

## TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2020/21

### Report of the County Treasurer

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

### **Recommendations: That the Committee adopts the Treasury Management Strategy for 2020/21 as set out in Appendix 1.**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 In February 2018 the Pension Fund, in accordance with the revised CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management in the Public Services, adopted a revised Treasury Management Policy Statement together with a statement of its 'Treasury Management Practices' (TMPs). No changes are proposed to these policies for 2020/21.
- 1.2 The policy requires the Investment and Pension Fund to consider a treasury strategy report, setting out the strategy and plans to be followed in the coming year.

#### **2. Treasury Management and Investment Strategy**

- 2.1 The Treasury Management and Investment Strategy is shown in draft at Appendix 1. It sets out the current treasury position, cash investments, prospects for interest rates and the investment strategy.
- 2.2 The strategy is broadly consistent to that agreed for 2019/20. The target return for treasury cash investments will be 0.6%, which is lower than for 2019/20, reflecting the potential uncertainties around the impact of Brexit on the Bank of England Base Rate. The Pension Fund has a slightly lower target than the County Council, reflecting the fact that Pension Fund cash balances are kept at a low level with the main purpose being to provide the required level of liquidity, and do not therefore benefit from the higher rates on offer for longer term deposits.

#### **3. Conclusion**

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to approve the adoption of the Treasury Management Strategy for 2020/21 as set out in Appendix 1.

Mary Davis

Electoral Divisions: All

Local Government Act 1972

List of Background Papers – Nil

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## Treasury Management Strategy 2020/21

### Introduction

The Treasury Management Strategy sets out the Devon County Council Pension Fund's policies in relation to: the management of the Fund's cashflows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions and investment strategies.

The Pension Fund has adopted the CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) Code of Practice for Treasury Management in the Public Services. A revised Code of Practice was published by CIPFA in December 2017, and a revised Treasury Management Policy Statement and a statement of 'Treasury Management Practices' (TMPs) were agreed by the Investment and Pension Fund Committee in February 2018. No changes are proposed to these policies for 2020/21.

This Treasury Management Strategy document sets out:

- The current treasury position, debt and investments;
- Prospects for interest rates; and
- The investment strategy.

### Schedule of Investments

The following schedule shows the Pension Fund's fixed and variable rate investments as at 31 March 2019 and as at 31 December 2019 (current).

**Table A – Schedule of Investments**

		Actual 31.03.19 £'m	Interest Rate %	Current 31.12.19 £'m	Interest Rate %
<b>GBP Deposits</b>					
<b>Fixed Rates</b>					
Term Deposits	< 365 days	0.00		1.20	0.74
	365 days & >	0.00		0.00	
Callable Deposits		0.00		0.00	
<b>Variable Rate</b>					
Call Accounts		0.00		0.00	
Notice Accounts		0.00		0.00	
Money Market Funds (MMFs)		24.15	0.77	28.04	0.73
<b>All GBP Investments</b>		<b>24.15</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>29.24</b>	<b>0.73</b>
<b>USD Deposits</b>					
<b>Variable Rate</b>					
Money Market Funds (MMFs)		0.98	2.45	1.97	1.62
<b>All USD Investments</b>		<b>0.98</b>	<b>2.45</b>	<b>1.97</b>	<b>1.62</b>

The recent investment performance of the Pension Fund's cash has been affected by the low interest rates introduced as part of the measures used to alleviate the global credit crunch. Interest rates have also been impacted by the introduction of new banking regulations requiring banks to hold higher levels of liquidity to act as a buffer.

The rates on offer increased marginally during 2018/19, following the Bank of England’s decision to increase the base rate up to 0.75%, but continue to be low in comparison to the past, and the returns on the Pension Fund’s cash investments are forecast to remain at low levels for the foreseeable future; however, the Treasury Management Strategy will continue to ensure a prudent and secure approach.

## Prospects for Interest Rates

Forecasting future interest rate movements even one year ahead is always difficult. The factors affecting interest rate movements are clearly outside the Council’s control. Whilst short term rates are influenced by the Bank of England’s Base Rate, long term rates are determined by other factors, e.g. the market in Gilts. Rates from overseas banks will be influenced by their national economic circumstances. The County Council retains an external advisor, Link Asset Services, who forecast future rates several years forward. Similar information is received from a number of other sources.

Link Asset Services are forecasting that the overall longer run future trend is for gilt yields, and consequently PWLB rates, to rise, albeit gently. These forecasts are summarised in the following Table B.

**Table B – Base Rate Forecasts**

	Dec (act) 2019	March 2020	June 2020	Sep 2020	Dec 2020	March 2021
<b>Base Rate</b>						
Capita	0.75%	0.75%	0.75%	0.75%	0.75%	1.00%
Capital Economics	0.75%	0.75%	0.75%	0.75%	0.75%	0.75%

The above forecasts have been based on an assumption that there is an agreed deal on Brexit, including agreement on the terms of trade between the UK and EU, at some point in time. The result of the general election has removed much uncertainty around this major assumption. However, it does not remove uncertainty around whether agreement can be reached with the EU on a trade deal within the short time to December 2020, as the prime minister has pledged.

It has been little surprise that the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has left Bank Rate unchanged at 0.75% throughout 2019 due to the ongoing uncertainty over Brexit and the outcome of the general election. In its meeting on 7 November, the MPC became more dovish due to increased concerns over the outlook for the domestic economy if Brexit uncertainties were to become more entrenched, and for weak global economic growth: if those uncertainties were to materialise, then the MPC were likely to cut Bank Rate. However, if they were both to dissipate, then rates would need to rise at a “gradual pace and to a limited extent”.

Brexit uncertainty has had a dampening effect on UK GDP growth in 2019, especially around mid-year. There is still some residual risk that the MPC could cut Bank Rate during 2020 as the UK economy is still likely to only grow weakly in 2020 due to continuing uncertainty over whether there could effectively be a no deal Brexit in December 2020 if agreement on a trade deal is not reached with the EU. Until that major uncertainty is removed, or the period for agreeing a deal is extended, it is unlikely that the MPC would raise Bank Rate.

## Investment Strategy 2020/21 – 2022/23

The Devon Pension Fund continues to adopt a very prudent approach to counterparties to whom the Fund is willing to lend. As a result, only a small number of selected UK banks and building societies, money market funds and Non-Eurozone overseas banks in highly rated countries are being used, subject to strict criteria and the prudent management of deposits with them. The lending policy is kept under constant review with reference to strict criteria for inclusion in the counterparty list.

The Treasury Management Strategy will continue to be set to ensure a prudent and secure approach.

The Investment and Pension Fund Committee is required under the guidance in the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice to approve an Annual Investment Strategy.

The overall aims of the Pension Fund's strategy continue to be to:

- Limit the risk to the loss of capital;
- Ensure that funds are always available to meet cash flow requirements;
- Maximise investment returns, consistent with the first two aims; and
- Review new investment instruments as they come to the Local Authority market, and to assess whether they could be a useful part of our investment process.

**The overriding objective will be to invest prudently, with priority being given to security and liquidity before yield.**

The outlook for cash investment remains challenging. Whereas in the past there has been a perception that Governments would not allow banks to fail, the current regulatory environment puts more emphasis on the requirement for investors to take a hit by funding a "bail-in". A bail-in is where the bank's creditors, including local authorities depositing money with them, bear some of the burden by having part of the debt they are owed written off. The balance of risk has therefore changed, and as a result the Council has considered alternative forms of investment in order to diversify its risk.

Under the Markets in Financial Instruments (MiFID II) directive, local authorities are now classed as retail clients by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). This has implications for the range of investments that are available to local authorities. While bank and building society deposits are unaffected by the new regulations, some banks have determined that they will only take term deposits from professional clients, and a range of alternative forms of investments are only available to professional clients. However, if the local authority meets criteria set by the FCA, then it can apply to the financial institutions with which it wishes to invest to request that the institution concerned "opts up" the local authority to elective professional client status. The Pension Fund has made applications and been opted up to elective professional client status where required.

Those counterparties who have confirmed that they will treat the Council as a professional client under the MiFID II regulations are set out in Table C below.

### Table C – Counterparties that have "opted up" the Council to elective professional client status

Counterparty	Counterparty Type
Blackrock	Money Market Fund
Aberdeen Standard	Money Market Fund
Insight	Money Market Fund

## Appendix 1

In addition, brokers Tradition and Tullett Prebon, and our treasury advisors, Capita, have opted up the Council to professional client status. The majority of bank and building society deposits are unaffected by the MiFID II regulations. This list only includes those counterparties relevant to the Pension Fund's treasury management strategy and the management of cash. The Pension Fund has also opted up to elective professional client status with the external investment managers it uses as part of its wider investment strategy.

Subject to the MiFID II regulations, a variety of investment instruments are available to the Local Authority market. In addition to the notice accounts and fixed term deposits available from UK and overseas banks, it is also possible for the Pension Fund to invest through its treasury management strategy, for example, in UK Government Gilts, bond funds and property funds. These alternative instruments would either require the Pension Fund to tie up its cash for significantly longer periods, thus reducing liquidity, or would carry a risk of loss of capital if markets go down.

The Pension Fund has considered these alternatives but, given the wider investments of the Fund and the need for liquidity with respect to the Fund's cash, has concluded that these less liquid forms of investment should not form part of the Fund's treasury management strategy.

Security is achieved by the creation of an 'Approved List of Counterparties'. These are the banks, building societies, money market funds and other public bodies with whom we are prepared to deposit funds. In preparing the list, a number of criteria will be used not only to determine who is on the list, but also to set limits as to how much money can be placed with them, and how long that money can be placed for.

Banks are expected to have a high credit rating. The Council uses the ratings issued by all three of the major credit rating agencies, Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's, made available to the Council through its external Treasury Advisors. These are monitored daily.

The lowest rating published by any of the agencies is used to decide whether an institution is eligible for inclusion. Where the counterparty is only rated by two of the major ratings agencies the lowest rating published by either of the two is used. This rating also determines the maximum amount which can be loaned to an individual counterparty. Non-Eurozone overseas banks that meet the criteria are included from countries with a high Sovereign rating.

The time length of all deposits with financial institutions will be managed prudently, taking account of the latest advice from the Council's external advisors.

Money Market Funds have a portfolio comprised of short-term (less than one year) securities representing high-quality, liquid debt and monetary instruments. Following the financial crisis these funds were seen as higher risk and were therefore not used by the Council. However, the new regulatory environment around the concept of "bail-in" means that many money market funds are now regarded as a more secure form of investment than bank deposits, as they diversify their investments across a range of financial institutions to spread the risk, and will therefore be used where appropriate.

Money market funds must have an 'AAA' rating to be included on the counterparty list. They may be CNAV (Constant Net Asset Value), LVNAV (Low Volatility Net Asset Value) or VNAV (Variable Net Asset Value). Yields and prices will be monitored on a daily basis to ensure that there is minimal risk of loss of capital.

The Pension Fund will also make use of the US Dollar money market fund used by the Fund custodian. Cash will only be held in US Dollars where distributions are received from investments denominated in the currency and pending drawdown of commitments to US Dollar denominated funds.

## Appendix 1

Other public sector bodies are principally arms of Government, or other local authorities, and although not rated are deemed suitable counterparties because of their inherent low risk.

The 'Approved List of Counterparties' specifies individual institutions, and is formally reviewed at least monthly. Notification of credit rating downgrades (or other market intelligence) is acted upon immediately, resulting in any further lending being suspended.

Table D below summarises the current 'Approved List' criteria.

### Table D – Counterparty Approved List Summary

Counterparty Type	Fitch	Moody's	Standard & Poor's	Credit Limit
<b>Other UK Banks</b>				
not below	AA- & F1+	Aa3 & P-1	AA- & A-1+	£50 million
not below	A- & F1	A3 & P-1	A- & A-1	£30 million
<b>UK Building Societies</b>				
not below	AA- & F1+	Aa3 & P-1	AA- & A-1+	£50 million
not below	A- & F1	A3 & P-1	A- & A-1	£30 million
<b>Non-Eurozone Overseas Banks</b>				
Sovereign Rating of	AAA	Aaa	AAA	
and not below	AA- & F1+	Aa3 & P-1	AA- & A-1+	£50 million
and not below	A- & F1	A3 & P-1	A- & A-1	£30 million
<b>UK Public Bodies</b>				
<b>Central Government</b>				
– Debt Management Office				Unlimited
<b>Local Government</b>				
– County Councils				£10 million
– Metropolitan Authorities				£10 million
– London Boroughs				£10 million
– English Unitaries				£10 million
– Scottish Authorities				£10 million
– English Districts				£5 million
– Welsh Authorities				£5 million
<b>Fire &amp; Police Authorities</b>				
				£5 million
<b>Money Market Funds</b>				
	AAA	Aaa	AAA	£30 million

Where the short term rating of a counterparty is one notch below the stated criteria, but the counterparty meets the long term rating criteria, they may still be used subject to the advice of our external advisors (Capita) who will take into account a range of other metrics in arriving at their advice.

The credit ratings shown in the table for banks and building societies allow for greater sensitivity in recognising counterparty risk. Liquidity in investments is the second key factor in determining our strategy. Funds may be earmarked for specific purposes, and this will be a consideration in determining the period over which the investment will be made.

The counterparty limits shown in the table also apply at a banking group level. This ensures that the Pension Fund is not exposed to the risk of having maximum sums invested in multiple institutions owned by a group that encounters financial difficulties.

## Appendix 1

For the 2020/21 financial year it has been assumed that the average interest rate earned on lending to banks and building societies will be **0.60%**. This reflects an element of prudence, given the uncertainties around the impact of Brexit. It also reflects the lower levels of cash maintained by the Pension Fund and the requirement for liquidity, which reduces the opportunity to make longer term deposits. The target we have set for 2020/21 is thought to be one that is achievable.

### **Borrowing Strategy 2020/21 – 2022/23**

The Pension Fund will not normally need to undertake borrowing. There may, however, on an exceptional basis be a requirement for short term borrowing to aid cashflow. If short-term borrowing is required, this will be targeted at an average rate of **0.7%**.