

Introduction

This capital strategy sets out how Gloucester City Council intend to spend capital to provide services and meet the strategic aims in the Council plan. This strategy gives a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of local public services along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future financial sustainability. It has been written in an accessible style to enhance members', residents and other stakeholders understanding of these areas.

Background

The Capital Strategy demonstrates that the authority takes capital investment decisions in line with service objectives and properly takes account of stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability. The Capital Strategy also sets out the long-term context in which capital expenditure and investment decisions are made and gives due consideration to both risk and reward and impact on the achievement of priority outcomes. Decisions around capital expenditure, investment and borrowing should align with the processes established for the setting and revising of the budget for the local authority.

The Capital Strategy should also be tailored to the authority's individual circumstances and should include capital expenditure, investments and liabilities and treasury management. For Gloucester, the Treasury Management Strategy drawn up in line with the Treasury Management Code will continue to be published as a separate document and this will remain separate to differentiate between the demand and assessment of capital expenditure and the management of the investment and borrowing portfolio.

Policy Context

The Council plan 2017 – 20 defines the Council's vision:

“A city that works for everyone”

The priorities to support this vision are:

- Working to create a vibrant and prosperous city
- Working to maintain a safe and attractive city
- Working to build strong and resilient communities
- Working to provide great services that ensure value for money

The vision and priorities are underpinned by our core values.

For full details of the Council Plan see: **Council Plan**

The Capital Strategy is an important policy document in delivering the Council's Vision in terms of maintaining and extending the Council's asset base but needs to

take a longer-term view to reflect the life cycle of capital assets. The life cycle of capital assets, often known as non-current assets, will range between 5-60 years or even longer if land is acquired. Decisions made now will affect residents, business and other stakeholders for many years to come.

Capital Expenditure and Financing

Capital expenditure is where the Council spends money on assets, such as property or vehicles, that will be used for more than one year. In local government this includes spending on assets owned by other bodies, and loans and grants to other bodies enabling them to buy assets. The Council has some limited discretion on what counts as capital expenditure, for example assets costing below £6,000 are not capitalised and are charged to revenue in year.

- For details of the Council's policy on capitalisation, see: Statement of Accounts 2018/19 page 21, Accounting Policies point 19 - Statement of Accounts

In 2020/21, the Council is planning capital expenditure of £19.519m as summarised below:

Table 1: Prudential Indicator: Estimates of Capital Expenditure in £ millions

	2018/19 actual	2019/20 forecast	2020/21 budget	2021/22 budget	2022/23 budget
General Fund services	7.955	75.768	19.519	0.804	0.769
TOTAL	7.955	75.768	19.519	0.804	0.769

The capital programme includes a variety of projects from large regeneration to smaller individual projects, the main capital projects are detailed below:

Kings Walk – The initial project included a capital investment of £5m from the City Councils project partners Reef. This initial investment was for improvements and conversion of the former BHS store, Kings Walk car park and improvements to the Mall. The works to Kings Walk car park were completed in 2019-20 and the conversion of the former BHS store has already commenced. The next phase will look to make further enhancements to the Mall in line with the Councils investment in Kings Square and will explore further opportunities for the development of the centre. The Council anticipates initially borrowing to facilitate this project, with borrowing costs being met by the forecast income.

There is also the opportunity for further unit purchases by the Council. This will be done on a case by case basis, as the Council continues to redevelop the area. Borrowing costs will be met from income generated through the project.

The redevelopment of Kings Square has commenced in the current year and this significant project in the Council's regeneration plans is expected to be completed before the end of 2020. Planning and enabling works have already been committed at £1m, which will be funded from a combination of capital receipts and the Regeneration fund. Future costs will be funded from borrowing, initially borrowing costs will be met from the VAT shelter income, before being offset against income generated from the Kings Quarter development.

The project to regenerate Kings Quarter is moving forward with a full report expected to be taken in early 2020. This will see significant investment by the Council in both the physical, economic and cultural redevelopment of this part of the city. The required investment will be significant and will be a long-term investment of up to 50 years.

Railway Station – Work will redevelop the station and link it to the Bus Station and City Centre, this project will be funded via the LEP.

The Fleece – The Council continues to explore opportunities for the redevelopment of this iconic part of the City. The Council will support the redevelopment, but this project is to be developer led.

Housing Projects – The recent purchase of St Oswald's and approval of revised Housing Strategy will bring a number of housing projects forward. As these projects are developed any required investment for delivery will be analysed to seek affordable solutions.

Governance: The Capital Projects Steering group and/or the Property Investment Board review projects for inclusion within the Council's capital programme. Projects are collated by finance who calculate the financing cost (which can be nil if the project is fully externally financed). The groups appraise all bids based on a comparison of service priorities against financing costs and makes recommendations for the capital programme. The final capital programme is then presented to Cabinet in January and to Council in February each year.

- For full details of the Council's capital programme see: [Money Plan](#)

All capital expenditure must be financed, either from external sources (government grants and other contributions), the Council's own resources (revenue, reserves and capital receipts) or debt (borrowing, leasing and Private Finance Initiative). The planned financing of the above expenditure is as follows:

Table 2: Capital financing in £ millions

	2018/19 actual	2019/20 forecast	2020/21 budget	2021/22 budget	2022/23 budget
External sources	0.491	3.795	0.969	0.574	0.494
Own resources	4.286	0.955	4.550	0.230	0.275
Debt	3.178	71.018	14.000	0.000	00.000
TOTAL	7.955	75.768	19.519	0.804	0.769

Debt is only a temporary source of finance, since loans and leases must be repaid, and this is therefore replaced over time by other financing, usually from revenue which is known as minimum revenue provision (MRP). Alternatively, proceeds from selling capital assets (known as capital receipts) may be used to replace debt finance. Planned MRP and use of capital receipts are as follows:

Table 3: Replacement of debt finance in £ millions

	2018/19 actual	2019/20 forecast	2020/21 budget	2021/22 budget	2022/23 budget
Own resources	0.529	2.077	2.499	2.387	2.337

- The Council's full minimum revenue provision statement is available here: Treasury Management Strategy - MRP

The Council's cumulative outstanding amount of debt finance is measured by the capital financing requirement (CFR). This increases with new debt-financed capital expenditure and reduces with MRP and capital receipts used to replace debt. The CFR is expected to increase by £11.864m during 20/21. Based on the above figures for expenditure and financing, the Council's estimated CFR is as follows:

Table 4: Prudential Indicator: Estimates of Capital Financing Requirement in £ millions

	31.3.2019 actual	31.3.2020 forecast	31.3.2021 budget	31.3.2022 budget	31.3.2023 budget
General Fund services	45.032	114.343	126.207	124.176	122.186
TOTAL CFR	45.032	114.343	126.207	124.176	122.186

Asset management: To ensure that capital assets continue to be of long-term use, the Council has an asset management strategy in place. Gloucester City Council has a diverse estate from ancient monuments to commercial property. The asset management strategy details our approach to managing our diverse assets including our acquisitions and disposals, planned maintenance, governance and performance.

- The Council's asset management strategy can be read here: [Asset Management Strategy](#)

Asset disposals: When a capital asset is no longer needed, it may be sold so that the proceeds, known as capital receipts, can be spent on new assets or to repay debt. The Council is currently also permitted to spend capital receipts on service transformation projects until 2023/24. Repayments of capital grants, loans and investments also generate capital receipts. The Council plans to receive £2.5m of capital receipts in the coming financial year as follows:

Table 5: Capital receipts in £ millions

	2018/19 actual	2019/20 forecast	2020/21 budget	2021/22 budget	2022/23 budget
Asset sales	0.479	0.500	2.500	1.000	0.500
Loans repaid	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
TOTAL	0.479	0.500	2.500	0.000	0.000

- The Council's Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Policy is available here: [Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Policy](#)

Treasury Management

Treasury management is concerned with keeping sufficient but not excessive cash available to meet the Council's spending needs, while managing the risks involved. Surplus cash is invested until required, while a shortage of cash will be met by borrowing, to avoid excessive credit balances or overdrafts in the bank current account. The Council is typically cash rich in the short-term as revenue income is received before it is spent, but cash poor in the long-term as capital expenditure is incurred before being financed. The revenue cash surpluses are offset against capital cash shortfalls to reduce overall borrowing.

Borrowing strategy: The Council's main objectives when borrowing are to achieve a low but certain cost of finance while retaining flexibility should plans change in future. These objectives are often conflicting, and the Council therefore seeks to strike a balance between cheap short-term loans (currently available at around 0.75%) and long-term fixed rate loans where the future cost is known but higher (currently 2.3 to 3.1%).

Projected levels of the Council's total outstanding debt (which comprises borrowing, PFI liabilities, leases) are shown below, compared with the capital financing requirement (see above).

Table 6: Prudential Indicator: Gross Debt and the Capital Financing Requirement in £ millions

	31.3.2019 actual	31.3.2020 forecast	31.3.2021 budget	31.3.2022 budget	31.3.2023 budget
Debt (incl. PFI & leases)	40.841	109.782	121.283	118.896	116.559
Capital Financing Requirement	45.032	114.343	126.207	124.176	122.186

Statutory guidance is that debt should remain below the capital financing requirement, except in the short-term. As can be seen from table 6, the Council expects to comply with this in the medium term.

Affordable borrowing limit: The Council is legally obliged to set an affordable borrowing limit (also termed the authorised limit for external debt) each year. In line with statutory guidance, a lower “operational boundary” is also set as a warning level should debt approach the limit.

Table 7: Prudential Indicators: Authorised limit and operational boundary for external debt in £m

	2019/20 limit	2020/21 limit	2021/22 limit	2022/23 limit
Authorised limit - borrowing	£110	£115	£115	£115
Authorised limit - PFI and leases	£35	£35	£35	£35
Authorised limit - total external debt	£145	£150	£150	£150
Operational boundary - borrowing	£105	£110	£110	£110
Operational boundary - PFI and leases	£25	£25	£25	£25
Operational boundary - total external debt	£130	£135	£135	£135

- Further details on borrowing are in pages 11 to 15 of the treasury management strategy
Treasury Management Strategy

Investment strategy: Treasury investments arise from receiving cash before it is paid out again. Investments made for service reasons or for pure financial gain are not generally considered to be part of treasury management.

The Council’s policy on treasury investments is to prioritise security and liquidity over yield, that is to focus on minimising risk rather than maximising returns. Cash that is likely to be spent in the near term is invested securely, for example with the government, other local authorities or selected high-quality banks, to minimise the risk of loss. Money that will be held for longer terms is invested more widely, including in property, to balance the risk of loss against the risk of receiving returns below inflation. Both near-term and longer-term investments may be held in pooled funds, where an external fund manager makes decisions on which particular investments to buy and the Council may request its money back at short notice.

- Further details on treasury investments are in pages 16 to 21 of the treasury management strategy - Treasury Management Strategy

Governance: Decisions on treasury management investment and borrowing are made daily and are therefore delegated to the Head of Policy and Resources and staff, who must act in line with the treasury management strategy approved by Council. Half yearly reports on treasury management activity are presented to Audit and Governance Committee which is responsible for scrutinising treasury management decisions.

Investments for Service Purposes

The Council makes investments to assist local public services, including making loans to local service providers, businesses to promote economic growth, the Council's subsidiaries that provide services. In light of the public service objective, the Council is willing to take more risk than with treasury investments, however it still plans for such investments to generate a profit after all costs.

Governance: Decisions on service investments are made by the relevant service manager in consultation with the Head of policy and Resources and must meet the criteria and limits laid down in the investment strategy. Most loans and shares are capital expenditure and purchases will therefore also be approved as part of the capital programme.

Property Investment

With central government financial support for local public services declining, the Council produced a Property Investment Strategy for investments in commercial property that are financially robust, demonstrate value for money and are aligned to the Council's strategic priorities.

The Council accepts higher risk on commercial investment than with treasury investments. The principal risk exposures include a fall in capital value on purchases, or vacancies within purchased property. These risks are managed in accordance with our Property Investment Strategy. In order that commercial investments remain proportionate to the size of the authority, these are subject to an overall maximum investment limit of £80m.

Governance: Decisions on commercial investments are made by the Property Investment Board in line with the criteria and limits approved by council in the Property Investment Strategy which include delegation for the Head of Policy and Resources to approve purchases up to £15m with purchases greater than £15m requiring Cabinet approval.

- Further details on other commercial activities are in the Property Investment Strategy: [Property Investment Strategy](#)

Liabilities

In addition to debt of £40.841m detailed above, the Council is committed to making future payments to cover its pension fund deficit (valued at £68.963m). It has also set aside £1.9m to cover risks of provisions, this mainly relates to NNDR appeals, where the Council has estimated the costs arising from appeals by ratepayers. The Council did not have any contingent liabilities in 2018/19.

Governance: Decisions on incurring new discretionary liabilities are taken by service managers in consultation with head of Policy and Resources. The risk of liabilities crystallising and requiring payment is monitored by finance.

- Further details on provisions (page 50), liabilities and guarantees are on page 65 of the 2018/19 statement of accounts - [Statement of Accounts](#)

Revenue Budget Implications

Although capital expenditure is not charged directly to the revenue budget, interest payable on loans and MRP are charged to revenue, offset by any investment income receivable. The net annual charge is known as financing costs; this is compared to the net revenue stream i.e. the amount funded from Council Tax, business rates and general government grants.

Table 9: Prudential Indicator: Proportion of financing costs to net revenue stream

	2018/19 actual	2019/20 forecast	2020/21 budget	2021/22 budget	2022/23 budget
Financing costs (£m)	2.228	2.146	5.285	5.168	5.133
Proportion of net revenue stream	13.59%	12.08%	24.50%	24.25%	24.83%

- Further details on the revenue implications of capital expenditure are noted within the 2020/21 revenue budget - [Money Plan](#)

Sustainability: Due to the very long-term nature of capital expenditure and financing, the revenue budget implications of expenditure incurred in the next few years will extend for up to 50 years into the future. The Head of Policy and Resources is satisfied that the proposed capital programme is prudent, affordable and sustainable.

Knowledge and Skills

The Council employs professionally qualified and experienced staff in senior positions with responsibility for making capital expenditure, borrowing and investment decisions. For example, the Head of Policy and Resources is a qualified accountant with 25 years' experience, the Accountancy Managers are both qualified accountants with 25 and 14 years' experience. The Council pays for junior staff to study towards relevant professional qualifications including CIPFA, ACT (treasury) and CIMA.

Where Council staff do not have the knowledge and skills required, use is made of external advisers and consultants that are specialists in their field. The Council currently employs Link Asset Services as treasury management advisers, the Council employs property consultants on a case by case basis. This approach is more cost effective than employing such staff directly and ensures that the Council has access to knowledge and skills commensurate with its risk appetite.