



<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> December 2020</b>
<b>PART:</b>	<b>1</b>
If Part II, reason:	

<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>BUDGET PREPARATION 2021/22</b>
Contact:	Cllr Graeme Elliot, Portfolio Holder for Finance & Resources James Deane, Corporate Director (Finance & Operations) Nigel Howcutt, Assistant Director (Finance & Resources)
Purpose of report:	To provide Members with an overview of the draft budget and provide the opportunity to scrutinise and provide feedback to Cabinet.
Recommendations	That the Scrutiny Committee review and scrutinise the draft budget proposals for 2021/22 and provide feedback, to be considered by Cabinet, for each Committee's specific area of responsibility.
Corporate Objectives:	All. Setting a balanced budget supports all of the Council's corporate objectives.
Implications:	The financial and value for money implications are set out in the body of the report.
Risk Implications	The Council is required to set a balanced budget and scrutiny of the overall budget proposals will assist in the challenge process required.
Community Impact Assessments	Where appropriate, Community Impact Assessments for proposed budgets amendments have been undertaken by relevant service areas.
Health And Safety Implications	None.
Consultees:	Budget Review Group; Portfolio Holders; Chief Officer Group; Corporate Management Team; Group Managers.
Background Papers:	Agenda item 7 October 2020 Cabinet - Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 – 2024/25.
Key Terms,	GF – General Fund

Definitions & Acronyms	HRA – Housing Revenue Account MTFS – Medium Term Financial Strategy OSC – Overview and Scrutiny Committee RSG – Revenue Support Grant
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## Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to present for scrutiny and review the draft budget proposals for 2021/22.
2. Budget detail for every area of the Council has been made available to all Members. A glossary of what is grouped under headings is set out in Annexe A.
3. With the exception of the Finance & Resources committee, which scrutinises all budgets, individual Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs) will focus only on those appendices and that portion of the Capital Programme that relate directly to their remit.
4. A senior Finance Officer will be present in each of the committees to support the Chair.
5. The following appendices are relevant to the draft budget proposals for 2021/22:

### **Corporate view**

- Appendix A – General Fund Budget Summary 2021/2
- Appendix Bi – Budget Change Analysis 2020/21 – 2021/22
- Appendix Bii – General Fund Budget Summary by Committee

### **Strategic Planning & Environment**

- Appendix Ei – Strategic Planning & Environment Budgets Summary 2021/22
- Appendix Eii – Strategic Planning & Environment Budgets Detail 2021/22

### **Capital Programme**

- Appendix Hiii – Strategic Planning and Environment Capital Programme: Summary of new and amended projects. 2021/22 - 2025/26
- Appendix liii – Strategic Planning and Environment Capital Programme 2021/22 - 2025/26.

## Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

6. The current MTFS was approved by Council in October 2020 and contained the following key decisions which have informed the budget-setting process for 2021/22:
  - A General Fund savings target of £590k for 2021/22
  - A General Fund savings target of £1.8m over the duration of the MTFS period
  - A General Fund balance of between 5% and 15% of Net Cost of Services
  - A minimum HRA working balance of at least 5% of turnover
7. The draft budget presented in Appendix A has a balanced position. At this stage, this remains subject to a number of budgetary assumptions. Work continues on these assumptions, and the finalised position will be reported to Members at the Joint OSC in February.

8. Council has delegated authority to the S151 Officer to revise the MTFS if material changes to forecasts are required as a result of future government announcements. In light of the current Covid pandemic and the constantly changing financial environment the S151 Officer is providing Cabinet with regular MTFS and financial updates.

### **Key Assumptions included in draft General Fund Budget**

9. The following assumptions are incorporated within the draft budget:
  - £5 increase in Council Tax and 1% increase in taxbase
  - An average 2.5% pay settlement
  - Vacancy factor of 5% for non-front-line services
  - Business Rates funding levels set at safety net levels (See para 13)
  - Negative Revenue Support Grant (RSG) (See paragraphs 14 - 18)
  - New Homes Bonus reduced by 55% (£970k). (See para 19-20)
  - Inflation freeze on Supplies and Services

### **Government funding – Business Rates**

10. Due to the global pandemic the Local Government Fair Funding Review, most recently planned for rollout in 21/22, has been further delayed and Government has stated that Local Authorities will receive a one-year settlement for 2021/22.
11. In the absence of specific detail, this budget makes a series of funding assumptions, outlined in subsequent paragraphs. Confirmation of 2021/22 Government funding levels will be announced within the Local Government Finance Settlement, expected in December, and incorporated within the second draft budget brought for Members' scrutiny in February 2021.
12. The expected economic downturn in future months together with an as yet unclear Government Business Rates policy for 21/22 have combined to create significant uncertainty over the level of funding the Council will receive from Government next year.
13. This proposed budget has therefore taken a prudent approach and set retained Business Rates funding at the 'safety net' level, i.e. the Government-guaranteed minimum level of funding under the current system. The approved MTFS compartmentalises Covid pressures and provides for this shortfall to be supported through the use of reserves. This ensures that the Council can take a prudent approach to likely funding levels and control the impact through use of reserves without making unnecessary and potentially damaging short-term changes to its underlying business model.

### **Government funding – Revenue Support Grant**

14. The Local Government Finance Settlement 2020/21, issued by MHCLG in December 2019, suspended '**negative RSG**' payments for 20/21. At that point Government indicated this was a one-off arrangement and has given no subsequent indication that there will be a further suspension in 2021/22.
15. The concept of 'negative RSG' was introduced to enable Government to reduce the level of funding paid to an authority when there was no further RSG left to reduce. The idea was that the negative RSG would net off against the Business

Rates funding to bring total authority funding down to a level, which, in Government's opinion, reflected its level of need.

16. In this respect 'negative RSG' was only ever a transitional tool until each authority's needs-level funding is captured and baselined within the Business Rates future funding methodology. Government has previously stated that RSG will cease to exist as a funding stream once the new funding model is rolled out.
17. It is prudent to assume that Government has not fundamentally changed its medium-term assessment of Dacorum's level of need, and that the suspension of negative RSG last year was a temporary relief, and not guaranteed to be reflected in the funding methodology beyond the current year. Consequently, this budget assumes that negative RSG will reduce the Council's funding by £970k in 21/22.
18. Any decision by Government to suspend negative RSG again in 21/22, in whole or in part, will lead to a financial gain for Dacorum. Unless explicitly announced otherwise by Government, this benefit should be seen as a one-off and accordingly used by the Council to fund one-off expenditure. Final confirmation of Government's decision around negative RSG is expected in December as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement, and any implications will be reported back to Members in February.

#### **Government funding – New Homes Bonus**

19. New Homes Bonus (NHB) was also planned for review under the now-delayed Fair Funding Review. In the absence of any further updates, this budget assumes no change to Government's previous commitments on future years' payments, i.e. that NHB will cease in 22/23.
20. In line with the approved MTF5, this budget assumes a continuation of the Council's current strategy, i.e. due to its time-limited nature NHB funding is not used to support ongoing service provision, but is instead contributed to the Dacorum Development Reserve for future one-off spending.

#### **Key General Fund budget savings since last year**

21. Detailed budget changes between 2020/21 and 2021/22 are shown in Appendix B. Key items include:
  - £4.7m removal of the one-off pensions payment arising from triennial review
  - £150k total staff efficiency savings
  - £450k increase in income generated
  - £80k reduction in Supplies and Services costs

#### **Key General Fund budget growth since last year**

22. Detailed ongoing growth areas (i.e. not one-off items of expenditure to be funded from reserves or additional grants) are shown in Appendix B. Key items include:
  - £186k to Employees budgets
  - £101k to support new Premises costs
  - £2.2m Income reduction arising from the forecast impact of Covid.

23. In order to assist Members in their scrutiny, the draft Strategic Planning and Environment budget is set out at a detailed Service level in appendices Ei and Eii.

### **Capital Programme**

24. The draft Strategic Planning and Environment Capital Programme is set out in Appendix liii.
25. The changes to the capital programme are highlighted in appendix Hiii. There are 4 new capital project requests that require £1.4m over the 5 years of the capital programme between 2021-25/26, there are also 4 requested amendments to the capital programme that relate to slippage of existing capital projects into 21/22.

### **Next Steps**

26. Members of the individual OSCs are asked to review and scrutinise the draft budget proposal for 2021/22, and to provide feedback for Cabinet to consider ahead of the next Joint OSC, in February 2021.

## **Annexe A**

### **Explanation of expenditure categories used in appendices**

Budget Categories Glossary

### **Employees**

This group includes the cost of employee expenses, both direct and indirect, for example:

- Salaries
- Employer's National Insurance and pension contributions
- Agency staff
- Employee allowances (not including travel and subsistence)
- Training
- Advertising
- Severance payments

### **Premises**

This group includes expenses directly related to the running of premises and land:

- Repairs, alterations and maintenance
- Energy costs
- Rent
- Business Rates
- Water
- Fixture and fittings
- Premises insurance
- Cleaning and domestic supplies
- Grounds maintenance

### **Transport**

This group includes all costs associated with the hire or use of transport, including travel allowances:

- Repair and maintenance of vehicles
- Vehicle licensing
- Fuel
- Vehicle hire
- Vehicle insurance
- Employee mileage

### **Third Party Payments**

Third party payments are contracts with external providers for the provision of a specific service. Examples for the Council include the Call Centre, Payroll Services, and Parking Enforcement.

### **Supplies & Services**

This group includes all direct supplies and service expenses to the authority:

- Equipment, furniture and materials
- Catering/Vending
- Clothing and uniforms
- Printing, stationery and general office expenses
- External services (consultancy, professional advisors)
- Communications and computing (eg software maintenance, telephones and postage)
- Members allowances
- Conferences and seminars

- Grants and subscriptions

### **Capital Charges**

These statutory accounting adjustments reflect a notional charge to the service for the use of a Council's asset. An example is Cupid Depot, for which a charge is made to Waste Services, for as long as the service uses the asset. These charges are reversed out centrally and do not impact on Council Tax.

### **Transfer Payments**

This includes the cost of payments to individuals for which no goods or services are received. For the Council this only relates to Housing Benefit payments.

### **Income**

This group includes all income received by the service from external users or by way of charges:

- Rental income
- Sales of goods or services (eg the sale of recyclables and waste sacks)
- Fees and charges (eg Planning, Parking and Burials)

### **Grants and Contributions**

This group includes all income received by the service from external bodies:

- Specific Government grants
- Income for jointly run projects/services
- Reimbursement of costs (eg recovery of legal costs)
- Other contributions (eg recycling credits from Herts County Council)

### **Recharges**

This statutory accounting adjustment charges out the back office functions (such as Finance and Legal) to the front line services. These adjustments are based on timesheet information provided by Group Managers and are subject to changes each year. The recharges overall will come back to zero, with the only impact on Council Tax being the overall charge to the Housing Revenue Account, as shown in Appendix A.