From: John Simmonds, Cabinet Member, Finance & Procurement
Andy Wood, Corporate Director Finance & Procurement

To: Communities Cabinet Committee – 18 September 2013

Subject: Medium Term Financial Outlook

Classification: Unrestricted

Future Pathway of Paper: N/A, this report provides background information to recent government consultations about future funding settlements

Electoral Division: All

Summary: This report is to keep members informed of the latest funding estimates for the next four years and the implications for KCC's financial planning. The report includes information on two key government consultations launched over the summer and the likely timetable for setting the 2014/15 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan

Recommendation:

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the potential implications on future funding settlements and the Council's Budget/Medium Term Financial Plan and the likely timetable for setting the 2014/15 budget.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Government has recently launched 3 consultations which provide more information about the final settlement for 2014/15 and indicative settlement for 2015/16. The purpose of this report is to provide committee members with summary of the potential implications for KCC in advance of consideration of the forthcoming Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

1.2 The estimated funding settlement figures included in this report are speculative at this stage. The figures will become more definitive following the outcome of Government's consultations and the publication of funding settlements. Members are reminded that the local government funding settlement from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is only part (albeit a significant part) of the overall resource equation for the Council. The total resources available to the Council will also be influenced by grants from other government departments, Council Tax and Business Rates tax bases.

2. Financial Implications

2.1 The proposals in the government consultation will have a significantly detrimental impact on future funding settlements. Future budgets are likely to continue to require significant year on year savings of a similar magnitude to those that have been made in each of the last three year's budgets.

2.2 The Council's proposed response will emerge when the draft Budget and MTFP are published for consultation later in the year. The final Budget and MTFP will be presented to County Council on 13th February 2014.

3. Bold Steps for Kent and Policy Framework

3.1 The financial outlook was included in Bold Steps for Kent. This predicted that we would be facing a reducing resource base over the period of the current Spending Round (2011/12 to 2014/15). As it has transpired this prediction has proved remarkably accurate although the requirement for savings due to reduced resource base is likely to carry on for longer than anyone could have foreseen at the time.

4. Background

4.1 Prior to the Spending Review 2010 (SR2010) we forecast that KCC would need to make savings of £340m in real terms over the forthcoming four year spending review period. We predicted this would arise from the combination of reduced government grants (in response to tackling the budget deficit), freezing/limitations on increasing Council Tax, and increasing spending demands (mainly due to inflation and population related demands). So far this forecast has proved to be remarkably prescient as over the last 3 years we have had to make savings of between £80m to £100m per annum.

4.2 These savings have come from a variety of efficiency and service transformations which have largely been achieved with minimal impact on front line services. We have also had to balance the budget by taking one-off savings such as utilising reserves and in-year under spends due to the late announcements on changes to the funding arrangements. These measures are only a short term solution and need to be replaced with long term sustainable savings.

4.3 SR2010 covered the four years from 2011/12 to 2014/15. The next spending review has been deferred until after the 2015 General Election. In the meantime the Government has announced its spending plans for 2015/16 in the June Spending Round 2013. This paper explores the indicative funding for the last year of the current SR2010 period, the implications of the 2015/16 announcement (including consultation on specific details) and speculation on potential funding settlements for 2016/17 and beyond.

5. 2014/15 Indicative Funding Allocations

5.1 The provisional indicative allocations for 2014/15 were included in section 3 of the MTFP. These were based on the provisional settlement announced in December and showed an overall reduction in KCC's Start-up Assessment Funding Assessment (SUFA) from £411.9m to £378.3m (£32.6m reduction). The indicative settlement was subsequently updated to £378.7m (£32.2m reduction) but this was not considered significant enough to change the final version of the published MTFP.

5.2 The Chancellor's Budget Statement in March announced a further 1% reduction in local authority funding for 2014/15 as part of revised spending plans. At the time we had no indicative figures but we estimated this would equate to a further £3.3m reduction on top of the £32.2m set out in final indicative allocations. This estimate has subsequently been borne out in the illustrative funding allocations included in the technical consultation for 2014/15 and 21015/16 (see section 7 below) which show a revised Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) for 2014/15 of £375.4m as a result of the additional 1% reduction and revised RPI forecast for Business Rate uplift.

5.3 The full impact of the 1% reduction is proposed to be taken from the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) component of the funding methodology, and within RSG the Council Tax Freeze element is to be protected. This means the remaining RSG would be reduced by an average of 1.78%. The impact of this protection on the Council Tax Freeze element is marginal but nonetheless welcome. The Business Rate element of the funding methodology has been updated for the latest Retail Price Index (RPI) forecast.

5.4 The technical consultation also includes a proposal to top-slice an additional £95m from the amount allocated to local authorities in order to fund the safety net protection for those authorities with reduced Business Rate yield. Originally it was intended that the safety net would be funded from the levy on authorities with large increases supported by a £25m top-slice as prudent provision should the two not balance. Business Rate forecasts submitted by billing authorities indicate that £25m will not be enough and the Government proposes to increase this to £120m for 2014/15. The consultation also considers whether this additional top-slice for the safety net should be partially offset by reducing the top-slice for capitalisation by £50m. If agreed these top-slice changes would equate to a further £0.7m reduction in KCC's baseline allocation.

5.5 The impact on the indicative allocations for 2014/15 of all the proposals in the consultation is set out in table 1 below. Overall this shows the reduction in funding for KCC has worsened from 7.8% to 8.8% as a consequence of the changes.

Table 1	Kent County Council					England				
	RSG		Business Rates	Total		RSG		Business Rates	Total	
	CT Freeze £m	Balance £m	£m	£m		CT Freeze £m	Balance £m	£m	£m	
Final 2013/14 settlement	8.613	238.120	164.145	410.878		356.308	14,819.093	10,898.554	26,073.956	
Final 2014/15 indicative settlement	8.437	201.081	169.179	378.697		349.038	12,275.003	11,232.825	23,856.866	
Impact of 1% Reduction		197.496		375.429			12,056.140		23,659.095	
Impact of RPI forecast			169.497					11,253.917		
Impact of Safety Net topslice		196.794					12,011.140			
Revised proposed SFA	8.437	196.794	169.497	374.727		349.038	12,011.140	11,253.917	23,614.095	
Original Reduction				-32.181	-7.8%				-2,217.090	-8.5%
Revised Reduction				-36.150	-8.8%				-2,459.861	-9.4%

5.6 The KCC total of £374.7m for 2014/15 represents the estimated SUFA. The actual funding available to the Council will depend on the local share of the Business Rate yield as SUFA will not equate to actual funding beyond 2013/14. We will not know the local share of Business Rates until billing authorities calculate the tax base, this will be at the same time the Council Tax base is calculated.

5.7 We are developing a monitoring system with district councils so that we can more accurately forecast both the Business Rate and Council Tax bases (including the impact of Council Tax Support Schemes and collection rates). We anticipate that variations between the Business Rate tax base and the assumptions in SUFA will be marginal for 2014/15 but will become more significant in future years. At this stage £374.4m is included in the updated MTFP i.e. £36.15m reduction on 2013/14.

6. 2015/16 Settlement

6.1 The Spending Round 2013 announced a 10% reduction in the overall funding for local government in real terms (8.2% in cash terms). This was demonstrated by the reduction in the departmental "Resource DEL" for local government from £25.6bn in 2014/15 to £23.5bn in 2015/16. Resource DEL is the approved Departmental Expenditure Limit and represents the amount of revenue spending delegated to individual Government Departments.

6.2 The technical consultation published on 25th July included a proposed SFA for local government in 2015/16 of £20.519bn, this compares to the revised SFA for 2014/15 of £23.614bn described in section 5, and represents a 13.1% reduction in cash terms. Table 2 shows the breakdown for KCC and nationally.

Table 2	Kent County Council			England		
	RSG £m	Business Rates £m	Total £m	RSG £m	Business Rates £m	Total £m
2014/15 Revised Indicative Allocation	205.231	169.497	374.727	12,360.178	11,253.917	23,614.095
2015/16 Proposed Indicative	151.354	174.253	325.607	8,949.809	11,569.678	20,519.487
Year on Year Change	-26.3%	2.8%	-13.1%	-27.6%	2.8%	-13.1%

6.3 The consultation does not include an explanation of how an overall 10% reduction in real terms (8.2% in cash) has translated into a 13.1% reduction (in cash) to the main source of funding allocated to local authorities. To understand this we need to look more closely at the funding included within Resource DEL. This is not as straightforward as it may seem as the detail of what is included in Resource DEL is not published and we have had to make some assumptions. Table 3 shows these assumptions for 2013/14 and the provisional figures for 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Table 3	2013/14 £m	2014/15 £m	Change	2015/16 £m	Change
Local Governent Settlement	**26,074**	**23,614**	**-9.4%**	**20,519**	**-13.1%**
Held Back					
NHB contribution	506	800		1,100	
Capitalisation	100	50			
Safety Net	25	120		50	
Other Grants	916	774		774	
New Grants					
Collaboration and Efficiency Fund				100	
Fire Transformation Fund				30	
Social Care New Burdens				335	
Independent Living Fund				118	
Troubled Families				200	
Sub Total	27,621	25,358		23,226	
Transfers	-3,884				
Rough Total	23,700	25,400		23,200	
Published Resource Del	23,900	25,600	**7.1%**	23,500	**-8.2%**

6.4 If our assumptions about the “Resource DEL” are correct it would appear that what has been presented as new funding for local authorities in 2015/16 has actually been funded at the expense of the main SFA for local authorities i.e. money local authorities would have otherwise received through RSG/Business Rates mechanism. The reduction in the main SFA funding is also greater due to increased holdbacks (this is the case for 2014/15 and 2015/16). These changes explain why the reduction in SFA is greater than the overall 10% reduction for local government in real terms. This means local authorities will have to make greater savings on existing spending than 10% implied by Spending Round announcement. This has taken most authorities by surprise and the 13.1% reduction has already attracted an adverse reaction within local government circles when it was announced.

6.5 The Government launched a separate consultation on 25th July regarding the funding for the new Local Growth Fund (LGF). The Government has already determined that the LGF should be created by redirecting existing funding from education and skills, transport, and housing. This consultation deals with the proposal that £400m would be pooled from New Homes Bonus (NHB) between authorities within each Local Enterprise Partnership. In essence legislation would be passed requiring local authorities to pass on a fixed % of NHB to the LEP. The consultation considers two options:

- A standard % for all authorities (35.09% based on forecast value of NHB in 2015/16)

- An alternative in two tier areas with the upper tier transferring 100% of its NHB and lower tier councils a lower % (estimated around 18%) to deliver the same overall amount for the whole authority area as option 1.

6.6 The estimated impact on KCC would result in the loss of NHB of between £2.8m to £8.2m. The NHB in 2013/14 is worth £4.5m to the County Council and £17.9m to district councils. Some of the transfer would in effect come from projected growth in NHB over the next two years which could be worth between £3m to £3.7m to KCC. District councils are predicted to lose between £5.7m to £11.1m under the proposals. NHB is a significant source of funding for district councils.

6.7 The Spending Round 2013 also included an announcement that the Education Services Grant (ESG) would be reduced by £200m as part of the spending changes for DfE. ESG was introduced in 2013/14 by transferring just over £1bn from the local government settlement to DfE. DfE allocates the grant to academies and local authorities as un-ring-fenced funding for central services on a per pupil basis. The amount allocated to academies is more per pupil than the amount allocated to local authorities. This arrangement replaced the previous Local Authority Central Share Equivalent Grant (LACSEG) adjustment which had been challenged.

6.8 We have previously recognised that it is not unreasonable that local authority funding for central services should reduce as more schools convert to academy status. The logic of this is incontrovertible. However, we have challenged both the LACSEG and the ESG methodologies for taking too much from local authorities and creating a two tier funding between academies and local authority maintained schools. We have no detail on how the latest reduction in ESG will be applied but the impact for KCC could equate to a loss of between £4m to £5m in addition to any reductions as a consequence of further academy conversions.

6.9 Overall we are estimating that we could lose between £56m to £64m of funding in 2015/16 as a result of the Spending Round 2013. This is significantly more than we have faced in the last two years, and similar to the reduction in 2011/12 when local government bore the brunt of the first round of funding reductions following SR2010. These predicted funding reductions together with the inevitable additional spending demands arising from inflation and population growth means we are likely to need to find savings in excess of £100m in 2015/16. This would be the fifth consecutive year of making savings of this magnitude.

6.10 Some of this reduction will be offset by the new funding streams. The government stated that these would significantly reduce the impact and the total package equates to a 2.3% reduction in overall local authority spending. We remain sceptical of this calculation, particularly if the new funding streams bring with them additional spending obligations. The new streams (with national funding amounts) include the following:

- £3.8bn pool for integrated health and social care
- £330m fund for transforming services (including an additional £200m for troubled families)
- £335m to invest in 2015/16 in advance of changes to social care in 2016/17
- Support for further Council Tax freezes in 2014/15 and 2015/16

- A joint programme with Department for Education to review pressures on children's services
- Flexibility to use capital receipts to fund one-off revenue costs of service reform

6.11 At this stage we have very little information about how these funding streams will be allocated and what strings will be attached to them.

7. Technical Consultations

7.1 We have already referred to the technical consultations. Three consultations were published towards the end of July. Each has a different deadline for responses (shown in brackets):

- New Homes Bonus and the Local Growth Fund (19th September)
- Local Government Finance Settlement 2014/15 and 2015/16 (2nd October 2013)
- Proposals for the use of capital receipts from asset sales to invest in reforming services (24th September 2013)

7.2 As these are largely technical consultations the response will be agreed by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Procurement (Deputy Leader) following discussion with the Leader and relevant Cabinet Members. Where timing allows we will include the draft response/final response as background documents to this report.

7.3 The main issue in the NHB consultation is the differential arrangements proposed in two tier areas. Whilst we recognise the significance of NHB grant to district councils we should not underplay the role the County Council plays in promoting housing growth or that NHB has been used to underpin the Council's overall budget. The rest of the consultation deals with enforcement, accountability, arrangements for London, authorities which are part of more than one LEP and committed expenditure.

7.4 The main issue in the finance settlement consultation is the unexpected reductions for 2015/16 dealt with in section 6 of this report. The consultation itself seeks views on technical changes to the formula used to determine individual authority shares. The consultation also deals with integrating the existing Council Tax Freeze grants into the main funding arrangements and adjustments for Carbon Reduction scheme.

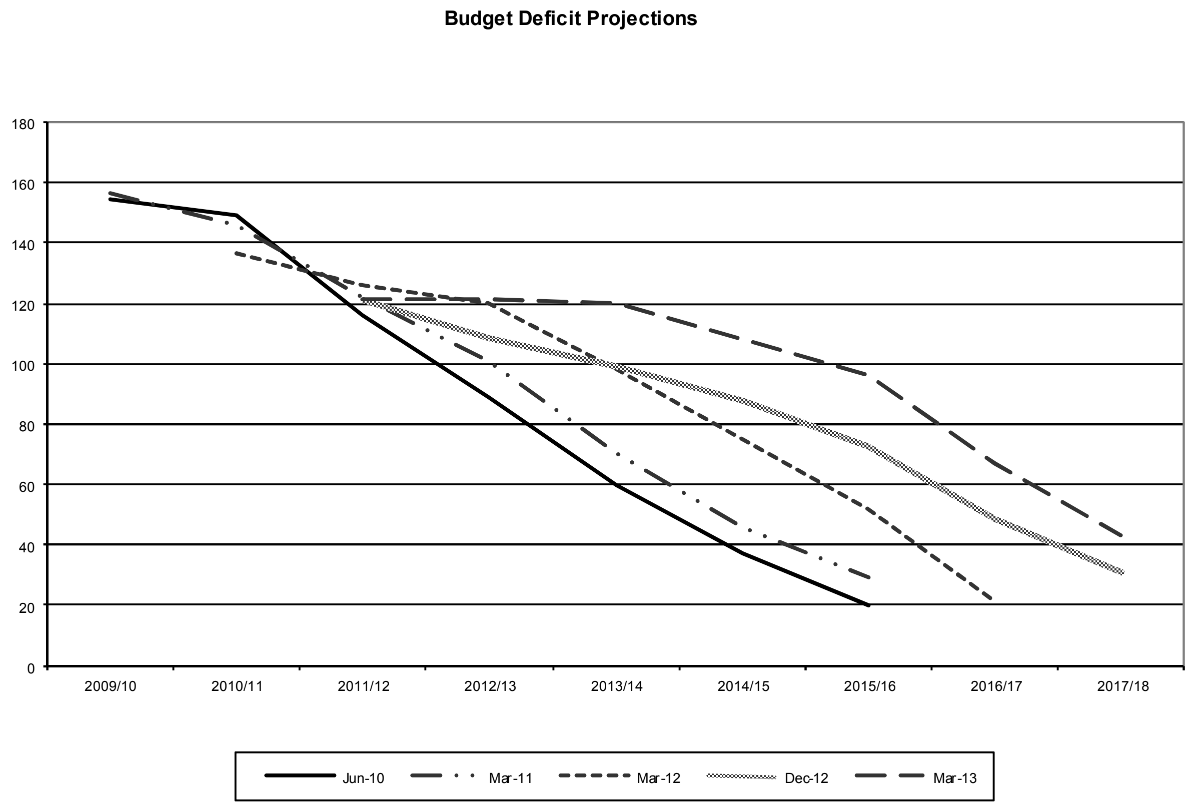
7.5 The consultation on use of capital receipts for asset sales is largely self explanatory. Currently receipts from asset sales can only be used to fund new infrastructure projects. Under the proposals in the consultation we would also be able to use receipts to fund one-off revenue purposes to stimulate organisational change. The consultation deals with the practical implementation and potential scope of alternative arrangements.

8. 2016/17 and Beyond

8.1 The Chancellor of the Exchequer has already indicated that there are likely to be further public spending reductions needed in 2016/17 and 2017/18 if the objective of eliminating the structural deficit is to be achieved. He has indicated that reductions will be of a similar magnitude to SR2010 and Spending Round 2013. We have no detail where these reductions might fall and whether the protected departments (schools, health and overseas development) will continue to be protected.

8.2 Some independent analysts are predicting that spending reductions may have to carry on until 2020 if current trends continue. Certainly it has been the case that in spite of spending reductions the projections for eliminating the budget deficit have progressively been extended. This is represented in graph 1 below which shows that each year projections in the Autumn Statement and annual Budget Statement have got worse.

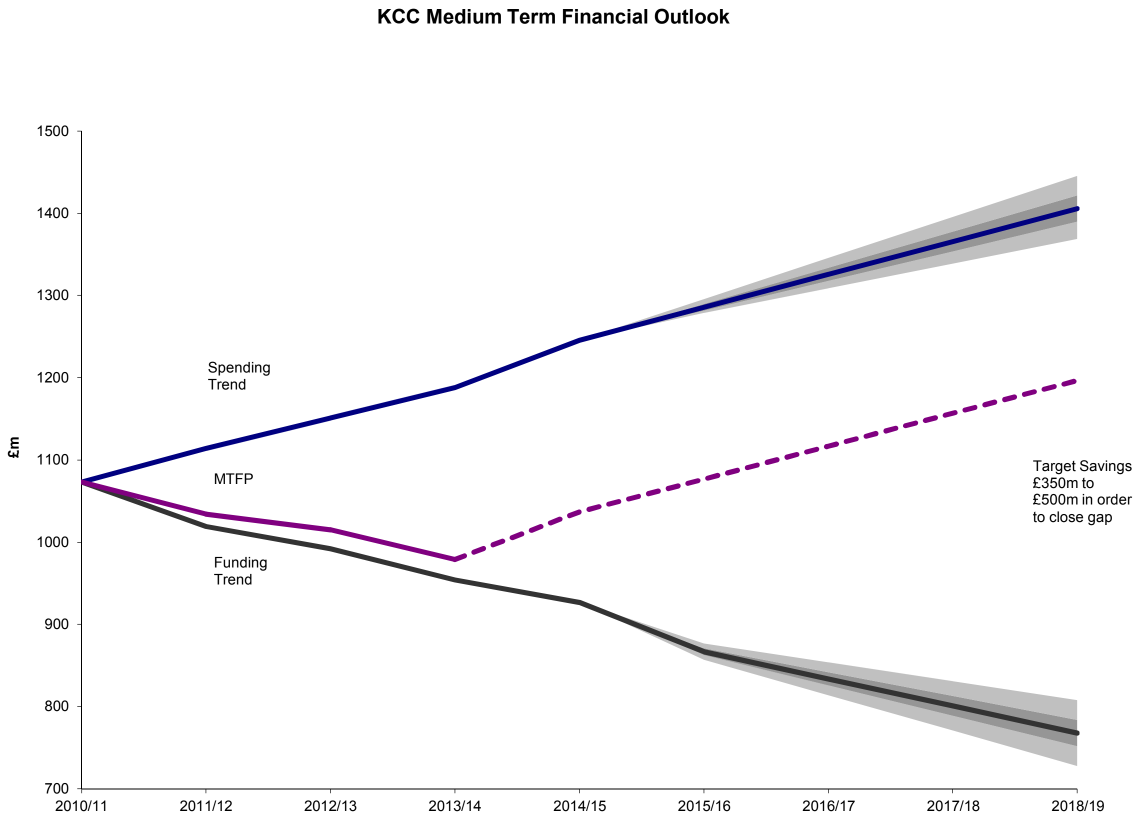
Chart 1



8.3 We have plotted the funding and spending changes for KCC since 2010/11 on a like for like basis. This includes the impact of changes in grant mechanisms e.g. transfer from specific to un-ring-fenced grants; and the transfer of responsibilities e.g. learning disability, public health, Council Tax support, etc. We have then projected funding and spending on similar basis forward to 2018/19. This gives us the most plausible picture over the longer term, although inevitably as we look beyond more than 2 years the estimates become vague with greater likelihood of variation.

8.4 The graph also shows our progress to date in balancing the budget. This shows that each year we have nearly reached the underlying spend necessary for a balanced budget but each year there has been a small element of one-offs. Chart 2 shows the projections for KCC up to 2018/19 and progress to date.

Chart 2



8.5 Chart 2 exemplifies the challenge we face. This was referred to in the County Council paper on 18th July “Facing the Challenge” and officers have already embarked on a transformation programme for the Council to meet this challenge. As previously indicated the scope of the savings and the long period of year on year reductions are unprecedented.

9. Timetable for 2014/15 Budget

9.1 As indicated in section 5 the reductions for 2014/15 are largely as we anticipated. We are developing plans how savings can be achieved without compromising the longer term objectives for the whole Council transformation. We will be looking to issue a draft budget for consultation in November. Whilst we would have liked to carry out consultation earlier the uncertainty over the recent technical consultations and Business Rate/Council Tax base means this isn’t advisable without excessive caveats.

9.2 We aim to report feedback from consultation to Cabinet and Cabinet Committees in January. Whilst the timing for this is tight it will still enable us to publish a final draft budget and MTFP in time for County Council papers for the 13th February meeting when the budget will be discussed and resolved.

10. Conclusions and Recommendations

10.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with more information about the latest funding projections for future years. As in previous years decisions on the level of Council Tax and how we cover unavoidable spending demands and local policy/service initiatives will also have to be factored into the budget. What is clear is that we will not be able to balance the budget without making further substantial savings over the next 4 to 5 years.

10.2 What is also clear is that announcements on grants for further Council Tax freezes are likely to be around 1%. Referendum levels for excessive increases are also likely to be around 2%. This leaves very little room for manoeuvre on Council Tax

10.3 Members are asked to NOTE the potential implications on future funding settlements and the Council's Budget/Medium Term Financial Plan and the likely timetable for setting the 2014/15 budget.

11. Background Documents

- KCC Budget Book 2013/14 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2013/15
- New Homes Bonus and the Local Growth Fund – DCLG Technical Consultation Document
- Local Government Finance Settlement 2014-15 and 2015-16 – DCLG Technical Consultation Document
- Proposals for the use of capital receipts from asset sales to invest in reforming services – DCLG Technical Consultation Document

12. Contact details

Report Author:
Dave Shipton
Head of Financial Strategy
01622 694597
dave.shipton@kent.gov.uk

Relevant Director:
Andy Wood
Corporate Director Finance and Procurement
01622 694622
andy.wood@kent.gov.uk