

# Draft Savings Plan 2022–24

## Tunbridge Wells Borough Council





# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Savings Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Budget Survey Results 2023/24</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Consultation 2024/25</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Financial Principles</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Safeguarding Finances</b>	<b>7</b>

# Foreword

In setting the budget for the most recent years it was necessary to assume a need to temporarily use reserves to balance the budget. However, the combination of greater investment income and significant staff vacancies resulted in the use of reserves not being required and a surplus being transferred to the General Fund. These events were exceptional and cannot be relied on to continue into future years.

It has been two years since the impact of the Pandemic and with income streams now stabilised and with inflation persistently high the Council must set out a savings plan to close the gap between income and expenditure. The Council's External Auditors have made an improvement recommendation that the Council return to the pre-pandemic routine of setting a balanced but without the use of reserves.



# Savings Summary

The table below shows the draft savings plan at this stage in the budget setting process.

Year	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
Net Budget before savings	14,050	14,936	15,977	19,272	20,513	22,607
Business Rates and Grants	(3,232)	(3,232)	(2,632)	(2,632)	(2,632)	(2,632)
Council Tax	(9,929)	(10,426)	(10,948)	(11,497)	(12,073)	(12,677)
Reserves	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>(13,160)</b>	<b>(13,658)</b>	<b>(13,580)</b>	<b>(14,128)</b>	<b>(14,704)</b>	<b>(15,309)</b>
<b>Savings required (cumulative)</b>	<b>889</b>	<b>1,278</b>	<b>2,397</b>	<b>5,144</b>	<b>5,809</b>	<b>7,298</b>
<b>Savings Plan</b>						
Reduction to 39 councillors	(50)	(50)	(50)	(50)	(50)	(50)
Town Hall occupation costs	(140)	(140)	(140)	(140)	(140)	(140)
The Amelia Business Rates	(70)	(70)	(70)	(70)	(70)	(70)
Civic Amenity Vehicle*	(33)	(33)	(33)	(33)	(33)	(33)
Planning Fee Increase	(150)	(150)	(150)	(150)	(150)	(150)
<b>Savings still to find</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>835</b>	<b>1,954</b>	<b>4,701</b>	<b>5,366</b>	<b>6,855</b>

\*Subject to consultation with parish and town councils

Updated June 2023

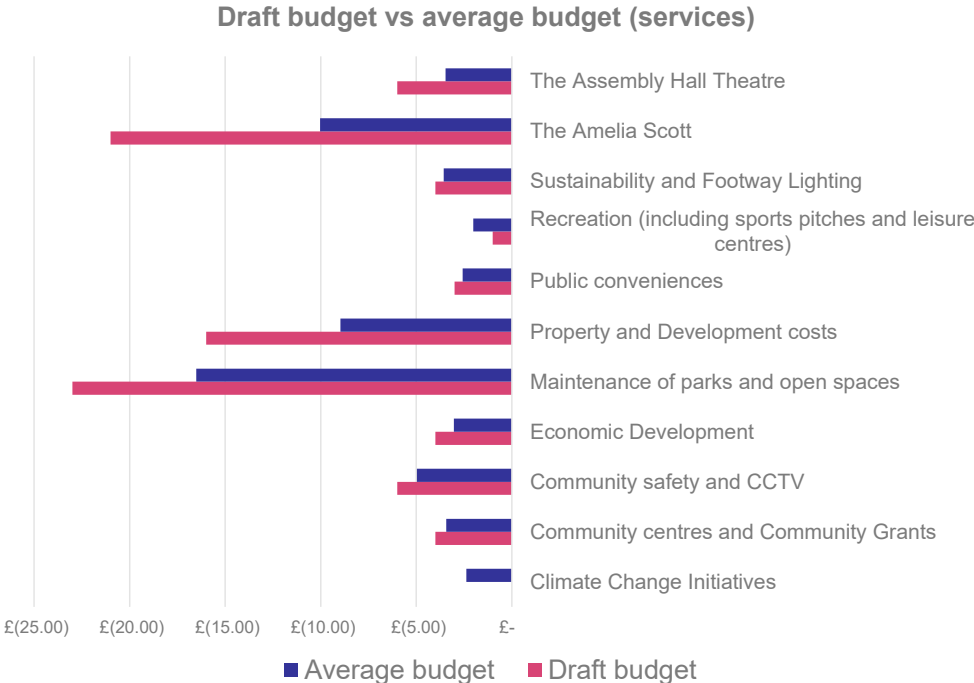
# Budget Survey Results 2023/24

The 2023/24 budget consultation survey public were then asked to allocate a fixed amount of funding across the discretionary services (those provided by choice) to see how this compares with the draft budget. The areas where the public would be most likely to reduce the budget are:

- The Amelia Scott
- Property and development
- The Assembly Hall Theatre

The full results of the consultation were considered by Cabinet and published on the website.

[tunbridgewells.gov.uk/news/2023/february/budget-survey-thank-you-for-taking-part](https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/news/2023/february/budget-survey-thank-you-for-taking-part)



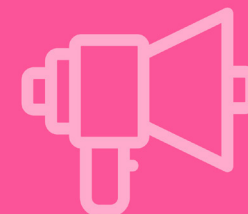
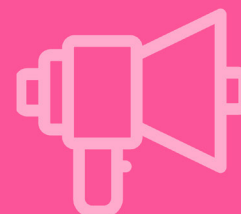
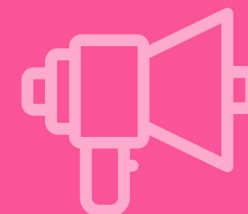
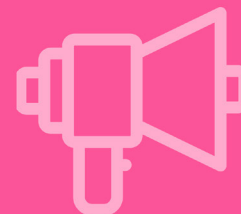
## Consultation 2024/25

A similar budget consultation exercise where the public are asked to allocate funding to arrive at a balance budget is planned to run for four weeks from the 8 December 2023 to 5 January 2024. This is shorter than the usual six weeks, but this will give more time for the results to be considered and potential changes made before the budget is finalised.

A Residents' Survey will run for six weeks (12 June to 23 July 2023) and cover broader financial principles which can also be considered as part of the budget setting process.

**talkingpointtunbridgewells.  
[uk.engagementhq.com/residents-survey-2023](https://uk.engagementhq.com/residents-survey-2023)**

In addition a Councillor Convention was held on 20 June 2023 to gather the collective thoughts and suggestions from all three tiers of democratically elected representatives with responsibility across the borough.





# Financial Principles

1. The Budget Strategy is as follows:  
*Where ongoing expenditure is met from fees, charges, government grant and council tax with only the use of earmarked reserves being used to meet one-off priority expenditure.*
2. The Council Tax Strategy is as follows:  
*The MTFS assumes that the Council will increase Council Tax to the 'cap' threshold as this is the basis used by the Government in their assessment of the resources available to the Council."*
3. The Reserves Strategy is as follows:  
*A £4million minimum level of reserves will be maintained and the proceeds of capital disposals will be prioritised to restore the level of reserves to pre-pandemic levels.*
4. The Property Asset Oversight Panel will  
*consider the route to dispose of surplus assets and ensure the resumption of capital receipts to fund the capital programme.*
5. The External Borrowing Strategy is as follows:  
*The Council will remain free of external debt.*





# Safeguarding Finances

Cllr Christopher Hall explains what safeguarding finances means for the council and for residents.

My name is Christopher Hall. I'm the Liberal Democrat member for Broadwater and also the Portfolio holder for Finance and Performance. Safeguarding the Council's Finances is not surprisingly my principal mission in life, but it's something that touches every aspect of the work the Council does.

The Council delivers a wide variety of invaluable services, and these can only be supported if there's a solid financial base upon which to provide residents with what they need. Inflation has sky-rocketed which has an impact on our costs. Couple that with the withdrawal of funding from central government, and it makes the task of balancing the budget extremely challenging. We can't afford to spend more than we earn or draw on our reserves to plug the gap without running out of money. That's why we need to take action now to put the Council's finances on a stable trajectory for the next few years.

As a resident of Tunbridge Wells since the year 2000 I have seen the town change a lot. It's a wonderful place to live, but as society

changes so do our hopes and expectations of what makes for a good quality of life. There are more demands for safer streets that encourage cycling and walking, good quality sports and leisure facilities, progress on de-carbonisation and a vibrant local economy. We can only make progress with any of these things if we have stable government finances.

We made progress last year on improving our income to pay for services. I appreciate it's never going to be a popular move, but we had to take action to increase fees and charges as well as parking charges in 2022. Before that parking charges hadn't been raised since 2017 so were not even keeping up with inflation. This has helped us raise much need extra revenues to support services and helped us to turn the finances around in time for this coming budget year 2023 - 2024. I am mindful of the cost-of-living crisis and uppermost in my mind is also balancing this with trying to keep increases to an affordable level.

In my budget speech to the Council on 1st March I outlined a three-point strategy for getting the finances on a sustainable footing. Increasing revenue was the first. Second was to look at any efficiency savings that could be made in the budget. The council

gets audited every year, and one of the main recommendations was that the Council implement a savings plan. We're nearing the end of that process and will look at what savings we can make over the summer. This isn't as draconian as it sounds, as a sensible pruning of certain expenses is the most likely outcome. Thirdly, the Council owns around £102m worth of assets, maintaining them at a considerable cost. We need to look at disposing of any that are no longer showing good value for the taxpayer.

If we can continue to implement the 3 point budget plan this year, I am confident that we can get to a position where the finances become less of a key focus and more of a stable platform that we can build from in the future. This will support the other 4 key areas of the Focus on Five as we strive to improve the quality of life for all our residents.

## **Cllr Chris Hall**

Cabinet member for  
Finance and  
Performance

