

Appendix A – Economic Summary 1 April 2016 – 30 September 2016

The below Economic Summary has been prepared by Treasury Solutions, Capita Asset Services. Treasury Officers at the Council, supported by advice from Capita, monitor the wider economy on a daily basis as it provides the context in which the Council invests its funds and provides information on credit risk relating to the Council's money.

The wider economic picture also provides information regarding the timing interest rates may increase, impacting investment strategy and also decisions on borrowing if applicable. Most Local Authority borrowing in general has traditionally been from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), a Central Government lending facility, whose rates are determined by UK Gilt rates and these fluctuate based on the wider UK economic environment. Although Wycombe District Council did not have any borrowing from the PWLB or the financial markets during the first six months of 2016/17, the economic background is important should the Council choose to borrow in future.

Capita Asset Services Economic Summary

UK GDP growth rates in 2013 of 2.2% and 2.9% in 2014 were strong but 2015 was disappointing at 1.8%, though it still remained one of the leading rates among the G7 countries. Growth improved in quarter 4 of 2015 from +0.4% to 0.7% but fell back to +0.4% (2.0% y/y) in quarter 1 of 2016 before bouncing back again to +0.7% (2.1% y/y) in quarter 2. During most of 2015, the economy had faced headwinds for exporters from the appreciation during the year of sterling against the Euro, and weak growth in the EU, China and emerging markets, plus the dampening effect of the Government's continuing austerity programme. The referendum vote for Brexit in June this year delivered an immediate shock fall in confidence indicators and business surveys, pointing to an impending sharp slowdown in the economy. However, subsequent surveys have shown a sharp recovery in confidence and business surveys, though it is generally expected that although the economy will now avoid flat lining, growth will be weak through the second half of 2016 and in 2017.

The Bank of England meeting on August 4th addressed this expected slowdown in growth by a package of measures including a cut in Bank Rate from 0.50% to 0.25%. The Inflation Report included an unchanged forecast for growth for 2016 of 2.0% but cut the forecast for 2017 from 2.3% to just 0.8%. The Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, had warned that a vote for Brexit would be likely to cause a slowing in growth, particularly from a reduction in business investment, due to the uncertainty of whether the UK would have continuing full access, (i.e. without tariffs), to the EU single market. He also warned that the Bank could not do all the heavy lifting and suggested that the Government will need to help growth by increasing investment expenditure and possibly by using fiscal policy tools (taxation). The new Chancellor Phillip Hammond announced after the referendum result, that the target of achieving a budget surplus in 2020 will be eased in the Autumn Statement on November 23.

The Inflation Report also included a sharp rise in the forecast for inflation to around 2.4% in 2018 and 2019. CPI has started rising during 2016 as the falls in the price of oil and food twelve months ago fall out of the calculation during the year and, in addition, the

post referendum 10% fall in the value of sterling on a trade weighted basis is likely to result in a 3% increase in CPI over a time period of 3-4 years. However, the MPC is expected to look through a one off upward blip from this devaluation of sterling in order to support economic growth, especially if pay increases continue to remain subdued and therefore pose little danger of stoking core inflationary price pressures within the UK economy.

The American economy had a patchy 2015 with sharp swings in the growth rate leaving the overall growth for the year at 2.4%. Quarter 1 of 2016 disappointed at +0.8% on an annualised basis while quarter 2 improved, but only to a lacklustre +1.4%. However, forward indicators are pointing towards a pickup in growth in the rest of 2016. The Fed. embarked on its long anticipated first increase in rates at its December 2015 meeting. At that point, confidence was high that there would then be four more increases to come in 2016. Since then, more downbeat news on the international scene and then the Brexit vote, have caused a delay in the timing of the second increase which is now strongly expected in December this year.

In the Eurozone, the ECB commenced in March 2015 its massive €1.1 trillion programme of quantitative easing to buy high credit quality government and other debt of selected EZ countries at a rate of €60bn per month; this was intended to run initially to September 2016 but was extended to March 2017 at its December 2015 meeting. At its December and March meetings it progressively cut its deposit facility rate to reach -0.4% and its main refinancing rate from 0.05% to zero. At its March meeting, it also increased its monthly asset purchases to €80bn. These measures have struggled to make a significant impact in boosting economic growth and in helping inflation to rise from around zero towards the target of 2%. GDP growth rose by 0.6% in quarter 1 2016 (1.7% y/y) but slowed to +0.3% (+1.6% y/y) in quarter 2. This has added to comments from many forecasters that central banks around the world are running out of ammunition to stimulate economic growth and to boost inflation. They stress that national governments will need to do more by way of structural reforms, fiscal measures and direct investment expenditure to support demand in the their economies and economic growth.

Japan is still bogged down in anaemic growth and making little progress on fundamental reform of the economy while Chinese economic growth has been weakening and medium term risks have been increasing.

Interest rate forecasts

The Council's treasury advisor, Capita Asset Services, has provided the following forecast:

	Dec-16	Mar-17	Jun-17	Sep-17	Dec-17	Mar-18	Jun-18	Sep-18	Dec-18	Mar-19	Jun-19
Bank rate	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.25%	0.25%	0.25%	0.25%	0.50%
5yr PWLB rate	1.00%	1.00%	1.10%	1.10%	1.10%	1.10%	1.20%	1.20%	1.20%	1.20%	1.30%
10yr PWLB rate	1.50%	1.50%	1.60%	1.60%	1.60%	1.60%	1.70%	1.70%	1.70%	1.70%	1.80%
25yr PWLB rate	2.30%	2.30%	2.40%	2.40%	2.40%	2.40%	2.50%	2.50%	2.50%	2.50%	2.60%
50yr PWLB rate	2.10%	2.10%	2.20%	2.20%	2.20%	2.20%	2.30%	2.30%	2.30%	2.30%	2.40%

Capita Asset Services undertook a quarterly review of its interest rate forecasts after the MPC meeting of 4th August cut Bank Rate to 0.25% and gave forward guidance that it expected to cut Bank Rate again to near zero before the year end. The above forecast therefore includes a further cut to 0.10% in November this year and a first increase in May 2018, to 0.25%, but no further increase to 0.50% until a year later. Mark Carney has repeatedly stated that increases in Bank Rate will be slow and gradual after they do start. The MPC is concerned about the impact of increases on many heavily indebted consumers, especially when the growth in average disposable income is still weak and could well turn negative when inflation rises during the next two years to exceed average pay increases.

The overall longer run trend is for gilt yields and PWLB rates to rise, albeit gently. An eventual world economic recovery may also see investors switching from the safe haven of bonds to equities. However, we have been experiencing exceptional levels of volatility in financial markets which have caused significant swings in PWLB rates. Our PWLB rate forecasts are based on the Certainty Rate (minus 20 bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1st November 2012.

The overall balance of risks to economic recovery in the UK remains to the downside. Downside risks to current forecasts for UK gilt yields and PWLB rates currently include:

- Monetary policy action reaching its limit of effectiveness and failing to stimulate significant sustainable growth, combat the threat of deflation and reduce high levels of debt in some major developed economies, combined with a lack of adequate action from national governments to promote growth through structural reforms, fiscal policy and investment expenditure.
- Weak capitalisation of some European banks.
- A resurgence of the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis.
- Geopolitical risks in Europe, the Middle East and Asia, increasing safe haven flows.
- Emerging country economies, currencies and corporates destabilised by falling commodity prices and / or Fed. rate increases, causing a further flight to safe havens (bonds).
- UK economic growth and increases in inflation are weaker than we currently anticipate.
- Weak growth or recession in the UK's main trading partners - the EU and US.

The potential for upside risks to current forecasts for UK gilt yields and PWLB rates, especially for longer term PWLB rates include: -

- The pace and timing of increases in the Fed. funds rate causing a fundamental reassessment by investors of the relative risks of holding bonds as opposed to equities and leading to a major flight from bonds to equities.
- UK inflation returning to significantly higher levels than in the wider EU and US, causing an increase in the inflation premium inherent to gilt yields.