

**WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL – 3 FEBRUARY 2025**

**FOR DISCUSSION AS PART OF ITEM 8a – BUDGET PROPOSALS AND MEDIUM-TERM FORECASTS 2025/26**

**Amendment Proposal: Increased Planning Enforcement Capacity (Proposer: Cllr Tony Kingsbury)**

*Enforcement can often be a concern of residents when development happens without consent, and when plans are not adhered to. Planning enforcement continues to be stretched in dealing with the complexity and number of enforcements requested. Staff turnover in recent years has impacted some enforcement cases. With a larger team there would also be more resilience if temporary vacancies occur.*

*Therefore, we propose to allocate £127k out of the Strategic Initiative Earmarked Reserve to fund the recruitment of one full time senior enforcement officer for a fixed term of 2 years to increase the pace of resolution of enforcement, number of enforcement cases undertaken, reduction in outstanding cases and provide resilience to the team, thereby supporting residents in their valid concerns.*

**Section 151 Officer Comments regarding proposed amendment**

The cost of a planning enforcement officer and associated overheads (recruitment, equipment etc), for the period of two years is estimated to be around £127k.

The proposed amendment sets out that the funding would come from the Strategic Initiative Earmarked Reserve. There are already some proposals to utilise funds from this reserve in the coming years, subject to approval of the budget at Full Council. After these the commitments the balance of the reserve is forecast to be £1.027m.

If the amendment is carried, the revised forecast balance on the reserve would be £0.900m.

The purpose of this reserve, as set out in the covering report to the budget, is “For use of one-off specific projects and fixed term growth directly delivering corporate objectives.”

The proposed amendment, as funded from earmarked reserves, would not have any impact on the council’s savings targets or its general reserves strategy which are set out in the medium-term financial strategy.

**Budget pack amendments required for this proposal**

This budget proposal would increase the employee costs for 2025/26 by £64k, and £63k the following year. This would be offset by drawdown from earmarked reserves. The following pages show the updated appendices, where changes would be required for this amendment.

Consideration to the MTFS has been given. Whilst individual rows in the forecasts in table 2.2a would change, along with very minor impacts to interest on balances (F2.1 and F2.4), the net impact is not considered significant enough to warrant changes to the MTFS.

Description	Original Budget 2024/25 £ '000	Original Budget 2025/26 £ '000	Variance £ '000
Customer Service and Transformation	1,183	1,634	451
Finance	5,430	6,953	1,523
ICT and Digital	1,792	2,037	245
Legal and Governance	2,280	2,145	(135)
Budgets controlled by the Director	1,168	1,255	87
<b>Executive Director (Finance and Transformation)</b>	<b>11,853</b>	<b>14,023</b>	<b>2,171</b>
Leisure, Community and Cultural Services	2,838	1,910	(928)
Planning	1,069	918	(151)
Regeneration and Economic Development	(3,108)	(3,363)	(254)
Budgets controlled by the Director	442	459	17
<b>Executive Director (Place)</b>	<b>1,241</b>	<b>(75)</b>	<b>(1,316)</b>
Homes	483	496	13
Public Realm	6,525	7,434	908
Budgets controlled by the Director	127	361	234
<b>Executive Director (Resident and Climate Change)</b>	<b>7,135</b>	<b>8,290</b>	<b>1,155</b>
Senior Leadership Team	509	463	(46)
<b>Net Controllable Income and Expenditure</b>	<b>20,737</b>	<b>22,701</b>	<b>1,964</b>
<b>Net Recharge to the Housing Revenue Account</b>	<b>(6,145)</b>	<b>(6,530)</b>	<b>(385)</b>
<b>Net Cost of Services</b>	<b>14,593</b>	<b>16,171</b>	<b>1,579</b>
Income from Council Tax	(12,642)	(13,213)	(571)
Plus/Less Council Tax collection fund deficit/(surplus)	388	19	(369)
Business Rates Income	(4,069)	(4,467)	(398)
Plus/Less Rates collection fund deficit/(surplus) (Estimate)	1,705	1,127	(578)
New Homes Grant	(165)	(224)	(59)
Services Grant and Other Government Grants	(1,095)	(613)	482
Homelessness, UKSPF and EPR Grants	0	(2,731)	(2,731)
National Insurance Grant (Estimate)	0	(100)	(100)
Interest & Investment Income	(450)	(350)	100
Capital Financing Costs	1,210	1,305	95
Borrowing Interest Costs	1,026	627	(399)
Parish Precepts (Estimate)	2,217	2,384	167
<b>Net Total before movements in reserves</b>	<b>2,718</b>	<b>(64)</b>	<b>(2,781)</b>
Contribution (from) / to Earmarked Reserves - Other	(615)	(732)	(117)
Contribution (from) / to Earmarked Reserves - Grants	0	2,731	2,731
Contribution (from) / to Earmarked Reserves - Collection Fund	(2,093)	(1,127)	966
<b>Contribution from/ (to) GF balances</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>808</b>	<b>799</b>

Key of variance column = (Decrease in expenditure/increase in income), Increase in expenditure/reduction in income

General Fund Earmarked Reserves summary

Appendix A2

Reserve	Forecast Balance at 1 April 2025	Budgeted Movement	Forecast Balance 31 March 2026	Budgeted Movement	Forecast Balance 31 March 2027	Budgeted Movement	Forecast Balance 31 March 2028	Budgeted Movement	Forecast Balance 31 March 2029
	£'000	£'000	£'000						
<b>Earmarked Reserves</b>									
Strategic Initiatives Reserve	1,377	(294)	1,083	(173)	910	(10)	900		900
Business Rates Retention Reserve	3,061	(1,127)	1,934	(1,934)	0		0		0
Pensions Reserve	401	(401)	0		0		0		0
Transformation Reserve	988		988		988		988		988
Commitment Reserves	185	(27)	158	(27)	131	13	144	13	157
Grants and Contributions Reserve*	2,657	2,731	5,388		5,388		5,388		5,388
Local Plan Reserve (Other reserves)	453		453		453		453		453
Climate Change Reserve (Other reserves)	114	(10)	104	(10)	94		94		94
Civic Buildings Reserve (Other reserves)	301		301		301		301		301
Disability Access Reserve	82		82		82		82		82
Other Reserves	65		65		65		65		65
<b>Total Earmarked Reserves</b>	<b>9,684</b>	<b>872</b>	<b>10,556</b>	<b>(2,144)</b>	<b>8,412</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8,415</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8,428</b>
<b>General Fund Working Balance</b>	<b>6,460</b>	<b>(808)</b>	<b>5,652</b>	<b>(1,600)</b>	<b>4,052</b>	<b>(800)</b>	<b>3,252</b>	<b>(300)</b>	<b>2,952</b>
<b>Total Reserves</b>	<b>16,144</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>16,208</b>	<b>(3,744)</b>	<b>12,464</b>	<b>(797)</b>	<b>11,667</b>	<b>(287)</b>	<b>11,380</b>

\* It is anticipated the full £2.731m will be utilised in 2025/26 following recommendation of use to Cabinet (Homelessness grant, EPR Grant and UKSPF)