

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

12th February 2013

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN & COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2013/14.

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Phil Mould, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management
Portfolio Holder Consulted	
Relevant Head of Service	Teresa. Kristunas, Head of Finance and Resources
Wards Affected	All Wards
Ward Councillor Consulted	
Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

To enable Members to consider the current financial position for the revenue budget 2013/14- 2015/16.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to **RECOMMEND** that

to enable Members to approve the budget for 2013/14, 2014/15 & 2015/16:

- 1) **the Council determines the level of Council Tax discount to be applied to the prescribed classes of dwellings as defined by the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (England) Regulations 2003 (as amended) for Class C [vacant dwellings] where the dwelling appears in the Valuation List for the first time and it has been continuously unoccupied and substantially unfurnished since the effective date of entry into the list:**
 - i) **for the first 3 months from the date of entry into the list - 100%**
 - ii) **for periods of more than 3 months and for less than 6 months - 50%**
 - iii) **for periods of 6 months or more - 0% - no discount.**

For the purposes of Class C, when considering whether a dwelling falls within the class, any period of occupation, not exceeding 6 weeks, during which it was not unoccupied and substantially unfurnished, shall be disregarded;

- 2) **the powers to reduce the Council Tax payable on a case by case basis , as provided by Section 13A 1(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, be delegated to the**

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

12th February 2013

**Executive Director of Finance and Resources and the
Revenue Services Manager;**

- 3) **authority be delegated to the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services to amend the Scheme of Delegation to Officers to implement (2) above;**
- 4) **the recommendations set out in Appendix 1 'Part C' of the report be approved;**
- 5) **a bid for Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment of £14K be approved and funded from general fund balances detailed in paragraph 3.30;**
- 6) **a bid for Green Deal up to £10K be approved and funded from general fund balances detailed in paragraph 3.32;**
- 7) **the use of balances totalling £24,000 be approved; and**
- 8) **the Pay Policy Statement at Appendix B be approved.**

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) provides the framework within which the revenue and capital spending decisions can be made over a 3 year period. It is revised and updated on an annual basis to take into account any alterations that may be required as a result of changes that impact on the Council's services.
- 3.2 As part of the review, officers consider the impact of demand on service and the costs associated with this demand. This may result in additional costs (associated with maintaining current service delivery) or reductions in anticipated income revenue over the next 3 years.
- 3.3 The report also details the setting of the Council Tax this is included in Appendix A and includes all the resolutions. Billing Authorities must set the amounts of the tax before the 11th of March in the preceding financial year. Appendix 1 details the action taken to date and the decisions still to be taken in each of the following areas:
 - a) Part A Setting the Council Tax for 2013/14.
 - b) Part B The Collection Fund

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

12th February 2013

c) Part C Conclusions and recommendations

3.4 As Members are aware, there are considerable additional cost pressures facing the Council over the next 3 years as a result of a number of issues including:

- Reduction in Council Tax Benefit Grant received
- Changes to welfare reform and the impact on the Council from residents service need
- Transfer from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit
- Impact of the current National Economy

3.5 Officers will continue to work with our partners to identify the costs that may be associated with some of these changes.

Formula Grant / Localised Business Rates

3.6 As Members are aware, the provisional settlement that was received by the Council for 2013/14 – 2014/15 was lower than originally estimated. The table below shows the actual cut in Government Grant from 2009/10 to 2014/15 and equates to a 41% real cut in the funding received to support services.

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Formula Grant / RSG plus Baseline Funding*	£5.557m (excludes concessionary fares element)	£4.696m	£4.212m	£3.775m	£3.168m
Year on year reduction £		£0.861m	£0.484m	£0.437m	£0.607m
Year on year reduction %		15%	10%	10%	16%
Cumulative reduction £		£0.861m	£1.345m	£1.782m	£2.289m
Cumulative Reduction %		15%	24%	32%	41%

*these figures have been adjusted so they are like for like in all years and may not reflect the figures in the budget due to changes in what is included in these grants. Thus does not correspond to the Govt Grant line in 3.23.

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

12th February 2013

- 3.7 The Government grant we received for 2012/13 represented a cash decrease of 10% on the previous financial year.
- 3.8 The current mechanism of allocating formula grant will be replaced from April 2013 with a system of formula grant and localised business rates. As these are effectively the same pot of money for the purposes of this MTFP they will be viewed as one funding stream.
- 3.9 Localising business rates will transfer risk from central to local Government. As a billing authority we will be far more exposed to reductions in the local taxbase if businesses close or rates are revalued. This places far greater pressures on the cashflow and reserves of the Council as well as the risk of greater volatility in the future levels of expected funding.
- 3.10 The Council has supported the opportunity to pool business rates with other councils to mitigate against these risks. Redditch Borough Council will continue to pool with the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Pool as this offers the greater financial benefit to the Borough.
- 3.11 The Government are also transferring two specific grants into the formula grant funding from 2013/14. These are the 2011/12 Council Tax Freeze Grant (£144k) and Homelessness Grant (£98k).

New Homes Bonus

- 3.12 The Council received New Homes Bonus in the current year of £380K. It is prudent to assume that in future years that this figure will increase in line with the assumed increase in taxbase of 0.25% per annum. This would raise an estimated £70k additional grant per annum until the scheme matures in 2016/17.
- 3.13 As agreed in the current MTFP, any income received from New Homes Bonus grant will be utilised to offset the pressures facing the Council over the medium term.

Council Tax

- 3.14 To ensure that necessary levels of funding are available given the large reductions in government grant highlighted above, Council Tax increases will have to be sufficient to ensure that funding is available for the services that create value to the customer have appropriate levels of financial resource.
- 3.15 The Council Tax freeze for the current financial year was funded by an additional one off government grant of £58k. It had been hoped that

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

12th February 2013

this would become an ongoing grant, however this grant was for 2012/13 only. Further savings and Council Tax increases have been identified as part of this MTFP to compensate in future years.

- 3.16 The government have offered a grant equivalent to a 1% rise in Council Tax for 2013/14 and 2014/15 for councils who freeze their Council Tax in the next financial year. Acceptance of this freeze grant will cost the Council £118k pa once the grant ceases (assuming Council Tax would otherwise rise by 2% in 2013/14).

Council Tax Discounts

- 3.17 The Council has discretion to change the discounted amount in certain prescribed classes of Council Tax Discounts. Members have already agreed a number of changes to Council Tax discounts, and need to consider further changes as detailed below.
- 3.18 Where a property is left vacant and unfurnished for a period of upto 6 months then 50% will be due for periods of more than 6 months then full Council Tax becomes payable. The property must then be occupied for a minimum period of 6 weeks before a second period of 50% discount can be applied for.
- 3.19 It is also recommended that new builds have a 100% discount for 3 months then 50% discount for a further 3 months with 100% Council Tax being due after a period of 6 months.

Transformation

- 3.20 The significant reductions in funding are not anticipated to improve for a number of years and therefore officers have looked at alternative ways to deliver savings whilst improving services to the community. As previously reported, the services provided by the Council are undergoing transformational change using a different approach to assessing the value provided by the service. This work will focus on the purpose of services to the community and will aim to realise savings and protect those services that create value to our customers.
- 3.21 As reported previously, officers will continue to review the financial position of the authority within a framework of financial principles. These are:
- a) Reduce Waste in a system (Stop it now)
 - b) Design a new system to reduce waste and cost

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

12th February 2013

- c) Reduce the costs associated with enabling service provision rather than those that create the value to the customer.
- 3.22 There are 3 levels of costs associated with services delivered by the Council;
- a) Create Value – these are the costs to deliver front line service, those which create real value to the customer.
 - b) Add Value – these costs provide support to those services on the front line. They add value to the customer but do not directly deliver the service.
 - c) Enable – there are a number of costs that relate to the enabling functions across the Council. These include the management and support services that provide advice and support to the services that add and create value. As part of the financial principles, officers are looking at the ratio of the cost of the enabling function compared with those that create value with the aim to align resources to those that provide the most value to our customers.
- 3.23 Any additional income currently generated that delivers more than the target revenue has been built into the projections as a revised target to achieve.
- 3.24 Officers have also identified a number of budget pressures that have either been deemed “unavoidable”. Unavoidable includes the ongoing effects of pressures identified during 2012/13 together with any issues that have been raised as fundamental to maintaining service provision as part of the budget process. In addition income shortfalls that cannot be managed by improved marketing or price increases have been addressed during the budget planning.
- 3.25 These include:
- a) Reduction in funding from Worcestershire County Council in relation to funding for the customer service centre (HUB) of £22k.
 - b) Shortfall in on street Car parking income £22k
 - c) Reduction in funding received for Learn Direct 15K.
 - d) Business Rates payable on vacant units £26K
 - e) Document Management System (spend to save) £21K

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

12th February 2013

Financial Position

- 3.26 The current summary position at 3.27 includes the financial impact of the above in addition to the following assumptions:
- a) 1% pay award in relation to inflationary increase. This will be subject to the national negotiation that the Council is signed up to.
 - b) General inflationary increases in relation to contract arrangements.
 - c) Inclusion of the provisional settlement for 2013/14 & 2014/15.
 - d) 3% increase in fees and charges (where appropriate)
 - e) An estimation of the New Homes Bonus income
 - f) Additional income estimated in relation to the Business Rates receivable by the Council

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

12th February 2013

3.27 The revised position is shown below.
(Figures below do not include the bids to be considered)

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Base cost of General Fund Services	9,605	9,465	8,422
Pressures –unavoidables	143	413	224
Savings (reduction waste, redesign systems, reduction in enabling costs)	-283	-1456	-388
Service Expenditure	9,465	8,422	8,258
Vacancy/outturn savings	-400	-400	-400
MRP	792	740	708
Bad Debt Provision	50	50	50
Pension Strain	1,557	1,736	1,878
VAT Refund	-185	-	-
Investment Income	-471	-471	-471
Parish Precept	8	9	9
Net operating expenditure	10,816	10,086	10,032
Transfer from Reserves	-255	-	
Surplus from Collection Fund	-35	-	
Government Grant	-2,978	-2,307	-2,119
NDR Baseline	-1,927	-1,987	-2,007
NDR Growth	-200	-200	-200
New Homes Bonus	-380	-450	-520
Assumed Council Tax @ 0% (offset by 1% Gov Grant) 2% increase 2014/15 2015/16	-4,983	-5,084	-5,186
Council Tax Grant	-58	-58	
overall shortfall	0	0	0

3.28 Savings currently identified include:

- a) General underspends offered up as future savings
- b) Extension of sharing for services currently not shared across the Redditch and Bromsgrove.
- c) Improved efficiencies within services and renegotiation of contracts

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

12th February 2013

- d) Savings realised from transformation of services and driving out waste

3.29 The Council is to set a balanced budget for 2013/14 – 2015/16 and therefore will have to approve further savings, increase income or reduce high pressures for the 3 year period. Any additional spending, over and above the pressures identified above, would also need to be funded by additional savings. Officers are committed to realise the necessary levels of savings through transformation and will continue to work with staff to enable services to be delivered at a reduced cost to meet the cuts anticipated.

Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment

3.30 A Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) needs to be carried out as the last one was done around 2007 and is considered to be out of date. All the councils in Worcestershire have given an in-principle commitment to work together to get an up to date GTAA. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) stresses the need to have an up to date assessment, and a draft policy in the emerging RBC Local Plan No.4 has reasoned justification which indicates that an assessment would be carried out. The risks of not participating are around conforming with the expectations of the NPPF, and it may, in practical terms, become difficult to take enforcement action against any unauthorised sites without an up to date GTAA.

3.31 A bid of £14K is requested to be approved to allow the assessment to be carried out. This will be funded from General Fund Balances.

Green Deal

3.32 A bid for up to £10K is requested to be approved to allow officers to explore the options for the Green Deal working in partnership with either Birmingham Energy Savers (Carillion) or Worcestershire-wide Community Interest Company (CIC). This bid will be funded from General Fund Balances.

General Fund Balances

3.33 The level of the General Fund balance is currently £1.1m, as previously highlighted, there will be greater risks on the cashflow and the funding of the Council in the medium term. It is estimated that at the end of 2012/13 the balances will be £867K. Should both bids be approved balances at the end of 2013/14 are estimated to be £843K

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

12th February 2013

3.34 The current level of balances is nearing the minimum recommended level for the Borough. There is also the need for a fuller assessment of the necessary level of balances will be required once the full impact of the governments changes to local government funding are known.

3.35 The estimated level of government funding over the MTFP will reduce more rapidly than the increase in Council Tax revenues. Consequently, there will be a continuing focus on transforming service delivery to reduce waste and to ensure that the funding available is aligned to the services that create value to the community of Redditch.
Local Government Act 2003

3.36 There are a number of requirements that the Council's Section 151 Officer (the Council's designated Senior Finance Officer) has to include in the budget report. These are set out below, together with S.151 comments on each of the issues:

- a) The level and use of reserves to be formally determined by the Council must be informed by the judgement and advice of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO).

Section 151 Officer's comments: Review of general fund balances included above in report (4.17).

- b) The CFO to report the factors that have influenced his/her judgement in the context of the key financial assumptions underpinning the budget, and ensure that his/her advice is formally recorded. Where that advice is not accepted, this should be formally recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Section 151 Officer's comments: The main assumptions included in the calculation of the budget are included within the report. The budget updates and considerations at previous Committee meetings have been formally recorded.

- c) The report should include a statement showing the estimated opening balance on general fund reserves for the year ahead, any contribution to/from the fund, and the estimated closing balance.

Section 151 Officer's comments: statement included in this report (4.17)

- d) The report should show the extent to which reserves are financing ongoing expenditure.

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

12th February 2013

*Section 151 Officer's comments: included in the report.
Balances to fund 2013/14 only no further recommendations to
finance ongoing expenditure.*

- e) The report should include a statement from the CFO on the adequacy of general reserves and provisions both for the forthcoming year and in the context of the medium term financial plan.

Section 151 Officer Comments: the Council holds adequate reserves to manage future liability and financial constraints as detailed in 4.17.

- f) The report should include a statement on the annual review of earmarked reserves showing:
 - i) list of earmarked reserves
 - ii) purpose of reserve
 - iii) advice on appropriate levels
 - iv) estimated opening / closing balances
 - v) planned additions / withdrawals.

Section 151 Officer's Comments: The current reserves are reported on a regular basis through the financial monitoring reports.

Pay Policy

- 3.37 The Localism Act requires English and Welsh local authorities to produce a Pay Policy Statement ('the statement'). The Act requires the statement to be approved by Full Council and to be adopted by 31st March 2013 for the financial year 2013/14. The Pay Policy Statement for the Council is included at Appendix B
- 3.38 The statement must set out policies relating to:
 - (a) the remuneration of its chief officers,
 - (b) the remuneration of its lowest-paid employees, and

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

12th February 2013

- (c) the relationship between –
 - (i) the remuneration of its chief officers, and
 - (ii) the remuneration of its employees who are not chief officers.

Legal Implications

- 3.39 The Localism Act 2011 made significant changes to the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and requires the billing authority to calculate a council tax requirement for the year. Chapter 14 of the Local Government Finance Act provides for certain local authorities to levy and collect Council Tax. Sections 30 to 38 of the Act specify the calculations required to set the tax.
- 3.40 Billing Authorities must set the amounts of the tax before the 11th of March in the preceding financial year.
- 3.41 The required calculations and the Council Tax for each property band are set out in Parts B and C of the Appendices to the report.

Service/Operational Implications

- 3.42 The MTFP will enable services to be maintained and, where achievable, improvements to the community.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.43 The impact on the customer has been reduced due to the savings being realised by reduction of waste in the services and ensuring that all service that create value to the customer are resourced.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

To mitigate the risks associated with the financial pressures facing the Authority, regular monitoring reports are presented to both officers and Members to enable proactive action being undertaken to address any areas of concern.

5. APPENDICES

- Appendix A Council Tax Resolutions
- Appendix B Pay Policy

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

12th February 2013

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Available from Financial Services

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