

B. Budget 2020/21

1. Executive Summary

The following paper is the third document taken to Cabinet to assist the Administration in forming the budget for 2020/21 and understanding the opportunities and risk in regard to forming the budget.

It is not a decision paper but seeks a further Cabinet steer on both the general assumptions that drive the budget in Section 2 and the specific development proposals set-out in Section 3.

The paper has been put together following consideration of various options to raise council tax. This paper is written around raising council tax by 1.5%, half the predicted rate of inflation. Much of this paper is as previously considered but the information has been retained for completeness.

2. General Assumptions for Existing Budgets

A standard and formulaic approach has so far been taken in respect of reviewing existing budgets. This formulaic approach has been supported with a full costing of the proposed management and staff structure.

The basic approach taken is as follows:

That inflation pressures on pay and non-pay items are offset by proportionally similar increases in income, charges and rentals.

That cost pressures in individual budgets are funded by reallocating underspent budgets.

The result of this approach is to leave the use of District Development Funds, Efficiency Savings and Council Tax Increases free to fund developments and other investments.

2.1.1 Pay

The basic assumption on pay inflation is that it will rise by up to 3% in-line with Office of National Statistics estimates of inflation next year.

It is intended that 2% of this increase is provided to individual budget lines and that (up to) 1% is assumed spent but is held as a contingency to address issues such as market forces increases (for some) above inflation.

2.1.2 Non-Pay

The basic assumption on non-pay inflation is that it will rise by up to 3% in-line with Office of National Statistics estimates of inflation next year.

It is intended that 2% of this increase is provided to individual budget lines and that (up to) 1% is assumed spent but is held as a contingency to address issues such as market forces increases (for some) above inflation.

Specific calculations will be undertaken for the waste and leisure contracts and of course certain specific headings will attract no inflation at all, e.g. depreciation.

2.1.3 Income, Charges and Rents

The basic assumption on income, charges and rent is that it will rise by up to 3% in-line with Office of National Statistics estimates of inflation next year.

It should be noted that there are two significant exceptions to this rule:

- There is no rise in car parking income until the review is complete.
- Housing rents have been increased in line with the Housing Strategy and as per the national formula at 2.7% , Service charges will be more fully reviewed for 2021/22.

All the increase will be assumed as being received.

Specific calculations will be undertaken for certain rental streams and there are some charges that are set by central government.

2.1.4 Pensions

The basic assumption on pensions is that it will rise by up to 3% in-line with Office of National Statistics estimates of inflation next year. In practice the employment overhead of employers NI and employers' pension has risen from 28% to 29%.

An actuarial review of pensions is currently taking place and further cost implications may result as a result of this review

3. Development by Theme

The developments have been reviewed and expanded to show carry forward District Development Fund and Capital items from previous years. The aim is to show in one place all the priority developments that the Authority intends to deliver.

The list has therefore been renumbered and supporting documents for individual documents are available on request.

The development list also includes the contributions expected from Qualis in the form of recharges and loan interest profit to the Authority.

The development list is also grouped in themes to reflect the inter connectivity between proposals. Further details of the proposals are contained within the appendices at B.1.

A thematic consideration of the developments is shown below:

3.1.1 A

Theme	Stronger Place
Brief Description	Qualis Group
Development Proposal References	1, 2a-2e, 3
Issue to consider	<p>Authority should profit from arrangement and use dividend to correctly and appropriately convert sale receipts and social housing build and maintenance activities to generally useable profit.</p> <p>Need to ensure that there is a prudent approach to the payback of loans and the payment across of dividends. Implications to Authority balance sheet and liquidity also need to be understood.</p>
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£4.5 income and cash flow is modelled in detail removing the need for an abatement
Capital Impact in 2020/21	£0.2m
Loan granted 2020/21	£120m (but likely to be phased over three years including £500,000 working capital in 2019/20)

3.1.2 B

Theme	Stronger Place
Brief Description	Strategic planning for sustainable growth over next ten years, Local Development Plan and North Weald Master Plan and early investment in North Weald
Development Proposal References	4, 5, 6, 7
Issue to consider	Charged to DDF as strategic and non-recurring. Clear and implementable plans that Devco for instance, can refer to. Need to ensure plans are delivered and approved as early as possible in 2020/21
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£0.4m
Capital Impact in 2020/21	£0.1m
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.3 C

Theme	Stronger Council
Brief Description	More effective and efficient services to residents and customers arising from flexible working, IT and appropriate buildings and partnerships
Development Proposal References	8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 16
Issue to consider	Ensure proposals deliver operational and performance benefits and reduce cost. Set proposals against alternative options. Ensure opportunity cost of seconding staff to project are fully understood. Includes accommodation strategy.
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£0.5m
Capital Impact in 2020/21	£8.3m
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.4 D

Theme	Stronger Council
Brief Description	Improvements to Housing effectiveness and efficiency through new IT and practices.
Development Proposal References	17
Issue to consider	Ensure that current budgets off-set costs as much as possible and that increased effectiveness is delivered. Note that system upgrades in future will be funded on an annual basis as a charge rather than through a capital investment
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£0.1m
Capital Impact in 2020/21	£0.1m
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.5 E

Theme	Stronger Council
Brief Description	Improvement in revenue and benefits and other customer systems encouraging a shift to self-serve and automatic serve.
Development Proposal References	18, 19, 20, 21
Issue to consider	Ensure that current budgets off-set costs as much as possible and that increased effectiveness is delivered. Note that system upgrades in future will be funded on an annual basis as a charge rather than through a capital investment
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£0.1m
Capital Impact in 2020/21	NA
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.6 F

Theme	Stronger Communities
Brief Description	Long-term commitment to neighbourhood policing replacing DDF funding and allowing for an increase of one officer
Development Proposal References	22
Issue to consider	Return on investment, community cohesion and DDF funding runs out after 2021/22
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£0.2m, originally funded by DDF
Capital Impact in 2020/21	NA
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.7 G

Theme	Stronger Communities and Stronger Place
Brief Description	Variou initiatives to improve services to tenants and ambience and safety of estates including council house building programme. To be funded from HRA.
Development Proposal References	23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50
Issue to consider	A value improvement that can be set off against circa 3% rental rise and generally improves place and value of council house assets
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£0.6m HRA
Capital Impact in 2020/21	£14.8m HRA Capital
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.8 H

Theme	Stronger Place
Brief Description	Several schemes to improve planning performance and improve delivery, funded from planning performance agreement income
Development Proposal References	51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59.
Issue to consider	Need to ensure that planning performance income not only finds these initiatives but other planning initiatives as £94,000 credit is currently shown.
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£0.1m income as incentive payments exceed cost of proposals
Capital Impact in 2020/21	NA
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.9 I

Theme	Stronger Communities and Stronger Place
Brief Description	A variety of initiatives to improve security and vouch resources to attract National Lottery funding for museum and cultural developments
Development Proposal References	60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66
Issue to consider	Match funding provided to museum imitative
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£0.1m
Capital Impact in 2020/21	£0.9m
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.10 J

Theme	Stronger Place
Brief Description	A variety of initiatives to improve local highways and street scenes including a review of car parks
Development Proposal References	67, 68, 69, 70
Issue to consider	Initiatives also include transfer of resources from Essex CC and increased obligations to parishes. Governance around business and service arrangements needs to be finalised
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£0.1m
Capital Impact in 2020/21	£0.1m
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.11 K

Theme	Stronger Place
Brief Description	A variety of initiatives to improve technical services such as water quality monitoring, trade waste and bridge review and possible replacement and car parking.
Development Proposal References	71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80
Issue to consider	Ensuring value for money of services provided.
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£0.2m
Capital Impact in 2020/21	£0.7m
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.12 L

Theme	Stronger Place
Brief Description	Ongar Leisure Centre future (in the context of St Johns and imminent need for major investment)
Development Proposal References	81
Issue to consider	Impact of proposal on other leisure centre investments or proposed investments
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£0.1m
Capital Impact in 2020/21	Up to £8m in future years
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.13 M

Theme	Stronger Place
Brief Description	Replacement of fleet improving environmental impact and delivering financial efficiency
Development Proposal References	82, 83, 84, 96
Issue to consider	Rental versus lease of fleet, vehicle acquisition and provision potentially being a Servco function
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£m negligible net impact
Capital Impact in 2020/21	£0.8m
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.14 N (new)

Theme	Climate Emergency
Brief Description	New strategic initiatives with the addition of smaller schemes delivered by existing services
Development Proposal References	85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92
Issue to consider	Need to measure impact on environment over time.
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£0.3m
Capital Impact in 2020/21	£0.4m
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.15 O (new)

Theme	Stronger Council
Brief Description	Update gazetteer
Development Proposal References	93
Issue to consider	NA
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£0.1m
Capital Impact in 2020/21	£0.1m
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.16 P (new)

Theme	Stronger Council
Brief Description	Basic IT upgrades
Development Proposal References	94, 95, 97, 98, 101
Issue to consider	NA
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£ 0.1
Capital Impact in 2020/21	£ 0.1
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

3.1.17 Borrowing Costs (shown separately for clarity)

Theme	Stronger Council
Brief Description	Basic IT upgrades
Development Proposal References	NA
Issue to consider	NA
Revenue Impact in 2020/21	£2.4m
Capital Impact in 2020/21	NA
Loan granted 2020/21	NA

4. Funding of Developments

4.1.1 District Development Fund

The District Development Fund has historically been used for non-recurring investments and to pump prime other major changes. It is only envisaged that the continuation and completion of the Local Development Plan will be a call against the DDF resources. As a result, the transfer of resources to top up the DDF is also limited.

4.1.2 Efficiency Savings

The vast majority of services together with the budget that support them, is only adjusted for inflation. In-line with good business practice, it is proposed that the effectiveness and efficiency of services should get better as a result of a programme of continuous improvement and attainment of an upper quartile position in terms of performance and cost-effective delivery.

It is relatively common to set this efficiency target at 3%, however due to the recent review of establishments and delivery of savings this year, it is suggested that a Directorate wide savings target of 0.25% is set but delivery is not expected until 1st April 2021 as the recent management and staff restructuring has delivered all required savings in 2020/21.

4.1.3 Council Tax Increases

Locally raised taxes support approximately 25% of the total spend of the Authority. An annual increase in Council tax of 2.5% was included in last year's medium-term financial strategy.

In view of the scarcity and importance of the Council tax increase two options have been prepared that will fund all the high priority developments in total.

An increase in council tax of 1.5% has been assumed.

Council tax increases need not only to be considered in terms of the delivery of extra funding but also in terms of setting the council tax base for future years, the current comparative level of tax, the priority given to developments which any increase funds and issues of affordability and the value of services delivered to the local community.

In addition, the Authority holds a non-recurring amount of £500,000 less £50,000 as a non-recurrent ex-gratia payment from HMRC. To date this has not been assumed as being available in the budget and is nominally associated with environmental and other similar works at the North Weal Airfield site.

5. Summary Budget Options

The detail of the development options is set out previously and in the individual submissions shown at Appendix B.1. Although it is appreciated that not all proposals may be accepted and that savings requirements and council tax increases may vary, the following two budget proposals have been illustrated:

It should be noted that the cost of borrowing and depreciation impacts have been modelled but require validation.

The granting of an extra £120m of Qualis loans, mainly secured against land and property assets will result in the balance sheet of this Authority continuing to be considered as strong. The authority will need £30m of its own loans to fund the general capital and house building programmes.

The Authority will continue to be prudent and the following should be noted:

- That the benefits of Qualis have been abated by taking a prudential view of cash-flows
- That a contingency has been set aside to fund additional inflationary and/or demand pressures.
- Funding supporting developments and income from developments will be assumed spent but contained in a reserve. This reflects recruitment lead in times and encourages early implementation of developments and drawdown of funds.

5.1.1 Summary £

Value of revenue developments (net)	512,886
Funded by	
New DDF (including confirmation of use from previous years that equated to £2m)	1,164,590
Replenishment of DDF Reserve (no net new call or further need of replenishment)	-851,704
Council Tax Base Growth	65,000
Council Tax Increase	135,000
Total	512,886
Will also deliver capital schemes with a value of	£26,549,250
Will also allow new loans to be taken including £120m to Qualis of up to	£150,000,000