

Investment Strategy 2025/26

Contents

- 1.0 Introduction**
- 2.0 Treasury Management Investments**
 - 2.1 Contribution
 - 2.2 Further Details
- 3.0 Service Investments: Loans**
 - 3.1 Contribution
 - 3.2 Security
 - 3.3 Risk Assessment
- 4.0 Service Investments: Shares**
 - 4.1 Contribution
 - 4.2 Security
 - 4.3 Risk Assessment
 - 4.4 Liquidity
 - 4.5 Non-Specified Investments
- 5.0 Commercial Investments: Property**
 - 5.1 Contribution
 - 5.2 Security
 - 5.3 Risk Assessment
 - 5.4 Liquidity
- 6.0 Loan Commitments and Financial Guarantees**
- 7.0 Proportionality**
- 8.0 Borrowing In Advance of Need**
- 9.0 Capacity, Skills and Culture**
 - 9.1 Elected Members and Statutory Officers
 - 9.2 Commercial Deals
 - 9.3 Corporate Governance
- 10.0 Investment Indicators**
 - 10.1 Total Risk Exposure
 - 10.2 How Investments are Funded
 - 10.3 Rate of Return Received
 - 10.4 Commercial Investment Indicators

Annex A Commercial Investment Property Listing

1.0 Introduction

The Council invests its money for three broad purposes:

- because it has surplus cash as a result of its day-to-day activities, for example when income is received in advance of expenditure (known as **treasury management investments**),
- to support local public services by lending to or buying shares in other organisations (**service investments**), and
- to earn investment income (known as **commercial investments** where this is the main purpose).

This investment strategy meets the requirements of statutory guidance issued by the government in December 2021, and focuses on the second and third of these categories.

2.0 Treasury Management Investments

The Council typically receives its income in cash (e.g., from taxes, grants and fees) before it pays for its expenditure in cash (e.g., through payroll, invoices and benefits). It also holds reserves for future expenditure and collects local taxes on behalf of other local authorities and central government. These activities, plus the timing of borrowing decisions, lead to a cash surplus which is invested in accordance with guidance from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The balance of treasury management investments is expected to fluctuate between £53.0m and £66.0m during the 2025/26 financial year.

2.1 Contribution

The contribution that these investments make to the objectives of the Council is to support effective treasury management activities.

2.2 Further Details

Full details of the Council's policies and its plan for 2025/26 for treasury management investments are covered in a separate document, the Treasury Management Strategy.

3.0 Service Investments: Loans

3.1 Contribution

The Council has previously made loans to local organisations to support local public services and stimulate local economic growth.

Including the Urban and Civic Loan – A loan which was provided to Urban and Civic to fast forward the construction of Incubator II on the Enterprise Zone at Alconbury.

3.2 Security

The main risk when making service loans is that the borrower will be unable to repay the principal loaned and/or the interest due. In order to limit this risk, and ensure that total exposure to service loans remains proportionate to the size of the Council, upper limits on the outstanding loans to each category of borrower have been set as follows:

Borrower	31/03/2024 Actual £000s	31/12/2024 Actual £000s	2025/26 Limit £000s
Urban and Civic Ltd	1,984	1,984	Limit in total not across categories
Somersham Parish Council	4	4	
Improvement Loans (DFGs) ⁽¹⁾	300	248	
Employee Loans	1	0	
Rental Deposits	28	25	
Total	2,317	2,261	15,000

⁽¹⁾ These are small loans to householders.

Accounting standards require the Council to set aside loss allowance for loans, reflecting the likelihood of non-payment. However, the Council makes every reasonable effort to collect the full sum loaned and has appropriate credit control arrangements in place to recover overdue repayments.

3.3 Risk assessment

The Council assesses the risk of loss before entering into and whilst holding service loans by:

1. A robust acquisition due diligence process and subsequent approvals
2. Liability management (reviews of debt levels and terms)
3. Counterparty risk (financial exposures, potential defaults, changing business plans, credit rating)
4. Market factors (with periodic advice from appropriate professionals)
5. State Aid considerations
6. Use of professional treasury and financial advisors

The Dun and Bradstreet Credit Reports are used to provide credit reports on the borrowers. The reports provide the following:

- Risk Assessment
- Trade Payments
- Legal Events

- Corporate Linkage
- Company Profile
- Financials
- Registry Info

The credit reports have a tracking feature which notifies the Council regarding any updates on a borrower’s credit. Other sources such as Companies House and news websites provide the Council with extra information to assess and monitor risk.

4.0 Service Investments: Shares

4.1 Contribution

The Council will invest in the shares of its subsidiaries, to support local public services and stimulate local economic growth. The Council will be the sole shareholder of its subsidiary HDC Ventures Limited. The purpose of HDC Ventures is to enable the Council to participate in commercial trading activities.

4.2 Security

One of the risks of investing in shares is that they fall in value meaning that the initial outlay may not be recovered. In order to limit this risk, upper limits on the sum invested in each category of shares have been set as follows.

Shares Held	31/12/2024 Invested £000s	31/12/2024 Gain/Loss £000s	31/12/2024 Value £000s	2024/25 Limit £000s
Subsidiary	0	0	0	1,000
Total	0	0	0	1,000

4.3 Risk assessment

The risk will be assessed as the company matures and contracts are developed.

4.4 Liquidity

Each investment will be considered by Cabinet and the maximum period set will be on a case-by-case basis.

4.5 Non-specified Investments

The Council has limited the amount that can be invested in non-specified investments, this limit is £10m. The investments are categorised as non-specified because the term of the investment is or likely to be longer than 1 year. There is more detail in the Treasury Management Strategy (TMP1).

5.0 Commercial Investments: Property

MHCLG defines property to be an investment if it is held primarily or partially to generate a surplus.

5.1 Contribution

The Council faces considerable financial challenges over the medium term. To achieve financial sustainability, the Commercial Investment Strategy was approved. The Council invests in local and regional UK commercial property with the intention of income generation which will help fund public services. For fulling listing of properties see Annex A.

Commercial Investment Property (Summary)	31/03/2023 Value £000s	Gain/(Loss) £000s	31/03/2024 Value £000s
Legacy Properties;			
Huntingdon	21,599	(7)	21,592
St Ives	1,415	29	1,444
St Neots	7,314	(36)	7,278
	30,328	(14)	30,314
CIS Properties			
2 Stonehill	2,481	(205)	2,276
80 Wilbury Way	1,873	35	1,908
Shawlands Retail Park	6,055	(273)	5,783
1400 & 1500 Parkway	4,037	0	4,037
Rowley Arts Centre, St Neots	6,641	(97)	6,544
Little End Road, St Neots	3,321	(33)	3,288
Tri-link, Wakefield	14,748	(62)	14,686
Alms Close	1,447	2	1,449
	40,603	(632)	39,971
Total	70,931	(646)	70,285

5.2 Security

In accordance with government guidance, the Council considers a property investment to be secure if in the long-term its accounting valuation is generally at or higher than its purchase price.

A fair value assessment of the Council's investment property portfolio is made on an annual basis.

5.3 Risk assessment

The Council assesses the risk of loss before entering into and whilst holding property investments. The strategic objectives of the Commercial Investment Strategy are designed to mitigate risk by:

- Having the fundamental aim of an income rather than capital return (although the latter is part of the strategy).
- Adopting a portfolio approach so as to avoid concentration of risk in any one property, tenant or risk type.

In addition, CIS risk will be managed having regard to the following factors:

1. A robust acquisition due diligence process and subsequent approvals
2. Asset management plans and on-going reviews
3. Liability management (reviews of debt levels and terms)
4. Tenants' assessments (financial exposures, potential defaults, changing business plans, credit rating)
5. Portfolio factors including occupancy levels, operating costs.
6. Delivery partners (suitability, performance levels and financial stability)
7. Market factors (with periodic advice from appropriate professionals)
8. State Aid considerations
9. Professional advisors

External advisors are used when appropriate e.g., to undertake independent valuations prior to acquisition, asset valuation or when there is a lack of expertise in-house regarding an industry.

The Dun and Bradstreet Credit Reporter are used to provide credit reports on the tenants. The reports provide the following:

- Risk Assessment
- Trade Payments
- Legal Events
- Corporate Linkage
- Company Profile
- Financials
- Registry Info

The credit reports have a tracking feature which notifies the Council regarding any updates on a tenant's credit. Other sources such as Companies House and news sites provide the Council with extra information to assess and monitor risk.

5.4 Liquidity

Compared with other investment types, property is relatively difficult to sell and convert to cash at very short notice. To ensure that the invested funds can be accessed or liquidated, the Council will review investments regularly to ensure rental income is maximised (through rent reviews and lease renewals) and undertake asset management (re-letting, repairs, improvements etc) to ensure any proceeds from sale are maximised if assets are liquidated. Regular review of the property investment market will identify potential changes in market conditions and identify optimum opportunities to sell assets.

6.0 Loan Commitments and Financial Guarantees

Although not strictly counted as investments, since no money has exchanged hands yet, loan commitments and financial guarantees carry similar risks to the Council. At this moment in time the Council does not carry any financial guarantees.

7.0 Proportionality

The Council is dependent on surplus generating investment activity to achieve a balanced revenue budget. The table below shows the extent to which the expenditure planned to meet the service delivery objectives and/or place making role of the Council is dependent on achieving the expected net surplus from investments over the lifecycle of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Should it fail to achieve the expected net surplus, the Council's contingency plans for continuing to provide these services, are to use reserves where necessary to offset any negative variances in the final outturn. Unallocated general fund balances and non-earmarked reserves can be used in case of a downturn in investment income to meet a detrimental effect.

Proportionality of Investments	2023/24 Actual £000s	2024/25 Forecast £000s	2025/26 Budget £000s	2026/27 Budget £000s	2027/28 Budget £000s
Gross service expenditure	80,918	86,118	84,349	81,950	81,120
Net Investment income	2,771	3,046	3,620	3,698	3,747
Proportion	3%	4%	4%	5%	5%

8.0 Borrowing in Advance of Need

Government guidance is that Councils must not borrow more than or in advance of their needs purely in order to surplus from the investment of the extra sums borrowed.

The Council has previously borrowed to invest in commercial property however the Council now expects not to borrow to invest in property in the future purely for yield.

9.0 Capacity, Skills and Culture

9.1 Elected members and statutory officers

Through formal Treasury and Capital Management Group meetings, members are provided with updates on:

- The property investment market.
- Performance of current property assets – income growth, capital values, voids and debt.
- Review of investment opportunities investigated, if any.

More informal and regular updates are provided on the progress of individual key transactions, opportunities and market changes.

Key staff are appropriately professionally qualified, maintain annual CPD and maintain professional networks with other investors and advisors.

9.2 Commercial Deals

The Commercial Estates and Finance teams work closely to ensure the core principles of the prudential framework are maintained.

9.3 Corporate governance

The Commercial Investment Strategy has published delegated Council levels and process for investment decisions, these are adhered to.

The Treasury and Capital Management Group will be consulted early on any investment opportunities and provided with regular progress reports in addition to formal approval reports and a further reports on due diligence findings prior to formal commitments. A report to Cabinet in relation to the purchase is made before the deal is finally completed.

10.0 Investment Indicators

The Council has set the following quantitative indicators to allow elected members and the public to assess the Council's total risk exposure as a result of its investment decisions.

10.1 Total risk exposure

The first indicator shows the Council's total exposure to potential investment losses. This includes amounts the Council is contractually committed to lend but have yet to be drawn down and guarantees the Council has issued over third-party loans.

Investment Exposure	31/03/2024 Actual £000s	31/03/2025 Forecast £000s	31/03/2026 Forecast £000s
Treasury management investments	62,353	58,000	48,000
Service investments: Loans	1,988	1,986	1,984
Service investments: Shares	0	0	100
Property Fund	4,000	4,000	4,000
Commercial investments: Property	70,285	70,285	70,285
Total Investments	138,626	134,271	124,369
Commitments to lend	0	0	0
Guarantees issued on loans	0	0	0
Total Exposure	138,626	134,271	124,369

10.2 How investments are funded

Government guidance is that these indicators should include how investments are funded. Since the Council does not normally associate particular assets with particular liabilities, this guidance is difficult to comply with. However, the following investments could be described as being funded by borrowing. The remainder of the Council's investments are funded by usable reserves and income received in advance of expenditure.

Investments Funded by Borrowing	31/03/2024 Actual £000s	31/03/2024 Forecast £000s	31/03/2024 Forecast £000s
Treasury management investments	0	0	0
Service investments: Loans	0	0	0
Service investments: Shares	0	0	0
Commercial investments: Property	24,255	24,255	24,255
Total Funded by Borrowing	24,255	24,255	24,255

10.3 Rate of return received

This indicator compares the investment income received to the purchase price of the investment. Note that due to the complex local government accounting framework, not all recorded gains and losses affect the revenue account in the year they are incurred.

Investment Yields	2023/24 Actual %	2024/25 Forecast %	2025/26 Forecast %
Treasury management investments	5.2	3.0	3.0
Property Fund	4.6	4.5	4.5
Service investments: Loans	7.3	8.2	6.0
Commercial investments: Property ⁽¹⁾	5.6	6.1	7.2
All Investments (simple average)	5.7	4.1	4.4

(1) Based on gross income of Q2 2023/24 forecast £4.29m and 2025/26 budget £5.03m and valuation as at 31/03/2024.

10.4 Commercial Investment Indicators

Commercial Investment Indicators	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Forecast	2025/26 Forecast
Interest Cover Ratio	1.6	1.7	1.7
Loan to Value Ratio	103.6%	104.9%	104.9%
Gross Rent Multiplier	14.0	12.9	14.0

Interest cover ratio is used to measure how readily a business can pay the interest due on loans. The higher the number, the increased likelihood that the interest will be paid. The increase is due to the assumption that Fareham and other vacant units like those at Sudbury and Rowley Centre will be rented out in 2025/26. Loan to value is the value of the loan to the value of the property. If the percentage is over 100% that means the value of loan is more than the value of the property. Gross rent multiplier

is the value of a property compared to its annual rental income the lower the number the more attractive the investment is.

Commercial Investment Property Listing

Annex A

Commercial Investment Property	31/03/2023 Value £000s	Gain/(Loss) £000s	31/03/2024 Value £000s
Legacy Properties;			
Huntingdon			
Cinema and Shops	540	12	552
Oak Drive Shops	977	134	1,111
Mayfield Road Shops	750	(8)	742
Pub Site Sapley Square	193	0	193
Oak Tree Health Centre	11,786	0	11786
Clifton Road Industrial Units	1,825	0	1825
Alms Close Industrial Units	1,453	102	1,555
Land Clifton Road	144	0	144
Land St Peters Road	2,930	0	2,930
Land Redwongs Way	380	5	385
Phoenix Court Units	621	(252)	369
	21,599	(7)	21,592
St Ives			
Library Row Shops	532	29	561
Enterprise Centre	883	0	883
	1,415	29	1,444
St Neots			
Queens Gardens Shops	430	78	508
Naseby Gardens Shops	273	0	273
Leys Road Shops	117	9	126
Cambridge Street Shops	140	(8)	132
Cambridge Street Warehouse and Yard	719	0	719
Levellers Lane Industrial Units	5,220	(115)	5,105
Caravan Site Rush Meadows	257	0	257
Café Riverside Park	158	0	158
	7,314	(36)	7,278
Total	30,328	(14)	30,314
CIS Properties			
2 Stonehill, Huntingdon	2,481	(205)	2,276
80 Wilbury Way, Hitchin	1,873	35	1,908
Shawlands Retail Park, Sudbury	6,055	(273)	5,782
1400 & 1500 Parkway, Fareham	4,037	0	4,037
Rowley Arts Centre, St Neots	6,641	(97)	6,544
Little End Road, St Neots	3,321	(33)	3,288
Tri-link, Wakefield	14,748	(62)	14,686
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Total	70,931	(646)	70,285