Treasury Management – 2025/26 Annual Report and 2026/27 Update Report – Appendix B

Economy and Interest Rates

UK Economy

As with 2024/25, UK inflation has proved somewhat stubborn throughout 2025/26. Having started the financial year at 3.5% y/y (April), the CPI measure of inflation peaked at 3.8% from July to September, before dipping to 3% in January and February. Core inflation picked up to 3.2% in February, from 3.1%, and the recent upward pressure on energy costs could see CPI inflation breach 4.5% later this year.

Against this backdrop, the continued conflict in Ukraine and Russia, and the potentially negative implications for global growth as a consequence of the implementation of US tariff policies, Bank Rate reductions look limited for the remainder of 2026 (as they do in the euro-zone). Bank Rate currently stands at 3.75%.

Moreover, borrowing became more expensive in 2025/26. Gilt yields rose materially in March 2026, more than reversing the falls earlier in the financial year. Additionally, the public finances have remained under pressure. The higher-than-expected public net sector borrowing of £14.3bn in February was £2.2bn above last February's outturn. But that borrowing overshoot was mainly due to timing effects relating to the £13.0bn government debt interest payment. That came in as the highest payment since June 2025, causing a 12.3% y/y jump in spending. On the flip side, sitting at £8.1bn, tax revenues were also higher than last February, largely on the back of solid growth in self-employment incomes in 2024/25, boosting self-assessment income tax receipts and stronger capital gains tax receipts.

However, the combination of some energy price support and pressures from higher inflation amid the ongoing energy price shock, higher interest rates and a weaker economy will ultimately put borrowing on an upward trend. With the rise in energy prices possibly pushing the Retail Prices Index inflation up to a peak of 5.7%, debt interest repayments will increase by about £10bn. A weaker growth profile, higher inflation, higher interest rates and gilt yields could erode about £11bn of the Chancellor's £23.6bn headroom.

The loosening in the labour market continues to bear down on wage growth. The 3myy growth rate of average earnings including bonuses slowed from 4.2% in December to 3.9% in January. Meanwhile, excluding bonuses, private earnings growth continued to fall from 3.4% to 3.3%.

The table below provides a snapshot of the conundrum facing central banks: inflation pressures remain, labour markets are still relatively tight by historical comparisons, and central banks are also having to react to a fundamental re-ordering of economic and defence policies driven largely by the US administration.

	UK	**Eurozone**	**US**
Bank Rate	3.75%	2.0%	3.5%-3.75%
GDP	0.1%q/q Q4 (1.0%y/y)	+0.2%q/q Q4 (1.2%y/y)	0.7% Q4 Annualised
Inflation	3.0%y/y (Feb)	1.9%y/y (Feb)	2.4%y/y (Feb)
Unemployment Rate	5.2% (Jan)	6.2% (Jan)	4.4% (Feb)

The Bank of England sprung no surprises in their March meeting, leaving Bank Rate unchanged at 3.75% by a vote of 9-0, but suggesting rates may need to rise if inflation picks up markedly. The vote could best be described as moderately hawkish. The MPC stated it "stands ready to act as necessary" and "is alert to the increased risk of domestic inflationary pressures through second-round effects in wage and price-setting". Even so, we suspect the committee is likely to put equal weight on higher inflation and weaker growth, particularly the poor macroeconomic backdrop prior to the energy shock, keeping interest rates at 3.75% this year.

10-year Gilt yields have been exceptionally volatile in the final weeks of 2025/26, troughing at around 4.23% in late February before shooting up to 5.00% (and well through that on an intraday basis). That spike was driven by the outbreak of war in the Middle East, which prompted a dramatic reassessment of investors' Bank of England policy rate expectations. Having been pricing in rate cuts in late-February, as many as four rate *hikes* were discounted by late-March. The 10-year yield ended the quarter at 4.92% with around 65bp of rate hikes priced in over the coming year. In addition to more hawkish monetary policy expectations, part of this increase in yields probably reflected an increase in term premia amid concerns that the government may react by loosening the fiscal purse strings.

As for equity markets, the FTSE 100 experienced another volatile quarter, surging to an all-time high of around 10,900 in late February, leaving it up 10% from the start of 2026, before giving back most of those gains in March after the outbreak of the Middle East conflict. That pullback leaves the index at around 10,176 at the end of the quarter. For context it was at 8,582 at the start of April. The £ has stayed relatively resilient also at $1.33, strengthening from $1.29 back in April.

Interest Rate forecasts at the time of approval of the treasury management strategy report for 2025/26 were as follows –

	2025/26 Average	2026/27 Average	2027/28 Average	2028/29 Average
Bank Rate	4.00%	3.63%	3.50%	-
1 Year PWLB	4.47%	4.12%	3.84%	-
5 Year PWLB	4.60%	4.25%	3.97%	-
10 Year PWLB	4.83%	4.43%	4.17%	-

Current Interest Rate forecasts for 2026/27 onwards are follows –

	2025/26 Average	2026/27 Average	2027/28 Average	2028/29 Average
Bank Rate	4.00%	3.75%	3.50%	3.25%
1 Year PWLB	4.57%	4.80%	4.22%	3.97%
5 Year PWLB	4.70%	4.90%	4.35%	4.10%
10 Year PWLB	5.23%	5.43%	4.85%	4.60%

US Economy

Despite a weak finish to 2025, the US economy has generally been the strongest among the developed economies, but with uncertainties growing surrounding the central economic tenet of being able to apply tariffs on an ad-hoc basis, and bend the FOMC Fed Funds rate decision-making, there is something of a stalemate in place at present over when, and if, rates will be cut further in 2026.

Inflation is currently stuck at around 2.5%, unemployment is only a little above 4%, and tax refunds are in the process of being facilitated for many households. There is some debate as to whether those refunds be – at least partially – offset by higher gasoline prices.

The S&P500 started April 2025 at 5,633 and finished March 2026 at 6,528 having peaked at just over 7,000. The 10-year Treasury yield finished March at 4.30% having been 4.17% back at the start of April, and during the year has been both above 4.50% and below 4.00%.

EZ Economy

The Eurozone economy has run pretty much in parallel with that of the UK. A slightly stronger finish to 2025 (GDP of 0.2% q/q) than that of the UK cannot hide the fact that the economy has been negatively impacted by German economic stagnation until late in 2025. France has also struggled against a difficult political backdrop but managed to post GDP growth of 0.3% q/q for October to December.

With Eurozone headline inflation close to 2%, the ECB has been able to reduce its Deposit Rate to 2%. Whether it rises from that low point will very much be driven by how energy prices trend over the coming months. The Euro has appreciated against the dollar from 1.08 at the start of April 2025 to 1.16 at the end of March.