APPENDIX 1

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

DRAFT

TREASURY MANAGEMENT

MID YEAR REPORT 2023/24

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To provide Members with a mid-year update on matters relating to the Council's Treasury Management function.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 Treasury management comprises the management of the Council's 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.

2.02 The Council's primary objectives for the investment of its surplus funds are to protect the principal sums invested from loss, and to ensure adequate liquidity so that funds are available for expenditure when needed. The generation of investment income to support the provision of local authority services is an important, but secondary, objective.

2.03 The Council's policy is to appoint external consultants to provide advice on its treasury management function. In September 2021 Arlingclose Ltd were reappointed as the Council's advisors for a period of 3 years, following a competitive tendering exercise. This period can be extended a further 2 years as per the contract terms to September 2026.

2.04 The Council has adopted the 2021 edition of the CIPFA Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice, which requires the Council to approve a treasury management strategy before the start of each financial year, a mid-year report, and an annual report after the end of each financial year.

This report includes the new requirement in the 2021 Code, mandatory from 1st April 2023, of quarterly reporting of the treasury management prudential indicators and non-treasury prudential indicators.

2.05 In addition, the Welsh Government (WG) issues guidance on local authority investments that requires the Council to approve an investment strategy before the start of each financial year.

2.06 This report fulfils the Council's legal obligation under the Local Government Act 2003 to have regard to both the CIPFA Code and the WG Guidance.

2.07 The Council approved the 2023/24 Treasury Management Strategy at its meeting on 23rd February 2023.

3.00 <u>ECONOMIC & INTEREST RATE REVIEW APRIL – OCTOBER 2023.</u>

Provided by Arlingclose Ltd, the Council's treasury management advisors.

Economic background: UK inflation remained stubbornly high over much the period compared to the US and euro zone, keeping expectations elevated of how much further the Bank of England (BoE) would hike rates compared to the regions. However, inflation data published in the latter part of the period undershot expectations, causing financial markets to reassess the peak in BoE Bank Rate. This was followed very soon after by the BoE deciding to keep Bank Rate on hold at 5.25% in September, against expectation for another 0.25% rise.

Economic growth in the UK remained relatively weak over the period. In calendar Q2 2023, the economy expanded by 0.2%. However, monthly GDP data showed a 0.5% contraction in July, the largest fall to date in 2023 and worse than the 0.2% decline predicted which could be an indication the monetary tightening cycle is starting to cause recessionary or at the very least stagnating economic conditions.

July data showed the unemployment rate increased to 4.3% (3mth/year) while the employment rate rose to 75.5%. Pay growth was 8.5% for total pay (including bonuses) and 7.8% for regular pay, which for the latter was the highest recorded annual growth rate. Adjusting for inflation, pay growth in real terms were positive at 1.2% and 0.6% for total pay and regular pay respectively.

Inflation continued to fall from its peak as annual headline CPI declined to 6.7% in July 2023 from 6.8% in the previous month against expectations for a tick back up to 7.0%. The largest downward contribution came from food prices. The core rate also surprised on the downside, falling to 6.2% from 6.9% compared to predictions for it to only edge down to 6.8%.

The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee continued tightening monetary policy over most of the period, taking Bank Rate to 5.25% in August. Against expectations of a further hike in September, the Committee voted 5-4 to maintain Bank Rate at 5.25%. Each of the four dissenters were in favour of another 0.25% increase.

Financial market Bank Rate expectations moderated over the period as falling inflation and weakening data gave some indication that higher interest rates were working. Expectations fell from predicting a peak of over 6% in June to 5.5% just ahead of the September MPC meeting, and to then expecting 5.25% to be the peak by the end of the period.

Following the September MPC meeting, Arlingclose, the Council's treasury adviser, modestly revised its interest forecast to reflect the central view that 5.25% will now be the peak in Bank Rate. In the short term the risks are to the upside if inflation increases again, but over the remaining part of the time horizon the risks are to the downside from economic activity weakening more than expected.

The lagged effect of monetary policy together with the staggered fixed term mortgage maturities over the next 12-24 months means the full impact from Bank Rate rises are still yet to be felt by households. As such, while consumer confidence continued to improve over the period, the GfK measure hit -21 in September, it is likely this will reverse at some point. Higher rates will also impact business and according to S&P/CIPS survey data, the UK manufacturing and services sector contracted during the quarter with all measures scoring under 50, indicating contraction in the sectors.

The US Federal Reserve increased its key interest rate to 5.25-5.50% over the period, pausing in September following a 0.25% rise the month before, and indicating that it may have not quite completed its monetary tightening cycle.

Having fallen throughout 2023, annual US inflation started to pick up again in July 2023, rising from 3% in June, which represented the lowest level since March 2021, to 3.2% in July and then jumping again to 3.7% in August, beating expectations for a rise to 3.6%. Rising oil prices were the main cause of the increase. US GDP growth registered 2.1% annualised in the second calendar quarter of 2023, down from the initial estimate of 2.4% but above the 2% expansion seen in the first quarter.

The European Central Bank increased its key deposit, main refinancing, and marginal lending interest rates to 4.00%, 4.50% and 4.75% respectively in September, and hinted these levels may represent the peak in rates but also emphasising rates would stay high for as long as required to bring inflation down to target.

Although continuing to decline steadily, inflation has been sticky, Eurozone annual headline CPI fell to 5.2% in August while annual core inflation eased to 5.3% having stuck at 5.5% in the previous two months. GDP growth remains weak, with recent data showing the region expanded by only 0.1% in the three months to June 2023, the rate as the previous quarter.

Financial markets: Financial market sentiment and bond yields remained volatile, with the latter generally trending downwards as there were signs inflation, while still high, was moderating and interest rates were at a peak. Gilt yields fell towards the end of the period. The 5-year UK benchmark gilt yield rose from 3.30% to peak at 4.91% in July before trending downwards to 4.29%, the 10-year gilt yield rose from 3.43% to 4.75% in August before declining to 4.45%, and the 20-year yield from 3.75% to 4.97% in August and then fell back to 4.84%. The Sterling Overnight Rate (SONIA) averaged 4.73% over the period.

Credit review: Having completed a review of its credit advice on unsecured deposits at UK and non-UK banks following concerns of a wider financial crisis after the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank purchase of Credit Suisse by UBS, as well as other well-publicised banking sector issues, in March Arlingclose reduced the advised maximum duration limit for all banks on its recommended counterparty list to 35 days. This stance continued to be maintained at the end of the period.

During the second quarter of the period, Moody's revised the outlook on Svenska Handelsbanken to negative from stable, citing concerns around the Swedish real estate sector.

Having put the US sovereign rating on Rating Watch Negative earlier in the period, Fitch took further action in August, downgrading the long-term rating to AA+, partly around ongoing debt ceiling concerns but also an expected fiscal deterioration over the next couple of years.

Following the issue of a Section 114 notice, in September Arlingclose advised against undertaking new lending to Birmingham City Council, and later in the month cut its recommended duration on Warrington Borough Council to a maximum of 100 days.

Arlingclose continued to monitor and assess credit default swap levels for signs of ongoing credit stress and although no changes were made to recommended durations over the period, Northern Trust Corporation was added to the counterparty list.

Heightened market volatility is expected to remain a feature, at least in the near term and, as ever, the institutions and durations on the Council's counterparty list recommended by Arlingclose remains under constant review.

Outlook for the remainder of 2023/24

The MPC held Bank Rate at 5.25% in September. Arlingclose believe this is the peak for Bank Rate.

The MPC will cut rates in the medium term to stimulate the UK economy but will be reluctant to do so until it is sure there will be no lingering second round effects. Arlingclose see rate cuts from Q3 2024 to a low of around 3% by early 2026.

The immediate risks around Bank Rate lie to the upside, but these diminish over the next few quarters and shift to the downside before balancing out, due to the weakening UK economy and dampening effects on inflation.

Arlingclose expects long-term gilt yields to eventually fall from current levels reflecting the lower medium-term path for Bank Rate. However, yields will remain relatively higher than in the past, partly due to quantitative tightening, with continued elevated volatility.

	Current	Dec 23	Mar 24	Jun 24	Sept 24	Dec 24	Mar 25	Jun 25	Sept 25	Dec 25	Mar 26	Jun 26	Sept 26
Upside Risk (%)	0.00	0.25	0.50	0.50	0.75	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Interest Rate (%)	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.00	4.75	4.25	4.00	3.75	3.50	3.25	3.00	3.00
Downside Risk (%)	0.00	0.00	-0.25	-0.50	-0.75	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00	-1.00

4.00 BORROWING

4.01 CIPFA's 2021 Prudential Code is clear that local authorities must not borrow to invest primarily for financial return and that it is not prudent for local authorities to make any investment or spending decision that will increase the capital financing requirement and so may lead to new borrowing, unless directly and primarily related to the functions of the Council. PWLB loans are no longer available to local authorities planning to buy investment assets primarily for yield unless these loans are for refinancing purposes.

The Council has not invested in assets primarily for financial return or that are not primarily related to the functions of the Council. It has no plans to do so in future.

BORROWING STRATEGY & ACTIVITY

4.02 Borrowing Strategy

As outlined in the treasury strategy, the Council'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 Council's long-term plans change being a secondary objective. The Council's borrowing strategy continues to address the key issue of affordability without compromising the longer-term stability of the debt portfolio.

There was a substantial rise in the cost of both short- and long-term borrowing over the last 18 months. Bank Rate rose by 1% from 4.25% at the beginning of April to 5.25% at the end of September. Bank Rate was 2% higher than at the end of

September 2022.

UK gilt yields were volatile, mainly facing upward pressure since early April following signs that UK growth had been more resilient, inflation stickier than expected, and that the Bank of England saw persistently higher rates through 2023/24 as key to dampening domestic demand. Gilt yields, and consequently PWLB borrowing rates, rose and broadly remained at elevated levels. On 30th September, the PWLB certainty rates for maturity loans were 5.26% for 10 year loans, 5.64% for 20-year loans and 5.43% for 50-year loans. Their equivalents on 31st March 2023 were 4.33%, 4.70% and 4.41% respectively.

A new PWLB HRA rate which is 0.4% below the certainty rate was made available from 15th June 2023. Initially available for a period of one year, this discounted rate is to support local authorities borrowing for the Housing Revenue Account and for refinancing existing HRA loans, providing a window of opportunity for HRA-related borrowing.

The Council submitted its application for access to PWLB lending 2023/24 (including access to HRA and certainty rates) in April 2023.

In keeping with the Council's objectives, no new borrowing was undertaken, while £0.870m of existing loans were allowed to mature without replacement. This strategy enabled the Council to reduce net borrowing costs (despite foregone investment income) and reduce overall treasury risk.

4.03 The long-term borrowing outstanding at 30th September 2023 totals £292.97million.

4.04 Loans with the Public Works Loans Board are in the form of fixed rate (£269.55m). £18.95m is variable in the form of LOBOs (Lender's Option, Borrower's Option) and £4.47m are interest free loans from government. The Council's average long-term borrowing rate is currently 4.51%.

	Balance 01/04/2023 £m	Debt Maturing £m	New Debt £m	Balance 30/09/2023 £m
Long Term Borrowing	290.49	(1.99)	0.00	288.50
Government Loans	4.71	(0.24)	0.00	4.47
TOTAL BORROWING	295.20	(2.23)	0.00	292.97
Other Long Term Liabilities *	2.75	0.00	0.00	2.75
TOTAL EXTERNAL DEBT	297.95	(2.23)	0.00	295.72
Increase/ (Decrease) in Borrowing £m				(2.23)

** relates to finance leases in respect of Deeside Leisure Centre and Jade Jones Pavilion*

4.05 No new long or short-term borrowing was undertaken during the period.

4.06 The Council has £18.95m LOBO loans where the lender has the option to propose an increase in the interest rate at set dates, following which the Council has the option to either accept the new rate or to repay the loan at no additional cost. These loans all have call dates within the next 12 months. The Council has liaised with Arlingclose over the likelihood of the options being exercised. If the option is exercised and an increased rate proposed, the Council will repay the LOBO loans with available cash or by borrowing from other local authorities or the PWLB.

4.07 Debt Rescheduling

The premium charge for early repayment of PWLB debt remained relatively expensive for the loans in the Council's portfolio and therefore unattractive for debt rescheduling activity. No rescheduling activity was undertaken as a consequence.

The Corporate Finance Manager, in conjunction with the Council's treasury advisors, will continue to review any potential opportunities for restructuring the Council's debt in order to take advantage of potential savings as interest rates change and to enhance the balance of the long term portfolio (amend the maturity profile and/or the balance of volatility).

5.0 INTERIM INVESTMENT AND PERFORMANCE REPORT

5.01 The definition of investments in the Treasury Management Code now covers all the financial assets of the Council as well as other non-financial assets which the Council holds primarily for financial return. Investments that do not meet the definition of treasury management investments (i.e. management of surplus cash) are categorised as either for service purposes (made explicitly to further service objectives) and or for commercial purposes (made primarily for financial return).

Investment Guidance issued by the Welsh Government also includes within the definition of investments all such assets held partially or wholly for financial return.

Non-treasury investments, including loans to subsidiaries and purchases of investment property, are not normally considered to be treasury investments, and these are therefore covered separately in Appendix A.

5.02 The maximum investments the Council had on deposit at any one time totalled £62m. The average investment balance for the period was £48.4m and the average rate of return was 4.58%, generating investment income of £1.11m.

5.03 Both the CIPFA Code and government guidance require the Council to invest its funds prudently, and to have regard to the security and liquidity of its treasury investments before seeking the optimum rate of return, or yield. The Council'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.

As demonstrated by the liability benchmark in this report (paragraph 6.01), the Council expects to be a long-term borrower and new treasury investments are therefore primarily made to manage day-to-day cash flows using short-term low risk instruments. The existing portfolio of strategic pooled funds will be maintained to diversify risk into different asset classes and boost investment income.

5.04 Up to 30th September, investments were made in the Debt Management Office Deposit Account, banks, other local authorities and money market funds.

5.05 The average of long-term borrowing was £294.04m generating interest payable of £6.659m, in line with budget forecasts to date.

	Investments		Long Term Borrowing		Short Term Borrowing	
	Interest received £k	Interest rate %	Interest paid £k	Interest rate %	Interest paid £k	Interest rate %
2023/24 Apr - Sept	1,112	4.58	6,659	4.51	0	n/a
2022/23 Apr - Sept	304	1.05	6,655	4.53	0	n/a
Difference	808		4			

Year-end projections are as follows:

	Investments		Long Term Borrowing		Short Term Borrowing	
	Interest received £k	Interest rate %	Interest paid £k	Interest rate %	Interest paid £k	Interest rate %
2023/24 est.	1,700	4.58	13,438	4.51	980	5.95
2022/23 act	940	1.87	13,297	4.53	14	4.55
Difference	760		141		866	

5.06 Credit Risk (security)

Counterparty credit quality was assessed and monitored with reference to credit ratings (the Council's minimum long-term counterparty rating for institutions defined as having "high credit quality" is A- across rating agencies Fitch, S&P and Moody's); credit default swap prices, financial statements, information on potential government support and reports in the quality financial press.

5.07 Liquidity

In keeping with the WG's Guidance on Investments, the Council maintained a sufficient level of liquidity through the use of money market funds.

5.08 Yield

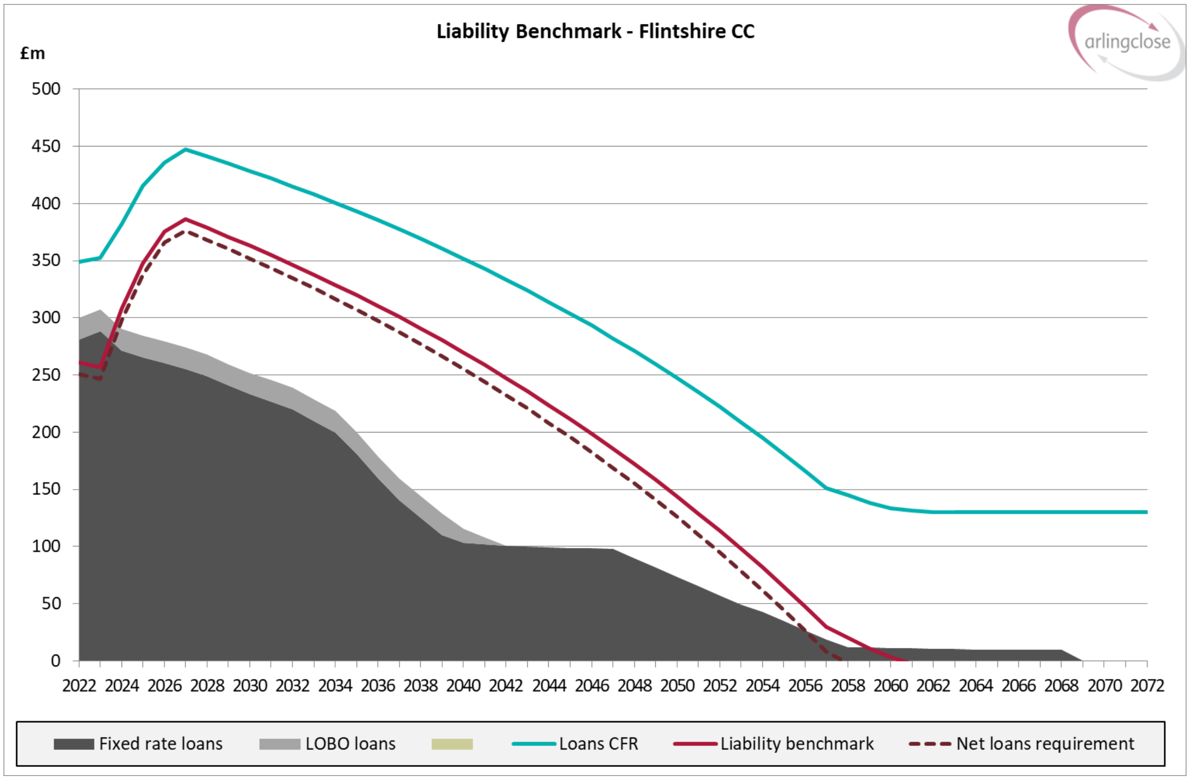
The Council sought to optimise returns commensurate with its objectives of security and liquidity. The Council's investment yield is outlined in 5.0.2.

6.00 TREASURY MANAGEMENT PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS

As required by the 2021 CIPFA Treasury Management Code, the Council monitors and measures the following treasury management prudential indicators.

6.01 Liability Benchmark

This new indicator compares the Council's actual existing borrowing against a liability benchmark that has been calculated to show the lowest risk level of borrowing. The liability benchmark is an important tool to help establish whether the Council is likely to be a long-term borrower or long-term investor in the future, and so shape its strategic focus and decision making. It represents an estimate of the cumulative amount of external borrowing the Council must hold to fund its current capital and revenue plans while keeping treasury investments at the minimum level required to manage day-to-day cash flow.



6.02 <u>Interest rate exposures</u>

This indicator is set to control the Council's exposure to interest rate risk.

Interest rate risk indicator	**30.06.23 £'000**	**30.09.23 £'000**
Upper limit on one-year revenue impact of a 1% <u>rise</u> in interest rates	30.2	44.0
Upper limit on one-year revenue impact of a 1% <u>fall</u> in interest rates	99.5	101.0

The impact of a change in interest rates is calculated on the assumption that maturing loans and investments will be replaced at new market rates.

Fixed rate investments and borrowings are those where the rate of interest is fixed for at least 12 months, measured from the start of the financial year or the transaction date if later. All other instruments are classed as variable rate.

6.03 <u>Maturity structure of borrowing</u>

This indicator is set to control the Council's exposure to refinancing risk. The upper and lower limits on the maturity structure of fixed rate borrowing will be:

	Lower	Upper	Actual as at 30.09.23
Under 12 months	0%	20%	1.65%
12 months and within 24 months	0%	20%	2.15%
24 months and within five years	0%	30%	6.41%
Five years and within 10 years	0%	50%	14.75%
10 years and above	0%	100%	75.04%

Time periods start on the first day of each financial year. The maturity date of borrowing is the earliest date on which the lender can demand repayment.

6.04 Long-term treasury management investments:

The purpose of this indicator is to control the Council's exposure to the risk of incurring losses by seeking early repayment of its investments. The prudential limits on the long-term treasury management investments will be:

Price risk indicator	2023/24 Limit	30.09.23 Actual
Limit on total principal invested beyond year end	£5m	£0m

Any long-term investments carried forward from previous years will be included in each year's limit.

6.05 Borrowing Limits

These limits are reported as part of the quarterly monitoring of the capital programme, however, they are repeated here for completeness.

	2023/24 Limit	30.09.23 Actual
Operational Boundary	£403m	£297.67m
Authorised Limit	£438m	£297.67m

7.00 OTHER ITEMS

7.01 Other treasury management related activities that took place during April – September 2023 included:

- Statutory override: In April 2023 the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities published the full outcome of the consultation on the extension of the statutory override on accounting for gains and losses on pooled investment funds. The override has been extended for two years until 31st March 2025 and is unlikely to be extended beyond this date. The Council will discuss with Arlingclose the implications for the investment strategy and what action may need to be taken.

- The Treasury Management Annual Report 2022/23 was reported to Governance and Audit Committee on 26th July 2023, Cabinet on 19th September 2023 and Council on 24th October 2023.
- The Quarter 1 Treasury Management update was reported to the Governance and Audit Committee.

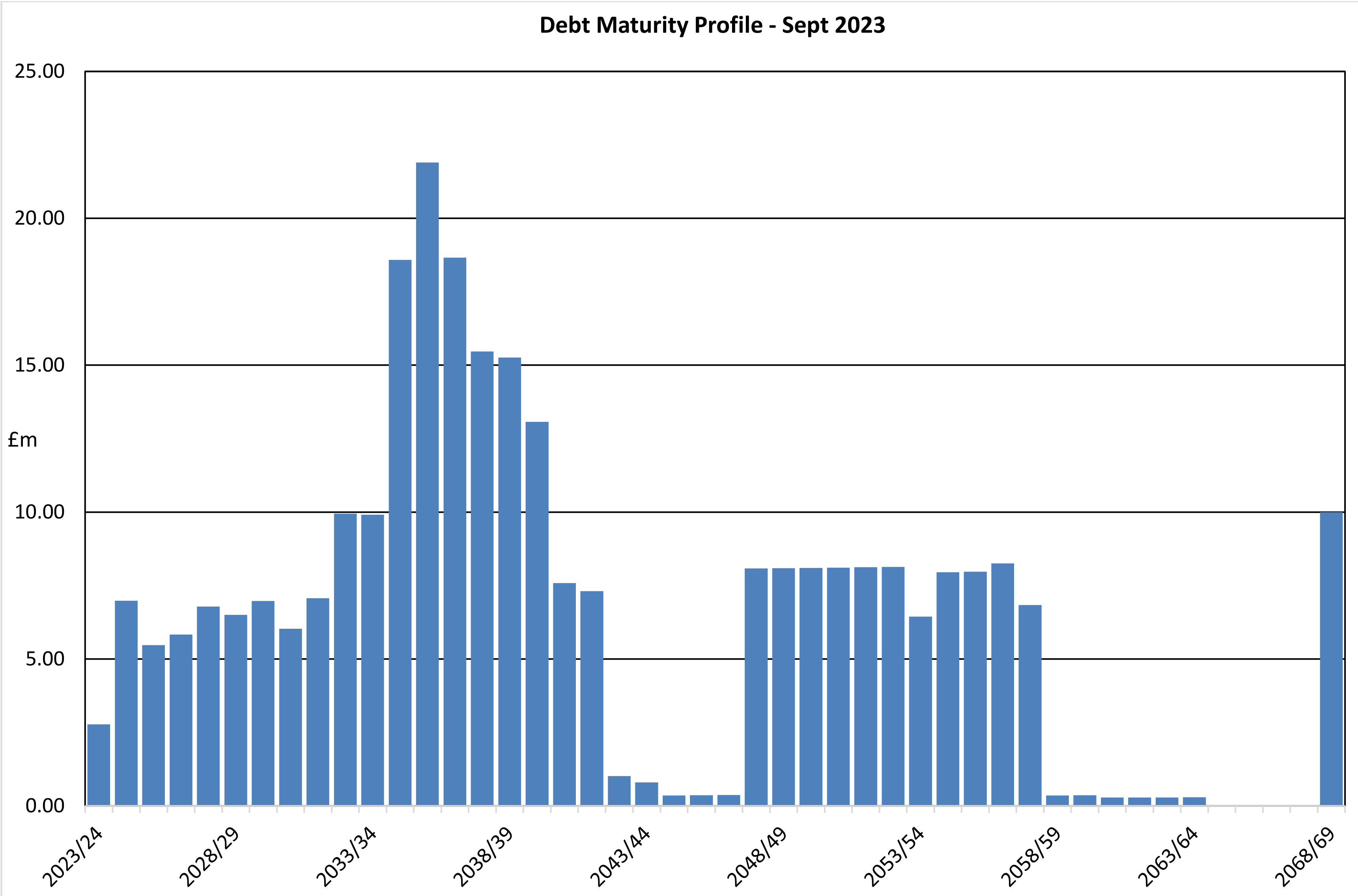
8.00 COMPLIANCE

8.01 The Corporate Finance Manager reports that all treasury management activities undertaken during the quarter complied fully with the principles in the Treasury Management Code and the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy. Compliance with specific investment limits is demonstrated in Section 6.00.

8.00 CONCLUSION

8.01 In compliance with the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Practice this report provides Members with a summary report of the treasury management activity during the first half of 2023/24.

8.02 As indicated in this report none of the prudential indicators have been breached and a prudent approach has been taken in relation to investment activity with priority being given to security and liquidity over yield.


Debt Maturity Profile - Sept 2023
25.00
20.00
15.00
10.00
5.00
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£m
2023/24
2028/29
2033/34
2038/39
2043/44
2048/49
2053/54
2058/59
2063/64
2068/69

APPENDIX A NON-TREASURY INVESTMENTS

1.01 The definition of investments in the Treasury Management Code now covers all the financial assets of the Council as well as other non-financial assets which the Council holds primarily for financial return. Investments that do not meet the definition of treasury management investments (i.e. management of surplus cash) are categorised as either for service purposes (made explicitly to further service objectives) and or for commercial purposes (made primarily for financial return).

Investment Guidance issued by the Welsh Government also includes within the definition of investments all such assets held partially or wholly for financial return.

The Council has given loans to wholly owned companies for service purposes and has historical non-financial investments in property defined as Investment Properties within the Council's Statement of Accounts. The Council considers both to be non-treasury investments.

1.02 Wholly Owned Companies

The Council's investments in the form of loans to wholly owned companies contribute to its service delivery objectives and/or to promote wellbeing as follows:

- The Council has embarked on an ambitious house building programme as part of its Strategic Housing and Regeneration Programme (SHARP). Over a 5-year period 500 new homes will be built at a range of sites across the county, a mixture of new council houses and affordable homes, alongside commissioning a range of linked regeneration initiatives and community benefits.

- Affordable homes are being developed through the Council's wholly owned subsidiary North East Wales Homes Limited (NEW Homes) in partnership with the Council. Affordable homes for rent are built or purchased by NEW Homes funded by loans from the Council. New affordable homes for rent have been built in Flint, Penyffordd (Holywell), Dobshill, Bryn-y-Baal, Northop and Saltney.

The Council considers that its financial exposure to loans to wholly owned companies is proportionate and has set the limits in the table below. The Council's loan book is currently within these self-assessed limits.

Borrower	Cash Limit
Wholly owned companies	£40m
Treasury management investments meeting the definition of a loan	Unlimited

Yield (net profit)

The loans generate a small income for the Council as there is a margin of approx. 0.25% charged to NEW Homes on the Council's borrowing rate from the PWLB. The income makes a very small contribution to achieving a balanced revenue budget.

1.03 Investment Properties

The Welsh Government guidance includes an investment category covering non-financial assets held primarily or partially to generate a profit, primarily investment property. Proper accounting practice defines an investment property as those that are held solely to earn rent and / or for capital appreciation.

The Council has a portfolio of investment properties, in the form of agricultural property and industrial units. Although these are classified as investment properties, they are legacy assets, and the Council is managing down its agricultural portfolio and is reviewing its position regarding industrial units.

Fair Value of Investment Properties

	31.03.2023 £m	31.3.2022 £m	31.3.2021 £m	31.3.2020 £m	31.3.2019 £m
Fair Value Inv. Properties	28.8	27.6	25.2	25.0	25.2

Yield (net profit)

The profit generated by investment activity makes a small contribution to achieving a balanced revenue budget. The table below details the extent to which funding expenditure to meet the service delivery objectives and or promote wellbeing in the Council is dependent on achieving the expected yield over the life cycle of the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Proportionality of Investment Properties

	2022/23 Actual £m	2023/24 Budget £m	2024/25 Budget £m
Net Revenue Budget	326.683	352.121	359.807
Net Investment income	1.67	1.65	1.65
Proportion	0.51%	0.47%	0.46%