

EXETER CITY COUNCIL
CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024/25

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Capital Strategy sets out how, when the City Council considers often competing demands for investments, it takes account of stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability in a long term context, and gives due consideration to both risk and reward and impact on the achievement of the Council's priority outcomes. It is part of the Council's integrated operational, revenue, capital and balance sheet planning.
- 1.2. As local authorities become increasingly complex and diverse, it is vital that Councillors and Senior Officers are fully informed about the long term context in which investment decisions are made and about all the financial and operational risks to which the authority is exposed. With local authorities having increasingly wide powers around commercialisation and being part of group arrangements or combined authorities, it is increasingly important for Councils to take into account the residual risks and liabilities all around them.
- 1.3. This Capital Strategy covers both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account, supporting service provision and linking with the Council's Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy. It provides a framework for the development of the three year capital programme.

2. Purpose and Aims

The Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (the Prudential Code) and the Treasury management in the Public Services Code of Practice and Cross-Sectoral Guidance notes (the Treasury Management Code) were updated by CIPFA in December 2021. The 2021 Prudential and Treasury Management Codes require all local authorities to prepare a Capital Strategy report which will provide the following:

- A high-level long-term overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services
- An overview of how the associated risk is managed
- The implications for future financial sustainability

The aim of the strategy is to ensure that all the Authority's elected members fully understand the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting Capital Strategy requirements, governance procedures and risk appetite.

- 2.1. The purpose of this Capital Strategy is to help achieve the Council's five strategic priorities set out in the Corporate Plan 2022-2026:
 - a. Prosperous local economy
 - b. Healthy and active city
 - c. Housing and building great neighbourhoods and communities
 - d. Net zero carbon city
 - e. Thriving culture and heritage

These priorities contribute to the Exeter Vision 2040:

"By the time they are an adult, a child born in Exeter today will live in a city that is inclusive, healthy and sustainable – a city where the opportunities and benefits of prosperity are shared and all citizens are able to participate fully in the city's economic, social, cultural and civic life."

3. What is Capital Expenditure?

- 3.1. An understanding of what constitutes capital expenditure is fundamental to realising the benefits that an authority can obtain under the Prudential framework. Unless expenditure qualifies as capital it will normally fall outside the scope of the framework and be charged to revenue in the period that the expenditure is incurred. If expenditure meets the definition of capital, there may be opportunities to finance the outlay from capital receipts or by spreading the cost over future years' revenues.

There are three ways in which expenditure can qualify as capital under the framework:-

- The expenditure results in the acquisition, construction or enhancement of fixed assets (tangible and intangible) in accordance with 'proper practices'.
- The expenditure meets one of the definitions specified in regulations made under the 2003 Local Government Act.
- The Secretary of State makes a direction that the expenditure can be treated as capital expenditure.

4. Approach to Capital Investment

- 4.1. The Council's approach to capital investment is fundamental to the Council's financial planning processes. It aims to ensure that:

- Capital expenditure contributes to the achievement of the Council's strategic plan.
- An affordable and sustainable capital programme is delivered.
- Use of resources and value for money is maximised.
- A clear framework for making capital expenditure decisions is provided.
- A corporate approach to generating capital resources is established.
- Access to sufficient long term assets to provide services are acquired and retained.
- Invest to save initiatives to make efficiencies within the Council's revenue budget are encouraged.
- An appraisal and prioritisation process for new schemes is robust.

5. Governance Arrangements

5.1. Capital Programme Approvals

The Authority's constitution and financial regulations govern the capital programme as set out below:

- All capital expenditure must be carried out in accordance with the financial regulations and the Council's Constitution.
- The expenditure must comply with the statutory definition of capital purposes as defined within this document and wider financial standards.
- The Capital Programme approved by Full Council as part of the Council's annual budget report sets the capital funding availability for the Council, the prioritisation of funding and the schemes receiving entry into the Capital Programme.
- Officers are not authorised to commit expenditure without prior formal approval as set out in the financial regulations.
- Each scheme must be under the control of a responsible person / project manager.
- Any agreements (such as section 106) which contractually commit to procure capital schemes will need to follow the same approval process as other capital expenditure before it can be formally incorporated into the capital programme.

Full Council:

- Approves the capital programme as part of the Annual Budget Report within the strategic boundaries set by the Council.
- Approves capital schemes into the approved capital programme to enable commencement of delivery and schemes to start to incur expenditure.

6. Funding Streams

Exeter City Council's Capital Programme is funded from a mix of sources including:

- **Prudential Borrowing** – The introduction of the Prudential Code in 2004 allowed the Council to undertake unsupported borrowing. This borrowing is subject to the requirements of the Prudential Code for Capital Expenditure for Local Authorities. The Council must ensure that unsupported borrowing is affordable, prudent and cost effective. This funding can also be used as an option to front fund development to stimulate growth. This has provided the Council with the flexibility to raise capital funding as demand and business need have dictated. This type of borrowing has revenue implications for the Council in the form of financing costs. An authority must not borrow to invest primarily for financial return.
- **External Grants** – such as disabled facilities grant funding.
- **Section 106, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and External Contributions** – Elements of the capital programme are funded by contributions from private sector developers and partners.
- **Revenue Funding** – The Council can use revenue resources to fund capital projects on a direct basis and this funding avenue has been used in the past. However, pressures on the Council's revenue budget has reduced options in this area and therefore the preference is for Invest to Save options to be adopted where feasible.

- **Capital Receipts** – The Council is able to generate capital receipts through the sale of surplus assets such as land and buildings. The Council seeks to maximise the level of these resources which will be available to support the Council's plans.

International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) 16 – Leases

From 1 April 2024, IFRS 16 will replace the current lease accounting standard as the method to account for leases in the Council's annual accounts.

The main impact is to remove the traditional distinction between finance leases and operating leases. Under the new accounting standard, all leased-in agreements will result in a new 'Right of Use' asset on the Balance Sheet and a corresponding debt (lease liability) in the Council's accounts. Leases for items of low value and leases that expire on or before 31 March 2025 are exempt from the new arrangements.

Future leases in (unless exempt) will constitute capital expenditure, and assets will be accounted for in the same way as if they had been acquired.

The de minimis limit for IFRS 16 has been set at £10,000, in line with the Council's capital expenditure de minimis. It is anticipated that the application of the Code's adaptation of IFRS16 will result in the following additions to the balance sheet:

- £325,404 Property, plant and equipment – land and buildings (right-of-use assets)
- £251,692 Non-Current creditors (lease liabilities)
- £73,712 Current creditors (lease liabilities)

These figures will change by a trivial amount, as calculations will be updated for interest rates as at 1 April 2024.

Capital Programme and Minimum Revenue Provision

The size of the Capital Programme will be influenced by funding sources and financing costs. The main limiting factor on the Council's ability to undertake capital investment is whether the revenue resource is available to support in full the implications of capital expenditure, both borrowing costs and running costs, after allowing for any support provided by central government, now mainly through capital grants.

The Council is required to set aside a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) in respect of capital expenditure previously financed by borrowing. The Annual Statement of Minimum Revenue Provision is set out in the Prudential Code for Capital Finance report. To reduce risk and minimise costs in light of elevated interest rates, it has been decided to defer borrowing where possible, or where necessary borrow for shorter periods with the intention of re-financing when rates are more favourable. However some targeted long term borrowing will be undertaken in 2024-25, where the costs will be offset against future income streams.

Revenue Implications

The revenue implications of capital investment must always be considered in investment decisions and prioritisation of projects. These include costs and savings implications.

Costs to consider include:

- Cost of borrowing (including Minimum Revenue Provision)
- Loss of investment income if reserves or useable capital receipts are used
- Running costs associated with the asset.

Savings, including benefits, to identify in the proposal include:

- Any positive impact of investment and economic growth on the Council's council tax base and business rates income

- Capital projects that generate income, revenue savings or efficiencies.

7. Stewardship of Assets

The Council's Asset Management Plan sets out the condition of its assets and the arrangements for managing these effectively. The Council's Corporate Property Strategy enhances these arrangements, including increasing the awareness that efficient use of property is an important element of maximising the value obtained from the Council's overall resources.

An extensive stock condition survey has been carried out on the majority of the Council's assets. This underpins the capital programme and has been updated to include the impact of our leisure portfolio of assets. As noted above however, the impact of rising costs and interest rates have caused the full capital programme to become unaffordable in the short-term and therefore the programme has been reduced to prioritise those assets which are considered highest risk. The other works have been removed from the approved capital programme pending a review of the portfolio.

8. Service Objectives

The option appraisal of proposed capital schemes overseen considers, amongst other factors, the following:

- How the proposal help achieve the objectives and priorities set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2022-2026.
- How the proposal will help achieve objectives set out in Service Plans.
- The service improvements and other anticipated benefits expected to be delivered from the investment.

9. Monitoring

- Capital budget holders are responsible for providing quarterly forecasts to the Finance Team. Any slippage, acceleration, underspends or overspends on schemes is identified as soon as possible.
- All forecasts are collated by the Finance Team and reported to the Executive and Council on a quarterly basis.