

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Cabinet

14 February 2023

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| TITLE: | 2023/24 Budget & Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2026/27 |
| PORTFOLIO HOLDER | Cllr Worthington – Portfolio holder for Finance |
| CONTACT OFFICERS: | Keith Pointon – Head of Finance |
| WARDS INVOLVED: | Non-Specific |

Appendix Attached

- **Appendix A (Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2026/27)**
- **Appendix B (Capital Strategy 2023/24)**
- **Appendix C (Fees & Charges 2023/24)**
- **Appendix D (Procurement Forward Plan 2023/24)**

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present the proposed Budget for 2023/24, updated Medium-Term Financial Plan 2023/24 – 2026/27, Capital Strategy 2023/24, proposed Fees and Charges for 2023/24 and Procurement Forward Plan 2023/24.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet makes the following **recommendations** to Council:

- Approves the General Fund Budget for 2023/24 as detailed in **Appendix A (section 9)**
- Approves the revised Medium-Term Financial Plan (2023/24 to 2026/27) as detailed in **Appendix A**, including the revised Capital Programme (attached at Annex A)
- Approves the Capital Strategy 2023/24 as set out in **Appendix B**
- Approves the proposed Fees and Charges for 2023/24 as detailed in **Appendix C**

- Approves the proposed Procurement Forward Plan for 2023/24, providing the authority to procure based on procurement activity detailed in **Appendix D**
- Approves a Band D Council Tax of £163.14 for 2023/24 (0% change from 2022/23)
- Approves a Band D Council Tax of £52.92 for Leek and £10.64 for Biddulph for 2023/24 (0% change 2022/23) in respect of Special District Expenses
- Notes the Chief Finance Officer's view that the level of reserves are adequate for the Council based on this budget and the circumstances in place at the time of preparing it (**Appendix A, Annex C**)

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 This report makes recommendations to Council for the budget and the level of Council Tax for 2023/24. The report also provides an update on the Council's medium-term financial position through to 2026/27. Additionally, it establishes an overarching Capital Strategy, sets out the fees and charges that are proposed for 2023/24, and details the Procurement Forward Plan 2023/24.
- 3.2 The budget setting and medium term financial planning process provides the Council with the opportunity to plan its delivery of public services in accordance with local priorities. There are also risks around the outcomes of national funding reviews (i.e. fair funding; business rates retention; and new homes bonus) which may have a detrimental impact on the future financial position.
- 3.3 The current four year MTFP was updated in November 2022 to reflect further updated economic forecasts in order to begin to understand the medium term financial impact.
- 3.4 This version of the MTFP updates the November forecasts, based on the provisional settlement information released in December, latest economic forecasts, and assumptions around the timing and level of capital and revenue expenditure and income.
- 3.5 The 2023/24 local government finance settlement had some positive news, with additional one-off grant funding, but it was a one-year settlement, which maintains a level of uncertainty in the Plan and makes medium term financial planning more difficult.
- 3.6 A new Funding Guarantee Grant was announced, the Council receives £354,960. The continuation of the Services Grant, which was new in 2022/23 has been confirmed for 2023/24, where this was uncertain previously - the Council's share is £101,868. The Council also receives an allocation of £63,440 in Rural Services Delivery Grant and £98,160 in Revenue Support Grant. Aside from the Funding Guarantee Grant, which is treated as a one-off,

the plan assumes that these grants will be ongoing throughout the life of the MTFP.

- 3.7 Lastly, the Council receives £59,452 in New Homes Bonus for 2023/24. An assumption of the positive impact of growth on this grant is included in the following years of the MTFP.
- 3.8 In terms of costs, the Council will incur costs higher than originally anticipated when setting the MTFP last year. The pay award for this year (2022/23) was £1,925 across all pay grades (an average of 6%) and is likely to be at least 4% next year. The current MTFP had anticipated a 2.50% pay increase. General inflation will also be higher than anticipated last year, with an average consolidated rate in the 2023/24 budget of 5.2%, rather than 3.3%.
- 3.9 This leaves a balanced 2023/24 budget on both the revenue and capital side, but with greater uncertainty and risk in the MTFP for future years. Particularly so, as the outcomes from Government's business rates review, fair funding review, or new homes bonus review are all unknown.
- 3.10 In conjunction with stakeholders, the outputs of an 'Ideas Lab' exercise undertaken during the Autumn of 2022 are being developed and early expectations of the outputs of this to produce a new strategy are incorporated into this MTFP: a total of £690,000 is included in the plan, profiled across 2023/24 £0, 2024/25 £200,000, 2025/26 £240,000, 2026/27 £250,000.
- 3.11 The financial settlement allows for a 3% increase in Council Tax. It should be noted that Treasury's published figures do assume all Authorities maximise the increase. The way capping (or "referendum limits") works, if the maximum increase is not taken then that opportunity is lost forever (there is no way to catch up in subsequent years). However, a freeze of the Council Tax Band D equivalent at 0% increase from 2022/23 to 2023/24 is included in this budget.
- 3.12 Having completed the annual budget exercise, a balanced budget for 2023/24 has been achieved. The final General Fund budget proposal for 2023/24 provides for a net budget of £11,694,640 and a Council Tax increase of £0.00 on a Band D equivalent property (0%) with the Special District Expenses remaining at £52.92 (Leek) and £10.64 (Biddulph) respectively.
- 3.13 A new financial year (2026/27) has been added to the MTFP and the overall financial assumptions have been updated for the four years. It must be stressed that there is a great deal of uncertainty in regard to this position, both from the uncertainty of outcomes of national funding reviews (i.e. fair funding; business rates retention; and new homes bonus) and the extreme volatility of inflation, interest rates and geo-political influences.
- 3.14 The forecast predicts a balanced budget position by 2026/27 – on the basis the inflation and interest rates return to more normal levels and the Council can once again become self-sustainable (without reliance on reserves) – albeit with the risks identified above.

3.15 The Capital Strategy and the Capital Programme have been updated and allow for additional investment in priority areas. The Medium Term Financial Plan includes an updated Capital Programme of £23,721,000 over the period 2022/23 – 2026/27.

3.16 The Procurement Forward Plan sets out details of the expected activity during 2023/24.

4. How this Report Links to Corporate Priorities

4.1 The successful delivery of all corporate priorities is dependent upon the effective management of financial resources, which is the subject of this report.

5. Options and Analysis

5.1 This report recommends a Council Tax level and associated budget, Medium Term Financial Plan, Capital Strategy (and future capital programme) and Fees & Charges for 2023/24 designed to best deliver the Council's corporate priorities within a balanced budget. Other options are feasible, but any alternatives would need to robustly identify the service and financial implications, in order to satisfy the Council's Section 151 Officer (under the Local Government Finance Act 1988, section 114) of the need to deliver a balanced budget.

6. Implications

6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)
None.

6.2 Workforce
None.

6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment
This report has been prepared in accordance with the Council's Equality and Diversity policies.

An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken on the Corporate Plan, which feeds into budget plans.

6.4 Financial Considerations
There are substantial financial considerations contained throughout the report.

6.5 Legal
The Local Government Act 2000 states that it is the responsibility of the full Council, on the recommendation of the executive, to approve the budget and related council tax demand. The Local Government Act 2003, section 25 requires the council's Section 151 officer to report to the council on the robustness of the estimates made and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves assumed in the budget calculations. The Local

Government Finance Act 1988, section 114 requires the Section 151 officer to report to all of the Authority's councillors if there is likely to be an unbalanced budget.

6.6 Sustainability

An earmarked reserve has been established to support with climate change related activities. Climate Change considerations are indirectly included in many aspects of the MTFP – including capital programme projects focused on Council buildings and vehicle purchases, as well as being a consideration in procurement activity reflected in the Forward Plan. These are highlighted, wherever possible, in the MTFP report itself.

6.7 External Consultation

The Council's budget plans have been subject to a consultation.

6.8 Risk Assessment

A full risk analysis has been undertaken which is contained within the plan.

MARTIN OWEN
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**Web Links and
Background Papers**

Location

Contact details

Various background working papers

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