

REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS AND COUNCIL TAX 2019/20

Submitted by: Executive Director (Resources and Support Services)

Portfolio: Finance and Resources

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To enable the Cabinet to recommend the 2019/20 General Fund Revenue Budget and the 2019/20 Capital Programme to Full Council, meeting on 20th February 2019, following consideration of comments received from the Finance, Resources and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee of 24 January 2019.

Recommendations

- a) That the 2019/20 General Fund Revenue Budget as detailed in this report and in the report to Cabinet dated 16th January 2019 be recommended to Full Council for approval.
- b) That the Capital Programme for 2019/20 to 2021/22, as shown at Appendix 3, be recommended to Full Council for approval.
- c) That an increase in the Band D council tax levy of 2.99% be recommended to Full Council for approval.
- d) That a minimum level of un-earmarked reserves and contingencies of £1.548m, required to be maintained for 2019/20, is recommended to Full Council for approval.
- e) That the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2019/20 be recommended to Full Council for approval and that the results of the consultation around de-minimus changes be considered by Full Council.

Reasons

To enable the Cabinet to recommend a robust and affordable budget for 2019/20 to the Council meeting on 20th February 2019.

1. Background

- 1.1 The 2019/20 Revenue Budget and the Capital Programme 2019/20 were considered by Cabinet on 16th January 2019, following which these were submitted to the Finance, Assets and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee, on 24th January 2019, for consideration.
- 1.2 As reported to Cabinet on 16th January 2019, in July 2018, Government invited Local Authorities to bid for the opportunity to undertake a pilot of 75% Business Rates Retention for 2019/20 only. As part of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Business Rates pool, the Council has been successful in its application. The pilot scheme will enable 75% of future growth in Business Rates to be retained within Staffordshire. An estimated £200,000 of additional resources will be generated as a result of this for the Council in 2019/20, these resources will be retained to meet financing costs associated with the vehicle fleet renewals and replacement programme, including the acquisition of vehicles required for the new recycling service included in the capital programme. A full appraisal of financing options will be undertaken for these assets.
- 1.3 The savings and funding strategies considered by Cabinet on 16th January 2019, as included in Appendix 1, will result in £248,000 over and above the budget 'gap' being made available for investment in the Council's priorities as per the Council Plan 2018-2022. In addition to this it is also proposed that the

additional funding received from the distribution of the surplus on the national Business Rates Retention levy account (£56,000) be used for these purposes. This will result in a 'Borough Growth' fund of £304,000 being established, which will be used to invest in initiatives that are forecast to generate on-going revenue savings through reducing the costs of service delivery or through the generation of additional income.

1.4 It is proposed that the 'Borough Growth' fund be used to enable investment in the following corporate priorities:

A Town Centre for All (£104,000)

- Developing and implementing a 10 year Parking Strategy aimed at supporting the local economy. Cabinet has set out a number of areas of focus for the new strategy, these were detailed at 2.14 to 2.17 of the 16th October 2018 Cabinet report 'Review of Town Centre Car Parks'.
- Revitalising the market, developing with traders a clear programme for improvement. At its 7th November 2018 meeting Cabinet agreed to review the management and operation of the market in Newcastle town centre in co-operation and consultation with local interested parties to revitalise our historic market.
- Facilitating bids for grants, including the Future High Street Fund (FHSF). FHSF is a government initiative announced in 2018 budget to help local areas regenerate high streets and town centres. Bids will be considered for both Kidsgrove and Newcastle town centres.

Council Transformation (£100,000)

- Digital Delivery Programme. The Council is committed to introducing more streamlined and speedy processes to improve service delivery to residents, particularly in recycling and waste, environmental services and planning. Residents will be able to customise, via 'My Account', how they get up to date information on particular Council services.
- Establishing capacity to develop commercial working practices to reduce costs and generate improved revenue streams. This includes creating a work force fit for the future by developing the skills of our staff and also investing in apprenticeship opportunities.

Building for the Future (£100,000)

- Enable Residential & Commercial development to generate improved revenue streams. We will use innovative models to ensure that when development opportunities arise the Council retains an income stream or reinvests the income into further opportunities.

1.5 A summary of the overall Revenue Budget (estimated for 2019/20) is as follows:

	2019/20 (estimated) £'s	2018/19 £'s
Amount to be met from Government Grant and Local Tax Payers	13,050,020	13,335,420
Revenue Support Grant	-	(588,980)
Other Non-Specific Grants	(934,680)	(1,261,680)
Business Rates Retention Funding	(4,893,370)	(4,494,390)
Collection fund deficit/(surplus)	58,160	20,470
Borough Council Tax Requirement	7,280,130	7,010,840

1.6 The Borough's Band D council tax levy of £196.14 is an increase of £5.69 from the 2018/19 amount (an increase of 2.99 per cent), which is within the maximum increase permitted without triggering the requirement for a referendum in accordance with the excessive council tax legislation. This was the Cabinet's proposal that was considered at its meeting on 16th January 2019.

2. Finance, Assets and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

- 2.1 At its meeting on 16th January 2019 Cabinet noted the proposals for the Revenue and Capital Budgets for 2019/20, noting an increase in Band D Council Tax of 2.99%.
- 2.2 The report and the recommendations were referred to the Finance, Assets and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee for review on 24th January 2019. The Scrutiny Committee was specifically asked to consider what comments it wished to make on the draft Budget and Council Tax and was asked to consider and respond to 4 questions ahead of the Cabinet meeting on 6th February 2019. In response, the Scrutiny Committee:
1. Noted the inclusion of the income from the Charged Garden Waste Service in the revenue budget;
 2. Noted the use of the 75% Business Rates Retention Pilot income to accelerate the introduction of the Council's new recycling service;
 3. Noted the creation of the Borough Growth Fund as set out in the 'Statutory Guidance on the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts'; and,
 4. Noted the use of the Borough Growth Fund to support the Corporate Priorities as set out in 3.14 (of the report to Cabinet on 16th January 2019).

3. Final Finance Settlement Notification

- 3.1 The Council has accepted the government's offer of a four year funding settlement, which provides it with provisional allocations for 2019/20 (the final year). The final funding allocation for 2019/20 should be announced in February 2019, and should not differ from the provisional amount which the Council has accepted under the four year offer.

4. Savings and Funding Strategies

- 4.1 There have been no changes to the savings and funding strategy since it was considered by Cabinet on 16th January 2019. The proposed savings, totalling £2.468m are outlined in the table below and set out in detail in Appendix 1:

Category	Amount £'000	Comments
Income	500	Additional sources of income generation and an increased demand for services that the Council charges for.
Staffing Related Efficiencies	410	No redundancies are anticipated to arise from these proposals. The proposals also allow for a review of organisational capacity – £125,000 is currently available for this purpose.
Good Housekeeping Efficiencies, General Other Savings, Changes in Base Budgets	442	Various savings arising from more efficient use of budgets.
Alternative Sources of Finance/ Other Savings	1,116	New Homes Bonus funding, savings from negotiated contribution rates and advanced payments of superannuation contributions, effect of forecast Council Tax Base increase, savings from Parish Council concurrent functions contributions. An assumed 2.99% (per band D equivalent) increase in Council Tax. Flexible use of capital receipts for the delivery of restructuring, digital and Council transformation efficiencies.
Total	2,468	

5. Capital Programme

- 5.1 The Capital Programme for 2019/20 to 2021/22 considered by Cabinet on 16th January 2019 totalled £18.992m. Since this meeting a further review of vehicle requirements during this period has been undertaken resulting in a further £0.309m being required.
- 5.2 This gives a revised total of £19.301m required for the Capital Programme for 2019/20 to 2021/22. This is shown as Appendix 3 to this report. In summary investment in the capital programme of £19.301m will be funded by:
- £6.165m External Funding;
 - £9.271m Capital Receipts;
 - £0.217m ICT Development Fund; and,
 - £3.647m Vehicle Leasing/Prudential Borrowing

6. Localised Council Tax Support Scheme 2019/20

- 6.1 Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, substituted by section 10 of the Local Government Finance Act 2012 requires each billing authority in England to make a Localised Council Tax Reduction scheme, specifying the reductions which are to apply to amounts of Council Tax payable by persons or classes of person whom the authority consider are in financial need.
- 6.2 Any scheme needs to be approved by the 11th March before the start of a new financial year or a default scheme prescribed by regulations will be imposed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.
- 6.3 The introduction of a de-minimus amount below which Council Tax bills will not be recalculated for Universal Credit claimants is the subject of a public consultation (closing date 10th February 2019), the results of this will be reported to Council on 20th February 2019. The remainder of the scheme (Appendix 5) is intended to remain as per the 2018/19 scheme, as reported to Council on 22nd November 2017

7. Balances and Reserves and Risk Assessment

- 7.1 A review of the Council's Balances and Reserves together with a risk assessment informing the levels of these has been undertaken. The Council's Balances and Reserves are set out in Appendix 2.
- 7.2 The Council's S151 Officer has recommended that a minimum level of un-earmarked reserves and contingencies of £1.548m be held to reflect the levels of revenue risk shown. Therefore, the Council's Balances and Reserves Strategy for 2019/20 is that there should be a minimum General Fund balance of £1.448m and a Contingency Reserve of £100,000.

8. Risk Statement

- 8.1 Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 places a duty on the Section 151 Officer to report on the robustness of the budget. The main risks to the budget include:
- Spending in excess of the budget;
 - Income falling short of the budget; and,
 - Unforeseen elements e.g. changes to legislation or reductions in government grants
- 8.2 Such risks require regular and robust monitoring and it is essential that the Council has sufficient reserves to call on if required (see Section 7 above). The review and risk assessment indicates that overall reserves are required to be increased to £1.548m to reflect the levels of risk shown.
- 8.3 The assessment of the Section 151 Officer is that the proposals included in this report are robust and will ensure an adequate level of reserves.

9. Earlier Cabinet Resolutions

Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019/20 to 2023/24 (Cabinet 17th October 2018);
Budget Report (Cabinet 16th January 2019)

10. Appendices

Appendix 1: Savings and Funding Strategies

Appendix 2: Actual and Estimated Reserves at 31 March 2018 to 2020

Appendix 3: Capital Programme 2019/20 to 2021/22

Appendix 4: Key Council Achievements in 2018/19

Appendix 5: Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2019/20

Appendix 1 - 2019/20 Savings and Funding Strategies Being Considered

Ref	Service Area (Portfolio Holder)	Description	£000's	% of Budget Line	Detail
Income					
I1	Communications (Councillor Tagg)	Advertising Income	20	44.4%	Additional income from advertising income project (i.e. billboards and car parks). Sites have been identified to be pursued further
I2	Environmental Health (Councillor Johnson)	Licensing Income	80	20.0%	Increased demand in licensing requirements from customers, based on the number of licences forecast to be applied for during 2019/20
I3	Operational Services (Councillor Johnson)	Bereavement Services Income	100	5.9%	Increased demand in Bereavement Services requirements from customers, based on the number of cremations forecast to be undertaken during 2019/20
I4	Planning and Development (Councillor Northcott)	Development Control Income	100	20.7%	Increase in planning income as a result of the 20% national increase in fees chargeable
I5	Recycling and Fleet (Councillor Johnson)	Green Waste Income	200	N/A	Introduction of a fee of £36 per initial bin for subscribing households for the collection of green waste, resulting from the withdrawal of green waste recycling credits payments received from Staffordshire County Council
			500		
Staffing Related Efficiencies					
S1	All (Councillor Tagg)	Vacant Posts and Flexible Retirements	159	TBC	A review of vacant posts and service. A number of employees have been approved for flexible retirement within the Revenues and Benefits and Customer Services
S2	Finance (Councillor Sweeney)	Car Leasing Scheme	36	76.2%	Staff car leases to which the Council previously contributed not renewed following expiry
S3	Housing, Regeneration and Assets (Councillor Jill Waring)	Transfer of Disabled Facilities Function	72	29.9%	The transfer and retirement of Housing Officers following the transfer of the disabled facilities function to Millbrook Healthcare
S4	Housing, Regeneration and Assets (Councillor Northcott)	Restructure	26	6.0%	Minor restructure of the Facilities Management section and a reduction in hours of the Head of Housing, Regeneration and Assets
S5	Executive Management Team (Councillor Tagg)	Restructure	117	24.2%	A restructure of the Executive Management Team following a review of the Council's Senior Management structure
			410		

Good Housekeeping/General Other Savings/Changes in Base Budgets

G1	Central Services (Councillor Tagg)	Whole Council Elections	50	44.6%	Following the move to all out, 4 yearly Elections, an annual saving in the amount set aside for Elections can be made. A contribution will be made into a reserve from the remaining budget to allow for the required budget at the next all out Election (including printing costs)
G2	Finance (Councillor Sweeney)	External Audit Fees	13	20.6%	A reduction in the fees charged to the Council by Grant Thornton for the audit of the Council's statement of accounts
G3	Leisure and Cultural (Councillor Holland)	Community Centres	14	27.2%	As a result of the successful granting of full leases to Community Centre committees, agreed as part of the 2015/16 budget setting process
G4	Leisure and Cultural (Councillor Holland)	New Victoria Theatre Grant	10	17.5%	Phased reduction of grant given over a 5 year period agreed as part of the 2015/16 budget setting process
G5	Leisure and Cultural (Councillor Tagg)	Kidsgrove Sports Centre	100	100.0%	Reduction in base budgets required relating to the re-opening and running of the centre by a Community Interest Group. This is net of the borrowing costs associated with the initial contribution to the Community Interest Group from the Council
G6	Leisure and Cultural (Councillor Holland)	Castle Sport/Sports Council	19	100.0%	The reserves that are held on behalf of Castle Sport are sufficient to enable the organisation to work towards becoming self-sufficient in the medium term
G7	Housing, Regeneration and Assets (Councillor Northcott)	Public Toilets Business Rates	5	100.0%	Introduction of Government legislation to grant a 100% relief from business rates for all standalone public toilets
G8	All (All)	Good Housekeeping Savings	231	TBC	Reductions in budgetary requirements for supplies and services following a review of areas of underspend (e.g. printing, training, fuel, fees for services)
			442		

Alternative Sources of Finance/Other

A1	Corporate (Councillor Tagg)	Superannuation Lump Sum	140	7.7%	Negotiation of the contribution rate relating to pensions contributions and a discount for the advanced payment to the Pensions Actuary of superannuation lump sums
A2	Corporate (Councillor Tagg)	Council Tax Base	58	0.8%	An increase in the Council Tax Base resulting from new properties, an increase in collection rate and a reduction in residents eligible for Council Tax Reduction (increase of 305 residential properties)
A3	Corporate (Councillor Northcott)	New Homes Bonus contribution	192	15.2%	Further additional New Homes Bonus funding to be received in 2019/20 as a result of new properties and a reduction in the number of empty properties within the Borough.
A4	Corporate (Councillor Sweeney)	Council Tax Increase	211	2.99%	Assumed increase of 2.99% per Band D equivalent property, any increase above this amount would be subject to a referendum
A5	Corporate (Councillor Sweeney)	Parish Council Section 136 Contributions	15	25.0%	Following on from the previous administrations policy, regarding the payment made to Parish Councils for concurrent functions, as agreed as part of the 2017/18 budget setting process

A6	Corporate (Councillor Sweeney)	Flexible Use of Capital Receipts	500	N/A	The flexible use of capital receipts direction allows certain types of expenditure to be charged to capital rather than revenue, examples of these include, restructuring, digital delivery, generation of ongoing efficiencies and equipment
			1,116		
Grand Total			2,468		

Appendix 2 – Actual and Estimated Reserves at 31 March 2018 to 2020

Reserve	Actual Balance at 31/3/18 (£000's)	Estimated Change in 2018/19 (£000's)	Estimated Balance at 31/3/19 (£000's)	Estimated Change in 2019/20 (£000's)	Estimated Balance at 31/3/20 (£000's)	Purpose
General Fund Balance	1,200	248	1,448	-	1,448	Working balance to cover unforeseen adverse events affecting the budget. Approved minimum balance of £1.448m
Contingency Reserve	210	(110)	100	-	100	To meet cost of unforeseen contingencies or for any other purpose approved by Council. Approved minimum balance of £0.100m
Equipment Replacement Fund	552	61	613	141	754	To pay for the replacement of items of plant and equipment
Renewals & Repairs Fund	-	-	-	-	-	To meet the cost of repairs and maintenance of Council owned buildings and structures
ICT Development Fund	67	(42)	25	50	75	To meet the cost of new IT requirements, including capital expenditure
Budget Support Fund	355	(118)	237	(110)	127	To support the General Fund revenue budget or to meet costs approved by Council
Borough Growth Fund	-	-	-	304	304	To fund investment in corporate priorities
Conservation & Heritage Fund	45	(5)	40	(5)	35	To provide repair grants to owners of historic buildings
Museum Purchases Fund	61	-	61	-	61	To purchase, conserve and enhance exhibits
Maintenance Contributions	75	(15)	60	(15)	45	To fund maintenance costs in respect of land transferred to the Council from developers contributions to periodic maintenance costs
Standards Fund	6	-	6	-	6	To ensure the Council meets its responsibilities under the ethical and other standards frameworks
Business Reserve	1353	(552)	801	(287)	514	To hold surpluses of business rates received per the revenue account and to pay subsequent deficits on the collection fund
Keele Master Plan Reserve	82	(63)	19	(19)	-	To meet the costs of the Keele master planning exercise

Appendix 3 – Capital Programme 2019/20 to 2021/22

CAPITAL PROJECTS	Proposed Programme			
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	TOTAL
	£	£	£	£
PRIORITY - Local Services that work for Local People				
Service Area - Council Modernisation	195,000	320,000	486,000	1,001,000
Total	195,000	320,000	486,000	1,001,000
PRIORITY - Growing our People and Places				
Service Area - Housing Improvements	1,075,000	1,080,000	1,130,000	3,285,000
Service Area - Managing Property & Assets	437,456	82,359	101,500	621,315
Total	1,512,456	1,162,359	1,231,500	3,906,315
PRIORITY - A Healthy, Active and Safe Borough				
Service Area - Environmental Health	0	10,000	0	10,000
Service Area - Streetscene and Bereavement Services	355,000	470,600	945,600	1,771,200
Service Area - Recycling and Fleet	756,000	4,166,000	609,500	5,531,500
Service Area - Leisure	546,000	681,000	331,000	1,558,000
Service Area - Museum	30,000	140,000	240,000	410,000
Service Area - Managing Property & Assets	387,463	49,035	40,456	476,954
Service Area - Engineering	172,215	15,873	170,193	358,281
Total	2,246,678	5,532,508	2,336,749	10,115,935
PRIORITY - A Town Centre for All				
Service Area - Managing Property & Assets	652,165	1,519,428	1,106,383	3,277,975
Total	652,165	1,519,428	1,106,383	3,277,975
CONTINGENCY	1,000,000	0	0	1,000,000
TOTAL	5,606,298	8,534,295	5,160,631	19,301,225

FUNDING				
Capital Receipts	3,508,298	3,927,295	1,836,132	9,271,725
External Contributions	1,335,000	2,065,000	2,765,000	6,165,000
ICT Development Fund	117,000	50,000	50,000	217,000
Fleet Replacement - Leasing or Borrowing	646,000	2,492,000	509,500	3,338,500
TOTAL	5,606,298	8,534,295	5,160,632	19,301,225

Appendix 4 - Key Council Achievements in 2018/19

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2018/19

Britain in Bloom -

Newcastle-under-Lyme has swept the board at the Heart of England in Bloom awards for the third year in a row. The borough's entry was announced the overall winner of the regional competition, with top spot also being achieved in the coveted small city category and a 17th consecutive gold award, at the National Brewery Centre in Burton recently. This year's campaign has been the most successful ever for the Borough, winning a gold award in the RHS Britain in Bloom national finals Champion of Champions category, the highest accolade in the campaign. The Borough also won the national Wild About Gardens award for the second year in a row, and a Community Champion award for one of our local volunteers. A total of 7 of the Borough's strategic parks and cemeteries received Green Flag status this year.

Move to Castle House

This year has seen the move to our new home at Castle House, and it is encouraging that early feedback about the new building and working arrangements has been positive. This move allows the Council to embrace a new way of working and new opportunities of joined-up service delivery both amongst our own teams but also with our partners who are sharing the building with us, in order to provide improved local services for the people of the borough.

Our Digital Council

The introduction of a customer portal and self-service tools for a basket of council services will be a major step forward in the digital delivery of services for residents in Newcastle-under-Lyme. Digital technologies have the potential to improve the way the majority of council customers interact with local authority services whilst at the same time generating significant efficiency savings. A customer portal will help the Council make progress with both of these considerations and over the next 12 months we will further embrace the digital delivery of other services of the Council to enhance the local services offered.

Added to this, officers in the Recycling and Waste service are delivering major successes in a drive to get the most out of the Bartec waste management system. The technology is used by more than 60 councils in the UK for scheduling all types of waste collection, monitoring performance and continuous service improvement. Bartec helps teams out on the road to record key service data such as missed bins, contamination, presentation rates and so on.

ICT Infrastructure

During 2018, ICT oversaw the biggest upgrade of the Council's ICT infrastructure for the past 20 years. ICT oversaw the relocation of both the Council's primary and secondary data centres, without incurring any significant disruption for services during operational hours. Agile working has been successfully rolled out to more than half of the Council's office based staff and was a significant contributor towards the move to Castle House. Improved, flexible technology has been introduced across Council sites that facilitate staff working from any location and ICT has developed its relationship with Staffordshire County Council, resulting in a fully shared network infrastructure across Castle House.

The Council's website

The Council's website has been awarded a four star status for the first time since 2012/13. In addition the Borough Council recently retained its Plain English Crystal Mark – a key factor in accessibility.

Kidsgrove Sports Centre

Plans to reopen part of Kidsgrove sports centre under a community management model have taken another positive step forward. Cabinet has agreed to make a one-off capital contribution of £300,000 towards opening the "dry side" facilities.

Use of Guildhall

The Council has worked with Support Staffordshire and a range of partners to establish a community and voluntary sector hub based at the Guildhall, which is now up and running. A wide range of organisations such as Staffordshire Adult Autistic Society, Shaw Trust-Work and Health Programme and Moneyline are providing their services for the people of the Borough. Friends of the Guildhall Group are providing cover for the reception area.

Supporting Retailers and Local Businesses

Working with partners the Council continues to support retailers and local business to remain and prosper in the town centres. The annual Business Boost competition, which provides business support and cash prizes is open to Newcastle based businesses some of which are based in our town centres. Working with Newcastle Business Improvement District and Appetite Creative People and Places Programme, we continue to celebrate our local cultural heritage by promoting events which encourage visitors, support local businesses and raise the profile of our towns. Newcastle town centre vacancy rate currently stands at less than 17% with NBC owned building having a vacancy rate of 8.9% and Kidsgrove town centre vacancy rate is one of the lowest in the County at 6.4%.

FUTURE PLANS

New Recycling Service Planned

Within two years a new kerbside recycling and residual waste collection service will be introduced for all households. A new recycling service is planned for launch / delivery in two years' time. This will be a twin stream system and is at the heart of a proposed new kerbside recycling service. Residents will place most recycling in one wheelie bin, using a separate container for paper and card, and this will be collected every fortnight. This is only the first strand to a complete overhaul of the Council's recycling and waste services.

Keele University Growth Corridor

Exciting plans have been announced for the long-term expansion of the area to the west of Newcastle as a result of a significant planning exercise by the Council and its partners.

The vision outlines aspirational plans for the former golf course at Keele, parts of Silverdale and land adjacent to Keele University. The Keele University Growth Corridor responds to the borough's housing needs and ambitious plans set out in the Keele Deal which identifies opportunities for significant investment at the university and includes the provision for new housing on the former golf course, a new primary school and a small convenience store. An important feature will be the creation of attractive walking routes within the campus and residential parts of the scheme. Land has also been set aside to help the university meet its sustainability aims with renewable energy provision on the campus.

Regeneration of the Ryecroft area

Given the national changes to town centre retail demand, plans for the regeneration of the Ryecroft are to be reviewed. Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council and Staffordshire County Council will be working together to review options regarding the future development of the Ryecroft site. Both Councils are keen to ensure the successes of the Castle House development are mirrored within the Ryecroft scheme and provide an uplift to the townscape and the contribute to the development of a vibrant and successful town centre.

ICT Delivery

Over the next 12 months ICT will significantly improve the desktop services offered to users, with the roll out of Windows 10 and the latest version of Office. The team will also play a crucial role in supporting the Council's Digital ambitions from both the external customer perspective and for internal users. The technology and solutions that ICT deliver over the next 12 months will pave the way to fundamentally alter how services are delivered; allowing staff to be more productive and deliver better outcomes for the residents, visitors and businesses within Newcastle under Lyme.

Employment & Skills

The Council will continue to co-ordinate the Newcastle Employment and Skills Group, working with partners to address key issues around skills and employment across the borough, and work with the Stoke and Staffordshire LEP Education Trust to deliver the Skills Strategy to better meet employers' requirements. Our current claimant levels at 1.4% are lower than both the West Midlands (2.9%) and national levels (2.3%). This allows more focus and support to the long term unemployed, claiming Employment Support Allowance, to help them back into training and work.

Appendix 5 – Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2019/20

Claim Type	Council Tax Support Scheme
Pensioner Claimants	
No scope for changes within LCTS	Up to 100% of Council Tax Bill
Working Age Claimants	
Claims will be based on a max of 80% Council Tax Liability (unless in a protected group)	Up to 80% of Council Tax Bill
Properties in bands higher than Band D will be based on 80% Band D Council Tax	Up to 80% of band D rate
Second Adult Rebate will not be retained in the Local Scheme	Nil
Capital Cut off at £6K (non-passported)	No Council Tax Support if capital exceeds £6k
Earnings Disregards	Flat rate of £25 if claimant working
Claimants who are eligible to Severe Disability Premium (SDP)	
May allow up to 100% LCTS as protected group	Up to 100% of Council Tax Bill
Claimants who are eligible to receive War Disablement Pensions, War Widow's Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Payments	
May allow up to 100% LCTS as protected group	Up to 100% of Council Tax Bill

Discretionary Payments

The Council has discretion to award Council Tax Support, in excess of the accounts determined by this framework, where it is satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist.