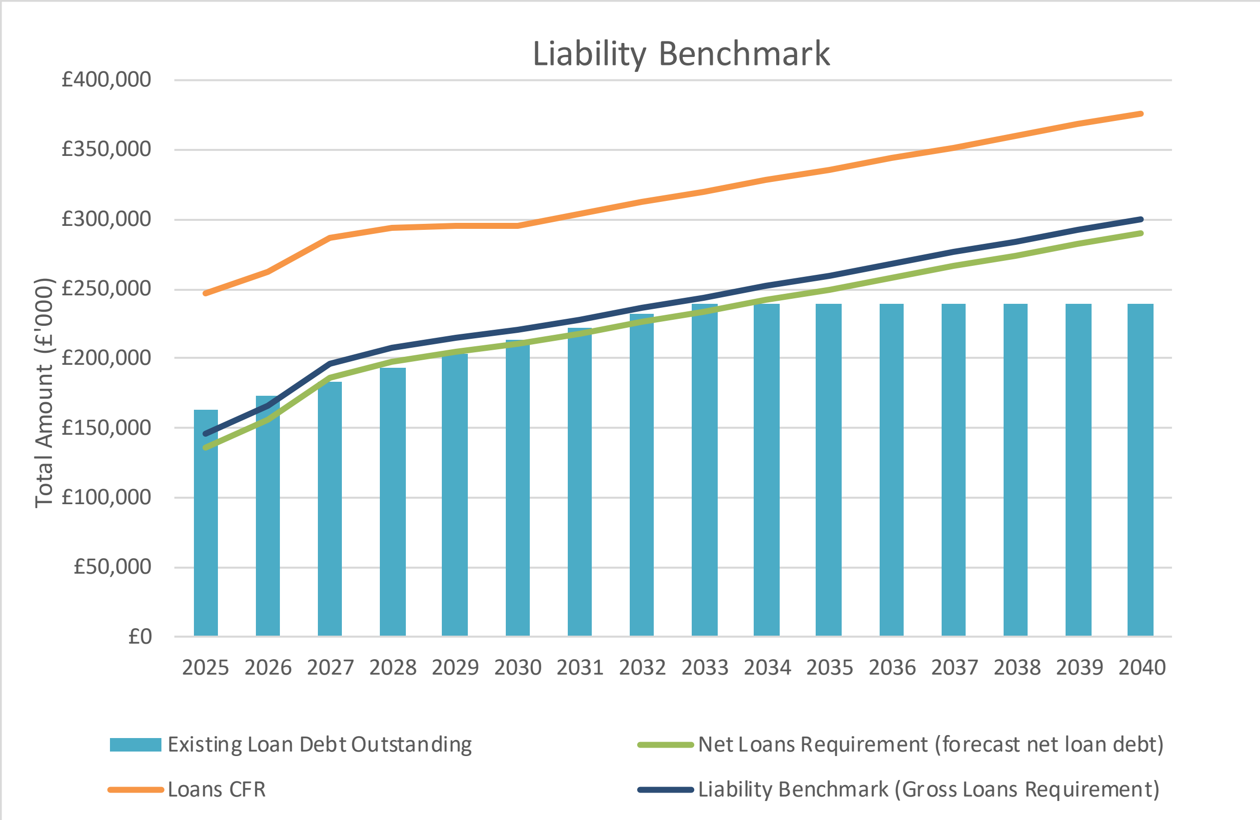
33. The Committee is asked to approve the CFR projections below:

Table 5 – CFR Projections

	2025/26 Revised £m	2026/27 Estimate £m	2027/28 Estimate £m	2028/29 Estimate £m
CFR – General Fund	155.431	156.441	157.776	159.073
CFR – PFI	4.817	3.725	2.633	1.541
CFR – Right of Use Assets	3.702	4.034	4.365	4.696
CFR – housing	79.239	88.537	97.635	106.534
CFR - Loans to JV's	18.595	33.654	31.779	23.342
Total CFR	**261.784**	**286.391**	**294.188**	**295.186**
Movement in CFR		**24.607**	**7.797**	**0.998**

Liability Benchmark

34. A third prudential indicator is the Liability Benchmark (LB). The Council is required to estimate and measure the LB for the forthcoming financial year and the following two financial years, as a minimum.



35. There are four main components to the Liability Benchmark:-

(a) **Existing borrowing (loan debt outstanding)**: the Council's existing loans that are still outstanding in future years.

(b) **Loans CFR:** calculated in accordance with the loans CFR definition and projected into the future based upon estimated prudential borrowing and associated MRP

(c) **Net loans requirement (Forecast Net Loans Debt)**: 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.

(d) **Liability benchmark (or gross loans requirement):** this equals net loans requirement plus short -term liquidity allowance.

36. The Liability Benchmark is effectively the Net Borrowing Requirement of a local authority plus a liquidity allowance. In its simplest form, it is calculated by deducting the amount of investable resources available on the balance sheet (reserves, cash flow balances) from the amount of outstanding external debt and then adding the minimum level of investments required to manage day-to-day cash flow.

37. CIPFA recommends that the optimum position for external borrowing should be at the level of the Liability Benchmark (i.e. all balance sheet resources should be used to maximise internal borrowing). If the outputs show future periods where external loans are less than the Liability Benchmark, then this indicates a borrowing requirement thus

identifying where the authority is exposed to interest rate, liquidity and refinancing risks. Conversely where external loans exceed the Liability Benchmark then this will highlight an overborrowed position which will result in excess cash in the organisation requiring investment thus exposing the authority to credit and reinvestment risks and a potential cost of carry.

38. The Liability Benchmark position is not to be confused with the under/over borrowing position as shown by the prudential indicator in Table 8 below. This compares the actual gross debt to the capital financing position and is demonstrated in the Liability Benchmark above by comparing Loans CFR to Existing Loan Debt outstanding.

MRP Policy Statement

39. The Council is required to pay off an element of the accumulated General Fund capital spend each year (the CFR) through a revenue charge (the minimum revenue provision - MRP). It is also allowed to undertake additional voluntary payments if desired (voluntary revenue provision - VRP).

40. MHCLG regulations have been issued which require the full Council to approve an MRP Statement in advance of each year. The MRP Guidance 2024 provides 4 options for calculating MRP. An authority can use a mix of these options if it considers it appropriate to do so.

41. The adoption of IFRS 16 Right of Use Assets has led to some assets previously leased and therefore off balance sheet, being brought on to balance sheet. MRP will also need to be provided for those assets as they will increase the CFR.

42. The Regulations state that local authorities must make MRP with respect to any debt used to finance a commercial capital loan. A capital loan is defined as a loan undertaken primarily for financial return or where the loan itself is capital expenditure undertaken primarily for financial return. The Authority's loans to joint ventures are categorised as commercial loans. It should be noted however that the loan repayments can also be used to reduce the CFR and hence the MRP charge, however, until the loan has been fully repaid MRP must be charged.

43. It is proposed that Darlington Borough Council's MRP policy statement for 2026/27 will be:

(a) For Capital expenditure incurred before 1 April 2008 and expenditure which was granted through credit approvals since that date MRP will be calculated on an annuity basis (2%) over 50 years or the useful life of the asset.

(b) Capital Expenditure from 1 April 2008 for all unsupported borrowing MRP will be based on the estimated life of the assets, repayments will be on an annuity basis.

(c) Repayments relating to the PFI scheme will be based on the life of the asset of 60 years from 1 April 2008 on an annuity basis (2%).

(d) For IFRS 16 Right of Use Assets the MRP will be measured as being equal to the element of the rent/charge for the asset.

(e) For commercial loans MRP will be based on the estimated life of the assets and repayments will be on an annuity basis until the loans have been repaid in full.

44. There is no requirement on the HRA to make a minimum revenue provision but there is a requirement for a charge for depreciation to be made.

45. Repayments included in annual PFI or finance leases are applied as MRP.

46. For capital expenditure on loans to third parties where the principal element of the loan is being repaid in instalments, the capital receipts arising from the principal loan repayments will be used to reduce the CFR instead of MRP. Where no principal repayment is made in a given year MRP will be charged in accordance with the Council's MRP policy.

47. **MRP Overpayments** - A change introduced by the revised MHCLG MRP Guidance was the allowance that any charges made over the statutory minimum revenue provision (MRP), voluntary revenue provision (VRP) or overpayments, can, if needed, be reclaimed in later years if deemed necessary or prudent. In order for these sums to be reclaimed for use in the budget, this policy must disclose the cumulative overpayment made each year.

48. Cumulative VRP overpayments made to date are £0.500m.

Affordability Prudential Indicators

49. 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. The Council is asked to approve the following indicators.

Estimates of the ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream

50. This indicator identifies the trend in the cost of capital (borrowing and other long-term obligation costs net of investment income) against the net revenue stream.

Table 6 - Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream

	2025/26 Revised	2026/27 Estimate	2027/28 Estimate	2028/29 Estimate
General Fund	4.10%	4.02%	3.54%	3.43%
HRA	12.49%	14.07%	12.51%	12.62%

51. The estimates of financing costs include current commitments and the proposals in this year's MTFP report.

Treasury Management Strategy

Borrowing

52. The capital expenditure plans set out in the previous paragraphs 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 and the Council's Capital Strategy. This will involve both the organisation of the cash flow and, where capital plans require, the organisation of approporiate borrowing facilities. The strategy covers the relevant treasury / prudential indicators, the current and projected debt positions and the Annual Investment Strategy.

Under Borrowing position

53. Over the last ten years the Council had maintained an underborrowed position i.e. the amount of our gross external borrowing has been less than our balance sheet Capital Financing Requirement. This strategy has served the Council well in a period where returns on investment have been low and borrowing costs have been relatively high. This has also meant that we have had less in the form of investments and so reduced counterparty risk. To support the MTFP it was agreed that longer term investments would be pursued as these would give a return over and above the cost of any additional borrowing that would be taken. Following due diligence the Council currently has 2 Property Funds with a total investment as at 31st December 2025 of £16m. These are expected to bring a gross return of between 2.50% and 3.50% over the life of the MTFP. In 2024/25 (the Council had 3 funds) property funds returned £0.981m in dividends.

54. Captal values of proerty funds do fluctuate over time and due to prevailing economic conditions over the past few years the capital value of our invetments has decreased. During 2025/26 we have seen capital values start to recover as interest rates and inflation start to fall. This recovery is forecast to continue, however it will strongly depend upon what happens in the economic climate in the coming year.

55. The final assets of the Lothbury fund have now been disposed and the fund is now in the final stages of the wind up process. It is anticipated the fund will close in May 2026.

56. In line with previously agreed delegations the Treasury Management Strategy gives flexibility for Officers to manage the day to day operations of our investments including the property funds to maximise returns for the Council. Officers will continue to use this delegation to manage our options and report back to Members through the usual reporting processes.

Current Portfolio Position

57. The overall treasury management portfolio as at 31 March 2025 and for the position as at 31 December 2025 are shown below for both borrowings and investments.

Table 7 – Treasury Portfolio

TREASURY PORTFOLIO				
	Actual 31/03/2025 £m's	Actual 31/03/2025 %	Current 31/12/2025 £m's	Current 31/12/2025 %
Treasury Investments				
Banks	0.000	0.0	0.000	0.0
local authorities	0.000	0.0	0.000	0.0
money market funds	10.090	28.5	11.520	42.1
Total managed in house	**10.090**	**28.5**	**11.520**	**42.1**
Property funds	25.318	71.5	15.854	57.9
Total managed externally	**25.318**	**71.5**	**15.854**	**57.9**
Total treasury investments	**35.408**	**100.0**	**27.374**	**100.0**
Treasury external borrowing				
local authorities	37.000	21.4	30.000	18.4
PWLB	123.138	71.3	123.068	75.6
LOBO's	12.600	7.3	9.600	6.0
Total external borrowing	**172.738**	**100.0**	**162.668**	**100.0**
Net treasury borrowing	**137.330**		**135.294**	

58. The Council's expected treasury portfolio position at 31 March 2026, with forward projections is summarised below at Table 8. 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 8 - Gross Borrowing to CFR

	2025/26 Revised £m	**2026/27 Estimate £m**	**2027/28 Estimate £m**	**2028/29 Estimate £m**
Debt at 31 March	178.238	188.238	203.238	218.238
Loans to Joint Ventures	18.595	33.654	31.779	23.342
Other long-term liabilities (OLTL)	8.519	7.758	6.997	6.236

Gross Actual debt at 31 March	**205.352**	**229.650**	**242.014**	**247.816**
The Capital Financing Requirement from Table 5	**261.784**	**286.391**	**294.188**	**295.186**
Under / (over) borrowing	**56.432**	**56.741**	**52.174**	**47.370**

59. Within the range of 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 the borrowing is not undertaken for revenue or speculative purposes.

60. The Executive Director of Resources and Governance reports that the Council complied with this prudential indicator in the current year and does not envisage difficulties for the future. This takes into account current commitments, existing plans, and proposals within this budget report.

Treasury Indicators: Limits to Borrowing Activity

The Operational Boundary

61. 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 and the ability to fund under-borrowing by other cash resources.

Table 9 - Operational Boundary

	2025/26 Revised £m	2026/27 Estimate £m	2027/28 Estimate £m	2028/29 Estimate £m
Debt from Table 8 (incl JV's)	196.833	221.892	235.017	241.580
Other long-term liabilities	8.519	7.758	6.997	6.236
Operational Boundary	**205.352**	**229.650**	**242.014**	**247.816**

The Authorised Limit for external debt

62. This is a key prudential indicator and represents a control on the maximum level of borrowing. This represents a legal limit beyond which external debt is prohibited, and this limit needs to be set or revised by Full Council. 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:

63. 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.

64. The Council is asked to approve the following Authorised Limit:

Table 10 – Authorised Limit

	2025/26 Revised £m	2026/27 Estimate £m	2027/28 Estimate £m	2028/29 Estimate £m
CFR	261.784	286.391	294.188	295.186
Additional Headroom @ 5%	13.089	14.320	14.709	14.759
Authorised Limit	**274.873**	**300.710**	**308.897**	**309.945**

65. It is proposed that the additional headroom for years 2026/27 to 2028/29 is 5% above the CFR, this would allow for any additional cashflow needs throughout the years.

Prospects for Interest Rates

66. The Council has appointed MUFG Corporate Markets Treasury Limited as its treasury advisor and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. The following table gives MUFG Corporate Markets Treasury Limited central view for future interest rates and the economic background to that view is shown at **Appendix 1.**

Table 11 – Interest rates

	Bank Rate %	PWLB Borrowing Rates % (including *certainty rate adjustment)			
		5 year	10 year	25 year	50 year
Dec 2025	3.75	5.00	5.30	5.80	5.40
Mar 2026	3.75	4.60	5.20	5.80	5.60
Jun 2026	3.50	4.50	5.00	5.70	5.50
Sep 2026	3.50	4.30	4.90	5.60	5.40
Dec 2026	3.25	4.20	4.80	5.50	5.30
Mar 2027	3.25	4.10	4.80	5.50	5.30
Jun 2027	3.25	4.10	4.70	5.40	5.20
Sep 2027	3.25	4.10	4.70	5.30	5.10
Dec 2027	3.25	4.10	4.70	5.30	5.10
Mar 2028	3.25	4.10	4.70	5.30	5.10
Jun 2028	3.25	4.10	4.60	5.20	5.00
Sep 2028	3.25	4.10	4.60	5.20	5.10
Dec 2028	3.25	4.10	4.60	5.20	5.00

** The certainty rate adjustment is a reduced rate by 0.20% for those councils like Darlington Borough Council who have submitted more detail on future borrowing requirement to the Treasury. A further reduction on 0.40% is also available for those councils which like Darlington have a Housing Revenue Account.*

Investment and borrowing rates

67. Investment returns are likely to decrease towards the latter part of 2026/27 if both CPI inflation and wage/employment data continue to support a fall in the bank rate. Caution must be exercised in respect of all interest rate forecasts as there are so many variables involved at this time.

68. Borrowing interest rates are also forecast to fall by the end of 2026/27 although these still remain higher than what has been the case in previous years. Naturally timing on this matter will remain one of fine judgement, cut too soon and inflationary pressures may build up further, cut too late and any downturn or recession may be prolonged.

69. While the Council will not be able to avoid borrowing to finance new capital expenditure, to replace maturing debt and the rundown of reserves, there will be a cost of carry (the difference between higher borrowing costs and lower investment returns), so any new short or medium-term borrowing will incur a revenue cost.

Borrowing Strategy

70. The Council is currently maintaining an under-borrowed position. This means 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 has been used as a temporary measure. This strategy is prudent as medium and longer dated borrowing rates are expected to fall from their current levels once prevailing inflation concerns are addressed by tighter near-term monetary policy. That is Bank Rate remains relatively elevated in 2026 even if some rate cuts arise

71. Against this background and the risks within the economic forecast, caution will be adopted with the 2026/27 treasury operations. The Executive Director Resources and Governance will monitor interest rates in financial markets and adopt a pragmatic approach to changing circumstances:

    (a) If it was felt that there was a significant risk of a sharp FALL in borowing rates (eg due to a marked increase of risks around relapse into recession or of risks of deflation), then long term borrowings will be postponed, and potential rescheduling from fixed rate funding into short term borrowing will be considered.

    (b) If it was felt that there was a significant risk of a much sharper RISE in borrowing rates than that currently forecast, fixed rate funding will be drawn whilst interest rates are lower than they are projected to be in the next few years.

72. Any decisions would be reported to the appropriate Committee at the next available opportunity.

Treasury Management Limits on Activity

73. There are three debt related treasury activity limits. The purpose of these are to restrain the activity of the treasury function within certain limits, thereby managing risk and reducing the impact of any adverse movement in interest rates. However, if these are set to be too restrictive, they will impair the opportunities to reduce costs/improve performance. The indicators are:

(a) Upper limits on variable interest rate exposure. This identifies a maximum limit for variable interest rates based upon the debt position net of investments

(b) Upper limits on fixed interest rate exposure. This is similar to the previous indicator and covers a maximum limit on fixed interest rates;

(c) Maturity structure of borrowing. These gross limits are set to reduce the Council's exposure to large fixed rate sums falling due for refinancing and are required for upper and lower limits. The Council is asked to approve the following treasury indicators and limits:

Table 12 Interest Rate Exposure

	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	Upper	**Upper**	**Upper**
Limits on fixed interest rates based on net debt	100%	100%	100%
Limits on variable interest rates based on net debt	40%	40%	40%
Maturity Structure of fixed interest rate borrowing 2026/27			
		Lower	**Upper**
Under 12 months		0%	50%
12 months to 2 years		0%	60%
2 years to 5 years		0%	70%
5 years to 10 years		0%	80%
10 years and above		0%	100%

Policy on Borrowing in Advance of Need

74. 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 of need 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 through its investment strategy.

75. Risks associated with any borrowing in advance activity will be subject to prior appraisal and subsequent reporting through the mid-year or annual reporting mechanism.

Debt Rescheduling

76. Rescheduling of current borrowing in our debt portfolio may be considered if there is spare cash available to facilitate any repayment or rebalancing of the portfolio to provide more certainty is considered appropriate.

77. If there was a possibility the reasons for any rescheduling to take place will include:

    (a) The generation of cash savings and / or discounted cash flow savings;

    (b) Helping to fulfil the treasury strategy;

    (c) Enhance the balance of the portfolio (amend the maturity profile and/or the balance of volatility).

78. Consideration will also be given to identify if there is any residual potential for making savings by running down investment balances to repay debt prematurely as short term rates on investments are likely to be lower than rates paid on current debt.

79. If rescheduling was done it will be reported to Committee at the earliest meeting following its action.

New Financial Institutions as a source of borrowing

80. Currently the PWLB Certainty Rate is set at gilts + 80 basis points for Non-HRA borrowing. The lower Housing Revenue Account (HRA) rate started on 15 June 2023 for those authorities with a HRA. The HRA rate is PWLB Certainty Rate minus 40bps and is set to prevail until at least the end of March 2026.

81. Consideration may still need to be given to sourcing funding from the following sources for the following reasons:

    (a) Local authorities (primarily shorter dated maturities out to 3 years or so – still cheaper than the Certainty Rate)

    (b) Financial institutions (primarily insurance companies and pension funds but also some banks, out of forward dates where the objective is to avoid a 'cost of carry' or to achieve refinancing certainty over the next few years)

    (c) Municipal Bond Agency (possibly still a viable alternative depending on market circumstances prevailing at the time).

82. Our advisors will keep us informed as to the relative merits of each of these alternative funding sources.

Annual Investment Strategy

Investment and Creditworthiness Policy

83. The MHCLG and CIPFA have extended the meaning of 'investments' to include both financial and non-financial investments. This report deals solely with financial investments (as managed by the treasury management team). Non-financial investments, essentially the purchase of income yielding assets, are covered in the Capital Strategy.

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

    (a) MHCLG's Guidance on Local Government Investments ("the Guidance")

    (b) CIPFA Treasury Management in Public Services Code of Practice and Cross Sectoral Guidance Notes 2021 ("the Code")

    (c) CIPFA Treasury Management Guidance Notes 2021

85. The Council's investment priorities will be security first, liquidity second and then yield (return). The Council will aim to achieve the optimum return (yield) on its investments

commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity and with the Council's risk appetite.

86. In the current economic climate it is considered appropriate to keep investments short term to cover cash flow needs. However, where appropriate (from an internal as well as external perspective), the Council will also consider the value available in periods up to 12 months with high credit rated financial institutions, as well as wider range fund options.

87. 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:

(a) Minimum acceptable credit criteria are applied in order to generate a list of highly creditworthy counterparties. This also enables diversification and thus avoidance of concentrtation risk. The key ratings used to monitor counterparties are the short-term and long-term ratings.

(b) 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.

(c) Other information sources used will include the financial press, share prices and other such information pertaining to the financial sector in order to establish the most robust scrutiny process on the suitability of potential investment counterparties.

(d) This Council has defined the list of types of investment instruments that the treasury management team are authorised to use. There are 2 lists in **Appendix 2** under the categories of 'specified' and 'non-specified' investments.

(i) Specified investments are those with a high level of credit quality and subject to a maturity limit of one year.

(ii) Non-specified investments are those with less high credit quality, may be for periods in excess of one year, and/or are more complex instruments which require greater consideration by Members and officers before being authorised for use.

(e) Lending limits, (amounts and maturity), for each counterparty will be set through applying the matrix table in Table 13.

(f) Transaction limits are set for each type of investment in Table 13.

(g) This Council will set a limit for the amount of its investments which are invested for longer than 365 days.

(h) Investments will be placed with counterparties from countries with a specified minimum sovereign rating.

(i) This Council has engaged external consultants, to provide expert advice on how to optimise an appropriate balance of security, liquidity and yield, given the risk appetite of this Council in the context of the expected level of cash balances and need for liquidity throughout the year.

(j) All investments will be denominated in sterling.

(k) As a result of the change in accounting standards for 2023/24 under International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) 9, this 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. (In November 2018 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [MHCLG], conlcuded a consultation for a temporary override to allow English local authorities time to adjust their portfolio of all pooled investments by announcing a statutory override to delay implementation of IFRS 9 for 5 years ending 31 March 2023). Subsequently a further extension to the override to 31 March 2029 was agreed by Government but only for those pooled investments made before 1st April 2024.

88. However, this Council will also pursue value for money in treasury mangement and will monitor the yield from investment income against appropriate benchmarks for investment performance. Regular monitoring of investment performance will be carried out during the year.

Changes in risk management policy from last year

89. The above criteria are unchanged from last year.

Investment Counterparty Selection Criteria

Creditworthiness policy

90. This Council applies the creditworthiness service provided by MUFG Corporate Markets Treasury Limited. This service employs a sophisticated modelling approach utilising credit ratings from the three main credit rating agencies – Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's. The credit ratings of counterparties are supplemented with the following overlays:

(a) 'Watches' and 'Outlooks' from credit rating agencies;

(b) CDS spreads that may give early warning of changes in credit ratings;

(c) Sovereign ratings to select counterparties from only the most creditworthy countries.

91. This modelling approach combines credit ratings, and any assigned Watches and Outlooks, in a weighted scoring system which is then combined with an overlay of CDS spreads. The end product of this 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:

(a)	Yellow	5 years
(b)	Purple	2 years
(c)	Orange	1 year
(d)	Red	6 months
(e)	Green	100 days
(f)	No colour	not to be used

92. The MUFG Corporate Markets Treasury Limited creditworthiness service uses a wider array of information other than just primary ratings. Furthermore, by using a risk weighted scoring system, it does not give undue preponderance to just one agency's ratings.

93. Typically, the minimum credit ratings criteria the Council uses will be a short-term rating (Fitch or equivalents) of F1 and a long-term rating of A-. There may be occasions when the counterparty ratings from one 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.

94. All credit ratings will be monitored regularly. The Council is alerted to changes to ratings of all three agencies through its use of the Link creditworthiness service.

(a) 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.

(b) In addition to the use of credit ratings the Council will be advised of information in movements in Credit Default Swap spreads against the iTraxx European Senior Financials benchmark and other market data on a daily basis via its Passport website, provided exclusively to it by Link. Extreme market movements may result in downgrade of an institution or removal from the Council's lending list.

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

96. Any investment in Property Funds/ Corporate Bond Funds/ Asset Backed Investment Products will be subject to due diligence for each and every fund considered. The

maximum amount invested in any one fund will be £20million with a maximum of £50million total for all funds.

Table 13 – Time and monetary limits applying to investments

	Colour (and long-term rating where applicable)	Transaction Limit	Time Limit
Banks	Yellow	£5m	5 years
Banks	Purple	£4m	2 years
Banks	Orange	£3m	1 year
Banks	Red	£4m	6 months
Banks	Green	£4m	100 days
Banks	No Colour	Not to be used	
Banks 3 category – Council's banker (where 'No Colour')		£4m	1 day
DMADF (Debt Management Office)	Uk sovereign rating	unlimited	6 months
Other institutions limit			1 year
Local authorities	n/a	£5m per Local Authority	2 years
Money market Funds (CNAV, LVNAV & VNAV) and Ultra Short Dated Bond Funds	AAA	£5m per Fund	Liquid
Property Funds, Corporate Bond Funds and other Asset backed Investment products	AAA	£20m per Fund	

97. Due care will be taken to consider the exposure of the Council's total investment portfolio to non-specified investments, countries, groups and sectors.

98. The Council has determined that it will only use approved counterparties from the UK and from countries with a minimum sovereign credit rating of AA- from Fitch. The list of countries that qualify using this credit criteria as at the date of this report are shown in **Appendix 3**. This list will be added to, or deducted from, by officers should ratings change in accordance with this policy.

99. The proposed criteria for Specified and Non-Specified investments are shown in Appendix 2 for approval.

Investment Strategy

In-house funds

100. 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 is the case at present, but there is the prospect of Bank Rate being cut quicker than expected if the economy stagnates, so an agile investment strategy would be appropriate to optimise returns.

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

Investment returns expectations

102. The current forecast shown in paragraph 66, includes a forecast for Bank Rate to be cut to 3.50% in quarter 2 2026.

103. The suggested budgeted investment earnings rates for returns on investments placed for periods up to about three months during each financial year are as follows:-

(a)	2025/26 (remainder)	3.80%
(b)	2026/27	3.40%
(c)	2027/28	3.30%
(d)	2028/29	3.30%
(e)	2029/30	3.50%
(f)	Years 6 to 10	3.50%
(g)	Years 10+	3.50%

104. As there are so many variables at this time, caution must be exercised in respect of all interest rate forecasts.

Investment treasury indicator and limit

105. Total principal funds invested for greater than 365 days. 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.

106. The Committee is asked to approve the treasury indicator and limit: -

Table 14 – Maximum Principal sums invested

	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Principal sums invested greater than 365 days	£50m	£50m	£50m

107. For its cash flow generated balances, the Council will seek to utilise its instant access accounts, 30+ day notice accounts, money market funds and short-dated deposits (overnight to three months) in order to benefit from the compounding of interest.

Investment Risk Benchmarking

108. These benchmarks are simple guides to maximum risk, so they may be breached from time to time, depending on movements in interest rates and counterparty criteria. They relate to Investments that are not Property Funds. The purpose of the benchmark is that officers will monitor the current and trend position and amend the operational strategy to manage risk as conditions change. Any breach of the benchmarks will be reported, with supporting reasons in the Mid-Year or Annual Report.

109. Security - The Council's maximum security risk benchmark for the current portfolio, when compared to these historic default tables, is:

0.077% historic risk of default when compared to the whole portfolio.

110. Liquidity – in respect of this area the Council seeks to maintain:

(a) Bank overdraft - £0.100m

(b) Liquid short-term deposits of at least £3.000m available with a week's notice

(c) Weighted Average Life benchmark is expected to be 1 year.

111. Yield - local measures of yield benchmarks are:

(a) Investments – internal returns above the 7-day Sterling Overnight Index Average (SONIA) compounded rate

(b) Investments – Longer term – capital investment rates returned against comparative average rates

112. In addition that the security benchmark for each individual year is:

Table 15 - Security Benchmark

	1 year	2 years
Maximum	0.077%	0.077%

Note: This benchmark is an average risk of default measure and would not constitute an expectation of loss against a particular investment.

113. The above reported benchmarks for Security Liquidity and Yield all relate to Deposits with Banks and Money Market Funds but would not relate to Property Funds.

114. It is proposed that property funds will be benchmarked for performance against the IPD All Balanced Fund index which is the universe of all property funds, data for this can be provided by our Treasury Management advisors MUFG Corporate Markets Treasury Limited.

End of year investment report

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

Outcome of Consultation

116. No consultation was undertaken in the production of this report.

APPENDIX 1

Economic Background provided by MUFG Corporate Markets Treasury Limited

- The first half of 2025/26 saw:
  - A 0.3% pick up in GDP for the period April to June 2025. More recently, the economy flatlined in July, with higher taxes for businesses restraining growth, but picked up to 0.1% m/m in August before falling back by 0.1% m/m in September.
  - The 3m/yy rate of average earnings growth excluding bonuses has fallen from 5.5% to 4.6% in September.
  - CPI inflation has ebbed and flowed but finished September at 3.8%, whilst core inflation eased to 3.5%.
  - The Bank of England cut interest rates from 4.50% to 4.25% in May, and then to 4% in August (and subsequently to 3.75% in December).
  - The 10-year gilt yield fluctuated between 4.4% and 4.8%, ending the half year at 4.70% (before falling back to 4.43% in early November).
- From a GDP perspective, the financial year got off to a bumpy start with the 0.3% m/m fall in real GDP in April as front-running of US tariffs in Q1 (when GDP grew 0.7% on the quarter) weighed on activity. Despite the underlying reasons for the drop, it was still the first fall since October 2024 and the largest fall since October 2023. However, the economy surprised to the upside in May and June so that quarterly growth ended up 0.3% q/q (subsequently revised down to 0.2% q/q). Nonetheless, the 0.0% m/m change in real GDP in July, followed by a 0.1% m/m increase in August and a 0.1% decrease in September will have caused some concern. GDP growth for 2025 - 2028 is currently forecast by the Office for Budget Responsibility to be in the region of 1.5%.
- Sticking with future economic sentiment, the composite Purchasing Manager Index (PMI) for the UK increased to 52.2 in October. The manufacturing PMI output balance improved to just below 50 but it is the services sector (52.2) that continues to drive the economy forward. Nonetheless, the PMIs suggest tepid growth is the best that can be expected in the second half of 2025 and the start of 2026. Indeed, on 13 November we heard that GDP for July to September was only 0.1% q/q.
- Turning to retail sales volumes, and the 1.5% year-on-year rise in September, accelerating from a 0.7% increase in August, marked the highest gain since April. On a monthly basis, retail sales volumes rose 0.5%, defying forecasts of a 0.2% fall, following an upwardly revised 0.6% gain in August. Household spending remains surprisingly resilient, but headwinds are gathering.
- Prior to the November Budget, the public finances position looked weak. The £20.2 billion borrowed in September was slightly above the £20.1 billion forecast by the OBR. For the year to date, the £99.8 billion borrowed is the second highest for the April to September period since records began in 1993, surpassed only by borrowing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main drivers of the increased borrowing were higher debt interest costs, rising government running costs, and increased inflation-linked benefit payments, which outweighed the rise in tax and National Insurance contributions.

- Following the 26 November Budget, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) calculated the net tightening in fiscal policy as £11.7bn (0.3% of GDP) in 2029/30, smaller than the consensus forecast of £25bn. It did downgrade productivity growth by 0.3%, from 1.3% to 1.0%, but a lot of that influence was offset by upgrades to its near-term wage and inflation forecasts. Accordingly, the OBR judged the Chancellor was going to achieve her objectives with £4.2bn to spare. The Chancellor then chose to expand that headroom to £21.7bn, up from £9.9bn previously.

- Moreover, the Chancellor also chose to raise spending by a net £11.3bn in 2029/30. To pay for that and the increase in her headroom, she raised taxes by £26.1bn in 2029/30. The biggest revenue-raisers were the freeze in income tax thresholds from 2028/29 (+£7.8bn) and the rise in NICs on salary-sacrifice pension contributions (+£4.8bn). The increase in council tax for properties worth more than £2.0m will generate £0.4bn.

- The weakening in the jobs market looked clear in the spring. May's 109,000 m/m fall in the PAYE measure of employment was the largest decline (barring the pandemic) since the data began and the seventh in as many months. The monthly change was revised lower in five of the previous seven months too, with April's 33,000 fall revised down to a 55,000 drop. More recently, however, the monthly change was revised higher in seven of the previous nine months by a total of 22,000. So instead of falling by 165,000 in total since October, payroll employment is now thought to have declined by a smaller 153,000. Even so, payroll employment has still fallen in nearly all the months since the Chancellor announced the rises in National Insurance Contributions (NICs) for employers and the minimum wage in the October 2024 Budget. The number of job vacancies in the three months to November 2025 stood at 729,000 (the peak was 1.3 million in spring 2022). All this suggests the labour market continues to loosen, albeit at a slow pace.

- A looser labour market is driving softer wage pressures. The 3m/yy rate of average earnings growth excluding bonuses has fallen from 5.5% in April to 4.6% in September (still at that level in November). The rate for the private sector has slipped just below 4% as the year end approaches.

- CPI inflation remained at 3.8% in September but dropped to 3.2% by November. Core inflation also fell to 3.2% by November while services inflation fell to 4.4%. Nonetheless, a further loosening in the labour market and weaker wage growth may be a requisite to UK inflation coming in below 2.0% by 2027.

- An ever-present issue throughout recent months has been the pressure being exerted on medium and longer dated gilt yields. The yield on the 10-year gilt moved sideways in the second quarter of 2025, rising from 4.4% in early April to 4.8% in mid-April following wider global bond market volatility stemming from the "Liberation Day" tariff announcement, and then easing back as trade tensions began to de-escalate. By the end of April, the 10-year gilt yield had returned to 4.4%. In May, concerns about stickier inflation and shifting expectations about the path for interest rates led to another rise, with the 10-year gilt yield fluctuating between 4.6% and 4.75% for most of May. Thereafter, as trade tensions continued to ease and markets increasingly began to price in looser monetary policy, the 10-year yield edged lower, and ended June at 4.50%.

- More recently, the yield on the 10-year gilt rose from 4.46% to 4.60% in early July as rolled-back spending cuts and uncertainty over Chancellor Reeves' future raised fiscal concerns. Although the spike proved short lived, it highlighted the UK's fragile fiscal position. In an era of high debt, high interest rates and low GDP growth, the markets are now more sensitive to fiscal risks than before the pandemic. During August, long-dated gilts underwent a particularly pronounced sell-off, climbing 22 basis points and reaching a 27-year high of 5.6% by the end of the month. While yields have since eased back, the market sell-off was driven by investor concerns over growing supply-demand imbalances, stemming from unease over the lack of fiscal consolidation and reduced demand from traditional long-dated bond purchasers like pension funds. For 10-year gilts, by late September, sticky inflation, resilient activity data and a hawkish Bank of England kept yields elevated over 4.70% although by late December had fallen back again to a little over 4.50%.
- The FTSE 100 fell sharply following the "Liberation Day" tariff announcement, dropping by more than 10% in the first week of April - from 8,634 on 1 April to 7,702 on 7 April. However, the de-escalation of the trade war coupled with strong corporate earnings led to a rapid rebound starting in late April. As a result, the FTSE 100 ended June at 8,761, around 2% higher than its value at the end of March and more than 7% above its level at the start of 2025. Since then, the FTSE 100 has enjoyed a further 4% rise in July, its strongest monthly gain since January and outperforming the S&P 500. Strong corporate earnings and progress in trade talks (US-EU, UK-India) lifted share prices and the index hit a record 9,321 in mid-August, driven by hopes of peace in Ukraine and dovish signals from Fed Chair Powell. September proved more volatile and the FTSE 100 closed September at 9,350, 7% higher than at the end of Q1 and 14% higher since the start of 2025. Future performance will likely be impacted by the extent to which investors' global risk appetite remains intact, Fed rate cuts, resilience in the US economy, and AI optimism. A weaker pound will also boost the index as it inflates overseas earnings. In early November, the FTSE100 climbed to a record high just above 9,900. By late December, the index had clung on to most of those gains standing at 9,870 on 23 December.

MPC meetings: 8 May, 19 June, 7 August, 18 September, 6 November, 18 December 2025

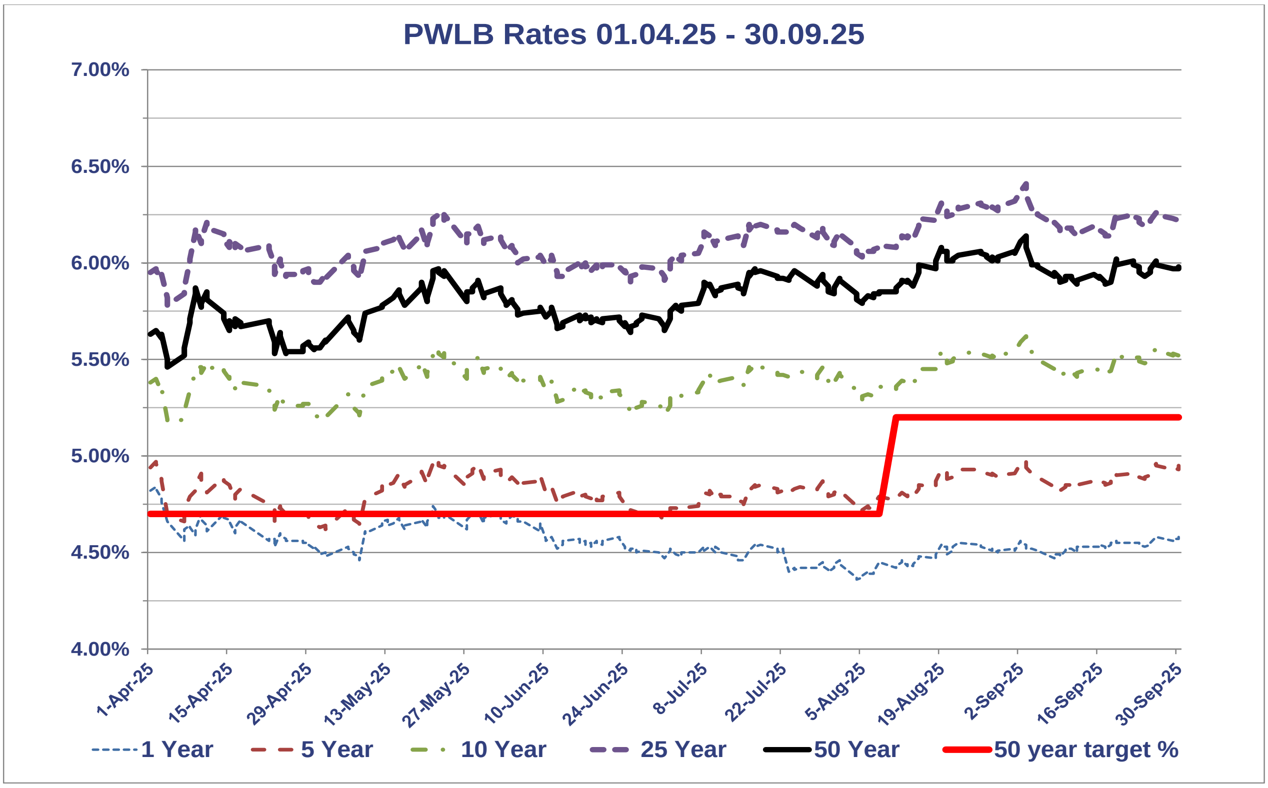
- There were six Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meetings held between April and December. In May, the Committee cut Bank Rate from 4.50% to 4.25%, while in June policy was left unchanged. In June's vote, three MPC members (Dhingra, Ramsden and Taylor) voted for an immediate cut to 4.00%, citing loosening labour market conditions. The other six members were more cautious, as they highlighted the need to monitor for "signs of weak demand", "supply-side constraints" and higher "inflation expectations", mainly from rising food prices. By repeating the well-used phrase "gradual and careful", the MPC continued to suggest that rates would be reduced further.

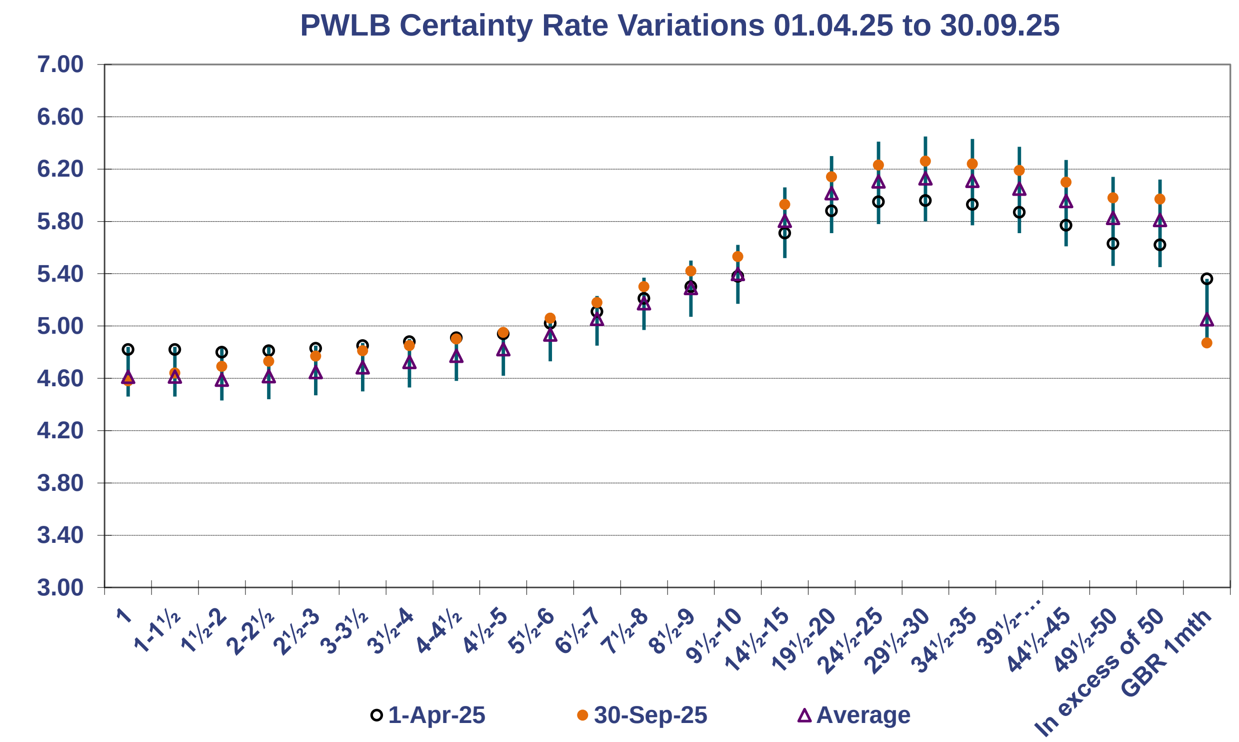
- In August, a further rate cut was implemented. However, a 5-4 split vote for a rate cut to 4% laid bare the different views within the Monetary Policy Committee, with the accompanying commentary noting the decision was "finely balanced" and reiterating that future rate cuts would be undertaken "gradually and carefully". Ultimately, Governor Bailey was the casting vote for a rate cut but with the CPI measure of inflation expected to reach at least 4% later this year, the MPC was wary of making any further rate cuts until inflation begins its slow downwards trajectory back towards 2%.

- With wages still rising by just below 5%, it was no surprise that the September meeting saw the MPC vote 7-2 for keeping rates at 4% (Dhingra and Taylor voted for a further 25bps reduction). Moreover, the Bank also took the opportunity to announce that they would only shrink its balance sheet by £70bn over the next 12 months, rather than £100bn. The repetition of the phrase that “a gradual and careful” approach to rate cuts is appropriate suggested the Bank still thought interest rates will fall further.

- At the 6 November meeting, Governor Bailey was once again the deciding vote, keeping Bank Rate at 4% but hinting strongly that a further rate cut was imminent if data supported such a move. By 18 December, with November CPI inflation having fallen to 3.2%, and with Q2 GDP revised down from 0.3% q/q to only 0.2% q/q, and Q3 GDP stalling at 0.1%, the MPC voted by 5-4 to cut rates further to 3.75%. However, Governor Bailey made it clear that any further reductions would require strong supporting data, and the pace of any further decreases would be slow compared to recent months. The markets expect Bank Rate to next be cut in April.

PWLB RATES 01.04.25 – 30.09.25





HIGH/LOW/AVERAGE PWLB RATES FOR 01.04.25 – 30.09.25

	1 Year	5 Year	10 Year	25 Year	50 Year
01/04/2025	4.82%	4.94%	5.38%	5.95%	5.63%
30/09/2025	4.58%	4.95%	5.53%	6.23%	5.98%
Low	4.36%	4.62%	5.17%	5.78%	5.46%
Low date	04/08/2025	02/05/2025	02/05/2025	04/04/2025	04/04/2025
High	4.84%	4.99%	5.62%	6.41%	6.14%
High date	02/04/2025	21/05/2025	03/09/2025	03/09/2025	03/09/2025
Average	4.55%	4.82%	5.40%	6.11%	5.83%
Spread	0.48%	0.37%	0.45%	0.63%	0.68%

APPENDIX 2

Treasury Management Practice (TMP1) – Credit and Counterparty Risk Management

Specified Investments

1. All such investments will be sterling denominated, with maturities up to a maximum of 1year, meeting the minimum 'high' quality criteria where applicable. (Non-specified investments which would be specified investments apart from originally being for a period longer than 12 months, will be classified as being specified once the remaining period to maturity falls to under twelve months).

Non-Specified Investments

2. These are any investments which do not meet the specified investment criteria.

3. A variety of investment instruments will be used, subject to the credit quality of the institution, and depending on the type of investment made, it will fall into one of the above categories.

4. The criteria, time limits and monetary limits applying to institutions or investment vehicles are:

	Minimum credit criteria / colour band	Max % of total investment / £ limit per institution	Max. maturity period
Debt Management Account Deposit Facility (DMADF) – UK Government	Yellow	100%	6 months (max is set by DMO)
UK Gilts	Yellow		5 years
UK Treasury Bills	Yellow		364 days (max is set by DMO)
Bonds issued by multilateral development banks	Yellow		5 years
Money Market Funds CNAV	AAA	100%	Liquid
Money Market Funds LNVAV	AAA		Liquid
Money Market Funds VNAV	AAA		Liquid
Ultra-Short Dated Bond Funds with a credit score of 1.25	AAA	100%	Liquid
Ultra-Short Dated Bond Funds with a credit score of 1.5	AAA	100%	Liquid
Local Authorities	Yellow	100%	5 years
Term Deposits with Housing Associations	Orange Red Green No Colour		12 months 6 months 100 days Not for use

Term Deposits with Banks and Building Societies	Orange Red Green No Colour		12 months 6 months 100 days Not for use
CD's or Corporate Bonds with Banks and Building Societies	Orange Red Green No Colour		12 months 6 months 100 days Not for use
Gilt Funds	UK Sovereign rating		

* DMO – is the Debt Management Office of HM Treasury

APPENDIX 3

APPROVED COUNTRIES FOR INVESTMENTS

This list is based on those countries which have sovereign ratings of AA- or higher, (we show the lowest rating from Fitch, Moody's and S&P) and also, (except - at the time of writing - for Hong Kong and Luxembourg), have banks operating in sterling markets which have credit ratings of green or above in the MUFG Corporate Markets creditworthiness service.

Based on lowest available rating

AAA:

(a) Australia
(b) Denmark
(c) Germany
(d) Netherlands
(e) Norway
(f) Singapore
(g) Sweden
(h) Switzerland

AA+:

(a) Canada
(b) U.S.A.

AA:

(a) Abu Dhabi (UAE)
(b) Finland
(c) Qatar

AA-:

(a) U.K.

A+:

a) Belgium
b) France