

TO: THE EXECUTIVE
DATE: 18 DECEMBER 2017

GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2018/19
(Chief Executive/Borough Treasurer)

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Under the Council's constitution, the Executive is required to consult on its detailed budget proposals with the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Commission and any other interested parties or individuals for a period of at least six weeks. This report summarises the current position on the Council's budget preparations for 2018/19 as a basis for that consultation.
- 1.2 At the time the agenda was published the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement had not been announced and is not expected until late December 2017. It is possible that this could change some of the assumptions in the report, however, as the Council accepted in Autumn 2016 the offer of a four year financial settlement, it is anticipated that funding will be in line with the indicative figures received on 20 February 2017 (as part of the Final Local Government Finance Settlement 2017/18).
- 1.3 All comments received on these budget proposals will be submitted to the Executive on 13 February 2018. This will allow the Executive to determine its final budget package and recommend the appropriate Council Tax level to Council, which will formally approve the 2018/19 budget and Council Tax on 28 February 2018.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive:

- 2.1 **Agree the draft budget proposals for 2018/19 as the basis for consultation with the Overview & Scrutiny Commission and other interested parties or individuals.**
- 2.2 **Agree the Treasury Management Strategy and associated documents at Annexe E and request that the Governance and Audit Committee review each of the key elements.**
- 2.3 **Agree that the 2018/19 Schools Budget be set at the eventual level of grant income plus any accumulated balances, with the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning authorised to make amendments and agree budgets for schools and services centrally managed by the Council.**
- 2.4 **Agree that the authority to set town centre car park charges is delegated to the Regeneration Committee.**
- 2.5 **Support the bid submitted by Bracknell Forest Council on behalf of the Berkshire Unitaries to DCLG to form a pilot business rates pool across the County, that would see a greater proportion of business rates collected being retained locally to support priority infrastructure projects.**

- 2.6 Approve the virements relating to the 2017/18 budget as set out in Annexes F and G and recommend those that are over £0.100m for approval by Council.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The recommendations are designed to allow the Executive to consult on its draft budget proposals for 2018/19 as required by the Local Government Act 2003.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The range of options being considered is included in the report and its Annexes.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

5 COMMITMENT BUDGET 2018/19 – 2020/21

- 5.1 Initial preparations for the 2018/19 budget have focussed on the Council's Commitment Budget for 2018/19 – 2020/21. This brings together the Council's existing expenditure plans, taking account of approved commitments and the ongoing effects of service developments and efficiencies that were agreed when the 2017/18 budget was set.
- 5.2 A number of changes are proposed to the Commitment Budget since it was last considered by the Executive in February and are reflected in the summary in Table 1. The most significant changes in 2018/19 are set out below:
- The impact of the transformation programme is now reflected (-£6.417m) including forecast savings from Adults (-£1.800m) and Children's Services (-£1.165m), the Commercial Property Investment Strategy (-£1.000m) and the Leisure Services Review (-£0.600m), which are at different stages of delivery.
 - The one-off additional Adult Social Care grant received in 2017/18 has been removed (£0.363m).
 - Additional funding for Adult Social Care, announced as part of the Government's March 2017 Budget, has now been incorporated (-£1.016m). This is supplementary funding to the improved Better Care Fund payable between 2017/18 and 2019/20.

The overall impact of these changes is to decrease the Council's Commitment Budget by £7.230m compared to the position reported in February.

- 5.3 Taking account of these changes, Table 1 summarises the position and shows that base expenditure (excluding schools) is planned to decrease by £5.188m to £83.153m next year, before consideration is given to allowances for inflation and the budget proposals identified by individual Departments in 2018/19. The commitment budget is shown in more detail in Annexe A.

Table 1: Summary Commitment Budget 2018/19-2020/21

	Planned Expenditure		
	2018/19 £000	2019/20 £000	2020/21 £000
Base Budget	88,341	83,153	80,305
<i>Movements in Year:</i>			
Adult Social Care, Health and Housing	-2,483	-1,185	509
Children, Young People and Learning (excluding schools)	-827	-580	10
Environment, Culture & Communities	-2,471	-622	-401
Resources	-591	-6	0
Non Departmental / Council Wide	1,184	-455	417
<i>Total Movements</i>	-5,188	-2,848	535
Adjusted Base	83,153	80,305	80,840

6 PROVISIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE SETTLEMENT 2018/19

- 6.1 The Council's budget is set within the context of a 4-year Local Government Funding Settlement (LGFS) published following the General Election in May 2015. As such, 2018/19 will be the third year of this agreement, and whilst the Council has relied on the published indicative figures there remains a risk that other funding streams provided by Central Government are potentially liable to change. These are noted below.
- 6.2 Alongside this 4-year settlement the Government announced plans to reform other key features of the local government finance system, including the move to 100% retention of Business Rates by 2020 (although this is now likely to be delayed), a major reduction in the funding available through the New Homes Bonus and the introduction of the Social Care Precept.
- 6.3 The estimates included in these budget projections assume that the indicative amounts published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) will be adhered to. The Government will publish the first Autumn Budget on 22 November 2017, setting out the government's plans for the economy based on the latest forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility. Whilst this is unlikely to provide any further clarity at an individual council level it may update progress on reforms and a general direction for future public spending limits.
- 6.4 Funding from central government is currently received through Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and Specific Grants. For planning purposes an estimate of the reduction in central government support has been incorporated within these Budget Projections reflecting a further cut of £2.6m in RSG for 2018/19. These figures will be refined when the provisional LGFS is received, which as usual is expected to be published in December.

- 6.5 The Council also receives substantial external funding through a number of specific grants for which the following assumptions have been included within the latest budget projections.

a) New Homes Bonus

In 2015/16 the Government consulted on a number of possible reforms to the New Homes Bonus to sharpen the incentive for housebuilding and provide £800m for Adult Social Care. The outcome of the consultation was announced alongside the Provisional LGFS for 2017/18. The Government decided to:

- reduce the number of years for which legacy payments are made from 6 years to 5 years in 2017/18 and then to 4 years from 2018/19 and
- set a national baseline for housing growth to sharpen the incentive for councils to deliver more new homes. The Government chose to set the initial baseline in 2017/18 at 0.4% below which the Bonus will not be paid. The Government also retained the option of making adjustments to the baseline in 2018/19 and future years in the event of significant and unexpected housing growth.

This has resulted in a significant net reduction in the funding received by Bracknell Forest from 2017/18 – approximately £3.9m was received in 2016/17 with an expected £1.9m in 2018/19. However the Government intend to further reform the incentive and have consulted on linking a reduction in the Bonus to the quality of decision making by planning authorities, as measured by the number of homes granted planning permission only on appeal. This approach would link Bonus allocations to the ratio of successful appeals to residential planning decisions over an annual period.

The reforms have yet to be exemplified so it is difficult to ascertain how the Council will be impacted until the provisional allocations and new regime is published alongside the Provisional Settlement in December. However, based on the information available it is not expected that these latest reforms will have a material impact on our already reduced allocation.

b) Education Services Grant

Education Services Grant, used to fund education support services which local authorities provide centrally to maintained schools but for the most part academies secured independently, has now been completely withdrawn. The £0.401m one-off grant received in 2016/17 to ease the transition has been removed in the Commitment Budget. However, the Council will be able to retain some of the schools block funding to cover the statutory duties carried out for maintained schools which were previously funded through ESG (approximately-£0.2m). In addition “retained” duties, which local authorities must deliver for both maintained and academy schools, will also be funded via the Schools Block element of the DSG (-£0.26m).

c) Other Specific Grants

Some of the largest specific grants received by the Council are the ring-fenced Public Health, NHS funding streams and Better Care Fund. Estimated improved better care funding included in the Final Settlement last year has been included in the budget proposals; - £0.062m is reflected in Table 5 with the additional funding for Adult Social Care announced as part of the national Spring 2017 Budget (-£1.016m) included in the Commitment Budget. The Government has confirmed that the ring-

fence on Public Health will be retained until 2019. It is likely that any further changes to the methodology and allocations to these specific grants will be implemented as part of the changes to the overall Local Government Funding System and the introduction of 100% Business Rates retention whenever this is announced.

- 6.6 A third important stream of income for the Council is Business Rates, a proportion of which is retained locally following the introduction of the Business Rates Retention reforms in April 2013. The level of Business Rates changes each year due to inflationary increases (set by central government), the impact of appeals and local growth or decline as local businesses and economic conditions expand or contract. The Government sets a baseline level of funding against which any growth or reduction is shared between local and central government.
- 6.7 The Government has announced that by 2020 (a date likely to slip), local government will be able to retain 100% of Business Rates, RSG will be phased out and local government will be expected to take on new responsibilities. The government has indicated a plan to abolish the Uniform Business Rate and give councils the power to cut Business Rates to boost economic activity in their areas, although the draft Local Government Finance Bill that contained those proposals is not currently part of legislative plans. Prior to this year's general election, the DCLG embarked on consultation regarding changes to the local government finance system to pave the way for the implementation of the 100% Business Rates retention. A number of groups were also set up to examine various aspects of the new scheme. Following the election, these discussions groups were put on hold. Although some meetings have now recommenced, this delay is expected to have an impact on the 2020 implementation date.
- 6.8 Currently the Council collects significantly more Business Rates than it is allowed to keep and only receives approximately a quarter of any Business Rates growth. It is known that any new system will include an assessment of need and that there will be a re-distribution of resources between authorities to reflect this. The Government has also stated that it will transfer more responsibilities to local authorities, to ensure that the new system is fiscally neutral across the public sector. All of these issues suggest that, until the finer details of the scheme are announced, any potential longer-term benefits of a new finance system need to be viewed with caution.
- 6.9 DCLG has published an invitation to local authorities to pilot 100% business rates retention in 2018/19. Leaders of all the Berkshire Unitary Authorities have supported a bid to establish a pilot business rates pool across the County, with Bracknell Forest Council designated as the lead authority. It is estimated that this could enable around £35m of additional funding to be secured for the area. The proposal is that around 70% of this would be provided to the LEP to undertake improvements in transport infrastructure that would help secure further economic and housing growth to benefit the County. The remainder would be allocated across the individual authorities in proportion to their actual growth in business rates income. No authority will be worse off financially than they would have been under the current funding arrangements. The Government timetable meant that authorities were unable to secure formal support prior to the bid being submitted and therefore the Executive is now requested to endorse it. It is expected that the announcement regarding the successful bids will be made alongside the Local Government Finance Settlement.
- 6.10 As well as the uncertainty surrounding the introduction of the 100% rates retention there has been considerable Business Rates volatility following the transfer of a large multi-national company on to the Council's valuation list in 2013/14. Initially this significantly increased the level of Business Rates collected locally but following a successful appeal the rateable value was reduced by 28% in 2016/17. A further

appeal was lodged following the 2017 valuation which is still outstanding and the company has also applied to re-join the Central Rating List. As the timing and outcome of these events are uncertain, assumptions have had to be made in calculating future income levels. An unavoidable consequence of this has been significant volatility in the Collection Fund balance each year. A small surplus is currently forecast on the Business Rates element of the Collection Fund for 2017/18; however this is subject to change depending on the final impact of the town centre regeneration. This is in contrast to the significant one-off surplus for 2016/17 which was transferred into the Business Rates Equalisation Reserve in 2017/18 and has been reversed out of the budget proposals in Table 5 (£9.113m). A final projection will need to be made by the 31 January which will be incorporated into the February budget report.

- 6.11 At this stage, Business Rates income is forecast to grow in line with the Government's baseline assumptions plus additional growth resulting from the opening of the regenerated Town Centre. The 2017/18 budget assumed an additional -£0.750m of Business Rates from the Town Centre and the Commitment Budget currently assumes a further -£0.750m of income in 2018/19. Actual income will depend on the rateable values agreed for the let units, which have yet to be received from the Valuation Office, and how quickly the remaining units are let. It is hoped that this information will be available for the February report.
- 6.12 There is a risk that the Council could lose a significant proportion of the additional Business Rates income it receives over and above baseline funding when resources are redistributed under the 100% retention scheme. This is a consequence of Bracknell Forest having for many years been assessed as having significantly lower funding needs than most local authorities and there being no reason to believe this will change under a new funding system. Therefore, to reduce reliance on this additional income to balance the budget, a reduced sum will be taken to support the base budget and £0.250m will be transferred into the Business Rates Equalisation Reserve as part of the budget proposals.

7 COUNCIL TAX

- 7.1 Council Tax at present levels will generate total income of -£53.247m in 2018/19. An increase in the Council Tax Base arising from the occupation of new properties during 2018/19, is expected to contribute an additional -£0.871m. The Local Council Tax Benefit Support Scheme is treated as a discount i.e. a reduction in the calculation of the Council Tax Base. The latest information on the take-up of Council Tax support in the current year indicates that it will be less than that budgeted for in 2017/18; however the impact on Council Tax income in 2018/19 has still to be assessed. All these figures will be updated when the Council Tax Base is finalised during December.
- 7.2 The surplus/deficit on the Council Tax element of the Collection Fund in 2017/18 will need to be assessed by the 15 January 2018. This figure will impact on the 2018/19 budget and will be incorporated into the February budget report.
- 7.3 The Government limits Council Tax increases by requiring councils to hold a local referendum for any increases in excess of a threshold percentage which is normally included in the Local Government Financial Settlement. In 2017/18 a referendum was required for Council Tax increases of 2% or more. Early indications are that the same level will be set in 2018/19 but this will not be confirmed until the Provisional LGFS is received. As a council with Social Care responsibilities, it should also be possible for Council Tax to be raised by a further 3% in 2018/19 to support Social Care pressures

and the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. Each 1% increase in Council Tax would generate approximately -£0.54m of additional income.

- 7.3 The Executive at its meeting in February will recommend to Council the level of Council Tax in light of the Final Settlement, the results of the consultation and the final budget proposals.

8 BUDGET PROPOSALS 2018/19

Service Pressures and Developments

- 8.1 In the face of significant reductions in public expenditure in general and in grants to Local Government in particular the scope to invest in new service provision is severely restricted. Nevertheless, it is important to retain a clear focus to ensure that the Council continues to deliver its six strategic themes. In preparing the 2018/19 draft budget proposals each department has evaluated the potential pressures on its services and these are set out in Annexe B. Table 2 summarises the pressures by department.

Table 2: Service Pressures/Development

Department	£'000
Adult Social Care, Health and Housing	2,633
Children, Young People and Learning (excluding schools)	1,357
Environment, Culture & Communities	521
Resources	602
Non Departmental / Council Wide	220
Total Pressures/Developments	5,333

- 8.2 Many of the pressures are simply unavoidable as they relate to current levels of demand or legislation changes. They do, however, also support the six strategic themes included in the new Council Plan in the following way:
- people have the life skills and education opportunities they need to thrive (£0.065m);
 - people live active and healthy lifestyles (£2.633m);
 - a clean, green, growing and sustainable place (0.221m);
 - strong, safe, supportive and self-reliant communities (£1.302m)
 - provide value for money (£0.577m).
- 8.3 Service pressures will be kept under review throughout the budget consultation period. There is always the risk in Social Care services in particular that the numbers of people requiring care packages, the content of existing care packages and contract inflation will vary considerably from the assumptions included in these draft budget proposals. Any revisions to service pressures will be reported to the Executive in February.
- 8.4 In addition to these revenue proposals the Council continues to invest in its priorities through targeted capital expenditure. Details are contained in the capital programme report, but the cost of funding all potential commitments arising from these various proposals is included in these draft budget proposals.

Service Economies

- 8.5 Members and officers have held regular meetings to determine options for savings and a list of potential draft budget savings has been developed, to supplement the Transformation savings included in the Commitment Budget. This list totals - £2.956m and is attached at Annexe C and summarised in Table 3. As in previous years, economies have focused as far as possible on increasing efficiency, income generation and reducing central and departmental support rather than on front line services. However, since it became a Unitary Authority the Council has successfully delivered savings of around £80m in total. As a result it is inevitable that there will be some impact on services, although this has been minimised.

Table 3: Summary Service Economies

Department	£'000
Adult Social Care, Health and Housing	-760
Children, Young People and Learning (excluding schools)	-421
Environment, Culture & Communities	-1,075
Resources	-477
Non Departmental / Council Wide	-202
Total Savings	-2,935

Significant Budget Decisions

- 8.6 Consideration and approval of the budget is a major policy decision. However, the budget, by its nature, includes a range of proposals, some of which in themselves represent important policy decisions. More details on each of the proposals are included in Annexe C.
- 8.7 As the budget report is a policy document and is subject to at least six weeks consultation, the identification of these issues within the budget report facilitates detailed consultation on a range of significant policy decisions.

Council Wide Issues

- 8.8 Apart from the specific budget proposals contained in Annexes B and C there are some Council wide issues affecting all departments' budgets which need to be considered. The precise impact of these corporate budgets is likely to change before the final budget proposals are recommended, however the current view on these issues is outlined in the following paragraphs.

a) Capital Programme

As outlined above, the scale of the Council's Capital Programme for 2018/19 will impact upon the revenue budget and will itself be subject to consultation over the coming weeks. All new spending on services will need to be funded from new capital receipts, government grants, developer contributions or borrowing. The proposed Council Funded Capital Programme of £10.976m and externally funded (including self-funding schemes) programme of £19.780m for 2018/19 features in a separate report on tonight's agenda. After allowing for projected receipts of approximately £8m in 2018/19 and carry forwards, the additional revenue costs will be £0.040m in 2018/19 and £0.340m in 2019/20. These figures include on-going costs associated with the

maintenance and support of IT capital purchases, which will help enable the Council's transformational change.

b) Interest and Investments

Now that the Council is no longer debt-free and is reliant on external borrowing to fund its capital investments, returns on surplus cash are likely to remain relatively low during 2018/19 and beyond.

As such the impact of interest rates on borrowing rates are of greater significance to the Council. The overall longer run trend is for gilt yields and PWLB rates to rise, albeit gently. In its November 2017 meeting, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) raised rates for the first time in 10-years – by 0.25%, in effect reversing the stimulus rate-cut introduced following the Brexit vote.

The MPC in its latest Inflation Report made some obvious comments around the fact that the UK is going through a period of heightened uncertainty due, particularly, to the unknowns around how the Brexit negotiations will proceed and the likely effect on households and companies. As such there is a wide spread of potential outcomes during the next 18-24 months. There is, therefore, a likelihood of heightened volatility as events actually unfold.

The Council's own forecasts are cautious and in line with a subdued path for increases in Bank Rate; we do not currently see inflation posing a significant threat over the next three years. Our assumptions are based on a 0.25% increase in November 2018 to 0.75%, 1.0% in November 2019 and 1.25% in August 2020. This is much in line with market expectations. Long-term interest rates are at historical lows with 10-year and 25-year Public Works Loan Board rates in the region of 2.2% to 2.7%. Short-term maturities are in the region of 1.5% offering a much smaller cost of carry (this being the difference between the cost of borrowing and the potential re-investment rates). Given a mix of borrowing maturities, the average interest rate on borrowing assumed in the Council's 2018/19 revenue budget is 2.5%

With borrowing rates at historical lows, the borrowing strategy of the Council will be to minimise the impact on the revenue account but recognising that better value is in the 40yr to 50yr range. The Council will therefore take a mix of borrowing maturities over the years reflecting the need for day-to-day cash flow and its longer-term capital investment strategy. The Council, in close co-ordination with its Treasury Management advisers, will monitor medium and long-term interest rates and take any necessary decisions based on the information available to effectively and efficiently fund the capital programme committed to by the Council.

The Council reviews the annual Treasury Management Strategy Statement under the requirement of the 2011 revised CIPFA Treasury Management in Public Services Code of Practice and Cross Sectoral Guidance Notes ("the CIPFA TM Code"). The Local Government Act 2003 required the Council to "have regard to the Prudential Code and to set Prudential Indicators for the next three years to ensure that the capital investment plans are affordable, prudent and sustainable". Annex E outlines the Council's prudential indicators for 2018/19 – 2020/21 and sets out the expected treasury management activities for this period. These take account of the Commercial Property Investment Strategy agreed by the Executive on 15 November 2016. It is recommended that the Executive agree the Treasury Management Strategy

and associated documents and in line with the Code of Practice request that the Governance and Audit Committee review each of the key elements.

c) Provision for Inflation and Pay Awards

The Commitment Budget excludes the cost of inflation on both expenditure and income. In past years, the Council has restricted the provision for inflation on prices as a general economy measure, to help address the underlying budget gap, although pay awards have been fully funded. In the context of the Council's overall financial position, it is again prudent to consider where the provision for inflation on prices can be limited as an economy measure, although some exceptions will be necessary to reflect actual increases that will not be containable without real service reductions or to meet contractual commitments. In particular it will be important to have realistic discussions with key providers about what level of inflation is genuinely necessary on some contracts and placements.

At this stage the inflation provision is not finalised, although for planning purposes a sum of £1.500m (£1.200m 2017/18) has been added to the budget. This will be achieved by:

- Assuming pay awards of no more than 1%;
- Negotiating to minimise inflation on contracts;
- Increasing fees and charges in line with the Council's income policy.

The National Employers made an offer to the unions on pay on 5 December. The proposal is for the majority of staff to receive a 2% pay rise from April 2018 and a further 2% rise in April 2019. To accommodate the introduction of the National Living Wage, the proposal also includes higher increases for staff on scale point 19 or below. Should the pay award be accepted, there would be an additional cost of approximately £0.5m compared to the £1.5m above.

The Council will need to consider where it is appropriate and necessary to provide for inflation over the coming weeks so that the actual inflation provision can be added to the final budget report in February 2018.

d) Fees and Charges

Increases in fees and charges are determined by the overall economic conditions, the willingness of customers to pay the higher charges and continued demand for Council services. The Council policy for fees and charges requires each Department to consider the level of charges against the following criteria:

- fees and charges should aim, as a minimum, to cover the costs of delivering the service;
- where a service operates in free market conditions, fees and charges should at least be set at the market rate;
- fees and charges should not be levied where this is an ineffective use of resources, i.e. the cost of collection exceeds any income generated.

Certain other fees will attract the percentage determined by statute. The proposed fees and charges are included in Annexe D, with the exception of those relating to town centre car parking. The level of increase in some car parks is limited by the agreement for lease on The Avenue car park and no

increase is likely before the Autumn. As such, it is suggested that authority to set town centre car park charges is delegated to the Regeneration Committee.

e) Corporate Contingency

The Council manages risks and uncertainties in the budget through the use of a general contingency added to the Council's budget. Every year the Council faces risks on its budget in relation to demand led services, Business Rates and the general economic climate. The Contingency has been increased by £0.5m to £2.5m as part of the draft budget proposals. This reflects the need to deliver significant savings in-year through the Transformation programmes, some of which are at early stages of implementation, whilst responding to rising service demands.

The Executive will need to make a judgement on the appropriate level of contingency at its February meeting, taking advice from the Borough Treasurer who will need to certify the robustness of the overall budget proposals in the context of the continuing progress on the Transformation Programme and the Council's remaining general and earmarked reserves. All the reserves will be reviewed to ensure that they are sufficient to manage the financial risks facing the Council in the coming years.

Spending on Schools

- 8.9 Changes by the Department for Education (DfE) to the way schools and education in general are funded are now reaching a conclusion and are intended to result in an efficient, simple and predictable funding system that is fair and supports pupils to achieve their potential. As the Council is the 6th lowest funded education authority, the expectation has always been that the most likely outcome for Bracknell Forest schools would be a funding gain.
- 8.10 As part of the process, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), the executive agency of the DfE, intends to put in place a Schools National Funding Formula (SNFF) to directly fund all schools thereby reducing the role of councils. The main financial responsibilities remaining with councils would relate to ensuring the needs of vulnerable pupils are met, sufficient school places are available, working with schools to ensure they understand and discharge their safeguarding duties, ensuring fair access through admissions and promoting attendance.
- 8.11 To support the funding reforms, the ringfenced Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) has been re-structured into 4 different elements; a Schools Block, an Early Years Block; a High Needs Block and a Central Schools Services Block. Each of these blocks has a new formula for allocating funds together with transitional funding protections to enable a measured move to the new arrangements.
- 8.12 In respect of the Schools Block, in December 2016, the DfE published illustrative financial information of the impact on individual schools from the proposed SNFF. For Bracknell Forest schools this showed that over the next 2 years, there would be an increase in overall funding of £3.24m (+5.1%). However in 2018/19, 4 of the smallest schools would receive reductions in funding ranging from 0.2% to 1.3% with 33 experiencing a gain of between 0.2% and 2.9%.
- 8.13 The publication of this data with the potential for reductions in some school budgets, coupled with the outcome from the general election where the government recognised that the electorate were concerned about the overall level of funding for schools as

well as its distribution, resulted in further changes to school funding from the previous announcements. There would now be an extra £1.3bn funding nationally for schools (£416m in 2018/19 and another £884m in 2019/20) with a guarantee that every school would receive a funding increase. The key elements of the new funding arrangements would be:

- in each of the next 2 years, every schools would receive a minimum per pupil increase of 0.5% and a maximum increase of 3%; and
- a minimum per pupil funding rate in 2018/19 of £3,300 for primary aged pupils and £4,600 for secondary aged pupils, rising to £3,600 and £4,800 in 2019/20

- 8.14 Despite there being an additional £1.3bn of investment in core school budgets, there is no noticeable overall increase in funding allocated to Bracknell Forest schools compared to the December 2016 amount. Whilst there is an increase of £0.263m of funding in 2018/19, this is offset by a similar amount of reduction in 2019/20.
- 8.15 This unwelcome outcome arises because the latest changes guarantee a funding increase to all schools (a minimum of 0.5%) rather than the previous maximum reduction of 1.5%. Thus the additional funding is in general being used to increase funding to the schools that were previously facing a funding cut or relatively low increase.
- 8.16 To assist a smooth transition to the SNFF, councils will continue to use their local funding formula for the next 2 years. Additionally, DfE Regulations do not allow councils to replicate the SNFF and therefore school budgets will always be different to the SNFF. This is likely to be a cause of confusion for schools that will need to be managed.
- 8.17 The Schools Block will also include funding at council level for premises, mobility and centrally managed growth (which includes new school funding for start-up and diseconomy funding), based on historic spend. With Binfield Learning Village (BLV) scheduled to open to secondary aged pupils in September 2018, the cost of supporting new schools will increase from the amount set aside in the 2017/18 budget. A provisional estimate of the likely cost increase next year is £0.555m. This cost needs to be met as a first charge from the total increase in funding, reducing the amount available for existing schools from £1.696m to £1.141m.
- 8.18 The DfE recognise that funding councils based on historic spend for growth will not necessarily predict accurately the amount of funding that will be needed for growth in future. However, it is considered appropriate for 2018/19; with alternative options being considered for the longer term, with a formulaic approach the favoured solution at this stage. There is no timescale for when this will be resolved, or what the new formula may look like, but changes are expected for 2019/20 when there is estimated to be a further cost pressure of £0.479m arising from the effect of BLV being open for a full year.
- 8.19 In terms of funding provided for education related services, from 2017/18, the DfE withdrew the £600m funding source – the Education Services Grant (ESG) - at a cost to the Council of £1.5m. The Council's Transformation Programme is examining a range of additional income opportunities and reduction of costs to ensure relevant services move to an affordable level. Maintained schools agreed to contribute £20 per pupil in 2017/18 and if the same agreement is reached for 2018/19 this will contribute £0.239m to council costs.

- 8.20 For Early Years funding for 0-4 year olds, 2018/19 is the second year of a new funding framework intended to support the policy objective of enabling more families to work when they want to, by extending the free entitlement to childcare for 3 and 4 year olds from 15 to 30 hours per week. The DfE will provide £1 billion additional funding by 2019/20 to increase provider funding rates to encourage the development of the additional places that will be required from increased take-up. The DfE has yet to confirm final allocations for 2018/19, but based on the original proposals, the expectation is that there will be an increase in per child funding for the Council of 5.8% in 2018/19, which represents an estimated 20.1% increase in the funding rate over 2 years.
- 8.21 Funding for councils to support pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) from age 0-24 is provided through the High Needs Block. With 50% of the new formula being based on historic spending patterns and with funding protection in place to ensure all councils receive at least a 0.5% increase from their 2017/18 allocations, many councils are experiencing similar funding allocations to last year, and this is the case for Bracknell Forest.
- 8.22 Councils will continue to receive funding for a small number of services that support schools and pupils which fall into the Central Schools Services Block. The distribution will be based on cash protecting a range of defined services that support vulnerable pupils and providing a per pupil amount for the more general services. Bracknell Forest will receive a 1.5% reduction in funding for these services (circa £0.015m), which is the maximum funding can be reduced by.
- 8.23 Taking account of this information, £90.29m of grant income is estimated to be available to the Council for 2018/19 through the specific ring-fenced Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This comprises £67.50m for the Schools Block, £7.05m for the Early Years Block, £14.70m for the High Needs Block and £1.04m for the Central Schools Services Block.
- 8.24 The DfE requires councils to confirm the basis on which actual school budgets will be allocated, including per pupil and all other funding rates, by 19 January 2018. To meet this requirement, 2018/19 school budgets will have to be set on the basis of the estimated level of DSG plus any other grants and accumulated balances. The draft budget proposals are prepared on this basis.
- 8.25 In addition to the DSG, schools also receive revenue funding from other specific grants including School Sixth Forms (currently -£4.643m), the Pupil Premium (-£3.345m), Primary PE and Sports Premium (-0.292m) and the Universal Infant Free School Meals Grant (-£1.487m). All of these amounts are subject to change in 2018/19.
- 8.26 There is a tight timescale to agree the Schools Budget, with the DfE expected to release the data that councils must use to set school budgets on the 16 December 2017 and requiring individual 2018/19 school budgets to then be confirmed by 19 January 2018. Setting the overall level of the Schools Budget and the operation of the funding formula that distributes the money to schools is a statutory council function. Agreeing how much is centrally managed is a decision for the Schools Forum. To meet these deadlines, council statutory decisions around the Schools Budget are delegated by the Full Executive to the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning. Recommendation 2.3 sets the parameters for the formal decision to be made that the Schools Budget is set at the level of grant received plus any accumulated balances, which ensures that there can be no impact on Council

Taxpayers. The Executive Member also endorses the decisions of the Schools Forum when these are undertaken in its statutory decision making role.

Summary

- 8.27 Adding the draft proposals to the Commitment Budget and taking account of the corporate issues identified above would result in total expenditure of £79.588m as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of proposals:

	£'000
Commitment Budget	83,153
Budget Pressures	5,333
Budget Economies	-2,935
Capital Programme	40
Inflation Provision	1,500
Change in Contingency	500
Reversal of the one-off transfer into the Business Rates Equalisation Reserve (BRER) for the Collection Fund - Business Rates surplus in 2016/17	-9,113
Recurring transfer of Business Rates income into the BRER	250
Reduction in New Homes Bonus 2018/19	932
Additional Improved Better Care funding	-62
Draft Budget Requirement 2018/19	79,598

- 8.28 Without the Provisional Finance Settlement, assumptions have had to be made on the level of grant income. It has been assumed that the Council can anticipate income of up to -£74.787m. This arises from Revenue Support Grant and Business Rates baseline funding (-£20.669m) and Council Tax at the 2017/18 level (-£54.118m).
- 8.29 With the potential overall cost of the budget package being consulted on in the region of £79.598m, this leaves a potential gap of around £4.811m. Members can choose to adopt any or all of the following approaches in order to bridge the remaining gap:
- an increase in Council Tax;
 - an appropriate contribution from the Council's revenue reserves, bearing in mind the Medium Term Financial Strategy;
 - identifying further expenditure reductions.

9 RESERVES

- 9.1 The Council has an estimated £8.5m available in General Reserves at 31 March 2018. Details are contained in Table 6.

Table 6: General Reserves as at 31 March 2018

	£m
General Fund	11.1
Planned use in 2017/18	(2.6)
Estimated Balance as at 31 March 2018	8.5

- 9.2 The Council has, in the past, planned on maintaining a minimum prudential balance of £4m. This assessment is based on the financial risks which face the Council and the Borough Treasurer considers these in the February report to the Executive at which a final decision on the use of balances can be taken, taking account of the financial position likely to face the Council over the next five years.

10 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The Council's constitution requires a consultation period of at least six week on the draft budget proposals. In this context, it is inevitable that, of the broad range of options proposed for consultation, not all will necessarily be included in the final budget package. It is also likely that some further issues with a financial impact will arise between now and February. When the Final Settlement is known, the Executive can consider the prudent use of revenue balances to support expenditure in line with the overall medium term financial strategy, along with any further expenditure reductions.
- 10.2 It is suggested, therefore, that the normal process whereby the Overview & Scrutiny Commission reviews the overall budget package and determines whether any specific issues should be considered further by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels at their meetings in January, is followed. The proposals will also be placed on the Council's website for public consultation.
- 10.3 All comments from the Overview & Scrutiny Commission, Overview and Scrutiny Panels and all others will then be submitted to the Executive on 13 February 2018. This will allow the Executive to determine the final budget package and recommend the appropriate Council Tax level to the Council on 28 February 2018.

11 BUDGET MONITORING 2017/18- VIREMENT REQUEST

- 11.1 A virement is the transfer of resources between two budgets but it does not increase the overall budget approved by the Council. Financial Regulations require formal approval by the Executive of any virement between £0.050m and £0.100m and of virements between departments of any amount. Full Council approval is required for virements over £0.100m. During 2017/18 a number of virements have been identified which require the approval of the Executive. These have been previously reported to the Corporate Management Team which recommends them to the Executive for approval. They have been included in the Quarterly Service Reports. Details of virements between departments are set out in Annexe F. Details of internal departmental virements exceeding £0.050m are set out in Annexe G.

12 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 12.1 Nothing to add to the report.

Borough Treasurer

- 12.2 The financial implications of this report are included in the supporting information.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 12.3 The Council's final budget proposals will potentially impact on all areas of the community. A detailed consultation process is planned in order to provide individuals and groups with the opportunity to comment on the draft proposals. This will ensure that in making final recommendations, the Executive can be made aware of the views of a broad section of residents and service users. A number of the budget proposals require specific equality impact assessments to be carried out and draft versions of these are attached in Annexe H. Consultation with equalities groups that are likely to be affected by the proposal is part of the assessment process.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 12.4 A sum of £2.5m is currently included in the draft proposals to meet the costs of unpredictable or unforeseen items that would represent in year budget risks. The Executive will need to make a judgement on the level of Contingency at its meeting in February.
- 12.5 The Borough Treasurer, as the Council's Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer), must formally certify that the budget is sound. This will involve identifying and assessing the key risk areas in the budget to ensure the robustness of estimates and ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place to manage those risks, including maintaining an appropriate level of reserves and Contingency. This formalises work that is normally undertaken each year during the budget preparation stages and in monthly monitoring after the budget is agreed. The Borough Treasurer will report his findings in February, when the final budget package is recommended for approval.

13 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 13.1 The Overview & Scrutiny Commission will be consulted on the budget proposals and may also choose to direct specific issues to individual overview and scrutiny panels. Targeted consultation exercises will be undertaken with business rate payers, the Schools Forum, town and parish councils and voluntary organisations. Comments and views will be sought on both the overall budget package and on the detailed budget proposals. In addition, this report and all the supporting information are publicly available to any individual or group who wish to comment on any proposal included within it. To facilitate this, the full budget package will be placed on the Council's web site at <http://consult.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/portal>. There will also be a dedicated mailbox to collect comments.
- 13.2 The timetable for the approval of the 2018/19 Budget is as follows.

Executive agree proposals as basis for consultation	19 December 2018
Consultation period	20 December 2017 - 30 January 2018
Executive considers representations made and recommends budget.	13 February 2018
Council considers Executive budget proposals	28 February 2018

Background Papers

None

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