

Title of Report:	Report by the Chief Financial Officer on the 2025/26 estimates
Committee Report Submitted To:	Council
Date of Meeting:	6 February 2025
For Decision or For Information	For decision
To be discussed In Committee YES/NO	No

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Cohesive Leadership
Outcome	Council has agreed policies and procedures and decision making is consistent with them.
Lead Officer	Chief Finance Officer

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	15 February 2025

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	YES/NO
Legal Opinion Obtained	YES/NO

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

This reports provides Members with an update in relation to the robustness of the 2025/26 Rate estimates.

2.0 Background

This report is prepared to facilitate Council's duty under Section 4 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 which states:

(1) The chief financial officer of a council shall submit to the council a report on the robustness of the estimates – it should be noted that the Chief Executive is the Council's nominated Chief Financial Officer in accordance with Section 2 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(2) A council shall have regard to that report when considering the estimates under section 3(2)(a).

(3) In this section "the estimates" means the estimates submitted to the council under section 3(1).

3.0 Report of the Chief Financial Officer on the 2025/26 estimates

3.1 The 2025/26 Rate estimates have been prepared, in so far as possible, on a zero-base basis. This is generally accepted as a more robust method of preparing budgets than the more usual practice of incremental based budgeting.

3.2 The amounts included within the Rate estimates have been prepared based on extensive discussions with the relevant Directors and associated budget holders and have regard to the officers' best estimates of known financial pressures and the resource requirements of continuing to deliver Council services in 2025/26.

3.3 The recommended rate estimates expressly provide for the:

- Annual pay award of 3%.
- Projected utility (Gas, electricity, water) costs
- Projected waste management costs
- Capital financing costs of approximately £8.3m
- Additional income as per officer recommendation
- Service adjustments as agreed during the presentations to the Finance Committee during the autumn

3.4 Uncertainties

3.4.1 As in all budget estimate processes, senior officers have utilised their professional judgment where appropriate and had regard to market forces in so far as it has been practicable to do so.

3.4.2 The estimation of future financial requirements has also had regard to the projected financial outturn in 2024/25 and the desire to utilise prior period favourable variances, where possible, to deliver outcomes in the Borough as agreed with Council.

3.4.3 Members should note that the proposed estimates have been prepared on the basis of assumptions and information provided to Council by third parties such as the Department for Communities and Land and Property Services previously notified to the Council.

3.4.4 Members will be aware of the continuing uncertainty surrounding the quantum of Rate Support Grant (RSG) which will ultimately be allocated to Council. As previously reported both the Departmental allocation to this grant and Council's allocation of the grant have reduced meaning the projected income from this source has reduced to £230,545.

3.4.5 The on-going situation with regards the economy and continuing, albeit reducing, inflationary increases continue to disrupt all facets of daily life including the local economy. It is too early to be able to project the long-term effects this will have but the potential remains high for a longer-term adverse effect on the local economy and consequently the non-domestic rates base in this Borough.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 Subject to the ongoing inflationary pressures and on the assumption that Council approves rate estimates which make provision for the cost pressures as set out in 3.3 above I am satisfied that the recommended rate estimates as presented are sufficiently robust to allow Council to deliver all its services in 2025/26.

5.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that Council approve the Chief Financial Officer's report on the robustness of the estimates.