

Flexible use of Capital Receipts Strategy 2025/26

Introduction

As part of the November 2015 Spending Review, the Government announced that it would introduce flexibility for the period of the Spending Review for local authorities to use capital receipts from the sale of assets to fund the revenue costs of service reform and transformation. Guidance on the use of this flexibility was issued in March 2016 which applied to the financial years 2016/17 through to 2019/20.

In December 2017 the Secretary of State announced that this flexibility would be extended for a further three years (until 2021-2022) and in February 2021 an additional extension of three years was announced. The new Government in 2024 announced a further longer-term extension to 2030 to fund transformation or other projects that produce long term savings or reduce the costs of service delivery.

The Guidance

The guidance issued by the Secretary of State under section 15(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 2003 specified that;

- Local authorities will only be able to use capital receipts from the sale of property, plant and equipment received in the years in which this flexibility is offered. They may not use their existing stock of capital receipts to finance the revenue costs of reform.
- Local authorities cannot borrow to finance the revenue costs of the service reforms.
- The expenditure for which the flexibility can be applied (known as ‘Qualifying Expenditure’) should be the up-front (set up or implementation) costs that will generate future ongoing savings and/or transform service delivery to reduce costs or the demand for services in future years. The ongoing revenue costs of the new processes or arrangements cannot be classified as qualifying expenditure.
- The key determining criteria to use when deciding whether expenditure can be funded by the new capital receipts flexibility is that it is forecast to generate ongoing savings to an authority’s net service expenditure.
- In using the flexibility, the Council will have due regard to the requirements of the Prudential Code, the CIPFA Local Authority Accounting Code of Practice and the current edition of the Treasury Management in Public Services Code of Practice.

To make use of this flexibility, the Council is required to prepare a “Flexible use of capital receipts strategy” before the start of the year, to be approved by full Council. This can form part of the budget report to Council. This Strategy therefore applies to the financial year 2025/26, which commences on 1st April 2025.

Examples of qualifying expenditure

There are a wide range of projects that could generate qualifying expenditure and the list below is not prescriptive. Examples of projects include:

- Sharing back-office and administrative services with one or more other council or public sector bodies;
- Investment in service reform feasibility work, e.g. setting up pilot schemes;
- Collaboration between local authorities and central government departments to free up land for economic use;
- Funding the cost of service reconfiguration, restructuring or rationalisation (staff or non-staff), where this leads to ongoing efficiency savings or service transformation;
- Sharing Chief-Executives, management teams or staffing structures;
- Driving a digital approach to the delivery of more efficient public services and how the public interacts with constituent authorities where possible;
- Aggregating procurement on common goods and services where possible, either as part of local arrangements or using Crown Commercial Services or regional procurement hubs or Professional Buying Organisations;
- Improving systems and processes to tackle fraud and corruption in line with the Local Government Fraud and Corruption Strategy – this could include an element of staff training;
- Setting up commercial or alternative delivery models to deliver services more efficiently and bring in revenue (for example, through selling services to others);
- Integrating public facing services across two or more public sector bodies (for example children’s social care, trading standards) to generate savings or to transform service delivery.

The Council’s Proposal for 2025/26

The Government has provided a definition of expenditure which qualifies to be funded from capital receipts. This is: “Qualifying expenditure is expenditure on any project that 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 demand for services in future years for any of the public sector delivery partners. Within this definition, it is for individual local authorities to decide whether or not a project qualifies for the flexibility.”

The Council has determined that the West Cheltenham (Golden Valley Development) initiative is a “Collaboration between local authorities and central government departments to free up land for economic use” and therefore meets the definition of a project that will generate qualifying expenditure.

The Council therefore intends to use the following use of capital receipts to fund the West Cheltenham (Golden Valley Development) initiative and the savings generated by this project are set out in the table below:

| | 2025/26 £m | 2026/27 £m | 2027/28 £m | Total |
|---|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| General Fund programme staffing costs | 0.475 | | | 0.475 |
| Savings / additional base budget income generated | | | (0.600) | (0.600) |
| Total | 0.475 | | (0.600) | (0.125) |

The additional base budget is generated through growth in business rates expected once the Innovation Centre and Mobility Hub are open. The business rates forecast is based on the models developed as part of the modelling of the development and assumes that the Council will still receive 40% of the total business rates payable by tenants on the site. This figure is also reflected in the Medium Term Financial Strategy forecast in Appendix 9 of this report.

Impact on Prudential Indicators

The guidance requires that the impact on the Council's Prudential Indicators should be considered when preparing a Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy. The council's current capital programme does not utilise the capital receipts that will be generated to fund the above programme. Therefore, there will be no change to the council's Prudential Indicators that are contained in the Treasury Management Strategy Statement which will be presented to Full Council in March 2025 for approval.