

Cheltenham Borough Council
Cabinet – 17th December 2013
General Fund Revenue and Capital - Interim Budget Proposals
2014/15 for Consultation

Accountable member	Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor John Rawson
Accountable officer	Director of Corporate Resources (Section 151 Officer), Mark Sheldon
Accountable scrutiny committee	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Ward(s) affected	All
Key Decision	Yes
Executive summary	This report sets out the Cabinet’s interim budget proposals for 2014/15 for consultation. The budget projections have been prepared before the December settlement announcement which is not expected until week commencing 16th December 2013.
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the interim budget proposals for consultation including a proposed council tax for the services provided by Cheltenham Borough Council of £187.12 for the year 2014/15 (a 0% increase based on a Band D property). 2. Approve the growth proposals, including one off initiatives at Appendix 3. 3. Approve the proposed capital programme at Appendix 6, as outlined in Section 7. 4. Delegate authority to the Director of Corporate Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, to determine and approve any additional material that may be needed to support the presentation of the interim budget proposals for consultation. 5. Seek consultation responses by 24th January 2014. 6. Approve that the Council will remain in the Gloucestershire business rates pool for 2014/15 (para 3.7) 7. Approve no change to the Local Council Tax support scheme in 2014/15 (para 3.10).

Financial implications	<p>As contained in the report and appendices.</p> <p>Contact officer: Paul Jones.</p> <p>E-mail: paul.jones@cheltenham.gov.uk</p> <p>Tel no: 01242 775154</p>
Legal implications	<p>This report proposes an interim budget for consultation purposes and there are no specific legal implications at this stage.</p> <p>Contact officer: Peter Lewis</p> <p>E-mail: peter.lewis@tewkesbury.gov.uk</p> <p>Tel no: 01684 272012</p>
HR implications (including learning and organisational development)	<p>In the spirit of building on our positive employee relations environment, the recognised trade unions received a budget briefing at the Joint Consultative Committee on 24th October 2013. Dialogue with the recognised trade unions will continue in order to ensure that the potential impact on employees is kept to a minimum and in doing so help to avoid the need for any compulsory redundancies. The Council's policies on managing change and consultation will be followed.</p> <p>Going forward, it is important that capacity is carefully monitored and managed in respect of any reductions in staffing and reduced income streams.</p> <p>Contact officer: Julie McCarthy</p> <p>E-mail: julie.mccarthy@cheltenham.gov.uk</p> <p>Tel no: 01242 264355</p>
Key risks	<p>As outlined in Appendix 1</p>
Corporate and community plan Implications	<p>The aim of the interim budget proposals is to direct resources towards the key priorities identified in the Council's Corporate Business Plan whilst recognising the reduction in Government funding.</p>
Environmental and climate change implications	<p>The draft budget contains a number of proposals for improving the local environment, as set out in this report.</p>

1. Background

- 1.1 In accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Rules, which is part of the Council's constitution, the Cabinet is required to prepare interim budget proposals for the financial year ahead and consult on its proposals for no less than four weeks prior to finalising recommendations for the Council to consider in February 2014. This report sets out the interim proposals for 2014/15.
- 1.2 The Local Government Finance Settlement for 2013/14 marked the introduction of the new local government resource regime with a significant change in the way local authorities are financed. Under the new regime, around 40% of the Council's Government funding comes directly from Business Rates and, as a consequence, has the potential to vary either upwards or downwards during the year. This is a key strand of the Government policy to localise financing of local authorities and brings the potential for increased risks or increased rewards.
- 1.3 One of the key unknowns with the revisions to the local government finance regime related to how the New Homes Bonus would be top sliced from the formula grant. It is now clear from the new regime that the new Homes Bonus forms an integral part of the financing of local government and is indeed used in the Government's preferred terminology of 'Spending Power' that it utilises when the settlement is announced. The interim budget proposals sets out clearly the anticipated use of New Homes Bonus to support the Council's spending requirement.

2. 2013/14 Budget Monitoring to November 2013

- 2.1 The accounting implications for Business Rates Retention and the grants due for schemes such as small business rates relief are expected to be announced in December 2013. In order to give a more accurate budget monitoring position for the third quarter of 2013/14, a separate budget monitoring position will be presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 14th January 2014.

3. Finance Settlement and significant changes to Local Government Finance

- 3.1 Since 2009/10 the Council's core funding from the Government has been cut by some £3.7 million, from £8.8 million to £5.1 million.
- 3.2 At the end of last year the Government announced that its funding would be cut in 2014/15 by 12.7%, making a further loss of £788k. More recently, it has become clear that the cut will be even bigger, and is likely to amount to 13.6% or £844k. Part of the reason for the larger cut is the Government's intention of creating a safety net to compensate local authorities for the loss of business rates income.
- 3.3 Overall we are likely to see a cut in RSG between 2014/15 and 2015/16 of 28%. The cut is not evenly distributed across blocks or elements, with the largest reductions in RSG of 34% being for lower tier (district council) functions. These reductions were much worse than expected.
- 3.4 The Autumn Statement delivered by the Chancellor on 5th December 2013 stated that the planned transfer of New Homes Bonus monies to the Local Growth Fund will no longer take place (other than in London) in 2015/16. We will need to await the outcome of the final settlement to understand the full implications of this announcement.

Business Rate Retention and Pooling

- 3.5 The Business Rates Retention Scheme was introduced on 1st April 2013. Under the Scheme, the Council retains some of the business rates raised locally. The business rates yield is divided - 50% locally and 50% to the Government. The Government's share is paid into a central pool and redirected to local government through other grants. Of the 50% local share, the District Council's share has been set at 80%, with the County Council's share being 20%. A tariff is

applied to reduce the local share to a baseline funding level set by the Government (£18.369m in 2013/14). Where the value of retained business rates exceeds the baseline funding level, 50% of the surplus is paid over to the Government as a levy; the remaining 50% can be retained by the Council.

- 3.6** In order to maximise the value of business rates retained within Gloucestershire, the Council entered into the Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool. Being a part of the Pool has the benefit of reducing the levy from 50% to 19%. Any surpluses generated by the Pool will be allocated in accordance with the governance arrangements agreed by the Gloucestershire Councils.
- 3.7** The Chief Finance Officers have reviewed the viability of the Pool for 2014/15 and are satisfied that it remains viable in its current form. Sustainable surpluses from the Pool will contribute towards the savings targets identified in future years.

Localised Council Tax Support (LCTS)

- 3.8** The Council was required to establish a local scheme for Local Support for Council Tax to come into effect from 1st April 2013, replacing the national Council Tax Benefit Scheme. For 2013/14, the Council adopted the existing national scheme as its local scheme. The cost of the local scheme was, therefore, expected to be broadly in line with the costs of the previous Council Tax Benefit Scheme. The Government cut funding for Local Support for the Council Tax Support Scheme by 10% with effect from 2013/14. The Council absorbed this cut in funding for 2013/14, with a view to reviewing the scheme for 2014/15.
- 3.9** 2013/14 was the first year the Government did not fully fund the scheme. Locally, the councils in Gloucestershire agreed not to make any changes to the scheme but, in line with other councils in the county, agreed changes to the council tax empty property exemptions and second homes discounts to help offset the approximate 10% shortfall in funding. Indications are that the additional revenue generated has offset the fall in funding for LCTS.
- 3.10** Following consideration by the Section 151 officers across the county, it was recommended that no changes would be made to the scheme for 2014/15 in order to avoid the potential for a significant number of claimants receiving small bills which may be difficult to recover. On 17th September 2013 Cabinet resolved that the Local Council Tax Support scheme (LCTS) remain unchanged for 2014/15, other than the annual uprating of premiums, allowances and non-dependant deductions and that a short public consultation should take place on the Council's website. The Council consulted on this basis but there was, not surprisingly, no response to this consultation. Consequently it is proposed to keep the LCTS scheme unchanged for 2014/15.

Parish Council Support Grant

- 3.11** The local Council Tax Support scheme operates in a similar way to discounts, such as for empty properties or single person occupiers. Rather than being accounted for as a benefit cash payment, the Council Tax base is reduced. Whilst this has no impact for the individual Council Tax Payer, a lower Council Tax base reduces the yield in Council Tax to this Council, Gloucestershire County Council, Gloucestershire Police Authority and Town and Parish Councils. To offset this impact, the Government pays a cash grant to all local authorities. The element of grant attributable to Town and Parish Councils is paid to the billing authority (i.e. this Council). It is for each billing authority to agree with its Town and Parish Councils any mechanism for paying over a share of the overall grant paid to the billing authority.
- 3.12** For 2013/14, the value of grant awarded to the 5 Parish Councils for LCTS was £10,269. Funding for Local Council Tax Support has been "rolled" in to the Revenue Support Grant and the Retained Business Rates Baseline Funding Position. As Government funding reduces, the Council will be under pressure to reduce the funding available for Local Council Tax Support available to Town and Parish Councils. However, in order to give Parish Councils a degree of financial stability and give them the assurance they need to set their own precepts, it is not

proposed to pass on any reductions in 2014/15.

Finance settlement

- 3.13** Taking all of the above points in to account, estimating the level of central government support and the Council's share of business rate income has been a challenging task. Given the degree of uncertainty, the draft budget for 2014/15 has been based upon the assumption that central government funding will fall by 13.6%.
- 3.14** This assumption is based on the illustrative 2014/15 start-up funding allocations and will clearly need to be reviewed following the Local Government Finance Settlement.
- 3.15** The analysis of central government funding which has been used to put the 2014/15 budget proposals together is shown in the following table:

	2013/14 £m	2014/15 £m
Revenue Support Grant	3.731	2.806
Cheltenham's share of Redistributed Business Rates	2.482	2.563
Formula Grant	6.213	5.369
Actual cash (decrease) over previous year		(0.844)
% cash cut		(13.6%)

- 3.16** The more detailed analysis of the net budget requirement for 2014/15 and the funding available is attached at Appendix 2.

4. The Cabinet's general approach to the 2014/15 budget

- 4.1** The Cabinet's budget strategy for 2014/15, approved at a meeting on 15th October 2013, included an estimate of £0.989m for the 2014/15 budget gap i.e. the financial gap between what the Council needs to spend to maintain services (including pay and price inflation) and the funding available assuming a 13.6% cut in government support.
- 4.2** The final assessment of the budget gap for 2014/15, based on the detailed budget preparation undertaken over recent months and the assumed financial settlement is £1.438m which takes into account the following variations:
- Freeze car parking charges £93.6k
 - Increased superannuation costs in respect of the 2013 triennial revaluation £206k
 - Additional cost for the collection of communal waste £93k
 - Council Tax freeze in 2014/15
- 4.3** For the past three years the Council has frozen its council tax precept at £187.12 a year for a Band D taxpayer. In proposing this course of action, the Cabinet has borne in mind the difficult economic and financial climate that many of our residents face. However, during the period of the freeze our own financial position as a Council has deteriorated sharply, and the Cabinet has been

acutely aware of the difficulty of continuing the freeze in 2014/15.

- 4.4** The Budget Strategy and Process report, approved by Cabinet in October 2013, highlighted the specific difficulties of continuing the freeze in 2014/15. Currently the Government is offering councils roughly half the cost of freezing council tax in 2014/15, when compared with increasing council tax by 2%. However, this limited incentive only lasts for two years, after which it drops out of the Council's budget, creating an additional funding gap of about £150,000 in every subsequent year.
- 4.5** Two developments have made it easier for Cabinet to recommend a council tax freeze for the fourth year running. The first is that we have succeeded in identifying sufficient savings and additional income to make it affordable in the first two years. The second is that the Government has withdrawn its proposal to top-slice our New Homes Bonus income from 2015 to fund economic development initiatives, adding to our forecast income and making a further year's freeze sustainable.
- 4.6** The continuation of the council tax freeze in 2014/15 will avoid adding to the financial burden of residents, many of whom are still facing difficult financial circumstances. It is particularly gratifying that, under this interim budget, this can be achieved without cutting frontline services and without introducing above inflation increases in fees and charges.
- 4.7** The Government introduced legislation through the Localism Act to require councils proposing what it regards as an excessive rise in Council Tax (over 2% in 2014/15) to hold a local referendum allowing the public to veto the rise. Clearly as the Cabinet is minded to propose a 0% increase in council tax for 2014/15, this requirement does not arise.
- 4.8** In preparing the interim budget proposals, the Cabinet and officers have:
- Prepared a standstill budget projection under a general philosophy of no growth in levels of service with the exception that it is a statutory requirement or there is a compelling business case for an 'invest to save' scheme. The full list of proposals for growth, including one off initiatives, is included in Appendix 3.
 - Provided for inflation for contractual, statutory, and health and safety purposes at an appropriate inflation rate where proven.
 - Budgeted for pay inflation at 1% for 2014/15.
 - Increased income budgets assuming an average increase in fees and charges of 2.5%, with some exceptions. Property rents have not been inflated but are now set in line with rent projections based on property leases. The Cabinet proposes to freeze car park charges, except for councillors' parking passes which will rise by inflation, and building control charges. The costs have been shown as growth within the interim budget proposals.
 - Green waste charges have been frozen since their introduction in 2011. It is proposed to increase these charges by £1 to £37 per annum which will ensure the scheme remains cost neutral to the council taxpayer. Those residents taking advantage of the discount for prompt renewal will pay just £35.
 - Assessed the impact of prevailing interest rates on the investment portfolio, the implications of which have been considered by the Treasury Management Panel.
- 4.9** The key aims in developing the approach to the budget were to:
- Do everything possible to protect frontline services

- Identify savings that can be achieved through reorganisation of service delivery or raising additional income rather than through service cuts
- 4.10** Once again, there has been a great deal of activity during the course of the year to develop this longer term strategy for closing the funding gap. The Cabinet has worked with officers to develop the 'Bridging the Gap (BtG)' programme using the BtG group supported by the Senior Leadership Team. The Cabinet's interim budget proposals for closing the budget gap in 2014/15, the result of this work, are detailed in Appendix 4, split into:
- Decisions already made by Council totalling £11k.
 - Proposals yet to be agreed by Council which are not built into the base budget, totalling £1,426,900. They comprise £776,900 of efficiency savings and additional income; an additional contribution from New Homes Bonus (NHB) of £450k to support the base budget; and a reduction of £200k in revenue contributions to fund capital expenditure given the Council's anticipated healthy balance in capital receipts from the sale of assets.
- 4.11** The Bridging the Gap programme and the commissioning process have also helped the Council to move towards a robust five-year strategy for closing the funding gap. The work done on leisure and culture services, ICT services, management restructuring and accommodation strategy, as well as a number of smaller pieces of work, give the Council the opportunity to think ahead over a period of several years, rather than planning its budgets a year at a time.
- 4.12** This budget proposes to make fuller use of the New Homes Bonus to support the revenue budget. This reflects the Government's view that the New Homes Bonus is part of local authorities' income stream, and not simply a "nice to have" extra. However we are well aware that the New Homes Bonus may in future years be a fluctuating source of income. Accordingly we have limited the amount of New Homes Bonus income being directly taken into the revenue budget to a total of £700k, which is 66% of the total expected income in 2014/15 of £1.060m. It is proposed that the remainder should be earmarked for one off or time-limited spending or kept in reserve.
- 4.13** The proposed one off uses of New Homes Bonus income include: £50k to support the well-liked and very effective Community Pride scheme; £200k to support the Planned Maintenance Reserve; and £50k to support the Mitigation fund for Cheltenham Transport Plan.
- 4.14** The Cabinet and SLT have been anticipating the need to make significant savings and have been actively managing vacancies and staffing levels in order to minimise the impact of service reviews, systems thinking and savings initiatives.

5. Treasury Management

- 5.1** Appendix 2 summarises the budget estimates for interest and investment income activity. Security of capital remains the Council's main investment objective. However, the budget has been prepared taking into account the following changes, agreed by the Treasury Management Panel at its meeting on 27th November 2013.
- 5.2** The Bank of England has said that interest rates will remain low through 2014/15, indicating that the Bank Rate will remain at its historic low until 2016, although current positive data on unemployment and inflation could mean an earlier increase. With this in mind, for 2014/15 interest payable will reduce by £5,000 and interest receivable will increase slightly by £100. As a result, the net impact on 2014/15 budget is an increase in net treasury income of £5,100.

6. Reserves

- 6.1** Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Financial Officer to comment upon “the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of the reserves for which the budget provides”. This review forms part of the formal budget setting report presented to Council in February 2014, however, some initial comments are given below.
- 6.2** A number of the savings proposed arise from organisational changes and require one-off sums to cover the costs of redundancy and early retirement. In order to keep general balances within the recommended range of £1.5m - £2.0m it is proposed to fund these costs from the pension reserve in 2014/15.
- 6.3** An assessment of the Civic Pride Reserve projects that this reserve will be wholly consumed by 31st March 2015. Given the Council’s aspirations in delivering the Cheltenham transport plan and its own accommodation strategy, it is proposed to realign the balances held in the IBS License Reserve and Vehicle Leasing Equalisation Reserve, totalling £265k. This will give continuity to the Cheltenham Development Task Force up to the financial year ending 31st March 2017.
- 6.4** The Council currently holds 2 reserves which are used to fund capital expenditure; namely a ‘housing’ capital reserve and a ‘general’ capital reserve. Given the significant capital resources now held within the Housing Revenue Account, it is proposed that these reserves be merged into one ‘general fund’ capital reserve in order to give more transparency over how the Council funds its general fund capital programme.
- 6.5** The Council is currently in the process of creating an independent Leisure and Cultural Trust which will deliver some of the borough’s ‘flagship’ services from October 2014. In order to give the new Trust some assurances in its infancy, the Cabinet is minded to create an earmarked reserve to cover any potential deficits in the early years of trading. The Cabinet will await the outcome of the budget monitoring report in early January 2014 before determining where this allocation can be funded from.
- 6.6** The Council anticipates the imminent disposal of North Place and Portland Street car parks. Whilst this is a welcome boost to the economy, it is acknowledged that the council will have a temporary shortfall in its net car parking revenue until the new facility is completed. In order to protect the Council from this volatility, the Cabinet is minded to create an earmark equalisation reserve to cushion the impact of fluctuating activity levels. Here again, the Cabinet will await the outcome of the budget monitoring report in early January 2014 before determining where this allocation can be funded from.
- 6.7** A projection of the level of reserves to be held at 31st March 2014 and 31st March 2015 respectively is detailed in Appendix 5.

7. Capital Programme

- 7.1** The proposed capital programme for the period 2013/14 to 2017/18 is at Appendix 6.
- 7.2** The programme includes provisional sums for infrastructure investment to be funded from the Civic Pride reserve and New Build through Cheltenham Borough Homes. It also includes the next phase of the ICT Infrastructure Upgrade strategy, agreed by Cabinet on 11th December 2012.
- 7.3** The Council anticipates the sale of North Place and Portland Street car parks during 2013/14, releasing substantial additional capital. A list of potential infrastructure investment projects across the town is being developed for approval by the Council, aimed at achieving our aspirations for a vibrant, beautiful and prosperous town. This is likely to include funding for the Town Hall capital investment scheme, reported to the Cabinet in July 2013.

8. Property Maintenance Programmes

- 8.1** The interim budget proposals do not include the 2014/15 property maintenance programme as the detail is still being finalised. However the budget includes a revenue contribution of £700k to planned maintenance together with a £200k contribution from New Homes Bonus, which will be enough to fund a very substantial programme. The planned maintenance programme was reviewed by the Asset Management Working Group on the 5th December 2013 and the recommendations will be built into the final budget proposals in February 2014.

9. Reasons for recommendations

- 9.1** As outlined in the report.

10. Alternative options considered

- 10.1** The Cabinet have considered many alternatives in arriving at the interim budget proposals. Opposition groups will be able to suggest alternative budget proposals for consideration by Council in February 2014.

11. Consultation and feedback

- 11.1** The formal budget consultation on the detailed interim budget proposals will be over the period **18th December 2013 to 24th January 2014**. The Cabinet will seek to ensure that the opportunity to have input into the budget consultation process is publicised to the widest possible audience. During the consultation period, interested parties including businesses, tenants, residents, staff and trade unions will be encouraged to comment on the initial budget proposals. They will be asked to identify, as far as possible, how alternative proposals complement the Council's Business Plan and Community Plan and how they can be financed. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be invited to review the interim budget proposals in the meetings scheduled for January 2014 and any comments will be fed back to the Cabinet.
- 11.2** Whilst the Cabinet will be as flexible as possible, it is unlikely that any comments received after the consultation period can be properly assessed to consider their full implications and to be built into the budget. Accordingly, if alternative budget proposals are to come forward, this should happen as early as possible.
- 11.3** All comments relating to the initial budget proposals should be returned to the GO Shared Services Head of Finance by the end of the consultation period for consideration by the Cabinet in preparing their final budget proposals. Consultation questionnaires will be available in key locations and for completion on line via the council's website. Comments can be e-mailed to **money matters@cheltenham.gov.uk**.

12. Performance management – monitoring and review

- 12.1** The scale of budget savings will require significant work to deliver them within the agreed timescales and there is a danger that this could divert management time from delivery of services to delivery of savings. There are regular progress meetings to monitor the delivery of savings and this will need to be matched with performance against the corporate strategy action plan to ensure that resources are used to best effect and prioritised.
- 12.2** The delivery of the savings workstreams included in the interim budget proposals, if approved by full Council will be monitored by the BtG group.

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Appendices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Risk Assessment 2. Summary net budget requirement 3. Growth 4. Savings / additional income 5. Projection of reserves 6. Capital programme
Background information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MTFS 2012/13 – 2017/18

The risk				Original risk score (impact x likelihood)			Managing risk				
Risk ref.	Risk description	Risk Owner	Date raised	I	L	Score	Control	Action	Deadline	Responsible Officer	Transferred to risk register
1.01	If the council is unable to come up with long term solutions which bridge the gap in the medium term financial strategy then it will find it increasingly difficult to prepare budgets year on year without making unplanned cuts in service provision.	Mark Sheldon	15 December 2010	4	4	16	R	The council continues to deliver savings and additional income from its Bridging the Gap (BtG) programme which now includes targets for commissioning projects based on approved business cases. The Cabinet have developed a budget strategy which identifies longer term savings targets for closing the MTFS funding gap.	ongoing	Director of Corporate Resources	26 January 2011
1.02	If the robustness of the income proposals are not sound then there is a risk that the income identified within the budget will not materialise during the course of the year.	Mark Sheldon	15 December 2010	3	3	9	R	Robust forecasting is applied in preparing budget targets taking into account previous income targets, collection rates and prevailing economic conditions. Professional judgement is used in the setting / delivery of income targets which are monitored throughout the year and reported through the budget monitoring reports to cabinet.	ongoing	Director of Corporate Resources	
1.03	If when developing a longer term strategy to meet the MTFS, the council does not make the public aware of its financial position and clearly articulates why it is	Jane Griffiths	15 December 2010	3	3	9	R	As part of the delivery of the BtG / commissioning programmes there needs to be a clear communication strategy. In adopting a	ongoing	Communications team to support the BTG programme	

	making changes to service delivery then there may be confusion as to what services are being provided and customer satisfaction may decrease.							commissioning culture the council is basing decisions on customer outcomes which should address satisfaction levels.			
1.04	If there is a reliance on shared services delivering savings and these savings do not materialise or shared service projects do not proceed as anticipated then other savings will need to be found to meet the MTFS projections.	Pat Pratley	15 December 2010	3	3	9	R	All shared services are operated under prince 2 principles, with clear business case and risk logs are maintained for the shared service. Savings / Benefit realisation are reviewed via the BTG and corporate plan monitoring	Ongoing	Deputy Chief Executive	
1.05	If the council does not carefully manage its commissioning of services then it may not have the flexibility to make additional savings required by the MTFS in future years and a greater burden of savings may fall on the retained organisation	Mark Sheldon	15 December 2010	3	3	9	R	Contracts, SLAs and other shared service agreements will need to be drafted and negotiated to ensure that there is sufficient flexibility with regards to budget requirements	Ongoing	Director Commissioning	
1.06	If the assumptions around government support, business rates income, impact of changes to council tax discounts prove to be incorrect, then there is likely to be increased volatility around future funding streams.	Mark Sheldon	13 December 2012	4	3	12	R	Work with GOSS and county wide CFO's to monitor changes to local government financing regime and adjust future budgets for any significant variances.	Ongoing	Director of Corporate Resources	