

## APPENDIX



### CABINET – 17<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024

**SUBJECT: DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2024/25**

**REPORT BY: DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present Cabinet with details of the draft budget proposals for the 2024/25 financial year to allow for a period of consultation prior to a final decision by Council on 27 February 2024.

#### 2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The report provides details of draft budget proposals based on the Welsh Government (WG) Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement for 2024/25.
- 2.2 The report also provides details of a range of cost and service pressures that require funding, details of proposed savings and the use of reserves, along with a proposed increase of 6.9% in Council Tax to enable the Council to set a balanced budget for the 2024/25 financial year.
- 2.3 An updated indicative Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) is also appended to the report showing a potential savings requirement of £46.700m for the two-year period 2025/26 to 2026/27.

#### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to:-
  - 3.1.1 Endorse the 2024/25 draft budget proposals, including the proposed permanent and temporary savings totalling £30.984m and the proposed one-off use of reserves of £11.394m.
  - 3.1.2 Endorse the proposed increases in charges for school meals in secondary schools, Meals Direct, and the Hive Restaurant along with the proposed increase in the fee for MOT testing as detailed in paragraph 5.4.5.
  - 3.1.3 Agree that 100% of the net projected underspend on the Council's 2023/24 revenue budget will be transferred into General Fund balances as outlined in paragraph 5.5.2.
  - 3.1.4 Support the proposal to increase Council Tax by 6.9% for the 2024/25 financial year to ensure that a balanced budget is achieved (Council Tax Band D being set at £1,446.37).

3.1.5 Agree that the draft budget proposals should now be subject to consultation prior to final 2024/25 budget proposals being presented to Cabinet and Council on 27 February 2024.

3.1.6 Note the indicative potential savings requirement of £46.700m for the two-year period 2025/26 to 2026/27.

#### **4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.1 Council is required annually to approve proposals to set a balanced budget and agree a Council Tax rate.

4.2 Council is required to put in place a sound and prudent financial framework to support service delivery.

#### **5. THE REPORT**

##### **5.1 Background and Economic Context**

5.1.1 The continuing impact on the UK from higher interest rates and inflation, a weakening economic outlook, an uncertain political climate due to an upcoming general election, together with war in Ukraine and the Middle East, are major influences in determining the 2024/25 Draft Budget Proposals and the medium-term financial outlook.

5.1.2 The Bank of England (BoE) increased Bank Rate to 5.25% in August 2023, before maintaining this level for the rest of 2023. In December 2023, members of the BoE's Monetary Policy Committee voted 6-3 in favour of keeping Bank Rate at 5.25%. The three dissenters wanted to increase rates by another 0.25%.

5.1.3 The November quarterly Monetary Policy Report (MPR) forecast a prolonged period of weak Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth with the potential for a mild contraction due to ongoing weak economic activity. The outlook for Consumer Prices Index (CPI) inflation was deemed to be highly uncertain, with upside risks to CPI falling to the 2% target coming from potential energy price increases, strong domestic wage growth and persistence in price-setting.

5.1.4 Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures showed CPI inflation was 3.9% in November 2023, down from a 4.6% rate in the previous month and, in line with the recent trend, lower than expected. Looking ahead, using the interest rate path implied by financial markets the BoE expects CPI inflation to continue falling slowly, but taking until early 2025 to reach the 2% target before dropping below target during the second half of 2025 and into 2026.

5.1.5 ONS figures showed the UK economy contracted by 0.1% between July and September 2023. The BoE forecasts GDP will likely stagnate through 2024. The BoE forecasts that higher interest rates will constrain GDP growth, which will remain weak over the entire forecast horizon.

5.1.6 The labour market appears to be loosening, but only very slowly. The unemployment rate rose slightly to 4.2% between June and August 2023, from 4.0% in the previous 3-month period, but the lack of consistency in the data between the two periods made comparisons difficult. Earnings growth has remained strong but has showed some signs of easing; regular pay (excluding bonuses) was up 7.3% over the period and total pay (including bonuses) up 7.2%. Adjusted for inflation, regular pay was 1.4% and total pay 1.3%. Looking forward, the MPR showed the unemployment rate is expected to be around 4.25% in the second half of calendar 2023, but then rising steadily over the forecast horizon to around 5% in late 2025/early 2026.

5.1.7 The current economic situation and increases in demand for services (particularly in Social Care) means that the Council (along with all others) continues to face unprecedented financial

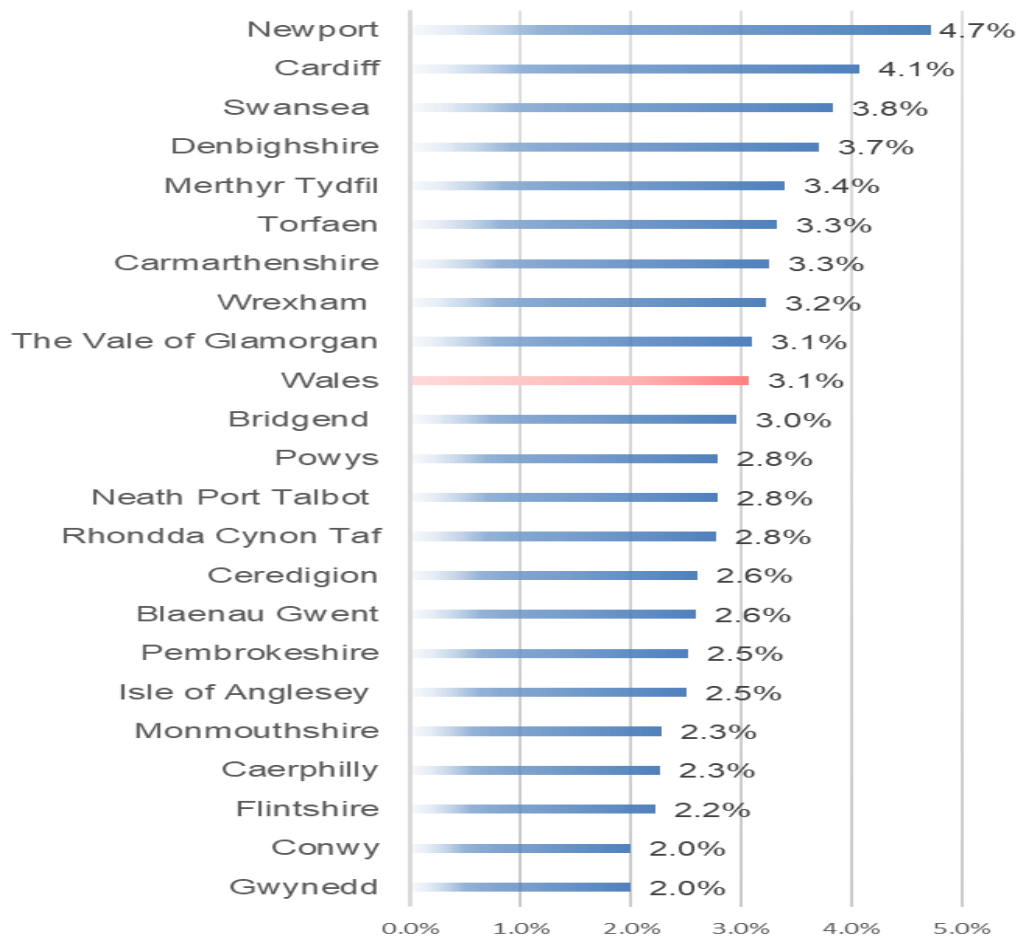
challenges. The seriousness of this situation is evidenced by a number of Councils issuing Section 114 Notices in recent years (Croydon, Slough, Northumberland, Thurrock, Birmingham, and Nottingham), which effectively means that these Councils were serving notice that they were unable to deliver balanced budgets. It is anticipated that a number of other Councils will issue Section 114 Notices moving forward.

- 5.1.8 Due to austerity, between 2008/09 and 2023/24 Caerphilly CBC has already delivered savings in excess of £111m to address reductions in funding and inescapable cost pressures. However, the details set out in this report show a savings requirement of £42.378m for 2024/25 alone, and due to the temporary nature of many of the measures proposed to balance the budget for 2024/25, it is currently anticipated that total permanent savings of £46.700m will be required for the two-year period 2025/26 to 2026/27.
- 5.1.9 The scale of the financial challenge facing the Council cannot be underestimated. Clearly, a financial strategy that seeks to continuously salami slice our services and deplete our reserves is not a sustainable or an appropriate approach, especially when the demands upon our services are far higher than ever, as our communities continue to present far greater and increasingly complex needs to us. To ensure we are able to meet the needs of our communities, whilst operating with significantly reduced funding, a whole council and a whole county borough holistic approach is needed, and this is being defined and developed through the Council's Mobilising Team Caerphilly Transformation Programme.
- 5.1.10 During the last twelve months significant work has been undertaken during the discovery phase of Mobilising Team Caerphilly to identify a wide range of projects that will help the Council balance its budget moving forward. We are now moving into the delivery stage with numerous projects being defined in detail in readiness for approval and implementation. A change programme of the scale being considered will require significant resources to be deployed and will inevitably take time to fully deliver. With this in mind, the draft budget proposals for 2024/25 effectively provide a transitional budget which is partially supported through the one-off use of reserves and a number of temporary savings measures. This will provide the time needed to deliver the range of prioritised projects under Mobilising Team Caerphilly.
- 5.1.11 Given the scale of the financial challenge faced by the Council, it is inevitable that some difficult decisions will need to be made at pace to ensure that balanced budgets can be delivered in the forthcoming years.

## **5.2 Welsh Government (WG) Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement for 2024/25**

- 5.2.1 The Local Government Financial Settlement received from WG on an annual basis is referred to as Aggregate External Finance (AEF). This consists of a Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and Redistributed Non-Domestic Rates (business rates). Details of the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement are usually announced by WG in early October each year. However, in recent years due to economic uncertainty the announcement has been delayed until December and details of the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement for 2024/25 were not released until 20 December 2023.
- 5.2.2 On an All-Wales basis there is an increase in Aggregate External Finance (AEF) of £170m or 3.1% on a like-for-like basis. Table 1 below shows the range around the average of 3.1% driven by the funding formula. This is largely a reflection of data movements in population and pupil numbers and an analysis of the components of change in the funding formula is set out in the suite of tables published alongside the settlement. The lowest increases are in Gwynedd and Conwy with 2.0%, and the highest is Newport with an increase of 4.7%. The Minister has implemented a floor mechanism at 2% which benefits the two authorities at the bottom and is funded from outside the settlement at a cost of £1.3m. The increase for Caerphilly CBC is 2.3%.

Table 1 - Changes to AEF by Local Authority (2023/24 to 2024/25)



5.2.3 Overall core revenue funding rises to £5.69bn in 2024/25. As this is the last year of the current Spending Review period there is no forward indication of settlements beyond the work that has been done by Wales Fiscal Analysis.

5.2.4 In terms of public sector pay, there is specific reference in the Minister’s letter that accompanied the settlement to teachers pay. This confirms that this will have to be funded from within the settlement envelope: -

*“I have again taken the decision to provide all the available funding up front and not hold back funding for in-year recognition of the 2024/25 teachers’ pay deal. Authorities’ budget planning must therefore accommodate these costs.*

5.2.5 Further on in the Minister’s letter there is also reference to the funding of the teachers’ and firefighters’ pension contributions: -

*“The Chancellor’s Autumn Statement referred to the changes to the SCAPE rate, which has implications for the costs of employers’ contributions to teachers and fire-fighter pensions. This in turn has implications for Local Authority budgets. Funding for this is expected to be provided by UK Government but not until 2024/25. I will be writing to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to press for assurances on the level and timing of this funding. My officials will keep your officers informed.*

5.2.6 In cash terms, the 2.3% increase for Caerphilly CBC provides additional funding of £7.766m for 2024/25. Whilst this is of course welcomed, the increase needs to be considered in the context

of the financial challenge being faced by the Council, with cost pressures totalling £56.079m for 2024/25 alone.

5.2.7 Changes to other pass-ported grants in the Provisional Settlement result in a net reduction of £202k for Caerphilly CBC in relation to the tapering of WG funding for Private Finance Initiative (PFI) Schemes.

#### Specific Revenue Grants

5.2.8 On a like-for-like basis, specific revenue grants will decrease on an All-Wales basis by circa 6.3% or around £92m. Education grants will go to local authorities from 2024/25 rather than the regional consortia and significantly many education grants will consolidate into 4 new grants: -

- Local Authority Education Grant (Schools Standards) £160m.
- Local Authority Education Grant (Equity) £155m.
- Local Authority Education Grant (Reform) £54m.
- Local Authority Education Grant (Cymraeg) £10m.

5.2.9 Some of the larger and more significant reductions in 2024-25 include: -

- Retail, Leisure, and Hospitality Rates Relief reduces from £130m to £79m.
- Social Care Workforce Grant reduces from £45m to £35m.
- Communities for Work+ reduces from £27m to £17m.
- Bus Emergency Scheme reduces from £42m to £39m.

5.2.10 There are increases in several grant schemes, some of the larger and more significant include:

- Substance Misuse Action Fund increases from £39m to £41m.
- Universal Free Primary School Meals increases from £63m to £94m.

5.2.11 Heads of Service are currently working with Finance Managers to fully assess the impacts of reductions in grant funding, but the working assumption is that services will need to manage within the reduced funding allocations.

#### Capital Funding

5.2.12 The capital allocations available to Caerphilly CBC in the RSG and from the General Capital Grant have decreased from £9.772m in 2023/24 to £9.709m for 2024/25. An updated Capital Programme will be presented to Cabinet and Council on 27 February 2024.

### **5.3 2024/25 Draft Budget Proposals**

5.3.1 The proposals contained within this report will deliver a balanced budget for 2024/25 on the basis that Council Tax is increased by 6.9%. Table 2 provides a summary: -

Table 2 – 2024/25 Draft Budget Proposals Summary

	<b>£m</b>
<b>Cost Pressures: -</b>	
• General Fund Services inflationary pressures (pay and non-pay)	11.934
• General Fund inescapable service pressures	13.655
• Schools cost pressures	8.283
• Reinstatement of 2023/24 temporary budget measures	22.207
<b>Total: -</b>	<b>56.079</b>
<b>Funded By: -</b>	
• 2.3% uplift in Provisional Settlement	7.766

• 6.9% proposed increase in Council Tax	5.935
• Permanent savings proposals	19.534
• Temporary savings proposals	11.449
• One-off use of reserves	11.394
<b>Total: -</b>	<b>56.079</b>

5.3.2 Whilst the proposals in this report present a balanced financial position for 2024/25, a significant element of this is being achieved through one-off temporary measures i.e. £11.449m of temporary savings and £11.394m through the use of reserves. These temporary one-off measures totalling £22.843m will only support the budget for 2024/25 financial year and they effectively allow a transitional budget to be presented that provides the time needed to deliver the range of prioritised projects under the Mobilising Team Caerphilly Transformation Programme.

5.3.3 The 2024/25 General Fund Services inflationary cost pressures totalling £11.934m are set out in Table 3 below: -

Table 3 – General Fund Services Inflationary Cost Pressures

	£m
National Joint Council (NJC) Pay Award	8.869
Increase in Employer Pension Contributions (NJC Staff)	1.245
Non-Pay Inflation	2.673
Non-Pay Inflation (Fees and Charges)	(0.853)
<b>TOTAL: -</b>	<b>11.934</b>

5.3.4 **National Joint Council (NJC) Pay Award** – The 2023/24 budget approved by Council in February 2023 assumed a NJC pay award of 5% from April 2023. However, the final approved pay award was an uplift of £1,925 across all pay scales (average net increase of 6.51%), which required additional funding of circa £2.3m to be identified. This is being funded in 2023/24 through a one-off contribution from reserves, and the additional cost has also now been factored into the base budget for 2024/25. In addition to this, a further pay award of 4% is assumed from April 2024. The assumed 4% uplift will be held corporately in the first instance and released to budgets once the actual pay award for 2024/25 has been determined.

5.3.5 **Increase in Employer Pension Contributions (NJC Staff)** – The Greater Gwent (Torfaen) Pension Fund is subject to an independent triennial valuation of its assets and liabilities. The outcome of the most recent valuation in 2022 requires a 1% increase in the employer's contribution for 2024/25, with a further increase of 0.5% for 2025/26. Any increase for 2026/27 will be determined by the next triennial valuation.

5.3.6 **Non-Pay Inflation** – The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) inflation rate peaked at 11.1% during 2022. The most recent published data for the 12 months to November 2023 showed CPI at 3.9%, down from 4.6% in the previous month. Looking ahead, using the interest rate path implied by financial markets the BoE expects CPI inflation to continue falling slowly, but taking until early 2025 to reach the 2% target before dropping below target during the second half of 2025 and into 2026. For budget setting purposes an inflation rate of 3% is assumed for 2024/25. The figure of £2.673m does not include any uplift for independent sector Social Care providers as the full cost of these increases is included in inescapable service pressures.

5.3.7 **Non-Pay Inflation (Fees and Charges)** - A generic increase of 5% is assumed for Fees and Charges.

5.3.8 Table 4 provides a summary of the 2024/25 General Fund Services inescapable service pressures totalling £13.655m. These pressures have been subject to a detailed review and have been incorporated into the 2024/25 Draft Budget Proposals on the basis that they are essential. Full details are provided in Appendix 1 for Members' consideration.

Table 4 – Summary of General Fund Inescapable Service Pressures

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>£m</b>
Corporate Services	0.252
Miscellaneous Finance	1.950
Social Services	10.448
General Fund Housing	1.004
<b>TOTAL: -</b>	<b>13.655</b>

5.3.9 The 2024/25 Schools cost pressures totalling £8.283m are set out in Table 5 below -

Table 5 – Schools Cost Pressures

	<b>£m</b>
Teachers' Pay Award	5.951
National Joint Council (NJC) Pay Award (School-Based Staff)	0.724
Increase in Employer Pension Contributions (NJC Staff)	0.188
Non-Pay Inflation	0.826
Other Service Pressures	0.594
<b>TOTAL: -</b>	<b>8.283</b>

- 5.3.10 **Teachers' Pay Award** – The teachers' pay awards in September 2022 and September 2023 were both 1.5% higher than the budgeted levels, and one-off grant funding was provided by the Welsh Government to meet the in-year costs relating to the September 2022 pay award only. WG has now confirmed that no further funding will be provided to meet the recurring additional cost of these pay awards, and that this must be funded from within the average 3.1% uplift in the 2024/25 Provisional Financial Settlement. A further pay award of 4% is currently assumed from September 2024 and this again must be funded from within the settlement.
- 5.3.11 **National Joint Council (NJC) Pay Award (School-Based Staff)** – The 2024/25 Draft Budget proposals include budgetary growth to fully fund the full-year impact of the 2023/24 pay award, along with additional budget provision for an assumed pay award of 4% from April 2024.
- 5.3.12 **Increase in Employer Pension Contributions (NJC Staff)** – As mentioned in paragraph 5.3.5, the outcome of the most recent triennial valuation of the pension fund in 2022 requires a 1% increase in the employer's contribution for 2024/25, with a further increase of 0.5% for 2025/26. Any increase for 2026/27 will be determined by the next triennial valuation.
- 5.3.13 **Non-Pay Inflation** - As detailed in paragraph 5.3.6 a CPI inflation rate of 3% is assumed for 2024/25.
- 5.3.14 **Other Schools Service Pressures** – These consist in the main of the following: -
- School floor area related changes.
  - Expansion of Trinity Fields Special School.
  - Demand pressures linked to Specialist Resource Bases (SRB's) or Specialist Satellite provision.
- 5.3.15 The Chancellor's Autumn Statement referred to changes to the 'Superannuation Contributions Adjusted for Past Experience' (SCAPE) rate from April 2024, which has implications for the costs of employers' pension contributions for teachers, which in turn has implications for Local Authority budgets. Funding for this is expected to be provided by the UK Government but not until 2024/25. The estimated cost of the proposed changes for Caerphilly schools is circa £4.8m, which presents a significant financial risk if this is not fully funded on a recurring basis.

## 5.4 2024/25 Draft Savings Proposals

- 5.4.1 Draft savings proposals have been identified for the 2024/25 financial year totalling £30.984m. These are summarised in Table 6 with further details being provided in Appendix 2.

Table 6 – 2024/25 Draft Savings Proposals

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Permanent Savings £m</b>	<b>Temporary Savings £m</b>	<b>Total Savings £m</b>
Corporate Services	1.187	0.658	<b>1.845</b>
Miscellaneous Finance	5.305	5.499	<b>10.805</b>
Economy & Environment	1.558	1.713	<b>3.271</b>
Social Services	0.526	2.545	<b>3.071</b>
Education & Lifelong Learning	0.284	1.034	<b>1.319</b>
Schools	3.000	0.000	<b>3.000</b>
All Directorates	7.673	0.000	<b>7.673</b>
<b>TOTAL: -</b>	<b>19.534</b>	<b>11.449</b>	<b>30.984</b>

- 5.4.2 The savings proposals have been split into 2 categories, those that are permanent and those that are temporary (i.e. not sustainable in the medium to longer-term). Savings of a temporary nature are not ideal, but they do provide a window of opportunity to identify, approve and implement permanent savings in readiness for the 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years.
- 5.4.3 Members will note that there is a proposed saving of £3m for schools. As outlined in Table 5, schools cost pressures totalling £8.283m have been identified for 2024/25. It is proposed that the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) will be uplifted by £5.283m, which means that schools will need to identify cost efficiencies of £3m. Finance staff will work closely with schools to identify opportunities to reduce costs wherever possible.
- 5.4.4 The permanent savings proposals include an initial 2024/25 in-year savings target of £5m for the Mobilising Team Caerphilly transformation programme. This will be delivered through projects that are currently “in flight” and there is an expectation that further significant savings will be delivered in subsequent financial years once further projects have been prioritised for development and delivery.
- 5.4.5 In addition to the savings proposals outlined in Table 6, it is proposed to increase the charges for school meals in secondary schools, Meals Direct and the Hive Restaurant in Ty Penallta by 7.5%. These increases will generate additional income of circa £57k above the 5% fees and charges increase already assumed in the 2024/25 draft budget proposals. It is also proposed to increase the charge for MOT testing undertaken in the Council's workshop from the current charge of £45 to the statutory fee of £54.85, which will generate additional revenue of circa £6k per annum. These above 5% increases are proposed by the relevant Heads of Service to help address budgetary pressures in the respective service areas and as such the additional revenue will not be available to support the 2024/25 savings requirement. The additional increases will instead be used to assist in managing expenditure within existing budgets.

## 5.5 Proposed Use of Reserves

- 5.5.1 To achieve a balanced budget for 2024/25 it will be necessary to utilise reserves totalling £11.394m as a further one-off measure. This again provides a short window of opportunity to develop sustainable solutions to address the projected budget deficit for 2025/26 and 2026/27.
- 5.5.2 It is proposed that the reserves in Table 7 are released to support the budget for 2024/25.



Table 7 – Proposed Use of Reserves

Description	£m	
Service Reserves: -		
• Corporate Services	2.697	
• General Fund Housing	0.100	
• Economy and Environment	0.610	
• Education and Lifelong Learning	0.362	
• Building Consultancy	0.017	3.786
Insurance Reserve		2.000
Projected Surplus General Fund Balance		4.189
Uncommitted Capital Earmarked Reserves		1.419
<b>TOTAL: -</b>		<b>11.394</b>

5.5.3 Members will note the proposed use of the projected surplus balance on the General Fund (i.e. the balance in excess of the minimum 3% recommended by the Section 151 Officer). This is based on a 100% take to the General Fund from the projected overall net underspend on the 2023/24 revenue budget as at period 7. Historically, services have retained 50% of underspends but given the scale of the financial challenge we currently face this will be postponed for the 2023/24 financial year. The projected General Fund surplus will be reviewed and adjusted as necessary for the final budget report that will be presented to Cabinet and Council on 27 February 2024, as period 9 projections will be available at that time.

5.5.4 A Joint Scrutiny Committee has been scheduled for 23 January 2024 to consider the 2024/25 Draft Budget Proposals. An Update on Reserves report will also be presented at this meeting for Members' consideration.

## 5.6 Council Tax Implications 2024/25

5.6.1 The draft budget proposals within this report include a proposed increase of 6.9% in Council Tax for the 2024/25 financial year. This will increase the Caerphilly CBC Band D precept from £1,353.01 to £1,446.37 i.e. an annual increase of £93.36 or weekly increase of £1.80.

5.6.2 The proposed increase of 6.9% for 2024/25 will result in the following totals for the Caerphilly CBC element of the Council Tax (the Police & Crime Commissioner and Town/Community Council precepts will be added to these totals when confirmed at a later date): -

Table 8 – 2024/25 Council Tax (CCBC Element) at 6.9% Increase

Band	Council Tax (CCBC Element) £	Weekly Increase £
A	964.25	1.20
B	1,124.95	1.40
C	1,285.66	1.60
D	1,446.37	1.80
E	1,767.78	2.19
F	2,089.20	2.59
G	2,410.61	2.99
H	2,892.74	3.59
I	3,374.86	4.19

5.6.3 The proposed increase in Council Tax of 6.9% results in weekly increases ranging from £1.20 for Band A properties to £4.19 for Band I properties. 75.73% of properties in the county borough are in bands A to C. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) mitigates against the socio-economic impacts on the most vulnerable households. 16,098 households currently receive

support with their Council Tax payments from the scheme, representing 19.93% of all households in the county borough. 17.18% (13,874 households) receive the maximum 100% level of support.

## 5.7 Financial Outlook for Future Years

5.7.1 Due to the unprecedented levels of inflation in recent years, the current economic outlook, and the range of temporary measures that are proposed for the 2024/25 financial year, it is clear that the Council will continue to face significant financial challenges moving forward. With this in mind the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) has been updated based on a range of assumptions, resulting in a further potential savings requirement of £46.700m for the two-year period 2025/26 to 2026/27. Details are provided in Appendix 3 and the following is a summary of the key assumptions: -

- An uplift in WG funding of 1% for both financial years.
- An indicative increase of 4.9% in Council Tax for 2025/26 and 3.9% for 2026/27.
- 3.5% for pay inflation in 2025/26 and 3% for 2026/27 (covering all staff including teachers).
- 0.5% uplift in 2025/26 for NJC employer pension contributions.
- Non-pay inflation at 2% for 2025/26 and 2026/27 in line with the Bank of England target.

5.7.2 In addition to the above, significant work has been undertaken with Directors and Heads of Service to identify further potential service cost pressures that will need to be considered in future years. These are currently estimated at £5.627m for 2025/26 and £5.761m for 2026/27. This is work in progress and the figures will be subject to change moving forward.

5.7.3 The temporary measures in the 2024/25 Draft Budget Proposals totaling £22.843m can be used for one year only. Whilst the temporary savings and the prudent use of our reserves provide an opportunity to smooth the path to major reform and transformation, we have only one chance to do this. As Members are acutely aware reserves can only be used once and therefore do not offer a sustainable long-term solution to bridging the budget gap of this and future years.

5.7.4 Given the unprecedented scale of the challenge that we collectively face, a financial strategy that seeks to continuously salami slice our services and deplete our reserves is not a sustainable or an appropriate approach, especially when the demands upon our services are far higher than ever. To ensure we are able to meet the needs of the most vulnerable residents in our communities, whilst operating with reduced finances, a whole council and a whole county borough holistic approach is needed.

5.7.5 The Council's emerging Mobilising Team Caerphilly transformation programme will be a key element in driving forward the significant changes required to ensure that we are able to address the financial challenges that we face. The programme has been under development over a number of months and has now moved beyond the initial discovery phase. Over 150 ideas and projects have been identified and organised into a portfolio, and resources have been brought into the programmes from across the organisation to begin implementation.

5.7.6 The transformation programme is built on Agile Programme Management principles, 'working in the open', and will deliver results at a faster pace and scale than previously possible. This working arrangement requires a high degree of trust between decision-makers and project teams as well as a more flexible approach to governance. There are two core objectives that have underpinned this work from the outset. This work must improve the customer experience while reducing the organisation cost of meeting the needs of our residents.

5.7.7 The full organisational narrative for the transformation programme was adopted by Cabinet on 15 November 2023 and is as follows: -

*"We are committed to delivering sustainable services that meet the present and future needs of our communities. We know we must adapt to meet the challenges we face, but this isn't simply*

*about cutting services; it's about flexibility and finding different ways to deliver what our communities need, when they need it.*

*This includes using fewer buildings, being more business-minded, and making our services more accessible. As we work to meet the needs of our communities more efficiently, we'll explore other ways to deliver services when it makes sense to do so.*

*We must engage with our communities to understand the needs of our residents and provide the right support to meet those needs as simply as possible. Where residents need services that we don't provide we will signpost them to the most appropriate partners to access the support they need.*

*We understand that some roles may need to change, and we expect there to be a reduction in staff numbers. We will look at voluntary departure options and as colleagues move on to new opportunities or retire, we will carefully assess how their roles can be managed going forward.*

*By working together, we can create a better future for all our residents.”*

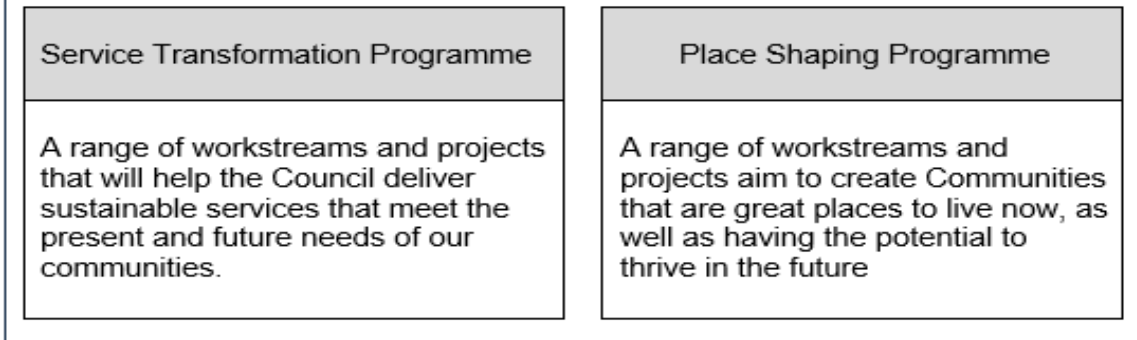
5.7.8 The essence of this organisational narrative has been distilled down into a series of transformation principles that have also been adopted by Cabinet: -

*When delivering transformation, the Council will: -*

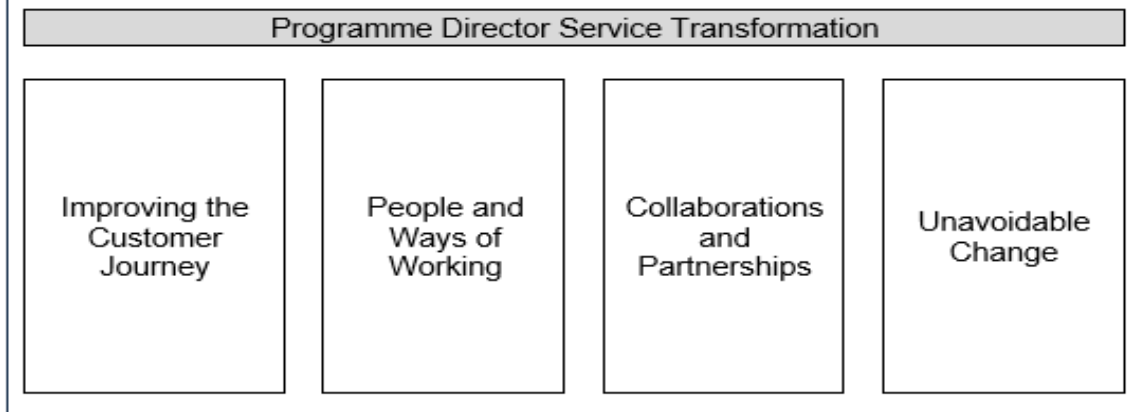
- *focus on flexibility and finding different ways to deliver what our communities need, when they need it;*
- *engage with our communities to understand the needs of our residents and provide the right support to meet those needs as simply as possible;*
- *deliver channel shift across our Council services moving from more expensive, face to face or telephone channels to online services where appropriate;*
- *explore alternative delivery models when it makes sense to do so;*
- *look at voluntary departure options and as colleagues move on to new opportunities or retire, carefully assess how roles can be managed going forward;*
- *use our reserves to help balance the budget in the short-term whilst change programmes are fully developed and implemented; and*
- *use our reserves on an invest to save basis to fund one-off costs to deliver changes where required.*

5.7.9 The Mobilising Team Caerphilly transformation work has been organised into a portfolio. This is essentially a collection of programmes, which in turn are collections of sub-programmes and projects as follows: -

**Figure 1 - Mobilising Team Caerphilly Portfolio**



**Figure 2 – Service Transformation Programme**



**Figure 3 – Place Shaping Programme**



5.7.10 As already mentioned, over 150 ideas and projects have been identified as part of the discovery phase of the service transformation programme. Some of these projects are now “in flight” and are being further defined and developed into firm change proposals. These “in flight” projects are being prioritised as the first change programmes to meet an initial £5m in-year savings target that has been proposed for Mobilising Team Caerphilly for the 2024/25 financial year. The initial projects under development include the following: -

- Review of the customer journey – Council Tax.
- Review of the customer Journey – Housing Repairs Service.
- Development of the Waste Management Strategy.
- Review of the Fleet Service.
- Asset management review including the implementation of a corporate landlord model.
- Improving spend controls and centralising/automating invoice processing.
- Community Asset Transfers.

- 5.7.11 In the medium to longer-term, a number of other change projects will need to be developed, defined, approved, and implemented to ensure that a significant contribution is made to the additional savings requirement of £46.700m for the 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years. The scale of the financial gap will inevitably mean that some very difficult decisions will need to be made but this is unavoidable in the current financial environment for local authorities. We will need to strike the right balance between “needs” and “wants” and a holistic, whole-authority approach will be required with all services contributing to the savings requirement. We will also need to consider alternative service delivery models and explore opportunities to work collaboratively with our partners. It is inevitable that the Authority will be smaller moving forward and service levels in many areas will need to be reduced, or even removed.
- 5.7.12 Over the coming months further transformation projects will be prioritised in line with the Mobilising Team Caerphilly narrative and agreed principles, and firm proposals will be brought forward for scrutiny and subsequent decision-making. It is vital that these proposals are developed at pace and that decisions are made early, in advance of the annual budget setting process.
- 5.7.13 The placeshaping element of the transformation programme will identify investment projects, the financial resources required, and the associated funding strategy. As capital resources are finite, choices will need to be made to agree what priority projects can be delivered. A report will be prepared for Cabinet consideration in the coming months.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

- 5.8.1 This report provides details of the Draft Budget Proposals for 2024/25 based on the WG Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement.
- 5.8.2 A balanced budget can be delivered for 2024/25 based on a combination of permanent and temporary savings totalling £30.984m, the one-of use of reserves totalling £11.394m and an increase of 6.9% in Council Tax.
- 5.8.3 The report also provides details of the updated Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), which currently shows a potential savings requirement of £46.700m for the two-ear period 2025/26 to 2026/27.
- 5.8.4 The unprecedented scale of the financial challenge facing the Council requires new approaches to service delivery and this will be driven through the Mobilising Team Caerphilly transformation programme. It is vital that service change proposals are developed at pace, and that decisions are made early to ensure that the projected savings requirement for 2025/26 and 2026/27 can be delivered.

## **6. ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 A range of assumptions have been made throughout the report in respect of pay and non-pay inflationary increases, inescapable service pressures, and the level of funding settlements moving forward.

## **7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 Where it is anticipated that there will be an organisational or public impact arising from specific savings proposals, budget impact assessments are required. Due to the late notification of the Provisional Settlement the budget impact assessments and integrated impact assessments (where required) are currently in draft form. These will be refined over the coming weeks and supplemented by the outcomes of the public consultation, which will not conclude until 13 February 2024. All budget impact assessments and associated integrated impact assessments will be finalised for the reports to Cabinet and Council on 27 February 2023.

7.2 Draft impact assessments can be found on the following dedicated webpages: -

### **Budget Impact Assessments 2024/25**

[Link to Budget Impact Assessments 2024/25 – Eng](#)

[Link to Budget Impact Assessments 2024/25 – Cym](#)

### **Integrated Impact Assessments 2024/25**

[Link to Integrated Impact Assessments 2024/25 – Eng](#)

[Link to Integrated Impact Assessments 2024/25 – Cym](#)

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 As detailed throughout the report.

## **9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Where staffing reductions are required as a consequence of savings proposals the Council will firstly try to achieve this through 'natural wastage' and not filling vacancies. However, where this is not possible the Council will utilise agreed HR policies and compulsory redundancies will only be considered as a last resort after all other options have been fully exhausted.

9.2 The Trade Unions will be consulted on the 2024/25 Draft Budget Proposals and will also be fully engaged in proposals to reshape services moving forward.

## **10. CONSULTATIONS**

10.1 Through the Council's cyclical engagement programme 'The Caerphilly Conversation', residents have, and continue to give their views on which Council services are of particular importance to them and where they feel the Council should prioritise its budget spend.

10.2 The next phase of this engagement work, subject to Cabinet endorsement, will launch on 22 January 2024 and run until 13 February 2024.

10.3 Views will be sought on the specific draft proposals highlighted within this report where there is potential impact upon members of the public. This work will build upon the budget impact assessments and where relevant, integrated impact assessments (IIAs) developed for specific proposals. The engagement programme will once again include further extensive face-to-face engagement, a survey, a high-profile presence on the Council's digital engagement platform and targeted stakeholder engagement, particularly focussing on groups identified through the development of IIAs.

10.4 A Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting is scheduled for 23 January 2024, which will provide an opportunity for all elected members to consider and comment upon the 2024/25 draft budget proposals.

10.5 Key findings and responses through the engagement activity will help shape the final draft budget report for Members' consideration on 27 February 2024.

## 11. STATUTORY POWER

### 11.1 The Local Government Acts 1998 and 2003.

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Appendices: -

Appendix 1 – 2024/25 General Fund Inescapable Service Pressures

Appendix 2 – 2024/25 Draft Savings Proposals

Appendix 3 – Updated Medium-Term Financial Plan

Background Papers: -

[Link to - Cabinet \(15/11/23\) – Mobilising Team Caerphilly Governance Arrangements](#)