

Rutland County Council

Catmose, Oakham, Rutland, LE15 6HP

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Meeting: CABINET

Date and Time: Thursday, 11 January 2024 at 10.00 am

Venue: Council Chamber, Catmose, Oakham, LE15 6HP

Democratic Services Officer to contact: David Ebbage 01572 720972
email: democraticservices@rutland.gov.uk

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A G E N D A

- 1) APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
- 2) ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR HEAD OF THE PAID SERVICE
- 3) DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Regulations, Members are required to declare any personal or prejudicial interests they may have and the nature of those interests in respect of items on this Agenda and/or indicate if Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applies to them.

- 4) MINUTES

To confirm the Minutes and Decisions made at the meeting of the Cabinet held on 12th December 2023.

(Pages 5 - 6)

5) ITEMS RAISED BY SCRUTINY

To receive items raised by members of scrutiny which have been submitted to the Leader and Chief Executive.

6) FUTURE OF THE PARKS SPECIAL SCHOOL

To receive Report No.02/2024 from the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services.

(Pages 7 - 98)

7) CORPORATE STRATEGY REFRESH

To receive Report No.03/2024 from the Leader of the Council for recommendation to Council for approval.

(Pages 99 - 114)

8) INTEGRATED BUDGET PLAN AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024/25 TO 2027/28

To receive Report No.04/2024 from the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Resources.

(Pages 115 - 294)

9) EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Cabinet is recommended to determine whether the public and press be excluded from the meeting in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and in accordance with the Access to Information provisions of Procedure Rule 239, as the following item of business is likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Paragraph 3: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

10) CONTRACT AWARD FOR PURCHASE OF THE REQUIRED VEHICLES AND ASSOCIATED TRANSPORT INFRA-STRUCTURE DETAILED WITHIN THE LEVELLING UP FUND BID

To receive Report No.05/2023 from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and the Environment.

(Pages 295 - 304)

11) ANY ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

To receive items of urgent business which have previously been notified to the person presiding.

12) DATE OF NEXT MEETING

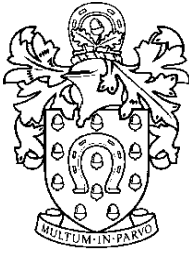
Tuesday, 13th February 2024.

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MEMBERS OF THE CABINET: Councillor G Waller (Chair)
Councillor A Johnson
Councillor P Browne
Councillor D Ellison
Councillor T Smith
Councillor C Wise

Quorum: 2

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Rutland County Council

Catmose Oakham Rutland LE15 6HP

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RECORD OF DECISIONS AT A MEETING OF THE CABINET

Tuesday, 12th December, 2023 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Councillor G Waller (Chair) Councillor A Johnson
Councillor P Browne Councillor D Ellison
Councillor T Smith

ABSENT: Councillor C Wise

OFFICERS PRESENT:	Mark Andrews Angela Wakefield Dawn Godfrey Kim Sorsky Kirsty Nutton Penny Sharp David Ebbage	Chief Executive Strategic Director for Law and Governance Strategic Director for Children's Services Strategic Director for Adult Services and Health Strategic Director for Resources Strategic Director for Places Democratic Services Officer
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Decisions published on 13 December 2023.

Key Decisions will be implemented on 21 December unless the Call-in Procedure as outlined in Procedure Rule 149 is invoked.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor C Wise.

2 ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR HEAD OF THE PAID SERVICE

There were no announcements from the Chairman or Head of Paid Service.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4 MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023.

RESOLVED

a) That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023 be **APPROVED**.

5 ITEMS RAISED BY SCRUTINY

No items were raised.

6 CONTRACT FOR THE ADULTS AND CHILDRENS CASE MANAGEMENT IT SYSTEM

Report No.154/2023 was introduced by Councillor A Johnson, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Resources.

The report asked for Cabinet's approval to delegate the award of the hosting and maintenance contract to Liquidlogic owned by System C (LiquidLogic) as the Council's incumbent provider, to ensure the optimum running and support of the Adults and Childrens Case Management system and other associated software products, under a new 7 year (5+2) contract.

The LiquidLogic system was the case management software system used by the Adults and Childrens directorates.

Members agreed to continue with the current provider to enable the Council to fulfil their statutory duties for Adults and Children's Services.

It was moved by Councillor A Johnson and seconded that the recommendation of Report No. 154/2023 be approved. Upon being put to the vote, with five votes in favour the motion was unanimously carried.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

a) **APPROVED** the delegation of the award for the Adults and Childrens Case Management IT system to the Strategic Director for Resources.

7 ANY ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 11th January 2024.

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The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 10.09am.

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CABINET

11 January 2024

FUTURE OF THE PARKS SPECIAL NURSERY SCHOOL

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services

Strategic Aim:	Healthy and Well A County for Everyone	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Cllr T Smith - Portfolio Holder for Children and Families	
Contact Officer(s):	Dawn Godfrey Strategic Director Children and Families	dgodfrey@rutland.gov.uk
	Gill Curtis Head of SEND, Inclusion and Learning	gcurtis@rutland.gov.uk
Ward Councillors	All	

1 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 Summary

1.1.1 The Parks Special Nursery School is a registered nursery school located on the same site as Oakham Church of England (CE) Primary Academy but maintained by the Local Authority. The Parks offer includes support for children with moderate and severe learning difficulties, as well as support for speech, language and communication, autism and physical disabilities. The Parks is designated as a nursery school; however, all children currently being taught at the school are of primary school (reception) age, which is outside the age range that the Parks is set up for. There are no children accessing a special nursery place this academic year and Rutland County Council is not aware of any children of nursery age needing specialist nursery provision from September 2024.

1.1.2 Following a review of the provision at the Parks by a group of experienced, independent SEND (Special Education Needs and/ or Disabilities) professionals which took place over two and a half years, it was identified that there were issues with the operational sustainability of the Parks. This was due to its size and scale; places at the Parks places are expensive and the nursery has very small pupil

cohorts which does not offer the best early education experience to set children on a positive path in their education, where socialisation with other children is a key positive early experience.

- 1.1.3 It was agreed at Cabinet on 12th September 2023 to go out to consultation on the future of The Parks provision, following the process set out in the Department for Education (DfE) guidance '*Opening and Closing Maintained Schools - Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers*' (January 2023). Consultation opened following the public launch on November 1st and closed at midnight on Sunday 3rd December.
- 1.1.4 80 individual people submitted a response through the dedicated parks consultation inbox over the consultation period. These were reviewed by an independent reviewer and, whilst all respondents raised some concern related to the proposal to close the Parks, there were no representations which offered any viable alternatives to closure.
- 1.1.5 The local authority is the decision maker on a school closure proposal and needs to have a position by mid-February 2024, when children's school places are communicated to parents for the start of the academic year September 2024.

1.2 Recommendations

- 1.2.1 Cabinet considers the outcome of the consultation and the feedback from the independent reviewer and approves the closure of the Parks Special Nursery School with effect from the end of the academic year, August 2024.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 1.3.1 Rutland County Council's ambition is to be a County that promotes inclusion, which supports all children and young people with Special Educational Needs and or Disabilities (SEND) to lead healthy, independent, and safe lives, focuses on their abilities not their disabilities and, wherever possible, have their needs met locally. (Rutland SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2021).
- 1.3.2 Following an independent review of the Parks, it was identified that the current arrangement was expensive and did not reflect the national and local aim for more children with special educational needs to be educated within their local mainstream early education or school setting.
- 1.3.3 The Parks is no longer operationally viable and continuing to keep it open does not make best use of limited resources. The Parks Special Nursery School has very small pupil cohorts which does not offer the best early education experience to set children on a positive path in their education, where socialisation with other children is a key positive early experience. Numbers over the past 6 academic years are shown below:

Year	Nursery year children in Parks	Reception year children in Parks	Year 1 children in the Parks
2018- 2019	3	3	
2019-2020	1	4	
2020-2021	5	3	

Year	Nursery year children in Parks	Reception year children in Parks	Year 1 children in the Parks
2021-2022	2	5	1
2022- 2023	2	5	1
2023-present		3	

- 1.3.4 The number of children legitimately requiring ‘specialist’ nursery places has declined. Children are placed there often because of lack of places to progress to at Reception, or by parental preference, rather than LA recommendation. The Designated Specialist Provision (DSP) at Oakham CE Primary School provides additional educational support so that children’s special needs can be met within a mainstream school setting, rather than a separate special school. Oakham CE Primary School DSP offered 20 places for children with EHCPs whose primary needs are Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Moderate Learning Difficulties but historically did not offer places for Reception Year children. Therefore, the Parks had supported children through Reception and even into Year 1.
- 1.3.5 Following negotiations, a new specification and a revised Memorandum of Understanding has been agreed with Rutland Learning Trust. From September 2023, a further 4 places at the DSP were commissioned and this now provides education from Reception age to the end of Year 6, supporting the aim to increase places for school-aged children and young people with SEND within Rutland schools.
- 1.3.6 The proposed changes to the delivery model for nursery-aged children will provide the opportunity to invest more in supporting children in their local mainstream early education settings when this is in their best interest and builds on the strengthening of the emerging good practice already being identified through the development of the SEND and Inclusion Early Years Pathway. Whilst there isn’t any dedicated specialist SEND provision in Early Years settings, many practitioners are highly skilled and experienced in supporting children with SEND and in promoting inclusion so that children with additional needs can benefit from receiving their early education offer with their peers.
- 1.3.7 The funding currently allocated to the Parks would support the development of further additional places for statutory school age children with SEND at the Designated Specialist Provision (DSP) at Oakham CE Primary school.; if the Parks remains open, this funding would not be available for the provision of additional places for children with SEND within in a Rutland school. Additionally, the space currently utilised by the Parks would be required to support the expansion of the primary DSP and would not be available if the Parks remains open.

2 REPORT

2.1 Introductory Paragraph

- 2.1.1 The Parks Special Nursery School is on the same site as Oakham CE Primary School but is a separate Ofsted registered nursey school occupying 2 dedicated classrooms, with access to shared spaces in the primary school. However, Special Nursery Schools are now extremely rare in the UK and, if available, they are usually designed to meet the needs of children with multiple and very complex special educational needs. As a specialist provision, the Parks was not set up to meet every

child's additional needs and there are nursery-aged children with an Education, Health and Care Plan whose needs would not be able to be met at the Parks.

2.2 Options Considered

- 2.2.1 Prior to consultation there were 2 options identified for Rutland County Council. There was the potential for further options to be presented during the formal consultation period; however, no viable options were received.
- 2.2.2 OPTION 1 - to continue with current arrangements. Whilst this may be viewed more favourably by some Rutland residents, this reduces the opportunities of young children to engage in an educational, social and emotional offer accessed with their peers with a local mainstream early education setting which sets them on a pathway for a positive educational trajectory, and would not support the aim to ease the continued pressure on the High Needs Block.
- 2.2.3 OPTION 2 - to proceed with closure of the Parks Special Nursery School with effect from the end of the summer term 2024. This option would offer challenges for the Council, however, would enable funding currently restricted to provision in the Parks to be utilised more effectively to better meet the wider needs of children with Special Educational Needs and/ or Disabilities. This option would be building on the already strengthening offer across the mainstream sector, so that there would be no loss of quality or quantity of provision, or of expertise and specialism locally, because this will be provided in maintained provision. In addition, arrangements will be more accessible and convenient for Rutland parents and children.

2.3 Background

- 2.3.1 In 2019, Rutland Schools Forum SEND Recovery Plan triggered the development of the SEND and Inclusion Early Years Pathway which examined the current education arrangements for children or young people with Special Educational Needs and/ or Disabilities to ensure they were either fit for purpose, or to plan for a future alternative model. The Pathway sets out a model for more Rutland children to benefit from completing their education within a mainstream early years and primary school setting where this was in their best interest.
- 2.3.2 As a result, two proposed changes were identified: To work with the Early Years sector to enhance the confidence and capability within mainstream early education settings so that they were more able to successfully support children with emerging wider needs AND to undertake a review of existing resources, both expertise and finances, starting with the Designated Specialist Provision at Oakham CE Primary School and the Parks Special Nursery provision.
- 2.3.3 All early education providers who receive government funding from the local authority are required to have due regard to the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2015). There are currently 32 registered early education providers in Rutland, made up of 14 nurseries, 14 childminders and 4 school-based EY provisions and, at the last Childcare Sufficiency Assessment <https://www.rutland.gov.uk/education-learning/early-education-childcare/childcare-sufficiency> there was 28% vacancy across the county indication of availability of places for Rutland families.
- 2.3.4 A key priority within the Pathway was further improving the quality of the early years

offer across Rutland settings to better meet the different needs of young children, with a focus on early identification of need and timely early targeted intervention. This would utilise the funding available early in the SEND system to help prevent children's needs from escalating and assisting in more positive long-term outcomes.

- 2.3.5 To promote the shift from a dedicated to an integrated education approach for children and young people with SEND, the Local Authority recently appointed a specialist SEND Early Years teacher to support early education providers. This further enhances the SEND and inclusion support available to children which includes a significant programme of training and resources to promote inclusive practice across Rutland's early years and childcare provisions. This is providing early education staff with increased specialist skills and confidence to effectively support children with SEND in mainstream settings. This was reflected in responses to the consultation; only 2 respondents raising a concern over the availability of suitable provision identified themselves as working within the early education sector.
- 2.3.6 A Speech Language Therapeutic Senior Practitioner has been working on early communication skills acquisition with all settings since 2021. Once the arrangements for Reception Year children with EHCPs (Education, Health and Care plans) had been secured, focused work started with the wider sector. An Early Years Specialist Social, Emotional and Mental Health Teacher, funded by Early Years (EY) Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant underspend was commissioned to help Private Voluntary and Independent Early Years settings put into practice the learning they gain through our Early Years learning programmes. This hands-on practitioner helps grow confidence and adjust practice to support children with emerging needs to thrive in a mainstream setting and not escalate into more specialist support. Both providers work on whole settings practice to develop a sustainable system. Both these initiatives are already having a tangible impact on confidence in SEND practice for practitioners and received great feedback from parents. Additional therapeutic support is planned through Delivering Better Value grant funding to help individual children.
- 2.3.7 The impact of this programme of professional development and support is seen in improved provider confidence and capacity to offer a wider choice of places for children with additional needs. In September 2023 the Council undertook an early education and childcare survey of parents and carers to gain a better view of parental need, which built on the feedback from the parental views gathered through the annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment process undertaken earlier in the year. The outcomes of these surveys enable the Council to review the impact of actions taken, to identify potential gaps in provision and to better direct resources. 100 responses were received to the September survey, and responses involved 155 children aged 0-6 years old, with a good mix across the age groups. Questions were asked specifically on whether any children under the age of 6 years currently received any special or targeted support with a total of 47 responses saying yes, and of these, 83% felt their child was getting the support they required, which demonstrates the impact of the programme of support, and the improved confidence within the early education sector.
- 2.3.8 This reflected the OFSTED/CQC inspection report from May 2023 which found that "High-quality inclusion support for practitioners in the early years provides them with the confidence to identify and assess children's needs."
- 2.3.9 Changes to the delivery model provide the opportunity to invest more in supporting

children in mainstream settings. Working with key stakeholders, the provision arrangements will be adjusted to meet forthcoming needs, serve more children and families in Rutland and develop sound and sustainable Early Years arrangements linked to the Family Hub Programme, aligned to Rutland's SEND and Inclusion Strategy and in line with the SEND and AP (Alternative Provision) Improvement Plan, seeking for more effective inclusion of children in their preparation for adulthood.

- 2.3.10 Parents and carers who have concerns that their young child may have additional needs are able to access advice and support through the Family Hub <https://www.rutland.gov.uk/rutland-information-service/family-hub> or the Local Offer <https://www.rutland.gov.uk/rutland-information-service/send-local-offer>.
- 2.3.11 To enable the Authority to ensure that the offer for families with children with SEND was achieving Rutland's vision to support all children and young people with SEND to lead healthy, independent, and safe lives and, wherever possible, have their needs met locally (Rutland SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2019), a group of experienced, independent SEND professionals were commissioned to undertake a review of the special provision at the Parks School starting in 2020. The focus was to examine the current arrangements and to ensure they were either fit for purpose, or to plan for a future delivery model. This included establishing a working group, independently facilitated by experts in the field of SEND and education, comprising of Rutland County Council officers, school leaders, parent governors and teaching staff from the Parks and Oakham CE Primary School, to develop a more inclusive Early Years pathway and widen the early education offer for children with additional needs.
- 2.3.12 This review, which took place over two and a half years, identified that there were issues with the operational sustainability of the Parks due to its size and scale. Recommendations from the review included strengthening inclusive leadership, strengthening inclusive relationships, shared design and understanding and refreshing the existing SEND and Inclusion Strategy in line with current outcomes of recent national reviews. This resulted in the development of the Early Years Pathway which sets out to develop SEND provision which is fit for purpose, meets demands and needs and remains flexible to ensure these criteria continue to be met. It also invests in the early years providers locally in order to build sustainable confidence in inclusion across the sector.
- 2.3.13 The Early Years Pathway aims to ensure best value, whilst offering access to support for more children, including those with emerging needs and those for whom an Education, Health and Care Plan is not appropriate. The intent is to increase opportunities for children with SEND or emerging needs to access mainstream Early Years education closer to home, where this would be in the best interest of the child. This is delivered within the early education offer in Rutland, enhanced by a suite of services and support for the child and the wider family, arranged in partnership between Rutland County Council SEND and Inclusion Service and the early education provision, to include therapeutic support and wider family hub arrangements. This would reduce the need for long journeys and give children with additional needs the opportunity to form friendships with other local children their age.
- 2.3.14 These services would be intended to help prevent children's further escalation and improve families' confidence and individual family functioning while this enhanced,

more holistic support package, would be focused on a transition to mainstream for the majority, for the next step in their journey. For those young children with more complex needs, whose needs historically would not have been met at the Parks, we will continue to work with families and specialist education providers to ensure they receive the high-level of targeted support they require. Where children with SEND are not attending a nursery or childminder setting, Rutland County Council's Early Years Inclusion team will continue to provide support via home visits.

2.3.15 As a result of the outcomes of the independent review, it was agreed at Cabinet on 12th September 2023 to go out to consultation on the future of The Parks provision.

2.4 Consultation

2.4.1 Consultation on the closure of The Parks Special Nursery School followed the process set out in the Department for Education (DfE) guidance 'Opening and Closing Maintained Schools - Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers' (January 2023). The reason cited for the proposed closure was that the Parks is no longer considered viable and that there will be no loss of quality or quantity of provision or of expertise and specialism locally as this will be provided in maintained provision. In addition, arrangements will be more accessible and convenient for local parents and children.

2.4.2 Consultation opened following the public launch on November 1st and closed at midnight on Sunday 3rd December 2023.

2.4.3 Consultation responses have been reviewed by an independent reviewer, Maureen Morris; Maureen is a parent-carer herself and has worked as a parent participation consultant nationally for a number of years, as well as being an associate of the charity Contact for families with disabled children. She is highly experienced in gathering the voice of parents, carers, and children.

2.4.4 Maureen reviewed all of the respondent e-mails, noting the comments, questions and responses as they came in. Her review took into account the impact on the author, the number of responses and the themes emerging, and questions were raised with Council staff as they arose which enabled officers to respond to key themes and provide feedback. The Council has published questions and answers on Rutland County Council's website, and these can be found at <https://www.rutland.gov.uk/theparks>.

2.4.5 A total of 80 individuals submitted a response through the dedicated parks consultation inbox over the consultation period, though there are 92 actual responses because of additional comments sent in following publication of the Q & A document on the website. Maureen rated these as Green - A concerned citizen who may have some knowledge and/or experience of this complex issue. This knowledge may or may not be current and/or the respondent has given no viable solution; Amber - Respondent has or has had a relationship with The Parks Special Nursery School, perhaps directly or indirectly. The decision may or may not have an impact on either their setting or them personally; Red - Respondent may be directly impacted by any decision regarding The Parks Special Nursery School or may have a solution which should be or has already been considered by Rutland County Council. 70 were rated green, 3 as amber and 7 as red.

2.4.6 Whilst all respondents raised some concern over the proposal to close the Parks,

with some very personal case studies relating to children who had attended over the past 10 years or more, there were no representations which offered any viable alternatives to closure. As these representations were received, responses to emerging themes were made through the updated Q & A documentation on the website, which sometimes then resulted in further representation. However, these representations made to the Council did not offer any viable solutions to the issue raised. All representations have been collated and published with these papers (Appendix A) following careful checking and redacting to ensure all identifiable personal details have been removed.

- 2.4.7 The independent reviewer, having carefully analysed all representations, considers that there were no viable alternatives to closure offered as an outcome of the consultation. She supports the proposal to proceed with closure of the Parks and to make more effective use of the wide-ranging resources available to families, such as the Family Hub and Early Help, and to education providers through the expanding programme of professional development and support. The Parks Special Needs Nursery Consultation Independent Review for Rutland County Council has been completed by Maureen and can be found in Appendix B.
- 2.4.8 It is our recommendation that the closure of the Parks Special Nursery School is confirmed, and the next steps are actioned prior to the cut-off date for communicating special school places in February 2024.

3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

3.1 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1.1 Special Needs Education is funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Fund. The development of the Early Years Pathway, with changes to the delivery model as described above, is key within the Council's Recovery Plan, providing the opportunity to invest more in supporting children in mainstream settings and thereby contributing towards to easing the deficit in the Dedicated Schools Grant. The deficit on the DSG this year is c£600k with the total deficit being £1,918k.
- 3.1.2 The cost of maintaining a place in mainstream DSP provision would be £10k per place. The Parks has a minimum Funding Guarantee of £250,719 for the 7.5 placements which was agreed to help the school with budgeting when the Council issued a formal letter stating its concerns of the finances of the Parks. This figure was agreed as from 2017/18 to 2021/22; however, the Council had been funding more than this in every year other than 2020/21 which was impacted upon by Covid.
- 3.1.3 Removing the Parks from the offer in Rutland, in line with the Delivering Better Value programme and the SEND Recovery Plan, which would enable further investment in the Designated Specialist Provision at Oakham Primary Academy and across the early years sector.
- 3.1.4 Following negotiations, a new specification and a revised Memorandum of Understanding has been agreed with Rutland Learning Trust. From September 2023, this now provides education from Reception age in the Designated Specialist Provision (DSP) at Oakham C of E Primary School. Investment in the DSP, resulting in an additional 4 places in September 2023 and a further 4 in September 2024, will be compromised if the Parks remains open because the funding will be

subsumed within the funding required to keep the Parks operating.

- 3.1.5 More choice and better support closer to home means we can invest more money into mainstream SEND support locally. Rutland's High Needs Funding can then be shared more equally among providers to widen the support available to a greater number of young children, leading to better outcomes for everyone.

3.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

This section has been approved by Sarah Khawaja, Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

- 3.2.1 It is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that they act in accordance with the relevant legislation and have regard to statutory guidance when seeking to close a maintained school.
- 3.2.2 Consultation on the proposal to close The Parks Special Nursery School was carried out according to the Department for Education (DfE) guidance '*Opening and Closing Maintained Schools - Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers*' (January 2023).
- 3.2.3 If the decision is made to close the school with effect from the end of the academic year, August 2024, the Local Authority will continue to consider all legal implications associated with disestablishing a maintained school as specified in Annex C of the statutory guidance: Proposals for school closures. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63d1357ed3bf7f3c44bcd6b9/Opening_and_closing_maintained_schools_Jan_2023.pdf
- 3.2.4 Within one week of making a decision, the Local Authority MUST publish their decision, and the reasons for such a decision being made, on their website

3.3 Risk Management Implications

The main risks to this Report and the Council achieving its objectives are as follows:

- 3.3.1 Risks associated with the closure of the Parks – Finance and Viability
 - 3.3.1.1 Assessment of Risk – High
 - 3.3.1.2 Mitigation: The school is not financially viable under current arrangements and if the decision is made not to close, it will continue to add pressure to the High Needs funding. Closure of the Parks, in parallel with the delivery of the High Needs Recovery Plan and the Early Years Pathway, will ease the deficit on the High Needs Block. Financial resources can be redirected to provide a more sustainable approach to meeting the needs of children with additional needs, with skills and expertise available in early education settings across the county. Specialist provision will continue to be provided for those young children with complex needs where it is required.
 - 3.3.1.3 Residual Risk - Medium
 - 3.3.1.4 Record of Risk: within High Need Fund Recovery Plan

3.3.2 Risks associated with the closure of the Parks – Profile

3.3.2.1 Assessment of Risk – high

3.3.2.2 Mitigation: There is reputational risk associated with any school closure. Local Authorities must ensure that, when closing a school that there will be no loss of expertise and specialism and that any replacement must be more accessible and convenient for local parents. The review of the Parks and the subsequent development of the Early Years Pathway and the associated programme of professional development and support for the Early Years sector has strengthened the the expertise across the sector, with specialist provision being available where this is required to meet specific complex need. Consultation offered stakeholders to respond and to offer alternative viable options to closure, but none have been received.

3.3.2.3 Residual Risk – medium

3.3.2.4 Record of Risk: within High Need Fund Recovery Plan

3.4 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

3.4.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) has not been completed because there are no identified risks or issues to the rights and freedoms of individuals

3.5 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

3.5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) screening has been completed. No adverse or other significant issues were identified. A copy of the EqIA can be obtained from gcurtis@rutland.gov.uk

3.6 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

3.6.1 The Council has a duty in accordance with S17 Crime and Disorder Act 1988, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to the likely effect of that exercise of those functions on and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social behaviour).

3.6.2 This duty has been considered and there are no community safety implications relating to the recommendations.

3.7 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

3.7.1 Children who attend education settings have full benefits of their learning environment, peer and community connections and relationships. These are evidenced to improve long term resilience, aspiration, and wellbeing.

3.8 ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

3.8.1 On 11 January 2021 Rutland County Council acknowledged that it was in a climate emergency. The Council understands that it needs to take urgent action to address it.

3.8.2 There are no environmental and climate change implications associated with the Recommendations.

3.9 PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.9.1 There are no procurement implications associated with the recommendations. Recommendations.

3.10 HR IMPLICATIOINS

- 3.10.1 If the decision is made to close the school with effect from the end of the academic year, August 2024, there will be HR implications for those members of staff currently on the payroll of the Parks. As a Local Authority maintained school, the LA (Local Authority) will be responsible for ensuring all appropriate HR processes are followed for those members of staff.

4 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 4.1 There are no background papers to the report.

5 APPENDICES

- 5.1 Appendix A: Consultation Responses
- 5.2 Appendix B: The Parks Special Needs Nursery Consultation Independent Review for Rutland County Council

An Accessible Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.

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Park Special Nursery School Consultation – Anonymised representations.

No. & RAG	<p>Green - A concerned citizen who may have some knowledge and/or experience of this complex issue. This knowledge may or may not be current and/or the respondent has given no viable solution.</p> <p>Amber - Respondent has or has had a relationship with The Parks Special Nursery School, perhaps directly or indirectly. The decision may or may not have an impact on either their setting or them personally.</p> <p>Red - Respondent may be directly impacted by any decision regarding The Parks Special Nursery School or may have a solution which should be or has already been considered by Rutland County Council.</p> <p>Date received and anonymised representation.</p>
1	<p>2/11/23</p> <p>Part of me thinks, what is the point in writing this email, and putting my input in, it probably won't be read, my voice won't be heard, no positives will come of this.</p> <p>I have come to realise and learn how lonely the SEN world is, and how very uneducated people are of the SEN community.</p> <p>**</p> <p>I truly believe we have been failed, there is very little support, knowledge and understanding of autism, I was one of those uneducated people once, I had no understanding of autism, I wasn't really aware of it. It was only due to my research I really started to understand, my ** clearly has autism, it was clear as day looking back at videos and pictures as a baby, huge red flags, not responding to name, nonverbal, no understanding, no sense of danger, stimming, no eye contact</p> <p>I showed my concern, I reached out to professionals and they responded with ** is a boy, they are lazy..... bringing my first child up who has autism, was a challenge, an completely unexpected journey, and sadly very lonely, with zero support.</p> <p>Then the parks happened, ** started at the parks non verbal, ** needs a quiet space, a lot of empathy, the best knowledge and understanding of autism and lots of patience. The staff have been so brilliant, they have supported me, been a shoulder to cry on, became my child's second family, the family we needed but don't have. They are the family I can hand ** over too who has very little communication using Makaton and visual learning to communicate. ** was there a whole year! They have changed ** life. They have made a positive impact on ** future, setting ** the right direction, teaching ** in ** own unique way, listening to ** when he needs to be heard, ** wasn't quite ready to shine. But the parks found ** and **is absolutely shinning.</p> <p>Every child needs the opportunity and the chance.... People are becoming more aware of autism, Rutland has military families, so there are always children moving to the area and many would benefit from the parks, people are unaware it exists, family's need help to be guided and supported, help make people aware that there are places and services out there to give you support. A child's first 5 years are the most important years of their life, in those years you learn so much, what you learn will guide you down the best path uniquely created for you, leading you to a successful happy life, add additional needs into the mix, a child is having to learn harder and more unique to meet their needs. I really struggle to see how a mainstream provision can provide this, it is not the same. And unfortunately, you just don't get it, and clearly not willing to see the beauty in the parks, and give them the chance, and instead of shutting them down, embrace the parks, make it bigger again, give children the support be the better county. A SEN child needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •the right setting •the right knowledge •the understanding • the patience

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •the support •the passion •the empathy •the love •the guidance •the space •the family <p>All that was given to my ** in just a year! ** has had the best educational start to life, and found ** beautiful path...</p> <p><i>**identifying personal details redacted.</i></p>
2	<p>3/11/23</p> <p>I want to convey my support for this facility to remain open.</p> <p>I feel it’s vital that there is a facility in Rutland that specialises in supporting those that have complex needs. We are an ever growing community and if this is lost it will never be replaced.</p> <p>I do not have any links to Parks and I don’t have a child with special needs, however in my wider family we do have children with complex needs and we have witnessed their parents fighting tooth and nail to get the support they needed. In fact in one case they took the local authority to court and won their case, this could have been avoided had common sense prevailed.</p> <p>Politicians do not understand the stresses and strains of raising a child with complex needs, simple tasks can be difficult and challenging.</p> <p>Such facilities like Parks unlock the potential for a child with complex needs, which is taken through to adulthood. This can enable someone to live independently. Closing Parks will not only impact on the ‘here and now ’but it will be felt for years to come. The decision could potentially create a ticking time bomb for the future.</p> <p>I fully support Parks remaining open and I will support any campaign that is fighting this, I have already signed the petition.</p>
3	<p>3/11/23</p> <p>**</p> <p>Today, I was shocked and saddened to hear of the possible closure of The Parks School. Shocked because SEN children have as much right to an education within their area as any other child and saddened to think that the most vulnerable in our communities have yet again, been targeted as scapegoats for a budget. With fewer children, parents and teachers involved, the idea is to take the low hanging fruit. It disgusts me.</p> <p>Where are these children to go? Taxi them miles from their homes causing distress and possible difficulties for their parents? Take them out of their own environment where they grow up? Spend a fortune on taxi’s and carers each day with parents not always sure that the same people will be awarded the contracts each term – with children then having to get used to another set of drivers and carers?</p> <p>I understand that budgets have to be met – but why is it always the most vulnerable who are targeted. These children have their whole lives in front of them. The education and social development that our grandchild received at The Parks was exceptional, enabling ** to move forward and develop to the point where we can see her now contributing to society in some small way.</p>

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	<p>I vehemently oppose your proposal to close The Parks School in Oakham and urge you to have some common humanity and find a way to cater for our young children. <i>**identifying personal details redacted.</i></p>
4	<p>3/11/23 I am contacting from my company a stage 4 approved AP working with Cambridgeshire, Peterborough, Bedfordshire, Lincolnshire and Rutland.</p> <p>I have just read the article regarding the closure of The Parks. Is there any way we can assist and support this - we have 3 AP venues in the area and looking to expand in to neighbouring LAs?</p>
5	<p>3/11/23 I am writing to express my deep frustration and disappointment regarding your decision to recommend the closure of The Parks School. ** I am appalled by your apparent disregard for the specialist needs and rights of the youngest and most vulnerable children in Rutland. It is clear that your decision is primarily motivated by financial concerns. While it is true that specialist education can be expensive, it is crucial to remember that our SEN children have the same legal right to an education as their peers. Many of them require the support and expertise of specialist staff in a small specialized environment in order to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. While some children with EHCPs may be able to cope in mainstream schools, they may have achieved even greater success and been happier in a more specialized setting.</p> <p>Rutland currently holds the shameful distinction of being one of the only counties in the country without a Primary or Secondary Special School. As a result, the council is forced to send significant numbers of SEN children out of county to access the specialist provision they require. This not only incurs substantial costs in terms of securing school places and transportation, but it also means that families like mine are left with limited options and are at the mercy of neighboring counties. While we are grateful for the opportunities provided by these counties, the provision may not always be suited to our child's specific needs. It is also important to note that these schools are bursting at the seams with children from their own county. Surely, these funds spent on educating and transporting our children out of county could be better spent thus allowing The Parks to remain open.</p> <p>Rutland needs to retain its only Special School, The Parks and take proactive steps to ensure that early years children with SEN receive the specialist support they need from a much earlier age. This includes issuing EHCPs for early years children and providing meaningful early intervention services. It is appalling to hear that the council has been systematically refusing to issue EHCPs for those in early years settings, therefore resulting in the decline in the number of students at The Parks, making it appear financially unsustainable. By doing so, you are playing with the rights of the most vulnerable members of our community, which is truly shameful and unacceptable. It is essential that you prioritize the needs of these children and provide them with the specialized education and support they require.</p> <p>Closing The Parks School will not only have a detrimental impact on the students and families currently attending, but it will also leave a significant gap in the provision of SEN education in Rutland. Sending these children on to early years nurseries that are ill-equipped to nurture these additional SEN children is not appropriate but also disrupts their social and educational development. It is crucial that Rutland has its own Special Schools to cater to the unique needs of these children and provide them with a nurturing and inclusive learning environment.</p> <p>Furthermore, the council's refusal to issue EHCPs in a timely manner is a clear violation of the rights of these children. Early intervention is crucial for their development, and by delaying the provision of EHCPs, you are denying them the support they need at a critical stage in their</p>

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	<p>education. This approach is not only unjust but also short-sighted, as it will likely lead to greater challenges and costs in the long run.</p> <p>I implore you to reconsider your decision to close The Parks School and instead invest in the education and well-being of our youngest children with SEN. They deserve equal opportunities and access to quality education, and it is the council's duty to ensure that these rights are upheld. Please prioritize the needs of these vulnerable children and work towards providing them with the specialized education and support they require.</p>
6	<p>3/11/23 (first representation)</p> <p>**I truly think closing the parks is a mistake. The parks is needed and wanted but getting the EHCP to get in is taking to long and is to difficult a process. I know of several family's hoping to attend the parks in sept 24. Unfortunately you are ill informed and wrong in your assumptions. Maybe spend some time with the families who need the parks and humbly learn just why it must endure.</p> <p>**</p> <p>The Parks is warmth and nurture, and caring, The Parks is calm, and steady, and inclusive. The team there are peaceful and engaging, thoughtful and perceptive, supportive and enabling. We tried a mainstream pre-school first, we were nudged firmly in that direction. It was lovely, the staff kind and friendly. They remain friends to us to this day, and watch our journey with interest. But mainstream was too busy, it was sudden and loud, it was far too bright, it was too fast and too unpredictable . . . I stayed EVERY session, I was always visible and accessible to **, yet still ** only managed an hour at a time. Sleep was non-existent, food was refused, ** screamed every night, **broke things, smashed things. ** tried to interact, but ** couldn't, the quantity of other children bemused **, we saw no way to help **.</p> <p>So we got our EHCP, on our second try. We had found our harbour, we had found The Parks From our first visit to The Parks we found where we belonged. Not just **, but our whole family have benefited. There is more sleep, ** has tried school dinners, **uses gentle hands, ** manages a whole school day and is sad to come home. They celebrate every achievement with us, they offer unwavering support and advice, they helped us through half-terms unending holiday with links, regular texts, and support packs.</p> <p>The Parks has a place, and a purpose, and it is powerful.</p> <p>The Parks and its staff have given ** the right beginning on her journey, and I will forever support and fight for it to be every child's right to have an appropriate educational place in a setting that meets their needs.</p> <p>22/11/23 (second representation)</p> <p>**</p> <p>Do not make such a massive mistake. We need this school</p> <p>**story part 2 What does The Parks do? **ago, ** non-verbal and at a lovely mainstream preschool. Yet ** never said a word, never made a sound. When ** laughed it was silent, when ** needed something ** made no attempt to ask or gesture or sign - ** just endured, existed on the very edge of those around **.</p>

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** ago, ** started at the parks.

** knows all ** letters and colours, ** numbers, ** shapes; ** fruits and vegetables and, if you have ever had the joy of accompanying us to Rutland Farm Park, ** chickens - and all her not-chickens.

** can ask for food, ** can request a drink, ** can ask for **shoes,** toothbrush, and **big sister. ** can tell you when ** hurt, when ** tired, when ** sad, and when ** is happy, **laugh is loud and rich and beautiful and often.

This time, you need to know I'm still an exhausted mother, I've waited four years for ** voice . . . to hear **, to talk with **, for ** to say mummy. This week I got my wish, when ** said it to me for the first time.  

What does the parks do?

It reached ** when I could not, it nurtured ** in ways I'd not thought of, it calmed **, redirected **, taught ** and enabled **, it engaged **. The parks, and its staff, gave ** a place that allowed **, at ** own pace and in ** own time, to find ** voice.

Closing The Parks would be a travesty, so like my **, I'm not remaining on the edge anymore, I'm using my voice and asking you to help us save The Parks.

28/11/23 (third representation)

**

Please read ** stories, please think very carefully what you are taking away from my child and future children. We tried mainstream, it didn't work for her.

We have days to save The Parks.....

What's a day?

12:15 am - ** is awake in my bed, asking for ** school, we cuddle and I shush ** as ** big ** needs to sleep, ** dad needs to sleep.

01:30 am - We give up, ** asks to put on ** "cosy" and ** "Christmas feet", so we can go downstairs. We put The Grinch on TV (which will play, on a loop, until ** leaves for school), we move the cats off he sofa, we doze, and chat, and ** asks for ** school.

04:00 am - We have breakfast - white cereal, 3 biscuits, juice in ** cup, half a banana ** asks for ** school.

06:00 am - ** asks for ** school again. We get dressed, ** in in ** blue Stitch T-shirt, we pack ** lunch box, snack, and swim stuff. ** asks for ** school - ** waits by the front door.

08:30 am - Off to school - asking for ** school, without separation anxiety or reservation, just pure joy and delight, ** walks away from me, ** doesn't look back.

3.30 pm - Home from school, we have tears - ** wants ** school.

4.30 pm - Teatime: peanut butter crackers, 3 slices of cucumber. ** asks for ** school.

7:00 pm - Supper and sleep medication, then bath-time, still ** asks for ** school.

8:00 pm - Bed time, we talk about school.

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	<p>What is one day to ** it's being at school, ** school, The Parks. It is structure, routine, joy, and expectation. It is safety, calmness, nurture, and learning. It is freedom, understanding, and acceptance. It is just what ** needs.</p> <p>What's a day? A day is time, it's time to sign the petition, it's time to email the council, it's time to support and to protest. That's all we need, time. That's all The Parks needs, time . . . preferably years of it.</p> <p><i>**identifying personal details redacted.</i></p>
7	<p>4/11/23</p> <p>Having worked ** and seen the difference it makes not just with the children but their parents/carers Removing this facility will profoundly affect the development of not only the existing children but future children as well. The effect on the parents of these children will also be significant in terms of transport and time to out of county Special Needs Setting.</p>
8	<p>4/11/23 (first representation)</p> <p>I would like to state that although I was not at the meeting last night I feel completely betrayed that RCC is planning to close the parks school.</p> <p>You state it isn't financially viable. However, all schools struggle and it would be more financially detrimental to the public council in the long run to close it and have a huge impact on the community. We spend more on social care for adults because we didn't invest in their futures or ehcps for homeschooling as there would be no where accessible for the children. Costing so much more in tutors, programs and therapies to compensate for what would of save money to simply have a school like the parks.</p> <p>It is so clearly needed because;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * It is providing an early years setting where children with SEN or need support and cannot cope in mainstream nurseries * It had been invested in by the public to improve facilities from the put door play area by tesco to hydrotherapy pool access lift. *There are many SEN children in the area that access or awaiting access to the parks. We have the highest amount of sen children in the country according to one of your surveys *It has expert staff who are trained to support and teach SEN children in a specialist setting. And over county's are over subscribed. *Sending children to other settings would cost money in travel for RCC and its constituents, not to mention local nurseries have stated they can't cope. They are not built for the environment needed. * my own child attended the parks and would not be where he is today if it wasn't for the limited class size and teaching support the school provides * The public WANT and NEED the school. It is an important part of our community and education. EDUCATION SHOULD BE A PROPRITY FOR ALL INC DISABLED. To close it would be discrimination. * It would compromise the RCC promise to work with parents and listen. The whole project you have created to work with us, would be undermined by shutting the school. <p>In addition to this you have made it harder and harder to access defeating the object of its purpose. You now need an ehcp to get a placement at the parks where before it was a special setting to gather evidence for an ehcp for children who clearly don't cope in mainstream</p>

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settings because it is simply too busy.. The council provided a 121 and they still stated he needed a place at the parks. The parks is a specialist setting designed to be calm and accommodating to ** needs including ** sensory disorder. Your facts stating there is no need are incorrect, in fact there are children now struggling at nurseries. This has a huge impact on their development and mental health as well as their families. The parks offer support you state you as a council are geared to provide but to remove the parks would be a huge step backwards which would cause irreparable damage to children in need.

Where are these children suppose to go if mainstream nurseries have already stated they are overwhelmed and not equipped for these young children. Where are they suppose to get their ehcp and gather evidence. Out of county is not practical or sensible. We can not stick a 2 year old on transport, if it was your child, how would you feel about it all. Over the years you state we have supported up to 8 children in the park. This is simply incorrect when ** was referred ** had to wait for a space and they already had around 12 children at the parks and he could only access 2 days a week. As well as the childminders because your report stated **needed the specialist intervention and opportunity to gather evidence for the ehcp. The parks should change its entry requirement to no ehcp as it was in 2015 and you should allow out of county children to be referred from towns such as melton. To make financially viable. As we send children to birchwood. We should be sharing the load and thus save money doing so. There are other ways to save money without making a detrimental impact to our community or putting families and children through unnecessary hardship and mental stress.

Thank you for your time and I hope you take these comments seriously.

5/11/23 (second representation)

Please note some incorrect facts in this report and some observations...

It is incorrect that The Parks can only support a maximum of 8 children at a time. We had 13 children on role one year and regularly a number greater than 8. There have been waiting lists at times.

It is very mysterious that suddenly there are 'no' children below reception age requiring a place. I question how this has come to be.

The parks have witnessed MIRACULOUS transformations and progress in the children who attended e.g. a child going from non verbal to verbal like my child ** and for their families

The council has tried to close The Parks previously and failed due to public opinion. Because The Rutland Hub has already been set up and is running with the remit to support children below Reception however this is not being successful as many request ehcps still and being pulled from mainstream nursery settings

Mainstream placements are NOT suitable for many children with SEN, for a myriad of reasons. I support change and progress and a teacher ** created a model of The Parks moving forward which fulfilled the criteria of what the report team said they wished for the children of the county. I feel that this was conveniently swept under the carpet.

I fully understand the Council's need to save money, with proper and full consultation this could have been achieved whilst still meeting the needs of ALL children to an outstanding standard. We may never see this happen now as your email for 30 days didn't work initially as I emailed and had mailer failure delivery and had to wait 3 days to send. This is my second email to highlight some facts.

30 days is not enough when it actually equates to 20 working days if emails are staffed.

30/11/23 (third representation)

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I would like to address serious concerns regarding your questions and answers published on the website. It is far from clear as your responses do not marry up to each question of what is being said.

Further more simple facts like the name of the school are not accurate e.g. It is not Oakham primary school. We have many primary schools in Oakham. I have attached some comments with regard to each section.

I would also like to add its highly inappropriate that this decision is going to cabinet rather than public on the 11th January. Especially when that is clearly not enough time to truly review public commenrs and feedback. It is also unethical as the lead officer is ** who has on more than one occasion verbally stated she wanted to close the school before the consultation began. Not to mention most of the cabinet (if not all) are from the same political party. Therefore the views of the constituents representated by Rutland are unbalanced and is all one sided. Therefore it fails the principle of demoacracy vote for decisions as important as this.

Furthermore please attached a screen shot for one of the minutes from one the meetings with **. Whereby it states that the send Improvemnr plan. DBV had stated it was to be carried out over the next 18 to 24months to work on improving SEND provision for long term goals. The key work streams of need identified that are specifically relating to my Objection are the following;

Building additional resources within school support partnership to avoid special placements. Since when did avoiding disability needs become a priority. If a sen placement is need the needs of the child come first not whether they can fit in your policies or budget. That is unlawful.

And the second point states the goal is to improve community and parental support. Closing the school is the exact opposite of the support and improvement. The school was rate outstanding by ofsted. Surely ita absurd to close a school that is needed (as there 7 children in Rutland wanting access not 2) despite what your report states because case officers have said don't name it as a provision.

I do hope you reconsider expecially after the BBC has covered this story again this morning on the news.

***identifying personal details redacted.*

9

4/11/23

I have grave concerns around this proposal. Many children who started at The Parks have latterly moved on to Birch Wood Area Special School, a Leicestershire County Council maintained school. These are children who have complex needs, rarely if ever met within a DSP. I would like to know more detailed evidence (figures) that children with severe and complex learning disabilities are having their needs met within Rutland schools.

Birch Wood School has been under increasing pressure to take children over number, this has included children from Rutland where there is no specialist provision. This year we have 227 on role. Our DFE net capacity assessment suggests we are significantly over number. Our planned admission was 190. This year our numbers have crept up again and this has included EYFS children from Rutland. LCC continue to invest in specialist places, RCC have not. I feel this is creating an inequality in accessibility for Rutland parents.

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	<p>Greater inclusion is very important within mainstream, but denying complex children access to appropriate support is a social justice issue. The Parks was a valuable resource to your families, its closure is a great loss to some of the most vulnerable in your community.</p>
10	<p>5/11/23</p> <p>Absolutely shocking these children need the school. As a father of a child with special needs these schools are to far and wide apart to close them. ** goes to Willoughby at Bourne and if that closed, we would be stuck where to send ** so to hear what's being proposed has made me angry and you have my full support</p> <p><i>**identifying personal details redacted.</i></p>
11	<p>5/11/23</p> <p>I would like to email to express my serious concerns regarding the proposed closure of the Parks Specialist Nursery. I am a parent of a child in Melton Mowbray who has an ehcp. When my daughter was younger we desperately wanted for our daughter to attend the Parks after mainstream and an educational psychologist stated ** needed a specialist nursery. We were refused a place due to being out of county! It was our nearest specialist nursery despite being out of county! The fact that Rutland County Council state there is not sufficient need is down to its ridiculous criteria it has put in place to access it, not because there isn't need! I am absolutely disgusted to hear that this is even being considered before changing the admissions process as if the admissions process was changed, many more families would be accessing it!</p> <p><i>**identifying personal details redacted.</i></p>
12	<p>6/11/23</p> <p>We are greatly concerned at the Council's proposal to close The Parks Special School and would ask you please to re-consider.</p> <p>The school provides absolutely essential levels of care and education for pupils with special needs – needs which can only be addressed in a purpose designed facility and by teachers with a particular skills and understanding. That is what The Parks provides and there is no other similar facility in Rutland.</p> <p>To remove this provision and suggest that the pupils go elsewhere is a dereliction of the Council's duty to the Rutland community which you represent.</p> <p>We understand that the proposal has been made because of the cost of running and maintaining the school. However, to close the school now would be an extremely short-sighted position to take. The cost of transporting children elsewhere and the on-going cumulative cost of their health care as they grow up will far outweigh any short term economic benefit.</p> <p>You also have a responsibility to consider the mental distress that will be caused to the pupils and the distress and added difficulty posed to their parents that closure of The Park will inevitably cause.</p> <p>Please do not make this decision.</p>
13	<p>6/11/23</p> <p>** attends this amazing school. Due to the hard work, dedication, amazing skills and love of all the staff ** has become verbal, can use the toilet, interact, read, write, try different foods. ** is flourishing and growing. The staff also support the family in such a wonderful way. We</p>

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	<p>know how privileged we are to have such an amazing school which is down to the hardworking and amazing staff. The school has helped nurture a wonderful future for **</p> <p>This constant threat of closure is unacceptable to the staff, the children, their families and the community. This school is so very needed and instead of this constant closure threat it should be celebrated and held high as a school of excellence and inspiration.</p> <p><i>** Identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
14	<p><i>7/11/23 (first representation)</i></p> <p>I am emailing yourself with the discust that you are planning on closing the Parks special school.</p> <p>Personally for me this will affect my little family, ** we are on the autism pathway for a diagnosis as well as global developmental delay as well as non verbal. We have just received ** school admissions letter which we cannot complete as mainstream schooling isn't possible for him. He has already been assessed by an educational psychologist that was paid by yourselfs which states he needs specialist setting. We are going to be inputting a request for a ehcp thishis week with a lot of evidence that he needs specialist.</p> <p>As far as I'm aware the dsp unit which you are suggesting to parents is still classed as mainstream as it's not 100% specialist. Will it have the expertise and experience the parks teachers have, I very much doubt it....</p> <p>If we refuse dsp and you close the parks the next option for my child is Birchwood in Melton if we can get him in there. My concerns are ** I do not and will not send ** over there at that young age because yourself dedcided to close the parks. I know of 2 other parents who are wanting the parks next year for reception so that's 3 children for the parks.</p> <p>As a parent I want the best for my child and the parks is. I know it, our family do, ** nursery teachers know it and also speak to your inclusion officers you employ they can tell you that too...</p> <p>Please can you listen to the parents of Rutland and accept of this school closes there will be a lot of disadvantaged children that won't get the support they need.</p> <p><i>18/11/23 (second representation)</i></p> <p>I am a parent who is wanting to send my child ** to the parks special school in September 2024 when ** should be starting primary reception like all of ** other peers. We have recently received ** school admissions letter which we cannot doing anything as mainstream schooling isn't possible.</p> <p>** is on the waiting list for a autism diagnosis as well as being developmentally delayed and has the learning age of a 18 month old. ** is also non verbal ** makes sounds but you cannot have a conversation at all with ** and ** doesn't understand basic tasks that are asked of ** ie putting ** coat on and eating with a knife and fork. ** is also in nappys and has no way to tell us when ** needs to go to the toilet.</p> <p>At the minute ** is a mainstream nursery who have been fantastic with **and offer ** support but ** doesn't learn there like the other children ** age do. ** is happy and settled there and is happy with the environment but there expertise only goes so far. Also with ** being happy there it gives me and my husband time for ourselves as selfish as that sounds.</p>

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	<p>Half the reason we chose the nursery for ** as it is next door to the parks to the surroundings are familiar to **.</p> <p>Last Friday ** nursery with request from myself and my husband have issued a application for ** to be assessed for a ehcp.</p> <p>The dsp unit that has been spoken is more to help children with additional needs and help them to be integrated into mainstream settings. But I can guarantee I will be pressured into naming it as the school we want to send ** regardless of ** needs just because it's the easiest option. We have also been told by inclusion about birchwood in Melton but personally I do not want to send ** to a primary school out of county just yet at the age of **.</p> <p>If ** was to access the parks ** will have the chance to use the speech therapists, occupational therapists the lists go on.</p> <p>In summery I feel like that the expression lamb to slaughter will be * if parks is closed next year. So please challenge to comments of no child that needs access to this school.</p> <p>** Identifying personal details redacted</p>
15	<p><i>7/11/23 (first representation)</i></p> <p>** attended the parks ** needs the parks. ** due to start school Sept 24, ** autism diagnosis ehcp draft, **needs the parks school like so many other children past and present.</p> <p><i>8/11/23 (second representation)</i></p> <p>Past parent hopeful present parent.</p> <p>** has been well known to the local authority for over a year, ** has a diagnosis of autism an agreed draft plan (for months) I have been told lies, I have told any and everybody ** needs the parks, its going to panel, ** should start the parks on this date(amazing) to then be told by the school oh ** been put forward for the dsp/mainstream. They cant meet **needs, So I emailed for an update, told (I will ring you Tuesday) nothing, I emailed for an update a couple more times and nothing ,eventually I was told again it was going to panel for the parks, if agreed only for a few months, I believe the local authority is ignoring and lying about these children who desperately need the parks school and fobbing parents off to meet there own narrative, this school has proved it is very much needed, but unfortunately to many parents are being detered with the very famous saying (they will be fine in mainstream)I have been told it with my ** children, mainstream is not suitable for everyone, and the nail in the coffin for me was, it is going to panel for the parks but there is a place in Sept 24 for a school in Grantham, WHY does it have to go to panel for a local school, you know our home town, but Grantham is a given, I and many others think,(cover up) to meet the local authority needs, it is disgusting that a few people that have no knowledge or experience with a diagnosis or additional needs gets to decide the fate of so many of the most vulnerable in our society.</p> <p>** has missed so much valuable time in a setting because Rutland County Council want to close THE PARKS for the sake of saving a few quid, the future of our most vulnerable is worth so much more.</p> <p>** Identifying personal details redacted</p>
16	<p><i>7/11/23</i></p> <p>Good Morning ** I think it will be a bad idea for you to close the parks because we have seen the benefits of the work the staff have done to help improve the children's education. Plus,</p>

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	<p>we have good friends who had their own children go to the parks. They have seen such a massive difference in their own child or children. The Parks has been a part of Oakham all our lives. we have seen the good and dedication of how much work the school and staff do to help the child or children and for the parents of the children. Please could you re think about the closure. it's about the children and they would have to go out of town and that would cost you more money in transport to take the children to the nearest place replacement setting. Other parents may not have the best income with sending their children out of the county for school because their have different kind of need that other school may not have the best understanding or knowledge support the children or child. this will make it hard for grandparents who pick up their grandchild up from the park. If your decision to close down the parks will have a very deep effect on the whole of Oakham and other schools like the parks pleas think long and hard on what you are going to deicide</p> <p>** Identifying personal details redacted</p>
<p>17 18 19 20 21 22</p>	<p><i>7/11/23 from 2 different people</i> <i>9/11/23 from 2 different people</i> <i>25/11/23 from 2 different people</i></p> <p>My name is ** and I am a Rutland resident. My address is **. My connection to the Parks is none. I have a deeply held moral belief that education is a basic human right, and it is the responsibility of a civilised society to care for its most vulnerable, which OFSTED recognise the Parks is “outstanding” in so doing.</p> <p>I object to the proposed closure of The Parks on the following grounds: (delete as appropriate).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe that there are children for whom The Parks is an essential provision, because they would simply not be able to cope in mainstream nurseries, even with additional support. T** will have an enormous negative impact on the children themselves, because children will miss out on early intervention which could help their development. • I do not believe that mainstream nurseries have the skills, expertise, experience or facilities in house to meet the needs of highly complex and disabled children, particularly those with significant physical disabilities, who need highly adapted communication environments, extremely small class sizes. • I believe that the cost of supporting these children in mainstream nurseries will cost more than educating them in the Parks, because they will require expensive additional equipment, changes to the environment, and specialist support staff. It will cost the council less to support these children together in a small group in The Parks, where they can share specialised staffing and equipment. • I believe that the evidence is that early intervention for children with SEND is vital, and for some, the intensive, specialist intervention that The Parks can offer them cannot be replicated within mainstream provision. • I do not believe that in the long run, closing The Parks will save council money, as without t** important early, intensive intervention, more children will end up needing specialist schools, which will mean sending even more children out of county to get the support they need.

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- I believe the challenging behaviour that would be seen from disabled children who are struggling to cope in mainstream provision would be distressing both for them and those around them, having a negative impact on everyone, and potentially place all children at risk.
- I believe that for many of these children, they would not be able to form meaningful relationships with their age-peers because their developmental levels are so different. In order not to feel isolated, they need to be with those with similar needs to them.
- I there are children with disabilities who need The Parks because their needs will not be fully met mainstream Reception classes, even those in the DSP and will need specialist provision. If the Parks were kept open, it could be adapted to provide t** provision, and therefore include more children.
- I do not believe that children who need The Parks would be able to access a mainstream curriculum, even if it is highly differentiated, without being isolated and marked out from their peers.
- I believe that within a mainstream environment, they would be included “in name only” in reality leading almost a parallel experience to their mainstream peers, and gaining little if any benefits from being around non-disabled peers.
- I do not think it morally right to reduce specialist provision for the most profoundly disabled and vulnerable children, so that more can be spent on those who’s needs are such that they are able to access mainstream.
- I do not agree that at a time where across the country other counties are building more special school places, that Rutland should be reducing the special school places. I do not understand why Rutland is different to every other county in that it does not have any children who need specialist education in reception.
- I do not accept that all parents with children with the complex needs for which The Parks caters would prefer their children educated in mainstream nurseries or in the designated specialist provision, and I believe in parental choice as per the code of practice.
- I believe that if The Parks closes, more parents will go to tribunal to get specialist provision for their children, which will incur additional legal costs to Rutland County Council.
- I believe that rather than a falling demand for the sort of “outstanding” education The Parks provides, it has instead been made harder and harder for parents to access. For many years, The Parks was oversubscribed, and has accommodated 13 children in the past.
- I do not feel that all the options for making the Parks viable have been fully explored, including but not limited to;
 - o facilitating quicker access for those children who’s needs have not been fully diagnosed
 - o facilitating access for those children with significant needs who have not yet completed the EHCP process
 - o expanding provision to include KS1
 - o using the facilities and staff in the holidays to provide more cost-effective respite care for children with disabilities.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do not think it right that young, highly vulnerable and disabled children should have to be bussed out of county to access specialist support. Aside from their welfare, it is expensive and not environmentally friendly. • At a time when other local authorities are investing in more special school places, I object that Rutland County Council are reducing their provision. <p>I have grave concerns over this proposal – on financial, practical and moral grounds, both for the children and families whom The Parks serves, and the wider community. I therefore object in the strongest possible terms to the proposal, and I urge Rutland County Council in the strongest possible terms to pursue strategies which would make The Parks viable without closing it or reducing the provision that it is able to offer.</p> <p><i>** identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
23	<p>7/11/23 (first representation)</p> <p>I would like to voice my thoughts on the proposal to close The Parks school.</p> <p>To confirm the details as asked in the consultation, my name is **. My relationship to The Parks is an individual who thoroughly believes that the setting should remain open to support our most vulnerable children and provide them with the opportunities and support they need to be successful.</p> <p>To explain my points. Frankly, I believe the proposal to close The Parks is ludicrous and quite honestly discriminatory to some of the YOUNGEST and MOST VULNERABLE children.</p> <p>The consultation stated that The Parks was ‘no longer financially viable’. My question here is, what has been done to MAKE The Parks financially viable?</p> <p>Going back to my discriminatory point. The consultation proposes to send children with SEN of nursery age into ANY nursery. How does this promote inclusion when the sole purpose of The Parks school is to provide a setting for these children to allow them to access education. By putting these children in any given nursery, which are catered for mainstream education, children with SEN will become lost due to the busy, over stimulating and intense environment. The Parks school is catered to provide a nurturing, low arousal environment with staff numbers to support these children. Furthermore, by the closure of The Parks and these children entering other nurseries, other children will miss out due to adult attention needed to be taken away to support these SEN children.</p> <p>My next point would come to the consultation argument of ‘The Parks has been under subscribed’. Firstly, pardon? Who is responsible for providing places for The Parks? The council. Who has not been referring children to The Parks? The council? Who wants to shut The Parks because there are not enough children on role? The council! How on earth does this make sense? Further coming back to my point of, what has the council done to make The Parks financially viable BESIDES turning away children?</p> <p>The Parks is a place where children thrive. They can access their potential. Families of the children are supported. The school is rated Outstanding by OFSTED. Yet the council wants to close it? In the words of the council ‘Special Needs nurseries are increasingly rare across the country’. Okay? Surely that’s even more reason to keep The Parks open!</p> <p>My next point would come to the proposal to put SEN children in any nursery. Aside from saying there are no children that require these special nurseries, that’s ridiculous because</p>

there are. That's not even a discussion point. There are these children, because the council WANTS to put them in a mainstream nursery! It's a contradiction by the council.

The council claims they want to use the money from The Parks closure to support EYFS SEN children. Okay. So nursery age children with SEN get to suffer from this? Really? So the council plans to take from these vulnerable children and make their education worse by taking away their support, taking away their opportunities and taking away their inclusion? The council claims by putting these children in a mainstream nursery is inclusive. How? Because they're together? I, an English man that speaks no other languages, could be put in a room full of Germans, speaking said German, but I wouldn't feel included. I'd feel lost, not have a clue what was being said and almost certainly wouldn't want to go back.

I'd also like to argue the point that Oakham C of E has said they can take children of reception age in the DSP (Designated Specialist Provision). Whilst the school has a classroom and shared access across the school with The Parks, what's to say they can meet the needs of EVERY reception aged child with SEN in the DSP? The offer in The Parks is still different with smaller groups, children of THEIR age and an inclusive curriculum of their age appropriate level. As I'm sure you know, there have been many special schools in the past which have said they can meet needs before 6 months down the line realising actually, that setting is not best for that child. The DSP is an equally fantastic environment which I will take nothing away from, but when there is a class with children aged from 4 to 8, is this really appropriate and inclusive for these children? Or would these 4 year olds be better having their needs met in The Parks with a curriculum more suited to their age, a classroom more tailored to their needs and while children of their age. To me, that says inclusion.

I personally feel there are many, many, many other points to make in support of keeping The Parks from closing. Such as there are no specialist staff in mainstream nurseries to support these children, SEN children having difficulties in accessing a mainstream curriculum or even the argument of 'will t** actually SAVE the council money' due to sending children out of county to have specialist education needs met.

These children don't have a voice for this matter. We are that voice. As someone that was failed by the councils approach to education, I do not, nor will not, lay down and listen to such proposals knowing how many children will suffer from these proposals.

Surely the fact that over 2000 people have signed a petition to keep The Parks from closing and it has even be covered on ITV News is enough evidence to suggest the people of Rutland DO NOT agree with this proposal?

I am more than happy to discuss any of this further should it be needed. However with any luck, the council will come to their sense and realise this idea is ludicrous and discriminatory as previously stated at the beginning of my email.

I would also be incredibly interested to know the number of emails sent to t** proposal with how many are against the closure of The Parks and how many are in favour, which I would assume from the public consultation, the coverage in ITV news and the outcry on social media, would be close to zero.

21/11/23 (second representation)

Thank you. There is one particular comment I would like to address in the consult Q and A. It states there are 11 children under the age of 5 with an EHC. From previous comments the

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	<p>council have said there are NO children that would benefit from The Parks. Surely these children could come to The Parks which would mean they would be OVERSUBSCRIBED.</p> <p>21/11/23 (third representation) I'm very much aware that under 5s refer to nursery and foundation age, but this is still 11 children which COULD access The Parks. You've also just said 'majority'... how much is majority? And majority still isn't ALL. That still leaves some which would benefit from a special education setting.</p> <p>It can be made clearer but regardless of it they are nursery age or foundation age they are still able to attend The Parks, and for some this may be the better option rather than DSP. Whilst the DSP at Oakham C of E is excellent, it isn't suitable for all children just because they have an EHC.</p> <p>** Identifying personal details redacted</p>
24	<p>07/11/23</p> <p>My connection to the Parks is that I have a deeply held moral belief that education is a basic human right, and it is the responsibility of a civilised society to care for its most vulnerable, which OFSTED recognise the Parks is "outstanding" in so doing. I also work in an additional needs school and previously worked in nurseries and I've seen how the importance of existing provisions. Nurseries are not set out to provide support that is being asked of them and private nurseries are still run in a way to make money...something that I fear could get in the way of getting support for the most vulnerable. The parks has also helped ** to thrive in mainstream/special needs schools.</p> <p>I object to the proposed closure of The Parks on the following grounds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I believe that there are children for whom The Parks is an essential provision, because they would simply not be able to cope in mainstream nurseries, even with additional support. This will have an enormous negative impact on the children themselves, because children will miss out on early intervention which could help their development.• I do not believe that mainstream nurseries have the skills, expertise, experience or facilities in house to meet the needs of highly complex and disabled children, particularly those with significant physical disabilities, who need highly adapted communication environments, extremely small class sizes.• I believe that the cost of supporting these children in mainstream nurseries will cost more than educating them in the Parks, because they will require expensive additional equipment, changes to the environment, and specialist support staff. It will cost the council less to support these children together in a small group in The Parks, where they can share specialised staffing and equipment.• I believe that the evidence is that early intervention for children with SEND is vital, and for some, the intensive, specialist intervention that The Parks can offer them cannot be replicated within mainstream provision.• I do not believe that in the long run, closing The Parks will save council money, as without this important early, intensive intervention, more children will end up needing specialist schools, which will mean sending even more children out of county to get the support they need.

- I believe the challenging behaviour that would be seen from disabled children who are struggling to cope in mainstream provision would be distressing both for them and those around them, having a negative impact on everyone, and potentially place all children at risk.
- I believe that for many of these children, they would not be able to form meaningful relationships with their age-peers because their developmental levels are so different. In order not to feel isolated, they need to be with those with similar needs to them.
- I believe there are children with disabilities who need The Parks because their needs will not be fully met mainstream Reception classes, even those in the DSP and will need specialist provision. If the Parks were kept open, it could be adapted to provide this provision, and therefore include more children.
- I do not believe that children who need The Parks would be able to access a mainstream curriculum, even if it is highly differentiated, without being isolated and marked out from their peers.
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- I do not think it morally right to reduce specialist provision for the most profoundly disabled and vulnerable children, so that more can be spent on those who’s needs are such that they are able to access mainstream.
- I do not agree that at a time where across the country other counties are building more special school places, that Rutland should be reducing the special school places. I do not understand why Rutland is different to every other county in that it does not have any children who need specialist education in reception.
- I do not accept that all parents with children with the complex needs for which The Parks caters would prefer their children educated in mainstream nurseries or in the designated specialist provision, and I believe in parental choice as per the code of practice.
- I believe that if The Parks closes, more parents will go to tribunal to get specialist provision for their children, which will incur additional legal costs to Rutland County Council.
- I believe that rather than a falling demand for the sort of “outstanding” education The Parks provides, it has instead been made harder and harder for parents to access. For many years, The Parks was oversubscribed, and has accommodated 13 children in the past.
- I do not feel that all the options for making the Parks viable have been fully explored, including but not limited to;
 - o facilitating quicker access for those children who’s needs have not been fully diagnosed
 - o facilitating access for those children with significant needs who have not yet completed the EHCP process
 - o expanding provision to include KS1
 - o using the facilities and staff in the holidays to provide more cost-effective respite care for

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	<p>children with disabilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do not think it right that young, highly vulnerable and disabled children should have to be bussed out of county to access specialist support. Aside from their welfare, it is expensive and not environmentally friendly. • At a time when other local authorities are investing in more special school places, I object that Rutland County Council are reducing their provision. <p>I have grave concerns over this proposal – on financial, practical and moral grounds, both for the children and families whom The Parks serves, and the wider community. I therefore object in the strongest possible terms to the proposal, and I urge Rutland County Council in the strongest possible terms to pursue strategies which would make The Parks viable without closing it or reducing the provision that it is able to offer.</p> <p>** Identifying personal details redacted</p>
25	<p>8/11/23</p> <p>I am very sad about the proposed closure of the The Parks School and hope that the plans for this can be reconsidered</p> <p>I used to be a member of staff at The Parks and have seen first hand the difference the specialised staff and environment can make to the children who through no fault of their own need so much more support to find their way in life.</p> <p>I have seen children arrive who were considered to be on the path of special school, make so much progress, cognitively, emotionally and behaviourly, that the need to go go down that path has changed. The early specialised interventions that are put in place can be individual to each child, and adapted quickly if needs be. They are able to be in a safe environment that can cater to behavioural issues without judgement, something that is equally important to parents.</p> <p>Those other children who continue on to Special School obviously have needs beyond what their named primary school could offer so obviously have needs beyond what the usual early years setting can provide. I know that over the years the Early Years settings have vastly improved with coping with children with additional needs but The Parks is a place for those children who may well have been down that route and it hasn't worked or whose needs are more extreme from the beginning.</p> <p>The parents also receive the support and understanding that The Parks gives which is invaluable to them. They are able to get advice at a time when life may be incredibly stressful, at a time when they may well be grieving for the child, the life, the future that they had envisaged for their child and family. There they are given hope without judgement, not always easy to find.</p> <p>I find it hard to believe that there you feel there are insufficient children to warrant keeping this amazing school available to those who need it. We saw many times in the past numbers at the start of a school year drop but within a few weeks new children arriving and suddenly been up to full capacity.</p> <p>This school is about community, supporting those families who need more for their child than they could ever have expected and certainly did not wish for .The opportunity of receiving</p>

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	<p>what The Parks can offer can, or could, be the make or break factor to those families staying together and their mental health as only people who have been in that situation, and to a degree those who work with those families, can fully understand. I hope the people making this decision can put their hand on their heart and say that if this unique and fantastic resource - The Parks School -is to close that they are sure that the alternative for these families will as good if not better for those that need it.</p> <p>Its one of those things, who never know who that will be but I know if it was any of my family, or friends family who found themselves in that situation, it The Parks that I would want them to go to.</p> <p>Sometime we just need to look at what is the right thing to do, not allowing money to dictate and how we should to be a caring supporting world.</p>
26	<p>8/11/23</p> <p>In terms of my relationship to The Parks I do not have one however I do work in Early years within Rutland.</p> <p>I object to the proposed closure of The Parks on the following grounds:</p> <p>For me as an early years professional I recognise the need to be inclusive but when speaking about children with complex needs it is not always possible to give them the best education in a mainstream environment that does not have access to appropriate facilities or specialist training. In terms of mainstream nurseries and other early years settings taking on what the Council proposes is no children (there are children that need The Parks school but the council is ignoring that) I do not feel it is feasible given the strain the Early Years sector is under and the massive recruitment issue that is happening locally – many of the local nurseries already do not have enough staff so how will they be able to provide children with complex needs the level of care they require and frankly deserve. Not only is my concern to do with lack of staff it is also lack of funding how will nurseries and other early years settings cover the cost of providing for a child or multiple children with complex needs when as a council you are already decreasing funds for SEND children. I do not believe that in the long run, closing The Parks will save council money, as without this important early, intensive intervention, more children will end up needing specialist schools, which will mean sending even more children out of county to get the support they need. It is not fair to families of these children or the children that the council is considering shipping these young children off to other counties. On that point it is neither cost effective to do so or environmentally friendly.</p> <p>As someone that has worked with a child with complex needs and someone who currently works in the early years I believe the evidence is that early intervention for children with SEND is vital, and for some, the intensive, specialist intervention that The Parks can offer them cannot be replicated within mainstream provision. I am also concerned that the challenging behaviour that would be seen from disabled children who are struggling to cope in mainstream provision would be distressing both for them and those around them, having a negative impact on everyone, and potentially place all children at risk. I equally do not agree that all parents want their children in mainstream as they themselves know that is not in the best interests of the child but where will they go if The Parks is closed.</p> <p>From what I have heard I think the council has been avoiding and delaying children having access to The Parks meaning that it looks to outsiders like no child in Rutland need The Parks however that is categorically incorrect and through talking to other early years providers I know of at least 50% of the space the parks provide would be full in 2024. At a time when other local authorities are investing in more special school places, I object that Rutland County Council are reducing their provision.</p>

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	<p>Have any of the council members in charge of this decision even spoken to families and spent any time caring for these children? (you claim you have spoken to families and early years settings but I am yet to see evidence of you doing so efficiently and as an early years provider in your county I can confirm that I have not been spoken to).</p> <p>I have grave concerns over this proposal – on financial, practical and moral grounds, both for the children and families whom The Parks serves, and the wider community. I therefore object in the strongest possible terms to the proposal, and I urge Rutland County Council in the strongest possible terms to pursue strategies which would make The Parks viable without closing it or reducing the provision that it is able to offer.</p>
27	<p>8/11/23</p> <p>It would seem that as a council. There is some very short sighted people proposing an agenda that they have no idea of. The need for the parks is still as great as ever if only you allowed them to run to capacity.</p> <p>As a former manager and senco of a main stream nursery that has offered lots of care for SEN children the parks offers care and education for children that cannot access main stream or if they do will be lost and unhappy due to the nature of how mainstream settings run in comparison. Having fought to get children places and EHCPs for the parks and offering dual placements. The best education and care these children got was most definitely with the parks and not my own setting. The curriculum they used was more tailor made to their needs which are diverse. We offered excellent parent support and care but the parks offered something beyond that.</p> <p>Staff are highly knowledgeable in mainstream but not always trained to the extent of those in the parks which will in the longrun have a detrimental effect on children.</p> <p>It will also have a knock on effect of the care offered to all the other children in the setting if staff are pulled away from their care and education.</p> <p>The parks is definitely an asset to the county and if allowed to run properly should be attracting children. Why spend money sending them out of country, costing even more when they can access the parks and hopefully filter into oakham c of e dsp unit. Saving money.</p> <p>I hope that all the views of those that actually know, are taken into consideration.</p>
28	<p>10/11/23</p> <p>As a teacher with 50 years' experience in special education, I write to express my deep concern following the news of the proposed closure of the Parks School. You cannot be unaware of the growing need for special education provision in the UK and of the long-term implications for children, their families and wider society entailed by any loss or reduction of such.</p> <p>Rutland should be at the forefront of creating more opportunities for children who have additional needs, rather than curtailing their life chances. It is incomprehensible that this retrograde step is being taken at a time of heightened understanding of the importance of special education and that this irreplaceable school faces closure.</p> <p>Rutland simply cannot afford to lose this dedicated specialist school. I urge everyone involved in this decision to carefully weigh the consequences and avoid the harm and distress that will inevitably follow the loss of the Parks School.</p>
29	<p>12/11/23</p> <p>My connection to the Parks is that my ** children are at the Oakham C of E School. We chose the school partly because of the Federation with The Parks School: we suspected that one of</p>

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my children might need additional support due to global developmental delays, and we knew that there was a wealth of expertise in SEN at the Federation.

I personally object to the proposed closure of The Parks on the following grounds: I believe that there are children for whom The Parks is an essential provision, because they would thrive in mainstream nurseries, even with additional support. Effective early intervention with SEN is crucial and I think the closure would remove that opportunity for children. Mainstream nurseries do not have the skills, expertise, experience or facilities in-house to support children with complex needs, whether cognitive, behavioural and/or physical. For instance, mainstream nurseries cannot provide very small group sizes or specifically adapted environments.

There is a non-negligible risk to the wellbeing and safety of non-SEN children, and staff, in the mainstream nurseries because staff will not be able to manage behavioural issues of some children with SEN which can manifest in physical or verbal abuse of other children and adults. It is clear that nurseries are already suffering from chronic underfunding, and most barely surviving financially. I do not think The Parks' budget, spread thinly across these settings, would be enough to remedy this. I am concerned that the extra pressure would harm staff, increasing staff turnover, and might tip nurseries into financial non-viability.

It seems to me morally wrong to reduce specialist provision for the most profoundly disabled and vulnerable children, so that more can be spent on those whose needs are lesser such that they are able to access mainstream education. It also seems morally wrong to remove parents' choice to explore specialist, non-mainstream support for their child(ren).

I doubt that the economic evaluation has accounted properly for the cost of supporting eligible children to the same standard as offered by The Parks, if these children are spread across a number of mainstream nurseries, especially with upfront costs of equipment and adaptations to facilities, plus funding specialist support staff. It seems likely that The Parks closure may incur costs to health and social care and more widely at a later stage in these children's lives because they have been denied the appropriate level of early intervention. For example, if children later need to be transported out of county to specialist schools.

** Identifying personal details redacted

30 13/11/23

I am currently **. During this time I have been able to work with numerous children with special educational needs and disabilities, as well as being able to offer support to their families.

As mentioned by the council 'there are very few examples of this type of provision elsewhere in the country' - surely this is something that Rutland should be proud of and ensure the continuation of The Parks.

I have been able to see the importance of this school and the huge benefit for our young children starting their educational journey. They are able to access play and learning in a much quieter environment which is best suited to their individual needs, which then enables them to make good progress. Not all young children are able to thrive in busy noisy environments. Surely all children, including our youngest and those with special educational needs and disabilities deserve the best possible start to their education.

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	<p>Although no nursery age children are presently attending this setting, there are, and will be children currently attending nurseries around the county who would greatly benefit from attending The Parks School.</p> <p>Surely Rutland County Council should continue to provide this much needed special nursery provision which the whole county can be proud to support. Do not make the mistake of losing this facility and all that it offers to our children and families in the community now and for those to come in the future.</p> <p><i>** Identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
31	<p>14/11/23</p> <p>First of all I would just like to say I am not a resident of Rutland but of Melton Mowbray however I know families in Rutland as I have ** Send Children who attend Birch Wood School.</p> <p>Your proposal to shut The Parks School is shocking to me as a parent, it is such a huge support to families who have a child with SEND with no or little support, as we all know the purse string for support are extremely limited.</p> <p>My story in Melton, which I doubt is unusual country wide, is that I have a now **year old child with autism and Global Development Delay and PICA. ** started at a mainstream pre-school when he was 2. ** cried every day for the whole time **was there - for 4 months. Eventually the pre school asked me not to bring **back any more! At this time there was also no SEND pre school provision in Melton **could attend either. As a parent it is soul destroying knowing there is nowhere to place your child where they will be happy and safe. I mean surely they have the right to learn like every other child! This will now be the reality for all the families now and in the future in Rutland.</p> <p>The emphasis at Rutland council worryingly seems to be on getting SEND children into mainstream education, where I'm afraid for many young people this is just not appropriate, each child should be given the education they deserve. I'm so thankful my** are having a fantastic education that is catered exactly around their needs in a calm setting, not just dumped in a loud mainstream because it's cheaper and closer to home.</p> <p>Poor Rutland children. I hope in time like the rest of the UK you will be decided to invest in SEND provision, not take it away.</p> <p><i>** Identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
32	<p>17/11/23</p> <p>I have been aware of the plans for closure for some time, and I have a clear understanding of the funding issues that we as a council face, however whilst we have a great school offering it would appear that this decision to close fails to consider several important points</p> <p>Where will those children that clearly can't manage in main stream go and at what financial cost</p> <p>What will the impact to the children having to travel? What is our role for children? It should be to give the best start in life?</p> <p>What is the impact on the wider family, financially, mentally, and socially?</p> <p>Long term costs balance against short term saving does this make sense?</p> <p>Who are we here to support the SEND side of school is at braking point, not enough capacity to help in early years, not enough capacity in secondary school, I know students who have travelled all the way through our schooling system and gone onto University for them to be</p>

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	<p>diagnosed with Dyslexia, what would have been the outcome if we had the support in place earlier?</p> <p>Are we failing a few to make ends meet? Are we making the route in to complicated? EHCP's hoops to get through.</p> <p>If we expanded the offer and had children from neighboring areas could it be better use of funds?</p> <p>Please think very carefully about the reasons and if we save some money will this be put back into the system to train additional staff to support those displaced, to enable them to thrive in a main stream setting, support them with all needs dietary, educationally and emotionally.</p>
33	<p>17/11/23</p> <p>I am writing to you to express my concerns over the recent decision to close Parks School.</p> <p>We have moved to Oakham in **, therefore we are a new resident in the area. Our reason for moving to this area was to be specifically in the blue light zone for Leicester Royal Hospital, there are two articles written about us, one explaining how severe our previous county was lacking the understanding, knowledge and resources for our **</p> <p>The reasons I am writing to you as a mother of a child with additional needs is that we have fought ** entire life to achieve support for ** and ourselves. We've upped and moved our lives not once, but twice having to live in London just to ensure **gets the right healthcare which actually in turn, saved ** life. Dare I say it, mine too. There is no way I'd of coped having a baby born that was unable to survive due to lack of quick thinking and proper healthcare. As a mother who has frantically and tirelessly fought to ensure we have the right support around us I am devastated to hear that a school ** would have know doubt of been going too is now closing.</p> <p>We moved here under the circumstances that we could sleep easy knowing we had the resources to ensure a smooth and safe upbringing of **after the hideous start we had to being SEN parents.</p> <p>Parks school is just a short walk away from our business which we have also upped and moved to Oakham. Our entire life has been moved here after research and deep thought into this huge risk we made as a family. To hear that this school is closing when ** could have gone here is something of a disaster in our eyes. As a mother who has seen ** fight for her life not once, but three times. I could have relaxed about her being in a safe and understanding setting just around the corner from me whilst I work.</p> <p>We are business owners in Oakham and also residents, we have specifically moved here to access what we felt was a fantastic school for ** along with the amazing healthcare we receive in this postal code.</p> <p>We cannot see this school close without showing you our need for the place to remain open. I need the support with **, I need ** to be safe and cared for in an environment in which ** can be equal.</p> <p>Somebody with ** goes their entire life being looked at, stared at, discriminated against, ignored so much so there are many documentaries on television about it. Discriminating facts such as "do not resuscitate" notes being put on their medical files should they ever get the super strains Covid-19. From the moment of them being in the womb, they are disregarded by humankind as "abnormalities"</p>

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	<p>I am just about sick and tired of people, those of whom disregard this school as no longer important in the community and suggest to close it. It is SO needed. Non of us know when we may have a child with additional needs, it just happens sometimes. You could have a perfectly smooth pregnancy and birth of a child to later uncover they need special care. These are our family, our friends and not just my kid, this can happen to anybody around us which is why this school is the most important school in the community because it is community.</p> <p>I have recently seen a ridiculous article in the Stamford news about Rutlands council giving away FREE bus rides to encourage Christmas shopping over the month of December, is that a waste of money that could of been used to save this school? Budgets can't be that tight.</p> <p>What disgusts me is that parks school has an outstanding ofsted report, they are the rarest reports to find!!! What peace it would have brought me to of sent my daughter here.</p> <p>** We are working on ** EHCP as we speak. I work three days a week, deducting our nanny's wage from my own salary so I know ** is safe and looked after. ** cannot go to a mainstream nursery, we tried. ** managed four days before we were blue lighted to A&E at midnight, ** had contracted three viruses. Common colds and a sick bug. Typical children would fight this off naturally, yet I sit with ** in a&e alone - my new baby at home with ** dad, I sit there and I remember the rushed mothers taking their kids to nursery full of colds and flus, thinking nothing of it because they have to work.</p> <p>** The reason parks school differs is because all of the parents are aware of these extra needs, they know some kids are more vulnerable than others. Teachers are trained to notice when ** is unwell, they know to call me and don't put it off because I'm at work and nursery is just childcare. Nursery is not childcare to me, nursery is an essential developmental help to **. It's a requirement that we go to work to earn money back from the costs of ** healthcare as a baby, funding the hotels ourselves in London as the hospital would only accommodate **.</p> <p>We have fought since the moment we became aware that our unborn baby had special needs and we will fight until the end for her. We are exhausted.</p> <p>** Identifying personal details redacted</p>
34	<p>17/11/23</p> <p>I am disgusted hear that you are closing the school when there is a great need and children are being turned away saying that it will be closed before it is ratified!! Think of the effect on the children and also the parents who need the support. I think this should be a top priority. Have you actually been directly involved and actually seen what these families have to cope with every day?? Yours Prayerfully</p>
35	<p>17/11/23</p> <p>Thank you for allowing me to comment on the proposal to close the Parks School in Oakham. My qualification to speak **</p> <p>I note the statements regarding the reasonings for the closure and consider these to be fundamentally flawed by error and manipulation of facts, and that therefore the proposal is not valid.</p> <p>That the school is not needed due to lower numbers on the role. This figure has been manipulated by officers. Officers have made conscious and publicly obvious efforts to discourage parents and carers from applying for places at the school. This is not “urban myth” – parents have come forward to state that this is the case and that they have been placed</p>

under firm and improper pressure to not apply for thi school for their children. It is anticipated that a number of those affected will contribute to this “consultation”. This may have been because of failing to fully understand the forthcoming guidance (some of which is quoted at the end of this contribution).

That it is right to share the SEN funding equitably between children. **This is a nonsense in principle** as children have varying levels and types of need which will require varying types and degrees of support. As such it will never be possible to have equitable distribution of SEN funding – unless some children are given more care than they need, and some are left to suffer less care than they need. Is this what RCC is proposing to do?

That each child “costs” £30k compared to £12 k elsewhere. **This figure is a misrepresentation of fact and impact.** **A, The fact** is that by discouraging numbers on the role the fixed overheads have had to be shared between a smaller number of children thereby creating the impression that the cost per child “must be” so high. This figure has only been reached by the improper pressure placed on parents and carers to not apply – thereby reducing numbers on the role thereby increasing average fixed cost per child. This is entirely a matter of officers’ own making and is not implicit in the running of the special school. Increasing numbers on the role will reduce the average cost per child (it is noted that variable costs rise on a stepped basis dependant on carer-per-child ratio requirements). **B The impact** of closing the school will not “save” £18k per child as the proposal might be read as implying. The truth is that all the fixed costs of the school will remain and will be carried by another budget. It is further the case that those children who cannot be supported in mainstream settings (and it is a known as fact that such children exist withing Rutland) will have to be transported out of County at the Council’s cost to settings that are distant from the children’s family and support networks. Transporting children out-of-county is already a serious budget issue for the council, and closing the Parks School will only exacerbate that problem with further increased costs.

That OFSTED will not issue an “outstanding” verdict in Rutland if this proposal does not go forward. I refer in this matter to the SEN and alternative provision improvement plan March 2023 which is quoted below. Ignoring for a moment the loss of confidence in OFSTED which appears to be in disarray – **the responsibility of the Council is to ensure best outcomes for the children** for whom it is responsible. The matter of how that is graded by an outside body is at best a moot point, being an indicator only and not being the objective of any policy. The best outcomes for our children must be the overarching measure of the policies that go forward rather than pleasing third parties.

That all children should be in mainstream settings. I refer again to the SEN and alternative provision improvement plan March 2023 which is quoted below .**Implicit in this is the word “inclusive” The leader of the council has used the word “integrated” This IS NOT THE WORD USED BY GOVERNMENT.** Children at the Parks School already meet the requirement as they are treated in an inclusive way attending both assemblies and performances and other events as applicable to them. Children from the C of E school are encouraged to engage with children at the Parks School. It is appreciated t** was not found to be the case in all (or indeed many) schools that were visited as part of the initial research for the report, however the failing of other schools should not impact on the Parks School and the Oakham C of E School which have successfully created t** “inclusion” partnership as required under forthcoming guidance.

Summary: Officers have made a clear, obvious and concerted effort to “run down:” the Parks School by pressuring parents and carers to not apply. This may be a result of misinterpretation of the forthcoming guidance This has manipulated the figures for attendance and thereby the average cost per head. This is easily reversible by keeping the Parks School open and increasing the number on the role - this would be in the best interest

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	<p>of children now and in the future by giving the greatest opportunity to achieve best outcomes - which should be the over-riding objective of the Council. As it happens this is likely in the best interest of the Council by avoiding further pressure on the transport costs to out-of-county placements.</p> <p>SEN and alternative provision improvement plan March 2023 Para 11 page 8 For children and young people, this means they will be able to access and regularly attend the most appropriate early years setting, school or college for their needs – <i>be this mainstream or specialist</i></p> <p>Para 13 Page 8 <u>Critically, we agree with what we heard during the consultation; that the national system should be co-produced with families, children and young people so we can build their confidence that the system will meet their needs quickly and effectively</u></p> <p>Para 21 page 11 Longer-term placements to support return mainstream (question – how do you have long term placements if you close the alternative provision?)</p> <p>Annexe C page 96 Alternative provision taskforces will help deliver wraparound support in alternative provision in schools <u>(question - so why close it if it is in the guidance?)</u></p> <p>Online reference https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63ff39d28fa8f527fb67cb06/SEND_and_alternative_provision_improvement_plan.pdf accessed 17/11/2023</p>
36	<p>18/11/23</p> <p>This must be the most stupid badly thought out proposal you ever came up with.</p> <p>Clearly you have no idea how difficult it is for a child with SEN, physical or mental disability or other complex needs to cope with even going to a "normal" nursery or a "normal" school.</p> <p>I remind you that the Parks looked after children born to military nurses & serving military who had served in Iraq - BABIES BORN WITH NO EYES !</p> <p>Im old enough to remember babies born victims of thalidomide. How do you expect a child with no limbs to attend "normal" nursery or "normal" school? Just because thalidomide stopped being used does not stop disabled children being born.</p> <p>Then you have babies brain damaged at birth. Really - go to "normal" nursery? Go to "normal" school? or the staff at this place have proper training to deal with a child who is not just doubly incontinent but also terrified of loud noises i.e other children !</p> <p>Then you have children on the "so-called" spectrum and that usually means not able to cope with crowds, loud noises, bright lights etc. Oh and other children ! These are children who may be highly intelligent but also totally unable to do "normal" things and may go fetal under a table or bang their head against a wall just to shut out the noise they</p>

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	<p>can hear that most people cant hear - or pick up chemical smells form people that make them fearful, upset, anxious.</p> <p>If they dont get the right care and the right support physically & mentally they will grow up to be depressed suicidal and worse.</p> <p>And you insane people think that the current teachers can provide all this extra care when schools are already oversubscribed & you keep giving permissionfor more new houses attracting more people with kids who need mainstream school ND SPECIAL SCHOOLS like The Parks.</p> <p>Go away and think PROPERLY and find the money to keep open this vital asset.</p> <p>And YES ** with autism is suicidal due to not getting proper support in secondary school of college. And due to not finding out ** dyslexia problem until ** was ** & then having that only done PRIVATELY !</p> <p><i>** Identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
37	<p>18/11/23 <i>Personal details only provided</i></p>
38	<p>19/11/23</p> <p>I have worked in the parks and have since moved to another area of the country and have worked in several other SEND provisions - NOTHING like the parks, The parks is by far the best place and does the best work with the children they have. I saw more results from the children in the parks than I have seen in any other early years setting for children with SEND.</p> <p>If you choose to close (the wrong choice) the parks school you will be closing the best provision you have for SEND children.</p> <p>For a council with no other SEND provision to be closing the only provision they have is Despicable ! If only there could be other parks all over the country.</p> <p>You should be using it as a place to set the standards for SEND early years provisions.</p>
39	<p>20/11/23</p> <p>I wish to add my name to the closure of The Parks School. I have no one who attends the school but I urge not to close it. I became aware of it by handing of leaflets outside Tesco store in Oakham. Please don't shut it.</p>
40	<p>20/11/23</p> <p>I am emailing you to express my concern over the proposal to integrate Parks School into a state Primary School.</p> <p>** worked at the Parks School for over 20 years and I find it difficult to believe there is not a need for a school for children with special needs.</p> <p>From the Warnock Report onwards, there have been cries to integrate special need children into main stream education and these children have suffered as a result.</p> <p><i>** Identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
41	<p>21/11/23 <i>Received via text</i></p> <p>I think the parks is so important because the little ones need their lovely friendship to be with friends feel safe and be happy friendship is important and a mainstream setting could be terrible children who are disabled or autistic often get bullied and don't have any friends</p>

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	<p>That happened to me as little girl when I was with mainstream children in the 1980s and I don't want it to happen to children today because it still does I've seen little girl left out at mainstream school it's horrible the parks school was the only one I felt safe in at that time please don't take it away from them they will have no Friends and get bullied possibly please listen</p> <p>I'm also concerned as to what happens to children with disability when they are too old to go to the parks as it now only goes up to five years old I am concerned that there are too many children struggling in mainstream schools and classes it breaks my heart to see a child being bullied or just playing by themselves in a corner or wandering around because they have no friends I have learning disabilities and anxiety and that happened to me as a little girl and it still seems to be happening to kids now having a teacher sit next to you in class isn't much good when you are out in the playground getting ignored or called names it's just so cruel and it doesn't seem to be going away sorry but please listen</p>
42	<p>21/11/23</p> <p>Having spent my professional career in Early Years Training and now, retired and living in Oakham, I note with interest your consultation on the Parks School. The residents of Rutland obviously have a very special facility here for children with extreme special needs. The Ofsted rating reflects the expertise of the staff and the progress of the children in their care. It also reflects the value of a beautiful modern purpose-built building, including the facility of a swimming pool and the ability for the children to be in contact with students from the adjoining Primary School.</p> <p>Even though the present children will not be affected, I feel it would be a great mistake to lose this facility for future children in our county.</p> <p>I do appreciate, however, that we must live in the real world and that, particularly at this time, cost is one of the core elements that RCC cannot disregard. As I understand it, at present the school is under used being only attended by 2 children. I imagine that the criteria for getting into the school is quite specific, with children probably needing to be statemented before being allotted a place. This is often a slow process for families and statements are not lightly given.</p> <p>There are, however, many children in the county who have special needs integrated into our primary schools.</p> <p>Is there some way of redefining the remit of the Parks School so that it can cater for a wider range of children, perhaps on a sessional basis?</p> <p>Is there a possibility of widening the scope of the staff as a support system for staff in mainstream education who educate children with diverse needs?</p> <p>As there are only 6 nursery schools of this type in the county, could spare places be offered to out-of-county children to make use of the school and staff and provide extra income for RCC?</p> <p>Over the past few years, and especially with the pandemic, children and their education seem to have suffered adversely. Even though the general population of Rutland is on the older side I think it is very important to prioritise the needs of the young and future generations.</p> <p>I have no links with the Park School.</p>

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43	<p><i>21/11/23 phone call</i></p> <p>It wont affect me as my children and grandchildren are grown up but I am worried about where these children will go. We seem to be losing all our education for those who are not academic.</p>
44	<p><i>21/11/23</i></p> <p>I was horrified to learn that RCC is proposing the closure of The Parks Special School in Oakham.</p> <p>This school’s status has been granted Outstanding by Ofsted and serves local children who cannot be integrated easily into mainstream state nursery and primary schools in Oakham.</p> <p>With regard to RCC’s objectives as outlined in your Corporate Strategy, it states you fully support equality, diversity and inclusion.</p> <p><i>Quote:</i> <i>Young people of all abilities will have the benefit of a positive and inclusive education, so that they can learn, do well and realise their ambitions.</i></p> <p><i>Rutland will be a county where everyone can reach their full potential.</i></p> <p>How can you, therefore, justify closing The Parks School?</p> <p>Those children certainly will NOT be reaching their full potential if they have to travel further away from their homes or integrate into other state schools. They would NOT be catered for as you state in your Corporate Strategy -the need for inclusive education- this is best provided for by the school they currently attend, which is outstanding.</p> <p>Is it simply a matter of funding? If so it would be really interesting for Rutlanders to know how much we are spending on the salaries of the Chief Executive and Senior Staff at RCC.</p> <p>Maybe a cut in salaries to help local children with SEN, complex needs and disabilities would be a solution?</p> <p>I would welcome your comments.</p>
45	<p><i>21/11/23</i></p> <p>My husband and I have lived at this address for ** years. I have been grateful to have had no personal family need for what the Parks offers but over time as a local I have heard of families whose young children and parents have been supported by the school. We are now all aware of the importance of care for the first years of a child's life and while main stream primary schools have certainly developed their knowledge of youngsters with extra special needs in order to help them, I believe the Parks School must offer that little bit extra for these sensitive children. I am sure the Parks School should survive.</p>
46	<p><i>22/11/23</i></p> <p>Please register my disquiet at the proposed closure of the Parks special needs school, which has been of enormous benefit to Rutlanders who need that specialised schooling over many many years.</p>

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	<p>I have no relationship, past or present, with the school other than as a concerned citizen of Rutland. The county I moved to when I was ** and am now ** – nearly a local. But I am aware of several old pupils of The Parks who benefited greatly from its presence and availability. Please reconsider the proposal to close.</p>
47	<p>22/11/23 I am writing to object to the closure of the Parks School.</p> <p>It is an essential school for children with many developmental disorders who would simply not cope in mainstream education.</p> <p>If one were to look solely at the financial implication of running such a school then, logically it should be expanded to facilitate taking on older children who are failing in mainstream education facilities who too have developmental disorders, surely out of area referrals would create a financial gain? from nearby councils, such as South Kesteven, Melton Mowbray. I appreciate that the correct numbers of staffing would need to be factored in with the necessary skill set, however surely a national call for suitable educators could be found? Rutland being a very attractive place to live.</p> <p>Please rethink this short sighted closure plan.</p>
48	<p>22/11/23 (first representation)</p> <p>Where do I even begin with my response to the consultation ... I'll start with my personal story for context.</p> <p>** was diagnosed with a rare genetic condition at the age of ** years & ** months, the geneticist said the main thing we could do to help our ** was early intervention to help ** reach ** potential, whatever that potential may be.</p> <p>**</p> <p>We had a lovely health visitor in Rutland who was extremely supportive and saw **- ** suggested we stop comparing ** to other children as it was not helpful and I can't thank her enough for that kindness. Our inclusion officer tried to push us to put ** into a mainstream nursery setting, when I asked if any nurseries were fully trained on makaton the response was that some of them should at least know some - would you drop an Italian child into a uk nursery and just expect them to be ok? No! I also wasn't happy that they would be able to give ** the medical or emotional support that ** needed to be safe. No mention was made of The Parks School. So we stayed at home and accessed baby groups when we could.</p> <p>It took a few months for me to be convinced to go to sunflowers support group as I wasn't sure we would fit in - I adore ** just as ** is but it can be difficult as a new parent to accept that your child is different and the future is very different to what you expected. It was at sunnies that a parent told me her son was at The Parks School and it was actually in the same building. The Speech and language therapist who supported us because of my **regular choking suggested that the parks would be perfect for ** - **would get all the early intervention he needed including regular speech therapy to try to help him eventually speak.</p> <p>Sunflowers arranged for me to speak with the Senco, we then arranged to have a visit to the school and on that visit we just knew it was the right place **</p> <p>**started part-time at The Parks ** and it became apparent that ** needed a huge amount of adult support and a personalised transition plan to gradually increase **hours, fitting this around operations and recovery times.</p>

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The Parks team are amazing. They really cared for ** and also for us as a family. We knew ** was safe there and that staff would contact us if there were any concerns. When you have a child with a disability who is preverbal and needs constant 1:1 attention it's very difficult to find anyone able to take care of them, so not only did The Parks look after **, but because we knew ** was safe it meant we could actually relax a little and essentially have some respite - which was very much needed given how he doesn't like to sleep!

The Parks team are quite frankly remarkable. They didn't just look after ** they cared for ** and helped ** to flourish in ways we didn't dream possible. We always felt so involved with everything at school and loved seeing photos and hearing the stories of things they'd been doing. I still laugh at the thought of ** sticking green play doh on ** keyworkers face and trying to say bogeys.

We can never thank them enough for everything they did not only for our gorgeous ** but also for us as a family. The support they gave me saved me on many occasions. I remember a staff member running out to the car park to check I was ok after drop off because they thought I looked upset .. they really do go above and beyond for the whole family.

If it hadn't have been for The Parks ** wouldn't have attended nursery, instead we would have been trying all the interventions on our own at home until he was old enough to look for a specialist placement out of county. The parks helped us secure an EHCP, then developed ** confidence and abilities to such a degree that ** was able to stay at a specialist unit attached to a mainstream primary where he lives.

Without the early support from The Parks team ** wouldn't have coped in the unit. ** now has friends he can see out of school and feels like part of ** community. I worry more about ** options for secondary school as that is where our county seems to be lacking for SEN children sadly.

The support we received from The Parks and a local support group had such an impact on our lives **. I find it very difficult to put into words just what The Parks means to my family as it has so many feelings uattached to it, it became like a second family to us and we will be forever grateful to them.

From a financial viewpoint ** I fully understand the need to balance the books. However, what is being proposed by RCC doesn't do this long term. Had The Parks school not been there for ** he would have gone straight to an out of county special school when he was old enough - so the council has saved lots of money on expensive out of county specialist primary age placement and transport costs.

The proposal to close The Parks looks like a short term gain to satisfy the Delivering Better Value project. It has been stated in the proposal that closing The Parks isn't about money.

On one hand RCC say the money saved on The Parks will be spread amongst the other settings to improve inclusivity, yet on the Q&As it states '£250,719 - This money will not be taken away from the school but will be used to enhance the offer at Oakham Primary School. This will be done by increasing the number of places in the school's Designated Special Provision (DSP) from September 2024'

So which is it?

Are RCC really going to pay the DSP £250,719 to extend by 4 spaces? Or is this another error.

Also, at the last early years working group meeting it was stated towards the end of the meeting that due to the improvements implemented so far there were no gaps to be seen except for communication - so if there are no gaps why take the money from The Parks to put into other nurseries or the DSP? (depending which line it is).

I am considering resigning from the early years and inclusion collaboration working groups for a number of reasons.

Reason 1 - The staff at the early years group kept raving on about how successful the SSP is and when a colleague of mine raised a family we are aware of that it isn't working for it was brushed under the carpet.

I am now personally having to support this family who's ** is on the verge of being excluded from a 2nd mainstream primary school to apply for an ehcp themselves. The current school has told them to look at alternative and specialist school provisions but without an ehcp they cannot get a space at a specialist school! The process is 20 weeks so what are they supposed to do in the meantime. An ehcp should have been applied for long ago, this child is in year ** and he was known to be struggling since nursery so why is it taking so long to actually help the children who desperately need it?

The family as a whole are suffering due to RCC letting them down. **

RCCs decisions have a huge impact on families not just the child with SEN and you are currently letting them down. The SSP is being used to look more 'attractive' than an ehcp therefore punishing families who actually need help and support. We are told that the nurture nest is only for children with attachment and trauma issues - what about the school based trauma you are inflicting on the children by forcing them to stay in the wrong environment. It is great to hear of the SSP successes and the children it is helping, but it needs to be recognised that the current system isn't working for everyone.

Reason 2 - at the 'Working together to support children and young people with SEND' event in April the group identified 4 initial areas to look at/improve on - collectively parents, RCC & other professionals.

1. Review of the Aiming High Short Breaks Criteria
2. How do we ensure good Early Years provision for all?
3. Special school provision
4. Ensuring all school staff have the skills to identify and support neurodiverse children and young people.

1&2 working groups to start June, 3&4 groups to start September.

I'm pretty sure the lack of specialist school provision was priority 1 or 2 based on votes in the in person event in the morning. And it wasn't just parents who voted for it. At the last early years group I asked why the meetings on the lack of specialist provision hadn't started yet as they were due to start in September.

The answer I got was

'Well it's never going to happen is it!' .. leaving me gobsmacked!

Then 'It's not on the political agenda' & 'nobody is building new specialist provisions'

So basically the working together only happens on the topics RCC want to work on and they ignore the other ones identified in collaboration?

I honestly feel so disappointed and for want of a better term let down. I genuinely wanted to work with the council to improve things for SEN children and families but when collaboration

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is a lie and just being used as a tick box to say 'we are working with parents' it is just not acceptable.

Reason 3 - at the consultation launch RCC staff member mentioned the collaboration groups and stated that parents had helped work on this pathway (of closing The Parks). However that is completely untrue! RCC staff member reassured the early years group at the meeting before the launch that The Parks proposal had absolutely nothing to do with our group! Apparently ** was supposed to come and apologise to parents at the last meeting however she didn't come and it was left to RCC staff member to apologise who wasn't even at the consultation launch.

The higher levels of RCC SEN staff just seem to not care at all or be completely incompetent.

Per proposal 'More choice and better support closer to home means we can invest more money into mainstream SEND support locally. Rutland's High Needs Funding can then be shared more equally among providers to widen the support available to a greater number of young children, leading to better outcomes for everyone.'

But by taking away The Parks you are giving LESS choice and support. No matter what alterations you propose to make to mainstream nurseries there will always be children that it still isn't suitable for. Where do they go?

If there is no Parks School they will either be at home until they are old enough for school (probably expensive out of county specialist), so not only do they miss out on early intervention and development skills it also means parents are unable to go to work.

Alternatively, they will be in an unsuitable environment causing harm to them and also to other children. Nurseries are struggling for staff and do not have the capacity to support more children with needs. I've been told that parents are already choosing to remove children from nurseries because they have been hurt by a child with needs when they've become dysregulated. Nurseries have already had Senif funding cuts this year so how is RCC giving them more support to help SEN children?

The term increased parental confidence keeps cropping up. A parents confidence has no impact on a child's actual needs, the needs are there no matter how a parent may feel about a setting. Trying to insinuate that parents only want The Parks school or other specialist provision because they are too worried is quite frankly insulting. Parents are the experts on their children and should be respected as such.

RCC staff have stated that all SEN parents just want specialist provision and see an EHCP as a golden ticket! Families want the correct provision to meet their child's needs whatever that might be. I personally want my ** to be educated in an environment where ** feels safe, happy and with ** alike peers, where ** can feel ** own kind of 'normal' and be proud of ** achievements.

Sharing funding equally is a ridiculous aim - children will always have varying needs and therefore need varying amounts of funding and support. Fair isn't everyone getting the same thing, fair is everybody getting what they need in order to be successful. We want children to thrive not just survive!

When ** attended The Parks School ** didn't have an ehcp and there were waiting lists for spaces. The Parks helped us apply for an ehcp - I'm a relatively capable person but as a parent

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I would not have had the thought or capacity to apply for an ehcp when my sleep deprived focus was simply on surviving and keeping my child safe.

The requirement to have an EHCP to access the parks was put in place by RCC subsequently. Expecting parents to sort out an ehcp when they are struggling to come to terms with their child's needs and just trying to survive is both ludicrous and cruel. Especially when RCC is attempting to reduce the number of EHCPs it issues to children. If they can't get an EHCP how can they get a place?

Putting that barrier to entry in has stopped access and reduced numbers - intentionally to run The Parks down to close it?

The Parks also used to take children from out of county. This again was stopped.

The proposal states that RCC are not aware of any children needing The Parks. That is a ridiculous thing to say. Just because RCC are not aware of any children does not mean they do not exist. I am aware of a number of both nursery and school age children who do want to access the provision. I have also been told that a family were told not to consider The Parks because it would be closing - this was a year before the consultation launch! Very naughty!

Yet another family was advised not to consider The Parks this year as there weren't any nursery age children there - the children currently in the parks are aged under 5 and it is a setting that matches the provision to what children need so that is completely irrelevant and demonstrates RCCs intention to put families off using the Setting.

With all of the new housing developments bringing more families into the county there will more than likely be even more children with needs here. Obviously this can not be accurately predicted as a figure but as a common sense approach we know this is likely to be the case, especially when one family even moved to Rutland because of The Parks School.

** (sunflowers) run sessions once a week term time for 2 hours (including a swim in the hydrotherapy pool that was built as part of The Parks relocation) at Oakham C of E. (Sunflowers) are a completely self funded organisation and volunteers have a vast amount of SEN knowledge between them - as SEN parents, the head of the old The Parks school, former nursery school workers etc.

For many families *(sunflowers) are the only respite and support they can access. *(offer them a safe space and the opportunity to talk to others who are in a similar situation. Sunflowers are full and currently have a waiting list of 6 families needing support. We know that some of the families do want to access The Parks School and if councillors wish to speak to these families we are more than happy to ask them.

So the statement that there are no children under 5 with SEN needing The Parks is incorrect, and RCC have been told repeatedly that we are full and have a waiting list so should be aware that there is a need for The Parks.

RCC have made no attempt to make The Parks school viable. As *(involved in the early years pathway, after *(the initial shock of having the future of *(school questioned *(then became excited at the thought of being able to help and support even more families and children. *(came up with ideas of services The Parks could provide if it was not at full capacity (so had less than 7.5 Full time equivalent or 15 part time children on role) such as providing AET training, providing makaton and communication training, providing a portage service, providing a sensory equipment library, supporting nurseries & eyfs settings and

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parents with training on communication/behaviour/anxiety etc, outreach support, nursery staff shadowing sessions etc as stated in the minimum funding guarantee 2022-23 which was agreed on 29/3/22 with RCC.

** spent a huge amount of time and stress investing in the process and made many suggestions on how The Parks could be made viable but everything was ignored as RCC had set their minds on closing The Parks many years ago.

The comment from RCC staff was 'it's an LA school and if we want to close it we will!'

If that was always the intention then why waste all of our time and I dread to think how much money on consultants (that could have been used to help children!). I am frankly disgusted by how the whole thing has been handled.

The Parks community special school has been consistently rated outstanding by Ofsted which is not an easy thing to achieve. This is something that should be celebrated and capitalised on not just written off.

If you owned a restaurant that achieved a Michelin star would you just close if the number of customers started to drop .. NO! You would use other strategies to make it profitable like advertising, offers & take away services. Just closing an outstanding provision does not make any business sense.

If you want to make it viable there are many options. Here are a couple of suggestions

1/ remove the need for an ehcp to access (if RCC aren't giving them out anyway you would have to)

2/ allow out of county children access, you expect other counties to take our children so why not do the same? This would also bring revenue into the county

3/ facilitate a (paid?) holiday club in The Parks setting so that SEN children can actually access something in the school holidays. Parents are struggling to access any respite/childcare in holidays and there is a shortage of Personal Assistants (PAs)

4/ Build on the outstanding The Parks School good name and expand to a bigger specialist provision for a bigger age range. We need our own special school - this saves money on out of county specialist schools, travel costs, chaperone costs, in county independent specialist schools (e.g. the shires base price £80k-£90k per child per year so 30 spaces is £2.4 million per year - although this school is likely to be full from next academic year). If you had a suitable provision you may also be spending less on EOTAS packages and tribunals. It would also mean children can be part of their community amongst their ALIKE PEERS, and parents can actually take their own child to school. To name but a few benefits! Costs are only going to increase as specialist provisions in the closest counties to us are full therefore children will be forced to travel even further at an increased cost.

1023/23 - FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST shows that out of county placements are steadily increasing - 2021 100 children, 2022 128 children, 2023 144 children

Early intervention will save money in the long run.

The revised budget shows that RCC is predicting an increase in EOTAS costs, given that EOTAS is only awarded when there is no school available to meet a child's needs RCC are admitting that in the future there will be more children who have no suitable school. Surely it would

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make sense to at least attempt to pre-empt this and work with families to provide what is needed.

According to Leicester County Council the number of Rutland children placed at Birchwood special school has shown a steady increase - 21/22 13 children, 22/23 17 children, 23/24 24 children. This does not include any of their other council maintained specialist provisions, or independent specialist provisions or either of these in other counties - so I would suggest this trend is likely to continue. At what point will RCC realise that our own in county provision would be beneficial to everyone?

On a number of occasions I have heard RCC employees say that the government and the green paper want more mainstream inclusion, fewer ehcps and fewer special schools. This is not true. Yes it states that inclusion should be improved and that should happen anyway in a civilised society. It also states the intention to implement a national standardised ehcp format and a digitised format. It also states that more special schools are needed to meet demand. It says that a key measure set to be taken forward by government is the creation of thousands of places for children with SEND across 33 new special free schools - but of course Rutland didn't apply for special free school funding - why??!

Birchwood wanted to set up a special school hub in Rutland - RCCs response was no. RLT wanted to set up a specialist provision in Ketton - RCCs response was no. Willoughby wanted to set up a special school in Rutland - no!

At what point will the local authority stop having tunnel vision and realise that what the county and our children need is more specialist provision and not less.

The parks school is registered as a community special school with the department of education (it is not a nursery school) so please listen to the community.

The Parks school is always going to be an emotional subject and it's contribution to the community cannot be questioned. However, having the provision also makes financial sense if you look at the honest facts (not the manipulated numbers) and start letting families actually access what they need.

Councillors need to realise that parents believe saving The Parks is such a priority that we are potentially doing it at the cost of our own children's future journey. I know many parents who are too scared to say anything in case RCC look on their family less favourably. It shouldn't be like this.

22/11/23 (second representation)

Please can you clarify what the process is on the consultation?

What do you mean by responses will be considered?

What is the 'process' that Maureen Morris will be independently overiewing?

How are responses to the consultation analysed and used to inform the final decision on the proposal?

So if Mr X sends an email then what happens? And how is this used to inform the decision?

Will councillors see all emails?

Will parts of emails be used (if so who decides which bits to ignore?)

Or is it just that a number of people have opposed?

I'd be really grateful if you could explain the full process

I've also cc'd in my ward councillors in case they already know the answer

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	<p>27/11/23 (third representation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can I ask what qualification Maureen holds in order for her to analyse that data and what type of analysis she is using? - And if she isn't using one, who is and what qualifications they hold? <p>28/11/23 (fourth representation)</p> <p>Please find attached a response to the Q&As RCC have prepared on the parks proposal consultation.</p> <p>We believe the answers RCC provided do not give the full picture and therefore have produced this response so the public and councillors can make a truly informed decision!</p> <p><i>** Identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
49	<p>22/11/23</p> <p>I do not have a relationship with the school.</p> <p>However is a concern that the closure of such a school with no alternative service offered could have a catastrophic impact on individual children.</p> <p>What a pity that this school has been chosen to bear the brunt of budget cuts.</p>
50	<p>22/11/23</p> <p>I wish to express my concerns around the proposed closure of The Parks School. As an Educational Psychologist in a neighbouring local authority, I have first-hand experience of the difficulties when it comes to placing Early Years children with SEND and sourcing appropriate provision. My concerns are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - removal of the Parks School will remove Rutland's only maintained specialist nursery provision. This means under 5s with SEND will be placed outside of county or in private provisions. With the recent government proposals to remove charitable status from private schools, the likelihood is it will cost the local authority more per pupil in fees than the existing notional funding. - children have a right to be educated in their local community. This is particularly important for pupils with SEND who are disproportionately disadvantaged from a social perspective to their peers. For pupils whose needs cannot be met at the DSP (or when that inevitably reaches capacity), vulnerably children will be forced away from their community. - RCC seem to be basing their decision on upcoming SEND trends for the 2024/25 cohort. There is no information on potential need for future cohorts and as early identification of SEND is improving, it seems short-sighted to close the school when there are likely to be pupils who would benefit from such a provision in the future. - equivalent specialist nurseries in neighbouring local authorities are heavily oversubscribed meaning pupils often have to be dual-registered in mainstream nurseries as there is not enough capacity to support them full-time. Closing the Parks School would compound this issue further. <p>I urge you to reconsider the school closure - there are other facilities in Rutland which are under-utilised yet remain open.</p>
51	<p>22/11/23</p> <p>The idea of closing The Parks School in Oakham, is the most stupid idea I have ever heard.</p>

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	<p>Children who need extra support/help and live in Oakham, The Parks School is the perfect School for these children.</p> <p>I have not needed to send my children to The Parks but I have friends who have sent their child/children there and there have spoken highly of The Parks.</p>
52	<p>23/11/23</p> <p>I became aware of The Parks School over that time, meeting with the then Principal **, an extremely dedicated woman with huge determination to improve the lives of children with disabilities.</p> <p>I worked with ** finding funding for a summer play scheme, which was successful. The Parks had also attracted funding from the Rutland Lions which enabled them to build a therapy pool for the children. I was then approached by a young group who wanted to take on a project and we met up with ** and discussed possibilities, the outcome of the meeting was they wanted to extend the building to provide a Parents Resource Centre. I was ** throughout this time. The aim was to make sure that parents could be supported by a wide range of services. Through their hard work and fund raising the Centre was opened by HRH The Princess Royal with councillors and local dignitaries attending - to bask in the glory, when they didn't contribute anything.</p> <p>I was aware that the Parks School was closed and incorporated into the new Oakham Primary School Build sometime ago.</p> <p>The next bombshell is that RCC now want to close this invaluable provision, shame on them! They say that they are committed to 'social inclusion', but clearly it is only when it suits them, they use community and voluntary when they can and abuse it when it suits them.</p> <p>In the main we learn from history but apparently the RCC does not. They should be ashamed at the way they have treated the voluntary, charitable and community sector over so many years. What a loss and so short-sighted.</p> <p>ALL our children count and if they need support then they should have it, especially at an early age. The Parks provision provided this.</p> <p><i>** Identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
53	<p>23/11/23</p> <p>Abusive email and followed by an apology</p>
54	<p>24/11/23</p> <p>I've been convinced to write to you after seeing the passion and concern felt by parents and friends of the Parks Special School.</p> <p>These families are already facing many challenges and to take away the support of a local school geared to their needs seems insensitive and unnecessary.</p> <p>The early years are so important for all children, to build confidence in a supportive environment where they will be with children and families living with similar needs. Specialist teaching and care at this stage will help them thrive and allow them to move on and progress, maybe to a mainstream school.</p> <p>Parents with non SEN children have choice as to where to send their children for their education. You are taking away a vital and perhaps only option from the families that have no choice yet need it most.</p> <p>Please reconsider.</p> <p>No relationship to Parks Special School, just someone affected by the passion and worry of parents fighting for their children's futures</p> <p>PS I have read your counter proposal but still feel that the status quo is the best option for the families concerned</p>
55	<p>25/11/23</p> <p>There needs to be a special school in Oakham for the needs of children my ** use to go there</p>

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56	<p>26/11/23</p> <p>I am writing to share my concerns about the closure of The Parks school in Oakham. I chose to send ** to Oakham C of E because there is a special unit attached as I wanted her to see that children with special needs are part of society. My **** is a big part of our life, but in the county ** lives in there isn't the same provision and it's a struggle for ** to be in a mainstream setting. Children with special needs don't deserve ostracised. The Parks is such a brilliant way of blending the needs of all children in one school.</p> <p>I hope that the decision to close the school can be reconsidered. I have seen through my sister's experience how tough it is if you have a child who needs more support. Access to the necessary provision is so difficult to get. The Parks school is such a vital local resource.</p> <p><i>** Identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
57	<p>26/11/23</p> <p>I have copied in my Ward Councillors and the Portfolio holder for Children's. I ask that this be shared with all Councillors.</p> <p>**</p> <p>The Parks Special Nursery School in Oakham consists of two classrooms attached to Oakham C of E Primary School. The Parks caters for children aged between two to six years old, contrary to what RCC's website says.</p> <p>** attended an amazing and local mainstream nursely during ** early years. This nursery was amazing and gave ** all the support ** possibly could, and **made sure to fight (and yes, ** did have to fight for this,) for extra funding from Rutland County Council in order to provide more support from ** lovely SENCO.</p> <p>It became apparent that this was not enough. ** had significant delays in both language and development despite the support put in place from the nursery and support from the inclusion team at RCC. It was decided that ** needed to attend The Parks School.</p> <p>This first started as a dual placement for ** – despite the extra and specialist support in mainstream, ** still needed a specialist setting in order to have **needs met. ** then needed to increase ** time at The Parks to a full-time placement.</p> <p>** then continued to do** foundation year at The Parks School. At this time The Parks did not require young children to have Education Health Care Plan's to attend their specialist pre-school. The Parks were instrumental in the process of ** being secured an EHC Needs Assessment and an EHC Plan. This was before ** were even diagnosed and support was so difficult to access because of this, The Parks being there for **, and us was a lifeline in order to gain the support that was needed.</p> <p>The Parks taught ** to communicate with me, and then to talk. They taught **so many basic life skills, to eat, to start the toileting journey which was more difficult for **, to begin to understand and regulate ** emotions - which for ** needed a significant amount of high intervention to be able to achieve.</p> <p>When we entered the SEND parenting journey, The Parks was our first port of call. Through them we met other parents and carers and were welcomed into a community that became, and still is a lifeline to us. The Parks supported us through some truly difficult times, and are a beacon of light and hope. They are unwavering in their empathy, compassion and support. They understand what you are going through, as a family, and are not judgemental but exceptionally generous in their care. Without the additional input from The Parks, I am certain that ** would have ended up attending a specialist primary school out of county. This is something that RCC claims to want to avoid. The provision at The Parks meant they could attend their local primary school (the designated specialist provision unit on Oakham C of E Primary School. Specialist units are legally classed as mainstream settings.) ** remember their</p>

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time at The Parks fondly and we all grew to love the people who work there. I simply cannot do The Parks justice in my testimonial but I implore all those who read this to believe me that we must save this school. The work they do is very much needed and this need is only increasing. The Parks is part of what makes Rutland a special place, where it is a county for everyone.

Since ** time at the school, the admittance criteria has been tightened and only children with EHCP's can attend, thus lowering the numbers. It is not common for young children to be issued with EHCP's. I believe this was a Local Authority decision to do this. The EHCP process in Rutland is an issue in itself. The feel and verbal anecdotes (and my own personal experience,) is that assessments are delayed and prevented by RCC. Officers and managers at RCC will verbally advise schools and early years settings to not apply, and they say the same to parents, despite whether children meet the legal criteria to assess. We also have a problem with unspecific EHC plans in Rutland which do not meet the legal framework (The Children and Families act 2014,) or adhere with the Statutory Framework, The SEND Code of Practice. The legal test for an EHC needs assessment is contained within Section 36(8) of the children and families act, and in brief it is met if a child has or **may** have SEND, and whether they **may** need SEND provision to be made through an EHCP. This is a very low threshold, and we should see more children than RCC are stating having EHC needs assessments.

The criteria for plans to be issued is slightly higher, but still a low legal threshold. This is contained in section 37(1) of the same act. Due to the low numbers of children under 5 with EHCP's and the very low numbers of those being assessed, I believe there is still an outstanding issue with RCC and the EHCP process.

The assessment process is also taking a long time and I am unsure if RCC are meeting the statutory timeframes for these, in total an EHC needs assessment should take 20 weeks from the request to assess, to the issuing of a final plan. If the decision is not to issue it should be 14 weeks. Any delay with this not only frustrates a families legal rights, but further prevents children from being able to access provision at The Parks.

I am aware that there are families who do have children in nurseries who want and need to go to The Parks. Since the announcement that only two children needed the Parks, parents have confirmed a further child has been admitted to the Parks.

It says in the consultation that having suitable settings closer to home which reduce the need to travel is widely understood to be better for children and their families. For children who need The Parks, like mine, the school not being there would have pushed them away from, and out of their communities as they could not have, and would not have been able to continue in a mainstream nursery.

The Parks is in Rutland, closer to home than nearest non-independent (and therefore costly,) special provision out of county, which is Birchwood in Melton Mowbray.

** attending The Parks allowed ** to progress enough to be able to attend Designated Specialist Provision at Oakham C o E Primary school. This will have saved RCC money in the long term. Had ** not attended The Parks ** would have needed to either go out of county to attend a special school, or have a costly independent placement within our county. ** are not the only children that will have saved RCC money by doing this.

I also want to highlight that Designated Specialist Provision (units on the schools,) is not actually classed as specialist provision, but is actually classed as mainstream. Expanding this is expanding our mainstream offer and not expanding the non-existent specialist schools on offer. Case law is the following; (TB v Essex County Council [2013] UKUT 534 (AAC), B-M and B-M v Oxfordshire County Council (SEN) [2018] UKUT 35).

I am aware that 3 schools wanted to set up specialist schools in Rutland, and all were blocked by RCC who claimed the numbers were not there. These schools were the Rutland Learning

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Trust, Willoughby and Birchwood. The numbers are there, a large number of children are sent out of county. The LA spend an astronomical amount of money on transport, and children within Rutland within specialist schools are at a very high cost to RCC.

There is not space for SEND children in mainstream nurseries, I believe the childcare efficiency study stated that there was 28% capacity in nurseries. If the plan is to admit more children with SEND, nurseries and childminders will need significantly more support, and building space in order to support these children, which they just don't have. This will be at a much greater cost to RCC.

The support to Nurseries and Childminders that RCC give is not enough, and a separate and serious issue within its own right.

I have been told by nursery managers and owners that the Specialist Early Years Teachers have called twice a year and that is all the support they had. I also want to highlight that Speech and Language (SALT,) provision from NHS isn't being provided. I have had a recent appointment with the Leicestershire SALT service telling me they just can't meet the provision in children's plans.

SENIF funding is now banded from £2-£8 per hour and RCC ask nurseries to use universal funding for 2, 3 and 4 year olds to top up any difference. Universal funding is not meant for this. The funding used to be at £10 per hour which is still not enough. How are nurseries meant to provide 1:1 support for children that need it on £2-£8 per hour? They cannot raise nursery fees to cover the cost for supporting SEND children as it is not allowed. They will simply be unable to admit the children, this will cost RCC more.

I also want to ask is where is the £250,000 that is "saved" by the proposal to close The Parks, intended to go to? The website states that it will be "reinvested into Early Years SEND support across the county" and then later states that "This money will not be taken away from the school but will be used to enhance the offer at Oakham Primary School. This will be done by increasing the number of places in the school's Designated Special Provision (DSP) from September 2024." This will only increase the spaces in the DSP by 4. How can a placement at The Parks be three times higher than at the DSP, when The Parks can offer 7.5 spaces, but the money created by closing it can create 4?

There will always be children who will need the most support and they will need places like The Parks. You judge a society by how they treat their most vulnerable. By this attitude Rutland are saying they want to take away from our most vulnerable children. You cannot give everyone the same level of support; you must assess by need. We need equity and not equality.

Closing The Parks is short sighted and will not save money in the long term. You could open it up to out of county admissions and generate money from other local authorities. You could make it into an efficient assessment centre again.

There are children who need the parks. I implore Councillors to talk to local Nurseries and Childminders directly to ask about the support they currently receive and if it is adequate. I can guarantee they will find the following; that the support is woefully inadequate, and that there are children who need The Parks.

Finally, as a last note, on the Q&A on The Parks consultation page it states "*What kind of wider support would be available to parents of families of children with additional needs, if The Parks were to close?*" I can tell you from personal experience that the support on offer is insulting and inadequate, and I am not alone with that judgement. Do not take away the one thing that works, and that Rutland does well.

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	<p>Please listen to the public on this.</p> <p><i>** Identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
58	<p>26/11/23</p> <p>**</p> <p>I have a personal connection to The Parks which I will detail below but I also have a deeply held moral belief that education is a basic human right, and it is the responsibility of a civilised society to care for its most vulnerable, which OFSTED recognise The Parks is “outstanding” in so doing.</p> <p>I attended the launching of the public consultation for the closure of The Parks School on the evening of Wednesday 1st November and was proud to be there to support the school. However, I found that the accessibility needs of the people who may wish to attend, particularly for a consultation considering people with additional needs, was completely overlooked. One elderly lady arrived with a walking aid and was shocked to find stairs up to the room but no one was there to offer her assistance or suggest an alternative accessible route so she had to struggle up them with some help from her elderly husband. There is also no opportunity for past pupils of The Parks or other people with communication aids, such as Talking Tablets or PECS, who are unable to send emails or use the telephone to convey their wishes and feelings regarding the proposal, surely their voices have as much right to be heard as the rest of us.</p> <p>You said you appreciate that everyone has very strong feelings about this but I honestly think you have no idea of the impact that this nursery school has on families. For me personally, when it was at the old site, it is the place that taught my ** to communicate and move independently, this then lead to my ** to teaching there and I completed work experience there, for a number of years it was my second home, a safe place where I was always made to feel welcome. My ** also works for the council, ** and without the expertise and knowledge of the staff at The Parks ** future would have been much more limited. These are the types of children for whom The Parks is essential, those who cannot access mainstream nurseries even with additional support and if they did it would be detrimental for both themselves and the other children accessing the provision.</p> <p>The main reason behind the closure of The Parks School appears to be because you say it is no longer financially viable but I don't believe all options have been considered. Instead of closing the parks to save money why not approach it from a different perspective and look at expanding it to make money, neighbouring local authorities used to pay to send their SEND children there and I'm certain they would jump at the chance to be able to access such a provision again. If The Parks were to keep accepting children for their Reception year this also increases the number of children that it could accommodate. Another option would be to allow children and families who are awaiting diagnosis or undergoing the EHCP process to access the provision, this would almost definitely increase the number of children on roll at The Parks.</p> <p>Also, I believe it to be untrue when you say there would be no children enrolled from next September. The local support group for preschool children with additional needs is oversubscribed and has a waiting list for spaces. One of the members of the group working to save The Parks has identified at least 7 (possibly more) children whose parents would like them to attend for next year and believe it is the most suitable setting for them. The cost of supporting these children in mainstream nurseries is likely to be more than educating them in the Parks, because they will require expensive additional equipment, changes to the</p>

environment, and specialist support staff. It will cost the council less to support these children together in a small group in The Parks, where they can share specialised staffing and equipment. I believe that rather than a falling demand for the sort of “outstanding” education The Parks provides, it has instead been made harder and harder for parents to access. For many years, The Parks was oversubscribed.

One of the points made at the consultation launch was that nurseries like The Parks are very rare nowadays, surely this is even more reason to keep it open, maintain the outstanding provision it is and celebrate the work that Rutland do through early intervention, which many researchers have found ultimately saves money in the long run. There are also wider financial implications that the closure of The Parks will have. Parents who have children that can no longer access a suitable setting, because mainstream can't provide what they need or they are so medically complex that their lives can't be trusted with anyone who isn't sufficiently trained, will be left with no other choice but to give up work and stay at home due to lack of childcare. This means they will no longer be able to financially contribute to our society in the way they would have done before but you will also be pushing those who are most vulnerable and unable to speak up for themselves further towards the edges of society.

I feel that overall this is a very short sighted move. In the short term I'm sure it will save money but in the long term, without the early intervention, you will have less children who can cope in settings such as the DSP at Oakham C of E Primary School or even potentially integrate into mainstream as they get older because they have missed out on the vital building blocks they need for their education therefore you will be paying more to send more children to out of county specialist schools because Rutland will have no suitable provision. I do not think it morally right to reduce specialist provision for the most profoundly disabled and vulnerable children, so that more can be spent on those who's needs are such that they are able to access mainstream. I believe that if The Parks closes, more parents will go to tribunal to get specialist provision for their children, which will incur additional legal costs to Rutland County Council.

I believe you have also received criticism from local nurseries who are not on board with the current plan and feel they are unable to provide the appropriate care and attention to meet the needs of the children who attend settings such as The Parks. They have admitted that they do not have the expertise to care for these children and are unable to provide the adjustments they need, such as much smaller class sizes or a space to themselves. They have also highlighted that the support and funding from the council is so little that it is already a nearly impossible task. You said that you would like children with SEND to interact with their peers but the children at mainstream nurseries are not their peers, they don't think and play in the same ways, they can't build meaningful interactions with each other and the children you are trying to integrate would end up more isolated than ever because their needs differ so greatly.

I do not agree that at a time where across the country other counties are building more special school places, Rutland should be reducing the special school places. I do not believe that all parents with children with the complex needs for which The Parks caters would prefer their children educated in mainstream nurseries or in the designated specialist provision, and I believe in parental choice as per the code of practice. The closure of The Parks will not bring about more choice, as the proposal states, but will leave parents with no choice but to keep their children at home until they reach primary school age when the local authority will have to provide transport and education out of county. At a time when other local authorities are

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	<p>investing in more special school places, I object that Rutland County Council are reducing their provision.</p> <p>As a student social worker I believe in the child's right to not be put at a substantial disadvantage compared with their peers and for discrimination to be eliminated but I feel that the closure of The Parks would not achieve this and I feel it is my moral duty to express my grave concerns over this proposal both for the children and families whom The Parks serves, and the wider community. I therefore object in the strongest possible terms to the proposal, and I urge Rutland County Council to pursue strategies which would make The Parks viable without closing it or reducing the provision that it is able to offer.</p> <p><i>** Identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
59	<p>27/11/23</p> <p>I would like to ask you not close the Parks Special School as the outcome for the 2 - 6 year old children affected will have to endure a great hardship of having to go elsewhere at so young an age.</p>
60	<p>27/11/23</p> <p>I was saddened to learn during a recent visit to Oakham that this incredible facility is facing closure. Although I am not currently resident in Rutland, I lived in Oakham for many years and my brother attended the school for a short time. It follows that I am aware of the value that the school brings, not just to those pupils, families and staff involved with it, but also to the whole community. I do hope the public consultation is not simply a box ticking exercise and that the proposed closure is a "done deal". I know that many share the same view as myself and urge the decision makers to reconsider the closure of the school.</p>
61	<p>27/11/23</p> <p>We ** appreciate, that as a Local Authority school, the decision to propose the closure of The Parks School is solely a Local Authority decision.</p> <p>However, having been co-located with Oakham CofE Primary, we have seen that, The Parks School has and continues to provide, outstanding care and provision for children and families across Rutland. Some of our most vulnerable local children, many with significant learning and complex medical needs or disabilities, have benefited and thrived from enriching opportunities and the professionalism, dedication and love from our school staff team.</p> <p>Governors largest concern is the lack of clarity around the pathways, provision and support for nursery aged children and their families who would have benefitted from a place at The Parks School now or in the future. This early intervention and support has been pivotal in the success of the children the school has supported. Its value and impact helping to reduce the stress on the overall resources in the longer term. While we recognise that our provision is unique, rare and not a statutory obligated provision for Rutland County Council, we have always believed that this is something to celebrate.</p> <p>If The Parks were to close, further expansion and staffing resources would need to be allocated to the Designated Specialist Provision with Oakham CofE to meet demand.</p> <p>Whatever the outcome of the consultation and any resulting decision by the Local Authority, our overarching aim is to support our staff team and the children and families which The Parks School serves. We want to ensure that, in whatever form, we still have an integral role in ensuring all local children with all ranges of needs and disabilities have their specific needs met locally.</p>
62	<p>28/11/23</p>

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I would firstly like to thank the Council for listening to parents, carers and interested parties at the introductory Consultation meeting and for involving Maureen Morris to have oversight of this Consultation. I found the published questions on the Council website very helpful in forming some of my arguments.

My interest in this Consultation is as a former member of Staff at the Parks School for more than ** years, through many changes and improvements. I worked there as a **, a **, the ** Co-ordinator and an ** worker carrying out Portage with children under the age of 2 years, as well as supporting children into main stream Nurseries and Reception classes.

I support the concept of Inclusion in main stream Early Years settings, if enough support can be provided for the children and their families. It is the right thing for many children with less severe SEND. Developmental input before the age of 5 years is as vital for children with SEND as it is for all other children. However, I believe that for the best possible outcomes, many children need a fully immersive environment, which does not just rely on a professional expert working with the child for a short session perhaps once a week. The children cannot receive the intensity of help that they may need in a busy, noisy Nursery Class.

The Staff at the Parks are able to deliver signing, communication systems, daily physiotherapy and other treatments if required, special equipment for indoor and outdoor play and all of this is in place for the child ALL of the time. They can work in a distraction free environment if that is how they learn best and work in very small groups if they have Social and Communication difficulties. I believe that this level of supportive start leads to better outcomes for the children in the next steps of their education, particularly for children on the Autism Spectrum or with Speech and Language problems. These children are at greater risk of developing behavioural difficulties if they become frustrated by their difficulties in communicating. Children with Autism in particular are helped by being in a very structured learning environment, something which cannot be guaranteed in a main stream Nursery. I believe that this level of input at an early age will reduce the expense to the Council of 'rescuing' these children at a later date when their difficulties may have increased. The extra 'three times' cost of providing a place at the Parks School could easily be dwarfed by the cost of putting in more extensive support at a later date for a child whose difficulties have increased, particularly if this has to be provided 'out of County'.

Having established what I consider to be valid arguments for retaining the Parks School there are other specific issues that I am concerned about:-

The Council has claimed that there will be no children requiring specialist Early Years provision after September 2023. At the Consultation introduction meeting, parents AND an Early Years provider stated that they have been discouraged from setting in motion an EHC Plan. One parent also claimed that some families are not even being told about the existence of the Parks School by other involved professionals. She had evidence of this from a parent with a child with Special Needs.

There is a high cost to the Council in providing education and transport out of the County for children with PMLD. In addition, they have a long, extended day because of travel times and will be less likely to have peer friends in the area that they live. I have a Paediatric Nursing background and therefore many PMLD children were able to attend the Parks School while I worked there, even though I was not employed as a Nurse. I feel that Rutland should look at the costs of out of county placements and assess whether the extra funding involved might be more than enough to provide a Paediatric Nurse post and allow these children to be supported in County. It would then also be possible to include some older children, who will

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never be able to access Main Stream education, in an extended setting. This would be an argument for improving the provision and making it viable.

The School currently has an 'Outstanding' Ofsted report. When the school had its first Ofsted this was also Outstanding and, in fact, the School was named as a School of Excellence in Parliament. It seems extraordinary that such a provision is again at risk. The Council used to boast about the School and I know personally that RAF and Armed Services personnel, who had children with Autism, actively requested postings to the area so that their children had an opportunity to attend the Parks. Instead of pointing out that there are very few places like the Parks, the Council should be showing Authorities elsewhere how the best can be provided.

There are currently very experienced Staff at the School, who are able to support children to attend other Early Years settings, in addition to their experiences at the Parks. If the School is closed, this pool of expertise will soon disperse and be lost, with a knock-on effect for main stream settings.

Families of children attending the Parks have always praised the support that they have received from all of the Staff. In many cases they have only just received their child's diagnosis and are devastated. I have lost count of how many parents told us that they would not still be together if they had not had support from the School in all areas. I do not believe that the main stream Nurseries have the time, resources and (sometimes) expertise to provide help at this level, however much they would want to.

I am not convinced that placing some children with SEND in an ordinary Nursery setting is truly 'inclusive'. From my own experience I have seen many occasions when, after a short while, the child lags behind their peer group's attainments, resulting in them almost becoming isolated, with their key worker providing experience away from the rest of the group, particularly if their difficulties are disruptive for group learning. My daughter-in-law works as a TA in a main stream Reception Class. She has had experience of the difficulties of including a child with Downs Syndrome, with no language and behavioural difficulties, which mean that she refuses to sign. Her frustrations have sometimes meant that she has been aggressive and hurt members of staff. This became so disruptive for the rest of the children that she has been taught and played with away from her peers - hardly Inclusion!

In conclusion, the Parks School is an amazing place. There were moves to close it in the past and current and past families fought to retain it then. Ex pupils spoke out against the closure. I don't believe that the arguments are very different now, the loss to future children and their families would be incalculable. I would beg the Council to reconsider at the decision Council meeting next year.

*** Identifying personal details redacted*

63 28/11/23

Firstly I will explain my connection to the Parks School. My name is ** and I was a Teaching Assistant at the Parks for ** years leaving my position there in **. I was highly trained , through the school, gaining a foundation course in **, Level 3 ** and I was trained as a **, working with very young pre school children/ babies and parents in a home situation. My Job was primarily to work with Autistic children from the age of 2 and a half to 6 in the Autism classroom.

Every single day our team members would work with individual named children on a key worker 1:1 basis , we would have group sessions which concentrated on confidence building and social interactions, I specialised in art therapy and led groups and individual sessions to promote creativity and let the children express themselves and be themselves through sensory art.

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	<p>The most important years of a child’s developmental life, as we all know, is from birth to the age of 5, this is a vital, proven statistic for a child without developmental issues so is even ‘more important’ for those young children who have Special Educational Needs.</p> <p>The Parks Nursery School always was and most definitely is a place to nurture these special children, what ever their disability and also very importantly their families who feel so vulnerable due to this frightening and life changing situation they find themselves in. The highly trained staff are there to access needs, provide interventions with regards communications and social integration, care for and support family members and hopefully help these very young children get ready to face their world their own way with the hope they will integrate through into a school placement, if appropriate. The communications systems that are taught at The Parks are so important for SEN children to be able to move forward in life and learn to ‘communicate’</p> <p>I feel tthis school most definitely needs to be kept open and expanded in an ever growing county, and keep providing valuable learning and life skills. As the Department of Education have stated for 24 – 25 in their improvement plan, ‘...All children with Special Needs and disabilities should receive the support they need with earlier intervention, consistent high standards and less bureaucracy’.</p> <p>Please, please reconsider. I have seen first hand what this special school achieves for the SEN children of Rutland and their families , it is a vital and hugely important resource for the county and we should support, be proud of and promote it as a Centre of Excellence.</p> <p><i>** Identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
64	<p>28/11/23 (first representation)</p> <p>**</p> <p>I wish to express my concerns over the proposed closure of the Parks school.</p> <p>I would like to start by stating that disability is indiscriminate of age, race, gender and economic status. Anyone can become disabled, or be diagnosed as such, at any point in their lives. The children who attend the Parks are born with their disabilities, be they physical and/or neurological. As one sign at the recently held protest to save the Parks school said; “would you close it if it were your child”?</p> <p>From a personal view point, the proposal to close the Parks is one that I wholeheartedly oppose.</p> <p>**</p> <p>The Parks school is listed on the DfE website as a community special school, able to accommodate 8 full time pupils. The school has been rated “Outstanding” by Ofsted in it’s last two Ofsted inspections. This rating is the highest accolade that Ofsted can give a setting. Is it any wonder that the community are up in arms at the proposed closure of one of the best schools in Rutland and the only community special school! To date, our change.org petition has 3037 signatures from the community. The law is clear when it comes to closing a maintained setting. The LA must provide an alternative that is more accessible than and either equivalent to or better than what is already being provided. The DSP at Oakham C of E does not have an Outstanding rating from Ofsted, nor do many of the mainstream nurseries in Rutland. The DSP’s entry criteria policy also requires children to have an EHCP, making it as inaccessible as the Parks.</p> <p>To close the Parks, or change what they currently do in any way, would have a devastating effect on SEND children in Rutland. From the details I have already mentioned about my own children, there are children who will always need the level of intervention, safety, expertise</p>

and support that the Parks provide and further problems as they grow older can be avoided by providing that crucial early intervention.

Two years ago, the entry criteria policy for the Parks school was changed from a child with an identified need, usually through the health visiting service under a section 17 of the Children's Act, to a child with an EHCP. I would like to know why RCC did not follow the statutory process as outlined by the government that must be followed when making a significant change to a school? It is unusual for a child under 5 to have an EHCP, mainly due to waiting lists to see a paediatrician or other services or because of delays in applying for and gathering the evidence for the EHCP itself. The local authority employ the use of educational psychologists to assess a child's needs, take advice from health professionals, gather information from educational settings, social care and of course, ask parents and carers to help provide the voice of the child in order to form an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for children who need them. Taking this view of assessment of need, it would be a natural consequence that the views of SEND children, parents, carers, wider family members and the community should form a vital part in the decision-making process, when determining the future of specialist provision in our county. It would seem that the local authority have already decided the fate of the only community special school in Rutland. The ridiculously timed short consultation period is wholly indicative of this. The perpetual inconsistencies, lack of transparency and repetitive inaccuracies within the Parks Proposal are indicative of the dim view the local authority take of the community and their views in this process.

I am somewhat bewildered by the persistent view of many RCC staff and councillors that "we don't want out of county children attending the Parks". Why?! It makes no sense at all, especially considering that the local authority are very happy to send their older children out of county to specialist schools instead of opening their own. There is significant irony in the fact that the local authority have consistently permitted the building of numerous retirement homes and complexes in Rutland over the last few years. By the very nature of old age, a good percentage of the people moving to Rutland to buy these flats are going to need some form of support from the local authority. This was a deliberate move by RCC, to allow the development of such accommodation. When a local authority deliberately encourages one group in society to take up residence in the county and deliberately cuts services to the very bone for another group, surely that then becomes an issue of social justice in the very least. At most, it is discrimination.

If the Parks is struggling financially, it is almost a given that increasing the amount of pupils would mean it would become financially viable as the cost per child would lower. As ** rightly pointed out, no matter whether you put DSP children in the building or Parks children, the basic running costs of the school will remain. This begs the question of what advantage is it to the local authority to close the Parks and expand the DSP? As a Michelin starred restaurant owner, if you had had a bad couple of months of turnover, it would be nonsensical to close your good quality business or turn it into a fast food restaurant. Both of RCC's explanations as to where the money saved from closing the Parks appear to be somewhat short-sighted. To close a provision that caters for the most vulnerable children in our area to distribute that funding further and benefit less needy children is ludicrous. There has been little mention of this plan since the consultation was launched and it would now seem that closing an 8 full time placed provision in order to fund another 4 places in a DSP is now the plan. Is the local authority suggesting that places in the DSP cost more than places in the Parks?! I'm not even going to try and explain how the maths just doesn't add up.

It would seem that the LA have taken to calling the Parks school the "Parks nursery school." This is misleading the general public as it is still listed on the Dfe website as a community specialist school which can cater for up to 8 children full time, or more children if those spaces

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are attended part time. Reducing the number of children right down to only preschool aged children does not mean a school suddenly becomes a nursery, particularly when the government statutory process for making significant changes to a school does not appear to have been followed, yet again.

I would like to know if the local authority have considered the following options before proposing the closure of the Parks? They are listed as follows:

- Allow another, well established specialist school to take over the Parks.
- Approach CIT, a learning trust based in Lincolnshire who have numerous specialist settings on their books, including one in Leicestershire.
- Invest section 106 money into the Parks.
- Apply to the free schools program, although I am aware that the program has closed to new applications.
- Allow the Parks to become a Community Interest Company or a charity.
- Offer the Parks to already established local charities to run.
- Look at community grants to help with the costs of running the school.
- Allow children from neighbouring counties to attend the Parks.
- Open the Parks during the holidays as a holiday club, which will benefit the economy as well as the school because parents will be able to work.
- Extend the provision to encompass key stage one children, thus lowering spend costs.

The government guidance also states that an equivalent provision should be made available that is MORE accessible for families without the loss of expertise and specialism. Making the Family Hub, based at the Children's centre, available to nursery aged/preschool SEND children is not an equivalent and in no way better than the current arrangements. The Family Hub building is small and facilities are limited. The support and therapy groups being proposed as being equivalent to the support the Parks children receive are already in existence. I can assure you, from personal experience, that the Family Hub and groups that have been suggested are in no way suitable for a child that is distressed and dysregulated. A 6 week makaton course is not in any way comparable to speech and language support delivered by qualified staff in a safe, quiet and calm setting. Many nursery aged Autistic children are unable to use alternative communication systems as they also need certain levels of understanding that often such young children have yet to reach.

I believe that the closure of the Parks has been on the agenda for years and that RCC have slowly been stripping away provision until there is very little left to close. The children who need the Parks school are not going to reach their full potential in mainstream settings, let alone survive. The damage this move will cause to the children's mental health is untold and an unforgivable sacrifice to make to save money. I do not believe that the closure is in anyone's best interests, only the local authorities budget figures. I believe the proposed closure is a move designed to force SEND children and their families out of Rutland, which is discriminatory and immoral.

Nurseries in Rutland are already struggling. The move to a banding system has had a serious impact on SENIF funding. The nurseries report that the support and training they currently receive is adequate, **however**, for some children, it is not enough. Physical space and the safety of other children and staff are already being compromised. The nurseries have already seen parents removing their children and going elsewhere because their child has been repeatedly injured. The local authority must remember that private nurseries are businesses. They do not have to accept children they cannot physically and /or safely accommodate and

that there is no assessment tool available to formerly establish whether a nursery can meet need.

Inclusion is not tantamount to integration. To integrate children who have behaviour that is indicative of distress into mainstream settings is unsafe. It will also show an increase in such behaviours, leading to a greater financial impact on the LA's budget, not to mention the damage done to the SEND children which is immeasurable. Staff will need extra training in restraint and de-escalation techniques. The number of tribunals will rise and seeing as Rutland is one of a handful of counties nationally who use barristers against most often, undefended parents at tribunal, costs will rise, sharply.

I am concerned that there is a lot of talk of children who are neurodivergent. Very little has been mentioned about children who have profound, multiple and complex needs or severe learning difficulties. What will happen to those children? Where will they be educated? Do they not have the right to an education in their local community? The domino effect of more SEND children in mainstream nurseries mean that the nurseries will start to fail financially and eventually close, meaning there will be less and less settings to cater for nursery children in the county. The current cost of living crisis means that moving counties, let alone house, for most families is not an option. So what happens then?

The SEND paper, which is still a green paper, states that mainstream schools need to become more inclusive. This is a given in any society. It also states, however, that a child's needs are still paramount and that provision for children who cannot access mainstream must still exist. Closing the Parks is removing the only community special school in Rutland. This will mean that very small children who live in Rutland will either be forced to survive in mainstream settings, who are already struggling to cope on the little funding available, or to stay at home. For children to stay at home, this will be devastating for many families. For some children, the increasingly diminishing choice of specialist settings means that an Education Other Than At School package is the only viable option for them. The rise in EOTAS packages will have an untold impact on the LA's budget. It is a known fact that parents of SEND children seriously struggle to work and most give up completely, forcing them into a position of poverty that could be avoided by providing suitable care for SEND children. The local authority have a duty of care, not only to the children who will be effected by the closure, but also the families of those children. Forcing children to stay at home means they miss out on a vital window of opportunity in their development. Early intervention is just that, early! In Autistic children, the age at which their needs emerge is generally around 18 months to 2 years. Research has proven that intervention at this age is effective and improves the general outcomes for those children. Suicide rates amongst Autistic adults, many of whom are late diagnosed and haven't had the benefit of early intervention are among the highest in society at 40%.

Closing such a vital part of the SEND pathway in Rutland is no longer an education issue, it is a social justice problem. To not provide any settings exclusively for the most vulnerable in our county is discrimination and a breach of disabled children's human rights.

Specialist schools provide children with a sense of safety and belonging. It allows children and their families to form communities where they are accepted. This is vital for well being. This can impact positively on the LA's budget because children will feel safe and content at school meaning they are able to learn. This in turn effects how they feel and consequently, behave at home thus reducing the need for carers assessments, respite packages, personal budgets and interventions from Early Help and Social Care. It will also reduce the need for further specialist education for some children.

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	<p>One of the biggest deficits the local authority has is transport. Travel arrangements for SEND children is historically difficult and this situation will not improve by closing the Parks. The local authority has a responsibility to make decisions that are in the best interests of the public purse.</p> <p>I am aware that Rutland are pilots for the Delivering Better Value project and the Change program. Whilst this is positive for Rutland, it is important to remember that policy, especially that which is being tested out, does not trump law and consequently children’s rights to a suitable education and early intervention.</p> <p>28/11/23 (second representation)</p> <p>Please could someone clarify as to why people who are sending responses in to this address are receiving multiple different automated responses?</p> <p>Many thanks</p> <p>** Identifying personal details redacted</p>
65	<p>29/11/23</p> <p>**</p> <p>I was shocked and dismayed to learn of the Council’s plan to close the Parks Special School. I have a grandchild who attended the Parks when he was 4.</p> <p>At the age of 3 weeks he was rushed to hospital where the doctors diagnosed and immediately treated **. As a result, he has many problems including being non-verbal. He attended a mainstream nursery where the staff struggled to meet ** needs and he was referred to the Parks. Within a very short time of being there, he was beginning to form words and communicate ** needs. He stayed at the Parks for a year before moving on the Birchwood, in Melton. Without the early intervention at the Parks of highly trained and qualified staff and an environment that met ** needs, he would not have made the significant progress that he did.</p> <p>The Parks Special School is the only school specifically for SEND children in the county and received a result of Outstanding at its last two Ofsted inspections. This is not easily gained and should be a cause for much celebration by the local authority. The obvious course of action for the council should have been to champion this achievement and to help The Parks to become a centre of excellence for children with SEND but the authority decide that closure was the best course of action. What a missed opportunity!</p> <p>The council is proposing to put the children who might have attended the Parks into mainstream settings, with one to one support, which will be very partially funded by the council and an assumption that nurseries can subsidise this from the early years education funding grant for 3 & 4 year olds that central government supply to local councils, who then shamefully top-slice it to fund other things. This means that the majority of nurseries walk a very thin financial line and cannot afford to subsidise one to one support.</p> <p>Many of the children who present with behavioural problems are eventually diagnosed with some form of autism. This often involves children having melt down because they cannot cope with the environment, noise or just being around too many people. During a meltdown a child can become aggressive and/or violent. This puts other children attending the setting and staff at risk of both physical and mental harm. With space generally being limited, there are no quiet rooms for these children to go to, no safe spaces where they can recover or go to when they feel overwhelmed.</p> <p>The majority of nurseries would struggle with finding space for the very large pieces of equipment that are required to support children with physical disabilities.</p>

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	<p>These are our most vulnerable children and we are setting them up for failure, if this goes forward. Mainstream is not the place for these children</p> <p>** personal identifying details redacted</p>
66	<p>29/11/23</p> <p>I write in response to Rutland County Council’s (RCC) proposal to close The Parks Community Special School in Oakham.</p> <p>I have a long association with the school in various roles: **</p> <p>I also have a wealth of professional knowledge in the area of SEND, having worked as a SENDCo in a primary school, Primary SEND Consultant for RCC, delivering the National SENCO award through the University of Northampton and for the advisory organisation IPSEA. For many years I have been a volunteer with Rutland Rotaract Family Support Centre (RRFSC) which supports children and young people with SEND and their families and previously ran the Sunflowers pre-school support group.</p> <p>I have also recently been involved in the Early Years Inclusion collaboration group at RCC. As the parent of ** child with a disability, I am a strong advocate of inclusive education and opportunity but I also believe that there remains a place for alternative, specialist provision where this is the most appropriate setting in which to meet an individual child’s needs. With the best will in the world, some children will not manage to access mainstream nursery provision: there appears to be no plan in place for those children, who RCC admits will exist. Although I have a strong personal connection with the Parks School, I have tried to be objective in examining RCC’s proposal for its closure.</p> <p>I was present at the consultation launch on November 1st and I feel the need to highlight the disinterest and ignorance around the proposal shown by RCC officers during their presentation, through their lack of understanding about the school, its purpose and funding. The officer making the presentation referred to Oakham Primary Academy several times during her presentation – there is and never has been a school of this name: The Parks School has been federated with Oakham CofE Primary School which recently joined The Rutland Learning Trust, which is fully supportive of both schools continuing to make provision for children with SEND.</p> <p>The RCC officer also referred to the fact that The Parks is funded for 7.5 FTE places but, <i>“as you can’t have half a child, I’ve rounded this up to 8”</i>. This flippant statement shows a complete lack of understanding of the fact that nursery aged children are not in full-time education, and totally missing the point that The Parks is funded for, and can actually make provision for more than 7.5 children, as those of nursery age would attend part-time. In fact, at the time of the last Ofsted inspection in 2020, there were 10 children on roll.</p> <p>It was also insulting for the officer to imply that members of the EYFS collaboration group had been involved in discussions regarding the future of The Parks : this was absolutely not the case and has forced an apology from RCC to members of that group.</p> <p>Furthermore, information on the proposal and how to respond was not made available until later on November 2nd, at which point the dedicated email address for responses was not working, necessitating an extension of the statutory deadline.</p> <p>This demonstrates to me that the officers involved really do not understand the nature of The Parks and how it is run and are therefore not suitably qualified to make recommendations regarding its future to Cabinet. Their lack of factual knowledge and failure to adhere to due process, shows the lack of importance which is being placed on the future of our most vulnerable children. Therefore, I believe that a decision of this magnitude affecting our most vulnerable children, who are unable to advocate for themselves, should be presented and discussed at full council, with the opportunity for public deputations.</p> <p>The Parks Community Special School is recognised as an OUTSTANDING provision by Ofsted which <i>“helps children to be the best they can be.”</i> (Ofsted 2020). Rather than celebrating the</p>

successes and unique character of The Parks, RCC has bizarrely chosen to use this strength and unusual characteristic as one of their reasons to suggest its closure. However, I do not have confidence that RCC officers are proposing suitable alternative provision for children who might have attended The Parks.

Annex C of the DfE guidance on closing schools (under which RCC states it is conducting this consultation proposal) states, “Where existing provision that is recognised by the local authority as reserved for pupils with special educational needs is being discontinued, a statement as to how the local authority or the governing body (as the case may be) believe **the proposals are likely to lead to improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of the educational provision for these children**”.

Ofsted (2020) judged the outcomes for children at The Parks as OUTSTANDING. I do not believe that mainstream nurseries will be able to maintain this and there is no evidence that the educational provision for these children will be improved in any way, especially as local nursery managers clearly stated at the consultation launch that they currently struggle to include children with additional needs due to the limited support available from RCC. Given that most of the local nurseries are independent businesses which cannot be directed by RCC to take individual children, there is a high risk that children with SEND will be left without nursery places unless their parents are willing to transport them further afield or use their energies to challenge a nursery’s decision under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Annex C of the DfE guidance also states that there is a presumption against the closure of nursery schools and “Where proposals relate to the discontinuance of a maintained nursery school, a statement setting out:

- *the local authority’s assessment of the quality and quantity of the alternative provision (i.e. alternative suitable schools in the area) compared to the school proposed to be discontinued and the **proposed arrangements to ensure the expertise and specialism continues to be available**; and*
- *the accessibility and convenience of replacement provision for local parents.”*

As previously stated, I do not believe that RCC is able to evidence that the expertise and specialism available at The Parks will continue to be available.

The proposal that the higher needs funding should be shared more equitably to benefit more children is, quite frankly, ridiculous. It is a well-known fact, demonstrated through the Pareto principle, that a small minority will always demand greater resource to meet their needs. It is not equitable to withdraw funding from those who need it most and redistribute it to others. Early, intensive intervention is proven to be cost-effective, whether this is in education, medicine or social care. I believe the comparatively high costs of educating a very young child at The Parks are later mitigated by their ability to access educational provision more locally within Rutland, thus avoiding costly school and travel fees outside their locality. I know that my daughter would not have been able to access mainstream primary school without the intensive intervention she received to develop her communication skills during her time at the Parks.

In the long-term this also means that children with SEND can become valued members of their local communities, rather than absent due to travelling for their education. The Parks school is very much part of the wider school and town community: pupils are familiar with the school environment at Oakham CofE Primary and this aids transition if it is an appropriate choice for them to continue their primary education there. Pupils from The Parks access the local community, going for walks into town, to the park, visiting the church and going to buy ingredients from the supermarket or fruits to try from the market. Small numbers and a high staffing ratio also allow for additional activities such as taking the train to Melton Mowbray, practising life skills which parents find daunting. The local beat officers have been known to play Santa and his elf for The Parks at Christmas! Pupils of The Parks may not be educated

within their immediate locality but they are educated within their community, Rutland being such a small geographic area.

Inclusion means that children are included within their community but also with peers with whom they can interact appropriately and to whom they can relate. Many of the young children who would attend the Parks cannot relate to other children in mainstream nursery. The skilled staff at The Parks are able to help children build meaningful relationships:

“Children learn how to make, and keep, friends because the teachers explain clearly to them how to do this.” Ofsted 2020

Where children are given no option other than to attend their local mainstream setting, this will potentially result in exclusion rather than inclusion, as they will be unable to relate to their peers and may become withdrawn or distressed, resulting in challenging behaviours as communication of their distress, thus alienating them further from their mainstream peers. I believe the resulting impact on already vulnerable children’s mental wellbeing will be immense, risking the start of a long-term, irreversible downward trajectory.

Our neighbouring Local Authorities all have some kind of specialist nursery or pre-school provision – the closure of The Parks would mean that there is no such provision within Rutland, severely disadvantaging very young children with SEND in the area. RCC currently has no alternative specialist pre-school provision or support for children with SEND and their parents, such as Portage or specialist pre-school teachers. Therefore, parents may choose to seek alternative specialist provision in neighbouring authorities, resulting in stressful travel for their children and the probability that they may choose to continue their primary education within another authority in a school environment with which they are familiar, thus costing RCC more in the long term.

Ironically, this would mean that children are having to travel further for nursery provision and are less included in their local communities. Alternatively, parents have indicated that they would choose for their child not to access nursery education at all, thus depriving them of crucial pre-school experiences, education and social interactions.

Stressed, distressed and exhausted parents already have to leave the county to access the majority of their child’s specialist health services: please don’t make them do this to access specialist early education as well.

As a family, we have experienced first-hand the genuine love, care and concern that the staff at The Parks show for all their pupils. They supported us through our darkest moments and provided a safe place where we could express our distress and feel safely “held”. Our ** siblings were as much a part of The Parks family as we were as parents, and they were supported too. To this day, over ** years since our ** left The Parks, we maintain strong friendships with other parents and families. This level of support has not diminished over the years and is one of The Parks great strengths – the lead Ofsted inspector was in tears speaking about it during ** informal feedback to school governors in 2020. The Parks is so much more than just a school.

RCC asserts that there is no current need for places at The Parks, due to low numbers and the age of children attending. Parents and voluntary organisations vehemently dispute this. Local voluntary group, Sunflowers, which supports pre-school children with SEND and their families, has struggled to support the number of families needing their help recently and maintains a waiting list for families to access their service. This is not a new issue and RRFSC also sees waiting lists for the youngest children to access targeted activities such as swimming and horse riding. It is interesting to note that the number on roll at The Parks increased from 8 when Ofsted inspected in 2016 to 10 when they inspected in 2020, before RCC introduced criteria requiring an EHCP to name The Parks for admission.

I think it is important to note that children born this month will be eligible for nursery education in the academic year 2025/26 and that the numbers quoted by RCC for August 2024 represent only a snapshot in time. Numbers can and do change, demonstrated by the fact

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that one family is known to have moved into the area recently in order to access The Parks setting. This is not an isolated incidence and several parents report having recently requested places at The Parks, as well as nurseries requesting EHCPs for children they believe would benefit from a placement at the Parks. Some parents report that they have been discouraged from applying for places at The Parks because there are too few children there to form a peer group.

In terms of funding, RCC states that it is no longer viable to maintain The Parks. I do not believe that RCC has creatively explored all possibilities for using the immense wealth of knowledge, skills and resources available at the Parks to increase support to all children with SEND in Rutland. I do believe that any financial savings to be made will only be short term gains, as some children may move out of county for educational provision or miss out on pre-school education, resulting in a greater level of unidentified needs to be addressed at a later stage. I also believe that there must be economies of scale to be had by keeping specialist equipment and resources in one place, rather than trying to resource several provisions with the same equipment. For instance, not all nurseries will benefit from access to a sensory room or hydrotherapy pool.

As a minimum, I would expect to see a comprehensive, visionary plan for pre-school children with SEND in place before the closure of The Parks is discussed. This would involve access to specialist teachers for those children who might have attended The Parks and a guarantee that outstanding outcomes for those children would be maintained.

Instead of closing this school I would like to see RCC build upon the outstanding provision at The Parks, possibly by amalgamating it with a mainstream nursery to provide greater opportunities for dual placements and social inclusion, whilst at the same time maintaining the skills and specialisms apparent in the setting. Previously, the Parks was used as an assessment setting for children with potential SEND but this is no longer possible due to RCC processes which require an EHCP to access the provision: a return to assessment through a dual mainstream/specialist setting would seem an efficient and cost-effective strategy. The way to improve the universal offer to all children with SEND, in my opinion, is to work with the Parks school to develop its services to reach more children (although according to RCC these children do not exist), not to close it.

*** identifying personal details redacted*

67 1/12/23

We, ** are disappointed to learn of the potential closure of The Parks. The Charity was founded by staff and parents from The Parks in 1999, when a need for support for families was identified. Historically we utilised a room within the school to offer our services. Families who access our services have had children attend the school and many of our families have also used the therapy pool.

We are seeing families whose children are unable to cope with mainstream settings and together with long waits for diagnosis these families are in need of support from organisations like ours. Travelling outside of the County for education is also a further strain on children. The need for a special nursery setting appears to be not required from the information supplied by RCC. The development of early years settings and the Schools Support Partnership, on paper, appear to be in a position to support any SEND nursery age children in the future.

We would also like to emphasise the importance of HIGH quality EARLY education for children who have, or may have, special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), as set out in the latest Research & Analysis review for Early Years (2023). Any delay in the early years can give

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	<p>rise to learning difficulty and subsequently to loss of self-esteem, frustration in learning and to behaviour difficulties. Early action to address identified needs is critical to the future progress and improved outcomes that are essential in helping the child to prepare for adult life (section 5.36, Special Educational Needs & Disability Code of Practice 0-25 years, 2015).</p> <p>The Designated Specialist Provision for primary age is only available at Oakham C of E, are their plans to expand this offer to other primary schools in the county? Will this reduce the number of children who are receiving Education Other Than At School funding as schools cannot meet need? Will the number of children who travel outside of county for education now be offered places at Oakham C of E? In short can RCC be confident in the sustainability of this plan for the long term?</p>
68	<p><i>2/12/23 hand delivered via Library</i></p> <p>Please do not close the Parks Special school. My nephew was there when he was young. We need places like this.</p>
69	<p><i>2/12/23</i></p> <p>I sincerely hope that my concerns will be taken with great seriousness and professionalism into the decision of the closure of The Parks Special School.</p> <p>The given reasons from RCC regarding the closure of The Parks and my argument against these are as follows:</p> <p><i>“The Early Years sector now has direct access to advice and support from Specialist Early Years Teachers and Speech and Language Practitioners”.</i></p> <p>At current practice I have no complaints about the early year’s specialist teacher. However, I do feel it will be a struggle to continue with our current support from her as ** is only working for RCC two days a week. With the closure of the parks and the DSP filling up we are likely to see more children within mainstream early years settings. Therefore, this will increase the needs for specialist advice and support both over phone, email and within the setting. How does RCC plan to facilitate this not only for the 2024 cohort but for the years to come?</p> <p><i>“We want to use our limited funding across the County to help the greatest number of children”</i></p> <p>One counterargument against this statement is that it does not take into account the varying levels of need among the children in the County.</p> <p>Quality over quantity: The emphasis on helping the greatest number of children may inadvertently lead to a compromise in the quality of services provided. Limited funding resources being spread thin may result in inadequate support or superficial interventions, preventing the children from receiving the comprehensive assistance and support that they require. By prioritizing quantity, the overall impact on each child's well-being and development may be diminished.</p> <p>Long-term outcomes: Allocating resources to the greatest number of children might not yield significant long-term benefits. Focusing on particular children or groups that require more targeted assistance can lead to more sustainable changes. Therefore, we should be Investing in quality interventions, such as providing comprehensive education such as The Parks.</p> <p>Overall, while helping the greatest number of children might seem like an equitable approach, it fails to address the varying levels of need, may sacrifice the quality of interventions, overlook long-term outcomes, and disregard the diverse needs of individual children. An alternative allocation strategy that considers the unique circumstances of each child would likely result in more effective and meaningful support which can be accessed within one provision such as The Parks.</p> <p><u>Further questions and concerns</u></p> <p>Is mainstream right for all children ? What happens when the DSP is full ?</p>

There is a growing body of research that suggests mainstream settings may not always be the most suitable environments for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in the early years. Below are some studies and research findings that support this idea: Gray, C., & Whitehurst, T. (2015) concluded that children with SEND in mainstream settings may face challenges in accessing individualized and specialized support. The researchers found that class sizes, limited resources, and lack of training among early years staff can hinder the children's progress.

Bracken, E., et al. (2018) highlighted that mainstream settings might not provide an inclusive environment for children with SEND. The research found that children with SEND received less individualized support, had limited access to adapted learning materials, and experienced difficulty engaging in meaningful activities within the mainstream curriculum.

Cooper, L., et al. (2018) highlighted the potential negative impact of mainstream early years settings on children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The study found that children with ASD may experience high levels of anxiety and stress due to sensory overload, lack of predictability, and social challenges within mainstream settings.

These studies collectively suggest that mainstream early year's settings may not always meet the diverse needs of children with SEND. Individualized support, specialized teaching approaches, and inclusive practices are essential to ensure optimal development and learning outcomes for these children. However, it is worth noting that research also recognizes the potential benefits of inclusive education and the importance of creating inclusive environments (please see my recommendations below)

How does RCC plan to further support the staff working in the early year's settings?

Children with complex needs often require multidisciplinary support involving professionals, such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, and psychologists. By having all staff trained in SEND, they can effectively collaborate with these professionals, ensuring a seamless and coherent approach to supporting the child's development. Additionally, staff with SEND training can also effectively engage and communicate with families, involving them in the child's learning process and supporting their needs. In most settings within Rutland there is usually only one practitioner who is designated as the SENCO. Most of the time this practitioner does not have a qualification for this. Practitioners are not equipped with the specific and complex training required to look after children who may require; manual handling, hoists, peg feeding etc. Will RCC fund more appropriate training for ALL practitioners within Rutland. Although the 'Inclusive practice' course and the Level 3 offered from Dingley's promise has been good it will not be enough to support children with complex needs.

Will RCC be supporting settings to support the practitioners moral and mental health as the stress levels increase with a higher number of children who require support?

Staff morale directly impacts the quality of care and education provided to children. When staff members are happy and motivated, they are more likely to be engaged and be proactive in their work. They are more likely to plan and deliver stimulating and developmentally appropriate activities, ensure children's safety, and provide individual attention and support. However, with a high stress job comes low staff morale which can lead to increased turnover. The early years are already in a recruitment crisis which can be detrimental to the stability and continuity of care. This can disrupt the relationships and routines established with children and families, requiring new staff to be hired and trained if we can find any !

Will RCC be making an effort to 'check in' with setting to see how they are coping. This can not simply be just about the children. Practitioners in the setting are often forgotten about when meetings take place such a review meeting. How are the practitioners coping? With a likely increase in SEN children the stress is likely to be heightened. This needs to be supported for managers and all practitioners.

What happens when nurseries are full or simply cannot take any more children who require SEND support?

50% of my preschool children require some form of support such as SALT, 1:1, inclusion team involvement or already have a diagnosis. I would feel great pressure to accept any further children into my setting who already have emerging needs due to fears of the future, the support available, the care for the other children in the setting, and of course the ability to give them what they deserve. I know there is another Rutland setting who I shall not name but after speaking with them in confidence they have also expressed how they will not be able to take on many children who require support. So when we all start saying no sorry we can not meet there needs where will these children go?

Why has there been such a Lack of further research into the cohort of 2025?

I currently have two children who are at the start of the EHCP referral. I also have one child whose parent has started the EHCP process themselves due to starting the setting recently and the child not transitioning well. These children are due to start mainstream school in September 2024. These children could have potentially benefited from the use of The Parks, however, there has been no rush from RCC to promote practitioners to start the EHCP process nor has there been any encouragement to express to parent's that there is an option other than a mainstream school.

In the setting we do have children who are aged either 2 or 3 years old with potentially some emerging needs. These children could potentially benefit from an EHCP and therefore the parks in future cohorts such as 2025. How is RCC supporting these children if the DSP is full in 2025?

Will RCC be looking for some alternative funding to support the settings and the children who require support ?

I have children within the setting who are currently receiving SENIF funding. Although it was presented to us that some settings would benefit from the new banding system this has not been the case for us. One example I can give you is child A. Child A was previously receiving 12 hours of 1:1 support per week at £10 per hour. Therefore, meaning we received £120 per week to support the child with 1:1. The new banding system has meant that this child has been graded at band 1 meaning they are only entitled to £2 per hour. This comes to a total of £60 a week. This is simply not good enough and if half the money he was receiving before. The only other funding available to children who require support is with DAF funding. This is only accessible to those who have had a diagnosis. This does not happen often therefore meaning not many children are able to access this funding which help to fund resources etc for the child.

My recommendations

My hope going forward is that RCC will employ the Early years specialist teacher for more than 2 days a week.

More inclusion officers that will come and support both the children and the staff – not just observe for an hour.

Dual placement with The Parks for those children who require it. This will mean that they are able to access the specialist support that they require alongside the benefits of mainstream settings.

To help with the viability of The Parks could they not open during the holiday to provide holiday clubs to Rutland and maybe even neighbouring counties who are also term time only. It is so important that parent's receive support and respite all year round not just term time only.

*** identifying personal details redacted*

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2/12/23

** it (The Parks) was, and always will be a very special place. I have witnessed first hand how outstanding this provision is, which has also been reflected by Ofsted in the last two inspections. I have a moral belief that education is a basic human right, and all children should have equal opportunities.

I object to the proposed closure of The Parks based on the following:

- I believe The Parks is an essential provision. Many children with special education needs will not be able to cope in mainstream settings, even with additional support. The environment is not appropriate, and will not enable them to thrive. They will be surviving. I have witnessed this first hand. Often nursery's and early years settings are too loud, and too busy which results in children spending time alone, and away from their peers, as they cannot cope. This is not inclusive, in fact it has such a detrimental impact on the child. It can cause extreme cases of anxiety, frustration and dysregulation. Having seen this first hand, I know that the challenging behaviour that can be seen from SEND children who are struggling to cope in a mainstream provision can be extremely distressing both for them and their peers. Not to mention, the pressure this will also have on the teaching staff. I believe we will also see a rise in mental health conditions in early years practitioners, because of this. The council's aim is for more children with SEND to access mainstream, but this is absolutely not possible for some children. Especially when children have not had the crucial early intervention, that The Parks provides. This simply cannot be replicated in mainstream settings. With this level of early intervention, it may even be possible for some children to access some aspects of mainstream in the future. Early intervention involves early communication skills, which is so important for any child. How would you expect a child who has not received any early intervention, and is non-verbal or pre-verbal, to go into a mainstream setting and access the learning?
- I do not believe that mainstream nurseries and early years settings have the skills, expertise, experience or facilities in order to meet the needs of highly complex and disabled children, such as those who need opportunities to communicate in other ways than verbal, extremely small class sizes, and a safe, nurturing environment that will enable them to learn, and develop. The Parks team have a wealth of knowledge and experience, as well as specialised training, some of which that could be potentially life saving. I know this, as I worked there for almost 10 years, and had this kind of training.
- I believe that the cost of supporting these children in mainstream settings will cost more than educating them in The Parks, because they will require expensive additional equipment, changes to the environment, and specialist support staff. It will cost the council less to support these children together in a small group in The Parks, where they can share specialised staffing and equipment. I do not believe that in the long run, closing The Parks will save council money, as without this important early, intensive intervention, more children will end up needing specialist schools, which will mean sending even more children out of county to get the support they need. Also, why should they have to go out of county? I believe this will also have a detrimental impact on the children, and their families, with more experiencing anxiety and depression as a result.
- There are many children with SEND, in and around Rutland who NEED The Parks. As do their families. The Parks is a lifeline to some families!

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do not think it is morally right to reduce specialist provision for the most profoundly disabled and vulnerable children, so that more can be spent on those who's needs are such that they are able to access mainstream. • I do not agree that at a time where across the country other counties are building more special school places, that Rutland should be reducing the special school places. • I do not accept that all parents with children with complex needs for which The Parks caters for, would prefer their children to be educated in mainstream settings. • I believe that if The Parks closes, more parents will go to tribunal to get specialist provision for their children, which will incur additional legal costs to Rutland County Council. • It seems to have become increasingly more difficult to secure a place at The Parks. What was once an assessment centre for children with identified needs, became only available to those with EHCPs. I have spoken to many practitioners, parents and SENCOs who have made it clear that there are increasing numbers of children requiring specialist support in mainstream settings, of whom would benefit greatly from attending The Parks. • I do not feel that all the options for making the Parks viable have been fully explored, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating access for those children with significant needs who have not yet completed the EHCP process Expanding the provision to cater for more children. Expanding the DSP at Oakham C of E to include nursery age children. Please note that despite RCC claiming that children within DSP access mainstream, most of them do not and cannot. Those children need a highly differentiated curriculum, as well as small class sizes and appropriate areas in which they can withdraw to, if they are feeling dysregulated. If DSP expanded to include nursery age children, it could become its own specialist provision within the Rutland Learning Trust. <p>I have extreme concerns over this proposal. The Parks affects the wider community, and is a lifeline for families. I therefore object in the strongest possible terms to the proposal, and I urge Rutland County Council to pursue strategies which would make The Parks viable without closing it or reducing the provision that it is able to offer.</p> <p><i>** identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
71	<p>3/12/23</p> <p>I am a Rutland resident and ** attended the parks and developed remarkably. Where is the data regarding the number of SEN children in the county requiring this facility ?</p> <p><i>** identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
72	<p>3/12/23</p> <p>I was a teacher for 34 years and have taught in both mainstream and special school settings. Placing children in the correct setting from the offset is vital to their subsequent ability to thrive. If a child is placed in a setting that causes them severe anxiety or lack of stimulation it will colour their view of 'school' for many if not all their school years. If they find a placement</p>

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	<p>that fits their needs the exact opposite can occur, they will see school as a safe place to learn and make positive relationships.</p> <p>Placing a child incorrectly does not only affect them but also their peers in the class. Children who are anxious and upset take more teacher time and attention, resulting in a less positive experience for their classmates.</p> <p>I am a great believer in providing good role models for all children. Many children with a special needs will thrive in a mainstream setting, but for those who don't, we need special provision such as The Parks to at least give them a positive start to school life and learn skills which will enable them to thrive in a less specialist setting.</p> <p>As well as providing support for the child, places like The Parks helps parents to come to terms with their child's special needs and helps them to develop strategies which can support the whole family through the years to come.</p> <p>I hope the council will think very carefully before taking away this very special school. Saving money now may result in spending much more in the future and causing a great deal of trauma to already grieving families who only want to see their children thriving in an appropriate and supportive school setting.</p>
73	<p>3/12/23</p> <p>We would like to make the following comments in relation to the proposals:</p> <p>It is short-sighted to close the provision on the basis of current numbers. Rutland's population will expand as more houses are built and the requirement for provision for children with special educational needs in the future should be anticipated because once the provision is closed it will not be revived.</p> <p>There are some children whose needs can be met when they are integrated into mainstream provision as long as the teachers are adequately trained and additional support resources are forthcoming. It is also true that some children with particular needs will find this type of provision will hinder their progress and they would be much better served in a setting geared to their requirements.</p> <p>My wife and I have spent our working lives in the education sector. Since moving to Rutland in ** I have worked in three neighbouring counties before becoming an inspector and retiring from Ofsted in 2010. My wife has worked as a teacher in Rutland for over ** years. We both know the importance of specialist provision for children with high needs both for the children and their parents.</p> <p>We understand that a local authority which is small will be faced with difficult choices but this should not be an excuse for letting down.</p> <p><i>** identifying personal details redacted</i></p>
74	<p>3/12/23</p> <p>I copy in my local councillor, so that they are aware of my views in full, and are able to, as appropriate, represent my views as my democratic representative</p> <p>I strongly object to the proposals to close The Parks. I'm a qualified teacher, with a masters degree at distinction level in ** and have ** children with special educational needs.</p>

My youngest ** has an EHCP. RCC refused to assess ** and only backed down when threatened with legal proceedings. At nursery in Rutland ** was failed (they didn't even contribute to ** EHCP assessment), and the nursery refused to have any more contact with RCC discussing him. They spent ** DAF funding (£800) after ** was so distressed ** was not able to continue in the nursery and had left, and the local authority early years officer, **, knew this. They had promised to use the money on items to support ** school transition, then the manager of the nursery, reneged on their promise. ** was not given lunchtime meals ** could reliably eat at nursery for over a year, despite us asking, and professionals recommending that ** restricted diet be accommodated. We were told by the nursery that it was OK, because ** had a good snack, but other children still had a lunch they were able to eat. As a consequence ** never accessed ** full entitlement because ** had to come home at lunchtime. ** is currently in mainstream school, but ** accesses only 10 out of 32.5 hours education per week. RCC provide ** with no alternative education. So RCC's claim that ** is "maintaining their education in mainstream" is disingenuous to say the least. I know of several children in mainstream schools who are accessing school part time because their SEND needs are not met - my ** was one such child - for three years ** never attended beyond lunchtime on only 4 days a week, and RCC did not ensure ** had a full time education.

I don't feel the local authority has explored sufficient ways to make The Parks financially viable, including relieving the excess demand for specialist places in other local authorities (which they would pay for) and using the asset effectively in the holidays to provide respite, and considering whether The Parks could be expanded to include KS1 and KS2, absorbing capacity from other local authorities subject to availability (which would thus reduce the cost). Equally, have MATs been approached to see if they would consider taking on The Parks / establishing it at an alternative location?

I feel that The Parks has been rendered under-capacity by RCC policy changes that have made it more difficult to access at a time where parents and nurseries are discouraged from applying for EHCPs, and they take around 6 months in any case. RCC officers are actively discouraging parents from applying for EHCP assessments even when the children meet the legal criteria for one; I met a 4 year old boy in reception the other day who is minimally speaking and can only use 2 words together, yet he has no EHCP. Imagine, for a moment, how you would function in our workplace if you could only put two words together, with minimal speech. Now imagine how the child can be expected to cope in a class of 30 with a single teacher, make friends, participate, and engage at times when he does not have 1:1 TA support. I saw the boy at a party weep, sob, and cry with sheer frustration and sadness at times when he wanted to play, but did not have the communication support he needed to tell his peers what he needed or wanted; he cut a sad and lonely figure, playing alone. "Included" in the party, but segregated by virtue of the fact that without constant adult support, he was unable to effectively communicate with peers who are verbal and do not use and understand signs and symbols. But according to RCC, he doesn't need an EHCP. My point, is that RCC's definition of 'need' does not always reflect children and parents' experience. So to say that 'no children need' The Parks, is in reality "we do now know of any children who in our opinion, the Parks is needed, although they may well feel differently if they knew it was an option."

Just because RCC does not know of children in November that need specialist provision for 10 months later, does not mean that they do not exist. There are few schools, who are full a whole 10 months before an academic year. Firstly, just because you don't know about something, does not mean they don't exist. RCC does not know precisely how many children have a diagnosis of autism, but it does not mean that those children it does not know of simply cease to exist, or do not have their associated needs. Presumably RCC are unaware of

how many children are on part time timetables, (otherwise surely they would be providing them with full time education), yet ** was on a part time timetable for 3 years without RCC providing him with full time education. Either RCC accept that there are children in mainstream education who are not receiving their entitlement to full time education whom they are failing, or they accept that there are those they don't know about yet clearly still exist. They cannot have it both ways.

I feel that closing The Parks will in fact cost the LA more, as they will need to provide specialist provision at settings across Rutland, rather than enjoying economies of scale of having complex children in one place, sharing resources and expertise. It may cost the LA more in the long run because it will result in more parents seeking specialist, out of county provision. DSP provision is intrinsically for those children who are able to, in a meaningful sense, access mainstream provision - otherwise, it is segregated education. To suggest that a child who is never in lessons with their mainstream peers and has no contact with them except at lunchtime and assembly is included, is absurd. Will all the children and staff at Oakham C of E be trained and continuous users of Makaton so that these children can have meaningful relationships with their peers at breaktime, and lunchtime, and access these lessons? Will small class sizes of 5 (a standard figure for the autism provision at Birchwood) be provided for those children who need very small group sizes in which to learn? Will children who display behaviour that challenges stemming from their diagnoses be welcomed and accepted in mainstream classrooms, when they may shout out, hum, sing, to manage their sensory needs? Will a child who regulates himself by opening and closing doors be permitted to sit by the door, repetitively opening and closing it throughout the lesson? Will children be encouraged to bounce on yoga balls, and regularly leave their seats, in order to move, despite the obvious distraction to other pupils this may cause? Will the teachers all use makaton and adjust their curricula and activities so that minimally speaking children are included? Otherwise, what access to mainstream education will these children realistically have?

There is confusion as to what benefit closing the Parks will achieve. One the one hand, we are told that the funding will go entirely to Oakham C of E to create additional DSP places, but how will the support the children with complex needs who are in mainstream nurseries? Where will these children go when their needs are such that they are a risk to themselves and others without the sort of intensive, continuous support in a quiet environment that the Parks provides. How will nurseries (who are businesses) be compelled to accept children who without highly specialist support pose a risk to themselves and others? How would they keep safe a child who repeatedly and without warning, bangs their head on objects? Or a child who initiates play with other children by hitting or pushing them? Without constant, highly skilled staff? On a pedagogical level, how will nurseries be expected to educate children who are 4 and learning early numeracy and literacy, alongside children who may be non-speaking and communicate their needs physically. How will these children have meaningful, reciprocal relationships with their peers? Would a mainstream school be expected to educate an 5 year old alongside 8 year olds, or 12 year olds alongside 15 year olds, despite their obvious developmental differences? So why would it be acceptable to expect nurseries, who often lack qualified teachers to do this? Ask yourself this - if your child was studying a subject at GCSE, say, physics. But instead of a teacher, the school had support from a visiting advisory physics teacher from the local authority every half term or so, but the rest of the time was taught by somebody with an A-level in geography who had been on a course to 'upskill' them, would you consider that adequate? So why would nursery practitioners, often on the minimum wage, be sufficiently skilled and qualified to teach children who have complex needs requiring bespoke, evolving, highly adaptive packages of support?

There is, to my knowledge, no significant, undisputed evidence basis that mainstream education is a causative factor in better outcomes for children with high level SEND. In fact, children with disabilities are many times more likely to be excluded from mainstream school, which indeed suggests the opposite. If such evidence exists, it has not been presented, and runs counter to the findings in "The Inclusion Illusion", by Webster (UCL)

"Based on the UK's largest observation study of pupils with high-level SEND, *The Inclusion Illusion* exposes how attendance at a mainstream school is no guarantee of receiving a mainstream education. Observations of nearly 1,500 lessons in English schools show that their everyday experience of school is characterised by separation and segregation. Furthermore, interviews with nearly 500 pupils, parents and school staff reveal the effect of this marginalisation on the quality of their education. The way schools are organised and how classrooms are composed creates a form of 'structural exclusion' that preserves mainstream education for typically-developing pupils and justifies a diluted pedagogical offer for pupils with high-level SEND. Policymakers, not mainstream schools, are indicted over the state of affairs."

Under the model proposed for the DSP at Oakham C of E, there would be significant numbers of children who access little, if any, mainstream education. Clearly, this is more likely to be for children with the most profound and complex needs, such as those catered for by The Parks, who are not able to access mainstream classroom-based education.

Leicester City Council state that:

DSPs provide specialist provision for specific types of special needs as part of mainstream school or academy. Children who are placed in DSPs do not require full time specialist provision but require some additional specialist support to access the curriculum. Their time is split between mainstream lessons and activities and the DSP. [Designated Specialist Provision \(DSP\) | Leicester City](#)

Clearly, there is a positive selection bias in favour of mainstream education (more able children tend to be placed there, who would achieve better outcomes regardless). However, the metrics in terms of outcomes are often limited, and my understanding is that there is within the literature no consensus that mainstream provision where children access few, if any, mainstream classes, results in better outcomes for children - academically, socially, and emotionally. I am concerned that educational psychology has not been consulted and provided a report into the proposed change and explained how the needs of complex children requiring the Parks will be met in the mainstream available, and that the mainstream nursery provision available and the DSP presents provision that is "as good, if not better" than the Parks.

Furthermore, how will vulnerable, disabled children who are not able to access mainstream nurseries because of challenging behavior or complex needs be safeguarded? Do we not run the risk that they will in fact have higher long term needs in the absence of intensive early intervention, thus requiring longer, more intensive specialist education.

Closing The Parks may also have a disproportionately large impact on women, who, in the absence of appropriate children for their children with complex needs, may (as more often the primary carer) suffer a loss of income both short and long term if they are forced to stay at home and care for the children. Has an equality impact assessment been done to consider the?

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Have local specialist provisions (all of which are full beyond capacity) been consulted to consider the impact it will have on them? Have they been consulted as specialists as to whether they think mainstream provision is suitable for the sort of children who need to access The Parks? Furthermore, there is a financial risk that an organisation may enter Rutland / a neighboring local authority and set up an independent specialist primary provision which could offer the sort of small class sizes and specialist provision that many complex children need. Given the high levels of success in parents achieving their chosen placement, the could in fact cost the LA more in the long run because Independent Special schools are *extremely* expensive, and in the absence of any LA specialist primary schools, and the local maintained ones being heavily over subscribed, parents would have a very strong case. The local authority knows this, as they spend hundreds of thousands of pounds every year on independent specialist placements, both in and out of Rutland.

Parents have a very good success rate of getting their chosen school whenever they are prepared to challenge RCC at tribunal, which more will do if the Parks is not available to reassure parents that their needs can be met in Rutland. RCC is one of a handful of local authorities who choose to pay solicitors and barristers tens of thousands of pounds to oppose unrepresented parents, yet the number of appeals found in favour of the LA and not upheld or conceded prior to hearing is extremely small. My home insurance does not provide legal cover unless I have a "reasonable" chance of success (more than 50%), yet my understanding is that of the appeals not conceded by the LA, the tribunal upholds the appeal in over 90% of cases. Yet however impoverished the LA is, when faced with parent-carers of disabled children without legal representation, it feels a need for teams of legally qualified personelle.

I urge the local authority to reconsider their decision, and explore ways to make The Parks sustainable, rather than leaping to a forgone conclusion and closing it. Independent specialist schools are often over-subscribed and run with very positive financial margins, so there is no reason to think that specialist provision is intrinsically nonviable in financial terms. There are so many significant risks in the plan, yet so many opportunities to use what is an "outstanding" school so much better. I truly believe that the conclusion RCC has reached is ill-conceived and highly short-termist, and will deliver poorer outcomes not just for children and families across Rutland and the wider area, but for Rutland County Council.

*** Identifying personal details*

75 3/12/23
I write to you as a Rutland resident and parent of a child with additional needs. It is essential that The Parks remains running to serve our community, I strongly disagree with the proposal to close The Parks.

76 3/12/23
I am a retired teacher who was based in London schools for 38 years. I have a long term interest in SEND provision and have closely followed the debate regarding the Parks nursery.

My observations are as below

It is reported that over the past 2 years, RCC have introduced the requirements of an EHCP as a criteria of admission. Despite this not being a statutory requirement. Given the children are typically admitted for two years only, the need for an EHCP as a condition of admission would seem to place a clear obstacle to entry.

It seems the assessment of likely future need is based on current numbers, I believe this is 3

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	<p>pupils, no reference is made in these numbers to Forces families who have been regular users of the Parks. These families move around so demand will vary.</p> <p>The BBC Today programme 29 November 2023 reported the UK is experiencing a significant demand for SEND provision.</p> <p>The latest OFSTED report on the Parks was based on far higher pupil numbers (10) than the current.</p> <p>FOI 10123/23 confirms the county has seen an increase in out-of-county placement from January 21 to October 23, from 100 to 144.</p> <p>I would question how rigorous the assessment of numbers has been.</p> <p>I would now like to turn to the formulation of the proposal.</p> <p>I believe a group of SEND professionals have been reviewing the Parks since 2019. A working group comprising of RCC, members of the staff of the CofE, the Parks and the parent governors concluded the current provision of the Parks was not fit for purpose and it would be in the best interest of both the Children and Parents if future provision targeted a wider group of children including those with special needs.</p> <p>Parents I have spoken to believe the Parks operates as an independently managed RCC funded specialist nursery school. However the ending of the Parks provision will only allow an increase of 1 DSP place.</p> <p>I therefore can only assume less provision of SEND to those who need it will be a result of the closure of the Parks.</p> <p>Therefore please record this as my objection to the proposal.</p>
77	<p>3/12/23</p> <p>As the parent of ** I support inclusive education and opportunity but also believe that there remains a place for alternative specialist provision where this is the most appropriate setting in which to meet an individual child's needs.</p> <p>It is odd that RCC is choosing to close a provision which is rated by Ofsted as an Outstanding provision, a provision which 'helps children to be the best they can be'. I wonder, how does RCC plan to engage another provision which is likely to lead to improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of educational provision for these children? (Annex C; DfE guidance on closing schools). In addition how does RCC propose to ensure that the proposed arrangements to ensure the expertise and specialism continues to be available? (Annex C; DfE guidance on closing schools).</p> <p>As a family we experienced the genuine love, care and concern the staff at The Parks show for all their pupils. They supported us as we started our journey as a disabled family, supported us during our dark moments and provided a safe place where we could express our feelings and emotions as we learnt to accept that our journey was going to be different to others. Our ** siblings were as much a part of The Parks Family as we were as parents and they too were well supported. Over **years later we maintain strong friendships with other local parents and families. Our ** is a valued member of the Rutland community as The Parks was, and still is, a valued and loved part of the wider community.</p>

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	<p>RCC, please think again before you finalise the proposal - stressed, distressed and exhausted parents already have to leave the county to access the majority of their child's specialist health services; please don't make them do this to access specialist early education as well.</p> <p>Work with The Parks School to maintain and develop it's outstanding and unique services, not to close it.</p> <p><i>** Identifying personal details</i></p>
78	<p>3/12/23</p> <p>I wish to record my dismay at the proposal to close such an outstanding and much needed facility. I do not have any personal experience of the school but have friends whose children have attended there. I do not believe that there aren't enough children in Rutland who are in need of the expertise that only the specialist staff there can provide. There is so much new housing being built and within the increased population there will be more children with special needs. Other authorities in the country are recognizing that the number of children with special needs is growing and are catering for them, Rutland isn't any different.</p> <p>These children cannot cope in mainstream education, it isn't fair to them and it's not fair to the mainstream children either. With the best will in the world there won't be sufficient/satisfactory support for them and everyone will suffer as a result. If the closure results in children being sent out of county that will be disastrous for them and their families.</p> <p>It has been suggested that the Parks School is undersubscribed currently because it has been made so difficult for anyone to be referred. I do hope there isn't any truth in this.</p>
79	<p>3/12/23</p> <p>I am a Rutland resident with a ** with SEND. I would like to register that I strongly disagree with the proposal to close the Parks. As a parent of a child with SEND needs I feel it is important to have this special provision for early years as early intervention can make a large difference. Based on personal experience, private sector nurseries (even ones that excel in most areas) are not fully equipped manage children with the special needs.</p> <p>Whilst for several years I pushed for my child to access mainstream (non-designated provision) education - it didn't work and I believe this has had a lasting impact on his mental wellbeing. I firmly believe that it is important to have educational provision with carers/educators that have the right skills and understanding that can make a lasting impact. This is just not feasible across a large diverse range of nurseries and childminders.</p> <p>The mental impact on parents of not having effective support is substantial and the ability to provide the type of provision can make a large difference to both parental wellbeing and economic productivity.</p> <p><i>** Identifying personal details</i></p>
80	<p>3/12/23</p> <p>I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to express my concerns regarding the recent announcement of the closure of the sole special school within the Oakham area, The Parks Special School. As a parent of an ** child with Down's syndrome, I am very worried about the potential repercussions this closure might have on children in our community who require specialised education and support.</p> <p>The geographical isolation of Oakham already poses significant challenges for families seeking specialised educational services. The absence of an alternative nearby school will necessitate</p>

extensive travel, placing an unfair and impractical burden on families and our children. For many of us, this distance is not just a matter of inconvenience but a significant barrier that could severely disrupt our children's education and well-being. Transporting our children long distances daily to access suitable educational facilities not only poses logistical challenges but also significantly impacts their routine, comfort, and ability to thrive in an educational setting conducive of their needs. The stress and fatigue associated with extended travel are not suitable for children with additional needs and could hinder their progress and development.

I urge you to consider the long-term consequences of this decision on the children who rely on the specialised services provided by The Park Special School. It is crucial to ensure that suitable alternatives or provisions are in place to guarantee the uninterrupted support and education these children deserve. I kindly request an opportunity for concerned parents, educational professionals, and relevant stakeholders to engage in discussions aimed at finding viable solutions or alternative arrangements that prioritize the welfare and educational needs of children with additional needs in our community.

Your attention to this matter is greatly appreciated, and I am hopeful that together, we can explore options that will safeguard the educational rights and well-being of children with special needs in our area.

Thank you for your consideration.

The following was received as an attachment with representation numbers 8 and 48.

The 'Save The Parks Team' Response to RCCs Questions and answers section of The Parks Proposal 24/11/23 (response in blue)

1. Will our voices be heard?

Yes. Public consultation on the Parks Special Nursery School is running from 1 November to 3 December 2023. All responses we receive via our dedicated consultation email address during this period will be considered. The Council has enlisted Maureen Morris to support the consultation and provide an independent overview of the process. Maureen is a parent-carer herself and has worked as a parent participation consultant nationally for a number of years, as well as being an associate of the charity **Contact for families with disabled children**.

• RCC were asked for further clarification on the process the responses are below:

- Please can you clarify what the process is on the consultation?

The statutory process of closing a maintained school is set out by the Department for Education: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1131568/Opening_and_closing_maintained_schools_Jan_2023.pdf

The consultation on the proposal commences with a public launch of the proposal. The proposal is then published in key places that are accessible to the community. The Council invites representations, comments and questions during a period of 30 days through an agreed and published route to the Council. All comments, representation and questions are logged. All responses received by email and other formats are being read by Maureen Morris, an external independent consultant. Councillors are receiving regular briefings regarding residents' questions and responses. Councillors are also having their own questions responded to.

- What is the 'process' that Maureen Morris will be independently overviewing

Maureen Morris, the external independent consultant, is reviewing the comments, questions and responses as they come in, and she will take into account the impact on the author, the number of responses and the themes raised to compile a report. Maureen Morris is providing an independent view on the consultation process and the comments that come in. She has been fully informed of the launch, the content of the proposal and sees all entries to the Council. She is asking questions of the Council as they arise. From this, a report will be created and presented to Rutland County Council Cabinet which will be published in advance of the Cabinet meeting. The Cabinet will then make a decision on the proposal. The outcome of that decision

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will be published within a week of the decision.

The DfE Guidance states that the local authority will be the decision maker on a school closure proposal and that within one week of making a decision, they MUST publish their decision and the reasons for such a decision being made on their website.

- *What do you mean by responses will be considered? How are responses to the consultation*

analysed and used to inform the final decision on the proposal?

Each comment or question is considered by Council Officers and by Maureen Morris. Key themes, impact on the community and the number of responses will inform the report that will go to Cabinet.

- *So if Mr X sends an email then what happens? And how is this used to inform the decision?*

As above.

- *Will councillors see all emails?*

A log of all emails is kept, and Councillors can see these if they request to do so. Councillors are also submitting questions and comments on behalf of constituents and are receiving responses.

- *Will parts of emails be used (if so who decides which bits to ignore?)*

All the comments representation and questions will be used.

- *Or is it just that a number of people have opposed?*

No, the content of the representations, comments and questions will be considered.

● We are awaiting responses on:

- what qualification does the independent consultant hold in order for her to analyse that data and what type of analysis is she using?

- If she isn't using one, who is and what qualifications do they hold?

● RCC, we've got to say that we find the answers you've given intending to clarify the process are still actually rather confusing and unclear!

● On one hand you say responses will be looked at for themes to compile a report (which infers that responses and comments will not be passed on in full) then at the end you state all the comments, representations and questions will be used. But how? If this was an EHCP you'd be in trouble for not being specific!

● Also, have all councillors been made aware that they will have to request to see emails?

2. Who has been involved in developing this proposal?

An experienced group of independent SEND professionals has been reviewing the special provision at The Parks Nursery School since 2019. This has been done to examine the current arrangements and make sure they are fit for purpose, or plan for a future delivery model.

Following on from this review, a working group made of Council officers, The Parks staff, Oakham Primary School teaching staff and leadership, as well as parent governors, was set up to develop a more inclusive Early Years offer for Rutland, targeting a wider group of children including those with additional needs.

● The school is called Oakham C of E Primary School - not Oakham Primary School

● Oakham C of E Press Release - 'As it is a Local Authority school, the decision to consult on the future of The Parks School has been made solely by the Local Authority. We believe that for a number of years, The Parks School has and still continues to provide outstanding care and provision for children and families across Rutland. Some of our most vulnerable local children, many with significant learning and medical needs or disabilities, have benefited from enriching opportunities and the professionalism, dedication and love from our school staff team. Whatever the outcome of the consultation and any resulting decision by the Local Authority, our overarching aim is to support our staff team and ensure that, in whatever form, we still have an integral role in ensuring all local children with additional needs and disabilities have their specific needs met locally.'

● How were the 'independent' SEND consultants found? What was the tendering process?

Who paid the consultancy fees? How much were they paid? (and is this money that could have helped SEND children?!) Which 'pot' did the consultancy fees come out of?

Did anyone at RCC previously know the consultants or recommend them? Were they

REALLY independent?

3. How much does it cost to run the Parks and what would you do with this money?

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The funding for Special Needs education and provision comes from the High Needs Fund (HNF), which is part of the Dedicated Schools Budget. The HNF is currently running at a deficit of £1.3million. The Parks has a Minimum Funding Guarantee of £250,719 for 7.5 places. This is to ensure the school and the provision has sufficient funding to maintain a safe learning environment for students. This money will not be taken away from the school but will be used to enhance the offer at Oakham Primary School. This will be done by increasing the number of places in the school's Designated Special Provision (DSP) from September 2024.

- It is 7.5 full time equivalent places so can be up to 15 children on roll part time.
- The minimum funding guarantee was only put in place 1/4/22 prior to this the school was actually underfunded.
- Both the top-up and place funding has been static for the last 10+ years and has not kept pace with increasing expenditure such as general inflation, staffing annual pay awards, significant pension increases, the significant realignment of support staff pay scales in line with the living wage etc. This has resulted in the school living off its reserves brought forward. The place funding is centrally set and has been fixed at £10k for many years so up until 1/4/22 the school received maximum funding of £75,000 (7.5FTE x £10k). In order to be fair, ensure quality and sustainability, surely the funding should be responsive to inflationary factors which **ALL** other schools receive as part of their entitlement through the national funding formula and independent providers receive through their price increases. The Parks does **NOT** benefit from this. RCC is able to add an inflationary factor to the top-up funding each year to ensure The Parks school is not disadvantaged compared to other schools or independent providers to avoid a diminishing base line. This is why an MFG had to be agreed to make the provision sustainable.
- It is only fair to give **ALL** of the information to ghs public as the response you have given insinuates that The Parks is at least 20% responsible for the high needs deficit which is simply not true!
- The parks **SAVES** the council money in the long term as early intervention at The Parks fast tracks children's development allowing many children to then access the local DSP rather than needing specialist out of county primary provision.
- HNF is paid for from the national budget allocation for mainstream Rutland schools. It can be accessed for any child without an EHCP attending a mainstream Rutland School. It is also used for supporting Rutland children with an EHCP who are educated in or out of county in mainstream or specialist provisions.
- The High Needs Block only covers children's placement or support costs. It does not meet the costs associated with legal challenge, assessment costs, travel costs etc. which is met by the Local Authority. (Per schools forum 17/6/21)
- Are RCC really going to pay the DSP £250,719 to extend? Or is this another error?

4. Will Early Years providers be able to cope with the influx of children who would have gone to the Parks, if the special nursery closes?

There are currently no nursery age children at the Parks Nursery Special School. All children currently at the Parks are of school age (Reception) and may be supported in Oakham Primary School's Designated Special Provision (DSP). In the previous two academic years, there were no more than three nursery age children attending the Parks, all of whom did so on a part time basis. Looking ahead, we are not aware of any children of nursery age needing specialist nursery provision from September 2024. This means there would be no increase in the number of children needing nursery places in mainstream settings if The Parks provision were to close.


- There are children who's families want to access the parks - for both nursery and foundation stage (it's not called reception anymore!). We have a list of some if RCC would like to see it?
- A Local SEN support group for under 5s has repeatedly told RCC staff they are full and have a waiting list - so RCC must know there are nursery age children who want to and could access The Parks.
- Since starting the consultation another child has started at The Parks – demonstrating how intake can fluctuate through the year it is not always a September start date.

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- Nurseries have come forward and said they have recently submitted paperwork for a number of children they believe need to access The Parks.
- There used to be waiting lists for The Parks school when children just had to have an identified need as criteria for entry, the staff then assisted in applying for an ehcp with evidence from the plan/do/review cycles. Since RCC put in the barrier to entry of children must have an ehcp it has been nearly impossible for young children to access the provision. Children are on waiting lists for ASD pathways, to see paediatricians and other professionals so they are unable to get diagnosis, or support, or an ehcp to access The Parks provision which they do desperately need!
- Expecting parents to sort out an ehcp when they are struggling to come to terms with their child's needs and just trying to survive is both ludicrous and cruel. Especially when RCC is attempting to reduce the number of EHCPs it issues to children. If they can't get an EHCP how can they get a place?
- Putting that barrier to entry in has stopped access and reduced numbers - intentionally to run The Parks down to close it?
- The Parks also used to take children from out of county. This again was stopped.
- Closing The Parks could also prevent parents from being able to work!
- With all the new housing developments bringing new families into the area surely it is common sense that some of those new families are likely to have SEN children? Especially as one family has already stated one of the reasons they moved to Rutland was to access The Parks school for their vulnerable child.

5. How can nurseries and childminders afford to support children with SEND without this having an impact on other children?

The number of children in mainstream nurseries or with a childminder would not change if the Parks were to close. This is because there are currently no nursery aged children attending The Parks. From January 2024, the local authority is making additional funding available for nurseries and childminders, so they can offer SEND support to wider range of children. This will allow the sector to provide additional support at the earliest opportunity and improve the long-term outcomes for our children with special educational needs and disabilities. Rutland County Council continues to provide this inclusion funding at a significantly higher rate than neighbouring local authorities.

- This is ridiculous - if The Parks can take 7.5-15 children each year and that setting is closed of course the number of children in mainstream nurseries would increase!
- SENif funding to nurseries and childminders has in real terms been reduced due to the new banding system. Where a child would have received £300 for 1:1 support (£10 x 30 hours) they may now receive as little as £60 (£2 x 30 hours). So what is this additional funding?
- Nurseries and childminder do currently identify needs at the earliest opportunity and provide what support they can - they then often have to apply for an ehcp to try and get children a place at The Parks as they cannot give the level of intervention/support required due to lack of funding/support.
- Private nurseries are independent business therefore as such of they are unable to meet the needs of children or do not have capacity they can refuse to take children (as long as it is not discrimination).
- Are RCC going to fund all mainstream settings to make adaptations such as hygiene rooms with hoists, specialist toilet frames, extra rooms built which they can then have a small number of children, train staff on tube feeding, sensory diets etc - so that they can meet the needs of children. Or will it end up in a years time having to create a setting that has all this - oh wait a minute like The Parks 
- Everyone in a civilised society wants inclusion but this isn't it. No matter what you do mainstream is not in the best interest of many children. And this should be about what is in the best interest of the children - not what you think you should do to be more inclusive. By taking this route of inclusivity you will be excluding the most vulnerable children from access to an early years education.
- Early intervention through The Parks gives children the best opportunity for success and optimises their chances of local inclusion later in their school career.

6. How do you know that nurseries and childminders have the facilities and expertise to support children with SEND?

Park Special Nursery School Consultation – Anonymised representations.

The expertise of Rutland nurseries is growing rapidly and is currently the best it's ever been, following support from our Early Years SEN Specialist Teacher. Nurseries and childminders can contact the Specialist Teacher at any point. They have also identified and provided bespoke training for mainstream practitioners, to help meet the needs of children with SEND. The Council's Inclusion Team is providing more targeted support for nurseries and childminders who care for children with the most complex needs. A Schools Support Partnership (SSP) has also been set up to promote inclusion in all schools in Rutland. The Partnership provides support for Speech, Language and Communication needs (SLC), advice for settings, training for all staff in the identification of SLC needs, ideas for promoting good SLC development and strategies for supporting children experiencing difficulties or delays. Rutland County Council also continues to fund training for Rutland Early Years practitioners from entry level inclusion training to Level 3 inclusive practice training, alongside a wide range of courses from quality trainers, such as Dingley's Promise and Nasen. More than 70 Early Years practitioners have now accessed inclusion training with Dingley's Promise. The Disability Access Fund remains available for nurseries and childminders to use for children claiming Disability Living Allowance. This helps settings to provide the facilities or make adaptations and adjustments to their environment to ensure accessibility for children with additional needs.

- Have you ever tried to claim DLA for a child under 5 (or even a child over 5)? I suggest not! It is incredibly difficult to get DLA awarded, so, in reality nurseries and childminders will not be able to access The Disability Access Fund so you are effectively pushing more and more costs onto them when the sector is already struggling to remain financially sustainable. And ultimately adaptations won't be made so children will not be able to attend.
- It is good to hear that more SEN training for nurseries and childminders is happening, however surely this is something that should happen anyway and should not rely on closing the only suitable alternative provision to do this!
- The SSP (formerly known as the EIP) was established in February 2020 and while there are some success stories it is also failing some of the most vulnerable children. RCCs intent to make the SSP support package look more attractive than the support a child will get with an ehcp to deter families from applying for an ehcp is abhorrent! And where the support has failed children and families have suffered trauma for years and having to apply for ehcps themselves in order to access a suitable provision - the ehcp process is a minimum of 20 weeks so what do they do in that time? While we understand that you need to allow strategies time to try and work, you also need to react quicker when schools and families are telling you it is not working! RCC are currently inflicting school based trauma on many children.
- Placing children who cannot access any of the mainstream educational opportunities, nor form meaningful reciprocal relationships with their peers in mainstream classes, is seclusion, not inclusion.

7. How many under-fives in Rutland have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan and how many have been refused an assessment or Plan in the past three years?

There are currently 11 Rutland children under the age of five (Nursery and Reception age) with EHC Plans. A further two children under the age of five are currently being assessed. In the past three years, we have refused to assess one child under five for an EHC Plan. This initial decision was eventually reviewed and a needs assessment was carried out. We have not refused to issue any EHC Plans to children under five years of age during the past three years. There are currently no children of nursery age being assessed for an EHC Plan and none being appealed.

- This data is not current - there are a number of nursery age children who have submitted ehcp assessment requests. There are also further families who should have been advised to request an assessment but haven't been.
- The parents of the child you refused to assess had to threaten tribunal to get you to change your mind and assess. This isn't something RCC chose to do even though they should have.

8. Does this mean young children with SEND won't get the education they have a right to?

Children with special educational needs and disabilities will continue to receive the right care and support in Early Years settings, whatever the outcome of this consultation. As a Local Authority, we have a legal duty under Section 27 of the Children & Families Act 2014 to keep under review the educational, training and social care provision made for children and young people with SEND. We

Park Special Nursery School Consultation – Anonymised representations.

must consider the extent to which the education, training and social care provision is sufficient to meet the educational, training and social care needs of the children and young people with SEND. As we have referenced already, a recent Local Area Inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission reviewed the Rutland's provision for children with additional needs and found these services to be among the best anywhere in the country.

- In the ofsted only 2 parents were spoken to - so how is that a true reflection?
- If you take away The Parks school there will not be sufficient APPROPRIATE placement for the SEN and disabled children of Rutland.

9. Will children who would have gone to the Parks now have to go out of county, with the associated transport costs?

We want to increase opportunities for children with SEND or emerging needs to access mainstream Early Years education closer to home. This would reduce the need for long journeys and give children with additional needs the opportunity to form friendships with other local children their age. The Designated Specialist Provision (DSP) at Oakham Primary School will be equipped to meet the needs of many of our Rutland children who may have previously attended The Parks Nursery Special School in Reception or Year 1. Our mainstream schools are also rapidly developing their expertise as part of Rutland's School Support Partnership (SSP). In addition to this, several primary schools are now creating more flexible mainstream offers of

provision to meet children's needs and are doing so effectively and inclusively. As a result, there are lots more opportunities for children who may have attended The Parks in the past to access and thrive in a mainstream setting. Rutland County Council does not expect the number of children travelling outside of the county for specialist provision to change. This remains a very low number of Early Years aged children. There are currently no Rutland children of nursery age and just three children in Reception or Year 1 attending out of county specialist provision.

- Children who would have attended The Parks will end up having to go out of county -maybe not at nursery age but when they reach statutory school age. Ultimately when the most vulnerable Childrens needs can not be met in mainstream nursery the child will end up staying at home until they are old enough to access an out of county specialist provision. The specialised early intervention received at The Parks can fast track children's development allowing many children to then access the local DSP rather than needing specialist out of county primary provision (at a high placement and transport cost)

- By closing The Parks you will be preventing many children from accessing suitable provision close to home.

- If you truly want SEN children to be able to access provision close to home then do what families have been screaming out for for many years - build an SEN provision for Rutlands children! If by any chance it isn't full (which is highly unlikely) other counties can pay RCC for places for their children bringing funds into the county.

- 1023/23 - FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST shows that out of county placements are steadily increasing - Jan 2021 100 children, Jan 2022 128 children, Oct 2023 144 children. It also states this is at a cost of over **£7.8 million** over the last 3 years (not including transport costs). This figure may even be **understated?** given that the oakham based Independent Special provision (The Shires) has a base cost of £80k -£90k per child per year! And some of the settings children from Rutland currently have placements at are a mix of other county maintained, independent schools, boarding schools, distance wise as close as melton to as far as the Isle of Wight.

- We wholeheartedly believe that all children with SEND should be allowed to access the provision which is most suitable for them, wherever that may be. However, as Rutland does not have its own full special school families are not given that option. As a recent RCC parent/education survey showed families really want their children educated close to home - this does not mean families want their children in mainstream!

- Rutland SEND families want a special school in Rutland so that children can be educated close to home in an appropriate setting with the correct approach/equipment/training etc

10. What is the Designated Specialist Provision (DSP) and how will they support the reception children who used to stay in the Parks?

The Designated Specialist Provision (DSP) is part of Oakham Primary School, which is an academy in The Rutland Learning Trust. It caters for children whose special educational needs and/or

Park Special Nursery School Consultation – Anonymised representations.

disabilities require specialist support over and above that which a mainstream school can normally provide as part of an EHC Plan. The DSP provides care and support for pupils from Reception, Key Stage 1 and 2. The DSP is designed to enable primary phase children with SEND, who require specialist and individualised support, to continue to access and experience mainstream education by offering them the opportunity to access aspects of the mainstream curriculum, the internal environment and the external environment of a mainstream school as

appropriate. They do this while continuing to receive individualised specialist support within designated DSP facilities. The DSP supports children with the following Special Educational Needs:

- Cognition and Learning - children with learning difficulties which are persistent over time, pervasive across the curriculum and which affect, alter or slow their learning.
- Communication and Interaction needs - children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and have difficulty in communicating with others. This may be because they have difficulty saying what they want to, understanding what is being said to them or they do not understand or use social rules of communication. The profile for every child with SLCN is different and their needs may change over time. Like the Parks Special Nursery, Oakham Primary School's DSP is not intended to provide support to children who have severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties, who are likely to have significant levels of support requirements across all areas of special educational needs and daily care. The provision may support children whose special educational needs might also require emotional and behavioural support and wider adaptation. This includes children with low to moderate behavioural support and sensory needs and may include children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) with additional cognition and learning needs. An explicit ambition of

the DSP provision is that children will have increased opportunity to access learning and social opportunities alongside their mainstream peers as an integral part of the mainstream school community. Oakham Primary School facilitate access to support as part of an EHC Plan, if required. This includes Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists, Educational Psychologists and Speech and Language Therapists, to ensure provision is appropriate to the individual needs of children. There is also a dedicated family liaison officer who provides support for families and works closely with the staff at Rutland County Council's Family Hub.

• **AGAIN THE SCHOOL IS CALLED OAKHAM C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL** if you can't even get the school name correct what hope is there!

• What happens when a child starts at the DSP but it then becomes apparent they cannot meet need? We understand that RCC has noticed children in this situation previously? If so this is not in the best interest if the child, the school, the staff or the other children?

• Over the last few years the level of needs that children have who access the DSP have changed and some might say increased. This has resulted in the DSP changing. In the past it had 2 classrooms (room 1 as a quiet autism unit and room 2 for moderate learning disabilities, ASD not primarily requiring quiet, and everything else). The DSP has since had to be restructured to have 3 pathways to better meet the needs of the children now accessing - with an informal, semi formal and formal pathway. The informal pathway focusing more on life skills and non mainstream curriculum learning. The DSP has had to change significantly in order to try to meet the needs of the children, yet RCC still want to treat it as a mainstream provision.

• The DSP is not an equivalent to The Parks. The Parks Special School is a specialist provision, the Designated Special Provision (DSP), which is intended to fit in between specialist and mainstream, is legally classed as mainstream provision.

Leicester city council describe DSPs as "DSPs provide specialist provision for specific types of special needs as part of mainstream school or academy. Children who are placed in DSPs do not require full time specialist provision but require some additional specialist support to access the curriculum. Their time is split between mainstream lessons and activities and the DSP.

"<https://mychoice.leicester.gov.uk/Categories/387>

Similarly, Leicestershire describe enhanced resource schools as;

"Enhanced resource schools are mainstream schools with additional resources for particular children with an Education, Health and Care Plan, where there is more specialist support and staff. Pupils are not generally taught separately and are included in the mainstream classes."

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/special-educational-needs-and-disability/education-and-childcare/send-support-in-schools/choosing-and-applying-for-a-school-for-a-child-with-special-educational-needs-or-disability-send>

11. How can I be sure my child will be supported as well in the Designated Special Provision as they would have been in The Parks?

The Parks Special Nursery School and the DSP occupy the same building and much of the space is already shared between the two provisions. This includes a swimming pool, which is used by children from The Parks and the DSP. Many of the staff, including the leadership team, already work across both The Parks and the DSP, ensuring the skills and expertise will remain.

The funding used to support the running The Parks Special Nursery would not be taken away if the provision were to close. Instead, it would be used to further enhance the offer at Oakham Primary School, including the DSP.

- On one hand RCC say the money saved on The Parks will be spread amongst the other settings to improve inclusivity, yet on the Q&As it states ‘£250,719 - This money will not be taken away from the school but will be used to enhance the offer at Oakham Primary School. This will be done by increasing the number of places in the school’s Designated Special Provision (DSP) from September 2024’

- So which is it?
- Are RCC really going to pay the DSP £250,719 to extend? Or is this another error.
- Just because The Parks and the DSP occupy the same building does not mean that they provide the same. The Parks is registered as a special school, whereas the DSP is legally a mainstream provision.

12. What kind of wider support will be available to parents and families of children with additional needs, if The Parks were to close?

As well as support and signposting from individual nurseries, Rutland’s Family Hub has a range of support groups for parents. This includes an Autism Support Group, Triple P ‘Stepping Stones’ parenting programme for the parents of children with SEND, as well as play and learning activities for children with developmental needs, such as the Let’s Get Talking programme or Space to Play. Full details can be found **on our Family Hub website**, by calling **01572 758 383** or by emailing:

familyhub@rutland.gov.uk Oakham Primary school also has a Family Liaison Officer available to families with children in the Dedicated Special Provision, from

Reception to Year 6. Where children with SEND are not attending a nursery or childminder setting, Rutland County Council’s Early Years Inclusion team provides support via home visits.

- Parental feedback is that the new Family Liaison Officer at **Oakham c of E school** has been a fantastic addition - increasing easy quicker access to support and answers, and freeing up some of the DSP staffs time more.
- The support groups and courses listed above already exist and have done for some time. They are mostly not SEND specific also.
- Surely the support stated in the RCC answer is available regardless of if The Parks is closed - or will this support be removed if The Parks remains open?
- Parental feedback also tells us that as most of a families battles over support and provision for their SEN child end up being with the local authority they are not always keen to attend sessions/groups that are linked to RCC.
- The local self funded SEN independent support group for under 5s is full with a waiting list.
- Playgroups do not give families respite! Children under 5 do not qualify for RCCs short break scheme so unless they have friends/family locally who are capable of looking after their child or they are able to access a **suitable** provision they get no respite from their parent caring role.
- When you have a child with additional needs this is not something you expect or plan for and the life you anticipated with your child is often quickly taken away leaving parents in shock .. and then feeling guilty. Parents need to be able to make connections with other parents who truly ‘get it’ parents who are going through similar experiences. They also need to be able to feel that their child is being looked after in a suitable environment that is safe to meet their child’s unique needs so that as an exhausted parent they can actually get a chance to breathe!
- Therefore closing The Parks will remove a valuable support to many families

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The Parks Special Needs Nursery Consultation

Independent Review for Rutland County Council

Commissioned review of the Parks Special Nursery Consultation running from November 1st 2023 to December 3rd 2023 undertaken by Maureen Morris OBE

Background

I am a parent carer who has been involved in Co-production work since 2007, firstly for my own Parent Carer Forum, as a Regional Representative for the National Network of Parent Carers Forums (NNPCF) and latterly as one of the Co-chairs of the NNPCF. I retired from the NNPCF in 2019. I have also undertaken work for a number of Local Authorities and Parent Carer Forums both directly commissioned or on behalf of the charity for disabled children Contact.

Context:

I was approached by Rutland County Council on November 6th 2023 to ask if I would be able to provide independent oversight into the public consultation regarding the possible closure of the Parks Special Nursery provision. I was commissioned to provide an independent review of all responses as they came in, identifying where feedback to the public would be beneficial through the Questions and Answers provided on the Council website. I was also asked to collate an overview of key themes and to independently inform the Council if any viable option proposed through the consultation could be considered.

The launch of the public consultation was held on November 1st 2023 at the Wisteria Hotel, Oakham and the request for Independent Oversight was made at that launch meeting. Owing to a technical issue with the hosting website, the inbox designated for responses to be made to the Council was not available immediately and it was agreed for the Consultation to therefore be extended to run until 3rd December 2023.

Following the initial meeting requesting my support it was agreed to hold weekly Teams meeting with a named officer from Rutland County Council and it was envisaged that my work would amount to around 3.5 hours per week depending on the number of responses from the public that were received. I would also provide suggestions to queries received based on my experience. With a final report when all the consultation period finished.

I was sent the briefing paper outlining the situation with the Parks and also notified of a Facebook group set up "Save The Parks special school Oakham". I have had two Zoom meetings with Rutland Parent Carer Voice and am grateful for their time and input. The members of Rutland Parent Carer Voice I spoke to did not express any views either for or against the proposal.

Review of responses received:

Between November 13th and December 4th, I was sent 92 responses from 80 individuals. Some were follow-on emails, and some were sent twice. A number were copies of a template letter posted on the Save the Parks Facebook page and while I do not discount these responses, they added nothing to the consultation other than 6 people had taken the time to send them in. A small number came from people who did not live in Rutland and, upon reflection, I have included them in the responses. Where there was a response from an education practitioner either within Rutland or from outside the county,

I made the suggestion that someone from Rutland County Council should engage with the sender. These education practitioners were:

1. The Head Teacher of a school outside of Rutland who currently takes a number of children from Rutland and was concerned that the school would be asked to accommodate a larger number of children due to the closure of the Parks and this would be detrimental to the children in which is the school catchment.
2. The manager of one early education provision within Rutland who expressed concerns about children with significant needs having an impact on staff and children in their provision without substantial increase in funding and staff training
3. The governing body of Oakham C of E Primary school asking for clarity regarding the future if the Parks were to close

I have been told that these practitioners have been contacted by officers of Rutland County Council to discuss their concerns, with assurances provided, or to ensure that the relevant information was made available to them. A response was also received from an independent provider of Alternative Provision who was exploring the possibility to expand into the area.

Suggestions from the responders who wished to ensure that the Parks Special Nursery School remained open included:

- A) The Parks could be used during the holidays and evening as a holiday club to enhance provision in the area.
I cannot see that this would be a practical solution to the situation that Rutland County Council finds itself in currently. The difficulties include staffing adequately during the evenings and holiday. Also, repurposing the classroom during the evening and holidays then returning them to be used by those attending the Parks during school hours along with funding for such a venture would be impossible.
- B) Rutland County Council should offer places to neighbouring local authorities, with responders saying other LAs “would snap their hand off” to obtain a place.
Neighbouring LAs have already got the opportunity to commission places in the Parks and none have taken up this opportunity.
- C) A number of responders quoted the fact that the Parks is currently rated Outstanding by OFSTED and that Rutland County Council should use this as an opportunity to “showcase” the model.
However, it is my understanding that there is no other Special Needs Nursery in England, if there was a perceived need for such a provision by other LAs then surely other LAs would have taken the opportunity to investigate the model since its last full inspection by OFSTED in 2016 when there were 8 pupils on role.

A number of responders have indicated that, in their view, Rutland County Council has in recent times have made it more difficult for parents to apply to the Parks, referring to “moving the goal posts” “discouraging parents from applying for the Parks”, and “raising the threshold for entry into the Parks which has been done with a view to making it easier to close the school.” I have seen no evidence of these allegations and can therefore make no comment.

There were also queries raised about the decision regarding the closure of the Parks not going before a full Council meeting. Rutland County Council constitution identifies this as an executive decision; as an executive decision it must be made by Cabinet and can't be made by Council.

Conclusion from the independent review of responses:

Closing any much loved and valued provision was always going to be emotive, however on reading the responses the large majority were talking about the experience of pupils who went to the Parks Special Nursery School some years ago there were only a very few who had current experience of the Parks as it is now, and I feel more weight should be given to the responses of these people. It is my understanding that families of children who may have been candidates for the Parks, as with all Rutland resident children who are identified as potentially requiring additional support, are currently being supported by officers of Rutland County Council while going through the EHCP (Education Health and Care Plan) process or whose children have been recently diagnosed, and this will continue even after a decision regarding the future of the Parks is made. This is a statutory process that all Councils must adhere to - the recent Local Area Ofsted identifies that this is a successful approach in Rutland.

I looked carefully through the responses and found nothing to indicate that the consultation was not done in a lawful way or that there were any innovative solutions given or suggested to ensure that the situation at the Parks could be changed.

Maureen Morris OBE

27th December 2023

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COUNCIL

25 February 2024

CORPORATE STRATEGY REFRESH 2024 –2026

Report of the Leader of the Council

Strategic Aim:	All	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Councillor G Waller, Leader of the Council	
Contact Officer(s):	Kevin Quinn Head of Corporate Services	01572 758292 kquinn@rutland.gov.uk
Ward Councillors	N/A	

1 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 Summary

1.1.1 This report sets out the revision to the strategic priorities of the Council covering the period 2024-2026. The revision has been undertaken as part of a scheduled refresh of the existing Corporate Strategy which was [approved by Council in July 2022](#).

1.2 Recommendations

1. That Council, on the recommendation of Cabinet, approves the Corporate Strategy refresh 2024-2026.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 1.3.1 The Corporate Strategy sets out the Councils strategic direction and ambitions in support of the County.
- 1.3.2 The Corporate Strategy is essential for enabling the Council to forward plan and to manage its services and resources based on the priorities identified.
- 1.3.3 The strategic priorities and objectives outlined within the refresh of the Corporate Strategy reflect the vision for the County which has been informed by the views of residents.

2 REPORT

2.1 Purpose

2.2 To provide Council with a refresh of the Corporate Strategy priorities and objectives covering the period 2024-2026.

2.3 Background

2.3.1 The Corporate Strategy (CS) sets out the strategic ambitions and medium-term direction of the Council and is an essential document for prioritising services, resources and to support decision making.

2.3.2 The current Corporate Strategy covers the period 2022-2027 and was approved by Council in July 2022. It was developed following an extensive engagement with residents which set out a vision for the County.

2.4 Refresh

2.4.1 Revision of the strategic priorities is part of the on-going review cycle built into the Corporate Strategy which sets out a revision every two years. This allows the Council to reflect any changes in landscape including, for example, the priorities of the new Cabinet following the election in May.

2.4.2 Since implementation in July 2022 the Council has also successfully delivered most of the commitments which underpinned the strategic ambitions of the Corporate Strategy. This means the Council is at the stage of refocussing its resources to reflect new responsibilities and emerging areas for development.

2.4.3 To revise the priorities and objectives collaborative sessions have been held with Cabinet and Corporate Leadership team. This work was supported by a review of current and future Council strategies and policy and reflecting on the existing commitments and requirements, including Government reforms and statutory changes.

2.4.4 This has culminated in a new set of priorities and objectives to support the existing vision for the County.

2.4.5 No other changes have been made to the Corporate Strategy. The values for the Council remain the same.

2.5 The new priorities

2.6 *Appendix A - Corporate Strategy Refresh 2024-2026*, sets out the revised priorities and objectives of the Council. The four priorities are:

- Tackling the climate emergency.
- A diverse and sustainable local economy.
- Support the most vulnerable.
- Provide good public services.

2.7 Each priority is underpinned by a set of objectives and areas of action. The actions are an example of the areas of work which will be undertaken.

2.8 Delivery

- 2.8.1 The objectives outlined within the refresh will be underpinned by a detailed Delivery Plan which will include a set of SMART actions. This is currently being finalised by Directorates.
- 2.8.2 The performance of the new priorities, including progress against the Delivery Plan, will be monitored through a revised performance framework which will be reported to Cabinet as per the current arrangements i.e. four times per year. This will be finalised by April to account for in year performance and the setting of appropriate targets.
- 2.8.3 Whilst endorsement of the refresh will mean the Council will work towards achieving the priorities outlined, there may be times when other factors, some outside of the Council's control, may impinge on its ability to do so. This could include financial constraints, Government legislation, policy and guidance and the local political context.

2.9 Options Considered

- 2.9.1 The Council can choose not to refresh the priorities of Corporate Strategy and operate within the existing Corporate Strategy which runs until 2027. However, this will mean the priorities of the Council do not reflect the current landscape and the key deliverables required of the Council under existing strategy and Government legislation.

2.10 Consultation

- 2.10.1 The vision underpinning the Corporate Strategy was developed through an extensive engagement and formal consultation exercise which received over 2000 responses.
- 2.10.2 The refreshed priorities for 2024-2026 reflect the Councils continued commitment to achieving the vision for the County.
- 2.10.3 The Council has scheduled a short public engagement exercise on the priorities to run until the end of January via a survey published on the website. The Council will also seek to raise awareness of the revised strategic priorities via social media and Council publications.

3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

3.1 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1.1 *This section has been approved by Kirsty Nutton, Strategic Director for Resources (S.151 officer).*
- 3.1.2 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however the Council will be making financial commitments which are guided by the Corporate Strategy priorities. Therefore, delivering the objectives of the Corporate Strategy must be commensurate with the two financial objectives of the [Financial Sustainability Strategy](#) which was approved by Council in November 2022.
- 3.1.3 To achieve this the Council has taken a range of steps over the last 12 months which has included the implementation of a transformation programme aimed at modernisation and achieving efficiency in the delivery of Council services and

embedding this transformation in to the financial planning of services, as detailed in the budget proposals contained in the Integrated Budget Plan 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 – 2027/28.

- 3.1.4 Corporate Leadership Team and Directorates have been assessing the key deliverables to support the Corporate Strategy over the next two years. This has been done in line with the cash limit approach to service delivery, further details of which are outlined in the Integrated Budget Plan paper, Report No.04/2024.
- 3.1.5 Whilst the Council has taken action to ensure financial sustainability in the medium term there remains some level of uncertainty in areas which are beyond the direct control of the Council. This includes, for example; the longer-term impact of the cost-of-living pressures and any associated demand on Council services, the uncertain economic climate and the future cost to deliver and commission services and Government regulation or changes to the Councils statutory responsibilities. Consequently, it remains possible that actions to support the Corporate Strategy will need to be adjusted or changed to reflect what we know and can realistically achieve.

3.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

This section has been approved by Angela Wakefield, Strategic Director for Law & Governance (Monitoring Officer).

- 3.2.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. However, there will be decisions associated with delivery of the priorities which will be brought to the relevant decision- making forum at the appropriate time. The Corporate Strategy forms part of the Council’s policy framework and any alterations to the Strategy must therefore be approved by Full Council.

3.3 Risk Management Implications

- 3.3.1 The main risk to the Council achieving the strategic priorities as outlined within the Corporate Strategy is that the Council is not financially sustainable. This risk is assessed as medium.
 - 3.3.1.1 The mitigation for this risk is the implementation of the integrated budget and medium-term financial strategy. The implementation of which means the residual risk is determined to be low.
- 3.3.2 Record of this risk is located within the Corporate Risk Register.

3.4 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

- 3.4.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) has not been completed because there are no identified risks or issues to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

3.5 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 3.5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has not been completed because no service, policy or organisational changes are being proposed. The CS provides the Council with a framework for future service delivery.

3.6 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 3.6.1 The Council has a duty in accordance with S17 Crime and Disorder Act 1988, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to the likely effect of that exercise of those functions on and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social behaviour).
- 3.6.2 The Corporate Strategy retains a commitment to maintaining Rutland as one of the safest places to live and includes the following objective: Deliver a safe, vibrant and attractive place.

3.7 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 3.7.1 The Corporate Strategy retains a commitment to improve the health and wellbeing of the County and includes the following objective: Improve wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.

3.8 ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 3.8.1 On 11 January 2021 Rutland County Council acknowledged that it was in a climate emergency. The Council understands that it needs to take urgent action to address it.
- 3.8.2 The Corporate Strategy reflects this with a priority focussed on Tackling the Climate Emergency. This priority means the Council will focus policy and action to support the County to tackle the climate crisis and minimise the impact of climate change on the lives of residents and local businesses.

3.9 PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.9.1 There are no procurement implications.

3.10 HR IMPLICATIONS

- 3.10.1 There are no HR implications.

4 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 4.1 None.

5 APPENDICES

- 5.1 Appendix A – Corporate Strategy Refresh 2024-2026

An Accessible Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.

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A County for everyone and a place to live your best life.

Corporate Strategy Refresh

Our priorities 2024-2026

Introduction

I am often asked why we spend time producing strategies when we should be spending time getting bins emptied, roads gritted and looking after our vulnerable residents. We do all these things, of course, but not in isolation.

The Corporate Strategy provides the framework for our decision making; do we invest in this, or in that? It ensures we don't make decisions on a whim but in a context and for Rutland this context is our residents' vision of "A County for everyone and a place to live your best life".

Our Corporate Strategy was introduced in 2022 but since then we have seen the cost of living grow which has had a wide impact on residents and public services. In Rutland we have also had a change of political leadership following all-out elections. It is timely, therefore, to refresh our Corporate Strategy to ensure it focuses on priorities of today.

We have many strengths in Rutland; a good sense of identity, a safe environment, a strong entrepreneurial spirit and good quality schools, for example. We also have a number of challenges such as; supporting the local economy to grow post covid, providing for an ageing population, addressing low social mobility and climate change.

We have therefore decided to focus on a few key priorities rather than spread ourselves too thin whilst recognising that there are also activities we will continue to do because we are legally required to do them. This strategy describes the framework within which we will operate and will be supported by a delivery plan.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gale Waller', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Councillor Gale Waller
Leader of the Council

Delivering in the current landscape

The global instability of the last few years has created a challenging landscape in which to deliver services and the impact of global events continues to be felt by all. We know some of the key challenges for Rutland:

- **Economy** - reversing the slowdown in our economy and supporting businesses and the local economy to grow.
- **Finances** - less funding for services and the continued impact of the cost of living on households.
- **Economic inequality** - providing access to better paid jobs locally, helping to reduce the low social mobility.
- **An aging population** and the pressure this is placing on care services.
- **Climate change** - the need to reduce the county's high level of waste and carbon footprint.
- **Vulnerable Children** - supporting children to be safe, happy and to thrive.
- **Health care** – tackling inequality of access.

The solutions to these challenges require us to work closely with our partners and the community and to think differently about how we deliver services in the future. Our role is to help minimise the impact on residents by making best use of the collective strengths of the County including:

- **Sense of identity** - a strong community spirit and sense of togetherness.
- **Education** - home to good quality schools and inclusive provision.
- **A safe place** - one of the safest places to live in the Country.
- **Culture and leisure** - a breadth of important historical sites and great attractions.
- **Health and care** - home to some of the healthiest, happiest and most active population in the country.
- **Connected** - a well-positioned County with good main road and rail links.
- **Entrepreneurial** spirit and innovation - a range of thriving local and global businesses.
- **Strong partnerships** - working collaboratively for change.

Our strategy is set in this context and is based on a need to be both realistic and achievable – helping to make your money go further and building for the future that residents have said they want.

A Vision for Rutland

During 2021 we led an extensive community engagement exercise where we spoke to over 2,000 residents about what local people value about life here and what really matters to them. This resulted in a shared vision for the County based on what matters most to our residents and this provides the basis for our strategy:

A County for everyone and a place to live your best life:

Rutland will be a modern rural County with an unrivalled quality and pace of life. Somewhere different and special, where you can escape from the norm. A place to be active and connect with nature. A friendly and welcoming county with incredible food, drink and heritage. A genuine surprise where countryside and traditional market towns are complemented by technological advancement and innovation.

Our Mission

We will use this Vision to inform our long-term plans and policies, ensuring that all the services we deliver contribute to the Vision and are in line with our priorities. As a Council our purpose is to:

“Improve lives by focusing quality services and expertise where they are needed most, helping the County to grow and thrive whilst remaining the special place our residents know and love.”

Our priorities for 2024-2026

We have identified four priorities each of which is underpinned by a series of objectives and actions:



Tackling the Climate Emergency

Policies will support the County to tackle the climate crisis, helping to reduce carbon emissions and minimise the impact of climate change on the lives of residents and local businesses.



Objectives

- Reduce carbon emissions and adapt to the impact of climate change.
- Increase biodiversity in the County.
- Further increase recycling rates and reduce levels of waste.
- Improve public transport links and opportunities for greener forms of travel.

To deliver this we will

- Ensure our Local Plan reflects strong environmental policy.
- Introduce a new strategic approach for managing flood risk.
- Develop a Sustainability Strategy that supports carbon reduction and biodiversity net gain.
- Develop a Local Area Energy Plan.
- Procure a new waste services contract.
- Support the community to reduce levels of waste.
- Transform our public transport network and facilitate greener forms of travel.
- Develop a biodiversity baseline for the County.

We will set targets for

- Reducing the Carbon levels of the County and the Council.
- Increasing biodiversity levels in the County.
- Reducing the volume of residual household waste.
- Increasing the level and quality of waste sent for recycling.
- Increasing the number of passengers using bus services.

A diverse and sustainable local economy

Building a strong rural economy with a productive, sustainable, and diverse business base that provides opportunity for all.



Objectives

- Grow a more productive local economy, working alongside our business partners to provide greater opportunities for better paid jobs locally.
- Invest in infrastructure to enable a growth in economic productivity.
- Meet the housing needs of our community.
- Deliver a safe, vibrant and attractive place.

To deliver this we will

- Implement a new Economic Strategy that attracts businesses and supports skills growth.
- Deliver the Mobi Hub and Medi tech centre utilising the Levelling Up Fund.
- Secure affordable housing commitments.
- Focus on environmentally friendly affordable living.
- Revise our Strategic approach to Homeless Prevention.
- Review our adult and community learning opportunities.

We will set targets for

- Reducing the wage gap earned by Rutland residents.
- Maintaining 5-year business survival rates.
- Increasing the economic value of the visitor, professional, arts and recreation sectors.
- Increasing the number of net homes built.
- Reducing the numbers presenting homeless from the previous year.
- Increasing the number of places allocated to subsidised adult learning programmes.
- Lowering or maintaining the percentage of children NEET or education unknown.
- Lowering the number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents.
- Maintaining the good condition of roads in the County.
- Increasing the number of inspections achieving grade A or B for litter and detritus.
- Maintaining the low levels of crime.

Support the most vulnerable

Working collaboratively to improve outcomes for residents, helping those that need additional support to live their best lives.



Objectives

- Provide inclusive education provision for children with additional needs.
- Improve wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.
- Improve outcomes for vulnerable children.
- Enhance outcomes for vulnerable adults through locally integrated services.

To deliver this we will

- Lead the SEND and alternative provision national Change Programme to drive service improvement for children with special educational needs.
- Invest in, and improve access to, leisure and recreation opportunities across the County.
- To develop tools to test practice and improve outcomes for children and families.
- Develop and implement a new fostering recruitment strategy.
- Implement a new adult social care strategy.
- Implement new approaches to prevention in adult social care.

We will set targets for

- Increasing the number of Rutland resident SEND children educated in County.
- Achieving the national healthy life expectancy for male and females.
- Maintaining or increasing the percentage of children placed in permanent places.
- Increase the percentage of children in need, child protection and children looked after seen in timescales.
- Increase or maintain the percentage care leavers who are in education, employment, or training and are kept in touch with.
- Increasing the percentage of families reporting that Childrens support services are helpful.
- Increasing Adults Reablement effectiveness.
- Increasing the percentage of people discharged from hospital into reablement / rehabilitation services who are still in their own home 91 days after discharge.
- Increasing the percentage of those using Adult Social Care reporting that services make them feel safe and secure.

Provide good public services

Delivering modern and cost-effective services which are easy to access and provide good levels of customer care.



Objectives

- Accessible services which offer good customer care.
- An effectively governed and financially viable Council.
- Empower and enable communities to support their local area.
- Support a dynamic and sustainable Council workforce.

To deliver this we will:

- Implement clear customer standards, even where the levels of service differ and communicate these to residents.
- Consider technological opportunities to deliver more efficiently.
- Deliver a Sustainable Financial Strategy whilst making best use of Council assets.
- Modernise the tools used by the Council to support efficient and effective decision making.
- Encourage and support Parish Councils to work with community groups to do more for their locality.
- To deliver services closer to communities through community sector collaboration.
- Deliver a workforce development strategy which supports skills development and continuous improvement.

We will set targets for

- Increasing satisfaction levels with Customer Services.
- Increasing the number of customer compliments.
- Reducing the number of customer complaints.
- Increasing the accessibility score of our website.
- Increasing the number of MyAccount transactions.
- Achieve a balanced budget that is not reliant on the use of reserves.
- Meeting Council committee publication timescales.
- Increasing staff satisfaction rates.
- Reducing the levels of vacancies.

Delivering against our priorities

The actions identified are an example of some of the things we will do. Our priorities are supported by a full delivery plan which incorporates a wider range of initiatives and actions.

Measuring performance

Measuring performance helps us to understand if our services do what they should and offer a good level of customer care. Using this information, we can improve our services by seeing what works and what doesn't.

To support this, we have a performance framework which includes a more detailed set of performance measures for each priority. This is reported to Cabinet four times per year and is accessible on our website for residents.

Our Corporate Values

We believe having a defined set of values which represents who we are is an essential ingredient in any successful organisation. As such we have developed a core set of values which staff and Councillors will live by and which our community can expect to see displayed in the everyday behaviours of our organisation and in the services which we deliver.

Passionate

Be energetic and positive, proud and dedicated to our County.

Ambitious

Learn, develop, seek out opportunities and embrace new ideas.

Work together

Trust and respect each other, engage with and listen to our communities.

Make a difference

Be the best you can be, strive for excellence and take responsibility for having a positive impact.

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CABINET

11 January 2024

INTEGRATED BUDGET PLAN (IBP) AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) - 2024/25 TO 2027/28

Report of the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Resources

Strategic Aim:	All	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Cllr A Johnson, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Resources	
Contact Officer(s): Name/Job Title	Kirsty Nutton, Strategic Director for Resources (s.151 Officer)	01572 758159 knutton@rutland.gov.uk
Name/Job Title	Andrew Merry, Head of Finance (ds151)	01572 758152 amerry@rutland.gov.uk
Ward Councillors	N/A	

1 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 Summary

1.1.1 This report comes to Cabinet as part of the Council’s formal budget setting process as set out within the constitution and as per legislative requirements to set a balanced and sustainable budget for 2024/25 - 2027/28.

1.2 Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet approves as the basis for public consultation:

1.2.1 The proposed budget including a Council Tax increase of 4.99% (2.99% general Council Tax and 2.0% Adult Social Care precept), as outlined in section 5.1.2 and Appendix F.

1.2.2 The budget proposals as outlined in Appendix B and C as the basis for public consultation.

1.2.3 The updated revenue budget assumptions, to be incorporated in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024/25 – 2027/28. These are outlined in sections 5 and 6.

1.2.4 The grant funding receipts estimated across the MTFS as contained in Appendix D.

1.2.5 The Fees and Charges Strategy that details the approach to be adopted by directorates when setting and updating fees and charges as provided in Appendix E.

1.2.6 The revised capital programme and schemes outlined in section 6.5 and referencing

Appendix K and M.

- 1.2.7 The funding of the capital programme as detailed in the treasury management and capital strategies in Appendices L and M.
- 1.2.8 The updated Reserves Strategy and forecast reserve commitments to fund the cost of transformational investment and previously identified departmental commitments as outlined in section 7.4, and Appendices B, C and I.
- 1.2.9 The Education budget as outlined in section 6.6 and Appendix N.
- 1.2.10 The budget virement limits as outlined in section 9.
- 1.2.11 The Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 – 2027/28 as set out in the body of the report and following appendices:
 - Appendix A – 2024/25 – 2027/28 MTFS detailed budget position
 - Appendix B – Budget proposals tables (pressures / savings / investments)
 - Appendix C – Directorates Overview, Service Ambitions and Budget Variation Statements
 - Appendix D – Grant Register
 - Appendix E – Fees & Charges Strategy / Policy & Schedule
 - Appendix F – Funding strategy
 - Appendix G – Financial Health Indicators
 - Appendix H – Financial Risk Register
 - Appendix I – Reserve Strategy
 - Appendix J – Consultation document
 - Appendix K – Capital Programme Schemes 2024/25 – 2027/28
 - Appendix L – Treasury Management Strategy & Annual Investment Strategy
 - Appendix M – Capital Strategy
 - Appendix N – Dedicated Schools Grant and the Schools budget
 - Appendix O – Carbon Impact Assessment
 - *(Appendix P – Council Tax Resolution – to follow for Full Council only)*

It is recommended that Cabinet notes:

- 1.2.12 The strategic financial approach taken by the Council outlined in section 3 of this report.
- 1.2.13 The Council's core funding position following the provisional Local Government Settlement outlined in section 5.
- 1.2.14 The forecast reserves position and the statutory advice of the Chief Finance Officer outlined in section 7 'The Robustness (Section 25) Statement'
- 1.2.15 The financial health indicators which consider the key financial considerations of revenue and balance sheet performance, and that capital investment is not resulting in undue burden on future funding, section 8.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 1.3.1 The Council must set a lawful and balanced budget. The approach outlined in this report work towards this requirement.

2 INTEGRATED BUDGET PLAN 2024/25 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024/25 – 2027/28

2.1 Purpose

- 2.1.1 This report to Cabinet forms part of the Council's formal Budget Framework. It requires Cabinet to initiate and make proposals and update assumptions to set a balanced budget for the financial years 2024/25 - 2027/28. There is a legal requirement to set a balanced budget for 2024/25. The purpose of this report is to:
- a) Recommend that Cabinet approve the budget proposals
 - b) Recommend that Cabinet approve the budget assumptions to update the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), to ensure estimates reflect the most up to date information available
 - c) Outline the financial impact of the financial challenges facing the Council, in setting a balanced budget for the MTFS period
 - d) Outline the strategic approach and actions taken by the Council to deliver a balanced budget in 2024/25.
- 2.1.2 Proposals agreed by Cabinet at this meeting on 11 January 2024, will be approved for consultation, with responses received considered at Cabinet on 13 February with final proposals recommended to Council on 26 February 2024 for approval.
- 2.1.3 This report is submitted for Cabinet to consider under the Procedure Rule 121, “3) to prepare the Annual Budget”

2.2 Executive Summary

- 2.2.1 The Council has been clear of its number one priority, it is outlined in the Corporate Strategy and that it is to be financially sustainable. This Integrated Budget Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (IBP & MTFS) puts the Council on a firm footing to deliver on this priority. Whilst the plan relies on the use of £1.3m of reserves for 2024/25, future years budgets are balanced against future estimated income receipts. This is ahead of the timelines outlined in the Financial Sustainability Strategy as approved by Council in November 2022 by using less reserves to underpin the day-to-day expenditure in the future years.
- 2.2.2 This Plan and Strategy has been put forward with affordable service provision at the heart of its creation, ensuring that these services deliver the Corporate Strategy. The Council previously recognised that a transformational approach to how it delivers services was required. Previous MTFS's showed the Council was living beyond its means with reserves being used to prop up day to day expenditure.
- 2.2.3 As a result, this Plan and Strategy provides proposals that aim to deliver financial sustainability. Over the MTFS it considers:
- the budget pressures from rising demand for services and increasing costs from inflation and pay awards, alongside a reducing and uncertain future funding horizon worth £13.1m
 - the strategic use of Council's reserves to fund investment that will aid the delivery of future savings and modern ways of working of £3.4m.
 - the strategic investment in Council fixed assets (infrastructure and buildings) of over £43.0m.

- for the first time is the inclusion of 14 financial health indicators that enable all members to understand past decisions on financial performance that influence on the current and future financial prospects of the Council as drivers of expenditure and opportunities to create sustainable plans
- it contains saving proposals, based on the 12 transformation workstreams that plan to deliver £4.6m of savings.

2.2.4 The recent Provisional Settlement announced by government on 18 December continues to mean that the Council is increasingly reliant on Council Tax as its main source of income to deliver services to the most vulnerable in society, to deliver community services, alongside the other services that make Rutland a great place to live and work such as roads, transport, and waste collection and statutory services that keep the community safe and well.

2.2.5 It remains true that the Council faces financial challenges, with early indications from government suggesting a return to the level of cuts seen in the years of austerity. However, with this plan Rutland County Council is taking proactive steps in its financial management and remains committed to keeping control of its destiny, ensuring services are provided in accordance with the vision held in the Corporate Strategy that is known is most important to residents and businesses.

2.2.6 This report is structured into the following sections:

3	Strategic Financial Approach	9	Budget virements
4	Integrated Budget Plan Summary	10	Financial Risks
5	Core Funding Assumptions	11	Consultation
6	Core Expenditure Assumptions	12	Alternative Options Considered
7	Chief Finance Officers Robustness (Section 25) Statement	13	Implications of the Recommendations
8	Financial Health Indicators	14	Background Papers
		15	Appendices

3 STRATEGIC FINANCIAL APPROACH

3.1.1 In construction of this 2024/25 Integrated Budget Plan the Council has worked to achieve the two key financial objectives previously approved as part of the Corporate Strategy (Council 7 November 2022, Item 10).

- The Council is committed to being financially sustainable - only spending the funding it receives and balancing the budget in any given year without using General Fund reserves.
- To maintain a recommended minimum limit of £3m as approved by Council as its General Fund balance. This helps protect the Council's financial resilience whilst operating in a challenging financial context with medium to longer term funding uncertainty.

3.1.2 These fundamental principles are carried forward in the Corporate Strategy Refresh 2024 also being considered at this Cabinet meeting through the objective of "an effective governed and financially viable Council".

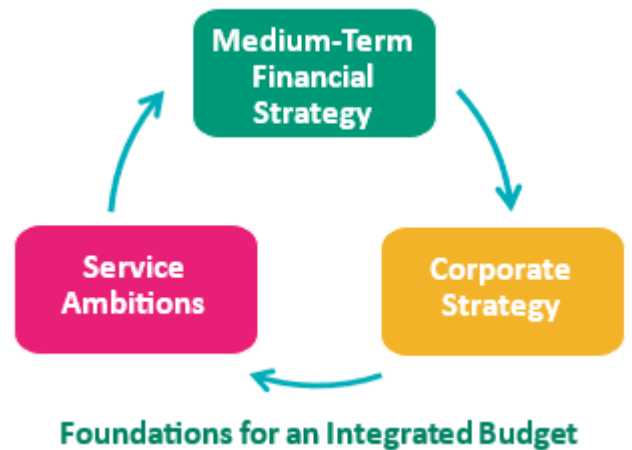
3.1.3 This strategy is based on the objectives above and three underlying principles:

- raising council tax to maximise funding available
- delivering the transformation programme and an “affordable service offer” and any other savings required
- using up to £2m of reserves to subsidise the budget to enable time for savings to be delivered.

3.1.4 With focus on the above objectives and principles the Council commenced an enhanced budget setting process in April 2023. The Council’s leadership team, working alongside the Portfolio Holder for finance, the Leader, and Cabinet members have undertaken, throughout the year, the following activities to create a financially sustainable position through:

- ✓ The approval and adoption by Full Council of the Reserve Strategy to facilitate financial resilience through use of balances to finance risk the Council may be exposed to, alongside investment provision to deliver medium to long-term saving plans.
- ✓ Adopting an enhanced Budget Setting Process for 2024/25 and future years called the Integrated Budget Plan. This approach commenced in April 2023 with Directors and Heads of Service in May 2023.
- ✓ Initial Cash Limits were allocated to Directors and in turn Heads of Service to enable services to be designed within an affordability envelope across the MTFS period to ensure financial sustainability is a focus.
- ✓ Linked to above, Heads of Service drafted Service Ambitions that detail their vision for their services alongside the actions required to deliver these plans within the Cash Limit allocated. This has helped ensure that the medium- and longer-term saving opportunities can be captured rather than a focus on short-term saving delivery.
- ✓ Delivery of the 12 workstreams identified as part of the Transformation Programme is incorporated into the Service Ambitions and budget proposals.
- ✓ Detailed discussions were held with the Strategic Director for Resources, Chief Executive, Strategic Directors, and associated Heads of Service to fully understand proposals for increases in investment and saving opportunities identified.
- ✓ Directors have worked with portfolio holders developing both investment and saving proposals in detail to ensure that proposals meet the objectives of the Corporate Strategy.
- ✓ Cabinet have reviewed the Corporate Strategy with the refresh incorporated into this budget plan and associated medium term financial strategies.
- ✓ Developed an budget consultation approach.

3.1.5 The budget setting process outlined above has enabled Strategic Directors and Head of Service to design their service within an affordability envelope and in line with the knowledge that a 'net nil' sum position underpinned the considerations. Where requests for additional funding were made, associated savings were required in other departments of the Council. This enabled a balance of solutions to be put forward for Cabinet consideration that meet the refreshed Corporate Strategy in a balanced and sustainable way.



3.1.6 The 12 transformational workstreams as identified in the Financial Sustainability Strategy are incorporated into the budget plan proposals and are based on the following themes:

- Operating framework
- Customer
- Community offer
- Commissioning & contracting
- Digital, data & technology
- Enabling services
- Public realm
- Cultural services
- Asset management
- Special educational needs
- Integrated care organisation
- Transport

3.2 Refreshed Corporate Strategy 2024

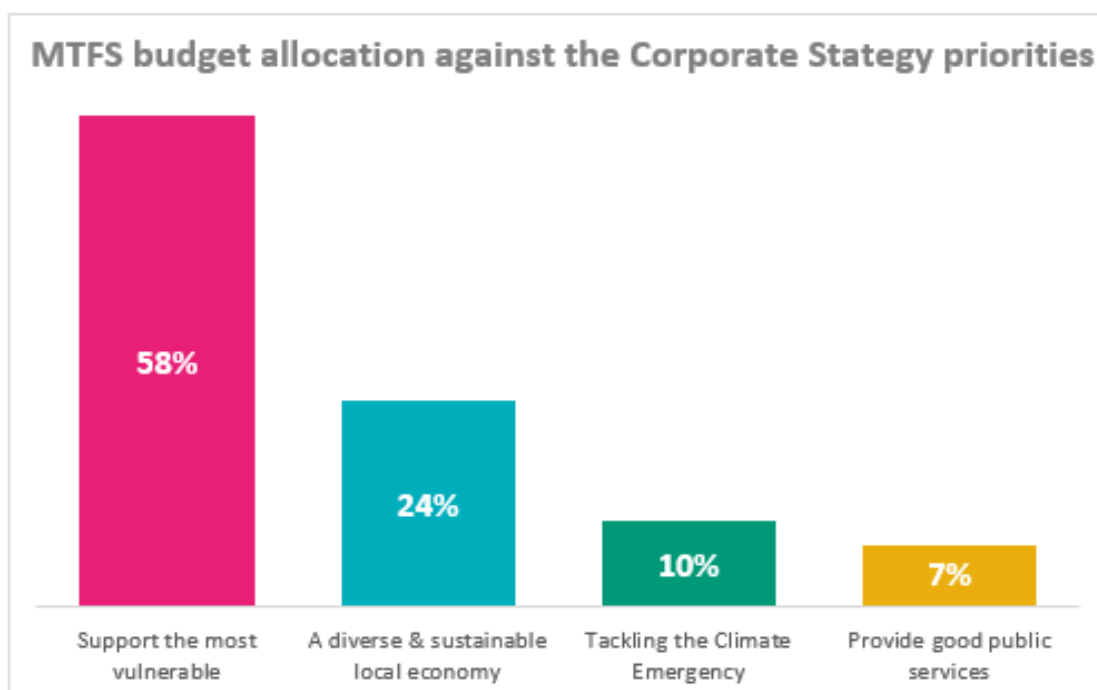
3.2.1 Alongside the consideration and approval by Cabinet of the Integrated Budget Plan and MTFs Cabinet will consider the refresh of the Corporate Strategy. Delivery of this strategy has been at the heart of the design of services within the affordability envelope and is based on the following four priorities, as shown in the diagram.

3.2.2 An estimate of how the budget is allocated to these priorities is provided throughout this Plan and Strategy. Some activities the Council undertakes are directly attributable to priorities and objectives, whilst other expenditure is indirectly attributable such as with the enabling services of the Resources and Law & Governance directorates. The allocation of budget also reflects the statutory duties of the Council.



3.2.3 Therefore, the allocation of budget to the corporate priorities is subjective but

provides a useful indication as where the Council's budget is spent and relative subsequent demands and risks that are placed on the budget.

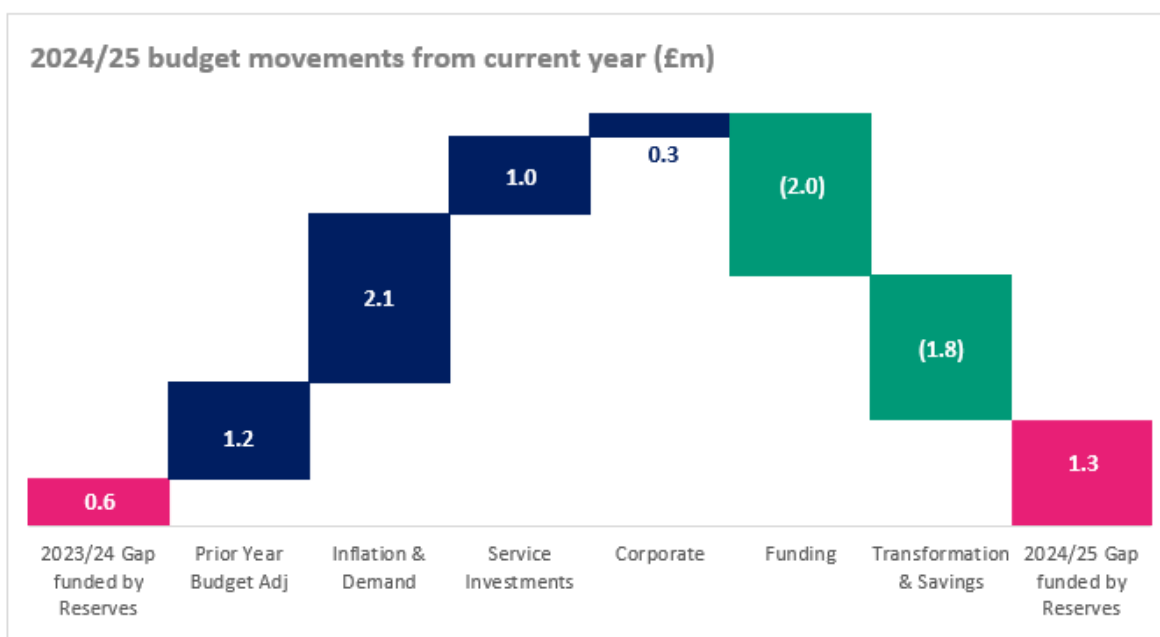


4 INTEGRATED BUDGET PLAN SUMMARY

4.1 The following tables summarise the budget position with detail of all proposals contained in Appendix B and C. The table takes the budget gap from 2023/24, which was funded from reserves, and summarises the budget pressures, savings and income estimated over the MTFS period.

Budget movement from 2023/24	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
2023/24 budget gap	589	589	589	589
Prior Year Budget Adjustment	1,215	1,247	1,247	1,347
Pressure - Demand	765	1,299	1,851	2,421
Pressure - Inflation	1,329	2,425	3,687	4,990
Service Investment	964	1,025	1,164	1,104
Pay award & risk management	288	1,458	2,326	2,684
Additional costs	5,150	8,043	10,864	13,135
Additional funding	(2,007)	(5,142)	(6,819)	(8,555)
Gap before savings	3,143	2,901	4,045	4,580
Transformation & savings	(1,827)	(2,901)	(4,045)	(4,580)
Gap to be funded from reserves	1,316	-	-	-

4.2 The following chart shows the movements relative to each other for 2024/25 with inflation and demand creating the larger budget pressures compared to current year. Prior year budget adjustments include the reversals of savings that were one-off in nature from the previous year such as the holding of vacancies, known contract fee increases, and removal of grants which were time limited.



4.3 The total package of savings and income can be further analysed into the following:

Transformation & saving category	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Demand management	(247)	(598)	(1,233)	(1,788)
Change in service offer	(519)	(1,112)	(1,443)	(1,443)
Service efficiencies	(336)	(376)	(493)	(532)
Contractor efficiencies	(494)	(494)	(494)	(494)
Income	(190)	(280)	(341)	(281)
Other (eg business rates)	(41)	(41)	(41)	(41)
Total	(1,827)	(2,901)	(4,045)	(4,580)

4.4 The following table provides a summary overview as to the budgets allocated by directorate over the MTFs period with more detail provided in Appendices A – C.

Directorate	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Adults & Health	17,559	18,056	18,494	18,965
Places	14,417	14,256	14,111	14,514
Childrens & Families	7,444	7,491	7,396	7,481
Resources	4,929	4,875	4,886	4,979
Law & Governance, Chief Executive	2,898	2,977	3,083	3,187
Corporate*	3,436	4,083	5,170	5,652
Budget	50,682	51,738	53,141	54,777
Financing	(49,367)	(51,738)	(53,141)	(54,777)
Total	1,316	-	-	-

* includes capital financing costs, future pay award estimated increases, risk management and investment from the Innovation Reserve

4.5 The following infographic provides an overview as to the types of services and areas of spend for the Council for 2024/25. Education, Adult's and Children's social care services represent 56% of the Council's gross budget.



5 CORE FUNDING ASSUMPTIONS

5.1.1 The following table outlines the Council's forecast core funding for 2024/25 based on the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement announced on 18 December 2023. Further details of the assumptions used are provided in Appendix F.

Funding summary	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Council Tax	(33,883)	(35,828)	(37,883)	(40,054)
Business rates	(6,830)	(5,468)	(5,695)	(5,944)
Better care fund	(2,994)	(2,994)	(2,994)	(2,994)
Social care grants	(2,687)	(2,687)	(2,687)	(2,687)
Rural Services Delivery Grant	(995)	(995)	(995)	(995)
Improved better care fund	(218)	(218)	(218)	(218)
Other	(173)	(116)	(116)	(116)
Core Spending Power increase*	-	(2,608)	(2,003)	(1,319)
Use of Innovation Fund Reserve	(1,587)	(824)	(550)	(450)
Total	(49,367)	(51,738)	(53,141)	(54,777)

* this is an assumption based on the latest information available. Previously reflected estimates resulting from the Fair Funding Review (FFR). The timing of the FFR is now likely to be impacted by a General Election, see 0 for additional information.

5.1.2 The local government finance settlement was published on 18 December 2023. As this was based on the Autumn Statement 2022 the Council was able to make reliable estimates in the main. As with all announcements from government which coincide with the Council's own report publishing dates, there are some adjustments where the finance team are working through the details which could impact on the final

funding assumptions for the Council. However, these are not anticipated to be material and therefore impact fundamentally on this report.

5.2 Council Tax

5.2.1 In calculating the level of general grant support to be provided to councils the Government assumes that councils will maximise income receipts from Council Tax as part of the Core Spending Power assessment, see point 5.5.

5.2.2 For this MTFS the level of proposed Council Tax income is based on 4.99% increase, which is comprised of 2.99% general and 2.00% Adult Social Care precept on the 2023/24 rates. This is in line with the 2024/25 referendum limits confirmed in December 2023 by Government and means that the Band D rate will increase from £2,013.04 in 2023/24 to £2,113.49 in 2024/25 for the Council's element of the Council Tax charge.

5.2.3 The Council Tax base is forecast to increase by 140 homes each year, which equates to 115 Band D equivalents. This forecast is in line with the housing growth experienced within the County except for 2023/24 where growth has slowed due to prevailing national economic conditions which are expected to continue to recover for 2024/25.

5.2.4 The Council is a 'billing authority' and therefore operates a 'Collection Fund' that accounts for all the council tax and business rate payments as they are received from residents and businesses. For Council Tax the funding is distributed to the relevant precepting authorities eg Police, Fire and Parish Council's, based on their demand made at budget setting. The Council's share of the estimated surplus on the Collection Fund for the current year 2023/24 is £0.0m but this will be reviewed in January and updated as part of the final budget proposal. For budget setting purposes this is accounted for in the following year 2024/25 budget.

5.2.5 The following table summarises the Council's current Council Tax income assumptions over the MTFS period:

Council Tax summary	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Council Tax increase	2.99%	2.99%	2.99%	2.99%
Adult social care precept	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%
Council Tax Band D (£)	£ 2,113.49	£ 2,218.95	£ 2,329.68	£ 2,445.93
Council Tax Base	16,031.0	16,146.2	16,261.0	16,375.80
Council Tax income (Band D x Tax Base) (£000)	33,883	35,828	37,883	40,054
Parish precept*	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc
Collection Fund surplus / (deficit)*	0	0	0	0
Council Tax budget (£000)	33,883	35,828	37,883	40,054

* to be confirmed in final budget following statutory declaration mid-January 2024

5.2.6 Further information on Council Tax assumptions are contained in Appendix F.

5.3 Business Rates (National Non-Domestic Rates - NNDR)

5.3.1 The Council has completed the government return (NNDR1) to determine the income receipt from business rates in 2024/25. The Council's gross income, based

on the actual rateable value of business premises in Rutland, has increased and has been offset by changes to the bad debt provision, empty property relief and the dampening of the gross rates amount in recognition of the challenging national economic climate. Further information is contained in Appendix F.

5.3.2 The following table shows a summary of income assumed from Business Rates over the MTFS:

Business Rates summary	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Business rates	(6,830)	(5,468)	(5,695)	(5,944)

5.4 Grants and the Local Government Provisional Settlement

5.4.1 The Local Government Provisional Settlement was published on the 18 December 2023. The Settlement maintained the assumptions from the previous year with a Core Spending Power (CSP) increase by £3.9bn (6.5%) in 2024/25. This is lower than the increase in CSP in 2023/24 (9.1%) and lower than that in 2022/23 (8.2%). This compares with the demand-led pressures in social care of adults and children's which outstrips the increases in funding as summarised in the table below:

	Core Spending Power	Consumer Price Index	GDP Deflator*	National Adults & Children social care pressures	Rutland's Adults & Children social care pressures
Rate Increase	6.5%	3.6%	1.7%	12.8% & 13.6%	8.2% & 9.2%

* GDP deflator - a measure of general inflation

5.4.2 Compared to most other years before that, the projected increase in CSP in 2024/25 is higher in cash terms, with the following noted.

- More than half of the increase in CSP will come from the council tax increase. This shows how reliant the funding settlement continues to be on council tax increases. For Rutland the CSP increase is 6.7% which relies on 77% of the increase to be funded from Council Tax.
- Social care grants increase for a further year. Two-year increases were announced in the Autumn Statement 2022, and allocations were confirmed in October 2023. The Adult Social Care (ASC) Workforce Fund allocations that were announced in July 2023 are rolled into the larger ASC Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund (MSIF) grant.
- Services Grant continues to operate in the same way as in 2023/24 but with a significant reduced overall amount (down from £483m to £77m).
- Projections assume no change in New Homes Bonus and no change in the Rural Services Delivery Grant
- Business Rates (NNDR) cap compensation will be paid to authorities for lost income arising from the decision to freeze the small business rating multiplier.
- Funding guarantee continues to be calculated on the same basis as 2023/24 at 3% of core spending power and takes into account:

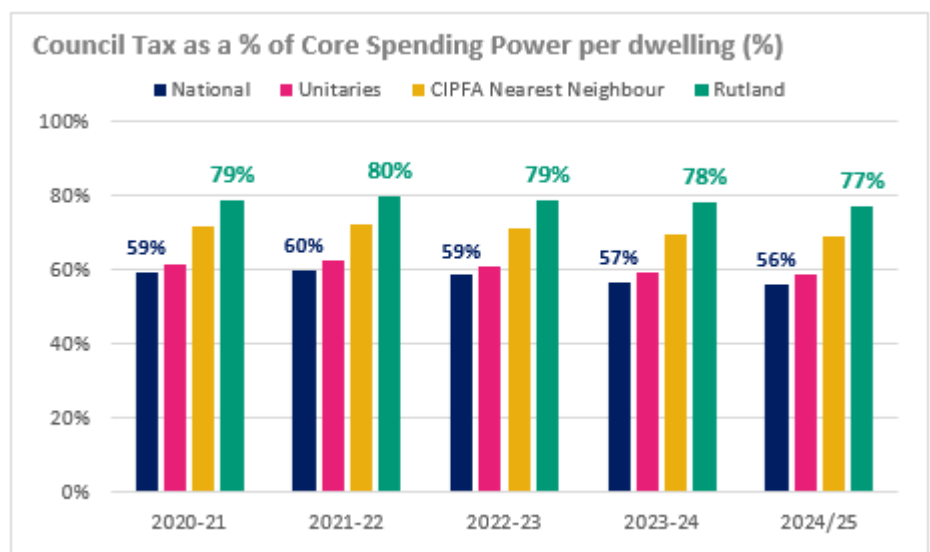
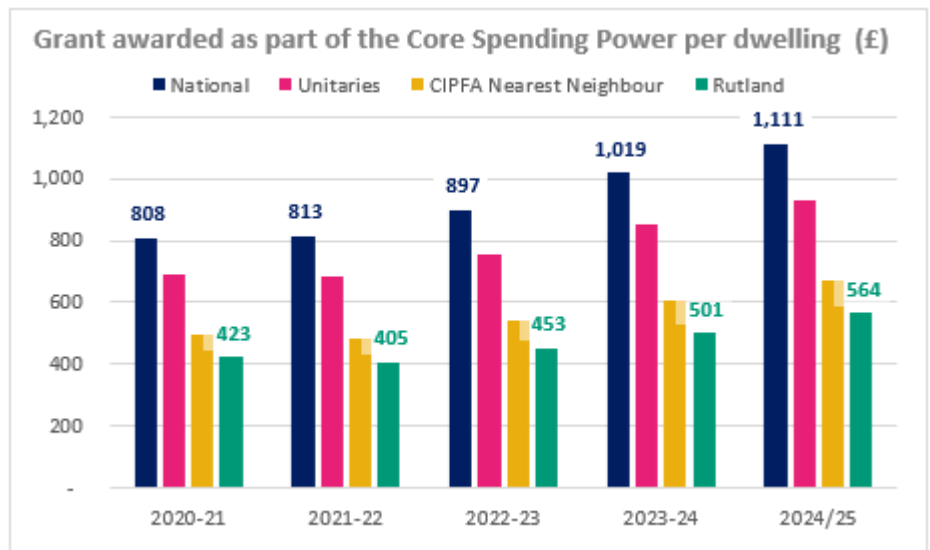
- Increase in council tax from taxbase growth – not from Band D tax increases
- Additional funding from grants, including Services Grant and all of the social care grants
- Change in New Homes Bonus allocations
- Indicative public health grant allocations have already been announced with allocations increasing by 1.36%. The government is claiming that this will deliver 7% real-terms increase in funding in 2024/25, however this appears to include “local authority-led efforts to stop smoking”. Cashable benefits are likely to be NHS directly and adult social care indirectly.

5.5 Core Spending Power

5.5.1 Core Spending Power (CSP) is a measure of total council revenue funding from all sources, except for ringfenced grants and often contains assumptions on funding Councils may or may not approve. The Provisional Settlement for 2024/25 the Council had a CSP of £2,449.47 per dwelling which is £91.60 less than the average national position.

5.5.2 The Council’s CSP for general grant allocation per dwelling, £564.45, compares to the average national of £1,111.48, a notably smaller proportion.

5.5.3 Therefore, the Council’s reliance on Council Tax to fund Council services is proportionately greater at 77% than the national position 56%. This is also the case when compare with CIPFA Nearest Neighbour authorities, and similar Unitary class authorities as shown in the chart.



5.6 Longer Term Funding Reform

- 5.6.1 For a number of years, the Local Government sector has been anticipating the implementation of major structural changes within the funding system, to reflect changes in relative need, resources and the continuing pressures, such as those most noticeable within Adults and Children's Social Care budgets. There is a renewed commitment from the government to "[improve] the local government finance landscape in the next Parliament". Any change is going to be after the next General Election, though, and possibly even under a different government. Changes in funding reform could then be very different from those that were proposed by the current government.
- 5.6.2 Local Authorities have been budgeting based on one / two-year funding settlements, with 2024/25 being no exception to this trend. This means operating under increased levels of uncertainty and difficulties when setting a strategic financial plan due to nature of short-term budgeting. This makes it difficult for the Council to plan how best to allocate resources and provide services. However, for the Council to become financially sustainable, the Council has made best estimates of future funding to help facilitate expenditure reduction activities now to generate savings in the medium to long term.
- 5.6.3 In addition to the plans to review and implement Local Government funding reforms, the government had outlined the implementation of the Social Care and waste collection and disposal reforms. Implementing these wide-ranging changes within a short timeframe presented difficulties nationally, therefore the proposals have been delayed. The Council will closely monitor and work through these policies, to ensure the local impact of it is fully understood, aligned and factored into future strategies.

5.7 Fees and Charges

- 5.7.1 As part of the MTFs the Council reviews its fees and charges to ensure that it is receiving appropriate recompense for the services that it is allowed to charge its stakeholders. For some of the charge's increases are set nationally, which reduces the Council's opportunity for income generation.
- 5.7.2 The Council is expecting to generate additional income of £0.2m in relation to fees and charges compared to current year. The following table outlines the scale of fees and charges by directorate:

Fees & Charges by Directorate	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Adults & Health	(1,647)	(1,647)	(1,648)	(1,649)
Places	(2,662)	(2,682)	(2,768)	(2,776)
Childrens & Families	(259)	(262)	(266)	(267)
Resources	(1,281)	(1,307)	(1,338)	(1,368)
Law & Governance	(16)	(16)	(16)	(16)
Total	(5,865)	(5,914)	(6,036)	(6,076)

- 5.7.3 Further information on the Council's strategy and policy for fees and charges is set out in Appendix E and on the Council's website.

6 CORE EXPENDITURE ASSUMPTIONS

6.1 In common with other councils, Rutland has experienced inflationary costs and increasing demand for child social care, adult social care and, albeit to a lesser degree than other councils' homelessness services which are placing significant demand on already stretched budgets.

6.1.1 A review of the Council's expenditure assumptions has been conducted by officers. This includes reviewing budget assumptions in relation to inflation on the Council's key contracts, pay rates and utilities. Assumptions have also been applied with regards to increases in demand over the MTFS period.

6.2 Inflationary Budget Pressures

6.2.1 Inflation is estimated to lead to additional budgetary pressures over the MTFS of £1.3m in 2024/25 rising to £5.0m by 2027/28. This accounts for 37% of the budget demand over the MTFS.

6.2.2 The Bank of England (BoE) monetary report (August 2023) has been used to inform the revised MTFS assumptions for the Council's expenditure and income. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation remains above the 2% target and the Office for National Statistics report that CPI was 6.7% in the 12 months to September 2023. The current MTFS assumes that inflation is expected to fall to around 5% by the end of 2023, with the target 2% being met by late 2024.

6.2.3 Greater energy prices have contributed to the high rate of inflation. The Council's energy prices will increase 7% in comparison to current budgeted levels in 2023/24.

6.2.4 Contract inflation is expected to continue to some degree, but at rates less than experienced during 2022/23. Key contract negotiations were undertaken in 2023/24 which has enabled the Council to develop a saving proposal of £0.5m within the Adults & Health Directorate.

6.2.5 After protracted negotiations local government pay award for 2023/24 was agreed in November 2023. The Council participates in the national negotiations. The assumptions within the MTFS have been reviewed and updated following this award with estimates in the range of 2.0% – 4.5% made over the MTFS period. Given the uncertainty with negotiations in recent years, this will be kept under review by both the HR and Finance teams and updates provided at later Cabinet and / or Council meetings.

6.2.6 Pension rates are included at the rate of the latest triennial valuation covering the period 1 April 2023 to March 2027. The same rates have been assumed at 22.8%.

6.3 Demand Led Budget Pressures

6.3.1 Nationally Councils have experienced increasing demand pressures in both adult's and children's related social care services.

6.3.2 The number of children requiring care has remained relatively stable compared to the national position for the Council, however the complexity of need has increased. Within the MTFS it is assumed that there is an increase in demand over the period of £0.5m by 2027/28 to reflect the higher cost of placement. In response to the experienced budget pressures from the increased numbers of care leavers budget provision of £0.05m has been included as a service investment for additional capacity.

6.3.3 Demand led pressures on Adult Social Care (ASC) care packages continues to grow. The pressure is due to rising demand in a number of areas including

community care and accommodated care for all age and client groups. Additional demand pressures have been assumed in the MTFS period of £1.6m by 2027/28.

- 6.3.4 Prevention and demand management saving activities have been identified as part of the MTFS budget setting process which will deliver estimated savings of £1.8m by 2027/28. Transformational investment in operational and commissioning activity to review and find solutions that meet the need whilst trying to avoid additional costs alongside applying funding tools to share costs fairly with health partners will be adopted.
- 6.3.5 Based on recent experience with Adult Social Care providers officers are considering enhanced options with regards to the Council ensuring that safeguarding obligations are met with all care providers in the County. Therefore, they may be a further budget update may be presented at the next Cabinet in terms of how an increase in capacity would be funded.

6.4 Key Budget Assumptions

- 6.4.1 The following table shows the key expenditure assumptions applied across the MTFS period:

Expenditure assumptions rates	2024/25 %	2025/26 %	2026/27 %	2027/28 %
Utilities inflation	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Contract inflation	*	2.00	2.00	2.00
Pay awards (<i>range reflects number of assumptions eg lump sums for lower scale employees</i>)	2.00 – 4.00	2.00 – 4.00	2.00 – 4.00	2.00 – 4.00
Pension**	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Demand (Cost Increase)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Interest rate for income receipt	4.89	3.26	2.76	2.70
Interest rate for borrowing***	6.38	6.38	6.38	6.38

* Various rates used due to number of contract renewals. Waste assumed at 7.5%, Highways 12% general inflation 2%, Social Care 4%. Reduced to Government target of 2.00% beyond 2024/25

** no known increase in rate until 2026/27 due to triennial review process – assumed no increase thereafter, will be reviewed as economy stabilises

*** average rate of current fixed rate borrowing

6.5 Capital Programme

- 6.5.1 The Council's Capital Programme is viewed over a four-year period to ensure correct stewardship of assets and efficient use of budgets, with the years forming the MTFS. The Council is proactive in attracting external funding for as many schemes as possible. A Capital Programme Board oversees the Council's capital requirements. The Capital Programme includes estimated project costs and profiling of expenditure whilst detailed business cases and due diligence is completed on some individual schemes.
- 6.5.2 A revised Capital Strategy forms Appendix M and once approved will guide the way for agreeing schemes in the Capital Programme in accordance with the key objectives within the Corporate Strategy. Given the continued challenge of setting a financially sustainable budget it is vital that any future capital programme consists of projects that are all or mostly grant-funded, that avoid future revenue pressures for asset maintenance and running costs where possible, lead to future income streams that pay back the investment in the short-to-medium term, and/or will lead to transformation and future revenue savings.

6.5.3 Under the previous accounting rules, leases that did not account for substantially all of an asset's useful economic life were treated as off-balance sheet and charged to revenue. The new IFRS16 accounting rule brings these leases (unless under a year in duration or for assets below a de minimum value) onto the balance sheet as capital expenditure.

6.5.4 The following table provides a summary position of the capital programme and funding over the MTFS period. For information on the detailed schemes this is contained in Appendix K.

Estimated Capital Expenditure*	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Supporting the most vulnerable	1,033	270	270	270
A diverse & sustainable local economy	26,043	14,589	2,684	2,684
Tackling the climate emergency	0	0	0	0
Provide good public services	2,984	547	547	547
Total Investment	30,060	15,406	3,501	3,501
Grant & Contributions	29,363	15,326	3,421	3,421
Direct Revenue Financing	-	-	-	-
Capital Receipts	697	80	80	80
Net Financing Requirement	-	-	-	-
Total Financing	30,060	15,406	3,501	3,501

* the Council is not undertaking any commercial activities / non-financial investments

6.5.5 As part of the transformation work, launched as part of the Financial Sustainability Strategy, the Council recognised the opportunity in a refreshed approach to optimising its asset portfolio to develop an Asset Management Strategy (AMS) that ensures value is maximised over the short, medium and long term. This strategy may result in rationalisation of Council assets and is likely to result in disposals where it is deemed assets no longer present a commercial, community or strategic case for retaining the property by the Council.

6.5.6 The Council will work with asset specialists as part of this continued review. To summarise some of the actions will include the following, and are outlined in more detail in the Capital Strategy in Appendix M:

- To develop on from the review of the asset base undertaken in 2023/24 - including receipt of updated valuations and the use of subject matter experts
- Reduce liabilities and expenditure to the Council in revenue and capital as a result of a rationalised asset portfolio

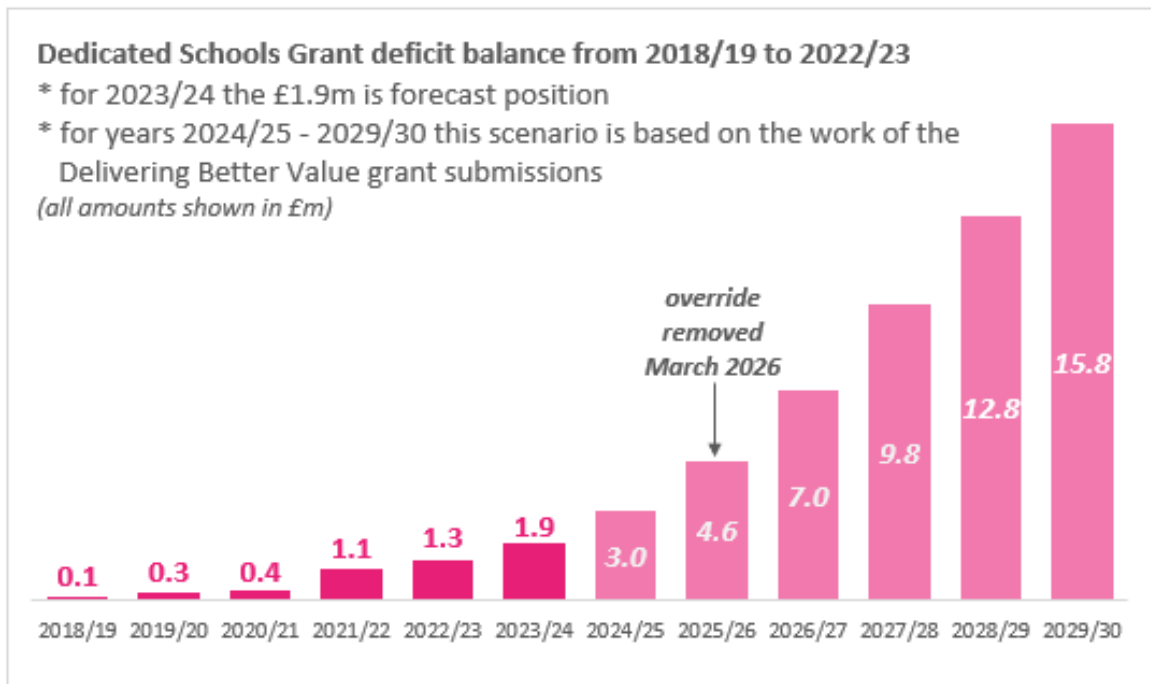
6.6 Dedicated Schools Grant and the Schools Budget 2024/25

6.6.1 The Local Authority retains a statutory duty to annually set the schools budget for all schools in the County (maintained and Academy schools). The majority of the funding for Education comes through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) which totals £39.8m including £31.5m for schools' budgets for 2024/25. Officers have worked with the Schools Forum, who are the representative group of education providers in the County, to develop budget proposals. A consultation exercise is undertaken with schools over how the funding is allocated via the Council's funding formula.

6.6.2 The local funding arrangements operate within the context of national requirements and guidelines, but the Council can use the national arrangements to target funding at priorities within the County. On 1 February 2024 the Schools Forum will consider the budget proposals outlined in Appendix N. The final budget proposals require

formal Council agreement at the meeting on the 26 February 2024.

- 6.6.3 The Council has a deficit balance on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). From 1 April 2020 a new regulation was introduced that enabled any deficit on the Schools budget to be transferred to the Dedicated Schools Grant Adjustment Account for a specified period of time in order for the deficit to be made good. This had the effect of separating schools budget deficits from the local authority General Fund for a period, initially set at three years but later extended until March 2026.
- 6.6.4 In recent years the High Needs Block has operated in challenging environments with new demand being experienced and inflationary pressures resulting in an increase in price. As a result the deficit has increased from £0.1m in 2018/19 to a forecast deficit of £1.9m by 2023/24.
- 6.6.5 As a result of this position the Council submitted a grant application to the Department for Education 'Delivering Better Value' in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) programme which aims to support participating local authorities to improve services to children and young people with SEND, working with the Council's partners to develop bespoke plans to deliver effective and sustainable SEND services.
- 6.6.6 The outcomes of this programme are that:
- children are assisted to grow and succeed in mainstream school and to get practical help at the right time in the right way which avoids exclusions
 - children's needs are identified and assessed quickly and the graduated response followed
 - settings having a greater understanding of unmet needs and the known links to behaviour and learning and therefore are better able to meet most needs within a mainstream environment. This will in turn mean that;
 - EHCP's are seldom needed except to support the most complex of needs in mainstream, and only in exceptional cases will a child need an alternative setting other than mainstream.
 - Therefore, through better understanding, training and experience of supporting complex needs, Rutland's mainstream setting will become specialist in their own right. This will lead to fewer children with SEND being excluded from mainstream, because these settings are confident that they can meet needs and in cases of behaviours that challenge they are able to de-escalate situations by providing the appropriate support.
- 6.6.7 As part of this scheme the Council is required to provide a model of a possible deficit position, and this is shown in the following chart. This shows that the deficit on the DSG could reach £15.8m by 2029/30 if no further mitigations (as listed in 6.6.6) were undertaken. Therefore, without meaningful intervention by the Council to address this deficit now the Council, under accounting convention, would be required to use a significant proportion of its General Fund to fund SEND expenditure once the statutory override deadline is reached. Funding the deficit at this rate would jeopardise the financial resilience and sustainability of the Council. Even at the current forecast deficit of £1.9m this restricts investment decisions that the Council could make in future service provision.



6.6.8 The Council is proactively involved in creating opportunities to address the deficit position in the High Needs block and was confirmed as a joint lead for the East Midlands Change Programme Partnership (CPP) alongside Leicester City and Leicestershire. The CPP is testing the key system-level reforms set out in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities & Alternative Provision (SEND AP) Improvement Plan that is expected to deliver the system and culture changes needed to improve outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND or in AP and their families. This work is funded via grant funding of £5.9m for the region. The financial impact of this improvement plan is to be modelled as the programme progresses from the current set-up phase.

6.6.9 Over recent years local service-based activities have led to improvements being made in the SEND service provision, which was formally recognised in the August 2023 report from Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission following inspection. Building on this success the Council, through participation in two national strategic schemes, will undertake activities that lead to a better value for money service provision. Whilst these activities should reduce demand on SEND services and in turn should halt and make good the deficit on the DSG it is not yet guaranteed. In summary, alongside existing Council initiatives, further work on the high needs block to review and reduce a number of cost drivers will be undertaken over the MTFS period:

- Demand levels – changes for the new academic year
- Average costs
- Impact of recovery plan measures
- Impact of Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme
- Impact of Alternative Provision (SEND AP) Improvement Plan

6.6.10 The Council has previously agreed to underwrite the DSG deficit reserve using a commitment against General Fund reserves of £1.9m, although the statutory override removes the immediacy for this requirement. This enables the Council to manage the risk of not making good the deficit through future DSG funding by the

end of 2025/26 up to this value. However, the Secretary of State is required to approve this funding transfer as it moves funding between central government departments of Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) and the Department for Education (DfE) and therefore it is not solely in the Council's remit to action.

7 CHIEF FINANCE OFFICERS ROBUSTNESS (SECTION 25) STATEMENT

7.1 Requirement

7.1.1 Section 25 of The Local Government Act 2003 includes the following statutory duty in respect of the budget report to Council:

“the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of the authority must report to it on the following matters:

- a. the robustness of the estimates made for the purpose of the calculations and*
- b. the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.”*

The Council is required to take this report into account when making that decision.

7.1.2 Section 26 of the same Act places an onus on the CFO to ensure the Council has established a minimum level of reserves to be retained to cover any unforeseen demands that could not be reasonably defined within finalising the proposed budget.

7.1.3 This report has been prepared by the Section 151 Officer (CFO) as part of fulfilling this duty and gives the required advice relating to the Council's current and next years financial position, including a consideration of the proposed budget as a whole and all the financial risks facing the Council. It identifies the Council's approach to budget risk management and assesses the risks associated with the current year and 2024/25 budget to inform the advice on robustness.

7.2 Overall Financial Position

7.2.1 The Council has a strong track record of delivering on its budget assumptions through sound financial management. The current financial year is forecasting an underspend of £1.6m at Quarter 2, which is a combination of interest receipts being greater than budgeted due to the increasing interest rates as the Bank of England combat inflationary pressures and savings made from a series of vacancies across the Council. However, the vacancy savings are mitigating some budget pressures incurred through changes in demand based on complexity of need, and price increases in contracts. Whilst the vacancy savings provide some mitigation to in year pressure, it is a strategic risk of the Council's in terms of being able to deliver the Corporate Strategy. Assumptions contained in this IBP and MTFs have been revised considering the performance in 2023/24.

7.2.2 The forecast underspend provides the Council with the opportunity to bring forward transformational activities to aid the achievement of financial sustainability. It is encouraging that the forecast outturn for the current year 2023/24 is better than budgeted, which provides some comfort in the form of a reserves position being better than expected. This is covered in more detail in section 7.3.

7.2.3 In November 2022 the Council agreed to a Financial Sustainability Strategy (FSS) that outlined the approach to the development as to how the Council could live within its means, a key corporate priority. This outlined 12 transformational workstreams, alongside the strategic use of reserves to underpin the budget whilst the savings plans were developed, implemented, and embedded.

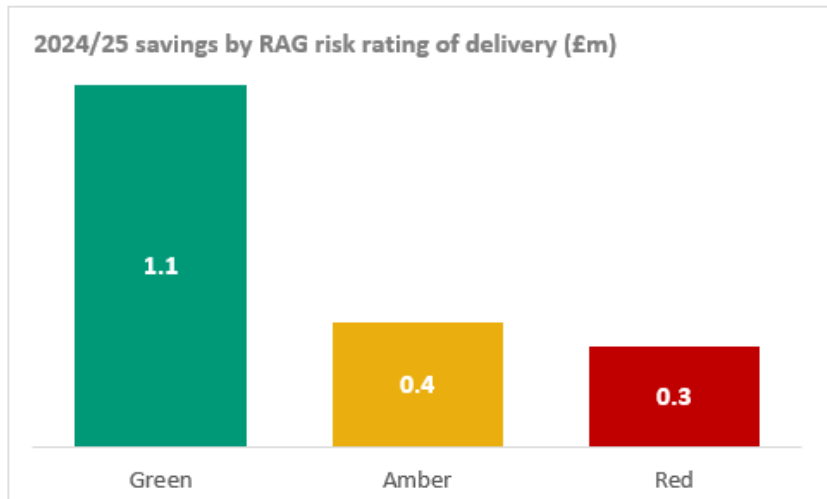
- 7.2.4 Using the FSS as a basis the Officers of the Council embraced an enhanced budget setting process that put service delivery at the heart of the budget design. The projected budget deficit in the FSS illustrated that the Council could no longer afford to provide services in the same way. The enhanced budget setting process therefore asked Heads of Service to design their services within a Cash Limit and which builds in the 12 transformation workstreams. The resulting Service Ambitions are outlined in Appendix C for each directorate.
- 7.2.5 Alongside this approach the finance team have completed a review of the financial resilience of the Council using 14 financial health indicators as contained in Appendix G. These indicators provide the context for the financial position the Council finds itself in today following past Council decisions and identifies where the Council has areas of strengths and weaknesses in achieving financial sustainability, see Section 8 and Appendix G for further information.
- 7.2.6 Section 4.1 of this report shows that the Council must make £1.8m of savings in 2024/25 rising to £4.6m by 2027/28. This equates to around 4% of the net revenue budget in 2024/25 rising to 8% by 2027/28. In addition, the Council needs to manage down some of the demand and cost pressures it can expect to face during the year ahead. The use of one-off savings and funding streams is modest, and likely to be better than many other Councils.
- 7.2.7 With regards to medium to long term financial challenges for the Council the continued uncertainty with future funding levels within Local Government remains a challenge against rising demand, expectations from the public and government alike, and rising costs of service delivery that outstrips funding available. Alongside this is the unknown funding solution to the increasing deficit position on the Dedicated Schools Grant. In the absence of firm and final solutions from the Department of Education, it is prudent to assumed that General Fund resources will be required in some form given that expenditure has been incurred, and the Council is already 'cash flowing' this expenditure. Without a known solution this is a risk that could expose the Council's financial position significantly. However, the Council is being proactive with both of these issues, with Officers and Cabinet taking action now to address these issues and mitigate this future risk.
- 7.2.8 In conclusion, the overall financial position of the Council remains a challenging one. Its resilience is relatively strong however, as detailed in section 7.3, there are risks attached to this proposed budget. However, this proposed budget can be seen as the step toward financial sustainability and contains risk mitigation considerations.

7.3 Robustness of the 2024/25 Budget Estimates

- 7.3.1 The revenue budget has been formulated having regard to several factors including:
- Funding availability
 - Demography and service pressures
 - Risks and uncertainties
 - Emerging opportunities
 - Inflation
 - Transformation workstreams
 - Priorities
 - Continued recovery from the pandemic
- 7.3.2 It is important in setting any budget, in any year, that estimates are based on the best available information at the time of setting it. The accuracy and reliability of that information varies depending on what you are trying to forecast. Where the accuracy and reliability are uncertain, it is important not to be overly pessimistic or optimistic.

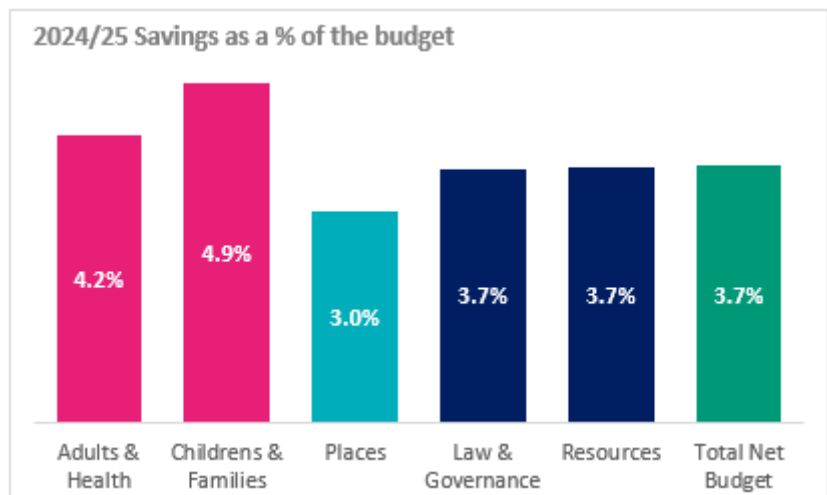
7.3.3 In the opinion of the Section 151 Officer, the over-arching conclusion is that the estimates prepared are realistic and deliverable, albeit challenging. There are however a number of issues to highlight:

- The Red rated risk savings shown in Appendix B rely on significant transformational change with how the public interact with the Council. Whilst the design of those new services means that accessibility is increased, leading to service improvements, it will require behavioural changes from the residents and businesses to be fully successful. The certainty of delivery of those savings is therefore less than ideal. However, this needs to be considered in the context of savings of £4.6m within an overall budget of £54.3m by 2027/28.



- There are Amber rated risks which include options that are not directly within the Council's gift to deliver. For example, greater working with partners to generate savings.

- The overall savings options do have a 'spread' across the Council's services and from a range of measures, most of which are within the Council's control to deliver on time and on budget. However, there is a considerable amount of work needed to deliver these savings and additional income, and there is therefore a risk of the capacity and pace needed to deliver the whole package of savings. The following chart shows this spread of savings as a percentage of the budget.



- Predicting demand pressures will always be a challenge, particularly when individual placements can be hugely expensive. Using historic trends, along with forecast population data, and intelligence from the Council's own internal management information systems, would normally provide a reasonable estimate. However, given the impact of the pandemic for almost two years, there is added uncertainty of demand projections still. The Council cannot be certain if demand continues to build and will then 'surge' through the systems as complexity increases through the loss of interventions at age-appropriate times.
- People's behaviours have undoubtedly changed from the pandemic years and may continue to do so now through the Cost-of-Living period. The Council has

previously seen the impact of online shopping on the high street footfall, and therefore visitors to the County, and the impact on local businesses is uncertain.

- For many years, inflation has been low and stable. Predicting where rates will go over the coming year remains difficult, and if they continue at current rates, or increase, then there will be a pressure on the budget that will need mitigating by good commissioning and procurement and / or other mitigations.

7.3.4 Given the above issues, the Section 151 Officer requires funds set aside to mitigate the risk from non-saving delivery. This will be from the repurposed Financial Sustainability Strategy & Budget Risk Reserve as the Council has created a sustainable budget position for 2025/26 – 2027/28 which does not rely on reserve funding to underpin the expenditure in those years. The widening definition of this reserve is required to provide an overall satisfactory conclusion on the robustness of budget estimates. This is therefore included in the proposed budget and is detailed in section 7.4, and Appendix I.

7.3.5 Risks will be reviewed and managed on a monthly basis through the Corporate Leadership Team's Board meetings for Risk & Finance Board, and the Corporate Project Management Board to ensure all savings are on track, where alternative solutions need to be devised and where mitigating actions can be appropriately applied. Progress will be reported through to Cabinet as part of the regular reporting and governance framework.

7.4 Adequacy of Reserves

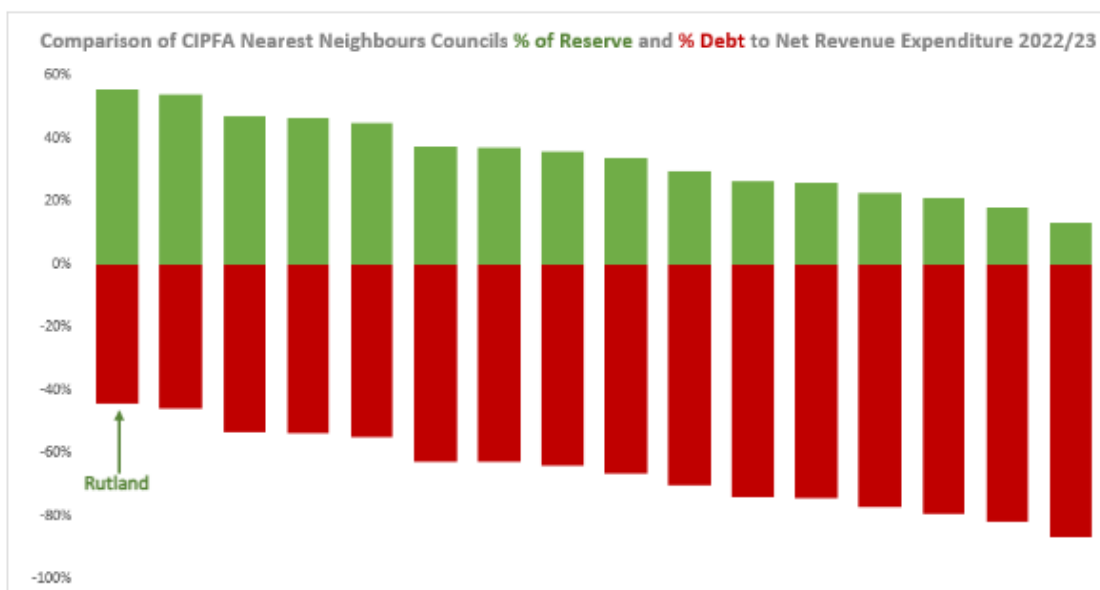
7.4.1 Each year, reviewing the level of reserves the Council holds is an important part of the budget setting process. The review must be balanced and reasonable, factoring in the current financial standing of the Council, the funding outlook into the medium term and beyond, and most importantly, the financial risk environment operating in.

7.4.2 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) recommend that the following factors should be taken into account when considering the level of reserves and balances:

1. Assumptions regarding inflation and interest rates
2. Estimates of the level and timing of capital receipts
3. The capacity to manage in-year demand led pressures
4. Ability to activate contingency plans if planned savings cannot be delivered
5. Risks inherent in any new partnerships
6. Financial standing of the authority (level of borrowing, debt outstanding etc.)
7. The authority's record of budget management and ability to manage in year budget pressures
8. Virement and year-end procedures in relation to under and overspends
9. The general financial climate
10. The adequacy of insurance arrangements

7.4.3 It should be noted that the assessment of the adequacy of reserves is subjective. There is no 'right' answer as to the precise level of reserves to be held. There is also no formula approach to calculating the correct level; it is therefore a matter of judgement. The duties of the Council's Section 151 Officer include the requirement 'to ensure that the Council maintains an adequate level of reserves, when considered alongside the risks the Council faces and the general economic outlook'.

7.4.4 Each Council must make their own decisions about the level of reserves they hold, taking into account all of the issues referred to above. A graphical analysis of the 2022/23 reserves follows. Rutland is ranked 1 out of 16 CIPFA Nearest Neighbour Councils in terms of the percentage of reserves held. The range of reserves held as a percentage of budget is wide; the lowest authority at 20%, up to the highest at 71%. The Council's figure is 71%. It is also worth looking at reserves alongside borrowing, as borrowing can be used to protect reserves, or reserves used to reduce borrowing. Fortunately, Rutland holds an appropriate level of borrowing and therefore that 'trade -off' remains an option. This is an area that is reviewed alongside the fiscal health indicators of the Council, Appendix G.



7.4.5 The reserves that the Council estimates to hold as at 1 April 2024 are, in the opinion of the S151 Officer, satisfactory for the year ahead. In considering the ten factors listed above, as well as the risks associated with the budgeted pressures and savings, it is the opinion of the S151 Officer that the overall risk environment for the Council has marginally decreased over the past twelve months as inflation appears to be reducing to the Governments target level, financial performance in the current financial year indicates sound budget assumptions applied, and financial analysis of the Council's balance sheet has been completed alongside other financial health indicators which indicate financial resilience for the Council.

7.4.6 The Council broadly categorises reserves as follows – in line with Local Government accounting practice:

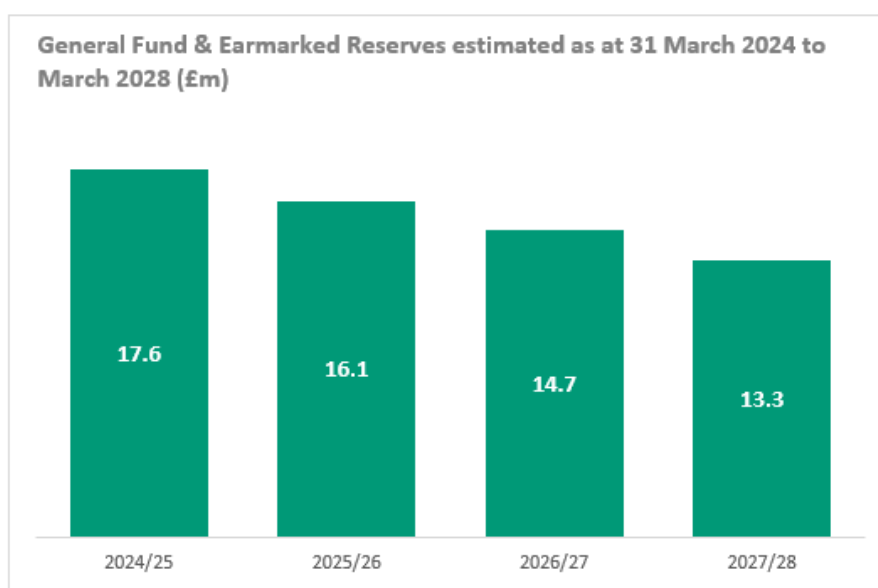
1. A working balance to manage in year risks – the General Fund Balance
2. Usable Reserves – these are reserves for available for future commitments such as transformational investments, have been used to balance the budget and manage specific risks inherent in the management of the budget
3. Ring Fenced Reserves – to meet known or predicted requirements

7.4.7 At the end of 2024/25 the Council's General Fund working balance is forecast to be £3.0m, usable reserves at £12.0m and ring-fenced reserves at £2.6m. The latter reserve type includes the £1.7m of reserves to fund the Local Plan costs.

7.4.8 More detailed consideration of the balance of reserves for investment and risk coverage is contained in the Reserves Strategy and Policy is contained in Appendix I. The following table provides a summary overview of the forecast position for

reserve balances across the MTFS period.

Reserves estimated balance as at 31 March	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
General Fund	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000
Financial Sustainability Strategy & Budget Risk Reserve	1,293	909	326	0
Departmental Reserves & Capital Investment Fund	1,906	1,631	1,355	1,079
Risk Reserve	7,071	7,071	7,071	6,723
Innovation Fund	2,813	1,989	1,439	989
Process Improvement Fund	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500
Total	17,583	16,100	14,691	13,291



8 FINANCIAL HEALTH INDICATORS

- 8.1.1 Against a backdrop of existing funding pressures, the financial costs of the pandemic and significant price increases, the financial challenges public services face currently feel unprecedented. Some Councils are better placed than others to weather this financial challenge. However, there is a need to maintain financial resilience against such significant pressures, new and emerging risks, and operating in an uncertain funding environment.
- 8.1.2 Financial resilience is the ability of public services to remain viable, stable, and effective in the medium to long term while facing pressures from growing demand, a tightening of funding and an increasingly complex and unpredictable financial environment.
- 8.1.3 The indicators included in Appendix G have been created to form an opinion of the Council's financial resilience and are based on:
- Revenue based indicators for financial sustainability in the public sector
 - Financial health indicators – based on traditional balance sheet indicators to inform the financial strategy
 - Capital based financial indicators as a key driver of the balance sheet health and resulting burden on revenue funding

- 8.1.4 In summary the 14 indicators of financial health for Rutland for the MTFS period suggest that the Council is taking appropriate measures to deliver a financially sustainable position. The revenue-based indicators reflect the uncertainty of future funding arrangements and the transformation savings agenda that is required to ensure the Council is able to operate within the funding envelope. The Balance Sheet indicators, alongside the Capital (investment in assets), show a relative position of strength which the Council can strategically use to support the revenue-based challenges. More detailed discussion of these indicators is in Appendix G.
- 8.1.5 The following table provides a summary as to the RAG rating of the trend for each grouping of indicator:

Indicator grouping	Red	Amber	Green
Revenue based financial sustainability indicators	2	2	1
Fiscal indicators	1	2	2
Capital investment indicators	0	0	4
Total	3	4	7

9 BUDGET VIREMENTS

- 9.1.1 The Council's Budget Framework, Part 9 of the Constitution enables the Council to specify the extent of virements within the budget and degree of in-year changes to the Budget Framework, which may be undertaken by Officers and Cabinet. Virements allows the Council to move spend approved in the budget to another budget in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules (FPR).
- 9.1.2 As part of the transformational workstream for 'Operating Framework' the FPR's will be reviewed in detail to ensure that they are appropriate to support a modern Council and do not create undue burdens that make it harder to deliver services to the public. It is best practice for the Council to review their FPRs given the impact of 'time value of money' such that the limits set may now give rise to unintended consequences if not regularly reviewed and updated. It is intended for this review to be completed by Autumn 2024.
- 9.1.3 In the existing framework, and the Council's FPRs, the principle remains that approved budget cannot be moved from one area of spend or project to another unless it meets the FPRs. This applies to both revenue and capital budgets.
- 9.1.4 The virement limits for 2024/25 are as follows:
- Directors, within their own area, can approve virements up to £25k
 - Virements required across departments can be approved by the Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer, at the request of the Directors, up to a limit of £100k, any virements more than this limit will require Cabinet approval.
 - All budget virements more than £100k will require Cabinet approval
 - All budget virements in excess of £500k will require Council approval
- 9.1.5 The virement procedure rules will not apply in the following circumstances:
- a) Reflecting organisational structure changes eg changes in reporting line
 - b) Allocating corporate budgets or savings to departments agreed in the MTFS
 - c) Allocating budgets to individual capital schemes eg from school places capital programme or local transport plan projects.
 - d) Receipt of ring-fenced grant funds where the Council has no discretion as to

how the funds are used.

10 FINANCIAL RISKS

- 10.1.1 Local Government has become increasingly exposed to risk and instability within the system. It has become financially stretched following over a decade of funding cuts and austerity measures, and the uncertainty around future funding and wider public sector reforms causes added difficulties for strategic planning.
- 10.1.2 The Council assesses financial risks as part of its budget setting process and regular budgetary performance reviews. The Corporate Leadership Team considers finance performance monthly and reported to Cabinet on quarterly basis with Scrutiny considerations on a regular basis throughout the year. The management oversight described above feed into the Strategic Risk Register review and is reported to the Audit Committee.
- 10.1.3 This risk management arrangement ensures that risk management is aligned with the overall organisational approach and that the identification of key issues are managed, reported, and escalated appropriately and in a timely manner. Officer awareness of risk and capacity to manage risk is maintained in line with the reporting framework to provide assurance to the Council's overall governance and control environment.
- 10.1.4 Most of the financial risks identified are inherent, including the requirement to deliver savings plans, management of budgets, which relate to demand led services, and assumptions in respect of the level of resources receivable through Council Tax, Business Rates and government grants.
- 10.1.5 In addition, there are rising external factors creating an additional layer of financial risk such as the rising cost of the national living wage, the impact of inflation, increasing energy prices and additional burdens placed on Councils from further government reforms such as with waste collection and disposal, and adult social care reform. Recent experience of the latter risk is that new burdens are more costly than the funding attached from government.
- 10.1.6 Reasonable mitigating actions have been made where possible to the identified and managed risks, this is included in Appendix H and within the Reserves Strategy and Policy in Appendix I. Cabinet and Council should consider these when reviewing this Integrated Budget Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy proposals.
- 10.1.7 The Council's budget is constructed using best estimates for both the levels and timing of spending, cashable savings and resources. The following table provides an indication of the sensitivity of the overall budget to movements in the assumptions underpinning the estimated budgets allocated.

Sensitivity analysis on budget estimates	Cash impact £000
Investment rates 1% higher than budget	390
Investment rates 1% Lower than budget	(400)
Transport - SEN - Cost Increases of 5% above budget	48
Transport – Home to School - Cost increase of 5% above budget	71
Underachievement of Savings 10%	183
Increase in Waste Management - 5% increase in Disposal Costs	113
Increase In Adult Social Care - Cost Increases of 1% above budget	163

Sensitivity analysis on budget estimates	Cash impact £000
Increase in Childrens Social Care - Cost Increases of 1% above budget	95
Pay Award – Flat £1,925 (as 23/24)	551
Pay Award – Flat £3,000	1,091
Pay Award – 10%	1,417
Pay Award - 4%	306

11 CONSULTATION

- 11.1.1 The budget consultation document is to be published on the website for residents, businesses, and staff to view and provide responses via an online survey. The Council will also seek to raise awareness of the budget proposals via the use of various mediums. Hard copies of the budget consultation document (Appendix J) will be available on request.
- 11.1.2 Representations will be sought from a range of stakeholders to enable residents, partner organisations, businesses and other interested parties to feedback on these budget proposals, which have been designed to deliver on the refreshed Corporate Strategy. The Council will make full use of its communications channels to share information about the budget consultation and encourage responses. This includes direct emails, website updates, social media, briefings, attendance at relevant meetings, and via members. Stakeholder groups are listed below:

Stakeholders
Rutland residents
Parish and Town Councils
Town Partnerships
Local businesses
Voluntary and community groups
Strategic partners

- 11.1.3 Responses from these interactions will be reported to Scrutiny, Cabinet and Council to consider alongside the Integrated Budget Plan proposals as outlined in this document.

12 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 12.1 No alternative option has been considered as the Cabinet is responsible under the constitution for initiating the budget proposals and the Council is statutorily obliged to set a lawful and balanced budget by 11 March annually.

13 IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 Elected Members

- 13.1.1 Members must have regard to the advice of the Chief Financial (Section 151) Officer. The Council may take decisions which are at variance with this advice, providing there are reasonable grounds to do so.
- 13.1.2 Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applies whereby it is an offence for any Members with arrears of council tax which have been outstanding for two months or more to attend any meeting of the Council or its committees at which a decision affecting the budget is made, unless the Members concerned

declare at the outset of the meeting they are in arrears and that they will not be voting on the decision for that reason.

13.2 Legal Implications

- 13.2.1 In terms of the Council's executive arrangements, the adoption of the Council's Budget is a role shared between the Cabinet and the Council, whereby the Cabinet (Leader) is responsible for formulating the budget proposals and Full Council is responsible for then approving (or not) those proposals and setting the budget and council tax requirement.
- 13.2.2 For the remainder of the year, the principal purpose of the Budget is to set the upper limits of what the executive (Leader, Cabinet or officer under delegated executive authority) may decide to spend the Council's resources on. The Council cannot, through the budget, overrule an executive decision as to how to spend money, but the Budget will require the Cabinet to exercise their responsibilities for decision making so as not to make a decision where they are 'minded to determine the matter contrary to, or not wholly in accordance with the authorities 'budget'. This means that a decision that leads to excess expenditure, a virement from one budget heading to another over the amount allowed by Council in the Integrated Budget Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy, or expenditure of unexpected new money outside the Budget is required to have approval of the Council before the Leader and the Cabinet can make that decision.
- 13.2.3 When it comes to making its decision on 26 February 2024, the Council is under a legal duty to meet the full requirements of Section 31A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, which includes the obligation to produce a balanced budget.
- 13.2.4 The principle of fairness applies to consultation on the budget proposals, both consultations required under s65 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and more generally as proposed here, which operates as a set of rules of law. These rules are that:
- Consultation must be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage
 - The proposer must give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit intelligent consideration and response
 - Adequate time must be given for consideration and response
 - The product of consultation must be conscientiously considered in finalising any statutory proposals.
- 13.2.5 Added to which are two further principles that allow for variation in the form of consultation which are:
- The degree of specificity with which, in fairness, the public authority should conduct its consultation exercise may be influenced by the identity of those whom it is consulting and
 - The demands of fairness are likely to be somewhat higher when an authority contemplates depriving someone of an existing benefit or advantage than when the claimant is a bare application for a future benefit.
- 13.2.6 It should be noted that the consultation taken place on the contents of this report, the Budget proposals, and consequently the Cabinet's general approach to balancing the budget, and not on the various decisions to take whatever actions that may be implicit in the proposals and later adoption of that budget, each of which may or may not require their own consultation process.

- 13.2.7 By virtue of section 25, Local Government Act 2003, when the Council is making the calculation of its budget requirement, it must have regard to the report of the Chief Finance Officer (CFO), as to the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves. It is essential, as a matter of prudence, that the financial position continues to be closely monitored. In particular, members must satisfy themselves that sufficient mechanisms are in place to ensure both that savings are delivered, and that new expenditure is contained within the available resources. Accordingly, any proposals put forward must identify the realistic measures and mechanisms to produce those savings.
- 13.2.8 Where the CFO makes a judgement that the council is unable to set or achieve a balanced budget, or there is an imminent prospect of this they have a responsibility to issue a section 114 notice (s114) of the Local Government Act 1988.
- 13.2.9 Once a s114 notice has been served the council has 21 days to meet and consider the report. During these 21 days the council must not incur any new expenditure unless the CFO has specifically authorised the spend.
- 13.2.10 This suspension of spending will trigger external scrutiny from the council's auditors. However, failure to act, when necessary, could result in the council losing its financial independence with its powers potentially passed to commissioners appointed by government.

Modifications to the Guidance

- 13.2.11 In June 2020, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) confirmed amendments to the guidelines in wake of the COVID-19 pandemic to allow Councils under budgetary pressure as a result of the pandemic time and space to explore alternatives to freezing spending via issuing a s114 notice.
- 13.2.12 The temporary modifications to guidance proposed by CIPFA would mean that it should not normally be necessary for a s114 notice to be issued while informal discussions with government are in progress. The modifications include the following two additional steps:
- At the earliest possible stage, a CFO should make informal confidential contact with DLUHC (previously MHCLG) to advise of financial concerns and a possible forthcoming s114 requirement.
 - The CFO should communicate the potential unbalanced budget position due to COVID-19 to DLUHC (previously MHCLG) at the same time as providing a potential a s114 scenario report to the Cabinet and the external auditor.

13.3 Data Protection Implications

- 13.3.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) has not been completed because there are no identified risks or issues to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

13.4 Equality Implications

- 13.4.1 All budget proposals published in this budget process have been considered with regards to equalities issues, and where an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) have been required these have been completed and compiled. This approach will be kept under review throughout the MTFs period and EIAs completed at each stage of any of the new proposals for example with the Communities workstream as implementation stages progress.

13.5 Community Safety Implications

- 13.5.1 The Council has a duty in accordance with S17 Crime and Disorder Act 1988, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to the likely effect of that exercise of those functions on and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social behaviour).
- 13.5.2 This duty has been considered and there are no community safety implications relating directly to the recommendations.

13.6 Health And Wellbeing Implications

- 13.6.1 None directly related to the recommendations.

13.7 Environmental And Climate Change Implications

- 13.7.1 On 11 January 2021 Rutland County Council acknowledged that it was in a climate emergency. The Council understands that it needs to take urgent action to address it.
- 13.7.2 All budget proposals published in this budget have been considered with regards to the carbon impact and where appropriate carbon impact assessments have been completed. In some instances, proposals are in the early stages of development and until detailed plans are available the carbon impact cannot be determined. These have been identified as 'unknown' at this stage but will be reviewed once detailed plans are available. These have been summarised within Appendix O.

13.8 Procurement Implications

- 13.8.1 There are the no direct procurement implications arising from this report, however all budget expenditure on the provision of services will be undertaken in accordance with Council's procurement framework.

13.9 HR Implications

- 13.9.1 The Council remains committed to developing a workforce that can continue to deliver the Council's priorities, and also is adaptable to change. The alignment of the Council's workforce, structures and processes is key to maximising capacity and performance. In a climate of recruitment, retention, pay pressures, and working within this MTFS, the workforce plan and talent management will help to ensure that there is a workforce that will meet the Council's current and future needs. A suitably competent workforce in the right place at the right time, will also enable delivery of the Council's transformation workstreams.
- 13.9.2 Whilst it is anticipated that there will be some staffing implications as part of this budget, much of the management focus will be looking at how the Operating Model needs to change to meet the needs moving forward and to ensure any staffing impact is minimised. In the event that saving proposals come forward that have headcount / staffing implications, these will be considered in line with the Council's Restructure Policy.
- 13.9.3 It remains the Council's priority to minimise the impact on staffing levels and so that redundancies are the last resort. Such measures may include vacancy management, reviewing the use of agency staff, and voluntary redundancy (subject to service delivery and future contribution to efficiency savings).

14 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Previous budget Setting Report \(37/2023\)](#)
- [Financial Sustainability Strategy \(158/2022\)](#)
- [2023/24 Quarter 1 – Revenue and Capital Forecast Report \(1 16/2023\)](#)
- [2023/24 Quarter 2 – Revenue and Capital Forecast Report \(168/2023\)](#)
- [The Dedicated Schools Grant \(Dsg\) And The Special Educational Needs And Disability \(Send\) Recovery Plan](#)
- [Strategic Risk Register \(176/2023\)](#)

15 APPENDICES

- Appendix A – 2024/25 – 2027/28 MTFs detailed budget position
- Appendix B – Budget proposals tables (pressures / savings / investments)
- Appendix C – Directorates Overview, Service Ambitions and Budget Variation Statements
- Appendix D – Grant Register
- Appendix E – Fees & Charges Strategy / Policy & Schedule
- Appendix F – Funding Strategy
- Appendix G – Financial Health Indicators
- Appendix H – Financial Risk Register
- Appendix I – Reserve Strategy
- Appendix J – Consultation document
- Appendix K – Capital Programme Schemes 2024/25 – 2027/28
- Appendix L – Treasury Management Strategy & Annual Investment Strategy
- Appendix M – Capital Strategy
- Appendix N – Dedicated Schools Grant and the Schools budget
- Appendix O – Carbon Impact Assessment
- *(Appendix P – Council Tax Resolution – to follow for Full Council only)*

An Accessible Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.

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Appendix A – 2024/25 - 2027/28 Medium Term Financial Plan by Service

Summary MTFs Directorate & Business Unit	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Prevention and Assurance	626	634	640	650
Community Care Services	1,462	1,460	1,444	1,437
Adult Social Care & Director costs	12,289	12,781	13,227	13,697
Better Care Fund	3,126	3,126	3,126	3,126
Public Health	55	55	55	55
Total Adults & Health	17,559	18,056	18,494	18,965
Social Care & Family Help, & Director costs	4,804	4,895	4,931	5,000
Quality Assurance & Practice Improvement	714	720	726	733
Communities & Prevention	755	698	573	581
SEND, Inclusions and Learning	1,172	1,178	1,166	1,167
Total Childrens & Families	7,444	7,491	7,396	7,481
Safe & Active Public Realm & Director costs	12,814	12,617	12,725	13,122
Culture, Leisure & Registration Services	574	578	387	393
Sustainable Economy and Place	1,028	1,061	999	999
Total Places	14,417	14,256	14,111	14,514
Financial Services, Insurance & Director cost	1,375	1,395	1,386	1,407
Information Technology	1,423	1,436	1,431	1,458
Customer Services Team	198	198	197	197
HR, Training & Health & Safety	529	520	526	532
Revenues & Financial Support	384	374	358	358
Property Services	1,021	952	989	1,026
Total Resources	4,929	4,875	4,886	4,979
Commissioning & Voluntary Sector	429	426	423	423
Corporate Services	902	984	968	971
Legal Services & Director costs	747	744	735	734
Democratic Services & Chief Executive costs	689	690	821	822
Elections	131	133	136	238
Total Law & Governance	2,898	2,977	3,083	3,187
Capital Financing	(310)	490	668	683
Pensions	719	719	719	719
Pay Award & Risk Management Contingency	1,421	1,879	2,846	3,208
Adult Social Care Reform	19	171	387	592
Investment from Innovation Reserve	1,587	824	550	450
Total Corporate	3,436	4,083	5,170	5,652
Total Budgets	50,682	51,738	53,141	54,777
Council Tax	(33,883)	(35,828)	(37,883)	(40,054)
Business Rates	(6,830)	(5,468)	(5,695)	(5,944)
General Grants	(7,067)	(9,618)	(9,013)	(8,329)
Investment funded from reserves	(1,587)	(824)	(550)	(450)
Total Financing	(49,367)	(51,738)	(53,141)	(54,777)
Deficit / (Surplus)	1,316	0	0	0

Appendix B - Budget Proposal Tables Service Investments

Service Investment Proposals

Ref	Budget Proposal	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Childrens & Families		45	45	45	45
CP001	Additional capacity in the care leavers service is required. The Council has experienced a growing number of care leavers and in order to meet demand and offer appropriate support we need an additional role in this area.	45	45	45	45
Places		875	875	875	815
PN001	Peterborough Regulatory Services to increase cost Peterborough City Council	88	88	88	88
PN004	Redesign and investment in Highways staffing structure	94	94	94	94
PN006	Electric Vehicle Charging infrastructure officer to deliver government funded scheme (offset by grant income below)	60	60	60	0
PP006	Additional costs incurred during 2023/24 for SEND transport due to an increase in Children requiring specialist services creating unfunded pressures	300	300	300	300
PP007	Waste Transfer Station mitigation following alternative disposal provision required during 2023/24	120	120	120	120
PP010	Biodiversity net gain officer and development of service linked to governments new requirements	105	105	105	105
PP011	Additional investment in Lead Local Flood Authority function	46	46	46	46
Law & Governance		10	40	170	170
LP001	PowerBI licensing fees and charges are required to ensure reports can be shared and accessed by service areas. Without these licenses reports cannot be viewed limiting the use for decision making and target use of budgets.	0	30	30	30
LP002	Additional budget required for the emergency planning partnership with Leicestershire Councils which still provides the Council with a value for money service offer, and with an increase in the fee of the Welland Service Level Agreement which supports the Council's procurement service.	10	10	10	10
LP003	Increase in budget for the Members allowances increase in line with the recommendations made in the independent report. However, this budget will be contingent on wider MTFs assumptions at the time of implementation.	0	0	130	130
Resources		35	66	75	75
RP001	Increase resources in the HR & OD team to add capacity for organisational development, employee health and well being initiative	27	27	27	27

Ref	Budget Proposal	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
RP002	Increased cost of using technology to lead to savings in processing and administration of tasks across the Resources functions.	8	39	48	48
	TOTAL	965	1,026	1,165	1,105

Saving Proposals

Ref	Budget Item	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000	Risk Rating
Adults & Health		(733)	(949)	(1,321)	(1,688)	
AS001	Savings made from a redesign team, looking to harness synergies between teams across the Council and management of vacancy savings	(78)	(79)	(5)	(5)	Amber
AS002	<p>This saving will be achieved through the combination of a range of activities that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The directorate will seek to beat the demand allocation assumed through increased focus on prevention activities across the period. This aligns with the transformation activity identified through greater collaboration with Health partners. · The use of MiCare as part of a 24/7 care model. · Enhanced focus of the management of the impact of the self funder market · Use of the Health & Care Hub through the Levelling Up Fund schemes that will facilitate an enhanced service that will enable customers to access services more efficiently. · MSIF Grant to help manage demand · Adoption of different recruitment and retention policies that create a more stable workforce and results in the less use of expensive agency staff · Greater use of internal day care with the most complex cases 	(246)	(461)	(907)	(1,274)	Amber
AS003	Continued benefit from supplier negotiations undertaken during 2023/24 compared to budget assumptions	(409)	(409)	(409)	(409)	Green
Childrens & Families		(366)	(487)	(790)	(921)	
CS002	New service delivery design based on Community Hubs providing universal and preventative services	(314)	(377)	(510)	(510)	Red
CS003	Saving will be achieved by increasing the early intervention offer via Multi Systemic Therapy, and through an increase in in-house foster placements. Work continues to manage family expectation around SEND provision and offer, realised through the Delivering Better Value programme, and the SEND Alternative Provision change programme that aim for a service experience that is maintained within the affordability envelope of the Dedicated Schools Grant	0	(50)	(150)	(250)	Green

Ref	Budget Item	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000	Risk Rating
CS004	Reduction in costs as a result of commissioning review	(45)	(45)	(45)	(45)	Green
CS005	Savings made from a redesign team, looking to harness synergies between teams across the Council and management of vacancy savings	(7)	(15)	(85)	(116)	Green
Places		(439)	(1,006)	(1,353)	(1,384)	
PN004	Introduction of street permitting scheme to become a self-financing service	(30)	(60)	(60)	(60)	Green
PN006	Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding to support expansion of charging points	(60)	(60)	(60)	0	Green
PS004	Museum and Castle business rates (NNDR) savings	(41)	(41)	(41)	(41)	Green
PS005	Savings made from looking to harness synergies between teams across the Council and management of vacancy savings	(8)	(8)	(8)	(8)	Green
PS006	Transformation work redesign of heritage service	0	0	(198)	(198)	Amber
PS009	Re-procurement of 2024/25 Grounds contract; 2025/26 Public realm strategy change standards and consistent approach	(100)	(250)	(250)	(250)	Green
PS010	Redesign of public Bus network & post 16 review	(100)	(400)	(400)	(400)	Green
PS012	SEND Transport savings as a result of more cost-effective solutions and impact from the work undertaken in the Children's directorate with regards to demand for SEND services	0	(87)	(174)	(265)	Green
PS014	Green Waste Fee Increase	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)	Green
PS015	Additional income generated from the redesign of the Council's heritage services	0	0	(62)	(62)	Amber
Law & Governance		(106)	(115)	(150)	(158)	
LS001	In house provision rather than commission	(30)	(36)	(45)	(49)	Green
LS002	Staffing structure changes within the directorate within the procurement, business intelligent, and corporate and executive support teams. Savings will derive from utilisation of existing vacancies to configure role capacity requirement combined with a reduction on capacity and demand management from other services in the Council.	(63)	(67)	(89)	(91)	Amber
LS007	Budget realignments where budgets no longer required on smaller expenditure items within Corporate Services and Legal Services	(13)	(12)	(16)	(18)	Green
Resources		(182)	(344)	(430)	(430)	

Ref	Budget Item	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000	Risk Rating
RS001	Implementation of the Enabling Services transformational workstream which will review transactional and processing activities. Support to the wider Council will adopt an approach to confirm actions to stop, move to line managers, and / or replace with better systems, technology, and greater use existing functionality.	(53)	(65)	(151)	(151)	Green
RS002	Procurement of new contracts in IT & Digital	(62)	(74)	(74)	(74)	Green
RS007	Insurance Contract Retender Savings	(35)	(35)	(35)	(35)	Green
RS009	Review finance subscriptions	(10)	(10)	(10)	(10)	Green
RS011	New opportunities following the review Local Council Tax Support scheme. Commencement from 1st April 2025 with work undertaken during 2024. Investment in new IT infrastructure may be required.	0	(40)	(40)	(40)	Amber
RS018	Charging of Overheads to Grants	(22)	(20)	(20)	(20)	Red
RS019	Savings from the repurposing of an asset in association with the Levelling Up Fund schemes	0	(40)	(40)	(40)	Amber
RS020	Reduction in maintenance and increased income	0	(60)	(60)	(60)	Amber
Total Saving Proposals		(1,826)	(2,901)	(4,045)	(4,581)	

Investment funded from the Innovation reserve

Ref	Investment	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Adults & Health		70	50	0	0
AI001	Temporary resource to develop business case for growth opportunities for more efficient use of internal resources to provide care for complex cases	20	0	0	0
AI002	Project officer for Health Care Collaborative transformation savings	50	50	0	0
Childrens & Families		190	35	0	0
CI001	Dedicated commissioning expertise to ensure value for money, manage the placement market, and support robust commissioning and procurement processes.	70	35	0	0
CI002	Continue with the trial of the MST approach adopted in 2023/24 to lead to further savings included above.	40	0	0	0
CI003	Employ content creators, interfacing with the services to build a strong media presence which will support the recruitment of quality workforce and foster carers, and local respite support.	30	0	0	0
CI004	Investment to improve efficiencies using the Liquid Logic system	50	0	0	0
Places		225	20	20	0
PI001	Investment to move to permitting - Highway & street works	100	0	0	0
PI003	Investment in improvements to the customer system, Fixmystreet, which will reduce officer time in support and facilitate better reporting functionality	30	0	0	0
PI004	Waste Prevention Programme through educational and promotional work to reduce tonnage collection leading to a more cost-effective collection and disposal service	35	20	20	0
PI008	Investment required in the Highways contract mobilisation that will lead to medium to long term efficiencies from the contract	30	0	0	0
PI009	Develop Carbon baseline for Rutland with a range of activities and actions to contribute to the Corporate Strategy for 'Tackling Climate Change'	150	0	0	0
PI010	Resource to support the Heritage structure design	0	0	100	100
Law & Governance		78	0	0	0
LI001	External capacity to undertake Adult Social Care placement audit to identify high-cost packages and potential savings. Will assist in managing inflationary actual cost of care uplift requests in future years.	50	0	0	0
LI003	Audio/Visual system upgrade in the Council Chamber to improve the quality of the meeting recordings. It would reduce officer time taken prior to during and after meetings to prepare, record and upload footage. It may reduce the number of in person attendees which relieves the pressure on physical resources helping the Council to contribute to the Tackling Climate Change Corporate Strategy priority.	28	0	0	0

Ref	Investment	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Resources		508	323	80	0
RI001	Investment in temporary resources to support the delivery of the Enabling Services transformational workstream which will facilitate savings in the short to long term. Activity includes updates to Council policies, development of Council employee skill sets, implementation of systems and process reviews.	145	27	0	0
RI007	Professional support to deliver support the transformation agenda across the Council	156	156	100	100
RI009	One off investment in IT software solutions to increase efficiencies, remove burdensome administrative tasks	227	160	0	0
RI016	Capital Programme for replacement of IT end user hardware	80	80	80	0
PI011	Temporary Customer relations resource to assist with workloads associated with the redesign Highways service	46	46	0	0
Corporate - Council wide		350	350	350	350
RI019	Service efficiencies pump priming	250	250	250	250
Investment funded from reserves		1,587	824	550	450

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Appendix C – Integrated Budget Plan: Service Ambitions & Budget Variation Statements

Directorate - Adults & Health – Summary Overview

Overview of Directorate

The Adults and Health Directorate is responsible for meeting the needs of adults within our community who require care and support. This includes providing information, advice and guidance which connects people to services available within our community, protecting vulnerable adults who are at risk of, or who have experience abuse or neglect and providing assessments to adults who may require support in their own home or in the community.

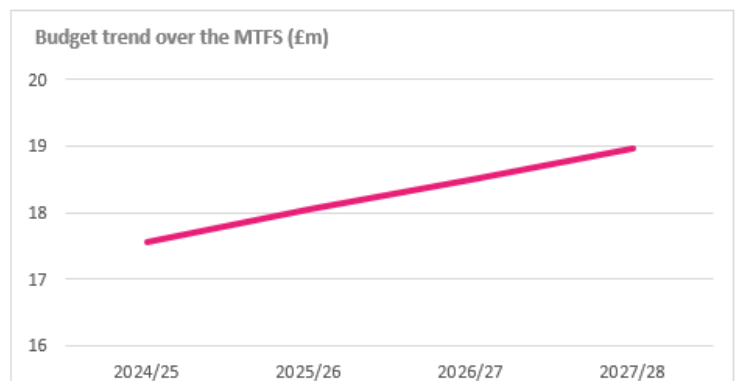
They work with various key stakeholders including health and the voluntary sector to provide holistic support options that consider adults health and wellbeing; with a focus on improving peoples outcomes through proactive, preventative support. The Directorate also covers Housing Options and Resettlement which helps people to access local housing, provides assistance to people who are at risk of homelessness and support for people who wish to settle in Rutland. Alongside this, the Directorate also covers Community Support Services which provide tailored care and support for people in the community, day services for adults with a learning disability and/or Autism and the Rutland Integrated Social Empowerment Team who work in partnership with the local Primary Care Network

Achievements / Performance

- Bespoke options for customer feedback
- Corporate Scorecard – evidencing positive outcomes particularly in areas such as reablement effectiveness
- Nationally recognised Falls Prevention project within Local Care Homes
- Self Service option launched 2023 which supports adults to self-refer for support
- Newly launched participation group which encourages co-production
- CQC outcome of Outstanding for our internal care provider MiCare
- Joint initiatives with Health such as Active Bystander and MECC
- 0 Complaints recorded for Adults and Health Directorate for 2023
- 7-day therapy service to support hospital discharges
- Weekly Multi-disciplinary team meetings with all local care homes
- Relaunch of the Learning Disability Partnership Board

Summary budget table

Summary	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Prevention and Assurance	626	634	640	650
Community Care Services	1,462	1,460	1,444	1,437
Adult Social Care & Director costs	12,289	12,781	13,227	13,697
Better Care Fund	3,126	3,126	3,126	3,126
Public Health	55	55	55	55
Total	17,559	18,056	18,494	18,965



Summary Subjective table

Adults	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Employees	5,537	5,537	5,537	5,537
Premises	13	13	13	13
Transport	47	47	47	47
Supplies & Services	954	930	911	905
3rd Party Payments	16,276	16,908	17,480	18,075
Income Gov Grants	(1,562)	(1,562)	(1,562)	(1,562)
Income - Fees & Charges	(1,647)	(1,696)	(1,748)	(1,800)
Third Party Income	(1,090)	(1,123)	(1,156)	(1,191)
Income - Contributions	(969)	(998)	(1,028)	(1,059)
Total	17,559	18,056	18,494	18,965

Corporate Strategy

This directorate primarily supports the delivery of the following corporate priorities:

- Tackling the Climate Emergency
- A diverse & sustainable economy
- Support the most vulnerable ✓
- Provide good public services ✓

Directorate - Adults & Health – Service Ambitions

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Prevention & Assurance	626	634	640	650

Ambition:

A **Housing Options, Homeless and Resettlement Service** that allows anyone that is in need of housing solutions to be able to access a highly qualified and trained team. This includes the team having the resources and local solutions available to them to assist the community of Rutland with all aspects of their housing options.

To ensure that those in need are able to access true affordable housing in Rutland should they wish to.

To hold a minimal waiting list especially for single applicants of Rutland with this being the highest proportion of applications. To have lower numbers of homeless client in temporary accommodation to support a better 'healthy life'.

Admiral Nurse Team

Admiral Nurses provide support to family carers and people living with dementia at any stage, with a particular focus on the most complex of situations that can affect the whole family. They make sure carers have the support and skills they need to equip them with stress management techniques and coping strategies.

Admiral Nurses work in the community and are part of the Adult Social Care team. They are supported and developed by Dementia UK, the specialist Admiral Nurse Charity. They provide one-to-one support, expert guidance, and practical solutions to help families to live more positively with dementia.

Quality Assurance (QA) Team

The service accepts referrals for carers, people with a diagnosis of dementia and those suspected of having dementia. Referrals can be initiated by any member of the health or social care team or by self-referral and must be made with the consent of the carer or person with dementia, if applicable.

The team work in partnership with the Leicester, Leicestershire, Rutland (LLR) Dementia Programme Board, Local PCN, Integrated Care Board and Voluntary organisations

The Quality Assurance Team provides support to all of Adult Social Care to maintain high standards of practice. They lead on the Audit programme, customer feedback, co-production and dedicated projects which look to strengthen service development for practitioners and people who require care and support.

The Team also includes specialist roles such as Principal Social Worker and Principal OT who are responsible for promoting excellence in practice across Social Work and Therapy services. Alongside this the Team also supports our local provider sector via the Compliance Lead and Clinical Care Home Co-Ordinator roles.

The Team leads on workforce development, participation groups, the development of guidance/policies and procedures wherever possible in partnership with colleagues across health, social care and the voluntary sector.

What are we doing to meet this ambition:

The Housing options, Homelessness and Resettlement service intends to ensure permanent qualified staff who are able to deliver good quality support and guidance. It is the intention to avoid using agency staff as this creates inconsistencies in service delivery.

The team are embarking on a media campaign to raise awareness of what it means to be threatened with homelessness in the hope that this creates an even earlier prevention offer to avoid pressures on the Homelessness Register and the need to use temporary accommodation. The campaign will be a mixture of social media, hands on training for partners, linking in with partners and the VCRS to ensure communities are aware of the support available early. There will be work within our secondary schools to educate key year groups of 'Cost of Living' impact, how this can lead to families, individuals, young carers, carers requiring earlier support but also identifying themselves in need of more affordable housing.

Working with Partners to secure more localised temporary accommodation rather than out of County as this impacts of people's health and wellbeing.

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Working with our Community around signposting and advice which is key to early detection and prevention of homelessness.				
The Admiral Nurse services work with health to help prevent the need for residential care or admission to hospital. Support is given to carers to avoid a crisis situation, giving people time plan their care. Their service does not offer commissioned support, but links in with social workers if support is required. This manages budgets to look at prevention at first point.				
The QA team supports teams to triangulated between performance, budgets and practice. This work supports practitioners in delivering best practice, alongside impact on budget. This work quickly enables us to respond to any changes to keep within cash limits.				
Community Care Services	1,462	1,460	1,444	1,437
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>The Community Care Services (CCS) support the community through integration and partnership in the local community to innovate and build on what is important to residents of Rutland. The whole team align together as one service, bringing together a diverse and skilled workforce, allowing a responsive and effective service.</p> <p>Our service ambition is to support and prevent the escalation of health and social care issues faced by our population, to ensure that residents of Rutland remain at home, independent for as long as possible. We will do this through integration across health, social care, and the community by the promotion of self-help and prevention strategies to avoid escalation of crisis and costly interventions having to be provided by both social care and health services.</p> <p>Through our inhouse services we will support those complex cases, including those with mental health, learning disabilities and at the end of life to live closer to home and provide a timely cost-effective service.</p> <p>What are we doing to meet this ambition:</p> <p>Our CCS inhouse services have over the last few years supported an ageing and more complex group of people. This has provided a RCC core budget saving due to the CCS inhouse service being more cost effective than commissioning placements out of county and enabled Rutland families to remain connected closer to home.</p> <p>However, we have continued to employ a core permanent staffing structure and rely on agency and casual/bank staffing to cover vacancies, absences and extra staffing needs as people support increases due to deterioration associated with increases on health and complexity of need and ageing. The use of agency rather than employing permanent staff, although more costly, enables us to be flexible and reduce as well as increase staffing resources. To mitigate the budget pressure due to the use of agency staff we have ensured that reviews of people’s needs are regularly held and pursuit of Continuing Health Care (CHC) funding is progressed in a timely way. Recently this has resulted in a high-cost staffing resource being paid for by non Council core budget, through external funding.</p> <p>All of the CCS services, Learning Disability (LD) day opportunities, Micare and Supported living, have developed an excellent reputation and those regulated by Care Quality Commission (CQC), outstanding gradings, as such we now have a waiting list for support from our inhouse services. We plan to develop a model to build and expand on our inhouse services, to both provide income into the Council, but also to enable people to live closer to home, attract income from neighbouring local authorities and health and provide a more cost-effective service than if the council commissioned packages outside of Rutland. We will also aim to explore a Shared Lives service for Rutland through the Accelerator Reform Fund which could create a wider market to commission to and provide alternatives to the more traditional commissioning routes.</p> <p>Many staff members of the Rise team are funded by non RCC core budget, we intend to fully explore how the team can work in collaboration with health and the voluntary community partners so that by strengthening prevention it will reduce or delay the overall need for care and support. Using the new Joy platform we will promote self-help, information and advice and divert people from crisis and the need for the council to commission a high-cost response.</p>				

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Adult Social Care & Director costs	12,289	12,781	13,227	13,697
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>To have a service with a CQC inspection rating of 'Good'. Work has already begun in earnest on the assessment framework which covers 4 themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working with People - Providing Support - How the Local Authority ensures safety within the system - Leadership <p>Within the areas, there is significant work underway on ensuring our teams can deliver exemplary care for the people of Rutland. The teams cover contact and response, community, hospital and reablement and safeguarding. The work is protecting vulnerable adults who are at risk of, or who have experience abuse or neglect and providing assessments to adults who may require support in their own home or in the community. Our ambition is to have a fully staffed service, who are trained and professional in delivering good outcomes for the people they work with. It is important we continue to deliver high satisfaction and performance levels within budget.</p> <p>We want to work with Health to improve access and manage demand. This will ensure better visibility of how services can work together and provide accessibility for people needing to use services across health and social care.</p> <p>What are we doing to meet this ambition:</p> <p>We are restructuring our services to ensure they we are able to meet demand within the resources allocated. The restructure will also support alignment with health services. This will avoid duplication and focus on a joined-up prevention offer.</p> <p>Recruitment continues to be proactive, and this will continue until we have reduced the need for agency workers and have a stable workforce in place. Our Information and guidance offer will be grown, alongside our digital capability, to provide a different way of accessing support, for those who are able to.</p> <p>More scrutiny on commissioning will be in place, to maximise external funding and monitor spend. New systems will support staff to work in a strength-based approach, drawing on an individual's strength and asses and those within their community. Our therapy team will continue to work preventatively providing aids and equipment to enable people to remain at home with reablement following a hospital discharge or a change in need.</p> <p>We will understand our self-funding market and how to provide timely information and advice when choosing care and support. This will support people needing support and their carers, to ensure decisions are based on all options available to them.</p>				
Better Care Fund (BCF)	3,126	3,126	3,126	3,126
<p>Alignment with Discharge to Assess (D2A) facilitation as part of the Adult Social Care Discharge Fund.</p> <p>The Adult Social Care Discharge Fund was used to fund additional block booked reablement beds in a residential nursing home to facilitate timely discharges. The reablement was delivered by RCC therapists who were available at point of discharge and throughout the patient journey. Additional community capacity was secured through additional funding to retain staff in the MiCare service.</p> <p>The plan for the Discharge Fund for 2023/24 includes two D2A beds in a residential home in Rutland. These will be used flexibly for any type of D2A need including assessment and reablement. This is based on learning from the previous discharge fund where wrap around and night- time domiciliary care was not utilised, and beds specifically commissioned for reablement although used effectively when there was need, were not always fully utilised. Beds have also been jointly commissioned across LLR. These will utilise the RRR model (Rehabilitate, Reable, and Recover) D2A services, supporting Pathway 2 discharges.</p> <p>Estimates of demand and capacity for intermediate care to support discharge from hospital.</p> <p>There was no unmet demand where people had to be offered support in a less beneficial service, due to there being sufficient capacity. There is capacity to provide support for people in their own homes on discharge from hospital meaning there is no over utilisation of bedded provision. Assumptions have been made that this will continue as there has been no reduction in provision of services such as MiCare and therapy led reablement. The</p>				

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Home First model continues to be further embedded which will serve to promote the efficient utilisation of support in people's own homes. The Housing MOT scheme , funded by BCF, continues to be a successful service providing holistic assessments of the home environment, including elements such as falls prevention, equipment, adaptations and general housing conditions. This is a home check service providing information, advice and support to promote people's independence and living safely in their own homes. The Digital MOT continues to assess the extent a person can be digitally enabled. Age UK partner with the local Housing Improvement Agency to provide options to upskill people, and a technology loan service.				
Public Health	55	55	55	55
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>To embed Public Health within the wider work of the Council and commission services which meet the needs of the Rutland population in line with the Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy and Public Health mandatory requirements.</p> <p>What are we doing to meet this ambition:</p> <p>A number of services are commissioned within the council and with external providers to meet needs, and to fulfil the requirements of the Public Health Grant. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open access sexual health provision; • substance misuse services; • infection control and health protection; • smoking cessation; and • children's 0-19 health provision. <p>The Grant also contributes to a variety of council services to support wider population health locally including the 11 plus children's health & wellbeing services, and Active Rutland.</p>				

Directorate - Adults & Health – Variation Statement

Ref	Adults & Health Budget Variation Statement	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
2023/24 Budget					
AE001	2023/24 Budget	16,902	16,902	16,902	16,902
Previous MTFS budget adjustments					
AO001	Service Adjustments	418	393	393	393
AO002	Demand allocation	496	843	1,201	1,571
AO003	Inflation allocation	476	868	1,320	1,787
Saving					
AS001	Savings made from a redesign team, looking to harness synergies between teams across the Council and management of vacancy savings	(78)	(79)	(5)	(5)
AS002	This saving will be achieved through the combination of a range of activities that include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The directorate will seek to beat the demand allocation assumed through increased focus on prevention activities across the period. This aligns with the transformation activity identified through greater collaboration with Health partners · The use of MiCare as part of a 24/7 care model. · Enhanced focus of the management of the impact of the self funder market · Use of the Health & Care Hub through the Levelling Up Fund schemes that will facilitate an enhanced service that will enable customers to access services more efficiently. · MSIF Grant to help manage demand · Adoption of different recruitment and retention policies that create a more stable workforce and results in the less use of expensive agency staff · Greater use of internal day care with the most complex cases 	(246)	(461)	(907)	(1,274)
AS003	Continued benefit from supplier negotiations undertaken during 2023/24 compared to budget assumptions	(409)	(409)	(409)	(409)
Investment					
AI001	Temporary resource to develop business case for growth opportunities for more efficient use of internal resources to provide care for complex cases	20	0	0	0
AI002	Project officer for Health Care Collaborative transformation savings	50	50	0	0
Reserve funding					
RF001	Funding from Innovation Reserve	(70)	(50)	0	0
	TOTAL	17,559	18,056	18,494	18,965

Appendix C – Integrated Budget Plan: Service Ambitions & Budget Variation Statements

Directorate - Childrens & Families – Summary Overview

Overview of Directorate:

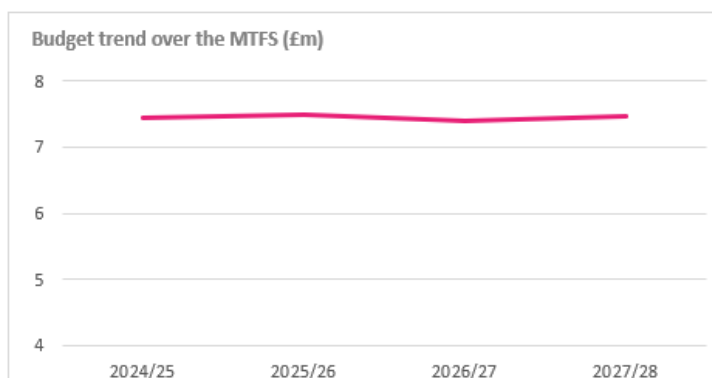
This Directorate is responsible for ensuring the needs of children and young people and their families are met, particularly those who are most vulnerable. It works with children, families and communities, as well as key partners including schools, health services and the police. It is responsible for keeping children safe, ensuring sufficient quality education placements, including early years settings, supporting children with special educational needs and commissioning of services, often with our partners. The directorate also leads on community and prevention services for Rutland and working with communities and the voluntary sector to support and help each other.

Achievements / Performance

- Positive OFSTED focussed visit in January 2023 evaluating child protection and child-in-need work
- Excellent OFSTED/CQC Area SEND Inspection in May 2023
- Past 12 months has seen increase in demand and level of complexity of need - particularly for young people who have social, emotional and mental health needs
- Significant proportion of our care population are unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- Increased number of care leavers.
- Delivered secondary expansion increasing secondary school places at Catmose College
- Delivered 'mainstream plus' provision at UCC increasing number of local school places for children with additional needs

Summary budget table

Summary	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Social Care & Family Help, & Director costs	4,804	4,895	4,931	5,000
Quality Assurance & Practice Improvement	714	720	726	733
Communities & Prevention	755	698	573	581
SEND, Inclusions and Learning	1,172	1,178	1,166	1,167
Total	7,444	7,491	7,396	7,481



Summary Subjective table

Childrens	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Employees	4,851	4,741	4,608	4,608
Premises	256	259	263	267
Transport	38	38	38	38
Supplies & Services	8,081	3,387	3,438	3,505
Third Party Payments	1,427	1,301	1,199	1,214
Income Gov Grants	(6,402)	(1,450)	(1,361)	(1,361)
Income from Fees & Charges	(259)	(262)	(266)	(267)
Third Party Income	(505)	(480)	(480)	(480)
Income from Contributions	(43)	(43)	(43)	(43)
Total	7,444	7,491	7,396	7,481

Corporate Strategy

This directorate primarily supports the delivery of the following corporate priorities:

Tackling the Climate Emergency

A diverse & sustainable economy

Support the most vulnerable ✓

Provide good public services ✓

Directorate - Childrens & Families – Service Ambitions

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Children’s Social Care and Family Help	4,804	4,895	4,931	5,000
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>To provide good services and deliver positive outcomes for children and young people with a stable staff base, consistency of staffing and support to children and their families.</p> <p>A service that is able to provide what families need to be successful at the right time minimising escalation.</p> <p>The service will deliver a combination of face to face and digital offer and utilise community assets to deliver services or co-locate services, in place based and all age multifunctional community spaces, supported by local communities and the voluntary sector.</p> <p>What are we doing to meet this ambition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to national emerging policy, such as the social care reforms, and align functions and form to reflect key priorities. • In order to meet the cash limit we will need to be permanently staffed with no agency workers. • Need to increase our in-house fostering capacity and capability so that we are able to respond to new pressures in the care sector and able to provide more care ourselves rather than using external providers. • Need to invest in technology to enable automation of some elements of job roles and reduce the need for some processes freeing up time and potentially releasing resource. • Continue to invest in preventative services and edge of care type work to stop children coming into our care and try to prevent them from needing a social worker in the first place. By doing this successfully we will better manage costs that exist in our system. • Look carefully at how we future proof the service and how we can have a highly skilled, resilient and stable staff team who are attracted to work and stay in Rutland. This includes reviewing our pay, retention and workforce development strategy. • Need adequate support infrastructure (e.g. business support, data) to support the delivery of high-quality services and enable proactive forecasting and demand mitigation 				
Quality Assurance & Practice Improvement	714	720	726	733
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>To support practice development and ensure that children’s services continuously improve and result in sustained improvements in the lived experiences of vulnerable children and young people.</p> <p>What are we doing to meet this ambition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed quality assurance framework focussing on the voice of children and families in receipt of services • Respond to national emerging policy, such as the social care reforms, and align functions and form to reflect key priorities. • Review Workforce Strategy for Children’s Services that enables the Directorate to understand its workforce needs and ensures organisational capacity and creates a culture which places good quality practice at the heart of everything we do. • Lead the Children’s Services development plan raising the quality of practice across Children’s Services and multi-agency partnership to ensure highly performing services. 				
Communities & Prevention	755	698	573	581
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>To support people earlier with community-based services before they require higher cost, higher need interventions, and create sustainable community led services which will build on existing networks and give a structure to services provided throughout our communities.</p>				

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
What are we doing to meet this ambition:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping in scope budgets to ensure delivery of savings target as contained in this budget plan and MTFS • Council assets will be leveraged to maximise community engagement (e.g. libraries). • Integrate services in a one-stop-shop approach through a new delivery structure with a focus on preventative support. • Create an environment of self-help via digital information/support to enhance the 'universal' element via the Information Advice and Guidance offer in all its forms. 				
SEND, Inclusions and Learning	1,172	1,178	1,166	1,167
Ambition:				
<p>The Learning and Skills Service will champion the expectation that children and adults in Rutland can receive an aspirational and inclusive education offer that reflects the needs, abilities and interests of learners and the skills and expertise required by employers.</p> <p>The Delivering Better Value Programme will support the transformation of the SEND system, led by the Local Authority and supported by key partners in health and education. The intention is to manage the deficit in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Fund and to reduce demand for Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessment and plans and special provision.</p> <p>The transformation programme will build on the established local SEND Recovery Plan and initiatives, and will focus on growing parental confidence, delivering the graduated response, developing mainstream provision and improve our data systems to better predict need and inform our commissioning intentions.</p> <p>Successful transitions into adulthood for vulnerable young people, and retention of engagement in education, employment and training, will be supported through a pathway from school-based education utilising the skills of the Transitions Coach.</p> <p>The Early Years Service has a statutory duty to help to manage the early years and childcare market.</p> <p>The education and emotional well-being of the pupil of service personnel will remain a priority for the Learning and Skills Service, with enhanced offers to support schools and early years settings in meeting the needs of these children and young people funded through MOD grants.</p> <p>The adult and community learning offer, funded through the Education and Skills Funding Agency's (ESFA) Adult Education Budget (AEB), will be delivered through an in house learning offer with a curriculum developed through feedback from residents and employers across Rutland. All classes, many of which are subsidised or at no cost to the learner, will focus on opportunities for progression in employment and economic development, and improvement in mental health and well-being. Employer engagement will be key to enhancing this offer, and ensuring the curriculum on offer supports skills development. Initiatives, such as the Department for Education (DfE) funded Multiply Programme, will further support employability of adults and aims to progress learners into further qualifications-based programmes and improve their employability options.</p>				
What are we doing to meet this ambition:				
<p>The staffing structure of the adult and community learning offer has been adjusted to ensure it is aligned more to community need. Alongside the fixed-term contracted staff within the Virtual School (funded through the Section 31 Grants), this has resulted in a staffing structure which has greater potential to meet the ambitions of the Service. Therefore, with the expectation of the retention of external ESFA budget and DfE funding for a further two years at least, the Learning and Skills Service should be in a position to achieve the ambition within the cash limits.</p>				

Directorate - Childrens & Families – Variation Statement

Ref	Childrens & Families Budget Variation Statement	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
2023/24 Budget					
CE001	2023/24 Budget	7,153	7,153	7,153	7,153
Previous MTFS budget adjustment					
CO001	Service Adjustments	356	331	331	331
CO002	Demand allocation	147	251	355	465
CO003	Inflation allocation	109	198	301	408
Service Investment					
CP001	Additional capacity in the care leavers service is required. The Council has experienced a growing number of care leavers and in order to meet demand and offer appropriate support we need an additional role in this area	45	45	45	45
Saving					
CS002	New service delivery design based on Community Hubs providing universal and preventative services	(314)	(377)	(510)	(510)
CS003	Saving will be achieved by increasing the early intervention offer via Multi Systemic Therapy (MST), and through an increase in in-house foster placements. Work continues to manage family expectation around SEND provision and offer, realised through the Delivering Better Value programme, and the SEND Alternative Provision change programme that aim for a service experience that is maintained within the affordability envelope of the Dedicated Schools Grant.	0	(50)	(150)	(250)
CS004	Reduction in costs as a result of commissioning review	(45)	(45)	(45)	(45)
CS005	Savings made from a redesign team, looking to harness synergies between teams across the Council and management of vacancy savings	(7)	(15)	(85)	(116)
Investment					
CI001	Dedicated commissioning expertise to ensure value for money, manage the placement market, and support robust commissioning and procurement processes.	70	35	0	0
CI002	Continue with the trial of the MST approach adopted in 2023/24 to lead to further savings included above.	40	0	0	0
CI003	Employ content creators, interfacing with the services to build a strong media presence which will support the recruitment of quality workforce and foster carers, and local respite support.	30	0	0	0
CI004	Investment to improve efficiencies using the Liquid Logic system	50	0	0	0
Reserve funding					
RF002	Funding from Innovation Reserve	(190)	(35)	0	0
	TOTAL	7,444	7,491	7,396	7,481

Appendix C – Directorate Plan & Budget Variation Statement

Directorate – Law & Governance – Summary Overview

Overview of Directorate:

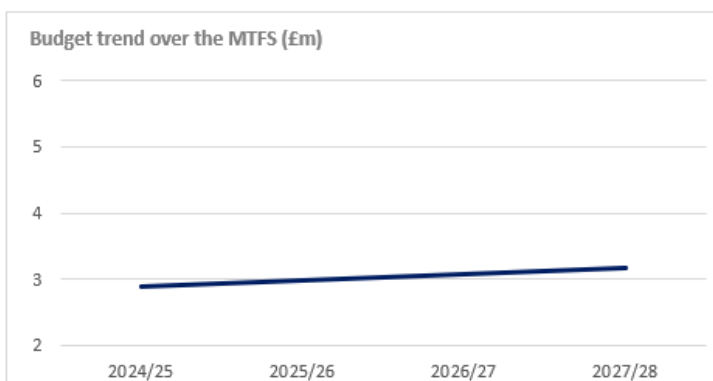
This directorate includes legal services; democratic services commissioning, procurement, administration of elections and the electoral register, emergency planning, communications, programme management, business intelligence, executive support, and information governance (incorporating data protection and handling information requests).

Achievements / Performance

- The number of subscriptions registered to receive the Council’s e-newsletter is 4,643
- The Council’s website accessibility rating has increased to 78% with plan to increase this further
- 100% of the agendas for Council and Cabinet to be published five clear working days before the meeting
- Customer complaints that have been received by quarter 2 is 47 which is 72% of the annual target of less than 65
- 96% of these complaints are responded to within the timescales set
- 112 customer compliments have been received by quarter 2 with a target of more than 145 set
- 100% of statutory information returns are completed within timescales
- 80% of external media enquiries are resolved within 48 hours
- 97% of legal advice is provided within 7 days
- Development work continues for the Business Intelligence service
- The Elections team are planning for the General Election and new requirements placed on the Council following boundary changes

Summary Budget table

Summary	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Commissioning & Voluntary Sector	429	426	423	423
Corporate Services	902	984	968	971
Legal Services & Director costs	747	744	735	734
Democratic Services & Chief Executive costs	689	690	821	822
Elections	131	133	136	238
Total	2,898	2,977	3,083	3,187



Summary Subjective table

Law & Governance	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Employees	2,243	2,250	2,185	2,221
Premises	0	0	0	8
Transport	10	10	10	10
Supplies & Services	530	561	690	747
Third Party Payments	373	375	378	381
Income Gov Grants	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)
Income Fees & Charges	(16)	(16)	(16)	(16)
Third Party Income	(204)	(164)	(124)	(124)
Income from Contributions	(35)	(36)	(37)	(37)
Other Income	0	0	0	0
Total	2,898	2,977	3,083	1,637,187

Corporate Strategy

This directorate primarily supports the delivery of the following corporate priorities, and enables all of the other priorities indirectly through service support:

- Tackling the Climate Emergency
- A diverse & sustainable economy
- Support the most vulnerable
- Provide good public services



Directorate – Law & Governance – Service Ambitions

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Commissioning & Voluntary Sector	429	426	423	423
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>A Commissioning Team that supports effective and efficient commissioning across the organisation, enabling individual business areas to identify how to translate service strategies and priorities in service delivery. Where procurement is needed, supporting business areas to self-serve for low value procurements and liaising with Welland Procurement Unit for higher value tenders.</p> <p>What are we doing over to meet this ambition:</p> <p>The Commissioning Team needs sufficient capacity and expertise to support the council to develop effective commissioning across its business.</p> <p>The current staffing establishment is: 2 xPO3, 1 x SO1, 2 x SO2 and 1 x Grade 6. There is currently an underspend against the set staffing budget due to a vacant post which has not been recruited to and the cash limit level will mean that this vacant post will need to be deleted from the establishment. Ad hoc business support could be funded from underspend in the staffing budget to maintain the delivery of low-level support and ensure Commissioning Officers focus on delivering where they can add most value.</p> <p>The Service Level Agreement with Welland Procurement Unit has been reviewed this year and deemed to represent value for money - the level of advice and support could not be provided in-house and to recruit to a dedicated post would be more expensive.</p>				
Corporate Services	895	977	961	964
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>Corporate services includes 4 service areas each with their own service plan and ambitions. Their functions underpin most council services and whilst having some specific corporate strategy commitments they contribute to they cut across all of our corporate priorities.</p> <p>Communications - Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen our internal communications, creating a robust intranet and internal communications approach which reflects our corporate values and supports self service. Benefit of reduced demand on smaller support services and increasing staff connectivity to the organisation, impacting positively on staff turnover and organisational stability. Developing our website further to improve accessibility, in line with statutory requirements, and support access to information and services online to increase online transactions and reduce demand on high cost ways of delivering services and customer support. Increasing the ‘visualisation’ of council services through improved use of video and photography, to support effective storytelling and highlight the human impact of our work with the core goal of building confidence in the council and its services, improving public perception and in turn reducing demand. To become less reactive by working with teams to get ahead of the curve in our publications. <p>Business Intelligence - examples include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapt the existing BI service to become a corporate service, strengthening business intelligence and data so that there is greater knowledge of what is happening in our services and when customers contact us (links to customer transformation). This includes rolling out PowerBI functionality. This requires a review of the service offer to enable capacity. Continue to deliver statutory data returns (23) whilst supporting service areas with timely data reporting. To introduce new model for management of social care Liquid Logic system, including training, and to adapt to support performance reporting. To support key projects from a data management perspective, including SEND Delivering Better Value and Adult social care reforms. 				

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Corporate Projects - examples include				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To embed good project management through a robust training programme that enables officers to self serve making project delivery more effective across the Council. To support the delivery of key projects underpinning our corporate strategy, providing assurance and oversight at a strategic level. 				
Corporate & Exec Support - examples include				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised executive offer that adds value to services, minimising non added value tasks so that service supports key areas of development and projects where needed. the ideal would be to have a task force style approach that could be moved across teams when needed to address any areas under particular pressure. To provide effective co-ordination and management of business continuity and emergency planning arrangements. To deliver a cost effective and minimalist post and reprographics service, utilising digital first where possible 				
What are we doing over to meet this ambition:				
Business intelligence				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration of service structure with a greater focus on operational capacity and delivery. This risks a loss of strategic development but would potentially enable a wider coverage of support across the Council. Service areas (children and adult services) would need to manage with a reduced offer, however there is potential for children and adult services to rationalise their quality assurance resources whilst securing a robust performance focus. Ongoing investment will be required to support a PowerBI model and the design and implementation of that model. At present we have a ringfenced one off pot to do this but there will be ongoing subscription charges. In addition service areas may need investment in some technology/or systems to enable data to be freely accessible. 				
Communications				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have already done the ground work to enable a structure to support the intranet, achieved by bringing the RIS platform into the new website and commissioning an intranet using the same website platform - this allows resource to be focussed on a singular platform. The challenge for communications remains the high degree of reactive work that is required, often to deal with issues that have come up in service delivery. This is a council wide challenge and relates closely to customer and structuring resources to better meet the needs of customers away from the back office, freeing up service resource to deliver the services. SLAs and working more closely with teams will also help this. 				
Corporate and executive support				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fundamentally there needs to be a reduction in what the team can offer and having less staff - this means better use of technology and greater capacity amongst officers and members to be self sufficient and to self-serve. This is something that requires buy in from others to achieve e.g. willingness to not have minutes and accept recordings and action only for many areas. Key areas previously identified were minute taking, diary management, 18pt and member queries. We are currently reviewing the offer for HOS as this is disparate across areas and requires a rethink. Exploring the potential for a singular business support model across children and adult services, this requires those services to be open to opportunities to revise resource on areas of business development. Exploration of governance and exec support services could provide opportunities to realise efficiency. 				

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Legal Services	348	345	340	340
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>For an efficient, effective in-house Legal Service delivered at as low a cost as possible.</p> <p>The Council's Legal Service function was transferred to Peterborough City Council (PCC) in 2011 based on a three-year Service Level Agreement (SLA) which could be renewed annually. PCC had a significant in-house legal team at the time and offered a comprehensive one stop service to the Council.</p> <p>Initially the Service worked well with regular reviews and timely advice and support. However, in May 2018, concerns with the PCC service led the Council's Cabinet to approve the transfer of the legal services function from Peterborough City Council back to Rutland County council. Cabinet also approved the delegation of authority to the then Head of Legal and Governance to assume responsibility for the management and delivery of Legal Services for Rutland to enable the Council to assess whether there is benefit in PCC continuing to provide the legal service, or whether it should be brought back in house and/or source alternative provision.</p> <p>What are we doing over to meet this ambition:</p> <p>Currently recruiting to two new in-house posts with a view to providing a high-quality, cost-effective inhouse legal service.</p>				
Democratic Services	473	474	604	604
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>Democratic Services will support the delivery of the Council's programme of meetings and good governance for the Council.</p> <p>What are we doing over to meet this ambition:</p> <p>Democratic Services did make a saving in that a governance officer post was deleted. Virtual Meetings are no longer permissible for decision making bodies, but remote working has left a legacy of a lesser reliance on paper. Meetings should be entirely paperless, even if not remote. Recording meetings means that there is no longer a need for detailed minutes.</p> <p>There should be a clear process for reports to support authors to ensure that report deadlines are met. The process needs to be streamlined to prevent the need to write multiple reports for one decision and the journey should be as short as possible. Increased capacity within democratic services will be needed to support the next general election.</p> <p>The most significant parts of the budget are member allowances which are fixed and member expenses, the latter are tightly managed but cannot offer a saving on them.</p>				
Elections	131	133	136	238
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>To deliver an effective general election and beyond.</p> <p>What are we doing over to meet this ambition:</p> <p>Elections will have to deliver a general election as well as the PCC election within a short timeframe. There is funding available, with the challenge will be resourcing and there will be a need for colleagues across the organisation to provide support.</p>				

Directorate - Law & Governance – Variation Statement

Ref	Law & Governance Budget Variation Statement	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
2023/24 budget					
LE001	2023/24 Budget	3,092	3,092	3,092	3,092
LE002	2023/24 Budget	192	192	192	192
Previous MTFS budget adjustment					
LO001	Service Adjustments	(334)	(284)	(284)	(184)
LO002	Inflation allocation	11	20	31	41
LO005	Service Adjustments	24	24	23	23
Service Investment					
LP001	PowerBI licensing fees and charges are required to ensure reports can be shared and accessed by service areas. Without these licenses reports cannot be viewed limiting the use for decision making and target use of budgets.	0	30	30	30
LP002	Additional budget required for the emergency planning partnership with Leicestershire Councils which still provides the Council with a value for money service offer, and with an increase in the fee of the Welland Service Level Agreement which supports the Council's procurement service.	10	10	10	10
LP003	Increase in budget for the Members allowances increase in line with the recommendations made in the independent report. However, this budget will be contingent on wider MTFS assumptions at the time of implementation.	0	0	130	130
Saving					
LS001	In house provision rather than commission	(30)	(36)	(45)	(49)
LS002	Staffing structure changes within the directorate within the procurement, business intelligent, and corporate and executive support teams. Savings will derive from utilisation of existing vacancies to configure role capacity requirement combined with a reduction on capacity and demand management from other services in the Council.	(63)	(67)	(89)	(91)
LS007	Budget realignments where budgets no longer required on smaller expenditure items within Corporate Services and Legal Services	(13)	(12)	(16)	(18)
Investment					
LI001	External capacity to undertake Adult Social Care placement audit to identify high-cost packages and potential savings. Will assist in managing inflationary actual cost of care uplift requests in future years.	50	0	0	0
LI003	Audio/Visual system upgrade in the Council Chamber to improve the quality of the meeting recordings. It would reduce officer time taken prior to during and after meetings to prepare, record and upload footage. It may reduce the number of in person attendees which relieves the pressure on physical resources helping the Council to contribute to the Tackling Climate Change Corporate Strategy priority.	28	0	0	0
Reserve funding					
RF005	Funding from Innovation Reserve	(78)	0	0	0
	TOTAL	2,898	2,977	3,083	3,187

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Appendix C – Directorate Plan & Budget Variation Statement

Directorate - Place – Summary Overview

Overview of Directorate:

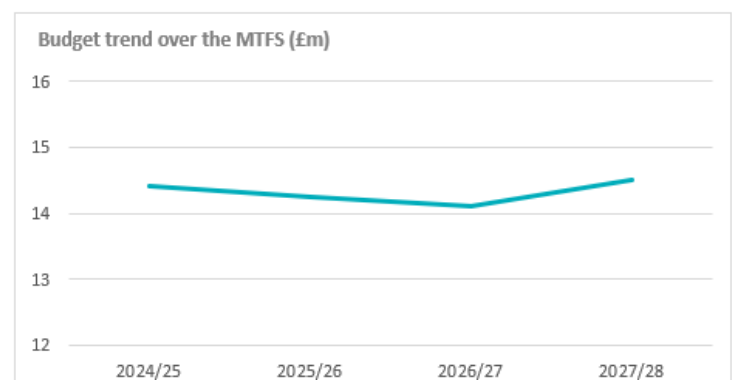
This Directorate is responsible for services to residents and the County including highways and transport, planning, economic development and visitor services, environment and street scene services (including waste and recycling, public protection and community safety, open spaces). It manages key partners who provide some services, such as waste and highways maintenance, on behalf of the Council relating to waste, cleaning and open spaces. It leads on the promotion of the County to attract and support business growth and investment.

Achievements / Performance

- Fly tipping levels are significantly down in 2023/24 continuing the good performance from 2022/23
- Street and environmental cleanliness is above target at 68% where inspections achieve an overall grade A or B for litter and detritus
- Increase in recycling during 2023/24 to 55.4% for the first quarter
- Volume of residual waste per household is 532.48 kgs
- 88% is the % of quality of recycling collected
- Number of new business births 165 by quarter 2 in 2023/24 against the target of 205
- Rutland remains in the top quartile of Councils for maintained A, B and C roads
- Number of volunteers supporting cultural services above the year's target at 77
- The number of visitors to the County is above target at 1.5m
- Number of passengers using bus services over 6 months is 42,327
- 46% of households with access to gigabite capability

Summary Budget table

Summary	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Safe & Active Public Realm & Director costs	12,814	12,617	12,725	13,122
Culture, Leisure & Registration Services	574	578	387	393
Sustainable Economy & Place	1,028	1,061	999	999
Total Places	14,417	14,256	14,111	14,514



Summary Subjective table

Places	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Employees	4,726	4,724	4,446	4,366
Premises	927	930	934	939
Transport	2,935	2,974	2,984	3,034
Supplies & Services	2,355	867	735	820
Third Party Payments	8,123	8,023	8,344	8,588
Income Gov Grants	(1,573)	(175)	(141)	(108)
Income Fees & Charger	(2,662)	(2,682)	(2,768)	(2,776)
Third Party Income	(270)	(259)	(274)	(214)
Income from Contributions	(144)	(146)	(149)	(152)
Other Income	0	0	0	0
Total	14,417	14,256	14,111	14,514

Corporate Strategy

This directorate primarily supports the delivery of the following corporate priorities:

Tackling the Climate Emergency

A diverse & sustainable economy ✓

Support the most vulnerable

Provide good public services ✓

Directorate - Place – Service Ambitions

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Safe & Active Public Realm & Director costs	12,814	12,617	12,725	13,122

Ambition:

Transport

Statutory transport services delivered with robust eligibility assessment processes is in place. Non statutory public transport services delivered within budget, meeting the local demand, encouraging modal shift, active travel and reducing emissions. Transport services which meet the needs of our community to access essential services such as medical and education and which support the economic health and employment opportunities of young people. Resilience to bus operator price increase demands to provide alternative provision to reduce leverage of external providers and a reduction in subsidy overall.

Highways

- Highways Services: Our ambition is to be an adequately resourced Highways Authority which maintains the highway in a good, safe condition which can attract and retain a skilled Highways team to manage both revenue and capital elements of the service.
- Revenue Highway Service Functions: include pot-hole repair, general highway repair, drainage, routine gully cleansing, verge drainage, grip cutting, foot/cycleway maintenance, street lighting repair, traffic light repair, sign and street name repair, barrier, bridge and culvert repair, Public Rights of Way, Winter Maintenance Service (gritting operation), Highway Development Control, and Asset Management (data collection, condition surveys) policies with a budget of £1.5m.
- Capital Highway Functions/Schemes: includes Department for Transport (DfT) funded Highways Maintenance Block (HMB) Capital maintenance, Pothole Funding, HMB Incentive Funding and Integrated Transport with capital funding 2023/24: £3.3m. If allocation is not spent, it impacts on future year allocations leading to lower investment in the network and very quickly more expensive repairs and lower quality network.
- Winter Maintenance and minor repair functions: are demand led and heavily influenced by weather events. Climate change, colder winters with more severe frosts and hotter summers impact on demand led budgets, making it difficult to predict. Cold winters with a lot of frost and low temperatures lead to exponential increase in the number of potholes and the number of claims from road users causing budget pressure, the level of carriageway and footway deterioration has increased year on year requiring more budget to be allocated to minor repairs.
- New Highways Maintenance Contract: implementing and embedding the new contract to maintain high standard of the highways network and deliver value for money in operational service delivery

Environmental

The ambition is to reduce waste and increase recycling whilst improving the quality of service to householders on waste collection and maintaining the quality of the public realm.

- Waste Management and Streetscene services are contracted out with the majority of the budget committed to deliver statutory household waste collections, recycling and disposal. Resident behaviour directly impacts on the quality of recycling and waste produced. Waste disposal costs fluctuate due to volatile market conditions. The new waste strategy sets out the statutory requirements and a new collection design that will deliver a better service and meet new statutory duties. The ambition is for significant investment into waste infrastructure to make us more attractive to the market and achieve more competition and better value as a result. Procurement of integrated waste and recycling services is planned for a new contract from 2028. The ambition is to secure greater efficiencies through new collection and disposal arrangements leading to lower overall costs and significantly improved resilience.
- The ambition is to keep our communities healthy and safe through robust delivery of public protection services. **Public Protection** is delivered as a shared service with Peterborough City Council. 98% of the budget is committed for the provision of these statutory services. The ambition is to continue with the shared service as they are efficient, well-run and effective within the available resources.

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounds Maintenance and Forestry has just been procured and the new service will deliver improvements in biodiversity due to reductions in frequency of grass cuts which also achieves financial savings. Our burials service provides an income which off-sets maintenance costs of the cemeteries and closed cemeteries. Recent benchmarking found our fees are in line with other Local Authorities. • Community Safety is delivered through the Safer Rutland Strategic Partnership and our own Community Safety Manager and Support Officer. Rutland is the 3rd safest county within the UK with a crime rate of 44 per 1,000 of population. The main county town of Oakham has the highest crime rates and currently benefits from CCTV coverage. Our ambition is to enhance the CCTV network through capital investment. We are working on a CCTV Strategy outlining the options, and requirements, for CCTV going forwards as all partners benefit from the service and it is non-statutory for the Council. <p>What are we doing to meet this ambition:</p> <p>Highways and Transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff resources: We are investing in additional staff resources and recruiting to posts that are currently vacant to provide greater resilience and strengthen areas of activity that are experiencing significant increase in demand e.g. flooding. • Statutory transport services – We will be reviewing relevant transport policies and decision-making to make sure we can meet demand within available resources. • Non statutory transport services – we are currently reviewing and re-designing the current public bus network and post-16 provision. The business case for the optimal design of bus network is in development and will consider the options available which retain the same level of access which achieves reductions in current subsidy provision. A review of post-16 transport policy and provision will identify the best option for continued support for young people’s access to education whilst achieving savings on current spend. • Parking services – Greater enforcement of parking restrictions is needed to encourage payment of off-street parking fees and to reduce inconsiderate parking and congestion in our town centres. Any reduction in enforcement presence in the county needs to be balanced with the need to enforce restrictions. Demand for car parking has recovered post-Covid and is growing and we will explore opportunities for additional off-street car parking provision. <p>Highways</p> <p>A new Highways Term Maintenance Contract will start in June 2024 providing an opportunity for a new partnership and strengthen ways of working. This also provides an option for additional services to be provided through this contract. Our ambition is to introduce street permitting to enhance our ability to manage street works. We also plan to invest in additional capacity for the Local Lead Flood Authority function.</p> <p>Environmental</p> <p>We have extended our waste collection and disposal contracts and re-procured our green waste and dry recycling contracts. This will mean we can plan for the implementation of new waste collection and disposal contracts as part of the re-procurement of long-term partnership arrangements to be in place for 2027/28 and meet the new requirements of the Environment Act. The Council is investing in the purchase of new waste collection vehicles that will significantly improve the reliability of the waste collection service from Late Spring 2024</p>				
Culture, Leisure & Registration Services	574	578	387	393
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>The ambition is to capitalise on the Levelling Up Fund grant investment to provide new and enhanced visitor offer for Rutland residents and visitors to the County, in particular the recently discovered Ichthyosaur and Roman Mosaic.</p> <p>Working in partnership with the private sector and other stakeholders, such as Discover Rutland, we want to make the most of the County’s heritage collection and assets such as Oakham Castle and the County Museum to widen access, host more and larger events, increase visitor numbers and bring Rutland to life through its history.</p> <p>Our ambition is to strengthen our highly regarded Registration Service and its offer to the public.</p>				

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
<p>Our ambition is to support the health and wellbeing of our residents through supporting a range of leisure opportunities through Active Rutland, and the wide-ranging local sports and community provision, and promoting the County's public rights of way and active travel.</p> <p>What are we doing to meet this ambition:</p> <p>We are investing £2m Levelling Up Funding into the digital interpretation of the Ichthyosaur and Roman Mosaic and the development of a new visitor attraction.</p> <p>We are reviewing the way we deliver our heritage services (museum and heritage collection) to help attract new and wider audience and generate additional income. We are also reviewing the way we use our heritage spaces so we can host additional and larger community and private events.</p> <p>We will be developing a new leisure strategy for the county and investing in new Active Travel arrangements.</p>				
Sustainable Economy and Place	1,028	1,061	999	999
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>To deliver services to support, shape and control as best as possible within financial constraints sustainable and appropriate growth in Rutland to specifically deliver:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Development Control Planning function, and associated services including land charges, conservation, tree works, listed buildings, building control and planning enforcement responding to planning applications and national infrastructure strategic planning applications. The work generated income that pays for the services to some extent, additionally there are service areas not covered by charging mechanisms. From November there have been additional responsibility for the monitoring and management of biodiversity net gain on all new planning applications. There's also demand on services outside of their control by the need for representation at planning appeals led by the planning inspectorate. 2. The Planning Policy functions - development of the Local Plan and all associated policies to guide and shape residential and commercial development in Rutland, addressing the duty to co-operate and all cross boundary issues related to development growth. This establishes far ranging policies touching on many issues such as minerals, affordable housing, carbon net zero, biodiversity, character and landscape, infrastructure constraints, employment needs, population growth, towns villages and settlements growth, retail and high streets, flood risks, environment, wildlife habitats etc. This team also includes housing policy, CIL contributions and S106 agreements. 3. Economic Development - business support and inward investment, economic baselining, design and shaping of an economic strategy, engagement with business community and other key stakeholders and multiplayers. Work will include development of an implementation plan harnessing stakeholders and other partners impacts. Delivery of the £23m Levelling Up Fund programme and £1.4m UK Shared Prosperity Fund and associated Rural England Fund. Harnessing funding opportunities including maximising corporate social responsibility and partnerships with established businesses. 4. Sustainability – the new budget allocation will support this work area to develop and deliver the Council's corporate sustainability strategy which will consider all service areas and how everything the Council does and owns impacts on climate change and approach to net zero. It will go into associated climate change interventions including the duty to report to Central Government on approach to net zero and biodiversity net gain. 5. Transformational Workstream - Public Realm - development of a set of recommendations and approaches for draft framework covering consistency of public realm offer in all towns villages and settlements, management of greenspace, verges and cemeteries, place shaping for the County. The ambition is to define consistent approaches with all towns and parishes as well as identifying costs savings and income generation opportunities. <p>What are we doing to meet this ambition:</p> <p>We are meeting government targets on delivery of the development control functions and the need for a Local Plan but there are unique challenges with regards to the speed of delivery and the management of relationships with residents, businesses and developers. Duty to report on biodiversity net gain will create additional opportunities and burdens from November 2023 and similar for climate change from January 2024.</p>				

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
<p>The transformational workstream Public Realm work is currently being funded through UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the funding is finite but is identifying income generation opportunities and a framework for a consistent approach to managing public spaces across the County.</p> <p>The work on defending the application for Mallard Pass Solar Farm - a national infrastructure project of significant size will ensure a significant income stream in generated should consent be given, to offset the impact on Rutland and its communities.</p> <p>There are additional risks on recruitment and retention of staff due to workload pressures and inability to impact needs with existing resources.</p>				

Directorate – Place – Variation Statement

Ref	Place Budget Variation Statement	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
2023/24 Budget					
PE001	2023/24 Budget	12,470	12,470	12,470	12,470
Previous MTFS budget adjustment					
PO001	Service Adjustments	752	784	784	784
PO002	Demand allocation	121	206	294	384
PO003	Inflation allocation	638	926	1,042	1,444
Service Investment					
PN001	Peterborough Regulatory Services to increase cost Peterborough City Council	88	88	88	88
PN004	Redesign and investment in Highways staffing structure	94	94	94	94
PN006	Electric Vehicle Charging infrastructure officer to deliver government funded scheme (offset by grant income below)	60	60	60	0
PP004	Redesign of the Council's heritage service with a role required to facilitate the work, will be self funding by year three and four with income matched outline below	62	62	62	62
PP006	Additional costs incurred during 2023/24 for SEND transport due to an increase in Children requiring specialist services creating unfunded pressures	300	300	300	300
PP007	Waste Transfer Station mitigation following alternative disposal provision required during 2023/24	120	120	120	120
PP010	Biodiversity net gain officer and development of service linked to governments new requirements	105	105	105	105
PP011	Additional investment in Lead Local Flood Authority function	46	46	46	46
Saving					
PN004	Introduction of street permitting scheme to become a self-financing service	(30)	(60)	(60)	(60)
PN006	Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding to support expansion of charging points	(60)	(60)	(60)	0
PS004	Museum and Castle business rates (NNDR) savings	(41)	(41)	(41)	(41)
PS005	Savings made from looking to harness synergies between teams across the Council and management of vacancy savings	(8)	(8)	(8)	(8)
PS006	Transformation work redesign of heritage service	0	0	(198)	(198)
PS009	Re-procurement of 2024/25 Grounds contract; 2025/26 Public realm strategy change standards and consistent approach	(100)	(250)	(250)	(250)
PS010	Redesign of public Bus network & post 16 review	(100)	(400)	(400)	(400)
PS012	SEND Transport savings as a result of more cost-effective solutions and impact from the work undertaken in the Children's directorate with regards to demand for SEND services	0	(87)	(174)	(265)
PS014	Green Waste Fee Increase	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)
PS015	Additional income generated from the redesign of the Council's heritage services	0	0	(62)	(62)
Investment					
PI001	Move to permitting - Highway & street works, £150k income from yr2 to meet costs	100	0	0	0

Ref	Place Budget Variation Statement	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
PI003	Investment in improvements to the customer system, Fixmystreet, which will reduce officer time in support and facilitate better reporting functionality	30	0	0	0
PI004	Waste Prevention Programme through educational and promotional work to reduce tonnage collection leading to a more cost-effective collection and disposal service	35	20	20	0
PI008	Investment required in the Highways contract mobilisation that will lead to medium to long term efficiencies from the contract	30	0	0	0
PI009	Develop Carbon baseline for Rutland with a range of activities and actions to contribute to the Corporate Strategy for 'Tackling Climate Change'	150	0	0	0
PI010	Heritage New Structure	0	0	100	100
Reserve funding					
RF003	Funding from Innovation Reserve	(345)	(20)	(120)	(100)
	TOTAL	14,417	14,255	14,111	14,513

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Appendix C – Directorate Plan & Budget Variation Statement

Directorate - Resources – Summary Overview

Overview of Directorate:

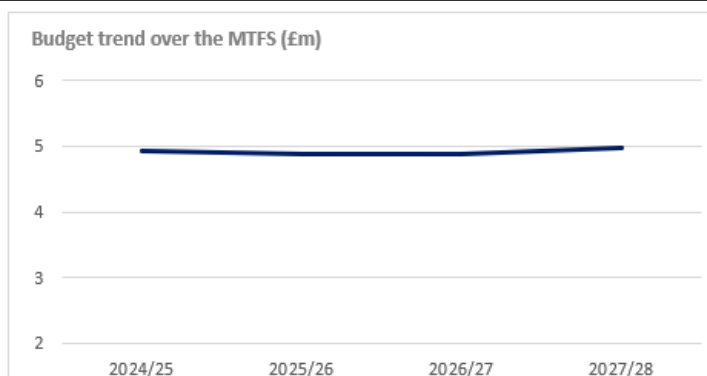
This department includes financial services encompassing financial planning and accounting, insurance, internal audit and property services. The department is responsible for transactional services including revenue and benefit services, payroll, income collection, payment of invoices, and finance systems. Alongside ICT and digital services to manage and support most of the council's business systems and drive to improve technological options for the council and its services. Whilst Human Resources and Organisational Development, and Health and Safety help deliver the Council's wider workforce strategic aims and overall service delivery.

Achievements / Performance

- Delivery of an enhanced budget process to facilitate the delivery of financial sustainability
- Statement of Accounts published online to statutory deadlines
- Increases in MyAccount registrations with 12,000 accounts
- 98% of customer invoices paid within 30 days of receipt
- Average customer telephone calls received 2,864
- Time taken to process new benefit claims is 30 days
- Average sick days lost per employee is 2.32 up to quarter 2 in 2023/24
- 9% is the current vacancy level as a % of the Council's overall workforce
- Lead authority in the regional SEND Alternative Provision initiative
- Accountable body for Levelling Up Funding

Summary Budget table

Summary	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Financial Services, Insurance & Director cost	1,375	1,395	1,386	1,407
Information Technology	1,423	1,436	1,431	1,458
Customer Services Team	198	198	197	197
HR & Organisational development	529	520	526	532
Revenues & Financial Support	384	374	358	358
Property Services	1,021	952	989	1,026
Total	4,929	4,875	4,886	4,979



Summary Subjective table

Resources	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Employees	3,264	3,274	3,199	3,213
Premises	1,461	1,416	1,480	1,546
Transport	1	1	1	1
Supplies & Services	1,802	1,847	1,891	1,934
Third Party Payments	3,382	3,342	3,351	3,351
Income Gov Grants	(3,553)	(3,553)	(3,553)	(3,553)
Income Fees & Charger	(1,281)	(1,307)	(1,338)	(1,368)
Third Party Income	(66)	(66)	(66)	(66)
Income from Contributions	(16)	(16)	(16)	(16)
Other Income	(65)	(63)	(63)	(63)
Total	4,929	4,875	4,886	4,979

Corporate Strategy

This directorate primarily supports the delivery of the following corporate priorities, and enables all of the other priorities indirectly through service support:

Tackling the Climate Emergency

A diverse & sustainable economy

Support the most vulnerable

Provide good public services



Directorate – Resources – Service Ambitions

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000								
Financial Services, Insurance & Director cost	1,375	1,395	1,386	1,407								
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>Our service ambition is to provide exceptional financial management and support to the Council, ensuring the efficient and effective use of public funds while promoting transparency and accountability.</p> <p>The Finance Team will move to a risk-based strategic approach that aims to integrate risk management principles into the overall financial operations of the Council to enhance decision-making processes and strengthen financial resilience ensuring the Council's key risks are managed appropriately. The finance function has a self-service ambition that empowers managers with the tools, information, and resources they need to pursue and achieve their service aims and objectives. Key components of such a finance function:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>1. Risk Identification and Assessment</td> <td>5. Budgeting and Planning Support</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. Risk Mitigation Strategies</td> <td>6. Financial Skills Development</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3. Transparent Financial Information</td> <td>7. Strategic Support</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4. Self-Service Reporting and Analytics</td> <td>8. Collaboration and Communication</td> </tr> </table> <p>This ambition for the Finance Function will be one that supports managers to self-service enabling managers to take ownership of their financial goals and make informed decisions. It promotes a culture of financial accountability, fosters innovation, and empowers managers to drive their own success while ensuring the Council's financial health is maintained / or improved. This coupled with a risk-based finance function to create a strong risk governance framework that enables the Council to proactively identify, assess, and manage financial risks, will go along to ensuring long-term financial sustainability and resilience of the Council.</p> <p>What are we doing over to meet this ambition:</p> <p>The Finance team will need to embed the restructure of the team, which will address the uncertainty created through the current levels of vacancies and use of interims. The impact to permanent staff members is expected to be minimal.</p> <p>The section intends to purchase Invoice Scanning Software to remove large non-value added processing. Which will compliment the review of transactional / processing activities in line with 'Enabling Services' transformation workstream actions.</p> <p>The department will complete an analysis that will confirm actions to stop, move to line managers, replace with better systems / technology / greater use of what the Council already has in place.</p> <p>Work will commence to investigate synergies between the Revenues and Benefit Team and the Finance team and see how the resources and skill sets can be used more effectively and efficiently to increase both resilience and create capacity.</p>					1. Risk Identification and Assessment	5. Budgeting and Planning Support	2. Risk Mitigation Strategies	6. Financial Skills Development	3. Transparent Financial Information	7. Strategic Support	4. Self-Service Reporting and Analytics	8. Collaboration and Communication
1. Risk Identification and Assessment	5. Budgeting and Planning Support											
2. Risk Mitigation Strategies	6. Financial Skills Development											
3. Transparent Financial Information	7. Strategic Support											
4. Self-Service Reporting and Analytics	8. Collaboration and Communication											
Information Technology	1,423	1,436	1,431	1,458								
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>Our main ambition will be to maintain the overall quality of the IT Infrastructure and to support the organisation operating within a hybrid environment.</p> <p>We will look to reduce our reactive support operations by improving self-service, creating a service catalogue to define what service we offer, improving our monitoring and alerting to reduce calls (where we can rectify before users are aware) and improving the overall service.</p> <p>We will continue to develop digital solutions to enable external customers to access our services including improving MyAccount.</p> <p>What are we doing over to meet this ambition:</p>												

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
<p>We will improve the ability for service users to self-serve and to reduce reactive support led demand on the service. This approach will be developed and embedded in the first two years with the target to achieve cashable savings in the final two years of this strategy.</p> <p>Some costs are directly related to overall headcount, for instance a 10% reduction in headcount should allow the number of Microsoft licences to fall by a similar amount (ignoring inflation). Reduction in headcount is also likely to reduce hardware costs around laptops and mobile phones as IT will have more equipment to redistribute to those in most need.</p> <p>We are expecting to reduce the costs on new contracts, eg in printers and telephony alongside cost savings from a review of the data connections and alternative ways of connecting key assets. There are opportunities to review data connections and to release costs when the PSN network is closed following a delay into 2024/25.</p> <p>There are limited opportunities for further application rationalisation however these will be explored. Opportunities to explore opensource software for core IT software will be undertaken, for instance help desk software and log management with businesses cases developed as part of approval governance.</p>				
Customer Services Team	198	198	197	197
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>The ambition for customer services is that we will grow the team such that the team will take the vast majority of the call across all services. This will allow the front office to be freed up from taking customer interactions and to concentrate on their service delivery.</p> <p>Our ambition is to adopt tiers of service requests so the central customer services can deal with transactional requests and less complex enquiries from residents, and only escalate to the back office the most complex cases. This will mean we reduce the demand into the back office by a tirage operation within customer services.</p> <p>We will use CRM technology to take all external customer interactions across telephony, face-to-face, emails, web-forms, MyAccount, video calls. These will be managed as cases by customer services and where there is a level of complexity will operate as a case manager for the lifetime of the service request. Technology will be used to improve digital journeys for residents and to reduce costs of delivering service in the back office. Where we will improve the options for customers to go online and make service request and be able to then track this call using a different channel.</p> <p>What are we doing over to meet this ambition:</p> <p>We will continue to provide a face to face service at Catmose with a floor walker to help ensure a good customer service is offered, whilst committing to the self-service principle. We will remove the lunchtime closing introduced over Covid. We will review our opening hours across all channels and will consider how to best structure these hours, for instance considering the balance between opening hours for face to face - perhaps mornings we offer and enhanced floorwalker service - and potentially leveraging our hybrid working to extend hours for web chat into some evenings.</p> <p>To support this we will grow the use of Salesforce within the team and within service areas. This will allow one key system to store all customer interactions with updates on progress on service requests being updated by the back office.</p>				
Property Services	1,021	952	989	1,026
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>Principle ambition is to align business and property asset strategies, ensuring the optimisation of the organisation's property assets in a way which best supports key business goals and objectives such that property assets that are fit for purpose and capable of delivering services and activities required.</p> <p>To manage property to support the Council's objectives and priorities set out in the Corporate Strategy by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimising the operation and long-term cost of the Council's estate 				

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing Value for Money by using Council resources wisely and having the required information to make robust and informed decisions for example developing a planned maintenance approach • Supporting the delivery of services through assets that add value and enhance modern ways of working • Considering the impact of sustainability in all decisions, making buildings as sustainable as possible and considering the impact of our carbon footprint • Taking a dynamic approach to asset management including retention, repurposing and disposal • Working with Partners to maximise opportunities and consider the transfer of services / assets to Town and Parish Councils and others • Embedding a Corporate Landlord Model • Having assets that are fit for purpose <p>What are we doing over to meet this ambition:</p> <p>This ambition can be achieved subject to the overarching Asset Review business cases decisions being approved and delivered. It is anticipated that front-loading of capacity and capability to achieve the outcomes of Asset Review. This can be achieved by a combination of interim staffing and / or consultants. Indicative delivery programme not known at time of writing but will be five years plus.</p> <p>As the Asset Review programme concludes, it is feasible to plan for reductions through more effective use of third parties for activities currently completed in-house subject to assessment over the value for money proposition. There will still be a need to maintain a suitably qualified / experienced in-house team to complete certain activities, act as Corporate Landlord and as Intelligent Client. Business cases will be required to quantify and ensure that savings are derived, with the expectation that it is likely to be cheaper to out-source some activities to specialists rather than deliver in-house.</p> <p>The Council's current assets are largely older buildings, with several services delivered out of inadequate or converted spaces. Many are listed and through achievement of past saving plans planned maintenance has been reduced. Delivery of the Asset Review transformation workstream aims to result in lower asset running costs.</p>				
HR & Organisational Development, Health & Safety	594	585	591	597
<p>Ambition:</p> <p>Our ambition is to create a culture of excellence, innovation, and collaboration. Activities of the team will support the strategic goals of the Council by supporting the attraction, development, and retention of the best talent, fostering a positive work environment, and enhancing employee engagement. The ambition is to be a strategic partner to the business, providing expert advice and guidance on all aspects of people management, performance, learning and development, diversity and inclusion, and employee engagement. The function also aims to be a leader in best practices, benchmarking, and continuous improvement, leveraging data and technology to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness. By achieving this ambition, the function will contribute to the Council's success and sustainability in a competitive and dynamic environment.</p> <p>What are we doing over to meet this ambition:</p> <p>In line with the transformational workstream we will complete the review of transactional / processing activities. This will confirm actions to stop, move to line managers, replace with better systems, technologies, and greater use of existing systems and technologies.</p> <p>We will investment in technology, following a review with ICT of all HR digital systems and identify opportunities for synergies, for example link between the recruitment, financial and learning platform systems. Investment in interfaces is expected as part of this work. Success of this work will be the achievement of a reduction, and / or shift in processing and transactional tasks which is anticipated to create a saving towards the end of 2024/25 with further cashable savings expected in the final two years of this strategy.</p>				

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Revenues & Financial Support	384	374	358	358

Ambition:

As the Revenues and Benefit Service we will provide a more cost-effective service in this vital part of the Council's operations. The function collects and manages the income that the Council needs to provide essential services, such as council tax, business rates and other debts. It administers and delivers welfare support to the people who live in the County, such as housing benefit, council tax support and discretionary housing support. The service aims to provide a fair, efficient and customer-focused service that meets the needs of the Council its residents and businesses.

What are we doing over to meet this ambition:

Local Taxes- we will aim to increase online self-service forms to increase to be 90% of all transactions over the period. The use of technology such as with Chatbot and AI would be used to answer 90% of all enquires with Customer Service to respond to remainder which are more complex and require specific tailored advice. Increased use of the Council's My Account alongside promotion of e-billing will help create efficiencies in how customers can interact with the Council and decrease the time required to respond to queries. e.g. recovery action, Direct Debit processing and complex enquires, complaints, appeals and statutory returns. Simplification/reduction of discretionary reliefs.

Benefits- We will aim to increase online self-service forms to increase to 80% for all claims and change in circumstances over the period. As with the above the use of technology such as with Chatbot and AI would be used to answer 60% of all enquires with Customer Service to respond to remainder which are more complex and require specific tailored advice. Increased use of the Council's My Account alongside 90% take up for e-notifications (replacing paper versions) will help generate efficiencies in service delivery. This approach will enable a core team to manage our existing document management system (DIP and Workflow), traditional access channels for customers who are unable to use self-service and to administer back office work that sits outside of self-service and to administer work from Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) e.g. Housing Benefit Award Accuracy Initiative (HBAA), Verification of Earning and Pensions (VEP), Automated Transfer to Local Authority systems (ATLAS), Universal Credit (UC), complex enquiries, complaints, appeals and statutory returns. A Review of the Local Council Tax Support scheme, including the use of discretionary funds, will be completed to simplify and reduce / remove administrative tasks that add costs to the system.

Community Care Finance- the existing policy will be reviewed and updated to clarify and create self-assessment opportunities to reduce back-office processing. This is anticipated to enable the introduction of self service for 90% of all service users over the period. Efficiencies are expected through greater working and sharing of skills sets with the finance function which will enable a reduction in resources following the embedding of new ways of working. Consideration will be given on the best management arrangement to enable an alignment of with the assessments and management / control of budgets.

Deputyship and appointeeship -a business case will be developed which looks at the cost / benefits of alternative service delivery for the cases presented to the Council. This task will assess the application of criteria for the Council to be responsible for any new deputyship cases to keep level to under a target level of cases.

Directorate - Resources – Variation Statement

Ref	Resources Budget Variation Statement	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
2023/24 budget					
RE001	2023/24 Budget	4,990	4,990	4,990	4,990
Previous MTFS budget adjustment					
RO001	Service Adjustments	(8)	(8)	(8)	(8)
RO003	Inflation allocation	94	172	261	354
Service Investment					
RP001	Increase resources in the HR & OD team to add capacity for organisational development, employee health and well being initiative	27	27	27	27
RP002	Increased cost of using technology to lead to savings in processing and administration of tasks across the Resources functions.	8	39	48	48
Savings					
RS001	Implementation of the Enabling Services transformational workstream which will review transactional and processing activities. Support to the wider Council will adopt an approach to confirm actions to stop, move to line managers, and / or replace with better systems, technology, and greater use existing functionality. Consideration to alternative service delivery methods included in approach.	(53)	(65)	(151)	(151)
RS002	Procurement of new contracts across in ICT & digital function with some minor system savings.	(62)	(74)	(74)	(74)
RS007	Insurance Contract retender savings	(35)	(35)	(35)	(35)
RS009	Review effectiveness of subscriptions to keep only those that add value to the operations, technical and professional advice and support continuing professional development	(10)	(10)	(10)	(10)
RS011	Opportunities following the review Local Council Tax Support scheme	0	(40)	(40)	(40)
RS018	Full cost recovery of professional support services in delivery of Council activities which are grant funded	(22)	(20)	(20)	(20)
RS019	Savings from the repurposing of an asset in association with the Levelling Up Fund schemes	0	(40)	(40)	(40)
RS020	Reduction in maintenance and increased income	0	(60)	(60)	(60)
Investment funded from reserves					
PI011	Temporary Customer Relations Manager to assist with workloads associated with the redesign Highways service	46	46	0	0
RI001	Investment in temporary resources to support the delivery of the Enabling Services transformational workstream which will facilitate savings in the short to long term. Activity includes updates to Council policies, development of Council employee skill sets, implementation of systems and process reviews.	145	27	0	0
RI007	Professional support to deliver support the transformation agenda across the Council	156	156	100	100
RI009	One off investment in IT software solutions to increase efficiencies, remove burdensome administrative tasks	227	160	0	0
RI016	Funding of the capital programme for replacement of IT end user hardware	80	80	80	0

Ref	Resources Budget Variation Statement	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
RI019	Council wide service efficiencies pump priming	250	250	250	250
Reserve funding					
RF004	Funding from Innovation Reserve	(904)	(719)	(430)	(350)
	TOTAL	4,930	4,876	4,888	4,981

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Appendix D. Grant Register

Directorate	Council Reference	Reference Description	Budget 2024/25 £	Budget 2025/26 £	Budget 2026/27 £	Budget 2027/28 £	Grant Title	Confirmed
Places	RC4112	Crime And Disorder	(19,200)	(19,200)	(19,200)	(19,200)	Partnership and Locality Funding - OPCC & Youth Prevention and Diversionary Fund	No
Places	RC1518	Public Transport	(68,700)	(68,700)	(68,700)	(68,700)	Bus Service Operators Grant	No
Places	RC1409	Neighbourhood Planning	(20,000)	(20,000)	(20,000)	(20,000)	DLUHC - Neighbourhood Planning Grant	No
Places	RC1084	UKSPF	(659,200)	0	0	0	UK Shared Prosperity Fund	Yes
Places	RC1103	Transport - Bus Services Improvement Plan (BSIP)	(739,600)	0	0	0	Bus Services Improvement Plan (BSIP)	Yes
Places	RC1094	Transport Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI)	(66,600)	(66,600)	(33,200)	0	Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI)	Yes
Law & Governance	RC1062	Executive Support	(3,000)	(3,000)	(3,000)	(3,000)	Access to Work	No
Adults & Health	RC4708	Housing Options	(68,300)	(68,300)	(68,300)	(68,300)	Homelessness Prevention Grant	No
Adults & Health	RC4570	Public Health	(1,468,100)	(1,468,100)	(1,468,100)	(1,468,100)	Public Health	Yes (2024/25 only)
Adults & Health	RC4576	Substance Misuse	(21,949)	(21,949)	(21,949)	(21,949)	Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment & Recovery Funding	No
Resources	RC3000	Revenues	(63,600)	(63,600)	(63,600)	(63,600)	Cost of Collection – Business Rates	Yes
Resources	RC3015	Benefit Processing	(94,500)	(94,500)	(94,500)	(94,500)	Housing Benefit Admin Subsidy Grants	Yes
Resources	RC3015	Benefit Processing	(6,500)	(6,500)	(6,500)	(6,500)	Various Minor Grants	No
Resources	RC3021	Housing benefits Payments	(3,388,500)	(3,388,500)	(3,388,500)	(3,388,500)	Housing Benefit Subsidy	Yes
Childrens & Families	RC4201	Care Leavers	(11,500)	(11,500)	(11,500)	(11,500)	Leaving care Allowance	No

Directorate	Council Reference	Reference Description	Budget 2024/25 £	Budget 2025/26 £	Budget 2026/27 £	Budget 2027/28 £	Grant Title	Confirmed
Childrens & Families	RC4207	Disabled Children	(22,500)	0	0	0		No
Childrens & Families	RC4252	UASC Over 16	(400,000)	(400,000)	(400,000)	(400,000)	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children	Yes
Childrens & Families	RC4253	USAC Over 18	(113,000)	(113,000)	(113,000)	(113,000)	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children	Yes
Childrens & Families	RC5240	Changing lives	(159,300)	(159,300)	(159,300)	(159,300)	Changing Lives	No
Childrens & Families	RC1075	Domestic Abuse	(63,000)	(63,000)	(63,000)	(63,000)	Domestic Abuse New Burdens	No
Childrens & Families	RC1013	New Apprenticeships	(20,083)	0	0	0	Supported Internships	Yes
Childrens & Families	RC1088	Multiply Funding	(43,400)	0	0	0	Multiply Funding	Yes
Childrens & Families	RC5129	Community Learning	(263.900)	(263.900)	(263.900)	(263.900)	Adult Education – Community Learning	Yes
Childrens & Families	RC5202	Rutland Adult Skills	(109,000)	(109,000)	(109,000)	(109,000)	Adult Education – Adult Skills	Yes
Childrens & Families	RC1055	Virtual School Head	(130,000)	(130,000)	(130,000)	(130,000)	Virtual School Heads to children with a social worker Virtual School Heads to certain previously Looked after Children	Yes (2024/25 only)
Childrens & Families	New	Wraparound Childcare	(174,440)	(88,998)	0	0	Wraparound Childcare Programme	Yes
Childrens & Families	RC1101	ELSEC Pathfinder	(251,653)	0	0	0	ELSEC Pathfinder	Yes
Childrens & Families	RC1102	SEN AP Programme	(3,909,833)	0	0	0	SEND AP Programme	Yes
Childrens & Families	RC1109	Delivering Better Value	(619,920)	0	0	0	Delivering Better Value	Yes
Childrens & Families	RC5246	Pupil Premium Plus	(58,625)	(58,625)	(58,625)	(58,625)	Pupil Premium Plus	Yes
Childrens & Families	RC1020	Bikeability	(22,500)	(22,500)	(22,500)	(22,500)	Bikeability	No

Directorate	Council Reference	Reference Description	Budget 2024/25 £	Budget 2025/26 £	Budget 2026/27 £	Budget 2027/28 £	Grant Title	Confirmed
Childrens & Families	RC5875	Schools Sports	(23,800)	(23,800)	(23,800)	(23,800)	School Games Organiser	No
Childrens & Families	RC5875	Schools Sports	(6,000)	(6,000)	(6,000)	(6,000)	Holiday and Food Programme	No
Corporate	RC3464	Corporate Grants	(2,993,500)	(2,993,500)	(2,993,500)	(2,993,500)	Better care fund	No
Corporate	RC3464	Corporate Grants	(218,818)	(218,818)	(218,818)	(218,818)	Improved Better Care Fund	Provisional 2024/25
Corporate	RC3464	Corporate Grants	(2,093,701)	(2,093,701)	(2,093,701)	(2,093,701)	Social Care Grant	Provisional 2024/25
Corporate	RC3464	Corporate Grants	(593,776)	(593,776)	(593,776)	(593,776)	ASC Market Sustainability	Provisional 2024/25
Corporate	RC3464	Corporate Grants	(995,149)	(995,149)	(995,149)	(995,149)	Rural Services Delivery Grant	Provisional 2024/25
Corporate	RC3464	Corporate Grants	(173,000)	(116,000)	(116,000)	(116,000)	Various small grants within the Local Government Finance Settlement	Provisional 2024/25
Corporate	RC3464	Corporate Grants	-	(2,608,000)	(2,003,000)	(1,319,000)	Fair Funding Review Assumptions	Provisional 2024/25
Total			(19,894,511)	(16,093,880)	(15,366,482)	(14,649,282)		

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Rutland
County Council

Fees and Charges Policy

Version & Policy Number	Version 1.0
Guardian	Andrew Merry, Head of Finance
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Approved by Scrutiny	TBC
Approved by Cabinet	TBC
Approved by Full Council	TBC

Summary of Document

A corporate approach to effective management of fees and charges will ensure the council maximises commercial opportunities to generate income on the delivery of chargeable services.

This policy underpins Rutland County Council's principles of setting and reviewing fees and charges as the council moves through a programme of transformation and will be subject to review to ensure that it continues to reflect the needs and aspirations of the council.

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The overall aim of the fees and charges policy is to ensure that fees and charges are set within a framework of value for public money for all our residents and businesses. It allows the council to have a properly considered, consistent and informed approach to all the fees and charges it levies for its services. This will in turn support the delivery of the Corporate Strategy.
- 1.2 Income from fees and charges represents an important source of funds to the Council and enables a range of services to be provided within the County. The unprecedented reductions in central government funding since 2010, means there is a much greater emphasis on locally raised income to fund services. This policy establishes a framework within which fees and charges levied by the Council are agreed and regularly reviewed.
- 1.3 The setting of fees and charges will be incorporated into the annual Integrated Budget Plan (IBP) and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and budget setting timetable. Incorporating these reviews into the service/financial planning process will also permit consideration of cross-cutting issues and impacts in the context of wider policy objectives. This policy provides a rolling schedule of the Council's fees and charges for consideration each year prior to the formal approval of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy at full Council in February each year.
- 1.4 This policy also provides guidance to managers on the main factors which need to be considered when reviewing fees and charges and the information that will need to be contained within reports being brought forward for consideration. It will also establish the timescales for the approval of the fees and charges.

2 KEY CHARGING PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 The main principles of this policy are as follows
- 2.1.1 **Council Priorities:** A Schedule of Fees and Charges shall be maintained for all charges where the Council has discretion over the amounts charged for services provided and for income generating activities. All decisions on charges for services and income generating activities will be taken with reference to and in support of Council priorities and recorded as delegated decisions, as appropriate.
- 2.1.2 **Charge Setting:** In setting charges, any relevant government guidance will be followed. Stakeholder engagement and comparative data will be used where appropriate to ensure that charges do not adversely affect the take up of services or restrict access to services. Full consideration will be given and documented to the full costs of delivery and the opportunities for improving efficiency and reducing bureaucracy.
- 2.1.3 **Subsidy:** In general, fees and charges will aim to recover the full cost of services except where this is prevented by legislation, market conditions or where alternative arrangements have been expressly approved by the relevant Director. A proportionate business case should be created for all charges that are subsidised by the Council. Approval for the level of subsidy should be obtained from the relevant Service Director, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer.
- 2.1.4 **Charging Levels:** The standard assumption is that all fees and charges will be

increased in line with CPI (a national inflation index that excludes mortgage costs) however some prices are subject to other indexation or must reflect changes to the underlying cost base that may be above or below this average inflation. In setting the level of fees and charges, Rutland County Council will have regard to the following principles:

- The level of fee set by statute
- Recovery costs and overheads
- Comparison with commercial offers
- Benchmarking with other councils
- Impact on behavioural change, including avoiding perverse incentives
- Considerations around pricing strategies and elasticity (for example, by setting fees too high, demand for the service may reduce. Equally setting fees too low may create unsustainable service demand)
- Implications for equality and diversity guidance.

2.1.5 **Charging Exemptions:** All services provided by the Council will be charged for unless prevented by statute, or where their use would have significant negative consequences in terms of the council's duty to promote equality of opportunity and protected groups who share a protected characteristic, or under exceptional circumstances agreed exempt by the relevant Director, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer.

2.1.6 **Concessions:** Concessions to priority and target groups will be considered where appropriate, in accordance with any relevant government guidance and will take account of the user's ability to pay. All concessions should be fully justified in terms of achieving the Council's priorities. Wherever possible we will aim to provide concessions consistently across the Council.

3 STATUTORY AND DISCRETIONARY CHARGES LEGISLATION

3.1 Statutory services are those services that an authority is mandated to or has a duty to provide, fees and charges in respect of these services are either set by Government or based on full cost recovery.

3.2 The Local Government Act 2003 provides a general power to charge for discretionary services (services that an authority has the power, but is not obliged to, provide). Additions or enhancements to mandatory services above the standard that an authority has a duty to provide may be provided as discretionary services.

3.3 The Council may generate income from the public through charging and trading for services that exceed the statutory requirements or are added value optional services, such as pre-application planning advice.

3.4 In general terms, the Council may not make a profit on its charging activities, or subsidise other services and cannot charge for services that customers do not choose to use. A profit may be defined as a surplus received in excess of the full cost of delivering the service. Full cost includes all direct costs, such as pay and materials, and also indirect costs including overheads such as finance, accommodation, HR and IT.

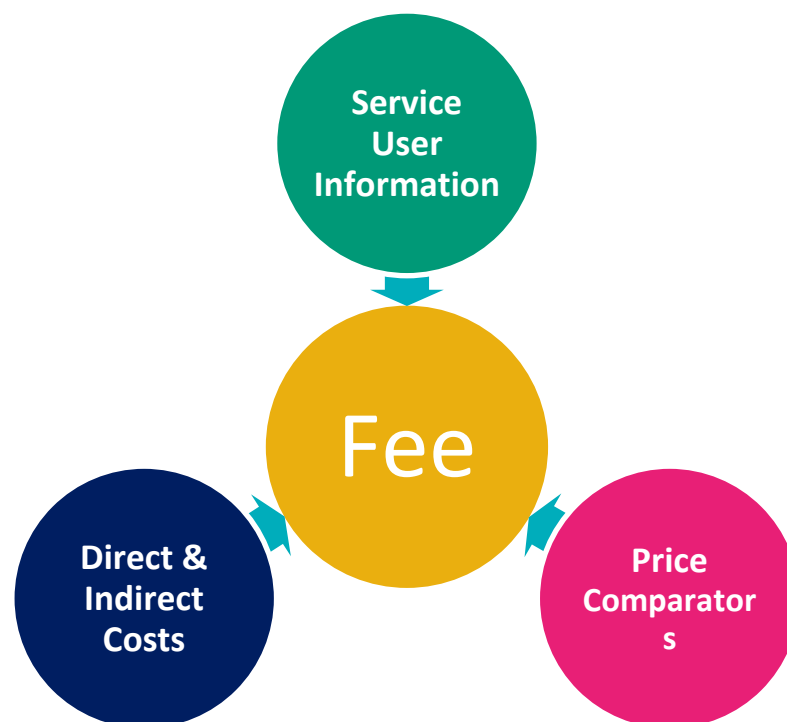
3.5 In accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and 'general powers of competence' contained within it, the Council may trade in any eligible service permitted by the

Council's constitution. But if the council wants to make a profit it must conduct this commercial activity via a separate company. Any such company must comply with competition law and standard trading legislation; however, services can be traded within the public sector environment, without resorting to a company.

4 REVIEWING FEES AND CHARGES

Process and Timescales

- 4.1 All fees and charges should be reviewed annually unless agreed otherwise (such as parking fees that are set three yearly) and in alignment with the annual budget setting timetable for the forthcoming financial year. Consideration should be given for any legislative consultations that may be required. Significant fluctuations in charges year-on-year should be avoided but may be inevitable if market conditions require this.
- 4.2 The effects of any new or substantially revised fees and charges on service usage and income levels should be closely monitored following implementation. Any unexpected adverse effect should be raised at the earliest opportunity.
- 4.3 Any comprehensive review of fees and charges for a service will need to include the following key elements. This is essentially about understanding the service, in terms of the cost both in total and for individual elements (activity costing), market conditions and service users.



- 4.3.1 **Direct and Indirect costs:** the charge for services to the service users should generally be calculated on the full cost of providing the service. This would include items such as:
- Salary and associated national insurance and pension charges
 - Travel / transportation costs
 - Premises costs

- Other supplies or equipment utilised in the provision of the service
- Capital cost for usage of asset (i.e. depreciation charges) regardless of the original funding of the asset
- Support service and other overhead costs (HR, accommodation, finance, IT) and corporate costs (democratic support and Corporate Leadership Team (CLT)) etc.

Not all these costs will necessarily be identifiable from the service budget on the system, so it is important that all relevant costs are identified through discussions with the finance team.

4.3.2 **Price Comparators:** Relevant data should be collected and analysed in relation to pricing information for similar services provided by other local authorities, preferably those in our nearest neighbour comparator group, together with any relevant local market competitor information. This should be used to benchmark the Council's current and proposed pricing structure. It is important that any significant differences can be explained.

4.3.3 **Service User Information:** It is important that managers understand their customer base and the key drivers for service users. Information should be obtained in relation to the level and types of user for each service. Ideally an assessment should be made in terms of price sensitivity, as this will need to be factored into the pricing models.

4.4 **Opportunities to Introduce New Fees and Charges:** In order to maximise income and/or reduce subsidy levels the council will fully explore opportunities to introduce charges for services that have previously been supplied for free. These opportunities will be highlighted within reports for member consideration.

4.5 **Links to Corporate and Service Objectives:** When proposing how to charge for the services being undertaken, it should be clear upon the basis used for charging, and there should be justification in respect of the method chosen in relation to the corporate and service objectives. When fees and charges are being set, any subsidies or concessions should be clear and transparent, and the reasons supported by corporate or service objectives. If the basis for charging is unclear, then a number of options should be presented for member consideration. The main charging models are set out in the table below:

Method	Description
Full Cost (default)	The Council seeks to maximise revenue within an overall objective of recovering the full cost of provision, including all overheads.
Full Cost – with discounts	As above, but with discounts being given to reflect market conditions, these will need to be evidenced.
Full Cost – with concessions	As above, but with concessions being given to enable disadvantaged groups to access the service. There needs to be a clear case for this. Subsidised Council policy is to make the service widely accessible but believes users of the service should make some contribution from their own resources. Could also be

Method	Description
	due to the adverse impact a commercial charging policy would have on other Council services.
Nominal	The Council wishes the service to be fully available, but sets a charge to discourage frivolous usage.
Free	Council policy is to make the service fully available without charge.
Statutory	Charges are set in line with legal obligations and charges are only made for added value services
Property Rental / Lease	Properties that are rented or leased to third parties should be done so at a commercial rate.

5 SUMMARY

5.1 Fees and charges are an important part of the council's income. This policy provides the framework to ensure that fees and charges are kept under review to ensure:

- Services continue to provide value for money to all our residents;
- The Council's charging potential is maximised, including ensuring opportunities to introduce new fees or charges are fully explored; and
- Fees and charges remain fit for purpose within the context of the charging principles established within this policy.

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General Funding Strategy & Policy

1. Background and Context

- 1.1. The Council receives general income from three main sources:
 - Council Tax
 - Business Rates
 - General government grants
- 1.2. This funding strategy outlines the objectives that will be applied with regards to this income. This strategy is factored into the MTFs and a more detailed review of the strategy will take place during 2024/25 and be presented to Council in the Autumn of 2024 to enable debate and inclusion in the following Integrated Budget Plan and MTFs
- 1.3. The Council is in receipt of specific service-related income such as with fees and charges and specific ring-fenced grant from government. This income is accounted for as part of the Directorate activity and forms part of the opportunities considered by Directors as to how their services operate, see Appendix D – Grant Register.
- 1.4. For income that relates to investments in Council assets this forms part of the capital strategy and treasury management strategy (Appendices M & L). The most cost-effective funding of assets is considered as part of the treasury management strategy and resulting impact on revenue expenditure. The overall approach is for the asset to be of benefit to the service delivery of the Council, leading to either a directly attributable saving or enhancement to service provision that create other non-monetary benefits. Additional grant funding for capital will not be undertaken if such expenditure provides an undue burden on future revenue expenditure both in terms of capital financing and ongoing maintenance costs.

2. Council Tax

- 2.1. Council Tax is levied on households by local authorities in Britain, based on the estimated value of a property.
- 2.2. Council Tax is the core funding stream for the Council and therefore an increase to raise this tax needs to be measured against the services required to deliver the Corporate Strategy and statutory functions, against what performance level is both affordable and acceptable. Each year the government, as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement, sets the limit as to the maximum increase to the rate of Council Tax that can be made without the need for a local referendum to increase fees above this rate. For 2024/25 this is 2.99% for the general Council Tax precept and 2% for the Adult Social Care precept.
- 2.3. For 2024/25 a 1% change in Council Tax equates to £0.3m on Council Tax income. The following table shows the assumptions in rates that have been applied to this MTFs period and assumes that the existing maximum % increases to precepts confirmed by Government before a local referendum is triggered will continue at the same level:

Council Tax rate increase / (decrease) for Rutland County Council	2024/25 %	2025/26 %	2026/27 %	2027/28 %
General precept	2.99	2.99	2.99	2.99
Adult Social Care precept	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
Total increase / (decrease)	4.99	4.99	4.99	4.99

- 2.4. The Council is the collecting authority for Police and Fire Council Tax precepts; however, it is unable to influence or control how much these precepting authorities charge. These precepting authorities are limited to their maximum increase by government.
- 2.5. The Council previously approved Council Tax reliefs for hardship which can be applied for in exceptional circumstances where the charge is reduce for a short time, and a separate discretionary fund which provides short term help for residents suffering from financial hardship. The use of these funds is kept under review and reported on during the year as part of the regular financial performance reports. The value of these funds over the MTFs are shown in the following table.

Council Tax discretionary reliefs funds	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Discretionary fund	20	20	20	20
Financial crisis fund*	20	20	20	20
Total	40	40	40	40

* The financial crisis fund is available to help in the event of a crisis, emergency, or disaster, and not limited to the payment of Council Tax. The fund is managed by Rutland Citizen's Advice Bureau on the Council's behalf.

- 2.6. Other statutory reliefs are available for residents such as Single Person Discount (SPD) and the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS). LCTS is a means tested support that is largely based on the abolished Council Tax Benefit scheme and considers the make-up of households. Cabinet considered a paper in October 2023 and approved that alternative schemes are to be explored during 2024/25 for further Cabinet approval seeking schemes that contribute to the financial sustainability of the Council. The Council's scheme has not fundamentally changed since its introduction in 2013.
- 2.7. The cost of SPD and LCTS reliefs reduce the tax base on which Council Tax can be charge, in effect depressing the number of dwellings from which income can be based upon. The impact of these reliefs on the tax base for MTFs Council Tax income assumptions are shown in the table, see point below.
- 2.8. Each year the Council makes an allowance for bad debt provision for the collection of Council Tax income. For Rutland, the collection rates compare favourably with neighbouring authorities and the Council, shown in the table below.
- 2.9. Following table shows the key assumptions for Council Tax base over the MTFs period.

Council Tax taxbase (Band D equivalents)	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Equivalent Chargeable Dwellings	16,292	16,391	16,507	16,623
Local Council Tax Support	(588)	(588)	(588)	(588)
Unbanded Properties	14	14	14	14

Growth	96	115	115	115
Bad debt provision (1% non-collection)	(158)	(161)	(162)	(163)
MOD Equivalent Taxbase Contribution	375	375	375	375
Taxbase assumed over the MTFS period	16,031	16,146	16,261	16,376

2.10. In March 2023 Council approved the adoption of the Empty Homes and Second Homes premiums in advance of legislation being passed (Government proposed amendments in May 2022). Further delays have been experienced and therefore the timing of implementation for these premiums is uncertain. The Council has begun modelling the assumptions of this in terms of increase to the tax based from 2025/26.

3. Business Rates (National Non Domestic Rates – NNDR)

- 3.1. Business rates are a tax levied on business properties to help pay for local Council services. They are the business equivalent of council tax on domestic properties. Business rates are paid to the Council by the occupiers or owners of most non-domestic properties. Business rates are calculated using a rateable value and applying a multiplier which is set annually by government.
- 3.2. The Council can retain 49% of the income its collects as Business Rates with 1% paid to the Fire Authority and the remaining 50% paid to central government.
- 3.3. The Council provides some discretionary relief to certain non-profit making organisations and is subject to eligibility criteria and evidence that the business can contribute to the Corporate Strategy priorities.
- 3.4. The following table provides a summary of the assumptions made with regards to business rates over the MTFS period:

Business Rate income & estimated reliefs	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Business rate income	19,503	20,126	20,762	21,452
Relief	(7,007)	(7,151)	(4,970)	(5,068)
Bad Debt Allowance	(33)	(33)	(34)	(34)
Appeals Allowance	(750)	(750)	(765)	(780)
Business Rate income	11,713	12,192	14,993	15,570
Less Renewables (100% retained by RCC)	(38)	(38)	(38)	(38)
Less Cost of Collection	(75)	(76)	(78)	(80)
Net Income	11,600	12,078	14,877	15,452
RCC Retention Percentage (%)	49	49	49	49
Retained Income	5,684	5,918	7,290	7,571
Compensation for Government Reliefs	1,997	2,034	940	958
Rates Income + Grant	7,681	7,952	8,230	8,529
Grant for Under Indexing	1,021	-	-	-
Tariff	(1,643)	(2,522)	(2,573)	(2,623)
Renewables	38	38	38	38
Levy	(267)	-	-	-
Total Business Rates Income	6,830	5,468	5,695	5,944

- 3.5. The Business Rates funding system continues to be increasingly complex, with Government making amendments frequently since 2013. This has resulted in a series of adjustments, shown in the previous table, and has resulted in many

councils having alternative calculations for their Business Rate income. The following points provide a summary of the business rates calculation:

- Previously the government set the business rate multiplier nationally and rates income was pooled nationally and re-distributed to councils via the government grant system.
 - Currently, under a 'hybrid' system, the business rate multiplier is still set nationally, but the total income is shared 50:50 between national and local government.
 - There is a system of 'top-ups' and 'tariffs' linked to the grant system to attempt to distribute funds based on need. This is based on a calculated Business Rates Baseline. The Council is deemed a 'tariff' authority as income receipts are greater than the calculated baseline.
 - A proportion (but not all) of the increased business rate income due to expansion in the business sector retained locally.
 - Safety nets to protect councils who experience business closures.
 - Complexity of the system means there is some local incentive for economic growth, but via a highly complex formula driven system.
 - The government has piloted a new system where some local councils retain more than 50% of any growth in business rates locally. The intention is to move to a revised system nationally, but this has now been deferred.
- 3.6. From 1992–2012, the national system meant that any local changes due to business closures or successful business rates appeals were dealt with at national level. Under the current system, any appeal that is successful has a local impact on the Council's funding levels. To offset some of this risk, some councils have joined together, usually in county areas, and formed voluntary business rates pools, which aim to spread such risk over a larger number of individual councils.

4. Grant Funding

- 4.1. The Council will ensure that all opportunities to attract additional grant funding are investigated when it is identified that the benefits of receipt of such funding aligns with the delivery of the Council's Corporate Strategy.
- 4.2. Applications to grants will be completed on a case-by-case basis to ensure that the costs of any bid submissions are not excessive in relation to the funds available and terms and conditions that may be applied to such funding.

5. Fees and Charges

- 5.1. The Council will ensure that commercial opportunities are maximised to generate income on the delivery of chargeable services. The aim of all fees and charges will be to recover full costs except where this is prevented by legislation and / or market conditions.
- 5.2. Income from fees and charges inform the overall Directorate budget and form part of the policies relevant to service provision, eg costs of green waste collection offset the total cost of the waste collection service. Fees and charges do not form part of the general fund income stream which underpins all Council expenditure.
- 5.3. Fees and charges are reviewed as part of each budget setting process in line with the Fees and Charges Policy detailed in Appendix E, and the design of affordable services to meet Cash Limit allocations.

6. Developer Contributions

- 6.1. The Council is a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charging authority and will raise charges in line with the published scheme <https://www.rutland.gov.uk/planning-building-control/local-plan/community-infrastructure-levy-cil>.
- 6.2. S106 planning obligations are used for all affordable housing contributions and may also be used for site-specific mitigation measures where it is more appropriate than applying the CIL regulations.
- 6.3. The Council will retain 5% of CIL receipts to fund the administration of the process as per [The Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010](#).
- 6.4. Administration fees for s106 obligations will be subject to separate negotiation and will be calculated inline with the fees and charges policy set out in Appendix E.
- 6.5. Developer contributions will be used to meet any obligations relating to needs arising from developments from where the contributions are received, generally these will be infrastructure needs such as;
 - highways
 - education
 - learning and skills
 - county sports provision
 - health & wellbeing facilities

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Financial Health Indicators

1. Background and context

- 1.1. Against a backdrop of existing funding pressures, the financial costs of the pandemic and significant price increases, the financial challenges public services face currently feel unprecedented. Some Councils are better placed than others to weather this financial challenge. However, there is a need to maintain financial resilience against such significant pressures, new and emerging risks, and operating in an uncertain funding environment.
- 1.2. Financial resilience is the ability of public services to remain viable, stable, and effective in the medium to long term while facing pressures from growing demand, a tightening of funding and an increasingly complex and unpredictable financial environment.
- 1.3. These indicators have been created to form an opinion of the Council's financial resilience and are based on:
 - a) Revenue based indicators for financial sustainability in the public sector
 - b) Financial health indicators – based on traditional balance sheet indicators to inform the financial strategy
 - c) Capital based financial indicators as a key driver of the balance sheet health and resulting burden on revenue funding
- 1.4. A summary of the indicators is provided in the following table. Three indicators are classed as Red rated risk, four as Amber, and seven as Green.

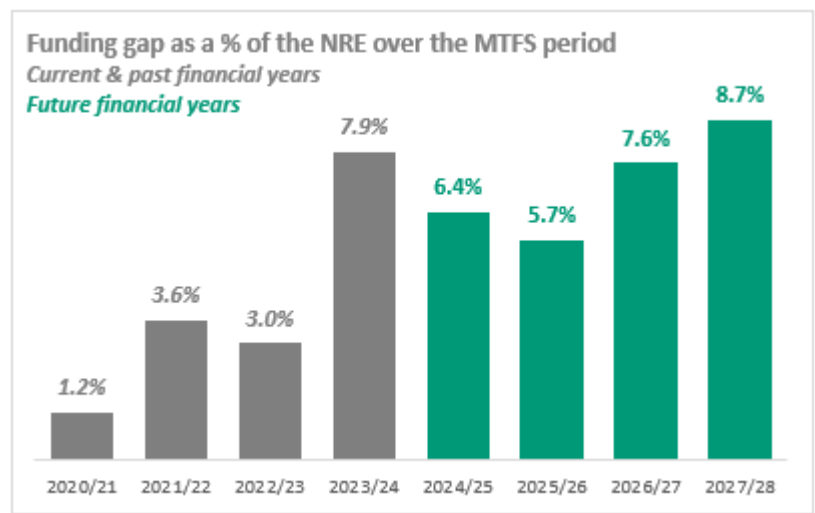
Indicator	Indicator Trend	RAG	
Revenue based financial sustainability indicators			
1	The funding gap as a percentage of Net Revenue Expenditure (NRE) over the MTFS period	Increasing over the MTFS period	R
2	Savings delivered as a percentage of planned savings	Steady over the MTFS period	A
3	Over/underspend relative to net expenditure	Steady over the MTFS period	A
4	Useable reserves as a percentage of net revenue budget	Decreasing over the MTFS period	R
5	The cost of total borrowing as a percentage of NRE	Decreasing over the MTFS period	G
Fiscal indicators			
6	Current assets to current liabilities	Above nearest neighbour average	A
7	Useable reserves to gross revenue expenditure	Above nearest neighbour average	G
8	Long term borrowing to tax revenue	Below nearest neighbour average	G
9	Long-term borrowing to long-term assets	Below nearest neighbour average	R
10	School balances to dedicated schools grant	Above nearest neighbour average	A
Capital investment indicators			
11	The direction of travel for the Capital Financing Requirement as % of asset value	Decreasing over the MTFS period	G
12	CFR as % of its asset value is no greater than nearest neighbour	Below nearest neighbour average	G
13	Risk impacting on the cost of total borrowing as a % of NRE	Steady over the MTFS period	G
14	The cost of total borrowing as a percentage of NRE	Decreasing over the MTFS period	G

2. Revenue based financial sustainability indicators

Indicator 1 - The funding gap as a percentage of Net Revenue Expenditure (NRE) over the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) period

- 2.1. Councils should have a clear estimate of their funding gap as a percentage of net revenue expenditure (NRE) over the medium-term financial planning (MTFP) period, along with robust saving plans to meet the gap. Targets or aspirational savings rather than firm plans pose a risk to financial resilience.
- 2.2. The Chief Finance Officers Robustness (Section 25) Statement in the main Cabinet report considers the robustness of estimates. The majority of savings have been based on the 12 transformation workstreams that formed part of the Financial Sustainability Strategy.

The savings have been RAG rated in terms of risk to delivery, with an enhanced monitoring of savings achievement being develop for implementation in the 2024/25 financial year.



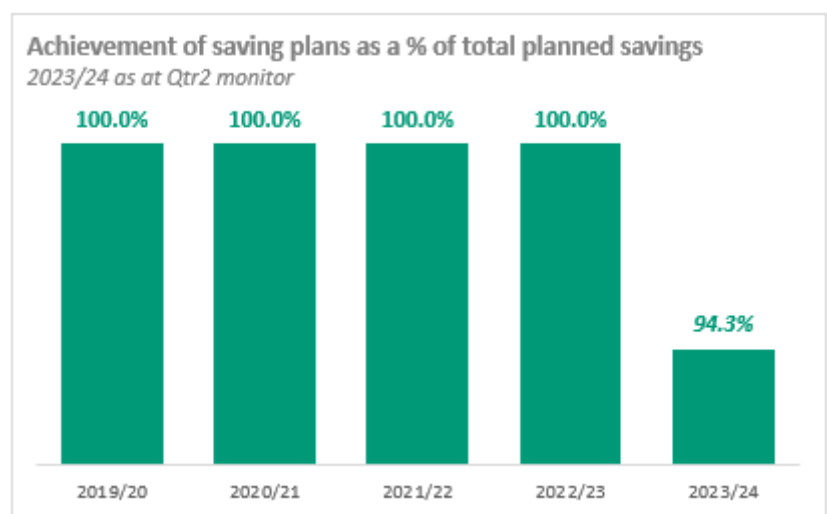
- 2.3. Whilst the Council has a balanced budget for each year across the MTFS period, savings and the use of reserves are required to achieve this position. The chart shows the level of savings and reserves required to balance the budget over the MTFS period is increasing compared to NRE.

2.4. Indicator trend - Increasing over the MTFS period – Red risk

Indicator 2 - Savings delivered as a percentage of planned savings

- 2.5. The ability to identify areas where specific financial savings can be made and to make those savings is a key aspect of ensuring ongoing financial sustainability against a backdrop of increasing financial pressures.

- 2.6. The chart shows that past performance for the achievement of savings plans. It has been assumed that the Council achieved all identified savings as planned as it was not reported otherwise. In the current financial year, the position as at Quarter 2 – September 2023 is shown, with one saving not proceeding as originally planned and three in services where there are other emerging pressures which puts achievement of the savings at risk.



2.7. CIPFA note that good practice is for bodies to have a single, consolidated, living document that tracks its savings plans. This should outline what has been agreed and how much progress has been made in implementation and links to both its budget and medium-term financial plan. The Corporate Leadership Team will adopt an enhanced approach to monitoring savings through 2024/25 alongside the corporate management of projects to ensure that the transformation agenda is being delivered through a series of Boards. Progress against savings achievement is reported as part of the regular financial performance reporting to Cabinet and Scrutiny, and Audit and Risk Committee through the Strategic Risk Register reporting framework.

2.8. Indicator trend - Steady over the MTFS period – Amber risk

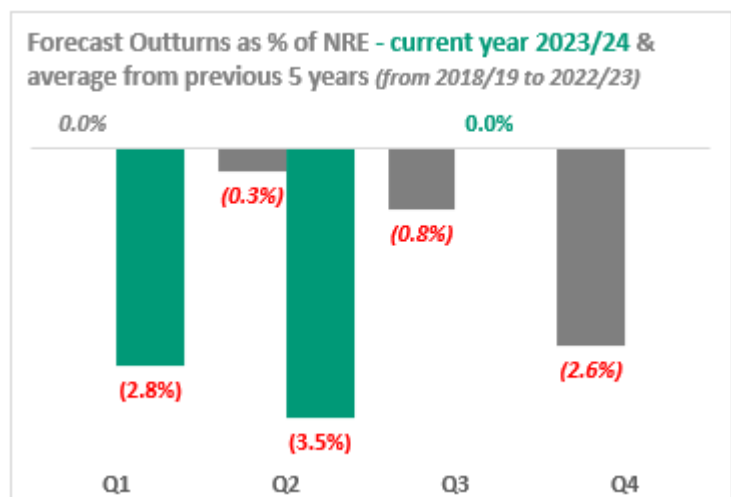
Indicator 3 - Over / underspend relative to net expenditure

2.9. It is important that overspending and underspending are kept under control and that actual expenditure is as close as possible to the levels planned. Inability to accurately forecast and plan expenditure risks creating unforeseen financial pressures and compromises the ability to set a balanced budget.

2.10. The quarterly revenue and capital forecast reports to Cabinet provide the narrative to for the reasons for the performance in year where budgets are forecast to under or overspend. The report details the planned use of reserves, unforeseen expenditure and mitigating actions by management to bring the forecast performance back to budget. Risks that are being management by the Corporate Leadership Team are also highlighted.

2.11. The 2023/24 forecast outturn performance is greater than the previous five years average performance. It should be noted that the current year has experienced increasing interest rates as the Bank of England puts in place measures to reduce inflation as experienced through increased costs in 2022/23. The Council also experienced exceptional financial challenges through the pandemic years of 2020/21 and 2021/22 where additional income was received that could not have been foreseen at the time of budget setting.

2.12. The following chart shows a general trend that the Council’s financial position improves as the year progresses. The average trend indicates prudent estimates used in building the budget alongside sound financial management throughout the year which has enabled less budget to be used to provide services which deliver the corporate strategy.

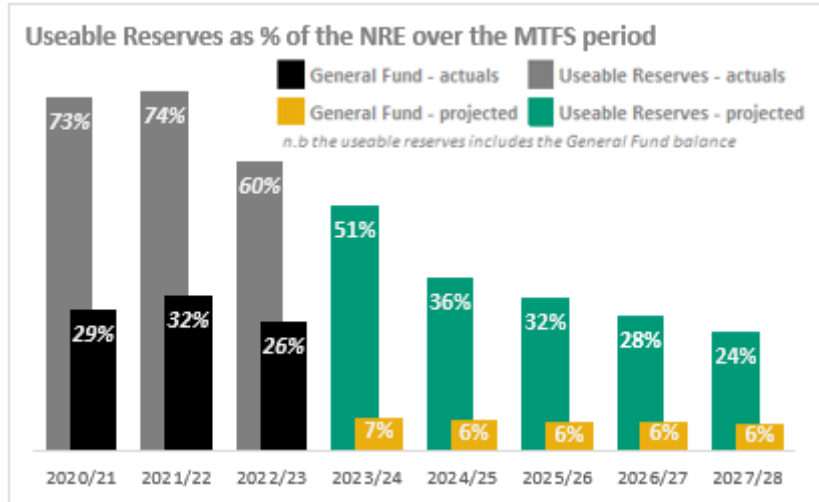


2.13. Indicator trend - Steady over the MTFS period – Amber risk

Indicator 4 - Useable reserves as a percentage of net revenue budget

2.14. Reserves allow financial uncertainty to be managed. Healthy levels of useable reserves are an important safety net to support financial sustainability. As well as being available to fund unexpected funding pressures, useable reserves can fund investments required to implement efficiency savings. The Council's strategic use of reserves is found in Appendix I.

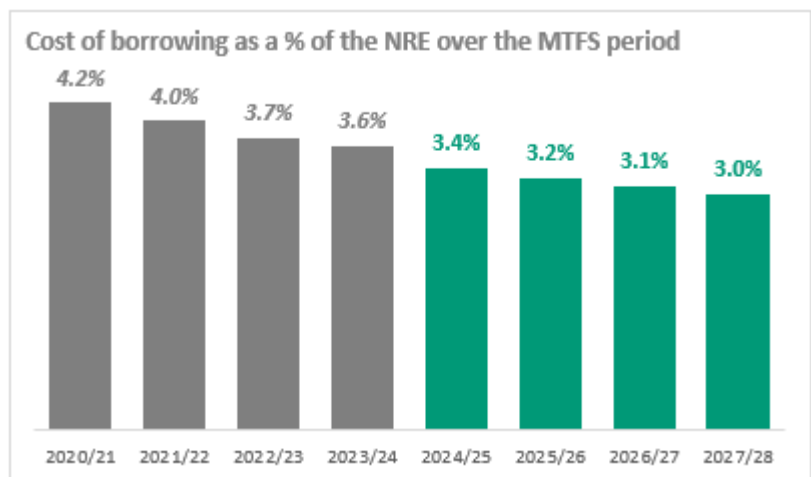
2.15. The chart shows useable reserves as a % of net revenue expenditure in recent years and over the MTFS period and is in line with the Reserves Strategy as the reduction in reserves is primarily due to the investment being made in order for the Council to become financially sustainable, with reserves expected to underpin the budget in 2024/25 only at £1.3m.



2.16. **Indicator trend - Decreasing over the MTFS period – Red risk**

Indicator 5 - The cost of total borrowing as a percentage of net revenue expenditure

2.17. Borrowing can be a valuable source of funding eg to fund large-scale capital projects. However, the cost of repaying borrowing, including interest costs, is ultimately funded from ongoing revenue budgets and can create a long-term commitment. The following chart shows the cost of borrowing as a % of the net revenue expenditure



in recent years and over the MTFS period. The Council currently has no plans to fund capital expenditure via borrowing and which shows through a decreasing proportion spent on servicing the Council's debt compared to all Council expenditure.

2.18. **Indicator trend - Decreasing over the MTFS period – Green risk**

3. Fiscal Indicators

3.1. These fiscal indicators are based on the Statement of Accounts (SoA) information and provide valuable insight into the historical financial performance of Councils. When used to examine trends over time they become increasingly powerful tools to scrutinise the financial decisions of Councils, and to assist this Council in evaluating options for the future.

3.2. These traditional accounting indicators are based on five indicators that the Audit Commission identified in 2009 that put aspects of a Council's finances – such as income, assets, debt and reserves – into context. These ratios, they suggested, could be used by elected members, taxpayers and auditors to scrutinise and challenge Councils' financial management decisions, based on the data in their accounts.

3.3. The following indicators show the Council's performance compared to a set of Councils that form Rutland's nearest neighbours according to CIPFA. The 'Nearest Neighbour' model was developed to aid local authorities in comparative and benchmarking exercises, the models provide a wide range of Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) based socio-economic indicators upon which the specific family group is calculated.

3.4. For this report, the associated Councils are:

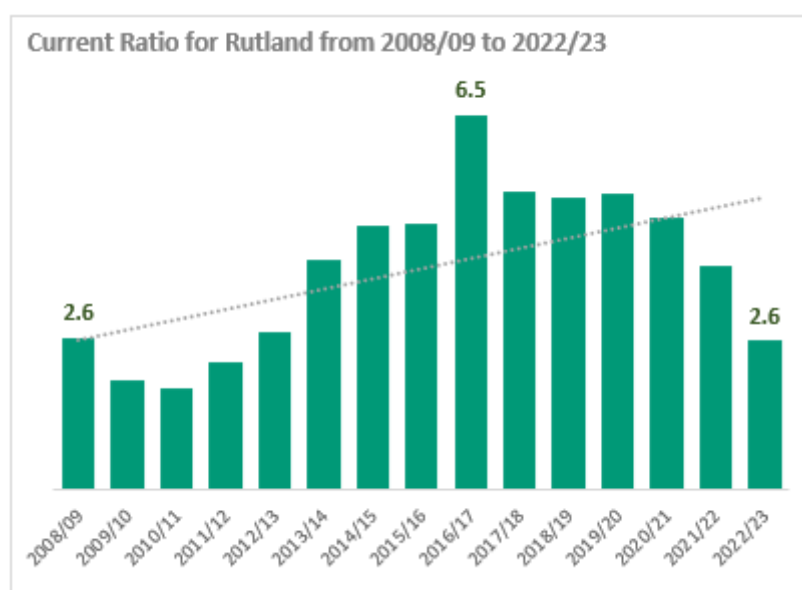
- Bath and North East Somerset
- Bedford Borough
- Central Bedfordshire
- Cheshire East
- Cheshire West & Chester
- Dorset
- East Riding of Yorkshire
- Herefordshire
- North Somerset
- Rutland
- Shropshire
- Solihull
- South Gloucestershire
- West Berkshire
- Wiltshire

Indicator 6 – Current assets to current liabilities

3.5. This ratio measures the relationship between a Council's current assets and its current liabilities. While it is commonly used to examine whether organisations are able to pay their debts in the short term, this is unlikely to be a risk for Councils given their ability to take short-term borrowing.

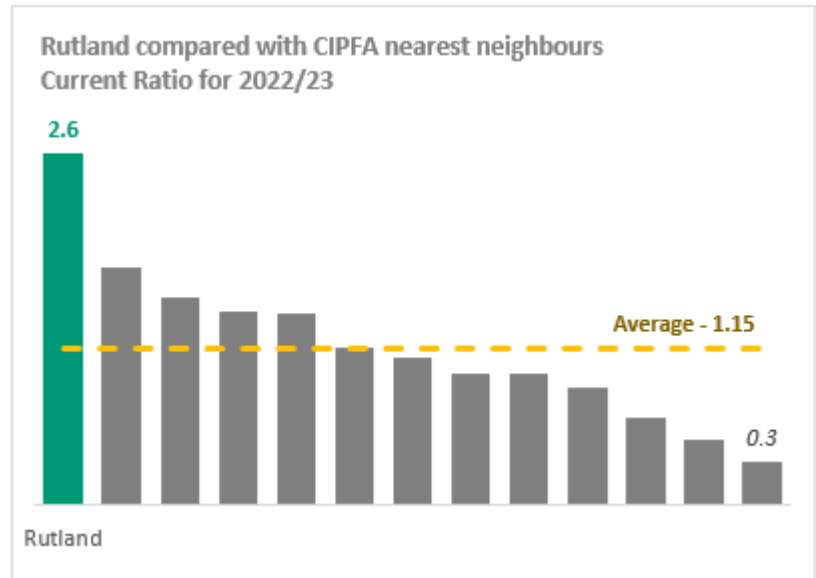
3.6. A current ratio that is in line with the industry average, in this case CIPFA nearest neighbour, or slightly higher is generally considered acceptable. A current ratio that is lower than the industry average may indicate a higher risk of distress or default. Similarly, if a company has a very high current ratio compared with its peer group, it indicates that management may not be using its assets efficiently.

3.7. For the Council the current ratio was 2.6 in 2008/09 and 2.6 in 2022/23. This compares with CIPFA



nearest neighbours group of 1.9 for 2008/09 and 1.0 for 2022/23. For Rutland this ratio has increased over time from 2008/09 to a peak of 6.5 in 2016/17 and is linked to an increase in current assets through an increasing cash balance as reserve balances have increased in order to mitigate the risk of the uncertain Local Government funding environment. Liabilities have increased each year since 2016/17 linked to income received in advance of activity being undertaken such as grants and contributions for capital investment.

3.8. Problems paying creditors, however unlikely, presents a significant reputational risk for Councils. If the ratio is below 1 the Council needs to satisfy itself that arrangements are in place to meet the liabilities. There may be additional costs for Councils that rely on short-term borrowing to pay debts.



3.9. Conversely, Councils with very high ratios should consider whether they are managing their current assets in the most effective way. For example, review their short-term investments and the adequacy of their debt collection arrangements, alongside other aspects of their financial management such as housekeeping and ensure only valid debtor balances remain on the balance sheet or have adequate provisions for bad debts.

3.10. For Rutland the main driver is linked to the cash balances which is linked to the value of reserve balances and having long dated maturity profile of debt which was transferred from Leicestershire County Council on the creation of the Unitary Council. Until this financial year it has remained prohibitive to refinance debt due to the premiums that would be charge through early redemption. However, due to the change in interest rates experienced during 2023/24 opportunities are being explored to redeem debt and with the knowledge of the Council's latest forecast capital programme expenditure and funding plans outlined in the Capital and Treasury Management Strategies.

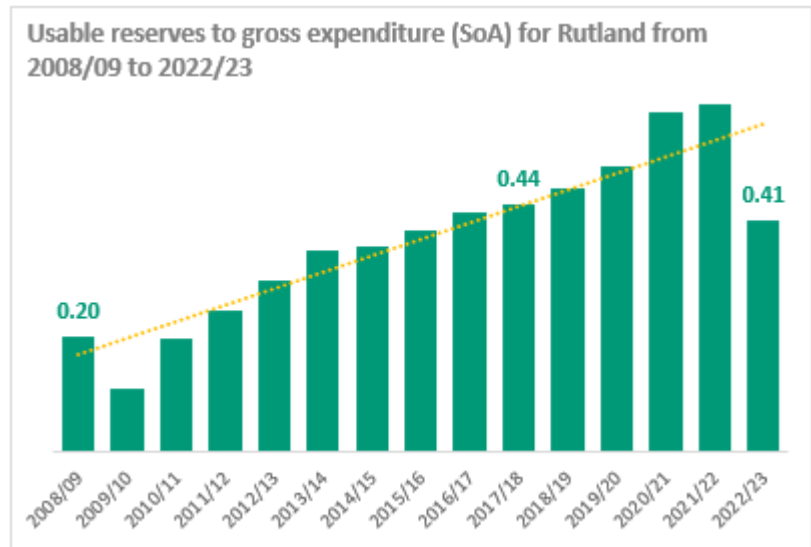
3.11. Indicator trend - Above nearest neighbour average – Amber risk

Indicator 7 – Useable reserves to gross revenue expenditure

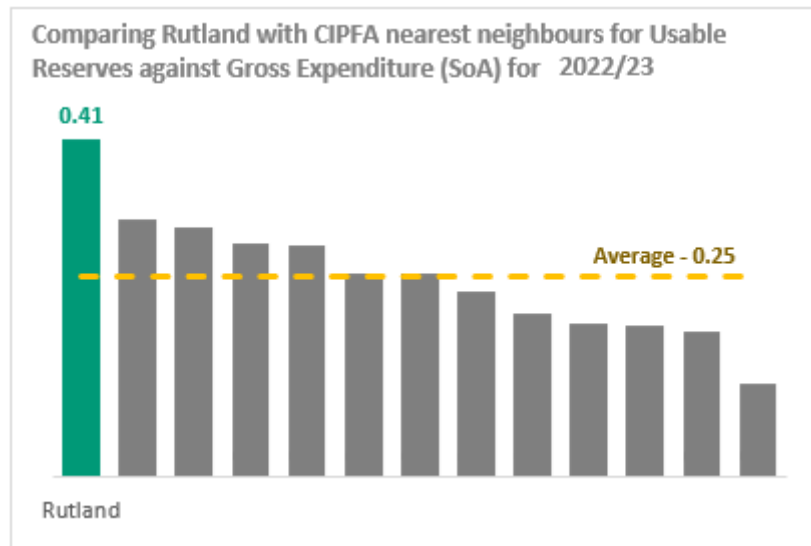
3.12. This ratio measures the relationship between a Council's useable reserves - the money it is retaining to fund future spending commitments and to meet unpredictable variations in spending - and its annual gross revenue expenditure (per the SoA).

3.13. For the Council the usable reserves to gross expenditure has risen from 0.2 in 2008/09 to 0.4 in 2022/23. This compares with CIPFA nearest neighbours' group of 0.2 for 2015/16 and 0.2 for 2022/23.

3.14. For Rutland this increase in ratio is linked to an increase in usable reserves balances over the period, whilst the increase in gross expenditure has increased at a reduced pace in comparison. These values are taken from the Statement of Accounts, and therefore provides an overview trend position so whilst the Gross Expenditure contains capital related expenditure it does provide an indication of consumption of all resources regardless of budgeting requirements between capital and revenue, as capital financing is only a timing issue and mitigations of this on council tax.



3.15. Councils face ongoing financial challenges as they adapt to deliver services at lower cost in response to rising demand and funding reductions. The cost and risks associated with service transformation and uncertainty about future funding, have resulted in some Councils increasing reserves, while others have been using reserves to make up shortfalls between their funding and spending plans.



3.16. Indicator trend - Above nearest neighbour average – Green risk

Indicator 8 – Long term borrowing to tax revenue

3.17. This ratio measures the relationship between a Council's long term borrowing and its tax revenue. When interpreting this ratio, consideration should be given to the reasons for long-term borrowing.

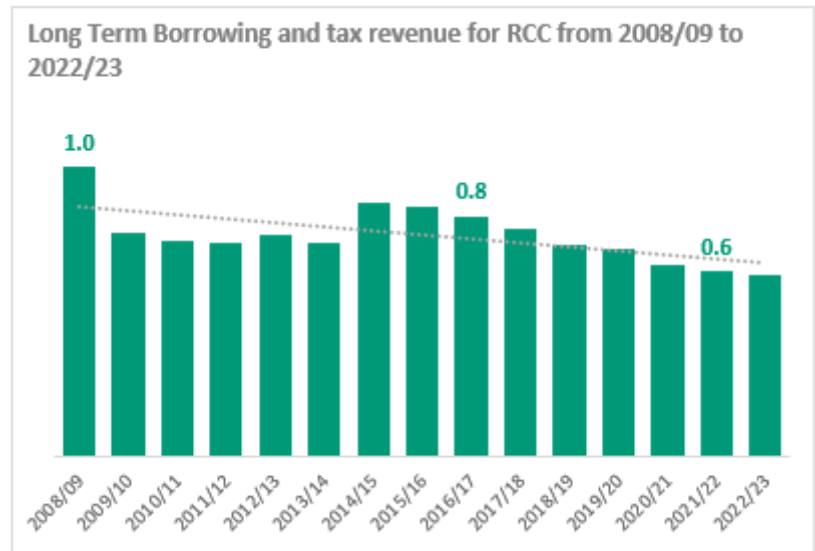
3.18. Councils enter into long-term borrowing to finance large-scale investment in the buildings and equipment they need to deliver high-quality services. The long-term borrowing considered in this ratio includes long-term liabilities related to Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes and finance leases.

3.19. Tax revenue in this analysis includes:

- revenue support grant
- council tax income
- business rates income

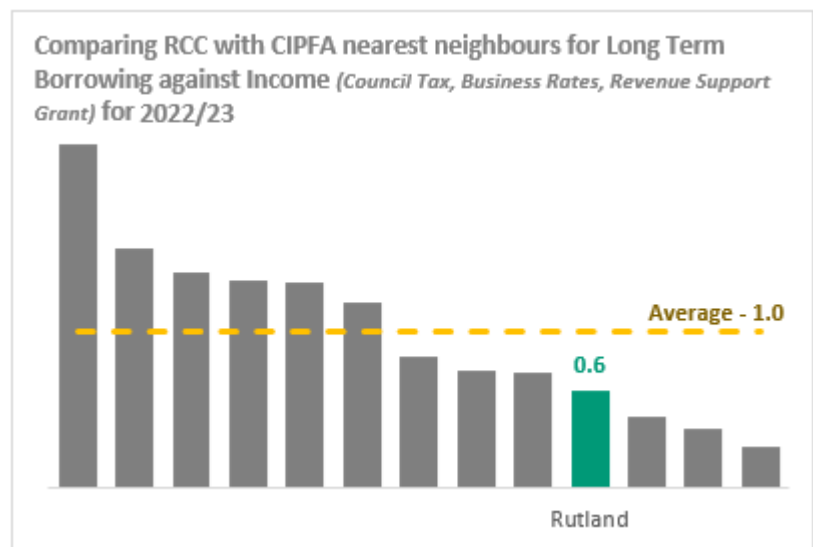
- 3.20. A number of factors have influenced the level of borrowing by Councils over the period, including:
- the freedom to enter into borrowing where this is deemed affordable (Prudential Code)
 - reductions in the funding provided by central government for capital investment
 - the historically low rates of interest which have made borrowing more affordable than at other times

3.21. For the Council the long term borrowing to taxable income has declined from 1.0 in 2008/09 to 0.6 in 2021/22. For Rutland long term borrowing has decreased over the period whilst taxable income has increased over the same period. This compares with CIPFA nearest neighbours' group of 0.9 for 2008/09 and 1.0 for 2022/23.



3.22. Councils need to ensure that their medium term financial strategies take sufficient account of the level of debt repayments to minimise any impact these may have on future spending plans. During most of the period of the analysis undertaken interest rates have been at historically low level, making borrowing more affordable. With interest rates set to rise in the years head future borrowing will be less so.

3.23. All Councils, but especially those with high ratios need to consider the affordability of their borrowing in the light of likely levels of tax revenue. Councils have already experienced reductions in support grant from government with further reductions expected. The retention of business rates created an incentive for Councils to increase income from this source but it has also increased exposure to risks of volatility in business rates yield.



3.24. **Indicator trend - Below nearest neighbour average – Green risk**

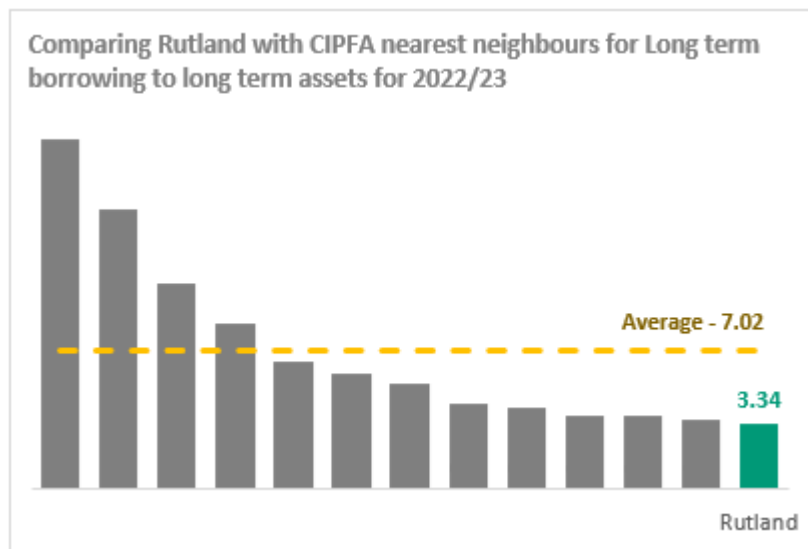
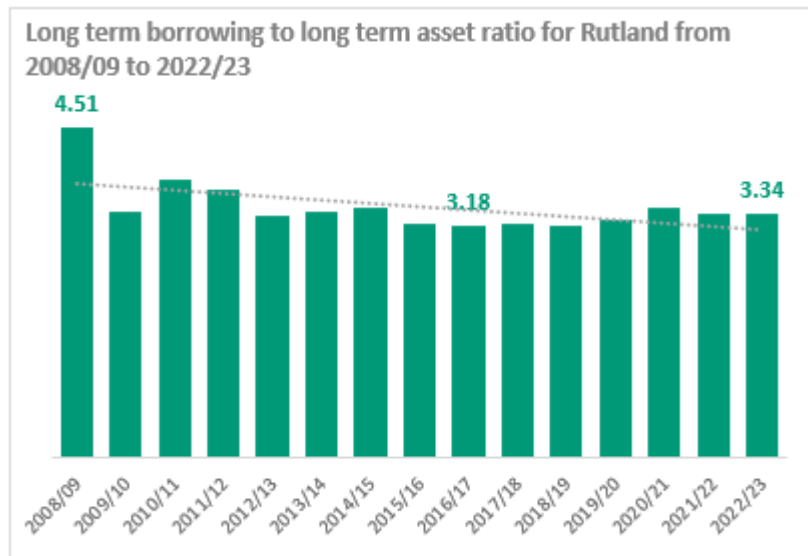
Indicator 9 – Long term borrowing to long term assets

3.25. This ratio measures the relationship between a Council's long-term borrowing (as per SoA) and long-term assets which include:

- fixed assets
- long-term investments
- long-term debts owed to the Council

3.26. The ratio provides insight into what borrowing has funded and the potential need for future borrowing. This is a traditional accounting ratio based on the Council's balance sheet, and for local government comparison to the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) is suggested as a better test of assets to borrowing requirement, with the difference between the two reflecting the internal borrowing to fund asset investment.

3.27. For the Council the long term borrowing to long term assets has increased from 4.51 in 2008/09 to 3.34 in 2022/23. For Rutland both long term borrowing and the value of long term assets remained stable over the period. This is linked to the fact that over 56% of long term assets are infrastructure based ie roads, which do not appreciate in value. This compares with CIPFA nearest neighbours group of 6.8 for 2008/09 and 7.3 for 2022/23. Rutland's performance could be improved by a reduction in long term borrowing, per point 3.10, and until recently this option has been prohibitive due to the cost of premiums required to be paid on the early redemption of debt.



3.28. The level of existing long-term borrowing and the value of long-term assets should both influence a Council's decisions about how to finance its future investment in delivering its services.

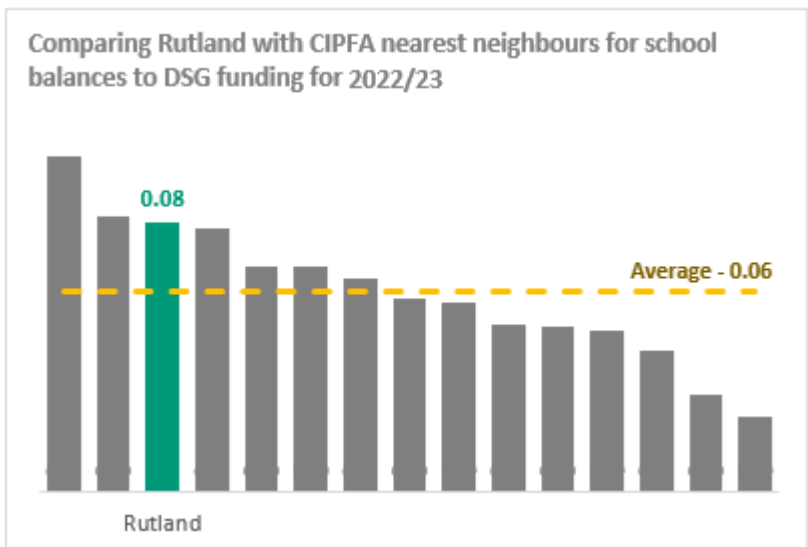
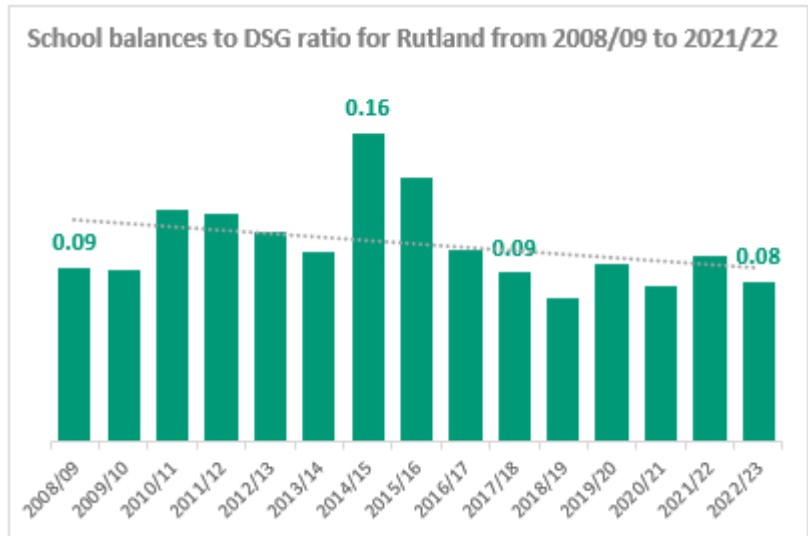
3.29. **Indicator trend - Below nearest neighbour average – Red risk**

Indicator 10 – School balances to dedicated schools grant

3.30. This ratio measures the relationship between the total - positive and negative - balances held by the maintained schools in the Council's area and the level of dedicated schools grant funding received from central government.

3.31. As with the ratio on useable reserves to gross revenue expenditure discussed earlier, this ratio highlights if there is a particularly high or low level of school balances relative to the money provided for spending on education.

3.32. For the Council the school balances to dedicated schools grant has reduced from 0.09 in 2008/09 to 0.08 in 2022/23. However, whilst this appears to be a relatively stable position school balances rose and peaked in 2014/15 and have generally declined in the years since. For Rutland as the DSG funding reduced school balances also decreased over the same period. This does not factor in the DSG deficit balance held on the Council's balance sheet.



3.33. Generally, a Council should consider whether there are specific reasons why schools are retaining particularly high balances and whether there is more that can be done to help schools manage their budget effectively, especially if General Fund is being used to support school related services. Through local schemes for financing schools the Council may introduce mechanisms to recover excessive uncommitted balances ' where some level of redistribution would support improved provision across a local area'. These are options that will be investigated through 2024/25.

3.34. **Indicator trend - Above nearest neighbour average – Amber risk**

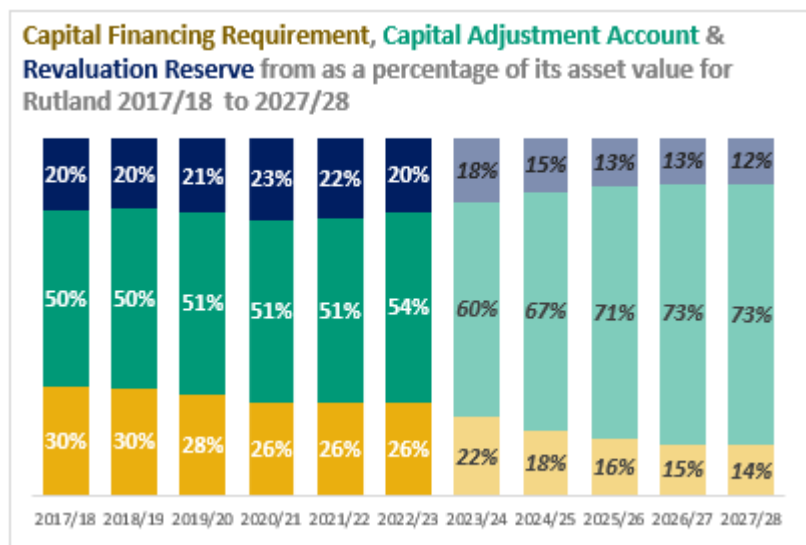
4. Capital Investment Indicators

- 4.1. A well-managed capital programme is a critical contributor to the overall financial position of the Council and in the delivery of excellent services to the residents and businesses of Rutland. As such the capital programme is a key factor to the achievement of a sustainable Council in the longer term. An effective Capital Strategy and a strengthened governance and control framework supports the Council in achieving this.
- 4.2. Depending upon the funding an investment in capital assets can create a long-term burden on revenue budgets through capital financing or the net treasury management expenditure. The revenue budget is therefore based on:
- interest charges – existing borrowing
 - MRP - (minimum revenue provision – repayment of debt principal)
 - interest charges – new borrowing
 - interest receipts – from cash flow surplus's
- 4.3. The Council is required to produce Prudential Indicators for both capital and treasury strategies. The prudential indicators consider the affordability and impact of capital expenditure plans and set out the Council's overall capital framework. Each prudential indicator either summarises the expected activity or introduces limits upon the activity and reflects the underlying capital programme. However, it is also note worthy that those Council's that have issued S114s all had prudential indicators, and therefore having Prudential Indicators alone do not create financial sustainability, but form a basket of indicators, as included in this Appendix, which will provide an overview of all financial trends.

Indicator 11 – The direction of travel for the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) as a percentage of its asset value over the medium-term period

- 4.4. The Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) measures a vital component of an authority's capital strategy, the amount of capital spending that has not yet been financed by capital receipts, capital grants or contributions from revenue income. It measures the underlying need to borrow for a capital purpose, although this borrowing may not necessarily take place externally. Therefore, it indicates a Council's debt position

- 4.5. The following chart shows the direction of travel for the Council since 2017/18 and projected up to 2027/28 based on this MTFs and an assumption on appreciation rates based on recent performance of Long-Term Assets on the balance sheet. It shows that the CFR is projected to decrease over a ten-year period from 2017/18 to 2027/28 from 30% to 14%, and therefore the debt position for the



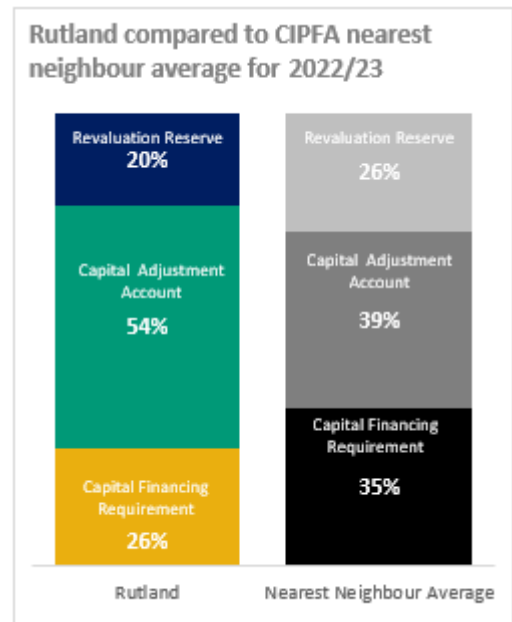
Council is also likely to decrease leading to a lesser burden on revenue budgets to

finance this debt (interest and MRP). However, as noted in 3.10 and 3.27, this would be dependent upon refinancing the Council's debt due to the long date maturity that is attached to the existing loans.

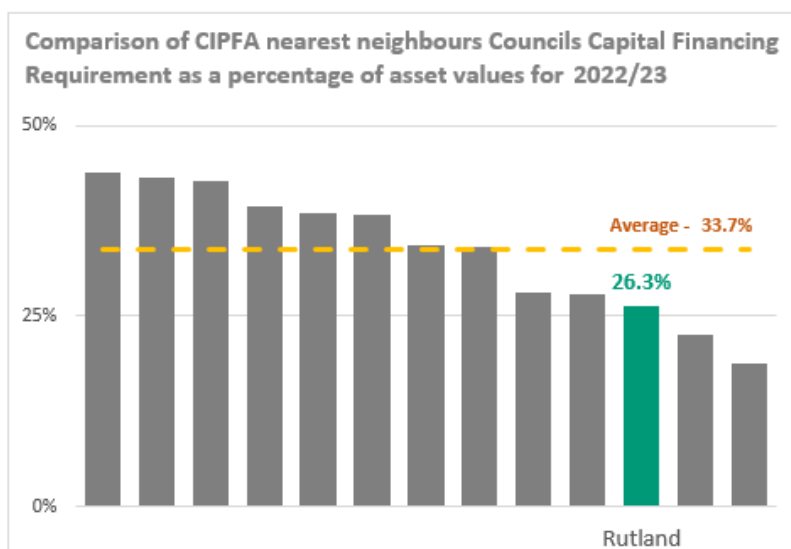
- 4.6. It also shows that appreciation for the assets on the Council balance sheet is likely to decrease from 20% to 12%. This is based on trends only and has not been modelled using factors from expert valuers. However, it may which suggest that the capital investments that are made are unlikely to appreciate over the same period based on historic performance as expenditure is incurred on assets do not appreciate.
- 4.7. Finally the chart shows that the amount of alternative funding of the capital programme from grants, third party contributions and capital receipts is to increase from 50% in 2017/18 to 73% in 2027/28. This estimate is based on the Council undertaking investment in its assets using third party funds or capital receipts and is subject to assets being actively managed as part of the Asset Management Strategies and Plans.
- 4.8. **Indicator trend - Decreasing over the MTFs period – Green risk**

Indicator 12 - The Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) as a percentage of its asset value is no greater than the nearest neighbour average

- 4.9. A comparison of the Council's CFR position with nearest neighbours would indicate whether capital investment is in line with service provision delivered by Councils of a similar size and service mix. If the CFR is greater than the average, then a review as to what is driving this difference should be undertaken and whether it is affordable in the longer term and confirmation on delivering a return on the investment assessed.
- 4.10. The Council, for 2022/23 has performed better than its nearest neighbour counterparts as to the impact of the capital investment on its balance sheet, as shown in the following chart.
- 4.11. A Council can only capitalise expenditure that meets the definition of an asset under proper accounting practice, that is expenditure on an asset that will provide the authority with control of the resulting economic benefit or service potential and has a measurable cost.
- 4.12. However, for Local Authorities, under the Local Government Act 2003, a Council can fund particular items of revenue expenditure from capital under statute if the expenditure is capital in nature such as enhancing an asset but the asset is not owned by the Council ie a Community Centre, or a school that has converted to an academy, or if approved by the Secretary of State a Capitalisation Direction ie equal pay compensation, or funding of transformational change. Therefore, it is possible for a Council to incur debt (a liability) without an associated asset on the balance sheet.



4.13. The chart shows the Council's debt position as a percentage of the value of assets 26.3%, and how this is below the average 33.7% for its group of nearest neighbour Councils as at 2022/23.



4.14. **Indicator trend - Below nearest neighbour average – Green risk**

Indicator 13 – Risks impacting on the cost of total borrowing as a percentage of Net Revenue Budget

4.15. This indicator looks in more detail at the risks inherent in the capital programme over the MTFS period. The direction of travel for these inherent risks of the capital programme compared to the year before are considered. Mitigation and management action can be put in place to help manage these risks and therefore impact on revenue budgets through increased governance and control measures and the Council does this through the Capital Programme Board which will commence in 2024/25 following the combination of the two previous asset management boards.

4.16. Based on the analysis of the following risks the trend suggests there is an increased risk of the capital programme impacting on revenue budgets over the MTFS period.

Direction of travel (DoT) based on comparison of values from the previous year									
IBP & MTFS Year	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total ↑	Total ↓	Total ↔	Risk Basis
DoT - Capital Programme	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	2	3	0	increasing capital expenditure = greater risk exposure based on value
DoT - Capital Receipts	↑	↑	↓	↔	↓	2	2	1	capital receipt target not achieved = no or reduced capital scheme OR increased borrowing
DoT - Grants & Contributions	↑	↑	↓	↓	↔	2	2	1	decreasing external funding may lead to additional borrowing however this is not the strategy
DoT - Borrowing	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔	0	0	5	there is no reliance on borrowing built into the capital programme or MTFS
Increased risk	2	2	1	1	0				

4.17. **Indicator trend - Steady over the MTFS period – Green risk**

Indicator 14 - The cost of total borrowing as a percentage of net revenue expenditure

4.18. Reference to this indicator has been included here as it relates to capital financing, however it was previously included as Indicator 5 as part of the financial sustainability indicators, 2.17. This shows the cost of borrowing forecast to reduce from 3.65% of net revenue expenditure as per the current financial year 2023/24 to 3.0% in 2027/28.

4.19. Indicator trend - Decreasing over the MTFS period – Green risk

5. Conclusion

- 5.1. Following the advice of their S151 Officer, Councils make local decisions in response to their local circumstances and plans. All elected members, regardless of political party and role within the Council, are responsible for ensuring that the Council budget balances and investment and expenditure decisions are appropriate for local circumstances.
- 5.2. These financial health indicators demonstrate the decisions of past Council members, with the resulting financial performance providing the foundations for decisions made today. All members are accountable to taxpayers for the decisions they make, both today and in the future through achievement of financial sustainability over the period.
- 5.3. In summary the 14 indicators of financial health for Rutland for the MTFS period suggest that the Council is taking appropriate measures to deliver a financially sustainable position.
- 5.4. There are indicators where improvements can be made such as the level of debt with the proactive management of current assets, and opportunities will be investigated in more detail during 2024/25.
- 5.5. Risks remain for the level of savings that are required over the MTFS. However, as outlined in this MTFS the Council has incorporated a transformation agenda in order to provide services within the funding envelope forecast. Whilst the immediate future year relies on reserves to underpin the position, the future years do not. Investment from reserves is being used to fund activity that creates financial sustainability or to effectively manage risks that are inherent in the activities of the Council and its financial operating environment.
- 5.6. The assumptions being used in the capital programme and associated capital and treasury related strategies provide a financial position that does not create additional revenue burdens.

Financial Risk Register

1. **Context**

- 1.1. Local Government has become increasingly exposed to risk and instability within the system.
- 1.2. Most of the financial risks identified are inherent, including the requirement to deliver savings plans, management of budgets, which

relate to demand led services, and assumptions in respect of the level of resources receivable through Council Tax, Business Rates and Government grants. In addition, there are rising external factors creating an additional layer of financial risk such as the rising cost of the national living wage, the impact of inflation and increasing energy prices.

Risk area	Description of the risk	Risk mitigation
<p>Level of Reserves</p> <p>221</p>	<p>As contained in Section 7 the Robustness Statement and the Reserves Strategy in Appendix I, sets out that the Council has a reducing balance of reserves.</p> <p>A risk to the financial sustainability of the organisation over the medium term is if reserve balances are continually used to underpin the day to day expenditure of Council activities.</p> <p>If the Council is unable to delivery savings to the timescales and values outlined in this MTFS, and is unable to mitigate during the year then reserve funding will be required to fund these delays and shortfalls.</p>	<p>The Council has adopted an enhanced budget setting process where Service Ambitions have been designed within an affordability envelope. This is in recognition that the current delivery of services is unaffordable and transformational change is required over the MTFS period. Reserves are being used to fund activity that will directly lead to savings as identified in the 12 transformation workstreams and through creation of a more modern Council in its operation and adoption of more modern working practices.</p> <p>The Council adopted a Reserves Strategy in September 2023, and has been updated and included in this MTFS document. This document outlines how reserves will now be used to fund investments to fund activities that in turn lead to financial sustainability and / or to mitigate risks inherent in the services the Council delivers. This MTFS outlines that only in 2024/25 are reserves required to balance the budget, which is in line with the Financial Sustainability Strategy approved by Council in November 2022.</p> <p>Reserves will only be drawn down one activity that requires funding ready to be taken, and a commitment against reserves shown until this point. Use will be monitored through the regular financial reporting cycle.</p> <p>The Council has considered these risks and there is provision within the Risk Management Contingency budget over the MTFS period and through the RAG risk rating of the savings plans a budget risk reserve has been allocated within the Financial Sustainability Strategy reserve.</p>

Risk area	Description of the risk	Risk mitigation
Level of one-off (non-repeatable) savings	A Council may rely on savings that are one-off in nature which puts at risk medium to longer term financial sustainability.	Savings have been planned over the MTFS period in alignment with the enhanced budget setting process. This has facilitated a shift in focus from making savings one year at time, and enabled strategic use of reserve funding to invest in activities that will lead to savings over the medium to long term.
Service delivery demand led services	The Council provides services in a number of areas where the need for support lies outside the Council's direct control, for example in children's, adult social care and homelessness. Demographic growth and demand pressures present financial risk for the Council over the medium term.	<p>The Council continues to take measures to review and modify its service provision to respond to increasing demand for services, through more cost-effective operating models and working with client groups and partners to manage demand for services. This approach underpins the transformational based approach to the savings identified in this MTFS.</p> <p>Regular monitoring, forecasting, and reporting of financial and service performance and anticipated pressures will be undertaken to ensure that corrective management action is taken to control expenditure within the approved budget. Savings plans are based on intervention and prevention, aiming to reduce need and service demand.</p>
Savings delivery (Current and New proposals)	The achievement of a financial sustainable budget across the MTFS period is reliant upon the successful delivery of the agreed savings plans.	<p>The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) consider the delivery of savings in two corporate boards monthly; the Risk and Finance Board and Corporate Project Management Board. The information and reports considered at these boards enables CLT to track delivery of savings and projects, taking remedial action where necessary.</p> <p>Delivery of savings and projects is then reported in the Finance performance reports to Cabinet and Scrutiny. Where changes in the operating environment have meant that the original savings plans are no longer achievable these are reviewed and updated as part of the MTFS budget setting process.</p>
Income	<p>Cost of provision of service outstrips returns or a reduced level of sales.</p> <p>There is a risk from the non-payment of invoices from our suppliers.</p>	<p>Delivery of planned income generation (and savings) is tracked through monthly financial reports and reported to CLT, Cabinet and Scrutiny. Programme and project governance will require recovery plans to be prepared where projects are identified as varying adversely from plan.</p> <p>The challenging economic environment has increased the risk on the recovery of debt. An assessment of the Council's bad debt has been undertaken and a provision made accordingly to mitigate the risk of the Council being able to recover this debt in full in the future. The Council</p>

Risk area	Description of the risk	Risk mitigation
		monitors the debt position and takes action to ensure payment of invoices.
Business rates 223	<p>The Council will benefit from any growth in business rates but also shares the risk of volatility of collecting business rates, changes to business rates during the financial year and administration costs associated with collecting business rates.</p> <p>The government's 'Check, challenge and appeal' system has reduced the level of open appeals however there is a provision set aside for appeals by the Council, and there is a risk that this may not be sufficient</p> <p>Business Rates collection rates</p> <p>Business Rates reforms have been further postponed. At present it is not clear how this could impact on the Councils funding levels</p>	<p>The finance team aligns forecasts using an approach with planning and revenue and benefit colleagues to monitor business growth as part of the budget setting process and at regular intervals during the financial year. On a monthly basis dashboard reports are made available to the s151 officer and the finance team to monitor business rates income.</p> <p>The Council has reviewed the level of Business Rates provision it holds to mitigate the financial impact of valuation change and appeals.</p> <p>Collection rate is on target and recovery action takes place on a timely basis. This is monitored by officers throughout the year and report to CLT.</p> <p>Officers will feedback to all consultations, to ensure all Rutland's views are communicated and considered. As information becomes available officers will model the financial impacts, and ensure the budget reflects the appropriate funding levels.</p>
Council Tax and Local Council Tax Support (LCTS)	<p>Non-collection rates increase beyond the budget assumptions.</p> <p>An increase in the levels of Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) claim levels, beyond budget assumptions. The current challenging economic climate, with the Cost of Living crisis, could increase the level of LCTS claims the Council has received, due to an increase in the levels of hardship being experienced.</p>	<p>Officers monitor the collection rate regularly and quarterly dashboard reports are made available to the s151 officer and the CLT to monitor council tax income collection and tax base growth. The Council will take necessary action to ensure payment of bills and has been mindful of challenges facing households.</p> <p>The Council will revise future year forecasts of council tax income accordingly.</p> <p>The LCTS case loads are being monitored by officers alongside the use of the Council's additional support funds of the Hardship, Discretionary, and Financial Crisis Funds.</p>
Local Government Reforms	<p>The Funding reforms (also known as the Fairer funding Review) presents a risk for the Council as it means there is uncertainty surrounding its future funding levels. Ministers have indicated that this review will form part of future proposals post a General Election in 2024.</p> <p>Government introduces new burdens for Local Authorities for example waste collection and disposal, and adult social care</p>	<p>Officers are continuing to monitor all announcements, publications and consultations from DLUHC and from Local Government advisors. This will include networking and attending events to keep abreast of the latest information.</p> <p>Officers will feedback to consultations, to ensure all Rutland's views are communicated and considered. As information becomes available officers will model the financial impacts, and ensure the budget reflects</p>

Risk area	Description of the risk	Risk mitigation
	<p>reforms. These burdens may or may not come with additional funding from government, the new expenditure exceeds funding available, or funding is provided but reduces over time which creates a new service expenditure burden.</p>	<p>the appropriate funding levels. This will include using the modelling tools which are available to us from PIXEL and the LGA.</p> <p>Officers will consider if there are opportunities for additional fees and charges, and other income sources to reduce the burden from new services.</p>
<p>Partnership working / contractual commitments</p> <p>224</p>	<p>The Council outsources or contracts out a large proportion of services on a long-term basis to third party organisations.</p> <p>There is a risk that the council could be subject to increased costs from these contracts due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General inflation • Increasing salary costs • Fuel / energy price rises • Care Market sustainability • Pressures within the Local Government neighbouring authorities where services are procured <p>or alternatively have little flexibility to generate savings within the current budget due to the level accounted for via these contracts. The terms of the contracts may also restrict this.</p>	<p>The Council reviews all contracts with a view to achieving improved value for money through strengthened contract management arrangements and negotiation of variation to services delivered. The Council's Contract Procedure Rules requires that all contracts have a named contract manager for the duration of the contract.</p> <p>The Council will continue to work closely with its partner organisations to deliver the best services to its residents in the most effective and efficient manner</p>
<p>Capital</p>	<p>The proposed capital programme is partially reliant on third party contributions and grant allocations. These funding streams are not always guaranteed, such that they could be impacted by a downturn in development or reduced opportunity for central government funding.</p>	<p>The capital programme is monitored and reported by officers within the monthly financial performance reports. The Council is updating the Terms of Reference for the officer led Capital Programme Board. The Board will meet regularly to review the progress of schemes contained in the capital programme and evaluate new proposals or opportunities available to the Council. The larger capital schemes will fall under the Council's programme management framework and therefore have associated governance structures to further mitigate the risk to the Council eg the Levelling Up Fund programme.</p> <p>All capital investment proposals require a business case which assesses funding options and associated risks and mitigating actions.</p> <p>Developer contributions, such as that within a section 106 agreement, are to be realised in line with approved policy and legal agreements.</p> <p>Grant bids to be worked up by the budget / project managers in partnership with the finance team, in line with previous successful bid submissions.</p>

Risk area	Description of the risk	Risk mitigation
	<p>The capital programme is also reliant on capital receipts to fund some schemes.</p>	<p>Achievement of capital receipts is monitored as part of the financial performance reports that are considered by CLT, Cabinet and Scrutiny. The finance team receive information on the latest forecasts for sale completion, estimated level of receipt, and the market environment operating under from the property team. The Asset Review work undertaken as part of the transformational workstreams will identify further opportunities as part of the asset management plan.</p>
<p>Economic (Treasury) risk</p>	<p>Inflation – increases above forecasts assumed within the budget.</p> <p>Interest rates - a change in interest rates could impact on borrowing costs which may in part be offset by increased investment interest receipts.</p>	<p>The inflation position and forecasts will be reviewed, and the impact monitored through regular finance performance reporting. Mitigating actions will be taken accordingly to manage activity within the budgets set.</p> <p>The Council is not reliant on borrowing to fund the capital programme and therefore the risk exposure to rising interest rates is mitigated. The Council current debt portfolio is based on fixed rate loans so there is no exposure to interest rate rises from variable rate loans.</p>
<p>Financial Resilience</p>	<p>There is a risk that the Council's financial resilience is put under strain to withstand the combined pressures of reducing grant funding and the increased cost and demand pressures.</p>	<p>The MTFS report sets out that the Council still has a challenge ahead, in order to achieve financial sustainability in the future. Savings plans outlined within this MTFS are achievable albeit challenging. The use of reserves to underpin the budget is now only planned for 2024/25.</p> <p>The Council has reviewed its budget setting process and adopted an enhanced approach that puts service delivery at the heart of how it spends its money. Service Ambitions have been designed within an affordability envelope meaning that longer term savings are captured and balanced against the need for short term savings.</p> <p>This MTFS also includes a set of financial health indicators so that Council is able to make decisions on the MTFS based on the knowledge of previous Council decisions. The indicators show that the financial risk to the Council is the yearly funding of the revenue budget, with a relatively healthy balance sheet position to support ongoing achievement of saving plans.</p>
<p>Climate change</p>	<p>The impacts of climate change in the UK and around the world are clear and demand urgent action. Climate change that impacts lives and livelihoods and the reshaping of landscapes and communities is already being experienced.</p>	<p>The Council's refreshed draft Corporate Strategy proposes Tackling Climate Change as a key priority for the Council. Under this priority the following objectives are planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce carbon emissions and adapt to the impact of climate change. • Increase biodiversity in the County. • Further increase recycling rates and reduce levels of waste.

Risk area	Description of the risk	Risk mitigation
	<p>The Council is committed to mitigate this risk to residents, businesses and stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve public transport links and opportunities for greener forms of travel. <p>This MTFS includes service investments to aid the delivery of this key priority which will be monitored as part of the regular finance and corporate performance reporting.</p>
Recruitment & retention	<p>The Council is experiencing challenges with recruitment and retention in some critical roles. This is not a specific risk to the Council with a number of influencing factors such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations from an agile workforce post the pandemic • Succession planning seen less of a priority in the sector as whole has created a knowledge gaps as staff retire • Pay rates • Competition between local authorities • Public sector less attractive through reducing budgets <p>The loss of staff mean there is a risk to the delivery of the Corporate Strategy and performance of key services may suffer</p>	<p>The Council monitors and reports on this risk as part of the Strategic Risk Register. There are a series of actions to mitigate this risk (see latest Risk Register considered at Audit & Risk Committee – December 2023, Item 10).</p> <p>The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) consider the delivery and impact of services on a monthly basis through finance reporting. The information and reports considered track financial performance, which is directly linked to performance, with the latter considered quarterly as part of the Performance reporting also considered by CLT, Cabinet and Scrutiny.</p>
DSG Deficit on the High Needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)	<p>The Council has a deficit balance on the DSG estimated to be £1.9m by 31 March 2024. From 1 April 2020 a new regulation was introduced that enabled any deficit on the Schools budget to be transferred to the Dedicated Schools Grant Adjustment Account which had the effect of separating the schools budget deficits from the local authority General Fund until March 2026. There is a risk that the School's deficit continues to increase and schools are not able to make good the deficit through application of the DSG funding when the override is removed in March 2026.</p>	<p>The Council has set aside funds in the reserve to cover the costs of the cash flow of funding this deficit.</p> <p>The Council is part of the Department of Education's Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme which is providing support to aid the Council in activities that reduce the demands of SEN to create a financial sustainable system which it is not at present.</p> <p>The Council has previously made provision to support this deficit from General Fund balances. However, this requires approval from the Secretary of State as it is cross subsidy of government departments and therefore not a guaranteed solution.</p>
The Local Plan	<p>The Council voted in September 2021 to restart its Local Plan process and set aside £1.4m with further contribution of £0.62m to increase the fund to £2.02m.</p> <p>There is a risk that without the Local Plan in place that the Council's exposure to planning appeals is increased.</p>	<p>The Council has ringfenced reserves of £1.7m remaining, which will be drawn down in line with the profile to fund the costs of producing the New Local Plan and the additional resources required due to not having a 5 year land supply.</p> <p>The Council follows the local plan policy to ensure that decisions are appropriately made. Where planning appeals are successful the</p>

Risk area	Description of the risk	Risk mitigation
		Council will mitigate any potential cost pressures this causes, and where necessary will drawn down on reserve funding.

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Reserves Strategy & Policy

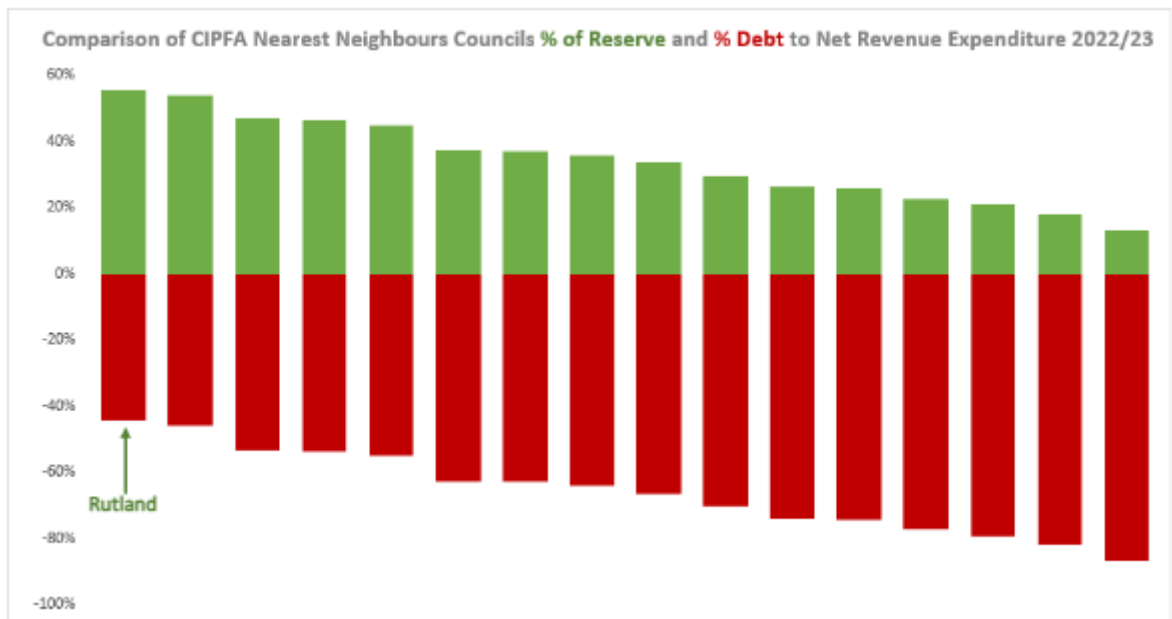
1. Background and Context

- 1.1. Sections 32 and 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 require councils to consider the level of reserves when setting a budget requirement. Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Financial Officer (Section 151 Officer) to report formally on the adequacy of proposed reserves when setting a budget requirement. This is completed at the Council through the 'Section 25 Report of the Director of Finance' contained within the Integrated Budget Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The accounting treatment for reserves is set out in the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting.
- 1.2. In March 2023 CIPFA issued their Bulletin 13 – Local Authority Reserves and Balances (Updated), and replaces the previous guidance provided in LAAP Bulletin No.99. Compliance with the guidance is recommended in CIPFA's Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government. In response to the above requirements, this strategy sets-out the Council's approach for compliance with the statutory regime and relevant non-statutory guidance for the Council's cash backed usable reserves.
- 1.3. All reserves will be categorised as per the Local Authority Accounting Practice guidance, into appropriate groupings.
- 1.4. Within the Statement of Accounts for General Fund Earmarked Reserves, all individual reserves are reported and include a description of the purpose of the reserve.
- 1.5. Earmarked reserves will be reviewed regularly as part of the in-year monitoring process and annually as part of the budget setting process, to determine whether the original purpose for the creation of the reserve still exists and whether or not the reserves should be released in full or in part or require topping up based on known / expected calls upon them. Particular attention will be paid in the annual review to those reserves whose balances have not moved over a two-year period, other than the General Fund, for further detail see Section 4 management and governance.

2. Overview

- 2.1. The Council will maintain:
 - a general fund reserve
 - a number of earmarked reserves in relation to specific purposes
- 2.2. The level of the general reserve is a matter for the Council to determine having had regard to the advice of the S151 Officer. Due to the prevailing economic uncertainties facing the Council's finances, the S151 Officer recommends aligning the use of reserves with their strategic use to achieve financial sustainability over the MTFS period. This enables assessment of their use and increases or decreases in fund balances to be transparently reported and shown in context of achieving the Council's objectives.
- 2.3. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) recommend that the following factors should be taken into account when considering the level of reserves and balances:
 1. Assumptions regarding inflation and interest rates
 2. Estimates of the level and timing of capital receipts
 3. The capacity to manage in-year demand led pressures
 4. Ability to activate contingency plans if planned savings cannot be delivered

5. Risks inherent in any new partnerships
 6. Financial standing of the authority (level of borrowing, debt outstanding etc.)
 7. The authority's record of budget management and ability to manage in year budget pressures
 8. Virement and year-end procedures in relation to under and overspends
 9. The general financial climate
 10. The adequacy of insurance arrangements
- 2.4. Each Council must make their own decisions about the level of reserves they hold, taking into account all of the issues referred to above. An assessment with regards to these factors and the level of reserves held is included in the Budget document and forms part of 'Section 25 Report of the Director of Finance', and an initial assessment included as part of the introduction of this Strategy.
- 2.5. As at 31 March 2023, which is the latest set of meaningful data comparisons, Rutland is ranked 1 out of 16 CIPFA Nearest Neighbour Councils (previously ranked 4) in terms of the percentage of reserves held as a proportion of their budget. The range of reserves held as a percentage of budget is wide; the lowest authority at 20%, up to the highest, Rutland, at 71%. It is worth looking at reserves alongside borrowing, as borrowing can be used to protect reserves, or reserves used to reduce borrowing. This is an area that is to be reviewed alongside the fiscal health indicators of the Council, Appendix G. The data referred to is captured in the chart below:



- 2.6. This strategy is based on the establishment of six key reserves / funds which will provide a balance between funds required for investment to bring financial sustainability to the Council alongside funds for risk mitigation activity. These reserves / funds are detailed in the following sections, and in summary are:
- General Fund
 - Financial Sustainability Strategy Reserve & Budget Risk Reserve
 - Risk Reserve
 - Departmental Reserves & Capital Investment Fund
 - Innovation Fund
 - Process Improvement Fund
- 2.7. The level of the general fund reserve will be a matter of judgement which will take account of the specific risks identified through the various corporate processes. A risk assessment of the General Fund will be made each year as part of the Section 25

Report of the Strategic Director of Resources (S151 officer). The level will be expressed as a percentage of the general funding requirement (to provide an indication of financial context). As part of the Financial Sustainability Strategy the Council agreed that it should hold as a minimum general reserve an equivalent to 5.5% of the Council's Net Revenue Expenditure, or £3m by the end of the strategy period. This approach and value remains reasonable given 2.8.

- 2.8. A Risk Reserve will be set up take account of specific risks to be covered through earmarked reserves. An assessment as at the end of December 2023 is provided in Appendix A. This Risk Reserve will provide the Council with approximately 2.5 to 3 times the value of risk identified using the risks factors listed in 2.3. These factors have been allocated a financial value based on an assessment of the risk by the S151 officer and a multiplier applied. The multiplier reflects the approximate timings to mitigate the financial impact of the risk once materialised by proactive management, as outlined below:

Stage	Financial risk cover	Action
Stop risk activity & reduce financial risk	Between 2.5 – 3 times the financial risk identified	Proactive management action to cease risk exposure
Reduce financial risk further to minimal activity		
Activity back in line with budget assumptions		

- 2.9. This Strategy enables the Council to manage its reserves based on key funds which support the strategic financial approach over the medium term, see point 6.2.
- 2.10. This report is being considered as part of the Integrated Budget Plan 2024/25 and MTFS 2024/25 – 207/28, with Council approval planned for February 2024 with regular review as part of the in-year monitoring process.

3. Strategic investment funds

- 3.1. The Council continues to face a shortfall in funding compared to expenditure demands and must annually review its priorities to address the shortfall. This MTFS contains some challenging saving targets, and in order to become financially sustainability further transformational change will be required over the medium to long term.
- 3.2. To achieve financial sustainability, the Council will need to invest in a range of innovative and transformational activities in order to reduce future costs of service delivery. Two funds were designated to fund such activity:
- the Innovation Fund
 - the Process Improvement Fund

The Innovation Fund

- 3.3. The balance on the Innovation Fund has been determined by assuming an approximate payback period of one year on the required investment (see formula below). For this purpose, the Transformational Savings of £4.0m identified in the MTFS has been used as the determining factor for the value of the reserve.

$$\frac{\text{Realisation of Savings}}{\text{(Years / Months)}} = \frac{\text{Investment Costs}}{\text{Value of Savings}}$$

- 3.4. Use of the Fund will be based on receipt and approval of Outline Business Cases which will provide an overview of the proposal, key milestones and timing of delivery of the proposal, along with a profile of the investment and achievement of savings and / or efficiency gains.
- 3.5. Savings from this Fund will directly support the savings required as part of the MTFS.

The Process Improvement Fund

- 3.6. For the MTFS period the balance on the Process Improvement Fund will be maintained in the region of £0.5m-£1.5m and will be drawn-down on the basis of business cases that either pay back the original contribution, or result in significant service improvements, or significantly reduced costs compared to the 'do-nothing' option.
- 3.7. Savings obtained from the use of these funds will be reinvested back into the fund creating a 'rolling fund' and an investment fund that is self-sustaining.
- 3.8. The use of this Fund must meet the criteria as described in the table in 5.4.

Summary for investment funds

- 3.9. Innovation and transformation need to be a constant and therefore any opportunity to replenish these reserves will be considered as part of each year's annual budget setting process, and any outturn opportunities offered by any underspends. As such, once the General Fund and Risk Reserve targets are achieved, any additional funds through underspends should be placed in the Innovation Fund and / or the Process Improvement Fund unless circumstances require alternative use. Consideration will also be given to the establishment of a fund to seed fund climate change activities.
- 3.10. The Council is in receipt of interest earned through investments of its cash balances to support its general spending plans. If the capital programme requires Council funding it is recommended that to avoid interest payments on borrowing the Council will effectively internalise that borrowing requirement by use of cash balances, including sums held in reserves and general positive cash flows. The Council will be able to facilitate this approach through use of the balances held in reserves that will help reduce on-going revenue costs. The use of reserves will reduce the opportunity to reduce costs of capital / interest receipts.
- 3.11. Reserves are one-off money. The Council will avoid using reserves to meet ongoing financial commitments, other than as part of the Financial Sustainability Strategy, and one of the Council's financial principles is to stop the use of one-off funding to support the base budget ie this reserves strategy will prevent reserves being applied merely to balance the budget.

4. Management and governance

- 4.1. For each earmarked reserve held there will be a clear protocol setting out:
 - The reason for/purpose of the reserve
 - How and when the reserve can be used
 - Procedures for the reserve's management and control
 - A process and timescale for review of the reserve to ensure continuing relevance and adequacy.
- 4.2. All protocols should have an end date and at that point any balance will be transferred to the General Fund. If there is a genuine reason for slippage, then the protocol will need to be updated. A questionnaire will be completed by the relevant budget

manager and reviewed by Finance to ensure all reserves comply with legislative and accounting requirements.

- 4.3. Reserves protocols must be sent to the Finance team for review and will be approved by the S151 Officer, the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), and by the Cabinet Member for Finance. Protocols should clearly identify contributions to and drawdowns from reserves across the lifetime of the MTFS, and these will be built into the Annual Budget. Ongoing recurring costs should not be funded from reserves unless part of a smoothing reserve and approved as part of the MTFS. The short-term use of reserves may be agreed to provide time to plan for a sustainable funding solution in the following financial year. Decisions on the use of reserves may be delayed until financial year-end and will be dependent on the overall financial position of the Council rather than the position of just one budget area.
- 4.4. All earmarked reserves will be reviewed as part of the monitoring process, the budget preparation, financial management and closing of accounts processes. Cabinet will be presented with the monitoring of reserves on a regular basis and in the outturn report and the Council will consider a report from the S151 Officer on the adequacy of the level of reserves in the annual budget-setting process.
- 4.5. The use of reserve funds will be subject to the usual governance processes. The following rules apply:
 - Any in-year use of the General Reserve will need to be approved by Cabinet and any planned use will be part of the budget setting process.
 - In considering the use of reserves, there will be no, or immaterial, impairment to the Council’s financial resilience unless there is simply no alternative.
- 4.6. The Council will review the Reserves Strategy and Policy on an annual basis through Audit and Risk Committee.

5. General Fund and Earmarked Reserves detail

- 5.1. The General Fund balance is the statutory fund into which all the receipts of the Council are required to be paid in, and out of which all liabilities of the Council are to be met, except to the extent that statutory rules might provide otherwise. The General Fund balance summarises the resources that the Council is statutorily empowered to spend on its services or on capital investment (or the deficit of resources that the Council is required to recover) at the end of the financial year.
- 5.2. Earmarked reserves are amounts set aside from the General Fund balance to provide financing for future expenditure plans. In summary:

General Fund	Earmarked Reserves
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A working balance to help cushion the impact of uneven cash flows and avoid unnecessary temporary borrowing • As a contingency to cushion the impact of unexpected events, major incidents or emerging risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monies set aside for future events or liabilities

- 5.3. The Statement of Accounts that are produced each year details the Council’s Earmarked Reserves and explanations as to why each are held. There will continue to be draw-down and contributions to these reserves in line with the patterns of expenditure anticipated when the reserves were created. There is no proposal within the budget to change this strategy.

5.4. The following table provides the details of all the General Fund revenue reserves:

Reserve	Reserve description
General Fund	<p>This Fund is the statutory fund into which all the receipts of the Council are required to be paid in, and out of which all liabilities of the Council are to be met, except to the extent that statutory rules might provide otherwise.</p> <p>This reserve ultimately smooths the financial impact of unexpected events, major incidents or emerging risks, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risks which exceed the other specific risk reserves (budget, inflation, and local taxation reserves) • The capacity to manage in-year budget pressures in relation to demand led service delivery • The general financial climate • Financial risks arising as a result of new government legislation or new burdens <p>The Financial Sustainability Strategy states that this reserve must not be reduced lower than £3m over the period.</p>
Financial Sustainability Strategy & Budget Risk Reserve	<p>This balance represents the strategic use of reserves to fund the budget gap whilst transformational activity is undertaken. The MTFS plans for £1.3m of this reserve to be used in the first year with a balance budget in the remainder of the years. This position is reliant on the delivery of saving plans. Therefore, the balance of this reserve will be used to mitigate the risk of delivering the savings on time and to value and will therefore act as a Budget Risk Reserve.</p>
Departmental Reserves	<p>Amounts set aside by departments in accordance with financial guidance. These funds have been received in advance for specific projects covering multiple years (ie grant funding), or funding to cover specific activity (ie the Local Plan), or for existing commitments (ie DSG deficit). The balance will vary as the projects / commitments progress. This includes funds set aside for investment in the Capital Programme.</p>
Risk Reserve	<p>This reserve is to be used to mitigate some of the financial risk resulting from the uncertainty contained within the budget such as from rising rates of inflation, risks associated with delivering a challenging savings programme not covered by the reserve above, and any timing differences due to Section 31 grants, future tax losses and the impact of the cost-of-living on income generating budgets.</p>
Innovation Fund	<p>The balance of the sums set aside which can be utilised to fund one-off type expenditure such as to fund service transformation with the aim of making current Council funding work harder ie efficiency gains.</p>
Process Improvement Fund	<p>This reserve will be used following the application of the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivers against the Council's corporate strategy and priorities, • Provides on-going revenue savings, or • Provides on-going revenue income, and • Must repay costs back to the fund within an agreed period (three year payback) OR delivers a benefit to a related service that contributes to sustainability <p>This reserve fund is not intended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Substitute existing funding-streams

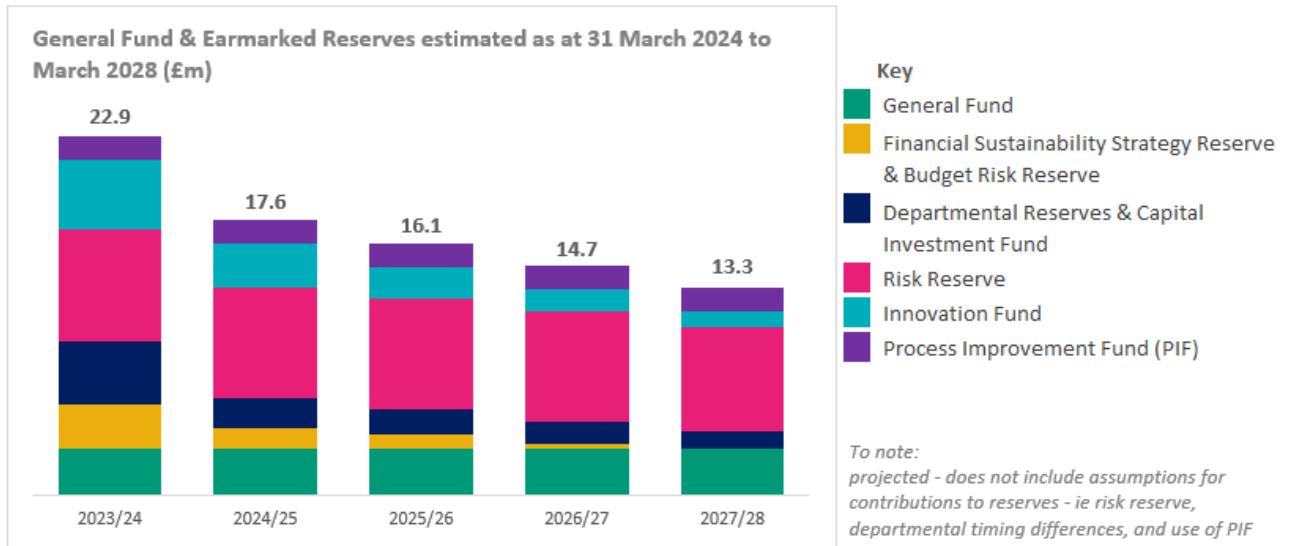
Reserve	Reserve description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meet on-going revenue needs ▪ Provide financial support for capital works

6. The Reserves Strategy balance of funds

6.1. The application of this Reserves Strategy on the balance of the General Fund and Earmarked Reserves is set out in the following table. Balances are estimated as at 31 March.

Reserves estimated balance as at 31 March	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
General Fund	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000
Financial Sustainability Strategy & Budget Risk Reserve	1,293	909	326	0
Departmental Reserves & Capital Investment Fund	1,906	1,631	1,355	1,079
Risk Reserve	7,071	7,071	7,071	6,723
Innovation Fund	2,813	1,989	1,439	989
Process Improvement Fund	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500
Total	17,583	16,100	14,691	13,291

6.2. The following chart provides an illustration of this reserve strategy. The chart shows a reduction in the reserve balances from an estimated £22.9m to £13.3m over the period. However, it should be noted that the future years are illustrative only, no assumptions have been made to the use of the Risk Reserve or made with regards to contributions to reserves – ie if there is use of a risk reserve appropriate contributions back to the reserve will need to be in as part of the overall Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and timings for additional saving delivery or income generation.



CIPFA Recommended Risk Factors in consideration of Reserve Balances

The factors that CIPFA recommend should be taken into account when considering the level of reserves and balances. Below, each of those factors is given a 'direction of travel' indicator since last year's budget was set. A downward direction means an improved position for this Council (i.e. the general trend direction of the risk compared to the assessments made the previous year).

1. Assumptions regarding inflation and interest rates

Inflation is currently at 4.7% above the Government target of 2%. Forecasts suggest a similar rate at the turn of the year, with monetary policy needing to be sufficiently restrictive for sufficiently long to return inflation to the 2% target sustainably in the medium term

↔ Interest rates are largely determined by the base rate, and to stabilise inflation the base rate has increased throughout 2023/24 to 5.25% in December 2023, and this maintains the 15 year high. This is aligned with policymakers' efforts to combat inflation, despite indications pointing to a deteriorating economic landscape.

The lower the actual and expected rate of inflation, the better it is for the Council's budget in net terms, but the converse may be true of interest rates.

2. Estimates of the level and timing of capital receipts

↔ For the current MTFS period reliance on capital receipts to part fund the capital programme is 1.3% of the programme with reliance peaking in 2025/26. Delivery against target is encouraging but remains challenging in the current economic climate. The Council has a Capital Receipts Reserve of £1.7m which is available to fund the future programme schemes.

3. The capacity to manage in-year demand led pressures

The forecast outturn position at Quarter 2 shows an overall forecast underspend of £1.6m compared to budget which largely relates to better investment income receipts (£1.3m) against the budget due to a national context of rising interest rates to combat inflationary pressures by the Bank of England.

↓ For 'net cost of services' the Council is forecasting an underspend of £0.3m. This underspend is arising due to the level of vacancies across the Council. This position is mitigating pressures arising from contract price increases through changes in demand, such as increased complexity in cases in addition to numbers of clients requiring care. Vacancy levels present the Council with risks (as outlined in the Strategic Risk Register) and management are addressing the impact of staffing levels on the performance of services, delivery of the Corporate Strategy, and the sustainable nature of this risk.

4. Ability to activate contingency plans if planned savings cannot be delivered

↔ The Council has in place a methodology which assesses the risk associated with key strategic partners. When risks are significant in terms of partnership contract risk or transport / infrastructure risks these are recorded as specific risks on the Strategic Risk register. There are no such risks at this high level contained on the risk register, and all risks are being managed by departmental teams.

Risks with our key Health partners, suppliers and commercial risks remain stable, but are kept under review given the prevailing economic climate and pressures such as inflation impacting costs of supplies and services.

5. Risks inherent in any new partnerships

↔ The Council has in place a methodology which assesses the risk associated with key strategic partners. When risks are significant in terms of partnership contract risk or transport / infrastructure risks these are recorded as specific risks on the Strategic risk register. There are no such risks at this high level contained on the risk register, and all risks are being managed by departmental teams.

Risks with our key Health partners, suppliers and commercial risks with our companies remain stable, but are kept under review given the prevailing economic climate and pressures such as inflation impacting costs of supplies and services.

6. Financial standing of the authority (level of borrowing, debt outstanding etc.)



The planned use of reserves of £1.3m to support the Financial Sustainability Strategy does reduce the Council's protection against a major unforeseen financial event, however a forecast underspend in the current financial year provides opportunities to contribute to reserves alongside management action to address vacancy levels, stabilise key service delivery, alongside bringing forward some transformational change. The general financial health of the Council remains fairly static, with overall debt levels comparing favourable compared to Nearest Neighbour statistical groups.

7. The authority's record of budget management and ability to manage in year budget pressures



The Council has continued to try and take the medium-term view on the financial position. The Council is has focused on the medium term position to deliver financial sustainability. The transformation workstreams are embedded into Service Ambitions and savings plans are integral in how services will be delivered over the period, as detailed in this MTFS.

Financial performance in the 2023/24 is encouraging and is enabling management to manage and mitigate risks now to aid financial sustainability in the medium to long term.

8. Virement and year-end procedures in relation to under and overspends



The Council's financial regulations set out clear expectations on the treatment and management of service under and overspends. The framework aims to balance incentives for services to benefit from efficiency and planned savings with the need to ensure in overall terms that policy and service priorities are being met where unplanned under or overspending occurs.

Any requests for Carry Forwards must identify the planned spend which has been delayed or the grant or other income which has been received late in the year, and state the purpose for which they will be used in the new financial year. They are subject to Cabinet approval.

A Reserves Strategy and Policy was agreed by Council in September 2023, with a revised version taken as part of the MTFS process. This clearly sets out the use of Reserves for investment in transformational activity that will aid financial sustainability or funds to mitigate risks inherent in the budget. The use of reserves outside of the Financial Sustainability Strategy is no longer permitted as part of the adoption of the Strategy.

9. The general financial climate



Inflation has exceeded 10% in recent years, with large increases in the price of energy and other materials and services. In the UK, this has impacted on households, businesses, and public sector organisations, including Councils, across the country. Rutland is no exception, and the external issues outlined are significantly impacting the Councils finances. This is on top of the legacy impact caused by the pandemic. This includes the impact on the medium-term cost profile, as the pandemic impacts on demand patterns and support for residents moving forward. Beyond 2024/25 there remains uncertainty over public finances over the medium term. The approval of the Council's Financial Sustainability Strategy and this MTFS provides a balanced budget with estimates for the future budget gap to be addressed and the financial strategy enables the Council to plan transformational service reform now to meet the future years funding challenges.

10. The adequacy of insurance arrangements



This will be kept under review as risks and claims develop, but based on historic claims this does not negatively impact on our adequacy of insurance arrangements.

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Rutland County Council budget consultation 2024/25

Introduction

Rutland County Council must set a balanced budget each year. The amount we spend on running local services can't be more than the total amount of money we get from our three main sources of income – money given to us by national government, fees and charges and Council Tax.

Consultation around Rutland County Council's latest annual budget runs until 5.00pm on Friday 2 February 2024. All the feedback received as part of this consultation will be reported to Cabinet, Scrutiny, and Full Council at the end of February, helping to councillors to make their decision.

Key points

A full copy of our latest draft Integrated Budget Plan can be read and downloaded from our website. Some of the key things to note in our 2024/25 budget are:

- The total cost of funding local services in Rutland in 2024/25 is **£49.1million** (up from **£46.6million** last year)
- The latest Local Government Finance Settlement has awarded Rutland County Council more money than it did in 2023/24. However, this increase is not enough to cover the rising cost of services
- Service pressures of **£5.2m** have been included in the budget, arising from demand, market cost pressures and contracts.
- The budget includes a Council Tax increase of **2.99%**, together with **2%** precept to help fund adult social care services.
- If approved, the average Council Tax increase for a Band D equivalent property would be **£1.93** per week
- The budget also includes provisions for **£1.285m** of Council Tax Support to help people on a low income
- The draft budget for 2024/25 is balanced using **£1.3m** of the Council's General Fund reserves
- Without further planned savings, Rutland's funding gap is projected to be **£2.9m** in 2025/26, assuming **£1.8m** savings are made in the next year and Council Tax is raised by a further 5%.

Council Tax and fairer funding

National government uses something called Core Spending Power to measure the total resources available to councils to fund local services. Core Spending Power for councils in England has increased this year. However, this is based on a government assumption that all councils will raise Council Tax by the maximum 4.99% allowed (2.99% Council Tax and 2% just for Adult Social Care).

Under the current national funding formula, Rutland gets less government funding per household than other councils with our same responsibilities. Because of this, we rely heavily on Council Tax to fund local services – even more so than other councils. To put this in context, Rutland relies on Council Tax contributions for 77% of its funding. Nationally, other authorities rely on Council Tax for around 56% of their funding. This is a big difference.

We have recently written to the government along with other local authorities to call for fairer funding for all councils in England. [You can read more about this on our website.](#)

Council spending

The draft Integrated Budget Plan for 2024/25 includes the follow spending plans for key frontline services:

- **£17.6million** for adult social care services, which include day care, community care, residential care, and protection
- **£7.4million** to support children’s social care services such as fostering, adoption, residential care, and support for children with disabilities
- **£3.9million** to pay for waste services. This includes recycling and disposal of waste, as well as the cost of running Rutland’s recycling centres
- **£2.7million** for school transport and school support
- **£2.6million** to fund public transport and other services such as maintenance of all roads, car parks, footpaths, bridges, and street lighting in the County, together with the cost of winter gritting, traffic management and road safety.
- **£2.4million** for public protection and environment, including street cleaning, grounds maintenance, trading standards and licensing services

Where we’ve saved

Rutland County Council has been working hard for many years to find savings and efficiencies that help close gaps in our budget while minimising the impact on services. This has included measures like:

- Reductions in workforce across all teams in the Council
- Changing how we manage demand for services
- Increasing income generation such as with green waste charges
- Pausing and reducing highways works available for emergency works and unplanned remediation
- Withdrawal of a carers’ grant
- Reduction in the outsourcing of children’s assessments for courts
- Reduction in the support for some parts of our learning disability day care and dementia services

For 2024/25, the budget process the Council has adopted an enhanced budget setting process that has focused on service delivery based on affordability. This has helped officers to put forward a range of savings and investments that deliver financial sustainability. It also means that services will begin to look and feel different as the Council transforms, so that it can provide services within the income it receives. The Integrated Budget Plan outlines the services we provide, together with a breakdown of the associated budgets.

Ongoing investments planned for 2024/25 include:

- Additional budget for inflationary and demand pressures of £1.2m
- Home to School transport costs following a rise in demand from SEND provision £0.3m
- Cost associated with alternative provision for waste disposal of £0.1m
- New burden costs from government for flood and biodiversity £0.2m
- Investment in technology to support customer engagement and decision making £0.1m

Savings which planned to be undertaken during 2024/25 include:

- Prevention activities where Council intervention at the right time reduces costs in the future £0.3m
- Transformation of service delivery, including efficiencies £0.9m. Examples include a new Communities Hub model, redesign of the public bus network, alternative use of key Council sites, and alternative delivery model for heritage services
- Negotiations with contractors of £0.5m
- Additional income generation of £0.2m

Budget consultation

SECTION ONE: Corporate Strategy refresh

A huge amount of work goes into preparing the Council's budget each year but why?

Ultimately, Rutland County Council exists to provide local services that help people who live and work in the county, as well as visitors to our area. These services range from running libraries and caring for vulnerable adults to maintaining the county's roads and collecting Rutland's waste and recycling. We issue blue badges for people with disabilities and make decisions on planning applications. We find families for children without a home and inspect food businesses to make sure they're meeting hygiene standards. We must be financially sustainable and set a balanced budget each year so that we can keep providing the hundreds of services that people rely on.

To guide this work and make sure we are following a clear plan, the Council has just refreshed its Corporate Strategy. The Corporate Strategy has been shaped by the Future Rutland engagement exercise, so it reflects what Rutland residents have told us is most important to them. It has a total of four priority areas and everything we do will be geared towards achieving these goals:

1. Tackling the Climate Emergency

We will support the County to tackle the climate crisis, helping to reduce carbon emissions and minimise the impact of climate change on the lives of residents and local businesses.

2. A diverse and sustainable economy

We will play our part to build a strong rural economy with a productive, sustainable and diverse business base that provides opportunities for everyone.

3. Support the most vulnerable

We will work collaboratively to improve outcomes for residents, helping those who need additional support to live their best lives.

4. Provide good public services

We will deliver modern and cost-effective services that are easy to access and provide good levels of customer care.

A full version of the refresh with further information on our objectives and targets can be found on our website.

QUESTION ONE:

To what extent do you agree with each of the four priority areas in Rutland County Council's refreshed Corporate Strategy? (*Sliding scale of 1-10, with 10 being Strongly Agree and 1 being Strongly Disagree for each priority*)

QUESTION TWO:

Is there anything that you think is missing which should be included as a priority for the Council?

- Yes
- No

If you answered yes, please use the space below to tell us more about what you think is missing:

SECTION TWO - Our financial health

The financial pressure on local councils has never been greater. We often talk about the fact that councils have more responsibilities than ever before, while experiencing unprecedented demand for our services – growing numbers of people need our help, particularly when it comes to social care. When you factor in the rising cost of delivering these important services (caused by soaring energy costs, staffing costs and the rate of inflation), it's not hard to see why councils like Birmingham and Nottingham have recently issued Section 114 notices. This is the clearest possible indication that a council is in financial crisis. According to [a recent survey by the Local Government Association](#), almost one in five councils in England think it is very or fairly likely they will need to issue a Section 114 notice this year, due to a lack of funding to keep key services running.

Rutland County Council needed to find additional funding of £1.4m to meet in-year budget demands experienced during 2022/23. This means we had to spend £1.4m more than we budgeted at the start of 2023, on top of £2.7m of increased spending that we originally forecast when setting our last budget. Looking ahead, our financial position remains extremely challenging. Once again, the amount of money we need to spend to run local services is greater than the amount of income we expect to receive, meaning we will have a gap of £1.3m in our 2024/25 budget.

Rutland is in a better position than most councils because of the way we've managed our budget over many years. In response to all the pressures we've described, we have been looking for ways to close our funding gap. We've looked at ways to generate more income, alongside activities that will drive more efficiencies in service delivery. The services we provide to residents will need to look and work differently in the future. However, this change is necessary to avoid situations like Nottingham and Birmingham and we are determined to achieve similar outcomes or better, regardless of the pressures we're facing.

You can read more detailed information about our current financial position in Council's draft Integrated Budget Plan for 2024/25: www.rutland.gov.uk/budget

QUESTION THREE:

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about how Rutland County Council should prioritise spending on local services? (*Sliding scale of 1-10, with 10 being 'Strongly Agree and 1 being Strongly Disagree'*)

- The Council should focus on providing services that benefit the largest number of people
- The Council should focus on providing services that offer support to people who need help or care
- The Council should focus on providing statutory services (the services it is required to provide by UK law)

QUESTION FOUR:

If we can only do one of these things, which do you think is most important?

- The Council should focus on providing services that benefit the largest number of people
- The Council should focus on providing services that offer support to people who need help or care

- The Council should focus on providing statutory services (the services it is required to provide by UK law)

Please use the space below to provide any further comments:

Our latest budget

The Council has been clear of its number one priority, it is outlined in the Corporate Strategy and that it is to be financially sustainable. Our Integrated Budget Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (IBP & MTF5) puts the Council on a firm footing to deliver on this priority. While the plan relies on the use of £1.3m of reserves for 2024/25, future years budgets are balanced against future estimated income receipts. This is ahead of the timelines outlined in the Financial Sustainability Strategy as approved by Council in November 2022 by using less reserves to underpin the day-to-day expenditure in the future years.

This Plan and Strategy has been put forward with affordable service provision at the heart of its creation, ensuring that these services deliver the Corporate Strategy. The Council previously recognised that a transformational approach to how it delivers services was required. Previous MTF5's showed the Council was living beyond its means with reserves being used to prop up day to day expenditure.

QUESTION FIVE:

To what extent do you support the following principles as a way to help the Council reduce costs while continuing to delivery local services? *(Sliding scale of 1-10, with 10 being 'Strongly Agree and 1 being Strongly Disagree)*

- We will create a smaller but functional council that spends less overall and makes better use of technology
- We will use the Council Tax flexibility given to us by national government, which assumes councils will apply maximum increases to help fund local services
- We will provide information, guidance and advice to help people serve themselves
- We will work with others, including voluntary organisations, who are in a position to deliver some services
- We will invest some of our reserve funding into the Council and services to reduce future running costs, if possible
- We will identify non-statutory services that can be charged for or run commercially (this means they make money and break even, at a minimum)

Please use the space below to provide any additional comments:

QUESTION SIX:

Do you have any other suggestions on how the Council could increase income, reduce costs or make savings to help us balance the budget?

ENDS

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Appendix K – Capital Programme Schemes 2024/25 – 2027/28

1.1 The Council’s Capital Programme is viewed over a four-year period to ensure correct stewardship of assets and efficient use of budgets, with the years forming part of the MTFS. The Capital Programme includes estimated project costs and profiling of expenditure whilst detailed business cases and due diligence is completed on individual schemes.

1.2 A revised Capital Strategy forms Appendix M and once approved will guide the way for agreeing schemes in the Capital Programme in accordance with the key objectives within the Corporate Strategy. The following table shows the detailed schemes of the capital programme and funding over the MTFS period.

Programme Area	Programme Description	Corporate Priority	Capital Expenditure 2024/25 £000	Funding		Capital Expenditure 2025/26 £000	Funding		Capital Expenditure 2026/27 £000	Funding		Capital Expenditure 2027/28 £000	Funding	
				Grant / S106	Revenue / Capital Receipt		Grant / S106	Revenue / Capital Receipt		Grant / S106	Revenue / Capital Receipt		Grant / S106	Revenue / Capital Receipt
Rolling	Disabled Facilities Grants	Vulnerable	270	270	-	270	270	-	270	270	-	270	270	-
	Devolved Formula Capital	Public Services	5	5	-	5	5	-	5	5	-	5	5	-
	Highways	Economy	2,684	2,684	-	2,684	2,684	-	2,684	2,684	-	2,684	2,684	-
	Local Transport Plan	Public Services	462	462	-	462	462	-	462	462	-	462	462	-
	IT Refresh	Public Services	80	-	80	80	-	80	80	-	80	80	0	80
Total			3,501	3,421	80	3,501	3,421	80	3,501	3,421	80	3,501	3,421	80
Approved	Estimated Carry Forward from Prior Year		1,264	1,249	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Asset Investment (H&S works)	Public Services	542	-	542	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Affordable Housing - Brooke Road, Oakham	Economy	163	163	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Levelling Up Fund schemes	Economy	21,717	21,717	-	11,905	11,905	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	UKSPF	Economy	165	165	-	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Waste and Street Cleansing Vehicles	Public Services	1,862	1,862	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total			25,712	25,155	557	11,905	11,905	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Request Approval	Affordable Housing South Street	Economy	347	287	60	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Family Hub	Vulnerable	500	500										
Total			847	787	60	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Programme			30,060	29,363	697	15,406	15,326	80	3,501	3,421	80	3,501	3,421	80
Pipeline	Waste Transfer Station	Climate	2,249	400		These funds are committed as per the report to Cabinet 13 December 2022. Business cases are required prior to spending these funds in accordance with usual governance processes.								
	Waste Vehicles - impact of Waste Bill	Climate												
	Highways Vehicles	Economy												
	Asset Review - HQ & et al	Public Services												
	Records Office	Public Services												
	Rural England Prosperity Funding	Economy												
	EV Infrastructure Fund	Climate												
Pipeline Developer Contributions	Highways	Economy	507			These funds are committed as per the report to Cabinet 13 December 2022. Business cases are required prior to spending these funds in accordance with usual governance processes.								
	Heritage & Culture	Public Services	571											
	Towns Villages & Public Spaces	Public Services	1,319											
	Public Transport	Climate	1,000											
	Health & Wellbeing Infrastructure	Vulnerable	372											
	Childrens & Young People	Vulnerable	302											
	Affordable Housing	Economy	283											
	Fire & Rescue	Public Services	12											
	Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)	Public Services	403											
Total			4,769	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

- 1.3 **Approved projects – approved projects continuing into 2024/25** - Some of the capital projects will span across more than one financial year. Any projects already approved which are not yet completed will continue into 2024/25. The estimated spend in 2024/25 will depend primarily on the outturn position (the amount spent) for 2023/24.
- 1.4 **Approved projects – Rolling programmes delivered with ring fenced funding** - The Council received ring fenced funding each year, which makes up the councils rolling programme, these capital schemes are developed inline with the objectives set out in the Capital Strategy (Appendix M).
- 1.5 **Projects in pipeline – to be submitted for approval or added in due course** - In a few areas, works are ongoing and some proposals for new projects are being developed. In these areas, Cabinet reports are expected sometime in the future.
- 1.6 **Requesting Approval** - In line with the Councils strategic planning the following projects have been identified for approval as part of the 2024/25 budget setting process. The following projects outlined below request approval to be included within the 2024/25 capital programme:
- 1.6.1 **South Street – Affordable Housing**

Nottingham Community Housing Association (NCHA) is a well-established social landlord with 146 dwellings in Rutland serving local needs. As part of their partnership working, they identified a site at 96 South Street, Oakham and have liaised with the Council. They have submitted a planning application for 4 one-bedroomed flats and 5 three-bedroomed houses. Opportunities like this for affordable housing for rent are rare in the town centre. As of 8 September 2023, there were 140 households on the Council's housing register waiting for general needs one-bedroomed dwellings and 66 waiting for three-bedroomed general needs dwellings in Oakham. The Council would seek 100% of nomination rights for first lets and 75% for relets.

In order to make the scheme viable at 100% social rent and to deliver all properties at a predicted Energy Performance Certificate Band A, a capital contribution of £346,500 is required (subject to planning consent and a funding agreement), plus an estimated £5,000 to cover the Council's legal costs. Of this £286,640 is available from the Council's section 106 funding for affordable housing. This leaves a current shortfall of £64,860 towards the last phased payment. It is recommended that this shortfall be met from section 106 affordable housing commuted sums, should these be received by the Council in time but, alternatively, that the remainder be funded from capital receipts.

1.6.2 **Communities Infrastructure Project**

The Communities Infrastructure project is a crucial part of the Council transformation aims for the Communities and Prevention workstream... The investment of capital funds will have a long-term impact on the facilities available to those in greatest need in the county and improve equality of access, and the provision of support.

It is proposed that the following spaces be developed, in summary:

Oakham Library – creation of a permanently partitioned group work/bookable meeting space with digital information point/IT access and which, could be used for example, for housing, employment and debt advice, and community support groups.

Oakham Library – creation of a multi-purpose family hub/teaching space for children out-of-school and adult learning in small groups.

Oakham Library – redevelopment of garage space to provide youth space (with separate access), bookable meeting room(s) and storage area for library/community hub resources.

Oakham Children's Centre (primary family hub site) – conversion of existing windowless meeting room into a sensory space (or use with neuro-diverse children/ including a resource for the Early Years Pathway).

Uppingham Library (community hub site) – originally it was proposed to extend the existing building and refurbish/reconfigure library space to provide group work/bookable meeting space and private interview space/information portal for families, with particular focus on family support and activities for parents of children with SEND, and housing, employment and other community groups. Potential to utilise space for young people as a drop in facility. Creation of accessible toilet facilities.

Following a series of site visits, however, the design of the existing space has been reconfiguration to house all the above within the existing footprint of the building thereby negating the need for any extension of the building.

Ketton Library (community hub site) – reconfigure existing disused dispensary reception area and storeroom with small area of library to create child and family space and refurbish existing clinic room to create area suitable as information point, drop-ins and advice/community clinics.

The funding for the project is proposed as being £63,000 from s106 and £437,000 from Education capital funds.

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Treasury Management Strategy Statement

Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy

Rutland County Council
2024/25

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1 KEY CONSIDERATIONS

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Council is required to operate a balanced budget, which means that cash raised through the year will meet its cash expenditure. The Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) has four fundamental roles:

- Manage external investments - security, liquidity and yield
- Ensure debt is prudent and economic
- Produce and monitor the Prudential Indicators
- To ensure that decisions comply with regulations.

1.1.2 The role of treasury management is to ensure cash flow is adequately planned so that cash is available when it is needed. Surplus monies are invested in low-risk counterparties commensurate with the Council's low risk appetite ensuring that security and liquidity are achieved before considering investment return.

1.1.3 Another function of the treasury management service is the funding of the Council's capital plans. These capital plans provide a guide to the borrowing need of the Council, essentially the longer-term cash flow planning, to ensure that it can meet its capital spending obligations. This management of longer-term cash may involve arranging long or short-term loans or using longer-term cash flow surpluses. On occasion, when it is prudent and economic, any debt previously drawn may be restructured to meet risk or cost objectives.

1.1.4 The contribution the treasury management function makes to the Council is critical, as the balance of debt and investment operations ensure liquidity or the ability to meet spending commitments as they fall due, either on day-to-day revenue or for larger capital projects. The treasury operations will see a balance of the interest costs of debt and the investment income arising from cash deposits affecting the available budget. Since cash balances generally result from reserves and balances, it is paramount to ensure adequate security of the sums invested, as a loss of principal will in effect result in a loss to the General Fund Balance.

1.1.5 CIPFA defines treasury management as:

"The management of the local authority's borrowing, investments and cash flows, including its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks."

1.1.6 Whilst any commercial initiatives or loans to third parties will impact on the treasury function, these activities are generally classed as non-treasury activities, (arising usually from capital expenditure), and are separate from the day-to-day treasury management activities.

1.2 Key Changes for 2024/25

1.2.1 For 2024/25 there have been no changes to key legislation that governs Treasury Management

- DLUHC's Guidance on Local Government Investments ("the Guidance")
- CIPFA Treasury Management in Public Services Code of Practice and Cross Sectoral Guidance Notes 2021 ("the Code")
- CIPFA Treasury Management Guidance Notes 2021
- CIPFA Prudential Code 2021

1.2.2 Other key changes within the strategy are:

- Consideration of the Treasury Management operations of the Council to the Audit & Risk Committee – the key principle of the Treasury Management strategy is to document how risks are managed and the Audit and Risk Committee consider the key strategic risks of the Council and therefore the approach is consistent. Reporting to commence to the Audit and Risk Committee in 2024/25 following approval of this strategy by full Council in March 2024.
- Updated the conditions for undertaking new or rescheduling borrowing (para 4.6.3)
- Updated the policy on undertaking borrowing in advance of need (para 4.7) minor change to ensure the Council can take to decisions to ensure value for money
- Included details of approved institutions for borrowing purposes (para 4.10) – included as this is the first TMS approved by newly elected members following the May 2023 local elections.
- Increased the level the Council can invest with high quality institutions from £7.0m to £10.0m. This increase is to ensure the Council can invest with high quality institutions. The Council will still ensure that there is not a reliance on one institution as set out in this strategy.

1.3 Reporting Requirements

Capital Strategy

1.3.1 The CIPFA 2021 Prudential and Treasury Management Codes require all local authorities to prepare a Capital Strategy report which will provide the following:

- a high-level long-term overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of service delivery
- an overview of how the associated risk is managed
- the implications for future financial sustainability

1.3.2 The aim of the strategy is to ensure that all the Council's elected members fully understand the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting Capital Strategy requirements, governance procedures, and risk appetite.

1.3.3 This Capital Strategy is reported separately from the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and non-treasury investments will be reported through the former. This ensures the separation of the core treasury function under security, liquidity and yield principles, and the policy and investments usually driven by expenditure on an asset. The Capital Strategy will show:

- The corporate governance arrangements for these types of activities;
- Any service objectives relating to the investments;
- The expected income, costs and resulting contribution;
- For non-loan type investments, the cost against the current market value;
- The risks associated with each activity.

1.3.4 Where a physical asset is being bought, details of market research, advisers used, (and their monitoring), ongoing costs and investment requirements and any credit information will be disclosed, including the ability to sell the asset and realise the investment cash.

1.3.5 Where the Council has borrowed to fund any non-treasury investment, there should also be an explanation of why borrowing was required and why the DLUHC

(Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) Investment Guidance and CIPFA Prudential Code have not been adhered to.

- 1.3.6 The Council does not hold any non-treasury investment for purely yield and financial return purposes. However, if a loss were to be incurred on any non-treasury investment during the final accounts and audit process, the strategy and revenue implications will be reported through the budgetary control process.

Treasury Management Reporting

- 1.3.7 The Council is required to receive and approve, as a minimum, three main treasury reports each year, which incorporate a variety of policies, estimates and actuals.

- a) **Prudential and treasury indicators and treasury strategy** - the first, and most important report is forward looking and covers: -
- the capital plans - including prudential indicators
 - a minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy - how residual capital expenditure is charged to revenue over time
 - the Treasury Management Strategy - how the investments and borrowings are to be organised, including treasury indicators; and
 - an Annual Investment Strategy - the parameters on how investments are to be managed
- b) **A mid-year treasury management report** – this is primarily a progress report and will update members on the capital position, amending prudential indicators as necessary, and whether any policies require revision. In addition, this Council will receive quarterly update reports as part of the Financial Reporting throughout the year.
- c) **An annual treasury report** – this is a backward-looking review document and provides details of a selection of actual prudential and treasury indicators and actual treasury operations compared to the estimates within the strategy.

Scrutiny

- 1.3.8 The above reports are required to be adequately scrutinised before being recommended to the Full Council. This role is undertaken by the Audit and Risk Committee. The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee also receive the Financial Reporting throughout the year and the Integrated Budget report which will also include the Treasury Management Strategy. As noted in 1.2.2 this will commence in 2024/25 financial year.

1.4 Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25

- 1.4.1 The strategy for 2024/25 covers two main areas:

- a) **Capital expenditure and revenue costs**
- the capital expenditure plans and the associated prudential indicators
 - the minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy
- b) **Treasury management considerations**
- the current treasury position
 - treasury indicators which limit the treasury risk and activities of the Council
 - prospects for interest rates
 - the borrowing strategy

- policy on borrowing in advance of need
- debt rescheduling
- the investment strategy
- creditworthiness policy; and
- the policy on use of external service providers

1.4.2 These elements cover the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003, DLUHC Investment Guidance, DLUHC MRP Guidance, the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

1.5 Training

1.5.1 The CIPFA Treasury Management Code requires the responsible officer to ensure that members with responsibility for treasury management receive adequate training in treasury management. This especially applies to members responsible for scrutiny. The Audit & Risk Committee have received training from the Councils Treasury Management Consultants during the Autumn of 2023/24, see section **1.5**.

1.5.2 To guide future training requirements the Council will use, CIPFA's Better Governance Forum and Treasury Management Network 'self-assessment'.

1.6 Treasury Management Consultants

1.6.1 The Council uses Link Group, Link Treasury Services Limited as its external treasury management advisors.

1.6.2 The Council recognises that responsibility for treasury management decisions remains with the organisation at all times and will ensure that undue reliance is not placed upon the services of its external service providers. All decisions will be undertaken with regards to all available information, including, but not solely, our treasury advisers.

1.6.3 It also recognises that there is value in employing external providers of treasury management services to acquire access to specialist skills and resources. The Council will ensure that the terms of their appointment and the methods by which their value will be assessed are properly agreed and documented and subjected to regular review.

2 THE CAPITAL PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2024/25 – 2026/27

2.1 Capital Expenditure and Financing

2.1.1 The Council's capital expenditure plans are the key driver of treasury management activity. The output of the capital expenditure plans is reflected in the prudential indicators, which are designed to assist members' overview and confirm capital expenditure plans.

Indicator 1 – Capital Expenditure

2.1.2 This Prudential Indicator is a summary of the Council's estimated capital expenditure for the forthcoming financial year and the following financial years including how it will be funded either from grants, contributions, or capital receipts with the remaining being the 'net financing requirement':

Estimated Capital expenditure	Actuals 2022/23 £000	Projects 2023/24 £000	Projects 2024/25 £000	Projects 2025/26 £000	Projects 2026/27 £000	Projects 2027/28 £000
Service Investments	7,145	7,951	30,060	15,406	3,501	3,501
Commercial Activities / non- financial investments	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	7,145	7,951	30,060	15,406	3,501	3,501
Grant & Contributions	6,958	7,928	29,363	15,326	3,421	3,421
Direct Revenue Financing	187	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Receipts	-	23	697	80	80	80
Net Financing Requirement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	7,145	7,951	30,060	15,406	2,663	2,663

Indicator 2 – Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)

2.1.3 The CFR is the total historical capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for from either revenue or capital resources. It is a measure of the Council's underlying borrowing requirement. Any capital expenditure which has not immediately been paid for will increase the CFR.

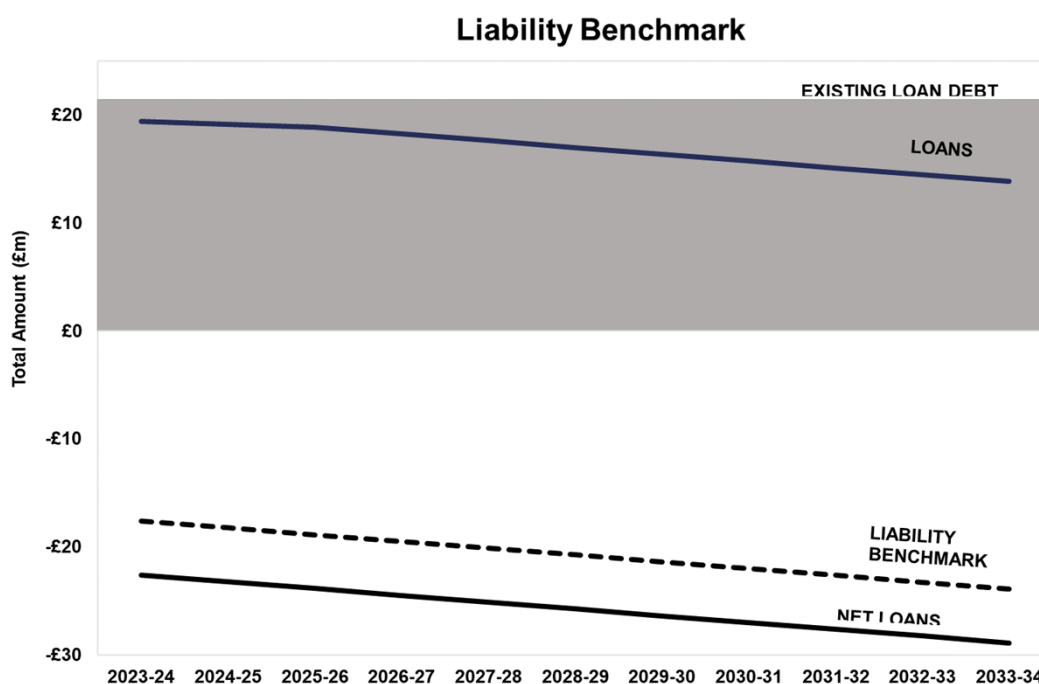
2.1.4 The CFR does not increase indefinitely, as the MRP is a statutory annual revenue charge which broadly reduces the indebtedness in line with each asset's life, and so charges the economic consumption of capital assets as they are used.

2.1.5 The CFR includes any other long-term liabilities (e.g. PFI schemes, finance leases) included on the Council's balance sheet. Whilst this increases the CFR, and therefore the Council's borrowing requirement, these types of schemes include a borrowing facility and so the Council is not required to separately borrow for these schemes. The following table shows the CFR estimates for the next financial years for Council approval:

Capital Financing Requirement	2022/23 Act. £000	2023/24 Est. £000	2024/25 Est. £000	2025/26 Est. £000	2026/27 Est. £000	2027/28 Est. £000
CFR – Services 1 April	19,425	18,810	18,195	17,580	16,965	16,350
Movement in year	(615)	(615)	(615)	(615)	(615)	(615)
Total CFR	18,810	18,195	17,580	16,965	16,350	15,735
Movement in CFR represented by						
Net financing requirement for the year (per Indicator 1)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Less MRP and other financing movements	(615)	(615)	(615)	(615)	(615)	(615)
Movement in CFR	(615)	(615)	(615)	(615)	(615)	(615)

2.2 Liability Benchmark (LB)

- 2.2.1 The Liability Benchmark is effectively the Net Borrowing Requirement of a local authority plus a liquidity allowance. In its simplest form, it is calculated by deducting the amount of investable resources available on the balance sheet (reserves, cash flow balances) from the amount of outstanding external debt and then adding the minimum level of investments required to manage day-to-day cash flow.
- 2.2.2 The Council is required to estimate and measure the Liability Benchmark (LB) for the forthcoming financial year and the following two financial years, as a minimum.
- 2.2.3 There are four components to the LB:
- Existing loan debt outstanding:** the Council's existing loans that are still outstanding in future years.
 - Loans CFR:** this is calculated in accordance with the loans CFR definition in the Prudential Code and projected into the future based on approved prudential borrowing and planned MRP.
 - Net loans requirement:** this will show the Council's gross loan debt less treasury management investments at the last financial year-end, projected into the future and based on its approved prudential borrowing, planned MRP and any other major cash flows forecast.
 - Liability benchmark** (or gross loans requirement): this equals net loans requirement plus short-term liquidity allowance.



2.3 Core Funds and Expected Investment Balances

- 2.3.1 The application of resources (capital receipts, reserves etc.) to either finance capital expenditure or other budget decisions to support the revenue budget will have an ongoing impact on investments unless resources are supplemented each year from new sources (asset sales etc.). Detailed below are estimates of the year-end balances for each resource and anticipated day-to-day cash flow balances.

Year End Resources	2022/23 Actual £000	2023/24 Est. £000	2024/25 Est. £000	2025/26 Est. £000	2026/27 Est. £000
Fund balances / reserves	29,830	28,093	23,430	22,702	22,252
Capital receipts	1,656	1,633	1,046	1,016	986
Provisions	908	908	908	908	908
Total core funds	32,394	30,634	25,384	24,626	24,146
Working capital*	(2,000)	(2,000)	(2,000)	(2,000)	(2,000)
New borrowing	-	-	-	-	-
Expected investments	30,394	28,634	23,384	22,626	22,146

* working capital balances shown are estimated year-end; these may be higher mid-year

3 MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION (MRP) POLICY STATEMENT

3.1 Legislation

3.1.1 Under Regulation 27 of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (England) Regulations 2003, where the Council has financed capital expenditure by borrowing it is required to make a provision each year through a revenue charge called the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP).

3.1.2 The Council is required to calculate a prudent provision of MRP which ensures that the outstanding debt liability is repaid over a period that is reasonably commensurate with that over which the capital expenditure provides benefits. The MRP Guidance (2018) gives four ready-made options for calculating MRP, but the Council can use any other reasonable basis that it can justify as prudent.

3.1.3 The MRP policy statement requires full council approval in advance of each financial year.

3.2 Adopted Methodology

3.2.1 The Council is recommended to approve the following MRP Statement

- For capital expenditure incurred before 1 April 2008 will either be
 - a) **Straight line basis** over 50 years.
 - b) **Asset Life, annuity method** – MRP will be based on the prevailing PWLB interest rate for a loan with a term equivalent to the estimated life of the project.
- From 1 April 2008 for all unsupported borrowing (including PFI and finance leases) the MRP policy will be (either / and):
 - a) **Asset life method** – MRP will be based on the estimated life of the assets, in accordance with the regulations (this option must be applied for any expenditure capitalised under a Capitalisation Direction);
 - b) **Depreciation method** – MRP will follow standard depreciation accounting procedures. These options provide for a reduction in the borrowing need over approximately the asset's life.
 - c) **Asset Life, annuity method** – MRP will be based on the prevailing PWLB interest rate for a loan with a term equivalent to the estimated life of the project.

3.2.2 The Council will undertake a review during 2024/25 with regards to timing of the repayment of existing borrowing. This will be in line with the financial health indicators outlined in Appendix G, specifically indicator 6 which considers the management of current assets and cash balances which indicates an opportunity for an alternative approach. Any amendments will require full Council approval and will be based on the methods outlined above.

3.3 MRP Overpayments

- 3.3.1 Under the MRP guidance, any charges made in excess of the statutory MRP can be made, known as voluntary revenue provision (VRP).
- 3.3.2 VRP can be reclaimed in later years if deemed necessary or prudent. In order for these amounts to be reclaimed for use in the budget, this policy must disclose the cumulative overpayment made each year.
- 3.3.3 Up until the 31 March 2021 the total VRP overpayments were £1.41m in 2013/14 and £0.597m in 2015/16 giving a total MRP overpayment of £2.01m.

4 BORROWING

4.1 Current Portfolio Position

- 4.1.1 The capital expenditure plans set out in Section 2 provide details of the service activity of the Council. The treasury management function ensures that the Council's cash is organised in accordance with the relevant professional codes, so that sufficient cash is available to meet this service activity and the Council's Capital Strategy. This will involve both the organisation of the cash flow and, where capital plans require, the organisation of appropriate borrowing facilities. The strategy covers the relevant treasury / prudential indicators, the current and projected debt positions, and the Annual Investment Strategy.
- 4.1.2 The overall treasury management portfolio as at 31 March 2023 and for the position as at 1 December are shown below for both borrowing and investments.

TREASURY PORTFOLIO				
	actual	actual	current	current
Treasury Investments	31.3.23	31.3.23	01.12.24	01.12.24
	£000	%	£000	%
Banks	35,000	76%	46,000	81%
Building societies - unrated	1,000	2%	4,000	7%
Building societies - rated	7,000	15%	1,000	2%
Local authorities	3,000	7%	6,000	11%
Total managed in house	46,000	100%	57,000	100%
Bond Funds	0	0%	0	0%
Property Funds	0	0%	0	0%
Total managed externally	0	0%	0	0%
Total treasury investments	46,000	100%	57,000	100%
Treasury external borrowing				
Local Authorities	0	0%	0	0%
PWLB	21,386	100%	21,386	100%
LOBOs	0	0%	0	0%
Total external borrowing	21,386	100%	21,386	100%
Net treasury investments / (borrowing)	24,614	0	35,614	0

Indicator 3 - Actual and estimates of the ratio of financing costs to net revenue budget.

- 4.1.3 This indicator identifies the proportion of the revenue budget which is taken up in financing capital expenditure i.e., the net interest cost and the provision to repay debt.

%	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Est. £000	2024/25 Est. £000	2025/26 Est. £000	2026/27 Est. £000	2027/28 Est. £000
Interest Cost	1,033	1,033	1,033	1,033	1,033	1,033
MRP	615	615	615	615	615	615
Total Financing Costs	1,648	1,648	1,648	1,648	1,648	1,648
Net revenue stream	39,901	45,771	47,779	50,914	52,590	54,327
Ratio of Debt to Net revenue stream	4.13%	3.60%	3.45%	3.24%	3.13%	3.03%

Indicator 4 - The Council's treasury position

- 4.1.4 The Council's forward projections for borrowing are summarised below. The table shows the actual external debt, against the underlying capital borrowing need, (the Capital Financing Requirement - CFR), highlighting any over or under borrowing.

Year End Resources	2022/23 Actual £000	2023/24 Est. £000	2024/25 Est. £000	2025/26 Est. £000	2026/27 Est. £000	2027/28 Est. £000
External Debt						
Debt - 1 April	22,058	21,386	21,386	21,386	21,386	21,386
Expected Change in Debt	(672)	0	0	0	0	0
Actual / projected Gross Debt 31 March	21,386	21,386	21,386	21,386	21,386	21,386
Capital Financing Requirement	18,811	18,196	17,581	16,966	16,351	15,736
Under / (Over) Borrowing	(2,575)	(3,190)	(3,805)	(4,420)	(5,035)	(5,650)

- 4.1.5 Within the range of prudential indicators there are several key indicators to ensure that the Council operates its activities within well-defined limits. One of these is that the Council needs to ensure that its gross debt does not, except in the short-term, exceed the total of the CFR in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional CFR for 2024/25 and the following two financial years. This allows some flexibility for limited early borrowing for future years but ensures that borrowing is not undertaken for revenue or speculative purposes.
- 4.1.6 The overborrowed position has not materialised from borrowing for revenue purposes, which this indicator is a key test. Whilst the CFR is reduced by MRP charge every year, external debt position has not changed significantly as debt is not due (see 3.3.5). Due to the repayment dates of the Council's inherited debt, as part of Local Government Re-Organisation. In recent years it has remained prohibitive to refinance debt due to the premiums that would be charged through early redemption. However, due to the change in interest rates experienced during 2023/24 opportunities are to be explored to redeem debt given the MTFs forecast of capital programme expenditure.

4.2 Treasury Indicators: Limits to Borrowing Activity

Indicator 5 – The Operational Boundary

- 4.2.1 This is the limit beyond which external debt is not normally expected to exceed. In most cases, this would be a similar figure to the CFR, but may be lower or higher depending on the levels of actual debt and the ability to fund under-borrowing by other cash resources.

Operational Boundary	2023/24 Est. £000	2024/25 Est. £000	2025/26 Est. £000	2026/27 Est. £000	2027/28 Est. £000
Debt	23,000	23,000	23,000	23,000	23,000
Other long-term liabilities	-	-	-	-	-
Total	23,000	23,000	23,000	23,000	23,000

Indicator 6 – The Authorised Limit

- 4.2.2 This is a key prudential indicator and represents a control on the maximum level of borrowing. This represents a legal limit beyond which external debt is prohibited, and this limit needs to be set or revised by the Full Council. It reflects the level of external debt which, while not desired, could be afforded in the short-term, but is not sustainable in the longer-term.
- 4.2.3 This is the statutory limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003. The Government retains an option to control either the total of all local authority plans, or those of a specific authority, although this power has not yet been exercised.
- 4.2.4 The Council is asked to approve the following Authorised Limit:

Authorised Limit	2023/24 Est. £000	2024/25 Est. £000	2025/26 Est. £000	2026/27 Est. £000	2027/28 Est. £000
Debt	28,000	28,000	28,000	28,000	28,000
Other long-term liabilities	-	-	-	-	-
Total	28,000	28,000	28,000	28,000	28,000

- 4.2.5 The following chart shows where the Council is currently are against all of the borrowing prudential indicators.



4.3 Prospects for Interest Rates

4.3.1 The Council has appointed Link Group as its treasury advisor and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. Link provided the following forecasts on 07 November 2023. These are forecasts for Bank Rate, average earnings and PWLB certainty rates, gilt yields plus 80 bps, and form the basis of assumptions contained within this strategy.

	Dec-23 %	Jun-24 %	Dec-24 %	Jun-25 %	Dec-25 %	Jun-26 %	Dec-26 %
Bank Rate	5.25	5.25	4.50	3.50	3.00	3.00	3.00
3 Month Av Earnings	5.30	5.30	4.50	3.50	3.00	3.00	3.00
6 Month Av Earnings	5.60	5.40	4.60	3.60	3.10	3.10	3.10
12 Month Av Earnings	5.80	5.50	4.70	3.70	3.30	3.30	3.30
5 Yr PWLB	5.00	4.80	4.40	4.00	3.70	3.50	3.50
10 Yr PWLB	5.10	4.80	4.40	4.00	3.70	3.60	3.50
25 Yr PWLB	5.50	5.10	4.70	4.30	4.10	4.00	4.00
50 Yr PWLB	5.30	4.90	4.50	4.10	3.90	3.80	3.80

4.3.2 Link Group interest rate forecasts, detailed above, are based on their views of the future economic climate, and below are some extracts taken from their economic forecasts:

- The central forecast for interest rates was previously updated on 25 September and reflected a view that the MPC would be keen to further demonstrate its anti-inflation credentials by keeping Bank Rate at 5.25% until at least Q2 2024. We expect rate cuts to start when both the CPI inflation and wage/employment data are supportive of such a move, and that there is a likelihood of the overall economy enduring at least a mild recession over the coming months, although most recent GDP releases have surprised with their on-going robustness.
- Naturally, timing on this matter will remain one of fine judgment: cut too soon, and inflationary pressures may well build up further; cut too late and any downturn or recession may be prolonged.
- In the upcoming months, our forecasts will be guided not only by economic data releases and clarifications from the MPC over its monetary policies and the Government over its fiscal policies, but also international factors such as policy development in the US and Europe, the provision of fresh support packages to support the faltering recovery in China as well as the on-going conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and Gaza and Israel.
- On the positive side, consumers are still anticipated to be sitting on some excess savings left over from the pandemic, which could cushion some of the impact of the above challenges and may be the reason why the economy is performing somewhat better at this stage of the economic cycle than may have been expected. However, as noted previously, most of those excess savings are held by more affluent households whereas lower income families already spend nearly all their income on essentials such as food, energy and rent/mortgage payments.

4.4 PWLB RATES

4.4.1 Yield curve movements have with the short part of the curve has not moved far but the longer-end continues to reflect inflation concerns.

The balance of risks to the UK economy:

- The overall balance of risks to economic growth in the UK is to the downside.

Downside risks to current forecasts for UK gilt yields and PWLB rates include:

- **Labour and supply shortages** prove more enduring and disruptive and depress economic activity (accepting that in the near-term this is also an upside risk to inflation and, thus, could keep gilt yields high for longer).
- **The Bank of England** has increased Bank Rate too fast and too far over recent months, and subsequently brings about a deeper and longer UK recession than we currently anticipate.
- **UK / EU trade arrangements** – if there was a major impact on trade flows and financial services due to complications or lack of co-operation in sorting out significant remaining issues.
- **Geopolitical risks**, for example in Ukraine/Russia, the Middle East, China/Taiwan/US, Iran and North Korea, which could lead to increasing safe-haven flows.

Upside risks to current forecasts for UK gilt yields and PWLB rates:

- Despite the recent tightening to 5.25%, the **Bank of England proves too timid** in its pace and strength of increases in Bank Rate and, therefore, allows inflationary pressures to remain elevated for a longer period within the UK economy, which then necessitates Bank Rate staying higher for longer than we currently project.
- The **pound weakens** because of a lack of confidence in the UK Government's pre-election fiscal policies, resulting in investors pricing in a risk premium for holding UK sovereign debt.
- Longer-term **US treasury yields rise strongly** if inflation remains more stubborn there than the market currently anticipates, consequently pulling gilt yields up higher. (We saw some movements of this type through October although generally reversed in the last week or so.)
- **Projected gilt issuance**, inclusive of natural maturities and QT, could be too much for the markets to comfortably digest without higher yields compensating.

4.5 Link Group Forecasts

4.5.1 We now expect the Monetary Policy Committee will keep Bank Rate at 5.25% for the remainder of 2023 and the first half of 2024 to combat on-going inflationary and wage pressures. We do not think that the MPC will increase Bank Rate above 5.25%, but it is possible.

Gilt yields and PWLB rates

4.5.2 The overall longer-run trend is for gilt yields and PWLB rates to fall back over the timeline of our forecasts, as inflation starts to fall through the remainder of 2023 and into 2024.

4.5.3 Links target borrowing rates are set two years forward (as we expect rates to fall back) and the current PWLB (certainty) borrowing rates are set out in the following table:

PWLB debt	Current borrowing rate as at 06.11.23	Target borrowing rate (end of Q3 2025)
5 years	5.02%	3.80%
10 years	5.15%	3.80%
25 years	5.61%	4.20%
50 years	5.38%	4.00%

4.5.4 **Borrowing advice:** Links long-term (beyond 10 years) forecast for Bank Rate has increased from 2.75% to 3% and reflects Capital Economics' research that suggests AI and general improvements in productivity will be supportive of a higher neutral interest rate. As all PWLB certainty rates are currently significantly above this level, borrowing strategies will need to be reviewed in that context. Overall, better value can generally be obtained at the shorter end of the curve and short-dated fixed Local Authority to Local Authority monies should be considered. Temporary borrowing rates will remain elevated for some time to come but may prove the best option whilst the market continues to wait for inflation, and therein gilt yields, to drop back later in 2024.

4.5.5 Link's suggested budgeted earnings rates for investments up to about three months' duration in each financial year are rounded to the nearest 0.10% and set out below. It should be noted that investment earnings have been revised somewhat higher for all years from 2025/26 as Bank Rate remains higher for longer.

Average earnings in each year	Now	Previously	RCC Budgeted Position
2024/25	4.70%	4.70%	4.89%
2025/26	3.20%	3.00%	3.26%
2026/27	3.00%	2.80%	2.76%
2027/28	3.25%	3.05%	2.70%

4.5.6 As there are so many variables at this time, caution must be exercised in respect of all interest rate forecasts.

4.6 Borrowing Strategy

4.6.1 The Council is currently maintaining an over-borrowed position, as mentioned in para 4.1.5 this is not due to borrowing, but largely due to the CFR reducing. In essence the capital borrowing need, (the Capital Financing Requirement), has not been fully funded with loan debt as cash supporting the Council's reserves, balances and cash flow has been used as a temporary measure. This strategy is prudent as medium and longer dated borrowing rates are expected to fall from their current levels once prevailing inflation concerns are addressed by tighter near-term monetary policy. That is, Bank Rate remains elevated through to the second half of 2024.

4.6.2 Against this background, S151 officer will in conjunction with the Council's advisers monitor the interest rate situation closely and will adopt a pragmatic approach to delivering the objectives of this strategy within changing economic circumstances.

4.6.3 All decisions on whether to undertake new or replacement borrowing to support previous or future capital investment will be subject to evaluation against the following criteria:

- a) Overall need, namely whether a borrowing requirement to fund the capital programme or previous capital investment exist
- b) Timing, when such a borrowing requirement might exist given the overall strategy for financing capital investment, and previous capital spending performance
- c) Market conditions, to ensure borrowing that does need to be undertaken is achieved at minimum cost

- d) Scale, to ensure borrowing is undertaken on a scale commensurate with the agreed financing route
 - e) To consider whether to use cash balances as a form of internal borrowing, but this will reduce the level of investments that can be made.
- 4.6.4 Any decisions will be reported to the appropriate decision-making body at the next available opportunity.

4.7 Policy on Borrowing in Advance of Need

- 4.7.1 The Council will not borrow more than or in advance of need with the objective of profiting from the investment of the additional sums borrowed. However, borrowing in advance of need is permitted to pre-fund future years' capital requirements, providing this does not exceed the authorised limit for borrowing. Therefore, the council may look to borrow in advance if the need to finance the future capital investment will materialise in two years or less; and
- a) Where the most advantageous method of raising capital finance requires the council to raise funds in a quantity greater than would be required in any one year, or
 - b) Where in the view of the section 151 officer, based on independent advice, the achievement of value for money would be prejudiced by delaying borrowing .
- 4.7.2 Having satisfied the criteria above, any proposal to borrow in advance of need would be reviewed against the following factors:
- a) Whether the ongoing revenue liabilities created, and the implications for the future plans and budgets have been considered and reflected in those plans and budgets, with the value for money of the proposal fully evaluated.
 - b) The merits and demerits of alternative forms of funding.
 - c) The alternative interest rate bases available, the most appropriate periods over which to fund and repayment profiles to use.
- 4.7.3 Risks associated with any borrowing in advance activity will be subject to prior appraisal and subsequent reporting through the mid-year or annual reporting mechanism.

4.8 Treasury Debt Prudential Indicators

- 4.8.1 There are three debt treasury indicators which ensure debt structure remains within appropriate limits. This manages risk and reduces the impact of any adverse movement in interest rates.

Indicator 7 – Upper limit on fixed interest rate exposure.

- 4.8.2 This identifies a maximum limit for fixed interest rates based upon the debt position net of investments. This has been set at 100% of the borrowing requirement.

Indicator 8 - Upper limit on variable rate exposure.

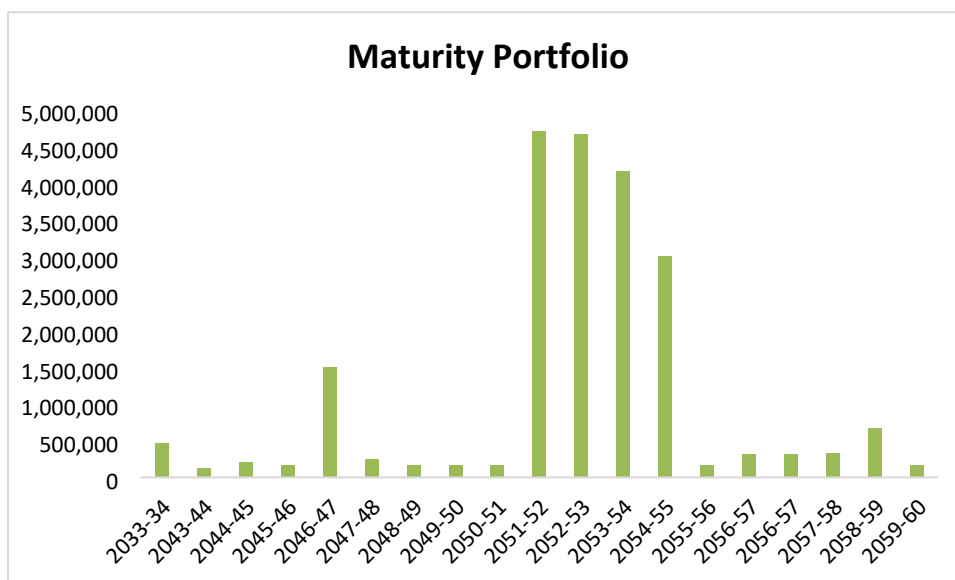
4.8.3 This identifies a maximum limit for variable interest rates based upon the debt position net of investments. This has been set at 25% of the borrowing requirement.

Maturity structure of rates for borrowing in 2024/25	Fixed Interest Rate		Variable Interest Rate	
	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Under 12 months	0%	25%	0%	25%
12 months to 2 years	0%	25%	0%	25%
2 years to 5 years	0%	20%	0%	25%
5 years to 10 years	0%	20%	0%	25%
10 years and above	0%	100%	0%	25%

4.9 Rescheduling of debt

4.9.1 Rescheduling of current borrowing in the Council’s debt portfolio may be considered if there is surplus cash available to facilitate any repayment, or rebalancing of the portfolio to provide more certainty is considered appropriate and creates no additional revenue burden.

4.9.2 The following chart shows the Council’s debt maturity profile by financial year as at 13 December 2023:



4.9.3 If rescheduling is to be undertaken, it will be reported to Council at the earliest meeting following its action.

4.10 Approved Sources of Long and Short-term Borrowing

4.10.1 Traditionally the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) has been the main source of longterm borrowing for local authorities. The interest rate charged on Public Works Loan Board loans is linked to the gilt yield. Currently the Council can obtain a Public Works Loan Board loan at 0.8% higher than the gilts yield (this rate is referred to as the margin).

4.10.2 The approved sources of long-term and short-term borrowing will be:

- Public Works Loan Board
- UK Local Authorities
- UK public and private sector pension funds

- Municipal Bond Agency
- UK Infrastructure Bank
- Any other financial institution approved by the Prudential Regulation Authority, (this is part of the Bank of England and is responsible for the regulation and supervision of around 1,700 banks, building societies, credit unions, insurers and major investment firms)

5 ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

5.1 Investment Policy – Management of Risk

- 5.1.1 The Council’s investment priorities will be security first, portfolio liquidity second and then yield (return). The Council will aim to achieve the optimum return (yield) on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity and with regard to the Council’s risk appetite.
- 5.1.2 The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and CIPFA have extended the meaning of ‘investments’ to include both financial and non-financial investments. This report deals solely with treasury (financial) investments. Non-financial investments, essentially the purchase of income yielding assets and service investments, are covered in the Capital Strategy, Appendix M.
- 5.1.3 The Council’s investment policy has regard to the following:
- DLUHC’s Guidance on Local Government Investments (“the Guidance”)
 - CIPFA Treasury Management in Public Services Code of Practice and Cross Sectoral Guidance Notes 2021 (“the Code”)
 - CIPFA Treasury Management Guidance Notes 2021
- 5.1.4 In the current economic climate, it is considered appropriate to maintain a degree of liquidity to cover cash flow needs but to also consider “laddering” investments for periods up to 12 months with high credit rated financial institutions, whilst investment rates remain elevated, as well as wider range fund options.

5.2 Creditworthiness Policy

- 5.2.1 The primary principle governing the Council’s investment criteria is the security of its investments, although the yield or return on the investment is also a key consideration.
- 5.2.2 The Section 151 Officer will maintain a counterparty list in compliance with the following criteria and will revise the criteria and submit them to Council for approval as necessary.
- 5.2.3 Typically, the minimum credit ratings criteria the Council use will be a short term rating (Fitch or equivalents) of F1 and a long term rating of A-. There may be occasions when the counterparty ratings from one or two of the rating agencies are marginally lower than these ratings but may still be used. In these instances, when counterparty ratings from one of the credit rating agencies (Fitch) meet the minimum criteria and also other relevant market data shows a stable position the counterparty can be used. If there is a major disparity between the counterparty ratings issued by Fitch and the other credit rating agencies then the counterparty will not be used.
- 5.2.4 Credit rating information is supplied by the Council’s treasury consultants daily on all active counterparties that comply with the criteria below. Any counterparty failing to meet the criteria would be omitted from the counterparty (dealing) list. Any rating changes, rating watches (notification of a likely change), rating outlooks (notification of the longer-term bias outside the central rating view) are provided to officers almost immediately after they occur and this information is considered before dealing. For instance for overseas counterparties a negative rating watch at the minimum Council

criteria will be suspended from use, with all others being reviewed in light of market, the negative ratings watch will only be a factor in the selection process for overseas banks or if the negative rating applies only to one or several counterparties

5.2.5 Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) factors can and do influence credit quality, ESG credit factors are those factors that can materially influence the creditworthiness of a rated entity or issue, examples include:

5.2.6 Environmental credit factors- climate policy, market changes to address mitigation and adaptation requirements related to climate change;

- Social credit factors- social capital including consumer and citizen relationship issues; socioeconomic and demographic issues; and
- Governance credit factors- risk management, cyber risk and governance structure factors- including board skill sets and key person risk.

5.2.7 The credit rating criteria is shown below alongside the time and monetary limits for institutions on the Council's counterparty list (for both specified and non-specified investments):

Credit rating criteria alongside the time and monetary limits	Fitch Rating (long-term / short-term)	Money Limit	Time Limit
Banks/ Building Society higher quality	AA-/F1+	£10m	3yrs
Banks /Building Society medium quality	A-/F1	£10m	364 days
Banks – part nationalised	N/A	£10m	364 days
Council's banker (not meeting Banks above)	BBB/F2	£10m	overnight
Building Society (not meeting Banks above & minimum assets £1 bn)	Not Rated	£10m	6 months
UK Government Gilts	UK sovereign rating	£7m	3 years
Debt Management Account Deposit Facility managed by the DMO (Debt Management Office)	UK sovereign rating	£10m	364 days
Local authorities	N/A	£10m	364 days
Property Funds	N/A	£2m	No limit set*
	Fund rating	Money Limit	Time Limit
Money Market Funds CNAV	AAA	£5m	liquid
Money Market Funds LVNAV	AAA	£5m	liquid

* No time limit as investment would need to be left to mature to ensure no loss on investments.

5.3 Use of additional information other than credit ratings.

5.3.1 Additional requirements under the Code require the Council to supplement credit rating information. Whilst the above criteria rely primarily on the application of credit ratings to provide a pool of appropriate counterparties for officers to use, additional operational market information will be applied before making any specific investment decision from the agreed pool of counterparties. This additional market information (for example Credit Default Swaps, rating Watches/Outlooks) will be applied to compare the relative security of differing investment opportunities.

5.3.2 For local authorities, in terms of credit risk they receive a risk score of 1, equivalent to government credit quality. There are a number of local authorities that are issuing s114 notices showing financial distress. An additional check will be undertaken before lending to other local authorities to confirm at the time of investment the Council is not subject to DLUHC intervention and they have not issued a s114 notice.

5.4 Other limits.

5.4.1 Due care will be taken to consider the exposure of the Council's total investment portfolio to non-specified investments, countries, groups and sectors.

- no more than 10% will be placed with any non-UK country at any time; and
- all limits in place will apply to a group of companies.

Indicator 9 – Upper limit on total principal sums invested for periods of longer than a year

5.4.2 These limits are set with regard to the Council's liquidity requirements and to reduce the need for early sale of an investment and are based on the availability of funds after each year-end.

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Long term treasury management investments; invested for longer than 365 days	10%	10%	10%

5.5 Investment Strategy

5.5.1 As per the Council's overall objectives, it will ensure that surplus balances are managed in a way to maximise the income potential whilst having regard to security risk.

5.5.2 The Council's approach is influenced by numerous issues:

- Cash flow – when will the Council need the funds to pay general running costs of the Council or fund capital investment activity;
- The vehicles allowed for investment as outlined in this strategy as referenced on 5.2.7;
- The rate of return on offer,
- Liquidity – the Council seeks to maintain liquid short-term deposits of at least £1.0m available with a week's notice and no bank overdraft.

5.6 Investment returns expectations.

5.6.1 The benchmark SONIA (Sterling Overnight Index Average) 1-month rate will continue to be the bench. SONIA is based on actual transactions and reflects the average of the interest rates that banks pay to borrow sterling overnight from other financial institutions and other institutional investors.

5.6.2 The investment income budget proposed for approval in the Budget 2024/25 is £1.95m. This is based on expected balances and forecast interest rate based on the anticipated base rate changes during 2024/25. This will be regularly monitored during the year and variances to budget will be reported in line with the reporting requirements.

5.6.3 Security – each counterparty the Council invests in has a risk of default (a calculated percentage to demonstrate the potential loss on the investment). The Council's maximum security risk benchmark for the current portfolio, is:

- 0.10% historic risk of default when compared to the whole portfolio. The following table demonstrates a financial representation of how much the Council would stand to lose at 0.10%.

	2023/24 Forecast £000	2023/24 Estimate £000	2024/25 Estimate £000	2025/26 Estimate £000
Total Investments at 31 March	36,860	35,840	34,820	34,820
Revenue impact of risk of default at 0.10%	37	36	35	35

6 APPENDICES

1. Economic background
2. Approved countries for investments
3. The treasury management role of the section 151 officer

6.1 ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

6.1.1 The first half of 2023/24 saw:

- Interest rates rise by a further 100bps, taking Bank Rate from 4.25% to 5.25% and, possibly, the peak in the tightening cycle.
- Short, medium and long-dated gilts remain elevated as inflation continually surprised to the upside.
- CPI inflation falling from 8.7% in April to 6.7% in September, its lowest rate since February 2022, but still the highest in the G7.
- Core CPI inflation declining to 6.1% in September from 7.1% in April and May, a then 31 years high.
- A cooling in labour market conditions, but no evidence yet that it has led to an easing in wage growth (as the 3myy growth of average earnings rose by 7.8% for the period June to August, excluding bonuses).

6.1.2 The registering of 0% GDP for Q3 suggests that underlying growth has lost momentum since earlier in the year. Some of the weakness in July was due to there being almost twice as many working days lost to strikes in July (281,000) than in June (160,000). But with output falling in 10 out of the 17 sectors, there is an air of underlying weakness.

6.1.3 The fall in the composite Purchasing Managers Index from 48.6 in August to 46.7 in September left it at its lowest level since COVID-19 lockdowns reduced activity in January 2021. At face value, it is consistent with the 0% q/q rise in real GDP in the period July to September, being followed by a contraction in the next couple of quarters.

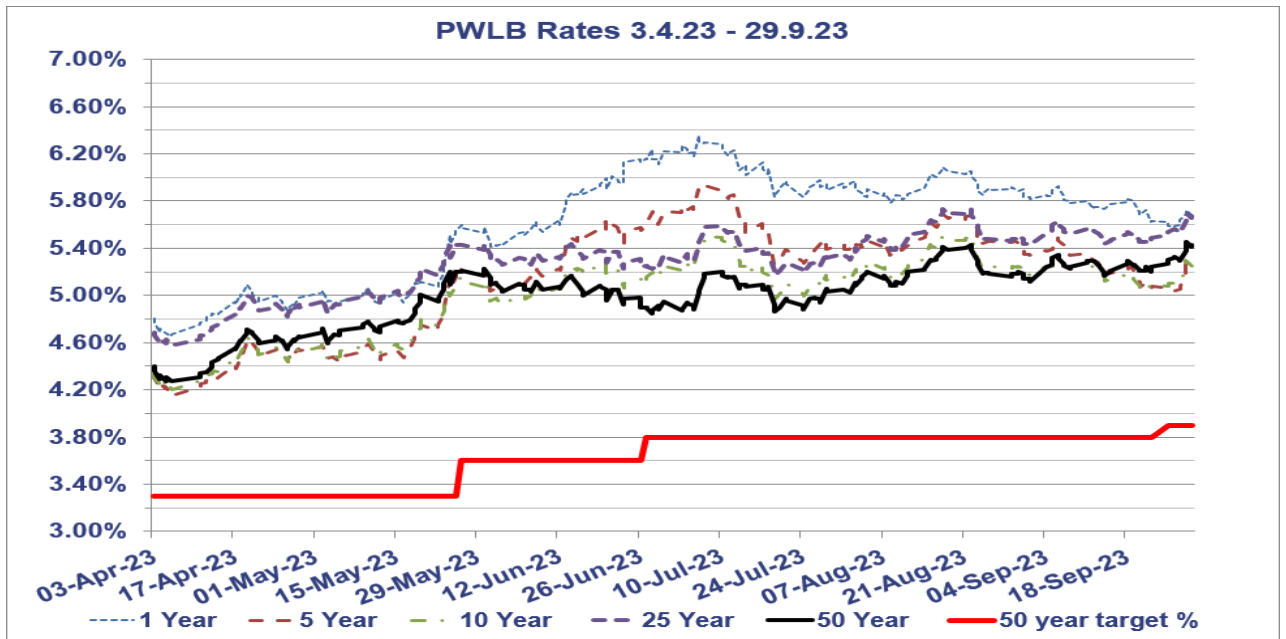
6.1.4 The 0.4% m/m rebound in retail sales volumes in August is not as good as it looks as it partly reflected a pickup in sales after the unusually wet weather in July. Sales volumes in August were 0.2% below their level in May, suggesting much of the resilience in retail activity in the first half of the year has faded.

6.1.5 As the growing drag from higher interest rates intensifies over the next six months, we think the economy will continue to lose momentum and soon fall into a mild recession. Strong labour demand, fast wage growth and government handouts have all supported household incomes over the past year. And with CPI inflation past its peak and expected to decline further, the economy has got through the cost-of-living crisis without recession. But even though the worst of the falls in real household disposable incomes are behind us, the phasing out of financial support packages provided by the government during the energy crisis means real incomes are unlikely to grow strongly. Higher interest rates will soon bite harder too. We expect the Bank of England to keep interest rates at the probable peak of 5.25% until the second half of 2024. Mortgage rates are likely to stay above 5.0% for around a year.

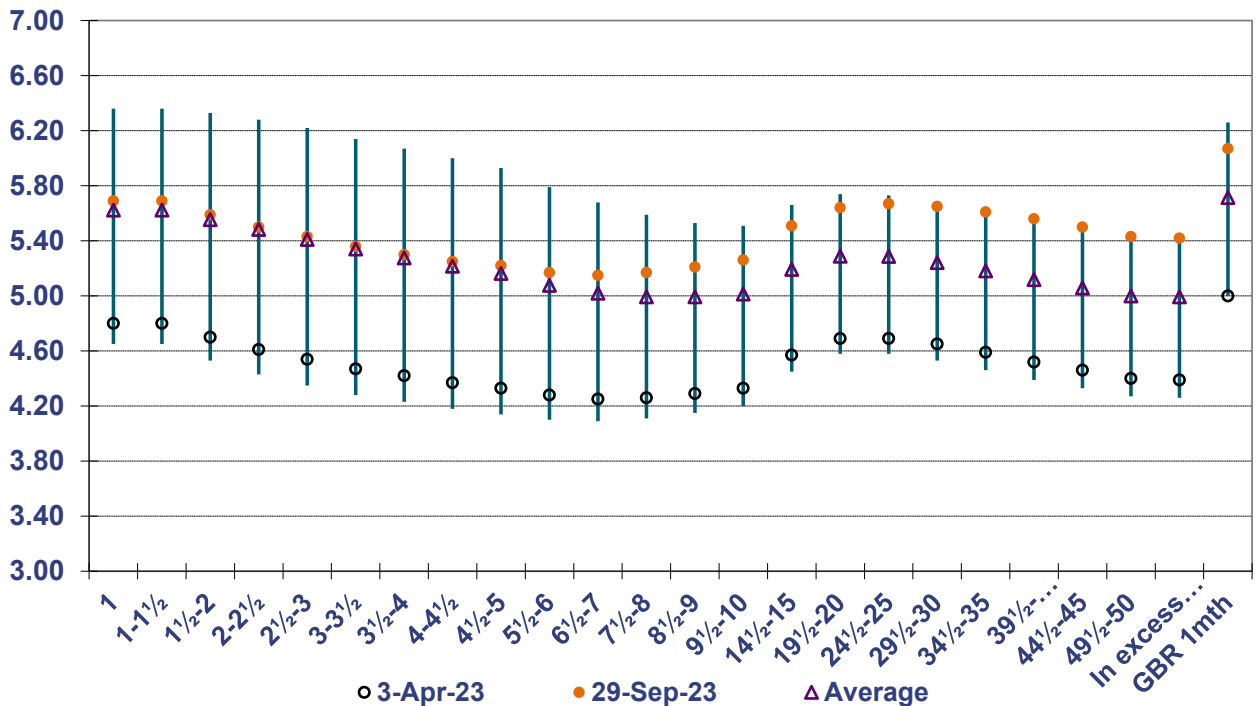
6.1.6 The tightness of the labour market continued to ease, with employment in the three months to July falling by 207,000. The further decline in the number of job vacancies from 1.017m in July to 0.989m in August suggests that the labour market has loosened a bit further since July. That is the first time it has fallen below 1m since July 2021. At 3.0% in July, and likely to have fallen to 2.9% in August, the job vacancy rate is getting closer to 2.5%, which would be consistent with slower wage growth. Meanwhile, the 48,000 decline in the supply of workers in the three months to July offset some of the loosening in the tightness of the labour market. That was due to a 63,000 increase in inactivity in the three months to July as more people left the labour market due to long term sickness or to enter education. The supply of labour is still 0.3% below its pre-pandemic February 2020 level.

- 6.1.7 But the cooling in labour market conditions still has not fed through to an easing in wage growth. The headline 3my rate rose 7.8% for the period June to August, which meant UK wage growth remains much faster than in the US and in the Euro-zone. Moreover, while the Bank of England's closely watched measure of regular annual average total pay growth for the private sector was 7.1% in June to August 2023, for the public sector this was 12.5% and is the highest total pay annual growth rate since comparable records began in 2001. However, this is affected by the NHS and civil service one-off non-consolidated payments made in June, July and August 2023. The Bank of England's prediction was for private sector wage growth to fall to 6.9% in September.
- 6.1.8 CPI inflation declined from 6.8% in July to 6.7% in August and September, the lowest rate since February 2022. The biggest positive surprise was the drop in core CPI inflation, which declined from 6.9% to 6.1%. That reverses all the rise since March.
- 6.1.9 In its latest monetary policy meeting on 06 November, the Bank of England left interest rates unchanged at 5.25%. The vote to keep rates on hold was a split vote, 6-3. It is clear that some members of the MPC are still concerned about the stickiness of inflation.
- 6.1.10 Like the US Fed, the Bank of England wants the markets to believe in the higher for longer narrative. In terms of messaging, the Bank once again said that "further tightening in monetary policy would be required if there were evidence of more persistent inflationary pressures", citing the rise in global bond yields and the upside risks to inflation from "energy prices given events in the Middle East". So, like the Fed, the Bank is keeping the door open to the possibility of further rate hikes. However, it also repeated the phrase that policy will be "sufficiently restrictive for sufficiently long" and that the "MPC's projections indicate that monetary policy is likely to need to be restrictive for an extended period of time". Indeed, Governor Bailey was at pains in his press conference to drum home to markets that the Bank means business in squeezing inflation out of the economy.
- 6.1.11 This narrative makes sense as the Bank of England does not want the markets to decide that a peak in rates will be soon followed by rate cuts, which would loosen financial conditions and undermine its attempts to quash inflation. The language also gives the Bank of England the flexibility to respond to new developments. A rebound in services inflation, another surge in wage growth and/or a further leap in oil prices could conceivably force it to raise rates in the future.
- 6.1.12 In the table below, the rise in gilt yields across the curve as a whole in 2023/24, and therein PWLB rates, is clear to see.

PWLB RATES 01.04.23 - 29.09.23



PWLB Certainty Rate Variations 3.4.23 to 29.9.23



HIGH/LOW/AVERAGE PWLB RATES FOR 01.04.23 – 29.09.23

	1 Year	5 Year	10 Year	25 Year	50 Year
Low	4.65%	4.14%	4.20%	4.58%	4.27%
Date	06/04/2023	06/04/2023	06/04/2023	06/04/2023	05/04/2023
High	6.36%	5.93%	5.51%	5.73%	5.45%
Date	06/07/2023	07/07/2023	22/08/2023	17/08/2023	28/09/2023
Average	5.62%	5.16%	5.01%	5.29%	5.00%
Spread	1.71%	1.79%	1.31%	1.15%	1.18%

6.1.13 The peak in medium to longer dated rates has generally arisen in August and September and has been primarily driven by continuing high UK inflation, concerns that gilt issuance may be too much for the market to absorb comfortably, and unfavourable movements in US Treasuries.

6.1.14 The S&P 500 and FTSE 100 have struggled to make much ground through 2023.

CENTRAL BANK CONCERNS

6.1.15 Currently, the Fed has pushed up US rates to a range of 5.25% to 5.5%, whilst the MPC followed by raising Bank Rate to 5.25%. EZ rates have also increased to 4% with further tightening a possibility.

6.1.16 Ultimately, however, from a UK perspective it will not only be inflation data but also employment data that will mostly impact the decision-making process, although any softening in the interest rate outlook in the US may also have an effect (just as, conversely, greater tightening may also).

6.2 APPROVED COUNTRIES FOR INVESTMENTS

6.2.1 This list is based on those countries which have sovereign ratings of AA- or higher, and also have banks operating in sterling markets which have credit ratings of green or above in the Link creditworthiness service.

Based on lowest available rating

AAA

- Australia
- Denmark
- Germany
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Singapore
- Sweden
- Switzerland

AA+

- Canada
- Finland
- U.S.A.

AA

- Abu Dhabi (UAE)

AA-

- Belgium
- France
- Qatar
- **U.K.**

6.3 THE TREASURY MANAGEMENT ROLE OF THE SECTION 151 OFFICER

The S151 (responsible) officer

6.3.1 List of specific responsibilities of the S151 officer in the 2021 Treasury Management Code includes;

- recommending clauses, treasury management policy/practices for approval, reviewing the same regularly, and monitoring compliance;
- submitting regular treasury management policy reports;
- submitting budgets and budget variations;
- receiving and reviewing management information reports;
- reviewing the performance of the treasury management function;
- ensuring the adequacy of treasury management resources and skills, and the effective division of responsibilities within the treasury management function;
- ensuring the adequacy of internal audit, and liaising with external audit;
- recommending the appointment of external service providers.
- preparation of a Capital Strategy
- ensuring that the Capital Strategy is prudent, sustainable, affordable and prudent in the long term and provides value for money
- ensuring that due diligence has been carried out on all treasury and non-financial investments and is in accordance with the risk appetite of the Council
- ensure that the Council has appropriate legal powers to undertake expenditure on non-financial assets and their financing
- ensuring the proportionality of all investments so that the Council does not undertake a level of investing which exposes the Council to an excessive level of risk compared to its financial resources
- ensuring that an adequate governance process is in place for the approval, monitoring and ongoing risk management of all non-financial investments and long-term liabilities
- ensuring that members are adequately informed and understand the risk exposures taken on by the Council
- ensuring that the Council has adequate expertise, either in house or externally provided, to carry out the above

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Capital Investment Strategy

Version & Policy Number	CIS 23/24
Guardian	Andrew Merry, Head of Finance
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This strategy sets out the Council's approach to compiling the capital programme, its priorities, availability of funding and financial management and has been prepared in line with the requirements in the Prudential Code. In terms of capital expenditure, the capital strategy should include:

- An overview of the governance process for approval and monitoring of capital expenditure, including links to the Council's policies on capitalisation.
- A long-term view of capital expenditure plans, where long term is defined by the financing strategy and risks faced by the Council with reference to the life of projects / assets.
- An overview of asset management planning including the cost of past borrowing, maintenance requirements and planned disposals.
- Any restrictions around borrowing or funding of ongoing capital finance.

1.2 The strategy should additionally include:

- The Council's approach to commercial activities including processes ensuring effective due diligence and defining the authority's risk appetite in respect of these, including proportionality in respect of overall resources.
- Requirements for independent and expert advice and scrutiny arrangements.
- An overview of the governance process for approval and monitoring and ongoing risk management of any other financial guarantees and other long-term liabilities.
- A summary of the knowledge and skills available to the Council and confirmation that these are commensurate with the Council's risk appetite.

1.3 The overall approach to developing the capital strategy is based upon the following key principles:

Principle 1	Principle 2	Principle 3	Principle 4
Delivery of council objectives and priorities	Maximise and promote best use of available funds	Ensure strong governance in decision-making	Ensure plans are affordable, prudent, and sustainable
Clear on objectives and priorities	Bidding for external funds where possible	Ensuring that all projects have an officer and lead member sponsor	Capital investment decisions will not place additional pressure on Medium Term Financial Plan
Appraising all investments in the context of objectives / priorities	Taking advantage of increased freedom and flexibilities. Both in terms of terms and conditions of grants or borrowing powers.	Option appraisal for all projects requiring evidence of need, cost, risk, outcomes and methods of financing.	Promoting capital investment which allows either invest to save outcomes or generates a revenue and/or capital return
Ensuring decision-makers are clear on the positive contribution capital investment makes to objectives	Generate funding, where possible, from the rationalisation of existing assets.	Ensuring all decisions are approved in line with the Constitution and the Capital Strategy	Minimising borrowing requirements by putting the first call on grants / internal resources

2 CAPITAL EXPENDITURE AND INVESTMENT

- 2.1 Capital expenditure is where the Council spends money on assets, such as property or vehicles that will be used for more than one year. In local government this includes spending on assets owned by other bodies, and loans and grants to other bodies enabling them to buy assets. The Council has some limited discretion on what counts as capital expenditure, for example assets costing below £25,000 and are charged to revenue in year.
- 2.2 There are three key drivers of the Council's capital plans:
- Corporate Strategy - strategic aims and priorities (para 2.3)
 - Asset management requirements (para 2.4)
 - Invest to Save (para 2.5)
- 2.3 The Council is being requested to approve a Corporate Strategy alongside the Capital Strategy and is doing significant work in all the above areas that may have a significant impact on future versions of the Capital Strategy. The priorities are:

Tackling the Climate Emergency
Policies will support the County to tackle the climate crisis, helping to reduce carbon emissions and minimise the impact of climate change on the lives of residents and local businesses.
A diverse and sustainable local economy.
Building a strong rural economy with a productive, sustainable, and diverse business base that provides opportunity for all.
Support the most vulnerable
Working collaboratively to improve outcomes for residents, helping those that need additional support to live their best lives.
Provide good public services
Delivering modern and cost-effective services which are easy to access and provide good levels of customer care.

- 2.4 The Council has also approved a Property Asset Strategy and guiding principles for the future management of the Council's assets. It includes the following aims:
- Manage property to support the Council's objectives and priorities set out in the Corporate Plan;
 - Minimise the operation and long-term cost of the Council's estate;
 - Provide Value for Money by using Council resources wisely and having the required information to make robust and informed decisions – developing a planned maintenance approach;
 - Deliver and support services by providing assets fit for purpose and effective, modern ways of working;
 - Consider the impact of sustainability in all decisions, making buildings as sustainable as possible and considering the impact of our carbon footprint;
 - Take a dynamic approach to asset management including retention, repurposing and disposal; and
 - Work with Partners to maximise opportunities and consider the transfer of services/assets to Town and Parish Councils and others.

Invest to Save

- 2.5 The Councils Integrated Budget Plan 2024/25 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28 requires the Council to transform the way it works and its service offer. As part of this, the Council understand that it will need to support one off investment with the aim of making current Council funding work harder ie efficiency gains.
- 2.6 Invest to save capital projects will follow a similar criterion to the Process Improvement Fund (revenue reserve, see Appendix I), with the key criteria for investment being:
- Delivers against the Council's corporate strategy and priorities,
 - Provides on-going revenue savings, or
 - Provides on-going revenue income, and
 - Must repay costs back to the fund within an agreed period (three-year payback) OR delivers a benefit to a related service that contributes to sustainability.
- 2.7 The capital programme will deliver £48.3m of capital investment to support the achievement of Council objectives. Key projects contributing to these objectives are summarised below with additional detail provided on the following page, and Appendix K.

Estimated Capital Expenditure*	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Supporting the most vulnerable	1,033	270	270	270
A diverse & sustainable local economy	26,043	14,589	2,684	2,684
Tackling the climate emergency	0	0	0	0
Provide good public services	2,984	547	547	547
Total Investment	30,060	15,406	3,501	3,501
Grant & Contributions	29,363	15,326	3,421	3,421
Direct Revenue Financing	-	-	-	-
Capital Receipts	697	80	80	80
Net Financing Requirement	-	-	-	-
Total Financing	30,060	15,406	3,501	3,501

Table 1: Estimates of Capital Expenditure over the MTFS period

Programme Area	Programme Description	Corporate Priority	Capital Expenditure £000	Funding		Uncommitted Funding £000
				Grant / S106 £000	Revenue / Capital Receipt £000	
Rolling	Disabled Facilities Grants	Vulnerable	810	810	-	-
	Devolved Formula Capital	Public Services	15	15	-	-
	Highways	Economy	8,052	8,052	-	169
	Local Transport Plan	Public Services	1,386	1,386	-	1,435
	IT Refresh	Public Services	240	-	240	-
Approved	Estimated Carry Forward from PY	77% Economy	1,264	1,249	15	-
	Asset Investment (H&S works)	Public Services	542	-	542	-
	Affordable Housing - Brooke Road, Oakham	Economy	163	163	-	-
	LUF	Economy	33,622	33,622	-	-
	UKSPF	Economy	162	162	0	0
Requesting Approval	Waste and Street Cleansing Vehicles	Public Services	1,862	1,862	-	-
	Affordable Housing South Street	Economy	347	287	60	0
Pipeline	Communities Infrastructure Developments	Vulnerable	500	500	-	-
	Waste Transfer Station	Climate	-	-	-	-
	Waste Vehicles - impact of Waste Bill	Climate	-	-	-	-
	Highways Vehicles	Economy	-	-	-	-
	Asset Review - HQ & et al	Public Services	-	-	-	2,249
	Records Office	Public Services	-	-	-	-
	Rural England Prosperity Funding	Economy	-	-	-	400
Pipeline Developer Contributions	EV Infrastructure Fund	Climate	-	-	-	-
	Highways	Economy	-	-	-	507
	Heritage & Culture	Public Services	-	-	-	571
	Towns Villages & Public Spaces	Public Services	-	-	-	1,319
	Public Transport	Climate	-	-	-	1,000
	Health & Wellbeing Infrastructure	Vulnerable	-	-	-	372
	Childrens & Young People	Vulnerable	-	-	-	302
	Affordable Housing	Economy	-	-	-	283
Fire & Rescue	Public Services	-	-	-	12	
	Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)	Public Services	-	-	-	403
Total			48,467	47,610	857	9,319

Rolling Programmes

- 2.8 The rolling programmes will potentially have sub projects, these projects will be prioritised based on the following:
- 2.8.1 **Disabled Facility Grants** – will be allocated in line with the Disabled Facility Grant criteria or the Health and Prevention Grant criteria found on the Councils website <https://www.rutland.gov.uk/adultsocialcare/grants-home-adaptations-equipment>
- 2.8.2 **Devolved Formula Capital** – passported on to schools inline with the grant terms and conditions.
- 2.8.3 **Highways** – The Highways Capital Programme supports the Council's statutory duties as a highway authority, under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980. The Council has a duty to maintain the Highway in such a state as to be safe and fit for the ordinary traffic that may reasonably be expected to use it.
- The capital programme delivers on the targets as set out in the 2020 - 2026 Corporate Plan.
- The programme of maintenance schemes is driven by the asset management and lifecycle planning based approach, contained within the Highways Asset Management Plan (HAMP) and Council's Street Lighting Policy.
- 2.8.4 The programme is then prioritised from highways asset condition surveys and inspections using a risk-based approach, further details on how the schemes are identified can be found in the Highways Asset Management Plan (HAMP).
- Any material highways schemes that are delivered in year will be reported separately as part of the Council's Quarterly Financial Performance monitoring report to Cabinet.
- 2.8.5 **Local Transport Plan** - The Local Transport Act 2008 sets out a duty for all local transport authorities to produce and keep under review a local transport plan and associated policies. Moving Rutland Forward (MRF) is the name of the Council's fourth local transport plan (LTP4), this covers the period from 2019 to 2036.
- The government grant for these schemes is provided by the Department of Transport to support small-scale transport improvement schemes, such as road safety, bus priority, walking, cycling and transport information schemes.
- Future capital projects will be driven by the themes within the Council's Local Transport Plan, and associated policies. The approval of these schemes will be in line with the Council's Budget Virement policy, contained within section 9 of the Cabinet Integrated Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy, of which this strategy forms Appendix M.
- 2.8.6 **IT Refresh** - The IT Refresh Capital programme will be used to modernise the Council by ensuring the end user hardware is appropriate and up to date. IT will establish projects to ensure that both the oldest IT equipment in the Council, as well as service areas needing IT investment and supporting new starters. The scope of this IT investment will be end user hardware including laptops, tablet, mobile phones, monitors and any other hardware to support modernisation.
- The IT Refresh Capital programme will also make investment in centralised hardware such as wireless, network switches, video-conferencing facilities, firewalls and other security hardware and IT server-room infrastructure to ensure that the Council is operating a modern, efficient IT service that is helping staff to be productive and operate in a safe, secure environment.
- 2.9 Full details of the Capital Programme can be found in **Appendix K** of the **Integrated Budget Plan 2024/25 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 - 2027/28**.

3 RESOURCING STRATEGY

3.1 The aims and priorities of the Council will shape decisions around capital expenditure, there is recognition that the financial resources available to meet priorities are constrained in the current economic and political climate. The context for capital expenditure decisions is as follows:

- The Council does have capital resources and expects to receive more resources in the future (Capital Receipts, Grants, s106 agreements and CIL);
- The Council has limited capital assets which it could sell and use receipts to reinvest;
- The Council expects housing growth and this growth will yield CIL which can be used to invest in infrastructure;
- The Council is currently servicing debt of c£22m, the current cost of servicing this debt is £1.6m per annum; so
- Any investment decision that requires borrowing must take into account any impact to the Councils Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

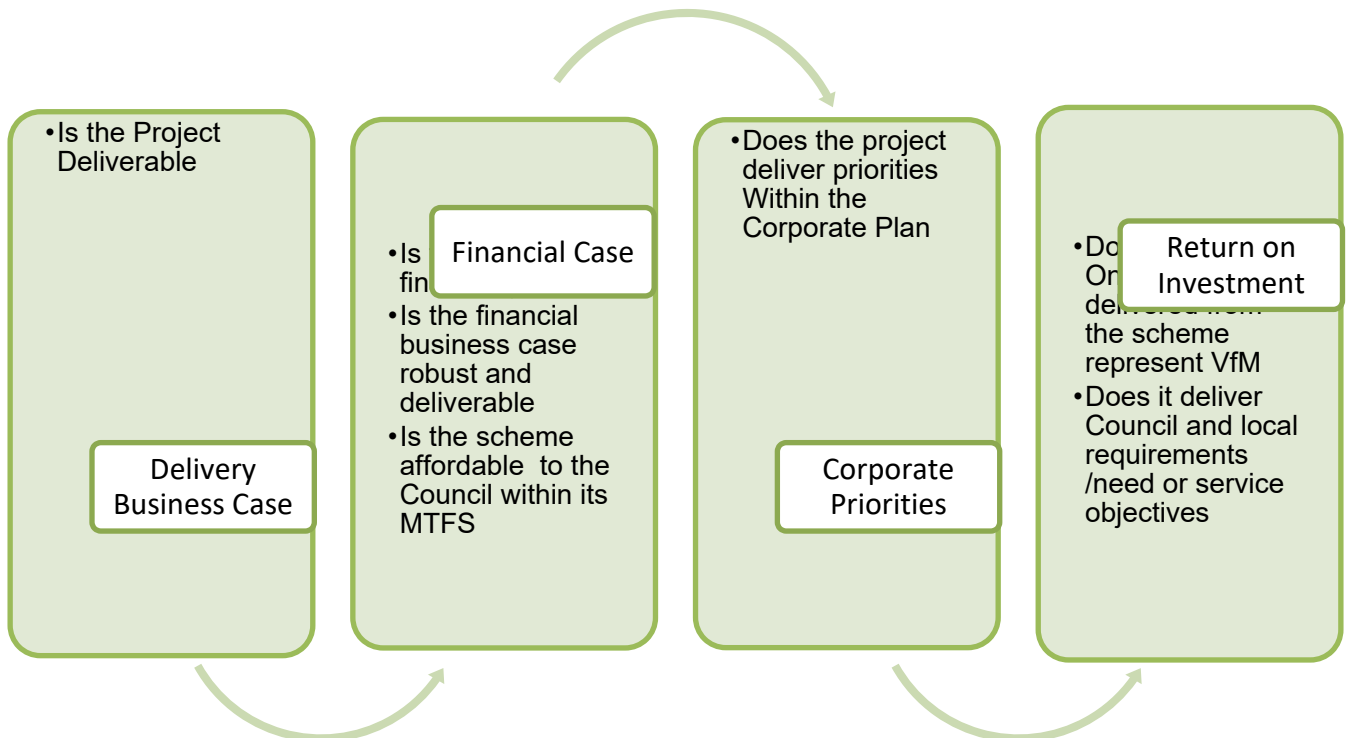
3.2 There are a range of potential funding sources which can be generated locally either by the Council itself or in partnership with others. The Council continues to seek new levels of external investment to match against its capital programme, this may be additional capital receipts from asset sales or contributions from other external bodies.

3.3 The Council has a number of options currently available for funding capital projects, including;

- **Government Grants** -capital resources from Central Government can be split into two categories:
 - a) Non-ring fenced – resources which are delivered through grant that can be utilised on any project (albeit that there may be an expectation of use for a specific purpose).
 - b) Ring-fenced – resources which are ring-fenced to particular areas and therefore have restricted uses.
- **Non-Government Contributions** - where there is a requirement to make an application to an external agency to receive external funding, which could also commit Council resources as matched funding to any bid for external resources.
- **Prudential Borrowing** - councils can borrow money to pay for capital assets. This can take the form of the Council running down its own cash balances or undertaking a loan from another organisation such as Public Works Loan Board (PWLB).
- **Capital Receipts** – capital receipts come from the sale of the Council's assets. Capital receipts will be available to support the capital programme as a corporate resource.
- **Revenue Contributions** - councils are free to make a contribution from their revenue budget to fund capital schemes. There are no limits on this.
- **Section 106 / Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** – use of section 106 / CIL funds from planning developments can be used for capital or revenue. As the purpose of these receipts is to invest in infrastructure to support development then they tend to be used for capital purposes.

Capital funding prioritisation

- 3.4 To ensure the Council makes appropriate capital investment decisions it will establish a prioritisation framework that is designed to support the decision making process for which capital investment projects and programmes are brought forward.
- 3.5 This supports scheme development and appropriate decision making through the Council's Capital Governance processes.
- 3.6 The Council continues to operate a rolling Capital Investment Portfolio, ensuring that decision making can be made at times when it's within the best interests of the Council.
- 3.7 Potential proposals for new council investment will inevitably exceed the resources available, therefore choice and priority setting should form an important part of the Council's capital appraisal process, ensuring that best choices in line with the Council priorities are made and value for money is achieved.
- 3.8 To assist the prioritisation of resources the Council will introduce a business case approach for new bids that are not funded from Specific Grants. The business case approach will adopt the principles in the CIPFA capital strategy guide on intended benefits, outputs and outcomes to develop a weighted score for each project for instance:
- **Benefits** – these can be financial and non-financial: a programme or individual project could result in net savings, an increase in your funding stream, an increase in your income stream, a reduction in CO₂ emissions or other such benefits.
 - **Outputs** – a programme or individual project could result in an increase in new business start-ups, new houses, an additional rail network, and additional personal equipment for frontline staff, digital technology or other such outputs.
 - **Outcomes** – a programme or individual project could result in jobs created or safeguarded for the area, a contribution to your housing target, improved connectivity, a refurbished asset for community use or other such outcomes.



4 GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-MAKING

4.1 The Prudential Code sets out a clear governance procedure for the setting and revising of a capital strategy and prudential indicators i.e. this should be done by the same body that takes the decisions for the local authority's budget – i.e. Full Council.

4.2 The Chief Finance Officer is responsible for ensuring that all matters required to be taken into account are reported to Full Council for consideration.

4.3 Progress against delivery of the Capital Strategy / Programme will be reported periodically in Finance Reports to Cabinet.

Capital expenditure / investment decisions

4.4 The Prudential Code states that decisions around capital expenditure, investment and borrowing should align with the processes established for the setting and revising of the budget.

4.5 The Financial Procedure Rules (FPR) set out clear procedures for the approval of capital expenditure, including:

- approval of the capital programme – Full Council (FPRs para 5.5)
- additions/changes to the capital programme – Cabinet/Council (FPRs para 5.7)
- borrowing – Full Council (FPRs 5.5 – 5.7) with borrowing sourced by Chief Finance Officer.

4.6 The Council have the following delegations in place for approving capital investment:

- Report 191/2016 - Cabinet agreed that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive and relevant Portfolio Holder to add small schemes (less than £50k) to the capital programme on the condition that all decisions are reported in the Quarterly Finance Report (Report No. 191/2016, Appendix A, para 2.4.4).
- Report 95/2020 - Cabinet agreed that the Strategic Director of Places in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and Director Legal and Governance, and the relevant Portfolio Holders be able to make decisions relating to the expenditure of Section 106 monies up to a value of £500,000 to deliver infrastructure and community facilities in accordance with the provisions of each individual obligation (Approved by Cabinet 31st July 2020, Report No 95/2020)
- Report 25/2021 - Delegate authority to the Strategic Director for Places in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to Approve the design, construction/ implementation and spend of/ on ITCP schemes with a value between £10,001 and £200,000.
- Report 111/2017 – Cabinet authorised the Director for Resources to allocate the IT capital allocation of £150k.

4.7 Part 8 of the Constitution - Financial Procedure Rules - Council/Cabinet determine how capital projects will be funded on advice from the Chief Finance Officer. There may be exceptional circumstances whereby it is financially beneficial to the Medium-Term Financial Plan and thereby the Revenue Account to change how projects are funded (e.g. to avoid borrowing costs) if the financial context has altered when preparing the outturn. The Chief Finance Officer in preparing the outturn will seek approval of any changes from Cabinet or Council if changes involve using new funds are not listed in the original programme.

4.8 In approving projects, Cabinet/Council may establish a vehicle (working group, panel, or board etc) to oversee the allocation of funds or completion of projects (e.g. an amount set aside for Sports grants could be allocated by a working group with delegated authority). In taking this decision, Members can consider risks and any other relevant factors.

- 4.9 The programme of meeting sets out the dates of Cabinet and Council meetings. Should the Council require decisions to be made quickly to respond to opportunities then the Constitution includes provision for emergency meetings.

5 PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND INDICATORS

CIPFA Prudential Code requirements

- 5.1 The Prudential Code requires Councils to think about six things when it agrees its capital programme:
- Service objectives – are spending plans consistent with our aims and plans?
 - Stewardship of assets – is capital investment being made on new assets at the cost of maintaining existing assets?
 - Value for money – do benefits outweigh the cost?
 - Prudence and sustainability – can the Council afford the borrowing now and in the future?
 - Affordability – what are the implications for council tax?
 - Practicality – can the Council deliver the programme?
- 5.2 Councils need to prove that they are complying with the Code and this is done through a series of prudential indicators that are set locally and approved at the same time the Council sets its budget for the following year.
- 5.3 These indicators are included in the Treasury Management Strategy but are based on the capital plans derived in accordance with this Strategy.

6 SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

In-house resources

- 6.1 The successful implementation of the Capital Investment Strategy necessitates the availability of people with the necessary experience of:
- developing capital projects;
 - acquiring and selling properties;
 - commissioning partners to deliver the capital programme;
 - managing properties as a landlord; and
 - sourcing suitable opportunities that match the criteria set under the adopted strategy.
- 6.2 The Council currently has in place a team in the Resources directorate which manages the current operational and non-operational asset portfolio.

Externally available resources

- 6.3 The Council makes use of external advice in developing projects or undertaking due diligence including external valuers, property condition experts, market appraisers etc. Other advice will be commissioned as and when required.

Members

- 6.4 Members are familiar with the budget process and approve the Treasury Management Strategy and Budget. Any additional training requirements will be discussed with the Scrutiny Committee.

**A large print version of this document is available
on request**



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Appendix N. Dedicated Schools Grant and the Schools budget

1 THE 2023-24 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG)

- 1.1 On 19th December 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) published the DSG allocations for 2023-24. Full details can be found on the DfE website at the following link - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2024-to-2025>
- 1.2 The headline numbers are included in the draft budget with the detail to be provided in the final budget.
- 1.3 The DSG announcement made by the DfE in December 20223 included the Schools Block, the Central Services Schools Block, the High Needs Block and Early Years Block (indicative). The actual amount to be received by the local authority during the 2032/24 financial years is subject to change and will be amended to reflect recoupment for academies. The current proposed 2023-24 allocations for Rutland are set out in table below, which also provides for comparison the 2023-24 allocations.

Dedicated Schools Block	2024/25 £m	2023/24 £m	Change £m
Schools Block	31.644	30.294	1.350
High Needs Block	5.882	5.656	0.226
Central Services Schools Block	0.208	0.198	0.010
Early Years Block*	2.598	1.609	0.989
Total	40.332	37.757	2.575

*Includes new duties for wraparound childcare

1.4 Schools Block

- 1.4.1 The Council follows the [national funding formula](#) with no centrally retained funds. Schools forum approved the maximum 0.5% transfer from the schools block to the high needs blocks.
- 1.4.2 Details of per pupil funding will be provided in the final budget.

1.5 High Needs Block

- 1.5.1 The decision making for spend on high needs activities rests with the Local Authority and the final decisions on budget allocations will be presented in the final budget.

1.6 Central Services Block

- 1.6.1 This funding is retained by the Council to meet its statutory responsibilities for Education and schools funding.

1.7 Early Years Block

- 1.7.1 The table below shows the hourly rates the Council will receive for each type of care. Final rates to be passported to service providers will be provided within the final budget

Early Years Block Hourly Rates	2024/25 £	2023/24 £	Change £
3 and 4 Year Old Funding	5.47	5.20	0.27
2 Year Old Funding	6.98	5.63	1.35
Under 2 Year Old Funding*	9.45	-	-

*Introduced in 2024/25

Appendix O – Carbon Impact Assessment

Ref	Proposal	This could be via the Council's own emissions or emissions across the County						
		Building Energy	Transport Energy	Water Usage	Renewable Energy	Carbon Offsetting	Other Carbon Reducing Activities	Embodied Energy
Service Investments								
CP001	Childrens additional resource capacity	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PN001	Increase contract costs for Regulatory Services	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PN004	Highways service redesign	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PN006	Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PP004	Heritage redesign of service	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PP006	SEND transport additional costs	Neutral	Increase	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PP007	Waste transfer mitigation costs	Neutral	Increase	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PP010	Biodiversity net gain officer	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Decrease	Unknown	Neutral
NP011	Local Flood Authority investment	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
LP001	Investment in data analysis	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
LP002	Increase contract costs for services within Law & Governance	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
LP003	Increase costs for Member allowances	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
RP001	Human Resources additional resource capacity	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
RP002	Greater use of technology cost to realise efficiency savings	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Saving Proposals								
AS001	Savings from resourcing synergies across teams in Adult Social Care	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
AS002	Savings within Adult Social Care that focus on demand management, better recruitment and retention, internal day care for complex cases, focus on funder market	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
AS003	Supplier negotiations in Adult Social Care	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
CS002	Community hubs providing universal and preventative services	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
CS003	Early intervention to reduce service demands in Children's directorate	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
CS004	Reduction in costs following commissioning review of services	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
CS005	Savings from resourcing synergies across teams in Children's directorate	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral

		This could be via the Council's own emissions or emissions across the County						
Ref	Proposal	Building Energy	Transport Energy	Water Usage	Renewable Energy	Carbon Offsetting	Other Carbon Reducing Activities	Embodied Energy
PN004	Introduction of street permitting scheme to become a self-financing service	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PN006	Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure grant funding	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PS004	Museum and Castle business rates (NNDR) savings	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PS005	Savings from resourcing synergies across teams in Place's directorate	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PS006	Transformation work redesign of heritage service	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PS009	Supplier negotiations in Places and public realm to change standards	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PS010	Redesign of public Bus network & post 16 review	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PS012	SEND Transport demand savings	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PS014	Green Waste Fee Increase	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PS015	Income from the redesigned heritage service	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
LS001	In House provision rather than commission for legal services	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
LS002	Savings from resourcing synergies across teams in Law & Governance Directorate	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
LS007	Savings from budget realignment in Corporate Services & Legal services	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
RS001	Savings from resourcing synergies across teams in Resources Directorate	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
RS002	Supplier negotiations in ICT & Digital	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
RS007	Supplier negotiations in Finance - Insurance	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
RS009	Supplier negotiations in Finance	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
RS011	Greater use of technology cost to realise efficiency savings	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
RS018	Charging of Overheads to Grants	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
RS019	Savings from the repurposing of an asset in association with the Levelling Up Fund schemes	Unknown	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
RS020	More efficient and effective use existing Council buildings	Unknown	Decrease	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Investments from reserves								

		This could be via the Council's own emissions or emissions across the County						
Ref	Proposal	Building Energy	Transport Energy	Water Usage	Renewable Energy	Carbon Offsetting	Other Carbon Reducing Activities	Embodied Energy
AI001	Temporary increase in resource capacity to delivery business case to lead to additional savings - Adults Directorate	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
AI002	Temporary increase in resource capacity to deliver projects - Adult Social Care	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
CI001	Temporary increase in resource capacity to deliver contract review to lead to additional savings - Childrens Directorate	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
CI002	Short term continued investment in preventative measures - Childrens Directorate	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
CI003	Temporary increase in resource capacity to delivery projects - Adult Social Care	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
CI004	Investment to improve efficiencies using the Liquid Logic system	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PI001	Investment to move to permitting - Highway & street works	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PI003	Investment in the greater use of technology to realise efficiency savings - Places Directorate	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PI004	Waste Prevention Programme investment	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral
PI008	Investment required in the Highways contract mobilisation	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PI009	Investment to develop Carbon baseline	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral
PI010	Investment for the redesign of Heritage service	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
LI001	Temporary increase in resource capacity to deliver contract review to lead to additional savings - Adults Directorate	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
LI003	Investment in audio / visual technology in the Council chambers	Neutral	Decrease	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
RI001	Temporary increase in resource capacity to deliver projects - Resources Directorate	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
RI007	Temporary increase in resource capacity to deliver projects Council wide	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
RI009	Investment in the greater use of technology to realise efficiency savings - Resources Directorate	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
RI016	Capital Programme for replacement of IT end user hardware	Decrease	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
PI011	Temporary increase in resource capacity to deliver projects in Highways	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral

This could be via the Council's own emissions or emissions across the County

Ref	Proposal	Building Energy	Transport Energy	Water Usage	Renewable Energy	Carbon Offsetting	Other Carbon Reducing Activities	Embodied Energy
RI019	Service efficiencies pump priming	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral

CABINET

11 January 2024

CONTRACT AWARD FOR PURCHASE OF THE REQUIRED VEHICLES AND ASSOCIATED TRANSPORT INFRA-STRUCTURE DETAILED WITHIN THE LEVELLING UP FUND BID

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and the Environment

Strategic Aim:	Sustainable Lives	
Exempt Information	Yes, Exempt Appendix B	
If yes please state relevant paragraph from Schedule 12A LGA 1972:	Paragraph 3, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any person.	
Exemption authorised by Chief Executive or in his absence by Strategic Director :	02/01/24	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Cllr C Wise, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and the Environment	
Contact Officer(s):	P Sharp/ Strategic Director for Places	07973 854906 psharp@rutland.gov.uk
Name/Job Title	A Culleton/ Head of Public Realm	aculleton@rutland.gov.uk
Ward Councillors	All	

1 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

- 1.1 A procurement process to purchase vehicles to deliver a new public bus service has been undertaken via the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) specialist vehicle framework 215-20.
- 1.2 Following a thorough procurement process, a winning bidder has been identified. See Exempt Appendix B.
- 1.3 The report seeks Cabinet approval of the award of the call-off contract in accordance with Rule 16.64 of the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules.

Recommendations

- 1.4 Approves the award of the Contract for purchase of Fleet Vehicles.

Reasons for the Recommendations

- 1.4.1 A robust procurement process has been followed, which has identified a winning tender that is most economically advantageous and meets the quality criteria required.
- 1.4.2 The purchase of fleet vehicles supports the ambition of the Council to reduce impact on the environment through the use of electric vehicles and to develop a new public bus network service.
- 1.4.3 The purchase of fleet vehicles is essential for the delivery of the new bus network. Revenue savings identified in the review will not be achieved without new fleet vehicles and so supports the recommendations.

2 INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

- 2.1 At its meeting on 12th September 2023, Cabinet approved the procurement of vehicles and associated transport infra-structure as set out in the Levelling Up Fund project.
- 2.2 Further to that report, at its meeting on 17th October 2023, Cabinet approved a new delivery model for the public bus network which requires investment in new vehicles and associated transport infra-structure.
- 2.3 The vehicle procurement via the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) specialist vehicle framework 215-20 commenced in November 2023 with a deadline for submission of bids of 8th December 2023. The specification for the new vehicles is attached at Appendix A.
- 2.4 Cabinet approval is required to award call off contracts via the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) specialist vehicle framework 215-20, in accordance with Rule 16.64 of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules for awards exceeding £213,477 in order to purchase vehicles as outlined in the LUF bid.
- 2.5 The value of the bids is likely to exceed £1 million.

Options Considered

- 2.6 If LUF grant was not available for the purchase of vehicles, the Council would need to find alternative sources of capital funds to deliver its ambitions to transform public transport. If this is not an option services will have to be reduced
- 2.7 If LUF grant was not available for the purchase of vehicles, the Council would need to find alternative sources of capital funds to deliver its ambitions to transform public transport. If this is not an option services will have to be reduced
- 2.8 Procurement of buses via open procurement processes would take longer and would be likely to cost more than following a framework call-off process where prices are set and so was excluded.

- 2.9 Whilst alternative frameworks were available, Rutland has good experience of using the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation, and it is considered a good fit for the purpose of vehicle purchase.

Background

- 2.10 In March 2022, the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) launched Round 2 of LUF. This was a competitive capital grant funding programme for investment in infrastructure to support local communities to 'level up' through: regenerating town centre and high streets; upgrading local transport and highways; and investing in cultural and heritage assets.
- 2.11 Following procurement through the ESPO framework, the report seeks approval to award contracts to the winning bidder in order to deliver the operational transport elements of the Transport capital project funded through LUF. Further work to procure associated transport infra-structure will follow, however, given the long lead times for delivery of vehicles, this is a vital step to achieving the new public bus network.

Procurement

- 2.12 This procurement process was managed by Welland Procurement in partnership with Rutland County Council under a call off competition under ESPO Framework 215_20 Specialist Vehicles, Lot 6 – Minibuses with a deadline of 8th December 2023 for submission of bids. Using a specialist framework ensures that suppliers' quality has already been assessed, and they have been determined by the framework to be able to meet requirements.
- 2.13 The use of the Framework ensures that the procurement is compliant with the Public Contract Regulations 2015, and with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.
- 2.14 The aim is to place a one-off order for 11 minibuses, made up of 8 diesel and 3 Electric Vehicles (EVs) to deliver passenger transport services in the county. The specification for the vehicles is shown at Appendix A.
- 2.15 The intention being for the Council to operate a countywide bus network including electric town bus services and Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services to meet demand as detailed in the LUF bid document.
- 2.16 The Council used an electronic tendering tool to manage this procurement process via a tendering portal operating on ProContract software.
- 2.17 Bidders were asked to complete an Award Questionnaire. Each tender was evaluated based on quality and price, to determine the most economically advantageous tender. The award criteria are made up of;
- 2.18 Quality 40%
- 2.19 Price 60%

The tenders were evaluated and scored independently by two officers.

Consultation

2.20 There is no further need for consultation on the award of contract.

3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

Financial Implications

- 3.1 There are no additional financial issues arising from this report as the transport grants will fund the capital costs associated with the purchase of fleet vehicles. The allocation of grant funding in the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) programme facilitates the purchase of these vehicles and as such is within the parameters for the LUF project. The LUF programme and associated projects were incorporated into the Capital Programme as part of the approval from Council in March 2023, Report No. 58/2023.
- 3.2 The investment in new vehicles is necessary to move forwards with the bus network review as approved by Cabinet in October 2023, and linked to the transformational savings which are included in the draft Integrated Budget Plan 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25-2027/28 consider at this Cabinet meeting.

Legal Implications

This section has been approved by Sarah Khawaja, Head of Legal & Democratic Services.

- 3.3 All procurement to resource delivery of transport operation LUF projects has been conducted in partnership with the Welland Procurement Unit, in line with the requirements of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

Risk Management Implications

- 3.4 The main risks to this Report and the Council achieving its objectives are as follows:
- 3.5 Risk: Late delivery of fleet vehicles will delay the implementation of the new public bus network and expected reduction in revenue costs.
- 3.6 Assessment of Risk (Medium)
- 3.7 Mitigation: Quality criteria in the tender requires delivery of vehicles within eighteen months of the date of order so that they are all available to be used immediately.
- 3.8 Residual Risk (Low)
- 3.9 Record of Risk (Transport WS12 Programme Risk Register):

DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

- 3.10 A Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) has not been completed because there are no identified risks or issues to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 3.11 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has not been completed for the following

reason, any public transport provision implemented will be compliant with The Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) ensuring equality in access to services. Exemption from this requirement will not apply to LUF transport operations projects.

COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 3.12 The Council has a duty in accordance with S17 Crime and Disorder Act 1988, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to the likely effect of that exercise of those functions on and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social behaviour).
- 3.13 This duty has been considered and there are no community safety implications relating to the recommendations.
- 3.14 An improved public transport offer providing access to social and leisure services can be effective in helping to reduce anti-social behaviour, especially in younger residents.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATION

- 3.15 Improved public transport provision results in reduced rural isolation and emissions from private car use, increased physical activity and access to services.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 3.16 On 11 January 2021 Rutland County Council acknowledged that it was in a climate emergency. The Council understands that it needs to take urgent action to address it.
- 3.17 Three of the eleven vehicles, in the tender are electric vehicles. Use of this alternative fuel to diesel offers an opportunity to improve on the current level of emissions which has a positive impact on environmental and climate change implications of the Recommendations.

PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.18 The procurement implications are set out in the body of this report.

HR IMPLICATIONS

- 3.19 There are no HR implications in the procurement of vehicles.

4 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 4.1 Report No. 58/2023 - Rutland And Melton Levelling Up Fund Grant Report 27th March 2023
[HTTPS://RUTLANDCOUNTY.MODERNGOV.CO.UK/MGCALENDARMONTHVIEW.ASPX?XXR=0&M=3&DD=2023&ACT=GO](https://rutlandcounty.moderngov.co.uk/mgcalendarmonthview.aspx?xxr=0&m=3&dd=2023&act=go)
- 4.2 Rural Innovation In Place – Levelling Up Proposition For Rutland & Melton
[HTTPS://WWW.MELTON.GOV.UK/MEDIA/LLVDPGJS/LEVELLING-UP-PROPOSITION-FOR-RUTLAND-AND-MELTON.PDF.](https://www.melton.gov.uk/media/llvdpjgs/levelling-up-proposition-for-rutland-and-melton.pdf)

- 4.3 Levelling Up Fund – Transport Project Procurement
<https://rutlandcounty.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MId=2792>

5 APPENDICES

- 5.1 Appendix A – Tender for Fleet Procurement
- 5.2 Exempt Appendix B. Appendix B is marked as “Not For Publication” Because It Contains Exempt Information as defined in paragraph 3 Of Part 1 Of Schedule 12A of The Local Government Act 1972, namely commercially sensitive information.

An Accessible Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.

**TENDER FOR FLEET PROCUREMENT
ON BEHALF OF RUTLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

Specification – Rutland County Council Fleet Procurement - LUF

1. Introduction

Following the successful award of grant monies for Levelling Up Funds (LUF) from, Rutland County Council (RCC) is seeking to place a one-off order for 11 minibuses. 8 diesel and 3 EV's to deliver passenger transport services in the county.

2. Background

The intention is for RCC to operate a countywide bus network including electric town bus services and Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services to meet demand as detailed in the LUF bid document.

3. Scope

- All vehicles would need to be of a specification that would allow them to be driven by a D1 licence holder as they will not be used for hire or reward.
- Vehicles will not be used on registered services with the Traffic Commission.
- All vehicles must be wheelchair accessible without the need for removing seats so as the 16- seat passenger capacity can be maintained.
- The 3 electric vehicles will be used within the two market towns of Oakham and Uppingham and diesel vehicles will be used within the rural areas.
- All vehicles will need to be delivered to Rutland County Council simultaneously and within eighteen months of the date of order so that they are all available to be used immediately.

4. Quality

The vehicles will need to have at least a 3-year warranty period with the supplier required to collect and deliver to and from RCC free of charge for all warranty issues within that period.

5. Vehicle Specification

- 11 minibuses, all being suitable to be driven by a D1 licence holder.
- 3 fully electric minibuses
- 8 to be diesel powered minibuses of at least euro 6 level.
- 17- seat capacity inc. driver, all passenger seats to be in rear saloon
- Rear saloon to be accessible by driver from their seat.
- Dragoon blue in colour (or close alternative)

- Drivers aircon
- Full height clear protection behind driver
- Wheelchair accessible via front side ramp with space for wheelchair.
- Electric entry door
- Rear saloon heater
- Grab handles on seats
- Twin lens door mirrors electrically adjustable with the upper lens heated.
- Driver's seat with lumbar and height adjustment
- Steering wheel with height adjustment
- Kite marked safety glass.
- Rear saloon fully soft trimmed in Transport Grade Hi Flex velour carpet
- Roof trimmed and insulated.
- Rear saloon seats to be clean wipe down vinyl seats with anti-vandal ABS hard plastic seat backs.
- All age 3-point seat belts
- Top sliding openers on saloon windows
- 4 way opening roof vent / escape hatch.
- Nonslip flooring
- Reversing sensors
- Reversing sounder
- Reversing camera
- Saloon lighting day/night
- Tyre pressures marked above each wheel.
- Rutland County Council wording and crest signage on both sides of the vehicle
- Also, the below crest and words needs to have equal prominence on both sides of each vehicle.



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