

Cherwell District Council

Capital and Investment Strategy 2023/24

A. Capital Strategy (Including Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement)

A1. Introduction

- A1.1. The Prudential Code for Capital Finance sets out that to demonstrate that the authority takes capital expenditure and investment decisions in line with service objectives and properly takes account of stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability, authorities should have in place a capital strategy. The capital strategy should set 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. The Strategy must be approved by full Council.
- A1.2. The objectives of the Prudential Code are to ensure that the capital expenditure plans of local authorities are affordable, prudent, and sustainable and that treasury management decisions are taken in accordance with good professional practice and in full understanding of the risks involved. This strategy should be read alongside and in conjunction with the Treasury Management Strategy and the Investment Strategy.

A2. Capital Expenditure and Financing

- A2.1. Capital expenditure is where the Council spends money on assets, such as property or vehicles, which will be used for more than one year¹. 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 £10,000 are not capitalised and are charged to revenue in year. In 2023/24, the Council is planning capital expenditure of £15.4m as summarised below:

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

	2021/22 actual	2022/23 forecast	2023/24 budget	2024/25 budget	2025/26 budget
Services	14.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Capital investments	25.1	17.3	15.5	8.6	2.4
TOTAL	39.1	18.3	15.5	8.6	2.4

- A2.2. The main capital projects across the period include the Vehicle Replacement Programme, East West Railways, and the new Bicester Depot.

¹ For details of the Council's policy on capitalisation, see Financial Regulations

Governance

- A2.3. Capital project bids linked to corporate or service priorities plus essential need are brought forward by Service Managers as part of the Budget & Business Planning process. These are considered by the senior officer leadership team, both in terms of priority and affordability. The Finance team undertake a calculation of the financing cost of proposals and recommend the level of investment based on affordability. Projects proposed to be included in the Council's capital programme are then considered and appraised by the Budget Planning Committee and provide comments to the Executive on the proposals. The Executive then, taking into consideration any comments, propose which schemes to include in the Capital Programme ahead of the final capital programme being proposed to Council in February each year.

Table 2: Estimates of Capital Expenditure in line with the Council's corporate priorities in £ millions

	2021/22 actual	2022/23 forecast	2023/24 budget	2024/25 budget	2025/26 budget
Healthy, resilient, and engaged communities	0.5	0.7	3.2	0.2	0.0
An enterprising economy with strong and vibrant local centres	15.0	4.3	2.9	3.8	0.0
Supporting environmental sustainability	4.5	4.9	2.4	1.9	0.9
Housing that meets your needs	18.5	3.3	3.1	1.4	1.4
Support Services	0.7	5.1	3.8	1.3	0.1
Total Capital Spend	39.1	18.3	15.5	8.6	2.4

- A2.4. 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 Initiatives). The planned financing of the above expenditure is as follows

Table 3: Capital financing in £ millions

	2021/22 actual	2022/23 forecast	2023/24 budget	2024/25 budget	2025/26 budget
External sources	11.3	4.7	5.5	5.0	1.2
Own resources	1.3	7.1	0.2	1.2	0.0
Revenue resources	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Debt	23.5	6.5	9.8	2.4	1.2
TOTAL	39.1	18.3	15.5	8.6	2.4

- A2.5. 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). In addition, 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 4: Replacement of debt finance in £ millions

	2021/22 actual	2022/23 forecast	2023/24 budget	2024/25 budget	2025/26 budget
MRP	1.6	5.2	5.6	5.7	5.9

The Council's minimum revenue provision (MRP) statement is included at Appendix A below.

- A2.6. 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 £4.2m during 2023/24.

Based on the above figures for expenditure and financing, the Council's estimated CFR is as follows:

Table 5: Prudential Indicator: Estimates of Capital Financing Requirement in £ millions

	2021/22 actual	2022/23 forecast	2023/24 budget	2024/25 budget	2025/26 budget
TOTAL CFR	250.2	251.5	255.7	252.4	247.6

Asset management

- A2.7. To ensure that capital assets continue to be of long-term use, the Council has a property management strategy in place. This is a multi-level approach structured as follows:

- At a tenancy level the Comprehensive Asset Register (a database of key lease events) is being updated and used to identify forthcoming lease events such as expiries, rent reviews and breaks. These are allocated to specific asset managers to progress whose work schedules are reviewed periodically.
- At a property level this can comprise the preparation of asset specific management plans which are then subject to periodic review and updating. This process is ongoing and informs the portfolio strategy as a whole.

Asset Disposals

- A2.8. 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 2024/25. In addition, there are currently no plans to utilise capital receipts on services transformation projects for 2023/24. Receipts from capital grants, loan repayments and investments also generate capital receipts

A3. Treasury Management

- A3.1. Treasury management is concerned with the management of the local 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.

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 typically has surplus cash in the short-term as revenue income is received before it is spent, but insufficient cash 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. At 30 September 2022 the Council had borrowings of £230m at an average interest rate of 1.72%, and £101m of investments at an average interest rate of 1.97%. The borrowing position is reported regularly to Accounts, Audit & Risk Committee as part of the Treasury Management reports.

Borrowing Strategy

- A3.2. The Council's main objective when borrowing is to achieve a low but certain cost of finance while retaining flexibility should plans change in future. To meet this objective the Council must review the current market conditions alongside the long-term forecasts from Link to determine how to structure borrowings. Short term loans, which usually have lower interest rates and offer excellent flexibility, are suitable for stable market conditions or when interest rates are forecast to fall. Medium to long term loans offer a certain cost of finance but are generally more expensive and inflexible. The Council must therefore seek to strike a balance between short and medium to long term loans, to meet its objectives, by anticipating both its borrowing need and the forecast interest rates.
- A3.3. Projected levels of the Council's total outstanding debt (which comprises borrowing and 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

	31st March 2022 Actual	31st March 2023 forecast	31st March 2024 forecast	31st March 2025 forecast	31st March 2026 forecast
Debt (incl. PFI & leases)	201.2	207.6	217.5	219.8	221.0
Capital Financing Requirement	250.2	251.5	255.7	252.4	247.6

- A3.4. Statutory guidance is that debt should remain below the capital financing requirement, except in the short-term. As can be seen from table 5 above the Council expects to comply with this in the medium term.

Affordable borrowing limit

- A3.5. 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: Operational boundary and Authorised limit for external debt in £m

	2022/23 limit	2023/24 limit	2024/25 limit	2025/26 limit
Operational boundary total external debt	290	290	290	290
Authorised limit total external debt	310	310	310	310

Further details on treasury investments can be found in the treasury management strategy.

A4. Commercial Activities

- A4.1. To drive leadership of place within Cherwell, stimulate growth, pursue economic regeneration and helping to return confidence to the local economy through investment and facilitating inward investment, the Council invests in commercial property which may also provide some financial gain and generate income to support the Council's revenue activities.
- A4.2. From a financial perspective, the Council recognises that commercial investments can be higher risk than treasury investments. The principal risk exposures are listed below together with an outline of how those risks are managed:

Illiquidity:	<p>The Council acknowledges illiquidity as a risk in property and whilst it cannot be avoided the risk is mitigated by the following strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The Council invests across a range of sectors and its assets are diversified in terms of lot size. b) Some of the Council's investments are not what is termed 'Investment Grade', but they are fundable – i.e., if sold they could be suitable for debt backed investors. c) The Council's assets are uncharged. It is often lenders who require assets to be sold and whilst gearing does not increase illiquidity per se, it can expose an owner to greater risk of selling an illiquid asset at an inopportune time.
Tenant default:	<p>The Council's portfolio includes both large national concerns and small local businesses (mainly retail or industrial type tenants). Tenant default risk is managed in two ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Tenants are vetted when entering the portfolio either as new tenants when property is let or as replacement tenants when existing tenants assign their leases. It has to be acknowledged that there is less control when a tenant applies for consent to assign, though guarantees may be sought. b) Risk is managed by diversification as only a small proportion of tenants will fail in any given year. c) A commercial risk earmarked reserve is held to meet any shortfall in income which may arise in year due to default.
Obsolescence:	<p>A significant proportion of the Council's portfolio comprises industrial / warehouse buildings and retail assets which have relatively low obsolescence compared to office premises which require significant investment to maintain the landlords fit out specification in line with market demands. Where the Council has offices a sinking / replacement fund is put in place with annual sums collected from tenants to put towards high-cost items such as the replacement of lifts or air conditioning.</p> <p>Where matters of Council policy override commercial concerns, the Council's portfolio is more vulnerable. E.g., where significant outlay may be required on plant and machinery at the end of their useful economic lives. This is considered in the Asset Management plan for each asset.</p>
Capital expenditure	<p>Please see above but also note that the Council aims to let space on Full Repairing terms which makes the tenant either explicitly responsible for maintaining the asset or allows CDC to recover the cost of repairs through the service charge provisions of the relevant lease.</p>

Market risk:	<p>Two key market risks are falling rents in response to declining economic conditions and extended marketing voids when leases end or tenants fail. These risks are mitigated in three main ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lease lengths should be 3 – 5 years + which obviates most market risks during the period of the tenancy. 2. Longer leases which contain regular rent review provisions normally require the rents to be reviewed in an upwards only direction. 3. Tenant failure – see above under Tenant Default, re: vetting and diversification policies plus earmarked reserves held. <p>An additional risk is over-exposure to town centre retailing as the portfolio's largest assets are Castle Quay Shopping Centre in Banbury and Pioneer Square in Bicester. The risks arising from these investments are managed as part of the Strategic Asset Management plan and Asset Actions Plans for each asset.</p>
Returns eroded by inflation:	<p>Most properties are let on lease terms which contain upwards only rent reviews and some are indexed linked guaranteeing rental growth. Although in general rental levels lag against inflation (both when rising and falling due to reviews or renewals being generally every 3-5 years) rents are historically considered to be more stable with less fluctuations.</p>
Rising interest rates:	<p>The portfolio is ungeared and therefore un-mortgaged.</p>

Governance

- A4.3. Decisions on commercial investments are made by Members and Statutory Officers in line with the criteria and limits approved by Council in the Investment Strategy. Property and most other commercial investments are also capital expenditure and purchases will therefore also be approved as part of the capital programme.

Further details on commercial investments and limits on their use can be found in the Investment Strategy (Section B of this report).

- A4.4. The Council also has commercial activities in trading companies, exposing it to normal commercial risks. These risks are managed by the governance structure in place. The Shareholder Committee is regularly informed of the progress of each company. The Shareholder meets with the directors both formally and informally to ensure there is a consistent dialog between the companies and the council.

A5. Revenue Budget Implications

- A5.1. Although capital expenditure is not charged directly to the revenue budget, interest payable on loans and MRP are charged to revenue. The 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 8: Prudential Indicator: Proportion of financing costs to net revenue stream

	2021/22 actual	2022/23 forecast	2023/24 budget	2024/25 budget	2025/26 budget
Financing costs (£m)	3.8	8.7	9.4	9.4	9.4
Revenue funding (£m)	22.4	23.5	31.0	25.4	14.0
Proportion of net revenue stream	17%	37%	30%	37%	67%

Further details on the revenue implications of capital expenditure are in the 2023/24 revenue budget.

Sustainability

- A5.2. Due to the very long-term nature of capital financing, the revenue budget implications of expenditure incurred in the next few years will extend for up to 50 years into the future, which aligns with the attached MRP Statement. The Section 151 Officer is satisfied that the proposed capital programme is prudent, affordable, and sustainable.

A6. Knowledge and Skills

- A6.1. The Council employs professionally qualified and experienced staff in senior positions with responsibility for making capital expenditure, borrowing and investment decisions. For example, the Section 151 Officer is a qualified accountant with many years' experience. The Council pays for junior staff to study towards relevant professional qualifications including CIPFA and RICS.
- A6.2. 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 Group as treasury management advisers and a range of property advisors as follows:

- Banbury based surveyors White Commercial, Wild Property Consultancy and Bankier Sloane provide advice on the local property market, and assistance with new lettings, lease renewals, smaller valuations and rent reviews.
- Where specialist advice is required, the Council will ask for competitive quotes.
- Montagu Evans supply asset management and facilities management in respect of Castle Quay Shopping Centre.

- Avison Young supply specialist accounting services in respect of Castle Quay Shopping Centre and Waterfront.
- Montagu Evans and Colliers both provide property valuation services
- BWD and Jackson Criss assist with Castle Quay lettings
- Gardiner Theobald provide project management, QS, CDM and Design services on Castle Quay Waterfront
- Broomfield Property Consultants Ltd and Prime Project Management Ltd provide services relating to Castle Quay and other property related projects

This approach is more cost effective than employing such staff directly and ensures that the Council has up to date access to market knowledge and skills commensurate with its risk appetite.

Appendix A – Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement

1. Where the Council finances capital expenditure by debt, it must put aside resources to repay that debt in later years. The amount charged to the revenue budget for the repayment of debt is known as Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). The Council is required by statute to charge an amount of MRP to the General Fund Revenue account each year for the repayment of debt. The MRP charge is the means by which capital expenditure which has been funded by borrowing is paid for by council tax payers.
2. Legislation requires local authorities to draw up a statement of their policy on the annual MRP, for full approval by Council before the start of the financial year to which the provision will relate.
3. The Council is recommended therefore to approve the following statement:

For unsupported capital expenditure incurred after 31st March 2008, MRP will be determined by charging the expenditure over the expected useful life of the relevant asset in equal instalments, starting in the year after the asset becomes operational. MRP on purchases of freehold land will be charged over 50 years. MRP on expenditure not related to fixed assets but which has been capitalised by regulation or direction will be charged over 20 years unless the Council determines an alternative useful life to be more appropriate whilst continuing to be prudent.
4. For capital expenditure incurred in the provision of loans to third parties, MRP will not be charged until the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has completed its MRP consultation and published revised guidance. This is expected to be completed and ready for implementation by April 2024. Repayments of loan principal received by the council will be treated as capital receipts and used to reduce the CFR or avoid future additional borrowing, thus reducing future annual MRP charges.
5. Where the Council acquires an asset under a finance lease arrangement, MRP will be charged at an amount equal to the rent paid to reduce the balance sheet liability in year.
6. Capital expenditure incurred during 2023/24 will not be subject to an MRP charge until 2024/25.

B. Investment Strategy 2022/23

B1. Introduction

B1.1. 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 deliver against its strategic priorities as outlined in its Business Plan (investments in service and commercial property). Such assets may contribute to the delivery of service objectives and generate commercial income.

B1.2. The investment strategy was a new report introduced for 2019/20, meeting the requirements of statutory guidance issued by the Government in January 2018, and focuses on the second and third of these categories.

B2. Treasury Management Investments

B2.1. The Council typically receives its income in cash (e.g. from taxes and grants) before it pays for its expenditure in cash (e.g. through payroll and invoices). 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 be an average of £11.8m during the 2023/24 financial year.

Contribution

B2.2. The contribution that these investments make to the objectives of the Council is to support effective treasury management activities.

Further details

B2.3. Full details of the Council's policies and its plan for 2023/24 for treasury management investments are covered in a separate document, the treasury management strategy.

B3. Service Investments: Loans

Contribution

B3.1. The Council lends money to its subsidiaries, local parishes, local charities to support local public services and stimulate local economic growth. The main loans issued are to the council's subsidiaries – the Graven Hill Village companies and Crown House Banbury Ltd. Graven Hill is a housing development providing significant

housing in Bicester. Crown House is a redeveloped derelict office building in the centre of Banbury which is providing significant rental opportunities in the town centre.

Security

- B3.2. The main risk when making service loans is that the borrower will be unable to repay the principal lent 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:

Table 1: Loans for service purposes in £ millions

Category of borrower	31.3.2022 actual			2023/24
	Balance	Loss allowance	Net figure in accounts	Approved Limit
Subsidiaries	70.39	(0.90)	69.49	85.90
Parishes	0.08	0.00	0.08	0.10
Local charities/Other	1.10	(0.09)	1.01	1.15
TOTAL	71.57	(0.99)	70.58	87.15

** including accrued interest*

- B3.3. Accounting standards require the Council to set aside loss allowance for loans, reflecting the likelihood of non-payment. The figures for loans in the Council's statement of accounts are shown net of this loss allowance. The Council, however, makes every reasonable effort to collect the full sum lent and has appropriate credit control arrangements in place to recover overdue repayments.

Risk assessment

- B3.4. The Council assesses the risk of loss before entering into and whilst holding service loans by approaching each loan request individually. The bulk of the council's loans are to its subsidiaries. When the council considers whether or not to create or acquire a subsidiary a full business case is prepared which sets out the optimal financing of the company. This will include an assessment of the market in which it will be competing, the nature and level of competition, how that market may evolve over time, exit strategy and any ongoing investment requirements. External advisors are used where appropriate to complement officer expertise and second opinions from alternate advisors is sought in order to monitor and maintain the quality of advice provided by external advisors.
- B3.5. Other service loans are evaluated against a set of criteria designed to demonstrate:
- Evidence of project objectives and needs analysis is provided
 - The loan must have a demonstrable community impact

- The loan would provide up to 50% of the whole project cost
- Such a loan can only be applied for by constituted voluntary organisations with their own bank account; Town or Parish councils; charitable organisations
- The loan cannot be applied retrospectively
- The applicant has provided evidence of its financial stability and of its ability to manage the proposed scheme.
- Appropriate checks have been carried out on the owners of the organisations to be satisfied as to their integrity and to avoid any potential embarrassment to the Council.
- The applicant has demonstrated that the proposed scheme has been developed following good practice in terms of planning, procurement and financial appraisal.
- The applicant has provided evidence the affordability of their proposed scheme and the loan repayments
- That the project furthers the council's priorities as reflected in its Business Plan

B4. Service Investments: Shares

- B4.1. The council invests in the shares of its subsidiaries to support local public services and stimulate local economic and housing growth. The council currently holds shares in Graven Hill Holding Company Ltd and Crown House Banbury Ltd.
- B4.2. One of the risks of investing in shares is that they can 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:

Table 2: Shares held for service purposes in £ millions

Category of company	31.3.2022 actual			2023/24
	Amounts invested	Gains or losses	Value in accounts	Approved Limit
Subsidiaries	35.65	0	35.65	38.26
TOTAL	35.65	0	35.65	38.26

- B4.3. The Council assesses the risk of loss before entering into and whilst holding shares by maintaining close links with the Boards of Directors of the companies through an established Shareholder Committee. Risk is assessed as above in Service Loans.

- B4.4. The maximum periods for which funds may prudently be committed are assessed on a project-by-project basis. The decision will balance both the long-term viability of the subsidiary and the revenue and capital requirements of the Council.
- B4.5. Shares are the only investment type that the council has identified that meets the definition of a non-specified investment in the Government guidance. The limits above on share investments are therefore also the Council's upper limits on non-specified investments. The council has not adopted any procedures for determining further categories of non-specified investment since none are likely to meet the definition.

B5. Service and Commercial Investments: Property

- B5.1. The Council invests in local commercial and residential property with the intention of regenerating the local economy, and for place shaping which forms a key part of its strategic priorities. The generation of income to support the provision of local public services, whilst a factor, serves as a secondary objective to that of the strategic priorities. The Council's asset portfolio comprises a cross-section of retail, office, and industrial assets together with a health centre which are held to ensure the delivery of services to the local community. Investments made in recent years which the Council continues to hold include:
- Castle Quay, Banbury; a covered shopping centre and newly developed retail complex
 - Pioneer Square, Bicester; a modern retail parade of shops
 - Franklins House, Bicester; a mixed-use complex comprising offices, hotel, business centre and public library
 - Tramway Industrial Estate
- B5.2. These assets are all town centre properties and afford the Council an opportunity to influence the amenity and environment of its two principal strategic centres. Castle Quay will, in particular, allow the development of a new leisure orientated focal point to help revitalise Banbury town centre.

These assets also contribute an aggregate £6.1m gross income to the council's revenue budget.

The major component parts of the asset portfolio are described below:

*Table 3: Investments in Property held for service and commercial purposes in £ millions**

Property	Actual	31.3.2022 Actual			31.3.2023 Expected	31.3.2024 Expected
	Purchase /Development Costs	Net Book Value in accounts 31.3.2021	Expenditure, Gains or (losses)	Net Book Value in accounts 31.3.2022	Net Book Value in accounts	Net Book Value in accounts
Castle Quay Shopping Centre	63.5	21.6	(6.2)	15.4	17.6	18.7
Castle Quay Waterfront, Hotel and Supermarket*	66.4	56.4	(24.4)	32.0	33.6	34.1
Pioneer Square	8.2	4.4	(0.3)	4.2	4.2	4.2
Tramway Industrial Estate	9.6	9.3	1.4	10.7	10.7	10.7
Other properties valued under £5m	13.1	10.0	(0.9)	9.1	9.1	9.1
TOTAL	160.8	101.7	(30.4)	71.4	75.2	76.8

*The properties in table 3 are currently held as investment property for the purposes of publication in the Council's financial statements. The categorisation of such assets is reviewed annually to ensure that they meet the criteria for classification in line with the CIFPA Code on Local Authority Accounting.

Security

B5.3. The Council considers a property investment to be secure where tenant performance, lease duration and property obsolescence are deemed to be at an acceptable level.

Risk assessment

B5.4. The Council assesses the risk of loss before entering into and whilst holding property investments by cash flow modelling the income and expenditure profile of each investment and interrogating that model across a range of scenarios to test the robustness of the investment. The modelling exercise is informed by the likelihood of tenant default and the chances that individual units will become empty during the hold period.

B5.5. The property investment market is dynamic, and we are kept abreast of developments by frequent communication and established relationships with local and national agents, supplemented by in-house investigations and reading of published research. The market is, at present, competitive in most asset sectors and our focus is on assets that are local and help to deliver the strategic aims of the Council.

B5.6. In all acquisitions we take external advice from acknowledged experts in the field and sense-check their input against our in-house knowledge, experience and expertise. The advice sourced covers market value but also, given the purpose of the investment, letting risk, marketability and occupational demand, and likely expenditure over the hold period.

- B5.7. The Council uses a number of local and national advisors and cross reference their views periodically. There is no single party who expects to be instructed by the Council without competition.
- B5.8. Credit ratings are used on acquisitions, new lettings and when tenants request consent to assign their leases. The Council uses D&B ratings as well as reviewing the published accounts of tenants or potential tenants.
- B5.9. A number of other strategies are used to mitigate risk:
- Tenant rent payment histories are analysed on any acquisition.
 - Tenant rent payment patterns and arrears are examined in the existing portfolio.
 - Introducing agents advise the council throughout the acquisition process and their advice includes market commentary at a national and a local level and commentary on perceived risks to the investment.
 - In tandem with the above every acquisition is subject to a third-party RICS Red Book valuation by qualified surveyors who are independent i.e., not acting for the council or the vendor on the acquisition.

Liquidity

- B5.10. Compared with other investment types, property is relatively difficult to sell in order to convert to cash at short notice and can take a considerable period to sell in certain market conditions. To ensure that the invested funds can be accessed when they are needed, for example to repay capital borrowed, the council acknowledges illiquidity as a risk in property and whilst it cannot be avoided the risk is mitigated by the following strategies:
- The Council invests across a diverse range of sectors and lot sizes. This affords the Council the ability to access a range of purchaser types e.g., small local investors, listed property companies or institutions.
 - The Council does not invest in high-risk assets which can be the most illiquid of all other than for the purposes of delivering regeneration which has a different investment objective from pure revenue or capital return.
 - Some of the Council's investments are not what is termed 'Investment Grade', but they are fundable – i.e., if sold they could be suitable for debt backed investors
 - The Council does not invest in specialist properties, where the market tends to be most illiquid.
 - The Council's assets are uncharged. It is often lenders who require assets to be sold and whilst gearing does not increase illiquidity per se, it can expose an owner to greater risk of selling an illiquid asset at an inopportune time.

B6. Loan Commitments and Financial Guarantees

- B6.1. Although not strictly counted as investments, since no money has exchanged hands yet, loan commitments and financial guarantees carry similar risks to the council and are included here for completeness.

The council has contractually committed to the following loan amounts which have yet to be drawn upon (as at 31/3/22)

Table 4: Loan Commitments and Guarantees

Borrower	Purpose	£m Contractually Available
Graven Hill Village Development Company Ltd	Revolving Credit Facility available to the council's subsidiary until 2026	£17m
Graven Hill Village Development Company Ltd	Facility Agreement that has been in place since 2014 to deliver the project.	Nil
Graven Hill Village Development Company Ltd	Loan Note instruments to enable the company to deliver its objectives	Nil
TOTAL		£17m

The Council has also provided bonds and guarantees to the value of £45.34 million to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) on behalf of Graven Hill Village Development Company Ltd in respect of the Company's obligations to OCC under s.106, s.278 and s.38 agreements.

B7. Capacity, Skills and Culture

Elected members and statutory officers

- B7.1. The majority of senior statutory officers are qualified to degree level and have appropriate professional qualifications. Their shared business experience encompasses both the public and private sectors.

Training and guidance are provided to support members in delivering their roles and support effective decision making.

Commercial Investments

- B7.2. Negotiations are either undertaken directly by Assistant Directors or at a senior level with Assistant Director direct involvement and oversight, alongside input from Directors and Lead Members where required. Assistant Directors are aware of the regulatory regime and convey that to all junior staff.

Corporate governance

- B7.3. There are appropriate corporate governance measures in place which comprise end to end decision making procedures. These include risk assessments within the organisation; presentation to relevant committees including Members, statutory officers' approvals, and relevant project boards. The annual Corporate Investment Strategy provides the reference point against which investment decisions are undertaken.

B8. Investment Indicators

- B8.1. 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.

Total risk exposure

- B8.2. The first indicator shows the council's total exposure which 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. These risks are managed by the Council operating within the Treasury Management, Capital and Investment Strategies and strict governance arrangements around the Council subsidiary Companies.

Table 5: Total investment exposure in £ millions

Total investment exposure	31.03.2022 Actual	31.03.2023 Forecast	31.03.2024 Forecast
Treasury management investments	52.15	16.97	10.00
Service investments: Loans	71.57	72.11	65.62
Service investments: Shares	35.65	35.65	35.65
Service and Commercial investments: Property*	71.40	75.20	76.80
TOTAL INVESTMENTS	230.77	199.93	188.07
Commitments to lend	11.00	11.00	17.00
TOTAL INVESTMENT EXPOSURE	241.77	210.93	205.07

*As per the net book value in Table 3

How investments are funded

Government guidance is that these indicators should include how investments are funded. Since the Authority 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 Authority's investments are funded by usable reserves and income received in advance of expenditure.

Table 6: Investments funded by borrowing in £millions

Investments funded by borrowing	31.03.2022 Actual	31.03.2023 Forecast	31.03.2024 Forecast
Service investments: Loans	71.57	72.11	65.62
Service investments: Shares	35.65	35.65	35.65
Service and Commercial investments: Property	139.50	143.32	144.87
TOTAL FUNDED BY BORROWING*	246.72	251.08	246.14

*The total funded by borrowing represents the gross expenditure incurred on service and commercial investments which form part of the Council's CFR. MRP (see capital strategy Appendix A) made to date on these investments has not been included in this total.

Rate of return received

- B8.3. This indicator shows the investment income received less the associated costs, including the cost of borrowing where appropriate, as a proportion of the sum initially invested. 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.

Table 7: Investment rate of return (net of all costs)

Investments net rate of return	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Forecast	2023/24 Forecast
Treasury management investments	0.11%	1.92%	3.50%
Service investments: Loans	1.5% - 12%	1.5% - 12%	1.5% - 13%
Service and Commercial investments: Property	Variable	Variable	Variable