



Report to:	Cabinet	06 February 2024
Lead Cabinet Member:	John Williams - Lead Cabinet Member for Finance	
Lead Officer:	Peter Maddock - Head of Finance	
Key Decision:	Yes The key decision was first published in the April 2023 Forward Plan.	

Summary General Fund Revenue Budget 2024/2025

Executive Summary

1. To consider the summary General Fund Revenue Budget for 2024/2025 and to recommend the Revenue Budget to Council.
2. This is a key decision because it results in the authority incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the Council's overall budgets.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that Cabinet consider the report and, if satisfied:
 - a) Review the detailed budgets presented at Appendix B, and summarised at Appendix A, with an estimated General Fund Gross Operating Expenditure for 2024/2025 of £76.731 million, estimated Gross Operating Income of £48.306 million and estimated General Fund Net Operating Expenditure of £28.425 million.
 - b) Acknowledge the key factors which have led to the proposed 2024/2025 General Fund Revenue Budget, with service pressures summarised at Appendix C and offsetting efficiency savings/policy options summarised at Appendix D.
 - c) Acknowledge that the 2024/2025 General Fund Revenue Budget gross expenditure is covered by forecast income sources (assuming no change in Government grant) and, therefore, any addition(s) to expenditure that are made by the Cabinet or Council will need to be met from the General Fund Balance.
 - d) Approve the 2024/2025 General Fund Revenue Budget taking into account the statement by the Chief Finance Officer on the risks and robustness of the estimates as required under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 (reproduced at Appendix F).
 - e) Set the Council Tax Requirement for 2024/2025 at £11,688,650.

- f) **Approve an increase in the District element of the Council Tax of £5 per annum, giving an average Band D Council Tax of £170.31, plus the relevant amounts required by the precepts of the Parish Councils, Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire Police & Crime Commissioner, and the Cambridgeshire Fire Authority.**
- g) **Approve the estimates of the amounts required to be made under the Non-domestic Rating (Rates Retention) Regulations 2013 as set out in paragraphs 38 - 41.**
- h) **Approve the use of the additional income from the Business Rate Pool, estimated at £1,100,000 in 2024/2025, for transfer to the established Renewables Reserve for priority projects.**
- i) **Subject to any changes to the recommendations above, recommend to Council that it approves:**
 - (i) **The 2024/2025 General Fund Revenue Budget based on known commitments at this time and planned levels of Service/functions resulting in a Budget Requirement of £37.125 million.**
 - (ii) **The District Council Precept on the Collection Fund (Council Tax Requirement) of £11.689 million in 2024/2025 (based on the Provisional Government Settlement) and a Band D Council Tax of £170.31.**

Details

A. Prospects for Local Government

- 4. This report sets out the draft revenue budget proposals for 2024/2025 that have been prepared in the context of an economic landscape that has continued with a degree of uncertainty and market volatility during 2023. The cost of living has been rising in the UK and across the world markedly over the past year, particular food, energy prices and high inflation levels. This is partly in response to the conflict in Ukraine and global recovery from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic though this should begin to ease in 2024 but will not fully be over until wages catchup for all households. In addition, there is continued uncertainty about the timing of local government funding reforms that, when implemented, could have a significant impact on the distribution of resources.
- 5. The funding reforms, previously planned for introduction from April 2021, had been further delayed and the long-standing funding issues remain unresolved. There was no update within the 2023/2024 Local Government Settlement on the business rates retention (BRR) reset or funding reform although the Government did announce that the BRR pilots would continue throughout the spending review period. It is reasonable to assume that these reforms are likely to be further delayed to 2026/2027 at the earliest, some seven years later than originally planned. These reforms are expected to fundamentally change how, and to what level, all Local Authorities are to be funded but there remains uncertainty as to the level and distribution of local government funding beyond 2024/2025.
- 6. A detailed refresh of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was considered by Cabinet, at its meeting on 07 November 2023, and this provided (i) an assessment of the resources available to the Council over the medium term and (ii) an assessment of spending pressures based on existing levels of service delivery and known policy/legislative changes. The determination of the 2024/2025 revenue budget has,

therefore, been informed by the MTFs financial forecasts, together with established and effective budget monitoring arrangements that have created a sound foundation for the management of the Council's financial resources. A further refresh of this is required in light of the provisional settlement and proposed 2024/2025 budget.

7. The financial landscape requires a reliance on an effective budget strategy and sound medium-term financial planning to ensure that the Council's limited resources are targeted to priority services and outcomes.

B. Economic Outlook

8. The economic landscape has continued with uncertainty, with the ongoing financial challenges associated with the cost-of-living crisis in the UK and across the world markedly over the past year, particular food, and energy prices. This is partly in response to the conflict in Ukraine and global recovery from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and high inflation levels acting as a dampener on growth and impacting on Council services. Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation, as a measure of price rises, increased by 4.0% in the 12 months to December 2023, up from 3.9% in November and the first time the rate has increased since February 2023 (based upon the Office for National Statistics (ONS) information). The prospects for economic growth appear limited with a real risk that the UK could fall into recession and a cautious approach is, however, being maintained given the level of uncertainty.
9. In response to the prevailing economic conditions the Bank of England Base Rate has been increasing during the financial year 2023/2024. The increase by 0.25%, to 4.25% from 23 March 2023 was followed by further increases, in response to market conditions, to 4.5% from 11 May 2023, to 5% from 22 June 2023, and to 5.25% from 03 August 2023. The base rate influences the interest rates that lenders charge for mortgages, loans and other types of credit.
10. Inflation used to drive expenditure and income assumptions in revenue budget planning have been based on the Bank of England and Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecasts; the percentage applied in the MTFs and in the proposed budget is 5% for employee related costs and for other costs inflation has been reflected using the percentage most suitable on an individual case basis taking the current economic situation into consideration.
11. The Council lends its cash balances externally on a short-term basis, with a view to generating a return that can be spent on delivering council services whilst managing both security and liquidity of the cash. Whilst there is marginal benefit from prevailing interest rates in terms of investment returns, local authorities have experienced unforeseen cost pressures as a result of increased energy prices, spiralling inflation, and national living wage pressures. These factors have been fully taken into account as part of the 2024/2025 budget setting process.
12. Long term loans were not used during 2023/2024 to fund items in the Capital Programme though it is anticipated that external borrowing will be required during 2024/2025. For budgeting purposes, available interest rates have been factored into the borrowing cost projections associated with the capital programme.

C. Budget Formulation

13. The detailed budgets continue to be presented for each service area numbered from appendices **B1 to B7** on a service by service basis and made up of a number of pages. Each service pack has a title page, a budget summary listing the main budget

categories, individual budget pages showing the detail behind the summary with some narrative (with similar budgets grouped together) and a subjective analysis which shows the service area spend by types of expenditure by Service code of Practice (SeRCOP) generally adopted by local authorities.

14. In looking specifically at the 2024/2025 Revenue Budget, the Council needs to be mindful of the financial backdrop and will need to ensure that any proposals, in particular around efficiencies and policy options, need to be realistic and above all sustainable. The financial landscape will, therefore, require reliance on an effective budget strategy and sound medium-term financial planning to ensure that the Council's limited resources are targeted to priority services and outcomes.
15. The Revenue Budget has been prepared in accordance with the Council's MTFS approved by Cabinet on 07 November 2023. The clear message is that budget setting and medium-term financial planning will be tough over the duration of the MTFS (to 2029). In determining the 2024/2025 revenue budget, due and proper regard has been given to its ongoing sustainability and the observance of a number of overarching principles. This has involved:
 - a) A comprehensive review of the base budget to provide greater assurance for the future. The review has been based upon regular established monitoring processes and has incorporated a review of the alignment between the original budget and service activity.
 - b) The commitment, in response to the financial challenges, to an ambitious 4-year plan to deliver high quality services, ensuring that financial resources are aligned to business plan priorities and improving customer service.
 - c) A positive commitment to achieve better value for money for the service areas whilst maintaining quality, accessible front-line services, and the adoption of a Value for Money Strategy by the Cabinet on 4 September 2019.
 - d) The continued review and tight control of the capital programme given the impact of borrowing on the revenue budget.
16. An overall commitment to increase annual income sources and reduce annual expenditure without materially reducing front line services provided by the Council.
17. The resulting draft 2024/2025 revenue budget sets out the Council's finances and the efficiencies required to produce a balanced budget in the light of the ongoing reduction in Government grant funding and other pressures.
18. In preparing the budget for 2024/2025 a detailed revised estimate for 2023/2024 has also been prepared considering the changes to expenditure and funding owing to a number of national and global factors: Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, global supplies production, rising inflation, Russian sanctions and the cost-of-living crisis.
19. There are several significant changes to the budget process; one change relates to Support Service Allocations. The requirement to allocate out all support services was made discretionary several years ago. This process is quite time consuming but made the allocation of the appropriate level of Support Services to the HRA transparent and clear. The 2024/25 budget has been prepared based on allocations only to the HRA, Council Subsidiaries, shared services, and corporate activities so this will mean significant movements in some areas as support services have no longer been allocated there. It is fair to say the revised process was not as easy as expected and

once the budgets are complete a review will be undertaken to assess whether we continue with this or revert to the previous approach.

20. The second change relates to non-operational budgets whereby pension related accounting adjustments and Capital Financing charges are not included within the detailed budget packs primarily because these are reversed out below the net cost of services line as they are an accounting adjustment and should not impact on the general fund balance or the Council Tax. It is felt that these changes improve the clarity of the detailed budgets.

D. Local Government Settlement – Funding Sources

21. The 2021 Spending Review, announced on 27 October 2021, set out Government's spending plans and departmental budgets for the period 2022/2023 to 2024/2025. It confirmed, at that time, that the Core Spending Power for local government was expected to increase by 3% per annum real terms (5% in cash terms). In addition, it was confirmed that there would not be a reset of the business rates baseline in 2023/2024 but there was no update on the timescale for the funding reforms.
22. The provisional finance settlement announcement, on 18 December 2023, made some changes to the funding allocations compared to 2023/2024. Whilst the delay in implementing the intended funding reforms benefits the Council in 2024/2025, there remains very significant risks to the funding level for District Council's in future years with the expectation that the Council will lose a significant share of its funding as a result of the funding changes – the expected, but deferred, business rate baseline reset could be particularly damaging. To offset the adverse impact of the local government funding reforms, when implemented, some form of damping support would be inevitable, although the detail on this and how it would be phased out over time has not been published
23. The key headlines in relation to the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement are as follows:
 - (i) Council Tax referendum principle of the higher of 3% or £5 per dwelling for 2024/2025.
 - (ii) Continuation of the existing Business Rate Retention Scheme for a further year, with 100% business rates pilots continued for a further year. It remains unclear what is happening with the proposed Business Rates reset. The Cambridgeshire Business Rates Pool was also confirmed for a further year.
 - (iii) A new allocation referred to as the funding guarantee introduced for 2023/24 (£1,070,500) has been increased from 3% to 5 in 2024/25 (£1,152,000). This is provided to ensure all authorities receive at least a 5% increase in core spending power. It was assumed that this will be discontinued after 2025/2026. On 24th January the Government announced that this would increase to 5%, although no detail has been confirmed in the actual figures yet¹.
 - (iv) Continuation of the Rural Service Grant up from £153,000 to £177,000 for a further year in recognition of the additional cost of providing services in sparse rural areas, pending implementation of the Fair Funding Review.

¹ Further changes were announced, including potential extra funding for Internal Drainage Boards, but no detail has been provided and so no figures are included in the budget papers yet.

- (v) The one-off services grant to support service provision has been reduced to £17,000 in 2024/25 and thereafter discontinued.
- (vi) Revenue Support Grant (RSG) of £243,000 has been allocated for 2024/2025 and is expected to continue into 2025/2026 and beyond but at an increased level.
- (vii) The original consultation on the New Homes Bonus (NHB) scheme closed on 7 April 2021 proposing a range of options to provide an incentive that is more focussed and targeted on ambitious housing delivery. Further expected consultation during 2023/2024 did not take place which means there is still considerable uncertainty around support going forwards. It had been assumed that the support provided in the settlement would be on the basis of a revised scheme, however, the Council has received an allocation of £1,757,000 on the basis of the current scheme.

24. The spending power of the Council, based upon the provisional settlement, can be summarised as follows:

	2023/2024 £'000	2024/2025 Provisional £'000	Change %	2025/2026 Forecast £'000
Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA):				
- Baseline Funding Level	2,746	2,891	5.3%	2,978
Total SFA – Per 2024/2025 Settlement	2,746	2,891	5.3%	2,978
- Rural Services Grant	153	177	15.6%	177
- Revenue Support Grant	228	243	6.6%	251
- Funding Allocation Guarantee	1,070	1,152	7.7%	2,546
- Services Grant	107	17	-84.1%	17
New Homes Bonus (NHB) Grant	1,508	1,757	16.5%	-
Council Tax Income	11,130	11,689	5%	12,304
Core Spending Power	16,942	17,926	5.8%	18,273

25. While the level of Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) for 2024/2025 remains stable as a result of the settlement that has been announced, there is still uncertainty relating to the SFA for 2025/2026 and beyond. The outcome of the Fair Funding Review, a probable baseline reset (and potential review of the Business Rate Retention system), and the review of NHB create uncertainty but this is now more likely to impact budgets from 2026/27.

26. The key elements of local government funding, some of the assumptions made for the period from 2025/2026 and local prospects were outlined in the refresh of the MTFS reported to Cabinet on 07 November 2023. These are outlined in more detail in the “Funding the Budget Requirement” Section below.

E. Spending Baseline, Spending Pressures and Savings

27. The table below sets out headline movements between the 2024/2025 draft budget and the 2023/2024 approved budget (Column 1 and 7 on appendix A) Detailed analysis by service area is outlined in **Appendices A and B**.

	Increased Resource £'s	Decreased Resource £'s
Resources		
Council Tax	369,620	
Business Rates	3,558,800	
Funding Guarantee Allocation	81,500	
Rural Services Grant/Services Grant/RSG (Net Change)		51,060
New Homes Bonus	248,550	
Net Increase in Resources	4,258,470	51,060

	Reduced Spending/ Funding changes £'s	Increased Spending £'s
Spending		
Chief Executive	379,000	
Climate, Environment and Waste Services	1,141,000	
Finance Service	5,625,000	
Housing Services	1,535,000	
Monitoring Officer		163,000
Planning Services	1,219,000	
Transformation, HR & Corporate Services		1,727,000
Interest Payable	505,000	
Investment Income	524,000	
Other Levies & Contributions		192,000
Capital Financing & MRP		7,025,000
Contribution to Earmarked Reserves		1,961,000
Contribution to General Fund		4,066,000
Change in budget requirement between 2023/2024 and 2024/2025	10,928,000	15,135,000

28. The most significant of these are set out below:
- a) The “Net Increase in Resources” is set out in more detail at Section “G” below. The increase in Council Tax is based upon a proposed £5 increase on 2023/2024 levels.

- b) Spending pressures and growth bids have been submitted and have been refined as part of the budget build process. These are summarised at **Appendix C**.
 - c) Pay and prices incorporate a pay increase of 5% and an assessment of contracted service inflation.
 - d) Funding changes (e.g. incorporating the additional S31 grants related to business rates and additional income from the Council's investments).
 - e) Capital financing charges to support the forward capital programme (see separate report on the agenda).
 - f) Savings proposals are set out in more detail at **Appendix D**.
29. It has been established practice, since 2020/2021, to maintain a prudent level of revenue contingency to enable unforeseen and "one off" needs (i.e. having no long-term ongoing revenue commitment) to be considered for funding during the financial year. The draft 2024/2025 revenue budget includes a sum of £500,000 for this purpose, which represents a little under 2% of the net operating expenditure.

F. Proposed Savings

- 30. The Council has embarked on an ambitious 4-year plan to transform service quality, realign financial resources to business plan priorities and improve customer service.
- 31. Progress with the range of savings proposals, including income generation opportunities, has been considered and refined as part the ongoing budget monitoring reports to Cabinet. The proposals have been subject to further refinement and consultation with stakeholders and the schedule of proposals, at Appendix D, have been included in the 2024/2025 Revenue Budget.
- 32. The profile of savings is influenced by deliverability and lead in times and an analysis by years at Appendix D together with an estimate of how much is expected to fall on the General Fund and how much are HRA related savings.
- 33. There continues to be, in addition, a great deal of work undertaken, in consultation with Heads of Service on budget challenge, in order to identify other savings on budgets sufficient to reduce the level of costs to the level of resources available, or to ensure that budgets are appropriately aligned. This has resulted in budget adjustments being made in the context of maintaining the relationship between resource allocation and the Council's Business Plan priorities.
- 34. In relation to partnership arrangements, a "recharge model" was introduced in 2020/2021 for existing shared services to ensure that recharges are fair and consistently applied and that taxpayers in one area are not subsidising services provided in another. The level of recharges applied has been factored into the 2024/2025 revenue budget.

G. Funding the Budget Requirement

- 35. Funding the Budget Requirement incorporates:
 - i Revenue Support Grant/Business Rates
 - ii Other Specific Grants

iii Council Tax

(i) **Revenue Support Grant/Business Rates**

36. The Business Rate Retention Scheme (BRRS) was introduced in April 2013 to provide Councils with stronger financial incentives to support property development and boost the economy in their local area. It means that Councils bear a proportion of the real terms change in business rate revenues in their area: gaining when revenues grow in real terms, losing when they fall. The proportion was initially set at 50% across England. In two-tier areas, like Cambridgeshire, 40% is retained by the District Council and 9% is retained by Cambridgeshire County Council and 1% by the Cambridgeshire Fire Authority.
37. The review of Local Government Finance that will comprise (i) the quantum and how existing funding streams will feature within this and (ii) the methodology to allocate funding (known as Fair Funding) has now been further delayed. It is uncertain when the introduction of the new funding model predicated on changes to BRSS to enable a 75% retention of Business Rates (with most, if not all of the 25% increase, allocated to authorities with adult social care responsibilities) will be introduced. The 2024/2025 revenue budget has, therefore, been based upon the existing funding regime.
38. The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement was announced on 18 December 2023 and sets out the Council's SFA for 2024/2025. This is identified in the table below, together with the other factors relevant to determining the Business Rates Yield for 2024/2025:

	2023/2024 £'000	2024/2025 Provisional £'000	Change %	2025/2026 £'000
Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA):				
- Baseline Funding Level	2,746	2,891	5.3	2,978
- Tariff	33,902	35,684	5.3	36,745
- Business Rates Baseline	36,648	38,590	5.3	39,748
- Section 31 Grants	5,818	5,825	0.1	-
Total SFA – Per 2024/2025 Settlement	2,746	2,891	5.3	2,978
Safety Net Threshold	2,449	2,674	9.2	2,754
Levy Rate (p in £) applicable if outside pool	£0.50	£0.50		£0.50

39. Specifically, in relation to the preparation of the 2024/2025 Revenue Budget:
40. The net Business Rates Yield has been estimated at £114.181 million for 2024/2025 as set out in Appendix E. The Council's share of this together with the surplus set out in Appendix E equates to £51.184 million compared to a Business Rates Baseline of £38.590 million as set out in the table above. The forecast is based on the number and

rateable values of non-domestic properties currently shown in the valuation list. The Business Rates forecast is predicated on the following assumptions:

- (a) The Council is entitled to a number of Section 31 Grants in relation to Business Rates to compensate for yield that is foregone due to national government policy, for example, the extension to eligibility for Small Business Rate Relief. These Section 31 Grants are included within the Council's net expenditure (at Appendix F).
 - Where growth or decline in the tax base, i.e. new developments, can be predicted with reasonable certainty this is reflected in the forecast yield.
 - There will be no significant changes to the overall value of reliefs, e.g. empty property rate relief or charitable rate relief over the course of the financial year.
 - (b) The business rates revaluation went ahead in 2023/24 and the council saw a significant increase in rateable values as a result. The key issue however in relation to forecasting the Business Rates Yield relates to the value of appeals and this is extremely difficult to predict. Given the economic situation and the cost-of-living crisis, there is likely to be a significant number of appeals coming forward as a result of increased business rates liabilities. Appeals relating to the previous "2010 List" and "2017 List" have been resolved, and whilst the provision rate used was based on the national rate of 4.7% there is little confidence that this is a guide to future appeal rates. Thus, whilst there is still no real data to base the provision on going forward a figure of 8% has been used to reflect the expectation that appeals lodged will be higher than those seen previously.
 - (c) Where ratepayers are faced with increased rates liabilities, the government will apply transitional measures so that new liability levels are reached over a three-year period. The value of transitional relief in these cases is estimated at a little under £11 million. Those ratepayers that see reduced rates liabilities will benefit from those reductions immediately.
 - (d) The estimated Business Rates Tariff and Baseline are both projected to increase by around 5.3% in 2024/25 but it is unlikely that actual income from business rates will increase by these sorts of levels given the expected level of appeals going forward, and economic climate, so it is proposed that some of the additional income in 2024/25 be set aside to meet the expected shortfalls in 2025/26 and beyond.
41. Under the business rates retention scheme local authorities are able to come together, on a voluntary basis, to pool their business rates, giving them scope to generate additional growth through collaborative effort and to smooth the impact of volatility in rates income across a wider economic area. The Council successfully applied to be the lead authority of a consortium which also includes Cambridgeshire County Council, Peterborough City Council, Fenland District Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridgeshire Fire Authority. The formal designation of the pool was confirmed on 18 December 2019 and was introduced on 1 April 2020. The Pool successfully continued into 2023/24 and has also been re-designated to continue in 2024/2025. It is estimated that the Council will benefit from an additional income in excess of £1 million during 2024/2025 and, in line with established policy, it is proposed that the sum continues to be transferred annually to top up the Renewables Reserve to fund priority projects determined by the Council.

(ii) **Other Specific Grants**

Rural Services Grant

42. The Council currently receives a Rural Services Grant in the sum of £153,000 in recognition of the additional cost of providing services in sparse rural areas. This has been confirmed to continue into 2024/2025 at the higher level of £177,000.

New Homes Bonus

43. The New Homes Bonus (NHB) was introduced in 2011 to provide an incentive for local authorities to encourage housing growth in their areas. The aim of the bonus was to provide a financial incentive to reward and encourage local authorities to help facilitate housing growth. It is based on the amount of extra Council Tax revenue raised from new-build homes, conversions and long-term empty homes brought back into use. NHB funding has been based on the following:
- a) NHB is payable on housing growth over a threshold of 0.4% of the Tax Base.
 - b) Payments are based on a rolling 4-year period.
44. Housing growth has been significant for this Council area and, as such, the Council has benefited from high levels of NHB. The Government has, however, stated its commitment to review NHB and the long-awaited consultation on the replacement for NHB, published in 2021, outlined a number of options for reforming NHB to provide an incentive more focused and targeted on ambitious housing delivery, that complemented wider planning reforms, and that sought to dovetail with the wider financial mechanisms the government is putting in place, including the community infrastructure levy and the Single Housing Infrastructure Fund. The Council has been a major beneficiary of the grant, receiving a peak of £5.2 million in 2016/2017 and there is a risk that the long outstanding review could result in a reduced financial benefit.
45. It had been expected that the changes to NHB would be implemented alongside the wider local government reform package, but the timescale for the changes remains uncertain and clarity of the future of NHB is needed following the consultation in 2021. It is now evident that the provisional settlement would be on a similar basis to the 2023/2024 budget, therefore, includes a reward from NHB in the sum of £1.757 million based on the existing scheme.
46. In line with the agreement of the partners, 10% of NHB has been set aside as a contribution to the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) Investment and Delivery Fund.

(iii) Council Tax

47. Council Tax has been the most predictable and stable element of Local Government funding, despite the uncertainty created by rising inflation and increased costs. This source of income is predicted to yield £11.689 million in 2024/2025 based upon an assumed £5 increase in Council Tax (the maximum level permitted by Government) and an increase in tax base based upon the latest estimates of housing growth.
48. The Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires the Council to set its Council Tax Base for the ensuing financial year by 31 January preceding the start of the new financial year and to notify precepting bodies of the Tax Base that will apply to their area. The Council Tax base for the financial year 2024/2025 has been set at 68,631.6 Band D equivalent properties (an increase of 1.9%(1300.9) compared to the 2023/2024 Tax Base of 67,330.7).
49. The proposed increase in Council Tax for 2024/2025 is 3.05%. This proposal equates to an increase of £5.00 on the average Band D property giving a Council Tax of £170.31

based upon the 2024/2025 Council Tax base of 68,631.6 Band D dwellings. The proposed 3.05% increase in Council Tax, results in a total yield from Council Tax of £11.600 million (including £0.089 million Collection Fund deficit).

H. Review of Reserves

50. A review of Reserves has been made as part of the budget setting process and a separate report on the agenda outlines the recommendations following the review.

I. Capital Programme

51. A review of the capital programme has been undertaken in conjunction with lead officers to ensure that proposed investment is prudent, sustainable, and affordable and a separate detailed report to the Cabinet proposes a revised profiled capital programme. The Capital Financing implications of the proposed capital programme are reflected in the proposed General Fund Revenue Budget. In the event that all changes are approved, and the latest forecast capital receipts are forthcoming, a forecast borrowing requirement of £64.34 million will be needed to support the total capital programme to 2028/2029.
52. The revenue implications of the Capital Programme have also been taken into account in the draft 2024/2025 revenue budget and are detailed at **Appendix A**.

J. General Fund Revenue Budget Summary

53. The 2024/2025 General Fund Revenue Budget Summary is detailed at **Appendix A** and the following is relevant:
- (i) Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and Business Rates
54. These figures reflect the Settlement for 2024/2025. Any adjustment (dependent on its effect) will be reported to Council on 27 February 2023.
- (ii) Council Tax Collection Fund Balance in aid of Council Tax
55. The Council's share of estimated Council Tax deficit as at 31 March 2024 has been determined by the Head of Finance and totals £0.089 million.
- (iii) Net District Requirement from Council Tax
56. After allowing for the increase in the Council's Taxbase, the average Band D Council Tax will be £170.31.
- (iv) District Precept on Collection Fund
57. In accordance with legislative requirements the District Precept on the Collection Fund will include Parish Precepts when known.
58. In pursuance of Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 the Chief Finance Officer is required to make a statement on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of Reserves in relation to the Council's budget calculations. Provided Members fully take into account the risks that are outlined in the report at **Appendix F**, I can confirm that Heads of Service are satisfied with the level of budgets put forward for 2024/2025 relating to their respective service areas although it must be recognised that the budget

allocations in 2024/2025, and the future prospects for service delivery, will be challenging and that pressures and constraints during the next financial year will be inevitable.

Reasons for Recommendations

59. To enable the Cabinet to recommend to Full Council the 2023/2024 General Fund Revenue Budget.

Options

60. There are options to remove or add items to the budget but, based on previous Cabinet decisions and the detailed discussions held with spending officers, the General Fund Revenue Budget as presented includes all items required to deliver council services and member priorities. The gross expenditure is covered by forecast income sources (assuming no change in Government grant) and, therefore, any addition(s) to expenditure that are required will need to identify matching savings and/or additional income if the proposed level of Council Tax is not to change.

Implications

61. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:-

Financial and Fraud Risk

Budget Overview

62. The proposed 2024/2025 revenue budget is set out in the table at **Appendix A**.

Government Funding Settlement

63. This report is based on the Government settlement relating to the revenue support grant and business rates redistribution. The consultation on the proposed settlement ended on 15 January 2024 and the final settlement is expected to be published in early February 2024.

Parish Council Precepts

64. Parish Councils had until 31 January to notify the Council of their precepts for the forthcoming year and, as such, the total of the precepts will be reported directly to Full Council on 27 February 2024 as part of Council Tax Resolution.

General Risk

65. The Revenue Budget for 2024/2025 has been prepared on a prudent basis but there are risks which may affect the budget. These risks include the following:
- The extent of service pressure being higher or lower than anticipated.
 - The delivery of planned efficiency savings.

- Unforeseen costs during the year which may exceed the provision in the general contingency of £500,000.
- The economic situation is either better or worse than anticipated with fluctuations in income sources (NB: This affects capital financing costs and fees and charges).
- Increases in inflation above those known or expected at this time.
- Member aspirations regarding service levels.
- The impact of changes in legislation.

66. It is also critical that the budget setting timescale is followed to ensure that statutory deadlines are complied with.

Specific Risk

67. When the Council considers each revenue service and function budget endeavours are made to identify potential risks. Inevitably, during the year, some of these risks will occur and impact on the budget by either requiring further expenditure or by reducing the Council's budgeted income. The budget process has identified a number of service specific risks relating to the range of District Council Services and related budgets. An overall assessment of risk and an assessment of the robustness of estimates are set out in **Appendix F**.

Legal

68. The Council is required by law to set a balanced revenue budget each year. There are two specific dates in relation to budget and Council Tax setting that are required by statute to be achieved. Firstly, it is a requirement that each local authority approves its Revenue Budget by 28 February each year for the forthcoming financial year. Secondly, a billing authority (i.e. this Council) is required to set the Council Tax for its area by 11 March each year for the forthcoming financial year.

69. It is a legal requirement (under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003) that before approving the ensuing year's Capital and Revenue Budget, the Council are required to receive and take into account a report of the Chief Finance Officer (Head of Finance) on the robustness of the estimates leading to the Council's Council Tax requirement and the adequacy of financial reserves. This needs to cover issues of affordability (having regard to Council Tax implications), prudence (having regard to Council policies/strategies) and sustainability (having regard to forecast annual expenditure and income). This report is at **Appendix F**.

Consultation responses

Leadership Team, Budget Holders and Lead Cabinet Members.

Background Papers

- Budget Report – Report to Cabinet: 06 February 2023/Council: 22 February 2023
- Medium Term Financial Strategy – Report to Cabinet: 07 November 2023
- Capital Programme Update and New Bids – Report to Cabinet: 05 December 2023
- 2023/24 Revenue & Capital Budget Monitoring – Report to Cabinet: 05 December 2023

Appendices

Appendix A: Revenue Budget 2024/2025: Summary

Appendix B1-7: Revenue Budget 2024/2025: Detailed Budgets

Appendix C: Service Pressures Taken into Account

Appendix D: Service Efficiencies/Income Generation Opportunities

Appendix E: Business Rates Yield Estimate 2024/2025

Appendix F: Revenue Budget – Risks and Robustness

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