

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Audit and Governance Committee	Date:	16 March 2015
	Cabinet		25 March 2015
Subject:	Treasury Management Update – Quarter 3 Report 2014/15		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	1. Prudential and Treasury Indicators		
	2. Treasury Management Investments		
	3. Economic Outlook		
	4. Detailed interest rate forecasts		

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 One of the requirements of the revised Code of Practice for Treasury Management in November 2011 recommends that members should be updated on treasury management activities at least twice a year, but preferably quarterly. This report covers Quarter 3, 1st October 2014 to 31st December 2014.
- 1.2 This report will highlight issues specific to the Council and also highlight the overall economic outlook as provided by the Councils treasury advisors Capita Asset Services.
- 1.3 The body of the report provides an overview of the Councils performance in Quarter 3 ;
 - **Appendix 1** highlights the key performance indicators in line with the Councils Treasury Management Strategy.
 - **Appendix 2** is the investments held at the end of quarter 3.
 - **Appendix 3** is an economic summary provided by the Councils treasury advisors.
 - **Appendix 4** is a detailed commentary on interest rate forecasts

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Audit and Governance Committee is asked, subject to any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet, to note the contents of the report.

- 2.2 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that the report be noted and note that no changes are required to the prudential indicators.

3.0 Annual Investment Strategy

The Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) for 2014/15, which includes the Annual Investment Strategy, was approved by the Council on 5th March 2014. It sets out the Council's investment priorities as being:

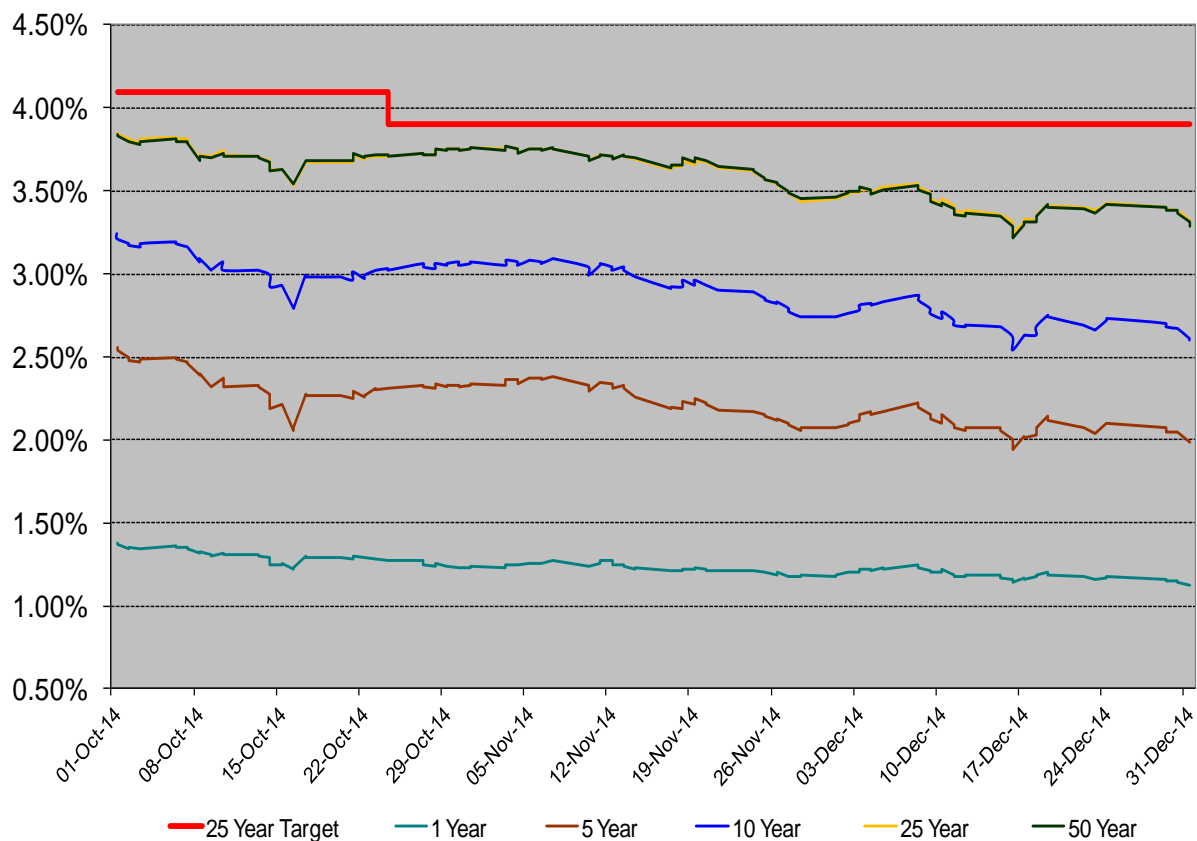
- Security of capital;
- Liquidity; and
- Yield

- 3.1 The Council will also aim to achieve the optimum return (yield) on investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity. In the current economic climate it is considered appropriate to keep investments short term to cover cashflow needs, but also to seek out value available in periods up to 12 months, with highly credit rated financial institutions, using our suggested creditworthiness approach, including sovereign credit rating and Credit Default Swap (CDS) overlay information.
- 3.2 Investment rates available in the market have been broadly stable during the quarter and have continued at historically low levels as a result of the Funding for Lending Scheme. The average level of funds available for investment purposes during the quarter was £7.02m. These funds were available on a temporary basis, and the level of funds available was mainly dependent on the timing of precept payments, receipt of grants and progress on the Capital Programme.

4.0 New Borrowing

- 4.1 The 25 year PWLB (Public Works Loan Board) target (certainty) rate for new long term borrowing for the quarter fell from 4.10% to 3.9% in late October.
- 4.2 No long term borrowing was undertaken during the quarter.
- 4.3 PWLB certainty rates, quarter ended 31st December 2014

	1 Year	5 Year	10 Year	25 Year	50 Year
Low	1.12%	1.94%	2.54%	3.24%	3.22%
Date	31/12/2014	16/12/2014	16/12/2014	16/12/2014	16/12/2014
High	1.38%	2.56%	3.24%	3.85%	3.84%
Date	01/10/2014	01/10/2014	01/10/2014	01/10/2014	01/10/2014
Average	1.24%	2.23%	2.91%	3.60%	3.60%



4.4 Borrowing in advance of need.

The Council has not borrowed in advance of need during the quarter ended 31st December 2014 and has not borrowed in advance in all of 2014/15.

5.0 Debt Rescheduling

5.1 Debt rescheduling opportunities have been limited in the current economic climate and following the increase in the margin added to gilt yields which has impacted PWLB new borrowing rates since October 2010. During the quarter ended 31st December 2014, no debt rescheduling was undertaken.

6.0 Compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits

6.1 It is a statutory duty for the Council to determine and keep under review the affordable borrowing limits. The Council's approved Treasury and Prudential Indicators (affordability limits) are included in the approved TMSS.

6.2 During the financial year to date the Council has operated within the treasury and prudential indicators set out in the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement and in compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Practices. The prudential and treasury Indicators are shown in appendix 1.

7.0 Other

- 7.1 During 2014/15 the Council continued to maintain an under-borrowing position.
- 7.2 This under-borrowing reflects that the Council resources such as reserves and provisions will have reduced debt rather than be externally invested. This strategy is sensible, at this point in time, for two reasons. Firstly, there is no differential between the marginal borrowing rate and investment rate so there is nothing to be gained by investing Council resources externally. Secondly, by using the resources to reduce debt the Council will reduce exposure to investment counterparty risk.
- 7.3 The Council will continue to monitor its approach to under borrowing in light of market movement and future events. In quarter four, the Council will complete the stock transfer of assets to Gloucester City Homes. In exchange the Government will write off a proportion of the Council debt. On transfer the Council debt landscape will alter, we will continue to monitor our position in light of the changes.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 Contained in the report
(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 There are no legal implications from this report
(Legal Services have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

10.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 10.1 There are no specific risks or opportunities as a result of this report

11.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

- 11.1 A PIA screening assessment has been undertaken and the impact is neutral. A full PIA is not required.

12.0 Other Corporate Implications Community Safety

- 12.1 None

Sustainability

- 12.2 None

Staffing & Trade Union

- 12.3 None

APPENDIX 1

Prudential and Treasury Indicators as at 31st December 2014

Treasury Indicators	2014/15 Strategy	Quarter 3 Actual
Authorised limit for external debt	£86M	£76.45m
Operational boundary for external debt	£85M	£76.45m
Gross external debt	£86M	£76.45m
Net borrowing	£86m	£75.45m
Maturity structure of fixed rate borrowing - upper and lower limits		
Under 12 months	0% - 50%	49.20%
12 months to 2 years	0% - 50%	8.61%
2 years to 5 years	0% - 50%	8.61%
5 years to 10 years	0% - 50%	5.38%
10 years to 20 years *1	0% - 80%	6.67%
20 years to 30 years *1	0% - 80%	21.53%
30 years to 40 years *1	0% - 80%	0%
40 years to 50 years *1	0% - 80%	0%
Upper limit of fixed interest rates based on net debt *2	100%	60.76%
Upper limit of variable interest rates based on net debt *2	100%	39.24%
Upper limit for principal sums invested for over 364 days	Nil	Nil

Prudential Indicators	2014/15 Strategy	Quarter 3 Actual
Capital expenditure * <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HRA GF 	£7.100m £6.882m	£4.476m £7.729m

Investment Portfolio

Investments held as at 31st December 2014 compared to our counterparty list:

Name	£'000	Date of Redemption	Counterparty Limits
Natwest	50	N/A (Call A/cs)	£5M
Goldman Sachs	1,000	N/A (Call A/cs)	£5M

1. Economic Background

- After strong UK GDP(Gross Domestic Product) growth in 2013 at an annual rate 2.7%, and then in 2014 0.7% in Q1, 0.9% in Q2 2014 (annual rate 3.2% in Q2), Q3 has seen growth fall back to 0.7% in the quarter and to an annual rate of 2.6%. It therefore appears that growth has eased since the surge in the first half of 2014 leading to a downward revision of forecasts for 2015 and 2016, albeit that growth will still remain strong by UK standards. For this recovery to become more balanced and sustainable in the longer term, the recovery needs to move away from dependence on consumer expenditure and the housing market to exporting, and particularly of manufactured goods, both of which need to substantially improve on their recent lacklustre performance. This overall strong growth has resulted in unemployment falling much faster than expected. The MPC (Monetary Policy Committee) is now focusing on how quickly slack in the economy is being used up. It is also particularly concerned that the squeeze on the disposable incomes of consumers should be reversed by wage inflation rising back significantly above the level of inflation in order to ensure that the recovery will be sustainable. There also needs to be a major improvement in labour productivity, which has languished at dismal levels since 2008, to support increases in pay rates. Unemployment is expected to keep on its downward trend and this is likely to eventually feed through into a return to significant increases in wage growth at some point during the next three years. However, just how much those future increases in pay rates will counteract the depressive effect of increases in Bank Rate on consumer confidence, the rate of growth in consumer expenditure and the buoyancy of the housing market, are areas that will need to be kept under regular review.
- Also encouraging has been the sharp fall in inflation (CPI) Consumer Price Index, reaching 1.0% in November, the lowest rate since September 2002. Forward indications are that inflation is likely to remain around or under 1% for the best part of a year. The return to strong growth has helped lower forecasts for the increase in Government debt over the last year but monthly public sector deficit figures during 2014 have disappointed until November. The autumn statement, therefore, had to revise the speed with which the deficit is forecast to be eliminated.
- The U.S. Federal Reserve ended its monthly asset purchases in October 2014. GDP growth rates (annualised) for Q2 and Q3 of 4.6% and 5.0% have been stunning and hold great promise for strong growth going forward. It is therefore confidently predicted that the first increase in the Fed. rate will occur by the middle of 2015.
- The Eurozone is facing an increasing threat from deflation. In November the inflation rate fell to 0.3%. However, this is an average for all EZ countries and includes some countries with negative rates of inflation. Accordingly, the ECB (European Central Bank) did take some rather limited action in June and September to loosen monetary policy in order to promote growth and is currently expected to embark on quantitative easing early in 2015 to counter this threat of deflation and to stimulate growth.

2. Interest Rate Forecast

The Council's treasury advisor, Capita Asset Services, has provided the following forecast:

	Mar-15	Jun-15	Sep-15	Dec-15	Mar-16	Jun-16	Sep-16	Dec-16	Mar-17	Jun-17	Sep-17	Dec-17	Mar-18
Bank rate	0.50%	0.50%	0.50%	0.75%	0.75%	1.00%	1.00%	1.25%	1.25%	1.50%	1.75%	1.75%	2.00%
5yr PWLB rate	2.20%	2.20%	2.30%	2.50%	2.60%	2.80%	2.90%	3.00%	3.20%	3.30%	3.40%	3.50%	3.60%
10yr PWLB rate	2.80%	2.80%	3.00%	3.20%	3.30%	3.50%	3.60%	3.70%	3.80%	3.90%	4.00%	4.10%	4.20%
25yr PWLB rate	3.40%	3.50%	3.70%	3.80%	4.00%	4.20%	4.30%	4.40%	4.50%	4.60%	4.70%	4.70%	4.80%
50yr PWLB rate	3.40%	3.50%	3.70%	3.80%	4.00%	4.20%	4.30%	4.40%	4.50%	4.60%	4.70%	4.70%	4.80%

Capita Asset Services undertook a review of its interest rate forecasts on 5 January 2015 after a proliferation of fears in financial markets around the plunge in the price of oil had caused a flight from equities into bonds and from exposure to the debt and equities of emerging market oil producing countries to safe havens in western countries. These flows were compounded by further fears that Greece could be heading towards an exit from the Euro after the general election on January 25 and financial flows generated by the increasing likelihood that the ECB would soon be starting on full blown quantitative easing (QE) purchase of Eurozone government debt. In addition, there has been a sharp increase in confidence that the US will start increasing the Fed. rate by the middle of 2015 due to the stunning surge in GDP growth in quarters 2 and 3 of 2014. This indicated that the US is now headed towards making a full recovery from the financial crisis of 2008.

The result of the combination of the above factors is that we have seen bond yields plunging to phenomenally low levels, especially in long term yields. These falls are unsustainable in the longer term but just how quickly these falls will unwind is hard to predict. In addition, positive or negative developments on the world political scene could have a major impact in either keeping yields low or prompting them to recover back up again. We also have a UK general election coming up in May 2015; it is very hard to predict what its likely result will be and the consequent impact on the UK economy, and how financial markets will react to those developments.

This latest forecast includes a move in the timing of the first increase in Bank Rate from quarter 2 of 2015 to quarter 4 of 2015 as a result of the sharp fall in inflation due to the fall in the price of oil and the cooling of the rate of GDP growth in the UK, albeit, that growth will remain strong by UK standards, but not as strong as was previously forecast. The Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, has repeatedly stated that increases in Bank Rate will be slow and gradual. The MPC is concerned about the impact of increases on many heavily indebted consumers, especially when average disposable income is only currently increasing marginally as a result of wage inflation now running slightly above the depressed rate of CPI inflation, though some consumers will not have seen that benefit come through for them. In addition, whatever party or coalition wins power in the next general election, will be faced with having to implement further major cuts in expenditure and / or increases in taxation in order to eradicate the annual public sector net borrowing deficit.

DETAILED COMMENTARY ON INTEREST RATES FORECASTS

- Change in market sentiment and outlook
- The plunge in the price of oil has been the major surprise of the last three months. This will reduce inflation and stimulate the economies of oil importing countries.
- There is a downside to the plunge in oil prices in terms of a sharp increase in the risk of emerging country debt default and emerging country oil producing corporate defaults. This could have a knock on effect on western banks who have lent to these areas and to hedge, pension and investment funds which have been wrong footed by holding debt or equities in these areas.
- Greece: the anti EU and anti austerity party Syriza is likely to be the strongest party in the January 25 general election. However, the Eurozone has put in place sufficient firewalls that a Greek exit would have little direct impact on the rest of the EZ and the Euro. The indirect effect is more problematic to quantify as such an election result would be likely to strengthen support for anti EU and anti austerity political parties in many EU countries. Italy is the greatest risk as it has the third biggest debt mountain in the world and has shown little progress so far in undertaking fundamental reforms to improve the competitiveness of the economy.
- UK GDP growth forecasts have recently been more subdued although growth will still remain strong, but not as strong as previously expected.
- The political risks around the UK general election in May 2015 have increased with the likely result now being very hard to predict.
- A combination of the above factors has caused us to put back the start of increases in Bank Rate from Q2 2015 to Q4 with knock on delays on increases in following years.
- We have also had to bring our short term PWLB forecasts down to reflect current abnormally low levels which are unsustainably low. However, how quickly or slowly they will unwind is very hard to predict.

The one area of resoundingly good news over the last three months has been that the American economy is well on track to making a full recovery from the financial crash. GDP growth rates (annualised) for Q2 and Q3 of 4.6% and 5.0% have been stunning and hold great promise for strong growth going forward and further falls in unemployment. It is therefore confidently predicted that the Fed. will start on the first increase in the Fed. rate by the middle of 2015. In contrast, the surge in UK growth during 2014 appears to have diminished (Q1 0.7%, Q2 0.9%, Q3 0.7%) and the year on year rate has subsided from 3.2% in Q2 to 2.6% in Q3. Forward indicators are also revealing some cooling of prospects going forward, though lets still keep hold of the fact that this remains strong growth by UK standards, but not as strong as previously forecast.

In consequence, it is now the US which is most likely to be putting central rates up before the UK. The prospects for the UK are somewhat mixed. The hoped for rebalancing of the economy towards greater reliance on exports is not happening and the UK faces an uphill struggle with its main trading partner, the EU now expected to resort to full blown quantitative easing (QE) early in 2015 in order to stimulate the economy to rise above near stagnation. However, UK consumer confidence is still buoyant although the housing market looks as if it is also cooling with house price rises and new mortgage approvals both subsiding. UK consumers are obviously benefiting from the fall in the oil price with overall inflation falling to 1.0% in

November, the lowest rate since September 2002. It is also forecast to stay around the same level for the best part of a year.

Nevertheless, the beneficial effect of the fall in oil prices will fall out after twelve months, so inflation will rise as a result after then, although it is still expected to remain at or near 2%. What this does mean, however, is that average wage increases are likely to exceed inflation for the coming year and so increase the disposable income of consumers. This, in turn, will underpin domestic demand and support GDP growth. Looking further forward, whichever political party or coalition comes to power after the general election in May 2015 will still have to decide what balance of government spending cuts and / or tax increases will be needed to bring the public sector net borrowing deficit down. This will likely mean an erosion of overall consumer disposable income although further falls in unemployment will counteract some of this effect. The Bank of England therefore faces an incredibly delicate task of balancing the pros and cons of when to start on increasing Bank Rate, especially knowing that many consumers are still heavily indebted and very vulnerable to increases in borrowing rates.

A further factor affecting financial markets and the confidence of UK producers is the increase in political risk. The UK faces a general election where the outcome looks very hard to predict as to the knock on effects on the UK economy.

As for the MPC, their last minutes appeared to show a consolidation of support for holding off on increasing Bank Rate due to the fall in inflation caused by the fall in oil prices. They will also be focusing in 2015 on how quickly wage inflation increases and said it needed to pick up further in order to meet the 2% inflation target. This resulted in financial market investors pushing back their bets on the timing of the next interest rate hike to late 2015 / early 2016. Our view has also shifted in this forecast to a first increase in Q4 2015 rather than Q2 2015.

CAPITA ASSET SERVICES FORWARD VIEW

Economic forecasting remains difficult with so many external influences weighing on the UK. Our Bank Rate forecasts, (and also MPC decisions), will be liable to further amendment depending on how economic data transpires over 2015. Forecasts for average earnings beyond the three year time horizon will be heavily dependent on economic and political developments. Major volatility in bond yields is likely to endure as investor fears and confidence ebb and flow between favouring more risky assets i.e. equities, or the safe haven of bonds.

The overall longer run trend is for gilt yields and PWLB rates to rise, due to the high volume of gilt issuance in the UK, and of bond issuance in other major western countries. Increasing investor confidence in eventual world economic recovery is also likely to compound this effect as recovery will encourage investors to switch from bonds to equities.

The overall balance of risks to economic recovery in the UK is currently evenly balanced. Only time will tell just how long this current period of strong economic growth will last; it also remains exposed to vulnerabilities in a number of key areas.

The interest rate forecasts in this report are based on an initial assumption that there will not be a major resurgence of the EZ debt crisis. There is an increased risk that Greece could end up leaving the Euro but if this happens, the EZ now has sufficient fire walls in place that a Greek exit would have little immediate direct impact on the rest of the EZ and the Euro. It is therefore expected that there will be an overall managed, albeit painful and tortuous, resolution of any EZ

debt crisis that may occur where EZ institutions and governments eventually do what is necessary - but only when all else has been tried and failed. Under this assumed scenario, growth within the EZ will be weak at best for the next couple of years with some EZ countries experiencing low or negative growth, which will, over that time period, see an increase in total government debt to GDP ratios. There is a significant danger that these ratios could rise to the point where markets lose confidence in the financial viability of one, or more, countries, especially if growth disappoints and / or efforts to reduce government deficits fail to deliver the necessary reductions. However, it is impossible to forecast whether any individual country will lose such confidence, or when, and so precipitate a sharp resurgence of the EZ debt crisis. While the ECB has adequate resources to manage a debt crisis in a small EZ country, if one, or more, of the larger countries were to experience a major crisis of market confidence, this would present a serious challenge to the ECB and to EZ politicians.

Downside risks currently include:

- The situation over Ukraine poses a major threat to EZ and world growth if it was to deteriorate into economic warfare between the West and Russia where Russia resorted to using its control over gas supplies to Europe.
- Fears generated by the potential impact of Ebola around the world.
- UK strong economic growth is currently mainly dependent on consumer spending and the potentially unsustainable boom in the housing market. The boost from these sources is likely to fade after the strong surge in growth in the first half of 2014.
- A weak rebalancing of UK growth to exporting and business investment causing a weakening of overall economic growth beyond 2014.
- Weak growth or recession in the UK's main trading partner - the EU, inhibiting economic recovery in the UK.
- A return to weak economic growth in the US, UK and China causing major disappointment in investor and market expectations.
- A resurgence of the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis caused by ongoing deterioration in government debt to GDP ratios to the point where financial markets lose confidence in the financial viability of one or more countries and in the ability of the ECB and Eurozone governments to deal with the potential size of the crisis.
- Recapitalisation of European banks requiring more government financial support.
- Lack of support by populaces in Eurozone countries for austerity programmes, especially in countries with very high unemployment rates e.g. Greece and Spain, which face major challenges in engineering economic growth to correct their budget deficits on a sustainable basis.
- Italy: the political situation has improved but it remains to be seen whether the new government is able to deliver the austerity programme required and a programme of overdue reforms. Italy has the third highest government debt mountain in the world.
- France: after being elected on an anti austerity platform, President Hollande has embraced a €50bn programme of public sector cuts over the next three years. However, there could be major obstacles in implementing this programme. Major overdue reforms of employment practices and an increase in competitiveness are also urgently required to lift the economy out of stagnation.
- Monetary policy action failing to stimulate sustainable growth and to combat the threat of deflation in western economies, especially the Eurozone and Japan.

- Heightened political risks in the Middle East and East Asia could trigger safe haven flows into bonds.
- There are also increasing concerns at the reluctance of western central banks to raise interest rates significantly for some years, plus the huge QE measures which remain in place (and likely to be added to by the ECB in the near future). This has created potentially unstable flows of liquidity searching for yield and, therefore, heightened the potential for an increase in risks in order to get higher returns. This is a return to a similar environment to the one which led to the 2008 financial crisis.

The potential for upside risks to UK gilt yields and PWLB rates, especially for longer term PWLB rates include: -

- An adverse reaction by financial markets to the result of the UK general election in May 2015 and the economic and debt management policies adopted by the new government
- ECB either failing to carry through on recent statements that it will soon start quantitative easing (purchase of government debt) or severely disappointing financial markets with embarking on only a token programme of minimal purchases which are unlikely to have much impact, if any, on stimulating growth in the EZ. (It should be noted that the Bundesbank and most German politicians have been very opposed to the concept of QE.)
- A sudden reversal of Russian policy on military intervention in eastern Ukraine caused by the likelihood of, or actual, severe damage done to the Russian economy by a prolonged depression in oil prices and by sanctions.
- A sudden reversal of Iranian policy on developing militarised nuclear capability caused by the likelihood of, or actual, severe damage done to the Iranian economy by a prolonged depression in oil prices and by sanctions.
- The commencement by the US Fed. of increases in the central rate in 2015 causing a fundamental reassessment by investors of the relative risks of holding bonds as opposed to equities, leading to a sudden flight from bonds to equities
- A surge in investor confidence that a return to robust world economic growth is imminent, causing a flow of funds out of bonds into equities.
- UK inflation returning to significantly higher levels than in the wider EU and US, causing an increase in the inflation premium inherent to gilt yields.

We would, however, remind clients of the view that we have expressed in our previous interest rate revision newsflashes of just how unpredictable PWLB rates and bond yields are at present. We are experiencing exceptional levels of volatility which are highly correlated to geo-political and sovereign debt crisis developments. Our revised forecasts are based on the Certainty Rate (minus 20 bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1st November 2012.