

21 January 2021		ITEM: 8
Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Draft Capital Programme		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property		
Accountable Assistant Director: Jonathan Wilson, Assistant Director - Finance		
Accountable Director: Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

This report presents the committee with the recommended additions and approach to the new capital programme for 2021/22 and subsequent years.

The council continues to deliver services to residents against the background of ongoing changes in population, local business growth and national infrastructure developments in the borough. This context has now been extended to include the impacts of Covid-19. Consequently there is an ongoing need to support the residents and the wider stakeholders of the Council through a planned programme of capital works. However this is also in the context of significant funding pressures as set out in the MTFS reported to Cabinet on 13 January 2021 and therefore the programme has been restricted to essential projects only. This report sets out the proposed requirements for projects proposed to commence in 2021/22.

1 Recommendations

That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1.1 Comment on the specific proposals set out within this report.

2 Introduction and Background

2.1 As part of the budget, the Council needs to set its capital programme for the following financial years. The development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) will need to take account of future capital spending plans over the period of the strategy.

2.2 The following sources of funding are available to the General Fund:

- a) Capital Receipts – these are the receipts realised from the disposal of capital assets such as land and buildings;
- b) Grants and Contributions - these could be ad hoc grants awarded from government or other funding agencies or contributions from developers and others;
- c) Prudential Borrowing – the Council is able to increase its borrowing to finance schemes as long as they are considered affordable; and
- d) Revenue – the Council can charge capital costs directly to the General Fund but the pressure on resources means that this is not recommended.

2.3 In more recent years, only Prudential Borrowing has been available to finance the majority of schemes within the capital programme with grants only being made available for specific services such as highways.

2.4 Funding from capital receipts may become available as part of the asset review undertaken in 2020/21. This continues to challenge the rationale for holding the asset resulting in the classification of assets as either:

- Released (for example to dispose of immediately or develop for housing);
- Re-used (for example for different services or more intensive or changed use); and
- Retained (business as usual, little need or opportunity for change identified).

Sites that have been identified for release are being reviewed by the relevant stakeholders to determine their redevelopment potential and enable a final decision on release of the asset or otherwise. This potentially enables further funding of capital projects from the capital receipts generated and reduce the level of prudential borrowing required. Equally a proportion will be set aside to support the delivery of the revenue budget as set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

2.5 Members should note that General Fund Capital Receipts can also be used to finance Housing Revenue Account capital expenditure which combined with Right to Buy buy-backs can enable the maximisation of HRA resources to fund capital projects.

2.6 Annually, all services consider their future capital needs and submit bids for schemes ranging from projects in their own right to smaller schemes that are required to maintain operational ability – such as capital repairs to operational buildings and system upgrades.

2.7 In addition, the Council Service Review (CSR) process identifies service enhancements that will ultimately reduce costs or increase income. These will need to be funded as and when identified.

2.8 Finally, there are those projects that require seed funding to prepare more detailed business cases. The council agreed in February 2017 to a £2m budget provision to ensure funding is available to prepare business cases for Future and Aspirational Capital Schemes. In light of financial pressures reported in the MTFs no further provision is sought this year.

3 Current Programme

3.1 Before considering the new proposals, it is worth reflecting on the allocations that have been agreed over recent years. These are summarised in Appendix 1 but, covering the period 2020/21 through to 2023/24, total over £299m with £237m still to be spent as at 1 January 2021.

3.2 The major projects that are included within the current programme include:

3.2.1 The widening of the A13;

3.2.2 Purfleet Regeneration;

3.2.3 A13 Eastbound Slip Road;

3.2.4 Civic Offices Development;

3.2.5 Thameside Theatre;

3.2.6 Grays Town Centre and Underpass;

3.2.7 Stanford-le-Hope Interchange;

3.2.8 Improvements to parks and open spaces;

3.2.9 New Educational facilities;

3.2.10 The HRA Transforming Homes programme;

3.2.11 HRA New Build Schemes;

3.2.12 Highways infrastructure; and

3.2.13 Improvements to the Linford Civic Amenity Site.

3.3 As noted and in light of Covid-19 and the funding gaps identified in the MTFs no further funding for feasibility projects is sought for 2021/22. However as the detailed review of assets developed this will enable longer term decisions that support an asset management strategy that aligns with the Council priorities.

4 Draft Capital Proposals

4.1 As set out above, there have been a number of schemes that can be seen as projects in their own right. These have been included at Appendix 2.

4.2 Having reviewed all of the other capital requests, they fall within one of three categories and are summarised in the table below. The amounts have been

calculated using the respective bid totals and would be under the responsibility of a relevant Directors' Board or Transformation Board for allocation and monitoring:

Responsible Board	Examples	2021/22 £m	2022/23 £m	2023/24 £m
Service Review	These could include new systems that create efficiencies, upgrades to facilities to increase income potential and enhancements to open spaces to reduce ongoing maintenance.	0.500	0.500	0.500
Digital	The council has been progressing steadily towards digital delivery, both with residents and amongst officers. This budget will allow for further progression as well as ensuring all current systems are maintained to current versions and provide for end of life replacement.	2.260	0.372	0.170
Property	This budget will provide for all operational buildings including the Civic Offices, libraries, depot and Collins House. It will allow for essential capital maintenance and minor enhancements.	1.290	0.00	0.00

4.3 In addition, the capital programme also includes the HRA, Highways and Education. These are largely funded by government grants and will be considered by their respective Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Cabinet under separate reports.

4.4 Highways are expected to receive in the region of £4m per annum whilst Education are expected to receive a further £4m in 2021/22 with further allocations for free schools.

5 Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

5.1 In previous years, the recommendations to Council have also included delegations to Cabinet to agree additions to the capital programme under the following criteria:

- If additional third party resources are been secured, such as government grants and s106 agreements, for specific schemes;
- Where a scheme is identified that can be classed as 'spend to save' – where it will lead to cost reductions or income generation that will, as a minimum, cover the cost of borrowing; and

- For Thurrock Regeneration Ltd schemes – these actually also fall under the ‘spend to save’ criteria set out above but has not been agreed over the last couple of years.

6 Reasons for Recommendation

- 6.1 The capital programme forms part of the formal budget setting in February and is an integral part of the Council’s overall approach to financial planning.

7 Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 7.1 The various capital bids put forward have all been considered by the service management teams and by the Directors’ Board. Some projects will have also been reported separately to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

8 Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 8.1 Capital budgets provide the finance to meet the Corporate Priorities. If a capital project was not to proceed, this may impact, positively or negatively, on the delivery of these priorities and performance with a corresponding impact on the community.

9 Implications

9.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**
Assistant Director - Finance

The financial implications have been set out throughout the body of the report. The financial impact of the borrowing decisions required to support the programme has been accounted for within the MTFS to date.

9.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Ian Hunt**
**Assistant Director Law and Governance and
Monitoring Officer**

Local authorities are under an explicit duty to ensure that their financial management is adequate and effective and that they have a sound system of internal control and management of financial risk. This budget report contributes to that requirement although specific legal advice may be required on each projects business case.

9.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
**Strategic Lead - Community
Development and Equalities**

All local authorities are required to have due regard to their duties under the Equality Act 2010. The capital programme is assessed at key stages to ensure the impact of each scheme is measured in a proportionate and appropriate way to ensure this duty is met and the needs of different protected characteristics are considered.

10 Appendices to this Report:

- Appendix 1 – Current Programme Summary
- Appendix 2 - New Capital Projects.

Report Author:

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