

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

**CABINET – 17 FEBRUARY 2022
COUNCIL – 3 MARCH 2022**

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATGEY 2022/23 – 2025/26

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

LEAD MEMBERS CLLR SHAUN DAVIES; LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CLLR RAE EVANS; CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, GOVERNANCE & CUSTOMER SERVICE

1. SUMMARY

1.1 The Council Plan sets out how the Council will deliver our vision to “**Protect, Care and Invest to Create a Better Borough**”. The Plan sets out 5 priorities to deliver the vision:

- Every child, young person and adult lives well in their community
- Everyone benefits from a thriving economy
- All neighbourhoods are a great place to live
- Our natural environment is protected, and the Council has a leading role in addressing the climate emergency
- A community-focussed, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services

1.2 This report seeks approval of the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy for the four years 2022/23 – 2025/26. This overview report, along with other linked reports on the agenda including:-

- The Capital Strategy
- The medium-term Capital Programme
- The Investment Strategy
- The Treasury Management Strategy and
- The Prudential Indicators report

together, form the Council’s overall Medium Term Financial Strategy for the next four years and the budget framework for 2022/23.

1.3 The Council received a provisional one-year funding settlement from Government on 16 December 2021. At the time of finalising this report, the final Revenue Support Grant settlement had not been received and

it has been assumed that the final allocation will remain unchanged. Details of a number of other grants totalling over £12m. had also still not been received at the time of drafting this report. Therefore, estimates for the outstanding grants have been made and are included in the budget assumptions. It is therefore necessary to approve a delegation to the Director: Finance & H.R. to amend the budget by adjusting the amount set aside in the inflation contingency for 2022/23 to accommodate any difference in funding between that currently assumed and the final grant allocations after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance and Customer Services.

- 1.4 As the settlement only relates to 2022/23, considerable uncertainty remains over the medium term financial outlook for the Council. However, as a large complex organisation delivering many essential services to our community we need to plan over a medium term period and therefore this report sets out a Medium Term Financial strategy (MTFS) covering the period 2022/23 to 2025/26. Due to the one-year settlement from Government, projections beyond next year are indicative and will be revised as further information becomes available.
- 1.5 The Government has applied severe financial constraints to local authorities during a prolonged period of austerity which has resulted in some councils in other parts of the country having to issue “section 114 notices” and taking extreme measures to restore financial stability. At the same time as we have been subject to cuts in our funding from Government, the Council has seen increased demand for key services, particularly Adult Social Care and Children’s Safeguarding which has necessitated very active budget management and financial control by Cabinet Members and officers across the Council. The Council has demonstrated a consistently strong track record of sound financial management delivering a financial outturn within budget and unqualified audit opinions for over 15 years despite having to deliver £133.7m ongoing annual budget savings by the end of 2021/22 - without the need to implement any emergency spending control measures.
- 1.6 Due to this track record, the Council remains in a sound financial position. For the fourth consecutive year, the Council also has the lowest level of council tax for the services that we provide across the whole of the Midlands region (see Appendices 1 and 2 for council tax comparisons). The average Council Tax at Band D in the Midlands region is more than 13% higher than in Telford & Wrekin. The Council continues to face increasing demands for many services including Adult Social Care. However, we are acutely aware of the pressures facing households in the Borough arising from both the pandemic and from increasing national taxes and rising food and energy costs. In both the Comprehensive Spending Review announced on 27 October and in the local government finance settlement announced on 16 December, the Government assumed that all councils responsible for

delivering social care services will implement a 2% general council tax increase plus a 1% Adult Social Care precept next year. However, despite these Government assumptions, **Telford & Wrekin Council are committing to freeze our level of general council tax for both 2022/23 and for 2023/24. The Council will apply the Governments' assumed 1% Adult Social Care precept next year.** This will raise £0.767m towards the £5.16m net additional investment required in Adult Social Care next year. For the average (Band B) property, this will cost £0.21 per week. After this increase, the Council still expects to have one of the lowest levels of council tax in the Midlands region and one of the lowest amongst all unitary authorities in England for the services that it provides. The increase in the total bill for each household will be affected by the decisions of the Police & Crime Commissioner, The Fire Authority and individual town and parish councils.

- 1.7 Due to our sustained effective financial management we are also able to make a number of significant investments to further Protect, Care and Invest in the Borough. These include:-
- Net investment of £1.31 m in to Children's Safeguarding next year and £5.16m in to Adult Social Care next year rising to £6.96m by 2023/24. The Council's net budget for Children's Safeguarding next year will be over £37m and for Adult Social Care the net budget will be almost £53.5m giving a total commitment to these two key areas of over £90m equivalent to over 65% of the total net revenue budget.
 - £10m for affordable housing initiatives,
 - Over £20m additional investment in NuPlace bringing the total investment up to £130.9m
 - £37m additional investment in the Telford Growth Fund to protect existing jobs in the Borough and to attract new jobs through inward investment.
 - A range of other capital investments including road maintenance and maintenance and refurbishment of our operational properties.
- 1.8 However, of course, we cannot continue to deliver everything that we do currently in exactly the same ways as we have done previously and need to continue to make savings where we can. Since 2009/10 the Council has delivered savings totalling £133.7m which has included deleting 1,660 jobs, this report contains details of our approach to identifying savings opportunities and to consultation and engagement on these proposals so that we minimise their impacts as far as possible. The report also puts forward new proposals that will deliver ongoing savings, including from additional income, of £143.7m by 2023/24. Despite the significant budget savings that we have had to make, the Council is still a large organisation delivering many services to local people and it is essential that we use our remaining revenue

and capital resources as effectively as possible to deliver the greatest possible benefit for local people.

- 1.9 The Council has consistently said that it will continue to protect the most vulnerable in our society and prioritise the protection of services to vulnerable adults and children in our community. The Council is committed to ensuring that we always meet the assessed needs of vulnerable people as we make changes to services we will always place priority on these essential services and will not let financial pressures mean that we fail to meet the assessed statutory needs of the most vulnerable.
- 1.10 A consultation period on the MTFS proposals approved at Cabinet on 6 January 2022 was held from 7 January 2022 through to 6 February 2022. Details of the results from this exercise and the Cabinet's response to them are contained later in the report. The Business & Finance Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the proposals at meetings held during January but did not receive any alternative budget proposals from any Opposition groups. Cabinet will agree final recommendations to full Council at their meeting to be held on 17 February and final decisions on the budget and council tax for 2022/23 will be taken at full Council on 3 March 2022.

2. ROBUSTNESS OF THE BUDGET STRATEGY.

- 2.1 The Council is required to set a balanced budget and under section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, the Council's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) is required to report on the adequacy of the Council's reserves and balances and on the Council's financial strategy including the use of balances and of the financial planning process.
- 2.2 Appendix 10 gives a more detailed view, but overall:-
- given the continued successful delivery of savings which will total £133.7m by the end of this year,
 - the long-term service redesign, particularly in relation to Adults and Children's services,
 - the more commercial approach being adopted and the investment being made in the borough,

It is considered that the Council is pursuing a sound financial strategy, particularly in the context of both the pandemic and the most prolonged and challenging financial position it has ever faced due to the combined long-term effects of Government grant cuts and increased service pressures. Further, it is considered that the Council maintains an adequate level of reserves and provisions and has an appropriate medium term strategy for the use of reserves.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS.

3.1 Members are asked to approve the following recommendations for consideration by full Council on 3 March 2022:-

1. To approve the MTFs for 2022/23 – 2025/26 and the budget framework for 2022/23 set out in this suite of reports.
2. To approve a 2 year freeze of the general Council Tax level.
3. To apply the Government's 1% Adult Social Care Precept in 2022/23.
4. To approve the investment of a further £5.16m into Adult Social Care in 2022/23 rising to £6.96m in 2023/24.
5. To approve net investment of £1.31m in to Children's Safeguarding in 2022/23
6. To approve the budget savings listed in Appendix 13 totalling £5.656m in 2022/23 rising to £8.34m (after "leakage") in 2023/24.
7. To approve the continuation of work with partner organisations, including Town & Parish Councils and Voluntary Sector and Community Groups to seek to identify ways to mitigate the impact of some of the cuts to services that we can no longer afford and to note the availability of the Invest to Save/Capacity Fund which is available to support partnership working.
8. To approve the base budget in Appendix 6.
9. To approve the use of £0.220m special fund balances for works at Castle Green Cemetery
10. To approve the use of £250k from the Invest to Save/Capacity Fund to support the development of "shovel-ready" schemes to maximise the Council's ability to receive funding from national challenge funding opportunities.
11. To approve the policy framework for Reserves and Balances and their planned use outlined in Appendix 9.
12. To note the CFO's robustness statement in Appendix 10.
13. To approve the Risk Register included at Appendix 3.
14. That Cabinet endorses the Council Tax Reduction Scheme a link to which is included within Appendix 14, for adoption by Full Council on 3 March 2022, ready for implementation from 1 April 2022.
15. That Cabinet approves the continuation of a Council Tax Reduction Hardship Assistance Policy within Appendix 14.
16. To approve the revenue implications of the medium term capital programme for the period 2021/22 - 2025/26 set out in the Capital Strategy and Programme reports also on this agenda.
17. To approve a delegation to the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Leader, to allocate the Capital Investment Fund to individual schemes and to incur associated expenditure.

18. To grant delegated authority to the Director: Finance & Human Resources, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance and Customer Service to action any virements required following the final allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant and other Grants and following completion of NNDR1 and final estimates of Business Rates Income as long as they are within the budget and policy framework.
19. To grant delegated authority to the Executive Director: Adults Social Care, Health Integration & wellbeing after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, Integration and Transformation, to enter into appropriate Section 256 and Section 75 Agreements under the NHS Act 2006 (as amended).
20. To authorise the Associate Director: Policy & Governance to execute all necessary contract documentation including the affixing of the common seal of the council as appropriate to enable the council to enter into appropriate Section 256 and Section 75 Agreements under the NHS Act 2006.
21. To approve this suite of MTFS reports as the Council's Efficiency Strategy for 2022/23, including the document at Appendix 16, to enable new capital receipts generated in the three year period starting 1 April 2022 to be used to fund the revenue costs of reform as assumed throughout these reports.
22. To note the initial projections for the potential budget gap through to 2025/26 and to start work in order to identify options for how this could potentially be bridged.
23. To approve that once all final outstanding grant allocations are received, authority to amend the use of balances in 2022/23 to accommodate any difference in funding between that currently assumed and the final grant allocations be delegated to the Director: Finance & H.R. after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance & Customer Services.
24. To approve the Pay Policy for 2022/23 included as Appendix 15
25. To approve the proposals for a revised formulae for the distribution to member authorities of any accumulated surplus of the WME Joint Committee set out in Appendix 17.
26. Delegation of authority to the Director: Finance & HR after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance & Customer Service, to make changes to the Service & Financial Planning Strategy with immediate effect to reflect all grants received from Government, including that in respect of the "£150 council tax energy rebate for properties in council tax bands A to D", and any associated spend.

27. To approve the additional recommendations contained in the other reports included in this suite of Medium Term Financial Strategy reports included on this agenda.

3.2 Final decisions will be taken by full Council on 3 March 2022 which will agree the budget and Council Tax levels across the Borough for 2022/23.

4. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT.

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Co-Operative Council priority objectives?	
	Yes	The Medium Term Financial Strategy is integral to ensuring that available resources are used as effectively as possible in delivering all corporate priority outcomes.
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	Yes	The proposals contained in this report will impact on specific groups of people. An initial Impact analysis, on the savings proposals, highlights limited equality impacts, further work will be undertaken to identify and mitigate adverse impacts as far as possible. We screen all savings proposals for potential equality impacts relative to the General Equality Duty and will carry out further impact analysis where appropriate, prior to any decisions being taken. Details of this screening and impact analysis process will be included in reports to Cabinet as appropriate.
TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE	Public consultation took place between 7 January 2022 and 6 February 2022. The proposals contained in the report were also subject to Member scrutiny during this period. Final proposals will be considered by Cabinet on 17 February 2022 who will make recommendations to Full Council on 3 March 2022. The final agreed recommendations will be implemented during 2022/23 and future years.	

FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	Yes	This report sets out the Medium Term Financial Strategy for the Council for the period commencing 2022/23.
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	This report develops the proposals for the Council's budget and policy framework which have been consulted upon in accordance with the Policy Framework & Budget Procedure Rules contained in the Constitution. In accordance with the relevant provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the Local Government Housing Act 1989, the Local Government Act 2003, the Localism Act 2011 and all relevant regulations made under these Acts, the Council has to set a balanced budget for 2022/23 before the 11 March 2022 and has to have regard to the advice provided by the s.151 officer (Chief Finance Officer) on the robustness of the budget and the adequacy of reserves supporting the budget before doing so. AL 12/1/2022
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	This report sets out the strategy framework which includes consideration of corporate risks – particularly in relation to the availability of balances. The updated corporate risk register of strategic risks is included as Appendix 3.
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	No	Borough-wide impact.

5. PREVIOUS MINUTES

- Full Council 4 March 2021 – Service & Financial Planning 2021/22 – 2023/24
- Cabinet 6 January 2022 – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 – 2025/26.
- Full Council 13 January 2021 – Setting The Council Tax Base for 2022/23.
- Audit Committee 25 January 2022 - 2022/23 Treasury Strategy and Treasury Update Report

6. NATIONAL CONTEXT.

- 6.1 When the coalition Government was formed in May 2010 they committed to eliminating the national budget deficit which required very significant cuts in public spending and a period of severe financial constraint for the Council commenced. Local authorities were particularly affected by funding cuts during this period because the Government protected many areas of public spending – but not local government.
- 6.2 At the same time, Adult Social Care and Children’s Safeguarding services, in particular, but also other local government services have faced significant additional pressures e.g. from the increase in the number of older people needing access to social care services and specialist care.
- 6.3 In recent years, as the Government cut funding for local authorities they assumed that councils would increase council tax by the maximum permitted up to the referendum limit, including the introduction of the Adult Social Care precept. This has seen a direct transfer of the responsibility for funding local government services from grants provided by central government to council taxpayers regardless of the ability of local taxpayers to fund these increases. As a Council with a low level of Council Tax (see appendices 1 and 2) and the majority of properties in Bands A and B a 1% Council Tax increase raises significantly less than in an area which has a high level of Council Tax and has a large proportion of properties in higher Council Tax bands.
- 6.4 **AUTUMN BUDGET AND COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW 2021.**
- 6.4.1 For the last two years, the government has only held single-year Spending Reviews, with 2019 being a single year due to the political turbulence around Brexit, and 2020 being a single year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to 2019, there had been three multi-year Comprehensive Spending Reviews (CSRs) since 2010, with each impacting on local government’s strategic financing.
- 6.4.2 CSR 2010 established the initial path of reductions to local government grant funding and introduced the Council Tax Freeze Grant and New Homes Bonus. CSR 2013 continued on this trajectory and introduced the Better Care Fund. CSR 2015 saw the scrapping of the Council Tax Freeze grant, and the introduction of referendum limits for Council Tax and the introduction of the Adult Social Care Precept.
- 6.4.3 On 7 September 2021, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak MP, wrote to Secretaries of State to confirm the government’s intention

to complete a multi-year CSR (CSR 2021) – the first multi-year spending review since 2015. CSR2021 would set revenue and capital budgets for 2022/23 to 2024/25. In this letter, the Chancellor also confirmed the intention to introduce a new 1.25% Health and Social Care levy to both employee and employer national insurance contributions to support the NHS and introduce a cap on care costs for people self-funding care costs.

- 6.4.4 On 27 October 2021, the Chancellor announced the Government's Autumn Budget and CSR2021. As previously indicated, this outlined the Government's revenue and capital spending plans for the three years 2022/23 – 2024/25 by setting budgets for each central government department.
- 6.4.5 CSR2021 was delivered within the constraints of a new set of fiscal rules and in the context of considerably improved economic forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). The MJ commented that *"The chancellor...revealed a new set of fiscal rules. He vowed to make borrowing only for investment purposes, not revenue expenditure 'in normal times', while underlying public sector net debt must continue to fall."* As reported in Public Finance, The Office for Budget Responsibility stated that *"public spending will increase from 39.8% of GDP before the pandemic to 41.6% of GDP in 2026-27, the largest sustained share of GDP since the late 1970s"* and that *"national debt will peak below 100% of GDP at 98.2% this year, before falling to 88% of GDP in 2026-27"*.
- 6.4.6 Overall spending will increase in real terms up to 2024/25, with departmental spending increasing in real terms by 3.8% a year on average over the Parliament – a cash increase of £150 billion a year by 2024/25 (£90 billion in real terms) which will require increased taxes to be paid. The Association of Public service Excellence reported that, *"The budget overall is set to deliver a net tax rise of £16.7bn by 2026-2027, taking it to a predicted 36.2% of GDP by the same year. This has been widely compared to the early 1950s with record levels of tax-take."*
- 6.4.7 The Government announced a very wide range of priorities in CSR2021, to which much of the additional funding has been allocated, these include:-
- Local government – an average real-terms increase of 3% a year in core spending power. However, this includes assumed income from council tax and the Adult Social Care precept. The spending review assumes that councils apply the full 2% general council tax increase allowable before a referendum is held plus an additional 1% ASC precept for eligible councils for each of the three years covered by CSR2021 and also made an assumption of continued growth in the tax base to reflect new properties being constructed. The Department for Levelling Up,

Housing and Communities (DLUHC) will set out full details of the council tax referendum principles and proposed approach to allocating grant funding through the Local Government Finance Settlement. The increase in funding is front-loaded. Councils will receive an increase in 2022/23, and this will remain for the Spending Review period, but will not increase significantly thereafter. The Core Spending Power increases in future years will come from council tax and the ASC reform funding which will merely aim to compensate councils for the additional costs that they will incur as a result of the cap on care costs for self-funders. By 2024-25 core spending power is expected to rise to £58.9 billion

- Public Health Grant - the Spending Review indicates that the Public Health Grant will be maintained in real terms, so it should be expected that councils will receive inflationary increases over the Spending Review period.
- Business Rates - The latest fundamental review of the business rates system has now been completed. The Chancellor's speech highlighted that the Government does not intend to abolish business rates, though the review states that the government will launch a consultation on an Online Sales Tax. A number of announcements were made, most notably a further freeze of the business rates multiplier (following a freeze for 2021/22 keeping the multipliers at 49.9p and 51.2p) and an extension of the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief (this time at 50%, lower than the 66% previously applicable, with a cash cap of £110,000 – up from the £105,000 cap applicable in 2021/22). The Government anticipates that the relief will cost £1.7bn nationally in 2022/23. The Government has announced that, after the next revaluation in 2023, revaluations will take place every three years instead of five years. The delay to 2023 of the next revaluation means that there is currently a gap in the Transitional Relief and Supporting Small Business schemes, and so these have been extended for 2022/23. A consultation on the Transitional Relief scheme for the 2023 revaluation will be carried out in 2022. A new relief will be introduced from 2023, which will allow businesses to benefit from 100% relief on any uplift in value for 12 months from when they make improvements to a hereditament. There will be a consultation on this prior to implementation, and then it will be reviewed after five years. A relief will also be introduced for plant and machinery used in onsite renewable energy generation and storage.
- All of these measures (additional reliefs, multiplier freeze, and revaluations) have historically been implemented with a view to ensuring a neutral impact on local government finance, with grants provided (or top up/tariff adjustments, in the case of revaluation) to cover the costs involved. There is no reason to believe that this would change for these announcements.

- Health and social care – with the Spending Review confirming previous commitments on a new Health and Social Care Levy.
- Education – An additional £4.7bn by 2024/25 for the core schools' budget in England, over and above the Spending Review 2019 settlement for schools equivalent to a cash increase of £1,500 per pupil compared with 2019/20 amounts. In addition, £2.6bn over the Spending Review period for new school places for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in England.
- Housing – Confirming previous announcements on the Affordable Homes Programme (£7.5bn over the spending review period) and remediation to the highest risk buildings with unsafe cladding; and also provides £639m in funding by 2024/25, a cash increase of 85% compared to 2019/20, as part of the Government's commitment to end rough sleeping.

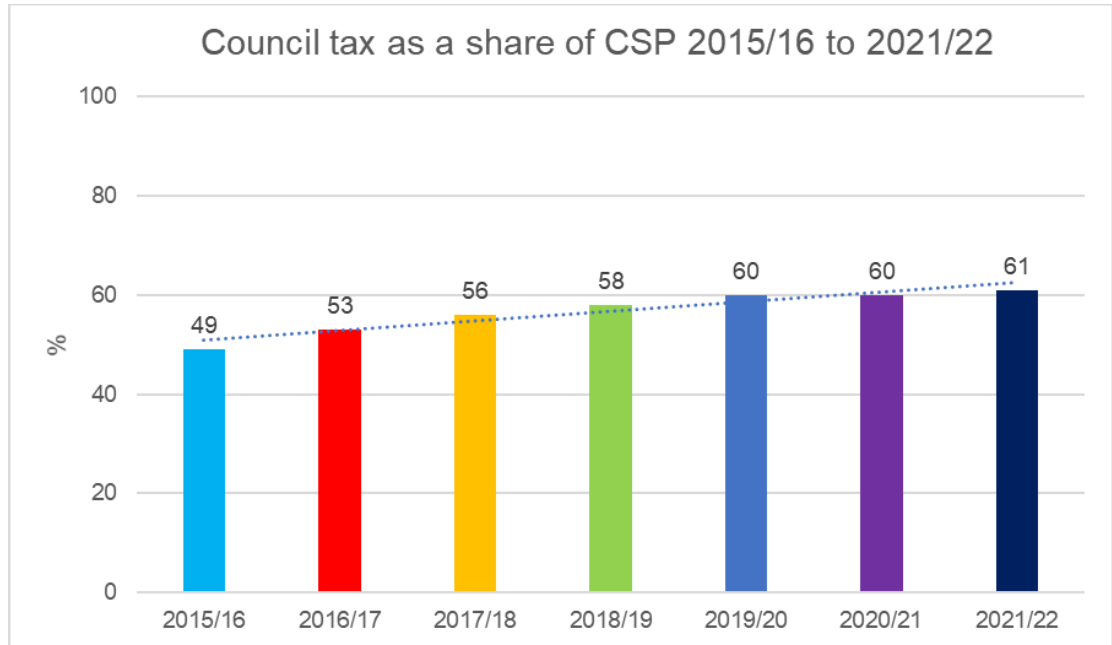
6.4.8 Local Government Funding Reform: - In his CSR, the Chancellor did not make any announcements about the future of the fair funding review (also known as the Review of Relative Needs and Resources), the move to further business rates retention, the business rates reset which were originally expected to be implemented in 2019/20, but which have been delayed a number of times, or new homes bonus reform. There was also no comment on whether local government could expect a three-year local government finance settlement which would have been possible given the three year period covered by the CSR.

6.4.9 The MJ commented that “*There was no hint at the future for business rates reform, leaving local government without a plan for its long-term finances.*” The MJ reported that the Chairman of the Local Government Association, Cllr James Jamieson, said: *'It is disappointing that the chancellor has not provided additional funding to address existing pressures on adult social care services and not increased public health funding. We remain concerned that the money allocated to social care from the Health and Care Levy will be insufficient to fund reforms. The potential rise in local government core spending power over the next three years will also be dependent on councils increasing council tax by 3% per annum.'*

7. LOCAL CONTEXT

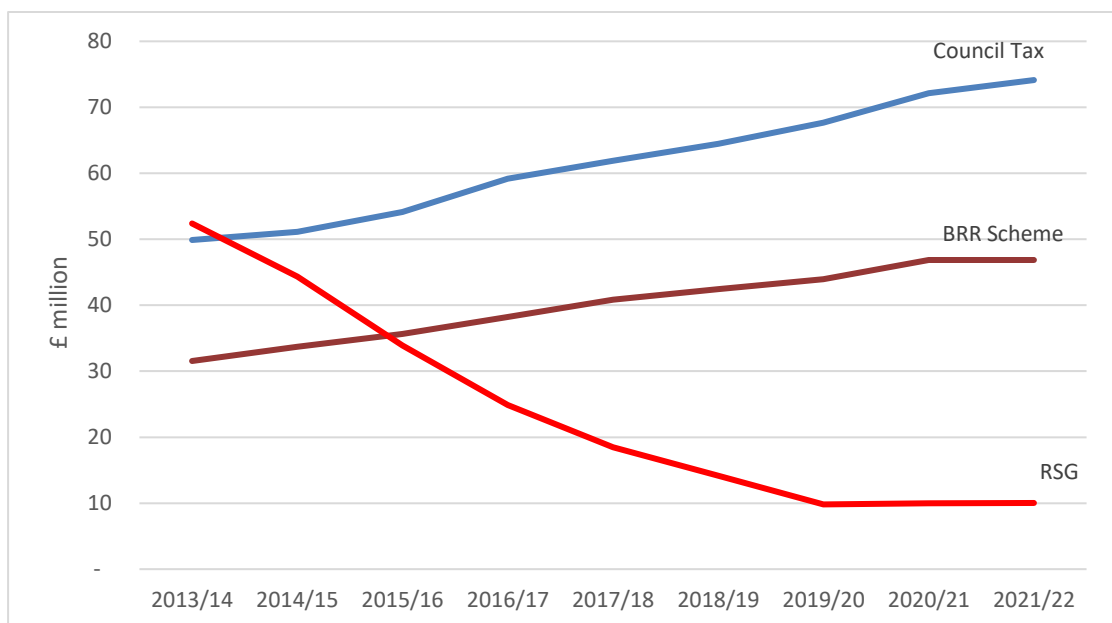
7.1 The Government's comparatively low priority for local government compared to other parts of the public sector in recent years has seen funding provided from the government reduce significantly with a deliberate shift in national Government policy to increase the proportion of local government services funded from council tax and other locally derived income sources.

7.2 In their briefing paper: “Local Government Funding Reform Decisions and Options” LgFutures highlight that the “*council tax share of Core Spending Power (CSP) rose from 49% nationally in 2015/16 to a projected 61% in 2021/22*” as shown in the chart that they have produced and which is copied below.



7.3 Locally, the impact of this policy shift is demonstrated in the graph below.

Funding of Telford & Wrekin Council Net Budget since 2013/14



7.4 The amount of Revenue Support Grant (RSG) has fallen from over £50m in 2013/14 to just over £10m in 2021/22. During this period

demand for many services has been increasing and inflationary pressures have also increased costs. As can be seen from the graph, the amounts raised from business rates and council tax have been increasing, which is in line with national trends.

- 7.5 In 2013/14 39% of the net budget was funded from RSG and 37% was funded from council tax. In 2021/22 only 8% was funded from RSG and 56% funded from council tax. However, throughout this period the council has maintained one of the lowest levels of council tax for the services that this Council provides in both the West and East Midlands, indeed it has been the lowest in the region for the last 4 years.
- 7.6 As well as a withdrawal of central government funding over many years, the introduction of the existing local government finance system in 2013/14 saw a significant transfer of risk to local authorities. This included the introduction of local “Council Tax Support” rather than centrally funded “Council Tax Benefits” and local retention of business rates.
- 7.7 As a large complex organisation delivering a huge variety of essential services and also one that continues to face significant financial pressures and many uncertainties, it is highly desirable that the Council should have a financial strategy that covers the medium term. However, it is clearly very difficult to produce meaningful future projections of resource availability in the absence of medium term funding settlements for local authorities from the Government particularly given the added dimension of continuing uncertainty over potential changes to the local government finance system that have been deferred on many occasions but remain likely to be implemented at some point. Despite this uncertainty, we have to make the best projections that we can and ensure that we seek to identify approaches to reduce reliance on government funding, ensure that an appropriate level of reserves and contingencies is maintained by the Council and that the Council maintains its long track record of sound financial management.
- 7.8 Despite severe financial challenges, the Council has a long track record of highly effective financial management and has again received an unqualified External Audit opinion for its latest set of accounts. Despite having made £133.7m of budget savings by the end of this year, the Council has managed to come within budget, without needing to implement unplanned emergency spending controls and has received unqualified external audit opinions for more than 15 years. Further details of savings made to date are included in Appendix 4.
- 7.9 The Council has sought to offset part of the loss of Government grant by generating income by adopting a more commercial approach to many existing services. We have sought to ensure that this approach spreads fixed costs, maximises use of any spare capacity and where possible brings environmental, social or economic benefits to our

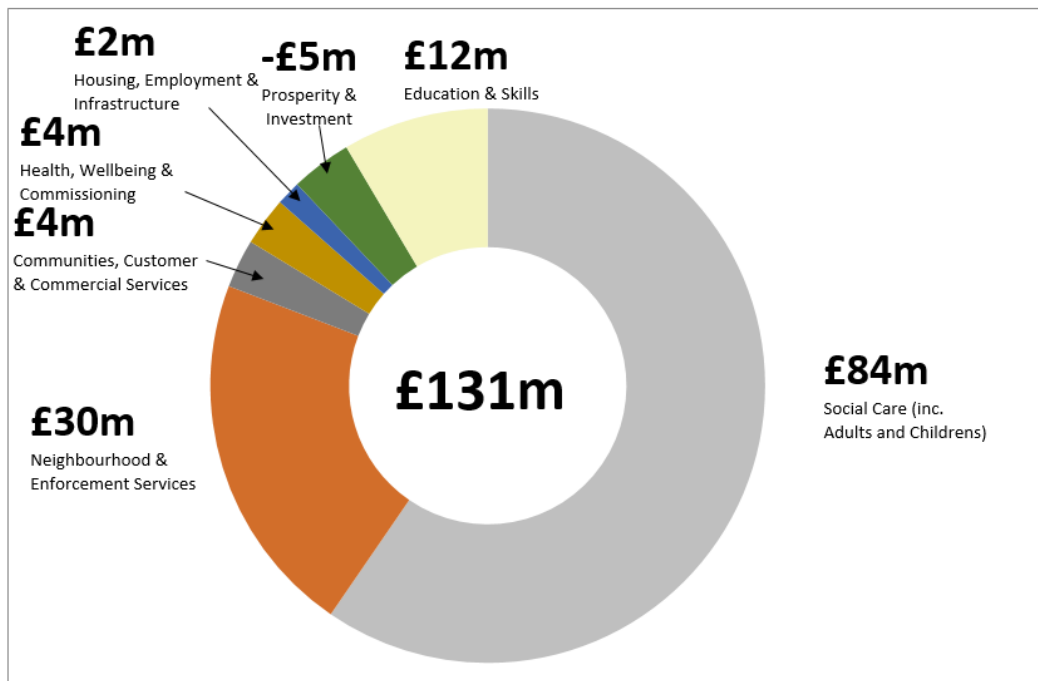
residents. We were the second council nationally to open a commercial solar farm and are currently investing in NuPlace, a wholly owned company, which offers high quality homes, mainly at market rents. Primarily NuPlace was established to increase the supply of private rented accommodation in the area, to regenerate brown field sites that the Council had been unable to sell and to drive-up standards in the wider private rented sector by offering a high quality alternative to private tenants. However, both of these schemes also generate a surplus after paying all associated costs. The profit is used to help reduce the amount of cuts that we would otherwise have to make to the front line services that the Council provides to our community.

- 7.10 The Council is also committed to investing in Telford's future. Ensuring that the Borough is an attractive place to live, work, learn and visit is essential if we are to attract new businesses that will create jobs and bring prosperity to the area and the people that live here. The Council also benefits from retaining a share of any additional business rates (between "reset periods") which also helps to minimise the cuts that we have to make to front-line services.
- 7.11 As part of our "Business Winning, Business Supporting" Approach, the Council is proposing to make additional investments in our Property Investment Portfolio which unlike some councils is invested solely within the Borough in new property holdings bringing new jobs to the Borough from inward investors but also retaining existing jobs in companies looking to expand and which may otherwise move out of the borough. Any net return after covering all associated costs is used to support front line services as will additional retained income from business rates between reset periods.
- 7.12 On 4th March 2021 the Council approved a one year service and financial planning strategy for the current financial year. A one year strategy was agreed because the Government only provided a 1 year funding settlement, because of the added uncertainties caused by the pandemic and because the Government had again deferred their planned major changes to the local government finance system. The Council remains committed to key themes from this earlier strategy and will continue:-
- To work with partner organisations, including Town & Parish Councils and voluntary sector and community groups to seek to identify ways to mitigate the impact of some of the cuts to services that we can no longer afford to provide. These discussions have been very successful and the Council is committed to extending this approach further through Partnership Deals with some transitional funding potentially available where appropriate.
 - Despite last year assuming that 2021/22 would be the last year that the Council would be able to transfer grant to the remaining, most severely affected, Town & Parish Councils in respect of

Local Council Tax Support, the Council is proposing to repeat the payments in 2022/23 and in order to enable these town and parish councils to plan on a medium term basis, we are proposing to now give certainty over the amounts to be allocated in the following two years which will see the remaining grant evenly phased out with the final payments made in 2024/25.

7.13 The budget set for the current year and which forms the basis for the budget for future years is summarised in the pie chart below:-

SUMMARY OF TELFORD AND WREKIN COUNCIL NET EXPENDITURE (£131m)



7.14 The chart shows that in 2021/22, £84m, or almost two thirds of our net budget, is spent on social care for adults and children. The LGA has said that *“we warned that children’s and social care services could fail to support everyone they need to. This is despite funding for both services making up nearly two-thirds of councils’ total spending due to rising demand. Our new analysis showed that social care authorities are spending more than 60 per cent of their outgoings on these vital services... We also highlighted the spiralling demand on children’s social services and future cost pressures in children’s social care, which are set to increase by an estimated £600 million a year until 2024/25, with many councils finding themselves in the unsustainable position of consistently having to overspend their children’s services budgets”*. Financial Management reports to Cabinet during the year have consistently highlighted that at Telford & Wrekin both adults and children’s social care services are facing pressure despite the

significant additional ongoing investments made in recent years, additional ongoing investment in both services is therefore required to ensure a robust MTFS in future years.

8.0 **A COUNCIL WORKING TO PROTECT, CARE & INVEST TO CREATE A BETTER BOROUGH**

- 8.1 Despite our severe financial constraints, Telford and Wrekin is a progressive Council with ambitions to improve the Borough and the lives of residents. We are tackling the enduring impact of the Government's sustained austerity programme and the pandemic head on.
- 8.2 The Council has an ambitious four-year investment programme to protect, care and invest to create a better borough and between 2020 and 2024 we will be investing more than £50m to keep neighbourhoods safe, clean and well connected.
- 8.3 In September 2021, the Leader of the Council wrote to every household in the Borough highlighting £16m of investments in projects that will make the borough cleaner, greener, safer and more enjoyable as part of our commitment to Protect, Care and Invest in the Borough which is on top of the £50m referred to above. This package includes:-





- 8.4 Our Council Plan agreed by Cabinet in October 2020 sets out how as a Co-operative Council, the organisation wants to take forward the Borough over the medium term. It is a Plan which is centred on tackling the inequalities that exist in our communities. We will build a strong, clean economy and will ensure that all communities benefit from this - that the very real differences between our communities are “levelled-up” and that all of our communities are resilient, healthy and prospering. Core to all of this will be the action we take to protect our environment and playing our part in tackling the climate emergency.
- 8.5 Despite the severe financial challenges we face, our mission is clear. We will support businesses to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, to attract new jobs and investment and promote clean growth in the borough, whilst seeking to protect, as far as we are able to, priority front-line services and are working co-operatively with our residents and partners to deliver these.
- 8.6 From our on-going engagement with local people over many years, we are clear that they and their families have some fundamental priorities which we as a Council will work with them to achieve. We know that the people of Telford & Wrekin want to live:
- **In a safe community** – we work in partnership with West Mercia Police to ensure that Telford & Wrekin remains a low crime area. Our work to support and safeguard children from sexual exploitation has been recognised by Ofsted as amongst the best in the country. We have worked to get Telford designated as a White Ribbon Town where domestic violence is not tolerated. Our Public Protection team deliver our enforcement agenda to ensure that local services and facilities are safe, that nuisances are tackled and houses in multiple occupation are better managed. We have made a commitment as a Council to always look after the most vulnerable in our community.
 - **In a clean environment** – we work in partnership with Idverde and Veolia and also with our Town and Parish Councils to ensure that our streets, parks and public spaces are clean and tidy and that we have first class waste collection and recycling services.

- **In a place with good roads and pavements** – each year we invest in a major programme to repair and maintain our roads and pavements. We have also secured significant amounts of Government funding to improve many roads, roundabouts and junctions so that congestion caused by more cars using our roads in the future will be reduced or avoided. The existing investment plan is summarised below:-



- Through our 'Pride in Your Community' initiative we have also made lots of little improvements in communities and on estates that can make a big difference to everyday life.
- **Where there are first class schools and education facilities** – we work in partnership to support our primary, secondary and special schools and performance is amongst the best in the West Midlands. We will continue to invest in maintaining and extending school buildings.
- **Where there are excellent and accessible hospital and GP services** – we are working with many GP practices and Health Services in our neighbourhoods to provide more joined-up health and care services that better meet people's needs there is support in the community to help people to stay healthy. We are also doing all we can to seek to retain full Accident & Emergency services at the Princess Royal Hospital as well as the Women's and Children's Centre.
- Where they have a job and there is a thriving economy – through our Enterprise Telford approach, we are attracting more new businesses to come to our Borough every year bringing new jobs. We have also supported many existing businesses to succeed and expand. Through our 'Pride in your High Street' initiative, we have sought to give local businesses the key skills to both survive and thrive in our town centres. We work to protect local jobs, we have lobbied Government to retain key activity in our town. We also work, through our Job Box and

Apprenticeship schemes, to ensure local people, and particularly young people, have the skills they need to get a job.

- 8.7 As a Co-operative Council, we are committed to listening to and involving residents in developing our plans to protect, care and invest to create a better Borough. Over the last two years, we have increased our engagement with residents, carrying out a wide range of consultations, including a Residents' Survey that all residents of Telford & Wrekin were invited to take part in. In total, we received 5,473 responses, exceeding our original target of 5,000 responses, with responses from every ward across the Borough.
- 8.8 The survey also provided an opportunity to encourage people to have their say on an ongoing basis through a new Community Panel. Residents were asked if they were interested in finding out more about the Panel, with 30% (1,640) expressing an interest.
- 8.9 While many other councils have focussed on making cuts while neglecting growth and stopped major development projects, we continue to prudently invest to create jobs and safeguard the future prosperity of the Borough and its residents.
- 8.10 Underpinning our relationship with the community are our Co-operative values. These values are at the heart of all that we say and do as an organisation:-
- **Openness and Honesty** - being open and honest in the way we work and make decisions and communicate in a clear, simple and timely way;
 - **Ownership** - being accountable for our own actions and empower others with the skills to help themselves;
 - **Fairness and Respect** - responding to people's needs in a fair and consistent way;
 - **Involvement** - working together with our communities, involving people in decisions that affect their lives and be prepared to listen and take on new ideas.

9. BASE BUDGET FOR 2022/23

- 9.1 Only a small number of changes have occurred since the Cabinet considered the Medium Term Financial Strategy on 6 January 2022. The most significant of these are summarised in the table below:-

Changes from 6 January 2022 Cabinet report	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000	2025/26 £'000
Additional investment in to ASC	260	260	260	260

Additional investment in to Children's Safeguarding	650	650	650	650
Contingency	0	(241)	(392)	(417)
Additional Business rates income	(900)	(900)	(900)	(900)
Other	(10)	231	382	407
Total net change	0	0	0	0

Final figures are still awaited for some grants at the time of drafting this report therefore the recommendations in this report include a request for a delegation to the Chief Finance Officer to make final adjustments to the contingency figure after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance & Customer Services.

- 9.2 The base budget for 2022/23 totals £145.41m and is summarised in Appendix 6. The budget will be restated after final decisions have been taken on the savings and investment proposals contained in this report.
- 9.3 Following receipt of another one year funding settlement from Government, there are many areas of significant uncertainty facing the Council and our overall financial position beyond March 2023 including the ongoing effects arising from the pandemic and the impacts that may arise from potential changes to the local government finance system.
- 9.4 It is with this uncertainty over the medium term financial outlook facing the Council in mind that the balance between the key components of the overall MTFS need to be considered i.e.:-
- New ongoing revenue and one-off capital investments (which also impact on the revenue budget both in the year of spend but also in some cases for many decades ahead),
 - The balance between further savings and the level of council tax increase,
 - The use of one-off resources versus retention of a sufficient level of one off resources to provide future flexibility.
- 9.5 Given the high degree of uncertainty, it is difficult to make accurate forward projections. However, it is essential that we now use the best available information to estimate the potential level of budget shortfall in future years so that we can start to plan ahead now through this MTFS framework which is based on the Council's multi-year budget model which includes many variables and will be regularly reviewed and updated as further information becomes available. Using current available information and assumptions, the position is summarised in the table below. However, it must be noted that the actual position may be very different to that set out below:-

Base Budget Movements from 2021/22	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000	2025/26 £'000
2021/22 Base Budget	131,014	131,014	131,014	131,014
Allowance for inflation on major contracts (using contract specific indices) and for pay inflation (1.75% for 2021/22 which is yet to be finalised; 1.75% in 2022/23 followed by 1.25% in the following three years)	3,779	6,085	8,380	10,689
Additional inflation contingency	2,424	2,183	2,032	2,007
Services Grant	(2,671)	(2,671)	(2,671)	(2,671)
Social Care additional grant (Adults & Childrens)	(2,133)	(2,133)	(2,133)	(2,133)
Impact of Capital Programme	1,812	3,049	3,696	3,618
Allowance for Single Status	-	-	1,270	1,270
Cost of Health & Social Care Levy	725	725	725	725
New Homes Bonus	(228)	(228)	(228)	(228)
Investments:				
Adult Social Care - new investment	6,739	8,739	8,739	8,739
Children's Safeguarding - new investment	1,850	1,850	1,850	1,850
Other Changes net of savings previously approved	358	(51)	107	27
Council Tax Collection Fund Adjustment	1,740	-	-	-
Updated Base Budget	145,409	148,562	152,781	154,907
Projected Funding	138,986	138,074	139,807	141,340
Base Budget Gap before Council Tax increase	6,423	10,488	12,974	13,567
Less:				
Savings	5,656	8,340	8,340	8,340
Council Tax Increase	0	0	0	0
Adult Social Care Precept of 1% applied in 2022/23 but giving an ongoing income	767	767	767	767
Shortfall to be covered from further ongoing savings, any	0	1,381	3,867	4,460

general council tax increases and use of one offs				
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Notes:-

- Some uncertainty remains on more than £12m of grants other than RSG which have been assumed but not announced at the time of drafting this report.
- No assumption has been made for any Council Tax increases in any of the years covered by the MTFs. It is assumed that the Council will implement the Government’s 1% ASC Precept which was assumed in the Government’s CSR projections for 2022/23 but no further increase in later years has been assumed.
- The projections for years after 2022/23 are only intended as a broad indication at this stage for planning purposes and the estimates will be further updated as additional information becomes available.
- It should be noted that over £10m of Government grant allocations for 2022/23 are of a one-off nature including ASC grants, the “services” grant and New Homes Bonus. The projections above assume that this, or alternative Government funding of an equivalent amount, will be received in future years.

9.6 After having delivered £126.4m of annual savings already, which will increase to £133.7m by the end of this year, it is clear that further cuts will be more challenging. Clearly the Council will seek to minimise impacts on our community by working with Town and Parish Councils, local community groups, service users, the voluntary sector, volunteers and other partner organisations. Based on the position summarised above, total savings since the period of austerity began are projected to total more than £148m by the end of 2025/26 (assuming no further council tax increases and based on the medium term projections currently available – although these will inevitably change as further information becomes available) made up as follows:-

	£m
Savings made to end of 2021/22	133.692
Savings previously approved/updated for 2022/23	1.479
Savings now put forward for implementation in 2022/23 and 2023/24 (gross of leakage from general fund)	8.467
Projected further savings required from 2023/24 to the end of the 4 year MTFs period in 2025/26	4.460
Total Projected savings by end of 2025/26	148.098

10. OUR APPROACH TO DEVELOPING SAVINGS PROPOSALS BUDGET ENGAGEMENT

10.1 Due to the significant uncertainty over the future of the national local government finance system, the prolonged period of financial constraint for un-protected areas of public spending and the consequent scale of ongoing annual savings that had been delivered by the Council a new approach to the development of future savings proposals was agreed from 2017 onwards. Future savings are likely to be more challenging as the “easier savings” have already been taken. More time is therefore needed to consult with stakeholders about options and ways to minimise impacts. Therefore savings are developed as soon as opportunities arise and capacity allows, rather than co-ordinating consultation through an annual process as historically was the case when resources were not so tight, and the need to implement change not so urgent. This means that we are able to engage with our communities and partners in a more meaningful way to develop more creative solutions to some of our challenges within the Borough. This also means that our budget engagement process takes place throughout the year, rather than for a 4 week period.

10.2 We commenced targeted discussions with our Town and Parish Councils, trades unions, business community and local voluntary and community sector partners and the Business & Finance Scrutiny Committee during January 2022. This is part of an ongoing dialogue that will continue throughout the year as our budget proposals are developed.

11. CAPITAL RECEIPTS AND DEBT CHARGES

11.1 The Council’s programme of property rationalisation has not only reduced running costs as we have disposed of buildings and other surplus assets but is also generating significant capital receipts enabling us to fund some investment from internal resources rather than from increased borrowing. Due to the assumed extension of a temporary Government relaxation in regulations, the Council should be able to use new capital receipts to fund transformation and severance costs. Debt clearly has to be repaid and adds to pressure on the revenue budget so the generation of capital receipts from the sale of surplus assets helps protect essential front line services. This reduces the amount of cuts that would otherwise have to be made.

11.2 The Council, unlike the Government, is not able to borrow to fund revenue services as the Council has to set a balanced revenue budget each year with any shortfall being funded by the use of balances or from further cuts to spending or increased income.

11.3 Debt repayments represent a long-term fixed charge against the revenue budget which reduces the amount of funding available for the provision of front line services. This spreads the cost of the acquisition of these assets over the useful life of the asset. However some capital investment that is incurred to achieve Council objectives such as

Nuplace which is offering tenants in the private rented housing sector the option of a high quality home operated by a long-term responsive landlord can not only deliver Council priorities but fund assets which will increase in value over the longer term and generate a revenue return greater than the cost of the associated debt charges. This surplus is used to reduce the cuts to essential front line services that would otherwise be required. The Council carefully assesses each potential new investment through a proper process to ensure that it does not expose the Council to an unacceptable level of risk either on an individual basis or when considering the entire debt portfolio of the Council with our approach set out in the capital and investment strategies, the treasury management strategy and prudential indicators reports that are considered by full Council each year.

- 11.4 In Telford & Wrekin debt repayments in 2021/22 accounted for 8.2% of the net revenue budget (including payment to Shropshire Council in respect of pre-unitary authority debt). This compares to:-
- Birmingham 29.0%
 - Unitary Authority average 10.4%
 - Telford & Wrekin 8.2%

11.5 A graph showing the percentage of the net revenue budget allocated to debt repayments in 2021/22 for unitary authorities is included in Appendix 5 (data was not available for 3 authorities from the CIPFA data source).

11.6 Our programme of asset sales totals £29.5m over the medium term. The planned profile of these receipts is shown below:

	£m
2021/22	14.743
2022/23	2.800
2023/24	5.500
2024/25	0.500
Later years	6.000
Total	29.543

11.7 Generation of these receipts is a key assumption within the MTFS. The Council has a detailed schedule of asset disposals to address this, which is regularly monitored by both officers and members of the Audit Committee and all the revenue consequences of temporary financing pending these scheduled disposals are built in to the Council's base budget projections contained in this report. This dependency will continue to be subject to close monitoring. If any delay is experienced in generating expected receipts, mitigation factors could include a combination of re-phasing some capital spending schemes, identification of other assets for disposal or additional borrowing on a temporary or long term basis although this would increase revenue costs and necessitate further cuts to other services or the use of

additional one-off revenue resources such as the in-year contingency or Budget Strategy Reserve.

12. SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS

- 12.1 Planning obligations under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), commonly known as s106 agreements, are a mechanism which make a development proposal acceptable in planning terms, that would not otherwise be acceptable. They are focused on site specific mitigation of the impact of development. S.106 agreements are often referred to as 'developer contributions'. The common uses of planning obligations are to; secure affordable housing, to secure financial contributions to provide infrastructure (for example relating to necessary highways works to provide access to the development) and to help fund new educational facilities for the children of families that move in to newly built houses. Careful negotiations are undertaken with developers in reaching the s.106 agreement, which are legally binding and clearly state what the funding can be used for.
- 12.2 Legally a S.106 can only be requested when it is:
1. necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms
 2. directly related to the development; and
 3. fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.
- 12.3 Negotiations have to ensure that developments remain viable and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states where obligations are being sought or revised, local planning authorities should take account of changes in market conditions over time and, wherever appropriate, be sufficiently flexible to prevent planned development being stalled.
- 12.4 The Council's Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee undertook a scrutiny review of Primary School Places during 2014 which considered s.106 agreements relating to education and it was agreed that details of these agreements would be included in the MTFs report in future years. Details are therefore included in Appendix 8 for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st October 2021 showing income and expenditure on each scheme relating to Education.

13. MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

13.1 Areas of Uncertainty – Reform of the Local Government Financial System

- 13.1.1 Significant changes were made to the local government finance system from 2013/14 including the localisation of a share of business rates, the replacement of the national Council Tax benefit scheme with local Council Tax Support schemes and the transfer of responsibility for Public Health services from the NHS to councils with the introduction of

a ring-fenced Public Health Grant funded by the Department of Health and Social Care. This current local government finance system represented a significant transfer of risk from the Government to councils but also brought opportunities and incentives to encourage growth in local communities in line with the Government's national drive to increase the availability of housing and jobs. This Council is well placed to benefit from the current financial system with an attractive environment, good motorway connections and ready to go development sites. We have grasped the challenge to become a "Business Supporting, Business Winning" Council.

13.1.2 The funding outlook beyond next year is very uncertain. Radical changes were also proposed by the Government to the local government finance system which were all due to come in to effect in April 2020. However, these changes were delayed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with a revised target implementation date of April 2021. Progress stalled due to the pandemic and the proposed changes were deferred again. Following receipt of the final local government finance settlement it now appears that the Government does remain committed to some reform but is also aware of the need for stability and transitional protections in any new system that is introduced. Whilst it is clear that the earliest that any major changes will now be implemented is April 2023, there is currently no commitment to exactly what changes will be implemented or when this might happen. Very little information is available to indicate how any new system may operate and the impacts that the changes will have for individual local authorities.

13.1.3 Despite a medium term CSR being announced on 27 October 2021, the Government have again only provided a one year local government finance settlement. Combined with the uncertainty around what changes may be made to the local government finance system, it is very unlikely that the Council will have any real clarity on its funding for 2023/24 and later years until we receive our settlement in December 2022, less than 4 months before the start of the financial year which has now been the case for a number of years and makes medium term financial planning exceptionally difficult. It is therefore essential that the Council maintains financial flexibility so that it is able to set a legal, balanced budget should the actual position be significantly different from the tentative projections included in this report for future years. Available uncommitted one-off resources should therefore be held in reserve. The changes that will be implemented will potentially have very significant implications for the Council and could include:-

- A new formula used to assess relative needs which will impact on the distribution of available resources between councils.
- Potential changes to the business rates system and the significant number and value of appeals against rateable values yet to be considered by the Government's Valuation Office agency.

Successful appeals impact on the Council's budget by reducing the income from business rates and potentially making repayments if appeals are backdated.

- “Reset of the local government finance system” which would see the benefits of all growth in business rates and council tax income since 2013/14 rebased across the country. This could see 100% of the growth that we have seen lost immediately or a lower percentage given up which could be phased over a number of years. Whilst we would lose the benefit from growth in our area we would benefit from a share of the growth achieved in other parts of the country.
- Changes to the New Homes Bonus (NHB) scheme were expected to be announced as part of the settlement on 16 December. However, the Government have again deferred the introduction of a new system and have rolled forward the approach used in 2021/22. However, a new system is expected to be introduced at some point in the future which could impact significantly on the Council as New Homes Bonus is a significant funding stream for the Council.

13.1.4 The Council will continue to take opportunities to respond through all available consultation processes linked to the introduction of these changes to lobby for a fair funding settlement for Telford & Wrekin residents. The deadline for responses to the provisional settlement was 13 January 2022. The Chief Financial Officer agreed a response to the provisional settlement with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance & Customer Services.

13.2.1 **Other areas of uncertainty:-**

- It should be noted that over £10m of Government grant allocations for 2021/22 are of a one-off nature including ASC grants, the new “services” grant, lower tier services grant and New Homes Bonus grant. The projections above assume that this, or alternative Government funding of an equivalent amount, will be received in future years.
- The continuing impact of the pandemic on the Council and our residents, businesses and voluntary and community sectors will be difficult to forecast if new variants of concern arise. At the time of preparing this report no announcements of the continuation of Government support for the continuing impacts on the Council of the pandemic had been made including reductions in income from many services. However, some limited additional funding for the Council to support local businesses was announced in late December 2021.
- The rate of inflation has increased recently, particularly with regard to energy costs placing pressure on Council as well as household

budgets. If the Bank of England continue to react to this pressure by further interest rate increases, the Council may face higher costs (although we prudently budget at long-term rates rather than short-term rates). Higher interest rates and the high level of the Government's national budget deficit could impact on the economy making recession more likely with consequent impacts on the construction of new homes and business premises in the Borough. This could impact on the generation of assumed capital receipt values and on Council budgets for local Council Tax support (if unemployment increases or household incomes fall) and the budgets for homelessness, housing benefit etc.

- The trend of schools to move to Academy status and the consequent risk of loss of existing and potential income for a wide range of services to academy chains.
- The levels of demand for key front line services – particularly children's safeguarding and Adult Social Care services and whether the Government will make new additional and sustainable funding available for these services.
- The levels of pay awards from 2022/23, at the time of preparing this report the Trades Unions are balloting their local government members on potential industrial action relating to the pay award applicable from April 2021.
- The pension fund is subject to triennial re-valuations with the next valuation to be based on the position for assets and liabilities as at 31 March 2022. Any change to the employer's contribution rate will be effective from April 2023 and will need to reflect the impact of the McCloud age discrimination case. The performance of the investments held by the Pension Fund and the assumptions used by the actuaries to assess the potential liabilities of the fund could have a significant impact on the Council's revenue budget.

13.2.2 Projections of what the council's budget gap might be in 2023/24 and later years are therefore extremely difficult to make and have a very high degree of uncertainty. Projections are based on the Council's budget model which will be regularly refined and updated as and when additional information becomes available. It is however certain that the actual position will be different from the projections for 2023/24 and later years included in this report. The actual position may be better or worse.

13.3 Local Government Finance Settlement

13.3.1 The last multi-year settlement that the Council received was announced in December 2015. This included indicative figures for a four-year period to 2019/20. The absence of any certainty over potential funding levels beyond next year is a major cause for concern,

2022/23 will be the fourth consecutive year that it will not be possible to undertake meaningful medium term financial planning.

13.3.2 When the three-year CSR was announced on 27 October, it was still hoped that we would receive a three-year funding settlement. On 16 December 2021, the Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP, announced, in Parliament, the provisional local government finance settlement for 2022/23 only. The Government's provisional settlement assumes that councils will increase their council tax by the maximum permitted (3% in the case of Telford & Wrekin Council) when calculating "core spending power". The government showed "core spending power" increasing by £10.95m, an increase of 7.7% between 2021/22 and 2022/23 (higher than the average for England of 6.9%). However, within these figures, the amount that the Government assumes that the Council will collect from council tax increases by £3.68m largely from increasing council tax by the full 3% with some additional benefit from growth in the tax base.

13.3.3 The assumptions made by the Government on the level of council tax increase that councils will apply take no regard of the ability of local taxpayers to pay the increased cost at a time that many household budgets are particularly squeezed by rising energy, food and other costs as well as increased levels of national taxation from April 2022. Despite the settlement being better than we have seen in recent years, the Council will still need to continue to make budget savings because the Council has a legal duty to set a "balanced budget" and we are experiencing very significant financial pressure on key services, most notably Adult Social Care, waste collection, energy costs and general inflationary pressures. Final proposals had not been announced at the time of finalising this report. If necessary, any changes will be agreed with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance & Customer Service and be adjusted through the inflation contingency.

13.3.4 Whilst the CSR set the strategic financial overview for the Government as a whole during the three years starting 2022/23, the local government finance settlement set out the specific proposals affecting local government but only for 2022/23 with details for each council being provided for one year. Key points included:-

- Council Tax Increases – As previously announced at CSR 2021, the council tax referendum limit will be 2% for local authorities with social care authorities also allowed a 1% Adult Social Care precept.
- Town and Parish Councils will continue to not be subject to referendum limits on council tax increases.
- A new "Services Grant" has been introduced for 2022/23, with the Council receiving a £2.671m allocation. This new grant has been allocated using a methodology that will be applied for one year only

although the funding will remain in future years, it will be distributed differently and the Government has confirmed there will be no transitional arrangements for changes to this aspect of Core Spending Power in future years.

- Revenue Support Grant – has been increased by 3.1%, (equal to £0.309m for the Council) in line with the September 2021 CPI.
- New Homes Bonus - The 2022/23 allocations have been reduced at a national level by £68m from 2021/22. There have been no changes to the scheme for 2022/23, with a single year's new allocation made alongside the outstanding legacy payment for 2019/20. There is no planned legacy payment for 2022/23 (as in 2020/21 and 2021/22). Locally we have seen New Homes Bonus increase by £0.228m due to higher levels of housing development which has also benefitted the council tax base. It is likely that a further consultation on potential changes to the system will be undertaken during 2022 and that a revised scheme will be in place from 2023/24.
- The allocation for the Social Care Grant in respect of both Children's and Adult Social care has increased by £2.133m and the "Improved Better Care Funding" allocation has increased by £0.23m.
- A new "Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund", has been introduced. This is to help fund Adult Social Care Reform, our allocation is £0.523m
- A further year of the "lower tier services grant" has been provided despite this having been launched as a one-off measure last year. The Council's allocation has increased by £0.011m compared to 2021/22.
- No papers have yet been published relating to the Fair Funding Review or the Business Rates Reset. The only announcement regarding funding reform was as follows: *"Government is committed to ensuring that funding allocations for councils are based on an up-to-date assessment of their needs and resources. The data used to assess this has not been updated in a number of years, dating from 2013/14 to a large degree, and even as far back as 2000. Over the coming months, we will work closely with the sector and other stakeholders to update this and to look at the challenges and opportunities facing the sector before consulting on any potential changes"*. It would therefore appear that the Government intend to make further announcements in the New Year, before then consulting on any potential changes. The LGA said: *"The Government should now provide clarity on which local government funding reforms will happen and when. It needs to push ahead with the Fair Funding Review, including looking both at the data and the formulas used to distribute funding. We look forward to resuming our work with Government on the Review to ensure overall local government funding is sufficient when any funding distribution*

changes are introduced and that no council sees its funding reduce as a result”.

- Public Health Grant – It is likely that this will continue to be paid through a ring-fenced grant in 2022/23. However, the settlement includes no information about the national total, or individual council allocations, of the public health grant for 2022/23 or, indeed, for a number of other grants.
- Disappointingly, no announcements of the continuation of Government support for the continuing impacts on the Council of the pandemic have been made as part of the settlement including compensation for continuing reductions in income from many services.

13.3.5 At the time of preparing this report, details of funding totalling over £12m expected for next year have still not been released by the Government and a significant degree of uncertainty over our actual position therefore remains.

13.3.6 In response to the provisional settlement, the LGA said “*The Government forecasts are based on the assumption that every local authority will raise their council tax by the maximum permitted without a referendum. This leaves councils facing the tough choice about whether to increase council tax bills to bring in desperately needed funding at a time when they are acutely aware of the significant burden that could place on some households. The LGA has long highlighted that council tax rises – particularly the adult social care precept – have never been the solution to the long-term pressures faced by councils, particularly in social care which is desperately in need of reform. Increasing council tax raises different amounts of money in different parts of the country, unrelated to need. Steadily growing demand has seen councils with responsibility for children’s and adult’s social care devoting nearly two-thirds of their total spending to these services. While the additional funding these services is good, it will not go far enough in addressing the very real existing pressures these vital services face”.*

14. 2020/21 PROJECTED OUTTURN POSITION

14.1 As the Financial Monitoring report also on this agenda shows, excellent financial control continues to be exercised and good progress is being made in delivering the overall budget for 2021/22. However, there are some areas of significant pressure and clearly, the actual outturn will be different, either better or worse, than currently projected. It is, therefore, essential that all Cabinet Members and budget holders continue to exercise tight financial control during the remaining weeks of this financial year and deliver all planned savings. It is currently expected that the Council will have some one-off funding available within the revenue budget contingency for 2021/22 at year end

(currently estimated to be in the region of £2.81m). No assumptions on the use, or availability, of this funding have been made at this stage because the position will change before the end of the year. The use of any in-year underspend will be considered as part of the out-turn report to Cabinet and may include transfers to the Council's Invest to Save/Capacity fund to support delivery of a balanced MTFS in future years. The position will continue to be closely monitored particularly for key services such as adult social care and children's safeguarding but also seasonal factors such as winter road gritting and any potential costs arising from flooding.

15. SAVINGS PROPOSALS 2022/23 and 2023/24

- 15.1 By the end of the current financial year, the Council will have delivered ongoing budget savings of £133.7m since 2009/10. Despite the proposed 1% Adult Social Care precept increase which will generate around £0.767m it is necessary for the Council to find further budget savings in order to deliver a balanced budget without using an unsustainable level of one-off balances.
- 15.2 Appendix 13 therefore includes a schedule of additional savings that if after consultation with service users and other stakeholders were all delivered would generate a total saving of £5.7m in 2022/23 rising to £8.5m (before leakage from general fund) in 2023/24. Clearly after already having delivered £133.7m of savings, these savings now put forward will include some proposals that are more challenging. As explained elsewhere in this report, extensive consultation with service users and partners will be undertaken in order to identify ways to mitigate the impacts of the proposals or to identify alternative options.
- 15.3 Whilst additional investment totalling over £6.96m net of savings in to Adult Social Care by 2023/24 is put forward in this report and £1.31m net of savings in to the Children's Safeguarding budget for next year, it is not possible, even in these services to continue providing the same services in the same ways. In order to ensure that the Council can continue to always meet the assessed needs of vulnerable adults and children in our community, it is necessary for new approaches to be taken to deliver better outcomes for our clients and to ensure that we operate as efficiently as possible. Cost improvement plans are therefore in place for both Adult Social Care and Children's Safeguarding. Details of these Cost Improvement strategies are included as Appendices 11 and 12.

16. INVESTMENTS

- 16.1 This suite of reports includes an investment package that includes over £318m of capital investments that will support delivery of our corporate priorities and ongoing additional net investment in to Adult Social Care

and Children’s Safeguarding services of more than £6m in 2022/23 and a commitment to increase this further in 2023/24. The capital programme and the additional ASC and safeguarding revenue investments are summarised under each corporate priority below:-



16.2 Every child, young person and adult lives well in their community

We want everyone in the borough to fulfil their potential, to be the best they can be. To do this it is essential that children and young people get the best possible start to life, that they receive a “good” or “outstanding” education, that they learn how to stay healthy and well, and that as adults they can access lifelong learning to develop their skills. We know that everyone, whether child or adult, thrives best when they live in a community with family, friends and networks of support. The Council and our partners will work to this goal where it best meets the interest of the person. Our other four priorities will support the delivery of this priority.

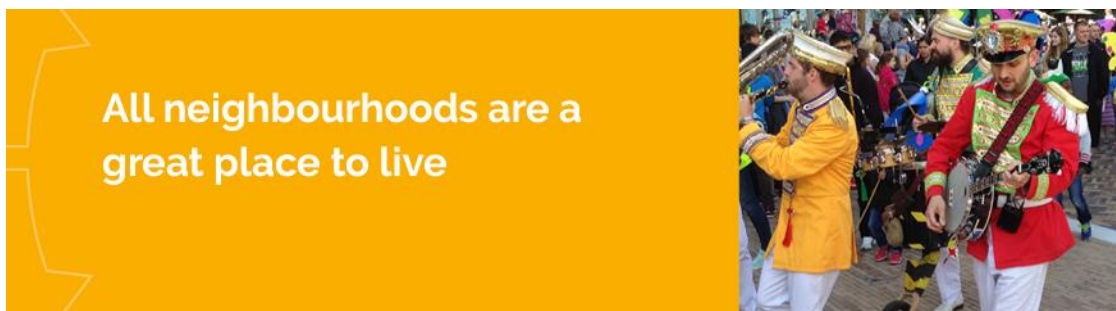
Capital	Total £'000	2021/22 £'000	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000
Adults Supported Accommodation	1,750		1,750	-	-
School Schemes	24,296	11,045	13,251	-	-
Disabled Facilities Grants	2,307	2,307	-	-	-
Other Schemes	126	126	-	-	-
Total Capital	28,479	13,478	15,001	-	-
Net Revenue investment	29,510	6,470	7,680	7,680	7,680
Total Revenue and Capital	57,989	19,948	22,681	7,680	7,680



16.3 Everyone benefits from a thriving economy

The borough has an outstanding track record of attracting and securing investment to create jobs. Whilst Covid-19 has brought challenges, our focus will be to attract investment, drive innovation and support businesses whilst they recover from these challenges and enable the economy to continue to grow. This is essential if we want an economy that everyone can benefit from which will enable inequalities across our communities to be addressed.

Capital	Total £'000	2021/22 £'000	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000
Property Investment Portfolio/Growth Fund	59,599	5,455	38,519	15,625	0
Towns Fund	23,134	1,144	12,571	9,418	0
Get Building Fund	2,323	2,323	0	0	0
Stronger Communities	3,467	3,467			
HCA Land Deal	6,505	1,522	4,703	280	0
Other Schemes	294	294	0	0	0
Total	95,322	14,205	55,793	25,323	-



16.4 All neighbourhoods are a great place to live

We want all our neighbourhoods to be safe and inclusive for everyone, including the young and the old. We want neighbourhoods to thrive and be places where people want to live. We want people to feel pride in, and ownership of, their communities and to feel as though they belong whatever their background. We want our communities to be well

connected and for everyone to have access to good, affordable housing.

Capital	Total £'000	2021/22 £'000	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000
Nuplace - Housing Investment	74,604	6,200	18,300	33,000	17,104
Affordable Housing Programme	10,000	-	5,000	5,000	-
Highways & Transport	34,176	15,901	11,274	7,000	-
Playing Pitch Investment	3,000	-	3,000	-	-
New Swimming Pool - initial works	1,000	-	1,000	-	-
Environmental Improvements & Enhancements	4,452	452	2,000	2,000	-
Pride in Your High Street	6,142	1,142	5,000	-	-
Housing Schemes	8,597	8,597	-	-	-
Other Schemes	6,033	4,051	1,582	400	-
	-				
Total	148,005	36,344	47,156	47,400	17,104

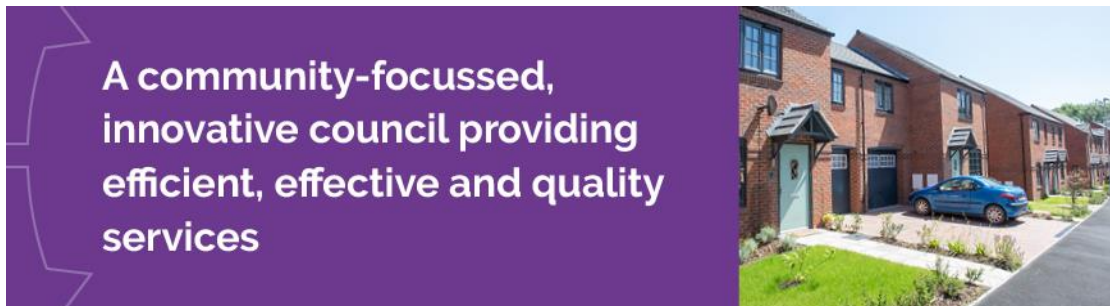


16.5 Our natural environment is protected, and the Council is taking a leading role in tackling the climate emergency

In October 2019, the Council recognised the climate emergency by committing to make the operation of the Council and the borough carbon neutral by 2030. We are committed to protecting our heritage and habitats too, protecting biodiversity both in the way in which the Council delivers its services but also through local planning policy

Capital	Total £'000	2021/22 £'000	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000
Climate Change	3,994	494	3,500	0	0
LED Lighting Invest To Save	280	280	0	0	0
DeCarbonisation Schemes	1,374	1,374	0	0	0

Total	5,648	2,148	3,500	0	0
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16.6 A community-focussed, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services

To deliver our community priorities, we will maximise the use of our resources, ensuring that we work efficiently and effectively together as one system, one organisation. We will continue to develop and support our workforce, our ICT systems and data, and our financial resources. Our decisions about how we do this will be informed by robust engagement and consultation with communities, businesses, partners and stakeholders

Capital	Total £'000	2021/22 £'000	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000
Capital Investment Fund	20,000	-	10,000	10,000	-
Asset Management Plan	2,233	833	700	700	-
ICT Investment	7,092	3,051	2,041	2,000	-
Efficiency Capitalisation	8,222	2,000	4,222	2,000	-
Other Schemes	3,272	1,250	1,165	857	-
Total	40,820	7,134	18,129	15,557	-

16.7 Due to the tight financial position faced by the Council the scope for significant new ongoing revenue investments over and above those outlined above is limited.

16.8 The Council has always said that it will meet the assessed needs of vulnerable adults and children and in order to do this next year, significant additional investment will be made available to Adult Social Care totalling £6.96m after allowing for planned savings by 2023/24. In total the net budget for Adult Social Care and Children's Safeguarding will exceed £90m next year.

- 16.9 A number of pressure areas were also addressed during development of the base budget as explained in Appendix 7. These ensure that the proposed budget is robust and sustainable.
- 16.10 The Council's significant capital programme which totals over £318m and is summarised in the capital programme report included as part of this suite of MTFs reports. It represents a very significant set of investment proposals and demonstrates the Council's commitment to **Protect, Care and Invest to Create a Better Borough**. The proposed package of capital investments will bring significant benefits to the Borough.
- 16.11 The capital programme includes a new Capital Investment Fund. This will supplement existing investments, along with allocation of some existing revenue reserves, to further support our "On Your Side" programme. This programme aims to help the Borough bounce back after the impacts of the pandemic, supporting residents as much as we are able to and to tackle key priorities for our residents.
- 16.12 The Council's existing funding allocation for Nuplace gives tenants in the private rental sector the opportunity to rent high quality, well maintained homes from a long-term responsive landlord and by increasing competition in this sector of the housing market standards will be driven up. The initiative has already seen:-
- 420 homes delivered, across nine sites with a further 58 under construction or refurbishment, bringing the total number of houses delivered, or in delivery to 478. Of these properties, 80 are for affordable rent or built to an adaptable standard, with the remainder being rented on the open market.
 - Nuplace's growing portfolio now provides a range of homes for over 1,000 people across the Borough with houses available within North and South Telford and Newport.
 - The diversification of Nuplace by the establishment of Telford & Wrekin Homes, involving the acquisition, refurbishment and rental of properties at locations across the Borough. This will continue to raise standards in the private rented sector.
 - In response to the Council's commitment to become carbon neutral across Council operations by 2030, solar panels and electric car charging points are being installed to 46 homes off Southwater Way to reduce energy bills for tenants.
 - The programme has resulted in over 28.6 acres of brownfield land being regenerated, addressing sites that might otherwise blight communities.
 - The portfolio is performing well with a cumulative void rate of 1.87% since the first site was opened.
 - Since 2015/16 - cumulative net incremental income of £6.1m has been generated for the Council which has benefitted front line services such as social care services.

- In addition, Council Tax and New Homes Bonus payments are estimated to have generated an additional £3.0m cumulatively to the end of March 2022.
- The Nuplace investment portfolio has experienced strong capital growth. Cumulative growth in the portfolio is 27% to the end of March 2021 and net equity within NuPlace's accounts totals £30.9m.
- In addition to delivering much needed housing, the programme has delivered considerable added value in terms of local employment, apprenticeships, supply chain development and the delivery of a range of community projects.
- Since 2015/16, Nuplace has delivered a cumulative profit before tax of £2.37m. (£1.79m after tax).

This MTFS now proposes that the Council makes additional funding of £19.7m available to further develop NuPlace and Telford & Wrekin Homes. In total, the Council's investment in NuPlace and Telford & Wrekin Homes will grow to £130.9m, currently approved funding and this additional investment has the potential to deliver an additional 402 homes which is anticipated to bring the total portfolio to 880 units.

16.13 The Council's existing £59.65m Growth Fund, which has now operated for 5 years:-

- Enables the Council to provide land, build and lease bespoke properties and offer a full turnkey solutions, and continues to drive a high number of investment enquiries drawing in new investors.
- The Fund has supported a range of commercial opportunities including new industrial units at T54, supporting the growth and expansion of current business such as Filtermist and providing grow on space for new businesses at Hortonwood West. Investment has also supported the delivery of Ni.Park (Newport), a new employment park for the Borough.
- Cumulatively, the £52.7m investment to date through the Growth Fund is estimated to deliver an ongoing gross return of 7.5%, 4.9% after borrowing costs but more importantly this project is attracting and retaining jobs for residents of the Borough.
- The funding committed to date in to a range of investments is anticipated to help deliver approximately 1000 new jobs and safeguard more than 250 jobs.
- The investment is also delivering growth in business rates income (between resets). The additional business rates of over £500,000 pa is being invested directly into delivering front line services across all the Borough's communities.

This MTFS now proposes that the Council makes additional funding of £37.6m available to further support Growth Fund initiatives.

16.14 Both NuPlace and The Growth Fund deliver significant benefits for residents and help deliver the Council's priorities. They also provide a net revenue benefit to the Council which is used to invest in front line services such as Adult Social Care. Details of capital investments are

included in the capital programme report included in this suite of MTFs reports.

17. COUNCIL TAX

- 17.1 Council Tax in Telford & Wrekin has historically been low compared to other councils. Indeed, it has been the lowest across both the West and East Midlands for the last 4 years for the services that this Council provides. Appendix 1 is a graph comparing Council Tax levels across the Midlands region and demonstrates that Council Tax in this area is the lowest in the Midlands region at Band D (£1,421.02). The average Council Tax at Band D in the Midlands region is more than 13% higher than in Telford & Wrekin.
- 17.2 Appendix 2 compares our Council Tax to the other unitary authorities in England and shows that we have the fifth lowest Council Tax at Band D out of 59 unitary authorities being £185.61 less pa than the average for unitary authorities of £1,606.63 which is also 13% higher than our level at Band D.
- 17.3 If Telford & Wrekin Council had levied a Council Tax at the average level of Midlands authorities (£1,610.86 at Band D which is £189.84 higher than in Telford & Wrekin) in the current year, we would have generated an additional £9.943m this year.
- 17.4 A further factor that has reduced resources in this area is “grant damping” whereby grant that the Government has calculated should be paid to this Council is withheld and used to support spending by councils that would otherwise receive less grant e.g. as a result of reducing population numbers. In the calculations used to establish the current local government finance system which came in to effect from 1st April 2013, £1.6m pa of this loss was perpetuated in the new baseline funding settlement for the Council and will be withheld from us – equivalent to a cumulative loss of over £16m by 2022/23.
- 17.5 As well as a comparatively low level of Council Tax, this area also has comparatively low property values with the majority of our properties being in Council Tax Bands A or B. 61.2% of total chargeable dwellings in Telford & Wrekin are in these two bands, compared to the average across all unitary authorities of just 49.0%. Whilst this is relatively good news for local residents in terms of their Council Tax bill and although we appreciate that Council Tax bills are a significant cost for local households, it means that we do not have the same scope to generate income from Council Tax as many other parts of the country where levels of Council Tax are much higher and average property values are also higher so a 1% increase raises considerably more per property than it does in Telford & Wrekin.

17.6 Despite the significant withdrawal of Government grant from the Council over the last 10 years, the Council has worked hard to keep Council Tax in Telford & Wrekin as low as possible recognising the financial pressures that our residents face despite the Government's deliberate and sustained policy of shifting the cost of funding local government services away from grants from central government and on to council taxpayers. The LGA have said "*council tax represented 45 per cent of council core spending in 2010/11, but by 2020/21 it had risen to 60 per cent. Council tax rises - particularly the adult social care precept - have never been the answer to the long-term pressures faced by councils. Councils will still have to find savings to already stretched budgets in order to plug funding gaps and meet their legal duty to set a balanced budget*".

17.7 In both the CSR and the local government finance settlement the Government have assumed that councils will increase their level of council tax by the maximum permitted without incurring the costs of a referendum. In this council's case this Government assumption is that we will increase our council tax by a total of 3% including the ASC precept. However, the Council is very aware of the pressure that many households are facing arising from the pandemic and from escalating energy, food and other costs placing considerable pressure on household finances. Therefore, despite the Government's assumptions over council tax increases, **Telford & Wrekin Council are committing to freeze our level of general council tax for both 2022/23 and for 2023/24. The Council will apply the Governments' assumed 1% Adult Social Care precept next year.** This will raise £0.767m towards the £5.16m net additional investment required in Adult Social Care next year. The 1% ASC precept would represent the average increase across the whole borough in the Telford & Wrekin part of the council tax bill and may vary slightly for individual households dependent which part of the borough they are located within and would amount to £0.21 per week for the average (Band B) property in the Borough. The increase in the total bill for each household will also be affected by the decisions of the Police & Crime Commissioner, The Fire Authority and individual town and parish councils.

18. BASE BUDGET, BALANCES AND CONTINGENCIES

18.1 Base Budget

A summary of the Base Budget position is included at Appendix 6 which shows a net base budget of £145.41m for 2022/23 after reflecting the investments set out in this report but before deducting the savings proposals. Assuming a council tax ASC precept increase of 1% for next year and that all the savings put forward are agreed leaves no residual funding gap and therefore no use of balances is required. Appendix 7 includes an analysis of the main changes in moving from the 2021/22 budget to the 2022/23 base budget.

18.2 Balances

- 18.2.1 Appendix 9 summarises the overall reserves and balances position of the Council after taking account of the various earmarked reserves and the risks faced by the Council. This currently shows over £20m available which could be taken in to account as part of medium term budget strategy considerations, excluding the current projection for unused 2021/22 corporate contingency of £2.81m shown in the Financial Management report also on this agenda which, on current projections, will also be available to support the MTFs in future years.
- 18.2.2 The Government offered Councils the ability to fund the one-off costs of service reform projects from new capital receipts generated during a three year period commencing from 1st April 2016, which was subsequently extended to a six year period (up to and including 2021/22) as part of the provisional settlement on 19th December 2017. Taking advantage of this opportunity offered by the Government will result in higher levels of debt than would have otherwise have been the case and therefore higher debt charges as all capital receipts would otherwise be used to fund planned capital projects. However, whilst the debt charges are ongoing they will be more than offset by the ongoing savings generated from the invest to save measures. In order to take advantage of this flexibility Full Council need to approve an updated “Efficiency Strategy” which is included as Appendix 16. It has been assumed that this flexibility which was due to come to an end in March 2022 will be extended again. In addition to this flexibility, the Council also holds some specific funds to support service transformation. Currently the uncommitted balance in the Severance fund is £1.1m. The Council also operates an Invest to Save/Capacity Fund.
- 18.2.3 The total “usable” one-offs detailed in Appendix 9 will be used to support the delivery of the MTFs as set out in this report. Given the exceptionally high level of uncertainty over the Council’s medium term financial position as previously highlighted in this report, it is important to retain as much flexibility as possible by limiting the use of available one-offs until the medium term position becomes clearer. It is possible to fund some costs budgeted from revenue resources from capital resources where the relevant definition of capital expenditure is met. This is an important flexibility which may be used at year end to supplement revenue reserves if considered in the best overall interests of the Council. The level of usable one-offs gives a good level of comfort that the proposals contained in this report are financially robust given the projected levels of spending in Children’s Safeguarding and Adult Social Care in 2022/23 have been fully allowed for in the proposed budget. The council also has £8.92m of general fund funding set aside for the one-off costs of implementing single status which may not all be required and which certainly won’t be required in 2022/23 and a £10m revenue reserve for Investment in Council Priorities. Having adequate uncommitted one-off resources is particularly important as the significant benefits obtained in recent years from

treasury management activities cannot be assumed to be available in future years, given potential changes to the guidance relating to Minimum Revenue Provision calculations and expectations that interest rates will increase.

18.3 Risk Management and Financial Resilience

18.3.1 Local Government has faced unprecedented financial challenges since 2010 and the Council has faced significant grant cuts at a time when demand for many services, such as safeguarding vulnerable children and adults, have been increasing. We are also in a period of considerable financial uncertainty due to another 1 year funding settlement (despite the three year CSR) and with expectations that some aspects of the much delayed reforms of the Local Government finance system will be implemented over the medium term but no information currently available to model what impact these might have on the Council. As an organisation that provides a vast range of essential services to the community and spends over £500m per annum financial resilience and risk management are very important considerations when agreeing our MTFS.

18.3.2 The key elements underpinning the Council's Financial Resilience are:

- **Setting a robust budget strategy which is deliverable and sustainable**
 - ✓ The Council has a long proven track record of strong financial management, with no overspends over the past 10 years and has consistently received an unqualified audit opinion from its external auditors
 - ✓ The Council has successfully delivered £133.7m of budget savings since 2009/10
 - ✓ Although very challenging, many savings have been phased over a number of years to allow adequate time for full consideration, consultation and implementation and in order to identify alternatives that mitigate impacts on our community.
 - ✓ An Invest to Save/Capacity Fund is in place to provide additional resources for priority areas and to assist with the delivery of savings; bids are subject to a rigorous business case development and approval process.
 - ✓ The Council has a comprehensive employee restructuring programme which is used consistently and supported by clear, costed rationales to support reductions in ongoing costs whilst maintaining the delivery of essential services and minimising compulsory redundancies as far as possible – only 10.5% of the posts that have been deleted to date have been as a result of compulsory redundancy.
 - ✓ Where required, additional investment has been included in the budget including, £5.16m additional net investment

in Adult Social Care has been allowed for in 2022/23 rising to £6.96m by 2023/24.

- ✓ Provisions are included in the accounts where required, to safeguard against potential costs, for example for bad debts and Appeals against NDR valuations.

- **Strong and Effective Financial Management**

- ✓ A robust risk based financial monitoring regime is in place to identify any adverse variances early so that corrective financial management action can take place. Additional in year savings targets have been delivered when necessary to meet service pressures when necessary.
- ✓ A strong and proactive financial management approach is adopted by budget holders supported by their nominated finance officer.
- ✓ The Council retains a good level of reserves and balances for the medium term strategy.
- ✓ The projected financial outturn for 2021/22 currently shows that £2.81m of the revenue budget contingency should be available at year end.
- ✓ Cost Improvement plans are in place to focus on Children's Safeguarding & Family Support and Adult Social Care, areas of high demand and high cost. These are monitored on a regular basis by Senior Managers and Members.
- ✓ All reports considered by SMT and Cabinet are required to include financial and legal comments prepared by suitably qualified officers to ensure that financial and legal implications are clearly understood before decisions are taken.
- ✓ Decisive corporate action is taken on a timely basis to manage the Council's overall resources in order to address pressures as they, inevitably, arise during the year given the complex disparate range of services provided by the Council.

- **Strong & Effective Capital & Treasury Management**

- ✓ There is an effective Treasury Management Strategy which aims to maximise returns for the Council while minimising risks with a solid long track record of exceeding targets set and always complying with Treasury management parameters.
- ✓ Long term interest rates are allowed for in the budget projections despite still holding around £26m of total debt in short term loans (at the time of writing this report) the majority running at rates below 1%. This enables the Council to lock in to longer term fixed rate loans when advised to do so by our external Treasury Advisors without impacting on the medium term financial projections included in this report.

- ✓ Treasury management decisions are managed at a strategic level in order to deliver best value rather than individual loans being taken out for spending on each separate capital project which often span several years.
- ✓ Funding capital assets (i.e. assets that have a long life) from borrowing ensures that the cost of the asset is charged to the revenue account over the useful life of the asset. Clearly if all assets were paid for directly from revenue, current taxpayers would be paying for assets that will still be available to taxpayers many years in the future.
- ✓ All capital investment proposals are subject to a rigorous business case development process to manage and mitigate risks as far as possible and are funded in accordance with the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy after taking advice from professional external advisors.
- ✓ Capital Programme resources are available, in accordance with the Prudential Code of Borrowing and capacity may exist to capitalise expenditure planned to be funded from revenue and in extreme circumstances the Minister may authorise an application for a capitalisation direction.
- ✓ A Capital Programme Board meets regularly to drive delivery of the capital programme and manage overall available resources. This is chaired by the Chief Executive and membership includes all Executive Directors, the C.F.O. and all Directors with significant capital projects.

- **Reserves & Balances**

- ✓ The Council has General Fund and Special Fund balances as a safeguard against unforeseen costs. A rigorous review of reserves and balances has been undertaken and identified those that are available to support the medium term strategy.
- ✓ One-off resources will be retained as far as possible to provide financial flexibility due to the high degree of uncertainty over the future financial outlook.
- ✓ In extreme emergency circumstances, general balances and some other funds that have been set-aside for specific purposes could be used and then replaced as part of a future strategy.
- ✓ The Council holds £8.92m set aside for one-off costs associated with the equal pay settlement. This is a significant sum which will be reviewed as modelling work on the likely cost of the eventual settlement is firmed-up.
- ✓ Contingencies have been built into the revenue budget: A general contingency of £3.95m in 2022/23 is held within the corporate core with, in total, a further £2.794m for inflation also held centrally;

- **Strategic Risk Management**

- ✓ The Council has a strategic risk register which is used to identify the substantive issues which may impact negatively on the delivery of the Council's priorities and may also have a financial impact. This is regularly reviewed by Senior Management Team to manage risks and mitigate potential exposures both as part of everyday business and as part of decision making processes.
- ✓ The current Strategic Risk Register is included as Appendix 3 of this report.

Reducing Dependency on Government Funding

- ✓ Despite financial challenges, the Council has a clear goal to attract new jobs and investment and promote growth in the borough and is committed to an investment programme which will safeguard the prosperity of the borough – growth will result in additional Council Tax, new homes bonus and business rates pending proposed changes to the local government finance system and periodic resets of the system thereafter.
- ✓ The Council has adopted innovative ways to improve quality of life for residents including Nuplace, its wholly owned housing company which provides tenants in the private rental sector the option of renting a high quality home from a long-term and responsive landlord. The solar farm, The Telford Land Deal (a unique joint arrangement with the Marches LEP and Homes England) and the Telford Growth Fund all bring significant benefits to residents and a net financial benefit after covering all associated costs is also generated which is used to help support the provision of front line services.

- **Insurance Arrangements**

- ✓ Appropriate insurance arrangements are in place to safeguard the council's assets and protect against liabilities.

- **Experienced Finance Team**

- ✓ The Council employs an in-house finance team who work closely with service managers developing good working relationships and understanding of the issues and pressures facing services.
- ✓ The Council's finance team includes a good mix of qualified accountants, accounting technicians and other staff with extensive experience built up in the Council, in other public sector organisations and the private sector.
- ✓ The Council makes sufficient resources available to the Section 151 Officer to enable comprehensive financial management controls to be maintained.

- ✓ The Council employs an experienced S.151 Officer who is a member of the Council's Senior Management Team reporting directly to the Chief Executive.
- ✓ The Council has an experienced Cabinet Member for Council Finance,
- ✓ Regular Financial Management reports are produced for and considered by the Senior Management Team and for Cabinet and appropriate action is taken to manage pressures as they arise.
- ✓ Specialist external knowledge is commissioned for specific projects where appropriate.

18.3.3 These factors, together with the Council's long track record of effective financial management over what has been an exceptionally challenging period of austerity, which was unprecedented both in scale and duration, closely followed by a pandemic provide a level of assurance that the Council is both financially competent and in a sound financial position despite the further challenges that the Council will inevitably continue to face.

18.3.4 MRP Consultation - DLUHC launched a consultation on proposed changes to capital finance regulations in respect of Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) calculations. The consultation closed on 8th February 2022 and the main changes, if approved without amendment, are proposed to take effect from the 2023/24 financial year. The proposals for change relate to the exclusion of a proportion of debt from the MRP calculation, particularly relating to investment assets, capital loans and some operational assets. The current rationale for this approach is that the asset will retain its value and therefore can be sold, with the capital receipt being used to reduce the capital financing requirement (CFR) instead of MRP. Some authorities make no MRP on these assets, while others make a significantly reduced charge by only calculating MRP. DLUHC does not believe this is a sufficiently prudent approach and proposes to remove the current discretion. Clearly this is a consultation at this stage and is not proposed to come into effect until April 2023. Discussions with our auditors have confirmed that no changes are required for either the current financial year or for 2022/23 but that if the consultation results in clarification that MRP should be allowed in all cases that the Council would prepare the budget for 2023/24 and later years on this basis. The Council, along with many others, has responded to the consultation to highlight unintended consequences that may arise if the proposed change is implemented.

18.4 Inflation Assumptions and Contingencies

18.4.1 The pay award for 2021/22 has not been settled at the time of preparing this report. The Council's budget model for future years includes an allowance of 2.75% for scale point one and 1.75% for all other scale points which is in line with the employers' final offer for 2021/22. An allowance of 1.75% has been built in for 2022/23 and

1.25% pa for the period 2023/24 to 2025/26. After many years of considerable pay restraint which have seen the pay of council employees cut in real terms by 25% compared to RPI (and considerably more for the most senior roles) there is a risk that the Council may not be able to retain or attract suitably skilled staff to deliver services in what is now a very challenging environment. Therefore in some areas additional “market factor” allowances are applied to aid recruitment and retention.

18.4.2 In accordance with practice in recent years, no allowance has been built in for general inflation, although provision for contractually committed inflation increases and Adult Social Care costs has been made.

18.5 Single Status

18.5.1 The Council is continuing its work to enable the implementation of a new job evaluation scheme to meet the requirements of the Single Status legislation. A considerable amount of work has been undertaken, including developing a comprehensive local Job Evaluation scheme. Work is progressing with the trades unions to ensure that the local job evaluation scheme has been applied in a fair and consistent way. Phases one and two of this work have been completed and work on Phase three which covers Council based employees is currently underway. This is an important process which takes time to complete accurately.

18.5.2 An allowance for the additional ongoing costs arising from single status has been built in to the budget for 2024/25 of £1.27m onwards. This is after allowing for existing commitments against the funding previously earmarked e.g. to meet the costs of moving away from fixed point grades and some additional payments for social workers to reflect market rates. It is also in the context of introducing a local job evaluation scheme that is expected to have a lower on-going cost than previously assumed. In addition to the ongoing budgetary provision £8.92m one-off funding was set aside several years ago to meet any one-off costs associated with implementing the Single Status agreement. As work progresses on the project it will be possible to assess how appropriate this level of one-off resource is.

19. REFORM OF FUNDING FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE

19.1 In September 2021 the Government published their policy paper “Build Back Better: Our Plan for Health and Social Care” laying out a commitment to creating a sustainable adult social care system. The Government have said that their planned transformation to adult social care is intended to “offer choice, control and independence to care users, provide an outstanding quality of care and be fair and accessible to all who need it, when they need it”.

19.2 The Government also made a commitment to ensuring Local Authorities were given access to sustainable funding for core budgets at the Spending Review although they stated an expectation that demographic and unit cost pressures will be met through Council Tax, the Adult Social Care precept and long-term “efficiencies”. They highlighted an investment of £5.4 billion in adult social care over the next three years to deliver the funding and system reform commitments set out in their Policy paper. This funding made available from the new National Insurance Levy.

19.3 To begin this planned transformation they said they would:-

- Introduce a cap on personal care costs - this is to be implemented from October 2023 at a value of £86,000 and is intended to ensure people will no longer face unpredictable or unlimited care costs. Once the cap is reached, local authorities will pay for all eligible personal care costs. In November 2021 DHSC guidance confirmed that only the amount contributed by the person themselves counted towards the cap and not the total cost of the care
- Provide financial assistance to those without substantial assets – a new means test is to be introduced at the same time so anyone with assets of between £20,000 and £100,000 will be eligible for some means-tested support. In comparison, the current higher limit is £23,250. People would still be expected to pay a contribution from their income and this may continue even when their assets fall below £20,000. The planned changes will also allow self-funders to ask their Local Authority to arrange their care for them.
- Deliver wider support for the social care system, particularly social care staff; there was a commitment of £500m investment over 3 years in new measures to support the workforce.
- Improve the integration of health and social care systems. They plan to co-produce a comprehensive national plan for supporting and enabling integration between health and social care which is intended to support existing plans on integration to go faster, changing the relationship between the individual and their local health and care system, and between local systems and national government

19.4 The CSR confirmed the £5.4bn already announced. Of this £3.6bn to be provided to local government to cover the costs of implementing the charging reforms, including the cap, the increased capital limit, moving towards paying a fair rate of care and the associated implementation costs. The allocation of this funding over the CSR period is intended to reflect when the impact of these changes will fall; as a result, more funding is available in later years, with £0.2bn in 2022/23 rising to £2bn by 2024/25. (As part of the provisional funding settlement for next year, Telford & Wrekin Council’s allocation from the “Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund” was set at £0.522m.) The remaining £1.7bn will go towards wider improvements to the social care system, including the £0.5bn investment to improve skills, qualifications and

wellbeing of staff in the care workforce. More detail on the use of the remainder of the £1.7bn is expected before 2022/23.

20. EDUCATION FUNDING – DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT

- 20.1 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in 2022/23 will be allocated using four blocks:
- 20.2 **Schools Block** - £142.5m, funding for all mainstream primary and secondary schools via a local funding formula, although the Government is planning to move to a nationally determined funding formula in future. The amount in the block for Telford & Wrekin has increased by around £7m compared to 2021/22, due to an increase in per pupil funding of just under 3% and an increase in pupil numbers, particularly in the secondary sector. The government has also allocated an additional supplementary grant of £4.1m for 2022/23 to provide support for the costs of the Health and Social Care levy and wider costs, making a funding total of £146.6m.
- 20.3 **High Needs Block** - £30.6m, funding for Special Educational Needs (SEN) placements and support, special schools, pupil referral units and other alternative provision. The value of this block has increased by around £2.5m compared to 2021/22, broadly reflecting the national average increase. The increase in this block in recent years reflects severe budget pressures in this area. The Government has also allocated an additional supplementary grant of £1.1m in 2022/23 to provide support for the costs of the Health and Social Care levy and wider costs, making a funding total for the area of £31.7m.
- 20.4 High needs will remain an area of significant financial pressure in Telford & Wrekin, as well as many other Local Authorities, due to the upwards trend in the number and complexity of children and young people with high needs. The lack of flexibility in the deployment of DSG funding means that the Authority is dependent on DfE allocations of high needs funding being sufficient to meet demand. Services are working to make local provision both educationally and financially sustainable, in particular by supporting mainstream schools to be as inclusive as possible.
- 20.5 **Early Years Block** - £12.7m – funding for free entitlement provision for 2, 3 and 4 year olds. Since September 2017 publicly funded provision has been extended from 15 hours per week (in term-time) to 30 hours per week for children of working parents. Funding is allocated to settings, both schools and private, voluntary and independent (PVI) providers based on a local funding formula. Telford & Wrekin's funding has increased by just under 4% for 2022/23. Cost pressures impacting upon settings include the year on year increases in the national minimum wage. As early years allocations are based upon numbers of children in two January censuses, January 2022 and January 2023 for

financial year 2022/23, the allocations are provisional until final adjustments are made after the financial year end (Summer 2023 for financial year 2022/23).

- 20.6 **Central School Services Block – £1.1m** - funding for Local Authority central services, which in the main are statutory. The Education Services Grant (ESG) ceased at the end of August 2017 and the Government created this new DSG block specifically for central services. However, the amount allocated is far lower than the previous ESG and Local Authorities need to secure Schools Forum approval for central services costs, despite the services being statutory responsibilities of the local authority.
- 20.7 In 2022/23, for the first time, we will also be asking maintained schools in Telford & Wrekin to de-delegate funding for the local authority's statutory school improvement functions. To date, these have been funded by the DfE's "School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant". This is to be removed by the DfE, half in 2022/23 and the remaining half in 2023/24. No alternative funding is being provided, although local authorities' statutory functions remain unchanged. Nationally, the value of the grant is £50m, whilst for Telford & Wrekin it was worth £0.182m in 2021/22.
- 20.8 Pupil premium rates have been increased by around 3% with the 2022/23 rates per eligible pupil being as follows:
- Primary pupils eligible for free school meals at any time over the last six years (FSM6): £1,385
 - Secondary FSM6 pupils: £985
 - Looked-after children: £2,410
 - Children who have ceased to be looked-after: £2,410
 - Service children: £320

21. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 21.1 Equality Impact Assessment is a tool that is used to ensure our decision making takes into consideration the protected characteristics with regard to the General Equality Duty (GED). In short we must demonstrate that we pay due regard to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations. We need to assess and analyse the practical impact on those whose needs are affected by changes to the way that we deliver our services or to our spending. We have adopted a proportionate approach that takes into account the relevance of a proposal with regard to equality. This is a measured response recognising that our resources are best aimed at dealing with

those proposals that could have the most significant impact. In order to accomplish this we have followed a process designed to screen proposals and ensure that they are fully explored.

- 21.2 Our process involves carrying out an initial scoping exercise to determine which budget saving proposals may require action or further investigation with regard to equality impact. For proposals where implications are identified and are at a sufficiently developed state a proportionate impact assessment is undertaken. Where a proposal is still at an early stage of development, an equality impact assessment will be undertaken during its development. This is an ongoing process that will continue throughout the year. As we engage with our community and partners to identify where we may need to deliver services differently we will ensure that we continue the process of screening these proposals to identify if there are any equality implications.

22. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

- 22.1 As outlined earlier in the report, we will continue to work closely with a range of community groups and Town and Parish Councils to develop alternative ways of delivering services. By engaging with residents and other partners it can be possible to find alternative ways of delivering those services that support our community. We will continue to engage with a range of partners and service users (experts by experience) who could assist in developing alternative service solutions in those areas that have potential to impact upon our residents.
- 22.2 The focus of the 4 week budget engagement process this year has been on communicating our strategy for developing the MTFS to our partners and wider community and seeking to open an ongoing dialogue with them about how we can continue to work differently together in order to make best use of available resources. This has involved clear communication in relation to where the Council intends to spend its budget, the proposed freeze of the general level of council tax for two years and the application of the Government's 1% ASC precept next year and highlighted the areas for new investment. The Council's MTFS was published on our website, information was provided on social media and was supported by wider media communications. People were given an opportunity to comment on these proposals by email, telephone or social media. Social media polling showed that residents were overwhelmingly in favour of a two year general council tax freeze. Of 631 votes across three platforms (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), 94.6% agreed with the freeze, 3.2% disagreed and 2.2% were not sure.
- 22.3 As part of our engagement process we have also commenced dialogue with our partners in the voluntary and community sector, with Town and Parish Councils and with businesses. These online consultation

sessions involved presentations on our MTFS and provided more detailed information about the challenges we face. The sessions also included an opportunity for us to take stock with our partners on the development of our Equality and Diversity Strategy.

- 22.4 Some common themes were explored across these sessions. An ongoing theme continues to be a focus on collaborative working and ensuring that we are all making the most of the limited resources we have. The importance of an ongoing dialogue and sharing information was also identified and how the Council can best support them with this.
- 22.5 As outlined above, communication of the Council's MTFS proposals has been the start of the process of more in depth engagement that will continue throughout the year. We will use the feedback from partners to enable us to work together as specific proposals relating to service delivery are developed. Our joined up approach to equality and consultation will ensure that we engage residents appropriately in relation to proposed changes to the delivery of Council services.

23. FEEDBACK FROM SCRUTINY

- 23.1 The Council's Business & Finance Scrutiny Committee is a politically balanced committee of eight non-Executive elected members and one co-opted member. The Committee is the main mechanism by which Cabinet consults annually with Scrutiny on the budget proposals.
- 23.2 The Committee held two meetings on 10 January and 17 January 2022 at which scrutiny was given to the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23-2025/26 agreed by Cabinet for consultation on 6 January 2022.
- 23.3 An alternative budget was not put forward by any opposition group.
- 23.4 The Committee would like to thank the Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance & Customer Service and the Chief Financial Officer for their presentations and answering questions to assist the Committee in its deliberations. The Committee also thanks those Officers involved in providing written responses to a number of questions raised.
- 23.5 Upon putting it to a vote, the Committee was unanimous to support the administration's budget approach. In particular, the Committee made the following observations:-
 - 23.5.1 The Committee supported the proposed two year freeze upon the general council tax 2022/23 – 23/24 but would apply the government's assumed 1% adult social care precept for next financial year.

23.5.2 The committee were supportive of the proposed budgets for Adult Social Care and Children Safeguarding revenue amounting to over £90 million equating to 65% of total net revenue budget outlined in the proposals.

23.5.3 The members understood the provisional 1 year funding settlement from the government and recognised the potential uncertainty over the remainder of the medium term financial strategy that runs to 2025/26 and that projections for future years will be updated as additional information becomes available

23.5.4 The Committee supported all the investments proposed in the budget strategy.

23.5.5 The Committee were understanding of the changes to the local government finance system that may be introduced in April 2023.

23.5.6 The Committee asked various questions around debt management and increases in the inflation rates currently being experienced nationally. Members were interested in how this would affect the council's finances over the next few years. Members were reassured that the Council had a general budget contingency of £3.95m for next year and a further £2.4m set aside within an inflation contingency, and that all aspects of debt management are monitored regularly by the Chief Finance Officer and his team as part of the regular financial monitoring that is reported back to cabinet on a regular basis throughout the year.

23.5.7 The Committee were pleased to see that the council continue to look for additional income streams, for better value of services procured from external providers, bringing in more investments and jobs into the Borough. This leads to an increased income stream from a more commercial approach to the services that Telford and Wrekin provide which helps to minimise the likelihood of cuts to our front line services.

23.5.8 The Committee and Chair thanked members for their questions over the proposals and for the Chief Financial Officer and his team who continue to monitor council's finances and especially in regards to the future of business rates retention and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

23.5.9 The Committee were complimentary of our council tax position of remaining the lowest in the Midlands region for four consecutive years and likely to remain so for 2022/23.

24. STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

24.1 As an organisation which provides a very wide range of different services to the community and spends revenue and capital resources in excess of £500m pa, the management of risks is an important

consideration in the budget setting process. The Council has a strategic risk register – included at Appendix 3, which is used to identify the substantive issues which may impact negatively on the delivery of the Council's priorities and may also have a financial impact. This is reviewed by the Senior Management Team to manage risks and mitigate potential exposures both as part of everyday business and as part of decision making processes and is also reviewed by the Council's Audit Committee.

25 PAY POLICY

- 25.1 The draft pay policy statement for 2022/23 which has been approved by members of the Personnel Committee informally, is included at Appendix 15. The Localism Act 2011 requires local authorities to produce an annual Pay Policy Statement. The Act requires the statement to detail the Council's policies in respect of remuneration at various tiers within the Council. The Act does not apply to local authority schools.
- 25.2 The purpose of these provisions is to provide transparency with regard to the Council's approach to setting the pay of its employees by determining:
- The methods by which pay is determined.
 - The detail and level of remuneration of its most senior staff
 - The Committees responsible for ensuring consistent application of the provisions set out in the Statement.
- 25.3 The Council's Pay Policy Statement details:-
- pay negotiation bodies,
 - initial allocation of pay points.
 - lowest paid employees and the ratio comparison with the highest paid officers.
 - Senior management remuneration.
 - the recruitment of chief officers
 - additions to chief officers pay
 - termination payments
 - where accountability and responsibility lies.

26. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

- 26.1 Each year Full Council is required to approve the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme for working age residents. Significant changes were made to the scheme in 2020/21. As was the case for 2021/22 there are no proposed changes to the scheme for 2022/23 except for up-rating of amounts within the scheme. The Council also has a Council

Tax Reduction Hardship Assistance fund and policy which is to continue during 2022/23. Details of both the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the Council Tax Reduction Hardship Assistance Policy are included in Appendix 14.

27. VARIATION TO WEST MERCIA ENERGY (WME) JOINT AGREEMENT.

- 27.1 Appendix 17 sets out a new formulae for the distribution to Member Authorities of any accumulated surplus of the WME Joint Committee which is recommended for approval to ensure an equitable profit sharing mechanism is in place between the Member Authorities participating in WME's procurement activity.

28. ROBUSTNESS OF THE FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND LEVELS OF RESERVES & BALANCES.

- 28.1 The Council is required to set a balanced budget and under section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, the Council's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) is required to report on the adequacy of the Council's reserves and balances and on the Council's financial strategy including the use of balances and of the financial planning process.

- 28.2 Appendix 10 gives a more detailed view, but overall:-
- given the continued successful delivery of savings which will total £133.7m by the end of this year,
 - the long-term service redesign, particularly in relation to Adults and Children's services,
 - the more commercial approach being adopted and the investment being made in the borough,

It is considered that the Council is pursuing a sound financial strategy, particularly in the context of both the pandemic and the most prolonged and challenging financial position it has ever faced due to the combined long-term effects of Government grant cuts and increased service pressures. Further, it is considered that the Council maintains an adequate level of reserves and provisions and has an appropriate medium term strategy for the use of reserves.

29. NEXT STEPS & TIMETABLE

- 29.1 Once the MTFs has been approved by full Council on 3 March 2022 and the Council Tax resolutions have been approved, it will be imperative that considerable resource is devoted to rigorous financial management and monitoring by all managers and budget holders. All managers need to effectively and proactively manage their budgets. Managers have a key role in the financial management of their services through use of the Agresso financial management system and

appropriate training to facilitate and support this continues to be made available.

- 29.2 The Council faces many financial challenges. There are many risks and uncertainties inherent in the financial system that was imposed by the Government during 2013/14. As made clear earlier in the report there is a very high level of uncertainty about how the new local government finance system now expected to be introduced from April 2023 will impact on the Council.
- 29.3 As well as exercising tight financial control and effective financial management, managers and Cabinet Members will continue working together to identify further savings and opportunities for additional income to bridge the anticipated budget shortfalls currently projected in 2023/24 and 2025/26. Developing options for consultation will involve discussion with partner organisations, service users and the community. The Council will need to actively respond to any additional consultation opportunities offered by the Government during 2022/23 around the new local government finance system and ensure that the implications of the final changes are understood and opportunities are maximised and the associated risks are effectively managed as far as possible.

30. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- LGFutures “Spending Review and Autumn Budget Briefing Note” dated 27 October 2021
- The MJ Bulletin Budget Special – 27 October 2021
- LGFutures briefing paper: “Local Government Funding Reform Decisions and Options” December 2021.
- Local Government Association 2021 Autumn Budget and Spending Review: On the Day Briefing - 27 October 2021
- DLUCH Website – provisional and final local government finance settlements
- LGA Website and Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2022/23: On the Day Briefing – 16 December 2022
- LGFutures Provisional Finance Settlement Briefing Note 2022/23 – 16 December 2021
- Local Government Association “Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2022/23 On the Day Briefing” - 16 December 2021
- APSE Briefing 21:47 - Autumn Budget and Spending Review Statement 2021
- Public Finance Magazine - Budget and Spending Review 2021: Sunak the taxman cometh 27 October 2021
- BBC News Website
- Revenue Support Grant Settlement Announcement – DLUHC Website
- LGA Chief Executive’s daily briefing – 26 November 2021
- Service & Financial Planning Report to Council – 4 March 2021
- MTFs Report to Cabinet – 6 January 2022

- Setting the Council Tax Base Report to Council – 13 January 2022
- Financial Monitoring Reports to Cabinet 6 January 2022 and 17 February 2022

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