

Audit Committee

Date: 19 March 2025

Subject: 2025/26 GMCA Capital Strategy

Report of: Group Chief Financial Officer, Steve Wilson

Purpose of Report

The Capital Strategy sets out the over-arching principles and processes by which the capital and investment decisions set out in the Capital Programme will be prioritised against the key aims of the Greater Manchester Strategy (GMS).

In addition, the Capital Strategy considers the funding implications of the Capital Programme and where borrowing is required, the Treasury Management Strategy sets out how this will be managed during the year along with the policy for managing investments. The Treasury Management Strategy also incorporates the statutory prudential indicators along with the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy to be adopted for 2025/26.

The Capital Strategy also provides an overview of the governance arrangements for capital investment decisions and outlines the Authority's arrangements for managing risk.

Recommendations:

The Audit Committee is requested to recommend the approval of the Capital Strategy for 2025/26 to the GMCA.

Contact Officers

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Report authors must identify which paragraph relating to the following issues:

BOLTON
BURY

MANCHESTER
OLDHAM

ROCHDALE
SALFORD

STOCKPORT
TAMESIDE

TRAFFORD
WIGAN

Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

N/A

Risk Management

The GMCA's approach to risk is included in section 9

Legal Considerations

This report fulfils the statutory requirements to have the necessary prudential indicators to be included in a Treasury Management Strategy.

Financial Consequences – Revenue

Financial revenue consequences are contained within the body of the report.

Financial Consequences – Capital

Financial capital consequences are contained within the body of the report.

Number of attachments to the report:

None

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

N/A

Background Papers

N/A

Tracking/ Process

Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution

No

Exemption from call in

No

GM Transport Committee

N/A

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

N/A

2025/26 GMCA Capital Strategy

1. Introduction/Background

1.1 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Prudential Code requires local authorities to approve and publish an annual Capital Strategy.

The Capital Strategy provides:

- a) a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services;
- b) an overview of the management of associated risks; and
- c) the implications for future budgets and financial sustainability.

1.2 The Capital Strategy maintains a strong link to the aims of the Greater Manchester Strategy (GMS). The GMS seeks to deliver Good Lives For all, and for our city-region to be greener, fairer, and more prosperous in all parts. This will be delivered by the following shared commitments:

- a) We will drive investment into our growth locations, and use that to create opportunity in adjacent towns and local centres
- b) We will enable the delivery of resilient, safe and vibrant communities where everyone has access to essential services, local centres and high streets which are successful and reflective of their populations, and access to high quality culture and leisure spaces
- c) We will ensure our local communities, neighbourhoods, villages, towns, cities and districts are protected and strengthened through the Places for Everyone Plan and Stockport Local Plan, with new homes delivered in line with our Zero Carbon commitments and Housing Strategy
- d) We will create a carbon neutral Greater Manchester by 2038, with better air quality and natural environment
- e) We will deliver a low carbon London-style fully integrated public transport system across bus, tram, train and bike
- f) We will enable the delivery of world-class smart digital infrastructure
- g) We will realise the opportunities from our world-class growth and innovation assets, driven by our Local Growth Plans / Industrial Strategy to open up opportunities in all parts of the city-region

- h) We will support our businesses to grow sustainably, to become as prosperous as they can be
- i) We will support the creation of better jobs and good employment that has a purpose beyond growing shareholder value, utilising the opportunity to positively impact on our communities
- j) We will ensure businesses are able to access the skills and talent they need, by provision of high-quality learning and wrapping support around individuals, enabling them to realise their potential - with access to good work for those who can, support for those who could, and care for those who can't
- k) We will ensure all our children and young people leave education and training ready to succeed in the labour market with a balance of academic, technical and 'life ready' skills
- l) We will ensure digital inclusion for all, including under 25s, over 75s and disabled people online
- m) We will ensure the delivery of safe, decent and affordable housing, with no one sleeping rough in Greater Manchester
- n) We will tackle food and fuel poverty experienced by Greater Manchester residents
- o) We will reduce health inequalities experienced by Greater Manchester residents, and drive improvements in physical and mental health

1.3 The Capital Strategy covers the following key topics and should be read alongside the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Borrowing Limits and Annual Investment Strategy 2025/26 also on the agenda for this meeting.

- a) The Capital Strategy;
- b) Governance, reporting and scrutiny arrangements;
- c) The capital programme
- d) Asset Management;
- e) Commercial Investment;
- f) The approach to borrowing and financial investments as set out in the Treasury Management Strategy;
- g) The policy for setting aside amounts to repay debt as set out in the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy;
- h) The financial indicators required by the Prudential Code;

- i) The approach to risk;
- j) The extent of other long-term liabilities; and
- k) Current knowledge and skills to deliver the Capital Strategy.

2. THE CAPITAL STRATEGY

- 2.1 The overarching Capital Strategy for the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) is to ensure that all resources are directed towards achieving the outcomes contained within the Greater Manchester Strategy (GMS) by maximising the use of external funding to deliver the highest impact affordable programme.
- 2.2 The following are priority investment areas for the GMCA and are reflected in the capital programme:
- a) Transport. The Authority is significantly investing in Metrolink, Rail, Buses, Interchanges and Active Travel. This is to achieve the GMS commitments of
 - enabling the delivery of resilient, safe and vibrant communities where everyone has access to essential services, local centres and high streets which are successful and reflective of their populations, and access to high quality culture and leisure spaces
 - delivering a carbon neutral city by 2038 with better air quality and natural environment and
 - delivering a low carbon London-style fully integrated public transport system across bus, tram, train and bike.
 - b) Economic Development and Regeneration. Alongside the Non-Treasury Investments in Section 5 of the report the Authority is significantly investing in social housing decarbonisation and brownfield sites funded by grants from UK central government, along with the Housing Investment Fund. This is to achieve the GMS commitments of
 - driving investment into our growth locations and suing that the create opportunity in adjacent towns and local centres
 - ensuring our local communities, neighbourhoods, villages, towns, cities and districts are protected and strengthened through the Places for Everyone Pland and Stockport Local Plan, with new homes delivered in line with our Zero Carbon commitments and Housing Strategy

- Realising the opportunities from our world-class growth and innovation assets, driven by our Local Growth Plans/ Industrial Strategy to open up opportunities in all parts of the city-region
 - Ensuring the delivery of safe, decent and affordable housing, with no one sleeping rough in Greater Manchester
- c) Fire & Rescue Service. A rolling programme of vehicles and equipment renewals alongside a refreshed estates programme funded mainly from borrowings.
- enabling the delivery of resilient, safe and vibrant communities where everyone has access to essential services, local centres and high streets which are successful and reflective of their populations, and access to high quality culture and leisure spaces
 - creating a carbon neutral Greater Manchester by 2038, with better air quality and natural environment
- d) Waste & Resources Service. Investment in improvements to current facilities enabling waste to be processed more efficiently.
- creating a carbon neutral Greater Manchester by 2038, with better air quality and natural environment
- e) Police Service. Significant investment in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), fleet vehicles and further service improvements funded by borrowings.
- enabling the delivery of resilient, safe and vibrant communities where everyone has access to essential services, local centres and high streets which are successful and reflective of their populations, and access to high quality culture and leisure spaces.

3. GOVERNANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

3.1 The GMCA's capital programme involves the expenditure and financing of £2.3 billion of capital schemes over the period 2024/25 to 2027/28. It is important therefore that the risks surrounding the delivery and financing of the capital projects are understood and appropriate governance arrangements are in place. For the Authority these governance arrangements are:

- a) The Capital Strategy itself which is scrutinised by Audit Committee prior to approval by the GMCA.
- b) The Greater Manchester Combined Authority which approves the Capital Programme and capital schemes;

- c) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee which has the remit for budget oversight and other financial matters is responsible for scrutinising the Capital Programme;
- d) In relation to Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) functions the Mayor is responsible for setting the Force’s capital and revenue budget allocating funds and assets to the Chief Constable. The annual Police Fund Revenue and Capital budget is reported to the Police, Fire and Crime Panel for information.
- e) The GMCA constitution sets out the powers of officers with regard to capital expenditure;
- f) The GMCA receives quarterly capital monitoring reports which identifies any variation to the approved programme;
- g) All capital expenditure follows the GMCA’s financial accounting framework which ensures expenditure is treated in a manner compliant with accounting convention / statutory guidance; and
- h) The capital programme is subject to both internal and external audit scrutiny.

3.2 Risk is inherent with any investment or commercial activity and whilst it cannot be eliminated, the authority will adopt a strategic approach to risk management. The GMCA’s approach to managing risk is that any risks will be appropriate for the authority to take and proportionate to benefits derived, in terms of delivery of Capital Strategy and GMS objectives, both for individual projects and cumulatively. In this way, the authority has a clear understanding of the adverse aspects of risk and can take steps to mitigate it when making decisions.

4. CAPITAL PROGRAMME

4.1. Schemes are included in the capital programme with the aim of delivering the 10 key priorities of Greater Manchester. The proposed capital programme is shown below along with the along with the associated financing.

Capital expenditure £m	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate	2027/28 Estimate
Transport	344.970	350.258	262.620	563.198	45.085
Economic Development and Regeneration	182.790	251.636	270.355	175.617	123.935
Fire and Rescue Service	9.937	20.334	39.695	27.586	4.783
Waste & Resources Service	3.367	9.379	25.617	30.728	0.000
Police Service	25.254	33.346	38.030	30.172	17.761
Total	566.318	664.953	636.317	827.301	191.564

Financing of capital expenditure £m	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate	2027/28 Estimate
Capital receipts	91.772	107.380	128.770	112.906	61.951
Capital grants	269.525	421.047	373.545	566.030	79.987
Revenue Contribution	5.094	0.155	0.090	0.090	0.090
External Income	35.985	8.997	7.266	2.750	2.500
Borrowing Requirement	163.942	127.374	126.646	145.525	47.036

4.2. The capital programme is subject to regular review with quarterly monitoring reports presented to the Authority. Estimates of capital grant allocations in the financing section above are known to be subject to variation.

5. NON-TREASURY MANAGEMENT REGENERATION INVESTMENTS

5.1 The GMCA does not make commercial investments, to the extent that it does not make investments purely to make a financial return. Where the GMCA has and does make capital investments, it is for strategic or regeneration purposes. The investments below align with the GMS priorities of a thriving and productive economy in all parts of Greater Manchester and safe, decent and affordable housing.

5.2. Growing Places Fund and Regional Growth Fund

5.2.1 The Growing Places Fund (GPF) originally secured by the GM in 2012/13 totalled £34.5m of capital grant funding which is being used to provide up front capital investment in schemes. The GPF has three overriding objectives:

- a) to generate economic activity in the short term by addressing immediate constraints:
- b) to allow Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to prioritise infrastructure needs, empowering them to deliver their economic priorities; and
- c) to establish sustainable recycled funds so that funding can be reinvested.

5.2.2 The Regional Growth Fund (RGF) of £65m was secured by GM through two rounds of bidding for UK Central Government funding in 2012/13 and 2013/14. The RGF has supported eligible projects and programmes raising private sector

investment to create economic growth and lasting employment, with over 6,000 jobs being either created or safeguarded.

5.2.3 The original GPF and RGF allocations have now been fully committed and the GMCA is in the recycling phase. Given that both investment funds were funded through government grant there are no direct impact on the revenue budget should any loans default.

5.2.4 There is likely to be opportunities to passport similar property investments using GMCA's own funds (prudential borrowing) to allow freeing up of GM wide Evergreen Funds for further investments.

5.3 Housing Investment Fund (HIF)

5.3.1 The Greater Manchester Housing Investment Fund has been designed to accelerate and unlock housing schemes. It will help build the new homes to support the growth ambitions across Greater Manchester.

5.3.2 Projects greater than £2m are recommended for approval to the GMCA by the Gateway Panel who review all the detailed information. This results in two separate committees reviewing the detailed proposals. Loans for less the £2m are subject to review and approval by the Credit Committee.

5.4 Greater Manchester Loan Fund (GMLF)

5.4.1 The GMLF was established in June 2013 in response to market constraints which significantly reduced the availability of debt finance.

5.4.2 The GMLF was set up to provide debt finance of between £0.1m and £0.5m to small and medium enterprises in the Greater Manchester region, with the objective of generating business growth, creating and safeguarding jobs. A maximum of £10m has been approved for use by the Fund.

6. COMMERCIAL INVESTMENTS

6.1 As the Government has introduced measures to actively discourage authorities from engaging in speculative commercial investment, principally by introducing access controls to future PWLB borrowing, then the Capital Strategy for 2025/26 does not allow for any investments to be undertaken solely for commercial purposes.

6.2 If the Authority wishes to engage in such activity, then it will need to prepare a strategy for considering such investments which is to be approved by GMCA. In

addition, such activity will also have implications for the Authority's future ability to borrow from the PWLB thereby adding considerable financing risk to the authority's capital expenditure plans.

- 6.3 As such the Group Chief Financial Officer declares that the Authority plans for capital investment as outlined in the capital programme do not contain any investments solely for commercial yield purposes.

7 BORROWING, REVENUE CONSEQUENCES AND THE TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT (TMSS)

7.1 Capital Financing

- 7.1.1 Wherever possible the financing of the capital programme will utilise and maximise external funding provided by central government or other third-party sources. The net financing requirement shown in the table in section 4 above is after application of capital receipts, capital grants and revenue contributions.

- 7.1.2 The capital programme is reliant on prudential borrowing totalling £447m between 2024/25 and 2027/28. This method of financing involves the GMCA borrowing from external sources and results in additional revenue costs of interest and borrowing plus a statutory charge known as the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). All prudential borrowing is undertaken in full compliance with the CIPFA Prudential Code which requires authorities to approve their own borrowing limits for the year with indicators to measure the affordability and sustainability of the capital programme.

7.2 Treasury Management Strategy Statement

- 7.2.1 The Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) is covered in a separate accompanying report and is closely linked to this capital strategy. The capital programme identifies the borrowing need of the authority whilst the TMSS considers how the GMCA will manage these cash requirements. This may involve arranging loans and taking decisions on whether these loans should be short or long term having regard to prevailing and forecast interest rates. The TMSS will also consider the GMCA's cash surpluses and how these should be managed. At times it may be beneficial to defer borrowing and use these cash surpluses to avoid borrowing and thereby saving interest expenditure.

7.2.2 The Authority has successfully pursued a policy of internal borrowing using its cash surpluses over the last few years whilst keeping interest rates under review for signs they may increase. In times of increasing interest rates the authority may borrow early and then invest the surplus cash until it is required.

7.3 Borrowing Limits

7.3.1 At the end of 2024/25 it is forecast that the GMCA’s external debt will be £1.431 billion (including PFI liabilities) and this is forecast to be £1.498 billion by the end of 2027/28.

7.3.2 The Prudential Code requires the GMCA to set two limits for external debt each year.

- a) The Authorised Limit – this represents the maximum limit for external debt, including PFI liabilities, taking account of fluctuations in day to day cash requirements.
- b) The Operational Boundary – this is the limit beyond which external debt is not normally expected to exceed. The GMCA is currently under borrowed as a result of pursuing an internal borrowing policy and thereby reducing financing costs.

7.3.3 Based on the forecast capital programme, the limits in the TMSS are:

£m	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate	2027/28 Estimate
Operational Boundary	2,607.241	2,628,924	2,660,472	2,580,207
Authorised Limit	2,724.707	2,747,568	2,780,769	2,697,082

8 APPROACH TO RISK

8.1 Risk is inherent with any investment or commercial activity and whilst it cannot be eliminated entirely the authority will adopt a strategic approach to risk management. The GMCA’s approach to risk is to balance risk with the achievement of its priorities.

8.2 There is a clear distinction between capital investments, where the achievement of strategic aims will be considered and treasury management investments which are made for the purpose of cash flow management. The risk appetite for these two distinct types of investment may differ given the difference in expected outcomes.

8.3 For treasury management investments and debt the GMCA's risk appetite is extremely low with security of funds the primary concern. The Authority seeks to invest surplus cash in instruments with high credit quality and for relatively short periods and to have alternative debt options available.

9 OTHER LONG-TERM LIABILITIES: PRIVATE FINANCE INITIATIVE (PFI)

9.1 The Authority has one PFI contract for 17 Police Stations. In financial terms, PFIs are regarded as a form of debt financing and included within the Authority's borrowing limits.

9.2 Under the terms of the PFI contract, the Authority makes regular payments which cover the service cost associated with facilities management and the asset itself. The PFI contract is due to end in 2030/31.

10 KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

10.1 Both the capital programme and the Treasury Management Strategy are managed by teams of professionally qualified, local government experienced accountants. Officers maintain and develop their knowledge through Continuous Professional Development and by attending courses offered by CIPFA and other sector experts.

10.2 The Group Chief Financial Officer has overall responsibility for ensuring the proper management of the GMCA's capital programme, assets and treasury management activities. The Group Chief Financial Officer is also a professionally qualified accountant.

10.3 The Audit Committee is the body that scrutinises all aspects of the Capital Strategy. Internal and external training is available to members of the committee to ensure they have the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding to undertake this role.

10.4 When required internal skills and knowledge will be supplemented by external advisors. The Authority's treasury advisors are MUFG.

11 RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 The Audit Committee is requested to recommend the approval of the Capital Strategy for 2025/26 to the GMCA.