

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Report of:	Corporate Director of Finance (S151 Officer), Andrew Humble
Relevant Executive Member:	Executive Member for Finance, Cllr Nicky Walker
Submitted to:	Executive
Date:	8 July 2026
Title:	Prudential Indicators & Treasury Management Outturn Report – 2025/26
Report for:	Information
Status:	Public
Council Plan priority:	Delivering Best Value
Key decision:	No
Why:	Report is for information only
Subject to call in?	No
Why:	Report is for information only

Proposed decision(s)

That the Executive:

- Note the Prudential Indicators for 2025/26 as the Council's year-end position in relation to capital finance activities and overall indebtedness. (Tables 1- 5)
- Note the performance of the treasury management function against the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26. (Para 4.33 – 4.38)

Executive summary

Similar to the majority of other local authorities Middlesbrough Council borrows money in order to finance its capital programme and also at times to fund its day to day cashflow. It does not borrow money to fund its revenue budget. The Council is not an outlier compared to other local authorities in terms of the level of total debt it has.

The Council is required to approve annually a Treasury Management Strategy and a set of Prudential Indicators, which self-regulate the level of capital financing activities of the Council and the affordability of the capital programme. These need to be set on an

annual basis to comply with the Local Government Act 2003 and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Codes of Practice on Capital Finance and Treasury Management.

The Treasury Management Strategy is important from both a financial and governance perspective, as it sets the framework within which the council manages its borrowing and investments, how it delivers these services, and how it controls the risks attached to related decisions. It also sets out the parameters and criteria that govern the day-to-day cashflow management activity and how these impact on the medium to long term financial planning. These include achieving value for money from any borrowing undertaken, managing risk, and protecting any resources that have been invested.

The Prudential Indicators are an integral part of the CIPFA Capital Finance Code and demonstrate whether the capital programme is affordable, sustainable, and prudent.

The report sets out the year-end outturn results for the 2025/26 financial year against the Treasury Management Strategy approved by Council on 19 February 2025 and gives an analysis of the results achieved. The following is a summary of the key points of the report:

- No prudential or treasury management indicators agreed as part of the Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26 were breached during the financial year.
- The amount of borrowing required during the year was lower than planned at £12.665m as against £17.085m in the original budget for the year due to slippage on capital schemes into future years.
- The Council's need to borrow, or Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) is £307.810m on 31 March 2026.
- The Council is 'under borrowed' by £27.221m or 8.8% at the financial year end. This means that it is using its internal cash balances rather than borrowing externally for some of its capital assets.
- The Council's total external debt is therefore £280.589m (£307.810m CFR less £27.221m) on 31 March 2026. This is in line with the practice adopted by most other local authorities and avoids the cost of carrying of any unnecessary external debt against the overall cashflow need for the Council and makes savings against the revenue budget.
- All cash investments have been made in line with the Council's credit worthiness criteria, generally with either central government or other local authorities.
- The net annual revenue cost of financing the Council's current and historic debt, less income from its historic commercial investments and on cash balances is £11.954m or 8.3% of the net revenue budget for 2025/26.

1. Purpose of this report and its contribution to the achievement of the Council Plan ambitions

- 1.1 This report provides important information regarding the regulation and management of the Council's borrowing, investments, and cash-flow for the 2025/26 financial year. It is a requirement of the Council's reporting procedures under the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice, and by regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003, to produce an annual review that covers the treasury activity and compares the performance against the original Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26 approved by the Council on 19 February 2025. It should be read in conjunction with the Council's revenue and capital outturn report for 2025/26 presented to Executive on 10 June 2026, both of which have a significant impact on treasury arrangements.
- 1.2 The report also provides the Prudential Indicators results for 2025/26 in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Capital Finance, which is best practice in terms of governance in this area.

Our ambitions	Summary of how this report will support delivery of these ambitions and the underpinning aims
A successful and ambitious town	The annual Treasury Management Strategy underpins both the revenue budget and capital programme for the Council for each financial year; by ensuring it has sufficient liquidity in place for all services to operate. As a result, it supports all the ambitions within the Council Plan.
A healthy Place	
Safe and resilient communities	
Delivering best value	In addition to the above, the Treasury Management Strategy contributes to delivering best value for the Council by ensuring that a framework for good governance is in place for all borrowing and investment decisions made. This means that borrowing is taken over periods that are consistent with the life of any capital assets purchased, and that appropriate provision is made in the annual revenue budget and medium-term financial plan for the associated capital financing costs. That the risks of any borrowing or debt refinancing undertaken are supported by fit for purpose business cases. Also, any investment decisions on cash balances are made with reference to the implications of security, liquidity and yield in relation to the principal sums invested.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Executive:

- Note the Prudential Indicators for 2025/26 as the Council's year-end position in relation to capital finance activities and overall indebtedness. (Tables 1- 5)
- Note the performance of the treasury management function against the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26. (Para 4.33 – 4.38)

3. Rationale for the recommended decision(s)

3.1 The recommendations above will fulfil the following for the local authority:

- Compliance with the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance for local authorities.
- Compliance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code for local authorities.
- Compliance with the Local Government Act 2003 Section 1 in relation to borrowing.

4. Background and relevant information

4.1 The Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26 (including Prudential Indicators) was approved at the annual budget setting meeting on 19 February 2025. The Council both borrows and invests substantial sums of money to provide liquidity for its revenue and capital plans, and is therefore exposed to various financial risks, including the potential loss of invested funds and the revenue effect of changing interest rates. The successful identification, monitoring and control of risk remains central to the Treasury Management Strategy each year.

4.2 The Council is a net borrower overall. The borrowing required to fund its capital programme is significantly higher than its normal cash balances that are available for investment purposes. As a result, the timing of capital financing decisions has a significant impact on the overall treasury strategy within the Council and how risk is managed.

4.3 The structure of this report to assess performance against the 2025/26 approved treasury strategy is as follows:

- Capital expenditure and financing for 2025/26.
- The Council's overall borrowing need.
- Prudential Indicators and any compliance issues.
- Treasury position on 31 March 2026.
- The economic background for the 2025/26 financial year.
- A summary of the Treasury Management Strategy approved for 2025/26.
- Treasury Management activity and compliance during 2025/26.

Capital Expenditure and Financing 2025/26

4.4 The Council undertakes capital expenditure on long term assets, which can be financed as follows:

- immediately during the year of incurring the expenditure, through capital receipts, capital grants, contributions, or from revenue resources.
- if insufficient financing is available, prudential borrowing can be used to spread these costs over future financial years.

4.5 Part of the Council's treasury activities is to address this borrowing need, either through borrowing from external bodies – predominantly the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb), other banks and financial institutions, or by utilising temporary cash resources within the Council (internal borrowing). The wider treasury activities also include

managing the day-to-day cash flow position, its previous borrowing activities, and the investment of surplus funds from cash balances that are not required immediately. These activities are structured to manage risk foremost and then optimise performance where appropriate.

- 4.6 Capital Expenditure forms one of the prudential indicators that are used to regulate treasury activity. Table 1 shows total capital expenditure and how this was financed, compared with what was expected to be spent and how this would have been financed. Further information on the capital variances at directorate level can be found in the 2025/26 revenue and capital outturn report, but this predominantly relates to capital schemes that have not yet been delivered or grants received in advance of need.

Table 1: Capital expenditure and financing in £ millions

	2024/25 actual	2025/26 original budget	2025/26 actual	2025/26 Variance to original budget	2026/27 original budget	2027/28 original budget	2028/29 original budget	2029/30 original budget
Prudential Borrowing	11.572	16.935	12.602	(4.333)	30.860	22.038	11.475	9.605
Borrowing due to leasing	0.771	0.150	0.063	(0.087)	0.150	0.087	-	-
EFS Capital Receipts	2.443	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Receipts for Investment Strategy	6.000	6.000	6.000	-	11.960	16.060	14.231	12.878
Flexible Use of Capital Receipts	4.447	7.500	5.659	(1.841)	5.272	1.472	-	-
Grants	31.693	43.230	26.858	(16.372)	37.106	6.933	1.078	1.000
Contributions	0.237	0.983	5.295	4.312	6.472	5.915	4.113	-
TOTAL	57.163	74.798	56.477	(18.321)	91.820	52.505	30.897	23.483

The Council's overall borrowing requirement

- 4.7 The Council's underlying need to borrow is called the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). The CFR results from the capital activity of the Council and resources used to pay for the capital expenditure over time. It represents 2025/26 and prior years' net capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for by revenue, capital receipts or other external resources and therefore must be met from borrowing.
- 4.8 The CFR will normally be a combination of external borrowing (from third parties in the form of loan arrangements) or from internal borrowing (from the council's own unapplied revenue and capital resources). External borrowing incurs both principal and interest costs as part of the Council's capital financing budget. Internal borrowing is from the Council's own cash resources and has an opportunity cost in that the cash is spent on capital activities, rather than invested.

- 4.9 Part of the Council's treasury role is to meet the funding requirements for this borrowing need. Depending on the funding requirements of the capital programme, the treasury team organises the Council's cash position to ensure that sufficient cash is available to meet the capital plans and cash flow requirements. This may be sourced through borrowing from external bodies (such as the government, through the Public Loans Works Board (PWLb), or the money markets).
- 4.10 The Council's underlying borrowing need (CFR) is not allowed to rise indefinitely. Statutory guidance is in place to ensure that capital expenditure is broadly charged to revenue over the life of the asset. The Council is required to make an annual revenue charge, called the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP), to reduce the CFR. This is effectively a principal loan repayment of the long-term borrowing need from the revenue budget.
- 4.11 The Council's capital financing requirement (CFR) for the year is shown in Table 2 and represents a key prudential indicator for the Council. The CFR outturn for 2025/26 is £307.810m which is £4.573m lower than forecast at Quarter 3 due to a decrease in the borrowing requirement for the year, due to slippage on the capital programme.

Table 2: change in the Capital Financing Requirement 2025/26 - in £ millions

Opening CFR at 1 April 2025		300.041
Add: Capital expenditure financed by borrowing		12.665
Less: Minimum Revenue Provision		(4.896)
Less: Other adjustments		(0.000)
Closing CFR at 31 March 2026		307.810
Forecast CFR at Q3 2025/26		312.383

Treasury Position for 2025/26

- 4.12 Whilst the measure of the Council's underlying need to borrow is the CFR, the Corporate Director of Finance can manage the Council's actual borrowing position by:
- borrowing to the CFR level; or
 - choosing to utilise some temporary cash flows instead of borrowing ("under borrowing").
- 4.13 Most local authorities have a degree of under borrowing within their CFR at present. This tends to be in the range of 10% - 15% of the total CFR. This means that external debt is lower than the need to borrow and other resources available have been used to bridge the gap. This strategy has been common within local government as part of an approach to generating revenue savings, in relation to annual capital financing costs, by deferring external borrowing to a later point in time driven by cash flow needs.

4.14 The Council's treasury management debt and investment position is organised by the corporate finance team to ensure that there is adequate liquidity for revenue and capital activities, security for investments, and to manage risks within all treasury management activities. Procedures and controls to achieve these objectives are well established both through member reporting and through officer activity detailed in the Council's Treasury Management Practices.

4.15 A summary of outstanding balances is shown below.

Table 3 – summary of borrowing and investments

<i>Treasury Position</i>	2024/25 Principal (£m)	Average Rate (%)	2025/26 Principal (£m)	Average Rate %
Public Works Loan Board (PWLB)	225.604	3.76	246.092	3.88
Banks	13.000	6.83	13.000	6.83
Other loans	14.838	3.82	21.497	3.91
Total Debt	253.442	3.92	280.589	4.02
Cash Investments	(21.555)	4.45	(9.053)	3.86
Net Debt	231.887		271.536	

4.16 Just under 88% of the Council's total debt is with central government via the PWLB on 31 March 2026. These loans vary in length from between 5 – 45 years and in essence match the lives of the capital assets they are financing. Most of the bank debt was taken out in the early 2000's when interest rates were higher, but these options were more attractive than borrowing from central government at the time. Due to the terms and conditions on these loans, there is no option to refinance them in the short term.

4.17 The other loans represent short-term borrowing from other local authorities. At times the Council will need cash liquidity to finance its revenue and capital commitments but interest rates for long term borrowing are not in line with the overall treasury strategy. In these cases, it is better value to finance this cash need over short periods of time, normally 1-3 months, even if interest rates are higher at that point. This allows the Council time to monitor market rates on long term debt for temporary reductions in rates caused by fluctuations in economic data and government policy.

4.18 Cash investments are temporary surpluses in liquidity that are either invested with central government via the Debt Management Office or with other local authorities with a cash need. Approximately £1.100m in interest was earned during 2025/26 on these balances.

4.19 The Council's total debt outstanding on 31st March 2026 was £280.589m. The Council's revised CFR position was estimated to be £312.383m at Quarter 3. However, the actual out turn position was £307.810m. When comparing this to our actual borrowing, this meant that the Council was "under borrowed" by £27.221m or 8.8%.

4.20 This "under borrowed" amount was financed by internal borrowing from cash balances which means that the amount that could have been invested externally was reduced to cover this. The reduced under borrowed position has the dual effect of reducing revenue costs incurred by the General Fund budget because borrowing costs are generally greater than investment returns. It also reduces counterparty risk by reducing our exposure to the inherent risks that exist in commercial banks and other financial institutions.

4.21 **Gross Borrowing and the CFR** – in order to ensure that borrowing levels are prudent over the medium term and only for a capital purpose, the Council should ensure that its gross external borrowing does not, except in the short term, exceed the total of the capital financing requirement in the preceding year (2024/25) plus the estimates of any additional capital financing requirement for the current (2025/26) and next two financial years (to 2027/28). This essentially means that the Council is not borrowing to support revenue expenditure. This indicator allows the Council some flexibility to borrow in advance of its immediate capital needs, if required. The table below highlights the Council's gross borrowing position against the CFR. The Council has complied with this prudential indicator as debt levels continue to be lower than needed.

Table 4 – Gross Borrowing to Capital Financing Requirement comparison in millions

	2024/25 Actual	2025/26 Original Budget	2025/26 Actual	2026/27 Budget	2027/28 Budget	2028/29 Budget	2029/30 Budget
Gross External Borrowing	253.442	292.388	280.589	326.028	347.623	350.651	351.233
Capital Financing Requirement	300.041	310.197	307.810	333.755	350.350	355.651	358.733
(Under)/Over borrowing	(46.599)	(17.809)	(27.221)	(7.727)	(2.727)	(5.000)	(7.500)
% of CFR	15.5	5.7	8.8	2.3	0.8	1.4	2.1

4.22 **The Authorised Limit** – The Authorised Limit is the "Affordable Borrowing Limit" required by section 3 of the Local Government Act 2003. The Council does not have power to borrow above this level.

4.23 **The Operational Boundary** – The Operational Boundary is the expected borrowing position of the Council during the year. Periods where the actual position is either below or over the Boundary are both acceptable, subject to the Authorised Limit not being breached.

- 4.24 **Actual financing costs as a proportion of net revenue expenditure** - This identifies the trend in the revenue cost of capital (borrowing and other long term obligation costs net of investment income) as a proportion of the Council's net revenue budget. The actual for this indicator has risen from the previous year due to an increase in the Capital Financing costs outturn.

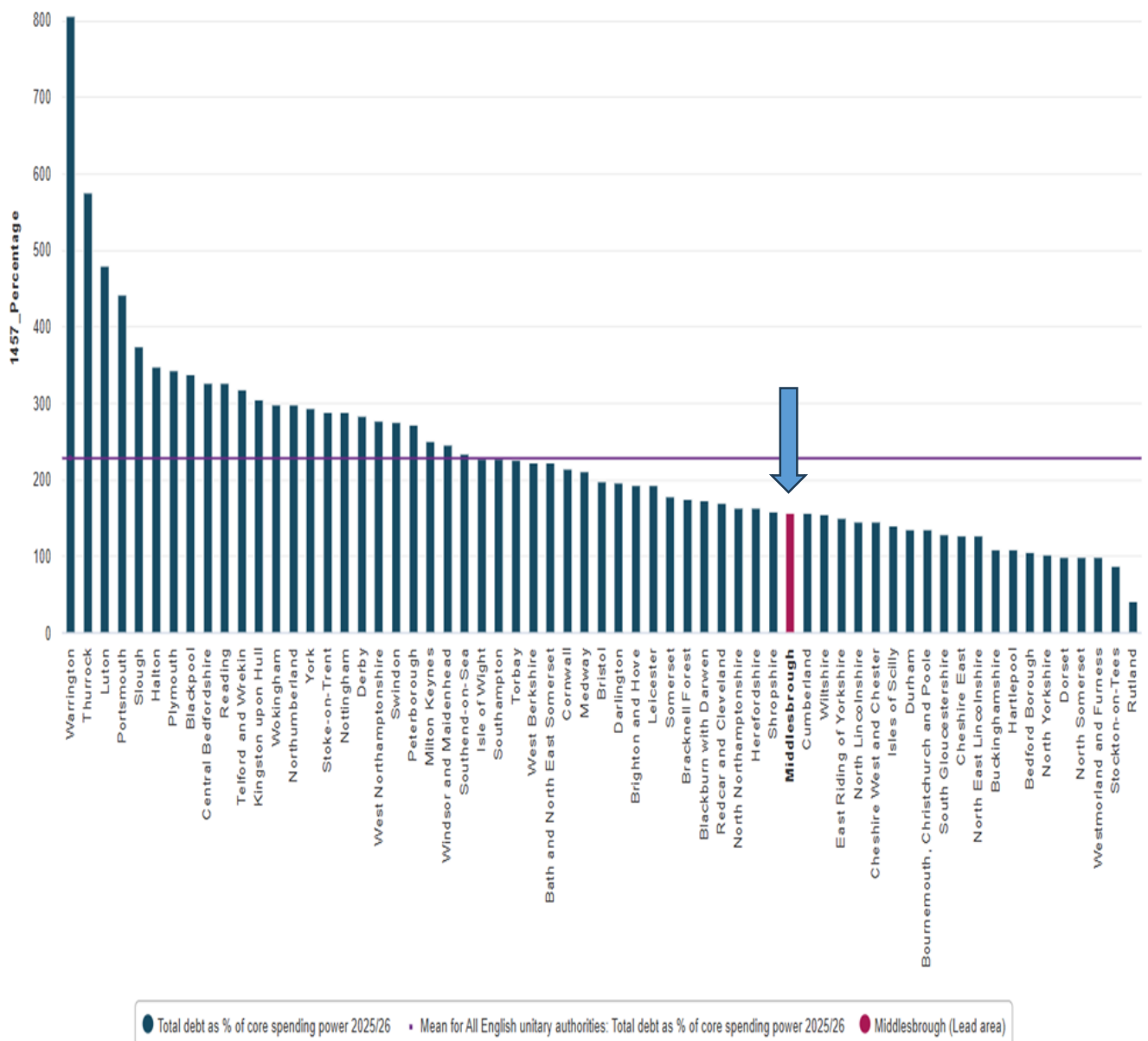
Table 5 – Key Prudential Indicators Summary

	2024/25 actual	2025/26 actual	2026/27 forecast	2027/28 forecast	2028/29 forecast	2029/30 forecast
Authorised Limit (£m)	318.000	331.000	354.000	371.000	376.000	379.000
Operational Boundary (£m)	308.000	321.000	344.000	361.000	366.000	369.000
Capital Financing Requirement (£m)	300.041	307.810	333.755	350.350	355.651	358.733
Current forecast - capital financing costs (£m)	11.405	11.954	14.151	16.022	16.769	17.396
Net Revenue Budget (£m)	143.190	143.304	200.840	225.265	241.231	250.017
Proportion of net revenue budget (%)	8.0%	8.3%	7.0%	7.1%	7.0%	7.0%

- 4.25 Due to the very long-term nature of capital expenditure and its financing, the revenue budget implications of this expenditure incurred in the next few years could extend for up to some 50 years into the future.
- 4.26 The figures in the table above have remained at lower levels when debt for the Council has been increasing. Members should be aware that this is because of the various capital investments in commercial property made by the Council over the last few years for regeneration purposes. This results in around £2.6m of income per year off setting the total capital financing cost by the end of the 2026/27 financial year.
- 4.27 Whilst the Council is not an outlier in terms of its level of total debt (see Graph 1 below), it was previously reaching the limit of its revenue affordability on borrowing to fund its future capital investment. Changes to the 2026/27 Local Government Finance Settlement and how the net revenue budget have been calculated have changed significantly with the Fair Funding Review 2.0 and the figures prior to this are not exactly comparable with those going forward. This is because the net budget of local authorities has increased substantially from 2026/27 due to the consolidation of a range of grants “rolling” into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) provided to local authorities.

4.28 The Council will need to review what the affordability threshold will be in this context and if the 10% best practice amount previously recommended by CIPFA is still relevant. Capital investment is important for the ongoing Council plan ambitions, however, there continues to be a need to be prudent, sustainable and affordable in its financial plans. The Corporate Director of Finance's view is that the Council will still benefit from prioritising its capital investment decisions over the medium and longer term and should secure its financing through third party funds such as contributions and grants and capital receipts from the sale of assets to minimise future borrowing.

Graph 1- Total debt as a percentage of core spending power (2025/26) for All English unitary authorities



Source:

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Economic Background 2025/26

4.29 A summary of the general economic conditions that have prevailed throughout 2025/26, provided by Arlingclose the Council's treasury management advisors, is attached at Appendix 1 for Members information.

Summary of the Treasury Management Strategy agreed for 2025/26

4.30 Treasury Management is defined as 'the management of the Council's cash flows, borrowing and investments, and the associated risk'. The main risks that affect a local authority include credit risk, interest rate risk, liquidity risk and refinancing risk.

4.31 The borrowing approach outlined in the treasury strategy was to achieve the optimum value for money for the revenue budget by a combination of long-term borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) when interest rates reached a trigger rate of below 4.75% and the maturity term of the new borrowing fitted in with the Council's current debt portfolio. If these conditions did not exist when cash balances fell below £10.000m, then short term borrowing would be considered for the minimum period possible, given that interest rates were expected to rise over the period. Additionally short-term borrowing would be capped at a maximum of 20% of the total of the Council's gross external debt balance.

4.32 The approach to investing cash balances is to follow the relevant government and CIPFA guidance in prioritising and protecting the principal sums involved by only investing with institutions on the Council's approved lending list. This factor is paramount and more important than the higher interest rates that could be achieved on riskier and illiquid investments with longer duration terms. Only 10% of total investments could be deposited for periods over one financial year given the higher levels of risk associated with these products.

Treasury Management activity during 2025/26

4.33 During the financial year, the Council maintained an under-borrowed position. This meant that the capital borrowing need (the CFR), was not fully funded with loan debt as cash supporting the Council's reserves, balances and cash flow was used as an interim measure. This strategy was prudent as investment returns were low and minimising counterparty risk on placing investments also needed to be considered.

4.34 All borrowing and investment activity undertaken during the financial year were in line with the approved Treasury Management Strategy agreed for the financial year.

4.35 A total of £50.000m of new external borrowing was undertaken during 2025/26. £45.000m of this was long term from the Public Works Loan Board with £5.000m of short-term borrowing from another local authority. This was offset by the repayment of £7.500m of maturing debt and £15.353m of annuity loan repayments. The total level of external debt for the Council rose by £27.147m during 2025/26. All borrowing decisions were authorised in line with the treasury management policy and via consultation with external advisers.

4.36 Investments were made with either central government or other local authorities on an almost daily basis to ensure that the Council's overall liquidity position was protected. All principal sums invested have been repaid on time by each counterparty. The total interest earned on these temporary cash balances for 2025/26 was £1.083m and helped to balance the overall net capital financing budget.

4.37 The Council's Treasury Management function has complied with all the relevant statutory and regulatory requirements, which limit the levels of risk associated with its treasury management activities. The adoption and implementation of both the Prudential Code and the code of Practice for Treasury Management mean both that its capital expenditure is prudent, affordable and sustainable and its treasury practices demonstrate a low-risk approach.

4.38 Officers of the Council are aware of the risks of passive management of the treasury portfolio and, with the support of Arlingclose, the Council's advisers, have proactively managed the debt and investments portfolio over the financial year.

5. Ward Member Engagement if relevant and appropriate

5.1 Not relevant to this report as it relates to corporate financial management issues.

6. Other potential alternative(s) and why these have not been recommended

6.1 Not relevant as the report is for information only.

7. Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

Topic	Impact
Financial (including Social Value)	All relevant financial implications are outlined within the body of this report and the supporting Appendix 1. The capital programme and financing being recommended in the budget report continued to remain affordable within the approved Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and revenue budget parameters throughout the financial year. The Council needs to manage and prioritise its future capital investment and associated funding strategies more strictly over the term of the MTFP to maintain revenue cost of capital investment within affordable and prudent parameters. The Prudential and Treasury Management indicators and processes remain robust and within prudent limits over the term of the MTFP. Tables 3 to 5 outlines the key debt metrics, and the capital financing costs as a % of the net revenue budget over the MTFP period.
Procurement	There are no direct impacts on procurement.

Legal	There are no direct legal implications of this report. All activity on capital financing, investments and borrowing is under current local authority powers under either the local government act 2003 or the capital finance and accounting regulations.
Risk	Any risk related issues are set out within the report. Risk management is an integral part of the Council's treasury management strategy, and these are considered as part of business-as-usual activities and are set out in more detail within the Treasury Management Practices document maintained by the central finance team.
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion	There are no applicable issues to consider within this report.
Reducing Poverty	There are no applicable issues to consider within this report.
Climate Change / Environmental	There are no applicable issues to consider within this report.
Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers	There are no applicable issues to consider within this report.
Data Protection	There are no applicable issues to consider within this report.

Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
Not Applicable		

Appendices

1	Economic Background – 2025/26 financial year (Arlingclose Ltd. March 2026)
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Background papers

Body	Report title	Date
Council	2025/26 Revenue Budget, Medium Term Financial Plan, Council Tax Setting and Treasury Management	19 February 2025
Executive	Treasury Management Mid-Year Review – 2025/26	3 December 2025
Executive	2025/26 Revenue and Capital Budget Outturn	10 June 2026

Contact: Justin Weston, Head of Corporate Finance (Deputy S151 Officer)

Email: justin_weston@middlesbrough.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Economic Background – 2025/26 Financial Year

The financial year was largely dominated by two periods of significant uncertainty and volatility. The first being the US trade tariff ‘Liberation Day’ in April 2025 and the second was the US/Israel war with Iran at the end of February 2026.

After the initial fallout from US trade tariffs, the following months saw some improvements as equity markets made gains and bond yields eased modestly. However, in the UK this trend in bond yields reversed somewhat as an uncertain economic outlook together with concerns around the government’s fiscal position and autumn Budget saw ‘term premia’ rise as investors demanded a higher return for holding gilts.

The Budget itself was more muted than had been expected. Despite a weak economic outlook, this helped UK markets perform better with gilt yields trending downwards, inflation easing, and expectations for cuts in Bank of England (BoE) Bank Rate increasing.

The end of February 2026 saw the start of the war between US/Israel and Iran. The conflict caused oil and other commodity prices to rise sharply as the shipping lanes in the region became effectively closed, restricting global oil supply. At the end of the period, the economic outlook remained highly uncertain in terms of its impact on inflation as well as countries’ fiscal and monetary policy conditions around the globe.

Prior to the start of the war, headline UK consumer price inflation (CPI) inflation had generally been trending downwards, albeit the 3% in February 2026 was unchanged from January. Core CPI also stayed put at 3.1%. Inflation was expected to fall further over the coming months to the BoE’s 2% target, but the war changed this. Inflation is now expected to rise again, but how quickly and by how much depends on the duration of the war and how long commodity prices are elevated.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported the UK economy expanded by 0.1% in Q4 2025. This followed previous modest gains of 0.2% in Q2 and by 0.1% in Q3. Of the subsequent monthly figures, the ONS estimated that GDP showed no growth in January 2026. As this is from before the war started the impact on growth will not be seen formally in the data for a couple more months.

While the most recent labour market figures were slightly better than expected, the general trend has been one of persistent weakness. In the three months to January 2026, the unemployment rate rose to 5.2% (from 5.1%), while the employment rate held at 75.1%. Despite inflation being expected to rise in the coming months, labour market conditions remain loose and so any upward pressure on wages from general inflation is likely to be tempered by the weaker labour market environment.

After cutting Bank Rate to 3.75% in December 2025, the BoE’s Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) voted 5-4 to hold rates in February 2026 and then unanimously to do so again in March. Until the war started, financial markets were expecting Bank Rate to be cut to 3.5% at the March meeting. However, the conflict in the Middle East quickly changed this. The MPC noted the risks to both inflation and growth and indicated they could move

rates either up or down depending on the conditions. Financial markets quickly responded to this by pricing in rate hikes.

Following the March MPC meeting, Arlingclose, the Council's treasury adviser, revised its central interest rate view and now predicts Bank Rate will be held at 3.75%. However, the conflict makes the outlook for rates highly uncertain. In the short-term the risks are to the upside with the chance of higher Bank Rate should the MPC decide it wishes to quickly quash potential second-round effects from higher inflation. Further out, if Bank Rate is hiked quickly, the pace and magnitude of subsequent cuts could take it far lower than was previously anticipated as policymakers add significant stimulus to a much weaker economic growth outlook.

The US Federal Reserve had been cutting rates over the period, reducing Fed Funds Rate target range by 0.25% at its December meeting to 3.50%-3.75%. At the three subsequent meetings, the rate was held at the same range. Policymakers noted that while inflation was elevated, economic activity had been expanding but the war with Iran made the path of monetary policy highly uncertain. Despite this, the Fed still suggested that further rate cuts were likely in 2026 and 2027.

The European Central Bank (ECB) has kept its key interest rates on hold since June 2025, maintaining the deposit rate at 2.0% and main refinancing rate at 2.15%. At its March 2026 meeting, the ECB noted the war in the Middle East had significantly increased uncertainty, creating upside risks for inflation and downside risks for growth, leading it to revise up its forecasts accordingly.

Financial markets: After declining sharply early in the financial year following the announcement of US tariffs, sentiment in financial markets had improved but equity and bond markets remained volatile throughout. However, the latter part of the period was dominated by the US/Israel war with Iran, which saw equity markets fall sharply, and bond yields rise as concerns over the inflationary impact from sharply higher oil and other commodity prices outweighed the flight-to-quality into government bonds often seen in conflicts.

Equity markets had been registering gains after the declines during the April sell-off, but the war reversed this, and markets saw another sharp drawdown. Both the FTSE 100 and 250 fell by around 10% over the month from the start of the conflict to the end of the financial year.

The period saw significant volatility in gilt yields. The 10-year UK benchmark gilt yield started the year at 4.65% and ended at 4.86%. However, over this time the 10-year yield hit a low of 4.23% and a high of 4.95% in the space of a month. It was a similar picture for the 20-year gilt which started at 5.18% and ended at 5.45% with a low and high of 4.92% and 5.55% respectively. The Sterling Overnight Rate (SONIA) averaged 4.01% over the 12 months to 31st March.

Credit review: Arlingclose maintained its recommended maximum unsecured duration limit on most of the banks on its counterparty list at 6 months. The other banks remain on 100 days.

After spiking in April 2025 following the US trade tariff announcements, UK credit default swap (CDS) prices had trended down before picking up modestly in October and November. After declining again in December and into the new calendar year, they rose sharply once again when the war in the Middle East started. They were still elevated at the end of the period, but prices for all banks on Arlingclose's counterparty list remained within limits deemed satisfactory for maintaining credit advice at current durations.

Financial market volatility is expected to remain, and CDS levels will be monitored for signs of ongoing credit stress. As ever, the institutions and durations on the Council's counterparty list recommended by Arlingclose remain under constant review.

Arlingclose Ltd
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