

REPORT TO: PENSION SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE & PENSION BOARD – 7 DECEMBER 2020

REPORT ON: TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY 2020/2021 (MID-YEAR REVIEW)

REPORT BY: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

REPORT NO: 329-2020

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To review Tayside Pension Fund's Treasury Management activities for the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Sub-Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Treasury Management activity during the first half of the current financial year indicates that investment income from cash balances held to pay pension benefits will be approximately £16,000 for 2020/2021.

4 BACKGROUND

Tayside Pension Fund is administered by Dundee City Council in accordance with Section 24 of its Financial Regulations. Investment policy and decisions (including those relating to Treasury Management) are delegated to the Pension Sub-Committee of the Policy and Resources Committee. The Pension Board assist the Sub-Committee with securing compliance to the regulations.

The primary objective of the Tayside Pension Fund is to provide for scheme members' pension and lump sum benefits on their retirement or for their dependants on death before or after retirement, on a defined benefits basis. There is limited discretion to vary these benefits.

Dundee City Council in its administering role, defines its treasury management activities as:

"The management of the authority's investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks."

It regards the successful identification, monitoring and control of risk to be the prime criteria by which the effectiveness of its treasury management activities will be measured. Accordingly, the analysis and reporting of treasury management activities will focus on their risk implications for the organisation and any financial instruments entered into to manage these risks.

It acknowledges that effective treasury management will provide support towards the achievement of its business and services objectives. It is therefore committed to the principles of achieving value for money in treasury management and to employing suitable performance measurement techniques, within the context of effective risk management.

All treasury management activities must comply with the appropriate regulations, codes and guidance as stated in the Treasury Management Policy Statement of Dundee City Council.

At its meeting on 21st September 2020, the Pension sub-committee of the Policy and Resources Committee and Pension Board approved the Fund's Treasury Policy Statement (Report no. 121-2020, article V of minute refers) setting out the policies which would govern all lending transactions carried out by the Fund.

The Treasury Policy Statement requires that the Pension sub-committee of the Policy and Resources Committee and Pension Board will receive and consider the Treasury Management Strategy at the beginning of each new financial year.

On 21st March 2020, the Pension sub-committee of the Policy and Resources Committee and Pension Board approved the Fund's Treasury Management Strategy for 2020/2021 (Report no. 122-2020, article VI of minute refers).

This monitoring report covers the Treasury Management activity over the first six months of 2020/2021 financial year for cash held to pay pension benefits. Fund managers will also hold cash within custodian bank accounts, these amounts are excluded from this report.

5 ACTUAL LENDING

Variations in cash flow requirements mean that there will be surplus funds which will be invested for short periods (maximum of 364 days). Short term investments will be restricted only to those institutions identified in the Fund's Approved Counterparties list provided they have maintained a suitable credit rating.

An analysis of the lending position to 30 September 2020 shows:

Month	Lowest Amount Lent £m	Highest Amount Lent £m	End of month Amount Lent £m	Interest Rate Range %	
				Min	Max
April 2020	1.3	21.0	7.0	0.32	0.45
May 2020	2.5	7.0	2.5	0.31	0.41
June 2020	2.5	2.5	2.5	0.24	0.32
July 2020	2.5	10.0	10.0	0.13	0.23
August 2020	5.0	7.0	5.0	0.05	0.18
September 2020	3.0	5.0	3.0	0.08	0.10

All cash investments were compliant with Treasury Policy Statement.

6 INTEREST RATE OUTLOOK 2020/2021

The Council's treasury advisor, Link Asset Services, has provided the following interest rate forecast on 11th August 2020 -

Link Group Interest Rate View 11.8.20										
	Dec-20	Mar-21	Jun-21	Sep-21	Dec-21	Mar-22	Jun-22	Sep-22	Dec-22	Mar-23
Bank Rate View	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10
3 month average earnings	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	-	-	-	-	-
6 month average earnings	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	-	-	-	-	-
12 month average earnings	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.15	-	-	-	-	-
5yr PWLB Rate	1.90	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.10	2.10	2.10	2.10
10yr PWLB Rate	2.10	2.10	2.10	2.10	2.20	2.20	2.20	2.30	2.30	2.30
25yr PWLB Rate	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.60	2.60	2.60	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
50yr PWLB Rate	2.30	2.30	2.30	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.50

The coronavirus outbreak has done huge economic damage to the UK and economies around the world. After the Bank of England took emergency action in March to cut Bank Rate to first 0.25%, and then to 0.10%, it left Bank Rate unchanged at its meeting on 6th August (and the subsequent September meeting), although some forecasters had suggested that a cut into negative territory could happen. However, the Governor of the Bank of England has made it clear that he currently thinks that such a move would do more damage than good and that more quantitative easing is the favoured tool if further action becomes necessary. As shown in the forecast table above, no increase in Bank Rate is

expected within the forecast horizon ending on 31st March 2023 as economic recovery is expected to be only gradual and, therefore, prolonged.

7 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Management. There are no major issues other than the risks noted in the Risk Register.

8 CONSULTATIONS

The Chief Executive and Head of Democratic and Legal Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

9 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

GREGORY COLGAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

26 FEBRUARY 2021

Economic Update

- As expected, the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee kept Bank Rate unchanged on 6th August. It also kept unchanged the level of quantitative easing at £745bn. Its forecasts were optimistic in terms of three areas:
 - The fall in **GDP** in the first half of 2020 was revised from 28% to 23% (subsequently revised to -21.8%). This is still one of the largest falls in output of any developed nation. However, it is only to be expected as the UK economy is heavily skewed towards consumer-facing services – an area which was particularly vulnerable to being damaged by lockdown.
 - The peak in the **unemployment rate** was revised down from 9% in Q2 to 7½% by Q4 2020.
 - It forecast that there would be excess demand in the economy by Q3 2022 causing **CPI inflation** to rise above the 2% target in Q3 2022, (based on market interest rate expectations for a further loosening in policy). Nevertheless, even if the Bank were to leave policy unchanged, inflation was still projected to be above 2% in 2023.
- It also squashed any idea of using **negative interest rates**, at least in the next six months or so. It suggested that while negative rates can work in some circumstances, it would be “less effective as a tool to stimulate the economy” at this time when banks are worried about future loan losses. It also has “other instruments available”, including QE and the use of forward guidance.
- The MPC expected the £300bn of **quantitative easing** purchases announced between its March and June meetings to continue until the “turn of the year”. This implies that the pace of purchases will slow further to about £4bn a week, down from £14bn a week at the height of the crisis and £7bn more recently.
- In conclusion, this would indicate that the Bank could now just sit on its hands as the economy was recovering better than expected. However, the MPC acknowledged that the “medium-term projections were a less informative guide than usual” and the minutes had multiple references to **downside risks**, which were judged to persist both in the short and medium term. One has only to look at the way in which second waves of the virus are now impacting many countries including Britain, to see the dangers. However, rather than a national lockdown, as in March, any spikes in virus infections are now likely to be dealt with by localised measures and this should limit the amount of economic damage caused. In addition, Brexit uncertainties ahead of the year-end deadline are likely to be a drag on recovery. The wind down of the initial generous furlough scheme through to the end of October is another development that could cause the Bank to review the need for more support for the economy later in the year. Admittedly, the Chancellor announced in late September a second six month package from 1st November of government support for jobs whereby it will pay up to 22% of the costs of retaining an employee working a minimum of one third of their normal hours. There was further help for the self-employed, freelancers and the hospitality industry. However, this is a much less generous scheme than the furlough package and will inevitably mean there will be further job losses from the 11% of the workforce still on furlough in mid September.
- Overall, **the pace of recovery** is not expected to be in the form of a rapid V shape, but a more elongated and prolonged one after a sharp recovery in June through to August which left the economy 11.7% smaller than in February. The last three months of 2020 are now likely to show no growth as consumers will probably remain cautious in spending and uncertainty over the outcome of the UK/EU trade negotiations concluding at the end of the year will also be a headwind. If the Bank felt it did need to provide further support to recovery, then it is likely that the tool of choice would be more QE.
- There will be some **painful longer term adjustments** as e.g. office space and travel by planes, trains and buses may not recover to their previous level of use for several years, or possibly ever. There is also likely to be a reversal of globalisation as this crisis has shown up how vulnerable long-distance supply chains are. On the other hand, digital services is one area that has already seen huge growth.
- One key addition to **the Bank's forward guidance** was a new phrase in the policy statement, namely that “it does not intend to tighten monetary policy until there is clear evidence that significant progress is being made in eliminating spare capacity and achieving the 2% target sustainably”. That seems designed to say, in effect, that even if inflation rises to 2% in a couple of years' time, do not expect any action from the MPC to raise Bank Rate – until they can clearly see that level of inflation is going to be persistently above target if it takes no action to raise Bank Rate
- The **Financial Policy Committee** (FPC) report on 6th August revised down their expected credit losses for the banking sector to “somewhat less than £80bn”. It stated that in its assessment “banks have buffers of capital more than sufficient to absorb the losses that are likely to arise under the MPC's central projection”. The FPC stated that for real stress in the sector, the economic output would need to be twice as bad as the MPC's projection, with unemployment rising to above 15%.

- **US.** The incoming sets of data during the first week of August were almost universally stronger than expected. With the number of new daily coronavirus infections beginning to abate, recovery from its contraction this year of 10.2% should continue over the coming months and employment growth should also pick up again. However, growth will be dampened by continuing outbreaks of the virus in some states leading to fresh localised restrictions. At its end of August meeting, the Fed tweaked **its inflation target** from 2% to maintaining an average of 2% over an unspecified time period i.e. following periods when inflation has been running persistently below 2%, appropriate monetary policy will likely aim to achieve inflation moderately above 2% for some time. This change is aimed to provide more stimulus for economic growth and higher levels of employment and to avoid the danger of getting caught in a deflationary “trap” like Japan. It is to be noted that inflation has actually been under-shooting the 2% target significantly for most of the last decade so financial markets took note that higher levels of inflation are likely to be in the pipeline; long term bond yields duly rose after the meeting. The Fed also called on Congress to end its political disagreement over providing more support for the unemployed as there is a limit to what monetary policy can do compared to more directed central government fiscal policy. The FOMC’s updated economic and rate projections in mid-September showed that officials expect to leave the fed funds rate at near-zero until at least end-2023 and probably for another year or two beyond that. There is now some expectation that where the Fed has led in changing its inflation target, other major central banks will follow. The increase in tension over the last year between the US and China is likely to lead to a lack of momentum in progressing the initial positive moves to agree a phase one trade deal.
- **EU.** The economy was recovering well towards the end of Q2 after a sharp drop in GDP, (e.g. France 18.9%, Italy 17.6%). However, the second wave of the virus affecting some countries could cause a significant slowdown in the pace of recovery, especially in countries more dependent on tourism. The fiscal support package, eventually agreed by the EU after prolonged disagreement between various countries, is unlikely to provide significant support and quickly enough to make an appreciable difference in weaker countries. The ECB has been struggling to get inflation up to its 2% target and it is therefore expected that it will have to provide more monetary policy support through more quantitative easing purchases of bonds in the absence of sufficient fiscal support.
- **China.** After a concerted effort to get on top of the virus outbreak in Q1, economic recovery was strong in Q2 and has enabled it to recover all of the contraction in Q1. However, this was achieved by major central government funding of yet more infrastructure spending. After years of growth having been focused on this same area, any further spending in this area is likely to lead to increasingly weaker economic returns. This could, therefore, lead to a further misallocation of resources which will weigh on growth in future years.
- **Japan.** There are some concerns that a second wave of the virus is gaining momentum and could dampen economic recovery from its contraction of 8.5% in GDP. It has been struggling to get out of a deflation trap for many years and to stimulate consistent significant GDP growth and to get inflation up to its target of 2%, despite huge monetary and fiscal stimulus. It is also making little progress on fundamental reform of the economy. The resignation of Prime Minister Abe is not expected to result in any significant change in economic policy.
- **World growth.** Latin America and India are currently hotspots for virus infections. World growth will be in recession this year. Inflation is unlikely to be a problem for some years due to the creation of excess production capacity and depressed demand caused by the coronavirus crisis.