

**TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL**

**CABINET – 18 FEBRUARY 2021  
FULL COUNCIL – 4 MARCH 2021**

**SERVICE AND FINANCIAL PLANNING 2021/22 – 2023/24**

**REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND THE CHIEF FINANCIAL  
OFFICER**

**LEAD MEMBERS Cllr S. DAVIES and Cllr. R. EVANS**

**1. SUMMARY.**

1.1 In October 2020, the Council's Cabinet agreed a refreshed Council Plan to deliver the organisation's vision to "**Protect, Care and Invest to Create a Better Borough**". The Plan sets out 5 revised 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 Service & Financial Planning strategy for 2021/22. This overview report, along with other linked reports on the agenda including:-

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

together, form the Council's overall Medium Term Service & Financial Planning framework and sets out the service priorities and budget for 2021/22.

1.3 On 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the Council approved a one year service and financial planning strategy for the current financial year. This strategy

was set after more than a decade of severe financial constraint caused by the Government's sustained austerity programme. During this period, the Council has had to make ongoing savings of £126.4m in order to set a balanced budget due to significant cuts to the grants provided by Government whilst, at the same time, demand for many services has increased significantly as has the cost of delivering many of them.

- 1.4 After the Comprehensive Spending Review was announced in November 2020, the Financial Times reported that *“England’s councils face austerity by stealth Sunak is giving local authorities extra flexibility to fund social care but council tax is struggling to replace central grants The Office for Budget Responsibility says ‘replacing some grant funding for local authorities with increased local funding via council tax increases’ will leave taxpayers paying an extra £1bn a year from 2021. UK chancellor Rishi Sunak appeared to make an attractive offer to English local authorities. He promised “extra flexibility” on raising funds for adult social care via council taxes “which together with £300m of new grant funding gives them access to an extra billion pounds to fund social care”. But while this suggested the chancellor was being generous with central government funds, in fact it was simply a suggestion to local authorities that they raise council tax rates much faster than inflation - something they have been doing since 2016”.*
- 1.5 The Government is therefore continuing the shift in responsibility for funding essential local government services from government grants to local council tax payers that has been in place for many years. **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 in 2021/22.”**
- 1.6 Councils are therefore faced with a stark challenge. After more than a decade of severe financial constraint which has forced significant budget savings (which in Telford & Wrekin Council's case have included increasing income from new commercial ventures such as NuPlace as well as significant budget cuts that have seen the workforce cut by over 1,600 posts) in order to meet the demand for services the Council will have to find more budget savings and also ask residents to pay more.

- 1.7 There is a high level of uncertainty over the future financial sustainability of councils. Some councils have already taken the unprecedented step of issuing section 114 notices, which freeze spending on all but essential items and require the council to reset its budget. Whilst Telford & Wrekin Council is not close to needing to issue a section 114 notice, there are many uncertainties facing the Council, which has the lowest council tax for the services that we provide across the whole of the Midlands region. This comparatively low level of council tax is not sustainable in the current financial climate. Whilst the Council has a track record of robust and effective financial management, and has adopted, by necessity, more commercial approaches to generate additional income in order to invest in the provision of front line services for our residents, the scope for further budget savings is more limited than previously as many activities have already faced very significant reductions. However, this report puts forward new proposals that will deliver ongoing savings, including from additional income, of over £7m by 2022/23.
- 1.8 The Council agreed a one year budget strategy for 2020/21 because the Government were proposing to make major changes to the local government finance system which were due to be implemented from April 2021 and in addition no Government spending figures were available beyond the end of the current year. A medium-term Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) was expected to be announced during 2020 which would have set out the Government's priorities over the medium term for public spending, taxation and the national budget deficit. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the uncertainties caused by this, the major planned reforms to the local government finance system have been postponed yet again with no date for implementation being announced. Due to the uncertainties arising from the pandemic, the CSR announced on 25 November 2020 again covers just a one year period. Therefore the long period of unprecedented uncertainty facing local government finance has been extended for at least a further year and has clearly been exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic on the Council and our communities.
- 1.9 In view of this significant uncertainty over the future of local government finance and what resources may be available to the Council beyond next year, and the uncertainties caused by the pandemic a one year service and financial planning strategy is therefore also proposed for 2021/22. However, capital projects need to be planned over a longer time horizon in order to achieve our priorities and ambitions for the community that we serve and therefore capital investment proposals are included in this report for 2021/22 and the following two years.
- 1.10 Key points of the strategy include:-

**Revenue Budget for 2021/22:-**

- Council Tax in Telford & Wrekin is currently the lowest across the Midlands region for the services that the Council provides (please see Appendices 1 and 2 for council tax comparisons). The average Council Tax at Band D in the Midlands region is more than 14% higher than in Telford & Wrekin. The Council continues to face increasing demands for many services including Adult Social Care. Whilst the Government have stated for a number of years that they will publish a green paper on how the increasing demand for Adult Social Care services being seen across the country should be funded no proposals have been issued, but rather, the Government have again suggested that the cost is funded by council tax payers by the application of a further Adult Social Care precept. It is therefore proposed that Council Tax for 2021/22 is increased by 1.99% and that the Council applies the Government's additional 3% "Adult Social Care precept" which in their funding projections, the Government have assumed will be applied by all eligible councils. This would give a total increase of 4.99%, raising £3.64m in total. 4.99% would be the average increase across the whole borough in the Telford & Wrekin part of the bill but will vary slightly for individual households. This equates to £1.01 per week for the average property in the Borough (Band B) and would help build ongoing financial sustainability for the Council for the medium term at a time when there are many uncertainties facing the Council and its financial position in future years. **Even after this increase, the Council is still expected 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.** 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.
- The Council recognises the financial pressures that many households also face and can offer support to those that will find this increase most challenging. In addition to the Council's council tax reduction scheme, the Council also offers an additional Council Tax Reduction Hardship Assistance Scheme for those residents that face very significant financial difficulties paying their council tax bill. The Council Tax Reduction Hardship Assistance Scheme is a discretionary scheme for which the Council receives no Government support but the Council will, this year, double the provision for this scheme to ensure that sufficient funding will be made available to cover all eligible claims.
- The Adult Social Care precept will raise £2.188m which will be fully invested in to Adult Social Care services to help fund increasing demands for, and the significantly rising costs of providing, these services. The Council's net budget for Adult Social Care next year will be over £47m
- The Council's net budget for Children's Safeguarding next year will be over £36m giving a total commitment to these two key areas of over £83m equivalent to over 60% of the total net revenue budget.
- Extra investment totalling £1m spread over 2021/22 and 2022/23 to support crime and anti-social behaviour initiatives over a two year

period. Along with partners, the Council has created multi-functional teams that work together to tackle issues of crime, disorder and quality of life within our towns and communities. Our approach continues to be data and intelligence led and allows the Council and its partners to have a robust approach in ensuring the borough is an even safer and cleaner place to live, work and visit. The Council is allocating this £1m towards delivery of a borough wide safer communities programme that will continue to build on the successful partnership with West Mercia Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). This two year programme is in development with implementation focused on data and intelligence led decision making and engagement with partners. This comes on the back of a £250,000 allocation by the council in 2019 match funded by the PCC to improve CCTV coverage in the borough.

- In order to cover rising demand for many services, inflationary cost pressures and to fund the new investment, a package of budget savings, including additional income generated by the Council's commercial activities, totalling £5.9m in 2021/22 rising to £7.139m in 2022/23 is required, together with
- The prudent use of £0.173m of available revenue balances to ensure a balanced budget for 2021/22 whilst retaining sufficient flexibility for the uncertain future that we face beyond 2021/22.

### **Medium-Term Capital Programme:-**

The medium term capital investment programme totalling £228.532m is summarised in the separate report also on this agenda and includes:-

- £65.3m further investment in to NuPlace – the Council's successful wholly owned housing company to provide good quality homes for rent, increasing the choice of homes available for people looking to rent from a high quality, responsible landlord with a commitment to providing secure long-term homes and will also regenerate some brown-field sites. Dividends paid by Nuplace together with other financial benefits including additional council tax and New Homes Bonus income will be used to help support key front line services including Adult Social Care and Children's Safeguarding. The Council has made a commitment to 'no return to rough sleeping' and continuing to provide an offer of accommodation to all rough sleepers or those threatened with having to sleep rough. Under this pledge, since March 2020, the Council has already provided emergency accommodation to over 350 individuals and supported over 250 into more permanent accommodation. Covid has also led to an increase in the number of individuals and families in the Borough finding themselves homeless or faced with

homelessness. To increase the provision of suitable accommodation and support to enable rough sleepers to sustain a tenancy and strengthen the supply of temporary accommodation alongside addressing the existing level of reliance on B&B and leased in accommodation, it is proposed to temporarily re-purpose £3m of the capital borrowing approved for Nuplace to finance the acquisition and refurbishment of accommodation for vulnerable groups by the Council.

- £40.7m for transport and Highways schemes including improvements to the A442 (to complete a 4 year scheme commencing in 2019/20 costing over £10m in total), and funding for repair of potholes, footways, drainage schemes, street furniture, refreshing road markings, road safety schemes, parking and sustainable travel schemes. The Council's continued commitment to investment in our highways has seen a significant improvement to our network in recent years which has, in part, been supported by our ability to successfully bid for external funding to support many initiatives.
- £25.7m for education capital projects including investment in secondary school expansion projects to increase pupil places
- £9.95m into Stronger Communities Project, a package focused on bringing back key brownfield sites into use, as well as providing a stimulus to the delivery of Station Quarter the next phase of the transformation of Telford Town Centre
- £9.65m for additional investment in the Council's Property investment portfolio which will attract new jobs, and retain companies that may otherwise leave the Borough if suitable premises are not available. Profits, and additional business rates, from these investments will be used to help fund key front line services including Adult Social Care and Children's Safeguarding.
- £6.9m for Pride in Your High Street schemes
- £6.5m investment in the Newport Innovation & Enterprise Package
- £5m for Environmental Improvements/ Enhancements
- £4m for Climate change initiatives with £0.14m available in 2020/21, £1.86m in 2021/22 and £2m in 2022/23 to support work to reduce the Council's carbon footprint and partnering with government and others on other climate change projects.

1.11 The severe financial constraints that the Council has had to operate within during a decade of austerity have necessitated very active budget management and financial control by Cabinet Members and officers across the Council. The Council has demonstrated a consistent strong track record of sound financial management delivering a financial outturn within budget and unqualified audit opinions for well over a decade despite having to deliver £126.408m annual budget savings by the end of 2020/21, equivalent to £700 for

every person living in the Borough, - without the need to implement any emergency spending control measures. The Council's external auditors have consistently reported that our arrangements for securing value for money are satisfactory and that the Council's current financial standing means that it is in a sound position to respond to challenges.

1.12 As stated above, when Full Council approved the service and financial planning strategy in March 2020, it was not considered appropriate or possible to set a detailed strategy beyond 2020/21 because the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), which sets the Departmental Expenditure Limits for each government department, only extended to 2020/21 and as a result The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MoHCLG) had only issued forward funding projections for councils to 2020/21.

1.13 A medium term CSR announcement had been expected during the autumn of 2020 which would have enabled a medium term settlement for local authorities to be announced by MoHCLG. However due to the uncertainties caused by the pandemic on 25 November 2020, the Chancellor, announced a further One Year CSR for 2020/21 and also announced that the medium-term Comprehensive Spending Review will be delayed for a year until sometime in 2021. Subsequently the Secretary of State has confirmed that implementation of the proposed changes to the local government finance system will all be deferred until at least April 2022 but very little information is available to indicate how this new system will operate and the impacts that the changes will have for individual local authorities. Indeed, it is unlikely that the Council will have any real clarity on its funding for 2022/23 and later years until we receive our settlement in December 2021, less than 4 months before the start of the financial year. The changes that will be implemented will potentially have very significant implications for the Council and are likely to include:-

- "Re-setting" the business rates system to reallocate the benefits of growth in the business rates base since April 2013 that have been retained by individual local authorities across the country,
- Potentially increasing the proportion of business rates income retained by councils, at a national level, to 75% but at the same time terminating other funding streams for example the remaining Revenue Support Grant and potentially Public Health Grant and/or transferring additional responsibilities to councils in order to retain "fiscal neutrality" at a national level.
- Implementing a new formula to assess the relative spending needs of all councils. This could potentially see significant shifts in resources across the country.
- Reviewing the New Homes Bonus system which is a significant funding source for Telford & Wrekin Council.
- Implementation of a transitional system to limit the amount that any council loses or gains from the introduction of these changes in any one year.

- Reflecting the implications of the Comprehensive Spending Review now expected in 2021 and the long awaited Adult Social Care green paper.
- 1.14 As information on the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review, now planned for 2021, and how the new local government finance system will operate become available it will be possible to model the potential impacts on the Council and to develop a medium term financial strategy for the period 2022/23 to 2024/25.
  - 1.15 Clearly, in addition to the uncertainties around the future national system of local government finance, the Council also faces additional uncertainties this year arising from the impacts of the pandemic. As there is a very high degree of uncertainty over the future financial outlook for the Council, it is essential to retain as much financial flexibility as possible by retaining uncommitted one-off resources which can be used to support the budget pending the identification of further ongoing savings, if these are required, and by minimising additional ongoing financial commitments as far as possible. This strategy therefore takes a prudent approach to the use of one-off resources, balanced against the need to make some ongoing savings and has limited the allocation of additional new investments to our highest priorities.
  - 1.16 The Council has faced a very protracted period of severe financial constraint as the Government has sought to reduce the national budget deficit in recent years. The national financial position has now been severely impacted by the Government's response to the impacts of the pandemic with the national budget deficit for 2020/21 reaching record levels. In recent years, the Government has protected many areas of public spending, notably the NHS, but not local government and it has been well documented that the cuts to local government have not been applied uniformly across the country but have hit areas with greater social need harder than average. The Council will have delivered £126.4m p.a. of ongoing budget savings by the end of the current financial year which is equivalent to around £1,600 less to spend each year on delivering services for every household in the borough or £700 for every adult and child. The Council has sought to make these savings in ways that protect front line services as far as possible and, where services to the public are affected, to do this in as compassionate a way as possible by looking to find new sources of income and by working hard to identify any alternative ways to work in partnership with other local organisations to ensure continuing service provision. The Council will continue with this approach.
  - 1.17 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.



- 1.18 The provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for next year was announced on 17 December 2020. This will see the Council's Revenue Support Grant increase by just £0.055m. Whilst New Homes Bonus grant will see a reduction of £2.85m (or more than 40%), no announcement had made for Public Health grant or a number of other grants at the time of drafting the report to Cabinet on 7 January.
- 1.19 The final settlement was received on 4 February 2021 which confirmed the figures for this Council in the provisional settlement as unchanged. Details of a number of other grants totalling over £12m. had 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 use of balances in 2021/22 to accommodate any difference in funding between that currently assumed and the final grant allocations after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Council Finance, Partnerships and Commercial Services.
- 1.20 In the CSR, it was announced that for 2021/22 councils would be allowed to increase Council Tax by up to 2% before a referendum was held plus 3% in respect of the Adult Social Care (ASC) precept. The ASC precept increase can potentially be phased in over 2 years. However, in announcing the funding available for councils next year, the Government have assumed that all eligible councils implement the full increase next year. For Telford & Wrekin, this would give a maximum increase of 4.99% next year which is equivalent to £1.01 per week for the average property in the Borough (Band B). A general council tax increase of 1.99% would raise around £1.4m and the ASC precept could raise just under £2.2m. After many years of severe financial constraint and with the need to make significant additional funding available for Adults, Cabinet Members have very carefully considered the options available to the Council. Given the £126.4m budget savings made over the past decade it is increasingly difficult to find further savings that do not have unacceptable impacts although this report does contain proposals for a further £5.9m of savings next year. Additionally, given the uncertainty facing the Council's future financial position and the need to find a sustainable ongoing solution to the funding challenges that we face use of remaining one-off resources has to be limited. This leaves council tax which currently is lower in Telford & Wrekin than anywhere else in the Midlands region for the services that this council provides. (Please see Appendices 1 and 2 for comparative information). We appreciate that local residents also face difficult choices in managing their household budgets, particularly given the impacts of the pandemic, but having considered the options available to us, the Council is reluctantly proposing to increase council tax by 4.99% for next year. This comprises the 3% Adult Social Care

precept (which will be used to increase the funding available for adult social care) and which the Government have assumed we will apply and a general council tax increase of 1.99%. The council offers reductions to council tax bills for residents on low incomes through its council tax reduction scheme and in addition has a Council Tax Reduction Hardship Assistance Scheme available for those that face the greatest hardship, the provision for which will be doubled next year.

- 1.21 The Council is firmly of the view that encouraging councils to increase Council Tax bills is no way to deal with the considerable national pressures of funding care of older people and that the Government needs to identify additional funding to cover these costs which will continue to escalate for the foreseeable future. In Telford & Wrekin a 1% Council Tax increase raises just £0.7m because Council Tax levels are comparatively low, as demonstrated in Appendices 1 and 2, and because the average property in this area is in Band B. Many wealthier parts of the country would raise significantly more from a 1% Council Tax increase as they will have many more properties in higher Council Tax Bands and generally tend to have better health and more “self-funders” and consequently have lower levels of demand for council-funded care. These views were endorsed by the chairman of the Local Government Association, Cllr James Jamieson, who has said: “Council tax rises – particularly the adult social care precept – have never been the answer to the long-term pressures faced by councils, particularly in social care, raising different amounts of money in different areas, unrelated to need. It is not the long-term solution which is desperately needed”.
- 1.22 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 but this does not mean that we can continue to deliver the same services in the same ways. We have to make changes but will always place priority on these essential services and will not let financial pressures due to Government cuts mean that we fail to meet the assessed statutory needs of the most vulnerable. To do this, we have also had to be innovative in identifying ways to generate more income to fund key front line services as well as seeking to address key issues for the Borough such as economic regeneration and improving housing standards in the private rented sector, examples include:-
- The total revenue benefit to the Council from NuPlace after covering all additional costs, last year was £1.176m.
  - NuPlace Ltd. made a pre-tax profit of £0.573m in 2019/20 which is expected to be slightly higher in 2020/21 and has increased the availability of high quality homes in the private rented sector managed by a committed and responsible landlord. In addition, Council Tax and New Homes Bonus payments are estimated to have generated an additional £2.3m cumulatively to the end of

March 2021 in total based on current build projections and NHB payment arrangements.

- Our solar farm generates a surplus after paying all costs of £200k pa.
- Our Telford Growth Fund continues to deliver ahead of expectations, attracting new and retaining existing jobs in the borough. Total revenue is projected to be £2.8m this year for the schemes committed to date (expected to increase to £3.3m for the schemes currently approved in a full year)
- Total income from our Commercial Services teams amounted to £21.2m last year.

The net benefits from these investments are used to support front line services.

## **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 delivery of savings which will total £126.4m 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 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 effect 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 5 March 2020:-

1. To approve the service and financial planning strategy for 2021/22 set out in this set of reports.
2. To approve a Council Tax increase of 4.99% (made up of 3% in respect of the Government's Adult Social Care Precept and a general Council Tax increase of 1.99%) in 2021/22.

3. To approve the investment of a further £2.375m into Adult Social Care in 2021/22.
4. To approve the investment of £0.5m in crime and anti-social behaviour measures in both 2021/22 and 2022/23.
5. To approve the budget savings listed in Appendix 13 totalling £5.900m in 2021/22 rising to £7.139m (after "leakage") in 2022/23.
6. To approve taking a measured approach to the use of available one-off resources of £0.173m in 2021/22.
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 £1.1m 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 policy framework for Reserves and Balances outlined in Appendix 9.
10. To note the CFO's robustness statement in Appendix 10.
11. To approve the Risk Register included at Appendix 3.
12. That Cabinet endorses the Council Tax Reduction Scheme included within Appendix 14, for adoption by Full Council on 4 March 2021, ready for implementation from 1 April 2021.
13. That Cabinet approves the continuation of the Council Tax Reduction Hardship Assistance Policy, including an addendum for 2021/22, within Appendix 14.
14. To approve the revenue implications of the medium term capital programme for the period 2020/21 - 2023/24 set out in the Capital Strategy and Programme reports also on this agenda.
15. To grant delegated authority to the Director: Finance & Human Resources, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance & Governance to action any virements required following the final allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant and other related Grants and following completion of NNDR1 and final estimates of Business Rates Income as long as they are within the budget and policy framework.
16. To approve the allocation of £9.65m from the Regeneration and Investment Fund to support the Property Investment Portfolio's Growth Fund, and gives delegated authority to the Director, Prosperity and Investment after consultation with the Director: Finance & H.R. and the Cabinet Member for Finance & Governance to consider business cases through this fund.
17. To approve the temporary re-purposing of £3m of the capital borrowing approved for Nuplace, to finance the acquisition and refurbishment of accommodation for vulnerable groups by the Council with authority to allocate this funding to specific schemes delegated to the Director:

Housing, Employment & Infrastructure after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economy, Housing, Transport & Infrastructure.

18. To grant delegated authority to the Executive Director: Adults Social Care, Health Integration & wellbeing after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care, to enter into appropriate Section 256 and Section 75 Agreements under the NHS Act 2006 (as amended).
19. To authorise the 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.
20. Members are asked to approve the option to extend the IGMT loan repayment period as outlined in section 27.1 of this report and terms to be delegated to the Director: Finance & HR and the Director: Prosperity & Investment after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance & Governance.
21. To approve this suite of service and financial planning reports as the Council's Efficiency Strategy for 2021/22, including the summary document at Appendix 16, to enable new capital receipts generated in the six year period starting 1 April 2016 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 2023/24 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 2021/22 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.
24. To approve the Pay Policy for 2021/22 included as Annex 2 of Appendix 15
25. To approve the additional recommendations contained in the other reports included in this suite of service & financial planning reports included on this agenda.

- 3.2 Final decisions will be taken by full Council on 4 March 2021 which will agree the budget and Council Tax levels across the Borough for 2021/22.

#### 4. **SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

<b>COMMUNITY IMPACT</b>	Do these proposals contribute to specific priorities?	
	Yes	<i>The service and financial planning strategy is integral to ensuring that available resources are used as</i>

		<i>effectively as possible in delivering all corporate priority outcomes.</i>
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	Yes	<i>The proposals contained in this report will impact on specific groups of people. An initial Impact analysis, on the savings proposals, highlights limited equality, environmental and economic impacts further work will be undertaken to identify and mitigate adverse impacts as far as possible and to maximise beneficial impacts. 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</i>
<b>TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE</b>	<i>Public consultation took place between 8 January 2021 and 7 February 2021. The proposals contained in the report were also subject to Member scrutiny during this period. Final proposals will be considered by Full Council on 4 March 2021. The final agreed recommendations will be implemented during 2021/22 and future years.</i>	
<b>FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT</b>	Yes	<i>This report sets out the service and financial planning strategy for the Council for 2021/22.</i>
<b>LEGAL ISSUES</b>	Yes	<i>This report develops the proposals for the Council's budget and policy framework which will be consulted upon in accordance with the Policy Framework &amp; 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 and the Localism Act 2011, the Council has to set a balanced budget for 2021/22 before the 11 March 2021 and has to have regard to the advice provided by</i>

		<i>the s.151 officer (Chief Finance Officer) on the robustness of the budget and the adequacy of reserves supporting the budget before doing so.</i>
<b>OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS &amp; OPPORTUNITIES</b>	Yes	<p><i>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. Environmental assessment is a procedure that ensures that the environmental implications of Council decisions are taken into account. The principle is to ensure that plans, programmes and projects likely to have significant effects on the environment are made subject to an environmental assessment. The Environmental Assessment aims to provide a level of protection to the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation of projects, plans and programmes with a view to reducing their environmental impact. The environmental assessment provides information on the environmental impacts of the budget proposals. Overall, on balance the environmental assessment of the budget proposals is expected to be positive.</i></p> <p><i>The economic impacts of the proposals are expected to be broadly positive in 2021/22 given the capital and revenue investments outlined in the report and the Council’s “business winning, business supporting approach”.</i></p>
<b>IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS</b>	No	<i>Borough-wide impact.</i>

## 5. PREVIOUS MINUTES

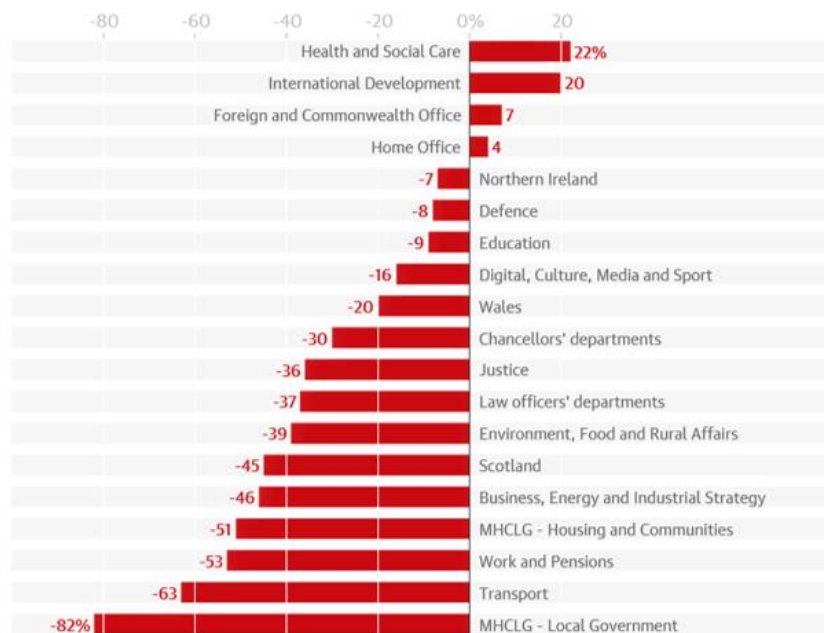
- Full Council 5 March 2020 – Service & Financial Planning 2020/21 – 2022/23
- Cabinet 7 January 2021 – Service & Financial Planning 2021/22 – 2023/24.
- Full Council 14 January 2020 – Setting The Council Tax Base for 2021/22
- Audit Committee 28 January 2021 - 2021/22 Treasury Strategy and Treasury 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 – although even now there is still a national budget deficit. Since 2010 however, the Government has also protected many areas of public spending – but not local government. Councils have therefore faced very significant reductions, much greater than almost all other Government funded services. The graphic below was published by the Guardian Online on 4 September 2019 and shows that Government support for local government fell by 82% between 2007/08 and 2019/20:-

### Government department spending since the financial crisis

Cumulative real change in day-to-day spending (per capita), 2007-08 to 2019-20



Guardian graphic. Source: Resolution Foundation



- 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 The Local Government Association (LGA) has previously highlighted that English councils will have had to deal with £16 billion of reductions to Government grant funding by the end of 2020. Nor have these reductions been distributed evenly across the country, with many of the councils with greatest social need receiving the greatest cuts as demonstrated in work undertaken for the LGA by the Institute for Fiscal Studies.
- 6.4 The National Audit Office (NAO) have calculated that there have been “substantial real terms falls in government funding (for local government): A 49.1% reduction between 2010/11 to 2017/18 and a 56.3% reduction by 2019/20.” The Government are assuming that councils will increase Council Tax by the full Adult Social Care precept and to the maximum of the referendum limit – this is 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.
- 6.5 The last medium term CSR was announced by George Osborne in November 2015. This set out the Government’s spending plans and priorities for 2016/17 to 2019/20 and set out expectations for economic growth, inflation and tax receipts during this period. A further CSR was due to be announced during 2019 but was deferred until 2020. Due to the impacts of the pandemic, this has been deferred again, until later in 2021, although no specific date has yet been announced.
- 6.6 However, the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak did announce a one year Spending Round for 2020/21 on 25 November 2020. Key points in this included:-
- Core Spending Power for local authorities is forecast by the Government to rise by 4.5% in cash terms next year. This is worth an estimated additional £2.2bn in funding for local government services but is dependent on all eligible councils increasing council tax by the maximum permitted percentage. Within this, councils will have access to an additional £1bn for social care next year, made up of a £300m social care grant and a 3% ASC precept. The additional £1bn of grant funding announced at Spending Review 2019 for Adult and Children’s

Social Care will be continuing, along with all other existing social care funding.

- COVID-19 - The Government announced another £1.55bn of unringfenced grant for the pressures expected to emerge in the first few months of 2021/22. Councils will also continue to see a significant loss in income, which is why the current Sales, Fees and Charges scheme (which refunds 75% of eligible income loss beyond a 5% threshold) is being extended on a pro-rata basis into the first three months of the next financial year.
- Tax Income Guarantee Scheme for 2020-21 - a new reimbursement scheme, worth just under an estimated £800m for 2020/21 local tax losses, will be launched to compensate councils for 75% of irrecoverable losses. This will be paid through an unringfenced grant.
- PWLB - In March 2020, the Government launched a consultation on reforms to the Public Works Loan Board intended to prevent the trend, in a minority of local authorities, of taking on debt to buy assets primarily for income. The Government announced the outcome of the consultation and lowered the interest rate of Public Works Loan Board lending by 100 basis points. This brings Public Works Loan Board interest rates back to the levels they were at before October 2019 but access to PWLB funding will be severely restricted for any Council that plans to invest primarily for yield.
- The Government announced that it will not proceed with the implementation of the Review of Relative Needs and Resources (formerly the Fair Funding Review) and 75% Business Rates Retention in 2021/22. In order to provide further stability, the reset of accumulated business rates growth will also not take place in 2021/22. However, the Government also announced that once the pandemic is through, that they want to work with councils on the resources available to meet the demands faced by councils. Further decisions on reform will be taken in the context of next year's Spending Review.
- In the CSR, the Chancellor also gave early clarity on the referendum threshold for council tax increases ahead of the provisional local government finance settlement. The Government is proposing that authorities can increase council tax levels for 2021/22 by up to 2% without holding a referendum, with a further 3% increase specifically for ASC services.
- Further information can be found here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2020-documents>.

- 6.7 In its response to the CSR, the Local Government association said that “overall, the Spending Review provides more certainty for councils next year as the Chancellor has provided further funding for councils to manage the cost pressures we face as a result of the pandemic. The Chancellor’s pledge to compensate for 75 per cent of irrecoverable council tax and business rates income, and to extend the scheme to fund a portion of councils’ lost income from fees and charges during the early part of the next year, provides some much-needed stability...**However, councils will still have to find savings to already stretched budgets in order to plug funding gaps and meet our legal duty to set a balanced budget next year. The headline increase in councils’ core spending power is predicated on households facing 5 per cent increases in council tax**” and that “The long-term outlook also remains unclear. Public finances will undoubtedly be under huge strain in the years ahead”.

## **7. LOCAL CONTEXT**

- 7.1 The Government’s low priority for local government compared to other parts of the public sector and its subsequent significant transfer of risks to the local government sector including the introduction of local Council Tax Support rather than centrally funded Council Tax benefits and local retention of business rates at a time when it has also radically reduced the grant that it gives to councils clearly all combine to increase the level of financial risk faced by councils. It is therefore very desirable that the Council should have a medium term service and financial planning strategy, although it is clearly very difficult to produce meaningful future projections of resource availability given the significant level of uncertainty around the future of the local government finance system created by the Government’s ongoing review and the pandemic. 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, that an appropriate level of reserves and contingencies is maintained by the Council and that Council continues to effectively control financial performance.
- 7.2 Despite these 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 £126.4m 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 over a decade during the most protracted period of unprecedented financial constraint that we have ever faced. The cuts in our grants have been made at a time when demand for many services, such as safeguarding children against harm or neglect and Adult Social Care have been increasing.

These factors combine to place this Council, like most others, under extreme financial pressure. Further details of savings made to date are included in Appendix 4.

- 7.3 The Council has sought to offset part of the loss of Government grant by generating income by adopting a more commercial approach from a wide range of existing services whilst seeking to recognise and manage risks as far as possible. We have sought to ensure that this approach also 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 good 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 with the additional objective of driving-up standards in the wider private rented sector by offering a quality alternative to private tenants. However, both of these schemes also generate a surplus after paying the capital costs used to fund the investment and other operating costs. The profit from these and other projects and from our participation in the West Mercia Energy Joint Arrangement 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.
- 7.4 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. Under Government proposals the share of additional business rates growth that is retained may increase to 73.5% (75% including 1.5% for the Combined Fire Authority rather than the 50% retained locally currently of which the Council retains 49%) at some point in the future.
- 7.5 As part of our "Business Winning, Business Supporting" Approach, the Council has already committed to making significant additional investments in our Property Investment Portfolio which is being invested within the Borough in new and also existing industrial, commercial and retail 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. The net return after debt charges is used to support front line services as will additional retained income from business rates (between reset periods).
- 7.6 On 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020 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 were proposing to make

major changes to the local government finance system which were due to be implemented from April 2020 and in addition, no Government spending figures were available beyond the end of the current year making medium term projections very difficult. The Council remains committed to key themes from this earlier strategy and in 2021/22 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.
- Our existing policy of transferring grant to Town & Parish Councils in respect of Local Council Tax Support. In line with the agreement made in January 2013, the amount available to allocate is £0.1m in 2021/22. However, this is likely to be the final allocation if the Government cease to provide Revenue Support Grant from April 2022 as currently expected.

7.7 In February, our staff and partners worked really hard to look after residents and businesses when the River Severn flooded. The coronavirus pandemic quickly escalated and has clearly had a huge impact across the world. The UK went into full-scale lockdown on 23rd March 2020 in an unprecedented step to attempt to limit the spread of the disease. Pre-empting lockdown, in early March, the Council immediately moved into an emergency response mode and acted quickly to safeguard its community and employees. The Council has continued to follow Government guidance and provide support to the community throughout the second lockdown in November and tier restrictions.

7.8 During what has been an unprecedented year, the Council has continued to provide all our usual services, except where we have been required to suspend them due to national restrictions (for example temporary closure of leisure centres and libraries during periods of lockdown). However, the Council has also sought to provide additional support to Telford & Wrekin residents and businesses. Some of the highlights include items below but there are many, many more:-

- Our Job Box teams are offering free support and advice to anyone in the borough looking for work
- At the start of lockdown in March we provided 54,000 meals to children on free school meals. We were doing this weeks before any national scheme
- Our teams made sure that we were one of the first councils to re-open our recycling centres and they still open 363 days a year. Thanks to

our Covid-safe measures, our Household Recycling Centres remained open during the November lockdown

- We're continuing to do all we can to help local businesses survive the pandemic and access grants. In the first lockdown, we were one of the quickest in the country to distribute the grants and have distributed over £30m of vital support to businesses through different grant schemes.
- We have also allocated over £30m of business rate reliefs to many businesses throughout the Borough,
- We granted 2 month council tax holidays to over 10,000 households
- We continue to support our local high street businesses throughout the pandemic by offering free business virtual workshops, grants and funding for diversification and free promotion via the Telford & Wrekin Virtual High Street Facebook group
- Our staff made sure our leisure centres re-opened safely and quickly this summer after lockdown and have reopened them again after the second lockdown ended. While closed our leisure teams helped residents to stay active with free virtual classes.
- We have supplemented the national schemes for track and trace and Covid testing
- We have provided additional support to local care providers
- We "Crowdfunded" £20k to provide more than 200 Kindles to ensure that care home residents and local hospital patients could stay in touch with loved ones during the pandemic
- Our Laptops for Learning scheme will help around 1,000 year 6 children across the borough over the next 3 years – providing 320 laptops to schools supporting children who have fallen between the gaps of the national scheme

7.9 All this additional support has been at a time when many of our income streams have been under pressure and comes after more than a decade of severe financial constraint due to Government grant cuts and increasing demand for many Council services, Covid-19 has resulted in pressures from increased costs, particularly relating to the provision of Social Care and safeguarding the most vulnerable in our community; the purchase of essential personal, protective equipment; income shortfalls relating to closed facilities and services; and projected income shortfalls in relation to Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates which are key funding streams for the Council.

7.10 After considerable active budget management work undertaken by Cabinet Members and officers throughout the Council, the total projected pressure is currently estimated to be £20.55m (including council tax and business rates shortfalls). The Council has now received £18.97m of Government National Emergency Response Funding including grant from the Sales, Fees & Charges income compensation scheme, which leaves a residual projected pressure of £1.58m which may be covered from the new Tax Income Guarantee

scheme announced as part of the CSR. Further information can be found in the Financial Monitoring report also on this agenda.

- 7.11 This is a much better foundation for the budget moving forward than was anticipated before the latest announcements of additional Government support for the current year. In the CSR, the Government also announced that some emergency Covid support funding would continue to be available to the Council in the first quarter of next year which it is currently assumed will largely offset the additional ongoing financial pressures caused by the pandemic.

## 8.0 **A COUNCIL WORKING 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 impact of the Government's sustained austerity programme head on and finding new ways to deliver services and to generate income. We have a long track record of sound financial management and innovative solutions.
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 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.
- 8.4 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. 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 such as HMRC, Cap Gemini and the Land Registry. 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.

8.5 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 year, 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. The Residents' Survey was carried out between 29 July and 4 September 2020. To ensure as many people as possible got involved, we ran a comprehensive communication campaign over this period, which included writing to every resident in the Borough, posting regularly on social media and asking Councillors, community groups and other partners to promote the survey in their local areas. In total, we received 5,473 responses, exceeding our original target of 5,000 responses, with responses from every ward across the Borough.

- 8.6 The aim of the survey was to capture views on issues that were topical and relevant to all residents, and that would inform the delivery of the Council's priorities. The main topics were:
- Covid 19, including the Council's response to the pandemic;
  - Climate change;
  - Local area – including local neighbourhood, local centre, Telford Town Centre and the wider Borough;
  - Volunteering.
- 8.7 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. A separate report on this agenda gives more information about the survey results and how the Council is responding to the feedback that we received.
- 8.8 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.
- 8.9 To enable us to deliver our priorities, the organisation will continue to change and develop in response to the challenges we face, particularly the need to make further savings. One of the ways we will drive this is through our **Recovery, Reform & Reset Strategy** which is focussed on shaping the organisation in response to Covid-19. This looks at how Council services support individuals, businesses and communities to recover but also how the organisation will change, for example, implementing new ways of working that technology enables and which will deliver savings.
- 8.10 Whatever decisions we make, we will continue to seek new ways to work in partnership and co-operation with the borough's communities to understand their priorities and address them.

8.11 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 2021/22

9.1 Only a small number of changes have occurred since the Cabinet considered the Service & Financial Planning Strategy on 7 January 2021. The most significant of these is inclusion of the lower tier services grant of £0.214m in 2021/22. The total net changes for 2021/22 amount to £0.213m and reduce the call on balances from the £0.386m shown in the January Cabinet report to £0.173m. Final figures are still awaited e.g. for a number of grants at the time of drafting this report and the recommendations in this report include a request for a delegation to the Chief Finance Officer to make final adjustments to the use of balances figure after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance & Governance.

9.2 The base budget for 2021/22 is summarised in the table below.

DIRECTORATE	2021/22 GROSS EXPENDITURE £	2021/22 GROSS INCOME £	2021/22 NET EXPENDITURE £
Prosperity & Investment	20,399,127	24,719,227	(4,320,100)
Finance & Human Resources	20,985,429	7,620,455	13,364,974
Policy & Governance	7,063,805	5,595,470	1,468,335
Children's Safeguarding & Family Support	40,300,332	3,049,946	37,250,386
Education & Skills	134,715,377	122,396,706	12,318,671

Health, Wellbeing & Commissioning	14,818,405	10,870,347	3,948,058
Adult Social Care	73,068,488	24,029,119	49,039,369
Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services	39,116,860	8,607,846	30,509,014
Housing, Employment & Infrastructure	5,039,775	2,742,757	2,297,018
Communities, Customer & Commercial Services	84,915,684	80,187,803	4,727,881
Corporate Items	15,792,106	28,574,035	(12,781,929)
Netting off of Internal Recharges included above	- 50,640,202	- 50,640,202	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>405,575,186</b>	<b>267,753,509</b>	<b>138,821,677</b>
<b>Contributions To/From Balances</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>734,750</b>	<b>(734,750)</b>
<b>Net Total</b>	<b>405,575,186</b>	<b>268,488,259</b>	<b>137,086,927</b>

9.3 The budgets above will be restated after final decisions have been taken on the savings and investment proposals contained in this report.

9.4 There are many areas of significant uncertainty facing the Council and our overall financial position beyond 2021/22 including the ongoing effects arising from the pandemic and clearly major uncertainty over our funding position from April 2022. Section 13 of this report contains further details of key uncertainties.

9.5 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 service and financial planning strategy need to be considered i.e.:-

- New ongoing investments,
- The balance between further savings and the level of council tax increase,
- The use of one-off resources,

9.6 Given the high degree of uncertainty, it is very difficult to make 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. The Council's budget model includes many variables and will need to be regularly 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 there is a much greater likelihood than ever before that the actual position may be very different to that set out below.

	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>
	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>
<b>2020/21 Base Budget</b>	<b>128,975</b>	<b>128,975</b>	<b>128,975</b>
Allowance for inflation on major contracts and for pay inflation (assumption in line with CSR announcement for 2021/22, 1% in subsequent years)	842	2,672	4,749
Increase in pension lump sum deficit payment figure - from actuaries	221	305	305
New Homes Bonus - updated projections	2,850	5,182	6,342
One-off increase in contingency due to Covid pressures and increased level of uncertainty	750	-	-
Impact of the Capital Programme - including reduction in borrowing rate	- 1,222	23	151
Allowance for Single Status	-	1,270	1,270
Additional social care grant	-1,253	-1,253	-1,253
Lower tier services grant	-214	-	-
<b>Investments:</b>			
Safer Communities	500	500	-
Adult Social Care	2,510	3,010	3,010
Housing, Infrastructure & Employment	184	334	334
Additional capacity required following review of posts funded on a temporary basis	916	1,216	1,269
Additional capacity in Policy & Governance	530	550	550
Leisure income shortfalls	650	-	-
Other changes	1,148	1,195	1,255
Council Tax deficit funding from reserves	-300	-870	-870
<b>Updated Base Budget</b>	<b>137,087</b>	<b>143,109</b>	<b>146,087</b>
Projected Funding	127,375	125,404	124,404

<b>Base Budget Gap before Council Tax increase</b>	<b>9,712</b>	<b>17,705</b>	<b>21,683</b>
<b>Less:-</b>			
Savings	<b>5,900</b>	<b>7,139</b>	<b>7,139</b>
*Council Tax Increase of 1.99%	<b>1,451</b>	<b>1,451</b>	<b>1,451</b>
*Adult Social Care Precept of 3%	<b>2,188</b>	<b>2,188</b>	<b>2,188</b>
<b>Shortfall to be covered from further use of one offs in 2021/22</b>	<b>173</b>		
<b>Shortfall to be covered from further ongoing savings, any further council tax increases in 2022/23 and 2023/24 and use of one offs</b>		<b>6,928</b>	<b>10,905</b>

**Notes:-**

- Considerable uncertainty remains on more than £13m of grants other than RSG which have been assumed but not announced at the time of drafting this report.
- The projections assume that all savings previously approved by Council are delivered in full and in accordance with currently anticipated timescales.
- No assumption has been made for any Council Tax increases in 2022/23 and 2023/24 at this stage.
- **Given the very high level of uncertainty over the impact of the Government's proposed changes to the local government finance system, and whether grants that have only been announced for one year, particularly those for social care, will be ongoing, the projections for years after 2021/22 are only intended as a very broad indication at this stage for planning purposes and the estimates will be further updated as additional information becomes available.**
- It is with this uncertainty over the medium term financial outlook facing the Council in mind that the use of balances, the need for further ongoing savings proposals, the level of council tax increase and ongoing investments need to be considered.
- The proposed use of balances in 2021/22 is prudent following the comprehensive review of available one-off resources that has been undertaken which has identified usable balances totalling approximately £20m available after allowing for the proposed use in 2021/22.

9.7 After having delivered £123.5m of annual savings already, which will increase to £126.4m 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 £145.925m by the end of 2023/24 (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 2020/21	126.408
Savings previously approved/updated for 2021/22	1.516
Savings now put forward for implementation in 2021/22 and 2022/23	7.247
Projected further savings required in 2022/23 and 2023/24	10.754
<b>Total Projected savings by end of 2023/24</b>	<b>145.925</b>

## **10. OUR 2020/21 SERVICE & FINANCIAL PLANNING STRATEGY**

### **10.1 Our Approach to Developing Savings Proposals Budget Engagement**

10.1.1 When the Council agreed its medium term service and financial planning strategy at Council in March 2017, it determined that because of the scale of ongoing annual savings that have now been delivered, it was essential that a new approach to the development of future savings proposals should be taken. Future savings are likely to be more challenging and more time will be needed to consult with stakeholders about options and ways to minimise impacts. It was therefore agreed that future savings would be 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. For this single year budget for 2021/22 we are again rolling forward this approach.

10.1.2 Since our last budget was agreed in March 2020 we have continued to implement this approach to our budget engagement and have carried out a range of consultations. For more information on our consultation activity please visit [https://www.telford.gov.uk/info/20240/consultations/327/current\\_consultations](https://www.telford.gov.uk/info/20240/consultations/327/current_consultations).

10.1.3 We will commence targeted discussions with our Town and Parish Councils, business community and local voluntary and community sector partners during January 2021. This is part of an ongoing

dialogue that will continue throughout the year as our budget proposals are developed.

## **10.2 Approach to Future Development of Savings Proposals.**

10.2.1 Our approach to Service and Financial Planning is underpinned and informed by our Co-operative Council ethos. This means that we are working together, with the community and partners, to collectively deliver the best we can for Telford & Wrekin with the combined resources we have.

To protect front-line services, the budget position has driven transformation and innovation within the Council. This has been focussed around 4 themes:-

- A.** Being a modern organisation where we aim to always get the basics right;
- B.** Solving problems and promoting social responsibility to reduce demand for services;
- C.** Reducing our dependency on Government grants;
- D.** Challenging and changing the way we do things.

### **A. Being a modern organisation where we aim to always get the basics right:-**

- Co-located teams to join-up service delivery and to rationalise operational buildings - disposing of 27 buildings saving £2m+ annually;
- Delivered £14.2m savings through better procurement and contract re-negotiation;

### **B. Solving problems and promoting social responsibility to reduce demand for services:-**

- **Managing Customer Demand** - through a fundamental service redesign, demand in our customer contact centre has been significantly reduced. Our digital transformation has enabled customers to submit documentation online for benefit claims. This has resulted in an 89% reduction in face-to-face visitors in a year for this service.
- **Strengthening Communities Adult Social Care (ASC)** - we work on behalf of local people in an integrated way with partners both in the NHS and across our vibrant community and voluntary sector which the Council have continued to invest in over many years. This investment has enabled ASC to maximise the use of the community assets avoiding too early access to funded ASC support. Through Telford & Wrekin Integrated Place Partnership we have developed an integrated Health and Social Care Rapid Response Team, working to reduce unnecessary hospital care. This is better than the national and regional average, and we are in the best quartile nationally. We recently secured

recognition from the Co-operative Council Innovation Network for this work.

- We run local booked appointments from local hubs providing advice, information and where necessary more formal assessment freeing up time for more complex work to be undertaken by our social work staff who are linked to GP surgeries. Over 500 staff and volunteers have been trained on how to **'make every contact count'** - to raise lifestyle issues with an individual and to direct them to further support. Our in-house ASC Shared Lives service has been rated as 'Outstanding' by the CQC and is an example of how we have used our resources creatively to avoid higher cost service provision by providing post hospital discharge re-ablement via Shared Lives.

- **Addressing substance misuse** - we have revised our approach and through this we have improved outcomes and made savings. Service users and volunteer peer mentors, through their lived experience of substance misuse, are experts and our greatest assets. Our peer-led, community-based recovery organisations, Telford Aftercare Team, Recharge and A Better Tomorrow are growing and evolving rapidly with support from the Council. We have increased the number of people successfully completing treatment for alcohol problems, improving successful completions, from 37%, which was worse than the national average, to 46%, which is significantly better than the England benchmark.

### **C. Reducing our dependency on Government grants:-**

We have significantly reduced our dependency on Government grants by seeking opportunities to generate additional income and bid for external funding. This has helped to protect services, fund fixed overheads and deliver our priorities:

- **Income through growth** - through our business-focussed joined-up approach we have built Telford & Wrekin's reputation as a place to do business - this then has translated into new business rates, New Homes Bonus and Council Tax. To date, we have generated an additional £7.5m in business rates and Council Tax through our 'business winning, business supporting' approach and, despite a significant cut, we still expect to receive just under £3.5m in New Homes Bonus in 2021/22. We have also established a £50m Growth Fund to invest in the development of business premises:

- Investing £21m into industrial and retail investments, generating over £1m pa gross return;

- Completing a number of design and build 'turn-key' units e.g. to support an expanding local business and delivered a hotel for Travelodge;

- Delivered 1000 new jobs and also safeguarding 300 jobs.

- **Commercialisation** - another key element of our strategy has been to increase income through commercial services and projects, prioritising those that deliver wider non-financial benefits to the



borough and are a good organisational fit. In 2019/20, we generated gross income of £21.2m from commercial services, an increase of £1.8m compared to 2017/18.

Recent successes include an increase in the sale of services to organisations outside the borough, including more than 100 out of borough schools, and securing a £1.2m contract for 2020/21 to provide property consultancy services to a council in Lincolnshire. We also continue to develop commercial projects, such as 'NuPlace'. This provides a significant income stream to the Council which is projected to exceed £1.4m in 2020/21. Since 2015/16, 'NuPlace' has generated a cumulative incremental income of £4.4m to the Council. Our solar farm has generated £2.35m gross income to date. We have a projected net income of £7.5m for 2020/21 from our 'Property Investment Portfolio'.

- **External funding** - we have also proactively bid for external funding to support key priorities, including:

- **Strengthening families** - we are one of only 20 councils to be awarded a share of £84m funding to roll out the 'Family Safeguarding' model used by Hertfordshire County Council to help troubled families.

- **Housing** - we have secured over £0.4m to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, £0.388m over 2 years to establish our Better Homes for All programme including a Rogue Landlord Taskforce, and set up a social value partnership to enable Telford & Wrekin residents to access funding to address fuel poverty.

- **Climate change** - we have successfully bid for £0.311m of grant funding to install LED lighting and solar panels in a number of Council buildings.

#### **D. Challenging & changing the way we do things**

- Reducing back office costs - we have cut back-office costs by over 50% since 2009, saving £12.4m a year.

- Reduced management and staff costs - the number of jobs has been reduced by 1,607 since April 2010 and reduced the size of the senior management team by 50% from 28 to 14 posts.

- Buying better value services:-

- Secured savings of £30m over the lifetime of the waste collection and disposal contract with Veolia. The recent introduction of kerbside collection of kitchen waste has been around 100 tonnes per week which is a gross saving 0.5 tonne of CO2 for each tonne collected.

- Our grounds and cleansing contract delivers savings of £695,000 pa and a better standard of service working with our partner Idverde.

- Challenging Policies – e.g. for calculation of the Minimum Revenue Provision (changing debt repayment from equal instalments of principal to an annuity basis with cumulative revenue benefits of over £40m by 2019/20).

## **11. CAPITAL RECEIPTS AND DEBT CHARGES**

- 11.1 The Council's programme of property rationalisation has not only reduced running costs but is also generating significant capital receipts enabling us to fund some investment from internal resources rather than from increased borrowing. Due to a temporary Government relaxation in regulations, the Council is also 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 – if available, 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. However some “good capital investment” can 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. Invest-to-Save schemes such as the solar farm or the Housing Investment Programme and investment in the Property Investment Portfolio represent “good capital investment” as they earn a surplus which can be used to help protect front line services as the surplus generated helps to reduce the impact on the revenue budget of Government cuts to our grants, as well as delivering wider environmental, social or economic benefits. The Council must, however, carefully assess each potential new investment through a proper due diligence and business case 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 investment portfolio of the Council.
- 11.4 In Telford & Wrekin debt repayments in 2020/21 accounted for 9.7% of the net revenue budget (including payment to Shropshire Council in respect of pre-unitary authority debt). This compares to:-
- |                             |       |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| ○ Birmingham                | 27.8% |
| ○ Unitary Authority average | 10.1% |
| ○ Telford & Wrekin          | 9.7%  |
- 11.5 A graph showing the percentage of the net revenue budget allocated to debt repayments in 2020/21 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 £23.885m over the medium term. The planned profile of these receipts is shown below:

	£m
2020/21	5.785
2021/22	6.300
2022/23	5.300
2023/24	0.500
Later years	6.000
Total	23.885

- 11.7 Generation of these receipts is a key assumption within the service and financial planning strategy. 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 resources.

## 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 service and financial planning report in future years. Details are therefore included in Appendix 8 for the period 1st April 2020 to 31st October 2020 showing income and expenditure on each scheme relating to Education. Details of these and all other s.106 agreements will be included in the final accounts report which is considered by Cabinet in May of each year to show the year-end balance and in-year movement relating to each current s.106 agreement.

### **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 However, the funding outlook beyond next year is more uncertain than it has ever been. 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 new target implementation date of April 2021. However, because progress stalled due to the pandemic the proposed changes have been deferred again. Whilst it is clear that the earliest that they will now be implemented is April 2022, 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 Whilst a medium term CSR had been expected to be announced during 2020, due to the uncertainties around the national financial position caused by the pandemic this was deferred again with the Chancellor only announcing a one year CSR. Combined with the uncertainty around what change may be made to the local government finance system and the absence of any national control totals beyond 2021/22, it is very unlikely that the Council will have any real clarity on its funding for 2022/23 and later years until we receive our settlement in December 2021, less than 4 months before the start of the financial year which has 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 very 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 completely new formula used to assess relative needs which will impact on the distribution of available resources between councils. Initial indications are that this review may see councils with a low level of Council Tax, lower than average income levels and higher levels of deprivation losing out. The government currently takes actual income from Council Tax into account when calculating Revenue Support Grant settlements but may in future use an assumed national level of Council Tax. Councils with an actual Council Tax below this could potentially face a funding shortfall. These issues have been highlighted by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) which has said that “London boroughs tend to set low Council Tax but receive generous grant funding due to high needs assessments. This means they will suffer when funding distribution across all English councils is changed ....the review seems set to make councils who set low tax rates bear more of the cost themselves”.
- The challenges faced by many traditional businesses, particularly retailers, which face competition from online competitors and the impacts of the pandemic have highlighted the burden that the current business rates system places on businesses. The Government are considering what changes to make to the business rates system. During the current year, businesses in the Borough benefitted from £30m of additional business rate reliefs exempted the leisure, retail, hospitality and children’s nursery sectors from paying national non-domestic rates this year. No extension to these reliefs has been announced at the time of drafting this report. Any changes made to the business rates system could have a very significant impact on council finances although the impact would vary between different parts of the

country depending on the rateable value of the businesses in their areas and the proportion of their total income derived from business rates.

- The pandemic has resulted in many businesses appealing the rateable values set by the Valuation Office Agency. Successful appeals will impact on the Council's budget by reducing the income and potentially making repayments if appeals are backdated. The pandemic has also clearly had a very significant impact on the profitability of businesses. Businesses that close may be unable to settle outstanding business rates liabilities and others may seek to enter payment arrangements that spread the cost over a longer period.
- The long awaited move to 75% retention of business rates by local authorities (locally, this would mean 73.5% for the Council and 1.5% for the Combined Fire Authority). The Government have made it clear that they will not merely pass the additional funding to councils to make up for the cuts to our grants but rather, they will cease other funding streams such as the Public Health Grant, which is currently over £12m for the Council and the remaining Revenue Support Grant and may potentially also pass additional responsibilities to councils so that the transfer is fiscally neutral at both a central and local government level. Some councils are likely to gain from these changes while others will lose and it is not currently possible to assess the impact at individual council level as there are many technical aspects of the new system that would need to be agreed. These technical aspects could include:-
  - The implications of the "reset of the business rates baseline" which would see the benefits of all growth in business rates 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 in the growth achieved in other parts of the country.
  - The changes to the business rates system may also see changes to the treatment of appeals against the rateable values set by the national Valuation Office Agency. The Government's Valuation Office Agency takes a considerable period of time to process appeals and a significant proportion of the total rateable value in the borough is subject to appeal creating uncertainty over what level of business rates income will actually be received. The Council has to estimate what proportion of these appeals will be successful and to what extent successful appeals will reduce the rates collected when estimating how much income business rates may contribute towards the Council's budget. Appeals represent a significant risk to councils that have no input to decisions about rateable values. The new system may see a move to treating appeals on a national basis

but the mechanism for doing this would be highly complex and the cost of successful appeals would be top-sliced from the total funding raised from business rates.

- Any transitional damping arrangements to protect councils from the combined impacts of the changes in business rates income and the fair funding review, any protection would be likely to be funded from limiting the gains for councils that benefit from the new system.
- The New Homes Bonus (NHB) scheme is also under review. NHB has already been reduced with the introduction of a baseline threshold or assumed level of housing growth for which no NHB is paid and the duration of payments has been reduced from 6 years to 4 years and from last year with no “legacy” payments being made. However, despite these changes, NHB is still a very significant funding source for the Council. In 2020/21 we will receive around £6m, however the Council’s allocation for 2021/22 was cut by over 40% by the government in the settlement for 2021/22 to less than £3.5m. The proposed changes are likely to reduce the funding allocated through NHB. At a national level, this may see funding transferred from district councils so that additional support could be provided for upper tier councils e.g. to provide Adult Social Care (ASC) services.

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 Council will also send a response to the provisional settlement. All consultation responses will be agreed by the Cabinet Member for Council Finance, Partnerships and Commercial Services. When responding, we will seek to always highlight the wholly inadequate funding for Adult Social Care which must be put on to a more sustainable basis.

## 13.2 **Comprehensive Spending Review 2020**

13.2.1 The last medium term Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) was undertaken in 2015 and set spending limits for 4 years through to 2019/20 which enabled MoHCLG to offer councils a 4 year RSG settlement which assisted with medium term financial forecasting. Last year, following the General election, the Government issued a one year “Spending Round” and the Council received a one year settlement for 2020/21 with the expectation of a medium term CSR and settlement being announced during 2020. However, due to the pandemic the Government have again issued one year CSR and one year settlement to local authorities. There is still no indication of what funding may be available after next year – the third consecutive year that this will have been the case – clearly this is not helpful in trying to set robust medium term financial strategies for large and complex organisations such as local authorities that deliver hundreds of different services.

13.2.2 It is now anticipated that the Government will undertake a medium term Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) during 2021. In undertaking a CSR the Government will update its projections for receipts from taxation, its assumptions for economic growth, inflation etc. and set out its priorities for public spending and its target for budget deficits or surpluses over the medium term. However the Government has already indicated that it will provide real terms growth for the NHS and protection for some other major areas of public spending such as education and defence so the outlook for local government is likely to remain extremely challenging, particularly given the pressure that the Government will face to bring the national budget deficit back under control as the impacts of the pandemic lessen.

13.2.3 The CSR will set the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for the MoHCLG over the medium-term but will not give any indication of the funding that will be available to individual councils. The LGA will continue to actively lobby in advance of the CSR to highlight the projected funding shortfalls faced by councils and the need for additional funding to be provided rather than further cuts to local services.

13.2.4 On 25 November 2020, the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, announced a one year CSR for 2021/22 which rolled forward the spending control totals for the current year for one further year but gave no clarity on spending levels at a national level beyond next year. Key points in this included:-

- Core Spending Power for local authorities is forecast by the Government to rise by 4.5% in cash terms next year. This is worth an estimated additional £2.2bn in funding for local government services but is dependent on all eligible councils increasing council tax by the maximum permitted percentage. Within this, councils will have access to an additional £1bn for social care next year, made up of a £300m social care grant and a 3% ASC precept. The additional £1bn of grant funding announced at Spending Review 2019 for Adult and Children's Social Care will be continuing, along with all other existing social care funding. COVID-19 - The Government announced another £1.55bn of unringfenced grant for the pressures expected to emerge in the first few months of 2021/22. Councils will also continue to see some loss in income, which is why the current Sales, Fees and Charges scheme (which refunds 75% of eligible income loss beyond a 5% threshold) is being extended on a pro-rata basis into the first three months of the next financial year.
- Tax Income Guarantee Scheme for 2020-21 - a new reimbursement scheme, worth just under an estimated £800m for 2020/21 local tax losses, will be launched to compensate



councils for 75% of irrecoverable losses. This will be paid through an unringfenced grant.

- PWLB - In March 2020, the Government launched a consultation on reforms to the Public Works Loan Board intended to prevent the trend, in a minority of local authorities, of taking on debt to buy assets primarily for income. The Government announced the outcome of the consultation and lowered the interest rate of Public Works Loan Board lending by 100 basis points. This brings Public Works Loan Board interest rates back to the levels they were at before October 2019 but access to PWLB funding will be severely restricted for any Council that plans to invest primarily for yield.
- The Government announced that it will not proceed with the implementation of the Review of Relative Needs and Resources (formerly the Fair Funding Review) and 75% Business Rates Retention in 2021/22. In order to provide further stability, the reset of accumulated business rates growth will also not take place in 2021/22. However, the Government also announced that once the pandemic is through, that they want to work with councils on the resources available to meet the demands faced by councils. Further decisions on reform will be taken in the context of next year's Spending Review.
- In the CSR, the Chancellor also gave early clarity on the referendum threshold for council tax increases ahead of the provisional local government finance settlement. The Government is proposing that authorities can increase council tax levels for 2021/22 by up to 2% without holding a referendum, with a further 3% increase specifically for ASC services.

Further information can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2020-documents>

13.2.5 After the Comprehensive Spending Review was announced, **the Financial Times reported that “England’s councils face austerity by stealth Sunak is giving local authorities extra flexibility to fund social care but council tax is struggling to replace central grants The Office for Budget Responsibility says ‘replacing some grant funding for local authorities with increased local funding via council tax increases’ will leave taxpayers paying an extra £1bn a year from 2021. UK chancellor Rishi Sunak appeared to make an attractive offer to English local authorities. He promised “extra flexibility” on raising funds for adult social care via council taxes “which together with £300m of new grant funding gives them**

***access to an extra billion pounds to fund social care”. But while this suggested the chancellor was being generous with central government funds, in fact it was simply a suggestion to local authorities that they raise council tax rates much faster than inflation - something they have been doing since 2016”.***

13.2.6 The Financial Times article went on to say “According to the independent Office for Budget Responsibility “replacing some grant funding for local authorities with increased local funding via council tax increases” will leave taxpayers paying an extra £1bn a year from 2021. The onus on local authorities to fund more of their services from council tax revenues rather than central government grants will exacerbate a continuous squeeze on local budgets since 2010 that left councils shouldering a hefty chunk of the austerity that followed the financial crisis. The Institute for Fiscal Studies calculates that councils received 77 per cent less in real central government grants per person in 2019-20 than a decade earlier...Mr Sunak is not the first chancellor to have sought to rein in central government expenditure by putting the onus on local authorities to increase council tax and take the blame for the hit to voters’ pockets”

13.2.7 The Local Government Association, has highlighted that council tax represented 45 per cent of members’ 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. They raise different amounts of money in different parts of the country, unrelated to need, and add an extra financial burden on households...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 in 2021/22. This means residents may see their council forced to increase bills next year. . . but still have to make cutbacks to local services.”

### **13.3. Other areas of uncertainty**

13.3.1 The continuing impact of the pandemic on the Council and our residents, businesses and voluntary and community sectors are difficult to forecast. It is very difficult to predict what impact the pandemic will have on the Council’s financial position in 2021/22. However, helpfully, in the CSR some additional emergency funding was announced for 2021/22. It was also announced that the sales, fees and charges income compensation scheme (which compensates councils for 75% of the shortfalls in these income streams above a 5% deductible threshold) would be extended to the first three months of 2021/22. Funding to compensate for 75% of the irrecoverable losses on council

tax and business rates income in 2020/21 was also announced although details of how this scheme will operate are still awaited at the time of writing this report. Previously the Government had said that losses on council tax and business rates (which will impact on the collection fund balances and would normally affect the income available to support the budget in the following year) could be spread over three years. Whilst this flexibility and the additional support announced are of course very welcome it is difficult, at this stage, to therefore predict what the likely closing balance on the collection funds and resultant impact on the council's budgets in later years will be. Allocations of the £1.55bn emergency funding were announced as part of the local government provisional finance settlement on 17 December 2020, with the Council being allocated £5.178m. However, detailed allocations for the other additional funding streams were not available at the time of drafting this report. Combined with the £3m Covid reserve that was created when the accounts for 2019/20 were completed and which is still expected to be available at the end of 2020/21, the Council has some resources available to continue to cover the additional costs arising from the pandemic for the first three months of 2021/22, after which it is hoped that either the national vaccination programme will enable life to start to move back to a new normality or, if this is not the case, the Government will extend its support measures for a longer period.

- 13.3.2 The impact of the pandemic and the BREXIT deal on inflation and the Government's deficit reduction policy and whether the economy moves in to recession with consequent impacts on the construction of new homes and business premises in the Borough, the generation of assumed capital receipt values and on Council budgets for local Council Tax support (if unemployment increases or household incomes fall), homelessness, housing benefit etc. is currently very uncertain.
- 13.3.3 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.
- 13.3.4 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.
- 13.3.5 The levels of pay awards from 2021/22. After a decade of public sector pay restraint and the outcome of the pension fund triennial re-valuation to be undertaken in April 2022 and effective from 2023/24 including the impact of the McCloud age discrimination case which could have a

significant financial impact on the Council's future employer pension contributions.

13.3.6 Projections of what the Council's budget gap might be in 2022/23 and later years are therefore extremely difficult to make and have a very high degree of uncertainty. Projections will therefore be regularly refined and updated as and when additional information becomes available. It is almost certain that the actual position will be significantly different from the projections for 2022/23 and later years included in this report. The actual position may be better or worse if, for example, the national economy goes in to recession or the Government seek to rapidly reduce the national budget deficit by making cuts to expenditure rather than by increasing taxes

#### 13.4 Local Government Finance Settlement

13.4.1 The last multi-year settlement that the Council received was announced in December 2015. In this, the 2016/17, settlement indicative Revenue Support Grant figures were also included for the following three years. The Government offered councils that submitted an acceptable "Efficiency Strategy" a firm 4 year grant settlement. This Council submitted its efficiency strategy and received confirmation that we were eligible for this 4 year grant settlement as detailed below:-

	2016/17 £m	2017/18 £m	2018/19 £m	2019/20 £m
RSG	24.899	18.457	14.147	9.812
% Reduction from Previous Year	-20.81%	-25.88%	-23.35%	-30.65%

13.4.2 Whilst the reductions to our Revenue Support Grant were very significant during this 4 year period, the advance notification did enable some degree of medium term financial planning – at least in the first year or two of the announcement. 2020/21 saw a small increase in RSG to £9.972m, an increase of 1.63% compared to 2019/20 in line with inflation. The absence of any certainty over potential funding levels beyond next year is, however, a major cause for concern as it will be the third consecutive year that it will not have been possible to undertake meaningful medium term financial planning.

13.4.3 When the one year CSR was announced on 25 November it became apparent that there would only be a one year settlement for 2021/22. The provisional local government finance settlement for 2021/22 was announced on 17 December 2020. The settlement saw a £2.85m cut to the Council's New Homes Bonus allocation. The Government's settlement assumes that councils will increase their council tax by the maximum permitted (4.99% in the case of Telford & Wrekin Council) when calculating "core spending power". The government show "core

spending power” increasing by £4.5m, an increase of 3.2% between 2020/21 and 2021/22. However, within these figures, the amount that the Government assumes that the Council will collect from council tax increases by £5.4m largely from increasing council tax by the full 4.99%. **The Council will therefore see a reduction in funding from the Government next year within the settlement of £0.862m.** This is made up as follows:-

<b>Funding Changes 2021/22 compared to 2020/21</b>	<b>£m</b>
Revenue Support Grant	+0.055
Under Indexation of Business Rates Multiplier	+0.466
Improved Better Care Fund	+0.000
Social Care Grant	+1.253
New Homes Bonus	-2.850
Lower Tier Services Grant	+0.214
<b>TOTAL REDUCTION IN GOVERNMENT FUNDING</b>	<b>-0.862</b>

The settlement will force the Council to not only increase council tax but to also continue to make budget savings because the Council has a legal duty to set a “balanced budget”.

13.4.4 Whilst the 2020 Spending Round sets the strategic financial overview for the Government as a whole during 2021/22, the provisional local government finance settlement sets out the specific proposals affecting local government for 2021/22 with details for each council being provided. On 17 December 2020, the Secretary of State for the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick MP, announced, in Parliament, the provisional local government finance settlement 2021/22. Key points included:-

- The 2021/22 local government finance settlement is for one year only. It is based on the CSR 2020 funding levels.
- Council Tax Increases – As previously announced at CSR 2020, the council tax referendum limit will be 2% for local authorities with social care authorities also allowed a 3% Adult Social Care precept. This can be applied in full during 2021/22 or phased over 2021/22 and 2022/23 in any proportions but must not exceed 3%
- Social Care Funding – Originally announced at Spending Round 2020, with further details provided in the technical consultation, the provisional settlement confirms the previously proposed national amounts and allocation methodologies.
- The Council received £1.253m of new Social Care grant which was partly allocated using a methodology to compensate councils that have less ability to generate income from the ASC precept due to lower tax bases and council tax levels. However, the grant is only confirmed for one year whereas the ASC precept will generate ongoing income in

areas that apply it in full – as the Government’s figures assume all councils will do.

- The provisional figures are expected to be confirmed in late January or early February 2021. The 2021/22 announcement is the first and only year of the Spending Round 2020, with future years’ announcements dependent on a number of factors, including the overall allocation to local government in CSR 2021 and any changes to the national local government finance system which could include: the outcome of the Fair Funding Review, the Business Rates Retention Reset, the move to 75% Business Rates Retention and any reform of the New Homes Bonus scheme.
- Parish and Town councils will continue not to be subject to the referendum limits. As in previous years, the government has indicated it will keep this approach under review for future years.
- The settlement announcement indicated that core spending on local services has the potential to increase by £2.2 billion in 2021/22, an increase of 4.5 per cent. Extra money was allocated to meet COVID-19 costs, new funding for adult and children’s social care but reductions in funding for New Homes Bonus which has been a significant income stream for the Council.
- The Government figures indicate that Core Spending Power will rise by an average 4.5 per cent in 2021/22 in cash terms. These Government forecasts are on the assumption that every local authority will raise their council tax by the maximum permitted without a referendum.
- The Government has set out its intention to hold a consultation on the future of the New Homes Bonus, with a view to implementing reform in 2022/23.
- Public Health Grant - will continue to be paid through a ring-fenced grant in 2021/22. However, there is still no information about the national total, or individual council allocations, of the public health grant for 2021/22 or, indeed, for a number of other grants.
- At the time of preparing this report, details of funding totalling over £13m expected for next year have still not been released by the Government and a significant degree of uncertainty over our actual position therefore remains.
- The Government states that it will revisit the priorities for reform of the local government finance system, taking account of wider work on the future of business rates and on the Adult Social Care system. Final decisions will be taken in the context of next year’s Spending Review.
- As announced in the Spending Review 2021, there will be no reset of the business rates baseline for 2021/22. In his statement to the House of Commons, the Secretary of State confirmed that the Government will work with the sector and Members across the House to seek a new consensus for broader reforms to local government, including the Fair Funding Review and the business rates reset, and will ensure that

councils are set on a long-term trajectory of sustainable growth and fair resources.

- As also announced in the 2020 Spending Review, the business rates multiplier will be frozen for 2021/22. It will remain at 49.9p (small business multiplier) and 51.2p (national business multiplier). Councils will receive £650 million in compensation in 2021/22 for under-indexing of the business rates multiplier.
- New Homes Bonus - Our provisional New Homes Bonus allocation for next year has seen a very significant cut of £2.85m compared to the current year to less than £3.5m. The Government are also committed to consulting on the future of the scheme.

13.4.5 In response to the provisional settlement, the LGA has said that nationally, *“more than 85 per cent of the potential 4.5% core funding increase next year is dependent on councils increasing council tax by up to 5 per cent next year. This leaves councils facing the tough choice about whether to increase bills to bring in desperately needed funding to protect services at a time when we are acutely aware of the significant burden that could place on some households”*. They have gone on to say 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”* and that *“The Government must urgently publish next year’s public health grant settlement so councils can get on with the job of helping keep their communities healthy and resilient, in the face of the ongoing pandemic”*.

13.4.6 The deadline for responses to the provisional settlement was 16 January 2021. The Chief Financial Officer agreed a response to the provisional settlement with the Cabinet Member for Finance & Governance.

13.4.7 The final settlement was received on 4 February 2021. It confirmed the allocation received by the Council in the provisional settlement as unchanged. Details of grants totalling over £12m were still unavailable at the time of finalising this report and therefore estimates have been included which will be updated as soon as the allocations are received with any change in unringfenced grants being balanced by adjusting the use of balances.

## **14. 2020/21 PROJECTED OUTTURN POSITION**

14.1 As the Financial Management 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 2020/21 in very difficult circumstances. However, there are some areas of significant pressure and clearly, the actual outturn will be different, either better or

worse, than currently projected as we continue to operate in an extremely challenging environment with a further lockdown now in force. It is essential that all Cabinet Members and budget holders continue to exercise tight financial control and to deliver all planned savings. However, it is currently expected that the Council will have some one-off funding available within the revenue budget contingency for 2020/21 at year end (currently estimated to be in the region of £1.9m) but as this projection is based on spending to the end of December and there may potentially be significant additional Adult Social Care or road gritting costs if we have a hard winter this potential benefit has currently not been assumed to be available in the assessment of projected one-off resources.

## **15. SAVINGS PROPOSALS 2021/22**

- 15.1 By the end of the current financial year, the Council will have delivered ongoing budget savings of £126.408m since 2009/10. Despite the proposed council tax increase which will generate around £3.64m 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 £5.9m in 2021/22 rising to £7.139m in 2022/23. Clearly after already having delivered £126m 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 mitigate the impacts of the proposals or alternative options.
- 15.3 Whilst additional investment totalling over £2.3m in to Adult Social Care is put forward in this report and the safeguarding budget is maintained, 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 Children's Safeguarding and Adult Social Care. Details of these Cost Improvement strategies are included as Appendices 11 and 12.

## **16. INVESTMENTS**

- 16.1 Due to the tight financial position faced by the Council the scope for new revenue investments is very limited. However, 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 on an ongoing basis and the Children's Safeguarding budget will be maintained. In total the net budget for these services will exceed £83m next year.

- 16.2 The only other significant revenue investment proposed for next year is a sum of £0.5m in both 2021/22 and 2022/23 to support crime and anti-social behaviour initiatives. Along with partners, the Council has created multi-functional teams that work together to tackle issues of crime, disorder and quality of life within our towns and communities. Our approach continues to be data and intelligence led and has allows the Council and its partners to have a robust approach in ensuring the borough is a safer and cleaner place to live, work and visit. The Council is therefore allocating this £1m towards delivery of a borough wide safer communities programme that will continue to build on the successful partnership with West Mercia Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). This three year programme is in development with implementation focused on data and intelligence led decision making and engagement with partners. This comes on the back of a £250,000 allocation by the council in 2019 match funded by the PCC to improve CCTV coverage in the borough.
- 16.3 Unfortunately, scope for further revenue investments next year is limited, as additional investments in other priorities would require further budget savings to be identified. However, a number of pressure areas have been addressed during development of the base budget as explained in Appendix 7. These ensure that the proposed budget is robust and sustainable.
- 16.4 In addition to the revenue investments, the Council is proposing a significant capital programme which totals almost £230m as detailed in the Capital Programme report included as part of this suite of service and financial planning reports. Capital projects take time to deliver and need to be planned over the medium term. . This is 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.
- 16.5 The Council's existing £64.4m funding allocation for Nuplace has already seen:-
- 329 homes delivered, across seven sites with a further 137 under construction or due to commence on site, bringing the total number of houses delivered, or in delivery to 466. Of these properties, 55 are for affordable rent, 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.
- At Maple Fields in Dothill, 19 of the 54 homes have been built to accessible and adaptable standards and designated for people over 55 or those with a demonstrable need, allowing people to remain living independently for longer in their homes.
- 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 1.88% since the first site was opened.
- Since 2015/16 - cumulative net incremental income of £4.4m 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 £2.297m cumulatively to the end of March 2021.
- The Nuplace investment portfolio has experienced strong capital growth. Cumulative growth in the portfolio is 17% to the end of March 2021.
- 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 £1.74m.
- This budget now proposes that the council starts to take a dividend from NuPlace to further help to support the provision of front line council services.

During 2020/21, the Council approved further allocations totalling £48m with the potential to deliver an additional 320 homes across seven schemes which is anticipated to bring Nuplace's portfolio to 786 units and will be a total investment of over £112m.

16.6 The Council's existing £50m 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 a Hortonwood

West. Investment is also supporting the delivery of Ni.Park (Newport), a new employment park for the Borough.

- Cumulatively, the £47m investment to date through the Growth Fund is estimated to deliver an ongoing gross return of 7.2%, 4.6% after borrowing costs.
- The £47m committed to date, in to a range of investments is anticipated to help deliver approximately 1000 new jobs and safeguard more than 250 jobs.
- Through the investment of the full £50m the Council is on target to generate over £3m p.a. in additional gross income. As part of the Councils continued commitment to the Property Investment Portfolio, further capital allocations from the Councils Regeneration and Investment Fund totalling £9.65m have been made, which will further enhance the portfolio.
- The investment is also delivering growth in business rates income. The additional business rates of over £500,000 pa is being invested directly into delivering front line services across all the Borough's communities.

16.7 The proposed Capital Programme will also see:-

- £40.7m for transport and Highways schemes including £6.5m for the A442 infrastructure improvements, and funding for repair of potholes
- £25.7m for education capital projects including investment in secondary school expansion projects to increase pupil places
- £9.95m in to Stronger Communities Project, a package focused on bringing back key brownfield sites into use, as well as providing a stimulus to the delivery of Station Quarter the next phase of the transformation of Telford Town Centre
- £9.65m for additional investment in the Council's Property investment portfolio which will attract new jobs, and retain companies that may otherwise leave the Borough if suitable premises are not available. Profits, and additional business rates, from these investments will be used to help fund key front line services including Adult Social Care and Children's Safeguarding.
- £6.9m for Pride in Your High Street schemes
- £6.5m investment in the Newport Innovation & Enterprise Package
- £5m for Environmental Improvements/ Enhancements
- £4m for Climate change initiatives with £0.14m available in 2020/21, £1.86m in 2021/22 and £2m in 2022/23 to support work to reduce the Council's carbon footprint and partnering with government and others on other climate change projects.

## **17. COUNCIL TAX**

17.1 Council Tax in Telford & Wrekin has historically been low compared to other councils. 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 (£1,353.48). The average Council Tax at Band D in the Midlands region is more than 14% 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 fourth lowest Council Tax at Band D out of 57 unitary authorities being £187.36 less pa than the average for unitary authorities of £1,540.84 which is almost 14% 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 (£1,549.92 at Band D which is £196.44 higher than in Telford & Wrekin) in the current year, we would have generated an additional £10.19m 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 £14.4m by 2021/22.
- 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. 61.3% of total chargeable dwellings in Telford & Wrekin are in these two bands, compared to the average across all unitary authorities of just 48.9%. 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 still 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. However, the most critical services that the Council delivers are safeguarding vulnerable adults and children and the Council is committed to ensuring that we always meet the assessed need of vulnerable social care clients. Whilst the government made some one-off funding available to support social care services next year, this is insufficient to meet the increases in demand that we face. The Council continues to see increasing demands for Adult Social Care in particular. It is therefore proposed that Council Tax for 2021/22 is increased by a total of 4.99% (made up of 3% in respect of the

Government's Adult Social Care Precept which the Government has assumed that all eligible councils will apply and a general Council Tax increase of 1.99%). 4.99% 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 £1.01 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**

18.1.1 A summary of the Base Budget position is included at Appendix 6 which shows a net base budget of £137.087m for 2021/22 after reflecting the investments set out in this report but before deducting the savings proposals. Assuming a council tax increase of 4.99% for next year and that all the savings put forward are agreed leaves a funding gap of £0.173m. Appendix 7 includes an analysis of the main changes in moving from the 2020/21 budget to the 2021/22 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 around £20m available which could be taken in to account as part of medium term budget strategy considerations, excluding the current projection for unused 2020/21 corporate contingency of £1.9m shown in the Financial Management report also on this agenda but after the recommended use of £0.173m one-offs to balance the position for next year.

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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 would need to approve an updated "Efficiency Strategy" included as Appendix 16. The Council will need to build up a balance in the severance fund for use from 2022/23 onwards. Currently the uncommitted balance in the

Severance fund is £1.2m. A further £1.1m is held as an uncommitted balance within the Invest to Save/Capacity Fund.

18.2.3 The total “usable” one-offs of £20.46m are detailed in Appendix 9 and will be used to support the delivery of the medium term service and financial planning strategy 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. However, it is proposed to use a limited amount of these uncommitted one-off resources, £0.173m, to support the revenue budget in 2021/22. 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 2021/22 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 2021/22 and a £10m reserve for Investment in Council Priorities giving the Council additional potential flexibility if required in the short-term. 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.

### **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 with changes to the Local Government finance system, now due to be implemented in April 2022 and currently no national Comprehensive Spending Review figures from the Government beyond 2021/22. As an organisation that provides a vast range of different services to the community and spends almost £500m per annum financial resilience and risk management are very important considerations when setting the Service & Financial Planning Strategy.

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 £126m 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 and a Partnership Capacity Fund are 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% 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, £2.3m additional investment in Adult Social Care has been allowed for in 2021/22
  - ✓ Provisions are included in the accounts where required, to safeguard against potential costs, for example for bad debts and NDR Appeals.
- **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 in recent years to meet service pressures.
    - ✓ A strong and proactive financial management approach is evident - during 2020/21, in response to the financial pressures relating to the coronavirus pandemic, officers undertook a rigorous review of reserves and balances to identify additional one-off funding which could be used to fund pressures if required, which has avoided the need for in-year savings measures to be implemented.
    - ✓ The Council has put forward a robust strategy to re-balance the 2020/21 budget in response to pressures being experienced due to Coronavirus (see the financial management report also on this agenda) while still retaining a good level of reserves and balances for the medium term strategy.
    - ✓ The projected financial outturn for 2020/21 currently shows that some of the revenue budget contingency should be available at year end despite the significant additional pressures being experienced in many parts of the budget as a result of Covid.

- ✓ 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**
    - ✓ 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.
    - ✓ 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 £58m 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.
    - ✓ All capital and revenue 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 advisors.
    - ✓ A Capital Programme Board has been established 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 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 that around £20m is available to support the medium term strategy after allowing for the proposed use next year.
- ✓ Despite the significant level of pressure faced as a result of Covid, 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 settlement is firmed-up.
- ✓ Contingencies have been built into the revenue budget: General contingencies totalling £3.95m in 2021/22 are held within the corporate core and the ASC and Children's Safeguarding budgets with a further £0.7m for inflation 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 updated Strategic Risk Register is included as Appendix 3 of this report.

### **Reducing Dependency on Government Funding**

- ✓ A key focus of the budget is on income generation, for example through the £60m "Property & Regeneration Investment Fund" approved last year and now supporting the expansion of NuPlace thus reducing the Council's reliance on Government Grant in the future making the Council more financially independent but also more subject to economic cycles.
- ✓ Despite the financial challenges being faced, 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 the major changes to the system expected in April 2022 and periodic resets of the system.

- ✓ The Council has adopted innovative ways to generate income such as from Nuplace, its wholly owned housing company, the solar farm, The Telford Land Deal (a unique joint arrangement with the Marches LEP and Homes England) and the Telford Growth Fund. Surpluses from these investments support front line services as well as providing wider environmental, social or economic benefits.

- **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 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 is unprecedented both in scale and duration, provide a level of assurance that the Council is in a sound financial position despite the further challenges that the Council will inevitably continue to face.

## **18.4 Inflation Assumptions and Contingencies**

18.4.1 The Council's budget model includes an allowance for pay awards of £250 for employees earning less than £24,000 pa (FTE) for 2021/22 and 1% for all employees for 2022/23 and 2023/24. If actual pay awards are lower than this the saving will be used to reduce the savings requirements for these years. If they are higher the Council will need to find further savings. 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.

18.4.2 In accordance with practice in recent years, no allowance has been built in for general inflation, although some provision for contractually committed inflation 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 2022/23 of £1.270m. 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. EDUCATION FUNDING – DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT**

19.1 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in 2021/22 will be allocated using four blocks:

- 19.2 **Schools Block - £136m** - funding for all mainstream primary and secondary schools via a local funding formula, although the Government's stated aspiration is to move to a nationally determined funding formula in future. The amount in the block for Telford & Wrekin has increased by around £10m compared to 2020/21, mainly due to an increase of around 8% in the funding per pupil. Some of this is due to a like-for-like increase in pupil funding of around 3%. The remainder represents funds previously allocated through separate teachers' pay grants being brought into the Schools Block.
- 19.3 **High Needs Block –£28m** - which funds Special Educational Needs (SEN) placements and support, special schools, pupil referral units and other alternative provision. The allocation for 2021/22 includes £0.5m for teachers pay which previously was allocated through separate grants. The remaining increase of £2.5m is approximately 10%, broadly reflecting the national average increase. This significant increase, following a similar increase last year, is a recognition of the severe budget pressures in this area.
- 19.4 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.
- 19.5 **Early Years Block - £12m** – 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. There has been a very modest increase in funding per child for 2021/22 of 1.35% for 3 and 4 year olds and 1.52% for 2 year olds. Cost pressures impacting upon settings include the year on year increases in the minimum wage. As early years allocations are based upon numbers of children in two January censuses, January 2021 and January 2022 for financial year 2021/22, the allocations are provisional until final adjustments are made after the financial year end (Summer 2022 for financial year 2021/22).
- 19.6 **Central School Services Block –£1.2m** - 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 most of which are statutory responsibilities of the local authority.

## **20. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 20.1 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.
- 20.2 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.

## **21. ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENTS.**

- 21.1 Environmental assessment is a procedure that ensures that environmental implications of Council decisions are taken into account. The principle is to ensure that plans, programmes and projects likely to have significant effects on the environment are made subject to an environmental assessment. Environmental Assessments aim to provide a level of protection to the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation of projects, plans and programmes with a view to reduce their environmental impact.
- 21.2 The revenue budget includes an ongoing budget to support work on climate change initiatives and the capital programme includes £4m earmarked for initiatives that will help the Council reduce its carbon

footprint working with government and partners where appropriate which will be used to help reduce the Council's environment impact. Overall, on balance the environmental assessment of the budget proposals is expected to be positive for example as the Council operates from fewer buildings energy use will be lower and lower employee numbers and increased home working will result in decreased car journeys to and from work and potentially work related journeys as we redesign services and make increased use communication technology.

- 21.3 An economic impact assessment will be undertaken for those proposals that have a significant individual economic impact. Clearly reducing spending by the Council will impact on the local economy for example through fewer people being directly employed by the Council and less business being placed by the Council with local suppliers as spending reductions are made. The Council adopts a proactive business supporting and business winning approach which will reduce the adverse economic impacts caused by the Government's continuing cuts to our grant and has also set out a significant Capital Programme which will offset the impact of spending cuts to some extent.

## **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 Service & Financial Planning for next year 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 level of council tax increase and highlighted the areas for new investment. The Council's strategy 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.
- 22.3 As part of our engagement process we have also commenced dialogue with our partners in the voluntary and community sector and Town and Parish Councils. These sessions involved presentations on our Service & Financial Planning strategy and provided more detailed

information about the challenges we face. The sessions also included an opportunity for us to take stock with our partners as a result of the impacts of Covid. This was to consider the impacts it has had on how we operate and how we can better combine resources by working more closely together during these difficult times to meet the complex needs of our communities.

- 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 Service and Financial Planning Strategy 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 seven non-Executive elected members and two co-opted members. 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 13 January and 18 January 2021 to scrutinise the Service & Financial Planning Strategy 2021/22 – 2023/24 agreed by Cabinet for consultation on 7 January 2021.
- 23.3 An alternative budget was not put forward by the main opposition group.
- 23.4 The Committee would like to thank the Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance 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 The general consensus of the Committee was to support the administration's budget approach. In particular, the Committee made the following observations:-
  - (a) Adult Social Care (ASC) continued to be financially challenging, not just for Telford and Wrekin but for local authorities across the country.

It was clear to the Committee that the application of the Government's 3% "Adult Social Care precept" which would be fully invested into ASC services was a necessity. The Committee continued to keenly await the government's green paper and debate on funding for long-term social care.

(b) The Committee supported the proposed increase in Council Tax for 2021/22 of 1.99%, together with the application of the Government's additional 3% "Adult Social Care precept" (a total of 4.99%). Members noted that with the increase the Authority's tax rate would still be among the lowest in the Midlands.

(c) Members expressed support for the Hardship Fund and other Council Tax mitigation policies during what had been and would continue to be a difficult period for residents.

(d) The Committee also noted and supported the investment proposals in the budget strategy and supported the prudent use of £0.386m of available revenue balances as set out in the report.

(e) The Committee supported the COVID-19 reserve contingency fund, it was noted that such contingency was prudent given the ongoing disruption posed by the pandemic for the foreseeable future.

(f) Members also expressed support for the savings proposals for 2021/22 – 2022/23.

(g) The Committee was in support of the additional £1m (over two years) investment supporting crime and anti-social behaviour initiatives.

## **24. STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER**

**24.1** As an organisation which provides a vast range of different services to the community and spends revenue and capital resources of around £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 regularly 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. The risk register has also been reviewed by the Audit Committee at the meeting held on 28 January 2021.

## **25 PAY POLICY**



- 25.1 The draft pay policy statement for 2021/22 which, will be considered by the Personnel Committee on 11 February 2021, 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. For 2021/22 there are no proposed changes to the scheme 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 2021/22 but with significantly increased funding earmarked for this purpose. Details of both the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the Council Tax Reduction Hardship Assistance Policy can be seen in Appendix 14.

## **27. IRONBRIDGE GORGE MUSEUM TRUST**

- 27.1 The Council made a loan to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust which is due to expire in January 2025. The balance outstanding at 31 December 2020 was £161,206 and the loan is secured by a guarantee from the Ironbridge (Telford) Heritage Foundation Ltd. The intention was that the loan would be repaid through offsetting services bought from the Trust over the period of the agreement with repayment being monitored against the January 2023 timescale. A recent review of the

service delivery and repayment arrangements indicates that a more realistic payment schedule would be to provide the option to extend the loan to January 2031 if required. This continues the valuable partnership working between the Council and IGMT which is key to the effective management of the World Heritage Site, maximising tourism and promoting Destination Telford.

## **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 delivery of savings which will total £126.4m 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 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 effect 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 service and financial planning strategy for 2021/22 has been approved by full Council on 4 March 2021 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 over and above the obvious and very significant reductions in Government grant. 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 CSR2021 and the new local government finance system now expected to be introduced from April 2022 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 significant potential budget shortfalls currently projected in 2022/23 and 2023/24. 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 2021/22 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**

- LG Futures Local Government Finance Settlement briefing
- BBC News Website
- LGA Website and CSR and Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2021/22: on-the-day briefing documents issued by the LGA
- Financial Times Website – “England’s councils face austerity by stealth” Chris Giles and Andy Bounds - 9 December 2020
- Revenue Support Grant Settlement Announcement – MHCLG Website
- Service & Financial Planning Report to Council – 5 March 2020
- Service & Financial Planning Report to Cabinet – 7 January 2021
- Setting the Council Tax Base Report to Council – 14 January 2021
- Financial Monitoring Reports to Cabinet 7 January 2021 and 18 February 2021

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## **INDEX OF APPENDICES.**

### Appendix

- 1 2020/21 Council Tax Comparison (at Band D) – Midlands Councils
- 2 2020/21 Council Tax Comparison (at Band D) – Unitary Councils
- 3 Strategic Risk Register
- 4 Savings Delivered to Date
- 5 Financing costs to net revenue stream 2020/21
- 6 Base Budget 2021/22
- 7 Analysis of Base Budget Movements
- 8 Details of education related Section 106 Agreements
- 9 Reserves and Balances
- 10 CFO's Robustness Statement
- 11 Children's Safeguarding & Early Help Cost Improvement Strategy
- 12 Adult Social Care Cost Improvement Strategy
- 13 Savings to be Delivered 2021/22 and 2022/23
- 14 Council Tax Reduction Policy
- 15 Pay Policy Statement 2021/22
- 16 Efficiency Strategy 2021/22