

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

AGENDA



Tuesday 5 December 2023

at 4.00 pm

**in the Council Chamber,
Civic Centre, Hartlepool**

MEMBERS: CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

Councillors Cowie, Harrison, Holbrook, Lindridge, Little, Moore and Sharp.

Co-opted Members: Tracey Gibson, C of E Diocese and Joanne Wilson, RC Diocese representatives.

School Heads Representatives: Adam Palmer (Secondary), Sue Sharpe (Primary), Zoe Westley (Special).

Parent Governor Representative: Martin Pout

Six Young Peoples Representatives

Observer: Councillor Buchan, Chair of Adult and Community Based Services Committee

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023 (*previously circulated and published*).

4. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS

- 4.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024/25 to 2026/27 – *Director of Finance, IT and Digital and Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*

CIVIC CENTRE EVACUATION AND ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE

In the event of a fire alarm or a bomb alarm, please leave by the nearest emergency exit as directed by Council Officers. A Fire Alarm is a continuous ringing. A Bomb Alarm is a continuous tone.

The Assembly Point for everyone is Victory Square by the Cenotaph. If the meeting has to be evacuated, please proceed to the Assembly Point so that you can be safely accounted for.

5. KEY DECISIONS

No items

6. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION

No items

7. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

No items

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

FOR INFORMATION

Date of next meeting – Tuesday 23 January at 4.00pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.



CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

5th December 2023



Report of: Director of Finance, IT & Digital and
Executive Director of Children's and Joint
Commissioning Services

Subject: MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS)
2024/25 TO 2026/27

Decision Type: Budget and Policy Framework

1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

Hartlepool will be a place:
- Where people are enabled to live healthy, independent and prosperous lives
- Where those who are vulnerable will be safe and protected from harm
- Of resilient and resourceful communities with opportunities for all
- That is sustainable, clean, safe and green
- That has an inclusive and growing economy
- With a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects the diversity of its community

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the MTFS and to enable the Committee to scrutinise / comment on the savings proposals referred from the Finance and Policy Committee.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Comprehensive MTFS reports have been considered by Finance and Policy Committee on 3rd July 2023 and the latest report on 27th November 2023, this is attached at **Annex A**. A number of key issues were highlighted within these reports, which are briefly summarised in the following paragraphs.

- 3.2 All councils are facing significant financial challenges owing to the impact of inflation, demand on services and inadequate increases in government funding to meet these challenges. This includes Hartlepool and these issues are the key driver of the budget deficit facing the Council.
- 3.3 As outlined in the November Finance and Policy Committee report, after an assumed Council tax rise in line with Governments expectations, the Council has a forecast budget deficit of £3.149m for 2024/25 and £8.080m over the MTFS period. As in previous years the addressing of the deficit needs to be managed through budget saving actions, which seek to minimise the impact on services where possible, and also use of reserves. As members will be aware the use of reserves to support the budget position is not sustainable, so must be done in a managed way, allowing time for further savings to be developed and service transformation to be delivered.
- 3.4 To support the meeting of this budget gap, savings proposals totalling £1.792m have been proposed for 2024/25 and a total of £2.792m over the MTFS period. The acceptance of the proposals for 2024/25 would leave a remaining budget gap of £1.357m to be met from reserves in that year.

4. ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED BY POLICY COMMITTEES

- 4.1 Finance and Policy Committee is seeking comments on the savings proposals, which are summarised by workstream in the table below.
- 4.2 Details of the individual savings provided in **Appendix C** and for ease of reference the items relevant to this committee are shaded.

	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	Total £m
Nuts and Bolts	0.465	0.285	0.250	1.000
Digital	0.010	0.030	0.030	0.070
Service Reviews	0.636	0.000	0.000	0.636
Commercial	0.681	0.405	0.000	1.086
TOTAL	1.792	0.720	0.280	2.792

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 As requested by Finance and Policy Committee, the Committee is requested to consider the recommended savings proposals detailed in **Appendix C** relating to the services within this Committees portfolio and provide any comments to be reported back to Finance and Policy Committee on 22nd January 2024, including suggesting alternative proposals if Members do not wish to implement these proposals.

6. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 To fulfil the requirement of the Council's Constitution to seek Policy Committee input on proposed savings.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:-

- Finance and Policy Committee - Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024/25 to 2026/27 – 3rd July 2023.
- Finance and Policy Committee - Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024/25 to 2026/27 – 27th November 2023.

8. CONTACT OFFICER

James Magog
Director of Finance, IT and Digital
Email: james.magog@hartlepool.gov.uk
Telephone: 01429 523093

Sally Robinson
Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services
Email: sally.robinson@hartlepool.gov.uk
Telephone: 01429 523914

Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date: 16/11/2023
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 16/11/2023
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 16/11/2023

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

27 NOVEMBER 2023



Report of: Director of Finance, IT and Digital

Subject: MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS)
2024/25 TO 2026/27

Decision Type: Budget and Policy Framework

1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

Hartlepool will be a place:

- where people are enabled to live healthy, independent and prosperous lives
- where those who are vulnerable will be safe and protected from harm
- of resilient and resourceful communities with opportunities for all
- that is sustainable, clean, safe and green
- that has an inclusive and growing economy
- with a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects the diversity of its community

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Council's financial position and to approve the budget savings proposals to be referred to individual Policy Committees.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A comprehensive MTFS update report was presented to the Finance and Policy Committee at its meeting in July 2023. The MTFS does not stand still and continuously evolves based on latest information, intelligence and changing circumstances, including the current years forecast budget outturn position.

4.1 ANNEX**A**

- 3.2 The updated MTFS position presented in this report continues to cover the three year position, 2024/25 to 2026/27, although it is important to recognise that the Council needs to be sustainable beyond this 3 year period and in to the longer term.
- 3.3 Speeches and presentations from government ministers and officials over recent months provide no indication that additional funding is forthcoming to Council's to support growing budget gaps. Key messaging is around the need for Councils to be transforming how they deliver services to balance their budgets and therefore not planning for government funding to fill the financial void.
- 3.4 Whilst a general election will take place during the next 14 months, there is similarly no promise of additional funds from the current opposition, should they be elected.
- 3.5 Whilst we do continue to make the case to government ministers and officials for additional funding, it is looking increasingly unlikely that funding allocations will increase in the short to medium term. The long awaited 'Fair Funding' review, which is likely to benefit Hartlepool, continues to be stalled. Fundamentally, the financial position is exceptionally challenging and is likely to remain so.
- 3.6 As included in the last MTFS update report in July, information on the historical context to the financial challenges facing the Council is included at **Appendix A**. This includes the change in the Council's funding since 2013/14 when the current funding system was implemented, the Council Tax Base position and our Council Tax relative to others in the region. This information continues to be appended to ensure members and readers are aware of the overall financial environment and constraints the Council operates under.

4. BUDGET PRESSURES

- 4.1 As noted, the forecast position in the medium term is constantly evolving. Following the comprehensive update provided to members in July, the below table has been updated where necessary and commentary on the areas of change provided in the subsequent paragraphs.

	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	Total £m
Spending Pressures				
Pay and Price Inflation	5.776	3.937	3.081	12.794
Energy	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Childrens Social Care	3.000	0.500	0.500	4.000
Waste Disposal	0.000	1.500	0.500	2.000
SEND Passenger Transport	0.200	0.000	0.000	0.200
Capital Financing	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.750
Total Spending Pressures	9.226	6.187	4.331	19.744

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Pay and Prices - Pay Award

- 4.2 The national pay offer for 2023/24 was agreed with the trades unions during November 2023. The agreed offer equates to £1,925 per employee regardless of grade up to spinal point 43. An offer of 3.5% for Chief Officers had previously been accepted. This overall pay award equates to a blended rate of approximately 6%. The Council had allowed for 5% resulting in an in-year shortfall for 2023/24 which has been factored in to the 2023/24 in-year budget position and also permanently addressed in 2024/25 budget plans.
- 4.3 In addition to addressing the 2023/24 gap as set out above, the MTFS allows for the pay awards reflecting an assumption of a return to longer term normal inflation levels and accompanying pay demands. Since the July update, an increased allowance of 3.5% (previously 3%) has been included for 2024/25, given inflation and in particular wage inflation remains higher than previously forecast. The assumption of 2% pay awards remain for subsequent years in line with the government's inflation target. These assumptions will be kept under review.

Pay and Prices - Audit Fees

- 4.4 Due to significant difficulties and failings in recent years within the Public Audit sector, a significant uplift in fees nationally has been trailed by the body responsible for managing the appointments process, Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA). The body have now confirmed that audit fee rates to be applied from 2023/24 will be 151% higher than 2022/23.
- 4.5 The PSAA recognises “the significant financial pressures on all types of local government bodies and understand that any further cost pressure is unwelcome. However, the level at which we are proposing to set the 2023/24 fee scale is determined by the audit work needed to deliver audits compliant with the requirements of the Code of Audit Practice, and market rates”.
- 4.6 This increase creates an in-year shortfall for 2023/24 which is factored in to the 2023/24 in-year budget position and also permanently addressed in 2024/25 budget plans.

Pay and Price – Income

- 4.7 For budget planning it is assumed that all discretionary fees and charges will increase in line with the inflation each year. For 2024/25 an uplift in line with September 2023 CPI (6.7%) is proposed. Areas with existing income budget shortfalls will still action an increase in charges in April 2024 where appropriate, but prudently the overall income budget target will not be increased, allowing the price increase to address the existing gap.

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Energy Inflation

- 4.8 The unprecedented increase in energy prices experienced over recent years has had a significant impact on residents, businesses and public bodies alike. Responding to this challenge, the Council progressed a twofold strategy of increasing the revenue budget for anticipated long term prices coupled with use of an energy reserve for the expected shorter term spike. This approach served the Council well during 2022/23 with £0.300m being drawn down from the reserve. The reserve is also supporting the 2023/24 budget position.
- 4.9 The Council purchases its energy via the regional North East Purchasing Organisation (NEPO), with a forward purchasing strategy in place where it is deemed prudent. At present, one third of the energy requirement for 2024/25 has been purchased.
- 4.10 Although energy prices are still forecast to reduce in 2024/25, a number of factors are placing more uncertainty in to the global energy markets. The on-going Russia/Ukraine conflict and more recent Middle East conflict are driving a significant amount of the uncertainty. In addition, the proximity of the Middle Eastern conflict to the Suez Canal and also the Australian strike action in the sector are further causes for concern, creating more price volatility.
- 4.11 At this stage it is too early to firm up the position in relation to the MTFS period. Whilst there is the potential for a reduction in prices in 2024/25, this may only result in the removal of reliance on the temporary energy reserve rather than leading to savings in the base budget. The position will continue to be closely monitored and updates provided in future reports.

Children's Social Care

- 4.12 The number of children in our care within external placements has increased over the past few years and continues to grow. More fundamentally from a financial perspective, the increasing complexity of children's needs and finite capacity in the residential market is leading to ever increasing prices being charged for accommodation. The average weekly cost of a placement has increased by over 45% over the last three years. Our highest external placement cost is currently £11,000 per week.
- 4.13 The Council continues to mitigate this pressure where possible through the promotion of in-house fostering, working with partner organisations in the sector and the opening of new Local Authority run homes within Hartlepool. However, these actions can have a long lead in time. Despite this approach, the budget is currently forecasting a significant and worsening overspend position as reported in more detail within the 'Strategic Financial Management Report - as at 30th September 2023' update elsewhere on the agenda.

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- 4.14 The previous MTFS update in July provided for an additional provision of £3m in to the Children's Social Care budget, phased over a three year period. Given the severity of the cost pressures being encountered within Children's Social Care, this has been accelerated, with the full £3m additional provision now being provided in the 2023/24 financial year, with a further £1m added to the position over subsequent years. Notwithstanding this acceleration, it is not clear whether this increase will be sufficient given the challenging market conditions, although cost mitigation strategies as noted in 4.13 are being progressed as quickly as possible. The position will be kept under review and any required amendments to the budget provision will be reported in the next budget planning report to committee in January 2024.

Waste Disposal

- 4.15 As reported in the last MTFS update report in July, Hartlepool has entered into a partnership with six other Local Authorities in the region to procure a new Energy from Waste facility. The procurement process is on-going, with an anticipated go-live date during 2026. The Council has benefitted from very competitive gate fees with the current incumbent, however, these fees are forecast to step up significantly for the 2025/26 year as part of the contract extension arrangement.
- 4.16 The financial due diligence work continues in relation to the above. The forecast budget impact from £2m remains within the MTFS period, but the latest understanding of the phasing of this impact has been updated accordingly.

Capital Financing

- 4.17 A capital financing pressure of £0.150m per annum was previous introduced in the MTFS in recognition of a future reduction in Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) savings and also the need for temporary borrowing for the Elwick Road scheme. This pressure has been increased to £0.250m to reflect the increase in borrowing required to fund Highlight leisure facility as approved by Finance and Policy, and subsequently Council, in September.

5. GOVERNMENT FUNDING

- 5.1 The Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25 is expected to be another one-year settlement for councils, continuing the trend of recent years. Current indications are that the provisional settlement will be published during the week commencing 18th December. The continuation of one year settlements continues to hamper financial planning and sustainability.

4.1 ANNEX

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- 5.2 As previously reported, the government have confirmed that the long awaited fair funding review and a reset of the business rates retention system will not now take place for at least two years. This review was first promised in 2016 and is envisaged to create a fairer formula for the allocation of government funding. Whilst there is no certainty, the Council has a reasonable expectation of additional funding through this review, not least due to our relative position on Business Rates.
- 5.3 A key safeguard in the Business Rate system is that any accumulated growth in the system should have been redistributed into a new baseline funding position for each Council. Councils that are significantly above the current baseline will lose funding to be redistributed to those councils closer to the baseline or below the baseline. Hartlepool is one of a small number of Councils below our baseline position, in part due to the reduced valuation of the Nuclear Power Station since the business rates system was introduced.
- 5.4 Until a baseline reset is undertaken accumulated business rates growth and therefore funding resides with those authorities generating the growth rather than it being redistributed to Councils based on need, such as ours.

Revenue Support Grant (RSG)

- 5.5 The government has indicated that this grant will increase by September 2023 CPI. Following the publishing of the September CPI rate of 6.7%, the MTFS forecast for this grant has been adjusted accordingly.

Social Care Funding

- 5.6 The final local government settlement 2023/24 provided for additional social care funding. These grants will continue in 2024/25 and although no individual authority allocations have been announced the national funding totals have increased for 2024/25. Estimated grant levels for 2024/25 have been calculated pro-rata using the 2023/24 distribution methodology.
- 5.7 The improved Better Care Fund has no increase applied in the budget model as per the current year and government indications.

New Homes Bonus (NHB)

- 5.8 As with the previous year, the 2023/24 New Homes Bonus grant included no legacy year payments, reflecting an anticipation that government will phase this grant out. The government had indicated their intention to consult on NHB during the year, but this has not been progressed. A number of Local Authorities have taken the prudent view to remove NHB from budget planning. At this stage it remains in our MTFS at £0.447m. Recent publications from government have now referred to New Homes Bonus for 2024/25, providing positive indications that the grant will continue. Confirmation of the position will not be fully confirmed until the settlement release at the end of December.

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Business Rates Top Up Grant

- 5.9 The Business Rates multiplier and Top Up grants have historically increased in line with September CPI inflation. Following the publishing of the September CPI rate of 6.7%, the MTFS forecasts have been adjusted accordingly.

‘Simpler Recycling’ reforms and Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (EPRP) Funding

- 5.10 Following recent consultation, the Government published, in October, its response on planned ‘Simpler Recycling’ reforms. This has confirmed that the required changes to waste collection arrangements have been delayed to April 2026 and also provide councils with greater flexibility over the number of bins they collect and also allowing charges for garden waste collections to continue.
- 5.11 In respect of EPRP, the government will fund councils according to a formula using information gathered from councils and other factors such as variations in cost of collection. The total cost will be collected as a levy by DEFRA on suppliers. For the delivery of other changes around food waste collections and recycling separation, the government will provide new burdens funding to support councils.
- 5.12 Pending further details, no new income is included within the MTFS in relation to the EPRP initiative. Also, the costs of the new collection requirements from April 2026 are assumed to be neutral, given the confirmation of new burdens grant funding. The position will continue to be monitored.

6. LOCAL FUNDING

Business Rates

- 6.1 Under the current Business Rates funding regime, the Council retains locally 49% of Business Rate income. Inherent in the system is an annual uplift usually based on September CPI and this has been factored into the position. All other assumptions impacting Business Rates have remained unchanged i.e. provision for Appeals, uncollectable debt and discretionary reliefs will remain broadly consistent.
- 6.2 The government has recently consulted on technical changes to business rates retention system in response to the Non-Domestic Ratings Act. The main impact will be the potential for de-coupling of the standard and small business rates multiplier, which will give government more flexibility in the future on how this is set. At this stage it is anticipated that this change will have a cost to the Council of up to £0.100m, however until the outcome of the consultation and the exact details are confirmed this has not been built into the budget position.

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- 6.3 Generally, the impact of inflationary cost pressures and reduced consumer demand may impact on the collectability of business rates. The position will be kept under review and adjusted should the need arise.

Council Tax

- 6.4 The Council has a track record of Council Tax base growth in recent years. Whilst new build homes numbers continue to be positive, the base position is coming under increasing pressure from exemptions and discounts, including the Single Person Discount (SPD). Hartlepool is not unique in facing these pressures. Regarding SPD, the Council is currently undertaking an enhanced review to support efforts to reduce any fraud or error in the system.
- 6.5 Elsewhere on today's agenda is the Council Tax Base report. These calculations suggest an increase of 438 properties to the Band D base position. An increase of 200 had already been allowed for in the budget model for 2024/25, therefore this further increase of 238, has now been factored into the budget position. An increase of 300 per year remains for 2025/26 and 2026/27
- 6.6 Current understanding is that the same Council Tax and Adult Social Care (ASC) referendum limits (5% total increase) for 2023/24 will apply for 2024/25, although this requires an annual decision by government. Local Council Tax decisions will be made later in the budget process.

7. RESERVES

- 7.1 The Council holds reserves for a variety of purposes, including those allocated for known commitments and risks, including capital schemes, the MTFS budget position, our insurance fund and business rates appeals risks. The reserve position has been volatile in recent years given the covid-19 pandemic and the significant inflationary and demand pressures currently being experienced. The only unallocated reserve is our general fund reserve, which serves as a reserve of last resort.
- 7.2 As detailed in the 'Strategic Financial Management Report - as at 30th September 2023' update elsewhere on the agenda, a review of reserves has been carried out to redirect resources to priority areas including bolstering the General Fund and Budget Support Fund given the on-going pressures.
- 7.3 It is important to note that the use of one-off reserves to balance the on-going revenue budget position is not a financially sustainable basis to set our budget. The Budget Support Fund was created to smooth the budget deficits over a number of years, whilst the Council transforms to be able to deliver within its available budget. The fund will also meet one-off costs associated with generating the on-going efficiencies to achieve this.

4.1 ANNEX**A**

- 7.4 For the 2023/24 budget setting, £2.471m of balances were used to support the overall budget position. The one-off nature of balances means that the budget position is detrimentally hit in subsequent years as their use unwinds. The £2.471m unwinds as per the table below.

	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	Total £
Temporary Use of Reserves (BSF)	1.471	0.000	0.000	1.471
Temporary Use of Investment Income*	0.000	0.500	0.500	1.000
Budget Impact of Use of Reserves	1.471	0.500	0.500	2.471

*the current budget is predicated on use of £1m investment income in 2023/24 and 2024/25, £0.500m in 2025/26 and £nil in 2026/27.

8. STRATEGY FOR BALANCING THE BUDGET POSITION

- 8.1 Based on the position outlined in sections 3 to 7 above, the updated budget position over the 3 year MTFS period is shown in the table below.
- 8.2 As Council Tax decisions will be made at a later date, the table shows the 'Gap to be addressed before Council tax increase'. This highlights a gap of £5.583m should no increase be applied for 2024/25 rising to £13.708m over the MTFS period. For every 1% Council Tax not applied, the Council loses circa £0.500m of income.
- 8.3 The gap for 2024/25 has increased significantly, which is predominantly due to the acceleration of additional Children's Social Care resource outlined in 4.14 above. The overall 3 year forecast gap has also increased as a result of the forecast changes outlined in sections 4 to 6. .

	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	Total £m
Spending Pressures				
Pay and Price Inflation	5.776	3.937	3.081	12.794
Energy	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Childrens Social Care	3.000	0.500	0.500	4.000
Waste Disposal	0.000	1.500	0.500	2.000
SEND Passenger Transport	0.200	0.000	0.000	0.200
Capital Financing	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.750
Total Spending Pressures	9.226	6.187	4.331	19.744
Government Grant Changes	(2.855)	(0.648)	(0.660)	(4.163)
Gap Before Local Funding	6.371	5.538	3.671	15.581
Business Rates	(1.443)	(0.460)	(0.469)	(2.371)
Council Tax - Base Increase	(0.844)	(0.578)	(0.578)	(2.000)
Collection Fund (Surplus)/Deficit	0.028	0.000	0.000	0.028
Gap Before Current Use of Reserves	4.112	4.501	2.624	11.237
Temporary Use of Budget Support Fund (reversal)	1.471	0.000	0.000	1.471
Temporary Use of Investment Income (reversal)	0.000	0.500	0.500	1.000
Bottom Line Gap to be Addressed (before Council Tax increases)	5.583	5.001	3.124	13.708
Cumulative Gap (before Council Tax increases)	5.583	10.584	13.708	

4.1 ANNEX**A**

- 8.4 Given the Government's position, the current assumption for the purposes of this update is that the maximum allowable Council Tax increase will be applied i.e. for 2024/25 a 2.99% core council tax rise and 2% ASC precept rise, leading to a total rise of 4.99%. The table below shows the budget gap after assumed council tax increase over the MTFS period.

	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	Total £m
Gap to be Addressed (before Council Tax increases)	5.583	5.001	3.124	13.708
Council Tax - Increase (3% / 3% / 3%)	(1.441)	(1.557)	(1.637)	(4.635)
Adult Social Care Precept - Increase (2% / 0% / 0%)	(0.993)	0.000	0.000	(0.993)
Bottom Line Gap to be Addressed (after Council Tax increases)	3.149	3.444	1.487	8.080
Cumulative Gap	3.149	6.593	8.080	

- 8.5 The position presented continues to have an element of uncertainty and risk given both the current global and national economic uncertainty, but also the medium term duration. **Appendix B** provides greater detail of the main risks and associated sensitivities impacting on the position.
- 8.6 As noted in the previous MTFS update report, the recent peer review highlighted the need for a more medium term strategic and transformational approach to financial planning and not an annual "salami-slicing" exercise. Inevitably there are challenges to adopting such an approach, not least the need to identify and confirm savings for the 2024/25 budget i.e. before transformation will be delivered, but also the capacity to deliver such a programme across the organisation.

Savings Proposals

- 8.7 Balancing the need for a more strategic approach, with the need for immediate savings, savings aligned to the below four workstream themes have been developed by Chief Officers.
- **Nuts and Bolts** – getting the basics right. Including proposals focussing on procurement, IT, Energy and Use of Property and Assets.
 - **Digital** - ever increasing acceptance and embracing of digital and on-line solutions. Building on our strong track record of promoting digital services and channel shift it is proposed to develop a Council Wide digital strategy, promoting a digital first mind-set, and a push to streamline data input by customers through to back office systems. Promoting high use of O365 functionality and intelligent use of data should also support this work stream.
 - **Service Reviews** - programme of activity to review front line and back office service provision, ensuring that it aligns to the priorities set out in the Council Plan and is provided in the most appropriate way.

4.1 ANNEX**A**

- **Commercial** - working towards ensuring a consistent, corporate approach across the Council to maximise income opportunities and push forward greater commercialism where there is a clear rationale and business case to do so.
The Council has seen positive Council Tax Base growth and this looks set to continue. The Council, working with partners as required, will also continue to promote inward investment to support regeneration and economic development in order to also drive Business Rate growth.

- 8.8 A summary of the proposed savings by workstream is shown in the table below. Proactively, savings have been developed beyond 2024/25 to assist MTFS planning. Savings proposals of £1.792m for 2024/25 and £2.792m in total of the MTFS period have been developed. **Appendix C** provides the detailed proposals along with information on staffing and equality impacts.

	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	Total £m
Nuts and Bolts	0.465	0.285	0.250	1.000
Digital	0.010	0.030	0.030	0.070
Service Reviews	0.636	0.000	0.000	0.636
Commercial	0.681	0.405	0.000	1.086
TOTAL	1.792	0.720	0.280	2.792

* Note, a proposal to introduce charges for Assistive Technology has already been approved by the Adults and Community Based Services Committee on the 9th of November and as such is not included in the **Appendix C**.

- 8.9 In addition to the quantified savings proposals noted above, 'Pipeline Savings Proposals' are being developed by Directors or as part of cross cutting themes, and will be discussed with relevant policy leads during their development. These proposals will be developed and considered over the coming year, with the potential of these being implemented during 2024/25 where possible. The aim of this approach is to limit the use of reserves during 2024/25 and over the period
- 8.10 The table below shows the overall MTFS position taking in to account the proposed savings proposals.

	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	Total £m
Bottom Line Gap to be Addressed (after assumed Council tax increases)	3.149	3.444	1.487	8.080
Savings Proposals	(1.792)	(0.720)	(0.280)	(2.792)
Bottom Line Gap to be Addressed (after assumed Council tax increases and proposed Savings)	1.357	2.724	1.207	5.288
Cumulative Gap	1.357	4.081	5.288	

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Use of Reserves

- 8.11 As previously noted, the use of one-off reserves to balance the on-going revenue budget position is not a sustainable approach to setting the budget. Whilst it shunts the budget gap back a year, it presents a danger that the Council simply utilises one-off money on delaying decisions. In addition this approach reduces the scope for the Council to invest and innovate in order to generate recurring savings. However, the budget position, coupled with high inflationary pressures and future uncertainty on government funding will necessitate some use of reserves over the period.
- 8.12 The aim of setting the Council's budget is that it should be sustainable over the medium term period, with recurring spend funded by recurring income. Decisions on use of reserves should be made consistent with that aim. As such it continues to be proposed that any use of reserves should be done on a diminishing basis over the period so that by year 4 of the current cycle the budget is sustainable.
- 8.13 The Council's Budget Support Fund helps to smooth the budget position over the MTFS period as well as meeting any one off costs associated with budget reductions e.g. redundancies. The current position of the Budget Support Fund is set out in the table below. The position reflects the need to use £1.471m to balance the 2023/24 budget position, addressing the 2023/24 forecast overspend and use of Interest on Balances over the period as agreed as part of the annual budget setting process. The current forecast overspend for 2023/24 reported elsewhere on today's agenda will also need to be funded from this reserve and is included accordingly.

	Core £m	Interest £m
Balance as at 31 March 2023	9.418	1.131
Add		
Interest on balances earned over period (forecast)	0.000	1.369
Funding allocated to BSF as part of Reserve Review	1.153	0.000
Less		
Use of reserve to support 2023/24 budget	(1.471)	(1.000)
Use of reserve to support 2023/24 forecast overspend	(4.228)	0.000
Use of reserve to support 2024/25 budget	0.000	(1.000)
Use of reserve to support 2025/26 budget	0.000	(0.500)
Use of reserve to fund capacity to deliver savings	(1.000)	0.000
Use of reserve to fund costs associated with savings	(2.000)	0.000
Forecast uncommitted balance over the period	1.872	0.000

- 8.14 As approved as part of the July 23 MTFS update report, reserves of £3m funded from the Budget Support Fund have been earmarked for the following purposes:

- Capacity to Deliver Savings - £1.000m

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The transformational approach outlined within the report will undoubtedly require capacity to deliver, including one off improvement spend. Earmarking this sum over the period will allow flexibility to support this agenda. Use will require a clear rationale connected to transformation or a sound business case for any invest to save spend. The savings proposals at Appendix C set out where allocations against this reserve have been made.

- **Costs Associated with Savings - £2.000m**
Over the period there may be redundancy or other one off costs associated with proposed savings, where staffing levels are reduced. Whilst the aim will always be to manage this through workforce planning this is not always possible. A pay-back period of 3 years will continue to be in place. Holding a prudent sum back will ensure these can be funded should the need arise.

- 8.15 Following the earmarking of funding outlined above, there is £1.872m remaining in the Budget Support Fund to support the MTFS position over the medium term and beyond. At present the forecast reserve level is sufficient to meet the indicated 2024/25 gap of £1.357m

Conclusion

- 8.16 The updated position set out in this report represents the latest understanding of cost pressures and funding assumptions impacting the Council. The changing position will continue to be monitored over the coming months and will be impacted by a number of areas, notably; in-year budget forecasts, inflation movements, the Chancellors Autumn Statement and significantly the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement at the end of December. A further update and detailed budget recommendations will be presented to the Committee in January 2024.

10. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 The following issues are relevant in relation to this report:

- the Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires local authorities to set a balanced budget – this report starts the budget process and further reports will enable budget proposals to be approved and then referred to Council to meet this requirement;
- the Local Government Act 2003 requires local authorities to consider the advice of their Section 151 Chief Finance Officer (the Director of Finance, IT and Digital) when making budget decisions. This advice must include details of the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves. These requirements will be addressed in future reports.

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11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 11.1 The savings proposals put forward will impact on the delivery of frontline services or service users to varying degrees. There are some proposals which simply by the nature of the service area that they cover will impact on those with protected characteristics. However, owing to the financial challenges facing the Council there is no choice but to change, redesign and potentially close services to reduce costs. Where this occurs the council will aim to minimise the impact on those with protected characteristics and will focus on securing services for those who are the most vulnerable within those protected characteristics.
- 11.2 Members are aware from previous MTFS reports that in making financial decisions the Council is required to demonstrate that those decisions are made in a fair, transparent and accountable way, considering the needs and the rights of different members of the community. This is achieved through assessing the impact that changes to policies, procedures and practices could have on different equality groups.
- 11.3 An initial analysis has undertaken to determine the potential impact of the proposals put forward and these are detailed in the table in **Appendix D**.
- 11.4 Further analysis will be undertaken to incorporate feedback from the planned consultation process and this will be presented to Members in the next MTFS report. An overall central assessment will also be undertaken to determine the cumulative impact of the savings proposals on each individual protected characteristics.

12. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY

- 12.1 The initial analysis that has undertaken to determine the potential impact of the proposals put forward as detailed in the table in **Appendix D** also considers the impact on those living in poverty and disadvantage.
- 12.2 Further analysis will be undertaken to incorporate feedback from the planned consultation process and this will be presented to Members in the next MTFS report. An overall central assessment will also be undertaken to determine the cumulative impact of the savings proposals on child and family poverty.

13. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Risk Implications	Risk Implications are outlined in Appendix B and will be further considered, as required, as part of future budget setting reports.
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4.1 ANNEX**A**

Financial Considerations	As set out in the main body of the report
Child / Family Poverty Considerations	As set out in the main body of the report
Equality and Diversity Considerations	As set out in the main body of the report
Staff Considerations	Potential staffing implications of the proposed savings are included within the Savings detailed in Appendix C .
Asset Management Considerations	Asset Management implications of the proposed savings are included, where appropriate, within the Savings detailed in Appendix C .
Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change Considerations	Environmental, Sustainability and Climate Change considerations of the proposed savings are included, where appropriate, within the Savings detailed in Appendix C .
Consultation	<p>Savings proposals as outlined in this report will be referred to individual Policy Committees.</p> <p>Public consultation on the 2024/25 budget and MTFS has been developed and a draft of the proposed consultation documentation is included at Appendices E(a) and E(b).</p> <p>Consultation with local business representatives and Trades Unions will be carried out during December.</p>

14. RECOMMENDATIONS**14.1** It is recommended that Members:

- i) Note the report;
- ii) Note the assessment of the forecast budget gap and proposed approach to address this gap in Section 8;
- iii) Refers the savings proposals to individual policy committees and instructs them to identify replacement savings if these proposals are not supported; and
- iv) Note the risks and scenarios outlined in the report which may impact upon the financial position presented as part of future MTFS updates.

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15. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 15.1 To enable the Finance and Policy Committee to approve the proposals to progress the development of the MTFS.

16. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:-

- Finance and Policy Committee - Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2023/24 to 2025/26 – 23rd January 2023;
- Council - Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2023/24 Statutory Budget and Council Tax determination – 23rd February 2023.
- Finance and Policy Committee - Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024/25 to 2026/27 – 3rd July 2023;

17. CONTACT OFFICER

James Magog
Director of Finance, IT and Digital
Email: james.magog@hartlepool.gov.uk
Telephone: 01429 523093

Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date: 16 November 2023
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 16 November 2023
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 16 November 2023

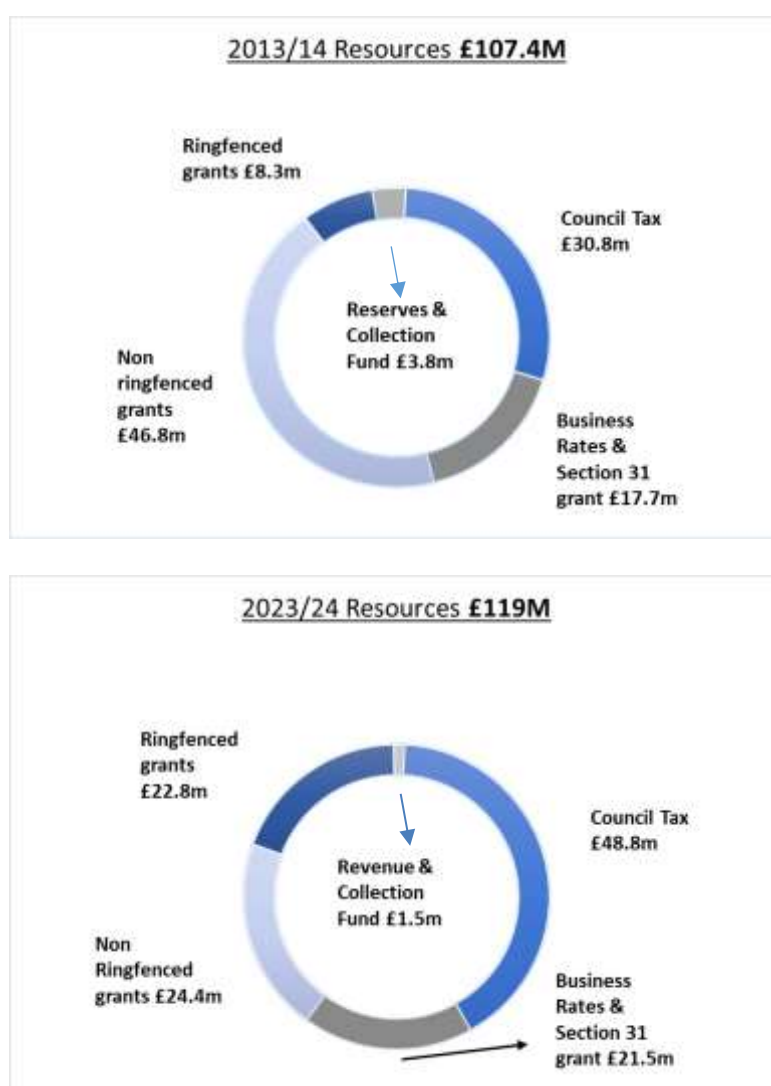
4.1 Appendix A

Funding Changes since 2013/14

1.1 Since 2013/14 the national funding regime has seen three key changes:

- A significant reduction in Government non ring-fenced Grants (i.e. Revenue Support Grant and Top Up grant);
- An increase in Government ring-fenced Grants, including the transfer of Public Health responsibilities and funding and various Adult Social Care grants; and
- Increased reliance on Council Tax to fund local services, which includes the introduction of the Adult Social Care (ASC) precept in 2016/17 and annual increases in this funding source up to and including 2022/23.

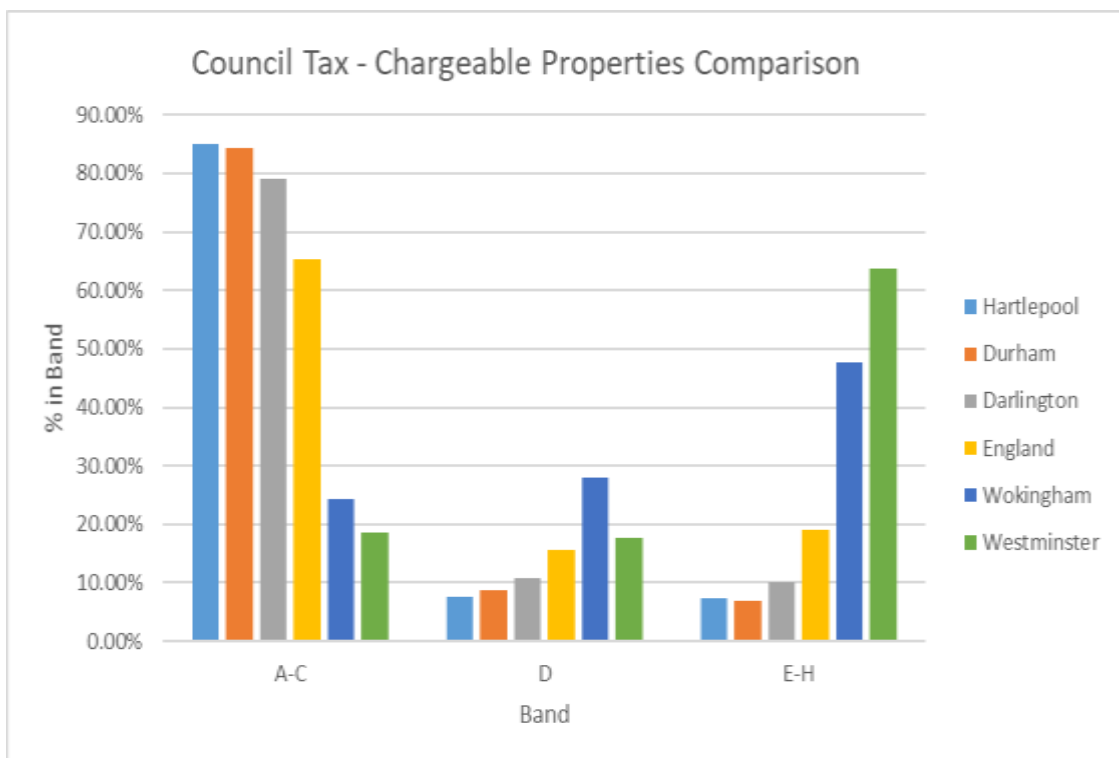
1.2 The impact on Hartlepool funding is summarised below:



1.3 Increasing reliance on Council Tax is a doubled edged sword as it means:

- Areas with a low council tax base (i.e. higher than average proportion of properties in Council Tax bands A and B – which includes Hartlepool and the other North East councils) raise less additional income for each 1% Council Tax increase than areas with a higher tax base – with lower demands on services. This means Council Tax increases offset less of Government funding reductions in areas with a low Council Tax base than is the case in more affluent areas;
- As a result councils with a low Council Tax base have to make greater service reductions and it becomes increasingly difficult for the public to understand the services Council Tax pays for.

1.4 In order to demonstrate the “low tax base” conundrum, comparison with two high base Local Authorities, two neighbouring Local Authorities and the English average is shown in the graph below. The graph clearly demonstrates the extent of shift required to equalise the tax base position with the national average, but also the sheer differential with more prosperous Local Authorities.



1.5 Whilst current and planned developments within Hartlepool are expected to continue the recent strong growth in Band E to H properties, it is clear that Hartlepool will continue to be a low tax base authority for the foreseeable future. Given since 2010 central government funding has moved away from needs based funding, there is less compensation funding for Hartlepool despite its low tax base.

- 1.6 The funding changes and low tax base have contributed to Hartlepool having a Council Tax level that sits slightly above the regional average, when parish councils are included as shown below.

Council Area	Band A* £	Impact of individual Parishes
Northumberland	1,386	*Within a number of Council areas, including County Durham, parish councils provide a number of services that are provided by Hartlepool Borough Council. Whilst the Band A rate shown here is an average for the area, there are often large variations dependent on the parish precept levied. As an example, the following Band A is paid in these County Durham areas: £1,473 Horden £1,453 Peterlee
Gateshead	1,381	
Durham	1,297	
Hartlepool	1,286	
Newcastle	1,280	
Average	1,257	
Middlesbrough	1,255	
Stockton-on-Tees	1,245	
North Tyneside	1,234	
South Tyneside	1,220	
Redcar and Cleveland	1,216	
Darlington	1,189	
Sunderland	1,092	

4.1 Appendix B**MTFS 2024/25 to 2026/27 Initial Risk Assessment**

Key risks or issues that may impact on assumptions made and impact 2024/25.

Issue and Risk	Reasonable Upside Scenario 2024/25	Reasonable Downside Scenario 2024/25	Rationale
Inflation proves stubborn and reduces at a slower rate than anticipated.	£nil	£1.000m	Reasonable assumptions based on latest forecasts have been made for inflation during the period. There is no upside scenario likely, whereby inflation fell more rapidly. Downside scenario based on additional inflation risk on general and ASC inflation.
Pay Awards are higher than assumed	£nil	£1.000m	Provision included in the MTFS based on pay offer and historic norms. No contingency is built in for higher award. The reasonable downside scenario assumes an extra 2% for 2024/25.
Energy prices do not reduce as anticipated	£0.250m	£1.000m	The approach to the energy price crisis was to provide a longer term increase to the base budget supported by a specific energy reserve for the shorter term exceptional price level period. New and emerging global events are placing further pressure on energy markets.
Interest Rates	£0.500m	£nil	Should interest rates remain high and borrowing decisions can be delayed on the approved capital programme, there may be an opportunity to generate additional temporary Treasury Management returns.
Government Grant Changes - NHB	£nil	£0.447	Latest indications are that NHB will continue. Whilst this is good news, the allocation is yet to be confirmed nor any intelligence received as to its likely value.
Collection Fund	£nil	£0.500m	The wider economic conditions may have a detrimental impact on collection of both Council Tax and Business Rate.
Income Budget	£nil	£0.500m	The wider economic conditions and the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic has created uncertainty over the achievability of key income budgets, including car parking.
Capital Programme Borrowing Costs	£nil	£nil (2024/25, but may impact later years)	Increased cost and/or interest rates may impact on borrowing costs. The impact is mitigated by pro-active Treasury management strategy and planned delay in borrowing decisions.
Social Care Charging Reform	£nil	£nil	Risk as to how this reform is now funded when government introduce the reform.

Category	Cttee	Budget Reduction Heading	Lead Officer	Budget Reduction 2024/25 £000	Indicative Budget Reduction 2025/26 £000	Indicative Budget Reduction 2026/27 £000	Total Budget Reduction £000	Verified by Finance (Yes/No)	Potential Staff impact over three years (indicative)	Equality & poverty impact	Description of proposed savings
Nuts and Bolts - Procurement	F&P	Procurement review	Beverley Bearne (AD - Development and Growth)	400	250	250	900	Yes	2	N/A	<p>Review of council wide procurement arrangements to ensure procurements are on-contract, are consistent council wide and represent full value for money. The review will also cover the differing procurement avenues, including purchasing cards and wider collaboration, including ensuring best use of NEPO contracts.</p> <p>The overall target for the project is £1m spread over 3 years, but with a front loaded profile. A £100,000 topslice in year one is proposed in order to provide the existing small team (1.6fte) with increased capacity to further develop the procurement function and consolidate procurement savings going forward.</p> <p>A sum of £150,000 has been earmarked from the MTFS Investment Reserve to support capacity work.</p>
Nuts and Bolts - Property and Assets	F&P	Asset Review	James Magog (Director - Finance, IT and Digital)	65	35	0	100	Yes	0	N/A	<p>Savings based on consolidating Bevan House and Windsor Offices staff into civic centre - savings realigned to latest estimate.</p> <p>A sum of £200,000 has been earmarked from the MTFS Investment Reserve to support his project. This project also allows other savings to materialise.</p>
Total				465	285	250	1,000				

Key - Equality & Poverty Impact

- A
- B
- C
- D
- E
- F
- G
- H
- I
- J
- K
- L
- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion and Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Poverty
- Care Leavers
- Armed Forces Community

Category	Cttee	Budget Reduction Heading	Lead Officer	Budget Reduction 2024/25 £000	Indicative Budget Reduction 2025/26 £000	Indicative Budget Reduction 2026/27 £000	Total Budget Reduction £000	Verified by Finance (Yes/No)	Potential Staff impact over three years (indicative)	Equality & poverty impact	Description of proposed savings
Revs and Bens	F&P	Revenues and Benefits on-line gateway	James Magog (Director - Finance, IT and Digital)	10	30	30	70	Yes	0	N/A	<p>Improved on-line portal for Council Tax billing, with the aim of 60% sign up over 3 years. Automated integration to back office system from customer updates (i.e. eliminate double keying of information). Savings are net of software costs and will accrue with reduced printing and postage, with staff processing savings anticipated in future years.</p> <p>No staffing reductions are anticipated. Indicative savings in 2025/26 and 2026/27 may arise from staff savings, but this is likely to be cost avoidance (i.e. not increasing staff numbers to cope with increased council tax base) or overtime reduction.</p> <p>A sum of £50,000 has been earmarked from the MTFS Investment Reserve to support his project.</p>
Total				10	30	30	70				

Key - Equality & Poverty Impact

- A
- Age
- B
- Disability
- C
- Gender Reassignment
- D
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- E
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- F
- Race
- G
- Religion and Belief
- H
- Sex
- I
- Sexual Orientation
- J
- Poverty
- K
- Care Leavers
- L
- Armed Forces Community

Category	Cttee	Budget Reduction Heading	Lead Officer	Budget Reduction 2024/25 £000	Indicative Budget Reduction 2025/26 £000	Indicative Budget Reduction 2026/27 £000	Total Budget Reduction £000	Verified by Finance (Yes/No)	Potential Staff impact over three years (indicative)	Equality & poverty impact	Description of proposed savings
Service Reviews	ACBS	Remodelling of beach lifeguard service	Gemma Ptak (AD - Preventative and Community Based Services)	25	0	0	25	Yes	TBC - casual staff	A	It is proposed to remodel the lifeguard service to prioritise areas of highest footfall. A reduced service has been operating over the last two summers due to challenges recruiting seasonal lifeguards despite training and development opportunities being provided. Impact assessments (including reviews of incidents reported) highlight that areas such as the paddling pool, water play area and fish sands typically see staff dealing with slips, trips and falls rather than water related incidents. As a result Seaton Beach (where footfall is highest and incidents are more likely to occur) has been prioritised to make best use of the available staffing resource. Increased water safety work, has been undertaken linked to periods of good weather and multi agency engagement to educate the community. This has a positive impact outside of lifeguards being present at all coastal locations. The RNLI and Coastguard will always respond in an emergency at all beaches, including those not supported by lifeguards because of the risk of rip tides or inadequate bathing conditions. A reduced service would include lifeguards at Seaton only during the summer months with a key focus on prevention. An annual water safety campaign would be implemented from May onwards and lifeguards would support exceptional events/activities with increased risk.
Service Reviews	CS	Activities for Children in Care	Jane Young (AD - Children and Families)	27	0	0	27	Yes	0	A / J	This budget supports improving outcomes for children in care which is called upon to fund extra curricular activities, trips, equipment etc. for children in care so they can enjoy and achieve. It is proposed to remove the full budget.
Service Reviews	CS	Local Welfare Support	Danielle Swainston (AD - Joint Commissioning)	129	0	0	129	Yes	0	B / F / K / J	Cease to deliver Local Welfare Support funding as financial safety net. In 2022 it was proposed to reduce funding by £86,000, this was accepted but decision taken to defer savings for 12 months. A report was taken to Finance and Policy Committee on 20 June 2022 outlining a new model for delivery of LWS and this was approved. Landscape of local welfare support has changed over recent years since this funding was delegated to local authorities. There is no longer a statutory duty to provide these services but they are a significant safety net for those in crisis. In recent years additional financial assistance and support has been provided through schemes such as Local Council Tax Support Scheme, Holiday Activities and Food Programme and Household Support Fund (HSF). HSF will be remodelled to increase application process as per the grant requirements and requests for essential financial support.
Service Reviews	CS	Childrens Homes - Block booking provision	Jane Young (AD - Children and Families)	312	0	0	312	Yes	0	N/A	Work in partnership with other children's homes providers who are coming into the market in Hartlepool and block purchasing provision at agreed cost. One house (3 children) currently securing Ofsted registration, another organisation at earlier stages, may be up to 12 months before this comes on line so opportunity to test model. Block purchase price has been negotiated and when comparing this price to spot purchase price for child with similar level of need, weekly cost is substantially less. Block purchasing will mean increased placement capacity within Hartlepool where children's needs can be met and allowing for continuity of school, health, family and social relationships etc. This will reduce reliance in spot purchasing from independent sector where demands outstrips supply and as such, providers demand very high cost for placements which are not linked to quality or expertise of provision.
Service Reviews	CS	Pupil Premium	Amanda Whithead (AD - Education)	68	0	0	68	Yes	0	A / J	Pupil premium is paid to the local authority for children in our care. This funds the virtual school and a proportion is provided to schools to support child in school setting. Current split is 40% retained and 60% paid to schools. No funding is retained in local authority to pay for back office costs associated with support to Virtual School for example finance, HR, ICT etc. Proposal is to amend the pupil premium split with 50% paid to school and 50% retained within LA. Schools Forum will be consulted on this proposal.

Category	Cttee	Budget Reduction Heading	Lead Officer	Budget Reduction 2024/25 £000	Indicative Budget Reduction 2025/26 £000	Indicative Budget Reduction 2026/27 £000	Total Budget Reduction £000	Verified by Finance (Yes/No)	Potential Staff impact over three years (indicative)	Equality & poverty impact	Description of proposed savings
Service Reviews	NS	Waste Services Restructure	Kieran Bostock (AD - Neighbourhoods)	30	0	0	30	Yes	-1	N/A	Restructure within waste services and subsequent realignment of duties to remaining staff. This reduction will be managed within vacant posts.
Service Reviews	NS	CCTV	Sylvia Pinkney (AD - Regulatory Services)	30	0	0	30	Yes	0	J	<p>The council is currently responsible for providing public space CCTV monitoring. The service is delivered on a 24/7/365 basis. The system has cameras located around the borough.</p> <p>The centre also operates as a 24/7 single point of contract for all alarm companies to inform the council that a building alarm has been activated, as well as appropriate follow up action including site visits.</p> <p>It also acts as the councils emergency out of hours contact centre.</p> <p>It is proposed to reduce the time the centre is manned from the existing 24/7 to weekends, bank holidays and nights on weekdays. For the remaining time the cameras would be recording at their at rest positions.</p> <p>Weekday night shifts would be 5pm to 9am (16hrs) producing a 33% reduction in weekly hours, providing a staffing saving of £30,000.</p> <p>This proposal would not affect the majority of other out of hours service that the centre provides. There may be some areas where alternative arrangements would need to be made, but these would be during the working day.</p> <p>The reduction of this service may impact on crime and disorder.</p> <p>Whilst the service employs 5 people currently, 4 are agency and as such there are no established posts impact.</p>
Service Reviews	F&P	PA review	Hayley Martin (Director of Legal, Governance and Human Resources)	15	0	0	15	Yes	-0.5	N/A	A review of PA support arrangements has enabled a consolidation of two teams supporting the Managing Director, Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services, Legal Governance and Human Resources, and Finance, IT and Digital. This will enable a vacant 0.5FTE post to be removed from the structure.
Total				636	0	0	636				

Key - Equality & Poverty Impact

- A Age
- B Disability
- C Gender Reassignment
- D Marriage and Civil Partnership
- E Pregnancy and Maternity
- F Race
- G Religion and Belief
- H Sex
- I Sexual Orientation
- J Poverty
- K Care Leavers
- L Armed Forces Community

Category	Cttee	Budget Reduction Heading	Lead Officer	Budget Reduction 2024/25 £000	Indicative Budget Reduction 2025/26 £000	Indicative Budget Reduction 2026/27 £000	Total Budget Reduction £000	Verified by Finance (Yes/No)	Potential Staff impact over three years (indicative)	Equality & poverty impact	Description of proposed savings
Commercial	NS	Bus Shelter Advertising Contract	Kieran Bostock (AD - Neighbourhoods)	21	5	0	26	Yes	0	N/A	<p>The new Tees Valley wide bus shelter contract will return advertising income with some of the income being used to fund the Connect Tees Valley service, currently funded from existing budgets.</p> <p>There is a risk that advertising revenue does not reach the levels anticipated, but this will be actively monitored.</p>
Commercial	F&P	Social Value Discounts	Beverley Bearne (AD - Development and Growth)	10	0	0	10	Yes	0	A / J	<p>The Council has traditionally granted Social Value Discounts (SVD) on rents charged on certain properties in its estate that qualify in line with the published policy. The percentage discount varies between 25% and 75% of the headline rental and is technically assessed each year by reference to the tenants' accounts, memorandum and articles of association/constitution and evidence of good governance, etc. As to be expected such SVD does contribute to the continued operation of laudable uses. However, there are regular questions between qualifying organisations as to fellow recipient's discount amounts and more generally as whether such operations do indeed need the discount to survive. Moreover, in granting such discounts, the Council forgoes much needed rental income.</p> <p>It is proposed that all tenants currently in receipt of this discount continue to only receive 25% discount - effectively two entities receiving 75% discount would become consistent with others that receive 25%.</p> <p>There is an alternative option to remove the discount altogether - this would produce a further £16k of saving. However, this is not proposed at this stage.</p> <p>Few councils provide SVDs by way of a strict policy in the way the council does. Removal of the policy does not prevent concessionary rental deals being done where the Council wishes to make a specific differentiation.</p>
Commercial	F&P / All	Fees and Charges Increase in line with September CPI	James Magog (Director - Finance, IT and Digital)	250	0	0	250	Yes	0	J	<p>September CPI is used by government as a basis for Business Rate increases and also grant settlements. It is proposed to use this date a basis for fees and charges going forward. All fees and charges not subject to statutory levels would be expected to increase by this amount, unless agreed by ELT otherwise.</p> <p>A number of budget areas currently experiencing income shortfalls will not have their income budget increased.</p>
Total				281	5	0	286				

Key - Equality & Poverty Impact

- A Age
- B Disability
- C Gender Reassignment
- D Marriage and Civil Partnership
- E Pregnancy and Maternity
- F Race
- G Religion and Belief
- H Sex
- I Sexual Orientation
- J Poverty
- K Care Leavers
- L Armed Forces Community

Equality and Child and Family Poverty Impact Assessment of the 2024/25 Budget Saving Proposals

Category	Budget Reduction Heading	Lead Officer	Equality & poverty Impact	Impact Assessment
Nuts and Bolts	Procurement review	Assistant Director – Development and Growth	N/A	There is no anticipated impact.
Nuts and Bolts	Asset review	Director – Finance, IT and Digital	N/A	There is no anticipated impact.
Digital	Revenues and Benefits on-line gateway	Director – Finance, IT and Digital	N/A	The move to digitalise Council Tax billing could potentially impact negatively on certain age demographics and those in poverty who have limited digital access. However, the impact has been mitigated as the existing service will continue to be delivered in parallel with the online approach. Therefore no overall impact has been identified.
Service Reviews	Remodelling of beach lifeguard service	Assistant Director – Preventative and Community Based Services	A	The beach lifeguard service responds to anyone who finds themselves in difficulty in the water however it is recognised that this may more likely be children. Following a review of incidents reported to the service the proposal is to prioritise providing the lifeguard service at Seaton beach, alongside delivering an annual water safety campaign and providing support to exceptional events / activities with increased risk, which aims to mitigate the impact on potential service users.

Category	Budget Reduction Heading	Lead Officer	Equality & poverty Impact	Impact Assessment
Service Reviews	Activities for children in care	Assistant Director – Children and Families	A / J	This proposal relates to children in care. However, it is not anticipated that there will be a significant negative impact for individual service users from this proposal.
Service Reviews	Local Welfare Support	Assistant Director – Joint Commissioning	B / F / K / J	Local Welfare Support (LWS) is a limited discretionary fund to help vulnerable residents with essential household goods and appliances to be able stay in or return to their community. There is no statutory duty to provide the LWS but it provides a safety net for those in crisis. It is intended that financial assistance and support provided through the Local Council Tax Support Scheme, Holiday Activities and Food Programme and Household Support Fund (HSF) will mitigate some of the impact of removing the LWS nevertheless the removal of LWS will have a negative impact on child and family poverty.
Service Reviews	Children's Homes – block booking provision	Assistant Director – Children and Families	N/A	This proposal relates to children's social care and aims to reduce the costs associated with the provision of accommodation for children in the care of the Council. There is no negative impact identified for individual service users from this proposal.
Service Reviews	Pupil premium	Assistant Director – Education	A / J	This proposal would see a change in the distribution of pupil premium funding relating to children in the care of the Council to increase the percentage retained by the Council. It is not anticipated that there will be a significant negative impact identified for individual service users from this proposal.

Category	Budget Reduction Heading	Lead Officer	Equality & poverty Impact	Impact Assessment
Service Reviews	Waste Services Restructure	Assistant Director – Neighbourhoods	N/A	There is no anticipated impact.
Service Reviews	CCTV	Assistant Director – Regulatory Services	J	The proposal is to reduce the staffed CCTV monitoring service to nights on weekdays, weekends and bank holidays only. Monday to Friday during the day cameras will record at their rest positions. It has been identified that this change may impact on crime and disorder which can link to poverty and disadvantage. However, the intention to retain the out of hours service will mitigate against some of this risk.
Service Reviews	PA Review	Director – Legal, Governance and Human Resources	N/A	There is no anticipated impact.
Commercial	Bus Shelter Advertising Contract	Assistant Director – Neighbourhoods	N/A	There is no anticipated impact.
Commercial	Social Value Discounts	Assistant Director – Development and Growth	A / J	This proposal would see a change to the Social Value Discount on rents charged on certain properties in the Council's estate limiting the discount to 25%. This would have an impact on two current tenants who provide services related to children and young people, adults of working age, older people and parents / carers.

Category	Budget Reduction Heading	Lead Officer	Equality & poverty Impact	Impact Assessment
Commercial	Fees and charges increase in line with September CPI	Director – Finance, IT and Digital	J	The proposal to increase fees and charges may have an impact on those living in poverty and disadvantage making it less affordable for them to access paid for services. A number of fee charging areas have reduced fee charging arrangements for those in receipt of certain benefits and these will remain reducing the potential impact of this proposal.

Key - Equality & Poverty Impact

- A Age
- B Disability
- C Gender Reassignment
- D Marriage and Civil Partnership
- E Pregnancy and Maternity
- F Race
- G Religion and Belief
- H Sex
- I Sexual Orientation
- J Poverty and Disadvantage
- K Care Leavers
- L Armed Forces Community



Balancing Hartlepool's Budget 2024-2025

Every February, Hartlepool Borough Council sets a budget for the year ahead which outlines how much money we will be able to spend on each of the services we provide. The Council is responsible for lots of different services. Some of these we do ourselves, some we work with others to do and some we pay other people to do for us. These services include giving children the best start in life and safeguarding those vulnerable to harm, providing adult social care, maintaining roads and pavements and providing leisure and cultural services.

We also support business investment and drive forward developments such as Highlight, screen production village, train station improvements and the exciting Town Deal projects, to ensure a prosperous future for the borough. There are some services that we have to provide by law. These are known as statutory services and include looking after children in care, supporting adults with care needs and collecting household waste. There are others that we choose to provide because they are nice things to have available to our residents. Although we have to provide statutory services we do not always have to provide them in a particular way and we could choose to do them differently in the future.

This year we have continued to see large increases in our costs as things become more expensive to buy. We also have higher costs because more people need our services, particularly in Adults and Children's social care. As an example, costs for placing a child into care outside of the Council have increased by 45% over the last three years. The average cost of providing this service is now approximately £5,000 per week, and some placements can cost more than £11,000 per week for one child.

As a result of these challenges we have an expected budget gap of £5.6m for 2024/25. That is the difference between what we expect to receive in income and the cost of continuing to provide all of our services at the current level. Over the period 2024/25 to 2026/27 this budget gap increases to £13.7m. We continue to lobby national government for a fairer share of funding but in the meantime we have a legal responsibility, as a council, to set a balanced budget.

We are not alone in facing such a challenging position, many other Councils are having difficulty balancing their budgets and you may have seen on the news that some Councils have even required the government to step in and effectively take control of their Council.

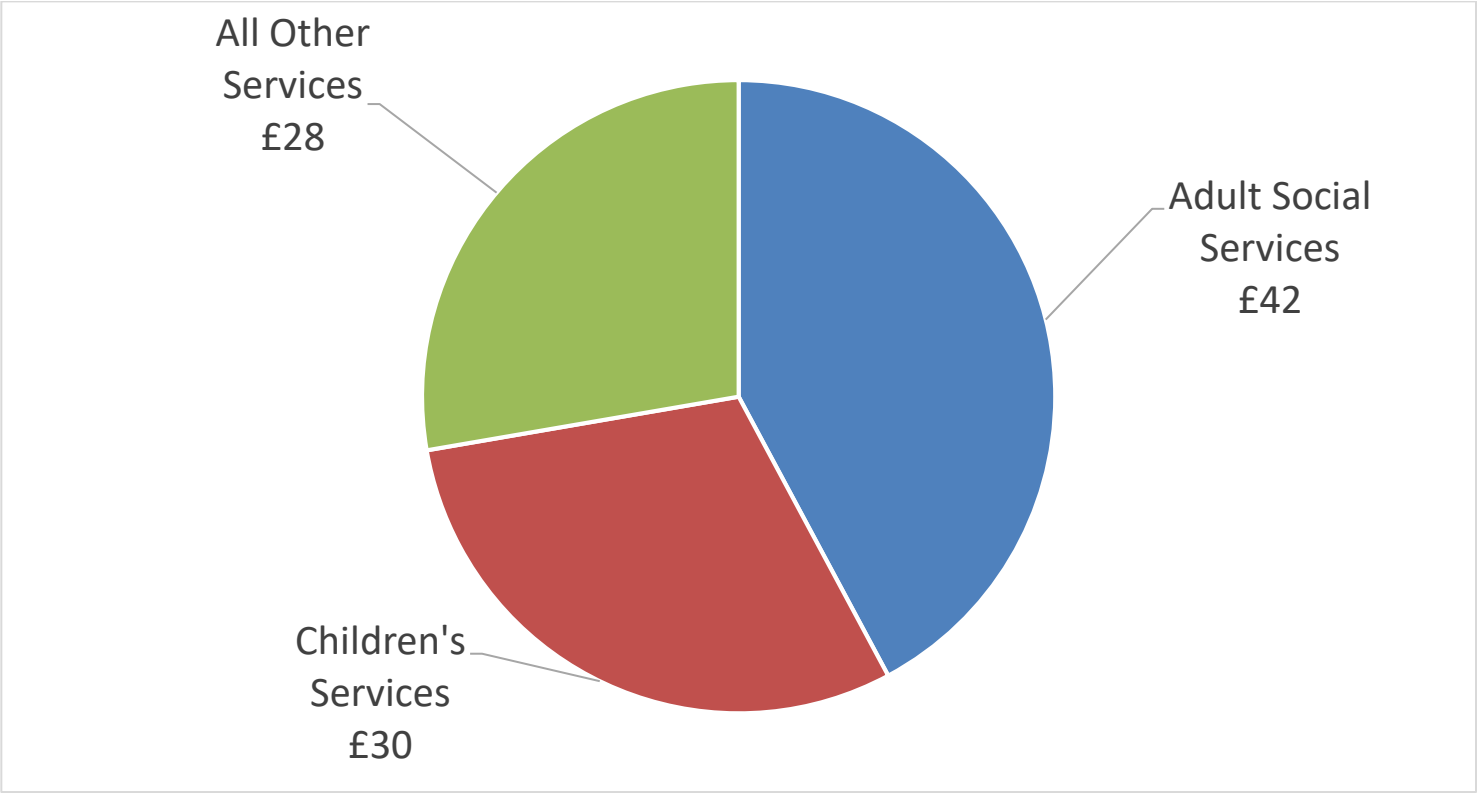
How has the 2024/25 budget gap arisen?

Pay and Price Inflation	£6.2m
Children’s Social Care Pressures	£3.0m
Previous use of one-off reserves	£1.5m
Government Grant Increases	(£2.9m)
Business Rate Increases	(£1.4m)
Council Tax Base increases (housing growth)	(£0.8m)
Total Pressure	£5.6m

Where do we get our money from?

Council tax does not fund all of your council services. We also raise money locally through business rates and fees and charges for services but we also receive a large amount of money from national government through grants.

For every £100 we receive to fund services, we spend:



How we plan to bridge the gap

The Council has adopted a four themed strategy to reduce pressures and address the budget gap over the next 3 years;

- **Nuts and Bolts.** This focuses on getting the basic things right. This will include a particular focus on;
 - Procurement – getting best value on the things we buy;
 - Information Technology (IT) – using IT and online systems to improve how we deliver services;
 - Energy – move towards achieving our net zero ambitions by minimizing our energy use and making sure we are getting value for money; and
 - Best Use of Property and Assets – looking at our buildings now that more staff work at home or hybrid work as well as looking at the land and properties that council owns to see if they can be sold or used for other things.
- **Digital.** Developing and promoting more council services to be online to make it easier for residents to contact the Council when and where it suits them. However the Council does recognise that some customers do prefer and need to have in person contact in some instances.
- **Service Reviews.** Reviewing public facing and back office services that the Council provides to make sure it is still appropriate to provide the service and that we are doing it in the most appropriate and cost effective way.
- **Commercial.** We need to make sure that we are getting the best deal for the Council when we are trading with other companies and organisations. We will also encourage business to come to Hartlepool, help local Hartlepool business to grow and support the regeneration of the town.

Will we need to increase Council Tax?

Subject to confirmation from the government in December, they are likely to expect councils to raise Council Tax by 5%. In other towns where the government has effectively taken control of the Council they have allowed them to raise Council Tax by a larger amount to help balance the budget. For example Croydon were permitted to increase by 15%, Slough 10% and Thurrock Council 10% in 2023/24.

No decisions have been made on Council Tax. However, for every 1% Council Tax rise, this generates an additional half a million pounds for Hartlepool Borough Council. The Council has a legal duty to balance its budget.

If we do not increase council tax, services will need to be cut further.

But Council Tax is thought by many to be unfair

Council Tax was introduced in 1992. We know it is an unpopular tax and is widely considered to be unfair. However, unless central government change the funding system for Councils, we have no choice but to charge our residents.

The council does operate a Local Council Tax Support scheme to help support those most unable to pay. More details can be found on the [Councils website](#).

Isn't Council Tax high in Hartlepool?

Council Tax is certainly higher than we would like. Unfortunately, the local government funding system means for councils like ourselves Council Tax will always likely be high. That is why we continue to lobby for a fairer funding system. The earliest a new funding system can be introduced is now 2025/26.

To help you understand we know that our Band A Council Tax is £29 a year higher than the regional average. However taking into account services provided by parish councils it is lower than the average in Northumberland, Gateshead and Durham Local Authorities. If you lived in Horden, for example, your Band A Council Tax would be £187 a year higher than on average in Hartlepool for 2023/24.

Your views

As we look to set our budget for 2024/25, we want to hear your views on our budget proposals by completing the survey that accompanies this booklet.

The survey will remain open until **1st January 2024** and should take around 5 minutes to complete.

Paper surveys will be available in the Community Hubs and the Civic Centre with pre-paid envelopes for returning the survey.

If you would like to complete the survey online then you can do so by using the following link or scanning the QR code:

<https://yoursay.hartlepool.gov.uk/balancing-the-budget-2024-25>



If you have any questions or would like further information then please e-mail:

yoursay@hartlepool.gov.uk

Thank you for participating in this consultation – your views are really important to us!



Have your say on our budget proposals

In our 'Balancing the Budget' booklet ([LINK](#)) we have set out the financial challenge we face and have shared with you how we propose to balance our budget. We have explained why increasing Council Tax is an option we must consider, including that the Government expects us to do so.

Further detail can be found in the report taken to November's Finance and Policy Committee [here](#).

Now it is your opportunity to tell us what you think about our budget proposals. We want you to share any suggestions that you may have for other ways that you think the Council can make savings or generate more money.

About the survey...

We are keen to understand who has responded to this consultation and to be able to break the answers down to see if different groups respond in different ways. In order to do this we will ask you to identify some information about yourself including your home postcode. This will not allow any individuals to be identified but will help us understand your views and to ensure we have received responses from a wide range of people. We have provided "prefer not to say" options for each question if you do not feel comfortable answering these questions.

What happens with the information you provide...

The data from this survey will be considered when decisions about the budget are made.

The survey will remain open until **1st January 2024** and should take around 5 minutes to complete.

If you would like to complete the survey online then you can do so by using the following link or scanning the QR code:

<https://yoursay.hartlepool.gov.uk/balancing-the-budget-2024-25>



If you have any questions or would like further information then please e-mail:

yoursay@hartlepool.gov.uk

Thank you for participating in this consultation – your views are really important to us!

- 1. Do you understand the financial pressure Hartlepool Borough Council is experiencing in the face of significantly higher costs and rising demands for services?**

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
No	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Don't know / Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/> 3

- 2. Do you understand that the Council has a requirement to look after the most vulnerable in society, and that the significant increases in costs, is resulting in funding for other services being squeezed?**

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
No	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Don't know / Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/> 3

- 3. The government recognised that the current local government finance system was not fit for purpose in 2016 when it began a review, known as "Fair Funding". The council has the expectation of significant additional funding following such a review. Unfortunately the Fair Funding work has been paused. Do you agree that the council should continue to lobby for fair funding for Hartlepool?**

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
No	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Don't know / Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/> 3

- 4. A number of councils have got into financial difficulty and have issued what is known as Section 114 notices. Effectively declaring themselves bankrupt and stopping all non-statutory spending. This has led to government intervention, significant service cuts and in some cases exceptional increases to Council Tax. Do you agree the council should make every effort to avoid such an outcome?**

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
No	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Don't know / Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/> 3




- 5. Do you think our four themed approach to balancing the budget gap is appropriate and strikes the right balance between inward looking savings, income generation and potential service impact?**

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
No	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Don't know / Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/> 3




6. To help us prioritise where to make budget reductions, please select three service areas to target for savings. Please select three options only.

Services for older people (including home and day care services, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Services for people with a physical disability, learning disability or mental health need	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Support for carers	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Public health services (including smoking cessation, weight management and drug and alcohol misuse services)	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Children's social care (including welfare, fostering and adoption, and child protection)	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Education and child care (including in nurseries and local authority schools)	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
Home to school transport provided by the Council	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
Services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)	<input type="checkbox"/> 8
Support for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)	<input type="checkbox"/> 9
Community hubs and libraries	<input type="checkbox"/> 10
Parks and other outdoor spaces (including Summerhill Country Park and public Rights of Way)	<input type="checkbox"/> 11
School meals	<input type="checkbox"/> 12
Registration services (births, marriages and deaths)	<input type="checkbox"/> 13
Regulatory Services (including community safety, anti-social behaviour, environmental health and trading standards)	<input type="checkbox"/> 14
Economic development (supporting the local economy)	<input type="checkbox"/> 15
Highways (including street lighting, highways maintenance, footpaths and cycle ways)	<input type="checkbox"/> 16
Concessionary bus travel	<input type="checkbox"/> 17
Waste services (including household refuse and recycling collections, trade waste collections and the household waste recycling centre)	<input type="checkbox"/> 18
Leisure services (including leisure centres, sports and recreation facilities and activities)	<input type="checkbox"/> 19
Planning and Building Control	<input type="checkbox"/> 20
Other services not listed here (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> 21

7. Do you understand that a Council Tax increase is one of the few options councils have to raise income to support the increasing cost of giving children the best start in life and safeguarding those vulnerable to harm, and providing adult social to our vulnerable residents?

Yes	 1
No	 2
Don't know / Not sure	 3

8. Do you agree we should increase Council Tax by the amount allowed in order to protect vital services?

Yes	 1
No	 2
Don't know / Not sure	 3

9. If you have comments on any of the specific schemes that we have included within our savings and income generation proposals or have any suggestions or comments as to how we can balance the budget, then please use the space below to tell us about them:

[illegible]

And finally...

We are now going to ask some details about you – your answers will help us to understand some of your earlier responses. We will use this information to see if the responses given to earlier questions vary based on some of these details. It will also help us to ensure that we get responses from a wide range of people.

This information will not be used to identify individuals and won't be shared. You do not need to complete this section if you do not want to or you can choose to answer some but not all of the questions. In some questions there is space provided if you wish to self-identify. Please note that these questions are from the 2021 Census so we are able to compare our responses against the population of Hartlepool.

10. Which of the following best describes you?

A resident of Hartlepool	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Not a resident but working in Hartlepool	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Not a resident but studying in Hartlepool	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

11. If you live in Hartlepool please tell us the first part of your postcode.

TS22	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
TS23	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
TS24	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
TS25	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
TS26	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
TS27	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> 7

- 12. Please tell us which of the following services, provided by Hartlepool Borough Council, you or the people in your household have used in the past 12 months.**
(Please select all that apply).

Services for older people (including home and day care services, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Services for people with a physical disability, learning disability or mental health need	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Support for carers	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Public health services (including smoking cessation, weight management and drug and alcohol misuse services)	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Children's social care (including welfare, fostering and adoption, and child protection)	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Education and child care (including in nurseries and local authority schools)	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
Home to school transport provided by the Council	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
Services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)	<input type="checkbox"/> 8
Support for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)	<input type="checkbox"/> 9
Community hubs and libraries	<input type="checkbox"/> 10
Parks and other outdoor spaces (including Summerhill Country Park and public Rights of Way)	<input type="checkbox"/> 11
School meals	<input type="checkbox"/> 12
Registration services (births, marriages and deaths)	<input type="checkbox"/> 13
Regulatory Services (including community safety, anti-social behaviour, environmental health and trading standards)	<input type="checkbox"/> 14
Economic development (supporting the local economy)	<input type="checkbox"/> 15
Highways (including street lighting, highways maintenance, footpaths and cycle ways)	<input type="checkbox"/> 16
Concessionary bus travel	<input type="checkbox"/> 17
Waste services (including household refuse and recycling collections, trade waste collections and the household waste recycling centre)	<input type="checkbox"/> 18
Leisure services (including leisure centres, sports and recreation facilities and activities)	<input type="checkbox"/> 19
Planning and Building Control	<input type="checkbox"/> 20
Neither me nor anyone in my household have used any services in the past 12 months	<input type="checkbox"/> 21
Other services not listed here (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> 22

13. Which Council Tax Band is your home in?

Band A	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Band B	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Band C	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Band D	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Band E	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Band F	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
Band G	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
Band H	<input type="checkbox"/> 8
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/> 9
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/> 10

14. Are you....?

Female	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Male	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Self-identify:	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

15. What is your age?

Under 16	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
16-25	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
26-35	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
36-45	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
46-55	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
56-65	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
66+	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/> 8

16. What is your ethnic origin?

Asian or Asian British	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Black African, Caribbean or Black British	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
White	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Other ethnic group (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/> 6

17. Are you...?

Bisexual	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Gay or lesbian	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Straight / heterosexual	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Self-identify:	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

18. Do you have any physical or mental health conditions expected to last 12 months or more?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
No	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/> 3

19. Do any of your conditions reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?

Yes, a little	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Yes, a lot	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
No	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

20. Are you, or have you been, in the care of the Local Authority as a child or young person?

Yes, I am a care leaver	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁
Yes, I am currently in care	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
No	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄

21. Please tell us if you, or your spouse / partner are currently serving or have previously served in the UK armed forces. Please tick all that apply

I have previously served in the Regular or Reserve Armed Forces	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁
I am currently serving in the Regular, Reserve or Territorial Armed Forces	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
My Spouse / partner is currently serving in the Regular, Reserve or Territorial Armed Forces	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
My Spouse / partner has previously served in the Regular or Reserve Armed Forces	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆

Thank you for completing the survey your views are important to us!

By completing this questionnaire you give Hartlepool Borough Council the authority to collect and retain information about you. The information collected about you will be held securely and will be processed to produce statistical reports. No personal data will be disclosed. Hartlepool Borough Council is the Data Controller for the purposes of the Data Protection Act.

Please place completed surveys in the box provided or return to:

Your Say,
Hartlepool Borough Council,
Civic Centre,
Victoria Road,
Hartlepool,
TS24 8AY

The closing date is **Monday 1st January 2024.**

<https://yoursay.hartlepool.gov.uk/balancing-the-budget-2024-25>

