

Report To: Cabinet

6 September 2021

Lead Cabinet Member(s): Councillor John Williams,
Lead Cabinet Member for Finance

Lead Officer: Peter Maddock, Head of Finance

General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy

Purpose

1. The Council reviews its Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and financial forecasts twice a year in accordance with best practice. Once at the start of the budget process and again toward the end. This report updates the MTFS to the financial year 2026/2027 and sets out the updated medium term financial plan following the outcome of a review of financial forecasts.
2. The assumptions within the document may need to be updated as the budget progresses and information becomes available and needs to be viewed in that context. In particular the outcome of the November spending review will provide greater clarity for future forecasts.
3. This is not a key decision as there are no resource implications directly arising from the report at this stage. The report does, however, ensure that the Council is aware of the financial challenges over the medium term and the financial forecasts outlined in the MTFS assist in the Council's financial planning.

Recommendations

4. **That Cabinet is requested to consider the report and, if satisfied, to:**
 - (a) **Acknowledge the projected changes in service spending and the overall resources available to the Council over the medium term.**
 - (b) **Recommend to Full Council the refreshed Medium Term Financial Strategy at Appendix A and updated financial forecast at Appendix B.**

Reasons for Recommendations

5. To ensure that the Cabinet is aware of the financial challenges over the medium-term and the strategy that is required to ensure that the Council will be in a position to deliver sustainable public services in the future.
6. To provide Cabinet with an update of the financial position and forecasts for the General Fund over the medium term following a review of financial assumptions.
7. To enable the Cabinet to recommend the MTFS to Council for approval in order to assist in the Council's financial planning.

Details

Background

8. The MTFS is the Council's overarching Financial Strategy document and gives financial expression to the Council's plans and fiscal challenges over the medium term. It sets out a range of financial assumptions and in so doing sets parameters within which the Council will deliver key public services over the medium term. This report includes an updated financial forecast, including risks arising due to COVID-19.
9. The MTFS comprises two key elements (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. Taken together the movement over the planning period of these two elements represents the financial challenge facing the Council.
10. There is a need, as part of effective medium term financial planning, to undertake a mid-year review of financial forecasts and projected changes in service spending. This will enable an updated forecast of the level of savings that need to be achieved to deliver the indicative Council Tax level.
11. The impact of COVID-19, in particular, has impacted on the financial forecasts and projections have, therefore, been further refreshed from the report that was submitted to Cabinet on 7 December 2020 to take account of subsequent announcements made by MHCLG on public sector funding and actual experience in the year to date. Specifically, the forecast takes account of:
 - Forecast pressures against the Council Tax Yield in the initial MTFS period.
 - Forecast pressures against Business Rates Yield in the initial MTFS period.
 - Forecast reduction in service-related income in the initial MTFS period; and
 - Forecast additional expenditure in the initial period of the MTFS.
12. It should be noted that these forecasts are based on assumptions in relation to both the duration and severity of COVID-19 and the speed of the UK economic recovery. A longer duration will increase costs and reduce income to a greater degree; an increased severity in economic terms will increase demand led spending and suppress recovery of income levels. The MTFS assumes that the economy will broadly recover by the end of financial year 2023/2024.
13. As far as 2021/2022 is concerned, the Council has received £0.634 million in support grant and, based upon returns to Government, anticipates that this will adequately offset the increased costs and loss of income arising from the impact of COVID-19.
14. To be able to deliver the Council's aspirations, set out in the refreshed Business Plan approved by Council on 20 May 2021, and meet its statutory responsibilities the Council must take a proactive approach to managing its resources effectively. The MTFS is a key tool for proactive financial management which allows for future projected funding requirements to be identified thus enabling the Council to identify appropriate actions to deal with any funding shortfalls. Coupled with the Service Transformation Programme, introduced during 2019/2020, the Council is able to manage its resources effectively in line with its established priorities.
15. The MTFS covering the period 2021/2022 to 2025/2026 was considered by Cabinet on 7 December 2020 and subsequently approved by Council at its meeting on 23 February 2021. The document sets out the framework within which financial forecasts, as part of the medium-term financial plan, are determined. The Strategy

has now been reviewed and refreshed to cover the period 2022/2023 to 2026/2027. The updated version of the MTFS is attached at **Appendix A** with the proposed minor changes identified in red and crossed through text.

16. This document sets out the framework within which the financial forecast, summarised at **Appendix B**, has been determined. The forecast shows the estimated funding gap between expected resources and expenditure, and between the period 2022/2023 and 2026/2027, stands at **£4.489 million**.
17. In considering the impact of the financial forecasts on revenue budgets during the MTFS period and the key issues for consideration, due regard has been given to the local and national policy context, current financial position, economic indicators, risks and assumptions relating to financial planning. It must be stressed, however, that the financial forecasts, and imminent budget setting process, are being prepared in the context of difficult economic circumstances with the impact of the UK withdrawal from the European Union in January 2020 and the implications of the pandemic; these factors have created real uncertainty and some market volatility.

Resources

18. The Local Government Finance Settlement for 2021/2022 was confirmed on 4 February 2021 and, in financial terms, overall Core Spending Power (CSP) increased by 4.6% (rather than the 4.5% in the provisional settlement). This uplift is entirely driven by the Greater London Authority, who have been given permission to increase its Precept by £15. The additional £47 million that it generates takes the overall increase in CSP from 4.5% to 4.6%.
19. 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. Consequently, over the MTFS period there remains uncertainty as to the level and distribution of local government funding.
20. Within the 2021/2022 Local Government Settlement there were no additional papers published regarding the local government funding reforms that were previously planned for introduction from April 2021, including the originally proposed increase in local business rate share to 75% (from 50%), a business rate baseline reset, a Fair Funding Review, and further other changes to key funding streams, such as social care and New Homes Bonus (NHB). A consultation on the replacement for NHB was published in February 2021, with changes expected to be implemented from 2022/2023, alongside the wider local government reform package. There is no confirmation on the timescale for implementation but an emerging view is that the reforms will not impact until the financial year 2023/2024.
21. The issues highlighted in previous MTFS reports (and set out below), therefore, remain relevant:
 - (a) There is no recognition of the proposed increase in local business rate share to 75% (from 50%) in that it is unclear when (or indeed whether) this will be introduced given current public finance turbulence. It should be noted that in the event of this being introduced that it is intended to be fiscally neutral, i.e. existing grants will be funded by Business Rates.

- (b) The Government will consult on Fair Funding proposals that will form the mechanism to allocate a share of the Local Government Control Total to Local Authorities. The Review will look at factors that drive spend (population, deprivation) as well as a Council's ability to raise local finance (Council Tax).
- (c) The Government is additionally looking at how best to build on the current business rates retention scheme and will consider issues such as appeals, growth and revaluation frequencies/baseline resets.
22. Given the extent of unknowns in relation to the Fair Funding Review and 75% Business Rates Retention, it has been assumed that Business Rates (for modelling purposes) will continue at a 50% retention level as at present (movement to 75% will be funding neutral for councils).
23. For the Council, the delay to the major changes in local government funding has resulted in broadly the same level of resource in 2021/2022 as allocated in 2020/2021. There remains, however, 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 likely funding changes – the business rate baseline reset is particularly damaging. Indications are, however, that the Fair Funding Review may not now be implemented until 2023/2024.
24. Council Tax has been the most predictable and stable element of Local Government funding, although COVID-19 has created a whole new level of uncertainty. This source of income is predicted to yield £10,033 million in 2021/2022 based upon the £5 increase in Council Tax (the maximum level permitted by Government) and an increase in the "tax base" based upon the latest estimates of housing growth. Good collection rates have generally been maintained during these difficult times but the Furlough scheme, introduced in spring 2020 in an attempt to stop people being laid off by their employers during lockdown, is expected to cease in September 2021 and the ongoing situation in relation to collection rates will need to be kept under review.

Medium Term Financial Planning

25. The MTFs forecast, reproduced at **Appendix B**, outlines the current financial position, economic forecasts and the headline figures for the medium term based upon the risks and assumptions relating to financial planning. These forecasts are set out in the table below which incorporates a number of planned savings and estimated additional investment income but factors in only limited additional service pressures beyond 2021/2022. Further service pressures will exaggerate the funding gap and, wherever possible, these should be managed within existing budgets.

	2022/2023 £'000	2023/2024 £'000	2024/2025 £'000	2025/2026 £'000	2026/2027 £'000
Council Tax	10,688	11,266	11,860	12,468	13,050
Retained Business Rates	9,879	7,300	7,446	7,595	7,747
Revenue Support Grant	-	-	-	-	-
New Homes Bonus	1,478	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Rural Services Grant	137	-	-	-	-
Section 31 Grant	-	-	-	-	-

Collection Fund Surplus	-	-	-	-	-
Total Resource	22,182	19,566	20,306	21,063	21,797
Net Budget Requirement	21,828	20,992	21,659	22,101	22,823
Net Resource Position	(354)	1,426	1,353	1,038	1,026

26. Spending pressures are, however, inevitable as the Council responds effectively to the needs of the service and customer expectations and, in this regard, Service Areas have been tasked to identify the existing budget pressures that need to be managed, and to prepare growth bids where existing resources and budgets need to be strengthened; these will be subject to review and refinement as part of the 2022/2023 budget setting process. Service Areas are also continuing to identify efficiency/savings opportunities across the Council's services that are realistic, achievable and sustainable (including possible invest to save initiatives and income generation opportunities).
27. The forecast assumes the continuation of the service transformation programme that was developed during 2019 in response to the funding gap and the financial challenges over the medium term. This includes a programme of targeted service reviews to ensure that value for money is obtained in the delivery of services. The impact of COVID-19 has to some extent necessitated a reorientation of the programme and a reassessment of some projects and lead times and the resulting impact of the range of planned savings and areas of potential additional income has been regularly reported to Cabinet as part of the ongoing budget monitoring.
28. Since the previous MTFS was adopted the PWLB consultation response has been factored in and no new stream 1 investments have been assumed after 26th November 2020. This has meant a significant increase in the net budget requirement and it will now be necessary to rely on other additional income or savings to plug the gap. The transformation programme is expected to deliver savings of around £2m and this has not yet been factored into the savings/income identified line below. The budget cycle now commencing for 2022/2023 will need to reflect the savings expected in that year and indeed the final MTFS produced as part of the budget will also reflect this.
29. The other factor affecting the figures is interest payable which has been increased slightly on figures previously as longer term borrowing has been assumed from 2022/2023. This needs to be kept under review with our treasury advisers but it is still likely that shorter term borrowing will be substantially cheaper for the council over the medium term.
30. The overall impact of the budget pressures, planned savings opportunities and other base budget adjustments (such as the cost of borrowing, investment income and pay and price inflation) is shown in the table below:

	2022/2023 £'000	2023/2024 £'000	2024/2025 £'000	2025/2026 £'000	2026/2027 £'000
Net Budget Requirement: Before Adjustments	23,303	21,828	20,992	21,659	22,101

Budget Pressures	163	24	23	23	-
Savings/Income Identified	(1,709)	(477)	(239)	(238)	(238)
Other Base Budget Changes	71	(383)	883	657	960
Budget Requirement c/f	21,828	20,992	21,659	22,101	22,823

* Further service pressures will exaggerate the funding gap and, wherever possible, should be managed within existing budgets.

31. The transformation agenda will continue to be pursued to target and deliver financial savings to contribute to the inevitable funding challenges that will arise from the review and redistribution of local government funding.
32. The changes to the rules around accessing borrowing from the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) for investment in commercial property must also be taken into account given the direct impact on the income generation opportunities that were a key element of the transformation agenda. The MTFS itself has also been updated to reflect the focus of the Investment Strategy towards commercial and service investment and, in particular, the presumption against the acquisition of commercial assets primarily for yield having regard to the new borrowing rules.
33. It is inevitable that the expected major review of local government financing would be accompanied by some form of “damping support” to reduce any sudden, adverse impact, on Council finances although it is acknowledged that this reduction would be phased out over a number of years.
34. The financial forecasts are based upon the latest modelling data, but the medium-term forecasts and damping should be treated with caution as the final position is uncertain until the provisions of the post 2022/2023 Spending Review are known and are eventually confirmed. There is also concern that any further service pressures over the medium term will exaggerate the funding gap. The estimated damping has not, therefore, been included in the current figures.

Financial Modelling

35. The Council subscribes to an external funding advisory service, with access to well developed and well-respected modelling data. The financial modelling is based upon the latest available data and the following key assumptions have been made in deriving the latest MTFS financial planning forecast:

(1) Council Tax

36. Council Tax is expected to remain the most predictable and stable element of Local Government funding, despite the impact of COVID-19. This source of income is predicted to yield £10,688 million in 2022/2023 based upon an assumed £5 increase in Council Tax (the maximum level that it is assumed will be permitted by Government), an additional sum of £200,000 derived from the sharing agreement and an increase in tax base based upon the estimates of housing growth.

1. Council Tax Yield has been adversely affected through a combination of an increased uptake of Council Tax Support (Council Tax Reduction Scheme) and an assumed reduction in Council Tax collected in year. The Secretary of State for Local Government has put in place arrangements to allow local authorities with a Council Tax deficit to phase the cost over three years. The MTFs allowed for a repayment of the authority's share of the overall exceptional balance deficit of £72,000 which will be phased equally over the next three years starting in 2021/2022.
- 2.
3. It is expected that the authority will continue to see moderate growth in the number of dwellings introduced through the introduction of new developments across the MTFs period, with an assumed Council Tax base increase of between 1.6% and 2.3%. The MTFs forecast includes an annual increase in Council Tax of £5 each year; this increase is for planning purposes only, and no decision has been made on the actual level of Council Tax increases in the medium term.

(2) Business Rates

4. 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. The scheme provides that Councils bear a proportion of the real terms change in business rates 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 Cambridge, 40% is retained by the District and 9% is retained by Cambridgeshire County Council and 1% by the Cambridgeshire Fire Authority.
5. In estimating rates yield from retained business rates for the purpose of the MTFs, COVID-19 has been considered in terms of the immediate and medium-term impact on business activity and economic recovery. The following key assumptions have also been made:
 - The current provision for existing Appeals is materially sufficient.
 - There are no further significant changes to valuation schemes resulting from Tribunal or Court decisions.
 - There are no significant variations to the levels of rate reliefs.
 - Projected bad debts is higher than historical trends, with the potential impact of the COVID crisis on business bankruptcies and, therefore, non-payment of business rates. The overall forecast used is that bad debts will be higher (2.5% compared to 1.5% of gross rates).
 - The compensation to Local Authorities by way of Section 31 grants to cover the cost of measures introduced to help businesses (e.g. Small Business Rates Relief) will continue and will be increased annually in-line with inflation (if the grants are discontinued it is anticipated there will be a compensating increase in the yield).
6. Estimates have been made in relation to a reduced Business Rate yield and a forecast Collection Fund deficit impact of £1.260 million for the current financial year. The financial forecast assumes neither a surplus or deficit in the period to 2026/2027.
7. Significant relief has been awarded to a number of businesses during the current financial year to recognise the pressures on trading opportunities. The Council was

recompensed for the lost rates income in the form of section 31 grants. For the purposes of the MTFS, it is assumed that reliefs will be consistent with those recorded prior to the pandemic. It is also expected that the Council will see moderate growth in rates yield as a result of new developments over the MTFS period.

8. The Government announced, in its March 2020 budget, a review of business rates and a consultation paper was published in July 2020 and closed in October 2020. The 2020 Spending Review, announced on 25 November 2020, confirmed the continuation of the existing BRSS for a further year but also confirmed that the fundamental review of the system would be reported in Spring 2021. Subject to the broad review of business rates, it was expected that the introduction of the new funding model for Local Government, predicated on changes to BRSS to enable a 75% retention of Business Rates, would be introduced effective from 2022/2023.
9. The Fair Funding Review has proposed a number of scenarios for redistributing business rates income when/if the transition to 75% retention takes place. This includes (a) losing all growth since the baseline was set (2013), known as a full reset, (b) losing part of the growth, known as a partial reset, or (c) Districts retaining the current income but the additional 25% going to upper tier authorities. Commentators generally seem to think that option (b) is the most likely outcome though some suggest a combination of (b) and (c). It must be stressed that even if option (a) is the basis of the new model, there will no doubt be a tapered removal of support rather than going straight to the new formula. The financial forecasts are based 2020/2021 values (some form of partial reset) with a 2% increase for growth year on year. The timetable for the Fair Funding Review is uncertain with commentators indicating that the impact may now be further delayed until 2023/2024.
10. The Government, however, announced on 18 February 2021 that the Business Rates Review would be delayed until Autumn and, instead of the expected details in Spring, there would be a "Tax Day" announcement on 23 March 2021, where the Chancellor published a number of tax-related consultations, with the intention that this would be followed by a final report from the Government in the Autumn.

(3) Rural Services Grant

11. The Council currently receives a Rural Services Grant in the sum of £131,000 in recognition of the additional cost of providing services in sparse rural areas. Given the delay to the Fair Funding Review, it has been assumed to continue into 2022/2023 at the sum of £137,000 before being phased out in subsequent years.

(4) Lower Tier Services Grant

12. This new one-off grant of £113,000 was provided to lower tier authorities in 2021/2022 to support service provision and is un-ringfenced. It has been assumed in the financial forecast that this will not continue in subsequent years.

(5) New Homes Bonus

13. 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 is currently 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.
14. 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; this is bad news for the Council, as the Council has been a major beneficiary of the grant, receiving a peak of £5.2 million in 2016/2017.
15. Initial reforms have, however, already reduced payments year on year with £2.768 million received in 2020/2021. The 2020 Spending Review confirmed that NHB would continue for a “further year with no new legacy payments”. The sum of £2.192 million has been included in the 2021/2022 revenue budget and it had been anticipated that the last NHB payment would be made in the financial year 2022/2023.
16. The long-awaited consultation on the replacement for NHB was published on 10 February 2021 and closed on 7 April 2021. Details of the consultation are available at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-future-of-the-new-homes-bonus-consultation>. The consultation paper outlines a number of options for reforming the programme to provide an incentive which is more focused and targeted on ambitious housing delivery, complements the reforms outlined in the Government’s Planning White Paper, and dovetails with the wider financial mechanisms the government is putting in place, including the community infrastructure levy and the Single Housing Infrastructure Fund.
17. Distribution options include rewards for housing growth (with higher thresholds or based on past performance), greater incentives for authorities with low land values, and then a range of incentives for other policy objectives. The consultation indicated that legacy payments from the existing scheme would not be continuing in the longer term. It is not clear whether the overall quantum will remain the same and, if this is the case, whether the reward-per-unit will increase as a result.
18. It had been expected that the changes to NHB would be implemented from 2022/2023 onwards, alongside the wider local government reform package. There is insufficient information at this time to determine the outcome of the consultation, whether in fact it will be implemented in 2022/2023 or which types of authority will gain or lose from the new NHB reforms, but the situation will be kept under review.
19. Previously the medium-term forecast had assumed that NHB would be phased out. The recent consultation that has now closed does, however, propose a replacement scheme so it would now be over cautious to assume nil income in future financial forecasts but too optimistic to assume a similar level of reward to that achieved in 2021/2022. The financial forecast has, therefore, sought to indicate a realistic level of reward from NHB with continued income from a revised scheme set at a lower level.

(6) Other Base Budget Changes

20. In terms of service pressures, an allowance has been made for the cost of waste collection and disposal with an additional waste round in 2024/2025 arising from the increase in the number of new properties across the District. An allowance has also been made for inflation on the Council’s key contracts and fees and charges.

Allowance for a pay award and pay increments (including National Living Wage) over the period has also been included. Until finalised, provision for these future costs are included as corporate costs and not allocated to Directorates.

21. The revenue impact of the latest approved Capital Programme has been included in the revised projections. Interest rate forecasts have been assumed to continue at low levels for the duration of the MTFS. Investment income has been determined having regard to the level of expected balances, including capital receipts and expenditure, together with Reserves and Provisions held by the Council and in line with the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy.

(7) COVID-19 Costs

22. It has been assumed that there will be some additional costs included in 2022/2023 that will continue to have a financial impact in the near term but will unwind over the MTFS period to 2026. The financial impact over the medium term includes:

- Non delivery of efficiency savings planned for 2021/2022 due to resources required to deliver savings being deployed to meet the demands of COVID-19 and the consequent changed circumstances in service areas.
- Staff operating model incorporating revised working practices that may well become embedded for a period of time.
- Increased Bad Debt Provision.
- Reduced income aligned to business confidence (commercial rents, planning applications).

23. There are a number of significant risks in relation to COVID-19 in that it is not clear as to the duration of the virus and severity and length of the economic downturn. In addition, social distancing requirements will more than likely increase costs in some services areas.

(8) General Reserve

24. The Council has a healthy General Reserve balance of around £14.5 million, taking into account the 2020/2021 General Fund revenue outturn position and the net underspend (after income from Taxation and Government Grants) in that year of £0.281 million, as also reported to Cabinet on 6 September 2021.
25. In considering future financial forecasts it was on the basis that a sum of £5 million, would be applied as revenue contributions to capital outlay in 2020/21. This was considered to be prudent as a reasonable level of General Fund balance will be maintained and capital projects, or investments, can proceed without recourse to more expensive funding sources and negate the need to provide a Minimum Revenue Provision.
26. The risks and assumptions will continue to be reviewed and this, together with savings and income generation opportunities from the transformation agenda and known service pressures, will enable the forecasts, reproduced at **Appendix B**, to be refined and updated as part of the Council's medium term financial planning. It must be recognised, however, that the assumptions used in the financial forecasts could

vary significantly for the actual outcome and there is more certainty than ever about the long-term funding for Local Government.

Alternative Scenarios

27. The table and chart below set out the impact of alternative scenarios on the cumulative funding gap. The alternative scenarios reflect a change to Council Tax, Business Rates, Corporate Pressures (including Inflation) and the ability to realise planned savings. The Negative Economic View additionally increases the Base Budget reflecting a broader assessment of an increased net spend.

	Pessimistic View (A), (B) and (C):	Optimistic View:	Negative Economic View:
Base Budget Requirement			2.5% increase on Base Budget Requirement due to cost and demand pressure arising from increased economic friction due to a move away from the existing trading relationship with the EU and slower recovery from the pandemic.
Council Tax	2.5% reduction in yield due to weaker economic recovery forecast	2.5% increase in yield due to improving economic conditions	As per Pessimistic View (A)
Business Rates	(A) 2.5% reduction in yield due to weaker economic recovery forecast	2.5% increase in yield due to improving economic conditions	As per Pessimistic View (A)
	(B) 10% reduction in yield due to Fair Funding Review (from 2023/2024)		
	(C) 20% reduction in yield due to Fair Funding Review (from 2023/2024)		
Budget Pressures/Demand	5.0% increase in demand due to socio economic factors arising from a forecast weaker economic recovery	2.5% reduction in demand due to improving socio economic factors leading to less demand for Council services	As per Pessimistic View (A)
Other Base Budget Changes (inc. Inflation)	5.0% increase in demand due to socio economic factors arising from a forecast weaker economic recovery	2.5% reduction in corporate costs due to lower pay and price uplift assumptions	As per Pessimistic View (A)
Ability to realise planned savings/income identified (e.g. due to impact of COVID-19)	5.0% reduction in overall planned savings level from service reviews	No variation from Baseline Scenario	As per Pessimistic View (A)

28. The impact of the scenarios is set out in the table below. This demonstrates the gap in resources to spend over the medium-term period and compares the scenario to the Baseline Case. It should be noted that, although these are high level assessments, the scenarios nevertheless give an indication of the potential impact on the Council's budgets over the MTF5 period.

	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026	2026/2027	TOTAL
Baseline Case	(354)	1,426	1,353	1,038	1,026	4,489
Outcome of Scenarios:						
Pessimistic View (A)	258	2,032	2,034	1,784	1,850	7,958
Pessimistic View (B)	258	2,579	2,593	2,354	2,431	10,215
Pessimistic View (C)	258	3,309	3,337	3,113	3,205	13,222

Optimistic View	(874)	945	831	479	425	1,806
Negative Economic View	841	2,615	2,617	2,367	2,433	10,873
Comparison to Baseline:						
Pessimistic View (A)	612	606	681	746	824	3,469
Pessimistic View (B)	612	1,153	1,240	1,316	1,405	5,726
Pessimistic View (C)	612	1,883	1,984	2,075	2,179	8,733
Optimistic View	(520)	(481)	(522)	(559)	(601)	(2,683)
Negative Economic View	1,195	1,189	1,264	1,329	1,407	6,384

Implications

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

Legal

30. It is a legal requirement that the Council set a balanced budget for the ensuing financial year; the MTFS provides the framework for this and brings together funding and spending assumptions over the medium-term thereby identifying funding shortfalls and providing sufficient time for decisions to be made in order to achieve balanced budgets over the medium term.

Policy

31. To demonstrate financial resilience, the Council sets out its potential funding position over the medium term thereby enabling the most effective strategies to be put in place to ensure that the Council is able to set a balanced budget (as required by statute) on an annual basis. Given the demand for services outstripping income sources, coupled with the impact of COVID-19, the MTFS identifies a funding gap that needs to be addressed over the medium term.
32. The financial strategy needs to have regard to the “resource envelope” available to the Council. This includes the transition to the new funding model, introduced in 2013/2014, predicated on the Business Rates Retention Scheme which means that the Council’s net spending is financed from local sources; Business Rates and Council Tax. As part of this continued transition the Government have been consulting on a Fair Funding Formula that will change the method of distributing funding levels across Councils based on “Need” and “Local Resources”. In addition, the MTFS period is outside of the current Spending Review period and, as such, the Government has not set out the spending limits beyond 2021/2022.
33. The Council has adopted its Business Plan for the period 2020-2025 and this was refreshed by Council on 20 May 2021. The areas of focus and key priorities within the Business Plan inform the policy framework for achieving the required ongoing savings whilst meeting the Council’s strategic objectives and statutory obligations.

Finance

34. The MTFS is the Council's key financial planning document and sets out the Council's strategic approach to the management of its finances and Council Tax levels over the medium term, thereby allowing sufficient lead time to develop services consistent with the forecast resource envelope.
35. The updated medium-term forecast covering the period 2022/2023 to 2026/2027, is attached at **Appendix B**, and is based upon the assumptions underpinning the financial projections and overarching plan. The forecast shows the level of savings that need to be achieved to deliver the indicative Council Tax level.
36. As further information is available in respect of the review of local government funding, it may be necessary to review the forecasts and provide a further report to Cabinet and Council on the implications.

Risk

37. There are inherent risks in developing a financial strategy over the medium term, not least due to the uncertainty of funding streams (this is particularly relevant as the outcomes of the Fair Funding Review and Spending Review post 2021/2022 are not known) and the demands placed on the Council in delivering services.
38. The current economic environment, arising from the impact of COVID-19, creates further risks in that the Council's resource forecasts take into account the impact on Council Tax and Business Rates yields. These assumptions are based on an economic recovery over the period to 2026.
39. The Council's overall reputation and performance assessment is at risk if it is not aware of the challenges presented by the reduction in resources available to it and their impact on key areas of performance of the Council. There are a number of other risks that need to be understood and broadly these fall into the following categories:
 - (a) Savings: it is inevitably more difficult to continue to reduce costs and put in place savings after an extended period of reduced funding, without impact on service provision. It should be noted that the legal requirement to set a balanced budget on an annual basis requires the Council to reduce its net costs in line with funding.
 - (b) Economic: The impact of Brexit on top of the current forecast turbulence may result in a greater drag on the economy and, as such, may impact on the Council's finances over the medium term. The risk is deemed to arise from (i) reduced economic activity adversely business rate income and increased levels of unemployment, (ii) reduced income from fees and charges, (iii) increased costs, including welfare related costs and increased demand for services and (iv) potential impact on the Council's supply chain.
 - (c) Climate Change: The Office for Budget Responsibility review of Fiscal Risks (July 2019) set out risks in relation to climate change and additionally recognised the need to develop greater sophistication in modelling such impacts. Adverse climate events will have financial consequences; an estimate of the one-off costs will form part of the General Fund risk assessed

level whereas those that potentially impact ongoing income/spending need to be considered as potential cost implications over an MTFS period.

40. As the Council reviews the MTFS twice a year, it is able to assess the robustness of the financial forecast, reassess risk and, where appropriate, refresh the forecast.

Environmental

41. There are no environmental implications arising directly from the report. The Council is fully committed to the “Green to Our Core” agenda as part of its approved Business Plan and it is, therefore, appropriate that environmental implications will need to be considered in the context of specific proposals that emerge.

Equalities Impact

42. In preparing this report, due consideration has been given to the Council’s statutory Equality Duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations, as set out in Section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010.
43. A relevance test for equality has been completed. The equality test determined that the activity has no relevance to the Council’s statutory equality duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relation. An equality analysis is not needed.

Effect on Council Priority Areas

44. Timely and robust consideration of the Council’s financial forecasts and budget setting is vital to ensure that financial performance is in line with expectations, emerging issues are identified and tackled and that Business Plan priorities are met.

Background Papers

Where the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection:

- (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- (b) on the Council’s website; and
- (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

The following documents are relevant to this report:

- Service Transformation Programme – Report to Cabinet: 4 December 2019
- General Fund Revenue Budget 2021/2022 – Report to Cabinet: 3 February 2021
- General Fund Revenue Budget 2021/2022 – Report to Council: 23 February 2021
- Medium Term Financial Strategy – Report to Council: 23 February 2021

- Business Plan 2020/2025 – Report to Cabinet: 22 March 2021
- Business Plan 2020/2025 – Report to Council: 20 May 2021

Appendices

- A Medium-Term Financial Strategy
- B Financial Forecasts 2022/2023 to 2026/2027

Report Author: Peter Maddock – Head of Finance
e-mail: peter.maddock@scambs.gov.uk

