

TO:- Cabinet

Councillor Roger Lees B.E.M. ,Councillor Victoria Wilson ,Councillor Rita Heseltine ,Councillor Kath Perry M.B.E.
,Councillor Robert Reade ,Councillor David Williams ,

Notice is hereby given that a meeting of the Cabinet will be held as detailed below for the purpose of transacting the business set out below.

Date: Tuesday, 06 February 2024

Time: 14:00

Venue: Council Chamber, Community Hub, Wolverhampton Road, Codsall, South Staffordshire, WV8 1PX



D. Heywood
Chief Executive

A G E N D A

Part I – Public Session

- | | | |
|----------|--|---------------|
| 1 | Minutes
To approve the minutes of the Cabinet meeting of 9 January 2023. | 1 - 2 |
| 2 | Apologies

To receive any apologies for non-attendance. | |
| 3 | Declarations of Interest

To receive any declarations of interest. | |
| 4 | The Councils Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 - 2028/29 and 2024/25 Budget
Report of the Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer and Finance Team Manager and Deputy Section 151 Officer | 3 - 38 |

5	Capital Strategy 2024/25 - 2028/29 Report of the Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer and Finance Team Manager and Deputy Section 151 Officer	39 - 56
6	South Staffordshire Habitat Bank Report of the Corporate Director of Place and Communities	57 - 64

RECORDING

Please note that this meeting will be recorded.

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Cabinet**
South Staffordshire Council held in the
Council Chamber Community Hub,
Wolverhampton Road, Codsall, South
Staffordshire, WV8 1PX on Tuesday, 09
January 2024 at 14:00

Present:-

Councillor Rita Heseltine, Councillor Roger Lees, Councillor Kath Perry, Councillor Robert Reade, Councillor David Williams, Councillor Victoria Wilson

19 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 5 December 2023 be approved and signed by the Chairmen.

20 **APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies.

21 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

22 **ALLOCATION OF RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUNDING**

RESOLVED: Members approved the allocation of REPF to the three organisations set out in 3.11 and appendix A, subject to any additional requirements as also set out in the appendix.

23 **THE COUNCILS MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024/25 - 2028/29 AND 2024/25 BUDGET**

RESOLVED (1): Members support the report together with the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), revenue estimates and capital programme for the 2024/25 budget for consultation with stakeholders. In particular:

RESOLVED (2): Members note the updated draft MTFS position and the revised revenue estimates for 2023/24 and 2024/25.

RESOLVED (3): Members note the reconciliation for the previous approved MTFS to the updated draft MTFS.

RESOLVED (4): Members support the revised capital programme.

RESOLVED (5): Members support that the minimum level of general fund reserves is maintained at £1.5m.

RESOLVED (6): Members note that the Leader of the Council be authorised to make any necessary amendments to include any late information or to correct any errors or omissions.

The Meeting ended at: 14:12

11 January 2024

CHAIRMAN

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET – 6th FEBRUARY 2024

**THE COUNCIL'S MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024/25 – 2028/29 AND
2024/25 BUDGET**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE (AND SECTION 151 OFFICER) AND FINANCE TEAM
MANAGER (AND DEPUTY SECTION 151 OFFICER)**

LEAD CABINET MEMBER – COUNCILLOR ROGER LEES, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2024/25 to 2028/29, projected revenue expenditure for 2023/24, and the Capital Programme for 2024/25 to 2028/29.
- 1.2 The proposals presents a three-year balanced budget achieved through the use of General Fund reserves until 2026/27.
- 1.3 The provisional Local Government Finance Settlement was announced on 18 December 2023 and this report incorporates the detail provided within the statement.
- 1.4 It is proposed that, subject to the final Local Government Finance Settlement, Members agree to increase Council Tax by £5 and utilise **£1.548m** of General Fund reserves in 2024/25.
- 1.5 The consultation period for stakeholders to comment on the budget is open until 5 February 2024. Any comments received will be reported verbally to Cabinet at this meeting in order for them to be taken into account before recommending the budget to Council.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Cabinet recommend to Council:

- a) Members approve this report together with the draft Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), projected expenditure for 2023/24, revenue estimates and capital programme for 2024/25 and proposals for the 2024/25 budget;
- b) Council pass a resolution in the form attached at Appendix 5 (noting that this is in draft form only for Cabinet as we await further information from precepting authorities);
- c) Council notes the report of the Chief Finance Officer on the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of the Council's reserves, attached as Appendix 6;

- d) That the Leader of the Council be authorised to make any necessary amendments to include any late information or to correct any errors or omissions

3. Summary Impact Assessment

POLICY/COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Council Plan objectives?	
	Yes	The budget is the financial expression of the Council's priorities and therefore underpins the Council Plan.
	Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) been completed?	
	No	Budget / MTFS assumptions and forecasts do not impact on equality issues.
SCRUTINY POWERS APPLICABLE	Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 23 January 2024 – the final decision will be taken at Council on 20 February 2024.	
KEY DECISION	No – Council decision	
TARGET COMPLETION/ DELIVERY DATE	March 2024	
FINANCIAL IMPACT	Yes	As set out in the report.
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	<p>The Council has a legal obligation to set a balanced budget (s32 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992) and must make three calculations namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an estimate of gross revenue expenditure; • an estimate of anticipated income; and • a calculation of the difference. <p>The amount of the budget requirement must be sufficient to meet the Council's budget commitments and ensure a balanced budget. The 2024/25 budget requirement must leave the Council with adequate financial reserves. The level of budget requirement must not be unreasonable having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its Council Tax payers and non-domestic rate payers.</p> <p>Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 places a general duty on local authorities to make arrangements for 'the proper administration of their financial affairs'.</p>
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	<p>The relevant risk (per the Strategic Risk Register) is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget pressures, increased income volatility and uncertainty as to the future of local government finance – The budget, the MTFS and the financial stability of the Council is severely impacted by reductions and/or changes in the way in which local government is financed.
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	No	

4. Background

- 4.1 The aim of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is to pull together all known factors affecting the financial position and financial sustainability of the Council over the medium term. The MTFS balances the financial implications of objectives and policies against constraints in resources and provides the basis for decision making. This MTFS covers 2024/25 to 2028/29 and highlights the various financial challenges facing the Council over this period.
- 4.2 The Local Government Finance Policy Statement was issued on 5 December 2023 and confirmed the following:
- Business Rates baseline funding levels and compensation (Section 31) grants will be increased by CPI
 - Revenue Support Grant will increase by CPI
 - Council Tax referendum limit of 3% or £5 for shire district councils
 - Minimum Funding Guarantee will ensure that all authorities see a 3% increase in core spending power before any decision on organisational efficiencies, use of reserves and council tax levels
 - New Homes Bonus will continue in 2024/25
 - Services Grant will reduce and the remainder to be distributed using the Settlement Funding Assessment distribution methodology
- 4.3 There continues to be significant levels of uncertainty around when the 'Business Rates Reset' or funding reform will be implemented and what impact this may have. The intention of this will be for the baseline need for local authorities to be re-assessed which will affect the amount of Business Rates that the Council is able to retain. This is a significant strategic risk for the Council.
- 4.4 Despite this uncertainty, the Council is still required to prepare an MTFS and therefore must use several assumptions in doing this. These assumptions are set out later in the report.
- 4.5 The state of the economy continues to be volatile and provides a challenging environment in which to set the budget. Although local government has largely recovered from the impact of COVID-19, some behaviours have changed in the long-term and this continues to affect some councils. There is also the 'cost of living' crisis, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine and the potential impact of conflict in the Middle East.

5. Annual Budget Setting Cycle and Timetable

- 5.1 The construction of the budget and the MTFS involves a number of key stages designed to ensure the budget is robust:
- Identification of budget issues as part of budget monitoring which is reported to Corporate Leadership Team and Cabinet on a quarterly basis;
 - Assembly of savings, efficiencies and additional budget requirements (Oct – Dec);
 - All member Resource Planning and Prioritisation Briefing Session (Dec 2023);
 - Decision on Draft Budget – (Cabinet 9 January 2024);

- Consultation with Stakeholders (10 January 2024 – 5 February 2024);
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the draft budget – (23 January 2024);
- Cabinet Review of Final Budget – (Cabinet 6 February 2024);
- Approval by Council – (20 February 2024);

6. **2024/25 Budget and Updated MTFS 2024/25 – 2028/29**

6.1 The MTFS has been updated for the period 2024/25 to 2028/29 and is summarised below:

Table 1: Updated MTFS and Annual Revenue Budgets

	2023/24		2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	ORIGINAL BUDGET	PROJECTION (Q2)					
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Total Service Expenditure	19,732	19,810	21,601	21,803	23,162	23,828	24,023
Capital Financing and Treasury	(671)	(1,009)	(731)	(255)	(133)	109	254
Net Expenditure	19,061	18,800	20,870	21,547	23,029	23,938	24,277
Total Funding	(17,289)	(19,168)	(19,322)	(20,369)	(18,200)	(21,602)	(22,376)
Forecast Annual (Surplus)/Deficit	1,772	(368)	1,548	1,179	4,829	2,335	1,901
Use of Collection Fund reserve					(2,000)		
Forecast Annual (Surplus) / Deficit	1,772	(368)	1,548	1,179	2,829	2,335	1,901

Table 2: Updated General Fund Reserves

	2023/24		2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	ORIGINAL BUDGET	PROJECTION (Q2)					
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Opening Balance 1st April	(8,672)	(8,672)	(7,755)	(6,207)	(5,028)	(2,199)	137
Closing General Fund Reserves 31st March	(6,900)	(7,755)	(6,207)	(5,028)	(2,199)	137	2,038

- 6.2 The above tables show that General Fund reserves are forecast to remain above minimum levels (set at £1.5m) until partway through the 2027/28 financial year. This continued reliance on General Fund reserves is unsustainable and will need to be addressed if increased Business Rates income is not generated as anticipated.
- 6.3 The draft budget for 2024/25 and the detailed draft MTFS are set out in full in Appendix 1.
- 6.4 The following key assumptions have been made in preparing the updated MTFS:

- Pay Award 4.5% 2024/25; 3% in 2025/26 and 2% thereafter
- Council Tax increases by £5 in each year and a gradual increase in the base across the 5 years
- General inflationary increase of 4.6% in 2024/25 and 2% in future years except in cases where contractual inflations are known to be different
- Business Rates reset assumed to happen in 2026/27 with transitional protection of 50% in first year and 25% in second year
- Stable Business Rates until inclusion of West Midlands Interchange (WMI), ROF Featherstone and i54 in 2027/28 (at mid-case estimates)
- Continued high interest rates but reducing across the years
- New Homes Bonus ceasing after 2024/25 and replaced with Funding Guarantee until 2026/27
- £1m set aside in Earmarked Reserves for the potential costs of temporary accommodation but nothing built into ongoing revenue budget currently

Reconciling the current updated MTFS to the Feb 2023 Approved MTFS

6.5 Changes need to be made to the Council's budget and MTFS to keep them up to date and robust. These changes have been summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Reconciliation of Previous and Updated MTFS

	Note	2024-25 (£000)	2025-26 (£000)	2026-27 (£000)	2027-28 (£000)
Deficit as at Feb 2023 MTFS		1,320	1,972	4,122	4,676
Movements/Changes: -					
Pay Inflation	1	251	349	332	343
Contract Inflation	2	171	179	184	192
Income Reduction	3	76	61	56	38
RPP Decisions	4	180	(171)	607	470
Business As Usual Amendments	5	276	307	406	413
Interest on Balances	6	(260)	(170)	(137)	(87)
Costs of Capital	7	0	129	168	280
Removal of New Homes Bonus	8	7	325	0	0
Services Grant Changes	9	85	(1)	49	100
Revenue Support Grant/ Business Rates	10	(1,741)	(2,282)	(496)	(4,084)
Council Tax Receipts	11	14	9	(11)	(12)
Application of Collection Fund Reserve	12	1,000	1,027	(2,000)	0
Collection Fund Surplus/Deficit	13	299	0	0	0
Funding Guarantee	14	(122)	(557)	(454)	0
Other	15	(8)	1	3	5
Total Changes		228	(793)	(1,293)	(2,342)
Deficit as at Dec 2023 MTFS		1,548	1,179	2,829	2,335

The main changes are as follows:

- 1 Pay Inflation.** The MTFS approved in February 2023 assumed a Local Government pay award of 5% for 2023/24, 3% in 2024/25 and 2% thereafter. Due to the economic uncertainty, a Pay and Inflation Earmarked Reserve was also created to protect the General Fund from higher than anticipated pay awards.

The 2023/24 pay award was actually settled as a flat increase in annual salaries of £1,925 per annum per full time equivalent post.

The financial impact of the 2023/24 award plus the updated assumptions set out in paragraph 6.4 are shown in Table 3.

- 2 Contract Inflation.** Outside of known contractual increases, a standard 2% inflation had been applied in the previous MTFS. A recurring budget of £150,000 in 2023/24, increasing to £200,000 in the following year was also created. This could be drawn upon, with the approval of the Leader and S151 Officer if any budgets across the Council required support for unavoidable inflationary increases. In addition to this resource, further resources were added to the Inflation Earmarked Reserve.

Due to the continuing high levels of inflation, a 4.6% increase has been applied in 2024/25 reducing to 2% thereafter. This is based on October 2023 CPI.

- 3 Income Reduction** There has been a reduction in the income target for crematoria and recycling credits paid by Staffordshire County Council.
- 4 Resource Planning and Prioritisation (RPP)** Appendix 2 to this report itemises key budget changes that have arisen from service developments and decisions requiring Member approval and/or ratification.
- 5 Business As Usual Impacts** Appendix 3 to this report details increases (or decreases) to the costs incurred by the Council where the costs of delivering service in accordance with existing policies have changed since the previous MTFS (excluding those caused by inflation and detailed above).
- 6 Interest on Balances** Increases to the base rate have continued to have a positive impact on the Council since the last MTFS as interest earned on cash balances has increased materially. It is now assumed that these rates will slowly reduce over the period of the MTFS resulting in lower levels of investment income moving forward.
- 7 Costs of Capital** This refers to the interest costs of borrowing and the provision the Council must set aside for repayment of principal for financing the Capital Programme (referred to as the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)). Three projects have been put forward to be added to the Capital Programme therefore resulting in an increase in this provision. The projects are: -

- Replacement of leisure equipment £641k
- Car Park improvements £360k
- Street Scene fleet replacement £551k

8 New Homes Bonus It has been assumed that there will be no further New Homes Bonus funding after 2024/25. However, this has meant that the increase in the Council's core spending power will fall below the 3% outlined in the Policy Statement and will attract a Funding Guarantee in years 2024/25 to 2026/27.

9 Services Grant The previous MTFS had assumed this grant would reduce across the 5-year period. The Policy Statement confirmed further reductions in this grant and this has now been included in the updated MTFS.

10 Retained Business Rates Section 8 provides further information on the changed assumptions in Business Rates

11 Council Tax Receipts Section 7 provides further information on the bases for the Council Tax income included in the MTFS.

12 Application of Earmarked Reserves The Council holds an Earmarked Reserve to protect against the volatility in Business Rates income. The previous MTFS assumed that this would be used equally across the years 2023/24 to 2025/26. An improved financial position for 2023/24 has meant that this is no longer required and the reserve is projected to remain at a level of approximately £3m.

The updated MTFS makes use of £2m of this reserve in 2026/27 to reduce the impact of the Business Rates reset. The remaining £1m is to be set aside in a new reserve for Temporary Accommodation pressures.

13 Collection Fund Surplus/Deficit The Collection Fund is the statutory account that deals with Council Tax and Business Rates. Each year the Council has to estimate whether this will be in surplus or deficit and at what value. Any surplus or deficit is required to be carried forward into the following financial year. It is currently estimated that the Collection Fund will be in a deficit of £299k at the end of 2023/24 and this will be required to be carried forward into 2024/25.

14 Funding Guarantee. The government has committed to providing a Funding Guarantee to Councils where their core spending power does not increase by at least 3%. It is assumed that this will also continue in the following two years. The estimated allocations of this are £122k in 2024/25, £557k in 2025/26 and £454k in 2026/27. As explained in note 8, the main reason for the increased allocation from 2025/26 is the loss of New Homes Bonus funding.

15 Other Minor other changes not categorised above.

7. Council Tax

7.1 It has been assumed that Members will agree to increase Council Tax by £5 for a Band D equivalent property in all years of the MTFS. This is the maximum allowable increase in Council Tax without a referendum.

7.2 Table 4 below details the current South Staffordshire Tax Base, the estimated growth in this tax base across the MTFS and the impact this has on Council Tax receipts for the Council.

Table 4, Council Tax Assumptions within the MTFS

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Assumed Tax Base (Total Number of Band D Equivalent Properties)	39,914	40,239	40,574	40,774	40,974
Council Tax – Band D (£)	140.34	145.34	150.34	155.34	160.34
Council Tax Increase (£)	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Total Council Tax Receipts (£000)	5,602	5,848	6,100	6,334	6,570

8. Business Rates

- 8.1 Business Rates income is the largest source of funding for the Council and therefore a significant risk. Business Rates are a volatile income type and can be easily influenced by the economic environment.
- 8.2 The Council's ability to utilise General Fund reserves in the earlier years of the MTFS are largely dependent on the knowledge that significant Business Rates income growth will be realised with the development of West Midlands Interchange (WMI) and ROF Featherstone in future years. The estimated income from these developments is based on 'mid-case' scenarios and could be significantly higher or lower than assumed.
- 8.3 The mid-case scenario has been used due to two areas of uncertainty; (1) the timing and impact of the Business Rates reset and (2) the completion of the developments and sale of units.
- 8.4 Over recent years, the government have issued various documents discussing the need for funding reform and a reset of the accumulated Business Rates growth currently held by councils. However, this has been delayed for several reasons and the government have again confirmed in the 2024/25 Policy Statement that 'now is the time for stability and continuity, and we will therefore not be pursuing any fundamental reforms to the system'.
- 8.5 In the absence of any firm plans from the government, the updated MTFS assumes that funding reform and the Business Rates reset will happen in 2026/27, at which point the Council will 'lose' any growth in Business Rates to date.
- 8.6 It is also assumed that there will be an element of transitional protection; 50% of the loss in funding in 2026/27 and 25% in 2027/28. There is currently no information from the government on this therefore this is an internal assumption based on the awareness of the financial strain on local authorities and that the sector would be unable to deal with a 'cliff edge' in funding in one year. This is however a significant risk for the future of the MTFS, particularly if the government decide not to provide transitional protection as they consider that councils have had sufficient 'notice' of the potential changes. Section 9 below provides some sensitivity analysis in this area.
- 8.7 Table 5 below shows the level of Business Rates income assumed in the current MTFS.

Table 5: Business Rates income assumed in the current MTFS

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Business Rates income (including S31 grants, tariff, pool returns & levy)	6,624	6,624	3,300	3,400	3,500
Growth from WMI & ROF Featherstone	119	722	0	4,317	5,521
Growth from i54 Western Extensions				250	250
Transitional Protection			1,662	831	
Total	6,743	7,346	4,962	8,798	9,271

- 8.8 The Council holds an earmarked reserves to cover the volatility in Business Rates income and to also prepare for the impact of funding reform. The MTFS assumes that £2m of this will be used in 2026/27 to reduce the impact of the Business Rates reset.

9. **Sensitivity Analysis**

Business Rates

- 9.1 Table 6 below indicates how changes to the broad assumptions made, particularly from 2026/27 could impact upon the level of General Fund reserves held by the Council.

Table 6: Sensitivity Analysis: Impact of Business Rates Retention scenarios on General Fund Balance forecasts

GENERAL FUND BALANCE	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Optimistic Scenario No Business Rates Reset and WMI & ROF Featherstone at mid-case	(6,207)	(5,028)	(3,861)	(3,918)	(5,141)
Current MTFS Assumptions Business Rates Reset in 2026/27; Transitional Protection 50% in first year and 25% in second year; continued arrangements for retaining growth; WMI & ROF Featherstone at mid-case	(6,207)	(5,028)	(2,199)	137	2,038
Pessimistic Scenario Business Rates Reset in 2026/27; No Transitional Protection and 25% reduction in ability to retain growth after reset	(6,207)	(5,028)	(537)	3,709	6,990

- 9.2 This shows that under the 'Optimistic Scenario' General Fund reserves are projected to reduce to £3.918m at the end of 2027/28, whereas under the 'Pessimistic Scenario' there

would be a deficit position of £3.709m. These are compared to the MTFS scenario which would result in £0.137m deficit at the end of 2027/28.

- 9.3 Whilst the optimistic and pessimistic scenarios are considered unlikely, this does demonstrate the impact that changes in the Business Rates Retention Scheme (and any linked funding reform) could have on the Council's MTFS. It is therefore important that the Council considers future options in the event of a material reduction in the expected Business Rates growth from WMI and ROF Featherstone.

Commercial Income

- 9.4 Table 7 below shows the impact of different occupancy levels of the Council's commercial units on the General Fund balance.

Table 7 Sensitivity Analysis – Impact of changes in occupancy rates on commercial rent income and General Fund Balance

GENERAL FUND	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Optimistic Assumption 100% Occupancy	(6,259)	(5,150)	(2,393)	(130)	1,696
Current MTFS Assumption 97.5% Occupancy	(6,207)	(5,028)	(2,199)	137	2,038
Pessimistic Assumption 92.5% Occupancy	(6,155)	(4,906)	(2,005)	404	2,380

- 9.5 Current occupancy levels in commercial units is at 98.5% therefore the pessimistic scenario would require a significant vacation of premises which is unlikely. Likewise, it is unusual for any commercial asset portfolio to have a consistent occupancy of 100%.
- 9.6 This shows that the Council's budget is less susceptible to changes in commercial rent income than Business Rates income. However, it is still important that this income is regularly monitored, and debt recovery processes are robust. The Council is currently in the process of attempting to move all tenants to direct debit as their payment methods which will also reduce the possibility of bad debts.
- 9.7 In view of the above sensitivity analyses, it is considered that the assumptions applied to the updated MTFS are balanced and prudent. However, these areas are high risk and therefore require regular review and monitoring.

10. Capital Programme

- 10.1 The full capital programme over the period to 2028/29 is detailed in **Appendix 3** to this report and is summarised below in Table 8.

Table 8: Medium Term Capital Programme (2023/24 to 2028/29)

2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
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£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
12,183	11,971	1,714	1,796	1,493	1,486

11. Earmarked Reserves

- 11.1 In addition to the General Fund Balance the Council also has Earmarked Reserves which are set aside for a specific purpose.

Table 9: Analysis of General Fund and Earmarked Reserves (Opening balances for 2023/24)

	Balance at 31st March 2023 £000
General Fund Reserve	8,672
Earmarked Reserves	6,996
Total Usable Revenue Reserves	15,668

- 11.2 The Council's Earmarked Reserves are set out in Appendix 7. A categorised summary of these is detailed below in Table 10.

Table 10: Summary Analysis of Earmarked Reserves

DESCRIPTION	Balance at 31//03/23	Use in 2023/24	Transfers 2023/24	Projected Balance 31/03/24
	£000	£000	£000	£000
Corporate Priorities	74	0	(16)	58
Investment in assets & resources	1,552	4	(16)	1,540
Member Priorities	0	254	141	395
Ringfenced Grants & Funding	1,368	(19)	0	1,349
Risk & Uncertainty	3,099	313	0	3,412
Service Teams	489	(97)	(109)	283
Transformation	414	(120)	0	294
Total Earmarked Reserves	6,996	335	0	7,331

- 11.3 Earmarked Reserves are regularly reviewed as part of the budget monitoring and risk management process and transfers made if new or emerging pressures become likely. The Section 151's statement on the adequacy of reserves is in Appendix 6.

12. Risks & Mitigations

- 12.1 There are always risks when preparing an MTFs as it is necessary to make assumptions in several areas due to the time period covered. These assumptions have already been set out earlier in the report.
- 12.2 Generally, the current level of Council reserves (General Fund and Earmarked) allows time to plan ahead and mitigate against most risks. However, it is important that these plans are made as early as possible so that they can be implemented if and when necessary.
- 12.3 Table 11 below highlights the main risks and how these can or have been mitigated.

Table 11: Risks and Mitigations

Risk	Mitigation
Business Rates reset happens in 2025/26 not 2026/27	<p>This is highly unlikely given the impending General Election which is due during 2024.</p> <p>General Fund reserves and Earmarked Reserves are in a healthy position which will still provide time to plan for the impact of this.</p> <p>The Council holds an Earmarked Reserve of approximately £2.8m to cover Business Rates volatility.</p>
WMI & ROF Featherstone growth does not materialise	<p>The assumptions around this are prudent and only include a mid-case scenario. The significant growth is not included until 2027/28 and indications that this will not happen would be seen well in advance of that date. This allows time to plan for alternative budget positions.</p> <p>The Council holds an Earmarked Reserve of approximately £2.8m to cover Business Rates volatility.</p>
The government does not provide transitional protection as part of a Business Rates reset	<p>The government will be required to issue a consultation prior to any funding reform which will allow time for the Council to understand the potential implications.</p> <p>The next MTFs process will need to include discussions about alternative budget options in the case of current assumptions being over-optimistic.</p>
Inflation levels continue at a higher rate than expected	<p>The Council holds a Pay and Inflation reserve (estimated balance of £458k by the end of 2023/24) which is able to substantially cover this risk.</p>
Temporary accommodation costs are higher than set aside in Earmarked Reserves	<p>General Fund reserves are at a healthy level and can cover some of this. There are also a number of other Earmarked Reserves that could be redesignated</p>

Risk	Mitigation
	(although this would impact on other Council Plan priorities).

13. **Conclusion**

- 13.1 The level of the Council's General Fund and Earmarked Reserves means that it is possible to produce a balanced budget for the next three years in an uncertain operating environment. The Council is alert to the risks in the current MTFS and will be considering alternative options if any of those risks do materialise.
- 13.2 The budget is judged to be prudent and deliverable and is therefore recommended to Members for approval.

14. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – MTFS 2024/25 to 2028/29

Appendix 2 – Resource Planning and Prioritisation (RPP) & BAU Amendments

Appendix 3 – Capital Programme – Summary of Capital Investment Plans

Appendix 4 – Cabinet Summaries (MTFS)

Appendix 5 – Form of Resolution to approve the budget and set the council tax

Indicative at this stage ahead of Parish Council's setting Council Tax

Appendix 6 – Report on the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves

Appendix 7 - Earmarked Reserves Analysis

Report prepared by:

Rebecca Maher, Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer)

John Mayhew, Finance Team Manager (Deputy Section 151 Officer)

APPENDIX 1 – MTFs 2024/25 TO 2028/29

	2023/24		2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	ORIGINAL	PROJECTED OUTURN AT M6	ESTIMATE	PROJECTED	PROJECTED	PROJECTED	PROJECTED
		£000s					
Business Enterprise and Community Infrastructure	1,441	1,304	1,140	1,275	1,340	1,395	1,421
Community Services	5,233	5,104	5,953	6,206	7,245	7,395	7,525
Corporate Services	4,129	4,222	4,215	4,456	4,590	4,921	4,780
Digital Transformation & Estate Management	1,760	1,874	1,485	827	818	821	874
Regulatory Services	845	845	890	979	1,003	1,023	1,041
Welfare Services	1,296	1,432	1,637	1,716	1,759	1,802	1,848
	14,704	14,782	15,320	15,459	16,755	17,358	17,487
Other Service Expenditure							
i54 Enterprise Zone	5,028	5,028	6,281	6,343	6,407	6,471	6,536
Total Other Service	5,028	5,028	6,281	6,343	6,407	6,471	6,536
Total Service Expenditure	19,732	19,810	21,601	21,803	23,162	23,828	24,023
Capital Financing and Treasury							
Investment Income	(562)	(900)	(680)	(455)	(316)	(192)	(110)
Borrowing Costs	235	235	235	350	350	351	350
Minimum Revenue	551	551	640	761	706	712	712
MRP Increase			0	15	53	164	228
Dpcn incl in Service	(895)	(895)	(926)	(926)	(926)	(926)	(926)
Capital Financing and Treasury	(671)	(1,009)	(731)	(255)	(133)	109	254
Net Expenditure	19,061	18,800	20,870	21,547	23,029	23,938	24,277
Funding:							
New Homes Bonus	(659)	(659)	(643)				
Services Grant	(91)	(95)	(15)	(51)	(51)		
RSG			(216)	(223)	(226)		
Funding Guarantee			(122)	(557)	(454)		
Business Rates	(5,000)	(7,000)	(6,624)	(6,624)	(3,300)	(3,400)	(3,500)
Collection Fund			299				
Transitional Funding					(1,662)	(831)	
Delays to Fair Funding	(150)						
Western Extension						(250)	(250)
Business Rates Growth			(119)	(722)		(4,317)	(5,521)
Collection Fund Smoothing	(1,000)	(1,000)					
Enterprise Zone	(5,028)	(5,028)	(6,281)	(6,343)	(6,407)	(6,471)	(6,536)
Council Tax Receipts	(5,361)	(5,386)	(5,602)	(5,848)	(6,100)	(6,334)	(6,570)
Total Funding	(17,289)	(19,168)	(19,322)	(20,369)	(18,200)	(21,602)	(22,376)
Forecast Annual Deficit	1,772	(368)	1,548	1,179	4,829	2,335	1,901
Use of Collection Fund Reserve					(2,000)		
Forecast Annual (Surplus) / Deficit	1,772	(368)	1,548	1,179	2,829	2,335	1,901

APPENDIX 2: RPP & BAU ITEMS

Business Enterprise & Community Services	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	2028/29 (£000)
Increase in planning fees	(248)	(248)	(248)	(248)	(248)
Increase in charge for PPA Agreements	(45)	(45)	(45)	(45)	(45)
Income from biodiversity credits	(35)	(35)	(35)	(35)	(35)
Total reductions in budget (savings)	(328)	(328)	(328)	(328)	(328)
Increased contribution for Building Control Service	16	35	55	58	58
Investment in BOT Auto fill forms	15	15	16	16	16
Investment in AI Technology for data validation	15	15	16	16	16
Staff Retention Fund	0	50	50	50	50
Apprentice – Planner	18	18	18	25	0
Total increases in budget	64	133	154	165	141
Total	(264)	(195)	(174)	(163)	(188)

Community Services	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	2028/29 (£000)
Closed Churchyards Sink Fund	25	25	25	25	25
Implementation of the Environment Act 2021 and Environmental Improvement Plan 2023		100	1,000	1,000	1,000
Salary costs of a permanent Tree Surveyor	42	43	44	45	46
Increase in the budget for car park maintenance & repairs	10	10	10	10	10
Baggeridge – increase in budget for the cost of a seasonal/casual ranger	17	17	17	17	17
Total increases in budget	94	195	1,096	1,097	1,098
Uplift of savings agreed as part of previous MTFS	(50)	(50)	(50)	(50)	(50)
Inflationary increase in cost of garden permits in 2024/25 & 2025/26	(85)	(87)	(87)	(87)	(87)
Total reductions in budget (savings)	(135)	(137)	(137)	(137)	(137)
Total	(41)	58	959	960	961

Corporate Services	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	2028/29 (£000)
Reduction in budgeted contribution to Pension Fund in future years			(120)	(240)	(360)
Total			(120)	(240)	(360)

Digital Technology & Service Transformation	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	2028/29 (£000)
Additional Senior Surveyor & Admin Support	85	89	92	96	100
Renewal of Capita Contract	30	30	30	30	30
Total Pressures/Additions to Budget	115	119	122	126	130
Re-profiling of commercial estates income	306	(191)	(216)	(245)	(245)
Sink Fund adjustment	15	(10)	(11)	(12)	(12)
Total Savings	321	(201)	(227)	(257)	(257)
Total	436	(82)	(105)	(131)	(127)

Welfare Services	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	2028/29 (£000)
Reduction in income expected from Housing Benefit overpayments due to move to Universal Credit and improved debt recovery	175	200	200	200	200
Total Pressures/Increases in Budget	175	200	200	200	200

APPENDIX 3 – CAPITAL PROGRAMME

	Budget 2024/25 £000	Budget 2025/26 £000	Budget 2026/27 £000	Budget 2027/28 £000	Budget 2028/29 £000	Total £000
Digital Transformation & Estate Management						
Replacement of workstations	45	45	45	45	45	225
Civica Licences	0	0	0	0	125	125
Digital Services Storage Area Network	0	100	0	0	0	100
Digital Services Core Chassis Switch 2025/26	0	90	0	0	0	90
Digital Services - vSAN switches & vSan Hosts	120	0	0	0	0	120
Digital Services - server room battery	0	0	10	0	0	10
Digital Services - Core Network Switches	0	100	0	0	0	100
Asset Strategy	1,819	0	0	0	0	1,819
Asset Strategy - Wombourne development	2,400	0	0	0	0	2,400
Asset Strategy - Unit4E Four Ashes	2,520	0	0	0	0	2,520
Total	6,904	335	55	45	170	7,509
Welfare Services						
Renovation and Disabled Facilities Grants	1,127	1,127	1,127	1,127	1,127	5,633
Total	1,127	1,127	1,127	1,127	1,127	5,633
Community Services						
Refuse Vehicles (new contract)	3,046	0	0	0	0	3,046
Waste Bins (new contract)	790	0	0	0	0	790
Leisure Centre Air Conditioning	13	0	0	0	0	13
Car park resurfacing	36	120	120	0	0	276
Leisure Centre equipment replacement	20	42	120	269	190	641
Street Scene & Baggeridge vehicles	35	90	374	53	0	551
Total	3,940	252	614	321	190	5,318
GRAND TOTAL	11,971	1,714	1,796	1,493	1,486	18,460

APPENDIX 4 – CABINET SUMMARIES

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
BUSINESS ENTERPRISE AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE					
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Building Control					
Building Control	52	71	91	94	97
Total Building Control	52	71	91	94	97
Development Control					
Developmental Control	34	121	146	179	181
Total Development Control	34	121	146	179	181
Economic Development					
Economic Development	274	285	290	296	303
Total Economic Development	274	285	290	296	303
Enforcement					
Planning Enforcement	230	234	239	243	247
Total Enforcement	230	234	239	243	247
Land Charges					
Land Charges	(8)	(8)	(8)	(8)	(9)
Total Land Charges	(8)	(8)	(8)	(8)	(9)
Local Plan					
Energy Conservation	7	7	7	7	7
Local Plans	423	435	443	451	459
Total Local Plans	430	441	449	457	465
Localities					
Localities	129	132	133	134	137
Total Localities	129	132	133	134	137
Total Business Enterprise and Community Infrastructure	1,140	1,275	1,340	1,395	1,421

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
COMMUNITY SERVICES					
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Baggeridge Country Park					
Baggeridge Country Park & Railway Walk	158	160	164	166	168
Total Baggeridge Country Park	158	160	164	166	168
Climate Change					
Climate Change	54	58	60	62	63
Total Climate Change	54	58	60	62	63
Landscape & Bereavement					
Cemetery	(241)	(260)	(270)	(268)	(291)
Total Landscape and Bereavement	(241)	(260)	(270)	(268)	(291)
Leisure Services					
Cheslyn Hay Leisure Centre	286	294	299	304	309
Codsall Leisure Centre	170	172	175	177	180
Facilities Development	259	264	268	272	277
Leisure Development Fund	0	0	0	0	0
Penkridge Leisure Centre	164	169	171	172	174
Wombourne Leisure Centre	84	83	84	83	82
Total Leisure Services	963	981	996	1,008	1,023
Recycling					
Recycling	121	123	125	127	129
Total Recycling	121	123	125	127	129
Refuse Collection					
Refuse Collection Client	3,393	3,592	4,593	4,696	4,800
Total Refuse Collection	3,393	3,592	4,593	4,696	4,800
Street Scene					
Car Parking	19	19	20	21	21
Environmental Improvements	7	7	7	7	7
Highways & Lighting	79	81	83	85	87
Land Drainage	4	5	5	5	5
Lane Green Depot	17	17	17	18	18
Street Scene	1,276	1,316	1,337	1,359	1,382
Total Street Scene	1,403	1,445	1,468	1,493	1,520
Community Services Assistant Director					
Community Services AD	103	106	108	111	113
Total Community Services Assistant Director	103	106	108	111	113
Total Community Services	5,953	6,206	7,245	7,395	7,525

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
CORPORATE SERVICES					
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Accountancy & Financial Services					
Accountancy & Finance	649	667	680	694	707
Total Accountancy & Financial Services	649	667	680	694	707
Communications					
Communications	172	175	178	181	184
Total Communications	172	175	178	181	184
Community Safety					
Community Safety	31	31	31	31	31
Community Wellbeing & Partnership	71	73	75	76	78
Total Community Safety	102	104	106	107	109
Corporate Finance					
Corporate Finance	577	640	653	717	728
Total Corporate Finance	577	640	653	717	728
Corporate Leadership Team					
Chief Executive	184	189	193	197	201
Corp Director-Chief Operating Officer	142	146	149	152	155
Corp Director-Governance (Monitoring Officer)	126	131	133	136	139
Corp Director-Place & Communities	140	144	147	150	153
Director of Finance (S151)	129	133	136	138	141
Total Corporate Leadership Team	721	743	758	773	788
Elections					
Elections - District	10	10	10	220	10
Individual Electoral Reg (IER)	184	189	192	196	200
Total Elections	194	199	202	416	210
Human Resources					
Human Resources	375	382	391	401	411
Human Resources - Members Training	7	7	7	7	7
Human Resources - Training	84	86	88	90	92
Total Human Resources	466	475	487	499	510
Member Support					
Member Support	192	198	201	205	209
Members & Civic Expenses	387	398	406	414	422

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
CORPORATE SERVICES					
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Monitoring Officer	14	14	14	14	14
Total Member Support	593	610	621	633	645
Pay and Pensions					
Pay and Pensions adjustments	620	717	774	766	757
Total Pay and Pensions	620	717	774	766	757
Policy					
Policy	121	127	132	137	142
Total Policy	121	127	132	137	142
Total Corporate Services	4,215	4,456	4,590	4,921	4,780

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT					
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Community Hub					
Codsall Community Hub	1,175	1,198	1,219	1,239	1,260
Jubilee House	(8)	(8)	(8)	(7)	(7)
Surplus Office Accommodation	(601)	(605)	(606)	(609)	(609)
Total Community Hub	566	585	605	623	644
Customer Interaction					
Customer Interaction	377	391	398	405	413
Total Customer Interaction	377	391	398	405	413
Digital Services					
AD - Business Transformation	103	106	108	111	113
Digital Services	1,612	1,654	1,674	1,699	1,715
MFDs & Scanners	22	22	22	22	22
Telephony	137	140	143	144	144
Total Digital Services	1,875	1,922	1,947	1,975	1,994
Estates & Assets					
Commercial Units	(1,320)	(2,061)	(2,123)	(2,174)	(2,174)
Commercials Offices	(170)	(174)	(178)	(182)	(182)
Estates & Assets	378	388	397	406	415
Hinksford Park	(221)	(225)	(229)	(232)	(237)
Total Estates and Assets	(1,333)	(2,071)	(2,132)	(2,182)	(2,178)
Total Digital Transformation and Estate Management	1,485	827	818	821	874

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
REGULATORY					
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Emergency Planning					
Emergency Planning	50	51	52	53	54
Total Emergency Planning	50	51	52	53	54
Environmental Health					
Dogs Kennelling & Collection	12	12	12	12	12
Environmental Health	721	741	755	769	783
Food Safety	(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)
Health & Safety Corporate	15	16	16	16	16
Health Licensing	(6)	(6)	(6)	(6)	(6)
Housing Standards	(10)	(10)	(10)	(10)	(10)
Licensing	(157)	(100)	(97)	(97)	(100)
Pollution	(10)	(10)	(10)	(10)	(10)
Total Environmental Health	563	641	658	672	684
Internal Audit					
Internal Audit	100	102	104	106	108
Total Internal Audit	100	102	104	106	108
Legal Shared Service					
Legal Shared Services	178	186	189	193	195
Total Legal Shared Service	178	186	189	193	195
Total Regulatory	890	979	1,003	1,023	1,041

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
WELFARE					
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Benefits					
Benefits DWP	0	0	0	0	0
Benefits Team	685	710	730	749	772
Housing Benefits	95	120	120	120	120
Welfare - Other Support	225	232	237	242	246
Total Benefits	1,005	1,062	1,087	1,111	1,138
Housing Operations					
Housing Services	255	262	269	277	285
Total Housing Operations	255	262	269	277	285
Revenues					
Revenues	378	392	403	414	425
Total Internal Audit	378	392	403	414	425
Homelessness					
Homelessness Initiatives	0	0	0	0	0
Total Homelessness	0	0	0	0	0

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
WELFARE					
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Total Welfare	1,637	1,716	1,759	1,802	1,848

WORKING DRAFT – TO BE COMPLETED – ILLUSTRATIVE ONLY

FORM OF RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE BUDGET AND SET THE COUNCIL TAX

COUNCIL TAX 2024/25

The Council is recommended to resolve as follows:

1. Resolved to recommend to Council that it pass the necessary resolution to determine the Council Tax relevant to each part of the District at this meeting, namely,
 - a) that it be noted that at the meeting on the 20 February, 2024 the Council approved:-
 - (i) the revised revenue estimates for the year 2023/24 and the revenue estimates for 2024/25
 - (ii) the revised capital programme for the year 2023/24 and the capital programme for 2024/25
 - (iii) the following positive assurance statement from the Chief Finance Officer, under the terms of section 25 of the Local Government Act 2005: “I consider that the estimates that have been made as the basis for the calculations set out below are robust, and that the levels of financial reserves proposed are adequate.”
2. That it be noted that the Council calculated:
 - (a) the Council Tax Base 2023/24 for the whole Council area as [Item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the “Act”)] and,
 - (b) for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish precept relates as in the table below:

Parish of:

Tax Base

ACTON TRUSSELL, BEDNALL & TEDDESLEY HAY
BILBROOK
BLYMHILL & WESTON- UNDER- LIZARD
BOBBINGTON
BREWOOD & COVEN
CHESLYN HAY
CODSALL
DUNSTON WITH COPPENHALL
ENVILLE
ESSINGTON
FEATHERSTONE
GREAT WYRLEY
HATHERTON
HILTON
HIMLEY
HUNTINGTON
KINVER
LAPLEY, STRETTON & WHEATON ASTON
LOWER PENN
PATTINGHAM & PATSHULL
PENKRIDGE
PERTON
SAREDON
SHARESHILL
SWINDON
TRYSULL & SEISDON
WOMBOURNE

-
3. Calculate that the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2024/25 (excluding parish precepts) is £.
 4. That the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2024/25 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
 - (a) £xx,xxx,xxx.xx being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils.
 - (b) £xx,xxx,xxx.xx being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act.

- (c) £being the amount by which the aggregate at 4 (a) above exceeds the aggregate at 4 (b) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).
- (d) £being the amount at 4(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (2(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year (including Parish precepts).
- (e) £being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act.
- (f) £ being the amount at 4 (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 4 (e) above by Item T (2(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no special item (Parish precept) relates.
- (g) in the following parts of the Council's area

Parish of:

Band D

ACTON TRUSSELL, BEDNALL & TEDDESLEY HAY
 BILBROOK
 BLYMHILL & WESTON- UNDER- LIZARD
 BOBBINGTON
 BREWOOD & COVEN
 CHESLYN HAY
 CODSALL
 DUNSTON WITH COPPENHALL
 ENVILLE
 ESSINGTON
 FEATHERSTONE
 GREAT WYRLEY
 HATHERTON
 HILTON
 HIMLEY
 HUNTINGTON
 KINVER
 LAPLEY, STRETTON & WHEATON ASTON
 LOWER PENN
 PATTINGHAM & PATSHULL
 PENKRIDGE
 PERTON
 SAREDON
 SHARESHILL
 SWINDON
 TRYSULL & SEISDON
 WOMBOURNE

being the amounts given by adding to the amount at 4 (f) above the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council's area mentioned above divided in each case by the applicable amount at 2 (b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.

(h) in the following parts of the Council's area

	VALUATION BAND							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
PARISH COUNCILS	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
ACTON TRUSSELL, BEDNALL & TEDDESLEY HAY								
BILBROOK								
BLYMHILL & WESTON-UNDER- LIZARD								
BOBBINGTON								
BREWOOD & COVEN								
CHESLYN HAY								
CODSALL								
DUNSTON WITH COPPENHALL								
ENVILLE								
ESSINGTON								
FEATHERSTONE								
GREAT WYRLEY								
HATHERTON								
HILTON								
HIMLEY								
HUNTINGTON								
KINVER								
LAPLEY, STRETTON & WHEATON ASTON								
LOWER PENN								
PATTINGHAM & PATSHULL								
PENKRIDGE								
PERTON								
SAREDON								
SHARESHILL								
SWINDON								
TRYSULL & SEISDON								
WOMBOURNE								

being the amounts given by multiplying the relevant amounts as above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(i) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to

dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

- (i) that it be noted that for the year 2024/25 the Staffordshire County Council, the Staffordshire Police Authority and the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire Authority have stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act, 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

	VALUATION BAND							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
PRECEPTING AUTHORITY	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Staffordshire County Council								
OPCC Staffordshire								
Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Authority								

- j) that having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amount at 4 (h) and (i) above, the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act, 1992, hereby sets the following amounts as the amounts of council tax for the year 2024/2025 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

	VALUATION BAND							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
PARISH COUNCILS	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
ACTON TRUSSELL, BEDNALL & TEDDESLEY HAY								
BILBROOK								
BLYMHILL & WESTON-UNDER- LIZARD								
BOBBINGTON								
BREWOD & COVEN								
CHESLYN HAY								
CODSALL								
DUNSTON WITH COPPENHALL								
ENVILLE								
ESSINGTON								
FEATHERSTONE								
GREAT WYRLEY								
HATHERTON								
HILTON								
HIMLEY								
HUNTINGTON								
KINVER								

	VALUATION BAND							
LAPLEY, STRETTON & WHEATON ASTON								
LOWER PENN								
PATTINGHAM & PATSHULL								
PENKRIDGE								
PERTON								
SAREDON								
SHARESHILL								
SWINDON								
TRYSULL & SEISDON								
WOMBOURNE								

5. Determine that the Council's basic amount of Council Tax for 2024/25 is **not excessive** in accordance with the principles approved under Section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION EXPLANATORY NOTES

Paragraph 2 refers to the Council Taxbase at Band D at 2(a) and to the taxbase at Band D for each parishes at 2(b).

Paragraph 4 (a) refers to the total spending to be met from Council Tax and Exchequer support, in respect of Parish and District Services.

Paragraph 4 (b) refers to the income, grossed up from the approved estimates, to be deducted from the expenditure at 4 (a) to arrive at:-

Paragraph 4 (c) which is the net sum to be met from Council Tax and Exchequer support, in respect of District and Parish Services.

Paragraph 4 (d) is the average Council Tax at Band D for District and Parish Services.

Paragraph 4 (e) is the total of the Parish precepts.

Paragraph 4 (f) is the Council Tax for District services only.

The Table at 4 (g) shows the Council Tax applicable to Band D for each Parish, for District and Parish services.

The Table at 4 (h) shows the Council Tax applicable to each band, for each parish, for District and Parish services.

Paragraph 4 (i) shows the Council Tax for each band to be added to meet the precepts of Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Police and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Paragraph 4 (j) gives the total amount to be raised for all services by parish and by band.

APPENDIX 6 - SECTION 151 STATEMENT ON THE ADEQUACY OF RESERVES AND ROBUSTNESS OF THE BUDGET

1. I am making this report in compliance with the personal responsibilities placed upon me as Chief Finance Officer by sections 25 to 28 of the Local Government Act 2003. The legislation requires me to report to the authority on two matters.
 - The robustness of the estimates it makes when calculating its budget requirement; and
 - The adequacy of the authority's reserves, taking into account the experience of the previous financial year.

This report fulfils this requirement and provides councillors with assurance that the budgets have been compiled appropriately and that the levels of reserves is adequate. It is a statutory requirement that councillors must consider this report when considering and approving a budget.

Robustness of Estimates

2. I have led and been actively involved in the process of setting the 2024/25 budget and MTFS and am assured that this has been detailed and robust.
3. The detailed budget preparation was overseen by an experienced qualified accountant, supported by other finance staff, familiar with the requirements of the budget preparation process. The basis of the estimates included the following elements which are in my view crucial to setting realistic budgets.
 - Staffing budgets are built up based on the actual staffing establishment and its current costs.
 - The budgets reflect, as far as can be determined, costs of major contracts including likely cost increases.
 - The budgets are informed by the results of the 2023/24 budget monitoring and incorporates the impact of any issues affecting future years.
 - The budget identifies the on-going cost of Council decisions taken where the financial impact has been quantified.
4. The detailed budgets have been scrutinised by:
 - Service Team Managers;
 - Corporate and Assistant Directors;
 - Cabinet members; and the
 - Overview and Scrutiny Committee
5. In particular, proposals for growth and savings have been carefully reviewed in order to be satisfied of their robustness and for their relationship to the priorities of the Council. The budget does not contain any unspecified or unrealistic savings proposals or

contingencies. However, the budget is balanced by the use of reserves and more work needs to be done in order to be financially secure over a 5-year period.

6. The budgets have been assessed as part of the authority's approach to risk management and the major financial risks identified. These risks are outlined in section 11 of the main body of the MTFS report.

Conclusion - Robustness of estimates

7. Taking all these factors into account, I am satisfied that the estimates have been prepared on a robust basis.

Adequacy of Reserves

8. The Chartered Institute of Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) has produced guidance on local authority reserves and balances. This guidance does not prescribe a minimum level of reserves but sets out that the following factors are considered when assessing this:

Budget assumptions	Considerations for the Council
The treatment of inflation and interest rates	The current economic position has been considered and information from our treasury advisors (Link) has been used.
Estimates of the level and timing of capital receipts	The Capital Programme includes an estimate of the profile of use of current capital receipts. No assumption has been made of new capital receipts.
The treatment of demand led pressures	All demand led services have been considered and increases in budgets included in RPP process where appropriate. Examples are the Waste Contract and Baggeridge Country Park staffing.
The treatment of efficiency savings/productivity gains	There are currently no efficiency savings built into the budget.
The financial risks inherent in any significant new funding partnerships, major outsourcing deals or major capital developments	Not applicable.
The availability of other funds to deal with major contingencies	The Council currently has £6.9m set aside in Earmarked Reserves, of which £3.4m is to cover major contingencies such as temporary accommodation pressures and business rates volatility.

Financial standing and management	Considerations for the Council
The overall financial standing of the authority (level of borrowing, debt outstanding, council tax collection rates)	Council Tax collection rates are good in the authority (approximately 98%). Levels of debt are reducing (although older debts are still a concern and investment has been made in additional temporary staff to address this). The Council's level of borrowing appears high in external indices such as OFLOG but this is due to long-term borrowing that was taken out at a low rate and is not a concern internally.
The authority's track record in budget and financial management	The Council has maintained expenditure within budget for the last three financial years and is forecast to do the same in 2023/24. There are no concerns about the financial management processes within the Council.
The strength of financial information and reporting arrangements	Budget monitoring is reported to the Corporate Leadership Team and Members on a quarterly basis as part of the Integrated Performance Monitoring report.
The authority's virement and end of year procedures in relation to budget under/overspends at authority and service team level	The Council currently does not have set procedures for the treatment of over/underspends at year-end. The level at which virements are approved is set out within the Council's financial procedures.
The adequacy of the authority's insurance arrangements to cover major unforeseen risks.	The insurance cover for the Council has been considered and is judged to be sufficient. There is also an Earmarked Reserve to cover items below the excess included in the insurance policy.

9. Considering the above, and my assessment of the robustness of the estimates in the budget, I recommend that a minimum prudent level of reserves continue to be set at £1.5m for 2024/25, which is to be reviewed annually. This minimum level of reserves has also been benchmarked against other similar authorities and is in line with the minimum levels set by those authorities which provides further assurance.
10. At the start of the financial year 2023/24 the Council's General Fund reserves stood at £8.672m million. This is above the minimum level of £1.5m. However, this is being used across each year of the MTFS to balance the budget. This level of reserves allows the Council time to plan for the potential impacts of funding reform in future years and is not deemed to be excessive.

Adequacy of reserves conclusion

11. I am currently of the opinion that, because of our record of prudent spending, careful budgeting and effective budgetary control, the adequacy of the Council's reserves is sufficient, and the minimum level of General Fund reserves can be maintained above £1.5m until the end of 2026/27. However, if the Council is unable to benefit from the Business Rates growth arising from the development of WMI and ROF Featherstone, alternative actions will need to be considered to close the budget gap in future years.

Rebecca Maher, Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer)

John Mayhew, Finance Team Manager (Deputy Section 151 Officer)

APPENDIX 7 – EARMARKED RESERVES

Description	Balance at 31/3/23	23/24 increase / (decrease)	Proposed Transfer 23/24	Projected Balance at 31/3/24
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Corporate Priorities				
Section 106 ●	295			295
Forward Planning	48		-16	32
Transactional Services	162	-20		142
Pay and Inflation Uncertainty Reserve	474	-16		458
Climate Change	26			26
Insurance	47			47
Collection Fund Reserve	2,471	379	-1,000	1,850
Business Rates Pool Surplus	922		-300	622
Total Corporate Leadership Team	4,445	343	-1,316	3,472
Regulatory Services				
Legal Shared Services	70			70
Total Regulatory Services	70	0	0	70
Corporate Services				
Rural Transport ●	15			15
Community Cohesion Project ●	2			2
PCC and ASB Grant Income ●	13	21		34
Covid Shielding Grant ●	58	-2		56
Localities PCC Funding ●	16			16
Human Resources	29			29
Electoral Registration	30			30
Elections Act	19	-19		0
Comms Team - Apprentice	29			29
Redmond Review	19			19
Apprentices	20	-20		0
A&FS Efin Upgrade	19		-19	0
Total Corporate Services	269	-20	-19	230
Digital Technology and Service Transformation				
Unit 4e Insurance ●	213			213
Community Lottery ●	10			10
Transformation Reserve			294	294
Transformation Projects	123	-8	-115	0
Commercial Opportunities Seed Funding	20			20
Sink Fund (Commercial Assets)	244	77		321
Reception Area Improvement	10		-10	0
ICT Mobile Communication	29			29
Sink Fund for Community HUB	6		-6	0
Capital Projects Contingency (Wombourne and Unit 4e)			300	300

Description	Balance at 31/3/23	23/24 increase / (decrease)	Proposed Transfer 23/24	Projected Balance at 31/3/24
Customer Experience Transformation	112	-112		0
Digital 2	111		-111	0
Total Digital Technology and Service Transformation	878	-43	352	1,187
Welfare Services				
New Burdens Fund ●	157	-12		145
Housing and Homelessness ●	182	-18		164
Temporary Accommodation			1,000	1,000
Customer Services CRM	49		-49	0
Total Welfare Services	388	-30	951	1,309
Community Services				
Leisure Grants ●	6			6
Gift in Will (Baggeridge) ●	60			60
Closed Churchyards ●		238		238
Track and Trace Payments ●	122			122
Leisure Development Fund	53	-33		20
Joint Use Repairs	107	-50		57
Wombourne Leisure Centre 3G Pitch Maintenance	25			25
Community Budgets – Jubilee	5		-5	0
Environmental Health – EDMS/IDOX	61			61
Tree Inspector	42	-21	-21	0
Ward Based Priorities		16	141	157
LDF Grant Income	35	-8		27
Total Community Services	516	142	115	773
Business Enterprise and Community Infrastructure				
UK Shared Prosperity ●	184			184
Local Plans	24			24
Development Management	103	-24		79
Local Plans – Self and Customer Build Housing Grant	20	-18		2
South Staffordshire Tourism Association	1			1
Land Registry and Biodiversity	93	-15	-78	0
Neighbourhood Grant	5		-5	0
Total Business Enterprise and Community Infrastructure	430	-57	-83	290
TOTAL EARMARKED RESERVES	6,996	335	0	7,331

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET - 9 JANUARY 2024

CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024/25 – 2028/29

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND SECTION 151 OFFICER AND FINANCE TEAM
MANAGER AND DEPUTY S151 OFFICER**

LEAD CABINET MEMBER – COUNCILLOR ROGER LEES, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

PART A – SUMMARY REPORT

1.0 SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 The 2017 version of the CIPFA Prudential Code introduced the requirement for authorities to produce a capital strategy. The purpose of the capital strategy is to firmly place decisions around borrowing in the context of the overall longer-term financial position of the authority and to provide improved links between the revenue and capital budgets.
- 1.2 The last approved Capital Strategy covered the period from financial year 2022/23 to 2026/27.
- 1.3 Given the current uncertain economic climate, and the switch in external auditors to take effect from closure of the 2023/24 accounts it is prudent to approve an updated version to commence from the start of 2024/25 and to cover the period to 2028/29.
- 1.4 It is also noted that the current Council Plan expires in 2024. As the Capital Strategy necessarily follows the objectives of the Council Plan, this Capital Plan shall act as a holding document (to ensure we have a current plan in place) to be reviewed and updated as necessary alongside the approved, revised Council Plan (2024-28).

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members of Cabinet support the attached Capital Strategy 2024/25 to 2028/29.
- 2.2 It shall be noted that the document will be further revised (if necessary) further to the approval and publication of the Council Plan (2024-28)

3.0 SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

POLICY/COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Council Plan objectives?	
	Yes	The Capital Strategy is informed by Council Plan objectives and targets

	Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) been completed?	
	No	This report does not impact on equality issues
SCRUTINY POWERS APPLICABLE	N/a. The Capital Strategy is adopted further to Full Council approval	
KEY DECISION	No	
FINANCIAL IMPACT	Yes	The report ensures that the Capital Strategy of the Council, including future acquisitions and maintenance can be afforded and financed within the constraints of the MTFS.
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires the Council to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs. The 2017 version of the CIPFA Prudential Code introduced the requirement for authorities to produce a capital strategy.
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	No	
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	No	All Wards

4.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 4.1 The Appendix to this report includes the drafted Capital Strategy for the Council for 2024/25 to 2028/29.
- 4.2 In approving the broad principles of the Strategy, it should be noted that financial details in the Appendix will be updated alongside and commensurate with the MTFS. The intention is that both documents will be presented to Full Council in February 2024 (in the case of the MTFS there is a statutory requirement to do so) and it is imperative that they are consistent at that stage.
- 4.3 The Capital Strategy also needs to align and be consistent with the Council Plan. The current approved Plan (2020-24) will in due course be superseded. If necessary, an updated Capital Strategy will be drafted for Member approval to reflect priorities within the new Council Plan (2024-28) when the latter is adopted.

5.0 IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Not applicable

6.0 PREVIOUS MINUTES

Not applicable

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Draft MTFS 2022/23 to 2026/27

Report prepared by

John Mayhew Finance Team Manager and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Rebecca Maher, Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

CAPITAL STRATEGY

2024/25 – 2028/29

Document Contents

- 1. Background and Scope**
- 2. Capital Strategy**
- 3. Economic and Political Context**
- 4. Capital Programme**
- 5. Capital Acquisitions**
- 6. Maintenance of the Asset Base**
- 7. Disposals**
- 8. Carbon Neutrality**

- 9. Appendix 1 – Existing Asset Base**
- 10. Appendix 2 – Capital Programme**
- 11. Appendix 3 – Financing the Capital Programme**

1. Background and Scope

- 1.1 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Prudential Code requires local authorities to produce a Capital Strategy to demonstrate how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management contribute to the achievement of corporate objectives. The Prudential Code has been updated to incorporate changes which restrict councils using borrowing to finance commercial property investment for the sole purpose of generating financial returns. This strategy is fully compliant with these requirements.
- 1.2 The Council Plan 2020-24 is the primary Strategic Document of the Council. The Capital Strategy is to be viewed as the means through which Capital Assets can be best acquired, maintained and disposed of in order to contribute towards the aims and objectives within the Council Plan.
- 1.3 The Council Plan is delivered through the two priority areas, each with five key objectives as set out below:

Priority Area 1 - Prosperous communities:

- Provide business friendly services through locality community hubs to enable businesses to set up and grow.
- Attract inward investment.
- Deliver economic growth through property acquisitions and commercial developments.
- Support Economic growth through quality planning management.
- Provide support to people to overcome barriers to employment.

Priority Area 2 - Vibrant communities:

- Improve the health and wellbeing of people by providing excellent leisure facilities.
- Provide a quality environment that we can all be proud of.
- Work with our communities and developers to bring forward new housing opportunities.
- Lead, engage and support our communities through the locality + programme.
- Utilise digital technology to enhance resident access and achieve service efficiencies.

1.4 **Each of the objectives is supported by the delivery of five key delivery arms:**

- Financial stability
- Embracing technology
- Flexible and skilled council
- Working with our communities
- To create a business and community hub.

2. The Capital Strategy

2.1 **As mentioned above, the aim of Capital Strategy is to ensure that the Council manages the acquisition, maintenance and disposal of its Capital Assets to best achieve the aims of the Council Plan.**

2.2 In addition to the Council Plan, the Capital Strategy is also closely linked to the following documents.

Approved Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) [Link to MTFS](#)

Approved Treasury Management Support Strategy [Link to TMSS](#)

Detailed Asset Management Plan

2.3 All Capital activity will be fully compliant with the Cipfa Prudential Code.

2.4 The detailed application of this Capital Strategy shall ensure that:

- Property acquisitions and commercial developments to deliver economic growth, are properly appraised, budgeted and financed to ensure Council Plan objectives are achieved.
- Capital acquisitions that do not clearly meet economic objectives can demonstrably achieve other objectives listed in the Council Plan.
- The proper maintenance of the capital asset base is considered in the medium term and appropriately budgeted for and financed.
- Processes exist for the ongoing appraisal of the asset base and a rigorous methodology applied should any decision be required in relation to disposal.
- The required budget and financing in relation to all capital decisions is fully incorporated into the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

3. Economic and Political Context

- 3.1 On 22 November 2023, the Chancellor of the Exchequer delivered the Autumn Statement.
- 3.2 Within the Autumn Statement, it was reported that the OBR is forecasting:
- The economy to grow more slowly over the forecast period, leaving the level of real GDP only 0.5% higher in the medium term than the March forecast.
 - Inflation is expected to be more persistent and domestically fuelled than previously thought, falling below 5% by the end of this year but not returning to its 2% target until the first half of 2025.
 - Markets now expect interest rates to remain higher for longer to bring inflation under control.
- 3.3 The implications of the latest economic conditions above for the application of the Capital Strategy are as follow:
- Capital acquisitions can be viewed as carrying potentially more risk (in the short term) if demand for rented industrial properties reduces.
 - Capital developments and maintenance of assets may be impacted adversely by ongoing high inflation.
 - The cost of capital remaining high may make new acquisitions unattractive as returns from relatively risk free treasury investments may be higher better. In the medium term however, if the purchase price of capital acquisitions lowers future purchases may present more attractive yields.
- 3.4 Public finances are expected to remain tight and there can be little expectation of significant, new capital resources becoming available through the Financial Settlement for 2024/25.
- 3.5 However, wider policy agendas remain including the Shared Prosperity Fund and Net-Zero ambitions. The achievement of these targets will require local authority partnership with other stakeholders and is also addressed within this Capital Strategy.

4. Capital Programme

- 4.1 The Capital Programme is the budget ascribed to each approved Capital scheme.
- 4.2 Affordability constraints materialise in two forms. These being the revenue impact of capital expenditure and / or the financing of the Capital Programme itself. The latter is detailed in Appendix 3.
- 4.3 The revenue impact of each item within the Capital Programme should be fully incorporated within the business case prepared for decision.
- 4.4 The costs to the Medium Term Financial Strategy will be through an interest charge (either incurred, or if internal resources used, interest receipt foregone) and (unless revenue resources directly applied), a minimum revenue provision (MRP). The latter is intended to meet the capital costs of the asset through the revenue budget across the assumed lifespan of the asset.
- 4.5 If there are assumed economic benefits arising from the capital expenditure, the additional income streams (or potentially cost savings) would also be factored into the MTFS. If the primary purpose of the spend is commercial, there would be an expectation over the medium term that these benefits should exceed costs in order for the proposal to proceed for incorporation in the capital programme.
- 4.6 If the development is not commercial in nature but is instead envisaged to contribute towards wider aims of the Council Plan, then it is still important that the impact across all years of the MTFS is transparent and that the intended advantages (non-financial) are justified this increase in costs.

5. Capital Acquisitions

- 5.1 The Council Plan makes explicit reference to deliver economic growth through property acquisitions and commercial developments. This strategy has to date produced an economic yield of benefit to the MTFS as well as enhancing investment in the wider South Staffordshire economy.
- 5.2 The CIPFA Prudential Code refers to such capital expenditure as 'undertaking investments for commercial purpose'. It is acknowledged that the primary purpose is to make a financial return which will in due course enhance the long term affordability of the MTFS.
- 5.3 The Prudential Code does not discourage local authorities from making such investments but requires councils to acknowledge the additional risk involved

and ensure that such acquisitions are subject to enhanced decision making and scrutiny.

- 5.4 As a minimum, due diligence shall take full account of prevailing interest rates to ensure that the expected return from the investment can make a positive contribution to the MTFS on a net present value basis.
- 5.5 The accounting rate of return and payback period shall also be considered in understanding that risk associated in relation to investments for a return, increases across longer time horizons, even if the NPV shows a positive return. Factors such as any inherent optimism bias (both in terms of costs incurred and time factors for completion and commencement of revenue streams) should be taken into account.
- 5.6 The decision to acquire an investment property shall follow the following approval process:
- CLT (Outline Business Case)
 - CLT (Full Business Case)
 - Cabinet
 - Asset Scrutiny Panel for decision
- 5.7 Noting that achieving a commercial return is the primary, but not the sole reason for undertaking the investment, the final decision shall not be solely determined by the outcome of the financial appraisal but shall fully consider:
- All forecast costs and income streams
 - Due assessment of risk and consequence (including any optimism bias)
 - Other competing priorities
 - Non-financials that also impact upon the Council Plan.

6. Asset Maintenance

- 6.1 It shall be explicitly acknowledged within the Asset Strategy that if an asset is worth acquiring and/or holding, it should be maintained in good condition in order to ensure that it continues to meet the aims of the Council Plan.
- 6.2 The methods by which this is achieved shall be:
- All assets are included in the schedules forwarded to the Council's insurers at up to date replacement cost value to insure against material loss due to insurable events.

- Revenue budgets are held to ensure ongoing maintenance can be delivered.
- Asset condition register is maintained to establish a programme of major works to be undertaken to a proscribed timetable.
- A sink fund is established, funded via revenue and incorporated into the MTFS. Major works when undertaken according to timetable shall be funded via this reserve.
- The adequacy of the sink fund is reviewed alongside the proposed programme of major works as an integral part of the budget setting and MTFS process each financial year.

7. Asset Disposal

7.1 An asset shall be considered for disposal if it is deemed that:

- Financial returns are no longer being achieved (and there is no medium term prospect of such returns being achieved) in line with the original business case.
- Wider economic benefits to the organisation and wider objectives within the Council Plan are not being met by retaining the asset.
- There is an active market for the asset and a potential purchaser (or purchasers) has been identified.
- The opportunity to contribute to the priorities in the Council Plan is better achieved through realising the value of the asset.

7.2 The process for deciding upon disposing an asset will mirror that to acquire an asset and therefore will comprise of:

- CLT (Outline Business Case)
- CLT (Full Business Case)
- Cabinet
- Asset Scrutiny Panel for decision

8. Climate Change

8.1 With a number of council's declaring a 'Climate Emergency', councils are taking urgent action in their local areas with partners and their local communities to combat the negative impacts of climate change and to deliver net zero carbon by 2050.

8.2 South Staffordshire Council has established a specific Earmarked Reserve with a view to developing its sustainability agenda and encouraging investment in initiatives progressing towards net zero.

- 8.3 The Climate Change strategy will increasingly play an important role in the Council Plan and Capital Strategy, and it will be important that sustainability considerations are incorporated into all outline business cases for capital acquisitions and disposals.
- 8.4 The Council's maintenance programme for its asset base shall also take into account climate change considerations.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 The Capital Strategy of the Council is an important document outlining the objectives by which the Council undertakes its capital expenditure and maintains (or disinvests from) its asset base.
- 9.2 The Capital Strategy is also closely aligned to and is informed by other key strategic documents of the Council including (but not necessarily limited to);
- Council Plan (2020-24) (and revisions thereafter)
 - Treasury Management Strategy
 - Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)
 - Asset Management Plan
- 9.3 The Capital Strategy shall be reviewed on an annual basis and approved by Full Council alongside the MTFS.
- 9.4 A report on achievements against the Capital Strategy shall be reported to Cabinet alongside the Revenue Outturn Report upon publication of the draft Statement of Accounts (pre-audit).

Appendix 1 – Existing Asset Base

Table 1: Analysis of Council Assets as at 31/3/2023

Description	Industrial Premises	Codsall Community HUB	Digital Technology	Lane Green Depot	Other	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Land and Buildings	28,994	9,523	0	272	3,655	42,444
Vehicles/Equipment	0	791	178	253	627	1,849
Infrastructure	0	0	0	107	0	107
Community Assets	0	0	0	0	1,369	1,369
Surplus Assets	0	0	0	0	51	51
Heritage Assets	0	0	0	0	122	122
	28,994	10,314	178	632	5,824	45,942

Appendix 2 – Capital Programme

Table 2 below details the current (2023/24) Capital programme of the Council.

Table 2, Capital Programme

Capital Programme	Budget 2023/24	Budget 2024/25	Budget 2025/26	Budget 2026/27	Budget 2027/28	TOTAL
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Corporate Services						
Asset Strategy	4,359					4,359
Asset Strategy – Wombourne Redevelopment	1,400					1,400
Restoration of Unit 4E Fire Damaged	3,348					3,348
Capital Programme Contingencies	250					250
Total Corporate Services	9,357	0	0	0	0	9,357
Digital Transformation and Estate Management						
Replacement of workstations	150	45	45	45	45	330
Civica Licences	60					60
Digital Services	150		290	10		450
Total Business Transformation and Estate Management	360	45	335	55	45	840
Welfare Services						
Renovation & Disabled Facilities Grant	1,126	1,126	1,126	1,126	1,126	5,630
Total Welfare Services	1,126	1,126	1,126	1,126	1,126	5,630
Community Services						
Street Scene Fleet	79					267
Hub Electric car charging points						95
Refuse Vehicles New Contract		3,046				3,046
Waste Bins		790				876
Ten Year Leisure Cardiovascular renewal	97					239
Leisure Centre Indoor Cycling Renewal						12
Leisure Centre Resistance Equipment	70					170
Leisure Centre Air Conditioning						33
Leisure Centre Refurbishment						1,985
Leisure Centre Potential VAT Liability	645					645
Wombourne Leisure Centre 3G Pitch						83
Baggeridge Country Park Road Access						120
Total Community Services	891	3,836	0	0	0	7,571
Planning and Business Enterprise						
Regional Housing Board						126
Total Planning and Business Enterprise	0	0	0	0	0	126
GRAND TOTAL	11,734	5,007	1,461	1,181	1,171	23,524

Future acquisitions and capital developments that are approved are added to the Capital Programme.

Appendix 3 – Financing the Capital Programme

Table 3 below details how the Capital Strategy in Appendix 2 is financed.

Table 3, Financing the Capital Programme

	Capital Financing					
	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total
Borrowing	6,298	3,836	290	10	0	10,434
Capital Grants	1,126	1,126	1,126	1,126	1,126	5,630
Capital Receipts	962	45	45	45	45	1,142
Leasing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Insurance	3,348	0	0	0	0	3,348
Total	11,734	5,007	1,461	1,181	1,171	20,554

If the purpose of the budgeted Capital Programme is to ensure affordability in relation to the Medium Term Financial Strategy, the financing is focussed on cash flow. In essence it can be seen as providing the assurance that cash commitments that arise from completing the Capital Programme can be met as they fall due, whether in payments to contractors, developers or any other stakeholders to whom monies are owed.

The upper constraint on financing is the borrowing limit which is set by Members further to recommendation by the Audit and Risk Committee and is contained within the Treasury Management Strategy.

Borrowing can be undertaken from a number of approved sources including the Public Works Loans Board.

Other common sources of borrowing include:

- Other local authorities
- Commercial Banks
- Internal borrowing (ie use of our own cash reserves)

The use of own cash reserves does come at a cost as whilst no interest rate is paid out on the borrowing, there is a loss of income in terms of interest foregone had the cash reserves been invested.

Capital Grants are monies received (usually but not necessarily from central government). In the table above the grants shown relate entirely to the Disabled Facilities Grant. This aspect of the Capital Programme therefore has a neutral impact on the MTFs and associated costs of financing.

The Prudential Code details the constraints imposed upon local authorities for applying Capital Receipts as financing for capital projects.

Entering into finance or operating leases are alternative methods of acquiring assets for use as opposed to outright purchase. Whilst none currently planned for in the Capital Programme this is an option for consideration if available. Accounting treatment would be as per the Accounting Standard IAS16.

The appropriate vehicle for financing should be an integral part of an approved business case.

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET – 6 FEBRUARY 2024

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE HABITAT BANK

REPORT OF THE LEAD PLANNING MANAGER

**COUNCILLOR VICTORIA WILSON - CABINET MEMBER FOR BUSINESS ENTERPRISE AND
COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE**

PART A – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 This report comprises a proposal for South Staffordshire Council to set up its own habitat bank for the purpose of providing biodiversity units to sell in relation to biodiversity net gain.
- 1.2 The report includes detail on proposed parcels, their current condition, proposed habitats and next steps to take to register the sites with Natural England's net gain register at the point of sale after it becomes live after 12th February 2024.

2. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

POLICY/COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Council Plan objectives?	
	Yes	The habitat bank will contribute to the following Council Plan 2020-2024 objective: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide a quality environment that we can all be proud of.
	Has an Equality Impact Assessment (Equal) been completed?	
	No	Not required
	Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been completed?	
	No	Not required.
SCRUTINY POWERS APPLICABLE	Yes	The Constitution and associated protocol provides that front line Councillors, the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer will have five clear working days following dispatch of a notification of a proposed decision in which to call in for scrutiny, decisions proposed by the Cabinet or its members. In accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and associated protocol, any two or more members wishing to request that this proposed decision should be called in for scrutiny

		should do so by giving notice to the Corporate Director of Governance either by e-mail or in writing before the end of the fifth day specifying the reason or reasons therefore. The Corporate Director of Governance will then call in the proposed decision and arrange for it to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee/relevant Scrutiny Panel. A copy of such notice must also be sent to the Lead Cabinet Member either by email or in writing by the end of the fifth day. This proposed decision will be confirmed and implemented or, where appropriate, referred to the Council for consideration at its next meeting, on or after the date to be notified upon circulation of the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet, unless called in for scrutiny by that date.
KEY DECISION	No	
TARGET COMPLETION/ DELIVERY DATE	<p>Biodiversity net gain becomes mandatory in February 2024.</p> <p>Natural England's Register will go live on 12th February 2024, and subject to completion of S106 agreements with Staffordshire County Council to secure the management, the land will be registered on the register at the point of sale.</p>	
FINANCIAL IMPACT	No	Discussion and further investigation technical implementation of Conservation Covenants remain ongoing. At this stage it is recommended that support is obtained to continue with those investigations and discussions as the scheme is implemented.
LEGAL ISSUES	No	Discussion and further investigation technical implementation of Conservation Covenants remain ongoing. At this stage it is recommended that support is obtained to continue with those investigations and discussions as the scheme is implemented.
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES including climate impacts and health impacts if applicable	<p>The proposals will create and enhance natural habitats through appropriate habitat management. This will directly contribute to the Council's Biodiversity Duty established in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, and will also contribute towards climate resilience by actively managing and enhancing areas of natural green space for biodiversity.</p> <p>The proposals will also provide local residents with more access to nature and biodiversity in the long-term, which have proven benefits in relation to mental and physical health.</p>	

IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	Yes	The current sites proposed are Council-owned sites in Perton, Bilbrook and Lower Penn. The long-term intention will be to include more land in other wards to ensure good geographical availability of biodiversity units in the future.
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PART B – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

3. INFORMATION

Background

- 3.1 Biodiversity Net Gain (known as BNG), the principle of leaving a development site in a better state for biodiversity than before development commenced is enshrined in the Environment Act 2021 and will become mandatory for all developments (with some exceptions) by February 2024.
- 3.2 As of 12th February 2024, all major developments will be required to deliver 10% BNG. This will be applied to smaller sites from 2nd April 2024 subject to confirmation through secondary legislation.
- 3.3 When a developer is unable to deliver all or part of their BNG requirement on their development site, they may purchase 'biodiversity units' (the BNG 'currency') from a Habitat Bank to offset their on-site requirement to another site.
- 3.4 Habitat Banks are created when a landowner improves habitat on land within their ownership under a management plan that has been informed by a robust ecological assessment. The habitat prior to improvement is known as the 'baseline' habitat and the habitat post-improvement is known as the 'proposed' habitat.
- 3.5 Once a baseline has been established, the landowner can generate biodiversity units by progressing habitat management pursuant to the objectives of the management plan. The resultant 'uplift' in condition generates biodiversity units which can be sold to developers in need of these units to meet 10% BNG requirement.
- 3.6 All habitats created for BNG are legally required to be managed for a minimum period of 30 years.

Opportunity In South Staffordshire

- 3.7 South Staffordshire Council owns a number of land parcels suitable to create and/or enhance habitats. These habitats can generate biodiversity units which can subsequently be sold to developers for them to be able to achieve BNG requirements.
- 3.8 Several sites have been identified in South Staffordshire within the ownership of South Staffordshire Council that can be taken forward, initially, to contribute to the

South Staffordshire Habitat Bank. The initial tranche of sites are located in Lower Penn, Perton and Bilbrook.

- 3.9 The rationale for the selection of these sites has been based primarily on the ease of habitat creation (to generate units faster than complex/difficult management) and the presence of suitable access for management machinery if required.
- 3.10 The sites proposed to be taken forward initially have been surveyed between April and July 2023 by South Staffordshire Council, according to published habitat survey and condition assessment standards published by UKHab and DEFRA.
- 3.11 The sites proposed to be taken forward initially are as follows:

Table 1. Sites proposed to be taken forward for BNG habitat management.

Property/Land Description	Map Link
Open space located in area between Langley Road and Dirtyfoot Lane, Lower Penn	https://goo.gl/maps/QGkqYkaWZonDCypc9
Public Open Space Webb Avenue Perton South Staffordshire	https://goo.gl/maps/rAqHV1q1B12sPv8XA
Upper Lake The Parkway Perton South Staffordshire	https://goo.gl/maps/zBe1TcyRGGKLenESA https://goo.gl/maps/Cp8GwutJHdZWqqCU6 https://goo.gl/maps/BsVzaTN7mWTNKDfi9
Land near to 72 Stephenson Drive Perton Wolverhampton South Staffordshire WV6 7YB	https://goo.gl/maps/gFET1BrQzMTLAD6M6
Land Off Watery Lane Codsall South Staffordshire	https://goo.gl/maps/tftcf8tKnBxPEYLQ6
Land near to 48 Millennium Way Bilbrook Wolverhampton South Staffordshire WV8 1GA	https://goo.gl/maps/86LBu1G9yAXhFhbf8
Land near to Street Record Old Farm Drive Bilbrook South Staffordshire	https://goo.gl/maps/4vLop3igKUjcmH36

- 3.12 All calculations below are based on the accepted standard Defra 4.0 metric. The statutory metric has recently been released and the calculations below will be re-run through the statutory metric to ensure compliance with the relevant legislation.
- 3.13 Based on the Defra 4.0 metric calculations, South Staffordshire's Habitat Bank will initially generate circa 20 biodiversity units. This number will be updated once calculations have been progressed with the statutory biodiversity metric for the selected sites.

- 3.14 Units will be priced to ensure that the costs of habitat management works will be covered over the minimum 30-year period and will be competitively priced based on the market.
- 3.15 Further opportunities will be explored to add to the Habitat Bank, including areas such as Baggeridge Country Park, Shoal Hill etc. in the future.
- 3.16 It is possible that not all of the initial units generated by the scheme will be sold in the first year of offering units for sale, developers may have their own land to offset on, or may choose to use another habitat bank.
- 3.17 Until demand for the biodiversity units in South Staffordshire Council's Habitat Bank is demonstrated, it is recommended that sites are not registered with Natural England until the point of sale. This ensures costs are not incurred prior to units being sold, given that units may not be sold for a number of months/years.
- 3.18 If favourable management is progressed on habitats prior to their sale, they will begin to generate biodiversity units from the point that habitat management is progressed and the site is registered. Once demand has been demonstrated this may be an option that South Staffordshire Council wishes to pursue.

How the Habitat Bank is Created & Units Prepared for Sale

- 3.19 To be registered on the Register, habitat set aside for BNG unit creation must submit the following information to the Register:
- 1 A completed biodiversity metric for the 'baseline' units and the 'proposed' units.
 - 2 A Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) for a 30-year period.
 - 3 Provide evidence that the land is owned or long-term leased by the Habitat Bank and that landowner permission has been obtained.
 - 4 Provide details of a legal agreement (Conservation Covenant or S106 agreement) securing the management of the land and detailing responsibilities to manage in accordance with the Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP).
- 3.20 Step 1 has been completed. Habitat and botanical surveys have been completed for the proposed parcels.
- 3.21 Step 2 is currently being progressed for each parcel. Natural England have released a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) template and this is being used to write management regimes specific to each parcel of land.
- 3.22 Step 3 has been completed and our legal team have confirmed that we own the parcels to be used.

- 3.23 Step 4 will now not involve a Special Purpose Vehicle as a S106 agreement can be progressed with Staffordshire County Council to secure the management of the habitats to allow the sites to be registered. This is currently ongoing.
- 3.24 Conservation Covenants are another option for legally securing land management. This is a new legal mechanism introduced in 2023.
- 3.25 To be able to use Conservation Covenants, the Council must apply to Natural England to become a Responsible Body¹². The ability to register as a Responsible Body with Natural England went live on 27th July 2023 and involves a range of stages of assessment/eligibility criteria³.
- 3.26 Once registered as a Responsible Body, the Council will be able to utilise Conservation Covenants as another legal tool for securing the conservation of natural or heritage features on land.
- 3.27 The ability to use Conservation Covenants also enables the Council to have more control over third party Habitat banks in the local area; though this does come with increased monitoring and enforcement burdens, and the capacity to do this should be explored prior to entering agreements with other landowners.
- 3.28 The Council as a Responsible Body would not be obliged or required to enter into Conservation Covenants with third party landowners. However, entering into Conservation Covenants may be beneficial to have control over monitoring & enforcement of land located within strategically beneficial areas (such as in the Nature Recovery Network or Local Nature Recovery Strategy⁴)
- 3.29 The Council as a Responsible Body would have annual reporting duties to the Secretary of State, as well as responsibility for enforcement of Conservation Covenants. Capacity to monitor and enforce Conservation Covenants should be considered, however please note paragraph 3.28 above.
- 3.30 Natural England aim to process applications to become a Responsible Body within 12 weeks of receiving a complete application.
- 3.31 The application to become a Responsible Body is currently being drafted and will be sent to legal and finance for further scrutiny.

¹ [Conservation covenants: apply to become a responsible body - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conservation-covenants-apply-to-become-a-responsible-body)

² [Conservation Covenants \(local.gov.uk\)](https://www.local.gov.uk/conservation-covenants)

³ [Conservation covenants: criteria for being a responsible body - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conservation-covenants-criteria-for-being-a-responsible-body)

⁴ The LNRS is currently being produced by Staffordshire County Council. SSC are a supporting authority for the LNRS and the Senior Planning Ecologist is liaising with SCC on this.

Indicative Potential Costs to the Council

- 3.32 On the basis that sites will be registered at the point of sale it is not anticipated that there will be any initial costs for habitat management prior to this. Any funds for the purpose of habitat management, upskilling etc. over and above existing costs would be available at the point of sale.
- 3.33 The cost of registering a site on the BNG Register will be £639; and each subsequent allocation of part or all of that land to a development will be £45.

4. IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 4.1 No further impact assessment detailed.

5. PREVIOUS MINUTES

- 5.1 Not previously considered.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 6.1 Footnotes have been provided throughout in relation to supplementary information.

Appendix 1 provides location and habitat plans for the Bilbrook sites.

Appendix 2 provides a location and habitat plans for the Lower Penn site.

Appendix 3 provides location and habitat plans for the Perton sites.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 That the proposed sites as outlined in Table 1 are progressed as BNG delivery sites, and should progress through to the Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) stage which will override any existing Habitat Management Plans.
- 7.2 Discussions should continue with the legal team on the use of s106 agreements and Conservation Covenants, with a view to registering the proposed sites on Natural England's Net Gain Register at the point of sale.
- 7.3 Discussions should also continue with the legal team to understand the implications of registering to become a Responsible Body for the purpose of Conservation Covenants and to progress with the application to Natural England.

Appendices are available as meeting documents.

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