

Stage 1 Equality Impact Assessment – Initial Screening

Assessor(s) Name(s):	Chris Ward / Kerry Hubbleday
Directorate:	Council wide
Date of Completion:	February 2022

Name of Policy/Strategy/Service/Function Proposal

Budget and Council Tax setting 2022/2023 and Future Years Forecasts

The Aims, Objectives and Expected Outcomes:

The revenue and capital budget and council tax for 2022/2023 will be set at the Council meeting on 23 February 2022.

The proposals within the Budget report recommend a Budget for 2022/2023 that provides for the full financial impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the current year and its expected ongoing legacy over the next 3 years, £3.0m of savings, a Council Tax increase of 2.99% (1% of which is raised specifically to be passported to Adult Social Care, additional funding for Adult Social Care and Children's Services of £6m in total, being far in excess of the funding provided by the Adult Social Care precept and additional Social Care grant from Central Government (£2.9m combined). In addition the future savings requirements have been revised downwards to £2m per annum (from £3.0m per annum previously) for the three year period commencing 2023/24 but are predicated on maintaining General Reserves above £8m over that period.

There remains considerable funding uncertainty from 2023/24 due to a comprehensive overhaul of the Local Government funding system known as the "Fair Funding Review", it will determine a new formula methodology which will set each Local Authority's baseline funding level. Alongside this, a new system for retaining future Business Rate growth / loss will be implemented, taking away all existing growth and re-distributing that growth nationally according to relative need (rather than where it was generated). For these reasons, the Council's future forecast deficits could reasonably be expected to vary between +/- £3m which when spread over 3 years would vary the annual savings requirements by +/- £1m per annum.

During this unprecedented level of uncertainty, it is imperative that the Council continues to plan for savings of £2.0m per year in the future, retaining the COVID-19 funding and General Reserves at the levels proposed in this report so as to retain the necessary financial resilience to be able to respond in all circumstances.

The proposals also seek to remedy the financial stress being experienced in both Adults and Children's Social Care, providing a sound financial base as the Council moves into a very uncertain period for Local Government funding from 2023/24 onwards.

Since 2011/12 savings of £90m will have already been made (over 40% of controllable spend) due to the combination of government funding reductions and increasing demographic cost pressures.

In following the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), the Administration have proposed savings in previous years which have further financial savings benefits in later years. Many of the savings proposals put forward last year provide additional savings in the forthcoming year, known as the "full year effect". The extent of the "full year effect" is £0.9m and therefore just £2.1m of new savings are proposed for 2022/23. For 2022/23, 99% of all savings proposed are planned from Efficiency Savings and Additional Income with Service Reduction measures amounting to just 11%

The COVID contingency was established to provide a good level of surety that the Council will be able to continue to deliver all of its essential services as well as being able to respond to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic and its legacy after effects. In the current year, it is forecast that there will be £6.1m of commitments against the contingency, leaving a remaining balance of £9.1m for future years. The overall costs, income losses and funding losses (Council tax and Business Rates) arising directly out of the COVID-19 pandemic still remains uncertain for the current year and therefore the sum available to carry forward into 2022/23 is also uncertain.

The financial impact on the Council arising from the COVID-19 pandemic over the next 3 years also remains extremely uncertain. The key variables being:

- The immediate and ongoing impact on the costs of providing Adult Social Care and Children's Services
- The extent to which built up backlogs in Regulatory Services can be addressed
- The speed at which income losses will recover
- The impact on both Council Tax and Business Rate collection levels

It is important to note that it is the responsibility of the Council to approve the overall Budget and the associated cash limits of its Portfolios; it is not the responsibility of the Council to approve any individual savings or additions within those Portfolios, that responsibility is reserved for Cabinet Members. The budget savings are indicative only. It is therefore a matter for the Portfolio Holder and Service to have due regard to the equality duties as set out in the Equalities Act 2010 and where required to undertake an EIA assessment to determine the impact of each saving as they are taken forward.

Please delete as appropriate:

This is a proposal for the budget and council tax setting for 2022/23.

Key Questions to Consider in Assessing Potential Impact

<p>Will the policy, strategy, service or council function proposal have a negative impact on any of the protected characteristics or other reasons that are relevant issues for the local community and/or staff?</p>	<p>This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward</p>
<p>Has previous consultation identified this issue as important or highlighted negative impact and/or we have created a “legitimate expectation” for consultation to take place? A legitimate expectation may be created when we have consulted on similar issues in the past or if we have ever given an indication that we would consult in such situations</p>	<p>An overarching Budget consultation through an on-line survey took place between the 14 December 2021 and 21 January 2022 with 682 responses. The results of the Budget Consultation are set out in the body of the report and the recommendations are broadly aligned with the consultation response.</p> <p>The need for additional consultation will be considered as each savings item is taken forward</p>
<p>Do different groups of people within the local community have different needs or experiences in the area this issue relates to?</p>	<p>This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward</p>
<p>Could the aims of these proposals be in conflict with the council’s general duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not?</p>	<p>This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward</p>
<p>Will the proposal have a significant effect on how services or a council function/s is/are delivered?</p>	<p>This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward</p>
<p>Will the proposal have a significant effect on how other organisations operate?</p>	<p>This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward</p>
<p>Does the proposal involve a significant commitment of resources?</p>	<p>This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward</p>
<p>Does the proposal relate to an area where there are known inequalities?</p>	<p>This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward</p>

If you answer **Yes** to any of these questions, it will be necessary for you to proceed to a full Equality Impact Assessment after you have completed the rest of this initial screening form.

If you answer **No** to all of these questions, please provide appropriate evidence using the table below and complete the evidence considerations box and obtain sign off from your Head of Service.

Protected Characteristics	Positive	Negative	No impact	Reasons
Age				This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward
Disability				This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward
Gender Reassignment				This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward
Marriage & Civil Partnership				This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward
Pregnancy & Maternity				This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward
Race				This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward
Religion / Belief				This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward
Sex (male / female)				This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward
Sexual Orientation				This will be determined by separate EIAs as actual savings items are taken forward

Are there aspects of the proposal that contribute to or improve the opportunity for equality?	
This will be determined by separate EIAs as savings items are taken forward	

Evidence Considered During Screening
The Budget consultation survey, information provided by services and the budget information

Head of Service Sign off:	Chris Ward
Advice sought from Legal Services (Name)	Justin Thorne/Chris Potter
Date	February 2022

A signed version is to be kept by your team and also an electronic version should be published on the council's website (follow the link from the EIA page on the intranet)

Summary

Date of Assessment:	February 2022
Signed off by Head of Service/Director	Chris Ward