CYNGOR SIR *POWYS* COUNTY COUNCIL.

AUDIT COMMITTEE
10th February 2022

CABINET EXECUTIVE
15th February 2022

REPORT AUTHOR:	**County Councillor Aled Davies** **Portfolio Holder for Finance and Transport**
REPORT TITLE:	**Treasury Management Quarter 3 Report**
REPORT FOR:	**Information**

1. Purpose

1.1 CIPFA's 2009 Treasury Management Bulletin suggested:
'In order to enshrine best practice, it is suggested that authorities report formally on treasury management activities at least twice a year and preferably quarterly.'

The CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management emphasises a number of key areas including the following:

xi. Treasury management performance and policy setting should be subject to scrutiny prior to implementation.

1.2 In line with the above, this report is providing information on the activities for the quarter ending 31st December 2021.

2. Background

2.1 The Treasury Management Strategy approved by Full Council on 25th February 2021 can be found here.

https://powys.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s57662/Appendix%20F%20Capital%20Strategy%20and%20Treasury%20Management%20Strategy.pdf

2.2 The Authority's investment priorities within the Strategy are.

(a) the security of capital and
(b) the liquidity of its investments.

2.3 The Authority aims to achieve the optimum return on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity. The risk appetite has been low in order to give priority to security of investments.

2.4 With interest rates for investments remaining extremely low the use of cash reserves as opposed to borrowing is prudent and cost-effective.

3. Advice

3.1 Investments

3.2 Short-term money market investment rates have increased slightly following the increase to the Bank Rate (to 0.25%) in December. This has increased the interest rate on the deposit account with the councils' main bankers from 0.01% to 0.16%. However, given the surplus of cash held by other local authorities' investment returns on inter-authority lending are expected to remain low.

3.3 When looking at temporary investing, the Treasury team consider the bank fee to set up the arrangement, because of this cost some investments are not cost effective for very short periods of time where interest rates are circa 0.01% - 0.03%. However, the Authority does not have sufficient certainty around its cashflow to lend for longer periods where the return is higher.

3.4 The Welsh Government repayable funding the council received in March 2021 towards the Global Centre of Rail Excellence (GCRE) is currently being held in the Council's deposit account until it is required for the project. It is earning a minimal return (0.02%) which under the terms of the funding is ringfenced to be used for this scheme.

3.5 The Authority had no other investments on 31st December 2021.

3.6 Credit Rating Changes

3.7 There have been no credit rating changes relevant to this Authority's position during the last quarter.

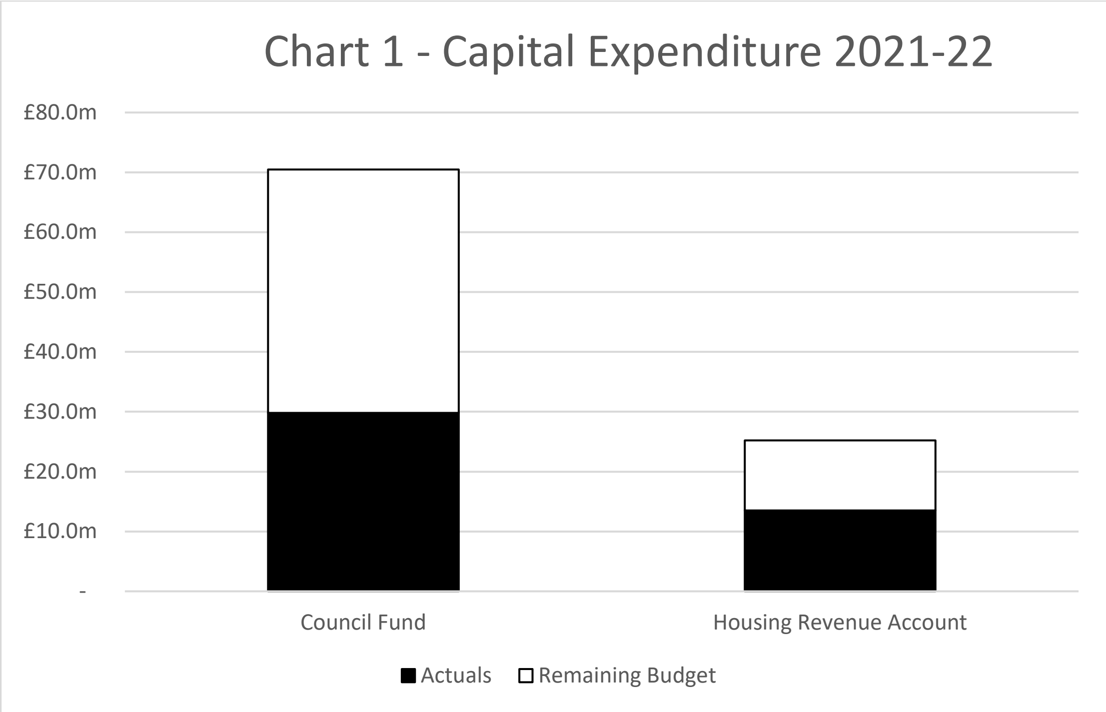
3.8 The Authority's Capital Position

3.9 The council approved the 2021 to 2031 Treasury Management and Capital Strategy on the 25th of February 2021. This included a Capital Programme for 2021/22 totalling £101.53 million.

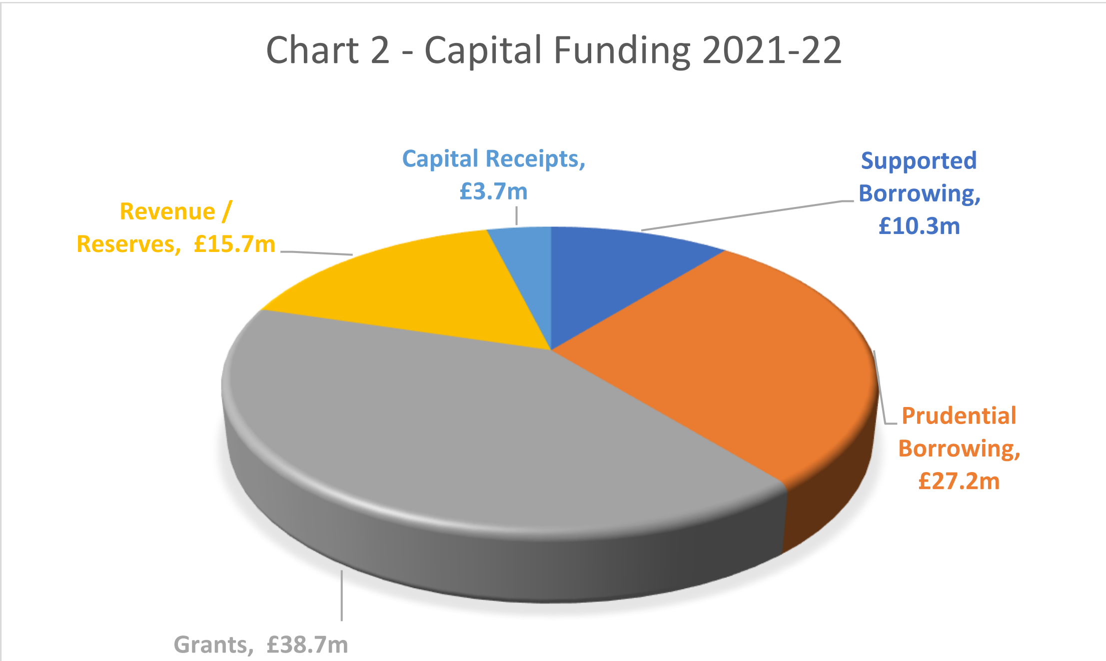
3.10 The revised programme at the 31st of December 2021 has reduced to £95.59 million. As part of the Capital Review, services are being challenged on their profile of spend in year, it is likely this forecast will reduce.

3.11 Actual spend to date amounts to £43.18 million, representing 45% of the total budget.

3.12 Chart 1 below summarises the spend against budget.



3.13 Chart 2 below sets out how the 2021/22 capital programme is funded, 39% will be funded through borrowing, the interest cost for this is charged to the revenue account.



3.14 The Council's underlying need to borrow for capital expenditure is termed the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). This figure is a gauge of the Council's indebtedness. It represents the current year's unfinanced capital expenditure and prior years' net or unfinanced capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for by revenue or other resources.

3.15 Part of the Council's treasury activities is to address the funding requirements for this borrowing need. Depending on the capital expenditure programme, the finance 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 external borrowing or utilising temporary cash resources within the Council.

3.16 Net external borrowing (borrowings less investments) should not, except in the short term, exceed the total of CFR in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional CFR for the current year and next two financial years. This allows some flexibility for limited early borrowing for future years.

3.17 Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)

£'m	2020/21	2021/22 Estimate	2022/23 Estimate	2023/24 Estimate
Original Estimates 25/02/2021	422.77	468.58	509.45	534.90
Quarter 1 estimate	397.10	436.96	460.03	480.61
Quarter 2 estimate	397.10	431.17	453.27	472.40
Quarter 3 estimate*	397.10	419.11	444.23	466.37

3.18 The budget reprofiling into future financial years has reduced the CFR estimates as shown in the above table. The above estimates are based on the assumption that only 70% of borrowing included in the capital programme will be required. This will differ from the figures disclosed in the 2022/23 Capital and Treasury Management Strategy.

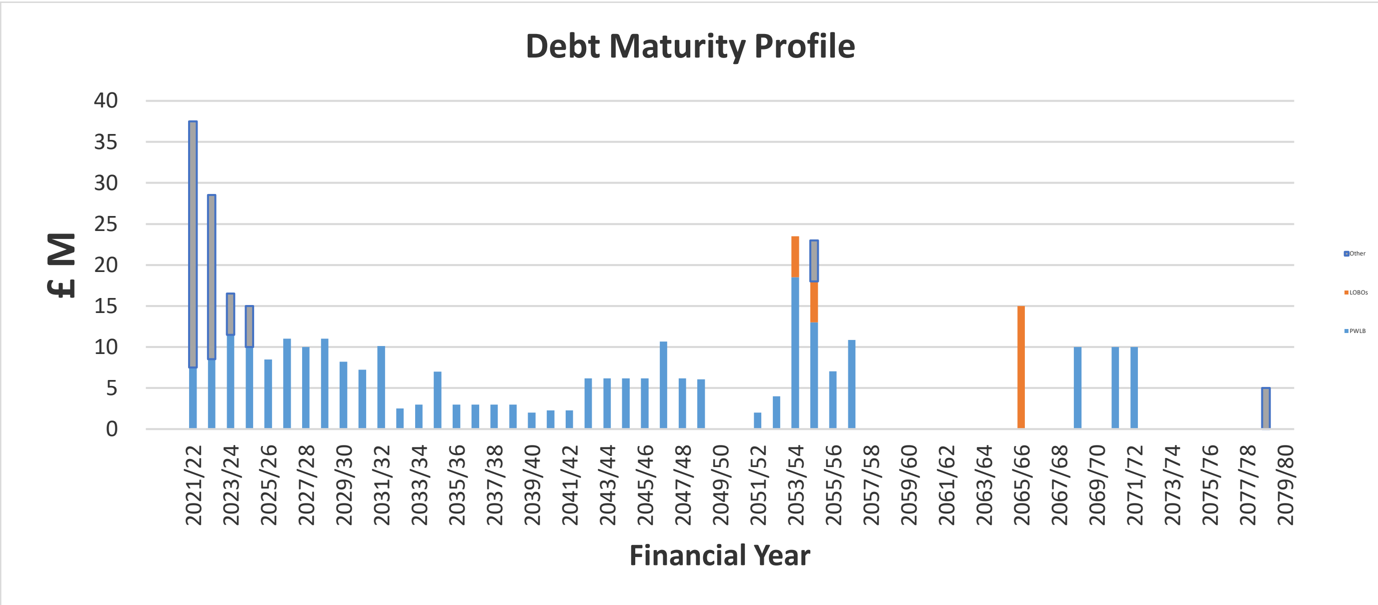
3.19 Borrowing / Re-scheduling

3.20 Effective management of the Authority's debt is essential to ensure that the impact of interest payable is minimised against our revenue accounts whilst maintaining prudent borrowing policies.

3.21 A prohibition is still in place to deny access to borrowing from the PWLB for any local authority which had purchase of assets for yield in its three year capital programme. There are currently no schemes for yield in the Capital Programme. With the significant amounts of borrowing in the future Capital Programme, the inability to access PWLB borrowing will need to be a major consideration for any future purchases of assets for yield. The additional income these assets generate must be sufficient to cover the increased borrowing costs, as borrowing sources other than the PWLB are likely to be more expensive.

3.22 The Authority had outstanding long-term external debt of £347.7 million at 31st March 2021 (excluding the GCRE repayable funding). In relation to the CFR figure for 31st March 2021, this equated to the Authority being under borrowed by £49.4 million. Using cash reserves as opposed to borrowing has been a prudent and cost-effective approach over the last few years. However, members will be aware that internal borrowing is only a temporary situation and officers have advised that, based on capital estimates, it will be necessary for the Authority to borrow at stages over the next few years.

3.23 Debt Maturity Profile as at 31st December 2021.



Key Blue = PWLB; Grey = Market Loans including other local authorities; Orange = LOBOs

3.24 The treasury team together with advice from our treasury advisers have been monitoring the PWLB rates and the uncertainty around the Omicron variant caused the PWLB rates to drop. In November £20 million of long term PWLB borrowing was secured over 49 and 50 year duration at rates of 1.71% and 1.70% respectively. The rates at the time were 20 basis points (0.20%) below the forecasts and with the funding required to ensure the council had sufficient cash available to meet its commitments in November and December 2021 the borrowing was secured.

3.25 Continued uncertainty over the Omicron variant saw the rates drop to 1.35% in December 2021 and with a further £11.5m to be repaid in quarter 4, the decision was made to borrow a further £10m at this rate over 48 years. This was slightly further in advance than the council would usually borrow, by the 31st of December 2021 the rate had increased to 1.70%. There will be a cost to carry of £0.021 million in 2021/22 but it saves £0.035 million per year compared to borrowing at the higher rate of 1.70%, giving a total saving of £1.680 million over the duration of the borrowing.

3.26 Staged repayment of the Nant Helen section 106 deposit is continuing as the backfilling works on the site progress. This is also reducing the cash position of the authority; this repayment will reduce the amount the council is under borrowed.

3.27 It is unlikely that any further borrowing will be required before the end of the financial year.

3.28 With the changes to the MRP policy and the delayed requirement to borrow, it is likely that the revenue budget set aside to cover these costs will be underutilised in this financial year, however as demonstrated in the tables later in the report, these costs are likely to increase year on year.

3.29 PWLB Loans Rescheduling

3.30 Debt rescheduling opportunities have been very limited in the current economic climate and following the various increases in the margins added to gilt yields which have impacted PWLB new borrowing rates since October 2010. No debt rescheduling has therefore been undertaken to date in the current financial year.

3.31 Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream

3.32 This indicator identifies the trend in the cost of capital, (borrowing and other long term obligation costs net of investment income), against the Councils net revenue budget (net revenue stream). The estimates of financing costs include current commitments and the proposals in the capital programme.

£'m	2021/22 Estimate	2022/23 Estimate	2023/24 Estimate
From the approved Treasury Management and Capital Strategy 2021/22			
Financing Costs	13.59	16.55	17.61
Net Revenue Stream	279.81	281.26	282.17
%	4.8%	5.9%	6.2%
Quarter 1 estimates (before any over provision)			
Financing Costs	11.14	13.09	14.35
Net Revenue Stream	279.81	281.26	282.17
%	4.0%	4.7%	5.1%
Quarter 2 estimates (before any over provision)			
Financing Costs	10.70	11.73	12.89
Net Revenue Stream	279.81	281.26	282.17
%	3.8%	4.2%	4.6%
Quarter 3 estimates (before any over provision)			
Financing Costs	10.85	11.29	12.17
Net Revenue Stream	279.81	302.33	314.29
%	3.9%	3.7%	3.9%

3.32 The table above shows the change in the current estimates for the capital financing costs between those disclosed in the Treasury Management and

Capital Strategy included as part of the 2021/22 Budget report and the updated estimates at the end of December 2021.

3.33 The decrease has been caused by two factors.

1. The updated Minimum Revenue Policy (MRP) approved by Council in March 2021 has realigned these costs more equally across the life if the assets involved.

2. The reduced borrowing requirement to support the capital programme in 2020/21 and future years. This has been the result of reprofiling of budgets into future years and funding from Welsh Government being made available earlier than anticipated. This has allowed the council to defer the date that it expected to take out additional borrowing, reducing the current interest costs, however this borrowing will still be required in the future.

The table below provides a breakdown of these changes

£'m	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Original Estimates 25/02/2021	**13.59**	**16.55**	**17.61**
Change in MRP Policy	(1.75)	(3.64)	(3.68)
Change due to reprofiling/grants	(0.70)	0.18	0.42
Quarter 1 estimate	**11.14**	**13.09**	**14.35**
Change due to reprofiling/grants	(0.44)	(1.36)	(1.46)
Quarter 2 estimate	**10.70**	**11.73**	**12.89**
Change due to reprofiling/grants	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.05)
Change due to lower borrowing rates	(0.10)	(0.52)	(0.94)
Change due to HRA/GF apportionment	0.29	0.16	0.27
Quarter 3 estimate	**10.85**	**11.29**	**12.17**

3.34 A principal was set in both the 2021/22 Budget and the MRP Policy Report that any benefits from the MRP change are ringfenced to support the Capital Programme to ensure the Council is beginning to address its increasing capital financing costs. It was agreed that the council may use the underspend to make a voluntary revenue provision or overpayment on top of the budgeted MRP and can be reclaimed in later years if deemed necessary or prudent. As such, an overprovision of MRP can be made in line with any surplus in the revenue budget allocated to MRP to help reduce the increasing Capital Financing Requirement. Further work is being undertaken as part of the Capital Review to understand the implications of the Capital Programme and the capital ambitions of the council.

3.35 Prudential Indicators

3.36 All Treasury Management Prudential Indicators were complied with in the quarter ending 30th December 2021.

3.37 Economic Background and Forecasts

3.38 The most recent forecast of interest rates by the Authority's advisor are shown below, an increase in the rates is expected over the next few years which will increase the costs of borrowing.

Link Group Interest Rate View 20.12.21	Dec-21	Mar-22	Jun-22	Sep-22	Dec-22	Mar-23	Jun-23	Sep-23	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25
BANK RATE	0.25	0.25	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.25
3 month ave earnings	0.20	0.30	0.50	0.50	0.60	0.70	0.80	0.90	0.90	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
6 month ave earnings	0.40	0.50	0.60	0.60	0.70	0.80	0.90	1.00	1.00	1.10	1.10	1.10	1.10	1.10
12 month ave earnings	0.70	0.70	0.70	0.70	0.80	0.90	1.00	1.10	1.10	1.20	1.20	1.20	1.20	1.20
5 yr PWLB	1.40	1.50	1.50	1.60	1.60	1.70	1.80	1.80	1.80	1.90	1.90	1.90	2.00	2.00
10 yr PWLB	1.60	1.70	1.80	1.80	1.90	1.90	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.10	2.10	2.10	2.20	2.30
25 yr PWLB	1.80	1.90	2.00	2.10	2.10	2.20	2.20	2.20	2.30	2.30	2.40	2.40	2.50	2.50
50 yr PWLB	1.50	1.70	1.80	1.90	1.90	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.10	2.10	2.20	2.20	2.30	2.30

3.39 The economic background provided by our treasury advisers; Link Group is attached at Appendix A.

3.40 VAT

3.41 The Technical Section of Finance act as the authority's VAT section. VAT can pose a risk to the authority hence this report includes VAT information.

3.42 The monthly VAT returns were submitted within the required deadlines during this quarter.

3.43 Key Performance Indicators - The VAT KPI's for 2021/22 are attached at Appendix B.

4. Resource Implications

4.1 N/A

5. Legal implications

5.1 N/A

6. Data Protection

6.1 N/A

7. Comment from local member(s)

7.1 N/A

8. Impact Assessment

8.1 N/A

9. Recommendation

9.1 This report has been provided for information and there are no decisions required. It is recommended that this report be accepted.

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Appendix A

Economics update, provided by Link.

MPC meeting 16th December 2021

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) voted 8-1 to **raise Bank Rate by 0.15% from 0.10% to 0.25%** and unanimously decided to make no changes to its programme of quantitative easing purchases due to finish in December 2021 at a total of £895bn.
- The MPC disappointed financial markets by not raising Bank Rate at its November meeting. Until Omicron burst on the scene, most forecasters, therefore, viewed a Bank Rate increase as being near certain at this December meeting due to the way that inflationary pressures have been comprehensively building in both producer and consumer prices, and in wage rates. However, at the November meeting, the MPC decided it wanted to have assurance that the labour market would get over **the end of the furlough scheme on 30th September** without unemployment increasing sharply; their decision was, therefore, to wait until statistics were available to show how the economy had fared at this time.
- **On 10th December we learnt of the disappointing 0.1% m/m rise in GDP** in October which suggested that economic growth had already slowed to a crawl even before the Omicron variant was discovered in late November. Early evidence suggests growth in November might have been marginally better. Nonetheless, at such low rates of growth, the government's "Plan B" COVID-19 restrictions could cause the economy to contract in December.
- **On 14th December, the labour market statistics** for the three months to October and the single month of October were released. The fallout after the furlough scheme ended on 3oth September, (about one million people were still on furlough), was smaller and shorter than the Bank of England had feared: unemployment did not increase hugely in October. Indeed, vacancies rose to a record 1.219m in the three months to November showing there were acute shortages of labour.
- These figures by themselves, would probably have been enough to give the MPC the assurance that it could press ahead to raise Bank Rate at this December meeting. However, the advent of Omicron in late November potentially threw a spanner into the works as it poses a major headwind to the economy which, of itself, will help to cool the economy. The financial markets, therefore, swung round to expecting no change in Bank Rate.
- **On 15th December we had the CPI inflation** figure for November which spiked up further from 4.2% to 5.1%, confirming again how inflationary pressures have been building sharply. However, Omicron also caused a sharp fall in world oil and other commodity prices; (gas and electricity inflation has generally accounted on average for about 60% of the increase in inflation in advanced western economies).
- **Other elements of inflation are also transitory** e.g., prices of goods being forced up by supply shortages, and shortages of shipping containers due to ports being clogged have caused huge increases in shipping costs. But

these issues have reduced during the second half of 2021 and are likely to clear during 2022 when prices would be expected to subside back to more normal levels. Gas prices and electricity prices will also fall back once winter is passed and demand for these falls away.

- The Government has stepped in with some **fiscal support for the economy**, targeted mainly at the hospitality sector. Due to the huge cost of such support to date, it is likely to remain being limited and targeted on narrow sectors. The Government may well, therefore, effectively leave it to the MPC, and to monetary policy, to support economic growth – but at a time when the threat posed by rising inflation is near to peaking!
- This is the adverse set of factors against which the MPC had to decide on Bank Rate. For the second month in a row, the MPC blind-sided financial markets, this time with a **surprise increase in Bank Rate from 0.10% to 0.25%.** What's more, the hawkish tone of comments indicated that the MPC is now concerned that inflationary pressures are indeed building and need concerted action by the MPC to counter. This indicates that there will be more increases to come with financial markets predicting 1% by the end of 2022. The 8-1 vote to raise the rate shows that there is firm agreement that inflation now poses a threat, especially after the CPI figure hit a 10-year high. The MPC commented that "there has been significant upside news" and that "there were some signs of greater persistence in domestic costs and price pressures".
- On the other hand, it did also comment that **"the Omicron variant is likely to weigh on near-term activity".** But it stressed that at the November meeting it had said it would raise rates if the economy evolved as it expected and that now "these conditions had been met". It also appeared more worried about the possible boost to inflation form Omicron itself. It said that "the current position of the global and UK economies was materially different compared with prior to the onset of the pandemic, including elevated levels of consumer price inflation". It also noted the possibility that renewed social distancing would boost demand for goods again, (as demand for services would fall), meaning "global price pressures might persist for longer". (Recent news is that the largest port in the world in China has come down with an Omicron outbreak which is not only affecting the port but also factories in the region.)
- On top of that, there were no references in December to inflation being expected to be below the **2% target in two years' time,** which at November's meeting the MPC referenced to suggest the markets had gone too far in expecting interest rates to rise to over 1.00% by the end of the year.
- These comments indicate that there has been a material reappraisal by the MPC of the inflationary pressures since their last meeting and the Bank also increased its forecast for inflation to peak at 6% next April, rather than at 5% as of a month ago. However, as the Bank retained its guidance that only **a "modest tightening"** in policy will be required, it cannot be thinking that it will need to increase interest rates that much more. A typical policy tightening cycle has usually involved rates rising by 0.25% four times in a year. "Modest" seems slower than that. As such, the Bank could be thinking

about **raising interest rates two or three times in 2022 to 0.75% or 1.00%.**

- In as much as a considerable part of the inflationary pressures at the current time are indeed **transitory,** and will naturally subside, and since economic growth is likely to be weak over the next few months, this would appear to indicate that this tightening cycle is likely to be comparatively short.
- As for the timing of the next increase in Bank Rate, the MPC dropped the comment from November's statement that Bank Rate would be raised "in the coming months". That may imply another rise is unlikely at the next meeting in February and that May is more likely. However, much could depend on how adversely, or not, the economy is affected by Omicron in the run up to the next meeting on 3rd February. Once 0.50% is reached, the Bank would act to start shrinking its stock of QE, (gilts purchased by the Bank would not be replaced when they mature).
- **The MPC's forward guidance on its intended monetary policy** on raising Bank Rate versus selling (quantitative easing) holdings of bonds is as follows: -
    1. Placing the focus on raising Bank Rate as "the active instrument in most circumstances".
    2. Raising Bank Rate to 0.50% before starting on reducing its holdings.
    3. Once Bank Rate is at 0.50% it would stop reinvesting maturing gilts.
    4. Once Bank Rate had risen to at least 1%, it would start selling its holdings.

- **COVID-19 vaccines.** These have been the game changer which had enormously boosted confidence that **life in the UK could largely return to normal during the second half of 2021** after a third wave of the virus threatened to overwhelm hospitals in the spring. The bursting onto the scene of **the Omicron mutation** at the end of November had threatened to cancel the Christmas holidays, but the Government decided not to impose more severe restrictions in the hope that this mild, but highly contagious variant, would not overwhelm hospitals. The big question is whether further mutations of the virus could develop which render current vaccines ineffective, as opposed to how quickly vaccines can be modified to deal with them and enhanced testing programmes be implemented to contain their spread.

US. See comments below on US treasury yields.

EU. The ECB joined with the Fed by also announcing on 16th December that it will be reducing its QE purchases - by half from October 2022, i.e., it will still be providing significant stimulus via QE purchases during the first half of 2022. Although headline inflation reached 4.9% in November, over half of that was due to energy but oil and gas prices are expected to fall sharply after the winter. As overall inflation will fall back sharply during 2022, it is likely that the ECB will leave its central rate below zero, (currently -0.50%), over the next two years.

The main struggle that the ECB has had in recent years is that inflation has been doggedly anaemic in sticking below its target rate of 2% despite all the ECB's major programmes of monetary easing by cutting rates into negative territory and providing QE support.

China. The pace of economic growth has now fallen back after the initial surge of recovery from the pandemic and China has been struggling to contain the spread of the Delta variant through using sharp local lockdowns - which depress economic growth. However, with Omicron having now spread to China and being much more easily transmissible, this strategy of sharp local lockdowns to stop the virus may not prove so successful in future; this strategy poses a potential renewed threat to world supply chains. The People's Bank of China made a start in December 2021 on cutting its key interest rate to encourage flagging economic growth.

Japan. 2021 has been a patchy year in combating Covid. However, recent business surveys indicate that the economy is rebounding rapidly now that the bulk of the population is fully vaccinated, and new virus cases have plunged. However, Omicron could reverse the success of 2021 in combating Covid. The Bank of Japan is continuing its very loose monetary policy but with little prospect of getting inflation back above 1% towards its target of 2%, any time soon.

World growth. World growth was in recession in 2020 but recovered during 2021 until starting to lose momentum more recently. Inflation has been rising due to increases in gas and electricity prices, shipping costs and supply shortages, although these should subside during 2022. It is likely that we are heading into a period where there will be a reversal of **world globalisation** and a decoupling of western countries from dependence on China to supply products, and vice versa. This is likely to reduce world growth rates from those in prior decades.

2. Interest rate forecasts

The Council has appointed Link Group as its treasury advisor and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. The PWLB rate forecasts below are based on the Certainty Rate (the standard rate minus 20 bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1st November 2012.

The latest forecast on 20th December is compared below to the last forecast (29th September) in the previous quarter. A comparison of these forecasts shows that PWLB rates have fallen, more so in the longer maturities, and show a speed up in the rate of increase in Bank Rate as inflation is now posing a greater risk. Some of the fall in PWLB rates during December was probably due to window dressing by pension and investment funds preparing their finances for the year and quarter end position for 2021 on 31st December: it was therefore expected that part of those falls would be unwound in the new year.

Link Group Interest Rate View	20.12.21													
	Dec-21	Mar-22	Jun-22	Sep-22	Dec-22	Mar-23	Jun-23	Sep-23	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25
BANK RATE	0.25	0.25	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.25
3 month ave earnings	0.20	0.30	0.50	0.50	0.60	0.70	0.80	0.90	0.90	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
6 month ave earnings	0.40	0.50	0.60	0.60	0.70	0.80	0.90	1.00	1.00	1.10	1.10	1.10	1.10	1.10
12 month ave earnings	0.70	0.70	0.70	0.70	0.80	0.90	1.00	1.10	1.10	1.20	1.20	1.20	1.20	1.20
5 yr PWLB	1.40	1.50	1.50	1.60	1.60	1.70	1.80	1.80	1.80	1.90	1.90	1.90	2.00	2.00
10 yr PWLB	1.60	1.70	1.80	1.80	1.90	1.90	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.10	2.10	2.10	2.20	2.30
25 yr PWLB	1.80	1.90	2.00	2.10	2.10	2.20	2.20	2.20	2.30	2.30	2.40	2.40	2.50	2.50
50 yr PWLB	1.50	1.70	1.80	1.90	1.90	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.10	2.10	2.20	2.20	2.30	2.30

Link Group Interest Rate View	29.9.21									
	Dec-21	Mar-22	Jun-22	Sep-22	Dec-22	Mar-23	Jun-23	Sep-23	Dec-23	Mar-24
BANK RATE	0.10	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.75
3 month ave earnings	0.10	0.10	0.20	0.20	0.30	0.40	0.50	0.50	0.60	0.70
6 month ave earnings	0.20	0.20	0.30	0.30	0.40	0.50	0.60	0.60	0.70	0.80
12 month ave earnings	0.30	0.40	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.60	0.70	0.80	0.90	1.00
5 yr PWLB	1.40	1.40	1.50	1.50	1.60	1.60	1.60	1.70	1.70	1.70
10 yr PWLB	1.80	1.80	1.90	1.90	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.10	2.10	2.10
25 yr PWLB	2.20	2.20	2.30	2.30	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.50	2.50	2.60
50 yr PWLB	2.00	2.00	2.10	2.20	2.20	2.20	2.20	2.30	2.30	2.40

Additional notes by Link on this forecast table: -

- *LIBOR and LIBID rates will cease from the end of 2021. Work is currently progressing to replace LIBOR with a rate based on SONIA (Sterling Overnight Index Average). In the meantime, our forecasts are based on expected average earnings by local authorities for 3 to 12 months.*
- *Our forecasts for average earnings are averages i.e., rates offered by individual banks may differ significantly from these averages, reflecting their different needs for borrowing short term cash at any one point in time.*

The coronavirus outbreak has done huge economic damage to the UK and to economies around the world. After the Bank of England took emergency action in March 2020 to cut Bank Rate to 0.10%, it left Bank Rate unchanged until it raised it from 0.10% to 0.25% at the MPC meeting of 16th December 2021.

A summary overview of the future path of Bank Rate

- In December 2021, the Bank of England became the first major western central bank to put interest rates up in this upswing in the current business cycle in western economies as recovery progresses from the Covid recession of 2020.
- The next increase in Bank Rate could be in February or May, dependent on how severe an impact there is from Omicron.

- If there are lockdowns in January, this could pose a barrier for the MPC to putting Bank Rate up again as early as 3rd February.

- With inflation expected to peak between 5 and 6% in April, the MPC may want to be seen to be active in taking action to counter inflation on 5th May, the release date for its Quarterly Monetary Policy Report.

- However, rising gas and electricity prices last October and next April and increases in other prices caused by supply shortages and increases in taxation next April, are already going to deflate consumer spending power without the MPC having to take any action on Bank Rate to cool inflationary pressures.

- On the other hand, consumers are sitting on around £160bn of excess savings left over from the pandemic so when will they spend this sum, in part or in total?

- The December 2021 MPC meeting was more concerned with combating inflation over the medium term than supporting economic growth in the short term.

- Bank Rate increases beyond May are difficult to forecast as inflation is likely to drop sharply in the second half of 2022.

- However, the MPC will want to normalise Bank Rate over the next three years so that it has its main monetary policy tool ready to use in time for the next downturn; all rates under 2% are providing stimulus to economic growth.

- We have put year end 0.25% increases into Q1 of each financial year from 2023 to recognise this upward bias in Bank Rate - but the actual timing in each year is difficult to predict.

- Covid mutations remain a major potential downside threat in all three years as we ARE likely to get further mutations. How quickly can science come up with a mutation proof vaccine, or other treatment, – and for them to be widely administered around the world?

- Purchases of gilts under QE ended in December 2021. Note that when Bank Rate reaches 0.50%, the MPC has said it will start running down its stock of QE.

In summary, with the high level of uncertainty prevailing on several different fronts, it is likely that these forecasts will need to be revised again soon - in line with whatever the new news is.

Forecasts for PWLB rates and gilt and treasury yields

The current PWLB rates are set as margins over gilt yields as follows: -.

- PWLB Standard Rate is gilt plus 100 basis points (G+100bps)
- PWLB Certainty Rate is gilt plus 80 basis points (G+80bps)
- PWLB HRA Standard Rate is gilt plus 100 basis points (G+100bps)
- PWLB HRA Certainty Rate is gilt plus 80bps (G+80bps)
- Local Infrastructure Rate is gilt plus 60bps (G+60bps)

Gilt yields. Since the start of 2021, we have seen a lot of volatility in gilt yields, and hence PWLB rates. Our forecasts show a steady, but slow, rise in both Bank Rate and PWLB rates during the forecast period to March 2025 but there will doubtless be a lot of unpredictable volatility during this forecast period.

Upside risk to gilt yield forecasts. While monetary policy in the UK will have a major impact on gilt yields, there is also a need to consider the potential impact that rising treasury yields in America could have on our gilt yields. **As an average since 2011, there has been a 75% correlation between movements in US 10-year treasury yields and UK 10-year gilt yields.** This is a significant upward risk exposure to our forecasts for longer term PWLB rates. However, gilt yields and treasury yields do not always move in unison.

US treasury yields. During 2020, US President Biden and the Democratic party pushed through a huge programme of fiscal stimulus and are still trying to get another major package approved – the American Families Plan; this is still caught up in political haggling. Financial markets were alarmed that all this stimulus was happening at a time when: -

1. A fast vaccination programme had enabled a rapid opening up of the economy during 2021.
2. The economy was growing strongly during the first half of 2021 although it has weakened overall during the second half.
3. It started from a position of little spare capacity due to less severe lockdown measures than in many other countries.
4. And the Fed was still providing substantial stimulus through monthly QE purchases during 2021.

It was not much of a surprise that a combination of these factors would eventually cause an excess of demand in the economy which generated strong inflationary pressures. This has eventually been recognised by the Fed at its recent December meeting with an aggressive response to damp inflation down during 2022 and 2023.

At its 3rd November Fed meeting, the Fed decided to make a start on tapering its $120bn per month of QE purchases so that they ended next June. However, at its **15th December meeting** it doubled the pace of tapering so that they will end all purchases in February. These purchases are currently acting as downward pressure on treasury yields and so it would be expected that Treasury yields will rise over the taper period, all other things being equal. It also forecast that it expected there would be three rate rises in 2022 of 0.25% from near zero currently, followed by three in 2023 and two in 2024, taking rates back above 2% to a neutral level for monetary policy.

Downside risk to gilt yield forecasts. There are also possible downside risks from the huge sums of cash that the UK populace have saved during the pandemic; when savings accounts earn little interest, it is likely that some of this cash mountain could end up being invested in bonds and so push up demand for bonds and support their prices i.e., this would help to keep their yields down. How this will interplay with the Bank of England eventually getting round to not reinvesting maturing gilts and then later selling gilts, will be interesting to monitor.

Significant risks to the forecasts

- COVID vaccines do not work to combat new mutations and/or new vaccines take longer than anticipated to be developed for successful implementation.
- The pandemic causes major long-term scarring of the economy.
- The Government implements an austerity programme that supresses GDP growth.
- The MPC tightens monetary policy too early – by raising Bank Rate or unwinding QE.
- The MPC tightens monetary policy too late to ward off building inflationary pressures.
- Major stock markets e.g., in the US, become increasingly judged as being over-valued and susceptible to major price corrections. Central banks become increasingly exposed to the “moral hazard” risks of having to buy shares and corporate bonds to reduce the impact of major financial market sell-offs on the general economy.
- Geo-political risks - on-going global power influence struggles between Russia/China/US/Iran.

The balance of risks to the UK economy: -

- The overall balance of risks to economic growth in the UK is now to the downside, including residual risks from Covid and its variants - both domestically and their potential effects worldwide.

The balance of risks to medium to long term PWLB rates: -

- There is a balance of upside risks to forecasts for medium to long term PWLB rates.

A new era – a fundamental shift in central bank monetary policy

One of the key results of the pandemic has been a fundamental rethinking and shift in monetary policy by major central banks like the Fed, the Bank of England and the ECB, to tolerate a higher level of inflation than in the previous two decades when inflation was the prime target to bear down on so as to stop it going above a target rate. There is now also a greater emphasis on other targets for monetary policy than just inflation, especially on ‘achieving broad and inclusive “maximum” employment in its entirety’ in the US before consideration would be given to increasing rates.

- The Fed in America has gone furthest in adopting a monetary policy based on a clear goal of allowing the inflation target to be symmetrical, (rather than a ceiling to keep under), so that inflation averages out the dips down and surges above the target rate, over an unspecified period of time.
- The Bank of England has also amended its target for monetary policy so that inflation should be ‘sustainably over 2%’ and the ECB now has a similar policy.
- ***For local authorities, this means that investment interest rates and very short term PWLB rates will not be rising as quickly or as high as in previous decades when the economy recovers from a downturn and the recovery eventually runs out of spare capacity to fuel continuing expansion.***
- Labour market liberalisation since the 1970s has helped to break the wage-price spirals that fuelled high levels of inflation and has now set inflation on a lower path which makes this shift in monetary policy practicable. In addition, recent changes in flexible employment practices, the rise of the gig economy and technological changes, will all help to lower inflationary pressures.
- Governments will also be concerned to see interest rates stay lower as every rise in central rates will add to the cost of vastly expanded levels of national debt; (in the UK this is £21bn for each 1% rise in rates). On the other hand, higher levels of inflation will help to erode the real value of total public debt.

Appendix B

VAT - Key Performance Indicators

Creditor Invoices

VAT return for	No of high value Creditor invoices checked	No of Creditor invoices highlighted as requiring "proper" document for VAT recovery	% of creditor invoices checked requiring "proper" document for VAT recovery
Apr-21	205	0	0.00%
May-21	209	1	0.48%
Jun-21	286	1	0.35%
Jul-21	259	1	0.39%
Aug-21	189	0	0.00%
Sep-21	259	1	0.39%
Oct-21	253	0	0.00%
Nov-21	267	2	0.75%
Dec-21	229	1	0.44%
Jan-22			
Feb-22			
Mar-22			

Income Management Entries

VAT return for	No of entries checked by formula per the ledger account code used	No of entries needing follow up check (but not necessarily incorrect).	% of entries needing follow up check
Apr-21	697	0	0.00%
May-21	847	2	0.24%
Jun-21	972	4	0.41%
Jul-21	860	8	0.93%
Aug-21	869	0	0.00%
Sep-21	636	20[1]	3.14%
Oct-21	892	2	0.22%
Nov-21	777	1	0.13%
Dec-21	866	0	0.00%
Jan-22			
Feb-22			
Mar-22			

1 These relate to two cash amounts, but one of them was NMWTRA which is split over many budgets so is counted per budget line for consistency with past statistics.

Debtor Invoices

VAT return for	No of Debtor invoices checked	No of checked debtor invoices with incorrect VAT code used	% of debtor invoices with incorrect VAT code
Apr-21	88	0	0.00%
May-21	82	0	0.00%
Jun-21	86	0	0.00%
Jul-21	95	0	0.00%
Aug-21	72	0	0.00%
Sep-21	193	1	0.52%
Oct-21	105	0	0.00%
Nov-21	107	0	0.00%
Dec-21	145	0	0.00%
Jan-22			
Feb-22			
Mar-22			

Note: Debtors VAT checking is carried out by Finance via a work process prior to the invoice being raised hence the improvement in errors compared to previous years

Purchase Cards

VAT return for	No of transactions for which paperwork requested for checking	Resolvable errors discovered	Value of VAT potentially claimable but recharged to budget due to non- response	No of transactions where VAT claimed incorrectly	% of transactions available to be checked where VAT was claimed incorrectly	Value of VAT incorrectly claimed hence recharged to budget
Apr-21	193	15	£2,000.55	14	7.25%	£555.26
May-21	144	5	£1,165.80	16	11.11%	£849.52
Jun-21	153	5	£1,083.04	28	18.30%	£726.18
Jul-21	123	6	£1,289.84	23	18.70%	£858.25
Aug-21	61	5	£730.68	1	1.64%	£5.00
Sep-21	151	14	£1,028.56	9	5.96%	£711.13
Oct-21	93	2	£384.00	10	10.75%	£294.07
Nov-21	127	2	£621.25	12	9.45%	£830.02
Dec-21	155	3	£692.09	30	19.35%	£1,307.69
Jan-22						
Feb-22						
Mar-22						

Chargebacks to service areas

The upload of appropriate documents to the Barclaycard purchase card system to enable vat recovery was made mandatory in September 2017 as a result of the lack of response from service areas/establishments to provide documents when requested. Where no document has been uploaded, any VAT amount input against the transaction is charged to the service area as there is no evidence to support the vat recovery.

Any other VAT errors that come to light as a result of the various checks are also charged to the relevant service areas.

Budget holders are able to see this clearly as chargebacks are coded to account code EX400600 and the activity code used alongside this gives the reason why this chargeback has occurred.

The total amount charged back to service areas in 2021/22 to end of December is £253,279. The breakdown of this is as follows:

Potentially correctable errors

Reason	**Amount £**
Not a tax invoice[1]	(35,860)
Powys County Council is not the named customer	0
No invoice uploaded to purchase card system	52,016
Invoice(s) do not match payment	4,273
No evidence to back recovery	252
No Signed Authenticated Receipt[2]	225,641
Total	**246,322**

1 Includes VAT successfully recovered relating to errors in previous years
2 The majority of this figure relates to capital schemes and officers are obtaining the relevant documentation, the figure has reduced to £85,569 at the 1st of February and the balance should be cleared before the end of the financial year.

Other errors

Reason	**Amount £**
Non-domestic VAT	82
No tax on invoice	2,602
Supply not to Powys County Council	1,794
Over-accounting for VAT	2,453
Internal payments	26
Total	**6,957**