Report to Council

Council Motion: "A New Start for Oldham"

Report Authors:
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18 November 2026

Reason for Decision

A Council Motion was proposed by Councillor Harkness and seconded by Councillor Al-Hamdani at the meeting of 16 September 2026. The motion was as follows –

"Residents of Oldham Borough want their Council to change to reflect the priorities of the people. They want their Council to get the basics right, with a laser-focus on improving the performance of frontline services including drain clearance, road repairs and park and green space maintenance. Residents want their Council to tackle environmental crimes like littering, dog-fouling, fly-tipping and graffiti.
It is also time to deliver fair funding to all districts and communities in Oldham Borough and not just keep pouring capital investment into Oldham Town Centre."

Resolution – to request relevant officers to produce a budget report to explore how existing funding can be reprofiled to address the priorities set out in this motion and specifically addressing: environmental crime (including littering, dog fouling, fly tipping and graffiti); frontline services (including drain clearance, road repairs, and park and green space maintenance) and delivering fair district funding.

As a result of this Council Motion, it was agreed that at the next Council meeting scheduled for the 18 November 2026, Officers would produce a budget report to explore how existing funding can be reprofiled to address the priorities set out in this motion and specifically address:

- Environmental Crime (including littering, dog fouling, fly-tipping and graffiti);
- Frontline Services (including drain clearance, road repairs, and park and green space maintenance) and
- Delivering fair district funding.

This report has been provided in response to the motion for Council's consideration.

Executive Summary

This report provides some context of the issues impacting the Environment Service Areas currently, and the financial impact of these challenges. The report also provides a history of the

Councils Environment Budgets (2023 – Present), identifying any adjustments made for both growth and saving proposals.

Recommendations

Council members are asked to note:

1. The budget information in this report and the challenges the various services in the Environment Directorate are facing.

2. That there is no flexibility within the current year's approved budget for any amendments to be made in year.

3. That any proposed amendments for next year's budget (2027/28) will need formal consideration and costings to be fully assessed through the Council's budget setting process.

4. That Group Leaders, Group Deputies and Interim Lead Members have been briefed on the Council's in-year budget position and the process for setting the budget for 2027/28.

5. That additional briefing sessions will be held to support Groups as part of the annual budget setting process; these commence in the coming weeks ahead of Scrutiny and Council consideration in the new calendar year.

Council Motion Response: "A New Start for Oldham"

1. Background – The Wider Local Government Context

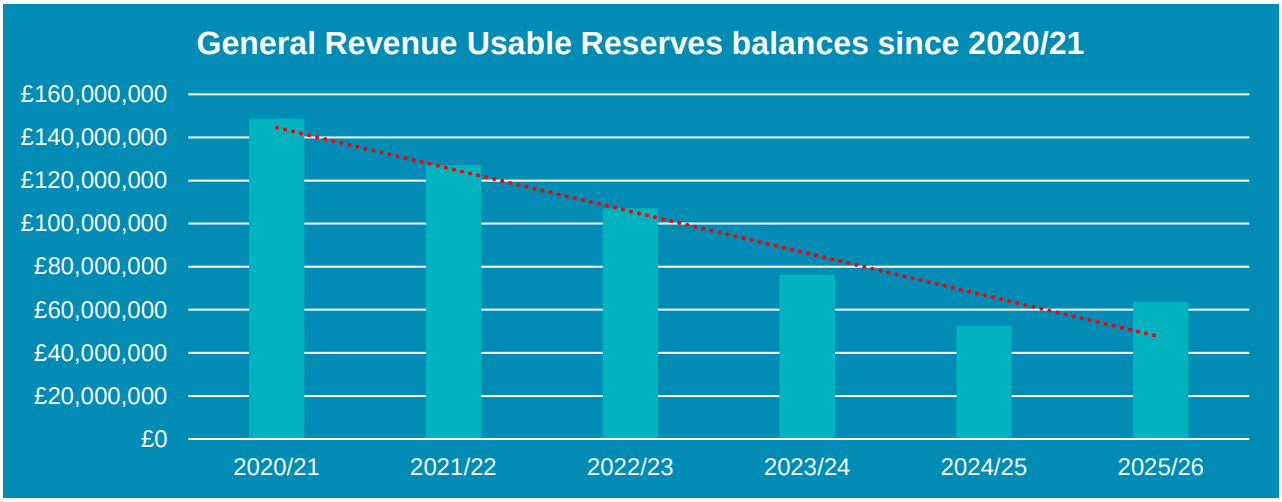
1.1 Over the past four years the Council has continued to operate in an increasingly challenging financial environment, with rising demand for both Adult and Children's Social Care, homelessness support and SEND, coupled with inflationary pressures, placing significant strain on the revenue budget. The legacy of underfunding over the last 15 years (over £280m of savings delivered since 2010) has amplified these challenges, with Central Government funding and locally generated income not keeping pace with demand and inflationary pressures. Whilst the Council has continued to set balanced budgets, this has required a combination of savings programmes, transformation initiatives and a substantial use of reserves.

1.2 The cumulative budget gap 2023/24 to 2026/27 was over £111m, with over £69m of savings and over £22m of reserves needed to help bridge the gap, as per the table below:

	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	Total £000
Budget Gap	**34,145**	**33,180**	**23,721**	**20,301**	**111,347**
Bridged by:					
Flexible Use of Capital Receipts	(2,600)	(2,600)	(2,600)		**(7,800)**
Revenue Grant Resources Review				(10,196)	**(10,196)**
Transformation Programme Savings				(2,000)	**(2,000)**
Budget Reduction Proposals	(19,968)	(19,827)	(21,121)	(8,105)	**(69,021)**
General Use of Reserves	(11,577)	(10,753)			**(22,330)**
Revised Budget Gap	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**

1.3 Central Government implemented the Fair Funding Review for 2026/27. Funding has been realigned across the whole system to reflect deprivation needs and the ability to generate income, which in turn has been linked to funding allocations. Whilst the Council welcomes this switch to a clear focus on aligning funding to those areas of high need and low taxbase, like Oldham, there is still much to be done to address many years of underfunding along with tackling demand and inflationary pressures especially in social care.

1.4 The Council has put in place a recovery plan to strengthen its financial resilience. A key strategy when setting the budgets for 2025/26 and 2026/27 was the replenishment of revenue reserves. For several years, these reserves have decreased in value and as a result have impacted the Council's overall financial resilience. In 2025/26 and 2026/27 reserves were not used to help bridge the budget gap, with £2.5m transferred back to reserves as part of the budget setting process. The graph below shows the reserve position since 2020/21.



1.5 The Council continues to face significant financial challenges due to ongoing, higher demand, increasing costs of services and the legacy of underfunding over the last decade. This is reflected in the 2026/27 Month 6 position of an overall forecast overspend of £3.622m. The Council must operate with a finite amount of funding that is aligned to statutory and corporate priorities.

2. Current Position

2.1 Environment Budget

2.1.1 The following table sets out the high-level summary of the Environment Service Area Budget for the financial years 2023/24 to 2026/27.

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Total
Opening Budget	**36,989,150**	**39,307,290**	**38,694,580**	**38,726,250**	
Levies and Precepts	478,000	810,000	392,190	690,050	**2,370,240**
Growth	1,801,460	1,334,170	1,896,370	1,650,940	**6,682,940**
Savings	- 545,000	- 2,564,790	- 1,450,000	- 1,545,410	**-6,105,200**
Pension Reduction				- 581,840	**- 581,840**
Budget Realignment	583,680	- 192,090	206,800	- 318,590	**279,800**
Structure Changes			- 1,013,690		**-1,013,690**
Closing Balance	**39,307,290**	**38,694,580**	**38,726,250**	**38,621,400**	

2.1.2 The table above identifies budget adjustments in the following categories –

- **Levies and Precepts –** Members will be aware that the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) charges the Council for Waste Disposal and Transport Services in the form of levies and a statutory charge. The Council has no discretion over the payment of such levies and statutory charges so where levies increase, additional budget needs to be allocated.
- **Growth –** Additional budget allocation awarded because of additional demand. For example, £0.300m was awarded to the Waste Service in 2023/24 to accommodate the growing number of houses in the borough and the increased collection demands.
- **Savings –** As part of budget setting each year, savings proposals are put forward and agreed. This area identifies the Environment savings made each financial year.

- **Pension Reduction –** In 2026/27, the Council agreed with the GMPF to a reduced employer contribution rate from 19% to 15.5%. This amount reflects the budget reduction in Environment because of its implementation.
- **Budget Realignment –** Adjustments made throughout the year reflect changes to service delivery and structures.
- **Structure Changes –** Throughout the period identified, full-service areas have been added to and removed from the Environment structure. Examples include Strategic Transport, Building Control and Parking.

2.2 Environment Savings Analysis

2.2.1 As the table above states, the Environment Directorate has contributed over £6m worth of saving proposals over the last 4 financial years.

2.2.2 The breakdown of these savings for each financial year is listed below –

2026/27	**Saving Description**	**Saving**
PLC-BR26-039	Highways Reprioritisation	(436,000)
PLC-BR26-040	Waste, Greenspace and Cleansing Re-Prioritisation	(350,000)
PEG-BR1-817	Parking Contract Review	(250,000)
RES-BR26-034	Essential Car User Review/Fleet Hire Review	(150,000)
PLC-BR26-038	Place – Top Tier Directorates Restructure	(359,410)
	Total	**(1,545,410)**
2025/26	**Saving Description**	**Saving**
PEG-BR1-819	Environment Service Review	(545,000)
Budget Adjustment	S38 Income & Staff Capitalisation	(100,000)
Budget Adjustment	Highways Reprioritisation	(300,000)
Budget Adjustment	Street Cleansing Review	(75,000)
Budget Adjustment	Trading Standards Review	(220,000)
Budget Adjustment	Reduction in Envirocrime Posts	(60,000)
Budget Adjustment	Health & Safety Review	(100,000)
Budget Adjustment	Leadership Review	(50,000)
	Total	**(1,450,000)**
2024/25	**Saving Description**	**Saving**
	Introduction of vacancy management factor	(193,510)
	Increase fees and charges	(297,280)
PPL-BR1-508	Increase External Customer Base - Trade Waste	(3,000)
PEG-BR1-636	Don't Trash Oldham Betterment Programme	(335,000)
PEG-BR1-637	Refocus fly-tipping enforcement activity – Don't Trash Oldham	(250,000)
PEG-BR1-640	Develop Building Control shared response with other Local Authorities	(100,000)
PEG-BR1-643	Review Options for Future of Remaining Glasshouse Provision	(74,000)
PEG-BR1-723	Public Protection Service Review	(110,000)
PEG-BR1-724	Environmental Services - Service Delivery Changes to Parks and Cleansing	(1,079,000)
PEG-BR1-725	Highways & Engineering Service Review	(123,000)
	Total	**(2,564,790)**

2023/24	Saving Description	Saving
PPL-BR1-510	Public Protection Restructures - Environmental Health & First Response	(50,000)
PPL-BR1-508	Increase External Customer Base - Trade Waste	(10,000)
PEG-BR1-635	Reshape Bonfire Event	(25,000)
PEG-BR1-636	Don't Trash Oldham Betterment Programme	(112,000)
PEG-BR1-638	Increase Fees - Cemeteries and Crematoria Service	(228,000)
PEG-BR1-641	Income Generation – Trade Waste	(120,000)
	Total	**(545,000)**
	Total savings 2023/34 to date	**6,105,200**

2.3 Growth Analysis

2.3.1 Whilst the Environment Directorate has seen significant savings reductions as outlined above, it has also benefitted from £6.682m of additional growth.

2.3.2 The details of this growth have been split by financial year in the table below.

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Total
Pay Award Growth	1,294,440	1,334,170	1,449,630	659,540	4,737,780
Impact of NI changes			446,740		446,740
Contract Inflation				136,620	136,620
Street Cleansing Investment				250,000	250,000
25/26 Unachieved Saving				604,780	604,780
Waste Investment	300,000				300,000
Pest Control Investment	100,000				100,000
Highways Redesign	107,020				107,020
Total	**1,801,460**	**1,334,170**	**1,896,370**	**1,650,940**	**6,682,940**

2.3.3 £1,361,800 (20.38%) of the growth identified above would constitute as additional resource to the service to meet increased demand.

2.3.4 The remaining £5,321,140 (79.62%) has been added to the service to meet pay and contractual inflation.

2.3.5 The following table helps demonstrate the net impact of savings and growth that have specific impact on the Environment Directorate's ability to provide the service. Items such as pay award growth, contract inflation, and pension reduction have been omitted as they don't provide any additional resource to the Directorate.

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Total
Opening Budget	**36,989,150**	**37,534,850**	**34,777,970**	**34,389,550**	
Growth	507,020	-	854,780		**1,361,800**
Savings	- 545,000	- 2,564,790	- 1,450,000	- 1,545,410	**- 6,105,200**
Budget Realignment	583,680	- 192,090	206,800	- 318,590	**279,800**
Closing Balance	**37,534,850**	**34,777,970**	**34,389,550**	**32,525,550**	

2.3.6 From 2023/24 to 2026/27, the Environment budget has been reduced from £36.989m at the start of 2023/24 to £32.526m at 2026/27.

2.3.7 This reflects a **£4.464m reduction (12.07% reduction) over four financial years.**

2.3.8 The following staff reductions and additions have been implemented to help achieve the savings –

Financial Year	FTE Lost Via Savings	FTE Gained Through Growth	Net (Loss)/Gain
2023/24	(5.00)	9.00	4.00
2024/25	(38.08)	-	(38.08)
2025/26	(5.00)	4.00	(1.00)
2026/27	-	5.00	5.00
	(48.08)	**18.00**	**(30.08)**

3. Environment Service Delivery – Impacts on Performance

3.1 Reduction in the critical mass of operational staff outlined above has resulted in services reprioritising delivery as well as impacting response times. For example, FTE reduction in grounds maintenance and cleansing, outside of the Don't Trash Oldham programme, has meant that there are fewer operatives, and therefore, response times to fly tip removal, grounds maintenance and cleansing have been impacted. As a result of the reduced operational staff, grounds maintenance operations were re-aligned and some static gardeners removed from parks. Furthermore, a review of land ownership was also undertaken, and all land not owned by the council was no longer maintained unless the owners were willing to pay the cost of maintenance. The only exception being maintenance to ensure highway safety.

3.2 Furthermore, inflationary and cost pressures have also meant that the cost of materials and equipment has increased significantly during the above period, especially machinery and fuel. This factor has also impacted how much the Service can deliver as well as resulting in operational overspend in the directorate. For example, during the last 4 years, highways aggregate has increased between 25% and 45%, tarmac has increased by almost 40% over the same period, and costs of bin wagons have increased by 60%. In addition to the purchase cost, repair and maintenance prices have also increased and price shocks because of global energy increases filter through on a regular basis across all areas of service delivery.

3.3 Furthermore, regulatory changes have also impacted demand on Services. The changes because of Awaabs Law increased demand for housing inspections, pressure of which is sustained, and additional changes around Renter's Reform have created further regulatory demands for the teams to deliver. This has meant that teams have had to prioritise service delivery, and non-statutory functions in some areas have been reduced to meet statutory duties.

3.4 Given the above savings, budget realignments and regulatory pressures, the Service has continued to deliver on key priorities outlined in the Motion, including keeping the borough clean, waste collection services, fly tip removal / enforcement, graffiti removal, gulley cleaning and weed spraying.

3.5 A breakdown of service delivery, over the last 4 administrative years is listed below:

3.6 Litter Reports and Clearance:

Year	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Number of Reports	990	921	1301	710
Tonnage Removed	783	904	978	Ongoing

3.7 Fly Tipping Reports and Clearance:

Year	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Number of Reports	5533	4867	5723	6348
Tonnage Removed	1368	1029	1061	1089

3.8 Waste Collection:

Year	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27 (6 months)
Tonnage Removed	65,369	65,876	66,573	33,771

3.9 Gully Cleaning:

A dedicated, ward by ward gulley cleaning programme was started in Sep 2024. The original aim was to clean all the gullies in the borough over an 18-month period. This work has taken much longer than originally planned. To date, approximately 32,000 of the 47,500 gullies have been cleaned, and the teams are currently working in the last ward, Failsworth East.

Not all gullies were accessed the first time, mainly due to parked vehicles. Moving forward, the team will be revisiting the wards, in order, engaging with local ward members, introducing traffic management and remaining gullies will be cleaned. Some gullies need to be repaired, and others need a 'dig-out' – dedicated teams will follow the gully wagon and undertake repairs as necessary. Further communications and a timetable of these works will be shared by the end of Nov 2026.

3.10 Weed Spraying:

The weed spraying programme was brough back into the Council in the Summer of 2025 after contractor failure. Since that time, approximately £55,000 has been invested to deliver the service. The operations in 2026 have been impacted by the extreme weather and the failure to complete the programme in 2025. This has resulted in excessive growth and delivery challenges. Given the investment, and revised working, the Service is confident that, weather permitting, it will deliver a complete boroughwide programme in 2027 that will be effective and visible in dealing with weed growth. Operatives that deliver this service are moved out of the fly tipping cleansing function during the weed spraying period, thus, effecting cleansing operations.

3.11 Graffiti Removal Costs:

Boroughwide graffiti removal remains a priority and investment in this work has continued. Below is a breakdown of the costs incurred for removal operations. Most graffiti is removed 7-10 days after reporting.

Year	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27*
Cost of Removal £	51,311	43,630	36,633	39,294	17,627

3.12 Play Equipment Repair & Maintenance:

The table below outlines investment in play equipment repairs and maintenance. Money allocated reduced in 2023/24 as the budget allocation was re-aligned. However, further investment in 2026/27 (external grant funding) has resulted in outstanding repairs being completed and this work remains ongoing.

Year	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27*
Repair and Maintenance spend £	222,000	169,000	93,000	76,000

3.13 Highways Operations & Capital Delivery:

The Highways Service continues to deliver reactive maintenance and capital delivery programmes. Investment over the last 4 years and the current year is detailed in the table below. Capital delivery (resurfacing) has relied on capital provided by the city region settlement process. Oldham Council has not invested its own capital for highway delivery until this year, with an additional £2m capital investment.

	Capital Spend	**Revenue Spend**	**Total Spend**
2022/23	7,521,000	2,097,009	9,618,009
2023/24	3,067,000	2,508,000	5,575,000
2024/25	3,067,000	2,739,000	5,806,000
2025/26	3,067,000	2,459,000	5,526,000
2026/27 – projected	CRSTS, 5,392,000 Oldham Council, 2,000,000	2,156,000	Ongoing

Capital expenditure and Districts

3.14 The Council's capital programme is approved by Budget Council each financial year and sets out the capital funding priorities over a five-year period, funded in various ways such as through grant, capital receipts, prudential borrowing or revenue contributions. Since 2023/24, capital investment has been split across the borough as follows:

Area	**2023/24 £000**	**2024/25 £000**	**2025/26 £000**	**Total £000**
Town Centre	43,997	50,958	32,377	**127,332**
Districts	21,279	16,147	20,291	**57,717**
Equipment	872	1,540	626	**3,039**
IT	4,148	4,160	1,602	**9,910**
Other (REFCUS)	10,916	8,986	17,228	**37,130**
Grand Total	**81,212**	**81,791**	**72,125**	**235,127**

3.15 As can be seen in the table above, 54% of expenditure has been spent within the Town Centre with 25% spent across the districts.

3.16 Within the capital programme, funding for emerging priorities from 2027/28 is held at £5.000m, phased over the programme as follows:

	2027/28 £000	2028/29 £000	2029/30 £000	2030/31 £000	Total £000
Funding for Emerging Priorities	902	2,506	-	1,592	**5,000**

3.17 As part of the 2027/28 budget-setting process, Members may propose priorities for this funding in line with the approved funding profile. Any increase in allocations to the Emerging Priorities Fund will create an additional borrowing requirement and, consequently, will require the identification of ongoing revenue resources to meet the associated financing costs.

4. Service Improvement Options

4.1 Investment / budget realignment options based on the motion and linked to Service priorities are listed below. These are indicative and provide an estimate of what service changes / improvements could be realised if additional funding was to be made available/realigned.

4.2 Waste, Cleansing & Greenspace

Option 1 - Enhanced Service	**Option 2 – High Performing Service**
Indicative Cost £0.8m - £1.0m per annum Additional Resources Frontline Operations • 6 Street Cleansing Operatives • 4 Parks and Open Spaces Operatives • 1 Countryside Ranger • 1 Working Supervisor • Part-time Administrative Support	**Indicative Cost £2.4m - £3.0m per annum** Additional Resources Frontline Operations • 12 Street Cleansing Operatives • 10 Parks and Open Spaces Operatives • 2 Countryside Rangers • 3 Enforcement Officers Management **Professional Support** • 3 Supervisors • 1 Senior Supervisor / Area Manager • 1 Service Manager • 1 Tree Officer • 1 Funding Officer • 1 Performance and Data Officer • 1 Administration Officer Community Support • 3 Community Development Officers (Grade 6) • £100,000 community grants budget
Outcomes A targeted investment focused primarily on improving cleanliness, parks and open spaces, countryside management and tree maintenance. It strengthens frontline capacity and provides additional support to community environmental	**Outcomes** A substantially larger investment designed to deliver a more visible, proactive and comprehensive environmental service. Alongside significantly greater frontline capacity, it introduces dedicated enforcement, management, funding, performance/data and tree expertise, expands community development and grants, and provides greater investment

groups, while largely building on the existing service model.	in trees, fleet and operational infrastructure.

4.3 Public Protection

Additional Enforcement & Investigation Capacity
Indicative Cost £450K • 5 Waste enforcement/waste crime officers • 3 Technical Enforcement Officers (additional regulatory enforcement capacity) • 1 Trading Standards Officer – proactive investigation and enforcement • 1 Enforcement Support
Outcomes • Quicker response and investigation of fly tipping – link to cleansing service and therefore, removal of waste • Litter & dog waste enforcement • Proactive & Effective Enforcement for wide environmental protection
Additional Options Outsource litter FPNs to external providers and an income sharing model

4.4 Highways Operations

Additional capital funding to deliver greater highway maintenance to ensure a 'steady state'. Recent inspections of the network show that this needs to be in the region of an additional **£6.5m per annum** – separate to the CRSTS funding. **Additional Recruitment** • 1 Road Safety Officer • 1 Engineer to delivery disabled parking bay requests/implementation • 1 Technical Assistant to work on service requests • 1 Streetworks co-ordinator
Indicative Cost - £300K
Outcomes • Able to improve resident and member demand for highway assessments • Improved delivery of disabled parking demands • Improved customer service response • Improved coordination and network management

5 Consultation

5.1 Group Leaders, Deputy Leaders and Interim Lead Members have been briefed in detail on the Council's budget, in year pressures, savings plans, the detail set out in this report on

Environmental Services, and the proposals for the upcoming budget setting process for 2027/28.

5.2 Comments and suggestions were noted during the briefing session to inform the recommendations to this report.

5.3 Wider engagement with elected members and any form of public consultation is not required at this stage. This will follow in due course as part of standard budget setting processes.

6 Financial Implications

6.1 The report provides an overview of the Environment Services budget position from 2022 to the preset, highlighting movements in the budget over this period. It identifies areas of budget growth, including pay award and targeted investment, together with the savings proposals implemented by the service to mitigate the financial impact of these pressures.

6.2 The Council continues to operate within a challenging financial environment, driven by increasing demand, rising service costs and the cumulative impact of historical funding reductions. To align limited resources with statutory and corporate priorities, the Environment budget has reduced by £4.464m over the period (12.07%), with staffing levels reducing by approximately 30 FTE posts.

6.3 Whilst Environment Service improvement options have been presented (Section 4), these actions can only be implemented with a reprioritisation of Council/Place funding.

6.4 At the end of the 2026/27 Quarter 2 period, the Council is reporting an adverse position of £3.622m. Whilst the Council continues to work to mitigate this position by the end of the financial year, this financial position means that there are no available resources currently available to support an investment request during this financial year.

6.5 As per the Council's budget report approved by Budget Council in March 2026, the Council has a significant budget gap over the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) period. The Council is continuing its work to update budget assumptions to account for changes such as increased inflation and interest costs as part of the established budget setting process, with savings proposals required to bridge the budget gap

6.6 This means that further savings options in addition to those to bridge the 2027/28 budget gap will need to be identified from across the Council by Members for investment at this value to help set a balanced budget in 2027/28.

6.7 Once the budget gap has been fully offset by all agreed budget options, further budget realignment within the existing funding resource can be addressed.

6.8 The Council's capital programme was approved at Budget Council in March 2026 and includes £5.000m of funding for emerging priorities that Members may want to allocate to specific schemes as part of the budget setting process for 2027/28.

6.9 In line with the Council's approved budget strategy, no additional capital programme growth will be supported during the period covered by the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2031/32, other than investments supported by a robust business case demonstrating the delivery of revenue savings. As part of the 2027/28 budget-setting process, any proposal to increase capital expenditure beyond existing programme assumptions would require financing through prudential borrowing.

6.10 Any additional borrowing would generate ongoing revenue costs through debt repayment and interest charges. Consequently, Members would need to identify recurring revenue savings or other sustainable funding sources to meet these costs and ensure that the Council can maintain a balanced budget position over the life of the borrowing.

(John Hoskins/Vickie Lambert)

7 Legal Implications

7.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report. (A Evans)