

Committee:	Council	Date:	21 February 2023
Title:	Medium Term Financial Strategy and 2023/24 Budget Proposals		
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Neil Hargreaves, Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Budget		
Report Author:	Jody Etherington, Assistant Director – Finance		

Summary

1. The Council is required to prepare detailed budget reports to enable the annual budgets for the General Fund and council tax, Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and the capital programme to be set.
2. The Section 151 Officer is required to provide members with a section 25 report giving advice and assurance on the reserves position, including the minimum safe level of contingency funds that need to be held, and the robustness of any estimates used in the calculation of the proposed budgets. The report also provides commentary on the assumptions in the Medium Term Financial Strategy and any associated plans and strategies.
3. In addition, the Council is required to prepare a number of supporting strategies on an annual basis:
 - Commercial Strategy
 - Medium Term Financial Strategy
 - Treasury Management Strategy
 - Capital Strategy
4. The Council is also required to consider and approve the council tax resolution for 2023/24 which sets the combined council tax charge in respect of the Council and its preceptors (Essex County Council, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex, and town and parish councils).

Scrutiny

5. The Scrutiny Committee reviewed all of the reports (except the council tax resolution) at its meeting on 31 January 2023.
6. The Investment Board reviewed the Commercial Strategy at its meeting on 19 January 2023, and recommended it as part of the budget setting process.
7. Proposed changes to housing rents and service charges in the HRA were presented to the Tenants and Leaseholders' Panel on 17 January 2023, and the Housing Board on 19 January 2023, and endorsed by both.
8. Cabinet reviewed all of the reports (except the council tax resolution) at its meeting on 9 February 2023, and the motion to recommend to Council for approval was carried unanimously.

Recommendations

9. The recommendations to Council are set out in the following table:

Report Title	Purpose of Report	Recommendations
Appendix A - Section 25 Report - Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves	A statutory report provided by the Section 151 Officer to provide members with advice and assurance on reserves, safe levels of contingency, assumptions used for budget estimates and any significant associated risks.	<p>Council is recommended to:</p> <p>(i) note and have regard to the Section 25 report when considering the budgets for 2023/24;</p> <p>(ii) note the risk assessment relating to the robustness of estimates as set out at paragraph 9 of the Section 25 report;</p> <p>(iii) set the working balances for 2023/24 at £1.782 million for the General Fund and £581,000 for the Housing Revenue Account;</p>
Appendix B - Commercial Strategy 2023-2028	Sets the Council's strategy with regards to its commercial investments.	(iv) approve the Commercial Strategy 2023-28;
Appendix C - Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-2028	Details all known factors affecting the financial position of the council over a 5 year period, providing a clear and concise view of future sustainability and resilience, allowing for effective medium term planning.	<p>(v) note the key risks and assumptions set out at paragraph 29 of the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-2028;</p> <p>(vi) approve the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-2028;</p>
Appendix D - Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24	Sets out the strategy and governance relating to the Council's cash-flow management, use of banks, investments and borrowing, taking into account guidance from our independent advisers and risk appetite.	<p>(vii) approve the changes to investment counterparty limits set out at paragraphs 52-54 of the Treasury Management Strategy, to apply with immediate effect;</p> <p>(viii) set the treasury management prudential indicators as set out at paragraphs 66-74 of the Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24;</p> <p>(ix) approve the Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24;</p>
Appendix E - Capital Strategy 2023/24	An overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future financial sustainability	<p>(x) set the capital prudential indicators as summarised at Annexe E2;</p> <p>(xi) approve the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement 2023/24 as set out at Annexe E1;</p> <p>(xii) approve the Capital Strategy 2023/24;</p>
Appendix F - Capital Programme 2023/24 - 2027/28	Sets out capital expenditure and the associated financing sources over a 5 year period.	(xiii) approve the Capital Programme 2023/24 - 2027/28, including the planned application of capital financing set out at Annexe F4;

Report Title	Purpose of Report	Recommendations
<p>Appendix G - Housing Revenue Account Budget 2023/24</p>	<p>Sets the detailed budget for the Housing Revenue Account for 2023/24, including the setting of rent and service charges.</p>	<p>(xiv) approve the increases in HRA rents as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General needs and supported accommodation – a 7% increase for existing tenants in accordance with the cap set by government, with formula rents to increase by the maximum permitted amount of 11.1% (to be applied only when properties are relet). - Temporary accommodation – rents to be increased in line with formula rents as in previous years (11.1%). - Garage rents – to be increased in line with September 2022 CPI (10.1%) <p>(xv) approve the increases in HRA support and service charges as set out at paragraphs 21-27 of the Housing Revenue Account budget report;</p> <p>(xvi) note the Equality & Health Impact Assessment at Annexe G4;</p> <p>(xvii) approve the Housing Revenue Account Budget 2023/24;</p>
<p>Appendix H - General Fund Budget and Council Tax 2023/24</p>	<p>Sets the detailed budget for the General Fund for 2023/24, including the proposals for the council tax precept and fees and charges.</p>	<p>(xviii) approve the Council Tax Requirement for 2023/24 of £6,694,027, equivalent to £171.61 for a band D property, representing a £5.00 increase on the 2022/23 amount;</p> <p>(xix) approve placing £195,036 (the equivalent of the 2023/24 band D council tax increase) into a Cost of Living Support Fund to support households in hardship through additional council tax discounts, as proposed by officers;</p> <p>(xx) approve the planned use of General Fund reserves during 2023/24 as set out at paragraph 47 of the General Fund budget report, including the use of £2.667 million from the Medium Term Financial Strategy reserve to balance the General Fund budget;</p> <p>(xxi) approve the reprofiling of spend on the Local Plan, and associated drawdown of reserves, as set out at paragraphs 29-34 of the General Fund budget report;</p> <p>(xxii) approve the schedule of fees and charges for 2023/24 as set out at Annexe H5;</p> <p>(xxiii) delegate authority to the Director of Finance and Corporate Services (Section 151 Officer) to set and/or amend fees and charges in relation to services which are operating in competition with commercial providers, for example trade waste;</p> <p>(xxiv) note the Equality & Health Impact Assessment at Annexe H6;</p>

Report Title	Purpose of Report	Recommendations
Appendix I - Budget Consultation Report 2023/24	Sets out the results of the budget consultation exercise undertaken to inform the budget setting process.	(xxv) approve the General Fund budget for 2023/24; (xxvi) note the contents of the Budget Consultation Report 2023/24;
Appendix J - Council Tax Resolution 2023/24	Sets the combined council tax charge for all property bands for the 2023/24 financial year	(xxvii) approve the Council Tax Resolution 2023/24 report; (xxviii) adopt the formal council tax resolution as set out at Annexe J1.

Financial Implications

10. All financial implications are included in the individual reports and strategies

Impact

Communication/Consultation	Tenant and Leaseholders' Panel, Members, CMT and budget managers
Community Safety	No specific implications
Equalities	See EqHIAs at Annexe G4 and Annexe H6
Health and Safety	Failure to recover the full costs of the HRA through rent and service charges may threaten the Council's ability to undertake safety critical work in the future
Human Rights/Legal Implications	The recommendations fulfil the legal requirement to set a balanced budget
Sustainability	Affordable rent levels and appropriate housing supply are an important factor in the sustainability of local communities and in particular rural communities
Ward-specific impacts	No specific implications
Workforce/Workplace	As detailed in the reports

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
As set out in the individual appendices. The most significant risks are summarised at paragraph 9 of the Section 25 report (Appendix A) and paragraph 29 of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (Appendix C).			