

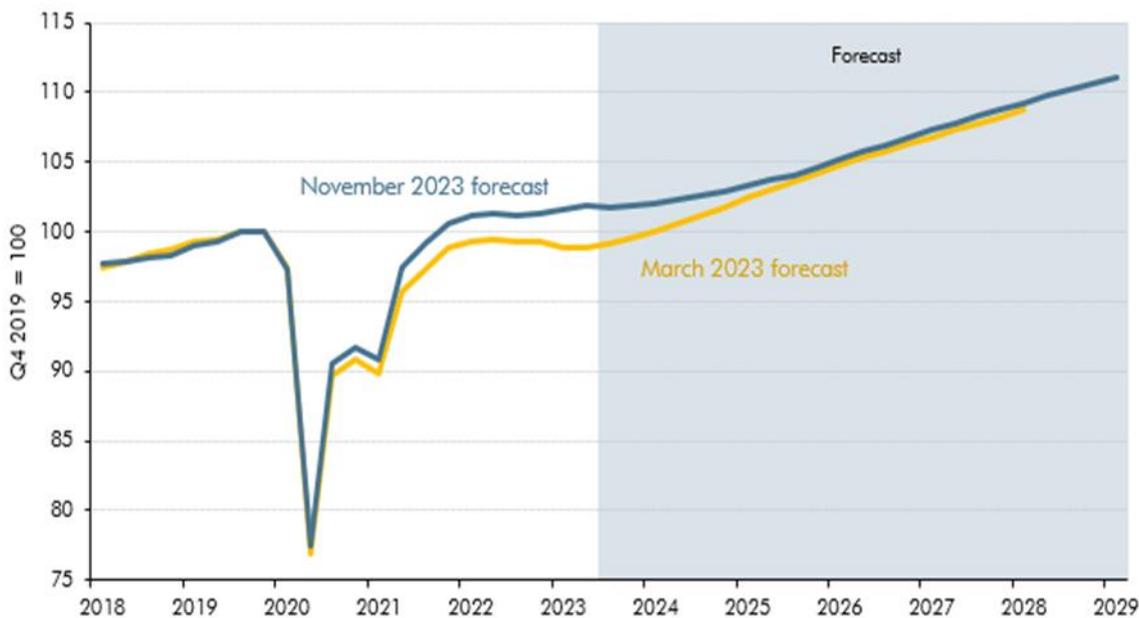
Economic & Fiscal Context

The national fiscal and economic context is an important consideration for the Council in setting the budget. This context not only determines the amount received through central government grants, but it also sets out how local government spending fits in within the totality of public spending and the wider economy. The Autumn Statement and Local Government Finance Settlement LGFS set the government's expectations of how much local authorities can raise through local taxation as well as departmental spending from which central government grants to local government are funded. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) produces an Economic and Fiscal Outlook (EFO) report to provide the Chancellor of the Exchequer with an independent and up to date fiscal and economic forecast including impact of government policy decisions. This section of the report highlights the key elements for economic growth, inflation, and public sector spending/borrowing.

Economic Outlook - Growth

The November OBR report identified that the overall economy has recovered more fully from the Covid-19 pandemic and weathered the energy price shock better than previously anticipated. Gross domestic product (GDP) recovered to its pre-pandemic level by the end of 2021 and was 1.8% above it by mid 2023. This compares to the March 2023 forecast that GDP would be 1.1% below pre-pandemic levels at the same point in time. The EFO report indicates that survey data suggests that much of the improved economic strength can be attributed to a modest degree of excess demand. However, although GDP is starting nearly 3% higher than previous forecast, future growth is forecast to be more sluggish and GDP is only to be 0.6% higher by 2027 than the previous forecast as GDP growth is squeezed in the short-term forecasts by a combination of real wages, higher interest rates and unwinding of temporary government support. The comparison between previous and latest forecast for GDP is shown in the following chart 1 from the EFO report.

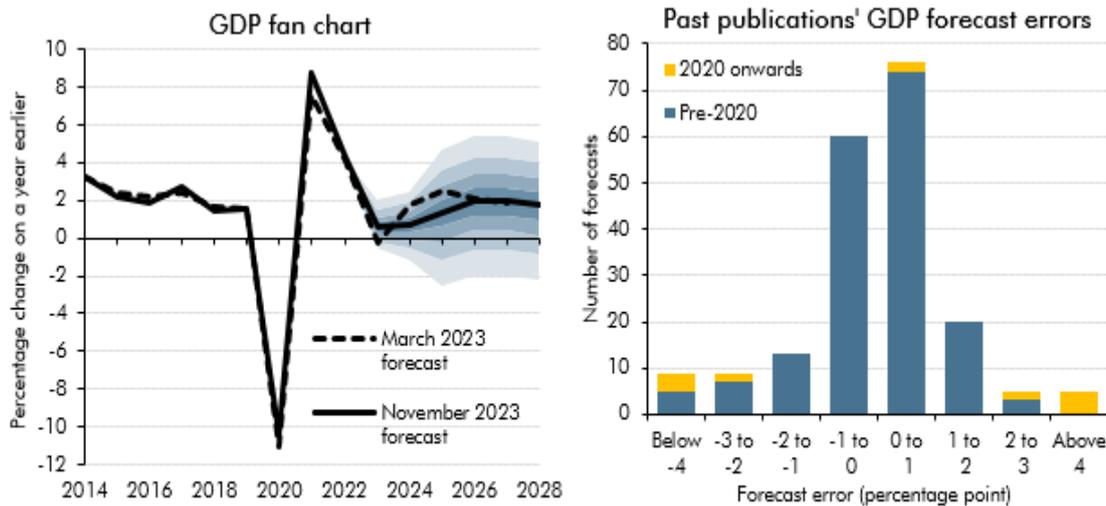
Chart 1 – Real GDP



Source: ONS, OBR

The OBR recognises there is significant uncertainty around GDP growth forecast. This is illustrated through a fan graph showing the central case (as per chart 1 above) and other potential scenarios (shaded according to probability) and the scale of errors in previous forecasts. These comparisons are shown in the following chart 2 from the EFO report.

Chart 2 – GDP Growth Fan Chart and Past GDP Forecast Errors

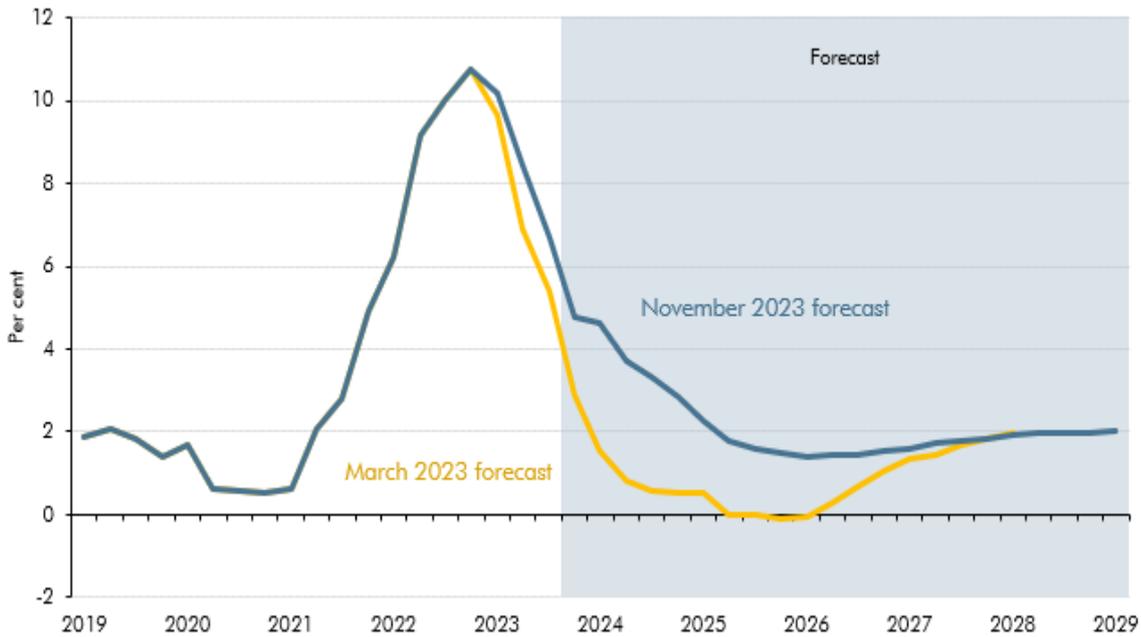


Note: On the left-hand chart, successive pairs of lighter-shaded areas around our forecast represent 20 per cent probability bands. The right-hand chart shows the distribution of forecast errors for every Autumn forecast since 1987. Source: ONS, OBR

Economic Outlook - Inflation

The OBR is forecasting that inflation will remain higher for longer, taking until the second quarter of 2025 to return to around the 2% target, this is more than a year later than in the March 2023 forecast. The OBR has concluded that this slower decline in the rate growth in inflation from previous forecast is due to domestic factors including the higher demand (and subsequent gap between demand and supply within the economy) and stronger wage growth more than offsetting the faster than expected decline in gas prices. From a peak of 10.7% in the last quarter of 2022, CPI is forecast to fall to 4.8% in the final quarter of 2023 (noting that since the OBR forecast was published CPI rate of inflation in November 2023 fell to 3.9% compared to 4.6% for the year to October and the rate in December was 4%, and if this trend continues for the final month in quarter 4 2023 the forecast would be overestimated). The OBR forecasts that as rate of GDP slows and a modest amount of spare capacity opens up and gas prices fall further that inflation is forecast dip slightly below the 2% target between 2025 to 2027, before returning to the target level in the longer-range forecast. The comparison between previous and current inflation is shown in the following chart 3 from EFO report.

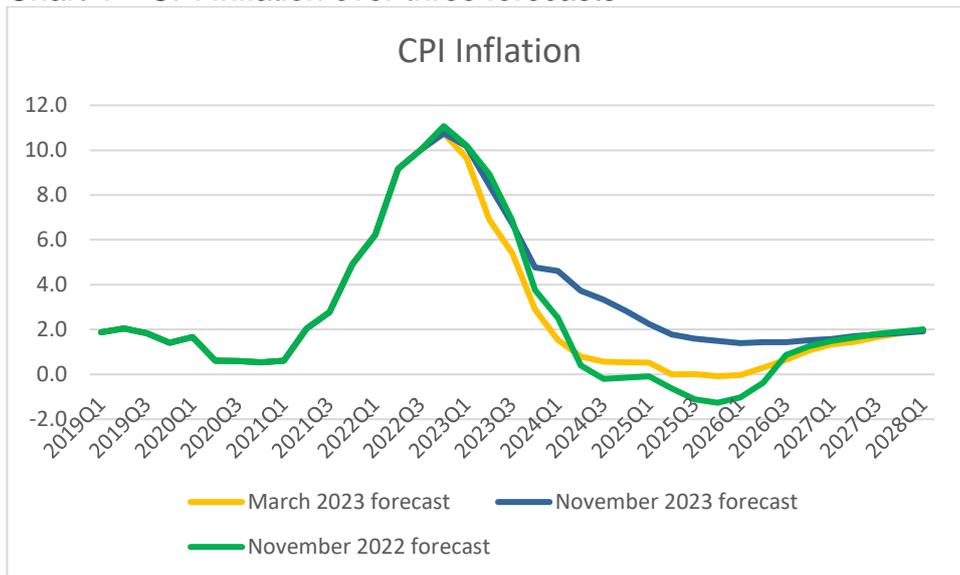
Chart 3 – CPI Inflation



Source: ONS, OBR

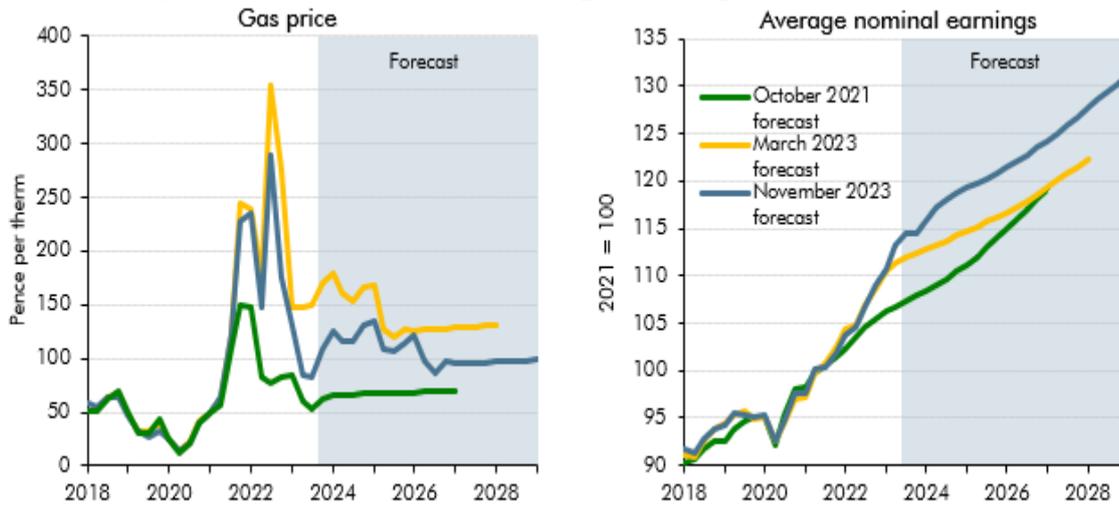
We have also compiled a comparison with previous November 2022 forecast where at one stage inflation was forecast to be negative in Chart 4 below.

Chart 4 – CPI Inflation over three forecasts



The impact of gas prices and wages on inflation were demonstrated in the EFO report as per chart 5 below.

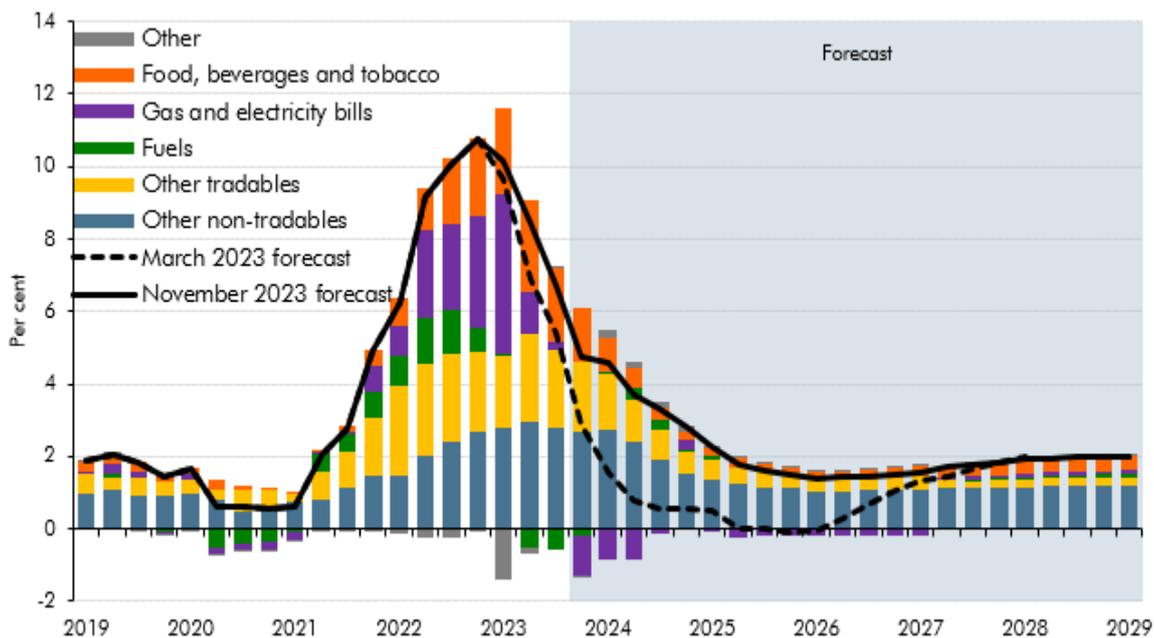
Chart 5 – Impact of Gas Prices and Average Earnings



Source: Datastream, ONS, OFGEM, Eikon, OBR

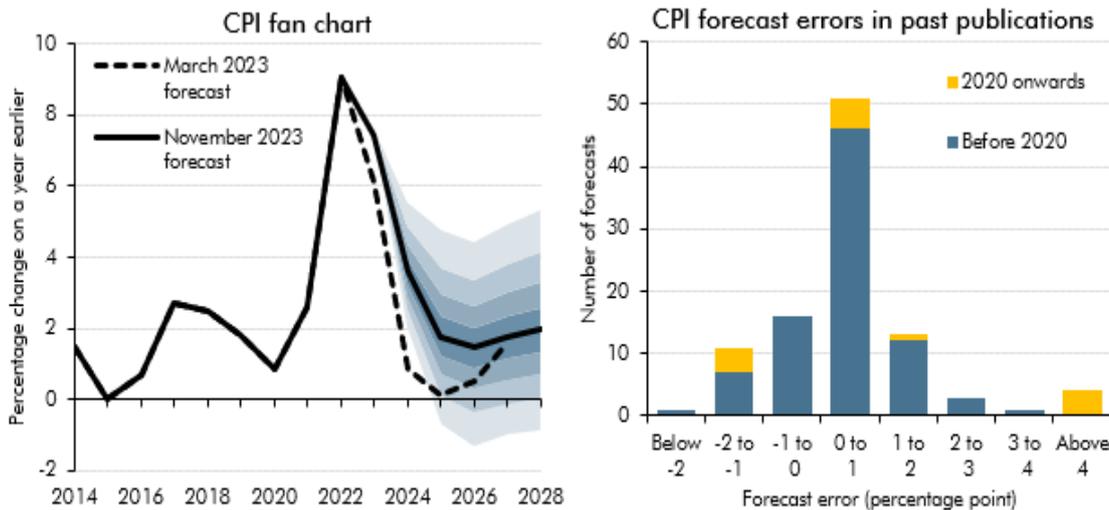
The EFO report confirms that the risks around inflation outlook remain high given both domestic and international uncertainty. The EFO report includes an analysis of the main contributors to inflation (chart 6) as well as an analysis of the more significant variations in inflation forecasts since 2020 (chart 7) similar to chart 2 for GDP uncertainty.

Chart 6 – Contributions to CPI Inflation



Source: ONS, OBR

Chart 7 – CPI Inflation Fan Chart and Forecast Errors in Previous Publications



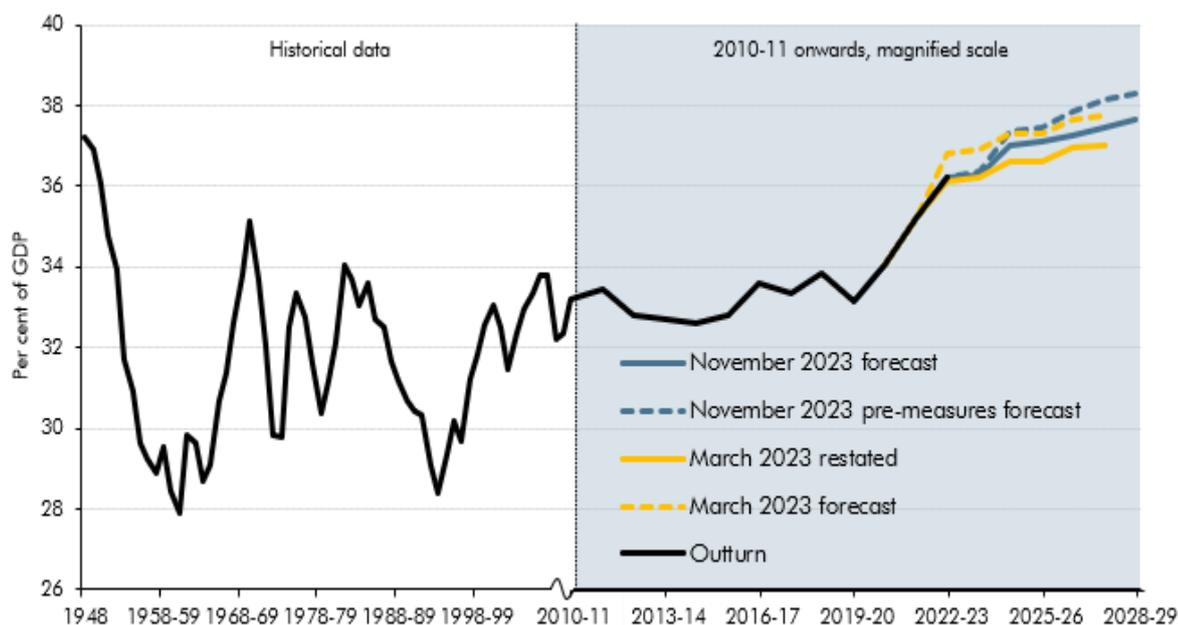
Note: On the left-hand chart, successive pairs of lighter-shaded areas around our forecast represent 20 per cent probability bands. The right-hand chart shows the distribution of forecast errors for every Autumn forecast since 2003.

Source: ONS, OBR

Fiscal Outlook – Public Sector Receipts

Total public sector receipts in 2022-23 as a share of GDP reached 40.1%, a 3.2% increase on pre pandemic level of 36.8% in 2019-20. Public sector receipts are forecast to continue grow faster than GDP reaching 41.6% by 2028-29. National account taxes¹ equate to 36.2% of GDP in 2022-23 (an increase of 1% on 2021-22), and marginally higher than the restated forecast for 2022-23 in March 2023. The share of national account taxes is forecast to reach a post-war high of 37.7% of GDP in 2028-29, 4.5% above the pre pandemic level in 2019-20 of 33.1%. The share of national account taxes as % of GDP is shown in the following chart 8 from EFO report.

Chart 8 – National Account Taxes as a share of GDP



Note: For March 2023 forecast restated, the denominator is the latest nominal GDP outturn in 2022-23 grown forward using our March 2023 forecast.

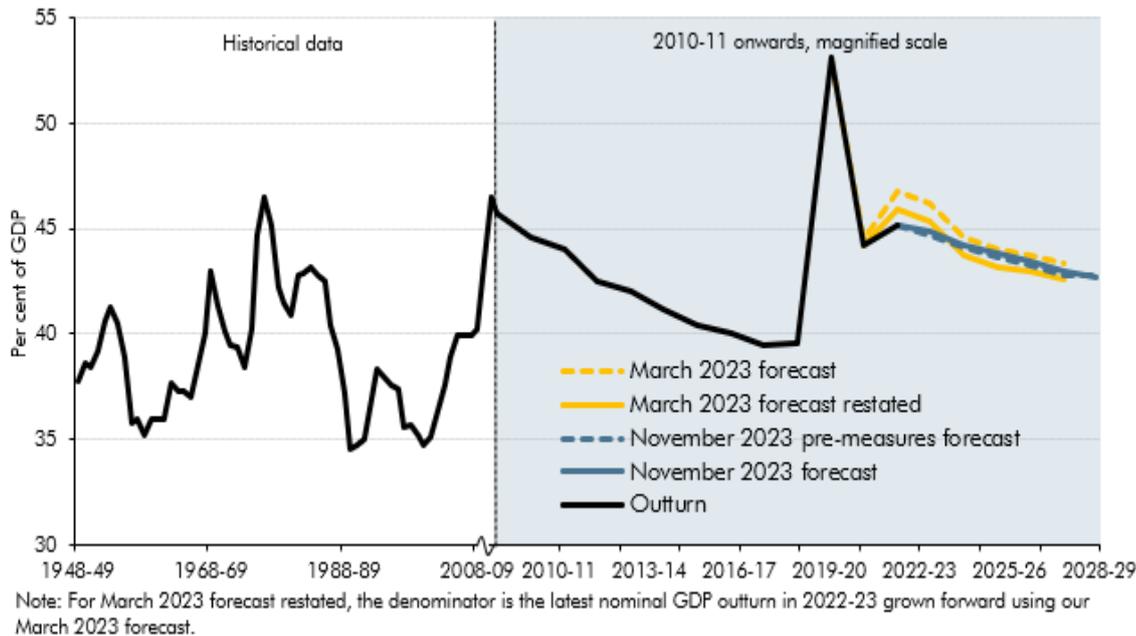
Source: ONS, OBR

¹ National account taxes are a slightly narrower measure of public sector receipts and are more comparable over longer historical periods as they exclude public sector gross operation surplus, interest and dividend receipts and other non-tax receipts.

Fiscal Outlook – Public Sector Expenditure

Total public spending in 2022-23 as share of GDP reached 45.1%, an increase of 0.9% on 2021-22, and 0.8% lower than the restated forecast for 2022-23 in March 2023. Total public sector spending is forecast to fall marginally to 44.8% of GDP in 2023-24 as the unwinding of energy support measures is largely offset by higher welfare costs. Public sector spending as a share of GDP is forecast to fall further each year over the forecast period as a share of GDP from 44.2% in 2024-25 to 42.7% in 2028-29. The share of public sector spending as % of GDP is shown in following chart 9 from the EFO report.

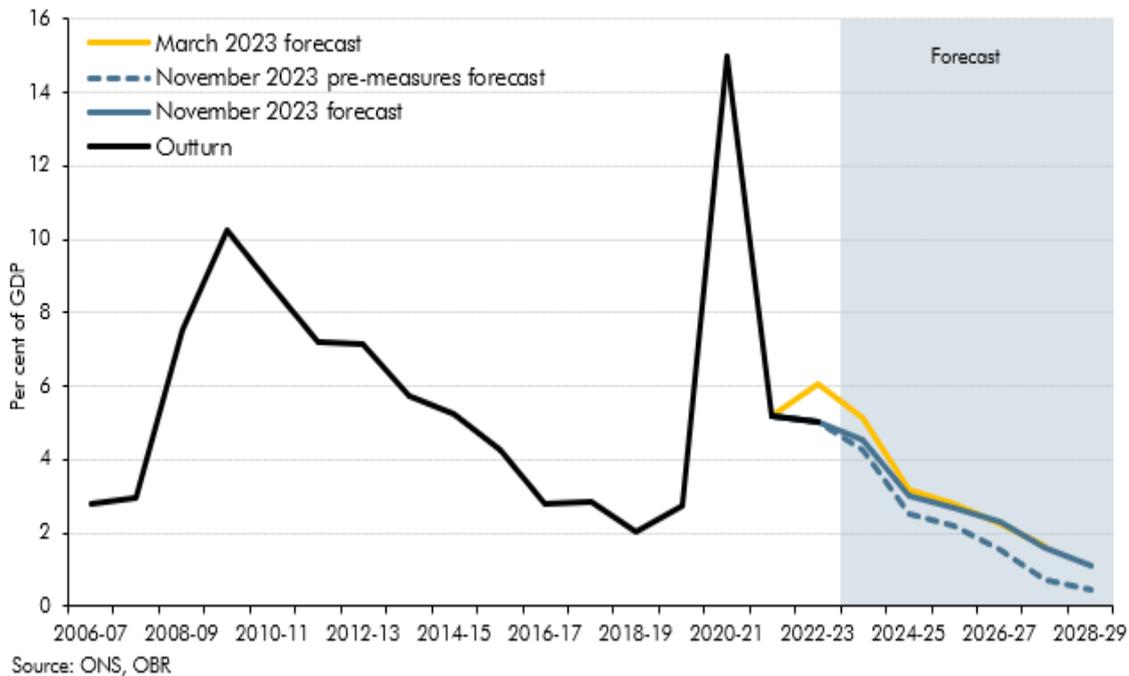
Chart 9 – Public Sector Expenditure as share of GDP



Fiscal Context – Public Sector Borrowing and Total Debt

Public sector net borrowing in 2022-23 was £128.3bn (5.0% of GDP), this is a reduction from 5.2% in 2021-22. Net borrowing is forecast to fall to £123.9bn in 2023-24 (4.5% of GDP), this is 0.6% lower than the March 2023 forecast for 2023-24 of 5.1%. Net borrowing is forecast to fall further over the forecast period to £35bn by 2028-29 (1.1% of GDP). Public sector borrowing as % of GDP is shown in following chart 10 from the EFO report.

Chart 10 – Public Sector Net Borrowing



Public sector net accumulated debt was £2,251bn in 2022-23 (84.9% of GDP), an increase from 83.2% in 2021-22 but less than the March 2023 forecast for 2022-23 of 88.9%. Total debt is forecast to increase through the period to £2,458bn in 2023-24 (89.0% of GDP) to £2,845bn in 2026-27 (93.2% of GDP) and to £3,039bn by 2029-29 (92.8% of GDP). The improvement in 2023-24 is due to higher than forecast GDP and compared to the March 2023 forecast total debt as % of GDP is forecast lower in every year. Public sector net debt (excluding Bank of England) as a % of GDP is shown in the following chart 11 from the EFO report.

Chart 11 – Public Sector Net Debt (excluding Bank of England)

