



**Powys County Council's
Medium Term Financial Strategy
2019 to 2024**

Foreword by the Leader

This Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) has been produced at a challenging time against the backdrop of continuing reductions in grant income from Welsh Government. In addition, the outcome of the Children's Services inspection during the Autumn of 2017 required a wholesale redrafting of the 2018/19 budget; this has inevitably impacted on our financial strategy for future years.

Whilst an increase in the funding to Wales from central government has meant that we have received an improved settlement from that originally projected, it is, however, still a reduction in the level of funding for services. This has created financial pressure particularly when our costs and investment requirements continue to rise.

The challenge of delivering services in rural areas has long been recognised in our County and I am pleased to say that this challenge is now acknowledged at a national level when the previous financial year saw the full implementation of the population sparsity allowance within the Social Services allocation of the funding formula. It's well known that this did not provide 'extra' funding but did see Powys removed from the need for 'Top Up' funding provided in previous years.

Even so, we continue to be affected by population changes and other factors that impact on the amount of money we receive to deliver services. Powys may no longer be at the bottom of the funding table but we are still 19 out of 22.

The 2019/20 budget proposal sees a significant level of budget reductions but the Cabinet has attempted to avoid reductions in front line services and the clear priority is to improve the provision of Social Services within our County. In 2018/19 we changed our budget plan at a late stage to include over £12m of investment that demonstrated our commitment to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults in Powys. This commitment remains and the draft 2019/20 budget takes out the need for Children's Services to make a £2.2m saving whilst confirming last year's significant addition remains in the base budget.

We have also continued to support investment in education at a time of reducing funding with a further £1m provided to schools. Over three years this means that an additional £1m has been provided each year.

The combination of these factors mean we face one of the most challenging periods in the history of Powys County Council. We must transform the way that we provide services using our 2025 programme as the basis for that change.

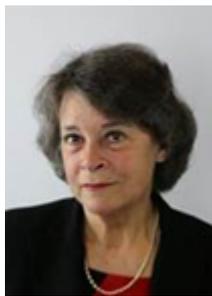
This revised MTFS continues to see closer alignment between the policy framework and the way we plan to use our finances. Our vision is a Council that is both open and enterprising. We want communities to feel supported so that they have a say in what is provided for them locally and the way those services are delivered.

We acknowledge that we need to increase the pace of change to meet the challenges we face and the new cabinet will bring fresh challenge, new ideas and new thinking that is flexible, innovative and designed to set the authority on course for a strong and

vibrant future. This approach along with a Corporate Improvement Plan provides the framework to deliver services over the medium term.

We note and welcome Welsh Government's commitment to seek greater collaboration across local government boundaries rather than changing local government structures. We were already fortunate to have a unique position in Wales with the same boundary as our single Local Health Board. The future will see integrated working develop further as we deliver the services that the people of Powys expect and deserve.

The Cabinet has a bold and ambitious programme to see Powys play a significant role in the region's economy and the close collaboration with Ceredigion continues in order to gain a growth deal that will have a greater significance beyond the economic agenda. It is essential that we see Powys retain its young people in new and innovative employment sectors whilst recognising that our traditional sectors of agriculture and tourism will also expand and flourish. There is a close link to our funding settlement because if we can increase employment and the numbers living in our county we will see more funding to deliver key services. This will help secure the County as place that provides the right environment for communities and business to thrive.



Rosemarie Harris
Leader of Powys County Council

Introduction

This document is the financial strategy for Powys County Council for the period 2019 to 2024. It has been developed as part of the overall strategic planning process alongside the 2025 Vision and Corporate Improvement Plan which captures the financial, regulatory and policy drivers affecting the council and sets the direction and approach. It also incorporates the plan for delivering a balanced budget for 2019/20, and indicative budgets for the following 4 years to March 2024. This means the Council has an ongoing financial plan to enable service transformation within the funding levels available.

This financial strategy includes all Council services activity funded by the revenue budget, the Housing Revenue Account and the Capital programme. This information is presented in a 5-year budget model and a 5-year Capital Strategy Programme.

The model sets out how a balanced budget will be delivered for 2019/20.

The model identifies the estimated requirement for further savings of £26m over the remaining four-year period of this strategy. Given that local government does not have funding data from Welsh Government beyond 2019/20, this assessment is based on indicative figures focusing on how Local Government Settlements in Wales may be affected by central government's finances in the future. It is therefore based on best available information. However, forecasting for future years is difficult to predict with any great certainty and is subject to multiple internal and external influences. Even so, it is highly likely the reducing funding for Powys will continue because of population changes and the continuing reductions in national funding. The funding for local government is finite and largely distributed based on population factors and this remains our greatest challenge when compared with other parts of Wales that see an increase in population.

Strategic Context

The Chancellor has signalled an end to austerity but the Council's budget settlement will continue to be affected by the UK Government's measures to prioritize levels of public spending. Welsh Government's policy of prioritization on the Health Service will also impact adversely on local government funding.

The budget process both at a national and local level continues to be undertaken against an uncertain backdrop, both in terms of the fiscal outlook and in terms of the impact of leaving the European Union.

The Office for Budget Responsibility reports that the outlook for the public finances, in the medium term, looks much the same as it did in March 2018. A significant improvement in the underlying pace of deficit reduction, that, on its own, would have put the Government on course to achieve its objective of a balanced budget for the first time. However, this underlying improvement had already been swallowed up by the Prime Minister's promise of higher spending on the NHS made in June. The remaining budget policy measures are a further near-term giveaway that gradually diminishes over the forecast leaving the deficit in 2022-23 little changed overall.

GDP growth in 2018 is projected to be 1.3 per cent down from the 1.5 originally forecasted, primarily due to temporary effects of the snowy first quarter. Therefore, slightly stronger growth is expected than was forecasted in March.

The upward revision to cumulative GDP growth means that the underlying improvement in the budget deficit rises from £11.9 billion, this year to £18.1 billion by 2022/23. At 0.6 per cent of GDP, on average, this is the largest favourable underlying forecast revision made since Dec 13. Improvements are down to the strength in tax receipts in 2018/19, lower unemployment, lower debt interest and other smaller factors. On its own, this would have been sufficient to achieve a budget surplus of £3.5 billion by 2023-24, meeting the fiscal objective of balancing the budget by 2025, but the UK Governments budget spends the fiscal windfall rather than saving it.

The big picture in this forecast is of a relatively stable but unspectacular trajectory for economic growth close to 1.5 percent in every year plus a gradual further decline in the budget deficit and in net debt as a share of GDP. However, the forecast is made based on some broad brush assumptions regarding the impact of Brexit. OBR will adjust their assumptions, as necessary, for the eventual agreements on trade, migration, budget contributions and other issues. The forecast assumes a relatively smooth exit from the EU. A disorderly one could have severe short-term implications for the economy, the exchange rate, asset prices and the public finances. The scale is very hard to predict, given the lack of precedent.

On 29 October, the Chancellor of the Exchequer presented the UK Autumn Budget. As a result of the UK Government's spending decisions, Wales received Barnett consequential of £554.3m between 2018-19 and 2020-21. This comprises an extra £485.9m revenue; £59.9m capital and £8.5m of financial transactions capital.

Welsh Government had stated that local government would be "front of the queue" for extra funding resulting from the Autumn Budget as it recognised the real pressures local authorities are facing. The final settlement reflected some awareness of this commitment.

In January 2018, local authorities were facing a 1% reduction in the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) for 2019-20 – this was equivalent to a cash reduction of £43m. The draft Budget 2019-20 reduced that cut in funding in the RSG to less than £15m (equivalent to a reduction of 0.3% in the RSG). Welsh Government put in place a floor to ensure no authority would face a reduction in funding of more than 1% over the previous year. The draft Budget also provided £84m of additional revenue in special grants and other funding streams for local government outside the RSG.

In November, Welsh Government announced a package of additional funding proposals worth a total of £141.5m over three years (2018-21) for local government.

Wales Fiscal Analysis briefing note reports that Welsh Government day-to-day spending will increase by over 2%, in real terms, in 2019-20 - by far the largest increase since before the start of austerity measures in 2010-11. However, it will still be around 5% lower in real terms than in 2010-11.

On the capital side of the budget, the majority of consequentials for capital spending from the Autumn Budget was for the current financial year (2018-19), though the capital block grant for 2019-20 has increased by around £10.6 million. The Welsh Government has also allocated a further £27.5 million from its unallocated capital finance, the majority of which will go to local authorities' general capital fund.

Local government and the wider public sector has, and must continue, to realign itself to the fiscal reality it faces and manage its spending within the available funding.

Powys has already made significant reductions in its expenditure with savings in excess of £100 million over the last decade as a response to reduced government funding and the requirement to cover additional spending demands.

The local context affecting our funding and demand for services is well recognised and heavily influenced by Powys being sparsely populated with a wide geographic area requiring services. Powys has a higher than average elderly population that is predicted to increase at a rate that is significantly greater than the national average. This statistic can largely be attributed to people living longer as a result of better healthcare and improved lifestyles together with an inward migration of people above retirement age to the County. Conversely, the county's younger population is declining with a reducing birth rate and a sizeable outward migration of young people. Further educational and career opportunities are the main contributors to this trend.

These factors in combination are presenting significant challenges. The provision of services to a dispersed and relatively small population is expensive as a result of greater transport costs and the demand for facilities to be delivered locally or within a commutable distance. Additionally, a consequence of an ageing population is the increased demand for more complex, and therefore more expensive, care support.

We welcomed the recognition in the funding settlement that rural authorities incur additional costs to deliver services such as social services and are pleased to see the inclusion of adjustments to the formula through the implementation of the Social Services sparsity allowance. The phasing of this change now sees Powys excluded from the top-up protection it received previously so the actual effect of the change is nil.

The work undertaken by the Local Government and Welsh Government Joint Distribution Sub Group has been vital in bringing these issues to the fore. This is only the start and we would welcome further work on the grant funding formula looking at other costs such as Public, Home to School and Special Education Transport all of which are significant cost pressures for rural authorities.

In 2017 Powys received a poor inspection report from Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW). The Council fully accepted the findings in the report, published on the 17th October, and the subsequent warning notice issued by Welsh Government. It quickly acknowledged the need for urgent and sustained change to ensure the safeguarding of children in Powys.

A significant level of investment has been provided for both Children's and Adult's totalling £12m, and while this demonstrates the priority that these services have in our

decision making, it presented a significant and late challenge to our financial planning in 2018/19.

In order to deliver a balanced budget over the medium term, a transformational approach is required, and which will need to be delivered at pace. This will require some radical thinking, drawing on experience of other authorities and learning from others. We will have to reconsider the discretionary services we provide and review the levels of service we can afford to deliver for our statutory services.

The developing commissioning strategy for Social Services will describe how we will align the finances in that area, what investment/reinvestment and disinvestment is required to reshape the service, and what outcomes will be achieved in the short, medium and long term, including savings from more efficient working practices as well as investment and early intervention.

This work is key to the development of the Council's financial strategy and as this and the approach to transformation becomes clearer over the next few months, we will need to realign and refocus our financial strategy over the medium and longer term.

On the current modelling, reductions are required in spending of over £6.5m in 2020/2021 with a further £20m over the following 3 years. This will be achieved through transformational change and cost efficiencies but reductions in some services offered will also be inevitable.

We clearly recognise that we can no longer afford to maintain the Council in its current form. The status quo is not sustainable and a different operating model will be required.

Vision 2025 – Our Corporate Improvement Plan 2018 - 2023

The 2017 local government elections saw a new cabinet and new vision in place. Vision 2025 represents the new administration's long term vision for the council and its priorities are clearly laid out, these are:

- **The Economy** - We will develop a vibrant economy
- **Health and Care** - We will lead the way in providing effective, integrated health and care in a rural environment
- **Learning and Skills** - We will strengthen learning and skills
- **Residents and Communities** - We will support our residents and communities

To help us deliver the above outward facing priorities, we also have an internal facing priority called Making it Happen, which focusses on improving communication and engagement, leadership and governance and changing how we work.

The Corporate Improvement Plan is our road map to achieve the Vision 2025, setting out our top priorities and milestones. It draws together information from a number of our key strategies, the steps we will take to meet our priorities and the improvements you can expect to see when our plan is delivered.

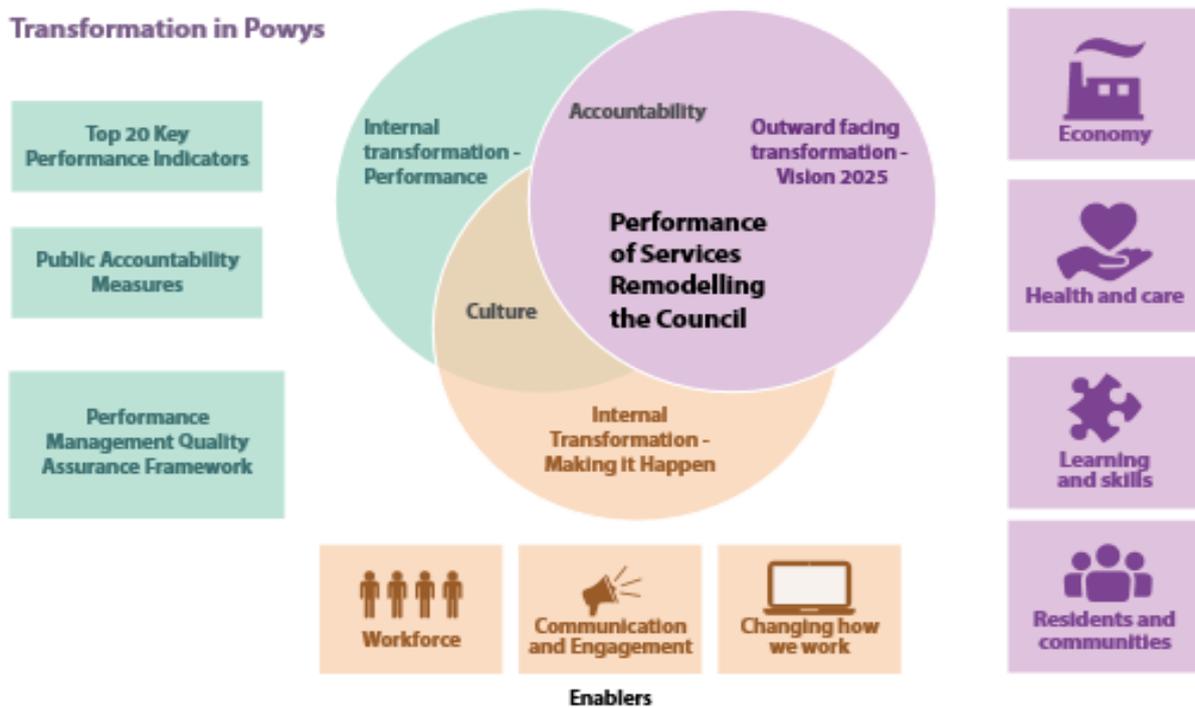
It provides an important framework for engaging residents, councillors, staff and other stakeholders, such as regulators, in the vision and the council's priorities.

During 2018, we redefined our approach to delivering Vision 2025 to ensure improved accountability and a greater focus on outcomes. This includes:

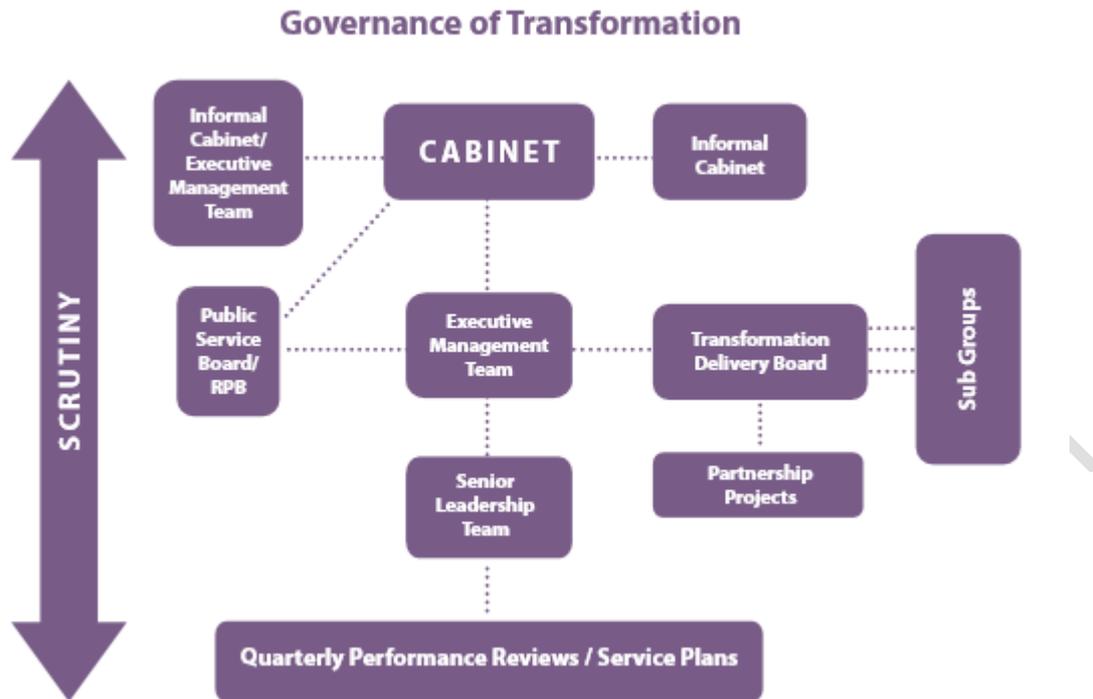
- Adopting a new strategic approach to council performance
- Changing the organisation culture and promoting positive behaviour
- Internal transformation and remodelling the council

The new approach to organisational transformation includes:

Transformation in Powys

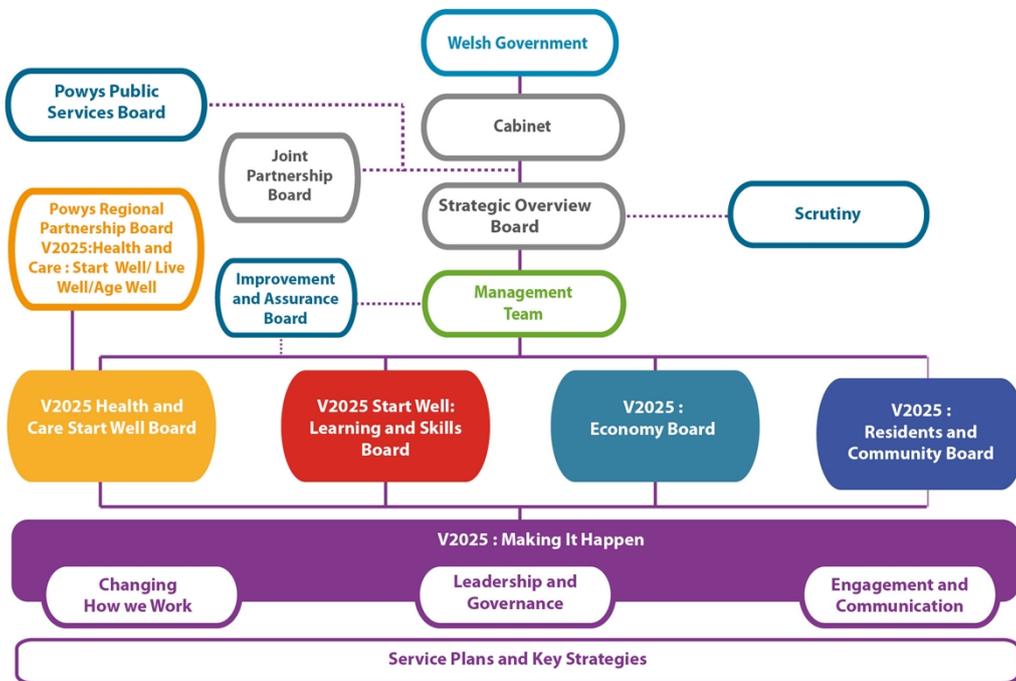
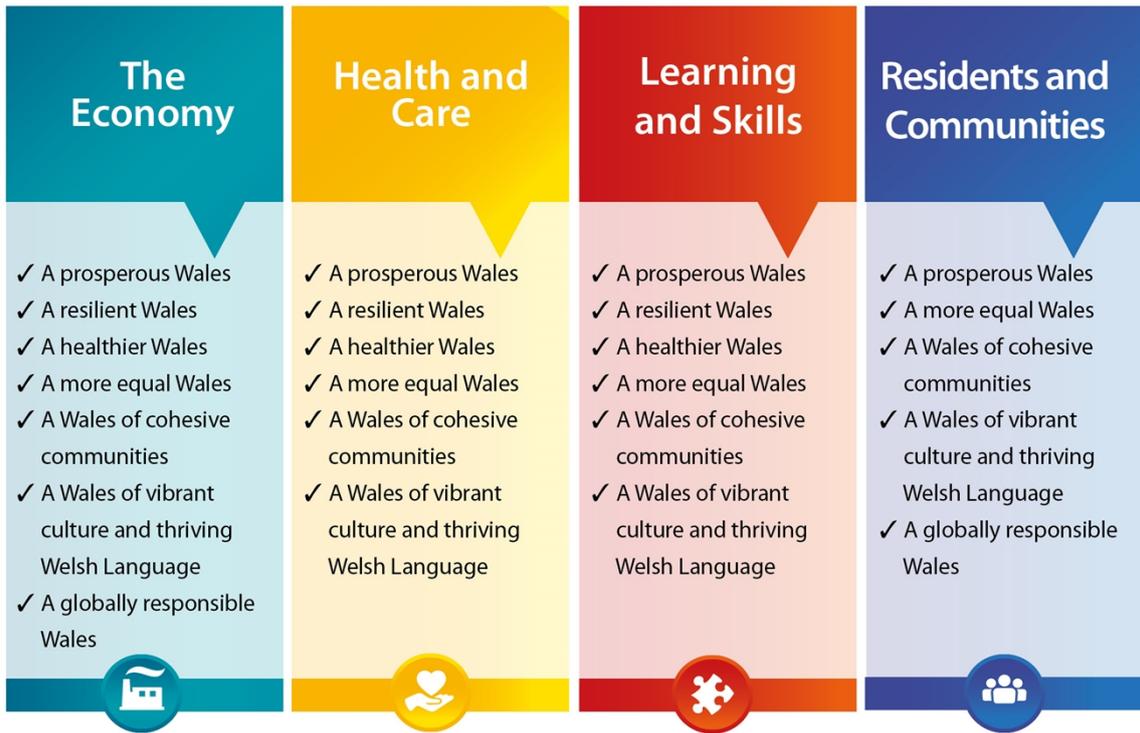


Governance of Vision 2025 has also been streamlined. There is now one Transformation Programme that will focus purely on significant transformational projects that need to be delivered by more than one service. There will still be lots of service improvement work that will help us deliver Vision 2025, but this will be managed and governed separately at a service level.

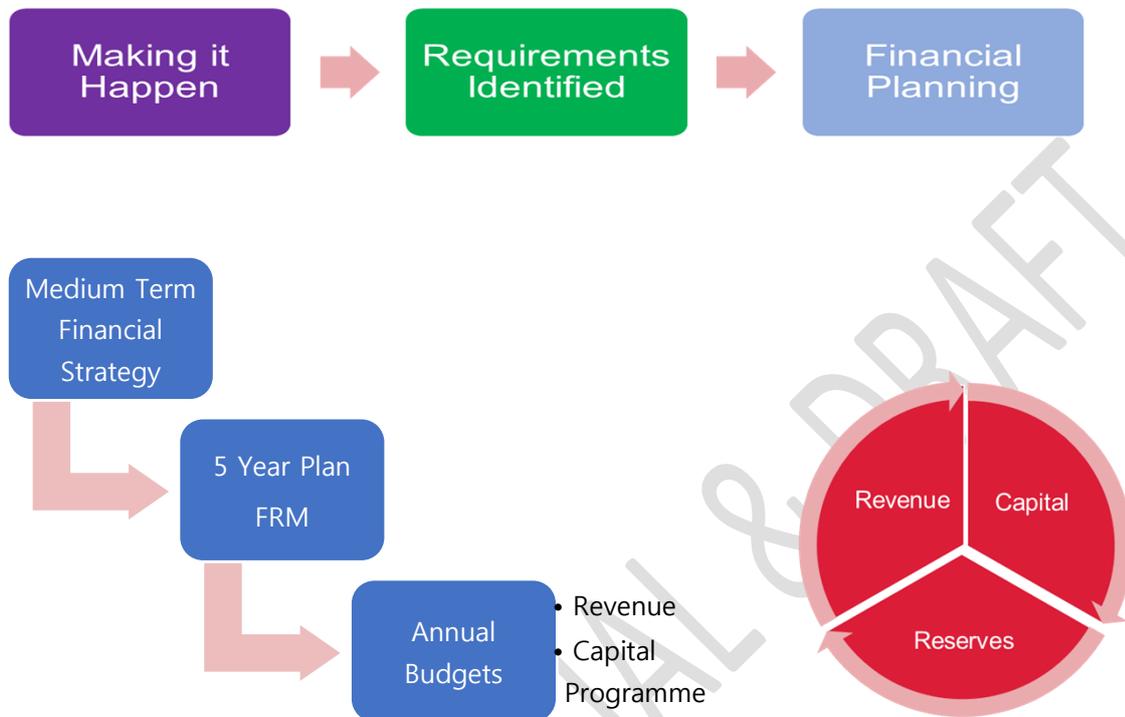


Our Corporate Improvement Plan shows our contribution to the strategies that we are working on with our partners. These include the Powys Public Services Board Towards 2040, and the Powys Regional Partnership Board Joint Area Plan.

The plan also shows how we are contributing to the aspirations of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Act puts in place seven well-being goals to ensure public bodies in Wales are working towards improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of their areas. Each of our priorities contributes to one or more of the well-being goals that will help us improve Powys now and over the long term:



In an era of continued budgetary pressures, growing demand and increased expectations, it is very important that we are clear about what we want to achieve now, and in the future and support this within our financial planning.



Funding Assumptions

The Welsh Government provides funding to the Council in the form of a Revenue Settlement Grant (RSG) and a share of the National Non Domestic Rates Pool (NNDR). Together they constitute the Council's Aggregate External Finance (AEF), which represents approximately 70% of our funding.

The Aggregate External Finance (AEF) figure for 2019/20 was £174.291m, which was a 0.3% or £0.524m reduction in grant after adjusting for transfers. The impact upon Local Government in Wales as a whole was an average increase in funding of 0.2%. This means that Powys has £1,323 of funding per capita, compared to the Wales average of £1,352 and the year on year change ranks 12th out of all the Unitary Authorities.

Powys collects NNDR (more commonly known as Business Rates) from businesses within the county. These funds are pooled at a national level and redistributed to Councils via a formula. Powys receives over £13m more than it collects.

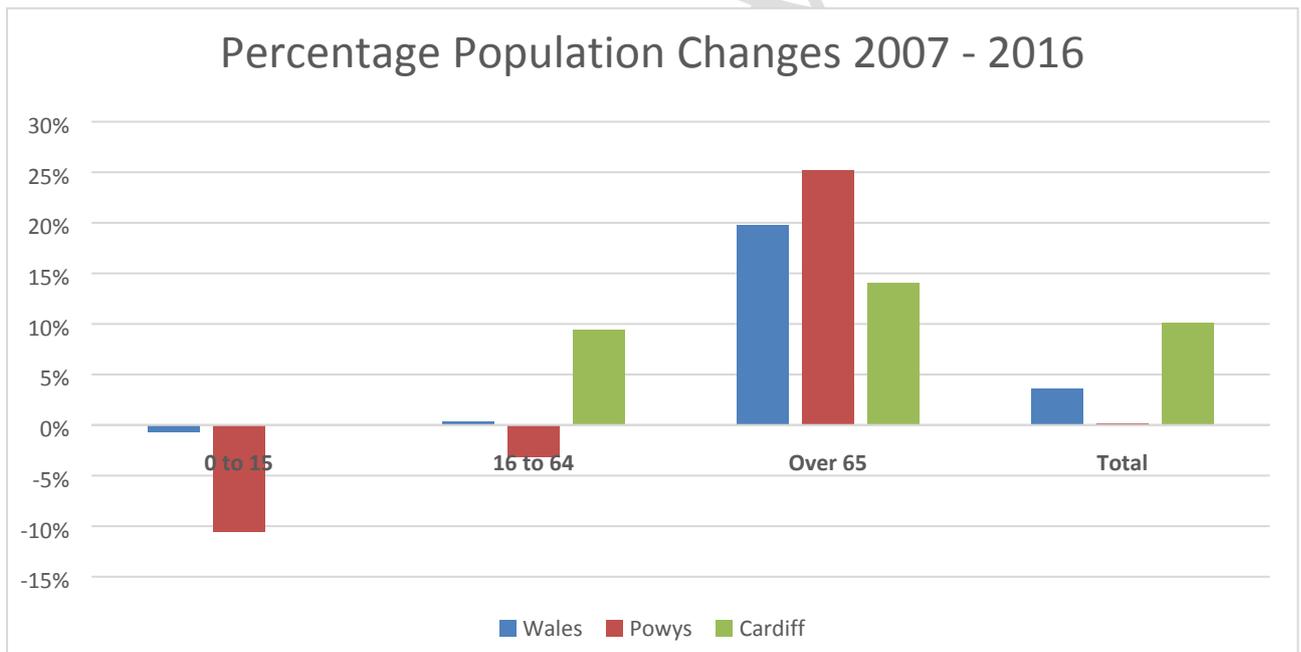
Powys' Settlement also reflects movements in the factors included in the overall formula like population projections, pupil numbers and benefit claimant counts. The key indicators are shown in the table below.

Changes in Key Datasets

Dataset*	2018-19 Final	2019-20 Final	% Difference	Rank
Population projections	131,922	131,721	-0.2%	22
Pupil Numbers - Nursery and Primary	9,840	9,755	-0.9%	21
Pupil Numbers - Secondary in year groups 7-11	6,315	6,297	-0.3%	18
Free School Meals - Primary	1,065	1,034	-2.9%	20
Free School Meals - Secondary	640	637	-0.5%	15
Children in out of work families	3,000	2,900	-3.3%	15
IS/ JSA/ PC/UC (not in employment) claimants - 18 to 64	1,886	1,605	-14.9%	22
IS/ JSA/ PC claimants - 65+	4,684	4,466	-4.7%	8
IS/ JSA/ PC/UC (not in employment) claimants - all ages	6,584	6,084	-7.6%	11
SDA/DLA/PIP claimants - 18 to 64	4,538	4,544	0.1%	4

1. For definitions of the indicators refer to the Local Government Settlement 2019-20 - Local Government Finance (Councils) Report.

The total number of people living in Powys is declining which impacts on the amount of funding we receive. This is further compounded as population in other Authorities and across Wales is rising leading to further impacts for Powys on the distribution of funding. This trend is set to continue and is reflected in the funding assumptions we make.



The number of pupils in Nursery and Primary Schools in Powys have reduced. Pupil numbers reduced by 85. The number of pupils in Secondary Schools in Powys has reduced by 18.

Powys has seen a continued decline in pupil numbers over the last ten years and although numbers are stabilising, they are not projected to recover to their former levels. Even if maintained at their current levels, the increase in numbers elsewhere in Wales will potentially mean we have less funding in our future settlements.

Free School Meals in Powys have decreased in both Primary and Secondary sectors, by 2.9% and 0.5% respectively.

Welsh Government has not provided any settlement figures for future years. The table below models the percentage change in Aggregate External Finance (AEF) if a reduction were applied. A 1% reduction equates to £1.74m.

Reduction	Cash Reduction
%	£'000
0.5%	0.870
1.0%	1.740
2.0%	3.480
3.0%	5.221
4.0%	6.961

Due to the amount of funding delivered to the Council in this way, any change can be significant and in order to plan over a 5-year period we have assumed that funding will continue to fall at 2% per annum; a reduction of over £13.5m by 2023/2024.

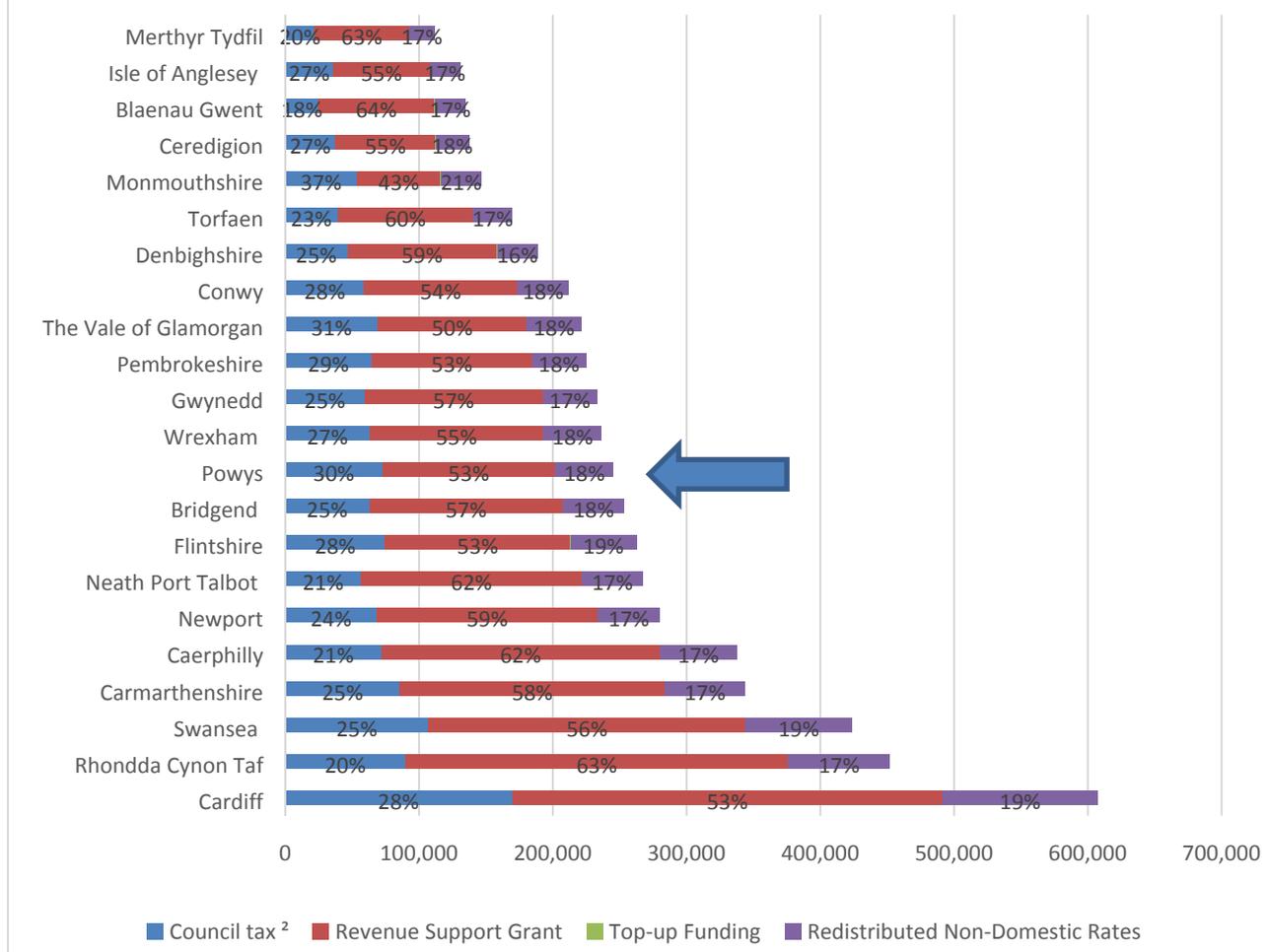
Specific Grants

In addition to the AEF, Councils also receive specific grants which are accompanied by specific terms and conditions as to how they can be used. We receive around £60m of grant funding each year. These grants have also declined in recent years and where a grant has been reduced or withdrawn, the Council's policy is that the service funded by the grant also reduces or ceases.

Council Tax

Council Tax represents around 30% of the Council's Net revenue budget. Powys' Council Tax contribution is greater than other Authorities. Most other authorities collect less because they have a greater share of the RSG. Council tax charges across Wales in 2018/19 shows that Powys has the 9th lowest charge for Band D in Wales.

Principal council funding, by Unitary Authority, 2018-19



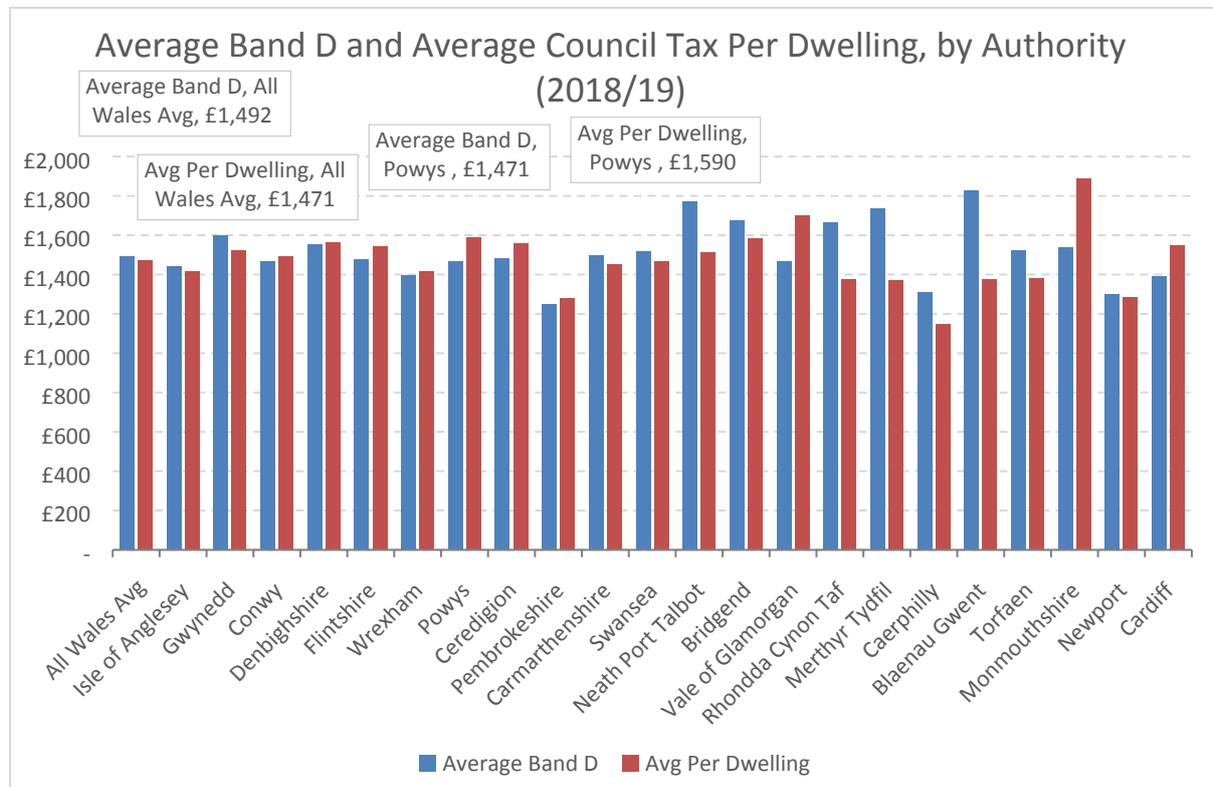
In our financial model (FRM), we are proposing an increase in Council Tax each year of 5% for future years.

The total Council Tax households will have to pay will be affected by decisions from public bodies, including Community Councils and the Police Authority.

The following table indicates the additional permanent funding per annum that Council Tax increases ranging from 1% to 10% produces:

Council Tax Percentage	Impact of Increase
1.0%	£0.73m
2.5%	£1.84m
5.0%	£3.67m
7.5%	£5.51m
10.0%	£7.35m

A balance needs to be struck between the ability to raise enough money to fund important services to the right level and the impact increasing taxation has on the residents of the County. Average Council Tax per dwelling in Powys was the 4th highest in Wales in 2018/19. This is particularly sensitive in a county with one of the lowest average wage levels in Wales.



Council Tax collection rate for 2017/18 was 97.5%, 0.1% above the Welsh average of 97.4%. The highest collection rate in Wales for 2017/18 was 98.3%. By the end of December 2018 the collection rate for 2017-18 had risen to 99.04%.

The introduction of Council Tax premiums, on 1st April 2017, and the roll-out of Welfare Reform, including universal credit in Powys, in October 2018, was predicted to have an impact on in-year collection and arrears, estimated at between 0.2% to 0.3% drop on in-year collection. Comparing in-year collection rates, 2016/17 (97.6%) to 2017/18 (97.5%), saw a reduction of 0.1% - less than predicted.

Revenue Budget

Our revenue budget indicates what we will spend on day to day services. It includes the cost of salaries for staff employed by the Council, contracts for services procured by the Council, other goods and services consumed by the Council and the cost of financing borrowing to support the capital programme. Our revenue spending priorities

are determined according to the Council's statutory responsibilities and local priorities as set out in our corporate plan (Vision 2025).

Reductions in funding and increasing cost pressures place significant pressure on service delivery. Over the last decade we have made savings of approximately £100m. Our financial strategy must identify and calculate the impact of pay, price and inflationary increases, changes in demand for service provision, changes in statutory and legislative obligations, and the funding of our local priorities.

Each Directorate maintains an individual Financial Strategy and model (FRM) which is considered as part of the overall budget model. The approach is a new one and enables a greater level of financial planning at a lower organisational level. In addition, the strategy "Safe and Sustainable Budgets for Social Care" will inform future investment and disinvestment in these services. In addition, the Programmes to deliver the Vision 2025 will be developed and monitored through the Council's Transformation Delivery Board for inclusion in the annual budget cycle and 5-year plan.

It is expected that the 2025 Vision will be delivered within the existing Revenue Budget. Some investment may be required to support capital expenditure or transformational activity and funding identified to support our plans will be allocated on the basis of sound business cases.

A number of overarching assumptions are included in our planning, a summary of which together with a sensitivity analysis of the projections are as follows:-

Driver	Comments	FRM Assumption(s)	Impact (£m)	Sensitivity: +/- 1% (£m)
Revenue Support Grant & Non-Domestic Rates Funding	Welsh Government have indicated an average 1% reduction in funding for 2019/20; in addition data changes impact adversely on Powys' funding, therefore we assume a higher level of reduction	0.15%	£0.26m	£1.74m
Council Tax	Cabinet have set the current assumption at 5% increase per annum	9.80%	£7.20m	£0.73m
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	1% Change in Council tax			
External Grants	Approximately £62.6m of external revenue grants expected in 2018/19	-	-	£0.63m
Inflation - Pay	Includes Employers National Insurance & Pensions	2.00%	£1.37m	£0.68m
Inflation - Non Pay	Excludes Schools and Adult Social Care	2.00%	£0.28m	£0.14m
Additional Funding For Schools	Additional £1m assumed in 2019/20		£1.00m	
Children's Placements	1% Change in the number of Children who are looked after			£0.85m
Home Care Clients	1% Change in the number of clients receiving home care			£0.20m
Residential/ Nursing Clients	1% Change in the number of clients placed in residential homes			£1.13m
Pension Fund Contributions	Based on the latest actuarial review an additional £750k has been included in the FRM every year throughout the planning horizon		£0.75m	
School Rolls	Net increase of c. £200k included in FRM for 2019/20; Impact beyond 2019/20 TBC		£0.19m	

We set our budget within a statutory framework under the Local Government Act 2003 that requires a balanced budget for the forthcoming financial year. There is no requirement to set out a balanced position beyond the next year but the five-year strategy has been developed to enable longer term planning and transformation.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy:

- Identifies the cost of implementing our Vision;
- sets out future funding levels from Welsh Government;
- considers the level of Council Tax to be raised;
- identifies and estimates the cost pressures facing the Council;
- sets out the policy on Reserves;
- identifies the gap between our funding and expenditure.

How we will balance the budget

In order to deliver an ongoing balanced budget, the gap in our financial planning must be closed.

As a temporary measure reserves were utilised in 2018/19 to bridge the gap. This provided more time for the development of savings proposals and the transformational programme that needs to be implemented.

Current modelling is as follows:-

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Council Tax Increase	9.5%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%
Funding Change	0.2%	(2.0%)	(2.0%)	(2.0%)	(2.0%)
Total Funding	£255.2m	£255.7m	£256.6m	£257.7m	£259.1m
Net Budget c/f	£247.5m	£255.2m	£255.7m	£256.6m	£257.7m
Inflation	£1.6m	£3.5m	£3.6m	£3.6m	£3.7m
New Responsibilities	£4.1m	£0.5m	£0.5m	£0.5m	£0.5m
Pension Requirements	£0.9m	£0.8m	£0.8m	£0.8m	-
Other Pressures	£6.3m	£2.4m	£1.4m	£2.8m	-
Savings Identified	(£12.7m)	-	-	-	-
To/ (From) Reserves & MRP	£7.5m	-	£2.5m	£2.5m	-
Total Budget	£255.2m	£262.3m	£264.5m	£266.7m	£261.8m
Budget Gap - In Year	-	(£6.6m)	(£7.9m)	(£9.0m)	(£2.7m)

The following strategies will be developed to close the gap:-

- The transformation of service provision;
- improved efficiency and a “Right First Time” ethos;
- identification of investment opportunities and income;

- Capital Programme – reviewed, opportunity to invest;
- Cross Cutting Themes;
- commerciality/income generation/fees and charges;
- reconsider the levels of Council Tax increase;
- some service reductions – ceasing or reductions to levels of service;
- the use of the Spend to Save reserve to support transformation;
- the raising of capital receipts to support transformation.

Council Wide Operating Principles for Transformation

- Moving from an organisational focus (supporting our own internal requirements and functional silo's) to a focus that looks to meet our residents and communities' needs;
- Management ethos focuses on improving the outcomes for residents and communities by removing barriers.
- Moving from functional silos to services that effectively meets our residents and communities' demand.
- Decision making is based on a clear set of principles, experience, knowledge, robust evidence and is taken as close to the frontline as possible.
- Continuous improvement informed by timely data which will measure how well we are delivering outcomes for residents and communities.
- Accountable for activities and accepting responsibility, resulting in transparent delivery of effective outcomes.
- We challenge everything we do, and will realise the right outcomes using our transformation methodology.
- Partnerships are outcome focused, based on collaboration and strong relationships (working together, stronger together).

The transformation of services will require investment to implement. This is supported within our financial planning and includes a recurring Management of Change revenue budget, a specific Spend to Save reserve and the use of capital receipts to capitalise appropriate costs. We will also bid for additional resources from Welsh Government to support our programme.

Budget Principles

The approach to budget setting is underpinned by the following Budget Principles approved by Cabinet:-

- a. Flexible, Remote and Mobile working
This is already underway and should be aligned to downsizing corporate offices and increasing productivity. There is considerable cost tied up in the corporate estate and a savings target for accommodation savings will be explored. This must be based on a new approach to working arrangements.
- b. Improving Collaboration
The Welsh Government's policies on local government collaboration mean we will seek partnering arrangements as further detail emerges. There may be scope to explore the various collaborative models including partnerships and

shared services. We already collaborate but more can be done and the Local Health Board is a key partner under this theme.

c. Customer Insight

The Business Intelligence function has made progress since its creation. However, we are still richer in data than information. Improved decision making and performance through better customer insight may be an area where financial gains can be made.

d. Business Process Improvements

There is already good evidence that progress has been made in this area. However, this is patchy and the organisation needs to fully embrace business process improvement techniques. Technology can assist this area and the introduction of a new finance system will be a key element as well as integrating systems to make processes more efficient. Investment here can bring significant savings which may not impact directly on front-line service delivery and therefore should be politically easier to deliver.

e. Productivity

Access to information, better techniques and relevant training can increase productivity and more responsive services (this should be linked to business process improvements outlined above). The Roots programme can be a key foundation for improving productivity. Areas such as customer relationship management, workflow and case management can also be looked at under this theme.

f. Flexibility

It may be appropriate to support the workforce in work/life balance issues whilst remaining within Local Government terms and conditions. Some councils have offered the workforce the options of a more flexible approach to leave arrangements that sees staff `buy` additional holiday by being able to take unpaid leave to external holidays. Clearly this would need to be carefully managed but has the benefit of avoiding reducing workforce numbers as a result of change.

g. Commercialisation.

A more commercial approach is already evident in Business Services within the Resources Directorate with contracts being won and services provided to other public organisations. This can be a key part meeting the 2019/20 requirement and may require an exploration of the model in order to remain compliant with local government legislation. There is great scope to increase the income flows to the Council. In addition to business services, there is potential for a range of services such as catering, cleaning and vehicle/plant maintenance to trade. The services will need to be run on a commercial basis and will have to compete locally as well as nationally. Property is another area where we can increase income from taking a more speculative approach to acquisitions, leases and development.

Income, Fees and Charges

Income generated through fees and charges plays an important part of our financial strategy. The Council raises approximately £60m of income annually. An **Income Policy** is in place together with a Fees and Charges register. It is important that fees are reviewed at least annually as part of the budget setting process and reviewed during the year, in line with the Council's income policy. This will ensure existing targets are being met, additional costs are being recovered through charging, and any further income potential is explored to maximise the Council's resources.

Improving income management and service cost recovery has a key role to play in enabling the Council to achieve its financial and wider strategic objectives.

The Wellbeing and Future Generation Act – Assessing the impact of our decisions

The Wellbeing and Future Generation Act enshrines in legislation sound principles that mean the impact of decisions should be considered over a wide range of stakeholders over a longer period. The Council has a thorough impact assessment process in place to ensure that all decisions are properly considered. All budget decisions will continue to be assessed rigorously to ensure that the impact is understood and that prudent and sustainable budgets continue to be set.

Capital

The **Capital Strategy** is fundamental to the effective delivery of the Council priorities and our Vision 2025. It facilitates a seamless interface between business planning within the Council and the management of assets and capital resources. This will ensure that the provision of resources and future investment are prioritised. The provision of the right asset in the right place at the right time will ensure the effective and efficient delivery of a comprehensive range of quality services. It is aligned to the Asset Management Plan and the major investment plan for 21st Century Schools, jointly funded with Welsh Government.

The future capital requirements will align with the revenue budget, ensuring investment is linked to service development and commerciality. Ultimately, our aim is to use fewer resources, including our buildings, but use these far more efficiently.

The Capital Programme, is closely aligned to the Treasury Management Strategy, in terms of identifying and undertaking necessary borrowing and when cash will be paid into the Council's bank to support cashflow.

The Council is required to make an annual charge against its revenue budget for the repayment of its debt liability in respect of capital expenditure funded by borrowing, for both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Debt. This is called the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). The Council revised the method of calculating MRP to a 2% straight line for the General Fund, for debt going forward.

It has now reviewed the current years MRP liability and will retrospectively make an adjustment that will see the debt liability being repaid eight years earlier, and effectively moves the start point of the 50 years useful asset life back to 2007/08. This means that the debt liability will be reduced to nil in 2057, rather than in 2065. The

impact is less MRP on the general fund of over £19m. The MRP policy statement is adopted each year and provides a full picture of the Council's strategy.

A Welsh Government Directive has provided Authorities with the opportunity to utilise capital receipts from the sale of property and other assets to fund transformation costs. Powys has used this opportunity appropriately to capitalise such costs over the last 3 years and will again consider using this to support transformation costs over the next 3 years.

A **Capital Receipts Policy** has been developed to support this approach which includes the projected level and use of receipts over the period for which the directive applies. The disposal of surplus property and assets will be assessed on an annual basis and the level of receipt projected and considered within the budget model.

Reserves

The **Reserves Policy** establishes a framework within which decisions are made regarding the level of reserves held by the Council and the purposes for which they will be maintained and used. This is a key component of the MTFs as a sound reserves policy is essential in order to underpin the financial sustainability of the Council. It is for this reason that we have developed our approach to reserves through an effective policy.

The use of reserves and the levels at which they are maintained is determined on an annual basis as part of the Council's budget setting process following a risk based assessment. The approach is supported by the policy around the use of reserves. All reserves are corporate rather than service based.

The Council faces a continuing financial challenge and it is essential that a prudent reserve level is in place to ensure enough financial capacity is available. This cannot be stressed too highly given the level of savings, the risk inherent in the budget and the significant challenge to balance the budget over the medium term.

Reserves of £7m were used to support the 2018/19 budget. This one-off funding reduced the need for further immediate savings, providing more time for the development of the transformational programme that needs to be implemented.

The level and purpose of holding of reserves is a matter for each authority to determine as part of sound financial management. However, it is useful to refer to Financial Indicators based on ratios produced by Welsh Government. These indicators provide comparative statistics for Local Authorities and include the following on reserves:-

	Powys¹	All Wales Average¹
Usable reserves as % of gross revenue expenditure	17.9%	17.5%
Earmarked reserves as % of gross revenue expenditure	9.7%	12.2%
General reserves days turnover	10.8 days	10.3 days

¹Local Authority Financial Indicators, Wales

2016/17

The above indicates Powys compares favourably with the rest of Wales in terms of usable reserves and days turnover.

Usable reserves as a percentage of gross revenue expenditure

This indicator measures the relationship between an authority's usable reserves and its annual gross revenue expenditure.

The average for Wales in 2016/17 was 17.5% (17.8% 2015/16). Seven authorities had a % greater than 20% (seven in 2015/16). Powys is 17.9% (18.4% 2015/16).

Earmarked reserves as a percentage of gross revenue expenditure

This is an indication of reserves increasing proportionately more than gross revenue expenditure or vice versa.

Councils with very high levels of earmarked reserves relative to their spending should review the purposes for which these are held to ensure they are still required. The purpose for holding reserves, particularly where reserves are increasing, should be clearly communicated in presentation to the Council and through the annual accounts. The average for Wales in 2016/17 was 12.2% (12.4% 2015/16). Seven authorities had a % greater than 15% (eight in 2015/16). Powys is 9.7% (2015/16 8.4%).

General reserves days' turnover

This measures the number of days an authority would have of financial cover if it needed to utilise solely general reserves to fund day to day expenditure. Usually this is shown as a percentage but number of days can provide a clearer way of showing the reserve cover. Where the cover is high, it will indicate that an Authority has a low risk strategy. Conversely, a low coverage suggests a higher risk strategy. This may be through choice or due to a lack of other funds.

The number of days' turnover covered by unallocated reserves for Wales in 2016/17 was 10.3 (2015/16 was 10.8). Four authorities had more than 17 days' turnover cover (2015/16 two). Powys is 10.8 (2015/16 18 days).

These indicators demonstrate that Powys has been around the average for the indicators reported.

Ring-fenced and Specific Reserves are identified and held for defined purposes, this includes a Spend to Save reserve which provides a source of funding for transformational activity across the Council. Allocations from this reserve are considered by the Making it Happen Programme Board and are approved on the basis of an appropriate business case.

The use and replenishment of reserves are included into the 5 year FRM.

Investments and Borrowing

The Council has a clear ***Treasury Management and Investment Strategy*** which is approved at Council each year and sets out the expected activities and appropriate strategies of the Treasury function in respect of borrowing and investments.

Cashflow management is essential to ensure we minimise our need to borrow. Strengthening the understanding and importance of this function could facilitate stronger working capital and the ability to invest balances at a rate of return level of around 0.5%. In recent years, minimal investment income has been achieved through cashflow management, because of the uncertainty about the level of capital spending

profile. A return could be achieved if we had confidence in capital obligations alongside corporate changes to creditor payments and debt collection.

The strategy confirms the need to borrow to support the capital programme and continue to be significantly under borrowed. The consequence of which is the reduced cost of borrowing and the revenue budget model and forecast are revised regularly to assist the budgets.

The Council's policy of avoiding new borrowing by running down spare cash balances has served well over the last few years. However, this needs to be carefully reviewed to avoid incurring higher borrowing costs in later times when the Authority will not be able to avoid new borrowing to finance capital expenditure and/or to refinance maturing debt. Borrowing rates are forecast to increase, and borrowing to cover the future capital programme costs will be considered against the cost of carry.

Risks and Risk Management

At a time when the Council is facing unprecedented challenges, the effective management of risk is needed more than ever. A risk-managed approach to decision making will help us to achieve the objectives of Vision 2025 and deliver services more efficiently, using innovative and cost-effective means.

A ***Risk Management Framework*** is in place to ensure that at all levels of the organisation we are able to identify risks which would prevent us from achieving our objectives (including failing to take advantage of opportunities). There is clear guidance on the terminology associated with risk management and the process itself, along with a set of practical tools and techniques to help us manage risks, deliver objectives, meet targets and maintain resilience.

We must not lose sight of the fact that risk is inextricably linked to opportunities and innovation. The Council cannot be risk adverse, and it needs to take full advantage of opportunities for improving services therefore we need to be proactive in the way that we identify and manage our risk.

Having a better understanding of the importance of, and fully implementing, risk management will make a huge contribution to the Council. Better identification of risks and their management will mean that better use of resources is achieved. If we use the resources available to us more efficiently and effectively then the service to our customers can only be improved.

Budget Risks

Change Delivery Capacity

A number of savings are now categorised as 'transformational'. In other words, a proactive approach to change is required rather than the more traditional percentage budget cut. It is important the Council recognises that, at a time of change, investment may be needed to deliver change. In some cases, specialist skills will be required for short periods.

Budget Savings

The level of savings required in 2019/20 is significant. Any unforeseen delays in implementation will impact on the achievement of the reductions required. Progress on the delivery of agreed savings targets will be reported to Cabinet on a monthly basis. The reserve position of the Authority is in line with the prudent range of 3 - 5% and these are available to “smooth” any slippage in delivery of the savings. However, the emphasis is placed on ensuring savings are delivered. Plans within service areas need to be managed robustly in order to limit any underachievement and monthly budget monitoring and savings delivery monitoring ensures Cabinet has visibility of financial performance. The table below summarizes the level of savings delivered over the last 4 years.

Financial Year	Target (£000s)	Delivered (£000s)	Delivered %
2014/15	17,576	14,016	80%
2015/16	12,768	9,716	76%
2016/17	12,139	9,633	79%
2017/18	11,780	8,327	71%
2018/19	8,280	6,294	76%

Income

The budget is supported by approximately £60m of generated income and therefore services need to constantly review their income levels and develop creative plans to ensure that they are sustained. This risk is being mitigated by an overall strategy for income and a move to full cost recovery wherever appropriate.

Equal Pay

The Council has mitigated the financial risk of potential future equal pay claims by holding a reserve to support these costs. This is kept under review.

Treasury Management

The revenue budget and capital programme are supported by daily cash movement managed within our borrowing and investment strategies. The financial climate has a significant impact on these activities. We continue to monitor these on a daily basis. Any variation in the cost of borrowing is being mitigated by a proactive approach to refinancing our borrowing wherever possible. This ensures that, wherever possible, our long term borrowing for our capital projects takes advantage of the historically low level of debt interest.

Variations to Settlement Assumptions

The Council makes every effort to ensure that its assumptions about budget settlements for future years are based upon the best available evidence. However, future settlements cannot be predicted with absolute accuracy and can be influenced by political and economic policy changes.

Political Approval of Budget

The Council is required under the Local Government Act 2003 to set a balanced budget for the forthcoming financial year, and this must be approved by Full Council.

Availability of Reserves

The Council may suffer other costs that may arise due to unexpected events such as: -

- Civil emergencies and Natural Disasters
- Failure to deliver statutory duties – failure to deliver, including safeguarding activity in relation to adults, children, health and safety or public health could result in possible negligence claims.
- Increased threat of legal litigation in respect of service delivery standards and regulations and multiple insurance claims. This risk is the likelihood of needing to replenish the insurance fund immediately from reserves as a result of several claims above our excess.
- Increase in energy cost prices.

If the actual position is different to the assumptions made in producing the budget, in-year adjustments would be needed.

Mitigation, Review and Monitoring

As part of the impact assessment process, the author of the assessment is asked to identify mitigation to any negative impacts that have been identified. The risks and the identified mitigation must be managed within the appropriate project risk register to ensure continual monitoring and management of the risks.

Stakeholder Engagement & Public Consultation

Public Consultation

Over the past few years the Council has sought to engage residents in the decision making process around setting a balanced budget using an online budget simulator tool. The savings targets subsequently agreed by the Cabinet and ratified by Full Council have then led to service managers needing to develop more detailed proposals which have, in the main, gone out for public consultation. This has created a further opportunity for affected residents to influence service delivery by attending drop-in engagement sessions, public meetings, organised workshops or completing online/paper surveys to have their say.

The views of residents have been sought and received in a number of ways including:

- The Powys Budget Simulator
- Specific service type Consultations
- Legislative consultations

Appropriate methods of engaging with our residents are considered and implemented on an annual basis.

Member Seminars

Members of the Council are engaged in the budget planning process from the outset through a series of budget seminars. These seminars look at the development of the budget proposals and all members have an opportunity to consider, challenge and input into the process. Financial assumptions and settlement information is shared with members and the impact on the budget modelled and considered. Members are provided with the Impact Assessments for each of the proposals and the feedback from the consultation exercises carried out.

Finance Scrutiny Panel

The Finance Scrutiny Panel, comprising Group Leaders of non-Executive Groups together with representatives of the Audit Committee, continue to be engaged in the budget process and are regularly updated on the process and the proposals as they develop.

Conclusion

In developing this Medium Term Financial Strategy, the Council has a clear framework within which to develop its 5-year budget model and a 5-year Capital Strategy Programme. The model and the assumptions included within it will be reviewed and updated as more information becomes available. Specific savings proposals are being developed and these will be finalised and reported in detail as each annual budget is developed and submitted for approval.

The detailed proposals for 2019/20 are in place and a programme to identify the remaining mitigations required to produce a balanced position for 2020/21 through to March 2024 will be implemented.

This process will enable the Council to strategically prepare to deliver a Council which is affordable, sustainable and able to achieve its 2025 Vision.

Supporting Documentation

Vision 2025: Our Corporate Improvement Plan
Income Management and Service Cost Recovery Policy
Capital Strategy
Capital Receipts Policy
Reserves Policy
Treasury Management and Investment Strategy

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