

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - RESOURCES
DATE OF MEETING: 26 JANUARY 2017

REPORT OF: ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FINANCE
TITLE: REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS 2017/18

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 To outline the strategic framework within which the estimates have been prepared and highlight the issues that will affect the actual setting of the overall level of council tax.
- 1.2 This report also summarises the overall budget position arising from the current cycle of Scrutiny Committee meetings.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 That Scrutiny Committee – Resources notes the report and comments accordingly.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

- 3.1 To ensure that the Council is in a position to set a budget and determine the Council Tax for the City of Exeter in line with the statutory timeframe.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources

- 4.1 The report sets out the proposed budget for 2017/18. Details of the resource implications are set out in section 8.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

- 5.1 The proposed budget will achieve the requirement to maintain a minimum balance in excess of £3 million. The Medium Term Financial Plan is reliant on substantial savings being delivered over the next three years in order to maintain and strengthen the Working Balance to ensure the Council is able to cope with any issues arising from 100% Business Rate retention.

6. What are the legal aspects?

- 6.1 The Council is required by the Local Government Act 1992 to determine the Council Tax for the following year. In order to do this, a balanced budget is prepared.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

7.1 The Monitoring Officer has no issues of concern regarding the report content.

8. Report Details:

8.1 Local Government Provisional Finance Settlement 2017-18

8.1.1 4 year Settlement

During the settlement for 2016-17, the Government offered Local Authorities the opportunity to apply for a 4year agreed settlement subject to producing an efficiency plan. The Council took up this offer and were notified in November that the Government had agreed the Settlement.

8.1.2 The provisional settlement for 2017-18 therefore reflects the figures in the Medium Term Financial Plan.

8.1.3 The draft valuation list for the Business Rates revaluation has been released by the Valuation Office. Exeter's list has risen by 0.97% against a national increase of 9.6%. This means that on average bills in Exeter will reduce. The Government have adjusted the amount that Exeter has to pay over to the Government to ensure that the changes arising from the revaluation are cost neutral.

8.1.4 Appendix 1 shows as a comparison the formula funding settlement figures for all Devon authorities. The final settlement figures will be announced later this month but at this stage it is not expected that they will be significantly different from the provisional announcement. The figures show that in comparison with the other Devon Districts the City Council has fared better in percentage terms of formula funding reduced.

8.1.5 Core spending power is a new definition used by the Government, which encompasses an individual authority's:

- Council Tax Requirement including estimates of Council Tax increases and increases in the Taxbase;
- Social Care Precept (not applicable for district councils);
- Formula Grant;
- New Homes Bonus;
- Rural Services Delivery Grant and
- Better Care Fund (not applicable for district councils).

Appendix 2 shows a comparison of Devon authorities using this definition of revenue spending power. Using this measure Exeter's core spending power reduces by 14.0% over the period.

8.2 COUNCIL TAX

8.2.1 The Government has announced in respect of the local authority tax referendum threshold, that Shire District councils will be allowed increases of less than 2% or up to and including £5, whichever is higher. Upper Tier Authorities may increase their Council Tax by up to three per cent above the threshold as long as the additional income is spent on Adult Social Care. This is on top of the 1.99% increase they may make for other services but can total no more than 6% over the next three years. Exeter's budget strategy for next year assumes that council tax will increase by £5, which, along with the estimated surplus on the collection fund of £87,500 and increase in the taxbase will raise an extra £308,000.

8.3 BUSINESS RATES POOL

8.3.1 Local Authorities in Devon (with the exception of South Hams DC) have agreed to form a Business Rates pool for a fourth year. The benefits of the pool are that any additional growth within Devon is shared between the Councils in Devon rather than a levy being paid over to Central Government. However there are risks that where a Council's Business Rates income falls below their safety net, then it is the responsibility of the members of the pool to make payments to them rather than Central Government. The budget allows for a small gain from pooling.

8.4 KEY ASSUMPTIONS

An overall allowance of £110,000 has been set aside for inflation. The inflationary increases allowed in the budget are:

Pay Award	1.0%
Pay – Increments	0.5%
Electricity	1.5%
Gas	1.5%
Oil	1.5%
Water	0.0%
Insurance	5.0%
Rates	1.2%
Fuel	0.0%
General Inflation	0.0%
Income (excluding Car Parks)	1.5%

8.4.2 General inflation has again been held at zero; however where there are contracts in place, inflation at around RPI has been added. The pay award for 2017/18 has been agreed at 1% which has been added to the budgets.

8.4.3 In respect of interest rates, next year's budget reflects the likelihood that whilst base rate may remain low, borrowing for cashflow purposes will increase and the Council may begin to take out borrowing over a longer timeframe as a result.

8.5 FURTHER ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED

8.5.1 Before the Council can finalise its revenue budget for next year there are a number of issues that require further consideration as follows: -

- Equality Impact Assessment
- New Homes Bonus
- Future spending pressures and review of the medium term financial planning process
- The level of reserves and balances

8.6 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.6.1 Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) form part of the Council's decision making process and are a tool to help the Council identify what effect or possible effects its work may have on different groups of people. All local authorities have a legal responsibility to assess their policies and functions, and to set out how they will monitor any possible negative impact on equality target groups. The Council needs to consider the impact on equalities of all new and reviewed Council strategies, policies, projects, services or functions, budget decisions and restructures. By anticipating the consequences of its actions on equality groups the Council can make sure that, as far as possible, any negative consequences are eliminated, minimised or counterbalanced by other measures, and opportunities for promoting equality are maximised. As part of this process any revenue savings proposals are assessed for any potential equality issues and EQIA's are undertaken as appropriate with the results available on the council's web site.

8.7 NEW HOMES BONUS

8.7.1 The Government have announced their response to the New Homes Bonus consultation. As members will remember the Government intends to remove £800 million from New Homes Bonus in order to fund Adult Social Care. The Government have therefore reduced the number of years to be paid from 6 years to five years in 2017-18 and will further reduce it to four years from 2018-19. Additionally, no payment will be made on housing growth below 0.4%. This has resulted in Exeter being awarded £3.597 million for 2017-18.

8.7.2 To date the Council has received New Homes Bonus of £0.389 million in 2011/12, £1.323 million in 2012/13, £2.205 million in 2013/14, £2.778 million in 2014/15, £3.529 million in 2015/16, £4.232 million in 2016/17 and provisionally been notified that it will receive a further £3.597 million in 2017/18. A new methodology for distributing New Homes Bonus is being proposed for this financial year and has the following impact:-

Year	Top Slice (revenue)	Community Projects	Major Projects /Debt Reduction	Unused / Projects	Revenue	Total
	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's
2011/12	-	-	-	389	-	389
2012/13	120	361	601	241	-	1,323
2013/14	120	286	1,757	42	-	2,205
2014/15	120	286	2,372	-	-	2,778
2015/16	120	286	3,123	-	-	3,529
2016/17	120	189	2,000	923	1,000	4,232
2017/18	125	189	1,000	1,283	1,000	3,597
Total	725	1,597	10,853	2,878	2,000	18,053

8.8 REVISED MEDIUM TERM REVENUE PLAN (APPENDIX 3)

- 8.8.1 An updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) is set out in Appendix 3. The MTFP currently indicates that no additional savings are required over the next four years (2016/17 – 2019/20), although some of the savings identified are currently being analysed to ensure that they are achievable.
- 8.8.2 Looking to the longer term there are a number of uncertainties and factors that could affect the future financial position. These include: potential costs arising from the review of service plans, the cost of any new statutory functions, and additional borrowing and revenue costs in respect of any new capital programme commitments. Any additional revenue costs / reduced income streams that are not currently identified within the medium term financial plan will have to be met from further savings. Further ahead, the move to 100% Business Rate retention by Local Government as a whole provides further uncertainty over future funding levels.

8.9 BALANCES AND RESERVES

- 8.9.1 The Council's current policy is such that the minimum level of the General Fund Balance will remain above £3 million. As the Council faces greater uncertainty in the medium term over funding it is prudent to hold reserve levels at a higher rate to offset sudden losses of income. The latest estimated position of the General Fund Balance is that it will be £3.596 million as at 31 March 2018, equivalent to 23.3% of Exeter's net revenue budget. The Council's revised medium-term financial plan (Appendix 3) indicates that the General Fund Balance will increase to £6.474 million by the end of 2020/21.
- 8.9.2 The Council also has other reserves that have been earmarked for specific purposes. The Council's proposed revenue budget for 2017/18 includes a net transfer to earmarked reserves of £769,000. This is broken down as shown below:-

Transfer (from)/ to reserves:

	2017/18 £'000
Transfers to Reserves	
New Homes Bonus	<u>3,597</u>
	3,597
Transfers from Reserves	
New Homes Bonus	(2,664)
Events	(100)
Sports	(56)
Vehicle Licensing	<u>(8)</u>
	(2,828)

8.10 REVENUE ESTIMATES 2017/18 (APPENDIX 4)

- 8.10.1 The Council's revenue estimates for next year are being considered during the current cycle of Scrutiny Committee meetings for the final budget report to the Executive on 14 February 2017. In total, Service Committee Expenditure for 2016/17 is £12,852,260 which is £303,970 higher than the current year.
- 8.10.2 In addition there are other items to take into account referred to as 'below the line' as they do not form part of the individual service controllable budgets. These include an estimate of £150,000 for net borrowing in respect of the overall cash balances, £1,764,028 towards meeting the borrowing costs of the Council's capital programme, and new homes bonus grant and transfers in respect of balances and reserves. The Council's total General Fund Expenditure budget requirement for 2015/16 is planned to be £11,864,809, a reduction of £325,785 compared to 2016/17.

8.11 COUNCIL TAX BUDGET REQUIREMENT 2017/18

- 8.11.1 As stated above, the Government is setting the referendum trigger for District Councils at above £5 or 2%, whichever is higher. The budget has been set on the basis of a £5 increase, although this is ultimately a Member decision. It should be noted that in the Government spending calculations, they have assumed that all District Councils will raise their Council Tax by £5 and have set the spending reductions accordingly.
- 8.11.2 When all the Government Grant funding is taken into account the resultant net expenditure to be financed from council tax is £5,337,809 (as indicated in Appendix 4), an increase of £308,173 compared to 2016/17.
- 8.11.2 Each year the Council must estimate the likely surplus or deficit position on its Collection Fund and any such amounts must be taken into account when determining the band D Council Tax amount for 2015/16. For next year it is estimated that the collection fund will have a surplus (£87,504), which will be used to fund part of the expenditure to be financed from Council Tax.
- 8.11.3 After taking into account the surplus and the taxbase of 36,197, the proposed band D council tax for 2016/17 is £145.05, which means that the council tax would increase annually by £5.00 or 3.57%. An increase of 1.99% would reduce the Council Tax requirement by £80,111, which would have to be taken from reserves.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

- 9.1 The budget underpins the Corporate Plan by determining the amount of funds available to the Council to deliver its priorities.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

- 10.1 The key risks revolve around ensuring that the Council has sufficient funds to both meet the financial plans set out in the report and to protect itself against any unexpected expenditure that occurs. The risk is mitigated by ensuring that there are sufficient reserves held to offset unexpected expenditure needs. Regular monitoring is undertaken and reported to both the Strategic Management Team and Members.

11. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, Economy safety and the environment?

11.1 Not applicable.

12. Are there any other options?

12.1 Not applicable.

Dave Hodgson, Assistant Director Finance

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:

None

Contact for enquiries:

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