



# Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** Thursday, 12 January 2023  
**Time:** 10.00 am  
**Venue:** County Hall (Committee Room 1 or Council Chamber - to be confirmed),  
Dorchester, DT1 1XJ

## **Members (Quorum 3)**

Shane Bartlett (Chairman), Andy Canning (Vice-Chairman), Rod Adkins, Jon Andrews, Piers Brown, Barry Goringe, Mark Roberts, David Shortell, David Tooke and Bill Trite

**Chief Executive:** Matt Prosser, County Hall, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ

For more information about this agenda please contact Democratic Services  
Meeting Contact 01305 252209 / [lindsey.watson@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:lindsey.watson@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting, apart from any items listed in the exempt part of this agenda.

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## **Agenda**

<b>Item</b>		<b>Pages</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>APOLOGIES</b>	
	To receive any apologies for absence.	
<b>2.</b>	<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>	
	To disclose any pecuniary, other registrable or non-registrable interests as set out in the adopted Code of Conduct. In making their disclosure councillors are asked to state the agenda item, the nature of the interest and any action they propose to take as part of their declaration.	
	If required, further advice should be sought from the Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting.	

### 3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Representatives of town or parish councils and members of the public who live, work or represent an organisation within the Dorset Council area are welcome to submit up to two questions or two statements for each meeting. Alternatively, you could submit one question and one statement for each meeting.

All submissions must be emailed in full to [lindsey.watson@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:lindsey.watson@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk) by 8.30am on 9 January 2023.

When submitting your question(s) and/or statement(s) please note that:

- no more than three minutes will be allowed for any one question or statement to be asked/read
- a question may include a short pre-amble to set the context and this will be included within the three minute period
- please note that sub divided questions count towards your total of two
- when submitting a question please indicate who the question is for (e.g. the name of the committee or Portfolio Holder)
- Include your name, address and contact details. Only your name will be published but we may need your other details to contact you about your question or statement in advance of the meeting.
- questions and statements received in line with the council's rules for public participation will be published as a supplement to the agenda
- all questions, statements and responses will be published in full within the minutes of the meeting.

[Dorset Council Constitution](#) Procedure Rule 9

### 4. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

To receive questions submitted by councillors.

Councillors can submit up to two valid questions at each meeting and sub divided questions count towards this total. Questions and statements received will be published as a supplement to the agenda and all questions, statements and responses will be published in full within the minutes of the meeting.

The submissions must be emailed in full to [lindsey.watson@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:lindsey.watson@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk) by 8.30am on 9 January 2023.

[Dorset Council Constitution](#) – Procedure Rule 13

**5. BUDGET STRATEGY AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN**

5 - 70

To receive a report of the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer).

**6. URGENT ITEMS**

To consider any items of business which the Chairman has had prior notification and considers to be urgent pursuant to section 100B (4) b) of the Local Government Act 1972. The reason for the urgency shall be recorded in the minutes.

**7. EXEMPT BUSINESS**

To move the exclusion of the press and the public for the following item in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the meaning of paragraph x of schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

The public and the press will be asked to leave the meeting whilst the item of business is considered.

**There is no exempt business.**

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## **People & Health Scrutiny Committee & Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee 10 & 12 January 2023 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan strategy report**

### **For Review and Consultation**

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr G Suttle, Finance, Commercial & Capital Strategy

**Local Councillor(s):** All

**Executive Director:** A Dunn, Executive Director, Corporate Development

**Report Author:** Aidan Dunn  
**Title:** Executive Director – Corporate Development  
(S151 Officer)

**Tel:** 01305 221000

**Email:** [aidan.dunn@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:aidan.dunn@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

**Report Status:** Public

#### **Recommendation:**

The Scrutiny Committees are asked to review and comment on the budget proposals set out in the draft Cabinet report attached at Appendix 1 to this covering report and provide any feedback to Cabinet in time for responses to be included in the report being considered on 23 January 2023.

#### **Reason for Recommendation:**

The Council is required to set a balanced revenue budget, and to approve a level of council tax as an integral part of this. A balanced budget is essentially one where all expenditure is funded by income without unsustainable use of one-off or short-term sources of finance.

Part of the approval process includes the budget proposals being considered formally by Scrutiny Committees prior to Cabinet approval.

#### **1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 This report sets out proposals for Dorset Council's 2023/24 revenue and capital budgets and summarises the medium-term financial plan (MTFP),

- which covers the following four years to 2027/28. The report also includes the capital strategy and the treasury management strategy.
- 1.2 The budget proposals are built around the priorities identified in the Dorset Council Plan and were considered by the Dorset Council Scrutiny Committees on 10 and 12 January 2023. This paper contains details of Cabinet's responses to the matters raised by those Committees.
  - 1.3 This budget continues to reflect members' priorities of resource allocation into front line services wherever possible and this is reflected in the areas of growth set out in the analysis in this paper.
  - 1.4 In recent years, the Council's budget setting has taken place against a backdrop of a pandemic. Whilst the prominence of this global event may have waned, the impact is still being felt, not only through the virus still presenting itself and causing serious illness and death, but also in the aftermath of health and care systems coping with the continuing impact and the emerging arrangements, post-pandemic.
  - 1.5 This budget is being set against a global economic backdrop of high inflation, economic volatility, a cost-of-living crisis and industrial action across many public services.
2. **Financial implications**
    - 2.1 All covered within the Cabinet report.
  3. **Environmental implications**
    - 3.1 All covered within the Cabinet report.
  4. **Well-being and health implications**
    - 4.1 None specifically identified in the Cabinet report.
  5. **Other implications**
    - 5.1 None specific.
  6. **Risk Assessment**
    - 6.1 **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:  
Current Risk: High  
Residual Risk: High
  7. **Equalities Impact Assessment**
    - 7.1 The budget is a framework for the Council to achieve its priorities and the requirement to achieve a balanced budget is delivered through a number of key assumptions, and the delivery of programmes of transformational change.

7.2 The overall budget framework has not been the subject of a separate equality impact assessment but the programmes and changes upon which delivery of the budget will depend will themselves be assessed.

8. **Appendices**

8.1 Appendix 1 – Draft Cabinet report on budget and MTFP strategy

9. **Background Papers**

9.1 None

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# Cabinet

## 23 January 2023

### Budget strategy and medium-term financial plan (MTFP)

#### For Recommendation to Council

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr G Suttle, Finance, Commercial & Capital Strategy

**Local Councillor(s):** All

**Executive Director:** A Dunn, Executive Director, Corporate Development

**Report Author:** Aidan Dunn

**Title:** Executive Director - Corporate Development  
(S151 Officer)

**Tel:** 01305 221000

**Email:** aidan.dunn@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

**Report Status:** Public

#### Recommendation:

Cabinet is asked to agree and to recommend to Council:

1. the revenue budget summarised in Appendix 1;
2. the increase in general council tax of 1.9987% and 1.9987% in the social care precept, providing a band D council tax figure for Dorset Council of £1,905.93; an overall increase of 3.9974%;
3. to note the council tax base agreed by the S151 Officer earlier in this budget setting process;
4. no change to the current scheme of Local Council Tax Support as set out in this report;
5. the capital strategy set out in Appendix 3 and note the review in progress around the current capital programme and emerging bids;
6. the treasury management strategy set out in Appendix 4;
7. the assumptions used to develop the budget strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), as set out throughout this report and summarised in Appendix 5;

8. the recommended balances on earmarked reserves and on general funds, including the minimum level of the general fund, the application of a further £3.5m of reserves to support the safety valve agreement, and the repurposing of £3m of the Council's other reserves for spend-to-save investment in transformation;
9. the fees and charges policy set out in Appendix 6;
10. in making these recommendations, Cabinet is requested to consider and agree the responses to the recommendations and comments made as part of the budget scrutiny process (Appendix 7);
11. recommendations 1-6 from the 8 December 2022 Harbours Advisory Committee meeting regarding fees and charges, budgets and asset management plans;
12. agree and recommend to Council the flexible use of £5.3m of capital receipts for the purposes of transforming the Council's asset portfolio over the next three to five years. Work with DLUHC is ongoing to confirm this.

### **Reason for Recommendation**

The Council is required to set a balanced revenue budget, and to approve a level of council tax as an integral part of this. A balanced budget is essentially one where all expenditure is funded by income without unsustainable use of one-off or short-term sources of finance.

The Council is also required to approve a capital strategy, a capital programme and budget, and a treasury management strategy, each of which are included with this report.

The draft budget proposals have been considered by the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee and by the People and Health Scrutiny Committee and their recommendations are set out in appendix 8 for Cabinet consideration.

#### **1. Executive summary**

This report sets out proposals for Dorset Council's 2023/24 revenue and capital budgets and summarises the medium-term financial plan (MTFP), which covers the following four years to 2027/28. The report also includes the capital strategy and the treasury management strategy.

The budget proposals are built around the priorities identified in the Dorset Council Plan and were considered by the Dorset Council Scrutiny Committees on 10 and 12 January 2023. This paper contains details of Cabinet's responses to the matters raised by those Committees.

This budget continues to reflect members' priorities of resource allocation into front line services wherever possible and this is reflected in the areas of growth set out in the analysis in this paper.

In recent years, the Council's budget setting has taken place against a backdrop of a pandemic. Whilst the prominence of this global event may have waned, the impact is still being felt, not only through the virus still

presenting itself and causing serious illness and death, but also in the aftermath of health and care systems coping with the continuing impact and the emerging arrangements, post-pandemic.

This budget is being set against a global economic backdrop of high inflation, economic volatility, a cost-of-living crisis and industrial action across many public services.

This paper also provides an update on funding announced in the local government finance settlement on 19 December 2022.

## **2. Financial implications**

All covered within the report.

## **3. Well-being and health implications**

None specifically identified in this report.

## **4. Climate implications**

Protecting Dorset's natural environment is a key priority area, as articulated in the refreshed Council plan. Work is continuing to ensure that Council-wide approaches are embedded into both our operations and decision-making, and progress has been very strong with reductions in emissions of 26% from 2019 based on a number of significant financial commitments, including:

- The £10m Dorset Council capital has been invested into key areas such as fleet transition, electric vehicle infrastructure, street light replacements and estates.
- The £19m Salix Public Sector Decarbonisation scheme is now largely complete, with measures installed on over 200 buildings. Carbon emission reductions of around 20% on Dorset Council buildings have been achieved.
- An additional £2.7m has been secured for public electric vehicle infrastructure via the LEVI fund.
- The Low Carbon Dorset programme has completed projects with a total value of £15.1m, with another £2.3m total value contracted to complete by the end of January. The total value of projects is therefore likely to be £17.4m, and of this around £9m is match funding.
- Of the £4.5m allocated to Dorset for the Shared Prosperity Fund, around £400k has been provisionally allocated to support existing programmes.
- £385k of additional capital (including £285k of government funding) has been allocated to Healthy Homes Dorset programme to support Dorset Residents with home energy efficiency measures.

- £1.3m has been secured from Defra for Dorset to run the Farming in Protected Landscape scheme, which is being run by the Dorset AONB.
- Significant bids for funding have also been submitted to the Homes Upgrade Grant the Net Zero Pioneer funds.

As part of the ongoing re-alignment of resources towards the climate and ecological programme, during this financial year a Corporate Director has been appointed and four additional officers have now been added to the sustainability team. A climate and ecology operational group and Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) sub-group is now in operation, alongside a dedicated programme manager and programme support resources.

Communications support is now well embedded into the programme, and revenue support has been provided from the transformation team alongside wider Council support for the Low Carbon Dorset project. Significant officer time from throughout Dorset Council is now committed to running projects such as electric vehicle infrastructure, fleet and estates transformation. It is expected that this corporate approach and realignment of resources will accelerate further during the next few years.

## **5. Other Implications**

Nothing specific.

## **6. Risk assessment**

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: High

The Council is required to set a balanced budget. The financial climate remains extremely challenging, and the risks therefore remain high for all local authorities as we aim to deliver value for money and financial sustainability in a highly volatile environment.

The Council is forecasting an overspend in 2022/23. The Quarter 3 financial management report provides analysis of that estimate and is a separate item on the same agenda as this report.

The provisional local government finance settlement was published on 19 December 2022 and, though the Council is still working through the detail of some of this, headline conclusions and assumptions are set out in this report.

The short-term nature of the settlement is again a risk and affects our ability to plan for strategic service delivery in the longer term. This Council continues to call for a longer-term, rolling settlement which would provide greater certainty over resource levels.

Despite the mitigations and the governance framework around strategic and financial performance that the Council has in place, the S151 Officer deems the risk still to be *high*. Pressures continue to build in the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and around the High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

## 7. **Equalities impact assessment**

The budget is a framework for the Council to achieve its priorities and the requirement to achieve a balanced budget is delivered through a number of key assumptions, and the delivery of programmes of transformational change.

The overall budget framework has not been the subject of a separate equality impact assessment but the programmes and changes upon which delivery of the budget will depend will themselves be assessed.

## 8. **Appendices**

1. High-level consolidated revenue budget summary and directorate budget summaries
2. Council tax resolution (for the Council report only)
3. Capital strategy 2023-2028
4. Treasury management strategy 2023/24
5. Summary of financial planning assumptions
6. Fees and charges policy 2023/24
7. Response to the issues raised by the Scrutiny committees
8. Harbours Advisory Committee budget proposals for 2023/24

## 9. **Background papers**

[Medium term financial plan and budget update to Cabinet 4 October 2022](#)

## 10. **Introduction, context and priorities**

- 10.1 The refreshed Dorset Council Plan 2022-24 was agreed by Council in October 2022. The plan is underpinned by five key priorities for 2022-24 and details the steps we will take to deliver our vision to make Dorset a great place to live, work and visit.

**Driving economic prosperity** - We will support sustainable economic growth across the county, enabling high-quality jobs through improvements to productivity, sustainability, and accessibility, creating great places to live, work and visit.

**Creating stronger, healthier communities** - We will enable our residents, working with partners, to develop strong networks of support and maintain strong communities. We will focus on the most vulnerable in our communities to improve wellbeing and reduce inequality through

collaboration between public services, community leaders, residents and voluntary groups.

**Creating sustainable development and housing** - We will work with government, registered housing providers, community land trusts and local housing partners to deliver affordable, suitable and decent housing. We will ask for their support to help us promote our climate and ecological priorities by providing sustainable services such as rainwater harvesting, solar panels and other such approaches.

**Protecting our natural environment, climate and ecology** - We will improve access to, and use of, Dorset's environment in a sustainable way which protects it for future generations.

**Becoming a more responsive, customer focused council** - We will continue to be responsive, fair, and efficient in how we deliver services to our customers by listening and learning from their experiences. We will strive to constantly improve with an emphasis on innovation and working with you in a collaborative approach.

- 10.2 Aligned to the Dorset Council Plan, Cabinet has approved the Transformation Plan, which described the approach that the Council is taking to redesigning services, so that the Council's priorities can be met with the funding available.
  - 10.3 Significant progress has been made in delivering on these priorities. However, the Covid-19 pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis continues to prove to be a huge challenge. The impact on the Council's financial position and performance has been dramatic as income levels have fallen while service demand and expenditure has increased. There is still a substantial amount of risk and volatility around our assumptions, and this is covered in more detail later in this report. The local government finance settlement has been broadly positive despite some of the policy detail needing clarification.
  - 10.4 The challenge for 2023/24 and beyond continues to be how will the Council achieve a balanced budget whilst continuing to provide high quality services for the residents of Dorset.
- 11. Environmental volatility and uncertainty and budget assumptions**
- 11.1 It is extremely difficult to estimate how future inflation and other global events will be felt by local authorities. However, we are required by law to set a balanced budget and we must build our MTFP and budget strategy with the best information and knowledge we have available and with clarification around the risks involved and the mitigations supporting them.
  - 11.2 The latest budget assumptions are shown in the table in appendix 5 for transparency. It should be noted that these are forecasts of what will happen on top of the base budget that was built for 2023/24. We should also be clear that there are cases where the reader may disagree with the

assumptions – there may be a challenge around the level at which we have set inflation, for example.

- 11.3 The approach to inflation for 2023/24 has been to include pay inflation of 4% and to add 6% for general inflation. The Council expects a continuation of good contract management practice with suppliers to ensure productivity, efficiency and sustainability are also reviewed at the same time as the scope for price increases. The Council’s budgets are essentially cash limited and we cannot therefore afford to award full inflationary uplifts for all service contracts.
- 11.4 As well as general inflation, the budget proposals make provision for further, specific inflation where we know that this is going to be necessary – and in some cases, where we have received specific grant from Government to deliver this, such as the expectations around increases in care markets resulting from increases in the minimum wage. A summary of price increases built into the budget across directorates, in addition to general inflation, is shown in the table below.

	<b>Original assumption 2023/24</b>	<b>Revised assumption 2023/24</b>
Council tax increase	<2%	<2%
Council tax base growth	0.75%	1.2%
Social Care Precept	1%	2%
Business rates growth	0.50%	4.67%
Pay award	2.00%	4.00%
General inflation	2.50%	6.00%
Increase in fees & charges	2.50%	5.00%
Employer pension contribution	0% +£750k	0% -£988k

**12. Fees and charges**

- 12.1 An average increase in fees and charges that the Council levies has also been estimated at 5%. For some services the charges will be higher, and in others it will be lower.
- 12.2 The Council has also developed a fees and charges policy for full implementation from 2023/24. This is attached at Appendix 6. The policy has been through the Corporate Leadership Team and Senior Leadership Team and has also been considered by the Place & Resources Overview Committee on its way to Cabinet as part of this budget strategy.
- 12.3 Implementation and subsequent monitoring to ensure the success of policy objectives is a significant step towards the Council covering more of its costs and placing less demand on general funding. Increasing income also comes with increased risk, however, especially when operating in a competitive market. As revenues grow, so does risk and the resource required to manage new business efficiently.

### 13. Provisional local government finance settlement

- 13.1 The local government finance settlement was announced on 19 December 2022. It followed the publication of a finance policy statement on 12 December that set out Government's intentions for the local government finance settlement for the next two years.
- 13.2 The Council is still working through the detail of the statement, but the headlines and assumptions we are making and including in the budget strategy are set out below and throughout the rest of this report.
- 13.3 Headline information for the sector is shown in the table below, for the five years Dorset Council has been established. More detail follows on the Council's own draft settlement figures.

Illustrative Core Spending Power of Local Government:					
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Settlement Funding Assessment	14,559.6	14,796.9	14,809.7	14,882.2	15,671.1
Compensation for under-indexing the business rates multiplier	400.0	500.0	650.0	1,275.1	2,204.6
Council Tax Requirement excluding parish precepts <sup>1</sup>	27,767.8	29,226.9	30,308.2	31,922.5	33,838.4
Improved Better Care Fund	1,837.0	2,077.0	2,077.0	2,139.8	2,139.8
New Homes Bonus	917.9	907.2	622.3	556.0	290.6
Rural Services Delivery Grant	81.0	81.0	85.0	85.0	85.0
Winter Pressures Grant <sup>2</sup>	240.0	-	-	-	-
Social Care Support Grant	410.0	-	-	-	-
Social Care Grant <sup>3</sup>	-	1,410.0	1,710.0	2,346.4	3,852.0
Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund	-	-	-	162.0	-
ASC Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund <sup>4</sup>	-	-	-	-	562.0
Lower Tier Services Grant	-	-	111.0	111.0	-
ASC Discharge Fund	-	-	-	-	300.0
Services Grant	-	-	-	822.0	464.2
Grants rolled in	231.6	232.3	238.1	238.6	-
Funding Guarantee	-	-	-	-	136.0
Core Spending Power	46,444.9	49,231.4	50,611.4	54,540.5	59,543.8
Change in CSP (£ millions)	-	2,786.5	1,380.0	3,929.1	5,003.3
Change in CSP (%)	-	5.66%	2.73%	7.20%	8.40%

#### Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA)

- 13.4 SFA is the local share of business rates and revenue support grant (RSG). Members will recall that Dorset Council has received no RSG up until this point – in fact our RSG was negative and was offset by the Government by using the central share of business rates. However, for the 2023/24 settlement, Government has rolled some other grants into RSG meaning that Dorset Council now receives £654k from this funding source.
- 13.5 Contextually, RSG nationally is being increased by CPI% for 2023/24 before grants are rolled in so those that continue to receive it will benefit from this funding growth. Dorset Council finds this a particularly unhelpful aspect of the national funding arrangements.

#### Business rates

- 13.6 The business rates multiplier is being frozen at 0.499 but councils will be compensated for this through S31 grant. The exact quantum of this is



unclear at present until we complete our own business rates modelling work.

- 13.7 Dorset Council does not simply take the headline figures for business rates budgets from the settlement, this means we do not set a budget which has the same core spending power (CSP) uplift as the settlement. Dorset Council has allowed for around £2m increase in the business rates yield in 2023/24 but there is too much risk in setting a less prudent estimate before the NNDR1 figures are produced. The Council does its own calculations based on circumstances we understand better locally than are modelled in Government's formula.

Council tax

- 13.8 The announcements have confirmed that the existing limit for a local referendum will be raised to 3% – so a proposal to increase council tax by 3% or more will trigger a local referendum. There is also provision for councils with social care responsibilities to raise the adult social care precept by a further 2%. These changes apply for 2024/25 as well as 2023/24. Dorset Council has not yet made any policy decisions around council tax levels beyond 2023/24.

- 13.9 These budget proposals include a core council tax increase of 1.9987% and an adult social care precept increase of 1.9987%. The proposed total increase is therefore 3.9974%, which results in an annual band D council tax charge of £1,905.93. This is an increase of around £1.41 per week on the 2022/23 charge. The council tax charges proposed for each band for 2023/24, for Dorset Council only, are set out in the table, below.

2023/24	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H
<b>Core</b>	£1,110.84	£1,295.98	£1,481.12	£1,666.26	£2,036.54	£2,406.82	£2,777.10	£3,332.52
<b>Social Care Precept</b>	£159.78	£186.41	£213.04	£239.67	£292.93	£346.19	£399.45	£479.34
<b>Total</b>	£1,270.62	£1,482.39	£1,694.16	£1,905.93	£2,329.47	£2,753.01	£3,176.55	£3,811.86

- 13.10 The council has calculated its tax base as 152,424 band D equivalent properties, compared with 150,617.9 for the previous year. The Council is also anticipating a £1.6m surplus on the council tax collection fund for 2022/23 and this is factored into the 2023/24 budget as one-off funding.

Public sector pay

- 13.11 Public sector pay costs increased significantly in 2022/23 with the implementation of the £1,925 increase across all spinal column points. This added around 8% to Dorset Council's pay bill.
- 13.12 As noted earlier, for 2023/24 the assumed pay increase is 4%, which amounts to approximately £6m.
- 13.13 The national living wage (NLW) will increase by 9.7% to £10.42 from 1 April 2023. It will apply to people aged 23 and above, and the Government continues to aim for a NLW which is two-thirds of median incomes by 2024.

Delaying charging reform – repurposed funding

- 13.14 Government has already announced that charging reforms for adult social care will be deferred by two years from the planned implementation date of October 2023. What is now clear is that £1.265bn in 2023/24 and £1.877bn in 2024/25 will be distributed as additional funding to the social care grant as a repurposing of that funding. More details on Dorset Council's share of the fund are below.

New grant funding for discharge

- 13.15 £300m in 2023/24 and £500m in 2024/25 is being made available nationally. This is 50% of the funding announced for this purpose at the Autumn Statement – NHS England will receive the other 50%. Funds will have to be pooled through the Better Care Fund (BCF) process, but this is in addition to the existing BCF rather than repurposing. More details on Dorset Council's share of the fund are below.

Ringfenced grant to support capacity and discharge

- 13.16 Nationally, £400m in 2023/24 and £683m in 2024/25 is being provided in a separate, ringfenced grant for capacity and discharge. More details on Dorset Council's share of the fund are below.

Fair cost of care funding

- 13.17 £162m nationally is being made available in each of the next two years to support further work on the fair cost of care. This started in 2022/23 and is therefore a continuation of the funding to support work in this area. Dorset Council receives £1.2m through this fund.

Services grant

- 13.18 The Services Grant will be reduced from £822m to £464.2m nationally. The Government suggests this is to account for the cancellation of the increase in National Insurance Contributions and to route some funding to the Supporting Families programme.
- 13.19 The distribution of the remaining grant will continue to follow the Settlement Funding Assessment as previously. Dorset's allocation of this grant amounts to £1.7m compared with £3.1m in 2022/23.

New homes bonus

- 13.20 The New Homes Bonus will continue in 2023/24 with a new round which will attract no legacy payments. Dorset Council's allocation is £1.8m in 2023/24, compared with £3.8m in 2022/23. This reduction had been assumed in our budgeting work.

Rural services delivery grant

- 13.21 The rural services delivery grant will remain unchanged, Dorset Council's share is £2.5m in 2023/24.

Lower tier services grant

- 13.22 The lower tier services grant (£111m nationally) and a proportion of expired new homes bonus legacy payments (£276m nationally) will be repurposed to guarantee that all authorities will see an increase in Core Spending Power (CSP) of at least 3%, before additional council tax income is factored in.
- 13.23 Dorset Council's position is such that we do not benefit from this fund as our increase in CSP is above 3%.

#### Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

- 13.24 The Government has announced the extension to the statutory override for the DSG for the next three years from 2023/24 to 2025/26. In practical terms this means that the cumulative overspend on the DSG will not fall to be funded from the Council's reserves but will instead continue to be treated as a separate, negative reserve on the Council's balance sheet.
- 13.25 Cabinet's approval is also sought for the Council's safety valve agreement with the Department for Education (DfE) in the form of an additional £3.5m of reserves in 2023/24 to reduce the cumulative overspend. Previous planning assumptions were that this would be funded from the revenue budget.

#### Dorset Council core spending power (CSP) changes

- 13.26 The table below sets out year-on-year changes in the published CSP figures. The settlement was broadly in line with our expectations. Additional funding for social care was provided but this will be neutral to the budget and is as described above in this report, with further detail in the service-specific areas below.

Illustrative Core Spending Power of Dorset Council:					
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Settlement Funding Assessment	43.6	44.3	44.3	44.3	46.6
Compensation for under-indexing the business rates multiplier	1.4	1.8	2.3	4.5	7.8
Council Tax Requirement excluding parish precepts <sup>1</sup>	241.3	251.5	263.9	276.0	292.2
Improved Better Care Fund	10.4	12.1	12.1	12.5	12.5
New Homes Bonus	3.8	3.0	1.7	3.8	1.8
Rural Services Delivery Grant	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.5
Winter Pressures Grant <sup>2</sup>	1.7	-	-	-	-
Social Care Support Grant	2.9	-	-	-	-
Social Care Grant <sup>3</sup>	-	9.0	9.4	13.3	22.3
Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund	-	-	-	1.2	-
ASC Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund <sup>4</sup>	-	-	-	-	4.0
Lower Tier Services Grant	-	-	0.4	0.4	-
ASC Discharge Fund	-	-	-	-	1.7
Services Grant	-	-	-	3.1	1.7
Grants rolled in	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.2	-
Core Spending Power	308.7	325.2	337.7	362.7	393.2
Change in CSP (£ millions)		16.5	12.6	25.0	30.5
Change in CSP (%)		5.35%	3.86%	7.40%	8.41%

## **14. Local council tax support (LCTS) scheme**

- 14.1 Dorset Council was established on 1 April 2019 and, since then, has applied a 90% LCTS. This was initially agreed by the Shadow Executive and Shadow Council and is subsequently confirmed by the Cabinet and Full Council each year.

- 14.2 LCTS replaced the National Council Tax Benefit Scheme in 2013. It is means tested and is based on customers' circumstances. If successful, an applicant can reduce their council tax liability by up to 100%. In line with government criteria, the Dorset scheme provides that older people and working age customers who are vulnerable may receive a reduction of up to 100% of their council tax liability. For working age customers who are not vulnerable, awards are capped at 90%.
- 14.3 So, for example, a working-age customer who is not vulnerable has a council tax charge of £2,000 per year. Based on their income and household circumstances, they are entitled to maximum council tax support. The maximum support is limited to 90% of the charge, so their award would be £1,800 and they will still have to pay the remaining £200.
- 14.4 The cost of the LCTS scheme is met by the collection fund in the same way as council tax discounts, exemptions and reliefs. The cost of the scheme for the 2021/22 was £29m, the cost of the scheme in 2022/23 will be advised as part of the current year's outturn reporting.
- 14.5 In preparing this budget strategy report, consideration has been given to the current scheme to assess if it is still fit for purpose. Officers have reviewed the scheme and propose no changes for 23/24. We have given full consideration to the effectiveness of the scheme and the impact of covid 19 and the cost-of-living crisis on our current customers and are satisfied that no proposals should be made at this time.
- 14.6 We continue to monitor the scheme and have scheduled a full review during 2023/24. Any potential modelling and option changes which will be subject to full, detailed public consultation to ensure Dorset residents continue to receive the most suitable, affordable support.
- 14.7 As part of the Autumn Statement 2022 it was announced that Local Authorities would be provided with funding under the Council Tax Support fund. Recipients of LCTS with a balance to pay in respect of the 2023/24 liability will be awarded £25 towards reducing any sum due. If the total amount to pay is less than £25 they will be granted the amount due up to £25 as accounts cannot be placed in credit. Customers will not need to claim this additional support as entitlement will be calculated and applied on their behalf.
- 14.8 As of 1 December 2022, Dorset Council was providing LCTS to 22,320 claimants.

## **15. Flexible use of capital receipts**

- 15.1 Dorset Council is undertaking a service reconfiguration of both its Assets & Property department and Regeneration and Economic Development functions.
- 15.2 A whole-system approach to converging these two strategic functions will lead to the delivery of restructuring leading to transformation. £5.3m of previously unallocated capital receipts will be used to fund the service

reconfiguration, structural changes, and operating model refinements to provide the Council with a centralised, corporate landlord property and asset management approach as agreed by Cabinet in November of 2020.

- 15.3 Changes will result in increased strategic capacity, new business partnering roles into the services, additional delivery capacity, and further operational support capability to identify and drive additional land and asset reviews to release surplus sites generating further longer-term revenue savings for the authority whilst providing land holdings primarily for residential and economic development activities.

**16. MTFP process and budget development**

- 16.1 The budget approved in February 2022 showed there was a MTFP gap, including planned savings, of £20.775m from 2023/24 to 2026/27, of which £15.069m arose in 2023/24.
- 16.2 Following on from a review of our assumptions and accumulating cost and demand pressures, the budget gap moved on as summarised in the table below, which was presented to Cabinet on 4 October 2022.

Budget Gap as at 18/01/22	£15,069,868
Increase in tax base growth	(£650,853)
Increase in central grants	(£880,000)
Increase in specific grants	(£11,956,608)
Additional estimate for pay award	£2,898,034
Additional estimate for inflation	£11,219,553
Additional income from fees and charges	(£2,068,056)
Additional estimate for energy	£952,807
Supporting DSG plan	£3,500,000
Fair cost of care allocations	£7,773,668
Reduce MRP	(£1,000,000)
Reduce interest paid for capital programme	(£1,000,000)
Additional income	(£598,000)
Reduce Adult Care Packages	(£5,692,372)
Reduce LAC packages	(£1,291,350)
Adults & Housing pressures	£1,468,634
Place pressures	£3,600,504
Children pressures	£3,614,830
Corporate pressures	£4,235,008
Estimated cost of increments	£3,500,000
Additional 2022/23 pay award	£6,848,345
Adults & Housing savings	(£300,000)
Place savings	(£4,825,856)
Corporate savings	(£377,358)
Reduction of Transformation	(£5,000,000)
Budget Gap as at 22/09/22	<u>£29,040,798</u>

- 16.3 It was clear that rising demands were having an impact on the MTFP and increased the budget gap from £15m to £29m. Cabinet requested that officers should work with their Portfolio Holders and Lead Members to consider a wide range of transformation and efficiency savings that would close the budget gap.

- 16.4 Over the time since then, officers have worked through a number of savings and transformation options to help close the budget gap. This

information was shared with all members at informal briefings. This work has enabled the budget gap to be closed as follows:

Budget Gap as at 22/09/22	£29,040,798
Increase in council tax yield	(£3,424,528)
Increase in business rates growth	(£2,008,443)
Change in grants	(£1,218,085)
Change in inflation	£80,221
Change of DSG support to reserves	(£3,500,000)
Decrease in Adults pressures/savings	(£6,100,900)
Decrease in Corporate pressures/savings	(£1,451,699)
Decrease in Children's pressures/savings	(£1,250,026)
Decrease in Place pressures/savings	(£967,831)
Reduction of pay estimates built in centrally	(£2,199,193)
Change in LGPS secondary rate	(£1,738,000)
Change in collection fund surplus	(£1,600,000)
Reduction in contingency	(£1,262,314)
Use of grant funding	(£2,500,000)
Reduction in rent recovered	£100,000
Budget Gap as at 22/12/22	£0

## 17. Setting a balanced budget

17.1 In the October budget report to Cabinet, we reflected that all budget work needs process and method, and these must be structured around a framework – in this case, a draft statement of principles – to be used in developing the budget. The principles were intended to be constructed as helpful language to be used to describe how we would do our work to balance the budget and take difficult decisions about how to deliver the priorities and outcomes in the Council Plan. The principles are:

- i) we will not balance the budget strategy by using reserves
- ii) resource allocation will be driven by the Dorset Council Plan and priorities
- iii) services should be protected where possible but clearly demonstrate value for money and improved efficiency
- iv) we should seek to maximise the savings from becoming a unitary council
- v) we will develop short-term and long-term transformational savings plans
- vi) we will continue to take an increasingly commercial approach
- vii) we will use best practice around business cases for our decision making and we will be open to invest to save opportunities

- viii) budgets should be realistic to achieve the objectives of the council and we must hold ourselves to account for their delivery and sound financial management.
- 17.2 These principles were in turn built upon the Council's priorities as set out in the plan approved by Council and summarised earlier.
- 17.3 Aligned to the Dorset Council Plan, Cabinet approved the Transformation Plan, which described the approach that the Council will take to redesigning services, so that the Council's priorities could be met with the funding available.
- 17.4 Significant progress has been made in delivering on these priorities. However, the legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the rapid rise in inflation have had a dramatic impact on the Council's financial position and performance. There is still a substantial amount of risk and volatility around our assumptions.
- 17.5 The Council continues to face cost pressures specifically relating to the state of the global economy and these have been well documented in quarterly financial management reports to Cabinet, in specific briefings and in the budget update provided for Cabinet in October. More detail on budget movements is shown in the appendices to this paper and these should be read alongside the directorate updates below.

## **18. New financial strategy**

- 18.1 During 2021/22, as part of the response to the challenge of complex financial management during the pandemic, the Cabinet agreed a new financial management strategy statement.
- 18.2 The previous strategy had been written as a short-term policy prior to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and was mainly concerned with seeing the Council through the first year or so as a new organisation. However, the pandemic caused a pause in many areas of work, including on the financial strategy, meaning it was only approved by Cabinet on 8 November 2021.
- 18.3 The strategy was subsequently revised and approved by Cabinet as part of the review of the outturn for 2021/22 and preparations for the budget round for 2023/24. It brings together many aspects of the Council's business including financial management, commercialism, procurement, treasury, investments and reserves and is a document which underpins all financial management, including this budget strategy. It is essential reading alongside this report and will continue to be updated annually as part of the budget preparation work.
- 18.4 The only notable – and exceptional - departure from the financial management strategy for 2023/24 is that £3.5m of contributions from reserves are being used to support the SEND strategy through the safety valve agreement with the DfE. This was previously planned to come from

revenue budget contributions, but reserves will be used instead in 2023/24 to make a one-off contribution to reduce the cumulative debt. Funding has been earmarked for this purpose.

## 19. Summary budget proposals

- 19.1 Analysis of budget movements and savings is set out in the individual Directorate/Service sections of this report and in the appendices. If adopted, this budget strategy will deliver a balanced budget in 2023/24 and the following gaps, still to be resolved, for the following years of the MTFP.

	<b>Previous Year Budget</b>	<b>MTFP Yr1 Budget Setting</b>	<b>MTFP Yr2</b>	<b>MTFP Yr3</b>	<b>MTFS Yr4</b>	<b>MTFP Yr5</b>
	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>2024-25</b>	<b>2025-26</b>	<b>2026-27</b>	<b>2027-28</b>
DC net Budget	333.226	347.262	368.858	382.781	395.212	413.403
DC Funding resources	333.227	347.262	355.044	363.628	372.448	381.508
<b>Gap (Surplus) / Deficit</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>13.815</b>	<b>19.153</b>	<b>22.763</b>	<b>31.895</b>

## 20. Directorate-level context updates

- 20.1 This section of the report deals with the budget contexts for each of the Council's directorates.

### Adults Services & Housing

- 20.2 Adults Services and Housing have had the first year post-Covid where we have had to support the costs of Hospital Discharges with no additional funding. Through the Integrated Care Board (ICB), partners are seeking a way to rebalance demand across the out-of-hospital pathway, improve system resilience and improve outcomes for people.
- 20.3 A step towards this is the accelerator programme, which is jointly funded with our health colleagues through the Better Care Fund (BCF). This is a positive step forward which aims to deliver new bedded reablement services, investment in creating capacity across the community to support long-term care through homecare, and a model of trusted assessment which will minimise hospital assessment for ongoing care need and speed up the discharge process.
- 20.4 In year, a national fund of £1.36bn was allocated to support changes to the fee levels paid by local authorities, and the associated reform of commissioning systems that will be required. The Council was required to do three things to access the fund:



- undertake 'cost of care' exercises for 65+ care homes and 18+ domiciliary care settings;
  - develop a market sustainability plan, using the cost of care exercises as a key input to identify risks in the local market, with a final plan to be submitted in February 2023; and
  - submit a spend report detailing how funding allocated for 2022/23 is being spent in line with the fund's purpose.
- 20.5 Dorset Council was allocated £1.152m in 2022/23 which was used alongside additional, non-recurrent funding from health, to move towards paying the fair cost of care to its providers based on the findings from the cost of care exercise.
- 20.6 As set out in the Autumn Statement, the government is making available up to £2.8 billion of additional funding in 2023/24 and up to £4.7 billion in 2024/25 to support adult social care and hospital discharge. The biggest funding increase for adult social care in history.
- 20.7 This will put the adult social care system on a stronger financial footing and improve the quality of and access to care for those who need it, and includes:
- £600 million in 2023/24 and £1 billion in 2024/25 will be allocated through the Better Care Fund to support hospital discharge, helping people regain or maximise independence as soon as possible and freeing up NHS beds for those who need them;
  - £1.3 billion in 2023/24 and £1.9 billion in 2024/25 will be distributed to local authorities through the Social Care Grant, ringfenced for adult and children's social care;
  - £400 million in 2023/24 and £680 million in 2024/25 will be distributed to local authorities through a ringfenced grant for adult social care.
- 20.8 The overall 2023/24 budget proposed for Adults and Housing is £160.641m before savings. This includes £19.412m of additional funding as set out below:
- pay-related cost increases and utility increases (£2.409m)
  - increases in care market costs (£11.649m)
  - housing general inflation (0.056m)
  - fees and charges increase (-£1.445m)
  - market sustainability and fair cost of care (£3.997m)
  - cost of discharge programme (£1.746m)
  - cost to support reforms (£1.0m).

- 20.9 The above pressures have been offset by 2023/24 transformation savings (£3.40m), tactical savings (£2.873m) and additional grant funding of (£7.185m) as follows:
- £1.746m through the Better Care Fund to support hospital discharge, helping people regain or maximise independence as soon as possible and freeing up NHS beds for those who need them;
  - £3.997m to support the Market Sustainability Plan and Fair Cost of Care to be fully delivered by 2025;
  - £1.443m for additional social care support.
- 20.10 The total net budget for Adults and Housing for 2023/24 is £147.183m, an increase of £5,953m.
- 20.11 Adult Social Care and Housing have developed a ten-year plan that will look to deliver improved outcomes and greater financial sustainability to manage future demand and market sustainability. The programme looks to deliver prevention, short term care, quality, and sustainability through six programmes of work.
- 20.12 There are risks within all budgets, particularly those demand-driven services that sit within Adults and Housing services. All modelling and strategic budget planning has been based on the best information and projections available. However, pressures and demands are subject to change, and this can have a significant budgetary impact.

#### Children's Services

- 20.13 The overall budget proposed for Children's Services is an increase of £3.368m, to £77.804m, an increase of 4.5%.
- 20.14 The Directorate's ambitious, five-year transformation plan is a key component of the 2023/24 budget, along with the *Dorset Children Thrive* locality model and closer working with partners from various agencies, delivering six priorities, including all children and young people within Dorset having the best start to life. Remodelling budgets to deliver these priorities remains a critical activity.
- 20.15 2023/24 will be the third year of the Children's Services transformation programme, with projected in-year savings of £3m. There have also been savings of £0.935m for the third year of The Harbour project in Weymouth.
- 20.16 Budget increases centre on two main themes for 2023/24; pressures that impact all council services, such as pay inflation, general inflation and cost of increments and pay awards (£5.586m); and specific budget increases for Children's services, totalling £2.47m.
- 20.17 Specific budget increases cover nine areas designed to support Children's priorities, including the best start to life for all children and young people. A summary is provided in the table below.

Area	Description	£m
Pay related and General changes	As per all Directorates, additional funding for pay awards, increments and other pay adjustments. This also includes fees and charges and gas and electricity changes.	5.586
High Needs Block Recharge update	The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2022 have been reviewed to identify appropriate expenditure for the HNB recharge. Changes annually.	0.328
Special Guardianship Order increased costs	Increase in the number of children with SGOs, therefore reducing the number of Children in Care. After a transitional period, financial allowances are assessed.	0.250
Children who Are Disabled Services - Intensive Support Packages	Increased need in support packages for children with complex needs to live at home. This covers overnight short breaks demand and cost pressures.	0.695
Impact of the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Minors	Dorset's revised Nation Transfer Scheme threshold is 67 (from 47). This is part of an Unaccompanied Minors strategy. This requirement is to fund non-placement costs (e.g. Social Workers, Interpreters, Personal Assistants).	0.366
Children's Advice and Duty Service (ChAD) - New staffing structure	Formalise ChAD as a 7-day service, including bank holidays and weekends, operating from 8am – 8pm only during this time.	0.300
Inflationary increase in Premature Retirement Compensation budget	Children's Services hold Premature Retirement Costs, Dorset Council's Pensions team have advised that these need to be increased to match nationally agreed pension increases.	0.180
Leaving Care service development	The number of Care Leavers in Dorset will exceed the number of Children in Care this year. To fulfil our statutory responsibilities and ensure the best life chances, additional posts are required to support these young people.	0.150
Keeping In Touch service capacity	Additional posts to ensure court-ordered contact between child and family can be facilitated.	0.105

Area	Description	£m
Growing our own: Student Social Workers	Part of a strategy to have 21 Student Social Worker positions by 2025	0.100

- 20.18 The Children in Care model has been updated to reflect the cost of the current cohort in 2023/24, assumed new entrants and leavers, inflation and the application of the transformation programme as most transformation projects within Children’s affect the Children in Care cohort, now and in the future.
- 20.19 Nationally, Children’s Services budgets are under significant pressures. Understanding the national context and identifying appropriate risks is important when setting a budget. There is one clear message; Children’s Services nationally are experiencing significant service pressures and will potentially be subjected to a major policy shift within the next 1-2 years.
- 20.20 The County Council Networks (CCN) states the national picture for part of Children’s Services budgets
- “With demand and costs rising each year, councils overspent their Looked After Children budgets by £450m last year – a 9% overspend.”
- 20.21 Dorset does buck this trend though, for example through the locality model and maintaining early help services, the 2021/22 outturn position was £0.8m, or 1%, over budget.
- 20.22 However, Dorset Council is not immune to the experiences of other local authorities, particularly the weekly costs of external providers. The 2021 Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) report into Children’s Social Care stated;
- “The CMA’s market study found that large private sector providers of fostering services and children homes appear to be making higher profits in England and Wales than the CMA would expect in a well-functioning market. This suggests that local authorities may be paying more for these services than they need to...”
- 20.23 The Sufficiency Strategy for Dorset Council is delivering the creation of more in-house residential provision, and investing in our fostering service, however this takes time to deliver and is a challenge with the current construction market.
- 20.24 The Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) have highlighted Nationally an increase in the number of children being taken into care while waiting long periods for children and adolescent mental health services [CAMHS], often at significant cost.

- 20.25 Children's Services are likely to experience a major policy change during 2023 as the Children's Social Care reforms (based on the MacAlister independent review) are announced:
- "The review's final report argued that the current children's social care system was "increasingly skewed to crisis intervention, with outcomes for children that continue to be unacceptably poor and costs that continue to rise". It concluded that "for these reasons, a radical reset is now unavoidable".
- 20.26 The report said that without fundamental changes the number of children in care would increase from the current level of 80,000 to 100,000 in 2032. It also said that costs could increase from £10bn to £15bn per year. It indicated that implementing its recommendations would lead to 30,000 more children living safely and thriving with their families by 2032 compared with the current trajectory.
- 20.27 The report set out its conclusions and recommendations in the areas of family help, child protection, family, the care market, the care experience and the workforce." (Source: House of Lords Library).
- 20.28 Dorset is already implementing many of the independent report's recommendations, however a full assessment will be required when more detail is available. Additional funding may be announced to support the implementation of the review's recommendations.
- 20.29 Dorset Council is part of the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). Nationally set thresholds have risen from a requirement to take 47 to 67 unaccompanied children during 2022/23, and potentially will change again during 2023/24. Home Office funding does not necessarily cover the full costs for supporting these young people, and therefore this remains a risk.
- 20.30 In summary, there is still significant risk within the 2023/24 Children's Services budget, including the delivery of the ambitious transformation programme, wider demand pressures, appropriate funding and support from partner organisations and expected policy change.
- 20.31 To mitigate some of this risk, ringfenced Social Care grant of £3.7m has been made available to the Directorate. This grant will provide a degree of stability as Children's services enters what could be a very challenging and changeable period.

#### Place Directorate

- 20.32 The overall budget proposed for the Place Directorate is an increase of £4.962m, to £86.718m, just over 6%. Gross expenditure is £155m, with £68m of income earned, specific grants, or other contributions.
- 20.33 The approach for developing the Place Directorate budget for 2023/24 attempts to take account of much of the turbulence seen in the current year. The primary issue is to deal with the impact of high inflation as

experienced on a national level, as well as funding the national pay awards. Where possible, Place Directorate has attempted to mitigate these rising costs through increases in fees and charges and absorbing other service-specific pressures through savings measures.

20.34 It should be acknowledged that the budget as proposed has uncertainty in some areas meaning that it is not risk-free. The major issues in each area are discussed below.

20.35 The main components of the budget increase are:

- pay awards and other related central adjustments £7.519m
- energy cost pressures £1.066m
- service-specific pressures £1.476m
- savings proposals £5.119m

20.36 Our arrangements for energy costs are via a purchasing consortium and is known as LASER. Costs are known for the period October 2022 to September 2023, but costs for the second half of the year are not yet clear. This is the same arrangement that has been in place for Dorset Council since inception, but the risk of inadequate budget setting for 2023/24 is considerably higher than in previous years due to the significant price rises seen in the international energy market.

20.37 The current year has benefitted from favourable prices in relation to our recyclate disposal. Forecasting for recyclate prices is notoriously difficult, given the nature of the global markets. Nonetheless, we are proposing a small improvement compared with the current year's budget (not the actual performance) and at the same time highlight this risk as a potential call on contingency to act as a buffer against the market volatility. Setting the budget for recyclate price can never be considered risk-free.

20.38 Additional funding is proposed to be added to the budget for service specific pressures, but only where there is a near unavoidable commitment to do so. The major items within the service specific pressures are:

- funding of inflation with Waste contracts £958k
- Dorset Travel £360k
- vehicle fuel £250k
- flood defence staffing £150k
- Waste Operations – part year of collection crew £106k
- Waste Strategy – from 1 January 2023 legislation relating to persistent organic pollutants will be enforced (£100k).

These are partly offset by service specific new income for rent receivable for Coombe House and South Walks House.

20.39 Dorset Travel is facing cost pressures of circa £2.5m in the current year. There is a national picture where all aspects of travel, but especially SEND transport, are facing significant cost increases - well above the rate of inflation. There are two things of note within these budget proposals regarding travel. Firstly, significant emphasis is now being placed on transport transformation, with the intention to reduce overall cost. Whilst it is hoped that transformation will reduce costs, there is the contingency budget which could be used to mitigate the risk. Secondly, given the wide range of issues facing Dorset Travel and in some recognition of these issues, the budget has been increased by £360k.

20.40 The vehicle fuel budget has been increased by 6% as part of the default budget assumptions and by a further £250k for fuel-specific pressures. This is to reflect the high price increases seen during the summer of 2022, resulting in a considerable forecast of overspend for the current year. At the time of writing, vehicle fuel prices have been on a slow but steady reduction, but the risk remains. The addition of a further £250k should address vehicle fuel prices in 2023/24 if there is no deterioration. It is also worth noting a potential but unconfirmed rise in vehicle fuel duty as part of the Government's spring budget statement, which is not budgeted for.

20.41 There is a total of £5.119m of savings assumed within the proposed budget, which budget holders will need to deliver. Three of the most significant savings proposals are:

- reduction in the running costs of the property estate due to disposals £531k
- net savings arising from the customer transformation programme £500k
- net savings arising from the transport transformation programme £250k.

The remainder of the savings proposals (£3.838m) are numerous and are not set out in full here especially given that a small number of these are sensitive and still subject to consultation. However, these can be summarised as additional income generation, service efficiencies and robust in vacancy factor assumptions.

20.42 The Harbours Advisory Committee met on the 8 December 2022 and set out the harbours 2023/24 budget considerations. For reference, the reports are attached as an appendix 8 to this report. The proposals are based on assumptions and principles that are consistent with those used for the rest of the Dorset Council budget but acknowledging that any surplus generated remains ringfenced for each individual harbour. There are no specific items arising to draw to the attention of Cabinet or Council.

Public Health Dorset

20.43 Public Health Dorset is a shared service established to provide public health functions to the two unitary authorities, Dorset Council and BCP Council. In order to fulfil statutory duties to improve health and wellbeing, and reduce inequalities in health, both Councils receive a ring-fenced grant from the Department of Health and Social Care. This is passed to councils via the DLUHC. The grant must be used to provide mandated public health services, but it can also be used to support wider interventions to improve health and wellbeing.

20.44 Each of the Councils retains part of the grant to deliver services outside the scope of the shared service agreement, but still within grant conditions. Grant allocations for 2023/24 are not yet available.

#### Corporate Services

20.45 The overall budget proposed for Corporate Services is an increase of £5.2m, to £35.574m.

20.46 The proposals incorporate identified budget pressures of £5.8m partially offset by cost reductions of £0.5m. The increase is largely related to pay, pension and inflationary changes together with reductions in some income streams. Further details are identified in Appendix 1.

20.47 Corporate Services consists of the Corporate Development Directorate, Business Insight, Intelligence and Communications, and the Legal and Democratic Services teams.

20.48 The role of Corporate Services is threefold:

- to provide direct support and services to residents (e.g., the Revenues and Benefits team and the Land Charges Service)
- to support colleagues in the Place Directorate, in Children's Services and in the Adults and Housing Directorate so they can provide the best services they can within financial and legal constraints
- to provide those essential corporate services required of an organisation of our size and scale.

20.49 During 2022/23 the department has continued to provide crucial services which have enabled the Council to function as well as continuing to deliver significant front-line response including business grants, enhanced business rates reliefs, and other national initiatives.

## **21. Transformation and savings opportunities**

21.1 Savings proposals and additional income targets included within the budget proposals are summarised in the table, below.



	Savings	Additional Income
Adults	(£4,773,000)	(£1,500,000)
Children's	▶ (£3,935,000)	
Corporate	(£33,850)	(£85,000)
Place	(£2,348,013)	(£2,771,310)
Total Service Savings	(£11,089,863)	(£4,356,310) ▶
Central Finance	(£4,750,312)	
Total Savings	(£15,840,175)	(£4,356,310)

21.2 Work continues to identify savings and transformation over the longer term for continuing input into the MTFP and the budget strategy. This work is regularly reviewed through the relevant Boards and Committees.

## 22. Risk

### General uncertainty, the pandemic and a single-year settlement

22.1 There is risk in any set of budget proposals. Like every council – and Government itself - we are facing a number of potential scenarios each of which carry varying levels of volatility and uncertainty in our planning assumptions. Whilst Government has provided some policy ambition for 2024/25, these aims will be subject to the regular process of consultation as well as national and global events between now and when the next settlement is announced.

22.2 The Council is limited in what can be done at this stage to mitigate much of the environmental and economic risk, but we will remain focused on delivery of the work programmes required to support services to Dorset's residents, within the budget available. Continuous monitoring of the agreed budget will be key to ensuring we keep abreast of the operating environment and make important, well-informed, timely decisions about our activities and their consequences.

### Dorset Council post-LGR

22.3 Dorset Council is fortunate in that local government reorganisation enabled it to reduce its cost base, identify adequate resources to see it through its early years and set a robust reserves strategy for the future. But reserves cannot be relied on as a sustainable source of finance, we can only spend them once and doing so reduces our capacity to mitigate the risks that reserves provide for, as well as reducing resilience against unknown future events (see budget principles and the section on reserves elsewhere in this paper).

### Inherent volatility in demand

22.4 Even without the impact of Covid-19 and then the cost-of-living crisis, there was considerable risk around our planning assumptions for growth in demand and pressure on costs. The funding proposals set out in this

paper provide for reasonable forecasts of growth in demand for Adults' Services and Children's Services but both locally and nationally, demand for people services continues to challenge capacity and budgets.

#### Transformation and savings risks

- 22.5 There is also inherent risk in any transformation programme or other tactical savings plan in ensuring the right work is done in sufficient time to realise savings in line with the plan. These things are not always entirely within the Council's control – some will involve consultation, others require specific resources to be deployed to deliver them and as we saw during the pandemic, sometimes these plans cannot be delivered because officer time and effort is reprioritised elsewhere.

#### Inflation

- 22.6 There is also still significant inflationary pressure in the economy. The November inflation rate eased slightly to 10.7% and opinion remains divided on whether this is a shorter-term, temporary phenomenon, or whether it will be longer-term, and sustained. Either way, it is important for the Council to include an element of price increases in its financial plans although we cannot provide for all of this because our budgets are effectively cash limited.
- 22.7 Our approach to inflation is therefore to provide for general inflation at 6% and further specific inflation within service budgets where we know there will be particular pressures. It will be necessary for us to continue to carry out effective contract management so that we ensure that a robust and value for money approach is taken to supplier increases. We cannot afford to simply increase contract prices by inflation. We will work positively with our supply chain to discuss all aspects of contract performance – including pricing – but this must be within the context of overall affordability within the Council's budget. It is also the reason that we are recommending that some of the unallocated funding from the settlement is added to contingency for the time being.

#### High Needs Block

- 22.8 Dorset Council, like many other authorities nationally, has an accumulated overspend on the High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).
- 22.9 The Regulations in place to provide for the current accounting treatment of this deficit were due to fall away on 1 April 2023 but this has now been deferred until 1 April 2026. The immediate risk of this overspend falling to the Council to fund has therefore subsided but longer-term risk remains that the overspend will fall to be funded by councils.
- 22.10 Dorset Council is already implementing an ambitious plan to deliver additional, high-quality capacity and to achieve outstanding provision within the budget envelope, but this will take time as well as the resources

the Council has already committed to the programme. Dialogue with DfE continues.

#### Future national strategy implementation

- 22.11 There is considerable risk around the implementation of future national strategies for care services. We know that adult social care cap and associated reforms have been deferred for two years but as we have seen, additional funding is still being provided.
- 22.12 There are further reforms which will impact on the MTFP in due course and these will be built into the Council's financial model as and when more policy and financial detail is available.

#### Risk management and reporting

- 22.13 The Council has robust governance and reporting processes around risk and concerns around containing expenditure within the budget can be escalated through this framework at any time. The S151 Officer is required to provide assurance as part of the budget strategy, and this is set out later in this report.
- 22.14 The S151 Officer has also commissioned SWAP to review the work that has been done to underpin the assurance statement that is given in this budget report and that will be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee in due course.

### **23. Reserves, balances, contingency and resilience**

#### General funds

- 23.1 The balance of Dorset Council's general fund closed at £33.2m on 31 March 2022. Any overspend in the current year will impact on that balance unless it is financed via the use of other reserves.
- 23.2 In 2018 the Shadow Council commissioned an independent report from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) which recommended that the Council should retain a minimum of 5% of its budget requirement as a general fund reserve. The S151 Officer recommends this approach is continued for 2023/24 and with reference to the net budget requirement calculation set out in Appendix 1, Cabinet is recommended to agree a minimum level for the general fund of £17.35m.
- 23.3 However, as in previous years with similar risk and volatility of planning assumptions, prudence would suggest that it would be better to hold a higher level of general reserves to provide for risks which are not mitigated through specific, earmarked, reserves. Cabinet is therefore recommended to set a level of general reserve at double the value of this minimum level, £34.7m and that the operating range therefore be set at £17.35m to £34.7m. Outside of these parameters, intervention will be required to lower or raise the general fund balance.

#### Other reserves and reserves strategy

- 23.4 As well as the general fund, the Council has other earmarked reserves which are set aside to mitigate against specific risks that may arise during the year or beyond. These reserves cannot be repurposed without impacting on the mitigation they provide against the risk profile of the organisation. A fuller narrative on risks and reserves was provided as part of the 2021/22 outturn [report](#) to Cabinet and no change to those reserves is proposed at this stage other than for the general fund and for the support for the safety valve agreement.
- 23.5 In its policy announcement on 12 December, Government signalled its intention to sustain focus on the levels of councils' reserves, particularly given the substantial increases in balances seen at some councils during the pandemic years. The Government will explore a potential user-friendly publication on local authority reserves, using data currently collected through the local authority revenue expenditure and financing (outturn) statistics. The exact use to which this information will be put remains uncertain at this stage.

#### Contingency budget

- 23.6 It is prudent for any organisation to set a contingency budget to provide for unforeseeable circumstances arising during the year. The key is to set the contingency budget as accurately as possible, so it strikes a good balance between allowing the organisation to manage risk whilst not causing a diversion of material funds away from front line services where there are clearly continuing pressures.
- 23.7 For 2022/23, the contingency budget was set at £9.5m and provided for some fairly specific risks around inflation and pay award costs being in excess of funding provided in services own base budgets. These risks remain, although our assumptions are that they will be at a level that causes less risk and pressure for the contingency budget. Despite this however, it is still recommended that the Council sets the contingency budget at £8.2m. This represents 2% of the net budget.

#### Resilience

- 23.8 The proposed level of the general fund, the specific, earmarked reserves available, and the contingency budget all support resilience alongside a robust budget process that has taken place during the budget setting process.
- 23.9 The Council is also continuing to develop its value for money framework and reports are regularly taken to Audit & Governance Committee on this subject. Value for money is a key and continuing cornerstone of good governance and it is essential that it is embedded in every financial decision we make. Given the financial pressures that are building in the system, and continuing price and demand pressures on the Council's budgets, value for money is essential in managing what are essentially cash-limited funds whilst delivering excellent value services for residents.

## **24. Capital programme**

- 24.1 The Council's capital programme was impacted significantly by the pandemic and EU exit in particular, and the problems this has caused with the supply chain, and now inflation in the construction sector continue to cause slippage.
- 24.2 In presenting the Qtr2 finance report to Cabinet in November, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Cllr Gary Suttle, indicated that a review of the programme would be needed as the Council could be trying to deliver too many projects. Since then, further work has been started to review existing projects as well as new bids coming forward for 2023/24, but this work has not yet concluded.
- 24.3 At this stage, the S151 Officer is therefore advising against further projects being approved as part of the budget setting process. It is possible that some currently approved projects will cease or be deferred as part of the current review, and this will allow the programme to be reprioritised.
- 24.4 As long as we proceed within the currently agreed capital total, there will be no further pressure on the revenue budget. The treasury management budget itself is also currently outperforming its targets due to slippage in the capital programme, high cash balances available for investment and reduced borrowing. These factors allow some headroom for capital spend in 2023/24 if that is the result of the review work. Staying within our agreed capital total will not put further pressure on the revenue budget in 2023/24. There are currently bids for £47m for 2023/24 but these are not being considered until the review work concludes.
- 24.5 No new detail is therefore provided for the capital programme over and above what was approved in the 2022/23 budget, as updated by quarterly financial management reports. The headlines can therefore be summarised as:
- £106.2m of slippage brought forward from previous years into 2022/23
  - £140.3m in total of funding that was approved for 2022/23 in the capital programme
  - £39.7m of spending that was for 2023/24 when the 2022/23 MTFP was approved.
- 24.6 The agreed capital programme to 31/03/2024 therefore amounts to £180m. As well as the outcomes from the current review, there are also likely to be further projects and programmes that arise during the year through funding from external resources, and these will be incorporated into the programme and reported to Cabinet each quarter.
- 24.7 Members might however, wish to note and agree the proposals to continue with a capital contingency budget and a minor works budget. Both of these currently work well and allow flexibility to address

unforeseeable pressures that arise in the year without recourse to Cabinet in advance.

- 24.8 The commitment to the capital programme in this budget round therefore amounts to almost £260m in total.

## **25. Engagement with and scrutiny of the budget**

- 25.1 The proposals set out in this budget strategy and MTFP have been developed over a considerable period. The Council operates a ten-year, rolling financial model and this is consolidated into a five-year MTFP, the first year of which is the budget. Although the proposals for 2023/24 have therefore been some time in the making, it is in the year of preparation that any budget proposals come under most scrutiny.

- 25.2 In order to make the development of the budget inclusive, there have been a number of briefing sessions for members during the year. There are also specific directorate-focused arrangements in place for Portfolio Holders and Lead Members and any member can ask questions or request information about financial management at any point.

- 25.3 As well as quarterly financial reports to Cabinet to keep all members abreast of budget development, there is also a separate and specific paper on early stages of budget process, principles and strategy which went to Cabinet in October 2022. Following this, was a good level of member engagement before during and after the two informal briefing events that took place prior to the meeting of the People and Health Scrutiny Committee and the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee in 7 January 2023. Feedback from both Committees along with Cabinet responses is set out in appendix 7.

- 25.4 Cabinet is receiving all of these, post-scrutiny proposals for consideration and recommendation to full Council in February 2023.

## **26. Consultation, communication and equality**

- 26.1 The 2022/23 budget proposals are driven by the Dorset Council Plan and priorities. The Plan was initially agreed by Council in February 2020 following wide consultation with partners, the public, local businesses, Town and Parish Councils, employees and other stakeholders throughout Dorset. More than 1,600 responses were received through the consultation, and these were used to shape - and continue to shape - the new Council's priorities, as reflected in the budget proposals and MTFP.

- 26.2 The Executive Director for Place also leads consultation with the business sector and managers throughout the organisation share information regularly with businesses in the supply chain to ensure they are aware of and can contribute to the conversations around priorities and resources.

## **27. Other factors influencing budget strategy development**

- 27.1 The Council's **Transformation Plan** is aligned to help deliver the Council plan and is focused on:

- a) Being more commercial – Modernising the way we operate to ensure we are business friendly, to behave in a more business-like way and commission as one council.
  - b) Putting our customers first – Working together to design and deliver modern, accessible services to our customers.
  - c) Delivering climate and ecological priorities – Ensuring our change programme delivers in line with our climate and ecological strategy.
  - d) Making the best use of our assets and leading economic growth – Reviewing the council buildings and properties to ensure best use and value of assets and help drive prosperity whilst adopting a focus on places and spaces.
  - e) Implementing a digital, intelligent, data led approach – Using our data to help us predict demand and improve our prevention agenda.
  - f) Working with the Integrated Care System – Working with partners to transform our care services by removing traditional divisions between services, and ensure people and communities get the support and care that they need
- 27.2 The **Property Asset Management Strategy** continues to be implemented as the Council “right-sizes” its estate after convergence of the predecessor councils’ property portfolios. The plan describes the options to acquire, retain and divest property that will help us deliver transformed services, generate capital receipts, reduce running costs and help the Council operate in a modern and efficient way.
- 27.3 The Asset Management Strategy dovetails with the **Dorset Workplace Strategy** which enables the Council to deliver better services more flexibly in a range of ways to meet Dorset residents’ needs.
- 27.4 Delivering better value is also the aim of our developing **Commercial Strategy**. Cabinet has previously approved a new Procurement Strategy and we now look to strengthen our commercial approach further with the **fees and charges policy** (appendix 6)
- 28. S151 Officer assurance**
- 28.1 Part 2 (Section 25) of the Local Government Act 2003 requires officers with responsibilities under s151 of the Local Government Act 1972 to make a statement regarding the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of reserves at the time the budget is set.
- 28.2 There are also other safeguards aimed at ensuring local authorities do not over-commit themselves financially. These include:
- the Chief Financial Officer's powers under section 114 of the Local Government Act 1988, which requires a report to the Cabinet and to all

members of the local authority if there is or is likely to be unlawful expenditure or an unbalanced budget;

- the Local Government Finance Act 1992, which requires a local authority to calculate its budget requirement for each financial year, including the revenue costs which flow from capital financing decisions. The Act also requires an authority to budget to meet its expenditure after taking into account other sources of income. This is known as the balanced budget requirement;
- the Prudential Code, introduced under the Local Government Act 2003, which has applied to capital financing and treasury management decisions;
- the assessment of the financial performance and standing of the authority by the external auditors, who give their opinion on the council and the value for money it provides as part of their annual report to those charged with governance.

28.3 The robustness of the budget critically depends on the maintenance of a sound financial control environment including effective financial management in each of the Council's service directorates. Dorset Council's scheme of financial management sets out the responsibilities of all those involved in managing budgets and incurring commitments on behalf of the Council. The revised financial strategy statement is also a key document in setting out financial management arrangements, responsibilities and strategy for the Council.

28.4 Whilst financial projections are based on realistic assumptions, known demand and well-formed models, some budgets are subject to a degree of estimation error as actual expenditure can be determined by factors outside of the Council's control, for example demand for provision for adults with complex needs. Some activity is also subject to more volatility and things can change very quickly and unexpectedly.

28.5 It is also generally not appropriate or affordable to increase budgets simply to reflect overspends in current or previous years. A reasonable degree of challenge to manage within the resources available is necessary and monitoring of expenditure, in order to take corrective action if necessary, is particularly important during a time of budget reductions.

28.6 The Council has well-developed arrangements for financial monitoring during the year. Budget performance is reported quarterly through the Cabinet and scrutinised by a number of other committees, including Audit & Governance Committee. There is also a well-defined model of finance staff working as business partners alongside service managers to support financial management and control. The Council's financial management system also operates on a self-service basis, enabling all officers to interrogate financial information at any point in time.



- 28.7 Finance business partners routinely report to Directorate Leadership Teams each month and the S151 Officer meets weekly with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Commercial & Capital Strategy. There is also an officer group - Capital Strategy and Asset Management Group (CSAM) - that monitors progress against the current capital programme and deals with the pre-Cabinet governance arrangements for managing the bidding and financing process for all capital expenditure proposals to Cabinet.
- 28.8 Member involvement in budget development has been extensive again this year, particularly through meetings of the Performance Leadership Board, regular update reports to the Portfolio Holder, Leader and Deputy Leader, the wider Cabinet and in all-member briefings.
- 28.9 The budget itself has also been subjected to all-councillor scrutiny, firstly through two briefing sessions, led by Portfolio Holders and Executive Directors, then more formally through the People and Health, and the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committees which were held in January 2023. These budget proposals have therefore been developed by the Council's officer group, led by the Executive Directors, and with significant input from members, and co-ordination by the finance team. In order to gain further assurance about the affordability of the Council's strategy and plans, each Executive Director is taking personal responsibility for their budget through a formal sign-off process which will also form part of their performance assessment during the year.
- 28.10 The Internal Audit Service have worked alongside the Council observing the budget setting process. They have provided me with a reasonable assurance opinion that the process has been based on sound evidence, assumptions and principles.
- 28.11 Taking all these factors into consideration, I consider that the estimates prepared in line with the strategy explained in this report to be robust. In more "normal" times, I also consider the levels of reserves, as set out earlier in this report, to be adequate for the risks that the Council is currently able to anticipate. The deferring of the end date of the Regulations around the DSG overspend is helpful in providing this assurance but the longer-term risk remains and the Council is focused on delivering the strategy which will eventually remove this risk.
- 28.12 Despite the steps taken to gain assurance and the processes, controls and monitoring that the Council has in place, the challenge and complexity of managing activity and associated expenditure within these estimates should not be underestimated. Against the backdrop of the events of the last two and a half years, and our inability to be more certain over funding arrangements beyond the first year of our MTFP, the future will therefore remain challenging and balancing future years' budgets will require sustained transformation. Continued, close monitoring – as referenced in our processes, above - will be required during the year and prompt action will be needed if performance and forecasts vary materially from budget

## **29. Summary and conclusions**

- 29.1 The financial climate remains extremely challenging. Although the Spending Review will allow us to make progress in many key areas of transformation and service improvement, a single-year settlement for local government still hampers our ability to invest effectively in future service strategy.
- 29.2 There are clearly still challenges ahead meaning the Council started planning for 2023/24 early to develop and implement robust plans to fit within our assumed budget envelope and to keep all members well informed around budget development and strategy.
- 29.3 Members of the two scrutiny committees have considered the information in the draft budget proposals as part of their scrutiny processes and their feedback and recommendations are set out in Appendix 7 for Cabinet's consideration.
- 29.4 Whilst I believe these budget estimates to be robust and that reserves are adequate, significant risk remains due to the global economic environment.

Aidan Dunn

**Executive Director of Corporate Development**

### **Footnote:**

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

## Appendix 1a

### Subjective analysis of budget 2023/24

	Original Budget		2023-24		£'000 Movement in Balances	£'000 Net Budget (2023-24)
	£'000 Pay	£'000 Non-Pay	£'000 Fees & Charges	£'000 Grants /Funding		
<b>People – Adults &amp; Hsg</b>	<b>28,151</b>	<b>197,416</b>	<b>(61,858)</b>	<b>(16,525)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>147,183</b>
Service user related	181	176,613	(50,251)	(8,126)	0	118,417
Adult Care Ops	19,708	469	(4,829)	(106)	0	15,241
Commissioning	2,999	10,657	(2,938)	(4,291)	0	6,426
Director Office	717	4,180	0	(2,272)	0	2,625
Housing	4,161	5,495	(3,841)	(1,730)	0	4,086
Building Better Lives	386	2	0	0	0	387
<b>Corporate Development</b>	<b>29,738</b>	<b>84,696</b>	<b>(10,847)</b>	<b>(73,470)</b>	<b>(1,616)</b>	<b>28,501</b>
Finance & Commercial	11,303	78,475	(7,316)	(73,470)	0	8,993
Human Resources	5,709	307	(2,079)	0	(442)	3,495
Digital & Change	2,903	97	(102)	0	(732)	2,166
ICT Ops	5,556	4,321	(1,329)	0	(1)	8,547
Director	28	7	0	0	0	35
BI & Performance	1,269	19	0	0	0	1,288
Comms & Engagement	995	173	(21)	0	0	1,146
Community Grants	393	977	0	0	(38)	1,333
Superfast Broadband	645	41	0	0	(403)	282
Chief Executive's Office	937	170	0	0	0	1,107
Dorset Care Record	0	109	0	0	0	109
<b>Place</b>	<b>66,461</b>	<b>88,756</b>	<b>(63,673)</b>	<b>(4,572)</b>	<b>(254)</b>	<b>86,718</b>
Economy, infrastr, growth	23,230	45,253	(28,820)	(3,682)	(645)	35,335
Place	31,888	34,466	(25,478)	(557)	659	40,978
Customer Services, Libraries, Archives	6,836	2,362	(1,019)	(333)	0	7,845
Director's Office	532	(415)	(1)	0	0	115
Assets & Property	3,627	6,829	(8,234)	0	53	2,275
Climate & Ecological	349	262	(121)	0	(321)	169
<b>People - Children</b>	<b>48,159</b>	<b>45,867</b>	<b>(7,383)</b>	<b>(8,445)</b>	<b>(394)</b>	<b>77,804</b>
Quality and Assurance	2,852	152	(371)	(19)	0	2,614
Care & Protection	20,622	38,008	(227)	(664)	0	57,740
Commissioning & Partnerships	7,615	141	(2,318)	(1,447)	(394)	3,597
Education & Learning	13,005	3,316	(2,960)	(1,560)	0	11,802
Director's	4,065	4,249	(803)	(4,756)	0	2,756
DSG Recharge	0	0	(704)	0	0	(704)
<b>Legal &amp; Democratic</b>	<b>5,731</b>	<b>2,771</b>	<b>(1,429)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7,073</b>
Assurance	1,046	540	(61)	0	0	1,525
Democratic & Electoral	1,064	2,065	(108)	0	0	3,021
Land Charges	617	1	(987)	0	0	(369)
Legal	3,004	165	(273)	0	0	2,896
<b>Public Health</b>	<b>3,882</b>	<b>22,092</b>	<b>(12,637)</b>	<b>(13,336)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Public Health	3,882	22,092	(12,637)	(13,336)	0	0
<b>Central Finance</b>	<b>6,938</b>	<b>10,370</b>	<b>(6,697)</b>	<b>(29,218)</b>	<b>18,589</b>	<b>(18)</b>
General funding	5,233	52	(2,697)	(29,105)	0	(26,518)
Capital financing	0	9,560	(4,000)	0	10,381	15,941

Contingency	0	0	0	0	8,207	8,207
Precepts	0	738	0	(112)	0	626
Retirement Costs	1,705	21	0	0	0	1,726
<b>Total Non Schools</b>						
<b>Budget 2023/24</b>	189,060	451,967	(164,524)	(145,566)	16,324	347,262
<b>Schools Budget</b>	0	301,420	0	(301,420)	0	0
<b>Budget Req 23/24</b>	189,060	753,388	(164,524)	(446,986)	16,324	347,262
Business Rates Top Up						(50,199)
Rev Support Grant (RSG)						(654)
Council Tax Surplus						(292,109)
New Homes Bonus						(1,825)
Rural Services Del. Grant						(2,475)
						<u>(347,262)</u>

## Appendix 1b

### Cost type analysis – budget 2023/24

Cost Type	Original Budget 2023/24 £'000
Internal Charges (Expenditure)	8,957
Authority (Democratic) Costs	1,868
Pay Related Costs	189,060
Premises Related Costs	21,481
Transport Related Costs	24,426
Supplies and Services	411,835
Transfer Payments	129,761
Levies & Precepts	738
Third Party (Contracted Out) Payments	153,444
Net Schools Budget	878
Contingency and Movement in Reserves	16,324
<b>Gross Expenditure</b>	<b>958,772</b>

Government Grants (Specific)	(446,986)
Income, Fees & Charges	(164,524)
<b>Gross Income</b>	<b>(611,510)</b>

<b>Budget Requirement</b>	<b>347,262</b>
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Council Tax	292,109
Business Rates	50,199
New Homes Bonus	1,825
Rural Services Delivery Grant	2,475
Revenue Support Grant	654
<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>347,262</b>

\* This includes an estimate for schools and public health budgets

## Appendix 1c

### Dorset Council summary movements in budget 2022/23 to 2023/24

	Adjusted base budget 22/23	Current base budget 23/24
Adults & Housing	£141,229,707	£147,183,031
Children's	£74,435,901	£77,804,438
Corporate	£30,324,762	£35,574,345
Place	£81,755,647	£86,718,280
Central	£3,833,784	(£18,246)
Total	£331,579,801	£347,261,848
Funding	(£331,579,801)	(£347,261,848)

### Summary of Additional Social Care Grant Funding

Dorset Council Additional Social Care Grant funding	2023/24
Social Care Grant increase	£8.96m
New Adult Social Care Grant (market sustainability)	£3.99m
New discharge funding	£1.75m
Total	£14.70m

## Appendix 1d

### Adults Services & Housing – summary of movements

	£
People - Adults and Housing opening base budget 2022/23	£142,381,767
Adjustments to budget in 2022/23 (P virements)	(£1,152,060)
Adults and Housing base budget position 2022/23 after adjustments	£141,229,707
Pay inflation	£978,547
General Inflation	£10,293,974
Fees and Charges income	(£1,444,868)
Gas and Electricity costs	£9,702
Reduction in NI Levy	(£165,476)
Cost of increased pension fund contributions	£372,100
Cost of increments & pay award (estimate)	£1,213,711
<b><u>Pressures</u></b>	
ASC data based modelling pressure	£968,634
<b><u>Savings</u></b>	
Recovery and reablement	(£150,000)
Day opportunities	(£150,000)
Reablement	(£350,000)
Enhanced Shared Lives	(£100,000)
Dorset Care Framework	(£300,000)
Birth to settled Adulthood	(£100,000)
Commissioned Community Care	(£1,500,000)
Shared cost	(£250,000)
BCF Uplift	(£1,373,000)
Workforce	(£500,000)
<b><u>Additional income</u></b>	
Additional income from Adults	(£1,500,000)
<b>Adults and Housing current base budget for 2023/24</b>	<b>£147,183,031</b>
<b>Increase in base</b>	<b>£5,953,324</b>

## Appendix 1e

### Corporate Development and Legal & Democratic Services – summary of movements

	£
Corporate Services base budget position 2022/23 after adjustments	£30,324,762
Pay inflation	£1,196,217
General inflation	£741,328
Fees and Charges income	(£200,479)
Gas and Electricity costs	£0
Reduction of NI Levy	(£208,217)
Additional cost of LGPS	£542,200
Cost of increments & pay award	£1,972,783
<b>Pressures</b>	
Leadership Support additional posts	£70,440
DCR Contract obligations	£109,000
ICT net pressures	£634,700
Apprenticeship levy costs	£55,040
Additional legal capacity	£268,883
External Audit increase of costs	£186,538
<b>Savings</b>	
Electoral supplies and services reduction	(£33,850)
<b>Additional income</b>	
Legal income	(£85,000)
<b>Corporate current base budget for 2023/24</b>	<b>£35,574,345</b>
<b>Increase in base</b>	<b>£5,249,583</b>



## Appendix 1f

### Place – summary of movements

	<b>£</b>
Place base budget 2022/23 after adjustments	£81,755,647
Pay inflation	£2,284,847
General inflation	£2,713,568
Fees and Charges income	(£2,123,267)
Gas and Electricity costs	£1,066,713
Coombe House & SWH Rental Income	(£498,000)
Reduction of the NI Levy	(£381,932)
Additional cost of the pension fund contribution	£952,100
Cost of increments & pay award	£4,093,887
<b>Pressures</b>	
Waste - new crews at Ferndown and Shaftesbury	£106,040
Waste - estimate of POPS	£100,000
Waste strategy - unfunded inflation	£958,000
Dorset Travel cost pressure	£360,000
Flood defence team	£150,000
Additional fuel costs	£250,000
Coombe House SEN Travel pressure	£50,000
<b>Savings</b>	
Transport	(£250,000)
Asset & Property	(£906,000)
Place Services	(£622,013)
Customer Services, Libraries and Archives	(£570,000)
<b>Additional Income</b>	
Asset & Property	(£400,000)
Place Services	(£696,310)
Highways and parking	(£1,655,000)
Customer Services	(£20,000)
<b>Place current base budget for 2023/24</b>	<b>£86,718,280</b>
<b>Increase in base</b>	<b>£4,962,633</b>

## Appendix 1g

### Children's Services – summary of movements

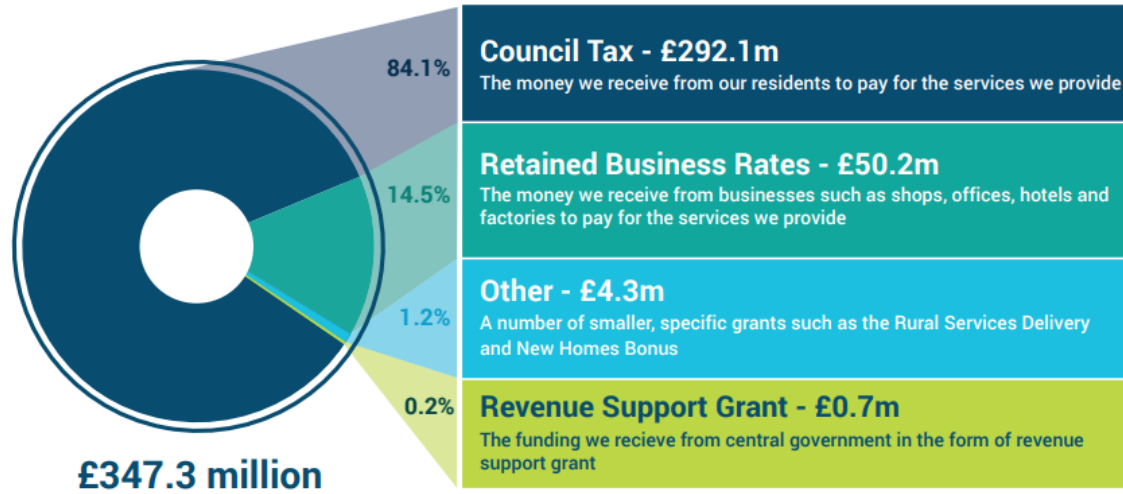
	£
Children's base budget position 2022/23 after adjustments	£74,435,901
Pay inflation	£1,569,446
General inflation	£1,856,029
Fees and Charges income	(£148,218)
Gas and Electricity costs	£37,080
Reduction of NI Levy	(£272,700)
Additional cost of pension fund contributions	£647,200
Cost of increments & pay award	£1,897,096
<b><u>Pressures</u></b>	
HNB recharge removal	£327,510
Fostering rates/SGO rates/Retention	£250,000
cWaD Services - Intensive Support Packages	£695,000
USAC	£365,500
cHaD - new staffing structure	£300,000
Care Leaver report	£150,000
Keeping in touch service capacity	£105,000
Student Social Workers	£100,000
Increase in Premature Retirement Compensation budget	£179,700
<b><u>Savings</u></b>	
Childrens Home Project	(£935,000)
Our Family Digital Offer	(£500,000)
Family Hubs	(£500,000)
Mockingbird	(£500,000)
Holistic Safeguarding	(£1,000,000)
0-25/Conception to settled adulthood	(£500,000)
Additional funding for Social Care	(£755,106)
<b>Children's current base budget for 2023/24</b>	<b>£77,804,438</b>
<b>Increase in base</b>	<b>£3,368,537</b>

## Appendix 1h

### Central budgets – summary of movements

	£
Central Finance base budget position 2022/23 after adjustments	£3,833,784
Increase in funding	£898,282
LGPS	(£988,000)
Contribution from Health	(£2,500,000)
Reduction in contingency	<u>(£1,262,312)</u>
<b>Central Finance current base budget for 2023/24</b>	<b><u>(£18,246)</u></b>
<b>Decrease in base</b>	<b>(£3,852,030)</b>

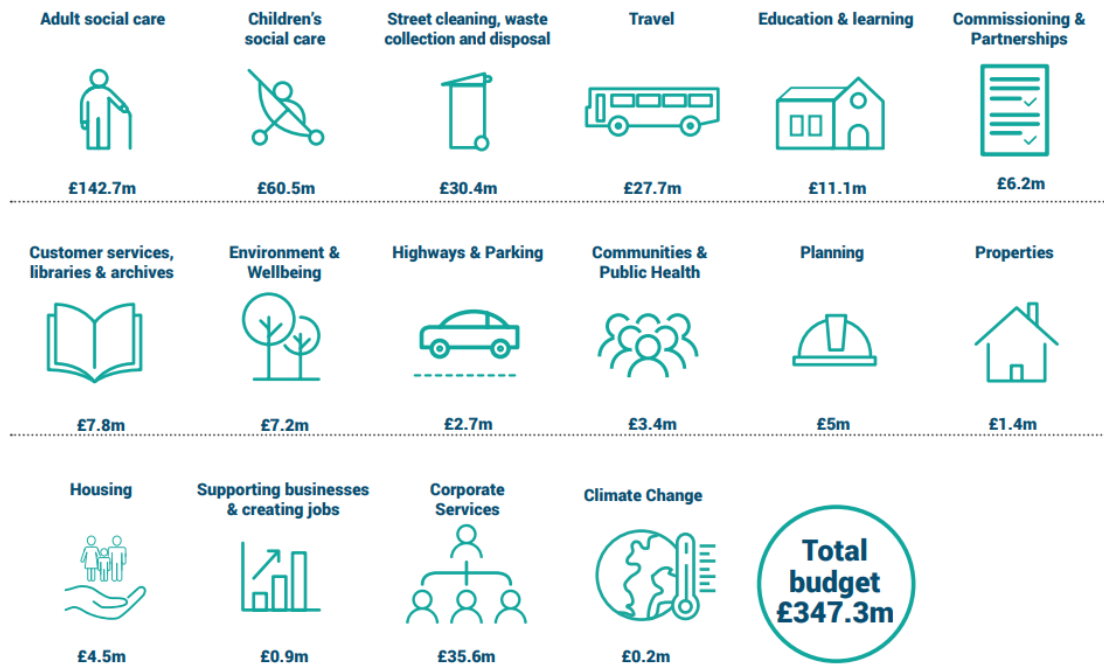
**Appendix 1i**  
**Sources of funding**



## Appendix 1j

### How the budget is spent

#### 2023/2024 - How will Dorset Council spend its money?



## Appendix 2

### Council tax resolution

(for Council paper only, intentionally blank for Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees reports)

## Appendix 3

### Capital strategy

Will be in Cabinet report

## Appendix 4

### Treasury management strategy

Will be in Cabinet report

## Appendix 5

### Summary of financial planning assumptions

	<b>Original assumption 2023/24</b>	<b>Revised assumption 2023/24</b>
Council tax increase	<2%	<2%
Council tax base growth	0.75%	1.2%
Social Care Precept	1%	2%
Business rates growth	0.50%	4.67%
Pay award	2.00%	4.00%
General inflation	2.50%	6.00%
Increase in fees & charges	2.50%	5.00%
Employer pension contribution	0% +£750k	0% -£988k

## **Appendix 6**

### **Fees & charges policy**

Appended to this report

## **Appendix 7**

### **Matters raised by scrutiny committees**

Will be available following scrutiny committees

## **Appendix 8**

Link to report and appendices to Harbours Advisory Committee – 8 December 2022:

[Harbours Budget and Setting of Fees and Charges 2023/2024](#)

[Appendix 1 Financial Summary Weymouth Harbour Final](#)

[Fees and Charges – Appendix 2 Financial Summary Bridport](#)

[Fees and Charges – Appendix 3 Financial Summary Lyme Regis Harbour](#)

[Fees and Charges – Appendix 4 Weymouth Harbour Proposed Fees 2023-24](#)

[Fees and Charges – Appendix 5 Bridport & Lyme Regis Proposed Fees](#)

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## Fees and Charges Policy

*A corporate approach to effective management of fees and charges will ensure the Council maximises commercial opportunities to generate income on the delivery of chargeable services*

*This Policy underpins Dorset Council's principles of setting and reviewing fees and charges as the Council moves through a programme of transformation and will be subject to review to ensure that it continues to reflect the needs and aspirations of the Council*

Draft v2 dated 16 12 22

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## Introduction

As with other Local Authorities, the Council is facing continuing financial pressures following years of reduced funding and the need to generate income locally. Making the best use of the ability to generate income from fees and charges is therefore important to the Council. Of the many services provided by the Council, many are centrally funded or managed through council tax.

Being more commercially minded where fees and charges are concerned will enable the Council to be in a better place to continue to meet funding challenges. The pandemic has shown how much residents rely on

the council services and has exposed further the budget constraints on delivery of services, the revenue from fees and charges is therefore essential to sustain future delivery.

The purpose of this Fees and Charges Policy is to provide a consistent approach in setting, monitoring, and reviewing fees and charges, and applies to fees and charges for discretionary services and trading activities across the Council. This Policy specifies the processes for fees and charges, and provides what factors need to be taken into consideration when charges are initially set and consequently reviewed annually.

A corporate approach to commercial activity in terms of setting fees and charges ensures that chargeable services represent best value to the residents of the Council's local authority area. It supports the focus of the Corporate Plan of Dorset Council to make Dorset a great place to live, work and visit, priorities being:

- Protecting our natural environment, climate and ecology
- Creating stronger, healthier communities
- Creating sustainable development and housing
- Driving economic prosperity
- Becoming a more responsive, customer focused council

## Being More Commercially Minded

The term "***Being more commercially minded***" and other terms such as commercialism, commercial, commercialisation etc mean different things to different people. The Council's Commercialisation Transformation Programme defines "Being more commercially minded" as four themes of: Behaving in a more business-like way; Being business friendly; Commissioning as One Council; and Making Money. These themes are shown below as separate, but connected, workstreams that compliments the Council's Commercial Strategy – Commissioning and Procurement in supporting the Council priorities of: Protecting our natural environment, climate and ecology; Creating stronger, healthier communities; Creating sustainable development and housing; Driving economic prosperity; Becoming a more responsive, customer focused council.



## Statement

This Fees and Charges Policy sets out the policy position of the Council when it comes to fees, charges, and establishes some key principles to apply when creating or reviewing any fees or charges.

The key objectives of this Policy are to ensure that:

- all decisions on fees and charges for services and income generating activities will be taken with reference to and in support of Council priorities
- all fees and charges, and the scope for charging, will be reviewed at least annually by the Directorate concerned in consultation with Finance and Commercial as part of the budget setting process

- the full cost of delivery to be calculated and documented to enable full consideration to be given to the opportunities for improving efficiency and income from a service
- in general, fees and charges income from discretionary services should recover the full cost of delivery, except where:
  - it is not appropriate to do so, for example where services provide support to service users that helps prevent the need to access more costly or complex services later therefore it is in the interest of the Council not to apply full cost recovery
  - it is prevented by government legislation to do so
- any approach to not apply full cost recovery is agreed by the relevant Executive Director in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, and if necessary, with the Section 151 Officer.

## Corporate Approach

This Fees and Charges Policy sets out the Council's corporate approach that will be taken on fees and charges where the Council has discretion on what charges are set for services provided.

It is corporate led to ensure that there is an overview of all fees and charges, with clear roles and responsibilities for their management in terms of setting, annual review, cost recovery, and where applicable, agreed discounts. Being corporate led ensures that Members' drive for commerciality is applied consistently across the Council.

A corporate approach to effective management of fees and charges will ensure the Council maximises commercial opportunities to generate income on the delivery of chargeable services.

## Fees and Charges

The Council provides a diverse range of chargeable services such as adult care, environmental protection, harbour berthing, collection of garden waste, planning and development control, car parking, to name just a few. Fees and charges reflect officer skills needed for the provision to deliver to a high value these high value services.

The Council receives fees and charges also from a diverse range of users that include large organisations and individual residents. This revenue is either a result of fees and charges under statutory powers (set by government) or discretionary (set by the Council)

When fees and charges are implemented, service users pay some, or all, of the cost of delivery. But when no charges are made, council taxpayers in general are subsidising the cost of delivery – potentially at the expense of the provision of another essential service to other Council residents. Fees and charges for

services are therefore considered individually, taking into account local circumstances, such as market conditions and service users.

All decisions on fees and charges for services and trading activities should support the delivery of the Council’s priorities and to be approved by the relevant Executive Director, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, and if necessary, with the Section 151 Officer and recorded as delegated decisions, as appropriate.

The Localism Act 2011 introduced the General Power of Competence (GPC) which permits councils to charge for Discretionary Services (non-statutory services) at a level that recovers the cost of delivery. This however does not permit a local authority to charge for any services rendered to an individual for which it has a statutory duty to provide unless legislation permits a specific charge to be made.

## Types of Fees and Charges

The decision on any level of fees and charges should be transparent and open to scrutiny.

It is recognised that it will not always be appropriate to seek to recover the full cost of delivery, including relevant amount of organisational overhead, but should be set as a subsidised, or concession, or nominal charge. However, such decisions should be subject to prior approval by the relevant Executive Director, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, and if necessary, with the Section 151 Officer. An example of not applying full cost recovery is where services provide support to service users that helps prevent the need to access more costly or complex services later therefore it is in the interest of the Council not apply full cost recovery.

There are a range of different types of charges against different types of services, supported by individual objectives which, for the purpose of this Policy, fall across the following:

- Statutory Services
- Discretionary Services
- Commercially Trading Discretionary Services

<b>Statutory Services</b> <i>Services that the Council has a duty to provide. Fees and charges set nationally</i>	
Type	Objective
<b>Statutory</b>	Charges are set by legislation
<b>Statutory prohibition</b>	No charges can be made against these services

<b>Discretionary Services</b> <i>Non-statutory services that the Council is not obliged to provide. Fees and charges set by the Council. Must not generate a surplus</i>	
Type	Objective
<b>Full Cost Recovery</b>	The Council wishes to make the service generally available but does not wish to allocate resources to the service. All costs fully recovered.
<b>Subsidised</b>	The Council believes access to the service should be widely available and is prepared to subsidise the service to ensure target groups have access.

	<p>Could also be due to adverse impact a full cost recovery or commercial charging policy would have on other council services.</p> <p>Funding support will come from the revenue budget, meaning council taxpayers are subsidising this service.</p>
<b>Concession</b>	<p>The service should be widely available, with users of the service making some contribution from their own resources, but not to the full value of cost recovery. For example, organisations whose purpose is to assist the Council in meeting specific objectives in its priorities and policy framework, or which contribute to the aims of local partnerships in which the Council has a leading role.</p> <p>The funds to make up the difference are not from revenue budget and might instead come from grant funding or other fundraising.</p> <p>Concessions might also be applied as a temporary discount by generating less income in the short term but linked to a better outcome, e.g., encourage growth of a new product, increase overall uptake, in the future.</p>
<b>Nominal</b>	<p>The Council wishes the service to be fully available but sets a charge to limit inappropriate or over-use of services that would otherwise be Fully Funded.</p>
<b>Fully Funded</b>	<p>Fully Funded services are free for service users as they are funded by the Council. As these services present a direct and full cost to the Council, knowing their value is critical.</p>

### **Commercially Trading Discretionary Services**

*Discretionary services provided as a commercial trading activity. The power to trade permits an authority to generate a surplus provided the activity occurs under a trading model, e.g., Local Authority Trading Company (LATC). Fees and charges set by the Council taking into account competitor pricing, demand, and the Council's market position*

<b>Type</b>	<b>Objective</b>
<b>Full Commercial</b>	The Council seeks to maximise revenue within an overall objective of generating surplus as large as possible from this service. Full cost recovery model.

<b>Commercial with Discounts</b>	As above, but with discounted concessions being given to enable disadvantaged groups to access the service. Full cost recovery model.
<b>Constrained Commercial (Full Cost Recovery)</b>	The Council seeks to maximise income but is subject to a defined constraint – policy, competition, commitment to service users, political. Full cost recovery model.

## Charging for Discretionary Services

Where the Council provides a service that goes above the statutory requirement, that additional provision may be charged for as a discretionary service.

When setting fees and charges, the following should be considered:

1. Service users must have agreed to receive and pay for the service
2. Charges may be set differentially, allowing people to be charged different amounts
3. The income must not provide an overall surplus to the Council
4. Horizon scan other Local Authorities fees and charges
5. The market in which services are operating
6. Any market changes and whether the services need to be adapted to reflect changes
7. Introducing a new chargeable service, will require an Equalities Impact Assessment to identify and consider any impact on vulnerable groups.

The Council's position is that charges for discretionary services are to be set at the appropriate level to fully recover their costs of delivery unless there is a specific decision by the relevant Director, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, to subsidise the service provision for policy reasons. Where setting a charge to recover full costs of delivery would lead to a negative impact on vulnerable groups, any discounts must be prior agreed with the relevant Executive Director, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, and if necessary, with the Section 151 Officer.

## Full Cost Recovery as Standard

For charges to cover the actual cost of providing the service, including support services' charges and other overheads, the true cost of service delivery should be calculated, taking into account all aspects of service provision. When estimating the cost of providing a service, the previous year's actual results (in terms of activity levels and expenditure) must be considered.

What to Consider When Calculating the Cost of Delivery		
Cost arising as a direct result of the service being delivered		
Staff hours / salaries (incl.NI and pension contributions)	Employee travel	All materials and equipment needed to deliver the service



<b>Indirect costs required to deliver the service</b>	
Facilities (Energy costs, routine maintenance, repairs)	Corporate support services (Finance, HR, IT, etc)

The overheads required to deliver the services can be estimated based on the previous year's internal charges plus an inflationary uplift. Consult with Finance and Commercial for support with these estimates. The cost areas quoted in the above table may need to be broken down into variable and fixed costs to model how, for example, the cost of delivery varies with the level of service demand. Where costing assumptions are made based on variables such as increased usage, this should be evidenced by an action plan detailing how this will be achieved.

## Agreed Discounts

Price sensitivities of individuals and groups should be understood so that charges can be set appropriately to deliver the level of services necessary to achieve objectives.

Any discretionary service that wishes to offer a discount from the full cost recovery position requires a business case. An accurate cost of delivery will therefore be required so that the business case contains accurate financial figures and the true cost of agreeing a discount option is understood.

Business cases detailing the rationale for a discount should consider:

- Any relevant Council priorities, strategies, policies, or objectives
- The need for all charges to be reasonable and able to withstand criticisms and legal challenges
- The level of proposed discount and the service's ability to afford it
- Access to and impact on users, including the level of choice open to customers as to whether they use the Council's services
- Whether the subsidy will target all users though the standard charge being set below full cost recover or will target specific sub-groups of users

Charges may be set differentially, so that different users are charged different amounts, however, this is not intended to lead to some users cross-subsidising others. The costs of offered a service at a reduced charge should be borne by the Council rather than other recipients of the service. Approval for any discounts should be obtained from the relevant Executive Director, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, and if necessary, with the Section 151 Officer.

If an Agreed Discount cannot be approved, the full cost of recovery must be charged. If a service is not viable when charging at that level, it is appropriate to review whether the service should continue to be provided.

## Portfolio Approach

While income from fees and charges should not generate an overall surplus, in some instances, services may wish to look at the income from all their products combined and take a "portfolio approach." This would allow some products to be offered at a loss, with the desired overall cost recovery position achieved from other products from within the same service that are priced more commercially. Equally, where it is not appropriate or cost effective to calculate the cost of delivery at an individual user level, charges may be set so that there is an overall full cost recovery from the delivery of a product or service.

## Administration and Notification of Charges

Once set, Heads of Service must apply fees and charges to all service users.

Service users should be aware in advance that a fee is payable, and the level of the fee. This means all charges must be published on the Council's website and at any point of sale.

The Council is required to charge VAT to service users where the product or service being supplied is subject to VAT. Service users that are either exempt from or able to claim back VAT and request a quotation exclusion of VAT, are an exception.

The most economic, efficient, and effective method of income and debt collection should be used and must comply with the requirements of Financial Regulations. When collecting fees and charges income, services should use the most cost-effective method available, i.e., online or with card, thus minimising the use of cash and cheque payments and invoicing as a method of collection wherever possible.

Payment should, wherever possible, be taken in advance. If collection in arrears is necessary, invoices should be issued promptly and clearly. Additionally, an allowance for cost recovery and bad debt write-offs should be included in calculations when setting any charges that are collected in arrears.

## Central Schedule of Fees and Charges

Financial and Commercial shall maintain the central Schedule of Fees and Charges. All fees and charges (including subsidies, waivers, and exemptions) must be identified, not just discretionary ones.

The central Schedule of Fees and Charges will be updated annually by Financial and Commercial, with the business areas concerned, and clearly include the date on which it was last revised. The Schedule to be published, as it is updated, on the Council's website.

## Regular Price Reviews

Reviews to be conducted annually for all services fees and charges in time to inform the budget setting process.

It is the responsibility of all Heads of Services to ensure that these reviews are undertaken by service areas that offer chargeable services. For business planning purposes, the standard assumption is that all fees and charges will be increased each year based on a reasoned and careful consideration of the level of inflation to be applied. Although charges within the same service area may need reviewing at separate times in the year. Annual reviews should consider the following factors:

- Inflationary pressures, and when a flat rate uplift might not be the most appropriate option due to specific changes to the cost-of-service delivery
- Service-level budget targets, with the context of council-wide targets and advice from Finance Business Partners
- Cost of administration
- Scope for new charging areas, this might be entirely new discretionary service to deliver, or existing services that are currently not charged for
- Use stakeholder engagement and comparative data, where appropriate, to ensure that charges do not adversely affect the take up of services or restrict access to services (other than where this is a desirable outcome)
- Must not generate an unlawful surplus

If a decision is taken to not increase some fees and charges the budget shortfall that this creates will need to be bridged through other operational and cost savings. Conversely, if charges are increased above inflation this can contribute to Directorate savings targets.

Service users should be given a reasonable period of notice before the introduction of new or increased charges.

To ensure cost effectiveness and efficiency when setting and amending charging levels, the following are to be considered:

- The desirability of increasing the Council's market share, particularly in fully commercial charges, e.g., temporality reducing a fee or charge in order to stimulate demand for a service, leading to increased income generation
- Obstacles to maximising full cost recover when providing the service
- Future investment required to improve or maintain the service
- If full cost recovery would require a sudden and large uplift and may reduce market share, it may be prudent to phase-in that price rise over a longer period with a temporary Agreed Discount
- The desirability of reducing the uptake of a given service, i.e., raising charges during peak times

## Annual Fees and Charges Schedule Updates

The Schedule for Fees and Charges template will be circulated annually by Finance and Commercial to the relevant business areas as part of the budget planning process. It must be completed in full, to include:

- A description of the charge
- The current price of all discretionary and statutory fees and charges
- New cost of the charge with the correct inflation rate applied
- Whether the charge is Full Cost Recovery or an Agreed Discount (or a statutory limit)

Finance and Commercial, will keep the central record of the Schedule for Fees and Charges on all service area's fees and charges for the purpose of ensuring statutory and discretionary fees are recorded accurately and set and reviewed in accordance with this Policy.

## Over-Achievement and Under-Achievement of Fees and Charges

At a level deemed appropriate by the relevant service, a clear escalation process should be in place for the under – or overachievement of charges.

For an over-achievement of a charge, the simple process should be for budget holders to inform the Head of Service, the Corporate Director of the service, and the Finance Business Partner. Within the year, discussions should be then held how to use this surplus to offset any areas running an overspend within the budget/service. At the end of the year, an overachievement in charges should result in discussions on whether to amend the target of that particular fee, or charge, in line with the Council's income generation aim.

For an under-achievement of a fee or charge within a service, the budget holder, and the Finance Business Partner should attempt to mitigate an underachievement, then the Head of Service should mitigate it within their service. Failing this, the Executive Director, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, should attempt to do the same for the Directorate before further escalating the underachievement to the Section 151 Officer should the Directorate be unable to mitigate the failure to meet an income target for any fee or charge. Again, if this under-achievement takes place at the end of the year, discussions should be held to amend to a more realistic and achievable income target.

## Legislation

The following legislation stipulates what local authorities can and cannot do in respect of generating income.

### **Local Authorities (Goods and Services Act 1970)**

Local authorities have the power to enter into agreements with each other and other certain types of public bodies for the performance of certain services.

### **Local Government Act 2003**

1. Gives local authorities the power to charge for services on a cost recover basis.  
Charging:

- Only applies to discretionary services (that has the power to provide but not a duty)
  - Cannot be used where charging is specifically prohibited by other legislation
  - Cannot be used where another specific charging regime applies
  - Is limited to cost recovery
2. Trade in activities related to local authorities' functions on a commercial basis.
- Trading:
- Most be exercised through a company which has a business plan for operation.
  - Can be delivered by participating in an existing private trading venture providing that this is a company within the relevant definitions (limited partnership and limited liability partnerships are not acceptable structures for local authority trading)
  - Can be used with a view to make a profit. In a company wholly owned by a local authority, profits can be returned to the authority through a dividend or service charge to hold down Council Tax or be reinvested.

## The Localism Act

Local authorities' powers and responsibilities have traditionally been defined by legislation. In simple terms, *we can only do what the law says we can*. This has often led to excessive caution and in some cases inaction as local authorities are wary of doing something new. Something may be thought as an innovative idea but because there is uncertainty whether it is allowable in law, and concern about the possibility of being challenged in the Courts, it is not actioned. The Government took the view that this needs to be addressed by the Localism Act, in that the Act sets out that local authorities instead of being able to act only where the law says they can, local authorities should be free to anything as long as they do not break other laws.

The Act includes a 'general power of competence' which gives local authorities the legal capacity to do anything that an individual can do that is not specifically prohibited. Cannot, for example, be able to impose new taxes as an individual has no power to tax. This general power gives local authorities more freedom to work in new ways to drive down costs. It gives increased confidence to do creative, innovative things to meet local people's needs.

The general power of competence does not remove any duties from local authorities; just like individuals they will continue to comply with duties placed on them.

The Act does however give the Secretary of State the power to remove unnecessary restrictions and limitations where there is a good case to do so, subject to safeguards designed to protect vital services.

## Other Considerations

As well as this statutory framework, local authority decision-making is also limited by certain well know principles including obligations to act rationally, fairly and to exercise powers for their proper purpose. This means that a local authority cannot use a power given to it for one purpose in order to simply generate income. It also means that in charging for discretionary services a local authority will have to have due regard to the rationality of imposing the charge and its impact on individuals as well as its ability to generate income.

There are many other important legal, commercial, and financial considerations for local authorities undertaking commercial activities, particularly through trading companies, including:

- Company law issues
- Tax liability (corporate tax and VAT)
- Procurement law
- Employment law (e.g., TUPE and pensions)

## Summary

This Fees and Charges Policy has set out the Council's position when it comes to fees and charges and has established some key principles that are required to be applied.

All chargeable services are required to follow this Policy to ensure that the Council benefits from generating income from fees and charges, and fully recover costs.

The Council recognises that the context in which it operates will evolve locally therefore this Policy will need to be updated and refreshed, as necessary, to ensure that effective management of fees and charges are maintained.

This Policy underpins Dorset Council's principles of setting and reviewing fees and charges as the Council moves through a programme of transformation and will be subject to review to ensure that it continues to reflect the needs and aspirations of the Council.

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