



Dacorum Borough Council

Capital Strategy 2023-2024

1. Introduction

1.1 Requirements of a Capital Strategy

The Prudential Code requires all local authorities to produce a Capital Strategy. The purpose of the Capital Strategy is to tell a story that gives a clear and concise view of how the Council determines its priorities for capital investment, decides how much borrowing is affordable and its risk appetite and the governance arrangements in place to manage those risks.

The Capital Strategy is required to set out the long-term context in which capital expenditure and investment decisions are made and gives due consideration to the risk, reward and impact on the achievement of outcomes.

The Council Strategy should demonstrate that capital expenditure and investment decisions are in line with service objectives and properly take into account stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability.

The Capital Strategy should cover:

- Capital Expenditure
- Debt, Borrowing and Treasury Management
- Commercial Activity
- Other long-term Liabilities and Non-Treasury Investments and Debtors.
- Knowledge and Skills.

2. Capital Expenditure

2.1 Overview of the Asset Management Strategy

The Asset management strategy sets out how the Council intends to use its property portfolio to support the priorities identified in its *Corporate Plan*, and how it plans to improve the performance of its assets. The Council's Asset Management Strategy can be found on the [Council's website](#). The strategy informs and supports the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. The strategy will be updated as part of the delivery of the Council's Commercial Strategy, and the review of the commercial assets service which is underway at the time of publication of this document (February 2023).

The Council has a significant and varied portfolio of assets, some of which provide an income stream, which is crucial to the funding/delivery of the overall Council objectives. The strategy provides a structure to asset governance and performance management which in turn helps improve Council's decision making and enhance income streams.

The strategy details the Council's focus on reducing its long-term asset maintenance costs through proactive maintenance scheduling and better cost recovery. This reduces the risk that under-investment will lead to a spike in maintenance costs or a loss of income should

the assets no longer be deemed fit for purpose. Annual maintenance and refurbishment budgets are set as part of the Council's budget setting process.

The Council aims to act as a catalyst for growth by maximising the use of its own assets and stimulating growth. This approach can improve the Council's revenue streams as a result of increased business rate retention and council tax base growth. The Council weighs up the risk and benefits carefully where new projects potentially risk the loss of current income. Getting the balance right between future economic growth and the protection and enhancement of revenue income is a key issue for asset management planning. Changes in demand for assets as a result of the pandemic will no doubt drive future planning.

The Asset Management Strategy includes the Council's disposals strategy. To ensure continuing efficient operation of the Council's assets, decisions on disposals of assets deemed surplus to requirements is recommended by the Corporate Growth and Infrastructure Board. This decision will then be referred to the Senior Leadership Team for review and confirmation and then Members in line with Financial Regulations. Assets under consideration for disposal are investment sites and selected garages.

The Council's social Housing stock is considered separately under the Housing 30 year Business Plan. The Social Housing landscape has significantly changed during the life of the existing Asset Management Strategy (AMS) 2016-2020, and therefore a refresh of the existing strategy would not be appropriate. A new whole organisation AMS will be produced based on the following foundations, a long term strategic approach, understand the housing stock and how it performs, align capacity and resources to priorities, efficient and effective repairs and programme delivery and the focus on what customers want. The AMS will progress through the approval process during 2023.

2.2 The Council's policies on Capitalisation

The Council capitalises expenditure on property, plant, equipment and software, when it brings economic benefit or service potential to the Council for longer than 1 year and spend is greater than £10,000 per scheme. The Council does not capitalise borrowing costs incurred whilst assets are under construction. Further details of the Council's capitalisation policy can be found in the Council's Statement of Accounts, notes to the Core Financial Statements section: <https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/council-democracy/finance/annual-statement-of-accounts>.

2.3 Flexible Use of Capital Receipts

The Council has a Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy. Qualifying expenditure for the flexible use of capital receipts is 'expenditure on any project is designed to generate ongoing revenue savings in the delivery of public services and/ or transform service delivery to reduce costs and/ or transform service delivery in a way that reduces costs or demands for services in future years for any of the public sector delivery partners.

2.4 Capital Programme approval process

As part of the annual Medium Term Financial Strategy review and budget setting process, Senior Officers are invited to submit new Capital bids using a business case template. The business case template outlines the project details including;

- how the project will meet corporate priorities

- Revenue and Capital Requirements
- Proposed funding sources

The Council's corporate priorities for 2020-2025 are:

- A clean, safe and enjoyable environment
- Building strong vibrant communities
- Ensuring economic growth and prosperity
- Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular to those most in need
- Climate and ecological emergency
- Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery.

Bids are scrutinised by the Senior Leadership Team to ensure they are affordable and support Corporate Priorities. The draft Capital Programme then goes through internal officer and member scrutiny prior to Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet for further challenge and review. The Capital Programme then goes to full Council in February for approval.

2.5 The Capital Programme

The 2022/23-2026/27 Capital Programme is summarised in the table below. The total Capital Programme for the next 4 years from 1 April 2023 is £292.683m. For 2022/23, the Capital Programme is £47.977m of which £40.616m is to be spent on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and £7.36m is to be spent on General Fund Capital Schemes. Further details of the Capital Programme can be found in Appendix I of the Budget Report.

Capital expenditure	2021/22 Actual £m	2022/23 Forecast £m	2023/24 Estimate £m	2024/25 Estimate £m	2025/26 Estimate £m	2026/27 Estimate £m
General Fund	8.248	7.361	32.470	25.779	5.820	3.581
HRA	17.400	40.616	81.248	62.011	38.868	42.906
Total	25.648	47.977	113.719	87.790	44.687	46.487
Financed by:						
Capital grants & S106	3.476	4.202	7.405	2.656	0.781	0.741
Capital receipts & reserves	17.087	40.491	56.522	23.479	24.304	25.470
Revenue contribution to Capital	5.085	3.284	2.538	2.498	0.000	0.000
Borrowing- General Fund	0.000	0.000	11.848	25.038	2.734	0.000
Borrowing- HRA	0.000	0.000	35.406	34.118	16.869	20.276
Net financing need for the year	25.648	47.977	113.719	87.790	44.687	46.487

2.6 Long term view of capital expenditure plans

The Council publishes its capital programme covering a 5- year period, in line with its Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the HRA Business Plan covers 30 years.

The focus for the Council's General Fund over the medium term is the development of facilities for the local community, including its flagship project to review and enhance the leisure facilities in the borough reviewing the current fabric and service provision of the existing Hemel and Berkhamsted Leisure Centres. During 2023 the council is committed to assessing the options open to the Council to enable, build or purchase to maximise both the opportunities to develop homes and commercial opportunities.

In the medium to longer term, the Council is committed to providing new homes in the Borough and has a HRA programme of new build housing totalling £147.42m over the next 5 year period commencing 1 April 2023.

The Council's capital expenditure programme supports the priorities identified in its Corporate Plan and delivery of the Council's services. As a government organisation governed by a political administration, the Council is subject to changes in government policy and also changes in the political direction, including that arising from local elections held every four years. This has potential implications for the content and direction of the capital programme.

The Council is mindful of risks to the delivery and financial performance of the capital programme over the MTFS period. These include, but are not limited to:

- Inflationary changes
- Local and National political considerations
- Legislative changes
- Access to expertise

The Council projects the potential financial impact of these risks over the life of capital projects where it is possible to do so. Capital schemes are supported by relevant project boards and their financial performance is monitored on a quarterly basis.

2.7 Cost of Borrowing for Capital Expenditure

Under statute, the Council is required to make a charge to revenue in respect of prior year's expenditure on the General Fund which is funded from borrowing (internal or external) in order to repay the principal, this is known as the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). External borrowing also incurs interest costs. Based on the current capital programme, the forecast charge to the General Fund for both MRP and interest on borrowing is:

	2022/23 £m	2023/24 £m	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m
General Fund	1.037	1.029	0.741	0.741	0.741

There is no requirement for the HRA to make a minimum revenue provision but the HRA is required to pay interest on the borrowing undertaken to fund the £354m Self Financing deal. In 2023/24 this is budgeted to be £11.267m.

2.8 Monitoring of Capital Expenditure

To mitigate the risk of overspends on Capital schemes or the Council undertaking borrowing when not required and incurring interest costs, the Council monitors Capital Expenditure against the approved budget during the financial year. The Budget Monitoring Report goes to the Senior Leadership Team, then Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet on a quarterly basis. The report provides the latest forecast position and provides an explanation of reasons for slippage and underspends or pressures on each individual scheme. Cabinet is required to approve any requests for additional budget and to approve slippage of projects into future financial years.

To ensure the Council is achieving value for money when awarding tenders for Capital works, Officers must adhere to the Council's Commissioning and Procurement Standing Orders. This details the Council's procurement thresholds and can be found on the [Council's website](#).

Post- project implementation reviews are also carried out, where appropriate, to ensure lessons learnt are taken into consideration for future relevant projects.

3. Debt, Borrowing and Treasury Management

3.1 Overview of Governance Process for Treasury Management

As per the Treasury Management Strategy, Full Council will receive reports on its treasury management policies, practices and activities, including, as a minimum, a mid-year review and an annual report after its close. Responsibility is delegated to the Section 151 Officer for the implementation and regular monitoring of its treasury management policies and practices, and for the execution and administration of treasury management decisions. Cabinet is responsible for ensuring effective scrutiny of the treasury management strategy, policies and monitoring before recommendation to Full Council.

3.2 Projection of External Debt and Internal Borrowing over the Long Term

The Council has total external debt of £349.868m at the end of 2021/22 and forecasts £415.980m at the end of 2026/27.

	2021/22 Actual £m	2022/23 Estimate £m	2023/24 Estimate £m	2024/25 Estimate £m	2025/26 Estimate £m	2026/27 Estimate £m
External Debt						
Debt at 1 April	353.502	349.680	337.446	355.214	385.672	400.497
Expected change in Debt	(3.822)	(12.233)	17.768	30.458	14.826	14.295
Other long-term liabilities	0.188	0.188	0.188	1.188	1.188	1.188
Actual gross debt at 31 March	349.868	337.634	355.402	386.860	401.685	415.980
The Capital Financing Requirement	345.051	349.299	393.901	450.144	464.235	477.749
(Under)/over borrowing	4.817	(11.665)	(38.499)	(63.284)	(62.550)	(61.769)

3.3 Limits on overall borrowing

The Treasury Management Strategy sets out the following borrowing limits:

Authorised limit	2022/23 Estimate £m	2023/24 Estimate £m	2024/25 Estimate £m	2025/26 Estimate £m
Debt	400.0	400	420	420
Other long term liabilities	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0
Total	410.0	410.0	430.0	430.0

3.4 Treasury Management Key Risks and Risk appetite

The Council's Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 sets out in detail the authority's risk appetite around its treasury management activities. The Council adopts a prudent approach to the management of risk, with its investment priorities being first, security, liquidity second and then return as detailed in the Treasury Management Strategy. This includes reducing the Council's exposure to large fixed rate sums falling due for refinancing at the same time by setting upper and lower limits for the maturity structure of borrowing.

3.5 Treasury Management Knowledge and Skills available to the Council

The Council uses Link Group as its external treasury management advisors. The Council recognises that there is value in employing external providers of treasury management services in order to acquire access to specialist skills and resources. The Council ensures knowledge and skills are commensurate with the authority's risk appetite. Council officers regularly attend treasury management training provided by Link Group.

4. Commercial Activity

4.1 Definition of Commercial Activity

Commercial activity is the investment in assets including loans and property primarily for financial return which are not part of treasury management activity. Commercial activity can also include service investments held clearly and explicitly for operational service purposes such as loans to other organisations for regeneration purposes. Commercial activity within the Council currently includes the holding of investment properties in the commercial assets portfolio to generate rental income. The Council's approach to commercial activity will be further developed in its evolving Commercial Strategy.

The purpose of the Council's Commercial Strategy is to seek, where possible to increase the Council's financial operating envelope, developing a programme of activities which expands its means. This will assist the Council in delivering its ambitious vision for Dacorum and deal with the further financial pressures which will inevitably arise in future years. There is a clear link between the Council's Commercial Strategy and this Capital Strategy. Capital investment decisions will be driven by the Council's Commercial Strategy. The first Commercial project to receive capital investment approval is the development of 6 light industrial units that will be developed over the next 3 years.

4.2 Investment Properties

At the 31st March 2022, the Statement of Accounts showed the Council held £66.454m of Investment Properties. This was 4.69% of the Council's Long-Term Assets. Investment Properties include shops, industrial units, storage units, offices, filling stations and nurseries. Investment Properties in 2022/23 are forecast to generate gross income of £5.6m. The net income from Investment Properties is £4.7m, which helps contribute to a lower net expenditure before Council Tax. For 2022/23 the net expenditure before Council Tax is £13.851m.

The Commercial Assets and Property Development team manage the Council's Investment Properties in accordance with the Council's Asset Management Strategy. Quarterly reports are sent to members using the Council's performance system (InPhase) on the performance of the Council's investment properties. Key indicators include:

- percentage arrears on Commercial Property rents,
- percentage of Occupation in Commercial Properties,
- Investment Property income year to date budget position

The Council's Commercial Assets and Property Development team includes RICS qualified professionals to ensure the Council meet legislative requirements whilst also using that professional knowledge and expertise to maximise the potential income of the portfolio.

4.3 Approach to risk in commercial activities

The Council holds investment assets which deliver an annual rental stream. These investment assets help the authority deliver a balanced budget over the MTF5 period as well as supporting the economic objectives the Council has for the Dacorum area.

As with its approach to treasury management, the Council adopts a prudent approach to the management of risk within its commercial activities. The Council engages professional advice on these activities as required, either from its own staff or via external advisors. Decisions on commercial activities are made in line with the Council's constitution.

The Council monitors the performance of its commercial activities via its financial monitoring process and the use of performance indicators. This process includes both Officer and Member scrutiny.

Since 2021, there is a specific Commercial Board in place which plays a crucial role in providing senior officer governance for Dacorum's commercial activity and helping to develop a more commercial focus and behaviours across the authority and, as a result, its remit will cover a range of activity which will influence commercial outcomes.

The Commercial Board has set up a clear governance process as outlined below, that will assist with the development and realization of the commercial strategy in the Council.

- i. **Informal Cabinet**, to be convened for all cabinet members on an informal, and as required, basis to discuss the draft Strategy and programme, and individual business cases as required.
- ii. **Finance & Resources Scrutiny**, to consider the draft Commercial Strategy and Programme, and individual business cases as required.

- iii. **Cabinet**, to approve the Commercial Strategy, Programme and business cases, with appropriate delegations to the Chief Executive and / or Strategic Director (Corporate and Commercial) for delivery of the programme once business cases are approved.
- iv. **Full Council**, to approve the resources required for commercial business cases.

5. Other long-term Liabilities and Non-Treasury Debtors

Any other long-liabilities that the Council undertakes are subject to member scrutiny and approval.

6. Knowledge and Skills

The Council employs a wide range of qualified professionals with expert knowledge and skills including legal professionals, RICS property experts and qualified accountants. Annual appraisals are carried out to identify training needs. The Council ensures Councillors have the required skills through the Member training programme. Where skills are not available in house, or in relation to material projects, the Council will draw on additional professional advisers as necessary, these currently include Link Asset Service for Treasury Management Services, Brazier Freeth for Commercial Property advice and various architects.