



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE
AUTHORITY**

Item 24/06

MEETING	Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority
DATE OF MEETING	8 February 2024
SUBJECT OF THE REPORT	Budget and Precept Implications 2024-25
STATUS OF REPORT	For open publication
PURPOSE OF REPORT	For consideration and approval
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>This report sets out the revenue and capital budget requirements for 2024-25. The overall level of central funding we expect for 2024-25, our Settlement Funding Assessment from Government, is £18.712m. This is based on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement and includes a 6.7% increase in Revenue Support Grant and inclusion of our existing fire pensions grant of £2.7m. Overall business rates funding is expected to increase but we do not have full details yet. The final amounts are expected to be confirmed in early February when the Final Settlement is published and the local billing authorities have advised us of actual business rates payments. Grants previously described as one-off's – the Services Grant and the Funding Guarantee Grant – have continued for 2024-25 and our total allocation has increased to an estimated £1.7m.</p> <p>The taxbase for the Authority for 2024-25 shows an increase of 0.84%, compared to an increase of 1.43% in 2023-24. There is a net surplus in the council tax collection fund which provides some additional one-off funding.</p>

	<p>A 3% core council tax referendum threshold applies for 2024-25, the £5 precept flexibility offered to all standalone Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) in 2023-24 has not been extended. The Band D Fire Precept for this Authority can be increased to a maximum of £86.95 (an annual increase of £2.52). The Authority is recommended to approve this increase. On that basis overall funding will be £73.919m.</p> <p>Capital investment requirements have been reviewed and the capital programme for 2024-25 totals £14.0m.</p>
<p>RISK ASSESSMENT</p>	<p>The Authority, through its Medium-Term Finance Plan, is able to achieve a balanced budget position for 2024-25, within the context of the Governments’ fiscal policy.</p> <p>Future funding is still a concern. The 2024-25 Finance Settlement is the sixth one-year settlement running and relies on significant amounts of grant funding that are not certain beyond 2024-25. Continued uncertainty surrounding the wider economy and the continuing impact of pay and price inflation are also significant concerns.</p>
<p>COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT</p>	<p>None for the purposes of this report.</p>
<p>BUDGET IMPLICATIONS</p>	<p>These are contained within the body of the report.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p>	<p>It is recommended that the Authority:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the revenue budget of £73.919m and capital budget of £14.0m for 2024-25. 2. Approve the Financial Principles shown in Section 4.2 and the resulting Medium-Term Finance Plan 2024-25 to 2027-28. 3. Approve the basic amount of Band D Fire Precept for the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority at £86.95 for 2024-25.

	<p>4. Authorise the Treasurer to issue precept notices on the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, Dorset Council, Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Council.</p>
<p>BACKGROUND PAPERS</p>	<p>https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/provisional-local-government-finance-settlement-england-2024-to-2025, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), 18 December 2023</p>
<p>APPENDICES</p>	<p>Appendix A - Summary options, Fire Precept Band D Appendix B - Precept requirements 2024-25 Appendix C - Medium Term Finance Plan 2024-25 to 2027-28</p>
<p>REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT</p>	<p>Name: Ian Cotter, Head of Financial Services and Treasurer Email: ian.cotter@dwfire.org.uk Tel no: 07500 066130</p>

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides the final position for the revenue and capital budget requirements for 2024-25. The budget and Band D Fire Precept recommendations are based on the financial principles previously approved by the Authority.
- 1.2 There are a number of issues and financial implications presented to the Authority in this report, and these are based on best information and professional forecasts. At the time of writing the report we have used provisional sums in respect of business rates income, whilst we await final confirmation of amounts from the billing authorities. Billing authorities are required to notify us by the 31 January 2024.

2. Funding issues

2.1 Local Government Finance Settlement 2024-25

- 2.1.1 The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024-25, providing details of our Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA), was published on 18 December 2023, with a 4-week consultation period closing on 15 January 2024. The Final Settlement is expected to be announced in early February 2024 and Members will be informed of any significant changes from the Provisional Settlement.
- 2.1.2 The SFA consists of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) allocation and estimates of the local share of business rates (the Baseline Funding Level (BFL)). The provisional figure for this Authority's SFA for 2024-25 is £18.712m. The breakdown of the SFA is shown below.

Table 1 – Settlement Funding Assessment	2024-25 £m	2023-24 £m	Difference £m
Total SFA	18.712	15.248	+3.464
<i>made up of:</i>			
- Revenue Support Grant (RSG)	7.398	4.403	+2.995
- Baseline Funding Level (BFL)	11.314	10.845	+0.469

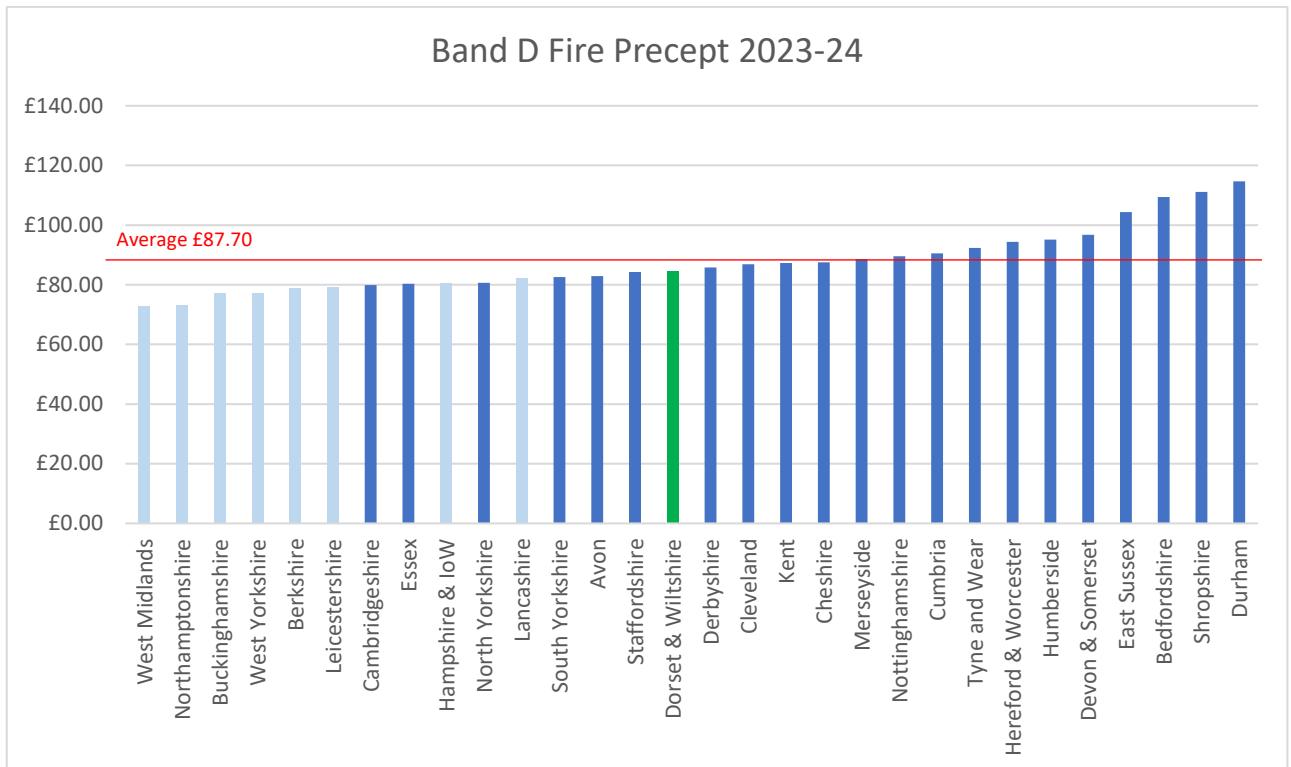
- 2.1.3 RSG allocations have been increased in line with the September 2023 CPI figure of 6.7%. Our existing Firefighters' Pension Scheme grant of £2.7m that has previously been distributed as a separate grant has now been incorporated into the RSG allocation. This has transferred after the RSG inflationary uplift for 2024-25. With this grant now forming part of the RSG allocation it should ensure its provision in future years is secured and we would also expect it to be increased in line with inflation each year.

- 2.1.4 The Baseline Funding Level (BFL) is split between an assumed level of business rates income and a top up grant payment from Government. The 2024-25 settlement has used a weighted average, specific to each Authority, to increase each element. Our total allocation has increased by £0.208m to £5.756m. The actual amount of business rates income that we receive is always subject to some uncertainty, and only confirmed in late January by the local billing authorities. Business rates collection rates have been impacted by additional business rates relief measures put in place by the Government in response to the Covid 19 pandemic and wider economic issues. This report assumes that any shortfall in actual business rates will be compensated for by Government through additional Section 31 grant funding. Any net difference will be adjusted through reserves and balances.
- 2.1.5 The 'Services' grant will continue into 2024-25, but has reduced by 84% to £67k. This was initially provided in 2022-23 "*so local authorities can provide support across the entire sector in recognition of the vital services delivered at every level of local government.*" The Authority received an initial share of this funding of £721k, this reduced to £423k in 2023-24 partly due to the change in Government policy regarding the increase in employer national insurance (NI) costs.
- 2.1.6 The Government introduced what was described as a "*one-off funding guarantee*" in 2023-24. This is to ensure that all local authorities, including FRAs, see at least a 3% increase in their Core Spending Power before any decisions about organisational efficiencies, use of reserves or council tax levels. The Authority received a total of £178k in 2023-24, one of three FRAs to benefit from this. In 2024-25, thirty-one out of the forty-four English fire and rescue authorities will receive an allocation having hit the revised 4% threshold announced by Government on 24 January 2024. The Authority now expects to receive an estimated £1.658m in 2024-25.
- 2.1.7 The Settlement also continues to provide a Rural Services grant to 'super-sparse' areas and our share of this is £67k, a small increase on last year now following the announcement of additional funding on 24 January.

2.2 Local funding

- 2.2.1 The Authority has a history of being a low funded, low spending Authority. Currently, only 27% of our funding is provided centrally, with the remaining 73% coming from local council tax funding.
- 2.2.2 The low level of central funding inevitably places pressure on levels of fire precept, but our level of precept (£84.43 in 2023-24) is still below the national average of £87.70 for all standalone FRAs (see Chart 1 below).

Chart 1: Band D fire precept 2023-24 (all standalone fire authorities)



2.2.3 The Authority has continued to promote the case for local council tax flexibility and the option for a further £5 de-minimis increase in the fire precept in 2024-25 for all standalone FRAs. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) provided detailed evidence of the pressures being seen nationally across the sector to Government in the build up to the 2024-25 Provisional Settlement, but the additional flexibility has not been granted.

2.2.4 The other referendum principles proposed in the 2024-25 provisional finance settlement consultation document are:

- a core council tax referendum principle for all local authorities of up to 3%.
- an adult social care (ASC) precept of 2%, for all authorities responsible for ASC services.
- a bespoke council tax referendum principle of 3% or £5, whichever is higher, for shire district councils.
- a referendum principle of £13 for police authorities.
- no referendum principles for mayoral combined authorities or town and parish councils.

2.2.5 Total fire precept funding is also dependent on increases in the taxbase, i.e. the number of Band D equivalent households in the Authority area. On average across

the whole of the Authority area our taxbase for 2024-25 has increased by approximately 0.84%, compared to an increase of 1.43% for 2023-24.

2.2.6 Our Medium-Term Finance Plan (MTFP) assumption for future growth remains at 1%, and each 1% variation is worth approximately £508k.

2.2.7 There are also one-off collection fund surpluses and deficits reported by the billing authorities, which offset or add to the amount of council tax income collected each year. A net surplus of £186k is to be included in the 2024-25 budget. This is a reduction from £374k in 2023-24. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic the surplus position averaged in excess of £600k.

2.3 Funding summary

2.3.1 Based on the financial position of the Authority, Members are asked to approve increasing the Band D Fire Precept by 2.99% for 2024-25. On that basis, the projected level of funding available for 2024-25 is £73.919m as shown in table 2 below.

Table 2 - Total Funding 2024-25	
Taxbase	572,960
Band D Fire Precept (£)	£86.95
Fire Precept (£m)	£49.819m
Council tax Collection Fund Surplus/Deficit (-) (£m)	£0.186m
Revenue Support Grant (RSG) (£m)	£7.398m
Business rates retention and Top Up grant (£m)	£10.679m
Business rates Collection Fund Surplus/Deficit (-) (£m)	£0.600m
Other government grants	£5.237m
Total Funding (£m)	£73.919m

3. Budget requirement 2024-25

3.1 In determining the 2024-25 budget requirement there are a number of influencing factors, outside of the issues around precepts and Government funding. The main factors are considered below.

3.2 Pay and Pensions

3.2.1 Staffing costs represent a significant element of the overall budget requirement. Based on previously agreed financial principles we ordinarily assume year-on-year pay awards of 2% for all staff groups. Members will be aware that the Fire pay award for 2023 was 5%, following on from the 7% agreed for 2022. The local

government pay award for 2023-24 was £1,925 or 3.88%, whichever was higher. The average cost of the award to the Authority is estimated to be around 5.8% based on our pay and grading structure. The impact of these pay awards were in excess of what the Authority had been able to budget for and the additional cost of £2.3m has now been built into the base budget allocation for 2024-25. Our projections for 2024-25 include a 3% increase for all staff groups before returning to 2% from 2025-26 onwards. The 3% assumption for 2024-25 adds a further £1.8m to the budget requirement. Anything more than 3% is unaffordable in the context of our overall financial position. A 1% variation in the pay award is worth approximately £550k.

- 3.2.2 As Members are aware, our employer pension costs have increased significantly in the recent years, firstly as a result of the 2016 valuation of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS), which set the employer contribution rate from April 2019, and then an increase in rates following the 2019 triennial Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) valuation. The Government has continued to fund 90% of the additional FPS cost by way of additional grant, with this Authority receiving £2.7m per year. This funding has now been included in our main Settlement Funding Assessment from 2024-25.
- 3.2.3 We expected to see a further increase in employer contribution rates for the FPS following the 2020 Scheme valuation as costs associated with the McCloud remedy and other FPS scheme valuation changes impact. The new employer contribution rate applying from April 2024 has now been confirmed. This shows the contribution rate increasing from 28.8% to 37.6%. Employer costs are currently budgeted at £6.8m and the increase in contribution rates is estimated to cost an additional £2.1m. The Home Office will be funding this increased cost with a new fire pensions grant but this is currently only guaranteed for 2024-25. Funding in future years is dependent on the outcomes of the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

3.3 Other budget issues and risks

- 3.3.1 Over the past few financial years, the Service has been provided with some one-off funding by the Home Office to support new protection and building safety requirements post-Grenfell. In 2020-21 £339k was provided, with a further £316k provided in 2021-22 and £271k provided in 2022-23 and 2023-24. These sums have supported some initial short-term investment in resources, but are all now spent. Our financial plans assume that there will be further one-off funding made available in 2024-25 at the same level as in 2023-24.
- 3.3.2 The level of general inflation in the economy as a whole has increased significantly from late 2021, right through 2022, before showing some reduction in the later months of 2023. The annual rate of inflation published for December 2021 was running at 5.4%, rising to 10.1% by September 2022, and then falling to 6.7% in September 2023. We have continued to see significant price pressures across all

budget lines, revenue and capital, throughout this period. Inflation increases also need to be factored into budgets where there is a contractual or legal commitment or for items beyond our control, such as utility costs. Base non-pay budgets will have increased by an estimated £1m more by 2025-26 than was estimated in February 2022.

3.4 Resourcing and Savings Programme

3.4.1 Overall costs have increased significantly and despite the welcome increase in funding for 2023-24 with the £5 council tax flexibility this has not been sustained into 2024-25. The Service now faces some difficult choices to achieve a sustainable budget and medium-term finance plan after 2024-25. Officers have set a target of saving a further £2.5m annually within the next 12-24 months.

3.4.2 Following the development of the new 2024-2028 Community Risk Management Plan (our Community Safety Plan), the Service will be reviewing the disposition and productivity of its operational resources. Whilst numerous changes have already been made to frontline delivery, a new comprehensive review of how we respond to fires and other emergencies has been completed. This review takes into account the changing picture of risk and demand in the Service area.

3.4.3 Having completed the comprehensive fire cover review, we know that, with some difficult decisions, we have opportunities to better match our resources to the risks we face. We must take these difficult decisions to adopt a risk-based approach to maximise the productivity and efficiency of the operational resources across the whole of the area in a financially viable and sustainable way. This will mean some challenging choices to stop, redesign and in some cases invest in operational response, with an overall objective to save £2.5m per year.

3.5 Overall budget requirement

3.5.1 Overall, the net budget requirement for 2024-25 is therefore £73.919m as summarised below:

Table 3 – Revenue Budget requirement 2024-25	Service budget 2024-25 £m
- Employees	60.217
- Premises	4.590
- Transport	1.545
- Supplies & services	6.181
- Agency & contracted out	2.997
- Democratic representation	0.116
- Capital financing/leasing	5.113
- Income	-6.026

- Transfers to/from Reserves	-0.814
Net budget requirement	73.919

4. Medium Term Finance Plan (MTFP)

4.1 The Medium-Term Finance Plan 2023-24 to 2026-27 shown at Appendix C is also recommended for approval. The MTFP supports the delivery of the Community Safety Plan, which set out the key challenges and risks facing us, along with how we intend to meet and reduce them. This is further supported by our bi-annual Strategic Assessment of Risk. The MTFP is also based on a series of Financial Principles, information from our constituent authorities and Service spending proposals.

4.2 The Financial Principles currently adopted in the plan are as follows:

Table 4	2024-25	2025-26 onwards	financial impact of 1% variation
1. Change in government funding settlement	+6.7%	+0.0%	£187k
2. Change in council taxbase	+0.8%	+1.0%	£508k
3. Core Council tax referendum threshold	+3.0%	+2.0%	£503k
4. Change in Band D council tax	+2.99%	+1.99%	£503k
5. Funding Guarantee Grant	£1.658m	£1.0m	£166k
6. Fire Pensions Grant	£2.1m	£2.1m	£210k
7. Pay award - Uniformed	+3.0%	+2.0%	£411k
8. Pay award - Corporate	+3.0%	+2.0%	£170k
9. Non-pay inflation*	various	+2%	£165k
10.	Maintain General Balances at in line with the risk assessment		

* General provision only. Specific additional provision has been made on certain budget lines

4.3 Based on our budget requirement and these assumptions the indicative net budget position over the medium term is as follows:

Table 5	2024-25 £m	2025-26 £m	2026-27 £m	2027-28 £m
Total funding	73.919	73.972	75.514	77.105
Estimated net service budget	73.919	75.996	78.002	80.196
Budget surplus (+)/deficit (-)	0.000	-2.024	-2.488	-3.091

4.4 To achieve a more sustainable medium-term financial position our assessment is that there is a need for continued council tax flexibility in future years. Table 6 below illustrates the beneficial impact of a further £5 increase in the fire precept for 2025-26, which would deliver over £1.7m of additional funding:

Table 6	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Total funding	73.919	76.351	77.945	79.590
Estimated net service budget	73.919	75.996	78.002	80.196
Budget surplus (+)/deficit (-)	0.000	0.355	-0.057	-0.606

4.5 Alternatively, continuation of the 2.99% core referendum principle past 2024-25 would provide some additional funding, although not enough to achieve the more sustainable medium-term financial position that we are seeking. Table 7 below illustrates this scenario:

Table 7	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Total funding	73.919	75.136	77.221	79.389
Estimated net service budget	73.919	75.996	78.002	80.196
Budget surplus (+)/deficit (-)	0.000	-0.860	-0.781	-0.807

5. Reserves and balances

5.1 The Service will need to use its reserves and balances in order to provide a sustainable long-term financial position. Full details of our Reserves and Balances strategy are included in the MTFP (Appendix C).

5.2 General balances and reserves

5.2.1 General balances are set aside as a safety net to cover unplanned and unbudgeted costs. 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.

5.2.2 General Balances at the start of 2023-24 amounted to £3.052m, increasing to £3.102m by the end of the financial year. We continue to review the general balances risk assessment on an annual basis as part of the budget setting cycle and the current assessment shows a potential net financial impact of around £3.15m. The reserve balance will increase to this level during 2024-25 and this is sufficient to mitigate the assessed risk.

5.3 Other earmarked reserves

- 5.3.1 The Authority has a number of other reserves that are maintained to help to deal with specific risks that cannot be managed within the annual revenue budget. This includes some of those items highlighted in our Strategic Assessment of Risk, such as the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) and Network Fire Services Partnership (NFSP) projects including the renewal of our 999 mobilising system.
- 5.3.2 Previously the Authority has been able to use some reserves to offset long-term borrowing in supporting its capital investment plans. Savings planned in previous budgets allowed us to add funds to our Capital Financing Reserve to support future capital investment and reduce borrowing costs. This meant that there is currently £9.5m available to support capital investment moving forwards, and in particular provide funding for essential investment in training facilities and a new mobilising system.
- 5.3.3 This is a sensible use of reserves, helping to reduce the strain of capital financing costs on future revenue budgets.

5.4 Reserves summary

- 5.4.1 The table below summaries the current forecast for reserves. Full details of our Reserves and Balances strategy are included in the MTFP (Appendix C).

Table 8: Summary - Projected reserve balances

Table 8	Balance 1 Apr 23 £m	Forecast spend 23-24 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 24 £m	Forecast spend 24-25 to 27-28 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 28 £m
General reserves	3.052	0.050	3.102	0.227	3.329
Earmarked reserves	14.476	-0.095	14.381	-12.692	1.689
Unused grants reserves	2.136	-0.491	1.645	-1.645	0.000
TOTAL	19.664	-0.536	19.128	-14.110	5.018

6. Capital programme

6.1 Capital expenditure summary

6.2 Our estimated capital expenditure requirements for 2023-24 to 2027-28 are shown in table 10 below. The capital budget for 2024-25 recommended for approval is £14m.

Table 9: Capital Programme 2023-24 to 2027-28

Table 9	Current Estimate 2023-24 £m	Indicative Budget 2024-25 £m	Indicative Budget 2025-26 £m	Indicative Budget 2026-27 £m	Indicative Budget 2027-28 £m
Capital Expenditure					
Estates	1.437	7.996	2.875	1.437	1.473
Vehicles	4.450	3.284	2.744	2.521	6.444
Equipment	0.238	0.358	1.836	1.485	1.322
ICT	0.970	2.390	2.170	1.228	0.445
TOTAL	7.094	14.028	9.624	6.671	9.684
Financed by					
Prudential borrowing	5.636	9.839	6.067	3.368	9.084
Revenue contributions/ reserves	1.458	4.189	3.557	3.303	0.600
TOTAL	7.094	14.028	9.624	6.671	9.684

6.3 Estates

6.3.1 The 2024-25 programme includes the outcomes of property conditions surveys, identifying the property assets in most need of attention now and over the next few years, based on risk and priority, and generally reflects a 7-year refresh cycle. The Estates programme also includes the required investment to deliver the project to provide future-proofed operational training facilities at Devizes Training Centre and Weymouth Fire Station.

6.4 Vehicles

6.4.1 Vehicles are regularly reviewed and are subject to the long-term vehicle replacement policy. The 2024-25 capital programme includes replacement of four large fire appliances, a large off-road fire appliance, six officer response vehicles and a number of other smaller vehicles. Over the following 5 years there is provision to replace a further twenty-two large fire appliances, four 4x4 fire appliances and a number of other specialist and smaller vehicles. The requirements for specialist and general vehicles are all reviewed through the Resourcing and

Savings Programme. Each project looks at the best way of providing the required functions, and covers consideration of vehicles, equipment, technology and crewing requirements.

6.5 Equipment

6.5.1 The main focus of the programme for equipment in 2024-25 is to support operational equipment requirements linked to the vehicle replacement programme. This includes supporting the specialist response reviews outlined above.

6.6 Information Technology and Communications

6.6.1 Ongoing ICT requirements are aligned to the plans set out in the ICT Strategy 2021-2024 and this includes information governance and security, operational communications, ICT resilience, technology management, digital transformation, and business intelligence and data management. The capital programme includes the equipment and systems requirements to support the strategy including investment required to replace the mobilising system used in Fire Control.

6.7 Capital financing

6.7.1 Capital expenditure can be financed from a variety of sources, including capital receipts, direct revenue contributions, reserves, specific grants and through prudential borrowing. The current funding plans are shown in Table 9 on page 13.

6.7.2 Table 9 shows the use of reserves and revenue contributions agreed within the budget strategy to reduce reliance on future borrowing. This includes ongoing contributions of £600k per year, plus a one-off amount of £500k in 2024-25 as a result of additional one-off funding. This will help to reduce the current overall capital financing requirement of the Authority and, consequently, the overall level of debt to be incurred in future years. These additional contributions can be funded from the reduction in capital financing costs achieved from previous reductions in capital spend, recent borrowing at historically low interest rates and the strategy of establishing and using the capital financing reserve.

7. Statutory declarations

7.1 Robustness of the estimates

7.1.1 Under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, the Treasurer, as designated under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 and Section 112 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, is required to report to the Authority when setting its Band D Fire Precept on two issues:

- the robustness of the estimates included in the budget: and,
- the adequacy of the financial reserves in the budget.

- 7.1.2 There are also a range of other safeguards aimed at ensuring local authorities do not over commit themselves financially. These include:
- The Chief Financial Officer's powers under Section 14 of the Local Government Act 1988, which requires a report to the Authority if there is or is likely to be unlawful expenditure or an unbalanced budget
 - The Local Government Finance Act 1992 which requires a local authority to calculate its budget requirement for each financial year, including the revenue costs which flow from capital financing decisions. The Act also requires an Authority to budget to meet its expenditure after taking into account other sources of income. This is known as the 'balanced budget requirement'; and,
 - The Prudential Code, introduced under the Local Government Act 2003, which applies to capital financing and treasury management decisions.
- 7.1.3 Whilst budgets are based on realistic assumptions, some budgets are subject to a degree of estimating error as actual expenditure can be affected by factors outside of the Authority's control, for example major incidents. The estimates have been prepared on an incremental basis, based on existing commitments, adjusted for inflation, increments and other unavoidable cost-drivers, and taking into account variations in service provision.
- 7.1.4 The revenue and capital budgets can be regarded as robust. Although there are risks in the 2024-25 budget, as with any budget, those risks are manageable, and have been taken into account in advising on the level of general reserves at this time.

8. Summary & key messages

- 8.1 The Service's revenue budget requirement for 2024-25 is £73.919m and the Capital Programme requirement is £14.0m.
- 8.2 In order to meet this budget requirement and taking into account the level of funding provided in the Local Government Finance Settlement, Members are asked to approve a Band D Fire Precept of £86.95 for 2024-25. This is the maximum amount whilst also ensuring the Authority does not breach the 3% council tax referendum threshold set by Government. This is recommended as the most prudent and sustainable option, in the face of ongoing economic issues and financial uncertainty.