

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO COUNCIL

24 FEBRUARY 2021

### REPORT OF THE INTERIM CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE

#### MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) 2021-22 to 2024-25

##### 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval of the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-22 to 2024-25, attached at Annex 3, which includes a financial forecast for 2021-25, a detailed revenue budget for 2021-22 and a Capital Programme for 2020-21 to 2030-31. This is dependent on Cabinet approval on 23 February 2021.

##### 2. Connections to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:

1. **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
2. **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
3. **Smarter use of resources** – ensuring that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

- 2.2 The allocation of budget determines the extent to which the Council's well-being objectives can be delivered. The Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) identify the Council's service and resource priorities for the next four financial years, with particular focus on 2021-22.

##### 3. Background

- 3.1 The Council's well-being objectives under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 are currently:

- Supporting a successful sustainable economy
- Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient
- Smarter use of resources

- 3.2 This MTFS has been significantly guided by these priorities. Although previous year-on-year changes in Aggregate External Finance (AEF) have necessitated significant budget reductions across different service areas, the Council still plays a very significant role in the local economy of Bridgend County Borough and is responsible for annual gross expenditure of around £435 million and is the largest employer in the county borough.
- 3.3 The Council's Corporate Plan is being presented to Council for approval alongside the MTFS 2021-25, and the two documents are aligned to each other, enabling the reader to make explicit links between the Council's well-being objectives and the resources directed to support them.

#### **4. Current situation/proposal**

- 4.1 This report is presented to Council to provide details of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for the four year period 2020-21 to 2023-24. The MTFS is complimentary to the Council's Corporate Plan, and looks to provide the resources to enable the Council's wellbeing objectives to be met. The MTFS outlines the principles and detailed assumptions which drive the Council's budget and spending decisions, outlines the financial context in which the Council is operating, and tries to mitigate any financial risks and pressures going forward, at the same time as taking advantage of any opportunities arising.
- 4.2 The MTFS focuses on how the Council intends to respond to the forecasted public sector funding reductions as a result of on-going austerity and increasing pressures on public sector services, which have been exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic. It sets out the approaches and principles the Council will follow to ensure the Council remains financially sustainable and delivers on its corporate well-being objectives.
- 4.3 The Council is required to approve a balanced budget for the following financial year and set the Council Tax rates for the County Borough. This report sets out proposals to achieve that objective and contribute towards a sustainable position going into the medium-term.
- 4.4 The quarterly reports to Cabinet during the financial year on the projected revenue position for 2020-21 have outlined in detail the impact on the budget of the additional cost pressures and loss of income faced by the Council throughout the year as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Welsh Government has played a significant role in mitigating a large proportion of these losses through their various funding streams, most notably the Covid-19 Hardship Fund. Whilst some of these additional pressures are not recurrent, there are a number that will require longer term funding as new ways of working are embedded into the Council's business as usual, and these are reflected in the MTFS.
- 4.5. The announcement of the final local government settlement for 2021-22 is approximately two months later than previous years, due to the delay in the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review by the UK government, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The final settlement is not due to be announced until 2 March 2021. As a result this budget is being proposed on the basis of the provisional settlement received in December 2020. Whilst we do not anticipate any significant change in funding between the provisional and final settlement, any changes will be reported back to Council at a later date. It is not envisaged that any changes will impact upon council tax.

## 5. Effect on policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 The budget setting process is outlined within the Council's Constitution and Financial Procedure Rules.

## 6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 The proposals contained within this report cover a wide range of services and it is inevitable that the necessary budget reductions will impact on the local population in different ways. In developing these proposals, consideration has been given to their potential impact on protected groups within the community and on how to avoid a disproportionate impact on people within these groups.

6.2 A high level Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken on the Council's budget proposals and updated MTFS (see Annex 1). Individual EIAs are completed for 2021-22 proposed budget reduction proposals which may impact on certain groups of citizens within the County Borough.

## 7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

7.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides a framework for embedding sustainable development principles within the activities of Council and has major implications for the long-term planning of finances and service provision. The 7 well-being goals identified in the Act have driven the Council's three well-being objectives, which are designed to complement each other and be part of an integrated way of working to improve well-being for people in Bridgend County. In developing the MTFS, officers have considered the importance of balancing short-term needs in terms of meeting savings targets, with safeguarding the ability to meet longer-term objectives.

7.2 The proposals contained within this report cover a wide range of services and it is inevitable that the necessary budget reductions will impact on the well-being goals in different ways. A Wellbeing of Future Generations Assessment will be undertaken on proposed individual projects and activities where relevant and will feed into specific reports to Cabinet or Council.

7.3 The Council's approach to meeting its responsibilities under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, including acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle, is reflected in a number of areas within the Medium Term Financial Strategy, not least:

5 Ways of Working	Examples
Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outlining the impact of a number of different funding scenarios (Best, Most Likely and Worst) to provide an element of flexibility to the Council.</li><li>• Majority of savings generated from making smarter use of resources with service reductions kept to a minimum and only as a last resort.</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The development of a 10 year capital programme which reflects the Council's affordability in terms of capital receipts and borrowing.</li> <li>• Investment in capital schemes that support the Council's corporate priorities and benefits the County Borough over a longer period.</li> </ul>
Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in preventative measures to reduce the burden on more costly statutory services.</li> </ul>
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Savings generated from collaboration and integrated working.</li> </ul>
Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicit links between the Corporate Plan, the Capital Strategy, the Treasury Management Strategy and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.</li> </ul>
Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A robust budget consultation exercise, including surveys and social media debates, to inform proposals.</li> </ul>

7.4 The above features are aimed at ensuring the Council's finances are as healthy as they can be for future generations. Although resources are limited, they have been targeted in a way that reflects the Council's priorities, including the seven well-being goals included in Bridgend's Well-being Plan, and this is reflected in the relevant appendices. Where possible the Council has aimed to protect front line services and invest to save, with budget reductions targeted at making smarter use of resources, commercialisation, collaboration and transformation. The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment is attached at Annex 2.

## **8. Financial implications**

8.1 This report outlines the financial issues that Council is requested to consider as part of the MTFs 2021-22 to 2024-25. The Council's Section 151 Officer is required to report annually on the robustness of the level of reserves. The level of Council reserves is sufficient to protect the Council in light of unknown demands or emergencies and current funding levels. It must be emphasised that the biggest financial risks the Council is exposed to at the present time relate to the uncertainty of Welsh Government funding, including funding to mitigate the effects of Covid-19, the increasing difficulty in the delivery of planned budget reductions as well as the identification of further proposals. Therefore, it is imperative that the Council Fund balance is managed in accordance with the MTFs Principle 9, as set out in the MTFs, and it is essential that revenue service expenditure and capital expenditure is contained within the identified budgets.

8.2 The Section 151 Officer is also required to report to Council if they do not believe that they have sufficient resource to discharge their role as required by s114 of the Local Government Act 1988. Members should note that there is sufficient resource to discharge this role.

8.3 The budget includes estimates which take into account circumstances and events which exist or are reasonably foreseeable at the time of preparing the budget. The budget has been prepared following consultation with Members, the School Budget Forum and service managers. Subject to the risks identified the MTFs provides a firm basis for managing the Council's resources for the year 2021-22 and beyond.

## **9. Recommendations**

9.1 Council is asked to approve the MTFS 2021-22 to 2024-25 including the 2021-22 revenue budget and the Capital Programme 2020-21 to 2030-31. In particular it is asked to approve the following specific elements:

- The MTFS 2021-22 to 2024-25 (Annex 3).
- The Net Budget Requirement of £298,956,245 in 2021-22.
- A Band D Council Tax for Bridgend County Borough Council of £1,597.01 for 2021-22 (Table 17 of the MTFS).
- The 2021-22 budgets as allocated in accordance with Table 10 in paragraph 4.1.3 of the MTFS.
- The Capital Programme 2020-21 to 2030-31, attached at Appendix H of the MTFS.

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**February 2021**

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**Background Documents:** Provisional Local Government Revenue and Capital Settlements 2021-22

'Guide to Welsh Public Finances', Auditor General for Wales, July 2018