

Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2017/18

Introduction

The Authority adopted the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's *Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice 2011 Edition* (the CIPFA Code) which requires the Authority to approve treasury management semi-annual and annual reports.

The Authority's treasury management strategy for 2017/18 was approved at a meeting of the Authority on 24 February 2017. The Authority has borrowed and invested substantial sums of money and is therefore exposed to financial risks including the loss of invested funds and the revenue effect of changing interest rates. The successful identification, monitoring and control of risk are therefore central to the Authority's treasury management strategy.

External Context

Economic backdrop: Commodity prices fluctuated over the period with oil falling below \$45 a barrel before inching back up to \$58 a barrel. UK Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) index rose with the data print for August showing CPI at 2.9%, its highest since June 2013 as the fall in the value of sterling following the June 2016 referendum result continued to feed through into higher import prices. The new inflation measure CPIH, which includes owner occupiers' housing costs, was at 2.7%.

The unemployment rate fell to 4.3%, the lowest since May 1975, but the squeeze on consumers intensified as average earnings grew at 2.5%, below the rate of inflation. Economic activity expanded at a much slower pace as evidenced by Q1 and Q2 GDP growth of 0.2% and 0.3% respectively. With the dominant services sector accounting for 79% of GDP, the strength of consumer spending remains vital to growth, but with household savings falling and real wage growth negative, there are concerns that these will be a constraint on economic activity in the second half of calendar 2017.

The Bank of England made no change to monetary policy at its meetings in the first half of the financial year. The vote to keep Bank Rate at 0.25% narrowed to 5-3 in June highlighting that some MPC members were more concerned about rising inflation than the risks to growth. Although at September's meeting the Committee voted 7-2 in favour of keeping Bank Rate unchanged, the MPC changed their rhetoric, implying a rise in Bank Rate in "the coming months". The Council's treasury advisor Arlingclose is not convinced the UK's economic outlook justifies such a move at this stage, but the Bank's interpretation of the data seems to have shifted.

In contrast, near-term global growth prospects improved. The US Federal Reserve increased its target range of official interest rates in June for the second time in 2017 by 25bps (basis points) to between 1% and 1.25% and, despite US inflation hitting a soft patch with core CPI at 1.7%, a further similar increase is expected in its December 2017 meeting. The Fed also announced confirmed that it would be starting a reversal of its vast

Quantitative Easing programme and reduce the \$4.2 trillion of bonds it acquired by initially cutting the amount it reinvests by \$10bn a month.

Geopolitical tensions escalated in August as the US and North Korea exchanged escalating verbal threats over reports about enhancements in North Korea's missile programme. The provocation from both sides helped wipe off nearly \$1 trillion from global equity markets but benefited safe-haven assets such as gold, the US dollar and the Japanese yen. Tensions remained high, with North Korea's threat to fire missiles towards the US naval base in Guam, its recent missile tests over Japan and a further testing of its latent nuclear capabilities.

Prime Minister Theresa May called an unscheduled General Election in June, to resolve uncertainty but the surprise result has led to a minority Conservative government in coalition with the Democratic Unionist Party. This clearly results in an enhanced level of political uncertainty. Although the potential for a so-called hard Brexit is diminished, lack of clarity over future trading partnerships, in particular future customs agreements with the rest of the EU block, is denting business sentiment and investment. The reaction from the markets on the UK election's outcome was fairly muted, business confidence now hinges on the progress (or not) on Brexit negotiations, the ultimate 'divorce bill' for the exit and whether new trade treaties and customs arrangements are successfully concluded to the UK's benefit.

In the face of a struggling economy and Brexit-related uncertainty, Arlingclose expects the Bank of England to take only a very measured approach to any monetary policy tightening; any increase will be gradual and limited as the interest rate backdrop will have to provide substantial support to the UK economy through the Brexit transition.

Financial markets: Gilt yields displayed significant volatility over the six-month period with the appearing change in sentiment in the Bank of England's outlook for interest rates, the push-pull from expectations of tapering of Quantitative Easing (QE) in the US and Europe and from geopolitical tensions, which also had an impact. The yield on the 5-year gilts fell to 0.35% in mid-June, but then rose to 0.80% by the end of September. The 10-year gilts similarly rose from their lows of 0.93% to 1.38% at the end of the quarter, and those on 20-year gilts from 1.62% to 1.94%.

The FTSE 100 nevertheless powered away reaching a record high of 7548 in May but dropped back to 7377 at the end of September. Money markets rates have remained low: 1-month, 3-month and 12-month LIBID rates have averaged 0.25%, 0.30% and 0.65% over the period from January to 21st September.

Credit background: UK bank credit default swaps continued their downward trend, reaching three-year lows by the end of June. Bank share prices have not moved in any particular pattern.

There were a few credit rating changes during the quarter. The significant change was the downgrade by Moody's to the UK sovereign rating in September from Aa1 to Aa2 which resulted in subsequent downgrades to sub-sovereign entities including local authorities. Moody's downgraded Standard Chartered Bank's long-term rating to A1 from Aa3 on the

expectation that the bank's profitability will be lower following management's efforts to de-risk their balance sheet. The agency also affirmed Royal Bank of Scotland's and NatWest's long-term ratings at Baa1, placed Lloyds Bank's A1 rating on review for upgrade, revised the outlook of Santander UK plc, and Nationwide and Coventry building societies from negative to stable but downgraded the long-term rating of Leeds BS from A2 to A3.

Ring-fencing, which requires the larger UK banks to separate their core retail banking activity from the rest of their business, is expected to be implemented within the next year.

The new EU regulations for Money Market Funds were finally approved and published in July and existing funds will have to be compliant by no later than 21st January 2019. The key features include Low Volatility NAV (LVNAV) Money Market Funds which will be permitted to maintain a constant dealing NAV, providing they meet strict new criteria and minimum liquidity requirements. MMFs will not be prohibited from having an external fund rating (as had been suggested in draft regulations). Arlingclose expects most of the short-term MMFs it recommends to convert to the LVNAV structure and awaits confirmation from each fund.

Regulatory Updates

MiFID II: Local authorities are currently treated by regulated financial services firms as professional clients who can "opt down" to be treated as retail clients instead. But from 3rd January 2018, as a result of the second Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID II), local authorities will be treated as retail clients who can "opt up" to be professional clients, providing that they meet certain criteria. Regulated financial services firms include banks, brokers, advisers, fund managers and custodians, but only where they are selling, arranging, advising or managing designated investments. In order to opt up to professional, the authority must have an investment balance of at least £10 million and the person authorised to make investment decisions on behalf of the authority must have at least one year's relevant professional experience. In addition, the firm must assess that that person has the expertise, experience and knowledge to make investment decisions and understand the risks involved.

The main additional protection for retail clients is a duty on the firm to ensure that the investment is "suitable" for the client. However, local authorities are not protected by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme nor are they eligible to complain to the Financial Ombudsman Service whether they are retail or professional clients. It is also likely that retail clients will face an increased cost and potentially restricted access to certain products including money market funds, pooled funds, treasury bills, bonds, shares and to financial advice. The Authority has declined to opt down to retail client status in the past as the costs were thought to outweigh the benefits.

The Authority meets the conditions to opt up to professional status and intends to do so in order to maintain their current MiFID status.

CIPFA Consultation on Prudential and Treasury Management Codes: In February 2017 CIPFA canvassed views on the relevance, adoption and practical application of the Treasury Management and Prudential Codes and after reviewing responses launched a further consultation on changes to the codes in August with a deadline for responses of 30th September 2017.

The proposed changes to the Prudential Code include the production of a new high-level Capital Strategy report to full council which will cover the basics of the capital programme and treasury management. The prudential indicators for capital expenditure and the authorised borrowing limit would be included in this report but other indicators may be delegated to another committee. There are plans to drop certain prudential indicators, however local indicators are recommended for ring fenced funds (including the HRA) and for group accounts. Other proposed changes include applying the principles of the Code to subsidiaries.

Proposed changes to the Treasury Management Code include the potential for non-treasury investments such as commercial investments in properties in the definition of “investments” as well as loans made or shares brought for service purposes. Another proposed change is the inclusion of financial guarantees as instruments requiring risk management and addressed within the Treasury Management Strategy. Approval of the technical detail of the Treasury Management Strategy may be delegated to a committee rather than needing approval of full Council. There are also plans to drop or alter some of the current treasury management indicators.

CIPFA intends to publish the two revised Codes towards the end of 2017 for implementation in 2018/19, although CIPFA plans to put transitional arrangements in place for reports that are required to be approved before the start of the 2018/19 financial year. The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and CIPFA wish to have a more rigorous framework in place for the treatment of commercial investments as soon as is practical. It is understood that DCLG will be revising its Investment Guidance (and its MRP guidance) for local authorities in England; however there have been no discussions with the devolved administrations yet.

Local Context

On 31st March 2017, the Authority had net borrowing of £60.6m arising from its revenue and capital income and expenditure. The underlying need to borrow for capital purposes is measured by the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR), while usable reserves and working capital are the underlying resources available for investment. These factors are summarised in table 1 below.

Table 1: Balance Sheet Summary

	31.3.17 Actual £m
General Fund CFR	30
HRA CFR	88
Total CFR	118
Less: Other debt liabilities *	(5)
Borrowing CFR	113
Less: Usable reserves	(27)
Less: Working capital	(26)
Net borrowing	60

* finance leases, PFI liabilities and transferred debt that form part of the Authority’s total debt

The treasury management position as at 30th September 2017 and the change over the period is shown in table 2 below.

Table 2: Treasury Management Summary

	31.3.17 Balance £m	Movement £m	30.9.17 Balance £m
Long-term borrowing	88	10	98
Short-term borrowing	0	6	6
Total borrowing	88	16	104
Long-term investments	0	47	47
Short-term investments	28	(25)	3
Cash and cash equivalents	0	1	1
Total investments	28	23	51
Net borrowing	60	(7)	53

Borrowing Strategy during the half year

At 30/9/2017 the Authority held £104m of loans, (an increase of £16m on 31/3/2017), as part of its strategy for funding previous years' capital programmes. The 30th September 2017 borrowing position is shown in table 3 below.

Table 3: Borrowing Position

	31.3.17 Balance £m	Movement £m	30.9.17 Balance £m	30.9.17 average rate %	30.9.17 maturity years
Public Works Loan Board	88	0	88	2.71	25
Phoenix Life Ltd	0	10	10	2.86	27
Local authorities (short-term)	0	6	6	0.28	0
Total borrowing	88	16	104	5.85	

The Authority's chief objective when borrowing has been to strike an appropriately low risk balance between securing low interest costs and achieving cost certainty over the period for which funds are required, with flexibility to renegotiate loans should the Authority's long-term plans change being a secondary objective.

In furtherance of these objectives, new borrowing was kept to a minimum, while existing loans are allowed to mature without replacement. This strategy enabled the Authority to reduce net borrowing costs (despite foregone investment income) and reduce overall treasury risk.

The “cost of carry” analysis performed by the Authority’s treasury management advisor Arlingclose did not indicate any value in borrowing in advance for future years’ planned expenditure and therefore none was taken.

Other Debt Activity

After £0.06m repayment of prior years’ Private Finance Initiative liabilities, total debt other than borrowing stood at £4.8m on 30th September 2017, taking total debt to £109m.

Investment Activity

The Authority holds invested funds, representing income received in advance of expenditure plus balances and reserves held. During the first half of 2017/18 the Authority’s investment balance ranged between £3 and £32 million due to timing differences between income and expenditure. The investment position during the half year is shown in table 4 below.

Table 4: Investment Position

	31.3.17 Balance £m	Movement £m	30.9.17 Balance £m	30.9.17 average rate %
Banks & building societies (unsecured)	2	0	2	0.10
Government (incl. local authorities)	25	(25)	0	0.10
Money Market Funds	1	0	1	0.18
Total investments	28	(25)	3	0.13

Both the CIPFA Code and government guidance require the Authority to invest its funds prudently, and to have regard to the security and liquidity of its investments before seeking the highest rate of return, or yield. The Authority’s objective when investing money is to strike an appropriate balance between risk and return, minimising the risk of incurring losses from defaults and the risk of receiving unsuitably low investment income.

Other Investment Activity

Although not currently classed as treasury management activities and therefore not covered by the CIPFA Code, the Authority also holds £47m of investment in its wholly owned subsidiary company. This represents an increase of £47m on the previous year due to new investment in Aspire.

1. The council loaned Aspire (CRP) Ltd £47,250,000 on the 3rd May to purchase the 50% share in Chesterford Research Park. The loan agreement is as follows;
 - I. Interest fixed rate @ 4% pa
 - II. No annual repayments, interest only with full repayment on year 50
2. The initial loan to Aspire (CRP) Ltd was funded by using the council’s available cash balances and short term borrowing from other Local Authorities.

3. On the 3rd July a loan agreement was signed with Phoenix Life Limited to borrow £37,000,000 over 40 years. The structure of the loan is as follows
 - III. The loan profile is set to be drawn down in 3 separate stages
 1. £10,000,000 on the 3rd July 2017
 2. £12,000,000 on the 3rd July 2020
 3. £15,000,000 on the 3rd July 2021
 - IV. No principal repayments will be made until 5th January 2022.
 - V. Fixed rate of interest @ 2.86% for all 3 drawdowns.
4. A further loan was requested by Aspire (CRP) Ltd for the sum of £60,000, this is due for repayment on the 31st March 2018 and interest will be charged at 4%.

These non-treasury investments will generate £1.89m annually of investment income for the Authority after taking account of direct costs and MRP, representing a rate of return of 4%. This is higher than the return earned on treasury investments, but reflects the additional risks to the Authority of holding such investments.

If CIPFA's proposed amendments to the Treasury Management Code are adopted in the revised Code from 2018/19, these will henceforth be included in the expanded definition of "investments".

Compliance Report

The Assistant Director of Resources can report that all treasury management activities with the exception of one transaction undertaken during the first half of 2017/18 complied with the CIPFA Code of Practice and the Authority's approved Treasury Management Strategy. Compliance with specific investment limits is demonstrated in table 7 below.

Table 7: Investment Limits

	H1 Maximum	30.9.17 Actual	2017/18 Limit	Complied
Banks and Other Organisations whose lowest published credit rating from Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's is A-	£6m	£2m	£3m	X
Banks and Other Organisations whose lowest published credit rating from Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's is BBB+	0	0	£1m	✓
UK Central Government	£31m	£0m	Unlimited	✓
UK Local Authorities	£10m	£0m	Unlimited	✓
Saffron Building Society	£0m	£0m	£0.5m	✓
UK Building Societies without credit ratings	£0m	£0m	£1m	✓
Money Market Funds	£1m	£1m	£3m	✓

Compliance with the authorised limit and operational boundary for external debt is demonstrated in table 8 below.

Table 8: Debt Limits

	H1 Maximum	30.9.17 Actual	2017/18 Operational Boundary	2017/18 Authorised Limit	Complied
Borrowing	£116m	£104m	£244m	£244m	✓
PFI & finance leases	£5m	£5m	£6m	£6m	✓
Total debt	£121m	£109m	£250m	£250m	✓

Since the operational boundary is a management tool for in-year monitoring it is not significant if the operational boundary is breached on occasions due to variations in cash flow, and this is not counted as a compliance failure.

Outlook for the remainder of 2017/18

The UK economy faces a challenging outlook as the minority government continues to negotiate the country's exit from the European Union. Both consumer and business confidence remain subdued. Household consumption growth, the driver of UK GDP growth, has softened following a contraction in real wages. Savings rates are at an all-time low and real earnings growth (i.e. after inflation) struggles in the face of higher inflation.

The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee has changed its rhetoric, implying a rise in Bank Rate in "the coming months". Arlingclose is not convinced the UK's economic outlook justifies such a move at this stage, but the Bank's interpretation of the data seems to have shifted.