

Agenda Item	7
Report No	RES/19/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Corporate Resources

Date: 04 June 2026

Report Title: Treasury Management – Summary of Transactions to 31 March 26

Report By: Chief Officer – Corporate Finance

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report on the treasury management transactions undertaken from 01 January 26 to 31 March 26 is submitted to Committee for Members' scrutiny and in compliance with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management.
- 1.2 This report sets out treasury management transactions during the period (see **Appendix 1**), reflecting activity undertaken to manage the Council's cash flows, and borrowing to fund capital expenditure. It also demonstrates compliance with the Council's prudential indicators (see **Appendix 2**).
- 1.3 The report also provides some specific information and commentary regarding volatility in borrowing rates as a result of current events in the Middle East, as they have impacted during the quarter.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. Consider and **note** the Treasury Management - Summary of Transactions report for the period from 1 January 2026 to 31 March 2026.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource:** Bank base rates started to reduce incrementally from August 2024 falling from its peak of 5.25% to 3.75% in December 2025 (see table at **paragraph 5.3**). In relative terms rates remain high compared to the past decade and UK Government targets. The Council has focused on accessing short-term rather than long-term borrowing on the basis that rates had been expected to fall further, albeit more slowly than had previously been anticipated. The quarter covered by this report has been impacted by the current geopolitical situation in the Middle East, which has led to a sharp increase in borrowing rates and volatility in rates across the latter part of the quarter. The use of short- term borrowing does however have associated risks such as market rates

increasing, and/or appropriate borrowing not being available when required. This approach is kept under regular review and may be changed depending on the prevailing short and long- term rates. The use of short-term borrowing does mitigate the risk of locking into long-term borrowing when rates are forecast to fall in the coming months. The impact on our borrowing approach due to the increasing cost and availability of short- term borrowing is considered at **paragraph 7.5**.

- 3.2 **Legal:** There are no Legal implications with Treasury activity undertaken in accordance with relevant regulations and within Policy as agreed by Council.
- 3.3 **Risk:** See paragraph 3.1 for information on managing the risks associated with short-term borrowing. This report includes particular reference to current events in the Middle East and risks and implications.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people):** There are no implications arising as a direct result of this report.
- 3.5 **Gaelic:** There are no implications arising as a direct result of this report.

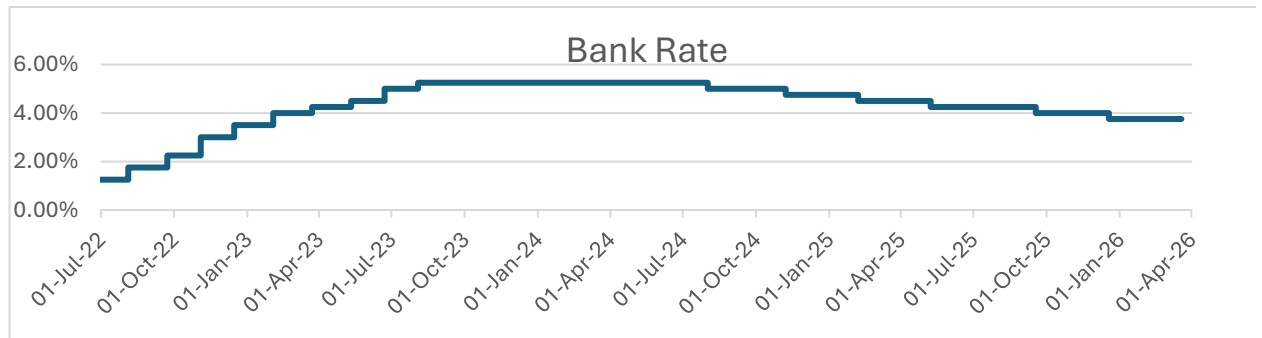
4. Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies, or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact on Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children’s Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When making any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is a monitoring and update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS)

- 5.1 The strategy agreed in March 2025 which applies to financial year 2025/26 is to fund the capital programme by continuing to consider all borrowing options on an ongoing basis, manage liquidity, refinancing and interest rate risks to minimise loan charge interest rates as much as possible.
- 5.2 The Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) sets monetary policy to meet the UK Government 2% inflation target, in a way that helps to sustain growth and employment and working to keep inflation low and stable. At its meeting on 30 April 2026, the MPC voted by a majority of 8-1 to hold the Bank Rate at 3.75% citing the war in the Middle East and the affect it is having on costs and rise in inflation to 3.3%.

5.3

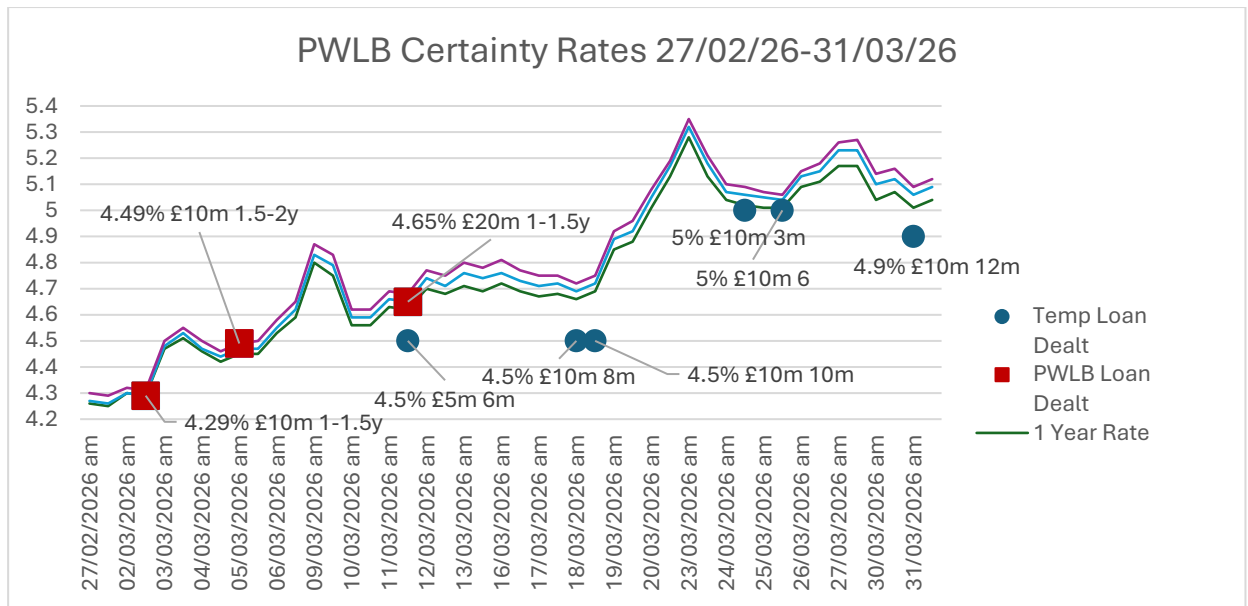


6. Financial and Economic Update

6.1 Treasury Management has been impacted since the start of events in the Middle East resulting in high volatility, and spikes in borrowing rates. The Geopolitical situation, along with the impact of domestic factors has meant that the bank rate is now forecast to be held at 3.75% throughout 2026, rather than an expected decrease. Inflation data released in the second half of 2026 will play a major role in determining whether the current forecast will stand. The table at **paragraph 6.4.1** highlights this volatility in PWLB rates since the start of the conflict and through to the end of March and shows at a point in time a 1% increase in the cost of borrowing compared to the end of February rates. The graph as shown below also highlights markers on actual borrowing undertaken in the period, with Council Officers endeavouring where possible to borrow at lower points in the upward rate trajectory, and also in this period being able to source temporary loans at lower rates than available via PWLB. At this time it is unclear to what extent the Middle East impact on borrowing rates may be, a shorter-term implication, or may extend for a longer duration. Given economic and budget forecasts had been predicating a decrease in borrowing rates, the current increase in rates and ongoing volatility does represent a financial risk. The current approach of borrowing for shorter-term durations does seek to mitigate risks by not locking into long term borrowing while rates are high. Future reports to Members will reflect further updates and should a more sustained period of increase interest rates arise, would highlight implications for the Council and any mitigations that could be considered.

6.2 In May 2026 the Scottish Government announced its intention to move to payment of General Revenue Grant from weekly, with the final weekly payment on 30 September 2026 to monthly commencing on 7 October 2026. This will impact on Treasury Management, requiring more cashflow planning and forecasting and will result in a higher balance of short-term investments at the start of each month, which will likely taper off as the month progresses. This may well require a review of counterparty limits and counterparties to ensure we have sufficient capacity to deposit and manage liquidity and counterparty risk. Any updates to counterparty limits will be highlighted in a future Treasury Management report.

6.2.1

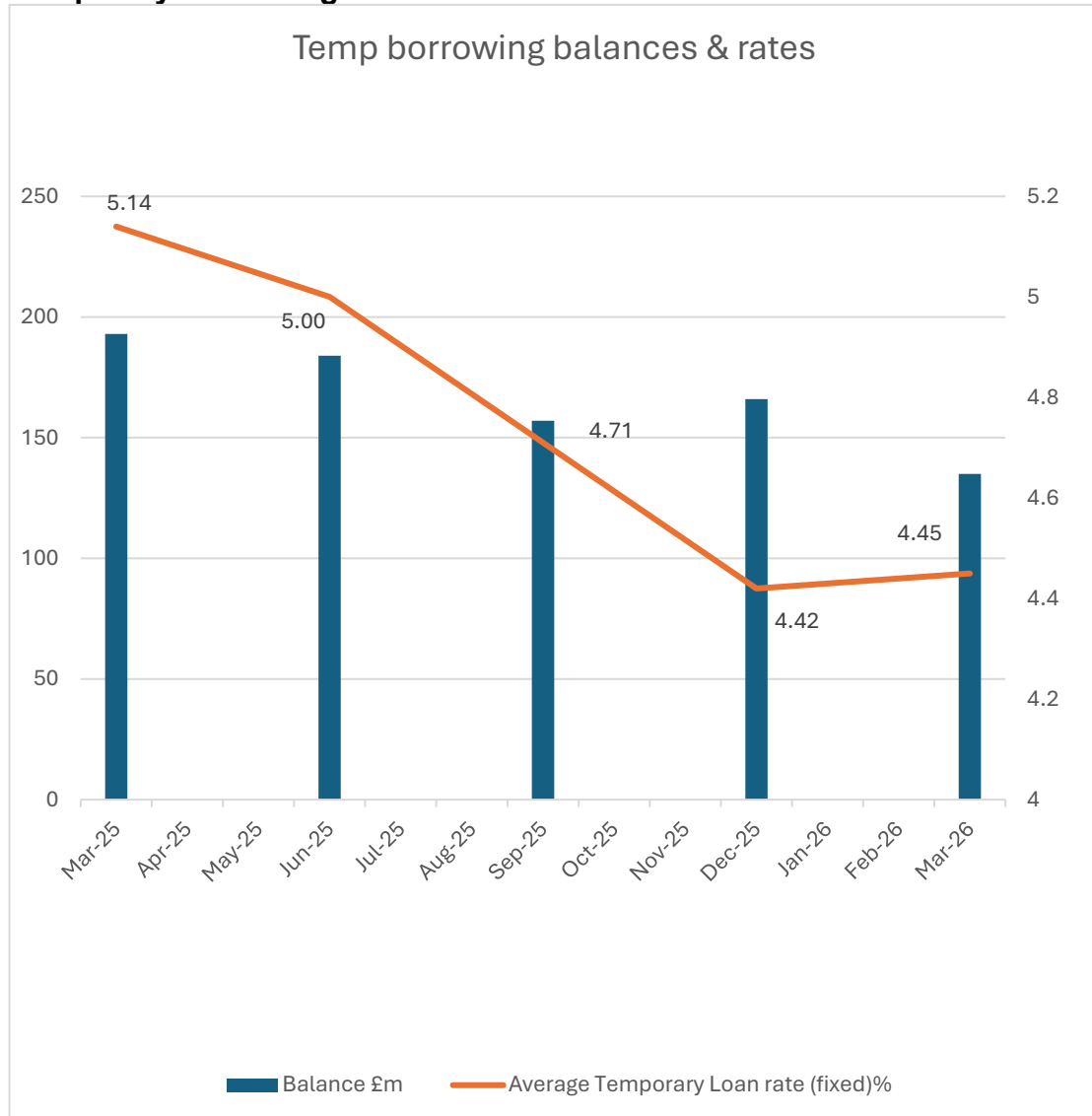


Key for borrowing undertaken: Rate (%), Amount Borrowed (£m), term of borrowing (m=months, y=years)

7. Borrowing Undertaken and Repayments Made

- 7.1 There is continuing market uncertainty influenced by both domestic and geopolitical factors. Bank Rate was reduced to 3.75% in December 2025 and, at the time of writing this report remains at this level. The Council's Treasury Management advisor, MUF, forecasts it will remain at 3.75%, a cut to 3.50% is not now predicted until September 2027, this is a revision to their previous forecast which predicted a cut to 3.50% in June 2026.
- 7.2 On 31 March 2026, the total of temporary loans was £134.5m (£165.5m at 31 December 2025) with £32.0m of temporary borrowing undertaken and £63.0m of temporary loans repaid during the quarter. As a comparison, the previous quarter's balances and average rates are shown below. Inter-local authority rates are driven largely by supply and demand.

7.2.1 Temporary Borrowing:



7.3 On 31 March 2026, the total of Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) loans was £1,184.7m (£1,115.5m at 31 December 2025) and the long-term Market loans total remained at £106.1m.

7.4 The following PWLB **borrowing** was undertaken between 1 January 2026 to 31 March 2026.

Amount £m	Loan Type	Start Date	Maturity Date	Rate %
10.0	Maturity	23/01/2026	01/12/2028	4.50
10.0	Maturity	10/02/2026	10/02/2027	4.39
10.0	Maturity	13/02/2026	13/02/2027	4.31
10.0	Maturity	24/02/2026	24/02/2027	4.27
10.0	Maturity	09/03/2026	11/08/2027	4.29
10.0	Maturity	12/03/2026	06/10/2027	4.49
20.0	Maturity	18/03/2026	07/04/2027	4.65
80.0				

7.5 The following PWLB **repayment** was made between 1 January 2026 to 31 March 2026.

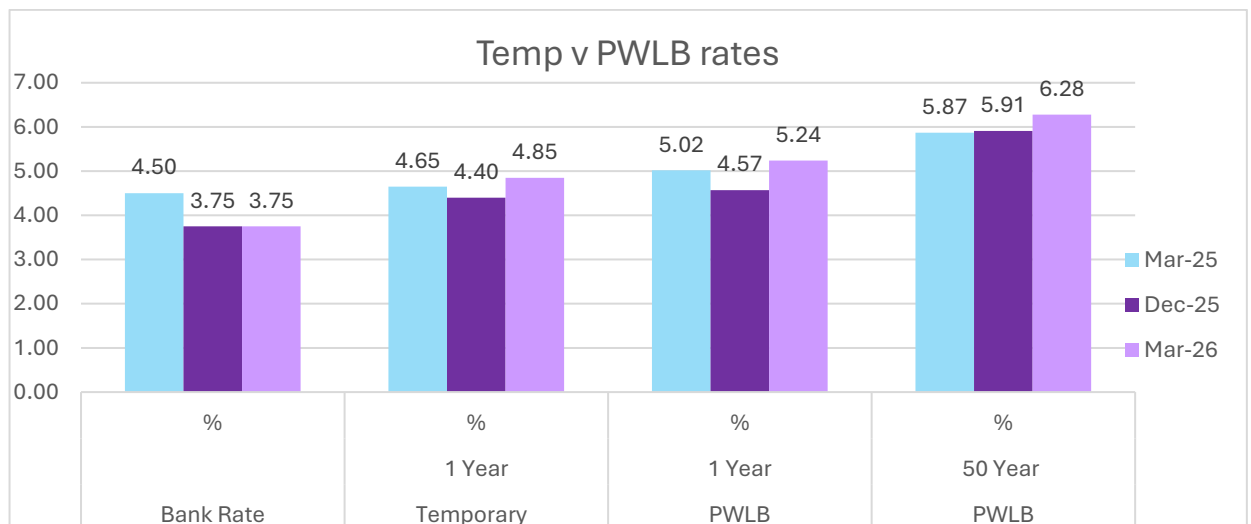
Amount £m	Loan Type	Start Date	Maturity Date	Rate %
10.0	Maturity	04/03/2025	04/03/2026	4.81
0.8	EIP	28/11/2023	30/09/2025	4.38

7.6 During the quarter a mix of temporary borrowing from the inter-local authority money market and new PWLB loans were undertaken. PWLB loans were taken for periods of less than 3 years with a variety of maturity dates to limit refinancing risk and targeting optimum PWLB rates.

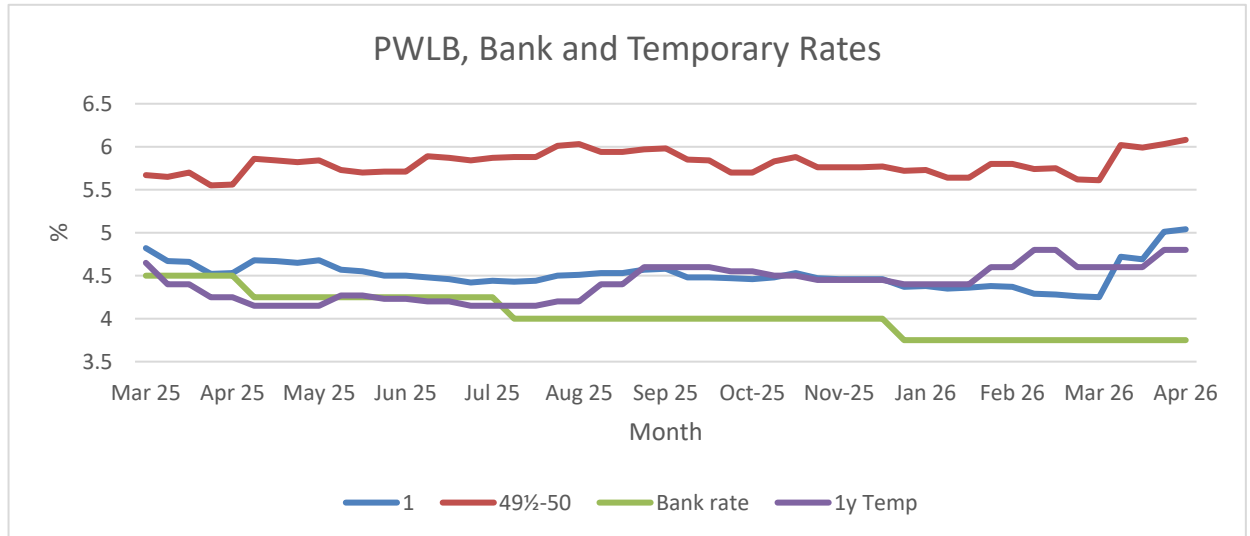
7.7 The Council's approach has been to use short-term borrowing to avoid locking into longer-term borrowing at high interest rates. This approach is regularly reviewed. At the time of writing this report, MUFG's forecast is for Bank Rate to remain at 3.75% until September 2027, short- and long-term rates have not fallen as quickly as previously expected. A mix of temporary borrowing and short-dated PWLB borrowing was deemed the most prudent approach.

7.8 The first chart below shows the cost of borrowing (interest rates payable) compared to the previous year and quarter. The second chart compares PWLB, bank and temporary market rates over the financial year to date and highlights the relationship between PWLB and Temporary borrowing rates, highlighting (using 1-year terms) where PWLB or market borrowing has been the most attractive at a point in time. Supply and demand remain a key issue in relation to market borrowing such that while rates may at times be more attractive, there is often a limited supply of funds.

7.8.1



7.8.2

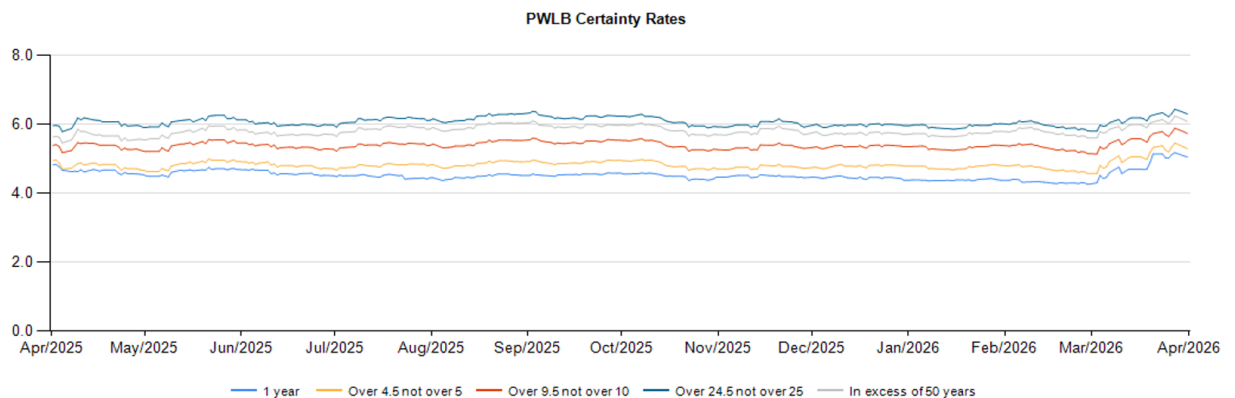


7.8.3

The PWLB rates for the financial year 2025/26 to date are shown in the graph below. Local authorities cannot borrow from the PWLB for investment purposes. Margins over gilt yields are as follows:

- PWLB Standard Rate is gilt plus 100 basis points (1.0%) (G+100bps)
- PWLB Certainty Rate is gilt plus 80 basis points (0.8%) (G+80bps)
- HRA Certainty Rate is gilt plus 40bps (0.4%) (G+60bps) until end March 2027.
- Local Infrastructure Rate is gilt plus 60bps (0.6%) (G+60bps)

7.8.4



8. Deposits

8.1 Cash flow, uncertainty, and the need to maintain liquidity, has meant the Council has held most of its cash balances in Money Market Funds (MMFs) similar to the approach being taken by other Local Authorities. Bank Rate remained at 3.75% at 31 March 26 and the rate of return on Money Market Fund (MMF) investments reduced during the quarter.

8.2 All investment decisions are taken with reference to CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management where **Security** of funds is the overriding consideration, then **Liquidity** and finally **Yield**.

- 8.3 A full list of all counterparties at 31 March 2026 is at **Appendix 3**.
- 8.4 When placing temporary deposits, the Council uses a weekly credit rating list provided by the MUFG, to assess the risks involved in lending to individual counterparties. The Council's lending policy is continually monitored against these credit ratings. This provides a balance of operational flexibility and risk awareness in managing the Council's temporary investments.
- 8.5 As noted earlier in the report, the change in payment frequency of Scottish Government (SG) Grant funding may require the Council to review some of its counter-party limits and associated arrangements. As the move to monthly payment (from weekly) may at points in the month result in higher cash balances held than under the current weekly payment arrangement. As the change by SG is not being made until later in the year, any implications can be considered in future reports.
- 8.6 The transactions reported here have been undertaken in line with the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Investment Statement (TMSS) for 2025/26 which was approved by Council on 27 March 2025.

Designation: Chief Officer – Corporate Finance

Date: 14 May 2026

Author: Mairi MacCallum, Treasury Officer

Background Papers:

[Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2025/26](#)

[Treasury Management Summary of Transactions 31 December 2025](#)

Appendices: Appendix 1 - Treasury Management - Summary of Transactions for the Quarter to 31 March 2026
Appendix 2 - Treasury Management – Prudential Indicators
Appendix 3 - List of Counterparties

Appendix 1 - Treasury Management - Summary of Transactions for the Quarter to 31 March 2026

Type of Borrowing	Outstanding debt at start of quarter £m	Raised £m	Repaid £m	Outstanding debt at end of quarter £m	Average Interest Rate	
					31 Dec 25 %	31 Mar 26 %
Public Works Loan Board	1,115.5	80.0	(10.8)	1,184.7	4.00	4.02
Market Loans	78.3	0	0	78.3	4.76	4.76
LOBO Market Loans	27.7	0	(0)	27.7	4.66	4.66
Fixed Temporary Loans (term < 1 year)	165.5	32.0	(63.0)	134.5	4.42	4.45
Variable Temporary Loan	0	0	(0)	0	-	-
Bank Balance	0	0	0	0	-	-
GROSS EXTERNAL BORROWING	1,387.0	112.0	(73.8)	1,425.2	-	-
<i>Temporary Deposits</i>	<i>(57.9)</i>	<i>(185.0)</i>	209.0	<i>(33.9)</i>	3.86	3.78
NET EXTERNAL BORROWING	1,329.1	(73.0)	135.2	1,391.3		
Total loan average					4.11	4.12

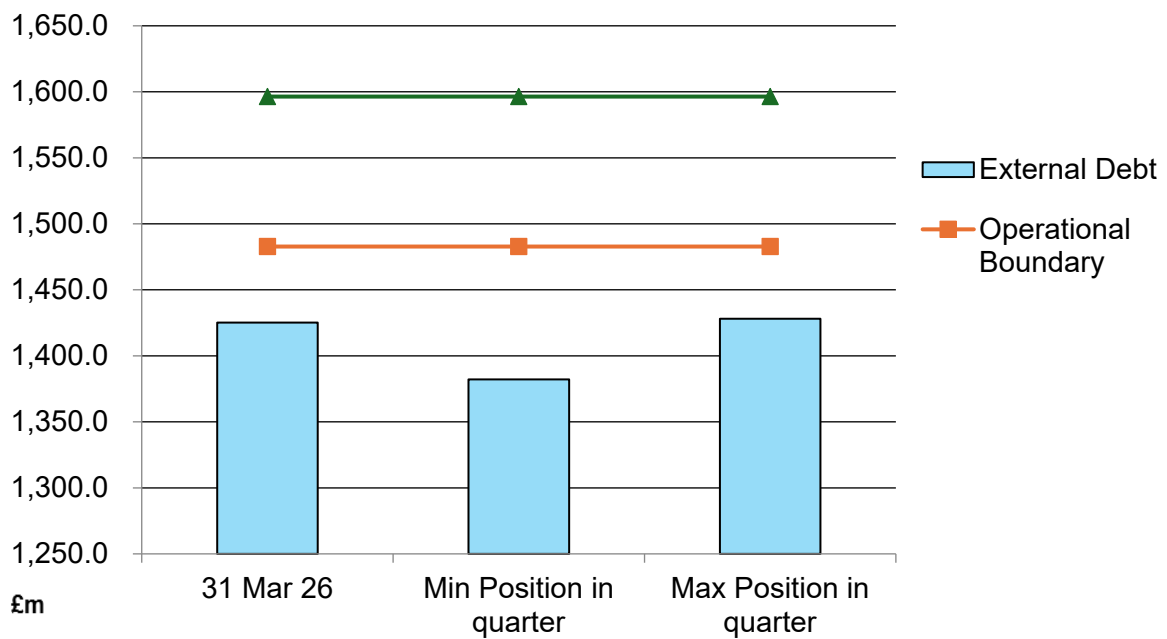
<u>Borrowing / Lending internal parameters as per approved Treasury Management Practices</u>	<u>Actual</u> %	<u>Approved Max</u> %
Short-term borrowing as % of the Council's total outstanding debt	9.4	25.0
Borrowing at variable rates of interest as % of the Council's total outstanding loan debt	1.9	35.0

Appendix 2

Treasury Management - Prudential Indicators

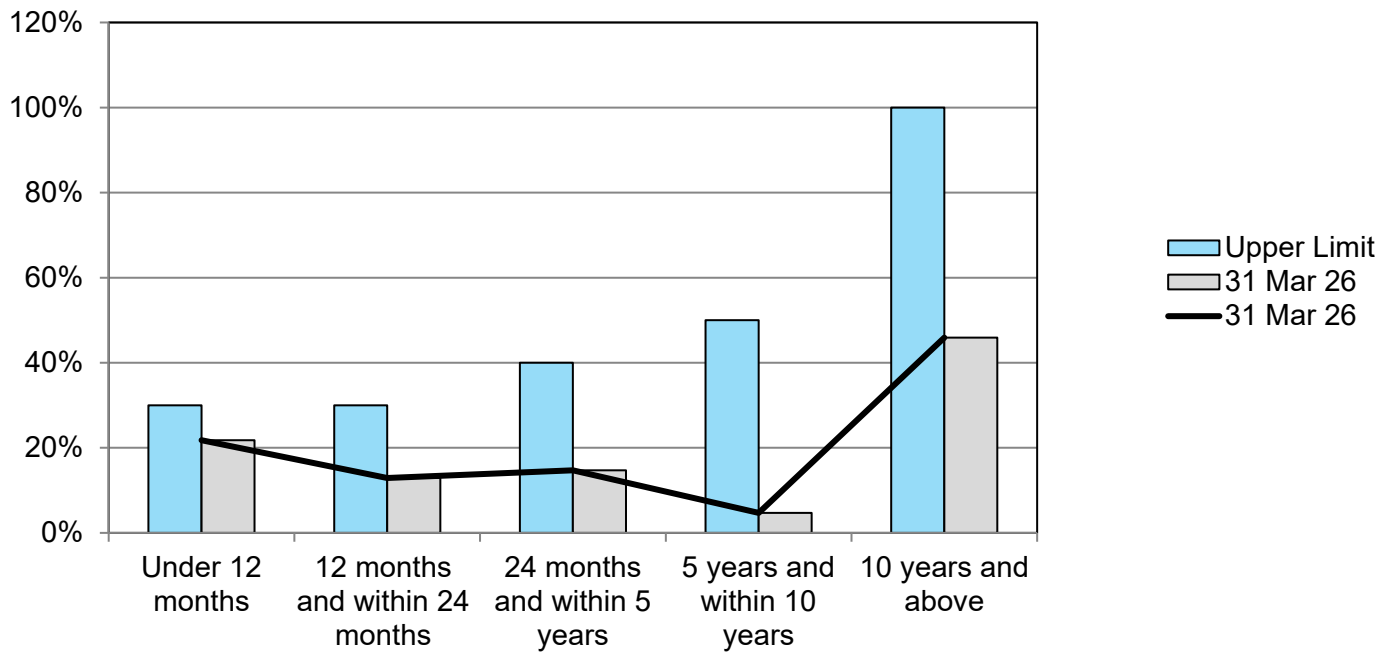
The Council has complied with all the prudential limits set in the TMSS 2025/26 during the quarter to 31 March 26.

External Debt

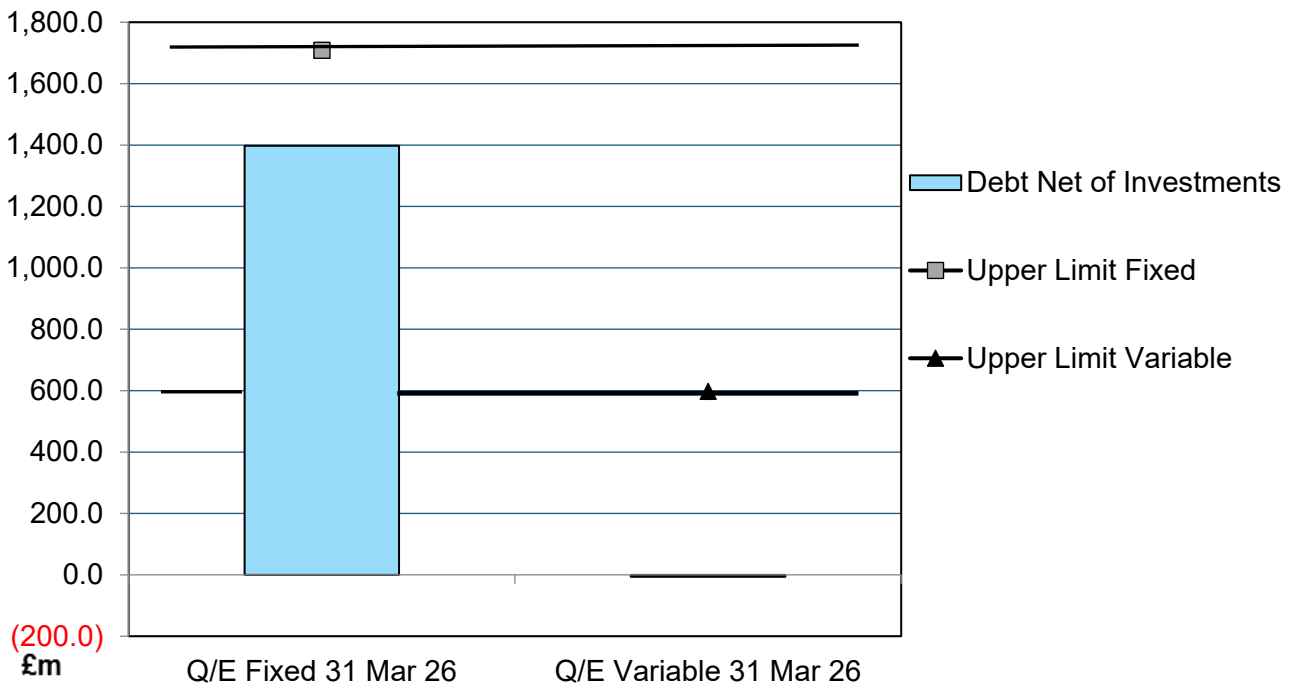


Note: the operational boundary, as set out within the TMSS, is an estimate of the likely and prudent operational level of borrowing on a day-to-day basis. It is an operational planning measure and distinct from the fixed authorised limit.

Maturity Structure of Fixed Rate Borrowing



Debt Net of Investments



Appendix 3

List of Counterparties

The following table is a list of current counterparties used, amount deposited with each counterparty and the MUFG credit rating as at 31 March 2026.

Counterparty	Amount £m	Counter - party limit £m	MUFG credit rating Mar 26	Total Amount £m	Deposit Type	Rate Mar 26 %	FTD Duration
Clydesdale** Bank t/a Virgin Money	14.2	20.0	Red 6 Mths	14.2	Call	3.75	N/A
	0.0				CMA	1.10	
Insight Investments MMF	5.7	20.0	AAA rated	5.7	Call	3.82	N/A
Northern Trust MMF	6.4	20.0	AAA rated	6.4	Call	3.80	N/A
Aberdeen Liquidity MMF	7.5	20.0	AAA rated	7.5	Call	3.82	N/A
BlackRock ICS MMF	0.1	20.0	AAA rated	0.1	Call	3.76	N/A
Total Deposits	33.9			33.9			

** includes overnight deposit in Clydesdale Cash Management Account which may occasionally result in a small overnight overlimit.