

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET
13th FEBRUARY 2024

**Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-2027
and Capital Strategy 2024-2034**

OPEN	
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor D Ross
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Head of Resources
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Appendix 1 Appendix 2 Appendix 3 Appendix 4 Appendix 5 Appendix 6	Base Budget Projections 2024-2027 Capital Programme and updated non-treasury prudential indicators Fees and Charges – Council Report of the Head of Resources/Chief Financial Officer in respect of Sections 25-28 Local Government Act 2003 Draft Alternative Budget Proposals Summary of budget consultation responses <i>The appendices to this report have been circulated electronically and a public inspection copy is available on request. (See front cover for details.)</i>

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Cabinet on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024-2027 and make recommendations to Council on the proposed budget decision. This report also seeks approval of the Capital Strategy for 2024-2034 including prudential indicators which set limits for non-financial investments and to fulfil the key requirements of the DLUHC Investment Guidance. As part of the overall approval sought the report of the Head of Resources in respect of statutory duties placed on Local Authority Chief Financial Officers in relation to budget setting and monitoring is considered.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The **CABINET** having re-considered the Financial Strategy 2024-2027, the results of the Budget consultation exercise, alternative budget proposals and recommendations of the Strategic Review Panel **RECOMMENDS TO COUNCIL** that it:

2.1 THREE YEAR BUDGET, CAPITAL STRATEGY AND POLICY FRAMEWORK 2024-2027

2.1.1 **APPROVES** the updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024-2027.

2.1.2 **APPROVES** the Cabinet Proposals – taking into account the impact on the Council's Capital and Revenue Budgets for 2024-2027 as shown in the tables in paragraphs 6.1 and 6.3 and as set out below:

- a.) **provision of community leadership funding of £1,000 for each councillor across the period of the MTFS, at a cost of £33k in each year.**
- b.) **delivering actions set out in the new corporate plan by increasing capacity in the Civil Enforcement team at a cost of £39k in the second year.** This will provide funding for one additional enforcement post in 2025-26.
- c.) **delivering actions set out in the new corporate plan by increasing litter picking activity at a cost of £52k/£56k in 2024-25 and 2025-26.**
- d.) **capital investment of £50k for accessible play equipment, which will have a revenue cost for the borrowing of £7.5k/year.**
- e.) **a spend to save proposal to provide permanent capacity within the property team, at a cost of £116k/£120k/£123k** to progress commercial rental income growth in line with the priority within the 2023-27 Corporate plan; cost of temporary agency resource is currently met from risk reserves; cost to be fully recouped from income growth from commercial rents.
- f.) **changes to the senior management structure to provide capacity for delivery of the priorities in the corporate plan, at a cost of up to £11k/£15k/£15k.**
- g.) **introduction of free one hour parking at one car park in each of the three towns, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.** This builds on the arrangements put in place in Bewdley in November as a consequence of the long-term traffic works. **This is anticipated to cost £51k/£54k/£57k.**
- h.) **to introduce web casting of meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a cost of £1k in each year** to allow maximum access for the public and in order to be fully open and transparent.
- i.) **to explore and develop a commercial proposal to bring long term empty homes back into use** to increase housing supply and help meet housing demand; and support an allocation from the Innovation Fund of up to £10k to fund the feasibility study.
- j.) **to hold a public engagement event with businesses, residents and stakeholders at Wyre Forest House for a State of the Area debate.**

2.1.3 **APPROVES** the fees and charges in line with this Strategy, and the impact on the Council's Revenue Budget for 2024-2027, as shown in Appendix 3.

2.1.4 **APPROVES** the Council's updated Capital Strategy:

- a) **Approval** of the Capital Strategy 2024-2034 set out in Appendix 1 of the December Cabinet report and the updated, associated Quantitative Indicators set out in Appendix 2C of this report
- b) **Approval** of variations to the Capital Programme and Vehicle, Equipment and Systems Renewals Schedule as set out in Appendices 2A and 2B, of this report (which updates Appendix 1 of the Capital Strategy report to December 2023 Cabinet)
- c) **Approval** of the limits for gross debt for non-treasury investments compared to net service expenditure and for commercial income as a percentage of net service expenditure as set out in Appendix 2C of this report.

2.1.5 **APPROVES** that any Final Accounts savings arising from 2023-2024, together with surplus Earmarked Reserves, be allocated by the Head of Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio.

2.1.6 The General Fund Revenue Budget be **APPROVED** including all updates from the position in December 2023 as set out in this report.

2.2 COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES

2.2.1 That Council Tax is increased by the higher limit specified by the Government of 3% and:

- a. **SETS** the Council Tax for Wyre Forest District Council on a Band D Property at £243.29 for 2024-2025 which represents an increase of 3% on Council Tax from 2023-2024.
- b. **ENDORSES** the provisional Council Tax on a Band D Property in 2025-2026 of £250.58 and £258.09 in 2026-2027, being increases of 3%.

2.2.3 **NOTES** the Head of Resources (as Chief Financial Officer) opinion on the budget proposals, recommended by the Cabinet in this report, as detailed in Appendix 4 of this report.

2.3 The Cabinet is asked to **APPROVE**:

2.3.1 Delegated authority is given to the Head of Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital portfolio, to make any appropriate adjustments to the General Fund Revenue Budget

recommended under paragraph 2.1.6 above, as a result of any further notifications from Central Government.

2.4 The Cabinet is asked to **NOTE in line with the recommendations of the Strategic Review Panel:**

- 2.4.1 The Alternative budget proposals as detailed within Appendix 5 of this report, further noting that updated versions as appropriate will be provided for Full Council on the 21st February 2024.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 On 20th December 2023, Cabinet considered reports on proposals for the Budget Strategy for the period 2024-2027 including the intrinsically linked Capital Strategy 2024-2034. The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement was announced on the 18th December. The Final Settlement was published on 5th February 2024. This report provides an updated position and a proposed budget decision for Council to consider on the 21st February 2024.
- 3.2 The following assumptions included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy are now updated or confirmed:
- Provisional Finance Settlement, now updated with the Final Settlement
 - Council Tax Base
 - The position in relation to New Homes Bonus
 - Collection Fund position restated to reflect deficit on Council Tax in 2023-24
 - Cabinet Proposals
 - Capital Strategy and Capital Programme
 - Business Rates Pool levy gain and retained growth projections
 - The overall Reserves position and Funding Gap
- 3.3 There are two matters that have arisen since the December Cabinet that either have or may have an impact on the 2024-27 MTFS. The first concerns the shared Worcestershire Regulatory Service. Following an intervention from the Food Standards Agency about the level of activity on food safety inspections the cost of the council's share of the service has increased by £35k p.a. The second matter concerns cyber security risk, more specifically this council's planned response to the LGA case study on the Gloucester City Council cyber-attack. The planned response will be fully costed during the 2024-25 financial year and may result in additional expense over the term of the MTFS. Any costs resulting from the response plan that fall into 2024-25 will be met from the general risk reserve.
- 3.4 The latest forward projection of interest receipts from our treasury cashflow investments has been included. Interest earned is expected to be £350k higher in 2023-24 than the previous estimate. In addition a small number of low value, cost neutral, in service corrections have been made that have no impact on the figures reported.
- 3.5 The increase in the District Council's tax from 2011-12 to 2024-25 taking into account the latest proposal is only 23.11% compared to a CPI increase of 50.57%

between 2010 and 2024 demonstrating that households within Wyre Forest have enjoyed sub inflation increases across that period.

- 3.6 The Budget Consultation survey was launched on Thursday 21st December 2023 and ran until Thursday 18th January 2024. The results of this consultation were considered by the Strategic Review Panel on the 25th January and informed the proposals in this report. A summary of the Public Budget Consultation responses is provided at Appendix 6. The report was considered by the Strategic Review Panel on 25th January 2024. The Strategic Review Panel meetings also received Alternative Budget Proposals for consideration by Cabinet in formulation of their final proposals and these proposals are included in this report at Appendix 5. Further updated versions will be provided, if necessary, for Full Council on the 21st February 2024. Following careful consideration of these proposal two additional items are included as Cabinet proposals as set out below at paragraphs 3.12.9 and 3.12.10.
- 3.7 A revised **Capital Programme**, with updates to the version considered by December Cabinet to incorporate changes to the Capital Programme is in Appendix 2A for Council approval. The programme has been updated to include the Food Waste Disposal Scheme funded by DEFRA, removal of the Electric Vehicle Charging point proposal now being delivered under a contractual arrangement and for disabled play equipment put forward as a Cabinet proposal.
- 3.8 A revised set of Quantitative Indicators for the Assessment of Risk Exposure is included as Appendix 2C, containing the new indicator, Net income from commercial and service investments as a percentage of net revenue.
- 3.9 The approach to be taken to **fees and charges** within the financial strategy recommended by Cabinet this year continues to have regard to demand and other market conditions. As a result, some fees and charges may be frozen or increased by less than the average of 5%. Cabinet decided in December that in addition to the Cabinet proposal to introduce free one hour car parking at one car park in each of the three towns that car park fees and season ticket prices will generally be increased by 10p or 20p per ticket.
- 3.10 Fees and Charges requiring Council approval are detailed in Appendix 3.

Spending Proposals

- 3.11 The Cabinet Proposals are revised following careful consideration of the budget consultation responses and Alternative Budget Proposals considered by the Strategic Review Panel on the 25th January 2024 and further dialogue with the opposition groups. The revised proposals demonstrate investment to deliver actions set out in the new corporate plan.
- 3.12 There are ten Cabinet Proposals this year as set out below:
- 3.12.1 provision of community leadership funding of £1,000 for each councillor across the period of the MTFS, at a cost of £33k in each year.
 - 3.12.2 delivering actions set out in the new corporate plan by increasing

capacity in the Civil Enforcement team at a cost of £39k in the second year. This will provide funding for one additional environmental enforcement post in 2025-26.

- 3.12.3 delivering actions set out in the new corporate plan by increasing litter picking activity at a cost of £52k/£56k in 2024-25 and 2025-26.
- 3.12.4 capital investment of £50k for accessible play equipment, which will have a revenue cost for the borrowing of £7.5k/year.
- 3.12.5 a spend to save proposal to provide permanent capacity within the property team, at a cost of £116k/£120k/£123k to progress commercial rental income growth in line with the priority within the 2023-27 Corporate plan; cost of temporary agency resource is currently met from risk reserves; cost to be fully recouped from income growth from commercial rents.
- 3.12.6 changes to the senior management structure to provide capacity for delivery of the priorities in the corporate plan, at an estimated cost of £11k/£15k/£15k. This is described in detail below at paragraph
- 3.12.7 introduction of free one hour parking at one car park in each of the three towns, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm. This builds on the arrangements put in place in Bewdley in November as a consequence of the long-term traffic works. This has an estimated cost of £51k/£54k/£57k.
- 3.12.8 introduction of web casting of meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a cost of £1k in each year to allow maximum access for the public and in order to be fully open and transparent.
- 3.12.9 to explore and develop a commercial proposal to bring long term empty homes back into use to increase housing supply and help meet housing demand; and support an allocation from the Innovation Fund of up to £10k to fund the feasibility study.
- 3.12.10 to hold a public engagement event with businesses, residents and stakeholders at Wyre Forest House for a State of the Area debate.

- 3.13 Business Rate projections based on participation in a Herefordshire and Worcestershire Pool for 2024-25 are shown in table 6.3 below. These have been revised taking into account completion of the NDR1 return and that the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Pool will continue in 2024-25. Accurate forecasting is extremely difficult, but it should be possible to manage any significant variations by drawing on the Business Rates Equalisation earmarked reserves if necessary. Estimates take into account the Council's share of forecast growth from major redevelopments, appeals, reliefs, economic regeneration work, forecast increases in the multiplier for inflation, revaluation and other Business Rates market intelligence. A collective Herefordshire and Worcestershire Business Rates Pool approach to provisions for appeals may result in outturn variances to these forecasts which will be reported as part of the Final Accounts process.

- 3.14 LG Futures were commissioned to undertake detailed financial modelling of the potential Pooling proposals for 2024-25. Extensive sensitivity and risk analysis has been undertaken as part of the work. This showed that it is unlikely that participation in the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Pool would not be beneficial.
- 3.15 Taking these items into account the projected Base Budget net expenditure for 2024-2025 is estimated to be £14.293m (see paragraph 6.3). This is £342k more than currently estimated to be raised from Council Tax, Business Rates Income retained, New Homes Bonus and all other grants based on a 2.997% pa Council Tax increase. This total is net of savings targets from Wyre Forest Forward and Localism work streams.

4. LOCAL AUTHORITY REVENUE FINANCE SETTLEMENT FOR 2024-2025

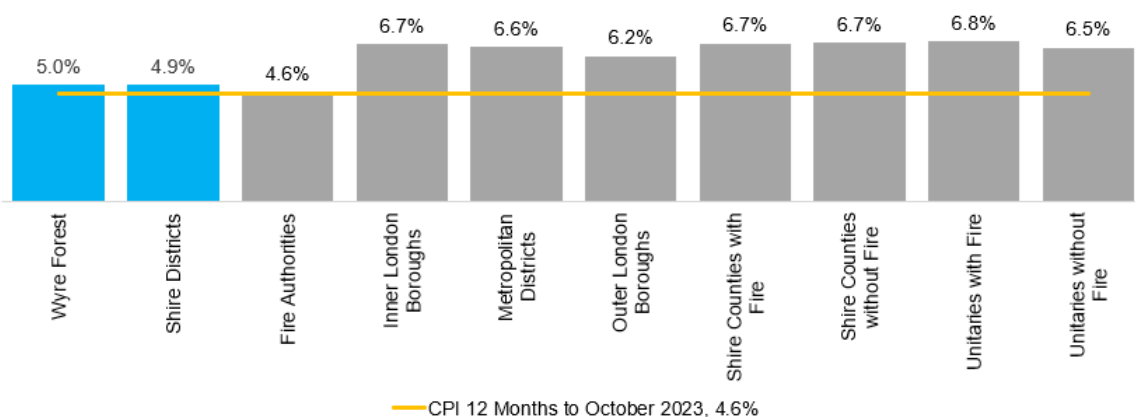
- 4.1 The Provisional Local Government Settlement was announced on the 18th December 2023. The Final Settlement was issued on 5th February. The Provisional Settlement contained no surprises, but the final settlement included an additional funding guarantee allocation as announced on 24th February. The total funding position was £126k higher than previous assumptions for 2024-25, but did not change the longer-term financial forecast.
- 4.2 The 2024-25 local government finance settlement is for one year only and is based on the Autumn Statement 2023. The final settlement confirms previous announcements; the main points are set out below followed by further analysis:
- **Council Tax** – the council tax referendum limit is set at 3%, with social care authorities allowed an additional 2% social care precept. The provisional settlement confirmed that districts will be allowed to apply the higher of the referendum limit or £5. This was confirmed at Final settlement. There will be no referendum limits set for town and parish councils.
 - **Business Rates Retention** – The small business rates multiplier has been frozen for 2024-25 at 49.9p and the standard business rates multiplier will increase to 54.6p. Councils will be compensated as if both business rates multipliers had increased by Consumer Price Index (CPI).
 - **Revenue Support Grant** – For authorities still receiving RSG, this has been increased by 6.7%, in line with the increase to the business rates multiplier.
 - **Services Grant** – This grant has been reduced from £483m to £77m, a reduction of £406m. The funding has been reduced after “factoring in the costs of using some of the remaining Services Grant to fund increases to other settlement grants and equalisation of the adult social care precept”. A small proportion held back as a contingency and resulted in an additional allocation at Final Settlement of £1,760. The methodology for the grant remains unchanged.
 - **New Homes Bonus** - The 2023-24 allocations have been announced at £291m. There have been no changes to the design of the scheme for 2024-25, with a single year's new allocation.

- **Funding Guarantee** – This grant is intended to provide a funding floor for all local authorities. The provisional settlement included a guarantee that no local authority would see an increase in Core Spending Power that is lower than 3% (before assumptions on council tax rate increases, but includes those on Council Tax base). The value of the grant increased from £133m to £197m for 2024-25. An announcement on 24th January increased this guarantee to 4%, the value of the increase, confirmed at Final Settlement is £124k.
- **Local Government Funding Reform** – Confirmation that funding reform will be deferred until after the General Election.

a. Core Spending Power – Overall

“Core Spending power” is a headline figure used by DLUHC to represent the key revenue resources available to local authorities, including an estimate of actual and potential council tax. The National Core Spending Power increased by 6.5% for 2024-25. The increase for individual authorities will be different to the national figures and the government figures also contain assumptions around council tax base change that may not be reflected in local projections. This Council's core spending power will increase by 5% in 2024-25 compared to 2023-24 This compares with the average for shire districts of 4.9%.

Table 4.2.1 - Change in CSP by authority type (2023-24 to 2024-25) – WFDC 5% increase



- b. **Council Tax** – For 2024-2025, there will continue to be differential limits that will trigger the need for a council tax referendum.

A referendum limit of up to 3% will represent the trigger for all authorities, except Shire Districts (higher of £5 or 3%) Parishes (no limit), Police and Crime Commissioners (£13), non-PCC elements of council tax for Mayoral Combined Authorities (no limit) and all fire and rescue authorities (£5). As previously announced, an adult social care precept of up to 2% will also be available in 2024-25.

- c. **Business Rates** - The application for a 50% Herefordshire and Worcestershire Business Rates Pool, including the Fire Authority has been confirmed.

- d. **New Homes Bonus** - the allocations have been announced for 2024-25. The Core Spending Power figures for 2024-25 include these allocations. There are no changes to New Homes Bonus this year, the overall allocation for each authority is based on a single allocation for 2024-25 with no legacy payments included in the allocation. The allocations are provisional and subject to final confirmation and checks.

4.3 Councils continue to face significant financial uncertainty and resultant risk. Clarity and certainty about how all local services will be funded over the next few years and beyond is needed. The 2024-25 settlement was the sixth one-year settlement. The one-off nature of grants, the uncertainty around New Homes Bonus and funding of waste reforms through the Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme cause significant difficulties in forecasting. A multi-year settlement is needed for forward planning and long term stability.

4.4 The forecast position in relation to total Government grant taking into account the Final Finance Settlement for 2024-2025 is shown in the Tables at 6.3.

5. COUNCIL TAX BASE

- 5.1 The Council Tax Base previously reported for 2024-25 has now been confirmed; this has increased from the 2023-24 level of 34,738 to 34,902 being an increase of 164 or 0.47%. This is due to growth in the housing stock and is net of reliefs, exemptions, discounts, disregards and Council Tax Reduction Scheme. It is forecast to rise over the term of the Strategy, informed by data from planning applications, resulting in increases of circa 1.4% or 500 additional properties each year in 2025-26 and 2026-27. The taxbase has been lower than anticipated during 2023-24, this has resulted in an in-year deficit. There are various reasons for this, whilst the gross property charge has increased, the increase arising from new build developments has been offset by a higher number of discounts than assumed. There has been a significant uplift in the number of council tax exemptions mainly due to deceased taxpayer exemptions and those awarded under the “severely mentally impaired category” following promotion by a TV celebrity and the VOA has cleared a back log of band reduction appeals.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Cabinet Proposals previously considered have been reviewed following consideration of the alternative budget proposals presented by the LibDem group. The final proposals are summarised below and included in the table in paragraph 6.3.

Agenda Item No. 7.1

ACTIVITY AND DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSALS	KEY	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	After 2026-27
		£	£	£	£
<u>Enforcement</u> Additional funding in 2025-26 for 1 new Civil Enforcement Officer. Unspent allocations approved in the 2023-26 MTFS being rolled forward.	C R S		38,800 1.00		
<u>Street Scene</u> Appoint 2 new Street Scene officers utilising allocations approved in the 2023-26 MTFS for part time litter pickers (including match funding) to partially off-set the increased cost to provide year-round blitz/hot spot reactive repairs.	C R S	51,700 1.70	55,800 1.70		
<u>Community Leadership Fund</u> Provision of community leadership funding of £1,000 for each councillor in across the period of the MTFS	C R S	33,000	33,000	33,000	33,000
<u>Additional Staffing resource</u> Additional staffing resource to address capacity within the property team to deliver corporate priorities (off-set by income target)	C R S	116,000 2.00	119,500 2.00	123,100 2.00	126,800 2.00
<u>Additional Staffing resource</u> Additional staffing resource to align the management structure to deliver the corporate priorities	C R S	11,250	15,000	15,450	15,900
<u>Adaptive play equipment</u> Provision of disabled play equipment in Brinton Park and Stourport riverside.	C R S	50,000 7,500	7,500	7,500	7,500
<u>Free one hour parking</u> Introduction of free one hour parking at one car park in each of the three towns, Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm. This builds on the arrangement already put in place in Bewdley due to long term traffic	C R S	51,000	54,000	57,000	57,000
<u>Web Casting of meetings</u> To introduce web casting of meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committee to allow maximum access for the public and in order to be fully open and transparent	C R S	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
<u>Empty Home proposal Feasibility Study</u> To explore and develop a commercial proposal to bring long term empty homes back into use to increase housing supply and help meet housing demand (allocate £10k funding from Innovation Fund)	C R S	-	-	-	-
<u>Annual State of the Area debate</u> To hold a public engagement event with businesses, residents and stakeholders at Wyre Forest House	C R S	-	250	-	-
<u>Commercial Income growth</u> A strengthened focus on growing the Council's net commercial income	C R S	160,000 CR	240,000 CR	300,000 CR	330,000 CR
TOTALS	C R S	50,000 111,450 3.7	- 84,850 4.7	- 62,950 CR 2.0	- 88,800 CR 2.0
Also: 3% pa Council Tax increase					

KEY - Changes in Resources

C - Capital

R - Revenue

S - Staffing - Stated in FTEs

- 6.2 The estimates and assumptions included in the December Cabinet report have been reviewed to reflect latest available information. Following completion of the NNDR1 return we can confirm our estimates of income from business rates and following the statutory calculation of the deficit on collection of Council Tax this funding source has been updated (£101k deficit).

Table 6.2 - Updated Position due to amendments since December Cabinet

Detail of Changes	Revised 2023-24 £	2024-25 £	2025-26 £	2026-27 £
Collection Fund Deficit		100,830		
Increased cost of Worcestershire Shared Regulatory Services		35,000	35,000	35,000
Increased Investment Income	(350,000)			
Increased funding from Government (Final settlement)		(125,880)		
	(350,000)	9,950	35,000	35,000
New/amendments to Draft Cabinet Proposals			250	
Total Variance	(350,000)	9,950	35,250	35,000

- 6.3 The following tables demonstrate the updated position for the Council when the revisions are incorporated into the Base Budget. The Council is forecast to hold a balance of £854k at the end of 2026-27 (see reserves table in 6.4) based on a Council Tax increase of 3% pa.

Table 6.3 - Updated Position Assuming a Council Tax Increase of 3% pa

	Revised 2023-24 £	2024-25 £	2025-26 £	2026-27 £
Net Expenditure on Services	13,313,420	14,181,740	15,247,040	15,788,150
Total Net Expenditure on Services	13,313,420	14,181,740	15,247,040	15,788,150
Include:				
Cabinet Proposals	0	111,450	84,850	(62,950)
Net Expenditure	13,313,420	14,293,190	15,331,890	15,725,200
Contribution (from)/to Reserves	215,060	(341,870)	(950,680)	(1,536,750)
Net Budget Requirement	13,528,480	13,951,320	14,381,210	14,188,450
Funded by:				
Revenue Support Grant	150,380	160,340	160,000	(356,000)
Business Rates	4,392,250	4,408,470	4,841,680	4,397,000
New Homes Bonus	240,030	285,060	0	0
Funding Guarantee	425,370	687,120	490,410	0
Collection Fund Deficit	0	(100,830)	0	0
Council Tax Income	8,205,460	8,491,310	8,871,030	9,265,950
Services Grant	114,990	19,850	18,090	0
Transitional Funding (assumption)	0	0	0	881,500
WFDC Council Tax: 3% increase per annum	236.21	243.29	250.58	258.09
Percentage increase in Council Tax	2.996%	2.997%	2.996%	2.997%

- 6.4 Reserves available as part of the three-year financial strategy are as shown in the following table. The reserves position at the end of 2026-27 compared to the December forecast is shown below.

Table 6.4. - Reserves Statement Assuming a Council Tax Increase of 3% pa

Reserves Statement	Revised 2023-24 £	2024-25 £	2025-26 £	2026-27 £
Reserves as at 1st April	3,468	3,683	3,341	2,391
December MTFS transfer to (from) Reserves	(135)	(332)	(915)	(1,502)
Service revenue account changes	0	(35)	(35)	(35)
Collection Fund deficit adjustment	0	(101)	0	0
Final settlement changes	0	126	0	0
Transfer to (from) Reserves	(135)	(342)	(950)	(1,537)
Updated Reserves as at 31st March	3,333	3,342	2,391	854

- 6.5 The table below shows a funding gap of £2.172m in 2026-27, an increase of £35,000 from the previously reported £2.137m in December 2023 as a result of the updates in this report, based on a 3% Council Tax increase.

Table 6.5 – Funding Gap Assuming a Council Tax Increase of 3% pa

Financial Gap	2023-24 £	2024-25 £	2025-26 £	2026-27 £
Wyre Forest Forward Savings not yet achieved	0	218,310	267,810	255,380
Generic Localism Savings	0	40,000	60,000	80,000
New Cabinet Proposal for Commercial Income				
- Property	0	110,000	140,000	150,000
- General (new initiatives and refocus on commercialism)	0	50,000	100,000	150,000
SUB- Total	0	418,310	567,810	635,380
Use of reserves from proposed 2024-27 Strategy	(215,060)	341,870	950,680	1,536,750
TOTAL	(215,060)	760,180	1,518,490	2,172,130

7. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

- 7.1 Equality, Climate Change and Health and Wellbeing Impact assessments will be undertaken as appropriate as part of reviews of service delivery arrangements and implementation of new models. There are no proposals in this report that require an assessment, because of their generic nature. However the proposed investment in accessible play equipment will enhance provision for disabled children in the district.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 Achieving financial sustainability is the most significant challenge facing the Council. The Strategic Review Panel provided some options for the Cabinet to consider in making its recommendations on the medium-term financial strategy. The principal risks were outlined in Appendix 5 of the report to Cabinet on 20th December 2023 and are summarised and refreshed where appropriate in Appendix 4 of this report.

- 8.2 The increased Council Tax Base from 2024-25, the development and regeneration of Kidderminster and the wider district following the successful award of grant under both the Future High Streets fund and the Levelling Up Fund, Cabinet Proposals and continuing progress with the Wyre Forest Forward Transformation savings contribute as far as possible to the mitigation of the financial risk within this budget strategy.
- 8.3 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require Local Authorities to fully consider and manage Risk as part of the Budget process. Appendix 5 of the December 2023 report showed an analysis of the significant financial risks which are affecting the Council. This has been reviewed and remains current subject to the comments and updates provided in Appendix 4 of this report.
- 8.4 Local authorities are required to formalise their approach to risk management and evidence it more directly as part of the budgetary process. Further statutory safeguards designed to prevent an authority from over-committing itself financially are as follows:
- Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 which requires the authority to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs and that the Chief Finance Officer has personal responsibility for such administration.
 - Section 32 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 which requires the authority to set a balanced budget.
 - The prudential framework, introduced as part of the Local Government Act 2003, covers the way an authority must manage its investments including affordability considerations. The assessment of affordability of financial plans requires a judgement about risk. Prudential Indicators are the monitoring tool to assess performance and risk.
 - The external auditor's duty to satisfy itself that the authority has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.
 - CIPFA Guidance on Reserves and Balances highlights the need to consider risks facing the authority; the risks posed by the continuing economic uncertainty, supply chain issues exacerbated by global unrest and departure from the EU and continued uncertainty about funding reform place pressure on the Council to hold higher levels of reserves to ensure ongoing sustainability.
 - To reinforce these obligations section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 requires the Chief Finance Officer to report to all councillors, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, if there is or is likely to be unlawful expenditure or an unbalanced budget.
- 8.5 CIPFA issued a Financial Management Code (FM Code) in October 2019 which provides guidance for good and sustainable financial management in local authorities provides assurance that authorities are managing resources effectively.

- 8.6 The Treasury Management Code and Prudential Code provide guidance to support the management of risks associated with Treasury and Capital Financing strategies.
- 8.7 The on-going principle of the Prudential Code is that capital plans must be affordable and proportionate, and an authority must not borrow to invest primarily for financial return.
- 8.8 The financial projections suggest deficits in funding across all three years under consideration, leading to an overall projected net deficit over the three years of some £2.172m. In broad terms this can be explained by the combination of cost pressures not met by government grant, and historic reductions in Revenue Support Grant and New Homes Bonus receipts.

9. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Local Government Act 2003

- 9.1.1 The Local Government Act 2003 (Sections 25-28) places duties on Local Authorities on how they set and monitor budgets.
- 9.1.2 Sections 25-27 require the Section 151 Officer to report on the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of its proposed financial reserves. This is reported to Council as Appendix 4 of this report.
- 9.1.3 Section 28 places a statutory duty on an Authority to review its budget from time to time during the year. If the Budget Monitoring Report shows that there has been deterioration in the Authority's financial position, the Authority must take such action as it concludes necessary. The Council currently reviews the Budget on a quarterly basis, with CLT/Cabinet receiving monthly budget monitoring reports, and this practice will continue.

10. CONSULTEES

Corporate Leadership Team
Cabinet

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.
- 11.2 Cabinet Report on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023–2026 20th December 2023.
- 11.3 Cabinet Report on updated Capital Strategy 2024-2034 20th December 2023.
- 11.4 Agenda and Minutes of the Strategic Review Panel.
- 11.5 Provisional and Final Local Government Finance Settlements 2024-2025.
- 11.6 Prudential and Treasury Management Codes December 2021
- 11.7 Strong Leader Cabinet Report – September 2023 – Business Rates Retention Business Rate Pool bid. Delegated Decision Notice 15th January 2023.

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

REVENUE BUDGET TOTAL REQUIREMENTS - DISTRICT COUNCIL PURPOSES - Before Cabinet Proposals and Council Fees & Charges

SERVICE	2023/24		2024/25			2025/26			2026/27		
	Original Estimate £	Revised Estimate £	At Nov.23 Prices £	Inflation £	TOTAL £	At Nov.23 Prices £	Inflation £	TOTAL £	At Nov.23 Prices £	Inflation £	TOTAL £
CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND SOLICITOR TO THE COUNCIL	2,218,860	2,865,280	2,475,940	91,170	2,567,110	2,423,970	167,130	2,591,100	2,431,470	246,550	2,678,020
COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT	5,482,310	5,433,920	5,770,940	302,800	6,073,740	5,777,540	549,720	6,327,260	5,786,140	804,160	6,590,300
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & REGENERATION	248,950	563,470	446,820	42,080	488,900	316,140	77,410	393,550	302,920	115,100	418,020
RESOURCES	2,448,120	2,294,550	2,168,340	20,450	2,188,790	2,064,940	38,680	2,103,620	1,973,420	82,440	2,055,860
REVENUES, BENEFITS & CUSTOMER SERVICES	1,389,990	1,444,330	1,524,990	78,850	1,603,840	1,556,220	140,890	1,697,110	1,568,730	205,030	1,773,760
STRATEGIC GROWTH	2,063,770	2,287,220	2,064,780	100,540	2,165,320	1,983,630	169,740	2,153,370	1,827,580	245,460	2,073,040
	13,852,000	14,888,770	14,451,810	635,890	15,087,700	14,122,440	1,143,570	15,266,010	13,890,260	1,698,740	15,589,000
LESS: CAPITAL ACCOUNT	585,490	234,650	526,450	5,200	531,650	948,890	9,360	958,250	1,003,530	13,450	1,016,980
INTEREST RECEIVED	(750,000)	(1,810,000)	(1,425,000)	0	(1,425,000)	(952,000)	0	(952,000)	(780,000)	0	(780,000)
TOTAL NET EXPENDITURE ON SERVICES	13,687,490	13,313,420	13,553,260	641,090	14,194,350	14,119,330	1,152,930	15,272,260	14,113,790	1,712,190	15,825,980
LESS: CONTRIBUTION (FROM) TO RESERVES	(159,010)	215,060			(243,030)			(891,050)			(1,637,530)
NET BUDGET REQUIREMENT	13,528,480	13,528,480			13,951,320			14,381,210			14,188,450
LESS: REVENUE SUPPORT GRANT	(150,380)	(150,380)			(160,340)			(160,000)			356,000
BUSINESS RATES INCOME	(3,442,050)	(3,442,050)			(3,655,460)			(4,841,680)			(4,397,000)
BUSINESS RATES GROWTH	(950,200)	(950,200)			(753,010)			0			0
FUNDING GUARANTEE	(425,370)	(425,370)			(687,120)			(490,410)			0
COLLECTION FUND (SURPLUS)/DEFICIT	0	0			100,830			0			0
NEW HOMES BONUS	(240,030)	(240,030)			(285,060)			0			0
TRANSITIONAL FUNDING (assumption)	0	0			0			0			(881,500)
ONE OFF SERVICES GRANT	(114,990)	(114,990)			(19,850)			(18,090)			0
GENERAL EXPENSES -											
COUNCIL TAX INCOME	8,205,460	8,205,460			8,491,310			8,871,030			9,265,950
COUNCIL TAX LEVY		236.21			243.29			250.58			258.09
COUNCIL TAX BASE		34,738			34,902			35,402			35,902

Agenda Item No. 7.1
APPENDIX 2A

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2024 TO 2034

Detail	2023-24		2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32	2032-33	2033-34	Prior to 01/04/2023	Total
	Original £	Revised £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	£	£
COMMITTED EXPENDITURE														
1. CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND SOLICITOR TO THE COUNCIL														
Headquarters - Office Accommodation	413,610	-	413,610	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9,586,390	10,000,000
SUB TOTAL	413,610	0	413,610	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9,586,390	10,000,000
2. COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES														
Parking Facilities: Improvement to Car Parks	29,530	23,600	30,930	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	419,970	474,500
Stourport Riverside	-	52,200	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	97,800	150,000
Community Safety CCTV Upgrade (Grant Funded)	-	-	4,460	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20,400	24,860
Brinton Park HLF Scheme (subject to successful HLF bid)	1,931,190	39,000	2,138,200	240,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	182,800	2,600,000
Food Waste Collection (funded by Defra grant)	-	-	1,037,760	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,037,760
Adaptive Play Equipment	-	-	50,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	50,000
Innovation Fund - Capital*	185,000	100,000	190,390	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	54,610	345,000
* Subject to Business Cases & approval by the Cabinet/CLT														
SUB TOTAL	2,145,720	214,800	3,451,740	240,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	775,580	4,682,120
3. STRATEGIC GROWTH														
Housing Strategy:														
Better Care Fund (BCF) - Disabled Facilities Grants (subject to confirmation 24-25 onwards)	2,000,000	1,350,000	2,376,090	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	16,524,300	29,250,390
BCF - Dementia Dwellings Grants	-	20,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20,000
BCF - Minor Adaptations Grants	-	100,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100,000
BCF - Discretionary Grants	-	100,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100,000
BCF - Discretionary Top Up Grants	-	100,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100,000
BCF- Hospital Discharge/Moving Home/Housing Advice Grants	-	80,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	80,000
BCF- Energy Efficiency	-	400,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	400,000
BCF- Disabled Adapted Units	-	240,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	240,000
Housing Assistance - Private Sector Measures (including Decent Homes Grant)	290,230	150,000	211,210	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,995,910	2,357,120
Housing Fund	876,000	1,045,920	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,045,920
Castle Road Development	2,000,000	721,140	3,000,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	139,070	3,860,210
Raven Street Conversion	-	84,700	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	84,700
Flood Relief	28,410	28,410	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	170,590	199,000
Flood Recovery Support (BEIS Funded)	150,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Local Authority Delivery Scheme Phase 3 (LADS3)	-	432,750	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	27,250	460,000
Home Upgrade Grant Phase 1 (HUGS1)	-	22,800	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	22,800
Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUGS2)	-	462,000	693,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,155,000
Future Investment Evergreen Fund*	890,470	1,096,830	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	47,100	1,143,930
Acquisition of Land at Horsefair, Kidderminster	49,590	49,590	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	410	50,000
Innovation Fund Capital	-	105,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	105,000
Capital Projects Fund*	3,500,000	1,000,000	7,267,750	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8,267,750
* Subject to Business Cases & Due Diligence														
SUB TOTAL	9,784,700	7,589,140	13,548,050	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	18,904,630	49,041,820
4. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION														
Levelling Up Fund**	5,517,050	4,358,510	12,750,920	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	790,570	17,900,000
Capital Portfolio Fund*	6,050,830	3,025,410	3,025,420	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16,754,620	22,805,450
Future High Streets Fund**	9,751,920	13,564,890	8,248,180	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,685,260	27,498,330
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	178,890	287,360	275,210	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	50,030	612,600
* Subject to Business Cases & Due Diligence														
**Any Co-funding subject to full Business Case following the principles of the Capital Portfolio Fund														
SUB TOTAL	21,498,690	21,236,170	24,299,730	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	23,280,480	68,816,380
5. RESOURCES														
ICT Strategy	250,000	502,480	912,000	257,000	97,000	84,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	4,150,640	6,003,120
SUB TOTAL	250,000	502,480	912,000	257,000	97,000	84,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,150,640	6,003,120
6. VEHICLE, EQUIPMENT & SYSTEMS RENEWAL SCHEDULE														
Vehicles & Equipment & Systems Renewal Schedule	1,012,040	1,119,720	668,890	1,505,290	1,429,690	366,490	467,690	933,690	544,690	122,890	122,890	122,890	7,708,940	15,113,760
SUB TOTAL	1,012,040	1,119,720	668,890	1,505,290	1,429,690	366,490	467,690	933,690	544,690	122,890	122,890	122,890	7,708,940	15,113,760
TOTAL COMMITTED EXPENDITURE	35,104,760	30,662,310	43,294,020	3,002,290	2,526,690	1,450,490	1,467,690	1,933,690	1,544,690	1,122,890	1,122,890	1,122,890	64,406,660	153,657,200

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2024 TO 2034

Detail	2023-24		2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32	2032-33	2033-34	Prior to 01/04/2023	Total
	Original £	Revised £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	Estimate £	£	£
FINANCING														
Capital Receipts: Funding Approved	1,985,680	2,190,390	626,680	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,817,070
Prudential Borrowing for Capital Projects Fund	3,500,000	1,000,000	7,267,750	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8,267,750
Prudential Borrowing for Capital Portfolio Fund	6,050,830	3,025,410	3,025,420	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6,050,830
Prudential Borrowing for Castle Road Development	2,000,000	-	2,838,360	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,838,360
Prudential Borrowing for Brinton Park HLF Scheme	176,380	-	-	176,380	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	176,380
Prudential Borrowing for ICT Strategy	250,000	502,480	912,000	257,000	97,000	84,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,852,480
Prudential Borrowing for Innovation Fund - Capital	185,000	205,000	190,390	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	395,390
Prudential Borrowing for Stourport Riverside	-	52,200	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	52,200
Prudential Borrowing for Future High Street Fund	1,808,000	-	1,808,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,808,000
Prudential Borrowing for Adaptive Play Equipment	-	-	50,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	50,000
Better Care Fund Grant (from Worcestershire County Council - subject to confirmation 23-24 onwards)	2,000,000	2,186,630	2,376,090	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	-	13,562,720
Housing Fund Grant	536,080	706,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	706,000
HLF Partner External Funding	1,754,810	39,000	2,138,200	63,620	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,240,820
Future High Street Fund (DLUHC)	7,943,920	11,240,380	3,584,960	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14,825,340
Future High Street Fund (GBSLEP)	-	-	1,500,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,500,000
Future High Street Fund (Brownfields Release)	-	725,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	725,000
Levelling Up Fund	5,517,050	4,358,510	12,750,920	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17,109,430
DEFRA Flood Grant Funding	28,410	28,410	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	28,410
S.106 Funding (Parking - Contractual Agreement)	27,670	23,600	29,070	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	52,670
S.106 Funding (Castle Road Development)	-	185,250	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	185,250
DEFRA Food Waste Collection Funding	-	-	1,037,760	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,037,760
Local Authority Delivery Scheme Phase 3 (LADS3) Grant Funding	-	432,750	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	432,750
Home Upgrade Grant Phase 1 (HUGS1) Grant Funding	-	22,800	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	22,800
Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUGS) Grant Funding	-	462,000	693,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,155,000
Flood Support Grant	150,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
CCTV Grant (PCC)	-	-	4,460	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4,460
UK Shared Prosperity Fund Grant	178,890	287,360	275,210	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	562,570
Vehicles, Equipment & Systems (Prudential Borrowing)	1,012,040	1,119,720	668,890	1,505,290	1,429,690	366,490	467,690	933,690	544,690	122,890	122,890	122,890	-	7,404,820
Direct Revenue Funding	-	1,869,420	1,516,860	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,386,280
	35,104,760	30,662,310	43,294,020	3,002,290	2,526,690	1,450,490	1,467,690	1,933,690	1,544,690	1,122,890	1,122,890	1,122,890		89,250,540

VEHICLE, EQUIPMENT AND SYSTEMS RENEWAL SCHEDULE 2024-2034

Detail			Classification	2023-24		2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32	2032-33	2033-34
				Original Budget	Revised Budget	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
				£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
1. VEHICLES															
MOT Bay & Garage Equipment - Replacement (slippage from p	N/A	R229	GARAGE EQUIPMENT		17,680										
Refurbishment Fund	N/A	R002	REFURBISHMENT FUND		30,000										
Bin Stock Renewals	BINS	Various	BIN STOCK RENEWALS	122,890	122,890	122,890	122,890	122,890	122,890	122,890	122,890	122,890	122,890	122,890	122,890
Tractor	AV070	R236	TRACTOR				48,000								
JCB Digger	AV183	R001	JCB DIGGER	72,000	72,000										
Midi Tractor	AV189	R236	MIDI TRACTOR			36,000									
Tractor (wx13 auv)	AV225	R236	TRACTOR			72,000									
Dennis Eagle Refuse Freighter	AV234	R002	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg				132,000								
Dennis Eagle Refuse Freighter	AV237	R002	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg				132,000								
Dennis Eagle Refuse Freighter	AV238	R002	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg				132,000								
Dennis Eagle Refuse Freighter	AV239	R002	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg				132,000								
Dennis Eagle Refuse Freighter	AV241	R002	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg				132,000								
Dennis Eagle Refuse Freighter	AV268	R002	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg				132,000								
Kia Rio	AV272	R193	CAR	18,000	18,000							18,000			
Kubota F3440	AV273	R160	RIDE ON MOWER AND FLAIL	33,600	33,600						21,000				
Kubota F3440	AV274	R160	RIDE ON MOWER AND FLAIL	33,600	33,600						21,000				
Forest TR8 Chipper	AV277	R252	CHIPPER	36,000	36,000									40,000	
Indespension Trailer (for chipper)	AV278	R252	TRAILER	4,800	4,800									5,000	
Vauxhall Astra 2.0 cdti	AV279	R160	CAR	14,400	14,400									12,000	
Viajet Roadsweeper	AV280	R200	ROAD SWEEPER 15000kg	156,000	156,000										
Small Van	AV281	R236	3500KG VAN	36,000	36,000									27,600	
Small Van	AV282	R236	LIGHT VAN	36,000	36,000									27,600	
Small van	AV283	R516	LIGHT VAN		30,000									27,600	
Iveco Cargo for Bulky	AV284	R200	TIPPER 7500kg			66,000									
Ford Connect	AV285	R193	LIGHT VAN	31,200	31,200									24,000	
Iveco Daily	AV286	R002	TIPPER 3500kg			42,000									
John Deere 1445	AV287	R236	RIDE ON MOWER	33,600	33,600						35,000				
Isuzu	AV288	R163	BOXED VAN 7500kg				36,000								
Mechanical Sweeper (Small JOHNSON C200)	AV289	R200	PAVEMENT SWEEPER	102,000	102,000						84,000				
Dennis Eagle Refuse Freighter	AV290	R002	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg			132,000									
Dennis Eagle Refuse Freighter	AV291	R002	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg			132,000									
Iveco Daily for Bulky	AV292	R160	TIPPER 3500kg			42,000									
Isuzu	AV294	R252	BOXED VAN 7500kg					57,600							
TR6 Chipper	AV295	R252	CHIPPER	36,000	36,000										
Mower	AV296	R160	RIDE ON MOWER				38,400								
Ride on Mower	AV297	R160	RIDE ON MOWER					30,000							
Tipper Vehicle	AV298	R254	TIPPER 3500kg				42,000								
Iveco Daily	AV299	R160	TIPPER 3500kg				42,000								
Small Van	AV300	R229	SMALL VAN					36,000							
Iveco Daily	AV301	R160	TIPPER 3500kg				42,000								
Iveco Daily	AV302	R160	TIPPER 3500kg				42,000								
Iveco Daily	AV303	R160	TIPPER 3500kg				42,000								
Iveco Daily	AV304	R160	TIPPER 3500kg				42,000								
Iveco Daily	AV305	R160	TIPPER 3500kg				42,000								
Iveco Daily	AV306	R160	TIPPER 3500kg				42,000								
Iveco Cargo small Refuse Freighter	AV307	R002	MEDIUM REFUSE FREIGHTER 12000kg RCV			132,000									
Dennis Eagle Refuse Freighter	AV308	R002	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg					210,000							
Dennis Eagle Refuse Freighter	AV309	R005	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg					210,000							
Dennis Eagle Refuse Freighter	AV310	R002	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg					204,600							
Dennis Eagle Refuse Freighter	AV311	R002	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg					204,600							
Iveco Daily	AV312	R200	TIPPER 3500kg					36,000							
Iveco Daily	AV313	R200	TIPPER 3500kg					36,000							
Iveco Daily	AV314	R200	TIPPER 3500kg					36,000							
Iveco Daily	AV315	R200	TIPPER 3500kg		30,000						36,000				
4x4 Offroad Vehicle	AV316	R163	4x4					36,000							
Isuzu	AV317	R252	BOXED VAN 7500kg						57,600						
Refuse Freighter	AV318	R002	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg					210,000							
Mechanical Sweeper (Johnson CN201)	AV319	R200	PAVEMENT SWEEPER									120,000			
Iveco Daily	AV320	R200	TIPPER 3500kg						42,000						
Iveco Daily	AV321	R200	TIPPER 3500kg						42,000						
Ford Connect	AV322	R160	LIGHT VAN											40,000	
Ford Connect	AV323	R200	LIGHT VAN											40,000	
Ford Connect	AV324	R185	LIGHT VAN											40,000	
Iveco Daily Refuse Freigher	AV325	R002	SMALL REFUSE FREIGHTER 7500kg RCV					102,000							
Mechanical Sweeper (Johnson VT650)	AV326	R200	ROAD SWEEPER 15000kg							156,000					
Mechanical Sweeper	AV327	R200	PAVEMENT SWEEPER							80,400					
Mechanical Sweeper	AV328	R200	PAVEMENT SWEEPER							80,400					
Mercedes Refuse Freighter	AV329	R003	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg								204,600				
Mercedes Refuse Freighter	AV330	R005	REFUSE FREIGHTER 26000kg								204,600				
Mercedes Refuse Freighter	AV331	R002	REFUSE FREIGHTER 18000kg								204,600				
Fork Lift Truck	FORKLIFT	R229	FORK LIFT												
2. OTHER															
Financial Management System Replacement	FMS001			45,950	45,950										
Flail Equipment replacement	R476	R236	FLAIL			24,000									
Wessex Proline	R600	R236	Pull Along Mower Attachment	200,000	200,000					28,000					
Lighting system upgrade (Wyre Forest House)															
				1,012,040	1,119,720	668,890	1,505,290	1,429,690	366,490	467,690	933,690	544,690	122,890	122,890	122,890

QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS FOR ASSESSMENT OF RISK EXPOSURE 2023-27

Capital Portfolio Fund as at February 2024		2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
DEBT TO GROSS SERVICE EXPENDITURE RATIOS					
Non treasury property investments debt to gross service expenditure (GSE) ratio	<i>Gross debt of non treasury property acquisitions as a percentage of gross service expenditure, where gross service expenditure is a proxy for the size and financial strength of a local authority.</i>	43.20%	49.94%	51.78%	50.13%
DEBT TO NET SERVICE EXPENDITURE RATIOS					
Non treasury property investments debt to net service expenditure (NSE) ratio	<i>Gross debt of non treasury property acquisitions as a percentage of net service expenditure, where net service expenditure is a proxy for the size and financial strength of a local authority.</i>	150.59%	163.52%	154.89%	145.63%
LOAN TO VALUE RATIOS					
Loan to PPE value ratio (property)	<i>The amount of non treasury property debt compared to the total asset value (Long term assets - PPE).</i>	35.60%	39.48%	38.68%	37.86%
Loan to value ratio (property only)	<i>The amount of property debt compared to the total property asset value (property portfolio only).</i>	103.81%	115.13%	112.77%	110.41%
CFR RATIOS					
CFR - Property	<i>Property CFR as a proportion of the gross CFR</i>	41.93%	35.86%	35.17%	34.77%
FINANCING COSTS TO NET SERVICE EXPENDITURE RATIOS					
Property investments financing costs to net service expenditure (NSE) ratio	<i>Non treasury property acquisitions financing costs as a percentage of net service expenditure, where net service expenditure is a proxy for the size and financial strength of a local authority.</i>	5.84%	5.73%	5.55%	5.34%
INCOME/INVESTMENT COVER RATIOS					
Property investment cover ratio	<i>The total net income from property acquisitions, compared to the interest expense.</i>	-42.92%	-19.38%	6.95%	8.79%
Property target income returns (excluding financing costs)	<i>Net revenue income (excluding financing costs) compared to equity. This is a measure of achievement of the portfolio of properties.</i>	3.01%	3.57%	4.20%	4.25%
Property target income returns (including financing costs)	<i>Net revenue income compared to equity. This is a measure of achievement of the portfolio of properties.</i>	-1.01%	-0.46%	0.16%	0.21%
Commercial income to NSE ratio	<i>Dependence on non-fees and charges income to deliver core services. Fees and charges should be netted off gross service expenditure to calculate NSE.</i>	4.00%	4.30%	4.90%	4.89%
Net income from commercial and service investments as a percentage of net revenue	<i>The net return from the property portfolio compared to the total net service expenditure.</i>	1.47%	0.65%	-0.23%	-0.27%
TRENDS					
Gross income	<i>The income received from the property portfolio at a gross level over time.</i>	(£1,731,360)	(£1,755,550)	(£1,863,650)	(£1,885,610)
Operating costs	<i>The trend in operating costs of the non-financial investment portfolio over time, as the portfolio expands.</i>	£1,083,830	£987,110	£960,060	£971,220
Financing costs	<i>The trend in financing costs of the non-financial property portfolio over time, as the portfolio expands.</i>	£865,570	£866,910	£868,290	£869,710
Net (income)/loss	<i>The income received from the property portfolio at a net level (less costs) over time.</i>	£218,040	£98,470	(£35,300)	(£44,680)

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**FEES AND CHARGES 2024-2025****COUNCIL**

Cost Centre	ACTIVITY AND DESCRIPTION OF SERVICE OPTION	KEY	CHANGES IN RESOURCES		
			2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
	<u>STRATEGIC GROWTH</u>				
R605	<u>Development Management - High Hedges</u> Increase charges by 5% in line with Council Policy.	C	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
		R	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
		S	0.00	0.00	0.00
R605	<u>Development Management - Planning Advice</u> Increase charges by 5% in line with Council Policy.	C	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
		R	£30.00	£30.00	£30.00
		S	0.00	0.00	0.00
R605	<u>Development Management - Pre-application Advice</u> Fees and charges reviewed and commercial judgement used.	C	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
		R	£1,290.00	£1,290.00	£1,290.00
		S	0.00	0.00	0.00
R605	<u>Development Management - Sale of Documents</u> Increase charges by 5% in line with Council Policy.	C	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
		R	£210.00	£210.00	£210.00
		S	0.00	0.00	0.00
R625	<u>Building Control - Decision Notices</u> To increase charges by 5% for copies of decision notices held by the Council prior to the formation of the North Worcestershire Building Control Shared Service.	C	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
		R	£10.00	£10.00	£10.00
		S	0.00	0.00	0.00
R310	<u>RESOURCES</u>				
	<u>Council Tax and NNDR</u>	C	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
	Summons Costs £50	R	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
	Liability Order Costs <u>£30</u> <u>£80</u>	S	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Bi-annual review of summons costs and liability orders to reflect inflation and additional Magistrates Court costs.				
	TOTALS	C	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
		R	£12,610.00	£12,610.00	£12,610.00
		S	0.00	0.00	0.00



Service	Planning	Service Manager	Planning Manager
Service Area	Strategic Growth	Cabinet Member	Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments

PROPOSAL OF SCALE OF FEES AND CHARGES

INCOME DESCRIPTION	Current Charge TO 31-03-2024 Charges inclusive of VAT (if applicable)	Proposed Charge FROM 01-04-2024 Charges before VAT	Proposed Charge FROM 01-04-2024 Charges inclusive of VAT (if applicable)
High Hedge Applications			
High Hedge Applications			
Householder	£473.00	£497.00	No VAT currently charged
Other	£473.00	£497.00	No VAT currently charged
Concession (for those in receipt of housing or council tax benefits)	£210.00	£221.00	No VAT currently charged
NOTES:			

Customers may be able to order and pay for some services online – please refer to <http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk>



Service	Planning & Building Control	Service Manager	Planning Manager
Service Area	Strategic Growth	Cabinet Member	Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments

PROPOSAL OF SCALE OF FEES AND CHARGES

INCOME DESCRIPTION	Current Charge TO 31-03-2024 Charges inclusive of VAT (if applicable)	Proposed Charge FROM 01-04-2024 Charges before VAT	Proposed Charge FROM 01-04-2024 Charges inclusive of VAT (if applicable)
Planning Advice			
Building Control Decision Notices (Pre 01-01-2012)			
Sale of Copy Documents			
Reply to general individual queries, Planning or Building Control for up to 6 questions (after that the full Local Land Charge Search fee will be charged)	£32.00 per Question	£34.00 per Question	No VAT currently charged
If any query requires a site visit to be made (e.g. compliance with conditions)	£91.00	£96.00	No VAT currently charged
Charges for Copy Documents			
See Note 2 below			
Monthly Decision List - Emailed	Free	Free	Free
Weekly Planning Application List - Emailed	Free	Free	Free
Decision Notices	£26.00	£22.50	£27.00
Decision Notices Additional Copies	£1.80	£1.58	£1.90
A4 - For each copy	£1.80	£1.58	£1.90
A3 - For each copy	£1.80	£1.58	£1.90
A2 - For each copy	£4.60	£4.00	£4.80
A1 - For each copy	£6.30	£5.50	£6.60
A0 - For each copy	£7.80	£6.83	£8.20

NOTES:

Note 1 - Copies, where appropriate, are available free up to a cumulative single transaction value of £10 for individuals (the discretion of Head of Service to be applied in cases of multiple separate transactions) and charged at full cost to representatives of professional and/or commercial companies.
Note 2 - Copies of all planning application plans and decision notices made from 2006 onwards are available online at zero cost at <http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/planning-and-buildings.aspx>
Customers may be able to order and pay for some services online – please refer to <http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk>



Service	Planning	Service Manager	Planning Manager
Service Area	Strategic Growth	Cabinet Member	Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments

PROPOSAL OF SCALE OF FEES AND CHARGES

INCOME DESCRIPTION	Current Charge	Proposed Charge	Proposed Charge
	TO 31-03-2024	FROM 01-04-2024	FROM 01-04-2024
Permitted Developments and Pre-application Advice	Charges inclusive of VAT (if applicable)	Charges before VAT	Charges inclusive of VAT (if applicable)
Permitted Development enquiries			
Proposed development type			
Householder	£30.00	n/a	n/a
Other	£30.00	n/a	n/a
Pre-Application advice			
Householder	£42.00	£36.67	£44.00
Biodiversity/Protected Species/BNG related advice			
Small Scale Developments (including one site meeting)	n/a	£57.50	£69.00
Major Scale Developments (including one site meeting)	n/a	£115.00	£138.00
Residential Development including Conversions (see note 1)			
1 dwelling (Fee for the first three meetings)	£116.00	£101.67	£122.00
2-3 dwellings (Fee for the first three meetings)	£324.00	£283.33	£340.00
4-5 dwellings (Fee for the first three meetings)	£435.00	£380.83	£457.00
6-7 dwellings (Fee for the first three meetings)	£637.00	£557.50	£669.00
8-9 dwellings (Fee for the first three meetings)	£868.00	£759.17	£911.00
10-24 dwellings (Fee for the first three meetings)	£1,158.00	£1,013.33	£1,216.00
25-49 dwellings (Fee for the first three meetings)	£1,852.00	£1,620.83	£1,945.00
50 - 74 dwellings (Fee for the first three meetings)	£2,315.00	£2,025.83	£2,431.00
75 - 99 dwellings (Fee for the first three meetings)	£3,010.00	£2,634.17	£3,161.00
100 - 149 dwellings (Fee for the first three meetings)	£3,704.00	£3,240.83	£3,889.00
150 - 199 dwellings (Fee for the first three meetings)	£3,768.00	£3,296.67	£3,956.00
200 - 299 dwellings (Fee for the first three meetings)	£4,863.00	£4,255.00	£5,106.00
300 - 499 dwellings (Fee for the first three meetings)	£5,557.00	£4,862.50	£5,835.00
500+ dwellings (Fee for the first three meetings)	£6,020.00	£5,267.50	£6,321.00
Non Residential/Commercial Development (see note 1)			
Gross floor area up to 75m2	Free	Free	Free
Gross floor area 76m2 - 249m2	£174.00	£152.50	£183.00
Gross floor area up to 250m2 - 499m2	£348.00	£304.17	£365.00
Gross floor area 500m2 - 999m2	£753.00	£659.17	£791.00
Gross floor area 1,000m2 - 2,499m2	£1,852.00	£1,620.83	£1,945.00
Gross floor area 2,500m2 - 4,999m2	£2,894.00	£2,532.50	£3,039.00
Gross floor area 2,500m2 - 9,999m2	£3,936.00	£3,444.17	£4,133.00
Gross floor area +10,000m2	£5,557.00	£4,862.50	£5,835.00



Service	Planning	Service Manager	Planning Manager
Service Area	Strategic Growth	Cabinet Member	Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments

PROPOSAL OF SCALE OF FEES AND CHARGES

INCOME DESCRIPTION	Current Charge	Proposed Charge	Proposed Charge
	TO 31-03-2024	FROM 01-04-2024	FROM 01-04-2024
Permitted Developments and Pre-application Advice	Charges inclusive of VAT (if applicable)	Charges before VAT	Charges inclusive of VAT (if applicable)
Other Categories			
Advertisements	£87.00	£75.83	£91.00
Change of Use	£174.00	£152.50	£183.00
Telecommunications	£260.00	£227.50	£273.00
Glasshouses/Poly Tunnels	£92.00	£80.83	£97.00
Others (see note 2)	£87.00	£75.83	£91.00
Installation of Solar Farm/Panels	n/a	£76.67	£92.00
Historic Environmental and Tree related enquiries			
Separate Listed Building and Conservation Area Advice			
(Up to 3 Separate Matters - see note 3)	£69.00	£60.00	£72.00
Cost per additional matter to be considered	£18.00	£15.83	£19.00
Separate Tree related Advice - number of trees not exceeding 10	£69.00	£60.00	£72.00
Separate Tree related Advice - number of trees over 10 but not exceeding 30 (see Note 4)	£139.00	£121.67	£146.00
Exemptions			
As set out in Guidance Note (e.g. Parish Councils, etc)			

NOTES:

Note 1 - If only principle to be discussed developer to provide indicative capacity
 Note 2 - Includes other development proposals such as variation or removal of conditions-proposed changes of use, car parks and certificates of lawfulness.
 Customers may be able to order and pay for some services online – please refer to <http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk>



Wyre Forest District Council

Service	Revenues	Service Manager	Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Manager
Service Area	Resources	Cabinet Member	Finance and Capital Portfolio

PROPOSAL OF SCALE OF FEES AND CHARGES

INCOME DESCRIPTION	Current Charge TO 31-03-2024 Charges inclusive of VAT (if applicable)	Proposed Charge FROM 01-04-2024 Charges before VAT	Proposed Charge FROM 01-04-2024 Charges inclusive of VAT (if applicable)
Council Tax and NNDR			
Council Tax and NNDR			
Summons costs	£50.00	£50.00	No VAT currently charged
Liability Orders	£30.00	£30.00	No VAT currently charged

NOTES:

Customers may be able to order and pay for some services online – please refer to <http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk>

**DRAFT Report of the Chief Financial Officer in respect of
Sections 25-28 Local Government Act 2003**

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the report of the Head of Resources in respect of statutory duties placed on Local Authority Chief Financial Officers in relation to budget setting and monitoring. The report provides councillors with assurance that the budgets have been compiled appropriately and that the levels of reserves held is adequate.

2. RECOMMENDATION (see 2.2.3 of main report)

THAT COUNCIL NOTE:

- 2.1 The Chief Financial Officer's opinion on the budget proposals, recommended by the Cabinet on 13th February 2024, as detailed in this report.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Sections 25 to 28 of the Local Government Act 2003 (The Act) place statutory duties on Local Authorities on how they set and monitor budgets. The Act requires local authorities to ensure that the budget estimates are robust, reserves are adequate and the Budget is monitored on a regular basis.
- 3.2 Section 25 requires the Chief Financial Officer to report to the Council on the robustness of the estimates it makes when calculating its budget requirement under Section 32 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and on the adequacy of its proposed financial reserves.
- 3.3 Section 26 requires authorities to adhere to their approved policies in relation to Reserves when setting budgets to ensure that the minimum Reserve levels are maintained.
- 3.4 Section 27 requires the Chief Financial Officer, at the time of the budget setting, to report if it appears that a reserve in relation to the previous financial year is likely to be inadequate. The reasons for the inadequacy and a recommended course of action must be considered by Council.
- 3.5 Section 28 places a statutory duty on the Council to review its budget and all calculations related to it from time to time. If the review shows a deterioration in the financial position, the Council must take such action as it considers necessary (if any) to address the situation.
- 3.6 Whilst Sections 25-27 relate specifically to budget and council tax setting for the following financial year, these Sections are being more widely interpreted by External Auditors to include the period of the Council's Financial Strategy; as a consequence it is necessary to report not only on next year's Budget but on the period covered by the Three Year Budget Strategy (2024-27).

4. KEY ISSUES – CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER'S OPINION ON 2024-27 BUDGET & THREE YEAR BUDGET STRATEGY

4.1 Macroeconomic context within which the council operates

Wyre Forest is a predominantly rural district centred around the 3 towns of Kidderminster, Stourport and Bewdley. Residents in the district earn marginally less than the West Midlands average, the unemployment rate is slightly below and the population is older than the UK average. There are significant pockets of wealth and deprivation across the district and most homes fall into bands A or B. The District performs the worst out of the 6 Worcestershire Districts for many health outcomes.

4.2 Overview of financial management track record

The Council has a good financial management track record with the 2022-23 revenue outturn being in line with the Revised 2022-23 budget in the 2023-26 MTFS. The capital programme contains two significant funds to support viable business cases for the first to support property acquisition or development and the second to support business cases that deliver efficiencies or otherwise are self-financing or generate a financial return over the medium term. There has been significant slippage on both of these programme due to the negative impact on business case viability of macro-economic conditions and base rate increases. A combined finance and performance report is considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet on a quarterly basis.

The Cabinet formally monitors budgets and performance in accordance with Section 28 of the 2003 Act, including 'Budget Risk Management' and takes appropriate action to ensure financial accountability. These quarterly reports are also considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In addition, Cabinet/CLT receive monthly budget monitoring updates. Reporting is regularly reviewed and refined including in relation to external income generation to provide relevant management information to improve the pace of decision making around demand-led income. The quarterly budget and performance reporting framework ensures that budget pressures are identified in a timely fashion to allow maximum time for action to be taken in year to address potential overspends.

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 have been incorporated into the Council's Financial Regulations. These regulations require the Council's Statement of Accounts be produced and approved by the Chief Financial Officer on or before 31st May and that the accounts are audited and published by 30th September. The Council has a consistent record of meeting the reporting and auditing timeframe. One of only three Councils to receive an opinion on its Statements for 2022-23 by the deadline.

4.3 Compliance with codes and standards

The Council complies with all CIPFA codes and relevant accounting standards including CIPFA's Prudential Code, the Treasury Management Code and the Financial Management code. A formal review of the action plan developed under the Financial Management Code was considered in preparation of this report.

The assessment of affordability of financial plans requires a judgement about risk and for capital plans this is covered in the Prudential Framework and associated codes and guidance. A revision to the Prudential Code and the Treasury Management Code was issued in December 2021. These codes include a requirement for a detailed capital strategy that sets out the long term context in which

capital expenditure and investment decisions are made, giving due regard to both risk and reward and the achievement of priority outcomes. The code updates reporting requirements for long term financial and risk implications in relation to non-treasury investments and requires that investments are not primarily made to generate a financial return. The revised Treasury Management Code enhances and strengthens the skills and training requirements for staff and members involved with the Treasury function. The Capital Strategy proposed for this budget cycle provides high-level projections over a 10 year timeframe to provide information for transparency and decision making, particularly in relation to movements in the Balance Sheet, Capital Financing Requirements and Minimum Revenue Provision which all impact on the revenue budget and reserves requirement. Prudential Indicators are the monitoring tool to assess performance and risk for treasury management and non-treasury capital expenditure and are reported to members in accordance with the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Capital Strategy prepared under the CIPFA Treasury Management and Prudential Codes.

4.4 Robustness of estimates

4.4.1 Key assumptions around growth, inflation and the impact of macro conditions

The budget includes reasonable assumptions for growth, inflation and demand. The expected tax base growth arising from adoption of the local plan in 2022 reflects the mix of properties expected to be delivered and reductions arising from reliefs, exemptions, discounts, disregards and the Council Tax reduction scheme have been factored into calculations. The additional demand on operational services from tax base growth has been factored into forward plans including work on route optimisation. Modest assumptions have been made across the strategy period for pay inflation (4%, 3%, 3%) and a separate pay risk reserve (£300k) is held to mitigate against the impact of awards above assumption. The impact of national policy on the National Living Wage has been tested against our establishment and the expected impact is included within the budget being presented. A granular approach has been adopted for contract inflation and at subjective level for non-contractual expense items. Demand for homelessness support has been factored into estimates as has the impact of the new build development in Kidderminster set to deliver 20 units of temporary accommodation during the strategy period.

4.4.2 Income assumptions

Council tax and business rates income assumptions have been reviewed and are adjusted to take account of collection rate experience the prevailing economic conditions, appeals lodged and local knowledge.

Demand for some chargeable services has failed to return to pre covid levels, the net impact of the reduced demand is reflected in the expenditure and income projections included in the budget presented for consideration. There remains a risk that income targets are not achieved due to changes in behaviour or Government legislation. Achievement of income against targets is regularly reviewed. The Commercial Activity Board has been re established to review activity. The senior management team (Corporate Leadership Team) has been realigned to release capacity to progress the commercial agenda.

The Council's property estate has been reviewed to assess the likely outcome of rent reviews, breaks and renewals with a pragmatic approach taken on void

periods, rent incentives and rent increases. There remains a risk that income assumptions will not be achieved. To mitigate against the impact of this risk crystallising, 20% of the net income achieved from property holdings is held in a property risk earmarked reserve.

4.4.3 Grant assumptions

A prudent position has been adopted in respect of unguaranteed grants such as New Homes Bonus, Services Grant, the 4% Funding Guarantee, Revenue Support grant and retention of Business Rates Growth.

Grant	Final Settlement 2024-25	Future Years assumptions
New Homes Bonus	£285k	2024-25 is the final year of this grant. No future year allocations are included
Services grant	£20k	Grant will again feature in 2025-26 then disappear
4% Funding guarantee	£687k	Funding guarantee will feature in 2025-26 and then disappear
Revenue Support Grant	£160k	An updated needs analysis will reintroduce negative RSG in 2026-27, with impact smoothed via new transitional funding arrangements.
Business Rates Growth	£950k	The current assumption, informed by the latest monitoring, is that we will achieve growth above the baseline funding assessment for business rates in 2023-24. A Business rates reset is assumed in 2026-27 with all growth lost. Transitional Funding assumed to smooth impact of funding reform and business rates reset over a 2 year period.

4.4.4 Savings requirement and feasibility of the plans to achieve the required savings

The Strategy takes a measured approach to identifying achievable savings and modest income growth targets based on pipeline proposals. The Cabinet have been proactive in removing any targets that are considered aspirational. The timetable for delivering the transformation programme (Wyre Forest Forward and Localism) will need to be carefully managed to ensure that the Council can deliver against the medium-term financial strategy. The need to drive forward the strategy is recognised and capacity within the Senior Management Team (the Corporate Leadership Team) is being strengthened by a restructure and realignment of responsibilities. The measures identified enable a balanced budget over the 3 year medium term but are not sufficient to fully close the financial gap. If planned efficiencies do not accrue from service collaborations in North Worcestershire the Cabinet will need to support alternative proposals to make savings.

The Future High Street and Levelling Up Fund programmes will regenerate Kidderminster and surrounding areas and promote economic growth. This will help

move the Council towards a sustainable balanced budget in the future, that is less reliant on the use of reserves. The overall funding gap in year 3 of the strategy has increased from circa £1.8m in the 2023-26 Strategy to circa £2.1m in 2024-27 Strategy due to the impact of high inflation and wage growth and despite a significant increase in investment income. The funding gap continues to represent a key risk to ongoing financial sustainability.

The programme of change outlined in the 2021-24 MTFS continues to be progressed. Services currently provided solely for the district by WFDC staff are, or have been reviewed and options for service collaborations with another council or councils in Worcestershire or other organisations are being explored and progressed where financially advantageous. This includes exploring the possibility of joint venture vehicles with the private sector and the option of a joint waste collection and disposal authority. This process could involve the transfer of relevant assets to other organisations or their placing in joint venture vehicles. If all other options have been explored and exhausted and it remains necessary to secure further cost savings then outsourcing to the private sector as an option for some services will need to be considered.

Work is planned to continue to reduce costs through internal efficiency, growth in income by increasing our customer base and regenerating our towns to increase income from the Council's assets and taxbase.

4.4.5 Financial risks relating to commercial ventures, partnerships and or investment.

The Capital strategy retains the Capital Portfolio Fund for the acquisition or development of property assets to further Council priorities. It is expected that the fund will make a contribution to the Council's financial sustainability although it is likely that proposals that grow our tax base will be favoured in future. No assumption relating to a net revenue stream from service investments has been assumed in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Business cases will need to evidence how proposals deliver against corporate objectives to evidence that capital expenditure is classified as service investment. It is recognised that any acquisitions proposed for outside the district but within the functional economic geography will need a particularly strong evidence based case to demonstrate how priorities are supported. Service investments are taken or held primarily for the purposes of delivering public services including housing, regeneration and local infrastructure. Financial return will be a secondary consideration except where it supports the financial viability of a proposal by covering financing costs. This will ensure that the council continues to have access to PWLB loans.

4.4.6 Other financial risks facing the council and mitigations in place are set out in section 8.

4.4.7 Debt service cost and exposure to interest rate risks

The Council's Capital Financing requirement (circa £60m) includes headroom for the Capital Portfolio Fund (£6m) and the Capital projects fund (£8m), both of which require business cases that demonstrate the annual cost of financing (borrowing costs) can be met from revenue savings or income before approval is given to proceed and do not increase exposure to interest rate risk. Actual external borrowing is currently £34m with circa £7m internal borrowing. A laddered approach to borrowing has been taken with annual maturities being approximately equivalent to the annual Minimum Revenue Provision charge. This approach reduces

exposure to interest rate risk on refinancing as well as reducing the risk of gross debt exceeding the Capital Financing requirement. CIPFA's new Liability Benchmark encourages Council's to internally borrow where cashflow balances are available to defer borrowing decisions and reduce the overall cost of borrowing. The Council has adopted a policy to internally borrow in line with CIPFA's new approach. The new data set included in CIPFA's 2023 Resilience Indicators shows that relative to the Council's near neighbours our debt and reserves position relative to income position is low risk.

4.5 Adequacy of reserves

4.5.1 A summary of usable reserves available to support the 2024-27 Medium Term Financial Strategy and to manage future risk is outlined below:

Revenue Reserves	Balance £
Earmarked Reserves (at 31st January 2024)	
Total Earmarked Reserves	12,726,588
Less: Existing commitments	6,151,453
Available Earmarked Reserves	6,575,135
Of which	
General Risk Reserve	1,461,000
Innovation Fund	472,000
External Funding	2,002,572
WFDC Budget	2,639,563
General unallocated reserves (at 1st April 2023)	3,468,050
Working balance	1,650,000
Total Revenue Reserves	17,844,638

4.5.2 Reserves narrative summarising the purpose of earmarked reserves and the basis of calculation of general reserves

The Council have adopted the general principles of the CIPFA Guidance on Local Authority Reserves and Balances, which outline a minimum Reserve (Working Balance) for this Council which has been adhered to in the Financial Strategy 2024-27.

This year's MTFS maintains the increased working balance of £1.65m following the increase at final accounts 2022-23. Overall levels of reserves held, increased in recent years to reflect ongoing risk but have reduced during 2023-24. The working balance will continue to be kept under review.

Earmarked Reserves are held to meet the cost of known liabilities and to manage future risk. The Council currently holds earmarked reserves of £12.7m (as at mid-January 2024). It should be noted that the Council has commitments against such earmarked reserves and the forecast balance after commitments is £6.6m. A General Risk Reserve is also held of circa £1.5m as at mid-January 2024. The level

of this reserve and the innovation fund will be reconsidered as part of the Final Accounts process. A Planned Property Maintenance reserve is held, taking 20% of the net proceeds from Capital Portfolio purchases to help mitigate future unknown risk.

The reserves position presented in the strategy assumes that the efficiency savings and income growth proposed in the Wyre Forest Forward program and localism strategy are achieved. The funding gap presents the financial position if these savings or growth plans do not proceed or fail to achieve targets set.

It is important that the level of reserves is carefully monitored and reviewed as economic conditions and rising inflation adds additional financial risk. Future funding levels continue to be uncertain as Local Government Finance Reforms and Business rates reset have again been delayed making any financial planning beyond the short term difficult. Consequently, reserves continue to be important to mitigating future risk. Further uncertainty arises from the reforms to waste collection under the Environment Act, the level of one off and ongoing new burdens funding and the timing of introduction of Enhanced Producer Responsibility scheme. Levels will be reviewed again when funding reforms are implemented and their impacts are known.

4.5.3 A review of the authority's resilience using CIPFA's Resilience Index

The CIPFA Financial Resilience Index 2023 and the indicators of poor financial resilience have been examined. The Financial Stress indicators suggest that the Council was in a stronger position at the start of 2023-24 than at the start of 2022-23. However, it should be noted that the indicators are backwards looking and do not take account of decisions in 2023-24. There are no areas of significant concern in relation to the financial stress indicators. In general, our indicators reduced over the 2022-23 indicating an improvement in the council's financial resilience. A second set of indicators examines the Council's reserves position. One indicator in this sub-set relating to the change in the unallocated reserves ratio is an exception to the trend and the indicator value indicates increased risk. The unallocated reserves indicator is calculated as the ratio of unallocated reserves to net revenue expenditure. This ratio is significantly distorted in 2021-22 by the payment of Covid related grants as this significantly increased net revenue expenditure, since the grant income that funded the payments was held in an earmarked reserve. There are no areas of significant concern.

- 4.5.4 **IFRS 9** - The ending of the IFRS 9 statutory override does not present a financial risk to the 2024-27 MTFS. The Council ceased investing in variable net asset value pooled investment assets during the 2022-23 financial year.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 These are contained within the main MTFS report.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 These are contained in Paragraph 3 of this report.

7. IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 This is a financial report and there is no requirement to undertake Impact Assessment screening.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 Strategic risk management is delivered, in accordance with the Risk Management Strategy, across the Council to identify and manage risks appropriately. Contained within the Financial Strategy 2024-27 and subsequent Cabinet reports are the significant risks and mitigating actions which have been identified, allied to the budget process.
- 8.2 Achieving ongoing financial sustainability is the most significant risk facing the Council. There are four significant financial risks affecting the Council over the next three years:
- Funding uncertainty as a result of delays to Local Government Finance Reforms changing key funding streams and allocation methodologies.
Mitigation - Prudent funding assumptions built into strategy and level of risk reserves maintained
 - Rising prices has resulted in pay inflation in the public sector in each of the last 2 financial years. There is a possibility that increases will continue to be ahead of inflation due to the autumn statement announcements in relation to the National Living wage, an increase of 9.8% to £11.44 in April 2024. Although this remains below WFDC's lowest pay point on the main pay scales which is now £12.77, the gap with the bottom point on the NJC pay scale is much closer and this will have a knock-on impact on the NJC pay award agreed for 2024-25, as the Local Government Employers will need to keep local government pay ahead of the possible National Living Wage in April 2025. There is a risk that the pay settlement for 2024-25 will exceed the growth expectations included in the MTFS.
Mitigation – Specific £300k pay inflation risk reserve maintained
 - Reliance on local income sources including from fees and charges, the Capital Portfolio Fund and other demand led income streams, there is a risk this may not be realised in line with projected expectations
Mitigation – Commercial activity Board re-established to review and monitor performance and to act as a catalyst for growth, and realignment of senior management resource built into the MTFS.
 - Risk that further savings required from service collaborations if pipeline proposals don't materialise will prove challenging to deliver in the timeframe required.
Mitigation – Alternative delivery models are available that can be delivered within the timeframe. The innovation fund balance is available to support any upfront costs if an alternative approach is pursued.
- 8.3 The Council proposes to keep the current £1,650,000 level of the working balance reserve under review. This fund is available to provide cover for urgent unforeseen expenditure e.g. in respect of a civil emergency. The Innovation Fund is held to fund one-off costs of implementation of Transformation to fund one-off severance costs following service reviews if they arise. The General Risk Reserve also mitigates more generic risks. Consideration of levels will be given as part of the Final Accounts process, in accordance with the delegations in the main budget report on this

agenda. In addition to these generic reserves, earmarked reserves are held to cover specific commitments and therefore limit financial risk. The Planned Property Maintenance reserve takes 20% of the net proceeds from Capital Portfolio purchases to mitigate future unknown risk; this is a fundamental element of the methodology used for the assessment of risk using the latest CIPFA guidance.

9. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 The Council continues to be reliant on contributions from reserves to balance its budget over the term of the Financial Strategy. The Finance Settlement, did not provide the financial certainty needed to support staffing and investment decisions that would contribute to future financial sustainability.
- 9.2 To reduce the financial risks now faced, it is essential that net expenditure and funding be better aligned by the progression of efficiency plans for reductions in spending and increased income generation. This realignment work continues but it is important that focus is maintained in 2024-25.
- 9.3 The continued delays to Local Government Finance Reforms creates further uncertainty and resultant risk and it is recognised that planning is particularly difficult given these delays. The level of reserves will need to be kept under consideration as more information emerges.
- 9.5 The assessment of affordability of financial plans requires a judgement about risk. This has been updated in the latest Capital Strategy and continues to be kept under review taking into account the changes to CIPFA Codes and access to PWLB loans. This places relevant focus on reporting and planning for long term financial liabilities and risk implications in relation to non-treasury investments. The 10 year Capital Programme helps achieve this. The current approval for the Capital Portfolio Fund is considered to be proportionate to the size of this Council and the composition of the Balance Sheet as reported in the statutory accounts. The December 2021 revisions to the Prudential Code make it clear that CIPFA is taking a more risk averse outlook in respect of investment matters. Local authorities must not borrow to invest for the primary purpose of financial return. Business cases for any future acquisitions will need to provide evidence that investment outside the District boundary contributes to the achievement of corporate priorities. Current guidance on Prudential Property Investment is met by existing policies and procedures.
- 9.6 Development of commercialism and income generation continues to be a part of the solution to close the funding gap, the generic Capital budget allocation to the Innovation Fund will be slipped to support new financially viable initiatives. All business cases will continue to include an appropriate assessment of risks gauged against potential rewards; review of risk and performance will be conducted at least annually for each area of commercial activity. This regular review includes the option to cease more commercial activity if appropriate.
- 9.7 Financial Resilience remains a key risk for this and most other Councils. It is essential that the Council better aligns expenditure with income to alleviate the reliance on reserves.

10.CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

10.1 In respect of the Budget Proposals recommended by the Cabinet, in my opinion, as s151 Officer

- **the estimates made for the purposes of Section 32 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 calculations are robust.**
- **The Reserves outlined in the Three Year Budget and Policy Framework Report to the Cabinet on this agenda are adequate in relation to the 2024-27 Budget.**

11. CONSULTEES

11.1 Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio

11.2 CLT

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Local Government Act 2003 Sections 25-28

Local Government Finance Act 1992 Section 32

CIPFA revised Prudential Code and Treasury Management Code December 2021

Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-27 Cabinet December 2023

CIPFA Financial Resilience Index 2023

CIPFA Financial Management Code – October 2019

CIPFA Code Guidance on prudential property investment

CABINET PROPOSALS AS PER FEB CABINET MTFs REPORT

	Revised 2023-24 £	2024-25 £	2025-26 £	2026-27 £
Net Expenditure on Services	13,313,420	14,181,740	15,247,040	15,788,150
Cabinet Proposals	0	111,450	84,850	(62,950)
Net Expenditure	13,313,420	14,293,190	15,331,890	15,725,200
Contribution (from)/to Reserves	215,060	(367,750)	(950,680)	(1,536,750)
	13,528,480	13,925,440	14,381,210	14,188,450
Net Budget Requirement				
Funded by:				
Revenue Support Grant	150,380	160,340	160,000	(356,000)
Business Rates	4,392,250	4,408,470	4,841,680	4,397,000
Business Rates - National levy redistributed				
New Homes Bonus	240,030	285,060	0	0
Funding Guarantee	425,370	663,000	490,410	0
Collection Fund Deficit	0	(100,830)	0	0
Council Tax Income	8,205,460	8,491,310	8,871,030	9,265,950
Services Grant	114,990	18,090	18,090	0
Transitional Funding (assumption)	0	0	0	881,500
COUNCIL TAX LEVY increase by 3% pa from 2023-24 onwards	236.21	243.29	250.58	258.09
COUNCIL TAX BASE	34,738	34,902	35,402	35,902
Reserves Statement	Revised 2023-24 £	2024-25 £	2025-26 £	2026-27 £
Reserves as at 1st April	3,468,050	3,683,110	3,315,360	2,364,680
Increase to Working Balance				
Contribution (from)/to Reserves	215,060	(367,750)	(950,680)	(1,536,750)
Reserves as at 31st March	3,683,110	3,315,360	2,364,680	827,930
LIB DEM PROPOSALS	Revised 2023-24 £	2024-25 £	2025-26 £	2026-27 £
Net Expenditure on Services	13,313,420	14,181,740	15,247,040	15,788,150
Lib Dem Proposals	0	140,680	74,830	(72,720)
Net Expenditure	13,313,420	14,322,420	15,321,870	15,715,430
Contribution (from)/to Reserves	215,060	(396,980)	(940,660)	(1,526,980)
	13,528,480	13,925,440	14,381,210	14,188,450
Net Budget Requirement				
Funded by:				
Revenue Support Grant	150,380	160,340	160,000	(356,000)
Business Rates	4,392,250	4,408,470	4,841,680	4,397,000
New Homes Bonus	240,030	285,060	0	0
3% Funding Guarantee	425,370	663,000	490,410	0
Collection Fund Deficit	0	(100,830)	0	0
Council Tax Income	8,205,460	8,491,310	8,871,030	9,265,950
Services Grant	114,990	18,090	18,090	0
Transitional Funding (assumption)	0	0	0	881,500
COUNCIL TAX LEVY increase by 2.996% pa from 2024-25 onwards	236.21	243.29	250.58	258.09
COUNCIL TAX BASE	34,738	34,902	35,402	35,902
Reserves Statement - LIB DEM PROPOSALS	Revised 2023-24 £	2024-25 £	2025-26 £	2026-27 £
Reserves as at 1st April	3,468,050	3,683,110	3,286,130	2,345,470
Increase to Working Balance				
Contribution (from)/to Reserves	215,060	(396,980)	(940,660)	(1,526,980)
Reserves as at 31st March	3,683,110	3,286,130	2,345,470	818,490
Difference in reserves between proposals	0	29,230	19,210	9,440

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**LIB DEM GROUP PROPOSALS 2024-25 ONWARDS**

ACTIVITY AND DESCRIPTION OF LIB DEM PROPOSALS	KEY	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	After 2026-27
		£	£	£	£
<u>Enforcement</u> Additional funding in 2025-26 for 1 new Civil Enforcement Officer. Unspent allocations approved in the 2023-26 MTFS being rolled forward.	C R S		38,800 1.00		
<u>Street Scene</u> Appoint 2 new Street Scene officers utilising allocations approved in the 2023-26 MTFS for part time litter pickers (including match funding) to partially off-set the increased cost to provide year-round blitz/hot spot reactive repairs.	C R S	51,700 1.70	55,800 1.70		
<u>Community Leadership Fund</u> Provision of community leadership funding of £1,000 for each councillor in across the period of the MTFS	C R S	33,000	33,000	33,000	33,000
<u>Additional Staffing resource</u> Additional staffing resource to address capacity within the property team to deliver corporate priorities (off-set by income target)	C R S	116,000 2.00	119,500 2.00	123,100 2.00	126,800 2.00
<u>Additional Staffing resource</u> Additional staffing resource to alignment the management structure to deliver the corporate priorities	C R S	11,250	15,000	15,450	15,900
<u>Adaptive play equipment</u> Provision of disabled play equipment in Brinton Park and Stourport riverside.	C R S	50,000 7,500	7,500	7,500	7,500
<u>Enhanced Free one hour parking to include Saturdays</u> Introduction of free one hour parking at one car park in each of the three towns, Monday to Saturday 8am to 6pm. This builds on the arrangement already put in place in Bewdley due to long term traffic	C R S	79,480	82,480	85,480	85,480
<u>Web Casting of meetings</u> To introduce web casting of meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committee to allow maximum access for the public and in order to be fully open and transparent	C R S	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
<u>Second Home Premium</u> To introduce the second home premium from April 2025	C R S		39,000 CR	39,000 CR	39,000 CR
<u>Town Hall Meetings</u> To hold one public meeting in each Town every year	C R S	750	750	750	750
<u>Empty Home proposal Feasibility Study</u> To explore and develop a commercial proposal to bring long term empty homes back into use to increase housing supply and help meet housing demand (allocate funding from Innovation Fund)	C R S	-			
<u>Commercial Income growth</u> A strengthened focus on growing the Council's net commercial income	C R S	160,000 CR	240,000 CR	300,000 CR	330,000 CR
TOTALS	C R S	50,000 140,680 3.70	- 74,830 4.70	- 72,720 CR 2.00	- 98,570 CR 2.00
Also: 3% pa Council Tax increase					

KEY - Changes in Resources

C - Capital

R - Revenue

S - Staffing - Stated in FTEs

CABINET PROPOSALS	R	111,450	84,850	62,950 CR	88,800 CR
Variance		29,230	10,020 CR	9,770 CR	9,770 CR
Total Variance (Overall saving over Cabinet proposals)				9,440	330 CR

STRATEGIC REVIEW PANEL

25TH JANUARY 2024

BUDGET CONSULTATION RESULTS

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The reports presents the results of the budget consultation on the 2024-27 Medium Term Financial Strategy. The consultation results are available to inform the Final Cabinet Proposals.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The panel is asked to note the analysis set out in the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Budget Consultation survey was launched on Thursday 21st December 2023 and ran for four weeks until Thursday 18th January 2024. The results of this consultation are set out below.

- 3.2 A total of 976 responses were received (2022 – 153; 2021 – 789; 2020 – 894). A summary of the responses is shown below. A full list of the questions is provided below. **For all questions, there were more people who strongly supported/supporting a proposal than those who strongly opposed/opposed it except:**

- **Community leadership fund. This was the least supported proposal with – among those who gave a view - 36% in support and 42% opposed;**
- **3% increase in council tax. Marginally more opposed the increase (44%) than supported it (43%).**

Question 1- Civil enforcement officers make sure drivers follow parking regulations on public streets and in car parks. We are proposing to fund an additional officer. To what extent do you support this proposal?

Strongly support – 24.28%
Support – 24.38%
Neither support nor oppose – 23.05%
Oppose – 14.92%
Strongly oppose – 13.37%

49% support vs 28% oppose

Question 2 - Clearing up dropped litter such as cigarette stubs, food wrappers and gum is a major financial burden to many local authorities including ours. We take action against those responsible so you can feel

proud and safe in the district. We have excellent support from volunteers who regularly litter pick, but we feel more still needs to be done to clean up the district. We are proposing to create a litter blitz squad, which would create two additional jobs. To what extent do you support this proposal?

Strongly support – 37.37%
Support – 35.93%
Neither support nor oppose – 13.04%
Oppose – 8.11%
Strongly oppose – 5.54%

73% support vs 14% oppose

Question 3 - One of our priorities is securing financial sustainability for the services our communities value. As part of our corporate plan, we have stated that we are working to increase net income from our commercial activities. We are proposing a target of £160,000 in year one, £240,000 in year two and £300,000 in year three. To what extent do you support this proposal?

Strongly support – 22.42%
Support – 32.54%
Neither support nor oppose – 21.90%
Oppose – 3.51%
Strongly oppose – 19.63%

55% support vs 23% oppose

Question 4 - We are considering introducing a free one-hour parking offer in one car park in each of the three towns, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm. The car parks would be Batemans Yard (Kidderminster), Gardners Meadow (Bewdley) and Vale Road (Stourport). This builds on the arrangements we introduced in Bewdley in November as a consequence of the long-term traffic works. This is anticipated to cost a total of £167,000 over the next three financial years. To what extent do you support this proposal?

Strongly support – 43.72%
Support – 19.65%
Neither support nor oppose – 14.81%
Oppose – 11.32%
Strongly oppose – 10.49%

63% support vs 22% oppose

Question 5 - In Summer 2023 we installed a wheelchair friendly roundabout in the play area at Spennells Park, Kidderminster. We are looking to provide more accessible play equipment in Brinton Park and Stourport Riverside. The proposal would involve a capital investment of £50,000 for the play equipment. To what extent do you support this proposal?

Strongly support – 40.08%
Support – 31.71%
Neither support nor oppose – 17.77%
Oppose – 5.99%
Strongly oppose – 4.44%
72% support vs 10% oppose

Question 6 - The community leadership fund is for all councillors to have the opportunity to support worthwhile initiatives, projects, activities and organisations within their ward. Councillors are allocated £1,000 each per year. There are 33 councillors so this would cost £33,000 each year. To what extent do you support this proposal?

Strongly support – 10.75%
Support – 25.23%
Neither support nor oppose – 22.23%
Oppose – 11.89%
Strongly oppose – 29.89%

36% support vs 42% oppose

Question 7 - We currently webcast our full Council, Cabinet and Planning Committee meetings. Webcasting allows maximum access for the public and helps the council to be fully open and transparent. It enables anyone to watch meetings live online and at any time as they are recorded too. We are proposing to introduce web casting of meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a cost of £1,000 in each of the next three financial years. To what extent do you support this proposal?

Strongly support – 16.75%
Support – 36.09%
Neither support nor oppose – 31.64%
Oppose – 9.00%
Strongly oppose – 6.51%

53% support vs 16% oppose

Question 8 - The increases we have made to our part of the Council Tax bill have been below the rate of inflation across the last decade. We are planning to put Council Tax up by £7.08 in 2024 for Band D households, that is an increase of 3%. This works out to less than 14p a week. Most households in the district fall into Band B or C, so they would pay less. To what extent do you support the proposal to increase Council Tax by 3% in 2024?

Strongly support – 16.86%
Support – 26.49%
Neither support nor oppose – 12.98%
Oppose – 9.95%
Strongly oppose – 33.72%

43% support vs 44% oppose

Question 9 – Do you have any other comments about the budget? We are particularly keen to hear your realistic and practical ideas for reducing costs or increasing income.

There were 327 responses to this question and parking, litter and town centres featured heavily. The themes of covered were varied and included:

- **Car parking** – Most comments welcomed the idea of the one hour free parking. However ideas suggested that this could be extended to more/all carparks within the district, and the 1 hour's free parking could be extended to weekends.
- **Litter** – Many respondents raised the problem of litter across the district. Suggestions included more enforcement officers needed for littering and dog fouling, increasing penalties to act as a deterrent and CCTV cameras in littering hotspots.
- **Empty shops** – Comments noted that a way to increase income was to decrease the number of empty shops within the town centres. Suggestions included giving small businesses incentives to rent the premises. Suggestions included reducing business rates.
- **More leisure activities** – outdoor equipment, youth clubs, craft markets, funding to save pool at St George's Park.
- **Non-district responsibilities** – some comments focused on services the Council are not responsible for such as highway maintenance and St George's park.
- **Council Tax** - Many comments focused on increases in council tax, and the impact on residents of the cost-of-living crisis. Many called for council tax to be frozen or even cut: this is reflected in the 34% of respondents who strongly opposed the 3% increase in question 8.
- **Councillors** – several comments calling for the number of councillors or their allowances to be reduced and objecting to the community leadership fund. The latter reflects the response to question 6.