



**Investing in Warwickshire –  
Capital Strategy 2022-32**

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# Introduction

Investing in Warwickshire is a fundamental part of our role as a County Council. We want Warwickshire to be the best it can be, sustainable now and for future generations.

As a county, we boast a broad range of strengths that make Warwickshire a great place to be. We benefit from a buoyant economy, significant business and housing growth, considerable community capital, much valued natural environment and town centres that are a vital part of local life. But looking ahead, we also face significant challenges, including the impact of Covid-19, demographic pressures and climate change.

As an organisation, we are equally well placed but face uncertainty over future funding levels and our ability to meet growing demand for the services we provide.

Together, these factors influence our approach to capital investment. To respond effectively, we need to take a strategic and holistic approach to the use of our capital investment fund and assets to deliver our key priorities and to ensure all Warwickshire residents share in the County's economic success.

Our Capital Strategy 2022-23 aims to optimise the way in which we generate, manage and allocate the capital funds at our disposal.

It forms a critical part of our policy and financial planning process. It is an integral part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy to help deliver our Council Plan.

Our approach aims to maximise the use of capital resources to continue to make Warwickshire an attractive place to live, work, visit and do business, ensuring good stewardship and opportunities for sound investment when they arise.

This capital strategy has been developed to ensure that our long-term approach to investment takes proper account of prudence, value for money, risk, sustainability and affordability. It is supported by a robust delivery and governance framework to guide expenditure and investment decisions; performance will be monitored at overall, programme and project levels to track progress and achievements against priorities.

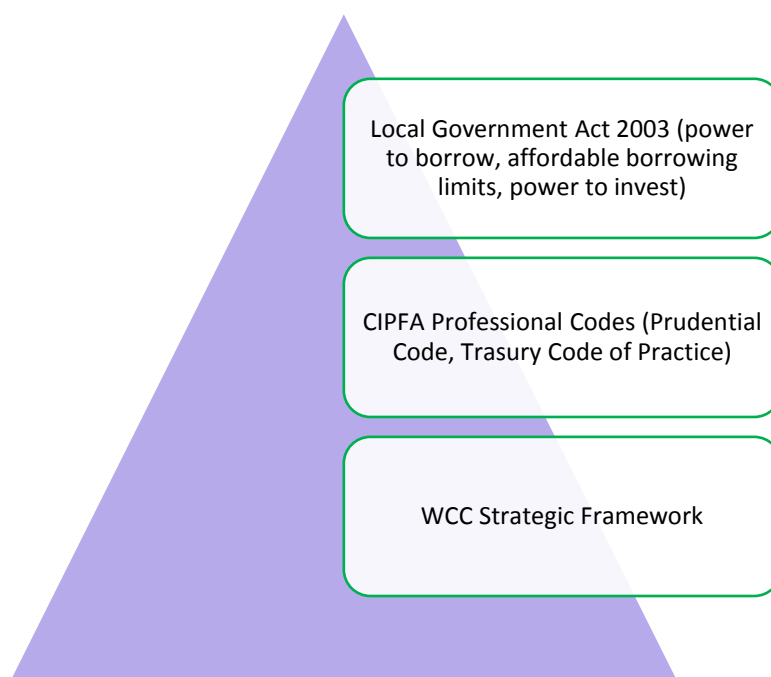
Together these ensure compliance with the CIPFA Prudential code.

We recognise the lasting impact and legacy of good, evidence-based capital investment and the Capital Strategy 2021-31 sets out our approach to making this happen in and for Warwickshire.

## Policy Context

### Legislative background and the CIPFA Professional Codes

In 2004, local authorities were provided with the flexibility to make their own capital investment decisions. Legislation, guidance and professional codes of practice were introduced to support decision making and ensure investment and borrowing is prudent, sustainable and affordable.



The 2017 edition of the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities introduced the requirement for authorities to produce a capital strategy. This was updated in 2021 with additional capital strategy guidance.

***The purpose of the capital strategy is to place decisions about borrowing in the context of the overall longer- term financial position of the authority and to provide improved links between the revenue and capital budgets.***

The guidance is not prescriptive and allows the capital strategy to be tailored to the individual authority's circumstances. The Council has adhered to this guidance in this Capital Strategy.

### Internal Policy Framework

The capital strategy is a key part of our strategic framework and a critical element of our Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which is in turn aligned to the Council Plan. It sets out the choices we make in relation to the amount and nature of the capital investment we make and provide a link between capital and revenue budgets.

The Strategy is made up of three key elements:

- Strategic context – Sets out the aspiration and direction for our capital investment within the context of the Council Plan and longer term social, demographic and economic trends (Why).
- Programme – Sets out the capital programme funded by our investment; the key governance and decision-making framework with consideration to risk (What).
- Framework – Sets out the way we plan and prioritise investments; manage capital spend and the capital programme in line with best practice and statutory requirements; and how we fund this strategy within a balanced medium term financial strategy (How).

Whilst the MTFS covers a rolling 5-year period, the capital strategy reflects the long-term nature and benefit of capital investment and is fixed over a longer timeframe and addresses how we intend to pay for our capital investments and activities.

Our approach to capital investment is informed by a number of existing strategies within the Council’s policy framework as detailed in the technical annex, with the key ones shown as below. The Council is committed to the development of its Climate Change and Infrastructure Strategies, these will provide further insight and direction for the Capital Strategy.



The desired outcomes of the Capital Strategy are aligned to the core strategies to influence wider agendas and partnership working such as the Warwickshire Property and Development Group, the Warwickshire Recovery Investment Fund, the Health and Wellbeing Partnership, the West Midlands Combined Authority, the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership, the City of Culture, the Commonwealth Games and other local authorities in the region.

## Strategic Context

The intent of the Capital Strategy is to support the vision for Warwickshire as set out in the Council Plan: To make Warwickshire the best it can be, sustainable now and for future generations.

In order to achieve this the Strategy aims to create the infrastructure that will enable, encourage and support:

- A county with a vibrant economy and places with the right jobs, skills, and infrastructure;
- A place where people can live their best lives; where communities and individuals are supported to live safely, healthily, happily and independently;
- A place with sustainable futures which means adapting to and mitigating climate change and meeting net zero commitments; and
- A Council to make the best use of its resources.

In addition to delivering the above priorities the Capital Strategy also need to remain flexible to be able to address the challenges presented by the ever-changing environment the Council operates in: including local and national politics, macroeconomic trends, social and technological changes all set in the context of climate change and post Brexit and post-Covid recovery. The key themes that drive our capital strategy are highlighted below:

### **Social changes – a growing and aging population**

Warwickshire continues to be an attractive place to live, work and visit, which is forecast to experience significant population and housing growth. Population growth is forecast to increase by at least 19,000 dwellings by 2025 and may well exceed this in view of housing development trends.

The fastest growth is expected to take place in older age groups: those aged 70 and over are projected to increase by almost 14% by 2025 and those aged 85 plus will increase by 22% over the same period. By 2025 there will be an estimated 4,300 residents in care homes aged over 65, which represents a 20% increase from the 2019 estimate.

A growing ageing population is likely to see increases in those living with disabilities and other long-term health conditions. The current forecasts indicate a 17% increase in residents living with dementia. This will lead to additional demand pressures on public services including health, social care and fire to protect, prevent and support vulnerable people.

This will require us to work differently; to invest in early interventions, demand management encourage service innovation, reduce costly care packages and enable more self-help and resilience in our communities.

The number of Children Looked After by the Council is projected to continue to rise, reflecting population increases and national trends.

Our school age population is projected to increase by 9% by 2025 but this will then slow down by 2041. There is an estimated need for an additional 6,000 school places by 2025.

The growth in population and households will mean a need for additional infrastructure requirement, particularly transport, waste and school places including special education needs.

### **Technology and automation – ‘the fourth industrial revolution’**

Technological advances and changes in the way customers interact with service providers, will lead us to maximise the use of digital and other technologies across our services.

The current phase of automation is multi-dimensional and includes the use of robotics/drones, AI & AR (Artificial Intelligence & Augmented Reality), 3D printing through to new uses of database and information analysis in terms of blockchains. Each individual element is transformational on its own and together will bring revolutionary change to how we provide services.

### **The Climate Change Emergency**

The UK Government has committed to Net Zero by 2050 and has undertaken a process of extensive policy development and new legislation. These policies and new laws will impact on Warwickshire businesses, public services and communities.

Every aspect of life is expected to be impacted by climate change from how our energy is produced through to how we preserve local biodiversity, from how we encourage new green economic sectors and retrain people for a rapidly changing green economy, to supporting the retrofitting of homes with green technology like replacing gas boilers with ground source heat pumps.

The Council has declared a climate change emergency and is developing an action plan in recognition of its role as community leader, service provider and estate manager.

### **Economic recovery**

The impact from the Coronavirus pandemic has had significant impact on the UK, its businesses and its communities. The sudden impact of the pandemic caused GDP to drop by over 19% during 2020. Even though the economy has returned to some level of growth, most economic sectors remain below their February 2020 peak.

Despite Warwickshire’s strong economic foundations, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic presents challenges for our key sectors. The automotive and advanced manufacturing sectors face short-term impacts in terms of disruption to work and supply chains, whilst our tourism sector faces significant pressures which could see unemployment rise as government support schemes come to an end.

The capital strategy can play a key role in supporting the recovery of key sectors such as construction, as well as playing a role working with partners such as the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership to invest in projects and infrastructure which will give the local economy the confidence and certainty to invest and grow. It will do this through the prioritised allocation of resources to initiatives which best meet the recovery outcomes.

Our longer term (post Covid recovery) ambitions for Warwickshire are being driven through our place-based programme which will identify specific opportunities and needs to be addressed.

### Financial sustainability

We need to work in different and innovative ways to reduce costs and optimise use of our assets to aid our sustainability in the face of growing demand and an uncertain financial climate for local authorities.

There are opportunities and challenges to leverage external contributions (grants, developer contributions etc.) for our capital programme.

We need to optimise our commercial approach and activities to generate income and grow the tax base in order to deliver wider outcomes for Warwickshire.

International, national, and local disruptions in supply chain and increasing inflation will make it more challenging to deliver our capital ambition within available resources

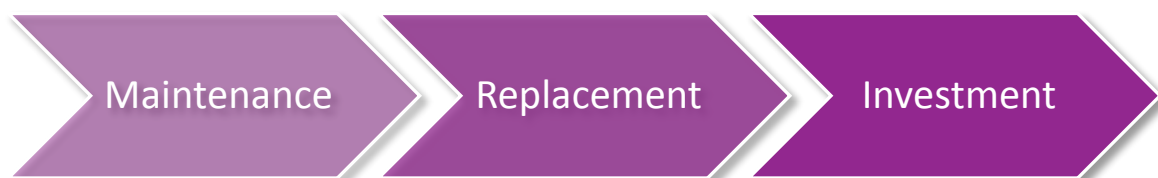
Population growth, whilst brings its own challenges, will help increase the Council tax base and positively impacts on our ability to borrow for capital investment.

## Asset Management Planning

The Capital Strategy at Warwickshire is more than a plan for investment; it incorporates a comprehensive and funded plan for maintaining, replacing and improving the assists the Council controls.

The Council has responsibility for assets used in service delivery including property, highway infrastructure (roads, footpaths, structures, lighting) and other types of assets. It is essential to understand the need, utilisation, condition and the investment and operating cost requirements of assets, whether owned or leased.

When prioritising investment, it is key to understand the long-term cost of maintaining and operating existing assets and their fitness for purpose, having consideration of which are deemed essential in continued service delivery or which can be considered for alternative uses.



A funded programme of planned replacement of assets underpins the Council's capital investment strategy, aids business continuity and reduces operational risk.



## Risk Appetite

In undertaking complex projects, decision making will continue to be supported by proportionate business cases in line with best practice covering strategic, economic, financial, commercial and management cases. For large complex projects, professional external advice and services would be sourced to undertake due diligence to understand risks and inform decision making.

Capital investments can be broadly split into four types:

1. Expenditure on existing assets to ensure they meet the requirements of service delivery, are fit for purpose, meet health and safety guidance, and reduce future costs.
2. Expenditure on specific projects to meet strategic objectives.
3. Expenditure on non-treasury investments to meet strategic aims. Non treasury investments could include loans or equity towards capital expenditure incurred by external bodies, Council subsidiaries or joint ventures.
4. Expenditure to enable the organisation to save revenue resources.

The Council recognises that achieving these aims could require consideration of alternative delivery structures and of all forms of funding including additional borrowing. Capital investment funded by borrowing will be undertaken in priority areas to meet our capital ambition, whilst at all times clearly understanding how the affordability of such expenditure can be managed over the longer term supported by robust due diligence, business cases, risk management and monitoring.

Non treasury investment funded by additional borrowing would only be undertaken after:

- Cabinet approval of a robust business case supported by independent advice;
- Consideration of the legal basis on which the expenditure is being incurred;
- Affordability and risk assessment of such expenditure over the longer term; and
- Assurance the proposal is in line with HM Treasury rules on financing our borrowing and the CIPFA Prudential code

## Governance and Decision Making

### Capital Programme approval process

The capital programme is developed in line with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and approved as part of the Capital Budget Resolution by Full Council in February each year.

Corporate Board review the draft future capital programme, consider its affordability and make recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet is responsible for considering the capital programme, along with recommendations on how it should be financed as a whole, its affordability and priorities, and will recommend a revenue budget and a capital programme to Full Council for approval.

A pipeline of potential future capital projects provides insight so priorities can be weighted across the organization and geographical area of Warwickshire.

## Project approval

Capital projects will be brought to Members for approval throughout the year, and approved projects will become part of the capital programme.

The governance arrangements and approval limits are detailed in the Finance Rule for Capital Additions.

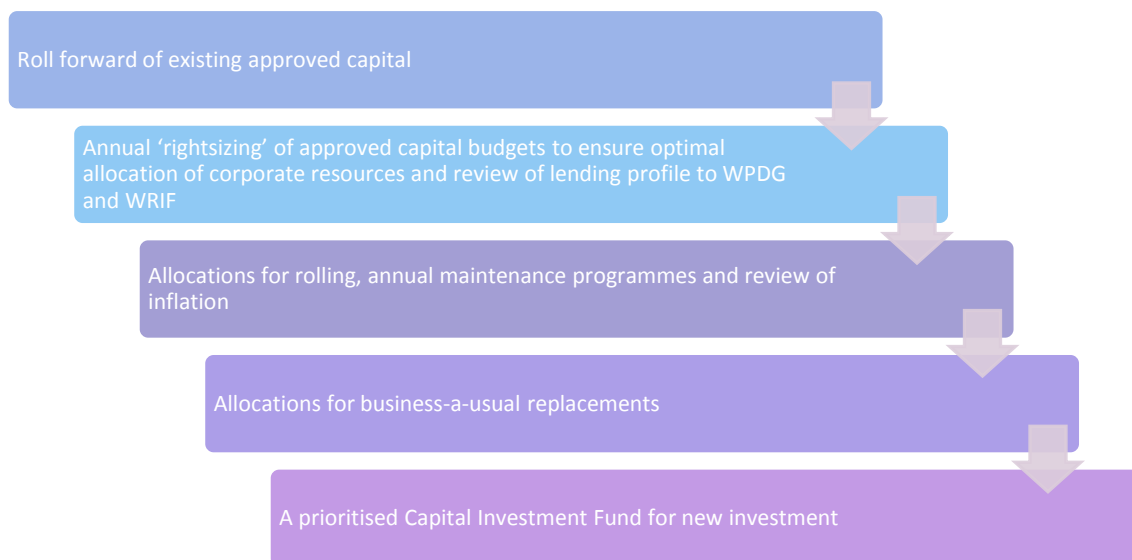
## Financial Monitoring

The technical appendix sets out how the capital programme is monitored to ensure that our capital spending is effectively managed to deliver value for money, together with the capital governance framework.

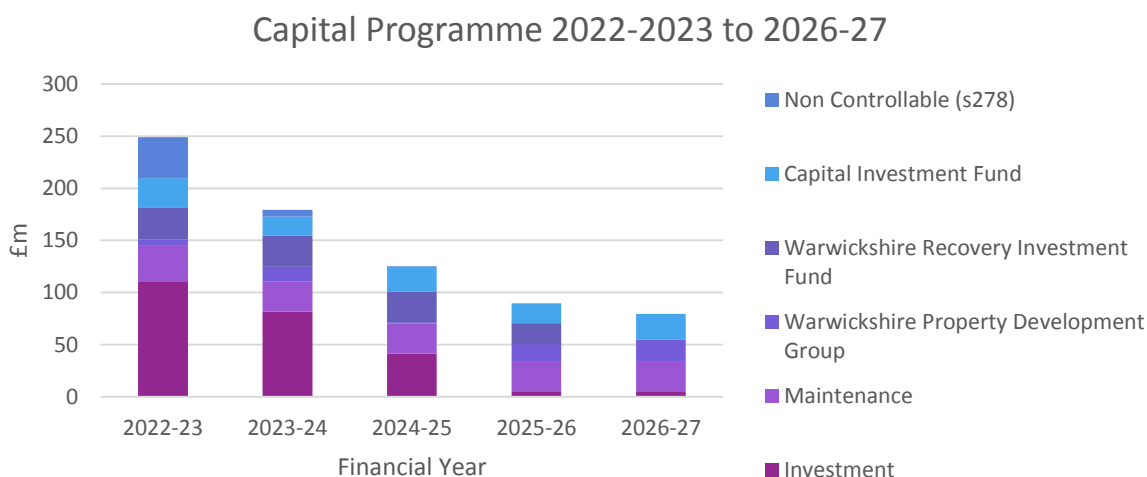
## Capital Programme

The Council maintains an approved rolling capital programme, that covers a 5-year period, which is subject to an annual update as part of the budget process.

The capital programme incorporates:



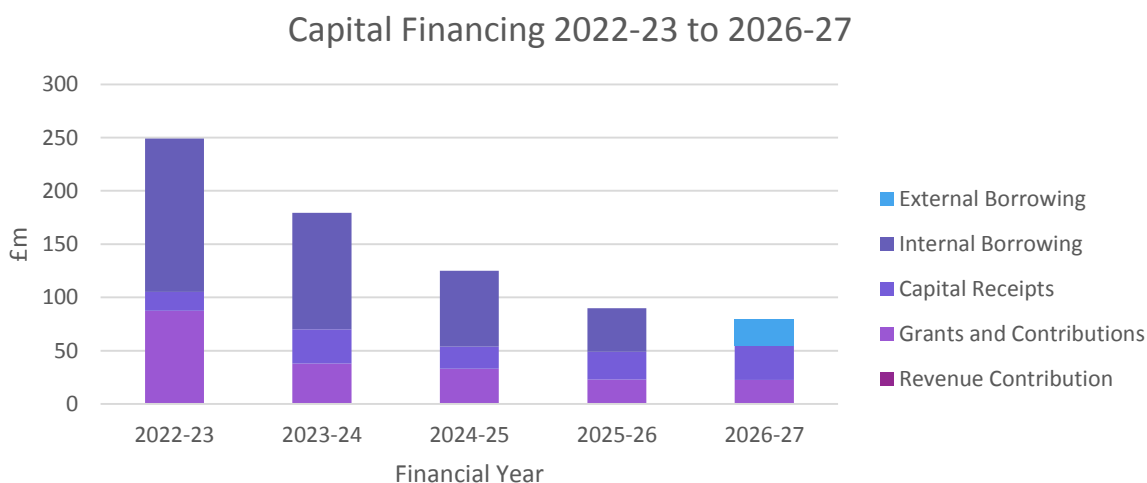
The current Capital Programme is summarised in the table below:



In comparison, actual capital expenditure in 2020/21 was £100 million and projected capital expenditure in 2021/22 is £168 million.

## Funding the Strategy

Our main capital resources are service specific grants, third- party contributions, capital receipts, contributions from revenue and borrowing. When assessing the level of planned capital investment to undertake, we make a judgement about the level of capital resources that are likely to be available over the period of the programme. We aim to optimise the use of all other available sources before using borrowing to fund our capital programme. The funding of the capital programme is outlined in the chart below:



Based on current estimates, WCC is expecting to spend £751.5m capital over the next 5 years. A breakdown of the capital programme is attached to the capital budget resolution and analysis of the

allocations is included in the technical appendix. Future capital priorities not yet included in the capital programme are included in Annex D to the technical appendix.

The Council's strategy for its borrowing is set out in the Treasury Management Strategy and takes account of factors such as interest rates and the spreading of loan repayment dates to reduce risk. The technical appendix outlines the approach taken to assessing sustainability and affordability of the capital programme and illustrates the effect of borrowing decisions on the revenue budget. Prudential indicators will be approved as part of the Treasury Management Strategy.

The basis for the delivery of the overall capital programme is subject to Member approval:

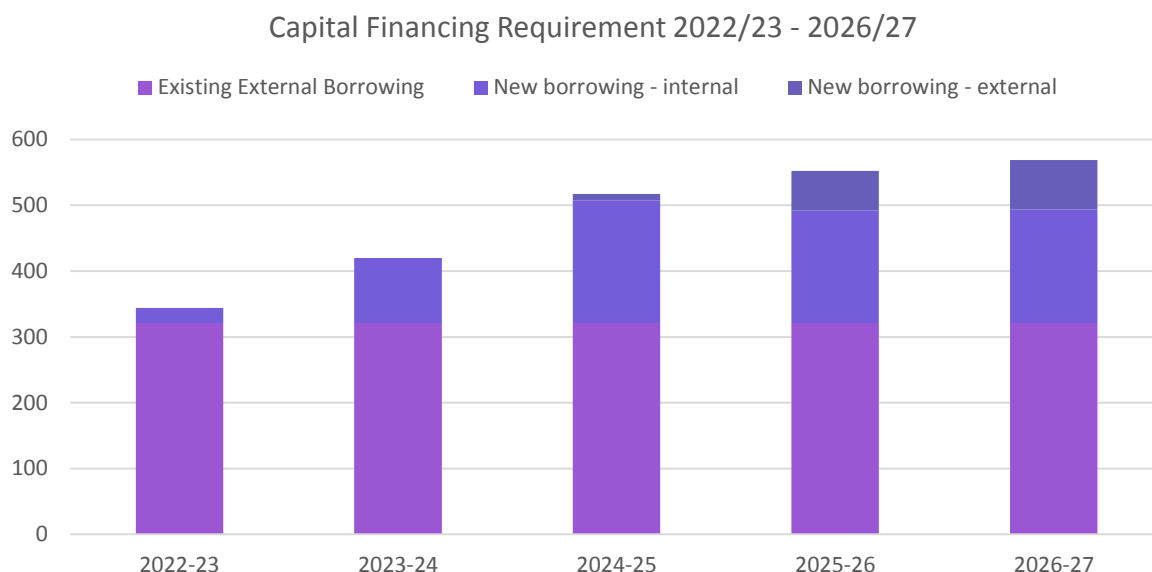
- £35.600 million new borrowing annually, funded as part of the revenue proposals for the 2022-27 Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- £12.185 million of maintenance allocations funded from a top slice of this borrowing and are strictly cash limited.
- £2.515 million to fund business as usual replacement of assets funded from a top slice of the annual borrowing.
- The balance of the £35.600 million annual borrowing (£20.900 million) will be allocated to the Capital Investment Fund where services will be invited to submit business cases relating to pipeline projects to bid for funding throughout the year.
- All capital receipts (excluding those from the disposal of schools) are used to offset the need for additional borrowing. Exceptions to this policy are only considered when as part of an invest-to-save project such that investing the capital receipt will result in larger levels of offsetting additional borrowing or greater revenue savings than would have been achieved by simply offsetting planned debt (or if previously agreed by Members as being earmarked for a particular purpose).
- The disposal profile of capital receipts will be used to inform the MTFS and revenue savings targets by offsetting the revenue cost impact of new borrowing.
- The base level of investment in the school stock is fixed at the level of government capital grant for schools plus receipts generated from the sale of school assets and developer contributions. Circa £3 million of the government grant forms an annual contribution to the cost of school maintenance. The remainder of funding is used to invest in the provision of additional places.
- The base level of investment in the maintenance of Warwickshire's highways and street lighting and casualty reduction is fixed at the level of government grant for this purpose.
- Contributions from developers are maximised and applied to appropriate schemes ahead of Council resources whenever possible.

## Managing the Borrowing Requirement

The Council's Treasury Management Strategy considers how the cash requirements arising from the Council's Capital Strategy and detailed investment programme are managed by external borrowing and the timing of any such borrowing.

Where capital expenditure has been incurred without a resource to pay for it i.e. when proposed to be paid for by borrowing, this will increase what is termed the Council’s Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) which is the Council’s underlying need to borrow. The Council is required to make a prudent provision for the repayment of historic capital expenditure from its revenue budget in line with its agreed policy. This reduces the CFR.

Future projections of the CFR based on the Capital investment programme and resources deemed available to fund it are shown in the table below. Forecasts are subject to the timing of capital expenditure and receipt of funding sources.



By 2026/27 the CFR is forecast to increase to £549m. This would place Warwickshire in the upper quartile of shire counties but remain within its debt capacity. The MTFs projections include the costs of servicing the borrowing requirement. The Treasury Management Strategy addresses how the Council will meet the borrowing requirement including any external borrowing. The Council can consider various debt instruments, with the main source of long-term borrowing for local authorities historically being the Public Works Loan Board.

However, alternative options could be considered for specific council projects. Advantages and disadvantages of such products, supported by external advice in respect of different options, would need to be considered including risks, track record and cost of issuance.

Best treasury management practice is that loans are not taken on a project-by-project basis and our treasury management practices are aligned with this.

## Affordability

The fundamental objective in the consideration of the affordability of the authority’s capital plans is to ensure that the level of investment in capital assets proposed means that the total capital investment of the authority remains within sustainable limits.

Capital investment undertaken historically, and the proposed Capital Programme, form an integral part of the Council's revenue budget and MTFS. The revenue impact of capital schemes for Council Tax include:

- The costs of operating / maintaining new assets.
- The capital financing costs of servicing any borrowing required to pay for investment (interest and prudent provision for repayment of capital investment paid for by borrowing). Where capital expenditure is paid for using borrowing, the Council has a statutory duty to charge an amount to future revenue budgets for the eventual repayment of that expenditure. This spreads the cost of capital expenditure incurred now, and historically, to future revenue budgets. The manner of spreading these costs is through an annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). Our MRP policy is included in the Treasury Management Strategy and details about its impact on the MTFS are provided in the technical annex.
- The revenue costs of preparing and delivering projects.
- Abortive costs required to be charged to revenue budgets if schemes do not proceed.

Some or all costs of investments may be offset by financial and non-financial benefits such as income, cost avoidance and importantly improved outcomes for residents of the county.

It is recognised that the Council cannot afford to do everything, however where revenue resources are deemed available to increase the level of Council borrowing, where it needs to do so, this will be considered.

The percentage of the Council's revenue budget that is committed to capital financing costs is increasing in the long term due to the recent expansion of the capital programme through the Capital Investment Fund and the creation of Warwickshire Property and Development Group and the Warwickshire Recovery & Investment Fund.

A detailed review of our debt capacity has been undertaken and it found that Warwickshire has sufficient scope to increase borrowing and fund the increased borrowing cost within the revenue budget as set out in the MTFS.

## Future Strategy Development

At the time of writing this strategy the Council Plan was under public consultation, with the Delivery Plans underpinning the focus areas still to be developed.

As the Council Plan and Delivery Plans will drive the allocation of funding from the Capital Investment Fund any unforeseen changes may have an impact on the detailed framework of capital prioritisation outlined in the technical annex of this strategy.

An objective for future strategy development is to ensure the optimum alignment of the strategic objectives, focus areas, delivery plans and the detailed capital framework at a more granular level.