

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES
Corporate Performance & Resources Scrutiny Committee

30th January 2023

REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY 2023/24 to 2025/26

(Copy of Cabinet report 09/01/2023)

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.** Cabinet in October 2022 received a report on the Revenue Budget Outlook for 2023/24 to 2025/26 which appraised Members of the financial outlook and the proposals for taking forward the budget preparation.
- 1.2.** This report provides Members with the current view of the Revenue Budget for 2023/24 together with indicative figures for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years. The report is based on officers' projections of spending requirements and takes account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on 14th December 2022.
- 1.3.** Whilst significant work has already been undertaken in preparing the budget, this represents an initial position statement which will be updated over the coming months as the budget is further developed, council members are engaged and public consultation takes place. The final settlement is due to be received from Welsh Government on 7th March 2023.
- 1.4.** The report is broken down into six parts:
 - Funding Projections/Provisional Settlement
 - Budget Requirement
 - Impact on the Authority's budget requirement
 - Consultation
 - Conclusion
 - Recommendations

2. FUNDING PROJECTIONS/PROVISIONAL SETTLEMENT

- 2.1. The provisional settlement was announced on Wednesday 14th December 2022. Provisional figures for individual Local Authorities were provided for 2023/24, with indicative figures for 2024/25.
- 2.2. The Westminster Autumn Statement announced in November 2022 included a significant Barnett consequential for Welsh Government, reported at £1.2 billion over two years. This was primarily made up of increased funding for Education, Health and Social Care, and changes to business rates, all of which are devolved functions.
- 2.3. The main points of the Provisional Settlement 2023/24 on an all Wales basis are as follows:
 - 2.3.1. Local government revenue funding for 2023/24 set at £5.514 billion, an increase of 8.0% (£403 million) compared to 2022/23. Like for like, the increase is 7.9% on an all-Wales basis.
 - 2.3.2. The minister's letter accompanying the settlement highlights that the increase includes funding to meet the Foundation Living Wage, as well as passporting the Education consequential from the UK Autumn Statement.
 - 2.3.3. Whilst this is welcome, the inflationary pressures far exceed the funding provided. In particular, no additional funding has been provided to meet the inherent budget shortfall going forward as a result of the 2022 pay awards.
 - 2.3.4. There is no funding floor, meaning a wide variation between individual Local Authorities, ranging from +9.3% (Monmouthshire) to +6.5% (Blaenau Gwent). These variances are driven by updates to key datasets which influence the funding allocation, such as the number of Universal Claimants and Free School Meal Pupils in particular areas.
- 2.4. The Settlement figures for Carmarthenshire are:
 - 2.4.1. After adjustments for WG identified transfers, the increase in the provisional settlement is 8.5% (£26.432 million). The Aggregate External Finance (AEF) therefore increases to £338.017 million in 2023/24.

This settlement is significantly above the indicative figure of a 3.4% increase and provides some £15.5m more than our original assumption, **however Welsh Government themselves recognise that even this increased figure will not be enough to meet inflationary pressures facing councils and difficult decisions will need to be made.** The

level of inflationary cost increases is on a scale not seen for several decades, as discussed in detail later in this report.

We have set our Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) assumptions for 2023 and beyond to accommodate an easing of inflation versus current rates. Whilst the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecasts a sharp reduction in CPI over the next 12 months – we have followed this pattern, albeit at a higher level – this is because the OBR forecast includes in particular the impact of energy and food costs, which our budget accommodates as separate cost pressures. A key assumption is that across our workforce, pay awards track the prevailing inflation rate over the medium term. The financial model forecasts a requirement for £20m savings over the three year MTFP period.

Details of the many Welsh Government Service Specific Grants were provided alongside the provisional settlement on 14 December 2022 at an all-Wales level. For 2023/24, as has been standard over several years, most remain at a broadly similar level (cash value) to previous years, which will in reality reduce outputs. With the level of general inflation as well as pay awards at a much higher level, the impact of this next year will be significant.

2.5. There are however some important updates to specific grants:

- There is new funding of £40m all-Wales to provide continued support to Ukrainians seeking refuge in Wales. This funding will be critical to mitigate any unfunded pressure on Local Authority budgets, meaning that the £1m pressure recognised in the October report can now be released.
- WG has provided additional £5.5m funding to flatline the Recruit Recover Retain Standards (RRRS), instead of the planned reduction. This will enable schools to continue catchup/recovery activities.
- The Additional Learning Needs Transformation grant has nearly doubled from £6.6 million to £12 million across Wales. This increase is estimated to contribute c. £300k-400k to Carmarthenshire.
- The Pupil Development Grant has been increased by a reported £9m across Wales, which is estimated at c. £500k-600k to Carmarthenshire

As with last year, there are a number of grant changes referred to in the text to the main WG budget narrative, for which the values do not appear to be reflected in the Local Government provisional grant tables – it is assumed that they are due to be updated for the final settlement.

3. BUDGET REQUIREMENT 2023/24

3.1. Current Years performance (2022/23)

3.1.1. As the Authority’s core spending requirement remains constant year on year, a review of current year’s performance is important in identifying whether there are any underlying problems within the base budget

3.1.2. The current projection for the Revenue Outturn for 2022/23 (based on the October 2022 monitoring) is as follows

Service	Approved Budget £'000	Total Expenditure Forecast £'000	Variance Forecast For Year £'000
Chief Executive	17,218	16,687	-531
Communities	119,589	122,223	2,634
Corporate Services	29,116	28,235	-881
Education and Children's Services	187,394	191,091	3,697
Environment	65,784	65,709	-75
Departmental Expenditure	419,101	423,945	4,844
Unfunded Pay offers		6,300	6,300
Corporate contingency	3,000	200	-2,800
Capital Charges	-17,694	-20,194	-2,500
Levies and Contributions	11,479	11,477	-2
Transfer to/ from Reserves	0	-2,370	-2,370
Net Expenditure	415,885	419,358	3,473

The main reasons for the departmental variances are as follows:

- Chief Executive’s Department: underspends on member pay and travelling, registrars and vacant posts across the department, offset by People Management overspends
- Education and Children’s Services: Significant overspends in children’s services due to increased demand and agency costs, overspends in ALN budgets and School Meals Service, offset by additional grants in Early Years non-maintained provision.
- Communities Department: underspends in Older Peoples and Physical Disabilities budgets are offset by overspends in Learning Disabilities and Mental Health divisions. Additionally, Leisure income levels have been gradually returning to pre-pandemic levels, however this creates an in-year overspend. It should also be noted that without the sectoral staffing shortages in social care, the overspend could be significantly higher.

- Corporate Services: there are underspends on pre-Local Government Reorganisation pension costs, and Council Tax Reduction, partially offset by an overspend in Rent Allowances.
- Environment Department: Overspends in waste services, school transport and reduced car park usage post-pandemic, offset by vacant posts and reduced property maintenance activity due to contractor capacity.

At this point the Authority is currently forecasting an overspend of £3.5 million which will need to be met from general balances. **It is imperative that the structural pay issue causing this is dealt with in next year’s budget as this is not a sustainable financial position.**

3.2. Validation

3.2.1. Validation reflects the changes in expenditure requirements to deliver the **current level** of services in future years. Primarily this is inflation, but also includes some service specific changes. Some areas of inflation are currently at rates that have not been seen in decades and present risks to our budget. The key validation factors are as follows:

	<u>2023/24</u> <u>Original</u>	<u>2023/24</u> <u>Proposed</u>	<u>2024/25</u>	<u>2025/26</u>
General inflation - Expenditure	3.0%	5.0%	3.0%	2.0%
General inflation - Fees & Charges	2.5%	10.0%	3.0%	2.0%
Electricity & Gas	5.0%	£9.5m	-10.0%	0.0%
Fuel	5.0%	50.0%	3.0%	5.0%
Pay Inflation - non teaching	2.5%	5.0%	3.0%	2.5%
Pay Inflation - Teaching	2.5%	5.0%	3.0%	2.5%
NI increase	nil	-1.25%	nil	nil
Levies (see para 3.2.9)	2.5%	13.0%	3.0%	2.0%
Pension Contributions	nil	-1.8%	nil	nil
Capital Charges	£500k	£500k	£500k	£500k

3.2.2. With the exception of pay, the largest change to the council’s budget is the sharp increase in energy and fuel costs. As with large parts of the public sector, our gas and electricity needs are procured by Crown Commercial Services, who aggregate their client’s requirements to secure prices in the year ahead. Whilst this paid handsome dividends for our 2022/23 energy needs, the wholesale energy market has been at unprecedented levels, largely driven by the war in Ukraine. Carmarthenshire has set a two year purchasing strategy, with around three quarters of our energy needs already secured for 2023/24 and half for 2024/25. Based on the latest figures from Crown Commercial Services, we will need to add £9.5m to energy

budgets for 2023/24, however there is expected to be a 10% reduction for 2024/25 which is built into our calculations.

- 3.2.3. The cost of Road Transport Fuel has also increased rapidly over the last year. This affects both the council's own fleet, for which a 50% price increase has been added to budgets, as well as third party run services such as school transport, for which an explicit budget pressure is included within Appendix B.
- 3.2.4. The Council's 2022/23 budget was set on the basis of a 4% pay award for both NJC staff (the largest share of our payroll by value and staff numbers) and Teachers. Against this:
- 3.2.5. The NJC award has been agreed at a flat value of £1,925 across all grades, which equates to a 7.1% increase when applied to our workforce. The unbudgeted 3.1% "catchup" must be built into the budget calculations for 2023/24
- 3.2.6. The independent pay review body's recommendation of a 5% increase for all Teachers has been accepted by Welsh Government, but at this point Unions are balloting for strike action, demanding an uplift to 12%. Our draft budget includes the 1% "catchup" to 5%, with a recognition that any extra above this would be unfunded and represent an explicit significant risk. Every 1% is worth approximately £1m.
- 3.2.7. The previous MTFP planning assumptions include future annual pay awards of 2.5% for all staff. This was updated to 5% for 2023/24 in the budget outlook paper to reflect the higher inflation combined with the level of industrial action across both the public and private sector currently. Looking beyond this, the picture is highly uncertain, therefore our assumption is that pay growth mirrors inflation.

The impact of nationally set pay awards adds c. £19m to the estimated budget requirement for 2023/24, and a total of £33m over the 3 year planning period.

- 3.2.8. Against these extraordinary increases, we are able to offset three separate cost savings which partially mitigate the scale of the increase required:
- Within the Autumn Statement, the Chancellor confirmed the removal of the Health and Social Care Levy. As the 2022-23 allowed for an increase of £2m across council employed staff

and a further £500k for commissioned care, these can now be reversed.

- Staffing budgets have historically been set at the “top of paycales” – this means for individual jobs, the budget provides for the maximum pay point an individual employee could reach in that role. Whilst prudent budgeting, this leads naturally to an inherent underspend due to normal levels of staff turnover, internal promotions etc. By budgeting more precisely according to the exact makeup of the current workforce, we are able to reduce staffing budgets by an estimated £2.5m. This would apply to all departments, with the exception of delegated school budgets, as they are governed by the fair funding formula.
- Strong investment returns and prudent stewardship of the Dyfed Pension Fund over many years has resulted in a funding surplus, confirmed by the fund’s independent actuaries following the most recent Triennial valuation of the Dyfed Pension Fund which has been carried out over the last year. As a consequence, Carmarthenshire is able to reduce our Employers contribution rate by 1.8%, which provides a saving of £2.8m. The final valuation results will be notified to Carmarthenshire before the end of the Financial Year.

These three measures, taken together, are worth nearly £8m, and without which, the budget reductions requirement and/or council tax increase would have been considerably more challenging.

3.2.9. We understand from the Fire Authority that their indicative budget assumed a levy increase of 13%. Since this was agreed, Welsh Government has indicated that Fire Authorities will be required to meet the ongoing annual costs of the emergency service network, the share of which we estimate and anticipate will add £150k to Carmarthenshire and is shown in the pressures appendix for reference. This is yet to be confirmed by the Fire Authority in a formal meeting.

3.2.10. As a result of these factors, validation adds over £30 million to the current year’s budget.

3.3. Cost Reduction Programme

In anticipation of the settlement challenges, significant work to review service efficiencies/rationalisation proposals has been undertaken.

3.3.1. The savings targets set for each financial year are as follows:

	2023/24 £m	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m
Original target – MTFP (March 2022)	3.839	5.333	n/a
Budget Outlook (October 2022)	18.800	n/a	n/a
Proposed Savings (following Provisional Settlement and other budget adjustments)	9.377	6.448	4.531

3.3.2. Accordingly, departments have developed a range of proposals, and these efficiencies are included in **Appendix A** of this report.

- The efficiency proposals are categorised as follows:
 Managerial – Efficiencies that result in no perceivable change to the overall level of service delivery.
 Policy – Efficiency or service rationalisation proposals that will directly affect service delivery.

	2023/24 £m	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m
Managerial	6.136	3.641	2.755
Existing Policy	0	0.200	0.952
New Policy	3.241	0.543	0.289
Total	9.377	4.384	3.996

(Detail at **Appendix A**)

3.3.3. More work will need to be undertaken to further develop these efficiencies.

3.4. New Expenditure Pressures and contingency

3.4.1. New expenditure pressures are the combinations of additional cost to meet existing service needs e.g. increased client base/greater service take up and the costs of meeting change in service provision e.g. policy changes.

3.4.2. The original budget outlook report included £5.5 million per annum to meet growth pressures.

As with recent years, a much higher value of initial growth bids were received from departments, totalling £17 million. Based on an evaluation of the value and unavoidable nature of pressures submitted as well as additional funding identified through grants as explained in paragraph 2.5 above. Initial indications that many of the submissions are genuinely unavoidable and have already been constrained where practical. At this stage in the budget development, and pending further analysis to be undertaken by Directors, an indicative sum of £12 million been allocated across departments (Appendix B).

This budget round, social care pressures in particular have been at a very high level:

- the Foundation Living Wage, which impacts commissioned social care delivery, has been increased to £10.90, a 10% uplift.
- As well as demographic growth pressures for older people's budgets, this year's bid recognises the demographic increase in adults living with learning disabilities, which has seen a significant overspend in the current year.
- There are significant and unavoidable increases to energy and food costs incurred by residential care providers.

Last year's budget provided part year increased funding to support changes to the waste collection methodology – required to achieve increasingly challenging statutory Welsh Government recycling targets. This budget completes this with a further £0.8m, which will also contribute towards the decarbonisation agenda.

The Education and Childrens department bids include areas of acute overspend in the current year such as ALN and Inclusion services, and pressures on children's services.

3.4.3 In total, pressures funding adds £12 million to the budget, including an unallocated sum of £250k. The detail is provided at **Appendix B**.

3.4.4 Last year's budget included an explicit contingency budget of £3.5 m, of which £0.5m was ringfenced for social care. This was

to meet increased costs or lost income following the cessation of the WG hardship scheme which came to an end in March 2022.

Of the £3m corporate contingency, £200k has been allocated to school transport costs, with additional allocations likely to be needed to cover a range of budgetary issues such as sustained reduction in car park usage and PPE purchase and storage. As this requirement is much lower than what was feared, and given the scale of the budget gap, **it is proposed that £1.5m can be released.**

3.5. Schools Delegated Budgets

3.5.1 Over recent years, our MTFP has provided in full for known pressures to school budgets including inflationary costs and pay awards, without requiring any budget reduction proposals. School balances have also benefitted from additional grant funding provided by Welsh Government, with aggregate balances in March 2022 totalling £15.2m.

In 2022/23 delegated school budgets represent more than 30% of the authority's net revenue budget. Given the scale of the financial challenge this year, it is impossible to maintain this protection without significantly impacting other council services. This budget therefore includes a £2.7m saving applied, which is consistent with the level of savings required of other areas of council services.

Members should also note that as outlined in paragraph 2.5 above, there are increases to the RRRS grant (which was not expected to continue at the same level), ALN and PDG grants. These will all help to support education funding over the year ahead.

Immediately following the provisional settlement publication, there were calls to ensure that the additional Education Barnett consequential funding was indeed spent on Education. This draft budget meets and exceeds that expectation.

3.6. Internal Funding

3.6.1. Generally speaking, whilst the use of reserves to support annual budgets should not be summarily discounted, it must be treated with caution. Funding on-going expenditure from such funds merely defers and compounds difficult financial problems to the following year. One-off items of expenditure within any budget proposal lend themselves better for such funding support.

3.6.2. In deliberating this point however, members must bear in mind any **inherent risks** that may be built into the budget strategy. These include:

- Cash-flat grants next year with reductions in 2024/25, which inevitably will either reduce outputs, or increase pressure on core departmental budgets
- Teachers 2022 Pay Award – as this is currently not agreed by Unions
- 2023 NJC and Teachers Pay awards – our 5% assumption may be insufficient if inflation stays higher for longer
- Possible COVID19 resurgence, for which we have very little budgetary contingency, and would need to fall back upon reserves
- Social care delivery – the true demand pressures are currently constrained by what is operationally deliverable by the workforce – any positive progress made to increase capacity in this area will in effect have a negative impact on the budget

Following the significant change to funding from Westminster and the unrecognisable inflationary environment, Welsh Government has marginally increased its indicative settlement for 2024/25 from 2.4% to 3.0%. We have not uplifted our assumptions out of prudence, based upon:

- The indicative reduction in specific grant values could credible outweigh this, dependent upon individual grants and the extent to which they support core service delivery and fund staffing (direct or commissioned)
- The wide range in Local Authorities individual settlements. The 0.6% increase is dwarfed by the 2.8% variation from highest to lowest settlement.

It should also be noted that within the Westminster Government Autumn statement, much of the fiscal tightening is planned in the three years following the General Election in 2025.

3.6.3. The following table summarises the main categories of reserves held by the Authority.

	1 st Apr 2022 £'000	31 st Mch 2023 £'000	31 st Mch 2024 £'000	31 st Mch 2025 £'000
Schools Reserves	15,205	7,815	7,815	7,815
General Reserves	13,468	9,995	9,995	9,995
Earmarked Reserves	139,328	112,831	77,955	61,744

School Reserves

- Schools have delegated responsibility for the management of their own finances. The level of reserves held by an individual school at any point in time will depend on a number of factors including the level of contingency fund that the school governing body considers appropriate, and the particular plans each school has for expenditure. Officers have yet to be informed of any transfers to/from these reserves by individual schools for future years.
- Legislation allows schools to carry forward reserves from one financial period to another. The School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010 requires schools to limit their accumulated reserves at year end to £50,000 for Primary Schools and £100,000 for Secondary and Special Schools or 5% of their budget dependent on what is greater. School Improvement officers are currently working with schools to ensure they comply with the guidance. As at 31st March 2022, 17 primary, 2 secondary and 1 special schools were in deficit.

3.6.4. General Reserves

- In the changeable and challenging environment currently facing Local Government the Authority is committed to maintaining a reasonable level of General reserves or Balances. Whilst there is no prescribed minimum level for Balances, Council has previously deemed 3% of net expenditure as being a prudent level, which has been accepted by our Auditors as being reasonable
- The overall level of balances is taken into consideration each year when the annual budget is set and has on occasions been utilised to augment expenditure/reduce council tax. The 2023/24 budget was set on the basis of no transfers from the General Reserves. Based upon the October Budget monitoring (outlined in paragraph 3.1.2 above) there could be a draw on General Reserves of £3.5m and a fall of £7.4 m in school balances at the end of the current financial year.
- Given the ongoing impact of the pandemic response on our budgets and the uncertainty of continued WG support into next year, it is deemed imprudent at this stage to assume any further

support for future years budgets from the current General Reserves.

3.6.5. Earmarked Reserves

- The Authority holds earmarked reserves which have been set up to finance the delivery of specific projects, or in protecting the authority against future liabilities or issues. The reserves can be summarised as follows:

Reserve	March 2022 £'000	March 2023 £'000	March 2024 £'000	March 2025 £'000	March 2026 £'000
Insurance	13,536	14,286	15,536	15,536	15,536
Capital Funds	47,557	38,896	19,681	15,202	9,702
Development Fund (inc Schools Dev Fund)	1,033	1,131	2,185	2,191	2,191
Corporate Retirement Fund	6,171	6,493	6,108	5,747	5,403
Joint Ventures	1,538	1,504	1,455	1,406	1,387
Other	69,492	49,819	32,989	21,661	15,694
TOTAL	139,328	112,131	77,955	61,744	49,915

- As can be seen from the table above the level of earmarked reserves fluctuates greatly year on year, and whilst the level in each fund is not an exact science it is based on an informed estimate and past experience of the likely call on the authority in future years in line with the intended purpose of each reserve. Great care must therefore be taken when considering utilising such funds for purposes other than those which they were created as this could lead to the authority being faced with substantial unfunded liabilities in the future
- The budget proposals therefore assume nil contribution from reserves in support of the revenue budget in 2023/24 and a further analysis of the reserves held will be undertaken over the coming months with any further proposed utilisation being considered at the budget finalisation stage.
- Taking account of the proposals within this report, the Director of Corporate Services confirms that overall the estimated level of financial reserves (as indicated above) is adequate for the financial year 2023/24, with the General Reserves being at the appropriate level in line with guidelines and good practice, but is also very conscious of the significant risks highlighted in paragraph 3.6.2 of this Budget Strategy.
- The Director is also very conscious of the ongoing commitment to capital projects and of the demand on future services and

therefore feels the reserves will need to be monitored closely going forward.

4. IMPACT ON THE AUTHORITY’S BUDGET STRATEGY

The table below provides an updated position on the current financial outlook taking account of the provisional settlement and also other recent validation changes.

4.1. The Current Financial Outlook (updated for the Provisional Settlement) is set out in the table below:

	Current MTFP		Proposed Financial Model		
	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000	2025/26 £'000
Previous Year’s Budget	416,085	430,746	415,885	450,157	463,183
General Inflation incl energy	5,247	3,203	18,886	2,285	2,614
Pay Inflation ¹	6,314	6,430	11,636	8,236	5,733
Other, incl capital charges and release of corp contingency	1,506	1,165	261	1,454	1,280
Growth	5,500	5,500	12,150	7,500	7,500
Savings proposals	-3,908	-3,982	-9,377	-4,384	-3,996
Further savings to be identified	Nil	Nil	Nil	-2,064	-535
Funding unallocated	Nil	Nil	716	Nil	Nil
Net Expenditure	430,746	443,063	450,157	463,183	475,779
Funded by:					
Revenue Settlement	322,509	330,249	338,017	346,130	354,777
Council Tax Receipts	108,237	112,814	112,140	117,053	121,002
Council Tax Increase:	3.41%	3.85%	7.00%	4.00%	3.00%

1. Includes effect of reductions to pay budgets outlined in paragraph 3.2.8

4.2. The total of budget reductions now required for 2023/24 is £9.4m and for the 3 year period are estimated at £20m.

4.3. The 2023/24 budget contains £716k which is as yet unallocated, which will allow members scope to consider additional information forthcoming in respect of:

- 4.3.1. Responses to the consultation process
- 4.3.2. Clarification of specific grants – including the inflationary impact of reduced outputs
- 4.3.3. Further growth pressures not currently addressed
- 4.3.4. Changes in assumptions on inflation and pay offers
- 4.3.5. Changes arising from the final settlement

5. CONSULTATION

Budget consultation has been planned for the coming month and a summary of the individual approaches are as follows:

- 5.1.** Members seminars. (16-20 January 2023)
- 5.2.** The public consultation was launched on 21 December 2022 and will run until 29 January 2023
- 5.3.** Town & Community Councils meeting on 19 January 2023
- 5.4.** Commercial ratepayers consultation in January 2023
- 5.5.** Consultation with Scrutiny Committees 23-30 January 2023.
- 5.6.** Consultation with the Schools Budget Forum on 11 January 2023
- 5.7.** Trade Union Consultation meeting on 18 January 2023

6. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015

6.1. In considering the budget proposals, members need to take into consideration the requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Act requires that we must carry out sustainable development, improving the economic, social environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

‘... the public body must act in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’

- 6.2.** In doing so, we must demonstrate the following 5 ways of working:
- Looking at the long-term so that we do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs
 - Understanding the root causes of the issues to prevent them recurring
 - Taking an integrated approach so that we look at all well-being goals and objectives of other services and partners

- Collaboration – Working with others in a collaborative way to find shared sustainable solutions
- Involving a diversity of population in decisions that affect them

6.3. Carmarthenshire’s Well Being objectives were updated in April 2021:

Start Well

1. Help to give every child the best start in life and improve their early life experiences
2. Help children live healthy lifestyles

Live Well

3. Support and improve progress, achievement, and outcomes for all learners
4. Tackle poverty by doing all we can to prevent it, help people into work and improve the lives of those living in poverty
5. Create more jobs and growth throughout the county
6. Increase the availability of rented and affordable homes
7. Help people live healthy lives (tackling risky behaviour and obesity)
8. Support community cohesion, resilience and safety

Age Well

9. Support older people to age well and maintain dignity and independence in their later years

In a Healthy and Safe & Prosperous Environment

10. Look after the environment now and for the future
11. Improve the highway and transport infrastructure and connectivity
12. Promote Welsh Language and Culture

Corporate governance

13. Better Governance and use of Resources

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1. Currently the budget proposals assume the full delivery of all of the savings proposals submitted.

- 7.2.** Work needs to be undertaken to further develop the cost reductions for years 2024/25 and 2025/26 to be able to maintain the current Budget Strategy and level of council tax. Departments will be working over the forthcoming year to refine these savings.
- 7.3.** It is recognised the critical importance of minimising the Council Tax increase for our residents during this cost of living crisis, whilst recognising the requirement to set a legally balanced budget in a time of economic turmoil.
- 7.4.** Given the current risks around this Budget Strategy and the ongoing inflationary backdrop, the Council Tax increase next year has been increased to 7%, seeking to mitigate reductions to critical services valued by our residents. In years 2 and 3, the financial picture remains uncertain, and as such we have modelled indicative Council Tax increases of 4% and 3% purely for planning purposes, seeking to strike a balance with budget reductions. This partially alleviates the scale of the reductions proposals which the council needs to consider over future years of the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 7.5.** Over the coming weeks and part of the refining of the Medium Term Financial Plan where the Authority gets further clarification on costs and grant funding and feedback on the consultation, the Authority will aim to limit the Council Tax increase as far as possible.

8. RECOMMENDATION

8.1. That Cabinet:

- 8.1.1. Note the contents of the report and approve the three year Budget Strategy 2023/24 – 2025/26. This strategy will be used to support the budget consultation and form the basis of the final budget proposals.
- 8.1.2. Note the budget reductions/savings proposals in Appendix A, which will be considered as part of the consultation.
- 8.1.3. Note the unallocated sum of £716k in the current strategy, which will be given further consideration at the completion of the consultation as noted in paragraph 4.3.