

Hertsmere Borough Council

Financial Strategy

2013/14 – 2017/18

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Version Control

Document version control and history

This document is a working document and will be updated to include feedback from the consultation process, and additional information as it becomes available. Full Council, as mentioned below, will approve the final document. It is also a three year rolling strategy and intended to be a 'living and evolving' document and will be updated annually to take into account any new financial decisions and aspirations.

Version no.	Version	Release Date	Content and changes
1	First draft (Executive briefing)	4 April 2013	1st draft circulated for consultation/briefing.
2	2 nd Executive meeting	24 May 2013	Updated to reflect the comments of O & P Committee
3	Full Council	9 July 2013	Updated to include the recent Spending Review 2015/16

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Hertsmere Borough Council is situated to the north of London in the southwest Hertfordshire and has a population for 2011 of 103,200. The Borough covers an area of 39 square miles and includes the communities of Aldenham, Bushey, Potters Bar, Radlett, Elstree and Borehamwood and is bordered by three London Boroughs. Despite its proximity to London, 80 per cent of the Borough is Green Belt, much of which is in agricultural use.
- 1.2 In order to realise its vision, the Council has identified five Corporate Goals (as detailed in paragraph 2.3.2) that are based upon the strategic objectives of the Hertsmere Together Community strategy. The five Corporate Goals each have a number of outcome-based objectives, which support the development of priorities for action.
- 1.3 The Financial Strategy (the Strategy) is an integral part of and critical to the Council's Corporate Governance and Performance Framework, delivery of the Community Strategy and Corporate Plan and the majority of the Council's policies and strategies.
- 1.4 The Strategy is reviewed and updated annually to assist the Director of Resources in planning the Council's financial resources in the short to medium term (3 to 5 years) with a view to deliver the Council's service priorities. It also sets out the framework and principle on which the Council plans and manages its finances. As such it forms an integral part of the Council's Budget and Policy framework.
- 1.5 The Strategy covers a five year period, 2013/14 to 2017/18. The final financial settlement has been announced for 2013/14 to 2014/15, and 2015/16 headline figures was announced as part of the Spending Review 2015/16 with a 10% overall reduction. However, Hertsmere Borough Council's finance settlement will be announced during December 2013.
- 1.6 The strategy takes into account the national and regional context and links those with the Council's corporate goals and priorities. The Balances and Reserves Policy highlights the possibility that the Council may have to utilise some of its General Funds reserves as a last resort given the poor finance settlement and unprecedented economic conditions as stated in paragraph 7.1.5. The Financial Strategy also includes a section on influences, pressures and assumptions (paragraph 13) covering inflation, the economic recession, and austerity measures, to mention a few.
- 1.7 The Strategy has been updated to take into account the fragile economic recovery, the readjustments taking place in the financial sector (deleveraging). It also takes into account changes to Local Government Finance, Council Tax Benefit support scheme, New Homes Bonus, Business Rates Retention and Welfare Reforms as explained in 3.7 to 3.14. The next Spending Review took place in June 2013 and has provided provisional figures of 10% overall reduction for the year 2015/16 only. Based on latest available information it has been anticipated that there will be further significant reductions in government grants over the next four years amounting to £2.274m as explained in table 2 paragraph 7.1.5. This excludes any New Homes Bonus amounting to £1.099m which will depend on the number of residential properties build within the borough as explained in paragraphs 11.6. Hence the net reduction is anticipated to be £1.175m
- 1.8 The current review forecasts that the Council, in line with other authorities, is facing a challenge for the next four years and beyond. Key assumptions have therefore been made as detailed in paragraph 5.5 and include a council tax increase of no more than 1.95% for the years 2014/15 to 2017/18. This ensures that the Council Tax increase remains within the limit of 2% set by central government without invoking a referendum.
- 1.9 The Council has approved a balanced budget for the year 2013/14 and has achieved further savings from the final stage of the organisational review amounting to £224k within the 2013/14 budgets, delivering a total saving to date of £1.9m from change management and

organisational review. **Looking ahead, the financial forecast estimate additional budget requirements to be funded through efficiency savings would be £505k for 2014/15, £278k for 2015/16, £251k for 2016/17 and £286k for 2017/18 as detailed in paragraph 6.3.1 and appendix 2 to this report. This has been based on two key assumptions namely 1% pay award based on the Chancellor's budget statement and a council tax increase of 1.95% throughout the four years starting from 2014/15.**

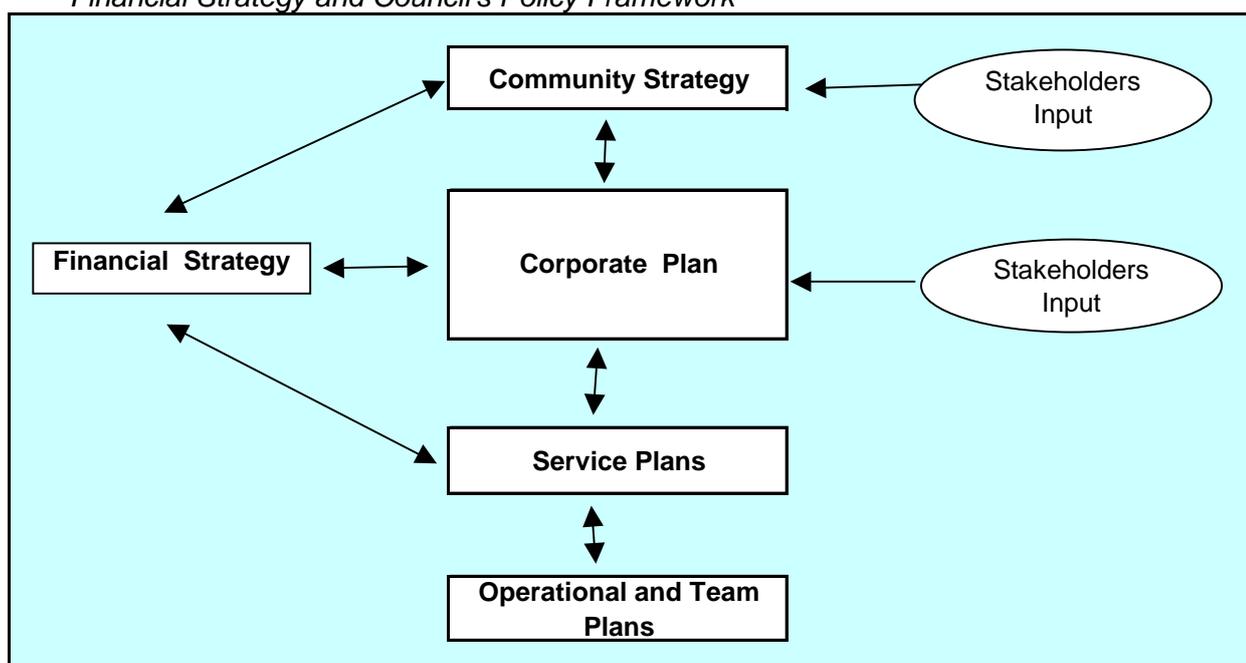
- 1.10 The last Participatory Budgeting process was carried out in 2010/11 and resulted in savings of £682K. It was agreed that this exercise be repeated in three years time. Hence the Council is embarking in a similar exercise during July 2013 with a view to find further savings in order to address the shortfall in funding from Central Government and to balance the 2014-15 budget.
- 1.11 The Financial Strategy is an ever-evolving document, which will be implemented over a considerable period and will be subject to ongoing review and update. This is especially relevant to issues such as the current economic climate and weakness in the financial sector. Hence this Strategy will be further revised for the financial years 2015/16 onwards. It is also possible that the 2014/15 settlement may be revised as a result of the latest announcement in the budget statement by the Chancellor. The financial impact is not known yet and hence has not been included in this financial strategy.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 The Financial Strategy is the Council's key financial planning document and is an integral part of Hertsmere Borough Council's (the Council) Corporate Plan. It is essential in applying a structured approach to the Council's service delivery and to ensure that resources are allocated to meet identified needs and priorities as shown in the diagram below. It sets out and considers the financial challenges and opportunities facing the Council and also ensures that policies are properly resourced and effectively delivered. This strategy has been written in a light of recession and austerity measures whereby the Council's grant has been reduced significantly.

2.2 Aims and Objectives of the Financial Strategy.

Financial Strategy and Council's Policy Framework



The overall aims of the Council's Financial Strategy are:

- 2.2.1 To set out how the Council wants to structure and manage its finances (typically for 3-5 years) and to ensure that this fits with and supports the Council's objectives as per the Council's Corporate Plan. The strategy should provide a framework, overall direction and parameters for resourcing of the Council's service delivery, and that the financial plans are achievable and sustainable.
- 2.2.2 To continue to deliver the Council's vital services within the financial constraints.
- 2.2.3 To ensure that the Council's finances are resilient in order to face future challenges such as austerity measures and recession.
- 2.2.4 To assist in the realisation of the core values of the Council, and in particular, to ensure resources are allocated in line with corporate and service priorities, after taking full account of the financial implications of all policies, statutory duties and any long term issues and implications.
- 2.2.5 To optimise use of the Council's assets in land, property and liquid resources so that appropriate reserves can be maintained in order to achieve the Council's overall financial and corporate objectives and to achieve the efficiency gains required to deliver a balanced and sustainable budget. This will be reviewed by the Council's external auditors as part of the annual audit which includes forming an opinion on the Council's financial resilience and value for money

The Strategic Financial Objectives are:

- 2.2.6 Given the economic climate the Council needs to apply a strategic approach to how the Council's services are prioritised, managed and delivered through the Community Strategy, the Council's Corporate Plan and service plans while ensuring Value for Money (VfM) is achieved at all times.
- 2.2.7 To procure goods and services in the most economical, effective and efficient way and in accordance with 'Value for Money' principles, driven by the Council's procurement strategy and the Council's VfM Strategy.
- 2.2.8 The Council has a duty to deliver services that provide best value to its residents. The table in paragraph 3.29 shows that the Council has achieved £4.812m of efficiency savings over the last nine years. This has been necessary following the significant reduction in support from central government. The recent Autumn Statement (2012) continues to reduce public spending in 2013/14 and 2014/15 and this has continued with the recent Spending Review 2015/16 where further savings overall of 10% are required in 2015/16. However, Hertsmere Borough Council's finance settlement will be announced during December 2013. This means that the continuance of this level of unprecedented cuts can only be achieved by the Council's continuous review and challenge of its services and the way they are provided.
- 2.2.9 To invest net capital receipts set aside for revenue generating projects into revenue generating asset portfolio and/or cost savings initiatives and future opportunities, such as projects where the Council is developing its surplus land with a view to sell or to keep for additional rental income. In cases where there is a time lag in securing investment opportunities, interest earned on this sum will be utilised for Revenue Budget purposes.
- 2.2.10 Where the Council will dispose of housing land at market value, 80% of the net capital receipts generated from the disposal will be set aside for the purpose of facilitating the supply of affordable housing. All other (non-housing land) estimated usable capital receipts generated since 2010/11 are used to fund future capital programmes. Thus no contribution would be made to the earmarked reserve for revenue generating projects. The

balance will be transferred to usable capital receipts and be used to fund capital projects.

- 2.2.11 To secure a reasonable rate of return on investments and projects which are considered as “invest to save” programmes. This has to ensure that the Council services are maintained and any revenue implications identified as part of business case.
- 2.2.12 To provide loans to subsidiaries companies at reasonable rates with a view to generate additional returns from cash which is surplus to Council requirement. This has to take into account the capital financing requirement of the Council and Prudential Code regime.
- 2.2.13 To maintain the level of capital, revenue and earmarked reserves and balances at an appropriate level, after taking into account external, financial and economic pressures.
- 2.2.14 To maintain adequate governance arrangements to ensure the legality of transactions that may have a financial consequence.
- 2.2.15 The Council is carrying out consulting with residents during July 2013 as part of the decision making process through Participatory Budgeting on a three year basis in order to help the Council to balance the 2014-15 budget.

2.3 Achievements

- 2.3.1 Over the years the Council has taken various initiatives as mentioned below which has led to maximise the Council's existing resources in order to ensure continuous and sustainable improvement in services.
 - Transfer of its social housing stock, which assisted the Council in earning substantial investment income. The investment income generated since 2007 has been reducing as a result of the unprecedented low level of base rate (0.5%). This has been exacerbated by the banks and building societies rebuilding of their balance sheets (shrinking their lending portfolio) and hence are less active on the money market. Hence it has proved difficult to generate sufficient investment income when compared with prior years. The Council's Treasury Strategy requires investments to only be placed with institutions whose credit rating provides maximum security for the funds invested in compliance with the Council's appetite for risks.
 - The recent award of contract for its leisure facilities management, including Bushey Golf and Country Club to Hertsmere Leisure Trust to provide the leisure services for an initial 10 years, starting January 2012, with an option to extend for five years have led to additional income to the Council of £257,000 per year.
 - A review of the staffing structure and streamlining of the senior management structure as resulted in efficiency savings to date of £1.9m in employee costs. This has enabled the Council to prepare a balanced budget over the years. However, the Council faces further challenges posed by the recent Spending Review 2015/16.
 - Investment in revenue generating property portfolio such as Elstree Film Studios, Cranbourne Industrial Estate etc.
 - Partnerships and consortium procurement wherever possible.
 - Working towards the achievement of Value for Money gains.
 - Continue to invest in IT infrastructure to ensure resilience and cost savings and enabling transformation of services.
 - Working in partnerships and shared service delivery in order to achieve continuous Value for Money gains and effective service delivery.

- Maintained adequate reserves – Earmarked and General Fund
- Prepared and delivered a balanced budget with no significant variance at year end and reduced the Council's Net Budget Requirement despite additional pressure in service delivery.
- Significant savings from adopting smarter ways of procuring and awarding significant contracts such as Leisure Services and Ground maintenance contracts.

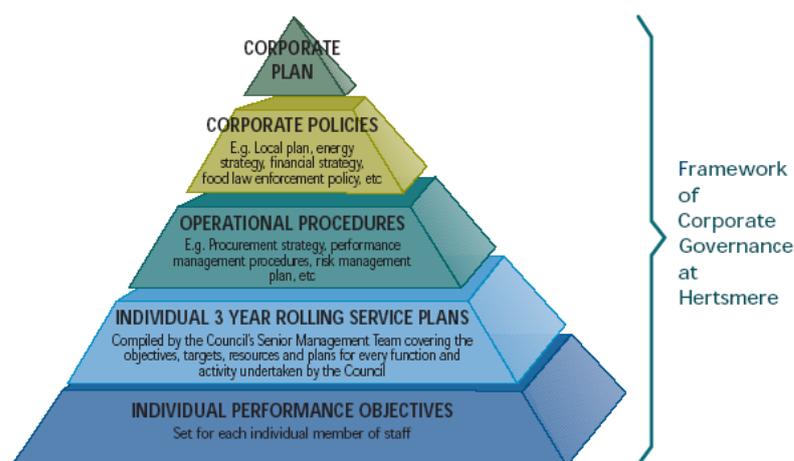
Corporate Plan Goals and Objectives

2.3.2 In order to realise its vision, the Council has identified five Corporate Goals that are based upon the Strategic Objectives of the "Hertsmere Together" Community Strategy. The five Corporate Goals each have a number of outcome-based objectives, which support the development of priorities for action.

- Safer communities
- Quality environments
- Healthy, thriving communities
- Economic wellbeing
- Decent homes

2.3.3 The Corporate Plan is currently being updated and will cover the next four years. There will be an annual review and a performance report will be presented each year.

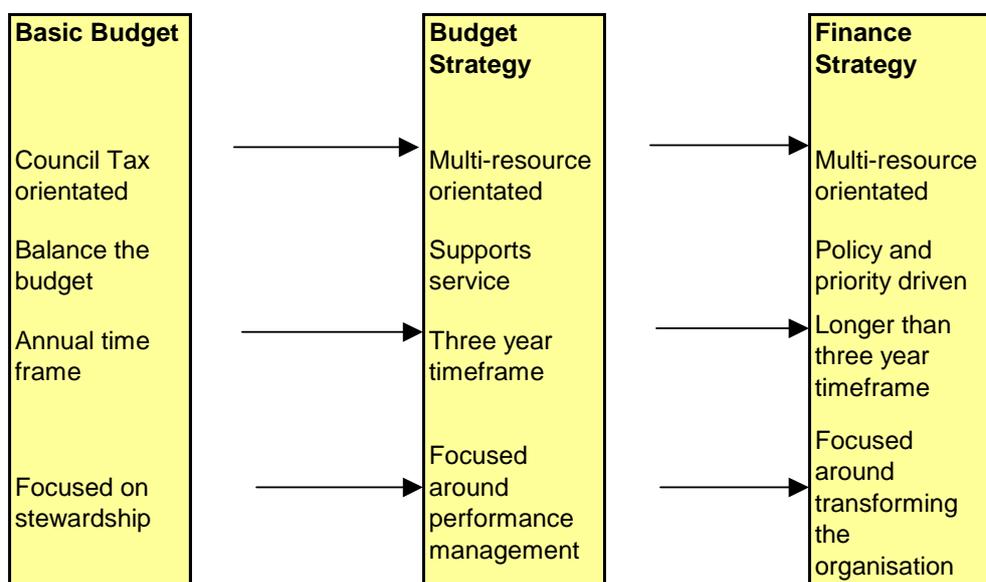
2.3.4 The Council's corporate priorities and those articulated within the Community Strategy are linked via the Council's Corporate Governance Framework. This provides the mechanism through which these priorities will be filtered down throughout the organisation as a whole.



Relationship between the Financial Strategy and Budget process.

2.3.5 The Council starts its detailed budget plan as part of the service plan, which is reflected in the budget strategy and culminates in the Financial Strategy. The relationship between the budget setting process and the Financial Strategy is shown below.

Relationship between Finance Strategy and Budgeting process.



2.3.6 This document has now been updated to take account of the following:

- The Council's Community Strategies.
- The residents survey carried out in 2011.
- The outcome of the External Auditors.
- Changes to the Council's Corporate Plan.
- Improvements made to the Service Plans.
- The Prudential regime for Capital Finance in Local Government.
- The Council's Housing Strategy and other key documents.
- Transformational Government and Information Services Strategy.
- The Value for Money agenda.
- The abolition of Comprehensive Area Assessment regime and Audit Commission.
- The Localism Act and Welfare Reform including roll out of Universal credits.
- The current economic downturn and financial turmoil.
- The Council's Performance Management Strategy.
- The New Finance Act.
- The Austerity Measures and the Chancellor's Autumn Statement and Budget Speech 2013.

2.3.7 The Council's finances fall into two main categories:

- Revenue: income and expenditure, which are of a recurrent nature i.e. on-going.
- Capital: income and expenditure, which are of a non-recurrent nature.

2.3.8 Annual revenue expenditure is financed by seven main sources:

- Revenue Support Grant
- Retention of Business Rates
- New Homes Bonus
- Council Tax
- Fees & Charges
- Investment Income
- Revenue Reserves (only in exceptional circumstances).

3 Background

National Context

Economic Update

- 3.1 The outlook for the global economy remains clouded with uncertainty. The UK economy has struggled to generate a sustained recovery so this offers little hope for a strong recovery in 2013. Consumer and business confidence levels are generally low and it is not easy to see potential for a significant increase in the growth rate in the short term.
- 3.2 The austerity measures that the coalition government has put in place aimed at getting the public sector deficit into order over for the four years may start losing support unless the economy starts to revive soon. The Government has put some £80bn made available to the banks to parcel through to business, but it is not clear that all this will be taken up. The housing market, a gauge of consumer confidence, remains subdued although house prices are being supported by the weak £ relative to some of the other main currencies. In an attempt to reduce the effect of the recession and to stimulate the economy, the Bank of England has left the base rate unchanged at 0.5% for 48 consecutive months and have embarked on a £50bn third round of Quantitative Easing (QE) at the start of July. It is unlikely to be the last tranche of QE and the total now stands at £375bn.
- 3.3 This has been highlighted by the recent announcement by Moodys (Credit Rating Agency) to downgrade the sovereign credit rating of the United Kingdom by one notch to Aa1 from Aaa, the key drivers for this was the continuing weakness in the UK's medium-term growth outlook and as a consequence of the UK's high and rising debt burden, a deterioration in the shock-absorption capacity of the government's balance sheet, which is unlikely to reverse before 2016.
- 3.4 Fitch Ratings placed the outlook on the UK's Sovereign rating to Negative Watch from Negative (March 2013). It has since downgraded the UK's Sovereign rating to AA+ from AAA (April 2013), the key drivers being the weaker economic and fiscal outlook for the medium-term projections.
- 3.5 Not only it is expected that fees and charges income will show moderate increases but the Council is likely to find the collection of income difficult as both local businesses and individuals struggle given the current state of the economy. During this difficult time it is Hertsmere's priority to minimise the effects of recession on its residents, and one of the ways it will do this is to keep council tax increases as low as possible. In 2013/14 there is a freeze in the council tax due to the current economic climate. This means that the council tax has been frozen for four years running, despite the cumulative impact of inflation of 13% over the last 4 years.

- 3.6 Moving forward to 2014/15 and onwards, the Council believes that it will be able to increase council tax by no more than 1.95%. It has been mentioned as part of the Localism Act that any increases above 2% (for 2013/14, this may change in future years) would require the Council carrying out a referendum. The difficult finance settlement announced in the autumn statement will have a profound effect as local authorities will have no choice but to take difficult decisions that may have an impact on local services. However the Council has always endeavoured to protect front line services and will endeavour to do so in the future.

Local Government Finance Act

- 3.7 The Local Government Finance Act was introduced to Parliament on 19 December 2011, and was given Royal Assent on 1 November 2012, becoming an Act. It takes forward proposals designed to encourage local economic growth, reduce the national financial deficit and drive decentralisation of control over local government finance.
- 3.8 The legislation represents a radical change to the local government finance system, which complements a wide package of financial measures that the Government is pursuing to support local authorities and local economies. It will:
- Enable local authorities to retain a proportion of the business rates generated in their area.
 - Provides a framework for the localisation of support for council tax in England.
 - Make changes to council tax rules to provide further flexibility on the council tax local authorities can charge on empty properties, and other small changes aimed at modernising the system.
 - Community Right to Bid gives community groups the right to buy community buildings and facilities that were important to them.

Business Rates Retention

- 3.9 The new system aims to give local authorities an incentive to encourage economic development by allowing them to retain some of their business rates growth locally. It replaces the formula grant system which funded areas based on needs and tax raising ability, but which also limited changes in funding from year to year.
- 3.10 Business rates are distributed across the country in a very different way to formula grant allocations. Thus just giving authorities the business rates collected in their area would produce significant increases in funding in some areas and equally significant reductions elsewhere. Government have set an initial “baseline” so that all councils receive funding broadly equivalent to their 2012/13 Formula Grant, whilst ensuring the overall level of Government funding for local government in England does not exceed the estimate set out in the 2010 Spending Review. A system of tariffs and top-ups has been built into the system to protect authorities from these changes. There are also Levy and Safety Net in place to distribute funds where local authorities achieving disproportionate level of business rate growth to authorities experiencing a reduction in their business rates yield above a given threshold (known as baseline funding). The Council may potentially lose £180K in business rates in the event of negative growth in business rateable values before it reaches the safety net threshold.

Local Support for Council Tax

- 3.11 The 2010 Spending Review included a commitment to localise support for council tax from 2013/14, subject to a 10% overall reduction in spending. The Welfare Reform Bill provides for the abolition of Council Tax Benefit. The Finance Act requires local authorities to establish a local council tax support scheme by 31 January 2013. The Council devised a scheme which was agreed by the Council on 16 January 2013 and also made technical

reforms to the Council tax in order to ensure that the reduction in Government grant has no impact on the Council tax i.e. the Localisation of Council Tax Support scheme is self-financing.

- 3.12 The changes to the scheme mean that, except for those claimants who fall into a protected group, residents will no longer be able to receive 100% Council Tax Benefit and would be expected to pay at least 20% of the relevant Council Tax charge for their property. The discount for properties that are uninhabitable or undergoing major repairs to be reduced from 100% to 50%. Unoccupied and unfurnished properties 100% exemption to apply for 2 months (was 6 months). Empty properties vacant for more than 2 years to have a 50% 'empty homes premium' levied on top of the 100% charge. This has helped the Council to negate the impact of a 10% reduction from Central Government.

New Homes Bonus

- 3.13 There was concern with the re-working of the local government funding that the New Homes Bonus (NHB) might have been removed or diminished in some way. It is clear that the Government wants to incentivise authorities to promote both economic and residential development and that as part of that NHB will remain as a key funding stream. Funding for NHB is top sliced from the control totals of RSG and then re-allocated on the basis of relative performance in housing growth there will be a strong cumulative redistributive effect, this will penalise areas of low housing growth.
- 3.14 The amount of NHB payable for a year is determined by the annual change in the total number of properties on the council tax list in October. The numbers projected are broadly in line with figures produced by the planning department. This means that the bonus payable on both new housing and empty properties brought back in to use. The increase in the tax base is multiplied by a notional average council tax figure of £1,444, with an additional premium for social housing. The calculated figure is then shared with 20% going to the county council and 80% to the district, with the amount being payable for six years. Details of Hertsmere figures for NHB can be found in table 11, paragraph 11.6.2.

Comprehensive Spending Review 2010 (CSR10)

- 3.15 In October 2010 the Government announced the Comprehensive Spending Review predicting an average loss of grant settlement of 7.25% over each of the four years. However, since the settlement in 2010 the economic recovery has been limited as a result of the effect of the Euro crisis on the UK exports and the fragile banking sector. This was recognised in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement to Parliament in November 2011, where the Chancellor of Exchequer intimated that the Deficit Reduction Plan was not achieving the desired results. This placed greater pressure on the need to reduce expenditure as a means of achieving its economic objectives. Given that central government has expressed a desire to protect as far as possible some key service areas, the future outlook for resource for core Local Government service is one of continuing contraction.
- 3.16 The total government grant (RSG and Business Rates redistributed) received by the Council at the beginning of the CSR 2010 (2010/11-base year) amounted to £7.464m. In 2011/12 the Council lost £1.134m and the following year 2012/13 a further £867k (as per table 2, paragraph 7.1.5). The Chancellor's Autumn Statement in December 2012 and the Local Government Finance Settlement in early February 2013, announced that the Council would receive a further reduction in budget for 2013/14 of £514k and a projected further reduction for 2014/15 of £905k, this making a total reduction in grant since the CSR10 of £3.420m which represents a 45.8% reduction when compared with the base year of 2010/11. Further cuts between 2015-16 and 2017-18 in the region of 2 to 7% have been mentioned in the Chancellor's Autumn Settlement. Based on the Council's forecast, anticipated reduction of 7% per annum in Government grant over the next three years has been used. This would bring the cumulative cuts to Council's core grant since the CSR10 of £4.789m which represents a 64.2% reduction when compared with the base year of 2010/11.

- 3.17 However, the Council also receives New Homes Bonus which is forecast to be £2.039m in 2017/18 (table 2 paragraph 7.1.5). This is guaranteed for six years only and this figure represents the cumulative amount for the period 2011/12 to 2017/18. Hence the net reduction in total government grant (in cash terms) amounts to £2.750m (37%) since the CSR10 giving the Council a forecast total government grant by 2017/18 of £4.714m. This equates to a reduction of £1.175m representing a reduction of 20% over the four year period, which is in addition of 21% over the last three years. This does not take into account the impact of inflation. Had the Council received CPI increases on the baseline 2010/11 figure (£7.464m) each year, then the total reduction in government grant by 2017/18 would be around 57%.
- 3.18 It was also announced the Government's intention to work with local authorities to freeze the council tax again in 2013/14. The grant settlement includes £66k to enable the Council to freeze council tax based on a 1% council tax increase, which is guaranteed for two years only.
- 3.19 Despite the difficulty to balance ongoing demands for services against the limited financial resources available, the members and officers have identified significant savings over the years that have enabled the Council to restrict the increases in council tax.

Bridging the budgetary shortfall – ways to face the challenge

(a) Participatory Budgeting

- 3.20 In order to achieve a more affordable and sustainable budget the Council felt necessary to engage with the residents as part of the decision making process. The process use is known as "SIMALTO" which is a tried and tested method of getting residents views on services and their relative preferences. Participatory budgeting leads to improving relation with communities as a result of the consultation. It thus promotes a greater level of participation in the decision making process by residents, an increase in community pride, increase in community cohesion, enhance the relationship between members and electorate and promote a greater understanding of how we work, including how the council tax is spent. A company called Research for Today carried out the Participatory budget
- 3.21 The last exercise carried out in 2010/11 identified the following findings:
- There are high levels of satisfaction with the current level of most of the service delivery provided in Hertsmere (92%) which is better than the vast majority of the other local authorities which have undertaken this process.
 - There was a general understanding of, and willingness from, residents to accept the austerity measures.
- 3.22 Adoption of the initiatives identified in the process resulted in budget savings of £682K and these was implemented from 2011/12 onwards.
- 3.23 Given the significant financial pressures and the statutory requirement to prepare a balanced budget, and at the same time maintaining as far as possible the current level of services, the Council will be embarking in a similar exercise during July 2013 with a view to find further savings in order to address the shortfall in funding from Central Government and to balance the 2014-15 budget.

(b) Partnership Working / Shared Services

- 3.24 The Council is committed to seeking out innovative partnerships and funding opportunities. The Council works in partnership with local community groups and other service providers (such as County Council, Clinical Commissioning Groups and Police) to co-ordinate their

services in accordance with community needs. The Council is also the lead member of the Local Strategic Partnership, which is made up of representatives from other major agencies. The authority seeks opportunities for sharing the use of land and buildings with other agencies. Its Civic Offices, leisure centres as well as community centres and the community shop are prime examples of shared facilities.

- 3.25 In addition the Council shares resources with other neighbouring authorities, such as shared internal audit services, shared posts: procurement, risk management, payroll services, disaster recovery, LLPG.

(c) Invest to save programmes

- 3.26 As part of the Capital budget for 2013/14, careful consideration has been given to the projects against the current economic background of reduced government grants and difficult financial times when the Council has to take difficult decisions. The total capital expenditure for the year 2013/14 amounts to £280k. The items agreed under this spend are all necessary either repairing damaged items to enable their continuing use, refurbishing to generate revenue or compliance with Health & Safety legislation. All the proposed items are urgent and vital, and highlight that the Council is being careful on what it spends its money - both current and future capital programmes.

(d) Workforce Strategy

- 3.27 The significant reduction in government grant has led to a reduction in the Council's workforce. The organisational review carried out by the Council post CSR 2010 has resulted in savings of £1.9m and represents a reduction of 15% of the Council's workforce. The Council will continue to put in place more robust and innovative ways of achieving further savings.

(e) Value for Money (VfM)

- 3.28 There is an even greater need for the Council to explore initiatives which will help to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery and to maintain front line services. For further detailed information on the council's Value for Money Strategy refer to Appendix 5.
- 3.29 The VFM gains are summarised as follows; it shows that the Council has achieved savings of £4.812m over nine years.

Hertsmere Borough Council - Actual Vfm gains 2005/06 to 2009/10 Actual CSR gains 2010/11 to 2012/13 Estimated CSR gains 2013/14 (A: Actual) (E: Estimate)		
	Year on Year Efficiency gains	Total Efficiency gains relative to 2004/05
Value For Money (VFM)	£'000	£'000
2005/06 (A)	366	366
2006/07 (A)	312	678
2007/08 (A)	466	1,144
2008/09 (A)	640	1,784
2009/10 (A)	539	2,323
Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR))		
2010/11 (A)	124	2,447
2011/12 (A)	1,802	4,249
2012/13 (A)	376	4,625
2013/14 (E)	187	4,812

- 3.30 The Council is required to present a balanced budget; part of its funding stream is the amount of Government grants it receives. As reported in section 7.1.5 the level of grant in each year is continuing to fall.
- 3.31 The Council has achieved a balanced budget for the year 2013/14. Further savings will need to be achieved in 2014/15 amounting to £505k in order to balance its budget.
- 3.32 A cash releasing efficiency gain is achieved when, for a given area of activity, an organisation is able to:
- Reduce inputs for the same or improved outputs;
 - Reduce unit costs to meet increased demand;
 - Optimise use of assets to improve outputs.
- 3.33 The Council no longer is required to calculate efficiency gains as part of the Government reporting procedures, however, as good practice it will continue to identify savings and will be based on robust processes and it is essential that the proper arrangements be in place to monitor that those savings are achieved as part of post implementation reviews.

Future transparency and inspection regime

- 3.34 The coalition government has abolished Comprehensive Area Assessment. This is replaced by a review of the Council's arrangements for securing financial resilience carried out by the External Auditors.
- 3.35 The review looks at: the key indicators of financial performance; its approach to strategic financial planning; its approach to financial governance; and its approach to financial control. The conclusion for 2011/12 is that whilst the Council faces some risks and challenges during 2012/13 and beyond, its current arrangements for achieving financial resilience are adequate.

Regional / County Context –

Local Area Agreements

- 3.36 Local Area Agreements have been abolished; historically in Hertfordshire LAA (1) was due for completion in 2009. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) received £537,000 in

2010/11. They spent £136k in 2010/11, £147k in 2011/12 and to date within 2012/13 £124k. It is anticipated that the remaining £130k will be spent by the end of 2013/14.

- 3.37 This has resulted in providing initiative to promote amongst other things, healthier life styles e.g. Health Inequalities Funding (improving people's health); Fitlinx (working with Year 6 children to reduce obesity); Active Environment (providing outdoor fitness equipment), Business Breakfast Club, and Safer Streets.

Investors in People (IiP)

- 3.38 Investing in people provides a national framework for improving business performance through a planned approach to setting and communicating organisational objectives.
- 3.39 In working with the Investors in People Standard, the Council has to show that it meets all ten indicators of the Standard, which includes demonstrating that managers are effective in leading, managing and developing people and showing that people's contribution to the organisation is recognised and valued.
- 3.40 The Council has achieved Investors in People in April 2011 and this lasts for three years. The Council will endeavour to keep its accreditation.

4 About Hertsmere

4.1 Local Context

- 4.1.1 Hertsmere Borough Council is situated to the north of London in southwest Hertfordshire. The Borough covers an area of 39 square miles and includes the communities of Bushey, Potters Bar, Radlett, Elstree and Borehamwood and is bordered by three London Boroughs. Despite its proximity to London, 80 per cent of the Borough is Green Belt, much of which is in agricultural use.
- 4.1.2 The population is 103,200 (2011). The borough is still the centre of Hertfordshire Jewish community, with around 67% of the Jewish population live in the borough, making up 14.38% of the population; larger than that of all the London Boroughs, except Barnet and Hackney. The borough also has a large Indian population of 3,723 people.
- 4.1.3 Unemployment is 2.3%, a small reduction from 2.4% in November 2011; this contrasts against the national average of 3.7 %. Historically many residents have commuted to work in London and a high proportion of them are in professional or managerial roles. There are a number of service sector employers in the area and Elstree/Borehamwood has been part of the British film industry for many years, hence one of the reasons the Council owns Elstree Film studios.
- 4.1.4 The majority of the housing in the Borough is owner-occupied with 17.4% in social and local authority rented housing and 13.8% private sector rented or rent-free. The average price of a semi-detached property is £348,300, which is above the Hertfordshire County, regional and national averages. The only higher average is Greater London.
- 4.1.5 Any changes in demographic factors will impact on the Council's entitlement of Government Grants, prioritisation of services, tax base for council tax, and growth in demand and use of services.
- 4.1.6 The national context as mentioned would impact the Council as follows:
- A weak and prolonged recovery may have significant impact on fees and charges generated by the Council.
 - A high level of unemployment would lead to an increase in homelessness and benefits claimants putting extra burden on the Council resources.

- The low level of Bank of England base rate would have a negative impact on the amount of interest income generated from Council investments.
- The level of grant received from Central Government would have a significant impact on the Council's resources and its capacity to maintain service delivery. The Council carried out a staffing organisation review with a view to achieve significant savings. This review has already had an impact on the Council's workforce plan; the Council's workforce was reduced by nearly 15% in 2011/12 and further savings were achieved in 2012/13.
- The changes introduced to the housing and council tax benefits system may lead to benefits claimants moving away from Central London to areas such as Hertsmere due to its close proximity to London and its good transport link. This would put additional strain on the Council's resources. Moreover changes which will take place while the new Universal Credit system is introduced which may have an impact on the number of homelessness and rent arrears.
- The Localism Act will have wide ranging implications for the Council in areas such as local authorities' powers of competence, inspection regime, transparency, engagement with residents, community empowerment and charging for services.
- The introduction of support for council tax replacing the current council tax benefit system will result in a reduction in the Council's tax base and increase in the number of council tax bills being sent to individuals who previously would have received 100% benefit. However, the scheme should be self-financing.
- The introduction of business rates retention will result in element of risk being moved from central government to local authorities, especially during the current economic conditions in that the Council may not meet the baseline (the level of business rates the Government expects the Council to collect) figure and from the outstanding business rate appeals.
- Due to the depressed housing and stock market, changes in demographics and some notable changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme,(LGPS) it is possible that the future contribution rates may go up. As this stage it is difficult to predict the financial implications. Hence this strategy does not include the impact which may result from the next triennial valuations due to take place by end of this year.
- New Homes Bonus started in 2011 and has seen increases each year around £332k per annum. The projected numbers of new properties and unused properties brought back into use are broadly in line with the figures produced by the planning department. However, the level of grant to be paid also depends on the state of the economy and the commencement of major developments. It's worth noting that there is no direct correlation between the reduction in Revenue Support Grant and the amount of New Homes Bonus allocated to districts. The latter largely depends on the number of new properties being built and/or properties brought back into use. The rate of growth in the residential sector may slow down which in turn will have a negative impact on the amount of New Homes Bonus. Hertsmere has areas designated as green belt land which need to be protected.

4.2 Services provided by the Council

- 4.2.1 The Council's various services range from waste services to housing as explained below. These services are vital to both residents and the business community. For a full list of services provided by the Council refer to the Council's budget book which is on the Council's web site.

Waste & Street Cleansing

- The household recycling service has continued to perform effectively and efficiently, each collection made costs just 50p, the recycling rate has remained stable at 45%, the Council has made further investment in the service with the purchase of 6 new collection vehicles in 2012.

- The commercial recycling service has strengthened and we are now providing a paper / cardboard collection service for just over 20% of our customers.
- 2013 sees the replacement of the street sweepers, as part of the Council's vehicle replacement program, this will further improve the efficiency of the service.

Crime and disorder

- Although not a statutory requirement the Council invests £128,000 a year in Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's) this contributes to a reduction in levels of crime.
- In 2010 the Council joined the Hertfordshire CCTV Partnership. The other members of the partnership are Stevenage, North Hertfordshire and East Hertfordshire. The partnership shares the CCTV management and monitoring services.

Cultural & Youth

- Elstree and Borehamwood Museum has been given a grant of £98,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund and £70,000 from the Council to enable it to relocate and develop the museum from its current home in Frayton Road to Shenley Road.
- The Council, in partnership with Arsenal Football Club, provides diversionary activities and curriculum coaching (Double Club) to schools in Hertsmere as well as running soccer schools for 4 weeks of the school holidays.
- Students from every secondary school in Hertsmere are invited to attend an annual Youth Conference where they learn about how democracy works, participate in an electronic voting workshop and have the opportunity to quiz local councillors in a political speed meeting.
- The Council also supports and works with partners to provide a wide range of youth activities across the borough.

Housing

- A number of initiatives have been implemented which have helped provide more temporary accommodation and reduce the cost, these include: The Private Leasing Agreements Converting Empties Scheme; bringing flats over shops back in house to home local families; and block booking through existing providers. Future demand is hard to predict with on-going changes to the coalition government policies. The full effect of Universal Credit and the proposed benefit cap will not be known until next year.

4.3 ORS Residents survey

- 4.3.1 Every three years the Council commissions an independent survey of its residents which this time covered the following main themes:
- Overall satisfaction
 - Council services
 - Online information
 - Contact with the council
 - The local area
- 4.3.2 The most recent survey was carried out in 2011 and the results showed that 91% of people surveyed were satisfied with their area as a place to live, and 60% of respondents felt that the Council provided good value for money, a rise on 52% in 2008.
- 4.3.3 Majority of residents (83%) agree that the quality of Hertsmere Borough Council services is good overall and 74% of residents are satisfied with the way the council runs things – an 8% increase on 2008 (66%).
- 4.3.4 Respondents who were satisfied with the way the council runs things cited bin collections, cleanliness and recreational facilities as key reasons. Of these who said they were

dissatisfied, reasons given were road and pavement maintenance, potholes, council tax levels.

- 4.3.5 Overall this was an encouraging set of results, reflecting the work the council carries out, particularly in relation to partnership working within our Community Safety Partnership, where positively, the majority of residents did not report any of crime and disorder issues listed as being a big problem: this included teenagers hanging around; rubbish or litter laying around; vandalism, graffiti, people using or dealing drugs, drunk and rowdiness in public places, noisy neighbours, abandoned or burnt out cars. And three quarters of residents agree that police and other local public services are successfully dealing with any problems.

5 The Medium Term Financial Plan and Budget Strategy

Medium term financial plan

- 5.1 As shown in paragraph 6.3.1 and appendix 2, the current anticipated additional budget requirement to be funded through efficiency gains is £505k for 2014/15, £278k for 2015/16, £251k for 2016/17 and £286K for 2017/18. The Council will have to fund any additional demand on resources by achieving efficiency gains to prepare a balanced budget as these can be redirected towards the Council's priorities. It is also clear from the projected figures that the Council will have to rely on efficiency gains in order to fund any additional budgetary requirements as the scope to generate additional income from Council Tax and Government Grants is very limited.
- 5.2 The medium term financial plan has been derived from the Council's Corporate Aims and Objectives, known statutory requirements, changes anticipated in economic factors, such as inflation, and changes to service plans.
- 5.3 As part of prudent financial management, the Council has placed less reliance upon investment income to fund on-going expenditure. Most of the investment income has been used to fund one-off projects. The current reduction in the base rate has led to a significant reduction in the amount of investment income generated from the Council's portfolio of investments and cash flow management.
- 5.4 The current economic climate and financial turmoil increase the pressure on the Council's limited financial resources. Hence the Council may have to rely on the General Fund balance and /or earmarked reserves in order to meet any budgetary requirement if the economic recovery turns out to be a weak and prolonged one. However, this would be a short-term measure, as the Council is obliged to present a balanced, affordable and sustainable budget in the long run. This will only be used as a last resort and in exceptional circumstances after having explored all other sources of income and efficiency savings. (subject to Council approval, as part of the future budget setting process).
- 5.5 The following key assumptions, have been used for the purpose of this financial strategy:
- Government grant i.e. Revenue Support Grant and New Homes Bonus to be further reduced by an average 7% per annum over the next three years – 2015/16 and 2017/18.
 - Council Tax increases of no more than 1.95% for the years 2014/15 to 2017/18, subject to any regulations to be brought in by central government in respect of referendum to be carried out as part of the consultation process before any increase in council tax is decided. Any changes in Council tax will have to seek Full Council approval as part of the annual budget setting process.
 - 2% growth in Fees and charges. This is in cash terms i.e. both real growth and any

inflationary increase. This does not take into account the impact of the decentralisation of Planning Fees.

- New homes bonus scheme: it has been anticipated that the allocation for the years 2014 to 2018 would be an average increase of £332k per annum. The Government announced as part of the Spending Review 2015/16 that £400m of the housing incentive funding would be handed to local enterprise partnerships from 2015-16. This may have an impact on the amount of New Homes Bonus allocated to districts, which may be in the region of 30%. However, this is out for consultation and therefore, the actual quantum is currently unknown. The projected numbers of new properties and unused properties brought back into use are broadly in line with the figures produced by the planning department. However the level of grant to be paid also depends on the state of the economy and the commencement of major developments. It's worth noting that there is no direct correlation between the reduction in Revenue Support Grant and the amount of New Homes Bonus allocated to districts. The latter largely depends on the number of new properties being built and/or properties brought back into use. The rate of growth in the residential sector may slow down which in turn will have a negative impact on the amount of New Homes Bonus. Hertsmere has areas designated as green belt land which need to be protected.
- Employee & related expenditure, including pay award, pensions and job evaluations to increase by 0% in 2013/14, 2.1% - due to pension and auto enrolment costs of 1.1% and pay award of 1% in 2014/15 and pay award of 1% in 2015/16 to 2017/18. This would require Full Council approval as part of the annual budget setting process.
- Net inflationary impact, net growth and increase in costs due to contractual obligations to increase by RPI. Utilities, fuel costs are projected to increase by 5%. This reflects the current economic and financial climate whereby the Council will have to keep tight control over costs and make better and effective use of resources. Part of the process will be through the application of its Procurement and VfM Strategy.
- Reserves movements: the use of LABGI is to be used in exceptional circumstances and in the main, for one off costs. Use of General Funds to be used as a last resort in exceptional circumstances as any reserves funding is not sustainable in the long term.
- Interest rate assumptions: At the date of this report, there are few signs of a recovery. However there are also risks which can damage the fragile recovery. Many economists, as well as the Council's investment advisors, expect the base rate to remain at this historically low level until quarter 4 of 2014 reaching 0.75 in first quarter of 2015.
- Capital: the biggest scheme to be undertaken relates to the works being undertaken at Elstree Film Studios. This is taking place in two stages, first being the removal of the mound at the rear of the site and this being financed by a grant from Local Enterprise Partnership and second stage being the building of the workshops, this being financed from internal reserves or external funding. The second phase will be subject to a business case and would require Council's approval.
- Over the next four years there will be significant changes as a result of the Welfare Reforms including the implementation of Universal Credit which will take four years to roll out. At the time of writing the implementation plan and eventual role of the Council in delivering the Welfare Reforms is not clear. Hence it is difficult to assess the financial impact on the Council. This will become clear as a result of the pilot schemes currently being run by the Department of Work and Pensions. This strategy will be updated in due course to reflect any financial implications arising therefrom

Budget Strategy

5.6 The Council has been very prudent with its financial management and the external auditors have highlighted this over the years. The budget strategy and budget setting process will

follow a similar process as adopted in prior years. This includes engaging stakeholders and an extensive process of consultation as set out in the budget timetable.

- 5.7 The Council carried out participatory budgeting in 2010/11, it was agreed that this exercise be repeated during July 2013. This will enable the Council to allocate its limited resources to those services the residents need as priority. It may also identify those non-statutory services that could potentially be reduced and therefore optimise the overall satisfaction levels of residents.
- 5.8 The Council's officers anticipated that, as part of the Spending Review 2015/16, there would be further government grant cuts on top of the already reduction in grants over the last three years, in the region of 10% and started its work in earnest from March 2013. This means the Council need to continue to review how services are delivered in the future.

Key principles for the Financial Strategy

5.9 The financial strategy lays down the following key principles:

- To keep the level of council tax as low as possible against the background of the economic downturn and financial turmoil.
- Investment of net capital receipts, earmarked for revenue generating projects, and/or cost savings initiatives. In cases where there is a time lag in securing investment opportunities, interest earned on this sum will be utilised for Revenue Budget purposes.
- Further explore alternative service delivery, to secure financial savings and efficiency gains, such as partnership working and shared services with neighbouring authorities and more innovative ways of delivering services which takes into account the provisions of the Localism Act.
- Maximise returns from the Council's portfolio of assets e.g. by developing our land.
- Further explore investments to save and "spend to save" schemes such as the Finance, Revenues and Benefits, planning projects which will deliver significant savings.
- Additional gains to be achieved by adopting better and smarter procurement practices.
- All projects to be evaluated with risk of slippage and the financial impact there from.
- VfM to be a key driving force in evaluating the current and future service delivery.
- Options and investment appraisals to be based on whole life costing.
- Embedding of electronic service delivery following implementation of e-government agenda and embrace the transformational government agenda.
- Explore the use of trading powers to generate additional income and from the Localism Act.
- Further develop the Council's Asset Management Plan.
- To set aside, as far as possible, sufficient funds in order to provide for the replacement of major assets such equipment, vehicles etc.
- Contingencies to be set at an adequate and prudent level.

6 Revenue Account: Budget setting process

6.1 The Revenue Budget Setting Process

6.1.1 Setting an achievable revenue budget is dependent upon resolving the fundamental conflict between the desire to improve services whilst at the same time ensuring that the cost of those services to the taxpayer is acceptable, affordable and sustainable. In order to resolve these conflicting aims, the Council needs to gain a clear understanding of the following factors:

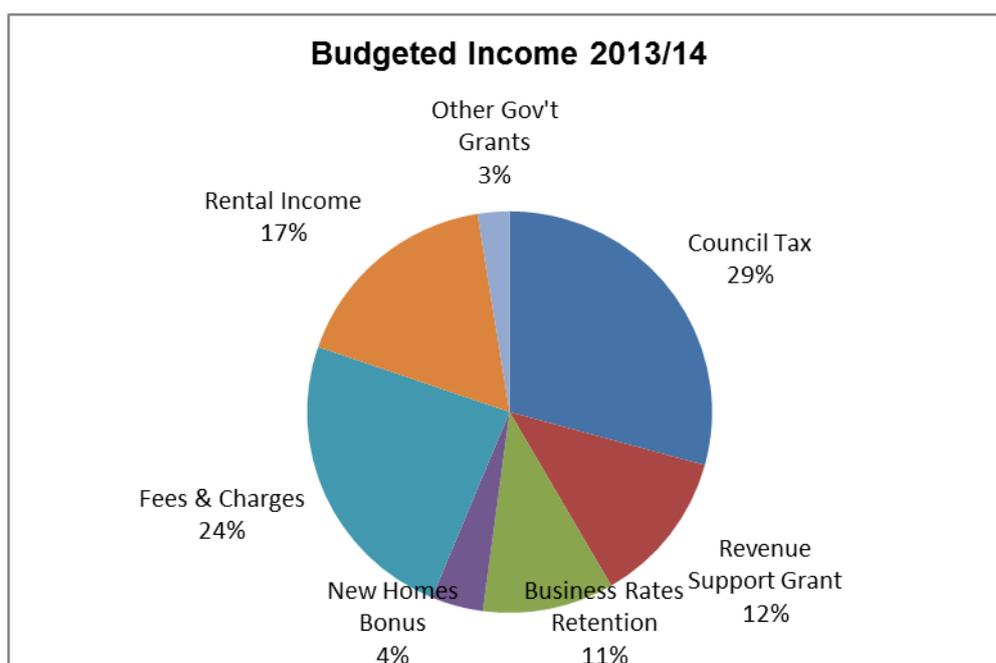
- What level of funding is required to provide each service for the forthcoming year.
- Which areas the Council considers to be its priorities for allocating funding.
- Whether any Value for Money gains or innovative service delivery solutions are possible for each service (e.g. through partnerships or outsourcing).
- Whether any additional income can be generated either in the form of Government or other grants, or through fees and charges levied.
- After consideration of all of the above factors, what an acceptable level of council tax will be for the forthcoming year.

6.1.2 In order to gain a clear understanding of each of the factors listed above and prior to presenting a proposed budget to full Council for approval, consultation is undertaken formally with the following groups:

- Residents
- Elected Members
- Service Managers
- The Finance and Property Portfolio Holder and The Leader of the Council
- The Executive as a whole
- Overview & Performance Committee
- Business Ratepayers, through the Corporate & community planning processes outlined below
- Outcome of Participatory Budgeting process.

6.2 Funding the Annual Revenue Budget

6.2.1 The gross expenditure of the Council's services is funded through various sources of income as shown in the chart below:



6.2.2 Central Government sets the level of Revenue Support Grant (RSG), the Business rates Retention, New Homes Bonus and other government grants which are payable to Hertsmere each year. The Council therefore has very limited control over these sources of income as evidenced by the latest finance settlement and significant reduction in government grants. The risk associated with the Business Rates and New Homes Bonus has been explained in paragraph 3.9 and 3.13.

6.3 High Level Budget Proposals 2014/15 to 2017/18

6.3.1 The following table shows the main proposals included in the 2014/15 to 2017/18 budgets. It shows the level of projected efficiency savings over the years 2014 to 2018 in order to balance the budget while at the same time maintaining service delivery.

Table 1. Key Budget Proposals	(Increase) / Decrease				
	2013/14 £'000	2014/15 £'000	2015/16 £'000	2016/17 £'000	2017/18 £'000
Total Service Improvements & Corporate policy Implications including employee costs	(388)	(355)	(214)	(225)	(237)
Net inflationary impact, growth and contractual obligations	(68)	(97)	(102)	(110)	(119)
Net (Increase)/Reduction in Income	(65)	173	187	195	153
Total Revenue Budget Savings/Efficiency	422	0	0	0	0
Net Increase on Prior Year's Budget requirement	(99)	(279)	(129)	(140)	(203)
Net Reduction in Government Funding net of New Homes Bonus	0	(355)	(281)	(245)	(220)
Increase in Council Tax	0	129	132	134	137
Efficiency Savings to be achieved in year	0	(505)	(278)	(251)	(286)

7 Revenue Account: Grants & Council Tax

7.1 Central Government Funding

7.1.1 The overall Council's expenditure (net budget requirement) is financed from two sources: external grants and council tax levies. External grants were previously (up to 2012/13) funded by Central Government via Revenue Support Grant and redistributed National Non-Domestic Rates. However, from 2013/14 Central Government funding now comes from Revenue Support Grant (RSG), Retention of Business Rates and New Homes Bonus (although an element came in during 2011/12).

7.1.2 As shown in the table 2 below the amount of government grants as a percentage of net budget requirement since 2011/12 shows a significant reduction from 50.5% to 39.4% in 2017/18. This means that the Council is left to fund a gap of 11.1%.

7.1.3 The 2013/14 budget has been prepared taking into account a tight finance settlement based on the new finance regime.

7.1.4 It is expected that future RSG will show further reduction on average over the three years of 21% or an average of £503k each year. The Retention of Business Rates shows an constant level of £1.9m a year, whilst the New Homes Bonus is showing a projected

increase on average over the three years of £332k each year. This has been taken into account for the purpose of forecasting future Government grant.

7.1.5 The following table shows the grant settlement (excluding council tax freeze grant) for the years 2011/12 to 2013/14 and the forecast settlement for 2015/16 to 2017/18. It is expected that there will be further grant reduction of on average 7% per year. The June spending review will see further cuts of 1% and since local government is not one of the protected departments, this will translate to nearly a 11% reduction in districts' grant when the top slicing of New Homes Bonus is factored in.

Table 2.	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Difference between 2017/18 and 2013/14
	Actual	Projected	Budget	Forecast	Forecast	Forecast	Forecast	
Types of Grant	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	
Government Grant before reduction	7,464	6,330	5,463	4,949	4,044	3,409	2,945	
Decrease in Cash Terms	(1,134)	(867)	(514)	(905)	(635)	(464)	(270)	
Government Grant (note 1)	6,330	5,463	4,949	4,044	3,409	2,945	2,675	(2,274)
New Homes Bonus	305	572	940	1,260	1,613	1,992	2,039	1,099
Total Government Grant (after reduction in NHB)	6,635	6,035	5,889	5,304	5,022	4,937	4,714	(1,175)

Note 1 – includes RSG and Business Rates Retention. Pre 2013/14, this was RSG and redistributed of national non-domestic rates. This excludes council tax freeze grant. For breakdown of total government grant, please refer to Appendix 2.

Note the total government grant on 2010/11 amounted to £7.464M (base year).

7.1.6 Under the old pooling arrangements National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) or business rates were collected from businesses by councils, pooled by central government and redistributed to councils on a population basis. From 2013/14 Council's will retain a proportion of Business Rates collected. Business Rates Retention combined with the revenue support grant (RSG), new homes bones and council tax make up local government funding.

7.1.7 The table below illustrates the actual, provisional, budget and forecasts for 2013-2018.

Table 3.	2013/14 £'000 Budget	2014/15 £'000 Forecast	2015/16 £'000 Forecast	2016/17 £'000 Forecast	2017/18 £'000 Forecast
NDR collected by HBC	42,443	43,858	45,083	46,523	48,199
NDR Entitlement for HBC	1,977	1,902	1,853	1,809	1,800
Safety Net	0	0	56	161	241
NDR Entitlement for HBC after Safety Net	1,977	1,902	1,909	1,970	2,041

7.1.8 As shown in the table above the amount of business rates collected by the Council are estimated to increase by around 3.4% each year. It is forecasted from 2015/16 the Council will start to receive a payment from Government as part of the safety net mechanism that is in place to compensate authorities where they are not reaching their threshold. As a result of reduction in future business rates it is likely that the Council will reach the safety net and hence the business rates retention will be protected if it goes below the safety net.

7.2 Specific Grants

Disabled Facilities Grant

7.2.1 Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) can be utilised as a contribution towards any expenditure incurred by the authority either under Part 1 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 or under Article 3 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. This gives Local Authorities the scope to develop innovative ways of supporting housing adaptations.

Table 4. Disabled Facilities Grant	2010/11 £'000 Actual	2011/12 £'000 Actual	2012/13 £'000 Budget	2013/14 £'000 Budget
Grant Receivable	237	266	290	233

The Council expect a similar amount for the years 2014/15 and 2017/18.

7.2.2 Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) derives from claims by local authorities that growth was inadequately recognised by the local government finance system, as set out in a review of housing supply. This has now been replaced by the New Homes Bonus Scheme. The "New Homes Bonus" is a Coalition Government scheme that is aimed at encouraging local authorities to grant planning permissions for the building of new houses. Under the scheme councils would receive an allowance equal to six year's council tax on the newly built home. Further detailed analysis of New Homes Bonus has been given in paragraphs 11.6.

Council Tax Freeze

7.2.3 Formula grant is fixed by the Government and therefore increases in service funding impact on the level of council tax that must be levied. Council tax setting induces significant tension in all budget-setting cycles, as there is a positive relationship between an increase in council tax and the quality and level of service provision.

7.2.4 Council Tax has remained the same since 2009/10. The Council received £164K in 2011/12 to provide a freeze in council tax which will be paid annually until 2015. Council received an additional £165k in 2012/13 for one year which is no longer payable. To assist the Council to continue a council tax freeze in 2013/14 we received £66k, equivalent to 1% increase in council tax, guaranteed for two years. Rises of 2% and above from 2013/14 onwards are subject to a referendum.

7.2.5 The table below reflects the council tax positions from 2012/13 to 2013/14 and the forecast for the next four years, assuming an increase in council tax of up to 1.95%.

Table 5.	2012/13 Actual	2013/14 Budget	2014/15 Forecast	2015/16 Forecast	2016/17 Forecast	2017/18 Forecast
Band D Levy (Incr. @ 1.95% for 2014/15 to 2017/18)	157.36	157.36	160.43	163.56	166.75	170.00
Council Tax	£6,633k	£6,633k	£6,762k	£6,894k	£7,028k	£7,165k

- 7.2.6 Hertsmere Borough Council acts as the billing authority for all council tax payments on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council, Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire and the Parish/Town Councils of Aldenham, Elstree and Borehamwood, Ridge, Shenley, South Mimms and Bushey & Potters Bar.
- 7.2.7 All receipts are paid into a collection fund. The receipts arising from council tax remain in the fund until specified dates when payments can be made to all precepting Authorities and the Borough Council.
- 7.2.8 The table below shows the distribution of Council Tax collected in Hertsmere.

Table 6.	%
Hertfordshire County Council	77.32
Hertsmere Borough Council	10.87
Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire	10.21
Parish Council Precepts	1.60
Total	100.00

8 Revenue Account: Income Generation

8.1 Fees and Charges

- 8.1.1 The Council obtains income from fees and charges for the provision of council services. A breakdown of the rates of fees and charges and the Council's charging policy for 2013/14 is included in the 2013/14 Budget Book.
- 8.1.2 However, the scope for significantly increasing the income from these sources is limited because:
- In relation to rental income and certain fees and charges, the Council must remain competitive with other providers.
 - Some fees and charges are determined by Central Government guidelines.
 - Some fees and charges are meant to breakeven, hence the Council recovers only the cost.
- 8.1.3 Other fees and charges relate to services provided for the benefit of the community where the Council aims to make the service accessible by making it available at a reasonable cost.
- 8.1.4 One of the immediate priorities set within the Corporate Plan is to review the Council's fees and charges in order to ensure that they remain competitive and effective. This has also been fully endorsed by the Council's external auditors. Fees and charges are reviewed as part of the budget setting process.
- 8.1.5 The table below shows the forecast for the years 2014/15 and onwards.

Table 7. Fees and Charges	2011/12 £'000	2012/13 £'000	2013/14 £'000	2014/15 £'000	2015/16 £'000	2016/17 £'000	2017/18 £'000
	Actual	Projected	Budget	Forecast	Forecast	Forecast	Forecast
Total Fees and Charges	8,775	9,330	9,409	9,747	9,992	10,242	10,446

*Note: Fees and charges are expected to be increased at the going rate of inflation and taking into account market conditions, and rules and regulations (e.g. land charges).

9 Revenue Account: Net Budget Requirement

9.1 Background

9.1.1 The Council's Revenue Budget represents the Council's target for the cost of providing its ongoing services in the forthcoming year. The Council is required by law to set a balanced Revenue Budget each year, showing how it intends to fund the services it plans to provide. The Revenue Budget therefore reflects the financial implications of the Council's aims and objectives for the forthcoming year. The Net Budget Requirement (NBR) is the total Expenditure minus Total Income (fees and charges), the balance being funding from Government grant (i.e. RSG, Business Rates and New Homes Bonus) and Council Tax.

9.1.2 The Council has the following options to consider in achieving the above requirement:

- Reduce the annual expenditure requirement by making efficiency savings, increasing the level of fees and charges and/or raising additional income.
- By achieving ongoing annual Value for Money gains i.e. economy (optimum costs), efficiency (maximise output) and effectiveness (better outcome).
- Increase the level of council tax
- Alternate ways of service delivery to achieve Value for Money gains.

Table 8. Revenue Expenditure	2012/13 £'000	2013/14 £'000	2014/15 £'000	2015/16 £'000	2016/17 £'000	2017/18 £'000
	Projected	Budget	Forecast	Forecast	Forecast	Forecast
Net Budget Requirement	12,424	12,523	12,297	12,148	12,037	11,954

9.1.3 The table above is based on the net budget requirement after factoring in the efficiency savings highlighted in paragraph 6.3.1.

10 Revenue Account: Sensitivity Analysis

10.1 As per Appendix 2, the Council has carried out a sensitivity analysis with regard to the risks associated with the medium term financial plan.

Sensitivity Analysis for 2014/15 – all variables

10.2 The best case scenario shows that the Council will be able to achieve a balanced budget in 2014/15. However the worst case scenario shows a deficit of £1.046m. The most likely scenario has been used for the purpose of this exercise and shows efficiency savings of £505K in 2014/15. However there are various permutations and combinations which may materialise in practice. The Council must monitor these variables and act accordingly.

Sensitivity Analysis 2015/16 to 2017/18 – main variable government grant (to be updated)

10.3 The level of reduction in grant affects the level of efficiency gains and budget savings that must be made. A 1% reduction in RSG would require additional savings of £167k for 2014/15.

11 Balances and Reserves Policy

11.1 Introduction

11.1.1 Sections 32 and 43 of Local Government Finance Act 1992 require local authorities in England and Wales to have regard to the level of resources needed to meet estimated future expenditure when calculating the budget requirement.

11.1.2 The external auditors make an assessment on the financial standing of the Council. Following the abolishment of the Audit Commission the Council's external auditor's scope of works has been increased, placing greater emphasis on Value for Money.

11.1.3 Within the existing statutory and regulatory framework, it is the responsibility of the Chief Financial Officer to advise the Council on the level of reserves that it should hold, and to ensure that there are clear protocols relating to their establishment and use.

11.1.4 When reviewing the Council's medium term financial plans and preparing its annual budgets the Council should consider the establishment and maintenance of balances and reserves. These can be held for three main purposes as follows:

- A working balance to cushion the impact of uneven cash flows and avoid unnecessary temporary borrowing.
- A contingency to cushion the impact of unexpected events or emergencies.
- A means of building up funds often referred to as earmarked reserves, to meet known or predicted liabilities.

11.1.5 There is no doubt that investment income has so far assisted the Council in maintaining and enhancing its General Fund reserves. However due to the significant reduction in the base rate the amount of investment income generated from the Council's portfolio of investment has reduced significantly. Hence, the Council is not anticipating any increase in the general fund reserve over the next four years as shown in the table below.

Table 9. Reserves	31/03/12	31/03/13	31/03/14	31/03/15	31/03/16	31/03/17	31/03/18
	Actual	Projected	Budget	Forecast	Forecast	Forecast	Forecast
Capital Reserve	£11.3m	£11.1m	£8.5m	£7.4m	£7.3m	£7.2m	£7.1m
General Fund Reserve	£8.7m	£8.8m	£8.8m	£8.8m	£8.8m	£8.8m	£8.8m
Earmarked Reserves	£13.1m	£12.2m	£10.4m	£9.8m	£9.5m	£9.3m	£9.0m

11.2 Reserves are defined by CIPFA as follows:

11.2.1 "Amounts set aside for purposes falling outside the definition of provisions should be considered as reserves, and transfers to and from them should be distinguished from service expenditure disclosed in the Statement of Accounts. Expenditure should not be charged direct to any reserve. For each reserve established, the purpose, usage and the

basis of transactions should be clearly identified. Reserves include earmarked reserves set aside for specific policy purposes and balances which represent resources set aside for purposes such as general contingencies and cash flow management.”

11.2.2 Capital reserves are subject to certain restrictions:

“Capital reserves are not available for revenue purposes and certain of them can only be used for specific statutory purposes. The revaluation reserve, usable capital receipts, and capital adjustment account are examples of such reserves.”

Revenue reserves are defined as follows:

“Revenue reserves result from events which have allowed monies to be set aside, surpluses, or decisions”.

11.2.3 Another reserve not available for general use is the pension reserve. The pension reserve is a revenue reserve that represents the financing of employee pension costs and is not directly available for other purposes. Where this reserve is in credit it may represent probable future reductions in pension costs, but is not a reserve that authorities can use at their discretion.

11.2.4 As at 31 March 2012 the Council’s pension fund showed a deficit of £33.3m. The pension fund liability reflects the outlook using assumptions that cover an extremely long term. The net liability reflects the valuation of assets which themselves can be subject to wide fluctuations over the long term. Any under performance or significant reduction in market capitalisation may lead to a significant increase in the pension deficit. The Council has always endeavoured to follow the actuary’s advice in deciding the level on contribution to the pension fund and as part of prudent financial management will continue to do so.

11.3 Principles to Assess the Adequacy of Reserves

11.3.1 In order to assess the adequacy of unallocated general reserves (balances) when setting the budget, the Chief Finance Officer, in conjunction with the management team and Executive, should take account of the strategic, operational and financial risks facing the Authority. The requirement for financial reserves is acknowledged in the Local Government Finance Act 1992, which requires billing, and precepting authorities to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure when calculating the budget requirement. In order to militate against over-committing financially, the Council is committed to producing a balanced budget.

11.4 Earmarked Reserves

11.4.1 Earmarked reserves are set aside for specific purposes as detailed in Appendix 4.

11.4.2 For each reserve held by the Council there will be a statement setting out:

- The reason for and purpose of the reserves.
- How and when the reserves can be used.
- A process and timescale for review of the reserves to ensure continuing relevance and adequacy.
- Procedures for the reserves’ management and control. The Chief Finance Officer in consultation with Service Head and Portfolio holder decides upon the required level for each reserve and most appropriate strategy to achieve this.

11.5 Local Authority Business Growth Incentive

11.5.1 The first LABGI scheme was a three-year Government initiative from 2005/06 to 2007/08 designed to give local authorities an incentive to encourage local economic and business growth.

11.5.2 The Council has not received any new LABGI since 2009/10 and no further allocation from central government is envisaged.

11.5.3 The table below shows the current Reserves position for LABGI and for 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Table 10.	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Opening Balance	1,014	623	475	167	130	65
Receivable in year	0	0	0	0	0	0
Utilised/Allocated	(391)	(148)	(308)	(37)	(65)	(65)
Closing Balance	623	475	167	130	65	0

11.5.4 The Ward Improvement Initiatives Scheme (WIIS) allows councillors up to £2k per annum to spend on local issues within their ward. This scheme aims to enhance local empowerment and promote community involvement. A total amount of £156k has been provided for over the 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12 budgets and funded from LABGI.

11.6 New Homes Bonus

11.6.1 New Homes Bonus (NHB) started in 2011/12 and was introduced by the Government to increase the number of homes and their use within a district. NHB is paid each year for 6 years and is based on the amount of extra Council Tax revenue raised for new build homes, conversions and long-term empty homes brought back into use. Payments for each eligible property are calculated per home in terms of the national average Council Tax Band D. For 2012/13 this was £1,444, for the basis of the financial strategy this has been increased annually by 1%.

11.6.2 The NHB settlement for 2011/12 was £303k and was not utilised / allocated during the year. The cumulative allocation of £940K has been utilised as part of the 2013/14 budget. It is also envisage that any future New Homes Bonus will be part of the revenue budget. The table below shows the current Reserves position for 2012/13 and projects this forward to 2017/18.

Table 11.	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
	£'000						
Opening Balance	0	303	0	0	0	0	0
Receivable in year	303	573	940	1,260	1,613	1,992	2,040
Utilised for one off	0	(876)	0	0	0	0	0
Utilised within revenue budgets	0		(940)	(1,260)	(1,613)	(1,992)	(2,040)
Closing Balance	303	0	0	0	0	0	0

11.7 S106 Reserves and CIL

11.7.1 When planning permission is granted it is the Council's policy to secure S106 funding if necessary. The table below shows the S106 reserves as at 2011/12. S106 funding will assist with some of the initial costs of infrastructure and other costs as agreed per S106 agreement. It is worth noting that any ongoing costs resulting from any developments may have a revenue (whole life costs) impact on the Council's revenue budget and has to be considered as part of the budget setting process.

Table 12. Section 106	2011/12 £'000 Actual	2012/13 £'000 Projected	2013/14 £'000 Budget	2014/15 £'000 Forecast	2015/16 £'000 Forecast	2016/17 £'000 Forecast	2017/18 £'000 Forecast
Opening Balance	998	1,191	1,791	2,141	2,491	2,841	3,191
Receipts	443	700	600	600	600	600	600
Utilised	(250)	(100)	(250)	(250)	(250)	(250)	(250)
Closing Balance	1,191	1,791	2,141	2,491	2,841	3,191	3,541

11.7.2 However, from April 2014, the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations will severely limit the ability of Section 106 obligations to fund general infrastructure projects. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a new tariff which will allow funds to be raised from new developments in Hertsmere to fund a wide range of infrastructure that is needed as a result of development. This includes new or safer roads schemes, park improvements, green spaces and leisure Centre's. However, Section 106 agreements will continue to be the primarily mechanism for securing affordable housing through the planning system. It is anticipated that from 2017 S106 will start to reduce and CIL will become the primarily mechanism for Hertsmere. This will not have any significant impact on the revenue budget of the Council as it will be administered as a separate fund largely to meet capital expenditure.

11.8 General Fund Reserves

11.8.1 In order to maintain financial flexibility and good financial standing, in 1999 the Council adopted a policy to maintain the General Fund Revenue Reserve at a level of at least £5m. The full Council in consultation with the External Auditors took this decision. At the time this decision was taken, there was no provision made for future inflationary increases of this amount.

11.8.2 The current s151 Officer in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Finance and Property Portfolio Holder has implemented a policy to increase this amount in line with inflation in order to maintain its real value, which has been commended by the External Auditors.

11.8.3 It has always been the aim of the Balances and Reserves Policy to increase, at a minimum, the level of the Council's General Fund reserves in line with the anticipated inflationary increase currently set at 3%. Over the last few years the Council has experienced some abnormal gains such as refund of over-declared VAT and refund of business rates resulting from revaluation of Council properties. As these were one off gains, it was prudent to set it aside as part of the Council general Fund and especially in times of significant cuts from central government and the uncertainties surrounding the economy.

11.8.4 Given the poor finance settlement, unprecedented economic conditions, stock market underperformance, financial turmoil and credit crunch, there is a possibility that the Council may have to utilise some of the General Fund reserves as a last resort. The sensitivity analysis shown in Appendix 2 demonstrates many of the variables associated with each cost and revenue, which in turn will require careful monitoring and management.

12 Capital Expenditure and Resourcing

12.1 Capital Expenditure – Strategic Objectives

- To approve all Capital Expenditure as per the Council's Capital Strategy.

- To work within the prudential indicators as set out by the capital regime known as the Prudential Code.
- To achieve a rate of return of at least the market investment rate, or base rate plus 2% (with a minimum of 5% as benchmark and higher in case of high risk initiatives) to be achieved by income and/or revenue savings generated by any new discretionary capital commitments, invest to save and spend to save initiatives. This is also applicable to any enhancements to existing assets with a view to improve efficiency e.g. energy reduction.
- To evaluate thoroughly all-ongoing financial commitments with respect to their impact on the revenue budget based on whole life costing.
- To minimise all future commitments against the Council's Capital Reserve unless the sources of capital recipes are identified and ring-fenced at the outset such as Housing Fund.

12.2 Capital Projects for 2013/14 and beyond as per Capital Budget 2013/14.

Table 13. REF	BID TITLE	£'000
2013-01	Civic Offices Windows	150
2013-02	Shops – External Services	80
2013-03	Garage Refurbishments	50
	Total new bids	280

12.2.1 The recommendation of the Asset Management Panel was to proceed with the projects. It was noted that in these difficult financial times when staff are losing their jobs we carefully consider and scrutinise every element of financial spend. The items proposed under this spend are all necessary either repairing damaged items to enable their continuing use, refurbishing to generate revenue or compliance with Health & Safety legislation. All the proposed items are urgent and vital and highlight that the Council is being careful on what it spends its money.

12.2.2 The table represents figures extracted from the Prudential Code for Capital Finance

Table 14. Capital Expenditure forecast	2011/12 Actual £'000	2012/13 Projected £'000	2013/14 Budget £'000	2014/15 Forecast £'000	2015/16 Forecast £'000
Central Services	571	365	1,371	0	0
Cultural, Social & Related Services	483	811	2,748	1,067	48
Environmental Services	181	72	114	0	0
Highways, Roads & Transport	31	1,033	1,390	0	0
Housing	325	672	490	0	0
Planning & Development Services	97	207	267	0	0
Total Capital Expenditure	1,688	3,160	6,380	1,067	48

Securing external funding

12.2.3 The Council in partnership with Hertswood School has built a Community theatre which is both beneficial to the school and the community. This demonstrates that the Council has both secured significant funding and minimised any recurrent costs for the Community theatre as it will be the responsibility for the school to run and maintain this valuable facility theatre which will benefit both the school and community.

12.2.4 The theatre was opened in November, and was renamed The Ark following a competition to find a new name. The theatre is available for hire by local amateur dramatic groups, dance groups, local bands and schools for their performances.

12.2.5 The Council has recently procured external funding to finance capital expenditure at Elstree Studios from the Local Enterprise Partnership for removal of the mound at the rear of the Studios and may possibly procure further funding from Public Works Loan Board or to use internal reserves to fund the second stage being the building of the workshops, subject to a business case.

12.3 Capital Resourcing

Useable Capital Receipts

12.3.1 In order to be able to fund any future capital programmes without resorting to loan finance, there needs to be sufficient usable capital receipts, earmarked reserves and sinking funds such as those for leisure and vehicle replacement.

12.3.2 One of the main sources of funding available to support the capital programme has been capital receipts from disposals of the Council's assets.

12.3.3 The strategy requires the Council's policy to invest 80% of the net capital receipts generated in 2004/05 and onwards into revenue generating asset portfolio and/or cost saving initiatives. In cases where there is a time lag in securing investment opportunities, interest earned on this sum will be utilised for Revenue Budget purposes. The balance (20%) of these proceeds is transferred to usable capital receipts and is used to fund capital projects. In cases where the Council is not able to identify any affordable housing or revenue generating investments, the earmarked amounts are invested in accordance with the Council's treasury management policy.

12.3.4 Over the years there has been a reduction in proceeds under the 'right to buy' scheme, which has been hitherto a major source of capital receipts. Moreover the number of properties to which the Council is entitled to receive a share of the disposal proceeds from LHA has diminished over the years. This is further exacerbated by the current stagnation of the housing market. As a result the amount of future capital receipts would not be sufficient to fund any significant future capital programmes.

12.3.5 As there are no remaining usable capital receipts for future projects all estimated capital receipts generated from 2009/10 onwards will be used to fund future capital programmes. In future no contributions will be made to the earmarked reserve for generating projects.

12.3.6 As shown in the table below, the Council has £7.3m earmarked for revenue generating projects or projects, which will benefit the community. The Asset Management Panel is responsible for recommending to Executive the utilisation of this fund and this is done on a case-by-case basis.

Table 15.	2011/12 £M Actual	2012/13 £M Projected	2013/14 £M Budget	2014/15 £M Forecast	2015/16 £M Forecast	2016/17 £M Forecast	2017/18 £M Forecast
Opening Balance	10.9	11.3	11.1	8.5	7.4	7.3	7.2
Movements	0.4	(0.2)	(2.6)	(1.1)	(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.1)
Closing Balance	11.3	11.1	8.5	7.4	7.3	7.2	7.1

Earmarked Reserves/Sinking Fund

12.3.7 The Council as part of the budget strategy and budget setting process has adopted a policy to set aside regular amounts towards a sinking fund for the replacement of vehicles and leisure equipment. The table below shows the current position.

Table 16.	2011/12 £'000 Actual	2012/13 £'000 Projected	2013/14 £'000 Forecast	2014/15 £'000 Forecast	2015/16 £'000 Forecast	2016/17 £'000 Forecast	2017/18 £'000 Forecast
Opening Balance	12,864	13,065	12,179	10,429	9,754	9,504	9,254
Net movements	201	(886)	(1,750)	(675)	(250)	(250)	(250)
Closing balance	13,065	12,179	10,429	9,754	9,504	9,254	9,004

The above table includes funds earmarked for the replacement of waste vehicles, which are not included in the capital budget.

12.4 Capital budget: Management and Monitoring Process

12.4.1 The progress of Council-funded projects is monitored both from a financial perspective (through monthly financial monitoring teams of members) and through regular progress reports submitted to committees on all significant schemes and to any appropriate partners or stakeholders. Other “indirect” schemes are largely monitored directly by committees but any schemes funded via S106 contributions also form part of the financial monitoring process. The measures are linked to Council and service aims and therefore will indicate how the Council is progressing at achieving these aims.

12.4.2 The Council has an Asset Management Panel which is responsible for all property related matters. The panel recommendations form an integral part of any Executive reports where resources are being secured. Also decision to invest, capital bids and sale of properties are considered by the panel which meets on a regular basis. A panel comprises of elected representatives including executive members and the Finance and Property Portfolio holder is Chairperson of the Panel meetings.

12.4.3 The investment appraisal process includes an evaluation and approval process from the initial project bid to business case, project prioritisation and post implementation review. This process identifies lessons learnt and the value of ongoing monitoring of the service benefits and financial performance for all projects.

12.4.4 Additional projects will be incorporated into the capital programme on a priority basis to absorb any slippage from the originally approved programme.

12.4.5 Procedures have been established to monitor and report significant deviations from forward-looking prudential indicators covering the capital investment plan, financing and treasury management, as stipulated by The Prudential Code for capital finance.

12.4.6 The Service Heads will carry out regular performance monitoring exercises with their staff to ensure their personal responsibilities are adequately undertaken and that delegated activities are properly conducted to ensure capital projects are on time, within budget and deliver agreed objectives.

12.5 Capital Strategy and Asset Management Planning

12.5.1 The Capital Strategy (Appendix 3) sets out the strategic direction for the Council’s capital programme and provides a background against which the Council will pursue funding opportunities in order to maximise capital investment . A updated Asset Management Plan is currently being updated and will be presented to members for approval later in the year.

13 Influences, Pressures and Assumptions

Pay award and Pay related costs

- 13.1 There was a pay award in 2012/13 of 2% following agreement with unions with changes to sick pay. No pay award has been included within the 2013/14 budgets, 2.1% - due to pension and auto enrolment costs of 1.1% and pay award 1% in 2014/15 and a 1% pay award have been forecasted for the following four years (2014/15 to 2017/18).
- 13.2 The UK economy has continued to remain in or around recession and inflation has remained around 2.5% to 3% (the last four consecutive months to January 2013 CPI been 2.7%).

Pension Contributions

- 13.3 The employer's pension contribution rate is expected to be 28.5% for the year 2013/14. This is based on officers' best estimates. The pension payment consists of two elements, a service charge and payment towards the pension deficit. When a member of the scheme is made redundant their current pension deficit is crystallised and payment becomes due. With the level of redundancies this will place a strain on cashflow.
- 13.4 There will be changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme from April 2014 that will have significant impact on the Council's pension contributions. Firstly, changes to the scheme, these include moving from an Final Salary Scheme to a Career Average Revalued Earnings; accrual rate moving from 1/60th to 1/49th; 50:50 option (giving employees the option to only pay half their normal contributions, in exchange for only receiving half of their entitlement i.e. an accrual rate of 1/98th). The second change is Automatic Enrolment, where the Government has insisted that all entitled employees must be enrolled into a pension scheme, and it is the responsibility of the employee to opt out of the scheme. However, on the third anniversary of opting out, the employee will be re-enrolled and it is then the responsibility of the employee to opt out again. There is a provision of 1.1% in 2014/15 to cover increases in pension costs resulting from changes to the LGPS and auto enrollment.
- 13.5 Any further underperformance of the stock market may lead to a significant increase in the pension deficit. The Council has always endeavoured to follow the actuary's advice in deciding the level on contribution to the pension fund and as part of prudent financial management will continue to do so.

Inflation

- 13.6 Over the years the inflation faced by the Council has been higher than RPI and CPI as a result of significant increases in the price of fuel and gas, and other contractual obligations. The Council will negotiate with all suppliers with a view to reduce any increases resulting from contractual obligations
- 13.7 The current RPI is 3.3%, January 2013, with CPI at 2.7%. The Government's target of 2% has been exceeded for some months. The Bank of England has said that increases in energy and other import prices and in VAT have meant that CPI inflation has been well above its 2% target for much of this period. The forecast as per OBR is as per table 17 below. This shows that the inflationary pressures in the economy are here to stay for the next few years.
- 13.8 Table below shows the latest forecast for RPI and CPI published by the OBR. The contractual expenditure included within the estimates (e.g. vehicle maintenance, software licences and ground maintenance) is based on RPI within the strategy.

Table 17.				
	2013	2014	2015	2016
RPI	3.2	2.8	3.2	3.6
CPI	2.8	2.4	2.1	2.0

Economic Downturn

- 13.9 The growth forecast for UK has been revised to 0.6%, 1.8%, 2.3% and 2.7% for the years 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively. The impact of the current economic situation has had and will continue to have an adverse effect on the Council's finances and its ability to continue to maintain service delivery. However the Council has managed to maintain front line services.
- 13.10 The Council together with other partners is working diligently to find ways in which much needed help can be provided to both the residents and business community. In 2013/14, £50,000 has been earmarked to appoint an officer to assist with local partners in creating conditions for economic growth and the promotion of well-being in the community.
- 13.11 The utilities and diesel expenses are forecasted above RPI at 5% for financial years 2015/16 to 2017/18. All other transport costs and supplies and services are forecasted at 1% for each of the years.

Income from fees and Charges

- 13.12 It has been assumed that fees and charges will increase by 2% per annum. This includes both real terms and increase due to inflation. It is worth noting that some fees are set by statutes and are meant to cover costs only. Income from fees and charges may see a reduction in demand if the economic recovery is weak and prolonged.

Council Tax

- 13.13 Council tax has been assumed to increase by 1.95%. A possible reduction in the collection rate would mean that less income would be received.

Investments

- 13.14 The continue low bank interest rate means that the investment income generated will continue to be low compared with that received from earlier years. There is also a continual high risk that some financial institutions may default in honouring their contractual obligations i.e. repayment of capital and /or interest.
- 13.15 Over the last year the MPC has continued to maintain historically low base rates.

Future base rates

- 13.16 While analysing the above it should be borne in mind that changes in the Base Rate remain the key method of attempting to control the effects of inflation in the economy. As long as the risk of inflation is under the 2% target set by Central government, the Bank of England will carry on with its monetary policy of keeping interest rate down in order to stimulate the economy.
- 13.17 The current base rate of 0.5% is at a historically low level. It is expected to remain at this level or even slightly lower until Q1 2014 when a small increase is anticipated.

Decision	Mar-12	Sep-12	Mar-13	Sep-13	Mar-14	Sep-14	Mar-15
Base	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.75
Change	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.25

Housing and Housing / Council Tax Benefits

13.18 The recent trend indicates that increased unemployment has led to an increase in the demand for housing benefits due to repossessions. This in turn increases the number of benefit claims. This stretches the Council's resources in both employee and financial terms. Moreover, the Grant from DWP will be reduced by 27% over the CSR period. There will also be significant changes to the way benefits processing will be done as a result of the introduction of Universal Credit. The final details of this scheme are still under consultation and DWP is running few pilots before the final roll out plan is decided. There are other issues with regard to staff and TUPE arrangements which requires further discussions and clarifications with DWP. Any changes may have an impact on the Financial Strategy, Council Finances, the workforce plan and the Asset Management Plan.

Grant Aid

13.19 The voluntary sector such as the Customer Advice Bureau (CAB) relies heavily on the Council for grant funding. The current recession could lead to a greater demand for these services and could lead to this sector calling for increased Council assistance.

13.20 As part of the 2011/12 budget process the Council has allocated an additional £37k to (CAB) in order to assist with the additional demand on their services as a result of the economic downturn, which has resulted in an increase in unemployment. This has remained unchanged into 2013/14.

Non pay related Costs

13.21 Non-pay related costs might also be higher than the rate of inflation e.g., contractual obligations and greater demand in services etc. It is also possible that there will be a reduction in the standard of goods and services provided by the Council's suppliers, as they will be looking into ways of reducing costs. This will have to be monitored by the Council.

14 Risk Management

Introduction

14.1 Risk management is an essential part of securing the "health" of an organisation. Effective risk management provides organisations with a means of improving strategic, operational and financial management. It can also help to maximise opportunities and minimise events which might result in financial losses, service disruption, bad publicity, threats to public health and claims for compensation.

Responsibility

14.2 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 states that the Council is "responsible for ensuring that the financial management and accounting control systems of the body are adequate and effective, that the body has a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of that body's functions and which includes risk management arrangements. The Audit Commission's Code of Audit Practice makes it clear that it is the responsibility of the audited body to identify and address its operational and financial risks, and to develop and implement proper arrangements to manage them,

including adequate and effective systems of internal control. The financial risks should be assessed in the context of the authority's overall approach to risk management.

- 14.3 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 also states that the Council is responsible for conducting a "review at least once a year of the effectiveness of its system of internal control and shall publish a statement on the adequacy of internal control (Statement on Internal Control) with any statement of accounts it is obliged to publish". It is CIPFA's view that the Chief Finance Officer has responsibility for ensuring that the authority has put in place effective arrangements for internal audit of the control environment and systems of internal control as required by professional standards.

Strategy and Policy

- 14.4 The Council considers the assessment and minimisation of all types of risk to be vital and has a strategy in place to meet its requirements. The Risk Management Strategy was formally approved by the full Council in June 2008 and was updated in November 2012. The bullet points below illustrate the impact of Risks on Financial Strategy:

- Not to be able to achieve the income required to fund the services as required by the Council's Strategy and Corporate Plan.
- The Financial Strategy will be kept under review and any unforeseen changes in the Service Plan will have to be evaluated as far as affordability and sustainability is concerned and the strategy amended accordingly.
- The level of resources and Council funding will have to be adequate in order to ensure any unforeseen increases in cost and absorbed without having any impact in service delivery.
- All assumptions used for the purpose of this strategy are kept under review and any impact will have to be assessed accordingly.

Current Position

- 14.5 The Local Government Act 2003, Part II, subsections 25-28, has placed onerous requirements on the Chief Finance Officer. Subsection 26 & 27 requires the Chief Finance Officer to give assurances to the members on the robustness of the budgets. The Chief Finance Officer is obliged to present a "balanced budget".
- 14.6 Known, and as far as possible, anticipated risks have been taken into account in all financial reports. However, Members will appreciate that the world economy is experiencing unprecedented changes, which no local authority is insulated from.
- 14.7 As far as can be apprehended in these circumstances, and in the judgement of the Chief Financial Officer, the budget is realistic and the reserves are adequate.
- 14.8 The Chief Finance Officer identified the risks inherent in the budget setting process as representing the greatest threats to the 2013/14 budget. This has been identified and any future risks and uncertainties have been factored in as part of the Financial Strategy based on information available at time of writing and to the best knowledge of officers. The mitigation plan is described in paragraph 14.9.
- The majority of income budgets are subject to external factors, such as demand and supply in the market and the general state of the economy.
 - Unemployment may become an issue placing a greater strain on finances and staff resources.
 - With the economic climate collection of rates may fall and the incidence of bad debts may increase.
 - Repossessions may increase which will place a demand for housing and benefit support
 - Continuous increases in the obligations placed upon the Council by Central Government, with little or no corresponding increase in funding.

Financial Strategy Risk and Mitigation Plan

- 14.9 The keys risks associated with the financial strategy are primarily based around the income the Council is expected to receive over the coming years. These are highlighted below with the control measures in place to reduce the likelihood of happening. The residual risk is regarded as medium risk and the Council will update the risk register in light of any new information.

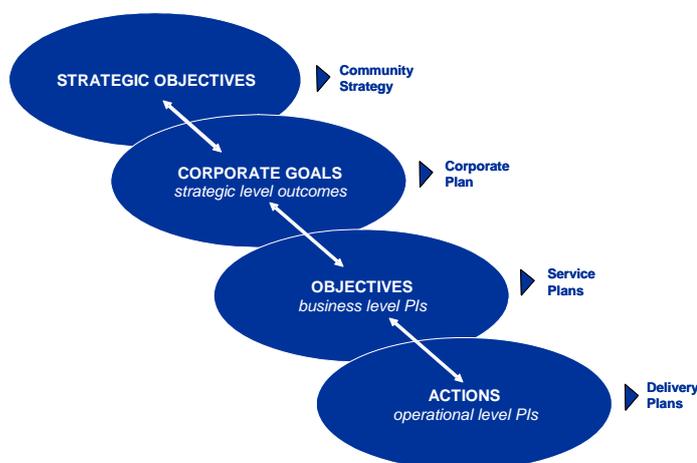
Risk	Control Measures in place
Government reduces Revenue Support Grant further than anticipated	Keep abreast of Government policy and on the economy. To be prudent within the strategy.
Reduction in Business Rates if the local economy continues to fall	To encourage growth within the district. Additional money in place to assist businesses.
Reduction in New Homes Bonus from changes to policy or growth not materialising	To be prudent within the strategy. Keep abreast of Government policy.
Failure to achieve savings identified within the strategy	To start the process early to encourage discussions on how savings can be achieved.
Reduction in fees & charges from the recession	To be prudent with budget and to monitor on a monthly basis to be able to react to changes.

15 Council's Performance Assessment and Management

- 15.1 The purposes for developing performance measures and applying comparison to the service are as follows:
- To provide a measure of the competitiveness of service delivery
 - Assist in the identification of potential service improvements
 - To provide meaningful performance information for service stakeholders
 - Generate a focus for internal service delivery
 - Demonstrate Value for Money in service provision.
- 15.2 The Performance Management Strategy sets out the Council's approach to managing performance. It should be read in conjunction with the Performance Management Operational Handbook, which sets out the details of the performance management processes at the Council.
- 15.3 Performance management is checking that the right things are being done and that things are being done right.

15.4 The Council's performance management model is:

PLAN, DO, REVIEW, REVISE. The performance management activities cascade up and down the organisation:



For further information about the Council's performance management strategy refer to the Council's website at www.hertsmere.gov.uk.

- 15.5 The Council monitors performance through a mixture of performance measures and outcomes on a quarterly basis, with performance reports considered by the Executive Performance Management Member Panel, Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee and the Executive.
- 15.6 The Financial Strategy is closely linked with the Council's other strategies and plans such as: Community Strategy, Corporate Plan, Service Plan, Operational Plans, Asset Management Plan, Workforce Plans, Procurement Strategy, Risk Management Strategy, Value for Money Agenda, Reserves and Provisions Policy and Prudential Code Indicators in order to adopt a more coherent approach to financial and strategic planning.
- 15.7 As mentioned in the paragraph above, the Financial Strategy feeds into the budget strategy and budget setting process and is a living document. It will be tested regularly in light of any new information in order to ensure that it is up to date and continues to be a key document for financial planning.

16 Key partners and alliance

- 16.1 The Council is committed to seeking out innovative partnerships and funding opportunities in order to deliver the capital strategy and achieve value for money. The Council works in partnership with local community groups (i.e. County Council, Clinical Commissioning Group and Police) and other service providers to co-ordinate their services in accordance with community needs. The Council is also a member of the Local Strategic Partnership, which is made up of representatives from other major agencies. The Authority seeks opportunities for sharing the use of land and buildings with other agencies. Its Civic Offices, leisure centres as well as community centres and Hertsmere Worknet are prime examples of shared use facilities.

17 Consultation Process

17.1 The consultation process is as follows:

Table 17.	
Meeting	Date
1 st Executive	17/04/2013
2 nd Executive	19/06/2013
Overview and Scrutiny	30/04/2013
Full Council	24/07/2013
Note: The reports and Appendices have also been discussed with Chief officers and Service Heads and their comments have been included and contribution much appreciated..	

18 Appendices

1. Action Plan
2. Revenue Financial Planning: 2013/14 to 2017/18 and risk sensitivity analysis

Hard copy available on request

3. Capital Strategy
4. Earmarked Reserves
5. Value for Money and Efficiency Strategy

Appendix 1

Action Plan

ACTION PLAN – TARGETS

The Financial Strategy sets the framework and parameters that need to be followed in the action plan and will form part of the budget setting process and service plans.

Action	By Whom	By When
To continue to monitor the impact of the recession and predicted slow and prolonged economic recovery and to take corrective measures whenever necessary.	Chief officers and Service Heads	Ongoing review. Action taken as and when required.
The long-term financial implications including whole life costing of any new initiatives should be considered prior to submission to Executive Committee for approval.	Chief officers and Service Heads	Ongoing
To achieve efficiency savings by improving service efficiency through new technology and new ways of working - customer centric services and partnership working. This will ensure that the financial strategy reflects service planning and the best value process.	Chief officers and Service Heads	Ongoing
Maximisation of return from the Council's Asset Portfolio and make use of freedom of trading powers and Localism Act.	Chief officers and Service Heads	Ongoing.
Review and maintain cost efficient and effective staffing structures.	Chief Officers, Head of Human Resources and Customer services Service Heads	To be reviewed in light of further local government changes.
No further commitments are to be made against the Council's capital reserves except for essential structural repairs and maintenance, replacement of assets, any statutory obligations and invest and spend to save programmes and any other extraordinary items determined by the Executive as a result of the Corporate Plan.	Service Heads	Ongoing – To be reviewed six monthly.
To assess the adequacy of the council's capital and revenue reserves and to ensure that remedial action is put in place to deal with any significant fluctuations.	Director of Resources	Ongoing – To be reviewed annually.
To achieve economies of scale through Partnership arrangements and public/private funding is sought for any appropriate project and as part of pathfinder.	Officers	Ongoing
Wherever permissible income from all sources to be increased by at least 2% per annum plus inflation either by increasing fees and charges and/or introducing new charging strategies subject to meeting statutory constraints and as part of Participatory Budgeting process.	Officers	Ongoing – To be reviewed as part of budget setting process.
To promote economic development by working with the business communities with a view to maximise business rates whereby the Council retains 40% of any growth.	Chief officers and Service Heads	Ongoing – To be reviewed annually

Hertsmere Borough Council
 Financial Strategy 2013/14 – 2017/18

Action	By Whom	By When
To encourage residential building programme with a view to maximise New Homes Bonus.	Chief officers and Service Heads	Ongoing – To be reviewed annually
Secure reduction in expenditure through competitive tendering, smarter procurement and via approved procurement policy.	Management Team	Ongoing
To continue investing any earmarked reserves for revenue generating projects with a view to optimise return from those investments.	Chief officers and Service Heads	Ongoing – To be reviewed annually
To maximise the number of social houses built by making use of S106 and in future Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).	Chief officers and Service Heads	Ongoing – To be reviewed annually
The revised the Council's efficiency agenda using the CSR 2010 as amended and for the recent SR2015/16. The Council should achieve efficiency as mentioned in Appendix 2 in order to prepare a balanced, affordable and sustainable budget.	Chief officers and Service Heads	Ongoing – To be reviewed annually
To assess and manage the risk associated with the council's investments and emerging from the financial strategy.	Director of Resources and Head of Finance and Business Services	Ongoing – To be reviewed annually
To asses impact of any changes resulting from local government finance, LGPS, business rates retention, Council tax support scheme, Localism Act and Welfare Reforms and take appropriate actions accordingly	Chief officers and Service Heads	Ongoing – To be reviewed annually

Appendix 2

Revenue Financial Planning 2013/14 – 2017/18 and Risk Sensitivity Analysis.

Hertsmere Borough Council
Financial Strategy 2013/14 – 2017/18

Hertsmere Borough Council
Revenue Financial Planning 2013/14 to 2017/18

	2013/14 Budget £'000	2014/15 Forecast £'000	2015/16 Forecast £'000	2016/17 Forecast £'000	2017/18 Forecast £'000
General Fund Budget Requirement					
Net Budget Brought Forward	12,523	12,523	12,297	12,148	12,037
Budgetary Increases / Savings:					
Employee & Related Expenditure Including Pension	-	283	135	137	139
Net Inflationary Impact, Growth and Contractual Obligations	-	169	181	198	217
Net (increase) / reduction in income	-	(173)	(187)	(195)	(153)
Funding requirement to be met by budget savings and efficiency gains	-	(505)	(278)	(251)	(286)
Net Council Budget Requirement	12,523	12,297	12,148	12,037	11,954
Net Council Budget Requirement After Reserves movements	12,523	12,297	12,148	12,037	11,954
Funding: See below					
Council tax grant	231	231	232	72	74
Council Tax	6,633	6,762	6,894	7,028	7,165
Revenue Support Grant	2,972	2,142	1,500	975	634
Business Rates Retention	1,747	1,902	1,909	1,970	2,041
New Homes Bonus	940	1,260	1,613	1,992	2,040
	12,523	12,297	12,148	12,037	11,954
Year on Year Decrease on Net Budget Requirement		(226)	(149)	(111)	(83)

Note: The assumptions made when compiling the above are set out in paragraph 13 of Appendix A.

Scenario / Sensitivity Analysis for 2014/15 to assess risk

Description		Most Likely (included in strategy)	Scenario A	Scenario B	Difference between Scenario A and B
Pay related costs, including pension cost	£	(283)	-	(271)	(271)
Income from Fees and Charges	£	173	267	107	(160)
Council Tax	£	129	132	132	-
Government Grant (RSG)	£	(830)	(830)	(830)	-
Business Rates	£	154	69	(116)	(185)
New Homes Bonus Scheme	£	320	384	240	(144)
Return on Investments	£	(104)	18	(47)	(65)
Income from related companies EFS	£	150	100	-100	(200)
Other costs / Contractual Obligations/Growth in services	£	(214)	(75)	(160)	(85)
Total		(505)	64	(1,046)	(1,110)
Savings and Efficiency gains to be achieved	£	505	-	1,046	

(figures shown in brackets, represents increase in cost or reduction in income and vice versa)

Note: Scenario A (may be classed as the best case scenario) shows that the Council will be better off by £64K whereas in case of scenario B (may be classed as the worst case scenario) shows a deficit figure of £1,046KK. However there are various permutations and combinations which may materialise in practice. The Council must monitor these variables and take corrective measures accordingly.

The main variances between scenario A and B are: no pay award included within the best and 2% within the worst; fees and charges increasing by 2.5% included within the best and only 1% within the worst; and income from related companies (i.e. EFS) includes increase of £100k, whilst the worst includes a £100k reduction. There is also a difference in Business Rates income of £185k and New Homes Bonus (NHB) of £144k. These grants / income largely depends on growth in residential homes (for NHB) and commercial properties for business rates and hence largely depends on the state of the economy.