



Report to: Council

Subject: Prudential Code Indicators 2006/07 to 2008/09

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek formal approval of the Prudential Indicators for Gedling Borough Council for the financial years 2006/07 to 2008/09.

BACKGROUND

The Local Government Act 2003 introduced the Prudential Framework for Local Authority Capital Investment. The key objectives of the Prudential Code are:

- That the capital investment plans of local authorities are affordable, prudent and sustainable.
- That treasury management decisions are taken in accordance with good professional practice
- That local strategic planning, asset management and proper option appraisal are supported

To demonstrate that these objectives have been fulfilled, the Prudential Code details the indicators that must be set and monitored. It does not suggest indicative limits or ratios, as these are for the local authority to set itself. The indicators are designed to support and record local decision-making, and not to be comparative performance indicators. The indicators cannot be set or revised in isolation from each other, but should be considered together.

In practice, the Code demands an iterative process, as the authority considers alternative financial strategies before deciding on one that is suitably affordable, prudent and sustainable. The authoritative setting and revising of prudential indicators must, however, be carried out by the same body that takes decisions on the local authority budget, ie full Council.

The Prudential Code places significant responsibilities on chief finance officers in local government. Through the Code, the chief financial officer is responsible for

ensuring that all matters required to be taken into account are reported to the decision making body for consideration. In considering its programme for capital investment, the Council is required within the Prudential Code to have regard to:

- Affordability, eg. the implications for Council Tax
- Prudence and sustainability, eg. the implications for external borrowing
- Value for money, eg. option appraisal
- Stewardship of assets, eg. asset management planning
- Service Objectives, eg. strategic planning for the authority
- Practicality, eg. the achievability of the forward plan

In all cases it will be for elected members to make the judgement between the constraints of affordability and the demands of services for capital investment.

PROPOSAL

Appendix 1 details the proposed Prudential Indicators for 2006/07 to 2008/09, which are judged to meet the objectives of the Prudential Code. They represent capital investment plans that are affordable, prudent and sustainable. The Indicators are split into two sections, Estimates and Limits:

Section 1 - Estimates - Details those indicators that are based on expected outcomes, and include four key indicators of the affordability of the authority's capital plans with particular regard to the impact on the Council Tax and Housing Rents. In considering the affordability of capital plans the authority is required to consider all of the resources currently available and those estimated for the future, together with the totality of capital plans, revenue income and expenditure forecasts for three years.

1. Ratio of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream

This represents estimates of financing costs, including current commitments plus the effect of medium term plan projections in respect of the cost of borrowing.

Appendix 1 shows that this indicator is expected to range from 3.55% to 6.53% in respect of the General Fund over the next three years, and -0.19% to +0.46% in respect of the HRA.

2. Incremental Impact of Capital Investment Decisions on Council Tax and Housing Rent

This is a key measure of affordability which estimates the incremental impact on the Council Tax and Housing Rent of the capital investment decisions contained within the Medium Term Financial Strategy, over and above capital investment decisions that have previously been taken by the Council.

The Council could consider different options for its capital investment programme in relation to their differential impact on the Council Tax and Housing Rent.

Appendix 1 shows that this indicator is expected to range from £2.54 to £6.26 over the next three years in respect of the impact on Council Tax (General Fund), and that the likely impact on Rents (HRA) is 23p for each year.

The indicators included in Appendix 1 for the incremental impact on Council Tax do not show the full impact of the 2006/07 new capital investment decisions. Due to the anticipated timing of borrowing and regulations for setting aside monies to repay principal, the full revenue implications of borrowing do not take effect until 2009/10. The full impact on Council Tax is estimated to be £7.29 per Band D equivalent property by 2009/10.

3. Capital Expenditure

This indicator estimates the future capital plans of the authority. Appendix 1 shows that this is expected to be £3.978m in 2006/07, £4.313m in 2007/08 and £2.956m in 2008/09 in respect of the General Fund, and £3.131m, £3.192 and £2.241m respectively for HRA.

4. Capital Financing Requirement

The Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) measures the authority's underlying need to borrow for capital purposes. In accordance with best professional practice, the Council does not associate borrowing with particular items or types of expenditure. The Authority has an integrated Treasury Management Strategy, and has adopted the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management in the Public Services. The Council has, at any point in time, a number of cashflows, both positive and negative, and manages its treasury position in terms of its borrowings and investments in accordance with its approved treasury management strategy and practices. In day-to-day cash management, no distinction can be made between revenue cash and capital cash. External borrowing arises as a consequence of all the financial transactions of the authority, and not simply those arising from capital spending. In contrast, the CFR reflects the authority's underlying need to borrow for capital purposes.

The Capital Financing Requirement will increase whenever capital expenditure is incurred, but where such expenditure is resourced immediately (capital receipts, direct revenue financing etc) the CFR will reduce at the same time, resulting in no net increase.

Appendix 1 shows that the CFR is expected to rise from £13.784 in 2006/07 to £18.389m in 2008/09 in respect of the General Fund. For the HRA, the negative position is expected to fall from £3.318m in 2006/07 to £2.318m for both 2007/08 and 2008/09.

Section 2 - Limits - Details those indicators that are based on limits, beyond which activities should not pass without management action. They include two key indicators of affordability and five of prudence:

Affordability

1. Authorised Limit for external Debt

In respect of its external debt, the Council must approve an “Authorised Limit” for its total external debt, gross of investments, for each of the next three financial years.

These limits separately identify borrowing and other long-term liabilities such as finance leases. The Council is asked to approve these limits, and to delegate authority to the Head of Finance, within the total limit for any individual year, to effect movement between the separately agreed limits for borrowing and other long term liabilities, in accordance with option appraisal and best value for money for the authority. Any such changes made will be reported to the Council at its next meeting following the change.

Appendix 1 shows that this indicator is expected to be £13m for 2006/07, £17m for 2007/08 and £18.5m for 2008/09 in respect of borrowing, and £1.5 for each of the three years in respect of long-term liabilities.

The Head of Finance is satisfied that these Authorised Limits are consistent with the authority’s current commitments, existing plans and the proposals in this budget report for capital expenditure and financing, and with its approved treasury management policy statement and practices. The Head of Finance confirms that they are based on the estimate of the most likely, prudent but not worst-case scenario with, in addition, sufficient headroom over and above this to allow for operational management, for example unusual cash movements. Risk analysis and risk management strategies have been taken into account, as have plans for capital expenditure, estimates of the Capital Financing Requirement and estimates of cashflow requirements for all purposes.

In taking its decisions on this budget report, the Council is asked to note that the Authorised Limit determined for 2006/07 will be the statutory limit determined under section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 2003.

2. Operational Boundary for External Debt

The Council must also approve an “Operational Boundary for external debt” for the next three financial years. The proposed Operational Boundary for external debt is based on the same estimates as the Authorised Limit, but reflects directly the Head of Finance’s estimate of the most likely, prudent but not worst case scenario, without the additional headroom included within the Authorised Limit, and equates to the maximum external debt projected by this estimate. The Operational Boundary represents a key management tool for in-year monitoring. Within this Operational Boundary, figures for borrowing and other long-term liabilities are separately identified. The Council is asked to delegate authority to the Head of Finance, within the total Operational Boundary for any individual year, to effect movement between the separately

agreed figures for borrowing and long-term liabilities, in a similar fashion to the Authorised Limit. Any such changes will be reported to the Council at its next meeting following the change.

Appendix 1 shows that this indicator is expected to be £12m for 2006/07, £16m for 2007/08 and £17.5m for 2008/09 in respect of borrowing, and £1.5m for each of the three years in respect of long-term liabilities.

Prudence

1. Net Borrowing and the Capital Financing Requirement

The Prudential Code includes the following as a key indicator of prudence:

“In order to ensure that over the medium term net borrowing will only be for a capital purpose, the local authority should ensure that net external borrowing does not, except in the short term, exceed the total of the Capital Financing Requirement in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional Capital Financing Requirement for the current and next two financial years”

Appendix 1 shows that this indicator is expected to be £16.071m for 2006/07, £17.548m for 2007/08 and £18.935m for 2008/09, and the Head of Finance confirms that no difficulties are envisaged for the current or future years. This view takes into account current commitments, existing plans, and medium term plan projections.

2. Upper limit for fixed rate interest exposure

3. Upper limit for variable rate interest exposure

The Upper limits for interest rate exposures are set to accommodate a Treasury Management Strategy in which fixed rate borrowing and investment is used to reduce uncertainty surrounding future interest rate scenarios whilst retaining flexibility to achieve optimum performance through use of variable interest rates.

Appendix 1 shows that the indicator for the upper limit for borrowing and lending at fixed rates is to be set at 200%. The upper limit for variable rates is to be set at -200%. These somewhat unlikely ratios are to accommodate the fluctuations experienced in the net position during the year, for example, new borrowing may be taken at fixed rates, but invested temporarily at variable rates until the funds are required, resulting in a net position that bears no relation to that expected at the year-end.

Appendix 1 also shows separate local indicators for upper limits on fixed and variable rates for borrowing and lending, since these are likely to be more meaningful to Members than the indicators set for the theoretical net position.

4. Upper limits for the maturity structure of borrowing

The upper limits for the maturity structure of borrowing are designed to avoid large concentrations of fixed rate debt that has the same maturity structure

and would therefore need to be replaced at the same time, therefore avoiding substantial refinancing risks.

Appendix 1 shows that this indicator is set an upper limit of 20% each for maturities under 1 year, between 1 and 2 years, and between 2 and 5 years. The limit is set at 50% for maturities between 5 and 10 years, and 100% for maturities exceeding 10 years.

5. Upper limits for principal sums invested for periods over 364 days

The upper limit for principal sums invested is set to minimise the exposure to the possibility of loss that might arise as a result of having to realise an investment before it reaches its final maturity. Appendix 1 shows that this indicator is to be set at £2m for sums maturing beyond 31 March 2007 and £1m for sums maturing beyond 31 March 2008. No investment maturing beyond 31 March 2009 is anticipated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to approve the Prudential Indicators and Limits for 2006/07 to 2008/09 as detailed in Appendix 1, which have been set with due reference to CIPFA's Prudential Code, under the Local Government Act 2003.