

Bolsover District Council

Audit and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee

20th January 2022

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2022/23 to 2025/26

Report of the Assistant Director of Finance and Resources

Classification: This report is public

Report By: Assistant Director of Finance and Resources

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PURPOSE / SUMMARY

To enable the Committee to consider the proposed budget 2022/23 for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan covering the years 2022/23 to 2025/26, prior to the report being taken to Council.

To provide Elected Members with an overview of the Council's financial position in order to inform the decision making process. Any comments expressed by the Audit and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee will be reported verbally to Council

REPORT DETAILS

1 Introduction

1.1 This report presents the following budgets for Members to consider:

- General Fund – Appendix 1 and 2
- Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Appendix 3
- Capital Programme – Appendix 4

In particular financial projections are provided for:

- 2021/22 Current Budget Position – this is the current year budget, revised to take account of changes during the financial year that will end on 31st March 2022.
- 2022/23 Original Budget – this is the proposed budget for the next financial year, on which the Council Tax will be based, and will commence from 1st April 2022.

- 2022/23 Original Budget, this includes proposed increases to rents and fees and charges for the next financial year for the Housing Revenue Account.
 - 2023/24 to 2025/26 Financial Plan – In accordance with good practice the Council agrees its annual budgets within the context of a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). This includes financial projections in respect of the next three financial years.
- 1.2 Recommendations agreed by Executive and Audit and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee will be referred to the Council meeting of 2nd February 2022 for Members’ consideration and approval.

General Fund

2021/22 Current Budget

- 1.3 In February 2021, Members agreed a budget for 2021/22 to determine Council Tax. The original budget showed a funding deficit of £0.291m. Throughout the year budgets have been actively managed with savings removed from the budget once they have been agreed.
- 1.4 The Revised Budget was considered by Executive at its meeting on the 6th December 2021 and by the Audit and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 25th November. There have been no changes to the budget position since this time. The revised budget funding gap is the planned use of the general fund balance for 2021/22 as agreed in 2020/21 of £0.080m.
- 1.5 The final in-year position will be dependent on the actual financial performance out-turning in line with the revised budgets as there may be further costs and/or savings identified as the year progresses. Whilst these estimates reflect the position at the time of setting there can be some volatility from the budget to the outturn position.
- 1.6 It was agreed that any surplus on the Council’s two main revenue accounts be transferred to reserves in preparation for future expenditure and to protect services at a time of declining central government support.

2022/23 Original Budget and 2023/24 to 2025/26 Financial Plan

- 1.7 The financial projection for 2022/23 to 2024/25 was approved by Members in February 2021. The 2021/22 budget process has updated those projections and established a base for 2025/26.
- 1.8 The proposed budgets for 2022/23 and 2023/24 are deficits of £0.082m and £0.018m respectively. As in 1.4 above, this is the planned use of the general fund balance as approved in 2020/21. Based on current information the requirement to achieve financial savings for future years is 2025/26 £1.212m (**Appendix 1**). **Appendix 2** details the net cost of each cost centre by Directorate.
- 1.9 Table 1 on the following page shows the updated figures resulting from the budget process together with estimates of future basic council tax increases. Also included is an estimate of potential new income from current projects and plans known about by the Council. Some of these we are working on ourselves and

some are reliant on developers. At this stage none of this income is realised and is therefore not yet included in our budgets.

Table 1

	2021/22 Revised Budget £000	2022/23 Forecast £000	2023/24 Forecast £000	2024/25 Forecast £000	2025/26 Forecast £000
Current Budget Shortfall	81	82	18	0	1,212
Pension costs to be funded by GF balance	(81)	(82)	(18)	0	0
Basic assumption for future council tax increases	0	(112)	(222)	(332)	(442)
Potential new income	0	(443)	(1,097)	(1,682)	(2,141)
Closing Budget Surplus	0	(555)	(1,319)	(2,014)	(1,371)

1.10 The main factors taken into account in developing the Council's financial plans are set out within the sections below.

Level of Government Funding

1.11 The current financial year 2021/22, was another roll-over settlement. The Spending Review 2020 was effectively a further one-year extension to the four-year settlement that covered the period 2016/17 – 2019/20. (The Spending Review 2019 also covered only one year – 2020/21).

1.12 The Spending Review 2021 was due to cover the years 2022/23 – 2024/25 and it was expected it would provide clarity on the impact of the Fair Funding Review; the abolition of the New Homes Bonus; the fundamental review of Business Rates and the baseline reset of Business Rates. It was anticipated the implications of the Levelling Up White Paper would also be made clearer in the announcement.

1.13 However, the provisional local government finance settlement announced on December 16th was a one-year settlement for 2022/23 only. There were no projected or indicative numbers for the remainder of the spending review period (2023/24 and 2024/25). Therefore, the SR21 is again effectively a roll-over settlement.

1.14 As previously discussed many times, the early indicative results of the above reforms were all detrimental to us as a district Council who has seen much growth in recent years, both in business rates and New Homes Bonus grant. The removal of these funding streams will have a major effect on our financial position. For this reason a delay in their implementation in their current form is not a bad thing for us.

1.15 In his letter of 16th December the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) wrote, “**Government is committed to ensuring that funding allocations for councils are based on an up-to-date assessment of their needs and resources. The data used to assess this has not been updated in a number of years, dating from 2013/14 to a large degree, and even as far back as 2000. Over the coming months, we will work closely with the sector and other stakeholders to update this and to look at the challenges and opportunities facing the sector before consulting on any potential changes. As part of this, we will look at options to support local authorities through transitional protection.**”

1.16 The following paragraphs show our government funding for 2022/23 from what we have been told in the provisional settlement and the assumptions we have had to make for future years:

New Homes Bonus

1.17 We have been waiting for the results of the Government’s consultation on the future of New Homes Bonus Grant for at least three years. It is widely expected that the grant will be abolished but it is not yet known what, if anything, will replace it.

1.18 We have received a roll-over of the current approach to New Homes Bonus with the delay of its abolition and a new allocation for 2022/23 based on our property numbers. We have been able to include an extra £0.608m in grant income for 2022/23.

1.19 Nothing has been included in the MTFP for 2023/24 onwards as the assumption that New Homes Bonus will disappear completely was established last year when we removed all the income for future years.

Fair Funding Review

1.20 Although delayed for another year it is still not known with any clarity what the impact of the Fair Funding Review will be. Initial modelling showed that the recalculated Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) was redirecting resources to those based on ‘need’ which would impact negatively on most shire districts. However, the 16th December letter states “**we want to take the time to fully consider its (SFA) future distribution in consultation with councils.**”

1.21 With this potential change of tact and the lack of any concrete figures for the likely impact of the Fair Funding Review we have once again not been able to attribute a value in our MTFP to any changes. Some commentators have even questioned whether the Fair Funding Review will be part of any changes to the funding of local government or whether it is just too complicated to implement.

Business Rates

1.22 In early November the government announced that plans to allow councils to retain 75% of Business Rates from April 2022, had been abandoned. It was said the policy would conflict with the government’s ‘levelling up agenda’ and that the government would now ‘proceed with caution’ on the issue. In fact the 25% extra

income was due to be paid to counties and districts were never going to benefit from this arrangement.

- 1.23 The implications on our Business Rates that follow reverting back to 50% instead of 75%, mean we have been able to include an extra £1.532m income for 2022/23. This change to our MTFP is not as a result of the 16th December announcement.
- 1.24 The figures in the MTFP for Business Rates have been updated for the latest assumptions around likely changes to our baseline funding level information, tariff amounts and the impact of a business rate reset. This was initially done last year at which time we reduced income by large amounts. This time we have been able to slightly increase the income figures for the inflation allowance which will be added onto our limits by government.
- 1.25 This has resulted in additional income of £0.006m for 2023/24 and £0.274m for 2024/25. It has been assumed 2023/24 is the year when the reset occurs and the income slowly increases each year as we build back the growth lost from the reset. No growth in these business rates figures has been included in any year to protect against further negative adjustments, an estimate of growth will however, be included in **table 1** above.

Revenue Support Grant

- 1.26 The roll-over settlement has meant a further year of receiving Revenue Support Grant. We will receive £1.232m in this bonus year of receiving the grant. We have assumed no grant will be received from 2023/24 onwards.

Lower Tier Services Grant

- 1.27 This grant was introduced in 2021/22 to provide damping to authorities with cash-terms reductions in Core Spending Power. It provides additional funding to district councils who are losing the most from the reduction in New Homes Bonus and gain the least from new grant increases and council tax increases.
- 1.28 We have been allocated another payment of this grant for 2022/23 which means we can include an extra £0.131m in the MTFP. Nothing has been included for future years.

2022/23 Services Grant

- 1.29 This is a new, one-off grant to support all services delivered by councils. This has been distributed to every authority using the 2013/14 SFA. The amount we are able to include as extra income for 2022/23 is £0.202m. Nothing has been included for future years.
- 1.30 The 2013/14 SFA uses 'deprivation' as the main driver for distribution, rather than 'need' that the more recent calculations were based on. As an area of high deprivation, in the past we've tended to benefit more from allocations based on this formula. It has been suggested by some that sharing this grant out using 'deprivation' rather than 'need' could be the start of the government's 'levelling up' or at least show their intent. If this were the case it could be good news for district councils like us but we might not find out about this with any certainty until the Spending Review 2022.

1.31 To summarise, the Spending Review 2021 was relatively good for local government compared to settlements received before. Districts received the lowest share of the extra government funding with the average increase for a district council of 4.6%, while Counties did better due to the Adult Social Care increases.

Mitigating Losses in Government Funding

1.32 To help mitigate losses caused by funding changes the NNDR Growth Protection Reserve was created a number of years ago. Originally this included transfers of income from the general fund when Business Rates income calculations were updated for new growth.

1.33 This meant income received would be more than initially estimated for that year and the extra amount to be received would be transferred into the reserve, almost as a savings account to be returned back to the general fund when income was reduced in future years.

1.34 In recent years extra income received from all sources of Government funding mentioned above have been transferred into the reserve if the budget for that year has already been in surplus when the extra funding has been realised.

1.35 The balance accumulated has meant we are able to use the reserve to even out some of the government funding losses over the life of the current MTFP. A transfer from general fund to the reserve will be made in 2022/23 of £0.004m. Latest estimates for transfers back to the general fund are £3.262m 2023/24; £2.990m 2024/25 and the reserve balance of £1.802m in 2025/26.

1.36 When savings are found from elsewhere or extra income is earned, the transfers from the reserve are reduced.

Expenditure, income levels and efficiencies

1.37 In developing the financial projections covering the period 2021/22 to 2025/26, officers have made a number of assumptions. The major assumptions are:

- For 2022/23 to 2025/26 2.25% has been included in staffing budgets as an estimate for a pay award.
- Investment income as a result of treasury management decisions has been increased slightly (£0.020m) in all years of the MTFP as interest rates are expected to rise. Current rates are 0.25% and an increase is expected in December 2021.
- Inflation specific budgets such as energy costs and fuel have been amended to reflect anticipated price changes.
- With respect to planning fees, a base level for income has been included for all future years of £0.400m. The rules of the Government's 20% increase to planning fees means we have to set-aside the additional 20% income we receive, to be spent specifically on the planning function.
- Fees and charges – service specific increases as agreed by Members.

Council Tax Implications

Council Tax Base

- 1.38 In preparation for the budget, the Chief Financial Officer under delegated powers has determined the Tax Base at Band D for 2022/23 as 22,443.26. This is an increase on the 2021/22 Tax Base which was reduced from previous levels as the Covid pandemic affected individuals financially. The Tax Base for 2022/23 looks to be back on track to where it perhaps would've been if the pandemic had not occurred.

Council Tax Options

- 1.39 The Council's part of the Council Tax bill in 2021/22 was set at £186.28 for a Band D property. This was an increase of 2.75%
- 1.40 The Council has a range of options when setting the Council Tax. The Government indicate what upper limit they consider acceptable. For 2022/23 District Councils are permitted to increase their share of the Council Tax by the greater of 2% or £5 without triggering the need to hold a referendum.
- 1.41 The table below shows some of the options and the extra revenue generated.

Increase	New Band D £	Annual Increase £	Weekly Increase £	Extra Revenue £
1.00%	188.14	1.86	0.04	41,753
2.00%	190.00	3.73	0.07	83,560
2.68%	191.28	5.00	0.10	112,163

- 1.42 The level of increase each year affects the base for future years and the proposed increase for 2022/23 is 2.68%, generating additional revenue of £112,163.
- 1.43 Members will recall that in our Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) approved in November 2021, we have the strategic intention '*to raise Council Tax by the maximum allowed in any given year, without triggering a Council Tax referendum, to endeavour to continue to deliver services*'.

Financial Reserves – General Fund

- 1.44 The Council's main uncommitted Financial Reserves are the General Fund Working Balance of £2.101m, the uncommitted element of the Transformation Reserve of £0.851m and the NNDR Growth Protection Reserve of £8.050m. Due to the uncertainty surrounding local authority income and the fact that the Council has reduced budgets to a minimal level, it is important that the Council continues to review whether we have an acceptable General Fund Working Balance.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

2021/22 Current Budget

- 1.45 In February 2021, Members agreed a budget for 2021/22. Rent levels were set in line with Government regulations with an increase of 1.5%, effective from 1st April 2021. HRA fees and charges were also set, effective from the same date.
- 1.46 The Revised Budget was considered by Executive at its meeting on the 6th December 2021 and by the Audit and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 25th November. There have been no changes to the budget position since this time.
- 1.47 A surplus of £0.006m was estimated, which was in-line with the current budget.

2022/23 Original Budget and 2023/24 to 2025/26 Financial Plan

- 1.48 The proposed budget for 2022/23 currently shows a surplus of £0.001m. Based on current information the surplus for future years is 2023/24 £0.004m; 2024/25 £0.004m; 2025/26 £0.011m. (**Appendix 3**). The proposal is to transfer the surplus into the HRA Revenue Reserve in all years.
- 1.49 The HRA budget is made up of the same assumptions as the General Fund budget for staff costs, superannuation costs and inflation. There are however, some assumptions that are specific to the HRA. The main factors taken into account in developing the Council's financial plans for the HRA are set out within the sections below.

Level of Council Dwelling Rents

- 1.50 The MHCLG (now Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities DLUHC) Policy Statement on rents for social housing – published February 2019 states, *'In October 2017, the government announced its intention to set a long-term rent deal for both local authority landlords and housing associations. This would permit annual rent increases on both social rent and affordable rent properties of up to CPI (Consumer Price Index) plus 1 percent from 2020, for a period of at least five years.'*
- 1.51 Therefore for 2022/23 the income for dwelling rents has been included in the budget at CPI rate 3.1% plus 1%. For future years it has been assumed the same policy will apply but 2% has been included as an estimate of the increase in income.
- 1.52 The table below shows the average rent increases on a 48 week basis, excluding service charges, for both Social Rent and Affordable Rent, which is charged on all new build properties.

Increase	New Rent Charge	Annual Increase	Weekly Increase	Range of New Rent Charge
4.1%	£88.92	£155.04	£3.23	£64.40 - £115.69
Average for Social Rent on a 48 week basis				
4.1%	£117.11	£204.00	£4.25	£83.79 - £206.12

Average for Affordable Rent on a 48 week basis
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Empty Property Levels - Voids

- 1.53 It is inevitable during a financial year that there will be occasion when properties are empty and therefore no income will be earned. This could be the gap in the tenancy between one tenant vacating and the next one taking up the property or could be part of a management decision to leave the property empty because it is part of a capital or repair scheme which is soon to commence.
- 1.54 An estimate of the number of void properties which may occur in each financial year needs to be made so that the dwelling rent income budget can be reduced to reflect this. For 2022/23 to 2025/26 the estimate for voids which has been included in the MTFP is 3%.

Fees and Charges

- 1.55 Although the main source of income for the HRA is property rents, the HRA is also dependent for its financial sustainability on a range of other charges. These charges are set on the principle that wherever possible charges for services should reflect the cost of providing those services.
- 1.56 A schedule of the proposed charges is set out at **Appendix 3, table 1**. For 2022/23 in most cases the charges are recommended to be increased by CPI 3.1% plus 1%.

Financial Reserves - HRA

- 1.57 The Council's main uncommitted Financial Reserves are the Housing Revenue Account Working Balance of £2.077m. In addition to the Working Balance there are further reserves for the HRA used only to fund the Council's HRA capital programme. These are the Major Repairs Reserve, New Build Reserve, Vehicle Repair and Renewal Reserve and Development Reserve.

Capital Programme

- 1.58 There will be three separate reports to Council on 2nd February 2022 concerning the Council's Treasury Management Strategy, Investment Strategy and Capital Strategy. The Capital Strategy report will consider capital financing such as borrowing which enables the proposed capital programme budgets to proceed.

2021/22 Current Budget

- 1.59 In February 2021, Members approved a Capital Programme in respect of 2021/22 to 2024/25. Scheme delays and technical problems can cause expenditure to slip into following years and schemes can be added or extended as a result of securing additional external funding. Where capital expenditure slipped into 2021/22 the equivalent amount of funding was not applied during 2020/21 and is therefore available in 2021/22 to meet the delayed payments.
- 1.60 The Revised Capital Programme was considered by Executive at its meeting on 6th December 2021 and by the Audit and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee

at its meeting on 25th November. There have been no changes to the budget position since this time.

General Fund Capital Programme 2022/23 to 2025/26

- 1.61 The proposed Capital Programme for the General Fund totals £1.911m for 2022/23; £2.559m for 2023/24; £1.031m for 2024/25 and £0.941m for 25/26 (**Appendix 4**).

Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2022/23 to 2025/26

- 1.62 The proposed Capital Programme for the Housing Revenue Account totals £14.451m for 2022/23; £14.819m for 2023/24; £14.046m for 2024/25 and £5.387m for 2025/26 (**Appendix 4**).
- 1.63 A list of all the schemes and associated funding are attached as **Appendix 4** to this report.

Robustness of the Estimates – Section 25 to expand on this year!

- 1.64 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2003, the Council's Section 151 Officer is required to comment on the robustness of the estimates made and on the adequacy of the financial reserves.
- 1.65 The Council's Section 151 Officer (The Assistant Director of Finance and Resources) is satisfied that the estimates are considered to be robust, employee costs are based on the approved establishment, investment income is based on the advice of the Council's Treasury Management Advisors and income targets are considered to be achievable.
- 1.66 Likewise the Section 151 Officer is satisfied that the levels of reserves are considered to be adequate to fund planned expenditure and potential issues and risks that face the Council.

2 Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 This report presents a budget for approval by Council. It seeks to ensure approval to budgets in respect of the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account and the Capital Programme.

3 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 3.1 Alternative options are considered throughout the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Audit and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee note the report and make any comments that they believe to be appropriate to be given verbally at the Council meeting on 2nd February 2022.

The Executive report recommendations are as follows:

- X1 That all recommendations below are referred to the meeting of Full Council on the 2nd of February 2022.

The recommendations to Council are:

- X2 That in the view of the Chief Financial Officer, that the estimates included in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2025/26 are robust and that the level of financial reserves whilst at minimum levels are adequate, be accepted.
- X3 That officers report back to Executive and to the Audit and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis regarding the overall position in respect of the Council's budgets. These reports to include updates on achieving savings and efficiencies for 2022/23 and future years.

GENERAL FUND

- X4 A Council Tax increase of £5.00 is levied in respect of a notional Band D property (2.68%).
- X5 The Medium Term Financial Plan in respect of the General Fund as set out in Appendix 1 of this report be approved as the Revised Budget 2021/22, as the Original Budget in respect of 2022/23, and the financial projection in respect of 2023/24 to 2025/26.
- X6 That any further under spend in respect of 2021/22 is transferred to the Council's General Fund Reserves.
- X7 On the basis that income from Planning Fees may exceed £0.500m in 2021/22, the Head of Paid Service in consultation with the Leader be granted delegated powers to authorise such additional resources as are necessary to effectively manage the resultant increase in workload.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

- X8 That Council sets its rent levels in line with government policy, increasing rent levels by CPI (3.1%) plus 1% to apply from 1st April 2022.
- X9 That the increases in respect of other charges as outlined in **Appendix 3 Table 1** be implemented with effect from, 1st April 2022.
- X10 The Medium Term Financial Plan in respect of the Housing Revenue Account as set out in **Appendix 3** of this report be approved as the Revised Budget in respect of 2021/22, as the Original Budget in respect of 2022/23, and the financial projection in respect of 2023/24 to 2025/26.
- X11 That under spends in respect of 2021/22 to 2025/26 are transferred to the HRA Revenue Reserve.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME

- X12 That the Capital Programme as set out in **Appendix 4** be approved as the Revised Budget in respect of 2021/22, and as the Approved Programme for 2022/23 to 2025/26.
- X13 That the Assistant Director of Property Services and Housing Repairs be granted delegated powers in consultation with the Portfolio Member and the Asset Management group to approve the utilisation of the £260,000 of AMP Refurbishment Work allocation, with such approvals to be reported back to Executive through the Quarterly Budget Monitoring Report.

Approved by the Portfolio Holder - Cllr Clive Moesby, Executive Member for Finance

IMPLICATIONS

Finance and Risk: Yes No

Details:

The issue of Financial Risks is covered throughout the report.

In addition, the Council has a risk management strategy and associated framework in place and the Strategic Risk Register is regularly reviewed through the Council's performance management framework. Strategic risks along with the mitigation in place to ensure such risks are manageable are reported to the Audit and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis. The risk of not achieving a balanced budget is outlined as a key risk within the Council's Strategic Risk Register and is therefore closely monitored through these practices and reporting processes.

Similarly the HRA needs to be carefully managed to ensure the HRA continues to be sustainable over the life of the 30 year business plan.

On Behalf of the Section 151 Officer

Legal (including Data Protection): Yes No

Details:

The Council is legally obliged to approve a budget prior to the commencement of the new financial year in April 2022. This report together with the associated budget timetable has been prepared in order to comply with our legal obligations.

The recommended budget for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme comply with the Council's legal obligation to agree a balanced budget.

There are no Data Protection issues arising directly from this report.

On Behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

Staffing: Yes No

Details:

These are covered in the main report and supporting Appendices where appropriate.

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

DECISION INFORMATION

Decision Information	
Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds: BDC: Revenue - £75,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £150,000 <input type="checkbox"/> NEDDC: Revenue - £100,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £250,000 <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Please indicate which threshold applies	Yes
Is the decision subject to Call-In? (Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)	Yes
District Wards Significantly Affected	All
Consultation: Leader / Deputy Leader <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cabinet / Executive <input type="checkbox"/> SAMT <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Members <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes Details: Portfolio Holder

Links to Council Ambition (BDC)/Council Plan (NED) priorities or Policy Framework including Climate Change, Equalities, and Economics and Health implications.

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

Appendix No	Title
1	General Fund Summary
2	General Fund Detail
3	Housing Revenue Account
3 table 1	HRA – Fees and Charges 2022/23
4	Capital Programme

Background Papers (These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Cabinet (NEDDC) or Executive (BDC) you must provide copies of the background papers)

None