

CABINET
03 DECEMBER 2020

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN – GENERAL FUND (GF) AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME

Cabinet Member Cllr Andrew Moore
Responsible Officer Andrew Jarrett – Deputy Chief Executive (S151)

Reason for Report: To produce an updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which takes account of the Council’s key strategies (i.e. the Corporate Plan, Business Plans, Treasury Management Plan, Asset Management Plan, Work Force Plan and Capital Strategy) and demonstrates it has the financial resources to deliver the Corporate Plan. This models potential changes in funding levels, new initiatives, unavoidable costs and proposed service savings.

RECOMMENDATION: Members note the updated MTFP and endorse the proposals outlined in paragraph 8.2.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) sets out the financial resources available to deliver the Council’s ongoing Corporate Plan pledges/objectives.

Financial Implications: By undertaking an annual review of the MTFP the Council can ensure that its Corporate Plan pledges/objectives are affordable.

Budget and Policy Framework: The Council has an annual legal requirement to set a balanced budget. The MTFP provides an overarching steer of what the Council can afford to deliver over a rolling five year period and is instrumental in setting the budgetary context for next year’s budget setting process.

Legal Implications: None directly arising from this report, although there is a legal obligation to balance the budget. There are legal implications arising from any future consequential decisions to change service provision, but these would be assessed at the time.

Risk Assessment: The MTFP makes a number of financial assumptions based on a sensible/prudent approach, taking account of the most up to date professional advice that is available. However, many of these assumptions are open to challenge and due to this fact Appendix 1, included within this report, shows the financial effect on key items in the plan if assumptions were to change (this is referred to as sensitivity analysis).

Equality Impact Assessment: It is considered that the impact of this report on equality related issues will be nil.

Climate Change Assessment: The allocation of resources will impact upon the Council’s ability to implement/fund new activities linked to climate change, as the MTFP sets the broad budgetary framework for the Council over the coming years. However, some initial provision has already been included in the draft 2021/22 budget

and further evaluation/consideration will be made as the draft budget passes through the PDGs over the next few months.

1.0 Introduction and Purpose of the Medium Term Financial Plan

- 1.1 The main purpose of the MTFP is to show how the Council will strategically manage its finances over the next four financial years, in order to support the delivery of the pledges/objectives detailed in the Corporate Plan.
- 1.2 The MTFP links the financial requirements, constraints and objectives included in all the key planning documents of the Council (i.e. Asset Management Plan, Treasury Management Strategy, Work Force Plan, and Business Plans) which culminate in the Corporate Plan.
- 1.3 The MTFP has been a key corporate requirement for a number of years and is an essential part of the budget setting process. It provides a financial model which forecasts the cost of providing Council services over a rolling four year period (four years forward plus current year), together with an estimate of the financial resources that will be available. This model provides an early warning mechanism if there is a significant budget gap between estimated costs and available resources.
- 1.4 The MTFP helps strategically plan the budget setting process, but of equal importance, gives Management and Members an overview of future budget gaps so strategic decisions can be made over levels of future spending, council tax levels, policies for fees/charges, asset investment or disposal, etc.
- 1.5 In addition to considering the General Fund financial position, the MTFP also reviews the affordability of the Council's capital programme over the same four year period. Again it predicts required capital projects (in the main focusing on essential asset replacement and health & safety items) matched against potential capital receipts and grant funding. This plan focuses on known capital commitments. However, at some point in the future we may well have to consider new items which will be subject to formal prioritisation (including spend to save capability).
- 1.6 In addition to these two key areas of Council expenditure we also prepare an MTFP for our Housing Revenue Account. This is reported separately and shows a four year programme, based on costs and income streams for our properties from April 2021 onwards.

2.0 Framework for the Medium Term Financial Plan

- 2.1 The starting base for the MTFP is the 2020/21 approved budget, which is then adjusted for any supplementary estimates approved by the Council or any significant budget variances identified in the monthly budget monitoring report to the Cabinet.

- 2.2 This base then has to be adjusted for unavoidable costs, such as, pay increases, inflation, service pressures associated with new legislation, a growing property base or improving performance, etc. The MTFP will also consider forecasts for investment receipts and fee/charges levels.
- 2.3 Finally the MTFP considers and makes assumptions regarding future levels of council tax (including the potential growth in tax base) and the likely level of future Central Government funding.
- 2.4 The MTFP models an overall aggregated position for the Council based on a range of assumptions. This then predicts an overall budget position, which can highlight a potential budget gap and then propose remedial action which can be taken to resolve it. Clearly, these assumptions can be challenged. They will vary due to changes in the local, national and international economic position and of course, the ongoing consequences of the Covid 19 crisis will have implications, not only for the current year, but also for the years to come. As a consequence, Appendix 1 illustrates possible risks within the plan and the potential financial sensitivity to changes in the assumptions.
- 2.5 The development of a four year financial model is based on a number of assumptions and perceived risks. These become more difficult to predict the further into the future you consider. In general terms a prudent/reasonable approach has been taken regarding forecasts, professional accounting guidance has been followed and external technical opinion has been sought where necessary.
- 2.6 The following underlying caveats have been adopted as a base assumption during the life of the MTFP:
- 2.6.1 Each year the Council will target a balanced revenue budget without the use of reserve balances. The level of predicted deficits over the period of this plan may ultimately require the application of reserves to achieve the mandatory balance. However, this option is not reflected in the numbers presented.
- 2.6.2 We will attempt to ensure that the General Fund Balance does not fall below our current minimum agreed level (£2m). However, as above, this floor may well be breached as a last resort to achieve a balanced budget.
- 2.6.3 Resources will be directed to high priority services and hence away from low priority services. With the exception of spend to save projects on lower priority services that can either cut future costs or increase revenue to enable cross subsidisation of higher priority services.
- 2.6.4 Council tax increases will be kept within Government set guidelines. In reality this now gives the Council very little scope to significantly increase council tax levels as the current nationally prescribed referendum rate is likely to be a maximum of 2% or £5 for the 2021/22 financial year. This plan assumes that the current rate will remain unaltered throughout the five year cycle.

- 2.6.5 Further efficiency/procurement savings will be secured and then factored into future spending plans.
- 2.6.6 We will continue to explore new commercial opportunities (as a 'business as usual' model is clearly no longer deliverable).
- 2.6.7 Prudential borrowing will only be made during the life of the MTFP after the production of a fully costed business case with a reasonable payback period.
- 2.7 With regard to the Capital Programme, the Council will continue to prioritise schemes, for instance to generate income, to meet corporate objectives and to enhance its asset base. The draft capital programme will also be reviewed/challenged by the Capital Strategy Asset Group (CSAG). In addition we will also look to dispose of surplus assets in order to maximise capital receipts and reduce ongoing revenue maintenance costs associated with holding the asset. Careful consideration will also need to be used to ensure we achieve the maximum market value when disposing of assets.

3.0 Current status and strategy for the Medium Term Financial Plan

- 3.1 The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) has been developed to provide a financial framework within which the Council can deliver the pledges/objectives in the Corporate Plan. This strategy focuses on the forward financial issues/pressures facing the General Fund and Capital Programme.
- 3.2 There are still some issues that have not been resolved or are still to be fully evaluated. These issues may either improve or worsen the summary budget position currently reported and can be summarised as follows:
 - 3.2.1 Continuing impact of rollout of Universal Credit
 - 3.2.2 Impact of the Provisional Settlement in November/December
 - 3.2.3 Ongoing service reviews (including changes to fees/charges)
 - 3.2.4 Changes to New Homes Bonus and Business Rate allocations/mechanics
- 3.3 With the Fair Funding Review being pushed back again in 2020/21, we are only expecting to receive a one year settlement for 2021/22. This clearly makes forecasting for future years very difficult. We have previously been advised that not only would Revenue Support Grant (RSG) be reduced to nil in 2019/20 we may have to pay some monies back to Central Government, namely **negative** RSG. So far this requirement has been removed and due to the inequity of this we are hopeful that this will not re-emerge. We have therefore not included negative RSG in our assumptions.
- 3.4 The MTFP shows the strong inter-relation between the General Fund and delivering a sustainable capital programme. The MTFP model predicts an estimated cumulative shortfall on the General Fund budget of £8.556 (made up of the cumulative amounts required to balance the budget each year). Without

any action the General Fund reserve of £2.251m would be insufficient to absorb the deficits over this period. There is some small mitigation in that the forecast outturn for 2020/21 is expected to be around the breakeven mark. The budget gap in 2021/22 is forecast to be £3,012k, which reduces to £1.148m in 2024/25. These predictions have included amounts to fund our future capital programme and future proposed savings and cost movements.

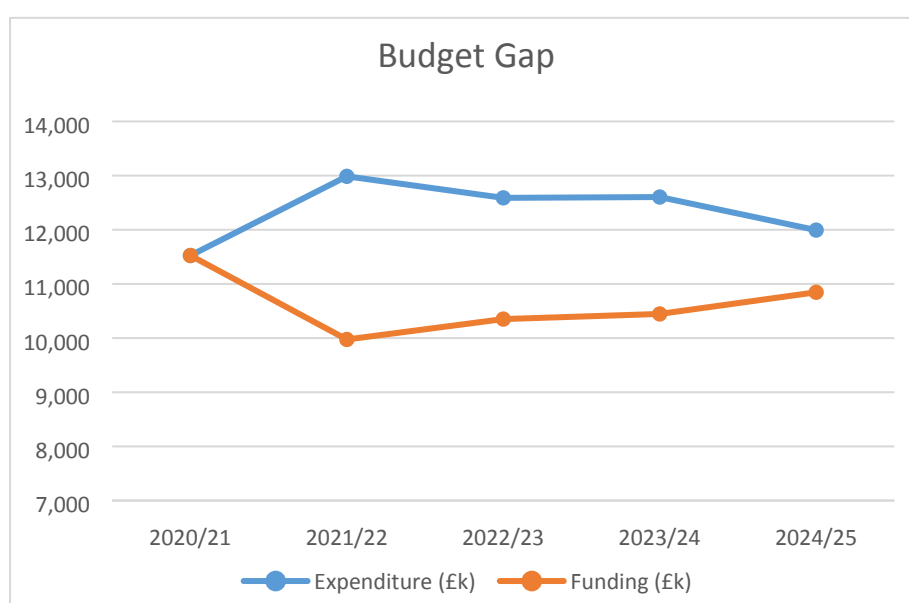
- 3.5 Members will appreciate that some of the proposed savings will require political support and therefore if some suggestions are deemed to be unacceptable then other savings will need to be proposed.
- 3.6 At this point it is still worth stressing that against a backdrop of an aggregate cut in Central Government Grant of c£5m between 2010/11 and 2020/21, the Council continues to deliver a wide range of well performing services.

4.0 Summary of the Medium Term Financial Plan

- 4.1 Table 1, shown below, gives a summary position for the MTFP, over the next 4 years. This shows an overall deficit of £1.148m over the life of the plan. This is clearly a challenge based upon a number of assumptions, caveats, decisions and is now made even harder by the volume of related risks that the Government has transferred to councils with the changes to Council Tax Benefit and Business Rate localisation. As well as cuts direct to the Council's budget from Central Government we have and will continue to suffer indirectly from cuts to Devon County Council's budget and from other public sector bodies such as the Department of Work and Pensions.
- 4.2 Clearly, any major variations in these assumptions would require a fundamental review of the Council's MTFP and would be reported back to Cabinet and the wider Membership as soon as practical, coupled with proposed courses of action that could be implemented.
- 4.3 Table 1 shown below gives an overall summary of the Council's General Fund MTFP position (which includes a wide range of assumptions that have been realistically decided upon based on external advice and the most up to date information available to us).

Table 1 – MTFP General Fund Summary

	2020/21 £	2021/22 £	2022/23 £	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Net Service Costs	10,334,257	12,777,797	12,312,191	12,285,845	11,491,602
Net Interest Costs	(129,104)	(274,400)	(343,352)	(331,122)	(341,122)
Provision for Repayment of Borrowing	1,052,154	868,010	881,871	886,508	920,281
Earmarked Reserves - New Homes Bonus	1,418,189	776,752	460,264	0	0
Earmarked Reserves - Other	(1,151,052)	(1,161,672)	(721,825)	(237,108)	(77,108)
General Reserves	0	0	0	0	0
Total Budget Requirement	11,524,444	12,986,487	12,589,149	12,604,123	11,993,653
Funded By:					
Retained Business Rates	(3,210,478)	(3,312,730)	(3,310,480)	(3,410,480)	(3,510,480)
Business Rates prior year surplus/deficit	(102,250)	439,767	255,323	0	(50,000)
Pooling Dividend	(150,000)	0	0	(50,000)	(100,000)
Revenue Support Grant	0	0	0	0	0
Rural Services Delivery Grant	(466,695)	(466,695)	(466,695)	(466,695)	(466,695)
BR Levy Surplus Grant	0	0	0	0	0
New Homes Bonus	(1,418,189)	(776,752)	(460,264)	0	0
Council Tax–MDDC	(6,064,832)	(6,038,700)	(6,368,700)	(6,518,700)	(6,668,700)
Council Tax prior year surplus/deficit	(112,000)	180,653	0	0	(50,000)
Total Funding	(11,524,444)	(9,974,457)	(10,350,816)	(10,445,875)	(10,845,875)
Gap – Increase/(Decrease) In-year	(0)	3,012,030	(773,697)	(80,085)	(1,010,470)
Gap – Cumulative	(0)	3,012,030	2,238,333	2,158,248	1,147,778



- 4.4 The table and graph above show that our projected budget gap is £3.012m in 2021/22, falling to an estimated £1.148m by 2024/25. The future budget gap of £1.148m is equivalent to 10% of the projected budget requirement in 2024/25. Due to the cumulative nature of this plan, if we balance our revenue spend to our available funding, each subsequent year will only then need to find the difference. We do however, have additional one-off maintenance spend in 2022/23 which is currently unfunded. This limits the post pandemic recovery in our budget gap in that year.
- 4.5 The Council has a legal requirement to set a balance budget and needs to ensure its overall costs are affordable i.e. they can be funded through income and planned use of reserves. Members therefore need to take the necessary decisions and actions to manage net spending within affordable limits.
- 4.6 A key point is that if no remedial action is taken to reduce our overall level of spend our General Fund balance would be insufficient to deal with the deficit arising during 2021/22. So clearly “business as usual” is an unsustainable option.

5.0 Capital Overview

- 5.1 There is no revenue contribution to the capital programme. As in previous years, the New Homes Bonus is earmarked for funding elements of the capital programme.
- 5.2 Table 2 below, shows the capital funding position during the life of the MTFP. A more detailed analysis of the overall schemes and potential funding is attached as Appendix 2.
- 5.3 The capital programme includes ‘rolling’ items already highlighted in the current year capital programme (i.e. Affordable Housing/Private Sector Housing Grants, the Major Repairs Account and the 30 year modernisation programme). The available receipts are based on a prudent basis, with no major asset sales (other than right to buy sales) factored into the model. If additional receipts are generated we could revisit our capital prioritisation list and bring forward new schemes into the programme or decrease the contribution from New Homes Bonus or begin to repay any outstanding borrowing.

Table 2 – MTFP Capital Programme

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	£000	£000	£000	£000
Total Capital Requirement (GF)	11,470	11,944	5,802	957
Total Capital Requirement (Other GF Projects)	1,009	10,384	2,650	2,645
Total Capital Requirement (GF)	12,479	22,328	8,452	3,602
Total Capital Requirement (HRA)	3,733	6,698	5,285	5,310
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Total Capital Requirement	16,212	29,026	13,737	8,912
Funded by:				
General Fund				
Existing Funds				
Capital Grants Unapplied Reserve	577	581	666	671
Capital Receipts Reserve	88	87	87	87
New Homes Bonus Reserve	1,014	509	158	77
Other Earmarked Reserves	150	116	91	41
HIF Funding	8,358	8,857	0	0
Total from Existing Funds (GF)	10,187	10,150	1,002	876
New Funds				
PWLB Borrowing	2,292	12,178	7,450	2,726
Total from New Funds (GF)	2,292	12,178	7,450	2,726
Total Funding (GF)	12,479	22,328	8,452	3,602
Housing Revenue Account				
Existing Funds				
Capital Receipts Reserve	951	1,551	1,551	1,551
New Homes Bonus Reserve	21	21	21	21
Housing Maintenance Fund EMR	88	2,536	1,128	1,128
Other Housing Reserves (MRA, Renewable Energy etc.)	2,673	2,590	2,585	2,610
Total from Existing Funds (HRA)	3,733	6,698	5,285	5,310
Total Capital Funding	16,212	29,026	13,737	8,912

6.0 Balances and Reserves

- 6.1 The Council started 2020/21 with an available General Fund Balance (GFB) of £2.251m which is very slightly above the current balance of £2m set by Full Council. On that basis, in “normal” times, it would be imperative that we look to match on-going spending plans to our available in-year resources.
- 6.2 A Council holds a GFB for a number of reasons, firstly to deal with any short term cash flow or funding issues, secondly to provide a contingency for exceptional one-off acts (i.e. flooding, fire, terrorism, business rate failure, etc.) and, thirdly to provide a buffer for known circumstances whose final effect is unknown (i.e. changes in legislation or major funding changes). Clearly, the more uncertainty that exists, the higher the balance required to mitigate this risk. This level of minimum reserves is assessed annually to ensure it is adequate.
- 6.3 With recent vaccine news, it is increasingly hopeful that the years ahead will be a post pandemic recovery period. Even so, this plan suggests that some utilisation of reserves will be necessary.

7.0 Risk, Opportunities and Uncertainty

7.1 Ongoing risks and uncertainty for the budget at this stage include:

7.1.1 **Local Government Finance Settlement (LGFS)** – we await the Provisional Settlement in November/December for 2021/22 which will be a one-year settlement. The previous four year offers gave us some certainty over the level of grants and we are mindful that while we await the Fair Funding Review, there will be further risks. We are also aware that the Settlement may bring further changes which will affect 2021/22 budget setting.

7.1.2 **New Homes Bonus (NHB)** – The calculation of NHB was changed in the 2017/18 Finance Settlement and a “top-slice” of 0.4% of growth was introduced alongside the reduction from six years to five years. The allocation was reduced to four years in 2018/19 and we now expect receipts under this scheme to expire in 2022/23.

7.1.3 **Council Tax** – The MTFP is based on the assumption of a £5 increase on a Band D property each year. This may of course not be possible due to Central Government restrictions and we are only likely to know this on an annual basis as the Settlement is announced.

7.1.3 **Council Tax Base** – The provisional estimates will be completed by the end of November and these will be added to the forecast as soon as they can be verified.

7.1.4 **Capital Programme** – the attached programme covers the next four years. Any amendment to spending proposals could contain further revenue budget implications such as borrowing costs.

7.1.5 **100% Business Rates Retention** – In the Autumn Statement 2015 the Government confirmed its intention to allow local authorities to keep 100% of business rates income by 2020. Since that time, we made a successful bid alongside our Pool authorities to be a 100% Pilot Authority for 2018/19. Unfortunately, this was for one-year only and we have reverted to losing 50% of our Business Rates growth to Central Government. The current Brexit deliberations have delayed the progress to 100% retention and we await the Fair funding Review and the Business Rates Reset to give us clarity about the way forward.

7.1.6 **Covid 19** – These numbers have been prepared on the basis that the current recovery trends in the income that we receive from the delivery of our services, will continue into next year. The November lockdown indicates how quickly things can change. Further, we now have news of a vaccine. Despite this uplifting development much uncertainty remains. How quickly will the vaccine relieve pressures? What further lockdown measures may be necessary before it is fully rolled out? How quickly will habits revert to pre pandemic routines? What level of financial support will local authorities receive after the current

schemes expire? The answers to these questions will all affect our finances in the years ahead.

7.2 Other Uncertainties:

- 7.2.1 Growth of property and commercial base – stepped cost impact but additional revenue based on current Government incentives (payment by results of delivery).
 - 7.2.2 Government funding – RSDG removal, Possible negative RSG, Fairer Funding Review, Business Rates uncertainty (including rebasing).
Changes to Housing Benefit Admin Grant, etc.
 - 7.2.3 Further cuts to Welfare system and impact of the roll-out of Universal Credit Scheme.
 - 7.2.4 Risk of spend to save projects and commercial investments – will projected savings and incomes materialise?
 - 7.2.5 Changes to DCC funding provision of specific services that could have a knock on effect to Mid Devon (e.g. Grounds Maintenance contributions, support for recycling activities and changes to municipal tips).
 - 7.2.6 Any upfront revenue costs associated with the Eastern Urban Extension / new properties in Cullompton/Garden Village.
 - 7.2.7 Changes to the referendum limits.
 - 7.2.8 “Spend to save” costs associated with the business and digital transformation project and ongoing savings delivered in subsequent years.
 - 7.2.9 Inflows and outflows of monies in respect of substantial property transactions.
 - 7.2.10 New commercial opportunities and regeneration programmes.
 - 7.2.11 Potential future partnership working with other authorities.
 - 7.2.12 Possible impact of BREXIT on the economy including changes in interest rates, inflation, etc.
- 7.3 All of the above items highlight once again just how difficult it is to forecast ahead with any degree of accuracy. Nevertheless the MTFP helps us examine the likely trends to assist in setting realistic capital and revenue budgets going forward.

8.0 Approach to closing the Budget Gap

- 8.1 Many of the issues, assumptions and sensitivity of items included within the MTFP are complex, often inter-related and will undoubtedly be subject to

variation and ultimately fundamental review depending on the levels of future Formula Grant reductions. However, strategic decisions have been ongoing to reduce our current and future operational costs.

- 8.2 We are mindful that the level of uncertainty in funding and external pressures e.g. from Homelessness legislation and Universal Credit as just two examples, makes forecasting difficult and with it a need to highlight risks and the need to push for further efficiencies within services. The MTFP shows an overall funding gap of £1.148m up to 2024/25 with a spike in 2021/22 of £3.012m. In order to reduce this deficit the Council will strive to constantly manage its costs and revenues by:
- 8.2.1 A continued reduction of service and employee costs – which may incur short term upfront costs.
 - 8.2.2 Ensure fees/charges are revisited regularly and that we are charging for all items possible.
 - 8.2.3 Continue and expand partnership working where practical.
 - 8.2.4 Investigation of a number of spend to save projects.
 - 8.2.5 Review our current and future property asset requirements.
 - 8.2.6 Maximise procurement efficiencies.
 - 8.2.7 Explore new commercial opportunities.
 - 8.2.8 Examine different ways of delivering services to reduce costs.
 - 8.2.9 Continued benchmarking and learning from best practice.
 - 8.2.10 Consideration of growing the commercial property base to align delivery with Government funding priorities.
- 8.3 The above plans will require all service areas to play an active role in securing future savings and we will also continue to consult with all of our major stakeholders, especially the tax payers, to ensure all future budgetary decisions accord with their priorities.

9.0 The Corporate Plan

- 9.1 Clearly there is a very strong link between finance and corporate/service performance. By integrating the MTFP, the Work Force Plan and the Corporate Plan the Council can demonstrate how it will afford to deliver its key objectives. This will also shape the ongoing priorities of the Council, as with finite resources it will need to decide on what its key priorities are.

10.0 On-going Delivery of a MTFP

- 10.1 The MTFP will continue to be updated on an annual basis. This will ensure that it will be a live document, subject to amendment and review by Leadership Team and Members and will provide a clear guide prior to commencing the annual budget setting process in future years.

11.0 Conclusion

- 11.1 Like all councils, Mid Devon is facing an ongoing and very challenging financial future. One of the many implications of the pandemic is the effect it will have on our finances. The Corporate Plan will need to be aligned to available financial resources (which will include a regularly updated Work Force Plan) so that the District can be placed to maximise cost effective delivery of its services that are so valued by its residents.
- 11.2 It should also be noted that Management will continue to play a pro-active role in both reducing ongoing service costs and exploring new possibilities to raise additional income.
- 11.2.1 Having a realistic financial plan for the next four years will enable the Council to ensure it is allocating its limited financial resources to its key priorities. Our current Corporate Plan sets out our goals/objectives over a four year period and must clearly be matched by the financial resources that are available. The Government's move from a relatively fixed core funding system to more of a '*payment by results*' process has introduced a lot more uncertainty and volatility for the future of our funding streams, which makes medium term financial planning an even more challenging process.
- 11.3 Like any strategic plan, the MTFP has been compiled based upon all available information at a fixed point in time. Clearly, as time moves on assumptions will change, Central Government will set new targets, bring in new legislation and adjust funding levels. We are aware that the Fair Funding Review may bring significant changes in our core funding including a Baseline reset or partial reset in Business Rates. Residents expectations will change, Member priorities will alter and therefore any plans must be flexible enough to cope with major changes. As we were already in a period of major financial uncertainty, now compounded by Covid 19, it is not only prudent but imperative that we seek to maintain our reserve levels to the fullest extent possible. Moving forward members must be provided with regular updates on the financial impact of any variation to what has been previously assumed.

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