



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE
AUTHORITY**

Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Medium Term Finance Plan 2020-21 to 2023-24

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Medium-Term Finance Plan (MTFP) sets out an outline financial strategy to meet the requirements of Members' agreed vision and strategic priorities as set out in the Community Safety Plan. The investment strategy is sufficiently robust enough to support the strategic intent of our approach to integrated risk management planning but has the flexibility to anticipate and react to changes in our operating environment.
- 1.2 The current financial context of the Authority is set by the funding outcomes from the Government's latest spending review. As part of the latest spending review, the Spending Round 2019, the provisional finance settlement for 2020-21 was announced on 20 December 2019 and confirmed a one-year financial settlement for 2020-21. This follows the previous four-year funding strategy for the period 2016-17 to 2019-20. Future funding beyond 2020-21 is subject to the outcomes of the Spending Review 2020, which is expected to be a full, multi-year spending review. The impact of this announcement is discussed on pages 4 and 5.
- 1.3 In developing our financial plans for 2020-21 onwards we have identified a number of financial scenarios. We have also ensured that our plans are reflective of the investment needs required to mitigate and manage our strategic risks. We have also carried out a sensitivity analysis on some key areas such as the impact of varying levels of Fire Precept increase.
- 1.4 Our medium-term projections bring together all of this work and reflect how our aspirations from the Community Safety Plan translate into our revenue and capital budget requirements. The table on page 20 shows our revenue budget projections up to 2023-24.
- 1.5 Our capital investment needs from 2019-20 to 2023-24 are shown from page 20 onwards. This shows our draft capital investment requirements, how we plan to finance this investment and the impact on the revenue budget.
- 1.6 The final section of the Plan looks at our reserves and balances (page 22) and how we plan to use them over the next few years to support the Authority's revenue budget and capital investment needs, i.e. our Reserves Strategy.
- 1.7 As Members will be aware, it has been confirmed from previous audits that the financial arrangements for the Authority are sound, and our scenarios concerning our future financial profile have received audit assurance.
- 1.8 The purpose of the report is to enable the Authority to consider and assess the MTFP, including the assumptions on funding from the Government up to 2023-24.
- 1.9 This is a dynamic document, integral to our financial management, and will be updated in response to national, regional and local issues when these affect the Authority's financial position.

2. Financial Context

2.1 National context

- 2.1.1 2019-20 was the fourth and final year of the settlement relating to the 2015 Spending Review. The Government has been committed to reviewing the funding mechanism for all local authorities, moving towards a new Fair Funding Formula and introducing changes to the Business Rates Retention (BRR) scheme. In terms of BRR, this was originally looking at a 100% rates retention scheme but has more recently moved towards a 75% rates retention model.
- 2.1.2 For 2019-20, 59% of fire funding nationally comes from council tax, 24% from business rates, 13% from grants, and the remainder from general income. The move to 75% BRR will reduce grant income further and increase the reliance on business rates. Under the current system, Fire receives 1% of business rates and a top-up grant from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The BRR system will be changing quite significantly, with the intention of reducing the volatility in the current system, but the impact on Fire is not clear yet.
- 2.1.3 The Government had indicated that there would be a new multi-year Spending Review, taking place in 2019, but on 8 August the Chancellor announced that there would be a fast tracked one-year Spending Round covering 2020-21 only. The Spending Round announcement was made on 4 September and this confirmed that MHCLG intended to introduce the 75% BRR scheme and the Fair Funding Review from 2021-22.

2.2 Impact on Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority

- 2.2.1 The impact on the Authority of national funding changes is shown in the table below. The Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) is the Government's assessment of how much funding is allocated to each authority and is made up of two parts:
- Baseline Funding Level (BFL): the amount the Government expects the Authority to receive from local business rates retention and top up grant
 - Revenue Support Grant (RSG), centrally funded grant distributed; the Governments' aim is to phase this out and move further towards full funding from local business rates.

Table 1: Settlement Funding Assessment (as at February 2020)

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Baseline Funding Level	9.478	9.567	9.763	10.056	10.286	10.454
Revenue Support Grant	9.948	8.069	5.704	4.493	3.796	3.857
Settlement Funding Assessment	19.426	17.636	15.467	14.549	14.082	14.311

- 2.2.2 From the table above it is evident that, despite the increase for 2020-21, the Government's Settlement Funding Assessment for the Authority is reduced by approximately £5.1m over the period 2015-16 to 2020-21.
- 2.2.3 The Government argues that the impact of these funding reductions is much less than this when you take into account the full funding resources available to local government. They justify this by publishing a 'Core Spending Power' calculation for each local authority, fire authority and police and crime commissioner. The latest details of this calculation for the Authority for the period up to 2020-21 are shown in the following extract (table below) from MHCLG's published figures.

Table 2: Government Assessment of Core Spending Power for the Authority

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Settlement Funding Assessment	17.636	15.467	14.549	14.082	14.311
Precepts (Council Tax)	36.316	37.489	39.348	41.239	42.759
Rural Services Delivery Grant	0.049	0.039	0.049	0.049	0.049
Transition Grant	0.167	0.210	0.000	0.000	0.000
Compensation for under-indexing Business Rates Multiplier	0.138	0.147	0.230	0.335	0.419
Core Spending Power	54.306	53.352	54.176	55.705	57.538

- 2.2.4 Although we welcome the small increase in funding from the one-year settlement for 2020-21, it does little to help with our medium-term financial planning and makes it hard to be clear about timescales for the Service changes that will be required to deal with our forecast budget gaps. The longer-term picture will not now become clear until a full, multi-year Spending Review, is carried out in 2020.

3. Service Context

3.1 Strategic Assessment of Risk

- 3.1.1 To ensure our Community Safety Plan (CSP) incorporates our requirement to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and remains relevant and reflective of the wider landscape in which we operate, we undertake a biennial Strategic Assessment of Risk.
- 3.1.2 This strategic assessment examines a range of key factors that impact on our organisation from opportunities and challenges emerging from within the fire sector and those within the wider public-sector environment. The assessment aims to highlight the strategic and operational risks we face and describes how we intend to deal with them.

- 3.1.3 As well as analysing our own data, the assessment is put together using a great deal of information from our partners and wider needs assessments associated with information from national and local sources, such as National Fire Chiefs Council Strategy 2017-2020 and Health and Wellbeing Strategies.
- 3.1.4 The assessment aims to ensure that decision-making and planning remains current and reflective of the landscape within which we operate. It is developed through a PESTELO (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, Legal and Organisational) analysis that draws on a broad range of information, data and intelligence, looking both externally and internally and against risk and demand. It is used to ensure that the priorities within the Service's Community Safety Plan (CSP), and the subsequent delivery plans, remain focused on maximising the impact the organisation has on improving public safety and health and wellbeing.
- 3.1.5 The document evidences the following key areas of focus for the Service within its current and future planning:
- Financial uncertainty for the Service and its partners is set to continue for the foreseeable future
 - The recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters will remain increasingly difficult
 - The outcomes and findings of the Grenfell Tower inquiry is likely to have a significant impact upon the fire sector, particularly in the areas of current system of building regulations and fire safety
 - The Service needs to engage and resource the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme to improve future resilience of communications and incident management
 - Reducing our environmental impact, which will need some one-off "Invest to Save" funding to generate longer term, ongoing savings as part of our efficiency plan
 - The number of individuals and householders that the Service needs to engage with to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries from fire, or to prevent unnecessary hospital stays is set to increase
 - The number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads remains consistently high
 - The availability of on-call appliances remains a key issue for efficient and effective operational response
 - The diversity of the workforce is not sufficiently reflective of the community we serve

- An ageing operational workforce will be a predominant feature of the Service for the foreseeable future, with a potential increase in ill-health retirement costs
- Better understand and improve the capability of our workforce and our one team approach
- Strengthening the Network Fire Service Partnership (NFSP) with our neighbouring fire and rescue services
- Improving the sustainability of our ICT systems, which is likely to need some one-off additional investment
- Strengthening our Service Control Centre (SCC)
- Ensuring the sustainability of our operational training centres, including the feasibility of developing a single, central training facility.

3.1.6 For planning purposes we have assumed a net base budget cost increase of £250k from 2021-22 to fund the estimated financial consequences of these items and this is included in our budget forecasts later in this document. We also have earmarked reserves that are available to support some of these issues and these are discussed in more detail in Section 7.

4. Efficiency and Value for Money

4.1 About our efficiency plans

4.1.1 Prior to their combination in April 2016, both Dorset and Wiltshire fire and rescue authorities were traditionally low spending and low funded organisations. They also received higher than average cuts to Government grant when compared to other combined fire authorities. To protect frontline services and be a stronger partner, both authorities agreed to merge under a whole system transformation programme. This plan charts the journey that we have subsequently made in delivering value for money services to our customers and sets our plans for dealing with continued financial challenges.

4.2 Approach to securing greater value for money

4.2.1 There is no one single way in which Value for Money (VFM) can be demonstrated. We believe it is important that we show our efficiencies as:

- Cashable savings... money that we can redirect
- Non-cashable savings... savings in time or costs that are avoided
- Savings to the wider public purse... savings to our partners

4.2.2 To help demonstrate our savings, we benchmark our performance against ourselves and with others, using key performance indicators. We also use unit costs that have been developed nationally, or that we have developed to help show these savings.

4.2.3 Our approach to ensuring the VFM is all encompassing and engrained in everything we do. More specifically we work hard at:

- reviewing the way we deliver our services; sharing and adopting good practice where we think this can be done
- ensuring that our operational resources are best aligned to community risks by analysing risk and using good data
- eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy, by making the best use of technology
- putting in place and encouraging mobile working so that we avoid unnecessary travel time and costs
- rationalising the use of our estate and maximising the opportunities to share premises
- ensuring that procurement decisions are business led and focused on whole life costs
- seeking more from our contracts and the quality of goods and services provided
- pursuing greater economies of scale and synergy by maximising our partnership opportunities
- seeking external funding and partnership opportunities
- comparing our financial performance with our peers using our own measures and through wider exercises such as the Basket of Goods' exercise
- ensuring sound governance and performance management.

4.3 Our efficiency journey so far

4.3.1 Since the 1 April 2016, when the new Authority and Service was established, £6.7m of cashable efficiencies have been realised.

4.3.2 These efficiencies are overviewed below:

i. Non-station-based staff including senior management

Cashable savings

£3.72m per year

Our Combination had a key focus on rationalising all corporate departments, non-station-based functions and senior management. All corporate departments were realigned against the new vision and single ways of working. Efficiencies and savings on non-staffing costs were also achieved through an initial review of combined budgets. Overall savings in the region of £3.2m were originally included in our Combination business case. Further savings of £0.5m have been secured from reviews carried out in 2018-19 and 2019-20.

ii. Procurement and contracts

Cashable savings

£416k per year

As part of forming a single Service, there were a wide variety of contracts that were harmonised. This offered an opportunity to secure financial efficiencies in areas such as insurance, where we saved £50k per year from 2016-17. The rationalisation of our contracts also provided an opportunity to work in partnership with the police, neighbouring fire services and other partners to explore the opportunities for more regional and sub-regional collaboration. We have undertaken joint procurements with Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service for the provision of occupational health, payroll and pensions administration services saving £121k per year. Other procurement savings have totalled £245k.

iii. Estates

Cashable savings

£252k per year

Upon becoming a new Service, we have undertaken a fundamental review of our estate. We did this for two principal reasons. Firstly, we wanted to ensure that we have a comprehensive, prioritised and value for money led approach to our future maintenance programme. Secondly, we wanted to further identify and open up opportunities for sharing our estate with the police, local authorities, health and other partners. We now have many formal and informal sharing arrangements in place with partners. This helps to improve joint working but has also yielded cashable efficiency savings in the region of £157k per year. We have disposed of part of a former headquarters site in Potterne. As well as securing a significant one-off capital receipt, we have also realised on-going savings by avoiding running costs and capital borrowing costs of approximately £75k per year. We have also completed a business rates review across all of our fire stations, generating savings of £20k per year.

iv. Service control centre

Cashable savings

£450k per year

As part of forming the new Service, a single Service Control Centre was established. This centre is led by highly trained control staff and uses the latest mobilising technology and is part of the Networked Fire Control Services Partnership. By establishing a single centre, annual savings of £450k were made.

v. Smarter working

Cashable savings

£34k per year

The new Service must now operate across a very large geographical area with a much larger population. Rural road networks and restrictive public transport are a key challenge for the new Service. To avoid wasteful and unnecessary travel, we have invested in technology to achieve more mobile and flexible ways of working. With support from Government, we have invested in a modernised and harmonised ICT infrastructure. Aligned to this we will also be

seeking to review key management processes to make them less paper based; more electronically enabled and more collaborative with our key partners. Together this will help us reduce vehicle purchase and maintenance costs; travel costs; improve our carbon footprint; maximise productive time and reduce the manual handling of data and management information. Together we believe that this programme improves efficiency and effectiveness of our staff and has generated £34k in cashable savings from reduced travel costs and £120k per year in non-cashable efficiencies from unnecessary travel time.

vi. Streamlining the Authority

Cashable savings

£55k per year

As part of forming the Authority, Members agreed an initial governance structure. Since establishing these arrangements, Members further reviewed them, which led to a reduction of Members (from 30 to 18) and associated democratic costs which saved £55k.

vii. Wholetime duty systems

Cashable savings

£1.67m per year

As part of the business case for combination we have agreed to pursue options for improving the efficiency of crewing wholetime fire engines. The first phase synchronised the watches across the new Service, aligning working patterns, start and finish times and work practices. Further work then looked at options for crewing adopted by the majority of fire and rescue services and has generated savings in excess of £1.6m per year.

viii. Emergency response vehicles

Cashable savings

£64k per year

Changes made to our vehicle replacement programme have enabled us to save £64k per year in ongoing capital financing costs.

4.4 Future plans

4.4.1 How much do we need to save?

4.4.1.1 Section 5 sets out our budget and MTFP in detail. Based on our planning assumptions for the period to 2023-24, we currently need to identify substantial savings to address the budget deficits reflected in the table below:

Table 3: Indicative Funding Gaps/Deficits

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Total Funding	57.064	57.920	58.792	59.752
Estimated Net Service Budget	57.064	59.240	61.103	62.605
Budget surplus(+)/deficit(-)	£0.000	-£1.320	-£2.311	-£2.853

4.4.2 Service Delivery Scenario Planning

4.4.2.1 We are currently developing a range of savings options for Member engagement and scrutiny in the autumn. The options being looked at will be aligned to the Networked Fire Service Partnership vision and are guided by the Integrated Risk Management Principles that the Authority has adopted.

4.4.2.2 Each option will clearly set out the level of savings that can be achieved; any risks associated with the option and the likely timescales required to deliver; including any consultation that may be required. As well as being mindful of when savings need to be delivered, as predicted in this MTFP, all options will also consider the impact of staffing profiles and our workforce planning requirements.

4.4.2.3 Members will be fully engaged from the autumn as the Authority responds to the outcomes of the forthcoming Spending Review.

4.4.3 Budget planning

4.4.3.1 We will review all significant non-pay related expenditure by carrying out reviews aligned to our contracts register and procurement arrangements. Departments will be required to conduct a review of current arrangements prior to commencing any new procurement process and extending existing contracts.

4.4.3.2 Through our annual zero-based budgeting approach and our business case process, Service expenditure based on need within the Service Delivery Plan is robustly reviewed, identifying cost reductions, savings and efficiencies (cashable and non-cashable). These will be registered and monitored in our savings register/efficiency plan and be reported through Service Delivery Team.

- 4.4.3.3 Directors and Heads of Departments (HoDs) have, and will continue, to assess and evaluate their services in a comparative context with regard to collaborative and partnership working to determine whether VFM is being achieved. This will be done through the Service Delivery Plan (SDP). In particular, we will look at opportunities within the Networked Fire Service Partnership (NFSP), our local partners (Councils, Police & Crime Commissioners (PCC), National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), neighbouring fire services and the wider fire service community).
- 4.4.3.4 We will continue with and further develop our Smarter Working programme, developing new ways of working, policies and procedures, re-engineering departments as priorities change, rationalising our estate and maximising technology and mobile working with continued investment as required. Investment on ICT and our estates will continue in line with our ICT Roadmap and Integrated Property Asset Management Plan and all additional requirements identified and approved through the budget process or business case process will be captured and planned into the MTFP. The establishment of any savings or efficiencies as a result of this will be registered on an ongoing basis and monitored in our savings register/efficiency plan and be reported through our Service Delivery Team.
- 4.4.4 Procurement
- 4.4.4.1 The Home Office has conducted two 'Basket of Goods' exercises in the fire service in recent years. We demonstrated that our purchasing decisions were value for money in that, in the majority of cases, we purchased similar goods for less money than the average. We will continue to monitor our purchases against this and in any future iteration of the Basket of Goods exercise to continue to secure VFM.
- 4.4.4.2 For all procurements undertaken, to obtain VFM we will consider the optimum combination of "whole life cost" (i.e. acquisition cost, cost of maintenance and running costs, disposal cost etc.) of a purchase and its fitness for purpose (i.e. quality and ability to meet our requirements). This definition enables us to compile a procurement specification which includes social, economic and environmental policy objectives (e.g. carbon footprint) within the procurement process. "Whole life cost" includes both quantifiable and non-quantifiable or intangible costs and benefits.
- 4.4.4.3 We will collaborate on all significant procurements (over £100k) where possible, using pre-established frameworks or developing frameworks to maximise any partnership opportunities and economies of scale where practical and beneficial to do so. Procurements savings/efficiencies will be registered on an ongoing basis, monitored in our savings register/efficiency plan and be reported through our Service Delivery Team.

5. Budget 2020-21 and Future Years' Forecasting

5.1 Finance Assumptions and Principles

5.1.1 The key finance assumptions and principles have been updated to ensure that they remain reflective of both our operating environment and our agreed strategic risks. Forecasts, projections and examples within this MTFP are reflective of these assumptions and principles, which were initially approved by Members in September 2018 and subsequently updated in December 2019. They are:

- (a) Principle 1 - Government Settlement Funding Assessment will increase by 1.6% for 2020-21, as announced in the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement on 20 December 2019
- (b) Principle 2 - Further Central Government Settlement Funding Assessment reductions assumed at 5% per annum beyond 2020-21
- (c) Principle 3 - Taxbase increases of 1.5% per annum
- (d) Principle 4 - Referendum principles will be set at the 2% for all fire and rescue authorities for 2020-21 and subsequent years
- (e) Principle 5 - Fire Precept Band D council tax increases of 1.99% for 2020-21 and subsequent years
- (f) Principle 6 - The continuation of surpluses on collection fund balances at a minimum of £250k per annum
- (g) Principle 7 - Pay awards are assumed at 2% per annum (unless otherwise agreed), and non-pay inflation at 1% each year
- (h) Principle 8 - Any residual revenue budget gap will require funding from the use of reserves
- (i) Principle 9 - Maintain General Balances at 5% or £2.5m, whichever is the greater, transferring excess balances above 5% or £2.5m, whichever is the greater, to the transformational improvement reserve.

5.2 Funding

5.2.1 Funding, in this context, is about how much money the Authority receives to pay for the services it provides. The primary source of funding comes from two main areas:

- **Government Support** (grants from central Government and business rates retention from local authorities)
- **Precepts** (council tax collected from local tax payers)

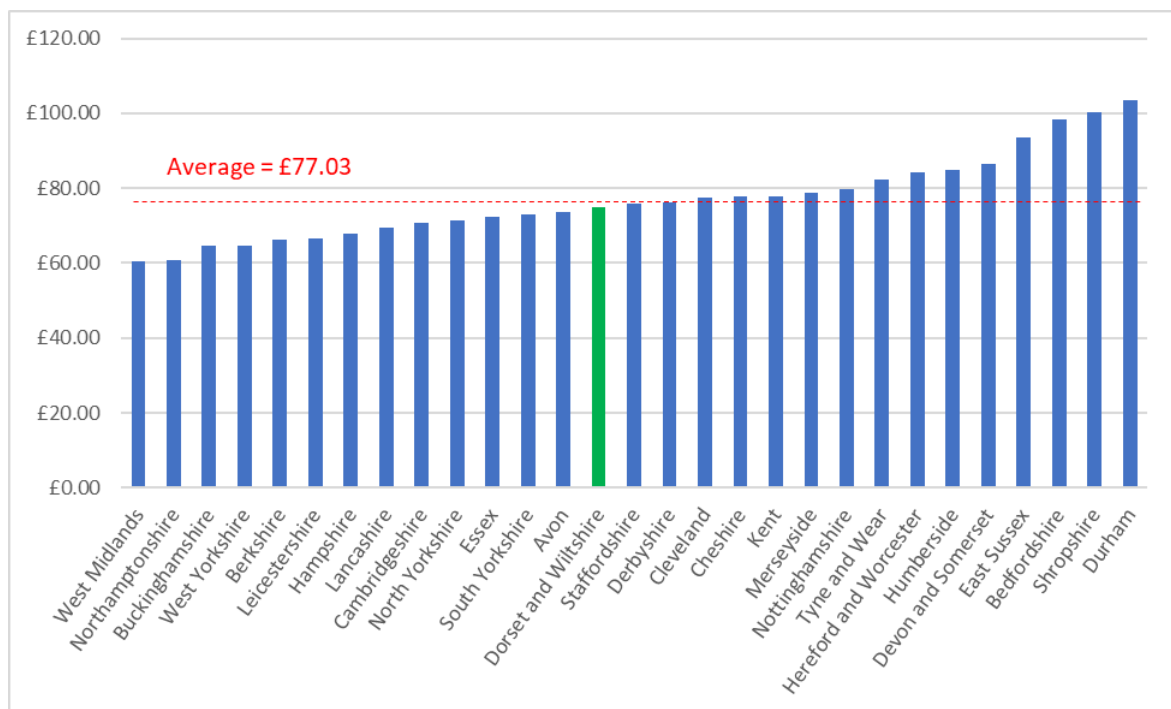
Government Support

- 5.2.2 The latest finance settlement announced on 20 December 2019 confirmed the anticipated funding increase of 1.6% in 2020-21. Overall, our Settlement Funding Assessment will have reduced from £19.436m (accumulated as two separate Authorities) in 2015-16 to £14.311m in 2020-21, representing a cash reduction of £5.125m or 26% over the period 2015-16 to 2020-21.
- 5.2.3 The settlement for 2020-21 followed the Government's one-year Spending Round announcement. We expect the Government to carry out a full Spending Review in 2020, which will inform funding levels for the next three or four years. Acting prudently, we are assuming that there will be further reductions in Government funding each year from 2021-22 onwards with each 1% reduction in funding worth approximately £143k. Our assumption of a 5% reduction equates to an approximate £715k reduction in funding for 2021-22.

Precepts

- 5.2.4 The Authority has a history of being a low funding, low spending authority. The low level of funding inevitably places pressure on levels of Fire Precept. Our 2019-20 Fire Precept figure of £74.87 compares to a national average for all English standalone fire authorities of £77.03 (see graph below).

Graph: Band D Fire Precept 2019-20 (all English standalone fire and rescue authorities)



- 5.2.5 Raising our Precept to the 2019-20 national average level of £77.03 would require an increase of £2.16 or 2.89%, breaching the current referendum threshold, but well within a £5 de-minimis increase.

- 5.2.6 In the Local Government Finance Settlement 2020-21 Technical Consultation document issued in October 2019 the Government proposed a core referendum principle of 2% for fire and rescue authorities. Our response to this consultation argued the case for a £5 de-minimis increase “to address and alleviate some of our financial pressures and put us on a much stronger footing to protect vital frontline emergency services”. Our individual submission supported a similar co-ordinated response from the NFCC.
- 5.2.7 The provisional finance settlement for 2020-21 announced referendum principles in line with those proposed in the Technical Consultation document, and they are as follows:
- a core principle of up to 2%, applicable to shire counties, unitary authorities, London boroughs, the Greater London Authority general Precept, and fire and rescue authorities
 - a bespoke council tax referendum principle of 2% or £5, whichever is higher, for shire districts
 - continuing the adult social care Precept at an additional 2%
 - no referendum principles for mayoral combined authorities or town and parish councils.
- 5.2.8 The Provisional Settlement Consultation document again asked for views on this package of referendum principles and our response continues to put forward the compelling case for a £5 de-minimis increase for Fire. Section 4.6 illustrates the financial impact of a £5 increase for this Authority.
- 5.2.9 The Police Funding Settlement for 2020-21, announced on 22 January 2020, has set a precept referendum limit of £10 for Police and Crime Commissioners.
- 5.2.10 It is anticipated that referendum principles will remain in operation at the 2% level for all fire and rescue authorities beyond 2020-21 as per Finance Principle 4 above. For planning purposes in this MTFP, we are therefore assuming Fire Precept Band D council tax increases of 1.99% for 2020-21 and subsequent years, as per Principle 5.
- 5.2.11 A 1% change in Fire Precept Band D or a 1% change in taxbase equates to approximately £420k per annum.
- 5.2.12 Precept income is levied on the collecting authorities and is based on a Band D council tax multiplied by the taxbase i.e. (the number of equivalent Band D dwellings in the area). On average across the whole of the Authority area, our taxbase for 2020-21 has risen by approximately 1.3%, slightly below our 1.5% assumption.

- 5.2.13 In establishing the indicative budget for 2020-21, funding from Precepts to be issued to billing Authorities is estimated, based on a Fire Precept of £76.36 (a 1.99% increase) and the taxbase increase of 1.3%, as follows:

Table 4: Estimated Precepts – Billing Authorities

Collecting Authority	Taxbase 2020-21	Precept 2020-21 £000
Wiltshire Council	187,935	14,351
Swindon Borough Council	75,879	5,794
Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council	142,996	10,919
Dorset Council	150,765	11,513
TOTAL	557,575	42,577

- 5.2.14 Given the assumptions for increases in taxbase and Fire Precept Band D, funding from Precepts is estimated as follows:

Table 5: Estimated Funding from Precepts

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
	Actual	Estimated	Estimated	Estimated	Estimated
Band D increase (%)	2.99	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99
Taxbase increase (%)	1.69	1.30	1.50	1.50	1.50
Taxbase	550,405	557,575	565,939	574,428	583,044
Fire Precept (£)	74.87	76.36	77.88	79.43	81.01
Precept (£m)	41.209	42.577	44.075	45.627	47.232

- 5.2.15 There are also one-off collection fund surpluses and deficits held by the billing authorities, which offset or add to the amount council tax income collected each year. In total, these amount to £176k for 2020-21, compared to £554k for 2019-20. These amounts should be considered as one-off windfalls and not wholly relied upon over the medium-term, although for future years the MTFP assumes collection fund surpluses of £250k each year (Principle 7).
- 5.2.16 In summary, the table overleaf 'Estimated Total Funding' shows the total funding assumed to 2023-24 based on the finance principles and assumptions above:

Table 6: Estimated Total Funding

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
	Actual	Estimated	Estimated	Estimated	Estimated
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Precept	41.209	42.577	44.075	45.627	47.232
Collection Fund Surplus	0.554	0.176	0.250	0.250	0.250
Revenue Support Grant	3.795	3.857	3.664	3.481	3.307
Baseline Funding Level	10.287	10.454	9.931	9.434	8.963
TOTAL	55.845	57.064	57.920	58.792	59.752

5.3 Pay Costs

- 5.3.1 Pay and pensions expenditure accounts for approximately 80% of the Authority's net revenue budget requirement. Consequently, the cost of pay awards and other contractual costs such as pay increments are a major factor when budgeting for future years.
- 5.3.2 Our plans continue to assume 2% pay awards for all staff groups, although there is a risk of higher increases being agreed following successive years of pay restraint and considering recent awards across other areas of the public sector. National negotiations on the role of the firefighter and required pay levels are still taking place.
- 5.3.3 The table below summarises the indicative additional costs of 2% pay awards over the life of this plan.

Table 7: Estimated impact of 2% pay awards

	2020-21 £m	2021-22 £m	2022-23 £m	2023-24 £m
Cost of Pay Award	0.857	0.897	0.917	0.934

- 5.3.4 The cost of underestimating pay awards by 1% equates to approximately £450k for a full year. The cost of pay awards is a significant risk factor for our budget and is therefore included in our risk assessment of our General Reserves and Balances, although this will only cover the in-year cost and will not account for the cumulative effect in subsequent years.

The cost of firefighters' pensions has increased significantly. In late 2018, we were notified of the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) latest valuation of the firefighters' pension fund. This confirmed a significant increase in employer contribution rates for 2019-20 onwards. The Government agreed to fund 90% of the additional costs in 2019-20 by way of Section 31 grant funding and this is continuing in 2020-21, but funding beyond 2020-21 has yet to be determined. The Government has indicated that this will be part of the Spending Review 2020

process. For this MTFP our share of grant for 2020-21 and future years has been estimated at £2.7m, the same as 2019-20, pending final confirmation from the Home Office. The previous MTFP assumed that the grant would increase in line with inflation each year.

- 5.3.5 We have also seen an increase in costs for the Local Government Pension Scheme. Following the latest triennial valuation, the change to our employer contribution rate will see costs increase by an estimated £77k.

5.4 Other Inflationary Commitments

- 5.4.1 The level of general inflation in the economy as a whole is growing and we continue to see price pressures in fire specific cost areas. We also need to apply inflation increases to budgets where there is a contractual or legal commitment or for items beyond our control, such as business rates and utility costs. The total amount that has been allowed for contractual inflation in future years is approximately £205k each year.

5.5 2019-20 Budget Requirement

- 5.5.1 Taking all of the changes into account, the Net Budget Requirement for 2020-21 is £57.064m as summarised below:

Table 8: Budget Requirement 2020-21

	Budget 2020-21 £m
Revenue Budget	
- Employees	48.247
- Premises	3.789
- Transport	1.495
- Supplies & Services	5.229
- Agency & Contracted Out	2.274
- Democratic Representation	0.115
- Capital Financing/Leasing	3.280
- Income	-6.697
- Transfers to/from Reserves	-0.668
Net Budget Requirement	57.064

5.6 Medium Term Forecast

- 5.6.1 The table below shows updated projections of the Authority's budget requirement from 2020-21 to 2023-24, based on the agreed Financial Principles, current data received from our constituent authorities, Service spending proposals and our Strategic Assessment of Risk, previously outlined in Section 3.

5.6.2 For planning purposes, we have assumed a net base budget cost increase of £250k from 2021-22 to fund the financial consequences of the issues outlined in the Strategic Assessment of Risk and this is included in our forecasts that follow.

Table 9: Estimated Revenue Budget 2019-20 to 2023-24

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Revenue Budget	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
- Employees	46.580	48.247	49.274	49.806	50.814
- Premises	3.884	3.789	3.861	3.928	3.997
- Transport	1.455	1.495	1.503	1.507	1.519
- Supplies & Services	4.893	5.229	5.229	5.297	5.368
- Contract Out Services	2.307	2.274	2.296	2.302	2.297
- Democratic Rep	0.094	0.115	0.115	0.115	0.115
- Capital Financing	3.338	3.280	4.091	4.563	4.913
- Reserve Transfers	-0.470	-6.697	-6.657	-6.626	-6.633
- Income	-6.236	-0.668	-0.472	0.211	0.215
Service Budget Requirement	55.845	57.064	59.242	61.104	62.605

5.6.3 Looking beyond 2020-21, based on our funding assumptions and forecast spending plans, we have indicative funding deficits of £1.32m rising to £2.85m between 2021-22 and 2023-24 respectively:

Table 10: Indicative Funding Gaps/Deficits

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Total Funding	57.064	57.920	58.792	59.752
Estimated Net Service Budget	57.064	59.240	61.103	62.605
Budget surplus(+)/deficit(-)	£0.000	-£1.320	-£2.311	-£2.853

5.6.4 This assumes increases in the Fire Precept of 1.99% each year, together with an expectation that continued funding will be made available to meet our increased employer pension costs (see 5.3 above). Without this continued pension funding the deficit forecasts could potentially increase significantly. As an example, the table below illustrates the impact of the current £2.7m grant being removed in equal steps over a five-year period.

Table 11: Indicative Funding Deficits, without continued funding - employer pension costs

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Total Funding	57.064	57.920	58.792	59.752
Estimated Net Service Budget	57.064	59.780	62.184	64.226
Budget surplus(+)/deficit(-)	£0.000	-£1.860	-£3.392	-£4.474

- 5.6.5 We continue to lobby for increased flexibility around Precept increases. The table below illustrates the significant beneficial impact of a £5 increase in the Fire Precept, which would deliver approximately £2m of additional funding.

Table 12: Indicative Funding Deficits, with £5 Precept increase in 2021-22

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Total Funding	57.064	59.891	60.832	61.864
Estimated Net Service Budget	57.064	59.240	61.103	62.605
Budget surplus(+)/deficit(-)	£0.000	£0.651	-£0.271	-£0.741

- 5.6.6 To bridge the indicative budget deficits, the Service will use its reserves and balances to support Service transformation and the associated transition costs; and look to find further reductions in budgets and/or cost efficiencies through the Communities Programme.

6. Capital Expenditure and Financing

6.1 Capital Expenditure Programme

- 6.1.1 The Capital Programme, covering the anticipated revised programme for 2019-20 and requirements through to 2023-24 is shown in the table below. The revised amounts shown for 2019-20 include projects carried forward from 2018-19 and anticipated in-year changes to the programme, with £1.242m funded from grants and other reserves.
- 6.1.2 The Capital Programme for 2020-21 totals £10.394m, the majority of which will require funding through prudential borrowing.

Table 13: Capital Programme

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
	Revised	Indicative	Indicative	Indicative	Indicative
Capital Budget	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Property/Estates	1.758	2.087	923	1.150	1.140
Vehicles	0.946	6.906	4.581	3.269	2.148
Equipment	1.198	229	405	114	1.801
ICT	0.798	1.172	530	565	275
Total	4.700	10.394	6.439	5.098	5.364
Financed By					
Prudential Borrowing	3.458	9.922	6.406	5.098	5.364
Capital Reserves	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Grants/Other Reserves	1.242	0.472	0.033	0.000	0.000
Capital Receipts	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Total	4.700	10.394	6.439	5.098	5.364

- 6.1.3 The 2020-21 Capital Programme includes the completion of the project to replace nineteen large fire appliances. A further seventeen large fire appliances and four 4x4 fire appliance are due for replacement over the following three years. A provisional sum of £662k is included in 2022-23 for the purchase of a fourth aerial appliance.
- 6.1.4 The programme for 2018-19 and 2019-20 included a major refresh of personal protective equipment (PPE), circa £1.6m. Breathing Apparatus will also be required to be replaced in a major refresh at a similar cost of circa £1.6m although this has been pushed back to 2023-24 financial year.
- 6.1.5 The programme also incorporates ongoing ICT requirements as determined by the 'ICT Roadmap' and this includes IT hardware and software replacements, communications equipment, systems and infrastructure.
- 6.1.6 Also included in the Capital Programme are the outcomes of a property condition surveys, identifying the property assets in most need of attention now and over the next few years. No provision has been made for major station replacements or enhancements.

6.2 Financing the Capital Programme

- 6.2.1 The table in 6.1.2 above also shows the assumptions currently being made about financing the Capital Programme. Capital expenditure is generally funded by a number of sources, namely capital receipts, direct revenue contributions, specific capital grants and, under the capital accounting regime in respect of local authority capital accounting, through prudential borrowing.
- 6.2.2 We have fully utilised our capital reserves and capital receipts over the previous three financial years to fund our Capital Programme. Following agreement with the Home Office, some elements of the Capital Programme are being funded from the Transformation Grant across 2019-20 to 2021-22. Additionally, £750k of direct revenue contributions will be made in 2019-20. Any shortfall of funding then has to be made up through prudential borrowing as shown in the table on page 20.
- 6.2.3 Prudential borrowing is undertaken usually at the end of the financial year in which the expenditure is incurred. Currently, the revenue costs of borrowing are approximately £75k per £1m borrowed (based on interest rate of 3.5% and debt repayment of 4% over a 25-year period). The Service's revenue budget requirement includes provision for the costs of prudential borrowing as indicated in the table on page 20.

- 6.2.4 Given our level of reserves and balances we have used surplus cash balances as a temporary measure to pay for capital expenditure. In the short-term, this under-borrowing has resulted in annual budget savings of around £675k per annum, based on an interest rate of 3.5% and debt repayment of 4%. Such a position is not sustainable in the longer term, particularly as our reserves and balances are utilised to support the MTFP, eroding the level of cash balances we hold.
- 6.2.5 Within the Revenue Budgets for 2019-20 to 2023-24 (included in the table in paragraph 5.5.1, under capital financing) are the costs of prudential borrowing in respect of the previous years' Capital Programmes i.e. 2021-22 will include the capital financing costs of any prudential borrowing required (currently estimated £9.9m) in respect of the 2020-21 Capital Programme.
- 6.2.6 Future capital requirements arising from the Communities Programme, in particular around assets (i.e. stations and vehicles), will impact on 2021-22 and beyond. Therefore, it is anticipated that programmes identified in 2021-22 and beyond will be adjusted to reflect any new requirements following the outcomes of the Communities Programme.
- 6.2.7 Beyond 2019-20, the Capital Programme will be predominantly funded through prudential borrowing as all other available capital funding resources would have been exhausted.

7. Reserves Strategy

7.1 Introduction and Background

- 7.1.1 The Authority needs to maintain separate reserves and balances to help deal with unexpected contingencies and specific risks that cannot be managed within the annual revenue budget, and to provide a working balance to help manage cash flow fluctuations arising from their normal business activities. An annual review of reserves is carried out as part of the budget setting cycle.
- 7.1.2 Section 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires that, when setting the budget for the forthcoming year, Precepting authorities should have regard to the level of reserves needed to provide sufficient resources to finance estimated future expenditure, plus any appropriate allowances that should be made for contingencies.
- 7.1.3 Best practice on the use and management of reserves and balances is provided by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and the Local Authority Accounting Panel (LAAP) guidance, specifically LAAP Bulletin 99 - 'Local Authority Reserves and Balances'. This was issued in July 2014, but since then many references have been made to the scale of public sector reserves by various parties.

7.1.4 In May 2018 the Government published the new Fire and Rescue National Framework for England which introduces a requirement for combined fire and rescue authorities to publish a Reserve Strategy on their website and outlined the detail which should be included. The Reserves Strategy forms part of our MTFP.

7.2 Strategic Context

7.2.1 There are a number of reasons why a fire and rescue authority might hold reserves, these include to:

- (a) mitigate potential future risks such as increased demand and costs
- (b) help absorb the costs of future liabilities
- (c) temporarily plug a funding gap, should resources be reduced suddenly
- (d) enable an authority to resource one-off policy developments and initiatives without causing an unduly disruptive impact on council tax; and
- (e) spread the cost of large-scale projects which span a number of years.

7.2.2 Reserves only provide one-off funding so the Authority aims to avoid using reserves to meet regular and ongoing financial commitments, other than as part of a sustainable medium-term budget plan.

7.2.3 **Long-Term Sustainability** - Reserves are an essential tool to ensure long-term budget stability, particularly at a time when the Authority is facing significant year on year reductions in grant funding over the medium term.

7.2.4 Reserve Balances have been identified as a key indicator of financial health and the Authority continues to have an appropriate level of reserves to deal with identified risks. As a minimum, there are sufficient balances to support the budget requirements and provide an adequate contingency for budget risks.

7.2.5 There are two different types of reserve, and these are:

- (a) **General Balances** – This Reserve is non-specific and is held to fund any unforeseen spending that had not been included in the base budget e.g. excessive operational activity resulting in significant retained pay costs.
- (b) **Earmarked Reserves** – These reserves are held to fund a specific purpose and can only be used to fund spending associated with that specific purpose. Should it transpire that not all of the agreed funds are required then unused earmarked reserves will be returned to General Balances.

7.2.6 **Provisions** are also held in addition to reserves providing funding for a liability or loss that is known with some certainty that it is expected to occur in the future, but the timing and amount is less certain.

7.3 Risk Assessment to determine the adequacy of General Balances

- 7.3.1 As a well-managed Authority, we strive to maintain as low a level of General Balances as possible, whilst still covering our financial risks. Being a single-purpose authority, we have no opportunity to use cross-service subsidies to meet unanticipated expenditure and so, proportionally, our General Balance may be slightly higher than for a multi-purpose authority.
- 7.3.2 The Authority has a robust approach to managing risk and there are effective arrangements for financial control in place. That said, given the high level of influence that third parties, such as the Local Government Employers and Government departments have on its income and expenditure, there is always a risk that the Authority will unexpectedly become liable for expenditure that it has not budgeted for.
- 7.3.3 The Authority has set a Financial Principle for General Balances to be at £2.5m or 5% of the annual revenue budget, whichever is the higher. The level of General Balances will be managed within this principle, with any amount in excess of £2.5m or 5% being transferred to the earmarked transformational improvement reserves.
- 7.3.4 The Financial Principle is a useful control measure but is a rudimentary way of assessing the adequacy of General Balances. A more meaningful approach is to develop a risk assessment. The Authority considers both measures as part of its annual reserves strategy.
- 7.3.5 A risk assessment of the adequacy of General Balances is carried out annually to determine the extent to which the Authority is exposed to uninsured and unbudgeted losses. The risk assessment for the coming financial year, 2020-21, has been prepared as part of the budget setting process and is shown in Appendix A. The impact and scale of potential losses has been estimated to calculate a potential net financial impact of £2.9m. At the start of 2020-21, General Balances are expected to be £2.8m and therefore it will not be necessary to amend the amount based on the current risk assessment as the difference is not considered material.

7.4 Annual Review of Earmarked Reserves

- 7.4.1 The Authority has a number of earmarked reserves which have been established for specific purposes where there have been timing differences at budget setting or year end, or emerging risks or cost pressures. The relevance of, and balance in, each of these is reviewed annually and the Authority is informed of the latest plans for the balances held in such reserves. As part of the annual review of reserves, earmarked reserves are presented in broad categories and analysed as outlined overleaf.

Earmarked Reserves – Investment for Improvement

- 7.4.2 A significant amount of funding has been set aside in reserves to support the change activity of the Authority through the delivery of the Community Safety Plan. 'Investment for Improvement' reserves will be used to invest in transformation projects and the development of our people which will support the modernisation of the Service. If restructure is required, reserve funding will be used to pay for associated redundancy and restructuring costs.
- 7.4.3 These 'Investment for Improvement' reserves, which are subject to regular review, are detailed below:

Table 14: Investment for Improvement

	Balance 1 Apr 19	Forecast spend 19-20	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 20	Forecast spend 20-21 to 23-24	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 24
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Transformational Improvement	7.470	0.316	7.786	-7.786	0.000
Youth Intervention	0.294	-0.065	0.229	-0.229	0.000
Leadership & Organisational Development	0.306	-0.123	0.183	-0.183	0.000
Apprenticeships	0.096	-0.032	0.064	-0.064	0.000
TOTAL	8.166	0.096	8.262	-8.262	0.000

- 7.4.4 Unless significant savings are identified from projects over the medium-term, there will be a requirement to draw down against the transformation improvement reserves. The next iteration of the Reserves Strategy will include further detail on the impact of the outcomes Communities Programme, which will in turn identify remaining budget pressures. At the moment, it is forecast that all of the transformation improvement reserves will be spent over the medium-term financial planning period.

Earmarked Reserves - Capital Replacement and Development

- 7.4.5 The Authority has had a strategy in place to reduce borrowing and use its available cash balances to fund capital expenditure and reduce its capital financing costs as a result. Balances held within the Capital Replacement Reserve, as well as available capital receipts, have all now been utilised as part of this strategy.
- 7.4.6 Future Capital Programmes will therefore need to rely on prudential borrowing or other specific resources that may be identified. If there is a need for further investment in our estate, infrastructure, vehicles and equipment above that already identified in replacement programmes, any additions to this reserve will help to fund the acquisition or enhancement, subject to long-term affordability. A modest £100k contribution to the Capital Replacement Reserve is currently included in the Revenue Budget each year.

7.4.7 Planning for the Capital Programme is undertaken as part of the annual budget setting programme and so each year the Authority will have the opportunity to review the funding options of the programme. The forecast use of capital replacement reserves will be determined by that programme. Given that it is prudent to maintain the long-term strategy to reduce, ideally remove, reliance on external borrowing to fund capital expenditure, a healthy level of reserves will be maintained wherever possible.

Table 15: Capital replacement and development reserves

	Balance 1 Apr 19 £m	Forecast spend 19-20 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 20 £m	Forecast spend 20-21 to 23-24 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 24 £m
Planning Gain	0.407	0.000	0.407	-0.407	0.000
Capital Replacement	0.000	0.100	0.100	0.400	0.500
TOTAL	0.407	0.100	0.507	-0.007	0.500

Earmarked Reserves - Specific Projects

7.4.8 The Authority may establish Earmarked Reserves for items which have been identified through a business case to address a specific risk or complete a specific project. These may form part of the planning cycle, either addressing a risk or maintaining the status quo, rather than being potential improvement activities. Expenditure will normally be spread over several financial years but there may be instances where a longer-term risk has been identified and provided for which may exceed the MTFP period.

7.4.9 These one-off reserves will be reviewed annually and either utilised, maintained or enhanced. Any unspent funds remaining at the end of any specific projects may be transferred to an alternative reserve, such as Investment for Improvement or Capital Replacement Reserve.

Table 16: Specific Projects Reserves

	Balance 1 Apr 19 £m	Forecast spend 19-20 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 20 £m	Forecast spend 20-21 to 23-24 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 24 £m
Service Control	0.580	0.000	0.580	-0.580	0.000
ESMCP	0.891	-0.200	0.691	-0.691	0.000
Emergency Medical Response	0.200	0.000	0.200	0.000	0.200
TOTAL	1.671	-0.200	1.471	-1.271	0.200

7.4.10 Explanation of specific project reserves:

- (a) **Service Control Reserve** – The Authority is part of a tri-service initiative through our Networked Fire Service Partnership with Devon and Somerset and Hampshire Fire and Rescue Services for the provision of Control functions. This reserve was set up to meet the longer transitional costs of joining up of the former two Control functions of the former Dorset and Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authorities in August 2015, at its current location in Potterne.
- (b) **Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP)** – The Authority has committed to be part of the ESMCP national project which provides the technology and network to allow Emergency Services a dedicated method of communication whilst being more financially efficient than its predecessor. Whilst funding has been allocated on a regional basis, there is a need to support the project beyond the funding (which has been allocated for discrete time periods) because of the South West region being the last to transition, which is why the reserve was established. The national project is currently under scrutiny of the Public Accounts Committee and may be subject to change or cancellation. If cancelled, there is a risk that the current Airwave facility will cost the Authority more, although at this stage that cannot be quantified.
- (c) **Emergency Medical Response** – Members approved the establishment of this reserve as start-up funding to support the costs of trialling new approaches to Emergency Medical Response.

Earmarked Reserves – Other Reserves

7.4.11 Some reserves are earmarked for supporting any shortfalls in future revenue budgets which are identified during the development of the MTFP.

7.4.12 These Earmarked Reserves, which are subject to regular review, are detailed below:

Table 17: Earmarked Reserves

	Balance 1 Apr 19 £m	Forecast spend 19-20 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 20 £m	Forecast spend 20-21 to 23-24 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 24 £m
Ill-Health Retirement	0.402	-0.151	0.251	-0.251	0.000
Hydrants	0.119	0.000	0.119	-0.119	0.000
Insurance	1.252	-0.100	1.152	-0.400	0.752
Safeguarding	0.013	0.000	0.013	-0.013	0.000
Leasing Rental	0.581	-0.085	0.496	-0.340	0.156
TOTAL	2.367	-0.336	2.031	-1.123	0.908

Unused Grants Reserves

- 7.4.13 These reserves relate to grants which have been given to the Authority which have either not been fully spent or have been received in advance of intended spend. Where a grant has been received in advance, the Authority's policy is to transfer the funding to an earmarked reserve for spending in future years. Specifically, timing differences have arisen on a number of grants relating to Prevention, funding for National Resilience, Fire Control Project, Transformation and the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Project.
- 7.4.14 Other 'smaller' grants are reviewed annually as part of the budget process to assess whether they are still needed. It is not anticipated that any of the current balances will be carried forward beyond the MTFP.

Table 18: Unused Grants Reserves

	Balance 1 Apr 19 £m	Forecast spend 19-20 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 20 £m	Forecast spend 20-21 to 23-24 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 24 £m
Prevention	0.249	-0.131	0.118	-0.118	0.000
National Resilience	0.296	-0.060	0.236	-0.236	0.000
Networked Fire Service Partnership (NFSP)	0.014	-0.014	0.000	0.000	0.000
Transformation Grant	1.432	-0.737	0.695	-0.695	0.000
Emergency Services Mobile Communication Project (ESMCP)	0.279	-0.139	0.140	-0.140	0.000
Other small grants	0.250	-0.158	0.092	-0.092	0.000
TOTAL	2.520	-1.239	1.281	-1.281	0.000

7.5 Summary – Projected Reserve Balances

Table 19: Summary Projected Reserve Balances

	Balance 1 Apr 19 £m	Forecast spend 19-20 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 20 £m	Forecast spend 20-21 to 23-24 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 24 £m
General Reserves	2.726	0.066	2.792	0.325	3.117
Earmarked Reserves	12.611	-0.340	12.271	-10.663	1.608
Unused Grants Reserves	2.520	-1.239	1.281	-1.281	0.000
TOTAL	17.857	-1.513	16.344	-11.619	4.725