

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Special Full Council – 24 February 2022

General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2022/23

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Henley, Corporate Resources

Report Author: Emily Collacott, Lead Finance Business Partner (Deputy S151 Officer)

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The report sets out the draft budget estimates for 2022/23, Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) forecasts, and 2022/23 Capital Programme with the proposed sources of funding. Importantly this is a balanced budget with resources available to meet spending plans for the year.
- 1.2 The Final Finance Settlement for 2022/23 was issued by Government on 7 February, and included details regarding general revenue grant funding, New Homes Bonus, COVID funding and business rates retention baseline and tariff. The overall level of 'Core Spending Power' funding anticipated to be available to the Council in 2022/23, based on Settlement funding, is a cash standstill position. This represents a real-terms reduction given inflationary pressures and is well below the average increase of 6.9% in the core spending power for all-England local authorities. However, the Settlement is better than the estimates previously included in the MTFP. There is a reduction in the Lower Tier Services Grant of £78,374, with other items being in line with the provisional Finance Settlement. Despite the Government setting a 3-year Budget in August 2021 the Finance Settlement announced is for one-year only, with funding for later years probably to be announced next December.
- 1.3 The Executive proposes a council tax increase of 2.95% (£5 on a Band D) in 2022/23, making the annual Band D charge £174.63. The increase in the tax rate provides an additional £283,247 income. An increase in the tax base – the total count of Band D Equivalent dwellings – also adds £117,760 to the total estimated council tax income for 2022/23, representing an overall increase of £401,007 compared to 2021/22.
- 1.4 The Executive proposes to precept £29,458 in special expenses for the Unparished Area of Taunton. This results in an annual council tax rate at £1.93 for a Band D property in the Unparished Area of Taunton.
- 1.5 The budget for 2022/23 has been prepared in line with the Council's agreed Financial Strategy. Despite the Government's 3-Year Spending Review announced in August 2021, the local Government Finance Settlement has again been for one year only which means future funding remains uncertain. The effects and uncertainty of the COVID pandemic on both the local economy and public sector services is also ongoing.
- 1.6 In addition, the Secretary of State confirmed in July 2020 his preference to implement local government restructuring in Somerset leading to the creation of a single unitary

council to replace the County Council and four District Councils in Somerset from April 2023. Somerset West and Taunton's financial strategy and proposed budget for 2022/23 recognises this will require significant resources to ensure services remain stable with minimal disruption, as well as additional resources to fund the implementation costs associated with this major restructuring programme.

- 1.7 The Executive present a balanced draft budget for 2022/23, which includes use of temporary funding from reserves to soften the budget gap in the face of current service demands and funding uncertainty and to meet service priorities. Longer term the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) presents a deficit for 2023/24 onwards which would have been addressed to maintain ongoing financial sustainability were it not superseded by local government reorganisation. The forecasts for 2023/24 are set out as an indicative position for a continuation of Somerset West and Taunton, however these estimates will be superseded when district services are transferred to the new unitary Somerset Council in April 2023. There is currently a high degree of uncertainty on how the overall funding position will be affected by this structural change and the finance settlement for 2023/24. Equally the business case for the single unitary aims to deliver annual savings of £18.5m per year. Delivering financial sustainability and tackling the underlying deficit will be a key financial planning challenge for the unitary.
- 1.8 The total costs funded by reserves in 2022/23 is £6.762m. This provides funding for significant one-off costs totalling £4.169m, planned use of £2m from earmarked reserves to fund capital debt repayment (releasing 2022/23 resources for in-year service costs), and £0.594m as a general contribution towards funding ongoing service costs. The latter two allocations amount to £2.6m are not sustainable funding in the medium or long term but delivers the current financial strategy up to 2022/23. Additionally, the Budget includes £7.541m from earmarked reserves in respect of deferred S31 Grant which offsets the business rates Collection Fund Deficit because of COVID-related rate reliefs in both 2020/21 and 2021/22 and the Tax Income Guarantee (TIG) scheme funded by Government in 2020/21.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Executive recommends Full Council approve the Revenue Budget, Council Tax Rate and Capital Programme for 2022/23 and Supplementary Budget in 2021/22 including:
 - a) Draft Revenue Net Budget of £17.018m for 2022/23.
 - b) The basic Somerset West and Taunton Band D Council Tax rate of £174.63 for 2022/23.
 - c) General Fund 2022/23 Capital Programme additions totalling £1.896m and 2022/23 Capital Programme Revisions of -£0.181m for previously approved schemes for 2022/23, as set out in Table 18.
 - d) A Supplementary Budget in 2021/22 of £1m for additional capital debt repayment funded from General Reserves.
 - e) The release of the £2.4m 2021/22 Budget Volatility and Risk Reserve with £0.4m transferred to General Reserves and £2m to fund a supplementary increase in the Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay budget in order to finance capital expenditure in 2021/22.
 - f) £570k is transferred from the 2021/22 budget to the Capital Financing Reserve to fund

the increase to the Car Park Improvement Project capital budget in 2022/23.

- 2.2 The Executive recommends delegating authority to the S151 Officer to approve the CIL capital grants budgets to reflect in-year CIL capital receipts passed to town and parishes in line with the CIL policy.

3 Risk Assessment

- 3.1 The Council is required to set a balanced budget. The S151 Officer's view is that the draft budget in this report is robust and reserves are adequate. The detailed robustness statement is included in section 17.
- 3.2 The main financial risks to highlight for the Budget are summarised below.
- 3.3 **COVID-19 Impact:** The proposed budget has been prepared taking into account the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. If further restrictions are imposed during 2022/23 this could have an impact on the Council's income and expenditure and budgets.
- 3.4 **Inflation:** Inflation rates are currently above the Government's target of 2%. Whilst the budget allows for inflationary pressures there is a risk that costs of construction works and purchased goods and services continue to rise and place further pressure on revenue and capital budgets. This is further exacerbated through supply chain challenges, particularly in the construction and specialist trade sectors. The risks are mitigated through procurement and spend controls, and general reserves if revenue costs cannot be managed within existing total budgets.
- 3.5 **Staff pay award:** The pay award for 2021/22 has not yet been agreed. The budget is based the Employer's final offer of 1.75% for 2021/22 and assumes a 2% pay award in 2022/23. For financial planning sensitivity analysis purposes, each 1% change in pay award equates to c£210k per year for the General Fund. This risk is mitigated through spending control and general reserves if costs cannot be managed within existing total budget.
- 3.6 **Parking income:** The estimates included within the proposed 2022/23 budget reflect the current information available from 2020/21 and 2021/22 usage levels following the reduction in car park use due to COVID-19, with an estimated increase in use due to easing of restrictions. There is a risk to this income budget if further restrictions are imposed, and people habits change. For financial planning sensitivity analysis purposes, it is estimated there is a margin for error in income estimates of +/-£400k. Adverse risk is mitigated through general reserves.
- 3.7 **Other fees and charges:** The proposed 2022/23 budget includes an estimated increase in income from the proposed increases to fees and charges due to be approved this month. If there is an impact on demand, then the income could vary by approximately £70k for a 1% reduction in fees (excluding car parking). Any adverse risk is mitigated through general reserves, where it cannot be managed within budget.
- 3.8 **Treasury investment income:** The borrowing and investment strategies employed during the acquisition of commercial properties have protected the Council's position whereby internal borrowing has been adopted in preference to obtaining now borrowing from the money markets. The two primary benefits have been to minimise net interest costs for the Council in the short-term and reducing the risk of Council potential exposure to "bail-in", that being the loss of capital investment because of the recovery processes employed in the event of a financial institution's failure. With the completion of the

commercial investment portfolio, cashflows has reduced and the dominating level of cashflow investments will switch to borrowing. As a result, risks aligned with movements in investment returns will substantially reduce with lower investment balances. To quantify this, we forecast (at the time of writing) that the remaining investments held during 2022/23 would carry a combined risk of variation in capital value and interest yield of approximately +/- £132k for a 1% movement in interest rates. These investment sums, which total approximately £17million, will be held as a contingency measure for unexpected cashflow movements and emergencies. Further liquid sums will also be held to accommodate the cashflow movements throughout the year; these attract a very low yield, so present negligible levels of interest rate volatility. Meanwhile, the Council's investment strategy and treasury operations do focus on preserving security, liquidity and yield as a basis for risk limitation.

- 3.9 **Property investment income:** The Council has successfully completed its planned investment in commercial property to deliver income to fund services. Budgets are based on reasonable estimates of expected income for the year, net of management costs. Whilst income volatility is expected to be low, no investment is risk-free. For financial planning sensitivity analysis purposes, 5% adverse volatility would impact income by c£360k. This risk is mitigated through the Investment Risk Reserve.
- 3.10 **Interest rates and capital refinancing:** The current treasury strategy is providing cost advantages with low cost of borrowing expected to remain in place for the short to medium term. However, it may be appropriate to refinancing some of the Council's capital borrowing requirements into longer-term facilities and interest rate rises could lead to increased borrowing costs. For financial planning sensitivity analysis purposes, it is estimated interest / financing costs could vary by up to £650k in 2022/23 for a 1% increase in interest rates applied to the current forecast of General Fund borrowing needs. This risk is mitigated by prudent budgeting, effective treasury management with budget impact mitigated through general reserves.
- 3.11 **Business Rates Funding:** Although Somerset West and Taunton are not within the Business Rates Pool in 2022/23 the Pool has agreed a gain share arrangement for next year. The amount will not be confirmed until year end, but the budget includes an income estimate of £250k. The risk is the actual receipt varies from budget based on outturn, with volatility estimated at -£150k to +£100k. Our core retained business rates funding volatility should be lower as we are at safety net in 2022/23, however funding through S31 grants is variable and the collection fund could still report a higher deficit in 2021/22 and/or 2022/23. Overall volatility for 2021/22 and 2022/23 is unpredictable but prudently estimated to be +/-£500k. Business rates funding risk is underwritten through the Business Rates Volatility Reserve.
- 3.12 **Local Government Reorganisation:** The proposed budget for 2022/23 includes £1.375m for Local Government Reorganisation, funded from General Reserves. As work progresses there could be further cost pressures which arise during the year. A further consideration is any further decisions taken in 2022/23 that exceed the approved budget and/or impact on reserves and/or have implications for the new Somerset Council. It is expected that legislation will come forward later this year regarding a statutory protocol. The LGR Joint Committee supported a Finance and Assets Protocol at its meeting on 4 February 2022.

4 Background Information

- 4.1 In October 2019 the Council agreed the Corporate Strategy which set out the Council's priorities and vision for the next four years with four strategic themes: Our Environments

and Economy; A transparent and customer focused Council; Homes and Communities; and An Enterprising Council. The budget seeks to allocate available resources to progress the priorities identified in the Strategy.

- 4.2 The COVID-19 global pandemic continues to have a significant influence over the work of the Council and its resources. Most significantly in financial terms, there has been a major reduction in parking income with demand expected to remain well below pre-COVID levels through into next financial year and beyond.
- 4.3 The Financial Strategy was reviewed and agreed by the Executive on 21 July 2021.
- 4.4 The General Fund Revenue Account is the Council's main fund and shows the income and expenditure relating to the provision of services which residents, visitors and businesses all have access to including planning, environmental services, car parks, certain housing functions, community services and corporate services.
- 4.5 The Council directly charges individual consumers for some of its services through fees and charges. The expenditure that remains is mainly funded through a combination of local taxation (including council tax and a proportion of business rates), commercial investment income and through grant funding from Central Government (including Revenue Support Grant, New Homes Bonus and other non-ring-fenced and specific grants/subsidy).
- 4.6 Each year the Council sets an annual budget which details the resources needed to meet operational requirements. The annual budget is prepared within the context of priorities and objectives identified by Members which are embedded in the Council's current Corporate Strategy.
- 4.7 The Financial Strategy agreed in July 2021, and the draft budget for 2022/23, set out the aim of maintaining capacity to protect services and minimising disruption during the transition to a new unitary council for Somerset, which is due to be formally created on 1 April 2023, as well as continue to respond to the demands of COVID on our services and our communities. Local Government Restructuring (LGR) in Somerset will deliver a single unitary Council for Somerset with effect from 1 April 2023. All five councils are being asked to contribute to the implementation costs of LGR, and the draft budget also includes a modest provision for additional backfill capacity to support Somerset West and Taunton services and/or the LGR programme during 2022/23.
- 4.8 The Draft Budget included in this report sets out a proposed overall balanced budget position for 2022/23, with resources available to meet estimated costs. However, this does rely on use of reserves which is not sustainable in the medium/longer term, but also includes significant one-off costs too. The draft budget also includes additional expenditure to meet identified cost pressures and bids to support new spending, as well significant savings as resources have been reprioritised in line with operational plans.
- 4.9 The Final Finance Settlement was announced on 7 February 2022, which provides details of grant funding for one year only in 2022/23. The funding announced is an improvement of our previous estimates and assumptions, but still represents a real-terms reduction. This is exacerbated with the expected drop in business rates retention funding to the Safety Net following the planned decommissioning of Hinkley B nuclear power station commencing in 2022. Overall, the Council's funding is projected to fall

sharply with ongoing uncertainty.

5 2022/23 Draft Budget Summary

5.1 The following tables provide a summary of the proposed balanced draft budget position for 2022/23. A further breakdown of the Total Spending on Services is shown in Appendix A.

Table 1 – General Fund Draft Budget Summary

	Original Budget 2021/22 £	Proposed Budget 2022/23 £
Senior Management Team	554,210	593,600
Internal Operations Directorate	9,324,155	9,720,720
Housing & Communities Directorate	3,028,290	3,233,680
Development & Place Directorate	2,230,860	4,044,460
External Operations & Climate Change Directorate	8,183,351	9,938,584
Local Government Restructuring	0	1,375,000
Technical Capital Accounting Adjustments	-2,301,110	-3,332,420
Net Total Spending on Services	21,019,756	25,573,624
Investment Property Net Income	-3,407,100	-7,239,960
Somerset Rivers Authority Contribution	97,909	99,136
Revenue Contribution to Capital	0	2,101,800
Capital Debt Repayment Provision (MRP)	699,530	2,982,730
Interest Costs	312,570	948,180
Interest Income	-514,500	-714,500
Special Expenses	29,093	29,458
Transfers to / from (-) Earmarked Reserves	1,665,036	-5,387,049
Transfer to / from (-) General Reserves	-1,159,562	-1,375,000
Somerset West and Taunton Net Expenditure	18,742,732	17,018,419
Parish Precepts	2,508,359	2,677,710
Total Expenditure Including Town/Parish Precepts	21,251,091	19,696,129
Retained Business Rates	-6,181,661	-4,579,632
Business Rates Pooling Gain	-250,000	-250,000
LCTS Grant	-224,736	0
Lower Tier Services Grant / Services Grant	-995,611	-640,917
Revenue Support Grant	-6,479	-7,297
Rural Services Delivery Grant	-253,432	-253,432
New Homes Bonus	-1,743,222	-1,566,792
Surplus(-)/Deficit on Collection Fund – Council Tax	-7,785	76,379
Surplus(-)/Deficit on Collection Fund – Business Rates	12,556,229	7,666,825
Business Rates Relief (COVID) S31 Grant (earmarked reserves)	-11,118,000	-5,482,789
Business Rates Losses 2020/21 TIG S31 Grant (earmarked reserves)	-998,505	-896,590
Business Rates Covid Additional Relief Fund S31 Grant (earmarked reserves)	0	-1,162,045
Demand on Collection Fund – Parishes and Special Expenses	-2,537,452	-2,707,168
Total Council Tax Raised by Council	9,490,437	9,892,671
Divided by Council Tax Base	55,947.87	56,649.32
Council Tax Band D – SWT Services	167.88	172.88

	Original Budget 2021/22 £	Proposed Budget 2022/23 £
Council Tax Band D – Somerset Rivers Authority	1.75	1.75
Council Tax Band D – SWT including SRA	169.63	174.63
Cost per week per Band D equivalent	3.25	3.35

5.2 The tables below show the movement in spending and funding for each Directorate between 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Senior Management Team:

5.3 This budget line holds the costs of the Chief Executive and four directors, a contingency to support strategic priorities in-year.

5.4 The Senior Management Team budget reflects the uplift as the salary award as offered by the employers. It reflects the existing structure and so budgets for the Director of External Operations and Climate Change role, that vacancy being the subject of ongoing discussions to ensure senior leadership capacity.

Table 2 – Summary of Senior Management Team Budget Changes in 2022/23

	£'000	£'000
Net Expenditure Base Budget 2021/22		554
Service Cost Savings:		0
Service Cost Pressures:		
Staffing Increase	39	
		39
Net Expenditure Base Budget 2022/23		593

Internal Operations:

5.5 The Internal Operations Directorate has responsibility to provide support and advice across all Council functions through its enabling services of ICT, HR, Finance, Business Intelligence, Democratic and Elections. It also oversees services that directly support the local community and residents contacting the Council, for example in Customer Services and Revenues and Benefits. In 2019/20, the Directorate became responsible for assessing and prioritising initiatives in business transformation to deliver efficiency in service provision across the Council.

5.6 Budget setting for this year has been influenced by a realignment of activities in line with Local Government Reorganisation activity which has produced both budget reduction and increases. For example, savings in ICT non pay budgets have been achieved due to forward planned projects being deprioritised however staffing costs have increased to support not only unitary needs but also critical projects such as the Health and Safety Improvement Plan.

Table 3 – Summary of Internal Operations Budget Changes in 2022/23

	£'000	£'000
Net Expenditure Base Budget 2021/22		9,324

	£'000	£'000
Service Cost Savings:		
Remove 2021/22 One-off review of Council Tax Support Scheme	-19	
Other savings with the Benefits Service	-29	
Reduction in Members travel/training and meeting costs	-13	
Reduction in ICT non pay budgets	-185	
Family Annexe Grant	-39	
Service Improvement and Efficiency Savings	-200	
Fees and Charges Income – Court Costs and Deane Helpline	-86	
Communications/Economic Development Budget moved to Development and Place	-141	
Other Savings	-7	
		-719
Service Cost Pressures:		
Increase in Staffing Costs	625	
Health and Safety	28	
Increase in postage costs and other business support	58	
Increase in Members Allowances	10	
Contract Increases	41	
Increase in Pension Deficit contribution	66	
Increase in Depreciation Charges	204	
Other Costs	84	
		1,116
Net Expenditure Base Budget 2022/23		9,721

Housing and Communities:

- 5.7 The Housing and Communities Directorate provides homelessness and rough sleeping, community resilience, housing strategy and enabling services funded by the General Fund, alongside some corporate asset related services such as compliance. These General Fund services sit alongside the larger Housing Landlord functions funded by the Housing Revenue Account.
- 5.8 Housing and Communities savings and budget changes are derived from an over provision of budget for Shopmobility, this will not impact the level of service or funding to the provider (Compass Disability), and by three posts transferring out of the Directorate predominantly working on GF assets so have moved to the new GF Asset team from Housing Property.
- 5.9 Staffing cost pressures and adjustments result in a £100k net increase, including inflation of £94k and adjustment to GF/HRA split of £89k.
- 5.10 The increase in homelessness cost reflects the required provision of new accommodation and associated revenue costs to replace Canonsgrove, however this will be funded from transfer from earmarked reserve.
- 5.11 The cost pressure on the CCTV budget is largely a result of a one-off budget reduction in 2021/22 (affordable as our maintenance budget had accumulated beyond its requirement) and the budget being reinstated in 2022/23 (albeit at a reduced level, there is still a net increase).

5.12 The increase within the Housing Enabling Budget is to correct a previous budget error.

Table 4 – Summary of Housing and Communities Budget Changes in 2022/23

	£'000	£'000
Net Expenditure Base Budget 2021/22		3,028
Service Cost Savings:		
Shopmobility Contribution no longer required	-32	
Assets Staff transferred to External Operations and Climate Change	-75	
		-107
Service Cost Pressures:		
Increase in Staffing Costs	118	
Increase in Homelessness (funded by transfer from earmarked reserve)	113	
Increase in CCTV contribution	56	
Housing Enabling	20	
Other Costs	6	
		313
Net Expenditure Base Budget 2022/23		3,234

Development and Place:

- 5.13 The Development and Place Directorate delivers a range of services and projects including strategy and policy development, planning services, economic development, town centre regeneration, heritage projects and major capital projects for regeneration. The Directorate also manages the commercial investment activity though the budget for this is included below the net cost of services.
- 5.14 Movement in the Development and Place budget include increases in staffing costs as are seen throughout the organisation.
- 5.15 Savings have been established through effective budget management and removal of budgets where they are no longer required helping to offset some of the increases.
- 5.16 New cost pressures are recorded to reflect the reduction of planning income and increased costs to support services the evidence base for a new Local plan, an innovation conference in 2022 as supported by Members, and our work on phosphates. These are staff costs that cannot be recovered through S106 agreements with developers and therefore cannot be absorbed within the phosphates interim mitigation funding provided by Council in October 2021.
- 5.17 The £141k increase for Communications and Economic Development is offset by the equivalent saving within Internal Operations and recognises the movement of this team across directorates. This is not therefore a new or increased cost overall. Similarly, the £69k change for Planning obligations is offset by the saving in the External Operations and Climate Change budget.
- 5.18 The Environmental and Leisure Improvements Fund will enable us to deliver on a range of longstanding but unbudgeted issues. This is a one off fund that follows on from the

previous successes of the Spring Clean.

Table 5 – Summary of Development and Place Budget Changes in 2022/23

	£'000	£'000
Net Expenditure Base Budget 2021/22		2,231
Service Cost Savings:		
Reduction in Heritage feasibility and one-off abortive costs	-57	
Other savings	-7	
		-64
Service Cost Pressures:		
Increase in Staffing Costs	646	
Local Plan Costs	50	
Innovation Conference	50	
Phosphates – additional cost for planning specialist role	50	
Planning – reduction in income	28	
Communications/Economic Development Budget moved from Internal Operations	141	
Increase in Depreciation Charges	235	
Planning Obligations budget moved from External Operations and Climate Change	69	
Environmental and Leisure Improvements Fund (one-off)	600	
Other Costs	8	
		1,877
Net Expenditure Base Budget 2022/23		4,044

External Operations and Climate Change:

- 5.19 The External Operations and Climate Change Directorate is a forward-facing directorate that provides or clients many the services delivered by Somerset West and Taunton Council. It also leads on the Council's climate and ecological emergency declarations.
- 5.20 The Net Expenditure invested in External Operations and Climate Change is increased from £8.2m to £9.9m in 2022/23. Against a backdrop of year-on-year efficiency savings and service improvement the impact of lost car parking revenue masks the true picture. That picture is one where concepts have been turned into delivery (e.g., CNCR Plan), medium to long term planning rigour adopted (e.g., 30-year General Fund maintenance programme) and costs reduced (e.g., Fleet contract).
- 5.21 The budget reflects an estimated reduction of almost £1.5m in parking income compared to historic trends pre-COVID, aligning the 2022/23 budget with current usage.
- 5.22 The directorate budget includes a further £500k allocation in 2022/23 to support the CNCR Plan and related climate change initiatives. This means a total of £1.5m has been allocated to support the delivery of this priority over a 3-year period 2020/21 to 2022/23.

Table 6 – Summary of External Operations and Climate Change Budget Changes in 2022/23

	£'000	£'000
Net Expenditure Base Budget 2021/22		8,183

	£'000	£'000
Service Cost Savings:		
2021/22 One-off Tree Planting	-100	
2021/22 One-off Community Enhancement Fund	-100	
2021/22 One-off Car Park Strategy	-53	
Bereavement Services – increase in rental income	-18	
Increase in Asset rents (non-investment)	-278	
Reduction in Fleet Costs	-180	
Reduction in Asset Management budget to fund contribution to capital for Closed Church Yards and Brewhouse Roof	-100	
Reduction in Non-Domestic Rates for Council Properties	-109	
Fees and Charges Income	-95	
Planning Obligations budget moved to Development and Place	-69	
Other Savings	-138	
		-1,240
Service Cost Pressures:		
Increase in Staffing Costs	257	
Car Parking Income – reduction of approximately 25% on historic levels	1,476	
Litter Enforcement 12-Month trial	60	
Somerset Waste Partnership contract increase (net of Recycle More Savings of £125k)	149	
Somerset Waste Partnership - contractors COVID costs to be funded from COVID funding	172	
Town Centre Power Wash - one-off	25	
Town Centres Spring Clean - one off	30	
Contract Increases	43	
Decrease in Licensing Income	90	
Increase in CCTV contribution	16	
Assets Staff transferred from Housing	75	
Increase in Depreciation Charges	592	
Other Costs	10	
		2,995
Net Expenditure Base Budget 2022/23		9,938

Local Government Reorganisation:

- 5.23 The Councils in Somerset have agreed to share the implementation costs for the creation of the Somerset unitary authority, estimated at £16.5m in the One Somerset Business Case. As agreed by the LGR Joint Committee, the District Councils will contribute 20%, which for Somerset West and Taunton's share equates to c£0.9m and it is proposed to budget for £1m including a contingency sum.
- 5.24 In addition, it is anticipated there will be major demands on Somerset West and Taunton resources that will need additional capacity and backfill in key areas (e.g., legal / governance, finance and many forward-facing services) therefore it is proposed to include budget provision of £0.375m to meet this need should it arise. The aim is to keep costs to a minimum with most transitional work delivered within existing management and staff resources through prioritisation of activity.
- 5.25 This total of £1.375m additional costs are one-off and are proposed to be funded by a

one-off allocation from General Reserves (see section 13 below). A proportion of the implementation costs are expected to be incurred in 2023/24 and it is assumed a balance of the £1m will therefore be carried forward at the end of 2022/23.

Table 7- Summary of Local Government Reorganisation Budget Changes in 2022/23

	£'000	£'000
Net Expenditure Base Budget 2021/22		0
Cost Pressures:		
Somerset West and Taunton share of implementation budget	1,000	
Somerset West and Taunton provision for additional transition/backfill capacity	375	
		1,375
Net Expenditure Base Budget 2022/23		1,375

Other Costs, Reserve Transfers and Funding:

- 5.26 Other Costs, Reserve Transfers and Funding includes Commercial Investment income, Debt Management Costs, Technical Capital Accounting Adjustments, the precept costs for Somerset Rivers Authority, Special Expenses and the Parishes and the Funding streams.
- 5.27 Section 6-11 below explain the major changes to government funding, business rates, new homes bonus, council tax and the Somerset Rivers Authority and special expenses precepts.
- 5.28 Details on the use of reserves are within Section 13 and 14 below.
- 5.29 The capital programme below in section 17 proposes to use revenue resources to fund the 2022/23 bids and the table below reflects this cost.

Table 8 – Summary of Other Costs and Reserves Budget Changes in 2022/23

	£'000	£'000
Net Expenditure Base Budget 2021/22		-2,069
Cost Savings:		
Increase in Interest Income	-200	
Commercial Investment - Reduction in Management Fee	-130	
Commercial Investment – net increase in income	-3,750	
Increase in Depreciation Adjustment	-1,031	
		-5,111
Cost Pressures:		
Increase in Interest Costs	636	
Revenue contribution to fund capital programme	2,102	
Increase in Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) for debt repayment	2,283	
Commercial Investment – reduction in legacy properties rental income and inflation costs	47	
Increase in Somerset Rivers Authority Precept	1	
Change in Parish Precepts	169	
		5,238
Reserve Movements:		
Reduction in contribution from General Reserves	1,160	

	£'000	£'000
One-off Contribution from General Reserves to fund LGR costs	-1,375	
Contribution from Investment Financing Earmarked Reserve in 22/23	-2,000	
Change in Contribution from Business Rates Reserve	-2,383	
Contribution from reserves towards Local Plan	-94	
Contribution from reserves COVID grant for SWP COVID costs	-172	
Contribution from reserves towards Leisure contract deferred savings	-135	
Contribution from reserves towards Homelessness	-113	
Contribution from reserves towards funding of capital schemes	-1,825	
Contribution from reserves towards one-off staffing costs	-330	
		-7,267
Net Expenditure Base Budget 2022/23		-9,209

Table 9 – Summary of Funding Changes in 2022/23

	£'000	£'000
Total Funding 2021/22		-21,251
Decrease in New Homes Bonus Grant	176	
Decrease in Lower Tier Services Grant	624	
Local Council Tax Support Grant one-off 2021/22 only	225	
Services Grant	-270	
Increase in Revenue Support Grant	-1	
Increase in Council Tax Deficit from Prior Years	84	
Increase in funding from Council Tax for Somerset Rivers Authority	-1	
Net increased funding from Council Tax for Somerset West and Taunton	-401	
Reduction in Business Rates Funding	1,602	
Reduction in Business Rates Prior Year Deficit	-4,889	
Reduction in use of Business Rates Holiday S31 Grant	5,635	
Reduction in use of Business Rates Losses S31 Grant	102	
Covid Additional Relief Fund S31 Grant	-1,162	
Change in Parish Precepts	169	
		1,555
Total Funding 2022/23		-19,696

5.30 The following table provides a high level summary of the contribution to the budget made by the Council's commercial property investment strategy. As the table shows the investment now provides a significant source of income. This has added to, and therefore diversified, the Council's income streams and helps to mitigate the reductions in other funding and enables ongoing provision of service priorities. The table includes the budgeted income from £99m invested since August 2020 plus that from legacy assets acquired before the current investment strategy commenced. There is a separate report providing full details of the strategy and investment performance.

	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000
Rent Income from 2021 Investment Fund	-6,930	-6,930
Management Costs	150	150
Legacy Assets Net Income	-460	-460

Investment Income	-7,240	-7,240
Less: Notional Interest Charge [included within Net Financing Costs in MTFP summary Table 16 below]	750	1,500
Less: Minimum Revenue Provision for Capital Debt Repayment [included within Net Financing Costs in MTFP summary Table 16 below]	2,000	2,000
Investment Income Net of Financing Costs	-4,490	-3,740
Contribution to Investment Reserves [included within Earmarked Reserves in MTFP summary Table 16 below]	0	380
Net Contribution to Revenue Budget	-4,490	-3,360

5.31 The table shows that the Council's property investment activity, including assets held for many years plus the increase in acquisitions since 2020, is providing total estimated income of some £7.2m. This income provides resources to cover the capital financing costs – debt repayment plus interest on borrowing – and results in an estimated net contribution to the revenue budget to fund service costs totalling £4.5m in 2022/23. This is estimated to reduce to £3.4m in 2023/24 with prudent budget allowance included in the MTFP for potential higher interest costs in future and prudent reserve provisions to manage ongoing risks.

6 Government Grant Funding

6.1 Following the Provisional Settlement in December 2021 the general grant funding is slightly higher than previous MTFP projections. The Revenue Support Grant (RSG) in 2022/23 is £7,297 and Rural Services Delivery Grant is £253,432, which together is £818 higher than the 2021/22 settlement level. Government has confirmed that 'Negative' Revenue Support Grant will again be offset in 2022/23. The final Finance Settlement was issued on 7 February and the Lower Tier Services Grant has reduced by £78,374 compared to the provisional figures.

6.2 Through the Settlement the Government has sought to ensure that no local authority sees a cash reduction in their estimated core funding settlement in 2022/23, reflecting the need for funding stability for local services. This was unexpected and provides welcome one-off additional unringfenced revenue grant, although as shown in the table below the total amount of additional general grant support received has reduced by £1.4m compared to 2021/22.

Table 10 – General Government Grant

	2021/22 £	2022/23 £	Change £	Change %
Core Funding:				
Revenue Support Grant	6,479	7,297	818	12.63
Rural Services Delivery Grant	253,432	253,432	0	0
Total General Revenue Grant	259,911	260,729	818	0.00
Additional one-off support:				
a) Lower Tier Services Grant	995,611	371,314	-624,297	-62.70
b) Local Council Tax Support Grant	224,736	0	-224,736	-100.00
c) COVID Pressures Grant	813,217	0	-813,217	-100.00
d) Services Grant	0	269,603	269,603	100.00
Total Additional Grant Funding	2,033,564	640,917	-1,392,647	-68.48

(a) **Lower Tier Services Grant** – the Government has confirmed a further one-off grant

of £371,314 to ensure there is no cash reduction in 'core spending power' compared to 2021/22.

(b) Local Council Tax Support Grant – this was a one-off grant for 2021/22 only and there is no allocation for 2022/23 within the Provisional Settlement.

(c) COVID Grant – the COVID grant was a one-off grant for 2021/22 only and therefore there is no allocation for 2022/23.

(d) Services Grant – the Government have confirmed a further one-off grant of £269,603 to ensure there is no cash reduction in 'core spending power' compared to 2021/22.

6.3 All of the above funding is unringfenced revenue grant funding which goes towards general funding of services in the Budget.

7 Business Rates Retention

7.1 Local authorities receive a significant proportion of their funding through the Business Rates Retention (BRR) system. For 2022/23 Somerset West and Taunton is not within the Somerset Business Rates Pool due to the reduction in business rates funding expected and adverse impact on the balance of risk and reward to pooling this brings. Up until 2021/22 the pooling arrangement has been beneficial for Somerset West and Taunton and the other pool member authorities.

7.2 The Finance Settlement confirmed the baseline, safety net and tariff for 2022/23. In order to support businesses, there will be no inflationary increase in business rates bills, with Somerset West and Taunton receiving grant from Government to compensate the loss of funding through this 'freeze'. The NNDR1 has now been completed and this has improved the estimated total business rate income retained by SWT by £381k compared to previous estimates.

7.3 A summary of the 2022/23 Retained Funding current estimate is shown in the table below.

Table 11 – Business Rates Retention Provisional Estimates

Business Rates Retention Provisional Funding Estimates	2022/23 Estimates £
Share of Business Rates Yield	16,947,038
Rates yield from renewable energy	548,990
Tariff to Government	-18,394,766
Levy Payment	0
Safety Net Income	248,964
S31 Grant funding for Reliefs	5,229,406
Net Retained Business Rates Funding	4,579,632

7.4 Although Somerset West and Taunton is exiting the Somerset Business Rates Pool at the end of 2021/22, the continuing Pool members have agreed to provide a contribution to Somerset West and Taunton from 2022/23 pooling gains in recognition of the reduction in pooling risk because of Somerset West and Taunton exiting. The proposed budget includes an estimated pooling gain contribution of £250k.

7.5 The Council's funding through business rates is expected to reduce to the Safety Net due to the planned decommissioning by EDF of Hinkley B power station commencing

by July 2022. This has a major impact on the level of retained business rates funding available to the Council with BRR funding estimates falling by c£1.9m per year as a result. There will then be a gap of several years before business rates funding is expected to grow when Hinkley C comes into operation. There is a financial planning risk though as Government is still committed to reviewing business rates retention and relative needs and resources funding distribution.

- 7.6 Due to the continuing support to businesses the Business Rates budget in 2022/23 still includes a spike in collection fund losses due to COVID, which is to be reimbursed by the General Fund next year due to accounting regulations. The Council will receive government funding through S31 Grant to fully compensate losses in respect of the business rates holiday 100% reliefs for April-July and 66% for August -March in 2021/22.

8 New Homes Bonus

- 8.1 New Homes Bonus (NHB) is grant funding allocated by Government, separate to Revenue Support Grant and Business Rates, which incentivises and rewards housing growth. The NHB grant is non-ringfenced which means that the Council is free to decide how to use it. The Council intends to fully use the NHB allocation for 2022/23 towards the revenue budget for services.
- 8.2 The confirmed NHB Grant for 2022/23 is £1,566,792 which is £176,430 or 10.12% less than the comparable amount for 2021/22.

Table 12 – New Homes Bonus 2022/23

	2020/21 £	2021/22 £	2022/23 £
New Homes Bonus Grant	3,253,289	1,743,222	1,566,792
Amount for core revenue budget	400,000	1,743,222	1,566,792
Transfer to growth reserve	2,853,289	0	0

- 8.3 The growth baseline remains at 0.4%, which sees a “top-slice” for net growth which does not attract any NHB grant. This is a surprise given the strong indications in the Government’s 2021 consultation of a reduction in the level of ‘reward’ for growth. Each year’s growth used to attract grant for 4 years but the annual growth ‘increment’ in 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 is each for one year only with no legacy payments. Table 13 below shows the current forecast within the current MTFP. The Government undertook a consultation in 2021 for the NHB system but they have not yet issued a formal response and the 2022/23 provisional settlement therefore continues the grant method for another year. The MTFP assumes no NHB grant funding after 2022/23, in the absence of reliable information upon which to base an estimate.

Table 13 – New Homes Bonus Grant Forecast

	2019/20 £k	2020/21 £k	2021/22 £k	2022/23 £k	2023/24 £k	2024/25 £k
2016/17	841					
2017/18	1,258	1,258				
2018/19	858	858	858			
2019/20	851	851	851	851		
2020/21		286				
2021/22			34			
2022/23				716		

Total	3,808	3,253	1,743	1,567	0	0
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9 Council Tax

- 9.1 The Finance Settlement has confirmed that Shire Districts are able to increase council tax by up to the greater of 1.99% or £5 (on a Band D) in 2022/23 without the need for a referendum.
- 9.2 The Executive recommends the option to increase annual Band D Council Tax to £172.88 for Somerset West and Taunton services, which equates to the £5 annual increase on the current Somerset West and Taunton rate of £167.88, and this is reflected in the proposed budget for 2022/23. If approved by Council, the Somerset West and Taunton total Band D tax rate including £1.75 for the Somerset Rivers Authority will be £174.63 per year or £3.35 per week. This represents an increase of 2.95% - 10 pence per week for a Band D taxpayer.
- 9.3 The approved Tax Base for 2022/23 is 56,649.32 Band D Equivalents, an increase of 701.45 (1.25%) compared to the 2021/22 tax base. The main reasons for the tax base increasing are housing growth, a fall in demand for council tax support discount, and a small reduction in the non-collection rate. The budget estimates for Council Tax income for Somerset West and Taunton is therefore 56,649.32 x £172.88 = £9,793,535. This represents a total increase of £401,007 compared to the previous year. The budget estimates are calculated as follows.

	£
Council Tax Income Budget 2021/22	9,392,528
Increase due to change in Tax Base (Band D equivalents)	117,760
Increase due to proposed increase in Tax Rate	283,247
Council Tax Income Estimate 2022/23	<u>9,793,535</u>
Amount raised for Somerset Rivers Authority (see below)	<u>99,136</u>
Overall Total Somerset West and Taunton Council Tax Precept	<u>9,892,671</u>

- 9.4 The Somerset West and Taunton council tax charge represents around 10% of the full council tax bills for households, which also includes precepts for the county council, police and fire authorities, and local town and parish councils. Details of the full range of council tax charges will be included in the Council Tax Determination report to Council on 24 February 2022.

10 Somerset Rivers Authority

- 10.1 The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) remains unable to raise its own precept and it is therefore proposed to follow the same arrangements as previous years. For 2022/23 it is proposed that the Band D amount will remain at £1.75 and this will raise £99,136 in funding for the SRA from the Council in 2022/23.

11 Special Expenses/Unparished Area Budget

- 11.1 From 2020/21 the Charter Trustees have been required to precept directly for the mayoralty and related civic costs plus their own governance/admin costs. The Council has also maintained an element of special expenses for the unparished area related to local service costs that a town/parish might provide if in existence but is beyond the scope of the Charter Trustees.
- 11.2 The Executive propose to precept £29,458 in special expenses for the Unparished Area

of Taunton in 2022/23 (2021/22 = £29,093). This results in an annual council tax rate at £1.93 for a Band D for the Unparished Area of Taunton. (Note: For referendum purposes we must measure this as though it is a charge for the whole area, which equates to £0.52 for Band D.)

12 Fees and Charges

12.1 The Council's Constitution delegates the approval of Fees and Charges (except for Car Parks) to the S151 Officer. Therefore, the increase in all other fees and charges is due to be approved by the S151 Officer in January 2021, in consultation with SMT and Portfolio Holders. Fees and charges are set on the principles of full cost recovery where appropriate or an inflationary increase in line with the financial strategy approved by the Executive.

13 General Reserves

13.1 The current reserves position is shown below. The provisional forecast of the reserves position at the start of the next financial year at £5.843m.

13.2 Following the improved funding position in the Settlement for 2022/23, it is proposed to use £1m no longer required from reserves to make an additional capital debt repayment in the current financial year 2021/22. This prudently reduces the overall General Fund borrowing requirement and reduces future debt financing costs (see 16.5 below).

13.3 The draft Budget also plans to use £1.375m of reserves to fund one-off costs in 2022/23 reducing the projected General Reserves balance to £3.868m. Using any more General Reserves towards balancing the budget moving forward is not sustainable in the medium term.

Table 14 – General Reserves Balance

	Approval	£k
Balance brought forward 1 April 2021		7,914
2021/22 Original Budget Transfer to Reserve	Council – 18/02/21	-1,160
Supplementary Budget - Local Poll	Council – 04/05/21	-86
Supplementary Budget - Phosphates	Executive – 21/07/21	-200
Supplementary Budget - Health & Safety	Executive – 21/07/21	-126
Supplementary Budget - Parks & Open Spaces	Executive – 21/07/21	-100
Supplementary Budget - Asset Management	Executive – 21/07/21	-150
Supplementary Budget - Asset Management Compliance	Executive – 21/07/21	-100
Supplementary Budget - Revenues Service Capacity	Executive – 21/07/21	-130
Supplementary Budget - Project Management Resources	Director/S151– 15/07/21	-19
Projected Balance after current commitments		5,843
Recommended Supplement Budget – Debt Repayment		-1,000
Recommended Return from the Budget Volatility and Risk Earmarked Reserve		400
Projected Balance 31 March 2022		5,243
MTFP Planned use of reserves for LGR		-1,375
Projected uncommitted balance		3,868
Current Recommended Minimum Balance		2,400

13.4 The above table does not include any underspend in 2021/22, which will be updated for Members through the Quarter 3 budget monitoring report.

13.5 Although reserves are currently projected to be above the minimum reserves balance, Members are advised that significant financial risks remain not least the transition to the unitary council and the need to ongoing financial sustainability measures in future. It is strongly recommended by the S151 Officer that reserves are maintained above the recommended minimum to provide flexibility and resilience in this context.

14 Earmarked Reserves

14.1 The budgeted transfers from earmarked reserves in 2022/23 totals £5.387m towards net expenditure, funding £2.794m in one-off costs and £2.593m in ongoing budgeted costs. In addition, due to accounting timing of the Collection Fund Deficit from prior years, the budget also includes £7.541m of earmarked Business Rates Deferred S31 Grants.

14.2 The following table details the use of earmarked reserves for 2022/23.

Table 15 – Proposed General Fund Earmarked Reserves Transfers 2022/23

	2022/23 Budgeted Transfers £'000	
Funding One-Off Costs:		
BRR – Offsetting Collection Fund Deficit	-125	
Funding the Capital Programme	-1,825	
Funding one-off service costs	-844	
One-off costs funded from reserves		-2,794
Funding ongoing costs:		
Investment financing	-2,000	
BRR – Supporting the budget	-593	
Ongoing costs funded from reserves		-2,593
Net Expenditure Funded by Earmarked Reserves		-5,387
BRR Deferred S31 Grant to fund Collection Fund Deficit		-7,541

14.3 The Council has set aside £2.4m in a Budget Volatility and Risk Reserve as a contingency for 2021/22. In light of the up to date outturn forecast for the 2021/22 as at Quarter 3 (to be reported to Corporate Scrutiny and Executive in March 2022) the S151 Officer has determined the budget risk in 2021/22 has been mitigated in-year and therefore it is no longer necessary to earmark these funds for this purpose. This provides an opportunity to manage financial risk further prudently, including the recommendation of our external auditor in his Auditor's Annual Report regarding the Council's capital financing risks (Audit and Governance Committee 13 December 2021). It is therefore recommended to:

- a) Transfer £0.4m from the Budget Volatility and Risk Reserve to General Reserves.
- b) Transfer £2m to the revenue account to fund a supplementary budget for a Revenue Contribution to Capital ("RCCO") in 2021/22 to reduce borrowing required for the 2021/22 capital programme.

14.4 A table of earmarked reserves projected movements and balances over £500k is included within Appendix B.

15 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Summary

- 15.1 The current MTFP forecast is summarised below and is set out covering a 3-year period up to 2023/24.
- 15.2 The Budget for 2022/23 will be the final budget for Somerset West and Taunton with its services and functions transferring to the new unitary council for Somerset on 1 April 2023. Forecasting for 2023/24 is indicative only in this context, based on Somerset West and Taunton continuing in its current form. It is not clear what the impact of moving to the unitary will mean for funding, and we do not yet have a provisional finance settlement for 2023/24 on which to base estimates. It is therefore prudently assumed one-off allocations in the 2022/23 finance settlement will not continue into the following year. Costs and income will also be rolled into unitary council budgets and be updated according to the design and priorities of the new council including any savings that the unitary may deliver on its first year. However, it is important to recognise that there is a significant deficit forecast for 2023/24 on current projections despite these uncertainties, placing an immediate challenge for the unitary council's financial strategy and planning.

Table 16 - Draft MTFP Summary 2020/21 to 2023/24

	2021/22 Original Feb 2021 £	2021/22 Revised July 2021 £	Proposed 2022/23 £	Indicative 2023/24 £
Net Services Costs	21,019,756	21,019,755	25,573,624	22,534,531
Investment Property Net Income	-3,407,100	-5,562,100	-7,239,960	-7,239,960
Net Financing Costs	497,600	1,902,600	5,318,210	4,376,020
SRA Contribution	97,909	97,909	99,136	100,128
Special Expenses	29,093	29,093	29,458	29,752
Earmarked Reserves	1,665,036	2,415,307	-5,378,049	-54,750
General Reserves	-1,159,562	-1,159,562	-1,375,000	0
Net Expenditure	18,742,732	18,742,732	17,018,419	19,745,721
Retained Business Rates	-6,181,661	-6,181,661	-4,579,632	-4,566,866
Business Rates prior year surplus/deficit	12,556,229	12,556,229	7,666,825	1,331,340
Business Rates Holiday S31 Grant	-11,118,000	-11,118,000	-5,482,789	0
Business Rates Losses S31 Grant	-998,505	-998,505	-896,590	-896,590
Business Rates Covid Additional Relief Fund S31 Grant	0	0	-1,162,045	0
Estimated Pooling Gain	-250,000	-250,000	-250,000	0
LCTS Grant	-224,736	-224,736	0	0
Lower Tier Services Grant	-995,611	-995,611	-371,314	0
Services Grant	0	0	-269,603	
Revenue Support Grant	-6,479	-6,479	-7,297	-7,297
Rural Services Delivery Grant	-253,432	-253,432	-253,432	-253,432
New Homes Bonus	-1,743,222	-1,743,222	-1,566,792	0
Council Tax	-9,392,528	-9,392,528	-9,793,535	-10,090,582
Council Tax–SRA	-97,909	-97,909	-99,136	-100,128
Council Tax–Special Expenses	-29,093	-29,093	-29,458	-29,752
Council Tax prior year surplus/deficit	-7,785	-7,785	76,379	76,379
Net Funding	-18,742,732	-18,742,732	-17,018,419	-14,536,928
Budget Gap	0	0	0	5,208,793
Gap – Change on Previous Year	0	0	0	5,208,793

Note: The 2021/22 figures in this table show both the Budget approved in February 2021 and the

adjusted Budget to reflect the changes approved in the Financial Strategy by the Executive in July 2021.

16 2021/22 General Fund Capital Programme and Funding

16.1 The current General Fund Capital Programme in 2021/22 includes approved projects totalling £78.5m summarised in the table below with the full list of projects shown in Appendix C. Additionally, Council has approved further capital investment in future years including regeneration and properties for yield.

Table 17a - Summary of Existing Capital Approvals

Capital Expenditure	Total Capital Budget £000's	Forecast 2021/22 £000's	Forecast 2022/23 £000's	Forecast 2023/24 £000's	Forecast 2024/25 £000's	Total Forecast Expenditure £000's
Development and Place	145,263	68,261	31,309	37,755	7,938	145,263
External Operations	9,454	5,614	3,841	0	0	9,454
Housing & Communities	5,762	1,853	1,761	1,089	1,059	5,762
Internal Operations	2,110	1,680	430	0	0	2,110
Hinkley Capital Schemes	857	857	0	0	0	857
S106 Capital Schemes	702	203	499	0	0	702
Total	164,148	78,468	37,839	38,844	8,997	164,148

Table 17b Financing of Existing Capital Approvals

Capital Expenditure	Capital Grants CIL £000's	Capital Grants Other £000's	Section 106 Agreements £000's	Capital Receipts £000's	General Fund RCCO £000's	Capital Funding Reserve £000's	Borrowing £000's	Total Capital Financing £000's
Development and Place	13,166	14,157	632	745	0	0	116,563	145,263
External Operations	0	5,043	0	2,154	195	0	2,062	9,454
Housing & Communities	0	4,812	456	385	0	109	0	5,762
Internal Operations	0	0	0	1,182	0	20	908	2,110
Hinkley Capital Schemes	0	85	0	0	0	0	0	857
S106 Capital Schemes	0	0	702	0	0	0	0	702
Total	13,166	24,870	1,790	4,466	195	129	119,533	164,148

16.2 There have been a number of bids for the General Fund Capital Programme (shown in Table 18 below). These have been prioritised on the grounds that they remedy health and safety risk, deliver essential asset maintenance and essential assets for service delivery. The total cost of bids to be considered is £1.896m. In addition, some of the recurring schemes for 2022/23 approved in February 2021 have been reviewed and reduced by £181k giving an overall increased proposal of £1.715m.

16.3 It is intended to avoid increasing the borrowing requirements for General Fund schemes when financing the proposals for 2022/23 new bids. It is proposed to finance this capital investment through prioritising revenue budget and reserves plus using S106 contributions towards affordable housing schemes.

Table 18 – Capital Bids and Proposed Funding

	Current Approval £	Capital Bids/ Returns 2022/23 £	Revised/ Proposed 2022/23 Budget £	Financed By:		
				Revenue £	S106 £	Total Financing £
Budget Changes:						
External Operations						
Leisure Grants to Clubs and Parishes	15,000	-15,000	0	0		0
Play Equipment Replacement	20,000	15,000	35,000	35,000		35,000
New/Replacement Waste Containers	100,000	26,000	126,000	126,000		126,000
Vehicles and Large Plant	152,000	-27,000	125,000	125,000		125,000
Plant and Equipment	23,000	0	23,000	23,000		23,000
Internal Operations						
Desktop Hardware Refresh	280,000	-180,000	100,000	100,000		100,000
Deane Helpline Equipment	25,000	0	25,000	25,000		25,000
Sub-Total of Adjustments to Current Approvals	615,000	-181,000	434,000	434,000		434,000
New Budget Bids:						
External Operations						
Closed Church Yards	0	50,000	50,000	50,000		50,000
Wellington Sports Centre Roof	0	500,000	500,000	500,000		500,000
Vivary Park Footpaths	0	180,000	180,000	180,000		180,000
Brewhouse Theatre – Roofing Works	0	200,000	200,000	200,000		200,000
Car Parking Improvements	0	737,800	737,800	737,800		737,800
Housing						
Grants to RSLs	0	228,063	228,063		228,063	228,063
Sub-Total of New Bids	0	1,895,863	1,895,863	1,667,800	228,063	1,895,863
Total bids	615,000	1,714,863	2,329,863	2,101,800	228,063	2,329,863

16.4 The Capital Programme includes a budget in 2021/22 of £809,000 for Car Parks Capital Improvements. The project team have now identified that the total capital budget required to deliver much needed physical improvements and new parking machines in West Somerset car parks is £1,546,800. The increase of £737,800 is to be funded by earmarking £480,000 of funds in the current financial year from car park and asset maintenance budgets. To accelerate the provision of environmental improvement, including significant numbers of electric charging points, the CNCR budget is funding £90,000 and there is £167,800 from the Assets Earmarked Reserve. (Note, the Executive agreed to add this scheme to the budget at its meeting on 9 February. The amendment has been updated since the Executive meeting to include the £167.8k element to be funded from existing reserves.)

- 16.5 The Capital Programme for 2022/23 includes prioritised projects and schemes for the year ahead. There is a capital liability not currently included in the proposed budget regarding works at North Hill in Minehead. This is likely to involve significant expenditure but at the time of preparing this report the requirements have not been costed. This is expected to come forward after the Budget for 2022/23 has been approved.
- 16.6 As set out above in the Revenue Budget above, it is recommended the Council makes an additional voluntary repayment of historic capital debt. This is enabled through the additional funding in the Settlement reducing the need to use general reserves in 2022/23 and proposes to support ongoing financial sustainability by using £1m of reserves in 2021/22 to reduce debt and financing costs in future years. As well as benefitting future general revenue costs of capital, this will soften the impact if the North Hill scheme is approved and requires an increase in capital borrowing.
- 16.7 Duke Street car park is owned by the Council and the land is currently held as an asset by the Housing Revenue Account but is effectively operated as any other car park held by the General Fund. The Council is proposing to transfer the car park from the Housing Revenue Account to the General Fund. The appropriation of the car park will be undertaken in line with the latest technical guidance. Duke Street Car Park was independently valued for the 2019/20 accounts at £358k. The Housing Revenue Account Revenue and Capital Budget setting 2022/23 report recommends to approve the transfer of Duke Street Car Park from the Housing Revenue Account to the General Fund and to delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer to approve the final land transfer value.
- 16.8 The Capital, Investment and Treasury Strategies will be presented to Full Council in March and will provide more information regarding the financing strategy for the whole Capital Programme.
- 16.9 It is recommended to delegate authority for S151 Officer to approve the CIL capital grants budgets for CIL capital receipts passed to town and parishes in line with the CIL policy. This is just to regularise and simplify the approval of budget changes for prescribed amounts of CIL receipts that are passed over to towns/parishes as they arise.

17 Robustness of Budget Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves

- 17.1 Under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 the S151 officer is required to report to Council on the robustness of the estimates made for the purpose of calculations of the budget and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.
- 17.2 Estimates of expenditure and income include reasonable assumptions for increases and decreases due to trends and future influences such as inflation. The budget reflects commitments necessary to maintain service levels, and with demand-led budgets this inevitably entails a degree of judgement.
- 17.3 The 2022/23 budget estimates and Medium Term Financial Plan include significant pressures through funding reductions. Staff budgets have been updated to reflect the current establishment. The 2021 pay award has yet to be agreed but prudent assumptions are included for both the 2021 and 2022 awards in the meantime. Budgets for contracted services have been updated where necessary to reflect up to date costs and inflation assumptions, with some provisions for possible cost increases caused by COVID impact on service operation. Further investment in the Council's strategic priorities such as climate change is included for consideration.

- 17.4 Income through fees and charges reflects historic trends and assumptions about future trends. There has been a material re-basing of the off-street parking income budget reflecting the change in usage levels as impacted by the pandemic which is forecast to reduce ongoing income by at least £1.5m. COVID and the resulting changes in employment/consumer/customer habits continues to present a risk to budget accuracy. This has been considered and mitigated through prudent reserves planning for the year ahead.
- 17.5 The 2022/23 budget also includes the expected growth in commercial investment income reflecting the completion of acquisitions for the investment fund approved by Council in December 2019. I am confident in the strategy and process that has delivered this portfolio and the net income forecast. Inevitably no investment is risk-free. Investment assets are valued every year end to inform values carried in the balance sheet. Adverse changes in valuation below the carrying value in the accounts are written down to the Capital Adjustment Account with no immediate impact on General Fund resources. Valuation impairments only impact on usable resources upon disposal. Income volatility risk is underwritten by risk reserves.
- 17.6 Treasury investment and borrowing assumptions and estimates have also been reviewed to ensure these remain prudent in view of the economic impact of the pandemic. Further detail on this will be included in the Capital, Investment and Treasury Strategies report to Full Council in March. It is recognised there is a risk of rising interest rates and the wider economy may impact on investment income and borrowing costs. Prudent estimates have been used for budget purposes, with risks underwritten by general reserves.
- 17.7 The proposed 2022/23 budget plans use significant funds from revenue reserves to support investment in service delivery and capital projects plus one-off costs related to the implementation of local government restructuring in Somerset. In total, £4.2m will support one-off costs, with £2.6m covering recurring costs in line with the agreed financial strategy for next year. Supporting ongoing costs from reserves is not sustainable in the long run but is considered prudent in the current context and meets the objectives of the financial strategy in the lead up to structural change in 2023.
- 17.8 Taking assurance from leadership focus on financial management and the Council's controls I am confident the draft budget overall reflects reasonable forecasts and assumptions. There are many factors both within and beyond the Council's control that could lead to budget variances next year. However, my judgement is that it is more likely an underspend rather than overspend would arise particularly with increasing use of time to support structural change leading to possible delays in other activity. External factors such as supply chain and labour market challenges may also impact on this.
- 17.9 I remain reassured by the healthy reserves position of the Council which provides a good level financial resilience in the near term. However, given the financial risks and uncertainties faced it is very important that contingencies and reserve levels are maintained at prudent levels.

Risk and Uncertainty

- 17.10 I have considered risks and uncertainty in commenting on the proposed budget, including:

COVID impact on services, costs and income

- a) The response to COVID has been extensive and dynamic. Services and resources have adapted frequently and at short notice to implement many measures in response to the pandemic. This is likely to continue for some time. This may impact on priorities and capacity to deliver other services and projects.
- b) The Council's costs and income are susceptible to change due to COVID and the economy. Financial support from Government has been significant during 2020/21 and the first quarter of 2021/22 however there is no expectation of further support with no additional funding included in the 2022/23 Finance Settlement.

Mitigation: The budget has been updated to reflect estimated ongoing loss of income and additional service costs. Budget volatility will be mitigated through management intervention and in-year financial controls. The risk of overspend is underwritten by contingencies and reserves.

Future funding from Government

- c) The Government has again issued a one year Settlement for 2022/23 despite the 3-Year Spending Review announced in August 2021. This follows one-year settlements 2019 and 2020. The forecast funding for 2023/24 contains significant uncertainty for this reason and a cautious approach to funding estimates has been used. It is also unknown at this stage how local government restricting will affect total funding when the unitary is formed.
- d) The Relative Needs and Resources Review (previously known as Fair Funding Review) has not yet been completed, and the review of New Homes Bonus is yet to be concluded. It seems the Government may progress this in 2022 leading to further consultation on proposals.

Mitigation: The LGR Finance Workstream is engaging with Government to explore this further to inform the financial strategy and budgeting for the unitary.

Future funding through business rates

- e) The reset of the business rates baseline and funding, and the prospect of a redesign of the rates retention system is still deferred although the Government has indicated it remains committed to completing a review in future. Plans to implement 100% business rates retention have been abandoned.
- f) Hinkley Point B nuclear power station provides almost 20% of the total business rates in the district and will commence decommissioning in 2022. This is reflected in budget estimates for 2022/23, with the expectation the Council funding will reduce to the Safety Net.
- g) It is anticipated the Government would continue to fully fund any further COVID-related business rates reductions for ratepayers. No such support in 2022/23 has been announced at the time of preparing this report.
- h) The Council will not be a member of the Somerset Business Rates Pool in 2022/23 but will still benefit from a share in growth in the other Somerset districts to recognise the reduction in risk to pooling gains because of SWTC exit.

Mitigation: Prudent estimates have been used in the budget with funding volatility underwritten by the business rates volatility reserve.

Commercial and treasury investment and borrowing

- i) The commercial investment net income is underpinned by very strong governance and due diligence, which helps to minimise risks. The council finalised its planned investment in December 2021, with the budget estimates reflecting the completed portfolio. The risks associated with this investment are set out within the strategy, including market and economic risks as well as potential volatility in income, financing, and management costs. This is mitigated through prudent budgeting and earmarked investment risk reserves.
- j) The Government's decision to restrict access to PWLB means alternative sources of long term borrowing may be needed in future. There are competitive alternatives available, as seen by financing undertaken by many other authorities, however this represents a risk in terms of estimating future borrowing costs.

Mitigation: Prudent approach to budget estimates and debt repayment, with adequate funds held in investment risk reserve. An assessment of the consolidated cash flows, investment and borrowing requirements will be completed through the LGR Finance Workstream. This will inform the development of longer treasury management strategies including borrowing and refinancing requirements.

Delivery of savings

- k) The 2022/23 budget has been updated for actual and planned savings. A relatively modest efficiency savings target of £200k is included in the budget, and progress being made in the Service Efficiency and Improvement Programme provides confidence this estimate is prudent.

Accuracy of Budget estimates

- l) Budget holders and business partners have worked together to ensure budget estimates reflect realistic ongoing costs and income. Any forecast contains an element of risk and uncertainty.

Mitigation: Adequate reserves held to underwrite budget risk. Forecasts are reviewed monthly with significant variances and risks reported to senior management and members.

Council Tax

- 17.11 The budget will receive Council Tax funding in year based on the approved precept set in February. Volatility will be due to a variety of factors such as housing growth, entitlement to discounts, and demand for council tax support. This will result in a surplus or deficit in the Collection Fund, which will be reflected in the General Fund budget in the following year.

Mitigation: Reasonable estimates used to set the tax base, with estimates of a surplus or deficit monitored and included in MTFP forecasts.

Capital Programme Funding

- 17.12 The Executive's draft budget proposals for the General Fund capital programme are included in this report. Capital expenditure estimates on council housing provision is included separately within the Housing Revenue Account budget report. To support the spending plans, councils are required to publish and monitor a set of Prudential Indicators. These are included in the Capital, Investment and Treasury Strategies report to Full Council in March 2022.
- 17.13 The General Fund capital programme budget seeks a net increase of c£1m in the total programme, with the additional costs funded by existing revenue resources and external contributions. No increase in borrowing requirement is anticipated.
- 17.14 The Council's borrowing requirement is expected to increase significantly in the longer term. Future General Fund borrowing is largely related to regeneration schemes, which also benefit significantly from external grant funding that has been secured. This will improve financial viability including coverage of financing costs through income generation. HRA investment remains affordable based on forecast housing rent income.

Local Government Restructuring

- 17.15 The Council's 2022/23 Budget will be the final budget for SWTC. £1.375m has been included in the budget to meet estimated implementation and transition costs. The MTFP projection for 2023/24 is provided as indicative only as if SWTC were to continue as a single district council. Whilst this provides a forecast deficit of £5.5m, in practice the financial strategy, draft budgets and MTFP forecasts for the unitary council for 2023/24 onwards will be prepared by the Implementation Executive during the year ahead. This will need to reflect the consolidated funding arrangements for the unitary council. It will also take into account the planned savings from the One Somerset business case, currently estimated at £18.5m per year.

Adequacy of Reserves

- 17.16 With the existing statutory and regulatory framework, it is my responsibility as S151 Officer to advise the Council about the adequacy of the Council's reserves position.
- 17.17 Reserves are regularly monitored and formally reviewed at least annually with my formal opinion updated during the budget setting process each year. For the General Fund, the minimum level of general reserves has been re-assessed in view of the draft budget, considering a wide range of financial risks and uncertainty including the assumptions underpinning the 2021/22 budget estimates. The recommended minimum general reserve balance is £2.4m, with current forecasts providing further headroom to manage financial risks in the lead up to unitary implementation. For the HRA the minimum balance is set at £2m.
- 17.18 For the General Fund, it is important for Members' to note the planned use of reserves in 2021/22 and 2022/23. The budget report highlights the projected uncommitted reserves balance after taking this plan into account.
- 17.19 Earmarked reserve balances are expected to reduce as funds are used to meet commitments. The total balance is still projected to remain relatively high in 2022/23 including specific contingencies for investment and business rates funding risks. I am satisfied that reserves are appropriate to meet financial commitments and mitigate identified risks, however this will be kept under review.
- 17.20 My opinion is given in the knowledge that known risks (strategic, operational and

financial) are managed and mitigated appropriately in line with the Council's policies and strategies.

Conclusions – Statement of the S151 Officer

- 17.21 Based on the evidence I have reviewed I am able to confirm that I believe the Council's draft budget proposals for 2022/23 are robust and the Council's reserves are adequate. As mitigation for ongoing financial risks and uncertainty it is recommended that resilience is maintained through thorough ongoing monitoring and adaptable ongoing management of spend, underpinned by prudent retention of reserves and contingencies as set out in this report.
- 17.22 In order to meet Council plans and priorities, the MTFP includes plans to use reserves to support service expenditure next year. The Council's balance sheet remains healthy and can sustain this approach for a short period, however it is essential that robust plans are implemented through LGR to ensure ongoing financial resilience and sustainability.

18 Links to Corporate Strategy

- 18.1 It is important that Councillors recognise the financial position, challenges and risks faced by the Council and fully engage in the corporate and financial planning processes to determine an affordable and sustainable set of corporate aims and priorities. This should lead to the Council approving a sustainable final budget and MTFP in February 2022.

19 Legal Implications

- 19.1 The Council is required by law to set a balanced budget and failure to do so would result in serious financial and service implications and lead to Government intervention.

20 Climate and Sustainability Implications

- 20.1 The delivery of the Council's climate and sustainability objectives are embedded in many of the Council's revenue and capital budget proposals for both General Fund and Housing Revenue Account services. The 2022/23 GF Revenue Budget includes a further £500,000 allocation towards the implementation of the Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan, adding to the £500,000 allocated from general reserves in 2020/21 and £500,000 in the 2021/22 budget for this priority.

21 Partnership Implications

- 21.1 The Council budget incorporates costs and income related to the various partnership arrangements, and any changes in relevant forecasts and proposals will be reported for consideration as these emerge.

22 Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 22.1 Any relevant information and decisions regarding health and wellbeing will be reported as these emerge through the financial planning process.

23 Asset Management Implications

- 23.1 The proposed budget includes an increase in the General Fund Asset Landlord and Compliance works. Priorities will be determined in line with the Asset Management Plans in place.

24 Scrutiny Comments / Recommendation(s)

24.1 The report was considered by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 26 January and the recommendations supported.

24.2 The main comments/discussion points were:

- a) Clarity sought on how a new town council would be funded - officers will provide an update on this before Full Council on 24th February.
- b) Queries regarding internally borrowing for commercial investments – this was explained at the meeting and members were reminded of the upcoming briefing from Arlingclose on 31 January. The Capital Investment and Treasury Strategy will be presented to Council in March.
- c) How was SWT’s share of the LGR costs derived - the Councils have agreed that SCC will cover 80% which equates to £13.2m. The districts have agreed to share the remaining 20% - £3.3m – pro-rata to population. This results in an estimated contribution of £912k from SWTC. We have included £1m in the budget allowing for some contingency should it be required.
- d) Funding for Public Toilets – there is currently revenue funding within the budget for maintenance within the old “Taunton Deane” area of the district, no capital funding is included with the proposed budgets.
- e) Various budgets within the capital programme were discussed.

Democratic Path:

- Corporate Scrutiny – 26 January 2022
- Executive – 9 February 2022
- Full Council – 24 February 2022

Reporting Frequency: Annually

List of Appendices

Appendix A	Breakdown of Total Spending on Services
Appendix B	Earmarked Reserves
Appendix C	Capital Programme Summary
Appendix D	General Fund Budget Book 2022-23

Contact Officers

Name	Emily Collacott
Direct Dial	01823 218742
Email	e.collacott@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk
Name	Paul Fitzgerald
Direct Dial	01823 257557
Email	S151@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk