

Highways and Transport Committee

Date of Meeting:	26 January 2023
Report Title:	Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023-27 Consultation
Report of:	Alex Thompson – Director of Finance and Customer Services (Section 151 Officer)
Report Reference No:	HT/50/22-23
Ward(s) Affected:	All

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The Highways and Transport Committee is being asked to provide feedback, as consultees, on the development of the Cheshire East Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 to 2026/27. Feedback is requested in relation to the responsibilities of the Committee.
- 1.2. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets out how the Council will resource the achievement of the Corporate Plan and is subject to consultation and approval on an annual basis.
- 1.3. Developing the strategy requires a wide range of stakeholder engagement, including all Members. Feedback will be presented to the Corporate Policy Committee for consideration on, 9 February 2023, before a balanced budget is presented to the full Council meeting of 22 February 2023 for final review and approval.
- 1.4. The full consultation document can be accessed on the [Cheshire East Council](#) website.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. Financial strategies underpin how Cheshire East Council will allocate resources, achieve the Corporate Plan and provide in the region of 500 local services every day. The strategies must be affordable, based on robust estimates and balanced against adequate reserves.

- 2.2.** In February 2021 the Council approved the Corporate Plan 2021-2025 which articulates the vision of how these services will make Cheshire East an Open, Fair and Green borough:
- 2.2.1.** Open - We will provide strong community leadership and work transparently with our residents, businesses and partners to deliver our ambition in Cheshire East.
- 2.2.2.** Fair - We aim to reduce inequalities, promote fairness and opportunity for all and support our most vulnerable residents.
- 2.2.3.** Green - We will lead our communities to protect and enhance our environment, tackle the climate emergency and drive sustainable development.
- 2.3.** Committees are responsible for overseeing the achievement of these priorities. Resources, including Revenue, Capital and Reserves were allocated by the Finance Sub-Committee in March 2022, following the budget Council. All resources are allocated to a specific Service Committee or the Finance Sub-Committee.
- 2.4.** Each Committee plays an important role in developing the Strategy before it is approved by Council on 22 February 2023.
- 2.5.** The full MTFS is provided on the Council's website along with supporting consultation material. Each Committee is receiving an extract from the Full MTFS to assist with focusing on the Constitutional responsibilities of the Committee.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1.** That the Committee notes:
- 3.1.1.** The year-end forecast outturn position for 2022/23 (**Appendix 1**).
- 3.1.2.** The financial context and proposals contained within the Executive Summary of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (**MTFS report Annex C, Section 1**).
- 3.1.3.** Revenue Grant Funding (**Appendix 4**).
- 3.1.4.** Earmarked Reserves (**Appendix 5**).
- 3.2.** That the Committee provides feedback on the proposals within the MTFS, as related to the Committee's responsibilities, that can support and advise Full Council in fulfilling its responsibilities to approve a balanced budget for 2023/24, in the following areas:
- 3.2.1.** Revenue Proposals (Details are at **Appendix 2**).

MTFS Section 1 Ref No	Detailed List of Proposed Budget Changes – Service Budgets
	Highways and Transport Committee
102	Pay inflation
103	Local Bus
104	Highways
105	Energy saving measures from streetlights
106	Pension Costs Adjustment
107	Restructuring Potential
108	Parking

3.2.2. Capital Programme (**Appendix 3**).

4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1. In accordance with the Constitution Committees play an important role in planning, monitoring and reporting on the Council’s finances. Each Committee has specific financial responsibilities.
- 4.2. The Council’s annual budget must be balanced. The proposals within it must be robust and the strategy should be supported by adequate reserves. The assessment of these criteria is supported by each Committee having the opportunity to help develop the financial proposals before they are approved by Full Council.

5. Other Options Considered

- 5.1. The Council has a legal duty to set a balanced annual budget taking regard of the report from the Chief Finance Officer. As such options cannot be considered that would breach this duty. Any feedback from the Committee must still recognise the requirement for Council to fulfil this duty.
- 5.2. There is no option to “do nothing”. The Council has statutory obligations to provide certain services, which would be unaffordable if the Council failed to levy an appropriate Council Tax.

6. Background

- 6.1. The Council’s financial resources are provided from a combination of local taxes, government grants, investment returns on assets and other direct contributions from individuals or organisations. Financial plans are based on estimated spending and income over the next four years and the report of the Chief Finance Officer brings Members attention to the processes and risks associated with developing these estimates.

- 6.2. The Council aims to achieve value for money based on Economy (how much we pay for things), Efficiency (how well we use things) and Effectiveness (how we use things to achieve outcomes). Public feedback and internal and external scrutiny create the necessary framework to hold the Council to account for achieving these aims.
- 6.3. All councils are legally required to set a balanced budget each year.
- 6.4. The Budget Setting Process 2023-2027 has enabled a set of proposals to be developed for consultation.
- 6.5. The MTFS report is based on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2023/24. This was released on 19 December 2022. The final settlement is expected in early February 2023 with a debate by Members of Parliament in the House of Commons expected in mid-February (after the publication date of this report to Committee) to agree the position.
- 6.6. The MTFS report continues to include estimated grant allocations in relation to several Specific Grants (**Appendix C, Annex 7** and Committee specific at **Appendix 4** of this report). These will be refined as appropriate in due course.
- 6.7. Any changes made as a result of the engagement process and further debate will be reported to Members at the Council meeting on 22 February 2023.

7. Consultation and Engagement

- 7.1. The business planning process involved a series of events during 2022. Details of how this process was managed is included within the **MTFS report Appendix C, Annex 2**.

8. Implications

8.1. Legal

- 8.1.1. The Council should have robust processes so that it can meet statutory requirements and fulfil its fiduciary duty.

8.2. Finance

- 8.2.1. Please see all Sections of this report.

8.3. Policy

- 8.3.1. The MTFS report outlines policy and budget proposals which will impact on service delivery arrangements.
- 8.3.2. The Corporate Plan will drive and inform Council policy and priorities for service delivery. The priorities and actions listed may have direct policy implications will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

8.4. Equality

- 8.4.1.** Under the Equality Act 2010, decision makers must show 'due regard' to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it; and
 - Foster good relations between those groups.
- 8.4.2.** The protected characteristics are age, disability, sex, race, religion and belief, sexual orientation, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, and marriage and civil partnership.
- 8.4.3.** Having "due regard" is a legal term which requires the Council to consider what is proportionate and relevant in terms of the decisions they take.
- 8.4.4.** The Council needs to ensure that in taking decisions on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the Budget that the impacts on those with protected characteristics are considered. The Council undertakes equality impact assessments where necessary and continues to do so as proposals and projects develop across the lifetime of the Corporate Plan. The process assists us to consider what actions could mitigate any adverse impacts identified. Completed equality impact assessments form part of any detailed Business Cases.
- 8.4.5.** The proposals within the MTFS include positive and negative impacts. A separate Equality Impact Assessment has been produced and is included in **Appendix C, Annex 3**.
- 8.4.6.** The Corporate Plan's vision reinforces the Council's commitment to meeting its equalities duties, promoting fairness and working openly for everyone. Cheshire East is a diverse place and we want to make sure that people are able to live, work and enjoy Cheshire East regardless of their background, needs or characteristics.

8.5. Human Resources

- 8.5.1.** A number of the proposals will impact on staff. See **MTFS report Appendix C, Section 1** for full list of change proposals.

8.6. Risk Management

- 8.6.1.** The steps outlined in this report mitigate the four main legal and financial risks to the Council's financial management arrangements:
- The Council must set a balanced Budget.
 - Setting the Council Tax for 2023/24 must follow a compliant process.
 - The Council should provide high quality evidence to support submissions for external assessment.

- That Council borrowing will comply with the Treasury Management Strategy which is underpinned by the Prudential Code.

8.6.2. A risk assessment of the significant proposals being put forward has been carried out by each service and is included as part of the planning process.

8.6.3. It is important to note that the Council faces significant financial challenges in achieving its desired outcomes. Management of risk is embedded within the organisation to ensure the Council can seize opportunities, introduce new, innovative models of service delivery, focus on improving outcomes for residents and review its range of services whilst identifying and controlling any resulting risks. The approach to risk management will continue to be assessed as the Council's plans and financial strategy are implemented.

8.6.4. See **MTFS report Appendix C, Annex 4** for further information.

8.7. Rural Communities

8.7.1. The Corporate Plan, along with the 'Green' aim and supporting priorities will have direct and indirect implications for our rural communities across Cheshire East. These impacts will be considered and reported through individual work programmes as they are developed.

8.7.2. The MTFS report provides details of service provision across the borough. See **Appendix C, Section 1**.

8.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

8.8.1. The Corporate Plan, along with the 'Fair' aim and supporting priorities will have direct and indirect implications for children and young people and cared for children which will be considered individually and in line with the actions required. These impacts will be considered and reported through individual work programmes as they are developed.

8.8.2. See **MTFS report Appendix C, Section 1**.

8.9. Public Health

8.9.1. The Corporate Plan, along with the 'Fair' aim and supporting priorities will have direct and indirect implications for public health which will be considered individually and in line with the actions required. These impacts will be considered and reported through individual work programmes as they are developed.

8.9.2. See **MTFS report Appendix C, Section 1**.

8.10. Climate Change

8.10.1. The Corporate Plan has a very strong environmental thread throughout with a specific aim for the Council to be 'Greener'.

8.10.2. A number of priorities and activities are listed which will support the Council's commitment of being carbon neutral by 2025, including the ongoing delivery of an Environmental Strategy and a Carbon Action Plan.

8.10.3. Also see **MTFS report Appendix C, Annex 3** for further information.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Alex Thompson Director of Finance and Customer Services (Section 151 Officer) Email: alex.thompson@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Forecast Outturn 2022/23 Appendix 2 – Revenue Budget Changes for the Period 2023/24 to 2026/27 Appendix 3 – Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2026/27 Appendix 4 – Revenue Grant Funding Appendix 5 – Earmarked Reserves
Background Papers:	Outturn Report 2021/22 (Finance Sub Committee Meeting) Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2022-26 First Financial Review (Corporate Policy Meeting) Financial Review 2022/23 (Finance Sub-Committee) Financial Update 2022/23 (Corporate Policy Meeting) Council 14 December 2022: Domestic Taxbase Report and Council Tax Support Scheme Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023-27 Consultation