

### Annual Investment Strategy 2015-16

The Annual Investment Strategy is required under the Treasury Management code of Practice and statutory Investment Guidance issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government. Waverley's primary objective in relation to the investment of public funds remains the security of capital. The liquidity or accessibility of the Authority's investments and the yields earned on investments are important but are secondary considerations.

The 2015/16 Strategy is framed against this backdrop of continued uncertainty in the market. On a local level, the Strategy also recognises the significant levels of cash currently held by Waverley, mainly due to the accumulated HRA funds which will be spent on new affordable homes as schemes are delivered.

The capital finance regulations require the Council to determine a number of limits and guidelines for its investment activity including 'specified' and 'non-specified' investments. Specified investments are those held in sterling with a maturity of no more than a year and must be with the UK Government, UK local authorities or "high" credit rated institutions. Non-specified investments are any investments that do not meet the above criteria.

To meet the requirements of the Regulations it is proposed that the following policy and limits apply to all of Waverley's investment activity in 2015/16:

- Cash investments only with UK Local Authorities and the UK Government and institutions assessed as having a 'high credit quality'
- 'High credit quality' means having AAA rating for sterling money market funds or a minimum rating of A- for any banks and building societies, and being considered to have high credit credentials after taking account of the factors listed below.
- Waverley will not make any non-specified cash investments, other than when the investment is non-specified by virtue of it being for a period of more than one year, subject to it being an approved counterparty and an assessment of risk.
- £10million is the maximum investment in any single specified organisation at any one time.
- £15m is the total investment with any group - £7.5m remaining the maximum with any single member of that group
- Up to date information gathered by officers, together with specialist advice if appropriate, will be used to ensure compliance with the strategy
- Every investment will have a ratings check on the day of the investment and a list of potential counterparties will be prepared and approved by the S151 Officer before 1st April each year and updated throughout the year
- The maximum total investment at any one time that can prudently be committed for more than one year is £10 million.
- If cashflow certainty can be demonstrated over a longer term, Waverley will consider investing in property provided that a business case is presented to Members including a risk and viability assessment.
- The Director of Finance and Resources can seek the approval of the Executive to change the above limits during the year if necessary, provided that it is in the best interests of the Council to do so.

The proposed boundaries set out above remain as previously. In practice, the continuing market conditions will mean that controls may be tightened further, within the bounds of the approved policy, to create as much security as possible for Waverley's investment portfolio. These measures include:

- The major objective of managing daily cash balances to meet cash flow commitments remains the priority although it is recognised that the HRA cashflows are now significant and greater certainty exists so longer term investment decisions are possible
- In addition to the thresholds above, the maximum amount invested in any single specified organisation will generally be restricted to no more than 20% of the overall total external investments at that time
- Short term lending, generally targeted at up to 6 month, is generally judged to generate the best balance of return to risk, and most of Waverley's investment will fall into this category; although any opportunities in the yield curve with longer term investments may be taken
- Investments are also monitored on a sector basis and judgments made as to the appropriate level within each sector taking into account appropriate treasury management information
- General Market information is also used to enable some targeting of investment partners and the objective views of the credit agencies still have a value and are monitored more regularly.
- Close monitoring of credit ratings at the point of transaction including consideration of the 'future outlook' assessment.
- Increased frequency of updating the list of preferred organisations for investment with reduced working maximum limits for lower rated counterparties.

In order to continually review the Council's counterparty list and to make a judgement about whether a counterparty has a 'high credit quality', officers will gather and consider information such as:

- Credit rating 'future outlook' assessments
- Published credit ratings for financial institutions
- Economic fundamentals
- Share Prices
- Corporate developments, news, articles, markets sentiment and momentum

A major problem in the current environment is acknowledged as finding an investment counterparty providing acceptable levels of counterparty risk. In order to diversify an investment portfolio largely invested in cash, investments will be placed with a range of approved investment counterparties in order to achieve a diversified portfolio of prudent counterparties, investment periods and rates of return. Maximum investment levels with each counterparty within the limits set out in this Strategy will be set to ensure prudent diversification is achieved.

**Banking** - Waverley banks with HSBC. At the current time, HSBC meets the minimum credit criteria of 'A' long term. The Council continues to monitor the credit rating of HSBC and would report to Members if any major concerns emerged. If the credit rating falls

below the Authority's minimum criteria HSBC would have to be used in the short term for business continuity and liquidity requirements.

However, in practice, it would be impossible to restrict the Council's own bank, HSBC, to the same £limits as other investment counterparties because there are many instances when cash in excess of £10m is moving through the Council's HSBC bank accounts. Given also that it is likely that there will often be occasions when Waverley has more cash than the total of its approved counterparty limits, it is therefore necessary to specifically exclude HSBC's banking activities from the £10m limit. It should be noted that existing HSBC bank accounts are all instant access.

**Training** - CIPFA's Code of Practice requires the *responsible officer* to ensure that all members tasked with treasury management responsibilities, including scrutiny of the treasury management function, receive appropriate training relevant to their needs and understand fully their roles and responsibilities. Waverley's approach to training is set out in the schedule supporting Treasury Management Practice (TMP) 10.