



Uttlesford District Council

Medium Term Financial Strategy



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January 2018



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Financial Outlook

The provisional settlement was announced on the 19 December 2017. The basis of local government funding has radically altered such that Councils' funding depends directly on growth and prosperity in their local economies.

The Council is facing ever decreasing funding allocations, the withdrawal of Revenue Support Grant and Rural Services Transition grant in 2018/19 and significant reductions in New Homes Bonus.

The government recognises that Local Authorities need to understand the level of revenue available for a period of more than one year and as such have provided a settlement that covers both 2018/19 and 2019/20.

A consultation on the method of distributing funding is currently being undertaken, the Fair Funding Review, this relates to how the centrally collected revenue (excluding Council Tax) and any other government grants/funding is allocated to councils across the country. This is calculated on a formula of needs basis. The new methodology will be implemented alongside the 75% Business Rates Retention scheme in 2020/21.

In the 2016/17 settlement Government offered all authorities the option to 'sign up' for a four year funding deal. This was to give authorities certainty and clarity over future years funding streams. The Council formally accepted the offer in October 2016 along with 97% of other Local Authorities and 2018/19 will be the third year of the agreement. Although it should be noted that the grants included in the settlement have little impact on the council's overall funding, as it does not include New Homes Bonus.

The key items announced in the 2018/19 settlement were;

- Council Tax - core increase in Band D from 2% to 3%, for 2018/19 and 2019/20
- Rural Services Delivery Grant - retained at the same level as 2017/18. Last year's settlement proposed a reduction in the 'pot' of £15.5m, but this has now been reversed and allocations will remain at the same level as previous years.
- New Homes Bonus – no changes, 4 year legacy payments and baseline maintained at 0.4%.
- Business Rates Retention – local share to increase from 50% to 75% from 2020/21, and will include transfer of public health and other grants.

Revenue Support Grant has now been completely withdrawn and Uttlesford are now reliant on the following sources of income and funding;

- New Homes Bonus
- Business Rates Retention Income
- Council Tax
- Rural Services Delivery Grant (indications are that this will reduce in future years)
- Fees and charges
- Investment income mainly from wholly owned subsidiaries

New Home Bonus (NHB)

The Government's target in the 2017/18 settlement was to reduce total payments from £1.5bn to £900m by 2019/20. The pressure on social care has meant the reductions were moved forward with a planned reduction of £250m in 2017/18 to create the new adult social care fund. The 2018/19

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settlement made no amendments to the NHB scheme as announced in the previous year's settlement and the funding allocations are based on;

- Legacy payments reducing to 4 years in 2018/19 (6 years to 5 years in 2017/18)
- A 'deadweight' factor or notional baseline was introduced in 2017/18; NHB allocations will include a reduction for natural growth of 0.4%. This means that payments are made only on the increase in the number of properties above the notional baseline (average national growth). For Uttlesford, this equates to approximately 144 properties for 2018/19.

Business Rates Retention

An Essex wide bid to become a pilot area for 100% Business Rates Retention was unsuccessful for 2018/19, it is expected that further pilot areas will be considered in 2019/20.

The original proposal for the roll out of 100% Business Rates Retention for all local authorities has been replaced with a revised scheme for 75% retention from 2020/21 for all non-pilot authorities.

The MTFS assumes a consistent level of Business Rates income for the 5 years as Government have said that any changes to the level of income retention will be fiscally neutral, whether it is 75% or 100%. The key questions that need to be confirmed are;

- Will there be extra responsibilities that local authorities will be required to take on?
- Will the appeals risk continue to be managed locally or will there be a central pot?

Appeals continue to be a challenge, although the financial risk has now reduced with any new appeals being subject to the new process of 'check, challenge and appeal', and they must be submitted within 3 months of the billing period and the back dating period being limited to April 2017.

Funding Reductions

The table below shows how government funding for Uttlesford has reduced over the last 3 years. This emphasises the need for new, more efficient ways of working and to look for innovative income generating opportunities.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Business Rates Retention*	2,689	2,568	2,042
New Homes Bonus	4,279	3,772	2,864
Rural Services Grant	285	225	225
Revenue Support Grant	684	255	0
Total Funding	7,652	6,820	5,131

* this does not include any surplus/deficits from the collection fund which can affect the overall financial position

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Investment Income

In 2016/17 the Council set up a number of arm's-length wholly owned companies, under the Aspire brand name, which are run on a commercial basis separate from the Council's normal business. The Council set up the companies to support the Council with new income streams; this is a direct result of the reducing Government funding and the need for all Councils to move towards a self-financing position.

Aspire has two arms

- Aspire Holdings (UDC) Ltd
- Aspire (CRP) Ltd

Aspire Holdings (UDC) Ltd has three subsidiaries of which two are dormant whilst the Property and Maintenance Company started trading, on a very small scale, as from 1 April 2017. The three companies are:

- Aspire Property and Maintenance Ltd
- Aspire Rentals Ltd
- Aspire Land Development Ltd

On 15 May 2017, Aspire (CRP) Ltd purchased a 50% share in Chesterford Research Park (which is part of the South Cambridgeshire Biotech Cluster) in a joint venture with Aviva Life and Pensions. The cost of the purchase of the 50% share was £47.25 million. Aspire (CRP) Ltd is borrowing the funds from the Council at a fixed interest rate of 4%.

The interest return on the loan to Aspire (CRP) Ltd generates, in a full year, an income in excess of £2m; this income stream now supports the budget shortfall from the government funding cuts as detailed in the section above.

Universal Credit

The transfer of all working age claimants from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit is now expected to be April 2022. If there are any delays in the rollout timetable this will have an impact on the Council's budget. The forecasted reduction in the Working Balance Reserve is entirely due to the fact that the Council budget will reduce following the rollout of Universal Credit.

There is a high risk that the actual level of claims transferred to Universal Credit will be significantly lower than that forecast by the Department for Work and Pensions, due to the large number of pensioner and other types of disregarded claims.

Budget Model

To inform the financial outlook for UDC, a detailed budget model has been prepared, the table below shows the direct service income and expenditure budgets.

	2018/19 £ '000	2019/20 £ '000	2020/21 £ '000	2021/22 £ '000	2022/23 £ '000
Gross Service Expenditure	37,573	34,488	31,833	29,685	27,853
Gross Service Income	(24,591)	(21,744)	(19,436)	(17,372)	(15,466)
Savings		(150)	(300)	(300)	(300)
Demand Growth		50	100	450	500
Service Expenditure	12,982	12,644	12,197	12,463	12,586

The following key inflationary assumptions are used in the model.

- Gross service expenditure and income:** Takes the 2017/18 base budget as a starting point and one-off items have been removed. Inflation has been included for salaries at 2%, utilities in line with the current market forecasts and 3% for fees and charges except where special arrangements apply e.g. car park charges and taxi licences.
- Universal Credit** – Assumed that Housing Benefits expenditure and subsidy will continue to phase out of the UDC budget in 2018/19 and Universal Credit to be implemented in full by **2022/23**. This is shown by the Gross service expenditure and income reducing year on year.
- Service demand** – Due to growing population and housing numbers, it is prudent to assume greater demand for council services such as refuse and recycling, revenues collection, etc. A cumulative figure of £50,000 pa has been used from 2019/20.
- Specific grants:** Housing Benefits subsidy at 98% of expenditure. Benefits admin subsidy being reduced to reflect rollout of Universal Credit.

	2018/19 £ '000	2019/20 £ '000	2020/21 £ '000	2021/22 £ '000	2022/23 £ '000
Capital Financing Costs	3,072	1,233	1,340	1,695	1,994
Pension Fund - Deficit			980		
Pension Fund - Added Years	85	85	85	85	85
Recharge to HRA/Corporate Core	(2,073)	(2,150)	(2,074)	(2,119)	(2,140)
Investment Income	(2,100)	(2,100)	(2,200)	(2,200)	(2,400)
Investment Cost	456	616	897	1,243	1,525
Corporate Costs	(560)	(2,315)	(971)	(1,295)	(935)

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e) Corporate items:

- Capital Financing Costs – are in line with the projected capital programme's financing requirements.
- Pension Fund deficit payment – 2020/21 shows a 3 year upfront payment is made to the Essex pension fund; a discount is received for the advanced payment.
- Recharges to HRA – based on the apportionment of actual costs of central services and corporate core applied to the Housing Revenue Account.
- Investment Income and cost – this is the estimated income generated from the investment in Chesterford Research Park and the subsequent cost of borrowing to fund the purchase. This model assumes no additional development at the Park.

	2018/19 £ '000	2019/20 £ '000	2020/21 £ '000	2021/22 £ '000	2022/23 £ '000
Business Rates Retention	(2,576)	(2,000)	(2,000)	(2,000)	(2,000)
Business Rates prior year Balance	534				
New Homes Bonus	(2,864)	(2,939)	(3,102)	(3,240)	(3,415)
Rural Services Grant	(225)	(225)	(225)	(225)	(225)
Council Tax prior year Balance	(14)				
Funding	(5,145)	(5,164)	(5,327)	(5,465)	(5,640)

f) **Business Rates Retention:** The Council currently retains 40% of business rates income collected, from 2020/21 government has announced that this will increase to 75% income retention, until we know how this will work; a prudent forecast has been included for future years.

g) **New Homes Bonus:** The model shows the announced figure for 2018/19. Future year's allocations are based on the latest funding analysis, using average growth in the area.

Council Tax

The MTFS has been prepared on the assumption that Council Tax will be increased annually by 2.99% in 2018/19 and 2019/20, the years beyond that are based on an increase of 1.99%. The Administration will be looking carefully at the Council's finances during the life of the MTFS and will take appropriate decisions depending on the circumstances at the time.

Tax base assumptions are in line with housing growth forecasts based on the average growth over the last five years, which equates to approximately 2%. An estimate of LCTS discounts has been made. These assumptions give rise to the forecasts in the following table.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Tax base	38,159	38,883	39,622	40,375	41,144
LCTS Discounts	(1,948)	(1,948)	(1,948)	(1,948)	(1,948)
Net Tax Base	36,211	36,935	37,674	38,427	39,196
Band D equivalent	147.21	151.60	154.62	157.70	160.84
Percentage Increase	2.99%	2.99%	1.99%	1.99%	1.99%
Council Tax income	(5,330,374)	(5,599,547)	(5,825,197)	(6,059,941)	(6,304,145)

General Fund – 5 year summary

	2018/19 £ '000	2019/20 £ '000	2020/21 £ '000	2021/22 £ '000	2022/23 £ '000
Gross Service Expenditure	37,573	34,488	31,833	29,685	27,853
Gross Service Income	(24,591)	(21,744)	(19,436)	(17,372)	(15,466)
Savings		(150)	(300)	(300)	(300)
Demand Growth		50	100	450	500
Service Expenditure	12,982	12,644	12,197	12,463	12,586
Capital Financing Costs	3,072	1,233	1,340	1,695	1,994
Pension Fund - Deficit			980		
Pension Fund - Added Years	85	85	85	85	85
Recharge to HRA/Corporate Core	(2,073)	(2,150)	(2,074)	(2,119)	(2,140)
Investment Income	(2,100)	(2,100)	(2,200)	(2,200)	(2,400)
Investment Cost	456	616	897	1,243	1,525
Corporate Costs	(560)	(2,315)	(971)	(1,295)	(935)
Total Net Expenditure	12,421	10,329	11,226	11,168	11,651
Business Rates Retention	(2,576)	(2,000)	(2,000)	(2,000)	(2,000)
Business Rates prior year Balance	534				
New Homes Bonus	(2,864)	(2,939)	(3,102)	(3,240)	(3,415)
Rural Services Grant	(225)	(225)	(225)	(225)	(225)
Council Tax prior year Balance	(14)				
Funding	(5,145)	(5,164)	(5,327)	(5,465)	(5,640)
Total Net Operating Costs	7,276	5,165	5,899	5,703	6,011
Movement in Reserves	(1,495)	(46)	(300)	325	325
MTFS Reserve	(450)	450			
Council Tax Requirement	5,331	5,569	5,599	6,028	6,336
Council Tax Income	(5,331)	(5,600)	(5,825)	(6,060)	(6,304)
(Surplus) / Deficit	0	(30)	(226)	(32)	32

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Sufficient reserves should be maintained to cover the eventualities that may arise from 2019/20 if the savings identified cannot be realised. The Council should proactively look for service efficiencies and income generating projects.

Due to the degree of estimation involved and the longer term projections referred to in the preceding paragraphs, it will be absolutely essential to maintain strong financial discipline around all aspects of the council's costs and income.

The Council must ensure it is in a strong position to anticipate and adapt to funding outcomes that differ from those currently assumed. Therefore any decision to incur additional costs (e.g. service investment) or to reduce income (e.g. fees & charges reductions) must be fully funded by sustainable cost savings and/or additional income elsewhere in the council's budget.

Reserves

Total General Fund usable reserves during this five year model are estimated to decrease from £8.940 million to £7.748 million, a reduction of £1.192 million.

This includes the addition of the surplus for 2018/19 which has been allocated to the Garden Communities Reserve, but excludes any in-year surpluses or deficits for future years.

To support future projects a new Developments Reserve has been created and it is planned that any in year surpluses will be allocated to this reserve.

A schedule of forecasted reserves balances is set out on the following page.

General Fund Reserves – 5 year summary

£' 000	1.4.2017	2017.18	31.3.2018	2018.19	31.3.2019	2019/20	31.3.2020	2020/21	31.3.2021	2021/22	31.3.2022	2022/23	31.3.2023
	Actual	Net Movement	Forecast	Net Movement	Forecast	Net Movement	Forecast	Net Movement	Forecast	Net Movement	Forecast	Net Movement	Forecast
USABLE RESERVES													
<u>Financial management Reserves</u>													
MTFS Reserve	1,000	0	1,000	(450)	550	450	1,000	0	1,000	0	1,000	0	1,000
Transformation Reserve	766	882	1,648	(630)	1,018	0	1,018	0	1,018	0	1,018	0	1,018
<u>Contingency Reserves</u>		0		0		0		0		0		0	0
Emergency Response	40	0	40	0	40	0	40	0	40	0	40	0	40
<u>Service Reserves</u>		0		0		0		0		0		0	0
New waste depot site	1,488	(1,000)	488	(488)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Planning*	519	41	560	(264)	296	(296)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Garden Communities	0	0	0	105	105	0	105	0	105	0	105	0	105
Developments	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Waste Management	201	0	201	0	201	0	201	0	201	0	201	0	201
Homelessness	40	24	64	0	64	0	64	0	64	0	64	0	64
Economic Development	121	(63)	58	0	58	0	58	0	58	0	58	0	58
Elections	50	25	75	25	100	(75)	25	25	50	25	75	25	100
Strategic Initiatives Fund	7,492	(5,573)	1,919	0	1,919	0	1,919	0	1,919	0	1,919	0	1,919
New Homes Bonus Ward Members	38	0	38	0	38	0	38	0	38	0	38	0	38
Voluntary Sector Grants	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Health and Wellbeing	27	(22)	5	(5)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Capital Slippage	0	92	92	0	92	0	92	0	92	0	92	0	92
Private Finance Initiative	87	96	183	80	263	0	263	0	263	0	263	0	263
TOTAL USABLE RESERVES	11,869	(5,498)	6,371	(1,627)	4,744	79	4,823	25	4,848	25	4,873	25	4,898
RING-FENCED RESERVES		0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Working Balance	1,268	118	1,386	16	1,402	0	1,402	0	1,402	0	1,402	0	1,402
Pension Reserve	0	0	0	0	0	325	325	(325)	0	300	300	300	600
Business Rates Reserve	1,034	0	1,034	(533)	501	0	501	0	501	0	501	0	501
Licensing Reserve	0	78	78	198	276	0	276	0	276	0	276	0	276
DWP Reserve	71	0	71	0	71	0	71	0	71	0	71	0	71
TOTAL RING-FENCED RESERVES	2,373	196	2,569	(319)	2,250	325	2,575	(325)	2,250	300	2,550	300	2,850
TOTAL RESERVES	14,242	(5,302)	8,940	(1,946)	6,994	404	7,398	(300)	7,098	325	7,423	325	7,748

*includes Planning, Development Control and Neighbourhood Planning

The forecast underspend for 2017/18 is not shown in the 5 year Reserves Strategy above nor however are the identified shortfalls in the years from 2019/20.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

Under the self-financing reform the Council took out a loan for housing stock of £88.4m. The debt has been structured so that it is repaid in years 6 to 30 i.e. from 2017/18 to 2041/42.

2018/19 will be the seventh year of self-financing and the second year of the principal repayment of the loan.

The HRA has completed an extensive programme of new builds and redevelopments of both social housing and sheltered housing units. The repayment of the loan principal has impacted significantly on the business plan, HRA reserves and future year's capital programme.

A review of the HRA Business Plan and the financing of the loans were undertaken in 2017/18, by Arlingclose Ltd (Treasury Management advisors) to ensure that maximum benefit is being obtained, both in terms of interest rates and also the ability for the HRA to continue to deliver new housing.

The review showed that complete refinancing of the loan would incur high penalty fees, the option that offered best value and allowed the business plan to continue to deliver a programme of development would be to re-borrow the amounts repaid in previous years as required.

The HRA is restricted with its borrowing due to the government imposed debt cap. Announcements in the Draft Finance Settlement stated that in 2019/20 Local Authorities would be able to apply to have their debt cap raised subject to certain criteria and we await further information regarding this.

A number of financial assumptions, including interest rates, rent setting, void rates, bad debt levels and repair costs have been used in the HRA Business Plan and revenue budget setting. These and other assumptions will be kept under review and monitored in 2018/19.

The table on the next page shows the predicted 5 year financial position for the HRA. The use of the HRA reserves and the 5 year reserve balances are detailed in the Reserves Strategy.

Housing Revenue Account – 5 year Summary

	2018/19 Original Budget	2019/20 Original Budget	2020/21 Original Budget	2021/22 Original Budget	2022/23 Original Budget
£ '000					
Dwelling Rents	(14,333)	(14,027)	(14,705)	(15,283)	(15,885)
Garage Rents	(214)	(216)	(218)	(220)	(222)
Other Rents etc	(3)	(3)	(3)	(4)	(4)
Charges for Services & Facilities	(851)	(860)	(868)	(877)	(886)
Contribution towards expenditure	0	0	0	0	0
Total Income	(15,402)	(15,106)	(15,795)	(16,384)	(16,997)
Housing Finance & Business Management					
Business & Performance Management	0	0	0	0	0
Rents, Rates & Other Property Charges	75	75	75	75	75
	75	75	75	75	75
Housing Maintenance & Repairs Service					
Common Service Flats	201	201	201	201	201
Estate Maintenance	148	148	148	148	148
Housing Repairs	2,379	2,379	2,379	2,379	2,379
Housing Sewerage	54	54	54	54	54
Newport Depot	19	19	19	19	19
Property Services	316	316	316	316	316
	3,117	3,117	3,117	3,117	3,117
Housing Management & Homelessness					
Housing Services	413	413	413	413	413
Sheltered Housing Services	583	583	583	583	583
	996	996	996	996	996
Other Costs					
Bad Debt Provision	100	100	100	100	100
Depreciation - Dwellings (to MRR)	3,567	3,295	3,435	3,435	3,435
Depreciation - Non- Dwellings (to MRR)	202	102	102	102	102
Interest/Costs re HRA Loan	2,615	2,604	2,613	2,601	2,570
Repayment of HRA Loan	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Investment Income	(15)	(15)	(15)	(15)	(15)
Pension Costs - Added Years	19	19	19	19	19
Pension Deficit - Triennial payment	0	0	158	0	0
Recharge from General Fund	1,675	1,675	1,675	1,675	1,675
HRA Share of Corporate Core	398	381	381	381	381
Right to Buy Admin Allowance	(10)	(10)	(10)	(10)	(10)
Total Non-Service Expenditure	10,551	10,151	10,458	10,288	10,257
Total Expenditure	14,739	14,338	14,645	14,475	14,444
OPERATING (SURPLUS)/DEFICIT	(663)	(768)	(1,150)	(1,909)	(2,553)
Transfer to/(from) Capital Receipts	(413)	(400)	(400)	(400)	(400)
Revenue balance available for capital financing	(1,076)	(1,168)	(1,550)	(2,309)	(2,953)
Capital Schemes Funded from Revenue	1,047	1,246	1,198	1,198	1,198
Transfers to/(from) Reserves					
Capital Projects	120	(78)	352	1,111	1,755
Change Management Reserve	0	0	0	0	0
Potential Developments	0	0	0	0	0
Sheltered Housing Reserve	0	0	0	0	0
Transformation Reserve	0	0	0	0	0
Working Balance	(92)	0	0	0	0
	28	(78)	352	1,111	1,755
(SURPLUS)/DEFICIT	(0)	0	0	0	0

Housing Revenue Reserves – 5 year Summary

Reserve £'000	2017/2018			2018/2019			2019/2020			2020/2021			2021/2022			2022/2023		
	Balance 01-Apr-17	Net Movement	Balance 31-Mar-18	Balance 01-Apr-18	Net Movement	Balance 31-Mar-19	Balance 01-Apr-19	Net Movement	Balance 31-Mar-20	Balance 01-Apr-20	Net Movement	Balance 31-Mar-21	Balance 01-Apr-21	Net Movement	Balance 31-Mar-22	Balance 01-Apr-22	Net Movement	Balance 31-Mar-23
<u>RINGFENCED RESERVES</u>																		
Working Balance	498	48	546	546	(92)	454	454	(2)	452	452	13	465	465	12	477	477	12	489
	498	48	546	546	(92)	454	454	(2)	452	452	13	465	465	12	477	477	12	489
<u>USABLE RESERVES</u>																		
<u>Revenue Reserves</u>																		
Revenue Projects	60	0	60	60	0	60	60	0	60	60	0	60	60	0	60	60	0	60
Transformation Reserve	180	0	180	180	0	180	180	0	180	180	0	180	180	0	180	180	0	180
	240	0	240	240	0	240	240	0	240	240	0	240	240	0	240	240	0	240
<u>Capital Reserves</u>																		
Capital Projects	3,809	(3,809)	0	0	120	120	120	(78)	42	42	352	394	394	352	746	746	1,755	2,501
Potential Projects Reserve	2,298	(2,298)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sheltered Housing Projects Reserve	318	(318)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	6,425	(6,425)	0	0	120	120	120	(78)	42	42	352	394	394	352	746	746	1,755	2,501
TOTAL USABLE RESERVES	6,665	(6,425)	240	240	120	360	360	(78)	282	282	352	634	634	352	986	986	1,755	2,741
TOTAL RESERVES	7,163	(6,377)	786	786	28	814	814	(80)	734	734	365	1,099	1,099	364	1,463	1,463	1,767	3,230