

APPENDIX 10
ROBUSTNESS OF BUDGET ESTIMATES AND ADEQUACY OF RESERVES: STATEMENT OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

BACKGROUND

A key responsibility of the Council's Chief Financial Officer is to give assurance on the robustness of the budget strategy which includes highlighting the risks associated with its deliverability and sustainability and the adequacy of reserves.

The framework within which the Council's budget setting process operates and the final budget strategy was developed is governed by legislation which provides regulatory safeguards for the Council:

Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the authority's Chief Financial Officer to report on the **robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of reserves** allowed for in the budget proposals in the budget report, so Members are informed and can consider this when they make their budget decisions.

Section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 highlights the Chief Financial Officer's responsibility to report to members if it appears to him that an unbalanced budget is likely to be set for the year.

Local Government Finance Act 1992 identifies the requirement to set a balanced budget.

Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 - Financial Administration requires that authorities should appoint a Section 151 Officer to have responsibility for the proper administration of its financial affairs.

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 – Regulation 4 requires that the accounting records and control systems include measures to ensure that risk is appropriately managed.

The requirements of the prudential Code must also be complied with (a separate report on prudential Indicators is included elsewhere in this suite of service and financial planning reports).

Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 makes it a criminal offence for any Member with arrears of Council Tax which have been outstanding for two months or more to attend any meeting of the Council or one of its committees at which a decision affecting the budget is to be made, unless the Member concerned declares at the outset of the meeting that he or she is in arrears, and will not be voting

on the decision for that reason. The Member concerned must then abstain from voting.

The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 provide that the Council's procedures must provide for the minutes to record how each Councillor voted (including any abstentions) when determining the Council's budget and the level of Council Tax to be levied

In addition the CIPFA guidance on Local Authority Reserves and Balances requires that a statement reporting on the annual review of earmarked reserves should be made to Council, at the same time as the budget. The statement should list the various earmarked reserves, the purpose for which they are held and provide advice on the appropriate levels. It should also show the estimated opening balances for the year, planned additions/withdrawals and the estimated closing balance. This is included as Appendix 9 of this report.

ROBUSTNESS OF ESTIMATES

Overview

Since 2010 the Council has faced unprecedented cuts in Government grant and over the past 10 years has made £117m of ongoing savings to manage within its reducing resources. The Government has an objective to eliminate the national deficit and will continue to cut public spending as it aims to meet its target and while some parts of the sector, such as health and defence, are protected further cuts will inevitably fall on local authorities. The 2018 Autumn Budget did include some additional funding for Adult Social Care/Children's Safeguarding and repairing potholes. However, the amounts allocated were one-off sums and much less the Local Government Association have calculated is required to avoid further cuts to social care services.

As outlined in some detail in the service and financial planning report, there is considerable uncertainty at present over the impact of a number of significant proposed changes to the local government finance system which are due to come in to effect from 1 April 2020. Therefore estimates of the Council's financial position after this date are subject to a high degree of uncertainty. However, we need to make the best estimates of the potential position facing the Council that we can in order to assist with medium term financial planning. The projected budget gap over the next two years, 2020/21 and 2021/22, for the Council is currently estimated to be around £25m, although this will be updated as further information becomes available. The budget gap, however much it is, will need to be met through a package of savings measures which will be developed in line with the core elements of the "Being the Change" organisational strategy as well as some increases in council tax and use of one-off resources in the short-term. The covering service and financial planning report therefore recommends that we do not commit around £16.2m of available one-off resources projected to be available at the end of 2019/20 and that officers start to commence work on developing further savings options for discussion with the new Cabinet following local elections scheduled for 2 May

2019. It is, however, now inevitable that some of the cuts will have significant impacts on local people and the Council is committed to consultation and is keen to work with partner organisations to identify alternative options for service delivery. The Council will continue with its approach to the budget consultation which will take place throughout the year, rather than being compressed into a 4 week period which will allow greater focus and interaction with the community. In parallel the Council is committed to investing in Telford's future and the strong financial management in recent years has allowed one-off sums to be invested in the borough ensuring that Telford is a prime place to live, work and do business in.

The Council has specifically prioritised Adult Social Care and Children's Safeguarding. Adult Social Care will see investment of £0.842m next year; and Children's Safeguarding & Family Support services will see investment of £3.296m to reflect the pressures being experienced by these services. This is not to say that changes are not required in these services and longer-term savings are required which will be achieved from new operating models.

As mentioned, the Council's medium term service and financial strategy has 4 core elements in line with the Being the Change ethos, which will take the organisation forward and deliver budget savings:

- Focusing on solving problems and promoting social responsibility and action to manage and reduce demand for services,
- Challenging and changing, reviewing and reimagining the way we do things,
- Reducing our dependency on Government grants,
- Being a modern organisation with modern practices and where we always get the basics right.

These themes are expanded upon in the "Being The Change" report issued by the Managing Director in December 2015, refreshed in March 2017 and June 2018.

Despite the financial challenges being faced, the Council has a clear goal to attract new jobs and investment and promote growth in the borough. Growth will deliver increased numbers of houses and businesses in the borough which will result in additional council tax, new homes bonus and business rates and whilst some additional costs will arise from a larger population, the net additional income generated will contribute towards helping to reduce the level of cuts needed.

2019/20 is the final year of the Government's multi-year settlement and the final year before significant changes are made to the Rates Retention Scheme (incorporating the outcomes of the Fair Funding Review and re-setting the Business Rates system). Under this system, authorities currently retain 50% (49% for Telford & Wrekin Council and 1% for the Combined Fire Authority) of growth in locally collected business rates. This brings opportunities, in terms of the council directly benefiting from business rate growth, but also increased risk, in terms of lost income if businesses close or move out of the area, claim

significant empty property reliefs or lodge successful appeals to the Government's Valuation Office Agency against their rateable value. Ensuring business rates income is maximised is a key priority for the Council which is being closely monitored. The move to at least 75% business rates retention by 2020/2021 is in principle welcomed however we await further technical consultation for more details to fully understand the implications for us.

The financial outlook is clearly challenging and there is an ongoing programme of targeted service reviews and restructuring underway.

Overall therefore, given the continued delivery of savings which now total over £117m, the long-term service redesign, particularly in relation to Adult Social Care and Children Safeguarding & Early Help services, the commercial approach being adopted, and the investment being made in the borough, it is considered that the Council is pursuing a sound financial strategy in the context of the most prolonged and challenging financial position it has ever faced due to the combined effect of Government grant cuts and increased service pressures.

The 2019/20 Service & Financial Planning Strategy has been informed by:

1. Impact Assessments and Risk Management

We are continuing to develop and deliver savings; with the high level of grant cuts some impact on service delivery is inevitable. A commitment has been given to protect delivery of the most essential services for vulnerable children and adults.

Due to the ongoing scale of savings required which will inevitably be more challenging on top of the savings already delivered, the Council will continue with its approach to the development of future savings proposals which allows more time for consultation with stakeholders about options to minimise impacts. Going forward, therefore, proposals will be developed as soon as opportunities arise and capacity allows, rather than concentrating consultation through the 4 week period as part of the annual budget process. This will allow meaningful engagement with our community and partners to develop creative solutions and will mean that the budget engagement process will take place throughout the year as an ongoing dialogue.

It seems inevitable that the level of financial risk will increase both to individual services and the operation of the council as a whole and this will be common to local authorities across the country and exacerbated by the move to 75% local retention of business rates. Cumulative risk attached to adopting an increasingly commercial approach will also need to be kept under review and key commercial decisions will continue to be subject to development of business cases and Cabinet approval.

A differential approach to savings targets has been taken by Cabinet Members and Directors within their service areas, rather than an across

the board percentage reduction, to recognise the relative demands, risks, opportunities and challenges faced by different Council services.

We have set aside a revenue contingency of £3m next year; in addition a further £1.1m for inflation. There is also £0.8m set aside as an additional contingency for Children's safeguarding in 2019/20. As mentioned above, additional investment is being made into both Adult Social Care and Children's Safeguarding & Family Support in 2019/20. Further, an Invest to Save/Capacity Fund and a Partnership Capacity Fund are in place to provide additional resources and to assist with the delivery of savings.

Individual service areas have continually managed and monitored key risks relating to their service areas to ensure they are providing the best service they can when faced with reduced resources and ongoing reviews. The senior management team monitors service performance and seeks to manage and mitigate significant potential exposures to risks where possible. The current risk register is included at Appendix 14 of this report and includes reference to Brexit. Brexit is causing some uncertainty over key issues which may impact on the Council including levels of future interest rates, potential impacts on the rate of inflation and potentially on overall future economic conditions that may impact on demand for some Council services etc

2. The Financial Management Process

Financial monitoring provides a regular financial health-check throughout the year and also provides information which feeds into the budget strategy. Financial monitoring follows a risk-based approach with high-value, volatile areas being monitored more closely than low-value, less volatile areas. Regular financial management reports are presented to Senior Management Team and Cabinet during the year which highlight any significant variances and therefore areas of risk. Progress on the delivery of savings will be monitored through this route flagging both 'in year' and future year financial strategy impacts. The reports also monitor the budget contingency and performance against council tax, business rates and sales ledger income collection targets. The Senior Management team also regularly consider significant debts outstanding to the Council and agree actions to obtain payment as quickly as possible.

3. The Budget Setting Process

The overall medium term financial planning position of the Council is controlled through a model which is updated during the year as new information becomes available - including current year trends identified through monitoring. At a more detailed level finance officers meet with budget holders and review all budgets on an annual basis on top of the usual monitoring work. Budgets are cash limited. Areas of unavoidable growth and pressures have been identified and scrutinised as part of the budget process along with the deliverability of the savings package which forms an integral part of the overall strategy.

The budget setting process links to both the budget monitoring process, performance monitoring and risk management, discussed above, together with other issues such as meeting new legislative requirements and statutory obligations.

2019/20 Budget Assumptions and Considerations:

Given the difficult financial position the Council faces, a tight line has been taken on planning assumptions for next year but this is mitigated by the inclusion of the general revenue contingency of £3m plus £1.1m inflation contingency. A risk assessed review of reserves and balances has been undertaken which has identified uncommitted balances of £16.26m, prior to any remaining underspend at year end, which is taken into account as part of this medium term financial and service planning strategy.

<u>Inflation</u>	
Pay Award	2.7% has been included for pay awards for 2019/20 and 2020/21 and 3% for 2021/22; and an average 2.7% has been included for teachers pay. If the estimates are inaccurate the actual level of pay award will be allocated to service budgets and any adjustment made to the budget model which will either increase or reduce the savings requirement.
Apprentice Levy	An allowance of 0.5% of the pay bill is included to meet the cost of the Apprentice Levy during 2019/20. Schools will pick up the cost of their element of the levy.
Employer's Pension Contribution	The Shropshire Pension Fund had a funding level of 84% at 31 March 2016, the date of the last triennial evaluation undertaken by independent actuaries. Following this and discussion and negotiation with Pension Fund Officers, the employers' rate was set at 14.1% plus a lump sum payment agreed for each year (£3.9m in 19/20) which has been included in budget projections. It should be noted that the next triennial evaluation will be at 31 March 2019 for implementation in 2020/21 and the position will be updated at this point.
Employer's National Insurance Contribution	Nil increase.
Non-Pay budgets	A provision for known contractually committed inflation has been included. No other allowance for non-pay inflation has been made as budgets are cash limited. If inflation continues to rise this will place pressure on service budgets and the

Contingencies	<p>position will be kept under review through regular financial monitoring.</p> <p>There is a general contingency of £3m plus £1.1m contingency for inflation. There is also £0.8m set aside as an additional contingency for Children’s safeguarding in 2019/20.</p>
Service Pressures	<p>The difficult economic situation has an impact on the community and results in an increase in demand for council services.</p> <p>The key service pressures identified for the medium term relate to Adult Social Care and Children’s Safeguarding & Family Support.</p> <p>Children’s Safeguarding & Family Support – there are currently 380 Children in Care (at 31.12.18) and financial monitoring shows a projected overspend of £3.5m in the current year. Safeguarding children from harm and neglect is one of the Council’s top priorities and the 2019/20 budget includes additional investment of £3.296m. A cost improvement plan is in place to address areas of pressure to ensure that costs are contained within the increased base budget as far as possible. The position will be continually monitored and reviewed again as part of the 2020/21 service and financial planning process. The Service has developed a rolling 4 year placement model with the aim to reduce the total number of placements.</p> <p>Adult Social Care – the Council has consistently prioritised the protection of vulnerable people and the level of cuts made to the Adult Social Care budgets has been significantly less than other services. In total, the 2018/19 Adult Social Services budget will be increased by £0.8m. While we are committed to meeting the assessed needs of vulnerable adults changes will be needed to the way services are provided to deliver savings in future years.</p>
Central Government Funding / Local Government Resources Review	<p>The Business Rates Retention Scheme replaced the current system for funding Local Government in April 2013. This allows local authorities to retain 50% of the growth in locally collected business rates (49% for Telford & Wrekin Council and 1% for the Combined Fire Authority). There are opportunities in relation to business rates growth but also risks in terms of reduction in business rate income. The amount included for business rates in 19/20 has been based on local information, which we consider to be more realistic than the national estimate used by the Government in their</p>

	<p>settlement figures and will need to be closely monitored throughout the year.</p> <p>The level of business rates appeals is of particular concern, with £92m rateable value from the 2010 Valuation list is currently under appeal. The Council has made prudent provision to meet the cost of successful appeals. However the level of future appeals is difficult to predict due to VOA adopting a new Check, Challenge & Appeal process following the 2017 revaluation and there being very limited information on this.</p>
Council Tax	<p>The Council will increase council tax by the 2% "Social Care Precept" and by an additional 1.2% (3.2% in total) in 2019/20.</p> <p>Confirmation of the referendum limit thresholds for 2019/20 was received in late December and there is no risk of the planned council tax increase being above the threshold set and the council therefore incurring additional costs of holding a referendum and potential re-billing costs.</p>
Council Tax Support	<p>Telford & Wrekin's Local Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme is included as an appendix to the Service & Financial Planning Strategy and there are no changes in 2019/20 to the global percentage reduction in CTS paid to non-vulnerable, working age claimants previously set at 25%. A council tax hardship fund of £0.030m is available to award discretionary discounts in cases of extreme financial hardship. Council tax support is paid as a council tax discount and there is a greater financial risk than under the Council Tax Benefit System as claimants classed as "non-vulnerable" who previously received 100% benefit will now have some council tax to pay. Since CTS was implemented in April 2013 claimant numbers have reduced overall however the number of vulnerable claimants has increased. The impact of CTS has been included in the setting of the council tax base for 2019/20.</p>
Interest Rates	<p>Base rates were increased from 0.5% to 0.75% in August 2018 with the next move being dependent on how the economy responds to the uncertainties of Brexit and the extent to which the Bank of England will be tolerant of higher levels of inflation. The Bank of England's Quantitative Easing programme was £435bn. Our investment and borrowing strategies for 2019/20 are set within this context.</p> <p>The assumptions for new borrowing are 3.0% in 2019/20 and 3.5% in subsequent years. A flexible approach to borrowing</p>

	<p>will be taken, in consultation with our treasury advisors, consideration will be given to affordability, maturity profile of existing debt, interest rates and refinancing risks as well as borrowing source. Maximum investment levels with counterparties are set to ensure prudent diversification and following strict investment criteria. Full details are included in the Treasury Management Strategy report included in this suite of service and financial planning reports. One of the primary objectives is to reduce the Council's exposure to risk while at the same time maximising returns. In the current interest rate environment and with considerable uncertainty on the financial robustness of counterparties, it is more advantageous to reduce investment levels and therefore reduce borrowing requirements. The investment portfolio is monitored on a regular basis and advice is received from independent professional treasury advisors.</p>
Treasury Management	<p>The Treasury Strategy for 2019/20 follows the requirements of the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice and clearly identifies the various exposures to risk and strategies in place to minimise this. The Audit Committee has a role to review and monitor the Council's treasury management arrangements which includes policies, procedures and the management of risk. The 2019/20 Treasury Strategy was presented to Audit Committee on the 29 January 2019 for their consideration and comments. The Committee will monitor progress during the year.</p>
Non-Treasury Investments	<p>The Investment Strategy for 2019/20, included as part of the suite of Service & Financial Planning papers, focuses on non-treasury investments. These investments are made to support local public services and include commercial investments which deliver a return to the Council as well as delivering Council priorities.</p>
Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)	<p>The figure allocated by the DfE in December 2018 for 2019/20 Dedicated Schools Grant was £152.6m (including academies). There are now four blocks making up the total DSG figure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools; • High Needs; • Early Years; and • Central School Services.
Schools Block	<p>The largest of these four blocks is Schools, which funds mainstream schools. This has increased by nearly £6m in 2019/20 to £117.2m, due to a combination of rising pupil numbers and an increase in funding per pupil, arising from</p>

<p>High Needs</p> <p>Early Years</p> <p>Central School Services</p>	<p>the continuing move towards a national funding formula for schools.</p> <p>The next largest block is High Needs at £22.2m. This too has increased compared to 2018/19, by around £0.9m but the high needs block remains under pressure due to increasing demand for high needs support. In addition to this allocation the Schools Forum agreed that £0.59m should be transferred from the Schools Block to High Needs in 2019/20, following a similar transfer of 0.5% of the schools block in 2018/19.</p> <p>The Early Years block, £12.1m, will be adjusted for actual numbers of early years pupils in January 2019 and January 2020 and so will be finalised retrospectively in Summer 2020. Since September 2017, this block includes funding for the extended 30 hours free provision for 3 and 4 years olds from working families.</p> <p>The Central School Services block, £1.1m, was introduced in 2018/19 following the demise of the Education Services Grant, which ceased in August 2017. Funding for education central services – statutory obligations for local authorities, not discretionary support – has sharply declined in recent years. As an illustration of this, the Education Services Grant (ESG) for T&W was £2.9m in 2013/14. Representatives of maintained schools on the Schools Forum agreed to de-delegate an additional £0.4m for 2019/20 to cover costs of statutory services that apply only to mainstream schools, but nonetheless the removal of the ESG has represented a further significant loss of funding to local authorities.</p>
<p>Estimates on the level and timing of capital receipts</p>	<p>The revenue budget and capital programme assume around £33m anticipated future capital receipts over the medium term planning period. Any shortfall or delays in generating expected receipts or in the amounts generated will need to be taken into account in future service and financial strategies. This could require scaling the capital programme back, re-phasing schemes or entering in to additional prudential borrowing which would necessitate further cuts to services. Delivery of projected receipts is monitored on a monthly basis as part of overall financial monitoring and reported to Cabinet quarterly.</p> <p>The Government has offered some flexibility on the use of capital receipts generated up to and including 2021/22. New receipts generated during this period may be used to fund the revenue costs of service reform projects. The Government recognise that in doing so revenue balances would be preserved but debt levels would be increased. The budget</p>

	<p>assumes use of this flexibility up to £4m in 2019/20 and this will be and updated in future budgets.</p>
<p>Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)</p>	<p>The policy in relation to MRP is set out in the Treasury Management Strategy Report. The rules around the calculation of the cost of borrowing that must be charged to the revenue account – the minimum revenue provision (MRP) - have been prudently applied in setting the 2019/20 budget strategy.</p> <p>The MRP policy is in line with the previous year.</p> <p>The MRP methodology adopted increases borrowing in the medium term as less MRP is set aside however by the end of the life of the asset the impact on borrowing is nil. The Council’s external auditors, are comfortable with this approach.</p> <p>Full details of the MRP approach is included in the Treasury Strategy report (also on this agenda).</p>
<p>Prudential Borrowing / Prudential Indicators</p>	<p>The use of prudential borrowing is in line with the capital programmes approved by full Council.</p> <p>Prudential Indicators are approved as part of the budget strategy (see separate report on this agenda) and are monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.</p>
<p>Single Status</p>	<p>The Single Status process is in progress with planned implementation during 2020/21. An annual provision equal to 4% of the relevant pay bill has been set aside in the accounts for the 4 years 2007/08 to 2010/11. It is now considered that there is adequate funding in the provision and no further contribution will be made and potentially if a locally designed scheme is implemented some of the funding set aside may be available to be released. The additional ongoing budget is included in the budget strategy from 2021/22 totalling £1.27m.</p> <p>There is possible exposure to liabilities from back pay and equal pay claims which along with any other one-off costs (such as a potential period of pay protection for employees who see their pay reduced) could be met from the one-off provision.</p>
<p>Savings</p>	<p>The Council has an excellent track record of delivering savings in accordance with agreed plans. Over the past 10 years savings totalling over £117m have been delivered.</p>

	<p>Savings for 2019/20 were agreed in previous budget strategy reports and there are no additional savings put forward for 2019/10 in this report. Projected further savings of around £25m are required in the period 2020/21 to 2021/22 and work will commence to develop proposals.</p> <p>There is a capital receipts flexibility to meet severance costs and the intention to increase the invest to save/capacity fund, which supports the delivery of ongoing savings, using the 2018/19 underspend.</p>
<p>Financial Risks inherent in any new funding partnerships, major outsourcing deals or major capital developments</p>	<p>There are a number of major capital projects that have been identified which require careful project management and monitoring during 2019/20 and beyond to ensure commitments are matched by funding actually achieved, particularly the reliance on capital receipts and future government funding levels for the council and its public sector partners. Major capital projects in the medium term strategy include the Housing Investment Programme and the Property Investment Portfolio Growth Fund.</p>
<p>The availability of other funds to deal with major calls on contingencies</p>	<p>General reserves or other funds may have to be used temporarily and restored if revenue contingencies, management and policy action is insufficient to deal with a major issue. The Council has evaluated the risks it faces against available balances as outlined earlier in this appendix and concluded that around £16.2m is available to use in the overall budget strategy, which is after meeting the commitment in 2019/20.</p> <p>Current projections for 2018/19 indicate that there will be a significant balance remaining in the corporate contingency at year end, part of which will be invested in key community priorities and part of which will be transferred into a budget strategy reserve to support the delivery of the overall medium term service and financial planning strategy in future years.</p>
<p>The overall financial standing of the authority (level of borrowing, debt outstanding, collection of council tax etc.</p>	<p>The Council's approach to sustaining its overall sound financial position is covered in a number of sections of this Appendix. The overall projected net indebtedness position at 31 December 2018 was £244.2m; net additional prudential borrowing anticipated in 19/20 is £34.4m, although a significant element of this relates to the Housing Investment Programme and PIP investments which will generate a commercial return greater than the cost of associated debt charges. The total reliance on capital receipts in the medium term strategy is £33m in line with profiled disposals (additional information is provided in both the Capital Programme and Treasury Management Strategy Reports). The Council budgets prudently for its level of borrowing,</p>

	<p>avoiding external borrowing where cash flow permits and running down investment exposure while rates available for new investments are very low.</p> <p>The assumed council tax collection rate for 2019/20 onwards is 99.25%. For each 1% not collected the cost is approximately £0.627m in lost income to the Council. Legislation requires that any collection fund deficit is corrected through Council Tax in the next year. In recent years collection has outperformed projections allowing use of a council tax surplus as part of next year's strategy.</p> <p>Cumulative collection rates to date for recent years are</p> <table data-bbox="821 674 1093 869"> <tr><td>2013/14</td><td>99.46%</td></tr> <tr><td>2014/15</td><td>99.34%</td></tr> <tr><td>2015/16</td><td>99.22%</td></tr> <tr><td>2016/17</td><td>98.98%</td></tr> <tr><td>2017/18</td><td>98.49%</td></tr> <tr><td>2018/19</td><td>64.70%</td></tr> </table> <p>Final recovery rates for all years are projected to be over 99.25%.</p> <p>Close monitoring of the impact of CTS on collection rates will continue during 2019/20.</p>	2013/14	99.46%	2014/15	99.34%	2015/16	99.22%	2016/17	98.98%	2017/18	98.49%	2018/19	64.70%
2013/14	99.46%												
2014/15	99.34%												
2015/16	99.22%												
2016/17	98.98%												
2017/18	98.49%												
2018/19	64.70%												
<p>The authority's track record in budget and financial management</p>	<p>The Council continues to demonstrate extremely strong financial management with outturn being very close to the net budget set and no overspends during the previous 10 years:</p> <ul data-bbox="603 1245 1284 1619" style="list-style-type: none"> • 2008/09 - underspent by £0.366m (0.31% of budget) • 2009/10 – underspent by £0.332m (0.27% of budget) • 2010/11 – underspent by £0.083m (0.07% of budget) • 2011/12 – underspent by £1.843m (1.42% of budget) • 2012/13 – underspent by £0.055m (0.04% of budget) • 2013/14 – underspent by £0.099m (0.07% of budget) • 2014/15 – underspent by £1.145m (0.89% of budget) • 2015/16 – underspent by £0.121m (0.10% of budget) • 2016/17 – underspent by £0.167m (0.10% of budget) • 2017/18 – underspent by £0.150m (0.10% of budget) <p>This demonstrates an outstanding track record of continuous strong financial management, despite considerable pressure on service budgets, notably Adult Social Care and Children's Safeguarding and an unprecedented protracted period of significant cuts to Government funding.</p>												
<p>Virement and Contingencies</p>	<p>Virement is an important feature of budgetary control. It provides flexibility to adapt expenditure patterns to meet changing needs and objectives, consistent with Council policy.</p>												

	<p>No Assistant Director or Service Delivery Manger should plan to overspend. All expenditure should be consistent with approved service priorities and the overall approved budget.</p>
<p>The adequacy of the authority's insurance arrangements to cover major unforeseen risks</p>	<p>The Council's insurance arrangements are a balance between external insurance premiums and internal funds to "self-insure". The Council use the services of an external insurance advisor to provide additional expertise in managing insurance arrangements.</p> <p>The Council has a strategic risk register (Appendix 14 of this report) which is used to identify the substantive issues which may impact negatively on the delivery of the Council's priorities and may also have a financial impact. This is regularly reviewed by Senior Management Team and Service Areas to manage risks and mitigate potential exposures.</p>

These assumptions are reviewed on an annual basis.

Reserves & Balances Policy

Introduction

Guidance on local authority reserves and balances is available from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA). This represents good financial management and underpins the framework followed by Telford and Wrekin Council in this policy.

Types of Reserves and Balances

As part of the Service & Financial Planning process, the Council will consider the establishment and maintenance of reserves and balances.

Reserves and balances can be held for a number of purposes. Some reserves and balances are essential for the prudent management of the Council's financial affairs. These will provide a working balance to cushion the impact of uneven cash flows; a contingency for the impact of unexpected events or emergencies and allow the creation of earmarked reserves to meet known liabilities. The consequences of not keeping a minimum level of reserves can be serious and is therefore one of the considerations taken into account when setting the medium term financial plan.

When establishing reserves, the Council will ensure compliance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom.

Some of the most commonly established earmarked reserves are:

- Sums set aside for major schemes, such as capital developments
- Insurance reserves – to provide for an element of self-insurance
- Service Balances – to permit under spends to be carried forward for future commitments
- School Balances – unspent balances of budgets delegated to individual schools

Level of Reserves and Balances

The minimum prudent level of reserves that the Council should maintain is a matter of judgement. It is the Council's safety net for unforeseen circumstances and must last the lifetime of the Council unless contributions are made from future year's revenue budgets. CIPFA guidance does not set a statutory minimum level so it is up to the Council itself, taking into account all the relevant local circumstances, to make a professional judgement on what the appropriate level of reserves and balances should be. Telford & Wrekin Council adopts a risk based approach to determine the appropriate level of reserves and balances to sustain and that which can be released to support the medium term financial plans.

Reserves and balances are only maintained in accordance with the risk assessment undertaken and are used in a planned way. Therefore the opportunity cost of maintaining the determined levels is kept to a minimum while interest is earned on the retained amount.

Process

Each reserve and balance will have a clear purpose showing how and when it can be used together with a process for review to ensure continuing relevance and adequacy.

An annual review of reserves and balances will be undertaken as part of the budget process each year and a schedule presenting the estimated opening balances for the forthcoming year, planned additions to/withdrawals from and the estimated closing balances will be presented in the budget report. The schedule will also show the purpose of each reserve and a comment on the appropriateness of the value held.

Consideration is given to the key financial risks and mitigation available to determine the resources available over the medium term to support the Council's budget.

This process will be repeated each year to ensure the ongoing adequacy of the Council's reserves and balances.

Responsibilities and Reporting Mechanism

The Chief Financial Officer has a duty to local tax payers, and must be satisfied that the decisions taken on balances and reserves represent proper stewardship of public funds.

The level and usage of reserves will be formally approved by Council, as part of the budget strategy, informed by the Chief Financial Officer's judgement and expertise.

The budget report to Council will include a statement showing the estimated opening balances for the year ahead (including general fund and earmarked funds), any projected additions to/withdrawals and an estimated end of year balance. This will be accompanied by a statement from the Chief Financial Officer on the adequacy of the general reserves and provisions for the forthcoming year and the authority's medium term financial strategy.