

NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET – TUESDAY, 29 SEPTEMBER 2020



Title of Report	REVIEW OF MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN	
Presented by	Councillor Nicholas Rushton Corporate Portfolio Holder	
Background Papers	<p>Medium Term Financial Plan – Corporate Scrutiny Committee Minutes 2 September 2020</p> <p>Medium Term Financial Strategy – Council 26 February 2019</p> <p>2020 – 2025 Medium Term Financial Plans – Cabinet 4 February 2020 (presented to Council 25 February 2020)</p>	<p>Public Report: Yes</p> <p>Key Decision: Yes</p>
Financial Implications	<p>The changes to assumptions that drive the Medium Term Financial Plans have resulted in changes to the forecast position to 2024/25 and are detailed in this report.</p> <p>On the General Fund the revised projected deficit arising between 2020/21 and 2024/25 could increase from £1m to £5.3m over the five year period. The Journey to Self-Sufficiency reserve stands at £6.3m which provides a healthy balance to be able to fund initiatives to reduce our ongoing spending, increase income and where necessary balance the budget.</p> <p>The HRA revised position could see the surplus reduce from £4.6m to £1.1m over the five year period.</p> <p>The Section 151 Officer considers the Council to be in a stable financial position over the forthcoming five year period as a result of historical surpluses achieved and retained in the General Fund Self-Sufficiency reserve and the HRA balances.</p> <p>Finally, this report seeks the approval of a new reserve, utilising £100k of the Self-Sufficiency reserve balance, for the purposes of engaging external support and creating internal capacity to deliver the Journey to Self-Sufficiency Programme savings.</p> <p>Signed off by the Section 151 Officer: Yes</p>	
Legal Implications	<p>There are no direct legal implications.</p> <p>Signed off by the Monitoring Officer: Yes</p>	
Staffing and Corporate Implications	<p>There are no staffing and corporate implications. However, it is likely that the Council will need to consider organisational changes required to mitigate the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other funding changes to ensure that critical services continue to be unaffected.</p>	

	Signed off by the Head of Paid Service: Yes
Purpose of Report	To present Members with the impact of modified assumptions within the Council's Medium Term Financial Plans, provide an update in respect of the Journey to Self Sufficiency Programme and set the context for preparing the Council's 5 year budget plans from 2021/22.
Recommendations	<p>THAT CABINET:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NOTE THE COUNCIL'S REVISED MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLANS; AND 2. APPROVE THE ALLOCATION IN PRINCIPLE OF £100K FROM THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY RESERVE TO ENGAGE EXTERNAL EXPERTISE TO SUPPORT THE DELIVERY OF JOURNEY TO SELF SUFFICIENCY PROGRAMME SAVINGS

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council's Medium Term Financial Plans (MTFPs) flow from the 2018 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which was approved by Cabinet in February 2018. The strategy introduced a new five year rolling assessment of the financial resources required to deliver the Council's strategic priorities and essential services and a new, self-sufficient approach to managing and safeguarding the Council's ongoing financial position in light of future central government funding changes.
- 1.2 At the February 2020 Council meeting, members were presented with a report that outlined the current financial forecasts within the Council's two Medium Term Financial Plans – the General Fund MTFP and a separate Housing Revenue Account MTFP to reflect the ring-fencing requirements around the Housing Service.
- 1.3 This report forms part of the biannual monitoring cycle established as part of the MTFS. The MTFPs are refreshed in the summer to provide the Council and Cabinet with information on the financial position of the Council prior to the development of the 2021/22 budget over the autumn and winter
- 1.4 Assumptions on both the General Fund and HRA forecasts have been reviewed in light of the 2019/20 financial outturn, the Government's Spring 2020 Budget and other known information concerning the predictions around future funding, income and expenditure. Of most significance throughout this review, is the review of assumptions in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.5 The plans were presented in draft form to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 2 September 2020 and included a revised forecast position for the current financial year based on monitoring undertaken in Period 1 of this year. This was because routine quarterly monitoring for the period April to June (Quarter 1) was postponed until late August so that the finance team could close the 2019/20 year and produce the annual accounts in line with revised statutory deadlines. The revised forecasts presented in this report show a revised position for 2020/21 based on Quarter 1 budget monitoring. A number of comments were made by the Committee in respect of the plans. An extract of

the draft meeting minutes can be found in Appendix A.

Quarter 1 forecast position and assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on in year finances and the Collection Fund

- 1.6** In July, a Finance Recovery Cell was established to support the financial recovery of the Council and assess and respond to the impact of the pandemic. This cross-Council team has assisted Finance officers in reviewing the assumptions that drive the financial plans and shaping the key messages to be taken away from the new forecasts.
- 1.7** The plans presented within this report include the impact of the pandemic to the Council's finances as projected based on the position to the end of Quarter 1 (June 2020).
- 1.8** The early assessment of the Council wide financial impact of the pandemic was assessed earlier in the year to be in the region of £2.129m gross and £1.043m net of emergency funding received at that time.
- 1.9** As part of Quarter 1 budget monitoring, Team Managers, having responsibility for service areas budgets, were tasked with reviewing the forecast spending and income for their areas for the year. Three principles were developed to focus managers and finance in their reviews and ensure the organisation is able to forecast a realistic outturn position for the 2020/21 financial year. These were:
1. Additional-ity – recognising the Council's strong financial position, but not relying on this to meet the funding gap and instead, seeking to identify savings where possible that will contribute to clawing back the funding gap.
 2. Renewal – reviewing budgets in light of the new environment and understanding what is no longer relevant or what new measures are required and making changes to in year forecasts as a result.
 3. Reality – being realistic about the ability to deliver new service initiatives or actions originally planned, and making changes to in year forecasts as a result.

This approach commenced with the Section 151 Officers review of earmarked reserves requests from service areas. The outcome of this review was that £0.9m was reallocated to the Self-Sufficiency reserve, as reported in the "2019/20 Provisional Outturn" report also on this meeting's agenda.

- 1.10** Assessment of the allocation of the emergency funding received to date has been undertaken and based on the extent of impact, the full level of funding has been apportioned to the General Fund.
- 1.11** The revised Q1 forecast position is now a forecast deficit of £0.978m for the General Fund compared to a budgeted surplus of £630k. On the HRA, the revised position is a forecast surplus of £2.4m compared to a budgeted surplus of £2.77m. Full details of the significant forecast movements along with a summary of financial position can be found in Appendix B.
- 1.12** The net impact of the pandemic stands at a forecast £1.7m across all council services, with £1.3m in the General Fund and £380k in the HRA. Since last reported to members in June and July, further significant spending pressures arising as a result of the pandemic have materialised. In addition, initial work has now been undertaken to assess the likely level of compensation the Council can expect to receive and as a result £200k has been assumed to be recovered within the General Fund. Further work to

finalise the estimate will be undertaken throughout September in order to make the claim to MHCLG. Again, full details can be found in Appendix B.

- 1.13** It is important to note that this estimated 2020/21 impact excludes the potential deficit arising on the Collection Fund as a result of lower levels of business rates and council tax. This is because, due to the nature of accounting for the Collection Fund, it remains too early to provide a reasonable estimation of the impact of Covid and the other factors that affect the Collection Fund balance (which include business rates and housing growth and the provision of reliefs and exemptions, for which only 5 months of data for the year so far is available).
- 1.14** The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government have confirmed that the repayment of any Collection Fund deficits arising in respect of the 2020/21 year will be phased over 3 financial years rather than being required to be 'repaid' in the subsequent financial year. At the time of writing this report, the detail surrounding this scheme has not been shared by the Ministry.
- 1.15** The Section 151 Officer is undertaking regular monitoring of the early forecasts and will be in a position to advise members of the forecast position in subsequent budget monitoring updates and as part of setting the draft budget.

Summary of Revised MTFPs

- 1.16** There are a range of possible outcomes in respect of the Council's future funding and overall financial position. To aid members understanding of these outcomes, specific scenarios are detailed and illustrated where relevant and as more is understood with regards to future funding and other variables, further updates will be presented to members. Overall, the Section 151 Officer considers the Council to be in a stable financial position over the forthcoming five year period as a result of historical surpluses achieved and retained in the General Fund Self-Sufficiency reserve and the HRA balances.
- 1.17** On the General Fund, future retained Business Rates is at risk due to the impending national funding changes, although very little detail is understood around the government's plans at this moment in time. The risk around the future of New Homes Bonus funding also remains. The effect of the pandemic is still emerging, but the review has taken into account the effect so far and projections into the future. The revised projected deficit arising between 2020/21 and 2024/25 could increase from £1m to £5.3m over the five year period as a result of changes to business rates and council tax funding along with projected increase in expenditure for the 2020/21 year. The Journey to Self-Sufficiency reserve stands at £6.3m which provides a healthy balance to be able to fund initiatives to reduce our ongoing spending, increase income and where necessary balance the budget.
- 1.18** On the HRA, expected income from rents has fallen as a result of lower general inflation but our costs are expected to rise. This has worsened the five year outlook, and whilst the current plan predicts a surplus over 5 years, this surplus could reduce and significant strategic decisions will need to be made as we look to incorporate work to respond to climate change in our longer term plans.

2.0 Journey to Self-Sufficiency Programme

- 2.1** The Journey to Self-Sufficiency Programme has, to date, delivered a range of outcomes associated with the Council becoming more self-sufficient including the implementation

of the Commercial Strategy, the redesign and approval of a new Corporate Charging Policy and the drafting of a new Asset Management Strategy.

- 2.2 The ethos of the programme is to enhance the cost-effectiveness, and therefore financial resilience of the Council in spite of, rather than because of, a negative financial outlook (where one exists). The approach builds on the Council's 'One Team, One Council' value to make the most of resources and reinvestment opportunities and being the best it can possibly be.
- 2.3 As part of developing the 2020/21 and ongoing budget, thematic savings targets for both the General Fund and HRA were established and built into budgets and Medium Term Financial Plans. The savings were designed on the basis that the self-sufficiency reserve would be used to fund initiatives that would reduce spending and increase income as well as the reserve also being used to balance deficit years where necessary. At that time, the project scope for each of the work streams remained under development and a further update around the specifics of each theme was anticipated in this report. However, as a result of the pandemic and the focussing of the Council's efforts on the emergency and recovery response, this work has been delayed.
- 2.4 Of the savings budgeted, the forecast for the 2020/21 year has reduced to £56k against a £570k budget for the General Fund and to nil against a £225k budget for the HRA.
- 2.5 The Corporate Leadership Team have reviewed the programme to reflect the current operating environment, resource constraints and deliverability of commercial savings built into the programme. Given the strengthened messages from Central Government around Council's acting commercially, it has been concluded that the organisation will need to focus more closely on its use of resources to deliver services in order to deliver savings and an ongoing sustainable financial position.
- 2.6 To ensure that future saving targets are both deliverable and met, it is requested that £100k budget is created in principle through a transfer from the Self-Sufficiency reserve. The purpose of this budget will be to engage external expertise to assist in the delivery of savings from 2021 to 2023. The request meets the purposes for the use of the self-sufficiency reserve as set out when it was established in 2018.
- 2.7 This external support will assist in the development and execution of a programme of reviews across all council services, focussing on financial and budgetary resources, efficient ways of working, contract management and procurement and income opportunities. It is planned for the external support to be in place early in the new calendar year. It is anticipated that any contractual arrangements that meet the Council's key decision criteria will be presented to Cabinet for approval.
- 2.8 It is also anticipated that there will likely be a further request for budgetary resource for the purposes of creating an internal team to assist in the delivery of the programme. At this stage the full requirements are yet to be scoped.
- 2.9 Members can expect a full update as part of the draft budget later in this year. Monitoring of expenditure of this new reserve and the progress of resultant programme savings will be delivered through the quarterly performance reports to Cabinet.

2.10 Approach to setting the 2021/22 budget

- 2.11 The Finance Recovery Cell team (referred to in 1.6 above) has also assisted in developing the principles for setting the forthcoming 5 year 2021/22 – 2025/26 Revenue and Capital budgets, as the organisation prepares to undertake this task from

September. The principles developed will be utilised in addition to those set out in paragraph 1.9 above:

1. **Established starting point** – The organisation, through its 5 year revenue planning approach and medium term financial plans already has an established 2021/22 budget which will be the assumed budget and for which only necessary changes will be made.
2. **Fundamental approach** – Changes to the already established 2021/22 budget position will focus only on the fundamentals:
 - a) Council Delivery Plan budgets;
 - b) Cost pressures that need to be picked up as a result of either increased expenditure or reduced income;
 - c) Savings that can be achieved through increased income or reduced expenditure. Specifically, the Finance team will be driving the identification of budgetary savings from across the organisation.

1.19 It is not anticipated that services will be in a position to prepare and submit service development proposals for the 2021/22 financial year. However, bids that demonstrate an improvement to the council's financial position and payback over a robust time period will be encouraged, but it is likely that these will need to be planned for the 2022/23 year or beyond, given the current uncertainty over the longevity of the pandemic and ability to deliver new initiatives.

1.20 As detailed above, targeted savings of the Journey to Self-Sufficiency Programme will remain to be included on the basis that external and internal resource will be identified and implemented to drive the programme savings forward to delivery.

3.0 GENERAL FUND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

2019/20 Outturn

- 3.1 The budgeted contribution to the self-sufficiency reserve for 2019/20 was £161k. The surplus achieved for last year was £1.158 million and this amount was transferred to the self-sufficiency reserve. A further £940k of earmarked reserves were also reallocated to the reserve taking the total balance of the reserve therefore increased from £4.2m to £6.3 million at March 2020.
- 3.2 Full details can be found in the separate 2019/20 Provisional Outturn report on this meeting agenda.

2020/21 Forecast Outturn

- 3.3 The current forecast position on the General Fund for 2020/21, following Quarter 1 budget monitoring, is a deficit for the year of £978k, compared to a budgeted surplus of £630k. A summary of the most significant variances can be found in Appendix B.

Medium Term Financial Plan - Projections as at February 2020

- 3.4 The projected deficit arising between 2020/21 – 2024/25 as last reported to members in February 2020 was £1m as follows:

Table 1, Medium Term Financial Plan Projections as at February 2020

	2020/21 £'000	2021/22 £'000	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000	TOTAL £'000
Surplus/(Deficit)	94	-828	-1,815	-1,928	-1,591	-6,068
Journey to Self-Sufficiency Savings	570	895	1,120	1,245	1,270	5,100
Surplus/(Deficit)	664	67	-695	-683	-321	-968

Review of Assumptions

3.5 The review of the MTFP has incorporated the impact of the pandemic on the Council's finances both in terms of current year but also for future years. Given the significant weighting of future local government funding changes, assumptions around the future of Business Rates and New Homes Bonus have also been reassessed. Key changes and other areas of importance are outlined below:

3.6.1 **Forecast Outturn for 2020/21 based on Q1 monitoring.** Forecast outturn, as detailed in paragraph 3.3 above and Appendix B.

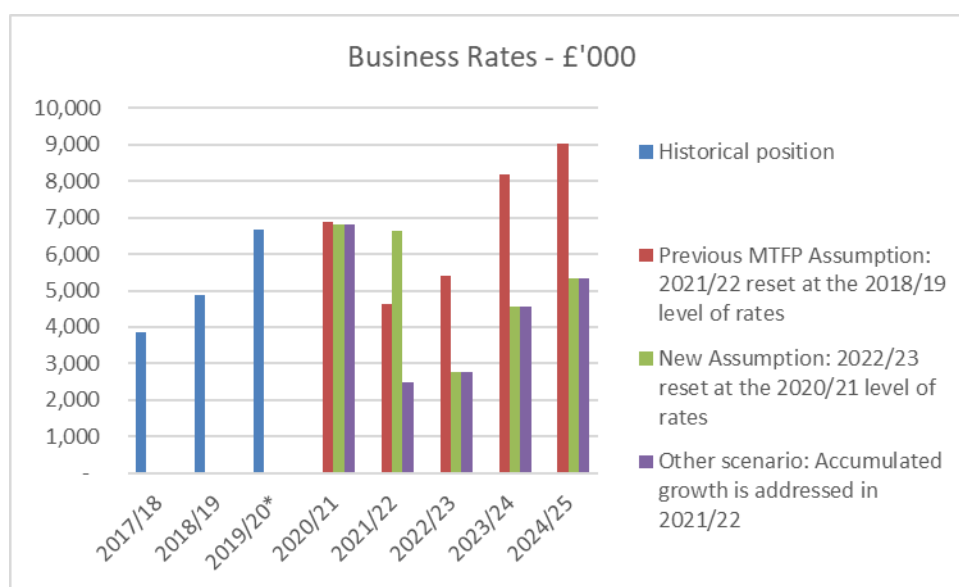
3.6.2 **Business Rates - Resetting of the baseline to remove accumulated growth in the system.**

- 3.6.3 The reform of the existing 50% Business Rates Retention System was due to be implemented on an already deferred schedule in April 2021 alongside Fair Funding. However, the government confirmed that the changes will no longer be implemented in 2021/22. The message alongside this announcement was that the government will continue to work with Councils on the best approach for next year including how to treat growth accumulated in the system from 2021/22. A consultation was announced on in July 2020, however it does not discuss the treatment of accumulated growth.
- 3.6.4 To address accumulated growth, it is likely that the Business Rates will be rebased meaning that a significant amount of income will be lost as NWL benefits from Business Rates in excess of the current baseline.
- 3.6.5 We have changed the assumption in the MTFP so that the baseline is reset in 2022/23, based on the level of level of rates achieved in 2020/21. The previous assumption was that rates were reset in 2021/22 at the 2018/19 level of rates. This change has the effect of reducing the amount of rates forecast to be collected over the 5 year MTFP by almost £6m, because the level of rates collected in 2020/21 is significantly higher than the level in 2018/19 meaning there is “further to fall”. The other effect of a later reset and later level of rates reference year is that there is less time in the MTFP to accumulate more growth.
- 3.6.6 Through scenario analysis, we could see rates decline further, if the accumulated growth is addressed in 2021/22 (see Figure 1 below). It should be noted, that if changes result in an adverse movement, Transitional Funding will likely increase to smooth the effect of any funding reductions (see 3.6.15 below).
- 3.6.7 **Business Rates: The impact of the pandemic and future growth.** Business Rates, along with Council Tax, are accounted for in the ‘Collection Fund’. This approach means that the Council and other precepting bodies receive their share of Council Tax or Business Rates in line with the original budgeted projections, with any over/under collection taken forward into the next year as a surplus/deficit through the Collection Fund. The forecast variance for Business Rates in 2020/21 is £70k adverse compared to the original £6.8m budget because of some minor changes that hit the General Fun in year (rather than the Collection Fund next year). The forecast deficit for the year will be estimated in November and incorporated into the 2021/22 budget. Despite an anticipated deficit on the Collection Fund, it is assumed that anticipated growth for 2020/21 will be met.
- 3.6.8 Assessing growth is a continuous exercise due to the fluidity of business growth and decline and approval of commercial planning applications. The district has a number of key sectors that could be impacted by the UK transition period through the movement of goods or people: Logistics, Aviation, Hospitality, Manufacturing and Aggregates. Through ongoing engagement with businesses via the Council’s Economic Development team, there hasn’t been any defined thought or movement from businesses as a result of Brexit.

3.6.9 To reflect the likely increase in bad debts and resultant deficit on the Collection Fund that will need to be accounted for in 2021/22 and the uncertainty around economic downturn and growth, the assumption for 2021/22 is that rates decline by 3%, before achieving 4% in 2022/23 and 8% in 2023/24 to reflect a significantly large assessment in the south of the district that received planning permission in 2019. Further work will be undertaken to assess the likely growth in Business Rates to the Council in consultation with the Revenues and Benefits and Business Focus teams ahead of setting the 2021/22 budget.

3.6.10 Figure 1 below illustrates the historical position in respect of Business Rates, the previous and revised assumptions around future rates and the scenario to demonstrate the effect of accumulated growth being addressed next year.

Figure 1, Business Rates – Historical Position and Scenarios



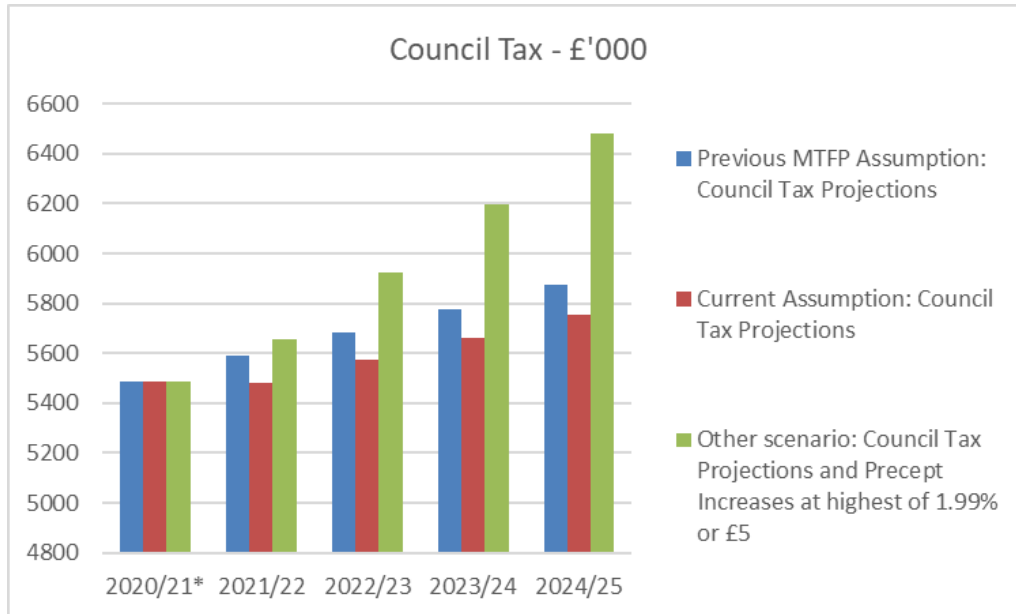
*The Council received circa £600k more in Business Rates in 2019/20 as a result of taking part in the Leicestershire 75% Business Rates Retention Pilot.

3.6.11 **Council Tax Collection Fund Deficit.** Similar to Business Rates, the effect of an adverse variance against the budgeted position for Council Tax will flow through the Collection Fund. The Quarter 1 assessment of Council Tax shows that we have an increase in arrears, an increase in Local Council Tax Support and a decline in new homes being delivered compared to the budgeted position for growth. The Q1 forecast deficit on the Council’s share of the Collection fund for this year in respect of Council Tax was £130k.

3.6.12 **Council Tax Growth.** Future years housing delivery has also been reviewed against a revised planning trajectory, although this remains very uncertain at this moment in time the revised position for homes added to the Council Tax base over the remainder of the 5 year plan is 540 homes for 2021/22 and 570 homes per year thereafter (compared to 650 and 600 as per the last MTFP). The effect of this slowed growth is £450k less than anticipated in additional Council Tax.

3.6.13 There is no change to the assumption regarding the Council's policy of freezing Council Tax. Figure 2 below illustrates the £1.8m of foregone income as a result of the policy from 2021/22 to 2024/25 as a result of this policy. The policy will save residents an average of £32.19 in Council Tax over the period.

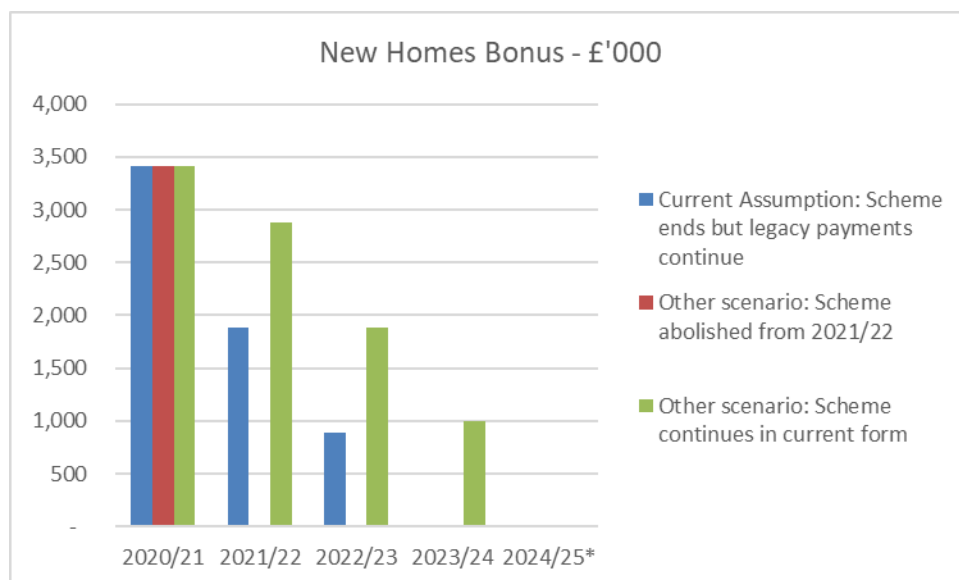
Figure 2, Council Tax – Effect of Assumption Changes on Future Years and Scenario on Council Tax Increases



*Despite revised forecasts for Council Tax Collection in 2020/21, these will not hit the Council's accounts until 2021/22 through the Collection Fund.

3.6.14 **New Homes Bonus.** The Government have confirmed their intention to look at the New Homes Bonus scheme and explore the most effective way to incentivise housing growth in the future, although there has been no further update since the budget was developed. Therefore the Council continues to assume that the scheme will cease and that legacy payments only will be received in 2021/22 and 2022/23. Figure 3 below illustrates the level of funding that would be received if the scheme were to continue as it is or if it were to be abolished entirely from 2021/22.

Figure 3, New Homes Bonus Scenarios



*No funding is assumed in 2024/25 under any scenario.

3.6.15 Spending forecasts. In the General Fund budget, expenditure is made up of spending net of locally generated income such as trade refuse, planning fees, grounds maintenance and legal income amongst others. As detailed above, 2020/21 forecast expenditure is currently aligned with the period 1 forecasts, adjusted for confirmed changes (3.6.1), and once Quarter 1 forecasts have been produced for the year these will be adjusted for in the MTFP. Projections surrounding future spending have not been adjusted for in the MTFP, but given the scale of potential funding changes, future plans will need to be reviewed. The Journey to Self Sufficiency programme will lead this process. In particular whilst general inflation is current very low, future assumptions regarding inflation will need to be reviewed. Additionally, any service-specific matters that could affect the medium term position of spend or income will need to be considered (an example of this is the planning reforms and proposed changes to housing need).

3.6.16 Transitional Funding. Transitional funding is likely to occur when a Council suffers a loss of funding above a certain level as a result of the implementation of a new funding regime. The concept of the funding is to smooth the effect of funding changes and minimise any cliff-edges. We currently remain unclear as to what basis Transitional Funding might be calculated when Fair Funding and Business Rates Reform (or the baseline reset if at a different time) are implemented. We included an assumption of compensation where funding reductions are in excess of -5% in our last MTFP based on advice from our funding advisors Pixel, and we adjusted the workings to take account of

'notional' Council Tax as it is unlikely that the Council will be compensated for any loss below -5% that occurs as a result of its historic policy to freeze Council Tax.

3.6.17 This assumption has not changed, but it is important for members to note that the total amount of Transitional Funding in the MTFP has increased as part of the review because forecast funding in other areas has reduced. It is also worth noting that if other funding scenarios were presented (as illustrated in the charts above), the level of transitional funding could go up or down.

Medium Term Financial Plan – Revised Projections

3.6 It is clear that there are a range of possible outcomes in respect of the Council's future funding and overall financial position. Based on the review of assumptions as set out above, the projected deficit arising between 2020/21 and 2024/25 could be £5.3m over the five year period and can be found in the table below. As Section 151 Officer, the Head of Finance is confident in providing assurance to members that the Council is able to deliver a balanced budget on an ongoing basis. As more is understood with regards to future funding, further updates will be presented to members.

3.7 It is important to note that this position assumes the Council will meet revised savings targets of £4.6m over this period. Should these savings not be achieved the deficit projected over the term of the MTFP would increase.

Table 2, Medium Term Financial Plan Projections as at September 2020

	2020/21 £'000	2021/22 £'000	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000	TOTAL £'000
Surplus/(Deficit)	-1,034	-1,641	-2,590	-2,038	-2,598	-9,772
Journey to Self-Sufficiency Savings	56	895	1,120	1,245	1,270	4,586
Surplus/(Deficit)	-978	-746	-1,470	-793	-1,328	-5,315

3.8 The balance of the Self- Sufficiency reserve as at March 2020 is £6.3m. This reserve will be used to fund a combination of funding initiatives that will reduce the Council's ongoing revenue spending and increase income and funding any deficit years that materialise.

4.0 REVIEW OF HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

2019/20 Outturn

4.1 The Housing Revenue Account had budgeted for a surplus of £1.4m in 2019/20, but achieved a surplus of £2.4m. The most significant variances included a lower depreciation charge of £455k, net savings on employee costs of £154k and an operating surplus from our in-house repairs team of £826k.

4.2 With balances at the end of the year totalling £16.7m, the HRA is in a position to repay the two loans totalling £13.0m that fall due in March 2022 and have £3.7m remaining. Of the remaining balance, £1.0m is kept as a working balance for the HRA, and the rest is available to respond to opportunities, such as acquiring new homes, improving existing ones or to continuing to repaying debt.

2020/21 Forecast Outturn

4.3 The forecast outturn position for the Housing Revenue Account for 2020/21 is currently a surplus of £2.4m, £378k lower than we had budgeted for. The main movements are set out in the Quarter 1 summary in Appendix B.

HRA Medium Term Financial Plan – February 2020 Projections

4.4 The projected financial position, presented to Council in February 2020, showed that the HRA was able to fully fund its capital programme and meet loan commitments falling due over the five year period from 2019/20 to 2023/24, with surpluses of £1.98m over 5 years that were increase to £4.6m due to £2.65m of Journey to Self Sufficiency savings being included in the plan.

Table 3, HRA Medium Term Finance Plan – February 2020 Projections

HRA	2020/21 £'000	2021/22 £'000	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000	TOTAL £'000
Total Income	18,238	18,766	19,346	19,953	20,474	96,777
Total Expenditure	-11,469	-11,643	-11,847	-12,050	-12,311	-59,320
Contribution to the Capital Programme (RCCO)	-934	-4,108	-5,133	-4,961	-4,720	-19,856
Financing Expenditure	-3,272	-3,256	-3,031	-3,032	-3,029	-15,620
Surplus	2,563	-241	-666	-90	414	1,980
Journey to Self-Sufficiency Programme Savings	225	325	575	625	900	2,650
Surplus	2,788	84	-91	535	1,314	4,630

Review of Assumptions

4.5 Since February 2020 the global pandemic has caused some of the underlying assumptions within our Medium Term Financial Plan to move significantly. The key changes are:

4.5.1 **Significant fall in expected inflation.** In February 2020 our expectation for inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), was that it would be near to the Bank of England's target of 2.0%. At that time inflation was at 1.7%, but it has now fallen significantly, with the Office for National Statistics estimating inflation for the year to June 2020 to be 0.8%. Economists expect this to continue to fall towards 0% in the coming months, and it is then expected to take up to two years for inflation to return towards the 2.0% target level.

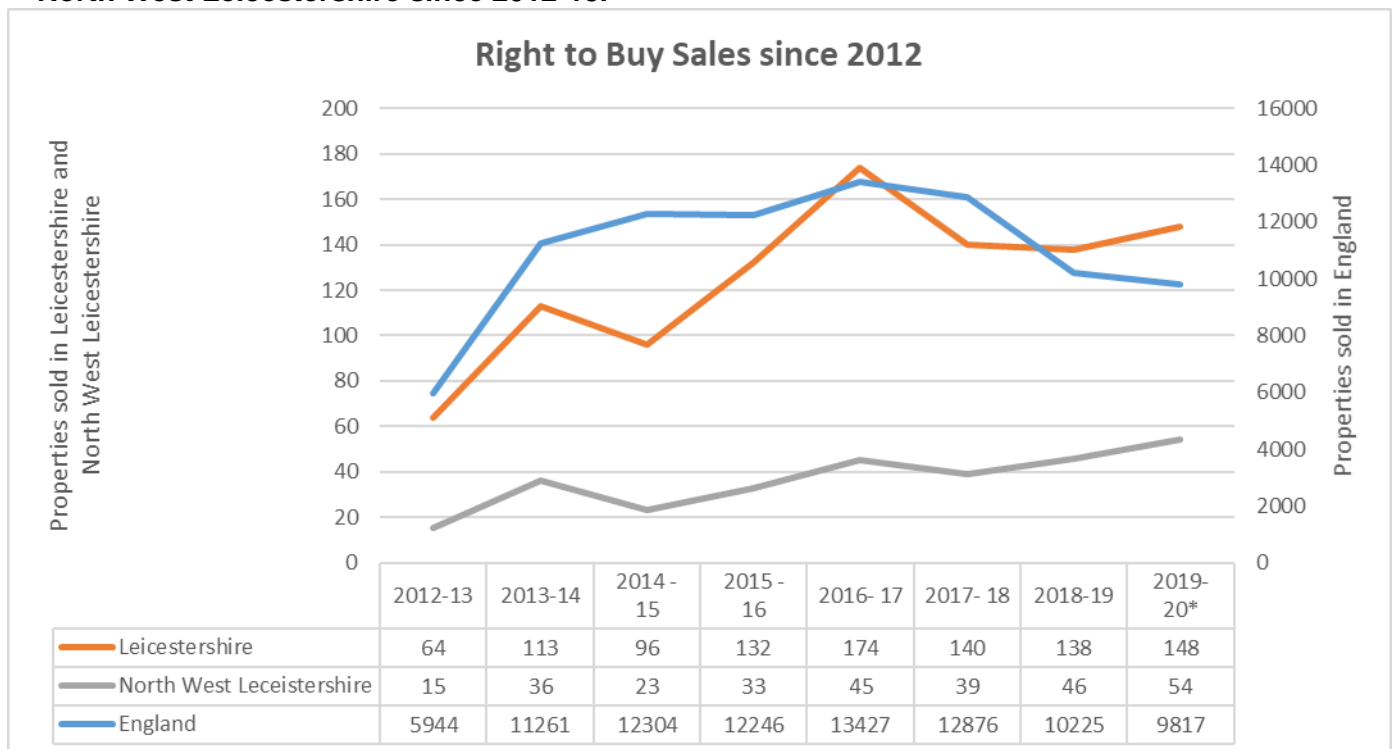
4.5.2 This fall has a significant adverse impact on our expected income. Government's current rent policy is to allow social housing rents to increase by CPI + 1% for the next four years, with the CPI figure being

taken at September of the year before the rise. Economist's current expectation is that CPI will be around 0.25% in September, so our expectation is that we will be able to increase rents by 1.25%. This will result in £314k less income in 2021/22 than originally anticipated and £1.3m less income over the 5 year period.

4.5.3 In 2016 the Government made a sudden change to its social housing rent policy by announcing a 1% reduction in social housing rents per year for four years. Whilst there is currently no evidence that a similar change is being considered, we must be aware of the risk that changing Government policy can have on the HRA's finances. We estimate that if a same 1% reduction were to happen again our income would fall by another £384k in 2021/22 and £5.8m over the 5 year period.

4.5.4 **Changes to our right to buy assumptions.** In 2019/20 we sold 54 properties to tenants through the right to buy scheme – 14 more than we had expected. Figure 4 shows that right to buy sales in North West Leicestershire have grown steadily since the scheme was reinvigorated in 2012, with average sales per year reaching 44 per year over the last 4 years. This trend is broadly in line with the trend in Leicestershire, but sales have started to fall nationally – largely driven by falls in London where it is less affordable to purchase property.

Figure 4, Number of properties sold through Right to Buy in England, Leicestershire and North West Leicestershire since 2012-13.



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

* Please note that data for quarter 4 of 2019-20 has not yet been published. We have included the full year figure for North West Leicestershire, but extrapolated the figures for Leicestershire and England are based on data from quarter 1 to 3.

4.5.5 In our February 2020 update we had expected right to buy sales to start to fall to around 42 per year. We have now increased that to 44 properties per year for the five year period, which is in line with a medium-term trend and appears realistic based on the 14 sales completed to date in this financial year. This has the effect of reducing

income by £12k in 2021/22 and £110k over the five year period.

- 4.5.6 The effect of additional right to buy sales on the surplus, however, is positive. This is because we retain a proportion of the sale proceeds as a capital receipt, which is used to fund the capital programme and reduces the need for HRA to make revenue contributions to the capital programme.
- 4.5.7 **Increasing costs.** Whilst general inflation is current very low, we expect to see our costs increase by more than inflation. This is as a result of a general increase in material prices through the pandemic period, along with changes to working practices both increasing costs and reducing productivity. There is also a risk that the end of the transition period following the UK's exit from the European Union could also cause prices to rise.
- 4.5.8 It is difficult to estimate the extent to which costs may change. We have assumed that costs will increase by an additional 1% over previous plans to CPI + 1.5% for the next two years, based on advice from housing experts. This increases our expected costs by £82k in 2021/22, and £595k over the 5 year period.
- 4.5.9 **Updates to 2019/20 and 2020/21 forecast expenditure.** The higher than budgeted surplus, as set out in paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2, means there is a larger HRA balance carried forward into this year.

HRA Medium Term Financial Plan – Revised Projections

- 4.6 The result of the above changes is the five year Medium Term Financial Plan could result in a lower surplus of £1.1m over the five year period, with the anticipated surplus in the current financial year being used to finance deficits in future years, as shown in table 6 below.

Table 4, HRA Medium Term Finance Plan – September 2020 Projections

HRA	2020/21 £'000	2021/22 £'000	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000	TOTAL £'000
Total Income	17,634	18,202	18,903	19,483	19,976	94,196
Total Expenditure	-10,960	-11,866	-12,133	-12,341	-12,541	-59,840
Contribution to the Capital Programme (RCCO)	-934	-4,005	-5,530	-4,923	-4,495	-19,888
Financing Expenditure	-3,339	-3,323	-3,054	-3,058	-3,058	-15,832
Surplus	2,401	-993	-1,815	-839	-118	-1,364
J2SS Adjustments	0	325	575	625	900	2,425
Surplus	2,401	-668	-1,240	-214	782	1,061

- 4.7 Borrowing is not required over the five year period of this medium term financial strategy. However, the compound effect of lower expected rents, higher costs and a large capital programme mean that the 30 year business plan currently forecasts a need for £62.7m of borrowing over its lifetime.

Achieving Carbon Neutrality

- 4.8 Our housing stock is considered to be the Council's greatest source of

greenhouse gas emissions, so work to reduce them will form a key part of our roadmap to zero carbon. Work completed by our consultant last year recommended the retrofit of heat pumps, installation of solar panels and improvements to the energy efficiency of homes to reduce carbon emissions. We are continuing to review the implications of this both financially and for our wider asset management strategy. This means we do not yet have a reliable estimate of costs to build into our Medium Term Financial Plan.

- 4.9** The cost of bringing over 4,000 properties up to low carbon standards is likely to be vast. Some other social housing providers estimating the costs could be between £20k - £45k per property. If we were to include an assessment of £20k per property within our Medium Term Financial Plan, the cost would be over £8m per year for the next 10 years.
- 4.10** The 5 year medium term financial position shows that there is not currently the capacity to fund this work through revenue contributions alone. Officers are currently exploring available grant funding opportunities, but even with external funding is likely that the Council will need to reprioritise its longer term capital programme and use borrowing to provide the financial capacity needed to meet our ambitious carbon reduction plans. These matters will be considered in detail the review of the Housing Strategy, Housing Asset Management Strategy and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan currently planned for 2021/22.

Policies and other considerations, as appropriate	
Council Priorities:	The Medium Term Financial Plans seeks to understand the amount of resources the Council will have to deliver its priorities in the future.
Policy Considerations:	Not applicable.
Safeguarding:	Not applicable.
Equalities/Diversity:	Not applicable.
Customer Impact:	Not applicable.
Economic and Social Impact:	Not applicable.
Environment and Climate Change:	The full impact of the climate emergency, declared by Council in May 2019, is not yet fully costed and mainstreamed into financial plans. The plans therefore do not reflect the full potential effort required to make the Council carbon neutral by 2030.
Consultation/Community Engagement:	Not applicable
Risks:	There are a number of risks associated with the Medium Term Financial Plan as clearly future events cannot be accurately predicted and as a result the economic outlook can change quickly. In addition, a great deal of uncertainty remains in the local government sector around core funding and the full extent of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A risk and sensitivity analysis is included within this report where relevant.

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APPENDIX A

EXTRACT OF DRAFT MEETING MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 SEPTEMBER 2020

6. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Tracy Bingham, Head of Finance, gave a detailed presentation on the changes to assumptions that drive the Medium Term Financial Plans (MTFP) which have resulted in changes to the forecast position to 2024/25. She focussed on the impact on the General Fund before handing over to Matthew D'Oyly-Watkins, who presented the assumptions in relation to the Housing Revenue Account.

The Chairman thanked the officers for their comprehensive presentation and invited questions and comments from Members.

With references to paragraphs 1.9 and 3.3 of the report, Councillor Sheahan asked for justification for the decision to reallocate £.09m of earmarked reserves to the self sufficiency fund and for confirmation if these were committed. He was advised that they were previously allocated for specific purposes but expenditure was not committed and that the earmarked reserves had been reviewed under delegated powers through a 'COVID lense' to identify those which could be reallocated by considering how long the reserves had been in existence and how long they had been set aside and for what reason. It was further noted that those earmarked reserves identified had not seen any expenditure in the last financial year. This additional funding would help bridge the gap, not only with the issues arising from COVID, but for any future financial challenges in the forthcoming years.

Councillor Sheahan challenged this as he understood that earmarked reserves were attached to expenditure which had been identified for a purpose so it seemed strange to him to say that it had not been allocated.

He was advised that earmarked reserves could be allocated for a specific purpose, however, if there has been no movement on these funds for a period or there was no clear intent on spending it in the near future, then the reserve can be reallocated.

Councillor Sheahan felt that if the money was uncommitted then it should be in the General Fund and this idea of moving money around which had been originally allocated for a set purpose, did not sit comfortably with him so he may want to address this again at a future meeting.

Councillor Sheahan moved on to the issue of thematic savings targets as referenced in paragraph 2.3 of the report and sought some clarity as to what these were. He was advised that these were the work streams as set out in the February budget reports and MTFP with themes around applying a more commercial approach to income and around contracts with a range of thematic savings. These were identified in the earlier part of the year as part of the Journey to Self Sufficiency Programme.

Councillor Sheahan conveyed his thanks for the report and presentation on business rates which has helped him gain a better understanding, accepting that it is extremely complicated, and he asked the Head of Finance to confirm his understanding of how it works. She was able to do this by confirming that Councillor Sheahan's summary was correct adding that the reason the Council benefits so greatly from growth is that the amount it has accumulated is way above the base line the Government believes our retained business rates should be at; and above that level the Council is able to retain more of the rates collected which is also why it represents a risk.

Councillor Sheahan then turned his attention to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and in particular paragraph 4.2 of the report which spoke about the balances and how this can be used to respond to opportunities such as acquiring new homes. He asked that this money does get spent, particularly on improving existing homes as we are only targeting about 15 new homes a year and yet still losing around 44 homes per year through 'right to buy'. He therefore believes that the money should be spent on increasing the standards of existing homes. However, he felt that the Council should have a strategy as to how it will tackle the issues of around achieving carbon neutrality, with particular focus on the level of carbon being produced by our homes. Councillor Sheahan also felt that the Council should be looking at other sources of funding as the Council could not be expected to fund it all as it would be a massive hit on the HRA.

Councillor Johnson referenced the contractual issue with regard to Newmarket and asked if the Council could recover any costs. He was reminded that this decision had already been made. Councillor Johnson expressed his disappointment at this decision.

Councillor Wyatt asked whether the Council would be able to tap into the grants being made available by Government to help landlords tackle the issues around achieving carbon neutrality within our housing stock. He also reiterated the comments made by Councillor Johnson in relation to the Newmarket contract and felt that Members should be able to have a say on the matter and, as such, it should be taken to full Council.

He was advised that the issue about the Government funding was currently being explored by the Housing Department and he was reminded that, with regard to the Newmarket contract, this issue had been considered by the Community Scrutiny Committee in July and later by Cabinet where the decision was not called in by Members who may have not been happy with that decision when they had an opportunity to do so.

The recommendation as set out on page 22 of the agenda was moved by Councillor Sheahan, seconded by Councillor Allman and by affirmation of the meeting:-

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be duly noted and the comments made at this meeting be reported to Cabinet.

**2020/21 QUARTER 1
FINANCIAL FORECAST SUMMARY**

		General Fund	HRA	Council Wide Impact
Budgeted Surplus/(Deficit) Position		£630k	£2.77m	
P1 Forecast impact of COVID-19 *		(£1.870m)Gross	(£259k) Gross	(£2.129m) Gross / (£1.086m) Net of emergency funding
Revised Forecast Position based on Q1	Q1 Forecast impact of COVID-19 *	(£3.085m) gross/ (£1.559m) net	(£383k) gross/ (£383k) net	(£3.468m) Gross / (£1.942m) Net
	Other variances *	(£50k)	£5k	
	Total forecast variance *	(£1.609m)	(378k)	
	Total Forecast Surplus/(Deficit)	(£0.978m)	£2.4m	
Significant movements		<p><i>Covid-19 related:</i></p> <p>a) £338k additional staffing costs of which £200k relates to the community hub</p> <p>b) £414k of additional support to Everyone Active</p> <p>c) £85k support to parish councils</p> <p>d) £83k on additional ICT equipment and licences to allow home working</p> <p>e) £70k on security and alterations at the council offices to enable safe working practices</p> <p>f) Receipt of the 3rd tranche of MHCLG funding of £152k and £130k of New Burdens funding</p> <p>g) Anticipated £200k funding to be received for the year through MHCLG Income Compensation scheme</p> <p><i>Other (non-covid-19 related) movements:</i></p> <p>h) £173k of savings identified through a targeted review of key budget lines</p> <p>i) £55k savings within the planning team as a result of the delay in HS2 and reduction in appeals</p> <p>j) £33k saving in relation to MRP arising as a result of under-spend on the 2019/20 Capital Programme</p> <p>k) £127k forecast less in business rates compared to budgeted position</p>	<p><i>Covid-19 related:</i></p> <p>l) Surpluses on our in-house repairs team trading account falling by £459k. This is partially offset by fewer repair jobs being expected, saving £296k.</p> <p>m) £225k additional costs as journey to self-sufficiency saving targets have been reduced to zero.</p> <p>n) £140k savings from staff being redeployed to covid-19 responses.</p> <p><i>Other (non-covid-19 related) movements:</i></p> <p>o) £145k less income, mainly due to higher right to buys in 2019-20 reducing income in this year.</p> <p>p) Reduced forecast painting programme expenditure by £150k</p>	
Notes		The above forecasts currently exclude the impact of the potential deficit arising on the Collection Fund as a result of lower levels of business rates and council tax collected and increases in bad debts. The full impact will be estimated as part of setting the 2021/22 budget.		

* Favourable/(Adverse)