

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Capital Strategy 2023/24



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1. Introduction and Background

The Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) 2021 Prudential and Treasury Management Codes requires all local authorities to prepare a Capital Strategy report, which will provide the following:

- a high-level long-term overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services
- an overview of how the associated risk is managed
- the implications for future financial sustainability

The aim of this Capital Strategy is to ensure that all elected Members fully understand the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting capital strategy requirements, governance procedures and risk appetite.

The capital strategy has direct links to other key strategic and policy documents, such as:

- The Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan
- The Local Plan
- Asset Management Plan
- Treasury Management Policy and Strategy
- Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)
- Transport Strategy
- Capital Programme
- Procurement Strategy

The Capital Strategy complements the key documents above by defining the approach, structure and governance for the effective financing and management of our capital investment needs and ambitions. It outlines how the Council's existing capital resources will be effectively managed to meet the planned needs and opportunities for meeting the ambitions for future longer-term capital investments.

This strategy will be updated annually to reflect changes in circumstances that may affect the strategy.

2. The Council's Vision and Priorities

2.1 Priorities: Focus on Five

Capital plan schemes should emerge from, or be designed to achieve, the Council's strategic priorities and objectives set out in The Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan. The Borough Partnership has set itself five priorities called the Focus on Five:

- Safeguarding finances
- Vibrant and safer town and villages
- Carbon reduction
- Genuinely affordable housing and social rental housing
- Digital access, transparency and local democracy

The Borough Partnership is made up of eight Cabinet members who have individual areas of responsibility.

2.2 Operating Principles

In delivering the Focus on Five priorities the Council will abide by several key operating principles. These are:

- **Being outward-looking** – we will be community and partnership focused, leveraging social capital where possible
- **Valuing staff** – we recognise the vital importance of staff in delivering our services and will ensure that we remain an employer of choice to attract, retain and develop our employees
- **A learning council** – we will gather feedback from residents and service users, seek best practice from elsewhere and learn from our mistakes
- **Digital first** – ensuring that the widest range of residents and users can access our services digitally (whilst recognising that this will not be possible for everyone).

We will be seeking to reduce the budget deficit in a responsible manner by adopting the following principles:

- **User Pays** – a recognition that users of services should pay for the cost of those services rather than all council taxpayers.
- **Enabling** – exploring areas where others might be better placed to lead on facilities or service delivery.
- **Carbon reduction** – taking opportunities to incentivise behaviour that contributes to our climate emergency goals.

- **Preventing future costs** – taking opportunities to reduce future costs through preventative spend.
- **Delivering (good) growth** – using the opportunities associated with the Local Plan to deliver new homes and business opportunities and more generally being ‘open for business’ – encouraging investments and generating income to reduce the need to cut services.
- **Being opportunistic** – seeking opportunities for external funding, collaboration or the delivery of our priorities by others.

3. Local Context

3.1 Demographic and Economic Change

The borough of Tunbridge Wells is set in the High Weald of Kent, around 70% of which is designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty. Around 55% of the population live in the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells with 45% living in the larger towns of Cranbrook, Paddock Wood and Southborough and the surrounding towns and villages. The borough is bordered by the districts and boroughs of Sevenoaks, Maidstone and Tonbridge and Malling, to the north, whilst to the south it borders Wealden and Rother in East Sussex.

The population of Tunbridge Wells borough has grown by less (0.2%) than the national average (6.3%), and the latest Borough resident population is 115,300 (source: Census 2021 Results unrounded population estimates). This data also shows that the Borough has a higher percentage of its population living in 1 person households (29.4%) than most of its neighbouring authorities (25.6% in Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, 26.4% in Maidstone Borough Council, 26.5% in Sevenoaks District Council and 27.5% in Wealden District Council), with fewer 15 to 24-year-olds and more 45 to 54-year-olds than the national average.

The Borough has become more multi-cultural since the last Census. The proportion of all ethnicities except for White (English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British) have increased since the last Census, with the largest increases seen among Asian, Asian British and White (Other) ethnicities.

Historically, the Borough has had one of the lowest levels of unemployment in the country and the lowest levels of deprivation in the county (source: DLUHC Average Indices of Multiple Deprivation Score 2019). The 2021 Resident median weekly earnings show the borough to have the third highest in the County at £698.70 per week (Source: Nomis ONS). National surveys consistently name the borough of Tunbridge Wells as amongst the happiest and best places to live.

3.2 Sustainable Travel

Recent years have shown that travel patterns are changing and will need to change further to ensure everyone plays their part in reducing carbon emissions.

3.3 Housing

Our economic success and population growth have put pressure on housing demand, and the cost of housing is increasing. Median prices in the borough of Tunbridge Wells have been consistently higher than those of the South- East region, which have in turn tracked higher than those of England as a whole. The borough has experienced further demand for housing since the coronavirus pandemic, due to the desire of people wishing to relocate from London to areas with more outdoor space.

It is estimated that the population of the borough is likely to increase over the next 15 years with over 65s seeing a steady increase in that period. Tunbridge Wells borough continues to have higher average house prices than the rest of Kent and the South East region (as based on Land Registry House Prices 2019). Since 2006, the average price of a house in Tunbridge Wells has increased by £195,753 (an increase of 73%). Comparatively, other areas across Kent and the South East of England have seen increases of 62% (£127,004) and 64% (£145,447) respectively.

In 2019, entry level house prices were approximately 12 times the (workplace based) earnings of households in the borough, representing around a 38% increase since 2009, from around eight times the earnings. Indeed, the relative affordability of homes in Kent as a whole has worsened in both absolute terms and relative to the rest of England.

The rising household numbers and prices, coupled with an ageing population, means that as well as needing to address the affordability of housing, there will be an increasing need to ensure a range of housing types and sizes suitable to meet the needs of older people, including specialist forms of housing, within both the market and affordable sectors

3.4 The Rural Areas

Tunbridge Wells borough is home to a number of attractive towns and villages with a rich natural history, a pleasant built environment and thriving rural businesses. Approximately 70 per cent of the land is designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty. Part of the success of Royal Tunbridge Wells is its pleasant setting and easy access to high quality countryside. Our historic towns and villages act as important service centres and are a vital part of the tourism economy.

Larger towns such as Cranbrook, Paddock Wood, and Southborough are essential focal points for the local economy and access to services. Over many years we have worked with parish and town councils in our area to enhance these features and deliver improved services.

3.5 Tunbridge Wells Town

Royal Tunbridge Wells is rooted in culture, leisure and the arts. It's what first made it a spa-town destination over 400 years ago. Today, the town continues to be a prominent destination, with cultural, leisure and arts opportunities complemented by our beautiful parks and open spaces, our spa town heritage and a wide range of sports and activity clubs on offer. This is a significant benefit to the local economy and for residents across the area.

More people enjoy cultural and arts activities in our area than the average across England. We can capitalise on this, but to do so we need to invest in our facilities.

Our residents value activities for promoting health and wellbeing, but we need to invest in our sports and recreation provision to encourage greater participation. The tourism that comes with being a destination town is an important part of our economy. We will continue to support the industry, encouraging the growth in visitor accommodation, and promoting an all year round offer of attractions that visitors can enjoy.

3.6 Devolution

A national policy agenda for local Government is to devolve local services to public bodies. Devolution means that services which are currently provided and funded by central Government may be devolved to other public bodies. It also means that services we currently provide as a borough council may be devolved to parish and town councils, or community groups.

This is to ensure that services can be provided at the most local level, where knowledge and choice can be used to provide the best services for residents. The models for local Government are changing to recognise this, which is creating both opportunities and challenges.

3.7 Resources and Finances

Public services have been facing funding pressures for some time. We are providing for an increasing population, who are growing older, and have higher expectations. The grant historically received from central Government was redrawn in 2018/19 but the Council was in good financial health, with the budget balanced annually, no long-term debt and unallocated financial reserves of £4 million.

The pandemic had a devastating financial impact on local authority finances with a significant reduction in income from sales, fees and charges. The Council also experienced additional service costs in responding to the Covid-19 emergency. Government put in place several financial support grants and the Council successfully applied for all that were available. This resulted in the cost of services for 2020/21 and 2021/22 being fully funded from council tax, grants and investment income with a small transfer made to the General Fund.

The 2023/24 budget includes the remaining impact to the Council's income from the pandemic and additional cost pressures largely because of rising inflation, labour shortages and supply chain distribution. The situation continues to be fluid and further significant variances can occur across the Council's budget. The 2023/24 budget has been balanced through the temporary use of reserves.

3.8 Climate Emergency

The Council recognises the overwhelming weight of scientific evidence pointing to man-made climate change and the harmful impacts this is having on natural habitats and ecosystems, biodiversity, and our lives in general. It recognises that it has a responsibility to take a firm lead on reducing the Council's and the wider borough's carbon emissions. However, the Council's ability to finance this has become severely limited due to the financial effects of the pandemic and it will require Government support to implement its responsibilities. The Council has agreed to:

- Declare its recognition of global climate and biodiversity emergencies.
- Set up a climate cross party task force to start a dedicated report with actions that it needs to take to address this emergency including how the wider community including businesses, organisations and individuals can be encouraged to make their own contributions to meeting a goal to make the Borough carbon neutral by 2030.
- Ensure that forthcoming plans and strategies set out ways in which the Council can make its contribution to reduce carbon emissions, the degradation of the environment and combating climate change by agreeing an ambition to make the Council's operations carbon neutral by 2030.
- Lobby central government to provide additional resources and to grant the necessary freedoms to deliver the above.
- Take steps with partners to proactively include young people in the process, ensuring that they have a voice in shaping the future by setting up a Citizen's Assembly as a way of also involving residents and businesses in the process as Climate change will have implications for generations to come.

4. Financial Context

4.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy

The MTFs together with the Council's strategic priorities and objectives are used to guide the inclusion of capital programme schemes and form the basis for any capital investment decisions. The MTFs will continue to be a major influence on the 2023/24 and subsequent Capital Programme schemes. The MTFs is updated once a year and the latest version is published on the Council's website.

Capital receipts derived from the sale of capital assets are used as a source of finance for new capital expenditure. The Council's assets are reviewed on a regular basis to identify the potential for disposal.

The demographic and economic features of the Borough give rise to a realistic assessment of very limited opportunities to attract funds from national and regional sources. Nevertheless, the Council will continue to investigate and exploit external funding opportunities.

Capital expenditure is currently funded from specific earmarked reserves, the capital and revenue initiatives reserve, grants from government and other bodies, developer contributions and capital receipts derived from the sale of assets.

All government support for the Council's capital expenditure is by way of capital grants. Government support through capital grants is usually ring-fenced for specific purposes. It is the Council's intention to try and secure capital grants, wherever possible, for schemes which advance the Council's strategic priorities and objectives.

4.2 Current Asset Portfolio

The Council holds a significant asset portfolio that supports both its operational activities and non-operational activities. The table below shows the breakdown of these long-term assets:

	£'000 31 Mar 21	£'000 31 Mar 22
Land & Buildings	£102,346	£103,561
Vehicles, Plant & Equipment	£1,773	£1,625
Infrastructure	£240	£235
Community Assets	£8,566	£8,566

Asset Under Construction	£11,361	£17,671
Heritage Assets	£3,654	£3,763
Investment Property	£710	£710
Intangible Assets	£1,035	£963
Total	£129,685	£137,094

4.3 Reserves

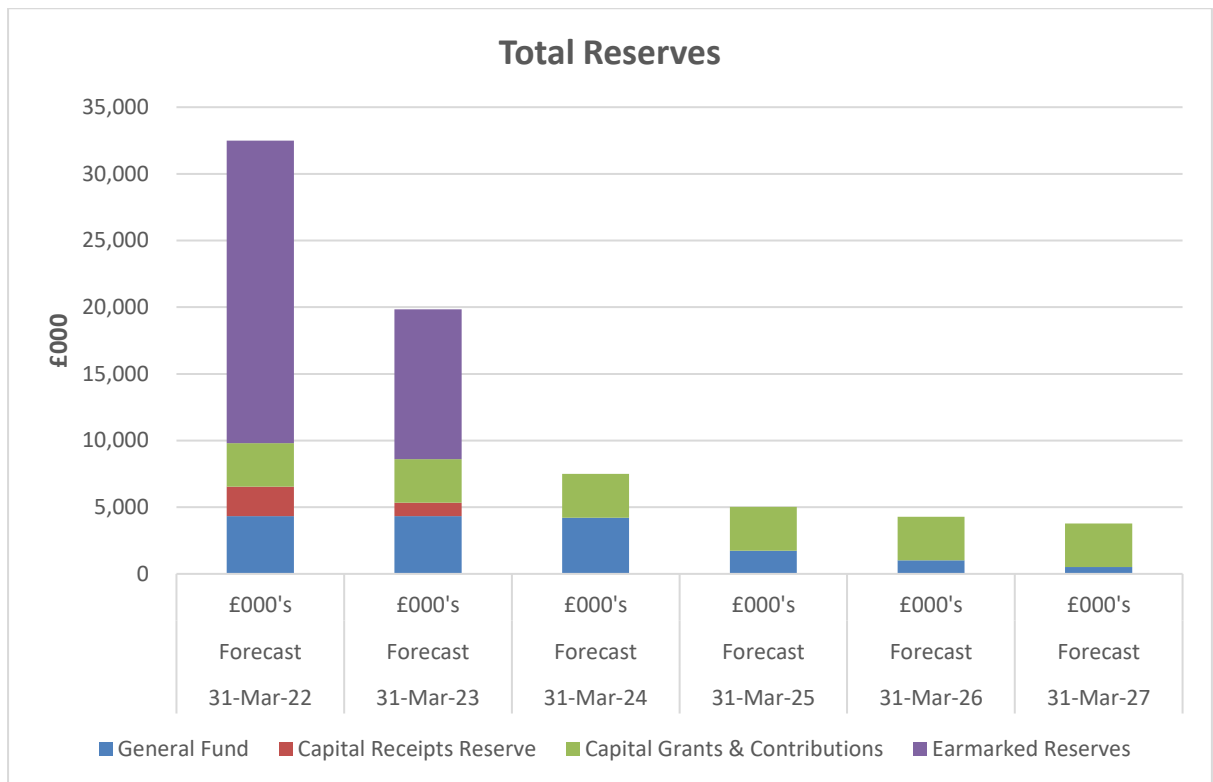
The Council had £32.493 million of usable reserves as at 1 April 2022, including £22.677 million of earmarked reserves. These reserves are available to fund the specific purpose of the reserve, in accordance with the virement procedure rules, which includes the funding of capital projects.

The Grant Volatility Reserve is an earmarked reserve used to manage fluctuations in Government grants from one year to the next. Its balance as at 1 April 2022 includes £6,911,000 that at year end will be used to fund the Council's share of the deficit currently held on the Collection Fund. It is committed and not available to spend despite being held in a usable reserve.

The 2022/23 budget was set with a deficit of £944,000 to be funded by reserves. This transfer from reserves was forecast to be £706,000 as at Quarter 2 due to an improvement in the forecast against budget.

Currently it is estimated that £943,000 will be needed to balance the 2023/24 budget. It is assumed that the revenue budget from 2024/25 is balanced without further utilisation of reserves.

The graph below shows the balance of these reserves.



5. Partnership Working

Our strategic partners help us to deliver our Focus on Five for the Borough.

To do this, we work together with a range of different organisations, on a local and regional basis, to achieve our projects and the priorities we have set out in the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council’s Plan.

5.1 Public Sector

Kent County Council

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has a strong strategic relationship with Kent County Council (KCC). KCC has helped us to deliver in a range of different ways across the years, including working directly in partnership with the Council on the Amelia Scott, the Community Hubs, and the Public Realm improvements. They are also significant consultees on the Local Plan, and County wide strategic documents such as the Kent and Medway Growth and Infrastructure Framework. The County Council will continue to be an important partner in the years ahead, as we seek to deliver on the Focus on Five priorities.

Parish & Town Councils

Alongside our close relationship with the County Council, we work closely with our local councils through the Parish Chairmen's Forum, and directly through some of our projects, such as the Community Hubs for Southborough, Paddock Wood and Cranbrook. They also acting as significant consultees on the Local Plan. We will continue to work with our Parish and Town Councils to explore opportunities for partnership working and the devolving of services where appropriate.

Mid Kent Services

Mid Kent Services (MKS) is a delivery vehicle for delivering shared services across Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Maidstone Borough Council, and Swale Borough Council. The three councils work in partnership with one another to deliver outcomes across a wide range of services and have a close operational relationship. Further opportunities to share services will be considered where they meet our priority of 'Safeguarding Finances'.

West Kent Partnership

The West Kent Partnership is a strategic economic partnership between Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council, and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. The three councils have similar demographic and socio-economic factors which influence their strategic approach to economic development. The West Kent Partnership provides a forum to discuss common approaches and influencing strategies regarding economic develop and infrastructure funding, which will benefit the whole of the West Kent region. This fits in with the 'Safe and Thriving Towns' priority.

Community Safety Partnership

The Community Safety Partnership is formed from a range of different public authorities, including the Police, the NHS and local councils in order to actively reduce crime and disorder by working together. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is an active partner in the CSP and hosts a shared community safety partnership hub in the Town Hall. Working together with partners through the CSP is a statutory duty, but also meets the priority of 'Safe and Thriving Towns'.

West Kent Health and Care Partnership (HCP)

HCPs support healthcare providers to work more closely with local Councils, not just with social care and public health colleagues, but also education, planning, housing, environmental health and leisure services. The West Kent HCP brings together health and care providers, including hospitals, community care, mental health care, GPs and social care, to plan and deliver services to the people of West Kent and to support them to live healthy lives. The Council works with the HCP to help deliver

public health and sports initiatives, including delivering services under the 'One You Kent' service. This fits in with the priority of 'Safe and Thriving Towns'.

Licensing Partnership

The Licensing Partnership is a delivery vehicle for shared service delivery in licensing. There are three other authorities, alongside Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, who are members of the partnership, and they work in a collaborative way to ensure excellent service delivery.

5.2 Private Sector

Tunbridge Wells Cultural Consortium and Creative Tunbridge Wells

The Tunbridge Wells Cultural Consortium exists so that cultural and leisure offerings from businesses, community groups, the council and the third sector are co-ordinated and used to best effect in terms of attracting visitors and revenue to the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells. This is in line with the Borough Council's Cultural Strategy aspiration of 'being the cultural capital of West Kent'. Culture has been identified by the Borough Council as being key to securing long-term prosperity for the area. Work is now underway to establish Creative Tunbridge Wells as a strategic partnership to help realise the maximum social and economic benefits of culture and creativity in the borough under the Cultural Compact model supported by Arts Council England. The partnership will be cross sectoral including cultural organisations, community groups and local businesses.

Royal Tunbridge Wells Together Business Improvement District

This is a community interest company which has been set up by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and key businesses in the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells including AXA PPP, Royal Victoria Place, Thomson, Snell and Passmore, Cripps and Markerstudy. The CIC is funded by local businesses and seeks to collaboratively make Royal Tunbridge Wells a key destination for retail, business, leisure and culture with the Business Improvement District.

Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (and SELEP)

The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, and its parent organisation, the South East Local Economic Partnership are partnerships set up between local businesses and local authorities, with input from the education sector. The role of the partnership is to drive forward and monitor economic growth across the South East region, with Kent and Medway being a sub-region of this. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is an

active member of the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, and sits on the KMEP Board. Active involvement in KMEP ensures the best outcomes for Tunbridge Wells.

5.3 Community and Third Sector

Town and Country Housing

Town and Country Housing is the main provider of social housing within the Borough and provides social housing accommodation across Kent and East Sussex. The group's headquarters are in Royal Tunbridge Wells, and the Borough Council enjoys a close strategic relationship, working together to improve social and health inequalities, where they are linked to housing.

Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum

The Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum is a community forum made up of representatives from residents groups, interest groups and other community groups within the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells. The Forum is supported administratively by the Borough Council. Forum members are consulted on specific topics, issues and ongoing projects that affect the town area, and also look into matters of interest to the community, which may not be on the Council's radar. The Forum is well attended, with between 40 to 50 members of the public attending each meeting, and their feedback is used where possible to inform policy and strategy development.

6. Principles Supporting the Capital Strategy

The key principles that underpin the Council's Capital Strategy are:

6.1 Strategic Priorities

Establishment of a direct relationship with the Council's strategic priorities and objectives, with the Capital Programme based upon investment needs and prioritised on an authority-wide basis. This demonstrates an explicit link with key strategic planning documents and recognition of the need for a corporate approach to cross-cutting issues such as the environment, social inclusion, affordable housing and community safety.

6.2 Public Consultation

The use of public consultation is, indirectly, an important part of developing the Capital Programme through its use in setting priorities and developing strategies, which may lead to capital projects coming forward.

6.3 Partnerships

Partnerships initiatives are considered in Section 5 which help shape policy objectives and which aim to deliver projects in conjunction with others.

6.4 Procurement Strategy

The Procurement Strategy seeks to ensure that good procurement practice is applied consistently throughout the Council. It sets out how the Council will address procurement and establishes its importance to the Council and the contribution it can make to improved service delivery.

6.5 Availability of External Funding

In support of the Council's strategic priorities and objectives to monitor and pursue available forms of external partnership and other funding opportunities.

6.6 Housing

As a non-stockholding Housing Authority, the Council has a key role to play in the delivery of the strategic housing function covering policy and enabling, private sector housing, and in identifying and addressing housing needs.

6.7 Use of the Council's Assets

Maintenance of an Asset Management Plan and performance measures for the use of Council owned assets to ensure optimum returns and early release of redundant assets in support of strategic investment priorities and to attract inward investment.

6.8 Consideration of the Impact on the Council's Revenue Budget

To ensure that capital investment decisions are consistent with the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, particularly the management of its revenue budget.

6.9 Value for Money

Each year the Council's external auditor gives an opinion on whether the Authority has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. All of the Capital Programme processes from identification and selection of schemes, through implementation to subsequent review of completed schemes can contribute to achieving value for money.

6.10 Investment in IT

Investment in IT in order to improve efficiency and economy and to meet customer aspirations for self service, particularly via the website; and to enable more flexible and different ways of working to be adopted to support and assist delivery of the Savings and Transformation Strategy.

7. The Capital Programme

7.1 Implementation and Managing the Capital Strategy

The Council has developed a process for considering and evaluating potential capital schemes as an integral part of its Capital Strategy. This process for selecting schemes is described below.

Schemes are applied for annually during the budget setting process and categorised into an A List, being Health and Safety works, funded by external income or an investment that will generate a future revenue income stream or cost saving, a B List, which is approved in principle but for which a formal application will be required throughout the year, and a C list, which is projects that do not fall into the A and B list. The A list is approved into the Capital Programme and the B list approved in principle.

The Capital Programme sets out how capital resources are used to achieve the Council's priorities where they are quantifiable. The Council has agreed a number of corporate projects in principle, however budgetary provision is only made when the concepts reach a sufficient stage to enable a business case and costings to be produced.

The Council faces decisions over the use of its reserves in contributing to this agenda and the balance that it wishes to strike between maximising income from asset disposals and using its assets to deliver the Council's priorities.

The Capital Programme is now maintained on a four year rolling basis, with Full Council approving the funding in principle of new additions. The Section 151 Officer has authority to determine the source of funding for each project when the decision is taken to procure each scheme.

The main strategic objectives of the Capital Programme, which provides the underlying principles for financial planning, can be summarised as follows:

- To maintain a rolling capital programme which remains within the approved sustainability limits and takes into account any decisions or actions which may have a material impact on future years
- To maintain the Capital Receipts Reserve at no less than £1 million
- To ensure that capital resources are aligned with the Council's strategic plan and corporate priorities
- To maximise available resources by actively seeking external funding, use of planning contributions, use of on-street parking funds and disposal of surplus assets for cash or other contributions
- To meet remaining commitments from the Capital and Revenue Initiatives Reserve so long as this resource can be maintained
- Prudential borrowing to be undertaken only where there are sufficient monies to meet in full the implications of capital expenditure, both borrowing and running costs
- To engage local residents in the allocation of capital resources.

The level of reserves will decline as they are used to fund the Capital Programme. New schemes will need specifically to consider alternative funding options, taking into account the cost of using capital reserves and the impact on the revenue budget.

7.2 Borrowing

The Council is also prepared to borrow money where it is considered to be economically prudent for long term capital projects and assets.

Borrowing for capital purposes is governed by the Prudential Code 2021. Local authorities have the freedom to borrow where they determine it to be affordable, sustainable and prudent. This enables local authorities to fund new borrowing from

savings in revenue expenditure or the generation of additional revenue income, for example investment in car parking where this increases income.

An objective of the 2021 Prudential Code was to respond to the major expansion of local authority investment activity over the past few years into the purchase of non-financial investments, particularly property. The Code requires 'that an authority must not borrow to invest primarily for financial return'.

In order to borrow from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), local authorities are required to submit a summary of their planned capital spending and PWLB borrowing for the following three years.

7.3 Current Capital Programme

The result of the process described in Section 7 is the Council's Capital Programme. This covers a four-year period and is monitored on a quarterly basis. At the end of each quarter a monitoring report is considered by the Council's Management Board and presented to Members at meetings of the Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board and Cabinet.

The capital programme for 2022/23 to 2025/26 totals £25,466,440. This is based on the Quarter 2 Capital Management report, presented to Cabinet in December 2022, plus new applications for 2023/24 as set out in the Draft Budget 2022/23, also presented to Cabinet in December. The new schemes totalled a gross budget of £2,228,000 (A List).

	£000
Capital Programme 2022/23	£10,556
Capital Programme 2023/24	£10,715
Capital Programme 2024/25	£2,915
Capital Programme 2025/26	£1,280
Total Gross Expenditure	£25,466
Government Grants	£8,071
Section 106 Contributions	£1,948
Other External Contributions	£819
External and Internal Borrowing	£1,250
Sale of Fixed Assets	£1,200
Earmarked Reserves	£1,590
Capital Initiatives Reserve	£10,588

Total Funding	£25,466
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In addition to the schemes included in the table above £1,361,500 was agreed in principle as the 2021/22 B List, £1,792,000 as the 2022/23 B List and £27,000 as the 2023/24 B List. These schemes will require a formal application to be approved into the capital programme.

The Capital Strategy needs to ensure that any capital investment decisions are both affordable and achieve the priorities set out in the Five-Year Plan. The Council is at the point where capital reserves are scarce and as such any investment in assets is likely to have implications on the revenue budget.

The Capital Strategy must therefore recognise the implications of capital investment decisions and ensure that they are in line with Council priorities, and financing requirements are robustly evaluated and understood. The availability of staff resources to deliver the capital programme will need to be considered during the budget process.

7.4 Flexible Capital Receipts Strategy

Local authorities are limited in their ability to utilise capital receipts, (the disposal proceeds from the sale of fixed assets or repayment of loans for capital purposes). Statutory guidance issued under s15(1) of the Local Government Act 2003 generally precludes capital receipts being used to fund revenue expenditure and requires them to be applied to either fund capital expenditure or to repay debt.

The Spending Review 2015 included a relaxation to the above regulations allowing the use of capital receipts for a limited period to fund revenue expenditure ‘that is designed to generate ongoing revenue savings in the delivery of public services and/or transform service delivery to reduce costs or improve the quality of service delivery in future years’. The period over which these amended regulations applied was between 2016/17 and 2021/22.

Historically the Council has delivered a supply of capital receipts from the sale of assets which were either generating little income or were underutilised, and therefore these were disposed of. These have helped fund the capital programme and have not been utilised for revenue expenditure. This supply has stalled but any future capital receipts that are now realised will continue to only fund capital expenditure.

7.5 Post Implementation Reviews

It is important that any issues relating to the implementation of a Capital Programme project are addressed as soon as possible; either during the project or shortly after completion. The wider issues of the effectiveness and value for money of a project are addressed through a formal system of post-implementation review. Lessons

learnt inform future capital programme decision making and monitoring reports are part of a system of continuous improvement.

8 Commercial Activities

With reductions in funding that the Council has faced it is having to look at commercial activities to supplement its income and support service delivery. However, to minimise risk of potential loss of income in the longer term it needs to ensure that any investment opportunities are based upon sound decision making that considers the future likelihood of investment income reducing.

Therefore when making commercial investment decisions the Council will follow the principles set out below:

- Commercial capital investments will only be made to enhance the Council's asset portfolio and will be linked to the delivery of the corporate priorities.
- Consideration will be given to the economic development potential of any investment decision.
- Expert advice will be sought to ensure any investment decision is based upon sound market intelligence, forecasts for future investment returns and yields that offer sound investment return without risking capital invested.
- Investment opportunities will always ensure that the Council's investment is protected as far as possible either through increases in capital value or from guaranteed revenue income.
- The Council will not borrow to invest primarily for commercial return.

9 Risk Management

One of the Council's key investment priorities is that all investment risk should be understood with appropriate strategies to manage those risks. Major capital projects require careful management to mitigate potential risks which can arise. All risks will be considered including political, economic, legal, technological, environmental and reputational as well as financial. The effective monitoring, management and mitigation of these risks is a key part in managing the capital strategy. No project will be approved where the level of risk, as determined by Cabinet and the Section 151 Officer, is unacceptable.

This strategy is closely aligned with the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy which contains key performance indicators.

10 Knowledge and Skills

The Council utilises the knowledge and skills of its internal officers when considering capital investment decisions and where necessary it also relies on the expert knowledge of specialist external advisors.

10.1 Internal Staff

The Council employs professionally qualified finance, legal and property officers who can offer advice and guidance when considering any capital investment decisions.

Finance staff are professionally qualified and have the necessary experience of how the Council works. They undertake Continuing Professional Development and maintain knowledge and skills through regular technical updates from appropriate bodies.

Legal staff are provided through the Mid Kent Services Legal Partnership. The team are professionally qualified solicitors or legal executives and are regulated by their respective professional bodies. Staff undertake Continuing Professional Development and their rules of conduct require that they have an appropriate level of skill and expertise to deal with the matter with which they are dealing.

The Property team is made up of a number of Chartered Surveyors who advise the Council on all property matters. They are members of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and comply with the RICS's rules in relation to Continuing Professional Development.

10.2 External Advisors

The Council uses external advisors where necessary to complement the knowledge its own officers hold. The Council recognises that the responsibility for decisions always remains with the authority and will ensure that undue reliance is not placed upon the services of our external service providers. All decisions will be undertaken with regards to all available information.

Some of these advisors are contracted on long term contracts or are appointed on an ad-hoc basis when necessary. Link Treasury Services provide treasury management advice, including investments, borrowing and capital financing.